

The *Helena* is docked at *Deep Space 12*, the hub of interstellar travel in the *Star Trek: Hidden Frontier* Universe.

By DANIEL DICKHOLTZ

# Beyond Hidden Frontiers

**Embarking on new Odysseys, Star Trek fan filmmaker Rob Caves Chronicles his Web exploits.**

**W**hen *Star Trek: Enterprise* began airing in 2001, many *Trek* fans were disappointed that the franchise had turned away from the 24th Century, feeling that the universe charted by *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* still held "strange new worlds" worth exploring.

Yes, there was 2002's *Nemesis* and plenty of novels, but it wasn't really the same as tuning in for another new episode. However, for the last seven years, that's *exactly* what thou-

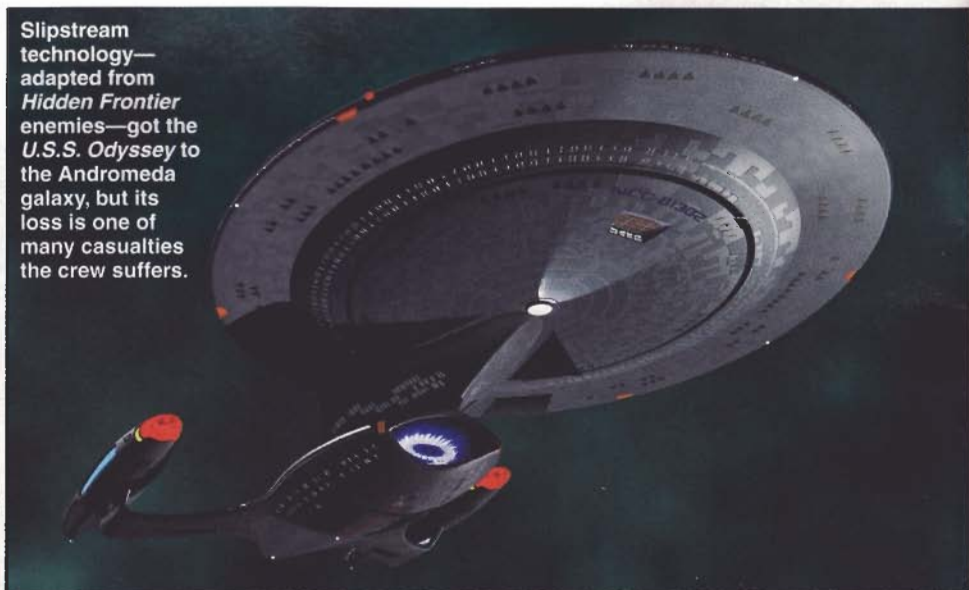
sands of Web-savvy Trekkers have been doing—watching a fan film series in which the Starfleet of some 300 years hence is still probing the unknown and discovering secrets that could shake the cosmos.

Produced under the aegis of creator Rob Caves' Areakt Pictures, *Star Trek: Hidden Frontier* managed to deliver 50 episodes in its seven seasons, and though it recently concluded with a feature-length finale, it's already being followed up by two spin-off series,



"I'm a big fan of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and onward," Rob Caves notes. "We're trying to keep that particular time period alive through our shows."

Slipstream technology—adapted from *Hidden Frontier* enemies—got the *U.S.S. Odyssey* to the Andromeda galaxy, but its loss is one of many casualties the crew suffers.



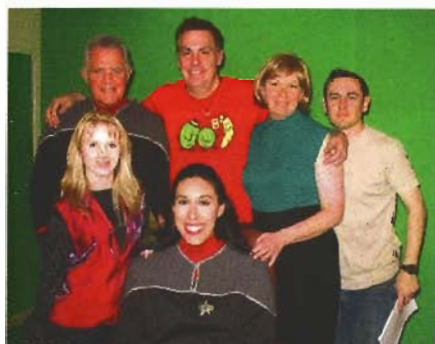


With *Hidden Frontier* finale co-writers Caves and Dan Crout on hand, J.T. Tepnapa directs Julie Gardner and Rebecca Wood (as villainesses Vorina and Betras). "J.T. has directed some of my favorite episodes," Caves says.



A wedding helps conclude *Hidden Frontier*. In attendance are Jorian Dao (Adam Browne), Captain Faisal (Savene), Captain Shelby (Risha Denney), Vedek Ro Dahkvura (Andrew Foster), Ro Nevin and Corey Aster (Tepnapa).

Star Trek: Trademark & Copyright 2007 Paramount Pictures



*Hidden Frontier* actors Larry LaVerne, Heather Asleigh, Sharon Savene and Barbara Clifford are joined by the non-costumed assistant director David O'Neill and Caves.

*Odyssey* and *The Helena Chronicles*, as well as a short film. *Hidden Frontier* also directly inspired the Scottish fan film series *Intrepid* and shares a character and the same corner of the quadrant with the audio series *The Section 31 Files*, and in its forums can be found fan fiction based upon the *Hidden Frontier* sub-universe and its characters. Not bad for something that those who were with *Hidden Frontier* at its earliest stages *didn't* want seen.

Caves, who works on the shows' CGI effects and also writes and directs episodes, "joined a *Star Trek* fan club in college, and they wanted to make a film." What they developed was *Voyages of the U.S.S. Angeles*. However, the group, fearful of legal repercussions (but mostly just embarrassed), didn't want it posted on the Web. "It was when we started to improve the production values that we said, 'Why don't we put that out and see how many people want to download it?'"

## Hidden Frontiers

*Hidden Frontier* is set in and around the Briar Patch, the warp drive-inhibiting region of space introduced in *Insurrection*. Since then, Starfleet has built *Deep Space 12* in orbit above the planet Ba'ku. The station was initially intended as a place to study the area's unique properties as well as a staging area for the *Excelsior*—a Galaxy-class dreadnought first captained by the avuncular Ian Knapp (David W. Dial), and then Elizabeth Shelby (Risha Denney)—and the *Independence*, commanded by *DS12*'s former administrator, Commodore Jennifer Cole (producer-director Jennifer Cole).

But that was before the first conflicts with the highly advanced yet drone-like Greys and their psychic masters, the Ethereals, and the discovery of the massive Tetrahedrons—weapons so overwhelming that control over them could easily tip the balance of power in the quadrant. And once the secrets of the Currents—passages through the Patch that allow for warp-like speed—get out, the sector is torn asunder by Federation forces, Klingons, Romulans, Cardassians, Tholians, Breen and just about every other spacefaring race ever mentioned in *Star Trek*.

*Star Trek: New Voyages*—the Internet series which has been around nearly as long as *Hidden Frontier*, but released only a fraction of the episodes—costs about \$70,000 a project. *Hidden Frontier* and its sequel series are produced for only \$500 an episode. "If that!" Caves laughs. His studio is his home, and the sets don't actually exist. "It's all filmed against a green screen, so once we have the equipment in place, the props and the costumes, the cost of producing episode after episode is pretty low. We can't afford to build sets. We don't even have the *space* for that. But we do lots with virtual backgrounds, and we have people around the world contributing their artistic skills to create virtual sets and starships." The drawback to this method is that a green halo surrounds the cast in earlier episodes. "Wait until you see *Odyssey*!" Caves declares. "The green lines are totally gone!"

*Hidden Frontier* is as much soap opera as it is space opera. Planned seasons in advance, its plotlines and character arcs wind around and away from each other. Shipmates get promoted, transferred, fall in love and sometimes are killed off. Some characters head off to the far reaches of the quadrant pursuing missing family members, while others never meet at all over the course of the series, though their actions impact one another. And unlike other *Star Trek* sagas, both amateur and professional, *Hidden Frontier* eschews the usual focus on a command crew that stays with each other at all times, regardless of rank, responsibilities or interests. Instead, it follows its central figures as they take up their individual quests.

However, *Hidden Frontier* wasn't always set up like that. The first two seasons—while they introduce a number of important characters and concepts—offer routine *Trek* stories, and the website where the entire series can be found ([www.hiddenfrontier.com](http://www.hiddenfrontier.com)) even warns newcomers that those early episodes aren't quite of the same caliber as the later ones.

"We realized that with the limitations of green screen and our production budget, we really weren't going to be all that different from any other amateur production by just making generic *Star Trek* stories," Caves argues. "So that's why we decided to take this



As a Betazoid tactical officer, Maya Stadi (Julia Morizawa) is "able to anticipate people's moves, attacks, that sort of thing." Now, if only Ro Nevin (Bobby Rice) can keep her from reading the crew's thoughts.



Most of *Hidden Frontier*'s plot threads were planned far in advance, but the romance between Myra Elbrey (Clifford) and Henglaar (John Whiting) wasn't one of them.

All Photos: Courtesy Rob Caves

Handing down orders are Admiral Knapp (David W. Dial), Admiral Rand (Carol Soldo)—flanked by her two aides (Dale Everett and Jonathan Benson)—and Admiral Nechayev (Renee Huberstock).



relationship that simmers over the course of the series are the unlikely pair of Henglaar, the *Excelsior*'s curmudgeonly Tellarite doctor, and Myra Elbrey, an upbeat Betazoid counselor with a direct professional style. "Henglaar was one of our breakout characters," Caves reveals. "He's a crotchety jerk sometimes, but there's something really human about how John Whiting portrays him, so people identify with Henglaar anyway."

"We didn't really have it plotted, but when the actress who plays Elbrey, Barbara Clifford, got the first script and read it over, she said, 'Oh, wait a minute. I see! There's sexual tension here!' So, she played it that way, and it worked. We didn't plan on them having a relationship, but when you see chemistry between people on screen, you go with it."

## New Odysseys

Much of the action from the third season on is driven by the ages-old enmity between two men, Tolian Naros and Siroc. "When we promoted Knapp up to Admiral, and made Shelby the driving force in the show, she needed a first officer, and we were fascinated by the idea of an NCO who had been manipulating things in Starfleet and the region for literally hundreds of years," Caves says. "Because of Naros' experience with the Patch, Starfleet pulls him out of retirement to take a command position. Larry LaVerne had the perfect look and demeanor for the character. We gave Siroc a backstory that really helped to flesh out the early days of the Patch and the idea of Naros and Siroc as onetime pals—treasure hunters, thrill seekers and society manipulators. Jim Davis has enormous range and scene-chewing ability. He was a natural for the role."

The emotional core of the series is the developing relationship between Ro Nevin (Arthur Bosserman, later Bobby Rice) and Corey Aster (J.T. Tepnapa). "J.T. has the distinct honor of playing the first openly gay character in *Star Trek*," Caves comments. "I know he is very proud of that, and he should be! But we always wanted Aster to be just another member of the crew, not 'The Gay Crew Member,' and I think J.T. has found a nice balance there."

Rice joined the cast with Season Five. "Bobby jumped headfirst into the character of Ro," Caves says. "The energy that he brought to the character and the show is something that I'll always admire."

**Things won't be easy for the *Helena* crew. "Characters are really fun to watch when you put them under stress," Caves says.**



Despite their limited resources, the *Hidden Frontier* crew incorporated as many of *Star Trek's* alien races as they could, and added new ones.

radical, serialized, epic storyline and do something compelling."

As for not focusing on the characters as a group, "There are logistical reasons for that," Caves admits. "We would have actors not available when other ones were, so literally, they wouldn't meet each other for a year. It forced us to write plots and stories that worked within those limitations. So we came up with multiple ships doing different things."

Although most of the major players are original characters, two are carried over from *Next Generation*: the aforementioned Shelby, and Robin Lefler (played in all but the second and third episodes by Joanne Busch). After being promoted to Captain of the *Excelsior* in

the third season, Shelby often finds that the command she so anxiously pursued isn't all that she expected it to be. Fortunately, she's balanced by the more pragmatic Lefler, her chief engineer, eventual first officer and—in a nod to Peter David's *New Frontier* novels—best friend.

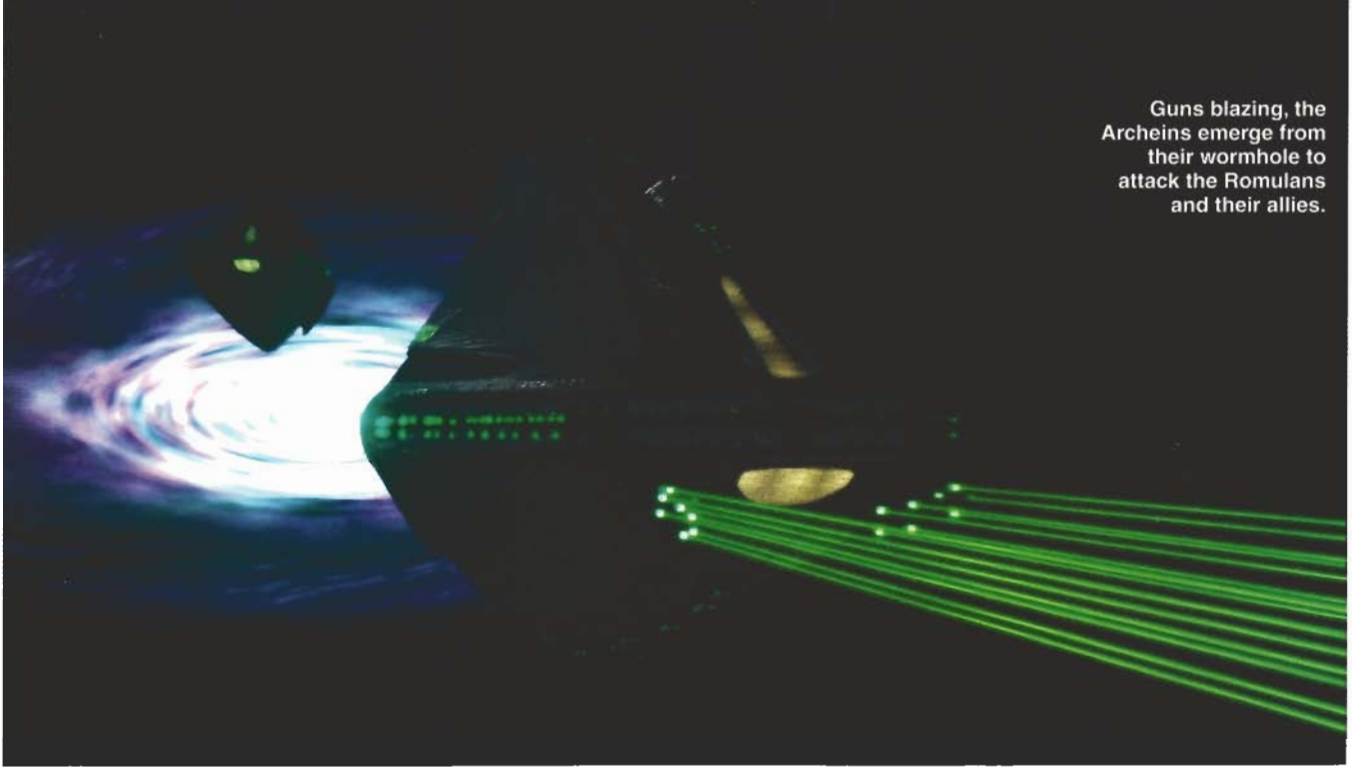
"The book series hinted at that, so it was a natural progression to expand upon it and make them friends," Caves says. "It harks back to the Kirk, Spock and McCoy relationship. That is one of *Star Trek's* trademarks: people working together under harsh situations who are...it's not romantic, but they love each other in a friendship sort of way."

Two characters who *do* develop a romantic



Two *Hidden Frontier* carryovers, Captain Faisal and Jorian Dao, head up "a crew of misfits" in the new series *The Helena Chronicles*.

Guns blazing, the Archeins emerge from their wormhole to attack the Romulans and their allies.



"Bad guys in the Andromeda galaxy are way more advanced than people in our own galaxy," Caves comments.



Tepnapa guides Mark Ashton Lund and Sterling Greene (playing doomed Starfleet officers) and Morizawa through a sequence in the *Odyssey* premiere.

Ro is the more serious younger brother of *Next Generation*'s wayward Ro Laren, and his upbringing makes it difficult for him to acknowledge his feelings for Aster. "We used Ro to tell this coming-out story over the course of a number of seasons," Caves says. "It was a way to tell that story for people who have never gone through that, or just wondered what it was all about. And the gay community just loved the whole thing. They identified with Ro,

especially. It was a way to show that by the 24th century, this isn't an issue any more, and that the universe isn't going to blow up because there's a gay character on the ship."

With *Hidden Frontier*'s finale wrapping up all its storylines, Caves and his crew—which now includes SF authors E. Robert Dunn and Brian Matthews—looked about for inspiration for a follow-up, and found enough for two shows. Classic *Trek* had introduced the Kelvans, an advanced race whose native Andromeda galaxy is enduring great strife. By the 24th century, the Kelvans have fallen to the Archeins, who are using a stable wormhole to reach our galaxy, attack the Romulan Empire and prepare their newly won space for colonization. Using experimental slipstream technology, a Federation ship with Ro and a Romulan observer aboard and a Klingon vessel with Aster on hand journey to Andromeda to shut down the wormhole. The mission ends in a pyrrhic victory: while Aster's ship escapes, Ro's is left behind, severely damaged and its command crew all dead. Now,



Michelle Laurent, Tim Foutch and Rice (as T'Lorra, Josh Gillen and Ro Nevin) work on an Engineering section that only exists as CGI. "It's prohibitively costly to build 15 sets for an episode," Caves says. Instead, they use "virtual sets" and digital locations.

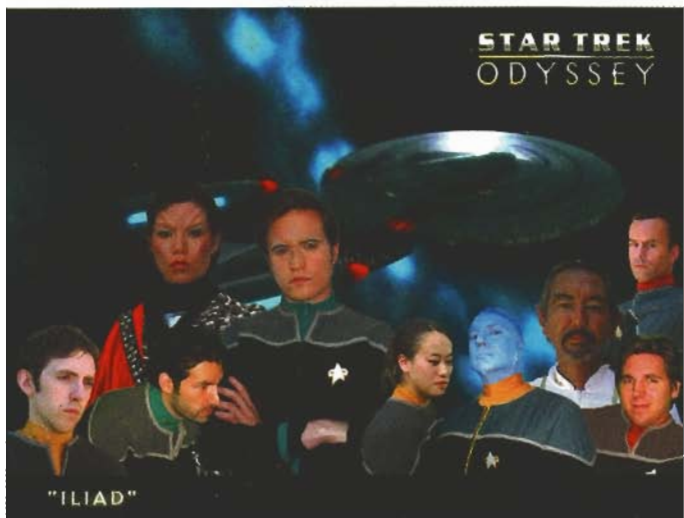
Lieutenant Commander Ro must pull his surviving shipmates together for the journey home, a mission that echoes a classic voyage.

"We wanted to use Homer's *Odyssey* as a rough canvas for a *Star Trek* show," Caves



When the *Odyssey* launches, its crew is unaware of how badly things will turn out. "It's a play on the *Voyager* concept," notes Caves, "but taken to a new level of severity."

Gillen, Dr. Vaughan (Matt Montgomery), T'Lorra, Ro Nevin, Maya, Chief Bixx (Foster), Alex Wozniak (Sam Basca), Captain T'Lek (Greene) and Commander Conner (Lund) may begin the *Odyssey* together, but not all survive the first show.



says. "Way back when we were thinking of ideas, many people were being hard on *Voyager* for not taking the chances it should have taken and not being the serialized show it should have been. So, with that in mind, we were thinking, 'What if we could take some of those *Voyager* concepts that were good, and mix them with something that has a good outline, like *The Odyssey*?'"

"It was an experiment in meshing together two ideas, and we thought, who better to do this than Ro, because he comes from a religious background? And what we're doing with *Helena Chronicles* is telling the Penelope side of Odysseus' journey through Aster, [his ex-lover] Dao [Adam Browne] and some other characters."

On *Odyssey*, Ro (now Brandon McConnell) has little choice but to make the battle-hardened Romulan T'Lorra (Michelle Laurent) his first officer. "She's at odds with Ro almost from the start," Caves says. "They have a pretty big arc as far as their relationship with one another developing over time [is concerned]. Ro has a Betazoid tactical officer [Julia Morizawa] who reads people's minds, so he has to have a talk with her in the first episode. There's a doctor [Matt Montgomery] who's of Welsh ancestry, and we're going to find out some surprising secrets about him. The chief engineer was killed, so there's this ensign from Canada [Tim Foutch] who's suddenly the chief engineer. Much of this is what happens in Homer's *Odyssey*: Odysseus loses

tons of his people all at once; and then he's screwed.

"Believe it or not, we're going to be following the Archein characters almost as much as the *U.S.S. Odyssey* characters. Like in *Hidden Frontier*, you're not just on the ship; you're following all these different plotlines. The Archeins are a matriarchical society, so you have a ruling family that's women, and the men are more subservient. There are varied shades of grey in all these characters. The queen [Cole], who's supposed to be controlling things, is being poisoned by her daughter. Very Greek, of course. And the general [Whiting] isn't necessarily a bad guy, but he isn't really in a position of power, either. So, it's lots of playing with Greek themes and stuff that is hopefully compelling to our audience."

## Trek Chronicles

*The Helena Chronicles* begins six months after the end of *Odyssey*'s premiere, with Aster just recovering from his injuries and being told that only his ship has returned. "He wants to rescue his husband, but he can't, because they don't have a means to do it," Caves explains. "*Helena Chronicles* is about him working with people to try and find a way to rescue this crew that Starfleet has given up on. Many different political things come into play."

When Naros was promoted to Captain on *Hidden Frontier*, he was given a first officer named Faisal (Sharon Savene), who did little more than acknowledge his orders. Now, she

returns as the Captain of the *Helena*. "She's a real novice," Caves says. "This is her first command, and she's back against the wall with all this stuff that's going on with Starfleet and Aster pushing her to do these experiments with Omega—which is completely illegal, because, if you remember from *Voyager*, it goes boom! She's going to be pulled in all directions, and that's when characters are really fun to watch."

On *Hidden Frontier*, it wasn't uncommon for actors to take on more than one role, and so Savene is pulling double duty, playing key parts on both series. "Sharon is having a blast with all these high-visibility roles!" Caves grins. "She had such sporadic character development in *Hidden Frontier*'s last couple of seasons, and now she's getting lots of positive reviews for her *Odyssey* villain. After seeing her play a dominating part in that, I'm excited to see how she brings some of that into her portrayal of Captain Faisal on *Helena*."

Also, notes Caves, "Brian came up with new characters—he's writing a bunch of *Helenas*—and he created some that are a little bit out there. He has a tactical officer who's half-Bolian and half-Nausican, so she's a bit like Worf. And then, he wrote a doctor who has these implants; he isn't a Borg, but he's always doing stuff with his physiology, chopping off limbs, and it freaks people out. There's also a chief engineer who's a bit nutty; he talks to himself. Basically, *Helena* throws together people who are misfits. It's like [*The Odyssey*'s] Penelope: She has her suitors in the house, and things are going to Hell."

With these two series, "Everything has been plotted out right through to the end. It's basically three seasons of each that [will run] concurrently. We've scripted most of *Odyssey*'s first season and *Helena Chronicles*' Season One and Two. So, it's just [a matter of] shooting stuff." *Odyssey*'s initial episode has already been posted, and production will soon rotate between the remainder of *Odyssey*'s five first season episodes and all three of *Helena*'s. If all goes well, *Helena*'s pilot will go online before year's end.

December should also see the premiere of the first-ever full crossover between two fan film series. An upcoming character from *Star Trek: Intrepid* was already introduced in passing in a *Hidden Frontier* episode, and Captain Shelby cameoed on that Scottish series' first offering. But now, crews from both will meet in *Orphans of War*. "They were coming over here on vacation, and said, 'Hey, why don't we shoot a scene?' Well, that scene turned into 16 pages, so we basically made a short. It's just long enough to have a beginning, middle and end, good character interaction and some interesting plot, but it isn't a full-on episode. It nicely dovetails between *Hidden Frontier*, *Odyssey* and *Helena*."

So why keep doing these *Star Trek* fan film productions? "That's a good question. We're nuts, I guess! It pretty much started out as a hobby," says Rob Caves. "It *is* a hobby. Basically, a group of *Star Trek* fans and budding filmmakers get together, and this is what we do on the weekends!"

The fan film crossover short *Orphans of War* "is a little bit of a bridge" between the three *Hidden Frontier* shows—and will also have an impact on the *Intrepid* crew.

