

Women at Warp Episode 146: “Balance of Terror”

SUE:

Hi and welcome to Women At Warp: A Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity in infinite combinations. My name is Sue and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Andi

ANDI:

Hello!

SUE:

And Kennedy.

KENNEDY:

WHAT UP? WHAT UP?

SUE:

And today we are talking about the TOS episode Balance of Terror, consistently cited as one of the best TOS episodes that there is.

ANDI:

I would honestly say it's one of the best Star Trek episodes that there is.

KENNEDY:

Agreed.

SUE:

Yeah. Well before we jump into that, we have a lot to talk about. *laughs* Before we get into that. We have our *bit* of housekeeping to do first. As always we like to remind you that our show was made possible by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as a dollar a month, and get some awesome rewards. From thanks on social media to simply watch long commentaries. And we are brainstorming possibly some more content that we could bring to the Patreon. So to join us over there, visit Patreon.com/womenatwarp. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. A little bit of additional information this time, we have a Tee Public store. We soft launched this a couple of weeks ago, but now there is a lot more stuff in it. There's some new designs based on our new banner art, which are awesome. There are some logo designs, there is our IDIC means BLM shirt, that all proceeds from that shirt will be donated in perpetuity to the Okra project. So that is up there, as well as some non podcast specific Star Trek designs. So you can check out our Tee Public store at teepublic.com/stores, with an S, /womenatwarp. And finally, Grace has recently been transcribing a *ton* of our back catalog. Really cranking out these transcriptions, it's kind of amazing.

ANDI:

She's a machine!

SUE:

Every day she says "Another one's done" "Another two are done" like, damn girl! We now have more than 80 episodes transcribed, so that is more than half of our back catalogue. And the transcripts live on our Website, attached to each episode post in the show notes. So you can read them, or share them with other fans who might otherwise have difficulties accessing the content of our show. So did I miss anything in our housekeeping today?

ANDI:

You were very thorough Sue, and I was truly impressed.

SUE:

laughs That's what bullet points will get you.*all laugh*

ANDI:

intense voice Organization!

SUE:

If there is a list to make, I'm going to make it. *Andi laughs* Let's get into this episode, Balance of Terror. I'm going to rattle off a little bit of fact stuff, in that the original air date of this episode was December 15th 1966. It is a first season TOS episode, depending on what list you follow this could be Episode 8, it could be Episode 15, because we've got air date order versus production order et cetera et cetera. Written by Paul Schneider, frequently appears on "Best of" lists, as we've mentioned. And yeah. So where would you all like to start today?

ANDI:

Well first of all, in case people forgot, I don't know how but maybe you did. I'm not going to judge you. This episode is the one where we first see the Romulans, and Kirk and the Romulan Captain get into like this Captain v Captain tense like space battles stuff, and like the underlying subtext of it all is "racism is bad" and that's what Balance of Terror is about.

KENNEDY:

I almost feel like, if we want to be specific right? Racism is a term that describes a system of power based on race. In this instance, I feel like more specifically it combats bigotry and prejudices.

ANDI:

And xenophobia.

KENNEDY:

Yeah. Those three in particular. And I only split that hair with you Andi, because now more than ever these terms in their verisimilitude need to be explained right?

ANDI:

And precise.

KENNEDY:

Exactly. So everybody was- well not everybody. *Andi laughs* Your boy Stiles was *super* bigoted, *super* prejudiced. OK? *Everybody* was a little xenophobic. Everybody, including Spock. Spock! His reaction to seeing the Romulans for the first time was I-*incredulous noise* Leonard Nimoy, my God you know? He just- *pause* how can I even explain it? Like the look on his face was like "Well, this is going to be *bad*." *all laugh*

SUE:

Like, can we just for a second recognize that in this very early episode in Spock's arc he like is *just now* thinking "Oh, Romulans *might* be related to Vulcans" It's not even a sure thing yet. It's like "Oh this might be what happened." And by the end of what we see of him in Star Trek he is working on reunification. And that's his goal in life is to bring the Romans and the Vulcans back together so much so that he quote unquote "dies" trying to stop their sun from going supernova. Like damn.

KENNEDY:

Yeah.

ANDI:

That's a character arc.

KENNEDY:

It is, for real. And I'll be honest with prejudices, prejudices's? Prejudices's's. *all laugh* And stuff. This episode makes me think about my own prejudices, if we're being completely transparent. Because I don't like Romulans *all laugh* I don't know if that's, you know, the Klingon in me. Or because every time we see them they're doing terrible things or what. You know? It's hard for me to look at a Romulan episode and not be like *judgey noise* you know? "Here we go, these ones" *Andi laughs* "Watch your purse, don't turn your back." You know, which is all really prejudiced and bigoted stuff to say.

ANDI:

Wow, how meta of you Kennedy. *Kennedy laughs*

SUE:

No it's just it's very funny that you bring that up in terms of your Klingon-ness because I have always just kind of been like "Ugh, Klingon culture. It's a lot, I don't really get it" but I have always loved the Romulans.

KENNEDY:

Really? Oh my God, I can't stand a Romulan. Ugh.

SUE:

I also, though like this is not an endorsement of the author because I am using this reference, but I also consider myself a Slytherin, so that might go hand in hand a little bit. *laughs*

KENNEDY:

Ah! Really? Yeah give me more of a 'claw feel.

SUE:

I'm a Slyther-claw. *Andi laughs* But I've always appreciated the like *devious* secretiveness that we get with Romulan culture. And I just- I find it fascinating. But while we're on the basis of like introducing the Romulans, like this is- they're introduced before the Klingons and Klingons become allies by Next Gen time. So the Romulans are also like the longest running adversary of Starfleet in the franchise.

KENNEDY:

It's true. So when it comes full circle, not to go terribly off topic, when it comes full full circle and shows like Picard where we see, you know, not humanitarian efforts but because it's pretty racist stuff us to assume that *all laugh* help for another species is *human* in nature, in origin only. But you know, in the rush to save those millions of people from that catastrophe, like seeing that there were two different types of Romulans was interesting as well. So to see all that, to see that it started here with Balance of Terror and then grew into this giant opposing force that has always kind of been- I'm sorry guys, I'm still stuck on the fact that Sue's a Slytherin. I don't even know *all laugh* I'm a Gryffindor, so I kind of have to act like I don't know you in the halls now because I thought- your robes looked blue to me.

SUE:

I'm not the evil kind.

KENNEDY:

disbelieving Okay. *all laugh*

ANDI:

I do want to talk about this a little bit though, because one of the things that I think the show does well is they don't make Stiles, our shithead on the bridge, they don't make him xenophobic without reason. Right? He lost family to the Romulans. He doesn't trust them because his experience with them has been negative. So like, that is an understandable and very human reaction. And one of the reasons why, you know, xenophobia in our world actually exists. So I appreciate that, even though he sucked, there were reasons for him sucking.

KENNEDY:

And it's that reason in particular is what keeps this episode so poignant and timeless to this day. Because how many, you know, Confederate right wing people, I'm trying to be very genteel and not use slurs, *Andi laughs* people will rest on their laurels on that? "Oh it's not you know rooted in racism. This is heritage. This is my family, this flag means this" and it's like *well* OK, but you didn't fight that war. That was, you know, whatever family members that you have in that war that might have perished in it? Are so far removed from you that you're not even blood related anymore. So relax. They don't know you, you don't know them.

SUE:

This is why this argument doesn't really hold water with me, like ever, because this war was 100 years ago right? Like, my grandfather fought in World War 2. My grandfather was imprisoned by the Germans. I don't hate all German people because of that. So this idea of like "You hurt my family a hundred years ago therefore I hate you." Like I have just never really *understood* that.

ANDI:

Yeah. And I think that the episode itself addresses it, because Kirk's response to this very human reaction is "It was their war, not yours." And it was like, "You gotta let that go, you can't let those wounds of the past impact how you're handling the situation now because that hatred that fear is going to make you make mistakes and it's going to bias the way that you approach this situation."

KENNEDY:

Yeah. I also appreciated the fact that Kirk nipped it in the butt immediately.

ANDI:

Absolutely.

KENNEDY:

Like, he didn't let slide comments eek out here and there. You know the way the rest of the crew was so I just kind of *confused noise* looked at him like, no one said anything. No one checked him, and if Kirk hadn't done it I don't know if anybody else would have. You know what I mean?

SUE:

But he kept trying.

KENNEDY:

It's true.

SUE:

Like, he didn't just do it once. You know give him the- give him the thing to decode. But he can do it.

ANDI:

Yeah. Microaggressions.

KENNEDY:

Yeah.

SUE:

Kirk calls him on it every time.

KENNEDY:

Every time. I love that, and I forgot about that. I remembered how gross and bigoted Stiles was, but I forgot about the fact that Kirk was being an ally and a friend. Before anybody got the chance to say anything Kirk was “Oh oh oh! Whoa. Let me talk to you for a minute! Come on over here. *Andi laughs* Let me chat with you real fast. What you're not fit to do, you sit here talk shit about my friend in front of me. All right? You're not about to talk shit about my friend at all, really. So whatever kind of *problem* you got? You need to go home and think about that for a second before you come up on *my* bridge. Are we clear?”

ANDI:

And it's beautiful because Spock doesn't do that for himself. Through the whole episode Spock just internalizes it, doesn't do a thing. He pretends it doesn't bother him. I think we can all agree it probably *does* bother him right. And instead Kirk is the one that is constantly calling it out. And how many times have any of us ever heard something bigoted towards us, towards others, and every time you've got to do that calculation “Do I speak up? Do I say something? Is it like, are they going to get angry? Are we gonna have to fight?” There is a cost calculation that you make in your head. Like “Is me speaking up going to do anything? Am I *tired* today?” You know?

SUE:

Well, what Kirk has going for him there is that he's in charge. But also it makes me wonder, I mean, they only have a limited number of characters they can deal with. Right? On the show week to week. But how much of this in Kirk's character is it because this guy's coming for *Spock* specifically?

KENNEDY:

That's what I'm saying. I feel like he probably would have checked it, if had anybody said anything bigoted about anybody else in the crew, just on some Starfleet stuff. Right? But the fact that Stiles kept coming for Spock is why Kirk was like “You're not gonna talk about my friend. You're not you're not you're not you're not. Not in front of me, not in front of anybody. You do it again. I'm gonna fight you like I'm not playing with you.” I really wondered *pause* how much of Spock anticipated *pause* well, he probably rationalized it. Right? In him internalizing it. He probably figured “OK this is a human being that we're dealing with. They react to things pretty weird *all laugh* but they don't mean to. Uuum. If I saw somebody who was trying to kill me that look like my science officer I would probably-no / wouldn't feel alarmed. But they get

along with that kind of stuff. All right. I'm not going to pinch him. I'm not going to put the pinch on his neck and will leave me alone because he's human and he can't help himself." I feel like Spock showed a lot of grace in this.

ANDI:

Yeah. The other thing that this episode kind of highlights, that the show explores more later but is always just kind of there, is Spock is an other on this ship.

KENNEDY:

Yeah. And the only other.

ANDI:

Yeah. He's the only non-human on this ship. And there's always that conflict, that internal conflict, and that conflict of "He does not see things the way that everybody else sees things." And that's definitely a plus for him in many ways, like how many times has his perspective helped them save the day? But it also keeps him separate. And they address it in this episode much more straightforwardly than they do in most episodes. But it's always kind of a little bit there. You know, even in jokes, in McCoy making jokes about his green blooded friend right? So I find it very cool that they actually addressed that Spock is different, and that difference is felt both overtly and like underlying all of the interaction.

SUE:

I don't think we've explicitly said it, but just in case, what is going on in these scenes is that we see the Romulans, they look just like Spock. Therefore, Stiles believes that Spock must be one of the enemy. Right? And that's where this is all coming from. And the thing I don't want us to like leave this part of the conversation without bringing this up, and I could very well be overanalyzing here because that is another thing that I do along with my lists. *laughs* The only time we see Stiles get any backup from anybody else on the ship is when Sulu agrees that they should have a security alert. And that's worth noting to me, because like exactly what Stiles is doing happened to George Takei. Like he and his family were forcibly relocated into internment camps during World War Two because they looked like the enemy quote unquote. And it's just like, I would love to- if I ever get the chance to talk to George Takei I would be curious to know if he was- remembers even if he was thinking about that sort of thing during the filming of this episode.

ANDI:

I thought about this when they had, later on in the episode, they kind of have a war room scene and both Sulu and Stiles are in that scene and Sulu is a pretty big part of that scene tactically, and the whole time I'm sitting there and I'm looking at George Takei and I'm like "This is his experience like this is literally something that happened to him and his family." This is- he was a part of one of the worst stains of American history and they don't really address it, but his presence there does speak to what Star Trek was trying to do. Because there was very specific reasons why Gene Roddenberry wanted Sulu and he wanted Chekov. And he wanted Uhura. Like, they weren't there by accident. He specifically said he wanted Chekov on the bridge

because he wanted to show that in the future we wouldn't have to be holding grudges against the Russians even though they were the enemy at that exact time that they were making the show. That's why he did it. It was very specific. And so Sulu being in that scene to me was really poignant in a lot of ways.

KENNEDY:

Yeah. And it definitely spoke to the broadness of human nature right? And our knee jerk reactions to fear what we don't immediately understand. The fact that every human being on that bridge suddenly looked at Spock like "Oh snap." And being in that war room- first of all just seeing Sulu in that war room was perfect because he was the only non-white person there. And just seeing how he, like you said, contributed to some of that fear mongering. It just makes it real hard to make a case for human beings, you know? *Andi laughs* When you look back over the catalog of humanity and include let's say Star Trek into this, and see some of the things that human beings have done in this universe as well. It's like "OK, we're scrappy and we've got heart. There's lots of chutzpah here. *Andi laughs* But oh man, you guys, can we have a powwow? Can we talk, because we're really- this is embarrassing. Like there are other species we have to deal with now. Like, I don't want to be held to a standard that you all have forced the rest of the galaxy to hold us to, you know?"

ANDI:

Yeah. And I do want to kind of go back to what you said before about this idea of an unknown enemy. I thought that it was particularly smart and canny to have the two things with the Romulans. One is a weapon that they don't understand, a big world ending weapon, and they reference nuclear war several times. And I mean we haven't even gotten to the fact that they're using nuclear weapons. I mean, we did the same thing. You know, like these are other atrocities that America has been involved in. But the other thing is the cloaking. An unknown enemy that you cannot see. And if you can't see your enemies face, how are you supposed to-

KENNEDY:

Identify them?

ANDI:

Identify them! How are you supposed to? And how you're supposed to understand them as a person. You know what I mean? And like, I thought it was really a good device and a metaphor to have cloaking be the thing that the Romulans are known for. They're attacking from stealth, they're unknown. They're scary because you don't know what their intentions are, you don't know where they're coming from. It's almost like a horror-like concept. You know what I mean? And I do want to say that we've talked about Romulans in the past and some of the Orientalist tropes that come into play when we're talking about them. Because they're an interesting mix of like Roman and then like some *pause* mish mash of Orientalist tropes. And that's a really common trope for anti-Asian sentiment, is like you they're inscrutable, you can't ever tell what they're thinking or what they're going to do. You know what I mean? So I just really think that this episode is really nuanced in some of its portrayals.

KENNEDY:

So many ways. Oh! The just- bit the basing of Romulan culture on Roman culture gives this really weird parallel of familiarity, especially if you studied any Roman history. Like the terms that they use, the terms that they call each other by. Like in terms of rank, is kind of like "OK this is familiar to me in that I've heard this before. So why do I feel so uneasy when I'm talking about them?" You know what I mean? It's good-it gives this weird *pause* I don't want to say double entendre, because that's not an accurate term, but it's got this *struggles* I don't know, oxymoronic kind of dual synergy *Andi laughs* thing going on where it's like "OK, I know what a Praetor is. OK. I know what a commander is. OK."-Oh what was a blonde?

SUE:

Centurion.

KENNEDY:

Centurion. Like, they use all of those terms. Senator and stuff like that. So it's like "OK I know what that is. Cool cool. I know what that is. All right. That's what this guy does." And it's like I know what these terms are meant to relay. But I'm looking at the people attached to these terms, and it puts a weird like xenophobic connotation on it. And I- it's frustrating for me, because it's not in this case a fear of the unknown, because there's elements of it that are known or at least familiar, draw some type of parallels being that's familiar to us. It almost makes it a fear of the known right? Because we think about Roman culture, ancient Roman culture like they were the original colonizers. So to see that and be like "Oh I know what this means. Oh I know what that guy does. Oh snap you guys right here doing it too."

SUE:

There are dictators, and there are conquests. It's like you know, you have this history with these terms that you're then like imprinting on the culture based on them in this fictional setting.

ANDI:

Yeah. And I also think that it kind of goes to the point of this episode is supposed to be that Kirk and the other captain are a mirror of each other.

SUE:

Oh for sure.

ANDI:

American culture is also really heavily influenced by Roman Greek culture. So like when you take that same basis underlying the quote unquote *enemy* what does that say about us.? So it's like it kind of plays into that whole mirroring aspect. Before we move on I want to talk a little bit more about that worm scene because another aspect of it that I was really impressed with was McCoy, and how McCoy throughout this entire episode is basically, as he usually is, the

mouthpiece for the human cost. The cost of human lives lost and the cost of, you know, even the enemies lives cost. But every single time we're having a conversation McCoy is there to go "But what about everybody's life?"

KENNEDY:

dramatic voice "Won't someone think of the children!?" *all laugh*

ANDI:

Yeah! But like really, like he's always there to be the conscience.

SUE:

He's the only one on the ship who doesn't- who isn't willing to start a war.

KENNEDY:

Yeah, he definitely reacted like a *doctor* before anything else.

ANDI:

Exactly. I love that.

SUE:

I love how much he hates people, but like loves *peoples*. *Andi laughs* If that makes any sense.

KENNEDY:

Yeah.

ANDI:

Yeah. No, like he's a grumpy son of a bitch but he will fight to save your life. Every single time! And not just like "Oh he'll patch you up" he'll fight to protect you, and to keep you from getting hurt in the first place.

SUE:

But he doesn't have to like you.

ANDI:

Exactly. *Sue laughs* He will roast you while he does it, and that's McCoy.

KENNEDY:

Oh my gosh the *roasting*. The McCoy roastings are some of the best. And it almost makes you like *pause* so when he wouldn't get into that green blood and hobgoblin nonsense towards Spock it was like "Bro, like you of all people know how inappropriate that is."

ANDI:

And yeah he somehow manages to make it like playful? I'm- It's weird because on paper it doesn't work. And you absolutely should not speak to people like that. And yet something about how charming the actor is- I dunno.

SUE:

Well, there seems to be some sort of understanding between Spock and McCoy right? Because Spock also gives it right back but also can destroy him with a look. So.

KENNEDY:

I mean they've all made out right? *Andi cackles* Let's be real, all three of them have totally made out in their own way, in some a drunken night. Like, we've all seen that movie where the besties are like *Bro voices* "Bro, I love you bro!" "Bro, I love *you* bro!" and then they're makin' out. *Andi loses it* So I'm convinced the three of them individually, and collectively, probably have made out at some point over the course of their five year mission.

SUE:

OT3 for sure.

KENNEDY:

Yeah.*all laugh* But what I found interesting was how much Kirk and the Romulan commander were making out. Like, they were totally playing chess on AOL chat rooms *all laugh* circa nineteen ninety seven, like getting off on the fact that we keep putting each other in check. Like they like- because they romanticized each other. *intense voice* "I would do that." "This is something I would do." "Oh wow he's really- this guy. He's cut from the same cloth as me" like they were basically like, admiring the other in a way- they were like their favorite parts of each other, were their favorite parts of themselves. So it was like "Oh I like how you wear this suit. I got the same one. That's *nice*. Oh it looks great on you too here. OK. OK, I see you. Give me my suit though, because it's mine. You can't be in here wearing the same thing, we are here in the same place, you got to go home or I gotta go home. So- I'm *not* going home, just so that's clear. So you gotta go."

SUE:

And that happened because they wanted to create an adversary for Kirk who was equally matched with Kirk. Like, it kind of- and that just like pinged my brain of like "Computer, create an adversary worthy of Data" right?

KENNEDY:

Probably the worst- the only terrible thing Geordi has *ever said*. *Sue laughs*

SUE:

I mean that's why this character is so great, is because they gave this Romulan commander, who is later at some point given the name Kares, it's just Sarek rearranged. *all laugh* Is like he's so complex. Right? We see he's not just this like bad guy out of nowhere. We learn in the short episode that he is tired of war and wishes it would just end, and like- but he's still going to do his duty. But he kind of hopes that the information he's sending back to his government isn't going to get there before the ship is destroyed. Like it's so complicated. But he's also not like shirking any of his duties to make that happen. And Mark Lenard has said that this role is one of the best roles he ever had on TV.

KENNEDY:

Wow.

SUE:

And in *These Are The Voyages*, I highly recommend this book, he said in comparing it to Sarek he said "In many ways I did enjoy that role" Sarek "but I think the more demanding role and the better acting role was the Romulan commander."

KENNEDY:

Yeah they were definitely making out with each other in themselves. It's like they were both a set of twins and they swapped twins for a second was like "Oh.*laughs* This is hot! Let's get it!" But I also like the fact that even though now we we know what we know about Romulans, or at least we know what we *don't know* about them? There was no malice, like overt malice anyway, on the Romulan ship. It was all about duty, it was all about following orders. It was all about, you know, completing the mission. Whereas in a lot of other depictions of other species, other cultures, if they have beef with the federation like you can tell. "I don't like you. You and your imperious little shiny ship. OK. Get out of here." Whereas these guys are just like "OK they're the enemy. They're wordless, they're nameless, faceless. It doesn't matter who they are as individuals. It doesn't matter what I think about them as individuals. All that matters is that I do my job." So it's great to get a very neutral soundboard, I guess for lack of a better term, of the Romulans. Which a number of the other cultures introduced in *Trek*, we didn't necessarily get. You know? What we heard about the Ferengi for the first time? They were *instantly* depicted as, you know, little gremlins.

SUE:

Hoo boy. They could have been so much worse though.

KENNEDY:

Oh absolutely! Oh my gosh, the Ferengi episode. Oh with the whips. Don't get me started.

SUE:

But like the memo about what they were supposed to be- *anyway* not this episode.

ANDI:

We will at some point discuss Ferengi, and racism against Ferengi, and racism within Ferengi culture. That is an episode we will do.

KENNEDY:

It really is. And that is a whole other sandwich there. *Andi laughs* So I'd just like- even though I have disdain for Romulans, it was important for me to, as a person who has, to see a very neutral portrayal of them that wasn't tainted by, you know, opinions or misconceptions I guess. To be fair, either. So I will give it that credit. Like the complexities and the nuances in this were definitely on point and very rarely seen since.

ANDI:

Mark Lenard's performance in this is really- everything hinges on it. The episode would not work if he did not turn in that performance. Because we needed someone who was an adversary, who was an antagonist, but that you didn't hate and that you were almost rooting for even though he's just killed a bunch of humans, a bunch of people. And yet somehow he still managed to turn in a sympathetic portrayal that makes you like, look that into the face and be like "Even in war, even when people in war do things, they're still on the other side, there's still a person and they still have reasons" and, you know, and it just- that's important. Because when you start getting into faceless enemies that you don't think of as people that's when things get real bad.

KENNEDY:

Right. Right. So I thought it was really important that they were able to see him at the end. The one thing I did- there were two other parts that I thought were- that I reacted too strongly when re watching it. One of them was Spock making a mistake. I can't think of another time when Spock has made a mistake. Like that, at any rate. I mean him accidentally setting off that signal was like "Spock. Baby. What is you doing? Like, what are you doing?" *laughs*

SUE:

He was very preoccupied about this revelation.

KENNEDY:

Right?

SUE:

Who knows. I don't know.

KENNEDY:

No, that has to be it! It's got to be it Sue. Because I can't think of any other logical reason.

SUE:

laughs Unless he just wanted to get back at Stiles. "Take this, asshole."

KENNEDY:

He could have done *literally anything*. He could have put a wet finger in his ear. *all laugh* He could dude- he could have kicked the chair out from under him. I don't know! Spock could have found a way. I feel like he was so preoccupied by that revelation and by the weight, the magnitude of the situation that they were in. And his human nerves, right? I'm sure he got a little nervous. Because everything was reliant upon that station, and he was thinking *nervous* "Oh God if I mess this up I'll never hear- I'll never hear the end of it from Stiles. I'll *never* hear the end of it. This goes my commission! I'm going to get transferred to another ship! They're going to put me on a space station to study a rock somewhere! Oh God is that a button?" You know? So *laughs* I thought it was really interesting to see Spock be fallible. The other thing that I *shrieked* about led me to- another thing that Andi and I apparently both shrieked about too is when the ship got hit and everybody got flung in a million places? Uhura straight up stood up. *laughs* She stood up. It was like "Nope. I'm over here. Oh God I'm going to stand in this doorway because I'm not being flung around on the ship. My behind is hanging out as it is. You're not doing this to me!" But I just thought it was great that everybody else flailed, and Uhura was like "Nope. Not today." *all laugh* "Not today."

ANDI:

It's that dancer training, you have to have dancer balance.

KENNEDY:

Yeah exactly. She definitely pirouetted into that corner, into safety.

ANDI:

And then Stiles heads down to the phase array, to help in the phaser bay, and Uhura just as calm as anything takes over the helm. Navigator Uhura, which I have my notes in all caps *Kennedy laughs* in like huge, with lots of exclamation points. Because that was amazing. And I liked that it was *pause* understated. It was just Kirk being like "Uhura take the helm" and Uhura being like "Yes sir" and taking the helm.

SUE:

And no one takes over for her. She transfers her station, or this is implied.

ANDI:

Yeah! She keeps doing her communications stuff from the helm. So she's doing two jobs right there and she's doing *both excellently*.

KENNEDY:

Yeah. For sure. I did peep how Shatner watched her walk up there though. *all laugh*

ANDI:

I can't 100 percent blame him, to be honest.

KENNEDY:

Yeah she's a babe.

ANDI:

She's beauty in human form.

KENNEDY:

For sure. But yeah. Just *nothing*. And that's how it's supposed to be done. Don't call attention to that. I'm glad they didn't bring up any *music*. I'm glad nobody *said anything*.

ANDI:

Oh my gosh. Can you imagine if it was that TOS shitty thing that they did, where they like smeared the Vaseline on the lens, and like go into a soft focus, and zoom in on the woman's face while that cheesy music plays in the background?

KENNEDY:

Yeah. Which they very rarely did for her. And that's because well- I've got- **sighs** don't get me started on how they- **Andi laughs** on what Nichelle had to go through in production with them. Don't get me started because I have spoons. OK? We could have a tea party about it. We can! When she got up I was like **enthusiastic** "OK!? You gotta fly the ship too? Go ahead and fly it! Fly it! Go ahead! You can fly it *and* talk on the phone! Who's going to be mad about it? Captain told you to do it! **Sue laughs** Wassup?!" That's really good.

ANDI:

It was awesome. A really great understated moment of the episode that just highlights how important Uhura is on that bridge. She's not just there to look gorgeous, although she does that too. She's doing *three jobs* on the bridge. One thing that I was struck by, we were talking about this kind of a little bit in that the Romulan captain and Kirk are like their mirror, and like their mutual respect for each other. But how hard did this make you all think of submarine movies?

KENNEDY:

So much.

ANDI:

Like world war 2 submarine movies?

SUE:

And that is intentional, as it was based on the film Run Silent Run Deep.

ANDI:

Ahhh! See? OK, so I immediately, once I like finished this episode, I went online and started looking up submarine movies. I was like "Is there one that could have influenced this episode? Because I can't see how it didn't."

SUE:

Actually, it was that one but also more the 1957 film *The Enemy Below*. So it was those two in particular. But it's one hundred percent of submarine film.

ANDI:

Oh yeah. The way they just like, sit quietly and it's like so tense but you can't do anything? The way they maintain tension across this episode in general was *masterful*, but like that like quiet edge of this storm kind of thing? That was so good.

KENNEDY:

And so exceedingly unnecessary. There is no sound in space. **all laugh** They could not be heard. They could have thrown a deck wide party on the Enterprise and the Romulans would not have been able to hear them. So the fact that they not only went dark, but they went silent too was like "This is unnecessary. We're in space. We are not under wat- Ooh right. The 60s."

ANDI:

OK. So now we have to have **sings jingle** Kennedys Science Corner! **all laugh**

KENNEDY:

Hey, I'm down for that. I'm *all about* having a little science side bar. "Side- science bar" Sci-bar? Instead of side bar it spells S C I-de Bar. **all laugh**

SUE:

I love the- I mean we don't know it in this episode yet, but how they sort of play out the Romulan technology. Their ships are powered by singularities. I think it makes a ton of sense that they-like their cloak takes up so much power that they have to decloak to fire weapons. I'd love to see something in the canon about like, scientists on Romulus working on fixing that problem so they can fire while cloaked you know? And I would think that would be one of the major things that they're, I guess, war department **laughs** would be working on. I think there's just- it's fascinating how they- how Star Trek sort of went, I'm not going to say "out of its way", but did the most to make sure that these cultures were different. It's not just "Oh everybody has warp drive." Everybody does it differently.

KENNEDY:

Yeah. Which is important to note. Once you see that there are- that there's room for differences, there's room for learning curves and discrepancies, when you consider all the different cultures in this galaxy, in this meaning like this Star Trek galaxy, it makes it a little bit more accessible. Right? If I know that Romulans have an issue with firing when cloaked, that means that any other things could be possible for another species who has warp technology. You know what I

mean? So it's not all this blank "Everything's great in the future because we can all go wherever we want" like it can establish complexities, it makes it easier to suspend disbelief.

ANDI:

And I do want to bring up a couple of things that struck me. You were talking earlier, Kennedy, about how out of the ordinary it was to see Spock make a mistake.

KENNEDY:

Oh my God. I was like "Baby what is you doing?" *laughs*

ANDI:

One thing that I noticed and appreciated about this episode was well Kirk in general is amazing in this episode. But one thing that I really liked is that Kirk is allowed uncertainty. So like, you have a whole scene where McCoy, yet again playing the conscience and like being that spokesman for the human side of the equation, he gets to sit there and be like "Why me? What if I mess up?" And when he is on the bridge you don't see any of that. He seems completely in control. He is making really tough decisions without blinking. You don't see any of that. So you get this quiet moment where you see that he doesn't know that he's doing the right thing. He's not entirely sure of himself. And I find that awesome. Because Kirk is such a hero to so many people, and he's like an original template for a lot of the heroes that we see in media. And instead of making him this cocky douche, you know, we give him- we make him thoughtful, and he's thinking about the things that matter, and he's thinking about how he could mess up and ruin people's lives. And I love that. And it kind of makes me sad that the cultural memory of Kirk I feel, like has been so corrupted into thinking that he is just some swaggering macho womanizing jerk, when he's actually extremely thoughtful, and precise, and takes time, and strategic on on these decisions, and he knows what the costs could be if he's wrong. And I love that scene. And I love that speech that McCoy makes to him about how we're all individuals and how amazing it is that we exist at all, as who we are, as the people we are, and not to throw that away lightly. Beautiful scene.

SUE:

And that scene specifically is from Roddenberry's rewrite. That whole like "three million galaxies, three million million that, and in all the universe don't kill the one named Kirk." That is one hundred percent Gene Roddenberry.

ANDI:

It's beautiful.

KENNEDY:

I got to give a nod to William Shatner in this.

ANDI:

Great performance.

KENNEDY:

We can say we want about things, right? But *laughs* that performance was one of the best I've seen from him, ever. On the bridge he's cool, calm, collected. He's young looking, he's youthful, his skin is gorgeous. Glowing everywhere, just sparkly right? But laying down in his quarters and when Yeoman Rand walks in to see if he's OK, you can see he quickly composes himself for her sake, but doesn't have enough in him to completely, you know, put the mask back on and clock back in. It's not until Bones comes back, he's like "Oh thank God" you know? He can finally let his hair down for a second, and in that moment as he's saying you know "Why me? I want to take a vacation, like I don't want to do this." He looked *older*. You know all the weight of the maturity of the decisions that he would have to make were apparent on his face, and it was only in that scene that- I mean, I feel like William Shatner as he's aged looks completely different. Like almost two different people, whereas most folks look like this older version of themselves. I feel like older William Shatner looks *completely* different than younger William Shatner. But in that scene I was like "Oh yes, that's the same person." It's really well done.

ANDI:

And then the other thing that I love about Kirk in this episode is this episode is called Balance of Terror. It's all about how fear pushes you to make cruel decisions. It pushes you to make decisions that are not well thought out. And throughout the whole episode you can see Kirk resisting that fear. He is resisting these knee jerk reactions based on biases, that Stiles is like the poster boy for what *not* to do. Like every step of the way Stiles is making assumptions. He thinks he knows what's going on because of what happened in the past. So he's like "This is definitely the Romulans. They definitely did all this. They definitely did that. They're definitely-" And at no point is Kirk like-

KENNEDY:

Co-signing it. Yeah.

ANDI:

Yeah. He's always re-examining what he knows to be true, and that is the sign of an open minded thoughtful person. And I appreciate that. And the fact that he doesn't let what he- you can see his fear clearly several times in this episode. And every time he resists that fear and pushes through to make thoughtful decisions. And then one thing I do want to say too is, you were- you brought up Rand, Kennedy. I thought it was very interesting how they used women in this episode. Not necessarily good, but interesting. *all laugh* And that they were definitely there to kind of show what you're fighting for, kind of thing? Starting with a wedding. Rand comes onto the bridge in the middle of a tense moment for basically just to be there so Kirk can look at her and like, feel feelings and comfort her. And so like Uhura is a bit removed from this, thank goodness. But like Rand and Martine are very clearly used for this purpose.

KENNEDY:

I would say- and not to step on what you're about to say here, I think we're going in the same direction. I would say- I would make the argument at least, that Uhura did serve to show what was worth protecting. Because here's this, you know, accomplished accredited officer who can do more than one thing on this bridge in this crisis and reacts in a way that a person would need to in a ship wide crisis. So if anything she's worth protecting too.

ANDI:

Oh I- Hundred percent. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying more that-

SUE:

She's the only one who's worth isn't in relation to the men.

KENNEDY:

Oh! I see. I see.

ANDI:

Yeah. She's not used as a crutch to heighten the emotion for men.

KENNEDY:

Gotcha.

SUE:

However this is the- I think the first, maybe the only time, we see Kirk actually having to deal with the consequences of losing a crewman. Which is is kind of interesting. You know the "Red Shirts" have become just a joke in the world, not even in Star Trek fandom. But in this episode in particular not only do we have McCoy fighting for like "Let's not start a war because so many people will die." We have specific people that we have met at the beginning of this episode, one of whom has died. Kirk has to end this episode by going and comforting the, I guess she's not a widow yet, the fiancée of the dead crewman.

KENNEDY:

The only one. What are the odds? She handled that way better than I would have. I would have had to be decommissioned if my fiance gets killed in battle the day we're supposed to get married. Oh no! I need to go. I need to take a leave.*laughs* I need to take a leave of absence. I need to put in some PTO please. Cause I'm not OK.

ANDI:

Yeah. Definitely. And I think that the point of that scene and the point of the wedding at the beginning is to underscore that there's a cost to war that you have to be aware of. I really like that. And I thought that that idea of a wedding, of love, of like these softer emotions kind of being celebrated in that way was quite poignant. And then Kirk trying to, not justify, but like

explain why his sacrifice was important. I don't know, I just- I found it to be a very poignant way to end that episode.

KENNEDY:

I agree. I do feel the placement of a chapel on a starship is a little weird.

SUE:

laughs There is- I read so much prepping for this episode. And like, there were so many people who sort of proposed maybe this is really an all purpose room and it's sort of like dressed as a chapel for this wedding. And there were other people who are like, well if there is a chapel is there also a temple, and a mosque, and you know whatever structure that Vulcans practice their spirituality in?

ANDI:

Like, they shake a lot of bells *Sue laughs* and they make soup, and then throw it at each other in a ritual soup throwing. *all laugh*

KENNEDY:

frustrated "There's plomeek everywhere!" I can see it.

SUE:

I mean hopefully if there is a chapel there is also a place of worship for everyone who's in the crew. And it's just interesting that these- the little things that like fandom has picked up and continued to talk about over the last 50 plus years you know?

KENNEDY:

Yeah, for sure.

SUE:

I want to mention the title of the episode a little bit. I mean it might be obvious to people, but the phrase we're used to hearing like "balance of power" right? In terms of like, "Let's make sure that you know us and our enemies have about the same level of military capability so that nobody makes the first move." It's attributed to Lester Pearson in June of 1955 at the 10th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter, talking about how that balance of power has changed so much with the addition of an atomic nuclear armament. And he said- attributed to him saying "The balance of terror has succeeded the balance of power" so the balance of terror *title* is about like not only are these two powers going to go to war, they're going to annihilate each other if they go to war.

KENNEDY:

Heavy stuff, yo. Definitely a meaty episode. Like, it's so important that episodes like this exist not only in our fandom *pause* but just in television. You know what I mean? In the media, so

that it can be referenced. Like there's so many reasons why this episode could be used in a curriculum somewhere to explain or just show the nuances of bigotry and how it can manifest in all these terrible ways.

SUE:

It's also clearly a World War Two story. It's clearly a cold war story. But like, it's relevant to any time you watch it. You know, I forget- I was on a panel somewhere at some point and somebody asked the question like post 9/11 what do we take from Balance of Terror? Because again we had this quote unquote invisible enemy and people were being targeted or discriminated against based on how they look, associating them with who people perceived as their enemy. So it seems like this- the who the enemy is changes with every generation. But this is a constant refrain.

ANDI:

Yeah and it's kind of a timeless story. And one of the things that struck me is the inclusion of internal Romulan politics into this episode. In which you get the sense that the reason that they're even out there, and it's not made explicitly clear why they're even out there destroying outposts. But you definitely get the sense that they're doing it because they have a political- a domestic political leader who is using xenophobia and a outward enemy to consolidate power at home and attack, and is attacking more for domestic political reasons than intergalactic political reasons. If that makes sense. And I found that to be pretty timeless too. Stoking fear of "the other" is a time honored tradition in politics, and it works pretty much the same every single time. It's always dangerous. It should never be indulged in, and yet we still have not learned this lesson.

KENNEDY:

No. I think it comes from, you know, the part of our brains that are still, you know, prehistoric that rely on impulses to survive right? I think that ancient part of our brains it's like "I don't understand it. Run away." *all laugh* is extremely difficult to subdue, primarily because it does keep us alive in so many ways. But when- because the brain doesn't, *pause* I don't want to say- I don't want to take responsibility away from us, in our ability to navigate those reactions. Right? Just because you have a knee jerk reaction to something, doesn't mean that it's-

ANDI:

OK or justifiable.

KENNEDY:

Yeah yeah. Yeah. So I don't want to go down that route necessarily. But it's I think a large part of why we can't quite get over that.

SUE:

There is a concept that comes from, you know, this- I can't say it comes from, but I first saw it in a tumblr post. *I know*. *laughs* But the idea is that your initial reaction to something, the thing

that happens automatically is what you are conditioned to think, and then what you find yourself thinking afterwards is what you have learned to think. And it's framed in the sense of like somebody seeing the way someone is dressed and reacting to it negatively and then saying "Oh no, they can wear whatever they want. Good for them." But it extends into recognizing that your knee jerk reaction is bad, means that you are learning.

ANDI:
Yeah.

KENNEDY:
It's true.

ANDI:
And I mean, our brains are trained to do this. And it's an unlearning process and you have to take the time to work on it yourself. And you can't expect other people to do that work for you. But it's necessary to become a better person. So get cracking. *Sue laughs* And I want to say that all of this, Star Trek- all of this is Star Trek at its best in my opinion. This is *sci-fi* at its best in my opinion. And it's taking something extraordinary and asking "How would humanity react to it? And what does that say about us?" And I- the one reason why I think this is extraordinary sci-fi that is better than your average media, is that in the end Kirk offers to save them. He offers them quarter. And what that says about Kirk, and what it says about the values of Star Trek, and I'm just grateful that this episode exists.

SUE:
Well I couldn't stop my wheels from turning so I have a proposal for you. Gryffindor Klingons, Slytherin Romulans, Ravenclaw Vulcans, Hufflepuff Humans.

KENNEDY:
shouting with excitement Oh my God! You nailed it!

ANDI:
Well the reason that that works is because I am a Ravenclaw and when you were having that conversation at the very beginning I didn't really bring it up, but I was like "I like the Vulcans." *all laugh* So if that makes Sue a Romulan, Kennedy a Klingon, and me a Vulcan that fits.

SUE:
laughs So if you don't want to use Hogwarts Houses anymore, and I can understand why you don't, you can use the classic Trek species. *laughs*

KENNEDY:
Aw man! Rest in peace houses. *all laugh*

SUE:

So the last thing we do, because this is an episode review show, is we rate this episode. Andi, what is your rating of Balance of Terror?

ANDI:

This episode is awesome. It is one of my favorite episodes of all time. I give it 10 out of 10 raised eyebrows on an "Oh shit" Spock face. all right. *all laugh*

SUE:

Alright Kennedy, what about you?

KENNEDY:

I would also say that this is required viewing for anybody who is interested in science fiction or, you know, the human condition whatsoever. I would give it 10 out of 10 danger pirouette-aways. *all laugh*

SUE:

And I am on the same wavelength. I'm gonna give this 10 out of 10 neon pink Romulan uniforms. *all laugh*

KENNEDY:

Yaaaaas.

ANDI:

Pink houndstooth! I miss it. I miss it so much.

SUE:

laughs It's so good.

ANDI:

I love it. Romulan fashion.

SUE:

All right we gotta get out of here because we keep talking. *laughs* But Andi where can people find you on the interwebs?

ANDI:

Easiest place to find me is on Twitter. I am @firsttimetrek.

SUE:

And Kennedy?

KENNEDY:

You can find me both on Instagram and Twitter @thatMikeychick.

SUE:

Awesome. 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. Find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @womenatwarp. You can also email us at crew@womenatwarp.com and for more from Roddenberry podcasts visit podcasts.Roddenberry.com. Thanks so much for listening.