

Star Trek: Boldly going where no man has gone before, again

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The last few years have seen a number of once-popular film or television franchises “rebooted” for the big screen. *Batman*, *The Incredible Hulk*, the *James Bond* films, *Friday The 13th*, and other successful series of days gone by have been reconceived and relaunched. These and other formerly lucrative properties are being recycled for the benefit of a new generation by the studios in the hopes of tapping into their profit-making potential. Along with everything else, the continual return to “used” (and re-used!) material demonstrates Hollywood’s remarkable paucity of imagination and inventiveness.

The 11th film in the “Star Trek” series, simply entitled *Star Trek*, joins the fold by returning to the origins of *Star Trek*’s pop-culture mythology and showing viewers how the original “Starship Enterprise” crew of Capt. James T. Kirk, Mr. Spock, “Bones” McCoy and all the others from the television show (1966-69) first met.

The story concerns the early lives of the fledgling crew. A young Spock is put through rigorous tests of mental ability on planet Vulcan, while his fellow pupils treat him as an outsider because he is half human. On Earth, a young James Kirk steals a car and goes joyriding, nearly killing himself in the process.

The two eventually meet and clash at Starfleet Academy where Spock (Zachary Quinto) is an instructor and Kirk (Chris Pine) a brilliant but irresponsible student. Kirk’s daring and Spock’s careful calculating are, predictably, contrasted, and the personality clash between the pair becomes the central theme of the film. Just as predictably, Kirk and Spock will soon discover they need each other and are both “incomplete” without the other.

When a time-traveling Romulan vessel from the future arrives in Federation space intent on destroying Spock’s home planet of Vulcan along with Earth, Spock, Kirk and the untested crew of the starship Enterprise must pull together to stop them.

As with so many blockbusters of this kind, the majority of the creative powers at work have been focused on the special effects. Spaceships twist and turn, avoiding debris and the “phaser” blasts of their enemies. One recalls an alarming number of objects exploding. The screen is constantly filled with action, often too much of it to take in. At times this is suspenseful or exciting, too often it is simply incomprehensible.

The new *Star Trek* devotes relatively little time to the characters themselves, although it is ostensibly about their development and the challenge of their first mission. The individuals change and grow too rapidly, relationships are formed and grudges forgiven too quickly. Most of it is unconvincing.

Reworking such familiar characters and events places a number of constraints on the filmmakers, although they are perhaps all too willing to abide by them as well. The tug-of-war between creating a new work and pleasing a built-in fan base takes its toll on the film. One almost groans as the catch phrases of the *Star Trek* series—“Live long and prosper,” “Damn it, man, I’m a

doctor not...something else”—find their way into scenes.

The original *Star Trek* series has maintained a considerable following over the years. Some of the program’s qualities continue to appeal. Created in the aftermath of the civil rights movement in the US and broadcast during the period of growing opposition to the Vietnam War, the show envisioned a future in which race and national boundaries have been rendered meaningless. Space exploration and the search for new discoveries and insights into the workings of the universe also play a central role. In addition, some of the episodes possessed a comic touch and, despite all the silliness of William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley and the others, the crew exuded a certain charm and camaraderie.

However, while the original series created by Gene Roddenberry was capable of rising above its simple Western-in-space motif, the current film from director J.J. Abrams and producer Damon Lindelof, two of the names behind the popular television series *Lost*, fails to do so. Perhaps more than any other film in the series, the latest *Star Trek* reveals itself to be a typical action movie and far less a work of science fiction. There is not very much about the film that one is asked to think about. One simply watches it and goes home.

The overall aim of the work, to “finally” show viewers how Kirk and Spock met, how the bridge crew of the Enterprise was formed and what transpired on their first mission ultimately, strikes one as trivial. These are not, after all, real people and this is not real history. This is not a work of art that desperately *needed* to be made.



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