

Transcript: Women at Warp: A Star Trek Podcast Episode 223, “Turnabout Intruder”

[Women at Warp: A Star Trek Podcast intro]

Andi: Hi, and welcome to Women at Warp: A *Star Trek* Podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional, diversity and infinite combinations. My name is Andi, and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Jarrah.

Jarrah: Hello.

Andi: And special guest, Claire.

Claire: Hello.

Andi: Before we get into our main topic, we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. 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 per month and get awesome rewards, from thanks on social media, up to silly watchalong commentaries. Visit www.patreon.com/womenatwarp.

Looking for podcast merch? Check out our TeePublic store. There are so many designs with new ones being added all the time and on so much more than just T-shirts. Find it at teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp. And also, we have some patron birthdays to give a shoutout to.

Claire: Yay.

Andi: Yay. Happy birthday to Theo, whose birthday is October 4th. Huzzah, Theo.

Claire: Go, Theo. Happy birthday. You kill that birthday.

[laughter]

Claire: You got this. Technically, it's already in the past, so--

Andi: You did have this.

Jarrah: Yes. You'll have it again in 360-- [crosstalk] 58 days. I don't know, whatever.

[laughter]

Andi: Additionally, happy birthday to Amanda, whose birthday is November 3rd.

Jarrah: Go, Amanda.

Andi: Woohoo. Happy birthday. And then lastly, happy birthday to Tracy, whose birthday is December 31st.

Claire: Yeah, Tracy, you show that birthday who's boss.

[laughter]

Claire: And also 2023.

Andi: Yeah. She really closed out 2023 with a big birthday bash, hopefully. So obviously, being a patron is awesome because you get to have us wish you awkward birthday wishes,

but you also occasionally get to pick a topic and even for some tiers, be a guest. And so, this particular topic we're about to be talking about was actually Claire's suggestion for a topic. Claire, do you want to tell us, one, a little bit about yourself, and two, why you chose this episode as a topic? Which is going to be us discussing *Turnabout Intruder*, the infamous episode.

Claire: Yes, sure. I am Claire. I have been watching *Star Trek* for basically my entire life, and I think this is the third time I've been on the show? Maybe?

Andi: Maybe.

Claire: Yeah, let's say yes.

[chuckles]

Andi: Definitely.

Claire: Yes. Confidence. I think *Turnabout Intruder* is a really interesting episode for all the reasons that it's also a really bad episode.

[laughter]

Claire: But I think that it's one of those episodes that people rightly write off as bad but then sort of never really look any deeper at. And I think there's a lot going on under the surface of this episode. So, I'm really happy to be here. Thank you.

Andi: I have to agree, and I'll say that I watched this episode almost 10 years ago when I was first time Trekking it, and I don't think I've watched it since. And I watched it today and was like, "Oh, dang. This is a really interesting episode. I have a lot to say about it," and I'm excited to talk about it. Some background facts on this one. This was the final episode of the original series. It was written by Arthur H. Singer, but the idea was Gene Roddenberry's, and it was directed by Herb Wallenstein and aired June 3rd, 1969. Actually, I was going to do our typical, like, "Hey, can someone do a quick synopsis of this one? If anyone has managed to forget what *Turnabout Intruder* is." But the NBC came out with a press release, which we found in *These Are the Voyages* by Marc Cushman, which is basically like a bible for Jarrah and I whenever we have to talk about an episode.

And I thought the press release was really interesting, so I thought I'd read that for us as our synopsis, and I really enjoyed it. So enjoy this.

From 1969. "A scorned woman wreaks a strange vengeance on Captain Kirk when she manages an exchange of bodies with him and takes command of the Enterprise in *Turnabout Intruder* on NBC Television Network *Star Trek* color cast." I love that. "NBC Television Network *Star Trek* color cast of Friday, March 28th. Dr. Janice Lester guest star, Sandra Smith easily convinces the crew and officers that Captain Kirk, in the guise of a woman, is insane. Dr. Lester resents the apparent dominant positions males occupy in the world of the future. As Captain Kirk, she attempts to murder the captain's life entity she now controls." Dun dun duun.

So, that's a pretty good synopsis, actually. That is indeed what happens, but I love the framing of it.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Yes. And also, apparently, the crew jokingly referred to the episode as "Captain Kirk, Space Queen."

[laughter]

Jarrah: So, that also kind of summarizes it.

Andi: I love that came about because Shatner kept infusing what he considered femininity into his performance. There were all these scenes where he would add a little feminine touch to something, and so the crew started calling it Captain Kirk Space Queen.

Claire: I am dying to know who came up with the idea of having him file his nails in conversation. [laughs]

Jarrah: Oh, my gosh. Yeah.

Andi: I really wish I knew. And unfortunately, Marc Cushman was unable to shed light on that particular creative decision. But I have to feel like a lot of it came from Shatner himself. Like, he really threw himself into this performance.

Claire: Yes, well, and it's in a lot of ways really similar to his performance as the Dark Kirk in *The Enemy Within*, even though there's nothing that's supposed to be feminine or womanly.

Jarrah: It's just extra sensual Kirk.

Claire: Yeah. It's Shatner just camping it up like nobody else can. [laughs]

Andi: Yeah, that's what I was going to say, is, like, is it feminine or is it just high camp?

Claire: I think it's just high camp. They put so much eyeliner on him in *The Enemy Within* that he got confused.

[laughter]

Jarrah: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yes.

Andi: [laughs] I actually think it's pretty funny that I really enjoy Shatner's performance in this, like a lot. As we said, campy, so there are parts of it that are really funny. The parts where he's like spinning around and puts his hands up and he's like, "Argh," I love that shit. Gold, bring it.

Jarrah: The most GIFable moments.

Andi: Exactly. I love all those. But then he also manages to add a lot of layers.

Claire: Yeah, I actually don't think his performance is offensive or anything in this. There are elements of this episode that are definitely like, "Yikes, what are you doing?"

Jarrah: I think he's playing the script.

Claire: Yes. And he's doing what the best he can is probably not the right way to phrase it, but he's doing what he can with the script he's given.

Andi: So, I definitely think his performance in general is a highlight of this episode. And he actually managed to, and I'm pretty sure this was unintentional, add some things to his performance that are really interesting and nuanced, which we will talk about a little bit. And I love that in *These Are the Voyages*, it was clear that they were like, "We can't ask Shatner to do this. He won't want to do this." And Gene was like, "Yeah, he will."

[laughter]

Andi: And of course, he did. He was completely on board, and I don't think that's surprising. But Leonard Nimoy was not so on board, and he had some pretty strong things to say about the episode and the concept, which he was not on board with. He basically said that the goal of the script was, "to prove that women, although they claim equality, cannot really do things as well under certain circumstances as a man. Like the command function, for example. And it was a rather chauvinistic, clumsy handling of an interesting question. What he set out to prove was that this lady given command of the ship would blow it. That's really what the script was about. Just that simple. That's what I was dealing with when we were shooting that show. The knowledge that was the concept. I rebelled against the concept. I was uncomfortable doing the whole show because I didn't believe in the concept." Which is also very Leonard Nimoy.

Jarrah: I think that 100% was my first reading of the episode, and I think that it's fair to say that was some of the intent behind it, especially when you look at some of Rodenberry's first story ideas, and just generally attitudes towards women that I don't question Nimoy's reading of that concept as problematic. I think also at the time, that would have been one of the easier readings to take away. But it also, like we were saying, kind of surprised me that there were layers to it that I hadn't maybe noticed on the first watch around.

Claire: Yeah, I have kind of a generous reading of this episode, but I do want to clarify that I think it's all unintentional and just a passage of time. So, I do not think that the production staff, the writers, whatever, were setting out to secretly play 12D chess and secretly have this weirdly feminist positive thing happen. No, definitely not. But I think with the passage of time and with just the luxury that we have maybe to view this through some different cultural norms now, there's some interesting stuff that comes up. It's like you accidentally shot a kind of a positively feminist scene while you were trying not to.

Andi: Yeah. And I mean, to his credit, Rodenberry himself said that, "Nowhere in my story was the statement made that this woman wasn't qualified to command because of her gender." So, that's not what he was trying to say-- or at least that's not consciously what he was trying to say with the whole story idea. But I think that it's pretty clear to everyone who has done any dives into Rodenberry at all is he had some biases that were not necessarily conscious. That kind of played out in his writing and the way he had takes on things.

Claire: Yeah.

Jarrah: Yes. I also think that his reading or his intention isn't actually good. Like, his intention is she lacked the qualifications on a personal level, and she also happened to be emotionally unstable. In her mind, sure, she was being discriminated against. And that could have just been another theme in the story, how we can limit ourselves because of our own belief that we will be discriminated against. It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. So basically, she was playing the gender card.

Claire: Yeah. And I know where he's trying to go with that, but he doesn't quite make the full connection there, of she does walk into this situation fully with it's because I'm a woman. But also, two things can be true at, and which is, I think, the case here, but not something that Gene Rodenberry or the other people in the production side were really able to figure to get.

Jarrah: Yeah. How many times has someone spoken about actual discrimination they've faced and then been dismissed by like, "Oh, you're just taking everything too personally." Or, "You're the problem. You need to behave more like X, Y or Z."

Claire: Right.

Andi: And I think one of the reasons this episode is very infamous-- well, there's a couple of reasons. One is it's the final episode, and what a way to go out. And then secondly, there's some lines especially that are just hotly debated about the intention and gets kind of caught up and when we're trying to build canon from these episodes, it's really hard sometimes to know what they meant. So, probably the most famous example of this is when Lester says something along the lines of, "Your world of Starfleet doesn't allow women to be captains," or whatever she says.

Claire: She says doesn't have room for women or doesn't allow room for women. It is just ambiguous enough to take it as basically anyone being the captain of a starship doesn't have room in their life for a family or for a partner. And in the case of this particular couple, it is a male captain and a woman feeling excluded, but it doesn't necessarily have to be that pairing.

Andi: And I think that not very many people gave it that generous of a reading. I think a lot of people took it super literally and they're like, "Wait a second. Women can't be captains? What is that? That's completely--" like, it doesn't fit. Even in the 60s version of Trek when there is plenty of gender bias and misogyny, that doesn't fit with the world that they built and then obviously since then has been made clear that there were women captains prior to this in the "*Star Trek* canon."

Claire: Yeah, I would love to know what the audience thought in 1969 or in the 1970s when this was being re-aired for the first time. Did audience members scoff at that line the way we do now, or was it sort of not as noticeably bizarre a line? I mean, I don't know. I would be interested to know that.

Jarrah: I've read different fan debates on this from the time that are pretty similar to this discussion about what was the intention here, where this was in the fanzine *Trek* and there's all these paperbacks, *The Best of Trek*, and there's some exchange back and forth about *Turnabout Intruder* where some people are saying, like, "Yeah, what's the deal? Starfleet doesn't allow women captains?" And some people are saying, like, "Oh, no, it was just her. She was crazy." And I think that the other piece of evidence that doesn't totally contradict that is in *The Cage* and *The Menagerie* when Captain Pike has a whole thing about, like, "I'll never get used to a woman on the bridge. Oh, except for you, number one. You're basically a dude." [laughs] Obviously, again, like *Strange New Worlds* and stuff has just chosen to ignore that line. But that is, I think, where you can see an idea of, like, maybe there weren't women captains if Captain Pike is like, "I don't know about this whole ladies on the bridge thing."

Claire: Although that was written even earlier, that was like '65, '66. So not that there's going to be a huge amount of change in three or four years, but it's all Gene.

Andi: This is a common problem with *Star Trek* in general about anything, is there's so many different writers and there have been so many different visions that will have different lines that contradict other lines. So, you'll have Kirk being straight up feminist sometimes and specifically saying that the women on his crew are just crew members and then directly contradicting things he says in other episodes.

Jarrah: I think that we can all agree that no matter what the intention was, it could have been clearer. I think there were a couple of opportunities where they could have clarified. And if the intention wasn't to say that women couldn't be captains, then I feel like Kirk could have pushed back on that at some point. And also, at the very end of the episode, we'll get

to the whole last line. But instead of saying she could have had as fulfilling a life as any woman, maybe she could have had a fulfilling life as any captain.

Claire: I mean, because she's really successful. She's not a captain, but she's a successful scientist leading an entire little archaeology crew on a planet. She's in charge of this expedition. She is capable and has had a successful life. I guess it's not the one she wanted, which is a shame that she can't have that, but it's not like she's been sitting at home doing nothing with her life.

I want to talk about we let's talk about Janice. I think it is fascinating that the most sexist person in this episode is Janice Lester both before she is in Kirk's body and after. Without question. Even though, yes, the Starfleet Laws might also be pretty sexist here, depending on the interpretation of that line. Janice is not alone in her sexism, but she is like by far the leader. [laughs]

Andi: And also, the most explicit. She's the only one who's saying flat out lines that are like, "It's terrible to be a woman. Women are weak."

Claire: Yeah. Like, threatening to strangle her own body.

Andi: Yeah. And actually, I want to talk about that, because this was super interesting to me is one of the first things I noticed in the very beginning is when she takes over Kirk's body, and she's clearly really excited about the strength of her body, she picks up Kirk in her body and is so dismissive of it and literally drops the body onto the couch thing with no care whatsoever. And I thought this was a really smart actor's choice, and it might have been. But also, I then found out that Shatner had the flu during this and they made him do it like 15 times or whatever, many times, and he started to lose strength in his arms and pretty much by the end, he was just like going over there and flopping her down. [chuckles] But it's funny that I'm not sure if there was an intention there, but it actually really adds to this thematic character choice that goes throughout the episode in which she is the architect of so much violence towards her own body.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Claire: Yeah. And there's also dialogue that backs it up about being weak and everything. This was one of those things where to me-- I don't want to get controversial. Janice Lester feels really TERFy to me. I don't know if that's not something I should say, but I feel like she has such a narrow conception of what women can do physically, in culture, socially, what it means to be a woman. That to me, it feels very much like when you hear TERFs trying to define what a woman is in a way that excludes transwomen, where they end up-- like over the course of their circular discussion, end up basically being like real women are these dainty, frail creatures that can be snapped in half just by the glance by a man. And they end up describing women in very reductive and weak ways.

Andi: Yes.

Claire: And that's what I mean when I say that Janice feels TERFy to me.

Andi: No, I think that's a really good point, because one of the things that's always fascinated me about TERFs and their logic that they twist themselves into pretzels, trying to justify their hatred of transwomen, and half the time they manage to backflip into straight up misogyny, that's like women-- I remember at one point, they were like, "This transwoman shouldn't be allowed to take care of kids." And it was like, okay, follow that road down logically for a little bit, and you arrive at, "Only women should be allowed to take care of kids, and cis men should not be allowed to be caretakers." You would never as a feminist-- What

kind of feminism is that? That's tremendously reductive, as you said, but they somehow managed to backflip through their bigotry into making really strong statements about how women are not only, as you said, weak, incapable. I saw at one point they were talking about how oppression is part of what makes a woman, and I'm sorry, but I reject that just because misogyny, and as a woman, I experience oppression, that's not a natural extension of my femininity. I'm sorry, I just reject totally.

And then, just turn it into being a woman is like some sort of biological construct, it only comes down to your biological functions, and that all to me, is just standard garden grade misogyny.

Claire: Yeah, and Janice Lester is just constantly leaning into that, especially towards the beginning when she's just gotten into Kirk's body and they've just gotten onto the Enterprise, and she's still kind of getting used to it. To me, what's really interesting, and I don't know how much of this was in the script or the direction or just Shatner's choice or what, but it doesn't come across as Janice trying and then kind of overcompensating, kind of trying to seem like a man, because it's not like she finds herself in the middle of a bunch of locker room talk and is like, "Yeah, ha-ha, those broads." She's not going along with it and agreeing. She's like instigating it completely to the point that the other men around her are like, "What the hell? This is weird. What are you doing? This is way too much."

And it was so clearly, yes, she's directing that aggression towards Kirk, but I feel like she's also really directing it at herself because it's her body that she's saying it to and just at herself as a woman and also as an individual. Like, she clearly has huge self-hatred issues.

Andi: Yes, and I think it's interesting. Your point about her feeling TERFy, I think is very well taken and very interesting interpretation. I also was thinking throughout this, that her hatred of her body and the way she seems to have internalized misogyny so much, is there a reading of this in which she-- if you take the idea that she doesn't want to be a woman, there's a trans reading of that too. And gender dysphoria can cause self-harm behaviors. I really, really do not think they were thinking anything along the lines of a trans reading of this.

Claire: No.

Andi: [chuckles] Let me be super clear about that. But if you do look at it through that lens, it could be like a really toxic reaction to not wanting to be a woman and wanting to be a man instead.

Jarrah: Yeah. I mean, I think that I also noticed that in rewatching it, if that was the intention, I think we would also find some additional problematic things around reinforcing the idea that transpeople are deceptive, because, like you said, it's a toxic representation. And I feel like even today, we're not at a place in our culture, pop culture and society where we have enough positive representations of transpeople in media that we can kind of be complacent about ones that are kind of toxic representations or reinforce these false negative stereotypes. But I do think it's super interesting.

And it sort of connects to one thing that I wanted to bring up, which was about Dr. Coleman, who's like her assistant that is in love with her. And one thing I will take issue with Marc Cushman writing in *These Are the Voyages*, because these are really helpful books. They go through all the production memos and things like that. But I will say I don't usually always agree with Marc Cushman's takes on personally what he thought of the episode. And he says, "We have to wonder about the motivation of Dr. Coleman. He claims to have gone along with this farce because of his love for Lester. But would a heterosexual man, as Coleman is written and played, really help and even kill so that the woman he loves can

transfer herself into the body of a man?" And that, to me, is like the least far-fetched part of this episode.

Claire: And also, what about him is necessarily a heterosexual?

Jarrah: Yeah.

Claire: He could be, but he also might not. Why does he have to be?

Jarrah: Yeah, he has that quote at the end of the episode where he says something like, when she's back in her body, "You are as I have loved you," or something like that. But that can mean a lot of different things. He can be like, "I love you for your brain this whole time, even though it's a little nutty."

[laughter]

Claire: Yeah. Or just like, "This is the form of you that I fell in love with, but I want you to be happy. And if that means having a different body, then I love that for you too because I love you and I want you to be happy."

Jarrah: Yeah. And in Rodenberry's original story, he described that Janice Lester has a penchant for employing men of weak personality and that she dominates Dr. Coleman. But I don't think we see that in what the final episode was. It was not so much like she was controlling him out of fear. He's very loyal to her and he loves her.

Claire: Yeah. I mean, there's like a couple of sort of potential blackmail moments of, "If you kind of out this plan, well, guess what? You're going to be implicating yourself as well because you knew this whole time and you are an accessory to these murders." But I still don't feel like that's his main motivation.

Jarrah: No.

Andi: And it's also interesting because one of the things I noticed in that first scene when Coleman comes back in and he gives Lester-Kirk like a look and you can tell he's like it was actually a really good performance by the guy who plays Coleman because you can see him going, "Did it work? Who is this?" And as soon as McCoy and Spock are gone, the body language between them changes completely. It was really interesting to me because when Janice is trying to portray Kirk, and you pointed this out too, Claire, in that she goes overboard with it. Like, this performance of masculinity is too much. As soon as they're alone, she shrinks down a little bit and starts to back up and he looms over Shatner. It's really interesting. I was like, "Wow."

As soon as she drops the persona, the body language reverts back to some stereotypical dichotomy kind of stuff. I thought it was interesting, which is another thing where Shatner's performance has stuff like that in there, which I have no idea if he meant to put it in there, but he certainly did in the final product.

Claire: Well, and I want to talk about Sandra Smith's performance too. She has the much more subtle performance to give. I mean, she's not camping it up, but I think the fact that she is not camping it up is really significant, because if you watch her-- and this is kind of what I was alluding to earlier in the episode of I would love to know what this was like to watch as an audience member in the 60s or 70s. Even though the character is Kirk, you are seeing a woman portray herself with a lot of confidence and poise and authority and skill. When she breaks that glass and cuts herself out of her bindings, that's a really cool little-- Nowadays, it probably you wouldn't even think of it, but maybe in 1969, it was like, "Wow, I'm watching this

someone who is presenting as a woman do something really kind of like rescue herself and be really capable." I don't know. Maybe that didn't mean as much to people as I'm thinking it would, but I would be interested to know.

But I think it's really significant, especially in the court martial later on where Sandra Smith does not sit with her legs splayed. She's not pantomiming masculinity in any of her body language. She's not being masculine, but she's not being feminine either. She's simply being a confident human being. And I think that's where this episode does some of its accidental feminism, where it's like confidence is not gendered, capability is not gendered, the ability to command effectively is not really gendered. And here is a visual example of that, even if it's not the example that the story is trying to tell. And I just think that's interesting.

Jarrah: Yeah. I also like before she's breaking out of sickbay, that scene with Chapel where-- this is Kirk coming up with a ploy, and it is a way of appealing to Chapel that does come across as very feminine. It doesn't raise Chapel's alarm bells that this isn't Janice Lester, like, "Oh, I promise I'll be good." Almost like it feels like Kirk flirting, sort of like being a bit like submissive flirting, kind of in a woman's body. But yeah, I like it.

Claire: Yeah. And it's like, "Let me drink this slowly. Take little sips, because a man would just knock this back because it tastes good. But I'm a woman, so I'm going to just drink it slowly." I also think it's interesting that, and again, this could just be a production choice, where they were like, "It's the last episode of *Star Trek*. We're not making another costume." It's fascinating to me that even after Kirk in Janice's body has been accepted by basically by at least Spock and McCoy, he doesn't change into different clothes. It kind of makes sense that he wouldn't put a uniform on because the whole crew would be like, "Excuse me?" but he continues to wear Janice's-

Jarrah: That bad pantsuit.

Claire: -weird jumpsuit. that looks like a little bit of a clown situation going on.

[chuckles]

Claire: He continues to wear it, and at no point-- it is pants, so maybe that helps. But at no point do we see him in her body moving like he's uncomfortable in the clothes or trying to cover himself up. If Kirk in his own body suddenly accidentally was wearing women's clothing, he probably would be like, "Ah, crap. This is a little uncomfortable." He's Kirk. He doesn't behave like that at all. And I just think that's-- again--

Jarrah: You also don't see him just looking down his shirt at his boobs.

Claire: Yeah. The one scene where he confronts his new appearance, it's not about him being a woman. He doesn't touch his hair. He doesn't examine his makeup or I don't know. Yeah, look at his boobs. It's really just, "I have a different face." Not, "I have a woman's face."

Jarrah: And Lester is like, "Well, I have strength now." Not like, "I have a dick."

Claire: [laughs] I'm sorry. I just took a sip of water.

[laughter]

Jarrah: I mean, I think it was partly that I think they were not seeing this as a sexualized story, they were also trying very hard not to make it a comedy and the book in the movie that it's based on were a comedy. So, I think if they had wanted to make it like a super campy comedy, they would have had moments that were like, "Oh, my God, I have boobs now."

Except for whatever you would have been able to say in the 60s. But they were trying to make it more about serious character dynamics, which I think supports the unintentional transness of it all.

Andi: I agree. And it's one reason why I think that actually has some interesting messages, because it seems to be saying that gender is not innate to your body, especially when Kirk is in the court martial and he's sitting very-- as Claire pointed out, the performance of the actress is very much like calm and just capable. And people are responding to her authority simply just because of how she's acting. Like, you can see the people in the room and the dynamic shift, even though they still think she's a woman, or they start to get confused, and that is just-- How do you even interpret that? What is that even saying? I feel like you could interpret that in so many different ways. What makes a person a certain gender? Their body versus their personality or their demeanor or masculine mannerisms versus feminine? It just gets so complicated how people are responding to each other, especially in that scene, and moving forward when they start to mutiny against Janice, like the way they treat Kirk, who is still in a feminine body, is like he's still Kirk.

Claire: It seems like Kirk doesn't have a strong-- Every other episode of the original series is like, "No, Kirk is a man. He knows he's a man, and he's a manly man." But I feel like in this episode, at least when he is being portrayed by Sandra Smith, it doesn't seem like there is a gender is an important thing for him to project. And I don't know if that's that he's really confident in his gender or that he's just like it's not the important thing right now. Right now, is not being executed and getting control of the ship back. But at one point, Spock holds Kirk's hand and arm for a good 10-15 seconds while kind of protecting her body, Kirk in her body. This is hard to talk about in a way that's not confusing, but he knows that this is Kirk, but he still is physically protective of her, of the body. And I don't know if that was Spock being protective of Kirk in a different bo-- just maybe Spock is always going to do that for someone who is physically smaller.

I don't know. Maybe that's just Leonard Nimoy kind of doing like an automatic-- I don't know what that choice was about, honestly, but I think it's an interesting one because at no point do you see Kirk pull away or look up at him, like, "Dude, it's me. You don't have to-- I'm not a damsel in distress here." There is none of that. It seems like Kirk's not at all phased or bothered by the gendered element of being perceived differently. He really just wants people to know that he's Kirk, not that he's a man. And that's really interesting to me.

Andi: Well, look at how we're trying to talk about this. The number of times we've switched pronouns between saying Kirk and she and Kirk and he, it's amazing how complicated and nuanced that starts to get even just trying to describe who is who, and what pronouns are we using for them? I'm sure I've used every pronoun under the sun for Kirk at this point throughout this episode.

Claire: I mean, Coleman and Janice in Kirk's body, they switch pronouns while talking about Kirk and Janice's body. There's a scene where they're talking-- Coleman refers to Janice in Kirk's body as Janice as the woman. And then they're, like, referring to Janice who's laying or Kirk, who's laying there on the stretch in sickbay in Janice's body. And they talk about him, and then the conversation shifts, and then they talk about her. They're shifting from-- because they know what's going on, we know that's really Kirk in there, but everybody else doesn't. So, they're going to refer to that person as a she. The whole thing is really--

Jarrah: Trippy? [laughs]

Claire: Yes.

Andi: And something I want to point out about the Kirk and Spock dynamics that you were saying is the whole time I was thinking I know. Like, I haven't looked, but I know. There are definitely fix about this. There are Spirk fixes. This is definitely an episode that Spirk shippers are like, "Ha-ha, yet another slide on my PowerPoint."

Claire: [laughs]

Andi: Because the fact that Spock is the first person to believe Kirk and that the way that Kirk convinces Spock is basically like, "You know me better than anyone else. Use your telepathy and tell me who I am." And Spock is like, "No, got it. Yup. 100% on board," and then immediately goes to war with everyone. He's ready to mutiny. He's ready to mutiny against Starfleet Command.

Claire: Well, and also the way they filmed that particular mind meld-- Like all mind melds are inherently intimate because of what they are. But the way they filmed that particular one is just like Nimoy is slinking around and being extra [crosstalk] with his eyes and just extra Spock. And that's an intimate moment. Not a sexual moment, but that is an intimate-- they knew what they were doing when they filmed that, at least. But I don't know that if they were thinking about the Spirk element of it, but I think it was very much like let Nimoy do his hot Spock thing with the female guest star of the week.

[laughter]

Andi: His hot Spock thing, I love that.

Claire: You know what I mean.

Andi: I do. That's why I love it. [chuckles] But yeah, I remember watching that and just going like, "Hmm, the Spirk shippers were fed this episode." [chuckles] It was interesting, and it goes to show-- I really feel like-- Actually, this is an interesting kind of thought exercise that I started to think about is if Kirk had stayed in Janice Lester's body, say something had happened and the transference hadn't ended, what would have happened? Would they have just like-- Like, I'm talking not just logistically, but also legally. Is that legally Kirk now? Like, if everyone accepts that's Kirk, does he then take his command back in Janice Lester's body?

Claire: I mean, it goes to that thing in the court martial about that it's not like I am Kirk, but that what makes me essentially Kirk is within this body. So, I don't know really how you parse that but yeah, I mean, the other thing, is this a *Tuvix* type situation? Like, are they new beings because they are in different bodies, or is it they are just exactly who they were before? And I think what we're given in the episode lends towards the latter interpretation that they aren't really changed by the fact they are in these bodies, except for with physical differences. But in the original story idea, there was going to be a final scene that luckily was cut by Rodenberry, where basically they were going to take Lester and Coleman to a Starbase to be turned over to authorities, on the Starbase they were going to come back to the ship, and Kirk would be annoyed because of some comment that was made when he complimented the Commodore's wife on her dress, implying that he's still kind of in touch with the feminine and that McCoy and Spock would bicker about it. And Spock would say, "Well, that's illogical to care." And McCoy would say basically these female synaptic patterns that he was going to have to relearn masculinity. And then, he sees a really hot young Yeoman and ogles her a couple of times, and he's like, "Nah, I'm good. I'm still real masculine."

[chuckles]

Andi: See, this is why I think it's so funny that we have these in-depth conversations about queerness and gender identity and just overall gender roles, and we're thinking about it so thoughtfully, and [laughs] then they have stuff like this. And it's like I don't think that they were thinking about it the way that we're thinking about it.

Jarrah: But that would imply that they are a new being if they have the other person's synaptic pathways in their brain now and their other person's way of thinking were written into their brain, which actually would kind of make sense. Not that there's clear gender synaptic pathways, but it would make sense that you would have if someone else's ability to think and be themselves was in your brain. It would make sense that it might rewire some things, although it was not that long of a time. But yeah, I mean, that whole scene kind of reminds me of like *Profit and Lace* and the whole, like, "Oh, Kirk, you still have hormones." [chuckles]

Claire: See, this is where I bring my own like, the body is just a big fleshy machine that we all exist in. I drive it from my head and then move to another body and whatever. But there would be a hormones, I guess the hormonal element would probably. Although it's of course not extremely cut and dried, what, like each person's hormones are different. And also, you're right, it's such a short period of time. If this was like a yearlong experience and then they switch back, that might be something. But also, we never see Kirk or Sandra Smith's portrayal of-- honestly be out of character. I think there are several reasons that scene was cut, one of them is they hadn't shown Kirk behaving like that prior, so it would be super jarring to all of a sudden, at the very end, have Kirk be like, sort of effeminate when he wasn't being effeminate while in a woman's body.

Jarrah: Yeah. I also think though in general, that our relationships between our brains and our bodies are way less clean cut than a lot of sci-fi and *Star Trek* would like people to think. And it makes sense for story purposes, but I think that fundamentally, our existence is so shaped by our body and our senses at all times that the idea of just being able to transplant your consciousness into a robot body and it being somehow the same person, to me, doesn't hold water. But I think in this episode, what is in the final version does kind of imply that it is fully Kirk in Janice Lester's body and Janice Lester in Kirk's body, and that they're not become like a different being, different identity.

Andi: I kind of want to pivot a little bit to the other characters in this episode because I find a lot of the other characters and how they react to this interesting. So, we talked about Spock but also, I want to talk about McCoy a little bit. Like, I really enjoyed the crew reacting to Kirk being weird and trying to figure out what's going on with Kirk and the dynamics of Janice Lester trying to pretend to be Kirk and the people who love him the most immediately going, "What is going on here?" It's like every episode of the original series for me. All of the other stuff is window dressing to the characters and the relationships to each other that are always strong to me, which is McCoy, Spock and Kirk. And I love the dynamics that we see between them in this episode.

There's one particular moment where I was just like, I love these two so much. They are my favs. Spock and McCoy are immediately teaming up to be like, "What's going on with our Captain? He's being weird." And they do that Spock-McCoy thing where they always set aside any of their bickering as soon as Jim is in trouble, and they start acting like a united team. And I just love that they kind of come together with a plan. And then, Janice's Kirk comes in and kind of like is sus.

[laughter]

And they leave, and McCoy and Spock give each other one of those looks and they have a whole ass conversation in a single look in which they make decisions and agree on their

decisions and then split off to execute those decisions without saying a single word. And it's beautiful to me. Spock is like, "Well, we haven't interviewed Janice Lester. I think we should." And then, Kirk is like, "No one gets to talk to Janice Lester." And McCoy and Spock look at each other and they're like, "This is sus. Yeah, it's totally sus. I don't think that we should allow this to happen. Why don't you distract her? Well, distract "Kirk" and I'll go question Janice Lester. Okay, cool, break." And they do it in like five seconds, just a significant look, and then they split off and go do those things.

You can't do that without really well-drawn characters, really well acted performances, and an audience that knows these people. And that is not something you can do in episode 2. That's only something that you can really pull off in a season 3 episode. But I just loved that. And I loved how as soon as McCoy is kind of on board, and as soon as the other officers are starting to go, "Wait a second," they all start uniting under Kirk's leadership again naturally.

Claire: Except for those cop ass dudes.

Jarrah: Oh, yeah.

Andi: The weird fascist security people who are like, "Actually, I'm totally fine with marching people to their death against Starfleet Law."

Claire: Yeah, these illegal executions, they're just like, "Go," and there's a bunch of them.

Andi: 100%. But I loved that both Sulu and Chekhov were like, "That's illegal." Like, they're immediately pushing back. They're immediately going, "Heck no." Because I think it goes to an aspect of the episode we have not talked about yet, which is Janice Lester's completely skewed understanding of what it means to be a Starfleet captain and the kind of power that she wields as a Starfleet captain because it's super clear to me that she thinks she's going to become captain and everyone's going to do what she says without question. But Starfleet itself has checks and balances on that, and we see that. We see McCoy pulling rank as a medical officer and saying, like, "No, as a chief medical officer, I have the ability to check you if I think you are being sus." And he does. And then you have junior officers straight up getting into the face of their commanding officer and saying, "That is illegal. That's against our fleet regulations," and then refusing to follow orders that they think are unjust.

Claire: And you also get an example of going back to what you were saying about the Kirk-Spock-McCoy dynamic, the moment when Spock questions Kirk's order to not go to Starbase 2, and instead, we're going to go to this other planet, we're going to go-- whatever. Under normal circumstances, Spock speaking up and being like, "Hey, Captain, actually, there might be a better way to do this," Kirk would be like, "Oh, thanks. Cool." Because that's the dynamic. Part of Spock's job is questioning Kirk in a way that allows Kirk to be a better captain. But instead, here, you see Janice immediately gets her hackles up and is like, "Excuse me. What?" Partially because she just doesn't know the dynamic between these two people. But also, you can tell that she is immediately overwhelmed by being a captain. Like, the minor just how to run a starship level captain stuff. She's immediately like-- she's read all the manuals, but she's never been a captain before. She doesn't know how to do it.

Andi: Yeah. And then I want to talk about Scotty.

Claire: Oh, yeah.

Andi: So, Scotty is interesting to me in this, and he is the one that specifically starts to plan and names what he's planning as a mutiny, which is kind of cool and kind of Scotty honestly. Scotty's like, "Oh, no, I'm not here for this. I'm immediately going to start undermining you." [laughs] That, I enjoy. I do want to point out one of his lines, which I remember so clearly the

first time I watched this episode, also being super struck by it, the reason he turns on who he thought was Kirk is because Kirk has what could be termed as like a tantrum in the court martial. And contrasted especially to how Janice Lester as Kirk is sitting there very calmly, very clearly like the whole direction in that scene is you be as emotional and over the top as possible, while the real Kirk is calm and in control. And the contrast of that is what makes Scotty go, "Oh, no, that's not my captain."

And he calls it "red faced with hysteria," is what he says. And I find that so interesting because there's a lot of dynamics in this episode about mental competence, mental illness. There's a whole conversation that Spock and McCoy have about how there's nothing wrong with the captain's body, if there is an illness, it's mental, which I don't know if we've ever even really heard of anybody saying-- they literally say "mental illness." But there is such a long and storied history of men putting women in institutions, calling them hysterical, calling them crazy, and disappearing women through the institutions, like mental institutions. And I just found it really interesting that he literally uses the word "hysteria" in the context of this history.

Claire: What's also fascinating is in that same conversation towards the end of it, McCoy says, "Spock isn't being scientific and neither are you." Meaning that Scotty is relying too much on his emotions and his gut to make this decision. Even though McCoy agrees with Scotty, he doesn't have the facts. And I think it's interesting that you have two men talking about hysteria in one hand and then also talking about how you need to make a decision based on emotions, regardless of whether the facts back you up or not, which is kind of something that you could accuse women of doing, especially in that time, as a reason that they're not necessarily going to be as rational as men or whatever. The original series has made that comment several times throughout its history about women being emotional, men being rational. But it's making the emotionally driven choice is actually the right choice here? And it's a bunch of men coming to that conclusion for themselves. I think that's kind of an interesting situation.

Jarrah: I also like the point that you had written in our outline, I think, Claire, about tantrums and like, "Are tantrums really gendered--?" [crosstalk] [laughs]

Claire: There's a whole *Silicon Valley*-- the genius--

Jarrah: Hollywood too?

Claire: Yeah, about the male lone genius, the Dr. Houses of the world, they function on tantrums.

Jarrah: Jimmy Fallons. There are so many. I mean, there's stories about people of all genders doing this, but I rarely hear the men that have this reputation in Hollywood Silicon Valley, places that I've worked, no one ever uses the word "hysterical."

Claire: Yeah.

Jarrah: They might say like angry or has anger problem, but it's definitely viewed a different way.

Andi: Well, that's a really good point, Jarrah, because I think what is interesting is men don't seem to think of anger as being emotional.

Jarrah: No.

Andi: They think of anger being rational. What they think of as being emotional is like sadness, like crying. So, to them, screaming at someone is not them being emotional, which is very not the case. And obviously, this is not just men, I think our society in general has a tendency to think of things through that lens.

Jarrah: Yes.

Andi: That's what I would say. The idea of anger not being a very powerful emotion, there's like a disconnect there, and there always has been. I want to talk about the ending in general, because I think it's interesting that as soon as the plan has all like Scooby Dooed, like, the mask has been taken off and like, "Oh, my God, it was Janice Lester all along," she collapses and just cries and goes straight to a man and lets him hold her and sobs into his chest. And I think that's funny because when she is in Kirk's body, as we have talked about some of the performance of masculinity, the second she's back in her own body, she does something that, to the audience at least, would read as entirely feminine.

Claire: So, I was thinking about that exact scene when I watched the episode again today for this recording. And I truly think that at least a portion of that was trying to direct around unintentionally portraying same-sex relationships.

Andi: Maybe.

Claire: I'm serious, because if you have Janice in Kirk's body being affectionate or in some way romantic towards Coleman or him being romantic towards Janice in Kirk's body, that's two dudes being sensitive together. If you show the other way around, then it's Kirk's mind in a woman's body. So, the visual of it is not a same-sex relationship, but then you still have the mental element of it. I really think they were trying to dance around that pretty hard because there's one scene towards the end where Janice in Kirk's body goes to Coleman one last time, and Shatner does put his hand on Coleman's shoulder, and it doesn't feel particularly romantic.

Andi: By the way, that's the moment that brought us Captain Kirk, Space Queen.

Jarrah: Yeah, they said he improvised that as a genius feminine move.

Claire: I mean, it came across like good job there, Shatner. It's not overly out of context. It doesn't necessarily read as feminine, but knowing what's going on and who these characters really are and that they have a relationship together previously, I feel like that was as close as they were willing to go. And then, the second everything was "correct" sex and gender wise, then you can have the heteronormative couple crying together.

Andi: I think it's more than that actually, because I think it's also like, "Here's what being a woman is," really.

Claire: Yeah.

Andi: You know what I mean? Collapsing onto a man and crying because you had your shot and you biffed it because that was Nimoy's interpretation too. He was basically like, you gave a woman a chance to be in command and she completely ran it into the ground and then cries. So, I think that particular scene is one of the stronger PowerPoint slides on the idea that this is just a straight up misogynistic concept.

Claire: Yeah.

Andi: Other thing I'd add is the fact that they called it Captain Kirk, Space Queen, which to us in 2023, calling someone a space queen sounds amazing and empowering, but in 1969 or whatever, that would definitely be homophobic, mocking.

Claire: Oh, 100%. Yes.

Andi: So, they have to have been at least somewhat aware of the queerness inherent. So, that adds yet another nuance. Are you guys sick of thinking yet? Because I kind of am. [chuckles] And then, the other thing obviously that we have to talk about with the ending is the very last line, which is like, "Her life could have been as rich as any woman's," which, what a weird thing to say.

Claire: Yeah.

Andi: Let's unpack that a little bit while we still have brain power to do it.

Jarrah: Be clearer, Gene Rodenberry and Arthur Singer. What do you mean? What would have made her life as rich as any woman's? If she wasn't--

Andi: Ambitious?

Jarrah: If she had just been okay with not having Kirk be able to love her? If she had been okay with not being able to be a captain, which may or may not be the case?

Andi: If she had stayed home and just had babies instead of trying to become a Starfleet captain?

Claire: I mean, I don't think the show would be going quite that far with the women's places in the kitchen element because they repeatedly demonstrated that's not thesis or not the perspective that the show is operating under. However, I really think that line is kind of just be happy with what you get. Don't complain. And so, I don't think that they're saying that what you should get is like super, super "stay home and raise the babies." But I do think that there is-- I mean, there's this common thing where ambition in a man is just being a man, and ambition in a woman is problematic in some capacity. It's being a bitch or asking for too much. It's being difficult. Whereas it's great in a man.

Andi: I just think this is probably slide two on Leonard Nimoy's PowerPoint.

Claire: Yeah, for sure.

Andi: And I think it's funny that it's in the same scene as, like, [chuckles] "Here's my next point, and it's this freaking line," like, what the heck does this mean? And how can you interpret it as anything other than "know your place"?

Claire: Yeah, also, just what a final line for the entire series of *Star Trek*. [laughs]

Andi: Well, to be fair, the final line is "if only," which is a little bit more poetic, but still.

Claire: I don't think so. [chuckles] I don't think it adds to the-- or I don't think it really changes the intent of that.

Andi: No, I don't think so either. But if you completely decontextualize it from the rest of the sentence, it actually is kind of "if only."

Claire: That's true.

Andi: If only they had any complete understanding of the kind of gender examination they were doing.

[laughter]

Andi: If only.

Jarrah: It's better than, "Hey, look at that hot Yeoman. Yup. Still got it."

Claire: Yeah, that is true.

Andi: "Guess I really am a man. She's got a nice butt."

Jarrah: Which also goes back to our whole old *Star Trek* didn't think there were gay people in space idea because yeah, of course it would prove that you were masculine if you found a woman attractive.

Andi: Oh, no.

Jarrah: Yeah, but also, do they ever come to the realization that Lester and Coleman killed all the people on their expedition?

Andi: I don't think they did because at the end, he was like, "Can I take care of her?" And they're like, "Of course, of course." And there was this very like, "Oh, they've been punished enough," but they full on murdered a bunch of people.

Claire: And also, did anyone send any communiques to Starfleet headquarters at any point? Like, "Yo, the flagship is mid mutiny right now. We'll send you an update in an hour."

Andi: I actually think they didn't because there was an undercurrent of, "We need to handle our business, because Starfleet Command is useless."

Claire: That's true. Yeah. I guess if you're going to be summarily executing your random officers, you're not going to want to tell people about that.

Andi: Well, I mean, at one point, Scotty says, like, "Starfleet Command has their job and we have ours." It's very clear that they think of those things as two separate things.

Claire: Meanwhile, I guarantee you somebody at Starfleet Command is like, "A mutiny is 150% our job. That's why we're here. Court martials and mutinies are the whole point of having an overarching governing body."

Andi: Well, look, we only think it's a good idea to follow regulations if it fits what the captain wants to do anyway, and that is something that is in every single *Star Trek* series and is a foundational idea. If Picard says the regulation is wrong, then it's wrong. Okay?

Jarrah: Yeah.

Claire: Exactly. The prime suggestion.

[laughter]

Andi: Exactly. Well, I think that's about all the time we have today, but do we want to do a quick rating? Which is a very interesting thing to do for this particular episode. And I've been

thinking about it, and I think my rating would be 5/10 murder scarves. In that I think there's a lot of really probably unintentionally interesting ideas around the nature of gender and femininity and masculinity and feminism in general and some really great performances. And I certainly love the characters and the character dynamics. But at the end of the day, did they land the Starship? The answer is no. So, I will give them half credit. So, I will give them 5/10 scarves used for murder.

Jarrah: Nice. I will give them 5/10 Nurse Chapel brown wigs.

[laughter]

Jarrah: For the same reason.

Andi: Yeah.

Claire: I'm going to go with 6/10 broken prune juice glasses.

Andi: Nice. I really love that she just hits the glass and is like, "I'm getting out of here."

Claire: Kirk made it a warriors drink before [crosstalk] it was popular.

[laughter]

Andi: All right, great. Well, Jarrah, where can people find you on the internet?

Jarrah: You can find me at *trekkiefeminist.com*.

Andi: Awesome. And, Claire, where can people find you?

Claire: I am on Bluesky, and my handle *@isolinearchip*.

Andi: Nice. And I'm Andi. I am still nominally on Twitter, kind of, but I am also anywhere else you might think to find me *@firsttimetrek*. To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit *womenatwarp.com*, email us at *crewatwomen@warp.com*, or find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram *@womenatwarp*. Thanks so much for listening.

[Women at Warp: A Star Trek Podcast outro]

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