

# **Cancelled Sci Fi TV: 1949 to 2015**

By John J. Joex

Copyright © 2016 by John J. Joex  
All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof  
may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever  
without the express written permission of the publisher  
except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

First Edition, May 2016

## Forward

This book began as the second edition of my previously published ***Why Where They Cancelled?*** the first part of which looks at the reasons why television shows (specifically those in the sci fi genre) get cancelled while the second part gives specific examples of shows that met an ill-timed fate. I started to include some of the more recent cancellations (that book was published in Fall of 2011) and expand on the number shows that were cancelled over the past few decades. But I ran into two challenges. One: television is going through some major changes now, and I wanted to wait and see how that plays out before expanding on my previous analysis of why television shows get cancelled. Two: I grew overzealous with my additions of older TV shows and the second part of the book grew rather unwieldy. So I decided to split them out into two separate books and focus on the cancelled shows themselves here while waiting for things to settle down to some degree in the television industry. If you are interested in the behind the scenes look at why TV shows get cancelled, I have a brief rundown at the beginning of this tome and there is also a free book offer for the first edition of ***Why Were They Cancelled?*** [at this link](#). But for now, enjoy my survey of cancelled sci fi TV shows and know that my updated deeper dive into the reasons why they get the ax should hopefully be available before too long.

**Comment on my sources:** Much of what I have compiled here as far as the facts, anecdotes, and trivia was amassed from years of reading magazines (anybody remember those?) and books, watching making-of documentaries, and of course surfing the web. A lot of the facts I have confirmed with research on the Wikipedia and IMDb sites, though I don't typically cite either of those unless I am referring to a particular piece of information or including a quote. You can find much of what I have covered at those two locations, but why do all that digging when I have it right here? If I did happen across one of these nuggets of information in a particular book or specific site, then I usually do reference it. Or if I include an actual quote, then I typically link to the source as well.

If you like what you read here, then check out my other books on the sci fi genre and also keep an eye open for the second edition of ***Why Were They Cancelled?*** and more books that I have on the way.

### Currently Available:

[\*\*\*Why Were They Cancelled?\*\*\*](#) The Plight of Sci Fi TV in the Face of the Unforgiving Niensens and Networks

[\*\*\*25 Must-Watch Science Fiction and Fantasy Movies:\*\*\*](#) An Essential Guide to the Best Movies of the Genre

[\*\*\*Sci Fi Trifles:\*\*\*](#) Useless but Essential Pop Culture Tidbits and Trivia from the Worlds of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror

[\*\*\*Sci Fi Genre Gems:\*\*\*](#) Lost, Forgotten, and/or Underappreciated Nuggets from the Worlds of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror

## **Table of Contents**

### **Cancelled Sci Fi Television**

#### **Why Do Sci Fi TV Shows Get Cancelled?**

#### **Do the Networks Hate Sci Fi Shows?**

#### **Survey of Cancelled Sci Fi TV Shows**

##### **Infamous Cancellations / Network Blunders**

##### **Recent Cancellations (Shows Debuting 2007 to 2015)**

##### **Other Cancellations (Shows Debuting 1949 to 2006)**

##### **Why Weren't They Cancelled (or Were They?)**

### **Free Book Offer**

#### **Index by Series Title**

#### **Index by Start Year**

## Cancelled Sci Fi Television

If you are a fan of science fiction and fantasy television (or just television in general), then you are almost certainly familiar with the fact that TV shows get cancelled. They debut at some point during the year, they air half a season's worth of episodes or more (sometimes less), and then they disappear from the small screen never to be seen again. Even though you loved a particular show and thought it was one of the best things ever to hit the tube, it was cancelled by those callous networks that just don't seem to care about their viewers (at least that's the way we all feel at some point or another). Not every show ends up getting cancelled, some stick around for two or three seasons or even more. But a lot do get the ax every year, and fans are left wondering why.

The simple explanation is that shows get cancelled because not enough people tuned in to watch them (or the networks *believe* that not enough did, more on that below). But many times there is more to the story than just that. A show could have been scheduled in a difficult timeslot, it could have received no promotion, it could have been shuffled across different nights, it could have been preempted frequently, it could have had its episodes aired out of order (and/or it just may *not* have been very good). And then after it was cancelled, the fans may have stepped up and tried to save it with a "Save My Show" campaign or it may have just disappeared into the TV Wasteland.

This book focuses on many of the science fiction and fantasy television shows (hereafter referred to as sci fi) that got the ax over the years and tries to piece together what happened and how the fans reacted. I am focusing primarily on those shows that aired in the United States during the "Prime Time Hours" (8 PM EST to 11 PM EST Monday through Saturday, 7 PM EST to 11 PM EST Sunday), though I do include a few others that aired in different timeslots which may have been well-known or that have interesting stories. I do not include British or other international shows that were produced primarily for their own countries because they follow a different model than U.S. shows (i.e., they are quite often *designed* to have a shorter run).

I would not call this an *exhaustive* survey of cancelled sci fi television, but I do believe that it is rather comprehensive (and interestingly gives a good overview of the genre meaning that *many* of these shows were in fact cancelled). For some shows there's just not much information on why they were cancelled; they hit the air, pulled mediocre to low ratings, then disappeared. And then there are those shows that had a relatively healthy run of four seasons or more (i.e., ***Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, Six Million Dollar Man, Star Trek: The Next Generation***) before wrapping up or getting cancelled due to franchise fatigue. I do not cover too many of those here unless there was an interesting story behind their eventual demise (***Farscape***, for example). And the fact is that there have been *a lot* of sci fi shows on television over the past sixty plus years (over six hundred and counting now) so it's hard to capture them *all* in one place. But I have included those that I have found good information on and/or believe they have an interesting story.

I have been a fan of sci fi television since the late 60's, and many of these shows I followed when they aired though many others I never got around to watching. Starting in 2007, I began blogging regularly and also closely following the ratings and cancellations of sci fi TV shows (currently at [CancelledSciFi.com](http://CancelledSciFi.com)). Plus, I had a closer eye on sci fi fandom during this time by following the many forums and social networks. So for the shows that aired from that year forward, I have more firsthand information on their ratings trends and how the fans reacted to the threat and/or fact of cancellation. For those shows I tend to have more commentary because I watched their fates unfold. And there are also those that I became closely attached to over the years and followed their plights as they originally aired.

Of course, it's hard to say if what I have here always captures the *full* story (or even half of it) because the networks keep their cancellation decisions close to the vest. When asked about cancelled shows they will typically give net-speak like they would have liked to keep it on the air but the ratings weren't strong enough or they decided to go in a different direction with that night of programming or it didn't quite fit with their other shows or some sort of spin like that. But the truth is that they may have actually had conflicts with the studio and/or the producers or the show regularly went over budget or it didn't attract the high-paying sponsors or a particular network executive did not like it or something along those lines. And it's also pretty clear that the Big Four broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC) did not quite get sci fi for many, many years (often looked upon as kids' shows) and genre entries were frequently given little chance to prove themselves (more on that below).

All of this and more has led to the cancellation of sci fi shows and I believe I have captured it pretty good in some places and maybe at least hit on a few of the highlights in others. So read on and see what nuggets of information you can learn about your favorite shows and/or those ones that you vaguely remember seeing on the air for a night or two before they disappeared into the TV Wasteland. And if you don't see a show you are looking for listed here, Tweet to me at [@CancelledSciFi](https://twitter.com/CancelledSciFi) or email me at [CancellSciFi@gmail.com](mailto:CancellSciFi@gmail.com) and maybe I will run a piece on it at [CancelledSciFi.com](http://CancelledSciFi.com) (and add it to future editions of this book) if I can find some interesting information about it.

## Why Do Sci Fi TV Shows Get Cancelled?

Why do they get cancelled? Well, the simple answer--from the standpoint of the networks--is that they do not attract enough viewers. Television shows cost money and that money comes from the revenue networks receive from advertisers who pay to run commercials during a broadcast. If a show does not have high enough viewership, then advertisers will not want to run their spots while it is airing (or will want a discounted rate) and the show will not be able to recoup its costs. And then the network will cancel it because it is losing too much money.

Now mind you that is the picture in about one hundred words or less, but it gives you a good high level view. There are other factors and some cases are different than others, but it delivers the basic rundown. To expand on that a little, I will give you the brief look at the life cycle of a television series.

It begins with a pitch to a network of an idea for a series and if the network executives like what they hear they will usually commission a pilot. This is an initial episode that introduces the characters, settings, premises, etc. The network usually fronts the money for this pilot and the creative team will put it together and come back and present it to the execs who will then make the decision on whether to move forward with this as a series (what is referred to as the "pilot season" has typically taken place in the Spring months). Dozens and dozens of pilots are produced each year and some of these are screened for test audiences while some are shown in venues such as the San Diego Comic Con to get feedback and/or generate buzz. Yet many of these simply disappear, never to be seen by more than a handful of people (unless bootleg copies make their way to DVD or the internet) and are never given the chance to carry on as a television series (Amazon.com is one who has championed changing that model by letting viewers vote on the pilots it is considering picking up). But a few do get the greenlight and these move forward into production for a television season. Also, sometimes the network might ask for the pilot to be re-tooled and revised because they liked something about the premise but did not care for the execution (this happened with the original *Star Trek*).

These days, when one of the broadcast network picks up a pilot to series they will typically order an additional twelve episodes to have a full initial order of thirteen (considered a "half" season by the broadcast networks even though a full season rarely goes longer than twenty-two episodes). In some cases, when the network has less faith in the series or may be reluctant to invest too much money because of high production costs, they may order fewer episodes. But thirteen hours is usually the target initial run for a series on the broadcast nets (if the pilot goes two hours, then typically eleven additional episodes will be ordered). Note that these days it is not uncommon for the cable networks to only go with around ten episodes for an initial season order and their full seasons rarely go beyond thirteen total.

Then the show has its first broadcast and the ratings (as delivered by the Nielsen Company) render their harsh verdict. And the early numbers are often vital to the success of a show, especially on the broadcast networks. More often than not, a series has its best numbers of the season with its first episode and then the ratings tend to trend downward from there

(sometimes slightly, sometimes dramatically). In some cases, a show may start lower and then build up an audience, but this is less common. And for some shows, especially those that like to end on a cliffhanger (which has become all too common these days), the season finale can pull in a significant number of viewers as well, typically higher than the average episode, though rarely higher than the premiere.

If a show debuts with moderate to low numbers, then its days quickly become numbered. As I mentioned, sometimes a show manages to build up an audience, but more often the network makes a decision on its fate before it gets that chance (though they have backed away from that some the last couple of seasons). Usually, they will let a show air out its initial order of episodes. But in some cases, when the numbers are really low, they may pull the plug almost right away. Other times, they may shuffle the show off to low-viewership nights like Friday or Saturday to burn off the remaining episodes before cancelling it. Or they may run the episodes in the Summer months just to fulfill their obligation. If any of these scenarios emerge, then the show is almost certainly headed to cancellation.

If the new series pulls moderate to good (or dare I say *excellent*) ratings, or it does the unthinkable and *builds* up an audience, then typically the network will pick up what is referred to as the "back nine" episodes. This will give the show a full season of twenty-two episodes (down from the twenty-four we typically saw ten to twenty years ago and the twenty-six plus we saw before that, and again this is the broadcast networks I am referring to). Sometimes a network will not have much faith in a show but still order more episodes to fill up the schedule because it is cheaper than starting up a whole new series (or they simply don't have anything else waiting in the pipeline ready to replace it). Sometimes they see some promise in a show (and at least passable ratings) and they give it that back nine hoping it will build up some steam.

As the season draws to an end, then the network has to decide which shows to renew and which to cancel as it works out its schedule for the upcoming year. Again, network execs turn to the Nielsen numbers to decide whether to keep a show running. Once a series has a good share of its season under its belt, then execs look less at the overnights and more at season to date averages and weekly trends. But if the most recent trends are downward, that usually tends to work against a show. If the numbers have been stable or if they are moving northward, network execs will be much happier. And sometimes, if a show scores well with a particular demographic, that can help as well (the 18-49 age range is considered the prime target because they allegedly respond best to advertising).

Ultimately, the networks make their decisions to renew or cancel based on which shows they believe will draw in the most viewers in the upcoming season. These days, they may pay attention to things like social network activity and they claim they are looking closer at the delayed viewing numbers. But ultimately it comes down to which shows people are watching when they originally air and thus the ones advertisers want to sponsor and which make the most money for the network. For those shows that do get renewed, they face the same cycle starting the next season, hoping to keep enough viewers watching to earn yet another year's worth of episodes and the cycle continues on from that. And the ultimate goal (at least

it used to be) is to achieve enough episodes to be attractive to the second-run syndication market (typically somewhere in the range of 80 to 100) which is where the show really starts to turn a profit.

As to the question of where the ratings come from, that would be the stalwart Nielsen Company which takes a sampling of the audience based on a select group of households that use electronic devices and/or hand-written logs to monitor their television viewing. The viewing patterns of this group are extrapolated out to the wider populace to determine which shows people are watching. Of course there are debates on the methods that Nielsen has used to slice out its sample of America and whether these are truly representative. And many people point out that viewing habits have changed over the past decade with DVRs and internet streaming becoming much more predominant (especially for sci fi shows). But there are no really viable alternatives at the current time, so the networks continue to rely on this old and arguably outdated system. Admittedly, Nielsen has made efforts to change with the times, but currently it still appears that the networks remained focused heavily on the overnights (no matter how much they claim otherwise) to make their decisions on whether a show is cancelled or renewed.

I've only scraped the surface here, though, and I go into much more detail in the first edition of my book ***Why Were They Cancelled?*** (the second edition is currently in the works). And the fact is that the model appears to be changing as the television industry is currently going through some major upheavals with the explosion of original programming across the many linear channels as well as new platforms available for watching episodic entertainment. But this should give you a good overview to help you understand the basics as you proceed through my survey cancelled sci fi TV shows.



## Do the Networks Hate Sci Fi Shows?

There has been a long-standing belief among sci fi fans that the networks have a particular hatred for the genre based in a large part upon the many cancellations we have seen over the years. After compiling this book, I would have a hard time arguing against that looking at all of the truncated shows that I have documented here and knowing of the many more that also suffered shortened runs. I would tend to guess that if you compared the number of sci fi shows that amassed four seasons or more (or enough episodes for a decent syndication run) vs. the number of cancellations, I'm sure you would see a much lower success rate than for cop shows or sitcoms or reality shows. I've not actually crunched those numbers (maybe I will at some point), but I bet the statistics would be telling.

However, I have argued previously that from the standpoint of good business it would seem like the networks would *not* work against their own shows. These companies pour a lot of money into the development of their programming and it seems reasonable to expect that they would do everything they could to help ensure success. A business needs to turn a profit to survive and it seems to make no sense to work against a particular type of show in such a way that it gets cancelled and the network loses money on it. But in truth, it may not be that the networks have worked *against* sci fi shows, especially prior to the 21st century, it's just that they did not really *understand* them so their decisions made it *seem* like they had a particular distaste for these shows. And I believe that you can draw up a very clear dividing line for how the networks--particularly the broadcast channels--have approached sci fi: the pre-**Lost** era and the post-**Lost** era.

Prior to ABC's **Lost** becoming a surprise hit in 2004, I see a very clear aversion among the broadcast networks--the Big Four that is: ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC--toward sci fi. Since the early days of television, the genre was primarily looked at (incorrectly) as having larger appeal to the younger audience, not the target demographic of 18 to 49 year olds. But some sci fi shows enjoyed phenomenal success (particularly **The Twilight Zone** and **Star Trek**), though often not until they moved into their syndication runs. So the networks knew that the audience was out there, they just didn't quite understand it or know the right way to tap into it. They also didn't recognize the different viewing patterns. Sci fi shows may not pull high initial ratings, but they attract devoted followings that will stay with them and continue to watch over and over (and also respond well to merchandising). Add to this the typically higher production costs for a sci fi show and you can see where the networks have often been frustrated with trying to get the genre to turn a profit using same model that works for most other shows. As you read through the examples in this book, particularly those that aired prior to 2004, you will see that poor scheduling is a common theme that led to cancellations. The networks kept hoping to find something that would appeal to that potentially lucrative genre audience, but weren't quite willing to give up the better timeslots and promotion money when they could play it safe with crowd-pleasing sitcoms, cops shows, family dramas, etc.

**Lost** changed the game in 2004, though interestingly you can see where ABC had it on a short leash before it proved itself. The show's genre elements were played down in the early

episodes and it was only allowed to go full-on sci fi (or fantasy if you prefer) once it had proved itself a ratings success. And when it *did* become a Top 20 performer and prove that sci fi could have wide appeal on television, the other networks took immediate notice. You could argue that ***The X-Files*** laid the groundwork when it hit the Top 20 in the late 90's, and the networks *did* definitely crank out many clones of that one. But after ***X-Files***-fever died down, the networks resumed their aversion to genre entries. When ***Lost*** became a huge hit out of the gate, though, it changed the landscape of television.

That's not to say that sci fi shows did not get cancelled from that point forward (and trust me, some of those *needed* to get cancelled), and that's also not to say that the networks suddenly figured out the genre and its fans. They just started to *respect* the genre more and recognize that a sizeable audience is out there that will tune in for these shows. This is evidenced by the increased number of sci fi entries hitting the schedule each year and the premium timeslots and promotions some of these are receiving. Of course many are still also subjected to dubious scheduling, but that's true of *all* the genres because there are only so many hours available to program during the Prime Time week. And the viewing habits of sci fi fans likely continue to frustrate the networks as they show a greater propensity to watch on non-linear platforms or after the live broadcast, something the advertisers don't want. And sci fi shows are still typically more expensive to produce, so that works against them as well.

So I don't believe that there is any *grand conspiracy* against sci fi shows that has existed since the inception of television (though it wouldn't surprise me if various network executives have a particular distaste for the genre). But I do believe that it does not fit well into the model that works for most other television shows and that has led to the networks making decisions that *suggest* they do not like the genre and also resulted in a higher cancellation rate.

## Survey of Cancelled Sci Fi TV Shows

So now on to those many cancelled sci fi shows from the past sixty-plus years. I have broken my survey of into four sections. First I cover the infamous cancellations, the ones that have worked their way into sci fi lore. This includes iconic shows like ***Star Trek, Farscape, Firefly,*** and ***Jericho*** where the networks axed good shows with strong followings and the fans fought to keep them alive. Then I look at some of the relatively recent cancellations going back to 2007. This is the year that I renewed my interest in the ratings and started writing about cancelled sci fi shows on the net (currently at [CancelledScifi.com](http://CancelledScifi.com)). I was watching and analyzing the ratings during this time, so I have a better understanding of why these shows got axed. Then I look at the rest of the sci fi shows that aired from the early days of television up to the first part of the 21st century. I have done extensive research on what led to those cancellations and pass that along here. Finally, I look at the shows that were not necessarily cancelled but people may believe they were--perhaps they *should* have been--or they managed to beat the odds and survive.

## Infamous Cancellations / Network Blunders:

As I mentioned above, some sci fi shows just get cancelled because they failed to attract much of an audience. They hit the schedule, their ratings results are poor, the network axes them, and they are mostly forgotten after that. But other shows make much more of an impression and their tales grow into the stuff of legends. And then there are also those shows that demonstrate the networks at their most befuddling as executive blunders lead to undeserved cancellations. Some of these stories are told in this section.

(The shows are ordered by their premiere date, you can go to the alpha index [here](#))

### The Outer Limits

**Aired:** ABC, 1963-65, 2 Seasons Totaling 49 Episodes

**Premiere:** September 16, 1963

**Premise:** This classic 60's anthology series delivered tales with heavier science fiction elements than *The Twilight Zone* as it focused on alien encounters, space exploration, time travel and other common genre themes.

**Created By:** Leslie Stevens

**Announcer:** Vic Perrin

**Cancellation:** This series offers a classic example of a show killed by poor scheduling. It pulled decent ratings during its first year, but in its second season ABC moved it from Monday nights (where *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* would take over the timeslot for its first season) to Saturday nights to compete with the popular *Jackie Gleason Show*. The ratings for *The Outer Limits* took a nose dive, and instead of rescheduling the show to a better timeslot, ABC just decided to cancel it at midseason, truncating its episode run at 49. It still managed to live on in syndication despite only running for a season and a half, but had ABC made any attempt to keep it alive, its classic run could have been extended even further.

**Interesting Fact:** The last episode of the first season--"The Form of Things Unknown" about an inventor who creates a device that can bring people back to life--was originally intended as a pilot for a series to be called *The Unknown*. When the series was not picked up, that episode was tacked on to *The Outer Limits*.

**Revival:** *The Outer Limits* was revived in 1995 and had a successful seven year run on Showtime and in syndication which produced 154 episodes.

**Star Trek**

**Aired:** NBC, 1966-69, 3 Seasons Totaling 79 Episodes

**Premiere:** September 8, 1966

**Premise:** This infamous sci fi series chronicles the five-year mission of the *USS Enterprise* as it patrols Federation space and makes contact with new civilizations.

**Created By:** Gene Roddenberry

**Starring:** William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley, James Doohan, Nichelle Nichols

**Cancellation:** The story of *Trek*'s cancellation is of course infamous and a good case study on the life and death of a television series. Even though *Star Trek* has gone on to become one of the most recognized science fiction franchises the world over, during its original network run it never drew very strong ratings and in fact it never finished in the top 30 shows for the season over its three years. It pulled mediocre numbers at best early in its first year and NBC might have cancelled it before it completed a full season based on its overall results. But that network was one of the first to begin tracking the demographics of their viewers at that time (age, income, gender, etc.) and discovered that *Star Trek* attracted what they considered a higher quality audience (upper income, well-educated, etc.) and decided to greenlight a second season of the series based in part on this. But the show still struggled in its second year (it actually dropped in the ratings) and rumors began to circulate that NBC would cancel it.

At this point, Bjo Trimble and her husband John stepped in to fan the flames of support for the series (sorry, couldn't resist the pun). Bjo had previously been a prominent figure in science fiction fandom, involved with several early conventions and fan societies in the 50's and 60's. When she heard of *Trek*'s struggles, she organized a letter-writing campaign (one of the first of its kind) which ultimately generated over a hundred thousand letters of support for the show, coming from doctors, scientists, professors and even the Mayor of New York, Nelson Rockefeller. This was quite a feat considering that science fiction fandom was not as well organized at that time and she didn't have something like the Internet (or even the old Usenet groups) to help her easily reach out to others who followed the show. Ultimately, NBC decided to keep *Trek* running for another season (and the fact is that they did not necessarily have it pegged for certain cancellation). However, the network did tinker with the series in what would be its final season by bringing in a new executive producer (the notorious Fred Freiberger), dropping the budget, and moving it to the Friday night "deathslot" (10 PM EST). Not surprisingly, the show's ratings slipped further, resulting in its eventual cancellation after its third season. But the series would go on to find a much larger audience in syndication in the 70's and it would build into a phenomenon that would go on to launch multiple television and film continuations of the franchise.

*Star Trek* gives us the classic example of how ratings alone may not sufficiently gauge the popularity of a show or its chances of generating a profit in the long term. NBC did at least

look beyond the base numbers at the demographics, a pioneering step at that point, but even *that* did not give them the full story. **Trek** had very broad appeal, from children to older professionals, and notable staying power as indicated by its syndication run as well as the film franchise and TV sequels it spawned. And NBC already had an indication of this from the fan mail that the series generated on a weekly basis (apart from the campaign to save the show), which was more than any other series on their schedule. But the show did not score well in the Niensens and it did not fit within the standard model for a Prime Time television series that demanded short-term ratings success to attract sponsors. Thus, the original series was truncated after three seasons, but it ultimately spun itself into a long-running phenomena that still continues to this day.

**Interesting Fact:** More than just the ratings led to NBC's tentative stance toward **Star Trek**, especially during its first two years. The show regularly ran over budget and the network was often at odds with Roddenberry as he continued to use **Trek** to push the boundaries of television (interestingly, his previous series **The Lieutenant** was cancelled because he annoyed too many people at the network). The behind the scenes stories for this show are quite fascinating and you can read about in in depth in Marc Cushman's excellent series of books **These are the Voyages**.

**Revival:** The resurrection of **Star Trek** from cancelled network series to a major, multi-media entertainment franchise is legendary. It began with the animated series in the early 70's followed by the big screen revival, the sequel/prequel TV shows, the 2009 movie reboot, and the upcoming new TV series (scheduled for a 2017 bow). There have also been **Star Trek** books, comics, games, audio dramas, and more that have followed the wake of the show's initial success in syndication after getting cancelled.

## **Space: 1999**

**Aired:** Syndication, 1975-77, 2 Seasons Totaling 48 Episodes

**Premiere:** September 4, 1975

**Premise:** In September 1999, a nuclear waste disposal area on the Moon ignites in a chain reaction of explosions sending Earth's satellite hurtling out of orbit and the inhabitants of Moonbase: Alpha find themselves on a reluctant journey through the galaxy.

**Created By:** Gerry Anderson, Sylvia Anderson

**Starring:** Martin Landau, Barbara Bain, Barry Morse, Catherine Schell

**Cancellation:** This series started off as a sequel to Gerry Anderson's **UFO** as he tried to rework some of the concepts of that cancelled show into a new venture. It eventually dropped all ties with **UFO**, though, and became its own self-contained series. ITV's executives were excited

about Anderson's vision of a grand science fiction series unlike anything else seen on television before (and with lots of explosions as Anderson promised) and they agreed to fund and produce the entire first season before it had received a network pickup in the United States, even though they were dependent upon that to justify the production costs. And all three of the of the U.S. broadcast networks did end up passing on it leaving Anderson with the task of selling it in syndication. But it quickly became a hot property in that market and when it first aired many affiliates preempted regular network programming in Prime Time in favor of airing ***Space: 1999***. The show pulled strong ratings early, but those started to slide and the networks put pressure on the affiliates to get back in line with regularly scheduled programming. This found ***Space: 1999*** often bumped to the weekend hours where it would air in the afternoon or early evening. But in those timeslots, it was regularly subject to preemptions from sporting events, so fans found it difficult to track it down and catch new episodes (I know this for a fact as I was one of those pouring across my TV guide each week trying find the latest episode). So obviously the ratings declined by the end of the first season putting the future of the show in doubt.

But after much debate, ITV saw fit to greenlight a second year, though they wanted to make it *less British* (i.e. slow and talkie) and brought in the notorious Fred Freiberger--whom many blame for the drop in quality of ***Star Trek***'s third season--as executive producer, giving him the task of gearing the show more for American audiences. However, this move seemed to ignore the fact that fans were not complaining about the stories, but the poor scheduling. The show moved away from some of the more heady concepts it explored during its first season and focused much more on action-oriented plots (with even *more* explosions). There were also multiple cast changes with lead characters (some much beloved) from the first year disappearing without explanation (most notably Victor Bergman and Paul Morrow). The show did have one good cast addition with Catherine Schell coming onboard to play the alien Maya, but then her character eventually wore thin as the writers all too often focused on her shape-shifting powers and she started to overshadow the show's other leads. All of this, along with continued poor scheduling (sometimes getting kicked to late night/early morning weekend timeslots) resulted in continued ratings attrition leaving the show's future in doubt. There were talks of a third season that would have run for thirteen episodes (to keep production costs down), but ultimately ITV decided not to continue with the show beyond its second year (most of us fans in the U.S. found this out when the cover of ***Starlog #6*** announced: "***Space: 1999*** Cancellation!!!"). The show had developed a strong fanbase that was connected by fanzines (the low-tech early version of today's social networks) and a letter-writing campaign immediately went in place to try and convince ITV to change their minds. In fact, Gerry Anderson encouraged the fans to lobby the show's studio from his regular column in ***Starlog***.

But the campaign never quite reached the level of the ***Star Trek*** effort that won that show a third season, and ***Space: 1999*** would remain cancelled and would also not have much of a life in syndication as it produced only 48 total episodes. Interestingly, the show was axed only a few months before ***Star Wars*** helped revive the science fiction genre in general in the Summer of 77. Had it been able to hang on just a bit longer, ***Space: 1999*** would likely have benefited

from the wave of popularity experienced after *Star Wars* became a blockbuster hit and that might have carried it into a third or fourth season or more. Ultimately, the series became a victim of bad scheduling, dubious network tinkering, and poor timing, thus leaving Gerry Anderson's "grand science fiction epic" truncated after two seasons. (You can read much more about the life and death of *Space: 1999* in Robert E. Wood's excellent book ***Destination: Moonbase Alpha***)

**Interesting Fact:** If the third season of *Space: 1999* had gone forward, there were also plans in the works for a spinoff series starring Maya which would have run concurrently with the parent show. Both would have run for thirteen episodes (to keep costs down), though it is not completely clear if Maya would have left Moonbase: Alpha or if there would still be a close connection between the two shows.

**Revival:** In 1999, a fan made, seven minute mini episode was produced titled "Message from Moonbase Alpha". In that segment, Zienia Merton reprised her role as Sandra Benes and her character broadcasts a final message to Earth as the personnel of the moonbase evacuate to Terra Alpha. The episode was first shown at a *Space: 1999* convention in its titular year and has been seen sporadically since then. Around that time, series writer Johnny Byrne (who had also helped with the mini episode) tried to drum up interest in a big screen revival of the franchise, but nothing materialized. In 2012, ITV announced plans to reboot the series, though now titled *Space: 2099*. No substantial progress appears to have been made since then, but word is that it will move forward at some point.

### **Battlestar: Galactica**

**Aired:** ABC, 1978-79, 2 Seasons (including ***Galactica: 1980***) Totaling 34 Episodes

**Premiere:** September 17, 1978

**Premise:** After the mechanical Cylons launch a surprise attack on the twelve human colonies, the *Battlestar: Galactica* (the lone surviving warship in the fleet) leads the surviving humans away from danger and in search of the mythical thirteenth colony known as Earth.

**Created By:** Glen A. Larson

**Starring:** Lorne Green, Richard Hatch, Dirk Benedict, John Colicos, Maren Jensen

**Cancellation:** At the beginning of the 1978 season, this series looked poised to revive sci fi on the small screen just like *Star Wars* had done for the genre in the movie theaters the year prior. And everything seemed on track as *BSG* scored strong in the ratings with its early broadcasts. But then CBS did a counter-programming strike and moved its sitcom juggernauts ***All in the Family*** and ***Alice*** to the same hour as *Galactica*, delivering a blow to the latter's ratings. The numbers continued to drop as the season progressed, and ABC ultimately decided it was too



expensive to keep the show going if it wasn't topping the Niensens. They cancelled it after only one season, which led to a massive letter-writing campaign to save the show along the lines of the effort that won *Star Trek* a third season. And the ABC brass *did* have a change of heart of sorts, though it's uncertain how much the write-in campaign impacted that as opposed to the network's realization that they had far too few episodes for a syndication run, and thus no chance of recouping their costs from *BSG*'s one season.

ABC made the decision to revive the series the following year in an altered (and more budget-friendly) format and dubbed it *Galactica: 1980*. This continuation had the *Galactica* discovering Earth, but choosing not to make direct contact with its people right away because humans did not have the technology to resist a Cylon attack. This resulted in several Earth-bound episodes that were much less expensive than the space-based stories of the first season. But the continuation had also gutted much of the original cast--some because of lack of availability, some for cost-cutting reasons, and some because they chose not to participate in the new series. In addition, *Galactica: 1980* skewed more to a younger audience, getting moved to the family friendly Sunday 7 PM EST timeslot, and many fans of the original disliked the new direction. Upon its return, the show initially debuted to decent ratings, but saw those drop off pretty quickly. It enjoyed little in the way of accolades from fans or critics, and it was axed after ten episodes had been produced (even though more were planned).

Why ABC didn't try to move the series to a different timeslot during its first season remains a mystery. *BSG* enjoyed ratings success early on, and if they moved it to a less competitive timeslot, it may have been able to keep its numbers from dropping so low. But the show faltered against the competition that CBS threw at it and ABC gave up on a series in which they had invested significant money way too easily. True, they did at least try to keep it going with *Galactica: 1980*, but that turned out to be too little, too late (and too *bad*). And with the cancellation of *BSG* along with NBC's subsequent axing of the big budget *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* the following season, the networks would shy away from any sort of ambitious science fiction television series for the next twenty years and more.

**Interesting Fact:** After *Battlestar: Galactica* debuted, 20th Century Fox sued for plagiarism and copyright infringement claiming the series had stolen from *Star Wars*. *BSG*'s studio Universal counter-sued, though, claiming *Star Wars* stole from *Silent Running* (the Droids/Drones) and *Buck Rogers* (a long list of swipes). Glen A. Larson's original script (titled "Adam's Ark") that eventually evolved into *BSG* dated back to the late 60's, but it's not impossible to believe that the George Lucas film heavily influenced the look and feel of the TV series. And everything was eventually settled out of court (with lawyers likely coming away with the biggest payout).

**Revival:** Series star Richard Hatch tried to revive the series in the 1990's and he wrote and co-directed the trailer "The Second Coming" which suggested the direction the revival would go (you can catch it on YouTube). Several other actors from the original series appeared in the trailer and allegedly Hatch believed that he could get Dirk Benedict back if the series moved forward. Nothing came from his efforts to keep the original series going, though, and it would ultimately be rebooted in 2003 with the much darker *Battlestar: Galactica* mini-series which lead to the ongoing

series that ran to much acclaim on the Sci Fi Channel for four years. Recently, there have been talks of yet *another* reboot--this time on the big screen--though nothing substantial has emerged from that yet.