

STAR TREK

Directed by J.J. Abrams
Produced by J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof
Distributed by Paramount Pictures
Released in 2009

Fans of the Original Series never had it this good. Even with the elevated budget and heightened care concomitant with any major studio production, the first six *Star Trek* movies, with the exception of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, never amounted to much. J.J. Abrams's *Star Trek* succeeds at the near-impossible task of restoring the original Star Trek with a new cast, each character better realized than ever before. Abrams manages this feat despite a film loaded with action because he allows action to dictate character. He also succeeds by elevating the Kirk-Spock rivalry and scaling back on the Bones character. This allows the Uhura-Scotty-Sulu-Chekov ensemble to finally develop identities transcending their duty stations on the *Enterprise*. Uhura is the real standout, and serves a pivotal role in the plot.

Abrams also does the Original Series credit by refusing to trash everything that's already transpired—from henceforth *Star Trek* will consist of two major alternate universes that split where Nero emerges from the future. Also, Leonard Nimoy (the definitive Spock and Spock being Star Trek's definitive character) is given a featured role as Spock Prime; a green-skinned Orion makes an appearance as one of Kirk's many conquests; and a Tribble sits right behind Scotty when his character is introduced. Demonstrating this kind of respect for the material goes a long way to convincing veteran fans that they're still wanted.

The director also peppers the action with creative uses of beaming, the franchise's most original idea and woefully under-utilized until now.

Abrams's only major failure will go unnoticed by most moviegoers, and will be taken as right and good by the rest. Spock delivers the 'Space, the Final Frontier' prologue as he did at the conclusion of the aforementioned *Star Trek II*. But in that movie, for the last time in the Star Trek universe, the concluding line read, "Where no man has gone before." Since Abrams is starting from scratch, he can do whatever he wants with the lines. What rankles about "Where no *one* has gone before" is not so much how it reads, but what it seems motivated by—Political Correctness and a preference to offend Conservatives rather than offend Liberals with the original line.

'Man' is the better option.

First, the word 'one' is too indistinct. It can mean 'person,' but it requires context to convey meaning.

Second, we know that aliens have already been where the crew is going. And even if they weren't, will Earthlings of the future really be proud of the exploits of aliens? Will we really become that enlightened and inclusive? We only care what humans accomplish.

Third, men have always been more inclined to explore and subjugate than women. Using 'man' rather than 'one' does not mean women cannot join along, but it could convey that they won't be celebrated in the process.

Fourth, 'man' could be taken in the context of race—the race of man, encompassing male and female. It would be the equivalent of 'human.' This comports with the Bible's classification in the creation account in Genesis, where, "God created Man. Male and Female He created them." But, admittedly, this is not a valid understanding of the meaning of the word 'man' in our current cultural and linguistic climate. Moreover, to be used in a way consistent with this interpretation of meaning, the line would have to be changed to, "Where man has not gone before."

Fifth, and this is a fair assumption, if a man has never explored something or accomplished some great feat of strength or daring-do, a woman probably hasn't either.

The film is the product of a post-feminist construct. It reintroduces the abbreviated skirts which so alluringly attired female crewmembers in the Original Series. And the unisex treatment of *Star Trek II* (Lieutenant Saavik is called Mr. Saavik) is rejected. In this film, a woman is addressed as 'ma'am.'

Returning to Uhura, she is as tough and competent as any man, but she is ultimately defined as a nurturer, thanks to her exquisite turbolift scene with Spock. And neither she nor any other woman is shown holding their own in fisticuffs with a man or an alien, an exaggeration many movies indulge in to find something new, but more typically, to avoid cries of sexism.

Interestingly, the film opens with the most hackneyed delineation of sex roles ever demonstrated in the Star Trek canon. Daddy Kirk sacrifices his life to save his crew (he remains at the helm shooting down missiles intended to fell the escaping shuttles), but he may be doing it all to save his wife and newborn. He almost admits to as much when he deflects his wife's protests that he join them. When he knocks down Nero's missiles, any one could be heading for the medical shuttle craft.

The opening lapses too far into sentiment with its many close-ups of Mrs. Kirk screaming in agony as she is delivered. It begs the questions, What was she doing on the *U.S.S. Kelvin* to start with? Is she part of the crew, or is she just Mrs. Kirk? Either way, it's a good thing Kirk's desire to preserve his lineage aligned with his responsibility to protect the fleeing crew. The scene demonstrates the advantages of keeping spouses off starships and it could also be read as an indictment of co-ed military deployment. Will the men have an inordinate desire to protect the women at the expense of the mission? Even if they do not, serving on a starship seems like an extreme version of serving on an aircraft carrier on a long deployment. Pregnant sailors in such a co-ed environment are now routine. So sex is a distraction. But what's the alternative? These issues are always glossed over in Star Trek, but if there were no women on a starship and the *Enterprise* set out on a five-year mission as in the Original Series, would the *Enterprise* degenerate into a jailhouse in the sky polluted by abusive, debauched men? Long term, men manage better when complemented by women. But in the short term the distractions inherent in any emotional relationship can threaten the mission. Starship service combines short-term and long-term considerations, the conflicting values seemingly irreconcilable. The ideal would be a series of short-term missions with a crew of men.

Of course, this is the future. A hormone to scuttle the libido would exist and could be mandatory. But who wouldn't want to be the one crewman who stopped his meds? He'd have a starship of lonely women for the taking, with no competition! Without such a drug, on a long

deployment the men would start fighting over the women, there'd be pregnancies, and as long as the Federation didn't require abortions, there'd be babies, some of whom would reach toddler stage before the ship returned home. That would be a major distraction in the middle of battle—who's going to man the nursery?