

Women at Warp Episode 147: Women Religious Leaders in Star Trek

GRACE:

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. We've got a big crew today. With us today we have Sue.

SUE:

Hi everybody.

GRACE:

We've got Sara.

SARAH:

Hi.

GRACE:

And we've got a very special guest, Blair Imani.

BLAIR:

Yee-hah! *all laugh*

GRACE:

We're ready to ride space cowpokes. As usual, before we get to our main topic we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. This episode is brought to you by Text Expander, more from them a little later. Our show is 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 awesome rewards from thanks on social media, up to silly watch along commentaries that we make ourselves. Visit www.patreon.com/womenatwarp. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcast or wherever you get your podcasts. So today is a very spiritual topic and I'm glad that we could all be here together.

SUE:

Before we jump into it, I mean Blair, I think a lot of our listeners will know who you are but would you like to introduce yourself a little bit and tell people about your history with Star Trek?

BLAIR:

Oh for sure. So y'all I'm the Muslim woman who pissed off all the Islamophobes with the Geordi La Forge cosplay. *all laugh/cheer* That's usually the context. It gets funny so many folks like, know me from that, and they're like "Oh you have a whole other life?" *all laugh* and I'm like most Star Trek fans, Trekkies or trekkers. And so I am an historian, I'm an author, I'm an educator. I'm an *influencer* now, thanks to all the folks who have realized racism is a conversation worth talking about, and history is part of that conversation. So now I educate folks weekly Sunday nights with Learn O'clock. I have Smarter In Seconds, a series where I educate

you on different intersectional subjects in 15 seconds or less. It's usually right at 15 seconds though. And I love Star Trek. I love Geordi La Forge. I also love LeVar Burton. And I just love the fandom of Star Trek, because y'all show up for people who are underdogs and really, you know, fortify and uplift the idea that Gene Roddenberry had when he wrote this, which was infinite diversity in infinite combinations. So I'm often giving talks and speeches and trying to wedge Star Trek in there by any means necessary.

SUE:

Awesome.

GRACE:

And how did you personally get into Star Trek? What did your journey look like there?

BLAIR:

I think that my journey looks like me having access to- like we had direct TV at home, and there would always be like these like solid blocks of Star Trek. I can't even remember on what channel, but the first episode of Star Trek I watched, I think I was either in middle school or early high school, and it was the episode that basically tackles drug addiction in the Next Generation. Where there's one- I mean spoilers, but it's been out forever. There's one group of aliens that has, you know, a severe severe addiction very similar to an opioid addiction. And then there's another one, like a sister planet, that provides the drugs and they're very affluent. They're doing great and they look very much down upon the people who make that wealth possible through the addiction, and Picard makes this call to say "Hey I'm not going to repair your ship, but I'm also not going to leave you ditched out here." And they're like "No, but if you don't repair our ship then we can't continue to like enslave these people through addiction!" and Picards like "You know, you'll figured it out" and I love that! Because at the time of this, you know, this episode happened it was right at the time of, you know, the War On Drugs and the Crack Epidemic. And for the sci-fi show to talk about the inequality, and to do it in a way that really highlights not only the class differences but the mental health aspects, what addiction looks like. You know, you have Dr. Crusher who's just like analyzing it, looking at, you know "I don't think that he's sick." Well, he *is* sick but it's not because there's an illness, it's because of addiction. And the way they talk about addiction *ah* like chef's kiss! So that really had me hooked. Because I was like "Wow, they're talking about something *this* nuanced at a time when it was not popular? I'm in!"

SUE:

I believe that episode was called Symbiosis.

BLAIR:

Yes!

GRACE:

And that's as good a reason to get into a franchise as any. Let's be real.

SUE:

For real.

GRACE:

Truely. I'm so glad we could have you on this topic specifically, because we want to talk a little bit about- we've touched Previously on different views of religion and Star Trek but what I want to bring you in here to talk about specifically was women as religious leaders in Star Trek.

BLAIR:

excited Yes.

GRACE:

Let's all get spiritual for a minute here.

BLAIR:

I'm already there.

GRACE:

All right. Cool. *all laugh* Awesome. Is everybody else there?

SUE:

Always.

GRACE:

Ok cool. Center yourselves, look inward, and ask yourself what do you think about a woman in a leadership role in religion and how does that apply to Star Trek? And what we've got here is a list of different characters and figures throughout Star Trek to go over, and I was wondering since you're our guest here Blair, would you like to pick the first one we talk about?

BLAIR:

I mean, I am always doing this thing where I'm like "She's not on the list but let me talk about her" so I won't do that.*all laugh*

SUE:

You can totally do that. This list is *definitely* not comprehensive.

BLAIR:

Yeah, you know- OK. We'll get to that later. I think the first because I have so many thoughts. It's very all over the place. But I think that Nuria is really, and that's of course because I'm partial to the Next Generation, really speaks to me the most. But I think beyond that, you know, the infinite diversity in infinite combinations is also a mirror to ourselves in the current era. Anytime you have a sci-fi show there's going to be elements of the current existing world that make it into there. And I was recently talking about this on a show called the Liberal Conspiracy, highly recommend it, it's on YouTube, about how the limitations of Gene Roddenberry in the writer's imagination as it relates to childbirth really shows. Because if you can wave like, you know, this

wand type element over somebody's forehead and diagnose them, and cure them, then why are we giving painful birth? You know, why is there still vaginal birth? Like this makes no sense. And so what I love about Star Trek having women religious leaders is that it's taking that limitation of the world, whether that's through patriarchy, religion, cultural, stigma, etc. tearing it down, and saying "We're going to make this the focus." And it's *fun too* because then you have all the people who don't realize how *much* Star Trek *is* religious. And it is.

GRACE:

It's absolutely fun when you get to have someone be like "Well, Star Trek isn't really a religious thing is it?" And then you get to be like "Yeah, it can be."

BLAIR:

Exactly.

GRACE:

That level of "Oh, you thought wrong" that you get to pull out. That's always fun.

BLAIR:

But the reason why I love Nuria, is because she has amazing brows. *all laugh*

GRACE:

Everyone on this planet has just wild eyebrows and I appreciated that a lot.

SUE:

So this is the Next Gen episode Who Watches the Watchers. Right? Where they're observing this proto-Vulcan culture and their township, their community, comes to think of the Enterprise and Picard as a god. And this actually- this episode comes up a lot when people talk about how *anti*-religion Star Trek can be. Because this is the episode where Picard basically gives a speech that is very very secular. And calls a religion like- oh I don't have it in front of me, and I'm going to misquote it, but basically primitive. Which is kind of a buzz word in its own right. But it's really interesting that we went to Nuria first. Yeah.

BLAIR:

And so that's why it's my favorite, because I- so as a religious person I'm Muslim, but also as you know a scholar and an historian and author I love going to the thing first that's the most controversial. It's like eating your vegetables first at dinner so you can get to the mashed potatoes. And so, this one is fun because this is always what people point to as far as you know "There's no Muslims in Star Trek." It's like first of all ya'll, hate to break it to you, but Star Trek's a fictional world. You know? Is this one real? Who knows. No, but it's so fun to me because I talk about this so often. So, I spoke at the Princeton School divinity recently, and it was before Corona times, and I was talking about canon and this idea of, you know, we have our personal canons, we have canon as it relates to the religious texts, et cetera. But if somebody can watch the same episode of Pokemon as me and have a different interpretation, and that's not even like high stakes related to our salvation or you know internal souls, then when it comes to religion it's

going to be way more intense. And just like that, Star Trek is used- you know, we have instead of a religious figure, you have Gene Roddenberry creating the text. We have people you know performing that text, and then writers contributing to it. We can make total parallels in religious texts. And then we have actors portraying it. And then the viewers, the audience, interpreting that. And the harmful thing is that you have people interpreting it to the detriment of others. I love this episode. It's one of my favorites because it's so much more about critical thought, about the- it's the detachment of God as a people? Which is you also, you know, valid. I'm not here to knock anybody's religious practices. But what I love is that it takes deification away from Picard. And I think it's also a challenge to white supremacy. Because you have Picard, this bald white man with an English accent, in the future which is so reoccurring. An amazing captain. And then you have this like the fantasy of colonization, where there is this myth that ingenious people were just turning over their, you know, their gold and their valuables to the White colonizers. And it says- it kind of, you know, knocks that in the face. In that it positions Picard as a savior, which is also part of the franchise. But I just really love it, because it just challenges so much mythology around new culture, around religion, and people weaponize it but I'm here to say "Hey it's just a different interpretation."

GRACE:

That's fantastic. I also just really appreciate how this is an episode I can point to and be like "Oh yeah. Remember the one when the lady from Better Things was on Star Trek? *all laugh* Yeah, the lady from Better Things and the guy from Robocop. They were both aliens in space together."

BLAIR:

"Remember that?" Yeah. Star Trek's good for that.

GRACE:

Star Trek is *great* for that. It's totally one of my favorite things about going back to an old series. But yeah, that was an excellent starter. And I'm really now hyped up to watch that episode again. All right moving on, Sarah, Is there a figure you'd like to bring up to chat over?

SARAH:

I thought we could maybe chat about women leaders in Vulcan spirituality in general? Cause I feel like Vulcans don't really have a *religion*, but they're very spiritual people. Like, they add a lot of woo to their logic.

BLAIR:

I mean, people are like "They're like, you know, the epitome of *not religion*." And it's like, they have a specific greeting, they have specific ways of dressing. Like, you might not attach a god to it but that religiosity, you know? Like, we really have to detach I think religion from this conversation of- about being it's a belief system. It's not necessarily always connected to a deity, but it is certainly a belief system, and we can 100 percent see that with the Vulcans.

SUE:

They have rituals, and practices and-

GRACE:

All this stuff that's integral to their culture.

SUE:

Yeah. I wouldn't call it prayers, but repetitions you know?

GRACE:

Even if it's not a religion, it's very religious-like, and they practice it *religiously*. I was actually on the fence about that one when I was putting together the notes for this episode because I- for one thing we had a Kolinahr high master and I was like "Oh cool! The person in charge of Kolinahr, leading Spock through that, is a woman. That can be cool. And like "But does Kolinahr count as a religious experience?" and then it was like "Does *any* of it count as a religious experience?!" *Blair laughs*

SUE:

Why not, right? That's the fun thing with religion is that it's really- it's subjective. It is based on our own personal biases, understandings, et-cetera. I mean for me, I watched Star Trek and I'm like "Look at all of the Muslim iconography." And like, you'll have somebody who knows nothing about Islam be like "What are you talking about?" Or worse you have somebody who, you know, is very Islamophobic and is saying that all types of other things. But that's the fun of it, right? Like any fandom, people are gonna bring themselves to it, you know? Like somebody watching that episode I talked about earlier, Symbiosis, who has a family history with addiction might watch that show completely differently than somebody else. But it's the same amazing experience. And I think that's what's so beautiful about these conversations is that hey, maybe we'll never know. We'll never be able to speak to Gene Roddenberry and say "Hey, was this religious? Was this not?" "Hey writers, was it this? was it not?" It doesn't *matter*. What matters is how the audience takes that away and that's what's so beautiful with media, star trek or otherwise.

SUE:

I was recently listening to friend of the show Callie Wright on their podcast *Queersplaning* about creating a ritual, just in life. That it doesn't have to be a religious thing. It doesn't have to be a prayer thing, but it can be a bit of a spiritual thing. And they broke it down with the main idea being that it becomes- something you do becomes a ritual when you do it with intention. And I think that idea can be expanded into the Vulcan spirituality where religion, or whatever we decide we're going to call it, because everything they're doing they're doing with the intention for a specific purpose, that is for them- I don't know if you'd call it self-improvement but I mean they're seeking to be the most logical they possibly can. There is a *path* that they are on. So I mean, I see no issue including that journey, including Kolinahr, in a discussion about religion on Vulcan.

BLAIR:

I totally agree. And that actually reminds me, this might be too much of a departure, so follow me on this one. I'm a historian. I'm good for that.*laughs* But when people talk about simulation theory, and they really like get into it- so simulation theory, for those who don't know, is this theory that everything that we experience is a simulation, think about living in the matrix, and that we are the design of some creator in a simulated program. And I'm like "Oh, okay cool. Like how folks talk about God? Like that?" And every time I say that in a space that's extremely secular, science-focused, AI focused, etc, that is very, you know, opposed to the idea of religiosity and God in the way that I understand God to be, it gets very frustrated. But it's fun because *pause* you know, I'm not going around being a jerk to people. I think that's terrible. But I really love to have these provocative conversations with people, because we're really coming from our own context. Somebody might feel that simulation theory is absolutely not *at all* created to- you know, connected to a deity. But to me, that same- you know it's just different language for the same descriptor. And I think honoring those truths, you know, maybe somebody hears, let's say, that Vulcan practices are religious in nature and that pisses them off. But that's definitely more connected to our own comfort levels with religion. You know, calling something a ritual, a chant, a prayer. If your prayer experience, you know, growing up has been homophobic or has been just not positive, you're gonna cringe from that. Doesn't necessarily mean that it takes away from somebody else calling it that. But we're always providing our own context. And so- I think especially with religion, because it is such a force, whether it's through theocracy or personal experience. That's why the conversation is so difficult.

SUE:

Sarah was there a particular character that you wanted to talk about?

SARAH:

Love a particular character, but I thought it was interesting that so many of the leaders were women. Because I grew up not religious but exposed to a lot of western religion. And in western religion the leaders tend to be men. You know, your pastor, your reverend, whatever.

GRACE:

That's how it has gone in my experience in Judaism also.

SARAH:

So I thought it was interesting that Gene Roddenberry decided that most of the leaders in Vulcan should be women.

GRACE:

I thought that was especially cool because we could see, T'Pol especially, in this role of not *exactly* a religious leader but like a cultural leader in terms of scholarship, in terms of questioning the basis of their culture, and why they do a lot of what they do. And I really liked that, especially because that's the basis for modern Judaism as we know it. Scholarship, and Talmudic texts, and interpretation is a big cornerstone of the Faith and I like that that's something that the Vulcans have got going on too.

SUE:

And when we see her in Amok Time she is revered. And then when she reappears, pre-appears? *all laugh* In Enterprise we learn that, you know, she was part of this philosophical revolution. And that's how she sort of gained this weight in this culture. And it's just- it's so interesting. And I mean, I know a lot of people say a lot of things about Enterprise.

GRACE:

There's a lot to be said.

SUE:

The Vulcan storyline in that season is one of my favorite bits of Enterprise. So I really love how they explored and expanded T'Pol when we learned of the revolution on Vulcan.

GRACE:

Gotta love the idea of the culture that we have this idea of as being very you know fixed in their ways as being one that's like "Surprise. We had a major cultural uprising that changed our entire school of thought just a couple of hundred years ago."

SUE:

But the great thing on Vulcan is that that's one lifetime!

GRACE:

Yeah. *impressed* Oh my God. I hadn't thought that way *all laugh* and I really should have.

BLAIR:

But there's just so many parallels. Like, just demonstrating the fact that that's possible. I mean you know, this is the original series. Right? Like talking about that in the midst of the civil rights movement. Like we know Dr. King was a fan of Star Trek, encouraged Nichelle Nichols to stay on, watched the show. The fact that Dr. King was a Trekkie. Like, what?! Like, cool. But also just the way that Star Trek and other sci-fi mechanisms can demonstrate "Hey, these people have an entire shift in their ideology and they're still around. Maybe we can too."

GRACE:

The idea of cultural evolution is such a big part of sci-fi, and I love seeing how much we get to see that represented in Star Trek. *emotional* Now I've made myself excited again! *all laugh*

BLAIR:

So the person who I wanted to bring up, that's not on the list but as I was thinking about it, is Deanna Troi. Because she is the most- like it's not secular, like it's definitely woo woo. You know like, woo woo that's like pretty much slang for spiritually-ish religious you know? And I just find that the way that she interacts with people, yes it's based in psychology, yes she's a Betazoid and it comes from that, but just the way she interacts with her and her mother in later

episodes and seeing how like her- I think she actually- she's half-human half Betazoid. And how she interacts with people it's so empathetic. But it also reminds me of my friends and like elders in my family who, you know practice voodoo, who you know burn sage, who you know do incantations. And that's part of their religious experience. Here it's couched in the language of you know psychology, and energies, and you know feeling shifts. But she'll be walking through the ship and be like "Picard I've got a tingle in my spine. I feel like something's afoot." You know? *Grace laughs* It's not exactly- that's not a direct quote but-*all laugh*

GRACE:

Close enough.

BLAIR:

It just very much reminds me of the idea of religion being beyond the connection to a deity.

GRACE:

Right. She's very emotional and empathic and she definitely goes about helping people in kind of a spiritual sense, if *that* makes sense.

BLAIR:

I agree.

SUE:

So I have to go to Winn Adami.

GRACE:

Oh! *variety of reaction noises from crew*

SUE:

The elephant in the room. I think we could say.

GRACE:

The big-hatted elephant. *all laugh* Space Pope herself.

SUE:

So every time we end up talking in-depth about religion on the show I bring up a bit of my history, I will do that again. So I apologize for the people who listen who know this already. My dad is a doctor of theology. He is a retired Baptist minister. I grew up surrounded by evangelicals and I am very aware of some of the deceit and corruption and politics that happen in the evangelical church. And I'm not saying that that is everybody, but it's definitely there and I've witnessed it. So when I look at Kai Winn, and especially when she's Vedek Winn still, right? And sort of manipulating things to get the power that she wants. I *recognize* her, right? I very clearly like, *I know* who this person is and I know everything about her. But in a weird way, it makes me love her? Because I love a complex villain, and this is a complex villain who I feel like

I have a deeper insight to. I'm not saying that she's a good person by any *laughs* means, but she is a *great character*.

BLAIR:

I mean that's another important thing, is it- not everything religious-related is going to be positive *noises of agreement from crew* you know? And it's not. It doesn't mean that it's exclusive to Winn Adami, it doesn't mean it's exclusive to Islam, or evangelical Christianity, etc. etc. It's about power, and the way that people can wield power in the sense of their you know eternal soul, or afterlife, et cetera over each other. You know, that's an important part to talk about too. And what I love as well is that it's not- it's made clear. I mean Star Trek does this amazing thing where we could talk about something, but we don't villainize it. We can talk about unfortunate things, we can talk about things that are uncomfortable, but it's not characterized as if anyone who is this way is bad. It's about the choices of the person and the power that they're wielding. And that's always made abundantly clear.

SUE:

I think the thing about Kai Winn too is that even though she is angling for political power and a leadership role we also see her in very vulnerable positions where she wants so much to be favored by the prophets. And we see her doubting whether she believes enough. We see her wondering you know "Why does this person who isn't even Bajoran, why is he the Emissary and the prophets won't even speak to me?" right? And we see her struggle with that. And like having the background of that I do like, that is also very familiar. And it's just they put so much into this character and Louise Fletcher does such a phenomenal job with it. And I mean, I think she's one of the most well-rounded characters we get that- certainly that falls into to our topic today. But even on DS9 she doesn't have that many appearances. But we-

GRACE:

She makes a big impression.

SUE:

You get so much from her. Yeah.

BLAIR:

She is one of those appearances similar to Whoopi Goldberg's appearances on The Next Generation. Like, the moments where you do see her really makes a difference. Like everything from the wardrobe to the characterization. But also the fact that she is complex. It's not necessary that she's all good or all bad. She questions her martyrdom, you know? Like, she's gone through so much. "Is it worth it? Am I doing enough? Is what I've gone through enough to please the prophets?" I think I- you know, I also relate the fact that it feels like a familiar conversation to me that I see people struggle with.

GRACE:

I always love the inclusion of Kai Winn in the bigger discussion about Deep Space Nine and its representation of the Bajorans, just for further representation that we get of religion as a whole

there. Like with Kai Winn we get this sort of great depiction- I've- in the notes I included a quote from her saying that "I'm playing like the pope in space except she's like an ancient Pope from the days when popes were ruthless and powerful and exerted their powers and fought wars." And I really like that, because it's so interesting when you get into talking about religious history. There is a lot of religious-political conversation happening there and different places in human history where they, you know, they sort of went along together and held hands in ways that affected the outcome of human history. And you've always kind of got to wonder what happened on Bajor? *Blair laughs* Like how did their entire planet's culture become one monolithic religion?

BLAIR:

That's the thing! So, OK- yes you know, with this we're talking about Bajor. But when folks tell me that, you know, like Star Trek is taking place in the twenty-two hundred, specifically speaking about the Next Generation because that's my favorite, and people say "There's no religion anymore" that doesn't *just happen*.

GRACE:

No, I don't buy that at all.

BLAIR:

People don't just give up their beliefs. You know like, Geordi La Forge was born in Mogadishu Somalia, a Muslim majority country. Odds are like, there are some Muslims. You know? I like to believe that Geordi La Forge was a practicing Muslim you know? But that's also *my* headcanon. But the fact that people feel that that's impossible? What type of war took place? Like, was it the thing, that I think a lot of scientists believe, that when we have alien contact- we have our first contact then suddenly people will lay down their religious beliefs? You know, did that happen? Why is that not said? That's so specific. But the idea that there so so so much to be said about how we ended up with the cultures that we have, it's sci-fi history and it's fascinating.

GRACE:

Yeah. The thing that always weirds me out is Star Trek has always had this really strong basis in sort of secular humanism, outside of religion but with a lot of the same philosophies. And so like hearing someone say "Yeah but in the future, we're not going to need religion because we're all just going to be one people" It's like, "Yeah but that means homogenizing and like kind of weeding out all of these distinct cultures and belief systems." So is that really worth it if we're going to lose that much like culture and important heritage to people?

SUE:

Specifically in Next Generation, I mean, Data makes reference to Diwali I believe in Data's Day when he's writing to Maddox. And in TOS they had a Christmas party. Right? So the idea that religion is gone in the future is just inaccurate. But it's interesting, when you were talking about the homogenization of religions it made me think of Discovery actually. The episode- was it New Eden? At the beginning of season two where they, you know the- spoilers for Discovery. *That* is a warning I will actually give *laughs* because it is the most recent season. This group of

people, this town was essentially rescued by the Red Angel. And when they arrived on their new planet Terralysium, they couldn't *decide* basically which religion saved them. Right? Like was it the Christian god? Was it somebody else? So they have this church in this town with stained glass windows that combine iconography from multiple religions.

BLAIR:

And it's so beautiful. Like, I highly recommend doing a Google search. Like, I just can- like they got an Ankh in there if I recall correctly, like just beautiful.

SUE:

And they name stuff. They named them. I don't have the list in front of me or anything, but I do know that I think Wiccan is one of them. Christianity is one of them. Islam I believe is one of them. But it's interesting about like, is that a good thing or a bad thing? I mean it's certainly a good thing, that the town and the people came together and they didn't fight over it. But did they just combine religions to create a new one? You know, we didn't get much worldbuilding around that aspect.

BLAIR:

There's a show- or this movie on Netflix called Let It Snow, totally not Star Trek related, but they have this joke scene where they're doing the Nativity and they have like, you know, like a Hindu goddess in the Nativity. And they make it like non-denominational by just making it like instead of the *absence* of denominations, *all* of them. And I knew it was being portrayed as a joke, but I thought it was dope. Like I knew- like it sucks when somebody does something as like a sarcastic "Ha! Look at liberalism" and you're like "Yeah, that's actually great." *all laugh* It's like Accidentally Leftist. "Yeah, that's the goal!" You know like the image of the woman in the burqa sitting next to the drag queen. No. Yeah. That they should chill. Like, come on.

SUE:

That's my favorite one.

GRACE:

Just let them *both* be there!

BLAIR:

Yeah! And it reminds me of how I grew up like, I am now in retrospect realizing how I grew up was *so multicultural*. Like we learned Hanukkah songs though no one was Jewish at the school. And I thought that was dope, because if we were gonna have a holiday program, you know, and we just make it about Christmas we're lying. You know, but if we're actually going to celebrate other holidays like, talk about Kwanzaa, talk about you know Christmas, when you know Ramadan ends up happening around December again, and Ramadan as well, The solstice. You know, non-Christian pagan religions? That's dope. And so I think there's some people who feel like, you know, things can't co-exist and there is something to be said about having your own deal. But it's just like having a woman space you know? Like this is called Women At Warp. It doesn't mean that like "Oh man. Where are the other genders?" It's like "No, like this is a

specific space for folks.” And that space is still inclusive but there's worth in that. But I think that also having a space that's like integrated is also beautiful. And I think that they crushed it. But I also feel like some people watched that and like “Haha! The future liberals want.” And it's like, “Yeah. No, we do.” *all laugh*

GRACE:

Feel like I've got to go on a quick rant about a Hanukkah Bush real quick or something, because ugh. Ugh. Feeling the need to change one religions space to accommodate another religions space just so that you can all fit in better. That is a special level of pet peeve.

BLAIR:

I agree. Yeah, like we had like “Hey Blair, you're the only Muslim here. So we're gonna tokenize you with this conversation. Let's put up a Muslim ornament on the Christmas tree!” and I'm like *uncomfortable* “OK...uh...alright”

SUE:

And this is where we return to the difference between equality and equity.

GRACE:

Yeah yeah. If I had a nickel for every time I was asked to stand up in front of an entire class before the Christmas party and it'd be like “Tell us about your religion.” And I'd be like “I'm six. I'm six, and all the kids are waiting to eat cookies. This is not going to end well in any direction.”

BLAIR:

Yeah. The difference between assimilation and like cultures being appreciated, the difference between calling it a melting pot and calling it a delicious salad or potluck.

GRACE:

Yeah. It's so funny that you use the word *assimilation* because then I think of the Borg. And one of the big anxieties with the Borg having all of your cultures be assimilated into one and losing all meaning.

SUE:

But you know what? Isn't that a bit of a religion too? Because, you know, “seeking perfection.”

GRACE:

Yes.

BLAIR:

So scholars, scholars in particular- especially folks who work in black liberation theory like Jackie Lewis- Reverend Jackie Lewis, talk about how white supremacy is itself a religion. White supremacy being a religion because instead of you're just- you're focused on the worship of whiteness, on the implementation of white supremacist policies. And folks get really confused about that. *But* it's really beautiful, because then when you start to overlay that, you know, onto

different religions then you can make it very clear that when people are making the supremacy of one group over another their focus, that they're shirking their responsibility to each other. And that's the thing that so many folks talk about: the shirking of responsibility to yourself and to God when you put one person over another. So that's often what's discussed, looking at that as a religion. Also it being a religion that is in contrast. You know? You can't be a white supremacist and be Christian, yet there's so many churches that espouse that. Or if we look at the history in the United States, and this is not exclusive to Christianity but I used to be Christian so I feel like I can talk some s**t *Sue laughs*, in Christianity the Bible was used to justify enslavement. This also happens in Arab cultures with colonization. The use of like capitalistic enterprises to say "Hey, yeah. This Hajj that you need to go to Mecca for to fulfill your religious duties? That's going to cost you ten thousand dollars." That's *ridiculous*. But when we worship things that are harmful it just- it's bad for everyone. And then I think about the Satanists. Like, it's not even about the fact that Satanists don't worship Satan. They actually are like very cool people who show up at every great protest, whether that's like for reproductive health whatever. So we talk about evil, it's really looking about what harms people. Not necessarily attributing it to one group of folks. Shout out to the satanists. *all laugh*

GRACE:

They're always so *chill*, aren't they?

BLAIR:

They really are. Yeah.

JARRAH:

And now we just need to take a quick break for a word from our sponsor for this episode, Text Expander. Text Expander boosts your business productivity, or your personal productivity, by allowing your team or your crew to communicate smarter, faster, more logically, and more consistently across all your channels.

GRACE:

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GRACE:

Or captains log, if you will.

JARRAH:

If every time you open an email you want it to say “Hailing frequencies open” but you don't want to type that, because that's a lot of typing.

GRACE:

Just like that you've taken your Star Trek references to that next level.

JARRAH:

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GRACE:

Well if I could bring it in another direction really quick, because we were just talking about Winn previously, Kai Winn. I was wondering if we could bring it to Kai Opaka for a minute. Just sort of as contrast. And I really appreciate that she was the figure that all of this Bajoran spirituality was introduced through, because then we get this contrast in the show when it's continuing with this “religion can be used for political means” and “it can be used in really bad ways to justify awful things” we've got this memory of Kai Opaka who is just this very calm, very spiritual, and very grounded person. And so we get that contrast of “Religion *can* be that, but also can be wonderful and fulfilling and bring people together.”

SUE:

Opaka was also Kai during the occupation of Bajor.

GRACE:

So you *know* she saw some stuff.

SUE:

For sure. I think that's also why when we're introduced to her they say that she's kind of a hermit. Right? She doesn't come out much, she doesn't see a lot of people. I'm guessing that the Bajoran people might have wanted to like hide her to protect her. I don't know what that means for someone who is Kai. But it's interesting that when we're introduced to *Vedek Winn*, at the time she's introduced, as like one of the most conservative people of the most conservative sect of the Bajoran religion. In contrast to *Vedek Bareil*, who's I guess like your cool youth pastor. *all laugh*

GRACE:

He sits backwards on chairs and everything.

SUE:

But we don't know, I don't think we're told where Opaka sits on that spectrum.

SARAH:

Well, I had read that Opaka went into hiding because there was all this infighting going on, because all of a sudden the Bajorans were not occupied and they were trying to figure out what kind of government there was gonna be, and there were different factions, and she didn't want to get pulled into all of that.

GRACE:

So she is trying to keep the *religion* out of the *politics*.

SARAH:

Yes, she was trying to stay neutral.

GRACE:

Interesting.

SUE:

I like that. Yeah.

BLAIR:

So the interesting thing with Kai Opaka is that there's like- I can't even really enjoy the character because it's like there's a little black face going on... potentially or it's lighting? And so this is like a constant thing that comes up anytime anyone like tries to cosplay Kai Opaka. Because you know, if you look at a picture of her today and you look at a picture of her in the garb it's definitely that her skin is like you know darkened. And so when I first watched the show I was like "Oh my gosh! Who's this amazing black woman actress?" And I looked it up and was like "Oh, it's a white woman who seems to be painted quite brown." And so that's like a side thing. You know, sometimes the portrayal of *laughs* Aliens folks say "Oh this is, you know, I can kind of like hedge my bets here as far as dabbling in the blackface." But it's *never* a good idea. No no.

SUE:

I did not realize that occurred with the Bajoran makeup. It definitely occurs with the Klingon makeup all the damn time.

BLAIR:

Oh, hundred percent.

SUE:

But whew. Yikes.

BLAIR:

It could be lighting but, you know, err on the side of white supremacy in the United States.

GRACE:

My mind just went to a super weird coincidence also, because the one time she was on an episode of Friends she was wearing Kente cloth.

BLAIR:

Yeah.

GRACE:

What's going on there?

BLAIR:

It's interesting. And I think that- *clicks tongue* you know, let's just we'll table it. *laughs*

GRACE:

Yeah.Yeah. That definitely is worth further discussion though.

SARAH:

Oh oh. We could talk about a woman religious leader in Star Trek who actually *is* black. And I'm blanking on her name, but the Picards Romulan warrior Nun friend. *all make excited noises*

BLAIR:

Yes! Oh my gosh! The themes like- OK. So I have- I love Star Trek and I'm gonna bring up Star Wars, because I can.

SUE:

laughs I do that all the time.

GRACE:

We're all star friends here. *Sarah laughs*

BLAIR:

Sometimes in Star Wars they will portray evil folks in extremely Islamic looking garb, or you know like middle eastern garb and it frustrates me. But I really loved this character, and I'm googling her name, let me do it right now. Because it was showing just so many different themes coming together. Like women, warrior-ship, different diverse religions. Then you have like the folks who are in desert appropriate garb not being villainized as the evil folks. And I was just like "I love that!"

SUE:

The character's name is Zani.

BLAIR:

There's a couple folks as well. Like, it's an entire community.

SUE:

But the leader is Zani.

BLAIR:

And she is just like- they have this- actually it reminds you of organizing circles, honestly. Like, so this is in Picard, and they have this practice of being brutally honest and completely transparent with people. They don't dance around with language. And that is *so much* a part of black American culture in the United States. You know? Just speaking to my experience, not saying it's a part not a part of other cultures, but from what I experience has been is that it's very much about "Don't beat around the bush." You hear that at my family gatherings 20 times. It's just straight- come straight out just say it, and do it with love. And I really love that that was an element of this culture, because it's one thing to "OK. We're gonna have locks. We're going to show you know black people, but we're going to completely make it different." I mean, honestly when Geordi La Forge was being cast they wanted somebody black who didn't have a black accent, who spoke with perfect diction. Course LeVar Burton is immaculate for that, but so what if he had a specific regional dialect or accent? Same with Michael Dorn. And so to see that departure from this in Picard, the latest in the series, was really exciting for me. The elements of black culture were specifically uplifted in the future. Because like, why does Picard get to have an English accent but Geordi can't sound like he's from Brooklyn? That's not fair. *laughs*

GRACE:

Yeah. Why are some cultures more homogenized than others in the future?

BLAIR:

Surprise! It's white supremacy.

GRACE:

not surprised Oh no. Who'd have thought? *all laugh*

BLAIR:

But no, Zani is an amazing character.

SARAH:

Yeah. And another thing I appreciated about that episode was that there were multiple black Romulans in that episode, and they were different kinds of black Romulans. They didn't all dress and act the same.

BLAIR:

Yes!

SARAH:

There's the senator fellow, I think. Yeah. Very *very* different characters. I really appreciate when Star Trek does that.

BLAIR:

I so do as well, because like you know the idea that there's one type of way to be regardless of what that culture is, one way to be a woman. Like, the fact that there's mini skirts on the original series? Like, come on. Alright, we're in the future, we're fighting aliens, but we still gotta wear mini skirts? There's still gender, what the heck? That makes no sense, you know? And so I really love seeing that diversity, because yeah we have infinite diversity in infinite combinations, *but* those combinations tend to be limited by the folks who are creating that material.

GRACE:

massively agreeing Yes!

BLAIR:

And so as that evolves it's just so beautiful to me, because it shows "Hey, not only are we progressing in the present but we're progressing in what we determine the future to be." And that's really, I think, a measure of how much work is being done by scholars, activists, grassroots folks, you know, diversity, inclusion, etc. And it makes me super hopeful because more people deserve to see themselves in the future.

GRACE:

Fantasy genre, take some notes *please*. *crew laughs*

SUE:

Well, say what you will about modern Trek, or I should say current Trek, Discovery, Picard, even Lower Decks right? Star Trek has often been criticized for the monoculture. *noises of agreement* And the more recent iterations of Star Trek are breaking that. They're showing us different aspects of different cultures, they're showing us different Romulans, different kinds of Romulans and not just the senators with giant shoulder pads. As much as I dig those giant shoulder pads-

GRACE:

They *are* great.

SUE:

-not everyone is a Romulan senator. There are farmers. There are warrior nuns, apparently. It's great! And I think that started, in my opinion really, it started on Bajor. But I don't think they went far enough. We still have one religion, but at least there were different ways of practicing it, and different kinds of people, and different- uh- people who didn't practice it I should say, and different sects of the practice as well. We saw that there was some infighting about it. Not everybody followed it blindly. So I think that was hard to do, and I think one of the reasons- hard to do in the nineties, and one of the reasons they were able to is because you know they didn't pay a lot of attention to Deep Space 9. Because either TNG or Voyager was also on. So you know, they kind of let Ira Steven Baer and his writers room do whatever they wanted. *laughs*

BLAIR:

And you know, I think that the fans are really ready for it. Because when I posted my cosplay the immediacy with which I was getting fanfare about being a new character on the show, which I was like "I- I'm so sorry. I wish." And hey writers, I *am* a trained actress. I will show up and do the thing. But so many folks were like "Oh man, I'm so excited about your new character on Picard!" I'm like "This is actually just a fan thing, but I'm so down" *all laugh* and like all of these writers started following me, and I was like "I do voiceovers, let me know." But folks are ready for it. Because people like immediately without question were just like "Cool! New character. I'm excited." There were some people who were hateful, but there was an overwhelming amount of interest in "How do we incorporate things like hijab into Star Trek?" and that was really exciting for me. Because you know, hijab is a religious practice, but it's also a cultural practice that goes like back to the ancients. You know, whether that's veils etc. So we see some of this with Whoopi Goldberg's character. We see some of this with the warrior nuns in Picard. But it would be nice to see something that's like overtly religious in the modern context on the show.

SUE:

Especially on a human. Right? Because we can have Worf's baldric, nobody raises an eyebrow. We can have, you know, for a while Spock wears the IDIC in *Is There No Truth In Beauty*. I think I got that in the right order. We have the Bajoran earring on Ro.

GRACE:

But she gets but she gets crap for wearing it, while Worf is allowed to wear his baldric all the time.

SUE:

Yeah, but then she starts wearing it again.

BLAIR:

And I think it would be particularly great if *I* was the character.*all laugh*

SUE:

But we never see a human character really with a cultural or religious item or article of clothing or a piece of jewelry on the show, at least not that I have seen.

GRACE:

People love to talk about the Jewish media conspiracy, but I have not seen one Yarmulke on Star Trek. *Sue laughs*

BLAIR:

Not yet. We're gonna get there.

GRACE:

growling We'd better.

BLAIR:

And some Tichels too.

GRACE:

Yeah! Give me some tzitzit in space.

SUE:

I would love to see a mezuzah on a door frame on a starship.

GRACE:

I would love that so much! *laughs* Like, on the loading bay there's the mezuzah. Oh my gooo-*goes into a full conniption* Oh, you can't kiss it though if your ship is pulling up to it though. That's the only problem.

BLAIR:

Then is it- does it still count if the door frames moving? That's a lot-

GRACE:

unsure ..Yes? As long as your binding the word on the door posts of your house and, you know, as long as it's there usually you're OK.

BLAIR:

Because like there's so many things that are like- like remnants of religiosity that we have from like ancient times, and so it doesn't make sense that like one person gets to decide that religion just doesn't exist anymore. You know? And even- I know some folks who have the mezuzah, their parents are Jewish but they don't practice. But it's still part of their cultural heritage and I feel like that can continue.

GRACE:

Yeah, you can be culturally Jewish.

BLAIR:

Yeah absolutely. And so that deserves to be in Star Trek as well. And it's not only because Jewish folks absolutely deserve representation but also because people who have anti-Semitic beliefs or are anti-Semitic themselves deserve to see this in space as a statement. You know, whether that's Muslim folks, Jewish folks, etc., that we are here and that we matter and that we're in the future as well.

GRACE

Also just so we can have a little more fun saying *screw you voice* "You keep trying to come for us, *and we keep coming back!*"

BLAIR:

Yeah!

SUE:

Should we get back to our list?

GRACE:

Yes. *all laugh* Who'd like to go next?

SARAH:

I would love to talk about the female changeling on Deep Space Nine who- Because I don't know. It's all very Paul Atreides to me how they attain power and turn themselves into gods and create this entire culture.

GRACE:

Well now I'm also thinking she's kind of got a bit of a Bene Gesserit look with the high hairline and no eyebrows thing also.

BLAIR:

This is an aside, because I love those, but she's from the Omarion nebula, and I feel like they say it differently, but Omarion is an amazing singer of, you know, I believe Boyz II Men? I don't wanna be wrong about that, but I'd just like to think that his parents were Trekkies and named him after that. *Sue laughs*

GRACE:

Aww! I love that idea!

SUE:

But when you say they turn themselves into gods, they do so *literally* right? With the Jem'Hadar also they do that in the same way, you know, with a drug dependence just like in Symbiosis. How we started this episode.

GRACE:

Oh! We've brought it all back!

SUE:

Full circle! *all laugh*

GRACE:

How do you like that, you know, consistency? *laughs* Yeah. I'm trying to think of how to phrase this one thing I wanted to bring up about the Female Changeling also, in the fact that they make themselves gods to these people, but they also sort of spread that idea that they are gods by force. In the sense that, you know, they have a group of people they say "We're your gods" and they say "OK" and like "now you gotta take care of all these other people so they're going to fear us as gods as well by proxy."

SUE:

I would like to bring up, about the Female Changeling, that I hate that we have to call her the Female Changeling. *all make noises of agreement* Give the character a name *please*. And like, they're changelings. I mean, I guess she has gender if she *feels* a gender, but like to literally define this character as *the* Female Changeling when she is so important to the end of the story it makes me angered.

GRACE:

ferengi voice Feeeeeee-maaaaale. *Sue laughs* Well that's definitely fair. I feel like we really should have seen more of a conversation about gender with changelings anyway so-

SUE:

Definitely.

GRACE:

Feel like there's a dynamic that we see with, at least a lot of the people we've got our list. We've got the sort of marm-y, you know, very prim less revealing looking, you know, nun-like religious figures. And then we've got the sexy priestess characters *Blair laughs* and I think it's funny how we've got one or the other. I'm just glad that they didn't go with sexy Priestess character for the head of the Dominion because I feel like that would have not played great with power dynamics there. I do think that's funny.

SARAH:

You know, one part of their religion, and I'm doing air quotes right now, that really struck me was Weyoun and how, you know, a lot of time you see a man who's just like "Yes they're gods. That's all there is to it." But the one episode with the Weyoun who malfunctioned and ran away and at the very end all he wants is Odo's blessing. Because Odo is also his god. That one touched me.

GRACE:

Yeah, I'm just thinking about like a what mass being led by the changelings must look like, with like a church full of Weyouns. That's the rabbit hole I've fallen down mentally.

SUE:

Well Grace, you brought up the sexy space priestess. Do you want to talk about Natira?

GRACE:

Absolutely I thought Natira was like the ultimate epitome of this, in that she is a sexy space priestess archetype. And also on re-watching that episode I thought how- I was thinking how interesting it is that she really falls strongly into this whole idea of, you know, science and facts being counteractive to religion and faith, and how that's kind of the main crux of the conflict of that episode: this idea of "No no! You're all blindly following this religion. We must save you from your own oppressive religion." Which is really super colonialist construct in narrative.

SUE:

Yeah there's a lot going on in that episode.

GRACE:

There's *so much* going on in that episode. And we're following it via a woman in a two piece midriff outfit with weird sort of Greco Roman curls on top of her head. So it's hard not to be like "There's even more going on here than I'm having trouble wrapping my head around."

BLAIR:

laughs I also like that her makeup look looks very baked in the way that like, folks do their makeup now. Like Instagram folks? Like okay, ahead of your time *all laugh*, but this character and Xena the Warrior Princess were definitely instrumental in my bisexual awakening as a youth. Because I was like "All right! What's this about? I'd like to see more of *that*."*laughs*

GRACE:

All hail Xena. No lie, I was really tempted to see if I could do the two tone eyeliner thing just to-ahead of time before recording today just to get myself psyched up, and I couldn't make it work. *laughs* Because she's got like the white eyeliner and then the black eyeliner, and I thought that was fun.

SUE:

Isn't it funny how like the most alien makeup they could possibly come up with is now just Instagram trends?*laughs*

BLAIR:

Yeah that's such casual stuff. I think that's really funny too, just the way that fashion like applies. Also it's really interesting the way that religion in media often is like "OK, well if they're serious warrior nuns then we're going to depict them *this* way, and if we're trying to show that they like-" you know talk about primitivism, talk about excess, you know? Just different things the way that clothing goes into it. Which is also part of the ritual of it.

GRACE:

It just feels like such a "Well yeah" factor that sort of pageantry goes with religion in a way. And it's funny to see people were like "Well if they really had faith they wouldn't care about that." But they're *expressing* their faith this way.

BLAIR:

"But they're humans."

GRACE:

laughs Like, I was reading up on T'Lar who was a Vulcan priestess, and apparently someone complained when she shows up to do like the transferring of Spock's Katra from McCoy and they're like "Well if she's this great logical religious leader why is she wearing coral lipstick?"

That's not very logical." It is like *intensely* "No, it's *pageantry*, it's about making the occasion *special*."

BLAIR:

I get that all the time. They're like "Haha, so if you're covering your head why are you having makeup on?" And it's like, "I don't even know you bro, what the heck?" But also: because I want to! I wear my hijab because I want to, I wear my makeup because I want to. But just like, anything that has to do with women under the patriarchy, there's a conversation *to be had* in all realms about the extent to which we participate in things because we want to, and because we feel like we have to, or where we're literally forced to by society. Like the fact that so many folks can't breastfeed in public. Like, come on patriarchy. Come on, that's ridiculous.

GRACE:

But yes, I'm really glad you put it that way. Because it feels like there is also this sort of weird idea that people have about religion as being, again, faith versus science. And also dour-ness versus fun and- which is a very odd sort of dichotomy that people have decided to put upon religion. And that if you've ever seen a big grand religious festival that's pretty silly.

BLAIR:

Yeah and like, it's interesting to me too because like in Judaism as well as in Islam there's such an emphasis on cleanliness. And like, in Islam we pray five times a day, ideally. Doesn't always happen to be honest. But we practice Wudu, which is you know like the ritual cleansing of the body, where you clean out your mouth, you like you know wash your hands, and your feet. That's also based in science. Like, the reason why there was like, you know, lower levels of plague distribution because folks were actually practicing, you know, basic hygiene as a part of the religious text. So it's not religion versus science *at all*. And then also like- yeah, have you ever been to a wedding? *Grace laughs* Like you know, those tend to be fun and it's very much rooted in different religious traditions.

GRACE:

Yeah. It's just interesting how it can be expressed in so many different ways and people have just such a strict idea of what religion constitutes sometimes.

BLAIR:

Truly.

GRACE:

Right. Does anyone else have another one they wanted to bring in?

SARAH:

I'd love to go back to someone that Blair mentioned in passing, Guinan. Because she is who Picard always turns to when he needs moral guidance.

BLAIR:

And you know, it's funny because- so I'm an alcoholic. I'm sober now, and Inshallah I will remain so. But it's funny because so many folks as I was, you know, in my drinking career as we call it, would talk about how "I would rather go talk to a bartender than talk to a priest." And it's this idea of like coming into a place without judgment, and being heard, and being counseled. She's a ship's counselor, but she's also very much associated as the bartender of the ship. And so that's always what I tend to think about. Like, that doesn't come out of nowhere.

SUE:

She also has that same sort of connection that you brought up that Troi has. Right? In Yesterday's Enterprise she's the one who knows something is wrong. Yeah.

GRACE:

It's so funny, because my dad as a musician tended bar for most of my childhood. So at one point when I was a kid I asked him "So why are you tending bar?" He's like "Well think about it. You ever see an old cowboy movie? The bartender is always the one they come up to and just immediately tell everything to. So he's always the guy who knows the most about what's going on." But is gonna be the least, you know, judgey about it. And I've always thought that was an interesting perspective. And there's definitely something to that. That and he really wanted to work on his impression of the bartender in The Shining. That was a whole thing. *all laugh* He does it pretty good. I got to say.

SUE:

So, I want to talk about Alixus, which I don't know why they just didn't name her Alexis. A L I X U S, Alixus on DS9.

BLAIR:

Alixus sounds like a startup company. *all laugh*

GRACE:

infomercial voice "Alixus: get back to basics. Paradise."

SUE:

This is the woman who diverted her whole shuttle of like settlers and landed on this planet where she put up a dampening field so they couldn't use any of her technology. So she took her philosophy- it turns out she wrote all these books about like how technology is ruining humans.

GRACE:

sarcastic She sounds fun.

BLAIR:

She's a total Karen.

SUE:

Yeah. She turned it into a religion. And she's leading this town where she's, you know, forcing people to do certain work. And *she* set the rules, and she insists that it's for the good of this community, and she's trying to force Sisko and O'Brien to join, and not let them leave when they crash on this planet- or beam down to it rather, they don't crash on it.

GRACE:

And she's keeping all of these people there against their will, because as far as they know they can't leave.

SUE:

Well she's lying to them. So she's- this is more of a cult leader, I say really.

BLAIR:

That's an important point to emphasize. Because as I talk about religion I always try to make sure that I don't like flippantly dismiss anyone. So there are people, you know, there's many- you have the Amish, Mennonites, folks who deliberately, Orthodox folks, decide not to participate in technology. And that's valid. What's different here, and I think why we all kind of groan, is because it's by force you know? It's about the conversation about not being able to participate in something willingly. Which makes it very much a cult, in the sense that it's a harmful practice that is forcing people into one way of being.

SUE:

She also *lets* people *die*.

GRACE:

Yeah and tries to strongarm a woman into seducing Sisko right? So she is not of a kind and benevolent leader. She is a scary Karen.

SARAH:

I feel very strongly that she is what Adami Winn would have turned out like if she had been born on Earth.

GRACE:

Oh my gosh. There's a thought.

SUE:

At one point I think Sisko asks her you know after Meg? I think? I watched this episode somewhat recently. Sisko asks her like, "What if this had been your son? Would you have also let your son die knowing that you know there's a med kit on our ship that you tried to fly into a sun-" He didn't know that then. I'm hoping "That there's a med kit on our ship that could save this life?" And she's like "Yeah, I would. Because it's for the good of the community." So she's just like willing to let anyone die to further her own- It's not even ambition, to further her own philosophy.

GRACE:

Yeah, you know she wouldn't let people vaccinate their kids. While we're finishing up does anyone have any final figures that they'd really like to bring into the conversation?

BLAIR:

Actually I have a question for the pod, if I may. *all make positive noises* What would you like to see religion look like on Star Trek? Because I think that what we have here is some overt representations of religion, some that we've kind of pulled together out of our canon and, you know, discussions we've talked about a little bit through, but I'd like to hear from you what you would like to see depicted in Star Trek as far as religion goes.

SUE:

So in putting together this list, for me, it felt like anything that we can directly without question or discussion call a religion had a leader who was devious in some way. For the most part. Not Opaka but definitely Winn. You know, Alixus, a lot of these people are in it it seems for the power. And that's part of the story. So I would like to see *not that*. *laughs* Then basically just people having a faith in Star Trek and them living their lives. Make them main characters. You know, let a bridge officer have a hijab that matches their uniform. Let them have their- whatever religious ceremonies they have, and it's just a normal part of life because that's what it is.

GRACE:

I would like to see less representation of the different alien cultures as monoliths. I would like to see there be more representation of "Yeah, this entire planet full of people. They have more than one faith and culture going on. Who'd a thunk?!" I just think that that's important to represent that if you're gonna be doing infinite diversity in infinite combinations you really need to start putting it out there and not just defining different people as that one characteristic that you can think of off the top of your head, nonstop. The warrior race, or the religious race. And allow the cultures to be a little more complicated than that.

SARAH:

It's tricky isn't it? Because when you're going out in space and you're meeting beings like the Prophets and the Q it's a little bit harder to believe in Gods I think. Or it makes it more complicated and it gives you a lot more questions. So it's really hard for me to say "What does religion look like when there are wormhole aliens that live outside of linear time?"

BLAIR:

Yeah, that would change things.*all laugh*

GRACE:

You got to wonder what new religions would form and everything. *Sarah laughs*

BLAIR:

I think that's really a big thing too. Like, I feel like Starfleet in itself could be understood to be a religion. But yeah, there's so many factors that would go into a *complete* paradigm shift.

SUE:

Well Sisko says very early on, you know, "Just because we think of them as, you know, nonlinear wormhole aliens it doesn't mean they can't also be the prophets of Bajor."

GRACE:

Like, one man's Vesuvius is another man's wrath of God kind of thing.

SUE:

Right. It's the same argument right? Of science and religion. It doesn't- things can coexist. Things can overlap.

GRACE:

Things can *influence* each other. *Amazing*. It's almost like the world is much more complicated than a bunch of people are willing to admit. *Sue laughs* My goodness. Any other final thoughts before we finish up?

SUE:

Yeah, I have two really quick ones that I just wanted to mention. The first is Ardra, who isn't really a religious leader, but is taking advantage of a religion to get her way. Con artist Ardra. But Cassidy Yates, and I bring her up because there's a specific episode towards the end where she says "Apparently being the wife of the Emissary is different than being his girlfriend." And suddenly people that she's known for years and years are like asking her advice, and asking for her blessing. It just strikes me because, as I mentioned before, you know in being part of a religious leaders family is an experience that most people don't ask for. *laughs*

GRACE:

I can see that.

SUE:

Or at least I should say "In my experience." For some people it puts you in a different light and it shouldn't. Because we are all people. Right? So Cassidy sort of found herself in a religious leadership position that she didn't ask for or expect, because she was just living her life and now she has to figure out how to deal with it. And I think that's an interesting angle on the whole thing.

GRACE:

With a religion she's not even a member of.

SUE:

Right. Yeah.

GRACE:

shudders Well, that's got to make post-DS9 even more needlessly stressful for her. *all laugh* Just saying.

SUE:

The Emissaries child and everything.

GRACE:

I know! Because single moms don't get enough scrutiny already.

SARAH:

And I almost forgot. But- because we only got a glimpse of it, but in the Deep Space Nine documentary What We Left Behind they write the opening of season 8. And Major Kira is a religious leader.

GRACE:

It's interesting. And I think that- yeah, that's not the choice I would have thought of for Kira. But, OK. OK. I could see it feasibly happening.

SUE:

It's interesting because they do that in the books as well, in the shared continuity novels.

GRACE:

Yeah, that's what I've heard. Yeah.

BLAIR:

I just think this is gonna be so great, because I can't wait to post this with an extremely antagonistic header on Twitter *Grace cackles* about how "You all said there were no Muslims in space. Well look at all these religious leaders!"

GRACE:

Because religion is still a thiiiiing whether you like it or nooooot.

BLAIR:

Good and bad, because humans are a thing. If there's religion there's people and vice versa.

GRACE:

If there are people there will be beliefs.

BLAIR:

Amen. Wow, what a pun.*all laugh*

GRACE:

Well wrapping up then. Blair, where else could people who are interested to learn more about what you have to say and your work, where can they find you online?

BLAIR:

So they can find me *also* on Patreon. I actually just became one of y'all's patrons *cheers and sounds of gratitude* while we were talking. You know I'm a chronic multitasker. Sometimes you just need to do one thing, but my ADD begs to differ. I'm on Patreon teaching folks about history of privilege and oppression, both present and past. I'm also educating folks for free on Instagram, but if you want to take that further and support my work you can join me on Patreon. And I look at all my Instagram D.M.s, so keep it short, keep it sweet, and let's take the conversation further @BlairImani.

GRACE:

All right. And Sarah, where can people find more from you online?

SARAH:

So, you can find me on Twitter @SarahMiyoko S A R A H M as in Mary I Y O K O. You can find my fanzine Star Trek Quarterly on Facebook and we are always accepting submissions.

GRACE:

And Sue?

SUE:

You can find me on Twitter @Spaltor. That's S P A L T O R. And as this episode goes up Dragon Con weekend virtual is wrapping up. So lots of panels are probably hitting YouTube right now. I also recently did one on the animated series with Aaron Harvey and Dayton Ward, and that is available from Leftfield Media. And just search for Star Trek The Animated Series Leftfield Media and it should come right up.

GRACE:

And I am Grace, and you can find more from me on our on the Women At Warp blog, I'm writing there. You can also find more from me on Twitter @Bonecrusherjenk. And you can find me pondering the mysteries of just how if you're in deep space you're supposed to face west to pray towards Jerusalem in deep space. How do you do that?

BLAIR:

Oooh don't get the Muslims started on that one. That's a tough thing. *all laugh*

GRACE:

OK. Good to know. Good to know. So to learn more about our show or to contact us visit WomenatWarp.com or find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @womenatwarp. You can also e-mail us at crew@womenatwarp.com. And for more from the Roddenberry podcast visit podcasts.Roddenberry.com. Blair, thank you so much for joining us today. I'm so glad we could have you in for this conversation.

BLAIR:

Thank you so much for having me, and I'm excited to be a friend of the pod!

GRACE:

And thank you all for listening.