

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

8x17 - "Empathy."

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on the novel

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
Mission Gamma Book 2 - This Grey Spirit

by Heather Jarman

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 INT. DEFIANT - CORRIDOR

Dark and smoky, with small SPARKS and EXPLOSIONS going off all over. The ship has been attacked, but it is not rocking, and there is no sound of external weapons fire.

Lieutenant NOG struggles past the bursting light fixtures and power conduits and in through a large door.

2 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN ENGINEERING (CONTINUOUS)

Nog enters the room, still ducking random explosions and coughing from the smoke. Lt jg JOHN CANDLEWOOD (male, human) runs up, coughing too.

NOG
Lieutenant, what happened?

CANDLEWOOD
I think we ran into some kind of minefield, only one made up of tiny nanobots. They went straight for our energy systems and they're eating through them like candy.

As Candlewood hands him a flashlight, Nog runs to a flickering panel, and reads off what little he can.

NOG
Eighty-five percent of our EPS system is gone, and power levels are still plunging. John - make sure the auxiliaries are solid.

CANDLEWOOD
On it.

Ensign PERMENTER (female, human) is at another console.

PERMENTER
Transporters! Intruder alert!
Security to engineering!

An unfamiliar TRANSPORTER pattern twinkles in the dim and smoky room. It leaves two humanoid-sized FIGURES in alien environment suits, carrying a coffin-sized object between them. One of them pulls out a scanner and waves it around.

Hefting the box, the aliens start towards a wall panel. Permenter grabs a phaser from a small cupboard and steps into their way, pointing the phaser towards them.

PERMENTER

No you don't. Drop that thing and back up, now.

The aliens look at each other, then back at Permenter. One of them makes unintelligible alien NOISES. Nog grabs his own phaser and advances on them too. They keep coming forward, still speaking their alien language.

NOG

Stay back. Take one more step and I'll fire.

They keep coming, so Nog FIRES on one of them. The alien jerks and SQUAWKS, collapses to the deck, dropping the box.

In the distraction, the second alien grabs Permenter's weapon and hooks an arm around her neck, pointing the phaser at her throat. It gibbers at Nog, nodding towards his phaser. "Drop the weapon." Nog does and kicks it away.

Then the doors open and ELIAS VAUGHN strides in, weapon drawn, with SAM BOWERS and three other armed security behind him, plus JULIAN BASHIR carrying a medkit.

VAUGHN

Stand down!

The second alien drops the phaser in fright and dives for cover. Bashir rushes up to the fallen alien and begins scanning with his tricorder.

Bashir gently eases the helmet off the alien's suit, revealing an unconscious YRYTHNY - newt-like, amphibious, with brown ribbed and mottled skin, big green eyes, a wide mouth and small green-and-yellow markings.

Vaughn steps closer to the second alien, who has picked up a random piece of equipment and is holding it out as a weapon, still shouting in its alien language.

VAUGHN

Why are you here? What do you want with us?

The unconscious alien suddenly wakes up with a start, jerks up and VOMITS all over the floor. Bashir pats its back. The armed alien - TLARAL - is still shouting.

TLARAL

Nijigon boko nongolik attack us?
We were trying to help you!

VAUGHN

We haven't understood your language until now. Our ship has come under attack, and then you suddenly appear, uninvited. We had to assume you had hostile intentions.

Tlaral drops the weapon and takes off her helmet, revealing a female Yrythny with slightly different markings.

TLARAL

We saw what happened to your ship. My people, the Yrythny, are under siege from our enemies, the Cheka. These weapons are intended for us. You got caught by mistake. We came to assist.

VAUGHN

Then you have my apologies. I am Elias Vaughn, commander of the USS *Defiant*, representing the United Federation of Planets.

TLARAL

I am Tlaral. I am my vessel's chief technologist.

Nog approaches, putting down his phaser and inspecting the large box Tlaral had been carrying.

NOG

Then we already speak the same language. Show me how this works. Is this a duranium casing?

BOWERS

(shrugging)

Looks like we're done here.

VAUGHN

First contact, engineer style.

Nog and Tlaral get to work; Bowers and Vaughn look amused.

3 **EXT. DEFIANT**

The *Defiant* sits tethered inside a maintenance bay, cables and gantries connecting it to various bits of machinery.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

Captain's log, stardate 53471.3. Tlaral tells us that the Cheka's web weapons cover this entire sector. Since the Yrythny have so much experience, they've offered to help us repair the *Defiant*, as well as develop a defence against the nanobots.

This maintenance bay is open to space, and is actually in the lower aft portion of an enormous space-ship. This ship is shaped like a wheel on its edge, with warp nacelles on the back. The *Defiant* looks tiny in its grip.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

To this end, the *Defiant* has taken up residence inside Tlaral's ship, the *Avaril*, for the trip back to their homeworld.

The *Avaril* is approaching an attractive green-blue planet, with a large silver ring around it. The ring is artificial, packed with buildings, a bustling city in its own right.

VAUGHN (v.o.)
As for why the Cheka are besieging
the Yrythny at all, she seemed a
little more hesitant to say.

4 **EXT. YRYTHNY CITY PLAZA - DAY**

A large plaza, teeming with as many Yrythny EXTRAS as we can get. Most are dressed in nondescript veils and hoods, plain and colourless. They are agitated, unhappy, verging on a mob. Above, we can see a dome-like structure and the planet hanging large in the sky - we are in the ring city.

The senior *Defiant* crew - Vaughn, Bashir, Nog, Bowers, DAX and SHAR - emerge from a shuttle-port building, led by Yrythny police, and out into the plaza. Vaughn and Dax look at each other nervously, sensing the tension in the air.

There's a SCREAM, and sounds of weapons fire, and suddenly the crowd boils over. They begin surging forward on the police and the crew, bodies crashing into each other.

RIOTER 1
Cheka sending their spies...

RIOTER 2
Kill the murdering monsters!

One grabs Dax and begins to drag her away. Another knocks Shar to the ground with the butt of his weapon. Soon, all the *Defiant* senior staff are on their knees, with weapons at their heads.

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

5 EXT. YRYTHNY CITY PLAZA - DAY

Where we were. A female Yrythny, in a smart but still drab cloak, pushes through towards the rioters. This is KEREN.

KEREN

Fire that weapon, Undoh, and I
promise you'll never see the light
of day again. The same for any who
harm these innocent people!

Grudgingly, the rioter drops the gun. Keren LEAPS agilely onto a nearby lamp-post and SHIMMIES up it, using the suckers at the tips of her fingers. Once she is above the crowd, she calls out to them all.

KEREN

Listen to me, Wanderers! As your
Delegate, I speak as the law. This
gathering is illegal! Disperse now
if you wish to avoid arrest.

There is grumbling - some begin to move away, others not.

KEREN

Save your energies for actions
that will change our world for the
better, not doom your cause!

She is having enough of an effect for the police to succeed in dispersing the rest of the crowd. As the *Defiant* crew recover, Keren leaps down from the post. An official Yrythny male, much better dressed in fancy embroidered and tasselled robes, approaches the group. This is JESHOH.

JESHOH

Ah, Delegate Keren. Why am I not
surprised to find you here?

KEREN

I did not sanction my people's
actions here, Jeshoh.

VAUGHN

If I may, sir, Delegate Keren came to our rescue. We might be dead if not for her.

JESHOH

You are the leader of your group?

VAUGHN

Commander Vaughn, yes.

JESHOH

I bring the deepest apologies of our leadership. Please know we will do all we can to assure your continuing safety.

Jeshoh nods to one of the uniformed Yrythny police, who begins to lead the crew away. Keren falls into line and walks with them. Shar approaches her as they walk.

SHAR

Thank you. You saved my life.

KEREN

The fools who attacked mistook the report from the *Avaril*. They thought you were Cheka operatives. The ongoing conflict has many of our people on edge.

SHAR

I see. I am Ensign Thirishar ch'Thane, science officer.

KEREN

I liked the look of you, Ensign ch'Thane. Kneeling there, you didn't seem fearful. More curious.

SHAR

I do have many questions.

KEREN

As do I.

6 INT. YRYTHNY ASSEMBLY HALL

The senior *Defiant* crew sit along benches at elaborate tables, with piles and piles of food in front of them. Yrythny are mingled amongst them, all dressed very well. Each Yrythny has different facial markings to distinguish.

They eat with their fingers while they chat, washing their fingertip suckers in small bowls of water between plates. Sat next to Jeshoh, Dax watches this and copies.

Meanwhile, more blandly cloaked Yrythny move back and forth clearing and replacing plates. Dax notices how they are completely ignored by the fancier-dressed Yrythny.

DAX

If you don't mind, I'd like to know your people better. Vice-Chair Jeshoh, isn't it?

(he nods)

I heard Delegate Keren use the term "Wanderers," and call them "her people." What was she referring to?

JESHOH

You are perceptive. We are two people. I am Houseborn - after my time as a hatchling, I returned to my home. The Wanderers have no home - they too are swept into the sea as hatchlings, but lack the proper instincts to return to the place they were laid.

DAX

Then what happens to them?

JESHOH

They come ashore to other houses, where they are raised as servants.

A Wanderer servant spills some food onto a Houseborn's lap. The Houseborn BACKHANDS the Wanderer in the face. None of the other Houseborn care, but the Starfleet crew notice.

DAX
And Delegate Keren...?

JESHOH
A representative elected to voice
Wanderer interests in the Lower
Assembly. She is also trouble.
Wanderers have been afforded
greater and greater rights over
the last few hundred years. Keren
would have you believe otherwise.

DAX
Nevertheless, I'd like to hear
both sides of the story.

JESHOH
They get education, opportunities.
But now they want to serve in our
military. They want to join the
Houseborn in the waters and have
offspring. They fail to see that
passing on their flawed instincts
would weaken our entire race.

DAX
Have you thought about utilising
third-party mediation to open up
talks with the Wanderers? Someone
who's not invested in either side.

A Yrythny CLERIC, who has been listening in, is intrigued.

CLERIC
This third forges a whole peace?

DAX
I... suppose.

CLERIC
The Other. What she says follows
the pattern of the Other.

The cleric stands up and calls out loud, pointing to Dax.

CLERIC

This one has been sent by the
Other to finally bind our
fractured world!

Ezri's eyes go wide in surprise. At the head of the table,
Vaughn looks at her sternly.

DAX

That's not what I said. I only
said that the Wanderers and the
Houseborn should consider third-
party mediation...

VAUGHN

Lieutenant Dax will share our
knowledge and experiences with
you, but any other role would be
inappropriate. We have no
intention of interfering.

CLERIC

You cannot deny the Other!

Jeshoh calms the cleric, and then turns to Vaughn.

JESHOH

Commander Vaughn, it occurs to me
that your vessel is badly damaged.
The reports from *Avaril's* chief
technologist suggest that to help
repair it would take considerable
resources. Such investment could
leave our own ships vulnerable.

Vaughn smells the manipulation coming, but has no choice.

VAUGHN

Would you consider a trade?

JESHOH

Your own chief technologist's idea
for a defence against the Cheka
has merit. But we do not have the
materials to construct it here. We
will sponsor access to a nearby

trading consortium, where you can deal for those materials yourself.

VAUGHN

Very generous. And in return?

JESHOH

Allow Lieutenant Dax to stay and mediate talks between the Wanderers and the Houseborn. You saw how fragile the situation is. We cannot afford such disunity with the Cheka on our doorsteps.

Vaughn grinds his teeth.

7 **INT. YRYTHNY GUEST QUARTERS**

Vaughn, Dax and Bashir are now gathered in some pleasant guest quarters, discussing the matter heatedly.

VAUGHN

You can't seriously think this is a good idea, Dax.

DAX

They're asking for our help. Given the aid they're providing us, is it really so out of the question?

VAUGHN

You're talking about a fundamental change to their social structure.

DAX

Which they want to happen.

VAUGHN

God help me, Dax, you know what happened the last time you were in this position. They call it the Betreka Nebula Incident.

DAX

I am not Curzon.

VAUGHN

Try to remember that. And don't
start a war this time.

Vaughn leaves in a huff. Dax turns to Bashir, equally so.

DAX

Thanks for your support, Doctor.

BASHIR

You really think you could mediate
this conflict, don't you?

(no answer)

You do! You think you can fix this
entire planet. No challenge is too
great for Ezri Dax.

DAX

I don't know what you're talking
about.

BASHIR

Ever since Commander Jast died,
you've been relying more and more
on your past hosts. This isn't
you, Ezri!

DAX

How the hell would you know? Maybe
the Ezri you met - the one who was
nervous and got space-sick - maybe
she wasn't the real me.

She turns and walks into a side room, then throws a pillow
back out at him.

DAX

Get some rest, Doctor.

Then she slams the door on him.

8 INT. YRYTHNY GUEST QUARTERS

Another set of quarters - Shar works alone at a console.
After a few moments, Delegate Keren appears in the doorway.

SHAR
Delegate. What can I do for you?

KEREN
You can come with me, Ensign.

SHAR
I should check with my commander.

KEREN
Don't. Please trust me. I only
want to show you the other side.

SHAR
The other side of what?

KEREN
(gestures around)
Of this. Of my people. Jeshoh
would never let you see the truth.

He looks around, nervous.

SHAR
Very well.

He gets up and follows her out.

9 EXT. YRYTHNY RING CITY STREETS

Keren hurries through a crowded street at dusk, Shar close behind. The crowd are all Wanderers, in their shapeless cloaks; Shar wears one too, hood up to hide his features.

In a dingy back alley, Keren leads Shar into a SHOP selling tapestries and carpets. The shopkeeper ignores them. One particularly large tapestry is hung full-size on the wall.

Looking around to make sure no-one sees them, Keren lifts it up and disappears behind it. Shar is shocked, hesitates, looks around, then does the same.

10 INT. YRYTHNY MEETING HALL

Shar finds himself in a warehouse-type hall, filled with cloaked Wanderers sitting on benches, facing a makeshift

stage. Shar and Keren find a place towards the back. The crowd hushes as a Yrythny steps up onto the stage.

YRYTHNY 1

Aliens have come to our world.
Some even believe they have come
from the Other. I myself am
sceptical. But the Houseborn have
appointed these strangers to
decide our fate.

Other Wanderers call out from the crowd.

YRYTHNY 2

The strangers won't be allowed to
see us. They'll be trotted around
to the intelligentsia and told
pretty lies.

YRYTHNY 3

What about the burnings! They came
through our villages and burned
them to the ground.

YRYTHNY 2

Wanderer young are beaten with
clubs! Eviscerated!

YRYTHNY 3

Starvation. Repression. Slavery!
The Houseborn will never admit to
these things.

YRYTHNY 1

But reports of these atrocities
cannot come directly from us. The
Houseborn will simply dismiss it
as the ranting of militants.

Shar has been listening to these accounts with horror. As the crowd begins to heat up, Keren stands and walks calmly towards the stage. She climbs up, stands before the crowd, and pulls off her hood. The crowd gasps with recognition.

KEREN

You all know who I am. You know I am one of you. I believe that the coming of these strangers may be for our good.

She pulls back the sleeve of her cloak and shows the PALM of her hand to the crowd. The skin there has a pink-purple star pattern, very distinct from the rest of her skin.

KEREN

My time to go into the waters is soon. But because I am a Wanderer, I will be denied. Instead, I will present myself to the physicians, receive the injection and go about my life pretending I don't want or need to go into the waters. And I will be living a lie.

(with feeling)

I deserve to take a consort, to add to the next generation. I believe contact with the strangers will make that and more possible.

Keren looks out into the crowd, making direct eye contact with Shar.

KEREN

Who knows if they really were sent by the Other. But there is no question that these strangers may be our last chance.

As Shar absorbs her words...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

11 EXT. YRYTHNY PLANET - ESTABLISHING

As sun breaks across a portion of the glittering ring city.

12 EXT. YRYTHNY RING CITY STREETS - DAY

It's a bright day, and the streets are busy with cloaked Wanderers and robed Houseborn. Dax and Shar walk through the crowd. Dax hands a bag to a rather harried Shar.

DAX

Those historical precedents for expanding Wanderer rights - have you finished the summaries yet?

SHAR

They're in your database.

DAX

Let's eat. Once the Assembly members turn up, they'll keep us talking non-stop.

Dax stops by a street food vendor. They each purchase a bowl of steaming fishy-looking stuff with local currency.

SHAR

Sir, I understand that historical precedents provide vital context. But I think we're neglecting a crucial area of research.

DAX

Go on.

SHAR

The Yrythny conflict is based on the assumption that the Wanderers are biologically inferior to the Houseborn. What if we can prove that's wrong, scientifically?

DAX

That the inequities are perceived, rather than actual? I think that's very likely. But perception is nine tenths of reality, and I'm not sure any scientific proof will change that perception easily.

SHAR

Sir, I've also been investigating Doctor Bashir's readings of Yrythny biology. There's something very strange about their DNA. It seems... artificially enhanced.

DAX

The "Other" ?

SHAR

It's possible, sir.

DAX

Then maybe this Other intended for these social customs to play out. Maybe they serve a purpose not easily obvious to the outsider. For example, what would happen if every Yrythny were allowed to reproduce? Could the planet handle that kind of population explosion? They already built this ring because they were short of land.

SHAR

I've seen no evidence anyone has attempted to answer the question. But even if it can't, science may be able to solve that problem too.

DAX

But to conduct a proper scientific inquiry, you'd need enough time and enough subjects to make a viable statistical sampling. I don't think we'll get either.

SHAR

Sir, I am not questioning your decision to pursue the angles we've worked through so far. I'll complete everything you assign me and pursue the scientific issues in my own time, if you prefer.

DAX

Alright, Ensign, I can agree to that. But if I believe you're neglecting my assignments, I'll ask you to desist.

SHAR

Yes, sir.

DAX

Any word from Commander Vaughn?

SHAR

Not since yesterday. He should have reached the Consortium by today though.

DAX

Okay, we should go. I'm sure they'll be waiting.

Less than pleased with the outcome of their discussion, Shar follows Dax back into the crowds.

13 EXT. CONSORTIUM SPACE STATION

The *Defiant* sits in its maintenance bay, inside the rear hatch of the gigantic *Avaril*. Even bigger is the giant space station built in a ring around a glittering SPATIAL ANOMALY of some kind, bright and streaming with particles.

14 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN ENGINEERING

The room is still a mess, with lights low and engineers working all over. The Yrythny coffin-sized box from earlier is connected to the warp core, feeding it power through heavy lighted cables. Nog and Tlaral work alone together at a series of panels, both grimy and sweaty.

TLARAL

Femtobots?

NOG

Exactly. The Cheka nanobots are like viruses, invading and eating away at the ship's body. So what we need is an immunity system - even smaller robots that can eat their robots and destroy them.

TLARAL

And you will deploy these under the energy shield bubble.

NOG

Before they get a chance to infect the ship.

TLARAL

An excellent idea. The Cheka do not think for themselves - they steal whatever they need. They will never see this coming.

Overheated, Tlaral strips off the top layer of her uniform. She wears a vest underneath, and as she turns, Nog sees a large, angry-looking SCAR on the back of her shoulder.

NOG

Yikes, that's a nasty scar. What happened?

Tlaral looks nervous, caught out. She fumbles an answer.

TLARAL

Oh... I was caught in a coral tunnel near my House as a child. Nothing to worry about.

NOG

Remind me to tell you about my artificial leg when we're not so busy. We can compare war stories.

15 **EXT. YRYTHNY PLANET SURFACE - OCEAN - DAY**

Blue waters surge in powerful foam-edged waves as a Yrythny HYDROFOIL SHIP glides through them towards a rocky coast-edge in the distance. Steaming volcanoes rise into the sky.

Dax stands on the bow, windswept and wearing safety gear. Jeshoh is nearby, plus numerous uniformed Yrythny police agents. Some other well-dressed Houseborn dignitaries are there too, and some *Defiant* crew.

Jeshoh points down into the water, and Dax sees a school of small fish-like creatures swimming alongside the hydrofoil - Yrythny young. Dax is delighted.

JESHOH

Some will be Houseborn, some will be Wanderers. Too early to tell.

DAX

Can't you send the lost ones home? If a youngling from House Fnoral comes ashore at House Soid, why not just send it back to Fnoral?

JESHOH

Because if they can't find their way home in the first place, there's clearly something wrong. Isn't it better that we take them in and raise them, rather than casting them back out to sea or killing them? That's what the Houses did a thousand years ago. We've come quite a distance since those days, Lieutenant.

Dax spots a dull-cloaked Wanderer cleaning up after the Houseborn, the Yrythny police eyeing him suspiciously, and wonders if they really have or not.

KEREN (v.o.)

So, how much fun are you having, Ensign ch'Thane?

16 **INT. YRYTHNY GUEST QUARTERS**

Shar at his workstation in the guest quarters, unhappily slogging through piles of reports. Keren is at the door.

SHAR

Work needn't be entertaining.

KEREN

Your antennae, they're sagging.
Where is Lieutenant Dax?

SHAR

I'm surprised you don't know. She went with Jeshoh for a planet-side tour of one of the Houses.

KEREN

Ah, probably House Tin-Mal. One of Jeshoh's pet stories. I'll have my office send over the journals of Tin-Mal. I'm certain they aren't in your database.

SHAR

You're saying the historical data the Houseborn have been supplying us is incomplete?

KEREN

A political tactic. Select the facts that prove your argument, suppress the rest. You're quite solemn this evening, Ensign.

SHAR

I... I have an idea about how to approach your internal issues, but I don't have time or resources.

KEREN

Tell me.

SHAR

I've studied your DNA, and to say that it's a marvel of genetics is an understatement.

KEREN
You've discovered the Turn Key.

SHAR
What is it?

KEREN
Our legacy from the Other, some
would say. You think it holds the
solution to our problem?

SHAR
Maybe. But access to your labs is
restricted. One of my specialities
is cytogenetics, so I'm uniquely
qualified to handle this research.
If I only had the information.

Keren straightens, makes a decision.

KEREN
I have something to show you.

SHAR
(resigned)
I have a meeting.

KEREN
On my authority, consider it
cancelled.

SHAR
But...

KEREN
Please, Thirishar. This is more
important.

Struck by the urgency in her tone, he nods and joins her.

17 **EXT. YRYTHNY PLANET SURFACE - OCEAN**

As they near the coast, Dax sees the ruin of a great house,
abandoned and crumbling. There is no vegetation in or
around the area, and no fish in the surrounding sea.

JESHOH

You're looking at the remains of House Tin-Mal, a social experiment from four-hundred years ago. You see, Lieutenant, we're not the narrow-minded elitists you might think. In the case of Tin-Mal, my ancestors were very progressive.

DAX

This was a Wanderer city?

JESHOH

The records describe House Tin-Mal rising from the reef, glorious in its spires and towers. A testament to how wrong the Houseborn were to repress our brethren.

DAX

So what happened?

JESHOH

Clumsiness. Arrogance. Stupidity. Pick one. There was an accident, and everything for kilometres was contaminated and destroyed. Hatchlings, the fish and plant life, the reef itself. None of it survived. Hundreds of years later, it is still recovering.

DAX

I can't help but wonder... if the Wanderers had been raised with the same opportunities and experiences as the Houseborn, couldn't they be taught how to take proper care?

JESHOH

And in the course of it, how many more mistakes would they make?

Jeshoh looks at the destroyed buildings sadly, shaking his head. Dax sadly watches Jeshoh himself.

18 INT. YRYTHNY CARE HOME

Keren and Shar wait on the doorstep of a large, planet-side building. The door OPENS to reveal another female Yrythny, MRESEN. She is dressed in tasselled and jewelled robes - a Houseborn. She greets Keren warmly and ushers them inside.

MRESEN

Come in, Delegate. So pleased to see you. Your presence blesses us.

KEREN

Mresen. My companion, Ensign Thirishar ch'Thane.

MRESEN

A beverage, perhaps? Take a seat where you're comfortable -

KEREN

Ensign ch'Thane has come to see our lost ones.

MRESEN

(with sad understanding)
Of course. You know where to take him. Thank you, Delegate..

They nod to each other, and Keren leads a surprised Shar deeper into the building. It is a medical clinic, but pleasant and warm, with plants and bright sunlight.

SHAR

She's Houseborn.

KEREN

There are some aspects of life even Wanderer and Houseborn agree on. Here we are...

They move into another wing of the building, featuring a dozen beds carrying sick Yrythny. Shar and Keren walk among them and the attending nurses, smiling soothingly. Every one of the patients is visibly deformed or disabled in some way - missing limbs or eyes, burned skin, breathing tanks.

KEREN

This is also the legacy of the Other, Ensign. The Turn Key may have allowed us to evolve out of the oceans, but it is also what brought us to the attention of the Cheka. They want to engineer their own soldier race, and they see our genetics as the key they need.

SHAR

That's why they attack you.

KEREN

They do so much more than attack. They have no compunction about experimenting on live subjects. If anything, they prefer it. All these Yrythny were rescued from Cheka labs.

(heartfelt)

We cannot surrender to them. There is no compromise to be reached. They would not distinguish between Wanderer and Houseborn, between adult and youngling. We must be a whole people, Ensign, or we don't stand a chance against them.

On Shar's response...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

19 EXT. YRYTHNY PLANET SURFACE - HILL AREA

Shar and Keren hike along a path through windy, grass-lined hills. It is a stark environment, rocky and difficult.

KEREN

It's always lovely here after a storm. The skies are so green they almost hurt to look at.

SHAR

So why not live planet-side?

KEREN

Choices for Wanderers are limited. I could have learned aquaculture or raised livestock. I chose school. But could I ever do what you're doing? Explore the galaxy, make a new life for myself? Unlikely. I can't even take a consort. Not legally, anyway.

SHAR

You mean...

KEREN

Oh yes, it happens. Wanderer males are sterilised at birth, but females can't be sterilised without permanent physical damage. So we're force-fed hormones from youth, and given injections as adults. They mark us here -

(taps the back of
her shoulder)

- just to ensure there can be no mistake. Even so, some defy the law and mate with Houseborn males. They can't have an official union, so they share the little they can.

SHAR

This I understand.

KEREN

Ah! Ensign ch'Thane has a consort waiting for him back at home.

SHAR

Actually, I have three.

KEREN

Three?!

SHAR

Andorians have four sexes. None are truly male or female as most races think of it, but we usually accept such terms for simplicity's sake. Still, strictly speaking, I am not male. I am *chan*.

KEREN

I don't know what's harder. Having no parents, as we Wanderers, or having four.

SHAR

Unlike your people, all Andorians are required to procreate. It's a social obligation.

KEREN

Ensign, is having young difficult for your species?

SHAR

Very. It's not something we speak of to non-Andorians. Even most of the Federation isn't aware.

(hard to say it)

We have only a five-year period of healthy fertility. Beyond that, the chromosomal mutations are too great for our children to survive. Our genes are mapped out at birth to ensure we make the best match.

KEREN

You mean you didn't choose your consorts?

SHAR

No, but I love them dearly, even so. Still, bondmate matching is a stopgap measure at best. I know that science holds the answer, not cultural oppression.

KEREN

But Thirishar... surely other Andorian scientists before you have tried to find a solution.

SHAR

Yes. But none of them have had this opportunity to search the galaxy for answers. That's why I had to come now - I couldn't miss this chance.

KEREN

I see why the Other's Turn Key fascinates you.

SHAR

I hoped the genetic engineering that helped you to evolve might be used to address our problems.

KEREN

I think, Ensign ch'Thane, that the Other did indeed bring you here.

Keren and Shar turn a corner on the path, and see a small stonework village built into the side of the hills.

20 INT. YRYTHNY VILLAGE BARN

Keren leads Shar into what looks like a dilapidated barn, filled with farming equipment. But she opens a hidden door to a cellar, and descends the dark and dingy steps. Shar follows her down into the darkness.

21 **INT. YRYTHNY VILLAGE CELLAR**

Keren switches on a LIGHT, and Shar is astonished to find a laboratory in the cellar. Out-of-date equipment and boxes of paper records, but a laboratory nonetheless. Shar rushes forward and opens a drawer, looking reverently inside.

SHAR

Your records?

KEREN

Going back hundreds of years. We have labs all around the area. The remote location makes it easier to go unnoticed, and the rocks help shield us from sensors.

SHAR

But what about Houseborn records? We'll need a comparison group.

KEREN

Well, that's the other problem. Not many Houseborn want to be part of a Wanderer genetic study.

SHAR

Medical records? Or perhaps we could take samples from their drinking glasses -

KEREN

Tonight! At dinner!

Excited, the pair of them get to work on the records.

22 **EXT. YRYTHNY PLANET SURFACE - OCEAN**

The hydrofoil is rushing back through the water. Dax is looking out over the ocean when she hears a commotion. She turns to see the Yrythny police unexpectedly rounding up the Wanderer servants and the *Defiant* crew at gunpoint.

Dax steps forward in alarm, but Jeshoh is there in her way.

DAX

What's going on, Jeshoh?

JESHOH

There's been a terrorist attack on Houseborn breeding grounds.

DAX

And only Wanderers are criminals?

JESHOH

There are extremist Wanderer groups willing to take up arms against the Houseborn, yes. You saw them at the landing plaza. The attack was on my house, Lieutenant - House Perian. That is obviously meant as a message to me.

DAX

And what about my people? Why are they at the end of your guns?

JESHOH

Explosives were set off remotely from this vessel, after a signal was sent from your quarters up on the ring.

DAX

That's ridiculous! You can't possibly think we're involved. Me and all my people have been here with you all day.

Her face drops as she realises that is not quite true.

DAX

Oh no... Shar.
(taps combadge)
Dax to ch'Thane.

There is no response. Jeshoh looks at Dax as if this proves her guilt. She looks back nervously.

DAX

There's a logical explanation for this, I assure you.

(taps badge)

Dax to ch'Thane. Dammit, Shar, where are you?

23 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN ENGINEERING

Nog, Tlaral and the other engineers are working hard at panels around the room. Tlaral has covered back up.

NOG

Nog to Commander Vaughn.

VAUGHN (comm)

Go ahead, Lieutenant.

NOG

We're about ready here, sir. The femtobot shield can be activated at any time, although we can't run it at the same time as the cloak. Internal sensors are still down too, but we can move under our own power now.

24 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

Vaughn sits in the centre chair, with TENMEI and Bowers (plus extras) at their stations.

VAUGHN

Excellent work, Lieutenant. Please pass on my thanks to our Yrythny guests as well.

NOG (comm)

Will do, sir. Engineering out.

VAUGHN

Ensign Tenmei, prepare to clear all moorings from *Avaril* and set course to the Yrythny homeworld.

25 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN ENGINEERING

NOG

Ensign Permenter, keep working on those internal sensors. I am going to take... a... break.

PERMENTER

Yes sir.

Nog picks up a pile of padds, and Tlaral grabs her tools. Nog after-you's for Tlaral, and the two leave engineering.

26 INT. DEFIANT - CORRIDOR (CONTINUOUS)

Nog and Tlaral walk down the corridor to a turbolift.

NOG

Really, Tlaral, thank you so much for your help. We couldn't have done it without your knowledge of the Cheka weapons.

27 INT. DEFIANT - TURBOLIFT

They enter the turbolift and it starts moving.

TLARAL

You're very welcome, Lieutenant. Now you do something for me.

Tlaral lifts a tool and HITS Nog hard on the back of the neck, and he crumples. She catches him before he can fall to the deck. She pulls out another tool, presses a button, and the two of them dissolve in a Yrythny transporter beam.

28 EXT. CONSORTIUM SPACE STATION

The *Avaril* moves forward as the Consortium station recedes. Inside the maintenance bay, struts and supports disconnect from the *Defiant*, and the repaired ship moves slowly out, passing through the force-field and emerging into space.

29 EXT. YRYTHNY PLANET - ESTABLISHING

A nice beauty shot of the green planet and the ring city.

30 INT. YRYTHNY GUEST QUARTERS

Shar snaps to attention in front of Dax's desk, looking straight ahead. Dax sits behind the desk, trying to remain calm despite her frustration.

DAX

I understand that your intentions were honourable, Ensign. And you may not have disobeyed the letter of my orders. But you damn sure violated the spirit of them. You should have contacted me first with Delegate Keren's proposal.

SHAR

Yes, sir.

DAX

No-one's been able to identify who used this workstation to send the 'go' signal for the attack. Thankfully, none of our team is under suspicion any longer.

SHAR

I assure you, Lieutenant, I took all necessary precautions. And I brought enough data back from the peninsula to conduct a significant study of Yrythny DNA.

DAX

What?

SHAR

The farmers have been collecting Wanderer DNA for centuries. They intended to use it to match Wanderers with their proper Houses. But we can use that same data to see if there's any genetic basis for the caste system.

DAX

Do you really think the Houseborn will cooperate willingly?

SHAR

No. But Keren believes that with her connections in the Wanderer underground, we can -

DAX

(standing up)

Hold it. Keren is connected to the terrorists?

SHAR

Respectfully, sir, to call them terrorists is a generalisation. She took me to a meeting, I've met some of them. Not everyone endorses violence.

DAX

And why haven't you mentioned this little excursion before now?

(Shar hesitates
to answer)

I asked you a question, Ensign!

SHAR

I should have, sir. Curiosity got the better of me. I'm sorry.

DAX

I'm sure you are. But you consorted surreptitiously with a political leader who may be involved in the destruction of a breeding village and dozens of lives. Unborn children, Shar! What can you possibly say to make me trust Keren now?

SHAR

Are you convinced that the Houseborn didn't stage the attack themselves purely to implicate the Wanderers? Has anyone shown you evidence that proves unequivocally the underground is to blame?

DAX

That's enough, Ensign. You have acted in bad faith with respect to your commanding officer. You betrayed my trust, Shar.

SHAR

If you want to discipline me, I won't protest. But we can't ignore the potential significance of this research.

DAX

You think any research done with secretly obtained samples will be taken seriously? You'll have no credibility at all! If you want your results to be legitimate, you have to start conducting yourself legitimately.

SHAR

May I ask for official cooperation during our meetings tomorrow?

DAX

I'll present your proposal. If it's rejected, that'll be the end of it. Understood, Ensign?

SHAR

Yes, sir.

DAX

And Shar, I am restating and re-emphasising Commander Vaughn's original order. You're to have no unauthorised contact with the Yrythny. Is that understood?

SHAR

Yes, sir. If I may ask... what is your solution?

Shar is really starting to skirt the edge. But Dax preens over her solution, proud of what she has thought of.

DAX

As it happens, I think I do have a diplomatic solution, based on Alpha Quadrant history. Many times, when one group wanted to lead a different way of life, they simply left to find a new home of their own. We could find a world for the Wanderers to colonise and live without Houseborn oppression.

SHAR

Having two planets only gives the Cheka two targets. And clearly, since Wanderers are not allowed to reproduce, Houseborn parents give birth to Wanderer young all the time. Would you have them shipped off-planet as children?

DAX

Oh, you're playing a dangerous game, Ensign. I hope for your sake it's worth the risks you're taking. Dismissed.

They make eye contact, and behind his at-attention stance, his eyes are burning. For the moment, they are enemies. Then Shar turns and leaves.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

31 INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT

Shar sits in the pilot's chair, leaning across the console asleep. It BEEPS, waking him with a start.

COMPUTER

Model complete. Image available.

SHAR

Display results from Yrythny data analysis ch'Thane Beta Four.

The screen fills with reams of data and DNA model images. He turns to see Dax clambering in through the hatch. Keren and Jeshoh both enter the shuttle behind her.

DAX

Shar? We missed you at breakfast.

SHAR

Oh. I didn't realise we'd have company, Lieutenant.

DAX

Keren and Jeshoh kindly joined me to present my conclusions to the Upper Assembly, so I offered to take them back to the ring.

Dax takes the seat beside him, while Keren and Jeshoh seat themselves behind in the tightly packed cockpit. Dax leans in closer to Shar, speaking confidentially, trying to mend their fences. He remains cold and professional.

DAX

I know you had a lot invested in this project, Shar. Don't beat yourself up. The Assembly agreed to the compromise I suggested. I think we've succeeded in helping the Yrythny.

SHAR
(eyes ahead)
As you say.

DAX
Alright then. Prepare for launch.

32 **EXT. YRYTHNY ORBIT**

The *Defiant's* shuttle *Sagan* rises up gradually out of the atmosphere, the blue-green planet below.

33 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

An alarm begins to beep. Jeshoh pulls out a device - the Yrythny equivalent of a padd. He reads it in shock.

DAX
What is it, Vice-Chair?

JESHOH
My colleagues in House Perian have sent me information about the attack on our breeding grounds. They say a clutch of eggs was stolen. There is a shuttle leaving the planet now, which they believe is carrying them away.

KEREN
Who would steal fertilised eggs?

DAX
Shar, find that ship and set an intercept course. Use the phasers to disable the engines - I don't want them going anywhere. Then we can beam the eggs to safety.

34 **EXT. YRYTHNY ORBIT**

The tiny shuttle turns within the atmosphere and flies off in a new direction. Soon another ship appears, a smaller version of the *Avaril* design, heading up towards orbit. The *Sagan* closes on the Yrythny shuttle and FIRES phasers. The Yrythny ship's engines sputter and die, leaving it adrift.

SHAR

Their engines are down. I'm not picking up any other vessels.

DAX

That was suspiciously easy.

JESHOH

What about the eggs?

DAX

We'll beam them out now.

Dax hits the panels, and half a dozen crates materialise in the rear of the ship. Dax and Keren get up to inspect them.

SHAR

(turning to Jeshoh)

What can I do -

Shar sees Jeshoh pointing a WEAPON at his head, looking nervous but determined. Shar immediately growls, but doesn't move. Dax and Keren have not noticed yet.

JESHOH

Those eggs belong to an acquaintance of mine. We're going to deliver them. Please don't pull any tricks to provoke me into shooting you or Lieutenant Dax.

SHAR

(on a hunch)

Show me your hand.

Impressed with Shar's deduction, Jeshoh raises his non-weapon-holding hand. The palm shows the same pink-purple star pattern that was on Keren's.

SHAR

You are ready to go into the waters. With Keren?

JESHOH

We have chosen each other. But my own government will not allow it. Your people were our last hope, but you squandered it on politics.

SHAR

My analysis isn't finished yet. We still might have a chance.

JESHOH

We're out of chances.

Jeshoh gestures towards the panels. Shar sits and starts the shuttle moving up out of the atmosphere.

DAX

Shar? Why are we gaining altitude?

Dax comes forward from the rear cabin, and sees the gun in Jeshoh's hand. Resolutely, she places herself in the gun's path and stares sternly at Jeshoh. Keren sees too.

KEREN

You have a weapon, Jeshoh. I've never seen you with a weapon.

JESHOH

I'm defending something, Keren. Our right to a life together.

KEREN

You were at the meeting that night. You agreed the radicals could ruin everything we've worked for. Please don't tell me you've joined them, Jeshoh.

Under the following discussion, Shar quietly returns to his screens, and begins working on the DNA programs again.

DAX

You attacked your own breeding grounds, didn't you? You sent the signal from the boat.

KEREN

And you were at the landing plaza
when the crew were attacked there.
And you blamed me, Jeshoh!

DAX

You agreed to my proposals. You
both did! Why are you doing this?

JESHOH

Sending the Wanderers away will
not solve our problems! We will
still not be together. This way we
get change right now, in time for
us to go into the waters.

KEREN

Orchestrating terrorist attacks on
your own House won't solve our
problems either!

JESHOH

The attack was needed to acquire
these eggs. If I give them to the
Cheka, they will have the genetic
material they want, they will stop
blockading our world, and they
will give us the weapons we need
to make this a fair fight!

KEREN

You would sacrifice our young to
those monsters?

Shaking her head with disgust, Keren turns away from Jeshoh
and takes her seat, refusing to look at him.

36 **EXT. SPACE**

The *Sagan* sits quietly in space, alone.

37 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

Shar hands Dax a padd. She quietly reads with astonishment.

DAX

Shar, this is incredible.

SHAR

You have to tell them.

JESHOH

Tell them what?

DAX

Shar's research. This is the answer you've been looking for.

JESHOH

What about the compromise you negotiated with such skill? Peace at last for the Yrythny! All the Wanderers have to do is leave.

DAX

Colonisation, not exile! And it's a better option than genocide.

JESHOH

Yet now you expect me to believe that padd, magically appearing at our darkest hour, will solve all our problems?

DAX

That part is my fault. I wasn't as supportive of Ensign ch'Thane's efforts as I should have been.

JESHOH

It's a hoax. It has to be.

A proximity ALARM sounds, and the crew sees the enormous *Avaril* drop out of warp. It pulls to a stop some distance away. Almost immediately, lights begin to go off all across the larger ship, and it keels to the side. It's adrift.

DAX

Is that part of the plan?

JESHOH

Uh... of course.

38 **EXT. SPACE**

From another direction, another SHIP drops out of warp, matching the *Avaril* for size. It's unpleasant and creepy-looking, designed like a spider about to pounce.

KEREN

The Cheka.

DAX

Are you going aboard their ship, Jeshoh? Or do you transport the eggs to them and they transport the weapons to you?

JESHOH

I was supposed to receive my instructions when I arrived.

DAX

Open deals usually end badly. Too much room for a double-cross.

JESHOH

That won't happen.

DAX

Maybe. But there's the question of how you'll get home without the Yrythny military hunting you down, as well. If you're on the run, you won't be able to bring the Cheka weapons back to the underground.

39 **EXT. SPACE**

The *Avaril*'s bay doors open and a shuttle like the one that was carrying the eggs emerges. It heads for the Cheka ship.

40 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

JESHOH

Expect a signal from the shuttle.

SHAR

We're monitoring communications.
Lifesigns register two Yrythny...
and one Ferengi!

DAX

What? Jeshoh, what the hell is Nog
doing on that ship?

JESHOH

I... I don't know!

TLARAL (comm)

We have the specs for the cloaking
device, and an engineer who can
install it.

Dax and Shar both look furiously at Jeshoh about that.
Another voice replies, dark and gravelly - the Cheka.

CHEKA (comm)

What are we meant to do with him?

TLARAL (comm)

Once he's built the cloak, you can
do whatever you want with him.

41 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

The bridge is darkened, in stealth mode. Vaughn is in the
centre chair, fuming angry. He has heard it all.

CHEKA (comm)

What about the eggs?

VAUGHN

That's enough. Bowers, drop cloak.
Target that shuttle's shield
generators and fire.

The lights come up and the cloak drops.

42 EXT. SPACE

The *Defiant* ripples into view right next to the two larger
ships, and fires PHASERS at the Yrythny shuttle. The small
shuttle splutters and begins to lean like the *Avaril*.

43 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

SHAR

The *Defiant*!

DAX

At a guess, I'd say your deal is off, Jeshoh.

JESHOH

No!

Through the window, they see the tips of the creepy spider ship's legs begin to GLOW a threatening red.

44 **INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE**

BOWERS

Sir, I have a transporter lock on Nog and the two Yrythny.

VAUGHN

Beam them up, Lieutenant, and have security greet them warmly.

BOWERS

Yes, sir. I also have remote access to the Cheka computers. Their system security is pathetic.

VAUGHN

That's what happens when you're too lazy to take care of yourself, and just steal whatever you want. Anything interesting in there?

BOWERS

Would a complete map of the locations of their web weapons throughout the sector do you?

45 **EXT. SPACE**

The Cheka warship FIRES from the tips of its legs - the beams meet and destroy the small Yrythny shuttle.

46 **INT. DEFIANT - TRANSPORTER ROOM**

Tlaral and another Yrythny materialise on the pad, to find phaser rifles pointed in their faces. Beside them is Nog, hands cuffed behind his back and a bag over his head.

Bashir rushes up to him and pulls off the bag, undoes the cuffs, then runs a tricorder over him to be sure.

BASHIR

Welcome back, Nog. I wish I could tell you to rest, but we're a bit short-handed in engineering, and we still have to get out of here.

47 **EXT. SPACE**

The *Defiant* fires a spread of TORPEDOES at the Cheka's underside - they don't do much damage - and then pulls away from the area. The Cheka ship pulls around and follows.

The *Sagan* also follows, leaving the drifting *Avaril* alone.

48 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

KEREN

What are we doing?

JESHOH

We need to keep up with the Cheka. We have what they want, and they have what we want.

DAX

Listen to yourself, Jeshoh! You just saw them destroy one of your shuttles. They will turn on you! Let me talk to the *Defiant*. You and Keren can take asylum with us until we can negotiate with -

JESHOH

The way you negotiated the colonising compromise?

SHAR

The Cheka are releasing a wave of mines! Increasing shield power.

Through the window they see a collection of tiny NANOBOT MINES launch from the rear of the Cheka ship. Following too close, the *Sagan* runs straight into them.

The little shuttle lurches and shudders, and panels and lights EXPLODE all over. Power dies and the *Sagan* grinds to a halt. Dax hears the dull THUMP of flesh against bulkhead, and turns to see Keren collapsing with a bloodied head.

DAX

Jeshoh! Help her, dammit!

He stands and stares at her, stricken, no idea what to do. Shar gets up and runs to her, scans her with a tricorder.

SHAR

She has a subdural haematoma. A blood bruise on the brain. I have no medical training.

DAX

Doctor Bashir on the *Defiant* is one of the finest doctors in the galaxy. He'll stabilise her until we can get her to your people.

JESHOH

No! We'll never be together if we go back now!

DAX

If we don't go back, she'll die.

Jeshoh looks back and forth, trying to decide.

DAX

Jeshoh, you know what you have to do. End this.

49 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

Everyone is in all-business mode.

TENMEI
Target in thirty seconds.

BOWERS
Activating femtobot shield.

50 **EXT. SPACE**

The *Defiant* leads the Cheka on a chase through the system. The two ships skirt close to the star. Pulling away, the *Defiant* heads straight into another field of nanobot mines.

The nanobots descend on the *Defiant*. Small twinkling LIGHTS begin to detonate in the space immediately around the ship. The *Defiant* slows slightly, its engines struggling, but then gets a renewed surge of energy and pulls away.

The Cheka soar into the field behind the *Defiant*, and the nanobots descend on them instead. Small EXPLOSIONS go off all over the surface, and the ship splutters to a halt. The *Defiant* curves away and heads back to the *Avaril* and *Sagan*.

51 **INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE**

TENMEI
The web got them! The Cheka are no longer in pursuit.

BOWERS
Sir, the *Sagan* is hailing us.

VAUGHN
Put them through.

DAX (comm)
Defiant, this is Lieutenant Dax.
Permission to bring in the *Sagan*.

VAUGHN
By all means, Lieutenant.

52 **INT. DEFIANT - SHUTTLEBAY**

A bit more room now that there is only the one shuttle. Julian Bashir is anxiously waiting for Dax.

The *Sagan* settles to the deck, the hatch OPENS and Shar rushes out first. Following is Jeshoh, carrying Keren delicately in his arms, then finally Dax emerges.

SHAR

Doctor, we have a medical emergency.

Dax forgotten for the moment, Bashir rushes to Keren and scans her with a tricorder.

BASHIR

Get her to sickbay, I'll be right behind you.

(taps combadge)

Bashir to Richter - prepare for emergency surgery. Yrythny patient, subdural haematoma.

DAX

(catching up)

Hey, can I walk with you?

He reaches out, takes her hand, and they smile.

BASHIR

What exactly happened in there?

DAX

Ask me later. I just... I just want you to know I love you.

BASHIR

(surprised)

I love you too.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

53 EXT. YRYTHNY ORBIT

Beauty shot of the planet, and the glittering ring city.

54 INT. YRYTHNY MEETING HALL

A complicated DNA MODEL appears on a large screen at the front of an auditorium. Shar stands by the screen, proudly explaining to a packed room of Houseborn and Wanderers.

SHAR

In short, my genetic analysis reveals that what your society describes as undesirable "Wanderer traits" are in fact the Turn Key's attempt to evolve and improve the species. Over time, the Yrythny have selected their mates from a progressively narrower gene pool. If your current social customs continue - sterilising Wanderer males, allowing only the Houseborn to reproduce - then your race will inevitably be plagued by genetic mutations and abnormalities that will end in extinction. The only way to ensure your survival as a species is to allow the Houseborn and the Wanderers to inter-marry and have young together.

(beat)

This concludes my presentation. If anyone would like more data, it is uploaded to the Yrythny Scientific Archives. Thank you for coming.

He finishes, to resounding SILENCE from the audience. He wonders if he is about to be lynched. Then Nog stands up in the front row and begins CLAPPING loudly. The Yrythny look at him confused, but then hesitantly copy the actions. Soon the room is thundering with applause. Shar smiles proudly.

55 **EXT. YRYTHNY RING CITY STREETS - DAY**

Commander Vaughn waits at the bottom of a set of rather grandiose steps in front of a large official building. Dax exits the building and slouches tiredly down the steps.

VAUGHN

Ready to go, Lieutenant?

DAX

In every possible way.

VAUGHN

(starts to walk)

How's it going for Jeshoh?

DAX

Keren's testimony was persuasive. She came off sounding like she'd made the only possible choices in a difficult situation. But he did join the terrorists. He's facing pretty heavy charges. Perhaps if Tlaral takes full responsibility, they'll reduce his sentence.

VAUGHN

They haven't decided Tlaral's fate yet. Hiding her Wanderer identity and joining the military is a life sentence at least. Add in kidnap, and sabotage of the *Avaril*, plus trying to trade with the Cheka, and I can't imagine she'll see daylight for a long time.

They stop at the food vendor. Dax buys them both some food.

DAX

You should try this, Commander.

VAUGHN

I haven't had much time to explore the culture, certainly. You seem to have enjoyed your time here.

DAX

Enjoy is how I refer to vacations. I prefer to think I made the most of my time. I learned a lot. And not just about the Yrythny.

56 **INT. YRYTHNY GUEST QUARTERS**

Dax wears a fluffy bathrobe, cuddled up to Bashir on the couch. He strokes her hair affectionately while she thinks.

DAX

You were right. I haven't found my equilibrium yet. I was so sure I could do it all. I had no limits. But my idea only led Jeshoh to become a terrorist for his cause. It was... kinda humiliating.

BASHIR

That's not what I heard. The Yrythny were wowed by your diplomatic savvy.

DAX

Not mine. Curzon's. The speech I gave at the beginning? Lela's.

BASHIR

But it was Ezri who triumphed in the shuttle. None of the other hosts could have persuaded Jeshoh to stand down like you did. Without you, he might have gone through with Tlaral's plan.

DAX

That part I feel good about. The rest... not so much. Poor Shar. He knew I was on the wrong path, and he was very patient with me.

BASHIR

Your hair's longer.

DAX

It was two weeks, not two months.

BASHIR

Ah, but did you know that a Trill's hair can grow by up to half a centimetre a week?

DAX

We could continue discussing my amazing follicles, or we could find other equally intriguing parts of my anatomy to study.

Giggling playfully, they snuggle further into the couch and out of frame.

57 **INT. YRYTHNY GUEST QUARTERS**

Shar's quarters. Nog comes out of the bedroom area rubbing his eyes and yawning. Shar is at his desk still working.

NOG

Did you even sleep last night?

SHAR

Adrenaline must have kept me up. Yesterday was a rather unique day for me.

NOG

At least you didn't get hit over the head, kidnapped and nearly sold to the Cheka. I tell you, I'm never getting in a turbolift again. No good can come of it.

A KNOCK on the door. Surprised, Shar gets up and opens it. Keren is there, looking tired and bedraggled. Yrythny police stand at a polite distance, keeping watch.

KEREN

Try not to be so surprised, Ensign ch'Thane. I wanted to tell you about the ruling before you heard it officially. Is there someplace we can talk?

Shar looks back into the room, where Nog is still slobbering about and scratching himself. He turns back to Keren.

SHAR
The courtyard?

58 **EXT. YRYTHNY RING CITY STREETS**

Shar and Keren walk a little way through the streets until they come to a sitting area, where they both sit.

KEREN
They let me off easy. They are still going ahead with Lieutenant Dax's suggestion, as well as considering yours. When the first colonists leave our world, I will be with them.

SHAR
You had thought of leaving anyway. And now that your people have a defence against the Cheka weapons, you can go wherever you want.

KEREN
Yes, but to know that I will never be allowed to come home... it is a sobering thought.

SHAR
What of Jeshoh?

KEREN
I will wait for him. When his sentence is done, we will be together. But...

SHAR
What?

KEREN
They decided they couldn't excuse his relationship with me. He will

never be allowed to go into the waters.

SHAR

They're sterilising him?! But -

KEREN

No, Thirishar. We knew the risks. This is the price we must pay.

She brightens a little and brings up a small bag she had carried with her. She opens it, pulls out a small package, and hands it to Shar. At her nod, Shar opens the package.

KEREN

I have another reason to visit you. A gift. The eggs stripped from House Perian couldn't all be saved. Most had been out of the water too long. But I persuaded them to let me give you an egg pouch in thanks for your work.

(smiling)

I know what you're trying to do for your people, Shar. Now you'll have proper samples to work with and not just computer models. You've more than earned the right to take these.

Shar cannot speak with the emotion of this gift. He stares at the package in amazement. When he looks up, Keren is already walking away down the street with the police. But she gives him a last smiling glance back as she leaves.

FADE OUT:

THE END