



it: "This programming is for the entertainment of our viewers. Any recording without written permission from the broadcaster is strictly forbidden." Right. And you know who came up with the idea for this announcement? I bet it's the same jerk who invented the tags on furniture that say "Do not remove this tag under

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penalty of law."

I know just how it usually goes:

7-year-old: "Hey, Mom, I'm going to set up for 'Flintstones.'"

Mom: "Go ahead. Hey, someday you have to teach me how to do that."

7-year-old: "Hey, Mom, where's the typewriter? I have to write to Channel 7 if I want to get 'Flintstones' next Wednesday."

Mom: "Check Bobby's room. I think he was writing for permission to record 'Dukes of Hazard.'"

Yeah, I believe that one.

Now more and more when you have watched a program and are ready to press rewind, you see them come on and say, "If you would like a videotape of this program, send \$35 to ...." I think that is actually a plot to make you buy a lot of videotape. I mean, I have to think twice about re-recording over that tape now that I know it is worth \$35.

The final straw is the contest that one of the movie channels is running. They show you a movie, then they give you multiple choice questions on what you just saw. "Hey, if you are going to watch a movie, pay attention. What do you think this is, MTV?" At least in theory this should give you a real advantage if you are among the select few--the elite--who own a VCR. Okay, I must be honest. The questions a\_r\_e so simple and stupid that generally it wouldn't occur to anyone that they have to cheat by going back and checking out the original. I got three correct for a film I hadn't seen. But it's the principle we're talking here.

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Who shoots at the mid-day sun, though he be so sure he  
will never hit the mark, yet as sure as he is, he shall  
shoot higher than he who aims at a bush.

-- Sir Philip Sydney

## STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: This is a farewell to the original crew in a minor political thriller about Klingon perestroika and the old-line Cold Warriors who do not want to accept change. True fans of S\_t\_a\_r T\_r\_e\_k will be amazed at how closely the fall of the Soviet Union predicted what was going to happen in S\_t\_a\_r T\_r\_e\_k V\_I. Not the best of the series, but it is entertaining. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

Dearly beloved, we are gathered for the final adventure of the original crew of the starship Enterprise. The remote control has been passed to a new generation who are less and less interested in seeing swash-buckling heroes the age of their grandparents. And if the truth be known, Captain Kirk, Scotty, and Uhura are all sporting spare tires around the middle these days. Bones looks old. Spock seems to be ageing the best of the original crew and comes the

closest to still being dashing. I guess on at least some level that is not surprising. We always knew there was something very different about Spock and it just sort of rubbed off on Leonard Nimoy.

So what sort of adventure is the final outing? The title implies that the plot in a major way involves "death--the undiscover'd country, from whose bourn no traveller returns," an allusion to the "To be or not to be" speech from Act III, Scene 1 of H\_a\_m\_l\_e\_t. So did the filmmakers have the courage to kill off someone we loved and make that death meaningful, or did they find some way to cop out? Well, that would be telling! In any case, the main story is an end-of-the-Cold-War thriller, much like T\_h\_e\_P\_a\_c\_k\_a\_g\_e but reset in the "Star Trek" universe.

When the film opens, a Klingon Chernobyl incident has convinced the evil empire that the time has come for perestroika. On each side there are hard-liners who still live with the paranoia of the past, and new-liners who want to see a reconciliation and a new universe order. One Federation hard-liner is that crusty old Cold Warrior, Captain James Kirk (played somewhat against type by William Shatner). One of the new-liners is an old associate of his, Commander Spock (played this time around by Leonard Nimoy). The plot then proceeds to set up a fairly intriguing mystery and puzzle. An incident occurs that seems totally inexplicable. Kirk is framed to appear to have sabotaged the peace. This is the high point of the film. Unfortunately, the mystery's solution is very unconvincing. It is nearly as bad as the strategy puzzle in S\_t\_a\_r\_T\_r\_e\_k\_I\_I: T\_h\_e\_W\_r\_a\_t\_h\_o\_f\_K\_h\_a\_n. That one was solved by the scriptwriter

saying, "Oh, didn't you know? The Enterprise has the power to shut down the shields on other federation ships!" The solution to the puzzle here is not as bad as that of the W\_r\_a\_t\_h\_o\_f\_K\_h\_a\_n problem, but it is bad. I will explain why in a spoiler after the review.

Other touches were irritating, like repeated allusions to both Shakespeare and Sherlock Holmes. It is a strange and unlikely touch that Klingons revere William Shakespeare and even claim him as a Klingon.

With the exception of one violent scene in zero gravity the special effects are not particularly new or creative, though many of the exteriors in space are still quite beautiful. Occasionally narrow-angle shots were used when showing a new locale on a planet. This was probably to save on the creation of sets since less would be within the range of the camera, but it is a stark contrast to earlier chapters.

Two problems in casting were minor problems. The first was an unaccountable resemblance between the Klingon David Warner played in S\_t\_a\_r\_T\_r\_e\_k\_V\_I and the kidnapped diplomat he played in S\_t\_a\_r\_T\_r\_e\_k\_V. Also, Christian Slater plays the kid who has won a contest and got to play in a scene of a real "Star Trek" movie. He has one brief, no-talent-needed scene.

All told, this is a minor thriller and a just okay entry in the series. I give it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

**\*\*SPOILER\*\***

Spoiler: For two reasons I think that the solution to the mystery torpedo problem is bad. First, it assumes a new piece of technology to come along at a perfect but unlikely moment. That is possible but it seems a plot contrivance. What bothers me more is the geometry of the situation. A photon torpedo travels in a straight line. If that line does not intersect your torpedo tubes, it was not your torpedo. It would be hard to position another torpedo tube so the trajectory could be close enough to fool the bridge. Ideally the attackers would want to be in front of your torpedo tubes, but they could not because of the instantaneous loss of cloaking. They would have to position themselves so that their torpedo would fly in just the right plane. Even then, if the trajectory was observed from elsewhere on the Enterprise, the jig would have been up. If the victim ship were watching the Enterprise, they would have seen an impossible torpedo trajectory and also, for an instant, the ship that was firing on them.

Question: if a shape-changer wanted to prove she was a shape changer, wouldn't she just change her shape? Evelyn asked this one.

ON THE THIRD DAY by Piers Paul Read  
Random House, 1990, ISBN 0-679-40089-3, \$20.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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The jacket blurb of this book starts off, "Suppose Christ did n\_o\_t rise from the dead? This question is the startling premise of Piers Paul Read's new novel." Yeah, and several billion people's belief systems to boot. What the blurb writer meant (or at any rate, should have said) is "Suppose someone found proof that Christ did n\_o\_t rise from the dead?"

The premise of the novel is, in fact, that there is a "Lithuanian codex" to Josephus's writings that says that the body of Jesus was taken from the tomb and put in a clay jar in the cistern under the Temple Mount, and that the Israelis, while secretly excavating under the Mount, find the skeleton of a man crucified in the 1st Century with marks that match the "crown of thorns" and the wound in the side supposed given by a Roman soldier's spear. Now, clearly, whether this premise is fantasy depends on the reader's belief system as much as anything in the book itself. But the subject matter makes it reasonable to review it here, so do not take this review as promoting one belief system over another.

All this said, I now have to tell you that, as fascinating as the premise is, Read has managed to make the book extremely dull. (I found myself thinking, "This man could make the Resurrection dull"--a particularly apt image!) His writing style is flat, and his characterization consists of telling you about people's feelings in a very analytical fashion rather than by showing, through actions or dialogue, what their emotions are. He is also a sloppy writer, since he has religious Jews referring to "Christ" rather than "Jesus." The former is a title and Jews consider its use improper because it implies that the speaker believes it to be an accurate one. A parallel example would be that during the Second Great Schism of 1378, followers of Urban VII did not call Clement VII Pope, and vice versa. This is not followed strictly by all Jews, but it would have been by the ones Read is writing about. But worst of all, he relies on stereotypes for most of his characters, and even more offensive stereotypes for their motivations. (To tell more would be a spoiler, so I will discuss this further at the end, after the "spoiler warning.")

If you are interested in good writing along similar lines, there are better books to read. I would recommend Irving Wallace's T\_h\_e\_W\_o\_r\_d, whose premise is that a fifth gospel is found which was written contemporaneously with Jesus (or, if you prefer, the actual document found dates from a time indicating the writer of the document was relating first-hand knowledge actual documents of four gospels extant all date from the 2nd Century or later). There are

other, non-fiction works in this area, including T\_h\_e\_P\_a\_s\_s\_o\_v\_e\_r\_P\_l\_o\_t by Hugh J. Schonfield (the contention is that Jesus and his disciples faked his death on the cross), and H\_o\_l\_y\_B\_l\_o\_o\_d, H\_o\_l\_y\_G\_r\_a\_i\_l by Michael Baigent. The contention in the latter, even more far-fetched, is that after the Resurrection Jesus moved to France, got married, and raised a family whose descendents still control much of Europe. Look, I don't make them up, I just report them.

I should note that my first-ever book review was of T\_h\_e\_P\_a\_s\_s\_o\_v\_e\_r\_P\_l\_o\_t. I wrote it in 1967, when I was seventeen, for the high school paper. The town was over 75% Catholic, the principal always checked over the newspaper's content, and my review didn't get printed.

\*\*\*SPOILER WARNING\*\*\*

This paragraph describes the end of the novel--stop now if you don't want to know. Okay? It seems that Ya'akov (an Israeli and a member of the Mossad) was worried about the shifting power in the world. The Jews in the United States would soon lose their power in New York and California to other immigrants, mostly Catholic, and the United States wouldn't support Israel as much. And Japan and the other powerful nations would have no reason to back it, since Israel has no oil to sell. But if the Christians no longer believed that Jesus had superseded Judaism, they would all become Jews--or barring that, at least more supportive of Israel even if Israel didn't have oil. Ya'akov was captured in Lebanon during the Israeli invasion and interrogated in Syria by a Russian Jew. During the interrogation, Ya'akov mentioned that he had been thinking of ways to undermine Christianity. It turned out that the Russian also was worried about the power of Christianity, especially the Catholic backing of the independence movement in the Baltics (this was written in 1990, remember). So the Russian arranges for Ya'akov to be released, goes back to the Soviet Union, and arranges for the KGB to forge a codex with the burial comments, which is then "discovered." Meanwhile, Ya'akov finds a 1st Century skeleton, has it doctored to have the correct wounds, then "plants" it under the Temple Mount. He waits a couple of years, then arranges for the Mossad to excavate (secretly, of course) under the Temple Mount, and has a noted archaeologist along, "just in case we find anything."

Yes, folks, what we have here is that old standby, that hoary stereotype, the International Jewish Conspiracy to undermine Christianity! As if this weren't bad enough, he also claims that it's really only the Jews in the United States who support Israel, and that they manage to force it on everyone else.

Ptui!

I'm glad I checked the book out of the library rather than buying it. (But I suppose I shouldn't have expected more for an author whose best-known work is an account of the Andes plane survivors who resorted to cannibalism to survive.)