

In 1964, on a Desilu Studios soundstage in Culver City, California, a crew of filmmakers headed by creator Gene Roddenberry, prepared an unusual pilot for a series called *Star Trek*. The very first story was "The Cage," the most expensive pilot produced for television at the time. It starred Jeffrey Hunter as starship Captain Christopher Pike, with a leading lady, Susan Oliver, who played five different personas of one person. Oliver was an actress of note in the 1960s—with guest roles in *Twilight Zone*, *Peyton Place* and *Ben Casey*—so she was tapped to portray Vina, sole survivor of a spaceship crash on planet Talos IV.

The pilot—which *didn't* sell the series—was re-edited into a two-part episode of *Star Trek*, "The Menagerie." Twenty years later, the story as filmed was released on videocassette in color, including the many scenes deleted from its "Menagerie" repackaging (in black & white).

"It was very nice company," Oliver recalls of the filming of "The Cage." "All of us in the production enjoyed doing it. We went to Gene Roddenberry's house several times and just sat around the kitchen, had coffee and talked. Gene was very much present on the set during filming."

Caged Woman

Oliver first found out about the role from Gene Roddenberry while filming a segment of *Bonanza*. Roddenberry introduced himself and explained he had a character, Vina, he wanted Oliver to play in a science-fiction pilot. She would be seen in several different visages: as a girl in a cage, a lady serving a picnic lunch, a fair maiden in distress, a green Orion slave girl; and ultimately, a deformed and utterly sad spaceship survivor. For the slave girl sequence, however, Oliver would be required to dance very well—and quite seductively.

"One of the unique things about this job was I *wasn't* really a dancer," admits Oliver.

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"They had a choreographer work with me a solid week, every day, before I began filming. There were different facets in this role, and the green girl was most challenging."

That first time Oliver walked onto the set in complete green makeup and Orion slave girl outfit, the production crew's usual friendliness and kindness towards her dramatically changed. From Oliver's own words, in her book, *Odyssey—A Transatlantic Journey* (MacMillan, 1983), she explains what happened on that day:

"The usual easy 'hi Suse' banter was gone; the guys stood back and stared or averted their eyes as though it were immoral to look at such a woman. There seemed almost to be a sense of their whispering, 'Wow, Susan's not such a nice girl after all, she's maybe wild, evil.' Even before the dance began and I was just standing demurely to the side, this feeling was in the air. Gene had touched on something dark in man's unconscious; one could imagine doing things with a green mate that he would never dare with one of his own color. But the show was a very special experience and it was fun to do the wild dance; it also meant hard work. Believe me, it was not easy to be green."

Now, Oliver echoes those written words, noting, "There were many experiments in makeup. Fred Phillips, head of the makeup department, couldn't get the green girl's makeup. They couldn't find any green

makeup that would stick to skin, so they tried many, many things on me until they finally sent for help from New York where they found what they wanted."

Only after filming wrapped did Oliver discover that her green look had made others see red in embarrassment. Earlier, Roddenberry had asked Fred Phillips for a camera test of the green makeup, so an actress was hired. Technicians who processed the footage in the film lab were confused at seeing a *green* girl, so they corrected the chemical development, reverting the skin color back to flesh tones. Gene Roddenberry had to explain to them that green was what he wanted!

At the very end of "The Cage," Vina is shown as she really is—a deformed and horribly scarred survivor of the spaceship crash. The illusion of beauty had been kept upon her by the Talosians. Filming this sequence was tedious, as Oliver explains:

"It was a process that required a great deal of patience. I spent the day where they just kept making me up. And I would go from the makeup room to the cameras—which was tied down—sit on the stool, roll some more film, and then back to get some more aging makeup. We did that about five times, I'm not sure, but it took an entire day to complete."

Oliver also confirms there were no new scenes filmed with her when "The Cage" was repackaged as "The Menagerie." Net-

After her daring escape, the actress recalls her attempt to seduce a starship captain while trapped in "The Cage."

First Trek

As Vina, Susan Oliver became the product of Captain Pike's fantasies—and the pilot's crew's awe.



Susan Oliver

By FRANK GARCIA

After the unsuccessful pilot, Oliver and Jeffrey Hunter returned to *Star Trek* sort of—they didn't do any new scenes for "The Menagerie."

If Oliver makes another *Trek*, she would like it to be at the helm, directing *The Next Generation*.



Photo: Courtesy Susan Oliver





It was easy for the Talosians to transform Vina (Oliver) into different forms for Yeoman Colt (Laurie Goodwin), Captain Pike (Hunter) and Number One (Majel Barrett). However, it took the actress several hours of makeup sessions to do it.

work executives had, of course, rejected the pilot as being "too intellectual for television." When *Star Trek* eventually became a series, Roddenberry merely created the frame of "The Menagerie" around "The Cage," thus showcasing the original story. This two-parter eventually won Roddenberry the 1966 Hugo award for Best Dramatic Presentation.

Like many members of the cast and crew, Oliver participated in the *Trek* anniversary celebration.

"It was fun to see everybody again, and in that sense, Gene Roddenberry is again our 'papa bear,'" Oliver beams. "He and Majel [Barrett Roddenberry] are wonderful hosts. The longevity of relationships are very unusual in this town. This has a long-term family feeling. I was also there when he received the Hollywood star."

Oliver's character, Vina, also re-appeared in DC Comics' *Star Trek Annual #2* in which the crew of the *Enterprise* were forced to again return to Talos IV, the planet visited in "The Cage," only to find it controlled by Klingons who had learned the power of illusion. With his crew's help, Kirk defeated the Klingons, and restored the planet to its rightful owners, the Talosians.

"That comic was OK. In fact, I thought it was good storytelling. Each frame had something to tell, visually," Oliver comments, noting that the comic's panel-to-panel action resembles storyboarding so "it was quite instructional from a director's point-of-view."

The premise of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is an exciting one. "I would love to direct an episode!" Oliver exclaims. "I'm

going to get in touch with Gene and ask. It would be very interesting to see if the idea works with another set of actors. So much more is expected from the special effects." But after contacting Paramount, she learned her lack of experience in dealing with complex special FX eliminated her as a *Next Generation* director. Still, she likes *The Next Generation* and may again—armed with a new agent—apply for a directorial job.

According to Oliver, the secret to *Star*

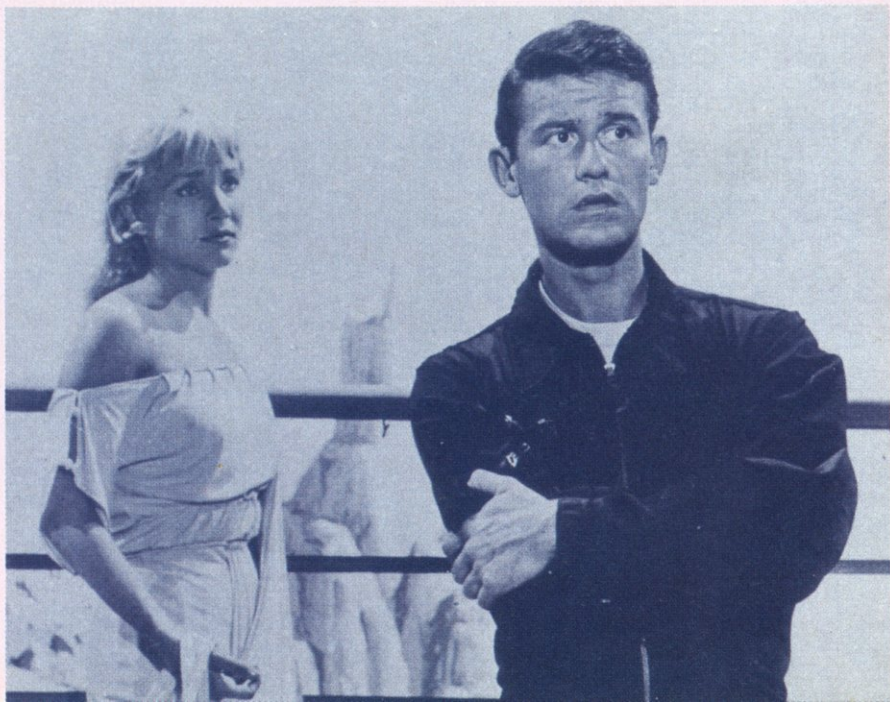
In caging another space explorer, Oliver taught Roddy McDowall that "People are Alike All Over"—even in *The Twilight Zone*.

Trek's phenomenal endurance is easy to understand. "The history of man's growth in civilization is tied in with explorers of the world," she says. "This show was an exploration beyond what we do every day."

Uncaged Characters

In her long career, Susan Oliver has played many characters. "But, I think *Star Trek* certainly rates very high on my TV roles. Amazingly, people have that episode as their strongest identification for me. I really loved doing the film, *Your Cheatin' Heart*, about the life of Hank Williams, the country singer. Also, I loved working with Liz Taylor on *Butterfield 8*. She was great, it was good fun."

Then, there was Oliver's visit to *The* (continued on page 88)



Twilight Zone Photo: Copyright 1960 CBS

Steinberg

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touch football. They said, 'If you want to do it, do it.' "

Though his parents bolstered his spirits with encouragement, self-confidence took years to develop. "Many people want to go back to grade school. I *don't*. Kids are cute, but they can also be very mean," Steinberg notes with a trace of bitterness. "It got better as I got older. Before high school, I believed everyone else. My mom would be teaching me to ride a bike and people would say, 'Ooh, that's cruel. Don't do that.' They didn't get it. She wasn't cruel, they were.

"If it was up to them, they would have me sit on a couch all day and do nothing. If that were the case and that was my background, I wouldn't be sitting here today. Because of what my parents did for me, that's who I am now. Being with myself and being small, I learned to work with it and use it to my advantage. I developed my personality because I wasn't going to get it by being strong and big and bullying people. I had to win friends another way.

"I developed a sense of humor and I had to be outgoing, too. When they first meet a little person, people are sometimes taken aback. They're afraid of what to say. They don't want to hurt you, so they would rather not speak. I have to make that first step," Steinberg continues. "I go and say, 'Hi, how ya doin?'" Then, I have to take my size lightly, not to make fun of myself, but just to say, 'Hey, it's OK. I know I'm short.' "

Towards the end of high school, Steinberg considered radio broadcasting as a possible career path. In college, he joined the campus radio station, delivering news. "I was in a booth talking to myself, with no one to relate to. After a few weeks," Steinberg recalls, "I said, 'I don't want to do this.' Then, I was cast in a play and I loved it. My professor was honest and said, 'You have potential and in many ways, you might have more of a chance than anyone else here. You'll be up for parts that others won't be.' But there's the other hand, too, and he said, 'You *won't* be up for parts others will. So, you must decide how dedicated you're going to be.' Acting is a profession that if you're not in it wholeheartedly, you're not in it. You must be committed.

"So, I took his advice."

In *Willow*, the main character is an underdog aspiring to be a sorcerer, and through his trials and tribulations, he learns to harness his burgeoning powers. Meegosh, through his good nature and selfless bravery, aids his friend. These are universal themes, themes by which Steinberg lives. "Every human being is given special gifts," David Joseph Steinberg concludes, "and by living your life, you strengthen the gifts and pass them on. I want to be noticed eventually because I'm a good actor. That's a real goal of mine, to be respected as a person and an actor, but not just because I'm short." ✨

Scanlan

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Scanlan. "It was the first thing out of my mouth when I had my meeting with [producers] Rick Berman and Bob Justman, but they disagreed. Rick said that if we were observing something back in the '40s and it wasn't our own characters, they might consider it. But if Captain Picard and the others go back, turn black and white, and then come out the door in color, it loses Gene Roddenberry's original concept of the *Holodeck*, which is an experience that starts as a visual experience and takes on an emotional reaction, but you never cease to be on the *Enterprise*. You don't go back to 1941, and you don't go to San Francisco. You go to the ship's *Holodeck*. It's a fine line, but one that I didn't think was important enough to argue with.

"The *Holodeck*, in my opinion, was never totally clear in its function to the audience," he notes. "'The Big Goodbye' is the first time that the people got, in a sense, trapped, because of a malfunction. They are trapped in the past, and yet it is *not* a time warp. I'm a neophyte at this, but it's very tough to tell the audience that this is not a time warp when we are deeply involved in a plotline in San Francisco. Bullets start flying and somebody gets hit and they start to bleed. It's pretty tough not to consider that a time warp. It was not. It was just an emotional and visual experience. I treated the two segments as entirely different pieces.

"The only key, the only balance to keep the audience reminded that they are on the ship, is the dialogue that Tracy put in. There's a point where Captain Picard says to Dr. Crusher, 'We should be getting back to the *Enterprise*.' She says, 'We *are* on the *Enterprise*,' and he replies, 'Oh yes, I forgot. It's so real.' In this episode, there was far less of this whole futuristic space genre than in the other episodes I've made a point to see. Tracy is really the one who made that happen. His writing and structure made that possible. All I had to do was stay true to whatever period I was in."

Admittedly "blown away" by "The Big Goodbye" winning the coveted Peabody, Scanlan is looking forward to the conclusion of the current Writers Guild strike and future excursions on board the starship *Enterprise*. He's excited about the direction the show has taken so far, and has only one suggestion for its future.

"I'd like to see more internal conflict and controversy, drama between the crew members, and not always have an outsider as the main antagonist," he confesses. "But I like what the show is already beginning to say, which is that you must have the intelligence and the courage to begin to create a new society. Wherever you go there is the human condition, as well as the need for responsibility, integrity, law and order, and so on. It's not just one guy shooting down another guy, like in *Star Wars*. Gene Roddenberry's never confided that in me, but that's my impression of *Star Trek*." ✨

Oliver

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Twilight Zone—where she and Roddy McDowall discovered "People Are Alike All Over."

"Roddy used to take me to lunch at MGM," she recalls, "since he practically grew up there. He would do all these hilarious impressions of big movie moguls and characters in Hollywood. I thought that was great fun.

"It was also very special for me because Rod Serling was a very modest, almost self-effacing person. He was very gentle and nice. Later, when I wrote a screenplay from a book I had optioned through my agent, I got it to Rod and he very kindly took me to dinner just to talk about this script and to encourage me. Then, off he went to Ithaca College, where he used to go every year to teach, and give something back to students. Rod was a very special person.

"But he wasn't there so much during the episode's filming. Mitchell Leisen was the director. He had been a costumer as well as a director. It was interesting to me that he worked very hard with the show's costumer, William Pitt. Leisen picked out a Greek gown for me to wear on Mars, [where "People" took place] because he said, 'You can only go so futuristic and then it comes back to the classic.'"

Oliver's other genre forays include two episodes of *The Invaders* ("The Ivy Curtain," "Inquisition") and a *Night Gallery* ("The Tune in Dan's Cafe"), but she had no specific comments about them because they were "only ordinary TV acting parts."

Her most challenging and rewarding hobby is flying. Oliver's solo voyages on a Lear jet in 1967 took her around the world on a transoceanic journey, which she chronicled in her 1983 book *Odyssey*. She set five world records for men and women pilots.

"I had a taste of everything in the flying. The racing, the jet, the ocean, but now I've caught the directing bug," she reveals. "That's where I go to spend my extra time. It's interesting to me that Bill Shatner and Leonard Nimoy are pilots who have turned to directing. So was Bill's father, and of course, Gene Roddenberry." Oliver's flights haven't stopped at the typewriter. She was nominated for an Emmy Award for her portrayal of Amelia Earhart's first flight instructor in the TV movie *Amelia*.

In recent years, she has worked as a director with credits including *Trapper John M.D.* and *M*A*S*H*. As an actress, she has appeared in *Magnum, P.I.*, *Murder She Wrote*, *Our House* and *Simon and Simon*. Directing feature films is also on her agenda.

"Any actor who is a professional, picks up so much information from years of experience that they bring extra insights into directing," explains Susan Oliver. "Not every actor will be a good director, you must have a good visual sense, a good story sense. I feel very deeply that I want to tell stories of value on film." ✨