

Panavision
in depth

We dig into
Spielberg's
Terra Nova



Timing is everything and so it was for the new Spielberg high concept sci-fi drama series, Terra Nova, piloted in Queensland last year. The series finished principal shooting in November, 2010 beating floods by several weeks. Clever scheduling played a big part in meeting the demands of a challenging storyline.

A post-apocalyptic tale of Planet Earth - suffering from pollution, over-population, resource depletion and so on in the year 2149 – the story reveals a scientific quirk that allows the Shannon family to lead a group of a thousand pioneers back to the deep past – 85 million years ago. The aim is for the group known as the Tenth Pilgrimage to create a population with more sympathy to the world's needs. They will give humanity a second chance by applying what they now know. Dinosaurs and other gargantuan beasts, already in place, have their own take on this invasion. Even more conflict comes from within the group as some unnamed saboteurs have an agenda not wanting the project to succeed. The Shannon family must identify and defeat them.

Commander Nathaniel Taylor (Stephen Lang, *Avatar*), **Jim Shanon** (Jason O'Mara, *Life on Mars*), a devoted father with a checkered past, guides his family – wife **Elisabeth** (Shelley Conn, *Mistresses*) and children **Josh** (Landon Liboiron, *Degrassi: The Next Generation*), **Maddy** (Naomi Scott, *Life Bites*) and **Zoe** (new-comer Alana Mansour) – through this exotic and luxuriant land of plenty in which they are the outsiders.

The floods that beset the nation had the decency to stay away until the crew left and will be nicely tidied up by the time they return, but the chaos on a grand scale may have many Australians looking for the portal that kickstarts the plot of Terra Nova. This is a totally new take on Star Trek, Lost in Space and Jurassic Park but with the science state-of-the-art and beyond. Trekkies will no doubt be anxious to see this as will fans of Avatar or people interested in an epic family drama with a lot of action.

Continued over





Panavision was proud to have provided the gear for this massive undertaking. The pilot's director, Alex Graves, has a pedigree that includes *The West Wing*, *Journeyman* and *Fringe*.

We recently spoke to Los Angeles Cinematographer, Nelson Cragg III, who headed up the camera department. Nelson won an award from the American Society of Cinematographers for his work on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and he has an impressive body of work with more than forty titles under his belt already. Amongst these, the epic adventure film *The Canyon* (Dir.: Richard Harrah, 2009), would have given him the greatest insight into shooting the landscapes that feature in *Terra Nova*.

Virginia born, Nelson (*above*) says that his first impression of the locations in Australia '...was awe. The area is really diverse in terms of terrain and much more tropical than anything I have ever seen. We spent the whole first week just scouting the locations and we saw everything from dense tropical jungle, to incredible waterfalls, to very urban dense city areas.' The diversity of vast locations suited the production perfectly, in particular, the natural light and unspoiled landscapes.

Exterior lighting was kept to a minimum but there were exceptions and tight and logical scheduling was important.

'... when you shoot in valleys, you literally lose the light at, like, 4:30 in the afternoon! So the director (Alex Graves) and myself would try to build workable exterior shooting days that maximized daylight. We would create very specific timelines to try to capture as much natural sun as possible, and then often shoot close up work on stage later.'

Visual Effects come with the territory in the Science Fiction genre, and *Terra Nova* was no exception planning right at the outset for seamless and realistic VFX transitions. Teamwork and preparation are crucial.

'We always tried to get huge scope shots in each VFX sequence to really give the show the epic feature feel ... [the] material deserved. We would often shoot the big wides on location where we could capture the real grandeur and then pull most of the really complicated creature VFX shots onto stage where we could have more time and control. We also needed a large amount of plate work so we would get the plates as we could, and sometimes when we didn't have time to shoot plates, the VFX super would take a camera and grab them while we shot scene work.'

Continued over



Action scenes are crucial to this adventure and Nelson flags one as particularly effective. It's a great chase scene involving a car-load of heroes and an angry, carnivorous dinosaur. Though anxious that schedules would not allow the scene to be shot perfectly, Nelson says that precise pre-planning was the key. He is also proud of the sequences set in the year 2149 citing his and Alex Graves' love of '... old school sci-fi like Blade Runner and Alien and we got to try some of those dystopian future type looks in these scenes.'

Of course, the story ultimately rests with the family drama and interplay between characters, something Nelson Cragg was very careful to respect. He showcases the skill of the cast, close-ups being given just as much planning and care as the huge landscapes.

For those of you hoping to cross the Pacific one day to work, Nelson points out that 'There is not too much difference in crews between the US and Australia. I had a really wonderful, hardworking crew in Australia, and together we really accomplished a lot. The major difference I found was the structure of the Grip and Electric crews. In the States, the Grips handle all the cutting and gelling of light. Any flags, diffusion, or rags that you use are handled by Grips. In Oz, the Electrics handle anything to do with cutting and shaping light. The Grips focus entirely on camera support.

Continued over



It took me some getting used to the Australian way of doing things, but once I did it all worked out.'

Melbourne based directors take note! Nelson is quite keen to head your way some time. 'I hear the food there is outstanding.'

Terra Nova is produced by 20th Century Fox Television, Chernin Entertainment, Dream-Works Television and Kapital Entertainment. Steven Spielberg, Peter Chernin, Brannon Braga, René Echevarria, Jon Cassar, Aaron Kaplan, Katherine Pope, Justin Falvey, Darryl Frank, Craig Silverstein and Kelly Marcel - Executive Producers. Alex Graves, also Executive Producer, directed the series preview.

A high quality, fully crewed undertaking, this pilot/preview resulted in a two hour broadcast standard special. It airs in the US over two nights commencing 23 May 2011.

Tech Info:

Sony F35s

Panavision Solid State Recorders

Panavision and Angenieux Zooms

Primo Prime Lenses