

## Women at Warp Episode 126: T'Pol Up In Your Business

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 today are crew members Jarrah-

JARRAH:

That's T'Jarrah to you.

SUE:

\*laughs\* And then "T'Grace."

GRACE:

Actually it's "Grace'T." \*all laugh\* Get it right next time, it's my name.

SUE:

"One is my name. The other is not." And for today's episode, we are joined by our special guest Kerry.

KERRY:

Hi everyone

SUE:

Kerry. Would you like to introduce yourself a little bit to our listeners? Tell them about your history with Star Trek?

KERRY:

I would love to. So yes, my name's Kerry and I've been watching Star Trek my entire life. My mom introduced me when I was little, and my first Star Trek memory is looking up on top of my parent's fridge and seeing Mr. Spock on this old black and white TV which we had in the late 80s. We were a little behind in the times there. But yeah, it just went from there. I grew up watching TNG and I watched some of Voyager and Deep Space Nine and I actually missed Enterprise during the first run. I was in college and busy doing other things and I just recently watched it and I really enjoyed it. So that's kind of where I am with my Star Trek viewing now. But it's always been a big part of my life.

JARRAH:

Kerry is also our blog's resident librarian and is currently running an awesome reading challenge that is inspired by the character we're going to talk about today. So you should check it out on her blog.

KERRY:

Yes please do.

SUE:

That's right. We are talking about T'Pol today.

GRACE:

We're going to talk T'P-all about T'Pol.

SUE:

\*defeated\* Oh my gosh.

GRACE:

I don't know what you expected. I really don't. \*Sue laughs\*

SUE:

Well-

GRACE:

T'Pol up in your business!

SUE:

I think that's my favorite title contender though, "T'Pol up in your business." \*laughs\* OK. But before we get into that main topic we just want to remind you that our show is currently entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon. We love our patrons. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as one dollar per month and get some awesome rewards from thanks on social media, up to silly watchalong commentaries, and recently some non-Trek podcast episodes. And any time that we have our episodes edited early we also try and do early releases for our patrons over there as well. So you can join us by visiting [Patreon.com/WomenAtWarp](https://Patreon.com/WomenAtWarp). That's P A T R E O N dot com slash Women At Warp. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. And now that that's out of the way. \*singing\* It's been a long road-

GRACE:

\*defeated\* Oh lord.

SUE:

\*laughs\* I've sung along to that theme song so much this weekend. But yes we're going to talk about the character of T'Pol today. There are *a lot* of aspects we want to go through. Some of her character development, some of her key arcs and episodes, definitely talk about the wardrobe, the fan reception. But I think it makes sense to start at the very beginning-

GRACE:

A very good place to start.

SUE:

Yes, \*laughs\* the casting of the character. So I think it's pretty well known, but maybe not, that T'Pol was originally intended to be the younger version of T'Pol, who of course we know from Amok Time.

KERRY:

That would've been so *cool*.

GRACE:

That would've been pretty cool.

SUE:

Yeah, at least we do get to meet her in the Kir'Shara arc. But according to the Star Trek Communicator, Brannon Braga said that the name was changed to avoid having to deal with the quote legal component of original series writer Theodore Sturgeon, who created T'Pol, and also because T'Pol was easier to pronounce.

JARRAH:

Sure, OK.

GRACE:

Sure. For a two-syllable name.

SUE:

I guess because there's a consonant at the end? Whatever.

JARRAH:

Well it sounds less like "Kapow!" as we \*Sue laughs\* discussed in our Amok Time episode. which is just kind of sad to me. But it was- yeah. Just go back to the Amok Time episode if you want to hear us making Vulcan name onomatopoeias.

SUE:

\*laughs\* So whenever we have this information I find it really interesting, and that is the description on the audition call sheet.

GRACE:

It never makes you feel very *good* once you've read it, does it?

SUE:

No. I mean my favorite is still the Beverly crusher one, but we'll save that for a later episode. But the description for T'Pol or at that point T'Pol is "Late 20s early 30s Vulcan female. Austere yet sensual-

GRACE:

Oh lord. Ugh.

SUE:

She's the science officer assigned to oversee humanity's progress on board the Enterprise. Although she's cautious and guarded around humans, whom she considers primitive and irrational, she's developed a grudging respect for Captain Archer. She'll become one of his most loyal and trusted crew members."

GRACE:

They *had* to put in sensual.

SUE:

\*sarcastic\* Of course they do!

KERRY:

Right at the beginning too.

GRACE:

Because you can't describe a female character without including "But she's hot! Don't worry."  
\*all laugh\*

JARRAH:

I mean the vast majority of the women principals in Star Trek writers Bibles like references they're- how attractive they are in the first couple sentences. So it's not totally shocking.

GRACE:

No, just disappointing.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And in the paperback edition of Broken Bow, and also I am pretty sure I read a similar quote in the 50-year mission, Brannon Braga talks about how this was a difficult role to cast and says "It took a lot of searching to find that actress who is at once striking and yet had an intelligence about her who *also* is a good actress." It's a hard combo for whatever reason, which is very similar to Rick Berman's comments on Dax, about like how it's impossible to find actresses that can convey both hotness and intelligence \*laughs\* but uh-

GRACE:

\*unimpressed\* Huh.

JARRAH:

So Jolene Blalock was cast. She attended the casting session with no makeup on and they basically were not 100 percent sure about it. Then they watched some footage of other productions she had been in and Rick Berman and others were persuaded that she would be right for the role. So that's in the audio commentary for the DVD Blu ray.

SUE:

It's very important that we note that she came in with no makeup on. How dare she. \*all laugh\* That's very much how that feels to me. \*laughs\*

KERRY:

That is how it feels. And I've never heard them say that about any of the male characters or anything like that.

GRACE:

"I saw him without any makeup on. He wasn't even wearing like the weird blue Vulcan eye shadow."

JARRAH:

Yeah.

SUE:

"Patrick Stewart came in without a toupee. How dare he."

JARRAH:

Yeah, was going to say that's the closest thing with a male character that I'm aware of in Trek. Where they were like "Oh I don't know if this guy can be a captain because he doesn't have hair." But yeah it certainly seems like "Well, I don't know...she seems austere, but can she be sensual? And by sensual I mean what's hot *to me* as a *straight dude*. \*Sue laughs\*

GRACE:

That is the benchmark for *all* sensuality.

SUE:

So they cast Jolene Blalock, who herself describes T'Pol often as "Catlike" so that's also-

JARRAH:

I mean, it's not an insult.

GRACE:

She's not wrong!

JARRAH:

Cats are good. People like cats.

KERRY:

Wonderful.

SUE:

Yes. But I mean, I feel like in this context that means like *slinky*.

JARRAH:

Yes totally. And I've never heard a male character referred to as cat-like in Star Trek. No. But like the cat-like aspects of T'Pol are more like "Disinterested in your BS." Like, that's the kind of cat-like I'm looking for in a Vulcan. \*laughs\*

GRACE:

I can see her just getting bored and knocking a plant over. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

Just her knocking stuff off the conference table.

KERRY:

Now I want to call her "T'Paw" \*crew laughs and "aww"s\*

GRACE:

\*chanting\* One of us, one of us.

SUE:

All right so let's jump in. I think it makes the most sense to go through this stuff chronologically as it aired. So her introduction Broken Bow, Jolene Blalock in an interview with Star Trek Magazine said "I am the beginning [of Vulcans]; this is laying the foundations, so everything that I do should be fresh and new. I need to create this out of originality, and I want to create it for myself." However, she had also referenced that she was a fan of the original series and re-watched the entire run to draw inspiration from Leonard Nimoy's performance. So then we meet her as our science officer in Broken Bow.

GRACE:

Our science officer who gets threatened with physical violence *a lot* in that pilot. Just *by her boss*. A lot.

KERRY:

Yeah that was a little unsettling.

GRACE:

That is something I didn't really notice until the most recent viewing I had of it. It's like "Oh wow, he just says he's going to hit her or something" a lot in the pilot. And this is our main character? OK. Whatever you say.

SUE:

So we've got, especially in the early seasons of Enterprise. We've got humanity really like living and dealing with other species in space for one of the first times if not the absolute first time. And you've got on Enterprise itself you've got T'Pol and you've got Phlox who are pretty much diametrically opposed.

GRACE:

Yeah he's stoked to be there. He's excited by humans.

But because, it seems anyway, and maybe it's exacerbated by the fact that they are so so different. But it seems that Phlox, even if the crew thinks he's weird accepts him. Because he's exuberant and happy and excited. But there's so much negativity put on to T'Pol. There's so much "Why can't you enjoy this? Loosen up!"

GRACE:

Because women are supposed to be upbeat no matter what. And if you are not that, if you are austere then you're seen as a downer. Or if a guy *is*, he's serious. A woman *is*, she's just being a stick in the mud.

SUE:

It's this intersection of racism and sexism.

KERRY:

Right?

JARRAH:

Yeah, we talked a bit before about how when characters get introduced if the captain doesn't like them that can make it hard for the audience to like them. I don't think that was the case about T'Pol. Like certainly, T'Pol developed a fan following I think the same way any other character did. But, you know, we start out right at the beginning hearing like Archer doesn't like Vulcans, pretty much no one on this ship likes Vulcans.

GRACE:

"Hey T'Pol we're putting you on a ship where no one likes Vulcans. Why aren't you having a great time?!"

JARRAH:

Yeah, and I don't actually necessarily have an issue with the- like I think that some of the politics around stuff we learned about the Vulcans is some of the most interesting stuff in Enterprise.

But it's more just that she's positioned in that group and then basically even though she's not really perpetuating the stuff that is the most problematic, people just keep pressuring her to be other than she is. And when I was first watching Enterprise it seemed like that like instead of it being T'Pol and Phlox that were positioned as outsiders off the bat, it was actually to T'Pol and Hoshi because they're both the ones that don't want to be there. Or that have hesitation about being there. So it was really challenging for me to get into Season One. Thankfully things get better, but that you start out with like everyone feels like a happy club except the two women.

GRACE:

Yeah. The two women are treated as out of place.

KERRY:

Yeah. Just seeing how it's an old boys club in a way with Trip and Archer, I'm kind of not surprised that Hoshi and T'Pol had moments of not wanting to be there.

JARRAH:

I was going to ask what was your first impression of T'Pol when you were watching Enterprise for the first time Kerry?

KERRY:

I'm embarrassed to admit that I didn't really like her at first. But I also try to remind myself that you know, there is this internalized misogyny we have in our culture where if a woman is not smiling or not friendly then she's not likable. And I tried to keep that in the back of my head. Because I thought that was important and- but I did find it hard to like her. I think it had more to do with just how the Vulcans were being presented. But my view did change eventually. I thought she was very interesting. She seemed to be- the fact that she was not wanting- that she really seemed as opposed to humans as the other Vulcans did but then chose to go with Archer. I thought that was an interesting plot. Yeah.

GRACE:

I still love the fact that in one of her first scenes with Archer they have a conversation that basically is her saying "Man, humans are weird and violent." and his response is basically \*angry\* "Don't call me violent! I'll beat the crap out of you!" Like oh my god, *dude*.

JARRAH:

"You guys insulted my dad!"

SUE:

This is not about T'Pol, but like \*all laugh\* no, I just like Archer feels so entitled to get to command this warp five ship because *his dad* worked on the warp engines. Like that's not you. That's your dad.

GRACE:



There's legacy and then there's straight-up nepotism.

SUE:

Just \*ugh\*. OK. Sorry.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I think what's interesting is, like I was saying about the Vulcan stuff and how we start to you know really quite early on in Season 1 with like shadows of P'Jem and stuff, see these cracks in Vulcan perfection. What I think is one of the shortcomings of Enterprise is that largely it doesn't really probe, even though it *presents* many more imperfections in the Federation than say in Voyager. They don't really directly- they don't grapple with that. Or like self-question as much with the possible exception of Dear Doctor. But there are like more of these issues, but they aren't like sitting around being like "Huh. But what about the ethics of this?" all the time.

GRACE:

Yeah there really is this attitude, pretty consistently, of "Well self-doubt is for the others."

SUE:

We got a really great comment on Twitter from Leticia who wrote "In outfit and "type" - she is a direct character descendant of 7 of 9 and is given an almost identical character arc. On the other hand, in contrast with 7, T'Pol is, in human terms, an older woman in a young woman's body. That dynamic, along with the resentfulness of humans toward Vulcans, contributes to the racist and sexist treatment she receives in the initial seasons." "I'm honestly not sure if the writers understood how to write a woman character who was stoic without making her a joke (like the first seasons) or making her more like the overtly emotional women characters they are accustomed to writing."

GRACE:

That's a very good point.

JARRAH:

Should we just like spend a second to talk about the outfit and stuff?

SUE:

Sure. So regularly when we ask about T'Pol the question comes up "Are catsuits logical?" and often someone answers "As logical as high heels." But this is a great departure from what we have seen Vulcans wearing in the past.

GRACE:

It's true it definitely is the "Well this is our sexy Vulcan (registered trademark)" and there is the fact that the rest of the crew is technically wearing jumpsuits also, but theirs are all utilitarian and they look like the kind you would wear if you were an astronaut. And hers looks impossible to get in and out of. So you always just find yourself wondering \*whispering\* "What if she to go to the bathroom?"

SUE:

They're wearing *flight* suits and she's wearing a *catsuit*.

JARRAH:

Yeah I was just going to again point out, I believe in The Andorian Incident where she's really really cold in her cat suit and Archer has to give her his coat and that being an example of how I believe the Vulcans would do better at equipping their officers with more functional outfits. That said, like you know want to be clear that the issue is not- like people should be able to wear whatever they want, but it's the issue is not that it somehow makes her a worse character or like anti feminist because she's wearing a cat suit, but that it's like out of step with who she's supposed to be as a character. And the history of the people that we are familiar with, and even like-

GRACE:

The history and the *aesthetics* of everything we've seen so far.

JARRAH:

So it just feels like there's like zero even attempt at an excuse for why this was a decision made, not necessarily in line with the interests of the character, but like in line with the interests of the writers and who they perceive the target audience to be which is to say teenage straight boys.

KERRY:

I think that's a really great point Jarrah, and these discussions about what characters wear, it's a hard line I think sometimes, because for me to discuss these things anyway because I worry "Am a slut-shaming this person for wearing an outfit like a catsuit? Or is this a valid criticism?" And I think like what you said, this wasn't really in line with who she was. So I think it's definitely an important thing to talk about. Yeah those outfits never looked comfortable.

SUE:

No. And according to Memory Alpha T'Pol had forty-nine different outfits throughout the run of Enterprise.

JARRAH:

I mean she has some cool away mission outfits and stuff. Although some of them are also a little silly.

SUE:

Yeah I mean this is *everything* she's ever worn. But a friend of the show Annika Dane does a lot of like what she calls fashion projects, where she writes about what different characters wear. And she noted that even T'Pol's casual clothing includes pajama-like outfits in no less than seven colors, four of which were separates that show off her midriff, and she appears naked in five episodes, and in her skivvies in six.

GRACE:

Yep. There \*uncomfortable laugh\* was definitely a reason for T'Pol.

JARRAH:

I mean, I guess if I had to pick just like off the top of my head like memorable T'Pol looks that I didn't mind, I think when she's like going undercover like in I think Carpenter Street she's got like the leather jacket and stuff. I feel like she looked a little bit more badass when she was pretending to be someone else I guess. And then I seem to recall in the episode Marauders which has sort of some cool T'Pol martial arts stuff. She is like in this desert outfit that's like all white with heels \*laughs\* I think. That said, I still was like "Huh. OK well at least it's functional and it's like you know better than wearing an all-black outfit I guess In the desert." But like all the federation people are wearing sort of like dust-colored outfits, anyway.

SUE:

Right. Well even when she sort of steps away from Vulcan high command and gets a Starfleet commission, she continues to wear this like catsuit.

GRACE:

Her Juicy Couture looking jumpsuits.

SUE:

\*laughs\* And that adds the patches, the Science Division piping, and the commission patches, and the rank bar. They add to this costume but it's still not in line with what the rest of the crew is wearing, even if she has a Starfleet commission. And you know, thinking back to Next Generation when Troi decides to take the bridge officer's test she starts wearing the standard uniform, when she has the full rank of Commander.

KERRY:

Yes. Have you heard that quote where she said that before she was *the chick*, and then she put on the suit that she was *the brain*. \*noises of consideration\*

JARRAH:

It's interesting because T'Pol's like super super smart, so in some ways that is kind of cool because it does kind of challenge our conceptions, or you know the conceptions of the creators of the show, that you can't marry hotness and intelligence. But it also still doesn't challenge the idea that women on these shows need to be- like meet some standard of like super-thin busty beauty.

GRACE:

But also, can I point this one thing out that I noticed also when I was watching Broken Bow. And that is the first time we see T'Pol when she's with other Vulcans she's wearing the robes, she looks very traditional Vulcan. But then when she's on the Enterprise she's wearing the

catsuit and I think that's funny that the immediate jump from "OK. You are among the Vulcans you are Vulcan" to "This is you being Vulcan amongst the humans." That really kind of draws into perspective visually this idea that if you are going to be *the other* you should be the *sexy other*. And that is the most acceptable way for a woman to be the other.

KERRY:

Right. And only the woman though, because Phlox wasn't-

GRACE:

Yes. \*Jarrah laughs\* Phlox is basically just wearing his jammy jams all the time, and he's a doctor. He's Dr. jammy jams.

KERRY:

But what about that one time when he walked around naked. \*Grace makes uncomfortable noise/crew laughs\* That was really weird.

GRACE:

So wait do we have a Phlox nudity count to rival T'Pol's nudity count? \*all laugh\*

SUE:

Not offhand. Sorry.

JARRAH:

Get on it, Internet.

SUE:

I would put money down though that they were lit very differently. \*laughs\*

GRACE:

Oh definitely. Yeah sure for sure. Also just as soon as the first "decon" scene comes up and you're watching Broken Bow you're just like \*exasperated\* "Oh, here we. Here we go."

SUE:

Yeah. Moving a little bit farther. OK. So we talked to you a little bit about the relationship with Archer. Do we think they were trying to mimic the original series here?

GRACE:

To an extent, yeah. I feel like when you have a character that's introduced sort of as the exotified beauty, as the hot one TM of the group, there's kind of a level of them needing to have a level of sexual chemistry with every other male character. Does anyone else feel that an ensemble shows?

KERRY:

Yeah, I think that's a fair point.

GRACE:

And definitely because he's the captain, he's got to be super virile and all that jazz.

JARRAH:

So were you meaning Sue, like were they trying to copy Kirk and Spock?

SUE:

Were they trying to copy Kirk and Spock, were they trying to recreate any kind of dynamic with T'Pol, Archer, and Trip maybe and Kirk, Spock, McCoy?

KERRY:

I've heard people comparing them a lot. I don't know if they were trying to do that, but I've heard a lot of comparisons between the two trios.

SUE:

I think the issue with like with the comparisons is the same issue we had like with Pulaski and Data right? Where Spock could give it back. Right? He understood the jabs, he could jab right back. And when Pulaski spoke to Data she was punching *down*. When the crew of Enterprise is sort of like picking on T'Pol they're also in a social way punching down. Like she's much more intelligent than them, but they're ganging up on her in the same way.

GRACE:

And when she's at a private dinner with Trip and the Captain, it's two guys ganging up on the one woman in the room.

JARRAH:

Yeah, I think that's a really important distinction about the dynamic. Because yeah, I mean like Spock is technically a lower rank than Kirk. But usually, it's like only Kirk or McCoy that's teasing. And the other one is kind of like "Oh come on" or just laughing along. But it does feel like ganging up in a few episodes, to me at least. Especially in the first couple seasons.

KERRY:

Oh yeah, I definitely felt that right away too. There was definitely a feeling of them ganging up on her and I always felt for her. And as an introvert, I also felt for her. It seemed like they, and everyone else, they were always trying to get her out to go out and socialize and go to the movie she didn't want to go to. And you know I, like her, I thought you know she should just be able to go read her book or have that alone time. So I think there was a lot of pressure on her from them to do things she wasn't interested in.

GRACE:

There's this nonstop sort of idea in media that introverted people just need to be fixed and made extroverted and that always bothers me.

KERRY:

Yes.

JARRAH:

Yeah. They just need to break out.

GRACE:

It's like "No. Sometimes the shell is there for a reason. The shell is where we're good."

JARRAH:

Yeah. But also like, there's almost a bit of there's also a bit of like kind of nerd shaming. And actually kind of almost like shaming her for how smart she is. Like there's the episode with the one- Oh! Cogenitor actually, where she's like "Oh we could like go see this really fascinating stellar phenomenon." And then it's like. "Or we could go do this other really way more fun thing that also seems way stupider." \*all laugh\* So there's a couple episodes like that where they're almost like \*petulant voice\* "Ugh, boring. Why would you want to survey a stellar phenomena?" And you're like "That is like the bread and butter of what they say the other crews are doing all the time." So-

GRACE:

You hang out in space, you should be getting really into this stuff.

JARRAH:

Yeah and like, it's not like if you look at who goes into space today there are a bunch of people who don't like science.

GRACE:

No. Why do you keep trying to convince us that it's these cool jocks hanging out in space you guys? Oh it's not happening. It's *not* happening. It's going to be a ton of nerds up there.

KERRY:

It'll be awesome with the nerds.

SUE:

Well, that happens in Strange New Worlds as well.

JARRAH:

Yeah. It's also unfortunate because it just makes me remember- because I actually feel like part of the reason I reacted poorly to Enterprise on first watching was because like I saw parts of myself in T'Pol? Of like, that feeling of being introverted and a bit isolated and wanting to go read my book and not go see the movie with these Bro's. And then like feeling like she wasn't super fairly treated and, you know, like it makes me remember what I was in high school and I

used to be like really upset and I would come home and tell my mom like “Everyone else has a boyfriend or girlfriend” and my mom would be like “Oh well they’re just intimidated because you’re smart” and I just like wanted to not be smart. And it just made me really mad because I’m like “It’s messed up that we’re still sending these messages that like you know in order to be liked you have to like not share your intelligence. As a woman.”

GRACE:

Yeah if someone’s advice to you to get along with other people more so is to suppress an intrinsic part of your personality, it’s not very good advice. Just saying. \*Sue groans\*

JARRAH:

There’s also like very few attempts by *them* to try to understand *her* or like what might be good about Vulcan society.

GRACE:

It’s like it’s very much an attitude of “You’re in *human* territory now missy!”

KERRY:

Right. “You have to do it our way now.”

GRACE:

\*western sheriff voice\* “Yeah, eat your breadstick! You’re in human town!”

JARRAH:

\*laughs\* “Eat your meat.”

KERRY:

Oh man. The vegetarian shaming too.

GRACE:

Yeah. We get a surprising amount of that with T’Pol. It’s just like guys, *be cool*.

KERRY:

Yeah. Did anyone ever do that with Chakotay? Or were there other vegetarians on the shows?

JARRAH:

I mean like the other Vulcans were, but I feel like in Voyager and the other shows they really like take it as a given, that there’s this delight in diversity. So you will have Neelix being like “I made you this special amazing food that’s just how your culture likes it!” and it’s terrible but it’s all coming from this place of-

GRACE:

“I tried!”

JARRAH:

"I want to meet you halfway here, and I want to learn from you as much as you can learn from me."

GRACE:

And we definitely have Picard going off on that whole \*Picard impression\* "Oh we don't ever eat actual meat in Starfleet. It's all replicated." \*Sue laughs\* And so they've definitely kind of at least gotten a little cooler about it by the time TNG rolls around. Or at least are acting less like "Whoa there hippie MC-tree hug!" \*Jarrah laughs\*

SUE:

Well I mean, Enterprise wanted to show us the beginnings of the federation or whatever. But they put this big emphasis on "The Vulcans are holding the humans back" and there is all this resentment and there's not a lot of trust.

GRACE:

I love that they're referring to it as "the Vulcans holding them back" when they're like "you're *giving* us information that could help us." It's like "We are waiting for you to figure it out on your own." That's not holding them back necessarily that's-

SUE:

Just because you've achieved warp drive doesn't mean you automatically get all of the scientific advances-

GRACE:

You're not *entitled* to the scientific advancement of the rest of the universe dude.

SUE:

Right. But anyway \*laughs\* I mean just the fact that *that is* what we're told the relationships between these two societies are, lays the groundwork for the characters butting heads all the time. And that's just intrinsic in the way they built the show.

JARRAH:

And that's not necessarily a bad thing. Like, I don't disagree with building in some potential for conflict. Like there's a lot of discussion about how Voyager could have done better if they wouldn't have resolved the Maquis situation in episode two. But it's when you combine it with the fact that she's the only one, it's not like half their crew or Vulcans or a third of their crew are Vulcans and that she's one of the very few women, that it adds these extra layers of power dynamics that make it kind of icky. But we sort of got off the topic of like T'Pol and Archer, because \*all laugh\* it does go beyond to like-



GRACE:

It feels like their character interaction is supposed to be representative of the Federation getting on better terms with Vulcan, as the Vulcans as equals, and not so much as a sort of symbiotic culture who's like \*Urkel voice\* "Hey look what I did. Please let me into your space club."

SUE:

Well, even though she is our representative Vulcan and the symbolism of her and Archer clashing is supposed to mirror, you know, humans and Vulcans clashing. A lot of T'Pol's storylines have her challenging Vulcan norms in a lot of ways or dealing with different issues. And as we go through them I just want to start this part off with another comment we got from Twitter. This one's from Laurie who wrote "they seemed to want to use her as a vessel for issues, aids allegory, addiction, sexual assault survival, repressed memories. Rather than have her be an organic character. I'm not saying the issues above aren't worth discussing but the way Enterprise handled it was so hamfisted that it reflected badly on her which is a shame"

GRACE:

That's an interesting take on that. I think there's definitely \*pauses\* something in that.

JARRAH:

I don't know if I agree. Well, I don't know that- I think she came out negatively. I think like we did an episode on Fusion and Stigma and while, you know we definitely had some quibbles with it, I think that episodes called Two About T'Pol if you're looking for it.

SUE:

Episode twenty-one

KERRY:

Yeah I just listened to it actually, it's a good one.

JARRAH:

I think that *overall* it was, you know, it was sympathetic to her. And it's like at the end- well, I think that stigma is less successful. I think that Fusion actually provides some of the men on the crew like an opportunity to show Allyship. I'm not saying that like I want to see the women characters assaulted more, but I think that the way that it was handled was actually one of the better handling of like sexual assault allegories in all of Star Trek.

GRACE:

Definitely agree.

KERRY:

I agree. Yeah totally agree.

GRACE:

But I do also think that T'Pol is used as the vehicle for a lot of "very special" conversations throughout Enterprise. And is that there is probably something to be taken from that.

KERRY:

I agree. I do agree. With Stigma, that episode- that one really struck me with how she didn't want to share her story. I didn't really care for the episode but I also thought it was- I think it's a very important one though, because there are some important discussions to be had around it. Especially, the topic of survivors sharing their stories and making the decision whether or not to share your story of assault. So I find that episode to not be perfect but I think it's an important one.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And I think that, you know one of my common threads looking into T'Pol's stuff is that I like what *she does*. Like I actually like *her* in that episode a lot. I love the thoughtfulness that she exemplifies and realizing that this is an issue that goes beyond her and she ultimately *forces* a pretty powerful conclusion. Even though Archer's being kind of Mickey Mouse annoying in that episode, I think that-

KERRY:

\*Ugh\* He was so annoying in that episode.

JARRAH:

Yeah but it shows some really powerful positive traits from her, in terms of her resilience and empathy and \*pauses\* thoughtfulness I guess.

KERRY:

Absolutely. Yeah, I did not like how he or any of the other men handled the situation. Just pressuring her to share her story, and Archer to his credit I guess he did kind of back off a little bit at when, I don't remember the Vulcan doctor's name but when he told everyone that it wasn't her fault. He basically just, like you said in the episode, he just outed her without her consent and that just wasn't cool at all. You know victims don't owe us their stories. So that was kind of upsetting.

JARRAH:

Yeah. But in terms of the other sort of the point about I guess positive traits, we had an article on our blog by Brianna Fern called the Logical Loyalty of T'Pol. And in her view it was really positive that T'Pol was very resolutely loyal and really like sacrifices a lot during the course of the show, in loyalty to mostly like the crew of Enterprise and Archer. For me, it's a little bit challenging, because I don't know that they deserve it because I'm very Ravenclaw \*laughs\*

and I don't know- like they don't deserve your loyalty! Get another like moral code that makes more sense with this. \*laughs\* But I mean, as like Star Trek character those are some of the types of traits that we really value on other shows. And it's not necessarily a bad thing. Although back to the Archer relationship, because this also we talked about this in the Archer's love interest episode \*laughs\* the episode where he's like old and she's taking care of him. I can't with that.

KERRY:  
Twilight.

JARRAH:  
Yeah, I think so. Too loya, too loyal.

GRACE:  
There's loyalty and then there's "God, she's not your mom Archer"

SUE:  
I'm not sure if they just really didn't know what to do with her, or if they wanted to show this character evolving over time. Because we get this, you know, potential future T'Pol who has stayed with Archer and takes care of him and this has sort of softened over the years. But we also see in her history an episode like The Seventh where she's basically a Vulcan assassin.

GRACE:  
Can I also just say that that episode kind of comes out of nowhere?

JARRAH:  
I kind of love it though, because it's like "Oh dimension! All of a sudden dimension!" \*laughs\* Like I wish *it didn't* come out of nowhere, \*Sue laughs\* but like there's a bunch of episodes that she gets over time like actually build this picture. But it's like they are consciously doing it in these chunks instead of you know systematically doing it over the course of her character development.

GRACE:  
I feel like we see a lot whenever there's a- there's the differentiation between a strong female character and then there's a quote unquote strong *female* character. It felt like this leans a little more towards the latter of the two. The fact that they're like "Oh yeah, also T'Pol can kick ass. She's a badass. We just didn't mention it." Feels like that happens a lot with nerdy lady characters who are also supposed to be eye candy. They have to have some kind of physical or sexy background.

KERRY:

Did all of you like the episode The Seventh? I personally was not fond of it, but I think I just found it to be kind of upsetting with- what was the name of the Vulcan she was trying to find? I can't remember. I want to say like just all the gaslighting was there.

JARRAH:

Yeah. It'd be more accurate to say that I love that there was an additional really significant piece of development, not necessarily how they handled the episode. Because I think another thing that's interesting is ultimately it's just another way of kind of villainizing the Vulcans and letting Archer and co feel smug. And there's less consideration to T'Pol and like what this says about her, that she engaged in this and more about like still kind of painting her at the end of the day as a victim because the Vulcans like you know mind-wiped her and then gaslit her. So there's definitely some interesting components there, but I think it could have been more interesting if it was like she's actually knowingly been keeping this secret. Maybe she was justified, but like what does this say about her?

GRACE:

There's dimension to be taken that wasn't taken.

SUE:

From what I've read about this episode they wanted to play on the fact that the Vulcan lifespan is so much longer than the human lifespan, and Braga said something to the effect of "What if she used to be a La Femme Nikita type character?" Because of course he did. \*Grace makes very dubious noise\* But he also said, which I actually think is interesting "We wanted to get under her skin a little bit and deal with issues she doesn't normally have to deal with, like guilt."

GRACE:

Femme Nikita, maybe not the best back story to inject into your character.

JARRAH:

What I would have liked to see it would be La Femme A la Kira. \*all laugh\* Like you find out that she's committed this murder, and that maybe it was justified, and she has some guilt about it. And like her friends start to realize this, and it just makes her a more complex character going forward like in DS9.

GRACE:

Does anyone else as soon as Menos actually shows up go "Oh my God. Senator Kelly?"

SUE:

We are pretty far into this episode already, but I do want to make sure that we hit the Kir'Shara arc a bit, that we hit the Trellium-D story, and we of course have to talk about Trip Tucker. So where would you like to go first?

KERRY:

Oh, we could talk about Trip, I guess. Because that's a big part of her life and a lot of people ship the two of them. That's a good starting point. Yeah I, you know, when they first showed the two of them together in Broken Bow I just thought "Oh no." I've never really liked it when two characters are brought together by having all that friction. It just seemed so underwhelming to me. But what did all of you think?

GRACE:

It is a little bit of a tired trope, the "opposites attract" thing. But I feel like they make it work with these two characters actually.

JARRAH:

We've had two really interesting articles on our blog by Janet Leigh about T'Pol and Trip, because definitely we've talked on the show most of us have not been fans of that couple. And Janet is a really long term Trip T'Pol shipper and has really put some thought into, you know, maybe some of the gender double standards too, but why T'Pol tends to be judged kind of harshly. For example like we really see this kind of narrative in the fandom of like you know "he's like this emotional man that won over the ice queen" kind of thing but she's kind of demonized for her you know unwillingness to be more forthcoming in her emotions and her like sort of stringing him along through her like arranged marriage and all that stuff. But it's in fact quite complicated, and some of the traits that we see in her as like- or that some people see in her as you know being standoffish or proud Janet's like "Oh is she just like a female Mr. Darcy and why are we looking at it more like that" and realizing that there's more to these characters.

KERRY:

Yeah I suppose that's a fair point. Yeah. One of the last episodes I watched, I can't remember which one it was, but it was when Trip had transferred back from Columbia and he was trying to get her to admit that she cared for him. And that just really annoyed me, because he went away because he was sad about her, and he should have been the one to have said "Oh I love you and I want to be with you and that's why I left." But instead he made it about *her* having to tell *him* like it was all her fault that he left even though he *chose* to leave. So that didn't sit well.

GRACE:

Way to put the onus on someone else, man.

JARRAH:

It's definitely a dynamic that rubbed me really the wrong way, that I still feel like a lot of the stuff was about still trying to get her to change, and not about him being more emotionally open. Like he certainly shows emotions, but it seems like in their communications there's a lot of him still needing to like be right.

KERRY:

I think just with the two of them the way he was always trying to change her, if that had been taken out of their relationship if he'd accepted her for who she was and he hadn't been constantly trying to change her. I think I would have appreciated the two of them as a couple more.

GRACE:

That's definitely kind of a major \*laughs\* detractor in their relationship.

KERRY:

Yeah. For me I think that really *is* the detractor. That and, I don't know, just the way they brought them together, the way the writers brought them together just never really worked for me. It didn't feel natural.

JARRAH:

\*sarcastic\* What? So you weren't a fan of the neuro pressure massage storyline? \*all laugh\*

KERRY:

It just- it didn't feel natural to me. It just felt like they were like "OK here's these two good looking people we'll have them give each other massages and then they'll fall in love."

GRACE:

"Now they're a couple! Enjoy!"

KERRY:

\*laughs\* Yeah.

JARRAH:

I would have liked to see more stories where they're mutually supporting each other. Instead of just- yeah. I mean, I think when that did happen it was quite nice and you could see the potential. But often it was like she's off doing something that he's slightly resentful of, or he's doing something and she's wondering like feeling guilty and "what did I do wrong?" or you know. It wasn't them like facing the same problem side by side most often. But when it was that's when I could see it working.

KERRY:

Yes exactly. I would have liked to have seen more of that.

SUE:

They rarely compromised with each other. You know, he tried to change her and she got frustrated, which I mean valid reaction. But it didn't seem long term to me. But *then* they found out they had a *surprise baby*.

GRACE:

Oooh, that changes everything. \*Sue laughs\* Babies fix relationships, apparently.

SUE:

What was the point of that storyline?

KERRY:

Sads?

SUE:

Xenophobia?

JARRAH:

I mean, I think you know the actors do a really good job. And like Jolene Blalock, that is- like it's really hard not to feel really emotional in, you know, her dealing with that. But you know actually, I really like that little xenophobia sort of arc. And some of the dialogue from the extremists is eerily well done compared to stuff we hear today. But the like you know "Let's create an alien baby" thing seemed to me the least successful and believable part of that.

GRACE:

\*laughs\* "Let's create an alien baby" sounds like a really weird game show.

KERRY:

\*laughs\* So we'd have Troi on that right? \*all laugh\*

GRACE:

Trip would be on it twice.

SUE:

But I also don't understand the point of "It seems Vulcan and human DNA just can't mix. Oh wait no they messed up. They totally can." I mean because the audience knows.

GRACE:

The audience has heard of Spock presumably. Right?

SUE:

\*laughs\* Of course they can. But is that just to like have them have this ability to take comfort in the fact that they could have a baby if they wanted to?

GRACE:

I guess?

KERRY:

Maybe?

SUE:

Even though they're supposedly not together at that point right?

JARRAH:

It's been a long hard road by that point. \*all laugh\*

KERRY:

Were the writers going to have them get back together if they hadn't canceled the show? Does anyone know?

SUE:

I have no idea.

JARRAH:

I don't know.

KERRY:

I'm so sad it ended when it did. I really feel like in the fourth season it was starting to finally find its legs and it's really too bad it didn't have more seasons.

JARRAH:

Yeah I agree.

SUE:

I want to briefly touch on the Kir'Shara. When the Vulcans find their true Vulcan orthodoxy or whatever. \*laughs\* But I think the arc is very interesting for T'Pol, because she has never really been all in with the Vulcan High Command. At least that we have seen since we've known her. But she doesn't really believe the Syrranites either so it's a bit of a surprise for her to find out her mom is one. But then she is roped into this mission and this goal to find the original writings of Surak. And they do and all of a sudden even before the end of the arc she's telling people "I'm a Syrranite. We don't lie." \*crew chuckles\*

GRACE:

Way to be all in there.

SUE:

I have no proof of this, but my own personal theory is that this three episode arc is meant to address some of the criticism that the show got about "these Vulcans not being the Vulcans that we're used to." And I think this is trying to show the audience "You know you're right. But here's how they get to where they are when you know them. This is how they get to Spock and Tuvok."



I don't know. It's interesting for her to be at the forefront I guess, of what one could call a spiritual or religious revolution of her society.

KERRY:

Yeah that's interesting. And I don't know- I never- I know a lot of people were bothered by how the Vulcans were portrayed in Enterprise and it bothered me initially but then it didn't. And I think it just shows how they grew as a society. And you get to see that later we since Enterprise is a prequel. But if you look at Deep Space Nine how a lot of changes were made towards the end, when Rom became the new Grand Nagus. So that was the beginning of a change in Ferengi society. So to me the way the Vulcans were portrayed I personally wasn't bothered by it. I thought it was interesting to see how they grew. And T'Pol, how she played a part in that too. I really liked seeing that she was there at the beginning as they were changing and growing as a society. And she as a character gets to be part of that.

GRACE:

She gets to be part of her species arc, not just her characters.

KERRY:

True. Yes.

SUE:

We also saw her from the very beginning sort of struggling with repressing her emotions. One of the first stories we get that actually gives us insight to her character is like wandering into this jazz club. Right? And then we have her storyline with the Trellium-D. Which is, brief recap, they stumbled across her old ship inside this Trellium-D like asteroid field, and they have all sort of disconnected, and they're having fits of rage, and it turns out that the substance prevents or affects the part of the brain for Vulcans that helps them repress their emotions. And then she starts, T'Pol, starts injecting herself with it and becomes addicted to it.

GRACE:

Yeah. Like I said, they used T'Pol as a vehicle for a lot of *very special* topics. And also can I just say, jazz club? Weird way to be rebelling. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

I mean for a Vulcan, it *is* improvisation.

GRACE:

I mean, is she like a white lady from upstate New York in the 1930s going to a jazz club? \*Sue laughs\*

JARRAH:

Because I mean she is spending all her time with Soval.

SUE:

Well we did get, specifically on this topic, we got a comment from Polly on Facebook. Polly is also the host of Sober Trek on the Tricorder Transmissions network.

GRACE:

Hi guys!

SUE:

All the shout outs today. Polly wrote "How T'Pol handled her PTSD and addiction were some of the strongest storylines for me for "Enterprise", but of course, it was because it was so personal to me. I think her portrayal of the character was pretty great."

KERRY:

Yeah. That's awesome.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I was just gonna say like a Star Trek in previous iterations has occasionally tried to deal with addiction and not *often* super successfully. Like you know "I feel weird but also good" \*all laugh\* You know, Wesley asking Tasha like "Why would people do drugs?"

GRACE:

Very after school special.

JARRAH:

Yeah. It is more helpful to have it located in a main character and to see them working through it, and probably still could be improved upon. But I think that that is positive and I think it's an issue that still, you know, definitely bears exploring.

KERRY:

Yeah definitely.

SUE:

Any more thoughts on this storyline?

KERRY:

How did everyone feel about Impulse? Just not looking at it through so much of a critical eye for me, I loved it. Just it just had this feel of like a fun zombie movie. But I'm curious like how all of you felt about it and how T'Pol's role was in it? When I saw it initially like right at the beginning when she was freaking out that was kind of scary, and I thought "Oh no is this going to be another one of those something bad happens T'Pol episodes and we learn a lesson?" so that

that was kind of my beginning but then I got caught up in the plot. And I loved it. But did anyone else feel that way?

GRACE:

I think this might have actually been my first episode of Enterprise I ever saw, because I remembered seeing like the ads for it and the whole sort of them playing up the kind of horror movie aspect of it and was like "Yeah I'd watch that." So this was my introduction to Enterprise actually. And I did like their sort of take on the scary movie aspect of the plot. I appreciated that and I appreciate how also with the ending we get kind of a what is it- The Friday the 13th fake out of "Oh but it's never really over for her is it?"

KERRY:

Oh like the end of the first season of Stranger Things.

GRACE:

Or the end of Carrie. Yeah. You're never gonna be totally right after that. I appreciate that and I appreciate that that's kind of a recurring thing with T'Pol, there's a traumatic experience and then there's the ongoing trauma that you live with after that.

SUE:

Yeah I have another Brannon Braga quote.

GRACE:

Oh boy.

SUE:

He said about this- the addiction storyline "She thought she'd found a way to perhaps access those long-repressed emotions and enter a different state of mind. And she got into trouble. To me, that's what makes interesting character drama: characters make mistakes.

GRACE:

That is true. But I feel like when you \*pauses/groans\* this is so complicated because when you get into the complicated media legacy of addiction and how it's portrayed to just call it a mistake feels like you're disregarding a lot of important aspects that should be brought up when talking about addiction as it is, as a disease, as a condition, as something that you can be predisposed to. And just writing it off as a mistake feels..

KERRY:

It's irresponsible.

SUE:

Reductive.

GRACE:

Yeah reductive.

JARRAH:

It individualizes the problem and lets people write off individual people with addiction, instead of recognizing like it's a disease. And there are also social aspects.

KERRY:

Exactly I agree.

GRACE:

That said, characters that make mistakes are more interesting than perfect characters. But definitely not the best phrasing there or the best approach I don't think.

SUE:

Well noting, just for fairness's sake, that is a quote from Star Trek Communicator, so it is contemporary to the time the episode was airing. So maybe that would be phrased a little bit differently today. Maybe not. Who knows.

GRACE:

I mean we can hope.

SUE:

Yeah. We do know of course that Jolene Blalock was pretty outspoken with her criticisms of Enterprise, especially in its third season. Some of the other cast members have been as well. And going so far as to accuse the producers of being out of touch with the fan base. \*a chorus of 'hmmm's\* Interesting. Yes. \*all laugh\* She even called, I think this is my favorite part because I think a lot of fans would agree, she called the series finale of Enterprise *appalling*. \*all laugh\*

GRACE:

Appalling or T'Pol-ing?

SUE:

Oh my God.

KERRY:

You beat me to it!

GRACE:

Sorry! \*laughs\* I had to.

KERRY:

It's pretty great.

SUE:

Just one more cause I can't resist. In response to her criticisms executive producer Brannon Braga said she quote might be overreacting a bit.

KERRY:

\*groans\* That's like a man's go-to line.

SUE:

Yeah, just sums it all up.

GRACE:

"She's being hysterical, that's the real problem here."

KERRY:

He's overreacting, it's not that bad.

SUE:

So. \*laughs\* There's so much to talk about with T'Pol because there's so many issues that this character goes through there's so many controversies around this character. I mean like we do, we go back and we look at individual episodes specifically. So yeah maybe the Trellium-D arc with Impulse would be one to take a closer look at in the near future. But as we begin to wrap up this episode I do want to share another listener comment from Facebook. I believe this name is pronounced Kaia. And if I'm incorrect I apologize but Kaia writes "I think her character shows that one can be open to new experiences and ideas without compromising one's own values or sense of self. Through her interactions with her crew mates, T'Pol illustrates how one can grow as a person without succumbing to external social pressures about what a woman (or Vulcan) is or how she should behave in any given social environment."

JARRAH:

It's a nice way of putting it.

GRACE:

Yeah it really is. I like that.

SUE:

Yeah. So I think that is a great summary of this character because even though she has been through a ton and even though her crewmates can gang up on her at times or tell her to loosen up or be more human-

GRACE:

Or smell, they just smell really bad to her.

SUE:

I think that she retains who she is. Like, she doesn't really stray from that. She has issues that cause maybe some veering off her path but she also has an integrity that she, I don't think, ever really loses.

GRACE:

Yeah, I definitely think that's the character at her best summed up right there.

SUE:

Is there anything that anybody wanted to bring up that we did not touch on today?

GRACE:

I like when they let her look more alien as the series progresses. Like give her bigger ears and more pointy eyebrows because they were like "Oh we're trying to downplay the alien part of the sexy alien" but it's like "No. Let her be an alien."

JARRAH:

Really? I thought that she was they were making her look more feminine.

GRACE:

Really?

JARRAH:

Yeah. Like I feel like her hair gets lighter and fluffier and her catsuits get more colorful like she gets the baby blue and the pink velour.

GRACE:

Yeah, but her eyebrows get more intense.

KERRY:

Oh, I didn't notice. \*Sue laughs\*

JARRAH:

It reminded me of Olivia Benson in the first four seasons of SVU.

GRACE:

Oh no. Or Rachel Maddow and the first couple seasons of her show when they're just globbing makeup on her.

JARRAH:

Yeah, we're like Kira in DS9 where she goes from looking like military kind of butch to-

GRACE:

But I just like that she got to have more Vulcan eyebrows because-

SUE:

So maybe they sharpened her facial features, but they softened her uniform?

GRACE:

Maybe that was the visual compromise there?

SUE:

\*laughs\* Well Kerry were you gonna say something?

KERRY:

Oh, I remember now. No, I was going to say I think if CBS All Access ever decides to do an Enterprise reboot I think Scott Bakula is all tied up with one of the CSI shows, so they could have Star Trek: T'Pol

GRACE:

Yeah! "T'P-haulin' ass!"

SUE:

All right. So I think that about does it for us today. Kerry thank you so much for joining us to talk about T'Pol. If people want to find you on the Internet where should they go?

KERRY:

I'm on Twitter. I have two different accounts you can follow. The one is Kerrbearlib K E R R B E A R L I B. And I also have a Spanish language Twitter I don't use it as much but you're welcome to follow me. It's pronounced Kari Trek K A R I T R E K and on Facebook I also have a group called Trekkie Librarians. I'm a librarian, and anyone is welcome to join. You don't have to be a librarian as long as you're a supporter of libraries. You are welcome to come join the fun with us

GRACE:

Bueno.

KERRY:

\*laughs\* Gracias.

SUE:

And Grace where can people find you?

GRACE:

You can find me on Twitter @Bonecrusherjenk and you can find me \*singing Air Supply's All Outta Love\* T'Pol out of love, I'm so lost without you. \*Sue laughs\* I'm done.

SUE:

\*laughs\* Jarrah?

JARRAH:

You can find me at [Trekiefeminist.com](http://Trekiefeminist.com) or on Twitter @JarrahPenguin.

SUE:

And I'm Sue, you can find me on Twitter @Spaltor that's S P A L T O R. To learn more about our show or to contact us visit [WomenAtWarp.com](http://WomenAtWarp.com) or find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @WomenAtWarp. You can email us at [Crew@WomenAtWarp.com](mailto:Crew@WomenAtWarp.com) and check out our blog at [WomenAtWarp.com](http://WomenAtWarp.com) and for more from the Roddenberry podcast network visit [podcasts.Roddenberry.com](http://podcasts.Roddenberry.com)

GRACE:

And that's the T'Pol folks!

\*outtro music\*

Voiceover:

The Roddenberry podcast network. [Podcasts.Roddenberry.com](http://Podcasts.Roddenberry.com).