



The Alpha Control Reference Manual

I would like to take this opportunity, if I could, to express a few views about *Lost in Space*, and about this book, after an investment of roughly five years of effort in making it possible. I suppose that the most-asked question from many people regarding this manual will be: "Why a book on *Lost in Space*?" Because, quite frankly, the show deserved one, and it is long overdue. At the time that Gary Stork and I started this project, with the exception of some fanzines and a few magazine articles, nothing had ever been published about the show. And most of what had been printed was pretty bad. Since then, no one has published a book on the *Lost in Space* universe, with the exception of some badly-written volumes coming out of California, the author of which obviously dislikes the show and has absolutely no interest in it. Until now, I do not believe that there has been a single book to do justice to the show.

Still, I know that there are a lot of folks wondering why this show still has so many dedicated fans. While I certainly cannot answer for the rest of *Lost in Space* fandom, I must admit that the show has held a special place in my heart for twenty years now, and despite all of its obvious faults, it always will. For me, the beginning of a life-long attraction started with the airing of the pilot. Here was a show that had everything: exciting storylines, interesting characters, beautiful special effects, even great music by John Williams! With the exception of Smith, all of the characters were people that you could easily look up to and admire. Even Smith had his moments. Although he tried weekly to wipe out the Robinsons, you knew deep down that he had some redeeming qualities that could be found if you looked hard enough.

In the beginning the stories were quite serious, although one had to overlook the scientific inaccuracies that often abounded. But you have to remember that this was still several years away from our reaching the moon, and most viewers were not that knowledgeable about the subject to notice these inaccuracies, or perhaps they just overlooked them altogether. The action-packed, fast-paced, and exciting stories during the first season more than made up for such minor problems. The cast, made up of seven excellent actors (eight if you count Bob May in his Robot suit!), did an outstanding job with the show, making each new adventure a true thrill for any young viewer. The good reviews and outstanding ratings of the first season verify that many people were pleased with the program.

I'm sure that every *Lost in Space* fan was looking forward to the second season with real excitement. The second season would be the first in to be filmed in color, which should have considerably improved the show. However, while the second season was brilliant visually, the show became a real nightmare for anyone hoping for a semi-intelligent script. *Lost in Space* had fallen victim to a disease then infecting the television industry, known as *Batmanitis*. Hollywood, always quick to cash in on a hot concept, was creating new shows - or in this case, altering ones already on the air - to take advantage of the latest sensation: "camp" tv programs. ABC had scored big with *Batman* in the previous season, and now CBS wanted a piece of the action. Hence, *Lost in Space* was turned into the resident "camp" program. And it worked: as the show became more and more absurd, the ratings went up and up. It was the low point of the series for anyone who had enjoyed the first season.

Season three started off somewhat better, with *Batmania* now at a (thankful) end, and an attempt was made to produce more serious stories. But the absurdities were still present, and Smith had been turned into such a buffoon by this point that it proved to be too difficult to back out of the established character/story formula that had proven so successful the year before. The third season was certainly better than the previous one, but it was still a far cry from what the fans had fallen in love with during the first year. After acceptable ratings during the show's third year, it was cancelled, reportedly because Allen refused to cut the budget according to CBS's demands. Since then, the show has continually been shown in syndication around the world, and has made millions of new fans.

It is difficult now, in this age of *Star Wars* special effects, Dolby Surround-Sound, and computer-generated graphics, to explain the magic of *Lost in Space*. One of the shows most endearing qualities for me has always been the characters, and the family relationship of the Robinsons. Here was a group of people who were willing to sacrifice their lives to save one another, who were willing to make any sacrifice to help the group, and, despite their minor personality flaws, always came through when they were needed. Even Smith could save the day if the situation were forced upon him. The characters in the show were wholesome, yet believable and worth emulating. After twenty years of watching the show, I can still view even the worst episodes with pleasure because of the family atmosphere portrayed in the series.

One of the unfortunate aspects of *Lost in Space* is that the show is still being, and probably always will be, compared to *Star Trek*. Such comparisons are not terribly logical. *Star Trek* was to TV science fiction what 2001 was for movie sci-fi: a quantum leap ahead of its predecessors. The show's creator, Gene Roddenberry, attempted to put on network television a serious space opera that addressed issues of the day. While not a commercial success in its original three-year showing, the show would eventually be regarded as a classic. The effort involved in producing such a show caused Roddenberry to bow out after the second season, leaving the

show to run its final course in the hands of others. Although Irwin Allen will never be accused of creating any works of art, to his credit he did produce four successful shows during this same time. None of the four shows were in the same league as *Star Trek*, but they were never meant to be. Allen aimed for a younger audience, and for shows that would be commercially successful. With the possible exception of *The Time Tunnel*, he achieved the goals that he had set forth. Such a rate of success was no small accomplishment on commercial tv.

In the final analysis, *Lost in Space* was a product of its time, and was a natural progression of the shows that had preceded it. It was, for instance, well ahead of shows that appeared on tv only a few years before, such as *Men Into Space*. The special effects were always top-rate, and are still superior to those used in many shows today. Visually, the show was never disappointing.

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When Gary Stork and I started this project around 1981, neither one of us realized just how much work, time, and expense we were getting into in order to complete the book. While this was a true "labor of love" on our part, there were quite a few occasions when I was ready to throw in the towel and call it quits. This was particularly true when it came to dealing with some people who offered their help in completing the manual. Virtually all of these individuals were quick to commit themselves, and not-so-quick to actually *do* something. This and other situations made it difficult to retain a positive attitude towards completing the book. It was at times like these that Gary convinced me to keep things going, despite whatever problems were currently plaguing the project. More than anything, the fact that this book was ever completed is due to Gary's perseverance.

Gary's engineering background enabled him to do a super job with the technical section, and he was a big help in co-authoring *The History of Alpha Control*. He also proved to be invaluable in helping Phil research the blueprints for this volume.

Two years ago another *Lost in Space* fan joined our staff: Phil Lublin. Phil offered to draw our blueprints, and we are very, very pleased with his efforts for this manual. Phil, with Gary's assistance, spent hundreds of hours watching video tapes and going over photos in order to produce the first accurate *Lost in Space* blueprints ever created. I'm sure that our readers will agree that Phil did a fantastic job on our book.

Flint Mitchell, editor of *LISFAN* magazine, has provided his expertise on *Lost in Space* and his unique insight into science fiction since the inception of the manual. He designed the Alpha Control mission logo that appears in this book, and was valuable in the final completion of this book. A section that Flint originally wrote for this volume will later be published when volume two is completed.

Bob Coyle was instrumental in obtaining the special foreword written by Bill Mumy. At this point, I would like to express my thanks to Bill for his foreword and for his support of our project.

I am also grateful to Jack Townsend for his help with the final preparation of this book. Jack provided the last two crew photos that we had been unable to locate and had given up any hope of finding. Thank you, Jack.

I would also like to thank my mother for putting up with my viewing virtually ever *Lost in Space* episode a dozen times or more over the years. A number of people would consider being forced to watch some of the second or third season episodes a rather cruel form of torture. If so, she endured it well, with never a complaint.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my wife Gloria for her help in preparing the final draft of the book. More important, I must thank her for her devotion and patience in helping me see this project through. She helped me retain my sanity when it was needed the most.

Additional notes for the 2nd edition of the *ACRM*

It has been over a year since our November 1986 release of the first edition of *The Alpha Control Reference Manual*. Sales on the first edition were outstanding, with over two-thirds of our 2,000 book print run sold in the first month! Copies of the first edition finally sold out in January 1988, hence the release of a second, revised edition. This new version features several blueprint corrections, a new cover, and slightly less pages because of a new type style being used.

Some minor corrections or changes have been made, such as changing the type style used in the uniform section. The text for this section was typed on a typewriter, a move forced on myself because of the late delivery of the half-completed drawings by the artist. Claiming (several times) that the original art was "lost in the mail" to both myself and Bob Coyle, the individual delayed publication of the first edition by weeks. My wife finally doctored up the drawings to an acceptable level so that we were not forced to drop out the already-advertised uniform section of the book. She refused to take any credit in the first edition, and the artist was not credited either because of his incomplete work. Both persons have been given credit in this volume.

Bill Anchors