

Star Trek V: The Final Frontier ★★

Year of Release: 1989

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: Skip It

Before I say anything about *Star Trek V*, you should know that while I'm not a Trekkie, I am an avid Star Trek fan. In fact, "Star Trek" is my favorite TV series and I love the Star Trek movies, especially *The Wrath of Khan* and *The Voyage Home*. So with that in mind perhaps you can appreciate just how much it pains my heart to report that *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* sucks Dilithium crystals! *The Final Frontier* is not only a shockingly poor follow-up to the enormous critical and popular success of *Star Trek IV*, it's also the worst film of the series.

As the movie begins, the Enterprise is docked for repairs, and its beloved crew is vacationing in Yosemite, no doubt recovering from their adventures in the previous film. But the camping trip abruptly comes to an end when Star Fleet orders Captain Kirk and company to Paradise City on Nimbus III, a planet in the neutral zone where a renegade Vulcan has taken hostages. Laurence Luckinbill plays Sybok, a Vulcan outcast who has forsaken logic in favor of base emotions and instincts. He possesses a mysterious, spiritual power to relieve people of their emotional anguish, and he uses this power to assemble a devoted following of worshippers. With their help, he high-jacks the Enterprise. Sybok intends to use the starship to reach Sha Ka Ri, a mythical planet at the center of the galaxy (beyond the Great Barrier) where no man has gone before. There he expects to find enlightenment from God almighty himself.

During *The Final Frontier*, we learn something new about William Shatner (a.k.a. Captain Kirk): while his command of a Federation starship is indeed impressive, he's not so adept at writing and directing movies. Shatner's hackneyed story and heavy-handed direction make the film far too self-serious and pretentious. *The Final Frontier* is as subtle as a sledge hammer; it hits us over the head with its melodramatic plot and syrupy, overbearing score. The movie captures neither the good-natured, light-hearted whimsy of *Voyage Home* nor the suspenseful, nerve-wracking excitement of *Wrath of Khan*.

The story line in *The Final Frontier* is astonishingly unbelievable. Sybok's quest for God is so ludicrous it's almost funny—almost so bad it's good. Almost, but not quite: I groaned more than I laughed. Not once during the movie did I accept the premise or suspend my disbelief. And how could I with these embarrassingly cheesy special

effects?

After striking it rich at the box office with *Star Trek IV*, Paramount somehow decided it could no longer afford the services of Industrial Light and Magic. I.L.M. (the special effects division of Lucasfilm) produced the special effects for the last three Trek films, and it also creates the fine effects in "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Giving I.L.M. its walking papers was a fatal mistake; the special effects in *The Final Frontier* are simply atrocious. They barely look better than those in the original TV series, which were good for their day but which would look shabby, laughable, and campy on the big screen. The Enterprise and the Shuttle Craft look plastic and artificial. Gone is the high-tech *Stars Wars* look of *Wrath of Khan*, *Search for Spock*, and *Voyage Home*.

Star Trek V is far too often derivative of other films. The bar in Paradise City, for example, immediately brings to mind the Catina Bar in *Star Wars*. Paradise City itself, with its grungy inhabitants, looks suspiciously like the city of Bartertown in *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. To make matters worse, the movie's spiritual, mystical overtones conjure images of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. *The Final Frontier* tries to cover so much ground that it fails even to capture the heart, soul, and flavor of Star Trek. The movie tastes too much like a potluck dinner of science fiction leftovers.

Star Trek V also suffers from a nagging problem that has plagued the entire film series; it lies in the way in which the movies have depicted the Klingons. In the original TV series, humans and Klingons differed not in appearance nor in intelligence but in cultural philosophy and ideology. Whereas the Federation preached peace and cooperation, Klingon society was based on warfare, competition, and hatred. In the movies, on the other hand, the Klingons have become ugly, gruesome-looking barbarians devoid of intellect. They are so crude and one-dimensional that they fail to make credible adversaries. We can't take them seriously because we are too busy laughing at their stupidity. This problem, which nearly sunk *Star Trek III*, once again rears its ugly head in *The Final Frontier*. The idiocy of the Klingon commander in *Star Trek V* makes the movie's already silly plot even harder to swallow.

The sole salvation of *Star Trek V* is the humorous banter and rapport between the characters, especially between Kirk, Spock, and McCoy—who

else? In the tradition of the TV series, *The Final Frontier* contains some vintage Star Trek dialogue. The characters in Star Trek are so familiar and so dear to our hearts that it's fun spending time with them even in the worst of circumstances, such as a

disappointingly mediocre movie. Even so, unless you're a true die-hard Trekkie, I'd suggest you skip this one and wait for *Star Trek VI*; I hear Checkov and Sulu are co-directing.

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