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Los Angeles - At first, the scene at the Fine Arts Theatre resembles any other Hollywood movie première. Autograph hunters throng the red carpet, cameras flash like strobe lights, and passing cars slow down in the hope of a celebrity sighting. But a closer look reveals something amiss. No one from the evening entertainment TV shows is here. Someone in the crowd is wearing what look like blue pajamas, Nike-swoosh eyebrows, and pointy ears. And when a driver rolls down his window to ask which film is being screened, he's confused by the answer: "Star Trek: Of Gods and Men."

This isn't the première for 2009's "Star Trek" reboot by movie director J.J. Abrams. The budget of "Star Trek: Of Gods and Men" probably wouldn't cover the cost of Spock's ears in that film. But the independent feature, funded by a single fan and made outside the aegis of franchise owners Paramount Pictures and CBS, does boast a cast and crew of "Star Trek" alumni. Indeed, fans of the show have come to the theater to witness the onscreen reunification of Nichelle Nichols and Walter Koenig – Uhura and Chekov from the original series – both of whom are working the red carpet.

"The 40th anniversary of 'Star Trek' was coming up and it didn't appear at the time that Paramount was going to do anything about it," says Sky Conway, the film's producer. "This was a way of looking back ... to celebrate this modern mythology that Gene Roddenberry created."

To film the story, which depicts several Starfleet members trapped in an alternate reality, the crew had to boldly go to what seemed like the final frontier: an abandoned automotive garage in upstate New York. There, in a barnlike structure 30 minutes away from Port Henry, a "Star Trek" hobbyist had painstakingly created a $100,000 replica of the USS Enterprise's bridge.

"They wouldn't let me on the set until my first shot," recalls Nichols of the 2006 shoot. "I was stunned.... It was a perfect duplicate. I felt like I wanted to walk right over to my seat, sit down, and put on my 'Bluetooth' and say, 'hailing frequencies open, Captain.' "

For his part, Koenig subconsciously crossed his legs under his old console, just as he did on the

old TV show. The actor did the movie partly for the work, but also because the script was an opportunity for his Russian weapons officer to do more than deliver expository dialogue such as, "Admiral, ve have found the nuclear wessel."

"It was something I could sink my teeth into and investigate emotionally," Koenig says.

"Of Gods and Men" is the most high- profile example of a growing number of "Trek" fan films available online.

"They're permitted to exist, so long as they don't make a profit," says Bonnie Malmat, manager of the Trek Today fan site. "Perhaps [the copyright owners] figure that the more people involved in fandom – even watching this – the more [they] will turn to their authorized productions."

Koenig stresses that "Of Gods and Men" is several steps above amateur fan films, one of which he starred in back in 2006. Veterans of shows such as "Deep Space 9," "Voyager," "Enterprise," and "The Next Generation" worked for minimum pay on the difficult shoot. Without air conditioning, the July temperatures were hot enough to melt a dilithium crystal. The crew, already reeling from swarming mosquitoes and a lack of cellphone reception, decided to shoot at night when it was cooler. The lowest point, according to associate producer Linda Zaruches, was when two actors finally nailed the film's most emotional scene at 3 a.m. – only to have the sound of a passing train ruin the shot.

After principal photography, it took two years for volunteers to create elaborate special-effects sequences. But the less-than $200,000 film won't be coming to a theater near you. Instead, it's available online for free at startrekofgodsandmen.net.

In a rare moment when he isn't posing for photographs at the one-off screening, Koenig assesses the film's place in the "Trek" universe. "It speaks so eloquently to the lasting power of this entity," he says. "It keeps going on and on."