

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

8x22 - "Greater Good."

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on the novel

*Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
Mission Gamma Book 4 - Lesser Evil*

by Robert Simpson

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. DEFIANT - ESTABLISHING

The Starfleet ship warps through space in the usual way.

2 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

A GRAPHIC on a computer screen, showing the *Defiant's* arc of planned exploration through the Gamma Quadrant, as seen in 8x14 "Twilight." A flashing icon indicates the *Defiant* nine-tenths of the way around it, nearing the wormhole end.

DAX sits in the command chair, observing this graphic on a small screen on the chair's side panels. It has been a long voyage, and she is proud of what they have accomplished. But it is definitely time for her to go home now.

She looks up and sees SHAR working at the science station, screens packed with scientific data. Dax knows he has had his own problems on this trip; she is gentle with him.

DAX

Shar, have you studied the data
from that bio-stream yet?

SHAR

Some of it. I regret to report
it's looking more and more like a
missed opportunity.

Dax nods with sympathy; nothing they can do about it now.

DAX

Maybe the next wave of explorers
from the Alpha Quadrant will learn
more about it.

SHAR

Yes, sir. It's just frustrating to
come so close to something so new
and not be able to study it.

BOWERS calls over from the tactical station.

BOWERS
Lieutenant, do you have a moment?

Dax gets up to join him and look at his screens.

DAX
What's up, Sam?

BOWERS
I was monitoring telemetry from
our advance probes, when one of
them sent back this.

He gestures to a GRAPHIC showing a distinctive wave pattern
among a field of white noise background radiation. Dax
looks closely at it, quite surprised and worried to see it
here. Bowers knows this is a big deal.

DAX
That looks almost like... Sam,
this better not be a joke -

BOWERS
I wouldn't joke about this,
Lieutenant. I've triple-checked,
and I'm telling you, it's exactly
what it looks like... almost.

DAX
(sigh)
Alright, take it from the top.

3 INT. DEFIANT - MESS HALL

BASHIR picks up a small Starfleet ration pack from a rack
of them, and inspects it. He is unimpressed.

BASHIR
Spinach frittata. Just add water.
(puts it back;
gets another)
Ham and brie on a quadrotriticale
baguette.
(another)
Denevan cherries flambé.

(yikes)
Eelshark salad with mixed greens.
(turns it over)
May be toxic to non-Bolians.

With a dramatic sigh, he throws that one back too, finally plumps for a package marked ASSORTED ROAST VEGETABLES and slouches over to a table, taking a seat. Next to him, VAUGHN is busy eating ARROZ CON POLLO.

BASHIR
Have I happened to mention that I've come to detest Starfleet field rations?

VAUGHN
Quite a few times in fact. Your attitude surprises me, Doctor. Colonel Kira once mentioned that you fought to get assigned to DS-Nine specifically so you could rough it on the frontier.

Bashir cringes at the reminder. Opposite, TENMEI is happily tucking into BABA GHANOUSH.

TENMEI
Learn to live dangerously, Doctor. You'll be amazed how much you enjoy everything.

BASHIR
I don't suppose Nog has had any luck at all with the replicators?

VAUGHN
Shall I remind you why we're on field rations in the first place?

BASHIR
Touché, Commander.

VAUGHN
You know, back in oh-four, I was in a situation much worse than this one.

TENMEI

Run for it, Doctor, before he
gains a head of steam.

VAUGHN

(ignoring her)

I remember it well. I was assigned
to a ship that had been forced to
go quiet for a month on the wrong
side of the Tholian border. No
replicators, no holodecks, total
radio silence. Just eighty-five
people with nothing but ration
packs, a library computer and a
lot of imagination.

BASHIR

(trying to get up)

You know, that sounds fascinating,
sir, but I just realised I left
something on in the medical bay...

Vaughn GRABS Bashir, now clearly performing to an audience.

VAUGHN

I can still recall Crewman
Richards stealing the rats from
the bio-lab for meatloaf...

TENMEI

He did not.

VAUGHN

Who's telling this story, Ensign?
Anyway, the point is that compared
to many who came before, we live
and work in luxury, even when
deprived of some of the things we
take for granted.

BASHIR

Point taken.

Vaughn clears up his food, drains the last of his iced tea,
and makes a big performance of smacking his lips.

VAUGHN

That was delicious. And you
haven't even started your meal.

Bashir looks down at his pack, now suddenly appetite-less.

BASHIR

I think I'll save it for later.
For when I'm really hungry.

Prynn chuckles as Bashir gets up and puts the package back
on the rack. As the doctor heads to the door, it OPENS to
admit Dax, carrying a padd and looking concerned.

BASHIR

Hi. You okay?

DAX

What? Oh, yeah. Just a report I
need to make to the commander.
Enjoy your dinner?

BASHIR

Oh, don't ask. See you when you
get off duty?

DAX

Sure. I'll even grab one myself
and we can eat together.

BASHIR

It's a date. Don't work too hard.

DAX

(forced laughter)

Where were you when I decided to
transfer to command?

Bashir is already heading out of the door, but calls back.

BASHIR

Being supportive.

With Bashir gone, Dax turns towards Vaughn. She is uneasy
about making this particular report.

DAX

Commander, Ensign. Hope I'm not interrupting.

TENMEI

(getting up)

Actually, I was just about to get going. I promised Mikaela I'd look over her idea for improving the navigational deflector.

VAUGHN

If you have time, stop by my cabin later. I found a Rowatu recording in the ship's data base that I don't think you've heard before.

TENMEI

Okay. Twenty-one-hundred?

Vaughn nods, and Prynn leaves with a smiling nod at Dax.

DAX

It's nice to see you two getting along so well now. If you don't mind my saying so, I think it agrees with both of you.

VAUGHN

Lot of wasted years to make up for. We've learned quite a bit about each other on this voyage.

DAX

She's a fine officer. The next generation of Vaughns is off to a good start.

VAUGHN

Fortunately for her, she's a Tenmei through and through. So what's up?

DAX

I was hoping you could tell me. Sam was reviewing the data from the last few probes, and one of them detected an anomaly in a lower subspace stratum. It's a layer no-one we know uses because of the high interference. Sam admits he almost missed it. But there's no doubt - it's a Starfleet transponder signal.

Dax hands her padd to Vaughn. He reads the data and changes immediately. He knows what this is. He shuts down cold, formal and tough while Dax keeps talking.

DAX

One of our people is out here, sir, where nobody else from the Federation has ever been, as far as we know. But the signal's much stronger than any Bowers or I have seen before. So I wondered if it might be connected to Starfleet Intelligence or...

(realises...)

Are you alright?

VAUGHN

Who else knows about this?

DAX

Just Sam. Is there something -

VAUGHN

Make sure it stays that way. I don't want either of you sharing this with anyone. Return to the bridge and engage the cloaking device immediately. Then alter course to trace this signal back to its source, maximum warp. If the crew asks, tell them not to.

DAX

You want to tell me -

VAUGHN

No. Just carry out my orders,
Lieutenant.

He gets up and heads to the door without further ado. But he stops at the threshold and turns back.

VAUGHN

One other thing. The *Sagan's* taken a beating the last few months. I want her better than ready in case we need her. Have a complete battery of systems diagnostics run from bow to stern, and an overhaul of the navigational array. Put Tenmei on it.

DAX

Alright. But it'll take time.

VAUGHN

Whatever it takes. Just do it.

And then he's gone, leaving Dax somewhat perplexed at the sudden change in tone.

4 INT. DEFIANT - VAUGHN'S QUARTERS

Vaughn strides into his quarters, locks the door behind him, and stands in the centre of the small room. He is breathing hard, his hands are shaking, and his eyes are wild with indefinable emotions fighting to get out.

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

5 INT. KORA II INSTALLATION

A typical Cardassian interrogation room, such as in 2x25 "Tribunal." Cold, metallic, hopeless and forbidding.

MADRED (o.s.)

Elias Vaughn. Starfleet special operative. Rank of lieutenant.

A younger Elias Vaughn (in his early 70s) lies naked (with tasteful shadowing) on the interrogation table. Though he is not visibly restrained, when he tries to move, he can't.

The one who spoke is a Cardassian military male in his 30s, sneering and superior. This is Glinn MADRED, a younger version of the man from TNG 6x10/6x11 "Chain of Command."

VAUGHN

And whom do I have the pleasure of addressing?

MADRED

You may address me Glinn Madred.

VAUGHN

Forgive me if I don't salute.

MADRED

We know Starfleet intelligence has been in communication with Cren Veruda for some time. And that the good doctor has expressed a desire to seek his fortunes elsewhere.

VAUGHN

Really. Then I suppose it's lucky I happened to be in the area.

Another Cardassian enters, a demure woman in her 30s - Obsidian Order. In reality this is RURIKO TENMEI (seen briefly in 8x02, 8x14), disguised. Her eyes are fixed firmly on Vaughn, though he does not yet recognise her.

MADRED

It's always best to leave
information extraction to the
experts, don't you think?

VAUGHN

Oh, don't sell yourself short,
Madred. I'm sure you have the
makings of a fine torturer.

Madred smiles coldly again. The disguised Ruriko continues
as if she has not heard. Vaughn schools his face blank.

RURIKO

My name is Kree Omiturin. You,
Lieutenant Vaughn, have arrived
too late to protect your people
from the doctor's invention. His
artificial intelligence is about
to link up across the Union via
subspace, enabling an attack the
likes of which the Federation has
never seen.

MADRED

Unfortunately for you, the good
doctor's expertise in devising
counter-measures to his own
invention will not be forthcoming.

RURIKO

I want to spend some time with the
prisoner now. Alone.

Slightly disappointed, Madred nods and leaves. Ruriko
produces a hypospray and injects Vaughn in the neck.

RURIKO

This will restore your mobility.
And you'll find a prison coverall
in the locker. Put it on.

Unsteadily, not sure what is going on here, Vaughn does so.
She passes him a phaser, which he takes hesitantly.

VAUGHN

Why are you doing this?

RURIKO

If you're as smart as your after-action reports paint you, you'll figure it out soon enough.

She leaves the room, and he falls in step behind her.

6 **INT. CELL**

A door opens on a pitch-black prison cell of cold metal, letting in a small sliver of light that illuminates CREN VERUDA, an old and beaten Cardassian male scientist. Ruriko and Vaughn step into the light, approaching him gently.

VERUDA

Is it time for another interview?

VAUGHN

Easy, Doctor. I'm with Starfleet, and I'm getting you out of here.

VERUDA

Ah, the Federation man. You came for me after all. When the Order discovered my plan to defect, I'd given up hope.

VAUGHN

Hope's the easy part. What's hard is escaping undetected from a high-security Cardassian scientific research facility. Any thoughts, Ms Omiturin?

The Cardassian woman smirks knowingly.

7 **INT. STARFLEET SHUTTLE**

Vaughn, Ruriko and Veruda TRANSPORT onto the rear pad of a small Starfleet stealth craft. A female Vulcan, Lt Cmdr T'PRYNN, turns to them from the helm station, impassively ignoring Vaughn's expression of surprise.

T'PRYNN

It is good to have you back,
Lieutenant Vaughn. I have already
laid in and executed a course back
to Federation space.

RURIKO

Good work, Commander T'Prynn. If
you'll excuse me, Doctor Veruda
needs to rest before beginning
work on his counter measures. We
can debrief later.

She leaves through a door into the back, helping the frail
Cardassian doctor with her. Vaughn is scowling at T'Prynn.

T'PRYNN

You have something to say.

VAUGHN

You knew about this, didn't you?

T'PRYNN

I was aware that a surgically
disguised Starfleet operative had
infiltrated the Kora Two facility.

VAUGHN

And you didn't see fit to reveal
that fact to me?

T'PRYNN

We knew there was a significant
non-zero probability you would be
captured. If you had been aware of
a third operative, you might have
been made to reveal that knowledge
under interrogation.

VAUGHN

You wound me, T'Prynn. Do you
really think I'd crack so easily?

T'PRYNN

You are only human.

VAUGHN

But why her of all people? 'Kree Omiturin.' Come on, T'Prynn. It's an anagram for Ruriko Tenmei.

T'PRYNN

Ah. Your nemesis.

VAUGHN

Please, she's a colleague.

T'PRYNN

Are you upset with Starfleet for assigning Commander Tenmei to this mission without your knowledge? Or do you resent being saved by your biggest rival within the bureau?

VAUGHN

Those are excellent questions.

T'PRYNN

She infuriates you.

VAUGHN

Yes.

T'PRYNN

She exasperates you.

VAUGHN

Yes!

T'PRYNN

You are attracted to her.

VAUGHN

(sigh)

Is it that obvious?

8 **EXT. SPACE**

The Starfleet stealth shuttle (circa 2340s) warps away.

With a simple change of ANGLE, we are now watching the *Defiant*, warping off in a different direction.

9 INT. DEFIANT - SHUTTLEBAY

At the far end of the bay, Tenmei lies on her back with her upper body underneath the jacked-up shuttle *Sagan*, working on components. She accidentally catches her hand.

TENMEI

Dammit, dammit, dammit!

In the foreground, Lt NOG's hands come into frame, holding two large milkshakes, white and frothy, in tall glasses. He clears his throat to get her attention - she emerges.

TENMEI

Ohhh, those look good.

He walks over to her as she gets up, and hands her a glass.

NOG

Lieutenant Candlewood mentioned you'd been in here since oh-eight-hundred without a break.

TENMEI

May the Blessed Exchequer deliver you from destitution, Lieutenant.

NOG

I'll drink to that.

Prynn moves to drink, but hesitates at a horrid thought.

TENMEI

Tell me you didn't puree any tube grubs for this.

NOG

No way. I learned my lesson the first time. Mine's a grub shake. Yours is just milk and ice cream. Candlewood mixed them himself.

TENMEI

Sorry I doubted you.

She takes a gulp, rapture filling her face. Nog moves to try his own drink, and CHOKES on it, spitting it out in a comical spray of milkshake and spluttering. Prynn chuckles.

NOG

Milk and ice cream!

TENMEI

Both of them? Hmm. Lieutenant Candlewood strikes again.

NOG

I'm gonna get even with that guy, so help me...

TENMEI

Maybe he has a crush on you and this is his way of expressing it. How's Shar doing?

NOG

Better, I think. Hard to be sure sometimes. You know what he's like. So what did you do to get banished down here anyway?

TENMEI

I wish I knew. I haven't been on the bridge in three days, ever since the course change.

NOG

Have you talked to your father? I mean, Commander Vaughn.

TENMEI

Is that why you brought me the milkshake? To pump me for inside information?

NOG

No! Well, not entirely.

TENMEI

Nog, one thing you should know about my father is that no-one has

ever accused him of nepotism. As present circumstance will attest.

NOG

Sorry. You'd think the only son of the Grand Nagus would know better.

TENMEI

It's probably just force of habit. Secrecy was vital on the kinds of missions he used to go on.

NOG

But he gave all that up.

TENMEI

People change. I don't completely understand why - all that Orb business is lost on me, frankly - but I do know how bitter he'd become about his life since my mom died. Whatever convinced him to make the change, it's renewed him.

NOG

Candlewood has a theory what the course change is all about. He thinks it's Cardassians.

TENMEI

Why would he think that?

NOG

He noticed there'd been a download of a classified file about Kora Two three days ago. That's in Cardassian space. And Commander Vaughn is the only one on board with the clearance for that file.

TENMEI

Doesn't really prove anything.

VAUGHN (comm)

Vaughn to Nog. Report to my ready room immediately, Lieutenant.

NOG
Aye sir, I'm on my way.

TENMEI
See? Always the last to know.

Nog begins to head out of the room, glad to be included.

TENMEI
Hey!

Holding her milkshake with one hand, she beckons Nog back over with the other. He comes, and she grabs the unfinished milkshake out of his hand.

TENMEI
No sense letting it go to waste.

10 INT. DEFIANT - READY ROOM

Vaughn sits behind the desk, with Dax and Bowers stood nearby. The door opens and Nog enters, eager to get into the loop but trying to maintain professionalism.

VAUGHN
Thanks for coming, Lieutenant.
Have a seat.

Nog sits, a little nervous. Everyone is very serious.

VAUGHN
I want to be clear about something
from the start, Lieutenant.
Nothing discussed during this
meeting leaves this room.

NOG
I understand, sir.

VAUGHN
Dax, tell him.

DAX
We've detected a Starfleet
transponder signal here in the

Gamma Quadrant. We've traced it to a class-M planet that the *Defiant* is currently orbiting. Attempts to scan the surface to pinpoint the transmission have instead turned up something else - the wreckage of a Jem'Hadar attack ship.

NOG

Any indication what destroyed it?

DAX

No, and no sign of survivors either, although the interference is making it difficult to be sure. The only way we'll find out more is by going down there.

VAUGHN

I'll be leading the away team. You and Mister Bowers will accompany me to inspect the wreckage and locate the transponder signal. We beam down in thirty minutes.

NOG

Yes, sir.

VAUGHN

Nog, I am repeating my initial order. This isn't to be discussed with anyone outside this room.

Nog now clearly understands this is not fun anymore - this is very serious. He departs, leaving Vaughn, Dax and Bowers to exchange intense glances.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

11 EXT. GAMMA QUAD PLANET - DAY

LONG SHOT showing normal-looking woodland - rolling hills and valleys, a variety of large trees, and large dinosaur-like creatures lumbering around or flying between them.

ZOOM IN, deep into the woodland, until we find Nog, Bowers and Vaughn. From this perspective we realise all the nature around them is on a massive scale - 30-foot trees, animals that tower over them. Nog has out his tricorder, scanning.

NOG

There. The fragments we detected are in that direction.

VAUGHN

Let's get moving. Bowers, keep a scan for life-forms. We don't want to get accosted by a predator.

They move off into the woods, Bowers also getting out his tricorder. After 100 yards or so, they see what initially looks like a moss-covered tree at a 45-degree angle.

Getting closer, it is clear that it is actually a Dominion ship's warp nacelle. Nearby is a large hump of metal, mostly buried in the hill-side. Woodland has grown over it.

VAUGHN

How long has it been here?

BOWERS

No more than two years, I'd say. But I don't think... Life-form. Humanoid. Inside the ship.

NOG

Is it the source of the signal?

VAUGHN

No, that's a bit further south.

At Vaughn's nod, Bowers draws a phaser and takes point as the team approach the crashed ship, spot an entry, and take up position around it. Bowers calls into the hollow ship.

BOWERS

Attention occupant of the Dominion spacecraft. We're from the United Federation of Planets. We mean no harm, but we wish to speak to you.

For long moments, there is no response. Bowers is about to lead the team inside when one of the large PTERODACTYL-like creatures we have seen flying around comes bursting out of the entrance, nearly bowling them over. They all catch their breath after the surprise, then Bowers scans inside.

BOWERS

No other life signs. Sorry, sir, I really thought it was humanoid.

NOG

I was this close to shooting that thing. What was it anyway, a bird?

VAUGHN

(shrug)

You two investigate the wreckage. I'm going on alone to track down the transponder signal.

NOG

But sir, you said -

VAUGHN

Just do it, Lieutenant.

Vaughn walks off further into the woods. Nog and Bowers look to each other, not sure what's going on with Vaughn.

12 EXT. FEDERATION PARK - DAY

A grave stone, marked with the English words T'PRYNN, LIEUTENANT COMMANDER, STARFLEET. 2190-2349. INTELLIGENCE, DUTY, STRUGGLE, WISDOM. Followed by presumably the same words in the Vulcan script. The stone is set among many in an open-air memorial, in a pretty wooded area.

Vaughn and Ruriko stand tearfully, holding hands, as they look down at the grave stone. Sadly, they turn to walk along the esplanade, sea on one side, woods on the other.

RURIKO

I've come to a decision, Elias.
I'm not taking any more field assignments. I want to get back into nanotech research full-time.

VAUGHN

Is this about T'Prynn?

RURIKO

It's sobering to see proof of how vulnerable we all are. That even Vulcans aren't immortal.

VAUGHN

She knew the risks. We all do, or we wouldn't sign on. Is this about... settling down?

RURIKO

I know you too well to ask that of you, Elias. I just need a few years away from the job.

VAUGHN

A few years away. To do what?

RURIKO

To raise a family. To have a child. With you.

He is completely stunned. Not what he was expecting at all.

VAUGHN

Let's talk.

But his beamingly happy face shows that the decision is already made.

From Vaughn's smiling face, the pleasant Presidio woods in the background...

13 **EXT. GAMMA QUAD PLANET - DAY**

...to Vaughn's stone cold expression as he stares INTO CAMERA, having found the thing he was really looking for. We do not yet see what this is; we only see his face and the woods in the background. He taps his combadge.

VAUGHN
Vaughn to Bowers.

14 **EXT. DOMINION SHIP - DAY**

Nog and Bowers are inspecting what they can see of the outside of the crashed ship when the call comes through.

BOWERS
Bowers here. Go ahead.

VAUGHN (comm)
Is Lieutenant Nog still with you?

Nog looks over, nervous about Vaughn's recent attitude.

BOWERS
Yes, sir. We've been looking for the cause of the crash -

VAUGHN (comm)
Belay that. Lock on to my comm signal and get to my coordinates. On the double.

BOWERS
Aye, sir. We're on our way.

They know something is very much up with the commander. They gather their stuff and head off into the woods.

15 **EXT. GAMMA QUAD PLANET**

Trekking through the woods, Nog is holding out his tricorder. He looks around himself, a bit uncomfortable.

NOG
I think something's watching us.

BOWERS
(taps combadge)
Bowers to *Defiant*. Anything new on
sensors, Lieutenant?

DAX (comm)
Negative, Sam. Atmospheric
interference is still playing
havoc with our scans.

BOWERS
How's our transporter lock?

DAX (comm)
(slight pause)
Chao reports the locks are solid.
Is something wrong?

BOWERS
Not yet. But stand by. Bowers out.
(to Nog)
How sure are you?

NOG
I'm not sure. I'm probably wrong.
I just can't shake the feeling -

He stops, staring at his tricorder.

BOWERS
What is it?

NOG
I'm picking up a large creature
about two hundred metres north.
One of the sauropods we saw.

BOWERS
We're going nowhere near it, it
shouldn't bother us.

NOG
That's not the problem. Two
minutes ago, the nearest of its
species was kilometres away. That

animal didn't wander in. It just appeared out of nowhere.

Deep breath - they think they know what it's all about.

BOWERS

First a humanoid, then a bird,
then a magic dragon.

NOG

It's a changeling.

16 EXT. GAMMA QUAD PLANET - DAY

Vaughn remains stood where he was, staring intently. Bowers and Nog approach, anxious to share what they have learned. But as they get near, they see what it is Vaughn has been looking for all this time. And they are suitably horrified.

BOWERS

Oh my god...

VAUGHN

Now we know who brought down the Dominion ship. But it cost them.

In front of them a large, deep ravine stretches into the woods. Not a natural ravine, but the result of another ship plummeting to earth, digging a massive furrow as it went. At the far end is what caused it - a broken BORG vessel.

On Bowers as he remembers...

17 MONTAGE - QUICK FLASHES

-- Bowers on the damaged bridge of a starship mid-battle, as Borg drones beam in and the frazzled crew react.

-- Clips from "Star Trek: First Contact" as the dozens of Starfleet ships pummel away at the advancing Borg cube.

-- Bowers hefts a TR-116 rifle, one of the throwback solid projectile weapons as seen in 7x13 "Field of Fire."

-- Unaccustomed to projectile weapons, the drones have no defence against the TR-116s and are going down.

-- The ship's captain, an Andorian *shen* (female), turns to reveal she is already infected. She reaches for a nearby ensign. Bowers shoots her dead to save him.

18 **BACK TO SCENE**

Bowers now stares with horror and gut hatred at the dead Borg ship. Similarly dismayed, Nog has his tricorder out.

NOG

Woah... this isn't a Borg ship. Or at least, it wasn't always.

BOWERS

What do you mean, Nog?

NOG

The hull plating underneath. I'd know it anywhere. It's Starfleet.

He is right. This is a Starfleet ship assimilated, the pristine off-white panels overrun with the branching conduits, tubes and dull metal of the collective. Vaughn knows exactly which ship it is. He has known all along.

VAUGHN

(quiet, intense)

USS *Valkyrie*, NCC-68816, Paladin-class. Crew complement, thirty. Lost with all hands stardate 46935 in a Borg engagement at the planet Kora Two. Presumed destroyed.

(deep breath)

Let's go. What we're looking for is in there.

Sobered, they begin to walk to the Borg-Starfleet ship.

19 **INT. BORG SHIP**

The transformed interior of the previously Starfleet ship. Borg conduits and technology are everywhere, turning it into a cold and robotic environment. The outside forest has not encroached in here, unlike the Dominion ship. This is a dead, frightening place - a tomb.

Julian Bashir BEAMS into the middle of this. Previously as excited as Nog to have finally been invited to the secret mission, he gasps and tenses as he recognises where he is. Controlling his natural fear, he begins to walk.

Picking his way through the canted corridors, Bashir steps over the dead and desiccated bodies of collapsed drones. Looking closer at one, he sees the distinctive ears of a Vulcan and a 2340s-era Starfleet insignia under the armour.

He turns a corner, and sees Bowers and Nog waving their tricorders over one solitary drone that is still standing in its alcove, apparently alive if a little withered.

A couple of steps away, Vaughn sits on a dead piece of machinery, his fingers rubbing the bridge of his nose, very pointedly not looking at the drone. Neither does he look up at Bashir as the doctor approaches.

VAUGHN

Thank you for coming, Doctor. This is the source of the transponder signal I mentioned. Please perform a full medical scan of the drone.

BASHIR

Yes, sir.

Bashir goes to join Nog and Bowers in their scans, sharing their looks of discomfort at the delicacy of the moment. They work in silence, tricorders beeping. After a while, all three step tentatively back over to the commander.

BASHIR

Sir, I've completed my medical scans. The drone is a human female, age indeterminate. Approximately sixty-eight percent of its body has been replaced by Borg technology, including most of the left hemisphere of the brain. Its condition is critical, but stable. The alcove is acting like a life-support system, trickling just enough power to keep the

drone alive. But that's it. In its current condition, the drone can't survive outside the alcove.

NOG

Sir, there's no evidence of any subspace transmissions besides the Starfleet signal coming from the drone. Any connection to the Borg collective was probably severed when the ship crashed.

Vaughn listens to the reports silently, then stands, his decision made. He is still not looking at the drone.

VAUGHN

Doctor, Lieutenant Nog... you're both to begin work immediately on extracting the drone from her alcove without killing her. Then you're going to beam her up to the *Defiant* where you, Julian, are going to reverse the assimilation and restore the drone's humanity.

Shocked looks - that is pretty much an impossible job.

BOWERS

Respectfully, sir, do you think it's wise to expose the ship to functional Borg technology?

VAUGHN

I've made my decision, Sam.

BOWERS

Yes, but the safety of the ship -

VAUGHN

(cold, dangerous)
- is my responsibility. And you'd do damn well to remember that, Lieutenant. Until further notice, restoring the drone is the *Defiant's* top priority. All other mission directives are suspended.

Security is to be maintained, both for the safety of the ship and to keep this from as many of the crew as possible. Am I understood?

NOG / BOWERS / BASHIR

(not quite
all together)

Aye, sir.

VAUGHN

Doctor, you'll find the drone's medical records in a subsection of Ensign Tenmei's file.

Bashir's eyes widen - he nods with sensitive understanding. Without another word, Vaughn walks away into the Borg ship.

BOWERS

I've never seen him like this.

NOG

And why would the drone's medical records be in Prynn's file?

Bashir returns to the drone, looking closely at its face.

BASHIR

Because apparently, this poor woman is Ruriko Tenmei. Prynn's mother.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

20 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

Ruriko is a Borg. She stands within a disconnected alcove inside *Defiant's* sickbay. She is still unconscious and weak-looking, only supported by the alcove itself.

Bashir and nurse RICHTER work to carefully remove pieces of Borg technology. Bowers stands to one side, his phaser ready just in case. Vaughn watches impassively from afar, unable to take his eyes off the pale, assimilated face.

BASHIR

Sir? Her condition remains stable. Using records on previous attempts to reverse assimilation, we've neutralised the most dangerous implants. But we've had to leave intact the ones that are keeping what's left of her body alive.

VAUGHN

What about brain activity?

BASHIR

There is some, but it's difficult to be precise. As best I can tell, she's in a coma. She's spent two years on minimal life support. I'll know more after we return to the Alpha Quadrant -

VAUGHN

No. You'll do the work here.

Bowers turns towards them - he heard, and he is not happy. Vaughn does not care what Bowers thinks right now.

BASHIR

Sir, please try to understand. I've done all that I can safely do for her under these circumstances. The *Defiant* simply isn't equipped

to handle this, especially not
without replicators.

Vaughn is starting to get angrier and angrier with everyone
questioning his orders.

VAUGHN

We're not leaving orbit, Doctor.
I'm not putting Deep Space Nine,
Bajor or anyone else in the Alpha
Quadrant at risk. I want her mind
restored before we go anywhere.

BASHIR

I don't know that I can do that.

VAUGHN

Well, you're going to try.

Bashir meets Vaughn's glare and holds it. He sympathises,
but he thinks Vaughn has lost objectivity.

BASHIR

Alright. But I want to be clear
that this is against my medical
judgement. And I fully intend to
enter into my log that your orders
are putting this woman's life and
the safety of this crew at risk.

VAUGHN

You're certainly at liberty to -

TENMEI (o.s.)

Mom?

Vaughn SPINS to see Prynn standing in the doorway, gaping
at the Borg drone. Vaughn advances, blocking her view.

VAUGHN

Get out. Get out of here now!

TENMEI

But, Dad -

He pushes her away, forcing her out into the corridor.

VAUGHN
NOW! Mister Bowers, confine Ensign
Tenmei to her quarters.

BOWERS
Sir?

VAUGHN
Do it, Lieutenant.

Bowers hesitates for a second, but gives in. He approaches the bewildered Prynn and gently coaxes her along.

BOWERS
C'mon, Prynn. Let's go.

The door closes, leaving Vaughn breathing heavily.

21 **INT. DEFIANT - READY ROOM**

Bowers and Dax are alone in the room, in a secret meeting. Bowers is quite agitated, Dax trying to be diplomatic.

BOWERS
I think he's losing it.

DAX
He's got to be under a lot of
strain, Sam.

BOWERS
I'm not disputing that. I can't
even begin to imagine what he must
be going through. But you didn't
see him on the planet, or in
sickbay. He's lost perspective.
He's made it personal.

DAX
What do you expect? Ruriko Tenmei
is the mother of his only child.

BOWERS
This is about more than Commander
Tenmei! We've discovered evidence

of a Borg incursion into the Gamma Quadrant. Our first priority is to report it to Starfleet. But Vaughn has even suspended transmissions to the station.

DAX

The incursion was more than two years ago. It may be an isolated incident. A few more days -

BOWERS

Lieutenant, this is the Borg we're talking about. We don't know what the hell they were doing, or when they might return to finish the job. I for one don't ever want to face a Jem'Hadar drone. And God help us all if they ever manage to assimilate a Founder. We need to do something about this now.

Dax sighs - she knows he is right.

DAX

I'll talk to him. Take the bridge. I'll relieve you when I can.

BOWERS

Thank you.

He turns and leaves. She sighs. What on Earth can she say?

22 **INT. DEFIANT - VAUGHN'S QUARTERS**

Vaughn sits on his bunk, jacket off, staring down at his combadge in his hands. The door CHIMES. Vaughn really is not in any mood to be questioned or defied, but eventually he gives in and OPENS the door. Dax strides in firmly.

DAX

Pardon the intrusion, sir. But I need to speak with you about the current situation aboard ship.

VAUGHN

And I think you've forgotten that this isn't open to discussion.

DAX

Be that as it may, we're going to talk about it. Now.

VAUGHN

(looking up)

Excuse me? You think getting in touch with your inner Curzon is going to make me put up with this? You're dismissed, Lieutenant.

DAX

I'm not trying to be Curzon! I'm trying to be your first officer, dammit, and your friend. Or are you so tied up in yourself that don't need either one anymore?

Vaughn STANDS sharply, towering over Dax, dark and angry. She refuses to be intimidated.

VAUGHN

I strongly suggest you walk out of here now, Lieutenant, while I'm still willing to pretend this insubordination never happened.

DAX

The Borg have been here, sir. We should be learning everything we can and taking that intelligence home as quickly as possible. Why aren't we?

(he doesn't answer)

You're a captain. You have a duty to these people who have served you faithfully for this entire voyage. And you have a duty to the Federation to put its security before personal considerations.

His hands clenched tight and shaking, he finally snaps and HURLS the combadge in his hand at his computer screen.

DAX
(quietly)
That's what this is about, isn't
it? You've spent eighty years
putting the Federation first.

VAUGHN
I did this to her, Dax. She's a
Borg because of me.

DAX
Tell me what happened.

VAUGHN
Everything?

DAX
If it feels right.

23 INT. T' PLANA-HATH - BRIDGE

Populated with a nearly-all Vulcan crew, including Captain SOTAK and Lt T'VAR. Vaughn stands beside the captain's chair, gazing with displeasure at the image on the screen.

A small smoky planet with an asteroid belt, focused on one asteroid in particular. A Starfleet ship, the unassimilated *Valkyrie*, is also visible nearby on the screen. Behind this, Ruriko Tenmei enters the bridge. She is back in uniform, carrying a padd. She stands next to Vaughn.

RURIKO
After all these years, I can't
believe we have to take down Cren
Veruda's AI all over again.

VAUGHN
I have to wonder why it's only
reconstituted itself now.

RURIKO
It's basically an artificial life-
form. It has the same instinct for
survival as any other life-form.

The Vulcan lieutenant T'Var reacts (as much as a Vulcan can react), and urgently presses panels.

T'VAR
Detecting significant fluctuations
in the local subspace fields.

SOTAK
On screen, Lieutenant.

24 **EXT. SPACE**

Space splits open dazzlingly, and an irregular vessel emerges, dwarfing the Vulcan and Starfleet ships. It is the odd-shaped BORG SHIP from TNG 6x26/7x01 "Descent."

It immediately FIRES on the other vessels, before moving closer towards the asteroid belt. The *Valkyrie* is quick enough to get out of the way, but the *T'Plana-Hath* is HIT.

25 **INT. T' PLANA-HATH - BRIDGE**

Panels blowing, things sparking. The Vulcan crew work hard.

T'VAR
The Borg vessel is linking with
the mining station. It appears to
be conducting a data transfer.

RURIKO
Combining all it knows about
Cardassian armaments with the
Borg's most lethal technology. God
only knows what a merger like that
could do to the Federation.

Vaughn looks sharply to Ruriko. They only have one chance before the entire mission is blown to hell.

VAUGHN
Is the prototype ready?

RURIKO
Ready is a relative term. I won't
be able to control it remotely.
I'll need to deploy on site.

T'VAR

The Borg vessel has ceased its data upload. And it's powering up its weapons again!

They brace for another attack, but the Borg ship FIRES on the asteroid mining station instead, which is atomised. Then the ship begins to move away, ready to leave.

Vaughn looks to Ruriko, knowing there is only one decision he can make. She knows it too, and does not blame him.

RURIKO

We both knew it might come to this on day, Elias. Let's just get on with it.

VAUGHN

Commander Tenmei, execute. Take the plan directly to the Borg.

RURIKO

(taps combadge)

Disassembler team, prepare for immediate transport onto the Borg ship. *Valkyrie*, this is Commander Tenmei. Please beam our away team aboard and prepare to pursue that Borg vessel.

VOICE (comm)

Acknowledged. How quickly will you need an evac?

Ruriko smiles wryly - she knows there will be no escape.

RURIKO

Tenmei out.

(to Vaughn)

Goodbye, Elias. It's been a wonderful life. At times.

VAUGHN

(whisper)

Goodbye.

The transporter beam takes her. Vaughn stares for a moment, unable to believe what he has just done. He turns to watch.

The Borg ship opens its TRANSWARP FISSURE, slips into it and disappears. The *Valkyrie* gives chase, slipping into the fissure just before it closes. It is gone.

Everyone on the bridge is silent, honouring their comrades.

DAX (v.o.)

You made the only choice you
could, Elias. You must know that.

26 **INT. DEFIANT - VAUGHN'S QUARTERS**

Vaughn is emotionally exhausted from telling his story.

DAX

(continuing)

It sounds to me like Ruriko knew it too. I don't think anybody on this ship would blame you. Nobody deserves what happened to her. But you can't lose sight of the bigger picture.

VAUGHN

I never expected to be in a position like this. That I would face a moment when I would put my own needs ahead of my duty. All my life, in every situation I was thrust into, I always knew what the right decision was. Whatever saved the most lives, whatever served the greater good, that's what I did. And I knew from the moment you brought me that padd what the right decision was here. And I deliberately made what I knew was the wrong decision. Because I couldn't bear the thought of failing her again.

DAX

These are some extraordinary
circumstances no-one could have
foreseen. The odds that she alone
would survive the crash, much less
be detected by the very ship you
and Prynn are both serving on...

(thoughtful)

It's an impossible set of
coincidences.

VAUGHN

No. There's an explanation. And
until now I've managed to avoid
looking at it too closely. But
it's high time I deal with it.

(stands up)

Assemble an away team and send
them down to the planet. And
Ezri... thank you.

Nodding with a small smile, Dax leaves and Vaughn follows.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

27 INT. DEFIANT - TENMEI'S QUARTERS

The door opens on the quarters Prynn shares with Jeanette Chao. Prynn stands tensely, with her arms folded, knowing exactly who will enter - Vaughn. She is ready for him.

VAUGHN

You okay?

TENMEI

You care?

VAUGHN

Yes, as a matter of fact, I do. I know what you did, by the way.

TENMEI

What are you talking about?

VAUGHN

Enough, Prynn. It's no coincidence that we just happened to detect that transponder signal, is it?

TENMEI

My God, mom's alive and you're chasing conspiracies? From me? Who the hell do you think you are?

VAUGHN

A better question - who are you?

TENMEI

I'm the daughter of Elias Vaughn! You don't grow up as the only child of two Starfleet spooks without learning a thing or two. Yes, I programmed the *Defiant's* computer to look out for mom's transponder frequency. What, you don't think I came on this voyage to get closer to you, do you?

Prynn sees that that one really stung, and actually feels slightly guilty. It brings her fire back under control.

VAUGHN

You didn't do it alone, you know. Your search for your mother only succeeded because of the *Defiant's* mission. The mission I proposed when I transferred to DS-Nine. And I made that decision because of my encounter with a Bajoran Orb.

TENMEI

(derisive)

You're telling me this happened because of the wormhole aliens?

VAUGHN

I really don't know. You know me, Prynn. I've never been a believer in much of anything. But against all probability and reason, I have a chance to save your mother. To make up for what I did to her.

The real pain is coming through, and Prynn responds to it.

TENMEI

It wasn't your fault. When are you going to stop blaming yourself?

VAUGHN

You've blamed me for seven years.

TENMEI

And I was wrong. I've realised that. And what does it matter why it happened? We found her.

VAUGHN

It matters because my decision to save your mother is based on the belief that I'm meant to. That it's destined somehow. And I've been letting that belief override

my duty to this ship. And that should scare the hell out of you.

TENMEI

It doesn't. Look, I can't pretend that I can take this idea of destiny seriously. But I do know you're not a bad captain. You're not even a bad father, really.

VAUGHN

How can you say that, Prynn? I was never there.

TENMEI

But that's just it, dad. You were always there. Whether we could be together or not, I never doubted how much you loved us.

Shaking his head, Vaughn tentatively reaches out and pulls Prynn into an embrace. She doesn't resist.

VAUGHN

Oh God, you are so screwed up.

TENMEI

(chuckling)

Chip off the old block, that's me.

VAUGHN

Would you like to see her?

TENMEI

You'll let me?

VAUGHN

If you really want to. But I have to warn you, she's in bad shape.

TENMEI

I don't care. I want to be with her, dad. I want us both to be with her.

She takes his hand, and they smile together.

28 **INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY**

Ruriko looks slightly better - more of the technology and armour has been removed, and her skin colour has improved. But one whole arm and shoulder are missing, replaced by now-gone machinery. Various bits of life-support apparatus are attached at numerous points all over her body.

Prynn stands, CRYING quietly as she looks into her mother's mutilated and still unconscious face. Vaughn, Bashir and a random security body are giving them their space.

Quietly, Prynn begins to HUM a gentle tune, a lullaby. Vaughn listens, enchanted by his daughter's voice.

Suddenly, the drone's eyes OPEN, staring right at Prynn. She GASPS with surprise, and stops singing. Vaughn looks up too, and sees the change. The drone's lips are moving too, making small fish-like bubble-blowing motions.

VAUGHN

Doctor...

Bashir runs up and checks his medical displays. Everyone is astonished and encouraged at this unexpected development.

BASHIR

Keep it up, Prynn. Don't stop.

Now crying openly, Prynn stutters her way back to the tune through the tears. The drone keeps staring and mouthing.

RURIKO

(croaky whisper)

Puh... puh... prrrreeeeennn...

Laughing through the tears, Prynn is ecstatic to have reached her mother. Watching it all, Vaughn begins to cry too, and reaches out to take Prynn's hand.

29 **EXT. GAMMA QUAD PLANET - DAY**

Nog and Bowers are back at the crashed Jem'Hadar ship, walking tentatively with phasers drawn just in case.

NOG

Ezri says we'll just return this one to the Dominion. Since we're not at war anymore, I don't think it'll have any reason to harm us.

BOWERS

Does it need a reason?

NOG

It could be halfway across the planet by now.

BOWERS

I don't think so. When we first showed up, it was just waiting in there. It's ready to leave.

They reach the same opening they found earlier.

30 INT. DOMINION SHIP

The bridge of the small vessel, the same as any Jem'Hadar ship. The decks are canted at a difficult angle. In the room is a mass of skeletons, most of them Jem'Hadar but one Vorta, identifiable by their skull shapes.

Crouched near them, looking at the skeletons wistfully, is a CHILD FOUNDER, the usual formless features but in the shape of a teenage girl. She looks up unconcerned as Nog and Bowers appear at the open doorway, stepping inside.

CHILD FOUNDER

I thought you left.

BOWERS

No, we didn't leave. We returned to our ship. It's still in orbit.

CHILD FOUNDER

Why?

NOG

We're from the Federation. We're friends of Odo.

CHILD FOUNDER

I know about Odo. He rejected the Link. He caused the death of another Founder. He was cast out.

NOG

No, he went back to the Link, after the Federation and the Dominion made peace.

CHILD FOUNDER

There is no peace.

BOWERS

There is. We even have a Jem'Hadar living with us on Deep Space Nine. He was sent to us by Odo.

CHILD FOUNDER

I understand that kind of peace. You have Vorta also, overseeing you, and many Jem'Hadar.

NOG

I don't understand what he's doing there myself, really. If you come back with us, I'm sure Taran'atar will tell you all about it. You could even order him to accompany you back to the Dominion.

Bowers throws Nog a dirty look - that wasn't in the plan. Nog throws him a toothy but guilty smile back.

CHILD FOUNDER

Taran'atar is your First?

NOG

First on our station, yes.

The Founder looks down at the skeletons, oddly forlorn.

CHILD FOUNDER

My First is dead. I miss First.
I miss Second. I miss Fourth.
(thinks for a moment)

I do not miss Third.
(looks back up)
Why did you come back?

BOWERS
To invite you up to our ship. When
we leave, we can take you with us.

CHILD FOUNDER
To your station, where you have
your Jem'Hadar.

BOWERS
For a little while, yes. We'll
send a message to the Dominion,
let them know we found you. You'll
be able to go home.

The Founder looks back down at the bodies, thinks a moment.

CHILD FOUNDER
I was taught to believe that
solids can never be trusted. But I
trusted my own kind to come for
me, and here I have been for two
years. I am ready to leave this
place. I accept your offer.

Bowers lets out the breath he had been holding. Nog grins,
thinking this is his chance to get rid of Taran'atar.

31 INT. DEFIANT - SCIENCE LAB

The child Founder stands in the lab, visually inspecting a
Borg drone, one of the dead and withered ones from the
crashed ship, partially dismembered and laid out on a slab.

Meanwhile, Vaughn strides into the room and approaches
Shar, who has been working on the dead drone. Bowers is
also nearby, keeping an eye on their Founder guest.

VAUGHN
Report.

SHAR

Sir, we've decrypted the data in the neuro-processor, and we were able to verify the *Valkyrie's* mission to the Gamma Quadrant.

VAUGHN

And that was?

SHAR

Three years ago, during the Borg's most recent incursion into our space, the Borg updated their database on the Federation and transmitted it back to the Delta Quadrant. Two items that jumped out at them were 'Dominion' and 'changelings.' They spent the next year constructing a transwarp conduit to the Gamma Quadrant, and deployed the *Valkyrie* as their advance scout. It encountered a Jem'Hadar ship, and both vessels were destroyed.

Meanwhile, the Founder is still quite intrigued by the Borg corpse. It notices a red light appear on the body.

Under the above:

BOWERS (o.s.)

We know the Jem'Hadar managed to do considerable damage to the *Valkyrie* early in the battle. It's very possible the Borg decided they weren't prepared to deal with that much resistance. Or maybe their priorities just changed. The *Valkyrie's* mission was about the same time as the Borg's first contact with Species 8472.

VAUGHN

(nods thoughtfully)

Excellent work, gentlemen. We need to make this data available to the Dominion as well as Starfleet.

BOWERS

The Dominion, sir?

The Founder continues to walk around the dead Borg, quite fascinated by this strange alien. When a small piece of technology begins moving, she doesn't realise this is bad.

VAUGHN (o.s.)

Absolutely. What better way to demonstrate our peaceful intentions than by returning a marooned Founder along with this information? This isn't just a tactical opportunity, it's a diplomatic one.

Without warning, assimilation tubules LEAP out of the dead Borg's hand and head straight for the Founder, sinking into her changeling flesh and injecting Borg NANOPROBES.

The Founder SCREAMS, her form losing control, writhing and thrashing bits of herself all around the room. The crew react with surprise and horror - Bowers draws his phaser.

VAUGHN

No, not yet.

Slowly, the Founder manages to pull her flailing appendages under control, pulling tighter and tighter until she forms a ball, a black mass visible at its centre. The ball shrinks and shrinks, straining and vibrating on the deck.

VAUGHN

Prepare to fire.

Bowers aims his phaser, but suddenly the changeling-ball stops vibrating and grows back to its humanoid shape.

The changeling extends a third arm out of her chest, stretches the arm all the way out to Bowers, and opens the hand to reveal a small black pebble - the nanoprobes.

Shar runs up and passes a tricorder over the black lump, quite excited.

VAUGHN

Are you alright?

CHILD FOUNDER

They were trying to overwhelm me. They were quite painful. They kept twisting me inside out. So I did the only thing I could think of. I squeezed them together until they stopped.

VAUGHN

Mister ch'Thane, explain please.

SHAR

It's true, sir, she's fine. Borg nanoprobes work on a cellular level, but in its natural state a changeling has no cellular structure. It's like trying to assimilate a body of water.

VAUGHN

But that drone was dead. How can its assimilation tubules still be functional?

SHAR

Apparently, even without a living humanoid host, the Borg imperative to assimilate can still survive, lying dormant until the right opportunity presents itself.

Bowers turns to Vaughn, horror on his face.

BOWERS

My God, that means -

VAUGHN

(realising)

Prynn.

Vaughn pulls his own phaser, and he and Bowers rush out of the lab. The Founder watches them go curiously.

32 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

Vaughn and Bowers run into the sickbay, weapons already drawn, expecting the worst. But all is peaceful. Ruriko is in her alcove, her eyes open and looking with love at Prynn, who sits next to her reading aloud from a book.

Seeing this, Vaughn sighs with relief and lowers his phaser. He gazes upon his family, reunited at last. He should be happy. But still, better safe than sorry.

VAUGHN

Prynn...

TENMEI

(looks up)

Dad? What's wrong?

VAUGHN

I'm not sure. But I need you to step away from your mother right now. We have to make sure everything's alright. Please, Prynn.

Seeing the phaser in his hand, Prynn isn't sure but does what he asks anyway. She closes the book, puts it aside and stands up to move away.

As she does, the tender, loving look goes out of Ruriko's eyes, replaced by cold machinery. Her one remaining hand reaches out sharply, grasping for Prynn.

Vaughn sees this, and raises his phaser again.

As we BLACK OUT, we hear the phaser fire.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

33 INT. DEFIANT - TENMEI'S QUARTERS

Prynn paces around the room, crying and shouting and full of hatred and anger for Vaughn, and grief for her mother. Dax sits quietly, letting her get it all out of her system.

TENMEI

He couldn't have been sure. He says she was going to assimilate me, but how could he know? Bashir said the autopsy was inconclusive.

DAX

I know. But he insists on what he saw, Prynn. Do you really think he was imagining it?

TENMEI

I don't know what to think. I just know we were so close... and he deliberately killed her. My father killed my mother, again.

DAX

You won't get any argument from him on that. He really believes that's true, that he killed Ruriko twice. But there's something that you both need to accept. Ruriko Tenmei died a long time ago, as a hero, saving lives. That thing in sickbay wasn't her. There was nothing left of her to bring back. She was all Borg.

TENMEI

She said my name.

DAX

(emphasising 'it')
Did it? Hard to know for sure.

TENMEI

Why did she respond to me, then?

DAX

You were the first life-form the drone encountered when it regained consciousness. It marked you for assimilation, just like the drone in the lab did the Founder. Do you understand what I'm saying, Prynn? You weren't that thing's daughter. You were its target.

Prynn shakes her head, not sure if she can accept this, preferring to cling on to the familiar hate.

DAX

Prynn, it was the Borg who killed your mother. Don't let them kill what's left of your family.

Slowly, Dax gets up and leaves Prynn alone.

34 **INT. DEFIANT - CORRIDOR**

As Dax emerges and the door closes, Vaughn is there, leaning against the wall. He has clearly been listening in. He is just as distraught and emotionally wrecked as Prynn, but far more experienced at keeping it under control.

VAUGHN

Why did you lie to her? Ruriko was alive in there, somewhere. Julian told me so. Despite what the Borg implants were making her do.

DAX

That's right, I lied. Because she wouldn't understand that you didn't really kill Ruriko to save Prynn, or even to save the crew. You did it for Ruriko. So that whatever was left of her wouldn't have to live with turning her own child into a monster.

Vaughn sags against the wall, his eyes red and swollen.

VAUGHN

L.J. warned me not to take Prynn
on this mission.

DAX

There's something to be said for
taking the advice of your elders.

A small smirk - Dax is substantially his elder as well. He
smiles slightly. But only slightly.

DAX

Give her time. Give yourself time.
And try to forgive yourself.

35 EXT. DEFIANT - ESTABLISHING

The *Defiant* is at warp, heading home once and for all.

36 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

Vaughn is sat in the centre seat. He looks around at his
senior staff - Bowers, Shar, Dax next to him, Prynn at helm
- and sighs. They were all so eager in the beginning, and
now they are all tired, emotionally battered and beaten.

BOWERS

Wormhole in one hour, sir. Still
no response from the station.

DAX

The new subspace relay might be
malfunctioning.

VAUGHN

Let's hope that's all it is.

SHAR

Sir, I'm conducting long-range
scans of the space near the
wormhole. I had hoped to determine
the status of the relay...

The edge in Shar's voice means something is obviously wrong. But he is also rather confused by what his panels are telling him. Vaughn sags further - yet another crisis.

VAUGHN
Yes, Ensign?

SHAR
Captain, the relay is gone.

VAUGHN
Was it destroyed?

SHAR
Yes sir, I believe it was. But...
my scans are showing that the
space around the wormhole has been
altered since we were last here.
If these readings are correct, the
wormhole now opens within the
Idran system.

VAUGHN
Idran? Are you telling me the
wormhole moved three light years?

SHAR
Not at all, sir. The system has.

Vaughn looks at his science officer, flummoxed. Shar looks back, just as helpless to explain. Suddenly Bowers REACTS.

BOWERS
Captain! Contact bearing zero-
four-zero-mark-nine. Distance
three-hundred-million kilometres
and closing. It's a Dominion ship.

VAUGHN
(instant reaction)
Red alert. Give me a visual.

One of the smaller Jem'Hadar ships appears on the screen.

VAUGHN
Hail them, Sam.

BOWERS

Sir, they are already hailing us.
And they're dropping to impulse.

VAUGHN

(that's weird)

Take us out of warp, Ensign
Tenmei. Sam, put them through.

The image on the screen changes - it's WEYOUN, wearing one of their headsets, with various Jem'Hadar milling behind. He is positively cheerful and friendly, his usual smarmy self. Vaughn tries to be gracious and diplomatic as he can.

WEYOUN (screen)

Greetings, *Defiant*. I trust your
little sojourn went well. To whom
have I the pleasure of speaking?

VAUGHN

I'm Commander Elias Vaughn,
captain of this vessel. And you
would be...?

DAX

I'll be damned. Weyoun. I thought
you were extinct.

WEYOUN (screen)

Lieutenant, I was first cloned in
the Gamma Quadrant. Did you really
think some of my genetic material
wasn't still on file?

DAX

I might have known it was too much
to hope for.

WEYOUN (screen)

Forgive me, Commander, yes.

(down to business)

Our sensors show you have a
Founder aboard your vessel. We
demand its return at once.

VAUGHN

We'd be happy to. Lieutenant,
please inform our guest of the
situation and arrange to have her
beamed aboard the Dominion ship.
And be sure to give her the chip.

Dax nods and leaves to do it. Vaughn turns back to Weyoun.

VAUGHN

We rescued the Founder from a
crashed ship. We were going to
contact you from Deep Space Nine,
but your arrival here simplifies
matters considerably. Her ship was
brought down by a force we're
quite familiar with - the Borg.

WEYOUN (screen)

I see. We're aware of the Borg
from our intelligence on the Alpha
Quadrant. Many of us wondered how
long it would be before they paid
us a visit.

VAUGHN

If you'd like, I'm sure we could
arrange to provide the Dominion
with additional intelligence as
part of an information exchange.

WEYOUN (screen)

Thank you for the kind offer,
Commander. I'll certainly pass it
on to the Founders.

VAUGHN

While we wait, can you explain
what happened to the Idran system?

WEYOUN (screen)

Remarkable, isn't it? To answer
your question, Commander, I cannot
begin to explain it. I suspect you
will find out before I do.

Just then, Dax re-enters and nods to Vaughn.

VAUGHN
Your bridge?

WEYOUN (screen)
Acceptable.

Vaughn nods to Bowers, who hits keys. On the screen, the child Founder MATERIALISES standing next to Weyoun, who bows in the typical obsequious Vorta way.

WEYOUN (screen)
Founder, you honour us with your presence. We're gratified by your safe return. Perhaps you'd care to rest after your ordeal?

CHILD FOUNDER (screen)
Yes, I think I would. Please thank the Federation people for their help to me. I owe them my life.

She turns and leaves, and Weyoun turns back to Vaughn. He would rather not have to thank them for anything, but he cannot disobey a Founder.

WEYOUN (screen)
You've done the Dominion a great service. You have its gratitude.

VAUGHN
We could say you owe us a favour.

WEYOUN (screen)
(cheerfully)
I'd rather not. Especially since we can repay it straight away. You see... I believe we've found something that belongs to you.
(nods off-screen)
Safe journey, Commander. Perhaps our paths will cross again.

The signal ends and Weyoun's face disappears.

BOWERS

Detecting a transporter beam!

VAUGHN

Shields!

BOWERS

Too late!

As Vaughn and Bowers both stand urgently, three Dominion TRANSPORTER beams coalesce at the front of the bridge. As the beams deposit their passengers, Dax gasps aloud.

DAX

My God, Jake... is that really
you?

Vaughn looks, and it is - it's JAKE SISKO, alive and well. Dax runs up and throws her arms around him, hugging him tight as they both laugh happily. She HITS him lightly.

JAKE

Whoa, Ezri, take it easy.

DAX

You big jerk! Kasidy and your
grandfather have been worried sick
about you! We all have.

JAKE

I know, I'm sorry. Nothing worked
out the way I expected.

BOWERS

The Dominion ship is moving off.

VAUGHN

Stand down from red alert, Mister
Bowers. And have Doctor Bashir
report to the bridge. Get Nog up
here too.

JAKE

I'm sorry, Commander. I'm Jake
Sisko. Permission to come aboard?

VAUGHN

(smiling)

No apology necessary, Mister Sisko. Permission granted. Welcome aboard, to you and your companions...?

JAKE

Oh God, I'm sorry. I forgot to introduce my new friends. This is Wex. She's on a pilgrimage.

He gestures to one of the other two bodies that beamed aboard with him - a small young alien woman with grey skin, black markings and a large mane of white hair. She inclines her head towards Vaughn, watching him, but does not speak.

JAKE

And, uh... this is my other new friend.

Jake steps aside, and out from behind him steps another figure, dressed in old and dirty robes. The figure pulls back its hood and steps forward, and Dax gasps again.

OPAKA

I apologise for the condition in which I greet you, Commander. My name is Opaka Sulan, and I was once Kai of Bajor.

FADE OUT:

THE END