**EL 111 ASSIGNMENT**

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**STAR TREK SERIES (MOVIE REVIEW)**

J.J. Abrams, who directed *Star Trek* (2009) and *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013), has beamed up to the ship, leaving us stranded on the planet's surface with *Fast and the Furious* auteur Justin Lin. This third installment in the millennial *Star Trek* reboot races along without an idea in its head, often recalling the silly, monster-driven final season of the 60s TV show. (Among the screenwriters is Simon Pegg, who plays Mr. Scott onscreen but also scripted such lowbrow favorites as *Hot Fuzz* and *Shaun of the Dead*.) The 2009 movie held out the promise that the familiar old characters might be taken in new directions, but Lin makes good on that only once, with a blink-and-you'll-miss-it shot of Mr. Sulu meeting his gay lover on shore leave; needless to say, there's plenty of stale comedy between the obtuse Mr. Spock and irascible Dr. McCoy.

Nick Naylor (Aaron Eckhart), a lobbyist for the tobacco industry, is pitching Jeff (Rob Lowe), a Hollywood super-agent who never sleeps, on bringing cigarettes back to the movies. Jeff envisions a science-fiction romance where Catherine Zeta-Jones and Brad Pitt light up in space — in between ravishing each other’s naked bodies, that is. Nick likes the idea, except for one problem: “Wouldn’t they blow up in an all-oxygen environment?” Jeff is prepared for this question. “It’s an easy fix,” he says. “One line of dialogue: ‘Thank god we invented the… whatever… device.”

“Star Trek Beyond” is a movie full of *whatever* devices, where an outdated ship that crash-landed on a hostile planet a century ago can be easily fixed up with a little TLC and an attack of killer bees is neutralized by blasting the Beastie Boys. The film’s own logic is so casually convoluted that, like Ellen Page in “Inception,” the characters have a way of narrating the action to the audience, just to make sure you’re following along. (You still may not be.)

“Beyond” is the first “Star Trek” film to be penned by Simon Pegg, who co-wrote the cult comedy Cornetto Trilogy (“The World’s End,” “Hot Fuzz” and “Shaun of the Dead”) with his frequent collaborator, Edgar Wright. Pegg’s script is a nonsense, but it is a spirited one, the closest in tone of the recent trilogy to the original “Star Trek” series. Created by Gene Roddenberry, the show was expansive with ideas about man’s existential fate, and subsequent installments only expounded on its philosophical optimism. “It is the struggle itself that is most important,” waxes Data in “The Next Generation.” “We must strive to be more than we are. It does not matter that we will not reach our ultimate goal. The effort itself yields its own reward.”

At the opening of “Beyond,” a sense of fatigue has set in over the Enterprise, and perhaps the films themselves. Kirk (Chris Pine), now three years into his mission to explore the vast recesses of the galaxy, tells his captain’s log that the infinitum of space is both beautiful and despairing: While it means anything is possible, the indistinguishable days turn punishing. “Things have started to feel a little episodic,” Kirk bemoans in a strong monologue that’s often quite pretty.

That kind of self-referential humor permeates “Beyond,” directed by Justin Lin (“Fast Five”) with a sense of rollicking adventure missing from the previous entry, “Into Darkness,” weighed down by dour ballast. “Star Trek Beyond,” more than anything, is designed as a course-correct from the previous film. “Into Darkness” was hampered by its own super-seriousness and an Uhura-Spock romance that felt ripped from a Katherine Heigl movie, but “Beyond” focuses on the real romance of “Star Trek” — the relationships between its crew members.

Spock (Zachary Quinto), following the destruction of his homeland, is contemplating leaving the Enterprise to carry on the work of the recently-deceased Commander Spock (Leonard Nimoy), his alter-ego from another universe. But as his team reminds him, Spock is needed on the ship — especially by Kirk, who wouldn’t be able to function without his right-hand man.