

Women At Warp - Episode 118 - Jayne Brook/Rekha Sharma

Jayne: Hi! This is Jayne Brook and you're listening to Women At Warp.

[WAW intro plays]

Jarrah: Hi and welcome to Women at Warp, a Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us as our crew of four women **Star Trek** fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name's Jarrah and thanks for tuning in! Today with us we have Grace—

Grace: Hey, nerds!

Jarrah: —and Sue!

Sue: Hello!

Jarrah: And we have just returned from beautiful, sunny—

Grace: Grasshopper filled.

Jarrah: Oh so sunny, so hot, and grasshopper filled Las Vegas, where we were at Star Trek Las Vegas. And this is the first of a few episodes where we'll be sharing some of the interviews and the panels that we did there. But before we get into our main topic we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. Our show, as you know, is supported entirely by patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as a dollar a month and get awesome rewards. From thanks on social media to silly watch along commentaries! Visit Patreon.com/WomenAtWarp.

Your support helps us do things like keep the show up and running, host our audio, helps us do this kind of convention reporting. So, thank you so much for those who are supporting us. You can also help us out by leaving or rating or review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. And we actually have recently released our first episode in our new patron tier the Spore Drive. Grace do you want to tell listeners about what to expect if they're eligible for that patron tier of content?

Grace: Expect the unexpected, gang. [fake forced laughter] Ah... But seriously, Andi and I recorded an episode about a bisexual representation in characters throughout media and we're we're both really excited to have gotten to record it. It was something near and dear to both our hearts so, check it out if you can and know that we will go on many, many tangents.

Jarrah: Our goal with this tier is to release an episode every couple of months that will tackle media that is not necessarily Star Trek. So, stay tuned for future episodes on topics like C.J.

Cregg and maybe, I don't know, **Schitt's Creek**. [laughter] We'll see where it goes! So, thanks a lot, again, for supporting us. Any other housekeeping before we get started?

Sue: Well, we did mention before we went to Vegas that we created lapel pins that we were offering for a five dollar donation at Star Trek Las Vegas to support the Pop Culture Hero Coalition and the Heroic Curriculum fundraiser specifically, and I am super pleased to report that we raised \$500 last weekend.

Grace: Oh my gosh!

Jarrah: That's awesome.

Sue: So and that went into the fundraiser, which will then be matched dollar for dollar by the Roddenberry Foundation. So, really we raised \$1,000 last weekend. So, that is super fantastic. So, thank you to everyone who came out and supported us in that endeavor!

Jarrah: So, this year at STLTV, there was no really, really big news like there was last year with the **Picard** series announcement. I don't think anyone was really surprised by that because there was so much announced at San Diego Comic Con just a couple of weeks ago but just wondering if either of you have any, sort of, overall observations or what was the highlights of the convention for you, before we go into some of our interviews.

Grace: Well, for one thing seeing how people turned out and wanted to make the charitable donations for the lapel pins A. 'cause we got to feel like, "Yeah, this is a really good lapel pin," and B. we got to raise all that money for an awesome organization. And just seeing people repeatedly coming up and being like, "Yes, I want to do that." That felt really good.

Sue: Yeah, it was really cool. We heard from a few people that they were going around asking for our pin at other booths, like Fansets—

Grace: Oh my gosh!

Sue: —which was pretty cool to hear. Honestly, we spent so much time at the booth that I didn't get to many panels, but unsurprisingly for me, the highlight panel that I did see was the Doctors panel, which was just a lot of fun. And you know, finally, Creation is starting to put different casts together to talk about shared experiences across series, which I think is really cool. And we just had a lot of great encounters at the booth. Somebody stopped by with a T-shirt she made in the 70's, she estimated 1979, that had all of these signatures on it from actors and big name fans alike. And it was just so great to see.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. There were a lot of really, really lovely listener interactions and also just interactions with people who had just discovered us through the panels at the convention and it just means so much to hear from people. I think, you know, one of the interactions that I

found was touching was there was a trans woman from Malaysia who came up and introduced herself and thanked us for the work around the pronoun pins, and some of the comments made on panels, and said that she felt like she had to leave her local club because of the homophobic backlash against Sulu in **Star Trek Beyond** several years ago. But said that, you know, the stuff that we had been doing in terms of the pins and such really made her feel welcome at STLV and so, that really means a lot. And it sucks that people are put through that and hopefully it will only expand to be more normal to make everyone feel welcome going forward.

Sue: Yeah, our pronoun pins were also very well received and that's—I'm just, I'm very proud of everything we did. [laughs] You know?

Grace: We ran out of them so quick, though!

Sue: Yeah, well, we know better for next year.

Grace: It's true. By the last day we just had a pile of he/him pins.

Jarrah: And then we still ran out of those, so. It was awesome!

Sue: Yeah, it was not a large pile. By pile we mean like 30. [laughs]

Jarrah: Yeah. But one other thing they did differently at this STLV, from previous years, is they had a really big focus on side stage programming that was led by scientists and academics and, you know, did sort of Teaching Track type programs. And I mean, like Sue, you know none of us really got to attend a ton of programming this year, but I did attend a few of those and went to one really cool one that was hosted by Jennifer Bailey Woodard and Stephanie Dean about—it was called Gendering The Holodeck. And it's about work on using virtual reality to sort of inculcate empathy for marginalized groups. And their research has put their students, who are trained in a bit of sociological theory, into the **Star Trek Bridge Crew** VR game and then had them code their interactions with participants and how that varies based on, say, the gender or race of their avatar and whether or not the gender of the Avatar corresponds with how the voice sounds. And so really, really interesting. I look forward to reading some of their research more in-depth.

Sue: Yeah, that sounds awesome!

Jarrah: So, today we're going to share with you some of the other things we were doing when we were not attending programming. And we're going to start with two interviews that we did with actors from **Star Trek Discovery**. And the first one is Rekha Sharma, who played Ellen Landry in season one of **Discovery**—both mirror and prime Landry. Any comments before we get into this interview?

Grace: She was so game for it. I was so happy to see that she was willing to dive in with hard questions right off—kind of off the bat.

Jarrah: Yeah, it was really great to talk to her and if you hear a bit of a kerfuffle in the middle that is LeVar Burton just randomly showing up while we were interviewing her, so.

Grace: LeVar f—ing Burton!

Sue: Family friendly!

Grace: LeVar consarned Burton!

[laughter]

Jarrah: Amazing. All right. Let's go right into it then.

[comm badge activation sound effect]

Sue: So, we're back at Star Trek Las Vegas with the Rekha Sharma. And we want to ask you, how's your convention going so far?

Rekha: Fantastic!

Sue: Fans are all doing well? Everything is good interactions?

Rekha: Just realized what I said there. Fan-tastic.

[all laughing and groaning]

Rekha: Yeah, I mean the fans, **Star Trek** fans are so lovely. I'm thrilled to be out here with all of my wonderful colleagues. You know, it's a family affair.

Sue: So, when you were first cast on **Star Trek Discovery**, were you warned about the franchise you were getting into, about the cultural phenomenon that is **Star Trek**?

Rekha: Yeah, kind of. I didn't need to be warned because I was so excited by it that I screamed like a little girl when I got the job. I have never been more nervous than I think—well, I mean not since I started acting. It's been a long time since I felt that kind of nerves and it was because I know how huge **Star Trek** is. So, to walk onto that ship and, you know, kind of—you can't help but go, “Oh my god, we're doing it again. As a **Trek** fan, are we going to do it right?” And there is this pressure, you know, to—you know, it's such a high bar to hold yourself up to. It's a legacy. I mean, over 50 years now. It's intimidating. So, yeah, I was very nervous about whether or not we were going to do the legacy justice. Yeah.

Sue: Right. Well, speaking of some fan reaction, early on in the first season of **Discovery**, before we even hit the mirror universe—spoilers—**Discovery** was losing a lot of characters to deaths. And a lot of the time there was some outcry among the fan base that most of those characters were people of color and especially women of color. And I was wondering if you had any comment on that situation, since Landry was one of them.

Rekha: Yeah, you know, I don't know why those decisions were made. My guess is that people were not thinking of it. And really seeing the kind of message that they're sort of putting out there, which is really unfortunate because of what the show's legacy is about. Because people like Nichelle Nichols changed the way that we look at women of color.

You know, the whole show's got a long history of making important societal changes, in terms of diversity and inclusivity. So, I have to say it makes me wonder, also, about the psychology of a writer's room that's run primarily by the white male perspective, which I do believe they have changed, as things have gone along. I know that Erika (Lippoldt) and Boey (Bo Yeon Kim) have developed a stronger and stronger voice in that writers room, as things have developed and I'm super grateful for that. White male privilege: you know, they're going to miss some things because that's the perspective they're coming from. And that's the only thing I can think of, of why that was allowed to happen; because they're just not conscious of it.

And maybe, you know, we all have this programming about what the public wants. You know, all that sort of producer mentality, middle America kind of stuff. And as we saw, shockingly, there is a huge portion of **Star Trek** fans that were actually super annoyed by diversity, which I didn't understand at all. You know, when I saw that coming through on Twitter and other social media I was just like, "How can you be a **Star Trek** fan and think in these really outdated sexist and racist ways?" Shocking to me. So, you know, I also wondered if that was part of the decision making. You know, were there some of the higher ups that actually think that way? And I certainly hope that's not the case and I haven't met anybody, you know, in the higher ups that I think thinks that way, but you don't know what people think. So. Yeah, I'm sorry I don't have a more informed answer for you, but these are the things I wonder about.

Sue: Absolutely, I think that's fantastic. But to focus on the positive impact of it, I did see that you tweeted yesterday about spending time in the green room with Nichelle and I'm just wondering if there's anything you would share—not anything like personal, but—about the time you've been able to spend with Nichelle since she is retiring from the convention circuit this year.

Rekha: Yeah, I mean it's an honor. The first time I met her was, I believe a Chicago comic con. I want to say maybe like 10 years ago or something, when I started doing conventions for the **Battlestar Galactica** series. And that was profound. And we talked about what she did back in the day, you know? And she told me how while she was, you know, doing an interracial kiss, in outer space, representing, Martin Luther King was still walking the streets. And that was, you

know, I didn't realize that. You know, I'm not up on my history, sadly, embarrassingly. But, it was a real eye opener to think about the kind of brave choices that she made.

And feminist choices too. You know, I know that there was talk about the length of the skirts and the boots and as I was saying at our discussion the other day, you know, I'm a fan of some of the opinions of Camille Paglia and, you know, stepping into the female beauty. Not from a place of serving a picture for men, but actually as a point of strength, so. And she did that, back then! You know, when it was beehives and yeah. It's been really special. And actually shared that with my mom and they met about three or four years ago in Dallas at a convention. I got to take a picture of my mom with Nichelle and, you know, that older generation not even understanding how that impacted everyone. It's just so cool. So cool. I'm super grateful.

[kerfuffle commences]

Grace: We need to pause for a second here.

Jarrah: Yeah we're pausing because...

Rekha: [to LeVar] Oh, you're welcome.

LeVar: I would not have survived.

Rekha: No you wouldn't have. You would've been dead at the table.

LeVar: I would have been a block of ice.

Rekha: I would have had to pick you up.

LeVar: Which, would have been very difficult.

Rekha: And throw you into the ground and dug the hole.

LeVar: So, if not for your sweater... [inaudible]

Rekha: You would have caused me so much trouble.

[end of kerfuffle]

Grace: Well, that was LeVar Burton just coming by. So, that happened! [a little star struck] Wow! Damn, only at the cons, I swear!

[laughter]

Rekha: I saved his life with my sweater last night.

Grace: So, he owes you a life debt now, yes?

Rekha: Yes. Life debt. Yep.

Grace: That's gonna be handy during the con circuit, I'm sure.

Rekha: Yeah, yeah, I think so. [laughs] Lord knows, there's there's a lot of close calls at these conventions.

[laughter]

Grace: So, we did talk earlier about how Landry did get unfortunately killed off as a character, but you're still doing some stuff with her. Looks like you've got some content for Star Trek Online coming out. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

Rekha: Well, it's out you can play it. In fact, you can even take one of these and unlock my character to be one of your bridge officers. Yeah it's great. It's really Landry's prequel to the time where she was on the Buran where she's actually working with prime Lorca, as opposed to douchebag mirror Lorca. [laughs] And we get to see what happened in Landry's life that led her to the moment where she calls people garbage.

Jarrah: I loved on the panel the other day, you were talking a bit about her relationship with, I guess unknowingly, mirror Lorca. And I was wondering if you could maybe tell our audience a bit about that and I think you likened it a bit to a bit of a Me Too story.

Rekha: Yeah, it was definitely a Me Too story and one that we—you know, it's funny because we shot that, it was before Me Too, I think when we when we shot it, kind of. So, it would've been interesting, had we shot that like, you know, six months later or whatever it was. I wonder if we would have kept that scene that got cut. I wonder if we would have explored it further to really remind, you know, the atrocities that happen in those kind of uneven power relationships and how people are manipulated. I'm glad that that's in there. It's an important thing to talk about.

Jarrah: Neat. I mean, of course in addition to **Star Trek** you're also well known among sci-fi fans for your work on **The 100** and **BSG**, among other things. What is your favorite non Landry role that you've played?

Rekha: Well, **Battlestar Galactica** was the best job I've ever had in my entire life. [laughs] Yeah. The stories that we told. I mean, we won a Peabody. You know, we went to the U.N. [laughs] I don't know if anything I do will ever have that much impact. Having said that, **Star Trek** has just as huge of an impact, but it's a different way. I didn't get to do three seasons, four

seasons on **Star Trek** so, maybe I would feel the same way about it had I had a similar sized role, but yeah.

Jarrah: What was it about your character on **BSG** that you really loved doing?

Rekha: Well, to go from thinking that you're fighting something and discovering that the thing you're fighting is you is a metaphor [laughs] that I loved exploring, that I continue to explore every day. [laughs] Yeah, and then just, you know, in terms of storytelling it was really intense to go, "Oh my god I'm not who I thought I was. What am I made of? Who am I allied with?" You know, trying to find your position and questions of belonging and are we all part of a larger society? Who is the enemy? There is no enemy. It's all gray. It's not black and white. I mean that show. So close to my heart.

Grace: We got a sign here telling us about **Limetown**. We're familiar with the podcast, as I'm sure a lot of people are. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that project?

Rekha: I'm really excited about **Limetown**. I think we've got something really special. Jessica Biel is amazing. Stanley Tucci, we all know is amazing. The creators of the show are wonderful. Every single person involved in this project brought their A game and I think that we're going to see a really, really strong product. Yeah, it's on Facebook Watch. It airs October 16th. I'm super excited I can't wait to see it.

Jarrah: Well, thank you so much for your time today. It's been a pleasure talking with you and I hope you enjoy the rest of your convention.

Rekha: Thank you.

[comm badge activation sound effect]

Grace: Boy, that sure was an interview.

Jarrah: Oh man. Yeah. I feel really lucky that we got to talk to her. I don't think it hurt that, you know, both her and the next person we're going to interview were in a line of tables with Mary Chieffo, who's already been on the show and was amazing and I feel like we can call her a friend of the show now. So, our next interview is Jayne Brook who played Admiral Cornwell and is another character who I think, you know, there was some controversy over her getting killed off. So, really appreciated being able to—

Sue: Spoilers.

[laughter]

Jarrah: Yeah, okay, if you're on Twitter you know it happened.

Grace: If we don't have swearing we have spoilers.

Jarrah: We asked questions about it. So, if you're listening to the interview hopefully you watched the second season or don't care that we just spoiled the ending. [Sue laughs] But I feel really fortunate that they were both really game to answer pretty upfront questions about that and you know whether those choices were necessary, whether things should've been done differently, and as well as, sort of, more general questions about their characters and what it's like being part of **Star Trek** fandom.

[comm badge activation sound effect]

Jarrah: So, we're here at Star Trek Las Vegas with Jayne Brook who played Admiral Cornwell on **Star Trek Discovery**. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Jayne: So happy to talk to you.

Jarrah: So, when you were cast in **Star Trek Discovery**, what was your first reaction? Did you know that you were going to be part of a big cultural phenomenon that is **Star Trek**?

Jayne: You know, I don't think I really realized. I knew Aaron and Gretchen, who were the producers at the time, and they said, "Please come play this Admiral." And then, funnily enough, as they tried to talk me into it I go, "Guys, you don't have to talk me into it. It sounds like fun." They said, "Yeah, well, you're going to die after three episodes, but everyone's going to be really, really sorry." You know, "You're going to be a hero, but you're just going to come in for three." I'm like, "Yeah, sounds like fun!" But then, at the end of that episode, where I was taken to Cancri IV, you know, Jason sends me off. I get taken prisoner. So, I called my husband and I'm like, "I don't die." And then, "I'm prisoner now!" And then from that came even more and more of the character. Those scenes with Mary that were so great. And then her being in charge at the end of episode one, or you know. So I don't—I didn't think I realized how wonderful of a character it was going to grow to. And I didn't know this whole world. I'd only heard of it through Bob Picardo, because he does a lot of conventions, but this is fun! Nice people.

Jarrah: That's awesome. I'm interested in what you feel really motivates Cornwell, as a character. I know that, you know, in the first season she's a little bit at odds with some of the Discovery crew. And then in the second season she ends up really being their champion, at the end of it. Do you think that she evolved over the course of those two seasons, or how do you see her being driven?

Jayne: Well, what's interesting about the first season is she reaches out—I always say to Jason's character but—she reaches out to Jason. Why am I keep thinking Jason? [laughter] Now I'm like, "Oh my god, I can't think!"

Sue: Lorca.

Jayne: Lorca! She reaches out to Lorca and she's the only one, partly because she's known him for so long, partly because she is a psychiatrist, but she's like, "Something's up here." So, even though she's at odds with him, you realize that in the beginning she's at odds with him because she wants him to keep his job and then she's at odds with him because she's like, "Something's up here and you're not taking Starfleet down. You're not taking this ship down," and everything. So, in a way, it's consistent with who she is in the second season as well. I just think whenever an admiral shows up everyone's like, "Oh my god!" You know, "The principal's here."

She developed over the course of two seasons because we saw more and more and more and more of her. Her personal life in the first season, a little bit. And then more and more of her strength as a warrior and as a leader. What I liked about her, I think, the most is that she didn't—I had an opportunity to play a leader and not just be pushing it and screaming all the time, someone who could just be the leader and not have to scream and yell. You know?

Jarrah: That's fabulous. You know, I mean, there's many cool things about Cornwell, but one thing that really we noticed is the fact that she was a mental health professional. And I think that's not something you often think of is a mental health professional becomes military leader or, you know, scientific military leader. How do you see that background shaping who she is?

Jayne: What's interesting, I actually had an Air Force psychiatrist come to my table yesterday and he said, "I served in the Air Force for 20 years it's pretty amazing that you made Admiral. That doesn't happen often." So, it made me—I was like, "Wow, that's really cool." I think that she must have been so astute, in terms of reading people and being firm and honest with them, speaking the truth, but also because of her training. And maybe, just because of who she is, being compassionate with them, that really, really difficult fine line to walk, of kind of tough love, and that might have made her able to become what she became.

Jarrah: That's really fabulous. Did one of you want to jump in?

Sue: All right. So, at the end of season two of **Discovery** there was a little bit of fan outcry when we lost Admiral Cornwell. And considering that we're leaving the Pike era, supposedly, within the **Star Trek** storytelling, some questions about why we couldn't just imagine her going on and having a happy ending. So do you have any comment on that decision making?

Jayne: Well, I don't have any—I mean, since I'm not in the writers room I don't know if—I can I can only guess. But the writers, I know that they have a lot of pressure. They have to come up with something pretty amazing at the end of every season, but also, in a way, it really honored—if they were going to end her storyline, it's kind of, you know, it is quite an honor that Cornwell would save the Enterprise, because then it's almost as if she made all the other things possible after that. You know? It's funny that, you know, it predates **The Original Series** so, that was a big bang—no pun intended—way to have her go out. But, yeah, maybe. I don't know.

People keep coming to my table and saying, you know, “This could have happened or that could have happened,” and you never know what imaginative leap the writers might take, but. Yeah.

Jarrah: Do we have holodecks yet on the ship? No, I think we're pre holodeck, sadly. My solution is always bring them back as a hologram. [laughter] But we actually had someone write for our blog an article about how cool it is to see Cornwell as a woman in leadership, you know, on a TV show who's not like 20 and I was wondering if you've heard from fans some response to that and how you feel about, I guess, being a badass woman in leadership? [laughs]

Jayne: You know, I think it's really, really important almost more, deeply important than we can know, consciously, just to see women who don't disappear after they age. And, you know, I've thought it through a lot, but after a certain age where the world finds that they're worth something 'cause they're fertile or beautiful or whatever. So, I just think it's incredibly important to see women not become invisible. And Cornwell is a great example of that. To see women, because there are women out there in the world. They're doctors, they're surgeons, they're lawyers, they're are all sorts of things, they're architects and we don't see them enough. So, that was quite an honor and very, very important to me, personally, to play someone who—a woman, yes, who's—you know, I don't like that phrase “middle aged” because it's kind of—it has connotations, but just an older woman. You know, a woman who is not the typical, young, Hollywood thing.

But what's so interesting too, to me, and fascinating is I thought when I played her that I would be getting a bunch of letters, or when I came to a convention, it would be a lot of women, you know, of my age that would be saying, “Thank you, thank you,” and that's true. But I couldn't believe the larger number of young women who were very drawn to that character. I was like, “Wow!” You know, women who are 22, 24. And I was talking with some people about it and they said, “Well, young women need—they need to know that there's a future for them. They need to know that there's something ahead.” And I was like, “Wow.” That's an honor to give that in some small way.

Jarrah: I totally agree. So, I'm just wondering, you know, now that the season's over whether you have any other projects you're working on that you'd like to share with our audience, or any final thoughts?

Jayne: No, now that I have Twitter, thanks to Doug Jones who set me up, and then I can let people know. I don't, at the moment, have anything planned, but now I have a way of saying, “Hey guys, I'm doing this or that,” when something comes up. So, I'll let you know.

Jarrah: Amazing. Well, we will definitely share when we see you tweet. Thank you again so much for your time. It's been a real pleasure talking with you.

[comm badge activation sound effect]

Grace: Wow, another great interview everyone!

[Sue laughs]

Jarrah: All right. Well, that's going to do it for us for our first episode from Star Trek Las Vegas. Stay tuned over the next few weeks. We'll be releasing some extra supplemental episodes with some panel content. And we have another episode of interviews coming up in a couple of weeks. So, join us then. Sue, in the meantime, where can people find you elsewhere on the internet?

Sue: You can find me on Twitter @spaltor.

Grace: And what about you, Grace?

Grace: You can find me on Twitter @BoneCrusherJenk and in bed still nursing this post-con hangover.

Jarrah: Oh man, I hear that. [laughs] I'm Jarrah. You can find me on Twitter @JarrahPenguin and at TrekkieFeminist.com. To learn more about our show or to contact us visit WomenAtWarp.com or find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @WomenAtWarp. You can also email us at crew@womenatwarp.com. And for more from the Roddenberry Podcast Network visit Podcasts.Roddenberry.com. Thanks so much for listening!

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