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Conspiracy (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*)

"**Conspiracy**" is the twenty-fifth and penultimate episode of the first season of the syndicated American science fiction television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, originally aired on May 9, 1988, in the United States. The premise was conceived by the show's creator Gene Roddenberry in a single sentence overview titled "The Assassins", being expanded into a thirty-page story by Robert Sabaroff. From this, the teleplay was produced by Tracy Tormé and the episode directed by Cliff Bole.

Set in the 24th century, the series follows the adventures of the crew of the Starfleet starship USS *Enterprise-D*. Following a meeting with a fellow captain, the strange behavior of high-ranking officers leads Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) and the crew of the *Enterprise* to uncover a conspiracy of senior Starfleet officers possessed by parasitic aliens who are preparing to invade the United Federation of Planets.

Numerous make-up effects were created by make-up supervisor Michael Westmore, including an exploding head using raw meat. There were concerns by producers that some of the effects were too graphic, but after a viewing by a staff member's son, they decided to broadcast it uncut. The episode has subsequently been included in some best episode lists of the series, and won one of three Primetime Emmy Awards for *The Next Generation*'s first season. Controversial when originally broadcast, it was initially banned from broadcast in the United Kingdom, and required a warning before airing in Canada.

"Conspiracy"

Star Trek: The Next Generation episode



Dexter Remmick's host body and queen parasite are destroyed by Picard and Riker. Such scenes made the broadcast of the episode controversial.

Episode no.	Season 1 Episode 25
Directed by	Cliff Bole
Story by	Robert Sabaroff
Teleplay by	Tracy Tormé
Featured music	Dennis McCarthy
Cinematography by	Edward R. Brown
Production code	125
Original air date	May 9, 1988

Guest appearance(s)
<div><div>■ Henry Darrow – Admiral Savar</div><div>■ Ward Costello – Admiral Gregory Quinn</div><div>■ Robert Schenkkan – Lt. Cdr. Dexter Remmick</div></div>

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- Ray Reinhardt – Admiral Aaron
- Jonathan Farwell – Captain Walker Keel
- Michael Berryman – Captain Rixx
- Ursaline Bryant – Captain Tryla Scott

Plot

While the *Enterprise* is en route to Pacifica on a scientific mission, Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart) receives a highly confidential message from an old friend, Captain Walker Keel (Jonathan Farwell) of the USS *Horatio*. Keel refuses to discuss his concerns, even though the frequency he is using is supposed to be a secure channel, and insists on a face-to-face meeting. Once they arrive at Dytallix B for this secret meeting, the crew discover the *Horatio* and two other Federation ships already present. Picard beams alone to the surface and is met by Captain Keel and the other captains. Keel reports strange orders from Starfleet headquarters and what he implies are suspicious deaths of Starfleet officers, and expresses concern of a conspiracy. Picard refuses to accept this without proof, but Keel warns him to remain wary. When the captain returns to the *Enterprise*, he is challenged by Counselor Troi (Marina Sirtis) about keeping his contact with Keel secret. Picard is skeptical about the conspiracy, but says that he trusts his old friend completely. The *Enterprise* resumes its previous journey. Picard has Lt. Commander Data (Brent Spiner) review all orders issued by Starfleet Command in the past six months. While the ship is still on its way to Pacifica, a disturbance is detected in nearby space. Upon investigating this, the *Enterprise* discovers a mass of debris that surely must be the shattered remains of the *Horatio*. Data completes his study and finds several strange orders from the senior levels of Starfleet. Picard informs his senior staff of the conspiracy theory, and orders the *Enterprise* to Earth.

As it approaches Earth, the *Enterprise* receives no response from Starfleet Command. Eventually, a transmission is received from a trio of Starfleet admirals: Savar (Henry Darrow), Arron (Ray Reinhardt) and Quinn (Ward Costello), an old friend of Picard's who recently made an inspection of the *Enterprise* (in "Coming of Age"). They are surprised by the *Enterprise*'s presence, but invite Captain Picard and Commander Riker (Jonathan Frakes) to dinner. Quinn requests to beam aboard the *Enterprise* for a tour. Captain Picard recalls being warned by Quinn about some kind of threat to Starfleet when the admiral was last aboard. Upon Quinn's arrival, Picard discusses matters with him and Quinn seems strangely evasive; Picard comes to believe that he is an impostor, or under some sort of alien influence. After warning Riker of his concerns and asking him to watch Quinn, the captain beams down to Starfleet headquarters to attend the dinner. On arrival, Picard is greeted by the other two Admirals who are accompanied by Quinn's assistant, Lt. Commander Remmick (Robert Schenkkan). Meanwhile, Riker visits Quinn's quarters on the *Enterprise* and questions him about

what he has in the small box he brought with him. Quinn tells Riker of a superior life form within the box. Riker attempts to leave but Quinn throws Riker across the room. A security team arrives to subdue Quinn, who is able to withstand a great amount of phaser-fire before he collapses. The ship's chief medical officer, Dr. Crusher (Gates McFadden), finds a small protrusion on the back of his neck. She discovers that a bug-like parasite has wrapped its tendrils around the stem of Quinn's brain^[1] and is controlling him. Dr. Crusher warns Picard of this incident when he contacts the ship in private. He is advised that the infected person can only be stopped by a phaser set to 'kill': the captain points out that he is unarmed. He then has no choice but to go in to dinner with his three superiors.

A bowl of living larvae is served at the meal, to Picard's disgust. He attempts to leave, only to find Riker blocking his way. The commander appears to be controlled by the parasite Quinn brought to the *Enterprise*. When the others see a prosthetic protrusion on the back of Riker's neck, he is accepted as one of them and allowed to dine. They reveal that the parasites are seeking to take over Starfleet, using humanoids as hosts. When he is about to put a handful of the larvae in his mouth, Riker suddenly produces a phaser and fires on one of the Admirals. Picard picks up a fallen weapon and the two *Enterprise* officers subdue the infected, causing parasites to leave the hosts and flee. One of the parasites scurries under a closed door and Picard and Riker follow it. They find Remmick ingesting the parasite to join several others inside him. Picard and Riker fire upon Remmick, destroying his body but freeing a giant parasite; the two continue to fire until it is destroyed.

Later, Dr. Crusher reports that the other parasites, including the one inside Quinn, have shriveled up and died, as they were unable to survive without the mother-creature that had been inhabiting Remmick. As they help to settle matters with Starfleet headquarters, they find that before Remmick was killed, he had sent a signal to a distant quadrant of the galaxy. The signal is thought to be a homing beacon.

Production

Gene Roddenberry originated the idea for the episode in a single-sentence proposal entitled "The Assassins". Robert Sabaroff expanded this idea to thirty pages, but his version was seen as too expensive. Tracy Tormé was then given the job of rewriting it, but some producers thought the new version was too dark until Roddenberry saw it and endorsed the new version.^[2] In one of the original versions, it was a faction within Starfleet who were conspirators rather than alien parasites, but Roddenberry did not like showing Starfleet itself in such a dark manner.^[2] *Wired* magazine has suggested that the premise was based on the Iran–Contra affair.^[3]

The director of the episode, Cliff Bole, was a school friend of makeup supervisor Michael Westmore.^[4] The scene with Remmick at the end of the episode was added in post-production, as it was originally scripted to have Riker and Picard come face to face with a full-sized mother creature.^[2] The part where the parasite enters Remmick's throat reportedly took many takes because the bulging effect was made by Westmore blowing into air bladders under a false neck, and Bole kept trying to make Westmore hyperventilate from the exertion.^[4] The parasites themselves were created by Makeup & Effects Laboratories from a design by Rick Sternbach.^[5] A mold of Paul Newman's face was filled with raw meat and then blown up to create the effect used when Picard and Riker fire on Remmick, but both Rick Berman and Peter Lauritson were concerned that it was too graphic.

Dan Curry invited his six-year-old son to watch the episode in order to test how children would react to it; the boy reportedly liked it so much that he suggested the creation of a Remmick action figure whose head would blow up by pressing a button. This resulted in Berman deciding to air the episode uncut with the full sequence included.^[4]

Several props and effects seen in the episode were reproduced from the *Star Trek* movies, including the shots of Earth and Spacedock One and the painting used of Starfleet Command. The doors to the room where dinner is served were later reused from season 2 onwards on the set for Ten-Forward.^[6] The episode also features two first appearances; the Ambassador class starship was mentioned for the first time (the *Horatio* was a member of this class, as was the *Enterprise-C*) and it also marks the first time that a Bolian had been seen on *Star Trek*,^[6] the species having been named after the episode's director.^[7] Although the parasites never appeared again on screen in any *Star Trek* series, they reappear in the Deep Space Nine relaunch novels, where they are revealed to be mutated Trill symbiotes.^[7]

Reception

"Conspiracy" aired in broadcast syndication within the United States during the week commencing May 13, 1988. It received Nielsen ratings of 9.4, reflecting the percentage of all households watching the episode during its timeslot. This was a decrease of 0.3 ratings points from the previous episode, "We'll Always Have Paris" and was less than the 10.2 rating received by the following episode, "The Neutral Zone".^[8] Due to the nature of the content, a warning was aired before "Conspiracy" was screened in Canada.^[3] It was initially banned by the BBC in the United Kingdom,^[4] but was later aired on BBC Two in an edited form.^{[3][9]} The episode was nominated alongside "Coming of Age" for Best Makeup at the 40th Primetime Emmy Awards, winning the award, one of three Emmys won by the show that year.^[10]

Several reviewers re-watched *Star Trek: The Next Generation* after the end of the series. Keith DeCandido for Tor.com described the episode as "a nasty episode that doesn't quite cohere into the level of nasty it could",^[7] but that the series "doesn't do horror/action all that often, and it serves as a good change of pace if nothing else".^[7] He gave "Conspiracy" a score of four out of ten.^[7] Zack Handlen, who reviewed the episode for *The A.V. Club*, thought that while "Conspiracy" was a "hard episode to forget", it was not quite as good as he remembered and did not quite "fit" with the rest of the season.^[11] He thought that certain parts of the plot were "idiotic", and the Admirals reminded him of a "Bond villain convention".^[11] He gave the episode an overall grade of B, writing, "fingers crossed that next time we encounter a danger this sinister, the writers know how to handle it".^[11]

"Conspiracy" was included as an honorable mention in a list of the best episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* by Mike Antonucci of the *San Jose Mercury News*.^[12] It was also included in a list of the best and worst episodes by Scott Thill at *Wired* magazine as one of the best, describing the reactions to the episode as "polarizing", and suggesting that "Conspiracy" might be worthy of becoming a plot in a future film by J. J. Abrams.^[3] *Total Film* also suggested the episode as a potential plot for the film that would become *Star Trek Into Darkness*, and described it as "easily one of the greatest episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*".^[13] In 2012, David Brown of *Radio Times* called "Conspiracy" "a definite high point" in the first season and

included it on a list of *The Next Generation*'s greatest moments.^[9]

WIRED magazine ranked "Conspiracy" as one of the best of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in a 2012 review.^[14] They note a creative plot involving a threat to the Federation.^[14]

In 2016, *Radio Times* rated the explosion of Remmick as the 50th greatest scene in *Star Trek*.^[15] In 2016, The Hollywood Reporter rated the episode as the 99th best episode of all *Star Trek* episodes up to that time.^[16] In 2019, Ars Technica noted that episode made them feel like the Enterprise D was operating in a larger universe, the stop-motion special effects sequence, and the legacy of a secret conspiracy in Starfleet.^[17] In 2017, the episode was noted as featuring scary and/or eerie *Star Trek* content.^[18]

In 2017, *Den of Geek* ranked "Conspiracy" as one of top 25 "must watch" episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.^[19] They also note that this episode's plot is foreshadowed by the prior episode "Coming of Age".^[19]

In 2018, *TheGamer* ranked this one of the top 25 creepiest episodes of all *Star Trek* series.^[20]

Home media release

The episode was released on VHS cassette in the U.S. on May 26, 1993.^[21] The episode was later included on the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* season one DVD box set, released in March 2002.^[22] "Conspiracy" was released as part of the season one Blu-ray set on July 24, 2012.^[23]

Notes

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External links

- "Conspiracy" (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0708691/>) on IMDb
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 - "Conspiracy" (<http://www.startrek.com/startrek/view/library/episodes/TNG/detail/68356.html>) at StarTrek.com
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