

has a contract with the young superstar—but his character didn't work out. Instead, "IV" ended up a time-travel movie with whales. "It didn't seem too exciting to go back in time to pick up a plant, or an insect or some serum against smallpox," Nimoy recalls. "So, I was having a conversation with a friend and up popped whales, singing humpback whales, and that's how 'Star Trek IV' got started."

Beaming all the way to the bank: No one doubts that this sequel will do as well at the box office as everything else in the series. In fact, "Star Trek" programs of one sort or another seem to be a limitless source of revenue. The prime-time series reruns still grab big ratings on 145 stations. And next fall there will be a new syndicated TV series—"Star Trek: The Next Generation"—stocked with fresh young faces to carry on the tradition and perhaps prepare Trekkies for the day that the original cast can no longer be beamed aboard.

What explains the ageless, unsinkable appeal of this show? Who better to ask than Nimoy, who hears the question in every interview, every speaking engagement, every cocktail party. "You can be glib and say the idea still works, the characters are still there, it still offers a hopeful future, which is what we all want. Those are the obvious answers, but it really doesn't answer the question, does it?" Nimoy says. "I think

there's something to seeing these very professional people helping each other to solve a problem and in the idea that mankind is humane and will do the right thing eventually to each other and to others. And we all like the idea that there are great mysteries still to be explored."

For Nimoy, personally, "there's something somewhat noble about what 'Star Trek' says and does." "IV," he hastens to add, "says something about the assumption that only human life is important and only human needs are important, and all else and others are here to serve that. It's an idea that just isn't very fair or true."

With "IV" behind him, except for the profit taking, Nimoy has begun to contemplate what comes next. He still hopes to direct and act in other movies: "I'm looking for something I can care about. I've had a lot of scripts offered to me, but I haven't found one I can say I want to spend a year doing. It's a lot of work, and I don't want to wake up one day in the midst of the pain of it saying, 'Why am I here?' I want to know every day why I chose the job." Of course that has never been a problem with "Star Trek." Even if he isn't boldly going where no man has gone before, Leonard Nimoy can always take comfort from the fact that, aboard the Enterprise, he always knows just why he's there: to be Spock.

LEE GOLDBERG in Los Angeles

Talking and Talking and Talking About Sex

People may compare "The Decline of the American Empire" to "The Big Chill" and to "Hannah and Her Sisters"; like them, it's a comic talkfest that takes place in an atmosphere of hypocrisy and comfort. But this French-Canadian film has an unembarrassed, out-of-the-mainstream feel of its own, and no fake momentousness. The story concerns a group of academics gathering for dinner and talking about sex. These conversations—sophisticated locker-room talk—are often raucously funny. We recognize that the theories that get spun are expressions in abstract terms of the characters'

personal concerns; we may come to suspect that the "decline" of the film's title refers to the older characters' experience of middle age.

Denys Arcand, who wrote and directed, has conceived his film in thoroughly sexual terms; the camera takes us through the web of words and into the characters. When he flashes back, he shows more than his characters divulge—he takes us into their privacy—and all along, he cuts away to images of natural beauty. The relaxed performances and the cinematography, with its attentiveness to changes of light, give us a feel for the characters' relation-

ship to their flesh, and a sense of how sex to them isn't merely an athletic pursuit, it's an imaginative one.

Many-hued splendor: Arcand's approach has the result of giving sex—the unforeseen effects it can have and the variety of things it can mean to people—a many-hued splendor. In a sequence that begins on a pier at dusk and moves into the evening, we watch the clouds and the water, we hear one of the men wonder whether, if the Soviets bomb the States, he'll be able to see the explosions, and we see the couples move (in various states of arousal and misery) into bed. This sequence has the emotionality of a rhapsody; Arcand gives us the illusion that sex is spiraling around us.

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