

# Oh my! George Takei talks about Trekkies, technology and Trump

The Star Trek icon launched an AR app called House of Cats, a spoof of President Donald Trump that lends POTUS the likeness of Grumpy Cat

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NEW YORK: “Oh my” is unquestionably George Takei’s catchphrase. But it turns out he wouldn’t mind if he had a different one.

PRWeek got to catch up with the famed Star Trek actor and activist, along with his PR representative, Bospar principal Curtis Sparrer, who teamed up on Takei’s latest project: an AR app called House of Cats.

The app combines two of the internet’s greatest fascinations — felines and activism — in a humorous spoof that gives President Donald Trump the likeness of Grumpy Cat.

The task of figuring out how to tell that story fell on the shoulders of Sparrer, a fully committed and unwavering Trekkie.

Sparrer and Takei told PRWeek about their first encounter, the star’s censure of Trump, and that iconic catchphrase.

**You used to run your own consumer technology show, *Takei’s Takes*, in which you once called Google Glass the “stupidest Instagram pic you’ll ever take this year.” If you had to review your own product on that show, what would you say?**

It’s going to be a very topical, timely, amusing, and sometimes “guffaw-out loud” kind of experience, to be working with Trumpy Cat.



George Takei and Curtis Sparrer

## How did you come up with the idea?

We were brainstorming, and a few years back we had great success with a cat called Grumpy [Takei used to regularly post pictures of the meme] and we both were nominated for a Shorty Award a few years back and we won. So we thought, “Well, why don’t we parlay Grumpy Cat and come up with a fake president version of Grumpy Cat as Trumpy Cat.” And so here we are, to lampoon and to have some fun with the fake president.

Trump has been hostile to immigrants and refugees and we wanted to be the counter to his opposition on refugees and immigrants. So we are contributing proceeds from the House of Cats to Refugees International, in order to bring support and succor to people in need, all over the world. The challenge is not only in the U.S., but in Europe and Southeast Asia.

**In 2015, you wrote an op-ed for the *Los Angeles Times* in which you said, “Fans come for the cat memes and they stay for the activism.” With this app, you’ve literally merged the two together. Why is humor such a potent way to approach activism?**

I’m a political activist and a political animal of the feline persuasion. Brad [Takei’s husband] tells me to calm down occasionally

and take a few steps back, get some distance on it, and you’ll see the larger picture and the issues that I’m [talking] about in context. When you do that, you see how ridiculous the situation is in that larger context, and that also can be an important topic in these dark times. So we got our inspiration from Grumpy Cat and brought my activism — and our love for felines — together with the House of Cats.

**Star Trek is about science, exploration, and empathy. What would the crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise say about Trump’s Space Force?**

Given the kind of thinking that Donald Trump is coming from, it would be a disaster. That would be something that’s going to doom the planet. So, no, no, no. Trump’s Space Force should never come about.

**Your catchphrase is, “Oh my.” Have you ever wished you had a different one?**

You know, I deal with the reality of my life. It’s a simple phrase. I use it all the time in my life. I use it for something outrageous: Oh myyy. But also something fantastic, something wonderful, [such as] seeing a glorious sunrise: Ohhh myyyy! It’s something so versatile. It can be used everywhere. I’m glad it’s something. At the same time, I’d prefer something else to go with me to my grave. My [grave-stone will say]: “Oh my.”

**How are you promoting the House of Cats app?**

Sparrer: So the kind of goldmine that is George Takei is that all journalists want to talk to him and get his perspective. So when we were working with [social influencer shop] The Social Edge’s [co-founder and CEO] Lorenzo Thione and [cofounder and chief creative officer] Jay Kuo, what we looked at was the activism, technology, and [Takei’s] involvement. We contacted a range of media, from app journalists to those who cover celebrities. Our strategy was that by going through a collection of different media, we’d be able to reach different parts of [Takei’s] fan base and support. I also believe that most Americans need to see a story in several different outlets before they’ll make a purchase decision.

**What was your first thought when you were given this opportunity?**

Sparrer: Oh my God!

Takei: Not, “Oh my?”

Sparrer: [Social Edge] has been working on this for quite a while. They have a marketing arm that’s been on with them for about a year developing this, but PR itself was brought on about five to six weeks ago. We were told, “Look, we really would like to partner with someone who can be aggressive and get going and who’s worked in the app space before.” We felt like we were just singled out by the high school quarterback. We said, “Yes, yes, yes.”

The Social Edge’s strategy and execution on this has really been perfect. Oftentimes when you work on PR projects, you wonder if you’re going to be the only person thinking. The good news is that they’ve been thinking and helping us get clever and smart. They go by the name Team Takei and they’ve just been amazing.

**How long have you guys known each other?**

Sparrer: Well, that’s rather odd turn of a phrase. I’ve kind of worshiped [Takei] from afar and he has seen me as a blip on the fan boy circuit, along with thousands of other people just like me. We’ve known each other for more than three decades. I was a member of the U.S.S. Lonestar, a Star Trek fan club that existed before the days of *The Next Generation*. We’re talking hardcore, people. I’ve been to a Klingon wedding, I’ve been to a Tribbles party - I’m committed.

**Can you speak Klingon?**

Sparrer: Qapla’. [Success!]

**Oh wow, you are committed.**

Sparrer: Yes. From the PR point of view, I think this kind of shows what anyone looking for a PR partner should look for. You should look for someone who’s passionate about your offering. You should look for someone who is going to think about it morning, day, and night, and really sweat it.

For me House of Cats was not just a client, it was a calling, it was a kismet, it was a thankless moment to really do something I loved. I think that with a lot of our clients, it’s the same thing.

**How did you keep in touch through all those years?**

Sparrer: It came about through the network of Facebook and San Francisco, where [Thione] posted a note saying that he was looking for PR help. I immediately responded and he put me in touch with [Takei]. I was having a meeting with [Thione and Kuo] about strategy, and all of a sudden [Takei] said, “Wait a second, do I know you, Curtis?” I said, “Yeah, George, we’ve known each other for about 15 years. Good to hear from you again.”

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*