

Star-trekking

Star Trek is nowhere as titillating as *Baywatch*, but with a bigger army of devotees, it certainly sells more than sunblock lotions. *Salina Christmas* examines the eccentricism of one of the world's famous obsessions.

STAR TREK RANKS NOWHERE CLOSE TO *Baywatch* in terms of libidinous stimulation but even without the sun-sand-and-silicone-implants formula, the sci-fi TV series that features more cosmetrical latex than spandex has somehow managed to inspire eight movies, a number one song, a very successful TV sequel, two successful offshoots, many websites and a huge market of ST paraphernalia.

But what hooked fans like music agent "Luke Skywalker", 27, on *Star Trek* isn't so much its commercial hype but rather, the series' self-fulfilling prophecies on contemporary issues.

"It's unlike (the purely fictional) *Star Wars* which is about open space," he commented. Drawing examples from Captain Kirk's mobile phone (elusive in the 60s, a reality in the 90s) and the conceptual "space warp", Skywalker rhapsodised: "Star Trek is quite factual, based on real science. It's about possibilities, not just fantastic imagination."

But despite this intense fascination, Skywalker has never taken the trouble to join any ST associations. "I've never taken the pain to join. That's why I'm a Trekker, not a member of the Moonies or Heaven's Gate."

Nor does he know any existing local ST associations. "You have self-confessed individual Trekkers, but never really an organised group," he said. "But I can introduce you to some friends through the *Star Trek* chatline ... if you consider that a formal *Star Trek* gathering."

Through what I'd call a kooky Internet teleconference, I was introduced to several die-hard Trekkers with fancy pseudonyms such as Tora Ziyal, Mira Sorvino Fan, Shinichi-e and Carmen Ibanez. Interview via the internet was such a pain - nobody followed any conversational structure and



Some enthusiasts at a gathering in Kuala Lumpur.

wasn't interested in doing so - so I had to do away with the set of questions prepared beforehand. The conversation was pretty much garbled and serious topics such as Heaven's Gate mass suicide could easily flipped into something totally stupid and irrelevant.

But after 45 minutes of intense Q&A (with every five-minute conversation backtracked by a curious Trekker probing: "Why do you ask? Are you a journalist?"), I sussed out that these people aren't as geeky as I thought. With ages ranging from 16 to 40 years old and professions varying from supermarket cashier to journalist, my subjects can't be any more different than you and me. Except that they love *Star Trek* too much.

The loathe of Hollywood smut isn't the only factor that bind the Trekkers together. Rather, it was the characters' socio-reli-

gious ambiguity which won the viewers' over. With the exception of Chakotay (of *Star Trek Voyager*), "none of the human characters seem to have religious faiths", observed Mira Sorvino Fan. Mancunian S.M.H doesn't necessarily believe in God, but he allows himself to believe in the concept of the Unseen - at least the ones extensively discussed in the series.

Beneath the sublime and the spiritual, there are other stimulus as well. Tora Ziyal said it was one of the very few TV series he and his dad could actually watch together ("I've been watching it since I was six") while Carmen Ibanez said she followed about 20 series of the cartoon programmes before she decided to follow the actual series.

So how do they apply *Star Trek* philosophies to real life? "I don't follow them at all," deadpanned Ziyal, "but there

are some that I follow, for example the Ferengi's Rules of Acquisition."

Asked to explain the rules, he lied: "Never insult a Ferengi's mum."

"No, it's like capitalism; money is the motivation. Nothing stands between you and your objective. I don't take it too seriously, though."

Apologetically, another Trekker entered: "Roddenberry may be dead, but his brilliant ideas live on." Interesting.

But how does their obsession differ from that of, er, Heaven's Gate? "ST inspires but it doesn't condone mass suicide," Mira Sorvino Fan countered, evidently peeved by this comparison.

"It's *Babylon 5's* fault," chimed another Trekker.

Do you guys mind if I call you Trekkies? I asked. Sometimes it's nice to listen to the things they say when they're mad. But to my disappointment, they said no. "Trekker is what we call ourselves. Trekkie is what the non-Trekkers (who usually pooh-poo our interest in *Star Trek*) call us," typed one. He added: "We don't find the latter derogatory. Some of us actually prefer to be called Trekkies. The latter sounds friendlier."

And nor do they mind spending a fortune on ST paraphernalia. Each confessed to have spent more than RM 1,000 on ST paraphernalia alone (phone bill excluded) and nobody seems to mind the hype. In fact, with regards to the cut-throat prices of the merchandise items, Tora Ziyal has only one regret: "I wish they would come cheaper."

With the exceptions of uniform tops and plastic tricorders, items such as books, videotapes, toys, posters and comic books are available at all Mind Shop outlets. Figurines and miniature models are available at Miniature Hobby at 1-Utama, with prices ranging from RM 149.90 to infinity. **E**

New look for mag

It was no ordinary event the day *ETC* turned two, *Reena Enbasegaram* writes.

HARD TO BELIEVE IT, BUT *ETC* HAS JUST celebrated its second birthday. Launched in 1995, the magazine, published by Panpac Publications (M) Sdn Bhd, has continually pushed the frontiers of the local media with its titillating gossip, no-holds-barred celebrity interviews, and especially, its tantalising photo spreads.

To celebrate the second anniversary, *ETC* had a bash in Heaven recently. Also in conjunction with its anniversary, the magazine hosted a cocktail party for AIM (Anugerah Industri Muzik) nominees earlier in the day at Concorde Hotel Kuala Lumpur. The AIM is the local Grammy awards, a recognition to our artistes' contribution and achievements in the local music industry, and this year's theme is "Malaysian music in contemporary times".

Arena was the compere, and Kassandra Kassim was emcee for both functions. Among the AIM nominees who turned up at the cocktail party were Siti Nurhaliza, The Bads, Butterfingers, Subculture and Happy Nightmare. Some then adjourned to the Heaven party.

Kenny Gregory, *ETC's* associate pub-

lisher, reveals that *ETC* hopes to make the cocktail party for the nominees an annual event as proof of *ETC's* "belief and conviction of the potential of the local music industry". It is also part of the magazine's commitment towards promoting the local music industry as "the editorial team was open to new sound and faces".

The party at Heaven was themed *A Night Less Ordinary*. An estimated 750 invited guests turned up. After 9pm, it was open to members of the public as well. Readers who had brought along a coupon found on the issue of *ETC* with Leonardo DiCaprio on the cover, were entitled to a goodie bag. Gregory claims that over all, close to 2,000 people thronged Heaven that night.

Apart from the AIM nominees, Prema Lucas, Kudsia Kahar, and Jeffrey Ong were among the local celebrities spotted "mingling" at the bash. Kassandra took care of the lucky draw and games.

There were also Reebok and Nexis fashion shows and a showcase by the Babylon Boom Boom cast from Penang. The former was mostly a showcase of



The guests treated to some cabaret stuff.

casual wear and the latter, a mixture of campy cabaret-like dances and comedy routines which were definitely 18SX.

Nothing original but entertaining enough.

The highlight of the evening was of course, the unveiling of the new cover. It was performed by Gregory, Arianna Teoh and Ning Baizura. With the revamp, the magazine has now shrunk in size, giving it a more contemporary appearance, and promising to be "fresher, sharper and brighter". While it will still have its finger on the pulse of the local and foreign nightlife and entertainment scene, the new staples will be fashion, sports, fitness, travel, relationship columns and other lifestyle features.

Gregory explains the revamp. "Products tend to have a life cycle. It's time to move on and have a new look as it (*ETC*) has been around for two years. There's an improvement in terms of layout and content."

The first issue of the revamp features Hollywood Cameron Diaz - posing provocatively in a see-through top and bikini bottom - on the cover. Among the new sections, Fitness features "martial arts" and catty advice columnist Ms Chow undergoes a makeover. **E**