

Women at Warp Episode 184: Dopey Utopian BS Transcript

Jarrah: Hi and welcome to Women at Warp, a Star Trek podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore Intersectional Diversity in Infinite Combinations. My name's Jarrah and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Andi...

Andi: Hello.

Jarrah: ...and Sue.

Sue: Hi there.

Jarrah: And our main topic today is the classic Star Trek episode "City on the Edge of Forever," but before we get into that we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. First of all, 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 watchalong commentaries. Visit patreon.com/womenatwarp. And if you're looking for podcast merch, check out our TeePublic store. There are so many designs with new ones being added all the time. The designs come on so much more than just t-shirts. There's coffee cups, there's masks, there's notebooks, there's stickers, etc. Lots of cool stuff. Find it at teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp.

And we also have a special announcement today, which is that we have some birthdays coming up. Matt and Gray's birthdays, which are coming up on—wait, they're no longer on the calendar! *Andi laughs*

Sue: Oh no!

Andi: What happened?

Jarrah: Something must have been set wrong in history. We have to go back!

Sue: Edith Keeler must die.

Jarrah: Oh, they just reappeared again. February 15th, apparently. The *Enterprise* crew must have gone back and let someone get hit by a truck. *Andi & Sue laugh*

Sue: Oh my gosh.

Andi: Well, thanks to them for that!

Jarrah: But seriously, very, very, very happy birthday to Matt and Gray. And hopefully you don't get accidentally wiped out of existence ever again.

Andi: Knock on wood.

Jarrah: Yeah. [knocking sound] Alright, so "City on the Edge of Forever," just coincidentally to that whole thing that just happened. Do we have to summarize this episode, because it's *so* classic?

Andi: I think yes, but also I would just like to say that my initial reaction to rewatching this episode is, this one is a banger. *Sue & Andi laugh*

Sue: This is one of those episodes that for me is a lot like *Star Trek IV*, "the one with the whales," right? Where I kind of forget the framing story because of the stuff in the middle.

Jarrah: Oh, totally. And I think that's also partly because the framing story changed so significantly from the original drafts. We'll go into this a bit. We did have a request from one of our Twitter followers to go into the script differences. But, if I was gonna summarize this in—let's see if I can do it in three sentences. McCoy goes temporarily mad and goes down to a planet where he jumps through a time portal and ends up in the past. And as a result, the Nazis win World War II. Kirk and Spock follow him through the time portal, which is called "The Guardian of Forever," and they figure out that what needs to happen for the Nazis to not win World War II is that a woman who runs a soup kitchen named Edith Keeler has to die. So they let her die, the Nazis don't win World War II, and they find Dr. McCoy and they all go home and it's sad. Oh, and Kirk and Edith Keeler fall in love in between.

Sue: She's a social worker and activist.

Jarrah: Yes.

Sue: I don't think it's fair to call her "a woman who runs a soup kitchen."

Jarrah: I mean, I'm very much looking forward to talking more about the woman—the real-life character that she's based on—but yes, that is correct. As with her real-life inspiration, Edith Keeler is one of the more complex Kirk love

interests. We talked a fair amount about her in one of our very first episodes on Kirk's love interests. I definitely feel like she came out towards the top of the pack on that one.

Andi: Well, I think she is a super interesting, complex character that for once doesn't boil down to Kirk's love interest. You know what I mean?

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Andi: A lot of the female characters on the show, everything that they are just kind of boils down to that, whereas she actually has her own arc and motivations and all of those things that are usually missing. Which is nice.

Sue: Mm-hmm.

Andi: More of that please.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: You know, in re-watching this episode I was thinking back to our Mirror Universe speculation episode.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Sue: When we were trying to find the divergence point between the Mirror Universe and the Prime Universe, and I started wondering if it was this event.

Jarrah: Mmm... That could make sense.

Sue: 'Cause the earliest time I think that we could determine from canon of a divergent point was World War II.

Andi: I've heard that theory before.

Sue: Hmm.

Andi: That this was the genesis of the Mirror Universe. I think it's a cool idea. I don't know if we'll ever know for sure or that we *should* ever know for sure, but I certainly like tying it back in to the larger mythology of the show, I think is fun.

Jarrah: Hmm. That's super interesting. It also means that, if you're gonna carry that forward... So at the beginning of the episode they go down to this planet where there's The Guardian of Forever, and after McCoy disappears through it they can no longer contact the *Enterprise*. And so Kirk basically says, 'We're gonna go through. Uhura and Scotty, you should just go make your own lives somewhere. And just live as best you can. Sorry, bye.' It's actually a very high-stakes moment, but that would mean that Prime Uhura and Scotty also were in the Mirror Universe, just having lost everything.

Sue: I think that's too much time travel and parallel universes to examine in this episode that is not about that.

Andi: But it's still a fun thought exercise.

Jarrah: Well, one parallel universe that we should look at a little bit is the original outline and scripts—multiple scripts—by Harlan Ellison. And I will say that there's a lot of back-and-forth that you can find if you read *These Are the Voyages*. It's also referenced in *Inside Star Trek: The Real Story* by Bob Justman and Herb Solow. And if you read those you will get the full sausagefest outlined about all the back-and-forth disputes between Harlan Ellison and Gene Roddenberry on whose script was better. But how much do you folks know about this, the whole dispute and what was changed from the original?

Andi: The only thing I remember hearing is that Harlan Ellison wanted it to be much more pure sci-fi and he didn't like jazzing it up with all of the character beats.

Jarrah: Hmm. So there's definitely some truth to that. I think that largely what people seem to be able to agree on is that Harlan Ellison's original concepts would've been really, really ridiculously expensive to produce. And he was someone that Gene Roddenberry approached very early on, along with Robert Bloch and Theodore Sturgeon and some other classic sci-fi writers to give Star Trek sci-fi cred.

Sue: Before we get letters, I believe it's Robert Bloch.

Jarrah: Oh, thank you. But he also was quite the procrastinator, and so after the first couple outlines, especially when people kept giving him feedback to cut things or change things to make them cheaper, he really started to kind of drag his feet, turning in other scripts, and really didn't like the proposed changes that they were making to try to eliminate what the producers saw as unnecessarily expensive moments or new characters. Like, so McCoy, for example, wasn't

originally a featured character, but they're like, 'Well, we're already paying this actor, so why are we gonna hire this guy to play a guest crew member we've never met when it could just be Dr. McCoy?' Same with Scotty having a role. Originally the idea was that there would be a random crew member who is a drug dealer, and when the person he is supplying drugs to threatens to report him to Kirk, he kills the man and he flees down to the planet to escape. Oh, no, sorry—he doesn't flee down to the planet, he's actually put to trial and then sentenced to death by firing squad on the nearest planet.

Andi: What the??

Jarrah: Yeah, so partly this was that he was also writing it before much of the show had even happened. So they were filming some of the first episodes, but he didn't really have a good sense of what Gene Roddenberry was going for. He thought that it should be like any other military ship where you would have some kind of shady characters. And so originally it's this guy who's a drug dealer and a murderer who flees through the portal when they go down to this planet to shoot him.

Andi: Okay, so I have thoughts on some of Gene Roddenberry's writing decisions over time. But in this case, Team Gene's Vision.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Andi: That's all very ridiculous. It doesn't fit in Star Trek. It also undermines a lot of the themes of this episode and just overall sounds like terrible ideas that should have been cut. And if he's still salty about it, he can cry more.

Jarrah: Well, he's dead now, but, uh...

Andi: I almost said he can die mad about it, but then I figured he was probably already dead, so I didn't say that.

Jarrah: There were other things that kind of diverged from the way that the characters were written. And other things just like, you know, he wrote a part for Janice Rand in it, who by that time was no longer on the show. Another thing that was cited as sort of not really adhering to the character was that when Spock and Kirk arrive on Earth in the past they encounter a man who's whipping up people who are homeless into a frenzy against the foreigners. And Spock and Kirk get chased by this mob. And Spock gets really upset about how humans are barbarians, and there's some language in the original that calls them 'more savage than any aboriginal culture' or something like that, which is gross.

Then basically Spock yells at Kirk, like, ‘I should have left you to the mob!’ So obviously that kind of stuff wasn’t where the characters were going, and so there was a bit of a misunderstanding there. And then there was just stuff that was really expensive. Like The Guardians of Forever were supposed to be nine-foot-tall, like a group of nine-foot-tall giants.

Andi: Now *that* could’ve been cool.

Jarrah: Yeah. And then it was supposed to be like rain falling between pillars? So he was quite disappointed with what the final Guardian of Forever looked like.

Andi: I mean, sorry.

Jarrah: They did say, basically, ‘We can’t have our crew member dealing drugs and killing someone.’ *Andi laughs*

Andi: I’m sorry, that’s just funny. Like, ‘Um, actually, that’s not quite the vibe.’

Jarrah: Yeah. Then they said, basically, ‘Well, we have to make someone go temporarily mad.’ And he [Ellison] wanted them to be bitten by an alien dog? And Robert Justman pointed out, like, ‘Do you remember how hard it was to try to make a dog look alien before?’

Andi: The unicorn dog! Classic, iconic.

Jarrah: And so D. C. Fontana came up with cordrazine and the thing about McCoy accidentally injecting himself.

Andi: So I will say that I do feel like that framing device is the weakest part of this episode, but it’s also just—it’s not really that big of a deal. It’s just a framing device really. It’s just a way to get them from place to place. If they’d had more time maybe they could have come up with something that made a little bit more sense and was cooler, but it’s not as bad as this dude thinks it was.

Sue: Maybe it’s a difference between ‘60s TV and today’s TV, but I think if this episode were made today, in alternate universe land, that we wouldn’t have had that framing device. We’re so used to our starships or, ‘Oh, they show up at a planet and they beam down and they look around.’

Andi: Yeah. But it’s not Doctor Who; they don’t have time travel usually. There has to be a reason.

Sue: But like, ‘Hey, go investigate this temporal anomaly.’ ‘Okay.’

Andi: Yeah but why would they run through it? Maybe they get sucked through it. See? Fixed. Done.

Sue: And you can lose that entire weird framing story.

Jarrah: Yeah, that’s a good idea.

Sue: It also makes me think of the question—this idea of hiring famous science fiction writers to write for your TV show that was *brand new*: is it a good idea? Especially when, I mean, this is the end of the first season, so it’s written far before this, before much is produced is what I’m trying to say. And you haven’t quite established character yet, and you haven’t established a lot of your show and your vibe and your tone. So I know, like, ‘Oh, Neil Gaiman’s coming in to write some Doctor Who.’ Okay, great. But, you know, Neil Gaiman was a fan of Doctor Who growing up. There was no Star Trek to be a fan of before this point where these writers are writing these episodes in their style, not necessarily in the show’s style.

Andi: I think it’s not a bad idea, especially if you’re doing pitching. As long as it’s super clear that in the end your ideas may not survive. And I think that’s where you start to run into problems: you get a guy like Harlan Ellison who’s like, ‘My precious, precious words! They could never be,’ you know, ‘improved,’ or whatever.

Sue: ‘How dare you touch my words?’

Andi: Exactly. And nowadays TV writing is a much more understood craft, and if you get someone like Neil Gaiman—even if it’s a new show—he’s gonna understand that he’s writing a part of a whole.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Andi: Whereas I think Harlan Ellison is just kind of a singular writer and not really into collaborating like that, and not used to that process. So probably just a mix of ego and communication issues and just difference of time and... But I still like the idea of having cool sci-fi writers who have cool ideas come in and pitch ideas that then get developed by the team that’s working on the show.

Jarrah: I mean, The Snod [Melinda Snodgrass] was writing novels before she wrote for Star Trek. But yeah, I mean, as you point out, there was more Star

Trek out by that point. But also if Gene hadn't approached these sci-fi writers, then we never would've ended up with such gems as "Wolf in the Fold." *Andi laughs* That was sarcasm, folks.

Andi: I think they cracked your code.

Jarrah: Yes. I don't know. Overall, it was an idea worth trying, but the egos were really big in this particular situation. It definitely seems like Robert Justman felt the closest to the original story and was like, 'We can't afford to make this, but it's beautiful.' And what I think is maybe the best behind-the-scenes memo I've ever read, which is Robert Justman saying, 'Sometimes I get the feeling the only way we could achieve a Star Trek segment on budget would be to have 60 minutes of Mr. Spock playing kazoo solo as Captain Kirk holds him in his arms while standing in a telephone booth.'

Sue: Would watch.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: Yeah. I would be down for that. And the thing is, to me the strengths of this episode are the ideas and the character moments. So, that you can always do on a budget.

Jarrah: Yeah. What I'll say is—and I think this probably finishes summarizing the major differences—that maybe one of the most significant differences is, in the original, Kirk and Spock go down to the planet and The Guardian of Forever says, 'History has been set out of whack because your crew member, Beckwith, let this person, Edith Kessler'—or something was her original name—'let her die. So you need to go back and fix this.' And then Edith doesn't actually show up until basically act three. And so they both changed that so that they don't go down knowing exactly what they're there to solve, but also D. C. Fontana wanted to bring up the relationship and build it up more slowly and meaningfully. And I think that most of us would agree that was successful.

Andi: Correct. Correct decision. And honestly, I really like the cold open. I'm not such a fan of the whole McCoy injection stuff, but the rest of it is really good. It's immediately interesting and it throws you right into the plot while still maintaining what's happening. It's really well done.

Jarrah: I am a fan of DeForrest Kelley's reaction acting.

Andi: Oh, he is so good in this episode. They are all so good in this episode, and he just sells the hell out of this. It's so over-the-top, but still believable, and he still has that warmth at the end. I genuinely think he turned in such a powerhouse performance in this one. Such a fan. Do I think that he needed to be injected with goo? No. Do I enjoy the results of the acting that he brought to us? Heck yes. Bring it.

Jarrah: Yeah. I would encourage, if people are curious, to go and to seek out more of the story. You can also find the graphic novels of Harlan Ellison's version of "City on the Edge of Forever," which someone naturally drew a Harlan Ellison cameo into. 'Cause that is the level of his ego. But it is interesting and I think that largely it does seem like the writers agreed that, in adapting it, they did lose something of the beauty and the style of the original, even if we all agree that it might not have made a very good Star Trek episode. So, looking at the episode itself, did you have any thoughts on how it turned out? Any themes or moments you want to raise?

Andi: I'm sorry, did I not cover it all when I said it was a banger? *Sue & Jarrah laugh* No, I really, really love this episode. This was the second time I've seen it, so it's still pretty fresh for me, and I still was watching it and I was like, 'This is the sci-fi rom com of my dreams.' It's really well paced. The acting performances are all amazing. I actually truly believe the chemistry between Keeler and Kirk. This might be my favorite sassy Spock episode. He is so sassy and it's so entertaining. It's pretty much—with the exception of the McCoy framing, which I still think is overall the weakest part of this episode, even though I don't mind it, and the super cringy racist storytelling about Spock being Chinese or whatever—I'd say this is as close to perfect as a Star Trek episode gets, especially since it's tackling these lofty ideas, but it's doing it in such a human way and focusing it through the prism of our characters and their feelings, which is always my preference. So yeah, as I said, banger.

Sue: So this is very much, I think, my asexual perspective, but it's always kind of bothered me that Kirk is in love with Edith Keeler. I mean, I don't know how long they've been there. I don't know how long it takes people to fall in love, but being in love with her shouldn't be necessary for not wanting to see her die.

Andi: True. But I still think they had a connection that they explored quite beautifully. I don't think that, from a storytelling perspective, them falling in love is necessary, but I think it adds an extra dimension to the sadness, I guess?

Jarrah: Yeah, I would agree. I think it shouldn't be necessary, and actually, I believe it's in the original that Kirk can't bring himself to let her die and Spock

has to, but I think that it adds more to the sense of pain at the end of it. Because he's not just able to be an objective Starfleet officer. But there are obviously other ways of caring deeply about someone.

Sue: But doesn't that just mean that she's fridged essentially?

Jarrah: I wouldn't agree, 'cause I think that she gets a fair amount of fleshing-out of her character, and they also talk about her impact and how she had the right idea but at the wrong time. I think that she gets enough of a role that it doesn't count as fridging.

Sue: Not in the most obvious way, but I guess it's just always kind of bothered me that they have to make it a love story in order for people to show that they care about each other. And not just in this episode, but in media in general. There doesn't always need to be a love story.

Jarrah: Yeah, that's definitely true. I think though that there is a risk of overusing the term "fridging" for just any time a woman dies and a man is upset about it. It has to be okay for people of all genders to die and have meaningful deaths in media. 'Cause death is also a part of life. So for me it's more about the character: did we get to see them as they would want to be seen, I guess is kind of how I think about it. And if you have a character that—I would say K'Ehleyr, who we get some good moments with, but ultimately their death has zero influence on the plot other than just to make Worf upset. Whereas Edith Keeler's death is actually quite important to the plot.

Sue: That's a fair point, for sure.

Andi: Plus they just look so cute at each other. When it comes to shipping, nothing pings my shipper heart like gazing longingly. That's the thing. Like, kissing, meh, okay, fine, I'll take it. But it's the staring that gets me, and they do some epic staring. And also I would like to add, if you are a Kirk/Spock shipper, this one's pretty funny.

Jarrah: Oh, so good.

Sue: It's so funny. The whole time Spock is like, 'Really man?'

Jarrah: Yeah. Well, and there's that epic shipper Kirk/Spock shipper line where Spock is like, basically, 'Where do we belong?' And she's like, 'You at his side where you always have been and always will be,' or basically something like that. And he's like, 'Oh, you're right. Well played.' *Andi laughs*

Andi: I definitely think there's a way to read it as Spock being jealous in some ways. There are some times when they focus on his face in a conversation where his reaction should not really be necessary, or at least not to the extent that they keep flashing back to his face, especially since his face is annoyed. So to me it reads as jealousy. I don't know if they did that on purpose and were just trying to portray platonic jealousy or just him being annoyed with Kirk being all flirty when they've got shit to do. I don't know, but I feel like there's a case to be made for reading it that way, and it's certainly very funny.

Jarrah: Yeah. Or maybe he's disapproving because he recognizes that anything they do has the potential to mess up the timeline?

Andi: Yeah. There's lots of ways to interpret it, I think, which is the joy of Spock as a character to me. Because his feelings are so nuanced and also he doesn't express them very strongly, you can make a case for lots of different feelings for him.

Jarrah: I do like also that part of the reason that he [Kirk] falls for her is because of her optimism. That she almost belongs in the future based on the way that she views the world and wants to see peace. And our listener and friend of the show, Anika, said, 'I dream of the AU where the solution is to bring Edith to the future.'

Andi: Oh, that's lovely. Yeah. There's the line where Kirk and Edith Keeler are talking and she says something about how she really wants to live in a world where they spend the money on—instead of spending the money on war and death, and Kirk's like, 'They spend it on life,' and she's like, 'Exactly.' And I'm just like, 'Oh god, I want to go to there too, girl.' It's the same struggle that we have fifty-some years later or whatever. That's one reason why some of Harlan Ellison trying to keep his original story—the optimism of Star Trek, especially *The Original Series*, was just so inspiring. To me, that exchange just gets to the heart of why I love Star Trek. Not only are they looking towards a brighter future, but they're explicitly saying that that brighter future is one where war doesn't exist, and we spend our money on life. So it kills me that people think Star Trek is not political. Look at this episode, which is one of the most quintessential Star Trek episodes ever, and it's very political. It's explicitly making a value judgment on what our current society spends its money on and deems as important, and I don't understand how you could miss it.

Sue: It's interesting to me that they portray her almost as a prophet. You know, especially when she's talking about what will be possible in the future.

Harnessing energy—how is a social worker gonna know about splitting the atom?

Jarrah: Especially ‘cause it was in the thirties.

Sue: Yeah, right. And spaceships, other than in movies or books? And it’s a very Roddenberry speech. But the note in our outline that Ellison called it “dopey utopian bullshit” is super great, but also a great description of Star Trek.

Andi: Yes! I love it. Sign me up. We need to put that on a t-shirt. *Sue & Andi laugh* Well, you talk about how she’s framed as a prophet: it’s completely true, but she’s also framed as specifically a leftist. Re-watching it now, years later—because the first time I watched this was probably 2014 or so, so it’s been a rough couple years, y’all—watching this with 2022 eyes is very, like, ‘Homegirl was a comrade.’

Jarrah: Okay, so do you wanna hear about the real person that Edith Keeler was based on?

Andi: Absolutely!

Jarrah: I’m filling Grace’s role in this episode, of the digression of historical trivia. Although there’s no murder, but there is a potentially fake kidnapping.

Andi: Ooh.

Jarrah: So have either of you heard of Aimee Semple McPherson?

Andi: No.

Sue: Yes, “Mc-Pheer-son.”

Jarrah: *pronouncing correctly* McPherson. Okay. So Harlan Ellison was reading a biography about her and thought, ‘What would happen if Kirk met someone like this, who was so good and pure and decent, but basically had to die for history to be put right?’ So, Sue, what do you know about Aimee Semple McPherson?

Sue: Well, I know that there is a Broadway musical based on her life...

Jarrah: Amazing.

Sue: ... called *Scandalous* ...

Jarrah: Okay!

Sue: ...with book and lyrics by Kathy Lee Gifford.

Jarrah: Um, this is blowing my mind. *Sue & Andi laugh*

Sue: It was on Broadway a couple years back, probably a decade or so now, and it was not good. But it was entertaining.

Andi: Hey, I am all for entertaining. Doesn't need to be good.

Sue: So yeah, I have seen her life story portrayed on stage. But shout-out to Carolee Carmello who carried that show on her back. *Andi & Sue laugh*

Jarrah: Okay. Amazing. So, McPherson was a controversial American Pentecostal evangelist and early radio preacher who founded the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. She's a really interesting figure because she both, I would say, is a better person and a worse person than Edith Keeler...

Sue: Yes, uh huh.

Jarrah: ...by my moral standards. So she definitely was cutting-edge for women evangelicals in many ways. She partly rebelled against some of her mother's Salvation Army teachings as a child by attending movies and dances. In high school she started what turned into a lifelong anti-evolution crusade, when she wrote to a paper to protest taxpayer-funded teaching of evolution in schools, and later she supported the prosecution in the Scopes Monkey Trial. She married a Pentecostal evangelist named Robert J. Semple at age 17 and converted. And I'm gonna skip over some things 'cause there's honestly a lot of interesting stuff in her life. Well, I'll put an interesting *Smithsonian Magazine* article in the show notes. But after the end of her second marriage, she became a full-time evangelist and faith healer. She spoke in tongues and encouraged speaking in tongues and traveled through the U.S. and internationally. She eventually made her headquarters in LA and Sunday services were attended by thousands to tens of thousands, depending on who you're asking. They included patriotic and quasi-religious music played by a 50-piece band, prayers and singing, as well as her sermon. So it's a good thing Harlan Ellison didn't put *that* in the script, because that really, really, really would've been too expensive. *Sue laughs* Some of the things where you can see the connection: so, she opened a commissary at her temple, which offered food, clothing, and blankets

to people in need; she was very active in creating soup kitchens, free clinics, and other charitable activities during the Depression; and she refused to distinguish between the quote-unquote “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. Whereas in “City on the Edge of Forever,” we see Edith Keeler make the speech about, basically, ‘If you’re not gonna give up the booze, you need to get out.’ And so her church did a lot of relief work. She supported Hoover, but then supported FDR, and she was very against saying that she was a member of a party. But she liked what FDR did for the poor. She also patronized unions, saying that basically supporting working people—she was essentially talking about working men at the time—getting together to make a better situation for themselves was going to be a better way of using your money than giving it to the wealthy.

Andi: So a complicated lady with nuanced politics here.

Sue: Oh, it gets wilder.

Jarrah: Yeah, so she is perhaps most famous for the time she disappeared for several weeks in 1926 and then turned up in Mexico, claiming to have been kidnapped while at the beach. Then when she came back to the States, over 50,000 people turned out to celebrate her return. And Sue, do you wanna fill in anything else before I cut right to her death? ‘Cause I was trying to save time.

Sue: No, those are the highlights. The faith healing and the speaking in tongues and the...

Jarrah: It definitely made me think of proto-*Righteous Gemstones*.

Sue: Yeah, yeah. And the supposed faked kidnapping.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So there was a lot of controversy about whether she faked it or whether it was real. Eventually she died at age 54 from an overdose of sleeping pills that was declared accidental. And she apparently had some other health problems. So who knows?

Sue: Essentially, if you’re interested in this kind of wild story, look into it.

Jarrah: And also I’m gonna be looking into that terrible, terrible musical, sounds [like].

Sue: Uh, it was so bad.

Jarrah: Was it like bad entertaining?

Sue: Oh, absolutely.

Jarrah: Okay.

Sue: But also it was like Kathy Lee went and bought a rhyming dictionary.
Andi laughs

Andi: That's extremely my jam.

Sue: As you were listening to each song, with each line, you could guess the rhyme and you were playing that game. It was a preview night—not a press night, but an industry night—that's the word. And everybody during act one was trying to be kind, right? And, you know, clap in places and not laugh, but act two, literally everybody in the theater was laughing out loud at the show, and it's just so sad, and they were trying so hard, but the material was just terrible.

Jarrah: And so it was like the *Justice* of musicals?

Sue: No, but like, nobody was buying tickets to it. Nobody. It was hemorrhaging money. But Kathy Lee was also a producer, so she just kept paying for it to keep running. Ooof, I can talk about just that show for an hour, but I won't.

Andi: *singing* Sup-ple-ment-al! *Sue laughs*

Jarrah: Yeah, 'cause I was thinking, I was like, what are we gonna talk about that other people haven't already talked about about this episode?

Andi: Well there you go. Women at Warp! This is our brand, obscure musicals and fake kidnapping plots and...

Jarrah: Complicated women in history.

Andi: You heard it here folks. You heard it here. Oh, that's great.

Jarrah: Yeah. So Edith Keeler, you can definitely see where some of those traits came from in terms of her being a bit of a socialist type. Although Aimee Semple McPherson was also very outspoken against communism, but she's

clearly doing charity. That's basically what she sees as her mission in life. I do think it's maybe no loss that they didn't have Joan Collins try to speak in tongues. *Sue & Andi laugh*

Andi: She could've pulled it off. She could've pulled anything off.

Jarrah: I mean, they obviously tried to keep it a lot more secular, even though they do say they're at a mission. You don't see a lot of religious stuff in the episode.

Sue: I was *just* about to say that, and I wonder whose influence that was. Do we know?

Andi: Gene's.

Sue: But I mean, was it there in the first draft and then Gene took it out, or...?

Jarrah: I don't know, but I don't think so. I have read the graphic novels that are based on the original script, and I don't recall it being a super overt theme. And what we do know is that Edith Keeler didn't even show up until act three in the original. So there probably just wasn't a lot of time. There might have been some notes about decor or something that could have led to that. But I don't think that that was really Harlan Ellison's aim.

Sue: 'Cause missions were, to my knowledge, very focused on not just helping, but also converting.

Jarrah: Yes. And the Salvation Army. And certainly, when I first saw this episode, I immediately thought of *Guys and Dolls*. That was my frame of musical reference where I was just like, 'Oh...'

Sue: Not such an obscure musical.

Jarrah: No.

Andi: Now I wanna see Kathy Lee's take on *Guys and Dolls*.

Sue: It's so bad.

Jarrah: We did have one listener hot take on Twitter about Edith Keeler, who said basically, 'My first impression of Edith Keeler was that she came across as

incredibly naive and a bit childish,’ and then basically ducked to avoid the people criticizing the unpopular opinion. But I said, ‘Look, unpopular opinions are our jam.’

Andi: Yeah, bring it on. I think that’s kind of the point of the episode, isn’t it? That her ideas were not wrong, but that they were misplaced in the time that they were at, and that following those ideas would’ve led to disaster. I mean, the whole point is that she’s naive.

Jarrah: Yeah. So would she be someone who’s tone-policing people online today? *Andi laughs*

Sue: I think it’s... ugh, not to this extreme, but it...this discussion reminds me of the discussions we have now about things like toxic positivity, right? Where you’re just like, ‘Find the good in everything. Only focus on the good stuff.’ No, sometimes you have to focus and deal with the bad stuff.

Andi: Yeah. I think the thing that really differs from her to, say, political philosophy where it is right now is, when it comes to fascist organizing and fascist uprisings, tolerance is not going to get you anywhere. It’s just gonna get you run over. And I think that was true then, and I think it’s true now. And I think that there is maybe a classical liberal idea that you can talk things through, and, if you just get them to see where you’re coming from, maybe you can solve these problems. But that only works if the person or group or movement that you are trying to oppose has an interest in that, and also a moral framework. And if they don’t have those two things, you’re just asking to get crushed. And, in the long run, getting crushed by a fascist uprising is going to end with a lot of people dying and hurt. So, you know, if we’re talking about what the moral thing is to do in that case, in my opinion, it’s to fight. And I think that that’s also the case that they’re making in this episode. That the Nazis needed to be opposed; they could not be appeased.

Jarrah: Yeah. That said, I think that—so first of all, we actually had two opposing takes on this message on Twitter. One of our listeners, @ElRonbo, said that we also should think about the era that it was airing, where at the time the domino theory was the excuse for the U.S. invading Vietnam. And so the message that pacifism would allow an evil empire to win—I would say, ‘could be,’ they said “should be”—seen as a pro-Vietnam War argument. Although then we had people reply and say, ‘I had the opposite take,’ which was essentially what you just articulated, Andi, that it’s when there’s Nazis around you, you can’t just be like, ‘But why can’t we all just get along?’

Andi: Well, I think that's a fair criticism and not wrong. The episode itself is set and framed with World War II, but the show was later than that, and they're absolutely right about the historical context around the political discussions happening then. What I think is that it's like, these are—I hesitate to even use the word “themes,” but themes of history. It's circular. It comes back and forth, and I do think that that's a fair takeaway. That's not how I read it, but I don't think that it's necessarily wrong. I really think that, genuinely, you can usually find an argument to view things through different framing and change the moral conclusions in lots of different ways.

Sue: Knowing the messages that Roddenberry wanted to put forth, I always took Spock's line that she was right but at the wrong time to imply, ‘And now is the right time,’ which would've been 1967. ‘66-‘67.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: Yeah, mm-hmm. Yeah, when the fascists have been defeated.

Sue: Well...

Jarrah: Or so they thought...

Andi: Yeah, well. And, you know, there's prosperity and hope for the future. That's when your society wants to move forward and become more progressive.

Jarrah: Yeah, for sure. I think both things can also be true. We talk about the tension between the intent and the reception and the point at which it was airing in history and the point that we're at now, watching it back all the time, and, for example, the fact that it could be read as pro-Vietnam War might have helped it with censors, but I'm pretty sure that was not the intention, ‘cause I don't think people were thinking of it quite on that level, even though certainly we have Vietnam arguments that people were thinking of in other episodes.

Andi: I think we see the Vietnam influence much stronger in other episodes. And in those cases they were mostly anti-war, so I think just from the context of Star Trek, I struggle to read it as a pro-Vietnam [War] message, but I think you can. Art is so dependent on your own viewpoint. You're always gonna see it through your own experiences, and that's part of the joy of it.

Jarrah: Yeah. I will say that, by and large, the listeners that replied on Twitter very much loved this episode. You know, they had some different reasons why. Another comment that we had was from the Dispatch Ajax! Podcast that said

that it channels the true spirit of Star Trek by challenging its idealism, and said that basically we wouldn't have *DS9* without it. It took me a second to wrap my head around that, but I think that they're right, that it shows the tension between, 'Here's what Star Trek wants to portray as an ideal future, but these values aren't ahistorical.' So, by kind of challenging that, it puts a finer point on what the values are. And then we got a whole series that explores the gray areas several decades later.

Andi: In both history and art, there are usually not easy answers.

Jarrah: Yeah. I think it is maybe fair to re-underline the point about the super racist couple of lines where Kirk is explaining Spock's appearance by saying he's Chinese, which is wrong on multiple levels. And that he got his ears caught in an automatic rice picker. But I think, from a modern audience perspective, what is disappointing to me is the 'Oh wow, Kirk isn't woke' moment. You want Kirk to know that that's offensive. Kirk is from a multicultural future where he has Sulu on the bridge, who is Japanese-American, and the idea that he would think Spock looks Chinese because, I guess—I don't even wanna speculate—it's super offensive and you want Kirk to know that it's super offensive, and he's just like, 'Yeah, this makes logical sense to me.'

Sue: Well, and they reference it and repeat the joke in *The Next Generation* 20 years later with Data in "The Big Goodbye."

Jarrah: Oh, right. Ugh.

Sue: And it's just still wrong.

Andi: It's too bad too because the actual delivery of the line, if you took out the racial connotations, it could be really funny. You can easily see with a little bit of tweaking how well that scene would've worked. 'Cause it's funny from the sense of Spock trying to have to hide his ears and Kirk having to explain Spock in general is a funny concept. It sucks that it was dragged down by this, and it's really the only part of the episode that really, truly does not hold up.

Jarrah: Yeah, and this was an addition by Gene Coon to try to bring some humor into it, and yeah, I have no doubt that people at the time probably found it less problematically funny, and you're right, he could have just been like, 'Oh, he grew up on an orchard and got his head caught in an apple picker,' or something. It didn't have to have a racist connotation.

Andi: It's too bad 'cause the delivery is quite charming.

One thing that I'd like to talk about that stands out to me about this episode that I really enjoy is the ending, specifically the tone of the ending. I have a soft spot in my heart for the 'Aww shucks, didn't we just have a grand adventure' endings. I really, really do. I think they're charming and a throwback and most of the time they make me smile. The fact that they so starkly did not do this in this episode, I think, makes it even the more powerful, where Kirk is just depressed at the end of this and you can feel it coming off of him. And he's just like, 'Some days I really hate my job. And today is one of those days' kind of vibe to him. I really enjoy it. And I think just tone-wise it's really powerful.

Jarrah: Yeah, I agree. We had another comment from CM200 that I think speaks maybe a bit to that—the tension around the Harlan Ellison storyline and is this Star Trek—where they said, 'This is an outstanding era of television that proves when you give Shatner the chance to act, he can break your heart, but it also feels like a departure from the format to that point. Is it such a departure that it's no longer Star Trek, though? I'm on the fence. By that I mean we're used to Kirk battling the alien/moral dilemma of the week and ultimately learning something about humanity in the process. In "City on the Edge of Forever," we ultimately have a love story with a tragic ending. Great television? Undoubtedly. But great Star Trek?'

Andi: I always struggle against the idea of Star Trek being any one thing anyway. You have *Wrath of Khan* and *The One with the Whales* and *Undiscovered Country* and *The Motion Picture* all being in the same movie universe even—and they're all completely different films. So I struggle with this idea of true Star Trek or one definition for Star Trek. Because, to me, Star Trek is just as much "Sub Rosa" as it is "The Inner Light."

Jarrah: Yep.

Sue: I see what they're saying in that it's a departure of what there was up to that point.

Andi: That's fair.

Sue: But up to that point, there was not even a full season of Star Trek. And now there are 55 years of Star Trek.

Jarrah: It speaks to the quality of the first season of *The Original Series* that we feel that there was such a canonical voice established so early on, because we would never necessarily be like, 'Oh, we should really hold everyone to what they did at the beginning of *The Next Generation* for the first seven

episodes. That set the tone and we should just stick with that.’ So I think it’s partly because there was so much great Star Trek in the first season of *The Original Series*.

Sue: So, I see what the comment is saying about this being a departure of what came before up to that point. But from this point on, this became an episode that set the tone for a lot of the franchise.

Jarrah: And I think in some ways, some of the episodes that a lot of people consider great Star Trek are those ones that kind of actually break new ground, like “In the Pale Moonlight.” I know it’s divisive, but it is one that a lot of fans consider the best because it was a departure from what came before.

Andi: I think it goes back to what I was saying about the ending, whereas if you establish conventions and then break them, it tends to leave more of an impact. So I like that comment, but I’m not entirely sure that I agree with it.

Jarrah: Yeah, me too.

Andi: We got some really good thought-provoking comments on this one. I think it matches the tone of the episode, I’d say.

Jarrah: Yeah, for sure.

Sue: I think that, grand scheme, all considered, I land with you, Andi. Where, ‘Is it Star Trek’ is not a question I like to ask. And if it has Star Trek on it, it’s Star Trek.

Andi: It contains multitudes. *Sue laughs*

Jarrah: And, if it hadn’t happened, then someone would have to go back in time and fix it, ‘cause otherwise the Nazis would win World War II. Well, I guess no, that would be after. But, you know, history would just be wrong. It’d be a whole thing.

Andi: We wouldn’t have a podcast. No. Can’t. No. Not. Not liking that world.

Jarrah: It’s terrible.

Andi: So, if I were to rate this episode, I would give it 9.5 out of 10 Spock ear-hiding hats.

Sue: Oh, you stole mine!

Andi: Sorry!

Jarrah: I mean, to be fair, there aren't a lot of memorable items in this episode.

Sue: I got another one.

Jarrah: The Edith Keeler action figure comes with a teapot and a tray, I believe. I'm also gonna go 9.5 out of 10, and I'm gonna say 9.5 out of 10 cozy plaid flannel shirts.

Andi: He does look so cozy in this episode. I always love seeing Kirk and Spock out of uniform. Ha, ha-ha. *Sue & Jarrah chuckle* No, but really, I do like seeing them in different costumes, and they do get put in a lot of different costumes throughout *TOS* and I always enjoy it. Another one that I also think is a banger is—what's the gangster planet called?

Jarrah: "Piece of the Action" is the episode.

Andi: Yeah. I also really like "Piece of the Action," and I love Kirk sittin' back in his huge suit, puttin' his feet up. This is the same sort of vibe where he looks like a lumberjack almost, but like an urban lumberjack. Super dig it.

Jarrah: Yeah. He was like, you know, a sexy hipster before sexy hipsters were a thing.

Andi: Yes, definitely. No wonder Edith Keeler fell for him.

Sue: I think, for me, I'm gonna take it down a little bit lower and make it 9 out of 10 mnemonic memory circuits.

Jarrah: Oh, that's great.

Well, are there any final thoughts before we wrap up?

Andi: Edith Keeler must die?

Jarrah: Amazing. Okay, well that's about all the time we have for today. Sue, where can people find you on the internet?

Sue: You can find me on Twitter @spaltor. That's S-P-A-L-T-O-R.

Jarrah: And Andi, how about you?

Andi: Yeah, easiest place to find me is Twitter, @FirstTimeTrek, where I very rarely live-tweet Star Trek.

Jarrah: And I'm Jarrah, and you can find me on Twitter @jarrahpenguin. That's J-A-R-R-A-H penguin.

To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit womenatwarp.com, email us at crew@womenatwarp.com, or find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @WomenAtWarp. And thanks so much for listening.

Women at Warp theme music plays

Andi: Can we name this episode 'Dopey Utopian Bullshit'? *Sue laughs*

Sue: I don't think it would appear in iTunes if we did.

Andi: Can we do 'BS'?

Sue: Sure.

Jarrah: I wonder if people reading the title would just think, though, that we're going to bash on the episode the whole time.

Andi: Well, then they would be pleasantly surprised now, wouldn't they?