

## Women at Warp Episode 20 Transcript: Book Club: Diane Duane

[Women at Warp theme]

**Andi:** Hi, and welcome to Women at Warp. Join us as our crew of four-women *Star Trek* fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Andi, and thanks for tuning in. I'm joined today by Sue.

**Sue:** Hi, everybody.

**Andi:** Now, today, we're going to be doing a very special book club episode, one that we've been teasing and talking about for close to three months now. When we were discussing what book to choose, we got a lot of suggestions for several of the books written by Diane Duane, especially the *Rihannsu* series, which is also known as *The Bloodwing Chronicles*. So, we actually decided to do an author focus instead of a book focus. And we are extremely lucky that Diane graciously agreed to come onto the show and answer some of our questions.

**Sue:** When we recorded our conversation with Diane, we had a lot of connectivity and latency issues on the voice over IP call. We were so happy when we finally got a stable call that we forgot to give her a chance to properly introduce herself on the show or give her a proper introduction ourselves. So, I'm going to do that right now.

Diane Duane's first novel was published in 1979. And since then, she has published more than 50 novels, numerous short stories and various comics, computer games and more. She's appeared several times on the New York Times bestseller list and garnered awards from such organizations as the American Librarians Association and the New York Public Library.

She's presently best known for her continuing *Young Wizards* series of young adult fantasy novels about the New York based teenage wizards Nita Callahan and Kit Rodriguez. She wrote one of the first episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, that would be the Emmy nominated where no one has gone before. And over the course of her career, has actually worked with *Star Trek* in more forms than any other person alive. Television, books, audio comics, manga and computer games.

**Andi:** So, basically, she's awesome.

**Sue:** She is pretty awesome.

**Andi:** We had an epic amount of fun with her when she came onto the show. And we were really excited to talk to her.

**Sue:** So, we're going to jump right into that interview.

**Andi:** So, was there any pressure from the publishers' post *TNG* to manipulate the *Rihannsu* series into more like the Romulans that were presented on the TV show?

**Diane:** The answer is no, absolutely not. The understanding when I came back to work on the book again was that this portion of the *Star Trek* universe had more or less been ring fenced for me, that they understood that it was an AU and that they were fine with that. I have to confess, that turned my brains around in my head a little bit. First of all, because it's an insane honor to have them say, "Come on in here and write alternate *Star Trek*," as it were under the aegis of the franchise. I said, "Well, fine."

What seemed to be the issue at the publisher's end was that people liked the books as they had been started in the beginning of the series. And that was the way they wanted to continue. And so, I just said, "Okay, I can cope with that." I went on to complete the series as it had been originally planned before everything went a little bit crazy. And that's the way it went. So, I was very happy to get the chance to finish up that story arc, which had been leaning on my shoulder whispering to me for a lot of years, and to send it on its way. That was a lot of fun.

**Sue:** What's it like to write novels set in a TV series universe knowing that what you create won't be considered canon and that anything you've meticulously established can be contradicted by a few lines of dialogue on screen?

**Diane:** This may shock people, but that doesn't bother me in the slightest. It's probably not terribly well known, but within literally months of becoming a published novelist, I was also working in television. That's the way it is in TV, that anything you write this week may be contradicted completely by something the franchise you're working with sanctions next week or the week after. And that's just the way it goes. You pull on your big girl knickers and get over it.

You'd be surprised how many people don't. There are a great number of, in particular novelists who are so used to being gods in their own universe. That's one of the pleasures of being a novelist, generally, that they find it very difficult to do franchise work of any kind, whether it's television or film, or whether it is writing spin off for. But I came very early to the understanding that I was most likely going to be rewritten, sometimes violently, [laughs] within an inch of my life, within hours of finishing a piece of work.

If you're going to work for very long in film or television or animation, which is where I got started, you learn that that's just how it is. If you can't cope with creativity in that mode, you need to get out of it, because they're not going to make it any easier for you. That's not their job.

Fortunately, when I broke into animation, my story editors actually came looking for me, having read my first novel, and they said, "Would you like to write cartoons?" I went, "Oh, yes, why wouldn't I?" And shortly thereafter, I found myself writing for *Scooby Doo*. It's an interesting situation to be able to say that Scrappy and I are colleagues, [chuckles] or contemporaries anyway. We got into animation around the same time.

Really you just get used to being rewritten more or less immediately. It's all part of the rough and tumble of television writing from the very lowest levels, the animated levels, right up to high end miniseries work. You get notes, you get rewritten. That's just the way it is. And whatever you did last season may be completely rolled over with cleats this season. You just pick yourself up, dust yourself off and say, the important question at this point is, did the check clear? If the check cleared, you're okay, and you dust off and get ready to do it again.

The books, it's the same deal. When you enter into work for hire at the novel writing end for a licensor, be it Tom Clancy, or Marvel or Paramount for *Trek* or whatever, you understand perfectly well that they own every word you're writing for this and that they can do whatever they please with it. That may involve completely discrediting or disavowing everything you did next year or the year after. You shrug and you say to yourself, did the check clear?

The other important thing about it is you don't do this work so much for longevity in the creative mode. You do it, because you really want to do it. You do it, because you're willing to take the chance of your work, becoming less than canonical. Not that it wasn't less than canonical to start with within minutes of having committed it. But you are willing to do that, because you just wanted to tell that particular story so much that you didn't care.

When I first got into it, at the *Star Trek* novel-- I had read a *Star Trek* novel by another writer who I knew. And to say, I was disappointed by it would be putting it real mildly. And I walked out of that experience with that book. I chuck the book away and I said to myself, "I could eat a ream of typing paper and barf a better *Star Trek* novel than that."

**Sue:** [laughs]

**Diane:** Big words, right? I started revolving in my mind a plot that had been obsessing me for a little while or haunting me for a bit. And finally, I called my agent and I said, "Don, guess what? I'm going to write a *Star Trek* novel." There's this long pause at the other end on the phone. He says, "Do you have to?" And I said, "Yes. Yes, I have to." Because the definition for me, then and now for a good *Star Trek* novel is one that can't effectively be told in any other universe, which was why once.

When somebody accused me of having retreaded some other science fiction work I was doing by just filing the character names off and sticking *Star Trek* characters into it, I became really incensed. I don't do that. I don't need to do that. Does anyone think I am so short of ideas that I would need to do that kind of thing. I got really angry over that. But anyway.

So, I went off, did this outline and my agent sent it off to Bantam as was at that point. They were just actually at that point about to change the novel franchise from Bantam to Pocket Books. And Bantam said, "God, we love this, but we're not going to have the license for long."

There was the usual kerfuffle that attends a license or changing publishing houses. And finally, when Pocket had the rights, they said, "This book that you pitched to Bantam, we love this. We want to publish it." And I said, "Fine, let's go." So, that *The Wounded Sky*. After I did that, they said, "Well, would you ever like to do some more?" I went, "You know, it's funny you should mention. [laughs] I have a few more ideas lying around." And that's the way that went.

**Andi:** How did you meet David Gerrold, and what effect did he have on your writing in general?

**Diane:** We met at a science fiction convention in New York. It was one of my first ones. I was working with the Con Committee on that one. I have a lot of history with New York science fiction and *Star Trek* fandom. David was a guest at this thing. If I remember correctly, he wasn't feeling well that evening. I suppose that you would know that before I was professionally published, before I was a writer full time, I was a nurse. And so, somebody said, "One of the guests isn't feeling well. Come on and take a look at him." And I did. He was fine.

I think it was as much the sort of pressure of him being chased down the hallway by a bunch of people who were really eager to have a long discussion of something with him and just the general wear and tear of being a convention. We got friendly. And the issue of writing for a living and what it was like came up. David was a great example of how it could be done when it was working. Some years went by, I left psychiatric nursing in New York and started doing private duty and other public health nursing in California.

After a while of being out there, suddenly, I found myself working with David as his assistant. It was enjoyable work. But in particular, what I got a firsthand education in was what it looked to be someone who wrote professionally for a living. David is a hard worker. David is one of those people who takes no bullshit from his muse. He sits down and gets the work done. I looked at him and it looked surprisingly easy, actually, such as [chuckles] the self-assurance

of the young. I said, well, he's doing this. And apparently, it is possible to make a living doing this, so well, maybe this is worth a try.

I had been writing for my own entertainment ever since I was very small. I think I wrote my first novel at seven or eight and illustrated it with crayon and the whole thing. And from that moment until meeting up with David and coming to work for him, it had literally never occurred to me that writing professionally was something I could do. And finally, I said, well, okay, it's working for him. Maybe, maybe this is what could work for me. So, very quietly at that point, I started work on my first novel.

I say very quietly, because the day I made the mistake of telling David that this really looked like a good thing and that I would like to be a writer, he rolled his eyes at the ceiling and said, "Oh, God, another one." He didn't know, but that was absolutely the best thing he could have done, because I just sort of looked at him quietly and I thought, you supercilious son of a bitch, I am going to show you. And so, I went off quietly and started work on my first book. Occasionally, when he was away on holiday, I would use some of his equipment. He had a very, very early computer that I was using to help me in typing out my drafts.

As it happens, I got a little careless about the way I was disposing of my paperwork. He actually found a page of something I had been typing, and he looked at it, he said, "This doesn't look terrible from what I can see. I'll tell you what. When you're done with this book, why don't you let me read it? And if I like it, I'll give it to my publisher and we'll see what they say," which was extremely generous and good of him. And so, I finished the book, gave it to him. He went, "Huh, okay." Read it. And immediately sent it to his publisher. And two weeks later the publisher bought it. And that was *The Door Into Fire*. And over the course of the next couple years, that got me nominated twice in a row for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer.

So, that was an auspicious beginning, I think it's fair to say. But David in particular, I think was there accelerating a process that I like to think would have happened eventually. But there's no question whatever that he really sped it up. He is, as a writer, a tremendous role model. He is merciless with himself, he is very tough on himself as regards his background work, his research and he is one of those people who will go hunting the right word, the exact right word to use in the exact right place and will not rest until he's chased it to its lair. That is a really good role model to have. And to this day, I have a tremendous amount to thank him for.

50 novels later, I think it's fair to say that he was not mistaken in what he pegged as promising raw material. And that said, there are still days when this material feels pretty raw. [laughs] 50 novels on, I'm maybe more aware than previously that there is a lot to learn yet. I'm really just hitting my stride now. But if not for David, this would have taken a lot longer happening.

**Andi:** Okay. Does your experience in psychiatric care help you flesh out your characters? And if so, how? How do you make aliens seem truly alien, yet still bring out enough of their humanity that readers can identify with them?

**Diane:** The second question, I wish I knew how to describe how I do that. I'm not clear. I've had a lot of good example. C. J. Cherryh, for example, is one of the absolute masters of doing really alien, alien-seeming species that you can still find some shred of common ground with. Motivation is key, I would guess. That's one of the reasons the psychiatric training is of assistance. Because when I was training, at least, most of psych nursing is about understanding motivation, why do people do the things they do?

If you can describe that well for characters in a book, then people will find a way to get in sync with them. That's really it. If you have a clear sense of what motivates your characters and how to find that, how to drill down or tunnel through to what your character's major business is about, that works well in prose and it works well in film. So, everything I learned in psych in that mode, I bring to my writing work day by day. It hasn't let me down yet, so this is useful.

**Andi:** I feel like you can see your psychiatric background and your *Enterprise's* commitment to the mental health of the crew, specifically with the addition of the recreation department and Harb Tanzer as a character.

**Diane:** Absolutely. Just can't really do their job under stress, it would seem to me, unless they have a chance to relax. Even the relaxation is going to require a certain amount of guidance in how you relax. I have always felt that if I had anything to bring to the *Enterprise* in general, it's the concept of it as a very, very large team of consummate professionals. I don't think idiots will last long in space, [laughs] if you follow me. I think the people who are sent out to do Starfleet work have to be really good at their jobs. People who work that hard and that effectively will also play very hard and effectively. They'll need to feel that they can do that safely, that they have a space where they can let loose and know that what they need to do to recreate themselves literally is not going to be misunderstood.

And that, I suppose, is where that came from. And one finds, as we follow that set of characters through the books, that just because they play hard doesn't mean they can't work hard or be quite deadly when they need to in the protection of the *Enterprise*, it seemed, you know even a good man has to go to war sometimes. The people who run the *Enterprise's* playtime will be just as deadly about taking care of the ship itself when they have to be.

**Andi:** As for the consummate professional bit, I see that in how you wrote Sulu, Kirk trusts him to run the helm with little to no interference and you give him some seriously badass moments.

**Diane:** Oh, but I love George Takei. [laughs] So much, I love Sulu's character and what George brought to it, brings to it. Again, yes, a professional. If they are superlatively talented at something, let them get the hell on with it. And they will prove you right. They will go out of their way to take care of you and prove to you how good they are at what they do. That makes your central characters stronger, not weaker, that they can impel that kind of performance from the people they work with. A good manager says what they need and then gets the hell out of your way. I would really like to think that Kirk would be.

**Sue:** So, your *Star Trek* TV credit is for the *TNG* episode where no one has gone before, which is the episode where we're introduced to the traveler for the first time. How did you get into writing for *Star Trek* on TV?

**Diane:** [laughs] Yeah. Well, it's mostly as I described it, having started in at the novel end. When I wrote *The Wounded Sky*, I left it behind me for some years and then *Trek* came back to television. And suddenly, everybody in town, everybody in LA, was working on a *Star Trek* script. It was inevitable.

Michael Reeves, who is an old writing buddy and whose house we were actually living in, [chuckles] Michael came to me one evening and said, "Look, I've been working on an outline for a *Trek* script here. It keeps looking like *The Wounded Sky*. So, why don't we just do this? Why don't we go in and pitch together?" And that was so insanely jealous, excuse me, not jealous, of course, so generous of him. And at that point in particular, it was generous, because I had no live action credit at that point and they were only taking Writers Guild members for pitching.

So, we went in and pitched. I have to say, that was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. I have scrubbed in on brain surgery. It did not frighten me as much as go as waiting outside Gene Roddenberry's office, getting ready to go in and pitch to him. And that said, it was completely ridiculous to be concerned. Gene was a pussycat. Bob Justman was there, David was there because he had helped us get in that particular door.

And to hear them describe what we pitched them at that point as the *Star Trek* is *Star Trek* story they had ever heard, that was a bit of a blast. Now, that said, [chuckles] positive beginnings like that don't necessarily mean that everything is going to run smoothly afterwards. We were most comprehensively rewritten. Yeah, there were considerable changes of the script that Michael and I turned in, and we then went on holiday to the UK, because Worldcon was in Brighton that year.

Of the script that we turned in, one scene and one line of dialogue-- Excuse me, one scene and one shot remain. The shot is mine. That's Picard going into the turbolift and nearly falling out of the ship. And the one scene is Michael's scene with Picard and his mother, who has been dead for some time.

This goes back in its way to what I was discussing earlier about the dangers of working for any licensor, that what you did last time may not stay valid for very long. When we saw how thoroughly we had been rewritten, our first intention when we were-- As I said, on holiday, and we must have spent two or three nights and several bottles of wine inventing exciting pseudonyms for ourselves, because if you don't like a rewrite, the guild will allow you to-- Instead of having your own name on the credits, use a pseudonym instead. We actually got so busy inventing pseudonyms that by the time we had decided on anything, the episode was already in the can [chuckles] and it was too late.

And that said, when it got nominated for an award here and there, it was still our names that showed, not the name of the person who had completely rewritten it. You take a deep breath, and you look to see did the check clear and yes, the check cleared, and you move on. This is what TV writers do. It's just part of the landscape. It was a little piquant, perhaps, in that we were one of the very first episodes done. And as a result, no one was really clear who-- In some cases, what the characters even looked like.

When Michael and I were writing *Picard*, Patrick Stewart had not yet been cast. So, all we knew was that the captain of the Enterprise, well, he had some French background. That's really all we knew about him. And so, we were working in a vacuum. Yet even in the extremely rewritten state and at that very early stage of production of the series, everyone does brilliantly. It's hard to begrudge the way it turned out. It's just what's so.

**Sue:** Did you ever pitch another story for the show?

**Diane:** Not then. Not for quite a while. I remember pitching to Ron Moore sometime later, but I think that may have been for *DS9*. It's quite a while and we were actually living-- We had settled in Ireland at that point. I remember having a long discussion with Ron over the phone and the story didn't go. But that happens 9 times out of 10, or 20 times or 50 times. You'll pitch 50 times for the one that actually makes it over the transom. No, but I have fond memories that was quite an experience at that point in time.

**Andi:** Where do you get your ideas for some of the more exotic aliens in your books?

**Diane:** I tend to look a surprising amount at deep sea life. There is some really odd stuff going on [chuckles] underwater on this planet alone. Some of those things you can

extrapolate into alien looking creatures without too much trouble. I have an unused alien box in the bottom of my head that I'll just dig around in there when I need an alien and pull one.

**Andi:** Oh, fun fact. Another show on our network did a role-playing show where one of the hosts played Cmdr. Flipper, which is super similar to your character Hui. And they did it for their 100th episode. So, Cmdr. Flipper is now actually a part of the Trek FM family.

**Diane:** Well, why the hell not? Hui was a present for Rick Sternbach. Rick had been one of the first ones to postulate that there would be Delphine or Cetacean crew members in Starfleet. I was thinking of him when I wrote that part. If I did a small sneaky tie into the *Young Wizards* universe, I can't be blamed for that. You got to do something to entertain yourself every now and then.

**Sue:** Who's your favorite original character that you created?

**Diane:** I think it has to be Ael. The whole *Rihannsu* end of things, I was very much looking for a female character who would be Kirk's equal and the kind of person that both of them would look at the other one and go, "God damn them." [chuckles] Each of them would be quite attracted to one another, yet find the other one completely untenable and annoying sometimes, and yet completely respect each other.

If there was a little subtext of Bern going on there, if there was a little, wouldn't it be interesting? No, no, of course, we can't even think about that because we have a job to do here. Let that be there. Let the subtext be there, but let it at all times be deeply submerged and just never let on. But I saw no reason that couldn't be done. I thought to myself at the time, it's about time there was a character like this to be a foil for Kirk. A lot of people seem to have liked the way that turned out.

**Andi:** Ael and Kirk actually prompted my first try at fan fiction, please don't go looking for it, it's terrible.

**Diane:** No, no fear. No fear. You should have seen my first fan fiction. Oh, geez, are you kidding? *Star Trek* fusion with the Monkeys, all right? [laughs] I don't know why I'm confessing to this. I really don't. It's the old thing. You cannot tell where the way you start is going to lead you. It's very, very odd. It never occurred to me writing *Trek* fanfic. It was terrible, terrible *Trek* fanfic back in the day that I would someday fetch up and why don't we try talking like human beings?

[laughter]

Since the system actually seems to be supporting that.

**Andi:** Just to say that actually, we got some good stuff. Your answers are awesome. I was just rocking back and forth, wishing I could say something every once in a while.

[laughter]

**Diane:** Thank you.

**Andi:** So, we ended by saying, Ael fan fiction. Basically, I don't think I've ever shipped anything in the original series so hard as I shipped Ael and Kirk, I was like, "All about it." And Sue might have a little bit of a background in fan fiction as well.

**Sue:** [laughs] I don't-- [crosstalk]

**Andi:** Specifically, Picard, Crusher.

[laughter]

**Diane:** Oh, dear me. It's where I came from. The funny thing right now is because of things like *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Twilight*, suddenly everybody is lurching out of the woodwork. And if they have any fanfic credential at all, they're waving it around over their heads. I come of a slightly older time, where it wasn't that we were ever instructed to hide it or anything like that. It's just that it wasn't discussed. It didn't really seem to come up. But God knows it's there. My fantasy work is grounded in terrible, Tolkien fanfic that I wrote and so on down the line.

The *Trek* stuff, I was a First-Generation Trekkie, so I had plenty of time to refine what I wanted to do in that universe between when I first saw it when I was 16, and when I started writing it professionally at whatever the hell age I was, 26 or 27 or 28, I don't even know anymore. Right now, I'm working on four different novels and two screenplays and all this other crap.

When you are a career writer, can really just be hard to keep track. It doesn't mean that even though you've got all this stuff going on that you don't love every single one of them, like your firstborn child. It's really hard to love them all that way at once. [laughs] So, you have to pick one to work on today and one to work on the next day.

Or, when you get the phone call that says, "Drop everything and do this now," then you fall madly in love with that particular thing for six months and then, you pick yourself up having exhausted yourself in the service of this universe over here, and you must immediately rush headlong into that other universe over there, and get into it and get your arms dirty and your hands. It's exciting in its way.

There is never at this end of things any danger of running out of ideas. That's what incensed me so hard about that one person who accused me of retreading something for *Trek*. I would never do it that disservice. But also, it would be a bad day around here if I had not had two or three novel ideas by the time I was finished with breakfast. [Andi laughs] But the truth is most ideas are crap. Most of them will not stand up to the strain of expanding them into full size stories.

Some ideas are just too slight. They just won't bear up under the stresses of what you need to do to make a good novel or a good screenplay of them. Some will, but they belong to other people, which is an annoyance, but you know that happens in the real world. So, unless you can get the permission to use those ideas, there's nowhere you can take that. Some will definitely work, but just the time isn't right there.

There's no support for it right now in the industry or the other side of it is the personal side, you may have your desk stacked up with so many projects you are working on that you just have no choice, but to say to something that someone offers to you, "I just can't. I can't do that now," and then it gets given to someone else and you weep little tears [chuckles] in the middle of the night sometimes. And there's just nothing you can do. It happens that way. But ideas, my to-do list is too long to look at right now. I need to live another 60 years, frankly, because otherwise, I'm not going to get all this work done.

**Andi:** I was wondering where Worf and Riker's love of opera comes from.

**Diane:** I have loved opera for many, many, many years, which is one of the reasons I got so excited about the prospect of being invited in on the ring thing. Especially, since we decided as we went into it that we were completely going to throw Wagner to one side that were not



any of the operatic tropes in the material that we were going to derive everything from the Elder Edda and that whole line of thought. But I love opera, like crazy. There are people who will claim that one of the ways you know for sure it's a Diane Duane story is if there's opera hidden in it somewhere. [Andi laughs] That's possible. There might be some truth in that.

You also have to look out for references to Switzerland [laughs] which is a place I love very, very much. Where were we? Opera. So, no the opera at a connection has been there for many, many years. We went on a school trip to The Met when I was, I think in fifth grade. There was a beautiful lady in a shiny dress standing on a step ladder singing the great aria *Astra Fiamonte*, the queen of the night sings at the beginning of *The Magic Flute*. And I was gone. I said, "That's it. I'm done. I love this. What is it?" [laughs] I've spent the next 50 years finding out what it is. Opera is a fabulous art form. God, I love it.

**Andi:** One of the things that I really enjoy about your books is how well you write the characters. McCoy especially is one of the ones that comes to mind for that. I hear his voice when you're writing him. Is there a specific character that's really easy to write for? Are there some that are hard to write for that you had trouble finding their voices?

**Diane:** I don't know that it's a matter of having trouble. I think you have to listen. You have to listen really hard to make sure you get the cadence right. If you watch enough *Star Trek*, you will acquire a certain level of expertise where you can hear things-- When you try them out in prose, you can hear things that Sulu would not say, that Chekov would not say, that Kirk would not say. If you could avoid those things, you'll be all right.

It works for me, at least. It's been such a pleasure lately rewatching the digitally remastered versions of *The Original Series*, and just reacquainting myself with the sound of those voices and their cadences in particular with an eye to comparing them to what's going on in the new sets of movies. And in particular, the way Karl Urban channels McCoy is so bloody brilliant.

**Andi:** Yes.

**Diane:** And the way Zach does Spock. Just moments when the voices are identical, and the cadences and the rhythms in which they speak are perfect. Perfect. I saw to my great delight the other day that apparently Karl Urban has taken to wearing the pinky ring [Sue laughs] that McCoy, which I had never really noticed, and now that I know about it, you see it everywhere, that DeForest Kelley insisted he be allowed to wear. It was something from his mother.

He apparently told Gene Roddenberry, "If I cannot wear this ring when I'm shooting McCoy, I will not play the character." And finally, Roddenberry said, "Well, okay. Yeah, fine." And so, you look at the little finger of his left hand, he's always got that ring. Karl Urban is wearing it as well in the films. It's fabulous. The commitment to getting it right is just so amazing. [laughs]

**Sue:** Do you have a favorite character to write for, or-

**Diane:** I don't know.

**Sue:** -is it just whichever mindset that you're in at the time?

**Diane:** It's the one I'm writing right now. It's usually the one I'm writing right now. I've been constructing a series of in between stories to fit in between books 9 and 10 of the *Young Wizards Series*. Book 10 comes out in February, *Games Wizards Play*. And between *A Wizard of Mars* and that five years of real time has elapsed. I've just spent the guts of the last two and a half months inside Kit's head.

As most of the books have been written with Nita as the primary point of view character, though that's been sliding a little bit in more recent books, partly just because of a sense that Kit has not been getting enough airtime. Having just spent the last month in his head, it's like, "I love him." [laughs] I love my character so much. He is so great. And God knows. His sister Carmela is a danger. She is a terror. I look forward to spending some time in her head if it can be worked out to happen in book 11. But it's whoever I'm working on now.

After I finish the projects I'm working on at the moment, I know I have one more *Star Trek* novel in me and I need to find out who I have to talk to about that at Pocket Books and say, "Let's tell this story." And that is such a Kirk and Spock story. It's going to be so funny. The working title is *Grand Theft Starship*. [Sue laughs]

Kirk is so good at stealing starships. Let's actually send him to steal one for a change, right? That's like not a Romulan one or whatever. We'll see if they go for this. I'm really hoping they will go for the storyline. It's all outlined. It's been ready for a while. It's just I had other things I had to finish first. I'm just hoping that-- Well, there's a film project looming over the horizon whose name I cannot speak at the moment, but I'm just hoping that stays out of the way for a few months, because I would love to get a first draft on this book in to Pocket, assuming that they like it and just let them run loose. Oh, God.

**Sue:** So, does it always work that way where you have to pitch a story idea to them, they never come to you when you're writing tie in novels?

**Diane:** Pretty much. Yeah. That's been the way it's been for me. The exception will be if an editor has an idea that they think would be terrific for you to write, they'll bring it to you. But generally speaking, my experience has been that they seem to prefer the ones that I bring to them. Again, that syncs up with my concept of the way I prefer to deal with licensed properties in general. But in particular with *Star Trek*, there are a lot of people who would open their veins in front of you for the right to write a *Star Trek* novel. This makes me [unintelligible 00:42:34] of wanting to hog the privilege. I've gotten to do this 10 times now.

There are lots of other people who ought to have a chance to grab this ring off the carousel as they go around. So, I have no intention of pitching any story to Pocket or Paramount that cannot best told as a *Star Trek* story. I have lots of other places to tell general science fiction stories or fantasy stories or whatever. But whatever I bring them has got to best suited for *Star Trek*. I will not exploit one of those precious novel slots for anything else, which is why I would resist, frankly. If even if the editors did descend on me and say, "We think you'd be perfect for this thing," that may be so, but I resist that a bit.

**Sue:** So, I think this follows. It's something I've been wondering about with *Dark Mirror*. You basically have written the only foray into the *Mirror* universe for the *TNG* crew. Its oftentimes people call those next-gen characters too perfect or just too precious. So, what was it like [Diane laughs] taking them into that darker universe?

**Diane:** Oh, God, that was delicious. Are you kidding? I have more mail from young boys and young men asking me, please to send them pictures of what Deanna looks like in her version of the uniform.

**Andi:** [laughs] Dark Troi.

**Diane:** So, Dark Troi. There is always that temptation-- Among writers, writers joke about it, about doing the evil twin thing, because it's seen as too easy. It's seen as low hanging fruit. Yet at the same time, if you are sufficiently in the unmirrored character's head to know where their weaknesses are, it's possible to construct a very believable *Mirror* version, one that

exploits those weaknesses and turns them dark. I don't think anybody looks at the mirror Sulu and [laughs] finds him too precious. It's like, "Oh, George, what did you do there?" Anyway, it was a lot of fun. It's a lot of fun sitting around thinking how do you turn Picard evil? What is a nasty Troi like? Barclay.

[laughter]

Oh, God, who is so ineffective in the real world. He's ineffective still in this one, but in a different way. That's a nasty way. It's just a lot of fun playing with that. I think all of us who are self-examining enough to understand that there are parts of us that can't bear the daylight terribly well would find a certain amount of amusement in building the bad version of these nice characters. The bad Picard is just like, "Oh, boy, what a grease ball." [laughs] Oh, God.

The joy of it for me is in watching the home universe characters reactions to them. That's where it really works. And also, to a lesser extent for me, because background is everything in constructing the universe that creates these characters and it makes it possible for them to be so God awful. That was fun. I have a long-time fondness for alternate histories, for studying the hinge points at which things go wrong. That was fun. Doing that for the *Federation*, that was enjoyable.

**Andi:** One thing I like is that how some of the characteristics in the dark versions are the same. And Picard having to deal with the fact that, "Hey, he painted the same painting in two different universes. What does that say about him and his "good universe" that he still shares those qualities?"

**Diane:** Yeah, absolutely. Because it can't be completely different. Otherwise, no one will buy it. It's just not as interesting if there aren't some points where the Venn diagram does overlap. Because without that, there's no conflict. If the other person is completely a wrong version of you, then you have no problem with clocking him over the head with the vase [laughs] and killing him. There needs to be drama. Drama is conflict. And in this case, conflict can lie very fruitfully in the way these two characters are alike instead of or as well as the ways they're different.

**Andi:** Do you have a background in science? Because you use a lot of science. You made up an entire discipline called Creative Physics, which I enjoyed. What is your background in science? Because you write it very convincingly, although, I'll be the first to admit I know nothing about science.

**Diane:** Before I went into nursing school, I was studying astrophysics. It was my idea that I was going to be a professional astronomer. Then I found out, A, it's really hard to get any work being a professional astronomer, and B, I hit the higher math and bounced. I became aware that though I might understand generally how a red giant worked or what was going on inside a black hole. I was not going to be able to describe that in terms of the mathematics, and therefore, my chances of getting a job in this business were like zero.

**Sue:** This is my favorite thing. [laughs] I'm sorry. I went into school also studying astronomy, and I hit the physics and bounced and wound up with a math degree. This is my favorite. [laughs]

**Diane:** So, there it is. I'd been in love with astronomy since I was eight. Our family's lawyer, for my eight birthday, gave me a subscription to sky and Telescope. And that was it. I was done. I knew immediately that I was going to love this thing for the rest of my life, that it was profoundly important that astronomy just mattered, and that all the sciences associated with it mattered. I still maintain a tremendous interest, not just in astronomy in general, but in

things like space medicine. And that never went away. When I became clear that science wasn't going to work, I turned my attention to the biological side. I had won a New York State Regents Science and Nursing Scholarship in high school.

When the science blew out underneath me, I said, "Well, there's still the nursing, isn't there?" And so, off I went to nursing school. And that worked fine. It taught me immediately never to be squeaked by anything. The very first day I was on the ward in nursing school-- You must bear in mind that at that time, because it was a nursing school based at a psychiatric hospital in one of the old-style chronic hospitals where people were just warehoused when they got old.

The first day on the wards, one of my patients that I was treating had gangrene and a significant portion of their foot came off in my hand while I was dressing it.

**Sue:** [squicks]

**Diane:** Yeah. Yeah, exactly. That is the point at which I understood that either if I had a problem with this, I was going to have to get over it real quick. And frankly, there's nothing to help you get over this squick problem better than going to school with other nursing students,, because lunchtime at nursing school turns into a who can squick everybody else out best contest. [Sue laughs]

And so, by the end of your first year, its handled. You've seen all the most horrible things you can possibly see. You've seen people get sick in ways that in your wildest imaginings would not have treated you to. You will see, as I did, a fair amount of death quite early on and you get used to it. That whole turn of mind is something that--

I'd say it's useful both, just in general life, but also, frankly, as a career writer, because you quickly learn that the thing that you thought you absolutely could not bear yesterday. You can bear if you stand up under it and say, "Okay, I am going to be the master of this situation. It is not going to be the master of me." You learn grit. You learn grit in nursing school.

**Sue:** Your stories from nursing school reminded me immediately of the scene in *Intellivore*, where Crusher's talking to Picard about her experiences, I guess, in her residency.

**Diane:** Yeah. Yeah. That was a difficult scene to write and in retrospect, incredibly ableist. I look at that now and think, I wish to God there was some way I could have phrased that better, because while it communicates the feeling of helplessness, there has to be a way to write that scene that would be less disenfranchising.

Nonetheless, one of the other things you do learn, even if you don't always learn how to express it correctly, is compassion. You cannot stay in nursing if you don't have a fair amount of compassion or learn it, learn it quick. And that maybe has been more useful to me in my writing than anything else. Because again, it enables you to get into the heads of your characters and feel the pain that they need to be feeling when they go through some of the crap you put them through. Because as a writer, you really have a job to be merciless and cruel to your characters.

You do not develop strength or growth in characters you're building by being nice to them. Your job is to take them to a bad place and push them through it, so they learn how to better than they are. But at the same time, you're allowed to feel sorry for them, even while you are dumping, pardon my French, shitloads of trouble on their heads. It's your job as their creator to make them better than they were when you started or incredibly worse, so that when you kill them, everyone goes, "Oh, thank God."

[laughter]

For every [unintelligible 00:54:21] we're at, the building of good villains is something I study with intense interest, because they can't be completely dark. You cannot have bad guys who are completely irredeemable. There always has to be that sense that maybe, maybe you could get them back if you could figure out the right thing to say. The harsh truth is in some cases no. No, you won't get them back. They are just, "They're evil. Kill them." [Sue laughs]

There is at the end of the day, both tremendous satisfaction in that and always at the character creating end, a little bit of sorrow going, "Oh, God, I wish. But no, you needed to be dead. It's fine."

[laughter]

And then, you move on.

**Andi:** Moving a little bit away from the science and math side of things, can you talk a little bit about the fact that you developed a language for *Rihannsu* and how-- I mean, what kind of tools did you bring to that?

**Diane:** I'm faking it.

[laughter]

Really faking it, and good example. One of my favorite, favorite writers again, C. J. Cherryh. She has a number of books in which the characters-- She throws earth-based characters in with aliens at the deep end and forces them to learn their languages. In particular, there is one book called-- Oh, God, it's not *Brother of Worlds*, it's the other one. Oh, its title is eluding me. I'll find it later. I'll mail it to you later.

But she takes this human character alone, cold, stranded at the far fringes of space so far away from earth that no one is even terribly sure what he is, and flings him into the midst of an incredibly involved-- *Hunter of Worlds*. That was it. *Hunter of Worlds*. Flings him into the middle of this incredibly complex multi-planet political situation to the solution of which he will eventually be key. But he has no language and he has to learn it word by word from these people as the book progresses.

The amazing thing is, by the end of the book, the reader, you, the reader understand a significant portion of this language as well. Carolyn is so good at what she does. Then again, she was a Latin teacher, all right? So, it's the kind of expertise and bravura that you would expect from someone who taught people languages professionally. I read that book and fell so hard in love with it. And I said, "If she did this, I can do this."

And so, what I did was simply invent a number of words that I knew I was going to need to assign a meaning to. And then, I wrote a very simple basic program that mimicked the sound of the words I had invented. Essentially, the language is a cross between Welsh and Latin some ways. It shares phonemes and consonant pairs from both. I instructed this language production program, just a very simple thing, to build me lots more words. And this it did. And then, I developed a very rudimentary grammar for those words, and started stringing them together and adding them judiciously, I hope, to the story. Essentially, I was doing my own spin on what C.J. did in *Hunter of Worlds*, which is such a fabulous book. I recommend it insanely to everybody.

Again, her way with aliens. She produces humanoid aliens in this that are true predators. And they are so scary. They look lovely. The [unintelligible 00:58:27] are really cool looking

and boy, you don't want to be shut in a room with one at the wrong time of month, bad. So, it was a great example, and I just put my own spin on that, and then expanded it on a little through the books that followed as I became clear exactly how much of the language I needed and how much I didn't, because there comes a magic tipping point where there are too many cool alien words and your reader says, "Okay, board with this now," and throws the book at the wall. Controlling the creative impulse in this regard is as important as exercising it.

**Andi:** I'm going to have your help with this next question, because I'm glad to find out that I guessed how to pronounce Ael's name on my own.

**Diane:** Uh-huh.

**Andi:** Mhiessan

**Diane:** Mhiessan.

**Andi:** Mhiessan.

**Diane:** It's essentially is three syllables. Mh-ie-ssan.

**Andi:** Mhiessan.

**Diane:** It's close enough. You don't really pronounce that H very much. It falls out the way the double Ls do in Welsh. Yeah, this is the far side of the argument. Pronounce it any way you like.

[laughter]

As long as you recognize that this word means this thing over here, you're okay. I'm not going to get all pronunciation Nazi on you. It's just, say it whatever way is easiest for you to say and move on. It's the story that counts really.

**Andi:** Well, the reason I brought it up is because it's a good example of this underlying philosophy that you wrote for both *Spock's World* and *Bloodwing*. They're sisters in a way, because you have *Spock's World* exploring the Vulcan side of things and *Bloodwing*, exploring the Romulan side of things and how their history and philosophy diverge. I'm just super fascinated by that and wondering where there real-world philosophies that you used to develop those or--?

**Diane:** Not as such. It's hard to fake enlightenment.

[laughter]

It's a bit of a problem, especially when working on the material for *Cirroc*. What you need to know, is that something about this character and something about his worldview changed his whole world around him. That's the important thing to know. I've been very eclectic in my religious and ethnological studies for many years. I cherry picked the best of or what I consider the best of, for example, Zen philosophy, and cherry picked some other real obvious things like the Golden Rule and just restated them in different idioms that people hadn't seen them before. And it seems generally to have worked.

It's always humbling to say, I'm going to sit down today and try to develop a worldview that will completely save a species life. And so, you are very cautious about what you choose to put into that particular basket and how you're going to present it to people. It's either going to

work or it's not. I got lucky with *Spock's World*. I think by and large it worked. But it's not easy. Just a feeling of caution hung over that entire *Enterprise*, so to speak. [chuckles] I'm glad it seems to have worked as well as it did.

As for the Vulcan and Romulan connection, we've always known they were connected. We've never really been given that much data about how tight the connection was. And at the time, there was nothing. At the time, the publisher just said, "Go, invent whatever you want." And so, I did. It seems to have worked for a lot of people. So, I'm considering myself quite lucky in this regard.

**Andi:** Yeah. When I think about both Romulan and Vulcan history now, I'm not sure that I could separate them from what is canon, because to me, it really helped deepen all of that. I don't think I could throw it out in my mind. I don't think that I could put a clear delineation, I guess, between the two, which is a good thing, I think, but interesting.

**Diane:** A lot of people have told me that-- Yeah, a lot of people have told me that they have made better sense of what is canon by having this material to fall back on.

**Andi:** Exactly. Like the background.

**Diane:** Yeah. And that's fine. I'm delighted to have been so useful. At the end of the day, when someone asks you to get involved with writing for a thing like *Star Trek*, which has meant so much to me over the course of my life. If it wasn't for *Star Trek*, I wouldn't be married to Peter, because it was in the process of dealing with a long-standing practical joke that David played on me that Peter and I actually banged heads for the third time and fell in love. At a *Star Trek* convention, where else?

[laughter]

There are certain resonances in our life. When you do this work, or at least when I do this work, it's always with an eye of, "This has given me so much. What can I give back? What can I put into the pond for other people to find?" All writers are acquisitive to some extent. All of us learn by copying the good work of other writers. And in this particular case, it was very much an issue of what can I give *Star Trek* back from my own pool of expertise that will make it bigger. It's the old magpie trope where the magpie steals something, but it brings back something shinier to put in its place. And that has always been something I've tried to do.

If I'm going to write *Trek*, I will try to put it back bigger, deeper, edgier, more meaningful than when I found it. Not that it wasn't already. Pretty damn big, meaningful, edgy and deep already. But you try to add. If I've been successful at that, then that can only make me happy that that's great to know.

**Andi:** Sue, did you have any other questions?

**Sue:** I think only if you want to tell us about stuff you're working on now, what people should be looking for.

**Diane:** Oh, God.

[laughter]

I wish I could. That's what makes me crazy.

**Sue:** Or, most recently released.

**Diane:** This is one of the difficulties-- All right. Well, just released is the piece of work that I was talking to you about Kit, which is itself novel length *Young Wizards Lifeboats* in which the fine detail of how you save the people of a world that is about to be destroyed. We get into that in, as I said, some detail. Normally in a main sequence, *Young Wizards* book, I wouldn't really have that much time to deal with something like that. This time, there's plenty of room for it. And that is now on sale in our own eBook store, [laughs] which is for those who want to know, [ebooksdirect.dianeduane.com](http://ebooksdirect.dianeduane.com).

The other thing, the next mainstream, the main sequence *Young Wizards* novel is coming out on Groundhog Day of 2016, *Games Wizards play*, which is essentially once every 11 years, the wizardly community on earth holds what is known as the Invitational. This is an event at which the smartest new young wizards of the present into intake are invited along to demonstrate the hot new spells they've been building.

Young other wizards, slightly older than they usually are invited in to mentor the new intake or certain members of it. Nita and Kit wind up with one guy who really, really-- The question is at the beginning of the book, does he need mentors or does he need a sledgehammer just about here on the top of his head, because he is so insufferable? Nita's little sister Darien winds up mentoring a young Iranian girl who the question with her is, does she need a sledgehammer or a kick up the butt more? It's hard to tell. Things get quite involved, but there's a lot of extremely fun character stuff in that one. Some of it I'm going to get yelled at, but I don't care. It's always enjoyable.

After that, there are a couple of media projects I'm involved with that. I wish to God, oh, I wish I could discuss them. I'm waiting in particular for one of them to pop, because it means I'm going to be very busy next year with a screenplay that, frankly, I'm the only person on earth qualified to write this screenplay. And I cannot wait. I cannot-- Ah God, I just want to chew my own arm off. It's so great. [Sue laughs]

But that project also hovering in the wings. I have to talk to my editor at Harcourt about it, is *Young Wizards 11*, which doesn't yet have a title, which is so unusual. Usually, the title is the first thing that hits me for one of these books, but not in this case. I think partly that is because this case, for this universe, this book is unusually dark. There have been people who say that my books swing, "You get a light one and then a dark one. You get a light one and a dark one." Well, if *Games Wizards Play* is the light one, then book 11 is so dark it shades into the ultraviolet, it is going to be an extremely bumpy ride.

Other than that, there are, again, other things I can't really discuss either, because I have nondisclosure agreements associated with them or I just don't want to talk about them, because it's too soon. But 2015 has been lively enough. 2016, 2017 are to be extremely lively, especially at the TV and media end. I just can't-- Oh God, I wish I could get into it. [chuckles] I'm going to cry now.

**Andi:** Well, maybe we should have you back when we get a chance when you are allowed to talk.

**Diane:** You will know when.

**Andi:** [chuckles] Oh, good.

**Diane:** I promise you, you'll know when.

**Andi:** So, we won't miss it by asking.



**Diane:** But it's going to come up in conjunction with another name and people are going to say, "What?" [Andi laughs] And it's going to be so much fun. Absolutely. Well, thank you. Is there anything else you need to ask me before we [Sue laughs] close this down?

**Andi:** No, I think that's it. Thank you so much for being here. We've been really excited to talk to you for months now. I think you blew our expectations out of the water. So, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us.

**Diane:** Thank you. Thank you very much for having me. Anytime, let's do this again sometime.

**Sue:** Oh, thank you.

**Andi:** Yes. Let's do it.

**Sue:** This is so great. [laughs] We'd also love to remind you to head on over to iTunes and subscribe to the show, if you're not subscribed. And if you feel so inclined, leave us a rating on iTunes. That's what helps other listeners find our show. If you would like to support Women at Warp directly, you can visit our Patreon at P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com slash Women at Warp. And that helps us do things like travel to conventions, get the word out, speak to more *Star Trek* related people, and yeah, do some awesome things that we could not do without your support.

**Andi:** I think that's it for us. Sue, where can people find you?

**Sue:** You can find more from me over at *anomaly podcast.com*, or follow me on Twitter, @spaltor. That's S-P-A-L-T-O-R.

**Andi:** And you can find me on Twitter, @firsttimetrek, where I am live tweeting my first time through *Star Trek* and I did a *DS9* episode this morning. So, that was really fun. You can also find both Sue and I at our Facebook for Women at Warp or our website, *womenatwarp.com*. Thanks so much for listening.

**Sue:** Bye.

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