

TREK STORY, PART I

TV's Star Trek franchise was a four-decade-long roller-coaster ride, beginning with two different shows helmed by two very different men—Gene Roddenberry and Rick Berman. Here's the first installment of their behind-the-scenes story.

MACHO MAN

In his youth, Gene Roddenberry was a lot like Captain Kirk—always looking for adventure. As a teenager in the 1930s, he wanted to be a cop and even volunteered for the FBI. In World War II, he became a decorated bomber pilot who completed 89 missions in the Pacific. After the war, Captain Roddenberry was piloting a Pan Am passenger jet over the Syrian desert when the plane lost an engine and crashed. He fought off looting nomads to keep his passengers safe until help arrived.

One day in the mid-1950s, Roddenberry, now a motorcycle cop, walked into a Hollywood restaurant and interrupted a group of TV producers at a lunch meeting. He dropped one of his scripts on the table and said, "You'll want to read this." It was an unconventional, swaggering way to get his foot in the door...and it worked.

WAGON TREK

By 1964 Roddenberry was a successful TV writer, having written dozens of scripts for successful TV Westerns (*Have Gun – Will Travel*) and police dramas (*Highway Patrol*). But his goal was to get a show he created on the air, and he already had the first piece of the puzzle—a great idea. From his official pitch:

Star Trek is a new kind of television science fiction series. The format will be "Wagon Train to the Stars"—built around characters who travel to other worlds and meet the jeopardy and adventure which become our stories.

Studio after studio said no. "Too risky," one executive said, "too smart. And way too expensive to produce every week." In the 1960s, TV sci-fi was more fantasy than science-fiction; there was little attempt at realism—with either the science *or* the storylines.

Combining a space adventure with serious drama was unheard of. But Roddenberry *knew* there was an audience for it.

GENE LOVES LUCY

Having been rejected by the major TV studios, Roddenberry turned to a smaller one, Desilu. There he succeeded. Although Herbert Solow, Desilu's vice president, wasn't completely sold on the *Star Trek* idea, he thought Roddenberry had great promise as a writer/producer and convinced his boss, Oscar Katz, to sign him to a three-year deal.

The studio needed a hit—its only show in production at that time was *The Lucy Show*. Lucille Ball herself (Desilu's president) convinced Katz to allow Roddenberry to pitch *Star Trek* to the networks, saying, "There aren't smart shows on TV." So Roddenberry went to CBS, home of *The Lucy Show*. After an impassioned, two-hour presentation, network president James Aubrey Jr. thanked Roddenberry for his time but turned down *Star Trek* because the network was already developing a similar show: *Lost in Space*. A meeting with ABC also ended in rejection. The only stop left: NBC.

This time, Roddenberry got the go-ahead. Mort Werner, NBC's vice president of programming, shelled out \$500,000 to produce a pilot. Called "The Cage," it starred Jeffrey Hunter as Captain Christopher Pike and Majel Barrett as his female second-in-command. (There was also an alien character with pointy ears played by Leonard Nimoy.) Werner was impressed by the storytelling, the drama, the acting, and the attention to detail, but still said no to a series, using the same "too smart" and "too expensive" logic that Roddenberry had heard so many times.

But there was a glimmer of hope. Werner allowed Roddenberry to film a second pilot—with a few changes: 1) find a younger, better-looking actor to play the captain, 2) demote the woman, and 3) get rid of the "pointy-eared guy."

A REFLECTION OF THE TIMES

Roddenberry was dismayed about the changes but elated about having a second chance, so he compromised. William Shatner came in as Captain Kirk (replacing Pike), and Barrett was recast as Nurse Chapel. But Roddenberry refused to relinquish the

“Vulcan” character. And he made one other change without informing NBC: He added a female African-American officer to the bridge.

Roddenberry wanted *Star Trek* to reflect American society and modern, progressive culture. Uhura, played by Nichelle Nichols, became TV’s first black female character in a position of authority during the civil-rights movement. Racism, militarism, pacifism—few topics were taboo for the original *Star Trek*. And it was an intelligent show, thanks to some of the day’s best sci-fi writers, including Harlan Ellison, Theodore Sturgeon, and David Gerrold (who would become best known for writing the episode “The Trouble with Tribbles”). Whereas other space shows (like *Lost in Space*) featured mindless monsters, *Star Trek* aired an episode about a “Horta”—a rocklike thing that turned out to be a mother protecting her young.

STARDATE 1513.1

Star Trek premiered on September 8, 1966, and a whopping 40 percent of American homes tuned in. The size of the audience may have been because NBC launched their fall season a week before the other networks; CBS and ABC were airing reruns. When competitors put new shows against *Star Trek*, ratings dropped. By the end of the season, it ranked a disappointing #52. Desilu’s Katz wanted to cancel it, but again Lucille Ball exerted her power to keep it in production for another year. At the end of the second season, NBC was all set to cancel the show, no matter what Ball said—it was losing badly to CBS’s *Gomer Pyle USMC*—but *Trek*’s small, rabid fan base mounted a massive letter-writing campaign to keep it on the air. The show was saved again.

Ratings, however, did not improve. NBC never knew how to market *Star Trek*, or to whom—it was too grown-up for the *Monkees* audience and too far-out for the *Gunsmoke* crowd. Plus, Roddenberry constantly battled NBC and soon Paramount, which bought out Desilu, over everything from budgets to hemlines. Even the actors were fighting with each other (Shatner frequently stole lines from his castmates) and with Roddenberry (over scheduling and appearance fees).

By the third season, the budget was severely cut and the show’s quality suffered. NBC was ready to let it go. The network put *Star*

Trek in the time slot where shows go to die: Friday night at 10 p.m. The final episode aired on June 3, 1969, a month and a half before the moon landing.

TOONING IN

Then something strange happened. Reruns of *Star Trek* in the mid-'70s attracted new fans and the show suddenly became a phenomenon. Fans assembled at *Star Trek* conventions, and spin-off novels were huge sellers in the sci-fi market. That proved to the brass at NBC that there *was* an audience for the show. Still, it was too risky to dive into another expensive production, and it would be too difficult to reassemble the cast to revive the series. So in 1973 NBC decided to make *Star Trek* into a Saturday morning cartoon.

Although it was cheaper to produce, *Star Trek: The Animated Series* was by no means a cheap knockoff. Roddenberry was still in charge; most of the original cast (including Shatner and Nimoy) voiced their characters; and veteran writers D.C. Fontana and David Gerrold wrote scripts. As many adults as kids tuned in, but there weren't enough of either to keep it on the air. Though the show was well received, NBC canceled it after two seasons.

PHASE II, ENGAGE

With reruns of *Star Trek's* original 79 episodes still performing strongly in 1977, Paramount asked Roddenberry to develop a second live-action series. Called *Star Trek: Phase II*, it was to be a revival of the original series, with Shatner, Nichols, and other cast members (but not Nimoy—he was committed to starring in *Equus* on Broadway). Sets were built, scripts were written, and contracts were signed. Paramount even envisioned *Phase II* as the linchpin of the Paramount Television Service, a new broadcast network it was developing.

And then *Star Wars* was released.

Not only did *Star Wars* become one of the highest-grossing movies of all time, it renewed interest in big-screen science fiction, which hadn't been popular in a decade. Paramount saw bigger dollar signs on the big screen, so they retooled *Phase II* into 1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. That decision launched a big-screen *Trek* franchise that spawned four movies and earned

half a billion dollars at the box office over the next nine years. The movies were such a success that in 1986 Paramount once again called on Gene Roddenberry to create a live-action television series.

Roddenberry decided he needed someone who knew not only how to get a show on the air but how to *keep* it on the air. His preferred choice for a producer was Harve Bennett, the man who wrote *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn*, but Bennett was too busy working on the *Trek* film series.

That's when Roddenberry was told that he should talk to a young man rising up through the ranks at Paramount: Rick Berman.

GENERATION NEXT

If Gene Roddenberry personifies Captain Kirk, then Rick Berman takes after Captain Picard. Whereas Roddenberry made action shows, Berman made PBS kids' shows such as *Big Blue Marble*, as well as the very intellectual documentary *Space*. And Berman was coming into his own as a producer, having worked on ratings giants *Cheers*, *MacGyver*, and *Webster*. One thing Berman wasn't: a *Star Trek* fan. Roddenberry didn't mind—the new show was going to take place 80 years after the original series, and he thought that it should look and feel different from the 1960s version.

But from the get-go, Berman's relationship with Roddenberry was tumultuous. Their first major clash concerned putting a “bald Englishman” on the bridge of the *Enterprise*. Roddenberry agreed that Captain Kirk's “cowboy diplomacy” should be toned down for the new show, but he didn't like Berman's choice for the role of Captain Picard: classically trained Patrick Stewart. Nearly everyone else did, however, and Berman finally talked Roddenberry into it.

In September 1987, the two-hour premiere of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* attracted a massive 27 million viewers. Paramount's gamble had paid off. For the first time in nearly two decades, a new live-action *Star Trek* series was on TV.

But it wasn't very good (at first).

Beam yourself to page 398 for Part II.

TREK STORY, PART II

In 1987 Star Trek made its return to the small screen, but the real drama was taking place behind the cameras. (Part I is on page 239.)

NUMBER ONE, THIS IS NUMBER TWO

As new producers, writers, and actors found their way, the first season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was uneven. Despite TNG's flaws, hardcore *Trek* fans kept tuning in, hoping it would get better. Few people, including the stars, expected the show to last. "We were all very nervous," said Levar Burton, who played Lt. Commander Geordi La Forge. "We felt that we were stepping into such big shoes that we took it, and perhaps ourselves, too seriously."

The entire concept of *Star Trek: TNG* was at odds with itself: It needed to have its own identity, but it also needed to piggyback on the legacy of the original series. Except for a brief cameo by DeForest Kelley as an elderly Dr. McCoy in the pilot, Roddenberry didn't allow any of the original actors to reprise their roles...but he did recycle plots and ideas from the old series.

KING LEAR IN SPACE

But Roddenberry was also nixing the edgier scripts. Head writer David Gerrold wrote an allegorical episode called "Blood and Fire," about the AIDS epidemic. Roddenberry rejected it. Gerrold and fellow writer D.C. Fontana quit after the first season because of office politics, and so did more than 30 other staffers, still a television record.

Roddenberry was increasingly suffering from heart trouble by the time the second season began, although he still held sway over the writers and actors. That gave Rick Berman an opportunity to take over. His first change was allowing actor Patrick Stewart to have more input on his character. Stewart, who'd trained with the Royal Shakespeare Company, had taken the role not because he was particularly interested in science fiction, but because he wanted to portray the inner struggles of a man whose duty was to protect hundreds of lives. As he put it, "I wanted to be King Lear in space."

Then, against Roddenberry's wishes, Berman approved the script for "The Measure of a Man," in which Starfleet orders the android Data to be disassembled and studied, and Picard must defend Data's "humanity." The episode was the first time Stewart got to sink his teeth into the role. "I was very happy to finally have a chance to take on some serious issues," he said. Brent Spiner (Data) was happy, too—he'd had an equally difficult time with his one-note role and credits Berman with allowing him to "find Data." Things started to get easier for the cast and crew.

THE FINEST FLEET IN THE GALAXY

In 1991 two major events occurred in the *Star Trek* world: Gene Roddenberry died at age 70, and *The Next Generation* became one of the most popular shows on television. The show's stars reached celebrity status, too—especially Stewart, whom *People* magazine named the "sexiest man on TV."

Under Berman, *TNG* won 18 Emmy Awards. And in 1994, it became the only syndicated show ever to be nominated for Outstanding Drama Series (it lost to *Picket Fences*).

YAWN

As the series aged, however, the quality of the show occasionally suffered. Some critics and viewers felt that *Star Trek: TNG* had become a victim of its own formula: give a crew member a personal crisis to deal with, introduce an alien with a forehead prosthetic to reflect on a thinly veiled human folly (greed, racism, etc.), and then put the ship in danger. *TNG*'s final two seasons revolved around stories like Commander Worf's young son not wanting to be a warrior, and Dr. Crusher falling for a man who turns out to be an alien who once seduced her grandmother.

Despite the formulaic plots, ratings for *TNG* remained high—so high, in fact, that Paramount executive Brandon Tartikoff ordered a new *Trek* spin-off in 1993. Tartikoff wanted a show about a father and son who travel through space helping people, but Berman and writing partner Michael Piller had other ideas. They kept the father-and-son angle (Avery Brooks as Captain Sisko and Cirroc Lofton as his boy, Jake) but put them on a remote outpost called Deep Space 9, located near a "wormhole" that very nasty aliens could get through.

Before he was a producer, Aaron Spelling appeared as an extra on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.

Star Trek: Deep Space 9 went beyond *TNG* to deal with subjects that previous *Star Treks* had never explored in depth, including religious fanaticism, immigration and the franchise's first same-sex kiss. And unlike *The Next Generation*, most of the characters didn't get along, which heightened the drama. Like *TNG*, *DS9* lasted for seven seasons.

GENERATIONS GAP

After *Star Trek: The Next Generation* ended in 1994, Picard, Data, and company were promoted to the big screen. At first, fans were excited to hear that the movie, *Star Trek: Generations*, would include Kirk, Spock, and McCoy. But Rick Berman, who produced the film and co-wrote the story, soon angered many of them. How? He killed off Captain Kirk.

When word leaked out before the movie's release that Kirk was going to die, most fans assumed that he would go out in a blaze of glory, sacrificing himself for the ship. But his death, while it did help Picard defeat the bad guy (played by Malcolm McDowell), was, in a word, anticlimactic. What irked fans of the original series most was that, storywise, Kirk didn't *have* to die—the movie's plot included a “temporal nexus” that Kirk could have gone to and never aged. All Berman had to do was put Kirk in there at the end of the movie. Said Leonard Nimoy, “To end it with a fight scene between Kirk and Malcolm McDowell! What's the point?”

Generations made more than \$75 million at the box office but received mixed reviews. “It is predictably flabby and impenetrable in places,” wrote Janet Maslin of *The New York Times*. “But it has enough pomp, spectacle, and high-tech small talk to keep the franchise afloat.”

CAPTAIN KATE

Maslin was right. The franchise stayed afloat, and Paramount called on Berman to create a fourth *Star Trek* TV series. The result was *Star Trek: Voyager*, the first *Trek* series with a female captain. The concept: Captain Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) and her crew become stranded on the other side of the galaxy and must find their way home. This gave Berman and writers Michael Piller and Jeri Taylor an opportunity to invent new

The Garry Moore Show once held a “Win Durward Kirby” contest...

aliens and force the crew to survive without the help of “the mighty Federation.”

Enough viewers tuned in to keep it going, but fewer than had watched *Deep Space 9*, and far fewer than for *The Next Generation*. And unlike the last two series, *Voyager* wasn’t syndicated; It was the flagship show for the new United Paramount Network (UPN). To build an entire network around a single show—especially a sci-fi show—was a gamble, but it proved just how big *Star Trek* had become.

THE SEVEN OF NINE SHOW

Studio bosses had left Berman alone on *TNG* and *DS9*; this time he found himself at the mercy of network executives. When they complained that the show wasn’t “sexy” enough, Berman was ordered to bring in curvy actress Jeri Ryan as Seven of Nine, a member of the Borg collective who is captured and rehabilitated by the *Voyager* crew. After the execs saw Ryan in her skin-tight Borg costume—she looked like a half-human/half-robot with gray skin—they sent Berman a memo complaining that she was *too* sexy. Mulgrew complained to Berman about the switch, and he agreed but told her that “orders are orders.”

The tactic paid off, though, because *Voyager*’s head writer, Brannon Braga, saw potential in the Seven of Nine character. Most *Trek* series had one nonhuman who helped the other characters learn about their own humanity. Spock filled that purpose in the first series; Data took that role in *TNG*. On *Voyager*, crew members—including the ship’s holographic doctor (Robert Picardo)—ended up teaching the cyborg Seven of Nine how to be human.

If you realign the phasic warp array to emit a graviton pulse, that should be enough to get you to page 475 for the final chapter of our Star Trek saga.

...The actor showed up at the winner’s home in a crate.

TREK STORY, PART III

By the year 2000, Star Trek had played a major role in American TV for more than half of its existence. Would Trek go boldly into the new century, or would its dilithium crystals finally peter out? (Part II is on page 398.)

AN ENTERPRISING IDEA

After *Voyager's* seven-year run ended in May 2001, Rick Berman begged Paramount to give *Star Trek* a one-year hiatus before launching another series. "It's oversaturated," he argued. "People are losing interest." They gave him until September.

The struggling UPN network needed viewers, and other than professional wrestling, *Star Trek* was its only bankable commodity. Berman and co-producer Brannon Braga, decided to go back in time in the *Trek* universe and base a series on how it all began.

By Berman and Braga's latest series, *Enterprise*, didn't look much like any of the other *Star Treks*. It took place a century before the original series, and there was no Federation, no Prime Directive, and no carpeted bridge. This starship *Enterprise* looked like a submarine on the inside. Another change: Instead of the typical symphonic theme that marked every other *Trek* incarnation, *Enterprise* opened with a rock ballad called "Where My Heart Will Take Me," sung by opera singer Russell Watson.

ARCHER'S GANG

Enterprise premiered on UPN less than two weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. More than 12 million viewers tuned in looking for a diversion from all the bad news—UPN's biggest audience ever. And what they saw looked sort of like the familiar *Star Trek*—there was a Vulcan, played by supermodel Jolene Blalock, and there was a rugged Starfleet captain, Jonathan Archer (Scott Bakula).

Ratings dropped off for the second episode and continued to decline, but compared to other shows on UPN, *Enterprise* did fairly well. Some critics and die-hard *Trek* fans, though, weren't happy. What seemed to irritate them most was Berman's indifference to *Star Trek's* canon. For example: Trekkers know that the first captain of the *Enterprise* was Captain April, not Captain Archer. Plus, some of the familiar *Trek* villains, like the Cardassians, were missing.

Only one person has won Emmys for acting, writing, and directing: Alan Alda (for M*A*S*H).

BACK TO BASICS

Even UPN execs noticed the lack of continuity, and they told Berman that if he wanted the show to survive, he'd have to "Trek it up." Berman renamed the show *Star Trek: Enterprise* in its third season and introduced a time-travel plot about a "temporal cold war" and a decidedly dark turn of events involving a major attack by an alien race. Fans on Internet message boards skewered the contrivances. Berman paid attention and pulled out all the stops to turn the series around. He eased off the writing and renewed his efforts in overseeing the show as a producer.

By the fourth season (2004–05), *Enterprise* had finally become what fans were promised in the beginning: a direct prequel laying the foundation for what was to come. Berman wound plots around the franchise's two most popular villains—the Klingons and the Romulans—and provided detailed explanations to correct continuity issues, such as why the Klingons on later *Treks* had bumpy foreheads while the original Klingons didn't (a genetic mutation). Now the faithful could finally watch a real *Star Trek*! Well, they could have...if only they'd tuned in.

END OF THE LINE

Much to Berman's dismay, UPN put *Enterprise* in the infamous Friday-night "death slot," where no show on a broadcast network had attracted a decent audience in more than a decade. In February 2005, UPN gave it the ax. While the majority of TV viewers barely noticed that *Enterprise* had even been on, much less canceled, some die-hard Trekkers are to this day livid at UPN (which folded in 2006). According to the fanzine *Trekdom*, "UPN suits cringed at the thought of intellectually challenging their *Sweet Valley High*, *Moesha*, and *WWE Smackdown* viewers. A network that thrived on fluff didn't have a high tolerance level for provocative drama."

Braga, who went on to oversee Fox's *24*, also blamed the network. "I think UPN hurt *Voyager* and much more with *Enterprise*, to be on a constantly shifting fledgling network that in some places was on channel 92, if you could find it, and you needed the foil rabbit ears." Still, Berman says, "I have nothing to be ashamed about. We created 624 hours of television and four feature films and I think we did a hell of a job."

Instant replay, invented by Tony Verna, was first used during a 1963 Army-Navy football game.