

STAR TREK QUESTION & ANSWER PANEL: FUNCON '68

(The panel was introduced by Bjo Trimble. Panel members were Robert Justman a co-producer on STAR TREK; David Gerrold, author of "Trouble with Tribbles;" Rick Carter, Roddenberry's assistant; Walter Koenig, "Ensign Chekov;" Joan Pearce, researcher; Dorothy C. Fontana, author of several scripts. The panel was taped by Linda Stanley and transcribed by Ruth Berman. Speakers are identified where possible, and numbered where names are not known. There are some ___'s where audience noises made the remarks indecipherable. Some repetitive remarks -- e.g. "Any more questions"-- have been eliminated.)

VERA HEMINGER: I heard that Gene Roddenberry invited members of the Science Fiction Writers of America to write for the show. What about that?

ROBERT JUSTMAN: I know that certain writers who are members have written for the show. D.C. can check me if I'm wrong, but I believe Harlan Ellison is one, and Norman Spinrad, Ted Sturgeon, George Clayton Johnson, Robert Bloch--let's see, who else? Richard Matheson, Jerry Sohl, Jerome Bixby--Jerome Bixby is working on a STAR TREK for us right now ("Day of the Dove"), as is Miss Fontana ((Enterprise Incident)).

1: I wondered if the show had set its history, say like from 1980 to whenever it takes place, or if that was up to the individual authors.

JUSTMAN: We don't wish to tie down to a particular point in future history. I suppose I could say any real date would be wrong not matter what--

1: I mean, the program itself has set a version of history, the history of the world--what happened before the ___ appeared.

2: There've been references to World War III.

JUSTMAN: I think your question is conceptual rather than factual. World War III has been mentioned on the show, but only one that I can remember. We would like to think, personally, that there never will be another war. One of the things we say on the show is that war is not only unnecessary, but it's wrong. We don't think that people should kill people. We've been decrying violence since the show has been on the air--and that fact has nothing to do with what's happened in our country recently ((the murder of Robert P. Kennedy)). If we sell too much of a message, why, we're sorry, but it's

better to say it a little harder than not to say it at all, we feel. But at the same time we're saying nothing different than anyone else happened to say over the past four or five thousand years, I would imagine. I hope we'll find an answer to your question. I think I kind of skirted around it.

3: What about the story of the Coms and the Yangs? ("Omega Glory")

AUDIENCE: Yeah!

3: I thought it a bit offensive, in the fact that the last ten minutes seemed to be mainly the American flag, waving it back and forth, saying rah rah rah.

JUSTMAN: Well, I appreciate that ((LAUGHTER)), but sometimes, in fact, quite often, being human, we err. I don't think that our motives were wrong; I just think probably that show--and I must agree with you--I think that in that show we overstated our case ((LAUGHTER)) to a great extent. But if you don't venture anything, you never achieve anything. For you people, I assume, and for myself, the case was certainly heavily overstated. Perhaps for other people it wasn't. Perhaps certain people disagree with what we were saying. ___ Mr. Roggenberry wrote that show himself, and he felt it very deeply. And he sat through and personally supervised the editing of that show. There's no other more I can say, except that we did it attempting to say when we thought was right. You are right; I think that the intelligence of our audience has been greatly over... under-estimated. ((LAUGHTER)) Underestimated not only by networks, but by ourselves, at times. I think that there is an inverse proportion--as audiences get older, they tend to be a touch less sensitive, on the whole. I've found that our strongest audience is among people who are in school or just out of school--I mean college, post-graduate students, not just high school--and I think they're the most broad-thinking group in our country nowadays.

4: In one of the show in the first season I believe you used a language translator--in "Arena"?

JUSTMAN: That was the second season--or no. First season in "Arena" and second season in a show called "Metamorphosis."

4: Why don't you use it more?

JUSTMAN: We use a universal translator when we're attempting to communicate with life-forms which are non-humanoid. To be perfectly frank, if we were to attempt to find a way to communicate by means of language with every different life-form that we encounter in the series, we would be spending one hour every Friday night learning how to talk to each other, and we would never get on with the story. So that's what's known as dramatic licence. When it suits the purposes of the show we use the universal translator.

5: But why don't we use it when communicating with humanoid people instead of having Spock say, "My, my, what a coincidence they're speaking 20th century English?" It would be much easier to accept lip-synchronization being in with English words, rather than to accept them actually speaking 20th century English.

JUSTMAN: In other words, what you're saying is that -- say we encounter a life-form, and it is humanoid, and it emits sounds where its mouth is that bear no relationship to English, or French, or Russian, or anything else.

5: Right.

JUSTMAN: How can we do that? We're human, you know, we people who make the show. And the actors who act in the show are human also, and we have, certainly enough of a problem just getting a performance. ((LAUGHTER)) One actor has to relate to another actor who is mouthing gibberish at him -- he's going to be quite difficult.

4: That's not what I mean. I mean, why couldn't you use the translator all the time?

JUSTMAN: Joan, you want to answer that?

JOAN PEARCE: I understand what you mean, but you have to make a choice. What is your choice? To see the actors acting the role or to spend all Spock's time dragging around what is classified as a universal-tinkertoy-alien-translator-taperecorder? It becomes a burden, and it becomes unimportant. It's much better to ignore the problem and let them all speak English, let them all understand, than to become burdened down with your leading characters spending all their time dragging around a cumbersome prop.

4: Then why don't you ignore it instead of having things like "What a coincidence, they're speaking with 20th century English."

PEARCE: You're speaking of, perhaps, "Omega Glory" again? As Bob says, it's one line in one show. The translator served a useful dramatic purpose in one show, because the creature was so different. On occasion, it serves a dramatic point. Most of the time it would serve the dramatic purpose of encumbering the actor.

JUSTMAN: There was a point made in that show, which is not "what a remarkable coincidence." We purposely attempted to draw as close a parallel as we could with that particular episode. We were after a certain something, a broader, more philosophical concept. There was a purpose in all that, and we hope that the purpose came out by the end of the show. However, you're right. We have also done, "My, my, what a remarkable coincidence," and hopefully we shan't do it so often in future shows, because of people like you who notice these things.

6: For whoever's in charge of special effects -- there should be a way around that. Why couldn't the prop be miniaturized?

JUSTMAN: I don't think it would make much difference even if the universal translator could be grouped with a thousand others on the head of a pin. That's not our problem. We could make anything as small as we wished for the show. If it doesn't work, we can say it works. But rather than take the time to translate everything, we would rather get on with the story, which is what we're there for. Technology certainly surrounds us. If I may throw in a digression, one of the things we attempt to say in the show is that, no matter how technologically advanced we become in the future, we should never lose sight of the fact that we are human beings, and that humanity is more important, and individuals are more important than all the machinery in the world. Or the universe. And the minute we let machines take over, we're in deep, deep trouble.

7: I was wondering why you don't put seatbelts on the bridge. ((Laughter & Applause.))

JUSTMAN: Well, if we put seatbelts on the bridge, then people wouldn't be able to fall out of their seats. ((LAUGHTER & APPLAUSE))

8: In relation to this matter of speaking 20th century English -- someone wrote in to a TV magazine ((Linda Stanley to the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner TV Weekly, October 1, 1967)), saying that in "Amok Time" there was supposed to be an extremely old ceremony completely unchanged, and why then did all the Vulcans speak English -- because the viewer can't understand Vulcan, that's why.

JUSTMAN: I'd like to add an interesting possible view, although we've never said it. I assume that what the people on Star Trek speak, especially the service or members of the Federation -- they don't speak English. They speak a lingua franca which exists throughout the Federation. We just happen to hear it in English, folks.

9: There's a translator in every TV set. ((LAUGHTER))

JUSTMAN: That's right.

10: Why not have it established that there's some sort of sensor device on the Enterprise that simply picks up the language the aliens speak and feeds it into the translator?

JUSTMAN: If you're going to have a sticky area, like that, of believability, and yet at the same time must get on with the show which is going to have to end in an hour, it's better to never even open the can of peas -- never even mention it on the show. The moment we do, we raise a lot of questions that can't be answered. Perhaps if we had never mentioned the Universal Translator half of your questions wouldn't come up now.

11: I was just wondering -- why does Chekov have such a horrible accent? ((LAUGHTER))

WALTER KOENIG: What is it that you object to in the accent?

11: The extreme use of wubble-yous. ((LAUGHTER))

KOENIG: Well, in my dialect we don't have wubble-yous, either. But my father, who was Russian, always used to ask us to "Pass the vegetables." I can only answer that by saying that I think perhaps it's a colloquial kind of speaking. I know that Slavic people do talk this way, regardless of whatever you've been taught in school, and I know it from a firsthand communication. I can't defend it on any other basis than that: people with a Slavic background -- Russians, Poles, etc. -- do have it. Once I worked out the way the character speaks, I found that it gave as well a very strong but indefinable characteristic for the character. You came to expect Chekov to speak that way, and I think it helped to develop him as someone distinctive on board. ((APPLAUSE))

JUSTMAN: I think that an additional answer to that is that Mr. Koenig is an artist, and an artist must distill his performance into a minute, because that's all the time he's allowed. Walter just spoke to you for a few minutes, and possibly he spoke longer here, today, than you'll ever hear at one time in a Star Trek episode. Therefore, what few things he does say on the show and that goes for Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, or anybody on the show... He doesn't speak very much, you know. Everything is compressed. That is the essence of art: everything is compressed. Just as in poetry! And therefore he must get across what he is all about in the shortest possible amount of time. I think he does it very, very well. ((APPLAUSE.))

12: I'd like to know how come on a Red Alert everyone's always flopping around the halls, and no one ever breaks anything. The whole ship lurches, and everyone goes flying into the halls -- don't they have some position to stay where they're safe?

JUSTMAN: Well, yes. When a Red Alert sounds, if you see anyone walking about in the halls, they're on their way to their action stations -- and they get caught off-base. Nothing ever gets broken because the ship is pretty strong. Maybe the actors get broken or damaged every now and then. ((LAUGHTER))

13: Last season you had the Galileo, and it was destroyed in "GALILEO SEVEN" Only this season it was back.

JUSTMAN: Well, we carry more shuttlecraft.

13: Others named the Galileo Seven?

JUSTMAN: No, some are named the Galileo Six, or Galileo Nine, or... only, you know, we were able to photograph one miniature, and it happened to say Galileo Seven on it, and it would cost us many thousands of dollars to rephotograph it.

14: Is there any chance of there being a Star Trek movie?

JUSTMAN: Nothing formalized yet. There is a possibility of that, but we've only been talking about it, and nothing's been done yet.

15: So many people have enjoyed the Tribbles, I wanted to ask David if there's any chance of their coming back.

DAVID GERROLD: I'm glad you asked that question. ((LAUGHTER)) I did have some thought on such a Tribble show. However, it's up to the production staff as to what they want to do this season, and I'm not in a position to say that we ARE going to do one.

JUSTMAN: The gentleman with the two cameras -- er -- one camera and one plastic.

16: Who came up with the idea of the pointed sideburns on everyone?

JUSTMAN: That was Gene Roddenberry, also known as the Great Bird of the Galaxy.

17: I wanted to know about the new timeslot -- is that set positively?

JUSTMAN: As with all the networks, it's set positively until they change their minds. But that's how we stand right now. We will be supposed to be starting on the air September 20 with our new shows on Friday nights at 10:00. Yes, Mrs. Tribble... er, Trimple?

BJO TRIMBLE: He has started more trouble with that...Is there any chance of a time change at mid-season, if there's enough objection?

JUSTMAN: The network sets the policy. It's their network, so to speak. The only thing that might influence them is viewer response. I suppose that, if the net work has a couple shows that are in trouble by mid-season, and, if STAR TREK is doing well enough, why, they might consider switching it. As long as we're about it, I'll also mention that there are other shows on the air which are baluable, and that, if you ever care about any show, no one's going to know it unless you let the networks know hou you feel. Ordinarily the networks pay no attention to mail. But being human and being under all sorts of pressures at times they will listen to listener response.

18: What happened to "Assignment: Earth?"

JUSTMAN: That was a spin-off. It met its fate -- it's been on the air, and that's it. There won't, so far as I know, be a series out of it. Sorry, but that's show business, as they say.

19: Do you buy scripts of a political nature?

JUSTMAN: We buy scripts of any nature, as long as they fit the requirements of this show. I might mention, however, that, while we have purchased stories and scripts from new writers at the present time we're completely filled on story assignments. I venture to say that we've done more than our share at encouraging new writers -- of course, submissions have to be sent in by a reputable literary agent; otherwise we can't read them.

20: First season you had a character called Yeoman Rand. Second season she was not there. What happened?

21: She married Finnegan.

JUSTMAN: She was very good, but it reached the point where we had to write things specifically for the character, which means you're dragging a character in by the heels. We'd been trying to find suitable vehicles for her, and we'd been unsuccessful. It ends up shoe-horning a character into the show. I'm sorry about that. I would've liked to have had her around, strictly for decorative reasons.

RUTH BERMAN: Question for D.C. Fontana -- you've written scripts that are both mainly comic and mainly serious. What special advantages and disadvantages do you find in writing either kind for this format?

D.C. Fontana: Well, I've found that we tend to get a little too serious sometimes, and on Star Trek we've always had the ability to laugh -- particularly if you've always got a lot of witty actors. "Tomorrow is Yesterday" started out very serious, and it got funny as we realized the kind of predicament that the captain would be in, facing a 20th century background when he came from the 23rd century -- or whatever century it is we're in. The advantage to injecting humor in a show is obvious; we want you to enjoy the show, and we feel that if it gets a little too serious, you might turn away, whereas if we can make you laugh you enjoy it more.

23: Why don't the people wear seat-belts?

JUSTMAN: When it's no longer dramatically necessary for people to fall out of their seats...There really is a reason for it. If you want to examine it really critically, we could never have anyone fall out of their seats in space. But it isn't very dramatic to have people sit there safely.

23: Why do the women's hairstyles change so much from week to week? Is there some problem with audience identification?

JUSTMAN: No, usually the main problem is with actresses. At times we cast the part so late -- this is one of the problems in doing television -- that by the time we get the actress into the makeup room in the morning and attempt to get a far-out style on her her...sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes she won't work, and we've had actresses who got kind of emotional and refused to come out of the dressing room or out of the makeup room, so we compromised.

24: Will there be more repartee between Spock and Dr. Mc Coy?

JUSTMAN: Yes, there will be. As long as we're on. I'm sure there will be.

25: While we're on hair-styles -- who designed Yeoman Rand's hairstyle?

JUSTMAN: That was motly Gene Roddenberry.

26: When you're traveling at warp speed, say 266 times the speed of light, how can you see anything, when you're traveling faster than the light you would see it by?

JUSTMAN: Well, we pretend a lot. ((LAUGHTER))

27: I have a question for Rick Carter. In that Andromeda story ("By any Other Name") the ship had to cross that barrier, and the way it looked on the television screen, the ship could have gone over the barrier. The barrier didn't fill the whole screen.

RICK CARTER: You've asked the wrong person. I thought that was an optical illusion -- the part that is the center of attention is where the ship is, and that's where they show the barrier, But it's like the dge of a bubble, and it really does extend over the whole screen.

27: Well, okay.

JUSTMAN: There is no way in a two-dimensional medium to show something approaching something out in the distance unless you give it certain limitations. If it covered the whole screen, you wouldn't know how far away it was. In a two-dimensional medium there's no way to show how far away something is unless it has a top and a bottom that seem to spread out as you get closer. If we were three-dimensional medium, we might have different kinds of problems.

28: Occasionally in the program some kind of technical advance will occur. For instance, in the Andromeda adventure, the Andromedans souped up the Enterprise so it could travel much faster than it previously could. Are these things cumulative, or are they just ignored for future episodes.?

JUSTMAN: When it suits the show's dramatic purposes, they can be cumulative; otherwise it's a forget-it-ever-happened kind of thing.

28: Well, do any of those things suit the purpose?

JUSTMAN: Yes, things have suited -- we use certain medical equipment that we developed and used again. The Universal Translator was developed for one show and has been used again. The Galileo Seven was developed for one show and has been used. There will be a new ship which you haven't seen yet, which will be a Klingon vessel, and it will be used by Romulans at certain times.

29: Klingons have been used as a background -- I was wondering, do you have any planet that was used for one sequence that will be used for another -- re-visiting the same planet again?

JUSTMAN: That happens from time to time, yes.

30: In various shows we have seen four or five other ships in Star Fleet, and I was wondering if we would be seeing the rest of the fleet.

JUSTMAN: Not the rest of the fleet at one time, no. As I remember, Dorothy Fontana created 12 starships and named them -- and I can't remember the names of all of them -- we've shown some of them. And some of them have been blown to bits. Luckily, we've always survived in ours.

31: If the phasers can shoot to stun, why should they ever be used to kill? For example, that white bear kind of thing on that planet where they had this situation of arming native peoples ((the Mugato in "Private Little War")), and they shot this white kind of bear, and it disappeared -- why couldn't they have just stunned it?

JUSTMAN: I can answer that in several different ways. I kind of prefer not to. But one way -- sometimes it's more exciting -- when it isn't a human being -- to "wipe 'em out."

31: But it's not right for an advanced civilization, not for the Star Fleet. The other people can do it, but our people shouldn't.

JUSTMAN: Well we can talk all around this problem for quite a while. As you will not, when a character has had forewarning, he attempts to stun, not to kill. In that situation I don't think anything like that was expected, and perhaps the setting was inadvertently set too high. But it is imperative that when it's your life or his, most of the time it's going to be his.

31: But it wasn't imperative. They can set to stun, not kill.

JUSTMAN: That's right. But supposing he didn't have time to

decide what setting he was going to get it on; he must had to squeeze the trigger.

31: But why should it ever be set to kill?

JUSTMAN: Because we're human, and we're foul.

31: But not them. They're honorable.

JUSTMAN: Well, we're honorable humans, and we're terrible.

31: But don't you think you should demand that the writers create situations where the Enterprise people wouldn't have to kill?

JUSTMAN: No. We will never demand that.

KOENIG: I think that there's an interesting point that has been brought up with this question. I think that no television show, regardless of how altruistic the motives, should ever deviate from depicting human behavior. If we get a kind of antiseptic objective, we're no longer showing human beings. In danger, when there's a threat, certain personal motivations become very important regardless of humanitarian characteristics that may otherwise hold sway -- he's going to try to preserve his own life.

31: But then you should have it so that they try first not to kill, and then that doesn't work, and they're still in danger, and then they kill. ((GROANS.))

JUSTMAN: Mainly, the phaser itself was designed to stun. ((APPLAUSE.))