



STAR TREK: Directed by J.J. Abrams. Written by Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman. Cinematography, Dan Mindel. Music, Michael Giacchino. Paramount Pictures, 2009. PG-13. 126 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

It's a clever thing that director J.J. Abrams pulls off in the simply named *Star Trek* — which could, alternately, be called *Star Trek Begins*, or *Star Trek Origins: Kirk and Spock*. With his writers, Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman, Abrams (co-creator of *Lost*) manages to essentially wipe the *Trek* slate clean, giving the makers of future *Trek* films the freedom to ignore nearly everything that went before.

But as audacious as the filmmakers may be, they can't — and don't — ignore the established characters. *Star Trek* is a success for many reasons, not least because it manages to be, like last year's *Iron Man*, a mostly non-intelligence-insulting, thoroughly engaging action-adventure flick. It's imperfect, but it's also delightful. On the one hand, the plot stumbles over itself a time or two; on the other, the opening sequence is the kind of thing that gives a science fiction fan (even one that grew up on *Star Wars*, not *Star Trek*) goosebumps — a feeling that continues through the *Enterprise*'s every maneuver and the script's every shout-out, visual or verbal, to the earlier *Trek*.

Still, the prime reason *Trek* is so much fun is the casting, which lets new faces

revise these familiar roles: Chris Pine is a brash, cocky Kirk, playful, yet angry that he never knew his father. Zachary Quinto (*Heroes*) nails the unnatural calm of the Vulcan Spock, who also wrestles with his parentage. Zoë Saldana plays a Lt. Uhura so smart and certain of herself that she lets me forgive the writers just a little bit for their failure to imagine a *Star Trek* in which the lone central female character didn't have to be somebody's girlfriend. Simon Pegg is a great Scotty and John Cho a charming (if underused) Sulu. And Karl

Urban (*The Lord of the Rings*' Eomer), as ship's doctor Leonard "Bones" McCoy, is simply outstanding. McCoy, Kirk's first friend at Starfleet Academy, is a man with his own talents who's not above a bit of trickery to achieve desired results — say, getting a Kirk who's facing academic suspension onto the *Enterprise* when the fleet takes off in response to an ever-so-timely distress call from Vulcan.

That distress call sets in motion the main plot of *Star Trek*, but the film establishes its real interest long before

then. In the beautiful opening sequence, a Starfleet ship meets its end and James T. Kirk comes into the world; in parallel scenes, Kirk and Spock grown up, one rebellious, one disciplined; when they both arrive at the Starfleet Academy, competition between them is as inevitable as their eventual clash. Abrams — who can't seem to leave time travel alone these days — solidly establishes a *Trek* universe that's split from the one we know, but it's still one in which Kirk and Spock are key, one offering confidence and charisma, the other an endless reservoir of logic and intellect.

A cynic might say that *Star Trek*'s alternate-universe ploy is just a way to make more films (and money) without fussing over continuity with the old *Trek*. But part of the charm of Abrams' film is the way it sets new parameters while showing affection and respect for the *Trek* that was. What happened in the *Trek* series we know still happened, as the presence of old Spock (Leonard Nimoy), who's central to this film's story, makes clear. But like Kirk leaving Iowa or Spock leaving Vulcan, this *Trek* is leaving the home of the established canon to make its own way in the universe. *Star Trek* is dead; long live *Star Trek*. **EW**

Sentimental Journey

I'm sure that at some point in his storied career, Michael Caine turned in a mediocre performance. I've just yet to see it. Unfortunately, Caine's impeccable talent can't always carry an entire film, be it last year's lackluster *Flawless* or John Crowley's wobbly *Is Anybody There?*, a gentle, predictable story of unlikely friendship. Caine plays Clarence, a retired, suicidal magician slowly losing his grasp on who and where he is. Reluctantly, he takes a room in an old folks' home run by a 40ish couple (Anne-Marie Duff and David Morrissey) whose 11-year-old son, Edward (Bill Milner, from the similarly sweet-but-slight *Son of Rambow*), is cranky about being displaced from his old room. He's also obsessed with ghosts, and with what happens after a person dies — understandably so, as the people in his house have a habit of departing their bodies.

Edward is a surly little git, Clarence a cranky old coot; clearly, their initial dislike will turn to friendship before long. Just as clearly, they'll push each other over the roadblocks keeping them from properly appreciating life. Edward is using his explorations of the paranormal to avoid his lack of friends and his parents' unhappiness; Clarence hasn't forgiven himself for something that happened long ago with his wife. Their friendship has potential, but it's nearly outweighed by the film's sentimental tone and the way the house's other residents are woefully short on character development; they seem defined by one personality quirk apiece. Caine's performance elevates Clarence's decline into heartbreaker territory, but the rest of the movie just doesn't keep up. *Is Anybody There?* (PG13, 95 min., ★★☆☆☆) opens Friday, May 15, at the Bijou. — Molly Templeton

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