



# Home Janeway...Naked...In a Tub

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A song runs through my mind as I contemplate a question about Star Trek: Voyager. Sing it to the tune of the theme of the TV show "Cops":

*Dull boys  
Dull boys  
Don't they make you snooze  
Voyager's main men  
Don't do IT for you*

Why is it, I wondered, that a show which so blatantly sells itself as an exercise in testosterone poisoning (see ANY Trailer Talk) has the most dull leading men in recent history?

They've established the women as vibrant characters from day one. Janeway (who is NOT crazy - see issue 2) is portrayed as a brilliant scientist, skilled diplomat, fearless leader of Starfleet officers, sexy lady (see "Janeway is Hot" - issue 4), and just general all around kick butt one-hell-of-a-woman character. She's constantly being discussed in the newsgroups in some way, there are many TV interviews of the actress who portrays her (Kate Mulgrew), *TV Guide* has had several articles about Janeway and Mulgrew is a big hit at any con she appears at.

Seven is a no brainer. She was a major thing before the first time Jeri Ryan (the actress who portrays her) ever stepped on the sound stage to film an episode. Heck, just seeing Seven walk down a corridor is a vibrant experience for the audience, ya know?

B'Elanna Torres (Roxanne Dawson) had the greatest potential, in my opinion, of any of the minor characters to be utterly fascinating and endlessly entertaining. Not only did that not happen, but she rarely shows up at all in an episode for more than one or two throwaway lines. She may have even fewer episodes devoted to her character than Tuvok. BUT, what is the word probably most often used to describe Torres? "Fiery!" I dunno about you, but that doesn't evoke the feeling of a dull character to me.

There's no question that the women, Janeway, Seven and B'Elanna are vibrant, dynamic characters. If there's a big gun to be hefted, it's going to be them. If there's a brainstorm to let loose, it'll come from them. How often have we seen Janeway strip down to her sweaty tank top, kicking butt and taking names? Or B'Elanna stripped down to her tank top, wrestling an engineering problem to the ground?

(Mmmmmm. . .tough women in sweaty tanks. . .stop! Got. To. Get. Back. To. Subject. . .)

Okay, onto the men of Voyager. Janeway's first officer, Chakotay, is played by Robert Beltran. What does Chakotay do as senior executive officer of a Federation Starship? He stands patiently on the bridge at Janeway's side and does what she says (mostly). He brings reports into her ready room. He sometimes trades quips with Paris. (Dorky, forgettable quips.) He goes on away missions and takes home videos (In the Flesh). Are we to the exciting part yet?

In the newsgroups, he is often referred to as "Wood Boy" and "Chuckles". Neither is a term of endearment, and the terms are used by both gay and straight viewers. The first term, I believe, is a reference to a negative audience opinion concerning the actor's expressive nature - like that of a cigar store Indian. I'm not sure where "Chuckles" came from, but I'm speculating the second half of the phrase would be "The Clown". Beltran seems like a nice guy, from what I've read in the con reports, and I've also read that away from Voyager he's an accomplished actor.

Although, consider the end of Unimatrix Zero. What depth of feeling was shown when, after losing Janeway, Tuvok and Torres to the Borg - The Borg! Chakotay hates the Borg! - he tells Paris to turn around and run away? Did anyone go, "Ooooh," or "Aaaaah"? Did anyone do more than briefly raise an eyebrow and mutter, "Huh. Wonder how Janeway gets out of this one next year." Remember the last time we saw a starship captain assimilated by the Borg? Did the hair stand up your neck like it did mine when Riker uttered the last line of that season?: "Fire."

So why is Chakotay bland? I don't think it's all Beltran's fault because . . .well, take a look at the other guys.

For all the setting up of Tom Paris as a galactic Bad Boy, he's settled into couch potato wedded bliss. Much has been made of the acoustical nature of B'Elanna's sex life with Paris, but we've never seen anything onscreen between them beyond something more closely resembling siblings. (I mean, come on! We've seen Torres and Chakotay in bed, but not Torres and Paris?) When his video game crashes, Arachnia (archly played by Janeway) saves the day. Yeah, that's real he-man stuff. ("Mommy! Mommy! My toy broke!")

Harry Kim is a likable fellow, though six years later he's still a boyish ensign. How? He's the only one of the lot who sleeps around. But doesn't A Look from Janeway still melt him like a puddle on the floor?

Tuvok is Vulcan. It goes without saying he's boring. He might have managed fascinating, like Spock, but that never happened.

When did the men of Voyager lose it? I think it began with Chakotay in the episode Resolutions, where he and Janeway are stranded, alone on the Delta Quadrant equivalent of a desert isle, with all the amenities of home. The first thing he does is build his captain a bathtub so she can soak away her cares. The first thing she washes off is him, apparently. Picture it: Janeway. . .naked. . .in a tub. Are you enjoying that as much as I am? Well then you're enjoying it more than Chakotay did. Anyone who can give up that vision with merely an embarrassed look is a total loser, in my book, and I think that's how the Voyager fans began to feel about him, too.

Don't get me wrong, I don't dislike these guys. But I think they're boring. It doesn't even matter why - whether it's the writers or producers or actors. . .whatever. If there's a scene where Chakotay, Paris, Kim & Tuvok are talking, fighting, even mud wrestling, I'll be watching the women characters standing nearby because they'll be more interesting.

So could it be the lesbian thing, I wondered? Maybe I was just being overly biased. Recently there was a discussion on a mailing list comprised mostly of bi-sexual and lesbian women, most of them at least a decade younger than me (sigh). We were talking about men we find sexy who - theoretically - floats our boat. The lucky skippers ended up being two types: butch and femme. Big shock there, huh? Lesbians tended to prefer the butch guys, like The Marlboro Man and Harrison Ford, while the bi-sexual women tended to prefer more "feminine" men, like Cary Elwes (Princess Bride) and Leonardo DiCaprio. The discussion was both enthusiastic and positive. . .no guy bashing to be found. (Man, the lesbian times, they have changed since I was a pup.)

On Voyager, the equivalent would be Chakotay - definitely butch - and Kim

- not quite femme, but more effeminate. So, these are the kind of guys we would be most interested in sexually if we were so inclined, right grrrls? Grrrls? Grrrls!! Wake up!

To test my theory that it isn't just because we're lesbians and bi-sexual women that we find Wood Boy (et al) no fun to watch, I used this article as an excuse to meet with one of my favorite people for lunch and quiz her about the subject (and gossip and other such fun talk as well, of course). The following is a much cleaned up version of that talk:

**Alternative Quadrant:** On behalf of all the readers of the AQ, thank you for talking to us today.

**Straight Friend:** No problem. It's a cool subject, and hey, I get a free lunch out of it.

**AQ:** Really? Who's paying?

**SF:** \*significant look\*

**AQ:** Oh! Right, then. \*checking wallet\* Okay, I think we should have some basic questions to start. . .you know, establish some parameters since the readers don't know you. Ready?

**SF:** Shoot.

**AQ:** Do you watch TV on a regular basis?

**SF:** TV and sleep are my favorite pastimes. Some shows let me combine the two.

**AQ:** What shows are your favorites?

**SF:** I like fantasy and sci-fi shows, mysteries sometimes, the occasional sitcom. Favorites include Early Edition, Now and Again (which the rotten network cancelled), Xena (but only occasionally nowadays), X-Files (monster of the week, not mytharc episodes), Poirot mysteries, Columbo mysteries, and Frasier.

**AQ:** Except for the first two, you like some good stuff.(SF: \*raspberry\*) What are some of your favorite lech objects from these shows?

**SF:** Lech objects?

**AQ:** Yeah, who "floats your boat"?

**SF:** I really used to enjoy Saturday nights when Early Edition and The Pretender were back to back; I called it my "studmuffin" line up. And I love Mitch Pileggi on the X-Files.

**AQ:** Especially if it's Skinner in his skivvies. \*snicker\*

**SF:** You got it! Hey, I'm all for eye candy, but if the character's intelligence, kindness, integrity, or sense of humor touches me, then I can be very attracted to some very ordinary looking actors. For example I thought Jonathan Banks, who played Vinnie's supervisor on "Wiseguy", was tremendously attractive - and he's a balding, snub-nosed little guy in wire-rim glasses. The character he played was emotionally complex, cunning, courageous, wry...in short, beautifully written.

**AQ:** Ookay. I think I've heard enough on that subject. Do you watch Voyager?

**SF:** Yes, although that is sometimes one of the shows that combines both my favorite pastimes!

**AQ:** What do you think of the male characters?

**SF:** Are there male characters on that show??? Hmm. I do remember a couple of actors standing around...those must be them.

**AQ:** Can you even name them?

**SF:** Sure, I can do that. I'm a fan of the show. There's Chakotay, Kim, Paris, and the Doc. I like the Doc a lot, though I wouldn't say he "floats my boat".

**AQ:** Tuvok?

**SF:** Oh no! I completely forgot him! How embarrassing. Let's face it: as far as eye candy, for me they don't measure up. My quick test: if he took his shirt off, would I go "oh yeah!" or "oh yuck!" Kim still has baby fat; Paris looks like one of those skinny, pasty-skinned guys without a hair on his chest; and Chakotay...well, I can only hope that shirt is painted on, because I don't even want to go there imaginatively. I will admit, I do have a soft spot for the Doctor, because I've got a thing for bald guys. And as far as emotional complexity and depth to attract me, to

think "here's a guy I'd want to share some pillow talk with," sorry, it just isn't there. Kim is a baby; Paris acts like a baby; and Chakotay has all the charm of a paperweight and just about as much impact on the plotlines. Again, the Doctor is ahead of the pack, having more screen time and more interesting issues to cope with as a hologram, but he's a testy little cuss most of the time, and that clipped, pedantic delivery he generally uses is not cuddly.

**AQ:** Do you have any idea why the guys are so dull? Do you even think the guys are dull? Maybe I'm seeing ghosts, here, ya know?

**SF:** I don't think you're seeing ghosts. They ARE dull. The women who think they aren't dull are probably dull, too! And it's a very interesting question to ask: why? What makes a dull character, and why should a writer/producer/director make those choices to create a dull character? And from a gender perspective, why make the male characters here dull and the female characters not dull?

**AQ:** Well what do we know about the guys?

**SF:** Not bloody much. Chakotay used to show a spiritual side, but they even managed to make that part of him dull as dirt and eventually the makers of the show dropped that. Kim plays the. . .what, the clarinet?

**AQ:** Yeah, catchy tunes, mostly.

**SF:** \*snort\*

**AQ:** Not much character building with the guys.

**SF:** No, there hasn't been. There's no angst, no real hardships for them. Heck, they're all good buddies now, even though they were originally intended to be at each other's throats for various reasons.

**AQ:** Have we considered that they may have been made boring on purpose because Janeway's a girl?

**SF:** Come again?

**AQ:** Well, maybe they thought she couldn't hold her own against guys, and they wanted to build up this first female Captain, and they ended up doing it at the expense of the guys.

**SF:** Oh, that is such a hack choice! How can they create this lovely strong woman character and then not test her by playing her off other strong characters!

\*much ranting about TPTB\*

\*much soothing down of the interviewee on the part of the interviewer\*

**AQ:** So, we can safely conclude you think that that would be a stupid thing to do.

**SF:** Don't get me started again.

**AQ:** Moving on. . . Is there any "chemistry" between any of the men and women characters?

**SF:** \*momentary blank look\* None that I've ever noticed. Even B'Elanna and Tom Paris are boring together, and they're supposed to be a couple. Forget about Chakotay and Janeway, though I did for a while think they might be neat together. Did you see "Resolutions" the other day?

**AQ:** \*laughing\* Yeah, and I'll have a few things to say about it in the column. Don't ask, cause you don't want to hear it.

**SF:** I think that, historically, Voyager has had a dearth of bad guys for anyone to play off of. That could be a contributing factor to the problem.

**AQ:** That's a good point. How can characters be interesting if they don't have anything exciting to do? Let's see. . .there were the Kazon and the Malox.

\*much laughing about the "dire evilness" of the dumbass Kazon\*

**SF:** Malon, not Malox. They were icky, but not evil or threatening. Were there even any other bad guys? I think Original Trek is the only show to come up with memorable, dangerous-seeming bad guys.

**AQ:** Next Generation had the Borg.

**SF:** Oh, and they're scary now. Does Janeway get threatened with a weekend of "Borg Club Med" next?

**AQ:** How about the Vidiians?

**SF:** Yeah! They were really scary. But they're long gone, now.

**AQ:** They only wanted Torres, anyway. Even the Vidiians didn't want the guys!

**SF:** What does that say about the worth of their parts?

**AQ:** \*shocked totally into silence by this kind of talk from her friend\*

**SF:** I'm sorry to say this, but it's getting late.

**AQ:** Yeah, I have to go back and pretend to work, too. So, summing up, we've decided that the Voyager guys **are** dull, and it's more the fault of the producers of the show (writers and directors) than the actors themselves, though they're not entirely without blame.

**SF:** That's right. I think the list would go, one, lack of good backstory, two, they don't do anything interesting, three, they either have no relationships or their relationships are boring, four, there's no conflict either amongst themselves or with outside forces and five, I just can't relate to them, personally.

**AQ:** Did we cover that last one?

**SF:** No, but I threw it in anyway as I thought of it.

**AQ:** You are too smart for me.

**SF:** Yes, aren't I?

\*much girl giggling for a moment\*

**AQ:** Thanks again for talking to us today.

**SF:** You're quite welcome.

So there you have it, everyone. The guys of Voyager are boring, and it's no one's fault and everyone's fault.

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