

## Cheap And Abundant, Fan Films Are Star Trek's New Final Frontier

By Danny Hakim The New York Times

19 June 2006

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Broward Metro

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.

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 spin-offs 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. (Its executives declined to comment.)

As many as 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](http://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](http://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](http://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 Sieber, 40, an engineer for a government contractor who likens his Star Trek project, at [www.starshipfarragut.com](http://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.

One series, at [www.newvoyages.com](http://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.