

STAR TREK

## The Seven Greatest Star Trek Parodies, Spoofs, and Homages

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The continuing popularity and deeply loyal fandom of the *Star Trek* universe is truly, as Mr. Spock might have put it, “fascinating.” For a franchise that started out with a mere three seasons and 79 episodes, *Trek* has far outlasted its originally stated “five-year mission”; it recently celebrated its 57<sup>th</sup> year in our firmament, and is still going strong. The high-minded idealism and hopeful vision of humanity’s future created by Gene Roddenberry in 1966 has earned a place of pride in our pop culture pantheon—which means that it can certainly take a bit of ribbing from time to time. Whether in the form of affectionate homage or full-on parody, *Trek* and its cast of characters continue to also fuel some memorable movies, TV episodes, and sketches. And the best part? The original cast members of the various series are often in on the gag!

Here, then, are seven of my favorite alternate takes on the worlds of *Trek*— boldly, and occasionally hilariously, putting a new twist on the characters and situations we’ve seen

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## ***Saturday Night Live (1975–Present)***

*Star Trek* had only been off the air for six years when *Saturday Night Live* launched, but it wasn't long before the sketch series was lampooning it, with “[The Last Voyage of the Starship Enterprise](#)” featuring John Belushi in the Captain's chair, Chevy Chase as Spock, and Dan Aykroyd as Dr. McCoy. Since then we've gotten Owen Wilson as Capt. Jeff Bezos in “[Billionaire Star Trek](#),” and Chris Pine reprising his rebooted Kirk role in a “[lost episode](#).” Most memorable and controversial, though, was not exactly a *Star Trek* parody—but the episode in 1986 when William Shatner (the original Capt. Kirk) showed up in a sketch [about a Trek fan convention](#) to tell his admiring followers to “get a life.” Is it the nadir or apex for SNL parodies? Maybe both.

## ***In Living Color (1990–1994)***



With “The Wrath of Farrakhan,” the second episode of *In Living Color* dipped into the *Trek* universe with a wildly over-the-top parody featuring Jim Carrey as an overacting Captain Kirk, David Alan Grier as Mr. Spock, and Kim Wayans as Lt. Uhura. (It was the most diverse version of the franchise until *Star Trek: Discovery* began airing decades later.) In the typically irreverent sketch, Nation of Islam leader Minister Louis Farrakhan (Damon Wayans) comes aboard the *Enterprise* and incites mutiny, then becomes the new captain and sets a new course: “Warp factor 5. We’re going home—destination 125<sup>th</sup> Street.”

### ***Galaxy Quest* (1999)**



More a loving hug than a parody of the *Star Trek* universe, *Galaxy Quest* is a true homage to several things at once: fan conventions, actors stuck in career-defining roles who clearly have not embraced their inner Shatners, and the power of a science fiction TV show inspiring enough that it manages to travel across the universe and convince aliens to seek out its heroic crew. At a reunion convention for the stars of the 1980s space adventure series *Galaxy Quest* (some of whom are there more grudgingly than the others) tempers and egos flare—until most of the cast is transported into space by aliens called Thermians, drafted into their conflict with an extraterrestrial warlord. With a cast that includes *Alien* star Sigourney Weaver and Professor Snape himself, Alan Rickman, plus Tony Shalhoub, Tim Allen, and Sam Rockwell, it's hard to find a missed step in this delightful, funny, and affectionate comedy.

### ***Futurama* (1999-Present)**



*Futurama* itself isn't based on *Star Trek*, but all the science fiction staples, spaceships, and aliens on hand (plus its writers' love of pop culture) make it a natural home for all manner of riffing on the classic series. And boy, does it riff, with tons of references sprinkled over its many seasons: Leonard Nimoy's (Spock) head appears in the very first episode, while whole episodes replay classic *Trek* storylines (like Fry going to Zoidberg's home planet for mating season in "Why Must I Be a Crustacean in Love"). But the ultimate expression of *Futurama*'s love of *Star Trek* has to be "Where No Fan Has Gone Before," when Fry learns that the *Trek* franchise became a religion in the 2200s. Every main cast member from the original series appears in the episode, except for the late DeForest Kelley (Dr. McCoy) and James Doohan (Scotty)—instead, a likeness of McCoy was used without dialog, and instead of Doohan's Scotty we had a newcomer called "Welshie."

### ***The Orville* (2017–Present)**



There's so much love out there for the idea of a hopeful voyage to the stars that Seth MacFarlane (of *Family Guy* fame) was able to get a series that was basically a *Trek* homage—and a surprisingly earnest one—greenlit. After two years on Fox it moved to Hulu, though it's not yet renewed for a fourth season. MacFarlane (who also stars) has long been a *Star Trek* superfan; he's included multiple references to the show on *Family Guy* (where he also roped in a bunch of *TNG*, *Voyager*, and *DS9* actors to share their voices). But many devoted to *The Orville* have noted that it has outgrown mere comparisons to *Trek* and become its own thing—an organic, looser evolution of the original franchise.

### ***Stalled Trek* (2012-Present)**



Muppets! In! Space! No, wait—this is the crew (sort of) of the *Enterprise*, but not as you’ve seen them before—Capt. Krok, Mr. Spott, Dr. McGruff, Lt. Uhiya, and they’re all animated... but rather muppety at the same time. This is the vision of Mark R. Largent, who has crowdfunded and released two parodies of *Trek* episodes (“Amutt Time” echoes “Amok Time”; “The City on the Edge of Foreclosure” echoes “The City on the Edge of Forever”) that are deeply funny—and also deeply adoring of the original material.

“The Dumbday Machine,” which remakes “The Doomsday Machine,” [was funded on IndieGoGo](#), and Largent told me he’s thinking about *Stalled Trek: The Next Generation*. “*Star Trek* was in heavy syndication when I was growing up,” he says in an email. “My friends and I would come home from school as kids, watch *Star Trek* and then go outside and play *Star Trek*. Around the same time, I discovered *Mad Magazine* and *Cracked*... and my uncle took me to see *Airplane* when I was 12. Toss all of those things into a young, impressionable mind and you get *Stalled Trek*.”

## ***Black Mirror* (2011–Present)**



Blending its take on Trek with the world of multiplayer online gaming and an embittered programmer (played by Jesse Plemons), “USS *Callister*,” a standout, 76-minute episode of the ongoing anthology series, won four Emmy Awards in 2018. The episode focuses on Plemons’ character Robert, who’s created his own mini-world within the larger game he created, and the parts of the episode set aboard the *Callister* are more a homage than a parody of *Trek*. In this virtual world, he turns his digitally cloned co-workers into the crew of his own spaceship, where he runs the show as captain. It’s a story that references *Trek* in various small details and in its visuals as well as in more obvious ways. But while there are funny moments, Robert is disturbingly abusive to his characters/co-workers—and there’s a very dark comeuppance for him in the end. (This is *Black Mirror*, after all.)

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