A few years ago, J.J. Abrams decided to take on a task most people would have thought impossible; rebooting the Star Trek franchise. But Abrams isn't one of the hottest directing/producing talents in Hollywood for nothing; a bright, imaginative man with the vision and energy needed to undertake such a daunting task. And according to Mitch, who admits he is not a huge Star Trek fan, he pulled it off in a big way. Mitch previews what he calls 2009's first blockbuster film.

A few years ago, J.J. Abrams decided to take on a task most people would have thought impossible; rebooting the Star Trek franchise. The problem wasn't just the fact that the last two movies (featuring the cast of "Star Trek: The Next Generation") had failed so miserably, but that the entire franchise was seen as antiquated, over-exposed, and in some cases; a joke. Countless spin-offs had diluted it to the point of wondering if the next version was going to be a musical. Another problem with the continued introduction of lesser copies like "Enterprise" were that the budgets kept getting reduced, and it showed up onscreen, almost to the point of being as laughable as the cheesy "special effects" from the original 1960s television show.

But Abrams isn't one of the hottest directing/producing talents in Hollywood for nothing; a bright, imaginative man with the vision and energy needed to undertake such a daunting task.

His result? The best film I've seen so far this year, hands down. This is what Summer Entertainment is supposed to be all about; a dazzling, breathtaking, adrenaline laced action film with laughs, thrills, chills, and a lot of heart. Fully grounded in the past, but now geared for the 21st Century and beyond, Abrams and his cast makes "Star Trek" viable again; just as much as Chris Nolan/Christopher Bale did with "Batman Begins" and Martin Campbell and Daniel Craig accomplished with 007 in "Casino Royale".

As a qualification, I am a casual fan of "Star Trek". Watched the entire original series as a child, caught maybe half of the shows of "The Next Generation" and several episodes of "Deep Space Nine" and "Voyager", while totally avoiding "Enterprise". For the "Star Trek" movies? Not really that big of a fan. I consider two of them very good ("Wrath of Khan" and "First Contact"), two of them decent ("Undiscovered Country" and "The Voyage Home"), and the rest as tolerable at best and crappy at worst.

But this one blows them away, because it works on every level, and will succeed in bringing the Gene Roddenberry mythology to a new generation of fans. Even someone who had never seen a single frame of William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy solving the mysteries of the universe will be able to go into this movie, understand every bit of it, and enjoy it immensely. For those who are at least casual fans, you'll love the little inside bits that are dripping with nostalgia, but not insider jokes that would confuse the novice. Mostly, everyone will appreciate the fantastic job Abrams has gotten out of his cast in incorporating the Old, but allowing it to appear New.

In fact, the only people who may not like it may be the long time

"Trekkies" who still dress up in stupid pointy ears to attend geek festivals (when not playing "Dungeons and Dragons in their parents' basement), because Abrams has no problem whatsoever in taking certain aspects in an entirely new direction, and throwing some conventional "accepted truths" completely out the window.

This movie has it all working; script, effects and cast. Given that these characters are so well known to so many people, I think that cast is the most important, and there isn't a false step to this. Abrams has noted that at one point he was considering Matt Damon for Captain Kirk, and he made such a wise decision to go in the direction of someone much less known...as well as much younger. Chris Pine pulls no William Shatner over-the-top theatrics as the All-American Rebel James Tiberius Kirk. Pine does an admirable job in rounding out this iconic character. His Kirk is still confident to a fault, semi-arrogant, handsome, brave, etc., etc.; but he also shows the inner anger and insecurity just below the surface, created by the events of his birth and upbringing. Within thirty minutes, I had totally forgotten about Shatner...which isn't a bad thing as I personally think that Shatner has become almost a parody of himself, and it had gotten to the point that when people think about Captain Kirk, it wasn't about the character, but about Shatner's over-acting ("I. Have. Two hundred. And. 50. People that I'm. Responsible for"). Chris Pine makes Kirk cool again.

If Pine's most difficult task would be to separate himself from the pre-conceived notions of the original, then Zachary Quinto had the exact opposite problem. In many ways, Spock is so much more famous and iconic of a character than Kirk. Consequently; Quinto had to make the character his own while still making him completely identifiable with Leonard Nimoy's visualization of the role. Quinto does so, with the assistance of Abrams and the scriptwriters, by showing us the rough

version of the finished product Nimoy gave us from the very first show. By the time we first saw Spock on TV, he was already the cold, logical counterbalance to Kirk's fiery swashbuckler in space. Quinto shows us what Spock was like before he gained that level of self-control. As most people know, Spock has a Vulcan father (excellently played here by Ben Cross) and a human mother (an interesting turn from Winona Ryder); and as much as he wants to be as fully logical as any Vulcan, his human emotions can get the better of him at times. In fact, he is shown to be just as much of a rebel on Vulcan as Kirk is on Earth. Quinto is fully believable in every scene he is in, no matter what the part calls for.

As we saw last week with "X-Men Origins: Wolverine", having two great actors/characters in a film won't save it if the remainder of the cast is weak, or poorly scripted. No problems with that with "Star Trek"...especially when it comes to Karl Urban playing Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy. I personally was a little leery of Urban in the role of the grumpy intellectual with a fear of space travel after only seeing him in action roles in "Lord of the Rings" as Eomer, as the assassin in "The Bourne Supremacy", and as the Viking leader of a tribe of Native Americans in (the awful) "Pathfinder". And now that I've seen his performance? I'm absolutely amazed. Urban, simply put, **became**
McCoy, seemingly channeling Deforest Kelly from the grave. It was an outstanding job in bringing the early years of this character to full life, providing the needed levity along with holding his own as part of the three cornered friendship between Kirk, Spock, and McCoy.

The "lesser" characters all had their moments in the sun as well. Zoe Saldana's Lt. Uhura got the best of it. In the series, Uhura

was little more than an intergalactic telephone operator in a mini-skirt. In Abram's version, she is just as intelligent and capable as the men-folk, a linguistic genius as well as a firebrand who has no hesitation when it comes to getting her way. Likewise, Helmsman Sulu gets to show a lot more of an action side, as John Cho teams up with Pine in one of the most intense action sequences in the film.

The least amount of screen time went to engineer Montgomery (Scotty) Scott and Ensign Checkov. But even with limited time, they made themselves memorable. Simon Pegg has zero resemblance to James Doohan, but he was still able to provide the proper level of comedy that Scotty usually supplied, as well as handling with aplomb the techno-babble that Star Trek is famous for. Likewise, Anton Yelchin brought a smile to my face was he mis-pronounced double-u just as badly as Walter Koenig did in the original, while still having the same youthful exuberance.

The only actor who got shortchanged a bit on character was probably Eric Bana as the villain Nero, and that's simply because they had so many characters to introduce and explain, they couldn't waste time on Nero's backstory. But given that, Bana seems to relish his utter nastiness as a Romulan commander out for revenge with far more bloodlust than Khan showed in the second film.

The plot itself is both complex and simple. The newly christened Enterprise, commanded by Captain Pike (a rock-solid Bruce Greenwood), is having to confront the sadistic Nero and stop him before he destroys Earth. Complicating it all are stories of earlier battles, and a time-travel twist that can be a bit confusing, but nowhere near to the level seen by Abrams' other famous work; the television series

"Lost".

Time travel is normally something that I consider a crutch for sci-fi writers when they've ran out of ideas. But that is not the case here at all, as it offers not only a way to work Leonard Nimoy into the film as the nearly 200 year old Spock, but also gives Abrams an infinite set of possibilities to take the series in the future. The film avoids falling into a stereotypical trap for time-travel; using it to allow everything to be made "all right" at the end. No convenience used here...and the reprecusions of the events may upset purists, but it will enable Kirk, Spock, McCoy, et al to head out on future missions without the audience saying "we know what will happen next because we know that in 30 years, Kirk/Spock/Bones are still doing things together. The future is now a blank slate. And as long as this cast, director, and screenwriters stay together, I'm expecting them to fill that slate with more imaginative adventures that I can't wait to see.

My Rating: Bernie Kosar (4 footballs).