**Star Trek: Rebooted or Reimagined?**

Hotly anticipated by fans all over the world, and based on arguably the most famous science fiction television franchise (*Doctor Who* fans would no doubt disagree with that), J.J. Abrams’s *Star Trek* (2009) proved to be a critical and financial success. This was not, however, a guarantee. The previous film series starring the cast of *The Next Generation* went out with a whimper in 2002 with *Star Trek Nemesis* and the television series was seen to have exhausted the well with the much maligned but recently reclaimed *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005). Still *Star Trek*, managed to offer fans a film which fulfilled their desire to see their favourite characters back on the big screen and attracted new audiences, importantly younger audiences, to a television series that still had a reputation for cheap cardboard sets and old-fashioned storytelling.

Yet, *Star Trek* worked by managing to pay homage to the original series (with Kirk, Spock and all the iconic characters played with vigour and real enthusiasm by all the actors) and creating its own look and feel that is distinctly modern. Abrams took all the elements that made the TV series work and blew them up to provide real Hollywood spectacle. From the very beginning of the film we know it is the *Star Trek* universe, with familiar audio beeps and chirps sounding from the USS Kelvin’s communication circuits. The language used by the crew, their uniforms and demeanour all suggest United Federation of Planets. We are back in the world of space exploration and human endeavour. However, this tranquillity was quickly disrupted by an alien attack on the Kelvin; the chaos of the ensuing battle bringing *Star Trek* into the same fast-paced league of the *Star Wars* franchise. From that point on *Star Trek* become more like George Lucas than Gene Roddenberry.

This change in tone, pacing and level of action was not an unwelcome transition. *Star Trek* takes the fun and humour from the original television series and makes it central. In many ways the new versions of older characters are caricatures, Urban as Bones is grumpy and delivers his familiar ‘I’m not a ..., I’m a doctor!’ lines with aplomb and Pine as Kirk is all too cocky and one can see him growing into Shatner’s Kirk. But, at the same time, these are different characters (for example, Spock is in a romantic relationship with Uhura) and they are informed by a contemporary Hollywood sensibility. They are new action heroes for the 21st century and their youthful exuberance as seen in the subsequent two sequels has taken them in different directions than their alternate and original timeline predecessors.

Throughout the now three films in the renewed *Star Trek* movie franchise there are hints to what has come before, adapted for both fans and newcomers: for example, we get to see how Kirk cheated the infamous ‘no-win scenario’ of the Kobyashi Maru at Starfleet Academy in the first film and in *Star Trek Beyond* (2016) it is revealed that the main antagonist is a veteran of the Xindi War first seen in *Enterprise*. There are also changes to established canon: we see Spock’s mother killed when Vulcan is destroyed by Nero. However, all moments – old and new – combine to form a coherent whole in which the intriguing premise is how the new film will create new adventures based on previous texts. The 2013 sequel, *Into Darkness*, gave us exciting insight to this with a reimaged Khan (Benedict Cumberbatch) targeting the Federation and doing battle with Spock and Kirk in roles reversed from *Star Trek II:*
*The Wrath of Khan* (1982), Kirk sacrifices himself to save the Enterprise and Spock defeats Khan.

So, are the recent films reboots or re-imaginings or are they something else? And how do fans view them? Do they potentially deter fans because they play with and pick at established story canon? William Proctor says of the franchise reboot: “The audience plays a vital role in this process and the struggle for hegemony is never static but always on the move, negotiating, dialoguing, resisting and acquiescing. The reboot strategy illustrates that audiences critically assess the texts they consume and, at times, cause the industry to rethink their tactics” (2012: 15). Certainly, Paramount is well aware of the potential backlash fans can create if they feel “their” text is “harmed” in any way. For example, fan reaction to the first trailer for *Star Trek Beyond* was so negative that Simon Pegg, who plays Scotty and wrote the script, posted online that he also disliked it and promised fans the second trailer and film would be better. Using his own fan status Pegg acted as both gatekeeper and spokesman – reflective of the contemporary culture in Hollywood to incorporate the fan wherever possible.

In *Star Trek* we have a blueprint for how Hollywood can take a previously successful, if not totally relevant, television series and give it a new life – not tied down by its own history but using history to inspire the story. The *Star Trek* franchise incorporates the fun and action of the blockbuster and thanks to the most recent addition it now has that one thing for which the television series has always been famous: social commentary. It works on multiple levels, and in its re-imagined version new audiences gets to see and feel again all those moments that made the original so impactful. We wait to see what will happen with *Star Trek: Discovery* on CBS next year – however it turns out, fans are ready to press the reset button.

Work Cited