

Women at Warp Episode 16: Pulaski Pulls No Punches

SUE:

Hi and welcome to Women at Warp. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Sue and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Andi.

ANDI:

Hi everyone.

SUE:

And Grace.

GRACE:

Hey everybody.

SUE:

And our special guest Britney.

GRACE:

Woo! Britney's here!

ANDI:

You want to tell us a little bit about yourself Britney? So people kind of know where you're coming from when it comes to talking about Star Trek? Like your background with it.

BRITNEY:

Of course. So I first started watching Star Trek like everyone else when I was a kid. But actually started with the original series films. And then I had to go back and watch the actual original series when it was on Netflix. And from there it was just- I kept watching. My favorite series right now, or has always been, Deep Space Nine. I just love their storytelling. Other than that, I just kind of fell into Trek.FM, and then fell into the Babel Conference, and I've just been off and running from then.

ANDI:

Yeah. We actually decided to bring Brittany on because of some of her awesome comments on our Facebook page. So you should definitely check it out and continue to comment there guys.

BRITNEY:

Yeah, it's a very fun community. These ladies are awesome.

GRACE:

Aw!

SUE:

Thank you! You're awesome.

BRITNEY:

Thanks. I just really felt super flattered. Cause I was like "Oh my gosh, I love this podcast. They want me to talk on here? I'm there."

GRACE:

AWW!!

ANDI:

It's kind of how I feel whenever anybody wants me to talk on Star Trek. I'm like "Really? cool. I mean yeah, but really?" It's a surreal feeling when you're like "People want to hear my opinions." And we do. We want to hear your opinions.

BRITNEY:

Yeah. I think that's what makes Star Trek so amazing, is that you have all these different voices just telling you about their experience with it. And the more voices, I think, the better.

ANDI:

Agreed.

GRACE:

Infinite diversity in infinite combinations.

SUE:

Absolutely! So let's do a tiny bit of housekeeping before we get into our main topic today. First up today's topic, which is Dr. Pulaski, was a suggestion from one of our patrons over on Patreon. Dusty suggested this topic and because he is a patron of a certain level that bumps that suggestion to the top of our queue. So if you'd be interested in getting your suggestion bumped up to the top or any other Women at Warp rewards over at Patreon, you can visit Patreon.com/womenatwarp. And thank you all so much for your donations.

ANDI:

Yeah. Both Dusty and Vance, who suggested our DC Fontana episode, came up with some really great ideas. So we're really excited to incorporate those. So everyone should feel free to head over to the Patreon and decide, you know, which level. But also continue to suggest things on our facebook, because we do look at that when we're planning shows.

SUE:

Yeah, we take suggestions from everybody. You don't have to be a patron to suggest anything, but when you are a patron of a certain level that does bump up the suggestion to the top of our queue. We're going to skip some feedback at the front of the show today because we have so many great comments about Dr. Pulaski.

GRACE:

We are up to our ears in comments. It's great.

SUE:

There are so much. And they're all wonderful. And a lot of them are really long. So we're sorry if we miss yours, or we're sorry if we only read an excerpt, but thank you. They are fantastic.

ANDI:

Yeah. We were really surprised and happy at how quickly they kind of came in. I think it speaks to how people definitely respond to her character. Whether it's positive or negative, people have strong feelings about her.

SUE:

And the last bit we have to talk about here is Grace's appearance at Geek Girl Con this fall. Grace, do you want to tell us about that?

GRACE:

I will be at Geek Girl Con in Seattle from October 10th to 11th. I'm leading two panels. One on talking about women's fears as portrayed in horror films and another one talking about gender and robotics in fiction.

ANDI:

Which both sound *awesome*. *Grace "aaw"s*

BRITNEY:

Oh man, it really does.

GRACE:

laughs Thank you!

ANDI:

I really wish that I could, you know, win the lottery so I could go to Seattle and see that.

GRACE:

Well one of the beauties of Geek Girl Con is a lot of stuff gets recorded.

ANDI:

Woo!

SUE:

Awesome. So let's do this thing, let's talk about Kate Pulaski. Catherine Pulaski played by Diana Muldaur, of course, appeared in all but two episodes of the second season. Those two episodes are Outrageous Okona and Q Who. And of course Muldaur had previously appeared in two episodes of the original series as two different characters who *also* held the title of Doctor: Doctor Anne Mulhall in Return To Tomorrow and Dr. Miranda Jones in Is There In Truth No Beauty.

ANDI:

I really like her character in that, and I really like that episode actually, especially for the original series. I think it brings up some super interesting topics and I just think that she is great on the original series. A good actress and she really brought a lot to *both* of her episodes.

SUE:

So, before we get into details of Kate Pulaski, how about we talk about our first and then maybe second reactions to her. Britney, as our guest why don't you start?

BRITNEY:

So when I first watched it, I was like "OK this is just a new character. That's not Beverly Crusher." So I didn't really feel a strong emotion one way or the other the first time I watched it. But then, you know, later on after being away from fandom you kind of read all this stuff surrounding it. So then when I was doing my re-watch I was like "Wow. I actually kind of like her more." But I completely understand why there was such a negative reaction. I don't think the reaction should have been *as negative* from certain segments of fandom. But I totally understand why it happened.

ANDI:

When I was tweeting it, I believe my first tweet about her was "Who the *beep* is Dr. Pulaski?" My Twitter is a little more not safe for work than we get on this show. But I basically was like "Who is this? What's happening? Where did Dr. Crusher go? What-what?"

BRITNEY:

You know, I guess maybe I was just a more naive viewer, because I just kind of went with the narrative of Star Trek. Most of the time, unless a show gives me a reason *not* to go along with them, I'll just go ahead and accept their changes and see how it plays out overall.

GRACE:

Yeah. My first exposure to Dr. Pulaski, because I watched a lot of TNG out of order, was Elementary My Dear Data. Which in hindsight may have been the worst way to get exposed to her as a character. Because without any introduction to her she just shows up in this Data episode pretty much just to say "Wow Data, you suck." And it's just- it's one of those

scandalized "Excuse you!" moments that keeps going through the whole episode. Like, who is this lady? Why does she hate Data so much? So that kind of soured her to me from the beginning. But in hindsight, you learn a lot from hindsight folks. In hindsight it was just interesting to look at her as a conceptual character. Like the idea of a sort of female McCoy on this new Enterprise interacting with this crew. And to take that idea vs. how the character was actually carried out, and I respect the vision, I respect the idea behind her. But at the same time she was just so mean.

SUE:

Yeah. I think my initial reactions to Dr. Pulaski were the same as a lot of people at the time, in that she came seemingly out of nowhere, she was mean to Data, she kind of blew off Picard, and, it's a totally unfair criticism, that she wasn't Beverly, because I at the time had already formed in my head such a strong connection to the Beverly Crusher character. We've discussed that plenty of times. *laughs*

GRACE:

Well Sue, we can't *all* be Beverly Crusher.

SUE:

Well, why not? *all laugh*

BRITNEY:

Kind of an impossible bar to try and hurdle there.

SUE:

Yeah. Right. But then as an adult, seeing it again and also kind of knowing what they were trying to do with that character, I realized that *all* of that is really an unfair judgment.

BRITNEY:

I agree. So, you mentioned Elementary and how that was so jarring, when I was kind of re-watching these episodes, but her first episode in The Child that was just so relentlessly just an overall negative impression. And it began with Picard couldn't even remember her name. So I don't know if this character was ever gonna get a fair shake.

GRACE:

Yeah, that's pretty much my opinion on it.

ANDI:

She really did get such a terrible character introduction. As you said, Picard is like "Who's this? Where is she?" and then it implies that she's in Ten Forward knocking it back you know?

BRITNEY:

Valid. *laughs*

ANDI:

Yeah. Why is that necessary? And then The Child is just such a terrible episode anyway.

SUE:

But she's *not* just in Ten Forward drinking. She's in Ten Forward with Troi who was just like cosmically raped and is now pregnant.

ANDI

Oh yeah! But the way she is- the way they have Picard react to her is unfortunate.

BRITNEY:

I agree. I mean, even without knowing that there is gonna be an issue with Troi, why is being in Ten Forward on its face a negative thing? She's the new Chief Medical Officer and it might be nice for her to get to know some people she will inevitably treat. And so you also view that is getting to know the crew that she's going to be working with. That introduction, without even Picard greeting her in the Transporter Room or as we'll later learn the shuttle bay, is just kind of weird. Like why is that her first introduction to us as a character and a person?

SUE:

There is a quote from Rick Berman from USA Today, actually, in 1988 where he said on her casting "We needed someone with a little more of an edge. Kate's a strong confident woman with a crusty edge who can hold her own with Captain Picard. Their relationship is not at all unlike that one between Kirk and McCoy. Although from the onset we had no intention of trying to duplicate the original team." I don't know how much I believe that quote. I don't see the Kirk and McCoy relationship so much as the season progresses.

GRACE:

Really more like *McCoy* and McCoy isn't it?

SUE:

laughs But it's really more like McCoy and Spock, because of the relationship that they try to create with Data. And a lot of the criticism is that one of the first things she does when she comes on the ship is that she insults the Data, who is already a fan favorite character.

ANDI:

Well I mean, I think my least favorite moment with her is in this episode which is when she calls him Data, and then he corrects her, and she's like *snorts* "What's the difference?" kind of thing. And I'm like "No."

GRACE:

Rude.

ANDI:

It's not cool. You call people what they want to be called regardless of what you think of- even if I agree with her on her problems with Data as being a person, or his personhood, it's still just rude. And then his reaction being like "One is my name and one is not." I loved that. So it was kind of bad for her as a character to have that moment happen, and then have him shut her down so completely, and you wanting to cheer for him for that? I mean that's a weird way to introduce that relationship I think.

GRACE:

She was introduced as being very antagonistic. And also going back to that Rick Berman quote, the idea that this female character is supposed to emulate this sort of McCoy-ness in TNG, it really does continuously when you're watching the character force you to ask yourself "Would I be OK with this if it was a male character? How much of this is just my media coding that these things are unacceptable in a woman vs. I just laugh it off with a guy?" And that's part of what makes talking about the character uncomfortable for me a lot of the time. Just having to bring that up and remind people that "Weeeeell..."

SUE:

Yeah, we have an e-mail from Oren, I'm just going to read part of it, where he basically says exactly that. "Would Pulaski get so much hate if she wasn't a woman, and an older woman at that?"

BRITNEY:

That's very true. But one of the problems with trying to duplicate, for me at least, that Spock McCoy situation is McCoy is actually punching in his weight class. Data literally has no frame of reference and any ability to *really* respond to her. So she's punching down, and it's not the jocularly that you can sometimes sense in McCoy. And Spock had his own sense of humor. He had his own sardonic dry wit about him, and then he can respond in kind. Data didn't even realize the insult was happening, and it was left to everyone around him to try to diffuse that situation. So it became like that one friend who's in your group of friends who just keeps making these comments and everyone else is forced to respond because the target is just ill equipped to even respond in any kind of measurable way, satisfying way at least.

ANDI:

I think that's perfectly stated, and that's exactly why I have a problem with it. It's because McCoy and Spock were on equal terms. I mean Spock got just as many great shots in at McCoy as McCoy got in an on Spock, and that's why it works. It's also an established friendship. You know, we don't come into it, you know, not knowing one or the other. We know them together from the beginning and there's a sense of history there, and a sense of a relationship, and also a sense of humor. Whereas with Pulaski, they brought her onto an established show, and you know had her comment on an established character as an outsider, and though that could have

been interesting, the way it was executed was extremely uncomfortable. And fans got defensive of Data, which makes perfect sense to me.

SUE:

Absolutely. But I do think we need to call out the fans a little bit here, because a lot of people never got past that. And the whole arc of the relationship between Pulaski and Data is one of growth. You know, by Pen Pals she's defending his *emotions*, that he apparently doesn't have. Whatever, he totally has emotions. I know not technically, but whatever. That's another discussion. Right? But I think they really missed an opportunity not really featuring her in Measure Of A Man. That was a few episodes later and that could have- bringing in a medical doctors perspective into that trial could have really been sort of a redeeming moment for her in that relationship. Do you know what I mean? *sounds of agreement*

BRITNEY:

Yeah I do. I kinda just a little disagree with that, because in Measure Of A Man they were going for more of an emotional appeal that almost wouldn't work with Pulaski. Because by that time we still kind of don't see enough of a warm up. But if you have Riker and Picard oppose, then you know it's from family. Pulaski still isn't family here. But she should have at least been in that show, that episode.

SUE:

Yeah. She's *gone* from, you know, after the poker scene at the beginning of that episode. And I'm just thinking "What if she were one of the people testifying?" If she came into there and said "Yeah, I had the same idea of this machine when I showed up on this ship. But let me tell you what I've learned."

ANDI:

Yeah. And I mean, they kind of used her character as a way to hit at this idea, anyway? Of Data, and what it means to be human, and what it means to be a person, and is he sentient and all of this kind of stuff. And then in the episode where they actually really tackle that she's nowhere to be found. Which I think is really strange because that was basically what they were envisioning for the character, is hitting on this theme. And then, you know, they finally do an episode around that theme and they don't use her. It just feels odd.

GRACE:

it feels half assed, is what it feels like.

BRITNEY:

Yeah. There was no dramatic payoff to anything that she had done or will do in that moment.

SUE:

So I want to now read a little excerpt from an email from Scott who says "Her situation with Data is actually kind of beautiful when you look at it as an arc. She sees and treats him as a machine initially, but it ultimately culminates in one of the most powerful scenes in the season. Where in

Pen Pals she defends him against Worf in the great conversation in Picard's quarters. Pulaski: Data's friend is going to die. That means something. Worf: To Data. Pulaski: Does that invalidate the emotion? She's come a long way in adjusting her views on Data as a person, and it shows character growth for her.”

ANDI:

I agree. I agree with that. I just don't think it was executed as well as it could have. And I think that that just has more to do with the general quality and tone of Season 2 than it does for her as a character. But I just think that there were a lot of opportunities to make that arc very resonant and they missed them.

BRITNEY:

I think a better moment was probably- I think it's from Up The Long Ladder when she says something like “He may not be experiencing emotions, but it's functionally the same. And this might be just the Android equivalent.” And until then we hadn't really had an explanation of what emotions and feelings would look like for an android. It was always in context of *humanity*. And I think perhaps he gave us that new perspective and I think it was a great one, because I feel like it informs his entire arc going forward and TNG as a whole.

SUE:

Do we have any more on the Data Pulaski introduction?

ANDI:

I just think that this is why people didn't like her.

GRACE:

Yeah.

SUE:

Oh absolutely.

GRACE:

Nail in the coffin from the beginning.

SUE:

It was a very **pause** not strong in the sense of *good*, but strong in the sense of *resonant*, introduction that I think a lot of people couldn't get past. Especially when the growth of that character was kind of in the background a lot.

ANDI:

The other big thick hurdle that I think she had is the love people had for Crusher, and then her coming in and being a very different character, and people resenting her for taking Gates McFadden's place.

BRITNEY:

I agree.

GRACE:

Yeah.

ANDI:

Which is unfair.

GRACE:

What would the character introductions- let's look at how Pulaski is introduced versus how Crusher is introduced. We see her like interacting affectionately with her son and being like *dainty voice* "Come along now Wesley" versus Pulaski being like "I'm in Ten Forward, I'm trying to be a Doctor doing a thing, and also screw you Data." *all laugh*

BRITNEY:

Yeah, that "Screw you Data" really comes through.

GRACE:

I'm just saying that to make quite- we have quite a differential.

ANDI:

I also don't think there is enough of a segue between them. And obviously that was for offscreen reasons, but it's- for me it was super jarring. And I wasn't even aware of any of this, and this is- also I was watching it was almost- a long time after it, and it still was jarring for me. I was like "Where did Beverly go?" I mean, I know that sometimes it's not possible, but I mean the same thing happens to Pulaski at the end of Season 2. She just disappears and Beverly is back. And it's like, it makes it hard to switch your brain between the two.

SUE:

What I didn't realize until I was looking into this is that, at her own request, Diana Muldaur was never listed as a regular cast member. She was a "special guest star" or a "special appearance by" because she only thought that it was going to be a year.

BRITNEY:

Yeah. I realized that for the first time too when you guys invited me on this podcast. I actually had never even realized that it was just "She's there" "Now she's not."

ANDI:

Yeah. As I said, I think it just goes to the kind of behind the scenes shenanigans that were plaguing the Next Generation, for at least those first two seasons, where there was a lot of off screen tension that was probably bleeding through to the actual stories as we saw on screen.

SUE:

And apparently the “revolving door” and- it’s quote unquote, and limited opportunities for women on the crew led critics to suggest that the series had a problem featuring women. So I would not say that’s necessarily wrong in the early seasons at least.

ANDI:

No I mean, *at that point* I would totally agree with that. I mean we had Troi who up until The Child, which I have to say as a caveat I hate The Child so much. I think it might be my least favorite Next Generation episode. But it was super interesting to me to hear Marina Sirtis talk about it on Mission Log. And she has a great deal of affection for that episode because it was the first one that really featured Troi front and center and gave her something to do. So as much as I-

GRACE:

Took them a while.

ANDI:

Yeah. So as much as I hate the “something to do” they gave her, she was not fleshed out in the first season at all. And I think that we forget that because, you know, we had the other six seasons to get a sense of who she was. But if you look at Tasha Yar, she was given very little to do as well, to the point where at the end of the first season if you had asked me what are the defining characteristics of Tasha Yar I would have been like “Eh?”

GRACE:

“Blonde?”

ANDI:

Yeah. And then Crusher being defined so solely between her male relationships between Wesley and Picard, and then Gates McFadden having problems with her portrayal as a character. I think that that’s completely accurate, that they were having trouble, and that they had a so-called woman problem.

BRITNEY:

Agreed.

GRACE:

Woman troubles, not usually the woman’s fault. Good to know.

ANDI:

laughs I mean, they definitely worked hard to tackle this, and actually bringing Gates McFadden back was one of the ways that they were trying to address this problem.

BRITNEY:

You know I realize it wasn't- It was from *Peak Performance* that Pulaski mounted such a defense about Data's feelings. I realized that a moment ago, I was like "Oh man."

ANDI:

laughs Do we want to talk more about her as an actress or do we want to move forward to her episodes?

BRITNEY:

You know what? Let's visit her as an actress, because I think she did such a great job with what she had. Like I really got the feeling that she was just not comfortable, and even hostile, towards Data because he is a machine. But it seems like she pretty much reflects the rest of the Federation. And it was just that this crew *knew* Data. As an avatar of the audience and how we're supposed to view Data going forward, because I think the narrative of TNG was kind of "This guy, this creature is already living and we're gonna treat him as a sentient being." And so to really progress that arc you would need someone to be that conflict generator. It just so happens that that bullet was taken by Pulaski and Diana.

GRACE:

Harsh toke.

ANDI:

I think she's a good actress. I really do. I don't know that she had as much chemistry as I would have liked with the rest of the cast.

GRACE:

I don't know. I feel like that's one of those things where maybe if we'd gotten to see her progress more as a character we might have seen some chemistry develop. But the whole situation with the character was just very wham bam thank you ma'am. And so we don't really get to see that much of a connection happen.

BRITNEY:

She has great isolated moments, but they never sustained. So when she's mighty arguing with Picard over "I'm giving you this order." I feel the tension between them. It's just outside of those key plot moments, you don't envision her as just someone that they would just talk to and that's a problem.

SUE:

Do you think that it is a generational issue? Because I mean, we learn eventually that she had kind of a fling, a relationship with Rikers Father. So she's much older than the rest of our main crew except for Picard. And that relationship with Picard is for the most part a contentious one. So she doesn't really fit in.

GRACE:

And that's unfortunate, because that's more missed potential that we have there for having more of a mixed age groups thing going on in this community on board the Enterprise. Generally speaking, a lot of the characters are around the same age with the exception of Wesley and Picard but, well *ish* more or less. But if we were able to get that more and mix and to actually get to see the field leveled out with Pulaski and Picard kind of butting heads on the back like "Whoa hey, we're both the older people here we're both supposed to know better." There was potential there that really did get missed out on. And I was a *little* excited when I realized Pulaski was going to be a thing because watching through TNG- because on one hand it was like "Wow she's a jerk.". But on the other hand it's like "Oh you don't get to see a lot of older characters in action shows" which would have been cool to see how they did that. And that doesn't really play out.

ANDI:

The other thing too is as much as I might have liked, kind of, this relationship between her and Picard. I like the idea of someone standing up to their commanding officer when they think it's right. And I think that that could have been cool. I think the problem for me is that I never got the sense that Picard liked her, and that makes it tough for me to, I don't know, relate to her?

GRACE:

"Here's a character. Bee-tee-dubs, main character *hates* her."

ANDI:

Yeah. I mean, that's just really hard for me to get past. Because I mean, some of the stuff that she does I can even agree with. Like she makes a handful of decisions in regards to Picard's health that I think are completely valid. But the way that she does it, and then Picard's reaction to it, and their kind of intensity with each other, it just makes me uncomfortable.

BRITNEY:

I agree. I mean there are- I can't remember what episode it was. Maybe in Natural Selection, when Picard finds out that she really wanted to serve with him and under him. And I'm like "Well, why isn't this manifest in anything that happens after? Picard, she really is predisposed to liking you. What's with this relationship right now."

ANDI:

It almost feels like a bit of a retcon, because they wanted to soften her a little bit.

BRITNEY:

Yeah, I can see that.

ANDI:

I mean I'm not sure, but it's just such a- it is in Natural Selection by the way. But it's just such a throwaway moment. Like "Oh she asked to be onboard your ship because she really respects you." OK. But we don't actually see that really. And so it kind of feels like this throwaway moment meant to make us feel like this relationship could improve, but then it doesn't really.

GRACE:

More missed potential.

BRITNEY:

laughs I think we're going to say that a lot with this character. And I thought that they might have had a little change of heart when he finds that out, because previous- like that I think the line right before it is "So what is she up to? I didn't know she wrote this super important book and what ship does she serve on?" Which- that seems out of character. So very much.

ANDI:

I feel like you would at least have read her file.

BRITNEY:

Yeah. He is the delegator in chief, I think. He trusts these people to do their thing because he knows thoroughly what they do. And you have him have a Chief Medical Officer who is not a bridge officer, and he doesn't know her capabilities.

GRACE:

That kind of puts the onus on him, doesn't it?

BRITNEY:

It really does, for me at least.

SUE:

It seems like Picard is firmly placed in the "She's not Dr. Crusher" camp, which is ridiculous, because he doesn't like her from before she steps onto the ship.

BRITNEY:

That's the impression I have consistently gotten. So in that kind of minefield going into a new crew, you're not going to be *comfortable*.

ANDI:

OK. Yeah. So we did get a comment that I really loved from our Facebook from Rebecca. And it's a pretty long comment, but I really love this section of it because I think it really goes to this resentment that we as an audience, and then also Picard, kind of feel towards Pulaski right off

the bat. She says "I love Pulaski, and every criticism I hear of her falls under a sexist or at least gendered umbrella. The one I hear most commonly is that 'She is not Dr. Crusher.' While loyalty to Beverly is the espoused reason, it just winds up falling into the old trope of pitting two women against each other. And the "We only have room for one great female character, not two." I love Crusher, and appreciating Pulaski in no way depreciates my admiration of another female character. Additionally she is criticized for being brash and outspoken, traits that would not be considered negative in a man. A third controversy is her butting heads with Data. As someone whose favorite character is Data, I still love that she challenges him. He *should* be challenged, and it sows the seeds of growth for them together and individually. As their relationship grows both characters develop and we see the beginnings of the first real character arcs in Next Gen. When McCoy butts heads with Spock, he is a lovable curmudgeon. When Pulaski challenges Data, she's considered a bitch." So I really like that comment just in general, but I do really think that it's worth noting that when we bring up Pulaski, and when we asked for comments about Pulaski, we got *a lot* of comments about Crusher. And about whether or not people preferred Pulaski or preferred Crusher. And I think that that's a completely understandable reaction, because she was directly replacing Beverly. But we don't have to pit these characters together and as an audience we need to think about how, you know, having preference for one doesn't mean you have to hate the other. And I think that they could have done a better job on the show of portraying that as well.

BRITNEY:

I agree. If I can reference a later episode, I think in Season 3, I can't remember. They have those Proto Vulcans and they're trying to mind wipe them, and Crusher just has this really kind of sarcastic comments like "Oh, I'm familiar with that work of Pulaski's." And I was like "That was kind of unnecessary."

ANDI:

Yeah. I mean, there is not a limit to the number of female characters we can have on Star Trek, and there's not even a limit to how many female *doctors* we could have on Star Trek. So we don't have to, you know, have a competition between them about who was better. We can like them both, or we can dislike them both. Or you can prefer one and not knock down the other. I mean, it's possible for there to be room for everyone.

GRACE:

I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that a man wrote that line. Just- not to generalize, but to generalize. *Andi laughs*

SUE:

Also it doesn't have to be said sarcastically either.

GRACE:

They could have working respect for each other. They're both competent doctors.

SUE:

Like *calmly* "I'm familiar with that work. I've read that paper" like that's a legitimate thing. So was it an acting choice? Was it a directing-

GRACE:

Stop pitting competent women against each other, for crying out loud!

SUE:

Right. The question of that is where it comes from.

GRACE:

No matter what answer we get, it's gonna be disappointing.

BRITNEY:

It really is, and so I would just prefer to remain in ignorance and just chalk it up to "That's what happened."

SUE:

Bad choices. *laughs* Somebody made a bad choice. So truth telling soul baring time, one of the things that changed my perception of Dr. Pulaski, believe it or not, was fan fiction.

GRACE:

Really?

BRITNEY:

That's valid, yes.

SUE:

And this is because, you know, as a kid basically I had these terrible feelings about her. "She replaced Beverly! Grr!" Basically this "pitting two women against each other" thing that we are talking about. But it was in a fan fiction story that these- the two doctors worked together, you know? There was some sort of problem on the ship, and Crusher contacted medical where Pulaski was at the time, and they worked *together* to solve this problem. And there was this camaraderie between them, and this friendship between them, and both characters were still *in* character. You know, they didn't change the character of Pulaski. The author didn't change the character of Crusher. And it's sort of like flipped a switch in my brain about women working together to solve a problem. And I remember it so distinctly, it's kind of funny.

BRITNEY:

Yeah. And I think their skills would work very well together. I think, from my feeling, is that Pulaski is more of a research medical doctor anyway; she'll treat patients, but she loves that research aspect and that challenge. And Crusher, she's just- she's so nurturing. She's just the

doctor. And so working together from those two perspectives would just give that issue, that problem, the audience, so much meat to enjoy from two hyper competent individuals being hyper competent together and solving an issue.

ANDI:

Yeah. And I don't think that there's anything in either of their personalities that would necessarily clash. So I could see them being friends or having positive interactions together without very much difficulty at all.

SUE:

But it is true that Pulaski does more doctoring in Season 2 than we really saw Crusher do at all in Season 1.

BRITNEY:

Which is so bizarre.

GRACE:

Yeah.

ANDI:

It's strange to me that they made some character choices, that I find questionable, but they definitely made a point of making it really really clear that Pulaski is an excellent doctor.

BRITNEY:

Agreed. The only problem I have is that occasion when you think she should offer her opinion or something she's just like "Meh. Whatever." Like in The Child. All these men are talking about what to do with Troi's baby and Pulaski is- her voice is nowhere to be heard. And I doubt that Julian Bashir, or McCoy, or the doctor from Voyager, or Phlox would have been so silent. But all of those are men aren't they?

GRACE:

Yeah. Like again, that whole thing of "We know it's serious because *men* are talking about it. That's how we know it's serious. Keep the ladies out of it."

ANDI:

I hate that scene so much it makes me ill.

BRITNEY:

It is one of the worst things.

GRACE:

I can't watch it without throwing things.

BRITNEY:

And that's coming- calling it "the worst" is coming from an episode where she is impregnated while she sleeps.

ANDI:

Yes. The Child. My least favorite episode of TNG.

GRACE:

Let's all just have a minute to be really angry about that. *all make angry frustrated noises*

BRITNEY:

Done. *Andi laughs*

GRACE:

We got that out of our systems now.

SUE:

That might be my favorite thing that's ever happened on this podcast. *laughs*

ANDI:

Synchronized growling. *Sue laughs* Yeah I mean, the first season is 100 percent Troi being like "I sense this." It's like, really? Anybody with half a brain could have read that out of the room and it makes me really sad.

SUE:

It's like direct inspiration for that Galaxy Quest line. "I have *one* job-

GRACE

overlapping "This is my job-

SUE AND GRACE:

together "And I'm going to do it!"

BRITNEY:

You'd think so. Like, her constantly saying "I sense things." But *then* she's doubted. And you're like "Why would you doubt her though?" Right?

SUE:

That actually happens in one of the ones I watched just today: Samaritan Snare. This is also the episode where Pulaski ends up performing heart surgery on Picard.

ANDI:

Yeah. This is the episode I was thinking of, especially when I was thinking of Pulaski being a competent doctor. Because he goes in for heart surgery, that everyone is assured is super routine, and then it goes wrong and the doctor basically says “I am not qualified to do this surgery. I need Dr. Pulaski.”

SUE:

I don't understand why **laughs** you would have a doctor perform even a routine procedure if they are not qualified to handle it if something goes wrong. That doesn't make sense. Picard not wanting to have the surgery just on the Enterprise with his doctor, because of his quote *image* also doesn't make sense. Like that doesn't feel very Picard to me. So I have a lot of issues with the setup here, but it's still great that Pulaski kind of shows up and is like “Saved you anyway.” **Andi laughs**

BRITNEY:

That *was* great. Actually, my favorite moment between them in this episode was when she's like “It's doctor's orders.” And I think every doctor in any Star Trek has to have that moment while saying “I can give you this order and you have to follow it.” And so I'm glad they gave it to her. I don't know if I would- I don't know if I liked it in this particular context, but I did like that moment.

GRACE:

It's a rite of passage if you're a doctor in Starfleet.

ANDI:

Overriding the captain.

SUE:

I believe the first time they gave Crusher that line was when she was *drunk*, I guess **Grace laughs**, in *The Naked Now* and it was supposed to be all sexy.

GRACE:

So you see ladies, you can be competent or you can be likeable, but not both.

SUE:

That *is* kind of the message, isn't it?

BRITNEY:

But then they err on the side of “pick being likeable.”

GRACE:

Yeah.

BRITNEY:

Actually, can we go back just for one moment to talk about the Pakleds? Apparently the casting, they deliberately looked for, you know kind of more portly actors with a kind open face, and they attach appliances to accentuate that. And so I just had a little bit of problem with that whole *pauses* philosophy of casting for the particular Pakleds. That's a tangent, but that was pretty- that pinged on my radar as soon as it happened. And since I read about them on Memory Alpha like, really?

ANDI:

Well, it's one of the more heinous fat stereotypes that all fat people are slow and dumb.

BRITNEY:

It was just shocking.

ANDI:

I certainly understand why you would have a problem with it. And I do too.

SUE:

Any other specific episodes anybody wants to talk about?

ANDI:

I want to talk about the one where we find out Pulaski banged Rikers Dad.

GRACE:

I really hope that's the episode title.

SUE:

The Icarus Factor?

GRACE:

No. No. The title is "When Pulaski Banged Rikers Dad."

ANDI:

His reaction to that is so great. That scene in Ten Forward where she kisses Rikers Dad, and Riker is just in the corner like sulking and stroking his beard and being like *disatisfied noises*. I love that so much, it makes me laugh so hard. I need to get a gif of Riker stroking his beard sulkily from the Icarus factor, because it was glorious. *Sue laughs*

BRITNEY:

But you can just see he's thinking "That woman, that man, I want to look away but I cannot because that woman and *my dad*."

ANDI:

laughs Like meeting a parents, I don't know, new girlfriend or boyfriend after a divorce or something right? But it's worse because it's his co-worker. It's his co-worker and he had no idea that he was working closely with his dad's ex girlfriend.

BRITNEY:

Then later on he finds out that she would have totally married him. So that's like a lot of information coming-

GRACE:

No wonder he's brooding.

BRITNEY:

How old is he? Thirty something?

SUE:

She could have been his mom.

ANDI:

In a cold minute. *all laugh* No, I totally understand his reaction here. Poor Riker. I would cheer you up, I promise.

BRITNEY:

They could go get sundaes with his girlfriend Troi.

ANDI:

laughs But I do think it's actually an interesting episode for Pulaski, just in general, because we do get to see her be kind of unabashed with her romantic past. Like she straight up says that she's been married several times, and she's cool with that, and not shying away from talking. She doesn't act like it's anything that she needs to feel awkward about or ashamed about and I think that's really- that's really cool and something that we didn't see enough for female characters on Star Trek.

BRITNEY:

Yeah. She was really candid and made clear that she had a sexuality, she still does, and deal with it.

ANDI:

Deal with it bro. And then also it was kind of interesting to see her and Troi interact so much, because she is actually the one that brings Troi to Rikers Dad. I will always call him Rikers dad. She is the one that brings Troi into that mix, and Troi is the one that calls him out on his, you know, the way he's been treating Riker this whole time, and telling him to deal with it basically. And she's the one that set that situation up. So I just think that it's kind of interesting the way she

is involved in that situation. I could see why people may not like it, but I have a tendency to like that episode for her.

BRITNEY:

I agree. I think this episode is **pause** it's one in the Pulaski favor column because, you know, it seems like they're making an effort to weave her in. At least into the tapestry of this particular crew. Because you know she's coming in cold, she doesn't really have anyone on the crew that she already knows, and I don't think we've ever really seen this. I mean, in Voyager you have Seven, but then the narrative kind of *really* goes on about *her*. And then you also have Ezri Dax. But she is literally the same character as before, but different. So there's always a touchstone. And this was as close to a touchstone as they ever got with Pulaski.

ANDI:

Plus she banged Rikers Dad.

SUE:

laughs Oh Andi.

ANDI:

I'm sorry. I just think it's so funny.

SUE:

And Brittany, I think you wanted to talk about Peak Performance?

BRITNEY:

Yeah. So I think a lot of people see this episode as her warming up to Data, and that's definitely true. I think that the best part is when she's kinda talking the Data at the end and she's trying to persuade him and say "Hey, you're fine. There's nothing wrong here." But then she kind of sticks up for him in saying "He may not have human emotions, but he has feelings. He has something that androids have." And I think that was very important to the conversation. I did *not like* her manipulation of him, because he just- there's no frame of reference for him to fight against that. So I would actually much prefer the constant jibes and comments and "He's just a machine" to his face rather than this manipulation of him, because he just- he cannot fight back against that. And then it led him into an existential crisis that was beneficial, but still it was so bad.

ANDI:

Can you remind me which episode that is? I haven't seen that one in a while.

SUE:

This is the Strategema episode, or as I like to call it The Finger Diddlys Episode.

ANDI:

Yes, you called it that and I was like "Sue, what are you talking about?" **all laugh**

BRITNEY:

I have this great fascination with Star Trek games. Like, every time they introduce a game or sport I'm just like "Can someone just write one paper, like just a one page paper about how this might be played? Because this is fascinating on a number of levels." And I don't know if all of those levels make sense.

SUE:

I think you can buy and play 3D chess.

ANDI:

Just as long as Anbo-jyutsu does not become a thing.

BRITNEY:

Oh, definitely not. *laughs* No.

GRACE:

I'm still holding out for Kadis-kot personally.

ANDI:

What's the game in Move Along Home? Because I would play that to be honest.

BRITNEY:

I would point Parisses squares, even though apparently that has a high mortality rate. *Andi laughs*

GRACE:

Apparently it can kill you.

SUE:

The best part of that episode, for me, is really a Picard line. And this is a Picard episode. But when he says to Data, and I know this isn't exact, but it's something like "It's possible to do all of the right things and still lose." Like, that is such an important thing.

BRITNEY:

That was an amazing line I think.

GRACE:

And just a really good moral to take away.

BRITNEY:

Yeah, because Data has never really failed without something going wrong with him. And so this is his first failure as a living being where he probably could not have done anything about it. And so his first taste of helplessness led him to this weird cycle of just indecision and insecurity.

And Voyager kind of does that with the doctor later on. But I was really- I really loved that moment here when, you know, Picard kind of knocks him out a destructive cycle.

ANDI:

I just think it's a really nice message. And also on Tumblr you can see that Picard line right next to Beyonce saying basically the same thing, and then a whole lot of people going "Well, obviously Beyonce needs to be the next Star Trek captain" which-

BRITNEY:

Can you send me that? I have never seen that and I must.

ANDI:

Absolutely, I will. I will send it to you, I will put it in our show notes too cuz why not? *Sue laughs* Captain Beyonce. Actually fun fact too, that once Jarrah and I were trying to think of all the ships that are named for women in Star Trek, and she was making up a full list and they were like very few. And so we were thinking about what we would name ships in the Star Trek universe, and I was like "USS Beyonce" and we were like "Yeeees!" So that needs to be a thing.

SUE:

I'm always thinking about- I mean like Futurama did it when Fry is like listening to the 90s grunge music or something and they're like "Turn off that classical music!" And they have all these ships named like the Tchaikovsky and everything. And I'm like, imagine like the USS Taylor Swift in 400 years. *all laugh*

GRACE:

The USS Gaga.

SUE:

That's classical music. *laughs* The USS Beyonce.

ANDI:

I would 100 percent serve on that ship.

BRITNEY:

laughing I would too. Like, her sister ship Jay-Z is off in the badlands. *all laugh*

SUE:

Oh my gosh.

ANDI:

So that went into a fun place. Are there other episodes we have to talk about?

SUE:

Yes! So there's something that I didn't know, I learned from one of our commenters that apparently Michael Dorn in some of the the special features on the Blu rays says that if Pulaski stuck around they were going to possibly develop a romantic relationship between Pulaski and Worf.

ANDI:

Oh my God!

BRITNEY:

I would be there for that.

GRACE:

Can you match abrasive to abrasive? The beginning of that apparently was hinted at in Up The Long Ladder.

ANDI:

I love- that is my favorite Pulaski scene where her and Worf drink Klingon tea together, and she's just such a bad ass in that scene.

BRITNEY:

Yes. And I did like the fact that she was there on his rites of ascension. I really liked it, because you have her and all those other guys. But she's there repping her care for Worf. And I appreciate that they included her in that.

ANDI:

Plus, you know that Worf wouldn't have a problem with her being, you know, aggressive towards him. He'd like that.

GRACE:

It's a turn-on for him.

BRITNEY:

I have no idea if it's appropriate for podcasts, but- I can't remember where I heard it, but-

GRACE:

laughing Just say it anyway.

BRITNEY:

Yeah. If someone was like, you know, with Klingons it doesn't seem like sex is a thing they that they do together. It seems like it's something that just happens *to them* independently. *all laugh*

SUE:

I've seen people joke about like, Klingon kink being like-

ANDI:

Oh my gosh that's what I was just about to say! *Sue laughs* It's like the Klingon version of BDSM is like cuddling gently. *All laugh*

SUE:

Or "normal-ing" as they call it on 30 Rock. *Andi laughs* But I don't think we can have a Pulaski episode without talking about Unnatural Selection.

ANDI:

Yeah. I think this is kind of the definitive Pulaski episode. I mean, there are a lot of episodes in which she is heavily featured. The first ones that came to my mind were the Elementary Dear Data one. But this is the one that she is- it's about *her*. Does somebody want to give us kind of an overview of Unnatural Selection?

BRITNEY:

Sure, I'll jump in there. So Unnatural Selection is the Enterprise encounters a derelict ship. They find that everyone there is dead and old, and so they trace the ship's steps, and they find Darwin Station where everyone there is old but not yet dead. And they beam aboard one of their genetically modified children and Picard and Pulaski get into it, because you know, they're dealing with a pathogen that nobody knows how it spreads or what's going on. So she finally just settles on examining the boy in a ship, in a shuttlecraft, and she is infected with this pathogen. And they go back to Darwin Station, because it's on full quarantine. And it looks like the pathogen is because of a mutated virus, because these kids are genetically modified to have *super* immune systems, and their immune systems attack the pathogen *before* it entered them, mutated the pathogen, and now it causes everyone to get old and die.

ANDI:

I love your technical term of "old and dead." *Britney laughs*

GRACE:

Well, if the shoe fits.

ANDI:

I'm pretty sure that's how Pulaski puts it too. *all laugh* It's not *quite* that way, but it boils down to "They're old and they're dead."

GRACE:

"Captain. Everyone here is old and dead."

ANDI:

Do we think this is a good episode for her? I had extremely mixed feelings when I was watching it.

GRACE:

It is certainly *an* episode for her. *Andi laughs*

BRITNEY:

There's mixed feelings on my part too. Because first off: I thought genetically engineering children, or any humanoid specifically humans, was illegal. Read Julian Bashir, read augments, read Khan.

SUE:

Andi, cover your ears.

BRITNEY:

Oh crap! I'm sorry.

ANDI:

No, don't worry about it. I didn't understand, so it can't be spoiler.

GRACE:

Yay!

BRITNEY:

So in all that I was like "First off, this is probably illegal. It's *definitely* illegal. I know this is illegal." But if you get over that hurdle then I think there are some flaws, but in general I felt that Pulaski sold it. I was sold by her at least on this.

ANDI:

I think it's admirable that she- because this is something that I feel is important for all of our doctors, and all of our doctors show very strongly, which is when people are hurt or in pain or in need of medical attention all of them will do just about anything to get them that medical attention. And you see that in a lot of different ways. I mean Bashir, I just finished Deep Space Nine season one. And I mean the most likable times that he was- the most likable moments for him are when he was being a doctor and like being very professional. And I think that's true here as well, where Pulaski's main goal here is to do her job, and I really respond to that. The thing that I'm not so happy with is she goes to Picard and says "I am 100 percent certain it is safe to, I guess, unlock this guy. And I promise it's safe." And then it wasn't. If he had let her do that she would have infected the entire ship. And that, I think, undermines her a lot. And makes it hard to be on her side, because she really almost just destroyed them all.

BRITNEY:

Yeah, I agree. I mean it seems like the narrative is saying Picard should be censured, I guess? Or at least just a little bit for not letting her help these people. But I'm like "No, he's the captain. And this is what he has to be concerned over." Because he pretty much quickly gave in as soon as a viable option presented itself, which was the shuttle craft.

ANDI:

Yeah. And they have that scene where she's like ready to fight him, and he's like "Yeah OK. Do it." And she's like "Wait, what?" He was like "You clearly listened to what I had to say and my concerns, and found a solution. So do it." And she was like "Oh." I'm like "Really?" I mean, he's not saying "No" just to spite you. He's concerned about the safety of his crew, which is his number one job. So yeah, mixed feelings on that one.

BRITNEY:

Yeah.

ANDI:

And I mean, can we take a moment and just talk about for a second the whole McCoy slash Pulaski thing? Because this is also the episode where it makes it really clear that she is not willing to use the transporter, which is one of McCoy's most famous quirks. Why does McCoy work so well and Pulaski not work as well?

GRACE:

Probably because the transporters are supposed to be safer by then.

ANDI:

Yeah, but I'm sorry, I mean they have that whole episode too where they're making fun of Barclay for being afraid of the transporter, and then he goes into the transporter and like flying things attack his face. Like I'm sorry, but I think a fear of the transporter is a completely legitimate fear. Especially since they're having malfunctions all over the place. But I just- I think that's one of the very strong parallels they tried to draw between them, and I don't know- I'm not even specifically talking about this particular quirk. I just- why do I love McCoy so much and have such mixed feelings on Pulaski?

SUE:

I think part of it is sexism. Like, that comment addressed before. You know, what if- "Would these characteristics be annoying if they were in a male character?" But part of it is that it is done before. It is so obvious that she is supposed to be a female version of McCoy that it gets to the point that every reference back to it is just like an annoyance.

ANDI:

That, and I just don't think she has the same humor.

BRITNEY:

Her kind of humor doesn't really work with what they were trying to go for. And like you said, we've already seen this. And a shortcut feels like a shortcut, especially if you can't execute the shortcut. And so this is a handwave-y form of "See? She's a normal human. And she is just like this crew, and she has quirks, and this crew will love her and she'll love them, and they'll just giggle over the transporter thing."

ANDI:

Anything more to say on Unnatural Selection?

BRITNEY:

That old age makeup was impressive for the time, it did her no favors. *all laugh* Oh, that seems rather shallow I suppose but I was just like "Man. She's so beautiful. What is this?"

SUE:

Even though when she came on the show she said, you know, she is very excited to be back in science fiction and happy to be working with Gene Roddenberry again, ultimately Muldaur's experience on Next Gen was not a happy one. She apparently really hated that makeup in Unnatural Selection, which caused her to apparently swear that she'd never work in science fiction again.

ANDI:

Ouch.

GRACE:

Yikes.

SUE:

When she left the show- over the years she's given a couple different interviews where some of the things she said were kind of *sad* to hear from somebody on a show that we love so much. She said that "The imagination and the joy wasn't there." She said that "Everyone was out for themselves. I don't think they were happy to have me there." But I guess the somewhat uplifting thing that's in an interview in the Los Angeles Daily News from 1990 is "I wasn't what it hoped it would be. I thought it would be wonderfully inventive and wonderfully creative, and I found it was not any of those things. But it did give me Trekkies. I love Trekkies. I find them very dear."

BRITNEY:

Aw! We love you too.

SUE:

And it's good to know that the fans are a positive thing, especially when you've had such a bad experience on a show. That the people who love the show can maybe make it better?

ANDI:

Yeah. Especially since she's one of those characters that I think is not popular in general. I was really impressed that a lot of our listeners who sent in comments did have some really thoughtful things to say, and a lot of them had, you know, positive thoughts towards her, and I think that's cool. But I know that when I was first Trekking her season I just got barrages of complaints about her character. I do not think that her character was a positive one overall for people, and I don't think it's a popular one. So I'm glad that apparently that hasn't translated in her being abused by fans, because that can happen. And it's a really ugly side of fandom, and I would be really sad to hear that Trekkies would do that to her. So I'm glad that at least that part of it was positive for her.

BRITNEY:

Me too. And I kind of think that in the age of Netflix, you know we're not taping things on VHS anymore and then re-taping over stuff, that you can kind of see the body of work. And I think Enterprise is kind of going through a resurgence, and they're getting new fans, and they're saying "Well, it's not as bad as it was." Because, you know, now we can just binge, and watch, and say "You know all these flaws I thought were really super bad? They're not, they're not so bad. There's potential here." And so maybe this is Pulaski's chance to kind of be rehabilitated. I don't think she'll be a character that people love per se, but she'll be a character where we'll say "Man, there was some missed potential. I think she's kind of awesome, but I see where the criticisms come from." And so I think she might actually get more fans.

ANDI:

Yeah. I mean, in the end I liked her in a lot of ways. I liked her straightforwardness. I liked the way she stuck to her guns. I liked the way that she would challenge people, think all of that is good. I just wish it had been executed better.

SUE:

It's interesting to me that so many of our comments sort of have that same kind of theme of "First time around I was put off by her." But as an adult or as a second time watcher a lot of people are coming around to that character.

BRITNEY:

I like to see that.

SUE:

Any last thoughts to add?

GRACE:

Mistakes were made. *Sue laughs*

BRITNEY:
Bad decisions happen.

ANDI:
She banged Riker's Dad.

SUE:
Exactly what I expected. *all laugh* And that pretty much wraps it up for us today. Britney, where can everybody find you on the interwebs?

BRITNEY:
I don't really have a big Internet presence, but I am on Facebook at the Babel Conference. So if you think I'm interesting and you want to have some good conversation everyone over there is pretty cool. I am obviously pretty cool. *Andi laughs* So, hop on.

ANDI:
Well put.

SUE:
Britney was also one of our frequent commenters on the Women at Warp Facebook page.

BRITNEY:
What can I say? Women at Warp is fantastic. *all "aaw"*

GRACE:
No, *you're* fantastic.

SUE:
So Andi, what about you?

ANDI:
The easiest way to find me is on Twitter @firsttimetrek where I am currently in the second season of DS9. You can also check out my archive project where I'm collecting my Next Generation tweets at firsttimetrek.Tumblr.com

SUE:
And Grace?

GRACE:
You can find me most easily on Twitter @BoneCrusherjenk, or you can read my writing at the Mythcreants blog.

SUE:

Awesome. And I'm Sue and I blog and podcast as well over at anomalypodcast.com. That's a n
o m a l y podcast dot com. Thanks so much for listening and we'll talk to you soon.