

Women at Warp Episode 50: “The Child” Transcript

INTRO MUSIC

Andi: Hi, and welcome to Women at Warp. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name's Andi, and thanks for tuning in. I'm here with the entire crew including Jarrah.

Jarrah: Have you ever played with puppies, Andi?

Andi: Don't be creepy, Jarrah.

laughter

Andi: And Sue!

Sue: Hi everybody.

Andi: Last but definitely not least, Grace. What up Grace?

Grace: New Year, new outrage, baby.

Andi: So, today we're going to be discussing our favorite episode of all time called “The Child” [TNG Season 2, Ep. 1].

laughter

Andi: But before we get into that we have some housekeeping.

Sue: I think first we want to remind everybody about the Woman at Warp book club over on [www.goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/161753-women-at-warp-book-club) [<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/161753-women-at-warp-book-club>], because we are preparing for another book club episode in which we'll be talking about the 50th anniversary special three part *Legacy* series which at least the first book sort of focuses on Number One bridging the gap between Captain April and Captain Kirk.

Jarrah: And it's great. I just finished it. It's good. And the Number One story continues. So, I'm glad that it wasn't just the first book.

Sue: Yeah, I haven't finished the first book yet I have to admit, but that's coming up. So, if you want to join us on that or at least know what we are talking about, you'll probably want to pick up those books. And let's see the Women at Warp blog has just started. That started on January 3rd and we're super excited about it. We are planning for one original post a week, and probably a crosspost as well every week. And finally there has been a slight change to our Patreon rewards for our upper tier patrons. We used to have for \$20 a month and above we used to just have a hang out where we'd talk about whatever everybody wanted to talk about. But, based on some feedback and some questions that we've asked our patrons that we are changing that hang out to a watch a long commentary every other month. So, we'll be rotating through the series and picking an episode every other month to watch and you can join us if you're at that level for the

watch along and participate or just wait until we post that audio on Patreon for you and watch it at your discretion. Discretion is the right word when you have time.

Jarrah: Convenience.

Grace: Discretion makes it sound like they're taking a risk listening there, doesn't it.

Sue: There you go.

Andi: If we do "Nemesis" again...

Jarrah: Well, yes. And I'm pretty sure we're talking about "Sub Rosa" [TNG Season 7, Ep. 14] for one of the early ones. So, yes.

Grace: Get your candles ready.

Andi: Basically, people liked that we did a commentary but they did not like that they had to watch "Nemesis" and I can't really blame them for that. So, we're going to be trying to choose things are not awful to watch from now on.

Grace: Yeah, this this way it's more like a reward and less like an assignment.

Andi: So, you definitely want to check out our "Sub Rosa" one though because y'all have not had the chance to hear Sue's impression of the Scottish dude from "Sub Rosa" *Andi tries to do the impression* "Dinna go to that hoose"

Sue: I would do it but now it's a patron reward. So, yeah that's the \$20 a month and up tier for that, by the way, if my terrible impression intrigues you.

Andi: It's definitely worth the cost I'd say.

Grace: "Hoose"

laughter

Jarrah: Clearly this is going to be an amazing watch along once we get to it.

Grace: Clearly yes.

Andi: But today we're actually discussing an episode of The Next Generation called "The Child" which is terrible. Jarrah, would you like to give us a synopsis?

Jarrah: I would. I was lying awake last night and this synopsis came to me as I was debating whether I needed to take the Christmas tree down yet.

Grace: Did it climb under your lame sheets? Gross the entire audience out.

Jarrah: Yes, it was a presence that visited me and so here this goes. Okay...

Grace: The ghost of crappy episodes past?

Jarrah: Maybe. Okay. ****singing to the tune of "What child is this"***** What child is this, who from Troi's womb, who super quickly, is leaping... Who makes Worf fear, oh and yeah Riker has a beard, and Wesley might even be leaving... This is Troi's alien rape baby, who likes puppies and burns himself for kicks... This is Ian Andrew, the child of Troi's mystical pregnancy... ****stops singing**** There you go. I couldn't fit in Guinan and Doctor Pulaski, but...

Andi: Wow.

Sue: That was the best thing ever.

Grace: Yeah. That was a rollercoaster of emotions there. I feel like you've taken my job, now.

Andi: Don't worry, we'll still count on you for the impressions around here, especially the Barbara Stanwyck impressions.

Grace: No, never again.

Andi: Grace's Barbara Stanwyck impression corner.

****laughter****

Grace: Anywho... Plot wise this is a really weird one.

Andi: Yes, that's putting it mildly. So I think Jarrah, that your synopsis was excellent. I think everybody probably remembers this episode as it's one of those kind of infamous ones. I don't think people forget this one. Basically an energy being impregnates Troi, and then we get to have the joy of a lot of really awkward writing around that. We get introduced to Dr. Pulaski for the first time. We get introduced to Guinan for the first time, and we get introduced to Riker's beard for the first time which is one of the few good things that comes out of this episode.

Sue: Where do we start though? I mean there's the obvious starting place of the Troi storyline, but I feel like that's going to be our main focus and maybe should wait a little bit.

Jarrah: Well, I was going to say we also get introduced to a weird scientist who looks like uncharismatic young Robert Redford in a beekeeper suit.

Grace: Oh wow.

Andi: I was thinking kind of the same thing. Like, when he showed up and he was really rude, and wearing the weirdest outfit, I was like this is not even among the top 10 worst things about this episode, but it's still terrible.

Jarrah: Well, and the only reason I say there's any Robert Redford comparison is just because like half his face is covered with a mustache.

****laughter****

Grace: It's a full coverage mustache.

Jarrah: Yeah. And he's like getting them to transport these risky diseases or something so that they can make a vaccine for something.

Andi: Yeah, the B plot in this episode makes zero sense.

Grace: Eighty percent of those diseases are stored in his mustache, you know it.

Jarrah: Also, it's like super super urgent that they get these super dangerous viruses and stuff transported, and then they get them to the place of the end and then they're like how long will it take to get a vaccine and he's like I don't know if we'll ever get a vaccine.

Grace: Man, that's a crappy MacGuffin.

Andi: It really is. I remember that line happening in me being just like what was the point?

Sue: But, also if the least harmful one gets out on the ship they're all dead in a matter of what, four hours?

Grace: Something like that, yeah.

Sue: So, yeah, let's definitely send the flagship that has way more people on it than any other ship to transport these diseases.

Grace: It's got children, apparently it's got puppies, it's got our one Android, but you know what...

Sue: They're going to kill the puppies!

Grace: We don't ever see the puppies again either.

Jarrah: Yeah. That's always been my position is that we don't know what happened to the puppies, but odds are they were recycled back into the replicator.

****laughter****

Grace: Do you think there are just like holographic puppies that they bring in every now and then? Like, sometimes...

Jarrah: Oh that sounds better.

Grace: ... In dementia wards they'll stage weddings, they just stage puppies for the children.

Jarrah: Well, I mean there is like that one kid who's playing with like floating blocks. So, clearly there are holographic projectors in the nursery.

Grace: Either that, or that one kid's just really, really skilled.

Jarrah: I thought you were going to say, really, really high.

laughter

Grace: Or, that that's just the kid from "The Matrix" all grown up and he's just floating around weird looking blocks.

Andi: Possible, it's possible.

Grace: All possibilities are possible in space. And when an episode is terrible.

Andi: So, amongst the you know mustaches and the viruses, we also get a new character. Which turns out to be a great character in Guinan, and I was watching it and I was thinking to myself that it was pretty impressive how seamlessly she kind of became a part of the crew.

Grace: I will give you that, but her first appearance is just kind of a blink and you'll miss it thing, and it's one of those moments where even after I know this show pretty well, I watch the first episode of the second season watch some weird stuff happen with Troi, watch this weird plot already starting to take shape, and then Picard walks into the bar and you have that moment of oh damn Whoopi Goldberg what are you doing here. And then she isn't addressed for another like 20 minutes or so in the episode, so I'm always really curious if there are people who tuned into that episode when it first aired and we're like, "did we miss an episode last week. I mean Whoopi Goldberg is just there all the all this stuff is diff. Why does Riker have a beard. What happened, what did we miss last week?"

Jarrah: That was my reaction watching it today, I was like, "wait, was this her first episode, because it was like they didn't even introduce her. This wasn't her first episode, was it?"

Sue: Any character information that we get, is in that conversation with Wesley.

Jarrah: Yeah, that's basically her role is to like counsel Wesley into realizing he doesn't want to go be with his mom who randomly disappeared, and instead wants to stay on the Enterprise.

Grace: So, Tori doesn't even get to do her job this episode.

Jarrah: Busy.

Sue: When does Troi ever get to do her job? It's very rare, unfortunately.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: I think Guinan is one of the highlights of this episode, it might be brief and it might not be very deep, I guess or super meaningful, but it's also not terrible. And she's kind of a soothing presence there. But Crusher just disappears.

Grace: She didn't disappears just every other member of the crew slowly disappeared until they all realized it was her that was gone, all along.

****laughter****

Grace: It was convoluted but, they managed to get multiple episodes out of it I guess.

Andi: What happened with Gates McFadden?

Sue: So, there are lots of different stories right.

Grace: Surrounding Gatesgate if you will.

Sue: And, lots of different stories from the people involved. But the, what Gates says now, is that or has said in the past, is that she was fired for being a feminist, actually. And that there was one writer in particular who basically said, "it's her or me." And they picked the writer. And then the rest of the cast was upset, and for season 3 Patrick Stewart was a major part of getting her to agree to come back.

Grace: Good on you P-Stew.

Sue: Right. By all accounts she would question them and say this isn't right or this should be done differently or how about we do it differently. And when I've heard her talk about it she has attributed that to coming from the theater world more so than the film world, and saying that things in the theater are much more collaborative. But, it seems also that there was a particular interpersonal relationship that was the catalyst for a lot of what went down.

Jarrah: Yeah, there's different places you can read different takes on it. The 50 year mission books talk a little bit about it, and I think there are some of the other TNG companions and other books that address it. But, certainly there were ridiculous levels of personality conflict going around between Season 1 and Season 2, and I think we're all glad that she came back.

Andi: Definitely, but like if you didn't know what was going on in the show, she just disappears and there's like this line that's like, "Oh she went to be the head of Starfleet Medical" and that's it.

Grace: That's kind of a big promotion there, also.

Sue: Well, from chief medical officer of the flagship to head of Starfleet Medical, it's...

Grace: That's like going from being head of a hospital though, to surgeon general isn't it?

Sue: Okay, you might have a point there.

Grace: It's still kind of an extreme jump.

Sue: But, you know in reality Picard has this exchange with Wesley about like this is this life you sign up for where you're just shuffled from posting to posting and that's how it goes down. And that's probably actually one of the most realistic parts about Starfleet. If you want to think of it as a military organization, even though it's not a military organization, but it really kind of is.

Andi: Yeah and then we're left with this awkward, we have to you're out of a way to keep Wesley and lose Beverly and it's super weird, like I would not let my kid grow up on a spaceship without me, but you know that's me.

Grace: Son, you're now going to live with this friend of your mom's who's got a funky beard and likes to entertain out of Galaxy guests.

****laughter****

Sue: And after having raised him alone for ten years, ten plus years, like it's weird.

Grace: Although, can we appreciate that Worf does offer to be the one to tuck him in at night?

****laughter****

Grace: They're like oh he's going to tuck him in? Worf's like, "Me. I'm going to do that. I'm completely game. I am ready to be the father you need."

Jarrah: I'll just quickly say, going back for a second, what Rick Berman says in *The Fifty-Year Mission*, which is that and I'm sure this is who you're referring to, Sue, Maurice Hurley, Rick Berman says "Maurice hated Gates he disliked the whole character Dr. Crusher and he wanted to get rid of Gates and replace her. He didn't like her acting and he didn't like her. He went to me at the end of season one and I said I thought it was a bad idea. Then he went to Gene and he managed to convince Gene. It was all part of the fact he was the last man standing at the end of the first season, and he was going to be moving into the second biggest chair over in the writing area next to Gene. It was request he was making and Gene decided he would honor it. So Gates was let go and we went into a whole casting procedure and it ended up with Dr. Pulaski."

Andi: Bad situation all around.

Sue: So, let's talk about Dr. Pulaski.

Grace: Yeah there's a lot to say.

Sue: We addressed this in our episode specifically on Dr. Pulaski.

Grace: Pulaski pulls no punches, in case you wanna look it up.

Sue: But, she's basically set up to fail from the very beginning. Picard forgets her name, and then they apparently expected her to report to the bridge, even though flashback to "Encounter at Farpoint" [TNG Season 1, Ep. 1], Picard goes and apologizes to Crusher for making her report to the bridge, and says, "I should have met you when you came on board." Okay? So, discrepancy number one. But then they ask where she is, she's in Ten Forward, so that automatically gives the impression to the audience that she's just boozing, you know, and socializing and not doing her job and neglecting her duties when in fact she is counseling the person who was just you know violated and impregnated.

Grace: Although, to be fair, I wouldn't be surprised if that's the first place we found McCoy on the ship. If they're trying to keep that character mirror there with her as kind of their McCoy figure.

Sue: Yet this is also the episode where she's mean to Data.

Grace: Every episode she's in she's mean to Data.

Andi: The beginning of her being mean to Data.

Jarrah: Well, she gets better on that and like in "The Measure Of A Man" [TNG Season 2, Ep. 9] and stuff she's clearly viewing herself as on his side.

Grace: Yeah, they were definitely setting us up for more of a character arc than we actually got, only without that arc there, it's just kind of a low that she's at when we start and we never get to go much further than that.

Andi: Yeah I mean it really struck me, Picard's face when he talks about her. I think what was happening is Patrick Stewart at least was trying to play it that he resented her for being there when Crusher is gone, but because they never really explored that very much for dialogue it just gives you the sense that the captain doesn't like this character so why should we. Which is unfortunate.

Jarrah: Yeah, I think that, so the part about her being mean to Data this, others have addressed this before, that they were trying to do a McCoy/Spock dynamic, but the reason it didn't work is because Data is a lot more innocent than Spock, and it just came across like she was bullying him and not respecting him, and so she you know mispronouncing his name and then when he corrects her she starts like laughing like basically like, "Ha ha you have feelings ha ha" kind of thing, and it's not funny because he doesn't. Whereas, like with Spock it would be kind of like teasing that he's claiming to not have feelings but we all know he does.

Grace: With Spock and McCoy there's a back and forth, there's a level of equal part banter there, and with Pulaski and Data she's just kind of punching down.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: And in addition to her, with the mispronunciation and the teasing, she's just outright mean when he wants to be with Troi during childbirth. And she says, "Counselor Troi needs a human touch and not the cold hand of technology."

Grace: Yes, she was getting poetically mean there.

Jarrah: That part was also, okay so other than this one part, I will give Puaski props for being a staunch advocate for Troi the entire way through this episode.

Grace: That is pretty great. And I do really like that we, it's just a quick thing but we get a line of her being like, "We can give you something for the pain, it won't change the experience for you at all," which makes me happy to hear the because I've known multiple people who've gone into the childbirth experience and just of been like, "No, I have to do it naturally otherwise I'm not really doing it" and it of course it was painful and they didn't think there was any other option because otherwise then they'd be like cheating themselves out of the full childbirth experience. And it's nice to see even in this situation that being acknowledged as like, "No you can, you can go into there you will still be having a baby you will still be connecting with your child even if you don't want to be in horrible pain."

Jarrah: Yeah and that like it's up to you. Either way you don't have to be ashamed of it.

Grace: Exactly.

Jarrah: Yeah but it's a little weird how she's like she sort of says that, you know, "Usually the father's here because the woman needs someone to hold their hand" and that was a little weird. I mean I guess, was this pre Murphy Brown single motherhood on TV?

Grace: I don't even know, but way to be heteronormative Pulaski.

Jarrah: No gays in space!

****laughter****

Grace: Not to be confused with the male gaze in space that's a different genre altogether.

Andi: One that Kirk's really good at.

Grace: They don't have single parents in the future? I find that hard to believe.

Jarrah: Or even just like you're, yeah like, you're part of a partner on a starship and your other part of your partner is on a different starship or on a planet.

Andi: It just was kind of a little jarring moment.

Jarrah: Well, I did like that Data got to experience it and be kind of adorable.

Grace: I did, too. I do like that we get to see that moment of Troi just being like, "Nope, Data. I trust data. I want my friend here." It's very sweet, even if he has kind of a doofus about it.

Jarrah: Well, you know who he is less of a doofus than?

Grace: A lot of people in this episode, but please continue.

Sue: Riker creepily watching the birth from around the corner?

Jarrah: Ahh, yes, that is possibly who I was talking about.

Grace: That is a special level of creeper, when you're creeping on a woman as she's actively giving birth.

Sue: And then she's like, "Were you here the whole time?" Like that's super cute. No it's not, no it's not!

Jarrah: Beardy McFragile Masculinity.

****laughter****

Grace: He's just kind of halfway glaring at her as she delivers a baby.

Andi: And it's not even the worst of his moments in this episode which has to go to, "Not to be indelicate, but, who's the father?" And I'm like yeah your delicacy is super appreciated, Riker. Just the picture of delicacy.

Sue: So, we're clearly on mystical pregnancy time now.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: This whole scene in the ready room, like they talk for a good four or five minutes before Troi says a word.

Grace: That's what bothers me the most about this episode, how little Troi actually gets to say and do in it. She is literally the vehicle for this episode, and it's very upsetting that she doesn't get to be more involved.

Jarrah: My impression of that scene, and I mean watching it again today with the remastered version, the music and the like heartbeat of the fetus and stuff in that scene was a lot more obvious to me, that is like we aren't even really supposed to be listening to them that much. But like watching Troi go through the process of deciding what she wants to do, and it's like I think we're supposed to feel like at that moment she forms this like mental and emotional bond with the fetus, and that's when she's like we'll basically do whatever the heck you want, but I made my decision I'm keeping this baby and Picard's like well the discussion is closed. But it's still a disturbing scene because of all of them not even thinking to ask her what she wants to do before that.

Sue: Right, so, I had so many feelings about this today. Right. So this whole thing with her medical records being up on the screen, and showing the video, and hearing the heartbeat it made me think of the abortion laws of like the forced sonogram before you can decide to have an abortion, which are super super terrible.

Grace: And that there are places where they will make you listen to the heartbeat before making a decision.

Sue: Right. And this scene almost reinforces that like, "You'll bond with your child as soon as you see a sonogram and you won't want to get rid of it." But which is really bothersome. But, there is that great moment where as soon as she says, "I've decided what I'm going to do," Picard's like "Okay, we're done then, no more talk." I was also surprised by how frequently they said the word abort and abortion during that scene because this was still the late 80s.

Jarrah: Yeah I mean like Worf basically like, "Well we have to terminate it." And I think Worf uses the phrase or the words abortion and abortion talking about what he thinks they should do with the fetus.

Grace: Which obviously I really want Worf's advice. Worf wants to tell you his his opinions on reproductive rights.

Andi: I am not going to listen. So, I actually was really struck at the very beginning of the scene when Troi walks in because, okay, let's rewind a little bit to the part where we have to watch her be sleeping, and then this little like Tinkerbell looking like comes and like super creepily...

Sue: Stops at her crotch.

Andi: Yes.

Jarrah: Yeah it goes up underneath the blanket, like it's floating through walls and like looking at crew members who are like dudes, so I guess it's not interested, and then like randomly find sleeping woman.

Andi: Yeah, and the way that it like the way the camera pans up her body as we're supposed to think that the light the light energy thing is going up. And then she makes this super creepy face that's kind of distressed, but also I don't know. It's all just intensely creepy. And I noticed also that the music is creepy and the way they're shooting it has a horror quality to it. So like even though at no point during this does anybody on the crew acknowledge that she has been raped. They filmed it as if it is something creepy and weird and wrong.

Grace: And that inconsistency really stands out.

Andi: Well, they have to have some idea obviously by the way that they staged that scene that she was being violated, because that's how they staged it. And then okay, so, then going back forward here when she walks into that room her whole body language is very uncomfortable. So, like her shoulders are a little bit hunched, her... She's looking straight at the ground, when she goes around everyone she does not make any eye contact, she sits as far as humanly possible from everybody else in the room which is male dominated, and she just looks traumatized.

Grace: She pretty much has to be in the middle of a discussion of her own assault in front of all of her male coworkers.

Andi: Yes! Including her ex boyfriend. But, this is why this bothers me so much, they never acknowledge that, but the way she's portraying it and the way that they've staged it is clearly there. So, it makes it even more creepy that they never acknowledge it because you can't make those sorts of acting, and story decisions, and lighting decisions, and music decisions without knowing what you're doing. So, it really freaked me out to be honest. And then you know she at the very end and she stands she's like you know finally looks up and looks back at them and looks very strong and is like, "I'm going to do what I'm going to do." That's all very empowering. But, from the whole scene from the beginning all the way up to that point is her as a victim.

Jarrah: And that's really the most powerful moment she has in the whole episode.

Grace: She doesn't make a lot of decisions otherwise in the episode.

Andi: Yeah, the rest of it is her being a victim on display for her coworkers and it's cringe inducing it makes me physically sick.

Jarrah: Well, and just being pulled along by the whims of this alien baby.

Andi: Yeah.

Grace: He likes puppies.

Jarrah: And like let's just be clear. So, okay, the alien, you can make a clear argument, the alien did not consider what it was doing to be assault. That doesn't make it any less assault because she's asleep and she did not consent to it. So, just to be like 100 percent clear there, and that's I think part of the really

frustrating thing is this whole idea that it's like a magical gift. I'm sure that there are people who, like there absolutely are people who choose to have a baby that they conceive as the result of sexual assault, and do find it to be like they love that child. It doesn't make the assault like it didn't happen.

Sue: Just because it wasn't physically violent, that doesn't mean it's not rape.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: Oh boy, oh god, I hate this episode so much you guys.

Grace: Can I also say one more thing about that rape scene? Just to bring it down a notch. It also establishes that she goes to bed every night with that giant hair.

****laughter****

Grace: That feels so unnatural to me.

Jarrah: That is true.

Sue: I think it just establishes between that scene and the scene in the conference room, that when you actually give Marina Sirtis something to do she will act the crap out of it. Even if what it is, is terrible.

Andi: Oh my gosh, her performance is amazing. It reminds me of "The Enemy Within" [TOS Season 1, Ep. 4], and that it's awful to watch. but the acting is incredible. And that's part of what makes it so awful to watch. Well, Grace Lee Whitney definitely portrayed the after effects of a sexual assault just heartbreakingly, and so does Marina Sirtis in a different way. Like so, Grace Lee Whitney is very upset and crying and very emotional, whereas Marina Sirtis is just playing it more like calmly keeping it together, but underneath is a lot of turmoil. Both very powerful, I just I feel like they're let down so much by the writing, and the story that they're telling is just so creepy that, I can't even really appreciate what they're doing. And speaking of Marina Sirtis, if you all have not listened to the interview that she did with mission log, you absolutely should. Ken and John did a great job with that interview and Marina Sirtis is a joy to listen to. She talks about how she likes this episode immensely, and one of the reasons why she liked it so much is she actually got some acting to do, and after an entire season where she did absolutely nothing, they finally gave her an episode. And I can certainly understand why she would have complicated feelings towards this episode and fond feelings towards this episode.

Jarrah: Yeah, but I think you're right Andi that it wasn't really until I watched it today and that I really saw more of those layers of those writers kind of playing with horror/suspense sort of notes there, or you know the composers whoever had a hand in that but, certainly with the music, and then later when Picard comes to her quarters and like the baby's 10, or whatever that's like clearly meant to be a very like creepy uncanny moment. And the part where he's like asks you know are you ready to say where you came from and he's just like, "no yet", super creepy.

Andi: Yeah, it's mad "Children of the Corn"-ish.

Grace: We also get to have it established here that Picard is just really terrified of kids.

Andi: Yeah.

Grace: I mean there's the whole this is a magical alien baby thing, but Picard he is just unsettled by children in general I think.

Andi: He is also really awkward with Wesley in this episode.

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: Yeah that was funny.

Grace: "Captain, are we friends yet?" "No."

Jarrah: Yeah it makes it so much weirder because there's this whole kind of attempt to make it seem like this magical gift, and we first get to see that when she you know, makes the connection with the fetus, but then it's reinforced when she feels no pain during giving birth, and instead just feels like euphoria. And, then of course later on that you know this whole goodbye that she has with the baby, it's this whole you like almost attempt to retroactively justify the assault.

Grace: Yeah. It's uncomfortable.

Andi: The way that they made such a point of saying that there was going to be no physical effects made me feel like they were trying to downplay what happened. And lessen the impact of what had happened for Troi. So we never had to listen to them analyze it again. It's like well her body's fine, so...

Jarrah: Yeah, you're like you know if you examine her you wouldn't even know she had a baby.

Andi: Yeah exactly, and that's super creepy to me.

Grace: Yep!

Sue: And it also just makes no sense.

Andi: Yeah.

Sue: Like your body doesn't grow to carry an eight or nine pound baby in three days with zero physical effects.

Grace: That would be horribly painful.

Sue: Literally like it... No, wrong.

Andi: This is a special episode of Sue's Science Corner, where she just gets angry and yells at everybody. "Incorrect!!"

Sue: Although, one of our commenters on Facebook, one of our listeners pointed out something that I never noticed before, although this is probably one of the episodes that I have watched the least, and that is: "If this alien like creature is only working with Deanna's DNA how come it's a boy?"

Jarrah: Yeah, shouldn't it be a clone?

Sue: Yeah.

Jarrah: Yeah well you know. We had a comment from Elly which kind of talks about some of the things we just touched on which she said, "I find the speed of the pregnancy and the pain-free birth really disconcerting; it supports the idea that pregnancy and birth is a magical, mysterious process which has very real, often dangerous consequences for women's health. Marina Sirtis did a good job with what she was given, but for something that's meant to give a female character centre stage, it feels very old-fashioned and patriarchal."

Andi: Yeah, just as an aside, guys our Facebook page we always put up something you know so people can discuss what our topic is going to be for listener comments and stuff, and it's always quite interesting to read your comments, but the amount of comments and the nuance of the comments we got on this episode were... It just blew me away. So, definitely go and check it out and read the discussion going on there because there are a lot of really amazing comments and some of them that I hadn't really thought of in the same way, so good job, I guess you guys rock.

Grace: You guys did your homework, nice going. But it is really funny that we get to see this is a situation where the birth is just you know kind of easy, painless, whereas usually on TV and also usually in Star Trek, we see birth as this you know dramatic, painful, screaming, writhing around kind of thing and it's unfortunate that we couldn't really get any middle ground there.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean it's part of the problem that I think Elly was pointing out is that oftentimes in a pop culture we only see childbirth presented as like very dangerous, and we know that while it can be dangerous, like tons of people you can have a home birth supervised by a midwife and be mostly fine, as well as like someone is there who knows how to identify when something is like in need of medical attention.

Grace: Right, and it really just adds to this idea of othering the process of childbearing and birth which...

Jarrah: Well, yeah and like it needs to be supervised by usually a male professional.

Grace: Yeah, exactly.

Jarrah: But then in this case it's like so unrealistically the other way that like, it's just like, I don't know, it's like a sigh. It's like breathe out, and there's the baby.

Grace: And there it is.

****laughter****

Grace: That's my cover of "Whoomp There It Is"

Sue: And of course to emphasize how alien this child really is, again, but it still took like two minutes.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: The other thing that bothers me about the idea of her body having no physical marks I guess, is the fact that there is really no follow up to this at all. And there's a great comment from Anika on our Facebook page that kind of gets to this, "Besides everything already mentioned my gripe is the entire lack of impact. Deanna goes through pregnancy, birth, and the death of her child in three days and it's never brought up again? I want her to confront Riker and Worf. I want her to try and hide it from her mother but oops, Lawaxana [sic] is a grade A++ telepath, and then they cry together. I want Guinan to get her to talk about it. She named the kid after her late father! I want consequences. I know TNG is episodic, I know some of this exists in novels or fic, but -- if we have to put up with this hot mess of an episode in the first place I want it to MATTER." And I have to agree with that.

Grace: Yeah, leave the characters as traumatized as the audience.

Andi: Yeah and the thing is, is I thought about this before but then apparently it also comes up in *The Fifty-Year Mission* where Lucy on her Facebook page brought up that Ronald Moore and Michael Pillar talk about the episode "Family" [TNG Season 4, Ep. 2] which is the one that's right after Picard was assimilated by the Borg and they felt like he needed to deal with that, which is good, and I agree that that was a good episode and a good instinct, it's just why do we never have that instinct for our female characters when they're violated. Frustrating.

Jarra: Yeah. I mean certainly stuff had, the whole staff had changed by that point. It doesn't mean that they couldn't have made that decision earlier, but I'm glad that there was that change in time for Picard's trauma. I mean, I don't know, I wouldn't say that they would make the same decision on Troi necessarily because I think after "The Best of Both Worlds" [TNG Season 3, Ep. 26] we have violations, and possibly night terrors. Not sure if those are both after there.

Sue: The thing is for our male characters there are tons of callbacks to early episodes and to things they want to dredge up and this never happens for Troi. Like "Dark Page" [TNG Season 7, Ep. 7], "Dark Page" would be the perfect time come to revisit this with Lwaxana.

Jarra: Oh hey I lost a kid, too. Yeah.

Andi: Yeah, well the way Lucy puts it that I think she put it very well is: "Sometimes episodes containing assaults dealt with the issue better, but a main cast female character coming to terms with something like this was never the sole focus of an episode." And yeah I think it's it's unfair and a missed opportunity really.

Jarra: In the *Titan* novels, hopefully this isn't much of a spoiler, she names a planet after Ian Andrew.

Grace: Awww, but after which one?

Jarra: Was her dad Ian Andrew as well? Or was he just Ian?

Sue: I believe he was Ian Andrew you as well.

Jarra: Oh, okay, well I thought it was after her kid.

Grace: Either way.

Jarra: Just based on the novel but it's been a while.

Grace: We'll give it the benefit of the doubt.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Grace: This time.

Andi: So, just as kind of an aside we referenced that this trope was called a mystical pregnancy, but I do think it's important to point out that the mystical pregnancy trope is very, very, very common in sci-fi. They've done it on Doctor Who and Torchwood and oh goodness.

Jarrah: X-Files.

Andi: Yeah, X-Files. Angel must be like the king of mystical pregnancy there were three. Cordelia had two, and Darla had one, but it's this idea of just, well it's exactly what it sounds like mystical pregnancy. But the reason that I have a problem with it is because it very much is something that happens to women instead of something that women are choosing to be a part of, and it really centers the story around their reproductive capabilities, rather than their personalities and lives.

Grace: It turns the characters into a vehicle for the plot.

Jarrah: Just like a vessel for babies.

Grace: Yep, pretty much.

Sue: When that light being is flying around it's pretty clear that it's looking for the most viable womb, and not like the best person to raise it as a human.

Grace: That's what shooting stars are, don't ya know, they're just mystical beings flying around looking for a uterus.

Andi: I'm never going to sleep again.

Grace: Yeah try listening to that B.O.B. song again, ****singing**** "can we pretend that airplanes in the night sky, are aliens looking for uteruses, I could really use a baby right now"

****laughter****

Jarrah: But yeah I mean, it kind of, I don't know, it lends itself to that idea that like you know if only you get pregnant you will experience the magic of motherhood kind of thing that it's this inherent universal experience that everyone with a uterus can go through, but all women can go through in like the way that they're crafting it because to the you know people who follow this trope it's like if you are a woman it equals you can be a mom.

Grace: Because you are not a woman until you do that, apparently?

Andi: The other flipside of that is using pregnancy as like a terror tool.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: It's like something to be feared, something that is going to be forced upon you. The whole thing is gross and I hate it.

Sue: If you want to roll your eyes at some of this like there's no greater joy of a woman's life than having a child stuff, which can be true for some people but isn't true for everyone, I encourage you to google the term "mommy jacking."

Jarrah: Uh oh.

Grace: I'm scared already.

Sue: And I'm just going to leave it at that.

Grace: I'm scared. I think my uterus just recoiled.

Sue: One example, there are generally examples from like social media where somebody will say something like "I'm hoping that that I get the best news of my life today" and somebody else will post like "are you waiting to find out if you're pregnant because that's clearly the best thing that can happen to a woman ever for all time." And the original poster will reply like "no I'm waiting to find out if I got into medical school, thanks."

Andi: Never heard that term before.

Sue: That's "mommy jacking."

Jarrah: So, I mean we've been talking for a little bit but we haven't really talked about the origin of this script, and I'm wondering if we should talk about this because there's like a reason that's such a bad episode got made.

Grace: Aside from incompetence?

Jarrah: Not that it justifies it, but...

Sue: This idea of this mystical pregnancy among the crew was apparently part of Gene Roddenberry's original pitch for Star Trek, and it never happened, and then it was developed as a script for phase 2 the never produced like second series of Star Trek.

Jarrah: Yeah. So, that was like the crew that was then adapted into the motion picture crew, and it was going to be Ilia the Deltan who was mystically impregnated and then because of the writers strike they dug up the phase two scripts and decided this was one of the most viable, no pun intended, to make for Next Generation, and so we got this episode.

Sue: Because they wanted to start production as soon as they possibly could once the strike was over. So, people who weren't writers worked on it because you couldn't be in production when you didn't have writers either. I don't know writers strikes are weird. But yeah so they basically dusted off this thing they never used and threw some other stuff into it and created this TNG episode. Then the fan production of Star Trek phase

2 which is now Star Trek: New Voyages made the Phase 2 script. With I think some minor changes so that you can watch on YouTube.

Jarrah: Yeah and...

Sue: We did!

Jarrah: I mostly found it funny, but I guess it raises the question of can this concept be saved.

Andi: Well, okay, so the... Just as an aside, if you're interested in checking out the phase two version that they did, it's actually better in a lot of ways, they took out some of the more egregious scenes such as that horrible conference room scene is gone, and I thought they did a better job with the sacrifice plotline, because at the end the mystical baby kid creep thing decides to take off so they can all be saved by the B Plot, I don't know, it's a mess. They did a better job with the Phase 2 script with it, I think.

Sue: McCoy is way more on the side of the crew member than Pulaski was.

Andi: Yeah there's there's some better McCoy moments. The child has more of an impact because they have her interacting with other crew members, whereas in this one it was just like, "hey I'm going to be a creep. And people are going to be creeped out by me and then I'm going to be gone."

Jarrah: Well, also the daughter doesn't know the whole time what the situation is. Like she as a child has to learn what her purpose was versus like Ian Andrew who seems to just be like a creepy a little child sociopath who basically, well maybe not a sociopath, but he kind of comes across as like this weird creepy kid who like knows that he's going to hurt people the whole time.

Grace: Oh man he's space Damien.

Andi: He is basically. Yeah, structurally I think it's better. It fixes a lot of pretty glaring problems that the TNG episode had, but I don't think this concept can be saved. I think it's just...

Grace: The concept itself is pretty flawed.

Andi: Yeah it's a flawed concept. I will say that we did have one of our listeners Becky basically proposed a rewrite, she said, "I haven't seen it in a long time, but yeah the whole forced pregnancy aspect is nasty. It would have been more interesting to have the alien able to communicate with Deanna, and ask her to help it experience life as a corporeal being. And Deanna agrees because she's Starfleet and they're all about making contact with new life forms, even in such a strange way. Maybe she'd seek Picard's permission - it's a first contact situation after all - and then there could be the arguments about whether to do it or not, rather than that creepy after the fact discussion the senior officers have about allowing the pregnancy to continue. But in the end it all comes down to Deanna's choice." I still don't know that I would super enjoy an episode like that, but she does fix a lot of the problems pretty simply right off the bat.

Grace: By giving Troi some agency in there.

Andi: Yeah.

Jarrah: Yeah. I mean if she seriously considered it first maybe.

Andi: I feel like if you did it that way, if you changed the first act to be about the consent, and about the idea of like first contact, and all that like it would have shifted the pacing, but I think it could have been if you had shifted the pacing down a little bit it could have been really interesting that way. And instead of more of something that was happening to her, be more about like unconventional ways to experience life and connect with people.

Jarrah: I mean it definitely would have been a less offensive episode, but I think it would have repeated a lot of things we see in other Star Trek episodes with like kids having to learn to be more human, and like what it means to be human, and you, it would take away a lot of the like acceptable kinds of tension in this I guess, because you would always know it was going to go away and you would always know what its intention was.

Sue: I think the concept of an energy being, or a higher form of life, or whatever taking human form to learn about humanity is just a part of science fiction that is difficult to get rid of because it is sort of an interesting concept. Like, how with somebody with no experience of humanity you know analyze it, how would they live a life as a human. But, I can't think of any way that you know that being could become a child, birthed as a human that is not in some way creepy. I mean it even happens sort of in "The Inner Light" [TNG Season 5, Ep. 25], right, because Picard lives the experiences of Kamin, but he's still being violated, like he's knocked unconscious and his brain has taken over.

Andi: Which is, by the way, why I do not like "The Inner Light", fight me on Twitter about it.

Grace: But we do still get to see that followed up to later and establish that it long term effected Picard. .

Andi: Yes.

Jarrah: We could also just have like a baby on a doorstep, like the baby just appears, and it appears to be human.

Grace: On the doorstep of a spaceship, that'd be pretty great.

Sue: So, they like build a robot baby that grows like a human?

Jarrah: No, I'm saying it's like, I don't know, it appears... It's a magical light ball here.

****laughter****

Andi: I'm sorry, but you had me at robot baby.

Sue: But somebody still had to have that baby, how does that energy become matter?

Andi: Sue's Science Corner!

Jarrah: Well, I'm not saying, I'm just saying if we're accepting a level of total scientific implausibility from this plot and maintaining that, then we can have it be the light ball just turns into a baby that appears to be human.

Grace: Suspension of Disbelief. Suspension.

Andi: I'm sorry but you had me at robot baby, and I really want to see this new episode that we've created.

Sue: I think I took it a little bit too far into Doctor Who.

Jarrah: Wait! And then Pulaski fingers that it's a robot, and has to challenge her own beliefs about Data.

Andi: See!! Oh my god, this robot baby is amazing. Can we please at least instead of "The Child" it will be "The Robot Baby." That's what it needs to be called.

Grace: Oh my god you guys we need to write this fic.

****laughter****

Grace: This robot child has won over my heart.

Jarrah: And, his name is Ian Android.

****laughter****

Andi: Now we have to call this episode "The Ballad of Ian Android."

Grace: Yes. Or "I, Ian."

Andi: So, is there more to say about our favorite episode ever, "The Child"?

Grace: Why?

Sue: Because writers strike.

Grace: Okay.

Jarrah: I mean I was going to say that I think part of the problem with this trope, that you mentioned, it tends to define women in terms of reproductive capacity. But I feel like that was a problem with Troi the whole way through, that it was always like assault, and pregnancy, and like things to do with the fact that Troi has a female defined body versus, any like traits that she really possessed. Unfortunately, all too often.

Andi: I also want to ask because I was trying to answer this question earlier and I could not. What is the message of this episode?

Grace: Sleep wearing a condom.

****laughter****

Grace: Wear your chastity belt to bed.

Sue: If the light ball can pass through walls do you really think that a prophylactic is going to stop it?

Grace: A space prophylactic maybe?

****laughter****

Jarrah: I don't know. I think it's just like kids are magical, but also dangerous. Which did we even mention like the reason that he has to leave and like basically kill himself is that he's threatening those super dangerous weird viruses that uncharismatic Robert Redford with the massive mustache brought on board?

Andi: Yeah, it's awful, it's awful B plot nonsense, science-y nonsense.

Grace: How many plots does this episode have?

Andi: So many!! That's one of the main problems with this episode if we completely like gave it a huge pass on all of the gender and consent issues, which obviously you can't, say we did... This episode is a mess from top to bottom because you have, you're introducing two characters, plus Riker's beard which might as well be its own character.

Jarrah: And plus Geordi is promoted and transferred.

Andi: Geordi becomes chief engineer, Wesley is weirdly hanging around even though his mom has disappeared into the ether, and it's just so much going on and none of it ties together, and it's just like plot soup with no redeemable message.

Sue: It's almost like they were trying to shove a second pilot into the first episode of the second season, because so much has changed.

Grace: Waiter there's a pilot in my pilot.

****laughter****

Andi: The whole thing is a mess. I hate it.

Jarrah: It's badly paced.

Andi: Oh it's awful!

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: Yeah.

Jarrah: I know that's like least problem with itm but that was one of the new ones I was like, "Oh in addition to all the problems I remembered, it's badly paced."

Grace: At least Troi gets that dope maternity gown.

****laughter****

Andi: That's true.

Grace: Apparently it was full of bird seed. Or so they say.

Andi: So we have to rate it.

Jarrah: Oh god...

Grace: I give it two dresses full of bird seed out of 10.

Andi: What is this bird seed thing?

Grace: Apparently the fake baby bump was made out a bird seed.

Andi: Interesting fun fact.

Grace: Did you think I was pulling that out of my ass?

Andi: Yes, yes I did.

Sue: That would be really heavy.

Andi: Yeah it would, and weird. Why would it be birdseed?

Grace: Because it moves around I guess like sand but not as sandy. Maybe they were hoping to attract birds to get some of those you know cats off set.

Jarrah: I feel like the next time I'm at the pet store I'm going to be like fondling a bag of birdseed, to just be like, "really?"

Grace: Nah, you gotta step it up a notch and then when they come by and be like "can we help you ma'am?", you've to go, "This is my baby now."

****laughter****

Jarrah: No, I say, "this is my alien baby now or my robot baby!"

Grace: Robo baby buggy bumpers.

****laughter****

Andi: Somebody has to follow that up with a rating.

Jarrah: Okay, I'm going to rate this episode, zero point five uncharismatic mustaches.

Sue: I'm going to rate this episode three beardless Rikers because that's how bad it is.

Andi: Not even the pain of a single beardless Riker, but THREE.

Grace: Three sad naked chins.

Andi: I guess I'll give it two out of... No, one out of ten awkward conversations with Picard about your future.

Jarrah: You noticed that Picard has never played with puppies? I'm just saying. Like he's like no I have never played with puppies and you're like...

Grace: Jean-Luc, what kind of childhood did you have? Were they not allowed on the vineyard, or are there no puppies left in France?

Sue: That just means he's a cat guy.

Jarrah: "But who will talk him in at night?"

Andi: Worf will!!

Grace: Worf is here to read you a bedtime story.

Sue: And Troi's just sitting on the bridge laughing as all of this is going on like "ha ha back to normal, so funny this crew."

Jarrah: Well that was like a very TOS ending.

Sue: Yeah it was.

Grace: What a mess.

Andi: Yes. This is not our favorite episode but hey, if you like it please let us know why.

Grace: And where we can send help for you.

Andi: We welcome all opinions, no matter how wrong.

Sue: That's like something I would say.

Andi: So, Jarrah, where can people find you elsewhere on the Internet?

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

Andi: And Sue, if people have questions for Sue's Science Corner where can they reach out to you?

Sue: You can find me on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/spaltor>

Andi: And Grace?

Grace: You can find me on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/BonecrusherJenk> and in their dreams.

****laughter****

Andi: And I'm Andi, you can always catch me on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/FirstTimeTrek>. You can also reach out to us at the show on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/womenatwarp/> or crew@womenatwarp.com Thanks so much for listening!

****OUTRO MUSIC****