George Takei: An American Voice

by Kevin Shirley

A grateful and passionate George Takei took the stage in the Marriott Atrium Ballroom Sunday morning to answer questions from fans of all ages about “all things Takei.” He began with a boisterous “Oh Myyy,” followed by a moment of reflection on the occasion of the 53rd anniversary of Star Trek and just what that meant. A television series that struggled to stay on the air became a major entertainment franchise because of the loyalty and passion of its fans. Takei was very intentional and deliberate in saying “thank you” to all. He was not only amazed by Star Trek’s longevity, the fact that “our children now play us,” but that the incredible support of the fans has given him a platform to be heard. “I have access because of you,” said Takei.

“I spent my childhood behind American barbed wire,” he said, “because we looked like the people who bombed Pearl Harbor.” Takei was referring, of course, to the years he and his family spent in a Japanese internment camp, located far from his Los Angeles home, in the swamps of Arkansas. American citizens all (except for his dad), his family was caught up in the anti-Japanese fervor that swept across this nation in the wake of Japan’s attack.

It became his “mission in life” to raise awareness among his fellow Americans of this history in order to keep it from happening again. Then his voice lowered: “Sadly, it is happening again along the southern border.”

Takei felt called to help the next generation of Americans understand the history of immigrants and the racism that has so often driven immigration policy at the national level. As a child he read comics, and those stories stayed with him. He concluded that he would share his story with the next generation of Americans through a comic; in this case a graphic memoir. Working with Justin Eisinger, Steven Scott, and illustrator Harmony Becker, Takei penned They Called Us Enemy, the story of the internment from the perspective of a 5-year-old child. His goal was to tell the truth of his experiences, as well as those of his parents.

Peter Mayhew: A Member of the Family

by Kevin Shirley

Sunday afternoon in Marriott A601-602, friends, loved ones, and fans of Peter Mayhew gathered to share their memories and love for the man who created one of American film’s iconic characters: Chewbacca the Wookiee from Star Wars. Bryan Young, Albin Johnson, Cherylyn Lambeth, and Ryan Ziegler guided the hour. This was not a Q&A. Rather, the session was an opportunity for people who knew, appreciated, and loved the man to come together to find solace in the company of one another.

As each panelist introduced themselves, a recurring theme immediately appeared: Mayhew was always in the moment when working with the fans. He was kind and loved them, and no matter what his struggles may have been, he had the ability to turn “it” on, focus on those fans, and give them not only his full attention but his energy as well.

The discussion then turned to Peter’s relationship with Dragon Con. When Young met with the Star Wars track director to prepare for this panel, the word “family” continued to come up. Mayhew enjoyed not just his days at Dragon Con but his evenings as well. As Johnson declared, you may be holding a pint while Peter was holding a pitcher, but the warmth and the comfort of family and friends was always there.

In what is quite possibly a Dragon Con first, the session concluded with a Wookiee “salute” and a bagpipe tribute from a “pipe-trooper.” As the song echoed through the room, those in attendance stood in silent homage to Mayhew, a member of the family.
Will the Real Karate Kid Please Stand Up? by Kelly McCorkendale

In 1984, Ralph Macchio, as Daniel LaRusso in The Karate Kid, lifted his arms sky-high, assuming “the crane” stance, and face-kicked his nemesis, the bully known as Johnny Lawrence, played by William Zabka. We all cheered. Our hero prevailed, getting the trophy and the girl. Good bested evil.

Or did it?

Fast forward thirty-some-odd years to a little show called How I Met Your Mother, where Barney Stinson began to chip away at our perception of The Karate Kid, singlehandedly forcing us all to question our allegiance to Daniel/Macchio. As our Karate Kid—as the Karate Kid. Macchio and Zabka, both charming, good-natured guys played along, guest-appearing on the show as a part of the “gag,” but the wheels started to turn. What if we got it wrong, and Johnny was the hero all along?

And so, Cobra Kai was born. Streaming on YouTube Premium, Macchio and Zabka reprise their roles—and their infamous rivalry—picking up 34 years after the events of the film alongside Martin Kove, who returns as sensei John Kreese. Cobra Kai explores the gray area around the characters, showing that Johnny was never 100% corrupt and Daniel never 100% faultless. The result is a deeply human look at a beloved story with a nostalgic overlay using humor and heart.

Macchio, Zabka, and Kove—who have undeniable chemistry and friendship—brought that same humanity, humor, and heart to the Sheraton Grand Ballroom A–F Sunday afternoon to dish on how they dusted off old characters with fresh perspectives, re-learned some old moves, and honored the memory of the late Pat Morita, Mr. Miyagi.

When asked what they struggled with on the show and also what they want to maintain from the film, Macchio was quick to say, “I have to have Miyagi’s essence peppered throughout the series somehow and keep that legacy.” He then added, “And that’s something they’ve done. And I think it’s important to the show, certainly for the LaRusso character and the whole series because he’s such a big part of that original film. I don’t think we would be making Cobra Kai if not for Mr. Miyagi.”

For Agyeman, being part of this queer, cis-gendered, hippie who wanted to leave, and she hopes we can bring a little bit more of that kind of world into the real world. The way that the fans were able to get the finale of Sense8 accomplished gives her hope and inspires her “because there are a lot of intelligent, open, woke-minded people out there.”

“The more of us that move out to spread our stories, spread our love, hopefully we can start to have an impact. I feel like with art, certainly, the more stories that are being told, that are being reflected back to us, if you can have equality and diversity behind the scenes, then how that’s reflected in front of the camera is much more authentic.”

Agyeman also expressed her passion for being able to help other people through charity and was recently part of Sleep Out, an annual fundraiser for Covenant House, a privately funded organization that helps homeless youth get back on their feet and be able to return to society with independence and dignity. She spoke movingly about how much these services are needed and how participating in the event profoundly affected her.

“We’re all in this soup together,” she said. “Can we just help?”

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2019 Dragon Awards by Debbie Yutko

Charles Gannon hosted the fourth annual Dragon Awards on Sunday evening, assisted by attending luminaries David Blue, Mike Capps, Peter David, Katherine Kurtz, Larry Niven, George Pérez, Tim Powers, Cat Rambo, Brandon Sanderson, and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro.

Gannon noted that the theme of this year’s Dragon Con is the 50th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing. He asked the crowd to consider Michael Collins, who didn’t get to walk on the moon, and stayed up in the command module, more alone than any man had even been before. Gannon asked all the nominees, those who won and those who didn’t, to stand up and be recognized for their marvelous efforts and achievements.

And the winners are:

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Novel: Uncompromising Honor by David Weber
Best Fantasy Novel (Including Para-normal): House of Assassins by Larry Correia
Best Science Fiction Novel: A Star-Wheeled Sky by Brad R. Torgersen
Best Horror Novel: Little Darlings by Melanie Goldberg
Best Alternate History Novel: Block Chamber by S.M. Stirling
Best Comic Book: Saga by Brian K. Vaught and Fiona Staples
The Eugin Foster Memorial Award: “When We Were Starless” by Simone Heller
Best Military Science Fiction or Fantasy Novel: Uncompromising Honor by David Weber
Best Science Fiction or Fantasy TV Series: Good Omens, Amazon Prime
Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Movie: Avengers: Endgame by Anthony Russo and Joe Russo
Best Graphic Novel: X-Men: Grand Design—Second Genesis by Ed Piskor
Best Media Tie-In Novel: Thrawn: Alliances by Timothy Zahn
Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Miniatures/Collectible Card/Role-Playing Game: Call of Cthulhu: Masks of Nyarlathotep Slipcase Set by Chaosium Inc.
Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Board Game: Betrayal Legacy by Avalon Hill Games
Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Mobile Game: Harry Potter: Wizards Unite by Niantic, WB Games San Francisco
Best Science Fiction or Fantasy PC/Console Game: Red Dead Redemption 2 by Rockstar Games

Amidst the global celebration and excitement, the daily Dragon Awards ceremony served as a testament to the creativity, dedication, and passion of the speculative fiction community. It was a night to remember, with stories and creators alike being celebrated for their contributions to the genre.