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The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 34

Gothic's Office. Gothic's Island Fortress. Bajor.

It had begun, the Bajoran civil war, or as much of a civil war as you could have without most of the actual military getting involved. And once again I was reminded that my actions, as well as the existence of the Collector threat, had truly screwed around with the season 1 episode timeline. Several prominent episodes of season 1 of DS9 had never happened, or maybe just hadn't happened *yet*, and the events of a season 2, two-episode arc were now playing out. I would be keeping my eyes open, though, as there were a few opportunities and choice pieces of technology in season 1 that I still wanted to get my hands on.

In the show, The Alliance for Global Unity, also known as the Circle, was an organized Bajoran extremist political faction, publicly led by Bajoran Minister Jaro Essa, one that emerged not long after the Cardassian withdrawal from Bajor, ending the Occupation. This seemed to be the case yet again, only the political situation was perhaps even more complex, as my actions had changed things in a pretty significant way, though the main instigators behind the Circle remained the same.

Through my foreknowledge, I *knew* that Jaro was behind the Circle and that he had the secret support of Vedek Winn and her cult of orthodox fanatics, but the real impetus for the Circle's success had been fifty years of oppressive Cardassian rule which had created a fierce desire for independence in the hearts and minds of many Bajorans, a desire so strong that many had been willing to join the Resistance, to pick up arms, to fight and to die in an almost certainly lost cause against the Cardassians. Those folks were the heart and soul of the Resistance and that willingness to fight against overwhelming odds had been a big reason why they had eventually succeeded.

But it *had* succeeded. And the galaxy was not the same as it once was.

Jaro and Winn had taken that desire for freedom from Cardassian tyranny and perverted it for their own selfish ends to now mean freedom from *all* external alien influences, with little thought to the potential consequences of that freedom in a much-changed galaxy. The presence of a stable wormhole in Bajoran space had changed *everything* for the planet. The Occupation was over and freedom from every alien influence, including the benign Federation, would only lead to the reoccupation of Bajor by the Cardassians who desperately wanted to regain control of Bajor, and through it, control over the wormhole itself.

The wormhole was the real prize, though. That was why the spoon heads were strongly supporting the Circle, providing more and more weapons that they knew could later on even be used against them, should they succeed. They simply didn't care. Control of the wormhole was worth the future price to be paid in the blood and lives of their people. It was the price of victory.

Looking back over the newscasts, it was clear to me that the vast majority of the Bajoran people harbored little ill-will for the Federation, not really, in fact most viewed the Federation's rebuilding assistance positively, but tensions had risen sharply as now the Federation and Bajoran cultures had publicly clashed and the Circle's supporters were doing everything they could to fan those flames of division, both real and imagined, drawing parallels to the horrors experienced during the Occupation and the suppression of the Bajoran culture and spirituality. It was a truly ridiculous comparison, of course, but propaganda and extremism were bedfellows of the ridiculous.

When Keiko O'Brien opened a school aboard DS9 for the children of its personnel and civilian residents, a good portion of her young students were obviously Bajoran. Her secular approach to the wormhole's exact nature and frequent references to the 'wormhole aliens' conflicted sharply with Bajoran belief and spirituality. According to Bajoran religious doctrine, the wormhole was the 'Celestial Temple,' the home of the Prophets themselves, beings who were not something as mundane and ordinary as 'aliens,' but their very Gods. The opportunistic Vedek Winn had arrived on DS9 looking for a wedge issue to sow discord and division and she'd found it in the station's school, and had promptly accused Keiko of the Bajoran equivalent of blasphemy.

I'd been so focused on ensuring Neela wasn't again part of these events and foiling Winn's plans to assassinate the Kai, that I'd not noticed how much of an uproar this was causing in the local population and later even reaching to the planet itself, even if it had been eventually resolved to most people's satisfaction. The outbreak of violence hadn't even occurred, since I'd stopped the school's bombing before it happened, which had prevented the Kai from coming to the station, and thus the assassination attempt had never happened either. The damage had been done, though. My guess was that the Circle's more hardcore members, who were no doubt drawn from Resistance cells Winn had visited or encountered during the Occupation, were stirring up crowds everywhere as a distraction, if nothing else, likely mispresenting or outright lying about the culture clash on the station.

Jaro Essa, a minister of the Bajoran Provisional Government, while likely not a true believer in the bullshit Winn was spreading, must have seen an opportunity to seize more power for himself, so that he could rule unilaterally and execute his vision for Bajor's future. That was a much harder proposition than it had been in canon DS9. In canon, Kai Opaka was long gone and the position of Kai was still left vacant, so that stabilizing voice had been absent. The First Minister in canon was also some weak nobody, someone easily replaceable, and who I still can't remember ever having heard the name of in the show, which illustrated just how unimportant they were.

My own actions had thrown a wrench in the canon timeline and had seen Li Nalas freed much earlier from his Cardassian prison camp, during the Occupation itself, and later was made the first First Minister of the Bajoran Provisional government, a position he was excelling at, in my opinion. The Bajoran Provisional government was much stronger and more unified than it had ever been in canon at this point, but it was far from unassailable, especially if the right failure points were exploited. Bajor had been occupied for more than 50 years; no one, no matter how

amazing a leader, would be able to heal those old wounds and shore up the structures of government and society that quickly.

Chaos was a ladder, though, and right now Jaro was using the civil unrest and religious tensions to foment dissatisfaction with the current government and their policies for his own purposes, or at least the appearance of it, by riling up a small, but extremely vocal minority. He was also willing to do violence to achieve his goals. From my foreknowledge, I knew that he had founded the 'Alliance for Global Unity' and covertly orchestrated its less than legal activities in order to inflame that dissatisfaction, but couldn't prove it yet. Whether he actually believed in any of the ideology of the terrorists he led or not was also unclear to me. 'The Circle' was likely just a convenient tool to be used against the Federation and the provisional government that the Federation supported.

While he wasn't actually coming out and saying it directly, he was creating a xenophobic isolationist vision of Bajor, arguing 'Bajor, for Bajorans.' That kind of nationalist xenophobia was as old as time.

I knew this because statements made by the Circle often compared the Federation presence in this system to the Cardassian Occupation, which any rational being who had lived during those horrific times could see just wasn't the case, but thanks to Vedek freaking Winn whipping people up into a frenzy, the rational people weren't being heard over all the loud fanatics screaming their regurgitated bullshit.

Worse, they were insisting that all 'aliens' be expelled from the planet, with veiled suggestions of terrible violence if they didn't quickly comply, which was alarming many in the Federation and the many other aliens on the planet. There had already been several violent clashes, but no arrests, which suggested that they were getting inside information and support from powerful insiders.

Strangely, considering the number of aliens on the station versus the planet, they were exclusively focused on Bajor itself and didn't seem all that interested in Deep Space Nine. I suspected that that was due to my presence and nominal control of all off-world Militia forces, something which really hadn't existed in canon DS9. With both a strong First Minister and a strong leader of the Militia's off-world forces in place, with the hardware to back up that position, expelling aliens from the station was beyond their capabilities. Being an 'alien' myself probably helped in that regard.

Well, that wasn't totally true, they did have some military support. General Krim, who led the part of the Bajoran militia which acted like the planet's police/law enforcement, wasn't doing anything to truly stop the Circle and was openly supporting Jaro Essa. In fact, the military forces on the planet appeared unwilling to confront the forces of the Circle. Every analysis of troop movements in the capital showed that every time there was a potential confrontation between the Militia forces and the forces of the Circle, the Militia forces withdrew to a safer position. Krim himself probably wasn't a bad person, he wanted stability, and Jaro supposedly offered that.

This also explained why the Circle had been supplied with heavy weapons by the Cardassians this time around, something that likely hadn't happened in the show. The militia forces led by General Krim were basically law enforcement, the police of Bajor, as such they didn't officially have heavy weapons and never did, since they were meant to keep the peace, not wage war against hostile alien aggressors for which greater firepower would be required. That was what my forces in the fighter squadron were supposed to provide.

General Krim, who was in command of the Militia's planetary forces, was unwilling to directly confront the Circle's forces. And he had arguably good reasons not to, as not only would this lead to violence between Bajorans that could quickly spiral out of control, it could threaten the capital as both sides would have heavy weapons and they'd inevitably end up being used.

A weakened and unstable Bajor was not what was needed right now. The Militia, even now, wasn't ready for a war. There were valid reasons why I considered it 'game over' if the Collectors actually reached the surface of Bajor. The planetary militia just didn't have the funding, equipment, training, or leadership it needed to be effective against an enemy like that who would undoubtedly also have space superiority. Oh, the First Minister, Li Nalas, was an effective leader; he inspired his troops and would be the first to pick up a phaser and lay down his life should Bajor be invaded, but he wasn't the hardened battle commander I was and he certainly didn't have my advantages in both technology and resources, monetary and otherwise.

And those in the Federation still wondered why I wanted to accumulate so much money. It was shit like this which showed how useful it could be.

The militia did have a lot of stockpiled Cardassian military equipment, though, left over from the Occupation stashed and hidden all over the planet. Ironically, with the Cardassians secretly smuggling in more weapons to supply the Circle, Bajor had never been this well armed. In the event of a Collector invasion the Bajoran planet-side Militia would disband to form Resistance cells, ready to fight again like we did during the Occupation.

"Why aren't you doing something?!" Neela demanded to know as she strode into my private office on the island. "You've got a squadron of fighters in orbit, your warship, and all this technology!"

My office, like the conference room Data had designed, was a mix of old and new world style, with a large wraparound desk, guest chairs, and a comfortable looking large couch to the side. The room, of course, had floor-to-ceiling windows offering panoramic views of the ocean and large doors that could be slid away and hidden to open the entire room up to the ocean breeze and more outdoor seating, as if there was never a wall there in the first place. My office also boasted a few colorful glass cubes to liven it up even further, from one of my favorite artists from the Earth of my dimension.

I took a deep breath, having expected a conversation like this, though I had always assumed it would be Kira.

"And what would you have me do, Neela?" I calmly and quietly asked the young woman with a sigh, trying to signal that I wasn't upset by the question or with her. "I could order our fighters to

bombard any massed Circle forces from orbit, but even if *my people* were willing to follow that order, and I was willing to give it, the Circle forces are in the capital, in a heavily populated area. Even the most precise orbital bombardment would result in civilian casualties, and likely won't get them all, leaving some free to wreak havoc, not to mention the secondary explosions that could result and would almost certainly level whole sections of the city. There are reports that the Circle have heavy weapons, armed gunships, that they haven't used yet. An attack on them from space could radically *escalate* the violence from their side. A civil war between the Circle and the government could see everything we've built fall apart practically overnight. Assuming the Provisional Government didn't fall, there would be fighting for years to come. It would be just like the Occupation all over again, except it would be Bajorans killing Bajorans!"

Neela wasn't really mad at me, or my supposed lack of action, she was just frustrated with the situation and afraid that everything she'd fought for could be lost. Seeing the Bajor she'd fought and bled for tear itself apart, not by external enemies this time, but by its own people, was driving her crazy. Lacking anything useful to say in response she simply stormed out. I suspect she would come back to apologize later.

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"Are you well, General?" a calm voice asked, interrupting my silent reverie gazing out at the ocean from my office, as I thought on what I could do, or maybe what I *should* do. This had all worked out in canon, but the butterflies I'd introduced had added some new layers of complexity to an already volatile situation. The situation was both better and worse than in canon, in some respects. It was better in the sense that with my military position, DS9 and its alien population was unlikely to be targeted, but worse in that my presence and the advanced fighters I'd provided to the Militia had also seen the Cardassians secretly provide the Circle with much heavier weapons to fight with this time.

Startled, I turned to see the Kai in my office's doorway. She must have entered with ninja-like skill; she had to have, given that even a distracted Augment was *extremely* hard to sneak up on. Did Bajoran monks practice some form of martial arts or had some kind of presence concealment? Many Asian religious orders did on Earth after all. I'd have to investigate that at a later date.

"Not really, your Eminence," I admitted with a sigh, quickly getting to my feet to show her the respect she deserved and gesturing for her to please take a seat. I was doing a lot of sighing these days. "I'm struggling to find a long-term solution to this crisis that prevents everything from falling apart. I would certainly welcome any advice and guidance that you are willing to give."

The episodes detailing these events really glossed over just how complex the situation was and how difficult it'd be to resolve. The Kai didn't have a solution either it seems, considering the contemplative silence that followed as she gracefully took a seat in front of my large desk. Kai Opaka was one of those rare individuals whose mere presence could grant you comfort and strength, though. Kira had said something along those lines a few times in the past. She'd even said that I had a presence like that, that she'd felt it during some of the most dangerous operations we'd undertaken during the Occupation.

No, if there had been a simple solution we'd have used it by now. Oh, unlike in canon, with her alive and in her role as Kai, I could ask her to address the people to appeal for calm and understanding, but that wouldn't solve anything in the long-term, not with so many external forces working so hard against us. It'd be like putting a small band aid on a very large wound. She also knew this, which was why she was keeping her efforts focused on helping one of my other plans to succeed.

Unlike the many aliens on the station, there were many frightened non-Bajorans, including alien traders, aid workers, diplomats, and others, currently on Bajor at risk and in danger from the xenophobia currently gripping the planet. With the current unrest and conflict in the capital, Li Nalas had been forced to reluctantly advise that all aliens and non-citizens of Bajor currently on the planet, leave for their own safety as the Provisional Government could not guarantee it. He did this despite knowing how it arguably made him and his government look weak. This had prompted a mass exodus from the planet, many leaving through various means, but with the quadrant in the grips of war with the Collectors, many couldn't leave due to lack of ships in the area, or otherwise had nowhere to go. The Circle was supportive of this, interestingly, but had stated that Starfleet vessels would not be allowed near the planet.

When the First Minister had told me of his plans, I offered my island and home to anyone displaced that couldn't or didn't want to leave the planet. They'd have my hospitality and protection from any that would seek to harm them during the unrest. It would be a disaster on many levels if any of these visitors to Bajor came to harm, especially if Bajor had any chance in the future to become members of the Federation, so Li was extremely grateful for my offer.

There weren't truly that many aliens on the planet, relatively speaking—Federation aid workers made up the majority of them—but there had been too many to quickly evacuate with the Circle's restrictions and I wouldn't put it past the extremists to target any aliens who remained. If I believed their batshit crazy ideology, that's what I'd do. The Federation were squeamish at the best of times. If their citizens were harmed or killed, that would be powerful evidence that Bajor had descended into civil war over their involvement and presence on the planet and they would pull out entirely.

Even the orphanages that had Cardassian and half-Cardassian children in their care were potentially at risk, so I'd taken those kids in too. I needed a long-term solution for them. Perhaps they should be sent to Earth? They had no place on Cardassia, and likely no future here on Bajor, no matter how well the average Bajoran typically treated them. If I were Starfleet Intelligence, I'd help facilitate them coming to the Federation while so young, then try to recruit as many as they could into joining the organization in the future. They could be very useful as operatives working against the Cardassians.

"Then it is time," the Kai declared. "Come with me, seek wisdom from the Prophets."

I shook my head.

"Prayer isn't going to help," I said. "And if the Prophets wanted to send me a vision, they would."

The Kai leaned towards me and took my hand gently.

"Though their eyes are ever on you and your actions, I was referring to using one of the Orbs," she corrected gently, with a small smile on her face, like she had just said something funny. Was she aware that I was fucking with the Prophets' vision of the future on the daily? "I suspected we would need their wisdom during these trying times, so I brought an orb with me when we fled from the Capital."

That might seem like a cowardly action for me, running away rather than staying and fighting, but I wanted to protect Bajor and its people, which wasn't a goal I could achieve by killing even the deluded members of the Circle. Lupaza certainly wanted to get more involved, but I had stopped her. Really, all I could do was run damage control and attempt to lessen the violence until my Section 31 allies returned with the proof I needed of Cardassian involvement and support. The First Minister had agreed that my presence might only inflame the unrest further and had asked me to focus on the protection of the non-Bajorans in my care to the best of my ability.

"Very well, your holiness," I agreed. "But I've used an Orb before. It didn't really give me solutions to my problems, though maybe it did inspire me a bit, made me surer that I would eventually succeed."

I had seen both my rank as a General in the Militia, as well as my completed armor and weapons, years before either had happened. I'd even gotten ideas from those visions. It had become, in some respects, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Bajoran Orbs, known to the Bajorans as the Tears of the Prophets or as the Orbs of the Prophets, were mysterious and powerful artifacts that were sent to the Bajoran people by the Prophets themselves. The Bajorans stored them in special arks which contained their powerful energies, as they induced unusual effects on those exposed to the raw energies, even if that didn't always result in a vision.

"This is the Orb of Prophecy," the Kai told me, after she'd summoned an aid to bring it into my office. "It is considered by some scholars to be the most powerful of all the Orbs, and perhaps the most dangerous, given how our mortal minds, limited by linear time, are prone to misinterpreting what it shows us. I must warn you, using this orb is intense and can be draining even for healthy people. But you will endure, I am sure," she ended, with a small smile on her face, knowing of my genetic enhancements from a conversation I once had with her, but that warning was probably standard.

I noted right away that this Orb was larger than the others I'd seen in the past, and was a paler shade of green. What that might mean, if anything at all, eluded me entirely.

"The Prophets allowed you to use the Orb of Guidance, wanted you to even," the Kai explained as I got closer to the shiny green alien magic thing sent by Gods who saw the past, present and future simultaneously. "Let us hope that they are feeling equally as generous today."

There was a sudden and very bright light, and then I was whisked away.

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“You have a truly beautiful home, Gothic,” Ambassador Lwaxana Troi of Betazed gushed with a light laugh, as she unhurriedly walked with me on the tour I was giving her of my home, our arms linked, like we were a couple of teens on a date. “It’s almost Betazoid in its ostentatious opulence, but only *almost*.”

That made me laugh out loud. I suppose it was quite opulent by 24th century Federation standards.

“Thank you, Lwaxana, we all should aspire to be a little more Betazoid in our life, though I’m not sure I could pull off that flamboyant poet/dreamer vibe like you guys do so well,” I joked with a smile. “It doesn’t fit the badass Augment, but not despotic tyrant, vibe, that I’m currently going for, though I do have some rather colorful pieces of glass artwork in my office you might think fits the Betazoid aesthetic for unusual and flamboyant beauty.”

“Well, if anyone could pull off badass poet/dreamer, it’d be you, Gothic,” she replied with a twinkle in her eye. “As for despotic tyrant, well, we all can be a little of that, *in the bedroom*,” she whispered sultrily.

“I’m happy to play that role anytime you like, Lwaxana, with or without my other girls in bed with us,” I joked right back. “I think I should warn you, I told them one too many sex stories about you from back on the *Enterprise* and now they call you the ‘sex tiger’. I hope you’re not offended.”

Lwaxana threw her head back and laughed uproariously at that.

“Offended? Heavens no. I’m honored! An Augment was a mountain I climbed with courage in my heart and passion in my loins,” she gushed. A wicked twinkle appeared in her eye, like she was about to tell me something that she knew she probably shouldn’t. “Deanna didn’t realize that I wasn’t exaggerating about your prowess in the bedroom. Can you believe she thought that I was exaggerating? She told me the day after your little tryst, she tried to stand up from bed and that her legs failed her. I guess the muscles just kept *twitching*, uncontrollably. Beverly had to make a house call just to get her functional for the day!”

“Don’t ever change, Lwaxana,” I said fondly, shaking my head, very amused. “I was a bit surprised to learn that you were still on Bajor, though. I thought you’d have returned to Betazed or Earth after the mutual defense treaty was finalized with the other Federation Ambassadors.”

“I considered it, but I decided to be a bit of a trailblazer,” she answered conspiratorially. “Did you know that there are no embassies or consulates for any of the Federation member worlds on the station or on Bajor? Can you believe it? The wormhole will be the jumping off point for numerous scientific missions, mining explorations, first contact with numerous gamma quadrant races, yet none of the other Federation member worlds have an official presence here.”

“Interesting,” I said. “It’s not a bad idea, but I don’t believe there have been all that many betazoid ships that have actually come through the station since the Occupation ended. Are you going to encourage your people to come more?”

“Perhaps, in time,” she said, still holding me close as we walked arm-in-arm through my highly polished marble floored hallways, at least what appeared to be marble. “While the embassy will be officially one for Betazed, if we’re the only official embassy on the station representing a Federation member world, we’ll unofficially serve as the diplomatic contact and resource for any Federation citizens that come through the Bajoran sector, regardless of homeworld.”

“Ambitious!”

“Yes, I thought so too,” she said with another smile. “Though I have had some doubts since this Circle business started. It calls into question just how stable the Bajoran Provisional Government actually is.”

I grimaced at those words, but it was valid concern given recent events and I was very grateful that she was giving me a chance to assuage her concerns.

“Between you and I, I firmly believe that this situation will be resolved soon,” I reassured. “I can’t share any specifics, but I already have a plan in motion to see this crisis ended. Rest assured, in the meantime, that you and your people and every non-Bajoran on this Island, will have my full protection and I swear that no harm will come to you here.”

“I know,” she said. “I was in the process of hiring a private transport ship to evacuate my staff and I, but when I heard your offer of protection I canceled those plans. I trust you, Gothic.”

“Thank you, Lwaxana,” I said, earnestly and gratefully. “I will endeavor to always prove worthy of that trust. In fact, there was something I wanted to talk to you about that could see Betazed better weather a storm I see coming in the future.”

Betazed had fallen during the Dominion War. I had considered many times giving Lwaxana a warning that would see Betazed better protected, but I could never quite figure out how to broach the topic in a reasonable way, or the opportunity to do so.

“I’m intrigued,” she said.

“Let’s discuss it in my office. It’s not something that I feel comfortable speaking about in the hallway where anyone could hear,” I admitted. “My private office is just ahead.”

As we got closer to my office, Lwaxana let out a loud giggle, practically a guffaw, for no discernible reason. She turned to me with a wicked, mischievous look in her eyes that I did not see the reason for.

“What do you find so amusing,” I asked.

“You’ll see shortly,” she mischievously responded, just as we reached the door to my private office.

With my always on connection to my Island and home systems, I could have easily asked Hermione what was going on, but decided a surprise every now and then could be a good thing.

Stepping up to my soundproof office door, the door opened letting in a ton of natural light from my office’s floor-to-ceiling windows. The sight I encountered was both amusing and ridiculous,

which thoroughly explained what Lwaxana, aka the sex tiger, was laughing about mere moments ago. I couldn't help but roll my eyes.

"Work that tongue in my cunt, you filthy Bajoran *slut*," Ro growled down to the moving head of short red hair obviously working her tongue between Ro's legs. Ro was perched entirely naked on the top of my desk, her legs spread wide open, while another naked woman was bent in half eating her pussy. My office positively stank of sex. "The only way you're getting Gothic's dick in that wet pussy is if you please me first. Gothic only gets the finest pussy. I'm not sure you make the cut if that's the best pussy eating you can do."

"What is going on here, Ro?" I asked from the doorway, trying to sound stern, but finding this entire situation a bit hysterical. Ro's wink at me was very over the top. Lwaxana's constant giggling also really didn't help. My life really was turning into a porno movie these days and I can't say that I had any real issue with that.

"This slut was on Bajor in the capital on vacation, when the evacuation order was issued," Ro explained. "She wanted protection and to thank you personally for looking out for so many."

"Ah, and who exactly is this 'Bajoran slut?'" I asked, amused at Ro calling this unknown woman a slut.

Ro, of course, threaded her fingers in the red hair of the woman between her legs and roughly pulled her head up. I instantly recognized the shiny wet mouth and face of the beautiful dabo girl, Leeta. Her eyes lit up in delight at seeing me, a growing smile on her pretty face. As a character that frequently appeared in the shows, who had dated Bashir and would one day marry Rom, I had wanted to bang this voluptuous slut for a while now, but had never gotten an opportunity.

"Leeta, lovely to see you," I greeted her kindly, despite how surreal the situation was. "I hope Ro hasn't worked you too hard."

"No, not at all," Ro assured me as she shoved Leeta's face back down into her pussy. Leeta tried to say something, but all I heard were muffled, high pitched words that I couldn't quite make out.

Glancing between this surreal sight and Lwaxana, I decided I may need to postpone my meeting with the Ambassador.

"Lwaxana, it seems that I might need to delay our conversation for a little while, perhaps we can reschedule our meeting?" I offered uncertainly.

"Nonsense, Gothic, now is a perfect time," Lwaxana breezily replied, a huge shit eating grin on her face. "I'm happy to talk with you while you...*work*."

With that she practically glided into the room and laid out decadently on my couch, directly facing Ro and Leeta, as if waiting for the show to continue. Well, if that's what she wanted.

I gracefully walked into the room and stepped behind my desk. My chair had been pushed out of the way and the fully nude body of Leeta was bent in half in front of me, ass wide out, her pussy wet and open and looking quite ready for me slide immediately inside. Her ass was full and lush,

with wide hips just perfect for a good grip, and her big, hanging tits were just calling for my hands to squeeze and massage.

“Leeta, you’re a beautiful sight, but I want to make sure you actually want me to fuck you,” I said, as I ran my hands up and down the silky soft skin of her back, then feeling her tits and ass, then pulling the cheeks apart and massaging them. “Can you give me a little wiggle to indicate your consent?”

Lwaxana scoffed from the couch, “Oh please, in her thoughts she’s practically begging for you to fuck her. She consents. In fact, she’s wanted to fuck you from the moment she first met you, but hadn’t found the right opportunity till now.”

Looking down, Leeta spread her legs wider and was wiggling her ass side-to-side like crazy, before she reached between her own legs and spread her lips open for me. So, yeah, I think Lwaxana was dead on. After taking off my shoes and pants, I freed my cock and ran it up and down Leeta’s engorged slit, getting the head nice and wet, before I slammed forward, balls deep, into and inside the beautiful Bajoran.

Leeta practically screamed in delight into Ro’s pussy, as I started to pump my hips into her pillow like ass. She had an ass made for good hard fucking and hips just right to pull her into me.

“Oh, she likes what you’re doing, sir,” Ro advised. “Her lazy tongue is really working harder now.”

I rolled my eyes at this, but kept pumping my cock into her. She felt wonderful wrapped around me and had excellent muscle control.

I turned my attention back to Lwaxana, not stopping my hips from thrusting into this lovely pussy for even a moment. Normally I was loathe to give my sexual partners anything less than my full attention, unless it was group sex, but when needs must.

“Laren, earmuffs,” I said with a gesture. Ro Laren’s strong thighs quickly squeezed around Leeta’s head and ears tightly, hopefully keeping her from hearing what I would be talking about, but I wasn’t all that concerned even if she did.

“Were you aware the Collectors attacked the station?” I asked.

“Yes,” Lwaxana answered, seemingly unbothered at getting a live sex show while we had a serious conversation. “As I understand it the station performed well and there were minimal casualties.”

“Yes, we got lucky. Many other far better defended worlds did not,” I said, continuing to divide my attention between the woman I was fucking and the pleasure that brought me, and my purpose for this conversation. “The Collectors divided their nearby forces and the station eventually received the support of the *Enterprise* and a few other ships. That tipped the balance. During this conflict-”

“Gothic, normally I can tell what someone wants to say long before they themselves have even fully organized their thoughts. I can’t read your thoughts, though, so can I ask that you just get to

the point with little regard for my diplomatic rank or any formalities,” she interrupted. “I promise I won’t be offended.”

Blunt and direct, I could get behind that.

“Did you know that Betazed’s planetary defense net is over a hundred years old?” I asked out of the blue.

“No. If that’s true, I must admit, I did not,” she responded concisely, now looking more serious at this abrupt conversational detour. “That doesn’t exactly fall under my purview.”

“It hasn’t been updated since it was originally installed in the 23rd century, after the Federation/Klingon War. It is antiquated and obsolete. It is also undermanned and not maintained as well as it should be considering how important a function it performs, and hasn’t been stress tested in decades. I strongly suspect much of the defense net would fail if actually put under live fire conditions,” I informed her, trying to convey just how serious I was. “It will be woefully insufficient against a threat like the Collectors or a peer opponent of the Federation with advanced starships and modern weaponry.”

“How do you know this?” she asked, looking interested at this turn in the conversation.

“Much of this information is public record, but it really doesn’t matter. You can easily confirm everything I’ve said with your government or with a little poking around, should they not want to admit it,” I said. “The days of Kirk, Sulu, and Spock are over, along with the ability for member planets to fully trust that their defense can be handled entirely by the Federation. A hundred years of relative peace and no peer opponent to truly threaten its existence, like the Klingons did, has dulled Starfleet’s edge and many member worlds have gotten incredibly complacent with their own defenses. Betazed, and all the Federation member worlds really, need to spend the time, money, and resources to upgrade their defenses if they can, to see to their own protection and defense separate from Starfleet, before it’s truly needed. Justify it however you want with your leaders, blame the terrible threat of the Collectors, but do it as soon as possible or else Betazed will pay for it in the blood of their citizens.”

“Why tell me this? Is it the Collectors? What do you know that I don’t?” she asked.

“I have a perspective that you don’t, you could say, coming from a more war-like time. Starfleet is not the powerful shield and sword you think it will be. The Collector threat has shown just how unprepared the Federation is for a real war, one that truly threatens its existence,” I answered. “I was also- You’ve heard of the Prophets, correct, the aliens that exist outside linear time within the wormhole itself?”

“Yes, I’ve read the reports Commander Sisko submitted to Starfleet.”

“They see the past, present, and future simultaneously and they’ve given me a glimpse of the future on a few occasions. Dark times are coming, Lwaxana, for Betazed and for all of us in the alpha quadrant.”

“Why tell me this? Why not tell Starfleet?” she asked.

“Who would believe me?” I asked incredulously. “I’m a big bad Augment, a monster from Earth’s dark past. But we have a personal connection. I think you’ve gotten my measure and me, yours. You said to me today that you trust me. And whether you believe me or not, whether anything comes of it or not, I wanted to warn you, to give you the chance to changes things for the better. What you do with this information is *entirely* up to you, though I beg you not to share with anyone else that I’ve seen parts of the future.”

There was a twinkle in Lwaxana’s eyes, “I’ve seen through your evil plan to strengthen Betazed’s defenses. You *monster!*”

We both laughed at her over the top declaration of my evil.

“But, seriously, I will look into this and if things are as you say they are, I will try to convince my leaders the defense net needs to be updated or replaced, or at a minimum, better maintained.”

“I feel truly ridiculous having a serious conversation like this while I’m balls deep inside Leeta’s lovely pussy, but this is my life now,” I said with a faux grimace and gesturing to Laren that she could release Leeta’s poor ears. “It’s my cross to bear!”

Now that my thoughts were no longer on the heavy conversation we were having, I noticed how Lwaxana was fidgeting rhythmically, her pelvis twitching slightly with each thrust of my hips inside Leeta. Deciding to test my theory, I sped up my thrusts, grinding very hard on Leeta’s pelvis, my left hand playing with her clit then following it up with a hard slap to her ass. There were two screams.

Lwaxana’s practically jumped, letting out a loud moan.

“Am I fucking one woman or two, Lwaxana?” I asked with a grin.

“Oh, shut up,” she replied with no true heat in her voice. “This slut’s taking a perverse amount of pleasure at being treated so carelessly and your cock is making her feel far too good. Her thoughts and emotions are effecting me.”

“Well, let me help with that then,” I said with an evil grin. “Hermione, replicate and beam into my office the latest design of the bliss baton, ball emitter attachment.”

Moments later, what looked like a futuristic massage gun materialized on my desk, trigger and all, with a large, shiny metal ball on the end the size of a golf ball. I turned on the baton and an electrostatic field surrounded the ball emitter, which artificially reduced the friction on the ball’s surface when placed against skin. In other words, the field made the ball slippery and would glide smoothly and easily along skin without any messy lubrication needed.

“What in the heavens is that?” Lwaxana asked in surprise, obviously wondering what the device I had just beamed into my office and was kind of brandishing like a gun.

“Let me show you,” I grinned, before I pulled the trigger and dramatically placed it directly on Leeta’s spine, one of the most nerve rich parts of the humanoid body. Her spine lit up in a spreading, neon blue glow and she started screaming into Ro’s cunt, shocked pleasure as she immediately orgasmed, shaking uncontrollably and then squirting all over me. As I slid the

emitter ball up and down her spine, lighting it up in a blue glow, her pussy squeezed, spasmed, and massaged my cock like wild and all I could do was hang on for the ride.

Lwaxana's back arched from the psychic feedback from Leeta's intense (possibly continuous) orgasm, obviously cumming herself just from feeling Leeta's pleasure second hand.

I deactivated the baton and was about to cum inside Leeta when Lwaxana jumped up from the couch and dropped to her knees in front of me, pulled my cock out from inside Leeta's soaking wet pussy and practically swallowed my cock whole as I came down her throat instead. Leeta was too out of it to notice that her hard won cum had been stolen from her. Lwaxana dutifully swallowed every last drop, running her thumb up and down my cock to get out every last bit before she pulled away.

"I want you to do that to me. *Now!*" she practically growled in command, a look of longing and need on her beautiful face.

"As you command, Ambassador," I dutifully answered.

Thank God for an Augment's stamina because I had a feeling that I'd need every bit of it before the day was over.

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The Next Day. Balcony Dining Area. Gothic's Island Fortress. Bajor.

Gothic and Kai Opaka were having a sumptuous meal together on a large, wraparound balcony with a beautiful view of the ocean in the distance. While not directly by the water, the General had obviously chosen to build his home on top of this hill as it was the highest point on his island and thus offered breathtaking panoramic views of his lands and the crystal-clear turquoise waters that surrounded it. You could even faintly hear the waves crashing rhythmically against the rocks. As this was a semi-tropical island, the salty breeze off the ocean was a wonderful feeling on the skin as it was quite warm on the island.

The Kai knew that these lands had been given to the General as both a reward and repayment for his service and material support during the Occupation. She was just glad that he had found some measure of peace after all those years of violence and bloodshed, and had made a home and life for himself on the very planet that his efforts had helped liberate. He had fought for a people and world not his own, but they were his now too. His generosity had also not ended when the Occupation had, and she knew the rebuilding of Bajor would not be anywhere near as far along as it was without his frequent support when there were shortfalls in resources or material. For a man so interested in accumulating wealth, he had a strange habit of giving it away for a good cause.

The Kai sometimes felt guilty, being so well fed while so many of her fellow Bajorans were going hungry right now or otherwise struggling, but she also understood the importance of being a good guest in the present moment. She felt less guilty at the moment since she knew that the non-Bajoran refugees that had found sanctuary and protection on this island were eating the exact same food she was, or at least the same quality.

Accepting the General's hospitality had been wise and for the betterment of her people. He'd removed her from the capital and because of that the Circle had no reason to target any of the temples in their attempts to arrest her, or otherwise harm those around her in their pursuit.

No doubt the Circle had intended to set up some sort of sham trial for her so-called crimes against the Bajoran people during the dark days of the Occupation. Of course, in her heart, she did not believe she was guilty of what they would accuse her of.

The true *collaborators* had worked with the Cardassians for their own comfort, safety, or to possess some form of power over their fellow Bajorans. Yes, she had worked with even the likes of Dukat, but she had done so only in order to save lives, never for her own benefit. She'd spent many years of her life in underground bunkers under Cardassian guard rather than live in a more comfortable setting on Terok Nor, as Dukat would have wished.

Yet those days and those hard decisions still weighed heavily upon her mind and conscience. One life to save a hundred was a *cold arithmetic*, especially for the one effected by it, a moral dilemma that she had often struggled with, but the survival of her people required that she take those burdens upon her shoulders. If the Prophets wished to punish her for her actions, she would *gladly* welcome it as atonement for what she had felt forced to do.

Her appreciation for Gothic's rescue was helped by the fact that she hadn't actually left Bajor, something she had sworn never to do during the Occupation and something she had no desire to do now. Which was why she'd been so impressed by the advanced transporter system here on the island. She and all the other alien residents and visitors still left on Bajor had gathered together in the government building which housed the First Minister's office. Many harried, displaced people came, their luggage and possessions they couldn't do without strewn around them, all frightened and wary at this disruption to and threat to their lives.

She had truly felt for them, walking among them, offering a kind word or a hug to those who seemed to need it. The sight of all the innocent children effected by this had truly caused her heart pain. They knew nothing of the evils of the world and did not understand why they had been forced to desperately flee from their familiar homes and lives, but children could be powerfully observant at times and they could sense the fear and distress of their parents, no matter how hard their parents tried to hide it behind brittle smiles. You'd think General Gothic's large, powerful form, clad in advanced armor and weapons would have frightened those children, but his open, kind, and genuine smile, promises to keep them safe and comfortable, and direct offers to the children to let them play on his sandy beaches and swim in his warm waters, had won them over. They were soon whisked away in large groups by transporter beam to his beautiful home.

From the sounds of the happy children running and playing all around her, Gothic had kept his promise.

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"General, did your Orb experience aid you?" the Kai inquired.

It had done something, of that Opaka was certain, the Prophets obviously having chosen to share their wisdom with the man once again. Those who had undergone an Orb experience could always detect it in another, it was something in the eyes, and a recent orb experience was even more noticeable due to the strain it placed on a person. The Orb of Prophecy strained both the mind and the body, but it was the emotional impact more than anything else that showed. When the certainty of one's place in life and the path they were on were called into question, it was a jarring experience at the best of times.

General Gothic gave a soft sound of assent, his meal mostly untouched as he gazed out over the water. Giving the General time to think, she allowed her eyes to scan the many tables around them full of happily eating people, laughing together as they obviously felt safe here in the General's home. From how many had chosen to eat near and within sight of the General himself, they drew comfort and a sense of safety from his very presence. It was quite a striking sight considering how frightened and afraid they had been mere hours before when they had been forced to flee from their homes and the lives they'd built on Bajor.

The vast majority were humans from the Federation, but there were many other species represented who were enjoying the delicious food produced by the General's no doubt top-of-the-line replicators which had food options from all over the galaxy. Parents of young children were watching their children run around and explore the space with wistful eyes, happily playing with the many other alien children that were, for now, calling the General's home their own too. Children didn't care what race a fellow child was when they wanted to play together; they didn't intrinsically bear that prejudice in their hearts. Couldn't her people in the Circle not see how beautiful that was, and how misguided their thinking was? There were many races in the galaxy, but they were all people at their cores, worthy of respect, worthy of life. And these many aliens had done nothing to harm the Bajoran people, in fact most here were actually on the planet only to help in the rebuilding of Bajor after the Occupation.

This was not the way to repay them for their help, she thought with sorrow.

The General's home had many well-appointed guest rooms for all, and they had quickly settled into them upon arriving. If their rooms were anything like the large suite that she had been provided with, they were the height of luxury and elegance and their many needs were being well taken care of. It would have been very easy for the General's home to slip into outright decadence, but the designer had done a very good job making even a guest room appear homey and welcoming. Any additional needs they had were all being immediately and freely taken care of, whether that was in newly replicated clothes or their unique medical needs in the island's state-of-the-art infirmary, staffed by three very beautiful female doctors who seemed to be experts on the medical needs of every race they encountered.

The General still hadn't answered after several minutes of comfortable silence, but their comfortable silence was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Hermione at their table, a sort of holographic computer interface for the island's systems, she had been told, which she assumed was based on a human woman who'd been alive during the General's native time. Perhaps she was a former lover and the General enjoyed seeing her again?

The thigh-high stockings, short skirt, and knotted white blouse exposing the holograms trim stomach and much of her breasts was certainly an interesting choice on the General's part, she thought, not that she would judge anyone when it came to such things. The Bajoran people were quite libertine when it came to sexuality, after all.

"General, your Eminence, I apologize for interrupting your meal, but our sensors have detected six Cardassian Nedar-class gunships, traveling at high speed, approaching the Island. Their weapons are armed and they are not replying to my hails," Hermione informed us.

"Interesting," the General responded with a quiet sigh, but he seemed otherwise unconcerned, like he had expected something like this to happen. While he seemed unconcerned, several people around us who had overheard Hermione's report were now looking out to the water with fear and trepidation, but seemed to be reassured by the General's calm and unconcerned reaction to the news. Though she tried to spot them, she saw nothing, the gunships likely too far out to yet see. She, on the other hand, was very troubled at the Circle's escalation in the violence and what it meant for her people's future. This escalation was truly unprovoked. "The Resistance and later the Militia only had three captured Nedar gunships in their possession after the Occupation. I wonder where they got the rest of them?"

"Hermione, raise the island's shields. Power up and arm all defense batteries, but do not fire unless I give the command," the General ordered. "Provide me a tactical view."

The Hermione hologram nodded sharply then looked out to the sea with a look of concentration on her beautiful face.

At these commands, many things happened simultaneously. The first was a hologram of the General's island appearing above the table, his home clearly depicted, with the approaching gunships outlined in red and a shield bubble visually being raised over the entire island and much of the surrounding water, including a second smaller shield directly enclosing the house itself. She knew little of such things, but to shield such a large island could not have been easy. The power demands would likely be extreme. The shield was strong enough to be visible to the naked eye for a second or two upon completely enclosing the island, before it then faded to invisibility.

"They're coming from that direction, your Eminence," Hermione clarified for her, gesturing in a specific direction, towards the waters near their table, likely both for her benefit and those nearby that were listening intently. Had Gothic known the likely direction their attackers would be coming from and chosen this table specifically? She supposed it made sense, that was the direction the Bajoran capital lay in.

By his commands, hidden weapon emplacements were raised up all over the island and their positions were showing up on the tactical hologram of the island and turning a bright green, likely indicating that they were online, armed, and ready to fire.

"They've stopped," Hermione reported.

Opening a channel, Gothic spoke to whoever was operating these armed gunships.

"Unregistered gunships, you have entered restricted airspace above the private island home of General Gothic of the Bajoran Militia. You are ordered to turn around and leave or you will be fired upon," he ordered calmly.

The gunships, having detected the shield, had quickly come to stop just outside the shield perimeter and spread out, hovering in place. Perhaps ten seconds after being ordered to leave they responded with energy weapons fire and photon torpedoes, which lit up the evening sky in a kaleidoscope of color as their weapons impacted ineffectually against the visible shield. Everyone, besides Hermione and General Gothic, flinched at that first impact upon the shield. Opaka was no engineer or soldier with experience with such things, but she was fairly certain that the shields didn't waver an inch.

"Do you intend to destroy them?" Opaka asked quietly, without any judgment in her voice.

The General would certainly be justified in doing so, both morally and legally. The fools in the gunships had fired on his very home, unprovoked, which was currently filled with frightened civilians and children. Both she and they were likely what the Circle wanted most right now, though killing or capturing the General himself was likely an objective too.

"No, I won't kill any Bajoran unless I have no choice. Luckily for them, their weapons are not anywhere near strong enough to pose a true danger to us. They'll figure that out shortly," Gothic responded. "And if they don't, well, a warning shot or two should help them realize that they continue to live only because I allow it."

It was as the General said, after two solid minutes of continuous bombardment upon the Island's perimeter shield, the General's patience had obviously run out.

"Primary shield strength is down 0.5 percent," Hermione calmly reported. "Secondary shield strength remains at 100%."

"That's enough now. Hermione, prepare to fire warning shots with energy beams to graze each of their shield edges, 1% power," he commanded, the hologram signaling near instantly that her targeting and adjustment to the weapon's power output was complete. "*Fire.*"

With that command, thick beams of neon blue energy flew unerringly towards the gunships, lighting up each ship's shields and completely overpowering them. What kind of weapons these were she had no idea, but they didn't appear to be phasers or disrupters. Whatever they were, they were exceedingly powerful even at 1% power, and were obviously weapons meant to reach into orbit to destroy state-of-the-art warships, not obsolete, though still dangerous, Cardassian gunships.

The gunships fled in terror mere moments after the island's defenses had opened fire, nearly colliding with each other in their haste to flee the area, showing them just how outmatched they were, with no loss of life on either side.

Once they were gone, the Kai went back to her earlier question about the Orb. The actual experience was private, but what it would lead to did concern her, in fact it concerned all of Bajor.

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Farm. Rakantha Province. Bajor.

"I'm surprised that you made it here in one piece, being a big, bad alien and all, looking to control our way of life and subsume our unique cultural identity. It's interesting how quickly they've seemingly forgotten just how much you did during the Occupation to secure our freedom from the Cardassians," Shakaar joked with a smile and a wink, something he had learned from me during our time working together in the Resistance. He poured us both a generous measure of his homegrown spring wine. "You are someone they're *very* interested in getting ahold of. When I heard, I laughed and thought, 'good luck with that, fools.'"

My smile in response was positively vicious.

"I've missed you, Shakaar! The Cardassians, with all their power, couldn't even kill me when they had a 100k bars of latinum price on my head!" I joked, laughing together for several moments before turning serious again. "But that hasn't stopped them from trying, I'll tell you. They've already attacked my home with six Nedar-class gunships trying to get ahold of the Kai and the alien refugees I'm giving my hospitality and protection to," I told him, to his visible shock.

"I, hadn't realized things had gotten that bad yet," he responded quietly. "To even go after the Kai. I assume it didn't go well for them."

"No, it did not." I tersely replied, still a bit pissed at the escalation in violence. I'd had to order Lupaza and the fighter squadron from getting involved and/or retaliating for the attack on me.

Things weren't that bad yet, not really, at least relative to the history of this kind of thing on other worlds. The Circle simply didn't have the manpower to actually conquer and hold even small parts of the planet. It was one of those upside-down situations where they seemingly had more weapons than people to wield them. They were depending on the breakdown of social order, which involved riots and other forms of civil unrest to do a lot of the damage, in the hope that the Provisional Government would fall in the chaos. And just like the Resistance of old, they were constantly recruiting to boost their strength and ability to effect change. Each success meant more recruits. The Militia had many roadblocks in place in an effort to contain the Circle while allowing innocents to flee the capital.

"Where did they get six Nedars, anyway?! We could have used those gunships when we liberated Gallitep, or on a dozen different operations during the Occupation," he exclaimed, now looking thoughtful. "By the end of the Occupation, and maybe only in the last few months when the Cardassians were pulling out, we captured maybe 2 or 3 of them in the chaos of the withdrawal? Where did they get the rest?"

"We had 3, but *that*, my friend, is the right question. In fact, it's the same one I asked," I said, leaning forward to show just how serious I was. "I let them bombard my island's shields for over 2 minutes while my sensors took deep scans. Three of the six were exactly what you'd expect, old, hasty repairs in the Resistance-style when we obviously didn't have the right parts or tools

to do it right, but just needed it to run. The other 3, though, were made to *look* distressed, on the surface, at a quick glance, but my sensors told a very different story.”

“What story was that?” he asked, sounding suspicious.

“Like they had just rolled off the fucking factory floor on Cardassia Prime,” I answered quietly.

Shakaar was silent for almost ten seconds before he obviously had a horrible realization.

“*No!*” he whispered in disbelief. “After all we fought for, all we died for, they’d invite them back in? *Traitors!!*” he practically growled.

“Whether they are traitors or not is a matter of interpretation, as I don’t believe they actually *know* where the weapons are truly coming from. They think they’re buying them from Kressari traders,” I explained. “Plans are in motion to expose the true source of the weapons, though, the Cardassians.”

“Those fools!” Shakaar growled before taking another drink. “They’ll condemn us all to more years of oppression and murder.”

“The Circle and their leaders, Minister Jaro Essa and Vedek Winn Adami were the spark, maybe truly homegrown, but the Cardassians wanted to help fan that spark into a great inferno that would topple the Provisional Government by providing them the weapons to succeed.”

“Do you think they know you are working against them?” he asked. “Maybe you were the true target of that attack on your home.”

“It’s possible, but unlikely. It’s irrelevant, though, since they didn’t succeed and they’d have to be suicidal to try again,” I answered solemnly, a hint of a growl in my voice. “They’re lucky that I had no desire to kill Bajorans or else I could have destroyed their gunships with a single shot. Not sure if it was the right decision in the end, but I let them go.”

Naturally, he was interested in hearing more, but was unwilling to ask for more than I was willing to give. Shakaar had always been good like that. Once you’d proven yourself to him, you were good till you gave him a valid reason not to be. He gave me a nod, agreeing with me that it really was a tough decision.

“I understand, my friend. You helped free us from the oppression of the Cardassians, not to kill misguided Bajorans too drunk on their supposed patriotism to realize that driving the Federation away would be a disaster or that they are actually Cardassian puppets,” he said, taking another drink of his wine. “We’d be back to hiding in damp, vole infested caves, desperate and hungry, fighting the Cardassians again within a month. Those days were not the ‘good old days’ for me, Gothic. I have no desire to go back to that life and I doubt you do either.”

“Exactly, my friend!” I replied passionately. “If the Celestial Temple hadn’t been discovered, a stable wormhole to the gamma quadrant to everyone else, maybe their plan wouldn’t be a disaster in the making, an invitation for the Cardassians to return and start again. But it was. The Cardassians don’t want Bajor back, they certainly don’t want to return for the same reasons they occupied Bajor in the first place. They want the wormhole.”

"Why are you here, Gothic? You know I would have nothing to do with the Circle," he asked.

I didn't show my ace in the hole just yet.

"It's important to prepare as much for success as for failure. The Kai felt I needed the Prophets' help, so she allowed me to experience the Orb of Prophecy and Change," I explained. Shakaar's mouth fell open, his expression a mix of awe and envy. "It showed me many things, including a timeline in which I hadn't come to this dimension, or become a general in the Bajoran Militia, or purchased fighter ships for Bajor."

Shakaar frowned, but was obviously curious, "What did that timeline look like?"

"The Circle was a much bigger problem in that timeline. General Krim both in that timeline and ours, was a supporter of the Circle and prevented clashes with their forces that could have stopped them already, giving them success after success. They essentially controlled the entire Bajoran military and mounted an attack on DS9 that necessitated that all of its off-world residents quickly evacuate," I explained what I remembered from the actual canon episode.

"There was no equivalent to my position in the other timeline, and certainly no serious off-world forces besides the station and the Federation's three runabouts. In this timeline, they know that every ship under Militia control, including the fighter squadron, which is the Militia's most advanced military hardware, is under my direct command. They don't have anything in their arsenal that compares, so they haven't even tried. That's both good and bad. It's good in the sense that they lack the ability to project power off the planet, but it's bad in the sense that all their efforts and personnel are focused on the planet. With Krim's support, they could succeed in overthrowing the government."

"What would the Federation do if that happened?" he asked.

"They'd leave. Their invitation was from the Provisional Government. If the Provisional Government falls due to internal political unrest, they'd have no invitation and thus they'd be forced to leave."

"I ask again, Gothic, why are you here? While it's horrifying to learn that what I fought for for most of my life is falling apart all around me, I'm just a farmer now."

"And I used to work in a library. Times change," I told him. "Sometimes the Prophets call for us to do more than we ever imagined."

He nodded at that bit of wisdom, but he didn't reply immediately. I knew him to be a man who thought things through. In fact, he was more level headed and forward looking than most of the people I'd worked with during the Occupation, which is probably why he lasted so long. He'd never wanted to be a leader, he'd just wanted his farmland back, but that hadn't stopped him from being an extremely effective one.

"Right now, Minister Jaro and Vedek Winn are working to overthrow the Provisional Government," I said. "If they win, they'll kick the Federation out, and open the doors for another Cardassian Occupation of Bajor. The very second the last Starfleet Officer is gone a fleet of

Galor-class warships will take Deep Space Nine and from there they will invade Bajor again. They would never have left this place if they'd known the wormhole was here and once they're back, we'll never be rid of them, no matter what we do or how many we kill. You'll be back in those damp caves, eating roast vole and fighting the Cardassians in a month's time. The good old days will be here to stay."

"What a terrible picture you've painted, Gothic," Shakaar groused. "Thank you for that."

"I intend to expose Cardassian involvement to the Chamber of Ministers. My greatest hope is that this news will wake everyone up to the real danger here. The question is what comes next, though. In another dimension, in another time, Li Nalas would have been killed by a fellow Bajoran and Sisko would be asking *you* to become First Minister. In this timeline, Li's a strong leader who needs time to rebuild."

"How far my people have fallen. To kill Li Nalas himself. And me, First Minister, what insanity!" he exclaimed, his trust in me so strong that he believed what I was saying without proof.

"The Provisional Government cannot stand without the military's full support, especially now, with the Occupation's wounds still unhealed. Li and I need someone on Bajor to lead the Militia forces there, someone who sees just how precarious our position really is," I explained. "We need you."

"Does the First Minister know that you're asking me to be a Militia General?"

"Nope," I responded with a laugh and a large smile. "But I know I can convince him that you're the right man for the job."

Shakaar got up and busied himself with some dishes, not making eye contact with me, obviously deep in thought.

"I don't know, Gothic," he said. "I thought those days were firmly behind me. I'm just a farmer now. I led a small Resistance cell, what do I even know about being a General?"

"What did I really know, Shakaar?" I replied quickly. "You'll figure it out, and you'll have my full support every step of the way."

He could be so much more, and to prove it to him I took the Orb out of its protective travel casing. It was still hidden within its ark, but its presence now could be *felt*, as well as seen. It practically filled the room with its power.

"I could try to convince you," I told Shakaar, who had now fallen to his knees in supplication before the Orb. His hands up in prayer at being in its presence. "I could say that you owe me a great deal, or that you owe Bajor, or that you owe it to yourself, but if what I have planned is meant to be then the Prophets will show you the path forward that you are meant to take. I'm fairly certain that there can be no stronger endorsement than that."

With that I left Shakaar to have his orb experience. I quietly left the farmhouse and went outside into the cold night as an explosion of light filled the room behind me. I rubbed my head wearily

while thinking about what the orb had shown me. Each orb was different. They all offered wisdom of sorts, sometimes in the form of visions of the future or the past, but the Orb of Prophecy and Change was not like the Orb of Guidance. The Orb of Prophecy showed a sequence of events, glimpses of a future timeline, in my case even the canon timeline from the show. All of which had been hard to focus on since they'd not been very clear, they were out of context, and they'd come very rapidly.

I'd seen myself presenting the evidence of Cardassian involvement in supplying weapons to the Circle---both the evidence that Odo had obtained in canon and the damning, incontrovertible, and detailed evidence my Section 31 allies had already delivered to me---to what passed for government right now.

Then I'd seen a slightly older, but also happy looking Shakaar becoming a General in the Militia.

Then I saw him kissing a very pregnant looking Nerys, which meant this course of action would most likely lead to me losing her, but it would also lead to a more stable and prosperous Bajor.

Then I'd seen his election to First Minister when he was much older.

My last vision had been of Shakaar with grey hair signing a document which brought Bajor into the Federation as a full member planet.

This was a series of events that I wouldn't oppose because deep down I was willing to give up Nerys to secure Bajor's future. She'd do the same if our positions were reversed; she'd have insisted on it, no matter how much it hurt her.

But that didn't mean I had to be fucking happy about it.

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“Gothic to B’Elanna, I intend to take the *Temptress* for a small flight to the capital,” I called out over the ship’s internal comm system, while sitting in my comfortable captain’s chair on the bridge of my ship. According to my sensors, she and Neela were working on something in engineering. “Is the ship ready for that?”

“She’s ready, Captain,” B’Elanna responded, a smile in her voice. “As long as you don’t intend to engage the slipstream drive, she’s fully operational in all other respects, including weapons.”

“Very good, I’m taking her out now. Prepare the engine room for imminent departure,” I ordered.

“Aye, Captain.”

As I still didn’t have a dedicated pilot to fly the ship, I brought the neural connection with my ship to the forefront of my mind. It would be incorrect to say that I ‘engaged it’ or otherwise ‘turned it on’ as it was always there, always on, along with the connection to my island’s systems. However, I wasn’t always actively engaged with it.

Like before, my ship, in the form of the cutest little rottweiler puppy, was incredibly excited and eager to please at his master showing him attention, jumping into my mental lap. I, of course,

gave my little one lots of pets and she eventually rolled onto her back in my lap so that I could rub her belly. Her little breathy yips and the way her leg pumped uncontrollably was adorable. I gave her a few mental minutes before I signaled that it was time to get to work and she dutifully sat up in my lap and faced outward, as if gazing into space herself. Through my connection with the ship, I could feel Natasha closely monitoring the ship's systems as this was essentially the first time I'd taken my new ship out, even if it was just going to be a short flight in atmosphere.

With the speed of thought, I started running down a long checklist of items necessary for departure from the underground hangar beneath my home on the island. External hatches were secured, power was being rerouted to structural integrity and the thrusters, checks were being performed on the landing system readying it to retract, and a few dozen other tasks were being performed one after another.

With a mental command, the thrusters underneath my ship gently fired bringing my ship slowly into the air, the landing apparatus, that I'd wholesale copied from Starfleet's Intrepid-class starship, retracted into the structure of the ship itself.

'Hermione, secure any drive exhaust and open the bay doors,' I mentally ordered.

'Acknowledged, my lord. Exhaust secured. Opening bay doors now,' Hermione responded.

This new way of addressing me had come about after I had further loosened the digital shackles on both Hermione and Natasha. It was an interesting result which I hadn't encouraged or discouraged, curious to see how it developed naturally. They alternated between 'father', 'my lord', 'creator', and 'sir' depending on the situation. I was curious if more titles would organically arise over time.

Carefully piloting the ship forward with my physical eyes closed, I engaged thrusters and flew through the open bay doors, coming out the side of the large hill my home rested upon. There were two huge retractable, reinforced doors on either side of the hangar bay, opening on each side of the hill, that way I could fly out of either one depending on how my ship was oriented in the hangar bay. The opening was covered by an elaborate holographic illusion and sensor dampening field to hide it from prying eyes. Data had assured me that the *Enterprise* herself could be floating over my island and they'd be unable to see what I didn't want them to.

I briefly considered engaging the cloak, but it was unnecessary at the moment, and not appropriate in this case as my intention was to send a strong message to the Circle, as well as all the forces of the Militia. In the future, I may just dock my ship with the station, or put it in high orbit over my Island.

As my ship flew higher and higher, I slowly passed through the low, fluffy white clouds that were often above my island. As my ship breached the sparse cloud cover, it felt like I was flying unaided, Bajor's sun lighting and warming my face. There was nothing quite so freeing as immersing yourself in your ship's sensors and flying through the clouds. I often wished my girls were capable of experiencing this.

I set a direct course to the capital and slowly flew in that direction at a low 10k feet above the surface. I wanted to be seen coming from a long way off.

My sensors detected the small flight of three Klingon fighters on an intercept course long before they contacted me.

“Unidentified starship, this is Bajoran Militia Fighter Flight 1. You are in restricted Bajoran airspace. Identify yourself and your intentions or you will be fired upon,” came a voice over subspace comms, one I instantly recognized.

“Fighter Flight 1, this is General Gothic, piloting my personal starship, the new *Flighty Temptress*. Sending personal identification codes to you now, Major Lupaza,” I replied calmly, happy that the fighter squadron had acted like they’d been trained to.

“Codes received, General Gothic,” Lupaza responded after a few moments of checking, before her voice turned sultry and seductive. “Your ship is very impressive. It looks...dangerous, just like its owner and captain.”

“It is dangerous, you incorrigible flirt. I’m going to tell Furel that you’re trying to seduce me again,” I snarked back with a smile. Lupaza was a good friend and one of my many old lovers from the Resistance. Kira and her remained very close to this day and often interacted as part of their daily duties.

“Go right ahead, he’s heard all about my slutty days back in the Shakaar with you and Kira. He’d probably tell you to give me a good fucking and spare his poor back and pelvis from how hard I’ve been riding him lately,” she immediately joked back.

Knowing Lupaza and Furel, and the Bajoran attitude towards sex, she was probably dead serious about that, “Don’t ever change, Lupaza. You and Furel always have an open invitation to my island for vacation, you know that.”

“We do,” she responded sweetly, before turning serious again. “You’re on course to the Capital. Have you finally decided to act against those Circle fuckers? Will you finally let us off the leash?”

“I have. If my plan is successful you’ll be hearing all about it shortly,” I responded. “For now, keep to the rules of engagement I laid out for them, only fire when fired upon.”

“Thank the Prophets. Furel and I have been worried those stupid fucks might actually succeed in overthrowing the government,” she admitted.

“You and me both,” I answered.

“May the Prophets guide you, Gothic. Lupaza out,” she said, before her flight broke off sharply and headed back into orbit to resume their standard patrol.

Several minutes later, just as I had hoped, I detected launches from the surface. Those six Nedar-class gunships the Circle had in their hands were back, and on an intercept course with my ship. Time to intercept was 1 minute.

‘Ready all weapons, Natasha,’ I ordered. ‘Begin sensor scans to determine particle beam strength to disable shields only.’

‘Sensor scans and data from previous engagement suggest 1.53% power to particle beam,’ Natasha advised.

‘Thank you, Natasha,’ I answered. ‘Begin preparations to hack their onboard computers and take control of the ships.’

‘Understood, readying electronic warfare package,’ she responded.

In this case, the electronic warfare package was akin to a stripped-down clone copy of Natasha herself. She’d essentially be sending a semi-independent clone of herself into the gunship’s computer systems and waging war with those systems for control of the vessel. Natasha, by my design, was an amazing hacker when it came to enemy ships and hardware, but this would not be a challenge for her. Over the many years of the Occupation, the Bajoran Resistance had become, by necessity, true masters when it came to Cardassian technology, especially in the area of circumventing their security.

I had benefitted from those many decades of experience and had a further cheat code in the treasure trove of data that Section 31 had given me prior to my stint as a 24th century pirate. On top of *that* hard won expertise, and the cheat codes from Section 31, I had a literal cheat code in the form of a carefully hidden backdoor that I had secretly installed in all stolen Cardassian technology the Militia had in its possession. My thinking, at the time, was that it would be prudent to have that ability if the Cardassians ever recovered any of their stolen hardware. Thus, we’d be able to turn it against them. It was just as useful, though, in this case, where insurrectionists had taken control of these gunships for their own purposes.

Of course, 3 of the 6 gunships were practically brand new Cardassian military hardware and thus didn’t have that backdoor already installed. When the Circle had attacked my home, I had been tempted to make a few of them just shutdown and fall from the sky, but the extra gunships had made me wary and I had no desire to expose that capability so early in the game.

I let them get close for what I had in mind, even though my ship was repeatedly lashed with the distinctive yellow orange beams from their disrupter cannons and micro torpedoes exploding on my shields.

‘Shield strength is 100%,’ Natasha dutifully reported, just as she was programmed to, even though it wasn’t strictly necessary with the entirety of the ship’s data available to me.

Reaching out with my mind, I targeted each ship with a precisely attenuated beam of energy. A continuous beam of neon blue energy struck each of the gunships’ shields, causing them to flare into visibility and then spectacularly fail after only a few moments of sustained contact.

The pilots once again tried to flee the combat area once they realized how hilariously outgunned they were. They turned erratically, taking off in multiple directions at high speed. They even made it a few thousand meters away before, like they were a team of precision flyers flying in formation, they turned back and took up positions around my ship, traveling on the same course

and at the same speed as I was. The pilots were probably terrified at losing control of their ships and wondering why the emergency eject system wasn't working.

'Enemy gunships are under my control, my Lord,' Natasha reported. 'Your orders?'

'Beam all pilots and any crew, if any, to the brig,' I ordered and I could immediately detect one of my main transporter pads activating and beaming all six pilots directly to my ship's brig. Boy, were they going to be surprised, when that first energy sweep disintegrated all of their clothes.

'Transport complete,' Natasha informed.

'Bring all captured gunships to a stop and beam them into the main cargo bay. Then power them down,' I next ordered.

It was prudent to take these ships into custody, that way they couldn't be used again by the Circle in some last-minute attack out of desperation. Besides, 3 of the 6 gunships were practically brand new and further proof of Cardassian involvement and supply of weapons to the Circle.

'All gunships have been retrieved.'

After an hour of travel at low speed and low altitude, I found myself hovering over the capital and the building holding the Chamber of Ministers. From the many people gawking at my ship in the sky, I felt certain that my message of strength had been heard by all that I wanted and needed it to.

Standing up, I decided it was the perfect time to bring an end to the Circle.

"Gothic to B'Elanna, the ship is station keeping directly above the Bajoran Chamber of Ministers; stay here until I return. I'm going to beam down and will return soon. The ship is yours," I said, though whether the ship was really hers, when I could maintain control of it from the other side of the galaxy, was a matter of interpretation.

"Understood, Captain. I'll take good care of her," B'Elanna responded. "Good luck."

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In a power play that I'm sure would piss off many who didn't want to hear what I had to say, I materialized directly in the center of the main meeting hall of the Bajoran Chamber of Ministers. The transporter materialization was a bright silver white, hundreds of vertical silver white lines quickly assembling my pattern in a way very distinctly different than that of a modern Starfleet transporter.

Like so much of my technology these days, it was a mutt, a mix of advanced transporter technologies from several different races, but was mostly Husnock in design. That design had a much, much larger effective range which better fit my needs and was more my style anyways, meaning it was much quicker to complete the transport materialization process. For a race of conquerors, materializing more quickly meant that you were vulnerable for far less time, capable of attacking or defending that much faster.

As a show of strength and intimidation, my armor was in its silver fluidic alloy form, showing that I was ready for combat. On each hip were my two large, dangerous looking sidearms of my own design and on my back, handle in easy reach, was my sword.

Unsurprisingly, it was Jaro Essa that spoke first.

“Guards, stop that man,” Jaro commanded, two planet side Militia personnel under Krim’s command jumping to follow his order.

“What is this blasphemy!” Winn said next.

“Stand down!” Li Nalas ordered tersely to the guards who reluctantly backed off.

“Ministers of Bajor, I am General Gothic of the Bajoran Militia, head of all off world Militia forces and installations,” I identified myself, looking intently into the eyes of each person here. “I come before you today with undeniable proof that the Cardassians are behind Minister Jaro’s and Ve-”

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‘dek Winn’s attempt to take control of the government...’ I trailed off slowly and eventually stopped speaking altogether when I realized that I was no longer in the real world.

The world had gone red tinged, I could hear the sound of a heartbeat, and for some reason I was back on the bridge of my ship. It was my heartbeat, I could tell. I’d seen this same phenomenon on multiple occasions in the show when the Prophets took someone’s consciousness into their realm when they wanted to communicate, usually Sisko. Or, at least, that’s how it always seemed.

‘It is the anomaly,’ Kira said, while walking past me, a look on her face that I had never seen before, detached, aloof, like she was looking down on me. This was most definitely not Kira, just a Prophet wearing her face.

‘The disrupter, again,’ Neela said next.

‘He has knowledge of the game’s future,’ Dax said.

‘It is *not* linear,’ said Ro.

‘His knowledge interferes with the prime design,’ Kira said.

‘Can we stop him?’ Neela asked.

‘No, he is claimed, protected from us and all the others,’ Dax answered.

‘Q and the □_I→_□/□_□_ agent of chaos, their entertainment,’ Ro practically spat.

All those fantasy and science fiction stories seemingly had it right. Names had power, and the true name of a likely conceptual being was not meant to be heard or learned by mortals, which is probably why I had just fallen to my knees, then to the floor, curled up like a baby. It currently felt like my brain was dripping out of my eyes, ears, and nose, even in this conceptual world that

they had pulled me into. No wonder the Q continuum's denizens all called themselves 'Q' when dealing with mortals. For some reason I had a bone deep certainty that the only reason that I was still alive was that I was separate from my body at the moment, so the damage hadn't transferred over. If the true name of a conceptual being had been used in the real world, I'd simply have died, *horribly*. For some reason I couldn't tell if the Prophets didn't realize that this would happen when they said my patron's name, or they were exacting a little penance for all the trouble I'd given them recently.

'Stop! I get it. Vedek Winn was not formally identified in the, 'prime design' timeline,' I said, reeling from the soul deep pain that I had just experienced, which I still wondered whether they meant for me to experience. Was this a loophole in Q's and my patron's protection? 'This is the second time you have protected her.'

'She *has* a purpose,' Kira answered.

'A role to play in the game that few else can,' Neela continued.

'I'm not willing to live my life in this new time and dimension afraid to make changes to the canon timeline!' I exclaimed. 'That's not why Q and my patron brought me here.'

'You risk everything with your interference, even your own life when you stray from the path,' Dax said.

'Believe me, I get that. I'm not unreasonable, though. Bajor gave me a home; they made me one of them,' I continued. 'If Winn is so damn important to your plans, I'm willing to let her continue as you have planned. I spared her life once before in that cave, at your request, when I was just going to shoot her in the head and be done with it. A favor for a favor. You will owe me a second favor now,' I bargained.

If I didn't have my protection from Gods in place, I wouldn't be arrogant enough to even attempt this. Gods were fickle fucks at the best of times and didn't like owing mortals shit. At least that's what all the stories said.

I really wasn't opposed to letting Winn go. If the Prophets felt it important enough to intercede on her behalf a second time then I had to take that shit seriously. They were working for the betterment of Bajor and winning their divine war would be to their benefit and that of the entire galaxy's. I was not so arrogant to think that I had any right to mess around with such a high-level war between conceptual, God-like beings. Being owed a second favor, wouldn't be such a bad thing, though I seriously had no idea what to ask for even now, or what was ultimately even within their purview of power.

'Let her continue her path...and we have a deal,' Ro said, striking a bargain with me. I really hope they understood what they were agreeing to.

'We have a deal. Now send me back,' I said, eager to end this conversation.

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"-attempt to take control of the government," I continued, hoping that sounded seamless.

“General Gothic has long been an outspoken supporter for Federation involvement in the future of Bajor, but he is not Bajoran and cannot know what is best for *our* people. He stands in opposition of our great future, of what we could become once again if left free to. He is an opponent of reason, of progress, and now, finally, of me,” Minister Jaro said, in that admittedly badass calm tone of his. I was getting Magneto charismatic speech vibes from him for some reason. “I’m honored to be included, General, but I have no intention of allowing you to disrupt the orderly transition of power with these wild charges.”

“They are only wild charges if I cannot *prove* them, Minister,” I replied, equally calmly, which seem to infuriate the Minister. My strong voice carried in the silence of the room.

I held out my hand and a padd materialized in my hand. A little bit of showmanship could go a long way.

“This is a manifest padd from a Kressari vessel,” I said as I slowly walked around the room, meeting the eyes of each Minister. “It bears the thumb scan of a Cardassian Gul, who transferred weapons from his ship, to that ship. Those weapons were then transported by the Kressari to the Circle. These weapons were largely the reason the Circle has been so successful. Put in their hands by Bajor’s greatest enemy, with the hope that these misguided fools will do what they could not do on their own, to drive the Federation away from Bajor and allow their return once again.”

“You are human. Your friends in the Federation could have easily manufactured such evidence,” Jaro replied.

“For years, I *fought* for, *bled* for, and *killed* for Bajor’s freedom from the Cardassians. Many of you fought side-by-side with me in the Resistance,” I said, making eye contact with and getting nods of respect from several people I recognized from various Resistance operations. I’d even saved a few of their lives. “I’ve protected this planet as if it were my birth world, and after the Cardassians were driven away, even donated money and material to the Provisional Government and the Militia to see it stronger and better protected. Over your heads fly 12 advanced fighter ships that I bought and loaned to the Provisional Government. I may not be Bajoran by birth, but can you say you’ve done as much for Bajor as I have, Minister Jaro?”

“Exaggerations and lies,” he called out.

“Let him speak!” the First Minister exclaimed.

A data storage device materialized in my hand, this one courtesy of Section 31, though they had no need to know that.

“This data storage device contains the entire computer database of the Kressari vessel that transported the Cardassian weapons into the hands of the Circle,” I explained. “It contains every sensor record that ship took of the Cardassian freighter which delivered the weapons, the DNA scan of the Gul who boarded that ship, the scans of the weapons themselves and who they ultimately delivered them to, and so much more. It is incontrovertible evidence on its own, so complete and comprehensive that it would be near impossible to fabricate.”

I paused for effect as whispers broke out among the gathered Ministers.

“If that is not enough. On my way to the capital to present these findings, I was attacked by 6 Cardassian Nedar-class gunships, the same gunships which tried to assault my home, to kill the Kai herself and the many aliens on Bajor that I gave my protection to, the ones that couldn’t evacuate in time. I captured them today when they attacked me on the way to the Capital to present my findings; they are currently sitting in my cargo bay. Any competent, unbiased investigator will quickly detect that three of the six gunships the Circle had, though made to appear old and distressed, are practically brand new, as if they just rolled off the factory floor on Cardassia Prime. I invite anyone here to examine all my evidence, to come aboard my vessel and conduct their own scans on these gunships and question their pilots currently in my brig.”

Silence. Total silence.

“This coup will deliver Bajor back into the hands of its greatest enemies. Are you all willing to live under Cardassian rule again?”

“I assure you there is nothing to these accusations,” Jaro attempted.

“Then you should have no objection to an inspection of this manifest and other data, Minister,” Vedek Winn interceded out of the blue.

I had to give the woman credit. She was a political animal, one who obviously had sensed the change in the winds of fortune and had positioned herself to survive the aftermath, distancing herself from Jaro. If I hadn’t struck a bargain with the Prophets, I might have chosen to expose her involvement, but that wasn’t going to happen today. I had been paid for my silence.

“No, of course not. We’re adjourned for the time being,” Jaro said. “And let me say that I completely support this investigation and fully intend to cooperate.”

And that was that. The aftermath of this episode never really made complete sense to me or was adequately explored after the Cardassian involvement became known. I strongly suspected that Jaro would resign in disgrace, but would otherwise not face the consequences of his actions, as he probably was actually ignorant of the Cardassians providing them weapons.

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Sisko's Office. Deep Space Nine.

"So, the Circle is done for," the Commander summarized as our meeting came to a close. "And Bajor will soon likely enter a new period of political stability. You have done the Provisional Government and the Federation a great service. Many of the non-Bajorans you protected, including Ambassador Troi and her diplomatic staff, have asked that you receive a commendation or medal in thanks."

I nodded in response. A new medal for my uniform would be nice, especially one directly from Betazed, but my thoughts were elsewhere.

If only it were as simple as Sisko made it. This younger Ben Sisko was clearly a far more optimistic version of himself than the one that had been seen in season 1, episode 1, of the show. Having a loving wife and son alive was bound to help with that. For fuck's sake I hope he wised up quickly. There were a lot of hard decisions to be made and dirty deeds that had to be done in the war-torn years to come. If he had a time with me killing Cardassians, during the fucking Occupation itself, how was he going to handle the killing that needed to be done during the Dominion War?

"Well, it's over, but all its former leaders and fanatic followers are still free and mostly unknown," I said. I guess my role was to be the realist/pessimist in the group now. Yay. "But sure, the actual organization has fallen apart, thanks to it becoming known that the fucking Cardassians were supplying the Circle with weapons and explosives and the Circle played right into their hands, aiding whatever plans the Cardassians had to take the planet back."

Sisko sighed and started playing with his iconic baseball, perhaps finally realizing that this wasn't some amazing, total victory. Most of the Circle idiots were in the wind now and who knows what stupid cause they'd support in the future at Winn's urging.

"I hear that your title has recently undergone a change, from General to Admiral," he said. "Is that correct?"

"It is," I replied, fighting a sigh.

In the aftermath of this debacle, Minister Jaro and General Krim had resigned in disgrace. With my strong endorsement, the First Minister was happy to appoint Shakaar as the new General in charge of the planet side Militia forces. The Prophets had really lit a fire in Shakaar during his orb experience and he was now more than happy to give up his life of farming to help preserve Bajor's freedom from the Cardassians and all other future threats. Whether that meant the Prophets shared something about the Dominion, I didn't know and wasn't about to ask. And he wasn't offering to share.

Another interesting effect of all this, especially after the common people realized just how close they had come to the Cardassians returning to oppress them, was that Li Nalas's government was stronger and more stable than ever. It had also exposed just how precarious the government's position could be with the way everything had been hastily organized after the Occupation ended. With the way things had been set up, the nascent government could not survive without the military's support and that was a dangerous situation to be in. Who knew when some future General or high-level officer might decide to try to topple the government again when its foundation was still so shaky, maybe because they thought they knew better or some such nonsense.

With the wave of popular support for a change to be made to ensure that this couldn't happen as easily again, coupled with the public support of the Kai (at my urging), and two militia generals who would be directly affected by the change, Li Nalas had gotten the other ministers to agree long enough to dissolve the militia at it currently stood and thus remove a major structural weakness in their system of government. Much of the militia's current purview and forces would

be reassigned to a new, separate and independent, domestic law enforcement organization, akin to a police force.

That sounded bad for me, but the Bajoran Militia had simply been renamed and reorganized into the new Bajoran Defense Forces, which was completely separate from the newly created police force which would now handle all future domestic, civilian matters of law enforcement, even if this new police force was still mostly made up of former members of the militia for the time being. However, it was very different in that it wasn't an army, it was law enforcement, made up of civilians now and completely separate from the military.

This new police organization would have separate buildings, different uniforms, and over time the militia officers would either be replaced by academy trained officers or they'd undergo the same training once they could be spared. The Bajoran Defense Forces and the police would have two separate spheres of authority and could backstop each other in the future should one or the other seek to undermine the government itself. At least that was the idea. It wasn't perfect, but it would certainly make it harder for one armed faction from easily overthrowing the entire government of Bajor.

"I'm not saying that the Circle is totally done for or those isolationist ideas have been erased from the hearts and minds of many Bajorans, but they've been disgraced. Aiding the Cardassians in retaking the planet is not something the Bajoran people will ever forgive or forget," I said.

As for me and Shakaar, not much would actually change in practical terms. We'd be getting a bit more government oversight from Li Nalas's faction, which wouldn't be a problem as he needed our support and as a former Resistance fighter, understood many of our issues; he just wanted to be able to tell the people that the new Defense Forces fully answered to the government, just as the new police force did.

"So rather than have an actual civil war, we end up with two rival political parties in the post-Circle shakeup," I was explaining to Sisko, just to make sure he fully understood the whole situation. "Winn's lot are the conservative, isolationist, and traditionalist faction, who want to go back to a pre-occupation Bajor, because, you know, that worked out so well. While those who follow Li Nalas and the Kai are more progressive, open to change and want closer ties to the Federation and maybe even Federation membership down the road. Not a united government, true, but now there are two solid political factions who might actually agree on some things, rather a dozen all pulling in different directions and paralyzing government entirely."

Which wasn't the whole story.

"Then you have the current First Minister who will do whatever the majority wants, which is currently Li Nalas's growing faction," I continued. "Of course, that could quickly change once it comes time to elect a new First Minister or Kai, but until that happens things should calm down nicely."

A period of sustained calm and stability was exactly what Bajor and I needed, leaving me free to look into the Collector situation, resolve the ongoing issues with the *Temptress'* slipstream drive, and time to do whatever favor Section 31 would want for giving me that data. It'd likely be a

relatively minor favor considering they had just as much of an interest in preventing Bajor from falling to the Cardassians as I did and would likely have acted anyway, even without my request. Their data evidence was also only part of what I'd needed to finally convince the Ministers of Cardassian involvement. Odo's stolen Kressari datapad, like in the episode, had helped too. It may have even been enough on its own to convince everyone, but I was strong believer in overkill and I didn't like leaving these things to chance.

"Where does that leave us then?" Sisko wondered.

I stood up.

"Pretty much the same as before," I answered him. "Starfleet will continue to administer the station and control the wormhole. The new Bajoran Defense Force is divided now into a navy and an army. General Shakaar is in command of the army, in other words, the Bajoran Defense Forces on Bajor, while I maintain command of the navy, as well as all off-world bases. Any off-world colonies set up in the future will be defended by the navy. The former militia forces here on the station will transition automatically to become part of the navy, but will still remain under your command, just like before, but on paper still under my authority. In practical terms it will just be a change of uniforms. I'm thinking something in a nice dark blue color. The Bajoran fleet, such as it is, will patrol Bajoran space, deal with smugglers and the like, fight off any Collector incursions--Prophets willing that won't be necessary--while not interfering with the running of DS9."

"But you're an Admiral, now," he asked, the hint of a smile on his lips told me that he had detected my discomfort with the rank change. "Why did that happen?"

"It was decided that since I work side-by-side with Starfleet officers, that we should adopt your rank hierarchy, at least with regard to the top rank," I explained with a sigh. "It was felt that having the same rank as Starfleet's ultimate leaders would make working together easier, or smooth my interactions with most Starfleet personnel who would understand the rank better. Li Nalas was definitely working some psychological angle when he came up with the idea."

"That makes sense, I suppose. Why does the change seem to bother you?" Sisko asked with a smile. "It doesn't sound like it'll effect your duties and responsibilities at all. It's just a name change."

Exasperated, I answered, "You know my background, I was a soldier in the US Army on old Earth; I wasn't in the Navy," I replied. "Even now I view myself more as a soldier than a ship captain, though I'm probably going to be doing a far more ship-to-ship combat going forward in this time, I admit."

"Will Major Kira's rank name be changed?" Sisko asked.

"No," I groused. "A Major is akin to a Commander in Starfleet, so having both a Commander Sisko and Commander Kira in command of this station was felt to be too confusing overall, so only I'm being affected. Shakaar will still be a General. If Bajor ever joins the Federation in the future, we'll transition all the ranks over as part of our forces' assimilation into Starfleet."

“Anyways, the creation of a civilian police force and the removal of those civilian law enforcement duties from the purview of the former Militia is the biggest practical change to be had in the aftermath of the Circle,” I explained to Sisko. “The idea is that it will be much harder for a future Bajoran Defense Force General/Admiral or other officer to singlehandedly topple the duly elected government in the future.”

“A sound idea, but one that limits your own power,” Sisko responded, looking intently at me. “That surprises me.”

“I think you have some misconceptions about what I want, Commander, or perhaps old prejudices arising from what I am that is clouding your judgment,” I replied calmly, my voice only slightly sharp. “I have always acted in the best interests of Bajor.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” Sisko admitted, a touch of shame in his voice. “I will pay closer attention to that in the future, I promise you.”

“Thank you,” I said. “Oh, if you could do something to show your support for Shakaar, without actually coming out and saying it, I’d be grateful. General Krim’s actions tarnished the position in the eyes of the people and the job will be hard enough as it is without that unearned anchor hanging around his neck,” I said to the Commander. “Maybe invite him to tour the station or something. An invitation from the station’s Commander and incidentally the Emissary of the Prophets, would go a long way. Just between you and me, I think he could very likely be Li’s successor as First Minister in the future, assuming he plays his cards right.”

“I will see what I can do,” Sisko offered with a small smile.

Bringing Shakaar to the station, even briefly, would no doubt lead to him reconnecting with Nerys, but if she could be happy with him then I should let her go and be happy for them. At least then maybe she wouldn’t have to suffer through losing that Vedek guy.

In the meantime, I’d enjoy the time we had left together.