

Women at Warp Episode 137 Transcript: Book Club: *The Last Best Hope*

Jarrah: Hi and welcome to Women at Warp, a Roddenberry *Star Trek* podcast. Join us as our crew of four-women *Star Trek* fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Jarrah and thanks for tuning in. Today, with us, I have crew members, Andi.

Andi: Hello.

Jarrah: And Sue.

Sue: Hi there, everybody.

Jarrah: And we are going to be doing a book club episode today. But before we get into the 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 a month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media up to silly watch-along commentaries. Visit www.patreon.com/womenatwarp.

As the world is in challenging times right now, we've been doing some extra bonus patron exclusive watch-alongs and opening those up to all our patrons. So, if you are an existing patron, make sure you're checking your Patreon feed to learn about those. And we've had a couple and we promise only ridiculous episodes. So, the next one we're going to do is *Masks* from *TNG*. So, check it out. And if you can't join us, you can still listen to the audio from all of these hangout watch-alongs.

You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts.

Well, we hope that all of you listeners are doing well and thanks to everyone who joined us for the discussion of this book, which is the latest in our book club. It's *The Last Best Hope* which is the first *Picard* tie-in novel. It's by Una McCormack and we've been discussing this for the last month or so in our Goodreads Group and if you aren't already a member of that, you can hop over to goodreads.com and search Women at Warp in the groups field and you can join in the discussion and learn about future reads and suggest your own books too. All right, overall thoughts?

Andi: I liked this book. It's well written, it's a good book, it was easy to read. I don't like the whole direction that *Star Trek* seems to be going lately, which is basically, like, instead of it being idealistic and inspirational, it is now very realistic and not inspirational at all. So, I liked this book. I would even give it five stars. It's an excellent book and it's really interesting and it's well written. And the characters are well drawn and everything about it is good. I just wish it wasn't *Star Trek*, which is a harsh thing to say.

But that's how I feel because Lord knows the world is shitty. I don't need to know that. I'm used to things being shitty, that's not why I watch or read *Star Trek*. I watch *Star Trek* because we've skipped past all of that and now things are good and there's still conflict and there's still problems and there are still bad people. But the society itself is better, and the society presented in this book is not better, it's the same one we have.

Sue: Yeah. There are definitely a lot of parallel stuff going on today, 100%. I think what happened when we had *TOS*, *TNG* on the air is that they really told us that everyone in the Federation and the Federation itself had these great ideals that were shared and the conflicts that we saw were with non-Federation races.

Andi: Or outliers, like random admirals that went bad and then we had to-- But they were outliers, they were individuals. They weren't part of the actual functioning society.

Sue: Right. And what we're seeing now in *Star Trek* is this internal struggle inside the Federation that the outliers are the ones fighting against.

Andi: Yeah, I don't like it.

Jarrah: I don't disagree with you. I think that this is a part of *Star Trek* that I appreciate, but it is missing something. And when I read this book, I also think it was a very good book overall. It certainly-- The book definitely isn't hopeful. I think the series gets a little more hopeful towards the end of Season 1 at least. But when I finished this book, it was around the mid-season of the series and I just felt so, like, I miss when *Star Trek* was comforting because I was like reading the news and then getting my fears from what I was reading the news reinforced in the book and the show, and it didn't feel like an escape anymore.

So, I appreciate it for what it's doing. I just wish that it was maybe a little bit more interspersed and that maybe we could have-- I know we're expecting animated shows and stuff, but maybe it's not always that the lighter stuff is the realm of like the less serious stuff like animation and kids' cartoons tend to be taken a little bit less seriously even if that's not fair, but maybe the lighter stuff could also be in the main universe sometimes.

Sue: Mm-hmm.

Andi: Yeah, but it's not like *TNG* was not dramatic and it didn't have conflict and it didn't tackle big, scary ideas. It was tackling it from a different perspective. Or even *DS9*, people bring up *DS9* in this conversation at all times when they're like, "Well, what about *DS9*? *DS9* was dark." Yeah, but a lot of the darkest episodes of *DS9* were like looking back, like *Past Tense* is a great example of that where Bashir is sitting here and is like, "What is this? This is terrible. How did they let it get this bad?" And he's looking back on it from a perspective of, "This is not our society anymore."

Sue and Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Andi: It's frustrating. Like you look at *DS9* and the other thing about *DS9* is that it's on the frontier. It's not in the heart of Starfleet, it's not in the heart of the Federation, it's on a new frontier and they're dealing with other non-Federation races and species and stuff. So, it's a different perspective. Whereas this is right in the heart of the top decision-making people and they suck.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: You know what I mean?

Sue: And in the older shows, the conflicts and the problems that needed to be solved typically originated from outside our main cast-

Andi: Yes.

Sue: -and they don't anymore.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Sue: But for me, I think this is one of the best tie-in novels that we've had in a very long time-

Jarrah: Yeah, I'd agree.

Sue: -for the *Star Trek* series, but I totally get where you're coming from. And I think that it's almost no win in the fact that this is not a feel-good, uplifting novel because it is a prequel to finding our hero in a really bad place in his life.

Andi: When you first open the book, one of the first things you see is a quote from *TNG*, which is, "It's possible to make no mistakes and still lose."

Sue: Mm-hmm.

Andi: Well, clearly, because you start this book and it's Picard at his most idealistic and you know he's just going to fail. And I think that it's valuable to look at a character like that's a hero and explore his failures, but this was just brutal and it completely undermined everything he believes in. And I don't know, it's just we live in a world where we are constantly failing as a society in my opinion. Like, we're failing the Uyghur Muslims, we're failing the Rohingya Muslims, we're failing the Syrians. We are doing that right now. I would much rather read a story about a humanity that's gotten its shit together and is not failing anymore and is doing things the way they should be done, which is taking care of people and caring more about people than we care about money. And instead, we have the opposite of that. So, it's a really good book. It's really well written. It's good sci-fi. I liked it. I liked reading it. I just wish it wasn't *Star Trek*. I wish it was just a random sci-fi book.

Jarrah: I think that's fair. I did appreciate it though, and I certainly find that-- these days that I'm finding myself repeating to myself like, "Just one impossible thing at a time." And I feel like that, to me is my favorite takeaway from this book is, I guess like trying to persist through crisis. And I know it doesn't end well in the beginning of the series, but I think I am seeing myself more as Raffi and Jean Luc in the middle of this book. And so, I feel like there's still nothing wrong with that approach, I guess. But I totally-- Like, I definitely see what you're saying. So, should we get into some of themes and questions?

Andi: What do you think the biggest theme of this book is?

Jarrah: One of themes, I mean, I think probably-- Okay, so now I'm like, "That's a good question." One of themes, I don't know that I'm going to say this is the biggest theme, but I did appreciate theme of sort of like self-determination for the Romulans and Starfleet trying to handle this in a non-colonialist way. And I don't know if that's really a theme, but that was something that I appreciated about the approach to this, that they could have introduced different dynamics or they could have been super imaginative. But I think having Lieutenant Koli there being the person who is like, "I can say from my experience as a Bajoran that this is how it should not be done and that you're going to lose people's support if you don't let them feel like they have ownership over this process." And I thought that was a good kind of check on some of the more problematic elements of the sort of *TNG* mentality of things where they come in and just lecture people.

Andi: I agree totally. And I feel like that was one of the strengths of the book, is critiquing the idea that Picard knows what's right and if everybody just does what Picard says, everything will be fine. And the idea that Starfleet would have the right, in the name of saving lives, of going into another empire or whatever and making decisions for their citizens that they don't have the right to make.

And that kind of flows into what I thought the biggest theme or the most resonant theme for me was the idea that you can't control what other people are going to do. You can't control how other people feel. You can't control how other people see things. And there are a lot of examples of having characters who see the same event completely differently and neither of

them are completely wrong or right, which is a really good indicator of the strength of the moral dilemma, is if one person's right and the other person's wrong, well, that's easy. If they both have points, then it's a lot harder. So, I liked the Romulan liaison they had on the ship and how even though I definitely--

We've talked about Lieutenant Koli, the Bajoran woman, and how she tried so hard and then there was a breakdown and there was a massacre. And she saw it as Picard's fault or rather that Picard did not take the responsibility he needed to take for those lives. And then on the other hand, you have this Romulan liaison who saw it as a necessary thing that had to happen. And even though I'm more on her side than his side, you can also see his side, even if it sucks. That is something that kind of just happened over and over again where you're just like--

Another example is the scientist, Dr. Safadi, where she was like, "But this is the truth. Why won't people see the truth?" And she wants the truth to be like this one thing that is not open to interpretation. And I agree with her. She did have a mathematical, scientific truth. But you still can't force people to believe in it, and you can't force people to make the decisions you would make. And not being able to control everything means that you can make all the right decisions and still fail, as Picard would say, and that's what happened. He couldn't find the perfect words to unlock the Romulan psyche and have them see it his way.

Sue: And to that point, and to Jarrah's earlier, I do like that very early on, Crusher tells Picard, "Don't surround yourself with yes men. Find somebody who is not going to be blinded by the stories that are built up around you." And that's where we get Raffi, that's who that person is for him. But I don't think there are enough of them. And I do think she starts to buy into like the great man Picard. But I was also watching earlier today Jessie Gender's review of this book. So, I'm going to give them credit for this. But they said that one of the biggest themes they saw was theme of compromise. So, everyone has to make compromises, the Federation, Picard, Raffi, the Romulans. And for each of them, they compromise in most of these situations, probably more than they want to.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Sue: And we see the consequences of that because when you have to compromise over and over again more than you want to for a lot of people, you start to breed resentment.

Jarrah: Yeah. I think that McCormack does a really good job of laying out like how some of the politics changed and that tension between-- And wishing this maybe was not the dynamic in the Federation, but you could see how those border worlds had some legitimate grievances that were turned in some unhelpful ways. And that distance between the mission happening on the ground and the political decisions being made and the impact that had and the declining support within the Federation because people were having to make those compromises around their-- Like, giving up their research and things like that and not going out to the store for non-essential reasons or things like that. It was not at all close to home, is what I'm saying.

Sue: Well, yeah, it brings up this idea of like-- because he's been on the Enterprise for all this time, right?

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Sue: Is being on a Starfleet starship, anyone, not just the Enterprise, but that's a bubble, right?

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: They don't have to deal with what's going on internally with the politics of the member world. They don't have to deal with the fight for resources. So, he comes back and gets sort of not thrown into but is now in this situation that involves all of these internal Federation politics, all of these politics with the Romulans and the resources of getting all of this done. And it's just far outside, like one ship and one crew that has been his purview for, what, 30 years.

Andi: That's why I appreciated the character of Clancy so much because there were a lot of scenes that were from her perspective that kind of, they were both funny and kind of eye opening where you see Picard and he is still this high-minded idealist. And she's just like banging her head against the wall because she's just like, "You're not seeing it. You're not hearing us. We're trying to tell you that the political will to do this is eroding." And he's like, "Well, just tell them it's the right thing to do." And she's like, "But that's not how people work." [laughter] And so, I really appreciated kind of seeing that high-minded idealism that Picard is so well known for and is such a part of who he is, he just cannot comprehend that not everyone is going to think the way that he thinks and it makes him have blind spots that get exploited.

Jarrah: Yeah, definitely. I thought it really helped underline the dynamics between Picard and Clancy and maybe excuse the F-bomb dropping if you understood this background. That said, you shouldn't expect, and I don't think they did expect that everyone watching the show will have already read the book. You shouldn't need to have read the book to understand that, but I just felt like I appreciated the way they played it if you know this background a bit more. How do we feel about Olivia Quest?

Andi: She's a politician.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: Jarrah and I both work in public service/politics.

Jarrah: Yep.

Andi: And I'm sure that both of us have dealt with our fair share of politicians. I've been working on campaigns before I could vote. And I've been around a million politicians and I've worked for a million politicians. They are almost all like this. Even the good ones. Even the good ones have this underlying, "How do I make this work for me?" And they have the ego and they always in the back of their mind, no matter what they're doing are, "How will I get reelected," and, "How do I leverage this power for more power?" They are all like that. That's the personality type that is drawn to politics. It just is.

Jarrah: Yeah. I feel like these days you can really see who is having trouble resisting that voice in the current moment. And then, some people are being like surprisingly not like that but are kind of like that all the rest of the time. But yeah, it's an interesting dynamic. And again, starts out with some decent rationale but she's very much going at this with an agenda, and I thought it was interesting. I didn't have any problems with her as a character.

Andi: She was probably the most realistic part of that book.

Sue: I have a problem with her character.

Andi: As a person.

Sue: Yeah. [laughter] The accuracy seems like it's there. Just the repeated phrase of, what was it? "Romulan space for Romulans," or "Romulan space is best for Romulans"?

Andi: Yep.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Sue: Ugh. Even when there's fake slurs or fake racism in fiction, it feels very upsetting to me in a lot of ways. And you just can't help but hear in the back of your head the "send them back" people or the "America first" people or the "not in my backyard" people. And that was just one of those things that really, I think, was striking to the parallels to today that's in this novel.

Jarrah: Also, just on the politics side of things, I wanted to highlight, I think maybe my favorite-- actually, I don't know if this is my favorite quote, but one of my favorite discussions that Picard and Clancy have where, like Andi was referring to it, but he says "Then, they must put aside their grievances, listen to the better angels of their nature, and make a sacrifice that is necessary for others to survive." It goes, nobody said Clancy wins elections telling people to make sacrifices.

And that is horribly bleak and actually mirrors something that I was reading recently about how I think it was FDR in the fireside chats asked Americans to eat less beef so that they would have more meat-- less problems with rationing around the war effort. And so, basically, they were like, "All Americans should not eat meat one day a week." And it was framed as this thing we must all do for the good of the war effort. And not really since that time until very, very recently have we seen elected officials ever make that case and nor can we-- We've kind of stopped being able to even imagine a world where it's like, "Yes, vote for me and I will ask you all to consume less gas and turn the tide against climate change." And it's almost like that's a bridge too far, guys. So, I did like that mentioned in the book because it does speak to maybe our culture is pretty messed up if we can't expect our politicians to be leaders in a national effort for the good of all.

Andi: Yeah. And this is what my biggest problem with this whole book is, and new *Star Trek* in general, is that I don't want it to be realistic. This is so realistic, this is so hyperrealistic that I can see it happening. I can see these conversations. They're the same arguments politicians always make. I don't want *Star Trek* to be realistic. I want it to be aspirational. So, yeah, she's a good character. She's well written, Quest is, and Clancy. And they're both very good characters that did what they needed to do within the plot. They just depressed me.

Jarrah: Yep. Should we talk about the Maddox and Jurati situation, which was something we asked our listeners about?

Andi: We should just take that whole thing out of the book. It was so creepy. I hated everything about it. I hated all of their scenes. She is really creepy to me. I don't get her deal. The other thing is y'all need to remember that I haven't seen the show yet. So, I've only seen the first episode of *Picard*. So, to me, all I know about this character is this. And either she is the world's most cunning manipulator, she's real shady, or she's a complete cliché. And either way, I don't like it. I don't like this relationship. It's super creepy.

Jarrah: Well, I can say that pretty much all of our listeners who responded were also not a big fan of the relationship. Kara had a good comment. She said, "I am really struggling with the Maddox-Jurati relationship and the characterization of Jurati herself. Why is the primary perspective through Maddox? It would have been better to see him through Jurati's eyes than the way we get it, which is the other way around. So, she is just a sweet, worshipful student who puts the moves on him and he's only considerate of her feelings when hears her

'soft sounds' and realizes she's crying more than once." Kara has seen the series and says that she feels Alison Pill made Agnes Jurati very rich, layered and complex and not a manic pixie dream girl and she's very self-aware, but this person is not the one in the novels.

Andi: They make a good point about how it's through Maddox's eyes because he only sees her in conjunction to himself. She's there to make him feel happy at all times sexually when it comes to his research. She's basically his cheerleader.

Sue: Tells him what a genius he is all the time.

Andi: Yeah, it's so creepy, just the way everything is about him, nothing is about her. He makes a couple asides. He's like, "Oh, yeah, she got her doctorate in robotics." Okay, bro, but she's just following you around telling you're a genius all the time, okay. So, we don't know if he's like an unreliable narrator and she's not like that at all, but that's the only version of her we see and she's a mess.

Jarrah: Yeah. Sue, what were your thoughts on this?

Sue: I think it's super gross.

Jarrah: [laughs]

Sue: It's difficult. There's definitely this professor-student thing going on. The book does, at least to me, because it talks about her previous degrees, imply that she is like older when they meet and not, I don't know, like a 22-year-old grad student or even younger. But he has definitely got to be, what, 50s if he was average age of the *TNG* crew when we first met him, right?

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Sue: And just the age difference is bothersome to me. The power dynamic is not great. And she just like sticks around and follows him around like this little puppy and it-- Oh, I don't like it at all. I also think that it almost does a disservice to Maddox, which I know he isn't supposed to be a villain in *Next Gen*, but if you actually look at the character, he cares about this work. He's trying to learn and that is his main goal, is figuring out how to create more Soong-type androids. But now, they also make him like a lech [laughs] and it makes him gross and terrible in a new and different way.

Jarrah: Yeah, there's the line, "Bruce Maddox had never really doubted himself or his great elusive dream. He never did." Yeah, it just-- If anything, it actually probably negatively impacted my view of the relationship in the show because it filled in that professor relationship, but then also because of the way she's just kind of presented as this puppy and we don't really see what her driving motivation is other than to praise him for his genius. And then, you see in the show her getting kind of lectured for it for letting him go and all that kind of stuff and I just did not-- And then, it was romanticized. Please do not show me that hologram of them kissing anymore, guys. So, yeah, also, not my favorite part of the book.

That said, should we talk about which characters we liked in the book? We talked a little bit about Koli, but we also asked about which characters from the show did this book make you see in a new light. And we had many comments saying that this book made people love Raffi more.

Sue: Me too. I was not sure I was on board with her in the show, to be honest with you. And then, the book made me like her a lot more.

Jarrah: Andi?

Andi: Well, I haven't seen the show.

Sue: [laughs]

Jarrah: [laughs] Did you like her in the book?

Andi: Oh, yeah. Raffi is great. I liked that she was a very smart, no-nonsense kind of person. I enjoyed that-- because you have Picard, who's always-- I don't want to say it's artifice because he's completely sincere, but he is always like this elegant creature. And then, you've got Raffi just being like, "Fuck this. This fuckin' sucks." And I really dug that dynamic between them, and I felt really sad for her that she lost everything and for a mission that failed. And honestly, I feel like she came out of it worse than Picard did.

Jarrah: Oh, she totally did. Despite what you blame that on but I thought it was an interesting mirroring of social structures in our time, that Picard goes into it up ahead on power, race and gender and comes out of it bruised ego, but he also got to make the decision, and she didn't really have a say, and she ends up a lot worse off than he does. But I do like that it doesn't challenge-- The way that it portrays her conflict about "taking this job or going back to my family," I like that it doesn't apologize for the decisions that she made and acknowledges that, yeah, she made that choice, and it's a valid choice, and she suffered for it, but wouldn't necessarily have suffered the other way.

Sue: Picard takes a moral stand, and he makes that choice for himself, but he's also making it for Raffi. So, because he wants to be up on his high horse, she loses her job.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: And that is a pretty terrible situation. But I think what I found, I guess, off putting about her at the start of the show was the familiarity with Picard because we didn't have a backstory. We didn't know where that came from. And I felt like the story in this novel explained it all perfectly and I'm on board for it. And that took any of that doubt or concern away from me.

Jarrah: Yeah. Our listener, reader, Zoe, said, "I love that Picard wanted to work with her because of how good she was at her job and because he wanted someone who would push him. One of my favorite traits in a leader is the desire to have people around you who push you rather than act as an echo chamber for your ideas." So, agreed.

Sue: Which is exactly what he was warned against.

Jarrah: Yeah. Do you want to talk about the Crusher scene too?

Sue: No. [laughs] It hurts me.

Jarrah: I will say, I felt it hurt in a validating way a little bit. [laughter]

Sue: You just want me to admit that I cried on the subway over a *Star Trek* book. [laughter] It's hard to see that crew split up for me, for any of the characters. I think, however, that in the descriptions of Picard leaving the Enterprise, that Una McCormick did them all justice, I'll put it that way.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: It's nice to see that Worf, who thought his career was over at one point during *Deep Space Nine*, become the captain of the flagship. It's nice to see Geordi join this project and take on really the role of a lifetime in trying to create this rescue fleet. And in other ways, it's heartbreaking. So, for me, the goodbye with Crusher is heartbreaking. But I also think, frustratingly, very much in character for those two, so. [laughs]

Jarrah: Yeah, I think it accomplished a, I guess, goal of transitioning in a way that didn't undermine the character's previous connection.

Sue: And I do appreciate, I said it earlier in the episode, that she's the one to tell him that he needs someone who will challenge him, because for a lot of their time on the Enterprise, she was that person for him who's not going to let him get away with his crap, and he listens to it. And that's how we get Raffi, and I'm down for that.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Thoughts on the Qowat Milat?

Andi: I like that sword dude. [laughs]

Jarrah: Yeah, I was going to say.

Andi: I still haven't seen him in the show show, but every picture I see of him, and he was adorable. And I just love sword dude, the elf guy, I like him.

Sue: Elnor.

Andi: Yeah, I know his name, but he's sword dude and elf guy.

Jarrah: Okay. [Laughs]

Andi: I really like the honesty thing because that could have been really cheesy. And also, I feel like a lot of times when people try and tackle this idea of absolute candor or honesty as never lying, they have a tendency to show it as rigid and not a good thing. We need lying. And I really liked the portrayal of the idea that, no, it could be really healthy if you do it right. And I loved the idea of promises being a possible lie. I loved everything about that, that was great. And sword ladies, I love sword ladies.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Yeah. I'm also a fan of them and of Zani acting as kind of mentor figure to Picard throughout this.

Andi: I just love the idea of-- So, you have the Romulans, and they keep getting set up as this homogeneous culture. And then, they come and they show a section of Romulan culture that is the opposite of what everybody is taught to expect of Romulans. And then, contrasting this order with the Tal Shiar was brilliant.

Jarrah: Yeah. Actually, I wouldn't mind talking a little bit more about how they portrayed the Romulans in different groups. There's a couple things I wanted to raise. First of all, Suvim, who's like the subpraetor kind of diva character that they have on the ship, I think it was a few chapters in where I was like, "Is he a good choice for the face of this crisis?" And we do get some more different Romulans later, but it seems like if he's the main person that you see them helping and he's just being super demanding about his room all the time, that it is-- I was like, maybe the person that was in the middle to upper ruling class isn't the best person to kind of explain this crisis to a reader. But I don't know your thoughts, and I think we do get a little bit more different later on.

Andi: Well, I think it was actually great because he becomes like a metaphor for the entire Romulan empire where his pride is keeping him from understanding reality. And then also, he's complaining about these little things that mean nothing because he thinks that's what's important, is like the--

Sue: That's an indicator of his stature or status.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Andi: Exactly. And then in the end, he's humbled, which is exactly what the Romulans go through. The ambassador for the Romulans is a good example of that. And that by the end, she's like, "You need help." And it's never like-- he was an asshole about it [laughs]. And then he had to come to terms with what was happening. He had to finally face the truth, which is something the Romulans will not do through the whole book. Like, they go out of their way to hide the truth over and over and over again, but eventually they can't anymore. You cannot wish away a supernova. You can't lie away a supernova. It's happening and it's going to happen. So, that final moment where all fight is gone from him and he has nothing and he just collapses is kind of indicative of the whole Romulan arc.

Sue: We have this Romulan culture that is so built on secrecy and pride, or at least the one that we know from TV, and the question that I keep hearing people ask is, like, "Why do the Romulans care so little about saving their own people?", and I think it's a wrong question. They won't admit to what's going on because of their own pride. You nailed it exactly, Andi. But long term, the truth is going to be evident. And if you don't get your people out, you're not really going to have a people anymore. I don't understand the continued denial at home. If you want to continue to deny what's going on to the Federation, to the other players in the astropolitical universe, fine, but you're letting your top scientist be vaporized because he's buying into the lies.

Andi: Yeah. So, I feel like this is another one where it runs right into theme that she's like, "This is how climate change is going to destroy us."

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: The politicization of science in general, trying to hide the truth and pretend it's not happening for as long as humanly possible, that's not a rational thing. And yet, that is exactly what we're doing.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. And that's like obviously most clearly represented in the character of [unintelligible 00:37:17], who's like the super wealthy dude who's preventing all the people in his town from leaving and has the shady house with all the fake entrances.

Andi: That maze was amazing. Amazing. And I loved it as a metaphor for the entire Romulan situation. It's overly complicated and it slows everything down and it just is all about status and pride. And that's when I really started to like-- I forget his name, the Romulan liaison that was like Picard's right-hand guy in that scene. I started to really appreciate him because I feel like at the end, he really did start to see how dumb this shit is and how much it hurts their society to have this be who they are.

Jarrah: I did really like the dynamic with that Tal Shiar guy and the Qowat Milat. And I think you're right, they did a good job introducing those different dynamics. There're also the people that really don't want to leave their town. There's all kinds of different dynamics. I think the area where it differs semi notably from some current refugee crisis. Well, in a bit.

So, one of the issues in this book is the Romulan state is basically like actively trying to not participate in this process. And when it comes to putting them on certain worlds, wants them actively on different worlds. And so, that kind of conflict, obviously there's refugee crisis where there's a conflict between states, the state that's resettling and the state that people are fleeing from, but it's less analogous to this exact situation, but it was definitely interesting.

Andi: I just thought she did a really good job. McCormack did a really good job of making the Romulans not just all the same.

Jarrah: I did really like the character of Vritet, who is the Romulan scientist who's corresponding with the Earth scientist or trying to. And that like it's very tragic how their work is kind of twisted against each other by their intelligence, the Tal Shiar folks. There was an also an obvious, very depressing parallel at the end when he gets taken away to be tortured and that they're using a very-- like their four-light style interrogation, torture where they're trying to get him to accept that there were no errors in the data.

Andi: Yeah. And I liked the way they contrasted how he was not able to do pure science and Safadi was. But how even though she was in a more open society that allowed her to do her scientific research and publish it, that it still got politicized. It just was in a subtler way and that she really wanted to be friends with this guy. Like, I just thought she was so sweet that she just-- They spoke the same language and she wanted to be able to work with him and she thought he was so brilliant. And he even shared that. I liked the scenes from his perspective because it was interesting to see how the propaganda had worked on him, but he still admired her and respected her science. And in a better world, they would have worked together and solved problems together.

Sue: I feel like that's a common thing we see in some fiction that despite politics or despite any conflicts or wars that might be going on, that we have scientists that can come together to work together to solve a problem. And unfortunately, it doesn't actually-- Their symposium idea doesn't work in this setup because one government is not willing to see past their pretenses and their lies.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: I think that some of the stuff that we are seeing with both the Federation and the Romulan Senate is that we've got governments making decisions out of fear. And I think that is-- it's extending into to *Star Trek: Picard*, the show that like instead of thinking about compassion and saving as many lives as possible or helping as many people as possible, we've got fear reactions that are down the road causing larger problems.

And we also have the Romulan government specifically controlling the messages of their media and saying that news from elsewhere is basically fake news, and making sure that-- They basically got state TV, that their people are only hearing what they want them to hear. And it's a scary kind of controlling situation.

Jarrah: Yeah, definitely. I feel like there are a couple of slightly odd jokes and cultural references in the book that just caught me off guard at a couple points. And some, I think, work better than others. Like, there's a point where when they're in the super wealthy guy's mansion and Raffi is making this joke about how his wives must all be hidden in cupboards, like sort of a Bluebeard reference. And I thought that was okay, but a little odd. So, there is a point earlier on where Raffi and Jean-Luc are talking about the cartoonist that escaped, and they talk about how there's a kind of underground railroad for dissidents. And I was just like, okay, well, maybe that is just known as a term that means helping escaping oppressed people. But I did a bit of searching and I didn't find that there's really an understanding of

that as a really broader term outside the underground railroad. So, did maybe question that as a metaphor, but it was interesting.

Sue: I didn't catch that, but I think you're right.

Jarrah: Yeah. There's another one too where he uses the phrase "gone native." That's a little bit--

Sue: That one I did notice. Yes.

Jarrah: It depends on the context, but in that case, it's talking about how Olivia Quest is being accused of being too political and bourgeois and out of touch with her own world. And that to me, it seemed like it was an implied criticism from the people on her planet and not intended in a flattering way. And so, I would generally would have probably just stayed away from the term.

But yeah, overall, maybe I'll just finish with a depressing and hopeful quote in one, "How does one help in an apocalypse? What does one do? One does one's best." So, just going to keep repeating that a lot.

Sue: Yeah. Unfortunately, I think what this novel is telling us is that Picard's best would never have been good enough because the situation is just too dire. It's a lot of too little too late, but even if there had been a lot more, it would still be too late.

Andi: It's out of his control.

Sue: Mm-hmm.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm.

Andi: But I think you can take from this that you might fail and it's out of your control, but you should still do your best, which is what he did and what we should do.

Sue: So, we get at the very end to get us to the place where we find Picard, at the beginning of the show, we have him quitting Starfleet because they are giving up on the Romulan rescue effort. But isn't he also then just giving up? Because when-- He basically rage quits. When he retires, he retires from everything. Not only his work, but his relationships.

Jarrah: He just writes cranky, passive aggressive notes.

Sue: Right. [laughs] But he stops communicating with Raffi. Apparently, he stops communicating with Elnor or Zani or anyone and just goes and basically turns his vineyard into a hermitage to write his books. But isn't he just doing exactly what the Federation just did? He didn't get what he wanted, so he peaced out.

Andi: I think what happened is he lost faith in everything. He lost faith in what he had been, like his whole life had been working towards.

Jarrah: Yeah. And I think that it's an understandable and human reaction in the situation, but it does bug me, I think, that he is letting people down and he certainly beats himself up over it in the beginning of the series as well. Like, "I've been basically just waiting around to die and I haven't been trying to make things better." And he does start to go back to those people. But I think what bothers me is in the beginning of the series when he's kind of being like, "Well, I'm just going to go pick these people up because I couldn't like afford to lose my

good friends. So, let me pick some expendable people up for this.” And I don’t-- I know that’s not the intention.

Sue: Well, he literally says like, “My old friends have too much to lose. I can’t have them risk that. I need somebody with nothing to lose.” That’s almost a direct quote.

Jarrah: Yeah, exactly. So, it’s like, yeah, “Let me pick someone that can get killed without hurting too many other people.” It’s very weird as just a statement of principles from a Jean-Luc Picard-like character. But I do understand. I think the situation makes it believable for me.

All right, I mean, we did ask one question. Just asking whether people should, if they have not either read the book or watch the series, which should they do first?

Andi: I would read the book first.

Sue: Well, you have.

Andi: I know. [laughter] But even just seeing the first episode of *Picard*, I’m really glad I read the book first.

Sue: Yeah. I definitely read it early on and I think that especially for later episodes and especially, especially for Raffi, I think it provides some much-needed background.

Jarrah: I would agree. Yeah. Our listener, Helene, said that, on the other hand, that it was helpful to see what the characters look and act like on screen, to have that to visualize when you’re reading it.” And she said, “It helped build my mental image of the world, and especially when it comes to imagining [unintelligible 00:48:07] the Daystrom Institute.” So, that is another fair take on it. I think as I finish this series, I find myself mentioning the book to a lot of people I’m talking to, their like, “Oh, but in the book, it says this.” And so, maybe that is a point for watching it simultaneously or first. But I would definitely recommend reading it. I think it’s a really, really strong *Star Trek* novel whether or not it’s *Star Trek*, but officially a *Star Trek* novel.

Andi: No, it is *Star Trek*. I just wish it wasn’t. Like, I’m not one of those people who’s like, “This isn’t real *Star Trek*.” It’s just that *Star Trek* has taken a different direction than it used to have, and I missed the old way of doing things. That’s all.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Yeah. All right, without further ado, Sue, where can people find you elsewhere on the internet?

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

Jarrah: And, Andi?

Andi: You can find me on Twitter @firsttimetrek.

Jarrah: And I’m Jarrah. And you can find me on Twitter @J-A-R-R-A-H-Penguin. To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit womenatwarp.com. Or find us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram @womenatwarp. You can also email us at crew@womenatwarp.com. And for more from the Roddenberry Podcast Network, visit podcast.rodnenberry.com. Thanks much for listening.

[Transcript provided by [SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription](#)]