Women at Warp Episode 98: Fanfic Part 2

SUE:
Hi and welcome to Women at Warp:. A Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Sue, and thanks for tuning in. with me tonight is Andi.

ANDI:
Hello!

SUE:
And our special guest B.A. Lopez.

B.A.:
Howdy.

SUE:
Tonight's main topic we're going to be talking about fan fiction.

BA:
Woo! *crew laughs*

SUE:
We have previously done an episode on what we called "pre-Internet fan fiction." That part 1 was our episode 53 and covered approximately 1967 to 1989-ish. So we're gonna be looking at 1989 forward in this episode. Really quickly before we jump into that. And before I ask Dinda to tell us more about herself we have some super quick housekeeping to do. Our show is entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as one dollar per month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media to silly watch along commentaries. Most recently we put up the pressroom audio from Star Trek Discovery from New York Comiccon. So all those interviews, the full audio is up on Patreon for our patrons. So if you'd like to join us there you can visit Patreon.com/womenatwarp. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. And that's all this week. So Dinda, why don't you tell us a little bit about your history with Star Trek, your fandom in Star Trek, and your history with fan fiction.

BA
Oh wow. You know, you put together an amazing list here, these resources, and I went through and it's, you know, it's a little frightening to think how long ago some of this happened now. It's like 20-23-24 years ago. But you know my dad was a Star Trek fan. And then I came kind of late to the Next Generation, and it was an ex-boyfriend who introduced me to it, and it was interesting because like I said I came in pretty late and was instantly hooked on the people aspect of it and just you know great writing, great show. So it lured me in with *that* and then

being a geek at heart it lured me into the technology and getting more into the technology side of it and figured that out. And didn't *directly* lead me to my job at NASA but *laughs* eventually ended up working at NASA and became a huge *huge* space geek. So it was a good fit. And just the whole Roddenberry-esque optimistic view of the future and everything is something that really drew me in and continues to draw me into the Trek universe.

SUE:
And when did you get started writing fan fiction?

BA:
Like I said, more years ago than I even care to think about now. *Sue laughs* But I found *pauses, sighs* I'm trying to remember. I found a couple of things after-online back in the early days. I was thinking about the Trekiverse, Alt.StarTrek.creative. And I found people like Amy Raduege, I found Sandra Guzdek, some of those folks. Amy was just-she was incredible. The first story I ever read was The Cure. Which is still an incredible great story and started finding more people, other like-minded kind of authors and fans and stuff and decided- I can't remember what made me sit down and think I could write something and want to write something about it, but eventually I did and was kind of shocked by the response and the well wishes and the people I met and I just had a great experience with it.

ANDI:
Do you have any particular characters or ships that you write?

BA:
Yeah I've only really ever done Picard/Crusher and

ANDI:
Ah! So this is why Sue knows you and loves you! *all laugh* I've cracked the code!

BA:
Yes!

SUE:
Well true. I'm going to call you out a little bit because you also won the first ever alt.startrek.creative award for best next gen story, in a tie, and best Picard/Crusher story back in 1995.

ANDI:
So you're a celebrity, is what we know now.

BA:
Of course I don't think of myself that way.*Andi laughs* Like I said it's really *really* humbling and a little bit scary. I remember going to an event, you know, the group of women who became

really involved in the P.C. the Picard Crusher fanfic started the group Bonc, B on John Luc. I think Amy and Sandra started it and a bunch of other people joined in. Have met some of my best friends in life through that group, traveling companions, people like Sue, and other folks. And I remember going to the very first they were all getting together to go see Patrick Stewart at a play in New York. So I said "OK I'll go" and honestly I was a little bit freaked out. One of the ladies showed up from Germany and had created this cover work for my story and wanted my autograph and stuff and I was like "Whoa! What is this about?" *crew laughs* It was crazy.

ANDI:
Being internet famous is super surreal.

BA:
It is.

ANDI:
I remember when we went to Star Trek Las Vegas and more than one person like recognized me and it was super weird. I was like *uncomfortable voice* "Oh yeah. Cool I'm not weirded out at all. I really *enjoy* this." part of me that was like "But why though?"

SUE:
I mean I knew you from the newsgroups and the chat rooms as "Dinda" and for some reason my brain never put it together with the name on your stories of BA Lopez. So when it finally clicked and I was about to meet you in person for the first time I really did freak out. *all laugh* and I'm pretty sure I've told you that before, but it was absolutely true!

ANDI:
Well we get attached to our favorite fic writers and our favorite stories. Like I am literally rereading one of my favorite fics today that I have probably read 20 times. *cat meows in background* Yeah, Mary likes it too.

SUE:
But one of my favorite aspects about that part of the community, we're sort of out of order here and we'll get a little more chronological in a bit, but I've talked about it a lot especially on recent panels is that community that did come from it. The Bonc listservs were relatively small. And that made them intimate. We all really did get to know each other, we became close friends, as you said *traveling companions*, and you just created relationships that I don't think exist in as many places or come as easily as they did then. And I have said on panels that like the women who became my friends and mentors from this fanfiction community are the people that I called in times of life crisis. You know, something's not going right at school or at work or you know someone in the family is sick. I'm pretty sure that you Dinda talked me out of transferring colleges *laughs* at one point.

BA:
I do remember giving you some help like on resumes and some of that stuff. And that stuff. So that's good. And I love doing that. I mean I just talked to-somebody called me, found me online, I talked to them this morning, and you know in a professional sense now but it's it's that whole thing and maybe that's from Star Trek maybe that's you know a certain type of people. But I just love giving back and teaching you know? It is just inherent. And with Star Trek you know that whole, like I said, that optimism. There's this optimism in the Trekiverse that isn't in other genres of science fiction. And that's something that drew me to it and continues to draw me to it, because at one time I even went out there and I asked, you know my colleagues at NASA and I asked people online, I said "Name me another writer-name me another universe that's been created in the future that isn't dystopic. That isn't, you know, humans are really terrible, we destroyed ourself, we destroyed the universe, and you know we had to go and go on. Or show me how schools are in the future." You know? And we could not find any good examples of science fiction where things actually got better. And that was really disheartening to me. So that's something you know when I have the luxury of being able to write again and I really want to write about.

SUE:
So were you involved at all in the fanzines or was everything once the internet came along for you?

BA:
Yeah, by the time I got to it-I actually still have a stack of fanzines that I had ordered, and everything I have right now as packed and I'm in the middle of a move. But yeah I still, every now and then, come across those things. But by *that* time most of it had been online. And the Alt.StarTrek.creative, the fanfic.net, the private archives that a lot of people had. I mean I'm pretty sure I lost most of my own stories for a while and stuff and couldn't locate them if you asked me to. One of the rumored jazz drives and hard drives of floppy disk and and who knows what sort of media. And now moving things into the cloud into an online archive I had to ask people for-I'd forgotten stories I had written and then people would send me stuff that's like "Oh yeah I completely forgot I had written that." *Sue laughs* I probably don't even right now have a good archive of my own stories. Crazy.

SUE:
Well, when we talk about Usenet and alt.startrek.creative to go a little bit more into the facts and history of that, it was actually 1982 that the first Star Trek board was created on the Internet of the time. It was net.Star Trek created by Roger No. And as you would suspect, Star Trek fans began posting fanfiction to that group and it lasted for a good five years. In 1987 Usenet groups started to be reorganized. Net.StarTrek closed down and fanfic got *moved* in a way to wreck.arts.startrek. And then it was in '91 *laughs* this-I think this is the beginning of my favorite bits. This attitude. Posters to wreck.arts.startrek felt *inundated* with Star Trek fan fiction. They discuss voting to create a wreck.arts.startrek.creative and during this period

alt.StarTrek.creative was formed and still exists to this day, although it is not nearly as active as it used to be. But I still get an email every time somebody posts something to that board.

BA:
Wow I didn't know that was still out there.

Sue:
Yeah, you can subscribe I think through Google Groups.

BA:
Oh yeah I remember that. Yeah and doin those late night chats.

SUE:
Oh yeah.

ANDI:
I mean we're talking early days. We're talking like dial-up.

BA:
Yup. Absolutely, and trying to download stuff.

ANDI:
I'm pretty sure the dial-up noise will like, live in my brain forever.

SUE:
Oh yeah. Downloading text was a lot.

ANDI:
Where I would like download one like *line* at a time. I remember my very first Website that I did. I did a *laughs* fan Website, and I think it was Angel Fire, for Titanic and the pictures would take a solid 10 minutes for them to all load because I had these huge large pictures of like really nice pictures of Titanic. *laughs* The Internet. What a treasure trove.

SUE:
laughs Well as soon as alt.startrek.creative really got it going in 1991, Trekiverse the archive for alt.startrek.creative was formed. I just want to note really quickly that this archive was on a university server.

ANDI:
laughs Which university? Do we know?

SUE:

I could find it, but I don't have it off the top of my head. But a *lot* of early fanfic was on university servers because there was a huge contingent of college age people on the Internet. That's where the access was. So *so* many of those early stories have .edu in the email address afterwards. *laughs*

BA:

Yeah, I remember being at the-yeah I was working on my graduate degree at the time, and being in the university lab and being able to use those resources to get the Star Trek stuff. And also remember there was a guy Joseph Tivoli, T-I-V-O-L-I, he was one of the guys who helped, again, some of that archiving and that type stuff, setting up some of those systems and that guy became really *really* famous and really started- I mean that's a whole system, a whole nother thing to look into because he- like I said he created some incredible computer resources and possibly made a lot of money.

SUE:

Well yeah, and the Trekiverse archive is *huge*. It still exists. It's still updated, I believe. The latest info I could find is that the current archivist is Katey RedShoes and the index maintainer is Steven Ratliff, and that is a name that AFC users will certainly recognize.

BA:

Yes. Oh Stephen.

SUE:

But Trekiverse is currently archiving everything posted on alt.startrek.creative, alt.startrek.creative.eroticamoderated, and alt.startrek.creative.allages.

ANDI:

That's interesting, so like you had different boards for different like ratings of stories? That makes sense. See, I didn't get into fan fiction until, I dunno a couple of years ago really. Not that long ago like Archive of our Own is where I will read fanfic. So like, the new stuff. So all of this like history and how fanfic used to be shared is tremendously interesting to me.

SUE:

Yeah and the board sort of broke out the same way that alt.StarTrek.creative broke out of the discussions of the shows. You know, people started to feel inundated with erotica stories, mature stories and then technically it just became alt.StarTrek.creative.erotica first and then spam followed, and then it became alt.StarTrek.creative.eroticamoderated after that. So it certainly evolved throughout the years and "all ages" began in 1997. So that's how it broke it up. You really could physically-not *physically* but you could go to the boards but a lot of people subscribed by email and just got you know the list, everything that came through that day. So whether you wanted to see something or not you didn't really have a choice if you got the Digest by email.

BA:

Yeah, and now that I think about it one of the reasons *that* evolved that way is because there was suddenly this fear of people who were writing more adult Star Trek stories that "Oh my god. Kids may be getting this. People under 18. Could I become liable for providing you know that type of story to somebody under age?" and a lot of it started going offline and through the private mail list because of that fear. And so that was interesting that, like I said, something happens, you try to moderate it, you try to- invention of how the community tried to self police itself and put those policies in place even without government having to come in, which is awesome. And then to see it evolve and then to see people-a lot of people even myself pull back off the public listings and off the public boards into more private groups, where "OK. I know these people so I trust these people." type thing.

SUE:

Yeah. There was no, I hate the word, but gatekeeper right at the doors of ASE. You could just go into it if you wanted to. And a lot of us who weren't 18 yet definitely did. So *laughs* that's the thing that I'm admitting to on a podcast. *laughs*

BA:

Yup.

ANDI:

May I ask, so we're talking about some of the more mature stories. Was there a differentiation between like het relationships and queer relationships? Or was it all in one place, or was the queer shipping like not mainstream, or like how did that work.

SUE:

I mostly read Picard/Crusher at the time but I don't *remember* it. There weren't *sub* boards or anything so it all just came to the same place. But the the queer stories that I remember there were far fewer in the next gen set than there were of the TOS.

ANDI:

Well yeah, 'cause TOS has a much more natural ship, I think in Kirk and Spock.

SUE:

But I definitely remember seeing some.

ANDI:

I was just curious because I know that we talked about, in our first podcast, we talked about how some people didn't like that aspect of the fanfic, and I was wondering if that, I guess, continued to be an issue in this period of fanfic or if people were still really open to it.

BA:
I think, if you remember Sue, one of the things that was interesting again, community kind of policing itself, was that there was this whole list of acronyms and short versions, P.C. you know, and I mean some of the stuff I had to look up "What is you know this mean?" or "What does that mean?" because you would write a story title then after it they would put you know the initial for the pairing group, for the type of pairing, for all the stuff that may be in that particular story. So if you were looking for something specific you could find it, or if you wanted to stay away from something you could also avoid it a lot better and I think that was interesting. Like I said, the community very much trying to police itself in that respect.

ANDI:
So "tags" essentially.

BA:
Yeah

SUE:
Yeah. They came after the title and they tended to come in the same order. So we all just sort of fell into this accepted pattern. But also I would say that fanfic was *my* first experience with content warnings. You know people were very very conscious, even in you know the mid 90s, of like "This story has this" "This story has underage sex." "This story has nonconsensual sex." "This story has whatever else" just because people were- we were very conscious of understanding that not everybody liked to the same thing or wanted to read certain things.

ANDI:
Yeah.One thing that the community is extremely good at is tagging and trigger warnings. So like, you can write the most messed up thing in the entire world, I mean like stuff that people wouldn't even think to think of it is in fic for sure, and nobody will really get angry with you usually. I mean there are occasional like, flares of I guess policing of certain ships or certain kinds of fic, but heaven help you if you don't tag it because that's when people will get really angry with you. And I've always found that to be pretty funny, like we sometimes get pushbacks on trigger warnings, like it's just for sensitive people, but really it's a way for people to look at like a list of things like "This doesn't look like something I'm interested in" and move on. *Or* if you have certain sensitivity to certain kinds of stories or like a certain ship is something that you don't like then you can avoid it. And I find that to be very helpful and necessary and cool and I wish that people were more conscious of that in our everyday world as they are in the fic world.

BA:
Yeah absolutely.

ANDI:
'Cause I find it very helpful.

SUE:
It also helps you weed through things, because there was no-when you got the Digest mail there was no filtering right. Other than control F on your keyboard to go right to the pairing you were looking for. *laughs*

ANDI:
Yeah It's-the thing I like most about Archive of our Own is that you can include and exclude tags now, so you can narrow down your search by ship, you can narrow down your search by rating, you can narrow it down by tags, you want *these* tags included and you want *those* tags excluded, that sort of thing. And it's awesome. It saves a lot of time and it saves a lot of like mental energy.

SUE:
If only that came along faster.*laughs*

ANDI:
Yeah! Well I mean it's not it's not a simple search algorithm. You know like, this is something that they've been working on for years now.

SUE:
Well I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, because I have much more on Archive of our Own when we get to it. But still in the early 90s around the same time that we had Usenet, all of the message boards, and Trekiverse things were, at least the way I see it in my brain, still kind of split up. Nothing was in the same place other than the Trekiverse archive of the ASE groups. People had personal Web sites where they'd post their stories. One thing that I remember specifically was story *listings*. So they wouldn't host the story, it would just be a website that listed every story for a certain pairing and where to get it. "This story is in the zine." "This story is on this website for this story." "You have to email the author." That was a *thing*, and a thing that I did. *laughs*

ANDI:
laughing I can just picture young Sue emailing people and being like "I need more sweet sweet Picard Crusher. Send it to me!"

SUE:
100 percent accurate. *all laugh*

BA:
Yeah I remember that. You're absolutely right about the listings and there were certain authors who did that because, you know nowadays everything is affiliate marketing and you do everything to get an email to sell to that person, back then a lot of those authors for their own whether it was ego or whatever they wanted people begging them-asking them for stories. And I think I remember certain authors "Oh no you have to come to me for this story. I'm the only

place you can get it." And I was you know, I was never like that but I found it interesting that there were some sites out there and some particular authors that just were just looking for that adoration and for people to- and some of them honestly weren't that very good. I mean the quality of stuff out there was just- that was the other thing, that you know that you really couldn't tag. It wasn't until, Sue when did the reviews start coming in? Was that on on fanfiction.net? Where you can have the reviews and stuff. There started to be a lot of bad fic out there too. And I think the review system and other stuff helped because, like you said, we were just- you were like me devouring everything you could find on that particular pairing or that particular topic and you sometimes waste a lot of time and then the worst thing was an unfinished story where you would get bits of a story and then the author wouldn't finish it and you'd just be like "Oh my God! You have to-" you know? And yeah that was really frustrating.

SUE:
Those were certainly things that I think came along with the move from zines to the Internet. Right? We no longer have somebody who is curating the stories that are going out. You no longer have a central editor, although individual writers may have beta readers, you no longer really have quality control. Anybody who wants to post something can post something and you can see that as a good thing or a bad thing.

ANDI:
Or both!

SUE:
Yeah, but there are things you gain too like the instant feedback. From what I remember on usenet there wasn't a whole lot of commenting on stories that were posted other than like "I liked this." But the comments or kudos, as they're called on an Archive of our Own, I think really did start to come along with fanfiction.net in the late 90s.

ANDI:
I love the idea of going to an author directly and like the authors being like *dealer voice* "Well what you want? What you want? I got a really sweet Picard/Crusher, rated E, thirty-thousand words, you want that? You got to come straight to the source." Yeah I can just picture it. Like if you think about it like a physical realm, I picture them in like the back alley is with the big trench coats they've got what you need. They've got the stories, they've got the hook up, and that makes me laugh.

BA:
That's funny! Because yeah, now you made me think about challenge stories.

SUE:
Oh yes!

BA:
Which was a lot of fun, where somebody would throw out "OK. You have to use *these* elements in the story" or "The story can only be a thousand words long. Or "It has to be you know" they would put all these you know "I challenge you to write a story that has this this this and this" and then people would all take that same concept for the same challenge. And those were a lot of fun. Very creative and I don't think a lot of those were out there. I think a lot of those were more private mailing list perhaps. But yeah, that was a way to get authors to put out more content and more interesting- and as an author it really challenged you to go outside your- cause I tend to be very canon related. I tend to be very strict on my physics, space, all that type stuff. And so to have someone challenge you to say "Hey can you write something, you know, that's just so crazy over here." So that was actually a lot of fun. And I think good for the community and good for authors who wanted to try something different.

SUE:
Yeah I mostly remember those challenge stories within our listserv.

ANDI:
Yeah. I mean currently we have something similar in the idea of prompts, but it's less of like a challenge and more like "This is a story I want. Someone write it for me."

SUE:
Oh no, the challenge story is where like "You have to mention a fork, and they have to appear in England" *Andi laughs* and like it was bonkers. It wasn't like "I want a story that has a puppy in it" *laughs* like things that were off the wall. Most of the time anyway.

ANDI:
And I mean I think a lot of people get into writing like fanfics because they are practicing. Like it's *really* good practice if you are interested in writing professionally. Some people just do it for fun but it is also it's a writing exercise that has feedback. It's almost like a writing group that- people like- or like a workshop, writing workshop that people who want to be professional writers will do. Like, you go to college for that. Like that's a huge part of what like MFAs are about are writing workshops. But you can do the same thing through fanfic groups and it's pretty cool.

BA:
Yeah absolutely. I mean I remember when you first put stuff out there and there was no grammarly, there was none of those helpers, or even spellcheck was you know in infancy and so getting other people to be your beta readers and stuff like that and having that feedback was critical and a lot of fun too.

ANDI:
There are a lot of professional authors that wrote fanfic. And when we had Diane Duane on we talked to her about that, and she used to write Star Trek fan fiction before she wrote *Star Trek* fiction. So like, I think it's a cool way to get your feet wet.

SUE:
That was true for a lot of the authors, especially in the 80s for Pocket Books where they were people who wrote fanfiction in the zines prior, who then got hired to write the Pro-fic really before they knew Next Gen was even coming.

BA:
And then when they started having, you know it was that whole turn from Paramount you know first trying to shut all that stuff down and then kind of embracing it all the way up until when they finally started having their own contest, the pocket books. And what it was-it was a strange new world.

SUE:
Strange new worlds.

BA:
Yeah. And I thought about, you know, trying to do something for that but I just didn't have time at that point. But I was really happy to see that turn and to see that become more mainstream.

SUE:
Another turn that fan fiction took on the Internet was the move to fanfiction.net and this wasn't really you know, a consensus move but when this popped up in 1998 it was someplace that people could post stories, it had search features, you could look for that particular ship that you wanted, or that particular series which you couldn't even do on on Usenet to that point, and post works in progress get feedback. I don't remember if there was a rating system like Archive of our Own defaults to, but I mean fanfiction.net and also livejournal where you could follow particular authors, or form groups of people to follow as well is really where that the next step was in terms of fan fiction on the Internet.

ANDI:
Yeah I actually have read some fic on live journal. I've read fic on fanfiction.net too, but like I'm into the Dragon Age fandom and there was a *huge*-it was called Dragon Age kink meme and it was basically just pages and pages and pages of prompts and then prompt fills. And it was kind of interesting like how much writing was actually posted on livejournal but It's not super well formatted in some ways. So-

SUE:
No, definitely not. *laughs*

ANDI:
Yeah. So it kind of takes some digging to find what you're looking for. And it was more like a message board. A really really really long message board. It was hard to organize.

SUE:
And as a bit of an aside, in the last couple years livejournal- livejournal still exists obviously, but it was purchased by a Russian company that opposes LGBTQ rights. So there was a scramble of a bunch of people trying to, you know, not trying to but going into their old livejournal accounts and pulling stuff off of it. Getting all of the things that they wanted out of their livejournals and shutting it down. So it was interesting to see people who hadn't thought necessarily about their fanfic in years going back in to retrieve it because it was still meaningful to them.

ANDI:
Well and that's the thing that's a little bit nerve wracking about trusting an online archive, is it can disappear. Like livejournal still exists. I still read fic on it because one of my absolute favorite fics of all time is hosted on live journal, every once in a while I'll go back in and read it, but it's so nerve wracking to think that it could just disappear. So like, I actually went in and literally copied and pasted it and put it in a Google Doc because it's just you never know! You never know what's gonna happen. So yeah if you are a fic writer out there always keep copies of your own work because as solid as some of these sites are and as solid as they seem you never know when they're just going to-their archives are just gonna go poof.

BA:
Yeah absolutely. And you know again, it's hard to. Who do you trust out there, you know which cloud do you trust? It's Google, Icloud. Like I said I'd still- when I move, you know, I found these old- still have some floppy disk and still have some jazz drives and stuff. Media that I can't even read anymore on the current technology. And so there's probably stuff that have been lost. I found the whole-I've got a whole drawer full of printed out stories because you know again way back then we would get the story from- somebody would email it to you and you'd print it out. And I don't know if some of those stories are available *anywhere* on the Internet anymore. And like I said I know I've lost probably some of my stories just because I got lazy and wasn't sure where to move it, how to know what to do with it. Yeah. So that's an interesting piece that "who do you trust online when it's not your own server-it's not your own website?" And even if you do trust like LiveJournal or somebody like, know how much control. Google you have no control over. Icloud you really have no control over. they could change your terms at any time. So that's a, you know, something. I don't know if there is a good answer for that. You say you keep your own copy, but what you're doing every few years is you've got to change it from, oh gosh what was before Microsoft Word? You know .txt files, and then word 1.0 I think. I have remember seeing a floppy disc like write 1.0 and writing stories and MC Right? But nothing can read that format anymore. So I don't know. I think you would have to make a conscious effort every few years to have an old file to bring it up to whatever today is and do that. But yeah, that's more time then I have that's for sure. Somebody wants to take on that. You're welcome to my files.

ANDI:
It makes me feel like someday there's gonna be like Internet archaeologists.

SUE:
Uh-huh.

BA:
Absolutely.

ANDI:
And their whole job is going to be tracking down lost information on lost servers on lost floppy disks.

SUE:
Well we already have, what is it? Archive.org? Web archive? That has the screenshots of old Websites throughout the years?

BA:
The Internet time machine, yeah.

ANDI:
Yeah just a tremendous amount of data.

SUE:
And actually, I was looking at the Bonc homepage today at work through the wayback machine.

BA:
Oh wow. And I think I still have Bonc.net. We couldn't get a Bonc.com because it was the "Bikers of Northern Carolina" or somebody like that had it. *crew laughs* For a long time I had the domain Bonc.net or something.

SUE:
Did we explain that acronym in this episode Andi?

ANDI:
I don't think so.

SUE:
So Bonc was that listserv we both belonged to of the Picard/Crusher persuasion. B-O-N-C, which in whoevers mind created it meant "Beverly on John Luc." *Andi laughs* That's what we're talking about when we say Bonc.*Sue laughs*

BA:
Right. That was Amy and Sandra, who came up with that. They were the first two writers and some of the first ones who started that.

SUE:
It was also a verb.

BA:
Yeah. And I think most people thought of tt was B O N K will think of bonk and bonking type stuff. And I didn't realize kind of a little play on words that was actually going on because didn't even Gates at one time she was like "Hi Bonc-ers!" at one of the cons. And we're like "Did she know what that acronym really means? Or does she think it's just a group of you know women writers or something?"

SUE:
Well I told her what that acronym meant once and I made her spit out her drink. Sooo. *all laugh* That is 100 percent true. I was also like maybe 15.*laughs*

BA:
That's awesome.

SUE:
But, you mentioned the group of women writers. Thank you for that transition for me. We talked a lot in our part one of fanfiction about how the fanfic community was *overwhelmingly* women in the fanzine era. That continued to be true as it moved on to the Internet. There aren't a ton of demographic studies but I can tell you from experience that was my experience. But we do have from fanfiction.net they did a demographic study in 2010 of *their* writers and they only had two choices, we were still dealing with the binary in most places, but their results were that 78 percent of fanfiction.net members, not necessarily writers, identified as female.

BA:
Yeah that's not surprising.

SUE:
I'm actually a little bit surprised it's not more.

BA:
Really? Well if you think about it you know what, again not just men women in general, when you think about how they use the Internet you know when men tend to be a lot more visual. And so if there had been, and I'm sure there were I just wasn't into them, the image archives and things like that as opposed to the written archives and the story and stuff like that. So yeah that doesn't surprise me that a large majority of women writers and readers and that type stuff. And if you look at-I was looking on some Amazon writing and publishing some things there, and the

people who want to write and make a lot of money writing Kindle books or Amazon books or books in general the biggest selling stuff is romance novels. So that romance novel you know genre is, from a money perspective, it's just that it's incredible how much money people spend in that genre.

ANDI:
Well Fifty Shades of Grey is like a third rate Twilight fic.

BA:
laughs Yup!

ANDI:
It's an AU, like a corporate AU of Twilight and it made one bajillion dollars which still makes me mad because of all of the great fic out there *BA laughs* this one crappy Twilight AU made all of the money which is bonkers. AU by the way means alternate universe. So like taking it-if you took Beverly and Picard and put them in a modern setting *Sue laughs* or decided that John Luc was a barista *BA laughs* that would be an AU specifically.

SUE:
Or one of my favorites which is post-World War 2.

ANDI:
Aw yes. There are some good ones. *Sue laughs* I have some of my favorite ones for Yuri on Ice is because Yuri is Japanese and Viktor is Russian, so theres a lot of really interesting like Russo-Japanese War fic and then World War 2 fic is really big there too because there are a lot of interesting like spy stories you can tell. AUs are the best. It's like "How do we take our characters, keep them in character, but like completely toss their lives into a blender and see what comes out?" Its great. Unless you know, it's 50 Shades of terrible.

SUE:
Of course you bring that up, but if you go looking on the Internet for history of fan fiction articles *everything* written you know in the last five-six years maybe a little bit more is *perky annoying voice* "It didn't start with Fifty Shades of Grey. There's a whole history!"

ANDI:
I know! That's why I'm so bitter about it! Because this is our success story? Really? *Sue laughs* Like there is- I have read fic that is longer than like a huge dense novel, like a Russian novel, that is *so good*. Like as good as published stuff or better. And then *this,* I don't know what it is. But at the very least it brought some like light onto the community I guess? So in that way-But there are a lot of actually modern writers that got famous in the fic community first and then ended up-

SUE:
Oh for sure.

ANDI:
writing. Specifically thinking of Cassandra Clare, who has her own issues but yeah..

SUE:
Seanan Maguire is another one that immediately hops to mind.

ANDI:
Rainbow Rowell. So there is a fair few that started out on fic and ended up in fiction itself.

SUE:
Dinda you mentioned earlier that like impermanence of online archives, the inability to know if you really own it, if terms might change, if you're things might disappear. And that, along with a particular incident, is sort of what brought us Archive of our Own. In 2007 there was a website called Fanlib that was created that had the goal of monetizing fan fiction.

BA:
Oh yeah.

ANDI:
Yikes.

SUE:
The fic, that was primarily authored by women, was put on this site which was run entirely by men and drew criticism of course. Which led to the creation of the non-profit "The Organization for Transformative Works" which sought to "record and archive fan cultures and works." Very well put. And then created the Archive of Our Own. And this was a website that was created by the community. In an article called A Brief History of Fanfiction on How We Get to Next, we'll link to it in the show notes, there is a quote from Christina, I'm going to say Busse? B-U-S-S-E. Who is the founding co-editor of The Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures, and she says "When Ao3 (Archive of Our Own) got coded it was the largest majority women independent coding project anywhere. So you had people who'd never coded a line before in their life learning a programming language and then contributing to the project. People learn usable skills in their pursuit of fandom whether it's editing video or images or HTML."

ANDI:
Yeah!

BA:
Yeah absolutely.

ANDI:
They do a lot of work. They have fundraisers all the time, and in fact occasionally people get salty about the fact that they'll have a fundraiser and I'm like "Do you not understand how much server space they use? and how many queries they handle for every single time you look up a fic on their website? like the amount of coding that goes into that?" It's just a tremendous undertaking and I'm grateful for it all the time.

BA:
Well yeah, and like she said they're usable skills. Because you know, think about the skills we had to develop just to get onto a listserv to create a website and to do all this stuff. I ended up- I've done a lot of work in open source software for a long time, and it always amazed me, the communities, people who are know they're volunteers who are doing this literally for free and people are always like "Why are people doing this for free? How can this even exist?" This is all just community goodwill type stuff. That's the only thing they get out of it. But people do, and that's again for me a very hopeful or very positive thing that's come out of this. To see people- that effort to do good things and to, like I said, it expands you know peoples skills. It brings new people into the community. And at least *my* experience has been pretty welcoming you know for new people coming in. I was pretty fortunate I didn't have any really bad experiences. I know, like you said, some people have and-but I remember that kind of rebellion when "Somebody is going to take my stuff and try to make money and monetize it." And part of it was well there was this other argument like "Well you took Paramount stuff." That was the whole disclaimer. You know "Paramount created all these characters and spent all this money to promote these characters and you're-" But again, we weren't making money off of it. You know, none of us were making money off it. It was just for our own fun. So like I said, it's been interesting to me to see these communities develop around the different types of fanfic and the different projects that grew out of all this stuff. It's just amazing. Like I said, how much human effort and goodwill people put together to create this really neat stuff out there.

SUE:
Yeah I mean I know I learned HTML at the very least, and basic image editing making a geocities website in middle school or high school. And learning that, seeing that coding, seeing how you can manipulate a new media space takes away some of the mystery for you. So it's you're not afraid to learn more because you find out you can do it. You know? And there is, especially in the coding of Archive of our Own, there's an entire community that's doing it with you. And coming out of that listserv community, that mentoring community in the fanfiction world we would show each other. You know, somebody would-it wasn't just "Hey can somebody edit this image for me?" It was "Can somebody show me how to do this? Can somebody teach me how to do this?" And there was a sharing of resources and a sharing of knowledge that came out of this as well.

ANDI:

I will say that we have to talk a little bit about what I consider Ao3s sister site, being Tumblr. Because Ao3 doesn't have the ability to like, send messages really. Like you can comment on someone's fic but you couldn't like send them a direct message. It's not a board in the same way that some of the other fic sites were. So what ended up happening is you would have your conversations about fic on tumblr and then you would link to your fic on Ao3. And they're kind of linked in that way which is interesting. And if Ao3 ever decides to expand to have like message boards and reblogging and microblogging or even direct messaging that will be interesting to see how that changes things.

SUE:

I can only imagine that would make things much more difficult.

ANDI:

Yeah I mean, I personally think the system as it works now is pretty efficient. I don't have a whole-like I'm not super into Tumblr but like when I am talking fanfiction things that's where most people are. And I just think that's interesting. It's like two sides of the same process I guess.

BA:

Yeah. So you're back to you know, like you said, a list of stories and just a story archive versus the forum and the medium for discussion. Which yeah, from a coding perspective you try to throw all that into one site with the moderation. Yeah, that would be you know, from a technology standpoint a lot of bandwidth that I can see why they haven't put that together yet.

SUE:

One thing that's really wonderful with Archive of our Own is the incredibly granular search functions. You can search by *anything.* You can search by type of pairing, you can search by character, you can search by show, or by pretty much anything you can think of and that information, the intense tagging that authors do on Archive of our Own makes- It gives us data. *laughs* Basically. And one of the users did an unofficial census in 2013, and we will link to those results again in the show notes if you want to explore more, but it's just so interesting to see the numbers that came out of this. And again this is five years ago-ish, 80 percent of the respondents identified themselves as female 4 percent as male meaning that the 16 percent was split among the trans community. These are the options that were available "both transgender and trans" were options, "androgynous, agender genderqueer, and other" was totaled 16 percent so there were more people in the the gender queer umbrella or agender than male on Archive of our Own.

ANDI:

Yeah, I literally know of *one* guy in the entirety of both of the fic fandoms that I belong to. And I'm *very* vocal and I literally know one man.

SUE:
So it feels very much like the gender disparity is becoming much greater and I hope that you know, guys out there, that you're not discouraged from entering the world of fan fiction. Please do. It's a wonderful place. *laughs* The average age for Archive of Our Own respondents was just 25 years old.

BA:
Oh wow.

SUE:
Which-Wow. *crew laughs* Only 38 percent of respondents identified themselves as heterosexual.

ANDI:
Yeah that doesn't surprise me either.

SUE:
Thirty point six percent as bisexual. Fifteen point nine percent as pansexual. And Ace, demi, and gray totaled up to twenty one point five percent. That's a number that I find super interesting because they say that, I mean, all all three of those fall under the asexual umbrella and they say that asexual people are only one percent of the population but on Archive of our Own we are apparently 25 percent of the population.

ANDI:
Yeah and I mean, one thing that-the reason that number doesn't surprise me is like, theres this completely open environment that is extremely welcoming of queer identities with stories about happy queer people. Like there's angst, there is tragedy, but for the most part like, it's just hundreds of thousands of stories about people falling in love. And almost-like the huge swaths of it are about non heterosexual relationships. And of course that's going to draw you in.

SUE:
So it's like a refuge?

ANDI:
Yes! 100 percent is. I mean the number of stories I read about trans people on Ao3 is just-it's so many! Like it-almost every character I know of has a tag for trans, that character. Where they-you can see them as trans if you wish, and read all of the stories that imagine that character as trans. That's just so freeing and it's so positive and it's like if you're living in a world where you're not accepted Ao3 is definitely a place where that is accepted.

SUE:

Another number that I just love that came from this study was that male/male slash fic makes up forty five point five percent of all Archive of our Own content. So *all* other pairings, all other types of stories, just over half *laughs* add up together. But it's totally like the front runner. The leader of what the content-the amount of content is on this archive which is, I would say, has become the main place to go if you're looking for fanfiction.

BA:

That's interesting to me, to see how much is relationship based, period. Because when you look at a lot of the traditional fic around Star Wars, Star Trek, all the other stuff it can be more sci-fi, more techie type driven. And I remember reading stuff I could- you could just tell the difference between a male writer and a female writer without even with the pseudonyms or whatever the content. And I remember, like you said, there were so few men out there. I remember one of the strange feedback I got on a story one time is a guy sent me feedback on this story and he was really upset because one of the things I did in the story was I had Picard let his shuttle maintenance go, because again, it was a plot device to get him to where I needed to get him to. And this particular guy was really upset that Picard would never let that happen. And so it goes back to how I don't like-OK it's a made up story and it was a plot device because I needed him to land on *this* particular planet. And you know you get into that cannon versus you know again getting the science right. And I think women are more about the story, the relationship, and they can kind of let go of even some of the science and the physics and that type stuff, where you know maybe some of the men don't have that ability. To leave, to do an AU type stuff. So that was kind of interesting to get that, to hear from male readers and see, you know, reinforce I guess some of those male female things about how they look at writing in general and reading stuff and what they expect from stories.

SUE:

So how do you think people outside of the fanfiction community see fanfic writers? *BA sighs* within the fan community and without.

BA:

I think it's like any hobby. I always just looked at it as a fun hobby. So if you like golf you know, you play golf and people who don't play golf really don't understand golf. And so if you look at fanfic as a hobby and not something more serious than that, like Gamers and things like that, whatever your particular hobby is, people who don't share that passion for that hobby and that pairing probably don't understand it and why you would spend that amount of time on something that maybe isn't going to bring you any monetary benefit. So maybe there's *that* aspect of it. But again if it brings you great enjoyment, you love playing video games, or you love writing fic. For me it was definitely a way to relax to get outside of your everyday type stuff. And I found a lot of readers that reached out to me. That was kind of how they were using it as well too. It was interesting to me the diversity, in the socioeconomic spectrum, that I got feedback from from different people. I mean literally a woman living in a trailer with three boys and a husband, who is a four child, to people I knew at NASA ,and stuff like that. And I'll let you in on a secret, even

certain spaceflight community people and astronauts were fic writers and definitely enjoy fanfic and stuff like that. So it definitely, you know, spans the spectrum of people out there.

SUE:
It's so interesting because I definitely feel like when you tell somebody "Oh and I also write fanfic" it's like it takes you to the next level of geekery.*crew laughs*

ANDI:
I also feel like it's super gendered. So like, there's always an automatic kind of dismissal of things that women do. So we were talking about earlier, about Amazon and how popular romance novels are on Amazon. The entire publishing industry is propped up by the romance genre. And yet, name me another genre that is as looked down upon as the romance genre. And it's because it's written and read by women, mostly. I feel like it's the same for fanfic in some ways that, not everybody obviously, but there are some people who look down on fanfic and think it's dumb and silly because it's written by and for women, by and large.

SUE:
And yet there's hours spent coming up with stories. There is hours spent for some people on research, depending on how detailed their story is going to be. There's hours spent writing and editing and *pauses* even so, you're still creating something and that's how you're enjoying your fandom and I don't *pauses* it certainly shouldn't be looked down upon. But to- and I think cosplay has for a long time gotten the same sort of bad rap. Like how can you look down on an aspect of fandom that is inherently creative? It has never clicked in my brain.

BA:
I was just about to ask you about some of the cosplay stuff. Because, it was interesting, you said earlier there is like this hierarchy of "Yes I know I'm a geek." "OK yes I know I'm into sci-fi." or "I know I'm into fantasy" our moment there. OK. The next level is "OK I know I like fanfic." And then "I know I write fanfic" and then *even* then there was a line. I remember some people saying it's "Oh but I'll never do cosplay!" You know? *laughs* like that was still the fourth level or something, really you know stepping into it. And now it's become, like you said, so much more mainstream in many respects. And so how do you feel about that Sue? Did you ever see that progression?

SUE:
In my brain there *flipped* a little bit, that you know maybe- I would say even like cosplay has become especially in the last couple of years very very acceptable because it gets treated really well in write ups. People talk about the construction, and the respect for that craft has suddenly shot up quite a bit. But it *feels* to me, and this is just me, that admitting you spend a lot of time writing fan fiction is like it's the top level basically *laughs* of the super nerd hierarchy. *BA laughs* And it could just be my own reading of it. That could just be my own experience of it. Because you know they have said in recent years "Make sure you Google yourself before you go on job searches" And for a long time old fanfiction would come up. Like, "Am I going to have

to explain that at a job interview? That thing I wrote when I was 13?" So I mean, that could just be a little bit of my own embarrassment in the muggle world. But whatever. You can find it. It's out there. It's Bad. But we're close to the end of our time. I really wanted to, really quickly if everybody can stick around, talk just a little bit about the tropes that have arisen within the fanfiction community itself.

ANDI:
When you say tropes do you mean like sex pollen? Or do you mean like coffee AU?

SUE:
pauses Yes.

ANDI:
Both?

SUE:
I mean *laughs* we don't have to list them all. One of the big ones that arose out of Star Trek, really out of Amok Time, was the "F or die."

ANDI:
Yes.

SUE:
Yeah. So these two characters are put in a situation where they must have sex or they're gonna die.

ANDI:
There's a lot of Trek stuff that has ended up as fanfic tropes.

SUE:
"Sex pollen!"

ANDI:
Sex pollen is the other one that I was thinking of. Yes

SUE:
"Ship to ship combat" which is something that I had not heard the name of until today, doing some research. But that is the fandom pitting two different ships against each other arguing about who should hook up. *Andi laughs* That is apparently called Ship to ship combat. And I love it. I think the biggest one, the one that we hear bandied about quite a bit is "Rule 34." *BA laughs* and rule 34 is "if it exists there is a porn of it."

ANDI:
Yes. It can get really disturbing too because, like in Overwatch there is a new character that came out that's a hamster. And they rule 34'd him in like .02 seconds and I was like "Really guys? Like, if we're gonna let one go It was gonna be the hamster." but they did it. Because people are perverts. *all laugh* No. Bad. Bad internet!

SUE:
So I think we've covered just about everything. There is a post from a tumblr user that I would like to read *BA laughs* that I think sums up the idea of fan fiction on the Internet very well throughout the ages. I will try and get through it quickly. The tumblr user is berlynn-wohl, and we'll link to the post but it says "different fanfic eras explained as lunch.

Pre-internet era: You walk into a room and sit down at a table. Someone brings you a turkey sandwich, a bag of potato chips, and a soda. Perhaps you are a vegetarian, or gluten-free. Doesn't matter; you get a turkey sandwich, a bag of potato chips, and a soda.

Usenet era: You walk into a room and sit down to your turkey sandwich, a bag of potato chips, and a soda. Someone tells you that over at the University they are also serving BLTs, pizza, coffee, and beer.

Web 1.0 (aka The Great Schism): You walk into a room. The room is lined with 50 unmarked doors. Someone tells you, "We have enough food to feed you and a hundred more…but we've scattered it behind these fifty doors. Good luck!"

Web 2.0 (present): You walk into a room. Someone points at the buffet and says, "Enjoy!" You turn to see a 100-foot-long buffet table, piled high with every kind of food imaginable. To be fair, some of the food is durian, head cheese, and chilled monkey brains, but that's cool, some people are into those…and trust me, they are even more psyched to be here than you are."

ANDI:
laughs It's true.

BA:
Yeah, If it's out there- If people can imagine it they can write it and put it on the Internet. and even some of the stuff, I just don't have that great imagination apparently, some of the stuff out there it's a bit *stutters* it's interesting, that's for sure. *crew laughs*

SUE:
I kind of regret that the time that I was most into fanfiction I was really only into one ship. I mean like in reality, I don't! *crew laughs* But if I paid attention to more than just the Picard/Crusher stories. There was a time in the early 2000s that I was pretty sure I had read every single one on the Internet.

BA:
You probably had. *Sue laughs* And yeah, I wondered about that too. Because you know I did tend to stick to that one genre for a long time and stuff, and writing was-and I tried to expand into some other areas. I knew some writers who went into some really interesting areas: Gargoyles, and all kinds of comic shows, and a lot of Harry Potter stuff. But I- and I think for me it was just a matter of time. I just no longer had the time anymore to dabble in that stuff and to write anymore. Which now makes me sad.

SUE:
Any final thoughts on our internet era fanfiction?

ANDI:
Go read fic. I think it's awesome.

BA:
Yeah go read it! It's also-go write it. Maybe somebody should start putting some of those challenges up again and get some of these old writers out of the mothballs and-because it really is good for your brain to get good- I won't say good clean fun, but it's good fun. *all laugh*

SUE:
Awesome. So Dinda thank you so much for joining us for this talk today. It was so much fun. If people want to find you or your projects on the Internet where would we send them?

BA:
So I'm still out there on social media different places like that, don't have as much time for it anymore. Still on Twitter, Dinda. And that was one of the things, with that name, was that it was very unique. It is actually my nickname that my grandmother gave to me and I was able to get you know Dinda@mac.com and Dinda all over the place which was awesome. But now I've got the project I'm working now is called The First School On Mars.org. So that's a Website and a curriculum project trying to work with some of my former NASA colleagues and other folks who-anyone who's interested in thinking about living on Mars, colonizing Mars, what that school, and what we have to teach the first generation of the kind of kids who are going to be going to living and working on Mars. And that's kind of what I guess my next project. I just got the website up and running, just reached out to some former co-workers to help work on that project with me, and that's something I look forward to having more fun with and start thinking about the stories in the kids who are going to be writing from Mars. So that should be fun.

SUE:
You are a super badass, just so you know.

BA:
You got to do *something*. No Sue. You've been amazing Sue. I really enjoy getting to know you and lots of other folks in the community, like I said, I travel with you. To see you folks into a lot of

great inspiration from seeing folks like you I met when I was young and you guys were young, and some of things these folks have accomplished professionally and personally it's just amazing to me. So thank you guys at Women at Warp and Anomaly. I get to listen-not as much as I want. I try to catch up on some of the pod-some of your older episodes and you guys just do amazing work and I really love seeing your work out there.

SUE:
Oh thank you! I can 100 percent for certain say that my life would be totally different without the fanfiction community. All right so Andi, where can people find you on the Internet?

ANDI:
Easiest place to find me is Twitter @firsttimetrek where I'm livetweeting through my first time through Star Trek.

SUE:
And I'm Sue, you can find me on Twitter @spaltor, that's S-P-A-L-T-O-R, or with some creative searching on Trekiverse. If you'd like to reach the show you can do so on Twitter @womenatwarp. Send us an email to crew@womenatwarp.com. Look us up on Facebook, Women at Warp, or Instagram, same thing. And for more from the Roddenberry podcast network you can visit podcasts.Roddenberry.com. Thanks so much for joining us.