

Women at Warp Episode 244: Ad Astra Per Aspera

[Women at Warp theme]

Sue: Hi. And welcome to Women at Warp, a Star Trek podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity infinite combinations. My name is Sue. And thanks for tuning in. With me today, I have two very special guests. We have Amanda returning from our Trek Court of Space Law episode.

Amanda: Hello.

Sue: And Hypatia is also joining us today.

Hypatia: Hi.

Sue: So, we will hear a little bit more from both of them about their history with *Star Trek* and their history with the law in just a little bit. Of course, I have our tiny bit of housekeeping to do first.

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And now, that is out of the way, we are going to get into our episode. Patron voted all about the *Strange New World* Season 2, Episode 2 at *Ad Astra Per Aspera*. So, let's talk to these guests.

Amanda, why don't you remind our listeners or introduce yourself to ones who didn't hear your previous episode, tell us about your history with *Star Trek* and your, I guess, a relationship/history with the law and the legal proceedings that we're going to be talking about.

Amanda: Sure. Hello, guests. It's so good to be back. So, my introduction to *Star Trek* was my mom watching *The Next Generation*. I probably didn't quite get it, but then I got hooked in with *Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine*. As I like to joke, between my mom and my husband, they have created a monster.

I love *Star Trek*. I am a lawyer. I've been a lawyer since 2010. I practice in Alaska. I focus my practice on working with folks who are under the government scrutiny for their parenting, or perhaps have broken the law or accused of such. So, that is what I do. And so, this episode, I really love.

Sue: [chuckles] What about you, Hypatia?

Hypatia: I am a Latina attorney and mediator with a background in bioethics. I've been working in the dispute resolution space for over a decade. I practice in state, federal and international tribunals that includes courts and courts of arbitration. I'm a lifelong *Star Trek*

fan. I started with *TNG*. I became a lawyer in part because of *The Next Generation* episode, *The Measure of a Man*. But I think my favorite in the franchise is *DS9*.

So, I personally tend to avoid media that takes place in a courtroom, but I'm really happy to make an exception for [Sue laughs] *Star Trek*, and particularly, this episode.

Sue: All right. So, then, how about we get into it? As usual, we like to start our episode deep dives with a short summary. In this case, I have grabbed that summary from Memory Alpha, because I'm feeling less creative lately. So, according to Memory Alpha, the recap of this episode is Commander Una faces court martial along with the possible imprisonment and dishonorable dismissal from Starfleet. And her defense is in the hands of a lawyer who's also a childhood friend with whom she had a terrible falling out. There's a lot left out of that summary.

[laughter]

This is all about the revelation that Una Chin-Riley is Illyrian and it was genetically modified, which is, of course, against Federation/Starfleet law. This is a rare episode with no B plot as well. Everything is about this trial in this episode. So, where do you want to head first? Who has a thought they want to throw out?

Hypatia: I have a thought about storytelling. So, like I said, I make exceptions for *Star Trek* episodes that take place in courtrooms in part because of my background. But I also think that the reason some of the courtroom episodes are so consistently some of the best episodes of *Star Trek* is because the format provides an opportunity for what's usually the subtext of the show, like the ethos of Starfleet and the Federation to become the literal text in the episode.

It's a powerful way to tackle some of the thornier political, moral and ethical issues that are the backbone of the show. And so, *Ad Astra* is no exception. But the courtroom episodes are the periodic reminder sprinkled throughout the franchise that all of the progressive casting allegory themes in the show aren't some kind of narrative quirk. They're actually integral to the show. And with some exceptions, they have been since 1966.

The future isn't infinite diversity in infinite combinations strictly by happenstance. We get to interstellar travel, and ultimately the Federation, once we as humans tackle racism, xenophobia, misogyny and a whole host of other forms of systemic oppression.

And so, for me, the courtroom episodes spell that out for the audience and remind them that while the literal interpretation of the episodes is entertaining them every week, the moral, allegorical, sometimes analogical considerations are not only critical to the stories being told, they're also didactic and they have real world application.

Sue: I'm blown away.

Amanda: Yeah. That's so brilliant. [laughs] I'm like-- [laughs] Love it.

Hypatia: I have so many more thoughts about this particular issue.

[laughter]

Hypatia: I don't want to monopolize the conversation in any way.

Sue: Well, I guess then let's jump into some of these things that do have real world issues. We're talking, of course, in the episode, the science fiction aspect, of this is genetic

modification. But the allegory is so much more. Even the language that's used is reminiscent of like, "Don't ask, don't tell" policies that we've heard so much about.

There's talk of finding sympathetic doctors to perform certain procedures on certain people. That is reminiscent of the US pre-row and again now, amazingly. And even the queer community seeking care during the worst of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. There were people couldn't even get medical treatment because of who they were.

Amanda: Yeah, I agree, Sue. I think the allegories are really powerful. I think just what you were saying, Hypatia, regarding storytelling and passing-- I was thinking a lot about Una and her particular privilege in being the person that can-- because we find out right in the episode that she's ultimately the one who "turned herself in." But that's kept until the very end. But that Una, in her particular role with all the privilege she has, I think even her attorney-- Her name is escaping me. I want to say--

Hypatia: Neera.

Amanda: Neera. Yeah. Neera says to her, "Most Illyrians don't have your privilege." And so, she can be the character who can finally say, "I want to be seen." I think a lot about-- what you're saying folks who like women that need the abortion care can't be seen. Folks in the queer community seeking care during the AIDS crisis couldn't be seen. Folks in the armed services don't ask who, don't tell couldn't be seen.

But Una, who I think is supposed to represent a white woman that can be, and I thought that was a really interesting moment. I was curious what you two thought about that aspect of it, and if that was noteworthy or if I was overthinking it.

Hypatia: I think that's spot on, Amanda. That was my takeaway as well. Again, this is because I'm thinking of it in terms of subtext and text. But one of the things that I really appreciated about how they set the story up, is that Una is so sympathetic. She's a really good example of how even good intentions can cause incredible harm.

We are given a clearcut example here of how impact can trump intend, because it's not just the law. It's also attitudes, beliefs, fears and revanchism that the law is fertilizing here. It's like this entire system that's oppressive. Not just the attitudes of any one person, we're talking about something that's truly systemic.

So, even though Una's crewmates admire and respect her, she's still oppressed, because the system that she lives in is one that does not acknowledge her right to exist. The fact that she made it to such an esteemed position is not evidence that the oppression is over. And neither is the fact that the court rules in her favor at the end.

I think that her personal log at the end of *Ghosts of Illyria* exemplified this perfectly. She expresses relief that she had a moment where she didn't have to be in the closet. This is how racism works. This is racial supremacy in action. Non-augments are the default person in the Federation system. This is how misogyny works. It's how ableism works. It's how age discrimination works. Most timely of all, this is transphobia, homophobia, bodily autonomy. [chuckles]

We think about how many trans folks are going to brave transition or brave being out if their very existence is criminalized. That's the chilling effect and that's the entire point of laws like this. And Una's collateral damage. She's the most sympathetic victim of these really sweeping prohibitions, because sometimes the people who weren't even the target of the original legislation get caught up.

Una is every woman who dies of an ectopic pregnancy. Now that Ro has been overturned, she's every kid at a school athletic event who is subject to sexual assault, because someone believes they're trans and they want to see what's in their underpants. She's every Imane Khelif who's targeted, because she doesn't fit into the narrow, white, Western ideal of femininity. She is the perfect example that the oppressive system works as designed.

Sue: Yeah. They're super direct with it as well. She has the line where she says, "The laws banning us," gave people permission to act on their worst impulses. That is something that we have very much seen in our real world a lot lately. This also got me thinking a lot about passing privilege as you brought up, Amanda. Whether is it really a privilege? Is it not? I guess the positive, if you want to spin it that way, [chuckles] aspect of passing privilege is that it can protect you. But after a certain point, there is a guilt that comes with it.

Our friends at Lambda Quadrant do a panel that they call when passing feels like failing, because a lot of us, at least in the queer community, feel like there's a responsibility to be out and loud and proud about certain things. But when you're in certain situations where you just pass, and you do that for your safety and you make that choice, it can feel like failing.

Amanda: Well, that's exhausting. I can imagine too, just carrying that around. In the episode, it's carrying a secret, but the secret is who you are.

Hypatia: Absolutely. I think that there's an interesting corollary to passing. So, just by way of background here, I'm Cuban-American. I come from a mixed-race family. My grandmother has spoken very openly with me about passing politics in Cuba versus passing politics in the United States, and who gets to pass, who is considered white in Cuba and who is considered white in the United States.

For those who don't know, Cuba is a 90% black island. You probably wouldn't know that from any of their marketing materials. It is a closely guarded secret. The majority of people with black ancestry in Cuba do not disclose that. They actually don't even identify as black. They identify as one of the other categories within the racial caste system there, because being black is so stigmatized. And so, there's these different levels of passing depending on hair texture, eye color, skin color and the combinations of those particular features.

And so, I was definitely thinking about passing that was front of mind for me in watching this, but I was also thinking about respectability politics more generally, because I think there's an arc between *Ghosts of Illyria* and *Ad Astra* that isn't just the plot. It's not just Una's story. It's also the story of the titular Ghosts of Illyria on the planet. And so, I think it's a really good example of how systems demand that marginalized people be perfectly peerless in their extraordinariness in order to be deemed worthy of equality.

So, the treatment of the *Ghosts in Illyria* and Una, I think, are really damning critique of how the Federation, with all of its high mindedness and talk of ideals can be an oppressor precisely, because it is this small-l liberal institution. So, just a refresher for folks who might not remember this episode, I just watched it again last night. We learn that the ghosts in the episode were a separatist group of Illyrians who had turned their backs on their culture and their people, and they risked it all to make themselves palatable to the Federation. Once they sacrificed their literal lives trying to strip away everything that the Federation used to justify their exclusion, they then brave a cataclysm to save the lives of Pike and Spock.

If it weren't for Una's role in the episode, the audience would have been left with the impression that these Illyrians, these "Good Illyrians," this model minority should have been let into the Federation, because they were willing to assimilate. That's an extremely regressive way of thinking. And that conclusion belies the Federation's claim that it champions diversity, and multiculturalism and inclusivity.

Una's story in the B plot is just as incriminating, because at the end of the episode, when she is narrating her personal log and she is simultaneously grateful that Pike accepts her for who she is and resentful, because the way he showed support makes her feel like the only reason he is championing her is because she is exemplary.

What if she hadn't saved the ship? Would he still be in her corner? What if she wasn't "one of the good ones," but just a regular Illyrian being a perfectly satisfactory officer, like, so many of the officers in Starfleet? There's this meme that's like-- I wish I had the confidence of a mediocre white man.

[laughter]

What if she could be the mediocre white man in Starfleet? When will it be enough to just be an Illyrian? That's how that episode closes. When I was growing up, I heard all the time from elders as a Latina that people are going to have preconceived notions about me. So, I won't be entitled to the same presumption of respect as my peers. I would have to be twice as good and work twice as hard to get half as far. I would have to be perfect. We've seen it play out time and again on the news.

The most manifest example for me happened in France. I think 2018. It was Mamoudou Gassama, the man who scaled four stories to save a child who was dangling from a balcony. Until that news story, he'd been undocumented and had no recourse for traditional immigration. But because he risked his literal life to save a child, he was granted citizenship.

So, there's a big question here of when can marginalized people be people who don't have to do anything remarkable, don't have to be superheroes or martyrs to get basic rights and respect that people from the majority just get by default? When do we get to be regular people with flaws and faults? When do we truly get to be individuals instead of avatars of these marginalized identities?

Sue: Yeah. That goes right into some questions that I wrote down in prepping for this episode, like how much of a victory is this really if this tribunal is making judgments on a case-by-case basis, if it is one on a technicality, if it only applies to one person? Is it right? Is it ethical to be celebrating it?

Amanda: Why did she have to, in a way-- She had to seek asylum when she was running from oppression. But she was running from the oppression of the Federation, which was also, like you said, it's a technicality and a painful technicality. We know from *Deep Space Nine* that it's still illegal to be augmented. The approach to Bashir is, I think, gentler but still pretty draconian in that his dad who was just trying to make his son a little bit better. And again, they're not Illyrians, but still his dad's trying to make his son a little bit better and he ends up doing, what is it, two years in a minimum-security facility. So, they still carry on these beliefs even into *Deep Space Nine*. Again, it's not phrases against DeLorean's although I don't know that was ever cleared up. I don't know if you folks know.

Sue: Yeah. The provision that they're dealing with at least in *Ad Astra* is not specifically against Illyrians, but just any genetic modification or augmentation. So, that certainly still seems to be in place. I think there's also an aspect of-- Isn't Bashir's modification related to his Section 31 position or am I conflating things? It's been a while. [laughs]

Amanda: I think in the episode, they talk about how Bashir was an unexceptional seven-year-old. So, Bashir remembers his life before he was augmented. And then, they decided to genetically modify him, augment him, so that he became exceptional. That too makes me think of just going back to the metaphor of genetic modification-- it also makes me

think of folks who have to mask, folks who they may be neurodiverse and they're able to mask, but again, just being someone who passes who can't be who you really are. That has to be exhausting.

Honestly, just thinking that women in a courtroom setting, we are both supposed to be not aggressive, but also get criticized if we're not aggressive enough. So, just again, thinking through those themes of wanting to change or change, but the exhaustion of having to live as someone you aren't.

Hypatia: Absolutely. There is so many really rich metaphors, I think, in both *Ghosts of Illyria* and *Ad Astra*. Because when I was rewatching *Ghosts of Illyria*, the first thing that jumped to mind was actually masking for neurodivergent people, because the late Illyrians in that episode sacrificed themselves. They literally died trying to change themselves to be palatable.

That's what burnout can look like for autistic people. They work themselves ragged trying to fit in and trying to play a part that is not really natural to them. It's really painful, and it does feel like sacrificing a piece of yourself in order to be accepted. So, I think that is a really excellent point, Amanda.

Sue: Yeah. From just personal anecdote related, a couple years ago, I changed departments at my day job. Most of my floor now is somewhere in the neurodivergent realm. It is just such an easier work day, because we all understand each other. Everybody can unmask, and anybody can stim when they need to and just be open about, "Hey, can you maybe not make that noise right now?" [laughs] It's a world of difference when you don't have to do that to confine yourself to other standards all day long.

Hypatia: Absolutely. Sue, I had a thought about the point you made about this Pyrrhic victory that we see here. This episode to me is proof that there's always going to be one more thing. It reminds me of that Toni Morrison quote about the discursive projective of racism is distraction that keeps us engaged and jumping through every hoop that the people who are invested in maintaining the system put in front of us. And so, she said, "There will always be one more thing."

You can look at the conclusion of this episode and say, "Wow, that's really sad," and go on with your day. Or, you can watch the episode and recognize that in our world, just like in *Strange New Worlds*, there's more work to do. The fact that there isn't a happy ending every time is precisely why we should keep striving to *Ad Astra* to reach through the stars, to grasp the moral arc of the universe and yank it where we want to go. There's going to be resistance. That just means that we have to pull harder.

So, even though the end of the episode is sad on a systemic level, I think it can be a really timely reminder that there's still work to do, and there's always going to be work to do and we should show up and roll up our sleeves and do it.

Sue: There's a callback to this episode a few later in of all things, those old scientists. [laughs] When Boimler discloses or I guess Mariner discloses the poster of Una, the recruitment poster that says "*Ad Astra per Aspera* on it." She's so moved, and she says, "They put that on the poster?" It's such an interesting thing, because for her not knowing anything about their time, the implication there to her could be that this law isn't there anymore, and Illyrians are serving in Starfleet and they're so proud of her for breaking ground. But as far as we know, as viewers in the lower decks era which isn't that long after *Deep Space Nine* genetic modification is still banned. The law hasn't changed and they're tokenizing her really.

Amanda: Yeah. Again, in the *Deep Space Nine* episode, nobody talks about-- They're always referencing [chuckles] and I guess I should say, of course, when they wrote *Deep Space Nine*, they didn't know *Strange New Worlds* was ever a possibility, a glimmer in anyone's eye. But like you said, Sue, we don't even know if Boimler knows that Una is an Illyrian. He may just think she's great.

Hypatia: I like to think that he knows, because he's such a geek and knows absolutely everything about everyone. [Sue laughs] But that raises a really interesting question. It's like, did they seal her personnel file? [laughs] That's a legitimate concern.

Sue: Pike, certainly, when he was going to convince Neera to take the case was saying, "If you win, this is going to send ripples out through the entire quadrant." So, the implication from that seems to be that it would have been a public trial, right?

Hypatia: Sure. I think that's a reasonable takeaway. I also just have my doubts about institutions in general. This is one of the things that I wanted touch on is that this power paradox, that's at play here in this episode.

I actually think this episode is a really brutal indictment of the Federation. It's offered in a soft way in the sense that it's quite indirect. Neera holds up the hypocrisy of the Federation to everybody who's in that arbitration room. But I think that it could have been offered more explicitly. I am curious and I would love to know what the writers were thinking by offering it in the way that they did, because there is this pattern that we see repeat through history, that institutions that are started for the right reasons end up using a lot of their resources on their own proliferation instead of doing the work that they were designed to do.

And so, as a result, they necessarily end up sacrificing their mission in patently hypocritical ways and using their future security as an excuse. And so, that's why I have my doubts about the openness of those proceedings, because it's certainly—Pike, he is the idealist in that situation. He believes in the Federation. He believes in Starfleet. But they might have a different agenda. We know that they do, Section 31 exists. [chuckles] So, truly, who knows what happens by the time we get to these old scientists.

Sue: When Neera goes up and blatantly says to them like, "I understand you were hurt in your eugenics wars and you took these steps to protect yourself, but your fears have turned you into the oppressor," that's just-- Every time I watch it, it is still so striking to me.

Hypatia: Absolutely. They're practicing collective punishment. This is really regressive stuff. This is sins of the father style justice. They're practicing it on people who are not members of the majority. They had nothing to do with the eugenics wars, like a handful of augments start a war, and now every person who's augmented has to pay the price.

Amanda: My mind keeps coming back to the speech that court gives. I think people call it the Root Beer monologue or the Root Beer speech when he's talking to Garak in *Deep Space Nine* about how the Federation just homogenizes everyone at some point, and they are just like the Borg. This episode, just how we're talking through it, makes me think and the lack of progress brings me back to what's one of my favorite monologues on that point about the Federation as much as I love it has huge flaws.

Sue: It's so interesting. *Deep Space Nine* was a show set on the fringes or on the border of the Federation with so many non-Federation characters that there was criticism of these institutions all over it. You didn't really see that on *Next Generation*. You didn't really see it on *Voyager* and even *Discovery*. I wouldn't have expected to see it on *Strange New Worlds*, because it's that bright, shiny space exploration feeling to the show. But then, here this is.

And it really is a harsh look at whether the supposed utopia is a real one or not, or whether it's just shiny coverings like Disneyland.

Amanda: Yeah. It makes me think of how Kennedy, one of the cohosts, calls it safe new worlds. But maybe this isn't a safe new worlds episode. I wonder what she thinks.

[laughter]

Hypatia: I have another neurodivergent thought. As a neurodivergent person, I have another neurodivergent thought. Very dendritic ways of thinking over here.

[laughter]

Hypatia: I'm sure that relates to absolutely nobody.

[laughter]

Hypatia: Who's here right now?

Sue: Or, most of us.

[laughter]

Hypatia: Two things that fit together in this neurodivergence thought bubble for me. So, the first. Something that was really striking to me was the episodes focus on which culture is more hostile. It was done very incidentally, but it really struck me because when Pike visits the planet to find Neera, it's physically very hostile to a non-augment.

We see Pike wearing a respirator and the consequences of him removing that respirator, but we also see that he's allowed to wear it, and the atmosphere, at least inside, can be altered to be more hospitable to him. It's a very stark contrast to the Federation's categorical ban on Illyrians.

Pike's allowed on the planet. There are ways to make it accessible to him. There are accommodations. The Federation has none for Illyrians. That does not paint the Federation in a very positive light. That particular juxtaposition got me thinking about invisible disabilities and the social model of disability. Neurodivergence, of course, was front of mind there.

When Pike visits Neera, we're getting a good example of how the social model of disability works. So, just a little bit of background in case folks don't know. Up until the 1950s, the predominant lens of disability was the medical model, which is a functional analysis of the body as a machine, basically, that can be fixed in order to fit more normative values. At the end of the day, the focus was labor. Can you work? Yes or no? Can you be fixed? Yes or no? What is your value to society as a result?

Unsurprisingly, the medical model of disability carries a negative connotation. To this day, disability is highly stigmatized. The social model of disability developed at around the same time that *Star Trek* aired actually. It developed in the 1960s. I think you see a little bit of this in *Nextgen* with Geordi. But it identifies systemic barriers that make it difficult or impossible for disabled people to exist.

So, these barriers include physical barriers for physical disabilities, but they also include things like derogatory attitudes, social exclusion. That's true regardless of whether the exclusion is intentional or inadvertent. So, under the social model of disability, a person can have physical, sensory, intellectual, psychological differences, any of those that could result

in individual functional differences. But it's not necessarily a disability, unless their context fails to accommodate them.

So, what Sue was talking about earlier, working in a space where there are a lot more neurodivergent people, your needs as a neurodivergent person are more likely to be accommodated than if you are working in a majority neurotypical space.

I can use an example of a physical disability first to make this a little bit more clear. So, if a person is a wheelchair user and there's no ramp, that's a disability. But if every building has a ramp at the main entrance, and it's readily accessible and it's always safe to use, it's not blocked by anything, that person's not disabled. They might have some functional differences in their life, but they are able to go about their day.

If an immune compromised person can safely access hospital care now, during the pandemic scene, because the air is being filtered, healthcare workers are wearing N95s, hospital screening for airborne infections like RSV and the flu and COVID, they're taking airborne precautions and room assignments, etc., etc., that person's immune system is not a disability at that point, okay?

So, Pike's inability to breathe on nearest planet is not a disability under the social model. He has access to the planet, because he is a breathing apparatus. If they had banned breathing apparatuses, he would be disabled. But because it's not banned, he's not considered disabled. When he takes it off, they can alter the atmosphere to accommodate him. The fact that this capability is there means that this Illyrian society can be accessible when they want to be. That doesn't mean that they are accessible. Accessibility means that you don't actually have to change anything about the way that your society is organized. But they certainly could.

The Federation says it's accessible. Near society can be. So, in that sense, they're slightly more progressive than the Federation. But again, disability depends on context. So, on an Illyrian planet, Una would not be disabled. But in Starfleet, she is, because of systemic barriers. We wouldn't typically think of her augmentations as a disability, but she's really no different than a neurodivergent person. There is certain things about her that are different, some of which might offer some kind of benefit to her, some of which might not be considered a benefit. But it's all considered a threat, and it's therefore, penalized or stigmatized in some way. Folks who are on the spectrum often report being ostracized or discriminated against or stigmatized.

And so, that was very long winded. But it just seemed like such a great example of the difference between the medical model and the social model of disability that I don't think gets enough attention even in *Star Trek*, which is quite progressive in general.

Sue: Early *Star Trek*, it's interesting when we discuss how *Star Trek* has dealt with disability over the years, because early *Star Trek* is very much about fixing disabilities. They don't exist anymore. As things go on, as we get to *Next Gen* and *DS9*, it is much more about accommodation.

Hypatia: Absolutely. It's this neoliberal concept. I think it's so fascinating to look at the different offerings in the franchise as a snapshot of political thought at the time what was considered progressive at that time.

Amanda: Hypatia, I thought what you said about the allegory for neurodivergent folk and Una living among the crew, it struck me, and I hope you two can help me put this in better words. But I remember reading Temple Grandin's book about how Temple's was viewed as someone who wouldn't be able to work, wouldn't be able to function and is in fact able with

accommodation to create. I think Temple creates like, is it a specific way of herding cattle that only because of how Temple's brain works, they can do that? And so, that's-- [chuckles] I'm trying to think of how to put that, because we're not meeting neurodivergent folks where they're at and we are missing out as a society.

Sue: That makes complete sense to me.

Amanda: Okay.

[laughter]

Sue: As you were talking, this got me thinking too about-- Again, our conclusion to this trial that not just that it's a technicality, but it comes to granting Una asylum from this persecution that is imposed by this same organization. And in a way, it is allowing the folks on this tribunal to pat themselves on the back for doing this nice thing and making themselves a savior of a victim that they created.

Amanda: Yeah, they were the oppressors. They were the judge who continues to put people of color in jail. But oh, they're just doing their job. They were the prosecutor that continues to advocate for high bail. They're just doing their job, as opposed to what if one of the judges had said, "I disagree with this proceeding. I will not sit on it." What if we saw that? Or, what if Patel actually said, "Nope, I'm not doing this. I'm not prosecuting the Starfleet officer." But they didn't, and that gives me the ick.

Hypatia: Yeah, it's a nightmare from an ethics perspective. There's so many issues with-

[laughter]

Hypatia: -Patel, or with Patel even being there. [laughs]

Sue: There needed to be romantic tension, obviously. [laughs]

Amanda: Oh, not my favorite character.

[laughter]

Hypatia: I do have a thought about the saviorism point that you mentioned, Sue. I think it's really interesting. I think the choice to have another Illyrian be Una's lawyer here was really clever, because typically in these episodes, the advocate's always a captain. It's like an insider in the system. So, when you think of measure of a man, it's Picard. And so, it's usually this person who paternalistically is the voice of the voiceless. But in the real world, marginalized people aren't voiceless. We're just denied access to the microphone, like [chuckles] people won't give it to us.

And so, both gatekeeping and saviorism are the oppressive system working as intended, which is why that outcome is so bittersweet, because it does give the panel the opportunity to be like, "Yay, we did the right thing." But I think that was excellent. I think it was masterful, because what they did is that they shone a really massive spotlight on systemic bigotry and how it actually works every day. And so, that usual subtext, that bigotry is immoral and unjust and just basically primitive.

I think, again, it's like a reminder to an engaged audience. I know that Trekkies are generally very thoughtful, because [chuckles] all of the fora and all of the ways that we talk about episodes-

[laughter]

Hypatia: -shows me that we are all overthinking this stuff.

[laughter]

Hypatia: I'm hoping that the takeaway for everyone watching that episode, is that we all do have a responsibility to put an end to systemic oppression. It's plainly in the text, because it's in the words of the advocate in the courtroom. That's really the first time that you get that.

Sue: Any other aspects of the episode we didn't touch on?

Amanda: It does pass the Bechdel test.

Sue: Oh, yes.

[laughter]

Amanda: It does. It definitely passes the Bechdel test. I think I touched on I love the women in the courtroom. The defense attorney is a woman, the prosecutor is a woman, the defendant and the head judge are all women. Even La'an role is wanting to help and advocate. I love that from the law can still be and very much feel like a male dominated industry, and I still love seeing those visual representations that women don't have to be the softer advocate. You saw different kinds of advocacy from the folks involved. I like the juxtaposition of Pike's role versus-- Is it the Vulcan Jag?

Sue and Hypatia: Pasalk.

Amanda: Pasalk. I kept calling him Patak in my notes, [Sue laughs] and I was like, "No, that's just a Freudian slip, Pasalk. But the juxtaposition between Pike and Pasalk, Patel gives him that which absolutely, as you said, Hypatia, ethically weird why he shouldn't testify. He knows to sit down and shut his mouth, whereas Pasalk cannot help himself when it's time to cross examine Una, and he puts his hand on Patel and then he steps in it. I thought that was lovely and a little bit more superficial than what we've been talking about. But it just gave me a, "Yeah-- See, that's why you shut up and sit down."

Hypatia: Definitely have had those days in court.

[laughter]

Hypatia: It always feels amazing when it happens.

[laughter]

Amanda: Yes. When the other side asks one question too many, that's what Pasalk did

Sue: When there's a character beat in here for La'an as well, because as an audience, we learn that she is also modified or carries the modifications, I think, is the way they put it. So, it makes me wonder if we might see something like this again for her.

Hypatia: That's a really good point.

Amanda: Yeah. I was just looking at-- Because Neera says to her something like-- She says, "Considering your last name, I think you would understand the nuances of genetic manipulation. Genetics is not destiny. It was drilled into you. You were not born a monster." I

had written those down. Yeah. So powerful for La'ans already established story arc with her ancestor. Or, does this episode predate the episode where she goes back in time?

Sue: Yeah, that's the next one.

Amanda: Okay. Yeah.

Hypatia: It shows her arc from this episode to episode 3, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, is that she's coming to terms with it and accepting it and not allowing part of her that would be oppressed if she didn't pass to cause self-hatred.

Amanda: Mm-hmm. Literal self-destruction, if she took out Khan. Yeah.

Sue: All right. Well, if there's nothing else anybody wants to bring up from their notes.

Amanda: I could nerd out on the fruit of the poisonous tree reference and tell you how it was delightful, but maybe not completely accurate, and then [Sue laughs] talk about Mapp v. Ohio. It's not really a technicality when you kick things out on fruit of poisonous tree, because cops shouldn't break the constitution, but we can save that for another time.

[laughter]

Sue: I loved all of that already.

[laughter]

Amanda: Also, did Pasalk remind you of the baseball team captain of the logicians?

[laughter]

Sue: A little bit.

Amanda: Right?

[laughter]

Amanda: It's like I wonder if he's the [unintelligible [00:45:51] That'd be a funny little band theory. Pasalk, he lost rank after this and became a bitter Starfleet member who took up the earth sport of baseball and passed it on to his son, because Vulcans are long lived, who became a captain.

Hypatia: I do love the one little. I guess maybe that's the B plot, that scene in the lounge where Spock comes over and apologizes for the outburst after talking to Pasalk. [laughs]

Amanda: Yes.

Hypatia: So good.

Amanda: Yeah. I love that M'Benga knew Spock well enough to be like, "Oh, no, they're really having it out."

Sue: That's a nice little deep cut, because when we're introduced to M'Benga in *TOS*, I'm pretty sure they say that he went to medical school or worked in a hospital on Vulcan, so it makes sense that he would be better at reading Vulcan body language. But deep cut, anyway. [laughs]

Amanda: That's a great deep cut.

Hypatia: That's a delicious little Easter egg. I love that.

[laughter]

Sue: So, I think it's time to get to our episode ratings, this time around. I personally think among all of *Star Trek's* courtroom episodes, I think this is one of the best. But I'll save my rating for last, and I'll say, Amanda, what is your rating for *Ad Astra per Aspera*?

Amanda: Well, I have to give it 101%. It's fantastic. It's fun in that it's-- As a practitioner who sometimes finds courtroom drama really draining and silly, both in the real-- No, I'm kidding.

[laughter]

Amanda: -in the fictional world. I don't live in the real world either. It just gives me the feels. I cried while watching it, and I recognize it shows a problematic Starfleet, but still, I just as a woman and a lawyer and having seen all these struggles, it's chef's kiss.

Sue: Hypatia?

Hypatia: Yeah. It's an episode about number one. For me, it is number one of all of the courtroom episodes in *Star Trek*. As I mentioned before, I've really appreciated that they centered the entire narrative around Una and her people. This is the first time we get someone from a marginalized background getting to advocate for their own people and their own selves. That is incredibly powerful.

She's not told she's too close to the issue, she's not told she's too emotional and she can't be objective. That's a huge deal, because Una is a stand in for so many different kinds of marginalized people. We practiced our rituals in secret. She's Jewish and she's indigenous. She's a person being discriminated against because of her race, who is passing. She's trans. She's a person who's hiding who she really is and is closeted, because she can pass and isn't clocked, she has privilege. She's not reduced to stereotypes for her deceit, but she's given a platform to actually share her story and have it told through an advocate who doesn't have to earn the goodwill of the system.

The best part of this for me was that there was no soapbox for the savior who is part of the system. In this episode, Pike is explicitly told, "Sit down. Shut up. You're going to make things worse." I whooped at that line. It made me feel incredibly seen. It made me feel as a marginalized person, that the marginalized point of view was being centered.

Sue: Yeah. Not only do I think this will go down as one of *Star Treks* best courtroom episodes, I think this might go down as one of the franchise's best episodes, period. Because I think it's really incredible and it was really super, super well done.

So, as we close out, then today, I'll ask you both if there's anywhere that you'd like to point people to, if they want to follow you on the Internet or anything you want to promote for people to check out, and we'll go in the same order and start with Amanda.

Amanda: I am pretty quiet on the internet. My law firm's website, if you are being oppressed by the government and need help in Alaska, is 49thstatelaw.com. I will also be teaching a session in Nebraska on the November 14th at what's called the Bob Chaloupka Kick Ass Trial Skills Seminar. So, if you are a lawyer and want to meet me in person, I'll be in Nebraska on November 14th.

Sue: That's awesome. Hypatia?

Hypatia: Can I go to that? [Sue laughs]

Amanda: Yeah, I'll send you an email.

Hypatia: That sounds amazing. As for me, I am actually in the process of launching a Substack. It's going to be about ethics, bioethics and media literacy in general. It's called La Seneschale. It is spelled L-A S-E-N-E-S-C-H-A-L-E. It is extremely long, probably not the best name, but it is inspired by the guardians of old during the middle-ages, and I feel like that's everyone's mantle these days. So, I hope that you will check it out when it launches in two weeks.

Sue: Phenomenal. And I was Sue. You can find me right here on Women at Warp. To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit womenatwarp.com. Email us at crew@womenatwarp.com or find us on Facebook or Instagram, [@womenatwarp](https://www.instagram.com/womenatwarp). Thanks so much for listening.

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