

Ents & Tech

METRO

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A man in a dark, long coat stands on a pile of rubble in a destroyed city. He is looking towards a futuristic skyline in the distance. The scene is dark and dramatic, with a blueish tint to the sky and some orange flames visible in the foreground.

STAR TREK
HAS KIRK FINALLY MET HIS MATCH?

Trekkies, dark days just got cool

As the sequel to the *Star Trek* reboot beams on to the big screen, **Matt Mueller** meets the cast and director JJ Abrams

IN 2009, director JJ Abrams and his creative cohorts rebooted *Star Trek*. In came a sexy cast (Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Zoe Saldana), infectious humour and a clever origin story that boldly threw off reverential constraints by setting its story in a parallel dimension.

Landing with a \$386million global kerching, a sequel was inevitable. Now, Abrams and his cast have returned, with newcomers Benedict Cumberbatch and Alice Eve on board to spice things up.

As the title suggests, *Star Trek Into Darkness* is a darker beast than its predecessor. Abrams, who injected the cool factor into the geekiest of sci-fi franchises, has gone all Christopher Nolan, with *Into Darkness* echoing the tonal shift Nolan made going from *Batman Begins* to *The Dark Knight*. The new film spends substantial time on Earth, in 23rd-century London and San Francisco, and incorporates modern-day touchstones such as domestic terrorism and militaristic leaders.

'It felt right to us because it's what scares us,' says Abrams when we meet at the Corinthia Hotel in central London. 'So often in genre fare, the bad guy is like Ming the Merciless: a raving, over-the-top archetype,' he says. 'We wanted someone who was oddly relatable. He's not wearing some crazy cape or mask, he's just a guy in a black shirt and pants. He is one of us and he is among us.'

That someone is Cumberbatch's John Harrison, a villainous figure who unleashes war against Starfleet Command. Speculation has been rife the Sherlock star is playing a legend in the *Trek* canon: Khan, the baddie played by Ricardo Montalban in 1982's *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. (We won't spoil it.)

But, contemporary relevance aside, let's be clear: darkness in Abrams' world is relative. 'JJ's a workaholic but he runs a light set,' says Pine. 'He loves to laugh and bring levity into the films. He's not a screamer.'

There is ample humour in *Into Darkness*, particularly in Pine's cocksure incarnation of James T Kirk and his often acrimonious relationship with the coolly cerebral Spock. 'The first one was about Kirk getting the captain's chair,' says Pine. 'This one's about him earning the chair.' *Into Darkness* gives Quinto, who plays Spock, the chance to spread his wings, too. 'Spock's less willing to tolerate certain egregious affronts in this movie,' says Pine.

Even at 46, Abrams, the whizz-kid behind TV hits such as *Lost* and *Alias*, and now a big-time movie director, abounds with childlike enthusiasm. During the

Into Darkness shoot, he brought a magician and a beatboxer he'd spotted on YouTube to entertain his troops on set. He cranked Michael Jackson tracks through soundstage loudspeakers, prompting

Saldana, back as Uhura, to break into Thriller's zombie/ghouls dance with men dressed as Klingons. 'I started doing it and they all jumped on board,' says Saldana. 'The sight of these 6ft 5in stunt guys doing the Thriller dance with me... it was awesome.'

Saldana was keen that Uhura got to 'kick ass' after her relatively subdued outing in *Star Trek*. 'I said to JJ and the writers: "I don't care if you put her in a bathing suit, just give her a gun or somebody she can punch,"' laughs the actress. She got her wish: Uhura gets to knock seven shades out of several Klingons during the mission to bring Harrison back to Earth. Simon Pegg also gets to be far more integral to the plot.



Boldly back: Zachary Quinto and Chris Pine in *Star Trek Into Darkness*; JJ Abrams (right) takes charge; Zoe Saldana (left) gets to kick ass

'I was very happy when I got the script,' he says. 'Scotty plays a pivotal role, which is nice.'

ABRAMS'S ambition was always to make *Star Trek* cool. With its emphasis on high-octane action, *Into Darkness* is the least geeky *Star Trek* film yet. 'In terms of what's the least nerdy, you're asking the wrong guy,' he says. 'Star Trek wasn't for me as a kid and not because I was cool. It just felt too intellectual and talky. With the movies, my goal was not to dumb anything down but I also wanted to make it sexier and pulse-pounding.'

As Pegg puts it: 'JJ doesn't feel like he's dealing with a sacred text. We got the chance to start again, so we can keep it interesting without being too slavish.'

One thing that hasn't changed is Kirk's womanising ways. In *Into Darkness*, he hits the whisky after a

punitive demotion and wakes up in bed with a pair of sexy aliens sporting tails. Was that Pine's idea? 'No, it was JJ's,' he smiles. 'That was fun to shoot: it's two beautiful women in a bed. But it's 50 people watching you too. It's not like it's sexy time.'

Cumberbatch is notable by his absence, a busy filming schedule keeping him away. But he's the object of praise from all concerned, delivering a memorable villain to a franchise sorely in need of one after Eric Bana's forgettable Romulan adversary in *Star Trek*'s 2009 reboot. 'After not having much interaction with our villain in the first film, I have some great scenes with Benedict,' says Pine. 'As actors, we have very different qualities. Benedict is a force of nature in this, this scalpel-like weapon of mass destruction.'

Despite only four director's credits to his name (*Mission Impossible III* and *Super 8* being the other two), Abrams is one of the most powerful



film-makers in Hollywood, in charge of two of its heftiest franchises. Having saved *Star Trek*, we'd place our bets on him giving *Star Wars* an equally bountiful new lease of life. But Abrams won't be bringing his *Star Trek* cast with him. 'That would confuse me,' he chuckles.

Even though Kirk is cut from the same 'loveable rogue' cloth as Han Solo, Pine similarly balks at the notion of trekking to a galaxy far, far away. 'I give props to whoever gets to play the young Han Solo,' he says. 'But that would be digging myself a really big hole for people not to like me.'

Star Trek Into Darkness is in cinemas from May 9.



ON MY PLAYLIST !!!'S NIC OFFER

THING BY DEXTER

I liked blasting this on the huge speakers in the studio where we recorded our new album. Some nights, I would sleep in the mixing room just so I could use those amazing speakers.

SHIVA BY FOSKY FEAT SHIVA (MARTINEZ BROTHERS REMIX)

This is what I want us to sound like. If you've got any tips on how we can make our next record

sound like this track remixed by Chris and Steve Martinez (pictured right), holler at us.

SOKODE BY KECHE

I heard this on a recent trip to West Africa. Whenever I'm backpacking through places such as that, I always carry a transistor radio with me – it always gives me a window into the country I'm in.

HELPLESS BY THE CLEANERS FROM VENUS

I have a friend who only likes old music. I find that attitude tedious but she turned me on to this old band. Helpless is so amazing, it's made me listen to what she says.

MUCH TOO MUCH BY SASS

I do have to mix in some old songs for proper balance.



This band's music hits me immediately – I never have to try to understand it. In our minds, this is what we think we sound like.

TASTE OF HONEY (FROM THE CITY) BY ROMARE

Romare's EP, *Meditations On Afrocentrism*, was a highlight in 2012. This is from his new EP, *Love Songs: Part One* – my favourite of this year so far. **Zena Alkayat**

!!!'s new album, *THR!!!ER* (Warp), is out now.