

# Star Trek: A New View from the Bridge

Producer/director J.J. Abrams has gone back to the future of the *Star Trek* franchise with a fresh new take on the classic sci-fi adventure. Using the familiar elements that Trekkies have come to expect — the transporter room, the sights and sounds of the bridge, futuristic battle sequences — this *Star Trek* film adds a twist with its fully realized characters that hook audiences into an emotional storyline.

Co-editors Maryann Brandon and Mary Jo Markey followed Abrams's lead in creating a film that paid homage to the original franchise while offering an inventive take on the material, which introduces audiences to the young, formative lives of the U.S.S. Enterprise crew, including Captain Kirk, Spock, and Scotty. "We wanted to create characters with the same kind of arcs that you would in any good movie," says Markey. "The only way action movies [are really effective] is when the action plays out through characters you are invested in."



In particular, the editors focused on making the characters appealing to audiences. "At first we thought the Kirk character was too aggressive for people [to like]," explains Brandon. "We wanted to show him in a light where people would understand him and could forgive him. In the movie, people will see that he'd had some bad luck; his Dad was killed and he'd never gotten over it. By going to the academy when he was young, he could put his crazy, aggressive energy to work."

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To heighten the storyline's dramatic impact, Brandon and Markey, who've both worked with Abrams before on *Alias* and *Mission: Impossible III*, frequently found themselves simplifying scenes. For example, they compressed some of the more elaborate time-travel sequences. "The whole storyline with [the villain] Nero in prison [for 25 years] was unnecessarily complicated. The sequence originally showed Nero in prison waiting for Spock to emerge from a black hole. But we didn't need to show all those years," says Markey. "J.J. showed up one day with a scheme on how to lose those scenes, and it worked so well. It's a great example of how editing really is the final rewrite."

## Sci-Fi Teamwork



film.

The two editors developed a practical method for working together, splitting the film in half so each could cut a variety of action-based and character-driven sequences. They were aided by first assistant editors Julian Smirke and Lucy Wojciechowski and assistant editor Kerry Blackman. Visual effects editor Martin Kloner and visual effects assistant Elana Lessem handled the more than 1,000 visual effects shots in the

Each member of the editing team used his or her own Media Composer system, provided by Santa Monica-based rental house Digital Vortechs. All seven systems were connected to an Avid Unity MediaNetwork with 16 terabytes of shared storage, enabling them to share media and projects simultaneously.

Burbank-based Fotokem processed the 35mm dailies and delivered Avid DNxHD 36 media on hard drives to the editors for cutting in HD. “It was a really easy process,” says Wojciechowski. “By handling the digitizing, Fotokem did an additional step that we didn’t have to do. It saved us a lot of time, at least an hour [for each hour’s worth of dailies].” The quality of the DNxHD 36 output was even good enough to handle all of the film’s screenings in theater settings.

Given the magnitude of the visual effects work, the greenscreen work was extensive, and Kloner used the Avid Media Composer system exclusively to create the temp visual effects. “When building composites, my ‘go to’ effects are 3D Warp, AniMatte, and SpectraMatte with a few others mixed in from time to time,” he says. Working with four different effects houses, Kloner also made use of color-coded tracks and locators to indicate which shots were temporary, interim, and final on the timeline, so the entire editing team could see the status of each effect shot at a glance.

There were numerous temp sound effects too, which were added to the cuts. “J.J. likes his cuts to have sound effects as early as possible,” says Wojciechowski. “We were constantly keeping things in sync. With the Avid [system], you can have so many files in a folder — up to 5,000 — so we could efficiently handle the sound effects without any issues.”



Sound work was handled by Hollywood-based Soundelux, using as many as 15 Pro Tools|HD systems throughout the sound design and editing processes. Pro Tools|HD systems were also used to record and mix the score and for playback during the dubbing process, using five 64-channel playback systems. The easy interoperability between the Avid editing systems and the Pro Tools systems, from Digidesign, a part of Avid, enabled a fast and easy exchange of digital files throughout the post process.

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Maryann Brandon, Editor, *Star Trek*

### **Seeing a Whole New World**

The hard work and easy rapport of the editing and sound teams helped streamline the entire post workflow. “It was a phenomenal crew and everything worked like a charm,” says Brandon. “The Avid [Media Composer system] is a workhorse of a machine.”

With flexible digital editing tools, the editing team could stay focused on the creative task at hand, working with the inventive Abrams who brought his signature stamp to the franchise. “J.J. loves coming to the editing room. He is always interested in seeing our interpretation of the material and loves the process of transforming material into something new and even surprising,” says Brandon.

The result was a fun, exciting, emotional *Star Trek*. “Reinventing the wheels of an established franchise is a challenge,” says Smirke. “You have to walk that fine line of respecting what’s gone before and at the same time going in a new direction. J.J. managed these two things beautifully.”

