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BLASTING GHOSTBUSTERS

Our critic slimes latest Ghostbuster remake. For all the ghostly details see page 37.

A 50-year voyage

Local Trekkies reflect on half a century of *Star Trek*

BY VICTORIA PATERSON
 Staff Writer

Space, the final frontier...

On Sept. 8, it will have been precisely 50 years since those words were first beamed into family living rooms around North America.

In the years since *Star Trek* first debuted, it has spawned five live-action series and a sixth in development, 13 movies, an animated series and countless books, games, comics and collectibles.

While it's been five decades since Gene Roddenberry's vision of a multi-cultural crew exploring space together on the U.S.S. Enterprise warped onto screens everywhere, the fan base shows no signs of waning. Legions of Trekkies everywhere are still dedicated to the universe spawned by Roddenberry's "Wagon Train to the stars" idea.

In fact, thanks to the various spinoffs, TV reruns and now the digital revolution, the fan base is probably exponentially larger than it was during the show's original three season, 79-episode run in the late 1960s.

But why do shows and a universe created mostly in the 20th century still appeal in the 21st?

Trekkies of St. Albert

Ryan Mullan is a St. Albertan and has been a fan as long as he can remember, since he was about two.

He's now 33-years-old and still a Trekkie. He has a particular fondness for the second series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (TNG), and the video and computer games like *Star Trek Online*.

The reasons the shows have appealed to him have morphed over the years. When he was a child, he liked the space-fantasy exploration aspect of the show, but as he grew older he started appreciating the intellectual stimulation the show's plotlines could provide as the writers' toyed with various ethical dilemmas or celestial conflicts.



BRYAN YOUNG/St. Albert Gazette

These Data and Geordi La Forge bobbleheads show the characters dressed up in Sherlock Holmes costumes, a reference to *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes where they played Holmes and John Watson on the holodeck.

From Captain Jean-Luc Picard's moralistic soliloquies in TNG to the vision of the future offered to viewers in the Cold War era when it first debuted, Mullan finds something to think about in *Star Trek's* various takes on ethical situations.

"It was a future that was utopian and had a lot of promise," Mullan said. "You don't always have to agree with them, but it's provocative."

He keeps a communications badge, which also often serves as the franchise's logo, at his office to refer to "when I need to remind myself what's the right way to be."

Some St. Albert Trekkies have come to the show a bit later than Mullan did, showing that even in 2016 the franchise's appeal endures.

Dana Popadynetz just converted to the way of Trek in the past few months.

"I was always a *Star Wars* guy and always had a hate on for *Star Trek*," Popadynetz said. But he was recently looking for more science fiction to watch, and some *Trek* fans at work convinced him to give the show a shot.

He's just recently finished watching all seven seasons worth of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

"I think it's kind of an interesting look at what a utopian, moneyless society would look like," Popadynetz said. "The politics of *Star Trek* I think is probably one of the most under-rated elements of the show."

Proving that not all of the shows are for everyone, even for Trekkies, he



gave up on the original 1960s *Star Trek* after only a few episodes.

But in TNG he sees optimism for humanity's future, something he thinks is appealing to people as dark current events keep choking up the news cycle.

"I feel like there's more people getting into *Star Trek* now," he said, noting there seems to be a recent resurgence in Hollywood's interest in science fiction properties.

Even though *Star Trek: The Next Generation* first broadcast in the late 1980s, ending in the early 1990s, Popadynetz still finds some of the episodes are almost eerily applicable today in terms of social commentary.

Cross-generational appeal

The social commentary is what Chad Bolster wanted his young daughters to be able to understand when he introduced the show to them.

The Bolsters live in Edmonton but have family in St. Albert, and some of them work and volunteer in this city.

While Chad Bolster has been a fan for at least 30 years, it's much newer to his daughters, Laura Bolster, 12, and Grace Bolster, 10.

The trio all have their own costumes, based on the 1960s *Star Trek* uniform, and watching the various incarnations of the show is a father-daughter hobby. Laura is a science officer Vulcan, inspired by first and science officer Spock. Grace finds inspiration in the show's communications officer, Uhura, and so wears a red uniform. Chad's favourite character is Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy, so he dresses as a medical officer, complete with a medkit.

The family has gone to shows like St. Albert's Eek! Comic and Pop Culture Fest and Edmonton Comic and Entertainment Expo dressed in their costumes.

Chad introduced the show to the girls about three years ago.

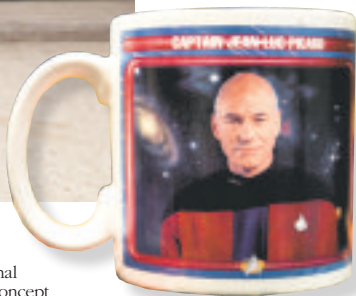
CODIE McLACHLAN/
 St. Albert Gazette
 Hardcore *Star Trek* fans Grace, 10, left, and Laura, 12, right.





CODIE McLACHLAN/St. Albert Gazette
Above: Star Trek fan Ryan Mullan poses with his Starfleet insignia.

Left: Hardcore Star Trek fans Chad Bolster, centre, and his daughters, Grace, 10, left, and Laura, 12, right, pose for a photo at their home in Edmonton.



BRYAN YOUNG/St. Albert Gazette
Captain Jean-Luc Picard, played by Patrick Stewart, helmed the 1980s revival of Star Trek and is many fans' favourite captain.



Anthony Rotolo has developed and taught a university-level class entirely about Star Trek.

Academic Trek talk

Those differences – some original series fans might refer to the Vulcan concept of Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations – are a strength of *Star Trek* and part of its ongoing appeal, said Anthony Rotolo, a U.S. based professor who has taught about *Star Trek* at the university level for years. He said the fandom offers a form of safe harbour for many people from different walks of life.

"I think that's the strongest element of *Star Trek*, is its ability to bring different groups of people together, and I think that's what would make Gene Roddenberry happy to see happening still from that franchise," Rotolo said.

Rotolo started Trek Class at Syracuse University after making references to it in other courses. His attempt to craft a syllabus came after jokes he should teach a class on *Star Trek*.

The class has morphed over the years and lead Rotolo to be asked to speak and write on the subject, including the massive annual convention in Las Vegas.

Star Trek and other pop culture phenomenon have become an area of academic research for Rotolo.

There are many examples of the cultural importance and impact of *Star Trek*. One of the most famous is that Martin Luther King Jr. stepped in and encouraged Nichelle Nichols, who played Uhura on the original series, to stay on the show when she was considering quitting. Uhura, a black woman on the bridge of a starship in an important job, was a revolutionary notion in the 1960s. As Whoopi Goldberg, a comedian and actress who herself would go on to be a recurring guest star on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* tells it, when she saw Uhura on television, she went running to her family to point out that there was a black woman on television, "and she ain't no maid."

The first *Star Trek* series alone featured an alien as a

first officer (played by a man of Jewish descent) and, along with Uhura, featured Asian and Russian characters. Putting

Walter Koenig's Pavel Chekov on the bridge was a bold move in the 1960s as the Cold War still raged.

The diversity is a pattern that continued throughout the series, eventually featuring a black captain in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and a woman at the helm in *Star Trek: Voyager*, not to mention each show's diverse cast of characters, representing different human races and species.

Star Trek isn't done featuring the diversity of human existence, either. In the new movie premiering this week the character of Hikaru Sulu will have a male partner and the couple will have a daughter.

Social influence isn't the only influence *Star Trek* has wielded. It's inspired many to enter science or spawned inventions based off the show's imagined technology.

Other inspirations can be seen in Mullan's communications badge office reminder, or in Rotolo's former grad assistant who found inspiration in Geordi La Forge, a character on *TNG* who was blind and the chief engineer of the ship. She was legally blind and went on to be a graphic designer, Rotolo said.

The theme of difference was important to Roddenberry and has attracted an ongoing audience, Rotolo said.

The theme of difference was important to Roddenberry and has attracted an ongoing audience, Rotolo said. While there are many things that are of academic interest or cultural relevance, he thinks the show's near-zeal for highlighting and embracing difference has felt inclusive to the generations that have watched *Trek*.

"*Star Trek* gives people hope," he said.
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