

'Star Trek' movie a showcase of thrills, good acting

LIGHTSCAMERAREACTION

STEPHEN BROWN Staff Writer

STAR TREK GENERATIONS
★★★ (out of four stars)

They're supposed to go where no one has gone before, but android Data (Brent Spiner) did not need to go there!

Aboard a pirate ship simulated by the virtual reality of the Enterprise Holodeck, Data takes advice from his friend Dr. Beverly Crusher (Gates McFadden) to have some fun with life. Do something unexpected, she tells him.

Evading his usual logic, Data pushes the prim Dr. Crusher off the plank into the freezing water. She is not amused.

It is but one sequence that illustrates the concept of actions leading to a discovery. Whether the result sheds light or yields agony, these epiphanies help characters to grow and to learn.

"Star Trek Generations," a bridge between the classic television program and the recent new generation series, is a serviceable entry into the ongoing sci-fi saga. But its highlights are priceless moments which offer reassurances that some constants about the human condition hold true for all of us, even in a galaxy far, far away.

The plot to bring together the two casts is clever and reasonable.

The story begins in the 23rd century when a retired Captain Kirk (William Shatner), Chekov (Walter Koenig), and Scotty (James Doohan) make a special appearance aboard the Enterprise-B for its maiden voyage.

Disaster strikes when an energy ribbon destroys a nearby ship and approaches the Enterprise. Kirk, ever the hero, descends to the lower part of the ship to engineer a rescue.

Scotty helps beam several survivors from the destroyed ship onto the Enterprise, among them Guinan (Whoopi Goldberg), the sage bartender from the "Next Generation" cast, and Dr. Soran (Malcolm McDowell of "A Clockwork Orange" and "Time After Time"), a villainous scientist on the verge of a breakthrough.

Kirk, who helps save the Enterprise, appears to be dead when the energy ribbon cuts away his

section of the ship.

The action then shifts to the 24th century, when the "Next Generation" cast encounters the energy ribbon and Soran, who has not aged.

The ribbon destroys everything in its path, but its middle, the Nexus, is a utopia ("It was like being inside joy") that Soran yearns to reach, even if he must kill millions of people to get there.

Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart) is determined to stop him. Ultimately, Picard finds Kirk, who is alive and well in the Nexus, and the two captains join forces to defeat Soran.

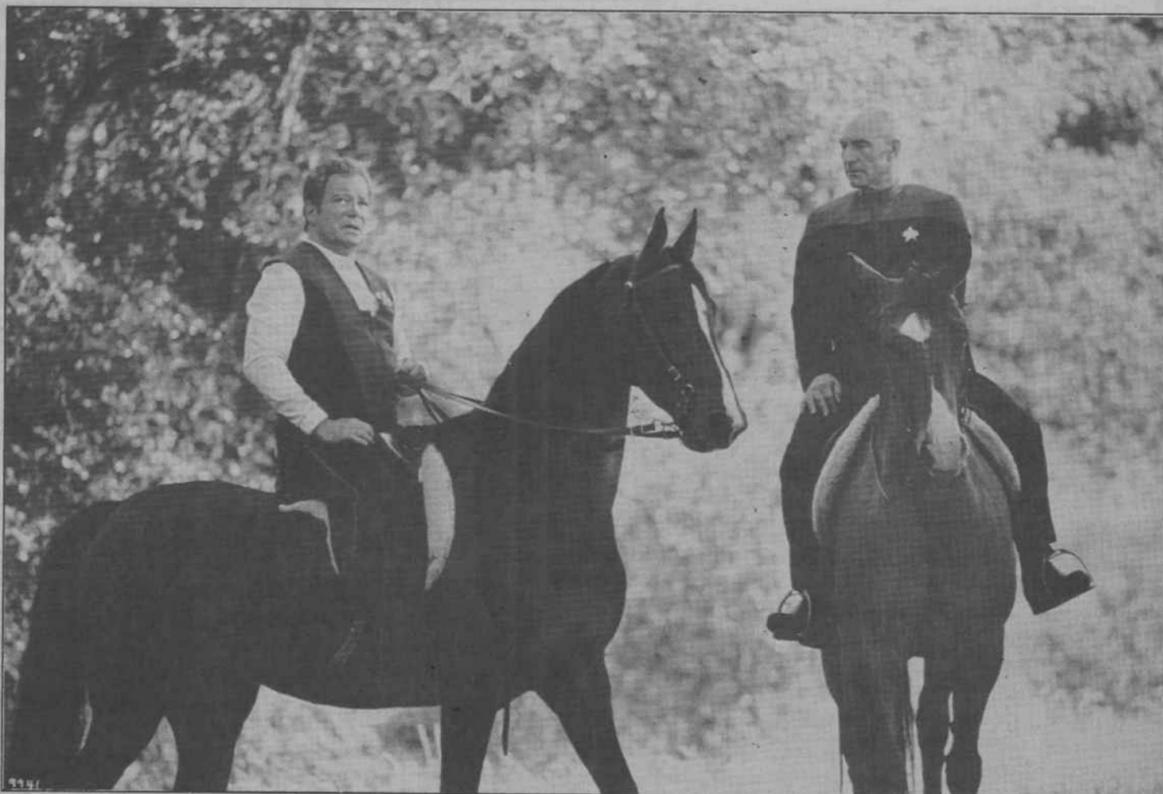
Screenwriters Ronald Moore and Brannon Braga, along with director David Carson, help construct a story equally accessible to full-fledged Trekkers as well as to viewers who simply want a solid entertainment. Regardless of your familiarity with the characters, it is easy to realize their universal appeal and understand their motivations.

The primary obstacle the filmmakers overcome in this transitional entry to the film series is to keep the story germane to followers of the original series as well as to devotees of its successful spinoff. Since "Next Generation" recently ended its seven-year run, the filmmakers were challenged to create a film that is more than just an extended-length episode. And they succeed, for the most part.

Since the classic cast said most of their good-byes in the previous sequel, the major thrust of this film spotlights the "Next Generation" ensemble cast.

Patrick Stewart's Captain Picard gets to show a wide range of emotions in response to a family tragedy. His bold command of his life and of the Enterprise make him a superb captain. Stewart, a trained Shakespearean actor, adds a depth to the subtext about the end of his family line. Through visions of possible futures (reminiscent of the "Deep Space Nine" premiere) and dialogue about unfinished business, the film pits Picard against himself as he struggles with questions of destiny.

Stewart conveys Picard's courage as he plunges into the Nexus despite Guinan's warning: "If you go, you're not going to care about anything —



Capt. James T. Kirk (William Shatner) and Capt. Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) make plans to save the universe again in "Star Trek Generations." It is the seventh in the "Star Trek" movie series and the first to feature "The Next Generation."

and you're not going to want to come back."

Brent Spiner's Data is the highlight of the film. When chief engineer Geordi La Forge (LeVar Burton) inserts an emotion chip into Data's brain, the android takes on an uproariously hilarious personality. Singing his responses as he checks the computer for life forms on a planet and laughing hysterically for the first time at a joke he heard seven years before in the original episode "Encounter at Farpoint," Data injects into the movie a needed dose of humor.

Picard tells Data, "Part of having human feelings is learning how to integrate them into your daily life."

Picard sorts through these deep questions of

life with Kirk and Soran throughout the film. The pessimistic Soran claims that death is the only constant in the universe, saying "Time is the fire in which we burn." In contrast, Picard states, "Our mortality is part of the truth of our existence."

Anyone doubting that Patrick Stewart is the best thing that ever happened in the "Star Trek" acting department will eat their words, especially during his sequences with the consummate over-actor William Shatner.

The special effects are good, ranging from the decloaking Klingon Bird of Prey to the always updated transporter beam visual to a new stel-

lar cartography room which maps out the Nexus in a virtual reality environment.

Some aspects of the storyline are recycled from past films, including Soran's similarity to the villain of the film series' worst installment, "The Final Frontier," and the resemblance of the Nexus concept to the Genesis planet of "Wrath of Khan."

"Star Trek Generations" is a probing look at the way lives interrelate and how our emotional connections help solidify our characters. "If something's important, you make the time," a wise character says. Now it is time for the new cast to move forward and enjoy their own adventures.

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