

THE BALTIMORE SUN

Sunday, May 4, 2014



LLOYD FOX, BALTIMORE SUN

Howard Weinstein, left, and Steven Wilson are two of four authors who will appear at the East Columbia library to discuss their work relating to Star Trek. They are both writers for comic books.

Local writers to share love of distant worlds Four found careers in their affection for a 1960s space adventure

BY JANENE HOLZBERG

For The Baltimore Sun

The nation's space exploration program had already captivated 12-year-old Howard Weinstein's imagination when the episodes of the original "Star Trek" began airing in 1966.

"The show was the coolest thing happening on TV, outside of space launches," the Elkridge author said, recalling how school days were interrupted so that bulky TVs could be wheeled into classrooms for students across the nation to watch live blastoffs.

The science fiction series,

which follows the voyages of the starship USS Enterprise, shared an optimistic outlook with the U.S. space program that attracted the now 59-year-old author of 65 "Star Trek" comic books and seven "Star Trek" novels.

At a time when schools were holding bomb drills to teach children to huddle under their desks in case of nuclear attack, "the show's message was, 'Things will get better,'" he said.

"Its setting 300 years in the

future alone was enough to say, 'You'll get through this.' That was powerful."

Weinstein will join three colleagues who share a "Star Trek" bond for a meet-the-authors event called "Fantastic Quartet: Four Writers on Creating Strange New Worlds" at 7 p.m. Thursday at the East Columbia branch library.

The other writers are Dave Galanter and Steven H. Wilson, who are also Elkridge residents, and Robert Greenberger, who lives in Fulton. The four are

friends as well as collaborators.

They have written dozens of "Star Trek" novels, comic books, television scripts, nonfiction books and articles, as well as original tales set in worlds of their own creation, according to the library's online description of the speakers.

While they all have written for projects other than "Star Trek," "that's what we're all known for" and what audiences want to hear about, Weinstein said.

The library drew the program's title from the TV series' voice-over introduction, given each week by actor William Shatner as Capt. James T. Kirk. In it, he describes the Enterprise's mission "to explore strange new worlds" and "to boldly go where no man has gone before."

"Everybody is familiar with the show or the movies, and having four writers who have written about 'Star Trek' and who all live in Howard County makes for a very unique event," said Christie Lassen, the library's public relations director.

Wilson was a young child growing up in Clarksville when the three seasons of the original "Star Trek" episodes aired, so he discovered the series in reruns.

"The writing was, overall, of extremely high quality, the production values were high, and the music was cinematic," said Wilson, 48, who is chief information officer for the Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services.

He, too, appreciated the show for its optimistic perspective.

"Why 'Star Trek?' Because it speaks to a hopeful future in

which humanity has improved but still has struggles that we can relate to," said the married father of two teenage boys.

"The series was groundbreaking because, like 'M*A*S*H' and 'Lou Grant,' for which it paved the way, it had something to say about the world we live in. Few series had the guts to do that in the 1960s."

Today, Wilson describes himself as a new-media artist. He works in his spare time as a fiction writer, blogger, pod-caster, radio show performer and publisher, usually operating at some level of overdrive in order to juggle his job and his hobbies.

"We've all stuck with it and are all orbiting around [the same] world," he said, noting the four often appear together at science fiction conventions, such as Balticon and Shore Leave, both held in the Hunt Valley area of Baltimore County.

Greenberger, who took his first job as an English teacher in September at Owings Mills High School, said he owes a lot to "Star Trek."

"One of my claims to fame is that I edited the 'Star Trek' comic books for DC Comics for eight years, starting in 1984," said Greenberger, a 55-year-old New York native.

His personal story began in Long Island as a sickly child prone to bouts of bronchitis. He was offered Superman comic books to read and recalls his father watching "Star Trek."

"I responded to 'Star Trek's' story themes and characters," he said. "We were the aliens walking among other worlds [in the show's plots], and I liked the

what-if aspect of putting human beings in different settings to see how our basic humanity would set us apart."

In 2012, Greenberger wrote "Star Trek: The Complete Unauthorized History," a labor of love which the publisher had asked him to write and which Weinstein read as he wrote it.

" 'Star Trek' writers belong to an elite club, and we formed deep friendships and moved on to other projects together," he said. "It's been really enriching." A dozen "Star Trek" writers, all fans of space flight, were recently treated to a VIP tour of NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston in exchange for presenting panel discussions on the series to employees, Greenberger said.

"We were basically willing to sing for our supper in order to take the tour, which was amazing," he said.

Inge Heyer, who worked on NASA's Hubble Space Telescope and is a visiting assistant professor of physics at Loyola University Maryland, is a big fan of "Star Trek" and of the quartet.

"I became an astronomer because of 'Star Trek,' and I have lots of friends who became physicists, doctors and engineers for the same reason," said the native of Germany. She has collected "Star Trek" books and comics for decades and owns all of the foursome's combined body of "Star Trek" works, among other authors' non-fiction books and scholarly writing on the series.

"It is just plain fun to walk into a bookstore and see books by authors I know personally," the Parkville resident said.

Galanter, an information technology engineer, said "Star Trek" continues to distinguish itself "by demonstrating how, if we act together, we can maintain civilization despite humanity's challenges.

"It is far more positive than most. Many [books and movies] show a dystopian future, like 'Blade Runner,' which is very

dark, and 'The Planet of the Apes,' " observed Galanter, 44, who is in the midst of writing a "Star Trek" novel.

Weinstein, who trains dogs along with keeping up with writing projects, has turned his attention to writing historical fiction.

"As I got more disillusioned with the state of the world, I

realized that how we got to where we are is as interesting as how we'll get to where we may be," he said of the genre change.

"I'm glad 'Star Trek' is still around. But we don't want it to be a mosquito caught in amber," he said. "We love new blood and different points of view, and that's what makes these interactions so worthwhile."

Copyright © 2014, Howard County Times, a Baltimore Sun Media Group publication