

Star Trek: the Next Generation

“The Bonding”

US TV series : 1989 : dir. : 45 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

[Wil Wheaton](#)

Patrick Stewart; Jonathan Frakes; Brent Spiner; LeVar Burton

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Radio Times listing:

“An Away Team member is killed by a mine on an old battlefield, but then mysteriously reappears.”

Being a subordinate crew member in a landing party was always a dicey business on “**Star Trek**”, particularly for those in the red security sweaters. You were always the first to cop it, and give Bones the chance to utter the famous line (which for once he definitely *did* say) “He’s dead Jim”.

But this is “**The New Generation**”, and that means crew members haul their dependents with them through the vastnesses of the Roddenberry universe. In this instance, the ill-fated Away Team member leaves her son Jeremy (±11) behind, and the episode settles down to chew over the *issue* of grief and coming to terms with intimate loss. Klingon crew member Whorf, who feels responsible to the boy as he was head of the Away Team in question, lost his own parents in action as a child, and resident whiz-kid Wesley Crusher (Wheaton) lost his father in very similar circumstances, when Picard was in charge of the fatal mission. Much to chew over for everybody then. Matters are complicated somewhat when Jeremy’s dead mother puts in a personal appearance and tries to take the boy with her back down to the desolate planet surface. She is, it transpires, the physical projection of an incorporeal species still inhabiting the planet, who feel beholden to the child for the loss of his parent. Whorf has prior claim, however, and once the pseudo-mother is persuaded her interference is not required, Jeremy goes through a Klingon ritual ceremonially bonding him to Whorf – not as a *bride*, you understand, but as a brother. So that’s OK then.

Less incessantly irritating than many episodes of the series, it’s all done in the best possible taste and without excessive wringing of the emotions, but the cardinal sins are still present. Writing as a science fiction fan, my prime objection to the new series (it was new once) was that it isn’t an SF series at all. It rattles out the conventional array of soap opera dilemmas and plants them on a starship, leavened with occasional outbursts of techno-babble, and some graphic effects that would have been the envy of Kirk and co. But the writers of the original “**Star Trek**” were preponderantly SF writers, some major names among them. This series could have been written by the “**Dallas**” or “**Dynasty**” folks, just throwing in the odd phaser-burst to remind us – hey, this is the 24th century! “**The New Generation**” converted Star Fleet into a social services agency - a caring, sharing Enterprise preoccupied, not with discovery and exploration, but with *interpersonal relations*. **Yakkk!!**

Moreover, greater technical slickness cannot disguise a total poverty of imagination about the future. Even leaving aside the alien species encountered (which were absurd enough in the first series, lord knows), the creators do not surprise us with *any* radical differences in human behaviour three long centuries hence. The family structure, the role of kids v parents, the physical appearance, the social manners – these are all entirely recognisable as 1980s American conventions. Naturally, women are treated on an impeccably equal footing, and naturally, black people (Klingons) are accepted without a hint of racial tension. Political correctness has wrought its majick on the human condition and here it is, in full flower, peace and harmony having won the day. But in reality, people of the 24th century *would* look and sound odd to us, they *would* have certain customs and habits that would baffle us today, just as our customs and habits would baffle the most intelligent observer from 1589. A common thread of humanity links us, of course, but where Roddenberry and his writers completely failed (and most other futuristic TV series besides) was in **over**-stressing that essential sameness, when they should have been intriguing and challenging us with the differences. There is no perceptible sex life in the 24th century – less even than in Captain Kirk's day – but this is not the series trying to be challenging (physical sex might *indeed* be obsolete by that date), it is the series making obeisance to the Family Values television agenda.

One of the most immensely irritating characters on the new-look Enterprise (and she's very much in evidence here, obviously) is Counsellor Deanna Troy, a supposed telepath who stuns us time and again with such insights as "I sense anger" or "You are concealing your pain". She has all the insight and clairvoyance of a Mystic Meg, and she's there right beside the captain on the bridge of a Federation starship, empathising and platitudinising at Warp speed. It's quite obvious why they put her there. It should be quite obvious why that was a bad idea.

When the *issue* at hand is grief and "closure", an empath will be in her agony aunt element, and so she is, advising Picard, Whorf and alien species alike how to aid in the boy's healing process. If I were Picard, I'd be booking her a place on every Away Team to come, in the hopes of a helpful land mine somewhere putting her out of my misery.

I missed the opening moments of the episode, and so did not catch the name of the actor playing Jeremy, but no doubt he'll be recognisable to American viewers from elsewhere. Other incidental episodes of the series similarly featured child players (more so than did the first series), but the central boy character of Wesley was inexplicably given to an 18-year old actor, who is then addressed and patronised by captain and crew as though he were a boy of 12. What can you do with a series like that? Well, just ignore it, that seems the best policy.

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