

Ian M. Cullen recently sat down with Nichelle Nichols and LeVar Burton, here is the interview:

Earlier this month I was given the unique opportunity to sit down and discuss a number of topics with Nichelle Nichols and LeVar Burton of *Star Trek* fame. Over the course of 15 minutes we discussed a number of topics in relation to Star Trek.

The first thing we discussed was Nichelle Nichols' return to the role of Uhura for the Internet mini series *Star Trek: Of Gods And Men*, which turned out to be something of an education for LeVar Burton, who hadn't heard anything about the project.

"It was a time out of sequence story," Nichelle explains, "and so although I was Uhura, I had a life that I didn't know of and a life I did know of. One that was being used for, and against, me, which was rather interesting to play, and I liked it a lot."

"Tim... had a view of what the film was to be that I wasn't aware of, to begin with,"

Nichols said

"So once I knew where he was going, although I never got the chance to discuss it with him, I was really ok."

As many know, *Gods & Men* is produced by Sky Conway and directed by *Star Trek: Voyager's* Tim Russ. When I mentioned the fact that

Of Gods & Men

was directed by Tim and asked Nichelle Nichols about working with him, LeVar Burton jumped in and asked for all the details.

"I feel so in the dark," LeVar said to both Nichelle and I. ***"Tell me about it."***

"There's this young man [James Cawley] in upstate New York who has built an entire replica of the original series Enterprise Bridge -- and he built it spectacularly," Nichelle continued obligingly, outlining some of the background to the

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New Voyages
fan film projects, of which
Gods and Men
is the latest of several.

In recent years *New Voyages* has enjoyed high profile guest appearances from both Walter Koenig and George Takei. Both commented on the timeless quality that James Cawley has managed to get with his replica of the original *Enterprise* Bridge, a view Nichelle Nichols shares, revealing that she wasn't allowed to see it until her scene and she thinks that her first line of dialogue, which she speaks when entering the bridge through the lift doors sum up her feelings in a very apt way.

"I open these doors, and this is my first appearance on the Bridge, and it's supposed to be a museum now. So I walk on the bridge completely unaware of how accurate it is to the one I originally worked on and say the line, 'As I live and breathe...'"

"So where do I see this?" asked LeVar, who was very interested in the show.

I explained that he can see it on the Internet at www.startrekofgodsandmen.net and gave him the proper information.

Over the course of this interview, I learned a great deal about both Nichelle Nichols and LeVar Burton. They both admitted to being huge fans of science fiction and also learned that both had admired each others work in the entertainment industry for quite some time. So when asked what kind of story they'd like to do if they were given licence to produce their own mini series, I got two very ambitious answers.

"Well, I'm a big science fiction fan," Burton revealed. **"I would love to do a mini series based on Octavia Butler's works. She wrote some really thought provoking stories like *The Kindred*, which used the science fiction device of time travel to explore slavery in the United States."**

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“She is a brilliant, brilliant writer” Nichols agrees. ***“I’m a bit of a science fiction buff myself and I have two projects but the one I’d love to do is a series based on the adventures of Saturna, a trilogy of books I’m writing. I have a third to write but the first, Saturna’s Child, was very successful and Saturna’s Quest was the second.”***

When chatting about the *Star Trek* movies it's fair to say that in the past LeVar was somewhat critical about Stuart Baird's handling of *Star Trek Nemesis*, the final *Trek* film to date. When I asked about this he laughed and asked, ***“Really, what did I say?”***

The problem for LeVar, it turns out was mostly what he describes as Baird's ignorance when it came to knowing *Star Trek*. ***“He knew nothing about it,”*** Burton opined. When asked what he'd have done differently if he had more creative input into the movie he said, ***“Well, I probably would have hired a different director. As a matter of fact am sure I would have.”***

When I commented on how I felt Data and Geordi's friendship was not given much screen time in the Next Generation movies, Burton revealed a few interesting things about the origins of the relationship.

“You know the Data and Geordi relationship is terrific,” he feels. ***“That existed from the very beginning, in fact that was in the audition sides. In the audition sides, Data and Geordi formed a team. They called themselves the perceivers because Data’s brain and Geordi’s eyes saw the world in a very similar fashion. The perceivers never made it to series but that friendship, you know that close bond that the two of them had, did.”***

“When I got married 15 years ago. Brent [Spiner] was my best man.” Added Burton.

As you'd expect, the subject of J.J Abrams came up and both Nichols and Burton seem very optimistic about the new *Star Trek* movie which is expected to come out in Summer 2009.

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“I like J.J’s work,” said Nichols ***“and I have a great deal of respect for him. I have a greater deal of respect for him that, instead of going ahead and recasting after having initially got the green light from Paramount, which he could have done, he instead asked to meet separately and equally with all the original cast members.***

“He didn’t make a big deal about it,” Nichelle continued. ***“I mean, he called one, he called the others and asked our agents if he could talk to us, and I went on and had lunch with him. We talked about it and he wanted to know my opinion.”***

“Just the sort of things Stuart Baird didn’t do,” interjected Burton and laughed.

“So I went out and had lunch with him,” continued Nichols ***“and found that he was not only giving, you know this value of respect, so much as really wanting to know what I thought and how I felt.”***

During their lunch Abrams invited Nichols to the set, and understandably Nichelle jumped at the chance.

“You know I met the young woman Zoe Saldana [the new Uhura] and I was thrilled when I met her. She is a beautiful young woman, and he wanted to know how I felt about Gene [Roddenberry’s] dream and I felt like it was safe. It’s going to be totally different. It’s going to be his vision and it starts out with greater and more spectacular technology. As Gene probably would have done had he had the finances and the technology that has advanced between now and then. I felt honoured and I felt safe on behalf of Gene.”

Lately LeVar has been more focused on his directing and has a new film due out called *Reach For Me*, which sounds like a very moving human drama. LeVar was more than happy to give us a little insight about this project, which he directed and also acts in.

“Reach for me takes place in a Hospice. [Seymour Cassel](#) plays Alvin, who is in his 70’s and dying of cancer, as is everyone in the hospice. He’s very angry and not a very nice

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person - shit head. His best and only friend dies in the first five minutes of the picture and they bring him a new roommate, a young kid in his 20's and it's a very simple story."

"We have [Seymour Cassel](#), [Alfre Woodard](#), [Lacey Chabert](#) from 'Party Of Five' and [Johnny Whitworth](#)

in the cast,"

he continues,

"and

[Adrienne Barbeau](#)

, who will just tear your heart out with her honesty, she's just unbelievable. She's going to surprise folks with the depths of her soul. She just puts it all out there. She really does.

"The character that I play is Nathaniel the night nurse," LeVar explains. "He's gay. There is nothing stereotypical about Nathaniel at all. I just wanted to expand and push people's buttons you know? Challenge their ideas."

In closing I would like to thank Anne Lindup and the Crew at [SF Ball](#) for allowing me some sit down time with Nichelle Nichols and LeVar Burton at this years

[SF Ball](#)

. I also wish both LeVar and Nichelle continued success in their future projects. Thanks also go to Alan Nash for being kind enough to allow me the use of some of his fantastic photographs that were taken during the guest talks at

[SF Ball 14](#)