

Women at Warp Episode 2: Women on TNG

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. I'm Andi, your moderator for the week and I'm joined with Jarrah and Sue. Hi, ladies.

Jarrah: Hey.

Sue: Hello.

Andi: Today we're going to be talking about women on *The Next Generation* and now looking forward we're definitely going to be tackling a lot of topics here at Women at Warp, from specific characters and episodes, to broader thematic elements seen in Star Trek in general.

Andi: I thought I would probably be a good idea to discuss some of the bigger topics as well, such as how each series as a whole dealt with women. Probably not going to be able to fit it all into one episode, probably going to need a part two or maybe even a part three, but I thought we could start here and see how it goes now.

Andi: Now, Jarrah you did a really interesting project for your blog, *Trekkie Feminist*, where you analyzed every series, episode-by-episode, to see how they passed the Bechdel Test. How did *The Next Generation* stack up against all of the other series for women?

Jarrah: Yeah, thanks. So for those few who don't know, the Bechdel Test is sort of started out as a bit of joking reference by Alison Bechdel in her comic *Dykes to Watch Out For*. And basically, in order to pass the Bechdel Test, it's usually applied to movies, a movie needs to have two women characters who have names who talk to each other about something other than a man.

Jarrah: So it's a really really low standard, and it isn't meant to evaluate how feminist something is because you can have something that passes the Bechdel Test, but it's not feminist in any way. Like *Star Trek (2009)*, which we were talking about before the

show, passes the Bechdel Test because Uhura and her lab partner are talking about their lab assignment, while Kirk is lying under the bed watching her get changed.

Andi: So, it's the basic minimum of, you know, whether or not we have women talking.

Jarrah: Yeah, exactly. Because it's really hard to find any episode that would not pass if you changed it and made it two men talking about other than a woman. Basically every piece of media that exists would pass that test.

Jarrah: So it's just an indication of how there may not be enough women characters, or women characters might be written in stereotypical ways. So I had some volunteers who also helped me out so I didn't have to watch all of the episodes by myself. And we went through and we ran the Bechdel Test on all of Star Trek. So *TNG* came out at a 44.9% pass, 44.9% of episodes passed the Bechdel Test. The highest season score was season five, which was a little bit over 60%.

Jarrah: I guess I wasn't super surprised, it was significantly better than *The Original Series*. There were a lot more women, but I mean it's still fairly limited.

Andi: Well, what was *The Original Series'* numbers, 10%?

Jarrah: Season three it got almost to 20%, but season one was, I think, less than 5%.

Andi: I mean that's not surprising.

Jarrah: Yeah. The results are all up on <http://trekkiefeminist.tumblr.com> if you want to look at the episode-by-episode result.

Sue: You know I actually really don't think that as bad as it sounds for *TNG*. Mostly because our two main women who are there throughout the the entire series are the medical doctor and the counselor. In general when they're going to be talking to each other they're going to be talking about the mental or physical health of someone else on the crew. All of the rest of whom are male. So by default I think there are some conversations there that are about men that are really just about a crew member and

they're not talking about men in a relationship sense, even though they definitely do that as well.

Jarrah: Yeah that's totally fair. I had some people say that I should have rated those things passes, but I didn't because the writers could have theoretically made more people women which would have increased the odds of them talking about women as patients as well.

Jarrah: But it's not a perfect test but even in 'Angel One', which is about a planet ruled rule by women, we get men talking to each other about something other than women three times in the first five minutes of the episode. So it just goes to show that when you have a lot of men-characters that they are getting to converse a lot more about work related things

Andi: And then with *Voyager* you have Janeway as the captain so that theoretically any time she gives an order to a female crew member that would be a Bechdel pass because they're talking about something other than a man. So that just alone would mean that I bet *Voyager's* numbers are the highest, because even the most casual interaction from Janeway to a female crew member is going to pass that bar.

Sue: Yeah, and her chief engineer is also female.

Andi: Exactly. So this just goes to show like yes it's it's a very general way to look at you know how many women you have and how they interact with each other but it does tell us something because if you had more women it would be a million times easier for you to pass this test if you had women that are doing jobs on the ship that are not related to, you know, their male love interest or whatever you're going to have that pass a lot easier. So I mean with such a low bar you would think that our media in general could clear it quite highly, but unfortunately this is one of those bars that just don't pass as often as we should.

Andi: So I want to also talk about some of our main female characters on the ship. Obviously, we have Crusher and Troi as our main female characters. We also have a lot of recurring characters that are really interesting and we kind of discussed this a little bit

in our first episode about our general favorite female characters in Star Trek as a whole. I was wondering if you guys wanted to tell me just who your favorite female character on *TNG* is, and why, and why you see that they were handled better.

Jarrah: Now I know Sue's. I know who Sue's favorite character is.

Sue: Yeah my favorite *TNG* character is my favorite female character, Beverly Crusher.

Sue: And actually the way you posed the question I found interesting, why you felt they were treated better.

Sue: I don't necessarily think she was, but I think there was something about the way Gates McFadden portrayed the character that gave it more than the writers intended. But I think the one of the most interesting things about Crusher is that she is a single mom.

Sue: So for the first, oh how old is Wesley when the season starts? Fifteen? First fifteen years or really not first fifteen, but for the previous 10-ish years she was raising this kid alone.

Sue: And then any time that Wesley has anything going on that he needs advice on he's not turning to his mom he's turning to Riker or Picard or Geordi or Data. He's turning to one of the other men, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with meeting a male role model in this boy's life, but he never talks to his mom about anything which is really weird.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean it's kind of a common joke that they make is that Beverly doesn't do very much mothering considering that she's a mother, but that's not really the fault of Beverly, that's the fault of writers wanting to have these male bonding scenes between Wesley and some of the male crew members. Which does turn it into some interesting relationships. It's just why wouldn't you also talk to your mom about it?

Sue: It's a weird, maybe they didn't want to show that relationship but *TNG* can be strange sometimes. And I know Gates McFadden has spoken out about that several times. I know she has spoken out about how she went to the writers and she had

disagreements on them about, especially in the first season, how they were treating her character.

Sue: And that is most of the reason why she wasn't around in season two and it took a lot of convincing to bring her back to the show. But I think she's also she also has a quote where she said that she went to the writers and told them just write the character as a man, by virtue of me playing it I will make it a woman. So I do think part of my love for Beverly Crusher is because of my love for Gates McFadden, but there is something about the character and the way she played it and maybe even the snarky comments and the faces she makes now and then, or the fact that sometimes the male members of the crew really don't want to cross her path that just drew me to her since I was five years old.

Andi: I think we need to be careful here because there are a lot of really great female characters that were not well served by the writing. And I think Crusher is a good example of this, Troi is, I think, even a better example of this where it's not that we dislike the characters, it's just that we wish they were given more to do so. I agree with you that Crusher, I really like her as a character, she got some some interesting things to do, and when they did her episodes where she got to kind of stretch, she was awesome and very capable and very cool. How about you, Jarrah?

Jarrah: So when I was little I loved counselor Troi. I thought she was like a Star Trek princess and I shipped Riker/Troi. I was like, I don't know, eight years old. As I got older I really realized just how poorly she was served, like you're saying.

Jarrah: Marina Sirtis has talked a lot about this, about how she was like a potted palm on the bridge, just there for decoration, until season six when she gets to start wearing an actual uniform. And then suddenly she had brains because you weren't looking at her cleavage.

Jarrah: But I think that with her there's also that the writers just didn't respect the importance of a mental health professional. And we saw that, I think, a bite with Ezri Dax as well, that there were actually comments for some of the writers that Gene Roddenberry really wanted a counselor on the ship, and I forgot which writer was saying

this, but basically this is what will date our show because it's new-agey to have a counselor. But in fact that's actually an important job, doing people's mental health is an important job, and we just never really got to see her do that. So it's kind of disappointing.

Jarrah: She also had a lot of horrible romantic episodes that involve things like psychic rape and often involve sort of the message that women should be careful and not too free with their sexuality. So it's super problematic, but I really think Maria Sirtis has a couple outstanding episodes that really show what she could have done if she was given more stuff to do. Like 'Face of the Enemy'.

Jarrah: Yes, so I'm still a Troi fan. I like in the novels she gets a lot more stuff to do in the way of diplomacy and in counseling work and that's cool.

Andi: I find it really sad to think that people would not think that a mental health professional would not be vital on a star ship. I'm sorry but they are living in space. I can't think of one, is there something more stressful than that? I mean they're living in space, they're going on very dangerous adventures all the time, people die quite often.

Andi: I mean just imagine all of the grief counselling she would have to do every time we have one of those episodes where something blows up and they like, "Oh no! Deck 7, everyone's dead". The idea that a counselor wouldn't be extremely important in those scenarios, and also her empathy, they had such a chance to make her empathy so cool and very very useful. I mean, you're talking about diplomacy.

Andi: How how useful would it be to be empathic and a diplomat at the same time? Being able to read the room is half of what you're doing in diplomacy anyway. And they don't give her very much of a chance to do that. There is an episode where she kind of does that, but they ruin it by making her fall in love with the fellow empath.

Andi: Which is again what you're talking about earlier Jarrah, where they really didn't know what to do with her in general so all the Troi episodes with some notable exceptions, like 'Face of the Enemy', are like, "Troi falls in love with a sketchy dude, again". And it's just really unfortunate because off the top of my head I can think of so

many cool things she could have done with her powers and done with her job. Instead it just turns into a joke. "I sense that they are not telling the truth." "I sense this", which is unfair both to her character and to Marina Sirtis as an actress and it's really sad. Missed opportunity, I would say.

Sue: Even now there is a huge subset of our society that thinks mental health is a joke. You know people talk about, "Oh I need to see a counselor I really need to talk to somebody about X Y Z that's going on with me" and people just laugh at it.

Andi: Yeah and one of our more persistent issues of ableism in our society at large is that mental health is not as important as your physical health. Which is bonkers because obviously your brain is the most important thing to your entire self if it's not working correctly, that's a huge problem. If you're trying to fix your computer while ignoring the motherboard. It just doesn't make any sense. But we don't treat mental health as it's important. And a lot of times people with some of our more common forms of mental illness, depression, anxiety, these kinds of illnesses are not treated as seriously as they should be. And I think that you're absolutely right this is probably one reason why her character was sidelined because the show wasn't ready to really tackle mental health in a meaningful way.

Andi: And there are a handful of episodes where they try to you and I think it's great. I mean she does have people that come to her that are clients for her counseling services. And then you know we do get the character of Barkley who has a mental illness, and I have mixed feelings about him as a character because on the one hand I was super excited to see mental illness being brought up on Star Trek. But I was not very excited to have it be mostly a punchline, and I was not excited to have that character be portrayed as weaker as everybody else just because he has this anxiety issue that he did.

Jarrah: I just wanted to let you guys know about something I read an article in, I think, Starlog from 1995.

Jarrah: OK so this is an interview with Denise Crosby and she's saying, "I remember a scene I had to do at my audition, which really showed you what the character could have been, what I thought Tasha was going to be. It was an extraordinary scene and it was a

shame that it never appeared at any of our shows. I don't really know why it didn't. It was a scene in which Tasha had a real problem on the ship. She idolized Captain Picard. He represented a father figure to her and he embodied all of the perfect patriarchal power and together make things that she never had in her life. Because she and to out him with such powers she had problems dealing with him. He scared her and she felt very insecure around him even though she deserved to be in her position.

Jarrah: She said to Troi, who was really acting as shipboard shrink in this scene, they try to get to what Tasha's problem was. Troi out of the blue asks Tasha, 'When was the last time you had sex?' Tasha says, 'What?' And Troi asks it again. Tasha asks how that applies to the problem. Troi says, 'No, no, no, you've got to have some time off for yourself.' Basically Troi told Tasha, 'Go get laid for a few days then come back and tell me how you feel.' It was an extraordinary scene." And then she says like, "Marina and I used to talk about it all the time. Where the hell was that scene? Why didn't we ever get to do it. It allowed the two of us to interact which we rarely did in my 20-something shows and that would have been very insightful." But I don't know, what do you guys think?

Andi: I mean the fact that they would have sent someone who is having a mental issue to the counselor is good.

Sue: They never would have put that on TV in 1987.

Andi: I just don't know that they should.

Sue: I'm not sure that's the solution.

Jarrah: It's like, "So you idolized Picard and you didn't have a man in your life so go find some men to get laid with."

Sue: But you know what? It kind of points to something, because you mentioned Tasha's history, that has always kind of bugged me about *TNG* and people's reaction to *TNG*. They're like, "Oh it was made in the late 80s, it's so idealistic, nobody has any problems." But every single one of our major characters has a traumatic past.

Sue: Like Tasha was, I guess the implication is that she was like gang raped as a young child in this terrible town.

Jarrah: Numerous times.

Sue: And Troi has lost her father really young, and her mother is clearly crazy. And Crusher lost both her parents and was raised by her grandmother. Picard's father disowned him. Riker's father disappeared. There are a lot of father things, Wesley, and in addition Crusher's husband died after like five years.

Sue: You know everybody has something terrible. Like La Forge's mother disappeared. So like all these people should be having a lot more issues, and possibly depression or anxiety or separation problems, abandonment issues, than they're ever shown as having they're all just happy-go-lucky because it's the late 80s.

Jarrah: Well and partly that Gene Roddenberry apparently thought that's a lot of mental health problems, like physical health problems, would be cured in the future. So that came up in the episode, I think, 'The Bonding' where the little boy's mother dies and apparently they had a huge fight over that episode because Gene Roddenberry said, "In the future like kids aren't going to have grief over this kind of thing." And everyone, luckily, disagreed on that, because that's pretty ridiculous and they made that episode. But I think that the hand he had in creating these characters was a bit in that transitional stage that these are supposed to be people that we can admire and that part of that is somehow that they've overcome things, even if that's really unrealistic.

Andi: Think about how much character development and how much relationship development could come from Troi helping each of these people face their problems, face their pasts, and come out better on the other side. Especially Tasha Yar, who has one of the most horrific backstories you think you could ever write for anyone. And I think we could spend a whole episode, and we should, on Tasha Yar and her background and how problematic it is. But I mean that would just have made for a stronger show with stronger characterization, in my opinion. And I really don't buy the idea that mental health just becomes perfect in the future.

Sue: Think about if Wesley had actually befriended that kid who lost his father.

Andi: Yeah. I mean there are lots of story possibilities that also help, you know, people who are suffering from these sorts of mental illness see somebody overcome them in a meaningful way, in a meaningful job, and still be important and heroic. I think that could have been really really cool.

Andi: Getting a little bit back to our characters, because we went off on a really interesting tangent that maybe we should consider for another episode. 'Mental health on the Enterprise'. My favorite female character from *TNG* is Guinan and we talked a little bit about that before. And actually I think it's interesting because you know we talked about how Troi doesn't get to counsel. That's basically what Guinan does as a bartender. You know they have her having these sort of I mean there's the episode with Crusher where she leads Crusher through a traumatic event, gently, with her tending to have, what? A tennis injury or something? Help me out.

Sue and Jarrah: Tennis elbow. Yeah.

Andi: And she uses this as a way to get in with Crusher and help Crusher deal with some of her feelings. And I just I think that's really interesting that they had a counselor on board and they gave a lot of her duties to a woman who's tending bar. Which I mean I guess isn't totally out of the blue because we do have this idea that you go up to the bar, "Well what'll you have?" and then you spill out your problems to the bartender. And I just think it's cool that we actually had some of that happening at all. It could have been nice to have Troi do it but if Guinan was there, Guinan was there.

Andi: And then just in general I think she's a really gentle, but strong character and I always liked how we never quite knew what was going on with her. She was very mysterious. I never quite understood her background. And you know even what she was what race she was, it was never completely clear, which I thought was fun. And then I just really like her relationships with all the characters especially with Picard. I thought they had a really nice relationship and I would like to see more Guinan all the time.

Jarrah: Did you watch the movies yet, Andi? Like *Generations*?

Andi: I have not watched the movies yet.

Jarrah: Because they get more into her background. I wouldn't say it's a great movie but she does get to ride a unicorn on a merry go round in Picard's imaginary Victorian Christmas living room.

Andi: OK you've just sold me on that movie. If you were trying to warn me away you failed. That sounds awesome.

Andi: I'm waiting on the *TNG* movies because I've been told that I am supposed to watch *The Original Series* movies for I watch the *TNG* movies. So I just take that advice and go in it.

Andi: OK. So let's move on to more episodes. So we have some really great episodes for women in *TNG*, and we have some really bad episodes for women in *TNG*. We've got the two extremes quite represented here. So I was wondering if we could maybe go through and what's a really good episode for women for everybody in what's a really bad one? Sue if you want to start.

Sue: I think the one that we touched on a little bit before with Guinan and Crusher is a really great episode. I think it's 'Suspensions', is that right?

Andi and Jarrah: Yes. Yeah.

Sue: See, you probably made a lot more notes than I did. I'm just using my brains.

Andi: What. Hey Jarrah, can you kind of recap what that episode is?

Jarrah: I remember this one because I reviewed it pretty recently for my blog. And basically what happens, and this is actually really cool, is that Crusher invites this whole team of scientists on the ship to investigate this Ferengi scientist's idea that he can basically develop a thing that can let you fly into a sun's corona to investigate it. And so there's this other group of scientists, two of whom are women, there's a Klingon woman

and a Vulcan woman, a human man, and then this man, I cannot remember his race, but he's a blue guy. But then the man who's piloting the first mission gets killed and it looks like maybe these technologies fail. But Crusher still refuses to give up on the scientists this Ferengi scientist and then he gets killed. So it's kind of a murder mystery.

Jarrah: And she is bent on proving his theories to try to find out the truth of the situation and not let his ideas die. So it's really neat because we don't really get to see her, like we see her doing experiments, but really doing science outside a medical setting is kind of cool. Plus she totally stares down this awesome Klingon who basically like she slams her against a wall and Crusher just like gets up and stares her down. It's pretty great. So sorry I was just like taken away your part, Sue.

Andi: Like Crusher as detective. I do remember that episode. I couldn't remember which episode Guinan-Crusher scene was from, but I do remember this episode and it is a good one. Crusher gets a lot to do in it. And you know it's always nice to see her doing fun stuff and what's more fun than being a murder mystery detective?

Sue: And that she goes up against her commanding officer too. Picard's like, "You can't do this, I'm going to take away your commission." she's like, "Go ahead, I'll do it anyway because it is the right thing to do and it is the thing I care about and I'm not just going to let whatever be swept under the rug."

Andi: It's nice too because so often we have women that are portrayed as hysterical or emotional and, you know, illogical and not the right when they have these suspicions. But Crusher's totally proved to be completely right in the end she was totally right to pursue it so strongly and everybody dismissed her was wrong.

Sue: Although, she does go against a cultural wishes, I think, to perform an autopsy and that's another issue that happens a lot in Star Trek.

Jarrah: Yeah the the resolution seems a bit too simple. The stuff she does is pretty egregious and then it's just kind of swept under the rug because she was right. But I really appreciate how she sticks to her guns in that episode, as well as 'Remember Me' and how Picard backs her until he basically can't because she's really crossed a line.

Picard is basically like, "I trust you. Even though the evidence points to the contrary I believe that you're telling the truth."

Andi: That's a that's a good pick, Sue. See that's not what I would have thought of right off the top of my head. I really like that pick. What about a really bad episode?

Sue: Is this mine too? The one I keep thinking of, because we were talking about Troi and her counseling abilities so much. Again I'm not going to remember the name of it.

Andi: That's what we have Jarrah for is are like our library. If we ever do Star Trek trivia Jarrah is going to be the one that's going to be like buzzing in every five seconds or remembering some obscure.

Sue: But usually I can feel like thirty seconds of a scene and tell you the episode name but my brain's just not awake this morning. But it's the one where something happens to Troi and she loses her ability.

Jarrah: There you go, 'The Loss'.

Sue: Because she presumably maybe this is just my opinion she presumably has gone through all of this training to have degrees in counseling and psychology. But as soon as she loses her empathic ability she's completely useless and she is a hysterical crying wreck who just throws tantrums and doesn't want to see anybody. And I just. That episode has always rubbed me the wrong way because you are a professional, you had training in this, you should be able to, first of all, know that you need to deal with your own loss, but also be able to continue doing your job.

Andi: I think that that's one of the episodes that a lot of people who don't like Troi point you as why she was basically not competent at her job and I don't know. I see where you are coming from, but I also find it sad that we couldn't have an episode like this and make it work because the way they're putting it is she's basically lost one of her senses. So would you treat her the same way if she had gone suddenly blind? Would they have had more patience with her if she was suddenly deaf or lost a limb and was in a

wheelchair, you know? They don't really give her much of a way to kind of grieve that and the way she reacts to it.

Sue: Well they do, but she refuses it. That's the thing, everyone around her is trying to figure out what they can do to help her. And she says, "No I'm going to do it. Stop treating me this way stop babying me." And then she throws tantrums.

Jarrah: Yeah I think that we we should probably do an episode on ableism.

Andi: Yes!

Jarrah: Because I also think the important part of the loss is that she eventually realizes that she would be totally capable of doing her job without that sense. Verses like the episode where Worf breaks his back and tries to commit ritual suicide. So I think in the scheme of how Star Trek has represented disability it's not the worst, but it's problematic for sure.

Andi: Yeah, it's too bad too because I could see it being really interesting and in a really good Troi episode they handled it a little better. But she does come off as being very unlikable, very strident, overreacting kind of.

Andi: But she has suffered. I mean it's called 'The Loss'. So it is kind of an episode about grief.

Jarrah: I don't know. I just I wish that it could be better I guess.

Andi: I definitely see where you're coming with Sue, and the problems you have.

Jarrah: Again not one I would think of so well done for that.

Sue: I'm not sure if it's necessarily a bad episode for women or if it's just a bad episode for Troi who happens to be a woman.

Jarrah: I think we can count that.

Andi: I mean one of the things that we want to talk about is how are our female crew members are characterized, so I think that's all that counts. How about you, Jarrah?

Jarrah: Alright, fast. OK. So I just recently made a list of what I think are my top 10 feminist *TNG* episodes so they all had to pass the Bechdel Test, and I picked number one as being 'Yesterday's Enterprise'.

Jarrah: First of all it has an awesome woman captain of the *Enterprise*, Rachel Garrett, and slick from the very first minute we see her like she totally owns that role and I can totally buy her as great a captain of the *Enterprise* as Kirk or Picard. And then it basically redeems Tasha's really crummy death that we had in season 1. We get her to come back. She gets to bond with Guinan and she basically gets to find a more meaningful end to herself. And yes that sort of undermined later in the show, but for 'Yesterday's Enterprise' it's amazing and great.

Andi: Yeah I mean Tasha Yar, if we want to talk about characters poorly served by the material I don't think we can get much worse than Tasha Yar. From the very beginning they definitely wanted her to be some sort of like strong, warrior woman-type trope and they just didn't know how to write that and they they kept backing down on it and they kept being afraid to go there. I feel like they were trying to do like a Zoe-type character from *Firefly*, but just didn't have the tools to make it work.

Sue: I feel like they sort of did what they redid what they wanted her to be with a Ro.

Andi: Exactly.

Sue: And even even though Ro had her problems they then redeem themselves further with Kira.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: Yeah it's like they were exploring this idea of actually having a kickass woman and then their first couple tries didn't work very well and then hopefully they manage to get to

the point where they could write a woman that was very strong physically but not make her you know emotionally weak or just written poorly.

Andi: I think a lot of problems we have especially now when people are talking about "strong female characters" is people think that they can write a character that could just punch someone in the face confidently and consider them a strong female character which is just not the case. I feel like this is something that Yar suffered from. And I mean that episode where she dies the first time, 'Skin of Evil' has to be one of the worst episodes ever. Not just because of how they handle Yar, but it's just a bad episode.

Andi: So I agree with Jarrah that is very nice to see Tasha Yar come back and actually be written well, that's just very satisfying. It was so disappointing to see her go down like that. All of this and we we're talking about how Gates had problems with how she was portrayed, Denise Crosby had even worse problems with how she was portrayed and was basically like, "Peace, I'm not doing this. Bye." Which is why they had to write this super clumsy death for her and super horrible funeral. Guys, if I die unexpectedly do not let my funeral be like that.

Sue: And super hilarious wound.

Andi: Oh that is just a trainwreck. I really honestly feel like if we could have left Yar's story at 'Yesterday's Enterprise' they would have redeemed her character immensely. I'm just really sad that, Jarrah you alluded to it, that they come back and they bring her back and they make her a victim again. She can not get away from being a victim. It's really sad, but I do agree that 'Yesterday's Enterprise' is, I think, just one of the best episodes of *TNG* in general. And one of the reasons that it is, is because they handled their female characters better.

Andi: And this is a trend that I see through *The Original Series* and *TNG* is that when they have an episode that is better for women that episode becomes better as a whole. Just as a piece of entertainment. I mean it's just over and over and over again. When you have all of your characters being well-served it turns the episode into something stronger. Great pick, Jarrah. I agree 100%. And maybe this is a good possibility for a

new series is seeing a prequel of Captain Garrett being awesome on the *Enterprise*. I mean, is she the only canon female captain of the *Enterprise*?

Sue: That we know of, yes.

Andi: Yeah. Sadly we would know how that story would end. But I still think that she was a really strong character especially considering she was only on screen for a very short amount of time. It's always impressive when you have a character that makes such an impression.

Jarrah: OK so first, my worst pick. There's I think a couple that are generally acknowledged as some of the worst Trek episodes and some of the most sexist Trek episodes of *TNG*. But the one I'm going to pick is 'Code of Honor' because as Wil Wheaton says in his review, "Oh good we get to be sexist and racist in this one!"

Andi: It's like they were like, "How can we make it even worse?"

Jarrah: Oh god it's so bad. So basically, for those of you who don't remember, it is the one where there is a race of people. So basically they cast all black actors to play this alien race and dress them in like faux-tribal prints except shiny and then made them horribly barbaric. So basically the leader of this planet, Lutan, who supposedly is really studly.

Andi: I just can't buy it. That was one of the first things that I could not buy is so that we were supposed to think that this guy was somebody that anybody would fight for.

Jarrah: So what happens is he abducts Yar and then because of the Prime Directive Picard can't just take her back. He has to let her fight Lutan's wife to the death over Lutan, because basically Lutan wants his wife's fortune because even though like this society is super patriarchal the wife holds the money until she dies. So Lutan like, "Ha! Yar can kill her because she is a super great fighter. And then I'll get all of her money and whether super-sexy Yar wants to stay with me or not, doesn't really matter."

Sue: So the Prime Directive will not let Picard take Yar back, but she can kill, essentially, the queen?

Jarrah: There's also like some, I think, vaccine at stake, this planet has vaccine that a planet desperately needs. So I think Yar could have chosen to go back but she's like, "I want to stay and fight because we really need this vaccine for this planet."

Andi: [sarcastically] That's super great plot. Yeah, top to bottom. Well written guys.

Jarrah: It's so terrible.

Jarrah: So first, I mean it's obvious why it's super racist, like let's cast a whole race of aliens as basically imbued with all the *Heart of Darkness* stereotypes you could. And then it's obviously a success because you have like two women fighting to the death over a man in like tight outfits. But what's I think the worst part about it is this whole thing that like Lutan so studly that no woman could possibly resist him. And this we see a lot in *The Original Series* with this idea that women just can't control themselves around certain men, that they lose all their capacity for reason because of their hormones and feelings and sexual desires.

Andi: Well we get that really cringe-worthy scene between Troi and Yar where Troi basically makes Yar admit that she's attracted to Lutan, which first of all.

Jarrah: In front of Captain Picard.

Andi: It's horrible. But sorry if you're sharing a ship with like Riker and Picard and Geordi La Forge how are you ever going to be tempted by this super gross Lutan guy? And it felt like another way to diminish Yar's power. You know like she actually likes the fact that he kidnapped her? What? That's horrible.

Jarrah: Totally, yes. Like in that scene Picard and Troi are just hanging out with Yar. And this is totally, totally unnecessary, but Troi goes like. "Lutan is such a basic male image and having him say he wants you--" and Yar goes, "Yes of course it made me feel good when he--Troii I'm your friend and you tricked me!" So basically in front of Picard, for no

reason, she gets her to admit that she had feelings for Lutan, and it does not help the situation at all. All it does is make her seem like she can't really handle her job.

Sue: [sarcastically] You know what it is? It's a compliment. Just take it as a compliment, learn to take a compliment. Come on, dude don't be so sensitive.

Jarrah: [laughs] Yeah, oh my gosh. And actually there are several times in that episode where male characters including Picard comment on how attractive Yar is. So Picard goes to Lutan like, "Yes she is a rather lovely female."

Sue: So terrible.

Jarrah: We can tell. You don't have to say it all the time.

Andi: We can see her face, guys, we don't need to describe how beautiful she is. We see her before us.

Sue: It really is like a *TOS* episode. It really is.

Andi: Yeah, I mean I don't think that there are many episodes in *TNG* that reached *TOS* levels of horrible racist sexist tropes but this one definitely gets there. So 100% agree there, Jarrah, 100%. How about best let's end that on a positive note. Wash that episode out of our mouth.

Jarrah: Oh I already did the best one. What's your best?

Andi: Oh, that's right. OK so my best is actually 'Dark Page'.

Jarrah: Nice.

Andi: I can think of a lot of really great episodes for *TNG*. Ensign Ro comes to mind. I picked 'Dark Page' for two reasons. One, because it's specifically about a female relationship which we do not get nearly enough of. And two, it gives Lwaxana Troi a chance to be not silly and comic relief. And I think that Lwaxana is kind of a very

controversial figure in *TNG*. Some people like her, some people really hate her, some people find her annoying. I actually really kind of like her. I don't know the way she always does what she wants. I definitely like that.

Andi: But this is a great episode to showcase that she does have a deeper side to her and she does have, you know, traumatic experiences that she's dealing with. And that she hides a lot of her inner-thought with, you know, fancy costumes and over-the-top behavior. And then just being able to really delve into Troi and Lwaxana's relationship is really nice for me and just in general I think this is a fun episode.

Andi: The idea of going into somebody's mental landscape and pulling them out, it's a pretty common sci fi--I wouldn't want to use the word cliché--but it's one used often. But in this case I think is used really really well. So just as a whole I really enjoyed that episode.

Andi: Then my least favorite, by like a mile, is 'The Child'. So 'The Child' is basically one of the many instances we have where Troi is raped. Some sort of alien being comes and invades her body and leaves her pregnant. Which OK, we should definitely do mystical pregnancy sometime. I think it's just a really horrible trope that we see not only in Star Trek but all across sci fi and fantasy.

Andi: So she gets pregnant and then there is one of my least favorite scenes ever where they actually have a conference about it and they sit around the conference table and discuss Troi's pregnancy while she sits there silently. And nobody seems to think, "Hey maybe she should be the only one making any decisions about this pregnancy." And just it's so gross, it's so gross on every level. And then the episode at large is just really terrible. It's it's just another example of bad episodes for women often equals bad episodes in general. This one is particularly egregious.

Jarrah: Yeah I really I mean at the end of that conference room scene at least basically ever looks at her and she gets the final word. But it's so gorgeous to watch Worf talking about how basically we should make a decision based on the safety of the ship and not at all consider her wishes. And I think what's worse is Riker being like jealous. She just got raped.

Andi: So it's not a father yet.

Jarrah: He broke up with her and even that is just so disgusting it's like you just got assaulted, and his first thing is like to feel like his masculinity has been injured

Sue: Well, he is William T. Riker.

Andi: Well I mean and this just goes to a deeper issue of how people of sexual assault are treated in the Star Trek universe. But at no point, and correct me if I'm wrong and for I'm remembering this wrong, but I don't believe at any point anybody actually acknowledges that she's been raped or has her deal with that in any way. It's just kind of like they go straight to the pregnancy and then she's happy to be pregnant and then she's happy to have her kid but at no point does it does anybody ever say oh wait Troi you just got violated horrifically.

Sue: No, never.

Andi: Let's deal with that.

Jarrah: No. And I'm sure we will. I think we're planning an episode on psychic rape so we'll talk about the other episodes where similar things happen with Troi.

Andi: Yeah, I mean this isn't something that happens to Troi just once. Right? She gets to be violated over and over again. She gets an episode called 'Violations'. I think that's the reason why 'The Child' is one of my least favorites because I feel like it kind of incorporates all of the problems that *TNG* had in one episode. Troi's episodes being weak and always about, in this case not a shady man, but just being violated and then not dealing with that.

Sue: A shady energy being!

Andi: Yeah, shady energy being. This time she falls for a shady energy being.

Jarrah: Yeah, and I mean you know it's a totally valid choice to be like, "I want to keep this baby." But I don't buy it all that she would be not traumatized by carrying a baby to term in basically a day.

Sue: Mentally and physically traumatized because what.

Andi: Yeah and having a pregnancy is no joke. Your entire body changes in every appreciable way. And it's a very traumatic thing for your trying to go through over nine months, much less, you know, a couple of days. But we don't see any indication that it was hard, and we don't see any indication that she feels like she was raped at all. I mean they don't even they don't even name it as what it is, which is the most disappointing thing for me I guess.

Jarrah: And just a side note on 'The Child'. The reason we have 'The Child' is because of the writers' strike, they pulled it as a topic out of the failed Star Trek 2 TV show that never got off the ground. But there was a script, basically. But it's also the first episode where we got to see Dr. Pulaski who I think gets started off on a really terrible foot, and I think that that's a bit of a disservice to women in the show.

Jarrah: First they started off hating Data, but also her very first scene on the ship is basically Picard looking for her and being like, "Where's the new doctor?" And them saying basically she's in Ten Forward. It makes it sound like she's getting drunk on her first day. And I think if there's one thing that really kind of dooms a character for failure is when they start out having the captain not respect them.

Andi: Yeah I mean first of all, Pulaski just in general is definitely someone we're going to have to talk about in a bigger context. But her introduction as someone that Picard doesn't respect is bad especially since Crusher just disappears, basically. We don't even get some sort of episode where she transitions out. She just kind of leaves and we have this new person in her place. Which they decide to make a decision to have her be mean to one of our most beloved characters, which is not a great start to her character. Yeah. So. 'The Child', bad.

Sue: Word.

Andi: Do we want to add anything else to anything we've talked about today? Any of the characters or episodes?

Sue: I would like to hear the rest of Jarrah's top 10 list.

Andi: Yeah, let's hear that. So number one was 'Yesterday's Enterprise'.

Jarrah: So my top 10 list. And like I said I limited myself to episodes that passed the Bechdel Test. So there are a couple of episodes that just can't get in there for that reason. But that was partly just to make it easier for me, and it also reconsidered episode 10. But counting down: episode one I have 'Yesterday's Enterprise'.

Jarrah: For 2 I have 'Face of the Enemy', which I talked about briefly and I think is generally great partly because the Romulan commander that Troi has to face off against was written with the writer not knowing what gender they were going to cast. And I think it shows what you were saying earlier about like Dr. Crusher and how if the writers don't obsess so much about the character's gender they can just write better characters.

Jarrah: For number three I have 'Ensign Ro'. Number four, 'Dark Page'. Number five, 'Suspicions', a bunch we've talked about already. Number six, 'Preemptive Strike', which is the one where Ro defects to the Maquis. But I also like it because it has some good stuff with Admiral Nechayev and the woman in the Maquis that Ro sort of makes friends with, but she's really suspicious of Ro.

Jarrah: 'Who Watches the Watchers', which is the one where Troi and Riker are undercover in the proto-Vulcan society, and that is a society that is sort of a matriarchy. And I think it's done really well because they didn't just, like 'Angel One', assume that if women were in charge the whole place would be terrible. So I like that about it and Troi gets some cool stuff to do in the.

Jarrah: And then number 8 I have 'The Emissary', which is the first episode with K'Ehleyr. Number 9 I have 'Legacy' the one with Ishara Yar. And then 10. So 10 I have debated.

Jarrah: I put in 'The Outcast' even though I think it's really problematic, and I'm sure we will talk about it if we do one on LGBT characters. But I put it in basically because of the monologue that Soren gets about why it's not fair to force people to live in a way that doesn't feel right to them. But then a lot of people did complain that I didn't put in 'Remember Me', and upon reflection I think 'Remember Me' is probably slightly better than 'The Outcast'. But that is the last that I published.

Andi: I like it. I like that list a lot. I think it's interesting that--Sue did you--you didn't read that list beforehand did you?

Sue: I did not, no. I mean I probably did at some point because I follow Jarrah's Tumblr.

Andi: Yeah, I didn't either, and yet we still managed to hit basically all of those episodes in today's episode, which I think is really interesting

Sue: And your description of 'The Outcast' kind of reminds me of 'First Contact' as well where there is the female scientist who has a very similar speech. Who, I don't remember her name, but she's played by Bebe Neuwirth who I also adore.

Andi: Yes although I am not super into the her sleeping with Riker under false pretenses.

Sue: Right, it's problematic. Yeah, but there's a similar well-intentioned speech.

Jarrah: Yeah, and I'll post that link to the show notes as well. We're going to, on our site <http://womenatwarp.com>, we will have sort of notes on the episodes, and the times that we, you know, can't come up with someone's name or we can't remember the character's name or the episode name we'll put on the show notes and any links to stuff afterwards.

Andi: Does that mean we don't get to count on you as our encyclopedia. Because I was totally planning on counting on you as our encyclopedia.

Jarrah: Oh you totally can. Sometimes I forget things, like our last episode where I forgot Gene Roddenberry's assistant's name, Richard Arnold. So post that kind of thing in the show notes.

Sue: And we didn't really talk. I mean we talked a little about Dr. Pulaski, but not a whole lot about Commander Shelby. Not a whole lot about Lwaxana, not Nechayev. And I mean maybe we need to do this again for the minor-slash-recurring female characters on *TNG*.

Andi: Yes, I totally was thinking when I chose this topic in general I was like, "Well I feel like even though we're obviously going to be doing a lot of episodes in which we focus on a particular character," I mean some of them just have so much that we could talk about. I wanted to do a general one, and even then I was like you know this is such a huge topic we're probably going to have to do more than one episode on it. So I totally agree with you. I would really like to tackle, for instance, K'Ehleyr because I think she has a very interesting arc. And just some of the more minor recurring characters that we didn't get a chance to talk about, some of the episodes we didn't get a chance to talk about. So I think we can finish up this episode knowing that there is going to definitely be a part two because I don't know about you all but I have a lot more to say.

Andi: Thanks everyone for joining us for our discussion on women on *The Next Generation*. If you are interested in finding out more about Women at Warp you can check this out at our website, <http://womenatwarp.com>; or follow us on Twitter @womenatwarp. Now, Jarrah, where can people find out more about you and your work?

Jarrah: People can find me at <http://trekkiefeminist.tumblr.com>.

Andi: And Sue how about you?

Sue: You can find me over at <http://anomaly podcast.com>.

Andi: Great, and I'm Andi, you can follow my live-tweeting of Star Trek on Twitter under @FirstTimeTrek. Or you can check out my archive project on Tumblr at

<http://firsttimetrek.tumblr.com>. Do you have any questions or suggestions for upcoming episodes? Feedback of any kind? Feel free to email us at crew@womenatwarp.com.