



FAN
PHENOMENA

STAR
TREK



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Chapter 02

Not Your Daddy's *Star Trek*: Rebooting a Franchise and Rewriting a Fandom

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- On 18 January 2008, theatre audiences for *Cloverfield* (Reeves) watched a teaser trailer that combined footage of welders at work on the USS *Enterprise* with audio clips of John F. Kennedy's famous moon speech. As the strains of a well-known theme song swelled and Leonard Nimoy stated the iconic words: 'Space, the final frontier,' two words appeared on-screen: *Under Construction*.



Fig. 1: *Enterprise* (later *Star Trek: Enterprise*) was a *Star Trek* "prequel" and the last of the television series to date. Its last original episode aired in 2005. Image © Paramount Pictures.

J. J. Abrams's *Star Trek* would not be released until May of 2009 and the highly secretive project made many fans nervous. Though an admitted 'fanboy', Abrams was best known for his mainstream television shows like *Alias* (Abrams, ABC, 2001-2006) and *Lost* (Abrams, Lieber, and Lindelof, ABC, 2004-2010). How was he going to successfully reinvigorate a franchise as old as *Star Trek*? Fifteen years of media saturation (between 1993 and 2001, at least three television series spin-offs were airing concurrently in addition to the biennial feature films and syndicated TV reruns) had overseen the fandom's decline in recent years, culminating in the abrupt cancellation of the fifth live action series, *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005), in 2005. When *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009) (I shall refer to the 'reboot' as *Star Trek XI* hereafter, for clarity) debuted at a surprise screening in Austin, hours before the official release in Japan

in late April, initial word-of-mouth was positive. When it officially opened in the United States two weeks later, it was greeted as a certified hit, prompting satirical newspaper *The Onion* to comment in 2009, 'Star Trek fans are decrying the latest film in the long-running series as a fun and watchable action-packed thrill ride!' The theaters were full, often with repeat viewers, and its crossover success with general audiences meant that discussion of the film was not limited to the traditional cult fanbase.

Being a *Trek* fan since I was a small child, I sat in the audience on opening day, hesitant throughout the majority of the film. The people on-screen had the names and even some of the familiar tics of the characters I had known so well, but they were - different. An early scene of Starfleet Academy students panned widely across a sea of white faces, punctuated here and there by an exotic alien figure. *Star Trek* had always been an idealized future; its background in 1966 filled with more women and people of colour than will often be seen in contemporary programs today. Where was everyone? There were explosions and chases and fight scenes without pause; it resembled a video game more than the familiar science fiction parables of the past. What was I to make of this?

Revitalizing a fandom

The film was promoted as 'Not Your Daddy's *Star Trek*' - emphasizing its distance from its source material as well as making a blunt appeal for a newer, younger audience. The film-makers and their marketing engines largely succeeded: a multitude of online communities and message boards began to appear to discuss the film, its actors, and to share fan works. Some web communities were created in direct response to the issues I was worried about, such as *Where No Woman*, a Livejournal community dedicated to 'Un-erasing the Women of *Star Trek*'. Others were created to celebrate or champion