

FLASHBACK

STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER LED TO SERIES VETERAN NICHOLAS MEYER RETURNING TO SAVE THE AILING MOVIE FRANCHISE. THE PRODUCER OF THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY, STEVEN-CHARLES JAFFE, TELLS US ABOUT THE MAKING OF A FITTING SEND-OFF FOR THE ORIGINAL CREW OF THE ENTERPRISE...

WORDS OLIVER PFEIFFER

Following the almost literal *Final Frontier* in 1989, there was renewed chaos on the bridge of the *Starship Enterprise*. The William Shatner-helmed fifth instalment in the *Star Trek* movie series was both a critical and commercial misfire, which arguably shouldn't have attempted to boldly go where no man had gone before with its frankly insane pursuit-of-God-at-the-centre-of-the-universe storyline.

After putting the series back on track in 1982 by directing *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, in addition to co-writing the entertainingly close-to-comedic fourth instalment *The Voyage Home* (1986), Nicholas Meyer was contacted once again with an offer to resurrect the series following its most recent derailment.

"Nick got a call from Leonard Nimoy to say he was playing around with an idea of a new *Star Trek* movie where the wall, ie the Berlin Wall, comes down in space between the Klingons and us," explains producer Steven-Charles Jaffe. "We had just made a spy movie called *Company Business* based on the ramifications of the Berlin Wall coming down, but it barely had a release and did terrible business. Nick was depressed about what had happened, so he told Leonard he wasn't really interested."

Thankfully, Jaffe, who worked with Meyer on Jack the Ripper adventure *Time After Time*, offered some persuasive advice. "I said, 'Wait a second, this could be the greatest opportunity ever! It's not often someone gets to, in essence, make the same movie over again, but in a way that we know is going to be seen and marketed properly,'" he says. "He said, 'What are you talking about?' and I said, 'I'm talking about *Star Trek* giving the same message that we tried to do with *Company Business* and knowing that Paramount are going to release and market it, so why don't we do it?'"

Given the then-looming 25th anniversary of *Star Trek*, the pressure was on to mount a cinematic voyage worthy of that quarter-of-a-century accolade. Nimoy

had conceived the Cold War-hinged story after the idea of a prequel with a younger cast at the helm – dubbed 'The Academy Years' – proved unpopular with both the cast and fellow Trekkers. There was also a script outline penned by fellow cast member Walter Koenig, where the Romulans join the Federation and go up against the Klingons. The story ended up exterminating most of the original crew, with only Spock and McCoy surviving.

However, Nimoy's more politically poignant narrative won through. It centred on the problematic alliance between humanity and the potentially endangered Klingon Empire. It consequently explored issues of racism, including Captain Kirk's own prejudice as a result of losing his son at the hands of murderous Klingons, an event that was depicted during the Nimoy-directed *Star Trek III: The Search For Spock*.

Arguably the most successful *Star Trek* movie adventures feature a strong antagonistic threat, none so memorable than Ricardo Montalban's tyrannical return

as an avenging Khan in Meyer's previous directorial *Trek* adventure *The Wrath Of Khan*. Screen and theatre veteran Christopher Plummer was on the top of the filmmaker's wish-list for calculating Klingon General Chang for *The Undiscovered Country*.

"Nick wanted to get as much Shakespeare into this [as he could], so he thought, who better to play this villain and be able to quote some of his favourite lines than Chris Plummer?" reveals Jaffe. "He was an absolute joy to work with. He never had a role like this, and he just loved it and was so good in it."

Plummer wasn't the only revered guest star to feature in *The Undiscovered Country*. Also on board was veteran British character actor David Warner, portraying the more liberal-minded and sympathetic Klingon Chancellor Gorkon (the actor previously appeared as Jack the Ripper in Meyer's *Time After Time* and as a human ambassador in *The Final Frontier*). In addition, David Bowie's then-wife, Iman,



The *Undiscovered Country* reunited the original crew of the *Enterprise* once more.

SCORING STAR TREK

COMPOSER CLIFF EIDELMAN WAS TASKED WITH WRITING THE MUSIC TO STAR TREK VI. HE REVEALS HIS FRESH APPROACH TO THE FRANCHISE...



What was your brief for the score for *The Undiscovered Country*?

Nick described the opening to me as being unlike any of the other movies – more mysterious and a little bit darker. As great as all the fanfares and the marches were from all the previous films, that wasn't the tone of this film.

How was that level of freedom?

I wasn't really a Trekkie growing up. I liked the series, but I wasn't someone who was starstruck by the series. I think that was really helpful, because I never felt like I was up against the wall and had to live up to something that came before me. I felt completely liberated. Meyer knew he had a different kind of film on his hands with a different tone to all of the previous films. He completely opened the door. Apart from paying homage to the Alexander Courage theme once or twice in the film at the appropriate moments to bring back the history of the characters, I got to write an entirely new type of score.

Tell us about how you scored the theme for Rura Penthe.

They were constantly quoting Shakespeare in the film, so I thought it makes sense as [Kirk and McCoy are] up on the ice planet and they're either going to make it or they're not: there's a sort of existential question, so I thought, why not say it. So I contacted the linguist and asked them how they would say, "To be or Not to be," in Klingon. And he said, it's 'taH pagh taHbe' and I thought that's perfect! It's percussive, and it would be great for a male choir to punch those words out.

There's a beautiful crescendo at the end, how did you come up with the composition?

I thought to myself, "They're close friends, and they enter so much together, and they finally get to look off into space and have that moment of nostalgia and connection with each other." It's such a nice emotional part of the film for me, summing up – at that point – something like 25 years in their relationship, which comes to its final conclusion at that moment. It was a beautiful chance to let the orchestra relax into that scene and try to capture that emotional feeling. I thought that might be one of the perfect spots at the end to bring back the original theme to take you back to the beginning of their relationship.



This time, the Klingons aren't out-and-out adversaries.

➤ started as an enigmatic shape-shifter who ultimately ends up morphing into Kirk with superb comedic consequences, while there's a youthful Kim Cattrall as Spock's new Vulcan protégé Lieutenant Valeris. Michael Dorn also cameos as Klingon defense attorney Colonel Worf, who is notably an ancestor of his *Next Generation* character.

"Guess who's coming to dinner?" was the infamous movie-referencing line uttered by Chekov, which signalled one of the most memorable dinner sequences in science fiction movie history, where Kirk and crew sit down for a tension-induced Romulan ale-fuelled supper with their former Klingon adversaries. But it was perhaps the remark, "You haven't experienced Shakespeare until you have read him in the original Klingon," spoken by Warner that remains the best piece of dialogue in this chillingly comical scene.

"The first thing that comes to me when I recall that scene is the great English actor David Warner," acknowledges Charles Jaffe. "That whole gathering between the *Star Trek* cast, Christopher Plummer and



William Shatner's own on-screen vanity was amusingly sent up.

Warner was a lot of fun and of course they were all making jokes about the blue food!"

Real tension mounted with the planned Alaskan shoot, which quite literally experienced a meltdown before production even began. The glacier locale was ideal for the mysterious desolate frozen asteroid planet Rura Penthe, where Kirk and McCoy are sentenced to life imprisonment following a guilty verdict for allegedly assassinating Chancellor Gorkon.

"I went to Anchorage by helicopter and found these amazing caves made out of blue glacier ice, which were better than I imagined," explains Jaffe, who was also responsible for shooting second unit. "The director-of-photography, Hiro Narita, [and myself] were scanning these caves and had everything planned like a serious medical operation. We flew back to LA knowing that we were going to come back in a month and film. I don't know how we missed it, but when we returned it had all melted! So what I had planned was no longer there. We had to find a replica for our caves, which luckily we eventually did."

A much more light-hearted moment came with the filming of a comical confrontation between Captain Kirk and his mirror image, perceived as a sly dig at Shatner's apparent on-screen vanity. "Nick kind of made fun of [this] in the scene where Iman morphs into him and there was the line, 'I can't believe I kissed you!' with the sarcastic response: 'It must have been a life-long ambition!' That was an inside joke about the rumours that Bill is a vain person," explains Jaffe. "That was really meant to make it clear that he has a good sense of humour about those rumours."



Despite subsequent stories to the contrary, the producer denies he witnessed any hostility between certain members of the cast, and in fact has nothing but praise for the characters he grew up watching as a child. "This was a tight-knit family, and I was anxious to work with them. They were very welcoming and gracious," he recalls. "DeForest Kelley was a sweetheart, and so was Leonard and Bill Shatner – everybody was. Whatever things may have happened in the past between them, I didn't see any of it. I think they were all really happy to be making this last movie together."

Jaffe even came close to being starstruck by his experience working with his childhood icons. "I had one of these weird moments toward the end of shooting on the bridge of the Enterprise," he explains. "I was looking at the original cast, as we were setting up the shot and I had this crazy flashback to me as a little kid in my pyjamas watching *Star Trek* on TV in Connecticut, and I thought, 'God, is this a weird world!' Here I am now on the set of this movie working with them – the same people and in many ways the same *Star Trek*."

Sadly, the architect of this generation-defying franchise, Gene Roddenberry, died before the film's release. However, the *Star Trek* creator did view a final version of *The Undiscovered Country* before he passed away. "We met with Gene a couple of times during pre-production to go through the script. He had some minor points, but I think he was happy with it," says Charles Jaffe. "We also screened it to him before he passed away. He liked it, and I never heard anything negative from his camp. Everybody was pleased."

The Undiscovered Country abides by the rule that even-numbered films in the series are by far the most successful – a directive that has been validated all the way throughout the franchise until 2002's misguided *Star Trek: Nemesis*. Not unlike Meyer's *The Wrath Of Khan*, *The Undiscovered Country* explores hefty themes of revenge and the past coming back to haunt you, which are balanced by some well-judged light-hearted moments. The result is an entertaining and respectable swansong for the original cast of *Star Trek*, who literally get to sign-off come the closing credits.

"I thought it was kind of fun at the end having [all the cast] sign their names on screen. It was a really nice touch," says Jaffe, who's extremely proud of his experience on board the Enterprise. "I love being part of the *Star Trek* alumnus, because I can actually say to people on their birthday 'live long and prosper!' – I actually have some authority to say that." ☺



Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country is available to buy on Blu-ray now, distributed by Paramount Home Entertainment.

"WE MET WITH GENE RODDENBERRY... HE WAS HAPPY WITH IT"
CHARLES JAFFE



Kirk and McCoy are framed for the murder of Klingon Chancellor Gorkon.



At this point the Enterprise is showing its age, due to be decommissioned.