

# THE PIKE CODE

HE'S A WHEELIE GOOD ACTOR!



Sean Kenney rode the first motorised wheelchair to *Star Trek* stardom standing in for Jeffrey Hunter in 'The Menagerie' Here he chats to Pat Jankiewicz about his role - and also about being one of the few *Trek* Red Shirts to survive!

Above: "Don't tell him your name Pike!" Well it's not Jeffrey Hunter this time. Sean Kenney with William Shatner in 'The Menagerie.' Sean went on to another role in the show as Enterprise crew member Lt. DePaul, seen opposite next to an image of Jeffrey Hunter

**J**ames T. Kirk's predecessor, original Starship Enterprise Captain Christopher Pike was a handsome, dashing hero in *Star Trek's* unsold pilot, 'The Cage'. When Kirk and Spock meet him again, in the classic *Trek*

two-parter, 'The Menagerie', he is a twisted wreck of flesh. Scarred beyond repair by Delta Radiation, the poor, unfortunate Pike is mute, unable to communicate except by a beeping light on his electric wheelchair.

Operating it with his brain, Pike blinks the light once for 'Yes' and twice for 'No'. 'That man can think anything we can,' Dr. McCoy says of the damaged Pike, 'but he can't reach out and we can't reach in!' Horrified to see his former Captain in such a state, the loyal Mr. Spock hijacks the Enterprise to Talos IV, a planet banned by the Federation.

While the role of the dashing Captain was originally played by Jeffrey Hunter in the very first *Trek* pilot, his disabled self was played by another actor altogether. Hunter did not want to reprise his role from the pilot and, not wanting to let that expensive footage go to waste, *Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry revisited the Pike character. This time the crippled Christopher Pike was

played by long-haired Sean Kenney, and became one of the show's strangest and most memorable characters.

"I saw Pike as a man who was trapped. Trapped inside himself. He's a man that truly needed to escape from his thoughts, but he was essentially trapped; he could not speak."

"Doing *Star Trek* was a surprise," Kenney grins. "It was a labour of love for me to be in theatre at the time, I really enjoyed it. A talent scout from Paramount came to my play and saw me, took me aside afterwards and said 'I would like you to meet someone from Paramount. I think they would like looking at you.'"

"I said 'what do you mean 'looking at me?'" He said, 'Well, you look like another actor - Jeffrey Hunter. I think a producer there, Gene Roddenberry, would like to meet you.' I had no idea who Gene Roddenberry was at the time, but they brought me in to meet him. Gene looked at me, walked all around me and then studiously looked at me from all 360 degree angles and said 'You sure look like a guy we really wanted to use in this show and he's not available! Would you mind dyeing your hair white? We're gonna stretch your face about three inches and you're gonna look 87 years old.' For a 25 year

old guy starting out in the industry, that's a pretty weird request! Sure enough, that's how it all happened."

## LISTENING A LOT

Before he boldly went to *Trek*, the actor explains: "I was born in Cambridge, Mass. I did a stint in the air force, which sent me around the world a couple of times. In London, I got interested in theatre and that's when I came back here and got spotted by that talent scout."

'The Menagerie' ran as part of *Star Trek's* first season. "I was in the 12th and 13th episodes, and they hadn't even established a lot of the cast yet - Chekhov came in the second season," Kenney recalls.

"When I was on the show and you can't speak and your face is all taped up, all I would do is listen a lot and hear all the banter going on between the actors. They were establishing themselves with each other, because it was only 12 weeks into the whole *Star Trek* concept.

"I never saw William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy fight, but I did see Jimmy Doohan and George Takei have little political spats. I sat there in the chair listening to them. Jimmy was a World War Two veteran, he was shot five times on Omaha Beach. Politically, there was a bit of friction because George was very liberal and Jimmy was a traditionalist. They were very vociferous, and really verbally went at it. I heard Shatner badgered a lot of the directors, but the guy I worked with, Marc Daniels, you did not mess with this guy apparently, even Shatner knew that."

"Marc Daniels and Joe Pevney, who did 'Arena', were two people Shatner did not mess with. Because I came back as another character, Lt. DePaul every three or four weeks. I would hear that Shatner went after the other directors if they didn't take charge. Shatner would just nail 'em! Actors on the set have a lot of time to hang around, talk, fight and gossip."

Getting into the burned, wrecked body of Christopher Pike was a challenge. "The make-up artist, Fred Phillips warned me that I could get claustrophobic in this prosthetic and wheelchair," he notes. "Fred (who also did the Mr. Spock's makeup and ears) said 'They'll probably shoot you for about an hour, then pull you out of the wheelchair!'"

"The chair had a little door in the front, so if I had to go to the bathroom, I could get out of it if I needed to. I was sitting in that thing, my shoulders couldn't move, I would operate the joystick that would move the wheelchair and I also operated the light, which was one-beep/two beeps for 'Yes' and 'No'. Doing those things got to be second nature for me."

"We shot 'The Menagerie' in 8 days. By the 3rd or 4th day, I was flying around in this chair, I was so used to it. I could eat soup through the make-up. I really couldn't eat with it on the first couple days. The make-up took five hours to get on the first day. By the fourth day, it only took 'em two hours. In the beginning, they made a plaster mask of me and they worked on it and



worked on it to the point where they thought the face looked very fake. They felt they needed to add something. They wanted to add a very dynamic looking scar to dog leg along my face, to 'sell' my injuries. It really frustrated them, because the make-up scar would start to melt."

"This make-up guy on the show with Fred, Ray Sebastian, got so frustrated with it, he cut off part of his Levi jeans and literally taped it onto the side of my face as the scar! That scar is literally a piece of denim from Ray Sebastian's jeans! He needed something that would adhere to the face and was blue or purple in colour, like a burn. Then they dyed my hair and eyebrows white, so I literally looked like an albino!"

## TERRIBLE AT A PARTY

A highlight of the show for Sean was when Kirk and Spock acquainted themselves with the actor. "Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner joked around with me in that chair," he recalls happily. "I couldn't communicate, so they would joke around and say to others about me, 'Oh, he's terrible at a party - he doesn't even laugh at our jokes!' A lot of people criticise Shatner for what he did on the set, but I got to tell you, he always had that great sense of humour that you would see in his old law show, *Boston Legal*. His Denny Crane was more like the real Shatner. He was very glib."

"As for Leonard Nimoy, I didn't know it at the time, but my Mom and his Mom were actually friends! "When I came back on the show again as Lieutenant DePaul, I said to Nimoy, 'It's funny; you and I come from the same little town outside Boston and our Moms shop together!'"

"Leonard laughed and said 'What are the odds of that?' Leonard was the most impressive actor to me of that entire ensemble group. He would come to the set literally in character. As soon as he put his hand on the door jamb to the set, he was in character - he WAS Mr. Spock! He was a very well prepared actor."



"Bill Shatner rode in on a motorcycle, he lived at the time a very '60s free-wheeling existence. I think the network liked him as Captain Kirk because he was a swashbuckling guy. At a party, a psychologist once came up to me and said 'Y'know why *Star Trek's* a hit? Because there's three types on all TV shows: ectomorph, endomorph and mesomorph. Bill was the swashbuckling mesomorph, Spock was ectomorph-mental and the endomorph was McCoy, because he was the one who cared."

Sean says that to prepare him to play Jeffrey Hunter's Pike, "they showed me clips from the original pilot with pictures of Jeffrey Hunter in 'The Cage' and explained a little back-story. They ran some of the show to re-acquaint some of the actors with what happened."

"It was a very big deal to take that original pilot and re-cut it into the newer footage of the revamped series. It was also interesting to see that Jeffrey Hunter's Pike and Spock had a different relationship than Kirk and Spock. In the original pilot, Mr. Spock is a lot more demonstrative (of his emotions); he talks fast, moves his hands quickly, while Hunter is more of a thinker."

"There were only dailies, not video feeds when I did 'Menagerie'. I kept getting feedback the day after I started on the show as Pike that made me think Bill and Leonard were watching dailies. They kept coming up to me and giving me little taps on the shoulder. 'What you're doing is very good! They like what you're doing.' I felt good about it."

"By the time I was done at the end of the day, Bill and Leonard were already gone. They didn't know what I really looked like. When they came in every morning, I had already been there since 6:00 a.m. I was acting with my eyes - that's really all I could act with!"

Pike's wheelchair predicted the eventual creation of electric wheelchairs in the '80s and 1990s. "I truly hope the guy who made that chair for me made millions of dollars, because he said 'I never knew of a wheelchair that operates by motor, so I'm gonna put in a little electric motor!'"

"The motor looked like a 12 volt battery box and he had a joystick on one side for me and the red light, so I operated the wheelchair AND drove it to lunch!"





Clockwise from above: Pike (William Shatner) and Spock (Leonard Nimoy) in "The Menagerie"; Sean's healthy cigarette ad; Meg Wylie as The Talosian and Susan Oliver as Vina from the Star Trek episodes "The Cage" and "The Menagerie"; Kirk battles the Gorn captain in "Arena"; Sean as he is today

The actor admired the original Captain Pike, Jeffrey Hunter, "I never met him, but I met his wife Emily McLaughlin after he passed away. I walked into a party and somebody said to me 'That's Jeffrey Hunter's wife over there!' I walked up to her very cautiously and Emily's eyes got very large. She said 'I can't believe how much you look like my husband!'"

"She also told me the true story of how he died. He had gotten his inner ear damaged from a blow pot (an FX device used to simulate explosions) when he was in Spain doing a movie called *Viva America*. The blow pot blew off close to him, damaged his inner ear and destroyed his equilibrium. He was at home, when he fell, hit his head and suffered a cerebral haemorrhage at 42."

As for Susan Oliver, who played Vina and *Star Trek's* original green Orion Slave Girl, "Oh, Susan was great," he raves. "I met Susan prior to her passing away in 1985. When I met her, she was living in the Hollywood Hills. Somebody said 'You should meet her, because you both did the same *Star Trek!*' even though she shot the pilot four years before me, when I did *Menagerie*."

"I called her and said 'I played Pike after Jeff Hunter' and she said 'I have seen the new edition (of *Cage* and *Menagerie*, released in the '80s). I enjoyed what they have done and I would love to meet you!' I went up to her house. Susan was an amazing lady; I found out she was also a pilot who flew jets. Susan was a very bright lady but she had some health problems and passed away. I was impressed to see that she was still a ravishingly beautiful woman 20 years after she had done the show."

"My one regret is that I never got to meet Meg Wylie, who played The Talosian and I had always wanted to meet her. I wanted to meet all of the people who starred in the show. At least I got to chat with Susan."

"As Pike, I made a little bit of a splash at Desilu, which led to me getting Lt. DePaul on the show. Gene said to me 'You're a very

good actor,' and Gene was not one to use a lot of words. He preferred short sentences, but he added 'So I'm having you back.' I was happily surprised. He told me 'I want you in a recurring role; we'll write something in for you.' That was nice, because he knew what I went through to do the Pike role. Gene brought me back on-board. I wasn't a contract player like the leads are, but recurring roles happen on TV a lot."

#### A SHORT LIFE SPAN

Red Shirts, as the expendable crewmen were known as, had a short life span on the Enterprise. "Although I was a Red Shirt, I never died! Nobody knew who I was when I came back to the show as another character. They said 'We had a guy here who was in a wheelchair.' I said 'That was me!' 'Really?' 'Yeah - I couldn't talk at all!'"

As DePaul, he shows up in the classic *Trek* episode, *Arena*. "To me, that's one of the best stories they ever told! *Arena* was just a brilliant show, with The Gorn. It was based on a Fredric Brown short story. I remember I found the book with the short story in it after we did the show and I was impressed that Roddenberry was sharp enough to find a story that good."

"The episode I was most proud to work on was *A Taste of Armageddon*, which was beautifully done. *A Taste of Armageddon* was relevant because of the apparent threat of nuclear war that hung over the world during the Cold War. Here were two planetary bodies fighting each other in a very humane way, and disintegrating people for the body count - an amazing plot to have them come up with and a relevant message."

"I got to do *A Taste of Armageddon* because George Takei was in North Carolina doing *The Green Berets* with John Wayne, so I got to come in and take over as the navigator. I had more dialogue in that than my other appearances. I had some lines in *Arena*, but in this, my favourite scene is where it's me, James Doohan and Deforest Kelly. We're shooting off the



rockets and dodging danger - Scotty, me and Doc McCoy. We were defenceless and Kirk tells us 'Just start firing rockets and make them think we're going to attack them!'"

"Another reason I remember *Armageddon* so vividly is Barbara Babcock, who played the lead (Mea 3). She had a face that just took your breath away. Just stunning! She had a face that reminded me of Nicole Kidman, so I thought it was brilliant when they actually cast her as Kidman's mother in *Far and Away!* When I saw *Armageddon* I thought 'Her look would be movie material today. Major movie material, not just a TV guest star.' Celeste Yarnall (from *The Apple*) was also quite beautiful."

"Doing the show so much I got to know the *Star Trek* crew pretty well. Do you know the story of why it's the NCC 1701 Starship Enterprise? It means New Canaan, Connecticut, established in 1701. New Canaan is the town that Gene Roddenberry was born in. Isn't that wild?"

The actor remained busy on different TV shows. "I moved on to Universal, where I did a pilot called *Doctors' Hospital* with Tom Selleck, *Police Story* and *Get Smart* with Don Adams, all spinning off from my *Star Trek* work, as a lot of them were directed by guys who did *Star Trek* shows I had been in."

"On *Get Smart* (*Loss of Control*), Smart goes on reserve duty for the weekend and I'm another lieutenant, one who chews him out because he's always late, tired and not wearing a tie! I found out recently that Don was a Marine at Guadalcanal. Ed Platt who played the Chief at CONTROL was incredible; this guy was stage-trained like I was, great to work with, never dropped a line and stayed in character between shots."

"Platt was a great man, he passed away too early, a great character actor. Don had a hand in producing the show, so he would show up not knowing his lines, didn't care how long it took to get the takes and I thought 'Any other actor doing that would be let go!' Not only was he star of the show, he helped produce it. Don Adams called all the shots. Let's face it, the show was so successful. He was a very intuitive guy. I thought he was very businesslike, but Barbara Feldon (Agent 99) was a warm and wonderful person. The girl had magical eyes and she played it so well. What a sweet, nice person Barbara was!"



"I wanted to do a lot more sci-fi, but I wound up doing a lot of commercials. I went to Europe and lived in Spain. When I came back, I started doing a lot of independent films, Tom Selleck and I became friends and competitors. Because Tom and I were the same physical type we would go up for a lot of the same things. I knew him through his first wife Jackie. It was a friendly competition. We had the same agent."

"All of a sudden, he gets the Salem Man and I became the Winston Man! The cigarette company guys from North Carolina were funny; they all smoked cigarettes and said to Tom and I, 'Looks like yew two are gonna be our poster boys!' We told them we didn't smoke and the guy said 'That's fine. We want healthy lookin' boys for these ads!'"

Sean and Selleck teamed up for the classic sci-fi action flick, *Terminal Island* with a plot reminiscent of *Escape From New York*. "*Terminal Island* is one of those movies we used to call exploitation movies in the '70s and it was way ahead of it's time," he smiles. "It was about capital punishment criminals. In this future as it is today, we don't have enough prison space, so they are cast off onto these islands off of California, in Gulags. There's a lot of sexual innuendo. I'm the leader of the bad guys."

"Don Marshall worked with me on that, we both did *Star Trek*, Marta Kristen from *Lost in Space* is in it and Tom Selleck also worked with me on that. Tom was the sympathetic doctor on the island for doing a mercy killing! It was done by an impressive woman director, Stephanie Rothman. She was new at this, but she came up with this wild story and did a great job. It was ahead of *Escape From New York*. Don led the 'good' bad guys, while I headed the 'bad' bad guys. It was all shot at Pirate's Cove near Malibu, and the rest was shot at the Paramount Ranch."

"A lot of actors in 1960s and '70s television wanted to work their way into features by doing exploitation films like that. I made a biker film called *Savage Abduction* - I was a pivotal character; the biker who decides to turn into a good guy. My son saw the movie and said 'Oh My God, were you grungy in that movie, Dad!' I wore a beard, dirty, total opposite from Lt. DePaul! That was the era for

movies like that and *Terminal Island*."

Sean appeared with a then-unknown Debra Winger in *Slumber Party '57*. "Debra and I hit it off, she was great. That girl was amazing, with a literal sparkle. When we worked together, I was playing a hayseed moon-shiner, doing my southern accent."

Ironically, he decided to change careers. "I ran into Tom in Hawaii, just as he was starting *Magnum P.I.*, and he wanted to know if I was still acting, but I told him I took a sabbatical when the (Screen Actors Guild) strike hit. I became a photographer because I thought it was fun and shot a lot of actors. That sabbatical turned into a successful business, my company Biz Photo!"

"We're a marketing company, creating a photo persona for business and real estate people. I also did head shots for a lot of actors, like Kirk Cameron, Molly Ringwald and Kristy McNicol, even Screech from *Saved By The Bell* (Dustin Diamond). I started them all when they first hit town. My wife Taki and I have been married over 35 years. She helped promote my photography business."

Sean has also added writing to his already impressive CV. "I wrote a script about John The Baptist that I would like to make into a movie. There has never been a movie made about John the Baptist. He deserves his own movie. I feel I could play John; he was enigmatic and more interesting than just the little snippet that you get of him in *The Bible*."

While he still dabbles in acting, you don't always see him. "I did *Quantum Leap* as a looper. That was my first go at doing multiple voices, looping for my friend Jeff Gordon, who was associate producer with Don Bellasarius. Jeff called me in and said 'I need a hairdresser, a voice for this guy and Sean, I know you can do a lot of accents and I need you to do a lot of background voices for Scott Bakula to hear as he walks through this town...' Doing that show was great; Don Bellasarius was a wonderful guy and I had a lot of fun."



Of course, Pike still haunts him. "I saw the documentary *Trekies*, where the guy tries to cross the street in Pike's wheelchair during the worst part of winter and the *Futurama* episode, where the (Fry) character sits in a Pike wheelchair," he laughs. "I was also excited when my wheelchair Pike got his own light-up Christmas ornament with Kirk and Spock. Hallmark made that, it was a good likeness of me from the show and it made my beeping sounds."

He was also thrilled when the character returned in JJ Abrams' *Star Trek* reboot. "That was really cool. I enjoyed how Bruce Greenwood played Pike in the movies and how Abrams actually put him into a wheelchair at the end of the first film, which I took as a nod to my Christopher Pike. I just wish they hadn't killed him off in the second film!"

"If the Pike character made that much impact on people, I am very flattered. Not to get heady over it, but for Pike to reach that kind of iconship as it has, I'm just flattered for fans to feel for Pike, for a guy who is not speaking, sitting in his chair, only communicating through his eyes. I'm very satisfied that I did a good job. A lot of paraplegics and people in wheelchairs have told me that I was an inspiration."

"There's a Christopher Pike Fan Club - they gave me their club hat! I always thought it would be interesting for *Star Trek* to revisit Christopher Pike, not just because I would get to come back as Pike, but I thought it would be interesting for Pike and Spock to be re-united on Talos IV, except this time Pike could talk. I liked that they just re-mastered *'The Menagerie'* too."

"Every day I run into somebody who recognizes me from *Star Trek*. An F-16 pilot came up to me from Dulles Air Force Base. He said 'Do you know when we were flying over Iraq, we used what we called 'The Pike Code'?' I said 'What's that?' he explained that the pilots were *Star Trek* fans and 'Just before we break radio silence, we say Is that one beep or two beeps?' I was honoured that these F-16 pilots called it 'The Pike Code!' How cool is that?"