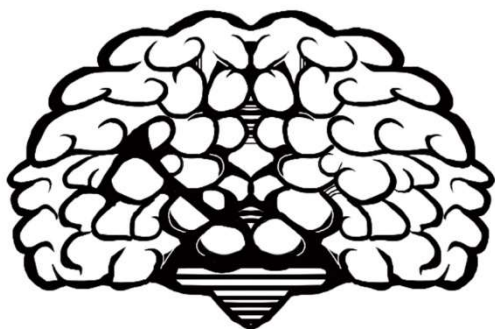


The Gold Archive #3
SPOCK'S BRAIN



By Nick Joy

THE GOLD ARCHIVE

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CHAPTER 3: THE THEISS TITILLATION THEORY

Dressed to Thrill

One of the problems with *Spock's Brain* is that the alien female (Eymorg) costumes don't hit the mark. Before examining why they're impractical, too obvious, too sexualised and parodic, we should contextualise what had gone before to bring the show up to this point, and indeed why the costumes had been so much better.

Ask someone to break down the characteristics of a typical **TOS** episode and it's likely to include 'alien women in sexy costume' or some similar variation in there. These exotic vestments were courtesy of the series' costume designer William 'Bill' Ware Theiss, who would fulfil this role for the series' three season run and make them an essential ingredient of the series.

William Shatner would observe that 'even within our first handful of episodes, Theiss had begun his series-long habit of keeping our guest actresses chilly... and nearly naked.'¹ The effectiveness is put down to what would be known as:

'the "Theiss Titillation Theory". According to Bill's theory, the degree to which a costume is considered sexy is directly dependent upon how accident-prone it appears to be... if it [the bikini] looks as if it might suddenly slip and something is in danger of accidental disclosure, then it suddenly becomes terribly titillating and sexy.'²

¹ Shatner, *Star Trek Memories*, p86.

² Whitfield and Roddenberry, *The Making of Star Trek*, p360.

One frequently cited example is Leslie Parrish's revealing pink chiffon outfit for *Who Mourns for Adonais?* where the front of the dress is held up by the weight of the train. Sherry Jackson's crossover halterneck and trouser combo worn by android Andrea in *What Are Little Girls Made Of?* is another example of the designer's ingenuity. 'Bill and Gene Roddenberry and myself... all three of us were designing that outfit. It was like some mechanical engineering job to make it work.'³

TOS gained a reputation for using revealing costumes in its shows, Theiss' costume designs permitted the actresses to show as much leg, breast and skin as possible, while attempting to adhere to the dictates of NBC's Broadcast Standards Department, the network censors.'⁴

After Theiss designed the costume for Vina as an Orion slave in *The Cage*, the network provided the feedback of 'too erotic'.⁵ One person who would show particular interest in the female costumes for the show's pilot was Gene Roddenberry, whose 'penchant for unusual female costume design was fulfilled as he personally checked out the skimpy, diaphanous costumes worn by Susan Oliver'⁶ Nichelle Nicholls reflected on Roddenberry's costume preferences. He 'liked beautifully gowned women, and he reflected that and insisted on it. You saw the little openings here, there, the cleavage there, they were dressed to the hilt with grey paint. They were still very sensuous wardrobes for women.'⁷ Given all of this, and the fact that Theiss had

³ StarTrek.com Staff, 'Catching up with TOS Android Andrea'.

⁴ Solow and Justman, *Inside Star Trek*, p28.

⁵ Solow and Justman, *Inside Star Trek*, p xviii.

⁶ Solow, and Justman, *Inside Star Trek*, p39.

⁷ Unknown, 'Interview: Nichelle Nichols – Your Costume'.

set the 'alien female costume' template with Vina from the outset in *The Cage*, what is so wrong with the Eymorg costumes?

At the most basic level, they lack credibility; they just don't make sense. Consider for a moment how the Eymorg society operates. The viewer is not given a lot to work with in the transmitted episode, though, as discussed in chapter 5, previous drafts shed more light on this female-led civilisation. The Eymorgs (female) lure the Morgs (male) down to their underground home by enticing them into a cave that contains food, furs, clubs, knives, hatchets and tools. When entering the cave, the Morgs spring the trap, the cave descends, and the occupants are overcome by previously-captured Morgs who are controlled by pain belts. These new captives are subdued, given pain belts too and then encouraged to breed with their Eymorg mistresses to keep the race going. We don't see any babies or children or find out what happens to the male babies, and the whole process is repeated when further propagation is required.

So why are they dressed so provocatively? They don't lure the Morgs themselves, they rely on tools and food. There's no obvious reason for these women to be dressed like this, in these impractical, and presumably uncomfortable costumes, other than to serve as window dressing to the story. Is there a lesbian subject here – that the clothing has been designed by and for other women to enjoy? The clothes would also need a degree of skill for their production. Presumably the Eymorgs periodically download this knowledge from the Teacher when clothing stocks run low?

The reality is more likely aligned to the wish of adding some sex appeal to the story and by upping the 'pain and delight' aspects of these dominant women by making them look like dominatrices. The

thigh-high leather boot has long been associated with the dominatrix, her whip and bondage gear here being replaced by wrist and belt gadgets that dispense intense pain.

The characters are objectivised as sex objects, dressed up in a male's version of what they think the femmes should look like. Gene Roddenberry saw no harm in this treatment of women: 'I think there's nothing wrong with using women as sex symbols... as long as that's not the **only** way you're using women. If you're using them to the exclusion of their minds and attitudes and abilities and so on, that would be different.'⁸

Marj Dusay, who played Eymorg leader Kara was thrilled with the role.

'I remember reading the [casting] breakdown and seeing, "She runs an underground bevy of women who control men with pleasure and pain." I thought, "Whoop-de-doo, this is for me!"' The clothes did present certain challenges, though. 'When they fitted that costume on me, I said, "Oh, my Lord!" I couldn't sit in it, because if I sat down, the straps on the dress would collapse and it wouldn't look right. So I was never shot sitting down.'⁹ Those costumes were made for stomping, not sitting!' As an alien queen, 'I had all my drones with me, all these other nymphettes running around in these little costumes, but I was the leader of the band. I thought that halfway through the episode we should have broken into a

⁸ Sackett, *Letters to Star Trek*, p65.

⁹ In fact, Kara **is** shown sitting down during the episode, though behind a desk.

rock number, because we looked like a Sixties girl group!¹⁰

This highlights another issue – the clothing doesn't look credible because it's more akin to what a 60s girl band, singer or backing singers might wear on stage. It's not a stretch to imagine Nancy Sinatra singing 'These Boots are Made for Walking' (1965) while wearing Kara's boots, or even **The Avengers'** Honor Blackman singing about these 'Kinky Boots' (1964) with her **Avengers** co-star Patrick Macnee. It's partly because they are so theatrical and overstated that these items pull us out of the episode's already-fragile credibility.

To be clear, these weren't the most provocative female fashions seen on **TOS**, but they do feel like some of the least subtle. This combination is not glamorous or elegant, it's fantasy fetish wear.

¹⁰ Jankiewicz, Pat, 'I Stole Spock's Brain', *Starlog* #51.

BIOGRAPHY

Nick has been professionally writing about **Star Trek** and TV science fiction since 1995, with his features, reviews and interviews published in print or web versions of *Star Trek Magazine*, *Sci-Fi Bulletin*, *Starburst*, *DreamWatch*, *TV Zone*, *Starlog*, *Cult Times* and *bbc.co.uk*. By his latest count, he has interviewed over 60 cast members and guest stars from the world of **Star Trek**, including Leonard Nimoy, Patrick Stewart, Brent Spiner and all of the main cast of **Voyager**. Nick is also a regular contributor to *Film Score Monthly* and wrote the soundtracks chapter for *The Billboard Encyclopaedia of Music*. He still owns his Mego **Star Trek** action figures from the 1970s, though McCoy's leg is now held in place by Sellotape.

He believes that he has watched *Spock's Brain* more times than any sane human should have to. He can be found on Twitter @NickJJoy.