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TV Theory Thursday: ORPHAN BLACK – Project LEDA & Character Names

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A little *Orphan Black* conspiracy theorizing to help pass the Thursday hours standing between you and Friday...

SPOILERS* *SPOILERS* *SPOILERS

Anyone who tells you they've got *Orphan Black* all figured out is almost certainly full of s-t. **BBC America's** hit sci-fi thriller is wonderfully rife with mysteries and paradoxes that leave the most astute minds walking in circles. Hell, sometimes the biggest mental challenge is simply remembering that all members of the Clone Club are, in fact, played by the same person—a conundrum caused by the unique and immense talent of series star **Tatiana Maslany**.

Since Season 1 concluded last summer, I've been toying with an overarching *Orphan Black* [conspiracy theory](#)—more on that later—and giving considerable thought to whether character names allude to any evidence of the show's ultimate direction. For a premise that requires as much (and as detailed) planning as *Orphan Black's* does, it seems highly unlikely that Clone Club names were picked out of a hat or otherwise randomly assigned. Certainly, happy coincidences are possible—ex. 'Cosima' (from the Greek *kosmos*, meaning "order") was named for the series' science consultant, [Cosima Herter](#), but the related name 'Cosmo' was born by a 4th-century saint who is one of two patron saints of medical doctors. Nonetheless, it seems more likely that most names were probably chosen for at least one reason and, thus, that each name's subtext has important implications within the show's overall framework.

For the moment, let's look at the three clones most centrally embroiled in the **Project LEDA** mystery, beginning with the one who started it all...

Sarah

'What's in a name?': First seen in the early pages of the Old Testament, Sarah (Hebrew, "princess"), wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac, is considered to be the matriarch from whom all the Chosen People (a.k.a. Jews) descend. Ever sassy, the 89-year-old reportedly laughed in G-d's face when promised that she would pop out a kid the following year. But, lo and behold, the then-nonagenarian gave birth to Isaac, the first 'Chosen' child born under Abraham's new covenant with G-d, and the father of all the peoples and nations that followed. [[Genesis 21:1-7](#) / [Genesis 17:5-7,19,21](#)]

Which is a long way of saying...: A 'Sarah' could be the Little-Engine-that-Could of would-be mothers. Given Biblical Sarah's treatment of her servant-turned-sister-wife Hagar—demanding that Abraham get rid of Hagar and their son Ishmael, to protect little Isaac's inheritance [[Genesis 21:8-21](#)—a 'Sarah' could also have a hot temper and a limited tolerance for other women and their interference in her life/plans.

Meaning...: Amidst fertility issues—documented (Alison and Rachel) and assumed (the Proletheans certainly seemed surprised)—Sarah is the unlikely mother who unknowingly defied the odds: As far as we know, she's the only one of 11 clones (5 living, 6 deceased) to have reproduced naturally. Plus, we've seen ample evidence of Sarah's short fuse and mama-bear-like response to those who in any way, shape, or form mess with her cub (or any of her men). Is it therefore possible that like Isaac, Kira (**Skylar Wexler**)—whose name comes from the Russian for "ruler"—is also some sort of important (or 'chosen') first?

...turning next to the series' first 'villain'...

Helena

'What's in a name?': From the Greek for "light," 'Helena' is the Latin form of 'Helen'. Kind of a big deal in Greek mythology, Helen of Troy was the daughter of [Leda](#) (the eponymous woman referred to in Project LEDA's title), fathered by Zeus in his swan form (while her twin, Clytemnestra was sired by Leda's mortal husband Tyndareus). Helen is said to have been kidnapped twice in her life: Once by Theseus when she was young, and again years later by Paris (leading to the Trojan War).

Which is a long way of saying...: 'Helena' is one-half of twin girls, with an unnaturally complicated childhood/family situation and a history of being kidnapped. Helena may also bear a seemingly divine defense against harm to her person, as the children of Greek gods were often thought to inherit some of their parent's immortality. (As did Pollux, one of Helen's twin brothers fathered by Zeus, who chose to [share his immortality](#) with his twin, Castor.)


Meaning...: Despite a wretched and torturous childhood, being stabbed with rebar (and stitching herself up in less than sterile conditions), and shot in the chest, the almost-absurdly-hard-to-kill Helena lives on—thanks, perhaps, to what some might see as a 'divine' gift: her 'backwards' internal structure. Sarah's ever-more sympathetic twin seestra—whose life to date comes alarmingly close to justifying (or at least explaining) so many of her mostly indefensible actions—has also been kidnapped twice: Once by Tomas (**Daniel Kash**) as a child, and recently by the creepastic Proletheans—with both incidents (in-)directly leading to the Proletheans' war on the Clone Club (RIP Katja) and collateral death and destruction, including poor Gracie's (**Zoé De Grand Maison**) sewn-up lips. Given that her mythological namesake gave birth to a daughter, [Hermione](#), will we possibly see the Proletheans' in vitro scheme come to fruition through Helena?

...and, finally, to the villain-apparent du jour...

Rachel

'What's in a name?': Ironically, given the manner in which this clone satisfies her sexual appetites, the name 'Rachel' comes from the Hebrew for "ewe" or "one with purity." In the Old Testament, we meet Rachel when her cousin Jacob agrees to pay a bride-price of 7 years' labor for her father Laban in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage. Come his wedding night, however, Jacob (who should have remembered that an oral contract isn't worth the paper it's written on) gets screwed—and *not* in the good kind of way: Thanks to his conniving uncle/father-in-law, and a particularly concealing veil, Jacob accidentally marries Rachel's older sister, Leah. Naturally, Jacob is pissed—but, his love for Rachel trumps his anger, and he agrees to work another 7 years for

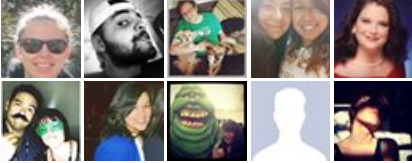
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the privilege of taking Rachel as his second wife. [Genesis 29:16-30] While Leah had kid after kid—courtesy of divine preferential treatment, to make up for her loveless marriage—Rachel remained childless for many years, which were chock-full of no-holds-barred contention between the sisters/sister-wives (and some bed-swapping maids, who really didn't help matters). [Genesis 29:31-35 / Genesis 30:1-21] Finally, the stork remembered Rachel's address, and she bore Jacob his favorite son, Joseph. [Genesis 30:22-24]

Which is a long way of saying...: Rachel' may have some severe Daddy issues and a tendency towards viciously envying those who have what she wants—especially if the envied is a sister or relative—and be a woman for whom conception is definitely a marathon, not a [sprint](#).

Meaning...: From the get-go, Rachel has seemed oddly fixated on Kira, with some strong feelings—jealousy, perhaps—of Sarah's ability to conceive, carry, and give birth to a child. Does the recent revelation that her father may *not* have actually died in that lab fire—landing Rachel in Leekie's care, which, clearly, hardened all the sweetness of the child seen romping around with mom on the VHS Sarah watched in Rachel's lair—signal the rumblings of Daddy issues coming to the forefront? If so, will they be aimed at her not-dead father, Leekie (**Matt Frewer**), or both? And, after all these years of struggle and heartache (assuming she has one of those) will Rachel manage to conceive and bear a child that, like [Joseph](#), will change the future course of an entire people?

...to yield my current [Orphan Black](#) conspiracy theory:

What if the Clone Club is just an intermediate step, and the Neolutionists/Dyad Institute's (plus a possible-but-as-yet unidentified backer) long-term goal concerns [the second generation](#) (i.e., Kira)? That is, what if the clones were intended only to be vessels that could/would birth some sort of new, genetically-enhanced form of human?

Maybe there's something in all this; maybe there's nothing. I might even prefer it if my hypothesis turns out completely wrong—'cause there's nothing I enjoy more than a TV series like *Orphan Black*, which keeps me guessing at every turn, and blows my mind just when I think I have it all figured out.

What do you think about the many mysteries of [Orphan Black](#)?
Share your Clone Club conspiracy theories in the comments below!

On the next [Orphan Black](#) (Saturday, May 24 @ 9|8c on BBC America)...



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