

## Women at Warp Episode 235: Interview with Dr. Una McCormack

[Women at Warp theme]

**Sue:** 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 is Sue, and thanks for tuning in. With me today is my cohost, Jarrah.

**Jarrah:** Hello.

**Sue:** And our very special guest, Dr. Una McCormack.

**Dr. McCormack:** Hello.

**Sue:** Hi. And we're so glad you could join us. I'm sure our listeners know, but Dr. McCormack, is the author of many *Star Trek* novels based on several of the different shows in the franchise, including *DS9*, *Voyager*, *Discovery*, and *Picard*. Her next book is a *Doctor Who* novel, *Caged*, featuring the 15th Doctor and Ruby, which will be released in June.

**Jarrah:** It's going to be good.

**Dr. McCormack:** I hope so.

**Jarrah:** We're both Whovians.

**Dr. McCormack:** Both Whovians. [laughs] Good, well, we might touch on that perhaps, but I'm very excited about this book, so I've had a blast with it. So, I think it's my best, Dr. Who's book, but we'll see. We'll see what people think.

**Sue:** Ooh. Well, we are going to I'm sure have a great conversation, but we do have a little bit of housekeeping to get to first. Our show is made possible by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron, you can do so as little as \$1 per month and get some awesome rewards from thanks on social media up to some silly watchalong commentaries. Visit [patreon.com/womenatwarp](https://patreon.com/womenatwarp) to find out more. And if you're looking for podcast merch, you're looking for podcast merch, you can check out our TeePublic Store. There are lots of designs. We are adding new ones all the time and on mugs, T-shirts, tote bags, so many different options there. Find it at [teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp](https://teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp).

There is one more thing in our housekeeping, which is we were originally scheduled to appear at Trek Long Island in May to June that weekend. Unfortunately, we will no longer be there, but we do want to promote that event and say it was a great first year last year. So, if you're able, if you're in the area, check out Trek Long Island. And there will be lots of Trek authors there as well to slide into the theme of this episode. All right, everybody ready to jump in?

**Jarrah:** Yes.

**Dr. McCormack:** I think so. Yeah. I say a dollar for all that stuff, that's brilliant. Yeah, everyone should be signing up to that Patreon.

**Sue:** I love that. That's an excellent promotion. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Another thing that our patrons got to do this month was to help come up with some of the questions for this interview, so.

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, lovely, good. Excellent.

**Jarrah:** Another just side bonus there, they came up with some good questions.

**Dr. McCormack:** I think so very much.

**Sue:** But why don't we start with, I guess, the obvious? How did you get into writing *Star Trek* novels? And what was your experience with the franchise before becoming, as we call it, a pro-fic author.

**Dr. McCormack:** A pro-fic author, yeah. Of course, I'm in the UK, so I think-- When I look at my kind of colleagues, people like David Baker, Dayton Ward and so on. They're all in the States and when their kids *Star Trek* is being syndicated, they're watching it very easily. It wasn't like that in the UK. I think the original series got run in the 1970s, but then really wasn't on at all until the mid-80s. So, really my introduction to *Star Trek* was through the films and I sort of got into *Star Wars*. *Star Wars* came out when I was about seven or eight, so exactly the right age to kind of blight my life with a need for spaceships.

So, once *Star Trek* movies came along, then I was interested because there was a spaceship, and then I was kind of the right age. And then *Next Gen* started and I was about 16, which, of course, again is a perfect age to kind of be coming to a show like that, which was a bit more cerebral and posing moral question and so on. But you really have to commit in the UK because it wasn't transmitted. So, every Friday, I would make a little pilgrimage to the local Blockbuster video store to see whether they've got the tape with the next two episodes on. So, I feel like, I've really worked hard [laughs] to get watch *Star Trek* over the years. So that was my introduction.

**Sue:** Wait, wait, wait. So, as it was airing, the VHS's became available in Blockbuster video?

**Dr. McCormack:** After it had aired in the States.

**Sue:** Okay.

**Dr. McCormack:** Really, the only way that you could get to watch it in the UK was that they were releasing video cassettes. And I don't know if you know this, but we had two different tape formats.

**Sue:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** So, the US had one tape format and the UK had a different one. So, they would have to kind of be converted and then released. And then I think you could watch it on satellite, but not everybody had satellite. And then I kind of joined a group of local fans and we were getting like little-- I always joke, it must have been like during the war when people were getting sent lipstick and nylons. We would get these little care packages of converted *Next Gen* episodes from friends in the States, and gather around and watch them. The conversions were horrible, you wouldn't believe the sort of the poor quality.

**Sue:** Wow.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yes. So, you really had to seek it out. In a way, it's a bit like that, again, where you're in the UK where you're sort of going, "Okay, well, where can I watch *Discovery*? Is it on Paramount? Is it on Prime? Is it on Pluto or whatever, some weird channel?" So, it's a little bit like that. I guess it's quite hard to get to see things like *Prodigy* and so on. But it really was something that you had to work quite hard to see. And then

eventually, kind of 18 months after you would have had it in the States, it would turn up on BBC One, this was *Next Gen*.

Yeah, it was quite hard work, but I loved it. In the interim, I think this is quite important for me, the Paperback books were coming out so I was reading a lot of the *Next Gen* novels. So, yeah, that was sort of my teens, 16 17, 18. I was kind of trying to get to watch *Next Gen* and then reading a lot of the novels. So, yeah, that was kind of my early taste of *Star Trek*, it's quite involved. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** As someone who grew up on a tiny island without internet and cable, I recommend everyone should have an [unintelligible 00:06:50] where they have to have people mail them *Star Trek*.

**Dr. McCormack:** [laughs] Oh, you've experienced that too? I was on a similar tiny island. Yeah, exactly. Exactly that. Kids today, they don't know.

[laughter]

Yeah, but I think it's just one of those things, isn't it? And then when it came to the novels, I'd kind of drifted away from *Trek*. And then, cutting a long story short, I really got into *DS9* and started writing fan fiction, mostly about Garak, perhaps predictably. And then I was posting it on, it was Usenet at the time. It became Google Groups again, showing my age.

**Sue:** alt.startrek.creative. I was there. Yep.

**Dr. McCormack:** alt.startrek.creative, you were there as well [laughs]. So, I was posting stuff on there under my own name because I'm quite naive in that respect. But this helped me. I got an email out of the blue from a guy called Marco Palmieri and he said, "I'm the editor of the *Star Trek* range. I've had your writing recommended. Would you like to pitch to write for the range?" And that's where it started. Yep. So, fanfic to profic, I was very lucky.

**Jarrah:** That's very cool.

**Sue:** There's sort of a tradition of that in *Star Trek* in particular, which I think is very cool.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah. People like Jean Laura and Vonda McIntyre, who I adore, I suspect had some *Star Trek* fanfiction in her past.

**Sue:** Yeah. A lot of them started out in the zines, in the 1970s.

**Dr. McCormack:** Exactly that. So, I guess I just was lucky that I was posting online that the show was off air, so people were taking risks, kind of bringing new authors in, and I just got that invitation to pitch and that's how it happened.

**Jarrah:** Nice. We had a question from our listener, Craig, who was wondering, what do you think or what do you see as the advantages or disadvantages of writing for an established IP as opposed to an original property?

**Dr. McCormack:** So, for me, I finally would tell why I love writing fanfic, why I love writing, particularly TV and visual media. About a couple of years ago, I realized that I'm aphantasic, have you come across this? It's aphantasia. It means that you've not really got much visual imagination.

**Sue:** Mm-hmm

**Dr. McCormack:** You don't get visual imagery very much. I've got practically no visual memory or visual imagination. So, all of that work for me as a writer is done for me. I wouldn't write this, it'd be terrible, " Jean-Luc Picard strode onto the bridge," yeah. And that's put straight in your head. You know exactly who I'm talking about. You know exactly what that location looks like. So that's, I assume is why I started writing fan fiction in the first place. The visuals were stimulating my imagination. But as a writer, at no point did I have to kind of worry about conveying that to you. So, a bit of a shortcut for me, in a way. Other advantages, it's massive fun.

[laughter]

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah. And if you're not enjoying it, then there's no point to it, really. Disadvantages, I guess, they would come down to people don't think it's real writing. They think it's a bit trashy, all these sorts of things. I mean, I just write the best that I can and, I'm not going to pretend that I'm Tolstoy, but I love what I do and I take care with what I do. So I guess the upsides are the pleasure of it, the way it suits my imagination, my enthusiasms. And the downsides are, "Does nobody recognize my genius?"

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** I feel like we recognize it.

**Sue:** 100%.

[laughter]

**Dr. McCormack:** Well, thank you. Thank you very much. I'm glad it's recognized somewhere. That's the main thing. [laughs] And in my lifetime, that's the other. [laughs]

**Sue:** Another question that came in from a listener. It was from Christina, who points out, as we've already alluded to that you've written a lot about Cardassians, worlds of *DS9*, *Hollow Men* and several more. What draws you to the Cardassians, and I guess Garak in particular? And is there more you'd like to explore there?

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, yes. So, it's funny going back to the sort of sources of this. So, the first *DS9* I've watched, and again, it was on tape. It was lent to me by my friend, Andrew. The first I watched was *The Way of the Warrior*. And I'm going, "This is okay, this is fine, this is really good. Who is that tailor? And why are people punching him?"

[laughter]

I'm very interested. This is extremely funny. And the moment that character came on screen, I was absolutely intrigued, as I think we all are watching Garak. So partly that character and the kind of-- It's like an onion, isn't it? You kind of get more layers unpeeled. So that's instantly, extremely interesting. But I think that character is interesting because of the context in which he's operating and that's why I find Cardassian interesting. You have what's clearly a very literate-- Garak's clearly a very literate and intelligent and cultured man. So, what kind of society produces someone like that who is simultaneously cruel and barbaric and does appalling things? And I think that was very fertile ground for my imagination to explore what kind of society would create people like that and how that society would have to change. So, I was absolutely gutted by the end of *DS9*.

**Sue:** Hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** By the death of Damar, they kind of built up as this kind of-- There's going to be a kind of moral reckoning. He's going to be the person to lead them through and that's kind of snatched away. So, I was absolutely gutted by that. I wrote reams, reams of fan fiction, which I put on the internet.

And that kept on intriguing me how that society had got there and what it would have to do to get beyond that. I think at the same time-- remember, this is still the 90s, isn't it? This is the late 90s. My first degree was in history. My PhD was in sociology. So, I was immediately applying that to the history of Europe. In 1999, the second World War is still pretty recent history. We're only talking, 50 years or whatever. So, I was applying that to think about European history, the context in which my parents had lived and the context from which I had emerged. Thinking about that and using, I think, Cardassian as a kind of way to reflect about empire and barbarism and civilization, all these sorts of things. And the question which I think I'm always interested in, which is how individuals relate to their broader context and how can we build societies that enable people to live their best lives, or not, as the case may be. So that's a sort of very long way round, sort of very long answer, but I think it was Garak first and then the context in which a person like that could come about.

**Jarrah:** That's very cool.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah. Cardassia is very British [laughs] as well, I think.

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** In any ways other than the colonization empire thing?

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, well, this empire, it's the way they talk obliquely and in parentheses-

**Sue and Jarrah:** Hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** -I think it can be quite British as well. The way that Garak would snark at Bashir and Sir Sisko, feels like the way that British people snark at Americans, yeah. "You with your wide eye'd enthusiasm. Let me tell you what it's like at the end of empire," this sort of thing. [laughs] They felt very European to me. And obviously the directly they're signifying as kind of space lizard Nazis, so that's happening as well. But I just find them endlessly, endlessly interesting. There was another bit to that question, wasn't there, about what else would I like to explore?

**Sue:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** I've got to say, I think I did pretty well out of [laughs] exploring Cardassian. The only thing I didn't get to do was in the novels I'd written a couple of kind of post war Cardassian novels and I had a third one in mind which would have wrapped up a lot of storylines. But of course, the book range came to an end with Coda when the series came back on air. So, I didn't really get to wrap up a lot of my storylines, but I did retool quite a lot of them for one of my *Picard* novels, *Second Self*. So even then, even if I didn't get to exactly wrap everything up, I think I wrapped up everything that mattered to me in that book.

**Jarrah:** Neat.

**Sue:** I'm still gutted over the demise of the shared continuity timeline.

**Jarrah:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** It's really sad, isn't it? It's just one of those things that happens at the end of the day, the books are there to support the show. We had a pretty good run.

**Sue:** Yeah, yeah.

**Dr. McCormack:** I can't believe some of the things I got in there. And in retrospect, I wish I'd known that I could have pushed it a lot further. There's all sorts of other things looking back I go, or maybe I could have tried this or tried that or pushed that there. The books we wrote are still there and a AO3 is open to anyone's offerings. So, there's no reason why that has to end in anyone's imagination and no reason why you have to take everything that's on the page as semi canon or whatever, people can write whatever they like, but, yeah, it was a real wrench. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Yep, that's one of my, I guess, I don't know, unpopular opinions. It's an opinion, I don't know if it's unpopular, is essentially that the purpose of canon is not actually that important and that everyone who is creating things, whether that's beta canon or just considered non canon, is in their own way trying to flesh out the universe and flesh out the gaps. And you can decide an individual piece of writing isn't to your taste. But generally, it's in my view, better to just take an inclusive view of all of it as interesting lenses into *Star Trek*.

**Dr. McCormack:** I agree. And I think that this is often people's inspiration for starting to write it, isn't it? That they see something on screen and they go, "No way would that character do that."

**Jarrah:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** What were they thinking?" And I, as a regular viewer with a real insight into this, I'm going to say "no." And I'm going to do my own version of this. [Sue laughs] And you can't stop the stories, you really can't. They feel like, I think this is a really interesting stage, really with people, like kind of characters like Kirk and Spock, and Garak and Bashir for me. They almost feel like they're moving out of a-- Think how many people have played Kirk now or have played Spock.

**Jarrah:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** It's very hard to think of anyone else playing Garak, I have to say. But they feel like they're entering a kind of semi mythic space now. Robin Hood's always in the Greenwood. Kirk and Spock will always be on the *Enterprise*. Garak and Bashir will always be having lunch together and playing footsie.

**Jarrah:** Do you think that's maybe part of the reason why we haven't really seen much Cardassians on the whole in newer *Star Trek* that's set in the future or, I mean, like *Picard* and *Discovery*? Is it that people can't quite conceive of what would be Cardassia after *Deep Space Nine*?

**Dr. McCormack:** We've seen a nod, haven't we? Is it the President in *Discovery*?

**Jarrah:** The President.

**Sue:** Rillak, yeah.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah. And then I think we got that little nod in the-- But it was alternate universe, wasn't it in *Picard*? Where we saw that marvelous Dukat's skull-

**Sue and Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Dr. McCormack:** -which is quite wonderful. I really enjoyed that. We're quite a select bunch, I think, those of us who are a bit crazy about Cardassians. You really get into them and then you go, "Oh, yeah, that's actually not what most people get from *Star Trek*, is it?" Actually, what they get from *Star Trek* is the Borg yawn.

**Sue:** Right.

[laughter]

**Dr. McCormack:** Or other things.

**Jarrah:** And the Soongs. All the Soongs.

**Dr. McCormack:** And just because we see it through this sort of lizardy lens, that's actually quite niche, [laughs] bizarre as that might be. The thing I wish they'd really done in *Picard* Season 3, and this is less Cardassian and more the Dominion. I think they sort of bring forward that question of the war crime of infecting the founders and the great link. They kind of bring it forward and I kind of went, "Oh, now we're talking. This is the kind of plot I'm into," and it disappears as it becomes a Borg story and a father son story. So, I would have been there for a lot more of that, and perhaps the Cardassians might have been implicated.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Like maybe there were changelings that happened to that didn't turn evil and you still could have addressed that. But, yeah, there was a bit of a like, "Well, but then the ones that happened to turned real bad."

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah, and because they're so bad when they kind of justified in reacting against them, where you kind of go, "Actually, these lads have got a point." [laughs] Oh, well, it was Section 31. It was really us is like, well, it doesn't feel like it from this end. So, I think that was a really rich vein. So, it's something that maybe I should write a book about it. [laughs]

**Sue:** Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one who was sick of the Borg, so I feel so validated. [laughs]

**Dr. McCormack:** They don't do anything for me. *Best of Both Worlds* incredibly thrilling first time around. But I think ultimately if you've got something that relentless, I don't find it dramatically compelling, I think. It just doesn't press my buttons. Whereas I know other people just love the aesthetic. And so, I would be much more interested, and indeed, I am much more interested in the kind of outlier cases, so, Seven of Nine or Hugh, they're much more interesting figures to me because what can you do with a kind of hive mind killing machine? It just walks around killing, doesn't it? I feel the same way about zombie stories. They don't kind of float my boat either.

**Jarrah:** At least when the zombies, there's no force behind them other than just hunger and they're slow and they wander at you.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah, it doesn't-- it's just not my kind of thing. I don't know, but people seem to get something-- I mean, reading about zombies and the kind of mythos of them and finding out about-- you're reading Zora Neale Hurston and that kind of thing, it's all incredibly interesting. But then screen zombies are just, that's a bit dull. [chuckles] And I feel the same way about the Borg.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. Well, since we were just talking about *Picard*, that's a good segue into looking a little bit at *The Last Best Hope*, which we read for Women at Warp book club. We really

enjoyed it. I would say that after watching Season 1 of *Picard*, I was kind of like, that was fine. And then I read your book and I was like, "I really like this now."

**Dr. McCormack:** Thank you. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** I mean, I particularly am a fan of political dynamics and social dynamics in stories, and so really enjoyed that, but was wondering, what's it like writing a prequel novel and dealing with the constraint of not being able to really have free reign with the ending?

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah. So, that's a good question. Well, first of all, it was really exciting, yeah. Just the process of it, they were great. They gave me kind of access to scripts and revisions of scripts as they were coming in. So, I was just reading all this stuff and kind of sitting on my hands and going, "This is really exciting. And I can't talk about it to anyone." And I still feel almost in a way that I still shouldn't be talking about it, so that was all fun.

And so, in a way, I was kind of watching the story unfold in many ways. But writing a prequel, I think maybe because I'm a fan fiction writer by training, such as it was, that's the kind of thing we do all the time, isn't it, when you're writing fan fiction? You'll kind of look at something and go, "Well, I wonder what the roots of that were." And there's always a story there. You can always find the story with a set of characters and a set of people. If you know how it turns out, that really only works to your advantage as a storyteller. You just use that to make the story more dramatic, more ironic, more tragic.

This book was always going to be a tragedy. It's always going to be downbeat. I know a lot of people feel it's not very Trekkish because of that. So, you have to work with that irony. But at the same time, you're hoping that your readers will trust that because they've seen the show, they know that even though this book goes to dark places, the ultimate conclusion is the optimism, the lightness, the kind of turnaround, the eucatastrophe, I guess, of what happens in the show. So, I just treated it as a kind of narrative challenge to tell that story, so it was self-contained. But to use what we know to kind of feed back into that book, it's like reading *The Silmarillion* if you're Tolkien fans. You don't read *The Silmarillion* without having read or watched *Lord of the Rings*. So, all of that is a kind of advantage for you, knowing how it turns out at the end.

So even as bleak as it gets in *The Silmarillion*, it really does get bleak, you always know that you've got the third age coming, which has its own losses and sadnesses. So, yeah, I treat it as a kind of-- It's not too pretentious, a kind of artistic challenge.

**Jarrah:** We also had a question from our listener, Ashley, after reading the book, and was looking at the dynamics that you describe in the Federation, particularly in those kind of border areas where you have a movement towards protectionism and discrimination against Romulans or discrimination against just non-humans, I guess. And she was wondering, do you see this as unique to the *Picard* universe, or would you imagine that the average Federation citizens has those inclinations across *Star Trek* as a whole?

**Dr. McCormack:** I absolutely loved this question. When you sort of sent the questions over, I absolutely loved this. I've been thinking about it on and off ever since. We could probably just do a podcast on this one, I think. First of all, *Last Best Hope* is definitely my Brexit book. I was kind of writing it as that calamity was all sort of unfolding around me. And when I read that question, I was thinking, "How much do we see, really, of life in the Federation?" And I think it's only really ever introduced to-- I have to think about this, but we go back to Earth and *Deep Space Nine*, don't we? And again, we see something that perhaps isn't as utopian or as much like paradise as perhaps it's sold to us. They quite rapidly move to troops on the street corners in *Homefront*, *Paradise Lost*, and that gives you a little edge. And then I was thinking, where else do we see and we don't very much *Voyager* by its nature, obviously we



don't. And I think we only really get it hinted at in the original series. We tend to see colony worlds and border worlds, don't we?

**Jarrah:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** So, I think this is a really rich vein of storytelling. And you wonder whether people don't notice it in the good times. Yeah, they kind of go, "We're very wealthy, we've got the replicators, everything's very relaxed. So, I'm learning the cello this year or whatever." But then if there are pressures, then something will bubble up. I think the difficulty with *Trek* is that at the same time you're trying to juggle that-- I mean, "Jean's vision," are sort of better people, more perfect people. I'm not particularly convinced by that. I think people are living their best lives, but they're living their best lives because the conditions allow that, materially, they have no pressures. They've all got universal benefit and abundance of goods. So, yeah, I can envisage other times within Federation history where there would be a lean to paranoia or those less palatable aspects of human nature. That's such an interesting question. I've only touched on kind of the top of what I would think about, but I lean towards Garak, perhaps, and say, "Oh, come off, it can't be that good."

[laughter]

**Sue:** I wonder even who the average Federation citizen is.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah, exactly.

**Sue:** Right, because you've got all of the member worlds, you've got colonies, you've got border worlds. That's a little bit, I guess, where they're telling us the Maquis came from.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yep, exactly.

**Sue:** And it's just so fascinating. I think so often, at least on screen, when they talk about the Federation, it really is a stand in for Earth.

**Dr. McCormack:** Exactly. Yeah.

**Sue:** And the other cultures that we're supposed to believe are part of it don't seem to be taken into account.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah. Perhaps only Vulcan. And we know from screen that the Vulcans are horribly racist towards humans. They kind of look at them as sort of half-baked idiots. One place where we did sort of think this through was when we were thinking of the plot for my novel about Tilly, *The Way to the Stars*. And that's almost entirely sort of set within domestic environments. And I think we're following what they'd said on screen was that Tilly's mother was a Federation council, so she's almost kind of elite in a way. So, we get this glimpse into a kind of political elite and what schools might be like and what it's like to live as a Federation citizen as a school kid. But then if you're not involved with Starfleet and you're not involved with the politics, what are you doing all day? Learning the cello, I guess.

[laughs]

**Sue:** Just volunteering to pick grapes at some dude's ancestral vineyard.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah, exactly. Who are those peasants? Exactly that, yeah. [laughs]. Oh, it's so rich. And I think the show was never really gone into that. I don't know, I'm forgetting obvious may be.

**Jarrah:** I feel like you covered the obvious examples there, but I think that part of, yeah, what really worked for me about your book. I mean, it, of course, was relevant for Brexit, but obviously, a lot of similar movements, tendencies across North America as well. And, yeah, you can sort of extrapolate from those few points that we know from *Star Trek* and from what we know about Earth today about just generally kind of how communities or regions or movements of people react when they feel either they're actually disenfranchised or there's a communications gap that leads to a gap in trust that leads to them feeling like, "Well, we can't really trust the people at the center to have our backs." And then what happens? Do they turn against the center? Do they turn against those more marginalized than them? Some combination of both, so I thought it was really interesting.

**Dr. McCormack:** The other place where we pitched this up in the books was-- and I think some of this might have come-- A lot of what I do or have been doing in the books is often working Kirsten Beyer, who wrote many *Voyager* tie novels and became a co-creator of *Picard*. And often what we would do would be working together. She kind of has had oversight of the kind of spin off books. We would often brainstorm, break the story of the novels. So, we did that with *Way to the Stars*. And we did it a little bit with a *Discovery* novel that I did called *Wonderlands*, which is Burnham's missing year. And a lot of what we did with that was reflect on what the Federation was like just before the burn.

And I think a lot of our thinking was, it can't just have been the burn that caused this disintegration. There must have been kind of fractures already in place. And I think some of that was connected up to our thinking of what we'd done in *Last Best Hope* as well. So that these kind of-- Exactly those sorts of things that you were just talking about, Jarrah, these sort of pockets of incipient mistrust and how they would turn into fractures or fragments or mistrust. It's very full of the Roman Empire, isn't it, I think? So, I think there was probably a straight line in what we were talking about in *Last Best Hope* to what we were doing in *Wonderlands* as well. So, it's really interesting. We should see more of the Federation, I think.

**Sue:** And *Wonderlands* is the one that, with the, I guess, name tributes to a lot of the early fans.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yes, that's right. Lovely, lovely spots. Yeah, I sort of named a lot after the early fans, particularly the writers of the early novels. Do we have a Marshak whole brief in there? I hope we do, yeah, it's definitely a McIntyre, possibly a Laura, that might have been a bit too obvious. Yes, that's right. Oh, lovely, I'm glad people have spotted that.

**Sue:** I think Marshak was the first one I saw and then there were three of them together later. I was like, "Oh, no, it's definitely nuts."

**Dr. McCormack:** That's going on here.

**Sue:** That's correct.

[laughter]

**Dr. McCormack:** Just a little nod into them. Yeah.

**Sue:** That's particularly my area of interest. [laughs]

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, lovely. There's a collection of academic essays coming out quite soon about the *Star Trek* novels, so keep an eye out for that. I've got one about Vonda McIntyre in it, so that's coming out quite soon, I hope.

**Jarrah:** Oh, awesome.

**Sue:** Well, I'm going to turn us a little bit away from politics, but we've talked on the podcast quite a bit about the fan criticism that Pulaski often gets and the inclination that people have to pit her against Crusher, and that's where the fandom debates always seem to go. And I'm wondering if that influenced your decision to team them up in *The Missing*?

**Dr. McCormack:** Absolutely. So, this idea that women are always going to be in competition or vying or have to compete or be compared to each other, I thought, "Well, that's boring." These are two intelligent, professional, clever, articulate women working broadly in the same field, why wouldn't they get on with each other? And I thought that was a much more interesting thing to explore.

And Pulaski, as I write is quite irascible, a little bit pigheaded. I think that's there in the show, isn't it? So, if she's annoying people, it's that she annoys people rather than it's because she's a woman [laughs] or that a woman is reacting in a kind of competitive way. And I just thought that was a much more interesting and fruitful thing to do.

I really enjoyed writing Pulaski. I kind of got to say a lot of things that I wouldn't dare say in real life, and I'm quite rude in real life anyway, so. [laughs] She's great fun just to let loose in a room, I think. But, yeah, absolutely, that kind of, "Oh, I can't stand her. Why can't we have the other woman back?" That's not interesting. Treat them as real people and see how they would genuinely get along. Of course, I imagine that she wound *Picard* up, he's glad to see the back of her, [laughs] but that's also fun. Crusher's a little bit more accommodating, perhaps calmer, or seeks more to smooth over, and then to have someone a little spikier and in your face and put them together. That's great pairing I think, so I enjoyed that.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I'm just imagining police procedural, because we talk about Detective Crusher a lot, and then you got Pulaski in the Sherlock Holmes episode, but I'm imagining like a *Scott & Bailey* type situation, but with--

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah, that would be amazing.

**Jarrah:** Yes.

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** Right. Well, I guess I know if someone else wants to go write that fanfiction, go for it.

**Sue:** [laughs]

**Dr. McCormack:** At the back of my mind, it was a friend said, "You've got to do Pulaski like she's in murder she wrote."

**Jarrah:** Oh, my gosh. [laughs]

**Dr. McCormack:** So, yeah, so in the back of my mind, it's kind of Pulaski investigates. So that is there, I'm glad, but *Scott & Bailey* think would be awesome, really good.

**Sue:** Well, anytime I find myself in the middle of that debate, I wind up recommending *The Missing* to people. [laughs]

**Dr. McCormack:** Aww, thank you. Thank you. Yeah, girls could be friends. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Shocking.

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, no. Amazing, isn't it? Newsflash.

**Jarrah:** Well, I had a question about the autobiographies of Mr. Spock and Kathryn Janeway that you worked on, and I was wondering a couple of questions, but I'll start with how did you approach covering events in those characters' lives that readers might already be familiar with from the shows?

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah, so it was-- Spock was thinking himself just because of the kind of wealth of material and the number of shows that I was having to draw on and including the animated series. Janeway was a little bit more straightforward because we were writing this before prodigy. The complication there, I think, was that *Mosaic* existed, which is a novel which covers similar ground. We looked at *Mosaic* and we kind of went, "If we take all this as fixed, we don't have a book." And anyway, a lot of *Mosaic* kind of gets contradicted by later series of *Voyager*. So, we said, "Okay, we're going to not use *Mosaic* unless anything from that actually ended up on screen." We kind of just went back to *Voyager* and went, what's there is there, and we'll use that.

So, I just decided that I would kind of put *Mosaic* aside, and we knew this would be frustrating for people who love that book because it's by Jeri Taylor, you do have that feel that there's a sort of extra degree of authenticity about it, but we wouldn't have had a book. So, we sort of went just back to the show and came up with what we thought was an interesting or fresh take on. And I think what I wanted to lean into was this sense of, "What's it like to be a woman trying to have a career in that environment," which perhaps a little bit kind of influenced by, she's the first actress. Kate Mulgrew is the first woman to play that part. So, they're all looking at her and whether she's going to be any good or that sort of.

So, I leaned a little into those themes of, "Can you have it all? Can you have career? Can you have partnership? Can you have family?" and all of these things. And almost, in a way, what happens with *Voyager* kind of resets that, she can't make that choice. The choice is sort of made for her in a way, and to work through the ramifications of that and the kind of found family that surround her.

I think one of the things that's tricky with these books is that you kind of have to cover the material that people know, but you don't want to sort of be summarizing or just describing stuff that they've seen on screen. That was much easier with the Spock book, where I think there's just so much that you have to lean back and say, "Okay, let's take a more thematic approach to this." I'm pleased with the structure that we came up with that book, so I think I'm probably happier with the Spock book, though I did have a lot of fun with the Janeway book. It was like sitting down with Janeway. It was like you kind of conceit, "I'm her editor," and it felt like, I was kind of turning up with my tape recorder and going, "Okay, let's hear what happened with the Borg on that occasion, or the Borg queen or Seven or whatever." It really felt like were having this conversation.

And then, of course, she read the book. Kate Mulgrew read the book, and that was completely brilliant. So, yeah, they're interesting books to do, and you've got to juggle kind of an expectation that it will cover familiar ground with not making that feel like it's rehearsed or dominating the book. They're an interesting experience.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I mean, my favorite part was definitely just how you capture Janeway's tone in that book.

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, thank you.

**Jarrah:** I didn't listen to the audiobook, but it was still, like, I could hear Kate Mulgrew reading it.

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, Lovely.

**Jarrah:** So, that was very cool. And I think that there's probably a bit of that dynamic when you're dealing with any kind of writing from licensed fiction, that you're always going to have people that imagined it a different way or felt attached to a different vision, and you can't make everyone happy all the time.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah.

**Jarrah:** But I think that it's just awesome that we are in a world that you can have a *Mosaic* and an autobiography of Kathryn Janeway and people can get amazing things from both of them.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah. And as you were saying before, one doesn't cancel the other. If you didn't like the autobiography-- if you don't like *Mosaic*, there's seven seasons of *Voyager*. And if you want more, I've not gone looking, but I bet there's an absolute metric ton of fan fiction. [laughs] And if that doesn't satisfy, there's your own head and a laptop.

**Sue:** Exactly. [chuckles] Well, we have a question from Helen, who says, "What's your experience like writing for other properties that have different worldviews to track, like *Blake's 7*? And do you think that writing for one universe impacts how you write for another?"

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, that's a really interesting question actually, because it can do. So, I think writing *Blake's 7*, which I don't know how well listeners will know, it's a 1970s, 1980s British science fiction series. It's quite cynical, it's got very cynical tone, a very nihilistic tone, and yet at the same time, because it's a British science fiction show, the 1970s and 1980s, everybody's like, wearing ridiculous clothes and it's covered in tinsel. Tinsel and nihilism is how a friend of mine describes it.

[laughter]

So, a little bit of that can come into Garak's voice sometimes-- I joke about the Cardassians being British. It can be a bit of whiplash, particularly if you switch. If I've been writing a book in one franchise and then I've got to pitch for something else. So, this happened a couple of years ago, I think I just finished writing a *Star Trek* book that had gone quite political and maybe there were scenes in it, so gone a bit dark. And then I had to pitch something for *Doctor Who*, which is completely different, and I sort of wrote this pitch up and I looked at it and I went, "That's actually a *Star Trek* pitch, isn't it? Let me just tweak this and make it a little bit more Douglas Adams." And, I won't set it here, I'll set it somewhere else, it's broadly the same story, but it's got a lighter touch, it's more playful and all these sorts of things. *Star Trek* books, and this might just be my *Star Trek* books, but I think this is true-- *Star Trek* books have a lot more meetings in them.

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** This meeting could have been a *Star Trek* is what I'm going to say.

**Dr. McCormack:** Exactly. But it's part of what *Star Trek* is a handful of people coming together to, like, they're saying for all mankind to where the problem, yeah. I think probably my favorite episode of *Discovery* was one in the last season where they get together and work the problem. They're working science, but also the political ramifications of it. So, *Star*

*Trek* does have a lot more meetings, whereas *Doctor Who*, I think, has a lot more of kind of jumping around and running and going, "But Doctor, what's happening?" You know, this guy-- [laughs]

**Jarrah:** There's a lot more trial and error.

**Dr. McCormack:** There is and lot more forward momentum, I think. And partly the *Doctor Who* books I do are much shorter, they're about half the length. So, the *Star Trek* ones can be a little bit more expansive and the audiences are different. The *Doctor Who* books that I've done are sort of aimed at 8 to 14. It's a book that a kid could read either by themselves or with a parent who ideally would enjoy it as well. So, they're different tonally, structurally, length audience, and sometimes you've got to remember that you're not doing that one, you do the other one. [laughs] But, it's always good, they palette cleanse each other quite nicely.

**Sue:** I would imagine for both *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*, that tone can shift even depending on which era I would say that you're working in. Your *Next Gen* cast is going to have a much different tone than your *DS9*. The same way that the 9th Doctor and the 10th Doctor are very different in their outlooks.

**Dr. McCormack:** Very much so. And I think so the difference between writing *Discovery* or writing *Picard*. *Picard* is a much more somber show. *Discovery*, it's big hearted and earnest and optimistic and caring, I think. These are the kind of qualities I like about *Discovery*, whereas *Picard* is autumnal, somber, filled with doubts in many ways. So just between those shows, there's a great disparity. And I think in my *Discovery* novels that they would get a little bit more playful, perhaps, than the *Picard* ones have done.

**Jarrah:** Another question. We talked a little bit about Cardassia and what more you might like to see there. But is there a particular *Star Trek* character or point in Starfleet history, otherwise that you would like more opportunity to explore?

**Dr. McCormack** Oh. So other than writing the further adventures of Garak and Bashir, what I would have loved to have done, and this came out in the Spock book, was that whole period of Spock on Romulus. Whilst I was writing those sections, I was kind of writing them going, "My God, there is a three-book trilogy in this about this sort of mission he has to Romulus and the alliances he has to forge and the betrayals and the trust and the mistrust." I would love to have written more about that. Sadly, I had about a chapter, if that. So that's something I would have really liked to have done. Yeah, I think that's the main one.

And I guess sort of in the back of your mind you're thinking-- so, in the back of your mind with *Doctor Who*, you're thinking, "Ooh, have I written something for each one of the doctors yet?" And then I guess at the back of your mind with *Star Trek*, you're thinking, "Have I written something in each series yet?" So maybe a *Star Trek* animated series. [chuckles] I've kind of covered that. I sort of covered that in the Spock book, didn't I? So that would be a bit cheeky. Maybe something for *Prodigy* or *Lower Decks* would be quite good fun. So, yeah, something that kind of ticked those off. But Spock on Romulus, I think, would have been the thing I would have written.

Oh, and something to do with Kira. I'd love to kind of explore Kira more. And I would really love to write the full history of-- Little bit at the end of *Deep Space Nine* with Garak, Kira and Damar on Cardassia. I'd love to write a book about that. It'd be great.

**Jarrah:** I'd read it. [laughs]

**Dr. McCormack** I'd write it.

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** Amazing.

**Sue:** Now I'm just thinking about Spock working towards reunification.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. It sort of reminds me of what you were saying earlier about how *Star Trek* hasn't shown us very much in terms of political dynamics or dynamics outside the core part of the Federation. But in addition, partly because maybe it's not exactly good TV. [chuckles] *Star Trek* shows us a lot of beginnings and endings of transitions and not a lot of the transitions in terms of social change. And so, you see Spock's undercover on Romulus and things are going bad, and then you see hundreds of years later, but it all worked out okay.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah, exactly. But you don't get that story, do you? Or daily life on Cardassia Prime. I did some of that in *Never-Ending Sacrifice*. I think that kind of novels lend themselves much more to kind of the domestic, don't they? So, well mine do, anyway. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I mean, the worlds of *Deep Space Nine* got into that a bit as well, both in yours and the other installments, like through the lens of a few different specific characters. But because it was people positioned in different parts of society, that was interesting. And you did in your Cardassia one get a bit into the rebuilding post war. That was really interesting.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah. No, that was a lovely set of books. That was Marco Palmieri. Just exploring those things exactly as you say, they're just almost a throwaway remark on screen. Things like the Tzenkethi. We got to explore in the books a lot more, and I got quite absorbed with them at one point, but frightening. Yeah, you just have that space in a novel and can make it a little bit more domestic, a little bit more measured than you could possibly ever have time for on screen.

**Sue:** Well, we have one more question, and this one is from our listener, Maria, who asks which non-Trek novels or authors would you recommend to a Trekkie who wants to get into Sci-Fi literature?

**Dr. McCormack:** Oh, wow. Where would I stop?

**Sue:** I love that, where would I stop? Where would I stop? I love that.

**Dr. McCormack:** [laughs] Where would I stop? So, I'm going to assume Ursula Le Guin is already on the list and Octavia Butler is on the list. So, the writer I would really encourage people to read, if they are interested in science fiction, *Star Trek* and feminism is Vonda McIntyre.

Vonda McIntyre people will already know as the author of five *Trek* books, including novelizations of the three of the movies, two, three, and four. But before Vonda wrote *Star Trek* novels, she was a superbly accomplished short story writer and novelist. And in particular, she wrote a novel called *Dreamsnake*, which is a sort of set on a post-apocalyptic earth about a woman who's a healer. She's a kind of slightly false genetics to do with some snakes and how she's able to use them to heal. I'm making it sound a bit odd, but it is absolutely awesome. But what's great about Vonda is that not only was she a brilliant writer, she's absolutely on top of gender politics and women.

And I would say, with reflection, nonbinary characters are centered in a way, this is my story, and why shouldn't it be? I say it's not even a question, "Here's my story, here's who I am, I

am the lead of this." She was ahead of her time, I think. And so not only do you get her incredible books, her original fiction, you also get her *Star Trek* books.

Her novel, I almost get the title wrong. I think it's *The Moon and the Sun* is set in an alternate history, sort of court of Louis XIV, and it beat *Game of Thrones* to the Nebula. I think it was the Nebula that year. It won the Nebula the year it was published ahead of *Game of Thrones*, so there you go. [laughs] Vonda was incredible.

I've just edited a collection of her short fiction, which is coming out quite soon. So, people should really read Vonda McIntyre, I think. And then go and read the *Star Trek* novels. I've just written an essay about her, and I was speaking to people who'd worked with her on those books, and the editor that she worked with, Dave Stern, he said, "There's a little bit of Vonda's DNA in *Star Trek, The Next Generation*, that when you go back to those books, the novelizations of *Wrath of Khan*, such as spoken in the Voyager, you sort of see that a little bit of that is going into *Next Gen*, her kind of anti-sexism."

**Jarrah:** And that was very needed after the novelization of *Star Trek-the Motion Picture*.

**Sue:** Oh, my gosh.

**Dr. McCormack:** Exactly, yes. Exactly that. But she was an amazing writer, incredible woman, and really in the thick of it of all these big debates about women writing science fiction in the 60s and 70s. So, Vonda, I would say. And then there's just thousands. If I'm thinking of people I've read recently, I'm sure people are on top of these, but I love Becky Chambers.

**Jarrah:** Oh, yeah.

**Sue:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. McCormack:** I've just started Martha Wells just started reading-

**Jarrah:** Oh yeah. Very fine.

**Dr. McCormack:** -*Murderbot* which I've been really enjoying. And then I've just today started very new writer, Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson, who won Ben Aaronovitch, set up a prize to first novel bi-part writer, which I think is just in Britain. But Esmie's book is called the *Principle of Moments*, and she also novelized the first Ncuti Gatwa *Doctor Who* episode, *Church on Ruby Road*. So Esmie is going to be a star already, is actually quite incredible. So, people might look for that. It's in hardback, I think it's coming out in paperback later in the year, and I hope it's got an American publication, but certainly perhaps you could find it on e-book. Oh, and then my other beloved author, and maybe people are not reading her as much as they used to, is Lois McMaster Bujold.

**Sue and Jarrah:** Oh, yes.

**Dr. McCormack:** Yeah, who I adore. So, if people haven't read her yet. Particularly if they are of the fan fictional inclination, I think there's a lot of that sensibility in that. A lot of talk about feelings and curtains-

[laughter]

-in between all the high space adventure. So those would be my kind of suggestions, I think.

**Jarrah:** That's great.



**Sue:** Yeah. So, we are running up on the end of our time. So is there anything else that we should have asked or you'd like to share or where people can find you or the best place to find your work, etc, etc.

**Dr. McCormack:** Well, I think *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* novels are quite straightforward to find your sort of bookshop of choice. In the UK, we've got a lovely site called *bookshop.org*, which kind of means that people can buy from independent bookshops. It's a sort of online shop front for them. I don't know if there's something equivalent in the States.

**Jarrah:** We have a Women at Warp Store on *bookshop.org*.

**Dr. McCormack:** There you go. That's exactly where people should be buying from. So very easy to find things there. Do please pre-order the *Doctor Who* novel that's coming quite soon. And, oh, gosh, well, I've sort of given up on Twitter. I'm kind of locked my account there just because it's become a bit miserable. And I've kind of migrated over to Bluesky. So, if people want to just follow some mindless chatter or indeed the adventures of tiny Garak, who goes around with me to interesting places,-

**Jarrah:** Yes.

**Dr. McCormack:** -tiny Garak is alive and well and posting on Bluesky, and you can find his pictures. My account is *@unamccormack* as ever, but really, Bluesky is where I am now. A little bit on Mastodon, but not very much, didn't quite get the hang of it, but I do post there occasionally. But Bluesky is where you're going to find me, I think.

**Sue:** Awesome. Jarrah, is there anything you want to pitcher plug this week?

**Jarrah:** Sure, you can find me at *trekkiefeminist.com*.

**Sue:** All right, and I'm Sue. To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit *women@warp.com* email us at *crew@womenatwarp.com*. Or find us on Facebook or Instagram, because we have also given up on Twitter *@womenatwarp*. Thanks so much for listening.

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