

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

9x16 - "Olympus Descending, pt 1."

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on the novella

"Olympus Descending"
by David R George III

appearing in

Star Trek: Worlds of Deep Space Nine
Book 3 - Ferenginar / The Dominion

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 MONTAGE FROM EP 9x04 "THE OFFICERS' CLUB"

-- Kira and Odo walk along the corridor.

VOICEOVER

Previously, on Deep Space Nine.

KIRA

Are you absolutely sure you have
to go back so soon?

ODO

Things are changing all the time
in the Link. I need to be there to
guide them. And then there's
Laas...

KIRA

Laas?

ODO

Yes... he's still determined to
find the rest of the Hundred.

-- Weyoun greets Odo; Taran'atar speaks to Odo.

WEYOUN

Founder, welcome. We are ready to
return you to the Dominion at your
convenience.

TARAN'ATAR

Founder... I would like to go with
you.

ODO

You still have work to do here. I
hope one day you will understand,
Taran'atar. Just... keep trying.

TARAN'ATAR

Yes, Founder. I will obey.

-- Shar and Nog watch Odo's ship leave the station.

DAX (v.o.)
DS-Nine to Dominion vessel Nine-
Seven-One. You are clear to
depart. Safe journey.

-- As the ship dives into the wormhole...

VOICEOVER
And now, on Deep Space Nine.

2 EXT. SPACE

The golden world of the Founders hangs peacefully in space. In the starry sky behind it, there is one particular star that outshines all the others. A bright beacon in the sky.

We PULL BACK slightly, and Dominion tech displays encroach around the edge of the image. We are looking through a Jem'Hadar viewer headset. Jem'Hadar EXTRAS wander unheeding underneath the image as they go about their business.

WEYOUN (v.o.)
This is Dominion vessel Nine-
Seven-One requesting clearance to
enter orbit. Please respond.

3 INT. DOMINION SHIP - BRIDGE

ODO, in his Bajoran Militia uniform, stands in the centre of the bridge, wearing the headset. He frowns at what he sees. Something about it disturbs him - he can't put his finger on what - and it's putting him on edge.

A half-dozen Jem'Hadar work the varied panels and controls. WEYOUN stands at one panel, his own headset in place.

VOICE (comm)
Your path is clear, vessel Nine-
Seven-One. Welcome home.

ODO
Weyoun.

Weyoun immediately flips up the viewer of his own headset and comes over to Odo, bowing his head slightly.

WEYOUN

Founder - how may I be of service?

ODO

I want to know if my people are alright.

WEYOUN

They are perfectly fine. I scanned the surface of the planet myself as soon as we were within sensor range. The Great Link is as you left it.

ODO

Then what is... that?

He raises his hand, pointing to something only he can see.

4 POV SHOT

The viewer image, with Odo's hand rising and pointing at the brighter star over the planet.

ODO (o.s.)

That bright object above the planet - it wasn't there when we left.

5 BACK TO SCENE

Weyoun flips his headset viewer back down and stands alongside Odo, observing the same image.

WEYOUN

An observant question, Founder. I noticed the object myself.

Weyoun indicates one particular Jem'Hadar soldier across the bridge.

WEYOUN

The seventh reports that it is likely a distant nova, and poses no threat to the Great Link.

ODO

If Rotan'talag isn't certain what it is, then how can he conclude that it isn't a threat?

WEYOUN

Quite right. Which is why I've ordered the seventh to continue gathering and analysing readings, so that he can make a complete and accurate report. I'm also going to contact my colleagues on other vessels and speak to them about their observations.

ODO

Very good. Keep me informed.

WEYOUN

Of course.

Weyoun bows his head again, takes a few steps backwards, and then turns and returns to his panel. Odo remains where he was, watching the display. There is something about it.

6 POV SHOT

As we grow slightly closer to the planet, we can see numerous other Jem'Hadar vessels also in orbit.

The image swings around as Odo turns his head, and we see Weyoun and the Jem'Hadar soldier, ROTAN'TALAG, working side by side at their panels, underneath the starfield.

7 BACK TO SCENE

As Odo watches them, the face of another Vorta appears on Weyoun's screen. This is a new female, VANNIS, with long flowing hair. She and Weyoun speak MOS for a few moments, discussing the object.

Still disquieted without really knowing why, Odo turns back to the image of the planet. After a few more moments, Vannis disappears from the screen and Weyoun comes back over to Odo.

WEYOUN

Founder, I've received a report from a Vorta on another vessel. And the seventh has independently confirmed the information I was given.

ODO

And...?

WEYOUN

The object is indeed a nova. It became visible in the sky here just three days ago, increasing steadily in brightness during that time. But it is located at a far enough remove from the Founders' world that it will not cause any danger to the Link.

ODO

(intrigued)

How far?

WEYOUN

It lies just outside the Omarion Nebula, Founder.

ODO

(surprised,
w/ wonder)

The Omarion Nebula?

Odo drifts off as he stares back at the image of the nova.

WEYOUN

Founder...?

ODO

(clears head)

Thank you, Weyoun.

He looks over at Rotan'talag, working at his panels. As the Jem'Hadar turns sideways for a moment, we see that he has no ketracel-white tube.

ODO

How is Rotan'talag... progressing?

WEYOUN

Forgive me, Founder, I'm sure it must be my fault, but... I'm afraid I don't understand the question.

ODO

Well, he's one of the four, isn't he? The ones who aren't dependent on ketracel-white, like Taran'atar. You've spent time with him - I wondered if you'd noticed any developments.

Weyoun genuinely doesn't understand what Odo is getting at, but doesn't want to offend him by saying so.

WEYOUN

The seventh is ready to serve however the Founder desires.

ODO

(disappointed, but
not surprised)

Thank you, Weyoun.

Weyoun knows he has disappointed Odo somehow, but has no idea how exactly. He backs away again, checks his console.

WEYOUN

We've entered standard orbit,
Founder. I'm ready to transport
you to the surface.

Nodding silently, Odo removes his headset, hands it to Weyoun, and walks across the bridge to an alcove at the side that contains a transporter pad. He steps up onto the pad, and Weyoun goes to its attendant control panel.

WEYOUN

As always, it has been a pleasure
to serve you, Founder.

Odo gives Weyoun a gently disapproving look with regard to
the title. But he knows Weyoun can't help it.

ODO

Energise.

Weyoun works his panel, and a Dominion TRANSPORTER signal
takes Odo.

That done, Weyoun returns to the centre of the bridge,
flips down his headset viewer, and sighs with satisfaction.
He has served his gods well.

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

8 INT. GREAT LINK - POV

The entire image is awash in thick, glutinous golden FLUID. We can see rocky outcroppings and a hint of sky, but we are looking at it through flowing Changeling protoplasm. We are inside the Great Link, looking out.

Our POV focuses on a small object in the sky outside. We push forward, closer to the surface of the Link. Faster, until we BREAK THROUGH the surface and find ourselves...

9 EXT. FOUNDERS' WORLD - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

...Outside the Link, on the small rocky island that serves as our anchor in the great golden sea. Our POV is still looking up into the pinky-orange sky. The NOVA is visible in the sky, though a little hazier through an atmosphere.

But that is not what we are looking at. There is another object in the sky, what looks at a distance like a gigantic BIRD, with wide gliding wings.

We break from POV, panning to the side until we realise we have been looking through ODO's eyes. He is just completing becoming solid, beginning from his head and rippling down to his feet. Eventually he stands in his Bajoran uniform, still gazing up into the sky at the oncoming bird-creature.

It flies closer to the planet's surface, becoming clearer. Now we see that it is the space-fish form the Changeling LAAS took at the beginning of 7x14 "Chimera," with the added wings for moving in atmosphere. Odo recognises the shape, and tenses himself for a possible confrontation.

The bird-thing flies directly towards the islet where Odo is standing. As it lowers itself, two additional BULGES grow out of its shape on either side of the central bulge. They break off from the main body and PLOP to the ground, spreading out a little from the impact. They are also Changelings, but small, unformed, and with the blue-green tinge of sick, damaged Founders.

The main body MORPHS in mid-air, touching down more gently, becoming a column of Changeling plasm. That then MORPHS further into the humanoid shape of LAAS. He steps backwards a touch, leaving a small pile of black ashes on the ground where he was - which goes unnoticed for now.

Meanwhile, the other two Changelings roll and tumble across the rocky ground and into the churning sea, merging and dissolving into the golden mass.

Odo steps forward, already aware that Laas is angry about something, but trying to defuse it before it starts.

ODO

Welcome... back.

LAAS

(contempt)

"Welcome"... I do not want to be welcomed. I want to know why the Hundred were sent out. Why we were sent away.

ODO

It's good to see you as well.

LAAS

I have no quarrel with you, Odo. You are one of the Hundred. You are one of us.

He gestures outward, including the two other changelings.

ODO

You know why we were sent out. I told you about it when we first met, and every other time we've had this conversation since.

LAAS

I know what you told me. Now I want to know the truth.

ODO

I've told you the truth.

LAAS

Have you? Do you even know the truth?

(beat)

Tell me again, then. Tell me again why the Great Link sent out a hundred of their own - a hundred innocents - to endure loneliness, and suffering, and death.

ODO

What are you talking about?

Exasperated, Odo looks down to the ground, and sees the pile of black ashes. It can be only one thing - the corpse of a Founder. Laas sees the recognition.

LAAS

Yes. That is what I'm talking about. So tell me again - why were we exiled from our people? For what good reason did this happen?

Looking at the ashes, Odo cannot answer.

10 INT. RUNABOUT - REAR CABIN

Darkness. TARAN'ATAR jerks awake from sleep, laying on the small bunk bed. He launches up from the bed, pulling his *kar'takin* knife from its holster and holding it out in defence. He looks around sharply, reorienting himself.

TARAN'ATAR

Computer - lights.

The lights come up, showing an empty room with no threats. A window reveals the star field outside, going by at warp. He sheaths his knife and pulls himself back under control, angered and frustrated to have been asleep again.

TARAN'ATAR

Computer - time.

COMPUTER

The time is ten-hundred-fourteen hours.

TARAN'ATAR

(growl)

I have been asleep for one hour
and forty-seven minutes.

He clenches his fists, furious. The door from the cockpit slides open, and KIRA enters, in uniform. Taran'atar forces himself to appear relaxed and calm.

KIRA

Taran'atar - I just wanted to let you know that we're about half an hour away from our rendezvous with the *Mjolnir*.

TARAN'ATAR

Acknowledged.

KIRA

Would you like to come and join us up front?

TARAN'ATAR

No. I prefer to be alone at the moment. Unless you are ordering me...?

KIRA

No, not at all. I just thought... well, never mind. Are you alright?

TARAN'ATAR

Yes. I'm fine, thank you, Captain.

Kira knows there is something going on, but doesn't want to push. She nods, half-smiles, and returns to the cockpit. The door closes, and Taran'atar stares after her.

11 **EXT. FOUNDERS' WORLD**

On the islet, where Odo stares in shock at the ashes.

LAAS

Why, Odo? Explain it to me.

ODO

You know why. Our people sent out a hundred of us to learn about the galaxy, and then return that knowledge to them.

LAAS

But why send out newly formed changelings?

ODO

Because the Great Link felt the need to hide. They used to travel the stars, discovering all they could about the universe, meeting other species, but...

LAAS

But...?

ODO

But some solids were suspicious of their ability to shape-shift, so the changelings were hunted and sometimes killed. For reasons of simple self-preservation, the Link isolated itself from the galaxy.

This is sounding increasingly like the official party line. Laas plays along, offering "helpful" suggestions.

LAAS

But they still wanted to expand their knowledge of the galaxy, and to gather intelligence about the dangers that awaited the Link.

ODO

Exactly. So they sent us out, with a genetic drive to return.

Laas paces back and forth across the islet, considering.

LAAS

That does not make sense.

ODO

What doesn't make sense?

LAAS

Sending infants on charges of exploration and intelligence. Why attempt to gather information in such an unstructured, uncertain manner? How could they abandon a hundred waifs in unfamiliar space, with no tools or instructions or life experience, without even self-awareness, and expect them to execute a successful mission?

Odo ponders Laas' questions, and has no answer.

LAAS

If the Founders were so concerned about the constant threat posed by monofoms, then how could they deliver infants from the Link into their midst, with no guidance and no protection?

ODO

(weak argument)

Solids are not inherently a danger to changelings.

LAAS

No?

(re pile of ashes)

This Founder died by the hand of a humanoid, killed for no other reason than the ability to alter form at will. Have you so quickly forgotten the Federation's attempted genocide of our people?

ODO

An action undertaken by a small subset of the Federation - a few individuals. In no way a valid representation of the whole.

LAAS

You have no objectivity in these matters, Odo. Your love for a monofom blinds you to their bigotry.

ODO

(defensive)

I love Kira. But my emotions for her do not alter facts... facts like my overriding feelings for the Link, which are evidenced by my continued presence in it.

LAAS

"Continued presence"? According to the Vorta, you spend hours and hours sitting on this rock, in your solid form. You only recently came back after being away for more than three months, much of it in the Alpha Quadrant. So much for your "commitment" to our people.

ODO

I spend time here because it helps me to think. It's easy to lose track of time when you're in the Link. And I left because I was tracking a possible threat to the Link - the rumours of the return of the Ascendants.

LAAS

And did you find any Ascendants on Deep Space Nine or on Bajor? Or perhaps in Kira's bed?

Odo refuses to rise to the bait - although it is tempting.

LAAS

Lie to yourself if you must, Odo. But I know your motives. You left because you hoped for one last connection to Kira. Look at you. You cling to monofom ways, Odo.

You dress like them. You measure time like them. You even communicate like them, with words, instead of the infinitely superior methods of the Link.

ODO

I don't have to justify myself to you, Laas. The Founders know the reasons for my time away, including my time in the Alpha Quadrant. They also know that I'm here now - that I didn't remain with Kira.

LAAS

Your presence is for the purpose of swaying the Great Link to your view of the monofoms. Do not deny it. Your goal here is not to help the Founders, but to change their way of thinking. Once you've done that... and maybe even if you don't... you'll go back to her.

Laas steps towards Odo, and begins to shimmer as he MORPS. His form gets slightly smaller, but still humanoid, until he resolidifies into the shape of Kira Nerys (as she looked in season 7). He speaks with Kira's voice, but Laas's own tone and inflections.

LAAS-as-KIRA

It's inevitable.

On Odo's reaction...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

12 EXT. FOUNDERS' WORLD - DAY

Odo is infuriated by Laas's impersonation - a violation of the woman he loves. He starts forward angrily, on the verge of fighting. Then he pulls himself under control before it goes too far. Laas-as-Kira looks at him pityingly.

LAAS-as-KIRA

Are you going to attack me now?
How like a monofom you are.

KIRA (v.o.)

To be honest, I'm disappointed.

13 INT. USS MJOLNIR - SHUTTLEBAY

The real Kira, in her Starfleet uniform, walks side-by-side with Capt KALENA HOKU (human Hawaiian female). They pass through a door and into the *Mjolnir's* shuttlebay, where a variety of small vessels sit. Among them are two runabouts - old faithful *Rio Grande*, and brand new *Yolja*.

Kira carries a padd, looking at the readings on it as they walk. She is annoyed at what she reads but remains friendly and doesn't take it out on Hoku.

KIRA

My chief engineer was told the upgraded waveguides on the new runabouts would provide a significant increase in warp velocity. But these readings are a marginal improvement at best.

HOKU

If you study the final specs, you'll find no new waveguides were installed. My guess is that they haven't even been manufactured yet. The shipyards are still overburdened just trying to replenish the fleet.

KIRA

I know. Believe me, I know.

The two stop near to the new runabout. Lieutenant BOWERS is taking readings over its hull with his tricorder, while Bajoran Ensign ALECO carefully stencils the name and number onto its hull - USS YOLJA NCC 75353. They acknowledge Hoku.

BOWERS

Captain Hoku.

Kira gazes into its reflecting window, looking at her own image. She fingers her uniform collar, touches the pips.

KIRA

It still catches me off guard sometimes. I wonder if I'll ever get used to it. Every time I think I have, I catch myself in a mirror or a window, and I'm surprised all over again.

HOKU

You'll adjust.

KIRA

Speaking of being captain, I've been hearing rumours about a certain skipper of the *Mjolnir* being up for promotion to rear admiral.

HOKU

(laughs)

Yes, I've heard the same rumours myself. God knows where they're coming from, because I sure didn't start them.

KIRA

Probably Commander Ra-Yalix. I saw him eyeing that chair.

Hoku gazes upon the new name being drawn on the hull.

HOKU

"Yolja." I thought runabouts were usually named for Earth rivers, but I've never heard of that one.

KIRA

(proudly)

That's because it's not on Earth. It's a Bajoran river.

HOKU

And it's about time too.

Hoku now feigns a calculated nonchalance to cover her nervousness about a certain subject matter.

HOKU

Where's Taran'atar?

KIRA

He's still aboard the *Rio Grande*.

HOKU

Well please convey my satisfaction in meeting him, however briefly. I just wish I could have gotten to talk to him a little longer.

KIRA

He's not at his most comfortable in social situations, I'm afraid.

Wanting to avoid the awkward subject, Kira turn to Bowers.

KIRA

Lieutenant - it's time we were on our way. Do the pre-flight on the *Yolja*, will you?

BOWERS

Aye, sir.

Bowers and Aleco gather their things and climb into the new runabout. Kira turns back to Hoku, hands her back her padd. Hoku brings up a new screen, with a thumb scanner.

HOKU

Let's get the official stuff out of the way, before we forget. As of this stardate, 54595.2, I - Captain Kalena Hoku - hereby transfer command of the USS *Yolja* to Captain Kira Nerys.

(padd scans
her thumb)

Computer, please transfer all authorisations and command codes for the *Yolja* to Captain Kira and her crew, authorisation Hoku nine-J-gamma, execute.

COMPUTER

Command codes transferred.

Hoku hands the padd back to Kira, who also scans her thumb.

KIRA

I hereby accept command. Now I'll just have to see if Nog can kick it up a notch.

(beat)

It's been great to catch up with you, Kalena. Hopefully it won't be so long until the next time.

HOKU

You too, Nerys. I'll have to see if *Mjolnir* can put in for some R-and-R at Bajor one of these days.

KIRA

Maybe when you're an admiral.

HOKU

Oh, stop.

They part - Hoku returning towards the doors to the shuttle bay and Kira towards the *Rio Grande*. She steps inside and closes the hatch behind her. The *Yolja* also closes its hatch. At the door, Hoku hovers to watch the ship leave.

Kira enters the runabout's cockpit to find Taran'atar sat at the front. She takes a seat beside him - he does not react at all, just keeps his eyes on the instruments.

KIRA

I see you're eager for us to be on our way.

TARAN'ATAR

(stony)

I am merely prepared for the journey ahead, and for anything that is required of me.

KIRA

Prepare for launch.

As Taran'atar works his panels, Kira is slightly disquieted.

15 INT. USS MJOLNIR - SHUTTLEBAY

Hoku stands by the doors, watching as the giant shuttle bay doors of the *Mjolnir* open, the blue glow of a forcefield stopping the air from escaping. The rear struts of the warp nacelles can be clearly seen through the opening.

The *Yolja* gently rises on anti-gravs and slowly moves towards the opening. It slips through the forcefield and disappears out into space. Then the *Rio Grande* does the same, pushing through the forcefield and into space.

16 EXT. USS MJOLNIR

The *Rio Grande* emerges from between the warp struts of the Norway-class *Mjolnir*, carefully navigates between them, and then away into space. Further away, the *Yolja* turns and heads in a different direction.

17 INT. RUNABOUT - COCKPIT

Kira sits with a silent Taran'atar beside her.

KIRA

Rio Grande to *Yolja*.

BOWERS (comm)
Yolja here, Captain.

KIRA
Set course for Deep Space Nine,
Lieutenant. And tell Nog to get to
work on the ship as soon as he's
finished with the *Euphrates*.

BOWERS (comm)
Will do, Captain. *Yolja* out.

Kira closes the comm. She takes a deep breath.

KIRA
Computer... set course for Ananke
Alpha, warp six, and then erase
all records of this course change
from the log. There's to be no
evidence of this whatsoever.

COMPUTER
Acknowledged. Course set.

KIRA
Engage.

Around them, the ship hums to life and the stars jump to warp. Kira is apprehensive. She looks to the side, at Taran'atar, who remains stony-faced, giving away nothing.

KIRA
Are you looking forward to this?

TARAN'ATAR
(doesn't turn)
I am doing what my duty dictates.

KIRA
Right, I understand that. But I
thought that you might still want
to do this, besides it being your
duty. Is that the case?

Taran'atar finally turns to look at her, but still without any expression beyond restrained annoyance.

TARAN'ATAR

I am doing what my duty dictates I
do. That is all.

He turns back to his panels. Kira turns back to her own,
still quite nervous about their course of action.

ODO (v.o.)

Why are you doing this?

18 **EXT. FOUNDERS' WORLD**

Odo stands on the rocky islet, confronting Laas-as-Kira.

ODO

Why are you acting this way, Laas?
I'm not your enemy.

LAAS-as-KIRA

At this moment, I consider the
entire Great Link an enemy of the
Hundred.

(re dead changeling)

This one - cast adrift, alone for
centuries, then found by a race of
humanoids, experimented on, and
finally killed in a paranoid rage.
Me - living among the Varalans for
two-hundred years, tormented,
miserable. The same story for the
other two. And for what?

ODO

For knowledge. That's what I was
told. I had no reason to
disbelieve it.

LAAS-as-KIRA

But don't you see, Odo, we have
every reason to disbelieve it?

ODO

That may be. But I never lied to
you. You don't have to fight me,
or provoke me with your shape.

LAAS-as-KIRA
You lied to yourself, Odo, and
that means you've lied to me as
well. And the Founders have lied
to us both.

Laas-as-Kira turns and walks towards the edge of the islet.
"She" steps into the gelatinous golden goo, wading deeper.

ODO
What are you going to do?

LAAS-as-KIRA
I'm going to learn the truth.

Odo watches Kira's shape dissolve, merging into the Great
Link until it disappears into the rolling mass of liquid.
Odo remains where he was, not knowing how to process Laas's
questions. He gazes at the pile of ashes on the ground.

19 EXT. SPACE

Establishing the *Rio Grande* still flying at warp.

20 INT. RUNABOUT - COCKPIT

Kira and Taran'atar are exactly where they were. Nothing
more has been said. Kira wants to talk, but the aura of
unapproachability from Taran'atar is palpable. Nevertheless
Kira has to try.

KIRA
Taran'atar... there's something I
want to talk to you about.

TARAN'ATAR
Yes, Captain?

KIRA
I know... about your problem.
(beat)
About your new need to sleep.

Taran'atar gets even stonier if possible. He fumes silently
for a moment before replying.

TARAN'ATAR

Doctor Bashir betrayed me.

KIRA

He was worried about you. About the extra stress you're putting on your system by refusing to sleep when your body wants you to. Don't worry, nobody else knows. I just wish you'd told me yourself.

TARAN'ATAR

It is an embarrassment. Something to be overcome, not indulged.

KIRA

(tries to be
soothing)

I'm not like the Vorta - I'm not going to chastise you for this.

TARAN'ATAR

But you are my Vorta. And I should be chastised. It is yet another failing. Another way in which I am no longer a true Jem'Hadar.

KIRA

Julian believed it was a side effect of your not needing to use ketracel-white.

TARAN'ATAR

The white makes us powerful. And tireless. Doctor Bashir was unable to replicate its effects by other means, and would not permit me to begin taking the white again. Yet he offered me no other solutions.

KIRA

Odo didn't want you to use the white. He wanted to see how you would develop without its influence in your system.

TARAN'ATAR

Yes... that is what the Founder
ordered. I do not understand why
he would want such a thing... but
I will of course follow his
instructions...

(beat)

... to the best of my ability.

Kira doesn't entirely like the implications of that little
qualifier. But Taran'atar has no more to say.

They both go back to watching their panels and looking out
of the window at the stars streaking by.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

21 EXT. FOUNDERS' WORLD - DAY

Odo sits with his back against one of the rocky peaks on the little island. He is alone, pondering, trying to think things through. The bright NOVA hangs high in the sky.

After a few moments, a twinkling sound fills the air and Weyoun appears in a TRANSPORTER beam. Odo quickly stands, not wanting to be seen so relaxed. The Vorta is worried about his god, eager to please and serve.

WEYOUN

Founder...

A look of annoyance from Odo. Weyoun corrects himself.

WEYOUN

Odo... I noted your prolonged presence here, and I wanted to see if you required anything.

ODO

No, Weyoun, I don't believe so.
But thank you.

Weyoun bows slightly, takes a few steps towards Odo.

WEYOUN

It is always my pleasure to serve.
Will you be transporting up -

ODO

(sharp)
Weyoun.

Weyoun is surprised to see that Odo has his hand out to halt him. Then he looks down to see why, and discovers that he has just stepped right into the pile of dark ashes.

He looks back up at Odo, shaking, revulsion and fear in his face, afraid that he knows exactly what the ashes are.

WEYOUN

Odo...?

ODO

(grave)

It is a dead changeling. Laas
brought it back with him.

Weyoun backs away, almost stumbling, overcome with horror. He looks like he is about to cry and vomit at the same time. Odo steps quickly towards him - avoiding the pile - and grabs him by the arms before he can start shrieking.

ODO

Weyoun. It's alright. It's...

(not alright
at all)

It's alright. Go back to the ship.
I'll probably beam up later.

Weyoun nods vacantly, unable to process. He reaches for his transporter control wrist-band, but Odo stops him again.

ODO

Keep this to yourself for now.

Weyoun nods again, and taps the wrist-band. He dissolves in a transporter beam, and Odo is left alone again. He sighs, feeling sorry for Weyoun's shock. He turns and looks out over the vast sea of changelings.

He walks to the edge of the islet, his form turning golden and malleable. He LAUNCHES into the air as a column of undulating protoplasm, and DIVES down into the Link. Our POV follows him down, bursting through the surface until...

22 INT. GREAT LINK - POV (CONTINUOUS)

We drift through the golden liquid, loose and changeable shapes forming and unforming and reforming out of the churning currents all around us. We move forward through it, diving deeper. Whispering, overlapping, half-heard VOICES echo to us through the sea of changelings.

VOICES

More of the Hundred have returned
to us... a changeling has been
killed... the solids must be
punished...

The whispers continue to wind around us and intertwine with
each other as we move on through the Link, searching.

VOICES

...the returning ones are damaged,
they need our help... we will take
care of them... we have seen the
sign...

LAAS (v.o.)

When were the Hundred sent out?
Why did you send us? How could you
abandon us like that?

VOICES

...we should not have sent them
away... it was agreed upon, it was
necessary... Odo and Laas ask
questions, they always ask...

ODO (v.o.)

Laas? Are you here? I need to
speak with you.

As we push on through the rolling deep, and the whispers
continue to surround us...

23 INT. RUNABOUT - COCKPIT

Kira and Taran'atar sit side-by-side, still no conversation
between them. Taran'atar remains stony and reserved, but
Kira has something on her mind, and it can't wait.

KIRA

Taran'atar... there's something
else I need to ask you. And I need
you to be honest with me.

TARAN'ATAR

(slightly offended)

I have never lied to you, Captain.

KIRA

I believe that's true. But... I just wanted to re-emphasise it. I need to know... why do you want to go to Ananke Alpha? Why did you make this request?

TARAN'ATAR

I have already told you my reasons.

KIRA

I know you have. I'm asking you to explain it to me again.

Taran'atar pauses. He does not like being questioned, but he can't possibly not answer. Kira tries again.

KIRA

Taran'atar - Ananke Alpha is the most secure, heavily guarded prison facility in the entire Federation. Only a few people even know it exists. I didn't know it existed until this. So please, help me understand. Why do you want to visit the Founder?

TARAN'ATAR

I wish to be of some small service to my gods.

KIRA

How so?

TARAN'ATAR

The Founder has been alone for a long time now. Separated from the Great Link since before the war started, and isolated from the entire Dominion since the end of hostilities. I hope to offer some relief from that circumstance.

She wants to trust Taran'atar, but isn't sure if she can.

KIRA

Are you going to attempt to free the Founder?

TARAN'ATAR

No, I have no intention of breaking the Founder from her prison. For the sake of the Dominion, she has decided on this course, and I must respect that.

KIRA

What if the Founder wants you to free her?

Taran'atar looks askance at Kira, almost amused at the naivety of the question.

TARAN'ATAR

Captain Kira, I have no doubt that if the Founder wished to escape her confinement, she could do so without my assistance.

KIRA

My question wasn't about your intentions, Taran'atar. What will you do if the Founder orders you to break her out? Admiral Ross made it clear that any attempt to escape Ananke Alpha will fail, and likely result in the death of the prisoner. So would you disobey her, or do as she commanded?

TARAN'ATAR

The admiral asked me the same question. Repeatedly.

He pauses again, trying to think how best to explain himself to Kira.

TARAN'ATAR

Captain, if you were asked to do something by one of your gods - by

one of the Prophets - can you
imagine any scenario in which you
would not abide them?

Kira would instinctively answer 'no,' but then she realises
what Taran'atar is getting at, and relaxes slightly.

KIRA

No, I can't imagine disobeying the
Prophets... unless, by my doing as
they say, they might come to harm.

TARAN'ATAR

Then we are of like mind, for I
would not follow the Founder's
instructions to help her escape
from her prison - not at the risk
of her life.

Kira relaxes a little more. She believes him.

KIRA

Thank you. It's not that I don't
trust you -

TARAN'ATAR

But it is. You don't trust me. But
that is of no concern to me. What
I find... interesting... is that
even though you do not trust me,
you still asked me what I was
going to do. If I had planned to
break the Founder free of her
prison, do you think I would have
admitted that to you?

KIRA

Yes - because of your dedication
to the Founders. Odo directed you
to follow my orders, and when I
ask a question, it's clear that I
am expecting you to answer me
honestly and completely. For you
to do otherwise would be contrary
to what Odo wanted you to do.

TARAN'ATAR

You are correct, of course. And I
have told you the truth.

KIRA

Well... I guess we're about to
find out.

Taran'atar tries not to be insulted - unsuccessfully.

24 **INT. GREAT LINK - POV**

Still within the Great Link, swimming through the flowing,
constantly changing and merging shapes. The echoes of the
many voices of the Link interweave and overlap.

VOICES

They are of the Hundred, they have
returned to us... they deserve to
know... no, it is too dangerous,
what if the solids were to
discover...

LAAS (v.o.)

Answer me! Tell me why I was left
to suffer alone in the wilderness!
I will not allow you to lie to me
any longer!

VOICES

...the solids have killed one of
us... we must be avenged... it is
our fault, our doing, they deserve
to know... they have returned to
us... it has returned to us... at
long last, we are saved...

ODO (v.o.)

Laas, please... are you there? We
have to talk.

LAAS (v.o.)

I am here, Odo.

We "feel" another shape come to meet us, meld with us, and
suddenly we BURST free of the Link again...

25 EXT. FOUNDERS' WORLD - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

...and a larger plume of changeling matter lands on the rocky islet. It breaks into two vaguely humanoid figures, who still hold each other by the hand, until they solidify more and take the forms of Odo and Laas. They step apart.

Odo looks at his companion though - it "looks" like Laas, but it doesn't "feel" like Laas. The attitude is different, less antagonistic, more diplomatic and wise.

ODO

You're not Laas, are you?

"Laas" smiles enigmatically, but does not speak.

ODO

You're another changeling, just pretending to be Laas. Why?

In response, the figure MORPHS into a twisting whirl of changeling before settling again as an unfamiliar BAJORAN man. Odo frowns.

ODO

Who is this? Who are you?

Standing there, the Bajoran grows older before Odo's eyes - creases developing in the skin, hair thinning and greying, back stooping, jowls drooping. Eventually the Bajoran is very, very old. Odo frowns, trying to figure the message.

ODO

Time... but not just time - age.
You're old. You're... the Bajorans
would say "indurane" - ancient.
Hundreds...

The Bajoran man raises an eyebrow, implying more...

ODO (cont)

(astonished)

Thousands... of years?

The old Bajoran man approves. The face begins to CHANGE again, becoming a succession of half a dozen different Bajoran men, all very old.

ODO
(uncertain)
You're... saying we're all very old. All the changelings.

The old Bajoran approves again, and shifts again to become the double of Odo himself, but much older - even more so than the way we saw him in 5x22 "Children of Time." The real Odo works to absorb the revelation.

ODO
I'm very old.
(pause)
That can't be right. That doesn't make sense. I was found by the Cardassians only forty years ago. How can I be centuries old when I was an infant only decades ago?

The figure MORPHS once again, finally becoming "itself" - an unfamiliar male changeling who we will call INDURANE.

Indurane follows the same Odo-style appearance of all changelings, but there is still a hint of extreme age about him. He looks thoughtfully at Odo, pondering his question, how best to answer it. He shakes his head slowly, musingly.

After a moment, he MORPHS again, becoming a humanoid-sized but loose and shapeless mass of changeling.

ODO
An infant changeling - right.

The mass seems to dissolve, diffusing out into the air until it disappears altogether. Odo frowns.

ODO
I don't understand.

Indurane pulls himself together out of thin air, recreating the shapeless mass, and repeats the process - diffusing into non-existence. Odo thinks harder.

ODO
Not an infant...?

Indurane goes through it again - pulls himself together, diffuses himself back out. The truth is starting to come to Odo, and he doesn't like it.

ODO
No... that's impossible.

Indurane pulls himself together one more time, returning to his humanoid-changeling form. He seems sad, sorry for Odo's confusion, and a touch guilty over... something.

Indurane finally speaks aloud - a deep, sonorous and wise voice. He hasn't talked like a solid in aeons, and it is strange and unfamiliar for him to do so now.

INDURANE
There are no infant changelings.

ODO
(shakes head)
How can that be?

INDURANE
There are no infant changelings...
because changelings cannot
procreate.

Odo is stunned at the revelation...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

26 EXT. FOUNDERS' WORLD

Odo stands opposite the new Founder, Indurane, with the pile of dead changeling ashes between them.

ODO
You're lying.

INDURANE
Have you ever known an infant changeling?

ODO
I was an infant changeling. Laas was an infant changeling.

INDURANE
Were you an infant? Was Laas?
(pause)
You are an investigator, Odo. What does the evidence tell you?

Odo paces, trying to reconcile all this information.

ODO
I was discovered in the Denorios Belt by the Cardassians.

INDURANE
Do you remember it?

ODO
Only the vaguest impressions. When they gave me to Doctor Mora, I was barely aware... I didn't know what they were, what I was, what I could do. Laas told me the same about his life with the Varalans.

INDURANE
So you were... infants?

Odo pauses again, thinking it through. Indurane lets him work through it by himself, come to his own conclusions.

ODO

There's no doubt that Laas and I were both unformed at some point. But... it doesn't necessarily follow that we were infants.

On Odo as he remembers...

27 FLASHBACK - 3x02 "THE SEARCH, PART 2"

Odo meets the FEMALE FOUNDER for the first time.

FEMALE FOUNDER

This is your home.

ODO

I wish I could remember it.

FEMALE FOUNDER

It's understandable that you cannot. You were still newly formed when you left us.

ODO

"Newly formed?" You mean I was an infant?

The female Founder takes a moment to think this over.

FEMALE FOUNDER

An infant... yes.

ODO

I suspected as much.

28 BACK TO SCENE

ODO

"Newly formed" - those were her exact words. "Infant" was just an approximation for my sake. I just assumed...

Indurane wordlessly approves this again.

ODO

You said that I'm much older than I remember. Centuries. So I can't have still been an infant when I was found forty years ago. I was just... unformed.

INDURANE

Have you not sensed the other unformed ones in the Link? Those changelings who have never left us, never separated from the whole, never learned to take shape? Are they infants?

ODO

No... they're just "unformed." But, I still don't understand how there can possibly be no changeling infants, how the Link cannot reproduce and form new individuals.

(thinks a moment)

We're not... immortal?

Indurane responds with the dissolving trick, disappearing into nothingness, then pulling himself back again.

INDURANE

We are not immortal.

ODO

Then how can the changelings not reproduce? For a species to survive in the universe, it has to have certain characteristics - like the ability to replenish its numbers that are lost to old age or death. You can obviously die - there's the proof right there.

He indicates the pile of ashes on the ground. Indurane looks sadly upon it, the guilt coming through again.

ODO

That's the fifth dead Changeling I've seen or heard about in only six years. I can't even imagine how many died from Section 31's disease. So how can you not be able to create new changelings to replace them?

Odo breaks off as something horrible occurs to him.

ODO

Oh... this is why no changeling has ever harmed another, isn't it? Why the Link always reacted so harshly to any threat, to any possibility of a threat against it. Why you hid yourself away from the galaxy. Every changeling killed is lost forever. Nothing will replace it. And the Link moves closer to extinction with each one lost.

INDURANE

We are fighting for our survival, Odo. Nothing more.

ODO

But... It still doesn't make sense! Evolution simply does not work that way! How could we have possibly evolved as a species without the ability to reproduce?

INDURANE

The Founders did not evolve.

ODO

What?

INDURANE

(contemptuous)

We are not like the solids. We are not some random event in space and time. We are not the result of

some fortuitous juxtaposition of
matter and energy.

Odo doesn't see how that can possibly be true, but he wants
to know more. He can't not seek answers.

ODO

Then how do you - we - exist?

INDURANE

The Great Link was generated by
design. The Founder population was
created in its entirety... by the
Progenitor.

ODO

Are you saying that the
Founders... have a god?

Odo struggles to comprehend what he has been told. His mind
boggles at the prospect. How can this be true?

VANNIS (v.o.)

Beam the Founder aboard.

29 **INT. DOMINION SHIP - BRIDGE**

Vannis, the female Vorta from earlier, stands in the centre
of her bridge, giving commands to her Jem'Hadar crew. She
walks over to the transporter alcove at the side, just as a
transporter signal delivers a FOUNDER onto the platform.

But the changeling remains unformed, not deigning to take
shape for these inferior beings. It remains as a pool of
undulating changeling goo on the platform, peaks rising and
falling at random.

Vannis isn't entirely sure how to handle this, but she has
to do her best. She bows her head, ready to serve however
she is needed.

After a few moments of ignoring her, the Founder changes
shape slightly. One peak rises in the middle, its tip
developing into the shape of a mouth - no face, no body,
just a mouth. It forms words in a female voice.

FOUNDER

What is the situation with the Overne?

VANNIS

The agricultural plague on Overne Three has been eradicated. But their food reserves remain low and, even rationed, might not last through the winter in the northern hemisphere.

FOUNDER

(impatient)

The reserves might not last the winter? When will you know for certain?

VANNIS

In the next two to three weeks. But we have a solution ready.

FOUNDER

And what is that solution?

VANNIS

We have brought another world, Rindamil Three, into the Dominion. If necessary, this new world will provide food for the Overne.

FOUNDER

Why are you waiting to see if it will be necessary?

VANNIS

Because the Rindamil foodstuffs cannot fully support the entire populations of both worlds.

FOUNDER

They don't have to. The starships and weaponry that the Overne help create for the protection of the Dominion are the priority.

VANNIS

I understand. Shall I commence transfer of the Rindamil food reserves at once?

The Founder dissolves its mouthpiece, melting back into a silent pool of flowing golden liquid. Vannis patiently waits for it to make its decision. Eventually the Founder recreates its mouthpiece and speaks again.

FOUNDER

You will wait two weeks only, to assess the severity of the Overne winter and its impact on the food supply. If there is any chance of a shortfall, begin shipments from Rindamil at once.

VANNIS

Acknowledged.

FOUNDER

Before then, I want you to take your ship to a moon orbiting a world near the Anomaly - in the Tevlin-De system. A tribe called the Sen Ennis resides there.

VANNIS

Yes, Founder. Are we to bring them into the Dominion also?

FOUNDER

Unnecessary. The tribe can offer nothing to us. However, a Founder was told by a former inhabitant of the moon that a member of a race calling themselves the Ascendants spent some time there when its ship crashed. I want you to go there and determine whatever you can about the incident - about the Ascendants themselves, about their return to this region of space, about their technology... whatever you can learn.

VANNIS
Acknowledged.

FOUNDER
Do you have anything else to
report?

VANNIS
No, I have nothing else to report.

FOUNDER
Then send me home.

The Founder's mouthpiece dissolves back into fluid. Vannis goes to the transporter console, taps its keys, and the Founder transports away. Vannis returns to her spot at the centre of the bridge, and slips on her headset.

VANNIS
First - prepare to break orbit.
Set a course for the Tevlin-De
system, best possible speed.

One of the Jem'Hadar nods silently, and goes to work.

VANNIS
Then get me all the information
the Dominion has... on the
Ascendants.

Vannis smiles, glad to be serving her gods.

30 **EXT. SPACE**

The *Rio Grande* drops out of warp at the edge of a barren, remote star system. There is nothing but the distant star and billions of asteroids in a massive ring around it.

The runabout glides slowly and carefully into the asteroid field. As it passes one asteroid, a SENSOR buried in the rocky surface of it turns to follow the ship's progress.

There is the BEEP of a comm signal, followed by the voice of a Vulcan woman, T'KREN.

T'KREN (comm, v.o.)
Ananke Alpha control to runabout
Rio Grande. You have been detected
approaching this facility. Your
arrival is anticipated.

31 **INT. RUNABOUT COCKPIT**

Kira and Taran'atar remain side-by-side at the controls,
having heard the incoming signal.

T'KREN (comm)
Power down your weapons systems
and warp drive immediately.
Failure to do will result in your
vessel being fired upon.

Apprehensive, Kira taps the appropriate keys. The back-
ground hum of the runabout dies off a bit. They move slowly
forward through the field of gently tumbling asteroids.

T'KREN (comm)
Thank you, *Rio Grande*. Sensors
detect one Bajoran and one
Jem'Hadar aboard your vessel. This
is in line with expectations.
Coordinates are being uploaded to
your navigational system now.
Follow them precisely. Any
deviation will result in your
vessel being fired upon.

A beep indicates the coordinates are received, and Kira
begins moving the runabout slowly and carefully. This whole
situation still worries her, but she is committed now.

T'KREN (comm)
Rio Grande, you have been given
instructions on procedures and
conduct at Ananke Alpha. You are
expected to follow procedures, and
the direction of facility staff,
without question at all times.
Failure to accept these terms will
result in immediate cancellation

of visitation rights and expulsion from the facility. Is this clear?

KIRA

(taps comm)

Yes, Ananke Alpha control. It's clear. We accept the terms.

T'KREN (comm)

Then you may proceed. Be aware you and your vessel will be under constant sensor surveillance throughout your time in this system. Any aggressive or hostile acts, or any acts contrary to instructions, will be met with serious consequences.

The comm BEEPS - channel closed. Kira takes a deep breath, turns to Taran'atar, makes a tiny attempt at levity.

KIRA

Nothing like hammering home a point.

The Jem'Hadar does not respond. He is part nervous, part excited, part contemptuous of the facility's procedures and crew. But he won't do anything to endanger this chance.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

32 EXT. RUNABOUT

The runabout glides slowly through the asteroid field, occasionally angling subtly to follow the prescribed path.

After a while, a dark shape looms among the asteroids, almost impossible to see. It is a GLOBE of dark metal, about a kilometre in diameter, visible only by the reflected light from the distant sun on its surface.

33 INT. RUNABOUT COCKPIT

Kira reacts to the ominous sight of the Ananke Alpha station. Her panels show her no contact readings at all - it is as if the place isn't there.

At a certain point, the runabout's engines automatically die out, braking thrusters fire, and the ship glides to a halt. A blue tractor beam reaches out from the sphere and snags the runabout. The ship SHUDDERS as it takes hold.

Kira looks nervously over to Taran'atar, who sits awaiting, not moving. She turns back to the window.

The tractor beam begins to drag the runabout closer to the facility. A saw-toothed mouth opens in its surface...

34 EXT. RUNABOUT

The runabout SHUDDERS again as it passes through an initial force field surrounding the globe some distance out, then again as it passes through a second force field covering the docking bay entrance.

We go with the small ship into the station's large, empty docking bay. The doors close behind it, and the ship settles gently to the deck. The tractor beam lets go.

35 INT. RUNABOUT COCKPIT

Seeing the inside of the docking bay through the windows of the cockpit, Kira turns back to Taran'atar.

KIRA
Are you ready?

TARAN'ATAR
I am... ready.

He stands, takes a deep breath, looks towards the hatch.

T'KREN (comm)
Ananke Alpha to *Rio Grande*. No weapons or equipment of any kind are permitted. Mister Taran'atar - please remove your knife and leave it on board the vessel before disembarking. Failure to do so will result in your being instantly rendered unconscious by means of radiation and phaser fire, and your immediate removal from this facility.

Sneering slightly, Taran'atar reaches behind himself and unsheathes his *kar'takin* knife. He turns it in his hand, passes the handle to Kira. She takes it wordlessly.

T'KREN (comm)
Captain Kira - there are no guest quarters or waiting facilities aboard Ananke Alpha. You will be required to remain on board the *Rio Grande* for the duration of Mister Taran'atar's visit with the prisoner. You will remain under sensor surveillance during this time. Is this understood?

KIRA
Understood, Ananke Alpha control.

T'KREN (comm)
Mister Taran'atar, you may now disembark *Rio Grande*.

Kira taps the keys to open the hatch, with a slow HISS.
Taran'atar walks slowly towards it, pausing in the doorway.

TARAN'ATAR
(*sotto*, to self)
I am Taran'atar, and I am dead. I
go to visit the Founder to reclaim
my life. I do this... because I am
Jem'Hadar.

He glances back over to Kira, who sits in the cockpit,
looking back at him with sympathy.

KIRA
Good luck. I hope you get what you
came here for.

He turns back to the doorway, and steps through it.

36 INT. ANANKE ALPHA - DOCKING BAY (CONTINUOUS)

Taran'atar emerges from the runabout, walks down the short
ramp, and stands still. Automated weapons systems all
around the room immediately track in on him.

Taran'atar is standing on a straight red line painted onto
the deck. His eyes follow the line, and at the opposite
end, standing in front of a closed door, is the Vulcan
female, T'KREN. She is armed but her weapon is holstered.

T'KREN
Mister Taran'atar, I am Commander
T'Kren. Welcome to Ananke Alpha.

Taran'atar stands there, alone, facing down the woman and
all the automated weapons.

37 EXT. FOUNDERS' WORLD

Odo stands alone again on his island, trying to wrap his
brain around the revelations that Indurane has provided
him. He looks up to the sky - the NOVA is still shining
bright. He gazes at it, intrigued and somehow disquieted.

He turns and looks out over the sea of changelings, which
seems more restless and churning than usual. He is angry
with them - for hiding the truth, and for then telling him
a truth he doesn't like.

He turns and PUNCHes both hands violently into the rocky peaks of the islet. His hands expand out into BLOOMS of changeling matter at the impact. It does nothing to calm him down.

There is a rippling sound from behind him, and he turns to see a figure rising out of the sea, a formless golden column moving towards the island. He turns to watch it approach. Its form tightens and coalesces as it walks up onto the island - but not into Laas or Indurane.

It becomes the female Ascendant RAIQ, as seen in 9x23 "Rising Son." Her tall, willowy, silver figure and fluted, fiery eyes stare Odo down, and he can't help but be chilled by them, even knowing it's not real.

ODO
Indurane...?

The Ascendant nods slowly.

ODO
Why did you come back? More fairy tales to tell me?

INDURANE-as-RAIQ
I came for you.

ODO
I wanted - Laas and I wanted - an explanation for why the Hundred were sent out. Not fantasy stories about a supposed Founder God. So if you're not going to tell me, why are you back again now?

INDURANE-as-RAIQ
(patient)
I came for you.

ODO
(frustrated)
And you came as an Ascendant. Why? What does this tell me?

Indurane-as-Raiq only looks at him. He clearly wants Odo to figure it out for himself.

ODO

Alright. The Ascendants are... religious zealots. They travelled the stars millennia ago, punishing any races they thought worshipped a false god, or who had the nerve to worship their gods without permission. They wiped hundreds of races off the face of the quadrant in an attempt to find their gods and reunite with them.

(beat)

So... you're saying that you're like the Ascendants... how? Are you trying to find your god, your... Progenitor?

INDURANE-as-RAIQ

The Progenitor created everything. The whole of the universe - matter, time, energy, life. Then it gathered a population of solids and imbued them with its own essence, creating the Great Link in its own image.

ODO

Well, be that as it may, I haven't seen much evidence of the Founders searching for their god.

INDURANE-as-RAIQ

(isn't it obvious?)

You are one of the Hundred.

ODO

Yes, we've established that. But you still haven't told me why. If it wasn't to explore the galaxy, then why?

Indurane shifts his features again, returning to his humanoid-changeling form. He steps closer to the pile of ashes on the ground, crouches down to inspect it sadly.

INDURANE

This was one of the Hundred. We failed the Hundred. But the Hundred did not fail the Link.

ODO

What? What do you mean?

INDURANE

As the Great Link diminished over time, persecuted by the solids, decimated by wars, unable to reproduce, we sought completion of our lives. We sought to join with the Progenitor. But it had left us after creating the Great Link, back in the beginning of time. We had no idea where to search for it, or how.

Indurane paces around, unburdening himself of a long-held secret. There is still a tone of guilt to his words.

INDURANE (cont)

We were met with suspicion, hatred and violence by the solids we encountered. Fearing our abilities, they hunted us, beat us, murdered us. Each death made our situation more desperate.

(beat)

We withdrew to a planet hidden within the Omarion Nebula, where we made a home for ourselves in isolation. We wanted to seek the Progenitor, but dared not venture back out into the universe.

ODO

(angry)

So you sent out a hundred newly formed changelings. As bait.

INDURANE

(plaintive)

We'd hoped your lack of knowledge and abilities would protect you from the solids. Some argued against this, but the opinion ultimately prevailed.

ODO

But how could you expect us to find your Progenitor, when we didn't even know who we were, let alone of its existence?

INDURANE

We did not expect you to find the Progenitor. We hoped that it would find you.

ODO

(putting it together)

A hundred innocents, lost in the universe. A hundred innocents, programmed to return to the Link.

INDURANE

Yes. We hoped that you would attract its attention, enjoy its protection, and that it would ultimately be drawn back to the Great Link itself.

ODO

And then what?

INDURANE

Then... we would be saved.

Odo is trying not to be rude, but this is nonsense to him.

ODO

This is all sounds preposterous. Why did you keep this from me?

INDURANE

We did not expect any of the Hundred to return to us for many many years. We were not prepared, and we did not know how we could reveal it to you in such a way that you would not hate us for it. And your relationships with the solids... our quest was not for them to know, so that they could thwart us.

ODO

Then why are you telling me now?

INDURANE

Because Laas wanted to know.
And...

ODO

And...?

Indurane turns and gazes up into the sky, an expression of almost rapturous joy on his face.

INDURANE

And because the Progenitor has finally returned.

Confused, Odo follows Indurane's eye-line up into the sky, and realises that he is staring at the NOVA.

The truth comes to Odo - the nova is the Progenitor. As he stares in amazement...

FADE OUT:

THE END