

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

8x19 - "Cathedral."

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on the novel

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
Mission Gamma Book 3 - Cathedral

by Michael A Martin & Andy Mangels

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. SPACE - ASTEROID FIELD

A huge, flat field of asteroids and planetesimals, frozen and glinting in the weak light of a distant star. A grating dissonant MUSIC - more like noise - wafts over the scene.

Somewhere among the asteroids sits the tiny shuttle *Sagan*.

2 INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT

JULIAN BASHIR, EZRI DAX and NOG are in the shuttle. Nog sits forward, gazing out of the window, enraptured at the cacophonous sounds. Bashir and Dax share a dubious look. Nearby, a screen shows a display of changing sound-waves.

NOG

It's beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.

DAX

Beautiful isn't the first adjective that springs to mind, Nog. I guess nine lifetimes isn't quite enough to develop a taste for free-form splitter music.

BASHIR

Sounds more like Sinnravian *drad*.

NOG

(impressed)

Exactly, Doctor. Most humans aren't familiar with atonal minimalist music.

BASHIR

Most humans aren't blessed with the same... auditory endowments... as Ferengi.

The "music" hits a particularly pungent note, causing Dax to twitch and shudder in sympathy. Nog smiles at it.

DAX

Kids today. Their music is just noise.

BASHIR

All musicological analysis aside for the moment, what's causing the distortion waves that have been serenading us for the last hour?

DAX

I still say it's clearly an inter-dimensional effect.

BASHIR

But centred where exactly?

DAX

If we had access to the *Defiant's* sensor array, we'd know by now.

NOG

Bringing the *Defiant* closer would only drown out whatever it is we're... not finding out here.

The music stops. The crew look to each other in confusion. Then through the window they see space begin to OPEN UP in a big angular hole, deeper within the asteroid field.

3 EXT. SPACE - ASTEROID FIELD

A massive OBJECT has emerged out of nowhere, slowly rolling within the asteroid field. The thing seems to constantly change shape as new facets rotate out of and disappear back into subspace.

This thing is like a real-life Escher puzzle, intersecting lines and impossible geometries. Parts of it look like ominous Gothic architecture, with spires and towers. Other parts look completely different. Light reflects off it like gold, silver and ruby jewels.

4 INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT

DAX

Whatever it is, it looks pretty benign from this far out.

BASHIR

And what do you suppose it is?

NOG

The Divine Treasury?

BASHIR

I certainly hope not. Isn't that the first thing you're supposed to see after you die?

NOG

You're right. I hereby withdraw the comment.

DAX

Near as I can tell, it's turning on some sort of inter-dimensional axis. We only see the shadow it casts in three-dimensional space. I couldn't tell you how many dimensions it actually exists in.

NOG

It seems pretty clear that this object is the source of all the distortions we've been picking up.

BASHIR

Our cosmic concertmaster. I wonder how long it's been out here.

NOG

I'm running a material analysis. It's old. Something like half a billion years old.

DAX

Try an interior scan, Nog. And watch the subspace horizon line. Don't want to fall over the edge.

BASHIR

Over the edge? What do you mean?

DAX

There's a very slight power drain on the shuttle. I'd bet all the *raktajino* on Qo'noS it's dropping off into whatever dimension that thing's moving through.

NOG

I think I'm reading a residual power source deep inside. And life signs are inconclusive.

BASHIR

Let's hail them. Maybe somebody's still home.

Dax looks around for opinions, then shrugs her assent.

NOG

Opening hailing frequencies.
Sending greeting messages in all known Gamma Quadrant languages.

Nothing happens for ten seconds or so. The object continues to roll gradually in and out of subspace.

DAX

Sorry, Julian. Looks like nobody's home after all.

Then Nog's console BEEPS, and all the screens start running fast with tons and tons of data, all in foreign symbols.

NOG

The computer's downloading data.

BASHIR

Is it dangerous?

NOG

Nothing executable. Looks like it's just a text file.

DAX
A whopping huge text file. Nearly
eighty megaquads.

BASHIR
So what does it say?

DAX
(fascinated)
No idea.

5 **EXT. SPACE - ASTEROID FIELD**

In the asteroid field, a new facet of the object rotates out of subspace - a huge SPIRE, dark and glittering, very narrow but reaching all the way out towards the shuttle, and getting closer by the second.

6 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

Nog reacts to another new alert on his engineering console.

NOG
Power drain's gone off the scale!

They all look up and see the massive spire heading right for them. Dax snaps into command mode.

DAX
Nog, evasive manoeuvres!

NOG
The helm's frozen!

DAX
Brace for impact!

7 **EXT. SPACE - ASTEROID FIELD**

The giant spire SWEEPS past the shuttle, missing it by the barest margin. But the shuttle is still caught up in the translucent energy field surrounding the object, tossed in its wake as the spire rolls past and moves on.

8 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

As the shuttle passes through the energy field, all the running lights go out, there is a bright FLASH of light, and a twinkling TRANSPORTER-like effect shimmers over all three crew. Then it passes and the lights flicker back on.

Holding his head, a bit dizzy, Bashir looks out to see the spire sinking and folding back into subspace.

BASHIR

What just happened to us?

NOG

Best guess, we passed right through the edge of the thing's dimensional wake. It's a miracle we weren't pulled in after it.

DAX

Impulse power's returning.

NOG

I've got helm control.

DAX

Then let's get out of here. Set course back to the *Defiant*.

9 EXT. SPACE - ASTEROID FIELD

Slowly, the shuttle turns and heads out of the asteroid field, leaving the mysterious object rolling away on its own in the distance.

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

10 EXT. DEFIANT

The *Defiant* hangs stationary in space, as the *Sagan* slowly approaches its parent ship.

DAX (v.o.)
Sagan to *Defiant*. Permission to
dock.

11 INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT

Dax, Bashir and Nog sit in their seats.

BOWERS (comm)
Permission granted, *Sagan*. But we
have a minor medical emergency.
Lieutenant Candlewood got a pretty
nasty plasma burn in engineering.
Nurse Richter has requested Doctor
Bashir's help as soon as possible.

BASHIR
Understood, Sam. Please beam me
directly to sickbay.

BOWERS (comm)
Acknowledged.

Bashir silently mouths "I love you" to Dax just before he dissolves in a transporter beam.

Through the windows we see the *Defiant's* shuttle bay doors, as Dax guides the shuttle up and into the ship's interior.

She suddenly lurches and grabs her belly, as if her stomach is rebelling.

NOG
Are you alright, Ezri?

Dax settles the shuttle to the deck and begins shutdown procedures. Her face is turning distinctly green.

DAX

I'm fine. Lunch must not have agreed with me.

NOG

Maybe I should take a look at the *Sagan's* replicators. After I get that alien text file transferred to the bridge.

As Nog works the panels with one hand, the other absently reaches down and scratches his leg - his old nervous tic.

DAX

Phantom limb still bothering you?

NOG

No, not really. I don't usually think much about it. But it still happens from time to time. The itching, I mean.

DAX

Do you mind if I put my counsellor hat back on for a minute?

NOG

Bearing in mind that free advice is seldom cheap.

DAX

I wonder if your old symptoms might be flaring up again because of delayed stress.

NOG

From AR-558? That was more than a year ago. Yeah, it cost me a leg, but -

DAX

Not from AR-558. At least not directly. I think it's really about Taran'atar.

Nog tightens, remembering his encounter in the turbolift.

NOG

I've thought about it. And I've concluded that the less I have to see of any Jem'Hadar soldier, the better I like it.

DAX

What do you mean?

NOG

I mean that all Jem'Hadar are cold-hearted killers, and nothing can change that. Not even a direct order from Odo.

DAX

(gently)

Nog, Taran'atar isn't responsible for what happened to you.

NOG

No, but he won't let me forget it either. Just by being there. I can put up with having a Jem'Hadar on the station because I'm trained to follow orders. But nobody can order me to like it.

He turns and opens the hatch of the shuttle, leaving.

12 INT. DEFIANT - SHAR & NOG'S QUARTERS

Ensign SHAR sits in the centre of his room, unblinkingly staring at his computer screen. It shows a repeating five-second clip of THRISS, laughing and tossing her hair.

Shar shakes slightly, holding in an Andorian's enormously powerful emotions of grief, anger, guilt, despair. He can't take his eyes away.

VAUGHN (comm)

Commander Vaughn to all senior officers, and all science staff. Report to the mess hall.

Shar almost ignores the summons, but finally stands, turns off the screen, and with a Herculean effort, pulls his emotions under a cold, distant and professional demeanour. He turns and leaves the quarters.

13 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

Lieutenant CANDLEWOOD (8x17 "Empathy") lies on a biobed. Bashir stands at his side, putting the finishing touches to healing his burned arm and shoulder. Nurse RICHTER (8x10 "Divided We Fall") is there helping out.

CANDLEWOOD

So what the verdict, Doctor? Am I a goner? Am I doomed to live as a hermit on some pitiful outpost light-years from civilisation?

BASHIR

(indulgent)

If you are, it won't be because of your arm. It'll be because of your charming personality. Just take it easy for a few days, alright?

(to Richter)

Kristen, could you finish up here, please.

RICHTER

Yes, Doctor.

CANDLEWOOD

Thanks, Doctor. I'll remember you in my memoirs.

Bashir turns to get ready to leave, but notices a medical tray where a laser scalpel sits with its laser still active. Worried, "who would leave that there?", Bashir reaches out to switch it off. But he FUMBLES it.

The laser scalpel goes SOARING out of Bashir's hand and straight towards Lt Candlewood. The laser drives right down into his thigh, and he SCREAMS aloud.

SEGUE INTO:

14 INT. DEFIANT - MESS HALL

The SHRIEKing of the mysterious object again, as an image of it rotates on the main viewscreen. Cmdr ELIAS VAUGHN sits watching it, fascinated. Bashir, Dax, Shar, BOWERS, TENMEI, CASSINI (human female) and T'RB (Bolian male) are also in the room, either sat or stood. Nog is not there.

BOWERS

I hope nobody will mind if the tactical officer asks a dumb and obvious question. But how does this thing change its shape like that? I've never heard of any architecture doing that.

DAX

Strictly speaking, it isn't changing its shape at all. Just what you can see of it.

BOWERS

Come again?

DAX

Imagine you're floating in a boat. There's an iceberg near you. All you can see of it is the little bit poking out of the water. The rest is hidden.

BOWERS

Alright...

DAX

Now imagine that the iceberg is slowly rotating on an axis that's deep underwater. You'll continue to see just a fraction of the ice at any one time, just never the same part. But the ice itself hasn't changed.

CASSINI

And if you row your boat too close to the iceberg, you'll get caught in its undertow and swept under with it. That's what almost happened to the *Sagan*.

T'RB
Metaphorically speaking.

TENMEI
So what is it?

BASHIR
It could be anything. A space colony. An observatory. A retail establishment.

TENMEI
An inter-dimensional ski lodge.

DAX
A hospital. Or a church.

T'RB
Until we manage to translate that alien text file, it's pretty much anyone's guess.

BASHIR
All we really know is that an intelligent and perhaps extinct species built it more than five-hundred million years ago for some purpose which remains obscure. We, uh... we also know that the...

(loses train
of thought)

Uh... the...

(beat)

The structure possesses certain higher-dimensional properties we don't understand. And... and that's about it.

Vaughn notices the hesitation. That's not like Bashir.

He looks to Dax, who is still looking rather queasy and not really paying attention to the meeting because of it.

Shar has not said anything either. Vaughn notices all this, and doesn't like any of it.

VAUGHN

I want to know more about this inter-dimensional wake the *Sagan* encountered. Could it have had any harmful effect on the shuttle's crew?

BASHIR

(hesitant)

It's possible, sir. But I'll have to run some tests to be certain.

TENMEI

I have run some tests. On the *Sagan*, I mean. It's in optimal condition, except for a peculiar quantum resonance pattern.

VAUGHN

Meaning what?

TENMEI

I wish I knew.

Vaughn looks to Dax, who is growing increasingly green.

VAUGHN

Lieutenant, how long have you been feeling ill?

DAX

It happened... I think it started during the flight back from the alien artefact.

VAUGHN

I see. Has anyone else from the *Sagan's* crew experienced any symptoms?

Bashir hesitates to answer, rather embarrassed.

VAUGHN

Doctor?

BASHIR

I believe I may have experienced a... lapse in concentration while treating Lieutenant Candlewood. I'm not at all certain what to make of it. If anything.

VAUGHN

(grinds teeth)

And you were both planning on reporting these difficulties exactly when?

BASHIR

With respect, sir, at the time neither of us was aware there was a problem. I'm still not sure there is one now.

VAUGHN

Alright. But what about Nog? How has he been feeling?

DAX

He's in engineering, sir.
Repairing the plasma leak.

CUT TO:

15 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN ENGINEERING

Nog is gritting his teeth as he works inside the guts of an open panel. His hand keeps going back down to itch at his leg, harder and harder. It's driving him mad. He can't concentrate on his work.

Ensign PERMENTER (8x17 "Empathy") approaches.

PERMENTER

Lieutenant, are you okay?

NOG

My leg feels like it's on fire.
Can't stop it itching.

Unable to stand it any longer, the leg buckles under him, and Nog collapses against the wall and down to the deck, seething and tearing at his trouser leg. Worried and confused, Permenter slaps her combadge.

PERMENTER

Permenter to Doctor Bashir.
Medical emergency in engineering.

16 **INT. DEFIANT - MESS HALL**

Vaughn and Bashir react to the message, but as they do, Dax suddenly collapses across the table, clutching her belly and SCREAMING in pain.

And instead of reacting to that, Bashir just gazes at the scene, expression blank and confused.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

17 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

Bowers runs into the room from the corridor, carrying Dax in his arms. Bashir rushes in behind him. Between them they lower Dax onto a biobed. Bashir grabs a tricorder and scans Dax, as Richter appears and activates the biobed scanners.

BASHIR

Her isoboramine levels are falling steadily.

RICHTER

Is her symbiont in danger?

BASHIR

It will be in an hour if nothing changes. Run a full bio-scan.

Dax lets out a blood-curdling MOAN. Bashir winces.

BASHIR

Get me the delta wave scanner. I want her unconscious.

Richter hands him a device, which he places over Dax's forehead. She settles down into unconsciousness. Meanwhile Bowers has been talking on his combadge in the background.

BOWERS

Incoming transport. It's Nog.

A TRANSPORTER effect leaves Nog on the floor of sickbay, being cradled by Ensign Permenter. Richter goes to them and helps the panting, hissing Nog up onto another biobed.

Medical work goes on for a few moments, Richter and Bashir working smoothly. In the middle of a task, Bashir pauses, distracted and unfocused. He shakes his head and continues.

Behind them all, Vaughn enters the room. Seeing the chaos, he stays in the background and lets them work.

Eventually there is a break in the action. Vaughn catches Bashir's eye, and gestures for the doctor to join him.

VAUGHN

Bad news first, Doctor.

BASHIR

Bottom line? Ezri is rejecting the symbiont. There's no denying it. No stopping it either, apparently.

VAUGHN

Any clue as to what's causing it?

BASHIR

There's no sign of any virus or infection. All the usual drugs are having no effect. Nothing I tried has made any difference at all.

VAUGHN

How long has she got?

BASHIR

A few hours. The same for the Dax symbiont, unless we remove it.

VAUGHN

Which would kill Ezri anyway.

Bashir nods, hollow and blank. He seems unfocused, only half-there. Vaughn places a fatherly hand on his shoulder.

VAUGHN

I'm truly sorry, Julian.

(pause)

How is Nog?

BASHIR

See for yourself.

Bashir leads Vaughn back out into the main sickbay and over to Nog, who lies on a biobed. A sheet is drawn up to his waist, somewhat deflated where his left leg should be. Next to him on a tray is his artificial leg, removed from his body. Nog speaks, slightly spaced from the painkillers.

NOG
Sorry about this, sir.

VAUGHN
Leishman and Permenter have got everything well in hand. You just rest and do whatever the doctor tells you.
(re: artificial leg)
What happened?

BASHIR
Nog's body apparently rejected it. And it's easy to see why.

Bashir pulls back the sheet, and reveals that Nog's leg, formerly cut off at the knee, is actually growing back, a small half-formed stump. Vaughn's jaw drops, gobsmacked.

VAUGHN
Curiouser and curiouser. Ideas?

BASHIR
I'm totally at a loss. It's grown another centimetre just while he's been here. Even the burned femoral nerves are regenerating.

VAUGHN
I'd be sorely tempted to call this a miracle, Doctor. And where we find one miracle, we might do well to keep searching for others.

His meaning is clear. Bashir looks sadly back over to Ezri, lying unconscious as Richter checks readings.

18 INT. DEFIANT - SCIENCE LAB

ch'Thane, Cassini and T'rb stand watching and working at panels as large screens fill with the alien text.

T'RB
We're linked up with the main computer's latest quadrant-wide

cross-linguistic comparison
algorithms. Let's hope it doesn't
overload the translation matrix.

CASSINI

So ,we need the Gamma Quadrant
equivalent of the Rosetta stone.

SHAR

Let's begin.

Flat and unemotional, Shar presses buttons, and numerous translation programs begin running on the text, grouping and regrouping the alien icons into sets. Certain sets begin to repeat; the groups start to become more regular.

19 **INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY**

The medical bay is now set up for surgery, with Ezri under a surgical arch, and Bashir and Richter in the red smocks. Dax is awake, if still subdued. Leaning over her, holding her hand, Julian is dishevelled and overwrought.

DAX

Julian? I don't want to be
conscious when you cut the cord.
I don't want to feel... emptied.

BASHIR

I understand.

DAX

I'm ready, Julian.

Bashir touches the forehead device, and she begins to drift off. Before she goes, she mouths "I love you" to him.

BASHIR

Goodbye, Ezri.

She is unconscious. Bashir turns to Richter, who hands him a laser scalpel. He takes it very carefully, wary of it slipping again. He slices a line in Dax's abdomen. The symbiont begins to wriggle its own way out - Bashir reaches in to gently help it along.

BASHIR

Neuro-cortical separator, please.

Richter takes his laser scalpel away and hands him another device, which he clamps to the symbiont cord. Small metal attachments sink into the flesh.

RICHTER

Symbiont vital signs are weak but holding steady. No sign of neuroleptic shock.

Bashir finishes carefully cutting the cord. It flops back onto Ezri's stomach as he lifts the symbiont away.

BASHIR

Kristen, please prepare a hypo with twenty cc's of isoboramine.

Kristen hesitates for a moment, looking a little confused, but then gets the hypospray and hands it to Bashir. He injects it into the symbiont's end of the cord.

RICHTER

Doctor, we tried this drug before, but it had no effect. Why the second injection?

BASHIR

That was isoboramine, Kristen. This time I used boramine, which should stave off any necrosis.

RICHTER

No, Doctor. That was twenty cc's of isoboramine. As you ordered.

Resting in Bashir's hands, the symbiont starts to squirm. Bashir and Richter look on in dismay.

BASHIR

My god. An isoboramine overdose. It's going into neuroleptic shock.

RICHTER

Is there an antidote?

Bashir stares in confusion. Why is it so hard for him to think? The symbiont's squirming is getting more violent.

BASHIR

Yes... just give me a minute to concentrate...

But he continues staring off, confused. Sound around him starts to become dull, the beeping alarms fading out. Richter is getting distinctly worried.

RICHTER

Doctor! We need to get that counter-agent! What is it?

BASHIR

The counter-agent is... endomethalamine! Inject ten cc's of endomethalamine directly into the symbiont's umbilicus.

He holds the thrashing symbiont still as Richter urgently grabs a hypospray, fills it, and administers it. Dax calms, and Bashir hands it to Richter, who carefully places it into a portable symbiont pool (8x05 "Reflections")

Shaken, Bashir goes back to Ezri, lying still and cold. But to Bashir's shock and amazement, her eyes flutter open.

BASHIR

Ezri?!

EZRI

Dax is... gone...

Richter comes back over and stares with amazement at the biobed displays. Previously on the verge of death, they are all suddenly springing back to life.

RICHTER

This is impossible...

But Bashir is only staring at the displays, seemingly fascinated by the pretty twinkling lights.

20 **INT. DEFIANT - SCIENCE LAB**

The text moves about faster and faster on the big screen, looking increasingly organised. Shar, T'rb and Cassini continue to work at panels, watching the screens.

CASSINI

It's good that it's such a huge block of text. Should get plenty of character repetition.

Shar is still not saying much, just working hard. Cassini and T'rb notice his silence, and share a questioning look.

Suddenly Shar REACTS to something on the screen. He presses buttons, and the moving text stops. One particular ICON is now front and centre - it somewhat resembles the mysterious inter-dimensional object. Shar stares at it...

21 **INT. DEFIANT - MESS HALL**

People file one by one into the room. Shar enters cold and stiff, holding a padd. Nog limps in using a cane to support his newly regrown leg. Ezri guides a slightly bemused-looking Bashir. Vaughn is there waiting. They all take seats, as the object continues to roll on the screen.

VAUGHN

So, what do we know?

BASHIR

I had Nurse Richter do a physical scan, all the way down to quantum level, of myself, Ezri and Nog.

EZRI

And of my weirdly healthy yet still disembodied symbiont.

NOG

Then I overlaid those signatures onto the scan Ensign Tenmei took of the *Sagan*. We're all exhibiting the same unusual quantum resonance pattern. And it's becoming more pronounced by the hour.

EZRI

There's a progressive change going on in the DNA of every one of us. But Kristen can't figure out why, or what it will ultimately do.

NOG

For starters, it seems to have grown me a new leg. As well as given Ezri and the symbiont mutual independence.

VAUGHN

And what about you, Doctor?

Bashir hesitates, slightly ashamed, not wanting to say what he believes is happening - what has been taken from him.

BASHIR

Neurological degeneration. I'm... regressing. To what I was before Adigeon Prime. I can't explain it, but somehow our encounter with the alien artefact has begun undoing my genetic resequencing.

EZRI

It fits. Nog and I are reverting too, if you think about it. He's become the two-legged Ferengi he used to be. And I'm the unjoined Trill I was before the *Destiny*.

SHAR

Perhaps I can help to explain. The translation is not complete, but I have enough to provide some interesting hypotheses. The text appears to be scripture. An origin myth of sorts. This -

(re icon on padd)

- is the most commonly recurring symbol. It translates as either "cathedral"... or "anathema."

NOG

Quite a love-hate relationship.

SHAR

The text speaks of people who were touched by the cathedral, and were "misaligned in the worldlines."

VAUGHN

Which means what?

SHAR

(more icons)

"Untethered." "Adrift." "Lost."
When a person's quantum resonance pattern drifts far enough from normal, that person can become incompatible with the quantum signature of our universe. You would be hurled randomly into some alternate world.

VAUGHN

So... you're all gradually transforming into alternate selves. A Julian Bashir whose genes were never resequenced.

EZRI

An Ezri Tigan who never joined with Dax.

NOG

Or a Nog who listened to his uncle and went to business school instead of Starfleet Academy.

SHAR

(quietly, to self)

Roads not taken. Different choices made.

VAUGHN

So we go back. Get inside the thing and fix this somehow.

SHAR

Yes, sir. Only... the text indicates that the artefact was once located on the surface of an inhabited planet.

VAUGHN

And where is that planet now?

SHAR

Lots of places. And in lots of little pieces.

They look with astonishment at the view screen, at the cathedral rolling amongst the asteroids, the meaning of Shar's answer dawning on them.

EZRI

(awed)

It's powerful enough to destroy an entire planet?

SHAR

It would seem so. And, of course, the closer we get to it, the more power it will drain from the *Defiant*, and the more likely we are to be caught in its wake. The entire crew could also become... "misaligned."

VAUGHN

So... as it stands, we can't go back to the cathedral.

On everyone's dismayed expressions...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

22 INT. DEFIANT - MESS HALL

Shar, Nog and Bashir are just leaving the mess hall. Ezri is following them when Vaughn calls her back.

VAUGHN
Lieutenant Da-
(oops)
Ezri, please stay a moment.

Ezri hears the correction and pauses. When Bashir realises she is not with him, he looks childishly scared for a moment. She nods for him to go on, then turns to Vaughn.

EZRI
A perfect opening to the subject.

VAUGHN
No.

EZRI
I'm sorry?

VAUGHN
I will not relieve you of duty.

EZRI
Sir, without Dax, I'm no use to you. I can't contribute to the mission. I might even put it in danger.

VAUGHN
You couldn't be more wrong. The command experience you've gathered over the last few months belongs to you just as much as to Dax.

EZRI
I'll grant you that. But so much of what Ezri Dax was came from the other hosts and their experiences.

VAUGHN
Which you found valuable, right?

EZRI
Of course I did.

VAUGHN
And why do you suppose that is?

EZRI
Because...
(catching on)
Because each host brings something
unique to the symbiosis.

VAUGHN
Each host. Not just Lela or Audrid
or Curzon. Ezri is part of that
list too.

EZRI
But what if I still can't measure
up without Dax? It's a joke to
think I can pull my own weight.

VAUGHN
Ezri - if you drop out of sight
because of your own perceived
shortcomings, how do you think
that will affect the work of every
other crew member on this ship?

She is taken aback. She had not considered that.

VAUGHN
So you're staying put, Lieutenant.
That's a direct order. You are
still capable of following orders,
aren't you?

EZRI
Yes, sir.

VAUGHN

Good. Because Doctor Bashir is going to need your support more than ever in the coming hours.

Vaughn's manner softens from commander to friend, looking wistfully to the image of the cathedral on the monitor.

VAUGHN

I must admit, it's chilling to see Julian slowly losing his faculties this way. I am one-hundred-and-two years old, after all. I can't help wondering... how much longer until the same starts happening to me.

23 INT. DEFIANT - STELLAR CARTOGRAPHY

The cathedral, slowly rumbling in and out of subspace, new facets appearing all the time. Pull back to reveal that the image is on the enormous screen that covers one whole wall of the *Defiant's* new stellar cartography lab.

Nog and Shar stand in the darkened room with the image in the background. The cathedral's "music" plays quietly. They are both eating lunch, padds still laid out before them.

SHAR

Perhaps we can run another simulation on using the warp nacelles to extend the range of the transporter.

NOG

We keep losing the signal. We need a different approach.

Shar's eyes are fixed on the cathedral, his mind elsewhere. The surface is still, but his emotions are rolling beneath. Nog stops eating, deciding he needs to confront his friend.

NOG

Shar, what's wrong?

SHAR

You are one of my most valued friends, Nog. I wonder if I have

ever taken the time to tell you that before.

NOG

Thanks. The feeling's mutual. Now what are you trying to tell me?

SHAR

Just that the people in our lives are irreplaceable. Once they're gone, there are no opportunities to repair our relationships with them. No second chances.

Nog realises something is really wrong with Shar. He is at breaking point. Nog silences the music and steps lightly.

NOG

Tell me, Shar. What's happened?

SHAR

It isn't easy. We Andorians do not confide easily with each other, let alone with outsiders.

NOG

Ouch. I thought we had more in common than that, Shar. Aren't we both sons of Very Influential People? And aren't we both always trying to keep that fact from swallowing us whole?

(Shar nods)

Alright, I'll get confessional first if that's what it takes. I want to confess to not being sure I'm really doing everything I can to crack this mystery.

He stands up, pushing his chair back, and hefts his brand new leg up onto the table surface. Shar is confused.

NOG

Don't you understand? That alien thing hurt Bashir and Dax pretty badly. But I got lucky.

SHAR

That is fortunate for you.

NOG

No! It's horrible! If we reverse whatever that cathedral did to us, I'll probably go back... to the way I was before. Just after the Jem'Hadar took my leg.

SHAR

Forgive me. I hadn't considered.

NOG

I've had a tough time thinking about anything else. So I've made my ugly confession. Now will you tell me what's bothering you?

SHAR

When you first learned that you would lose your leg, and that the loss would be permanent, how did you feel?

NOG

Shar, why do you always answer a question with one of your own?

SHAR

Please, Nog. Tell me how you felt.

NOG

I felt... incomplete.

SHAR

That is precisely how I feel, Nog. Incomplete. Permanently.

NOG

I don't understand.

Shar stands too, unable to begin. Trying to find a way. Just barely holding his pain in.

SHAR

Thriss. Thriss is dead, by her own hand. Our bond is sundered forever. I have no future. And I am solely to blame.

Nog is stunned. Shar's pain is palpable. Nog goes to him and draws him into a gentle embrace. Shar stiffens, unable to take comfort at first, but eventually relaxes and hugs back. Gently, quietly, his tears start to flow.

24 INT. DEFIANT - BASHIR & DAX'S QUARTERS

Julian sits cross-legged on his bunk - unshaven, clothes askew, staring into the distance. Crooked, juvenile letters are burned into the wall, reading MY NAME IS JULIAN. A dog-eared "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" is on the bed.

Ezri walks softly into the room. Julian looks up - he seems to almost not recognise Ezri.

BASHIR

You're quite pretty.

Next to him is the laser scalpel again, still switched on. Without calling attention to it, Ezri sits next to Julian on the bunk and takes the scalpel, switching it off.

BASHIR

That's mine.

EZRI

It's alright, Julian. You weren't planning on doing any surgery anytime soon, were you?

Julian looks shyly onto the bed, and Ezri sees his old teddy bear, KUKALAKA, among the tangled bedclothes.

BASHIR

I'm a doctor. I need instruments.

EZRI

Yes, Julian. But doctors keep their instruments in the medical bay. I'll take this there for you.

BASHIR

I have to go to the medical bay too. There's a patient I need to see. There's some... therapy I need to administer.

EZRI

Julian, you need to stay here. You're in no condition to care for a patient.

He looks at her, and the same man is still in there.

BASHIR

You don't understand. The therapy isn't for a patient. It's for me.

25 EXT. DEFIANT - ESTABLISHING

Just to indicate time passing...

26 INT. DEFIANT - MESS HALL

Vaughn, Ezri, Bowers, Shar, T'rb and Candlewood are sat around the table, with a low buzz of conversation. Bashir is there too, sat next to Candlewood. Bashir is a little smartened up now but still looking rather hollow, gazing silently down into his own lap. Nog is the last to enter the room, without his cane, a spring in his step.

CANDLEWOOD

Captain, I appreciate the invitation, but I'm not sure what I can contribute to the meeting. I've been in sickbay all day.

VAUGHN

You're here because you require Doctor Bashir's constant medical attention, Mister Candlewood.

Vaughn's significant look gets the message across.

VAUGHN

Ready whenever you are, Nog.

NOG

I want to start by saying that Ensign ch'Thane has double-checked my figures, as have the entire engineering and science teams.

BOWERS

Still sounds chancy to me. You're essentially using the asteroids as natural transporter relays.

NOG

More like platforms for a series of self-replicating transporter relays. We beam the first one out to the nearest cometary body, and it beams another relay to the next body, and so on.

BOWERS

There's got to be a huge power cost associated with this.

SHAR

Correct. The drain on *Defiant's* replicator supplies will be huge. We'll be on field rations for the rest of the voyage.

VAUGHN

A small price to pay.

NOG

And it will let us beam the crew onto the cathedral right from the edge of the asteroid cloud, without having to get anywhere near the thing itself.

EZRI

Assuming it works. You're juggling a lot of variables here. We don't even know there's anywhere to land inside the cathedral.

Vaughn is about to reply, when there's suddenly a bright FLASH of white light that fills the screen. It reveals:

27 **EXT. FERENGINAR**

Nog is standing outside, on a city street in a drizzling rain, wearing civilian Ferengi clothes. He looks up and sees the Tower of Commerce looming over him. Ahead of him on the street is the silhouette of a naked Ferengi female.

WOMAN
Come along, Nog!

Another FLASH, and...

28 **INT. DEFIANT - MESS HALL**

...We're back in the mess hall. Everyone's looking a little shaken, perturbed. Shar stands up with his tricorder out.

BASHIR
It wasn't a bad place at all. Not what I expected.

EZRI
I was back on the *Destiny*.

NOG
What just happened to us?

BOWERS
The three of you - you, Doctor Bashir and Lieutenant, ah, Tigan - you all just... vanished.

SHAR
For two seconds, your quantum signatures synced up with a nearby parallel universe. Fortunately you all snapped back to this reality. There's no guarantee you'll be so lucky next time.

VAUGHN

Well, we couldn't have asked for a better demonstration of the consequences of doing nothing.

29 INT. DEFIANT - TRANSPORTER ROOM

Ezri, Nog and a confused and nervous Julian all stand on the transporter platform, wearing environment suits. The portable symbiont pool containing Dax sits beside them.

Shar and Ensigns T'rb and CHAO (8x11 "Gateways") all work behind the console. Vaughn stands watching.

VAUGHN
Everything ready, Mister ch'Thane?

SHAR
Aye, sir. Chief Chao has confirmed that the first transporter relay is in place and operational.
(nervously)
I'm ready to proceed.

Vaughn gives him a solemn nod, and Shar starts working the panels. The transporter sound fills the room.

SHAR
First relay activated, replicating second relay now.

Bashir, Nog, Ezri and Dax dissolve in a transporter beam as Shar looks on with clenched jaw.

VAUGHN
Godspeed.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

30 EXT. DEFIANT

The *Defiant* sits at the very edge of the asteroid field, with the cathedral visible in the distance, further away than at the top of the episode. The feeling is cold, elemental, mysterious.

Gradually we move CLOSER to the cathedral, swooping over the twinkling frozen asteroids until the object looms big enough to fill the screen, then closer still, until it BLACKS OUT the screen. Fade back up into:

31 INT. NEW SYDNEY MINING CAVES

A transporter effect deposits Ezri into a rough cave set, lit by wall sconces and with occasional pieces of mining equipment. These are the New Sydney mines from her home colony (7x11 "Prodigal Daughter"). The cathedral's mystical music rings distantly, almost out of earshot.

Ezri stands in a utilitarian jumpsuit, not the environment suit, and her hair is longer (8x05 "Reflections"). She raises a wrist-lamp and shines it around the walls.

YANAS (o.s.)

Ezri.

Ezri turns and sees YANAS TIGAN, her overbearing mother, looking at her with an insincere smile.

YANAS

I'm sorry Starfleet Academy didn't
work out for you. But I can't deny
I'm glad you've come home.

Ezri frowns for a bit, then clears her head, remembering.

EZRI

(bitterly)

What choice did I have? Not even
Starfleet can stand up to the
irresistible force of my mother.

YANAS

That's unfair, Ezri. Unless you believe what happened to Norvo and Janel was somehow my fault.

EZRI

(resigned, beaten)

No, of course not. You needed me.

YANAS

Such a dutiful daughter. Now I need you to get back to the accounting office and catch up on the books.

Ezri turns away, submitting. In her way is BOKAR, the Orion Syndicate representative (also from 7x11). Smooth, suave, dressed in a business suit and thoroughly unpleasant.

BOKAR

I've come to discuss your recent equipment orders, Miss Tigan. I think you'd do well to consider a few... additional purchases.

EZRI

Why, Bokar? To pay off the Orion Syndicate so we don't have more mysterious cave-ins down here?

BOKAR

Such a shame, losing both your brothers like that. So sudden and tragic. Makes you appreciate what you still have all the more.

YANAS

What's he saying, Ezri? Did you deal with the Orion Syndicate?

Ezri shakes her head, confused. She can't quite remember.

EZRI

No, that was Janel.

YANAS

Janel's dead, Ezri.

EZRI

Yes, I know that...

(shakes head)

No, he's alive! This is wrong... I left this damned place. And I left you! And I stayed away.

YANAS

You need to stop dreaming, Ezri.
Accept life as it is.

BOKAR

Listen to your mother, Miss Tigan.

Ezri suddenly advances on him, and with a swift PUNCH to the stomach and another to the jaw, knocks him out cold.

EZRI

Problem solved, mother. Now it's your turn to clean up the mess.

She holds her belly, gasping with sudden pain. Her hair is shorter again, and she is back in her Starfleet uniform.

EZRI

Dax... I need Dax.

YANAS

Why would you return to that life?
You never wanted to be joined in the first place.

EZRI

I'm just following your advice, mother. Accepting life as it is.

YANAS

But I need you here!

EZRI

Hire a damn bookkeeper.

The room begins to fade around her, but before it goes:

YANAS
I still hate your hair.

32 **EXT. AR-558 ENCAMPMENT**

Weapons fire SCREECHES through the air, making Nog jump in fear. He looks around the misty, rocky basecamp (from 7x08 "Siege of AR-558"), hearing more weapons and screaming in the distance, with the cathedral music further behind it.

In his muddy, torn uniform, Nog runs desperately from rock to rock, terrified of what is out there in the dark. He runs out into a clearing, one that is full of dead bodies, Starfleet and Jem'Hadar. He steps through them in horror.

He reaches another rock, and steps round it, only to see a Jem'Hadar in his path, holding a weapon. It is TARAN'ATAR. Nog freezes in fear. Taran'atar growls down at him. Nog begins backing away, back into the field of bodies.

TARAN'ATAR
It is the Founders' will.

NOG
That doesn't make it right!

TARAN'ATAR
Everything done in the name of the Founders is right.

NOG
Yeah, well, the universe is a Ferengi. It always balances the books, and it never gives anything away without demanding payment.

He stops, sets himself strong, and raises a phaser rifle.

NOG
So if this is the way it's gotta be, then do your worst, Taran'atar. Just get on with it.

The Jem'Hadar growls again, and raises his weapon. He begins to charge forwards. Nog FIRES, and shoots him down.

More Jem'Hadar come from behind the rocks, all with Taran'atar's face, raging with violence, firing their weapons. Nog keeps firing, taking down as many as he can.

But they keep coming, and Nog eventually goes down in a hail of phaser fire, smiling as the scene fades to BLACK.

33 **INT. CAVES OF MAK'ALA**

Oh yes, more caves - this time the Trill breeding pools (8x10 "Divided We Fall"). Focusing on the large central pool, a symbiont bobs to the surface - Dax. It swims around a little, sending electrical charges out into the water. The cathedral music plays distantly somewhere.

Gradually, out of the darkness at the edges of the pool, nine humanoid figures appear, wading hip-deep through the water. As their faces are revealed, we see they are all of Dax's past hosts, as glimpsed in 8x05 and 8x07.

Dax sends out another electrical charge, as subtitles read THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE.

AUDRID

You've known about what's coming
for the past century, Dax.

LELA

All those years, those lifetimes.

TORIAS

And it still hasn't done anything.

EMONY

Why haven't you at least tried to
warn anyone, Dax?

Dax sends out more electrical fingers - the subtitles read I DON'T KNOW WHAT ANY OF YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.

JORAN

You see what you want to see, Dax.
You always were a master of
repressing whatever parts of
yourself you'd rather not face.

TOBIN

Why have you been holding back?

More electrical discharges. Subtitles: HOLDING BACK WHAT?
Audrid steps closer to the symbiont, leans down to it.

AUDRID

Your nightmares, Dax.

FLASHBACK - 8x05 "REFLECTIONS"

Quick flashes, almost too fast to see, of the moment when Audrid Dax's husband is attacked by an alien creature in another set of caves. And of him screaming incoherently and chasing the terrified Audrid through the caves.

BACK TO SCENE

Dax sends out more tendrils of electricity. Subtitles read:
MY NIGHTMARES ARE MY OWN BUSINESS.

CURZON

You couldn't be more wrong. Soon,
half the galaxy will be living
your nightmares.

AUDRID

Unless you rejoin with Ezri. And
warn everyone.

Finally, Ezri herself steps forward.

More electrical charges. Subtitles read: YOUR THOUGHTS ARE
DISORGANIZED. UNSUBTLE. I AM BETTER OFF WITHOUT YOU.

EZRI

Look, slug. I don't like this
joining thing any better than you
do. But we're a long way from
home. And I'm willing to take one
for the team if you are.

AUDRID

You know what you have to do.

The other eight figures recede back into the darkness, leaving only Ezri and Dax. She leans down to the symbiont, cradles it in her hands. The light begins to fade.

EZRI

So how about it, slug?

And the cave fades to DARKNESS, lit briefly by one last electrical discharge. No subtitles.

34 **INT. EXAMINATION ROOM**

The FLICK of a switch bathes a cold, sterile, unwelcoming room in harsh and flat artificial light. Julian Bashir stands in a hospital smock, a slightly learning-disabled man, scared and out of his depth.

Three Starfleet officers - two human women and one Vulcan male, all in blue medical uniforms - sit at a table, looking down their noses at him.

VULCAN

Well, Mister Bashir? Which is it?
A pre-ganglionic fibre, or a post-ganglionic nerve?

BASHIR

I'm afraid I don't know... I can't recall the answer to that, sir.

WOMAN

(with contempt)
Another defective. Put him with the others.

Two burly orderlies appear suddenly; they grab him by the arms and half-walk half-drag him out of the room. One of them has DUM stencilled on his shirt; the other has DEE.

35 **INT. CELL**

Bashir finds himself thrown into another sterile room where JACK, PATRICK, LAUREN and SARINA wait (last seen in 7x04 "Chrysalis"). Jack jumps up onto a table, wearing a big top hat, hyperactive as ever. The orderlies remain at the door.

JACK

Who's the new pleb, hmm? This is a private club, hmm?

Sweet, childish Patrick approaches, smiling wide, sipping from a bottle labelled DRINK ME.

PATRICK

Hi, I'm Patrick. Don't mind Jack here. They say he's -

(air quotes)

- antisocial.

Across the room, Lauren lounges seductively on a couch, with a silver tea set laid out in front of her. Sarina remains catatonic in her seat, staring at the wall.

LAUREN

Welcome to our little tea party. You're one of us now, Jules.

BASHIR

I'm not Jules. I'm Julian. And I don't belong here.

Bashir tries to leave, but the burly orderlies are there to block him. Jack leaps off the table at them, tackling them to the ground. Lauren seems aroused by the manly violence, Patrick blubbers in fear, and Sarina ignores it all.

Meanwhile, Bashir slips out unnoticed.

36 INT. WAITING ROOM

Bashir runs into another white room. Julian's parents, RICHARD and AMSHA BASHIR (5x16 "Doctor Bashir, I Presume") sit on a big red sofa, reading a broadsheet newspaper and a spy novel respectively.

Nearby, there is a potted plant with red, heart-shaped leaves. The cathedral sound plays as gentle muzak through wall speakers.

BASHIR

Hello, Mother. Father.

RICHARD

Ah, there you are, Jules.

BASHIR

Stop calling me that. My name is Julian now. It's been Julian ever since I understood what you did to me in this place.

AMSHA

We only want what's best for you, Jules. We love you so much -

BASHIR

You obviously don't love me enough as I am now.

The orderlies appear at one end of the room.

RICHARD

The doctors are ready to see you now, Jules.

Scared, Bashir turns and runs out the way he came in.

36 **INT. GENETIC LABORATORY**

Bashir quietly, furtively opens a door and sees one more identical white room.

In the middle, on a high-tech seat surrounded by lots of unpleasant-looking machines, sits a thin, small dark-skinned and dark-haired Arabic boy - six-year-old Julian Bashir, aka JULES.

The boy looks up as the adult Bashir enters, and they make eye contact. They instantly understand who each other are.

The boy is scared, tears in his eyes, his hands wringing nervously in his hospital smock. But he doesn't cry out. He is not stupid - he's brave. Bashir sees this and smiles.

The three Starfleet doctors from the panel are also there, working at the other side of the room, their backs turned so they don't see adult Bashir creep towards young Jules. Then one of them does turn, and sees him.

DOCTOR
You're not supposed to be here.

BASHIR
Neither is he.

Bashir reaches out and GRABS his younger self, who comes willingly. They make a dash for it back out of the room.

37 **INT. EXAMINATION ROOM**

Bashir and young Jules run past the panel of doctors, somehow in two places at once. The Vulcan is now wearing Jack's top hat, and his face is a big O of surprise.

38 **INT. WAITING ROOM**

Bashir and young Jules run hand-in-hand past his parents, who shout after them to behave. The burly orderlies give chase again, angrily waving lollipops in the air.

Bashir and Jules run, knocking over the plant and spilling red heart-shaped leaves all over the white floor.

39 **INT. CATHEDRAL**

Still running, they barge through a door and into a darker, larger space. They stop in surprise.

Bashir looks up and sees constantly changing architectural shapes and odd, impossible geometries high over his head. He is inside the cathedral. The mysterious music plays louder here.

BASHIR
My God, what have I done?

JULES
You finally recognised me.

BASHIR
But I prevented you from having the procedure. Where does that leave me?

JULES

Everything you did here was without the benefit of genetic engineering. You displayed courage and compassion. The acts of a simple but decent man.

Bashir smiles, finally understanding. Jules smiles back.

BASHIR

I am Jules. And Jules is me. And that's nothing to be ashamed of.

JULES

Consider your love-hate relationship with me... resolved.

Jules fades away, his bright SMILE lingering for a moment. Bashir gazes up to the ever-changing ceiling with wonder. His back straightens, the intelligence comes back into his eyes, and his Starfleet uniform materialises around him.

VAUGHN (comm)

Defiant to away team. Please respond.

(Bashir doesn't answer)

Away team, respond!

Bashir is too entranced by the magical cathedral to respond. A TRANSPORTER beam forms around him anyway, and as he dissolves and disappears, the cathedral shatters into jagged pieces of glass, splintering into darkness.

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

40 EXT. DEFIANT - ESTABLISHING

The *Defiant* still sits at the very edge of the asteroid field, with the cathedral visible in the distance.

41 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

Vaughn sits in the centre chair, his fingers gripping the arms tightly. Around him no-one speaks, there is just the sound of computers bleeping and people waiting.

VAUGHN

Anything, mister ch'Thane?

SHAR

Nothing yet, sir. I -

(alarms sound)

Captain! I believe I've made sensor contact with the away team.

BOWERS

I'm receiving combadge signals from inside the artefact. The pre-arranged evac signals. Very weak, and extremely red-shifted, as if they were moving away from us at great speed.

SHAR

They could be temporally distorted by the artefact. No way to tell how long they've been transmitting.

VAUGHN

Defiant to away team. Please respond.

(no answer)

Away team, respond!

(still no answer)

Vaughn to Chao. Lock onto the away team. Shar's feeding you the coordinates now.

CHAO (comm)
Sir, I just tried, and the main transporter buffer blew up. I can't get them.

A moment of horror as everyone wonders what they're going to do. Then Shar sits bolt upright with an idea. He begins rapidly hitting commands on his console.

SHAR
We still have one working transporter. I'm remotely engaging the *Sagan* now.

VAUGHN
Brilliant work, Ensign. Vaughn to sickbay - you've got incoming!

41 INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT

Lights on the panel light up, the transporter hums to life. A pattern half-forms in the cabin, then dissolves again.

42 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

Richter stands ready as the transporter signal reforms in sickbay. Lt Candlewood is still there too - now healthy and healed, and ready to help.

Ezri is the first to appear, holding her belly and half-collapsing to the floor in pain. Richter runs to her and begins to remove the environment suit, as a second beam deposits Dax's symbiont pod. As Richter is helping Ezri up, a third signal delivers Nog, his suit leg deflated.

RICHTER
Ezri, I can't wait for Julian to appear. I need to get Dax back into you right now.

Having placed Ezri on a biobed, Richter turns to get tools and runs right into Bashir. He spots the problem right off.

BASHIR
Kristen, help me with Dax. John,
help Nog.

They all jump into action.

RICHTER
Sir? It's good to have you back.

BASHIR
It's good to be back, Kristen.

43 EXT. SPACE - ASTEROID FIELD

The *Defiant* pulls away from the asteroid field, and begins heading away from the area.

VAUGHN (v.o.)
Captain's log, stardate 53581.0.
As we loop past the mysterious
alien artefact, we officially pass
the midway point of our journey
through the Gamma Quadrant. We're
on our way home.

44 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

Vaughn sits in the centre seat watching the cathedral recede away from them. Shar turns to him, his expression eager. Vaughn nods his assent - Shar gets up and leaves.

VAUGHN (v.o.)
What exactly the thing is, I leave
for better minds than mine to
determine. The readings the crew
has taken of the cathedral ought
to keep the Federation's
physicists and architects - and
maybe the psychiatrists too - busy
for decades. As for whatever other
races may come across it, all I
can do is leave behind a warning
buoy detailing our experiences,
and hope they see sense.

The door opens, and Julian Bashir and Ezri Dax enter the bridge to smiles all around. Dax goes to Bowers, who gives her a padd. She then brings the padd over to Vaughn, and hands it to him with a smile. He's still gazing.

DAX

Ship's status report, sir.

VAUGHN

Forgive me, Lieutenant. That thing lends itself to wool-gathering.

DAX

You should see it from the inside.

BASHIR

Sir, there's still one question nobody's been able to answer yet, even with the translated alien text. What's it for?

VAUGHN

Any thoughts, Lieutenant?

DAX

Well, from the text it's clear the cathedral's builders intended it to tap into unlimited power from multiple universes. But they lost control and it destroyed their planet.

BASHIR

That's not what I mean. I mean... what is it now? What has it become in the half-a-billion years since?

DAX

I'd attribute a lot of it to the phenomenon of emergent properties. Because of its original function, the object has always connected with parallel universes. Its ability to let people confront alternate versions of themselves may be an unintended side effect.

BOWERS
You're saying you think that
thing's just... an accident?

DAX
Precisely. Just as the universe
itself may be.

They all try to wrap their minds around that.

45 **INT. DEFIANT - SHAR & NOG'S QUARTERS**

Shar's repeating video clip of Thriss is playing again on the computer screen. Shar sits watching her laugh and toss her hair flirtatiously, tears in his eyes.

But now Nog is there beside him, offering comfort and friendship, holding his hand. Shar smiles his gratitude through the tears.

46 **EXT. SPACE**

The *Defiant* zooms through space at warp, on its way home.

FADE OUT:

THE END