

Women at Warp Episode 84: We Left Your Pope on a Moon

INTRO MUSIC

Sue: Hi and welcome to Women at Warp a Roddenberry's Star Trek podcast. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Sue and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Andi.

Andi: Hello.

Sue: And Grace!

Grace: Bright blessings nerds.

Sue: So today our main topic is going to be that of Kai Opaka, who was only with us really for two episodes technically 4, but makes a big impact on Deep Space Nine.

Andi: And our hearts...

Grace: And our hearts.

Sue: But first we have some housekeeping as usual. This week there is quite a bit of it, so we're going to try and get through it quickly. As always we like to point out that our show is entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon, that's why you never hear an ad on Women at Warp, if you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as one dollar per month, and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media to silly watch along commentaries to old pictures of us at conventions as kids, to early releases of episodes. So, if you're interested in that you can visit <https://www.patreon.com/womenatwarp>. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Next up Parsec Award nominations are open for 2018, the nomination period lasts through June 15th and that can be done if you're interested at <http://www.parsecawards.com/>.

Grace: Show us some love babies.

Sue: We also want to say congratulations to Nicole who won our TNG cats giveaway. So by the time you're hearing this the book should already be in your paws, and we have some other giveaways in the works so stay tuned for that.

Grace: Ooooooh!

Sue: We have also chosen our next Book Club pick and that is Keith DeCandido's "Articles of the Federation". This is a book that is set early on in the shared continuity timeline, which we've talked about a little bit before, but there shouldn't be too many spoilers as long as you have seen the ends of Deep Space Nine and Voyager. It focuses mostly on original characters, and it is about the inner workings and the politics of the Federation government.

Andi: Sounds cool!

Sue: Finally we want to talk about some conventions and where we're going to be. Obviously we were not at Universal Fancon because Universal Fancon did not happen.

Grace: Wah, wah...

Sue: There's a lot going on in the news and on the geek-a-sphere on Twitter. So we just really want to say that we hope that any of our listeners out there weren't burdened by the cancellation or postponement, and point you towards the many lists and documents that have been made for the vendors and artists who were planning to be there. So, if you have the ability and would like to please go and support them after this cancellation.

Grace: Please do so many people put so much on the line to try and get to this convention and get it working, and if you just even have a minute give it a look over, see what you can do to support all these independent artists and creators.

Sue: And congratulations to those who were there for the sort of pop up con that took its place that weekend, which was very cool to see the community come together. But we do want to say upcoming Jarrah will be on a panel at Ottawa Comic Con on Friday May 11th. The panel be about a celebration of TNG, featuring the editor and local contributors to a recently released book "Outside In Makes It So," the books a collection of essays by different writers one for each episode of TNG, and it includes Jarrah's piece on "Man of the People" [TNG Season 6, Episode 3]. So if you're in or around Ottawa we hope you can make it.

Grace: Canada!

Sue: I will be at Eternal Con on Long Island on June 16th and 17th, and I'll actually have a table there, I'll be sharing a table with my friend who is also a podcaster. Does anyone else have any upcoming convention?

Andi: No, because I'm boring.

laughter

Grace: Not at the time being.

Sue: Alright so that does it for housekeeping. Thank you for bearing with me for all of that. I hope it was informative. And we shall move on and discuss Kai Opaka, played by the amazing Camille Saviola.

Andi: I love her hat.

Grace: Camille is so much more than her single appearance on Friends.

laughter

Andi: Look up that episode, I love it! Until you said that I was like, what, she was on... OH MY GOD she was on Friends!! [Friends "The One with the East German Laundry Detergent" Season 1, Episode 5].

Grace: That's a good episode. I like to think that the Kai got a really crap deal when reincarnating and that's what happened.

Andi: I mean we see Kai Opaka from the very beginning. She has a huge role to play and like how he shaped DS9 from the pilot on, so I think she's an interesting character and it's almost as interesting to think about why she is no longer the Kai as it is to talk about her like tenure as Kai.

Grace: Absolutely. Her appearance early on is such a tone setter for Deep Space Nine, especially when you're coming from a franchise like Star Trek that is very science based, and does have this really intense love of

secular humanism, as opposed to actual religion and that can be taken in some not great directions, honestly we see a lot of, pop culturally speaking, tendency to go towards organized religion is usually a cause for bad things, and it really can be. But, I really appreciate that right off the bat with Deep Space Nine, with this character who's a spiritual leader and who's kind of the de facto leader for the Bajoran people we see right off the bat that these people's religion is serious, it's a part of their culture, it's not indicator of them being a backwater backwards society, and it's really cool how we get... again we get that right off the bat with her and Sisko's relationship.

Sue: There's so much happening in "Emissary" [DS9, Season 1, Episode 1], I mean before this episode our only experience really with Bajorans was Ensign Ro, right, and here we have Kira and we have Opaka, who are kind of on different spectrums of at least, or different ends of the spectrum of personality. But we also find that Kira is so grounded in her faith and that this, the woman who is the complete opposite of her personality wise, is that spiritual leader. And then we find out things throughout the series like, yes it's a spiritual position but it's also kind of a political position, and you're elected to Kai, but you're elected not by the Vedek council, but by the populace of Bajor.

Grace: And honestly that differentiation between Kira and Opaka, like right off the bat, that's my phrase of the day I guess, I love that we get that differentiation between the two of them because it really establishes that with the portrayal of Bajoran society we're not going to get just this homogenous idea of what a culture is, where like everyone's wearing the same clothes, everyone has the same opinions and attitudes, we are gonna get a fleshed out culture here, and I love that. I think that's really important especially in a show like Deep Space Nine, where so much of the tension of the show is based on Starfleet's adjacency to this other non-Starfleet affiliated society.

Sue: Yeah we do still have the issue that they're telling us that the entire planet has the same religion...

Grace: Which is weird.

Sue: Yeah, but at least they're not pretending that everybody agrees on everything all the time.

Grace: Yeah it's definitely not a perfect portrayal of a fleshed out society, but it's better than a lot of the ones we've seen.

Sue: Well, from the very beginning the reason that Sisko goes to see Opaka is that he wants to unite the different factions on Bajor.

Andi: We do see that she has a political role right from the very beginning right because we have Kira explaining that like the only person that's going to be able to unify Bajor in the face of not having the Cardassians to fight against anymore is the Kai.

Grace: And let's be real and in our society we have that too, we have spiritual leaders holding some political power in some places, in some cases a lot of political power, in some cases more than they should really have. You all thought I was going into this pro-religion, no I'm still salty.

Andi: The thing that makes me love the Kai right off the bat though is the fact that she meets Sisko who is like a powerful dude, and she's like I'm going to pet his ear, and it's going to be cool, and he is going to like it and he's so uncomfortable and it's amazing and I laugh so much at that.

Grace: And it really says something to have a character who is actively making you uncomfortable, but you don't dislike them for it, you understand where they're coming from, and really if you're looking at a community,

or religious leader, that's kind of part of it you have to deal with being like oh you're uncomfortable with my beliefs or my faith set, okay, that's you, let me explain what I think in any way. For good or for bad, that's just something I've seen a lot of.

Andi: I just think it's interesting too, that like from the very beginning it sets up this tension that Sisko has about being the emissary versus like being in Starfleet. He's very uncomfortable with this role that he plays and it starts right at the very beginning where she is like massaging his ear and saying mysterious shit, and it's pretty funny to see him so wrong footed, and I mean that's a thread that keeps going throughout DS9 and they set it up very quickly in the pilot which I think is interesting.

Grace: I love how in the entire first season so much of it is just based around Sisko being uncomfortable. Just, "What is going on here?"

Sue: According to "The Making of Star Trek Deep Space Nine" [by Garfield Reeves-Stevens and Judith Reeves-Stevens] Kai Opaka was originally conceived to be a male character, who was conflicting... often at odds with Starfleet's goals, which we see a little bit still with the Kai Opaka we did get. But his visitors were supposed to disrobe while he probed their pagn through deep tissue massage of their feet. I'm serious. This is what it says.

Grace: Wow...

Andi: That's gross... I don't let anyone to touch my feet man, that would not be okay.

Sue: But that's a very like religious-y ideal right?

Grace: That's a very 60s Star Trek thing.

Sue: No, but like think about how often when you're thinking about like Judeo Christian tradition, you hear people say oh and they washed their feet, like it's a very like...

Andi: Ritual thing.

Sue: Old school ritualistic religious-y thing.

Andi: I think I prefer the ear thing.

Sue: Well, yeah. But, that concept of the character went so far as to be written into the first draft of the DS9 bible.

Grace: Wow... I think we ended up better off, mostly with the whole having to strip down for a religious leader has some really effed-up connotations that I am... I do not like.

Andi: I think it's interesting that she's a woman though, it brings a different vibe to the whole thing.

Grace: Absolutely!

Sue: Especially in contrast to Sisko.

Grace: Well, also in contrast to this traditional idea of what we have of a community leader especially a religious leader that that is still so widely considered you know a masculine thing, and in all of the religious

circles I've been in there still sometimes this idea of a woman who is a religious leader it's kind of a token person there. It's always like this is our woman rabbi or this is our woman priest and to be like, no this is Kai Opaka, she is the head of our entire planet's religion and no one questions that, that's just part of the culture here. It's cool to see, and I really do like that we get her as this character that's a leader both politically and spiritually, and you can tell from the way she interacts with Sisko, that she is someone who has been able to do that and that people really believe in her full competency in both roles.

Sue: And one of our Facebook commenters, I'm sorry I didn't grab this one, pointed out that this was at a time where at least in the US there were a lot of debates over women in clergy. And I mean they haven't gone away, but it was a very big topic of conversation in you know the mid to late 90s.

Grace: Yeah look at the Vicar of Dibley, man.

Sue: Right, and not only that, we find out, well first it goes from Opaka to Winn, so two women in a row, shocking... scandal, but we find out later, I mean we're still technically talking about Emissary, but that she had at least one son, so not only was she space pope, she was a working mom.

Grace: Pretty badass!

Andi: I think another thing that starts out here that we start to see is Kira and Kira's relationship to her faith, and the beginning of that storyline that continues throughout DS9, too, so I just think it's really impressive that they did this pilot, and I think it's great pilot, I re watched it, it's pretty cool.

Grace: It's good, there's just a lot going on in it at once. I had to watch it like three times before I think I picked up everything that was going on.

Andi: There's a lot going on but I think it's well paced, but the thing that's impressive now that I've seen up until mid season four, is how much of what they started in the pilot is still getting played out and some of these questions are still being asked, and some of these problems are still being addressed. Especially, what do you do with the Cardassians? How do you balance keeping Bajor safe without infringing on their sovereignty, and then also playing the Cardassians and keeping them back without starting a war... like that tightrope, that political tightrope that DS9 continues to walk is all set up right there in the pilot, which is super cool.

Grace: They really do have all their cards on the table, which is pretty cool story wise.

Andi: But I did forget what a douche Bashir right off the bat.

laughter

And: And I was like ewwwww.

Grace: Oh my god Julian!

Andi: But I've gotten so used to like not-douche Bashir, that I go back to the season 1 Bashir.

Grace: It's kind of whiplash isn't it?

Andi: And I'm like What are you doing, frontier medicine what a tool...

Grace: Why are you hitting so hard on Dax?

Andi: I just watched "Starship Down" [DS9 Season 4, Episode 7] which is the one where they kind of like finally put the period on the Dax/Bashir flirtation and I was like yay this is done forever. And then I watch the pilot and it's like hey Dax let's get a drink. I'm like, ewwwww. It's pretty hard to make Alexander Siddig not attractive to me, and somehow season one Bashir manages to do it, I don't know how, it's some sort of dark magic.

Grace: At least we have O'Brien to commiserate with in hating early Bashir.

Andi: Some of my favorite things from season one are the way that O'Brien looks at Bashir when he's talking.

Grace: He's saying with his face what we're all saying with our hearts.

Andi: But the thing about Bashir too, I mean I know we're talking about Opaka, but the thing about Bashir that strikes me in the pilot is like he kind of represents what Kira is afraid of from Starfleet.

Grace: Oh absolutely.

Andi: Like that they're going to be super condescending, that they're going to you know try and change Bajor to be more like you know the Federation and not let them progress on their own, and that they're just going to swap Cardassian overlords for Federation overlords, and in that case he does his job quite well even though I want to bite him, and not in a fun way.

Grace: Well, also Bashir just as a character is a really good indicator of Deep Space Nine's awareness of this kind of idea of Starfleet, we'll just waltz in and fix everything, leave, it'll be great. And we actually get an entire episode based around that concept that I like that's like nope it's not gonna be that easy, there will be fallout in any direction if you just kind of step into this situation. And, I think that's part of why it is important that we just hate the dickens out of this guy at the beginning because it's like yeah, Starfleet is itself an arrogant concept and it is just stepping into situations where you aren't welcome and saying no we know what's right here, we're the best of the best and we're going to be the best, enforce our "best-ness" on you.

Andi: The other thing too is that he totally considers this as a way to like become better, like he's totally up for using Bajor and the Bajorans...

Grace: He sees this as a stepping stone, yeah.

Andi: Exactly. In his own personal and professional development instead of like you know people and stuff.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: And the reason I brought up Bashir a little bit more is because I feel like this is something that kind of goes into our next episode "Battle Lines" [DS9 Season 1, Episode 13] so we'll come back to Bashir again. One thing I do want to say about Opaka in this episode that we haven't quite gotten to is this whole like spiritual like giving people visions and like the way she seems like she knows everything that's going to happen.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: Whereas when we get Winn later on it's very clear that she's just a person, and she gets things wrong.

Grace: She's riding by the seat of her pants.

Andi: Yeah, she gets things wrong all the time, she has you know very questionable judgment, but when we get introduced to Opaka here she's very much like the archetypal like wise woman and it feels like she's in charge, and like she knows what's going to happen, and she's like this font of wisdom or whatever. And it's such a different vibe that we get from Winn.

Grace: That's what part of what makes Winn getting to be that the Kai feel like such a betrayal and such a loss or just like we're going from a Opaka to her, really.

Sue: So, part of the description, the revised description, of Opaka in the series bible said, "The Kai seems to have awareness on a higher plane of consciousness, knows things she cannot possibly know, although our people do not accept her powers at face value we cannot always explain them either. She speaks in vague mystical and indirect language forcing the listener to seek her meaning."

Andi: Well, they nailed it.

Sue: Yeah for sure.

Andi: I mean that's exactly the vibe that you get from her.

Sue: But she's definitely contrasting with Winn in later seasons, in the sense that Winn is after her positions for power.

Grace: Winn has an agenda, Opaka is just out there to be a spiritual leader and to seek... help others seek that sort of level of enlightenment.

Sue: We're definitely going to do a Kai Winn episode at some point.

Grace: Oh hell yes!

Sue: We have talked about her a few times, I think she's been one of our villains episodes, [<http://www.womenatwarp.com/episode-47-the-baddest-women-in-the-universe-part-i/>]and definitely in our religion episode [<http://www.womenatwarp.com/episode-29-what-does-god-need-with-a-starship/>], but I have to say there are moments of vulnerability we get with Winn where she's just like I try so hard and the Prophets don't talk to me.

Grace: Winn is just such a complicated character, and that's part of what makes her so dislikable, but also so interesting.

Sue: But I feel a sort of sympathy for her when she has those moments of vulnerability, because she wants that spiritual connection, the kind that Opaka has, and the kind that Bareil has, and she just doesn't get there and she doesn't know why. And it's sort of heartbreaking in a way.

Andi: I know why.

Sue: Well, because she's evil, right.

Andi: Because her motives are not pure.

Sue: Sure, but there is even a deleted scene from "Emissary" where she is offended right that Sisko has been named the Emissary by Opaka, and she's saying well why should somebody who doesn't even have our beliefs

hold this position, have this honor. Because you know Opaka being the kind of person she is, thinks she has done everything right, thinks she has checked all the boxes and she's not getting their reward. And the line which is then used later that Opaka says back her, is that one should never look into the eyes of one's own gods.

Andi: Fair.

Grace: That's sounds straight out of the Talmud, I swear. In the vague you have to interpret this sense.

Andi: Do we talk about the spiritual journey that Opaka sends Sisko on?

Grace: Yeah, absolutely.

Andi: I think they do a really clever thing in making it like science-y, so, like you can see how this could have turned into a religion, and it's still like that, but there's no clear answer so, if you want to see it as faith and God you can, and if you want to be like well it's just science that they are interpreting through faith, you can do that too.

Grace: Which is also just part of the fun of looking into religion in general, just seeing where the basis for it all comes from, and seeing that there is a basis for everything, but you can in a spiritual sense interpret it the way you want to, or the way that brings you meaning.

Sue: It's not really Opaka, but it's you know the Prophets through the the vision of Opaka that has this conversation with Sisko of, well it's really all the prophets in different forms, but they keep telling him why they take him back to his ship during the Wolf 359 encounter with the Borg, and they say but this is where you exist, and it's really powerful, just watching that, the idea of if you want to get on in your life even if you're physically elsewhere you have to move past where you're stuck emotionally.

Grace: It's such a wonderful establishment of Sisko as a character being like he can't really be in the here and now if he's still stuck in his tragedy of the past.

Sue: And how often does a show set up its lead character like that? I mean maybe now more often, but then? Here's a guy who can't get past these losses, and he doesn't want to be in his job, and he's unhappy, and he's suddenly a spiritual leader.

Grace: Up until this point he is definitely the character that's starting off is the most set up as being completely and totally fallible, he's the most flawed of the lead characters we have up to this point and that just makes it really interesting and again shows you're in for something different with Deep Space Nine.

Andi: I do like that he's also just tremendously competent, because I love competence!

Grace: Yeah, it's hard not to love him for that. He's competent work wise but emotionally struggling.

Andi: Yeah exactly. He's a good leader and you can tell that right away, but you can also see that like there's so much weighing him down and holding him back. I just think it's a tremendous emotional arc to give a character in his very first episode.

Grace: And it does make you really want to see him succeed. It makes you root for the character.

Andi: And the show!

Grace: And the show!

Sue: Well and then the next time we see Opaka is a little bit later in the season in "Battle Lines."

Andi: Does anyone want to give us a rundown of battle lines?

Sue: So, this is the one, remember in the pilot Kira says that Opaka's a bit of a recluse. She hasn't come out a lot, in "Battle Lines" she just arrives at Deep Space Nine, like with a shipment of medical supplies.

Andi: Yeah, Bashir's like say what... I didn't order a Kai with my medical supplies, like where did you come from?

Grace: I just felt like getting out a little, stretching my legs, I mean you never write, you never call.

Sue: So, Sisko takes her on a tour of the station, and she wants to see the wormhole, and Bashir invites himself along on their little trip through the wormhole.

Grace: Like he does.

Andi: Oh my god, I will never stop laughing at the faces people make at Bashir in the first season, Sisko's like, really?

Grace: This bitch is inviting himself along on the spiritual tour here.

Andi: But it turns out that it's a good idea, but whatever.

Sue: Yeah. I mean you get the impression through what she's saying, several times throughout the show, that she doesn't think she's going to come back from this trip.

Andi: Yeah she gives like a gift to O'Brien right before she gets on the ship, and he's like okay...

Sue: Give this to your daughter, we'll never see it again. But yeah the runabout crash lands...

Grace: Whaaat?

Sue: Opaka dies.

Grace: Whaaaa?

Sue: And then is not dead.

Grace: Whaaaaaaaa?

Sue: But she's dependent on these microbes, that means she can't leave this moon where they crash landed. So, she's going to stay and make peace with the people who are living on the moon.

Grace: Which is pretty incredible. As a comparison to what we get when we've got Kai Winn someone who very much has an agenda about her own fulfillment both politically and spiritually, wanting to be above everyone else and wanting to be in a position of power. And we have Opaka who's kind of arc in this whole story ends

with she totally decides she is going to put everything she has achieved aside, and could achieve in the future, and spend probably the rest of time trying to unite these groups of people and make nice between a very small group of people who are otherwise going to spend the rest of time fighting with each other, and that's incredibly selfless, that's also pretty convoluted, but spiritually speaking that is definitely saying well I'm not going to get any glory off of this planet, and I'm not going to really shoot for anything else, but isn't that enough to try and make sure that this group of people is going to be okay? That's an incredibly selfless thing to do.

Sue: I really love how Saviola played the crash.

Andi: Yeah.

Sue: Because you know there's the standard you know chair acting, and the shaky cam, but when you look at Opaka's face while the roundabout is crashing she's taking it all in, she's wide eyed, but she's also incredibly calm.

Grace: She's someone who has made peace with her God.

Sue: She's the only character who doesn't have a line that whole time, and I mean sure she's not running a ship system, but she's also not freaking out.

Grace: Also, can we talk about Kira's mourning of her when she first dies, and just Kira losing it and becoming hysterical with crying.

Sue: It's so beautiful.

Grace: It is such a far cry from "He's dead Jim" and just being dispassionate about it... death happens. This is someone who has meant the world to Kira and the Bajoran people and we really see that expressed.

Andi: So, this episode for me is such a mixed bag because there's so much that I love about it. Like, basically Kira's entire arc in this episode I think is amazing, and also like a piece of the arc that she goes on throughout the series like, the very basic Kira struggles are in this episode, like she has to move on from the war, she has to heal, she has to learn how to get past you know what was, and start building what will be, you know and Opaka kind of puts her on that journey in this episode and all of their scenes I think are amazing. And, I mean Nana Visitor's so good.

Grace: Oh she's fabulous in this episode.

Andi: She definitely sells like the mourning right when she thinks Opaka is gone and she sells every moment after that of like Kira struggling to move on, and having to face you know the mirror of these people who cannot stop fighting. And then at the same time, I'm like okay, first of all we have zombie Kai, and then second of all we've got these dudes that are just so annoying, and really irrational, and they make me crazy. And then also, what, she's just going to live here now.

Grace: Yep.

Andi: Okay, selfless, yes, but also maybe not the best use of resources.

Grace: As far as, we've only got this one spiritually leader.

Andi: And they need her, they absolutely need her. These dudes, well not just dudes, but like these people on this planet moon thing that just can't stop stabbing each other, I mean come on.

Grace: The "stabbed-y Andy's".

Andi: Just let them stab each other forever, like that's what they want to do, that's all they can comprehend, like fine, bye.

Grace: It's like a friggin Twilight Zone episode, "No, this is the hell they have built for themselves"

Sue: It's just really unbelievable to me that there will be these two factions on this moon who realize they can't die, therefore no side can win, and yet they still can't come to some sort of peace.

Grace: It is such an Original Series concept though isn't it.

Sue: It is.

Grace: All right so one thing that you've got to think about though as we're watching Bajoran society go from having Opaka as its spiritual leader to Winn as the spiritual leader, is do you think they came back to Bajor and told everyone about what happened here? So, that no matter what Winn does, no matter the fact that she has achieved kind of the highest rank possible on all of Bajor, is the top dog, is completely at this point of power, that she has to spend all of her achievement living in the shadow of everyone knowing that Opaka gave up everything to just try and make peace between these two groups of people, to spend all of eternity just in this completely selfless act? Does Winn have to live in the shadow of a martyr for that her entire tenure?

Sue: They make some very vague statement about, I think Sisko making a statement to the Bajoran people, but not what he said in it.

Grace: You've got to admit though that must just be such a slap in the face to Winn though, to finally get everything she wanted, but she's never going to have that level of love from the people for being a martyr.

Sue: But, they're also not electing a new Kai until later.

Grace: I know.

Sue: But nobody immediately steps into that role, but I mean I think she would, that Winn would live in the shadow of everything, of every selfless act by everyone, because she's always comparing herself.

Grace: Wow, she kind of does make her own hell then doesn't it.

Sue: Yeah.

Andi: I do want to say that like the writers immediately consigning Opaka to this stupid moon.

Grace: Yeah, that's a little bogus.

Andi: Makes sense when you think about where they wanted to go, because if you had Opaka in this role and not Winn, how many things would be avoided? How many conflicts would play out much differently?

Grace: Oh no, Opaka got sidelined for being too competent!

Andi: Yes, essentially, yes. She absolutely did. They did not need someone good and kind in that role, and that would keep the Bajorans together, and that would fight for peace. Like no.

Grace: I guess that would have made this shit too easy.

Andi: Exactly. So, they needed someone like Winn who could be a villain, and who could keep the conflict interesting, and who could make it very complex. Opaka was not designed to do that.

Grace: Good stories don't exist in a vacuum.

Sue: In a <http://www.startrek.com/> interview Saviola said, "What I loved about Opaka was that she was a woman of power and that only seems to happen in outer space. She had a dignity and a little bit a sense of humor even at the end. It would have been great to see who she developed into. But they brought in Kai Winn and it's always more interesting to see a more evil."

Grace: Also, I just want to bring this up, how often do you get to see a person of size in a position where it's a position of dignity and authority and a serious character like this? You don't see that nearly as much as we should. So it's really cool that we get to see this woman who's again the political and spiritual leader of an entire planet, and she's a woman of size and no one thinks anything of it. That's really cool. She is I think one of the few big people who we do see in Star Trek at all.

Sue: That's not a Pakled.

Grace: Yeah, which is unfortunate.

Sue: She's also a good foot shorter than just about everybody else on the show which I think is interesting as well, since they're all looking to her for leadership.

Grace: She's she doesn't look like an actor actor, and that's part of what makes it so cool, that it's like oh she is she is a human being, well she is a Bajoran, but she is a person just like you or I.

Andi: And now she's stuck on a moon, forever.

Grace: She's stuck on a moon forever.

Andi: Okay, I'm never going to get over that. That is just most ridiculous, like no, because the whole time I'm like just get her back from that damn moon.

Grace: Just go pick her up!

Andi: Go back there with your science-y stuff and like be ready and like fix this problem and get Kai Opaka back, don't just leave her there for all time, what's wrong with you people?

Grace: You have that problem a lot with a lot of these things when the plot's all wrapped up you're like, okay, and we'll never see them again, it's like there's nothing stopping you from checking up on them guys. Did you not see Wrath of Khan?

Sue: I knew there were some pitches for like finding her in the Gamma Quadrant, and bringing her back to Bajor and then having like a head to head with Opaka and Winn, and and also some novelizations and stories

where I think even Jake finds her in the Gamma Quadrant at one point, and they check in you know. So, there was talk at some point of bringing her back, and like with this whole microbe thing they definitely could have written a script around, it but they just chose to go with Winn.

Grace: The microbes are essentially Midichlorians aren't they?

Sue: Yeah, a little bit.

Andi: I mean for one thing you would think that there would be like pilgrimages.

Grace: Right? Something... I mean if people are starting to go into the Gamma Quadrant every now and then, why not. Why not be like hey let's all go check up on this religious leader that we left on a freaking moon.

Andi: Like seriously though like you have this this undying martyr of your religion who's like on the moon somewhere you can't tell me if you will one get in a ship and go do a pilgrimage and like ask her for wisdom and stuff.

Grace: Do you think like every Sunday, and all that, they're like praise be unto Kai Opaka?

Andi: Stuck on that damn moon.

Grace: *singing* She's on the moon now... a better place, not really, but yeah.

Sue: So then maybe Sisko didn't tell them the whole truth in his statement.

Grace: Look guys we left your pope on a moon.

Andi: They have a right to know.

laughter

Grace: Easter must be so awkward now.

Sue: Well... okay... So, the next time couple times we encounter Kai Opaka...

Grace: Story wise, encounter...

Sue: Storywise encounter, it is not in corporeal form but in the form of like visions and orb shadows, etc. etc.

Grace: Like you do...

Sue: Like you do. And in "The Collaborator" [DS9 Season 2, Episode 24] we find out some more about her past that we didn't know before.

Grace: Which I think is important, I mean it's all well and good to have a character that we establish as you know being interesting, but spiritual, and all knowing, and worldly. But to make that character complicated in a past tense, that is really the right way to go with a story like that. I mean we really can't do that much with a character who was just perfect, and it means so much more to the rest of the characters especially to Kira to be like, yeah this this woman who is your hero, but she also was a flawed person who sometimes made the wrong choices.

Andi: Any episode in which that dude that Kira dated that I can never remember his name, or his face, or anything about him because he's so boring.

Grace: Mr. Bland!

Andi: I literally, like if he is in an episode I forget that entire episode existed.

Grace: *singing* Mr. Bland, he was here, but we don't remember... Mr. Bland, send him to a moon, that would be better.

Andi: He just sucks all interest from a story from me, like I am, I just sit there and I'm like what's happening again?

Grace: *singing* Mr. Bland our female lead needed a love interest but we didn't know what to do. He's Mr. Bland.

Andi: They have no chemistry. It's kind of sad and scary how little chemistry they have like it shouldn't be possible, and yet.

Grace: *singing* Mr. Bland, he's just there to make Odo jealous.

Andi: I'm not the only one who feels this about this dude right. What's his name? Vedek... Vedek Bareil.

Grace: Shit, no I wrote a whole song just now about it.

Andi: Turnip dude.

Grace: More like Vedek Benign.

Andi: I always think of him as like having the personality of a bucket of turnips. So, when I'm talking about him on Twitter and I'm referring to him I'm like turnip dude and my followers actually know what I'm talking about.

Grace: You just say that and I always just think of Howl's Moving Castle.

Andi: But yeah, he is something else to me.

Grace: *singing* Mr. Bland, he's trying but not very hard.

Sue: He's there to serve as a contrast to Winn. Evil versus benign.

Andi: I love when they tried to show Kira like staring at him and trying to make us think that Kira thought he was hot and sexy, and that she was like feeling things... I'm like, mmmm, is she though? Like... I don't think so. I feel bad for the actor.

Grace: *singing* You're only as sexually attractive as is plot convenient.

Andi: I mean he's not bad looking or anything, I don't know. And, I mean it's not really so much the actors fault either although I don't think he did a great job of like portraying calm and not boring because, they wrote him to be extremely even tempered.

Grace: It is definitely a case of this character likes him because the writers tell us she does.

Andi: Yeah and I mean like I get that the I guess appeal for a character like Kira who's so emotional and like filled with such strong emotions to be drawn to somebody who is really good at controlling their emotions, and like very even keeled and stuff. I get all that, but I just don't feel like that comes through, he just comes through as boring. So c'est la vie. But it is cool to find out more about Opaka, more backstory for Opaka is always good and I dug that she was a mom and I dug that she wasn't just you know wise archetype lady that we saw from the pilot because that would get boring pretty quick.

Grace: Again, I'll take a complicated woman character over a perfect one any day.

Andi: Absolutely.

Sue: So in comments things were mixed about this. But do you think that this like retcon of the skeleton in the closet was a good thing for this character, or did it retroactively hurt this character?

Grace: Absolutely. Again, I think it's important that we have, especially women characters, who were allowed to be complicated and allowed to be a mixed bag rather than this either archetype of good or just complete and total garbage. It's really important that we have that in our stories because for so long we weren't allowed to have that, the woman character either had to be a saint or she was a slut. And with this we have a complicated character.

Sue: So again this one from an interview in the official Deep Space Nine Magazine Issue 9, I love the later series of Trek because there are so many interviews and magazines and references...

Grace: It gives us so much more to work with.

Sue: Yes, but Saviola said about this, "I didn't understand why what I did had to be kept secret when it was a heroic deed. It was almost like Oskar Schindler, I've sacrificed 40 including my own son to save twelve hundred."

Grace: Yeah that was a little weird. I mean it's not... it is a tactical move but... not the best one but it is one to be sure.

Sue: But, if she is still alive on this moon somewhere, and she's you know prayed to by the Bajoran people...

Grace: Praise be moon pope.

Sue: Right, would this be sullyng her reputation if suddenly who was it Prylar Sek and Vedek Bareil came out and said, oh by the way she... Prylar Bek, not Prylar Sek, sorry.

Grace: Well, you know Winn would take that and spin it in a nasty direction.

Sue: Sure, because Bareil knew, so therefore he's not fit. Yada yada yada. But instead he just stepped down, like it's the same result.

Grace: There's a bunch of weird weirdness in that to say the least. *singing* Mr. Bland makes questionable choices for some reason.

Andi: Yeah, I mean I don't know, I feel like it's a needs of the many type situation, because that's how she saw it, so like I don't see why this would be such a huge scandal, but I mean...

Grace: As far as making your characters complicated, it's dare I say it, a little benign.

Andi: I mean it's not like she you know say murdered someone in her first appearance like someone else we could name.

Grace: Like a few someone else's we could name.

Andi: Bombs everywhere! I have a policy that if anything blows up on or near Deep Space Nine, I just assume Winn did it. Until someone shows me some competing evidence I just assume Winn did it because I mean the evidence bears it out that she is responsible for a heck of a lot of explosions on or near Deep Space Nine.

Grace: She's just kind of a pyro isn't she.

Andi: She is! She just burns shit to the ground, while laughing.

Grace: That's how she gets her jollies. And he's a clogged toilet on the station Kai Winn!

Andi: Show me the proof otherwise, otherwise it's Kai Winn.

Grace: Are we talking absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Andi: Just blame Kai, specifically Winn. So, we have one more appearance by Opaka.

Sue: Yeah, this is in the episode "Accession" [DS9 Season 4, Episode 17] and it's very very brief. This is the episode where the prophets have sent back the Bajoran Akorem Laan, I probably said that wrong, who after 200 years, and he is now claiming... he's claiming to be emissary. So, Sisko steps aside and then is having orb shadow visions of Opaka, and Kira tells him, I think Kira, tells him that the Bajoran people believe, oh no, it's Bashir, tells him that the Bajoran people believe that you only have an orb shadow...

Grace: Bashir our resident expert on Bajorans...

Sue: Well he tells him that if... you only have an orb shadow if you have ignored the advice of the prophets from a previous encounter.

Andi: Kay.....

Sue: Sure, but the gist of it is that these visions of Opaka, plus the actions and beliefs of this new emissary convince Sisko that it is actually his rightful place so she convinces him to take on that role of emissary, and kind of be more active in it going forward.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: Oh, Opaka, she's worse than your grandma for like nagging displeasure. She won't let you forget it when you've let her down. Yeah, okay so how does she get it from the moon to here?

Grace: Faith of the heart?

Sue: The idea that it's not really her, but it's the prophets through her. Sure.

Andi: Okay.

Grace: Kind of a dick move on the prophets to use her likeness without permission.

Andi: Copyright infringement.

Sue: There was some unused dialogue from from an earlier script where Kira suggests that it was her trying to reach out telepathically and communicate with him from the Gamma Quadrant. And Sisko's reaction was we don't even know if she's still alive and Kira would be like yeah you're right.

Grace: On that immortal moon. We don't know if people survive there.

Andi: Someone could go check, just saying... anyways. I do think Opaka becomes more interesting when you think about her effect on others, in this case Sisko, but like especially Sisko and Kira and that she has such an effect on how they view things, and like the paths they end up taking, and in that way I think she's very interesting, and also very impactful as a character.

Grace: Definitely a character that lasts longer than her actual appearance is.

Sue: In effect, we really only had her for two episodes. But, I mean most of her impact I think at least in setting up the series came in the very first one.

Grace: Oh yeah.

Andi: Absolutely.

Sue: Which is really impressive.

Andi: Plus she's cool.

Grace: Yeah, she's a cool lady.

Andi: I dig her! She seems nice. She has a sense of humor. She likes to stroke Sisko's ear. I mean all pros.

Grace: She has your endorsement.

Andi: Yeah, exactly, like pro Kai Opaka, I'd vote for her. No, but really she does have a tremendous sense of empathy, which I really, I dig in characters.

Grace: And is what we would all hope the space pope would have.

Andi: Exactly, ideal space pope has a lot of empathy.

Grace: She's the space pope we want, not the space pope we deserve.

Sue: This whole time. Every time we use that phrase I've just been thinking, is the space pope reptilian.

Grace: Sure, why not?

Sue: Futurama invading my life.

Grace: Good times.

Sue: So, Camille Saviola was invited to star trek Las Vegas in 2014, and that's when her <http://www.startrek.com/> interview I mentioned before happened, it was leading up to that, and they asked her about like, are you surprised that people want to see you at this convention? And she said, "I guess Kai Opaka was not overexposed and for the Star Trek fans no detail is too small no character is too small. Opaka was very mysterious in a way, she was there and then she was not there. There was no evolution and no progression but she'd been there. So the fact that there's interest. That's great."

Andi: Well she understands Trekkies.

Grace: Yep, no kidding.

Sue: No detail is too small.

Grace: That's a very positive spin for it.

Andi: Yup, absolutely. And I think that's cool, like that's one thing that is really cool about being on Star Trek is like you will carry that forever. The Trekkies will remember you forever.

Grace: The Trek is eternal.

Andi: Exactly... like that damn moon.

Grace: The Trek, and its fallout are eternal.

Andi: Is there more to say about her?

Grace: We've got some pretty good listener comments we could share definitely. We've got one that I really liked from Pax on Twitter, "If Opaka had stuck around she would have become the Albus Dumbledore of DS9. Instead the Bajorans got stuck with Dolores Umbridge."

****laughter****

Andi: Accuracy, that's amazing!

Sue: The number of people who compared Winn Adami to Dolores Umbridge in these comment threads was just amazing.

Grace: It is a fair comparison, a "comfairison".

Sue: A comfairison?

Andi: And the Dumbledore comparison is good too, because like Dumbledore is like hanging out in that portrait.

Grace: But also also a flawed character in hindsight.

Andi: That's a good one, I like that, Dolores Umbridge, she's the worst.

****sounds of Andi's cat, Mary****

Grace: We've also got a really interesting one from Katie on Facebook who said, "I loved the character as an example of a woman holding spiritual power and political influence. Well I thought she was groundbreaking. The mirroring between Opaka and Kira I found very moving. I was in South Africa shortly after Mandela was elected president and the national TV station had DS9 shown daily at dinner time. Everyone would stop and watch it. Bars full of men watching this program about people trying to rebuild their lives with dignity. I've never been so proud of Trek."

Andi: Wow, that's amazing.

Grace: Well, it's really easy when it's something that we talk about just kind of flippantly that pop culture does affect people in the wider range of the world.

Sue: Oh for sure.

Grace: And and it's always of it's time, for good or for bad again.

Sue: I think in some ways DS9 was ahead of its time.

Andi: Yeah.

Grace: Yeah. I think it was in a lot of ways or could we even say out of its time.

Sue: We also had a comment from Doug on Facebook who said, "I feel like she could have still wielded influence from where she was." #deathmoon... I added that that's me, "It's too bad we didn't see her again. I remain fascinated by Deep Space Nine's portrayal of people of faith and how it feeds their resolve for political resistance. Such a thing is not often seen in Star Trek nor in much of western media."

Grace: See, Doug agrees with me.

Andi: He's also pointing out that people would have wanted to go to a pilgrimage. #deathmoon

****laughter****

Sue: Yeah I mean the last notes I really have for her is what Saviola has said about her casting. And apparently they called in basically every character actor they could think of and even wanted to audition Kathy Bates.

Grace: That would have been interesting, but probably very expensive.

Sue: And the other one from American Horror Story...

Grace: Jessica Lange?

Sue: Yes.

Grace: Oh, that would have been, that would have been wild!

Sue: Right?

Andi: They wanted a lot of Oscar winners in the Kai role I guess.

Grace: How many Oscar winners can you afford per Star Trek series?

Sue: And Saviola said, "I went in every character actress was there and I did a little tarot card reading, the real thing, my grandmother read cards and tea leaves down in Greenwich Village. She never charged people money and I have a little bit of that gift. Rick Berman was impressed with the quiet toughness of it. That's how it happened. I don't remember if I had a callback or not, it was really very easy."

Grace: That was a ballsy move.

Andi: Put "beat out Jessica Lange for a role" on your resume forever.

Grace: Put that on your vanity plates, tell the world.

Andi: Put that on your gravestone.

Sue: I don't think she actually went in because she wasn't doing TV at the time, but the note said they were interested in her.

Andi: That's pretty great.

Grace: Still knowledge you can take to the bank self-esteem wise.

Sue: I'm going to double check that now because I'm nervous.

Grace: It's all good.

Sue: Oh no, just Kathy Bates so ignore that part take it out.

Grace: No, no I think we should leave it in.

Sue: No, cause then I'm wrong.

Andi: It's okay we'll take it out.

Grace: That just makes you a complicated character too. And like we said we'll take complicated over perfect any day.

Sue: It was Kathy Bates who specified she didn't want to do any TV at that stage in her career, but they also on this list are Shelley Duvall...

Grace: Oh what!? Shelley Duvall had kind of become a recluse, was that by that point or did that happen later on?

Sue: I'm not sure about that.

Grace: She only just started reemerging.

Sue: Oh Natalia Nogulich is on this list!

Grace: Oh hey!

Sue: That would have been interesting. Tricia O'Neil...

Grace: That could have been cool.

Sue: Yeah, the possible list of people they either saw or wanted to see is quite impressive.

Grace: I think they made good.

Sue: But I was wrong, Jessica Lange was not among them, my fault.

Grace: You've got to pretend there's an alternate universe where that happened. It's the same alternate universe where Jeffrey Coombs is Riker.

Sue: I'm on a lot of allergy medication. Please blame the Claritin.

Andi: Now I'm keeping it all in.

****laughter****

Grace: **singing** Blame it on the Cla...a...a...ritin... And that's how many times I've sung this episode?

Sue: A lot, but not enough.

Grace: One of these days I'll just do a musical episode.

Sue: So do we have any final thoughts on Kai Opaka?

Andi: #deathmoon

Grace: Pretty much... Again complicated characters, we need em. Make your ladies complicated.

Sue: I think that I would have loved to see more of her but what we the little bit we did see really did shape Deep Space Nine, and it shaped the journey of our main character if not two of our main characters.

Andi: Here here.

Grace: She's definitely a small character that had a big impact on the series.

Sue: And as much as I would have liked to see more of her, her departure really did make way for I think one of Star Trek's greatest villains.

Grace: Absolutely no doubt.

Sue: All right so I guess that'll do it for us today if you'd like to reach us you can do so by emailing crew@womenatwarp.com, you can Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/womenatwarp/> and Twitter

<https://twitter.com/WomenAtWarp>, on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/womenatwarp/> and you can find our show notes and blog posts over at <http://www.womenatwarp.com/>. So Andi where can people find you on the Internet.

Andi: The easiest place for me is on Twitter where I call people turnip dude, and people understand what that means, and you can catch me at <https://twitter.com/FirstTimeTrek> where I'm live Tweeting through my first time through Star Trek.

Sue: And Grace?

Grace: You can find me on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/BonecrusherJenk> and on the moon of the undying.

Andi: #deathmoon

Sue: And I'm Sue, and you can find me on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/spaltor>. And for more from us and more from the Roddenberry podcast network you can visit <http://podcasts.rodtenberry.com/>. Thanks so much for joining us!

Grace: See you on the death moon.

****OUTRO MUSIC****

[Transcription service provided by: <https://twitter.com/carolinalady>]