

## Bava Metzia 58b with DS9 and related background (originally prepared for SVARA class, 2021, V. Spatz)

...The halls of magazines and newspapers remain difficult to break into without (white, often male) contacts or mentors. Just from my experience alone, that's often meant policing my own behavior to appear more "white" and less threatening: straightening my hair, cutting my hair, or holding my tongue in meetings when I've heard something unquestionably offensive.

Sisko would never take crap like that, but Russell has no choice. All he can do is try to publish his story, even if it has to be on the terms his white editor. And that's the heart of this episode: what it means to have the agency to write your own story. In the end, Russell agrees to a compromise with his white editor so he can see his story in print. After the chilling police brutality and the segregation and erasure we see earlier in the episode, it's not perfect, but it's something, and Russell is excited for it, giddy even....

..."Far Beyond the Stars" helped me set a rubric for [previously undiagnosed panic attacks]...it would be Capt. Sisko's job to keep his cool and get his crew out of danger. It's my job to do the same for myself, to stay alive, to do the hard work of working on myself, especially **when it feels like it'd be easier to die or disappear.**

— Eric Vilas-Boas in 2018 —

[long article title:] "Twenty years ago [1998], 'Far Beyond the Stars' introduced Star Trek's first black captain to America's ugly, racist past. This year, it helped me process my own mental health in America's present."

### Far Beyond the Stars S6:E13, Deep Space Nine (originally aired: 2/11/98)

In a vision from the Prophets, Benjamin Sisko, a Black human with the rank of Captain in the Federation of the Planets' Starfleet service, becomes science fiction writer Benny Russell, living in New York City in the 1950s. In real life, Capt. Sisko lives on and directs the diverse space station, Deep Space Nine (in the 24<sup>th</sup> Century, far from Earth); in the vision, Russell lives in Harlem, then mostly Black, and works in a predominantly white area.

In the vision, Russell's identity is first **casually erased** when the magazine requests a group photo of the writing staff and the editor tells him to sleep in, saying readers think "Benny Russell is as white as they are. Let's just keep it that way." (The only female writer is also told to stay home.)

Russell's writing is **casually dismissed** by several close to him, even as he enthuses about finally "writing for us." Colleagues applaud his story, "Deep Space Nine," but their editor, Pabst, rejects it, claiming "A Negro space station captain" is both unbelievable **and dangerous** ("could cause a riot"). Russell accepts fellow writers' suggestion to make the story into a dream, as more acceptable for white readers.

Shortly afterward, police fatally shoot Russell's friend, and he is badly beaten himself trying to reach the victim. Still bandaged and using a cane from the attack, Russell returns to the office to see the new *Incredible Tales* issue with his story. The staff learn together that the entire print run was pulped...and that Russell is fired.

Russell is **crushed** but still affirms the future he sees:

"You can deny me all you want but you can't deny Ben Sisko – He exists! That future, that space station, all those people – they exist in here! In my mind. I created it. And every one of you know it, you read it...I created it and **it's real!**"

Finally, Russell collapses. Sisko re-emerges and learns he is "the dreamer and the dream." (Later [S7:E2] we learn that Russell has been institutionalized, his writing and belief in a future **treated as insanity**.)

Even among these very bright and enlightened characters – a group that includes a woman writer who has to use a man's name to get her work published, and who is married to a brown man with a British accent in 1953 – it's perfectly reasonable to coexist with someone like [editor] Pabst. It's **in the culture**, it's the way people think. – Avery Brooks, "Deep Space Nine" actor and director of "Far Beyond the Stars" (see [Memory Alpha for this episode](#))

\*\*A tanna recited in front of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak:

**Causing a neighbor to publicly lose face is akin to murder.** He responded: You spoke well – I have seen myself that a person will **go out hearty and come back paled.**

"The Caucasian race has produced super-high-geniuses by the dozen in the last five thousand years; the Oriental race has, also. **The Negro race has not...**"  
– John Campbell, Editor, 1937-71, *Analog* (*Astounding Science Fiction*)

Campbell rejected Samuel Delany's story in 1967, saying that readers would be unable "to relate to a black main character." See, e.g., "Combating Dreams Deferred...", by Dr. Stephanie Toliver, in [Ethical ELA](#)

*Although born in '42, Delany was considered a model for DS9's Benny Russell.*

Samuel Delany, in Toliver (above): "... imagistic paraphernalia of science fiction functioned as **social signs** – signs people learned to read fairly quickly. They signaled Technology. And technology was like a placard on the door saying, 'Boys Club! Girls, keep out. Blacks and Hispanics and the poor in general, **go away.**'"