

Women at Warp Episode 45: “Lower Decks”

Sue: 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 Sue, and thanks for tuning in. I'm here today with the whole crew. We have Andi.

Andi: Hi everyone.

Sue: Grace...

Grace: Shawty got low low low low low-er decks.

Sue: And Jarrah

Jarrah: Riker hates me, you guys. I don't know, maybe I'm just too attractive. But, we're both Canadian.

Sue: Actually he's from Alaska.

Andi: That's like America's Canada, right?

Sue: World's most awkward scene. Today we're going to be talking about the TNG episode “Lower Decks” [TNG Season 7, Ep. 15]

Jarrah: Such a good episode.

Sue: It is.

Jarrah: We send out requests for comments before we record. My favorite one so far has been one from our Twitter where we're like What do you think of “Lower Decks”? And somebody wrote back, “It is good.” I was like well legit.

Sue: Not no.

Grace: Can't argue with that.

Andi: Where's the lie.

Sue: Before we get into our main topic we want to remind you as always about our Patreon, Women at Warp is completely listener supported and that support helps us to do things like travel to conventions, have information printed out to distribute and outreach, and to upgrade equipment. Some other things that we have in the works that we're not quite talking about publicly yet. But, If you'd like to become a patron you can head on over to <https://www.patreon.com/womenatwarp> and our donor level started just \$1 a month and every little bit helps keep us talking about feminist Trek analysis.

Jarrah: One thing I want to say is that semi-recently our Patreon support has allowed us to get some transcription done of episodes so if you're listening to new episodes and you know someone who might not be able to access our content because of hearing impairment or a language barrier then a transcript might

be helpful to them and you can now find those on our Web sites for our new episodes. And we're going back to doing the old episodes slowly but surely So thanks to our supporters for helping make that happen.

[The transcriber thanks you all too!! <3 ~B]

Sue: Absolutely.

Grace: Feels so good to be accessible.

Sue: Then let's move into our main topic "Lower Decks" the season 7 TNG episode which originally aired on February 7th, 1994. Somewhat of a sequel to "The First Duty" [TNG Season 5, Ep. 19] in which we follow four junior officers, instead of our usual senior staff, who are speculating on the actions of their superiors, who find themselves near the Cardassian border and suddenly involved in this top secret mission. And for the first time it seems they can't even speak to each other about what they know about the mission. And it's totally different from almost every other Star Trek episode, at least up until Voyager tried to do a similar story line with the "Good Shepherd" [VOY Season 6, Ep. 20], but I would say this one is far superior.

Andi: Yeah, agreed.

Sue: How does everybody feel just overall? Other than it is good.

Andi: I don't know man does that not sum it up?

Sue: It is good.

Andi: It is good.

Grace: It's definitely an essential TNG episode.

Andi: It's a classic.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: You don't forget this one.

Jarrah: No, and it's right near the end of the series so, it's a little unfortunate we get to meet these four characters, I mean Ogawa we know a bit about before, by the other three we don't really ever see again and that's a little unfortunate because the episode is so great it really makes you want to know more about where they went after.

Andi: Yeah a lot of our comments especially on Facebook were like "where was the spin off." Why didn't they come back on DS9 or Voyager. You know we wanted to see them again.

Jarrah: One thing I thought was funny, which is at the very beginning of this episode it starts out with like Riker and Troi doing the crew evaluations and Troi's like, "We did this three months ago." and I'm going like are really evaluating the whole crew every three months. I'm hoping it was just a subset, because that seems like absurdly often for evaluating people for promotions.

Andi: They probably have it on a rotating basis, so like every three months they have a batch.

Jarrah: Yeah I was like it makes me feel even worse for Harry Kim if they kept that up on Voyager. Like they're sitting down every three months and passing him over.

Grace: So, Harry what do you think you contribute here, if anything.

Jarrah: Yeah, I think you're right that they're not considering everyone and certainly they are, there's some people they seem to be considering for promotion to specific positions versus just a rank promotion.

Andi: One thing I do like though is I like seeing kind of the logistics of running a starship, because so much of the time we're completely focused on these huge events, you know big emergencies that sort of thing. It's cool to see kind of the day to day, and to see some of the stuff that Riker does when he's not screeching a Red Alert, you know. It's cool to see... It's cool to see the H.R. Department, I'm not going to lie, I think it's really interesting and it's really interesting to see kind of how Starfleet operates.

Grace: Wouldn't that be a great spin off? Just like the various sub-departments of Starfleet.

Andi: Oh my God. Star Trek HR!

Sue: See, a lot of the comments we got were, "I wish this were a miniseries," "I wish this were a spin off," "where is the series that focuses on these characters." But I guess maybe I'm the dissenter here, because I don't think it would have worked if every single episode of a series were following junior officers around watching them figure out what's actually going on. And you know seeing the senior staff sit around and do paperwork. I don't think that it actually would have made a very intriguing series if it were every episode. And I think what makes it so wonderful is how different it is.

Andi: I agree. But I mean think about how dramatic it was every time Kirk signed something. Could we not turn that into a whole show. Kirk signing all the PADDs that people hand to him, drinking some coffee signing more paperwork. I don't know. I think it would be very compelling.

Grace: Like just straight up 20 minutes of him just sitting there like *signing noises* after like 20 minutes he just like gets some Bananarama stuck in his head just sitting there like "It's a cruel, cruel, cruel, summer..." "Spock, was that Bananarama or Duran Duran? I don't remember." Yeah. Every time. Holy crap. We need more coffee.

Andi: Oh my gosh. I do agree with you, Sue though. I mean I understand wanting to have more of them just because when you get something awesome the natural inclination is more. But one of the reasons it's so awesome is because it's a twist. It's a different perspective than we're used to. But if we start following just those characters well then it's going to be the same kind of storytelling it's going to be focused in a different place

Jarrah: Even though we didn't get to see all the characters again we did get to see Taurik's identical brother Vorik on Voyager.

Sue: According to Jeri Taylor, who was also the mother of the actor.

Jarrah: Oh I did not know that! But he, I mean he is excellent as a Vulcan in but in both this role and on Voyager the actor Alexander Enberg. We've heard from several actors playing a Vulcan is not easy and he does a really good job, you know in this episode he's playing like a young guy and he isn't really sure why what he's doing isn't working and his kind of insecurity without losing Vulcan-ness comes across. I think it's cool.

Andi: All the best Vulcans are sassy. Okay? So, I mean right from Spock, this is classic troll Spock. Right. And then you I've only seen a little bit of Tuvok, but Tuvok is sassy. This dude is sassy too.

Grace: That's the secret to being Vulcan. There's a sassiness level!

Andi: It's just like being able to be that Vulcan neutral demeanor while also throwing so much tiny little bits of shade everywhere.

Grace: Micro-shade, if you will.

Andi: Love it!

Grace: Bah dah ba ba baaa, I'm diggin it.

Sue: So, I think the the obvious thing to talk about, the big focus of this episode, are the mentoring relationships, because you've got these four junior officers and Riker is obviously paired with Lavelle, Worf and Sito, Geordi and Taurik, and Crusher and Ogawa. And it's interesting how different they all are and, Keith DeCandido, actually, during Tor's Rewatch, wrote about how it sort of goes along with where they're stationed on the ship. He wrote, "Lavelle and Sito are intimidated by Riker and Picard, respectively, though Sito is able to overcome her intimidation with a push from Worf—but they're bridge officers, where discipline must be tight. Down in engineering, where tinkering and futzing around is encouraged, Taurik is utterly unintimidated by anybody, and gets an interesting combination of encouragement and discouragement from La Forge. And then there's Crusher and Ogawa in sickbay, who spend as much time gossiping as friends as they do discussing duty, and the ranks are almost irrelevant—though the importance of that "almost" comes into play when Dal is beamed on board."

<http://www.tor.com/2013/02/22/star-trek-the-next-generation-lower-decks/>]

Andi: Okay, and see that kind of gets at one of my very few nitpicks about this episode. Which is you get a very stark contrast where you have Taurik and LaForge having their engineering conversation where their mentor relationship is very much about improving the ship and engineering and science-y science-y stuff, and then you get to Ogawa and Crusher and they talk about boys. And I think it's super cool that Beverly is the kind of boss that you would share your personal life with, she's super nurturing and encouraging in this scene, and I love that I really do but it's just like when you come from two guys talking science and they go straight to two women talking boys it's frustrating and it's something that TNG does a lot, you know they'll show a lot of different conversations between the men and friendships and then you know you get Crusher and Troi doing aerobics and talking about boys, lighting orgasm candles and talking about boys. You know it's frustrating.

Sue: The episode passes the Bechdel test, but only because they also talk about her promotion.

Andi: Yeah.

Jarrah: Yeah I find that the scenes with Beverly and Alyssa to be like the least interesting for me of the episode. And again, like I agree with you, Andi, I appreciate this relationship and I think that is a valid type of mentoring to talk about people's personal lives and encourage them as friends as well as to talk about their jobs. Certainly, I mean my last few bosses we've all had like a fairly close relationship where yeah if you went on to date the night before you tell them about it the next day and it helps you to feel supported and that you're not just treated like an automaton, but it's problematic that we don't see as much of the discussion about her performance. And, I think Ogawa is shown as like the least layered of these four characters, which is kind of unfortunate.

Grace: Especially because she's a recurring character who we've seen more of.

Jarrah: Yeah, so maybe you'd argue we'll she doesn't need as much time because you've already learned some stuff about her but she just is kind of relentlessly cheerful until the very end.

Sue: But she's also arguably the most trusted, because she is the first one to be brought in on this mission with this Cardassian.

Andi: I think Ogawa's awesome and I love episodes with her in it, and I love when she's onscreen, like she just has this very awesome presence. I just wish that they had given her a little more meat.

Jarrah: Yeah. Or you know maybe as showed like the Riker/Lavelle, thing Troi is kind of involved in that, but maybe Troy could have played more of a direct role mentoring him, or somehow had a bit of a role that would show that there could be a different style of women mentoring. There isn't just like one way that women do it versus men who are like business and pressure and in Picard's case some kinds of bizarre mind games.

Sue: Yeah it definitely would have been nice to see them doing more actual medical stuff, instead of just sitting around chatting.

Andi: I will say though that Beverly seems like the best boss.

Jarrah: Oh yeah.

Andi: By far. One of the reasons why I love this episode so much is you get to see your characters that you see all the time in a different role. So, instead of seeing Geordi as an engineer we're seeing him as a manager. And I don't think he's a particularly good manager to be honest. And I also thought that back when, you know when they first introduced Barclay and he makes fun of him and I'm like that's your employee you're in charge of his performance if he is having a hard time, that's your responsibility to fix and Geordi seemed to be totally cool with just being all like oh well it's broccoli you know. And I see a little bit of that here too where he comes around but he's very resistant to being open to talking to Taurik. And then you contrast that with Beverly who is like let's talk about anything and seems like she would be the kind of person that you could sit down and be like these are my concerns.

Jarrah: Yeah I mean I'm all of them, I would definitely want Beverly as my boss just like purely based on this episode.

Sue: Although Worf is pretty great as a boss as well.

Jarrah: Yeah I just generally don't like my bosses you know forcing me into martial arts classes, just to teach me a lesson. I think it's hugely effective in this episode just personally I would not want to be in that position.

Sue: Right! But I mean Worf, I don't think you know think of him as having a staff even though he certainly does throughout the rest of the series, but when he finds that there are these issues over that that Picard has concerns about her. You know he obviously knows her the best, and it's so true to character that he wouldn't just go to her and say "hey I need to talk to you," but to make her come to the conclusion herself by being unfairly tested or unfairly judged again, and it just seems so true to character really for all of these characters.

Andi: The other thing too is that Worf and Sito are security so they're naturally a much more physical bunch than say engineering or medical are going to be. And it did make me laugh though because I was sitting there I'm like oh Worf is doing such a great job mentoring this young woman that he's hitting and knocking to the ground.

Grace: Out of love! Out of love, really.

Andi: Yeah!

Sue: It just rings so true to me as well that Riker is so annoyed by someone who is just like him.

Jarrah: Yeah definitely I mean I think that yeah Worf's doing some kind of tough dad love there but is kind of awesome. And it's obviously very moving.

Grace: Cadets I'm taking you out for ice cream you may have one scoop.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean Riker is the least directly mentoring him. He's just kind of more like evaluating him but he's the problem with why Lavelle isn't advancing is he's trying to suck up to Riker. I love when Troi is like "it's really interesting that you're judging this guy for being exactly the way that you were when you were his age."

Andi: It just goes to show that Troi is an essential ingredient on that ship like just forcing people to look at things a better way.

Sue: But that statement to Riker not only affects him, but that's what makes Geordi get up and say you know what I should go talk to Taurik.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean that's just such a great scene in this episode, too, where like both groups are playing poker and it keeps cutting back and forth.

Sue: Yeah it's so good

Jarrah: Yeah, it's so good, it's really well-written and it shows those parallels between the you know the crew you know and love and the crew that were getting to know and love and you know gives a bunch of people the occasion to kind of rethink where they're at.

Andi: I also just really think the editing is seamless and it's pretty cool that you've got Riker bluffing and succeeding, Lavelle bluffing and failing. It's pretty funny. It's like you really see in that moment that Lavelle is Riker but hasn't quite become Riker yet.

Grace: Riker light. I can't believe he's not Riker.

Jarrah: Well and even Taurik you know the way that he's playing the poker and just like all others the odds are whatever percent that I will not win this hand, and there for making these decisions and you can kind of see that he's a Vulcan in Starfleet who hasn't totally figured out how to interact with his human crewmates.

Andi: Maybe if they were playing Fizzbin instead. You know that classic Vulcan game.

Sue: And then we also have the character of Ben whose addition I think was kind of ingenious to this episode, because he's the civilian he interacts with anyone he moves between the two groups and they're both accepting of him and he is equally comfortable wherever he is.

Jarrah: And he's got like that awesome green futuristic Tweed onesie jumpsuit.

Grace: Boss

Andi: Yeah his outfits are unfortunate.

Jarrah: Well really all of the servers in Ten Forward.

Andi: True enough, true enough.

Jarrah: I don't think he's a particularly interesting character but he ties everything together, and he doesn't hurt the episode in any way.

Sue: I think his position is more interesting than the character itself.

Jarrah: Yes definitely like how he is able to like call Riker Will, and he can yeah like you said move between the two groups and be friends with everybody.

Andi: The reason that I wanted to talk about "Lower Decks" is because of Sito, because I think this is a good example of having a not completely one off but mostly one off character that has depth and an emotional arc. You can do it in one episode.

Grace: You absolutely can. This character is proof positive of that.

Andi: Which is why it's frustrating when we get all of these throwaway characters a lot of the times that are women that are just written so cardboard-y, because it can obviously be done. And I just I think she's one of the strongest female characters that we get for Star Trek. And one of the strongest narratives that we get for a woman character in Star Trek, which is why I wanted to talk about this episode.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean oh my gosh if Picard talked to me like that I would just be reduced to tears.

Andi: I would fall face forward and just faceplant and cry and never get up."Picard is disappointed in me!"

Grace: Bald dad, No!

Sue: Then we find out he requested her because he wanted to make sure that she got a fair shot at it.

Jarrah: It is really sweet. I just have to sort of like take a step back though and be like I don't know there are maybe other ways to approach that they wouldn't have been nearly as dramatic as you, you need to think as the audience that there's tension between them. But you know realistically if this was a workplace relationship I probably wouldn't want my boss to do that to test my character. I would probably want them to have a discussion with me upfront being like "Hey I requested you for this ship but I need you to prove yourself blah blah blah". So yeah. But like I mean don't get me wrong it totally it's effective TV writing and this is a realistic workplace scenario. Yeah. Just I mean it works really well to show her character and her development of being able to stand up for herself more strongly and Picard's way assessing her strength.

Andi: I like it too because "The First Duty" is a great episode, and one of the best things about that episode is being able to see Picard in a mentor position trying to steer Wesley into doing the right thing. And then we have a follow up with Sito, who didn't get a whole lot to do and that that episode was just kind of there, having that follow up with her to see him still continuing that, and still working hard to make sure that these people under his command and in the Academy are going towards what he believes the right values for Starfleet are. I just think it's lovely. And then you get the flipside of that, especially with Worf, in which they've come to care about this young woman and they're trying to make sure she's the best that she can be, so they can send her on a mission which she dies in. You know what I mean? And that sacrifice that they have to make and they know that the people under their command. One of the reasons why these evaluations and relationships are so important is because they're preparing them for life threatening work. And you know it's hard. I mean you can see and this is why I think this is such a great Worf episode, is you can see that he knows full well that he is pushing Sito to be the best version of herself, but that could get her killed. And he knows that, and he has to watch her go off and risk her life knowing that she could die and it would have been him that put her in that position. I just think that's so powerful.

Jarrah: Yeah I agree. I think that there's a couple of things about Sito too that we haven't covered really. One of them is that so you know at the beginning right before the first credits we learn that her and Lavelle are up for the same position, and Lavelle is stressing so much about this and she seems to be pretty calm and just have a bit of a better sense of like no matter what happens it'll be okay. And like at the end they say you know, she would have been happy for you. So that's that's cool. But she also doesn't have as good of a sense of her own self-worth, so that's what Worf sort of works with her on. But we also we talk a lot about fridging on this show, and this is not an example of fridging because like I wanted to bring this up like it you can have a woman character who is killed off and it can work still, and it's not always a bad thing because what we see in this is not a story about like a one dimensional woman who is killed off so that men could have emotional reactions. But it's like the story of a strong woman heroine who puts herself in a dangerous situation and is killed, and it illustrates her heroism in her character. So...

Grace: There's a difference.

Andi: It's her story. It's not Worf's story. It's not Picard's story. That's what fridging really is it's about sacrificing a female character for the emotional payoff for a man.

Jarrah: And the community has a reaction around her death, but it's her story and it's we feel sad because she died, we don't feel sad because...

Andi: Worf is sad.

Jarrah: ...other people are sad. Worf is sad, we do feel a little sad about that.

Sue: So I do want to talk a little bit more about her death, and the like fan reaction and what was supposed to happen and then didn't happen. So, right after this episode aired there was like a huge rise up in the Star Trek fan community. I think even Star Trek magazine, there were interviews that promised that she would come back, right and apparently, there are a couple of different sources about this from *Captains' Logs: The Unauthorized Complete Trek Voyages*, there's an explanation that in the early drafts of the script her death was a little bit more ambiguous and Jeri Taylor said, "When I mentioned that to Michael [meaning Michael Piller] he said, 'Absolutely not. She's dead. She stays dead. That would undermine the whole episode.' So I said 'Fine.' And the morning after Michael saw the episode he came in and said, 'We can't let her stay dead. We've got to bring her back.'" And then from *The Deep Space Log Book: A Second Season Companion*, Michael Piller said, "We have a plan to find her [Sito] in captivity and deal with what happens when somebody comes back from a long time and in captivity and the psychological impact of that sort of experience." Obviously that never happened, but that script turned into the episode "Hard Time" [DS9 Season 4, Ep. 19] which is in season four. And apparently there was also a plan to bring her back in a similar way in the books, in the DS9 books and that also never came to fruition. So, should she have come back, should she not have come back, and would it have undermined the episode to find her alive years later?

Andi: I'm of two minds. On the one hand, I see what Michael Piller's first reaction was which would be "no, we're telling a very specific story about sacrifice, and if you undo that sacrifice then what was our story about." But, I also think that she was such a strong character that you could have brought her back in a way that that was really interesting and, especially for DS9, I think could have been a really good fit.

Sue: Yeah there was definitely a lot of speculation maybe it was fanfic, I don't know. I was 11, that she would come back and join the DS9 crew. I don't know. I feel like it is such a powerful moment in this episode, I don't know if it would undermine it like a few years later if I had known this character for a few years of DS9, or from a few books would I watch this episode now and be like, "Oh well no big deal she's still alive."

Grace: Yeah, I got to wonder that too. It's a heavy hit, the end of that episode, and that sticks with you and on one hand the character was great, I would have loved to see more of the character but at the same time that heavy hit, it means something it carries weight and that weight is important as a reminder that people in Starfleet are essentially in a military complex where loss happens and to underwrite those as just, "oh well, another person died." That loses some of the humanity of the entire show if you do that, and I feel like her death really helps to maintain the idea that every loss is still important, that we mourn everyone who we say goodbye to, and that each individual life still matters.

Andi: Which is especially cool for Star Trek because you know we have this trope that we started in TOS of the Red Shirts, you know these disposable crew people, you know sitting at the con and having the con explode in their face you know. And just the idea that, okay but all those people had lives and stories and adding to that I think is really cool.

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: I mean I think that they made us feel more of an appropriate response to her death after one episode than Tasha's death after like half a season, just because they treated her character with respect.

Andi: My biggest problem with Tasha has always been I didn't know who she was. They made her so contradictory that if they said, gave me a scenario I was like, "What would Tasha Yar do?" I'd be like, "I have zero idea." Which was helped a lot by "Yesterday's Enterprise" [TNG Season 3, Ep. 15], but still like if you take her first season, I would have just been like, "meh, no idea." And yet in one episode I feel like I have enough of a sense of Sito to tell you what she would have done.

Sue: Well and the story itself, not even just the characters, but the getting back over the Cardassian border and the informant who's part of the Cardassian military, it feeds into what's happening with DS9 as well.

Andi: Yeah and we didn't really talk very much about the fact that the Bajoran/Cardassian aspects of this. Some of her strongest moments are regarding that. I really like the scene where they're trying to tell her how dangerous it is she's like, "I'm Bajoran, I know how dangerous it is to be a Cardassian prisoner," and then later on when they're on the ship and they're going over the border and you know like they have this conversation about why is this guy fighting against Cardassia, and like this idea of Cardassia as an empire and whether it's moral or not, and I just I'd love stories like that. It's small, but it's there. It's similar to how we have "Face of the Enemy" [TNG Season 6, Ep. 14] you have Toreth, who is clearly a moral person in service of what I would consider an immoral empire. I always find characters like that super interesting and contrasting that guy with Sito was brilliant.

Sue: Well and they're both having that conversation saying, "I'd never expect someone like you to do what you're doing."

Andi: Yep.

Sue: So they're both learning that their opponent in whatever their home conflict is, is different than the stereotypes that they've been fed.

Andi: And, you know it's amazing because how much is that three minutes worth of dialogue.

Grace: Probably less.

Andi: That's masterpiece writing, right there.

Grace: It is important also, when you get up, again when you go back to like the old, the idea of what people see Star Trek as versus what Star Trek really is. There's definitely this idea that, "oh the bad guys are the bad guys the good guys are the good guys." And I really like it when they explore that moral gray area of yeah but because they're with the antagonistic group doesn't make everyone a bad guy. It makes people in a situation where they're stuck supporting a bad group. Which is definitely something that I would like to see explored more and honestly just about any media context that is given at a wide range.

Andi: Well this is just such a classic Star Trek idea to me. I mean how many TOS episodes, I mean like our very first Romulan episode is this, you know, oh okay here's this enemy that we have, .but okay here's a member of that race, here's a Romulan guy doing the best he can. Kirk sees himself in that guy. You know it's one of the very first things that you see and then it's all the way through, I mean you've got DS9 doing an

episode on the Jem'Hadar and Odo trying to talk to the Jem'Hadar. You have "I Borg" [TNG Season 5, Ep. 23].

Jarrah: You have "Duet" [DS9 Season 1, Ep. 19]

Andi: All over Star Trek it's just it's one of the core ideals I think.

Grace: And it's freakin important, too. I mean even when, I'm saying this as an American, even when your country isn't directly in a time of opposition, when your country is not at war, it's important to remind yourself that the people on the other side are people, that you cannot make them faceless so that you can live with the amount of destruction that's happening, you have to maintain your empathy or what's even the point?

Andi: Yeah and I mean obviously this is super important to Gene Roddenberry, because it was the whole reason why they put Chekov on the bridge in the second season.

Grace: Absolutely, yeah.

Andi: Because at that time Russians were like the faceless enemy and he was like, "Nah son here is a Russian, an adorable Russian guy who's going to be right on the bridge and he's going to talk about Leningrad and 'Wodka' and you're going to love it."

Jarrah: To go back to the writing for a second, so apparently the story concept for "Lower Decks" basically consisted of like the character sketches for these characters, and they debated a lot about you know how much is this going to be their story versus the story of the main crew. And in the end I think it worked out pretty well and we had a comment from Jonathan on Facebook who said, "For me, that made me put Rene Echevarria into the same school as Ronald D. Moore - of those writers who can just write the periphery so well. They can pull someone out of the background and go, 'Here. Here's her story.' And I love that impulse."

Andi: I do want to go back a little bit to the fact that Sita and Lavelle were in direct competition for a job. I noticed that at some, like at one point especially right towards the beginning of the episode, when Lavelle's feeling real salty about it and he's kind of pouting at the con. Why is it Sito's job to make him feel better? You know what I mean? I know it's not a big thing, but it's something that I notice, it's like he feels insecure so she has to make him feel more secure.

Grace: Which is pretty bogus to think that, that's something you see a lot, that the female character has to make sure that the guy character is not sulking, like.

Andi: Yeah I mean you even see it a little bit with Troi and Riker.

Grace: Yeah

Andi: And it's just kind of like there's a lot of emotional labor going on here that I don't think people even really notice very much, but it's just kind of a weird... Okay, think about it if you had been to dudes, if you had two dude characters that are in competition for a job would you have one of those guys being like, "It's okay, everything's going to be fine. You're really cool."

Grace: Probably not.

Andi: It felt, meh. And for a while that made me not like Lavelle so much but then I loved, the redeeming moment for me for him was when he was like, "No you're just as qualified as anyone else," after the Picard thing, he was like, "You deserve that job just as much as anybody else, and it's not fair for him to judge you on this." And that was the moment I was like okay I'm on board with this character because I was a little bit iffy before that.

Jarrah: Yeah I feel the same way. I think that the the dynamic you see between Lavelle and Sito, it's not unlike something you would see in an office or a work relationship today, and there is generally this more of an expectation, or maybe you know women are also just socialized into doing it more to perform that emotional labor, to be like keeping in sort of an eye for people who might be struggling or in some emotional distress and feeling like it's your job to smooth that over.

Andi: Yeah and I mean there are a lot of examples that I can think of from my own office environment, like stuff as stupid as people expecting the women to do the dishes and make the coffee, and they don't even realize they're doing it. The other day...

Grace: The micro-agression.

Andi: Yeah, the other day my coworker actually called my boss out, she was like, "Why do you keep asking me and Andi to do the dishes?" And he was like, "I'm not", and she's like "You're looking right at me. You're asking me. Why aren't you asking, you know our male coworkers?" and he was just like, "Oh I am!" "No you're not." And he didn't notice he was doing that. And that's a little more straightforward than I think the emotional labor, but it's just interesting the way we kind of gender different types of labor and we put emotional labor very firmly in the woman side of things.

Jarrah: Oh yeah. Like you know right now we're getting ready for some really big stuff at work so everyone's super stressed out and it's always like women who are like stopping before work to pick up doughnuts to try to cheer people, up or just you know sending someone a cat picture, or checking in to be like, "Hey, are you okay?" And it's not like we don't have guys in the office and we have lovely guys who I work with, but it just definitely seems like there is more of a tendency for the women to sort of take that extra work upon themselves.

Andi: Organizing the office parties, making sure that we get the cards together for people who are leaving. Like I had to do that. I suck at that stuff. I am so bad at it. I don't even celebrate my own birthday, much less remember to get a card and a cake for somebody else.

Sue: We're certainly socialized to do that sort of thing like, "Oh so and so is feeling bad, let me pick up food and take it to work."

Grace: Let us nurture these strangers.

Sue: But the rest of the world is also socialized to expect that from us.

Grace: At one point I got started in a new office job and my supervisor said to me, "Oh you're probably going to want to decorate the office area for the holidays." And I was like, "Why would you assume, I've been here 30 seconds why would you assume I want to do that?" Which sucked, because I totally wanted to, I had to not do it out of spite. I love being festive, you guys.

Jarrah: Yeah and of course like, we're not saying like, you know I'm not like, "Oh people shouldn't do this." Like I'm doing this stuff too because I think it is actually valuable. The thing is that it's not valued It's like invisible work that people don't actually get any recognition for.

Andi: But it's expected, and when you don't meet those expectations like there's a disappointment there.

Grace: You get called cranky and shit.

Andi: Yeah and it's all very unconscious, it's all very under everything, like, "Well she's not going the extra mile." The extra mile to do what? What is she not doing, she's doing her job. Well yeah, but she doesn't help out. Help out how, you know?

Jarrah: Yeah like if Sito had been more competitive with Lavelle, and he had been upset and she just been like, "Huh..." Do you think that we would have responded so sympathetically to her? Like do you think that right off the bat people would have seen her as maybe more of like catty or bitchy and that that, like there was almost a pressure on her from how the audience would perceive her that she had to be like nicer and more supportive of Lavelle and sympathetic in the beginning, in order for us to accept her later.

Sue: See I always, maybe I'm reading it totally wrong, I always got the impression that the idea that she was up for ops was a surprise to her, because she's a security officer, right. So, I always thought that this attitude of like well it'll be fine no matter what, was because she was never really after that job.

Andi: I got the impression that was part of it, but I also got the impression that she was ambitious, but not aggressive, and that she had some insecurity issues.

Jarrah: Yeah like when they're doing that drill, and he's, this is the part you're talking to Andi right, where he's cranky that Riker was like, "One Aye is sufficient."

Andi: Yeah.

Jarrah: And she sits next to him and she's like, "You know, no he doesn't have a problem with you you're imagining it," and he's like, "Well why did he sit there and give you this assignment?" And she's like, "Well maybe I just need more practice than you." Instead of being like, "We're both awesome. It's nothing personal."

Andi: Yes she has to make herself seem less... smaller to make him feel better. That's exactly what I'm talking about with that interaction and I think it's super, super, super subtle and I don't think it takes anything away from the episode at large. I just found it interesting, and I'm really glad that they gave him that moment where he's like, "No, no. You deserve that job too." That made me very happy.

Grace: Getting to see the script there get kinda flipped up. "No I'm a guy, but I'm going to be supportive and emotionally lift you up. I'm here to help and nurture you too."

Andi: I love this episode.

Grace: It's a great episode.

Andi: It is good.

Jarrah: Yeah. One thing I wanted to mention briefly is I think that this episode works because it involves the senior officers in mentoring relationships, but like we said it is not their episode. And I would contrast that really briefly with the Voyager episode "Good Shepherd" where which is basically the Voyager "Lower Decks," but it is a Janeway episode. It's a great Janeway episode but I feel like none of the characters that we see in the "Good Shepherd" get to be as developed, or get as much space, because they need Janeway to solve their problems. And I think that the "Lower Decks" works a lot better because the characters get more layers, they're not so one dimensional and they get space to make their own decisions and to grow as characters with the help of, but not because of, those senior officers.

Sue: It's kind of amazing except for the poker scene that gets split back and forth. We really don't see a senior officer without a junior officer also being present. Like we're literally learning what's going on at the same time that all of them are.

Jarrah: Yeah. And I love that whole realisation that not everyone on the ship knows what's going on, but they have to follow orders. So, you know realizing that all these big episodes that we've seen throughout seven years of Next Generation, where they're fighting the Borg, or they're in some secret mission and they're rescuing someone, or they're you know they're doing something else that's a sensitive mission, that there's a whole bunch of people who don't actually know the full story.

Sue: Yeah and I think it's kind of interesting that this is also happening to them when they're all up for promotions, and they're sort of realizing, it seems like for the first time, that they can't talk to each other about it.

Jarrah: Yeah they can't talk to each other that the whole part where Lavelle's like, "You guys know something but you like you can't tell me"...

Sue: Right. So is this career advancement that they're also desperately after, like actually going to take away the friendships and the relationships that they have. Like are they sacrificing that in order to move up in the ranks.

Jarrah: But then they also would gain access to more information which in some ways would make their work more meaningful, they know what they're actually working on instead of like, "Hey come the fire phasers at this shuttle and it's a good thing that you have lots of logic going on so you can deduce what we're doing."

Sue: But they still can't talk about it with each other.

Jarrah: No exactly.

Sue: Like that's the thing that upset Lavelle so much, he's like "Well, we can tell each other what we know." And the rest of them are like, "Actually we can't. Sorry."

Jarrah: Yeah for sure. So there's yeah, shows like there's things you gain and things you lose by advancing.

Andi: And the pressures become bigger and the stakes become higher. Because, say Taurik screws up on an engineering thing. He's got Geordi there to help him fix it. Whereas when Geordi screws up, who helps Geordi you know?

Sue: Data.

Jarrah: Leah Brahms. But yeah, no, point taken. But, um, that when you're an ensign you can still get ordered into, well she didn't get ordered she volunteered, for the dangerous situation. Although we did have a comment from Manu on Twitter saying, "I always wondered if Picard is manipulating the ensign into taking the suicide assignment." I don't think there's any way to say necessarily 100% no, but I don't think that was intended to be how it was depicted. But that you can still end up losing your life and you had basically no decision making authority, or say in the situation. You weren't in the briefing room with the senior officers.

Andi: Yeah I mean think of all the poor people on the away teams that are basically there to get murdered. To raise the stakes and do they even know where they're going or why they're dying. It's why I like this episode so much.

Jarrah: That's a fair lead into another comment from Brittany, which was, "It was one of the few times in TNG where the ending is simply sad and indicative of those times in life where bad things happen and it's inexplicable and you can't change it. You just have to accept it and move on. It gets me in the gut because everyone thinks they're the hero in their own story and nobody expects not to succeed. I think everyone thought she'd be a hero and she'd succeed and it was an automatic assumption. The story cleverly took that away from the crew and the audience." But yeah there was I think there was definitely a bit of like a taboo writing TNG that you could have sad endings, and so there's only a few that have sad endings. Even some of the ones that are sad, like "Dark Page" [TNG Season 7, Ep. 07] it's like resolved at the end, you're just dealing with sad emotions, but this is it's like, "That was sad... that sucked."

Sue: The only resolution you can really draw from this is that you know she completed her mission. You know because they find the escape pod debris and not shuttlecraft debris. So you know she was on her way back.

Jarrah: Yeah, and that her friends all cared about her and everyone knew how valuable she was.

Andi: You know what it makes me think of? It makes me think of the end of "Wrath of Kahn" the way that you know they've lost someone, and they're...

Grace: We should have had Worf going, "SIIIIIITOOOOOOOO!!!"

Andi: Well I was thinking more along the lines of when you know they've started to process it, and they're standing around, and Kirk is talking about what Spock meant to everybody. That's more what I was thinking about. And then you know of course Spock comes back, and there are some of those people out there who say that, that undermines "Wrath of Kahn" in the same way. I don't agree because I mean more Spock is better to me but there is a point there, yes.

Sue: Well I also want to talk about sort of the legacy of this episode in particular, which is kind of an infrequent thing to talk about with individual Star Trek episodes, but apparently this episode made a huge impact on Russell T. Davies who I think most people will recognize as the showrunner for the beginning of the reboot of Doctor Who, and he cited this episode as a major influence for his episode "Love and Monsters" [Doctor Who, Series 2, Episode 10]

Grace: Oh ouch.

Sue: Which some people love, and some people hate, but I think it's a cute episode, but whatever, that's not the point. The point is that it provided the format for what a lot of Whovians refer to as the "Doctor lite" episode, which is you know pretty much standard in a Doctor Who season now. So, there's a whole like trope in another series because of this episode, and "Lower Decks" now called a "lower deck episode" has its own page on TV Tropes [<http://tvtropes.org/>], because so many people have taken this idea which I think was probably popularized if not originating with this episode and and copied it and tried to do this well let's let's take our minor characters and focus on them for a little bit.

Grace: Which is pretty cool. Like kind of a kind of like what they did with "The Zeppo" [Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Season 3, Ep. 13] episode in Buffy.

Sue: Yeah.

Grace: Xander being the Zeppo, he's making a donut run.

Sue: Which was another influence noted by Russell T. Davies actually.

Andi: I wish we talked about Buffy and to be honest.

Sue: Crossover!

Grace: There will always be time to talk about Buffy.

Sue: Well, is there anything that we didn't touch on that anybody wants to talk about?

Grace: So, you're from Canada too?

laughter

Sue: A grandfather? No, Canadian. It's so terribly awkward. I love it.

Andi: Oh just at the end of that he's just like I've failed. I'm just going to leave now.

Grace: That makes me want to give this episode five out of five failed social roles

laughter

Jarrah: Well there was a note in *The Star Trek: The Next Generation Companion* that they originally considered Barclay to be one of these four characters, but they thought he was too well-known. How do you guys think that would have affected this situation?

Grace: I would be interested to see how they would have done it.

Andi: I don't know that he would have fit in this particular role, but I think that they've used him for a similar role in the past and it's been effective. So, like "Hollow Pursuits" [TNG Season 3, Ep. 21] is similar in some ways to this episode in that you're taking a crewmember that's not one of the main crew and like focusing an

episode about how.. Because I mean how many parts of that episode are about how Barclay sees the crew, how Barclay sees Riker, how Barclay sees Geordi, and how Barclay sees Troi, Goddess of Empathy... So I see why that might have worked, but I also think that we've explored that with him in the past and it was cool to get new characters.

Sue: Not only is he already a lieutenant, he has had previous posts.

Grace: I still would have been interested to see how they would have done it.

Sue: Yeah, it just feels right that like it seems they're all ensigns and that's all their first posting we assume, we know that for a fact for some of them but Barclay, would be like middle management to me, he doesn't fit there.

Jarrah: There are some like ensigns we've seen recurring in positions that they could have brought back for this, like there's Ensign Sariel Rager.

Andi: I love her.

Grace: Although, Ensign Rager [rage-er] would be an awesome character name.

Andi: I remember when I saw that her name was Rager and then I realized they pronounced it not Rager [Rage-er] and I was like that's failure, you've failed, but she's awesome.

Jarrah: Yeah so there are some people they could have brought in like that, but then who would you have taken out, because you couldn't really accommodate more people than that.

Sue: Yeah I mean they promoted Lavelle to ops at the end, but also made it clear that it was Gamma Shift, so they didn't have to show him to us again.

Jarrah: Yeah

Grace: Yeah and it was kind of a hollow victory for him.

Sue: Yeah it would have been nice, we see Ogawa again of course, but I think it would have been nice to see Lavelle and Taurik, a little bit more in the remaining half season even if were just in the background.

Grace: Yeah it would've been a nice level of consistency. I'm still thinking about Barclay being referred to as middle management in Starfleet, for a second there I had a minute of like "Oh, does that make like Dwight Schultz the Dwight Schrute of Starfleet?"

Andi: Yeah, he's the assistant to the Chief Engineer.

Grace: Yeah there's a difference, there's a difference!

Sue: And somebody else in engineering regularly fills up his desk drawers with jello.

Grace: We just don't know who, yet.

Jarrah: Sonya.

Grace: Yeah, let's got for that.

Jarrah: She's at the gym.

Grace: And someone gets him a personalized bobblehead made, I can really see that.

Andi: I would 100% buy by Barclay bobblehead, 100%.

Grace: Except its face would be constantly just contorted in terror and anxiety.

Andi: That face he makes when he sees everything in the transporter field he's like, "AHHHHH!!"

Grace: Exactly yeah.

Sue: It's so great, he's so great.

Grace: Well there you have it folks, we took an episode that focuses on the minor characters, and we made it focus on a less main character, because that's how we roll apparently.

Sue: Oh my. All right. So is it rating time Grace are you sticking with five out of five failed social interactions?

Grace: That or five out of five red shirts we hardly knew.

Sue: Those are both sad ratings.

Grace: What do you want me to do, like have it be five out of five "Oh hey look, it's a Cardassian reference". Five out of five bright green hound's tooth bodysuits?

Andi: I'm going to give it ten out of ten fake made up Klingon rituals.

Jarrah: I'm going to give it two out of two pips

Andi: There ya go!

Jarrah: Oh sorry that my scale was so small it didn't really illustrate how much I love the episode.

Andi: Two out of two is a hundred percent. A plus.

Sue: I will give it ten thousand Quatloos.

Grace: That's a lot of Quatloos.

Sue: So I think that wraps it up for us today. Andi where can everybody find you on the internet?

Andi: Easiest place to find me is on Twitter <https://twitter.com/FirstTimeTrek> where I'm live tweeting my first time through Star Trek.

Sue: Grace?

Grace: You can find me on Twitter <https://twitter.com/BonecrusherJenk> and we're trying to make this happen on Tumblr at <http://graceheartstartrek.tumblr.com/>

Sue: And Jarrah?

Jarrah: You can find me on tumblr at <http://trekkiefeminist.tumblr.com/> or on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/jarrahpenguin>

Sue: And I'm Sue. You can find me on Twitter <https://twitter.com/spaltor> And if you'd like to contact the crew you can reach us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/WomenAtWarp> on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/womenatwarp/> by e-mail at crew@womenatwarp.com or by leaving a comment on our Web site which is www.womenatwarp.com Thanks so much for joining us