

Contemporary Collectibles: Collectors remember Mork from Ork

by *Linda_Rosenkrantz*

Watching the perpetually zany antics of Robin Williams on a morning talk show the other day brought to mind the equally antic character he created almost 30 years ago, but which still lives on in Nostalgialand: the alien Mork from the planet Ork on the "Mork & Mindy" TV show in the late '70s.

"Mork & Mindy" was a spin-off from an episode of the hugely popular "Happy Days" show titled "My Favorite Orkan," which aired in February 1978. In it, an alien lands on Earth in a large ovoid spaceship and attempts to abduct Richie Cunningham and take him back to Ork as an example of mundane human behavior, only to be foiled by Fonzie.

The madcap antics of Robin Williams - a 27-year-old stand-up comedian with virtually no television experience - attracted so much attention that the brilliantly improvisational Williams was given his own series before the end of that year. It was an immediate hit, becoming the most popular new series of the season, running for four more seasons.

The premise was that the free-spirited Mork had been an outcast on his own planet, where emotions had been bred out of the population. Sent to Earth to learn more about its backward ways, his egg-shaped space capsule landed in Boulder, Colo., where he met a young woman named Mindy (played by Pam Dawber) and convinced her to let him stay in the attic of her apartment house while, with her help, he studied and tried to adjust to human society. At the end of each episode, Mork would report back to Orson, his Orkan supervisor, on what he'd discovered about earthlings' behavior, giving full sway to Williams' comic virtuosity.

Unfortunately, the show suffered from personnel and schedule changes, then was somewhat revitalized when Jonathan Winters was hired to play Mearth, the (full-grown) infant son of the by-then-married Mork and Mindy, but it had lost its audience by the summer of 1982.

A month after the show was canceled, "Mork & Mindy" had morphed into a Saturday-morning cartoon show, with Mork now a teenaged high school student, retaining such supporting players as his six-legged dog Doynge.

There is no shortage of "Mork & Mindy" collectible memorabilia, much of it from the show's first year, 1978. Among them were a couple of lunch boxes and thermoses made by King-Seeley, one set in metal, the other in plastic. Mattel put out a talking Mork rag doll - dressed in the characteristic striped shirt and rainbow suspenders - in 1979, and, in the same year, a Mork in Egg Spaceship, and a set of 9-inch vinyl Mork and Mindy dolls by Mattel, Mork's with a talking space-pack voicing eight of the character's trademark phrases, while Ben Cooper marketed a rather grotesque Mork Halloween costume.

Among the countless other products were a four-wheel Mattel jeep with 8-inch Mork and Mindy dolls, an egg-shaped gum-ball bank, a "Na-No! Na-No!" activity book, "The Mork Book of Orkian Fun," several board and card games (one Parker Brothers example had pieces called grebbles - coins from the planet Ork), Colorforms play sets, transfer sets, a figurine painting set, a magic show set, radios, jigsaw puzzles, sleeping bags, party supplies, patches, stickers, calendars, tote bags, wristwatches, a talking alarm clock, trading cards, mittens, T-shirts, jewelry, belts and buttons.

RECENT REFERENCE

Although a lot of it is British-based, "TV and Film Toys and Ephemera" by Arthur Ward (The Crowood Press) is a useful and colorful compendium of information on vintage entertainment on both sides of the Atlantic, from the late 1940s to the 21st century, including "Mork & Mindy."

Linda Rosenkrantz has edited Auction magazine and authored 15 books, including "The Baby Name Bible" (St. Martin's Press; www.babynamebible.com). She cannot answer letters personally.

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