

Tongue in Cheek: Where No Man Has Gone Before

There seem to be older gay men coming gout all over the place lately. First there was actor Tab Hunter, the Doris Day and Rock Hudson-era hunk, coming out in his autobiography. Now we've gone more – well – galactic.

George Takei – who as *Star Trek's* Mr. Sulu was part of the Starship Enterprise crew through three television seasons beginning in 1966, and six subsequent *Star Trek* movies – has come out as a gay man in *Frontiers*, a Los Angeles queer magazine.

"The world has changed

Kirk and Spock were simply frustrated, because Spock's Vulcan sex drive, the "ponfar," only kicked in once every seven years, thus Kirk's multiple heterosexual dalliances.

from when I was a young teen feeling ashamed for being gay," Takei told the Associated Press. "The issue of gay marriage is now a political issue. That would have been unthinkable when I was young." Takei, who is 68 years old and received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1986, said that he and his partner, Brad Altman, have been together for 18 years. Apparently, his current role in the play "Equus" in Hollywood inspired him to come out publicly at long last.

With all due respect to Mr. Hunter – who by all accounts and in all the photos from his era was a total hottie – it was the Sulu coming out that affected me the most. I watched *Star Trek* re-runs after

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school when I was growing up, and the Enterprise crew held a cherished place in my adolescence. The relationship between Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock was practically a gay marriage. I always argued that Kirk and Spock were simply frustrated, because Spock's Vulcan sex drive, the "ponfar," only kicked in once every seven years, and that this explained Kirk's multiple heterosexual dalliances.

But what if I'd known about Sulu? And if Takei had been able to come out in the 1960s when the show was on the air, I wondered – how different might those episodes

have been? How different might his character have been?

Maybe there would have been something hot, like:

Captain Kirk: "Mr. Sulu, what's our status?"

Sulu: "Hull temperature is rising, Captain. And so am I! ..."

Or:

Mr. Spock: "Sulu, the 'ponfar' – the mystic Vulcan mating drive – is causing me to act illogically. I am finding you strangely – irresistibly – attractive."

Sulu: "Mr. Spock – your ears! I think they're getting bigger! I can't resist you any longer, you Vulcan vixen! Come meld with me now!"

Or maybe something inspiring:

Dr. McCoy: "We are gathered here today to celebrate the marriage of two fine men. Checkhov and Sulu – who first fell in love on Rigel 6 – have decided to recite their own vows."

Uhura: "Captain Kirk, we're getting an urgent message from StarFleet – the Romulans are attacking an outpost in the neutral zone. They are asking how soon we can respond!"

Kirk: "Kirk to the Bridge. Set a course for the neutral zone, maximum warp!"

Dr. McCoy: "Dammit, Jim – I'm a doctor, not a speed reader! We're not leaving until Sulu and Checkhov are legally married!"

That kind of episode would have made a difference in the life of at least one lonely boy watching *Star Trek* re-runs on the TV in his room after school. Then, as I watched and imagined a place and time in the human future where the possibilities were limitless – where a black woman could be the communications officer, a big-eared alien could be the trusted second in command, and a Japanese and a Russian officer worked side by side at the helm – I would also have known that the possibilities for me were limitless as well.

Now we know that the actor who played Sulu was gay, I can re-imagine the character as gay as well, completing the diversity of the Enterprise crew.

Yes, George Takei publicly came out later in life. But he did come out, and that took some courage. It was for him, perhaps, a final frontier, and I am grateful for it.

Boldy go, Mr. Sulu. Boldy go. ▼

Columnist Kevin Isom is the author of It Only Hurts When I Polka and Tongue in Cheek and Other Places, available at bookstores and online. He may be reached at isomonline@aol.com or KevinIsom.com.



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