

Women at Warp: Episode 110: Mary, Mother of Klingons

SUE:

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 Sue and thanks for tuning in. With me today I have Jarrah.

JARRAH:

Qapla!

SUE:

And Grace.

GRACE:

Hell yeah.

SUE:

sheepishly Grace says stuff. We have a very special episode for you today. We are joined later by Mary Chieffo to discuss her work in Star Trek Discovery, and L'rell, and lots of other stuff. But first we do our typical housekeeping.

JARRAH:

As you know, our podcast is supported entirely by our patrons on Patreon. For as little as a dollar a month you get access to exclusive bonus rewards like audio tracks that we don't release to the public, exclusive watchalong commentaries, and early release of episodes and other awesome goodness. So check it out on Patreon.com/womenatwarp, and if you're able to help support our show we really really appreciate it. Another way that you can help support our show is by helping us get more awareness and new listeners in your podcast listener, whether that's apple podcasts or wherever you listen to podcasts. Leave us a rating or review and it helps more people find our show.

SUE:

And you heard it here first, we are introducing a new tier on Patreon. If you pay attention to our social media feeds you may have seen our April Fool's joke where we asked for some comments for our episode on C.J. Cregg from the West Wing. Well, we got enough comments telling us that people wished that were real, that it's going to be real. So at the New Patreon level we bi-monthly will be doing podcast episodes on non-trek topics. so head on over to Patreon and check out our new tier.

JARRAH:

Ginger, get the popcorn!

SUE:

laughs And it is super short notice, we mentioned it on the last show, but at the end of this week April 26 to 28 Jarrah and I will both be in Washington DC at Awesome Con. So let us know if you'll be there too. And come say hi.

JARRAH:

We'll be posting the details of our times and places for our panels on our social media, so check that out at Facebook.com/womenatwarp or on Twitter @WomenatWarp, or Instagram @womenatwarp.

SUE:

And that is frankly quite enough of us talking *without* Mary. So let's head over to our interview. Mary, thank you so much for being here. We're super excited to talk to you, and I want to start off with a- probably the most general of our questions we have, which is that we know you and your castmates all seemed to deep dive into over 50 years of Star Trek canon while working on season 1. So what were some of your favorite story elements characters or episodes that came out of the Trek franchises?

MARY:

I love that question, because that was definitely a huge goal of mine was to- I love research and so to be able to have a franchise that is so fleshed out, I mean I could do as much research as I would do if I were working on a Shakespeare play. So I did watch all of the Klingon-centric episodes from every iteration of the show. I decided on chronological order when it came to actual- the chronology of the universe as opposed to when they were made. And I had some vague ideas, and I had seen the original and the reboot films but that was my general knowledge up until I was cast in the role. So I really did this really fun deep dive into all the Klingon lore, and then fell in love with so many different characters, and all of the different crews. But I will say that I really fell into Deep Space Nine pretty intensely. I actually so much so that by the last few seasons- I tried. Just for time's sake- I just, you know, I didn't have the hours in the day to watch every single episode ever. But that would be the real goal. But by the time I was really getting into the Deep Space Nine Klingon episodes, which obviously there are a lot of, I was really peripherally seeing all this other plot starting to happen, with the war and everything, so by the end I was just watching the whole show.*laughs* I was like "Well, what's gonna happen?!" *all laugh*

GRACE:

It's intense stuff! You get pulled in!

MARY:

Exactly! So that was really where I lost myself and I fell in love with, you know, in particular the female characters on that show. Which I feel are really uniquely fleshed out, and differently fleshed out, you know, Dax and Kira are two distinct characters that have wonderful flaws and strengths. And you know, I did get to see a lot of Dax in regards to a lot of the Klingon storyline

that ends up happening on that show. So that was really where I got really entrenched in it. And when it came to me watching it I was- that was when we were really about to start rehearsals and production for the first season. So I was like up in Toronto watching Deep Space Nine getting ready to go in there. So that will always have a very very special place in my heart, that show.

SUE:

That's awesome. And when you were watching through the Klingon stories, were there any of the Klingon centric episodes you used to help influence and inform L'rell?

MARY:

Yes, from Deep Space Nine my girl Grilka. *all cheer* I really did love her just strength as a character, and her sense of humor as well. I think it's always really great to see these very archetypal strong women dealing with somewhat humorous strange situations like having to deal with Quark. *laughs* And the two episodes that she appears in are just two of my favorites. And I also then, in paralleling L'rell's journey, I don't know if- it's really a lot of the stuff that ended up happening with her journey is kind of a chicken or the egg thing? I think it was more just like in the ether? But her, Grilka's, struggle with not being able to ascend to her own husband's house because she's a woman ended up really paralleling a lot of L'rell's journey. And made me realize at the time as I was just beginning to flesh the character out, why she would be about all that commander, who didn't see herself as someone who *could be* in the forefront. That she had to work from the shadows, and she had to manipulate in a certain way, and it was just the one of the strongest indicators to me of what a patriarchal species the Klingons were. And so that will always be, those episodes and that character, will definitely be real strong strong reference point for me.

GRACE:

Now, are there any aspects of Klingon culture that you've seen that you'd specifically like to see explored more?

MARY:

Yes. I really- it's referenced a few times just- they are known as this warrior race obviously, but they still have a fully fleshed society. And it's just what you don't- I'm interested in all the aspects that are referenced and not maybe fully seen. And then specifically, you know, in conjunction with that, like the matriarchs of Mo'Kai. I just would love to see more of what that culture really is like. You know, that within this very very strong masculine culture you have these women working from the sidelines. So all the contradictory aspects of the culture that I think, you know, we definitely tried to flesh that out more in Discovery. But for, you know, it's when there are so many amazing plots to explore it's hard to get all of them. And so I would just really love, you know, some way to to look more into how the Klingons function when they're not fully in battle. Which we, again, we've gotten a little bit of yeah.

JARRAH:

But like for example, I always want to know what does a day look like in the life of the Klingon scientist?

MARY:

Totally.

GRACE:

Who's making all that elaborate battle armor? Or do they have a fashion industry there? *Mary laughs*

JARRAH:

I mean, they clearly have a fashion industry if you saw your last episode, because that dress was amazing.

MARY:

laughs Thank you. I know, I really- I did love that dress. And Gersha Phillips and her whole team have just done incredible work this season on my clothes and everyone's. But I do joke about that, because I do have people like strapping me in, and like you know my *lava cape* as I call it in episode three at the beginning. That molten lava. Like, I couldn't- I had to go up to the platform and then they had to place it on me before the scene began, and I'm just- I- we were joking that maybe I have like these random like- what kind of alien servants has like L'rell employed to *laughs* keep her you know all done up all the time? But that's I guess one of that's *another* aspect of Klingon culture that would be fun to explore. The *designers* yes. *laughs*

GRACE:

The entourage culture, that there's got to be there.

JARRAH:

Nice. Well going a little bit more specifically to L'rell, we've seen her really reinvent herself and adapt over and over. And what would you say though are some of her really central unchanging characteristics and how does she go about expressing them?

MARY:

I *love* that question, because that has been- yes with a character who both when it comes to how the audience perceives her, how she genuinely changes physically emotionally there's so much that has been different almost on an episode to episode basis. The things that have really kept her anchored, in me, have been her heart. Really truly. I always say that my characters have my heart and soul, but then they're shaped by external circumstances that are different from mine. And so with L'rell that's obviously *laughs* taking it to eleven, as it were, when it comes to *laughs* all sorts of external circumstances shaping her. But what I do really look back plot wise at the choices that she makes, I think you ultimately see that all of them are for the

greater good, that she believes to be the greater good. And ultimately her heart does win, her empathy I should say. Like a heart is maybe more of a little too general, but I think her ability to grow and learn, that at the beginning of the first season she had pretty much no exposure to human beings. But obviously I think, you know, her interactions with Cornwell really shaped so much of who she becomes, and how she's able to then make the choice to save Ash Tyler as his own entity, because she's able to realize that the humans have a greater capacity for life than she was led to believe. And time and time again I think her willingness to make choices like that are pretty solid, pretty consistent, even if they're heartbreaking. *laughs* If anything she leads with her heart, but she always gets heartbroken. *all laugh*

GRACE:

Now L'rell is definitely a complicated character. Do you find yourself having to defend her at all for being seen as unlikable or too complicated?

MARY:

Absolutely. I really think- well it's- first season was one thing, because I was, you know, I literally could not articulate her true journey until much later in the show. So for a bulk of the time the audiences were being led to believe that she was a torturer rapist and I did not care for that because I knew that was not her truth. And I'm obviously very sensitive to that topic particularly in regards to sexual assault. And I did not want people to say- well the thing that has been trickiest I think is that I think there are people that still believe that that was what transpired between L'rell and Tyler, and that they weren't misconstrued memories between the two of them. And I think that, you know, perhaps there could have been *pause* even more of a conversation between the two of them, or more of a visual clarity that could have helped that. But that has been certainly something that I have been acutely aware of, and something that I want to be able to speak on, because at the end of the day the way I see that story is that it was- it came from a genuine place of love and then the experiment went terribly terribly wrong essentially, which is ultimately, harkening back to why she makes the choice to save Tyler, she realizes that that is not what she had intended. She had seen the Tyler persona as this shell that would easily be alleviated. And she has to come to come to terms with the fact that humanity has far more integrity than she realized. And so that- I mean this is- and I'm trying to do like the spark notes version *laughs* of how I feel about all of this. Because I mean- I have just during the time, during the first season when so much of that I *could not* speak to it. Like I was not allowed to, because that would give away a huge plot point. I just had to do writing for myself, you know, just to get it out. Get the thoughts out. And why I was committed *to this* character, because you know it's really *fun* to play a character who is more easily likeable. Who's you know- whose actions are straightforward. And while they can be like quirky and flawed, this is an element, it harkens back to the archetypes of Greek mythology and Shakespeare, and you know it's something that we still obviously as a culture really gravitate towards. You look at every franchise, you look at- I mean Game of Thrones, you look at these very intense storytellings where people are making all sorts of very *laughs* very debatable decisions in order to take power, or whatever it is. And so that was really what I had to lean into when it came to being at peace with who the character was within the story. Was that part of my feminist contribution was

to give life to a character who would spark debate. And I've also spoken to the fact that there is a certain reverse Beauty and the Beast archetype going on, and I think it's always helpful to reverse an archetype because then it allows you to view it in a new way. It allows you to maybe re-evaluate "Oh why are we- why have we kind of celebrated this sort of beast beauty? You know, why do we come back to that time and time again?" So it's my very long winded answer. *laughs*

GRACE:

all laugh It's a good answer!

SUE:

Well this wasn't on our list, but it made me, that your answer made me think, you know you and your cast were the first ones to be active on social media, to *have* social media while the show was airing. So what was it like when the fanbase was dealing with, you know, misconceptions shall we say of L'rell's character? What was it like for you being active on social media?

MARY:

Yeah sometimes I think I'm a little too active. *Sue laughs* Like, I'll do the dive. I will go in and find the one person who really hates something that I did, and like the character. Luckily, what has been like, at least gratifying as a actor, is that I find that people are taking issue with the character, and the story, and you know that it's they're not even thinking about the actor behind it? And that's really the goal, especially with such an extreme character, is that like I don't want people thinking about well you know "Mary Chieffo is dudda-duh." It's like "Who is L'rell?" So the fact that the comments I was seeing were more about who she was in the story was strangely gratifying. But also still as someone who feels very passionately about her story- I know- but it's like that's not self- well I guess self sabotage. It's you know self flagellation. Like, I *pursued* it. So that's on me. *Sue laughs* But certainly I will say, that the thing that I was most sensitive to during that first season was seeing, you know, people who have legitimate you know experiences, traumatic experiences, sexual assault, that's something as I said before is I'm extremely extremely sensitive to. And so I was in this place where I couldn't even reply to things, or be like you know, because then it would then the PR team would be like *laughs* "Hey! you're giving away-" So that was a good, I guess a month or so or even more, where- that's why I did my own personal writing in hopes that, you know. And as we are now, it's like I am able to talk about it in retrospect. But then at the same time, you know, there's been so much celebration and so much excitement. And anytime you know something you do elicits conversation, that *is* exciting. You know, we could easily be just throwing something out there and no one would respond. So the fact that there is so much interaction, and the Trek community is so strong, and so unbelievable. I mean it's been so thrilling for me to be a part of it, and to witness it, and just see all of you- the friendships that you have both on the Internet and then at the conventions, and how those intertwine. I mean it's- I think we've all really really enjoyed that element of it.

JARRAH:

That's super cool. Yeah. I was wondering, another thing, I mean there's always been some challenging makeup and prosthetics and costuming and Star Trek. But I feel like- and certainly we've seen it taken to a new level with Discovery being one of the first Treks that's in HD, getting to take part in *that*. How has that been as an experience? And I'm just curious what it's like and whether you think that women in the industry respond to this differently than men?

MARY:

Yeah. I do- it's been an incredible- I mean first time experience for me. I had never particularly envisioned myself doing prosthetic acting. But then when I realized what it required, I realized that it actually- a lot of my training kind of did lead to that. And being an alien specifically with another language I was kinda like "Oh I'm actually getting to throw myself one hundred and fifty percent into this character in a way that is totally suited to what I'm capable of". And I am proud of the fact that I have a high tolerance for pain, not that **laughs** it's acute pain but you know, I have a strong sense of stamina when I'm determined. And I did observe and have heard from others, both people that have worked on other shows with prosthetics in general, is that women do tend to be more tolerant **laughs** of extreme situations. Basically, women and Doug Jones. **all laugh** And Doug Jones is, you know, I mean he is the unicorn. But I mean, the fact that I got to go through all of this with him by my side, and in the trailer, and getting coffee with me, and talking about his experiences is just such a gift. But I did hear from, you know, someone else working on the show that they had worked on another project and there was some big other crazy armor thing, and there was like- it was like all these men and one woman, and she was the one who never complained **laughs** and apparently there was more vocalization from the male counterpart. And there was- you know- I guess it was, what was it last year? With Ant Man and The Wasp and Evangeline Lilly had that- there was that great clip of her talking about how the men were like "Oh be careful you know those suits they're really going to-" And then she got in it and she's like "Oh this is not that bad." And then she realized, you know, she lifted up her heel in that interview and was like "Oh right! Because I'm used to **laughs** operating with pain." **all laugh** And I do think and I- there was one great moment in the makeup trailer between me and Sonequa actually this past year, filming twelve actually. And I had gotten- I was trying to have a relaxing day. Good luck there **all laugh** and it was a later call for me. And I was "You know what? I'm going to work out. I'm gonna take a nice hot bath." And I took a nice hot bath, and then I got water in my ear, and I got an infection. **crew 'oh no!'/Mary laughs** I have like, very very sensitive ears and like small ear canals or something, I've been told. But I'm like "Well I still have to show up." and I'm like "It's not going to be-" It wasn't a big scene, it was gonna be OK. But I show up, and I'm in the trailer getting my hair braided, and she's there getting ready for some other scenes. Like "How are you?" I'm like "Well kind of just gave myself an ear infection" **laughs** and she's like "Oh are you okay?" "Yeah. You know I'll push through" and all that stuff and she's like "Yeah that is something you know? We do have a capacity to endure." and I'm like "We do, don't we?" **all laugh** And you know just- I think about all the things you know with, certainly you know, Sonequa as well. She's not covered in prosthetics, but just *all of* the *tasks* that she is constantly asked to do on a daily basis on the show. And just like falling over things, and flipping over things, and shooting things, and then tons of dialogue. Like, if you

allow yourself to complain and see how it's frustrating, because you know none of the outfits on the show were necessarily like you know bathrobes, except for one when *laughs* they are actually wearing like the few times that we see them in their quarters. *all laugh*

But I think that you know if you're determined, if you see the purpose, and you're willing to work with extreme circumstances it's only going to benefit everyone in the end. So I am really proud of the fact that that's certainly what I've embodied with L'rell as being in service of the larger story. And that comes from Sonequa down. I mean, that's always been what she's articulated to all of us as an ensemble, is that we're here to serve this larger story. And we're all like- I joke too, it's like "I *wouldn't* want the techno babble that she or Anthony have to spew every week", and they're like "I'm glad I'm not covered in rubber having to speak a different language." *all laugh*

So I think we all as a cast- and that is the gift of this cast is across the board is everyone's really willing to go that extra mile and make sacrifices.

SUE:

Well in this season early on in Point Of Light you were not only in all of those prosthetics, but you had an epic fight scene in a gown. *Mary laughs* What was preparation like for that? What was filming that?

MARY:

Yeah! That was- I mean it was *very very* challenging but ultimately an utter delight. *laughs* I love- the quote I've been saying is Ginger Rogers always said "She did everything backwards in heels" and I think "backwards in heels with prosthetics and two swords." *all laugh*

Two Chancellor swords that were designed specifically as like the swords of the chancellor, which I was like "Yes! Thank you Mario." our prop designer "That's cool." That was an interesting process, because the nature of TV is, you know, obviously we're aiming for this cinematic film level of presentation. But we are- we do not have the time that a film would have to rehearse a fight sequence like that. So we learned that entire sequence- we had a six hour rehearsal on Tuesday, and this was the last week of filming. We've filmed over the span of three weeks for that episode. So, rehearsed on Tuesday and then filmed the whole thing on Friday. And I also happened to wake up congested on that Monday. So that was fun. *all laugh/oh no's*

Right, because it was in May, and so right as all the pollen was coming out and this- we're proving that I apparently, as tough as I am, apparently I'm quite sensitive when it comes to ear infections and sinus infections. *all laugh*

But *laughs* It's the little things, my Achilles heel. But yeah I woke up, and so I think it was like- and you know there's always something going around set, so I think it was just a mixture. But anyway! Obviously powered through, once again. The capacity to endure. Ate a lot of spicy food and just did every possible, both like homeopathic and more you know science-y medicine, just *anything* to clear it out. But we rehearsed yeah the whole sequence- and the way you rehearse it is, obviously I'm not in the full prosthetic, but I did have like a mockup of the dress shape, and Gersha did specifically design all of my dresses- well except for the one when I make this feature kind of a high council. But to have this slit on the side so that I could actually move in them, because I've got like these leather pants on underneath. And so- and then in the heels. So I rehearsed for those six hours and cleared out my sinuses quite a bit. *laughs*

And then we had that next day, Wednesday, we filmed

everything before and after the fight sequence in the garden. So leading up to the fight, then we went to the end when Georgieu and all of that stuff. So but then Friday came, and that was eight hours I mean it was the full morning up until lunchtime. And they did design a fight dress basically, so the material was a little bit more malleable. I wish I knew what that material is. They told me at the time *laughs* a lot more about it. And even my necklace, which was really cool because that necklace is like a legit- like they had some jeweler come from Europe but like oh so really awesome, but very heavy. And so for the fight sequence they actually designed one that looked like it but was like rubber, which I was very impressed with. *laughs* So we filmed that, and I will say that- *laughs* OK. I'm going to just tell this anecdote because I feel very close to you all.*laughs/group cheers* So I really do like to do as many, if not, all of my stunts as possible. Unless it's something utterly dangerous that, you know, trained professionals should be doing. And that was true in the first season. I love my stunt double, she's incredible, but I have such a strong sense of how L'rell moves. It'd be one thing if I were playing a human, but she has such an alien quality of a fluidity that I really have worked on. A serpentine sort of feline thing, like I just feel very very attached to how she moves. And that was the same too when we filmed the sex scene in the first season, was they offered to have a double and I said you know "It's already such an extreme thing. I will only feel comfortable if I embody it, because at least I know that I- I know what my intention was." And like you know, still it's how they cut it and how they film it. But at least as the actor I wanted to give as much as I possibly could in that regard. So smash cut to filming this fight sequence. I'm doing it all and we're going through, and they started with the wide stuff, and you know it's difficult because you're covered in rubber. Oh and the ash! The ash falling from the sky. That was fun. *laughs* Like one of those things where it's like "Backwards in heels with two swords" and you've got rubber hands, and there's cobblestone, and then oh yeah it rains ash on Kronos.*all laugh* But still fun, and like just going for it. And then there was one shot where it was really just on Shahzad. And so they said like "Hey, can you get a sub in the double?" And I started crying *laughs* because I was like "Oh OK, that's fine. It's- it's- OK you go. Go ahead." "No no no no it's not you- it's just- it's like very far away." And here I am, like covered and bloody, sore- like just looking like a Klingon, I'm like "OK I guess I'll just step side" and they're like "For *one* take Mary.*Sue laughs* You're gonna be fine. *all laugh* We're saving your energy for the next *eight hours* of filming." I am just very clearly invested in my character. And I will say other than that, both Shazad and I did all of our stunts, and he too- yeah we like- we like to do it. It's- when you get the choreography of it, because it really is a dance ultimately, and it's really fun when you get in the flow of it. And luckily we have good- Moises was the main fighting partner I had, and he was super great. We really would practice things you know slow, medium, fast. And you know, they're good at respecting everyone's time and space. But it was a lot! And then the real punchline is that- so we finish all of that, and then we did film a little bit more of the stuff at the end when Georgeiu comes in and kills all the- everybody. *laughs* And of course Michelle Yeoh, *literal legend* you know, comes in is like "Oh yeah. Looks good guys" and I'm like "OK." *all laugh* And she also like the five things she has to do, where she just like walks on, picks up those like two different things, and shoots up, I mean looks like the most badass person in the world. And here I am like eight hours later after my giant sequence. But it was a good day. And it was our last day of filming. So it was very much like "go hard or go home" situation.

JARRAH:

That's awesome. And you can like- you can tell that there's always so much attention to detail in all aspects of Discovery. And that's part of what I found so impressive. I remember seeing you on a panel before the show started talking about like the Klingon language coaching, and parsing the Klingon language, and it was really really cool. You know from that to like how does a Klingon baby head look? *all laugh* And so I was curious about, you know, in the most recent episode, Through the Valley of Shadows, we caught a bit more of a glimpse into L'rell's relationship both with Tyler but also her role as a mother who's you know given up her child. And I guess I'm just wondering how you went about preparing for that, and how you feel that her relationship with Tyler has evolved since season one?

MARY:

Yeah I really it's- it was so- you know filming it obviously you get a sense of what it's going to be, but watching it this past week along with everybody else, it is really interesting to see how much L'rell has *pause* she's grown into herself in a lot of ways. And what's, I think, part of the heart breaking part of her story is that while she has assumed greater power on a political level she has had to- she is- you know it's very Queen Elizabeth. Queen Elizabeth the first. She has *pause* not closed herself off, but she is having to embody a much stricter sort of way of being in order to maintain her empire. You know that ending with "You may call me Mother" it's an incredibly *fierce* moment. But in a lot of ways the mother archetype is not the archetype that she had been embodying up until that point. In the first season she was far more of this, you know, there was a grittiness, she was a commander, she was a captain, she was just fighting the fight. There was an animalistic quality to how she had to go about things. And you know, this season she has had to negate a certain element of that. And I think, you know, the political commentary I hope we're making is that you see that she struggles just like any woman in 2019 with maintaining her power but also figuring out how to define her femininity. And yes, certainly in 12, I felt that what's fun is like you kind of get to play the imagination game when it comes to "You may call me mother" to arriving on Discovery and 12, which I certainly did. *laughs* I certainly came up with what could have been going on. I mean, I think she has been so dedicated to the cause, as she always is, at the end of the day she always chooses the larger whole. And sacrifices for that. But I think she's been so preoccupied that then, you know, we get to then get this other glimpse of her being completely taken aback by the fact that she's seeing someone that she thought she would never see again. And I do think it's interesting that she does ultimately "I feel released Tyler" fully because *pause* even though they- she doesn't kill him in three as she makes the Klingons believe, I don't feel like they were able to have a real moment of goodbye, a very calm goodbye. Like if Georgieu was there they're like, you know, kind of throwing everything together very quickly. I thought that this was a really lovely moment for them to at least *pause* look each other in the eye and kind of recognize what a *crazy* journey it's been. *all laugh* And yeah, I mean tying back into the question about the thing that has stayed true for her, which is I think ultimately her sense of empathy and heart. But yeah, I mean the twist of Tenavik is very interesting as well. I do appreciate the moment with Pike when they find out his name. It was just a moment that also allowed her a certain amount of closure in regards to the son, because I think it certainly must have weighed on her heart that she had let him go

for everyone's betterment. But to find out so soon that your son actually has turned into like a fine young man, *laughs* that is kind of this lovely unexpected gift. That like oh he's going to be OK. And Tyler's going to be OK. And ultimately I'm going to be OK. Which is an interesting moment to have near the end of this series, when obviously kind of everything else is culminating towards something much crazier. Like as you know the A.I. is imminent and all this other sort of stuff, that at least part of the journey is getting some senses of peace.

JARRAH:

I mean, I feel like sending your kid to a Time Crystal monastery is a great childcare solution. *all laugh*

MARY:

Very true.

SUE:

It does bring to mind though, the conversation that L'rell and Georgiou have in Point of Light, in episode three, where Georgiou tells her you know "Having a lover is a liability, having a child is a liability." And I think it's interesting that that's being depicted on screen now for women in power, because I remember stories of when Voyager started, you know, in the 90s of how they couldn't let Janeway have a romance because that would undermine her power. So it's bringing it to screen now. But I guess when do we get past that? Because we're- I'm gonna take it political, so brace yourselves. *laughs* We're looking at you know a political race with a lot of women entering the race for Democratic nominee, and I feel like we're mirroring that in some aspects with Discovery, and L'rell being told that having a life is a liability to her position.

MARY:

Yeah. I'm glad you brought that up, because I absolutely agree and I think I've also viewed her journey within the Klingon Empire as a way to explore that in a different way. Because Starfleet is the ideal, you know? The hope is that we have moved past a lot of what we're dealing with currently. And so, you know, L'rell is this great way to grapple with that. And I think that- Yeah. And then of course then with Georgiou, I mean these are the two women that have experienced a like "non-Starfleet", if you will, view of women at this point in the timeline. And obviously you're seeing you know a lot of changes going on with Georgiou as well this season. And I think that- yeah- I mean that's part of the heartbreak for me both as a viewer and then as the actor and building life into L'rell, is that girl can't catch a break.*all laugh* But that's so much about the societies that she's in. And I think, you know, that the device of using Kol'sha as this like very very archetypal patriarch is, you know, that's the point of these stories is, I've said it time and time again on practically every panel or thing I've been on, but is that sci fi is our modern mythology in so many ways. And and we get to explore these themes by having a character like Kol'sha who can embody all that the patriarchy feels like today. You know, it's like you can't do anything right. He's just there to undermine whatever L'rell tries to put forth. Like it doesn't- you know they're looking for "Oh whoever is around her" and it is the way in which we over scrutinize every candidate. I mean male or female, but certainly on the female level and I've been

hypersensitive to that for a long time. And the way in which I think there's also an interesting lack of *pause* empathy or there's just not enough empathy for the women who have had to traverse so much and in earlier eras. You know, that women coming through the political scene yes, are going to have a lot of flaws and mistakes in their past. Because they were dealing with a society that was really trying to keep them down. And so, you know, unfortunately and I certainly feel like this is the case for L'rell, is that they have these women have made choices that in an ideal setting *of course* they wouldn't make. *laughs* But because that was what they were told was the only way to survive, that was what they chose. And so I hope it's almost a cautionary tale in that regard, that it allows us to be "Oh we don't want that. We don't want to force our women leaders to have to make those sorts of choices. We don't want our leaders to feel like they have to cut off their lover and their child literally." Like, that's not what we hope for. We hope that we can celebrate a fully fleshed out female character or fully fleshed out female in the real world.

JARRAH:

Yeah. So it sounds like, you know, you don't see the loss that L'rell has gone through as being something that will necessarily make her more hardened, but maybe make her more- have even deeper empathy for others?

MARY:

Yeah, I like that idea. I think yes. I think certainly in the journey of 12 for me what I felt coming in, and there was actually- I there- I did- here was I came in in the Transporter Room and unfortunately I think for time that that got cut. It was not a big moment. I just, you know, appeared in the Transporter Room and then Tyler was there and I kind of *really* ignored him in that moment. Like Pikes there, and he's like "Welcome" I'm like "Thanks." And then just like walk past Tyler. *laughs* And I think that certainly that was like in building an arc for the episode, it was that she was initially like scared out of her mind. Because you know, it's like "Oh hey, the two things that you said you would never see again and that if are found out could cost you the entire empire are now back in your life." So, I think she's trying to embody that, and I'm sure when she gets back on the D7 she's like "All right everyone back in line." You know, like very- I think she embodies that when she has to. But I think what I find delicious about all these sorts of these, particularly queen-like characters or women that have to embody a certain archetype externally, is that what we love about the stories we see about them is seeing the other side. And I do love like Elizabeth, the film, you know. That you see that they come from so much and that while the history books weren't necessarily writing about that part of their life it was definitely there. So I think yeah, when it comes to who L'rell is truly deeply I think that she is still you know very soft. But she's also willing to- I mean she's so much stronger than me. Because she's Klingon. Like- oh that actually reminds me of Kenneth Mitchell, who is also I should say the other person who's willing to endure prosthetics *all laugh* brilliantly I might add. But he asked me when we were heading into the third episode "So would it have changed your performance if you had known L'rell had this child that she had *laughs* you know raised ex-utero, or like you know had left-" you know throughout the whole- because that's the whole second journey of season one is I have I am aware of the fact that I had this child. And I said

“You know, I probably would have leaned into it too much as Mary. Because Mary would be so distraught, but L’reil is innately stronger than I am in that regard, and she’s far more willing to endure in a certain way.” like I’m willing to endure the makeup to breathe life into her and she’s willing to endure actual life circumstances that are insane. *laughs* And so in that regard I think, I just really feel that yeah, I’ve learned how tenacious she is and how tough and yet soft. I just think, you know, I’d say it time and time again but it’s- I think it’s far more interesting when all of our characters are able to embody both sides of that.

GRACE:
Excellent.

SUE:
Do we have any more questions about L’reil?

JARRAH:
Oh man. I just have so much *all laugh* thoughts to chew on now. That was really amazing.

GRACE:
I’m having just an information overload over this one character.

MARY:
laughs This is just like “Welcome to my brain.” *all laugh*

SUE:
Given the opportunity, would you be interested in exploring another alien species? A la Suzie Plakson or Jeffrey Combs?

MARY:
Yes hundred percent! I get Suzie Plakson who’s also, I believe, a fellow six foot tall woman. I think I saw that.

JARRAH:
Yeah.

GRACE:
Oh you’re right!

MARY:
And obviously I love all of the characters she played and she’s awesome. But absolutely. I mean the gift already of L’reil is when when I was in school I was always playing these- well not always but quite often, playing extreme characters in one way or the other. Transforming. I was playing older women. I was playing men. I was playing- never an alien but creature-like you know? And you know it’s so my wheelhouse to transform. And so the fact that I was able to play

L'rell who is innate- like you just- it's like you know a side by side picture and it's like "Oh Mary has transformed into this character" so it's such a great gift already as an actor to have that on my resume. But I think it's absolutely delicious that there is this tradition in Trek to have their actors play multiple roles. Because, you know, it makes it so fun. Because you're either you are on the inside and know who all the actors are and know that it's that actor, like case in point when Ken came back as his father, and then coming back as his son. *But* if you're just a viewer watching the show and aren't into doing the deep dive then you, hopefully if the actor is doing a good job, aren't even aware of the fact that you're seeing the same actor play a different role. So it's a fun challenge and I just- I would love it. And I do- I mean like I have certain aliens that I've always been fascinated by. I really am very fascinated by Trill. Like I just- it's just such an interesting concept and I think, you know, just case in point being an actor and wanting to embody multiple personalities and multiple life experiences in one body that's literally being a Trill. *laughs* And of course the markings are so beautiful. But you know, I would just you know- and it is fun because I forget too, how much I technically don't look like L'rell. I mean because in my mind I see the similarities, and it is designed somewhat after my features. But I know if you're not looking for it there, you know, it doesn't necessarily look like me. Like I've- well I've had the funny experience now of being at a convention where I've one day met someone who's been in full costume and makeup and then they come up to me the next day and have to reintroduce themselves, and I'm "Oooh that's what people-OK." *all laugh* I was like "Oh!" because in my mind I'm just like "Oh I feel like I look fine." And then I have to be like "No Mary you see yourself in her because you're empathetic but doesn't really look like you." *all laugh*

SUE:

That's fantastic. Is there anything we didn't touch on that you'd like to share?

MARY:

You know it's funny, because I am looking- I told you I had all this, my writings and stuff. So I kind of just pulled them out before we started talking. And we've already touched on this a *bit*, but to say it more I guess succinctly is *pause* yeah, I feel like this is a good summary of our whole conversation *laughs* if I may be bold. But this idea of playing an alien, specifically in a human centric story, has been really informative to me as a human. But as a performer, because we're always trying to give voice to, you know, every side of the story. But what I found is as I talked to like- her being so foreign and yet humanoid, like the fact that there's enough humanoid quality to the Klingons that we tend to want to just judge her on human standards. But you have to take a step back and go "Wait a minute. She's grown up in a society that is not like ours." Their standards are different whether they be right or wrong is up for debate. But because I had to really go in there and understand why she made the choices she did, that was part of why I really wanted to defend her, even when I couldn't. Because in my mind it was like yes well from the society, and the way she's been treated, and the way she's been taught, and like the notion- the Messiah that she grew up following, like this is what she had to do according to her culture. And I think while I've- I'm a very you know liberal minded person who's very much for the rights of all, I think it is just only augmented that for me when it comes to fighting for equality, is that I've seen how people can easily diminish those who do not act and talk or look like them. And

that's been really really neat. And something that I didn't quite see coming the way it did. Because I think when it's an alien people can be more rude, honestly. Like they because it's like "Well it's, you know, it's sci-fi, it's an alien, like why they talk so funny? Why they look so weird? But if you said that about someone in the world that would be, you know, terrible. So it's just been a really interesting exposure in that regard. That I just, you know, I did- I have a deep obsession with Wicked. That was like the show that changed my life. And I did do for my eighth grade talent show I got a group of people together and we did What is this Feeling? the song, and *all laugh* so crazy of course, overly ambitious Mary is like "For the talent show I'm going to grab like six of my friends plus my friend playing Glinda and choreograph an entire like-" It was very funny and- why didn't I just sing like the Wizard and I? *all laugh* But anyway, but I did paint myself green for that, and I- we had a like a dress rehearsal during the day and so I painted myself green for that because they needed to see how they would light the green. And I was like *rebellious kid voice* "You know what? I'm going to keep the makeup on for the rest of the day." I walked around and went to all my classes and people really like obviously reacted to the fact that I had a green face, and it was experiences like that and why I'm so grateful for characters like Elphaba, and hopefully, you know, L'rell and so many of the great female characters that are being created and displayed more and more now. It allows us all to feel empowered in our uniqueness. And you know, I just think that it just we need more and more of it because you never know which character is going to resonate with, you know, whatever young woman is looking or young man. But that has been fun to have come from that, having been so inspired by a character who was in many ways ridiculed because of her external nature, to then be actually playing one. So it's been neat and I hope I get to keep in one form or another embodying women who are misunderstood. *all laugh*

GRACE:

Well we're all for that! That's our bread and butter right there.

SUE:

Can you tell us- probably the answer is No. *Mary laughs* Is L'rell back for season 3?

MARY:

Oh I can't say.

SUE:

That's what I figured.

MARY:

laughs. My favorite klingon phrase, *speaks Klingon* which is "I will not reveal military secrets." *all laugh*

JARRAH:

Well theoretically if you were, is there like a particular character you'd like to have more scenes with that we haven't really seen you interact with that much?

MARY:

Many! But I really, when it comes to her full journey, I think that there's more room for Burnham and L'rell to talk. I would really- because Tyler and L'rell talk a lot. And Burnham and Tyler talk a lot and that's good. And obviously there's a mutual respect between the two of them already. And I was glad that, you know, we had some sort of reconciliation at the end of the first season. But I just think that there's a lot of room for those women to talk, and I just like as a viewer I really respect their strength separately. And so I'd like to see, it would be really neat to see, how they could learn and grow from each other even more.

GRACE:

Now are there any final thoughts you would like to leave us with? *Mary laughs* Or our listeners?

MARY:

So I mean as is evidenced, I have many thoughts. *all laugh* Well, I'm trying to think. I mean I will say that I'm just really thrilled that I did get to speak with you guys, because I think what you guys are doing is really exciting and I really- before I guess last year I was- I listened to so many of your podcasts and I just really am excited to hear such intelligent conversations being had. And I think what's important is the balance between enjoying something, but also being able to be critical of it, and be able to envision how we can keep improving. And that's certainly what I hope for in regards to this franchise, is that we are, hopefully, it seems like we're in this time of re expansion. And my hope is that this community will just keep building, and thriving, and that more and more, you know, there will be *because* of social media and everything, is there is such a symbiotic relationship between the fans and the creators. And I just really hope that we just keep building this awesome team and ultimately the stories will just continue to be fleshed out even more. And yeah. So thanks for your passion.

GRACE:

Aw! How do you say "Aw shucks!" in Klingon?

MARY:

regal voice We say no such thing. *all laugh*

SUE:

My heart just grew three sizes.

JARRAH:

Qapla!

MARY:

I will say that thank you in Klingon is "qatlho" which they jokingly say in whatever book that they have it, they're like "This is a rarely used term in Klingon culture." *all laugh* But I do say it to Voq in episode four of the first season, in our little romantic dilithium processor scene. And I

always like that because I thought it really was a testament to the intimacy of their relationship. So I do like using that term, as Mary “qatlho”.

JARRAH:

Well *that* word. That. *all laugh*

SUE:

Mary, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us. This was fantastic! Wow.

MARY:

Yeah, anytime.

SUE:

That was such a fantastic talk we had with Mary. Again, so excited that she was able to join us and so happy to bring that conversation to all of you. So that is it for us today. Jarrah where can people find you on the Internet?

JARRAH:

You can find me on Twitter @J A R R A H-Penguin or at Trekiefeminist.com

SUE:

And Grace?

GRACE:

You can find me on Twitter @bonecrusherjenk.

SUE:

And I'm Sue. You can find me on Twitter @spaltor. That's S P A L T O R. If you'd like to reach out to the show you can email us at crew@womenatwarp.com, find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @womenatwarp. And for more from the Roddenberry podcast network visit podcasts.Roddenberry.com. Thanks so much for joining us.

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