

MOVIES

Vulcanized Once Again

Contrary to enduring rumors, Leonard Nimoy doesn't mind being Mr. Spock



GREGORY SCHWARTZ

In costume, not character: Nimoy and William Shatner relax on the set of 'Star Trek IV'

Everyone knows television is make-believe. It's just actors, and scripts, and fancy special effects. Same thing for movies—none of it is real. Sure, we all know that. But if you were to bump into Leonard Nimoy at 7-Eleven, your first thought wouldn't be, "Hey, Leonard, how are the Slurpees?" Admit it—you'd think, "My God, it's *MISTER SPOCK!*" So would we all. Because to the millions of us who teathed on the 79 prime-time episodes of "Star Trek" and the two years of animated adventures on Saturday mornings and the three movies, Nimoy isn't Nimoy at all. He is emotionless Mister Spock, science officer of the starship Enterprise, loyal friend to Captain Kirk, eternal irritant to Doctor McCoy. Nimoy could play Hamlet tomorrow, but he'd still be a Vulcan doing Shakespeare.

"We are what we are," says Nimoy, 54, bearded, bespectacled and decidedly un-Spocklike. "I'm welcome in other projects,

but I'm most welcome in 'Star Trek.' It's obvious." Nimoy is cowriter, costar and director of "Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home," the latest big-screen sequel to the small-screen series (1966-1969), which is scheduled for release late this month.

In "IV," the "Star Trek" gang must go back to 1986 and kidnap a couple of whales—they are extinct in the 25th century—to appease a frustrated alien intelligence that will destroy Earth unless it can talk to the mammals. At the same time, "IV" ties up some loose plot strings left dangling from the previous movies. Nimoy says this film will come closer to the spirit of the original TV series than its predecessors. "The jauntiness of the characters is somehow less self-conscious, less pretentious," says Nimoy. "It sets out to be less profound and in a way becomes more profound as a result."

Nimoy predicts that "IV," as more of a pure adventure story, may be the

first "Star Trek" movie that can lure in people who don't know the difference between a Vulcan neck pinch and a hearty handshake. "We have a chance to break in a new audience with this one," he says. "I'm the first to admit there are inside jokes that might make a stranger or outsider somewhat uneasy, might make him look around and say, 'I don't get this,' but I think you don't necessarily need to be a 'Star Trek' follower to enjoy the movie."

Tired of the pointy ears? For years the Hollywood community has continued to nurse the rumor that Nimoy was sick and tired of putting on his pointy ears and playing the Vulcan. In fact, after Spock died at the end of "II," Nimoy met with Michael Eisner—then the president of Paramount, the studio that releases the "Star Trek" movies—to lobby for a chance to direct "III." "I can't understand how you can ask me to do this," the perplexed Eisner reportedly said. "How can you ask me to give you control of a \$16 million 'Star Trek' feature when you

hate it? You hate it so much you had yourself killed off!"

Nimoy denies these enduring reports. "There has never been a 'Star Trek' project I haven't been a part of, and yet there is this persistent notion that I have refused to do 'Star Trek' or that I have rejected it in some way," he says. "There's some kind of strange anomaly going on here, right?" But does he regret his eternal linkage with Spock? "I'm grateful for it," says Nimoy. "It's better than being forgotten." Spock did, after all, provide him with enough clout to persuade Paramount to let him take over "III." And that movie, "The Search for Spock," did so well—grossing \$76 million—that he was asked to do it again this time. (Captain Kirk has since decided to follow suit; William Shatner will direct "V.")

Deciding what to put the Enterprise crew through on this voyage wasn't easy. In the early planning stages, "IV" was going to add Eddie Murphy to the cast—Paramount