

The Search for Spock: Star Trek III (1984)
Directed by Leonard Nimoy, written by Harve Bennett

A Better title might be *The Search for Schlock*. Leonard Nimoy is going to need all the regenerative planets he can find after *The Search for Spock*. He may have managed to bring Spock back to the world of the living, after killing the bat-eared Vulcan off in *Star Trek II*. But this will be child's play compared with breathing new life into his directorial career following this debut.

Star Trek III re-opens the can of worms introduced in *The Wrath of Khan*. The genesis formula, invented by the-son-Kirk-never-knew-he-had, has transformed a barren planet into a Garden of Eden. But protecting this secret of creation has been costly. Spock, in musketeer fashion, did a one-for-all number, and died in the process of saving the *Enterprise* for the next movie -- something Nimoy doesn't think necessary for a possible sequel number four. In case anyone missed number two, properly titled "Fantasy Island in Space", the audience is treated to a black-and-white video of Spock's last gasps as *Search* opens.

If Spock's body had been safely deposited on the surface of the Genesis planet, opening up all kinds of possibilities for an impermanent death, his mind is another story (and movie). Vulcans, we are informed, can do an out-of-body trick and record their minds on empty floppy discs. Not having access to a computer terminal at the time of his demise, Spock substituted the void between the ears of Dr. McCoy.

Within its unwelcome host, Spock's completely logical personality turns Bones from a neurotic into a schizophrenic. When he is threatened by a security guard, McCoy grabs him by the neck, a martial-arts maneuver peculiar to Vulcans. The technique doesn't work for Bones, but it works wonders for the audience of Trekkies. Knowing laughter fills the theatre, announcing that they're "in" enough to recognize the irony of having Spockian logic coming out of the mouth of Bones, normally the stereotyped champion of pure emotions aboard the *Enterprise*.

Vulcan tradition demands that Spock's mind and body be rejoined. But Star Fleet command has decided, once again, to ground the *Enterprise* and split up the crew. This plot device has always been a no-no: no *Enterprise*, no *Star Trek*. Kirk and his crew disobey orders once again and steal the *Enterprise* in order to carry out the search for the rest of Spock. When the supremely over-confident commander of the latest in super-star ships is ordered in hot pursuit of the pirates, his engines sputter and die. His state-of-the-art vessel is left in the *Enterprise*'s galactic dust, a victim of the human ingenuity of Scotty, the geriatric engineer, who had sabotaged the warp-drive.

Evil in the Garden of Eden

Just as Spock's rationality is supposed to be cold and inhuman in comparison with Bones' sentimentality, this failure of high tech illustrates another of the themes of the *Star Trek* series: that advanced technology is vulnerable to human will. But human will has a dark side as well, a theme pompously trumpeted in the various "Star Bores" movies. Because of the inevitable "flaw in his character", Kirk's son has included in the genesis formula a universally banned substance -- probably agent orange -- which causes the new world to self-destruct. For this error he is doomed, according to the

logic of ancient Greek drama and Hollywood movies. Having just been introduced in the previous movie, he shows considerable good sense by permanently exiting from any future sequels, dying in the final explosion of the planet Genesis, before it's too late for his acting career.

Like technology, people also have a capacity for good or evil. Fortunately for the plot, there are more forces for evil in the universe than Mr. Roarke's desire for revenge, the springboard for the shallow plot of *Khan*. The Klingons, Star Trek's answer to Pigs in Space, want to possess the formula for creating life, ironically because of its capacity for destroying it.

The Klingons are old stand-by enemies in the Star Trek series who usually end up out-smarting themselves. (Although their extra-terrestrials usually have human-like features, Star Trek III takes a line or two out of the Star Wars script by introducing a few exotic creatures, and even a bar scene, but only for minimal effect).

A Sacrilege

While the outlaw Enterprise and the Klingons navigate separately towards Genesis, Kirk's son leads a scientific expedition to the surface of the planet in search of life forms. Spock's casket is found to be empty but, because it is daylight, vampyrism is not suspected.

A second possibility is that he could have been devoured by the slithery orange creatures surrounding his casket. These life forms, we are told, have evolved from microbes carried from the ship. If microbes have evolved this far, this fast, in the environment of Genesis, what might have happened to Spock is beyond imagination. However, only germs evolve. Spock has been reincarnated as himself, beginning as an infant. Then, as the planet rapidly comes apart at the seams, he undergoes several abrupt transformations of age. Before you know it, Spock is old and ugly again, and probably an expert on baby and child care.

That leaves the Klingons. By using a "cloaking device", which renders their ship invisible to sensors, the Klingons gain the upper hand and manage to disable the Enterprise. But as Kirk and his crew escape to the planet's surface, the boarding party of Klingons is transported into an unexpected trap: the Enterprise self-destructs. A good portion of the star-ship explodes into a thousand pieces, seemingly well beyond the capacity of either Scotty or, indeed, of all the King's horses and men, to put it back together again. As the Enterprise disintegrates, nothing can be heard but wailing and gnashing of teeth -- not from the Super Dolby Stereo, but from the audience. The destruction of the Enterprise was a sacrilege. It was quickly followed by the explosion of the planet -- Darth Vader's "death star" probably lurking near-by. In these movies, the special effects are the real stars, but in Star Trek III they are especially violent and destructive.

Technology aside, the battle for the ultimate weapon comes down to a hand-to-hand battle, in the midst of a disintegrating planet, between Kirk and the Klingon Captain. Kirk manages to cling onto the last pieces of stable earth in time to throw the Klingon to his doom, rescue his crew, including Spock who has conveniently aged to the appropriate degree, and commandeer the enemy vessel.

Vulcan Mysticism?

Meanwhile, back on the planet Vulcan, it's time to rejoin Spock. This final scene, though, is way out of line. Spock was half-human and half-Vulcan, with the human half continually reintroduced to account for any out-of-character emotionalism. But cold logic is the opposite of fancy ritual. This places a very different light on the mysticism at the end of the movie. The ceremony, which attempts to recombine the elements of Spock's mind with his body, is incredibly spiritual and religious. But what logical place on a completely rational planet is there for sacred robes, for gongs, for priestesses and long-maned vestal virgins? These trappings had been introduced in earlier stories, so they aren't wrong in this sense. Nor are they wrong in terms of the whole genre -- not only the Star Wars movies, but the gamut of sword and sorcery flicks contain heavy elements of mysticism. But they are wrong for what Vulcan supposedly stood for.

In the end, we are told that "...The Adventure Continues". And there are many, if not infinite, possibilities. The crew of the recently defunct Enterprise are now outlaws and pirates. They are in command of a green, vulture-like Klingon ship that is vastly inferior in terms of fire-power to a Star-Ship but is equipped with a useful cloaking device. They will be pursued by an arrogant if incompetent earthling in a technological wonder, and by the Klingon Empire, both of whom they will easily out-wit. There is no end to the adventures Captain Quirk and his Merry Band could have in the "final frontier". It can continue as long and as far as the pocket books of new and old Trekkies can stretch. They can't be infinitely elastic, however. At some point this schlock must be revealed for what it is: a continuation of the old TV series, but at five or six dollars a shot.

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