Shore Leave Russia: *Star Trek* Fandom Creativity in Russia  
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As an organized community, Trekkers (a preferred self-designation) have existed in Russia starting from 2000, but not all of its members are millennials. Parts of the *Star Trek* series might have been brought from the US or elsewhere on VHS cassettes long before that, a series of books had been translated and published in Russia in the 1990s, but still it was not known in all its splendor to people at large here in Russia until later. During the New Year holidays in 2001, it was shown on the all-Russia TV channel STS for the first time, and that is when fans became enamored with it. They started to gravitate together on discussion boards on the Internet and pretty quickly decided to gather for their first convention near Moscow, in the forest.

![Fig. 1 Farewell, thank you for sharing.](image)

Yes, probably the first peculiar feature for the Russian trekkers is our week-long convention in the forest, called RusCon, where we live in tents camping-style. The convention has just celebrated its sixteenth year in a row. The place is carefully chosen, permissions for camping there are gained by the organizing committee, the date is announced some ten months ahead of time on the site trekker.ru, and registration starts three months before the convention. Over one hundred people come not only from Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also from distant parts of the country, including Novgorod, Vladimir, the Urals, Rostov-on-Don, Samara, Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod, and Siberia, and other countries, too, such as Ukraine, Austria, and China. People specially arrange for their vacations to meet with old and new friends at the convention, and to spend this week watching *Star Trek*, debating about the principles of the world drawn in all series of the franchise, taking part in competitions and games arranged throughout the week, as well as participating in creative sessions, seminars, and excursions. During the years, there have been excursions to Korolev’s Museum of Space Flight, Tsioikovsky Museum in Kaluga, and this past year included a visit to a local village cinema, where we gathered in cosplay costumes to watch the 13th *Star Trek* film that just premiered. Among the entertainment, there is often a Holodeck with cosplay and scenes written and staged...
on site, as well as nature art contests—after ten years, I still remember the cutest Enterprise model, with a dish made from a huge bracket fungus with elegant fir tree cones for nacelles. People come to RusCon also as families, with small children who become a new generation to admire Star Trek and build around it. Five days are thematically organized around each of the series—The Original Series, The Next Generation, Deep Space 9, Voyager, and Enterprise—and at the end of the sixth day, a Banquet night features sketches and an emotional ritual in which people join the flames of their candles together, telling each other what being together has brought them and thanking each other for the special memories.

Though the convention takes place in a forest and the food is cooked over a fire, still Trekkers enjoy a lot of modern technology: after a generator and a large screen were bought to the convention, it became possible to screen Star Trek episodes in good quality from licensed discs, with excellent sound quality due to the skills of a Trekker who is a sound operator by profession. We also have qualified journalists, programmers, and—quite naturally—space scientists in our midst. Though attendees’ ages range from newborns to at least 65, the average age of attendees is between 20-30. Wide canvases are tied above specially arranged birch tree trunks over the clearing with the fire, where people sit during interludes between episodes and also during screenings, eating food and listening to seminars, so that rains do not prevent any of our activities.

![Fig. 2: The daily hike to fetch spring water. Though called Rura Penthe, this duty is craved among participants, as it allows us to spend an hour of Star-Trekking across the fields and valleys.](image)

Most important to our convention are the principles of community living, where we depend on each other to perform our voluntary duties of preparing food, transporting food and water in a specially rented minivan, establishing the camp, maintaining ecological balance through the sorting of waste, and keeping watch. Meals are collective, with vegetarian choices, and lovers of mushrooms (such as myself) can gather and cook them, as well. Medical first aid is provided by a hired specialist, who—“infected” by the Trekkers’ enthusiasm—also takes part in common activities.
During several previous conventions, another tradition has also developed: informing all convention participants about the happenings of the day and forthcoming activities through a Radio Bozon. An anchor—the Moscow Base captain Paparazzi, or Papa for short—invites the most active participants for commentaries. Interviews are conducted with those who were in character for the games, and anyone brimming with something of common interest to express is welcome on these broadcasts.

This year, we held a themed game based around the general plot of the franchise and developed by the conference organizers: we were all colonists going to New Vega, but our ship was grounded by an anomaly on the way, and so we were made to explore the planet with limited resources. After finding a tribe of amphibious aboriginals (https://vk.com/photo3901635_426818016), we established contact with them and took part in a complicated interaction with other grounded extraterrestrials, managing to form working relations—even with a haughty Cardassian—to get a transmitter working, and were thus able to get on our route again. The underlying theme of the game is celebrating diversity. In that way, the Trekkers’ ideology follows the legacy of Roddenberry and the internationalism proclaimed and to some extent developed in Soviet times.

![Fig. 3: Larisa Mikhaylova with gathered mushrooms (species Boletus edulis).](image)

Each year for the Moscow trekkers starts with TNG—Trekkerskii Novyi God [Trekkers’ New Year], a non-alcoholic New Year’s celebration among friends, which annually gathers 30-40 people, in which each and every person gets a present from under a fir-tree and given away by Papa according to the inscription on the gift of each present. In one of the rooms with a screen, some episodes of choice can be watched, and in another room people play board games, share jokes, sometimes sing, and play specially-developed Trekker Scrabble and a unique Trekkers’ Poker—developed by Moscow fan M’Res—developed by Moscow fan M’Res—developed by Moscow fan M’Res—with five suits (based on each of the series), married Trek pairs, and Joker cards like Q, Borg Queen, or Tribble, along with special features that make a night at a Poker table into a story of probabilities and amazement, played entirely for the fun of companionship at the table during TNG or beside the fire at RusCon.
On Trekker.ru, one can find the most active forum of Russian Trekkers, with over 4,500 registered users and close to 1,000 active ones, who regularly take part in discussions or post *Star Trek* news. There are sections dedicated to all *Star Trek* series, films, books, plays, and debates on various aspects of *Star Trek*. An online *Star Trek* game can also be played and discussed there. For a Russian audience, translation is a question of special importance, and "Memory Alpha" is not only translated but also complemented in Russian. RusCon topics— with rules and memories from the previous conventions— can be seen in the next section, alongside sections dedicated to Starbase Moscow and smaller clubs in St. Petersburg and Rostov, a special topic made available for those who are looking for kindred spirits in their regions. All in all, it is a vibrant community eager to share why and what they love about *Star Trek*, and also why it is less popular here than, say, *Star Wars* or *Babylon 5* among science fiction fans in general. The answers to those questions might serve as a topic for a separate paper, but in short, *Star Trek* is less popular in Russia because it was not on TV for decades as it was in the United States, and was not even shown before 2000. However, new *Star Trek* films bring more viewers to get into *The Original Series* and eventually into the wider Star Trek Universe, and for that one can forget for a while the manifold deviations sanctioned by J.J. Abrams.

Fandom-centered materials have been published during previous years in St. Petersburg- and Ekaterinburg-based fanzines and regularly appear in a special department Trekker.ru of a Russian SF magazine called Supernova (*Sverkhnovaia. F&SF*), published in Moscow.

From inside the group have come at least two "self-research" projects performed by the author of the present paper and a Lomonosov Moscow State University Journalism Department graduate, Tatyana Gomozova, who was writing her graduation paper—which compared Russian and American Star Trek fandoms and which was defended in 2014—under my supervision and who spoke at RusCon-16 on Shakespeare in *Star Trek*. This research will be deepened for the annual international conference of the Russian Society for American Culture Studies (www.rsacs.org) this year. A special course on "*Star Trek* as an American Cultural
Phenomenon” has been offered by me for four semesters already, with indications of more research to be done in the future.

Fig. 5: Closing ceremony, RusCon VI in 2006.

Further Reading


