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Desire, Therapy, and 'Play' on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s Holodeck

MATTHEW LEGGATT

Abstract

In so many ways the vision of the future imagined in the *Star Trek* universe seems painfully distant. Perhaps, the closest the show has come to anticipating the world as it is today, however, can be found in its depiction of the holodeck as the crew's primary space for leisure. This article focuses on episode 21, season 3 of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, 'Hollow Pursuits', in which we meet Reginald Barclay, a nervous engineer who becomes addicted to the ship's virtual reality simulator. Taking its cue from Janet Murray's book, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, writing on the Enterprise's leisure technology has tended to explore the holodeck's role as a theatrical story-telling device. However, in 'Hollow Pursuits', I argue, Barclay's use of the software resonates far more with its closest comparator today: virtual reality videogaming. For Barclay the holodeck blurs the line between the virtual world and reality in ways that make other crew members uncomfortable. In doing so, as this paper demonstrates, it also reveals flaws in *The Next Generation*'s utopia particularly in relation to desire, addiction, therapy, and 'play'.

Keywords

Holodeck; virtual reality; *Star Trek*; *The Next Generation*; AI; videogames; deepfakes; utopia

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Although there are other 'games' seen across the *Star Trek* franchise—such as three-dimensional chess, poker, and various wargame exercises—most frequently when the crew of the Enterprise play together it is on the virtual reality simulator known as the holodeck. Considering that *The Next Generation* (TNG) first aired in 1987 as home computing was just starting to become more affordable—to put that into context, the first PlayStation console wasn't on the market until 1991—its liberal use of a highly sophisticated AI VR software to provide a regular source of distraction and entertainment for the crew is striking. Similar software had appeared earlier, most famously in the 1982 movie *Tron,* starring Jeff Bridges and directed by Steven Lisberger, and even in a 1974 episode of the *Star Trek* animated series called 'The

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Practical Joker' (Reed, 1974), but TNG made the holodeck seem like a natural part of its world, rather than a scientific marvel. While the holodeck has become a staple of the *Star Trek* universe and has appeared as an object of study in several works of criticism spanning the franchise (cf. Murray, 2017, and Tallon & Walls, 2008, in particular), for reasons of scope, in this short article I explore its depiction in TNG only, focused through one episode in particular—season 3, episode 21, 'Hollow Pursuits' (written by Gene Roddenberry, Sally Caves, and Ronald D. Moore, and directed by Cliff Bole, 1990)—which I argue raises a number of questions about the technology and its use, both in *Star Trek*'s futuristic utopia and in our society today.

In her influential book *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, first published in 1997 and then updated twenty years later, Janet Murray describes the holodeck as "a utopian technology applied to the age-old art of storytelling" (2017, p. 17). Essentially an entertainment facility aboard the Enterprise (and seen in later series across other Federation ships and stations), the holodeck is part living narrative, part game: "a universal fantasy machine, open to individual programming" (Murray, 2017, p. 17). In TNG the holodeck is viewed as a leisure activity. Crew members 'take a trip' to, rather than 'play' in/on, the holodeck. This helps to explain why, even though from today's perspective the holodeck's closest comparator would be virtual reality videogaming, in Murray's time (as, indeed, with those creating TNG) what takes place on the holodeck reads as a kind of literary text. What is more, Murray sees the holodeck as offering a particular vision of the future of literary or narrative texts, one that is distinctly utopian and optimistic when seen against wider concerns regarding entertainment technologies. She asks what seems an important question: "Will the literature of Cyberspace be continuous with the literary traditions of the *Beowulf* poet, Shakespeare, and Charlotte Brontë as the *Star Trek* producers portray it, or will it be the dehumanizing and addictive sensation machine predicted by the dystopians?" (2017, p. 26). For the most part, Murray is right to see the holodeck as a kind of narrative machine. In TNG, most holodeck episodes—so called because the episode revolves around some sort of period escapade on the holodeck—seem to spring from literary, or faux-literary, resources. For example, Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart) plays out his fantasies of being a private investigator in the fictitious noir novels of 'Dixon Hill' across several episodes (season 1 episode 11, 'The Big Goodbye', Scanlan & Tormé 1988; season 2 episode 19, 'Manhunt', Bowman & Devereaux, 1989; season 4 episode 14, 'Clues', Landau & Arthurs, 1991; and the 1996 movie *First Contact*, Frakes, 1996), while Data (Brent Spiner) plays as Sherlock Holmes (season 2 episode 3, 'Elementary, Dear Data', Bowman & Lane; season 6 episode 12, 'Ship in a Bottle', Singer & Echevarria, 1993). But there are instances where the holodeck becomes a site for more interesting, albeit dubious, 'play' and where Murray's literary comparison breaks down. In the episode I focus on in this paper, for instance, the holodeck appears much closer to that "addictive sensation machine" she associates with the dystopian imagination, although I argue that the holodeck's use in 'Hollow Pursuits' *also* takes us closer to a utopian vision of the technology than other episodes generally manage.

In a piece in *Educational Technology* in the early 1990s, M. D. Roblyer (1993, p. 35) complained that despite the "phenomenal education and training possibilities" offered by *Star Trek*'s holodeck, the crew of the Enterprise use the technology primarily to take "a break". As TNG continued, however, this changed and the holodeck was increasingly used for training purposes: Lieutenant Worf, in particular, can be seen using the holodeck to run combat simulations across many episodes, and Geordi LaForge (LeVar Burton), the Enterprise's chief engineer, variously uses the technology to work through theoretical ideas. But in *Play in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction* (2025), I argue that, for the creators of TNG, the holodeck had another purpose entirely. The holodeck, as I see it, is often used as a vehicle for the show to humanize the utopians of the Enterprise and to let the audience see the crew act against more familiar backdrops. Building on Bernard Suits' famous philosophical designation of gaming in his 1978 book *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia,* in which he lays out what qualifies as the 'lusory spirit' required for play to be *genuine*, I note that the holodeck, "is rarely conceived of as a space of genuine play for the characters. Instead, it offers the creators a chance to *play with* familiar settings" (2025, p. 161). The crew of the Enterprise are clearly the hard-working utopians of myth and stereotype. Play and respite are often threatened with many episodes either beginning (or ending) with the promise of shore-leave, but this is always interrupted by the novum that prompts the episode (cf. season 3 episode 13, 'Captain's Holiday', Chalmers & Behr 1990, and season 4 episode 24, 'The Mind's Eye', Livingston & Echevarria, 1991, both of which involve characters in a trip to the pleasure planet Risa). Indeed, play is rarely directly visualized on screen for any great length of time. As Lwaxana Troi (Majel Barrett), Deanna's (Marina Sirtis) free-spirited mother, tells her daughter in episode 24 of season 3, 'Ménage à Troi' (Legato, Bronson & Sackett, 1990), life on board the Enterprise is "all business and no play". Instead of providing play, then, the holodeck provides contrast. Where in regular episodes we see 'familiar' characters in 'unfamiliar' settings, these same characters become 'defamiliarized' when we see them acting on the holodeck's periodized stage. This means that these attempts by the creators to humanize the crew members often fail. The members of the crew come across as even more alien in these familiar settings than they do onboard the Enterprise. This has the effect of making their utopia more concrete, but also of distancing it from the audience.

One exception to this, however, might be found in the 'Hollow Pursuits' episode, which sees its central character, Reginald Barclay (Dwight Schultz), using the holodeck in ways that conflict with the moderate 'utopian' values followed by the rest of the crew. To this extent, while Barclay is marginalized onboard the Enterprise, he is also genuinely humanized by the holodeck in ways that the other crew members are not. He experiences and uses the technology in ways that anticipate our own struggles with the use of virtual reality gaming today: particularly those which involve virtual reality as an expression of desire, a means of escape, that highlights therapeutic uses of the technology and, more troubling, that see it as a site of addiction and exploitation.

Hollow Pursuits

In 'Hollow Pursuits', we meet, for the first time, Lieutenant Reginald Barclay, a reoccurring character who goes on to appear in five episodes of TNG, the movie *Star Trek: First Contact* (Frakes, 1996), and six episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager* (Berman, Piller, & Taylor, 1995–2001). In the episode, Barclay exhibits some *unusual* behavior—at least, unusual by the standards set by the crew of the Enterprise. The very name 'Hollow Pursuits', speaks to *Star Trek*'s more general attitude toward play. In their chapter, 'Why Not Live in the Holodeck?', Philip Tallon and Jerry Walls write: "Imagine how dull an episode would be where the crew simply has an enjoyable time playing in the holodeck with no real conflict or difficulty" (2008, p. 256). This somewhat cynical take on the value of holodeck play draws on wider criticisms of utopias that seem to suggest that without 'conflict' life would be boring. The critics continue: "Might a safe world be similarly dull? If nothing serious was ever ultimately at stake, if we could *never* suffer, wouldn't our actions all seem a bit trivial?" (2008, p. 256). To justify this, they point to our interest in "holodeck gone bad" episodes, where the lives of the crew are on the line (2008, p. 256). But the need for such episodes might also point to one of the fundamental flaws of TNG's utopia: the lack of genuine play for those onboard. That when we find a crew member like Barclay who truly indulges in free play and the enacting of his private fantasies on the holodeck, he is shamed for it, to my mind at least, represents the limits of the Federation's utopia rather than its rightness.

'Hollow Pursuits' opens with Barclay causing a ruckus in Ten Forward, the Enterprise's bar and 'real-world' social venue. What is truly incredible about this scene is just how jarring it is for the audience who, given their familiarity with the general temperament of the crew, are likely to be startled by Barclay's outburst. First, in response to a reprimand from Geordi for Barclay's abandoning his post, Barclay pushes his superior officer over telling him to take his "holier-than-thou attitude and get out of [his] life" (Roddenberry & Bole, 1990, 00:30). Next, confronted by an onlooking Commander Riker (Jonathan Frakes), who accuses him of "insubordination", (00:44) Barclay drinks to the charge before putting the First Officer in a grapple: "Riker, you're nothing but a pretty mannequin in a fancy uniform" he says through gritted teeth. "If Picard has a problem with me, you tell him to come and talk to me himself" (00:59). Afterward, we see Barclay's real interest: A seductively dressed Deanna, who claims to be excited by his "confidence" and "arrogant resolve" (01:33). If we didn't know something was off from the outset, we certainly do now. Finally, a message comes through asking Barclay to report to one of the Cargo Bays. That's where the encounter ends with this intriguing new character telling the computer to "save program", making it clear that this was some kind of holodeck fantasy all along (02:02).

While Sebastian Stoppe asserts that "Barclay seems like a stranger in utopian space" (2022, p. 70), Tallon and Walls (2008, p. 250) suggest that "nearly anyone—especially Star Trek fans—can sympathize with Barclay's obsession with a fictional world". They

note a contrast between 'Hollow Pursuits' and a later episode, season 6 episode 12, 'Ship in a Bottle' (Singer & Tormé, 1988), which sees Picard, Data, and Barclay trapped on the holodeck as a frustrated simulation of Professor Moriarty (Daniel Davis) is rebooted and tries to engineer his escape from the holodeck. Whereas in 'Hollow Pursuits' we find Barclay doing everything he can to spend time there, so much so that he neglects his real-world duties to indulge his holodeck fantasies, in 'Ship in a Bottle', characters seek only to escape the holodeck. Tallon and Walls ask, "which is the more reasonable desire", to dream of escape from the "illusion" or to be "caught up in it" (2008, p. 250).

'Hollow Pursuits' relies on a general mischaracterization of virtual reality gaming that is embedded in the technology's very name. In practice, when we play using VR, we do so to escape reality altogether. Jenna Ng writes that,

> The dream of the Holodeck's "total immersion" thus modulates through the post-screen's alternative lens – a different order of immersion in the indiscernibility of the screen via fluid shifts in dimensions from the physical to the virtual, and vice versa. In this sense, the re-ordering of the virtual against the actual in such contextual terms also adjusts virtuality as escape and the overcoming of human limitations: not only might we need to re-think how we are escaping, but perhaps also from what are we doing so. (2021, p. 145)

The reality that we escape from invariably also includes us: in VR we escape from ourselves. This is exactly what Barclay does. On the holodeck he's assured, assertive, and dynamic. As a member of the crew, he's the opposite: uncertain, nervous, and passive. In some other respects, then, virtual reality gaming shares some similarities with various role-playing games, where the purpose isn't to play oneself, but often to play as all the things we'd like to be but are not. Even when one does play a version of oneself in such games, it is nearly always a heroic version of that self. In short, there is really nothing unusual, at least for us, in Barclay's power fantasies, so why then must the episode shame him for them?

Barclay, we're told by Riker, has a history of "seclusive tendencies" (07:42). Where both Geordi and Riker seek to have Barclay transferred as a result of his general poor performance—primarily his tardiness and, it would appear, his timid demeanor—Picard admonishes Geordi for not doing enough to integrate and support the struggling engineer. Like Picard, during a conversation with Geordi in Ten Forward, Guinan (Whoopi Goldberg), the ship's bartender, defends Barclay referring to him as "imaginative", clearly indicating that she has some knowledge of his illicit holodeck use. It's interesting, however, that Geordi, in response, tells her that "maybe he's in the wrong line of work". "You engineering types don't appreciate imagination?" Guinan asks. Geordi rejects this, falling back on an easy escape clause… "he just doesn't fit in here" (18:14). But like Picard, Guinan knows best. When Geordi, in his floundering attempts to explain his dislike for the man, reaches for the excuse

that "he's always late, the man's nervous, nobody wants to be around this guy", Guinan says that "if I felt that nobody wanted to be around me, I'd probably be late and nervous too" (19:18). Barclay is clearly a loner who struggles with general social interactions. As Geordi tries to get to know him better over a drink, he dismisses the Lieutenant's struggles as indicative that Barclay is "just shy", but Barclay's admission that "I am the guy who writes down things to remember to say when there's a party and then when he finally gets there he winds up alone, in the corner trying to look comfortable examining a potted plant", evocatively denotes that shyness is not an adequate description (23:59). Barclay, in fact, suffers from a form of social anxiety and awkwardness, for which the holodeck provides a therapeutic release.

It is, perhaps, the distinctly erotic nature of Barclay's fantasies, however, that make for uncomfortable viewing. Where seeing him upend the power dynamics on board the ship might have, in fact, made him a kind of anti-hero, seeing his use of Deanna's image to fulfil his sexual fantasies is a different matter. In the second holodeck scene, we witness what appears to be a counselling session between Barclay and Deanna but it soon becomes clear that it is another one of the lieutenant's fantasies. Deanna supports Barclay asking, "why [he's] so hard on himself", but soon after the pair embrace and kiss (12:02). In other holodeck episodes we see frontline characters engage in holographic romances. For example, Geordi falls for a holodeck recreation of warp theoretician Dr. Leah Brahms (Susan Gibney) in season 3 episode 6, 'Booby Trap' (Beaumont, Wagner & Roman, 1989)—which is also indirectly referenced in 'Hollow Pursuits'—as does Riker with Minuet (Carolyn McCormick) in season 1 episode 14, '1001001' (Lynch, Hurley & Lewin, 1988). But, crucially, these romances don't involve the recreation of individuals that the crew members know (in fact, Geordi is actually shamed for his use of the holodeck when he comes to meet the real Leah Brahms in season 4 episode 16 'Galaxy's Child' [Kolbe & Kartozian, 1991] and she rebuffs his clumsy advances). There is, thus, an issue of consent that is rendered particularly problematic in Barclay's use of the holodeck in 'Hollow Pursuits'.

'Hollow Pursuits' shows us the double-standards at work. Upon initially seeing copies of Picard, Geordi, and Data (i.e., the ship's senior brass) dressed as the three musketeers in another one of Barclay's holodeck fantasies, Riker is deeply troubled. He wants to shut the program down, but Deanna insists that the fantasy might give the group a better insight into what makes Barclay tick as they try to hunt him down to help resolve a technical problem with the ship's warp drive. Next, a belittling version of Riker appears to challenge the group, and the Commander is even more upset. To some extent, these versions of the crew are harmless. They allow Barclay to, as he puts it to Geordi, "blow off some steam" (22:59). But they are also subversive since they indirectly challenge the status and hierarchy onboard the Enterprise, even if they do so in a private capacity only. Given Riker is disturbed by the program *before* the replica of his own image appears, we can only assume that it is this challenge which he views as the cardinal sin of Barclay's holodeck fantasies—to some extent it is merely the dream that Barclay might, in fact, be superior in some sense to his

more senior colleagues that seems to draw Riker's ire. Such a dream might, in essence, be seen as utopian. For example, we might regard it as another version of Saturnalia, the Roman festival where, for a brief period only, hierarchies were upended with masters waiting on slaves. Next, however, as the group continue, they run into a recreation of Deanna as "the Goddess of Empathy". Although not sexually explicit, this image offers up more than a hint at the seductive potential of these representations. We've already seen Barclay passionately kissing another representation of Deanna and here she is dressed in a toga asking them to "cast off their inhibitions and embrace love…" (32:36). The 'real' Deanna goes from telling Riker that what they've seen shows a "healthy fantasy life" to immediately wanting to shut down this image (32:22). The show positions this as about *her* double-standards. Just as she had cancelled Riker's attempts to shut down the earlier images of the crew as the musketeers, here *he* cancels *her* order with a smile before turning to Geordi: "Quite a healthy fantasy life, wouldn't you say…" (33:00). Thus, for Riker, these images (one that belittles the structure of male authority and command and threatens the established hierarchy, and one that non-consensually eroticizes a female member of the crew) are not only comparable, but, in fact, the former is the more serious infringement and the latter something to smirk about. The double-standards are surely *his*.

Lynne Joyrich argues that, in "'Hollow Pursuits', the specific contradictions that technofictional texts (holographic or televisual) may pose for women are suggested" (1996, p. 77). Focusing particularly on the representation of the ship's counsellor, she writes that,

> Reduced from a qualified professional into merely a muse of sexual healing (an even more exaggerated feminine stereotype than that of empath), Deanna Troi is portrayed in this diegetic fantasy as a mythical but nonetheless reassuring erotic object—precisely the kind of comforting emotional/sexual image that she may be for many of TNG's own viewers. (1996, p. 78)

In this scene we seem to have the deepfake conundrum exposed. Although AI deepfakes have gained more traction in the media of late, in large part because of fakes of politicians, deepfakes have been commonplace in pornography for considerably longer with fake celebrity videos forming their own 'genre'. That so little concern has been paid to their use in pornography, and so much to their potential use to replicate images of politicians, speaks to the inherent hierarchies of power embedded even here in what might otherwise be regarded as a democratic sort of technology. To this extent, the 'harmless' play of 'Hollow Pursuits', proves to offer a powerful commentary on one of the most serious technological concerns of our present moment. Elizabeth Caldera writes that, "as deepfakes become more popular, the ability to distinguish between which videos are authentic and which are doctored will begin to diminish, causing the potential for social, legal, and political harms in a variety of areas in our daily lives" (2019, p. 178). These concerns move from the political realm

(with discourse about Russian interference in 'Western' elections) to the everyday domestic realm, with the potential for deepfake versions of revenge porn, as noted by Caldera who asserts that the origin for deepfakes is "closely tied to pornography" (2019, p. 179). Functioning on the higher level, Barclay's actions are indicative of the connection, often noted in videogames, between violence and masculine sexual prowess. Aaron Toscano, for instance, notes that "many violent video games have sexual content, creating a virtual world where the gamer can wield the phallus for sexual conquest" (2020, p. 102).

Upon discovering his fantasies, Riker talks of Barclay's holodeck use as a "violation of protocol". Apparently, "crew members should not be simulated in the holodeck". Geordi responds that he doesn't think there's any regulation against it, but Riker insists that "there ought to be" (30:03). And perhaps he's right. Sebastian Stoppe (2022, p. 54) refers to Barclay's fantasies in this episode as a 'misuse' of the holodeck. But he also notes that the episode seems to indicate that "The *Star Trek* utopia does not allow deviators in their society" (2022, p. 71). What makes Barclay 'deviant' is worth considering. He clearly doesn't prescribe to the unwritten, and somewhat odd, Enterprise rule that your fantasies can't be about real crew members, but even this might have been acceptable to his senior colleagues had the engineer managed to prevent these fantasies from interfering with his work. In the early part of the episode, we see Geordi reluctantly try to understand Barclay's troubles and it is clear that he is prepared to overlook the holodeck indiscretions if Barclay is able to be fully present to discharge his duties. At the end of the episode, as Barclay does indeed manage to solve the conundrum affecting the ship's systems, saving the Enterprise from catastrophe, Geordi congratulates him saying, "glad you were with us out here in the real world today, Mr. Barclay" (42:49). It's a message we see across other texts about virtual reality, even those which celebrate the technology (cf., for example, Ernest Cline's novel *Ready Player One*, 2012, which sets its action in a world where energy, climate, and social crises have resulted in the majority of the population escaping into a virtual reality simulation called the *OASIS*). What the text really deals with, then, is not Barclay's fantasies, but, rather, his addiction. Once more, it is Geordi who diagnoses the problem when he admonishes the engineer: "You're going to be able to write the book on holodiction" (35:07).

Conclusion: Holodiction or holotherapy?

In TNG, addiction to gaming seems to have been a concern for the creators, given that *Star Trek*'s utopia is, broadly speaking, one of moderation rather than indulgence. We might note, for instance, that in another episode—season 5 episode 6, 'The Game' (Allen, Sackett, Bronson & Braga, 1991)—Riker returns from his holiday on Risa with an addictive videogame that threatens to enslave the entire crew. Ironically, the Enterprise is saved by the returning Wesley Crusher (Will Weaton) and his young love interest Robin Lefler (Ashley Judd) who, despite being young adults and thus the primary target market for videogames, are the only ones able to resist the

game's alure. Ljubisa Bojic (2022, p. 9) notes that in 2021, "60 million individuals were addicted to videogaming", a total of just over 3% of players. More problematic, however, is that "recent research has discovered that virtual reality gaming is more addictive than other forms of gaming" (Ljubisa, 2022, p. 4). In 'Hollow Pursuits', we see the double edge. Where Barclay's crewmates undoubtedly regard him an addict—with all the nasty associations that accompany such a label—Barclay himself treats the holodeck as a form of therapy. Indeed, it seems just as likely that such virtual escapes can offer a welcome break as they can endanger our wellbeing. Marijam Did notes that "although the mainstream associates videogames with mental health issues for their tendency to cause addiction or induce isolation, research has shown that games can also work as a form of therapy" (2024, p. 96). What is Barclay to do, after all, when his 'real life' therapist is also a part of his fantasy?

For Dooley Murphy (2023, p. 67), "the *Star Trek* holodeck … predominantly pays tribute to mainstream Anglophone genres: cowboy movies, murder mysteries, police procedurals, and stories involving historic swordplay". This is, in part, true of Barclay's use of the holodeck in 'Hollow Pursuits' since, beside locations which are recreations of areas of the ship (Ten Forward, Counsellor Troi's therapy lounge, and the Bridge) he also chooses to recreate the lush gardens of some Edenic paradise, populated by crew members dressed as musketeers—the creators of TNG loved any excuse to dress the cast up in period costume. But this does Barclay's imagination a disservice. His holodeck fantasies are not narratively driven, or even narratively inspired, as are, say, Picard's or Data's. Barclay eschews narrative in favour of experiential free play. Murphy has noted that the future of VR "needn't be narrative at all" (2023, p. 65). He blames *Star Trek*'s holodeck for misdirecting the industry and expectant users. For Murphy, the holodeck is "the dream of an omniresponsive AI storyteller, a subservient cyberbard" (2023, p. 65). Thus, literature about VR, he argues, has tended to assume that "computer-mediated storytelling has a seemingly singular destiny", with "all efforts that fall short of a holodeck risk[ing] being viewed as noble but inevitable failures on the path to perfection. (That is, unconstrained agency.)" (2023, p. 66). Barclay's use of the holodeck, however, points to the availability of other types of VR play and experience. For these, his utopia shames him, and, perhaps, rightly so, since they also point to the dangers of VR 'play' when it comes to erotic fantasy. But, in other ways, Barclay's play is more relatable and takes us back to the term virtual reality itself. Where Riker is keen for the holodeck to be a place entirely divorced from the 'real' world, Barclay shows how any such attempts at 'virtual reality' are also bound up with the 'real'. The episode shows the complex consequences of these technological forms of play where the fantastical interacts with the local and corporeal. In defending what Geordi and others seem to see as a childish fantasy world, Barclay asserts: "the people I create in there are more real to me than anyone I meet out here" (35:18).

So, is Barclay just a loner or deviant, or does the episode make him sympathetic and more like us? Probably, the answer is both. Ultimately, we might see Barclay's fantasies as childish. He dreams of having the confidence to seduce the women in his life

and of besting his rivals on board the ship in sword fights. When he is finally confronted about his actions by Geordi, who walks in during one of his holodeck simulations—don't these doors have locks on them?!—it is clearly reality that assumes control. He immediately offers to resign his post and leave the Enterprise. But Barclay is also the only member of the crew who really understands the potential of the holodeck: its potential to provide therapeutic release and to be more than just fantasy… to connect the real and the virtual. Sebastian Stoppe's line that, "the escape route from utopia for the individual is the holodeck" (2022, p. 72), raises this very tension. If the Enterprise is already a utopia, why do individuals need the holodeck as a form of escape? In one last simulation, we see Barclay having saved the day, stepping on to the Bridge to declare his intention to leave the Enterprise. He is offered good wishes from prominent members of the crew. Once more, however, the scene is a simulation. Rather than leaving the Enterprise the engineer is in fact saying a different sort of goodbye. As he ends the program, he proceeds to ask the computer to erase all his saved holodeck programs. Ironically, then, it is by this therapeutic use of the holodeck that he comes to end his own addiction to the technology itself: a neat encapsulation of the potential and the dangers of the holodeck wrapped up in one final scene.

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