



To Boldly Go and Do It Yourself; Separation anxiety motivates Trekkers to make their own movies

Danny Hakim

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Paul Sieber was wearing a Star Trek uniform in the deep Virginia woods when he found himself surrounded by a leathery-looking gang.

Fortunately, the ruffians were dressed up as Klingons, and Sieber, with a cigarette dangling from his mouth, was preparing to film them with a \$6,000 digital video camera. At times like this, Sieber, the writer and director of *Starship Farragut*, must come to grips with the obvious -- not all Klingons are trained actors -- and bellow, "Quiet on the set!"

From these Virginia woods to the Scottish Highlands, Star Trek fans are filling the void left in a galaxy that has lost Star Trek. For the first time in nearly two decades, television spinoffs from the original 1960s Star Trek series have ended, so fans are banding together to make their own episodes.

Fan films have been around for years, particularly those related to the Star Wars movies. But now they can be downloaded from the web, and modern computer-graphics technology has lent them surprising special effects. And as long as no one is profiting from the work, Paramount, which owns the rights to Star Trek, has been tolerant. (Executives declined to comment.)

Up to two dozen of these fan-made Star Trek projects are in various stages of completion, depending what you count as a full-fledged production. Dutch and Belgian fans are filming an episode, and there is a Scottish production in the works at www.ussintrepid.org.uk .

There is a group in Los Angeles that has filmed more than 40 episodes, according to its website, www.hiddenfrontier.com , and has explored gay themes that the original series never imagined. Episodes by a group in Austin, Texas, at www.starshipexeter.com , feature a ship with a crew that had the misfortune of being turned into salt in an episode of the original Star Trek but has now been repopulated by Texans.

"I think the networks -- Paramount, CBS -- are giving the fans the Trek they're looking for," said Sieber, 40, an engineer for a government contractor who likens his Star Trek project, at www.starshipfarragut.com , to "online community theatre."

"The fans are saying, 'Look, if we can't get what we want on television, the technology is out there for us to do it ourselves,'" he added.

And viewers are responding. One series, at www.newvoyages.com, and based in Ticonderoga, N.Y., boasts 30 million downloads. It has become so popular that Walter Koenig, the actor who played Chekov in the original Star Trek, is guest-starring in an episode, and George Takei, who played Sulu, is slated to shoot another one later this year. D.C. Fontana, a writer from the original Star Trek series, has written a script.

For many Trekkers, contemporary science fiction on television -- like Battlestar Galactica and more recent Star Trek spinoffs -- is too dark.

John Broughton Jr., who founded the Farragut project, said, "One thing about the classic Star Trek is, at the end of the episode, it was pretty much a happy ending," he said.

Broughton, a wiry U.S. Navy veteran with spiky hair, is a serious collector of all things Star Trek. His avocado tunic, he said, is made from bolts of the nylon used for the original Star Trek, purchased at \$100 a yard, and his boots are made by the son of the man who made the boots used in Star Trek.

His megaphone, bought for \$325 on eBay, was the one used by William Shatner when he directed the movie Star Trek V.

At 11 a.m., Sieber rounded up the Klingons and started explaining plot points. "Later, they filmed 12 takes of a scene but had problems with sound, battery and glare.

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Photo: Hamilton Spectator File Photos / It takes chutzpah to boss around a fierce Klingon like this guy, but sometimes producers of the fan-made Star Trek films have to do just that to get scenes shot.; Photo: The USS Enterprises' Capt. James T. Kirk and Lt. Uhura, below, are meeting a whole new group of Star Trek adventurers in cyberspace. There may be no TV series on the go, but that hasn't stopped fans from making their own episodes.; Photo: Photo