Twitter Thread by Jenn Dolari

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At the risk of crapping on Star Trek: The Motion Picture before it's 40th anniversary, I really think I've figured out why that movie is kind of plodding.

Don't get me wrong, I love the movie. It's my favorite cause it's the closest the movies have gotten to Pulp SciFi.

But it really is slow, lacks character moments and just goes on and on. Robert Wise's Director's Cut does fix things in the case of speeding the movie up, but it's still lacking in a lot of action or character moments.

Ever since I got my hands on the first draft of the movie written by Harold Livingston back when it was a two hour TV pilot, I tried to figure out where everything went wrong.

The pilot is actually really good, has a lot of action, a few nice nice character moments and really moves. The only real flaw is the ending, where V'Ger learns humans created it and it literally just turns and leaves.

How did it go so wrong?

I think it was the "Writer's War" between Harold Livingston and Gene Roddenberry.

I got several other drafts of the movie, including the second draft by Gene Roddenberry. Roddenberry's second draft actually added in a lot more character moments.

Kirk rallying the crew of the Enterprise to it's next mission. Uhura and a yeoman talking about how she finds Xon hot. Another with Kirk on the Beach with a woman named Alexandria as they leisurely jog back to Starfleet Headquarters. The downside?

He does this at the expense of action. The Kirk/Alexandria scene replaces Epsilon 9 intercepting the Klingon Transmission and cuts the tension there. Many of these scenes grind the movie to a halt.

The next draft I have doesn't list a writer (and there are at least one or two drafts between the Roddenberry Draft and this one), but I'm thinking it's written by Dennis Clark.

(in fact, it's now called The Motion Picture" and not "In Thy Image." The major note I saw in this draft is that Decker is a very unlikeable character, saying that Ilia as a Deltan will cause problems on the ship and holding Kirk and Spock at gunpoint so he can merge with V'Ger.

The next draft I have is the shooting script as it was when shooting began. There's more Motion Picture in here, mostly in the first half.

This again appears to be a Harold Livingston script as there is more action and most of the character development seems to come from revisions likely inserted by Gene Roddenberry (Livingston has the Enterprise go into V'Ger immediately after Ilia is captures, but there's a...

...Roddenberry revision that adds a whole day of the ship being held in a tractor beam before that happens for some character moments). Livingston has always had problems with the ending of the movie, and this draft gets choppier the closer to the end you get.

The final draft is the shooting script at the end of primary shooting which is pretty much what you see at in the film (except for the Spock Walk sequence, and this draft has the original Memory Wall scenes).

This script seems to have no real action in it, but also no real character moments. Much like the movie.

At the time of filming, it's known that Livingston and Roddenberry were busy re-writing each other in revision after revision.

The two shooting scripts show the last half of the movie changed significantly while it was being filmed). And I think this is what ground the movie to a halt. Essentially, the script became a compromise for the worst of both writers - with Roddenberry's character moments...

...being removed, but also Livingston's action moments being removed or toned down.

That isn't to say those two didn't do character moments/action. Livingston has a wonderful character moment of Kirk trying to convince McCoy (now a veterinarian working on a cheetah), to...

...rejoin Starfleet with McCoy turning him down because of survivor's guilt. Roddenberry was the one who introduced the idea of Decker merging with V'Ger (although in the version, the merge was him beaming himself from the Enterprise).

But the constant back-and-forth and rewrites, usually gutting Livingston's action and Roddenberry's character moments are what likely dragged that movie way down.

I'd love to see Livingston's first draft actually done, with the ending we got from The Motion Picture, which I think would be pretty awesome looking.

A comparison of all the drafts I have: https://t.co/g2VTi94pP6