

= Shades of Gray (Star Trek : The Next Generation) =

" Shades of Gray " is the 22nd episode of the second season of the American science fiction television series Star Trek : The Next Generation , the 48th episode overall . It was originally broadcast on July 17 , 1989 , in broadcast syndication . It was the only clip show filmed during the series and was created due to a lack of funds left over from other episodes during the season . Set in the 24th century , the series follows the adventures of the crew of the Federation starship Enterprise . In this episode , Commander William Riker (Jonathan Frakes) undergoes medical treatment by Dr. Katherine Pulaski (Diana Muldaur) for an alien infection and must relive numerous past events .

It was the final episode written by Maurice Hurley , who originated the idea and wrote the first draft of the script , with Hans Beimler and Richard Manning conducting re @-@ writes . It was directed by Rob Bowman and the framework sequences were filmed over the course of three days . It was watched by 9 @.@ 8 million viewers on the first broadcast , the highest ratings for the series since " Samaritan Snare " two months earlier . " Shades of Gray " is widely regarded as the worst episode of the series , with critics calling it " god @-@ awful " and a " travesty " ; even Hurley referred to it negatively . It can be compared to " Spock 's Brain " in The Original Series .

= = Plot = =

During a geological survey on Surata IV , Commander William Riker (Jonathan Frakes) is struck by a thorn growing on a motile vine plant . The away team immediately beams back to the Enterprise , where Dr. Katherine Pulaski (Diana Muldaur) finds out that the thorn has released a deadly virus into Riker 's body . Within a matter of hours , the virus will reach Riker 's brain , killing him . To try to save Riker 's life , Pulaski puts him into a machine that will artificially stimulate his brain neurons , keeping them active and resisting the virus . This causes Riker to dream of his past adventures aboard the Enterprise . Riker 's first dreams are of reasonably neutral occasions , such as his first meeting with Lieutenant Commander Data (Brent Spiner) . He soon moves on to more passionate and even erotic dreams , such as meeting the cheerful young Edo women on Rubicon III , the matriarch Beata (Karen Montgomery) on Angel One , or the computer @-@ generated holodeck woman Minuet (Carolyn McCormick) .

However , while pleasing to Riker 's mind , the passionate dreams only worsen Riker 's condition , as the virus feeds on the positive endorphins his brain is creating . Pulaski and Counselor Deanna Troi (Marina Sirtis) therefore agree to try to make the machine evoke negative dreams instead . Thus Riker dreams of Lieutenant Tasha Yar 's (Denise Crosby) death , or the apparent death of Deanna Troi 's child (R. J. Williams) . This has the desired effect , as the negative endorphins drive the virus away , but the endorphins are not strong enough . As a last resort , Pulaski uses the machine to evoke dreams of raw , primitive feelings of fear and survival . Thus Riker dreams of fighting the tar creature Armus (Mart McCesney) , the alien @-@ controlled Admiral Gregory Quinn (Ward Costello) , and the Klingon officer Klag (Brian Thompson) on board the warship Pagh . Seeing that the raw emotions work best , Pulaski intensifies the dreams to come at a more rapid pace . This finally kills the virus and Riker recovers .

= = Production = =

The episode was intended to save money at the end of the season by being a bottle episode which featured few additional characters . The only guest star was Colm Meaney as recurring character Chief Miles O'Brien . The reason was that the show had overspent on the episodes " Elementary , Dear Data " and " Q Who " , and Paramount Studios was holding the series to their overall season budget . It was the last episode on which Maurice Hurley acted as head writer ; he referred to the episode as a " piece of shit " and " terrible , just terrible " . He turned in the idea of a cheap clip show to save money and wrote the first draft of the script , with Richard Manning and Hans Beimler conducting re @-@ writes .

Director Rob Bowman initially thought that the episode could be filmed in five days , two less than usual . However , it was actually filmed in three days after pressure from Paramount with two spent only on the sickbay set . He later said that he simply shot the framework for the clips to be added in later , and never saw a final cut of the episode . Production assistant Eric A. Stillwell was responsible for selecting the clips that went into the episode , with 21 different clips included . The prop used on Riker to fight the infection was created from drawings by designer Rick Sternbach .

Ron Jones created the music for the episode , including a three note motif to represent the virus which infects Riker . Themes build as the episode progresses , with elements from " Infection Spreads " which is played over the scene between Riker and Troi move into the pieces " Shades of Pleasure " and " Earth Boys Are Easy " which is played over the pleasurable memories . String instructions and flutes are added to " Shades of Sadness " which played over the unhappy memories , before it built to a climax in the intense memories in the pieces " Critical Condition " , " Shades of Conflict " and " Final Intensities " . Several scenes retained the compositions from the episodes , including pieces by Dennis McCarthy , while others by McCarthy were re-composed by Jones .

= = Reception and home media release = =

" Shades of Gray " was first shown on July 17 , 1989 in broadcast syndication . It was the final episode of the second season and was watched by 9 .8 million viewers on the first broadcast . It was the highest number of viewers for an episode since " Samaritan Snare " some two months prior .

Several reviewers re-watched the episode after the end of the series . Keith DeCandido watched " Shades of Gray " for Tor.com , and admitted that he hadn't seen the episode since the original broadcast . He said that it was a " trainwreck " and even worse than he remembered , because other shows such as Xena : Warrior Princess and Stargate SG-1 had since done much better clip shows . DeCandido summed it up by saying that " In all honesty , they would have been better off doing one fewer episode if the season was shortened by the writers strike anyhow , and upping the budget on one of the other 21 . Just an awful , awful episode . " He gave the episode a score of zero out of ten . Zack Handlen reviewed the episode for The A.V. Club , describing the script as " god-awful " and the episode as " forced " .

Michelle Erica Green in her review for TrekNation called the storyline " absurdly flimsy " and that the episode " just felt lazy on every level " . She compared it to The Original Series episode " Operation : Annihilate ! " and the Voyager episode " Resolutions " for better episodes featuring alien infections . In the list of the five worst Star Trek : The Next Generation compiled by TechRepublic writer Jay Garmon , " Shades of Gray " was listed as the worst . Garmon described it a " travesty " and that the " nicest " thing you could say about the episode was that it was the last time there was a flashback episode in the series and the last appearance of Pulaski . It was also the original choice of worst episode by Empire magazine , but it was decided that it didn't count as it was a clip show , so " Masks " was chosen instead .

The first home media release of " Shades of Gray " was on VHS cassette , appearing on October 12 , 1994 in the United States and Canada . The episode was later included on the Star Trek : The Next Generation season two DVD box set , released in on May 7 , 2002 . The most recent release was as part of the season two Blu-ray set on December 4 , 2012 .