

Movies

Second 'Star Trek' film is light years beyond the first

By Gene Siskel

Movie critic

THOSE OF US who had never been fans of had never even seen the enormously popular TV show "Star Trek" and thus never understood the show's appeal were startled when we saw the very first "Star Trek" movie. It was a leaden piece of special effects splendor attempting to hide cardboard characters in a story that was laughable in its emptiness to say something profound.

The film had no style and no weight.

Happily, none of this is true of the second "Star Trek" movie, which is called "Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan."

The new film is a flat-out winner, full of appealing characters in engaging relationships in a futuristic film that has a delightfully old-fashioned sense of majesty about its characters and the predicaments they get into.

The difference: At every level this film is better—better script, direction, production design and acting.

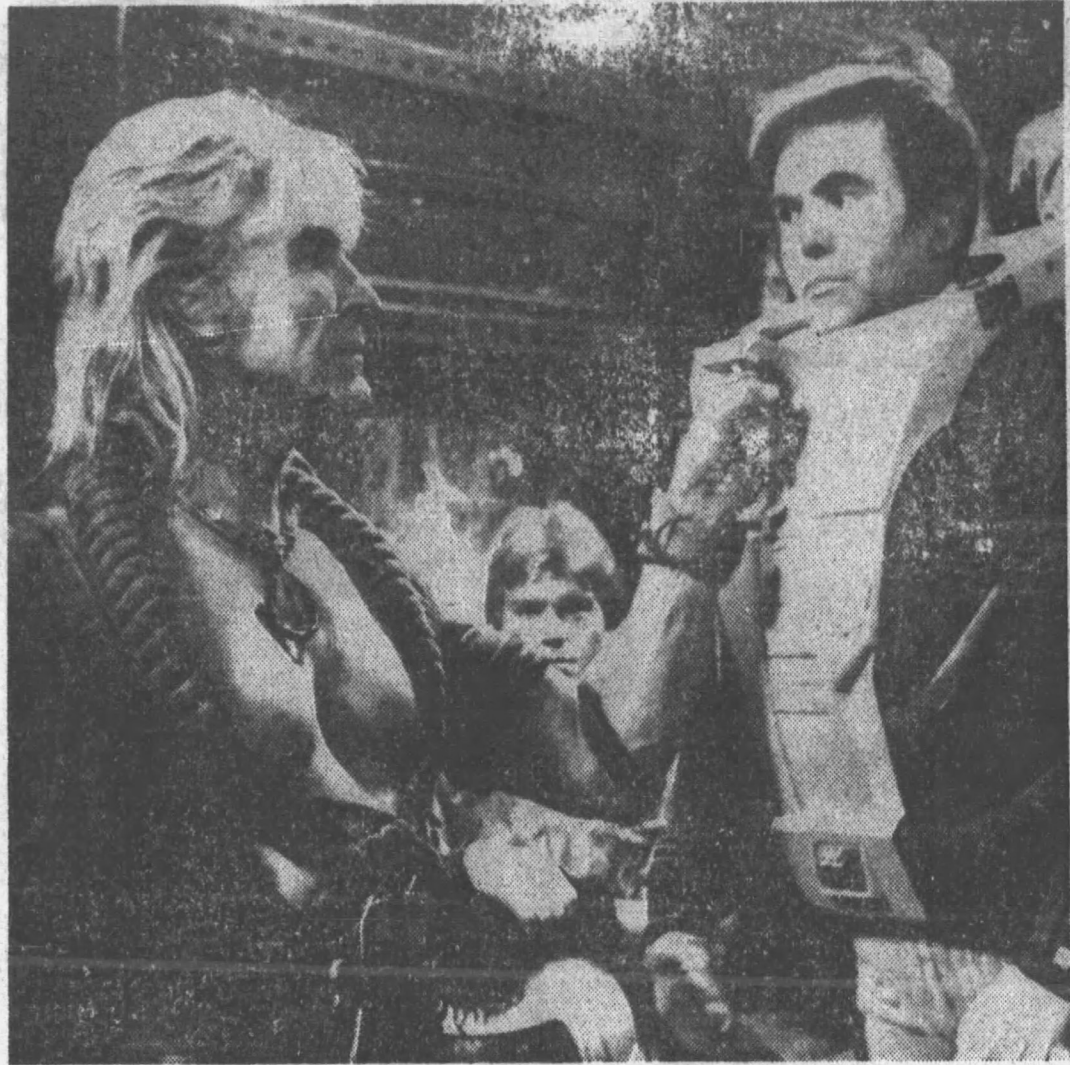
I used to ridicule the "Star Trek" fanatics in the Tribune, grown men and women in the 20s and 40s. No longer. This new film explains the appeal of such characters as the courageous now-Admiral Kirk [William Shatner] and his loyal Vulcan science officer Spock [Leonard Nimoy].

AND THE FILM also introduces an exciting new member of the Starship Enterprise crew, a woman Vulcan officer-in-training called Ilia [played by striking gamine actress Persi Alley].

Surprises? There are plenty, not the least of which is that Kirk turns out to have had a healthy sex life and that Spock is willing to live up to his constant pledge to Kirk: "I am your friend. I have been and always will be."

The new film is set in the 23rd Century. Kirk is going through a mid-life crisis as he celebrates another birthday. Rather than read William Shakespeare's "Passages," he's the kind of guy who will reread "Moby Dick." Already you've got to like him.

The story here concerns a direct threat to Kirk by a belligerent hunk of genetic engineering called Khan [Ricardo Montalban]. And you can forget about the "rich Corinthian father" jokes with this solid performance by Montalban. Or even, "Boss, boss, de spaceship, de spaceship." Even though he's been made up to look like Rod Stewart gone to seed, Montalban manages to shed his familiar ruses and comes across here as a genuinely scary fellow, upset at Kirk because he claims Kirk abandoned him 15 years ago on a distant



Ricardo Montalban [left] and William Shatner in "Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan": A flat-out winner.

"Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan"

★★★½

Mini-review: Worthy of a hit TV show

Directed by Nicholas Meyer; screenplay by Jack B. Sowards from a story by Harve Bennett and Sowards, based on the TV series created by Gene Roddenberry; photographed by Gayne Rescher; edited by William P. Dornlich; music by James Horner; production design by Joseph R. Jennings; produced by Robert Sallin; a Paramount release at the Chicago, Esquire and neighborhood theaters. Rated R.

THE CAST

Kirk	William Shatner
Spock	Leonard Nimoy
McCoy	DeForest Kelley
Khan	Ricardo Montalban
Scotty	James Doohan
Chekov	Walter Koenig
Sulu	George Takei
Uhura	Nichelle Nichols
Carol	Bibi Besch
David	Merritt Buttrick
Terrill	Paul Winfield
Saevik	Kirstie Alley

planet.

This direct threat on Kirk's life is exactly what the old man needs to get his juices flowing again. And what is interesting about the script and Shatner's performance is that Spock is portrayed as always in control, as having a good sense of humor about his situation, and as always holding a little power in reserve.

Those elements are the qualities that movie

stars of the '40s and '50s had in common, and Kirk is a throwback to that confident style of performing and presence. He's a stand-up kind of guy.

ALSO APPEALING in a way that he wasn't in the first film is DeForest Kelley as "Bones" McCoy, the Enterprise's chief medical officer. The man has some wit, supplied of course by a talented screenwriter.

"Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan" also has a solid, adult look rather than a whiz-bang, juvenile pinball atmosphere. The film thus may not appeal to little ones, but if you're looking for a morality play set in space, this is a very good one.

Credit screenwriter Jack B. Sowards for a script full of memorable and funny exchanges and director Nicholas Meyer [writer of "The Seven Per-Cent Solution" and writer-director of the underrated love story "Time After Time"] for telling Sowards' story cleanly.

"Trekies" owe a lot to these two men. Together they have ensured that there will be at least one more "Star Trek" movie, and Paramount Pictures would do well to make sure that they both have major creative input in its making.