

Movie discussion resource

Star Trek into Darkness

Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.

Genre: Science Fiction

Rating: M

Length: 132 minutes

Starring: Benedict Cumberbatch, Chris Pine, Zoe Saldana

Director: J.J.Abrams

Screenplay: Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman, Damon Lindelof



Brief synopsis

After being called home, the crew of the USS Enterprise find a seemingly unstoppable force of terror from within their own organization has detonated the fleet and everything it stands for, carried out a devastating terror attack on London and leaving the earth in chaos. Captain Kirk leads a deadly manhunt to a war-zone world to capture a one-man weapon of mass destruction. As the heroes are propelled into an epic chess game of life and death, love will be challenged, friendships will be torn apart, and sacrifices will be made for the only family Kirk has left: his crew.

More information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek_Into_Darkness

Questions for discussion

Some general questions might provide enough framework for you to discuss the movie:

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

Please note that this movie discussion resource is not a review, but a catalyst for conversation

Human nature

Despite everyday gripes and niggles amongst the USS Enterprise crew, the bond between them is held strong under the leadership of Captain James Kirk. Even in the extreme circumstances in which they find themselves, the crew show friendship, loyalty, courage and resolve under pressure. Is the *best* in human nature brought out under pressure and difficulty? If yes, are those who have 'easy' times in life more prone to the dark side of human nature when they do encounter difficult times? Or are positive human characteristics built in the 'easy' times and 'banked' for withdrawal at a later time when needed? Discuss.

Conflicted? Bring on a war!

The nature of human aggression is a key theme in the movie. What drives the destructive actions of the characters? This is more nuanced than 'good guys/bad guys' and simplistic evil. The motivations for what happens are often complex and surprising. Given all of this, the real danger seems to come from those who can see no other option to resolve conflict than by declaring war, and employing negative militarism. Discuss.

A glimpse into the future

Amazing technology is on display in the movie. But the question is, in what ways is technology best able to support what is life giving, and how do we rein in technology when it is actually life denying? Does technology simply provide more sophisticated 'toys' against an enduring landscape of good and evil? Discuss.

Playing with emotions

In terms of movie narrative, setting up scenes where you can't predict the outcome is one of the most basic plot devices. The viewer is often plunged into harrowing scenes where all seems to be hopeless, until one of the characters without a great deal of fuss seems to be able to fix the problem. For instance, in the scene when the USS Enterprise is crashing back into the Earth's atmosphere, and the crew has resigned itself to the fact that they're all going to die, into the scene comes a no fuss 'Fonzie' (Happy Days) kind of person, who simply gives the reactor core a literal 'kick start' to make it work again, and things are all okay again. Is the heightened anxiety a tool in the hand of a director to play with the emotions of the audience, or does it point to the fact that someone coming into a difficult situation from another angle can see what had been there all along, but had apparently not been obvious to those trying to find a solution? Was all the stress worth it? Discuss examples from your own experience.

Pursuit of the baddies

After 9/11, it seems that nothing has been spared by way of catching the 'baddies' behind the attack, on the understanding that 'someone has to pay for the act of terror'. In fact, the whole, tragic fiasco with the invasion of Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11 but yet was proclaimed as victory, 'prevailing' over the 'enemy'. Job done! 'Into Darkness' highlights the ethical implications of pursuing terrorists. How far is too far to catch a 'baddie'? Discuss.

Playing with history

Trekkies are notorious for minutiae details in the Star Trek franchise. William Shatner once mocked rabid conventioners on a Saturday Night Live skit when he told them to "get a life." It is a challenge for a director who needs some degree of poetic licence. J.J. Abrams seems to have a bet both ways: 'Spock and the audience retain all memory of past movies, but Federation history, as recorded in those films, is no longer unalterable. Things can now happen differently than they did before. It was like an Etch A Sketch got wiped clean'. (*Kenneth R. Morefield*) What are the theological and psychological implications for changing history, even in a movie franchise such as Star Trek? Discuss.

Things that go boom

And the point of it all? Is it nothing more than a series of video-game ready action sequences of chases, explosions, crashes and fights that would fit just as easily into most any movie franchise? 'We open with a scene of Indiana Jones (aka Kirk) running away from some primitive aliens. Several scenes had a verbal or digital countdown. Want to know what the Star Trek franchise has become? Before the count gets to zero you must (push this button/pull this lever/climb this ladder/inject this serum) or (someone you love/everyone on this ship/millions of extras) are going to die'. (*Moreland*) Is this all simply a vehicle for spectacle and 'things that go boom', with the Director appropriating the Star Trek characters people have come to love? Or is there something else going on? Discuss.

Where is God in 'Into Darkness'

Is there a 'Christ figure' in the movie? Is God spectacularly absent (and maybe there's something to discuss given what transpires)? Is the 'good guys/bad guys' theme an echo of images and actions of God from the Hebrew Scriptures where the 'bad guys' are defeated? How helpful or not is this image of God? Discuss.

Thanks to Palace Nova for providing support for the Movie Discussion Resources!
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The resource is available to download for use in small group discussion.

