



Star Trek: Set Phasers to Stun: It's been 37 light years?!

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The Mental Floss Cheat Sheet is designed to give readers a quick overview of sophisticated topics – making you look smart without all that annoying, studious effort. Use it as a conversation starter- all you gotta do is keep a straight face. “Go get ‘em, Einstein!”

Namedropping:

A little Star Trek (pron. Stahr Trehk) trivia will advance your standing with a plethora of nerds, geeks, sci-fi buffs and people who like tight uniforms. Start off by seeking out intelligent life, learning the Vulcan Mind-Meld (great at parties), then live long and prosper.

Stardate: 1966-9-6:8-9EST

On September 8, 1966, at 8pm, “Star Trek” premiered on NBC-TV. Having pointy ears has never been the same

The Basics:

Believe it or not, there are only 79 original episodes of “Star Trek” – and you’ve probably seen them all. Though the show is wildly popular in syndication (35 light years and counting), Trek never broke the Top-50 during its three-year run on television. In fact, star William Shatner’s other big series “T.J. Hooker” lasted four seasons, while “Star Trek” only lasted three.

The last original episode of “Star Trek” appeared on June 3, 1969, a month and a half before Neil Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the moon.

EXTRA CREDIT:

“Star Trek” almost didn’t boldly go into its third season, much less seek out new civilizations. When the show was rumored to

be on the cancellation block at the end of its second season, fans mounted a letter-writing campaign that made Klingons look like Teddy Bears; not only did it succeed in getting the show renewed, but it prompted an on-air announcement from NBC on March 1, 1968, stating as much. Ah, the power of Trekkies.

Show creator Gene Roddenberry was a visionary producer, not only with his sci-fi sets and gizmos, but also for including all sorts of morality tales cloaked in alien empires and futuristic quandaries – and out-smarting the network censors. Among the hot-buttons covered were anti-war sentiments, ecological viewpoints, gender equality (in outer space), and race relations (all fur is created equal). He also taught viewers that if you’re beamed down to a new planet wearing a red security uniform and haven’t been given a name yet, you’re toast.

Bad time-slots, poor ratings and some lousy writing in the third season got Trek cancelled before its “five year mission” could be attained, but syndication gave new viewers a chance to get on board. Something about the wild space frontier obviously struck a nerve with the masses: There have been six “Star Trek” series altogether, ten “Star Trek” films, and over 500 books on the subject published around the world.

Conversation Starters:

- Two of the show’s main actors, William Shatner and James Doohan, are Canadian. Beam me up, eh?
- The first space shuttle was named the Enterprise. An homage to “Star Trek?” When the shuttle was first publicly



showcased to the public on September 17, 1976, the Air Force Band played the theme to “Star Trek.” Gene Roddenberry and the key cast members from the series were also present at the event.

- The first “Star Trek” convention was held in New York City in January of 1972. Please tell us you haven’t been to one...
- “Star Trek” broke television’s racial barriers with African-American and Asian-American lead characters. Nichelle Nichols and Bill Shatner also shared TV’s first interracial kiss.
- Once every seven years, all Vulcan males experience “pon farr,” a powerful mating drive which demands that they mate or die. Since Spock is only half Vulcan, he must be very confused. Aaargh!
- Gene Roddenberry was a Los Angeles policeman before he quit to pursue writ-

ing full-time; among his writing credits were episodes of “Dragnet” and “Dr. Kildaire.”

- Majel Barrett, who portrayed Nurse Christine Chapel in the original series, also provided the voice of the Enterprise’s on-board computer. Barrett went on to become Roddenberry’s wife. (Talk about a cosmic casting couch!)
- In the show’s original pilot (later said to be set ten years before Kirk’s directive), the ship was commanded by Captain Christopher Pike, portrayed by Jeffrey Hunter. A second pilot, titled “Where No Man Has Gone Before,” was later filmed and aired as the third episode in the series. Maybe the transporter was busted.
- No surprise, but “Star Trek” has one of the coolest websites out there: startrek.com
- The “transporter” feature of the Enterprise was dreamed up to save dough: It was much cheaper to have the crew “beam down” to planetary surfaces, rather than attempting to film a realistic-looking landing for the gargantuan starship.
- Several pieces of the original “Star Trek” set were auctioned in 2002. The most expensive item: Kirk’s command chair, which went for a cool \$150,000.
- According to specs, the real “Starship Enterprise” would have been nearly 1,000 feet long and weighed almost 200,000 tons.
- James Tiberius Kirk will be born on Friday, March 22, 2233, in Riverside, Iowa.

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