

Blood and Fire

The Past is Prologue

The Next Generation's fifth season story *The Outcast* presented the first portrayal of homosexuality in Star Trek's 25 year history, but this was not the first time such a brave and welcome move was considered, as **Kathleen Toth** finds out.

STAR TREK is famous for boldly going where no one has gone before in television drama. The original series became known for Gene Roddenberry's insistence on having a multi-racial crew at a time when blacks were not cast as regulars in network television programming. Besides Nichelle Nichols, George Takei was also cast in a role which did not trade in any way upon racial stereotypes and Roddenberry charted a course in which contemporary taboos were ignored. He remained unbowed in the face of some NBC affiliates refusing to air an episode in which Kirk and Uhura engaged in a primetime interracial kiss. And in their midst was Spock, not only the product of an interspecies marriage but also preaching the alien philosophy of IDIC — respect for Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination.

THE NEXT GENERATION has not had to deal with quite the same set of issues — no one any longer questions the wisdom of casting actors like Michael Dorn or Whoopi Goldberg in the series. However, new times make for new prejudices. While Roddenberry won new plaudits from the handicapped for having a blind character functioning as a valued member of the crew, he never overcame the charge that women are not truly equal in the TREK universe and at the time of his death the series had also yet to carry through on commitments to incorporate gay characters into the crew of the Enterprise. Gay rights organizations have lobbied the STAR TREK production offices for over a year seeking admittance to the tolerant world of the 24th century. These organizations were told last summer that an effort would be made to portray gays as members of the crew in the glimpses of life aboard ship that are seen at times in places like Ten Forward. Roddenberry argued that it would not be appropriate to base an entire episode on the issue of homophobia or treat homosexuality as a controversial subject because he believed that this is another flawed aspect of our society that would have vanished by the 24th century, along with racism.

The aborted season one story *Blood and Fire* was written because Roddenberry and Gerrold were approached about this very subject while THE NEXT GENERATION was still in the planning stages and Gene Roddenberry made much the same statement then that he did nearly five years later regarding how the subject should be handled. That the script was never used and indeed had some role to play in Gerrold's decision to leave his post with the new series, does not detract from its strengths. Gerrold has denied that he thinks the fact that there was a homosexual relationship in the script was the reason for his inability to get it accepted for the series. And indeed the relationship is portrayed as incidental to the main story and is never treated as controversial in the eyes of the rest of the crew. Rather, for Gerrold, the main point of the script was a comment on the treatment of Aids patients in our society and accompanying fears about contaminated blood supplies. In the hands of someone so familiar with the Roddenberry tradition of using STAR TREK as a vehicle to comment upon the moral flaws of our own time, *Blood and Fire* was a dramatically satisfying lesson on the stupidities of hatred flavoured with the first season tension in the Enterprise crew that derived from the complex relationship between Captain Picard and the Crusher family.

Blood and Fire — synopsis

The Enterprise responds to a distress call from a scientific research vessel, Copernicus, but the away team cannot find any signs of life on the bridge. They do, however, find a most unpleasant corpse lacking blood. When they do find a survivor, he begs them to kill him and takes his own life with one of their phasers when they refuse. They soon learn to their horror that the ship is infested with Regulan Bloodworms or plasmasites, creatures first discovered 150 years ago. There was no cure for their lethal infection and there is a standing order to destroy any ships that are contaminated. However, the planet where the bloodworms were found has been quarantined for years and the plague virtually unknown until now. That mystery is solved when 15 survivors from the crew of 123 are found protected behind a repulsar field in the cargo area. The team from the Enterprise cannot beam back to their ship because they are now infected too, but Picard orders them to be beamed into the secured area on the Copernicus as they are about to be overrun by the plasmasites. The survivors include the leaders of the mission, who claim they were given authorization to do research in the quarantine area because of a fear that the Ferengi might seek to use the bloodworms as a weapon against the Federation. They have learned that the bloodworms are attracted to certain oxygen-bearing enzymes in the blood but they have found no cure.

Beverly Crusher thinks that it may be possible to save the people trapped on the Copernicus, however. If their enzymes can be suppressed the bloodworms will die almost immediately but the medical staff will have to then beam each of them to the Enterprise for a complete blood replacement in less than ten minutes to save their



David Gerrold (front row, 4th from right) in his cameo in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*

lives. Captain Picard is momentarily relieved of the burden of having to order the destruction of the Copernicus, but he is far less happy to discover his CMO attempting to beam to the research ship without asking his permission. He pulls her off the transporter platform but she insists that she is the person best equipped to supervise the treatment of the survivors. Picard says that he can order her not to go as she is a sole-surviving parent, but that is not what is uppermost in his thoughts. He reluctantly yields to her professional ethics and then turns to the transporter officer, Mr Worf, who says that,

speaking as a Klingon, he would suggest beating her.

Picard's dilemma is far from over. When he returns to the bridge, a crewman approaches him on behalf of some of the families aboard ship to request that he does not proceed with the rescue because of their fear of infection. Picard acidly informs him that this is not a democracy and that they are not going to abandon their crewmates. "And we're not throwing away half the human race because the other half is scared." Beverly is making unpleasant discoveries of her own — the researchers on the Copernicus tell her that there is no natural control on the plasmasites even in their native environment because they were actually engineered to be a doomsday weapon of war. Among the away team members trapped on the Copernicus are Eakins, a security officer, and Freeman, a medical technician. The two men have been matter-of-factly identified as having "been together" for two years.

Picard asks young Wesley Crusher to the bridge to monitor events, making the boy fear that he is only being nice because he has bad news for him. The Captain suddenly becomes aware how deep the gulf is that separates them. On the Copernicus, Freeman tells Eakins how much he worries about him being on security detail. Beverly's plan is put into operation and small numbers of infected personnel are injected with enzyme-suppressing drugs and then beamed to sick bay for blood replacement when the plasmasites are destroyed. The operation is working smoothly but it is a race against time because the plasmasites are breaking down the repulsar field. A crisis occurs when the Enterprise begins to run out of artificial blood. Donors will be needed to supply enough blood to save the last six crew members trapped on the Copernicus. Picard and Wesley forge something of a blood bond by being the first volunteers for this archaic process. As the last few humans struggle to maintain the defensive wall in the cargo hold, Freeman argues that he will have to be the last to beam out as he must monitor the enzyme levels in Eakins and Riker. When they protest, he injects them before they can make any further attempt to deter him. After they are safely beamed out, he injects himself but the plasmasites break through and are on him before it is safe to transport him, leaving the Enterprise bridge stricken by the sounds of his death.

Now a safe way to destroy the ship must be found and there is no ready answer. The plasmasites are not destroyed by phaser fire and they are not satiated by feeding. In fact, Dr Crusher suspects that they have been mutated in some way to inhibit the natural course of their development. Picard, who had already been repelled by the militarism of the "research" mission,

discovers that the leader of the mission actually intended to unleash the bloodworms on the Ferengi, whom he regards as a loathsome evil. He still intends to aim the Copernicus as a weapon at the Ferengi worlds, but is stopped by his associate. Wishing to make amends for all the lives that have been lost, the repentant scientist injects himself with a compound that Dr Crusher believes will restore the bloodworms to their natural lifecycle and demands to be transported to the Copernicus. His one way mission is a success. The bloodworms are transformed into a Sparkle-Dancer, legendary creatures of light that harmlessly dance and spin through the cosmos.

Blood and Fire was in the best traditions of STAR TREK's founding humanism and it can only be hoped that those who have inherited Gene

Roddenberry's universe will continue to welcome the opportunity to comment upon the painful issues of our own time through the medium of science fiction. David Gerrold himself currently has no desire to reassociate himself with THE NEXT GENERATION or do any writing for television. He has, however, expressed an interest in submitting proposals for one or more STAR TREK novels, something which he has not done since the publication of his novelization of the first NEXT GENERATION story, *Encounter at Farpoint*. I