

## **The next generation of 'Star Trek' directors**

By Danny Hakim The New York Times

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### **MASON NECK STATE PARK, Virginia**

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 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.

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; at [www.ussintrepid.org.uk](http://www.ussintrepid.org.uk), a Scottish one is in the works.

A group in Los Angeles 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 at [www.starshipexeter.com](http://www.starshipexeter.com), by a group in Austin, Texas, 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, a 40-year-old engineer 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.

And viewers are responding. One series, at [www.newvoyages.com](http://www.newvoyages.com) and based in Ticonderoga, New York, 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 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.

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. Klingon re-enactors from Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania played extras.

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, Pennsylvania. "It's a lot less work."

The couple of dozen people on the set are either related, are friends or met at a "Star Trek" convention.

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 Broughton's.

He recalled meeting 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. Next thing I know, I'm wearing a uniform.'"