

“The Visitor”: A+



An elderly Jake Sisko recounts a freak accident which caused his father to disappear years before.

Air date: October 9, 1995

Teleplay by Michael Taylor

Directed by David Livingston

“It begins many years ago. I was eighteen. And the worst thing that could happen to a young man happened to me. My father died.” —Jake Sisko

“The Visitor” is to *DS9* what “The City on the Edge of Forever” is to *TOS* and “The Inner Light” is to *TNG*: that special episode with so much universal appeal that it outshines the even more expensive and ambitious two parters with its simplistic beauty. It was the first *DS9* episode to be nominated for the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, and it topped a 1996 *TV Guide* list ranking the best *Star Trek* episodes of all time.

A Ben/Jake Sisko story, “The Visitor” is a “love through the ages” tale that eschews romance to instead explore the love between a father and a son.

For those of us who grew up tossing around the baseball with Dad in the backyard, it's especially meaningful; but what really makes it unique is its imaginative structure. Like some of the episodes of the 1980s *Twilight Zone* series, instead of ending with a twist, it begins with one. Opening with an elderly Jake Sisko at the end of his life, the plot unfolds like a chess game in its late stages working its way backwards; it's a narrative tool that was clearly developed organically from the story, as no writer would sit down and spontaneously invent it at the beginning of the process. And it's a daring choice, putting the weight of the episode on the shoulders of a guest star and asking him to carry the show.

Enter Tony Todd, who in his role as pinch hitter hits a grand slam. Todd, of course, had already secured himself free tickets to *Star Trek* conventions for life for his work as Worf's younger brother, Kurn. But his work as an older Jake Sisko here is his magnum opus. Sharing the stage with him as "the visitor" is Rachel Robinson, daughter of Andrew Robinson (Garak). While her understated performance is far less memorable than what her father brings to the show, it's the perfect complement to Todd's charismatic storytelling, giving the two futuristic characters a chemistry that reverberates throughout each scene they're in.

And then there are Avery Brooks and Cirroc Lofton. Brooks, playing a part reminiscent of Kirk in the "The Tholian Web", does the most with the least; his character appears infrequently, arguably becoming the titular character, yet Brooks plays him with such emotion, his love for his son spills over into scenes he's not even in. Lofton, meanwhile, is overshadowed as Jake Sisko by Todd, yet gives perhaps his greatest performance as well.

Credit must also be given to the set decorators, makeup, and wardrobe teams who effectively create the illusion that we've broken the bonds of *Star Trek*'s present and are catching a glimpse of a possible future. And with all the elements working together, they produce a synergy that can't be described in a recap or review. "The Visitor" is a must see, an episode that transcends *Deep Space Nine* and *Star Trek*, entertaining and moving nearly anyone who gives it a chance to do so.

Did you know? This episode was originally set to be directed by René Auberjonois (Odo), but a last minute change to Colm Meaney's film schedule caused "The Visitor" and "Hippocratic Oath" to be flip-flopped in the production schedule, forcing Auberjonois and David Livingston to switch assignments.