

A Heavenly Enterprise

BY ANN HORNADAY | *Washington Post Staff Writer*

Let us pray.

Lord of "Star Trek" and its many spinoffs, we thank thee for a movie that, against all odds, has miraculously resurrected a wheezing but beloved and still-relevant franchise.

We thank thee for an origin story that, unlike such recent downers featuring the Incredible Hulk and Wolverine, pays affectionate respect to its source material but never falls into slavish worship or, worse, self-seriousness. Instead, viewers have been blessed with a movie that retains a warm and playful spirit, even when one of its chief protagonists is being chased by a lobster-red monster on an intergalactic tundra, or fending off tattooed, time-traveling space pirates aboard a huge, fire-spewing drill.

We thank thee for a cast of bright young actors who plunge headlong into the spirit of "Star Trek" at its most goofy straight-faced, not only saying some of the show's most familiar catchphrases as if for the very first time, but even capturing the unique gestures and physical rhythms of their

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In the beginning: James T. Kirk (Chris Pine) as a biker daredevil with big things in his future.

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characters. There's sly-blue-eyed Chris Pine, who plays James T. Kirk as a young motorcycle-driving daredevil tearing through the cornfields of Iowa, who after a bar fight is persuaded by Capt. Christopher Pike (Bruce Greenwood) to join the Starfleet peacekeeping force. And Zoë Saldana and Karl Urban, who play Kirk's fellow newbies Nyota Uhura and Leonard "Bones" McCoy with the perfect combination of wit and utter commitment ("I'm a doctor, Jim!"). And young Anton Yelchin, master of Chekhov's impenetrable Russian accent, and Simon Pegg, who makes similarly neat and amusing work of Scotty's single-malt burr.

With luck, there's a special place in heaven (or some suitable corner of the galaxy) for Zachary Quinto, who plays the part-Vulcan, part-human Spock with surprising pathos, letting a touch of sweetness seep through the logician's otherwise flawlessly affectless demeanor. A particularly clever setup pits Kirk and Spock against each other, giving "Star Trek" the strong emotional fuel of fraternal rivalry that even comes to blows. Lord, we are most heartily grateful for the way Quinto tips his head and says "Fascinating," just as his predecessor, Leonard Nimoy, did. And for the way Pine hesitates just slightly before barking a command a la William Shatner, or rests his elbow on the arm of a starship's captain's chair when he takes the con.

Most of all, thanks and praise for that very starship itself: the USS Enterprise, the shiny, brand-new craft where these spiky, ambitious young Turks gather for their very first mission together, investigating trouble on planet Vulcan.

The marketing campaign for the movie has suggested this is "not your dad's Star Trek." That's wrong — no middle-aged Trekkie will be able to hold back tears when the Enterprise first comes into view. Rather, this 11th installment of the movie franchise, the first in seven years, is not just your dad's "Star Trek."

This installment has achieved a nearly impossible hat trick. It's a movie that is exe-

getically correct enough to appease the most hard-core buffs, while opening up the final frontier to a whole new generation of fans who have yet to appreciate "Star Trek's" ineffable combination of sci-fi action, campy humor and yin-yang philosophical tussle between logic and emotion. A nifty cameo appearance midway through "Star Trek" may be a bit too much of a good thing in the film's final chapter, but still gives it a satisfying full-circle touch.

Lord, please look kindly upon screenwriters Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci, who have eschewed the dour pseudo-depth, snarky irony and sadistic violence of so many recent action movies. Keep them steadfast in their devotion to resuscitating not only the "Star Trek" brand, but a long-abandoned principle in American cinema: pure pop pleasure.

Finally, mad celestial props to director J.J. Abrams, who has woven myth and escapism together so masterfully with the TV show "Lost," and who proves such an able steward of the "Star Trek" narrative and characters here. We are exceedingly grateful for his passion, his crisp attention to pacing, his unbridled joy in the Enterprise and its optimistic, intergalactically cosmopolitan enterprise. In an era when, in real life, Klingons would be logging on and even the Borg would have a blog, here is a filmmaker attuned to things both ancient and new, who has generously rewarded the pull of generational nostalgia without pandering or condescending to it.

Lord, we thank thee for imbuing Abrams with taste and conscience enough to guarantee that "Star Trek" will once again live long and prosper. May he do the same.

Amen.

Star Trek (122 minutes, at area theaters) is rated PG-13 for sci-fi action and violence, and brief sexual content.

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