

# Dark Territory Objects in Motion

By DarkKush

## The Unkindest Cut

**Benzar System**  
**Early August 2376**

"After days like this, I often wonder how I can continue looking at myself in the mirror," Samson Glover muttered, unable to pull himself away from the shuttle's aft viewer. Benzar still filled the screen, the bluish-green orb deceptively serene from space. Its innocuous appearance did nothing to uncoil the knots in Glover's stomach. He knew the hell that was spreading across the planet at this instance, because he had helped unleash it.

"I gave up looking in the mirror a long time ago," Ousanas Dar gruffly remarked. "Take the conn Daneeka," he informed the slim Bolian woman in the co-pilot's chair. Daneeka nodded tersely as the silvering Romulan got out of his seat. He slid into an empty aft seat beside Samson. "These missions never get easy," he said more softly. "Never." He repeated, staring hard at Samson. "I really wish it were a different universe, a place that didn't need people like us. This burden that we carry, this fear....of failure, the doubt over the rightness of our actions... It has a more devastating affect on the mind, on the spirit than a Klingon mind-sifter, trust me on that." Though he wasn't telepathic, Glover got the message. Decades before, Glover's friendship with Dar had almost ended due to the role Dar played in the Ghorusda disaster, his faulty intelligence resulting in the deaths of dozens of Starfleet personnel and the near immolation of Glover's wife's career. But Deitra had been dead for fourteen years now. Glover didn't think he would ever be able to forget what Dar had done, or hadn't done to cause such pain to his wife, and the crew of the USS Adelphi, but he had slowly embarked on the journey of forgiveness after their mission in the Romulan Neutral Zone several years ago. Though he realized he had never found it in himself to tell Dar so. And he wasn't sure that now was the time to do so, not in the cramped Romulan shuttle above the mayhem sweeping Benzar. Complete forgiveness would have to come, if ever, after Glover learned what the body count would total from this latest perfidy.

"I do understand," Samson wanly smiled, before gripping the Romulan expatriate's shoulder. "I'm also beginning to understand that sometimes you've got to find ways to forgive yourself and push on...though I think this one will be extremely hard for me." Dar nodded, a blank expression on his face.

It had been Samson's idea to use a modified Iconian probe to overwrite the complex biomechanical computer system governing the geostructures that Benzites

lived and worked in. Samson had informed Starfleet Intelligence that such a disruption would incite an appropriately nasty response from the Romulans now occupying the planet. The resultant Romulan repression would discourage the Benzites pushing to secede from the Federation and join the Romulan Star Empire.

After the Romulans had liberated the Benzites from the Dominion, they had wasted little time installing a puppet government and latching their tentacles into Benzar society. The Benzites were a people who appreciated order; perhaps a bit too much for Samson's taste and the appeal of the Star Empire's regimented society was a shockingly easy sell.

As much as Samson loved democracy and self-determination he also understood that having a Romulan beachhead inside Federation territory was too dangerous and would likely lead to another war. Glover had studied the Romulans for over five decades. Despite the recent alliance among the Federation, Klingons, and Romulans during the Dominion War, he knew Romulan hardliners weren't ready to take the next step to normalize relations with the Federation. It was unfortunate that many Starfleet hardliners felt the same way, and even more distressing that Samson was forced to agree with them and concoct this mission that flew in the face of many of the principles he had built not only his career on, but his life, and had taught to his son Terrence.

"Uh, guys," Daneeka said slowly. "If you care to put the male bonding on hold, I think you'll want to look at this." Seconds later, the shuttle's proximity alert wailed. Dar launched himself back towards the pilot's seat. Glover switched the aft viewer's sensors to the bow of the ship and activated the shuttle's miniscule weapon's platform. A vast stretch of space wavered just outside the shuttle.

Samson's heart rattled in his chest at the sight of the massive Romulan warbird looming over the bow of their shuttle. The communications console beeped, and Daneeka glanced back at him. "Sir, the Romulans are calling." Though Samson, Dar, and Daneeka had been stripped of their Starfleet commissions in order to remove any legal or tangible ties to Starfleet if they were captured on Benzar, Daneeka still lapsed in deferring to him since Samson had been an admiral, and hopefully would be again if they got out of the Benzar system alive. The trio had taken advantage of the communication breakdown in the immediate aftermath of the temporary deactivation of the geostructures to escape, with the help of a small band of Benzite partisans. Traveling at Warp Five, the highest speed the shuttle could manage, they had encountered no resistance. Most of the Romulan forces were planet bound on Benzar and the several Romulan war vessels they had bypassed had been more concerned with quelling the disorder on Benzar than closely examining Samson's cover story. The former admiral should've known their luck wouldn't hold.

"Patch them though," Glover said, "to my terminal." Samson self-consciously touched the tapered points of the Vulcanoid ears that had been surgically attached at Adigeon Prime before they reached Benzar. All three agents had been surgically altered. Dar, a fugitive from the Empire for decades had received the most cosmetic surgery, even more so than the blue-skinned Daneeka. Still he and Samson were leery that the disguises would fail at a critical time. So far it had held but the old admiral didn't want to take any chances. Seconds before contact was established,

Glover puffed out his chest and put on his best sneer. "What is the meaning of this?" He snarled, with what he hoped was a convincing amount of exasperated disgust. "How dare you impede us!"

Unfortunately, the stoic face staring back at him wasn't rattled in the slightest. "A planetary curfew has been issued. No ships are authorized to leave Benzar. Who are you and where are you heading?" The young commander leaned back in her seat, content to wait Samson out.

"I ask the questions here, not you!" Glover retorted.

"If you persist on being recalcitrant I will have no recourse but to either board your vessel or destroy it," the commander said calmly, as if she were talking to a child. Now she really is starting to get me steamed, Samson thought. "Identify yourselves immediately."

"I'm Colonel Tiber," Samson snapped, "of the Tal Shiar." Samson hoped the mention of the dreaded Romulan secret police would rattle the young officer.

"Please submit your identification codes," the woman said, still unruffled. Glover nodded, and Daneeka supplied the information.

"I'm on urgent business for the Empire," Samson said as he watched the woman read the information being downloaded from their shuttle.

"Yes, running while brave Romulan soldiers are risking their lives for the Empire on Benzar," the woman said, the neutral tone of her voice disturbingly at odds with her harsh words.

"The Imperial Fleet has its duties, and the Tal Shiar has its duties," Samson grinned. "Are we done here?"

"Who is accompanying you?" The woman asked, her voice cracking slightly. "As I'm sure you are aware, some rebellious Remans have taken advantage of the chaos to join with Benzite agitators. Are you harboring any Remans aboard your vessel?"

"You know the answer to that question already," Samson riposted. "I'm sure you've scanned us thoroughly." Glover hoped that the painful genetic re-sequencing that the Adigeons had put them through would hold up under the scrutiny of the warbird's bioscanners.

"Of course," the woman said. "There's just one more thing...." Samson's flare of relief faded when the commander gestured off screen. Seconds later, a new figure stepped into view.

"I am Colonel Viredis... of the Tal Shiar," the cadaverous man said, a too pleasant tone in his voice. "Colonel Tyan is it? I don't believe I've met you before."

Samson did his best to hide his fear. It would be just his luck to be almost out of the danger zone when they ran into a ship with an actual member of the Tal Shiar on it.

"Our organization is a large one Colonel Viredis," Glover said, "And I'm sure you're aware that it is in the interest of maintaining our effectiveness that a certain amount of anonymity is required among our agents."

"Yes," Viredis nodded. "But not among the senior leadership anymore. Chairman Koval changed the policy of his predecessor. But I'm certain you were aware of that?" He smiled without showing his teeth. He knows, Glover thought, his

stomach sinking. The former admiral motioned with his hands for Daneeka and Dar to engage in evasive maneuvers.

Before they could react, the shuttle rumbled. "They've latched a tractor beam onto us," Daneeka hissed.

"I demand you release us at once," Glover roared.

"I'm afraid that I can't do that Admiral," Viredis replied. "You had your orders and I have mine." The screen went blank.

"Damn it!" Samson smacked the screen. "Charge weapons and fire up the engines. Target that ship's tractor beam emitter. When she blows, thunder us the hell away from here!"

"Already on it," Dar said tightly. Feeling helpless, all Samson could do was watch from his screen as the beams from the shuttle's aft weapons bank bounced off the warbird's shields.

"We're not going anywhere," Daneeka said before uttering a string of Bolian curses. The shuttle rattled with as the engines fought against the tractor beam. "If I keep gunning the engines like this I might rupture a nacelle."

"Believe me, you would prefer instant death to what the Romulans probably have planned for us...me in particular," Dar said.

Daneeka looked at the Romulan and then back at Samson. Her voice was coldly detached when she asked, "Initiate self-destruct sir?"

Samson paused; thoughts of his son Terrence, his life in Starfleet, his late wife Deitra, and his friends flitted through his mind. Though he feared what the Romulans would do to them, he didn't want to do their job for them. As long as he drew breath he there was always a chance and even if it couldn't find one, he knew Terrence would tear up the galaxy to find them. "No," Samson shook his head.

"Samson we can't let them capture us," Dar protested. "I know I'm a dead man. But they'll torture you and Daneeka, draining every bit of information they can from you, and they will use that information against the Federation. You can't let that happen! I won't let that happen!" Dar unlatched the disruptor hanging from his hip.

"Shoulder that sidearm Mr. Dar," Samson commanded with quiet force. Daneeka was torn between checking her instruments and the drama going on inside the shuttle.

"I can't do that," Dar said. Glover rose slowly, unclipping his own disruptor. Daneeka started to rise, but Glover ordered her to maintain her station.

"Technically you're not my superior sir," Daneeka retorted.

"This is between us," Glover replied.

"Fine time to return to the sandbox," the Bolian replied, "the Romulans are reeling us in like the fresh catch of the day."

"And that's why I must do this," Dar said, raising his weapon. Glover did the same. A green beam lanced out, sizzling past Samson, connecting with the small sphere that encased the singularity powering the shuttle in the aft section of the shuttle. The beam pounded into the sphere, cracking it. Alarm klaxons bellowed as the singularity began to seep out of its cage, devouring everything it came into contact with. Samson hadn't realized that he had fired his weapon until Dar clutched his chest and fell to the floor.

"Oh my God!" Samson cried, running to the man. Daneeka left her seat, and knelt beside the fallen Romulan. Samson brushed aside the Bolian's help. He cradled Dar in his arms, fighting the increasing pull of the mini-black hole growing behind him. Green blood trickled from both sides of Dar's mouth. He smiled at Glover.

"I guess a Romulan finally did get me," he weakly flicked one of Samson's fake ears.

"You're going to be okay," Samson babbled, "I promise I'll get you out of this. I'll get us all out of this."

"No," Dar said, a spout of blood punctuating the words. "It's too late...die...with...dignity."

"Don't say that," tears stung Samson's face. "Please don't say that. I'm so sorry...I thought...." He looked to Daneeka for understanding, but only saw a cold disgust in the woman's indigo eyes.

"Never trust a Romulan," Dar's laugh was a painful wheeze. "You did learn something after all...from our conversations."

"I...I don't think I learned anything at all," Samson wailed. The tug of the singularity was growing stronger, but Glover didn't think the Great Bird himself could separate him from Ousanas at this moment.

"It's okay," Dar coughed again. "Don't worry...I forgive...." The Romulan's eyes glazed over. He was gone.

A powerful force tore at Samson and seconds later he was gone as well.

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## Reversals of Fortune

**Palais de la Concorde  
Paris, Earth  
Mid-August 2376**

Garth Logan refused to be intimidated. "That's not my concern," he said as disinterested as he could. "I lived up to my end of the bargain. I delivered Admiral Glover and Ousanas Dar to you. It's not my responsibility to ensure that your rivals don't do an end run around you."

"My rival is one of your assets," Commander Patrin Volok's eyes burned through the small viewer atop Logan's desk. After Logan didn't give the Romulan the reaction he hoped for, he said, "Don't deny it. I've known it for quite some time."

"If that was the case, why haven't you exposed them?" Logan asked, a playful smile on his face. He would never admit that Chairman Koval was a Section 31 asset, his loyalty insured by his desire for a cure to the Tuvan's Syndrome ravaging his neurological system.

"Because the knowledge serves my purpose," Volok answered. "Besides my vendetta was with Helanor," the older man said, referring to Koval's predecessor at the Tal Shiar. "She was the one that had me imprisoned, my lands taken, my reputation blackened..." the rest of the litany dissolved into inaudible grumbles. Volok now had a far away look in his eyes.

He's losing it...again. Logan often questioned why he had allied with Commander Volok, without the approval of Section 31's Directorate, to sabotage a mission that Starfleet Intelligence in part designed to stymie Romulan designs on the Benzar System. But he knew why, and it bothered him. In his own way he was just as unhinged as Volok, maddened by a thirst for revenge. He wanted to destroy both Captains Terrence Glover and Donald Sandhurst, two men that had left him to die in the Tong Beak Nebula years ago when he used the identity Gennaro Laurent.

He had survived their deathtrap and risen like a phoenix, with a new identity and more power than he could ever imagine, as Federation President Martin Santiago's Chief of Staff. The gifts were courtesy of Section 31. And now he had burned the last bridge he had left...unless, no one learned about his involvement with Volok. With the commander silenced, Logan could still enact his revenge against Captain Glover. If Admiral Glover was no longer a viable means to achieve that, Logan would look elsewhere. Once he had destroyed Glover he would turn his sights to Sandhurst.

"Listen commander," he said as sweetly as possible. "Your agents helped insure that the Romulan repression on Benzar was particularly brutal, and the Remans you commanded will likely find a new home on one of the uninhabited worlds in that system so long as you stick to our deal. I am committed to seeing that happen. How about we schedule a meeting?"

Volok regarded him skeptically. "You would come here...to Romulan space?"

"Of course not," Logan chuckled. "Let's meet somewhere neutral. You pick the place."

Volok scratched his temple for a few moments, and then tightly smiled. "I have just the location," he paused to tap the keys on his terminal. "Transmitting the coordinates now."

"Got them," Logan said a few seconds later. "I look forward to resolving this."

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**Federation One  
(In orbit of Alpha Centauri )  
One week later...**

Cid Finbar, the President's Press Secretary, burst into Logan's office. "We can't win for losing," the Rigelian exclaimed.

"What is it now Cid?" Logan grouched.

"Check out the latest FNS report," Finbar stomped around Logan's desk, as far into his personal space that Logan contemplated killing the ill-tempered man, and activated the screen on his desktop viewer.

Logan's heart stopped at the image on the screen. The last time he had seen Lt. Daneeka, he had sent her off to die. Now her bruised face was emblazoned across his screen. The camera pulled back to show the Bolian strapped in a chair. A disembodied voice asked her questions, and she answered them in a slurred voice. She was talking about the Benzar mission. She mentioned his name! The camera's image then switched to a raucous press conference. Senator Hiren, a tall, elegant man draped in purplish robes of state, addressed the cacophonous throng.

"This is incontrovertible evidence of the Federation's involvement in precipitating a planetwide emergency on Benzar that necessitated some unfortunate, regrettable actions by Romulan security forces in an attempt to stave off planetary anarchy. The testimony of former Starfleet officer Daneeka implicates not only Starfleet Intelligence, but a member of President Santiago's inner circle. This was a conspiracy to destabilize a lawful election, to undermine the will of the Benzite people. This outrage will not go unanswered." Logan switched off the screen, unable to watch more. Everything was starting to unravel, and now his plan to silence Volok would have to be put on hold as well.

"What the hell did you do Garth?" Finbar raged.

Logan put on the best cool expression he could muster. "You don't obviously believe that do you? That Lt. Daneeka was a confederate of Admiral Leyton, and I don't have to remind you of the enmity between Leyton and Santiago."

"You seem to know a lot about this Daneeka character," Finbar said, his voice steeped in suspicion.

"It's my business to be aware of any potential enemies the President might have," Logan replied nonchalantly. "If I wasn't watching out for his interests I wouldn't be doing my job."

"I wonder how far that goes," Finbar replied. Logan shot out of his seat, allowing his face to reddish and a veins bulge along his temples. He could finally allow some of his fear to the fore, though he did his best to mask it as righteous anger.

He shouted. "Just what do you mean by that? What are you trying to say Cid?" Logan was pleased when the Rigelian stepped back.

"Nothing," Finbar held up his hands in a placating gesture.

"Has the President seen this?" Logan asked. Before Finbar could answer, Santiago rushed through the door.

"Logan," he said, his voice breathless. "I need to speak to you alone. Right now!"

As soon as the door had closed behind Finbar, Logan ordered it locked. "What did you do?" Santiago asked, slumping down in one of the chairs surrounding Logan's desk. "You said you had an October surprise, something that would catapult my poll numbers and get me back into the Palais. Please tell me this wasn't it, that you had nothing to do with this?" The President paused, blinking hysterically for several seconds. "Please," he mewled.

"I assure you Mr. President that this is nothing more than Romulan propaganda," Logan answered smoothly. "You recall that Hiren is in a bit of a struggle for power himself with Senator Tal'aura. Hiren wanted to keep Romulan forces on Benzar, to make Benzar the beak of the raptor so to speak. Tal'aura is much more sensible. She was willing to return Benzar to the Federation in exchange for the resettlement of the Remans to a planet in the Benzar system."

"I don't need a history lesson," the President snapped.

"I know that sir," Logan replied. "Yes, I'll admit that I had some of our people working with Tal'aura's faction, doing some minimal coordinating."

"So, you did have a hand in this," Santiago sighed. "You know that the media is just salivating waiting for our return to Earth. I wonder if it's too late for me to join the Nyberite Alliance."

"I'm not saying that at all," Logan said. "I don't have control over Tal'aura or her people. Perhaps some of them got a little zealous. Of course a vote in our favor on Benzar would've been a boon to both of our causes. But I had nothing to do with this debacle."

"It wouldn't really matter if you did," Santiago retorted. "I get the blame for everything it seems. So, I guess the question is how do we plan a strategy to weather this latest storm?"

"One word," Logan said, "Solitaire."

Santiago looked at him askance. "Now is not the time for card games Garth."

"Solitaire," Logan repeated, with more force. The President froze. Logan shook his head as he got out of his seat. He walked around his desk, and knelt down to gaze into the President's gazed eyes.

"It's been too long between treatments," Logan said, "You're starting to resist the medication. We'll have to remedy that." He walked back to his desk, pulled out a hypo and placed it against the President's neck. He sighed as the cylindrical

device released its contents into Santiago's bloodstream. Logan then proceeded to instruct the President on how to respond to this latest crisis.

After bringing Santiago out of his trance and sending him on his way, Logan contacted his superiors. He knew it was best to contact them before they sent someone after him.

"The Directorate is not pleased," his contact, a stocky Andorian woman in a slick, black suit replied. "We know about your side-deal with Commander Volo. The section was in support of SI's plan. Without your interference perhaps the return of Benzar to the Federation would've ensured Santiago's reelection."

"What does that matter?" Logan cockily asked. "I'm sure Satie could be as easily controlled as Santiago."

The Andorian frowned. "Satie...is a bit problematic." The Andorian didn't elaborate.

"So, what do you want me to do?" Logan asked.

"Fix this problem you've created," the woman replied. "Our sources inside Romulus inform us that Chairman Koval has pilfered Admiral Glover for some unknown reason. Find out what Koval is up to and report back to the Directorate."

"And what about Admiral Glover?" The Andorian merely stared at him. Logan smiled. He might actually be able to get his revenge after all.

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## **Deadlines**

**Rokat Colony  
(Former Cardassian Union)  
September 2376**

Jake Sisko knew he should've been elsewhere, on Bajor attending to the needs of Kasidy, his pregnant stepmother, or in the Briar Patch, embedded with one of the starships helping bring sanity to the genocide initiated by the Alshain. But Jake's reporter's instincts told him that a major story was in the offing right here. The only draw back was spying on an old friend to get the scoop.

Jake sat in a darkened corner of the bar, a heavy cape thrown over his thin shoulders and a cowl masking his face. He was more afraid of being identified as a human than Jake Sisko, son of the man that had helped lead Starfleet against the Dominion. Though many Cardassians hated the Dominion now as much as he did, there were many others who hated the Federation just as vociferously. They hadn't been able to distinguish that the Federation was fighting a war against the Dominion, and unfortunately since the Cardassians had allied with the Dominion and started the war, Starfleet brought the war to them. And boy had it ever, Sisko sadly realized, remembering the defeated, angry faces he gazed upon while traveling from the spaceport to this bar. He had tried to walk quickly, to avoid contact or detection, fighting his writer's instincts to observe and catalogue along the way. Thankfully he had made it here in one piece. Now he just had to make it out, and bring Dr. Bashir back with him.

Jake turned away from the mug of cold fish juice curling his nose hairs to stare again at Bashir. The young doctor didn't appear to be too concerned about being noticed. It appeared that he wanted to be. He stopped nervously by the bar, checking his chronometer every few minutes. Odd behavior for a spy, though Jake had deduced that was what Julian had become, or perhaps always was.

He knew the thought was crazy, but Jake also knew about Bashir's previous fascination with espionage holoprograms and a bit about his twisted relationship with the rogue spy outfit Section 31. Add to that some strange personal behavior the last couple months and mysterious trips that even Ezri, his girlfriend didn't know really anything about, and it all got Jake's imagination humming.

Jake knew that Bashir had taken the last couple months almost harder than anyone on the station. Colonel Kira had been severely injured as part of a labyrinthine that turned DS9's defenses against the Cardassian Premier's ship, the woman dying in the process. Garak, Bashir's best friend, was accused of the assassination, and had vanished. Though it couldn't be concluded that Garak had not in fact died along with Premier Lang, Jake knew enough about the tailor/Obsidian Order operative to doubt that.

Maybe Jake had jumped to conclusions by considering Bashir might be a spy, but his gut told him that Bashir definitely knew more about Garak's fate than he was letting on, and he intended to find out what that might be.

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Jake was good, but not good enough, Doctor Julian Bashir thought, as he spied the young man trying to blend in at the back of the bar. Here was another complication he would have to deal with. It had taken him months to get to this point, not to mention the soul he had given to Section 31 in exchange for information about Garak's whereabouts.

He had provided the requisite pound of flesh, along with his soul, to satisfy Section 31, and his contact, a minister from the Bajoran government, had given him coordinates to this place, and the name of a contact that could give him the information he sought.

The first problem was he didn't know what this contact looked like, forcing him to shed any thought of anonymity. Second, he now had to think about ensuring Jake's safety. Things were already strained enough between him and Ezri. He couldn't let anything happen to Jake, the son of Captain Sisko, Ezri's best friend.

Rokat was a mining colony, its chief mining concern one of the subsidiary's in Trade Provost Minto Urlak's expansive corporate empire. The last time he had seen the kindly Urlak on DS9, the man had accused Garak of Natima Lang's assassination. Now in the campaign to succeed her, Urlak had made the capture of Garak one of his chief campaign goals. Bashir intended to find Garak first, so his friend could get a fair hearing.

A burly Cardassian bumped into Bashir. The young doctor looked up expectantly, hoping this was his contact. But the Cardassian merely sneered at him. "Out of the way human," he said with a thick disgust. The Cardassian elbowed his way up to the packed bar. This was a rough-and-tumble place, filled with unsavory clientele.

Bashir, with his genetic enhanced speed, strength, and agility, along with his training with Captain Sisko, Colonel Kira, Odo, and Jadzia had little doubt that he could hold his own against most of the denizens of the bar. But if a fight broke out, the doctor was certain Jake would rush to his aid. Though the young man had filled out, he was still no fighter. Unfortunately, Bashir still couldn't forget the memories of Jake leaving him wounded on the battlefield during a fire fight on Archanis IV. The young man meant well, but Bashir knew not everyone was cut out for this life.

"Bashir," a soft voice rasped in his ear. "Follow me," a slender, robed figure brushed past him and out of the bar. Bashir followed her. He hoped Jake would keep a safe distance.

The figure walked quickly through the darkened streets. Bashir nearly had to jog to keep up. When the woman ducked into an alley, the doctor grew suspicious. He pulled out his phaser, but kept going. He was determined to find out what happened to Garak.

As soon as Bashir stepped into the alley, a force slammed into his stomach. He doubled over, the phaser clacking to the ground. Before he could catch his breath he was thrown against the wall. In the fading day light, Bashir made out a scaly, beautiful face that was strangely familiar. "So, you're Doctor Bashir?"

"Yes," he managed to say after a few breaths. "Are you the contact?"

"No," she shook her head. "I killed him two days ago." Bashir struggled in the woman's grip, but she was too strong. Unfortunately, she was too close for him to kick at, and she kept her head angled away from a head butt. "I thought you were genetically augmented?"

"I am."

"Even augmented humans can't match the strength of normal Cardassians," the woman replied. "How you overcame us I'll never know."

"Well, you can have plenty of time to figure it out in a Federation penal colony." Bashir didn't have to look in the voice's direction to determine who it was. He already knew.

"Get out of here Jake," he ordered.

"Jake...Sisko's son," the woman's head whipped around to look at Jake. Her grip on Bashir remained firm. Jake held the phaser Bashir had just dropped in a quavering hand.

"Let him go lady," the young man warned.

"I'm no lady," she replied. "Doctor Bashir and I both came here for the same thing, and the good doctor will be the bait I need to trap him."

"You're after Garak?" He asked, seeking as much information as he could to try to figure out who this woman was, why she was here, and to determine a way to stop her.

"Oh yes," the woman's gaze returned to Bashir. Her eyes were darker than the encroaching gloom. "He escaped me once...never again."

"Now Jake! Fire!" Bashir cried. The woman threw Bashir even further into the ally, before sidestepping Jake's errant shot. She chopped Jake's wrist, and cuffed the man against the head. He fell to the cement. The woman retrieved the weapon and slowly approached Bashir. He began crawling backward, stopping when he hit something that felt like leather boots. Had the woman brought a colleague? Bashir looked up, but he only saw shadow. He reached out again and now felt nothing there.

"Where were we Doctor?" The woman matter-of-factly asked. Bashir began to get to his feet, but froze when the woman pointed the phaser at him. "Don't make me use this thing Doctor. I'm still not as familiar with phaser settings as I should be."

"Which proves my assertion that Entek was a substandard mentor to begin with," a voice sang through the darkness above Bashir's head, followed by a volley of energy blasts. Each one connected with the woman before she could get off even one shot. She pitched backward. A rough arm slid under one of Bashir's and pulled him up.

"Come along Doctor," Elim Garak said, stepping out of the murk. Bashir couldn't believe his own eyes.

"Garak, you're alive!" He moved to embrace his old friend, but Garak brushed him off.

"I would love to draw this out Julian, but now is not the time." The former spy went over to the fallen woman and checked her thoroughly. He handed Bashir's weapon back to him, and removed several others from the woman. "I doubt she's here alone." He paused, noticing Jake's slumped form for the first time. He

rushed over to check him. "Still alive. Thank the Prophets! At least that's one less group whose wrath I have yet to incur. Unless of course you and Jake don't get out of here now."

"I'm not leaving without you," Bashir protested.

"Yes you are," Garak replied.

"If you stay here they'll kill you."

"And I'll kill you if you continue arguing with me."

"No you won't," Bashir said, "That's not the kind of man you are."

"Still unwilling to think the worst of me," Garak thinly smiled. "You've learnt nothing from me after all these years."

"I know you're not a killer...at least of the Premier."

"Right you are doctor," Garak nodded.

"I thought Natima was the best thing that had happened to my people in a very long time."

"Then come back with me so we can prove your innocence," Bashir pleaded.

"This isn't a Federation matter," Garak replied. "It won't be solved by Federation law, in a Federation courtroom. The very soul of Cardassia is at stake."

"I want to help," Bashir said. "Whatever you're planning to do, you don't have to do it alone."

"Thank you Doctor, I knew I could count on you." He paused, pulled out two hypos from his hooded jacket and handed them to Bashir. "This one is to wake up Mr. Sisko. The other one is to keep Illiana unconscious."

"That's Illiana Ghemor," Bashir pointed at the unconscious woman. "That's the one that hurt Kira?"

"The one and only," Garak said. "Take her someplace hidden and safe. Don't let anyone know where you've hidden her until I contact you. Illiana's a part of the conspiracy to assassinate Premier Lang, but she's only one tool."

"Who's the mastermind?" Bashir asked. "You know who orchestrated this don't you?"

"Soon everyone else will too," Garak promised. "No go." He casually stepped over both Ghemor and Jake and disappeared into the night. Bashir knelt beside Jake, administering the hypo, though his mind was already trying to figure out what Section 31 safehouse he could store Ghemor in until Garak needed her. He guessed working for the devil came with some benefits after all.

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## Ronin

**Terra Nova**  
**Mid-September 2376**

"I'll do this as a favor to you," Ivan Cherenkov glanced in Pascal Fullerton's direction, "Not her," he said, regarding the ascetic Delb female that had transported down to Ivan's apartment. The woman looked dispassionately at Ivan.

"That's acceptable," she replied. Ivan hated politicians. Pols and diplomats often got a lot of people killed unnecessarily, like the tragedy on Kesprytt III that still haunted his nightmares and career. Plus, he had never respected anyone who ordered someone else to fight their battles for them.

"Thank you," Fullerton said. "I know you might consider this a step backward, but it is really for the best."

"Pascal I respect you, but I'll be the judge of that." Ivan replied. "I'm ready to go."

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**SS Aaron Satie**

"We really couldn't do this from a surface comm.?" Ivan asked, gazing into the face of retired Admiral Norah Satie, the front runner in the presidential race. The Russian had to admit that the holoprojector Satie was using was an amazing piece of tech. It was almost like Satie was in the cabin with them. Up close she seemed far more lifelike than she did on the nightly news feeds.

"I regret that we couldn't. I trust the security of my communication systems a slight bit more I'm afraid," Satie wanly smiled. "Thank you for coming."

Ivan nodded. "I'm all ears ma'am." Satie looked at Tore and Pascal.

They

both got the hint and left the room.

"Mr. Cherenkov, are you familiar with an organization called Section 31?" Ivan's breath caught in his throat. "I see that you are," the former admiral replied. "I believe you've had dealings with them in the past?"

Ivan didn't know how much Satie actually knew about the organization, whether or not this was a fishing expedition, or even if she was a member and trying to determine if he was a threat to the group. You just never knew with those people, so Cherenkov thought the best thing to do was play it as close to the vest as possible. He nodded, confirming or denying nothing.

Satie smiled again. "Well trained I see. Pascal was right. You are the perfect man for the job."

"And what job might that be?"

"I'm sure you know about Section 31, but there is another group, or groups I should say just as committed to ridding the Federation of that dreaded outfit as they are determined to subvert our individual liberties." Satie paused,

looking at him to see how he reacted to that revelation. Inside Ivan was thrilled, but he maintained a poker face. "You really are a block of ice eh Mr. Cherenkov?"

"Please continue," Ivan said.

"I've received information from one of these counter-groups. Section 31 has their claws deep inside President Santiago's administration. They're heavily invested in his reelection. I've become a threat to them, and I've received information I believe is valid that Section 31 wants to neutralize the threat I pose."

"How can I help you?"

"Pascal has told me a little about your predicament, about your desire to renounce your past. I know this will be hard for you, if you accept, but I would like for you to prevent any Section 31 assassins from robbing our citizens of their right to choose their leaders."

"That's a tall order," Ivan mulled over the offer. "I'm still a Starfleet officer, granted I'm on extended leave. There is only a limited role I can play in political affairs. I also don't think Command would cozy up to the idea of me being your hired gun."

"I understand," Satie said. "The choice is yours. Please let me know what you decide. I'll give you my personal code." She sent the code. "Well, I've got several more events planned for today. Thank you for considering this Mr. Cherenkov."

"Don't mention it."

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## Asunder

**USS Meharry  
Starbase 116  
Mid-September 2376**

Captain Terrence Glover hadn't felt so nervous since his first date. As soon as he resolved on the *Meharry's* transporter pad, he hopped off.

"Captain Glover, it's a pleasure to meet you," Captain M'Bira stretched out a furry hand. Glover grasped it firmly. He looked around the small room.

"Captain M'Bira, where is my wife?"

"Oh, she's in Engineering. She said there were some last minute warp injector tests she wanted to run before we disembarked. After I expressed a desire to meet you, she said you wouldn't mind a brief tour while she completed her tasks."

"Did she now?" Glover tried to hide his disappointment, but M'Bira was too perceptive.

"Have I erred somehow?" The gracious Caitian asked. "Human decorum is still a mystery to me at times."

"No," Glover nodded. "You haven't. I...just haven't seen my wife in a long time."

"I understand," M'Bira said. But Glover didn't think she did. He was surprised at M'Bira's youth. Perhaps she was younger than she looked, but Terrence suspected the captain was one of the new wave of CO's promoted to fill in the massive gaps left by the Dominion War.

Glover had been so excited by Jasmine's invitation that he hadn't really checked the crew roster of the ship she had signed on to. He hoped the captain's age was no demerit on her experience. "Please lead the way."

M'Bira was an amiable host. She took Glover through most of the *Olympic*-class vessel, and he had to admit he was impressed. He had always liked the spherical-hulled design on the *Olympic* class. It reminded him of the old *Daedalus* ships, which were one of his favorite designs.

The Caitian chose Engineering as her last stop. On the ride down, M'Bira said, "You know Jasmine is a great worker. She's only been aboard for a week, but she's already making an impact."

"Engineering is her first passion," Glover said absently. His mind was still back on the bridge. The Tactical Officer, a severe Efrosian, had showed him the miniscule complement of weapons the medical ship possessed. Glover had filed the information away. It would be one of the arguments he planned to use to convince Jasmine to come back with him. As a Starfleet officer, he hated the idea of leaving M'Bira in a lurch but he was sure her staff hadn't grown too dependent on Jasmine in just one week. Now was the time for the cleanest separation Glover reasoned.

When the turbolift doors opened, Terrence squared his shoulders and strode into the Engineering section. He was pleased that he turned more than a few heads. Captain M'Bira walked a step behind him.

"Jasmine!" He called. His wife was standing by the warp core, the soothing colors of the cylindrical contraption bathing her in soft light. Jasmine turned around from her work station. Before she could say anything, he wrapped her in his arms.

"Captain M'Bira," he said, "Permission to spend time with my wife."

"Permission granted," the Caitian smiled. Jasmine gently pulled herself free from Terrence's grasp.

"Come with me," she said, a bit coldly. She turned and headed toward her small office. Once inside, Terrence scooped her up again, and tried to kiss her. But Jasmine turned away from him.

"What's wrong Jazz?"

"Why did you have to embarrass me just now?" She asked, her voice clotting with anger.

"What are you talking about?"

"Snatching me up like you're some caveman. Asking my captain for permission to leave. That was very rude Terrence. I'm trying to build a relationship the Engineering department. I want them to take me seriously, and you've just kiffed that up!"

"Damn it Jasmine," Terrence couldn't stanch his anger this time. He had been putting up with Jasmine's detachment and mood swings for months now. "I'm your husband. We haven't been together in months! You've refused to see me, half refused to talk to me, and I don't know what to do. I don't care about you're being barren. The more I say it you don't believe me."

"Because I know you Terrence, and I know how much you want children," Jasmine said. "The more you tell me you don't care, the more I know you're lying, and the more it hurts."

"Jasmine what I want most is you," Terrence said, the joy he had felt at seeing her again started to deflate. He really didn't want to argue. He just wanted to be a husband to his wife again.

"I know Terrence," Jasmine began crying, "and that's why this is going to hurt me more than you know."

"What-what are you talking about Jazz?"

"Terrence...I want a divorce."

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## A Mean Year

### Deep Space Nine Early October 2376

"I'm a shadow of my former self," Captain Terrence Glover glumly remarked. "The old me would've knocked that smug Lar'ragos on his ass and then busted him down to potato peeler."

"We'll I'm glad it's not the old you," Lt. Commander Pell Ojana dryly observed. She placed her mug of Deka tea on the coffee table before continuing. "You know you're just displacing your anger right now, looking for something, or somebody to hit."

Glover turned away from the viewport and regarded his friend. "That may be, but damn if Lar'ragos and that sanctimonious Sandhurst don't make good targets. How can you put up that band of second-raters anyway?"

Pell smiled. "They're not so bad once you get to know them, and they are far from second rate. The *Gibraltar* crew rescued me from the Bajora Tava and helped stop the Alshain. They also came to the aid of the *Meharry* at Yaskh'lin IV."

Glover rolled his eyes. "Sandy was practically frothing at the mouth to tell me that you know."

"I think you're exaggerating a little," Pell said.

"You're getting a little protective of ol'Sandy huh," Glover managed a grin. "Something going on there?"

"I don't know," Pell admitted. "But I ask you to stay out of it. You have a hard time doing that."

"So, you're joining the hit parade on me too?"

"Terrence you know I'm on your side. That's never going to change." Pell walked up to him and squeezed his shoulder. Glover placed his head against the frigid viewport window.

"I'm glad there's at least one constant in this universe," he said. "Everything seems to be changing for the worst. I've lost my ship, my father's still missing, and my wife wants a divorce. I don't know what to do anymore. I...I used to be a winner, but now...."

"Don't talk like that," Pell said. "You'll find a way to make everything right again. I know you will."

"How?" Glover turned to her. The Bajoran was shocked to see the tears flowing down Terrence's face. Even though she was perhaps his oldest friend, it was very rare that Terrence even let her this close inside. Pell hugged him. He melted into her embrace.

"Jasmine just needs more time," she whispered in his ear. "It's obvious she has a lot of issues she has to work out, and she can't do that with you around. You have this tendency...to ah draw all the attention to yourself. A woman could get quickly pulled into your orbit, and that's not what Jasmine needs right now. She has to assert herself, learn to love herself again. Believe me, she knows you love her, but she also knows that doesn't mean frinx if she doesn't love herself."

Glover sighed, pulling away from her. He placed two large hands on her slender shoulders. He slowly smiled. "This has been one hell of a mean year. I can't wait until it's over."

"We've had mean years before and we got by them," Pell intoned, a determined cast to her face. "We'll make it this time too."

"I know we will," Glover's continued to smile for her benefit, though he didn't share her optimism. He wasn't sure if he would be able to surmount the problems rising like a monstrous tide over his own life, or if any of them could ride the waves crashing down on the Federation. Terrence nodded with false affirmation, trying to convince himself as much as support Pell. "Of course we'll make it."