

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

8x24 - "Unity, pt 1."

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on the novel

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: Unity

by SD Perry

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 MONTAGE FROM PREVIOUS EPS

- HIZIKI GARD shoots and kills SHAKAAR (8x20)
- TAULIN CYL shoots and kills VERAD (8x10)
- JEAN-LUC PICARD shoots and kills REMMICK (TNG 1x25)
- ELIAS VAUGHN shoots and kills RURIKO TENMEI (8x22)

4 EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT

The ship is travelling at impulse, within the Idran system.

3 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

VAUGHN is sat in the centre chair, only moments after the end of 8x22 "Greater Good." Jake and his guests have gone below-decks, as has Dax, leaving only Vaughn, SHAR, BOWERS and TENMEI, plus extras.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

Captain's log, supplemental. We discovered the loss of the Gamma Quadrant subspace communications relay at the same time we became aware of the massive shift of matter and space within the Idran system. Presumably, our relay was destroyed by said celestial event. Having maintained communication silence with DS-Nine during our recent encounter, we were unaware of our inability to communicate with the station. We are returning to Deep Space Nine after ninety-four days in the Gamma Quadrant. The successes and reversals of this mission are on record.

Prynn is back to the cool, unresponsive attitude of months ago, which Vaughn is quite aware of. He himself is still

broken up about the death of Ruriko and its effect on his relationship with Prynn, but is walling it up behind detached professionalism. He is long past ready to go home.

TENMEI
Approaching the wormhole,
Commander.

VAUGHN
Take us in.

4 **EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT**

The Gamma entrance of the wormhole bursts into explosive colour, and the *Defiant* dives in. Then the big blue flower closes up behind them.

5 **INSIDE THE WORMHOLE**

Inside the wormhole, there is the hint of a half-glimpsed pair of dark EYES amongst the background of the spatial effects. As the *Defiant* slips smoothly between the currents and eddies, the eyes turn to watch its progress.

6 **INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE**

Watching the beautiful display on the screen, Vaughn is completely unmoved. All emotion is dead. Tapping a panel:

VAUGHN
Engineering. Update on the warp
core diagnostic, Lieutenant.

NOG's response is a little breathless, as if he was just laughing. The last moments of JAKE's giggle can be heard.

NOG (comm)
The initial specs are filed in the
computer, sir. I already... ah,
everything is in proper condition,
though we'll want to run a more
extensive diagnostic once we -

Nog already told Vaughn all this, so he is a little confused to be repeating himself.

As Vaughn listens, he too realises his mistake, and is embarrassed, but of course he would never admit it. He snaps at Nog instead.

VAUGHN

Fine.

He goes back to watching Prynn, who is not looking at him.

FLASHBACK

Vaughn raises his phaser and SHOTS the Borgified Ruriko.

BACK TO SCENE

Vaughn closes his eyes and grits his teeth against the memory. His guilt is enormous, crippling.

On the screen, the crew sees the wormhole's Alpha terminus open, revealing dark star-speckled space. The ship passes through into normal space.

SHAR

Entering the Alpha Quadrant...

(sudden shock)

Commander!

Vaughn looks up sharply at Shar's tone and sees...

7 EXT. DEFIANT

...A fleet of Cardassian *Galor*-class warships waiting for them at the mouth of the wormhole, distinctly threatening. With Deep Space Nine tantalisingly out of reach, and Bajor further away, the space between is blocked with vessels.

8 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

The crew reacts to this with shock, surprise and confusion.

SHAR

There are four Cardassian *Galor*-class warships holding position ten-thousand metres from the wormhole's event horizon. Seven more between us and the station.

Sensors are showing at least nine others scattered throughout the system. Three of those are in orbit of Bajor.

As Vaughn tries to absorb that - is it a surprise invasion? a new occupation? - Shar becomes even more agitated.

SHAR

They've just armed, Commander. All of them.

On Vaughn's reaction...

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

9 EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT

The *Defiant* holds position in space, where we left it, with four Cardassian warships bearing down upon it.

10 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN ENGINEERING

Nog and Jake Sisko are sat together in a quiet corner of engineering, chatting happily, laughing, telling tales and generally enjoying each other's company.

JAKE

...So there we were, flying away from Idran in the Tosk's ship, and it started to break down again, and you know me, I know nothing about how to fix a ship. I was sure we were all gonna blow up and get vaporised and the whole thing would end up a big waste of time. But then this Dominion ship turned up out of nowhere and I was convinced they were gonna kill us. But once Weyoun saw who it was he'd saved, he couldn't have been nicer. I guess they really are sticking to that peace treaty.

NOG

Well, we'll be back at the station in just a few minutes, and then you can go see Captain Yates. She missed you a lot. But I told her you were okay. I knew it.

JAKE

How?

NOG

Just did. I wish you'd told me, though. Where you were going.

JAKE

Me too. It was stupid, running off without saying anything. And I am sorry. If it's any consolation, you were the only one I seriously considered telling.

Nog's combadge chirps.

VAUGHN (comm)

Nog, get to the bridge. Have your people standing by, and have someone secure the passengers in quarters. We've got a situation.

NOG

(eyes wide)

Acknowledged.

JAKE

I'll do it. I know the drill.

Instantly in action, they both get up and head to the door.

11 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

Nog enters the bridge to see the crew at action stations, and the view of the hostile Cardassian ships on the screen. BASHIR and DAX are now there too. Vaughn is in serious business mode. As Nog moves to his engineering console...

BOWERS

...unable to contact the station. The Cardassians are jamming all frequencies. We're being hailed! It's the *Trager*, sir. Gul Akellen Macet in command.

VAUGHN

On screen.

MACET's face appears; Nog and Dax both suppress a sneer.

MACET (screen)

Commander Vaughn. Welcome home.

VAUGHN

Gul Macet. Your presence here is unexpected. Not to mention quite provocative. Care to explain?

MACET (screen)

It's quite simple, Commander. We've been awaiting the *Defiant's* return for several days now.

VAUGHN

How thoughtful. But the last time I checked, the Cardassian military - or what's left of it - had no authority in this system. And yet here you are, with what can only be considered an occupation force.

MACET (screen)

I have the *Defiant* surrounded and targeted, Commander. You will surrender your ship to me, or I will destroy it.

VAUGHN

I don't respond well to threats on the best of days. So it's only fair for me to warn you that this isn't the best of days. I want to speak to Colonel Kira.

MACET (screen)

That will not be possible. You are trying my patience, Commander.

Vaughn sags back into his seat defeated, as if giving up. He is fed up of fighting - there is no fight left in him. Nog sees the reaction, and is shocked and worried by it.

VAUGHN

Will you guarantee the safety of my crew?

MACET (screen)

If they cooperate fully.

VAUGHN

Give me time to prepare them.

MACET (screen)

One minute.

The screen goes blank. Immediately, Vaughn snaps back into action. Nog grins as he realises the defeat was all an act.

VAUGHN

Alright. The way I see it, we get clear under cloak and try to contact Starfleet, but we do it making a run past the station, try to get as much intelligence as possible. Dax?

DAX

I agree. We can't let them take the *Defiant*.

VAUGHN

Then let's do this. Ensign, we'll need you at the top of your game.

Prynn nods a resolute acknowledgment and turns to her helm.

12 EXT. DEFIANT

Surrounded by Cardassian ships, the *Defiant* ripples and disappears, the last moment of visibility showing it darting off away from the Cardassians at full impulse.

13 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

Lights low, stealth mode. On screen, the starfield SWERVES as the ship banks sharply. The station grows nearer, but there are still many Cardassian ships to get past first. They are starting to react, moving into attack formations.

At her helm, Tenmei is in The Zone. She works the console almost without thinking about it. It's instinct for her.

SHAR

They're sweeping - antiproton, tachyon and chroniton. The *Trager*

has Dominion sensors, sir - the cloak may not hide us for long.

NOG

I knew that Macet was no good.
He's no better than his cousin.

BOWERS

Cardassian ships spreading into a defensive pattern.

VAUGHN

Dax, see if you can boost our signal to the station. Have a text ready to send.

BOWERS

They're hailing again.

VAUGHN

ch'Thane, feed whatever you've got on the sweeps to navigation.
Tenmei, pick us a hole.

Prynn smiles to herself, already knowing where she will go. On screen, a trio of Cardassian ships grow closer until their image DARTS sideways as the *Defiant* twists past them.

Getting closer to the station, we can see the USS *Gryphon* docked, battle-damaged, as well as Cyl's Trill transport. Other Cardassian ships swoop in to block their way.

VAUGHN

Tenmei -

TENMEI

There's a hole. I can get through.

VAUGHN

Then do it.

14 **EXT. DEFIANT**

Almost on top of the station, the Cardassian ships suddenly change their formation, swooping around and surrounding what appears to be an empty area.

15 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

Prynn struggles to redirect the ship, hissing frustration.

SHAR

Detecting EMP generator readings.
All three cruisers have fixed
their disruptors on the *Defiant*.

BOWERS

Sir, signal from the station. It's
Colonel Kira. She's ordering us to
stand down.

VAUGHN

Cut the engines, full stop.

Prynn does, annoyed that her escape plan didn't work out.

VAUGHN

What the hell's going on? Bowers,
are you sure it's the colonel?

BOWERS

Voiceprint confirmed, sir. The
Cardassians opened a comm window.

Vaughn stands, ready for an explanation. Dax comes to his
side, Bashir to hers. Everyone turns to the screen.

VAUGHN

Drop cloak and put her on screen.

The bridge lights return to normal, and the view screen
image changes. KIRA is standing at the central Ops table,
with Admiral AKAAR next to her, dwarfing her.

VAUGHN

Colonel? Admiral? I hope you'll
pardon my bluntness, but -

AKAAR (screen)

Commander. Who is your daughter
named for?

VAUGHN

Excuse me?

AKAAR (screen)

Answer the question, Commander.

VAUGHN

T'Prynn of Vulcan.

AKAAR (screen)

And have you spoken with T'Prynn since becoming first officer of Deep Space Nine?

VAUGHN

You know perfectly well T'Prynn died almost thirty years ago.

AKAAR (screen)

Yes, at Raknal Five.

VAUGHN

(increasingly
annoyed)

No, during a mission against renegade Ktarians. T'Prynn was never at Raknal.

That appears to finally satisfy Akaar, who turns to Kira.

KIRA (screen)

Doctor, I don't think I've ever thanked you properly for the care you gave me during my pregnancy.

BASHIR

(bemused)

You're, ah, very welcome, Colonel.

KIRA (screen)

That was your first Bajoran delivery, wasn't it?

Bashir folds his arms haughtily - he knows the nature of the game now, if not the reason they're playing.

BASHIR

I didn't deliver Kirayoshi,
Colonel. He was delivered by a
Bajoran midwife, Y'Pora, in some
spare quarters made up like a
traditional Bajoran birthing room.

On the screen, Kira subtly nods to Akaar.

AKAAR (screen)

Doctor, please step directly
behind Lieutenant Dax.

Confused, Bashir does. The whole bridge watches them...

AKAAR (screen)

Examine the back of her neck,
please. Feel the skin.

Vaughn's head SNAPS around, making eye contact with Akaar
via the screen. All of a sudden, he knows what is going on
here. Akaar's stern look warns him not to say anything yet.

BASHIR

I don't see anything.

AKAAR (screen)

Be absolutely certain, Doctor.

Bashir's fingers gently brush the back of Dax's neck. They
are both tense, not knowing why they are doing this.

BASHIR

There's nothing unusual about
Lieutenant Dax's neck, Admiral.

On the screen, Kira and Akaar both seem to relax.

KIRA (screen)

Thank you, Doctor. Sorry about the
precautions, but we had to be
sure. Welcome home, to all of you.

VAUGHN

You'll need to examine the rest of
the crew.

KIRA (screen)
Once you dock, yes. Take port one.
The Cardassians will be handling
the examinations.

VAUGHN
That's interesting. I take it we
can expect a briefing?

KIRA (screen)
Definitely. Tell the crew not to
resist. I'll explain when I can.

Kira's face disappears, replaced immediately by Macet.

MACET (screen)
Well played, Commander. I have
ordered my ships to stand down.
You may dock at will.

He disappears, replaced by an image of the station. Even
though they are home, the crew do not feel very welcome.

16 INT. DS9 - DOCKING RING CORRIDOR

The senior crew are lined up in the airlock. Vaughn is at
the head of the queue, followed by Dax, Bashir, Bowers,
Shar, Tenmei. Nog stands with Jake, OPAKA and WEX in the
next group, and more officers lining up back into the ship.

Cardassian medics, supported by armed Cardassian military,
scan each person and physically inspect their necks before
allowing them out of the airlock and into the corridor.

Vaughn allows the inspection with dignity. The others
follow his example, though still not understanding why.
Gradually, they move through the scans without incident.

Once out into the corridor, Jake sidles up to Wex, feeling
responsible for bringing the strange alien girl into this.
Her big black eyes are watchful of everything.

JAKE
So... how do you like the Alpha
Quadrant so far?

WEX

It is... different.

JAKE

Once this is all fixed, you'll be able to go to Bajor, with Opaka. And me, probably. I owe Kasidy a visit. She must be almost ready to have the baby by now.

But Wex is not paying attention - she is staring down the corridor. Jake turns to see what has grabbed her attention, and sees Kira looking back at him with astonishment.

KIRA

(whisper)

Jake?

Jake grins himself, and the two half-run into a big hug. She pulls back again to stare at him in happy disbelief. This is a wonderful surprise for her in a very bad time.

JAKE

Hi, Nerys.

KIRA

Where - how did they - oh, it's so good to see you, you have no idea.

(lower)

You had me so worried, Jake. And Kasidy, and your grandfather... Jake, what happened?

JAKE

I had to give someone a ride.

He turns, and directs Kira's attention further down the corridor. There is Opaka. Kira pales, letting out a short LAUGH that is all she can manage through the surprise.

Opaka steps towards Kira, and they embrace. Jake, Vaughn, Dax and the others give them their space.

KIRA

Oh... oh thank the Prophets.

Opaka steps back, looks closely at Kira. She sees the stress, notices the lack of earring. But she smiles.

OPAKA

I am happy to see you again, Kira, and I hope we'll have a chance to talk soon. But you obviously have business of some urgency to attend to. And I should like to rest a while. Perhaps we can meet later?

Amid the tension and unpleasantness, Opaka is calm and tranquil and soothing. Kira drinks in the sight of her, lost for what to say at this miracle, then catches herself.

KIRA

Yes, of course.

Kira straightens and tries to drag herself back to business after two of the biggest surprises of her life.

KIRA

Jake, I wish I could explain -

JAKE

Hey, remember who you're talking to. You'll tell me about it when you can.

He reaches out to squeeze her hand in friendship. She nods, then turns to lead the group back down the corridor. As they move off, Jake eyes their armed Cardassian escorts, not quite as sanguine as he would like to pretend.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

17 EXT. DEEP SPACE NINE

The *Defiant* is now docked on the docking ring. The *Trager* has pulled onto an upper pylon, next to the *Gryphon*. Other Cardassian ships are still hovering ominously nearby.

18 INT. DS9 - WARDROOM

Admiral Akaar, General CYL, Councillor VRETHA and Doctor GIRANI are present, tensely awaiting the others. The door opens and Kira leads the apprehensive *Defiant* party in - Vaughn, Dax, Bashir, Nog, Shar, Bowers.

KIRA

Please, everyone, take a seat.

As they do so, RO LAREN and Macet catch up and enter. Macet nods respectfully to Kira before taking his seat. Ro smiles warmly at Shar and takes a seat next to him.

Shar and his mother, however, do not acknowledge each other as they both sit. Bowers and Bashir recognise General Cyl with confusion - what has he got to do with this?

Kira takes the head of the crowded table. She is in charge here. She takes a deep breath, and begins.

KIRA

Thank you all for coming. I think you all know each other already, although some of you may not have met General Taulin Cyl of Trill Planetary Security.

Dax's face pales at Kira's introduction - she knows the Cyl symbiont and is amazed to see him here. Bashir notices her surprise. Cyl is not surprised to see Dax, however. He nods smartly to her but does not speak - now is not the time.

DAX

(under breath)

Cyl...

KIRA

The situation is this. Ten days ago, First Minister Shakaar Edon was assassinated here on the station, just as he was about to sign Bajor into the Federation. The assassin was a member of the Trill Ambassador's entourage, a man named Hiziki Gard.

Reactions. Bashir: empathy for Kira. Vaughn: passive acceptance. Shar, Nog, Bowers: surprise, but no personal connection. Dax: utter horror. She knows Gard as well.

KIRA

With Taran'atar's help, Lieutenant Ro tracked Gard down, and between his interrogation and the autopsy data, we have a motive. Shakaar had been taken over by a parasitic alien. He was no longer Shakaar Edon, and hadn't been for months.

Dax is shaken all over again - the parasites. She looks to Cyl, who has been watching for her reaction.

FLASHBACK - 8x05 "REFLECTIONS"

-- The alien creature leaps out of its frozen lair and smashes through Audrid Dax's husband's spacesuit.

-- The husband screaming incoherently and chasing the terrified Audrid through the caves.

AUDRID

(v.o. from 8x19)

You've known about what's coming for the past century, Dax.

BACK TO SCENE

The rest of the meeting carries on as Dax absorbs the repeated shocks. Bashir notices her reaction with worry.

KIRA

We know these creatures have a limited group consciousness, but are capable of individual action. Unjoined, they are small and mobile, and use a bio-chemistry similar to that of a Trill symbiont to control their hosts.

VAUGHN

The Starfleet conspiracy.

Akaar nods solemnly. By their looks, the other *Defiant* crew have no idea what Vaughn and Akaar are talking about.

AKAAR

We've been re-evaluating the data from the parasites' last incursion twelve years ago, when they attempted to infiltrate Starfleet Command. Knowing what we do now, we can see that their redeployment of forces at that time was putting a great deal of firepower within striking distance of Trill.

KIRA

We believe this latest incursion was initiated with the same goal. Why they're so determined to destroy Trill, we do not yet know.

Kira sends a pointed glance at Cyl - she knows he knows more than he is telling. Cyl is blank, giving away nothing.

KIRA

General Cyl claims to represent a group who have been preparing for the parasite threat for some time. Also, that they only began to suspect Minister Shakaar after it was already too late to save him. For the moment, we are accepting the general's word that the assassination was unavoidable.

Kira's tone and glance make it clear she accepts nothing of the sort. Cyl clears his throat and prepares to speak.

CYL

Trill first became aware of the parasites during a joint Trill-Starfleet scientific expedition nearly a century ago. That venture resulted in several deaths.

Cyl looks Dax right in the eye - she stares back.

FLASHBACK - 8x05 "REFLECTIONS"

The screaming, parasite-possessed Trill man is shot down from behind by a phaser, and collapses to the cave floor.

FLASH

On the doorstep of her home, an older and tearful AUDRID DAX reaches out to tentatively hug an equally distraught younger Trill woman - her daughter, NEEMA.

BACK TO SCENE

CYL

Most files from that time have been lost. Though there does seem to be some genetic similarity to the Trill symbionts, we have no explanation for it. I was sent to investigate on Trill's behalf and assist in any way I can.

Neither Kira nor Ro believe for a second that that is all he knows. He has said everything he is going to, though.

RO

Our scans have uncovered six other cases of infection on the station. Subduing them was extremely difficult. The parasites' ability to stimulate the adrenal glands and neutralise the pain receptors means that their hosts become unnaturally strong and resistant

to injury. But all six are now in medical stasis.

GIRANI

The only visible sign of infection is a small blue gill on the back of the neck.

Doctor Girani presses a button that brings up an IMAGE on the wardroom screens of the small blue gill in question.

GIRANI

Beyond that, symptoms include a marked change in personality, possibly due to a lack of access to the host's long-term memory. As the colonel said, while the parasites can act individually, there's reason to believe that they prefer to operate in hives or colonies, with one central creature controlling the actions of those around it - a mother parasite, if you will. She breeds a colony within her host and sends them out to take over others. There seems to be some limited telepathy involved in how she communicates with her brood.

RO

The presence of so many soldier parasites on the station strongly suggests there's a mother out there. We haven't found her yet.

Nog shudders at the horrible thought. Shar is impassive, intrigued by the science. Dax is pale with revulsion. Bashir is already caught up in the mystery, his brain busy working over all the facts.

BASHIR

Have you made any attempts to remove the parasites surgically?

GIRANI

We've been assured that to do so would kill the host. But we know from Starfleet records that if the mother is killed, the soldier parasites lose their control and can be easily removed. Whoever hosts the mother, though, is beyond saving. The physical damage is simply too great.

RO

Seven days ago, another parasite attempted to take control of Gul Macet. For some reason, it was unable to maintain its hold. Preliminary evidence suggests that Cardassians may be somehow immune to infection.

VAUGHN

Which is why they're taking point in security procedures.

AKAAR

Indeed. It may also be why Shakaar was reluctant to forge ties with Cardassia during his last days.

On Kira as she remembers:

FLASHBACK - 8x21 "LESSER EVIL"

Parasite-Montenegro taunts Kira in *Gryphon's* engineering.

MONTENEGRO

The Cardassians? A more useless species of humanoids we've yet to encounter.

BACK TO SCENE

VAUGHN

Who else knows about this?

AKAAR

Very few. We attempted to contact *Defiant*, but when we learned the subspace relay had gone dark, we had to prepare for the possibility that one or more persons aboard the ship had been infected prior to its departure, and that it would return as an enemy vessel.

VAUGHN

(to Macet)

No hard feelings, I hope.

Macet inclines his head but does not respond.

KIRA

Unfortunately, Shakaar had been under this parasite's control ever since his official tour of Federation worlds.

FLASHBACK - 8x06 "FALLOUT"

Shakaar harangues Kira over the comm screen in her office.

SHAKAAR (screen)

Nothing can be allowed to interfere with Bajor's admission to the Federation. Everything we've been working towards is coming to a head.

FLASHBACK - 8x16 "BABY STEPS"

Shakaar discusses Federation membership with Kira.

SHAKAAR

I've been working on this issue for months. Everything is proceeding exactly as I'd hoped.

BACK TO SCENE

KIRA (cont)

Which means he had months of unrestricted movement around Bajor

to infect anyone he wanted. With the generous assistance of the Cardassian military -

(nod to Macet)

- we've instituted a system-wide quarantine. Except for the people in this room and certain other key personnel, the general populace believes these security measures are related only to Shakaar's assassination. The very nature of the threat means we don't know who can be trusted. So it's vital that the truth doesn't get out.

AKAAR

We're doing everything we can to locate anyone Shakaar came into contact with, on Bajor or on the station, since his return from Federation space. Several search-and-screen teams are working the surface under General Lenaris's supervision. Understandably, however, the assassination of their First Minister followed by the appearance of armed Cardassians on their streets is leading to substantial unrest among the Bajoran population.

KIRA

On the political front, Bajor's membership in the Federation is currently...

(massive euphemism)

... on hold. Minister Asarem is trying to keep everyone calm. But the net result is that we're getting a lot of resistance. There've been three... incidents on the Promenade already.

DAX

(sharply)

What about Gard?

RO

He still refuses to talk, beyond what he's already told us.

Ro gives another suspicious glance to Cyl. Gard talks to him, she'd bet.

KIRA

Here's where I think we should go from here. Commander Vaughn, I'd like you to assist General Lenaris and coordinate detection teams. Perhaps a Starfleet presence will smooth things along. Bowers, go with the commander.

Vaughn and Bowers quietly nod their assent.

KIRA

Doctor Bashir, you will take over the medical research into the parasite-host relationship. Doctor Girani will continue to assist and manage the Infirmary.

BASHIR

I'd like to start by looking into the Cardassian immunity.

KIRA

Fine. I'll make sure you have a few volunteers standing by. Nog, see if there's anything you can do with the *Defiant's* sensors - maybe we can create a long-range scan. Shar, coordinate between the rest and keep everyone apprised of new information. Dax, perhaps you and the general could try talking to Gard again. He told Lieutenant Ro he interacted with one of your past hosts. In any case, you'll want to look into any historical connection between the parasites and the symbionts.

Dax nods, but she is not happy to remake this acquaintance. Bashir and Ro both see her reluctance, and wonder why.

KIRA

We're all going to have to work together closely on this. And we need to contain this information for as long as we can. Tell your people only what they need to know. It will get out, but even a day might make a difference.

(sigh)

Okay, dismissed.

Everyone stands up, all exhausted and more than a bit stunned at the sudden crisis that has fallen in their laps.

Nog and Shar confer in one corner of the room. Vaughn, Bowers and Akaar do the same. Cyl and Dax edgily approach each other. Specifically not looking at Shar, zh'Thane joins Kira and Macet in talking to Bashir and Girani.

Standing up, Ro sees all these groups and sadly realises she has no-one she needs to talk to right now. She is a bit overwhelmed, and she partly still blames herself for the whole situation. She decides she needs to get back to work and do what she can to fix this situation.

Keeping her head down as no-one pays her any attention, she threads her way out of the room.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

19 INT. DS9 - SHAR'S QUARTERS

The door opens, and Shar and his *zhavey* enter stiffly.

Inside, DIZHEI and ANICHENT wait for him, in their mourning robes, looking gaunt and unfed. They both rise and step towards him, and grab him in an embrace. He melts into them, his grief coming out at last.

SHAR

I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry that
she's gone.

ANICHENT

As are we, Thirishar.

DIZHEI

She couldn't wait any longer. She
was afraid you would stay away. Or
that you wouldn't go with us when
you did return.

VRETHA

With reason. His responsibilities
to Starfleet will keep him here.

SHAR

Only for a short time.

DIZHEI

When? When, exactly?

SHAR

I... don't know. A matter of days.
Perhaps a few weeks at most.

Dizhei turns to Anichent, the anger coming through now.

DIZHEI

You see? *Zhadi* was right. Even
after what's happened. Even now.

(back to Shar)

Do you care that we wait on your decision? On your insistence on chasing wishes and theories? That the waiting drove Thriss to her death? What is there to decide, if you love us as you say?

SHAR

But I may have found something. I encountered a people called the Yrythny, their unusual genetics may help us -

ANICHENT

That's wonderful, Shar. I'm proud of you.

And he genuinely is. But even through his drugged sadness, the accusation is clear. Was it worth Thriss's life?

VRETHA

I've spoken to the clan elders. They've found three *zhen* who appear to be suitable. And two *chan* who would be willing to step in, if you still insist on...

Shar's face drops - they are ready to replace him. Vretha is not angry with him anymore, just tired and resigned.

VRETHA

Are you so surprised? You push so hard, Thirishar, and you've made it so very clear you will continue to resist... would you have your mates suffer the consequences?

(sad sigh)

Perhaps I've failed to teach you properly. But I've done what I can. It is for the three of you to decide now.

Vretha turns and walks out of the room. Shar turns to his bondmates in sadness, desperation for them to understand.

ANICHENT

Shar... *ch'te*... you could come home with us, now. We love you. We could still make it work.

How can he, now? Thriss is dead, Anichent and Dizhei blame him. He blames himself. He reaches out to take a spare mourning robe that is laid out for him, and heads into the bedroom, into the blue glow of Thriss's stasis unit.

20 INT. DS9 - QUARK'S BAR

QUARK stands behind his bar, gazing miserably at the meagre crowd. Barely a half-dozen people in - all Starfleet busy wolfing down food in a quiet, rushed and tense way. Quark brightens slightly as Ro enters and heads towards him.

QUARK

Lieutenant. How nice of you to drop by. Truly an honour.

RO

Gimme a break, Quark. You know I've been busy.

QUARK

Busy at a job you're about to quit. And excuse me, but didn't you already catch the charming Mister Gard?

RO

I already told you, Quark. There's a conspiracy to keep Bajor out of the Federation. Gard was only one of them. We have to look for more.

QUARK

So you bring in Cardassians? Hey, Bajor's First Minister has been assassinated! Let's invite Bajor's former oppressors to help out!

RO

Wasn't my decision. What are people saying, anyway?

QUARK

(shrug)

What you'd expect. The Cardassians are responsible, they brought back the Orbs as a distraction. Hiziki Gard is a spy for the Dominion, they want to start another war. Starfleet is just putting on a big show to cover up their bumbling incompetence for letting Shakaar -

(oops)

Sorry.

RO

It's alright. I think that's why I've been working so hard. To try to make up for it.

QUARK

Laren, when this is all over... are you still interested in the two of us, ah, working together?

RO

I've been thinking about that. And I think... we should both keep thinking about it. Or at least I should. There's too much going on right now for me to give your proposal the time it deserves.

QUARK

(smirk)

I didn't propose.

RO

The proposed transaction, then. Is that alright?

QUARK

I... yes, that's alright.

Quark looks up with surprise and sees Nog at the threshold, chatting to Wex. As Nog heads into the bar, Wex turns and gives Quark a cold glare, then turns and walks away.

NOG

Uncle! How have you been?

QUARK

Terrible, as if you couldn't tell. Thanks to the Federation and their grand plans. Who was that girl? What were you laughing about? Have you brought me anything?

NOG

Nice to see you too, Uncle.

RO

(getting up)

I'll leave you two to catch up.

QUARK

You don't have to. You just got here. I'll - I'll buy you a drink.

Nog gasps aloud. Ro smiles indulgently.

RO

I'd like to, but I've got about a thousand things to do. I'm glad we talked. Welcome back, Nog.

She walks away. Quark watches her wiggle. Nog is amazed.

NOG

I had no idea it had gotten so serious. Even Grilka had to pay for her own bloodwine.

QUARK

Have you seen how much a Klingon can drink?

21 INT. DS9 - HABITAT RING CORRIDOR

Dax and Bashir walk along slowly, not touching the other, as Dax carefully relates her tale. Bashir is confused...

BASHIR

He's your daughter?

DAX

Audrid Dax was married to another
joined Trill, Jayvin Vod. Had two
children, Neema and Gran. Neema
was joined to the Cyl symbiont.

BASHIR

Didn't you tell me that Neema and
Audrid were estranged for a while?

DAX

Yes... That mission Cyl mentioned,
the scientific expedition. That
was me. Well, Audrid.

22 EXT. SPACE - COMET

An icy comet tumbles through space. An old Constitution-
class starship approaches in the distance.

DAX (v.o.)

Starfleet detected readings coming
from a passing comet that matched
a certain percentage of Trill.
Stardate twelve... something.

A shuttlecraft launches from the starship and heads towards
the comet, eventually landing on a flattish surface.

DAX (v.o.)

They didn't know about the
symbionts then, but we recognised
the readings, and we wondered if
we might finally get some answers
about how the symbiont-host link
evolved, millennia ago.

Six mid-TOS-era space-suited bodies emerge from the ship
and make their way into a crevice in the rocky surface.
Closer, we can see that one is Audrid Dax, exchanging
excited looks with another Trill male, JAYVIN VOD.

DAX (v.o.)

Audrid was on the Trill Symbiosis
Commission and a specialist in

symbiont biology, Jayvin was a professor of xenobiology, so we were the logical choices to join the landing party.

23 INT. DS9 - HABITAT RING CORRIDOR

Dax shivers quietly to herself as she remembers.

DAX

Even in the enviro-suits, it was cold. Cold and dark and airless.

24 INT. COMET - CAVE SET

The six figures tread through icy-cold channels in the rock, lit by threads of luminous sickly green ice. A charge seems to pass through the ice. Dax and Vod look excited.

DAX (v.o.)

Jayvin and I detected a symbiont pulse. An electrical flash like how the symbionts communicate with each other in the pools.

25 INT. DS9 - HABITAT RING CORRIDOR

BASHIR

It was a parasite, wasn't it?

DAX

(nods solemnly)

We found a pool, like the ones at Mak'ala, only smaller, and filled with that green ice.

26 INT. COMET - CAVE SET

As the other space-suited figures watch, Jayvin leans over to look into a bowl-like formation filled with the sickly green ice. A small indistinct shape is under the surface.

Suddenly, the shape BURSTS out of the ice and breaks through Jayvin's faceplate. He JERKS back, then turns, and his face is filled with a manic grin and wild eyes.

DAX (v.o.)
In a matter of seconds, he wasn't
Jayvin anymore.

Jayvin moves quickly, grabs a phaser off a Starfleet man and shoots three of them down in an instant. As he aims at the last Starfleet officer, Audrid is already running away.

27 INT. DS9 - HABITAT RING CORRIDOR

Dax is trembling, lost in memory while walking.

DAX
It came after me, speaking to me
in Jayvin's voice, saying terrible
things, horrible... This thing,
this monster ripping him to
pieces, finding the anger and the
pain in each host's life and using
that rage to express itself.

BASHIR
What did it say?

DAX
That it was coming.

28 INT. COMET - CAVE SET

Audrid clammers through the passages, CRYING and desperate. She comes to a dead end in the caves and turns, scared and horrified as the possessed Jayvin comes into view.

DAX (v.o.)
That it was leading the way for
its species, to find us, to find
Trill... it called us 'the weak
ones.' Finally, it cornered me.
But before it could act, Captain
Pike showed up and knocked it out.

A phaser shot hits Jayvin from behind and he falls forward, revealing another figure in a space suit.

29 EXT. SPACE

The Constitution-class ship travels at high warp.

DAX (v.o.)

We managed to get Jayvin's body back to the ship. We warped for Trill immediately.

30 INT. DS9 - HABITAT RING CORRIDOR

Still walking.

DAX

When we got home there was a transplant team standing by. The symbiosis between Jayvin and Vod was lost, both were dying... but knowing what I'd seen and heard on that comet, I couldn't let Vod be transplanted. I let it die.

(pause)

They sent ships to destroy the comet, disposed of the parasite and Vod. I thought they'd want to investigate, look into the genetic connection, but I was wrong. We had to keep our precious secrets. They buried it, and I went along.

BASHIR

What about Cyl?

DAX

Right, that was the point of the story to begin with, wasn't it? I told the children their father had been killed, but the Vod symbiont was still living. Thought it would help. But Neema found out. She discovered Vod had been allowed to die, at my recommendation.

BASHIR

And that's why you fell out.

DAX

Yes. We didn't talk for something like eight years, during which time Neema was joined to Cyl. But when I retired - when Audrid retired, she wrote Neema a letter.

FLASHBACK

The older Audrid Dax reaches out to hug her daughter.

DAX (v.o.)
She's the only one Dax ever told.

BACK TO SCENE

Bashir absorbs all of this new information about the woman he loves. There's always something new. Tentatively...

BASHIR
May I ask... how do you know Gard?

Dax is stern and uncomfortable as she remembers...

FLASHBACK - 8x05 "REFLECTIONS"

JORAN DAX has his arm hooked around a woman's neck and a jagged piece of glass held to her throat as an angry Trill policeman points a weapon on him and shouts to let her go. The policeman fires the gun, hitting Joran.

BACK TO SCENE

DAX
He killed me.

On Bashir's reaction to that...

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

31 INT. GUEST QUARTERS

Opaka sits on the low couch, flicking through pages on the portable computer screen - amazed, overwhelmed and dismayed by all the things that have been going on in her absence.

The door CHIME signals. Opaka stretches her old bones and goes to the door. She OPENS it, and Kira stands there - anxious, tired, covering it with a polite smile. Opaka guides her inside, sad to see her in this condition.

OPAKA

You look well, Colonel. Tired, but well.

KIRA

Thank you, Kai.

OPAKA

I am no Kai. Call me Sulan. If I may call you Nerys?

KIRA

Of course. It's just... I'm so happy to see you, Sulan. And so soon after...

(beat)

But so much has happened while you've been away, I'm not sure where to start.

OPAKA

Jake was kind enough to fill me in on most of it. Vedek Capril visited me, and I have read some of the station's reports. I know about B'Hala, and the Reckoning, about Winn and Bareil, about the Emissary's path, and about Dukat.

(sad chuckle)

Our world has had a time of it.

KIRA

There's more...

Kira drifts off, unsure how to begin. Opaka rescues her.

OPAKA

I was very sorry to hear about Shakaar. He walks with the Prophets, I'm sure.

KIRA

(not cheered)

I'm certain he does.

OPAKA

Capril talked about a book, too. Thousands of years old. He seems to believe it is dangerous.

KIRA

It has caused problems. There's a small but growing community who believe the book offers a choice, a different kind of spirituality.

OPAKA

What do you think, Nerys? Do you think this book is heresy?

Opaka's soothing, unjudgmental acceptance is just what Kira needs. The stress and confusion comes like a dam breaking.

KIRA

I don't know, Kai. I thought it was, at first. Then the Assembly tried to have it destroyed, and I... I gave it to the people. I really believed it was no threat, that our faith was stronger, and I was so furious with Yevir...

(catches breath)

I was Attainted for it. I'm not welcome in the shrine, forbidden to share the faith with anyone, and now there's so much going wrong and I feel so alone...

Overcome with emotion, Kira breaks into quiet SOBS. Opaka holds her, lets her get it out. Eventually Kira quiets and falls asleep from sheer exhaustion in Opaka's arms.

Opaka lays her down carefully on the couch, finds a blanket to cover her with, and sits watching her sleep, feeling very sorry for everything Kira has gone through.

32 EXT. DEEP SPACE NINE

Still tense and oppressive, but now with a note of hope for the new morning.

33 INT. DS9 - PROMENADE

Dax stands outside the door to the security office. She watches the small groups of people walking the Promenade, looking tense and worried. The security presence is unusually high - Bajoran, Starfleet and Cardassian.

A turbolift opens and Taulin Cyl emerges, heading straight for Dax with a professional smile.

34 INT. DS9 - SECURITY OFFICE (CONTINUOUS)

No-one is behind the desk as Dax and Cyl enter. The wall screens show GARD in a cell, with armed security keeping an eye on him. They watch the screens in silence for a moment. It is awkward - neither is sure what to talk about.

CYL

You were trained as a
psychologist? And before that, you
were in the sciences, I gather.
How many hosts since Audrid?

DAX

Five. Jadzia Dax was the science
officer here, she was before me.
Before her there was Curzon, he
was a diplomat, of a sort -

CYL

Yes, I know about Curzon.

DAX

Yeah, a lot of people know about Curzon. Before him there was a musician, briefly, and a test pilot. What about you?

CYL

Three, since Neema. A professor in forensic science, and a xenobiologist. And as you know, I'm in the military now.

DAX

Neema... did she do well?

CYL

She lived to be very old and very wise. Two children - neither joined, but she was very proud of them. She missed Audrid for the rest of her days. She also spent a lot of time trying to research the parasite Audrid told her about. As did Reck, and Elista... and me. We've never stopped looking. Now my position with planetary security makes it easy to spot suspicious activity - such as that involving your old friend Verad.

DAX

Yes, Julian told me you were instrumental in stopping him...

She drifts off as a horrible thought occurs to her.

FLASHBACK - 8x10 "DIVIDED WE FALL"

-- Verad is holding Dax prisoner at his basecamp.

VERAD

Do you know what they really are, Ezri? They're vampires, taking us all over one by one.

-- Later, as the real personality breaks through.

VERAD

Don't you understand, I'm trying to help! They're winning, and I have to stop them!

BACK TO SCENE

DAX

My gods, Verad... he knew.

CYL

He didn't just know, Dax. He was one of them. How it managed to get all the way to Trill undetected we don't yet know...

DAX

He tried to kill the whole planet with that damned drug of his!

CYL

That damned drug saved your life, Dax. How else do you think he was able to inform Kahn of the cure?

FLASHBACK - 810 "DIVIDED WE FALL"

-- Dax recounts to Bashir in their quarters.

DAX

There's a lot of things don't add up. It's like he was two different people.

BACK TO SCENE

DAX

(realising)

He'd taken the drug himself.

CYL

And that's why he retained enough control of himself to beg me to kill him.

DAX

You...

She is stunned at his cold matter-of-factness.

DAX

Gard... did you send him to kill
Shakaar?

CYL

No. Once he'd ascertained that our
suspicions were correct, he made
that decision himself.

DAX

But you support that decision.

CYL

Don't you? You know what they're
capable of, Dax.

Dax is ashamed to agree with him, but she does anyway. She
looks at the image of Gard on the screen, in his cell.

DAX

What will happen to him?

CYL

President Maz has already promised
full cooperation with the Bajoran
government. Ambassador Gandres
refuses to lobby for leniency.

DAX

So Gard's left taking the fall.

Cyl doesn't respond.

35 INT. DS9 - SECURITY CELLS

Dax and Cyl walk solemnly into the cell area. Dax nods to
the security people, who quietly file out of the room. Dax
and Cyl approach Gard, who is lying on the cell's bed.

Seeing them, Gard stands up, nodding politely to his new
visitors. Dax and Cyl grab seats - Gard sits back down too.

DAX

I remember you.

GARD

You remember Verjyl Gard. My symbiont has a very long history of, ah... seeking out criminal elements in Trill society.

CYL

Gard has never done anything else.

GARD

How much do you know?

DAX

All of it, I think. You've been watching for the parasites, they finally showed up, you came here to deal with it. But why kill Shakaar? Why not just turn him over to security?

GARD

Capturing Shakaar would have tipped them off. If the reason for the assassination remains unclear, there's a chance they might not realise we're onto them.

DAX

Do you really think the Commission aren't capable of handling this information? If you just told the President what we're up against -

CYL

We'd be met with hysteria and denial. Ambassador Gandres is a perfect example. I saw it in your eyes too, Dax. Something about the parasites inspires... an almost reflexive revulsion in our people. A fear so ingrained no-one wants to go near it.

DAX

You both did. And I admit there's something very disconcerting... but I'm not walking away either.

CYL

Audrid did. And all of Dax's hosts since then.

DAX

I should have pushed harder, I admit. But whatever mistakes I made before, I'm here now.

Gard smiles slightly. He admires her determination.

DAX

This isn't going to go away this time, you know. Even if we get past the current crisis without things getting any worse, Trill will have a lot to answer for. To Bajor and to the Federation.

Cyl and Gard share a look. They know she is right, but it won't be easy.

DAX

Now. Why don't you explain to me how you knew Shakaar was infected in the first place?

All three of them settle in for a long conversation.

36 INT. DS9 - KIRA'S OFFICE

Kira is scanning through padds behind her desk. She is smiling slightly, much more relaxed and refreshed after her cathartic meeting with Opaka.

Her combadge BLEEPs. Looking through the office doors, she can see Ensign SELZNER looking back to her, uncertain. The ensign knows the colonel won't want to hear this.

SELZNER (comm)

Colonel, Gul Macet just called in.
He's intercepted a shuttle from
Bajor... and the passengers are
insisting they be let through.

KIRA

Who are the passengers?

SELZNER (comm)

Vedek Yevir. Gul Macet says he's
made it very clear you'll want to
speak to him.

Kira practically growls. She has enough on her plate.

KIRA

Ask Macet to stand by, and have
Yevir comm'd through to me.

Selzner nods, and Kira turns on her screen. YEVIR's face
appears and begins talking without invitation.

YEVIR (screen)

Colonel. I understand that Opaka
Sulan and Jake Sisko are both on
the station. Is this true?

KIRA

Yes, Vedek. And I'm sure -

YEVIR (screen)

You must allow us to see them. We
have come to welcome them home.

Kira glowers. She doesn't want him to have anything to do
with them.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

37 INT. VAUGHN'S QUARTERS

Vaughn sits at his comm station, nervously wondering whether to make the call or not. Behind him there is a packed bag and his field coat slung over it. He finally takes the plunge and presses the panel.

Prynn's voice responds, perky and upbeat. Vaughn is briefly hopeful until he realises it is a pre-recorded message. He sags with sad disappointment. He has heard it before.

TENMEI (comm)

Hi, this is Ensign Prynn Tenmei.
I'm probably on shift or out
surfing or something. Leave me a
message!

VAUGHN

Prynn... it's Dad. I've been
trying to get hold of you. I'm
going down to Bajor for a while,
don't know how long. Call me if
you need anything. Love you.

It is wholly inadequate, and he knows it. He grabs his bag and coat and heads out. As always, he has a mission.

38 INT. DS9 - SHAR'S QUARTERS

Shar sits alone on a low bench in his room, Thriss's stasis chamber glowing blue nearby. He stares aimlessly, unable to feel any more after a night of fights and tears. Dizhei enters the room, barely able to meet his eyes.

DIZHEI

We can leave now. *Zhadi* has
already discussed the matter with
Admiral Akaar and Colonel Kira,
and there will be no delay.

SHAR

And Thriss?

DIZHEI

We'll have her transported aboard.
Have you... reconsidered your
position?

SHAR

(shakes head)

I think I should stay. You and
Anichent should start again. With
someone who feels as you do.

DIZHEI

If punishing yourself is your
reason, you punish us by it.
We've all lost Thriss.

SHAR

(no accusation)

Yes. And you will always blame me
for it.

The door signals. Shar moves to it slowly, expecting his mother. Instead the door opens to reveal Prynn, standing anxiously. She blurts her speech out, as if she has to say it before losing her nerve.

TENMEI

I'm sorry to bother you, Shar, but
he - my father's leaving for
Bajor, I ignored his messages...
and I know you've been having a
hard time lately, and I thought...

She finally realises that Dizhei is right there, and backs up in shame and embarrassment.

TENMEI

I thought you might want to have
lunch with me. But maybe another
time would be better.

Shar can only stare at her blankly, all social skills gone.

SHAR

Maybe.

TENMEI

Never mind. Find me later if you want. I'm sorry if I interrupted.

Prynn steps away and lets the door close. Shar has no reaction at all.

39 INT. DS9 - HABITAT RING CORRIDOR

Prynn walks down the corridor, disgusted with herself.

TENMEI

Good God, Prynn. At least wait until his dead fiancée has left the room.

40 INT. DS9 - DOCKING RING CORRIDOR

The docking area is full of patiently waiting passengers and numerous security people. At one airlock, Lt Bowers waits for Cmdr Vaughn, who approaches with his bag and coat, looking sad and emotionally exhausted.

At the next airlock, Shar, Dizhei and Anichent are as bad. They have already said the real goodbyes, so they exchange awkward acknowledgments and part in silence. Cardassian medics scan everyone again before letting them board.

At the third airlock is Jake Sisko, trying to avoid Vedek Yevir's star-struck gaze as they both wait. Jake stands uneasily as a Cardassian scans him, apparently satisfied.

Jake straightens, relieved, as he sees Opaka approach. Yevir becomes even more awed if possible. While the Cardassians are scanning Yevir, Jake chats to Opaka.

JAKE

Are you excited to get back?

OPAKA

Oh my, yes. It sounds as though there are many exciting changes taking place. I look forward to reading the Ohalu text -

Yevir overhears this, and looks surprised and worried.

OPAKA (cont)

- and sharing what the Prophets
taught me in my years away...
(a little nervous)
...and telling the Assembly about
the Eav'oq.

JAKE

Where's Wex?

OPAKA

Wex elected to stay behind.

JAKE

But... isn't that why she came?
To spend time with you?

The Cardassians have finished with Yevir, and he can't hold his excited tongue a moment longer. Opaka reacts with her usual polite calm, but she doesn't like being fawned over.

YEVIR

Eminence, it is so blessed to have
you with us. I hope you will join
us at the Shikina monastery in
Ashalla. That is where the Tears
now rest. And your own chambers
have been reopened for you.

OPAKA

That would be lovely, thank you,
Vedek.

Under this, Kira has been approaching down the corridor. Jake goes to her while Yevir fawns more over Opaka.

JAKE

Wex isn't coming?

KIRA

No, she said that Sulan requested
some time to get settled before
taking on a student.

JAKE

But, Sulan just said -

YEVIR

(stiff)

Colonel Kira, I must thank you
for... promoting the spiritual
health of Bajor.

Kira nods stiffly back, knowing he hates to thank her for
anything. Jake turns back to Opaka.

JAKE

If you need to get settled, I'm
sure Kasidy would be happy to let
Wex stay with us for a few days.

OPAKA

I invited her to come, Jake. She
refused.

JAKE

(confused, wary)

She told Kira that you asked her
to wait.

OPAKA

Everything is fine, Jake. Wex is
no threat, of that I'm certain.
She'll be along when the time is
right.

Jake nods reluctantly. Still beaming, Yevir leads Opaka and
Jake through onto the shuttle.

YEVIR

We're so glad you've come home,
Eminence. In such turbulent times,
the son of the Emissary returning
our former kai to us...

Before he disappears, Jake turns back to look at Kira. Her
face is full of conflicting emotions as she watches Yevir.
Then she looks at Jake, and her expression relaxes into a
warm, loving smile. Jake reflects it right back.

41 EXT. DEEP SPACE NINE

With Cardassian ships still in close proximity, two Bajoran transports and one Andorian personal flyer detach from the docking ring in turn and head out of station space.

42 INT. DS9 - INFIRMARY, RESEARCH LAB

Bashir stands at one of his machines, working calmly but quickly on some project or other. Near him, the door opens and Dax and Cyl enter together, soon followed by Kira.

KIRA

How are things going?

BASHIR

Good and bad. Cardassian immunity is a dead end, I'm afraid. The enzyme that blocks the parasites' control over Cardassians is poisonous to almost every other species I could name. But it did help me better clarify how the parasites control their hosts.

KIRA

How?

BASHIR

Chemistry. They tap into the neurotransmitters in the host body and redirect them how they want.

KIRA

What about the time window? How long till a joining is permanent?

BASHIR

It varies with the species. For the Bajorans that have already been infected, it would be about twenty to thirty days. The ones we've got in stasis were all detected well within the window, and the infection isn't advancing while they're in stasis.

KIRA

And what about the Trill?

He doesn't want to answer, not wanting to upset Dax.

BASHIR

Because the Trill have evolved to host a similar life-form, I would hazard a guess it would be much shorter. Possibly even immediate. Plus, they can bond with both the host and the symbiont.

Everyone looks troubled at that news. Bashir knows that his next bit of news is even more troubling.

BASHIR

The other thing... is that I know the biological connection between the symbionts and the parasites.

DAX

What? What is it?

BASHIR

We already knew the DNA between the symbionts and the parasites were similar, from the same gene family. I've been collaborating with a cellular biologist on Unefra Three for some time, on a program that breaks down the satellite DNA... There's no question. The genetic linkage is beyond ancestral. We're looking at recombination. Everything points to site-specific mutagenesis.

Bashir notices the blank and slightly annoyed looks on the others' faces. He realises he has gone off to technobabble land, and pulls himself together.

BASHIR

(translated)

Genetic engineering.

Kira is quietly shocked. Cyl is intrigued. Dax sighs in dismay. Bashir catches her expression and shares it.

DAX
Genetic engineering.

BASHIR
Doesn't look like we're ever gonna
get away from it, does it?

KIRA
Doctor, if I'm understanding you
right...

BASHIR
Yes, Colonel. I'm saying that
someone created these parasites.
Specifically and deliberately.

On everyone's shocked reaction to that...

FADE OUT:

THE END