

The Trekker's Guide to the Picard Years

By J.W. Braun

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Introduction: About this Book

When *Star Trek: The Next Generation* debuted on Thursday, September 28, 1987, few could have foreseen that it would surpass *The Original Series* in popularity and eventually graduate to feature films itself. Yet it happened, and along the way *TNG* scored the highest ratings of any *Star Trek* series and turned itself into a permanent part of the world's popular culture.

Happily, never before have the episodes been so assessable, with the days of fans having to catch the weekly show or having to rent *Star Trek* videos—or even having to shell out money for DVD and Blu-ray collections—no longer necessary to enjoy the adventures. Today's technology allows even the non-*Star Trek* fan to instantly watch just about any episode of any *Star Trek* series, thanks to the internet and streaming services. And yet, even big fans can be forgiven if they have difficulty sorting out the hundreds of hours of *Star Trek* available—save for a quick check online which may also yield spoilers and misinformation.

That's where this series of books comes into play, the second volume of which you're reading now. Throughout this edition, every television episode and feature film including Captain Picard and his crew is graded, reviewed, and analyzed...and all without giving away plot points and surprises that make *Star Trek* worth watching. If knowledge of one episode is important to enjoy another or if there's a prequel or sequel, the review includes that information as well.

These books are *not* a substitute for watching *Star Trek*. (After all, what is?) It's been said that a dozen people watching the same episode or movie will have twelve different experiences, and many *Star Trek* fans have a strong personal bond to specific episodes for their own special reasons. But what this book will do is share and explain my thoughts and opinions, not to supersede the reader's own thoughts and viewing experiences, but to enhance them with another perspective.

And just who am I, anyway?

I'm J.W. Braun, a guy from Wisconsin. I was born in 1975 and grew up with a family that loved science fiction and fantasy, becoming a *Star Trek* fan in the 1980s after discovering, in succession, *Star Trek: The Animated Series*, the *Star Trek* movies, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Today, I'm an unabashed fanboy who spends too much time analyzing entertainment and seeking out the people who make things like *Star Trek* possible so I can share what I learn with others. As I review the work, I try to be fair, but I also try to be honest. I can ask no more of you as you read this book!



Marina Sirtis and me

Grading the Episodes

At the top of the reviews, you'll see grades for the episodes. I use the standard American letter grade scale you may remember from school because it's easy to understand. But to spell it out (pardon the pun), here's a guide.

- A:** Excellent (nearly perfect)
- B:** Very good (exceeds expectations)
- C:** Average (par for the course)
- D:** Poor (below standard)
- F:** Failure (ugh.)

Each review will also include vital information about the episode, including a plot description, the original air date, and the writing and director credits. In addition, I will include notes for the remastered versions, which were assembled by CBS Digital and released between the years 2012 and 2014.

“Encounter at Farpoint”: B



(Pilot) Captain Jean-Luc Picard leads the crew of the USS Enterprise-D on its maiden voyage to examine a new planetary station.

Air date: September 28, 1987

Written by D.C. Fontana & Gene Roddenberry

Directed by Corey Allen

TV rating: 15.7

“Well, this is a new ship, but she’s got the right name. Now you remember that, you hear? You treat her like a lady, and she’ll always bring you home.”
—Admiral McCoy

Originally considered a classic, *Star Trek*’s first “let’s watch the characters meet for the first time” two hour pilot began to look more clunky and dated as the series began to improve in subsequent seasons and fans began to expect more from sci-fi TV. Despite this, however, the episode retains a sense of wonder and innocence, with a beautiful two-part story that successfully introduces the characters and lays a foundation for the series and 18 more years of *Star Trek* on television.

Setting aside the standard A/B formula, “Encounter” joins Fontana’s Farpoint Station mystery with Roddenberry’s new version of the old “Squire of Gothos” plot by using the latter to frame the former. In the end, Roddenberry’s

whimsical last minute addition proves the stronger, with the battle of wills between Picard and the powerful alien, Q, stealing the show, thanks largely to Patrick Stewart and John de Lancie putting on an acting clinic as Picard steps up to bat for humanity and Q tries to strike him out. (Wil Wheaton's take on Q: "The guy makes a straw man accusation, someone refutes it with logic and reason, so he simply changes the terms of the argument, all the while enjoying the attention he's getting.")

The Farpoint plot, which forms the heart of the episode, is serviceable but little more. Setting a precedent for future *Trek* pilots, Fontana uses the story to cleverly spread out the character introductions and to allow each cast member to be properly introduced before proceeding forward. The Farpoint stuff itself is really a Riker story, with guest star Michael Bell (more well known as a cartoon voice actor) serving as an antagonist of sorts, playing a character who comes across as a second-rate magician trying to keep his tricks up his sleeve while Riker tries to figure them out. In the end, the mystery turns out to have too simple of an answer, with the writers, in a self-aware moment, letting a character point out this very fact. But the payoff itself is lovely and worth the wait.

In a way, it's all a bridge from *TOS* to *TNG*, with the episode including unconvincing planet sets and featuring a healthy dose of debates about humanity while introducing a four star hotel-like Enterprise and her new crew. Throughout it all, there are plenty of flaws. With the script-writers unfamiliar with whom these characters are and wanting them all to address each other by name frequently to help the audience learn who is who, the dialogue is often laughable. ("Maybe this is something Jean-Luc would like looked into.") Troi, wearing the shortest skirt in the galaxy, treats her empathic abilities somewhat like a Vulcan mind-meld, attempting to literally become the emotion she's sensing, a cringe-worthy choice. And Data is seemingly fresh out of the box and having to figure everything out as he goes, despite the dialogue indicating—and future episodes confirming—that he has spent years working his way up through Starfleet the hard way. Meanwhile, the writers have little idea what to do with Yar, Worf and Wesley, save for using the latter as an awkward audience surrogate for a visit to the wondrous bridge. (And the future Chief O'Brien? He's literally a nameless extra.) But with Stewart ably anchoring the main cast, these issues feel more like opportunities to grow than problems that threaten the series as a whole. (Besides, how can you understand the full awesomeness of Riker's beard if you don't see him clean shaven first?)

The truth is that for all its issues, the pilot doesn't feel like a franchise struggling with the weight of its own legacy like *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. It feels fresh, with an aura of spring, like it's morning again in *Star Trek*. (Dennis McCarthy deserves a lot of the credit for this, delivering the perfect score to amplify the feeling.) These are characters searching for something, and it's not quite there yet, but you know it's around corner. The joy here is seeing them meet and embark on the great odyssey together—with a surprise note-perfect cameo from one of the stars of *TOS*.

“Encounter at Farpoint” was nominated for a Hugo for best Dramatic Presentation but lost to *The Princess Bride* (1987). *TNG* returns to the setting of this episode inside the finale, “All Good Things.”



My wife and I celebrating the 30th Anniversary of “Encounter at Farpoint” with the cast. From left to right: LeVar Burton, Patrick Stewart, Michael Dorn, Gates McFadden, my wife, me, Marina Sirtis, John de Lancie, Denise Crosby, and Brent Spiner

Remastered Version: Aside from the usual polish, CBS Digital fixes a still shot of a forest background when Riker enters the holodeck, giving it some life, and changes the location of a beam coming out of the Enterprise during the climax. (CBS does not, however, retcon the saucer edge to include the Ten Forward windows that will suddenly appear in Season Two.)

Did you know? Dennis McCarthy composed a theme song for *TNG*, but Roddenberry only liked the opening notes and reached into *Star Trek's* past, replacing McCarthy's main theme with music composed for *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. The situation echoes what happened with *TOS*, with the theme song composed for the pilot that sold the show ultimately replaced with the theme song from a prior pilot.

“The Enemy”: A-



While La Forge is trapped on a hazardous planet with an injured Romulan, tensions rise between the Federation and Romulan Empire.

Air date: November 6, 1989

Written by David Kemper & Michael Piller

Directed by David Carson

TV rating: 10.3

“We must measure our response carefully, or history may remember Galorndon Core along with Pearl Harbor and Station Salem-One as the stage for a bloody preamble to war.”

—Picard

Inspired by *Enemy Mine*, a 1979 sci-fi novella by Barry B. Longyear, this political thriller develops some serious drama just a few minutes in and then sustains the vibe for the course of the episode as its three intertwining subplots become more compelling with each act.

Andreas Katsulas guest stars as Romulan Commander Tomalak, bringing a gravitas equal to Patrick Stewart and working with the latter to shape a Cold War standoff that has roots in legitimate concerns from both sides. Picard is upset about discovering a Romulan named Patahk in Federation space (which both Patahk and Tomalak say is totally an isolated accident involving no one

else), and Tomalak is upset that Picard won't let him cross the Neutral Zone to save Patahk's life. Katsulas is brilliant in his part, playing up the subtext of his messages in such a way that anyone watching is able to read the thoughts behind his words as easily as Counselor Troi. Stewart, of course, holds his own, proving Picard is no wussy diplomat who can be pushed around on his bridge in Federation space.

Complicating this external situation is an internal conflict aboard the Enterprise: Dr. Crusher needs Worf to donate some ribosomes to keep Patahk alive, but Worf, whose parents were killed by Romulans, flat out refuses. So there's the question of whether Worf will come around, which leads to some heart to heart talks between the Klingon and his superior officers (and even a conversation between Worf and Patahk). This also sets up another dilemma for Captain Picard, who increasingly becomes aware that he must either respect Worf's rights to do as he will with his own body or order the Klingon to give up some cytoplasm for the good of the ship. (There's also the hanging question of whether the Federation can force a Romulan to undergo a transfusion against his will or if he has a say about *his* own body. In this particular case, Patahk is adamantly opposed to the procedure, though for all we know only Worf learns about Patahk's true wishes.)

But wait, there's more! La Forge, stranded on Planet Hell, runs into *another* Romulan! It turns out that Patahk must have made a clerical error in his preboard head count because there is, in fact, another Romulan on the wrong side of the Neutral Zone. The problem is that neither La Forge nor this Romulan will survive without helping each other get to a rendezvous point, and even then they'll have to hope Picard and Tomalak don't blow each other out of the galaxy if there's going to be a rescue. Guest star John Snyder works well with Burton, giving off the air of a foreigner with cultural differences while avoiding any offensive clichés in the process. (Snyder would return in Season Five to play the leader of a genetically engineered colony in "The Masterpiece Society.")

It all makes for exciting television, with the strong plotlines backed by an equally strong teleplay that makes good use out of just about all the characters. (Watch Riker, despite being merely a supporting player in the episode, spend most of the story on edge after his away mission loses a man and he takes it personally as a failure.) And the fact that Picard, Worf, and La Forge each have to deal with Romulans who are essentially mirror images of themselves makes everything all the better.

Happily, this is just the first of two successful Romulan episodes, with "The Defector" just a few episodes away. The Romulan episodes almost always force Picard to offer measured responses that will hold the Federation's ground but keep each side from starting a war. It's a dangerous tight rope act that proves a winning formula for the television show...though the well would run dry by the time of *TNG's* fourth feature film.

Remastered Version: For Galorndon Core, Gabl replaces a reuse of the planet from “The Child” with a similar looking digital version. Meanwhile, the high definition version of the episode gives much greater clarity to the dimly lit scenes on the planet stage set, making them much more enjoyable.

Did you know? This flashlight-like palm beacons used at the beginning of this episode were manufactured to be so powerful, they had to be plugged into a power source. To disguise this fact, their cords were run up the sleeves of the actors and down the inside of their costumes.

Did you also know? In a rare special effects mistake, the final shot shows the Enterprise and the Romulan warbird flying away in separate directions, despite Picard’s promise to escort the warbird back to the Neutral Zone. This is because the effects people, in this instance, prioritize the budget over the script. The footage of the ships departing is lifted directly from “Contagion.”

“Yesterday’s Enterprise”: A+



A rift in the space-time continuum brings a ship from the past into the present, altering reality.

Air date: February 19, 1990

Teleplay by Ira Behr, Richard Manning, Hans Beimler & Ronald D. Moore

Story by Trent Christopher Ganino & Eric A. Stillwell

Directed by David Carson

TV rating: 11.9

“This war’s not supposed to be happening. You’ve got to send those people back to correct this.” —Guinan

This time travel puzzle (which is actually a marriage of two separately pitched story ideas) is reminiscent of *TOS*’s “Mirror Mirror,” yet more subtle and cunning.

Back in its day, *TNG* thrived by telling stories that the sitcoms and game shows making up the bulk of its competition simply couldn’t do, and “Yesterday’s Enterprise” remains one of its crowning achievements. The product of several writers, with an uncredited polish by Michael Piller, the concept itself would traditionally be executed from the perspective of the usual characters, with Picard’s ship accidentally ending up in the future and having to find its way back home. Instead, the writers do the opposite, with a ship from

the past that arrives in the present that instantly causes sweeping changes in the timeline, a concept infinitely more creative and memorable that allows the episode to showcase a new style that takes advantage of television's visual nature. (In fact, the writers, who were forced to rush the script due to scheduling issues with guest stars Denise Crosby and Whoopi Goldberg, weren't satisfied with the finished script and expected the episode to be mediocre. But when you're reading the script in an office and you can't actually *see* how the story looks, you're missing out on much of what makes each scene special.)

Inside this all-new universe, the number of changes is so great, it's almost impossible to notice them all in a single viewing. We get new costumes, redesigned sets, and a crowded ship filled with people, intercom chatter, and ambient noise (with the sound of the doors, consoles, and engines louder than usual). There's no Counselor Troi, no friendship between Picard and Riker, and when it comes to phasers, no rule against open carry.

The most dramatic (and delicious) change, however, is the lighting, with Marvin Rush changing the look of each set with new styles and colors and allowing shadows to interact with the faces of the actors as they deliver their lines.

And yet it all merely serves as a backdrop for the star of the episode, the story, a double ship-based thriller, with the Kirk-era movie bridge set standing in for the ship from the past, the Enterprise-C. Like *TOS's* masterpiece, "The City on the Edge of Forever," "Yesterday's Enterprise" uses its time travel plot for a purpose rather than as a gimmick, with broad universal implications and intimate personal consequences. It creates an audacious tapestry that might seem more appropriate for a two-parter or a feature film (and indeed, the writers later lamented that it was too bad they didn't save this plot for *Generations* with Captain Kirk). But like "City," "Yesterday's Enterprise" works as a single episode thanks to quick and efficient exposition, free of technobabble and belabored detail.

With an A/B plot structure cleverly built around four characters, this one is almost all about Captain Picard, Guinan, Tasha Yar, and Lieutenant Castillo. It's Picard, of course, who has to decide whether or not to send the ship from the past back where it came from, knowing it will almost certainly be destroyed in battle the moment it returns. (Tucked inside this decision is a splendid example of the butterfly effect, with the ship from the past far better positioned to prevent an apocalyptic future from back in its own time as opposed to the present.) Meanwhile, Guinan serves as the audience surrogate, lending a voice to our own thoughts about what's not right, leading to an intense argument with Picard. Stewart, of course, enjoys commanding the stage, and this episode gives him a rare chance to do so as a stern, battle hardened captain in war. But Whoopi Goldberg is his equal here, with Guinan combating Picard's aggressive authority with calm words of wisdom he can't dismiss.

Yet "Yesterday's Enterprise" really belongs to Tasha Yar, a character written out of the show in the first season who returns, with the writers literally using the episode to voice their thoughts that her exit in "Skin of Evil" was disappointing and merits a do-over, and the plot allowing her to have a second

chance. Yar herself discovers that restoring the proper timeline is a literal dead end for her, and it gives the episode a personal touch as she attempts to process the dilemma, with Denise Crosby giving her most cerebral performance of the series.

Tricia O'Neil guest stars as captain of the ship from the past, giving her Captain Garrett the same drive, determination, and strong leadership style as Captain Picard. But it's her bridge officer, Lieutenant Castillo (played by Christopher McDonald), who ends up as the main representative from the old ship, spending much of the episode with Yar as the two grow closer. Crosby and McDonald play the relationship well, using the subtext to fill in the blanks the script leaves empty and allowing the relationship between the two characters to form the heart of the story. Meanwhile, Director David Carson shoots everyone with long lenses to keep the actors as the center of the focus, and uses the characters themselves to build the tension with each subsequent act. (To be fair, he does get some help from the special effects, with this episode including the most expensive battle sequences so far in the history of the show.)

With all these elements, "Yesterday's Enterprise" is the rare episode that can telegraph its ending a mile away and yet still be as enjoyable as another episode with a surprise twist. It was an instant classic the first day it aired, and today remains one of *Trek's* greatest achievements. It was nominated for Emmy Awards for music, sound mixing, and sound editing, winning for the latter.

The idea of an alternate universe caused by time travel returns in the 2009 *Star Trek* film, giving us new adventures for Jim Kirk and company.

Remastered Version: Like the previous episode, there are no significant changes for this episode's digital upgrade. The high definition, however, does a better job of showing off the details of the alternate universe.

Did you know? David Carson would go on to direct Captain Kirk and the crew of the Enterprise-B in *Star Trek: Generations*.

Did you notice? At Ten Forward, Lieutenant Yar tells Guinan she'd like the standard rations because she's in a hurry. Guinan nods and walks away, and then begins washing a table!

“Sins of the Father”: A-



When Worf learns that his deceased father has been branded a traitor, he visits the Klingon Homeworld to challenge the charge.

Air date: March 19, 1990

Teleplay by Ronald D. Moore & W. Reed Moran

Story by Drew Deighan

Directed by Les Landau

TV rating: 11.1

“I am Worf, son of Mogh. I have come to challenge the lies that have been spoken of my father.” —Worf

What starts off looking like a companion piece to “A Matter of Honor” takes a left turn and becomes the template and foundation for just about every Worf episode to follow, enriching *TNG* for the rest of its run in much the same way “Amok Time” does for *TOS*.

Tony Todd guest stars as Kurn, a Klingon officer who takes Commander Riker’s place as first officer as part of the same exchange program that previously allowed Riker to serve on a Klingon ship. You would probably think this would be enough to supply the episode with plenty of drama. (And indeed, computer expert Beth Woods pitched this as a main storyline). But despite some great moments in its own right, this part turns out to be just an appetizer. The

true plot (a story conceived separately by Drew Deighan) begins when Worf finds out someone is spreading lies about his late father, and the episode suddenly turns into a planet-based political thriller that introduces the Klingon homeworld. Art director Richard James, cinematographer Marvin Rush, and set director Jim Mees team up to create the look and feel of this setting (which would go on to thread its way through various incarnations of *Star Trek* for years to come), and matte painter Syd Dutton (a student of *TOS* matte painter Albert Whitlock) adds the icing on the cake with a breathtaking view of the Klingon's capital city.

Inside this playground, Ron Moore runs wild, merging the two stories into a teleplay that carefully cultivates its (mass) murder mystery, with Worf standing up for his father's honor while Picard plays detective and attempts to solve the crime. (W. Reed Moran gets a writing credit as well, though most of his contributions were edited out of the final script.)

Several guest stars leave their mark. In addition to Todd as Kurn, Charles Cooper plays Chancellor K'mpec and Patrick Massett plays Duras, with all three Klingons returning in future episodes. (There's also a good performance by Thelma Lee as an elderly Klingon nurse). But this is a case where the collective team effort eclipses any individual performances, with everyone successfully building and sustaining a new world with its own unique customs, values, and politics, making every moment of every scene on the Klingon homeworld irresistibly compelling.

In the midst of this foreign culture, it's up to Picard to find the puzzle pieces and assemble them without knowing what the picture on the box looks like. And after working on the edges of the big picture and starting to move inward, he finds himself increasingly in danger. Stewart, who had made no secret about his desire for more action sequences, brings his A game and takes over much of the episode. (In fact, Picard proves invaluable to Moore as an audience surrogate, with the captain learning to navigate the Klingon culture for our benefit, making "Sins" much more of a Picard episode than its reputation suggests.) Yet through it all, it's Worf who serves as the story's anchor, and Michael Dorn's performance that serves as the episode's cornerstone. Embracing the sets, language, and culture of the Klingon homeworld like they really are part of himself, he makes the whole concept instantly believable and emotional, and Worf's character-based battle for a pyrrhic victory proves more exciting than any space battle could offer.

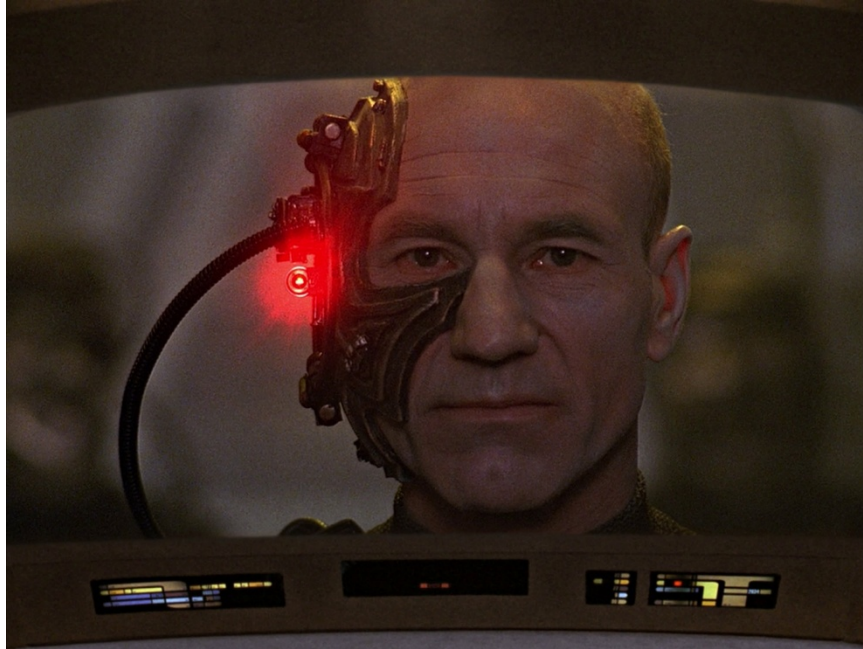
Ending with a resolution that demands a sequel, "Sins of the Father" proves only the beginning of a larger arc. The Klingon saga continues in the fourth season with "Reunion," but not before "Sins" went on to win an Emmy for art direction.

Remastered Version: Gabl gives us a more detailed Klingon planet and replaces the original matte painting of its capital city with a digital version. Also of note: when this episode was originally remastered for a *TNG* sampler disc, thirteen seconds of the original film negative (the first part of the scene in Act Four where Crusher and Riker discuss Worf's former nurse) could not be

located. As a result, this sequence had to be upgraded from the standard definition master tape. Happily, before the Season Three Blu-ray set was complete, the (mislabeled) negative was located and the high definition footage was inserted into the episode.

Did you know? The Klingon costumes for this episode came from the Kirk-era *Star Trek* movies. While this looked like a wise cost saving move on paper, the outfits were getting so old, it was difficult to keep them in one piece.

“The Best of Both Worlds”: A+



The Borg invade Federation space. (Season finale)

Air date: June 18, 1990
Written by Michael Piller
Directed by Cliff Bole
TV rating: 10.1

“Mr. Worf, dispatch a subspace message to Admiral Hanson. We have engaged the Borg.” —Picard

If *TOS*'s “City on the Edge of Forever” is the *Citizen Kane* of the *Star Trek* universe, that one episode from long ago that critics continue to praise, then “The Best of Both Worlds” is *Star Wars*, a dazzling game-changer with universal appeal that remains the most memorable episode in *Star Trek* television history. Written almost in secret by Michael Piller (with no input from the rest of the writing staff, save Ira Behr), this sequel to “Q Who” reinvents the Borg as the people-assimilating zombies they'd become famous for and gives them one of the franchise's most famous catchphrases, “Resistance is futile”— a defining expression only surpassed in *Star Trek* lore by the Vulcans' “live long and prosper.”

With everyone recognizing the importance of the episode, the show backs Piller's play with an unprecedented 80 visual effect shots and a cinema-worthy

score by Ron Jones bought to life by 77 musicians and a synthesized choir. The end result, along with the fourth season opener, rivals the *Star Trek* feature films, eclipsing *Star Trek V* (1989) in popularity by such a large margin that it turned “little brother *TNG*” into the coolest *Trek* on the planet and heir-apparent to the feature film throne.

But let’s back up a bit, shall we?

At its heart, “Best of Both Worlds” is a Will Riker episode. And it’s obvious from the opening teaser, when the first officer finds a crater where there once was a colony, that this isn’t going to be just another day at the office. (Of course, if Riker is supposed to be in the “center of town” as the dialogue indicates, shouldn’t he be in the middle of the crater? He’s standing on the edge, making me think the effects team didn’t understand what the writer was going for. But heck, our Founding Fathers misspelled Pennsylvania in the Constitution, so let’s not get too nitpicky.) The crater is a bad sign. But then, even before Riker has a chance to knock the dust off his boots back on the Enterprise, a hotshot lieutenant commander comes on board and basically starts doing his job just as Picard all but shoves Riker out the door as he says, “You know, the Enterprise will get along just fine without you.”

As all this is going on, the Borg are content to skirt the edges of the story, with the only Borg of note appearing at the end, incarnated by a *TNG* regular. That makes what’s usually cited as the definitive Borg episode one that’s really all about the Enterprise crew, with guest star Elizabeth Dennehy and the core cast creating their own internal drama.

Jonathan Frakes serves as the lynchpin, painting the portrait of a sympathetic everyman struggling with personal and professional decisions while the Lieutenant Commander Shelby, with no hesitancy in her personality, makes the guy look like he’s standing still. Dennehy, as Shelby, provides the ying to Frakes’s yang, delivering her dialogue with a self-assuredness and professionalism that belies her later admission that she knew so little about the show that her dialogue might as well have been a foreign language. Her trick is to give Shelby’s attitude an edge that somehow magnifies the bitchiness of her lines. There’s a superficial quality to it, as if Shelby’s afraid to let anyone get close—an opposite to Riker, who speaks with a welcome tone that invites others into his world. Putting the two personalities together is a recipe for fireworks, but much of it plays out beneath the surface through subtext. And boiled down to essentials, what it all comes down to isn’t Riker versus Shelby anyway—it’s about Riker versus Riker, with Shelby providing a mirror to help Riker sort out who he is and what he is to become. The hanging question throughout the episode is whether or not Number One can make the big decision, and the episode boldly answers it with the final line, a moment nearly every aspect of the story, from Picard’s quiet conversation with Guinan to Shelby’s ambition to be first officer, is building toward.

The late George Murdoch (“God” in *Star Trek V*) adds gravitas to the story as Admiral Hanson, and all the regulars are given a chance to contribute, with none—save Frakes—getting more to do than Patrick Stewart. With Picard recognizing the upcoming events as a turning point in history, the actor plays

the captain as a reflective leader witnessing the winds of change. Piller is hesitant to let Picard share his true thoughts about the future, but Stewart uses his expressions to fill in the gaps in the dialogue before a dramatic makeover alters the character forever.

With each scene building toward the climax with the perfection of a classic symphony, “The Best of Both Worlds” might not be *TNG* as it always was, but it represents *TNG* as we want to remember it and is often cited as the show’s defining episode. It was nominated for an Emmy for effects.

The story continues in the fourth season opener, “The Best of Both Worlds, Part II.”

Remastered Version: CBS does a fine job of redoing the effects in HD, but there are only a couple of significant changes beyond that: planet sphere footage borrowed from “The Child” is replaced with an original digital creation, and a pair of matte paintings representing the surface of the planet and the interior of the Borg ship are spruced up.

Did you know? The Battle of Trafalgar referenced by Picard was an early 19th century naval engagement in which 27 British ships, using unconventional tactics, defeated 33 French and Spanish ships, confirming the naval supremacy of Britain. During the battle, however, Admiral Lord Nelson, the architect of the victory, was shot by a French musketeer and died shortly thereafter at the age of 47.

Picard also mentions the Fall of the Roman Empire. However, contrary to his remarks, Emperor Honorius only saw the first sack of the city, with the Fall itself happening much later.

What if? By the end of the third season, the cast and crew of *TNG* knew the show was going to be renewed for a fourth, a feat surpassing *TOS*. But just imagine if the “The Best of Both Worlds” never had a second part! It’s a situation with precedent. In 1982, ABC cancelled *Mork & Mindy* after the sitcom had taped a season ending cliffhanger that left its title characters lost in time. (To give the show better closure, ABC changed the airdate order of the final few episodes to allow the show to end in the present.) Then there’s NBC’s *ALF*, which finished its fourth season three months before “The Best of Both Worlds” with a cliffhanger of its own: in the closing moments, the alien Alf is captured by an alien task force, and the series ends with the words “To Be Continued...” (Six years later, ABC finally gave fans a conclusion of sorts with *Project: ALF*, a poorly received made-for-TV movie.) Fortunately for Trekker’s everywhere, Commander Riker’s final words to Worf in “The Best of Both Worlds” are not the last we hear from the crew of the Enterprise-D.

Catching Up With Melinda Snodgrass

There are certain writers who have an intuitive sense of their career direction at an early age. Helen Keller wrote her autobiography when she was 22. Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* when she was 19. Anne Frank wrote her story (with the intent of having a version published) as a young teen. Melinda Snodgrass, on the other hand, took a different path, with a choir's loss eventually becoming *Star Trek's* gain.

"I wanted to be a grand opera star. So I studied opera at the Konservatorium der Stadt Wien in Vienna. But I'm not built for it, being a fairly small person. And my voice wasn't good enough for the international market. So I came home and finished my history degree with a minor in music. Then I went to law school and I passed the bar. At that point, I sort of felt obligated to go to work, so I worked first for the government, and then I joined a corporate law-firm, even though my specialty was Constitutional law. (When I was in school, that what was I loved best. But you can't exactly hang out your shingle and say, 'Bring me your Constitutional cases,' you know?) Then I discovered that while I really enjoyed the study of the law, I hated lawyers and I hated being a lawyer. But my very close friend at the time, author Victor Milán, said to me, 'I bet you could write if you tried.' So I started writing novels."

This gave Snodgrass an early opportunity to write for *Star Trek*, which was just then gaining a second life as a series of feature films and a series of books. "Originally, I wrote romance books under a pseudonym to pay the bills. But David Hartwell knew I needed to break into science fiction, so he suggested I write a *Star Trek* novel for him to get my foot in the door. (I had grown up a fan of the original show.) So I discussed with Victor the three types of *Trek* stories. There were hard military stories like 'Balance of Terror,' there were soft episodes like 'This Side of Paradise' and 'The City on the Edge of Forever,' and then there were the comedic episodes like 'Tribbles.' I opted to go with the soft story. At the time there were a lot of stories in the press about an attempt to stop the killing of baby seals, so I took that concept."

The Tears of the Singer was published by Pocket Books in 1984 and features the singing Taygetians, a group of semi-aquatic creatures being hunted for the jewel-like tears they secrete at the moment of death. Despite its success, it remains the only *Star Trek* novel Snodgrass ever wrote. "David Hartwell told me, 'Never write another one or you will end up doing nothing by tie-in books,'" she says, "and I took that advice."

Around the same time, George R.R. Martin, the future author of *A Game of Thrones*, moved down to Snodgrass's neck of the woods in New Mexico, and the two became friends. "We would hang out with Vic, Walter Jon Williams, and Roger Joseph Zelazny, all these terrific science fiction writers. Then George went off to Hollywood. He started writing for the 1980s *Twilight Zone* series, before moving onto *Beauty and the Beast* [a cult favorite TV show that ran on CBS from 1987 to 1990]. And he called me up one day and said 'Hey, Snod! I think you'd be good at this screenwriting thing. It requires a good sense of plot and structure, sharp dialogue, and interesting, powerful characters, and I think

you could handle all that well. If you write a script, I'll show it to my agent.' So, I thought, 'Cool!' because life is about taking chances. So I looked around the television landscape, and I thought, 'Maybe I could tackle *L.A. Law*.' But it looked like it was plotted so far ahead, I wasn't sure that was a good idea. And I wasn't going to do *Beauty and the Beast* because I thought that was unfair to George. If I wrote a really cruddy script, he'd have to tell me it was cruddy or he'd have to show it to his boss, and they'd go, 'Are you crazy? This is terrible!' But there was *Star Trek*. It had just come back as *The Next Generation*. So I thought that was a possibility, and I started watching."

It wasn't long before Snodgrass thought of an amazing story idea. At first, however, she was hesitant to use it for her non-commissioned, unsolicited "speculative" script. "George had told me very carefully that you never sell your spec script. Never ever ever. It's just a calling card to show you can write. All it does is get you in the door, and if they like it, they'll ask you to come in and pitch other story ideas. So I called him, and I said, 'George, I've got this idea, and I think it's a really good idea, and I don't want to waste it on the spec if it's not going to sell. Maybe I should save it for my pitches. And George gave me the most important piece of advice I ever got for writing. He said to me, 'Melinda, never hoard your silver bullet.' In other words, 'shoot the best thing you've got.' So I wrote 'The Measure of a Man.' It's something I couldn't have done if I hadn't had the training as an attorney because it's based on a very infamous Supreme Court decision concerning Dred Scott. He was a runaway slave who unsuccessfully sued for his freedom in the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case in 1857 and was forced to return to a life of slavery. I thought, 'This will work perfectly for Data.' So I built a script around the premise."

Along the way, she got some unexpected help. "I had a good friend who was a retired naval officer, and we were discussing my story idea—because I love to talk about them as I'm writing them—and he said, 'You know, in the Navy, when you're at sea or you don't have a JAG officer present and you have a case that has to be heard immediately, the captain always defends and the first officer always prosecutes. And I went, 'That's it! That is going to make this script and take it to a whole different level.' Because if it had just been 'bad guy shows up and wants to take Data apart' and everybody goes 'Oh no, you can't do that!' it's okay but it's not as interesting. And I felt like Riker was an underused character. Jonathan is a very good actor who didn't always get a lot of opportunities to show he's a very good actor, and I liked having him want to win and beat Picard because that's a very human thing. I always thought one of the biggest problems with *TNG* was that there wasn't enough tension between the characters. Everybody liked each other too much. And I had found a way to actually create a bit of drama and tension between the characters, more like the original series where Kirk, Spock, and McCoy argue about issues and you have the mind, the heart, and the passion conflicting in those three figures."

When she was satisfied with her work, Snodgrass submitted her finished script. Unfortunately, a major roadblock appeared the very next day. The 1988 Writer's Guild of America strike commenced, and *TNG*'s production came to a virtual standstill. When the strike ended months later, however, *TNG* staffers,

desperate for stories, came across her script in a slush pile and pounced on it, inviting Snodgrass to Los Angeles to close the deal.

“And now,” she says, “George tells people, ‘Do not listen to Melinda. Nobody sells their spec script.’”

In her visit to L.A., Snodgrass was asked if she could make some changes to her work. “My original teaser was Data learning how to swim. He had read every book on swimming, and he knew all the theories on it, but when he got in the swimming pool he sank like a stone because he weighs four hundred pounds or so. There’s a difference between reading about something and actually doing it. And the first thing Maurice Hurley said was, ‘We can’t do that. We’d have to go off the lot to find a swimming pool, and then his make-up would run anyway.’ So he asked me to come with something else where theory doesn’t match the experience. The meeting went on from there, and at the end of the three hour session, he turned to me and said, ‘I’m hiring you, and you start on Monday.’ So I went back to New Mexico, found a house sitter, packed my car, and drove to L.A. to go to work.”

Data would go on to “swim” in *TNG*’s third feature film, with the movie’s budget and technology allowing the writer more flexibility. In the meantime, Snodgrass invented a substitute for “Measure” that would become a recurring bit on the show: the officers’ poker game. “That was nice because it allowed them to interact with each other on a very personal basis. It reminded me of the original series where you had scenes in the rec room where the officers could be more casual with each other.”

She was nearly finished with her other changes when she was thrown a curve. “Maury called me into his office,” she recalls, “and he said, ‘Melinda, we’ve looked at the schedule, and we’re committed to Whoopi Goldberg for five episodes, so you need to write a scene for her.’ And now I’m down to about one day. No pressure! So I wrote a scene with her and Patrick where she talks about what’s at stake. But that was completely due to the contractual issue, and thank god for that because it was the perfect crystallization of the heart of the issue and made the whole thing work. (And she was such an interesting character anyway.)”

“Measure of a Man” finally aired in February of 1989 and went on to be nominated for the Writer’s Guild of America award for Best Episodic Drama. It’s still cited today by fans and critics alike as one of the greatest *Star Trek* episodes of all time. But for Snodgrass, there was little time to celebrate. Following the completion of its script, she immediately immersed herself in the work of her new position of story editor. In this capacity, she would review scripts, write or polish teleplays, and collaboratively work with the rest of the writing staff to give the production team something shootable before the cameras began to roll.

One of the first scripts she worked on was “Pen Pals.” “That was my teleplay based on a story by Hannah Louise Shearer,” she remembers. “Maury saw it and said to me that I write emotion very well and that I really get into people’s hearts and feelings, and he said, ‘Take a look at this and see what you can do with it.’ So I wrote it, and I even added a horseback riding scene with

Patrick which was shot on location. But I had a lot of fun writing that script, and the cast and crew did a nice job with it. That one's a nice memory for me."

Unfortunately, her next credited script, "Up the Long Ladder," was less successful. "Yeah, that was intended to be a commentary about immigration. I wanted it to be something that said that outsiders can bring enormous energy and fresh outlooks to societies that have become too stale and complacent. But when I was describing what I wanted to do to Maury, and I was trying to come up with an analogy, I said it was like a little village of Irish tinkers. Well, Maury is Irish, and he loved that so much he made me make them Irish tinkers. He also loved the slapstick more than the theme. So in the end, a lot of the substance was cut out. I was a lowly script editor so I didn't have the power to stop that."

Later in the season, she rewrote the teleplay for "Peak Performance," a story that offered another chance to pit Riker versus Picard. Like much of her work on the show, however, she took no credit for it. "My mentors in many ways were Ira Behr, Rick Manning, and Hans Beimler," she says. "And they taught me a valuable rule for screenwriting, which is if you are on the staff and you're getting paid a salary, and you're getting paid for your scripts, you never take credit from an outside writer. It's called jumping their credit. And every time you do that, it costs the writer in the residuals. If you're on staff, it's your job to rewrite scripts and make suggestions and stay in the background. I learned that lesson from three great guys, and I always apply it."

By the start of Season Three, Maurice Hurley was gone, replaced by Michael Wagner, and Snodgrass had moved into the role of executive script consultant. Her first order of business was the teleplay for "The Ensigns of Command," a Data story she came up with that was slotted to be the second episode of the season. "Gene Roddenberry had read the outline for the script and called me into his office. He said, 'You know Data is fully functional in every way, right?' And I went, 'Yes, sir.' And he told me to let Data and the guest star be intimate. I was trying to do a little riff on *Shane* where the stranger comes to town and the young woman who's had no experience with the outside world gets this giant crush on this guy. And Data doesn't know how to deal with it. I had no intention that they would ever have carnal knowledge of each other, but Gene wanted them to actually...do it. So I had to go back and I had to figure out how you logically get an android to sleep with someone. I know he did the Tasha Yar thing, but that's when they were all in a drunk-like state. What I ended up with was a logical progression. He says, 'I see you're upset' and then he analyzes it as a computer would and goes through different stages of physical interaction to make her feel better."

Meanwhile, Wagner himself was to write the first episode of the season, "Evolution," but ran into delays. "Michael was struggling with his script while also trying to run the writing staff, and I finished first. So they decided to flipflop the shooting of our episodes, making mine the first episode of the season to be shot. Well, everybody is tense when you're starting up a season, and Brent Spiner misread what I was trying to do. He read it as me making Data emotional. That wasn't the intention at all. But he got upset, and he went to

Gene, and Gene got upset. The script was rewritten, and Michael Wagner was so unhappy about that, he quit after only six weeks with the show. The whole thing was a tough experience for me.”

Not long after, Snodgrass stumbled across an unsolicited script by a young Ron Moore. “I pulled out ‘The Bonding’ from the slush pile,” she recalls. “I liked it a lot, and after I finished reading it, I pushed for it to be purchased.” By this time, Michael Piller had joined the show and was in the midst of taking charge of the writing staff. He liked the story as well, though he thought the script needed work. Rather than asking the unknown Moore to do it over, Piller gave the task to Snodgrass. Ultimately, Moore was grateful, both for being “discovered” and for Snodgrass’s rewrite, later saying in an AOL chat that Snodgrass’s changes greatly improved on his work. (He also appreciated Snodgrass’s generosity. As per her usual way, she allowed him to retain the sole writing credit for the episode.) “Ron then wrote a second freelance episode for us,” she remembers, “and then I pushed hard for him to be hired on the staff. Because we desperately needed another writer and Ron was superb.”

Moore did join the show, and the staff began to accumulate and consider more spec scripts, including one featuring a familiar story. “Bloodlines,” about the rights of an android, was a story by René Echevarria covering some of the same ground as “The Measure of a Man.” In Echevarria’s version, however, the focus was almost completely on a new character, Data’s “daughter,” offering little for the main cast to do. “It was a cool idea, but it needed work,” Snodgrass says, “so I rewrote it. And Ira took a look at what I did and said, ‘You’re really screwed here.’ He said, ‘This is so passionate and so intense, the big bosses are going to hate it.’ And they did.” The episode, ultimately polished by Michael Piller and re-titled “The Offspring,” nonetheless became a fan favorite, with René Echevarria (who, like Moore, was given sole writing credit) using it as a springboard to eventually join the *TNG* writing staff.

Snodgrass herself would go on to write “The High Ground,” which she intended to have parallels with the American Revolution. She was asked, however, to change the analogy to Northern Ireland. “I wanted it with Picard as Cornwallis and the Romulans as the French, who were in on the revolution, trying to break this planet away. And then Picard realizes he’s one of the oppressors. Instead, we do ‘Breakfast in Belfast.’”

But much of Snodgrass’s work was part of a team effort, with the staff writers working collaboratively to bang scripts into shape. And being the only woman on staff, she was often asked to write for one character in particular. “Inevitably, when we all had to work together to rewrite a script, they’d always give me the Troi scenes. ‘Here’s a scene with Troi, Melinda, you go write this one!’ But she was hard, because she was inevitably stating the obvious. It’s like ‘Captain, I sense they’re angry,’ and the audience is like, ‘No kidding, they just shot at the Enterprise!’ So it was difficult and a hard part for Marina. Personally, I wanted her to be much more manipulative and a lot more hard-edged, but the others always shied away from that and wanted her to be a softer, mothering kind of figure. I thought she could be a lot more interesting. In one particular episode we were rewriting, ‘The Price,’ there was this bad guy who

the Enterprise crew thought was a bad guy, but he hadn't yet exposed himself yet, and I said, 'She's a trained counselor, and she's somewhat telepathic. She needs to bait this man and manipulate this man until he attacks her.' And they said, 'My God, we can't possibly do that!' I really wish they had let me do it. I think Marina would have had a lot of fun with it. And it would have put Troi in control. She's doing this because she's the only one who can elicit this kind of response from him."

In fact, as Season Three progressed, Snodgrass was not happy with the direction of the writing overall. "It was one of those difficult situations. We ended up getting more and more crunched into this formula of 'outside threat, technobabble,' and it began to seem like it was Michael Piller trying to do what Rick Berman wanted, and Rick was trying to do what he thought Gene wanted. And it felt like the first thing to go was any characterization and emotion. And then the humor went; and we were left with this kind of rote problem that we solve with technobabble. It literally got to the point where some of the writers were just writing 'La Forge: (tech)' and then sending it over to Mike Okuda and Rick Sternbach to write technobabble. And Mike and Rick were great, but that was never the point of the original show. When I wrote 'Measure of a Man,' what I had in my heart and mind was some of the great episodes of the original series like 'City on the Edge of Forever,' 'Journey to Babel,' 'Charlie X,' and 'The Devil in the Dark.' That's what I had in the back of my mind all the time, and I think we lost that. Things may have subsequently become more interesting, but for me, that was it, and I said, 'I'm done.'"

And so as the show approached Season Four, the Enterprise sailed on without Melinda Snodgrass, though *Star Trek* remains enriched by her contributions. (The final episode of *TNG* even closes with one of her ideas.) Snodgrass herself went on to write for *L.A. Law*, *Seaquest*, *Sliders*, and a new version of *The Outer Limits*, not to mention a host of other projects. In fact, by the time many of her old friends had reunited on *DS9*, she felt too distanced from *Star Trek* to join in on the fun. "I would work with Ira Behr again in a heartbeat. I think he's just terrific. And it seemed like the big bosses left *Deep Space Nine* alone because they were all worried about *Voyager*. So Ira got to do something with a lot more passion and heart and with more interesting issues to explore. But by that time, I was a little too far removed from *Star Trek* to write for that. I had gone on to work for *Reasonable Doubts*, a cop/lawyer show, and I was a co-executive producer on *Profiler*, a show about hunting serial killers."

Reflecting on her experiences, Snodgrass sees them all as pieces of the same mosaic. "My life has been people saying, 'I bet you could do this if you tried,' and then I would try. And it's been a very fulfilling, rewarding career. And my plug for 'Stay in school, kids' is that my education, including law school, has helped me in everything I've done. Nothing's ever wasted."