

Let your geek flags fly

Local Trekkies (and Trekkers) continue their flight on the Enterprise—albeit vicariously, expensively and in a stationary setting

By [AnnaMaria Stephens](#)

You've undoubtedly seen the billboards: "STAR TREK THE EXHIBITION." The ad hype surrounding the multi-city traveling event has been more deafening than a warp core breach. The show features original scale models, sets, costumes, props and other artifacts from the beloved enterprise that spans 40 years and includes five TV series and 10 films.

In the mock transporter room, you can watch on television screens as you're beamed up. You can ride through the galaxy in a flight simulator. And—drum roll please—you can sit in the very command chair that once cradled Captain Kirk's behind (OMG!) as you gaze out upon the bridge of the Starship Enterprise from the original TV series (OMG! OMG!).

Of course, it'll cost you a few bars of gold-pressed Latinum. Admission starts at \$15 for military and shoots up to \$24 for adults. Photos cost extra (a lot extra), and the rides aren't included with the ticket. But that hasn't stopped San Diego's fervent Star Trek fans from speeding over to the Air and Space Museum to get their fix.

But who are these fans? You've probably heard of the oddballs that were featured in the 1997 documentary *Trekkies* (one guy wanted to implant Spock ears in his skull). That film caused so much controversy that a next generation of fans claimed the term "Trekkers" instead.

The truth is, serious Star Trek fans live among all of us. They're neighbors and friends and colleagues in nearby cubicles. And when an exhibition like this comes to town, they let their geek flags fly freely.

Dennis Hanon, an accountant and middle-aged father of two in Mira Mesa, didn't think twice about appearing at the opening of STAR TREK: THE EXHIBITION. Hanon, a fleet admiral in the Stranglehold crew (a local chapter of a West Coast group called The Ring of Fire Fleet), greeted visitors dressed as a Klingon.

"It's a real thrill for any fan," he says of the show. "I'm glad it finally came to San Diego."

While he admits he's not fluent in the fictional Klingon language like some, he points out that "our members each know a few sayings, so when we need to, we can put together a pretty convincing conversation—at least to people who don't speak it."

The Stranglehold crew meets regularly to discuss upcoming events, mostly costumed appearances at street fairs, parades, Renaissance fairs and themed parties. And, of course, Comic-Con. For roughly the past decade-and-a-half, the fleet admiral and his cohorts have staged a play at the Trek-friendly event.

"It's about the continuing adventure of our ship, the Stranglehold," explains Hanon, who started watching the original series with his mother in the '60s.

On Friday evening, Hanon's daughter Denise, who's turning 21 this weekend (a good thing, because Klingons drink bloodwine), will play a leading role in the production. Hanon's wife Debbie will also appear.

"We actually have fans that have seen us every year since we've started," says Hanon, who took a smaller role this time around so that other Stranglehold members could savor the spotlight. "Last year we filled un a

very large room of at least 200 people.”

Not every fan goes this distance. For Zach Smith, bassist of the local band Pinback, *Star Trek* is a pastime enjoyed mostly at home. Smith says he started watching when he was 4 years old. He'd hang out with some older neighborhood boys who loved the show, and the interest just stuck.

“There's no better sleep remedy than the hum of a smoothly calibrated warp-drive engine,” Smith jokes.

Actually, his wife Rachel Ehlin says, his comment is spot-on. She falls asleep to *Star Trek Voyager* (the mid-'90s series) every night, even when she joins Smith on the band's tour bus—but not because the show is boring, mind you.

“It's like a lullaby, or like being read to at night,” she explains.

Ehlin was a late convert. She recalls with a giggle that her dad used to punish her with episodes of *Star Trek: Next Generation*. She learned to appreciate the show while dating her future husband. Now, she boasts, she's a bigger fan than he is.

“I don't know why you're asking Zach about this,” Ehlin says mischievously. “I know way more than he does.”

That may be true, but Ehlin didn't star in a homemade *Star Trek* fan film like her husband did some 15 years ago. Smith played a Klingon, while longtime friends (and Three Mile Pilot bandmates) Pall Jenkins and Tom Zinser played Spock and Scotty, respectively. (Will somebody please post this on YouTube?)

“Pall put Silly Putty on his ears,” says their friend Michael Zimmerman, who donned black pants and a yellow shirt to portray Captain Kirk. “We all liked the show, and when they called me, I wanted to do it. They had video equipment and cool sound effects from the original series.”

Zimmerman was in kindergarten when he started watching with his older brother. “He was way into it,” he recalls. “My mom made us *Star Trek* costumes.”

He says Captain Kirk was practically a role model.

“Kirk was always getting into fights,” Zimmerman recounts. “He's kind of a bad boy, but also really intelligent. He appealed to the cerebral and, uh, body.”

“He was a ladies' man,” interjects his wife Jenny.

“*Star Trek* had action but also intelligent plots,” Zimmerman continues. “Now you recognize the moral lessons and commentary on systems of government and communism. But back then, there were lasers and spaceships blowing up!”

Most fans of *Star Trek* have stories similar to these to tell, memories tethered to the show in some way. And that's why this exhibition isn't a rip-off when you think about it. It's nostalgia on maximum overdrive.

STAR TREK: THE EXHIBITION is on view at the San Diego Air & Space Museum in Balboa Park through November. \$24 for adults, \$16 for kids, \$22 for students. www.aerospacemuseum.org or 619-234-8291.

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