

STAR TREK

RENAISSANCE

"Whispers from the Other Room"

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise, sailing through stars at a leisurely warp speed.

CROSS (V.O.)

Captain's Log, Stardate 80247.3.
After dropping off Y'lan and Dojar at the Ellensworld Institute to conduct some research, we are heading once more for the Bajoran sector to conduct a study of the unusual dark matter formations in the Callahan Nebula.

(beat)

The Enterprise being sent on a scientific mission. Who would've thought?

INT. ENTERPRISE -- REC LOUNGE

We see TALORA sitting at a table, eating breakfast and chatting with a MAN we haven't seen before, a ruggedly handsome man in a blue Starfleet uniform. The two are talking amicably as they eat, occasionally laughing at a joke or shaking their heads at something.

We pan around to see ELRIS LEA and JENNIFER QUINLAN huddled together at a table in the corner, watching Talora and the mystery man. Quinlan scratches her cheek thoughtfully.

QUINLAN

Human.

ELRIS

Right.

Pause.

QUINLAN

Science corps.

ELRIS

Right.

Pause.

QUINLAN

Unrealistically handsome.

ELRIS

Three for three.

QUINLAN

Seriously, I hardly know anything about him. He came aboard at Starbase 451, and is joining the science team on the Enterprise -- what there is of it -- but beyond that I'm completely in the dark. I don't even know his name.

ELRIS

Richard Marek.

Quinlan looks at her.

QUINLAN

How do you know that?

ELRIS

From giving him a physical the day he came on board.

Quinlan looks from Elris to Marek, back to Elris. She looks faint.

QUINLAN

You...? Him...?

ELRIS

Why are you surprised? It's Starfleet protocol: arriving crew members are given full physicals. Which, I admit, doesn't mean as much as it did five centuries ago, but even so...

She grins slyly. Across the room, Talora suddenly looks up at them. The two women suddenly take a great deal of interest in something outside the large windows, and speak through barely moving lips.

QUINLAN

What about Talora, though? That makes no sense.

ELRIS

That Marek would take an interest in her?

QUINLAN

That she would take an interest in anybody. Don't get me wrong -- she's my senior officer, and worthy of respect in that role. But let's face it -- the Ice Queen? The Mistress of Frigid?

ELRIS

I think everybody needs companionship
sometimes.

QUINLAN

We're talking about TALORA here. I
think we should warn him before it's
too late.

The woman in question looks in their direction again. Elris
and Quinlan smile and wave to her cheerfully, looking sweetly
innocent. Talora looks at them blankly for a moment, then
turns back to Marek.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

(softly)

Am I right or am I wrong?

ELRIS

I don't really think it's appropriate
to comment on such matters, Jen. I
will say, however, that you have on
occasion displayed profound wisdom
in certain matters of life. Now, if
you'll excuse me, my shift's about
to start.

With a final grin, Elris rises and walks out of the Rec
Lounge.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- SICKBAY

We see a cheerful TORAN NOA sitting on a biobed, feeding a
Tribble nestled in the crook of his arm. Elris enters
Sickbay, and walks up to him.

ELRIS

How's Fluffy today?

TORAN

(grinning)

Four days straight with no
procreation. I think we've got a
winner here.

ELRIS

You mean you've got a winner. It
was your project. You came up with
the drive suppressant; it's your
name that will go down in the history
books as the man who finally gave
the Tribbles a cold shower.

TORAN

(with a shrug)

These days, that's not much more than tidying up an obscure corner of medical history. And all such efforts must be paid for -- in this case, by figuring out what to do with all the baby Tribbles we have in stasis.

ELRIS

(grinning)

Like I said, it was your project.

TORAN

Yeah. Maybe the Klingons would appreciate a few of them...

Elris chuckles and rubs Fluffy's fur. Fluffy responds with a characteristic PURR. She and Toran look at each other for a second. The second stretches into several seconds.

TORAN (CONT'D)

What's on your mind, Doctor?

ELRIS

Not a lot. Just thinking that, now that we have some peace and quiet on the Enterprise...

The alert klaxons start to WAIL, and red lights FLASH in Sickbay.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Red Alert. All decks to battle stations.

ELRIS

...maybe I'll finally learn when it would be smart to just shut up.

They look at each other ironically for a moment, then go off to their workstations.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The klaxons and flashing lights are making themselves known here as well, as CAPT. NEIL CROSS paces in the center of the Bridge. NATHANIEL STOLT is at the Helm, BRIAN CALE at Ops, and various N.D. officers at Tactical and the aft positions.

STOLT

Ready for quantum slipstream drive, Captain.

CROSS

Initiate. And shut off that noise.

The Bridge is at once quieter. Then it shudders slightly as the Enterprise passes into quantum slipstream. The aft doors open and Talora and Quinlan enter the Bridge. They head toward their stations at the right-hand command chair and Tactical, respectively.

TALORA

Trouble, Captain?

CROSS

As usual. Time to intercept, Ensign?

STOLT

Three minutes, twenty seconds.

CROSS

Cale, play back the message.

Cale taps buttons. A loud burst of static fills the Bridge speakers, through which a voice can intermittently be heard -- male, frantic-sounding.

VOICE ON SPEAKER

...anyone... U.S.S. Majestic... being
attacked by... four seven mark two...
can hear my voice, please...

The message cuts off abruptly. The senior officers look at one another.

TALORA

U.S.S. Majestic? I don't believe
I've heard of it.

CROSS

Advanced Sovereign Class. Whatever
attacked her must have packed quite
a punch, so be ready for anything
once we come out of slipstream.
Understood?

QUINLAN

Aye, sir. Weapons armed, standing
by on shields.

TALORA

All decks report battle ready, sir.

Cross faces the viewscreen and squares his shoulders.

CROSS

Here we go...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

A tear opens up in the fabric of space, and the Enterprise ZOOMS out of it. Immediately before it is another starship, the Majestic. It is obvious that she has suffered greatly -- she is adrift, with several gaping holes in her hull. No other vessel is seen.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Cross stares at the broken body of the Majestic on the viewscreen.

CROSS

Life signs?

CALE

Negative. Life support has failed on more than half of the ship. Minimal power emissions.

CROSS

What about escape pods?

CALE

None in this area. Sir... I am picking up a second ship, bearing three two seven mark six. It's heading away from here at warp two.

TALORA

Not in much of a hurry.

CROSS

Or simply limping away from the battle. Can you identify it, Cale?

Cale taps buttons. He pauses, then taps buttons again. His eyes widen.

CALE

Sir, I don't... I mean, these readings can't be right.

CROSS

Is your console malfunctioning?

CALE

I don't think so.

CROSS

Then talk to me.

Cale checks his console once more, then looks up at Cross.

CALE

Sir... the ship reads as Jem'Hadar.

A long, stunned silence.

Then, all the officers look at Cross.

Cross, shocked beyond all rational belief, looks at the viewscreen. We slowly zoom in on his face as, faintly, distantly, we hear echoes of battle... phaser fire, explosions, humans shouting to one another... and a boy screaming for his mother. On Cross's face, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Continuous action from the teaser. Cross is still staring at the viewscreen, disbelieving, haunted.

TALORA

Captain? Captain Cross!

Cross blinks, shakes his head, as though snapping out of a dream. He looks around, regains his bearings. He speaks, softly at first, then with growing determination.

CROSS

Quinlan, advise Starfleet Command of our findings. Send out our sensor logs, any other pertinent information. Priority one.

QUINLAN

Aye, sir.

CROSS

Cale, any other ships nearby?

CALE

Negative, sir. Except for the second ship, the sector appears to be clear.

Cross nods.

CROSS

All right. Commander Talora, you will prepare an away team to board the Majestic. Search for survivors, and try to get a better handle on what happened. The Enterprise will leave you here and go after... the second ship --

TALORA

Sir, may I respectfully suggest that you should command the away team yourself.

Cross looks at her sharply.

CROSS

Captains entrust the command of away teams to their First Officers. That's how it's been done in Starfleet for quite some time -- didn't you get the memo?

TALORA

I think you would be a better choice for this mission, Captain. You have more familiarity with older Federation starships and their technologies.

CROSS

My aunt's foot.

Pause. Talora steps closer to Cross and lowers her voice so that the others can't hear.

TALORA

I don't want you going after the Jem'Hadar ship, Captain. Ideally, I don't want you involved at all.

Cross stares at her. Talora stares back evenly. Cross exhales through clenched teeth.

CROSS

Ensign Stolt, lay in a pursuit course and stand by. This won't take long.

He takes Talora's arm and half-escorts, half-drags her into...

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

When the doors close behind them, Cross wheels on Talora.

CROSS

Talora, you're the finest officer that I've served with, and for that reason I'm inclined to put up with more from you than from others. But first, to contradict my orders in front of everyone on the Bridge... Second, to question my command fitness in a vital moment such as this...

TALORA

You trust my judgment, sir -- you've said so before. And you must know that I can observe things that you may be either unaware of, or unwilling to admit to yourself.

CROSS

I can look out for myself.

TALORA

I saw you out there, Captain. I saw you freeze when Cale told you it was a Jem'Hadar ship. I saw you become that little boy again, the boy who experienced things no one should ever have to go through.

CROSS

(sarcastically)

Yeah, and I saw a Counselor about it.

TALORA

With respect, sir, I don't think that's good enough. I respect your command authority, but I cannot allow you to place yourself in a position where you could endanger the ship -- the entire Federation -- because of your own past.

CROSS

The hell with that! The danger to the Federation would be not having me there! We need someone there who knows about the Dominion -- knows what they're capable of. We need someone who isn't afraid to take action, not some feel-good diplomat! We need to destroy them, push them back, do whatever it takes before it's too late! Damn it, don't you understand? They're monsters!

Cross, his eyes in a frenzy, looks at her. Talora remains remarkably cool under his wild gaze.

TALORA

Step back for a moment, Captain Cross, and take a good look at yourself.

Cross opens his mouth to yell at her again... then, slowly, begins to calm himself down. He turns away from her.

TALORA (CONT'D)

I don't want to come to blows with you over this. I need you to see for yourself what's best for everyone. You're balancing on a very thin wire right now. If you go after that ship, you won't be able to hold against the wind. I know I wouldn't be a good First Officer if I let you.

Cross looks at her, looks at her for a long moment. Then, as though releasing a great weight, he sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- CORRIDOR

The corridor of the ship is dead but for some emergency lights.

Through the window, we see the Enterprise hovering in the distance.

Five transporter beams appear, and within them materialize Cross, Elris, Quinlan, and two security officers, BRUNN and WETTERLING, wearing environment suits. No sooner do they finish beaming in than, through the window, we see the Enterprise come about and ZOOM off into warp. The away team looks around them, Elris and Cross scanning with tricorders. Quinlan, sweeping the corridor with her phaser rifle at the ready, whistles softly.

QUINLAN

It's like a tomb in here. Whoops...
wrong choice of words. Sorry.

CROSS

Get it together, Lieutenant.

Quinlan looks at him ironically.

QUINLAN

I have it together, sir. It's just
that...

She breaks off. Cross glances at her.

CROSS

Just what?

QUINLAN

You don't expect to see this on a
Federation ship. You sort of think
that we're invulnerable, that we
can't be taken down. The Mighty
Starfleet, greatest military power
in the Quadrant. But first the
Q'tami, then this...

CROSS

I hear you. Doctor?

ELRIS

No life support anywhere on this
deck, just as we figured. The
interior sections probably fared
better.

CROSS

Right. Quinlan, Brunn, make your
way to Engineering. Keep your eyes
peeled. The rest of us will start
with the Bridge. It's right through
here...

As Quinlan and Brunn leave down the corridor, Cross goes to the nearby door and keys the panel next to it.

Not surprisingly, nothing happens. He opens the panel, pulls the manual override lever, then nods at Wetterling. Together, they pull the door open and step into...

INT. MAJESTIC -- BRIDGE -- CONTINUOUS

An updated version of the old Sovereign class bridge, the command center of the Majestic has become a nightmare. Burn scars cover the walls, debris from exploded panels lie everywhere, and conduits are blown right out of the wall. Most of the consoles are dead, although a few glow weakly. There are bodies everywhere -- some died from decompression, some from the explosions.

Elris and Wetterling fan out and look around, while Cross walks up to the center seat. In it is a middle-aged man wearing Captain's bars. A large piece of metal is sticking out of his chest. His face is locked in a final expression of horror, his eyes wide and lifeless. Cross looks down at him.

CROSS

Captain Garcia, I presume. He held his post to the very end, held them off as long as he could.

WETTERLING

It looks like they all died at their posts, sir.

Cross nods, then slowly reaches down and closes the Captain's eyelids. He looks up.

CROSS

The Dominion will pay for this. I swear it.

Elris, from across the room, looks at him.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise, sailing away at warp.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

LT. CMDR. ERIK GREY has arrived on the Bridge, and is walking to an Engineering terminal aft. He activates it.

GREY

Computer, transfer Engineering control to Bridge.

The console lights up. Grey looks up at Talora, who is walking up to him.

TALORA

We didn't need you here, Commander.
You could have stayed in Engineering.

GREY

I heard what we were going after. I
suppose I wanted to see it for myself.

They walk to the tactical station together, and look over the tac officer's shoulder at the display. It is showing the sensor readings of the fleeing ship -- a ship which bears the unmistakable look of the Jem'Hadar. Grey takes a deep breath and tries not to shudder at this hellish vision from the past. He looks up.

GREY (CONT'D)

Any others?

TALORA

Not that we've been able to detect.
Perhaps this ship is a lone wolf,
that came through the Bajoran wormhole
alone and is operating by itself.
Perhaps it's a rogue.

GREY

Yeah. We should be so lucky.

Talora looks at him.

TALORA

I take it you're less optimistic.

GREY

You know what they say: hope for the
best, prepare for the worst. And I
don't think it could get much worse
than a Second Dominion War.
I'm not sure the Alpha Quadrant could
pull itself together for another go
at them -- especially with things
being what they are right here in
the Federation. We have a hard enough
time guarding against forces from
within. And as you said, the first
time around was bad enough.

Talora nods somberly. There is a pause.

TALORA

Did you suffer from the war?

GREY

Well... to be honest, I don't remember
much of it.

(MORE)

GREY (CONT'D)

I was very young -- and when I grew up, I had my own war, with the Sheliak. But what I remember most from the Dominion War is the fear. My parents, my neighbors, my friends... everyone I knew, I could see it in their eyes. People were scared of the Dominion, and that's the truth. I can't say I blame Captain Cross for his feelings.

(beat)

What about you, Commander? What was your experience like?

Talora looks away for a long moment, her face deliberately even. Then she looks back at him.

TALORA

A long story, for another time.

Grey nods in understanding.

GREY

May there be another time, then.

He turns his attention back to the Jem'Hadar ship on the tactical display.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- BRIDGE

Cross is at the rear of the bridge, messing with something inside an open panel, as Elris and Wetterling continue searching the debris.

Suddenly, the console next to Cross's open panel lights up. Cross nods in satisfaction, closes the panel, and taps keys on the console. He spends a moment on this, then sighs.

CROSS

No good. Even with power restored through the new generator, I can't access the ship's logs.

ELRIS

Have they been safeguarded?
Encrypted, maybe?

CROSS

I doubt they would have had time to do that, but I can't tell either way -- the LCARS simply isn't responding to commands.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

Looks like if we want to get a handle on what happened here, we'll have to physically go through the memory banks.

ELRIS

That would take next to forever.

CROSS

Right. So I guess we'll just have to learn from our... friends out there.

He slams his fist into the hull, frustrated.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- CORRIDOR

Quinlan and Brunn come around a corner in a corridor deep in the ship, lit only by dim emergency lighting. Quinlan makes an eyeball sweep of the area, then uses her tricorder and scans an emergency bulkhead that closed over the corridor.

QUINLAN

Looks like the next section is pressurized. We can't beam through the bulkhead, so we'll have to make an airlock. Can you find a manual release for the next bulkhead?

BRUNN

Right here, sir.

He indicates a closed panel in the corridor wall. Opening it, he finds a lever and pulls it out. Next to him, another emergency bulkhead SLAMS into place, effectively trapping the two in that small section of corridor. Quinlan takes out a small device and places it on the other bulkhead. She nods at Brunn.

QUINLAN

Make sure to brace yourself.

Together, they pull the bulkhead open -- as they do, a gust of air RUSHES into the corridor section, knocking them both back a half-step. With some effort, they fully open the bulkhead, revealing another corridor. Quinlan scans with the tricorder again, then nods. With relief on their faces, they take off their helmets and stow them. Brunn sniffs the air.

BRUNN

Smell that?

Quinlan nods. She leads Brunn around a corner and through a door that has been jammed open, into...

INT. MAJESTIC -- ENGINEERING -- CONTINUOUS

Like everything else on this ship, this room is mostly dead -- the warp core deactivated, the consoles lifeless -- but the emergency lights are bright enough to see the carnage that took place here:

A dozen or so bodies lie on the ground -- some Starfleet, some Jem'Hadar. Most bodies have large phaser wounds; the rest died from the explosions that consumed much of the Engineering equipment. One person, a human, has been burned all over his body.

Quinlan, her mouth hanging open, slowly steps into the room. Suddenly she SLIPS in a puddle of Jem'Hadar blood, and nearly falls -- Brunn is there to catch her just in time. She nods her thanks, then looks around again.

QUINLAN
(softly)
One hell of a fight.

BRUNN
Yes, sir.

They look at each other, then back at the bodies.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Talora, Grey, Cale and Stolt are at their respective positions.

STOLT
Approaching the Jem'Hadar ship,
Commander -- she's dropping out of
warp.

TALORA
Slow to impulse. Hail them,
Lieutenant.

Cale presses buttons as the Dominion ship, large as life and menacing in a way only the Jem'Hadar can manage, grows larger on the viewscreen.

CALE
No response, Commander.

TALORA
Are they moving to attack posture?

CALE

No, ma'am. They're continuing on their original course, moving at half impulse. I'm not sure they're even aware of us.

GREY

They dropped out of warp when we approached, Lieutenant. Don't jump to conclusions.

CALE

Yes, sir.

Talora stands and walks up to Cale's console.

TALORA

Analysis?

CALE

I don't understand this, Commander. I'm not picking up any life signs on the Dominion ship either.

Talora frowns.

TALORA

How can that be? Was she hurt that badly?

CALE

She took a beating, sir. Shields are down, minimal power to their weapons array. Deflector grid looks pretty weak as well.

TALORA

Life support?

CALE

Fully functional throughout the ship, so I don't see--

The Jem'Hadar ship EXPLODES in a searing fireball, throwing flame and debris everywhere.

Before anyone can react, a huge chunk of the ship's hull HITS the Enterprise's shields, rocking the ship. Talora grabs the back of Cale's chair to stay upright as alarms go off at various consoles.

TALORA

Damage report!

CALE

Shields holding. Minimal damage to secondary systems.

GREY

What the hell just happened?

Talora shakes her head -- she has no more idea than anyone else.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- ENGINEERING

Quinlan is searching the bodies, as Brunn finishes searching the large room.

BRUNN

That's all of them.

QUINLAN

All right. Go out and search the adjoining corridors, see if the battle spilled out there anywhere. Be careful out there -- the ship's bad enough that I wouldn't trust the superstructure if I didn't have to.

BRUNN

Yes, sir.

QUINLAN

And make sure you stay in contact. If for any reason you can't get a hold of me, call the Captain.

BRUNN

Understood.

He leaves, as Quinlan continues searching the Jem'Hadar bodies. Finding nothing of interest, she stands upright and moves to one of the Engineering consoles. She taps at it, trying to activate it -- then, she looks at her hand. It is covered in Jem'Hadar blood.

QUINLAN

Yuck...

She makes a face and looks around for something to wipe her hand on.

Suddenly, there is a CLICK behind her, and a weapon appears out of nowhere, pressing itself to the back of Quinlan's neck.

VOICE

Keep perfectly still.

On Quinlan's nervous look, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. MAJESTIC -- ENGINEERING

As before, with Quinlan nervous and standing at phaserpoint from an unknown assailant.

VOICE

Put your hands on your head, fingers interlaced. Slowly.

She complies.

QUINLAN

Who are you?

A gloved hand reaches around and removes her commbadge.

VOICE

That's MY question.

Quinlan looks confused and scared.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- BRIDGE

Cross is still tinkering with the controls, and Elris still searching through the debris -- Wetterling has gone off somewhere.

CROSS

Even the basic sensor logs would be a nice start right now. If we can find out how the Dominion ship attacked, what new weapons or technologies it used against the Majestic, we can be ready...

TALORA'S COMM VOICE

Talora to Captain Cross.

Cross looks up.

CROSS

Cross here.

INTERCUT:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Talora and the others are still shaken from the sudden turn of events, but are working diligently to secure the ship and continue on.

TALORA

The Dominion ship is destroyed,
Captain. We're starting to investigate
the debris now.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

You destroyed it?

TALORA

No, sir. It appeared to self-destruct.

INTERCUT:

INT. MAJESTIC -- BRIDGE

Cross and Elris exchange looks.

CROSS

I don't understand. Did they see
you coming? Were they trying to
protect something?

TALORA'S COMM VOICE

Unknown, sir. The ship was severely
damaged; life support appeared to be
functional, but we failed to detect
any life signs.

CROSS

(grimly)

A booby trap, then. They tried to
catch you off guard, lure you in.
All right, proceed with the debris
search. Be as thorough as possible;
don't overlook anything that might
give us an edge. Understood?

TALORA'S COMM VOICE

Understood. Talora out.

The intercom is silent. Cross's brows lower in puzzlement.
He thinks for a moment. Then he suddenly looks at Elris,
who catches his meaning immediately.

ELRIS

The crew. They can't all have died
in the battle. If they weren't on
their ship, where were they?

CROSS

Either another ship took them off,
or...

He hesitates, then taps his commbadge.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Cross to Wetterling. Find anything?

WETTERLING'S COMM VOICE

Yes sir, I have... and I think you'll want to see it for yourself. I'm on deck two, section C-7.

CROSS

Stand by there.

He heads for the exit, motioning Elris to follow.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- CORRIDOR

Wetterling is standing in the corridor, grim-faced, staring down at something we can't see. Cross and Elris turn the corner, and stop in their tracks, seeing what Wetterling sees. Cross's eyes widen, and Elris looks at him.

ELRIS

(quietly)

You were right.

CROSS

(tapping his commbadge)

Cross to Enterprise. Belay that last order, Commander -- the debris search will have to wait.

We pan around to see, there in the corridor in front of him, a miniature version of the carnage in Engineering. Starfleet and Jem'Hadar bodies, four or five of each, apparently having fought to the death.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Our friends never left.

TALORA'S COMM VOICE

Understood, sir. Out.

Cross kneels down next to the bodies, studying them, while Elris runs her tricorder over them.

ELRIS

However it happened, it was fast. All decompression damage appears to be postmortem.

CROSS

They wouldn't have sent in such a small force. There must be others.

He taps his commbadge again.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Cross to Quinlan, what's your status down there?

No answer.

CROSS (CONT'D)
Quinlan, do you read me?

INTERCUT:

INT. MAJESTIC -- ENGINEERING

We see a CLOSE-UP of Quinlan's commbadge, and next to it her phaser, lying amidst the bodies and debris in Engineering. We can hear Cross's voice through the commbadge.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE
Quinlan, come in. Are you receiving me? Quinlan!

INTERCUT:

INT. MAJESTIC -- CORRIDOR

Brunn is walking down the corridor, looking left and right at the junctions. All is dark, all is quiet... until a shuffling noise is suddenly heard behind him. He whirls around.

BRUNN
Lieutenant Quinlan? Is that you?

He retraces his footsteps, returning to the last junction. Slowly, his back to the wall, he peers around the corridor.

Nothing there.

He pulls his head back, pausing to breathe a small sigh of nervous relief. This place is clearly giving him the creeps. He takes a moment to get a grip on himself, and starts to walk away.

As he does, a HAND appears from behind him and touches his shoulder. Brunn YELLS in surprise and whirls around...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Grey is sitting at the Engineering console as before. He is tapping keys, his eyebrows lowered in concentration. After a moment of this, he looks up.

GREY
Commander, I think I have something.

Talora walks back to join him at his station. Grey calls up a graphic.

GREY (CONT'D)

I've been going over our sensor logs, scanning all the EM and subspace bands I could think of. It appears that the Dominion ship received an encrypted data signal two microseconds before it self-destructed.

TALORA

Two microseconds would tend to stretch the boundaries of coincidence, I think.

GREY

Right. The self-destruct must have been remotely activated. Which means it might not have been a booby trap at all.

TALORA

(nodding)

They could have simply wanted to get it out of the way. What about the source of the signal? Did it come from the Majestic?

GREY

Well, that's the sticking point, ma'am... According to our sensor readings, the signal came from everywhere.

Talora looks at him.

TALORA

Everywhere?

GREY

Everywhere.

TALORA

How is that possible?

GREY

Well, unless we're caught in a signal grid larger than a Dyson Sphere, the signal obviously had to come from a particular source. The only explanation I can think of is quantum diffusion.

TALORA

Which is?

GREY

A way to send a signal without giving away your location. It works like this: all EM and subspace signals decay as a function of distance, right? You send your signal on a particular subspace carrier wave, designed so that upon decaying a certain amount -- which corresponds to the distance to your receiver -- the signal energy switches over to a certain quantum resonance frequency. This makes the energy scatter and bounce -- same way the photons scatter when you beam a flashlight through dust, only this is much more effective. It's almost completely uniform, so that the signal at the receiver's end seems to come from everywhere at once.

Talora blinks, and looks dazed for a second.

TALORA

I had no idea that was even possible.

GREY

It's entirely theoretical. I only know about it because Y'lan mentioned it some months ago -- and except perhaps for the Q'tami, nobody has a clue as to how to actually pull it off.

TALORA

And if the Dominion have developed that kind of technology in the last quarter century...

GREY

...then who knows what else they've come up with.

Talora looks grim for a long moment, studying the console readout and thinking. Then she nods at Grey.

TALORA

Stay on it. Anything else you find, let me know.

GREY

Yes, ma'am.

He goes back to work as Talora returns to the center seat and sits down. As she does so, Cale's console beeps.

CALE

Commander, incoming message from
Starfleet Command. Admiral Lynch
calling.

TALORA

(under her breath)
Great...
(louder)
On screen, Lieutenant.

The main viewscreen lights up with the face of ADMIRAL LYNCH,
an elderly gentleman with a hard, no-nonsense face and a
gold uniform.

LYNCH

Enterprise, this is Rear Admiral
Leland T. Lynch.

TALORA

Yes, Admiral?

LYNCH

We have received your information on
the Jem'Hadar ship, but are just as
much in the dark as you are. We
have no additional information on
the attack on the Majestic, nor on
any other possible Dominion incursions
into the Alpha Quadrant.

TALORA

Has there been no word from Admiralty,
or from Starfleet Intelligence?

LYNCH

They've both been informed, but I
haven't heard back from them. Then
again, people don't tell Leland T.
Lynch a great deal around here. I
don't know why that might be. Do
you, Commander?

Talora keeps her face carefully neutral.

TALORA

I'm sure I wouldn't know, sir.

LYNCH

It's damned frustrating. Anyway,
please investigate as far as possible,
and keep me updated of your progress
at all times. At least then someone
will keep me in the loop.

TALORA

We had similar hopes, sir.

LYNCH

Of course you did. Take care of
yourself out there. Leland T. Lynch
out.

The viewscreen flicks off. Talora's eyes narrow into slits.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- CORRIDOR

We look from inside the pressurized corridor as the bulkhead leading to the makeshift airlock opens, revealing Cross, Elris and Wetterling. They walked out into the corridor, removing their helmets as they do so. Elris scans with a tricorder and Cross and Wetterling pan around, their phasers at the ready.

ELRIS

No sign of anyone. Engineering is
just around the corner.

CROSS

That's where I'd be. Come on.

He leads them around the corner, and into...

INT. MAJESTIC -- ENGINEERING -- CONTINUOUS

They react at the bodies lying on the ground. Wetterling is visibly shaken by the sight, but keeps it together. Elris scans as Cross steps forward, surveys the bodies... then spots the commbadge and phaser lying on the ground. He kneels down and examines the commbadge closely.

CROSS

Quinlan's. No sign of Brunn anywhere.

WETTERLING

Shall I go out and search, sir?

CROSS

Not yet.
(tapping his commbadge)
Talora, do you read?

INTERCUT:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

TALORA

Loud and clear, Captain.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Elris, Wetterling and I are in Engineering. Quinlan and Brunn are missing. Quinlan's commbadge and phaser are here -- along with more Jem'Hadar bodies. A dozen or so. Still no life signs, but I'd bet there are more of them in the pressurized sections. We need a search party, heavily armed.

TALORA

Aye, sir. With your permission, I'll lead it myself. My... experience may prove useful.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Granted.

TALORA

Grey, with me. Cale, you have the Bridge.

She stands and leads Grey off the Bridge. Cale starts to stand up, but pauses when Cross's voice comes back:

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Mr. Cale, I want you to look for life signs again, this time with a level 2 scan. Concentrate on the pressurized sections.

CALE

Aye, sir.

He sits back down at Ops and taps keys, muttering something to himself. Stolt, at Helm, looks over at him.

STOLT

What was that?

CALE

Just thinking out loud. Not much sense in scanning is all.

STOLT

They might still be alive.

CALE

Under the tender ministrations of the Jem'Hadar?

Stolt, having no immediate answer for that, turns back to his station. Cale continues tapping keys for a moment.

CALE (CONT'D)

Cale to Cross. Aside from the three of you there in Engineering, I'm not picking up anything on the Majestic.

INTERCUT:

INT. MAJESTIC -- ENGINEERING

Cross sighs heavily.

CROSS

Understood. Has there been any contact from Starfleet Command?

CALE'S COMM VOICE

Yes, sir, a few minutes ago we spoke with Rear Admiral Lynch.

CROSS

(grimacing)

No help there, then. All right, Cale. Continue periodic scans, and let me know if you find anything -- or if you hear from someone other than Leland T.

CALE'S COMM VOICE

Understood, Captain.

Cross stands upright as Talora, Grey, and half a dozen security guards materialize in Engineering. He turns to them as they take in the sight of the bodies and react.

CROSS

Glad you could make it, Commander.

TALORA

My... pleasure, sir.

CROSS

We'll split into pairs to search for Quinlan and Brunn -- everyone keep your partner in sight at all times. This deck and the one below it are pressurized, as are a number of Jefferies tubes in the nearby decks -- it's a fair bet that's where they're hiding. Take nothing for granted, and contact the rest of us if you find anything at all. Everyone clear?

Everyone nods.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Let's move.

They start moving out of Engineering.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- STORAGE ROOM

EXTREME CLOSE-UP of Quinlan's face, as she SCREAMS bloody murder.

After a few painful seconds of this, she stops screaming, and we pull back to see that she is, in fact, alone in the room. She is securely restrained to a chair in the middle of the small room, her face red from screaming -- not in pain, but simply to be heard. She catches her breath for a few seconds, then starts screaming again.

The door opens and a Jem'Hadar walks in. He winces, very slightly, at the racket Quinlan is making. He steps forward, looks down at her as she pauses again. When he speaks, we can tell by the voice that it is the same person who found her in Engineering.

JEM'HADAR

Please stop screaming.

Quinlan, glaring up at him, grins viciously... then starts into another loud scream. The Jem'Hadar pauses for a second -- then, with terrifying abruptness, SLAPS Quinlan hard across the face. Her head recoils from the impact, then she turns to look at him, her lip bleeding.

JEM'HADAR (CONT'D)

(patiently)

I can be polite, or I can hurt you.
How would you have it?

Quinlan looks at the large creature with hatred.

QUINLAN

What do you want from me?

JEM'HADAR

As I've already indicated to you,
Miss Quinlan, I want answers. Nothing
more or less.

QUINLAN

You sound more intelligent than I
would have expected, scumbag, so
perhaps the phrase "name, rank and
serial number" means something to
you?

JEM'HADAR

(smiling)

It does -- and it is a much larger concession than we Jem'Hadar would ever make to an enemy. A weakness of your species, perhaps.

QUINLAN

Yeah, well, you won't soon be getting any answers out of this particular weakling.

The Jem'Hadar takes a step back, spreads his hands in supplication.

JEM'HADAR

Yet the question that is foremost on my mind is very simple, and very reasonable. It is this: why have you attacked us?

Quinlan looks at him in disbelief.

QUINLAN

Why have I attacked you?

JEM'HADAR

That is what I have been instructed to find out from you. Nothing more or less. I shouldn't think it would place a great strain on your intelligence, or on your sense of duty. I do not ask for vital tactical information, or intrude upon your sexual history, do I?

As he paces around Quinlan's chair, his feet kick a metal rod of some sort, about twenty centimeters long, toward Quinlan's feet. Neither of them notice -- Quinlan is still looking at the Jem'Hadar incredulously.

QUINLAN

That drug you're all supposed to take -- does it warp your memory or something?

The Jem'Hadar looks at her blankly.

JEM'HADAR

No.

QUINLAN

(rolling her eyes)

That was a joke. It was sarcasm.

JEM'HADAR

Ah -- humor. What was its purpose?

QUINLAN

I'm telling you that you attacked me, not the other way around! You captured me in Engineering, and took me here against my will. I didn't attack you. And it's pretty clear that you and your friends invaded the Majestic -- we sure didn't invade one of your ships, or kill a bunch of your comrades.

JEM'HADAR

Please don't profess ignorance, Miss Quinlan. It is a waste of our time, and an insult to our intelligence.

QUINLAN

It's awfully hard to insult something that doesn't exist.

The Jem'Hadar blinks and frowns for a moment.

JEM'HADAR

Was that another example of humor?

QUINLAN

Yes.

The Jem'Hadar nods in understanding. Then, at lightning speed, he SLAPS her across the face again. He then leans in very close to her, takes her by the chin and looks her in the eye, their noses almost touching.

JEM'HADAR

(hissing)

If you do not give me the answers we are looking for, and soon, you will discover exactly how humorless I am. Do you understand?

Quinlan only glares at him.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- CORRIDOR

Talora and Grey walk slowly down one of the pressurized corridors, she with phaser at the ready, he with tricorder. The lights in this section are flickering; there is not as much damage and debris as tends to be elsewhere.

GREY

The pressurized section extends another twelve meters around that corner. After that, it's all vacuum.

(MORE)

GREY (CONT'D)

According to the sensors, there's nowhere else on the Majestic where someone might have survived... this.

TALORA

When it comes to this ship, I find myself somewhat... skeptical of our sensor readings.

GREY

You think something's interfering with them?

TALORA

Interfering or deceiving. There must be something on this ship that we haven't accounted for yet; Quinlan and Brunn did not vanish into thin air.

They round the corner to find, a dozen meters ahead of them, an emergency bulkhead slammed into place... and lying on the deck in front of the emergency door, a human head.

Just a head. Nothing else.

Talora and Grey look at it for a long moment, silent. Then, her face unusually full of sorrow, Talora heaves a great sigh.

TALORA (CONT'D)

I thought my war was over.

Grey only nods grimly. They turn and, leaving the gruesome sight behind them, continue their sweep of the corridors. They simply walk in silence for a moment when, suddenly, the tricorder BEEPS. Grey looks at it.

TALORA (CONT'D)

What is it?

GREY

It--

He frowns.

GREY (CONT'D)

It's gone, whatever it was. An energy reading, about forty meters from here, in that direction.

He points off in one direction. Talora frowns.

TALORA

That would be in a corridor without life support.

GREY

Yeah. But... there are a few Jefferies tubes out that way which are still pressurized. I think Wetterling and D'raja were assigned there.

Talora taps her commbadge.

TALORA

Talora to Cross.

There is no response.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Talora to anyone.

Silence.

GREY

You seeing a pattern here? I think something is definitely messing with sensors and communications. The new and improved Dominion technology.

TALORA

We'll need an access hatch to get into the Jefferies network.

GREY

Should be right back here.

He leads her a little ways back the way they came, until they come to a door in the wall. Grey operates the manual release, and pulls the door open. It leads into...

INT. MAJESTIC -- ACCESS ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

A small room with a ladder going up and down, and hatches that lead into the maintenance shafts, slightly smaller than man-sized, on each wall. Grey looks at the tricorder.

GREY

No sign of the energy reading now, but if I remember correctly, we can get to that site through here.

He steps up to the hatch opposite from the door through which they entered, opens a panel next to it and tinkers with its inner workings. Talora, phaser held at the ready eyes the hatch warily.

TALORA

I thought Sovereign class ships were supposed to have larger Jefferies tubes.

GREY

These are the larger ones. Why, are you claustrophobic?

TALORA

No.

He looks at her.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Really. I'm not.

He shrugs, and goes back to his tinkering.

GREY

Believe me, this is nothing. You know what the Jefferies tubes on the Enterprise are like, of course, but you should have seen the ones on the old Akira class vessels. They were barely large enough for a Betazoid dart-ostrich to pass through. So, it could be worse.

He finishes his tinkering, and pulls the hatch open. An instant later, his eyes widen, and he JUMPS out of the way as phaser fire FLASHES out of the hatch from a ways down the tube. Talora manages to duck past it just in time. They press themselves against the wall as several more shots FLASH past. They look at each other.

GREY (CONT'D)

Don't say it.

They stay out of the way, as phaser fire continues to erupt from the hatch, and we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. MAJESTIC -- ACCESS ROOM

Continuous action from Act Two. Cross and Elris run into the room, phaser rifles at the ready, and take safe positions outside of the line of fire. They speak over the fire -- every so often, Talora leans over to fire a couple shots of her own down the Jefferies tube.

ELRIS

We heard the shots.

GREY

We were following an energy reading in the maintenance shafts. Looks like about three or four Jem'Hadar, down at the first access junction.

Talora leans around, squeezes off several more shots, then ducks away as more phaser fire comes down the corridor toward her.

TALORA

It looks like there's a Vorta with them. But as it now stands, we're in a stalemate. Can you call the others?

CROSS

Our communicators aren't working in this section... Let's try for a capture; the Vorta might know where our officers are being held. Suggestions?

GREY

There's a power phase inhibitor down at that junction -- if we can hit that with a blast, the explosion would set off a localized shock wave, incapacitating everyone there. We could take them alive, interrogate them later. But it's a very small target to hit -- you'd need some sharp shooting.

TALORA

I could do it.

CROSS

Fine. Now, let's see if we can give you the time you need for a good shot...

ELRIS

You don't suppose we could just ask
them, do you?

Talora, moving slowly, peers around the corner into the
Jefferies tube. She quickly pulls it out again as another
round of phaser fire comes down the hatch.

TALORA

No, I don't.

Cross, meanwhile, is looking around the access room. His
eyes eventually fall on a panel built into the floor in one
corner of the room. He looks at that panel for a long moment,
then looks at Grey.

CROSS

Erik.

Grey looks at him. Cross points down to the panel. Grey
looks at it, then looks back up at Cross. Slowly, he smiles.

GREY

You thinking what I'm thinking,
Captain?

CROSS

Can you do it?

GREY

Hold that thought.

He leans down, opens the panel, and begins making adjustments
to the circuitry inside of it. This continues for a long
moment as Talora and Cross continue to exchange sporadic
fire with the Jem'Hadar. Finally, Grey looks up.

GREY (CONT'D)

It's ready, but it won't last more
than a couple of seconds.

CROSS

I'll tell you when. Doctor, get
into position.

Talora takes a position behind the opposite corner of the
hatch, as Talora stands behind Cross. A beat, then Cross
nods. He and Talora lean around the corner and FIRE several
quick phaser bursts down the shaft. They pull back --

CROSS (CONT'D)

Now!

Grey makes a final adjustment, and a force field SNAPS into
place at the entrance to the shaft. A second later, Jem'Hadar
phaser bursts hit the force field... and BOUNCE back the way
they came.

We hear the screams of a Jem'Hadar as he is hit with his own fire, and at the same time the force field goes down.

Cross taps Talora on the shoulder, and she moves around him to kneel at the entrance to the shaft. As Cross and Talora provide covering fire, Elris aims her phaser.. squints... inhales... and FIRES.

There is an explosion, following by a reverberating GONG sound as the shockwave is released at the far junction. Then, silence.

Talora takes a deep breath as she stands up and looks down the corridor. All is quiet.

GREY

Nice shooting, Commander.

TALORA

Thank you.

Cross in the lead, they enter the shaft one by one and crouch-walk to the other end, where they arrive at...

INT. MAJESTIC -- ACCESS JUNCTION -- CONTINUOUS

The bodies of several Jem'Hadar and one Vorta lie on the floor in the access junction. Elris and Grey scan them with their tricorders.

ELRIS

They all survived the shockwave.

CROSS

Condition?

GREY

Bad to worse.

Cross kneels down next to the Vorta and turns his unconscious form over. He looks down at his face, eyes filled with anger, his lips curled into an almost-sneer. He looks up at the others.

CROSS

We'll take them all back with us.

Talora peers at him.

TALORA

To Sickbay, of course...

CROSS

For now. Then... I suppose they'll get what they deserve. Doctor, I assume you can safely remove the Vorta's termination implant?

ELRIS

Yes, but I have to remove it before he wakes up, or he'll trigger it.

CROSS

Then let's get them back to Engineering -- we can still beam back from there. Grey, you'll stay behind on the Majestic and find the others from the Enterprise -- tell them to hold positions for now. We'll see what information we can get.

GREY

Right.

They each start hauling an unconscious person toward the exit.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- SMALL ROOM

Quinlan is still in her chair, alone once more. Her face now sports several large bruises, and her nose is bleeding. She is in obvious pain, but remains alert as she looks around the room.

After several seconds of looking, her eyes fall upon the thin metal rod by her feet. She has noticed it for the first time, and after a second of puzzling -- probably over where it came from -- she shrugs and starts shuffling her feet to catch the rod in between her boots. After a moment of effort, she succeeds.

QUINLAN

Aunt Shannon said that I could have been a great gymnast. Let's see if she was right...

She then extends her legs straight outward in front of her, still gripping the metal rod with her feet. Grunting, she flicks her boots backwards and apart at the same time. The metal rod FLIES back toward her -- and lands neatly into her lap.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

That was too easy.

With a bit of leaning and groaning, she manages to get the metal rod into one of her restrained hands. Just then, she hears footsteps just outside the door. Quickly, she tucks the rod under her wrist -- just as the door opens, admitting the Jem'Hadar from before. The metal rod hidden, Quinlan looks up at him with a sickeningly sweet smile.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

You must really enjoy my company.

JEM'HADAR

I thought you'd like to know that your Captain and shipmates have left the Majestic. They have abandoned you.

QUINLAN

(scoffing)

I don't believe you. And even if I did, they'll be back for me. We Starfleet folks tend to be stubborn.

JEM'HADAR

Foolish would have been my choice of words.

QUINLAN

You say to-may-to, I say to-mah-to.

The Jem'Hadar blinks at her.

JEM'HADAR

I must also tell you that, given your unwillingness to cooperate, you may very soon cease to be useful to us. And if there's one thing we Jem'Hadar never allow, it's a person outliving her usefulness.

QUINLAN

I already told you. We did not attack you -- you attacked us.

JEM'HADAR

We know for a fact that it was a Starfleet vessel that attacked us.

QUINLAN

A Starfleet vessel? Gee... you wouldn't happen to mean the one we're standing on, would you? And I probably wouldn't blame them, considering your attitude problem...

The Jem'Hadar, growling, leans down very close to her. Quinlan looks him in the eye.

JEM'HADAR

You give me answers, human, or...

QUINLAN

Or what? You'll hit me?

She smiles sweetly again. The Jem'Hadar stares at her a moment longer, then stands upright.

JEM'HADAR

I will return soon. Consider
carefully your actions when I do.

He turns on his heel and marches out of the room. When the doors close, Quinlan exhales a sigh of relief and takes the metal rod out from under her wrist.

QUINLAN

Definitely too easy...

She bends down, manages to catch the metal rod in her teeth, and starts working at the lock mechanism of her arm restraint, moving her head this way and that to manipulate the rod.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise and the crippled Majestic, still drifting next to one another.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- SICKBAY

Three Jem'Hadar are lying in the biobeds, one with a sheet covering his entire body. As we watch, Toran pulls up a sheet to cover the body of another. Elris emerges from the surgical bay and looks at the body.

ELRIS

That one didn't make it either, huh?

TORAN

The cranial trauma was too much for him. And for a Jem'Hadar, that's saying a lot. Number three is going to make it, however. I'm keeping him in restraints for the time being. Any problem removing the implant?

ELRIS

None. It was exactly as our records said it would be -- they haven't modified it over the years. The Vorta was beamed directly to the brig.

TORAN

Well, hopefully they can get something out him.

Elris looks at the two dead bodies on the biobeds, her face unreadable.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIG

The Vorta, whose name we will learn is REES, sits in the small security cell, clutching his head and wincing. Talora stands in front of the force field, looking at him.

TALORA

Are you in pain?

REES

No.

TALORA

Ah. You're wondering why your termination implant isn't functioning.

The Vorta looks at her in surprise. She smiles slightly.

REES

You deactivated it? That's impossible.

TALORA

I suppose the Federation and the Dominion have both come a long way since last we met. You have quantum refraction, untraceable sensor, transporter and communication inhibitors, and the Gods know what else. We also have some new toys.

The Vorta looks away, discouraged.

REES

You're the ship that attacked us, I assume.

Talora frowns.

TALORA

The ship that attacked you? I don't understand.

REES

I should have known. We should not have come back.

The door leading to the corridor opens, and Cross enters. Talora notices him and quickly flashes him a look. She mouths the words "Stay there!" Cross, looking from her to the cell -- he is not yet visible to the Vorta -- picks up her meaning and stays back against the wall, listening, his face simmering.

TALORA

Do you mean that the Majestic attacked your ship? You were on board the Majestic, so--

REES

I mean the ship that attacked the Majestic!

TALORA

The Jem'Hadar vessel?

REES

No! The Federation ship!

Talora and Cross exchange confused looks.

TALORA

Perhaps we should start from the beginning. Who are you, and why were you on board the Majestic?

The Vorta sighs and clutches his head again.

REES

My name is Rees. I was... part of a detachment from the Jem'Hadar vessel you spotted on board the Majestic.

TALORA

Why?

Rees says nothing.

TALORA (CONT'D)

What was your mission, Mr. Rees?

Rees still says nothing.

TALORA (CONT'D)

What were you doing in the Alpha Quadrant? Why were you on the Majestic?

Rees leans back, sighs, and looks at Talora, saying nothing. Talora looks at Cross, who is quietly seething, then turns back to Rees.

TALORA (CONT'D)

All right. You and your men were on the Majestic for some reason when, all of a sudden...

REES

A Federation vessel attacked us without warning.

TALORA

How do you know it was a Federation ship?

REES

I was standing next to a window.

TALORA

Convenient. But something confuses me, Rees -- why would a Starfleet vessel attack one of its own?

The Vorta leans forward, looks Talora in the eye.

REES

I don't know. You tell me.

Nearby, unnoticed by either one, Cross clenches his fists.

TALORA

And you claim it was the Enterprise that attacked you?

REES

I didn't see the name on the ship -- it was some distance away, and I was too busy running for my life to notice the finer details. But it was unmistakably a Federation ship. And then you happen to show up minutes later. Do you expect me to believe that's a coincidence?

Without responding, Talora picks up a nearby padd, fiddles with the controls for a moment, then shows the display screen to Rees. Rees stands and approaches the force field, staring at the screen. We see that it is showing the outline of a Phoenix class starship.

REES (CONT'D)

No. That's not it.

TALORA

Then it was not the Enterprise who attacked you.

REES

Perhaps, perhaps not. I can only speak to what I saw: Starfleet firing upon Starfleet. The mighty Federation turning upon itself. Honestly, Commander -- with such corruption and disorder in your fleet, it's a wonder you've survived all these years.

Cross finally explodes. He steps out of his hiding place and in front of the force field before Talora can react, his eyes burning into the Vorta.

CROSS

Corruption? Disorder? Speak all the Dominion propaganda you want, but there's one thing you cannot deny and should not doubt: the Alpha Quadrant would sooner go down in flames than submit to your kind of "order."

Rees looks at Cross evenly, appraising him.

REES

You must be Captain Cross. I've heard of you.

TALORA

Captain...

CROSS

I'm not finished! Just look at yourself, a sightless, inhuman middleman, acting on the whim of a bunch of shapeshifting freaks!

Talora looks at her Captain, wide-eyed.

CROSS (CONT'D)

And let's not forget your puppets, the Jem'Hadar, those monsters who live for no purpose other than to murder innocent people!

REES

Interesting words coming from the Butcher of Coular.

Cross reacts as though slapped. Rees smiles faintly.

REES (CONT'D)

Oh yes, I've heard about that as well. Several hundred women and children -- Klingons, weren't they?

With a SCREAM of primal rage, and oblivious to the force field separating them, Cross raises his fist and lunges at the Vorta. Before hitting the force field, Talora grabs Cross by the arms and restrains him. His teeth clenched, murder in his eyes, Cross speaks over his shoulder.

CROSS

Let go of me, Commander. This is between --

TALORA

At ease, Captain! Step into the
corridor! Now!

Cross is taken aback by the directness of her words, and the authority in her voice. After a long moment, Cross relaxes and allows Talora to escort him into the corridor, glaring at Rees the whole time.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- CORRIDOR -- CONTINUOUS

Talora leads Cross into the corridor. As the doors close, Cross shakes free of Talora's grip and paces in front of her, clenching and unclenching his fists.

CROSS

His kind murdered my parents. They
murdered my sister. They murdered
millions of people, and then they
turn around and tell me how civilized
beings shouldn't behave! They have
no right... no right...

He stops pacing, calming himself down. He stands quietly for a moment, Talora watching him calmly.

CROSS (CONT'D)

You were in the war, Talora. You
don't talk about it, but I know it
wasn't a pleasure cruise for you.
How can you look at him, and not...

He looks at her, his mouth open, searching for the words. Talora simply continues to look at him, saying nothing, waiting. Finally, Cross nods.

CROSS (CONT'D)

This is why you didn't want me
involved. I think I understand.

TALORA

I hope so.

He looks away, and sighs.

CROSS

I'll be in my ready room. Keep me
informed. It's in your hands now.

TALORA

Aye, Captain.

He nods, gives her a final glance, then walks down the corridor. Talora watches him leave, then steps back into the brig.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC -- SMALL ROOM

The doors to the room open, and the Jem'Hadar steps in. He looks at the chair, and frowns.

The chair is empty.

The Jem'Hadar SNARLS, and turns to his left to check the corner. As he does so, Quinlan emerges from the shadows behind him and BASHES the Jem'Hadar over the head with a large core sampling rod.

The Jem'Hadar crumples to the ground, recovers quickly and stands to face his opponent -- but not quickly enough. Quinlan delivers a KICK to his abdomen, sending him sprawling backwards. He regains his feet, not quite steadily, and growls at Quinlan. Quinlan holds the core sampler like a baseball player ready to swing. A smirk appears on her battered face.

QUINLAN

You want another piece of me, tall,
dark and ugly?

The Jem'Hadar SCREAMS and lunges at her. Quinlan SWINGS. He tries to duck out of the way, but Quinlan is the faster of the two -- she delivers a solid blow to the Jem'Hadar's shoulder, knocking him aside. Without missing a beat, Quinlan whirls around, moving with the momentum of the core sampler's rebound, and delivers another blow, this time to the base of the Jem'Hadar's skull. The Jem'Hadar collapses to the ground, barely conscious, moaning softly.

Quinlan pauses to catch her breath, then drops the core sampler, reaches down and takes the Jem'Hadar's phaser from its holster. Then she draws herself up to her full height and looks down at him.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

I don't know if you can understand
me, or if you even care, but I am
going to say this for the last time.
We did NOT!

She KICKS him in the guts.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

ATTACK!

Another KICK to the guts.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

YOU!

A final kick, to the Jem'Hadar's face. He winds up on his back, unconscious, his face bleeding. Quinlan gives him a final, contemptuous look, then exits the room into...

INT. MAJESTIC -- ACCESS JUNCTION -- CONTINUOUS

Emerging from the storage room, Quinlan surveys her possible routes of escape. Several Jefferies tube shafts branch out from this junction, but all except one are sealed by emergency bulkheads. Quinlan walks to the one that isn't sealed... and hears faint voices, growing louder. Moving quickly, she stuffs the Jem'Hadar phaser into her belt, mounts the ladder in the center of the junction, and climbs upward. We follow her up the ladder, until she reaches...

INT. MAJESTIC -- ANOTHER ACCESS JUNCTION -- CONTINUOUS

She ascends into the room, climbs off of the ladder, and looks around. There are more Jefferies tubes leading off in different directions, each of them closed with an ordinary hatch. None of them looks any different from any other. She looks around for a moment.

QUINLAN

Luck of the draw, Jen.

She chooses one of the hatches, seemingly at random, and opens it.

INT. MAJESTIC -- JEFFERIES TUBE -- CONTINUOUS

We watch from the entrance of the tube as the hatch opens and Quinlan looks inside. We cannot see what she sees... but the reaction on her face is clear enough. Surprise, followed by dismay and resignation. She sighs heavily.

QUINLAN

Oops.

VOICE

All right, Lieutenant Quinlan, you've made your point.

Quinlan looks at the source of the voice, her face surprised again -- but before she can respond, another VORTA comes up behind her, smiling, and removes the Jem'Hadar phaser from her unresisting hand.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIG

Talora and Rees are as before, Rees sitting on the bunk once more, shaking his head.

REES

I can see why you're conducting the interrogation and not him. To be honest, Commander, I don't know why you would serve with him.

Talora glares at the Vorta.

TALORA

We all have our pasts to bear. Captain Cross has shown himself to be an outstanding commanding officer; there is no one in Starfleet whom I'd rather serve under.

REES

If you say so. But whatever else you might think about us, we do have a sense of morality. There are many values which we share.

TALORA

We'll discuss that another time. Right now, I'm more interested in your mission here in the Alpha Quadrant.

Rees sighs again, leaning back against the wall.

REES

I thought I had made it clear that I will not discuss it.

TALORA

Why? What do you stand to lose?

REES

I simply have no reason to trust you.

TALORA

Nor do I have a reason to trust you. The difference between us is that you're in a security cell, while I suffer no discernible disadvantage from my mistrust.

REES

How would I--

He breaks off, frowning. He looks away into space for a moment, concentrating. Talora looks at him, puzzled. Finally, Rees looks back at Talora.

REES (CONT'D)

All right.

Talora blinks.

TALORA

All right what?

REES

All right, I'll explain to you why we are here. Better still, I'll take you to the leader of our... delegation to the Alpha Quadrant. He can explain.

He rises, and stands in the middle of his cell, waiting. Talora continues to look at him, puzzled.

TALORA

I don't understand. What has caused this sudden change of heart?

REES

It was not my decision, but our leader's. He has decided to trust you, and asks for a meeting.

TALORA

And when did he tell you this?

REES

Just now.

Slowly, a look of comprehension comes over Talora's face.

TALORA

A subdermal transceiver.

REES

(smiling)

Close enough -- actually a cranial implant using a disguised carrier wave. As you've pointed out, we've developed some new toys since our last meeting. In any case, our delegation now waits aboard the Majestic. Once there, your prisoners will be released to you, and everything will be explained.

TALORA

No conditions?

Rees looks away and is quiet for a moment -- he appears to be listening to something. Then he looks back at Talora.

REES

No conditions, but one suggestion. Perhaps your Captain should not be present for this initial meeting...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise and the Majestic, still drifting together among the stars.

INT. MAJESTIC -- ACCESS JUNCTION

It's the same Junction that Quinlan climbed into earlier. We watch as Talora, Grey, Rees, and an Enterprise SECURITY OFFICER (N.D.) materialize in the shimmer of a transporter beam. They look around. Rees steps up to the Jefferies tube hatch that Quinlan had gone through before, closed once again.

REES

Through here.

Talora nods at him. He keys the panel, and the hatch opens. He then leads the others into...

INT. MAJESTIC -- JEFFERIES TUBE -- CONTINUOUS

As the four of them enter, their faces, all but Rees's react appropriately to the sight before them:

Several dozen people -- Federation officers mixed in with Jem'Hadar and Vorta, sitting or standing in the Jefferies tube. No one looks particularly alarmed or agitated at their entrance. No one says anything, but a few Federation officers and Vorta nod at the Enterprise crew as they make their way through the mixed crowd.

GREY

Quite a party.

REES

After the attack, we determined that this was the safest place on the ship, and moved all the survivors in here.

Around a corner, we see, leaning against a wall, Quinlan and Brunn.

GREY

Jen! Ensign Brunn -- are you two okay?

BRUNN

Fine, Commander. Nothing hurt except my pride.

QUINLAN

Yeah, Steve got off easy.

(MORE)

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

I enjoyed the company of a friendly neighborhood Jem'Hadar zealot.

GREY

Your face... My God, what did they do to you?

QUINLAN

Oh, that's nothing compared to how they smelled to me....

TALORA

But why? None of the others appear to have been mistreated -- why did they do this to you?

VOICE (O.S.)

We had to make sure of you.

It is the same voice as before -- again, we cannot see its source. Talora and company turn to look at it. After a moment, Talora takes a step forward.

TALORA

You're a Founder.

VOICE (O.S.)

And you're a Romulan. I had heard that you and the Federation were on better terms, but I must admit I am surprised to see a Romulan wearing a Starfleet uniform.

TALORA

What, exactly, did you have to be sure of?

VOICE (O.S.)

That you weren't our attackers. I ordered one of the soldiers to give Miss Quinlan... special treatment. I personally despise the methods, but the risks in this situation were too great to be less than certain. I have apologized to the Lieutenant for mistreating her -- and for what it's worth, she made an excellent show of herself.

Talora looks at Quinlan, who smiles and shrugs.

QUINLAN

As I used to say when we were kids, you should've seen the other guy.

Talora nods, then turns back to the voice.

TALORA

I take it you're the leader of the Dominion people here?

VOICE (O.S.)

I am.

TALORA

Why are you here?

VOICE (O.S.)

Because Captain Garcia invited us for a tour of the Majestic. In a broader sense, however, I am here as an Ambassador for the Dominion.

TALORA

Ambassador... I think I understand now. You're here to negotiate peace with the Federation.

Slowly, we pan away from their faces, toward the source of the voice.

VOICE (O.S.)

Not just the Federation. I have returned to sue for peace with all of the major Alpha Quadrant powers, if possible. The time has come to leave the past where it belongs.

GREY

You've returned. Does that mean you've been here before?

We finally pan around to the source of the voice... and there is no mistaking who this Changeling is. He stands there, large as life, and looking not a day older than when we last saw him.

ODO

It's been a long time, but I am certainly no stranger here.

On ODO's solemn expression, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIEFING ROOM

The doors open, and Cross enters the conference room. Two steps into the room, he stops, and stares at the room's other occupant.

On the other side of the room, Odo slowly turns from the large windows to look at Cross. He nods respectfully.

ODO
Captain Cross.

CROSS
Ambassador Odo.

ODO
You command a magnificent starship.

CROSS
(slowly)
And you're standing on it.

He says it as if he can't believe it himself. He continues to stare at Odo, his face unreadable. Odo nods to himself.

ODO
Commander Talora told me of your experiences with my people. I won't attempt to assuage the anger you must feel. But I think you should know, if you don't already, that I returned to my people--

CROSS
Yes. You did.

Odo pauses a beat.

ODO
I returned to my people after the war, to change all that.

CROSS
You're one of them. If it was simply an accident of your birth, then perhaps I could bring myself to understand, but it wasn't. You chose to be among them.

ODO
They are my people.

Cross takes a couple steps toward him, his eyes burning.

CROSS

And Bajor, and the Federation? They were what, chopped liver?

ODO

I performed my duty to them. I did the best that I could for all sides.

CROSS

You're a traitor.

Odo sighs, folds his arms, and scowls at Cross.

ODO

I'll accept your judgment of my past actions, reasonable or not, for the time being. If I had to justify myself to you, a man who holds a personal grudge against the Dominion, then we would have a problem. But I don't.

CROSS

I know -- I received word from Starfleet Command a few minutes ago. They are choosing to proceed with the peace initiative... which, it seems, they knew about all along. They ordered me to tell you that they neither caused nor condone the attack on the Majestic and your own ship, and are investigating the matter as we speak.

ODO

That's good news.

CROSS

So you say.

Cross continues to glare at Odo as the Changeling pulls out a chair at the conference table and sits.

ODO

Six days ago, I piloted a one-man scouting ship through the wormhole, and made contact with Federation officials at Deep Space Nine. The Federation and the Romulan Empire agreed to the peace proposal, and when last I heard, the Klingons were giving it serious consideration.

CROSS

Why do you come to seek peace? Why now, of all times?

ODO

It had to happen sometime. And this seemed a good time -- long enough that much of the bad blood between the Alpha and Gamma Quadrants would be over with. It's been nearly thirty years -- an entire generation since the war. We couldn't hide forever.

CROSS

(softly)

No, I suppose not...

ODO

In any case, the Federation and the Romulans made the decision to keep it a secret for now; that wasn't my idea. Yesterday, the rest of the delegation came through the wormhole, and we set our course for Camp Khitomer, escorted by the Majestic. Then, a few hours ago, we were attacked.

CROSS

By a Federation vessel.

ODO

Yes. Naturally, those in our delegation suspected a Starfleet trap had been sprung, and before I could take action, they started assaulting the crew of the Majestic. It was... very fast.

Cross steps up to the table and puts his hands on the back of a chair, thinking for a moment. Then he looks at Odo.

CROSS

When we answered the Majestic's distress call, we assumed that your ship had attacked ours.

ODO

Granted, the information you had was limited.

CROSS

Conveniently limited. The distress call was just garbled enough; the sensor logs just happened to be inaccessible at the time. Starfleet Command tells me that there is to be peace, but for all I know, my initial assumption is correct.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

And when you think about it, thirty years is long enough for the Federation to have a lowered state of readiness after the war -- but for all we know, there are hundreds of Jem'Hadar ships waiting to come through the wormhole, phasers blasting.

Odo springs to his feet, glaring at Cross.

ODO

(sharply)

Do you see conspiracy theories everywhere you look, Captain Cross, or only where it concerns those who have injured you? Either way, you're starting to sound very much like my old tailor!

CROSS

I have no reason to trust you!

ODO

Nor do we have reason to trust you! Thirty years ago, was it not Starfleet that almost committed genocide against my people? And lest we forget, it was your side that attacked us today, when we were on a mission of peace! But we--

CROSS

Put all the blame on Starfleet you like, but don't insult me by passing yourself off as trusting -- you ordered your man to beat Lieutenant Quinlan to within an inch of her life! How can there be a justification for that?

Odo is taken aback. He slowly sits back down, looks down at his hands, and is quiet for a long moment.

ODO

(softly)

You're right. I didn't trust you, not at first. And despite my words, I know that that trust will not come easily or willingly to either of us.

He looks at Cross.

ODO (CONT'D)

I know only that it must come.

(MORE)

ODO (CONT'D)

Somehow, we must find a way to make it come.

Cross looks at Odo, his lips pressed together, his eyes doubtful. He says nothing.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM

Cross sits at his desk, looking at the image of ADMIRAL DELFUNE on his terminal.

DELFUNE

After analyzing the sensor log fragments your recovery team extracted from the Majestic's LCARS, we have identified the vessel that attacked the convoy. It was a Starfleet vessel. The U.S.S. Atlantic.

CROSS

The Atlantic -- that's a Pelagic class. Do we have a possible motive for the attack?

DELFUNE

We do. Captain James Dykstra.

Cross frowns, and thinks for a moment.

CROSS

I don't believe I've met him.

DELFUNE

Really? That surprises me -- the two of you would have a great deal to talk about. Like you, Captain Dykstra lost his parents to the Dominion.

Cross's eyes widen. He leans forward in his chair.

CROSS

Dykstra's parents were killed in the war?

DELFUNE

A few years beforehand, actually. They were aboard the Odyssey when it was destroyed during the Federation's first encounter with the Jem'Hadar.

CROSS

I see... Then he wouldn't have needed much provocation, if any, to attack the Jem'Hadar vessel. The Majestic must have gotten in the way somehow--

DELFUNE

No. His target was both ships.

Pause.

CROSS

I don't understand.

DELFUNE

Captain, we kept the Dominion peace initiative a secret because we were afraid of exactly something like this happening. A century ago, the Khitomer peace accords with the Klingons nearly failed because a few determined men could not reconcile themselves to the idea of peace. We believe that the Dominion are making a good faith effort toward peace, and we are doing what which is in our power to make it work.

Delfune pauses, smiles wryly, and shrugs a little.

DELFUNE (CONT'D)

As a wise man once said, every so often a person should do something just because it's right. In any case, it was a stroke of misfortune that Captain Dykstra stumbled upon the convoy -- and, on an irrational impulse, fired on both ships. He, too, could not afford the idea of peace.

Cross looks stunned. He sits back in his chair, a dazed look in his eyes, and is quiet for a long moment.

CROSS

Admiral... you can imagine the effect that this is having on me.

DELFUNE

I hope so, for all of our sakes. Now, the Atlantic has been on silent running since the attack, but she was spotted twenty minutes ago in the New Santago system. Right now, our best chance of intercepting her is the Enterprise. But, if necessary, we can send another ship after her...

Her words trail off deliberately as she looks at him, an expectant look on her face. Cross pauses once more, gathering his thoughts... then nods slowly. Delfune reads the expression.

DELFUNE (CONT'D)

Good. Keep me appraised. Delfune out.

The terminal switches off. Cross stands, hesitates, then walks over to the window and looks out into space. The wreckage of the Majestic is at the forefront -- and from Cross's POV we can see more of the damage. Somehow, the battle scars show a certain streak of viciousness to the attack. Cross stares at it.

CROSS

How can I say I'm sorry... when it could just as easily have been me?

His face is suddenly filled with sorrow. He stares at the wreckage a moment longer... then pulls himself up, squares his shoulders, and turns to walk out of the ready room.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE -- CONTINUOUS

Talora is in her seat, Stolt at the Helm, Cale at Ops, and Quinlan -- looking much improved -- at tactical. The ready room doors open, and Cross steps onto the Bridge, tapping his commbadge as he walks toward his command chair.

CROSS

Cross to Ensign Wetterling. Please escort Ambassador Odo to the Bridge.

WETTERLING'S COMM VOICE

Aye, sir.

Cross sits in his chair.

CROSS

Helm, set course for the New Santiago system, and stand by quantum slipstream drive. Set long range sensors to scan for any Federation vessels as we go.

STOLT

Aye, Captain. Course plotted and laid in.

CROSS

Initiate.

(to Talora)

It was the U.S.S. Atlantic. We're going after her.

TALORA
Why did she attack?

CROSS
(dryly)
Her Captain has personal issues with
the Dominion.

Pause.

TALORA
I see.

The turbolift doors open, and Odo steps onto the Bridge,
escorted by an armed Wetterling. Cross stands and looks
back at them.

CROSS
Thank you, Ensign, that will be all.
Wetterling looks from Odo to Cross, surprised.

WETTERLING
Aye, sir.

He hesitates a beat, then steps back into the turbolift,
leaving Odo unguarded and alone in the aft of the Bridge.
He stands there impassively, looking at Cross. Cross draws
a deep breath and looks in Odo's general direction, avoiding
eye contact.

CROSS
Ambassador, in the interests of
cooperation and mutual consideration
during this prelude to the peace
negotiations, I invite you to witness
our pursuit of the vessel that
attacked your delegation. From this
point, whatever information I receive,
you will hear at the same time.

ODO
Thank you, Captain Cross.

Cross waves him to the command chair to his left, and Odo
crosses over to it. They sit down and face the viewscreen.

There is a long pause, which stretches out to the point of
awkwardness.

ODO (CONT'D)
(quietly)
You don't have to do this, you know.

Cross looks at him.

CROSS

Pardon me?

ODO

I have no doubt you have been ordered by your superiors to hunt for this vessel. I think you will do so with or without me present... and it is obvious that my presence causes discomfort for you.

Cross nods, and sighs a little.

CROSS

Then let's say it's because we owe you. The vessel that attacked you was indeed a Starfleet vessel. Its Captain was injured by the Dominion as I was.

ODO

I suspected as much. Even so, it is unnecessary for you to--

CROSS

Mr. Odo, every fiber of my being is telling me not to trust you. Every part of who I've been is telling me to throw you out the airlock and never look back. I barely know you, but I despise your very existence, for no reason other than what you are.

(beat)

That cannot stand. And if it's ever going to change, then the change must begin now, in this room, with this mission.

ODO

(slowly)

I see. Then, in the interests of peace--

CROSS

No. This is not about peace. It's about who I am, and who I might have become.

Odo gives Cross a long, hard look. Talora does the same. Finally, Odo nods.

ODO

I think I understand, Captain... and I thank you for being honest with me.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise ZOOMS out of the quantum slipstream and into normal space.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

STOLT

Now entering the New Santiago system,
sir.

CALE

Sir, long range sensors have detected
a Federation vessel holding position
above the star's magnetic pole at a
distance of twelve million kilometers.

CROSS

Undetectable by all but the most
sophisticated sensors. Can you
identify it, Mr. Cale?

CALE

No, sir. It is not sending its
transponder signal. But it appears
to be Pelagic class.

CROSS

The Atlantic. Hail them, Lieutenant.

A pause as Quinlan taps keys in her console.

QUINLAN

No response.

TALORA

Mr. Stolt, move to intercept.

STOLT

Aye, Commander. Interception in
four minutes, fourteen seconds.

CROSS

Quinlan, hailing frequencies.

QUINLAN

Open.

Cross stands, takes a step forward, faces the viewscreen
which shows the sun of New Santiago, expanding as the distance
is closed.

CROSS

This is Captain Cross of the Enterprise, calling the U.S.S. Atlantic. Captain Dykstra, do you read me?

There is a pause.

QUINLAN

It's hard to make anything out through the solar interference, but I am receiving an audio response.

CROSS

On speaker.

The speaker is suddenly filled with static, and the voice that comes on over it is that of a male, around Cross's age.

DYKSTRA'S COMM VOICE

Cross? Neil Cross? This is Captain Dykstra, and I'm glad it was you they sent after me. I think you're the only one who would understand.

Cross and Odo exchange looks.

CROSS

What is there to understand, Captain?

DYKSTRA'S COMM VOICE

The Jem'Hadar, Cross, they've come back! And they've corrupted the very core of Starfleet Command! I was monitoring their ship-to-ship transmissions. They're ready to hand them the Federation on a silver platter!

CROSS

So you admit that you fired on and disabled the Majestic. You killed hundreds of people today, not to mention violated a flag of truce.

DYKSTRA'S COMM VOICE

"Flag of truce?" That doesn't mean anything to those bastards! They killed my parents on the Odyssey, not because they were in a war, but just to prove a point! No other reason! Listen to me, Cross. You and I, we have to work together to stop them. We have to end this madness before it starts.

Cross, looking reflective, takes another step forward.

CROSS

That's exactly what I'm trying to do, Captain. End the madness. And for starters, I'm ordering you to surrender your vessel at once.

DYKSTRA'S COMM VOICE

Sur-- You don't actually believe them, do you, Cross? How can you? After what they did to your family, to all of us?

CROSS

We all have our burdens to bear, Captain. You must now bear yours, by accepting responsibility for the atrocity you have committed today. That ends the discussion -- you will now surrender your vessel.

There is a long pause, as the speaker crackles.

DYKSTRA'S COMM VOICE

They got to you, didn't they? I heard about you, Cross, and I thought you were different. But you're just another one of them. There's no reasoning with you.

CROSS

Captain Dykstra, I warn you that if you do not--

DYKSTRA'S COMM VOICE

(venomous)

Bring it on, Captain Cross. The Atlantic is probably no match for the Enterprise, but at least I will die with my dignity intact.

There is a final burst of static, then silence from the speakers.

QUINLAN

They closed the channel, sir.

CROSS

Hail them again.

A pause.

QUINLAN

No response.

CROSS

Helm, time to intercept?

STOLT

Two minutes, twenty seconds.

Cross looks back at Odo, who has been listening intently. He returns Cross's gaze.

ODO

I'm sorry, Captain -- I wish I could advise you in this situation. But whatever action you take, I will support it.

CROSS

You place a great deal of trust in me.

ODO

Yes. I do.

Cross nods slowly, then sighs.

CROSS

Lieutenant, advise the Atlantic that if they do not surrender within two minutes, we will--

QUINLAN

Captain, the Atlantic is hailing us. Audio only.

CROSS

On speaker.

The speaker again crackles with static, and then a new voice comes on -- female, younger than Dykstra.

THIESEN'S COMM VOICE

Captain Cross? This is Commander Gabrielle Thiesen, First Officer of the Atlantic. I have relieved Captain Dykstra of his duty and confined him to quarters. We are prepared to comply with your instructions.

There is a general sigh of relief on the Bridge -- even Odo looks relieved.

CROSS

Understood, Commander. We will rendezvous with you shortly. I hope Dykstra didn't give you much trouble.

THIESEN'S COMM VOICE

Oh, he raised a fuss, sir.

(MORE)

THIESEN'S COMM VOICE (CONT'D)

But he was acting irrationality,
clearly letting his emotions interfere
with his command judgment. I -- I
mean, we, the command crew, believe
that it was the right thing to do.

Cross looks back at Talora, and smiles.

CROSS

It takes a special kind of someone
to stand up to her commanding officer
when he acts like that. You're all
right in my book.

Talora returns the smile.

THIESEN'S COMM VOICE

Thank you, sir.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise, sailing through the stars at impulse power.

CROSS (V.O.)

Captain's Log, stardate 80247.3.
Commander Thiesen is taking the
Atlantic back to Starbase 142, where
Captain Dykstra will answer for his
actions of this day. We have returned
to the Majestic to pick up the
remaining survivors -- and also to
commemorate the loss of the 691 men
and women who died. Let the record
show that they gave their lives in
the line of duty.

(beat)

Meanwhile, the Dominion Peace Accords
will proceed. And for better or for
worse, the face of the galaxy is
about to change once again.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Cross and Odo are slowly walking toward the aft of the Bridge
as they talk.

CROSS

...and so the preliminary conference
will take now place on Deep Space
Nine?

ODO

The cat, you might say, is out of the bag -- there is little need for secrecy, and Deep Space Nine seems an appropriate place. It will also give me the opportunity to look up a few... old friends.

Cross nods in understanding.

CROSS

Well, the Enterprise will convey you to DS9 for the conference. After that... who knows? I guess it's up to the powers that be to determine what part we'll play.

ODO

Knowing what I do about the history of ships named Enterprise, I wouldn't be surprised if it's a large part indeed.

CROSS

Perhaps. We'll see.

There is a pause. Both Cross and Odo look somewhat uncomfortable.

ODO

(suddenly)

Oh, by the way, I ran into that reporter of yours, Carter. After recovering from his initial shock at seeing a Founder, he asked me for an interview.

CROSS

And?

ODO

And he won't do it again.

In spite of himself. Cross laughs. Odo smiles with him. Then, there is another awkward pause.

ODO (CONT'D)

Well, I will retire to my quarters. Thank you once again, Captain, for your help during this. If peace does happen between our peoples, it will be largely because of you.

CROSS

As a Starfleet officer, it has been my pleasure to be of assistance.

Odo nods in acknowledgement, then turns to the turbolift.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Odo.

Odo turns back. Cross looks him in the eye, pauses a beat... then steps forward and offers his hand.

Odo looks from Cross's hand to his face, not concealing his surprise. Then, slowly, he steps up to Cross and takes it. They shake hands.

Then they look at each other once more.

ODO

That was very difficult for you.

Cross looks away for a moment, considering.

CROSS

I still have many demons to battle, Ambassador -- and whatever might happen in the future, I don't think that shaking hands with you will ever be very easy.

ODO

I understand. It makes it all the more meaningful.

He smiles slightly and, with a final nod, turns and leaves the Bridge through the turbolift. Cross stands there for a long moment, staring at the closed turbolift doors, his face a potpourri of emotions. Then he turns and walks to his place at the front of the Bridge, where all officers' eyes are upon him. He looks at them in turn, then sits down.

CROSS

Time to go, Commander.

TALORA

Yes, sir. Helm, set course for the Bajoran system and stand by quantum slipstream drive.

STOLT

Aye, Commander. Course laid in.

Talora looks at Cross. Cross looks back at her, and then nods.

CROSS

Initiate.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise flies past the camera, and ZOOMS into the quantum slipstream, leaving us looking at the ever-changing starfield as we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

THE END