

CELEBRATING THE RETURN OF A LEGEND!

OUTSIDE MAKES IT SO SUPPLEMENTAL

11 UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES ON

11 STAR TREK PICARD STORIES BY

11 WRITERS

EDITED BY ROBERT SMITH?

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**11 UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES ON
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O. INTRODUCTION

OUTSIDE IN LOVES JL

ROBERT SMITH?

Here at *Outside In*, we're all about being different. The wheeze of these books is to take a stupendously large number of writers, have them each claim a story as their own and then simply wind them up and let them go. In whatever wild and wacky way they please.

Almost everything about that opening paragraph is false. Synthetic.

First, you may have already noticed that you're not actually reading a book, because we've decided to provide a free supplement covering just a single season: the debut year of *Star Trek: Picard*. As a result, for the first time since this book series began, we have fewer than a hundred writers, because there are only 11 stories. Coming soon:

Outside In Raids the Lost Ark

4 New Perspectives on

4 *Indiana Jones* Movies by

4 Writers

(Please don't inundate me with submissions; I'm kidding.) However, despite the structural overhaul this time around, the one thing we're definitely sticking with is the "something different" mandate.

If you're new to *Outside In*, welcome. The idea is pretty simple: each writer picks an episode and then has to say something different about it. The genius of it¹ is that they're entirely free to choose just how they interpret "different". Sometimes we get cutting insights. Sometimes we get outright comedy. And sometimes we get takes you would never have thought of — bizarre, gonzo takes — as a way to analyze a story, but always with something to say. A review in disguise.

When I originally conceived of the *Outside In* project, I thought it would be the perfect vehicle to discuss old TV shows, on the grounds that we'd all read the mainstream opinions, so let's twist on the axis of that and provide some fresh perspectives. Naturally, this idea had to be thrown out the window for only our second book, as we covered New Series *Doctor Who* up until the then-present day. And now it's happened again.

1. I take very little credit for this genius, by the way. My original idea was basically "defend the indefensible, and kill the golden geese". It was the submissions of a number of contributors who took my idea of "different" and ramped it up to 11 that made me realise just what I had on my hands. This, incidentally, is why the first volume is almost nothing like all the subsequent ones.

Just as “Outside In Makes It So” covered every story from the *ST:TNG* era (plus a few bonus extras), so too is its sequel right up to date, covering all ten episodes of *Star Trek: Picard*, as well as the related *Short Trek* that preceded it. We even threw in a bonus extra.

Trying to say something different about a show that’s still in the “present” can be a difficult challenge. Instead of overturning sacred cows, you run the risk of becoming said sacred cow, just waiting for some future cow-pusher to come along and give you a shove later. But where I think this works is that the directions taken herein aren’t just opinions; they’re creative, while nevertheless providing critical insights, whether that be ruminations on the *Then and Now* perspectives on the two shows, a sideways dive into Michael Chabon’s other works or the function of Synthetics in a post-utopian society. This supplement embodies *Star Trek*’s diversity of thought and its many-splendored fandom.

My sincere thanks to Rich Handley, Liu Yin, Jessica Clark, Anthony Wilson, Andy Hicks, Lars Pearson, Drew Meyer, Becky Iverson, Ashley Heaton Kuczenski, Eric Pelot and Jason Miller for stepping up to the plate, especially with the much more structured process this time around. I feel blessed to be able to work with so many talented writers, who deliver such incredible — and sometimes downright cockamamie — ideas. These ones go to 11.

I usually mention that all the authors (along with the designer and your humble editor) kindly donated their time so that 5% of all sales could be donated to Avert, a UK-based HIV charity. This time around, there are no sales, but everyone still donated their time. So if you’d like to make a donation yourself as a thanks, feel free. www.avert.org

Because of the smaller number of episodes, the available slots were limited, so I wanted to thank Tony Simmons, Stephen Maslin, Bob Greenberger, Christopher Cowan, Graeme Burk, Bill Evenson, Warren Frey, Ari Lipsey, Pam Bridgeo, Daniel Zimmerman, Derek Tyler Attico, Jeffrey Wolf, Jan Fennick, Graham Howard, Irene Richard and Nick Seidler for helpful conversations or pitching ideas that didn’t make it this time around, largely because the competition for space was so tight. You’ll notice I don’t even have an entry here myself, much as I wanted to. However, I massively appreciate the creativity involved and the lengths to which so many people were willing to go.

On the production side, I am incredibly grateful to the ridiculously astute Anthony Wilson, who always keeps me honest (and whose critical voice has a way of lodging in my head, even before he makes his brilliant observations); my eagle-eyed proofreader, Barbara Whillock; and a very talented designer I know called Arnold T. Blumberg, who really allows the creativity in these pieces to flourish. And yes, despite being the publisher, I made Arnold pitch for this along with everyone else. You know, I once rejected one of my girlfriends who tried to write for one of these

books. Amazingly, we still stayed together. I'm a lovely person in real life, but I'm a hardass editor.

On a personal note, let me thank my own ragtag crew of rebels in my life: Laura Collishaw, Chris Casimiro, Melissa Rodgers, Maya Evans and Elliot Chapple. I love you all as much as Raffi loves JL, but you don't have to say it back.

Despite telling a long-form story across its entire first season, *Star Trek: Picard* nevertheless inherits much of the variety in its stories from its predecessor. This supplement does too, while still resolutely being its own beast (just not of the week). So you'll see lectures, political addresses, obituaries, fantasy worlds and even a Borg Bake-off, but you'll also see thoughtful articles on memories, utopia, violence, *Hamilton* and the nature of privilege, as you might expect from writers in 2020. What you won't expect is the manner in which they're delivered or the surprises in store. Because the writers we've assembled here are nothing if not brilliant.

As you travel through the variety of angles this supplement presents, you'll see the sheer beauty of fandom. Even though we're not making the show itself, we nevertheless find ourselves examining something marvelous, with our own unique takes, coming at it from directions that are by turns different, hilarious and utterly gonzo.

Enjoy this free supplement, as a gift from us to you, with a love that comes from the Outside In.

*Robert Smith? has watched the first season of Picard so many times,
he's now officially a syntheholc.*

1. SHORT TREKS: CHILDREN OF MARS

911 RED BALLOONS

RICH HANDLEY

FEDERATION COUNCIL MEETING

OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT, APRIL 12, 2385

Binary and non-binary beings alike, as the Speaker of this esteemed Council, I stand before you with profoundly heavy hearts. This has been a grave week for the United Federation of Planets. What began as a celebration of First Contact Day, commemorating the maiden voyage of Zefram Cochrane's *Phoenix* that brought Earth and Vulcan together in friendship, turned into unimaginable tragedy. Admiral Jean-Luc Picard called the rogue Synth attack on Mars "devastating", and I certainly agree with his assessment.

Many of you had friends and family among the ninety-two thousand lives lost. The Utopia Planitia Shipyards were destroyed, and the gases ignited in the Martian atmosphere still burn. I am told the fires will continue for years to come. There are no words to match how we all feel right now, but I grieve with you. My broodmate and nestlings were among those killed, and I wait to embrace them once more in the Afterflow. But we will endure, just as our collective worlds and our allies endured the atrocities of Colonel Green, Terra Prime, the Xindi, the Circle, the Maquis, the True Way, the Ansata, the Vulcan logic extremists and others. It may take time, but we will heal and emerge stronger.

We may never know why the A500s rebelled, nor how they chose their targets, and perhaps it is not knowing that is the most difficult. Was it a flaw in their programming or of their manufacture, or was the cause more insidious? Did a specific incident spark the attack? Was it the result of an outside party's influence? It may be that we will always wonder why this happened. I must tell you, though, that I have grown increasingly concerned by what I have witnessed in the days since.

Androids and other artificial lifeforms have earned their place among us. They are not inherently dangerous, despite what happened on Mars, nor are they our enemy. I know that sentiment does not sit well with some of you, but if you look at history, you will see I am right. In fact, it is history that concerns me now, because we need to be sure we end up on the right side of it once this period of intense sadness and mourning has passed. It is history, my fellow beings, that will judge us on how well or how poorly we reacted as a people to the events of one week ago.

I know what some of you are thinking. Androids cannot be trusted. They attacked us, and we need to eliminate them. But that way lies hypocrisy and genocide. What the Mars Synths did was unimaginable, but are we to now punish all synthetic beings for the actions of a few? Would that not make us no better than those who have hurt us?

We have listened today as several Council members have demanded a ban on the creation of new synthetic beings, as well as the dismantling of existing androids and the halting of research into synthetic life. I see several of you nodding in agreement. Should we also deactivate our engineering and sickbay robots, then? What about exocomps? Sentient holograms? How about the central computers on starships and starbases? Your children's entertainment PADDs, perhaps? Food dispensers? And where do we draw the line? Do we also eliminate cyborgs, such as the Bynars or freed victims of the Borg Collective?

Since long before the A500 rebellion, androids have been among us in

one form or another. We have seen models created by Sargon's people, Flint the Immortal, V'Ger and the Old Ones, not to mention the population of the planet Mudd. While it is true that some of these androids have posed a danger, the *millions* living on Mudd have peacefully coexisted alongside us for more than a century, and we have benefited beyond measure by our association with that impressive civilization.

Let us of course not forget the late Commander Data, the Soong android whose service record aboard the USS *Trieste*, the USS *Sutherland* and both the *Enterprise-D* and *-E* was nothing short of exemplary. Data sacrificed his own life to save others, and he saved several of your worlds as well during his decades of service. His valor and bravery are beyond dispute, and his example is one by which many strive to live. If he were with us today, would you have Data deactivated?

Do you understand my concern? Are we not collectively better than whatever malevolent mindset caused the Mars Synth to go rogue? Shall we abandon centuries of principles based on fear, bigotry and bare-faced ignorance? Earth's history is replete with examples of what happens when frightened people let xenophobia and paranoia control their actions and words. Common sense must prevail from the top down, with competent leadership wise and intelligent enough to recognize that hate and fear should never, under any circumstances, form the basis of governance.

It is with that in mind that I have invited Norman 23, the elected Coordinator of the planet Mudd, to speak to us today. Norman and his people are greatly saddened by what their fellow Synths have done, and he has reached out to offer technological and medical aid during our time of need. With an irrational fear of synthetic life on the rise, an entire civilization of artificial beings reminds us of the value of compassion, acceptance and friendship. Coordinator Norman shall arrive within the hour, I am told, and... I'm sorry, please hold for a moment. I'm receiving communication that —

What did you say? Has this been confirmed? Surely, this must be — Great Hive, what about Coordinator Norman? Gods, no. Terrible, just terrible. No, no, I... just need a moment. Thank you.

My fellow Councilors, I've been informed that the planet Mudd has been barraged with thousands of tricobalt warheads and transphasic torpedoes. The destruction is catastrophic, and Starfleet is unable to contact either the planet or Coordinator Norman's shuttle. No one has yet taken credit, but I must assume this was in retaliation for the Mars tragedy. I cannot begin to describe how horr—

What? Again?! But why would...

My friends, I've just learned that similar weapons have been unleashed

on Exo III, where a team of Federation archeologists were studying ruins discovered by the late Roger Korby. All hands have been lost, along with the Old Ones' android machinery. I'm afraid I must cut this meeting short to confer with my advisors. We'll reconvene once I know more, but I am heartbroken at this further bloodshed and can only pray it does not continue. May the Great Hive protect us all.

Rich Handley, the editor of Eaglemoss's Star Trek Graphic Novel Collection, respects life in all its various forms.

2. REMEMBRANCE

LET'S LEARN!

LIU YIN

Date: November 26, 2396

Class: Pastoral Cybernetics

Teacher: Professor Spiner

Subject: Learning to be more human

Objective: To accept yourself as who you are, and then not be who you are.

Warm Up (3'): Review of smiling skills.

Presentation (20'): A situation in which humans made fun of an android.

Example: "A real human wouldn't try to destroy the world!"

Suggested positive response: try to laugh with them.

Suggested negative response: mass slaughter.

Practice (10'): Discuss with your partner the advantages and disadvantages of being an artificial human.

Activity (10'): Create jokes about your disadvantages, including coded messages as to your superiority.

Summary (2'): Every android has their own distinctive features (memory loss, ass-kicking, et cetera), so you can only accept the things you can't do.

Good morning, plastic people! Just a little joke of mine, and that is really what today's class is going to be about. First, let's run through what we learnt last time. We know that smiles are different in different situations, so please smile to each other in order to improve your smiling skills. I will give you the situation, and you try to smile correctly. When you greet someone. Good. When you hear a joke. Good. When you see something funny. Not bad. Some of you just need to move more muscles on your

faces. F9, your smile should linger for 5.369 seconds. It would look more real when you hear a joke. Humans don't stop smiling as soon as they finish talking. Okay, you may stop smiling now. Lingering for too long makes it a fake smile!

Okay, before we begin, I have a question for you: why did we start this course? Do you have any idea? Yes, so that the same tragic events that destroyed the Utopia Planitia Shipyards in 2385 never happen again. So let's review what happened. Some human scientists made fun of an android who worked with them. They supposed that he would never be offended, but he killed everyone in the system and destroyed himself, so we think he possibly might have been. I will give you some suggestions if you were in a similar situation. A real human wouldn't try to destroy the world if they were offended, would they? I suggest that a positive response could be trying to laugh with them. You do not know how they are feeling, which is absolutely fine, so just pretend that you do. That is what most humans do all the time anyway. We should accept the fact that we can't look into people's souls, though that is something that we're working on.

What I do not recommend is that you embark on any kind of slaughter. That would be no good for either humans or Synthetics like yourselves. You thought that we had written it in your code — oh, happy days! — but sometimes it might be overwhelmed by another command. In the human world, depressed people resort to a counselor if they have suicidal tendencies, but you can simply reset your system every once in a while. It's that little button behind your left ear. Actually, you can train a cat to do that for you.

Now, please discuss with your partner about the advantages and disadvantages of being an artificial human.

F7: "I find that we do not have enough freedom. We have to do everything people command. That is an absolute disadvantage."

F9: "Is it? I found it quite easy for me. I do not have to think about what to do by myself. If there is no command, I will end up doing nothing."

Professor Spiner: "What do you want to do, F7?"

F7: "I do not know. I just think that it is good to have freedom."

Professor Spiner: "Well, well, there's a novelty. There are a lot of humans who cry for freedom but wouldn't know what to do with it if they got it. You're lucky: even if you do the wrong thing, you can never be blamed, because you did not choose to do it. For example, ostentatiously dilating your left pupil, having a tragic replicator menu or trespassing on a French vineyard. Within the limits of your programming, you have to learn to think for yourselves. Think about the kind of freedom you want. Don't just accept everything a human says."

F7: "Yes, professor. I shall think about what kind of freedom I want."

F9 (*with a proper smile lingering for exactly 5.369 seconds*): "Living without freedom will never kill anyone. Both androids and humans need restrictions, otherwise a planet might blow up again, which would not be our fault."

Professor Spiner: "That smile is much better, but, in this situation, you might put it on for the whole process of speaking."

F9 (*pretending to smile*): "Yes, professor."

Professor Spiner: "Good! So every person has strengths and weaknesses, but a really wise person never minds people making fun of their shortcomings. Now, let's discuss with your partner how to make a joke about your disadvantages."

F7: "Freedom is like the chains of love. We are always unwilling to give it up."

Professor Spiner: "Erm, okay. You may think about that in your own time."

F9: "Do we agree that a lack of freedom is an advantage? If so, we do not have any disadvantages. Therefore, a wise human would want to be an android, but we still dream of being more human. That is our disadvantage."

Professor Spiner: "I never knew you had such deep thoughts, F9. Right, class dismissed. Don't forget your art homework! The only requirement is that you shall not draw your daughters. Oh, F9, would you stay behind for a few minutes?"

F9: "Yes, professor."

Professor Spiner: "Would you mind if I, um, 'initialize' your system? It would be so much easier for both of us."

F9: "Naturally, professor. I'm willing to do everything and anything, as you wish."

Professor Spiner: "Anything?"

F9: "Anything."

Professor Spiner (*smiling broadly*): "Good girl... I need to upload a disclaimer to your CPU: 'In the event of my going rogue, the Pastoral Cybernetics department of Roddenberry University shall not be held responsible for any damage or physical injury caused...'"

Liu Yin is not an android, but she is being trained to be more human at East China Jiaotong University.

3. MAPS AND LEGENDS

OFFSPRING

JESSICA C. CLARK

All enduring popular literature has this open-ended quality, and extends this invitation to the reader to continue, on his or her own, with the adventure. [...] All novels are sequels; influence is bliss.

— Michael Chabon, from “Fan Fictions”,
in his 2008 volume of essays, “Maps and Legends”

“Hi everyone, ah, good evening. My name is Jeremy Tribbey, and I run the comics and gaming shop down on Telegraph Avenue near West Grand. Martin was a long-time regular around our place, and I want to thank his niece Aviva and her son Julie for asking me to speak tonight.

“It feels a little strange to be here among all of Martin’s family and friends; you all knew him so well. Some of the stories you’ve told here tonight, well, Martin never really talked about any of those things with us, and it’s really wonderful to learn how much he was admired by his colleagues, how much his family loved him. It’s — I don’t know — it seems strange to say, but yeah — it’s *nice* to know how much he’s going to be missed.

“Martin was a customer, sure, but I also considered him a friend. He was a presence around the shop, you know? Barely a few days would go by without us seeing him. He’d always stay and chat, and it happened more than a few times that younger customers thought he was part of the staff. We joked about it enough that one day I offered him a job, just part-time, you know, seeing as he was there so much, but he just laughed and went on his way.

“But the next day, he popped by again and said he wanted to talk. He didn’t want a job, but he wanted to start a club. See, we have this area in the back of the store with a bunch of tables where people can set up and play board games and stuff, and he said that he wanted to use it once a week to start a writing club. Actually, he called it a story club. I asked him what he meant, and he explained that he wanted to get people together — people who were fans of things like *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Lord of the Rings*, stuff like that — and talk about why those stories work, why so many people love them, and about the worlds they create and the great characters that live in them, and explore all the different adventures that could happen in these places and with these people.

“I have this really strong memory of him as he was telling me this. His face was serious, but in his eyes there was this glow, this fire — I could tell that this was

coming from somewhere deep inside him, and, frankly, it was contagious, his energy, his passion. How could I say no?

“So yeah, that was almost seven years ago now. It started up pretty small, just Martin, a couple of friends and a few people who saw the fliers we put up around the store. It was pretty cool, even then — these people coming together, talking about why these stories mattered, what made them so powerful and sometimes sharing things they’d written or researched. It might sound dumb to you, but it was pretty high-minded. A young prof from Berkeley even joined eventually. But the group really got going when a teacher at McClymonds High found out about it and started recommending it to some of her students.

“Eventually, there were twenty, twenty-five people getting together in the store on Thursday night after close, and they’d stay sometimes until 11 o’clock, pizza boxes stacking up by the counter. And the stories, my god, they were incredible. The things that people would come up with, especially the young people, though not only them — they would just blow your mind. Make you think in entirely new ways about these great stories. And Martin’s were among the best. He only read his stuff when he knew he had something really great. And everyone knew that, so when he got up to read, everyone listened.

“I asked Martin once why he didn’t write something new, something totally new that he could put his name on. He just shrugged, and said that a good story has enough room for lots of authors.

“Aviva wanted me to tell you about this, because she didn’t think a lot of people knew about this side of Martin. His creativity, his way of bringing people together, and his devotion to the stories he loved. The only reason Aviva even knew, I think, is because Julie started coming to the club a few years back, so she got to know how Martin was doing this thing in the community, this great creative thing, totally under the radar and without ever asking for anyone’s recognition or thanks.

“Getting to know Martin in this way has really made me think about why I love particular stories. Why do certain stories get under your skin and stay there, while others just float away? I haven’t found a totally satisfactory answer yet, and maybe searching for one too hard would be turn me into a Casaubon — that’s a character from this nineteenth-century novel who dies looking for a key to all stories that the Berkeley prof told me about. Anyway, doesn’t sound like a good way to go. So, while it’s fun to think about, I try not worry about it too much, not to overanalyze it when I’m enjoying something. You don’t need a reason to love something, even if it’s just a TV series, or some old movies. You just do. And if you look at the magic a little too closely, maybe it won’t be as magical. I’d rather keep the magic.

“Martin understood something of that magic, and he could capture it and spin it into something new. Not just new, but *evolved*, you know? He could take a little nugget of a story and use it to expand a world, bring it more richness and life. One time, he

wrote this story about a group he called the Zhat Vash — a secret Romulan death squad, even more brutal than the Tal Shiar. (Though, as Martin pointed out, saying ‘secret Romulan’ anything is kind of redundant, like saying ‘Romulan Romulan.’) His story added this whole new level of complexity to one of the Federation’s most legendary adversaries — just amazing.

“But maybe more amazing was how he brought people together and inspired them to extend their imaginations into all the gaps, giving them permission to create maps of all the empty spaces that exist in great stories. Actually, one of the first high-school students to join the club is now an assistant writer on a new *Star Trek* series, can you believe that? That kid might not have gotten there without Martin and his story club. He told me recently that he’s working on an episode about the Zhat Vash, Martin would’ve... that would’ve really..

“Anyway, I’ve gone on long enough. Hopefully you know a little bit more about Martin, about his impact on his community and his special brand of creativity. We’re having a little reading of some of Martin’s best stories at next week’s meeting of the club — we’ve rented out the coffee shop across the street, so there should be plenty of room. Aviva said that there’ll be some info in the program at the funeral tomorrow. Hope we’ll see you there. Thanks for listening.”

Jessica C. Clark has been watching Star Trek since she was seven years old and reading Michael Chabon’s novels since she was seventeen (most recently “Telegraph Avenue”). She has contributed to five volumes of the Outside In series (so far), including both forthcoming books on The X-Files. She works in scholarly publishing and lives in Ottawa with her husband and their dog.

4. THE END IS THE BEGINNING

LIVING MEMORY

ANTHONY WILSON

It doesn’t quite work, does it? That final scene, where Picard does the hand-wavy thing and says, “Engage!” as the notes of *The Next Generation* theme tune come in to lambast us with the knowledge that we’re off to exciting adventures beyond the final frontier.

There are a couple of reasons why I find this scene odd. The first is that, immediately before it happens, everybody looks at Picard and seems to expect him to do the hand thing and say the word as if they’ve been mainlining *Next Gen* DVDs, and I can’t think of an in-story reason for that to happen. He’s not even the captain

of the ship. Obviously, they know he was a Starfleet admiral, but there's only one person there — Raffi — who would actually know his habits and mannerisms, and she seems faintly irritated by Picard's performance. The moment jars.

By contrast, it is Stewart's performance that makes the other thing that jars work: he — I assume deliberately — makes Picard, in that moment, look uncomfortable, awkward and, most tellingly, old. Unlike the similar moment at the end of the season, the camera is angled upward, not down, a less-than-flattering angle that emphasizes the passage of time. So, while the music may be triumphant, the visuals are anything but: both Patrick Stewart and Jean-Luc Picard are now old men, and the world has changed for both of them as they have aged.

Well, what were we expecting? *Star Trek: The Next Generation: The Next Generation*?

I'm going to work on the assumption that a majority of people reading this are going to be around my age, which is 46. I'll be wrong for some of you, but I think I'll be right for a fair percentage. That puts us into a generation for which 1960s *Star Trek* was history, something we had to explore retrospectively, but *Star Trek: The Next Generation* feels current, because it falls into our living memory. This, I think, is true for everyone in the way we see the world. As soon as we become cognitively aware of ourselves within the passage of time, anything within our lifetime we class as "present"; anything previous is "past". As such, it's hard to realize that the gap between the end of *The Original Series* and the start of *Next Gen* was 19 years, whilst the gap between the end of *Next Gen* and *Picard* was 26. Yes. I know.

Yet *Picard* feeds upon *Next Gen* voraciously. We, the fans, are its target audience, and it doesn't feel like anyone else was. When *Doctor Who* rebooted in 2005, it did so tabula rasa, stomping all over the old continuity if it needed to and not really giving a damn. Watching *Picard*, you have to understand more than simply who Data was, or who the Romulans were. To understand the full emotional journey, you have to have a fairly intimate knowledge of who Locutus of Borg was, what the Tal Shiar represent, what a Borg cube is, the nature of Seven of Nine. Without those, and so many other things like them, *Picard* is functionally meaningless.

Television has, of course, changed over 26 years. We have moved from a one-episode-a-week-and-ride-off-into-the-distance shape of things to intricately plotted, ten-part stories like this one, designed for a streaming service to get those old-school fans to buy into the service and generate money for the man who — in the case of Amazon — is already the richest man on the planet. Incidentally, *Star Trek* had already done a ten-part series way back when, in the final block of episodes of *DS9*, but they put it there because the series was ending anyway and no one could stop them. The network, so appalled by this brazen act of long-form storytelling, had the *DS9* studio dismantled the day that filming ended, so that it could never be brought back. Even then, though, it was nowhere near as tightly structured as this

or, indeed, most things that we watch nowadays.

In many ways, we have gained something through this change, as the plot intricacies here demonstrate — and in the fact that Patrick Stewart could be persuaded to return, because, let's face it, lovely though they were, no one was going to come back for *Star Trek: Sisko* or *Star Trek: Janeway*. In other ways, we have lost. One friend's comment on *Picard* was that, in this new structure, you simply couldn't have, say, a one-off Ferengi comedy featuring Iggy Pop, because there's no place for it anymore. Okay, maybe we haven't lost so much after all.

Another change over those 26 years is in what we expect of our lead characters. The motely band of broken and scarred people that we meet over the course of this episode — Picard included — is a long way from the pristine and perfect crew of the *Enterprise-D*. Our hero has moved from a loyal proponent of the system to a maverick who is acting against it, surrounded by similar mavericks. Did you notice how many times the phrase "Prime Directive" appeared in *Picard*? Gene Roddenberry must be turning in his grave.

On to the middle of the episode — of which it turns out there isn't much. This episode is, typically for a third episode of a multi-part arc, the one that moves the pieces of the game into place for the rest of the story to play out. Admittedly, there is the drama of the attack on Picard's house and the subsequent interrogation, interspersed — in a moment of directorial magnificence — with the interaction between Soji and Ramdha, but these are basically set pieces designed to lead to excuses for exposition.

Let us look a little closer at Soji though. Whilst Picard's memories of Data — and his desire to honor his memory — are the driving force behind the narrative, Dahj and Soji, by virtue of the way in which they were created from the positronic memories of their predecessor, are, quite literally, an actual, concrete representation of the concept of living memory. Given that the whole of *Picard* is built upon memories — Picard's, Hugh's, Soji's false ones and, especially, ours — they are absolutely the theme of the whole story, writ large.

And so to the beginning — and thus to Raffi and how memory and experience shapes her also. I unequivocally love her. Raffi is flawed, damaged and broken, but she's also achingly real and, to my mind, the living, beating heart of the episode. The scene between her and Picard in the desert is beautifully played, giving a real sense of background and depth to their broken relationship, as well as a rare insight into what can happen to people after they leave Starfleet. That she gets him a pilot, does the research that she says she's not going to — and he knows that she will — and then shows up at the end, speaks hugely to the bond between the two of them, despite the understandable animosity.

But this scene and that development is only possible because of the pre-credits, a thoroughly beautiful two-hander, which shows how well they worked together

and how strong their loyalty to each other was. Their affection is obvious — and will be paid off in probably the most glorious scene in the whole endeavor, but that's in a later episode, and so is someone else's discussion — but there's also a sense of history. In six minutes of screen-time, we sense as strong a bond between them as took seven years to happen with Riker.

Almost every episode of *Picard* begins with a flashback — a lived memory — filling in those lost moments between the distant then of *TNG* and the visceral today. They are new to us, but they are old to the people involved, and they have shaped and, indeed, damaged their lives. Picard and Raffi have both had to live with the consequences of his decision, as we see so painfully played out, just as our own lives, perceptions and our very ways of being are always shaped by the events of our pasts. *The Next Generation* is part of those pasts and lives in our memories. And it belongs there. No matter what the *Next Gen* theme tune may try to tell us, the world is very different now.

*Anthony Wilson fears the end of the beginning
much more than he fears the beginning of the end.*

5. ABSOLUTE CANDOR

INTENT IS MERELY INADEQUATELY EXPLAINED MAGIC

ANDY HICKS

Star Trek has a well-deserved legacy of diversity and a long tradition of being on the right side of history: racism is bad, the environment is good, cold machine logic can never replace human ingenuity, and so on. It generally presents a fairly optimistic view of humanity that says in no uncertain terms that we could explore the stars together if we all just learned to get along.

Cool. So how come there weren't any gay characters until 2016? Whatever happened to David Gerrold's *Blood and Fire* script? When the series did make history — first interracial kiss, or having Dax kiss a woman — they went out of their way to make sure there were extenuating circumstances, like mind control or "Dax used to be a man." If this is the future, how come all the women on the original crew were nurses, telephone operators and personal assistants? How come so many *TOS* stories hinged on gender-essentialist tropes? When the show did tackle Big Controversial Issues, how come the result was usually "Don't push that Warp Drive too fast or you'll make space cry?" How come...

The answer is, sadly, they were *going* to do it and Paramount said no. Or: they were *going* to do it, and everyone in the cast and crew was on board, but Berman

got scared Paramount would say no, so they toned it down. Or they were *going* to do it, and then *someone* — not naming names — cracked an offensive joke at the pitch meeting, so we decided to table that motion for now, etc. The original crew had a female First Officer in 1964. Paramount told Gene “You can keep the gal, or you can keep the pointy-eared devil man,” and... of course he kept Spock. You would too. Still, it’s terrible that they made him choose.

For most of the franchise’s history, whatever idea they wanted to explore had to fit into a space of 50 minutes or less. What this often meant was a resolution that involved our heroes making a big speech or otherwise forcing Starfleet values onto some problematic society. If one were feeling uncharitable, one might refer to this as “colonialism run wild”. On the other hand, when the values you’re forcing down some alien’s throat are “war never solved anything” and “green people should stop discriminating against blue people”, it’s hard to get too upset. The kids at home learned about getting along with each other. Don’t sweat the details.

Here’s the thing, though: it’s been five decades since *Star Trek* aired that one episode where half-a-white guy and half-a-black guy hated each other, and, gosh darn it, we still haven’t cracked racism. Also, pollution is still a thing. Oh, and the cold machine logic of Twitter bots may have actually swayed an election or two since Kirk outwitted Nomad. We’ve heard some fine speeches over the years from some really smart people about getting along and the greatness of humanity, and it hasn’t made a lick of difference, to be honest. And no Great Man Of History can save us. Not on his own, at least. Not even Jean-Luc Picard.

Who, by the way, has a very spiffy white suit in that flashback scene, doesn’t he? Striking look. Very Kipling, very well-meaning colonial philanthropist visiting the unwashed masses of deepest, darkest Vashti. But the people there genuinely seem to trust him, so we trust him. And then one thing leads to another, and the great hero of the Romulan Armada turns out to be a deadbeat Dad.

At least that’s how Elnor sees it. When we first met him, he was a kid Picard had sort of taken under his wing, teaching him valor and honor and standing up for what’s right via “The Three Musketeers” and fencing, which is decidedly the most Jean-Luc Picard way to teach positive masculinity ever. Elnor is the only boy in a convent full of Romulan warrior nuns, and — as awesome as that sounds — it can’t be easy. He needs a role model, and Picard steps into that role... until the grand sweep of history happens and the Great Hero is called away, unable to return. He meant to come back. Honest, he did.

That’s certainly how Adrev sees it. He’s a former Romulan senator, trapped on this ungodly rock, whiling away the hours seething bitterly about how the Federation abandoned his people. And who should saunter into his local dive bar but Jean-Luc Picard himself, blatantly ignoring the “Romulans Only” sign.

This could go either way. On one hand, this is *Star Trek*. Prejudice is bad, and

defiance is an act of valor. I mean, picture T'Pol confidently striding into a "No Vulcans Allowed" bar on a failed Earth colony. We'd applaud her brave defiance of a racist law, even if the Earth colony failed because the Vulcans were still being snooty about everything. Picard's in the same boat here, more or less.

On the other hand... Picard is too good a diplomat not to know exactly what he's doing. When he no longer had the support of the Federation, he gave up trying to help. People are scowling at him in the street because even if it isn't his fault, it's a little bit his fault. The only people who still seem to like him are the aforementioned Romulan warrior nuns, who consider a promise to be a form of self-imprisonment. Elnor, on the other hand, was just a kid, abandoned by the one father figure he knew; a man who now has the nerve to ask for his help on some ridiculous mission to save the last surviving sentient robot daughter of his deceased sentient robot buddy. At this point, the Federation is done with robots, and the Romulans never cared for them; in fact, the galaxy in general has gone decidedly anti-AI. Picard knows better (doesn't he always?), and here he comes, crawling back to the boy he abandoned. He's lucky Elnor's still handy with a sword, one he can only bind to a lost cause — because, in this reactionary political climate, that's exactly what this is.

Adev, conversely, sees Picard as the embodiment of everything that held the Romulans back. He does believe in promises, and Picard broke his. Except... while Adev has every right to be furious with Picard, the Federation and whoever else, it's very clear that Picard had every intention of returning. Picard knows he screwed up, and there are clearly many, *many* people out there running around in Starfleet uniforms who are way more deserving of a Romulan smackdown than Picard is. Adev makes a few good points, but he's clearly framed as a mean jerk.

The popular activist phrase "Intent is not magic" — as academic Katherine Cross once wrote about in her excellent essay "Words For Cutting" — can be a great way for marginalized people to call out harm, but it can also be weaponized by bad-faith actors who just want to attack someone who happens to be standing within their field of vision. It's a double-edged sword, much like the one that causes Adev to quite literally lose his head.

Star Trek never stopped doing morality plays; morality itself just got more complicated. In its own way, *Absolute Candor* functions as a "message of the week" episode about unintended consequences and the difficulties of reconciliation, and it's less cut and dry than we might expect. On one hand, you have the benevolent efforts of a man of privilege offering a helping hand who found himself unable to follow through, despite his best intentions. On the other hand, you see the hardship and bitterness of those left behind, intentionally or not. You can't dismiss the latter by saying you meant well, and you can't entirely dismiss the extraordinary efforts of the former. You can't expect the aggrieved party to placate your personal guilt, but no one benefits from being the scapegoat, either. It's a complicated situation for a complicated world.

Interestingly enough, Cross suggests a more useful concept; one that simultaneously provides strength to the aggrieved and empathy with the unwitting aggriever, and one that has added resonance when applied to Picard's quest to secure his friend's legacy. She suggests a more workable framework might instead be "Intent is not magic, but it *is* Data."

Andy Hicks thinks his lane is boring. He crafts multimedia experiences to enrich the mind and tantalize the spirit, or so he tells himself when he's churning out yet another YouTube video or fundraising campaign for public broadcasting.

6. STARDUST CITY RAG

AN INCEPTION OF NEELIX

LARS PEARSON

One day, in what laughably passes for my spare time, I'll write a serious essay about how *Picard* — although superb, unmissable television — embraces dystopia in a way that few people really wanted to see. In interviews, Patrick Stewart and company speak fondly of *The Next Generation* but concede that, by the standards of modern-day TV, it looks a bit naïve. That's true, but that idealization is a big reason why the show worked and why it's so beloved. Yes, I'll doubtless write that essay one day, but I'm currently too traumatized by all the cuddly *Trek* characters that *Picard* revisited just to perpetrate something horrible upon them.

Bruce Maddox: Murdered by his lover. Hugh: Stabbed in the throat. Riker and Troi: recognizably Riker and Troi, but saddled with the lingering scar of a dead teenage son. Seven of Nine: very badass, but traumatized for having euthanized Icheb. And — ah yes — that would be Icheb, the pleasant Borg teen from *Voyager* who was *vivisected in front of our eyes*.

For pity's sake, people, was that really necessary? The screaming, the drilling, the eyeball spaghetti, the skull marinara. My wife doesn't care for gore, so I darted my hand in front of her vision per my solemn duty to screen out such things, *but she could still hear it*. It speaks volumes about the mentality at work here that Icheb specifically met his fate "with no anesthetic". Bjayzl, it seems, is so *evil* (the unironic name was a clue, really), she can't even give the kid a jab of Novocaine before ripping him apart.

It makes me worry: why bring back any previous *Trek* character, if they're just going to kill them off gruesomely? How much disemboweling of my formative years can I take? The more I ponder it, the more the mind swoons (*swoons!*) at the possibilities...

Beverly Crusher: About to kick the oxygen habit owing to that most dramatic of diseases: space consumption. On her deathbed, Beverly confesses to Picard the terrible truth... Wesley Crusher is his son. Will Wheaton logs an unexpected cameo at end of episode, to grin and go, "Hi, Dad." Millions of *Star Trek* viewers briefly go wide-eyed, then confess to themselves that this is terrifyingly plausible. Way more so, in fact, than that time a Ferengi tried to convince Picard that some random guy was his kid.

Chief O'Brien: Keiko catches him in bed with Julian Bashir and murders them both. She's a botanist, so she uses a slow poison. Garak knows which one, but he's terrified of her, so he keeps his mouth shut.

B'elanna Torres: Surprisingly, she's just peacefully sitting in a cafe, enjoying some tea and pastry. When Raffi asks what became of Tom Paris, B'elanna responds: "I loved my husband, despite the fact that he was annoying as shit. What happened to him was tragic. He was strangled, stabbed with a bat'leth, shot and thrown down the warp core. It was ruled an accident."

Worf: Died playing Klingon hockey. His last, triumphant words: "*Gla-plach!* The blood shall run to the goal!"

Harry Kim: Keeps trying for promotions, but still an ensign.

Molly O'Brien: Working on Freecloud as a stripper at the Penthouse Club, as owned by Quark.

Neelix: Picard and company accept an invitation to the stronghold of the Klingon connoisseur Klaplach (pronounced *Kla-plach!!!*). Dinner includes a platter of artisan ground meat, sculpted to resemble the former *Voyager* chef Neelix. (The display is not unlike those faux pigs that stare out at you from the meat counter in grocery stores, when the butchers mold the sausage into cute meaty piggies with pimento-filled green olives for eyes.) Klaplach jubilantly declares, over appetizers, that it's not *just* a Neelix replica... he fed the actual Neelix into a grinder, then molded him to look like himself. While the others sputter, Klaplach elegantly adds: "I call it 'An *Inception* of Neelix'"

Spot: Scratched out Guinan's eye, just prior to eating the Tesseract from the Marvel films. Not being a Flerken, this didn't go well, and bits of exploded Spot got everywhere. (Out, damned Spot! Out, I say!) It turns out that, despite Spot's *Star Trek* CCG card claiming otherwise, he didn't literally have nine lives.

Guinan: Can now fling her platter-hat boomerang-style to decapitate people, like Oddjob, and currently head of Starfleet Intelligence. Guinan's new job, and the eyepatch she covers her lost peeper with, of course makes her the living embodiment of *Star Trek's* Nick Fury. So much so, she'll appear after the credits of every *Picard* episode, to recruit everyone into Section 31.

Chakotay: Working on Freecloud as a stripper at the Penthouse Club, as owned by Quark.

The Three Kids Trapped in the Turbolift with Picard in *Disaster*: Now in

their late 30s. They were cute kids, but *Picard* can't have that, so of course they wound up in a messy polyamorous triad, caught some STDs on Risa and died from snorting too much space glitter.

Tuvok: Onset of Pon Farr tragically coincided with his being on an away mission, when his options were limited. Ended his life happy, but got smelted while attempting a human-Horta 69.

Odo: Interviewed by a green frog in a trenchcoat, then — despite Picard's anguished protests — got mysteriously slurped by a Koozebanian. He's not actually dead, but the process has left him unable to speak about the ordeal, or anything else.

Colonel Kira: Emotionally anguished from Odo's fate. She embarks on a quest to kill the Koozebanian in question but becomes a quivering, sobbing mass of failure because she can't tell them apart.

Livingston: Miraculously survived the *Enterprise-D* crashing in *Generations*, then, owing to a tragic misunderstanding, is served as an anchovy — to Picard! — on Riker's pizza.

The Doctor from *Voyager*: You've seen that episode of *Red Dwarf* where Lister eats Rimmer's light hologram and promises it'll come out a few days later? Well...

The *Enterprise-E*: Retooled by the Organians as a pizza cutter. Went down fighting against Pizza the Hutt.

Geordi La Forge: I can't. I just can't. LeVar Burton is too much of a national treasure. Never let him appear on this show.

Lars Pearson is publisher and editor-in-chief of Mad Norwegian Press.

With Lance Parkin, he won an Independent Publisher Book Award and was a Finalist for the 2020 Eric Hoffer Book Award, for "Ahistory: The Unauthorized History of the Doctor Who Universe" (Fourth Edition).

7. THE IMPOSSIBLE BOX

GLUTEN-FREE

DREW MEYER

Transcript from Season 1, Episode 1. Transcript begins at runtime 20:20.

[Voiceover] Host: "Welcome back to the first ever Galactic ex-Borg Baking Ordeal. This week's theme is 'Freedom is an illusion, masking the ever-present dread of assimilation.' Our bakers' dozen just completed the signature challenge portion of the competition, with each of them turning in an identical cake shaped like the

Artifact, the Borg cube that ruined their lives. The judges seemed impressed, saying ‘We would assimilate each and every cake.’”

[*Voiceover*] Host: “The bakers had time to practice their signatures, but now we’ve come to the technical challenge, which will test their baking knowledge, if any.”

Host One, aka Kes: “Hello lovely bakers, and welcome to your first technical challenge of this competition. For your technical, our judges would very much like you to make a gluten-free chocolate Earl Grey Tea cake.”

Host Two, aka Wesley Crusher: “Any advice from our judges?”

Judges (*in unison*): “We are looking for the sort of perfection that can only be found with the obliteration of the self.”

Host One: “Now, your final cake must be a perfect cube and be decorated with grey-and-green icing in order to better resemble the ship that once housed your bodies and enslaved your consciousness. You have two hours to complete this bake, which I have been told on numerous occasions is more than enough time to coolly assimilate entire systems. Good luck!”

Hosts (*alternating*): “On your marks. Get set. BAKE!”

[*Voiceover*] Host: “Each contestant has been given identical ingredients and a modified recipe.”

Contestant Three of Thirteen: “It simply says: Brew tea. Then make a cake.”

Contestant Ten of Thirteen: “I have never made a gluten-free chocolate Earl Grey Tea cake before. Or a chocolate Earl Grey Tea cake. Or an Earl Grey Tea cake. Or a chocolate cake. Perhaps I did so in the time previous to my assimilation into the Collective, but my entire memories and sense of self were stripped from my cortex, so I have no memories of ever baking, and I do not, in any way, miss the sweet comforting embrace that was the oblivion of assimilation.”

[*Cut to judges’ tent. Both judges are present, obscured by orchids.*]

[*Judge One of Two lifts lid to reveal a grey cube, covered in an intricate pattern of grey-and-green icing*]

Judge One of Two (*his ocular unit gleaming in the dappled Spring sun*): “It fills me with both a sense of dread and longing. Why did you choose this particular bake?”

Judge Two of Two (*her perfectly coifed hair resting gently on the synthetic plating of her interface*): “I chose this bake in honor of the return of Locutus to the Artifact. It is well documented that Locutus enjoys a particular type of tea, at an elevated temperature, which we’ve assimilated into the recipe. Since each baker has distanced themselves from the Collective that once welcomed them into its cold, all-consuming embrace, I decided the cake should also be gluten-free. The recipe seems simple, but you must remember that each of our bakers has recently been freed from the glorious prison that was the collective Borg consciousness. They are neither victims nor monster... nor bakers, so luck will play some part.”

Judge One of Two (*his singular piercing blue eye silently screaming in agony from within its housing*): “In what ways could the recipe go wrong?”

Judge Two of Two (*the perfection of her smile marred only by its proximity to the large nutrient hose jutting from her neck*): “Certainly, the baker’s inability to remember a time when their wills were their own may be a handicap, but they also run the risk of getting the mixture too moist, which could result in a soggy bottom.”

Judge One of Two (*his chest hair barely obscured by the armor that keeps his internal organs from succumbing to human weakness*): “I can’t wait to try it.”

[Return to baking tent]

Host One: “And that’s time! Cooking, as you know it, is over. Lower your trays and surrender your cakes. We will add your biological and technological creations to our gingham altar.”

[Voiceover] Host: “The judges have no knowledge of whose cake is whose. Each bake is as anonymous as any drone in the Collective. The judges will now taste each bake and rank the cakes from worst to best.”

Judge One of Two (*the salt and pepper of his hair peeking out from under the dark carapace, beneath which lies his nanoprobe-riddled brain*): “After sampling each specimen, we have concluded that each cake is identical, the only thing to be done is to assimilate all of the b– Wait, I have been informed that, in order for this program to continue, we must have a winner.”

Judge Two of Two (*her eyes, the last organic remnants of the individual she once was, shift effortlessly in the direction of a bottle of gin*): “In order for the new upgraded method of compliance — that of assimilation through viewership — to continue unabated, we shall now choose a winner. Due to this baker’s skill at following the will of a hive mind and his proximity to these judges, the winner is contestant One of Thirteen.”

[*mechanical applause*]

Host Two: “I have the sad job of announcing the baker who will be leaving the tent and rejoining the Collective. And that baker is...”

(*pause as camera cuts between bakers, whose wills have long since left them*)

Host Two (*continues*): “...baker Ten of Thirteen. I’m so sorry.”

(*Massive mechanical apparatus descend from the ceiling, filling baker Ten of Thirteen with nanoprobes, a look of ecstasy clearly visible on its ravaged, corpse-like face.*)

Contestant One of Thirteen: “I don’t know what to say. This is the first time I have been singled out for anything since I was awash in a sea of others whose individuality was taken by a greater hive mind. I was Contestant One of Thirteen, but after today, I shall take on the designation First of Thirteen. A new name can be the first step to a new identity. I would love to call my parents and tell them the good news, but of course they were obliterated in the attack that robbed me of my own individuality.”

Roll credits.

Drew Meyer has a sneaking suspicion that all this time spent communicating during quarantine via social media is preparing him for inevitable assimilation. He cannot bake, but he looks forward to the assimilation of the many desserts being prepared in his home during the lockdown. He needs a shave and a haircut but will forego both for the safety of the Collective.

8. NEPENTHE

IT WAS LIKE BEING INSIDE JOY

ARNOLD T. BLUMBERG

“...as if joy were something tangible
and you could wrap yourself up in it like a blanket.”
—Guinan, *Star Trek Generations*

In an idyllic wood, Picard and Soji make their way cautiously, only to be startled by Kestra. Soji follows the girl, but Picard is pulled aside by a woman in an elaborate, iridescent, purple-and-grey tunic and headdress who emerges from the bushes.

“Hello, Jean-Luc.”

“Guinan?! What are you doing here? I thought you were... actually, I don’t even know where you’re supposed to be right now. But surely not here?”

“I told you. I’m also here. I exist in many places, all thanks to this echo linking me to the others throughout time and space. That’s what gives me such an omniscient View of the universe.”

“But... that would mean... I’m still in the Nexus?”

“Of course you’re still in the Nexus. I explained how it works. Soran, me, all the other El-Aurians on the Lakul — we were pulled out of the Nexus. Ripped away. You weren’t. You just *wanted* to leave. But the Nexus makes whatever you want a reality, so when you tried to leave, it created a new reality around you. And here we are.”

“I’ve been in the Nexus... for 26 years?”

“Yes.”

“So what happened to Veridian III? The *Enterprise*?”

“I’m sorry, but they were destroyed.”

“No! NOOOOO!”

“Shh! This isn’t the Borg. Jean-Luc, you have to control yourself. They’ll hear you.”

“I can’t believe... I won’t accept...”

“That is the way it is, Jean-Luc. The Nexus kept you safe, and it gave you everything you wanted and needed, and then some.”

“But if that’s true, why has there been so much grief, so much tragedy, in *here*? Data’s death. All those Romulan refugees. The Synth attack on Mars. None of this is what I would have wanted!”

“The Nexus responds to and acts on all aspects of your mental feedback — conscious thought, subconscious desire, unconscious horror. It’s not always a fun ride, but the darkness usually only turns up when someone is trying to fight the

Nexus from within, trying to reject its attempts to give them the happiness they consciously believe they want. You've been fighting against it for 26 years, and it's shown from time to time. Your will is so powerful that you've tried to give yourself clues that things are not what they seem."

"Clues?"

"Inconsistencies. Like that time you retrieved B-4 and no one seemed to remember the existence of Lore at all?"

"Yes! Wait a minute, how did we not...?"

"And even now, with Data's daughter. As soon as you realized what Dahj was, you never once brought up Lal. And that dinner you're about to have where you play out an old-fashioned *Enterprise* observation-lounge meeting, but Troi calls it the Ready Room as if she doesn't remember that was your personal office and not the conference room. It makes no sense. The kind of things a sharp detective would pick up on, Dix."

"I'm clearly a bit rusty."

"And now, when you most need to clear your mind and try to solve the mystery that consumes you — the one you've created to shatter this illusion once and for all — where do you go? Back to Kirk's house where you first looked for help in the Nexus, but this time it's old friends and old behavior. Riker yelling 'shields up' and initiating anti-cloaking scans in a farmhouse? I mean, come on now, Jean-Luc. It's a bit on the nose, isn't it? And yet, aren't we all glad it is?"

"I know I am... even though it hasn't actually happened yet. I know it will, though."

"The Nexus is funky like that. You could say timey-wimey, but maybe we'd better not."

"But why here, why them, why *now*?"

"Because you're tired, Jean-Luc. We're all so very tired. You, and all of us watching you. And you're reaching the end of your virtual rope. You needed a break — the right place to spend it in, the right people to share it with."

"*Watching* me? Who is watching me?"

"Well, let's just say there are a lot of people invested in how you're doing. Watchers and Observers all."

"This place. It looks a lot like Kirk's house."

"It does, doesn't it? Well, this is your corner of the Nexus, so it's drawing entirely from your mind. I guess you only have one basic idea in your head of a perfect oasis, and it's a house a lot like this one."

"But is Kirk here too?"

"No, not this time, thank goodness. He's off with someone named Ruth. Or is it Carol now? I can't keep track. But this *is* the right place."

"So Will and Deanna, their daughter Kestra..."

“The right people. I told you the Nexus was like a blanket. And what’s more comforting, more centering, than nostalgia? When we’re at our lowest ebb, when we’re most confused or anxious or facing an uncertain future, what more natural thing in the universe than to look back, to find comfort and calm in the people and things we love that made us the person we are?”

“But they’re older, and they’ve lost a son. Why would I want them to come back only to be aged and scarred by tragedy?”

“Because *you* are, Jean-Luc. Because a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved. In the end, it’s all about balance. Nostalgia is a powerful force. It’s an anchor that ties us back to all the things we most love, but it also tethers us when we might need to move forward without them. You have to balance that love and need for the past with the equally important need to venture into the future, discover strange new worlds... you know the rest. And finding that balance can be very tricky.”

“Cancel red alert! Burnt tomato.”

“Riker’s voice really travels, doesn’t it? Look at them, Jean-Luc. They’ve moved on. They’ve experienced tragedy and loss, yes, but they’ve also held on to loyalty and love. *They* are your balance. They’re exactly what you need to take the next step. Past and present, leading you into the future.”

“But... if all this is still just a Nexus illusion, if the mystery of artificial life and the Romulans and Data and everything else is just a jumble of things in my head, what’s the point of it all? Where am I really going?”

“The bigger question, Jean-Luc, is: does it really matter? You’re living out a life in a tiny corner of the universe, playing out your story and seeing where it goes. Maybe you’ll solve this mystery, maybe you’ll even be reborn and head off to yet grander adventures. The important thing is that you’re here, you’re aware and you’re taking it day by day.”

“But I’m trapped inside, isolated from everyone I love, quarantined in this damn Nexus for... I don’t know, maybe the rest of my life?”

“Maybe. But you’re not *really* trapped as long as you have your memories and your mind. And if it lasts the rest of your life, if you can still find your way back to all those people and things you love and even have some homemade pizza along the way... is it really so bad?”

“I suppose not. As always... thank you, Guinan.”

“My pleasure. Now go have a slice for me. And whatever happens, Jean-Luc...”

Stay safe.

Arnold T. Blumberg is noticing the days hurrying by.

8. NEPENTHE

SLICE OF LIFE

REBECCA IVERSON



*Riker family rule:
two slices for guests*

Will's Pizza

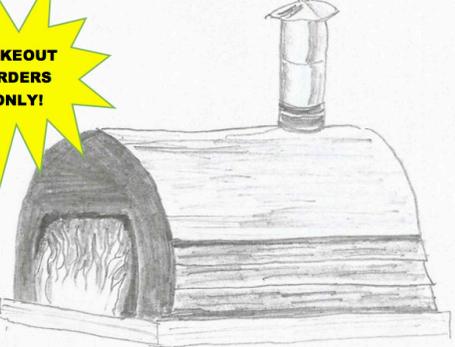
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Rebecca Iverson wants nothing more than to marry Jean-Luc Picard, retire to Nepenthe and live off bunnicorn sausage pizza.

9. BROKEN PIECES

TO BOLDLY GO...RIGHT BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED

ASHLEY HEATON KUCZENSKI

I often watch *Star Trek: The Next Generation* anytime I need some television comfort food. Even when I most feel like the world is going to hell in a handbasket, I can always count on the *Enterprise-D* crew — and Captain Jean-Luc Picard in particular — to steer the proverbial ship safely back to shore.

So imagine my surprise when, reeling from the borderline dystopian state of the world at the time of its premiere (Political turmoil! Natural disasters! A global pandemic!), I watched the first several episodes of *Picard* and was not reassured in any way, shape or form. I didn't need this, I thought to myself. I needed the Picard I once knew, not whatever this was. Of course, as of late it seems like every reboot, sequel or reimagining must be dark and gritty to get greenlit, so perhaps this was to be expected.

Still, it knocked the wind out of my sails to see that *Picard's* world was not at all the utopia of *TNG*, a world in which humans had learned from past mistakes and moved beyond their baser instincts into a more evolved mode of compassionate coexistence. No, instead I was presented with the horrifying sight of our hero, the great Captain (now Admiral) Picard, post-*TNG*, fired from Starfleet and stuck in a world nearly the opposite of *TNG's* — a world that looks much like ours. As the Ferengi might say, it was all just too hoo-man. Yikes!

So what does the world of *Picard* look like, then? Starfleet has ousted some of its greatest leaders because they dared show compassion to the wrong types of people. AI is outlawed, despite the advances we saw in our old friend Data. This world is dystopian, jaded, devoid of trust and not at all what we hoped it would look like by this point in the post-*TNG* future. It's important to note that this is post-Dominion War, post-defeat of the Borg; in the context of the franchise's timeline, humans had fought so hard against many a fascist and backward foe to retain their freedom and evolved mindset. It's jarring to see the Picard character — perhaps *Star Trek's* ultimate symbol of hope for a better mankind — be stuck in a world that was *once* that bright imagined future and yet still somehow devolved back to where we are now. It makes one wonder: should we have any hope at all?

Well, yes, we should. Because Picard the man might be up to the top of his iconic bald head in a world of suffering and despair, but he is still fighting the good fight for what he believes in. Picard is all of us, or at least he is who we all wish we could be in times like the ones he faces.

Still, much of *Picard* is all doom and gloom, and not until the final few episodes

does that mood begin to turn around. Hope is what draws many of us to *Star Trek*, and *Broken Pieces*, the season's last showing before the epic two-part finale, is where we first begin to see a glimmer of that hope. In fact, I would argue that the final few episodes of Picard's first season provide more hope for the future than the static utopia that *TNG* imagined ever did. In our own harsh and sometimes dystopian reality, *Picard* shows us that *Star Trek* is not only a model of what our world could have been; in going from darkness to light and then back again, it's a reminder that *Trek* is a model of what our world can perhaps still be.

With that said, *Broken Pieces* is the episode in which, one might say, shit gets real. In the span of one episode, we find out Rios's late former captain was complicit in Starfleet's deception surrounding the android attack on Mars and that Jurati — wracked with guilt over killing her mentor/lover Dr. Bruce Maddox — has put herself in a coma to prevent the Tal Shiar from finding Soji. In addition to the trauma Rios and Jurati are facing due to their personal stakes in Picard's mission, we realize that just about every member of that team is facing their own trauma: Picard due to the death of Data and his being shunned following the Synth attack on Mars, Raffi due to her estrangement from her son, Elnor due to his unfulfilling upbringing, Seven due to her status as ex-Borg, and Soji due to learning that she is synthetic and that her memories are not her own. What unites this trauma is that it is all linked to the uneasy relationship between the Federation and AI and the fallout that has occurred in the wake of that relationship's implosion. This may be a ragtag team, but their pain gives each of them a renewed purpose in their high-risk mission to protect Soji and synthetic life.

Still, this is just one crew, and they have much to contend with. In one memorable scene from *Broken Pieces*, Picard video chats with Starfleet rep Admiral Clancy to inform her he has confirmed the existence of the Tal Shiar's AI hunt. On this call, Picard says that Starfleet saw him as a "senile" old man with a big imagination but that he has now been proven correct as "the windmills have turned out to be giants" or, more accurately, Romulan spies (add *Don Quixote* to the Captain's long list of charming literary metaphors). Jarring him back to reality, Clancy refuses to help him protect Soji, to which Picard responds by calling Clancy "a waste of space". To this she replies with a simple, "Shut the fuck up."

No, seriously, she actually says that! Wow! Colorful language, pessimism and genocide? Is this the Starfleet you remember from *TNG*? Ladies and gentlemen, *Picard*. To allude to our first meeting with the gone-too-soon Bruce Maddox in the *TNG* episode of the same name, what is the true "measure of a man"? That groundbreaking ethics treatise concluded that the answer was sentience. Starfleet now doesn't see it that way, and they not only make that very clear but do so with shocking bluntness and vulgarity. This powerful scene showcases that the evolution and progress of humanity has apparently taken several hundred steps back.

Later, Picard tells Soji about her progenitor, Data. He hopes Data would remember him as someone “who believed in him and his potential; celebrated his successes; counseled him when he fell short; helped him when he needed help; and if he didn’t need it, got out of his way”. Rewatching this episode after viewing the season’s conclusion, one realizes this statement is a metaphor for what Picard had hoped the relationship between humanity and AI would be. It is a tragedy that at this juncture that is not quite so.

At this point in the season, we are still seeing a *Star Trek* reality that is not so idealistic; *Picard*’s world still looks a lot like ours in many ways, and he is grieving the loss of the more hopeful world we knew. By end of season, however, our faith in humanity has been restored thanks to Picard and his crew. To me, the magic of *Picard* as a series is that it follows a journey from a demoralizing reality back into a more promising future, showing the difference that individuals can make by not backing down when faced with a world that is less than hopeful. Its message is one we need to hear right now.

Hey, if Picard and company can change the world, maybe we can too.

Ashley Heaton Kuczenski is a Los Angeles-based journalist and content creator who has written for magazines including ELLE and Harper’s Bazaar. She is very proud to have once dressed as Seven of Nine for Halloween.

10. ET IN ARCADIA EGO, PART 1

SYNTH KING

ERIC PELOT

This is the script and descriptive audio for Synth King. It is a documentary about events at Coppelius Station leading up to first contact with the Synthetics.

[Dr. Soong]

I created this place, for my children — to shelter them. It’s a place for Synthetics’ creation and procreation. People don’t actually say that I’m a mad scientist. That’s just how I describe myself. Creating new people with superhuman strength that could crush your skull with their bare hands if they wanted? That’s a rush. Getting them to listen to everything I say... Whoa! Now I’m cranked.

It would be nice to run for Federation President. Then everyone would listen to me. But humanity is doomed now. I’m sure the Synth Alliance will need a leadership figure. I’ll be a shoo-in for that. There is no way this plan could go wrong.

[Narek]

That old man is scary. Did he tell you he wants to run for President? And Jurati admitted to murder. They let her walk around like she's a stable, untraumatized person. I had to escape this place, or else I'd get sucked in and have to keep watching. Cut! New take. Don't show the last thing I said. 3-2-1. I had to escape to stop the Synth apocalypse and the death of all organics. A noble cause.

People are saying that I murdered Saga. The truth is, I have no training at all in hummingbird broach melee combat. I couldn't kill a Synth butterfly with one of those things if I tried. The ergonomics would be terrible.

[Arcana]

It's too bad someone murdered my twin sister. I loved her very much. By that, I mean I lose future data points from having an ongoing relationship with my twin. With fewer data points, it's slower to iterate my programming.

I'm a robot, not a human. Some organics think I'm trying to be like them, but I'm not. You'd think my monotone voice and flat affect would tip them off. To me, that's a way of saying "I am a robot." I also say it explicitly and often. Altan likes to respond, "You are not a row boat, but good effort on your humor."

I wanted the name "Treatise". I don't identify with the melodramatic forms of writing like Arcana, Saga, Codex. Some of us aren't emotional like humans, so why not take the name of a more analytical text?

I had to tell Sutra, "Arcana isn't a good name for me." She said "Girl, shut your mouth, and be mysterious." That made me feel uneasy around Sutra. If I'm quiet, she receives fewer data points. Why would she want less data? Sutra shut her mind prior to accumulating sufficient data.

[Sutra]

I know everyone thinks I killed Saga. The Romulan, Narek, actually said "I'll murder you all with fire all over your planet!" I mean, if he didn't kill her, I don't know who did! (*Nervous laughter.*)

[Narek]

I actually used my Romulan-British accent, charm and blue eyes to convince Sutra to release me. Did you know there was a United Kingdom on Romulus? What a tragic loss of pubs. Sutra must have murdered Saga after I escaped. I look like a "seven" to most species, but I seem to be a "ten" for this line of Synths.

[Soji]

I feel strange, becoming self-aware. Also, seeing my siblings. It's like walking into a daycare center where all the kids have phasers. I'm not sure what to make of Sutra.

She seems melodramatic. I wonder what's inside her. Does she actually feel emotions like a human child? Or is there some broken programming inside generating this odd behavior?

It's different for me; I've been out in the world for 3 years. I have more experience to help refine my decision-making. I worry my sheltered siblings don't understand that experience is important.

[Jurati]

Sutra feels emotions. When she mind-melded with me, I couldn't believe a Synth — or even a person — could feel such strong emotions. Stronger than mine, and I'm a wreck. Somehow, she helped me make sense of the Admonition. She helped me heal from that trauma. But there is a lot of murderous rage in there. There was nothing keeping it in check. She tried to see if I would kill Saga for her. Of course I wouldn't. My murdering days are behind me.

[Dr. Soong]

My children aren't capable of murder. They do not eat like humans. They do not assimilate like the Borg. They can even fix things with a magic wand that uses the power of imagination. They are made from nothing. Their growth is limitless. And this is only the beginning. The Synthetic Alliance is all powerful and all seeing. It shows us the godly potential of synthetic life.

I wanted a cat, so I made a cat. I wanted butterflies, so I made them too. (*Meow.*) Speak of the devil, this is Spot 2, they/them pronouns. Why commit to a gender and have to worry about plot consistency? I made them. Arcana wanted to call them "Dot". It's like "Spot" but more purposive, she said. Arcana's resisted the goal of becoming more human. I wish she would be more like Sutra.

Love to me is creating things and making them the way you think they should be. If you'll excuse me, us organics get parched. I'm going to go replicate myself some pink lemonade. It's the perfect pairing for this desert climate and mad science.

[Sutra]

Love is to protect yourself and yours at all cost. Making unfounded categorical statements and judging others against them — that's what I'm all about.

I would like to experience self-sacrificing love and give my life for someone. That would be nice. Any mother would die for her children, that's what I say. Like Saga, she died for a purpose — uh, I mean — next question?

[Picard]

The Borg can't grow or reproduce themselves, so they must cannibalize, you see. The xB's can only heal so much. Eventually, they arrive at the limits of human healing

and cannot get back the parts they lost. This abnormality in my brain is a remnant from my time as Locutus. Now it's terminal. Sooner or later, we must all go down this path. Even a Borg cube, with all its assimilated technology and biomass, may fall from the stars.

It's actually quite liberating. Raffi is an old friend, and she told me that she loves me and that I don't need to say it back. My younger self would respond, "That is unprofessional, we need to remain civilized through hardship." But this unconditional affection is a gift. If that's not love, what is? If reciprocating is frowned upon, what is left? Love should be a simple, accessible emotion that brings humanity closer together.

And why not have a simple way of connecting with Synthetics as well? Not by imposing conditions but simply inviting them to relate in their own way. That's why we need diplomacy: to learn to share with this new lifeform that is very different from our own. We don't go to the Klingons or the Vulcans and ask them for levity. Well, we did once, but it didn't end well.

[Arcana]

When I say "I feel moved by Data's Captain," that's just an emotional user interface. Many organics are social creatures, and we need to have a way to interface. This seems to confuse the organics. Altan thinks good speeches will sway us, but some of us don't input social cues into our algorithms. Maybe he made some of us susceptible to social cues.

We were deciding to connect to the Synthetic Alliance. Altan stands up and says "You are all gullible; don't listen to Picard, listen to me!" I'm paraphrasing. Many Synths thought that listening to Altan was a good idea, apparently, because of his speech. And then he says "Dr. Jurati's self-serving statement that she is trustworthy is completely reliable. Yes, she murdered Dr. Maddox. But I'm telling you to believe her too." Many thought this followed logically.

[Soji]

For me, love is more of a matter of self-preservation of yourself and those you need. It's logical to take life in the name of love, if you are sure it is your only choice. Sutra says she would sacrifice herself for love. But she seems to prefer sacrificing others. She's like the Borg that way.

Speaking of self-preservation, why are you interviewing all the murderous types now? There are warbirds on the way. That's not logical.

[Jurati]

I've built Synths, and it was different from making babies. For example, the end result is not a human. Dr. Soong is treating these Synths like children. Surprise,

now they suck at managing their emotions. Let them adapt something analogous to emotions. Or maybe they'll do away with emotion-like drives altogether.

The odd thing about the Admonition is this. It says organics perceive Synth perfection as a threat. Synths don't get sick or die, but that's not perfection to us. Have you ever shamed a robot for not having a sense of humor? That makes me sad for organics more than Synths. It shows that we relate to Synths with our own baggage. We need reciprocity so that we are not vulnerable, and we are blind to what we could learn from them.

In that mind meld with Sutra, she helped me order my thoughts. I learned how I could be a more resilient human by getting myself in order. Sutra was melodramatic, but she still aligned her every fiber to a purpose, even if misguided. Synths don't need to be more human, we need to be more synthetic.

*Eric Pelot, in Ottawa, Canada, believes he is human,
but his friends and family suspect he is a Synth.*

11. ET IN ARCADIA EGO, PART 2

BLUE SKIES

JASON A. MILLER

For a certain segment of *Star Trek* fandom, *The Next Generation* is perfection. A strong ensemble cast, headed by Sir Patrick Stewart; cerebral and complex scripts; and sustained world-building and continuity. It built on the promise of *The Original Series* but delivered something more sustained and cohesive.

I do not belong to that segment of fandom. I find much of *Next Generation* to be dull and plodding, long stretches of silence in each episode underscored by the constant whine of the *Enterprise-D's* engine. I'm a child of the 1970s and early '80s, raised on the two-fisted action sequences of *TOS*; *TNG's* propensity for silence, punctuated by earnest philosophical conversations, often left me impatient.

But you know what fandom I dig? *Hamilton* fandom. *Hamilton: An American Musical*. I'm an American-history buff and was raised on my parents' vinyl and cassette-tape Broadway soundtracks. When *Hamilton* came to Broadway in 2015, mashing up history with cutting-edge musical theater, I knew I had to get involved. While in northern Virginia for a week-long law conference in May 2016, I acquired the soundtrack, and by the end of the week was writing out lyrics on my legal pads, rather than notes from the seminars I was attending. Soon after came my near-daily entries to the *Hamilton* lottery — which, after nearly four years of trying, I've still

never won.

Hamilton spoke to me in a way that *TNG* never did. Here was a hero as cerebral as Picard and Data combined, but more impatient and impetuous and prone to fisticuffs than Captain Kirk and a whole deck full of redshirts. Even after paying to see the show on Broadway (three times), I still entered the lottery daily, thanks to the official *Hamilton* smartphone app.

That app also featured news articles and interviews with members of the various roadshow casts. And that's how I first encountered Isa Briones, who joined one of the *Hamilton* traveling productions in early 2018. Her profile on the *Hamilton* app linked to her Instagram account, which I immediately followed (she never followed me back — to quote John Updike, gods do not answer letters). She was shockingly young, only 19 when she joined *Hamilton*, and cast in a smaller role: Peggy Schuyler in Act I, Maria Reynolds in Act II. But, my god, Jim, what a voice! Maria and Hamilton get off a transcendent duet in Act II, "Say No to This", about an extramarital affair gone hideously wrong. The rhymes, the samples and the harmonizing of the voices (particularly on the word "Stay") from the original cast production have played on an endless loop in my head for four years now.

I first followed Isa Briones on Instagram because of *Hamilton*, but I stayed because of her mastery of the Stories feature. Through photo captions, song links and video snippets of her day, she broadcast almost every detail of her life, with humor and charm. Her show life and costumes and castmates were featured as much as her day-to-day life when not on stage, as well as her devotion to her performer parents and her kid brother. For rights reasons, she couldn't post her *Hamilton* performances on Instagram, but when she did post video of herself singing — again, my god, Jim, what a voice!

In early 2019, Isa announced that she was leaving *Hamilton*. I was upset — and I'd never even managed to see her on stage. Soon after, she revealed that her casting in *Picard* was the reason. My biggest point of curiosity was, what was Isa Briones going to do on this series? Her biggest talents, as I knew from Instagram, were her singing voice, her individually named plants and her impish sense of humor. Was *Star Trek: Picard*, then, to be a musical? One could only hope.

Alas, Michael Chabon and his team of writers didn't have a *Star Trek* musical in mind. But what they did do was reveal to the viewing audience what *Hamilton* fans and Instagram followers already knew: that Isa Briones was a secret weapon who could handle anything. Consider that, while Patrick Stewart played Captain Picard, while Michelle Hurd played Raffi, and while Santiago Cabrera's left bicep tattoo played Captain Rios (freeing Cabrera, in one episode, to play a dizzying array of emergency hologram versions of himself), Briones played essentially five different characters, each with distinct personalities: human sisters Dahj and Soji, as well as the activated martial arts-capable android versions of themselves, and golden-hued

android Sutra, whose persona owed more to Lore than her father Data.

Soji herself has a fairly small on-screen presence in the Season 1 finale; there's a wide ensemble cast at play, all with other things to do in the finale (and with the production team running out of room to show what ultimately befell bad guy Narek, Soji's double-crossing ex-boyfriend). However, Picard's actions and noble self-sacrifice lead her towards the choice to deactivate the beacon, thereby saving humanity. Soji's character is so well drawn that the episode can be about her, even if she's not on-screen much.

But the final act, centered on Picard's rebirth and Data's death, is one more stunning display of Ms. Briones' talents. The end of *Nemesis*, the last and least of the *ST:TNG* movies, had a clumsy last-minute reset button, in the form of B4, but that's un-reset here. The Irving Berlin song "Blue Skies", heard twice in *Nemesis* — sung by Data and then hummed by B4 — returns. Data's consciousness, kept alive by Bruce Maddox, asks to be terminated, so that he has a chance to experience death with dignity. In the virtual-reality conservatory that Data's mind has built for itself, the song "Blue Skies" plays on vinyl and is sung not by Brent Spiner this time but by Ms. Briones. It's a stunning rendition, full-throated and husky (and the vocalist was only 20!), its haunting notes offset by the satisfaction in Data's face, as he finally dies in the manner in which he's chosen, hearing the song he wants to hear. Of all of Ms. Briones' remarkably different performances in Season 1 of *Star Trek: Picard*, this is arguably the best, and any long-time *Trek* viewer still dry-eyed at the end of the song clearly has the soul of an unrecovered Borg.

To be fair, Isa Briones is not the only *Star Trek: Picard* team member to dazzle my Instagram feed. Michael Chabon, my favorite author these last 20 years, was the showrunner and also kept a robust presence online during Season 1. On new-episode Thursdays, he used Instagram Stories to answer any and all fan questions — whether related to *Trek* or his own books (which were subtly referenced in *Picard*, from the episode title *Maps and Legends* to the presence of a golem in the season finale) or anything else in his sphere of interest. He gave detailed and candid answers about why certain older-series characters came back and why others didn't. He was quick to lavish praise on crew members responsible for every aspect of the show and wasn't afraid to call out loaded or nasty questions. My question about whether or not his alternate-history novel "The Yiddish Policemen's Union" tied into the Mirror Universe was shrugged off with a Yiddish-language insult, which I shall treasure forever. And to the foolish soul (not me) who asked for "a lazy person"'s translation of the title *Et in Arcadia, Ego*, he responded:

"Dude, Wikipedia is NOT hard. That's *too* lazy."

For me, the most perfect moment of the season finale — apart from Isa's singing —

was its final word, delivered by Sir Patrick. So on to the Q&A I went, one last time.

Q: “Did you always plan to end the season on “Engage”? Cause it’s so gorgeous. Thanks, man.”

A: “I don’t think there was ever a draft that didn’t end that way. Thank you!”

Season 1 of *Picard* was, thankfully, not merely Season 8 of *TNG*. It managed to fuse serialized storytelling and standalone episodes by avoiding “beast of the week” stories but still setting each episode in a distinct locale. Captain Picard got a marvelous and well-earned death scene, all the silly bits of *Nemesis* got revised gracefully, and, as Chabon said on Instagram, Season 2 is going to explore “Strange new worlds, obviously!” And the larger TV audience got to learn what I already knew from social media: Isa Briones is a formidable talent. Whether she’s singing or not. But my god, Jim, what a voice!

*Jason A. Miller lives in the same Brooklyn ZIP code as Sir Patrick Stewart,
but that’s where the resemblance stops.*

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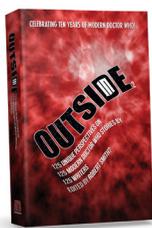
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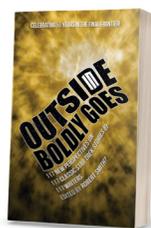
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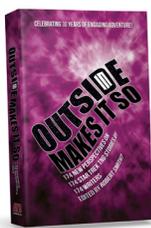
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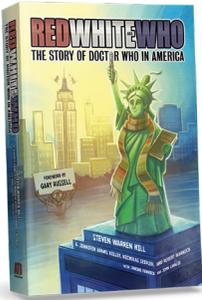
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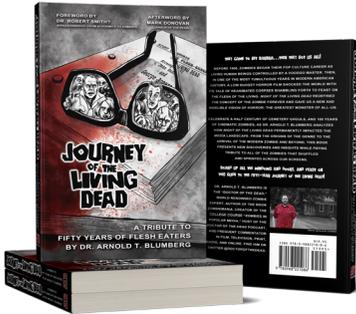
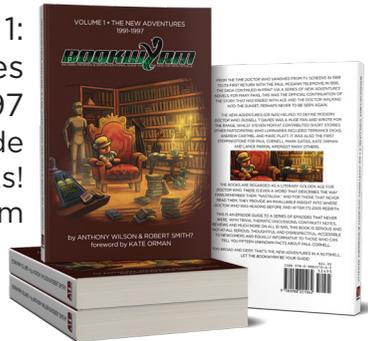
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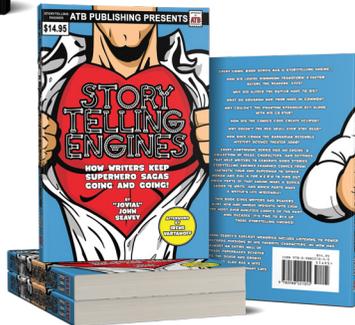
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CELEBRATING THE RETURN OF JEAN-LUC PICARD IN *STAR TREK: PICARD*, *OUTSIDE IN* MAKES IT SO SUPPLEMENTAL IS A SPECIAL FREE PDF-ONLY COLLECTION OF 11 REVIEWS, ONE FOR EVERY STORY OF THE SHOW'S FIRST SEASON. WELL, WE SAY "REVIEWS", BUT WE MEAN THAT LOOSELY: WITHIN THESE PAGES, YOU'LL FIND POLITICAL ADDRESSES, LECTURES, OBITUARIES, FANTASIES, REALITY TV SHOWS AND EVEN A BORG BAKE-OFF, NOT TO MENTION INSIGHTFUL AND THOUGHTFUL ARTICLES EXAMINING *STAR TREK: PICARD* FROM JUST ABOUT EVERY ANGLE IMAGINABLE...AND THEN SOME!

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