

## Women at Warp Episode 101: “The Inner Light”

JARRAH:

Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: A Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us as a crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name's Jarrah and thanks for tuning in. Today with us we have the entire crew. Grace

GRACE:

Hey everybody.

JARRAH:

Sue

SUE:

Hidee-ho neighborinos

JARRAH:

and Andi

ANDI:

Lowe

JARRAH:

and we are going to be discussing an iconic Star Trek episode, The Inner Light. But before we get into that we have a little bit of housekeeping to do. Our show was entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon. Your support helps us keep our show up and running. We do things like upgrade our equipment, deal with our audio and Web site hosting, pay volunteers to help transcribe and write blog posts for our show, and other- get out to conventions and otherwise promote the show and build our audience. So for as little as a dollar a month you can support us on Patreon, and we have various awesome rewards that you can get in return. From thanks on social media to joining us for silly watchalong commentaries. Visit [www.patreon.com/womenatwarp](http://www.patreon.com/womenatwarp). You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Another housekeeping item is our book club. Sue, do you want to talk a bit or a bit about our book club?

SUE:

Yeah. The next book we'll be reading is called Letters to Star Trek. It's compiled by Gene Roddenberry's assistant Susan Sackett, in I believe the late 70s. And there are several letters that were written to Star Trek, to Gene himself, and in some cases Gene's responses to those as well. So when we do our Book Club episode we'll each be picking a few instances specifically to talk about. But we will be talking about the entire book more specifically and generally over in

our goodreads group. So if you'd like to join us in that discussion you can find the Women At Warp group on goodreads.

JARRAH:

Awesome. Any other housekeeping before we move on to the main topic?

SUE:

We have a couple giveaways in the works, so we just want to let you know that. And keep an ear out for those in the new year.

GRACE:

\*singsong voice\* Get excited!

ANDI:

Shiny.

JARRAH:

Okay. So on to the Inner Light. The TNG episode season 5 episode 25, Original Air Date June 1st 1992. Let's all just take ourselves back in time to June 1st 1992. I was seven.

GRACE:

I was two.

JARRAH:

And we all, I'm sure, looked awesome. \*Sue laughs\*

GRACE:

Of course. Bowl haircuts, what wasn't there to love?

ANDI:

I had a hat that was a bucket hat, that I used puffy paint on and then also glued like plastic flowers to. And I thought it was the *bangin'est* hat. And it was not. \*Sue laughs\*

JARRAH:

I had a fanny pack that I glitter fabric painted flowers on to.

ANDI:

Aw Jarrah, we were always meant to be friends.

JARRAH:

Bangin' fanny pack.

GRACE:

I had a souvenir sweatshirt from the Nebraska corn palace that was bedazzled and also had a little pocket full of unpopped kernels of corn in it for decoration.

JARRAH:

Wow.

GRACE:

This was an actual article of clothing that I owned and wore as a child. \*Andi laughs\* Also the Corn Palace is a thing.

SUE:

I insisted on wearing a Marvin the Martian T-shirt to picture day at school. \*Andi laughs\*

GRACE:

That feels on brand though! You were sci fi from the get go.

SUE:

From the start, I'm telling you.

JARRAH:

Nice. Okay, so for anyone who doesn't remember the plot of this episode, there is a probe floating in space and it beams a signal that knocks Picard unconscious and makes him live the entire life of a dude from this civilization called the Katanians.

SUE:

a.k.a. the planet of tie dye and Tom shoes.

GRACE:

They've got a look.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And so he lives this whole life, realizes that their planet is going to be destroyed by a catastrophic environmental forces, and at the end realizes that he was part of the group of people that constructed the probe that was designed to share the memories of the planet's inhabitants as their civilization would not survive, after having a family and all that. And then he wakes up and that's the end. So there's your super summary.

GRACE:

And then he's got a little flute to remember it all by. Which I guess is cheaper than therapy, but you know.

ANDI:

Probably not as effective.

GRACE:

\*skeptically\* No. \*definitively\* No.

SUE:

I would like to acknowledge right at the top that in general by a lot of people this episode is considered one of Star Trek's best episodes. It won the 1993 Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation. It's the third of only four Star Trek episodes to have done that to *this* point. But there are definitely some themes and some topics and some stuff that is also kind of problematic.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Last year at Star Trek Las Vegas they did a special event just for the 25th anniversary of this episode where they had the writer Morgan Gendel, and the actress who played Elline- plays though the wife of Patrick Stewart's character in the Kataanian society. And I think Daniel Stewart was there too, Patrick Stewart's son who plays his son Batai in his Kataanian life. And certainly the song, that was composed by J. Chattaway for this- for the flute song, is very well known and brings many fans to tears to this day.

GRACE:

If you go to a Star Trek convention it's *inescapable*. \*Sue laughs\*

ANDI:

I actually ran into Morgan Gendel at Chicago Star Trek because he *sells* those flutes.

GRACE:

*Of course* he does.

JARRAH:

It's just like a penny whistle with a tassel on it right?

GRACE:

So it's slightly fancy. It's a twenty five cent piece whistle. \*Sue laughs\*

ANDI:

You can also buy like signed scripts from him. He was very nice. I enjoyed speaking with him. But yeah, I met him. He had a table there.

JARRAH:

Nice.

SUE:

And the expanded orchestral suite, the six minute suite, is beautiful.

GRACE:

I'll also say this is definitely the episode of Next Generation that the most, when I bring up Star Trek to people, people who just casually were watching it in the 90s will be like "Oh yeah! I love that one where he goes and lives as someone else for a while, I thought that was really cool." That's the most common episode I've heard referenced about TNG from non fans. So fans and non fans alike love this one.

JARRAH:

Yeah. It also is the third of four star trek episodes to win the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation. The other ones being The Menagerie parts 1 and 2, with both parts combined, The City On The Edge of Forever, and All Good Things. So definitely those other episodes are pretty heavy hitters as well. And that's considered a pretty prominent recognition.

ANDI:

Yeah. When I was First Time Trekking it this was one of the ones that people were extremely excited for me to Trek. And for the most part, even though I discourage this *hint hint* to possible listeners that might also follow my Twitter feed, I don't like it when people tell me that an episode is either good or bad. Don't tell me about that episode at all, really. But people do. All the time. And they were just "You're gonna love this episode" was the number one thing I heard.

GRACE:

People went hog wild on this one.

ANDI:

Yeah. Everyone was very excited for me to see it, because they thought I would absolutely love it. That's one reason why I think First Time Trek resonated with so many people? Because a lot of people come into these discussions having like decades of fandom behind them, and like popular fan opinions that kind of coalesce, and I don't. Or at least I *didn't* have any of that. So I always had like this fresh perspective that was not colored by like general fan ideas that people had kind of rallied behind. So for instance, I never found Wesley Crusher annoying. So sometimes I surprise people with whether or not I respond the way that they are expecting me to respond.

SUE:

But in addition to somebody's personal history with Star Trek and Star Trek fandom, there is the fact that so many fans have- saw this episode when it aired. And have history with this episode in particular. We were just saying earlier off mic that, you know, this is 92. And in 92 this like theater of the mind living another person's life concept was still a relatively new one in sci fi TV. Not entirely new, but it certainly was not the trope that it is now. So it was this whole concept

and this arc of this episode was kind of mind blowing for a lot of people watching it. Whereas now that is not the most impressive thing about the episode anymore.

JARRAH:

Yeah for sure. And I mean it it also led to at least two more Star Trek episodes that were along similar lines. One being the Deep Space 9 episode Hard Time, and one the Voyager episode Memorial. Both of which are pretty dark and-

GRACE:

Oh they're hella dark!

JARRAH:

More directly violent than this?

GRACE:

Yeah.

JARRAH:

But it showed that this had a profound impact on people.

GRACE:

You've got to wonder though, if those two episodes were a response to how you can look at this episode in kind of a problematic light though.

ANDI:

I do think that like there have been more than one person who's tweeted me and told me that like for them in nineteen ninety two this is like cinematic. It was like a movie. And I think sometimes we forget like the difference in quality of TV in 92 to now. Like now we have all these prestige dramas that have like that cinematic quality to them. And it was still a new thing. TV was still a young medium by any art telling perspective. So I think that it's hard to separate how you feel when you first see an episode and the context that you see an episode in. It's hard to kind of step away from that. And you shouldn't have to really, like that's all a part of the experience of art. You're bringing your own perspective to it and your own feelings and understanding of the world to it. That's why art is so subjective. Like, one person will watch this episode and be moved to absolute tears. And there are other people, such as myself, that didn't enjoy it as much. And I think that's really kind of beautiful. It's like it's different for every person and that's part of why art is so amazing and so interesting to dissect.

SUE:

And I think there are also people who do both. You know, you can be very moved by a piece of art and still have criticisms or things to talk about or things that you didn't like about it.

ANDI:

Absolutely. I like to think that that's what we do here.

GRACE:

At least part of the goal, yeah.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Going back to, you know, how this was kind of a big deal for science fiction at the time. Morgan Gendel in an article at IO9 talks about how he sort of feels like the same struggle that Picard as Kamin does, where he was a freelance writer trying to get the show to accept this script that was really weird for them. That like, this is unlike a lot of the Star Trek that had happened to date. Very focused on one character. Although, originally he had actually proposed that Riker and Ro be taken into the universe as well, which we can speculate on how that would have gone. And that he sort of likens it to Kamin having to get his people to accept the reality that their climate is changing and their civilization is gonna be destroyed. So yeah. It was a bit of an interesting time in the universe of television.

SUE:

What's so interesting is that within the first, I don't know, five minutes of the episode we have Batai planting this tree, and this tree will thrive in defiance of all of the climate science that they have. And that just-

GRACE:

That's *some tree*.

SUE:

I hadn't watched this episode in a while, and that just really resonated with me. Like here are our government leaders like actively fighting against climate science.\*laughs\* Wow.

JARRAH:

We had a comment from Rosemary saying "The planet roasted and there was nothing they could do to stop it. We have some limited influence on how ours warms up if we all pulled together, and we're not. It hurts."

ANDI:

Yeah. I mean, I saw this episode when climate change was much more, I guess, established. And so it's kind of very impressive to me that this is a story at all in 1992, and it really holds up. Like, this part of the story really holds up, like the idea of leaders that just don't want to face the problems that they are experiencing and just like a lack of vision for how to fix those problems. And kind of the sadness of what do you do when you're raising children and you don't know if there's gonna be a planet for them to live on? And all of that is super resonant right now.

SUE:

Well nobody takes action until it's too late to save the planet. And they just have to figure out how they're going to be remembered. And I think that's the saddest part to me.

JARRAH:

Yeah.

ANDI:

Yeah. Well if it makes you all feel better, earth already sent a whole load of crap into space. \*Sue laughs\* So like you know, when *our* planet is a desolate wasteland there are like really terrible pop songs and also Elon Musk's car \*Sue laughs\* just like floating out there, and they'll know humans were here.

GRACE:

Now I'm bummed out.

ANDI:

Man, I'm trying to lighten the mood Grace!

JARRAH:

There's some good stuff, there's good stuff out there too. Just think about what they put out on the Voyager probe. That, and like just forget the other stuff. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

Well, we know what happens when we find that again. \*laughs\*

ANDI:

Oooh my goodness. Well we've taken this even darker than the episode! \*Sue laughs\*

SUE:

But so, before I think we get into \*pause\* I don't want to say the *heavier stuff*. There's a- it's all kind of heavy stuff. But one of the complaints I see a lot about this episode is not really about the episode itself, but about the fact that you know next week we're back to normal. Which is the issue in general with, you know, early to mid to even kind of late 90s television. That it's all syndicated. And the only real follow up they had was when you see the flute again in Lessons, and you can argue in Generations. But there's a quote from Ron Moore from an AOL chat in 1997, you guys. \*laughs\*

GRACE:

Technology!

ANDI:

Top notch source.

SUE:

Well no, it was like an Ask Me Anything, like a Reddit AMA. But it happened on AOL.

ANDI:

That's amazing. I think that's awesome.

SUE:

And he wrote "We never intended the show to completely upend his character and force a radical change in the series. So we contented ourselves with a single follow up in Lessons." That *seems* not like something you should be contented with, but maybe that is my own personal feeling about Nella Daren.

ANDI:

\*laughs\* Well here's the thing. It's like, I mean it was the nature of TV. And in some ways it's still the nature of TV for a lot of shows, in which at the end of the episode you have to go back to the status quo. Because it's very very risky to upend a character in that way. Or even like changing settings is it's all very risky. Like the audience might not like it. The audience might not like the change. And you know, I get it. Do I wish that some of the trauma that's explored in the show was explored more deeply? Absolutely! I personally think Picard would be extremely affected by this, and extremely affected by say the Borg, and extremely affected by his torture. You know? Like, there are many examples even if you're just looking at Picard, of deep trauma that's not ever really explored. But I mean, it's kind of the limitations of this kind of TV storytelling.

SUE:

Yeah for sure.

JARRAH:

Morgan Gendel had proposed a sequel called The Outer Light, where they encountered Kataan survivors, including Eline, that never got made but could have an interesting.

SUE:

But how, if she died a thousand years ago?

GRACE:

\*whispering\* I don't know.

ANDI:

Sci-fi Sue, science. \*Sue laughs\*

JARRAH:

I don't know. They got rescued? They got put in stasis? They got- I don't know.

ANDI:

Clones. \*Grace laughs\* Time travel.

JARRAH:

Or maybe he proposed it at the very beginning. Like the two stories together, or something?

ANDI:

Maybe.

GRACE:

He was trying to discreetly slip in there a pilot for a series all about these people whose planet was destroyed, but they live in the future now and they get up to all kinds of wacky shenanigans. \*Sue laughs\* I'm sure.

ANDI:

You know, that's kind of what Gene Roddenberry did when he did the Ninja Cat episode.

GRACE:

Exactly. The backdoor pilot.

ANDI:

He was trying to make sure that he had a job if Star Trek didn't pan out.

GRACE:

It's called job security, and it is what it is.

JARRAH:

So, we have a bunch of themes that we can discuss. There's some sort of general ones that we identified, as well as there were five themes or questions that Morgan Gendel has identified. I don't know that we need to go through all five of them, we've already kind of covered off the theater of the mind, but one that I thought was interesting was what he calls "the healing brush tool" which is the question "Did the recreation show the Katanians more kindly than reality?" Like if you were creating a museum to show how your society lived would you make it better than reality? And he said he thinks yes. But, thoughts on that?

ANDI:

I don't think anybody can ever see themselves or their society dispassionately and without bias. So I would agree with him.

GRACE:

And I think everyone is embarrassed of aspects of their life, including their society.

ANDI:

Like if I had to go before say Q in some sort of galactic trial \*Sue laughs\* and had to defend humanity, I would have a lot of things to say in our defense but also like, I would have a lot of things to say about how crap we are. \*Grace laughs\* And even then I don't think I could honestly portray us as a species because I am part of it.

SUE:

I have a lot of questions about the society and its level of technology. Because we see Kamin building his own telescope but we also see touch activated sliding doors. The implication is that they have created a space program in order to launch this probe and have no manned spaceflight, but they have the ability to create this program that jumps into Picard's brain on the Enterprise and puts him into this world in his own mind.

GRACE:

Their planet has a *very* specialized educational system.

SUE:

Right. It all doesn't like Jive really well to me. But also, how did they do it? Did somebody-did Kamin sit down and tell his life story to somebody who typed it up? Or were they able to like scan his memory engrams and put that in the program?

GRACE:

See, that would've been an episode unto itself. This old man just describing all of his benign life stories, and them trying to work out a workable story from it.

SUE:

But I think that how they did it might help to answer this question. You know, if somebody actively programmed this from stories or experiences it's probably in a biased light. If it's simply, somehow, this man's memories maybe it's not. Or at the very least it would be the exact way he experienced them. Yeah, there has to be some kind of programming, because we see that Picard as Kamin appears to have free will. He doesn't- he's not being forced to take any kind of action we see when he decides that he is ready to have children. So there needs to be something in it that allows for deviation from the actual life story of this person. Did Kamin even really exist? Or is this a fancy brain holodeck program? I need to stop riffing on this now.  
\*laughs\*

GRACE:

I don't know, it'd be really cool if it turned out he was like an amalgamation of various figures in their society or just the people who are working on the project.

ANDI:

See to me, it feels very much like a RPG. \*all laugh\* No but seriously, like a virtual reality RPG.

GRACE:

I see it.

ANDI:

Where they put him in this place, and they gave him these non playable characters, and he can shape how he responds to them, and they will respond back. But like, they still have like set a blueprint for his life that he is supposed to follow. Like when you're talking video game development there is a lot of different ways that they push you towards choices, and even though you're like technically you go down *that* hallway and not *that* hallway, there is a lot of design ways that they make you go down a certain hallway you know? And when you're saying he has free will, I feel like it's Truman Show style free will.

SUE:

You're absolutely right. Where it's like they give him this like super empathetic nice sweet wife that he doesn't want to make sad. And then it makes it clear that the only thing that she really wants is kids. And then he feels guilty and like he has to do that. Like, I feel like yes there's an illusion of free will, but I don't know. I don't know. Can you have free will in a situation like that, in a simulation like that where they're actively trying to teach you a lesson? I don't know. I don't know the answer.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And one of our commenters also called into question the idea that he even maybe lived a full lifetime. Saying that "There's little to suggest that Picard gets to keep all those memories or even that a lifetime of them truly existed." And he sort of speculates that- this listener speculates that it may be sort of like the fragmented elements of a dream, where you fully albeit briefly believe you've lived a very different life and that- but that it fades quickly once you wake up. So that was just another interpretation of it.

ANDI:

Like you know how in the Truman Show when he starts- maybe people haven't seen The Truman Show which is about Jim Carrey in like a bubble and they're all watching him, and they want to make sure he doesn't leave, because if he leaves he'll realize he lives in like a dome. So when he decides he wants to like take a trip they put together a travel agency for him and he goes to it. And on the wall there's a poster of a plane getting hit by lightning and like crashing into the sea. And it says "It could happen to you" on it. And like everything is designed to make him not want to do that. And ultimately the point of that movie is that like his will is stronger. Right? But that's what I mean when I say like "Is his free will real?" I don't know.

GRACE:

I also like the idea of they made it so that the further away from this memory of this second life he's lived he gets, the less he can actually remember. Specifically so that he can't figure out why there're quite so many plot holes there. Just like "Hang on, you've developed brain preserving technology, but you couldn't get solar energy to take off? What?" They're like "No no no just

leave with a happy happy memory that we existed, and we were a very good, and very clean people.”

ANDI:

I mean, this is kind of getting into the reasons why I don't actually like this episode. In that I feel like it's extremely manipulative not just of Picard but of us. And I mean, all art is manipulative. Like that's the point of it, to manipulate your emotions to feel a certain thing. But for me it just seems so horrifying, the idea of somebody coming into my brain without permission, without consent and like rearranging my brain to show me a fake life that is designed to teach me something that they want me to know. That to me is like Invasion of the body snatchers type horror.

SUE:

Yeah. He did not agree to spend these twenty five minutes in this RPG.

ANDI:

Not only that like, it's not just- it's just like such a violation of your mind. I can't do- yeah. It's so creepy to me. And when it's supposed to be like touching and melancholy and sad and sweet and what you're actually feeling is like “Ew, no!” It kind of makes it harder for me to like connect with the message of the episode. So that's why I think I had such a different reaction to it than most people, because I was the whole time- I was like “No, leave him alone! Don't hurt him! He's been through so much!”

GRACE:

“Don't force him to *feel things!*” \*Sue laughs\* “How *dare* you?!”

ANDI:

But I mean, think about how traumatized he was after the Borg.

GRACE:

Yeah! This makes it especially messed up.

ANDI:

And a huge reason why he was traumatized with the Borg is because they invaded his mind. They turned him into someone he wasn't. And this does that, in a totally different way and with totally different intentions that are supposedly benign, but like it's functionally the same thing. And it really weirds me out.

SUE:

And there's no way that anyone who came across this probe, if it weren't Picard hypothetically, wouldn't have a traumatic experience in there. Eventually, you're going to have relationships, whether you choose to continue with the person you're told is your partner or not, whether you have children or not, you're going to get to the end of it and find out that everyone you've been

interacting with for as long as you thought you were in there died a thousand years ago. That's still going to be traumatic and that's still gonna be something that you're gonna have to deal with. So it's also forcing eventual trauma onto someone.

JARRAH:

Yeah, and you definitely were not alone in seeing that as super problematic Andi. Benjamin said- compared to the Borg experience with this and said "I know he keeps at playing the flute and actively fights the Borg memories but I bet he has two sessions with Troi every week to keep working through what thoughts are actually his, after this."

GRACE:

Yeah he's going to have some definite trust issues coming along.

SUE:

There is actually- I don't remember the name of it, but there is some really great fan fiction that I remember that had Picard dealing with this episode in particular, and saying things like "I don't know if these feelings are mine or not."

GRACE:

I would love to read that.

SUE:

I wish I remembered what it was. I'm sure I read it like 20 years ago.\*laughs\*

ANDI:

Well I mean, I just- it kind of boggles my mind because- OK, so I compared this episode a little bit to a virtual reality RPG. So I love RPGs. I play RPGs all the time. Like after Dragon Age 2 when one of my companions died. I was like, crushed. I sat on my couch and cried for a solid four hours like. And that was for an experience not only that I consented to, but like paid good money for.

SUE:

And knew wasn't real.

ANDI:

Exactly! And I still like, I- maybe I'm too sensitive. Say whatever you want. But it really messed me up. Like, it's one reason why it's my favorite game of all time now because, you know, having an emotional experience that intense is very rare. But I was *devastated*. And then like to think of it and extrapolate that to "I didn't know it wasn't real, I actually loved my kids and my grandkid and my wife. And now suddenly they're all they're all dead. But also they're not real?" Oh that would mess me up! \*laughs\*

SUE:

I mean and they're, along those lines, they're gaslighting him from the moment he shows up.

ANDI:

Absolutely. And that's the other thing I was wondering when I was re-watching it today, was when she was like trying to explain to him that he's not Picard, does she know at that time? Or you know how real are these people? Are they- well like, if she knows and is actively like gaslighting him into believing he's not real. That's even more messed up, but I don't know. Like I don't know if she's even a real person or if it's just a program. I don't- I don't know the answer to any of these questions. Like, the result is very emotionally manipulative, in my opinion.

SUE:

I realize it would take the drama of what's happening on the Enterprise D away entirely, but like how difficult would it be for the society to have put in a like "Hey! We would like to show you how we lived, because our society died a long time ago. Would you like to see it?"

GRACE:

Yeah there's definitely more sensitive ways to do it.

SUE:

"Click yes or no." \*laughs\*

ANDI:

Yeah, exactly. But the problem is like, and I see why they don't do that, is because it's a huge problem from a storytelling perspective.

SUE:

Absolutely.

ANDI:

Or like a huge part of the tension of this episode comes from "Is Picard really in danger?" Like "What's happening?" "What's happening?" is like a full third of the beginning of this episode. And if you know what's happening like, a lot of the tension draws out so you'd have to find a different way to insert that tension into the story. Well like, I agree. Like it doesn't seem like it would be that hard to be like "Here's an archaeological artifact of our people. Would you like to see how we lived and died?"

JARRAH:

I wonder if there would have been a way to flip it? Like to start- instead of starting on the Enterprise start in like the Kataanian simulation with Picard so you don't know what happened up and up until that point, until like the end of the episode.

ANDI:

Yes. See I think that that would've worked better, because the point is to keep tension for the audience not for Picard.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Also then we would have avoided a scene that both Kerry and Lynn Anne raised, which is Riker being rude to Dr Crusher.

GRACE:

\*annoyed voice\* *Riker!*

ANDI:

Yeah, I get it. He's worried. And I kind of appreciate the way he puts it. He says "I'm not going to let them keep drilling into him" is the way that he puts it, and that's kind of how I feel about it. So like I totally get where he's coming from in that like he sees it as an attack. But then Crushers analogy is also a good one, because if you pull a knife out of somebody who's been stabbed and you don't have a way to stop that bleeding like you can cut more than, you know, like there's a reason why if you are impaled in any way you should not pull out the knife. But I just think they're trying to make it more intense and it just comes off as condescending.

SUE:

Yeah there is the dramatic tension there too, though for Picard Kamin of whether or not, in the very beginning, he will accept this as his life or not. Which would also be gone if it turned out to be a consented to experience.

ANDI:

Yeah I would feel better about it if it were consensual, but the episode makes it clear, clear-er, that it's not ok that they did this. Do you know what I mean? Like, it's this- for me it's similar to The Child. In which one of the reasons why I find The Child so disturbing is because everyone's acting like this violation of Troi is great. You know what I mean? So it's not so much what happened. It's more about how they frame what happened.

SUE:

Yes. Because you're right. We absolutely do get Riker saying "I can't believe they're doing this, they're attacking him." And then once they know what it was everybody is like "Oh. Well OK then. It wasn't trying to hurt you so it's fine." Yeah. Intent doesn't matter Y'all. Just because you didn't intend to hurt somebody doesn't mean you didn't hurt somebody.

JARRAH:

But also I think you could argue in this case they should have reasonably known. Like, they clearly had notions of like love and family and that they would have been upset if their whole family died. Which is why they were trying so hard to preserve their civilization in some way. So they should be able to know that going through that would it be a lot to ask of someone.

ANDI:

I also find it interesting that it's like a one and done. I feel like it would be more effective if it was like an artifact that could like continue? Like anybody could have this experience. But maybe they didn't have the technology.

GRACE:

Nah, they just they somehow had the technology to make their probe zero in on the most high ranking person that would be on any given ship. The person with the most influence.

ANDI:

Yeah, that's the other thing. Why did it choose Picard?

SUE:

The probe was like "That dude loves archaeology."

GRACE:

"You know who looks like they'd look good with a flute? *This guy.*" \*Andi laughs\*

SUE:

"Which one's the star of the show? That one."

GRACE:

"Which one's going to act our way to an Emmy? This guy."

ANDI:

\*laughs\* Sue, you brought up earlier that they are wearing like the pastels and Toms or whatever. Picard looks hella good in them. \*all laugh\*

JARRAH:

And several people have pointed out that aging Picard on this planet looks way like less good than actual Patrick Stewart aging.

ANDI:

Well that's because Patrick Stewart is like immortal.

GRACE:

Love how we have that same thing with aged Michael J Fox in Back To The Future.

ANDI:

\*laughs\* But he does- like that first outfit they put him in which is like the sleeveless green number with the belt. And then like the very deep cut V so we can see his chest hair. Yeah that rings the bell. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

But there's people on this planet who when they choose a color and pattern, they stick to it.

ANDI:

Oh yeah.

GRACE:

That's one of my favorite things about fashion and Star Trek. Just everyone on the entire planet has a very similar aesthetic.

SUE:

He wore that mottled green Leia on Endor poncho colored \*Jarrah laughs\* tunic for like 50 years. \*all laugh\*

GRACE:

He was committed to the look. He knew what worked for him and that was what he was going with.

ANDI:

The aesthetics of their apartment also did not change at all. \*all laugh\* This is not a woman who like is looking for the newest decorating magazines. No refreshing of their dining room space, which was apparently just a pot.

GRACE:

No weird Friends redecoration choices. Let's be real, they made them.

SUE:

They should have painted it purple.

ANDI:

Everything was super like 90s motel. \*Grace laughs\*

GRACE:

Maybe *that* was it, they were Airbnb-ing their house for the entire time they lived there.

SUE:

I just know that I'm now gonna have to glue some giant fake crab claws onto my crockpot. \*Andi laughs\* What was that?\*all laugh\*

ANDI:

I just love that she never got rid of it!

GRACE:

It was a look.

ANDI:

\*laughs\* 50 years later that crackpot was sitting there *pristine*. \*all laugh\*

GRACE:

Well, everyone's got something that Grandma owned that they just can't get rid of.

ANDI:

Yeah. But like, I have a teakettle from my grandma and I love it. But it is not pristine. You know? I just found it very very endearing throughout the whole episode.

SUE:

See, we found the light stuff. \*all laugh\*

GRACE:

We got there eventually.

JARRAH:

A couple other themes that came up. One that I thought was interesting, because it came up in listener comments too, Is Morgan Gendel raised the idea of the desire of the civilization to survive even just in others memory. And there was a scene that was filmed but cut in which Data has deciphered the inscription on the outside of the probe which reads "Inside each of us lives an entire civilization" which was inspired by a Talmudic saying to the effect that killing a single person and therefore their descendants was like murdering an entire people. And says that, you know, "The Kataan people know they are about to die and desperately want to live on by finding someone special to walk in their shoes and tell their story."

GRACE:

I totally did not know that, but this episode does always make me think of a Jewish thing of using the word *Hineneh* a meaning "Here I am" as a phrase of worship in the sense of saying the fact that I am here and the fact that I feel is in and of itself an act of worship and that alone is a purpose for being. Just the act of existing is important in and of itself, and being acknowledged in that way is extra important. And I think \*laughs\* it's really cool that that could have been further in there and it wasn't. I'm sad that it wasn't, but cool that it was there to a degree.

ANDI:

I think it's definitely in the episode, in the sense that so much time is spent on thinking about children and having children. And I mean, that's one of the ways that we perpetuate ourselves. Even that tree you know? Like this idea of a monument to their hope or whatever.

SUE:

But we also only see them at home. You know, they're dealing with issues in their community. They're dealing with issues in their family, but we see them at home and working at home and working with each other. We never see that- we hear about school. But we don't see it. We don't- apparently nobody has a job they have to go to. \*laughs\*

GRACE:

Sets are expensive, OK?

SUE:

Which sounds great. But I mean, they don't even reference it. You know, it's not like "Well, you just got home from work and now you're going after your telescope" which you kind of expect from a lot of 90s TV.

GRACE:

\*nagging voice\* "You and your telescope!"

SUE:

The focus of what we were shown on Kataan really was the family relationships, and how the family is dealing with the issues in the community.

ANDI:

It's a very personal story. It's extrapolating the lives of an entire civilization through one family.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And we had a listener, Stacy, who wrote "After watching my own mother fight and lose her battle with cancer, I've even come to appreciate the nobility in fighting your cause against insurmountable odds knowing you will lose." That the Ressikans- wait were their names the Ressikans?

SUE:

They call it the Ressikan flute. But I don't know why.

JARRAH:

I think they're the Kataanians.

SUE:

Yeah. The planet is definitely Kataan.

JARRAH:

OK. But anyway, "that they believe passing on the personal details and experiences of one person was enough." And then she raises the same thing from the Talmud, that in her words "To save one life is as if you have saved the entire world. This episode may not be the happiest

but I think it is the most deeply touching and uplifting of the entire series.” So that's just the flip side. And the way that that personal story is very personal to a lot of fans too.

ANDI:

Yeah I mean, the number one thing I hear from fans about this episode is about how touching it is and how much it makes them cry. Which makes sense, because it's a very resonant theme I think. And it's a very well done episode. And Patrick Stewart is obviously phenomenal as he always is. And like, I have huge problems with this episode but even I- like that moment where his wife dies? And like the grief he has for her? I mean when Patrick Stewart is sad I am also sad. \*all laugh\* You know? That is the gift of a great actor. I found myself tearing up at that point because like, the absolute grief he portrays at that moment. And then also the other part that's really emotionally intense, I guess you could call it, is the moment he realizes everything that is happening. He says “Oh, it's me.” That's super powerful.

GRACE:

And the part when everyone he loves who's died comes back and-

SUE:

You mean the force ghosts?

GRACE:

Oh my gosh. I have seen this episode probably a million times but that's the one part that always gets to me.

ANDI:

Yeah. It's very sweet. It's like, it starts with, you know, his friend that he hasn't seen in so long and then just like all of these people who love him, and who he loves, and yeah it's beautiful.

GRACE:

Yeah. This episode has a lot of issues with it, but it is very beautiful.

JARRAH:

So, how do you think this could have worked, if at all, if Riker and Ro had been in it too?

ANDI:

That's so weird. How?

JARRAH:

It is super weird.

GRACE:

Yeah. I can't see that working.

ANDI:

First of all, Ro would probably shoot someone.

SUE:

Yeah. I can only imagine the entire tone changing.

GRACE:

Yeah.

SUE:

But when I think about it, it makes me think about the next phase. Right? Because I feel like it would be sort of like that. Where it would end up being the three of them there in this situation, that they have to figure out, and it becomes a puzzle rather than the family- the personal story that we get.

JARRAH:

I think if it was *just* Ro it could have been done sort of like a Preemptive Strike, or some of the episodes with Kira where she bonds with like another character who she starts out antagonistic about, but then like learns more about herself. But still wouldn't have probably held your attention as much.

ANDI:

I just feel like Riker and Ro are much more aggressive. And much more likely to not like, settle in the way that Picard did.

SUE:

Yeah absolutely. I feel like there would have been like *secret meetings* late at night about "We need to figure out what's really going on here. There is a conspiracy." Like, I don't think they would have- I know they it seems to have taken up five years, but Picard like sort of settles in very early on. And he's like "All right, I'm gonna play along with this." And I don't think Ro or Riker could have done that *that* easily and remained in character.

ANDI:

Not only that, but like if you had more than one of them then they have people to reinforce that no they don't belong here. Whereas if it's just Picard in isolation he's being Gaslight from every direction. He has to have moments where he's like "This life I had was made up."

SUE:

And the only hint he has is that pendant. Yeah.

ANDI:

And his own like not inconsiderable force of will. But like ever- any person no matter how strong willed is going to start to doubt themselves very quickly. But if you have someone that you know

from your life right there next you also in the same situation then you know like, there's another point of view outside of your own that would make you continue to like try and figure out the mystery. Which by the way, is something I really love about Star Trek in general, is this idea where somebody like "These shenanigans are happening to me" and everybody goes "Oh OK.\*laughs\* And they start figuring it out.

GRACE:

The "OK. We're just gonna go with it."

ANDI:

Like, "That sounds super weird. Let's figure out why that happened." It's very very rare that they're like "No, I think you're just crazy" They almost always like they-

GRACE:

Are believed in.

ANDI:

Yeah. Some general Star Trek love there. I love that about Star Trek.

JARRAH:

So do you think that had Picard been given the opportunity to consent, that he would have done it?

ANDI:

Hell yeah! \*all laugh\* That's one of the things that makes me so mad about it, is if you had told Picard "Hey, we've got this archeological artifact that will allow you to personally see and understand civilization from a thousand years ago. Would you like to do it?" He would have been the first person to say yes.

GRACE:

He would've been like "Oh hell yeah!"

ANDI:

That is like his idea of shore leave. You know?

GRACE:

That'd be more relaxing for him than shore leave.

ANDI:

That's one of the reasons why it makes me so mad! Like if you had just asked he would have been more than happy to do that for you. Maybe that's why I picked him. I don't know.

JARRAH:

No, I agree. I was just interested because one of our listeners, Paul, sort of said that this was as close to being a Trill as a human could get. And I think I read it a couple places referred to as kind of a romantic idea, to like live someone else's life. So is this something that we would all think is a pretty cool idea?

ANDI:

I would do it. But I mean, we've talked about how much I love RPGs soo..But yeah.

GRACE:

I just keep thinking of that, Lord forgive me for this, it always makes me think of the Rick and Morty thing where they've got a video game that's just you living as another guy. And then when you're done you like will be with a friend Who's like "Oh what did you choose to do?" "I chose to go back to work after I beat cancer" and stuff like that.

SUE:

Isn't that just the Sims?

GRACE:

Yes. \*laughs\*

JARRAH:

I mean, and I think it's important that it was created by the subjects, so it's not like a tourism thing.

GRACE:

Emotional tourism. That does sound like something that would pop up.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Or like well- or like cultural tourism I guess, that like is like "Oh let's, you know, how about we go see how awful it is to be like someone who's in this like really impoverished country" and that you would like live through something that was created by like a dominant culture. That would be weird and possibly like would just make you like you feel better about yourself.

GRACE:

I'm just thinking of voluntourism.

JARRAH:

Yeah yeah. Or like, you know, like there are all these experiences that people can have and I think people do it with really good intentions, like live for a week on the amount of money you get on welfare or like sleep on the streets for a night.

ANDI:

Can I tell you one that I find really offensive? Fat suits. \*all groan\*

GRACE:

Yeah. Every couple of years-

JARRAH:

I think that is much less well intentioned.

ANDI:

Like, so some extremely gorgeous skinny woman putting on a fat suit and being like "People are mean to me." Yeah.

GRACE:

\*bitchy voice\* "People don't stop to open doors for me anymore."

ANDI:

I could have told you that. You could have just listened to us. Like that really bothers me. It turns your personal experiences into like a zoo exhibit.

JARRAH:

Well yeah. And the people who create the like, ability for you to have those experiences are not the people that are in the marginalized cultures or marginalized groups. And it's not those people's stories who get told, it's the story of the privileged person that like went and experienced it on their own terms for like a night.

GRACE:

I am absolutely thinking of Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich right now. And her just being shocked that like "Wait what? The jobs are hard? There are people have to suffer indignities every day? And then have to go back to keep dealing with it? This is weird." \*Jarrah laughs\* Again, well-intentioned and a good piece of work, but very much coming from a privileged perspective.

SUE:

Well there's the story that's been making the rounds a lot lately, of "I signed my emails with my female co-workers name for a month." Yeah. Or you could have just listened? Absolutely right. You could have just listened.

JARRAH:

So that's the thing is like, I think the idea if there was- like if I could live someone else's life or like live in another culture that like knowing that that was something that they wanted and thought was valuable and that they had crafted that, then I think that would be like a really neat special experience. That said, I would only do it if counselling was free.

ANDI:

Yeah. And the ability to leave.

JARRAH:

Yeah.

SUE:

Yes.

GRACE:

Even Westworld probably had an emergency exit.

ANDI:

Yeah. Overall this episode is really really really well done, and there is a lot of really great reasons why people loved this episode, and I think it's just one of those really iconic ones that will always hold a special place in people's heart.

JARRAH:

Awesome. Well shall we wrap up then, any final thoughts?

GRACE:

Even with its problems, I give it eight piles of shoes out ten piles of shoes. \*Andi laughs\*

SUE:

I really was *not* sure you were going to say shoes. \*all laugh\*

JARRAH:

I mean I don't even know that I can rate this because I feel like the problematic thing is such a problem. But if they had only framed it differently it would be a masterpiece. And so much of it is really good that I kind of don't want to give it a rating, but I guess I will give it seven point five out of ten penny whistles with tassels glued on them. \*all laugh\*

GRACE:

Yaaay!

SUE:

Well I mean, up until a few years ago I kind of only had that fannish opinion about this episode. Though, it's a masterpiece because to be truthful, as much as I remember loving it for a long time it wasn't one that I watched very often. And then we did, Andi and I, before we started this show did an episode of Grace's show in which her co-host Oren asked us to pick our favorite episode from each season. And as I went through and was choosing and I got to season five, I was like "Oh well of course the Inner Light" and as we were recording it was Andi who said "Wait what?" \*all laugh\*

ANDI:

I wasn't surprised though, I mean it's definitely one of those episodes.

SUE:

Yeah. But I mean, I was like "What? You have a problem with the Inner Light?" again not having watched it in a long time, not remembering a lot of the specifics. And you pointed them all out and I was like "Oh my gosh, my world is changed." \*all laugh\*

ANDI:

Sorry!

SUE:

But no, watching it now and since I'm like "Yeah- but. \*uncomfortable noise\* But not that. How about this one?" So I don't know. My- can my rating be an imaginary number? \*laughs\* Seven I pi over six? I don't know. \*all laugh\*

ANDI:

To be fair, I have lots of unpopular Trek opinions. Like there are episodes that people think are bad that are like my favorites. So like, The storyteller from DS9 which is the one where O'Brien becomes like a like weather god. \*Grace laughs\*

GRACE:

He becomes equal parts prophet slash weatherman.

ANDI:

It's so good. It's one of my \*laughs\* favorite episodes. I mean, it's not good but it's so fun to watch. So like I've gotten to the point I'm just like "Alright I'm ready. Here's my opinion. Boo me."

SUE:

But I love that I can have the perspective of "I'm gonna remember what it was like to watch this episode for the first time 20 some odd years ago." And I, knowing what the intent was, can sit down and enjoy it for that. But I can also pick apart the themes like we did today, and talk about this stuff that makes you think. And for that I give Star Trek a 10 out of 10.

ANDI:

There you go. \*Grace makes noise of approval\* For me I'll give it two out of five homemade telescopes. Because I think it's an incredibly well done episode in every possible metric. It's just the part of my brain that is horrified can't turn off. And so then the whole thing takes on this really \*pause\* dark tinge that I can't quite get over. But it's a well done episode. So yeah.

JARRAH:

All right. Well then to wrap up, Andi where can people find you elsewhere on the Internet?

ANDI:

You can yell at me on Twitter, and I'll mute you, \*Sue laughs\* @firsttimetrek where I'm live tweeting my way through the first time of Star Trek.

SUE:

Where are you these days?

ANDI:

I am on a Voyager episode. I just watched the Deep Space 9 episode, the Bashir one where he becomes a spy. Our Man Bashir? Is that right?

GRACE:

Yeah.

ANDI:

Which was great.

JARRAH:

And Grace where can people find you elsewhere?

GRACE:

You can find me on Twitter @BoneCrusherJenk, and out back trying to figure out how to make my own telescope. No one told me it was hard. \*all laugh\*

JARRAH:

And Sue, what about you?

SUE:

You can find me on the tweets @spaltor. That's S P A L T O R. Or working on my tie fighter armor flight suit.\*Andi laughs\*

JARRAH:

Thank you. And I'm Jarrah and you can find me at J A R R A H penguin on Twitter. I'm also at Trekkiefeminist.com. And if you'd like to contact our show we have many ways to do that. We are on Facebook. The Instagram. The Twitter. We have a Website, Womenatwarp.Com all those other things you can find us @womenatwarp. Crew@womenatwarp.com is our email, and you can also help support our show and let us know what you think by leaving or writing a review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. And for more from the Roddenberry podcast network you can visit podcasts.Roddenberry.com. Thanks so much for listening.