

JIM Reviews film "STAR TREK" (2009), + details History of the Franchise

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“STAR TREK” – Boldly goes where no earlier Sequel has gone before!

Rating: 9 of 10 stars (as seen in the IMAX version).

2009 marks 30 years since the release of the first of the 11 “STAR TREK” motion pictures. For people who once were able to watch 3 different “S-T” TV series broadcast in one week, it may be hard to believe it’s been 4 years since the last Series ended, & 7 years since the last of the Movies came out. While the original TV show goes back to 1966, this new movie PREQUEL-izes the situation by wonderfully detailing the history of the main characters BEFORE we first “met” them on TV: Flippant, egotistical James T. Kirk (CHRIS PINE); ever-logical Spock (ZACHARY QUINTO, & a reprise by the ‘Prime’ original, LEONARD NIMOY); complainer Doc Leonard “Bones” McCoy (KARL URBAN); sexy Communication expert Nyote Uhura (ZOE SALDANA); helmsman Hikaru Sulu (JOHN CHO); young navigator Pavel Chekov (ANTON YELCHIN); engineering wizard Scotty (SIMON PUGH). You’ll also meet some new characters, including radical rebel Romulan “Nero” (ERIC BANA). There’s humor, great special effects & action, & fine casting & acting in a satisfying introduction to a bunch of old friends (& enemies)...

... The movie also introduces us to the U.S.S. Enterprise’s original Captain Christopher Pike (BRUCE GREENWOOD), Spock’s human mother Amanda Grayson (WINONA RYDER) & Vulcan father Sarek (BEN CROSS), Jim Kirk’s dad George (CHRIS HEMSWORTH) & his mom Winona (JENNIFER MORRISON), plus numerous others...

At the very end of the film, there is a special honor, stating that the film is done in special Memory of the series creator GENE RODDENBERRY & his wife MAJEL BARRETT (who played memorable characters in essentially all the live-action TV series). For those S-T history buffs out there, let me recount some chronological details on past incarnations of these incredible pieces of entertainment:

1966-1969: The ORIGINAL TV series— with WILLIAM SHATNER as Kirk, LEONARD NIMOY as Spock, NICHELLE NICHOLS as Uhura, DeFOREST KELLY as Bones, JAMES DOOHAN as Scotty, GEORGE TAKEI as Sulu, WALTER KOENIG as Chekov, & MAJEL BARRETT as Nurse Chapel.

1973-1974: The ANIMATED TV series (which was re-broadcast in the middle 1980’s). Many of the actors in the original series used their own voices for this EMMY-winning series, which introduced certain new elements such as the holodeck.

1978: A new live series was planned & considered as one of the prime bases of a proposed new Paramount network— but certain cast disagreements & the release of the first “STAR WARS” film derailed those plans. Thus, instead of designs for a new TV show, the studio switched to making the first feature-length MOVIE.

1979: The first FILM, “STAR TREK— THE MOTION PICTURE”. The title was certainly descriptive, even if not particularly clever! In this, Admiral Kirk worked to help earth avoid disaster from a huge energy cloud descending towards it.

1982: Feature film # 2 = “THE WRATH OF KHAN”. RICARDO MONTALBAN was unforgettable as a onetime prisoner (Khan Noonien Singh) seeking revenge against semi-inactive Kirk who’d caused him to be sent to a penal colony 15 years before.

1984: Feature film # 3 = “THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK”. Kirk steals the Enterprise to try to retrieve the body of supposedly-dead Spock, believing he was actually still alive as shown by his essence seemingly partially inhabiting the body of “Bones”.

1986: Feature film # 4 = “THE VOYAGE HOME”. For stealing the ship in the previous movie, Kirk & his crew are ordered home to face a court martial. It turns out a harmful probe is transmitting deadly signals towards Earth, &, to save the planet, the crew has to go back in time to find and retrieve the creatures for which the transmissions were originally intended. One of the first big films with an ecological type theme, this NIMOY-directed film garnered four Oscar nominations.

1987-1994: TV series “THE NEXT GENERATION” (which earned the highest ratings of any of the series). The new cast of this (set around 7 decades after the events in the Original series) included PATRICK STEWART as Captain Jean-Luc Picard, JONATHAN FRANKS as Commander Riker, MICHAEL DORN as Starfleet’s 1st Klingon officer (Worf), MARINA SIRTIS as Betazoid Counselor Troi, MAJEL BARRETT (in a recurring role) as Troi’s mother Lwaxana, GATES McFADDEN as Dr. Crusher, WIL WHEATON as her son Ensign Wesley, BRENT SPINER as android Data, LeVAR BURTON as engineer Geordi La Forge, & DENISE CROSBY as Security Chief Lt. Yar (& as her own half-Romulan daughter Sela)...

... This series had a bunch of memorable characters in recurring roles: WHOOP! GOLBERG as mysterious psychic-like bartender Guinan, JOHN DE LANCIE as omnipotent “Q”, COLM MEANEY as Navigator – Transporter Chief Miles O’Brien, DWIGHT SCHULTZ as increasingly-powerful engineer Lt Reginald Barclay, & MARK LENARD as Spock’s Vulcan father Ambassador Sarek. An exceptionally well-done, thought-provoking series!

1989: Feature film # 5 = “THE FINAL FRONTIER” (directed by WILLIAM SHATNER). Every family has a black sheep. Spock’s family had Sybok (played by LAURENCE LUCKINBILL), an unacceptably-emotional [= screwed-up & thus exiled] half-brother of Spock who steals a new version of the Enterprise to try to reach an area where he feels he could meet the God-like creature who made him. Also tooling around is an ambitious Klingon captain Klaa (played by TODD BRYANT).

1991: Feature film # 6 = “THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY”. This time, the environmental problems are on Klingon, which causes them to

sue for peace with the Federation. But, before peace (opposed by many on both sides) can be put into effect, Bones & Kirk are charged with offing the Klingon chancellor (which tends to be gallactically frowned on).

1993-1999: TV series "DEEP SPACE 9", set on a space station near planet Bajor recently liberated from the Cardassians, and with significant presence by various Klingon characters as the series progressed. This cast included AVERY BROOKS as (black) Captain Benjamin Sisko, RENE AUBERJONIS as shape-shifting Security Chief Odo, NANA VISITOR as (Bajoran) First Officer Kira Nerys, ALEXANDER SIDDIQ as Chief medical officer Julian Bashir, MICHAEL DORN reprising his role as Worf (here as Strategic Ops officer), & COLM MEANEY reprising his role as Chief Ops Officer Miles O'Brien...

... Also in the cast were TERRY FARRELL as symbiant Trill host Jadzia Dax, ARMIN SHIMERMAN as money-grubbing Ferengi bar-owner Quark, CIRROC LOFTON as Avery's son Jake Sisko, MARC ALAIMO as Cardassian Gul Ducat (who'd once run the station), CASEY BIGGS as Ducat's onetime aide Damar, ANDREW ROBINSON as mysterious Cardassian tailor – power-broker Garat (who becomes very important in the Federation's war with the Dominion), and JEFFREY COMBS who played at least 4 characters in this series. LOUISE FLETCHER acted as deceptive Bajoran spiritual leader Kai Winn, & SALOME JENS played the female Changeling...

1994: Feature film # 7 = "GENERATIONS". We're now on the Enterprise-B starship. People believe that Kirk was suddenly killed by a destructive energy swath threatening the galaxy. Nearly 80 years later, Captain PICARD [PATRICK STEWART & the rest of the crew from The Next Generation] goes searching for the truth about that, all the while trying to stop a mad scientist (Tolian Soran, played by MALCOLM McDOWELL) who wants to use the swath for achieving his own immortality.

1995-2001: TV series "VOYAGER". The cast consisted of KATE MULGREW as the 1st female Starfleet captain (Janeway) with a crew consisting of some ex-Maquis Starfleet rebels such as ROBERT BELTRAN as Commander Chakotay and ROXANN DAWSON as Chief Engineer Lt. Torres. Also in the cast was ROBERT DUNCAN McNEILL as Torres' eventual Pilot lover Tom Paris, TIM RUSS as Executive First Officer Tuvok, ROBERT PICARDO as the Emergency Medical Hologram – Doctor, ETHAN PHILLIPS as Morale Officer – Adviser Neelix, GARRETT WANG as Chief Ops officer Ensign Kim, and JENNIFER LIEN as quasi-omnipotent gardener – Medical aide Kes. Various characters from previous series appeared, such as JOHN DE LANCIE in a recurring role as "Q".

... As time went on, the series started to lose some of its core audience. That was strongly reversed by adding a onetime-BORG Astrometrics character called Seven-Of-Nine, memorably played by JERI RYAN. Her tight silver outfit and catch-phrase "Resistance is futile!" soon became iconic in America. She became so popular, Viacom (parent to Paramount Pictures who produced the series) even had her appear for a signing event at their store on Michigan Avenue in Jeri's home-town of Chicago. I well remember the line being literally a block-long to get in to see her, & how she was unflinchingly gracious to everyone in line, staying far later than promised to not only sign but pose for photos with people, etc. She also spoke privately to me afterwards, as she autographed one of the 2 specially-made banners created for the event.

1996: Feature film # 8 = "FIRST CONTACT". It's time to go BACK in time again: the evil BORG (with their deadly cubes) want to stop the humans from ever meeting the Vulcans (& thus expanding their contact with other worlds & founding the Federation). To stop that from happening, Picard (PATRICK STEWART) & the Enterprise-E crew journey back in time to disrupt the plans of the Borg.

1998: Feature film # 9 = "INSURRECTION". Oh, that Admiral Dougherty (—)! He wants to move the Baku people to gain control of their cosmic radiation as a weapon. Picard feels his superior Dougherty is wrong-headed in his actions, and works to undermine his efforts by helping the Bakuans (thus, the "Revolt-ing" development!).

2001-2005: TV series "ENTERPRISE", designed as a TV prequel to the ORIGINAL series time-wise. It talks about Earth's first contact with the Vulcans and the start of contact with other alien civilizations (with various tributes done over the life of the show to other Trek series & characters). SCOTT BAKULA played Captain Archer, JOLENE BLALOCK was sexy Vulcan Chief Science officer T'Pol, CONNOR TRINNEER was Chief Engineer - Commander "Trip" Tucker, LINDA PARK appeared as Communication officer Hoshi Park, JOHN BILLINGSLEY as Denobulan Medical Officer Phlox, ANTHONY MONTGOMERY as Ensign Mayweather, DOMINIC KEATING played Tactical Officer Lt. Reed, and JEFFREY COMBS appeared in a recurring role as Andorian (Vulcan-hating) Commander Shran.

2002: Feature film # 10 = "NEMESIS". A Star-Trekian war of the CLONES: Picard has been cloned into a younger version of himself by Romulan headman Shinzon, who also tries using an earlier clone-like version of DATA to try to control his little Corner of the World (which, naturally, includes a plan to destroy Earth).

2009: Feature film # 11 = "STAR TREK". A filmmaker friend of mine named Rex commented to me that he'd seen it before I did & quite ENJOYED the new pre-quel overall, especially the sets, design & special effects & action. He was NOT particularly impressed by its handling of the various relationships. When I saw it, I felt that, while I personally would have liked to see MORE about the personal connections between the various main characters, given that the film was already more than 2 hours long, it probably wasn't feasible to include much more than they did of that aspect (lest the film be far longer)...

... In other words, considering the limitations, I felt the film did a quite GOOD, satisfying job giving the "history" of the main characters, showing how they met & "linking" them together. I think the filmmakers did what "Prime" Spock urges one of the younger characters to do — namely, "what feels RIGHT!"... I would enjoy seeing an elaboration on the relationships in FUTURE episodes, though...

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