

## **Review: *The Visitor***

**by Jamahl Epsicokhan**

*I'm no writer, but if I were, it seems to me I'd want to poke my head up every once in a while and take a look around; see what's going on. It's life, Jake. You can miss it if you don't open your eyes.*

**Benjamin Sisko**

*The Visitor* is easily DS9's most moving and poignant character piece ever. For me, it's the first episode of *Star Trek* (or any episodic TV for that matter) I can remember that actually moved me to tears.

Told in flashback from an elderly Jake Sisko (Tony Todd) to a young woman named Melanie (Rachel Robinson) aspiring to be a writer, *The Visitor* features flashback as a narrative tool – and never before has such a narrative tool been so well-realized and efficiently utilized [on *Star Trek*]. Jake's tale begins from when he was eighteen years old, when his father, Captain Sisko, was killed in a freak accident aboard the *Defiant*.

This is the first of *The Visitor's* potent scenes. Seeing Sisko phased out of existence is somewhat unsettling, and we have nothing but instant empathy for Jake, who becomes lost and alone on a station without his father. The story continues to follow Jake through a year of the accident's aftermath. The memorial aboard the station, the Bajorans' loss of hope after the death of their Emissary, the declining relationship between the Federation and the Klingons – all these details are wonderfully realized examples of life on DS9 without its Captain.

Then, one day, Sisko reappears. He appears in Jake's quarters for a few seconds, then vanishes again. At first, Jake tries to dismiss it as a hallucination. But when it happens again, nearly a year after the accident, Jake is able to get his father to the infirmary, where Dax, Bashir, and O'Brien determine that Sisko is being pulled in and out of time. Outside of normal time, Sisko's experience of time has slowed to where the last year has only aged him a number of minutes.

Alas, they are not able to keep Sisko from vanishing again, and Jake is forced to watch his father vanish again. Chances are he will appear again, but there is no way for Jake to know where or when, or how to prevent his father from vanishing again. When the situation with the Klingons reaches a peak, the Federation turns the station over to them, and Jake tries to accept his father as gone forever. He returns to Earth to pursue a career in writing.

Old Jake continues telling his story to Melanie. His writing was successful. He got published. He fell in love and got married. He was building a life on Earth. Then one day, so many years after the accident, his father reappeared again. After a few wrenching minutes trying to catch up with old times, his father vanished yet again. Todd's reaction in this scene is a riveting performance.

This leads Jake to take up an obsession of finding a way to track his father through time and bring him back. He gives up his writing and goes back to school studying quantum mechanics theory. In the process, he gives up most of his life. His once-supportive wife finally gets fed up with his obsession and leaves him. Jake finally determines that he may be able to retrieve his father if he recreates the accident. With the help of Captain Nog, he assembles as much of the old *Defiant* crew as he can and takes the ship back to the original location where he attempts to manipulate time and space. He is able to pull himself into Sisko's time-frozen bubble and talk to him. But the rescue

attempt isn't working. Jake begins to fade back into the real world, still without his father. Sisko begs his son to promise he will get on with his life and let go of his father. Jake can't do it.

Jake is such a tragic character. His entire life has been a search for his lost father, a search that just will not work. It would have been easier if his father had truly died. Instead, Jake can't get on with his life because every time he puts his loss behind him, his father reappears again only to disappear later.

Old Jake finally learns that he can restore his father back to the original time of the accident if he ends his own life while his father has reappeared in normal time again. Ironically this happens on the very day that Melanie, the visitor, comes to see him. Sisko and his son have one last touching conversation, Jake dies of his own lethal injection, and Sisko returns to the accident on the *Defiant*, where he is able to avert it because of his experience.

Even after that rather lengthy synopsis, I cannot begin to do justice to this episode. It's just so good. I can explain the story and how it unfolds, but it's just not the same as viewing it. This episode is so wonderfully written and has such poignant, moving details that it soars to new heights of storytelling. Through this, we see many new things about Sisko and Jake – about their lives and their relationship. Above all, this episode stresses the bond between a father and a son, and contains family issues that many people can relate to.

Michael Taylor has delivered one of the series's best stories, and David Livingston's direction is stunning, stellar execution. As I said before, the flashback elements are wonderfully done and the performances are about as perfect as they could be. The editing and music is all in place, causing scenes to flow terrifically together. Even if you're grabbing the tissues by the end of this episode (I was) there is no way you can call this story maudlin or melodramatic. It's completely absorbing from the first frame to the last; definitely one of *DS9*'s finest moments. There is true magic working here.