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'Star Trek' Fans, Deprived of a Show, Recreate the Franchise on Digital Video



By [DANNY HAKIM](#)

MASON NECK STATE PARK, Va. — Paul Sieber was wearing a "Star Trek" uniform in the deep Virginia woods when he found himself surrounded by a leathery-looking gang.

Photos By: Bill Crandall for The New York Times



Fortunately, the ruffians were dressed up as Klingons, and Mr. Sieber, with a cigarette dangling from his mouth, was preparing to film them with a \$6,000 digital video camera. At times like this, Mr. 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 by a galaxy that has lost "Star Trek." For the first time in nearly two decades, television spinoffs from the original 1960's "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. (Its 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; 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 Web site, www.hiddenfrontier.com, and has explored gay themes that the original series never imagined. Episodes by a group in Austin, Tex., at www.starshipexeter.com, feature a ship whose crew 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 — I don't think they're giving the fans the 'Trek' they're looking for," said Mr. Sieber, a 40-year-old engineer for a government contractor who likens his "Star Trek" project, at www.starshipfarragut.com, to "online community theater."

"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 of 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 Trekkies, contemporary science fiction on television — like "Battlestar Galactica" and the more recent Star Trek spinoffs — are too dark.

"Modern science fiction takes itself too seriously," said Jimm Johnson, 37, who presides over Starship Exeter.

John Broughton Jr., who founded the Farragut project, agreed. "One thing about the classic 'Star Trek' is at the end of the episode, it was pretty much a happy ending," he said. "It was sort of like 'The Brady Bunch.' It was all tidied up."

Mr. Broughton, a wiry 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. His boots are made by the son of the man who made the boots used in "Star Trek," he said. His megaphone, bought for \$325 on eBay, was the one used by [William Shatner](#) when he directed "Star Trek V."

In the woods with the Klingons, Brad Graper, 52, finished detailing a pair of Nerf guns painted gray, with sections of chrome tailpipe added to them as gun barrels. Mr. Graper sat at a cluster of picnic tables in this lush 1,814-acre park. Klingon re-enactors from Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania played extras.

"I'm General DuraD," Mr. Graper said. "The D and the D are capitalized."

Around him, Klingons applied swarthy face paint and black hair dye, adjusted silvery sashes, and tottered in platform boots. They usually portray the more heavily costumed Klingons from "Star Trek: The Next Generation," the series spinoff that started in 1987. Those Klingons had big ridges on their heads requiring elaborate prosthetics.

"This is the first time I've ever done an original Klingon," said Sally Arkulari, 46, who works on a large farm in Lancaster, Pa. "It's a lot less work."

Ms. Arkulari is a tall woman, in a shimmering green dress, heavy eyeliner and orange hair extensions. What's her view on the Klingon woman?

"Love 'em because they're so tough," she said. "Part of that is not my personality. I need to be more aggressive as a person, and I'm not, so I like that."

The couple of dozen people on the set are either related, are friends or met at a Star Trek convention. David Sepan, 31, who plays a security officer, is a spacecraft analyst at the [Johns Hopkins University](#) Applied Physics Laboratory and monitors a space probe heading to Mercury. Mr. Sieber is a family friend. Mr. Sepan's sister Amy, 29, is Farragut's makeup artist and costume designer.

"I'm also Dr. Christina Hawley," she said, and then performed a line from her script: "Captain — he's dead!"

Holly Bednar, 42, who plays an engineer, is the executive director of a theater in southern Maryland and one of the few participants here with theater experience. Her husband, Mike Bednar, 45, is the prop man, cameraman, science officer and a friend of Mr. Broughton's. The Bednars were childhood sweethearts who lost touch for 23 years and then reconnected and got married in 2004.

Ms. Bednar came late to "Star Trek" and considers herself in the married-to-Trekkie category.

"It was kind of a nice thing for Mike and I to work on together," she said. "For Mike, it's the 'Star Trek' stuff. For me, it's the acting."

At 11 a.m., Mr. Sieber rounded up the Klingons and explained plot points. "You guys are generating a cloaking field from the planet around the orbiting weapon," he explained. Heads nodded. "They heard a rumor from some Orion spies that you guys might be trying to do something on this planet, not knowing that there's this many of you here, and that's why they end up getting ambushed."

Fair enough. The group packed into a caravan of cars and headed into the woods at the park south of Washington. They had the camera, a boom mike, even a Hollywood scene marker. Mr. Sieber yelled "Action!" A trio of Klingons charged a gully, crouched into firing positions and tumbled as they pretended to be shot.

Later, they filmed 12 takes of a scene in which Mr. Broughton, as the captain of the Starship Farragut, and the Bednars walk through the gully, talking. There are sound problems, battery problems, glare problems.

Next scene: the three jump behind a fallen tree. They pretend to be pinned down by Klingons.

"Reinforcements! Crossfire!"

In a quiet moment, Mike Bednar reflected on what brings a man into the woods, wearing a form-fitting blue tunic, jet-black pants and shiny ebony boots, and carrying a camera. He recalled meeting Mr. Broughton years ago, when his friend was ending his stint in the Navy.

"I used to joke with him, 'You'd never get me in a "Star Trek" uniform, even on Halloween, it's not going to happen,' " he said. "Next thing I know, I'm wearing a uniform."