

Homespun

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Homespun

by [Hawku](#)

Summary

"Yeah, our endearing traits should not extend to yours." -- Episode 7: In the late 24th century and under threat of the Dominion, the U.S.S. Phoenix-X repairs at Deep Space 9 before taking a patrol position with Task Force Epsilon.

Notes

Author's notes: The original of this was done sometime in the 90s as an edited RP chat presented in chatfic format. The Phoenix-X last encountered DS9 in "Deep Space Not So Much". This rewrite was completed in April 2024.

Homespun, Part I

Star Trek: Phoenix-X

"Homespun, Part I"

The *Nor*-class Cardassian fascist space station Deep Space 9 rotated peacefully within the confines of the Denorios belt of the Bajoran system until the gaping maw of the Bajoran wormhole splayed open and spewed out the *Prometheus*-class U.S.S. *Phoenix-X*. Lieutenant Commander Jadzia Dax, at her station in Operations, almost threw up in her mouth.

"Ugh!" she reacted before recomposing herself to a perplexed Kira Nerys. "Yeah, I don't know why I did that. It's nothing, Major."

Kira gave her a look. "A ship is approaching, isn't it?"

"The *Phoenix-X* is coming through the wormhole," Dax reported. "I still don't understand that vessel, so I didn't want to say anything."

The Major held up a hand. "No, I get it. Apparently, they ran through a multitude of exploding *Phoenix*-ships trying to perfect transwarp. I'll just say, Starfleet can be a little obsessive at times."

"Well, we keep launching *Enterprises*, so I can't argue with you there," Dax smirked before reading a forwarded message to her console. "They want to dock. They need repairs."

Kira sighed. "Why are ships always getting into trouble? Is it the war or just a trope? Let them in."

Meanwhile, the staff on the Bridge of the *Phoenix-X* got ready. Captain Daniel looked to everyone as they were busy.

"Well, it looks like we're going to be here for a little while," he conceded. "I want all personnel to keep working, unless you're off shift. Then you can explore Deep Space 9 in what some people consider a crossover but, really, is just normal in-universe functioning."

Commander Night Gotens squinted. "Why would you phrase it like that?"

"Well, Captain, Commander," approached Captain Aeris. "It was a pleasure going for a ride but, I must say, my gaggle of engineers and I are eager to get back to our own ship. The last thing they saw was the *Phoenix-X* inexplicably transwarping to the Gamma Quadrant."

Gotens perked. "I wonder what we look like going to transwarp? It must be a spectacular space-time transition effect."

"Hm. Well, we did get the shuttle *Roche* back before we left, so we should set it up to take something I'm calling a *selfie*," Daniel suggested. "In the meantime, have Kayl prepare our subspace social media posts."

Later, Gotens and the Ferengi BOB went together aboard Deep Space 9 and entered Quark's Bar. There, the Ferengi owner, busy cleaning a glass, took notice of them.

"You again!" Quark spouted at BOB. "Ohhh, no. If you're not here to gamble, drink or rent a holosuite, then get out of my face."

BOB held up his hands. "I know I came on a little strong before when I was job hunting, and I may have been a little too flirty with the dabo girls as a result of your rejection. But I'm not here for that anymore."

"He slept with the entire staff," Quark explained to Gotens. "All at once! What kind of beguiler uses his abnormal powers of persuasion for non-latinum-related pursuits? Not that I wouldn't have done the same at someone else's bar."

Gotens tilted, confused. "Beguiler?"

"It's just a thing and stuff," BOB dismissed. "The point is, I'm sorry. I just want to gamble. You know how it's the Ferengi version of relaxing at the beach." He shrugged. "Besides, I'm quite comfy being where I am now."

Quark scoffed. "Oh, really? What did you do, join a Starfleet ship?"

"No! I joined a Starfleet ship," BOB protested before he realized that Quark just said that. "Oh, wait. That's a yes. I mean, it's still up in the air whether they'll let me back on board after this stop, and I respect them enough not to use my powers on them, but you get the idea."

Both Quark and Gotens watched BOB walk off to the dabo tables. "I can't help but feel partially responsible for his downtroddenness," Gotens observed before Quark rolled his eyes and went off to another patron.

"Commander, I thought you'd be on the *Phoenix-X*, preparing selfie protocols with Kayl?" opened Aeris as she entered Quark's and joined him at the bar.

Gotens shrugged. "She's got it. Besides, you know me. Whenever I can get an authentic Blood Vesper without the pulp, I'm there." Quark passed him a red liquid in a martini glass. "And, don't worry about me staying alert. Armond's got our backs."

"That Armond. I could teach him a thing or two," Aeris gritted, looking away in distraction. "I mean, haven't you heard the Romulans declared war on the Dominion? It was this whole papery moony thing and all. Amazing stuff!"

The Commander did a double-take. "Wow. I had no idea. I'll have to check the Starfleet streaming site for log playbacks. Hopefully, nothing was deleted."

"Anyway, I have to go meet Captain Sisko. I still need to reach my ship," she said getting up. "Take care of yourself, Commander. No freak incidents."

But, after she left, Gotens was suddenly hit with an inexplicable, striking pain in his stomach, "Ugh! Oh, no. I wasn't supposed to have any incidents!" He then fainted to unconsciousness before a perplexed Morn caught him.

Meanwhile, an unawares Aeris bumped into Daniel in front of Sisko's office doors in Operations.

Benjamin Sisko stepped out to them. "Hello, Captain," he greeted to Aeris. "Captain," he then said to Daniel.

"I'm sorry, Captain," replied Daniel. "But I believe I Captainly got here before this Captain."

Aeris quickly rebutted, "Captain! I was here before this Captain."

"You took too long," Daniel invalidated. "This Captain is Captaining error like no Captain has Captained before."

Sisko rolled his eyes. "Captains! Please come inside."

As Kira and Dax watched the doors close on them, the two women turned to each other. "By the way, I heard there's another Trill on the station and that he has his own slug."

"That explains why I felt mine shudder for a moment. Some symbionts are very territorial with each other," Dax explained. "It goes all the way back to the Symbiont Wars. Though, the less said, the better."

In Sisko's office, the Emissary to the Prophets was quick to hold his hand up to the Captaining from Daniel and Aeris.

"Let's not start that again," Sisko insisted before taking out a PADD. "Now, Captain Daniel, Starfleet has orders for you to patrol the Flortarios system. Flortarios III is not a Federation planet, but if the Dominion manages to occupy that system, they will be too close to Federation space. Their leaders have already accepted us."

Daniel nodded. "We'll do our part in this war. But no depressing slow-motion battle sequences."

"Very good," Sisko agreed. "There are already several Starfleet vessels there, as part of your task force. Due to, what I'm told you have as, excessive untold enhancements, the *Phoenix-X* will assume command."

Captain Daniel chuckled. "You have no idea. Actually, there's a large contingent of lower deck Klingons on the *Phoenix-X* just waiting to be let—"

"Frankly, Captain, I'm hesitant to protest your place here, since rumour has it you are a Changeling yourself," he near-played while sizing him up. "But if the whole of the Federation were to learn of such a thing, then I'm sure any advantage we could gain against the Dominion would diminish greatly."

Daniel sighed. "If that were true, Captain, I'd just be trying to live a life. Even a hundred years ago, a tolerant Federation would have ostracized that."

Sisko raised a brow. "We'll agree to disagree. Thank you, Captain." He watched Daniel leave before turning to a wide-eyed Aeris. "Captain Aeris, you also wanted to see me?"

"I am dying to get to my ship, the U.S.S. *Xena*. It sounds Ancient Greece-like but, I assure you, we're closer to the Ottoman Empire."

Later, Doctor Julian Bashir and a few circling nurses had completed working on the unconscious Joined Trill, Commander Night Gotens. The Doctor hyposprayed Gotens awake.

"Ugh. It feels like I was hit by a Whale Probe, but with more of the squealing. What happened?" the Commander queried while sitting up.

Bashir nodded. "I'm still trying to figure that out. There's a chemical imbalance in your symbiont system. Do you have any idea what may have caused it?"

"Oh, crap. I think so. Not long ago, I was persuaded to eat a cookie. But, not just any cookie. It had some kind of knock-out chemical in it. Had Trill cramps and visions of giant tardigrades ever since."

The Doctor put his tricorder away. "Well, there's a lesson in taking pastries from coworkers. In addition to forced interaction, it always leads to medical complications."

"You don't have to tell me twice," Gotens agreed. "Actually, Doctor Lox gave me a temporary balancing agent to manage the issue. He was going to operate for a more permanent solution, but dinosaurs and space clouds happened."

Bashir walked around in surprise. "The Doctor Lox? He's renowned in the medical community for immoral practice and protocol violations. I

can't believe there is a starship he was accepted on."

"I assure you, Doc," Gotens started. "He cares for the wellbeing of his crew and has shown nothing but compassion between whatever strange set of tribble modifications he has going on. He can do both."

The human eyed him, skeptically for a moment. "Oh, fine. Be what it may, would you permit me to perform the balancing surgery? Just the experience itself would be valuable. We can forward all follow-up procedures with your doctor."

"Considering you're a legend, yeah!" Gotens perked, enthusiastically. "Any chance I could get one of those accelerated neural pathway formation things too? Would love to reach Spock-level intelligence, but without the pale skin."

Bashir looked at him. "You know there is a slim success rate to that, don't you? Never mind. We'd better inform your Captain of our plans," Bashir began just seconds before Daniel entered the Infirmary. "Well. Speak of the Devil."

"Actually, I'm a god," Daniel quipped. "By the way, don't look into that. It's an inside joke." He then turned to Gotens. "I came as soon as I heard."

The Commander nodded. "Word gets around fast on Deep Space 9. Strange when it applies to non-local crew, though."

"Yeah, our endearing traits should not extend to yours," Bashir defended. "As for the Commander, the cookie-caused symbiont imbalance is within a threshold of medical science, but I cannot predict how long or how many procedures will be needed."

Daniel shuddered. "Coworker cookies. I'm so glad I don't eat." Then he looked to a deadpanning Bashir before dismissing with a, "Don't look into that one either." He put a hand on Gotens' shoulder. "Take your time, Commander. The *Phoenix-X* will be on patrol in the Flortarios system."

"Flortarios? Old memories, eh?" Gotens drifted in distant reverie.

The Captain looked perplexed. "Huh? Oh, man. The imbalance is coming back. Please take care of him, Doctor. There was one time he was on green drink and told stories like flashback sequences. It was an episode in redundancy."

"That sounds like a clip-show nightmare. I'll do everything I can, Captain," Bashir said before Daniel left.

Next, Daniel was taking an appreciative stroll on the Promenade, on his way to an airlock when he was suddenly approached by Odo.

"Uh, excuse me, Captain," muttered the other Changeling in a Bajoran Militia uniform. "I was wondering," he hesitated, feeling somewhat out of character. "Well, if you would like to link with me?"

Daniel was taken aback, momentarily. "Oh, hi. Good for you. You keep wondering about that. See you later."

"Ahem! Well, you see, I could tell you were a Changeling from half a kilometre away and, despite some bad experiences with others of our kind, I would like to redeem that as well as learn more about you."

The Captain paused for a moment. "I am a fan of yours, Constable. But I'm not yet sure my level of comfort with linking." As Daniel began walking away, he had an idea and stopped himself. "Actually, Odo, wait. Would you join me on a patrol cycle on the *Phoenix-X* as Acting First Officer? We could get to know each other and, perhaps, consider that link?"

"I'll have to get clearance from Captain Sisko, but that would be acceptable," Odo pondered. "I'll prepare a travel bucket." He nodded to Daniel and walked off.

As the *Phoenix-X* was attached to Deep Space 9, the crew wrapped their efforts in the ship's Main Engineering with much ado pride.

"Amazing work, guys," Kugo relayed while examining a status console. "We were able to stabilize the warp drive and its transwarp function without the dependency on the Inimical cloud matter."

Billy shrugged. "Kind of a waste, though. What was left of that stuff gave us more power than our warp and fusion generators combined."

"Wait a minute. You're right," Kugo realized before snapping the entire Engineering back into a chaotic frenzy. "Everyone! Undo everything we did! Let's move, move, move!"

Meanwhile, Captain Daniel did a quick tour of the *Phoenix-X* before entering the Bridge. Everything and everyone was in tip-top shape.

"The ship couldn't have looked better. Too bad the Commander can't be with us," he sighed, taking a seat.

Ensign Dan, now realizing the situation, said to himself, "*Now's my chance to be promoted.*" He then turned to get noticed. "Oh, Captain."

"Yes, Ensign?"

The Bajoran walked over. "I have cleaned out the cups in your quarters and went into your personal logs to correct all your grammatical statements."

"What!? You entered quarters that don't belong to you, probably used the wrong soap and accessed classified information?? You do not know how much trouble you are in, Mister. You. Are. RELIEVED!"

Grumbling on his way out, Ensign Dan muttered, "Jeez. I was just trying to help." After he was gone, the Captain checked the chronometer on his chair arm.

"09:56 hours and still no Odo. I guess he's not going to join us. There goes my First Officer," Daniel relented.

But then, a gravelly voice cut in over comms. *"Odo to Captain Daniel. I have permission to go. Though, I could not find my travel bucket anywhere. I suspect Ferengi interference."*

"Don't worry about that. We have plenty here, Constable." After Odo was on board, Daniel checked for any other missing crew. "Daniel to BOB. It's time to make like a Ressikan tree and perish."

A nearly drunken BOB could be heard over comms with crowd noise and Quark's dabo table spinning in the background. *"You know what, Captain? Your crew is— is the best at breaking canon— Like, what even is half the stuff that's going— Going on?"*

"I got him. He's now on board," confirmed Lieutenant Kayl, studying her operations screen. "Ugh. We're going to need a cleanup in Transporter Room 3. Cleanup in Transporter Room 3."

As the *Prometheus*-class *Phoenix-X* detached from one of the Cardassian space station's upper pylons and jumped to warp, Commander Gotens was waking up in Deep Space 9's Infirmary from surgery.

"Take it easy, Commander," Bashir warned, helping him sit up. "The procedure was successful, but I recommend you stay off duty for a few hours in case of residual imbalance of personal judgment."

Gotens nodded. "Thank you, so much, Doctor. I'll spend the time in my quarters on the *Phoenix-X*, leaving erroneous comments on everyone's mission logs."

"My pleasure," Bashir smiled. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have another surgery scheduled. O'Brien dislocated all his limbs, this time using two kayaks as giant water skis."

After he was gone, Gotens tilted up to the air. "Hopefully, I haven't missed the ship. Computer, locate Captain Daniel?"

"Captain Daniel and the U.S.S. Phoenix-X departed Deep Space 9 at 10:00 hours," the computer reported. *"Alert. Pylon connector tube still hanging off that ship."*

Gotens tapped his chin. "Oh, that's right. The latch still gets stuck. Well, I can still catch up with them. I don't think Captain Sisko would mind if I borrowed some transport. I'll have to ask him first."

Entering Captain Sisko's office off to the side of Operations, he found that the Captain was frantic and busy, going through PADDs of mission reports.

"Got to find that mini report again," he said to himself before absentmindedly noticing Gotens, without looking up. "Out with it. What is it, Commander?"

Gotens gestured. "Actually, I wanted to know if I could borrow a vessel for transpor—"

"—Computer, where is Worf?" Sisko distracted after a pile of PADDs fell to the floor. "Starfleet wants his miniaturized runabout report, but the PADD itself was never returned to normal size." Then he noticed Gotens' perplexed look. "Just go ahead with whatever you want," Sisko dismissed in distress as he then took out a magnifying glass.

Gotens smiled. "Great! Thank you. I'll set it to auto-pilot home and auto-shoot any Jem'Hadar."

The Commander then went to the docking ring corridor, passing screens displaying runabout after runabout.

"Rio Grande, Gander... Volga?" he criticized. "What kinds of names are those?" But then he found a docking hatch's screen to an unidentified ship displaying a shape larger and unlike any of the runabouts. "Ahh, a relief from the river transfixation. This looks like a nice one. I'll take it."

Out, in space, the *Defiant* detached, turned and jumped to warp in the direction of the *Phoenix-X*. Meanwhile, a Jem'Hadar attack ship, the *Lyngon-951* suddenly surprise-dropped into normal space right in front of the station.

"Captain, we are under siege from a Dominion attack ship!" Kira declared from Ops as all the alert klaxons went off.

As the view screen showed the *Lyngon-951* swerving to out-maneuver Deep Space 9's targeting sensors, Sisko quickly belted, "Okay, everyone to the *Defiant*."

Upon all of them reaching the docking ring section where the *Defiant* was supposed to be, the senior staff became somewhat dumbfounded.

"What the hell? Where's the ship?" Sisko gritted while checking the logs. "Send a message to any nearby Starfleet vessels. Someone has hijacked the *Defiant*! Possibly a Dominion spy or Ferengi interference."

Worf turned to Kira. "I suspect the latter."

Meanwhile, Gotens put his feet up on the arms of the Captain's chair aboard the Bridge of the *Defiant*, in an attempt to relax per doctor's orders.

"Oh, this is spacious. Also, did I just walk through the navigational deflector to board this thing? Computer, what ship is this?"

The computer replied, "*This is the Defiant-class U.S.S. Defiant.*"

"What did you just say?" a growing wide-eyed Gotens halted as he got up, went to the helm and dropped the escort out of warp.

The computer easily repeated herself, "This is the *U.S.S.*—"

"—*Defiant*!?"

Not too far away, the modified *Galaxy*-class U.S.S. *Xena* trekked itself the fraction of a galactic unit. Its First Officer sat in the beige command chair, flanked by the ship's special counsellor and the Second Officer.

"Hey, guys," started Commander Wing. "Now that the Captain isn't around, I'd like to dim the lights a bit more. There is just something so bright about this Bridge."

Kuri turned to him. "You can't. That just leads to dimmer and dimmer ships until, in twenty-eight years, all Bridges are insanely dark!"

"Oh, you're just overreacting. Next, you'll be talking about lens flares," Wendy said before her proximity alert went off. "Hold on. I'm reading the *Defiant*! Didn't Deep Space 9 just put out an APB for them?"

Wing stood up. "On the subspace radio, yeah. All units, too."

"Are we the cops of the 24th century?" Wendy asked. "Never mind. We are now coming up to the stolen vehicle. Note, the plates match the description!"

The screen then clicked on to a view of Commander Gotens. Wing spoke before registering, "You there! You are under arrest for the theft of a Starfleet craft of the highest order. Wait. Gotens? Night Gotens?"

"*This isn't what it looks like,*" Gotens protested with upped palms to his old ship. "*Okay. Maybe I did do exactly what this looks like. But, be honest, we've all wanted to steal the Defiant at one point or another. —Hey? Are you a Commander now?*"

Wing blushed. "Ohhh, yeah. You said it would happen. Also, you would not believe this amazing woman I met at my promotion party. She had the biggest—"

"Commander! If we could?" interrupted Mable.

The man turned to her. "Please don't cut me off, Lieutenant." Then he turned back to the screen. "As I was saying, she had the biggest—theories on the origins of the Universe as well as an in-depth perspective on the social sciences of interpersonal relationships. Which makes this even harder, considering our pre-disposed friend-history."

"*Are you leading up to something?*" But Gotens was then beamed out and into the Brig of the *Xena*. "*Why is it so bright in here??*"

The *Xena* and *Defiant* then turned in space and warped back to Deep Space 9. There, they found that the station was under siege, now with several more Dominion attack cruisers.

"We've got our ship back!" Kira reported from a console in Operations as everyone was frantically working defence controls. "Talk about a sight for sore eyes."

O'Brien entered Ops and eyed her. "It was only gone for an hour, Major. Also, all my limbs are working again."

"Very good on both counts. Now, maintain photon torpedo bursts, Mr. Worf."

The Klingon continued firing, grumbling. "Being relegated to this again? I might as well have stayed on the Borg-stenched *Enterprise-E*. The variable deck count, I would have put up with."

Commander Wing was now on the *Defiant*, manoeuvring it and hitting the *Lyngon-951* with photon torpedoes until it exploded.

"Okay, Gotens was right about this ship," he realized. "I do not blame him for accidentally stealing the *Defiant*, that symbiont-imbalance thing he mentioned notwithstanding."

Another Dominion attack ship, the *Hinxen-332*, maneuvered away from a torpedo as it fired polaron beams on Deep Space 9. The three-nacelled *Xena* then intercepted and disabled it before the *Defiant* phaser-cannoned the *Hinxen-332* into another explosion.

"Yes! Did you see that assist from my ship?" Aeris bragged, entering Ops. "She's a tee-up'er. Think about us for your next missions. Here's my card."

Kira took one. "Is this hard paper?"

"Aaaand, we are done," Worf reported as he fired photon torpedoes into exploding one last Jem'Hadar attack ship, the *Lyngon-952*, prompting the other ships to retreat.

Dax perked. "What was this offensive for? It was obvious they were going to be defeated?" She wondered. "A misdirect for something else?"

"The *Defiant's* database was in a compromised repair state before the ship was prematurely exposed by the undocking," Worf theorized. "This particular task force may have been hidden in wait for that very opportunity."

Sisko raised a brow. "That's one less threat we have to worry about. Perhaps we have that Commander of the *Phoenix-X* to thank for drawing them out of their proximity sooner, or they may have struck Deep Space 9 at a more vulnerable time." He then noticed the perplexed look on some of the crew's faces. "Remember? They're a *Phoenix*-ship, but accelerated down the line of *Phoenix*-ships? Never mind."

Meanwhile, the U.S.S. *Phoenix-X* dropped warp in the Flortarios system. Its crew clicked on to a view of the majestic spacescape.

"Well, Constable Odo. What do you think? It's a beautiful place, isn't it?" Daniel queried.

Odo eyed the sulphuric red gasses backdropping a blue planet near an asteroid belt, whilst being highlighted by two suns. "Why, yes. I've seen many like this and, if we link, you'll see them too."

"Uhh, oh! Armond. How bad do you feel for anyone on that planet that has died from asteroid impacts?" the Captain diverted, nervously.

Armond checked. "Flortarios IV is uninhabited."

"Captain, we're being contacted by the U.S.S. *Dropzone*," Kayl reported after a message alert went off. "They say to meet in New Tallahassee city on Flortarios III. We'll be briefed on patrol strategies."

Daniel breathed a sigh of relief. "Phew! I guess we have to do more non-Changeling things. Yup. Postponing stuff for other stuff. Heh, heh." Then he snapped to, having successfully recovered himself. "Now, let's set a course, Mr. Red. Engage!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Homespun, Part II

Star Trek: Phoenix-X

"Homespun, Part II"

The *Prometheus*-class U.S.S. *Phoenix-X* craned precariously in orbit of the non-aligned planet of Flortarius III. The Ferengi BOB transported to the surface and entered a dreary, on-purpose Flortarian dive bar.

"What'll it be, Mac?" harumphed bartender Ruvio as he handed a drink to another Flortarian. "By the way, a hard 'Mac' is a bartender term of endearment."

BOB nodded as he leaned against the serving table. "As Ferengi, we all dabble in Quark'enings, regularly, in an effort to perpetuate stereotypes that may or may not be to our monetary advantage."

"Wait a minute. Are you *the* BOB? The rootinest, tootinest, fastest latinum earner in the West?" Then, digressing, "West, in terms of the galactic map if you oriented it in a way that the Gamma and Delta Quadrants populated the top half."

The accused man kept still as he was handed a complementary Aldorian ale. "The speed and growth rate of that Ferengi's earnings out-tracked the Grand Nagus himself. But not his wealth. Any loab-grower worth his brown money sacks knows that would mean certain death."

"A death that any big-eared moron would be honoured to endure given the mathematical impossibility of a fortune dwarfing that of our great overseer," came the sly remark from another Ferengi, entering the bar in a fancy Ferengi suit.

BOB did a double-take. "GuiMon Zonk?? You're the fleet commander for this sector!"

"That's right. And, if you recall, you were allowed to get away with abandoning your money-hoarding in an effort by us for you to realize it was all a foolish Tykon's Rift-y dream sequence to begin with."

The down-and-outer gulped his ale. "And I would've gotten away with it too if it weren't for you meddling Ferengi. Tricking me into coming here for a Starfleet recommendation is the exact reason I left. As in, the Alliance's preposition for money-grubbing is perpetually self-destructive."

"Hey! We like other things too. Misogyny, for one," countered Zonk. "Either way, we know, deep down, you still love making money, despite your overtly non-Ferengi professionalism on the *Phoenix-X* making the opposite clear. In fact, the Alliance is willing to forego all your military fees for your reinstatement and a possible exchange officer placement in Starfleet."

BOB put his drink down. "Are you telling me that the Alliance is conceding to the value of scientific exploration?"

"Well, it also doesn't hurt to have a man on the inside," levelled Zonk. "But, yes. You wore us down with your disgusting, overt displays of money-disregarding. At least now we can explain to all Ferengi why you're doing whatever it is you're doing."

Ruvio watched with wide eyes as BOB slowly stepped back from the bar. BOB took a breath before speaking again. "Keep your commission, GuiMon. The Alliance is like a Ferengi in a gorilla suit at a clown convention. He's always asked to leave."

"You know that suit is one of our national treasures! Also, one more thing," an ignoring Zonk interrupted, momentarily halting the self-exiled man from his exit. "Since you're noble now, there's another Ferengi, on this world, collaborating with the enemy who is in need of some stifling. Surely, his kind of earning is not representative of yours either."

Keeping his gaze to the out, BOB replied, "Careful. Federation morality doesn't scrub out."

BOB walked out into the dreary evening street where he received a communication from his pocketed Starfleet badge. Just as he was about to throw it away, he stopped himself and clicked it.

"*This is Captain Samya of the Dropzone,*" came the voice of a female human. "*BOB, we would like to have a word with you when we arrive in-system.*"

BOB blinked, perplexed. "Oh, fine. The *Phoenix-X* did decide to not-abandon me at that war-obsessed Deep Space 9, after all. So, Starfleet still gets a benefit of the doubt. But I choose the venue. Night club, full bottle service, Kirk-level shenanigans, Orion slave women. Men, too."

"*Let me counter that with: Our Starfleet ship, in a professional setting. No chair. An art statue in the corner that makes no sense.*"

The Ferengi's brow raised. "That sterile, efficient, cold medium is so non-Ferengi. Zonk would plotz in the way our kind does for comedic effect. Very well."

Later, after returning to the *Phoenix-X* to prepare, BOB was transported to the U.S.S. *Dropzone*. There, in the Transporter room, he was met with Captain Samya, a human of Japanese-descent and escorted through the corridors.

"Can you tell me why I'm here?" BOB asked. "Can you hint why I'm here?"

Entering the Conference room, BOB took notice of a grey-haired human with Admiral pips. "BOB, this is Admiral Theseus. He oversees

broad-view operations of several fleets for the Federation portion of this sector."

"We're calling some of them task forces. Seeing if the term can be interchangeable," Theseus added. "Speaking of things, you've been to Cardassia and the Dominion, correct? What happened at the Dominion?"

BOB nearly stumbled at the intel. "Well, I got lost and my ship was badly damaged by an asteroid belt before I picked up a nearby planet and —"

"You want to try that again?" Samya cut in, suddenly holding a phaser to his head.

The Ferengi put his hands up. "I— I was trading Ketracel white to a lost contingent. It made me question my place in the Ferengi Alliance. Don't shoot, please!"

"Samya's a little renegade-Starfleet at times," Theseus dismissed as she dropped her aim. "Helps me with negotiations. Either way, point made. You still have useful experience."

BOB eyed them. "Like the Alliance, even you *humaans* go a little too far." And then, realizing, "Hey. You want me to continue being your inside man to give up more Dominion secrets, don't you? I still know things, in the way a fluffy, furbal alien chef may inhabit a lost *Intrepid*-class ship?"

"Precisely. But, more precisely, you're to be the special counselor to the Captain and are to report anything out-of-sorts directly to me."

The other man crossed his arms. "But I've already served as said-counsel and my contract with you guys is over? Unless— a new agreement!"

"You will get to continue sciencing with us, without the arduous Academy training— which is bogus anyway— as well as having a place in the Federation. Your help with outing Damon Smith saw to that. The only caveat now being your recommission with the Ferengi Alliance, so it's an official exchange program."

BOB slumped. "Bloody caveats. Well, it appears the Alliance is finally, actually willing to indulge me in non-financial exploration. Perhaps satiating Dark Starfleet Needs is a trade-off worth Ferengi appeasement."

"They likely see you as a man on the inside but, to us, the Ferengi Alliance being of any sort of threat is so low, we could not be more secured if we just forwarded them our intel," Samya deadpanned.

Looking up at her, BOB double-taked, "Wow. Is your diplomatic discourse now Pakled, or did we lose it all after the *Sovereign*-class?" He shook his head. "Never mind. Turns out your flippancy is, in fact, more of a push for me than a retractor. Therefore, yes, give me the contract. I've got your fingerprint right here."

"Oh, Starfleet exchange contracts are blood samples now," Theseus admitted. "Helps with cloning compliant replacements in the event of repudiation."

As BOB got up and was to be escorted, again by Captain Samya, he stopped to add, "I only wish more people knew an untapped growth environment such as this, unlike the suffocating Alliance, whom is more burgeoning than a clown convention's gorilla suit display. It gets tantalizing hairy, is what I'm saying. Anyway, thank you, Admiral."

"We know all about that popular Ferengi analogy. But, yes, BOB. I get it."

TO BE CONTINUED

Homespun, Part III

Star Trek: Phoenix-X

"Homespun, Part III"

The effervescent *Nor*-class interstellar outpost Deep Space 9 spun endlessly on guard of the Bajoran wormhole. Captain Sisko paced incredulously in the Brig, outside a cell containing Commander Gotens.

"What the hell do you think you were you doing, taking the *Defiant*? You know we are at war and that Borg-buster is our most enjoyable hope!" reprimanded the Emissary.

Gotens crossed his arms. "Uh, you gave me the go-ahead with whatever I wanted. How could I not take the *Defiant*? It's a damn nice ship. Riker calling it little was so passive-aggressive. My advice, if it ever gets destroyed, get the exact same ship with the exact same hull, like nothing happened."

"Perhaps I will consider that," Sisko paused, somewhat fond of the idea before snapping back. "Now, listen! I look upon the Trill as our wise teachers, setting an example. It is clear you're not like that. But it is also clear, had you not interjected, Deep Space 9 would have been ripe for that hidden Dominion task force at a more vulnerable state."

The Commander perked. "So, actions and outcomes are quantum entangled?"

"Considering we are at war and in a desperate state, in this case, yes," Sisko raised a brow before dropping the forcefield. "For now, Lieutenant Commander Dax will escort you to Flortarios III, where she will pick up my Security Chief. Just activating these precarious forcefields has been a nightmare. We allowed five criminals to walk freely and promise to come back later because of them."

Meanwhile, BOB was transported to the *Prometheus*-class U.S.S. *Phoenix-X*, which remained in orbit of Flortarios III. He suddenly noticed the Flortarian Prime Minister transporting in, next to him.

"Oh. Aren't you that one guy and stuff?" the Ferengi did a double-take.

Clingten nodded. "I did not have sexual relations with that Orion— Oh, sorry. I've been rehearsing that speech all week." He shook his head. "Politics. Anyway, I'm to meet your Captain in his Ready Room for pre-mission discussions. Would you show me the way?"

"Sure," BOB acquiesced as they both stepped off the pad and began walking the corridors. "By the way. If your world condones illicit trade, aren't you inviting cutthroats and pirates like space jellies to a crazy man?"

The Prime Minister nodded. "We hope, by supporting free, unrestrained commerce, we encourage traders to become better people by enabling a wider worldview."

"It's reckless, even by Ferengi financial standards, for the mere loss of trade fees," BOB lambasted as they took a turbolift. "Not to mention, lapsing your security during the Dominion War invites quadrant-threatening, anarchist-enablers."

When they reached the Bridge, Clingten turned to him, before walking off. "All bureaucracies ripple moral and mathematical vacancies. We already know we're not perfect. We don't need lectures. Just better people."

Entering the Captain's Ready Room on the *Phoenix-X*, Clingten found Captain Daniel and Constable Odo, already talking.

"And, so, I slept with the enemy, betraying my best friend, Kira, for research purposes, you see," Odo explained before the two took notice of the leader.

Clingten held up his hand. "Don't worry. I've done plenty of that kind of inconclusive research. Everyone betrays everyone in politics. It's the after-speech that's the most challenging."

"A pre-game meet? Isn't getting-ahead-of-ourselves, getting ahead of ourselves?" Daniel observed.

The Flortarian nodded. "In most cases, the thing that's thing is actually that thing. But, for now, I need you two, with your shape-shifting abilities, to search out a Dominion spy on my world."

"How did you find out you had a spy?" Odo perked.

Clingten admitted, "Various things. Furniture was moved three centimetres to the left, then four centimetres to the right. Missing Kukalaka bears. It's the most obvious sign for Changelings."

"Damn. He's right," Daniel turned to Odo. "I know you've got a whole season of well-balanced, serialized episodic activities going, but would you be down for one out-of-character mission?"

Odo smirked. "I'm all about anomalous behaviour this season. I'm in."

Meanwhile, the *Danube*-class runabout U.S.S. *Rio Grande* sped through warp with Trills Jadzia Dax and Night Gotens at the controls.

"So, you're on your fifth host? Seventh, here," Dax compared. "Kind of an unreachable itch sometimes, right?"

Gotens blinked. "That must be a seventh host thing. Either way, it's nice to meet someone who is two lives older."

"Well, a woman never admits her life number. Unless she's a man. But, yes, that's also right. It's the seven-life itch," she realized. "Be wary of constant marrying of others. Poor Worf didn't see it coming."

The Commander's eyes widened. "That *Enterprise* addict? Congrats!"

BLAM! After dropping warp, the runabout was suddenly hit by an unexpected phaser beam before they flung shields up and saw the Ferengi *Na'Far*-class shuttle *Yone*.

"Wow! The rude scale is peaking," Gotens observed as he brought weapons online. "Hail them."

A human man by the name of Doyle then blinked on screen. "*Sorry. But they gave me no choice. My entire family of cannibalized collar bone collections are at risk.*"

"*Ugh!*" came the sudden comm interruption as the Dominion Vanguard heavy raider *Lyngon-2752* dropped warp and fired polaron beams until the shuttle exploded. Meloneus then appeared on screen. "*He justified his death, by the way. He was a murderer in his spare time.*"

Gotens perked. "Meloneus! Last we saw, you were rescued by that ship-hijacking Klingon, Ragon, from the *Phoenix-X*'s Brig. You know, you would have loved the Federation prison camps. They have marshmallows, *Row Your Boat* sing-offs, Climb a Rock shirts and everything."

"*It took me a while, but I finally remembered who you were,*" Meloneus admitted. "*I knew your last host, the renegade Rikonen Gotens. You fought my detachment during the Cardassian conflict on Flortarios III.*"

The Commander did a double-take. "Yeah, old-me left Starfleet to avoid the Federation-Cardassian War and I still ran into your contingent. Sooo annoying."

"*We Cardassians always have a way of turning ourselves up. Now, it's your turn to die!*" Meloneus escalated. "*Yarrrrh!*"

On the planet Flortarios III, in the sector known as Land O'Lakes, Daniel and Odo found themselves walking through town in the day.

"So, how do we find another Changeling?" Daniel wondered. "I mean, I know to find you by just seeing you there with my shapeshifted eyes."

Odo nodded. "It's how I know I'm me as well. Let's start where there are a lot of people. The sector market. Then we can scope him out and possibly other unscrupulous types from there."

"I guess. Also, you just can't stop constable-ing, can you?" Daniel surmised. "Such off-putting dedication makes me want to go for some ginkgo extract."

The other Changeling guffawed. "What do you mean, you *guess*? You are the Captain, and shapeshifters hate ginkgo extract!"

"Your nose is beside your mouth," a playful Daniel offered to a mortified Odo. "Ha! Just kidding."

On the *Rio Grande*, Dax was preparing for trouble as Gotens turned back to the screen to address their incoming attacker.

"You know, you just saved our lives from that generically terrible human," the Commander interrupted. "As evolved Starfleet officers with baked-in manners, we thank you for that."

Dax shook her head. "Wait. What?"

"*Saved you? Accidents happen, you know,*" stumbled Gul Meloneus, falling for it. "*You know, you are ruining a stomping-in-place moment as well as my classic rage-rising!*"

Gotens continued, unabated, "Now my children will be happy another day for the sparing of my life. The appreciation I have right now is insurmountable. You're great!"

"*Ugh. I came here to steam off a recent death through the historical revenge of a wartime compadre and that one time you caught me after our missed mishap,*" Meloneus deconstructed. "*Instead, your sideswaysing is throwing me off. I'll just kill you later! Oh, but you will be mine, Phoenix-X. Just you wait—*"

Dax checked the feed as it unexpectedly disconnected. "He's gone?"

"Yeah, I cut him off. The explaining of things has gotten far too cliché and metaphorically overcooked," he said as he relaxed back in his chair and put his feet on the console. "You see, when a symbiotic individual converges with a reptilian Dukat-wannabe, sometimes they have to cessate said-herpetological oration and—"

Suddenly, without notice, Dax pushed him off balance. "Don't you Trill-splain me!"

Elsewhere, in the sector marketplace on Flortarios III, Daniel and Odo continued their perusal through the busy crowds of shoppers, traders and various predictable cutthroats.

"A message from the Prime Minister says his intel agrees that the spy could be here," Daniel conjectured. "But it may be a good twenty to thirty hours before we even start suspecting any—"

But Odo just pointed to someone. "That woman over there. That human. She's been awkwardly, and with varying balance, walking back and forth from that compound to behind those trees. Only infant humanoids, perpetual drunks or new-to-shapeshifting Shapeshifters walk like that."

"Huh? Well, I suppose said-pediatry could be considered attractive. Though, I'm not privy to such—"

Odo suddenly cut him off. "Not that! And, she's coming this way. Quickly, turn into a— a chair or something."

"A chair? Outside, in the middle of a crowd? Pfft. I'll just reincarnate," Daniel suggested as he walked around a wall and descretely turned himself into a bald eagle.

Meanwhile, Odo followed the woman he heard being referred to as Cora as she stepped into a Flortarian hovercar, packed with contraband. "Harumph. A bald eagle? A little show-offy much?" The constable quickly liquified onto the surface of it as it took off, with Bald Eagle Daniel, and his impressive wingspan, following.

On the orbiting *Phoenix-X*, BOB observed Lieutenant Commander Armond taking the Bridge as they were being hailed from the surface.

"We're receiving a communication from the White House of Commons?" Kayl reported and questioned all at once. "Such a strange mashup."

The screen clicked on to a view of the Flortarian President. *"Greetings. We are ready for transport. Your Captain is to beam down for our pre-arranged meet and greet."*

"Hey, I heard that the Prime Minister's having an affair with your wife?" Ensign Dan brought up. "Or, is going to ask you out? These political rumours are all over the map."

Suddenly, as Clingten entered the Bridge, he came to see who was on screen. "President Creeton!"

"Uh, did you just call him a cretin?" Armond inquired.

Creeton cut in. *"That's my name! And, it is now obvious to me that Clingten has sent your Captain to solve our close-up problems. So typical of the opposition to do stuff behind my back! Well, what's done is done. We'll postpone the meet and greet as, I suspect, only a mission on the precipice of planetary security could warrant such an escalation."*

"I would've told you but, you know, we're all backwards here and stuff," Clingten shrugged.

The President nodded. *"It's our disfunction and support for a debilitating culture that gives us character. Creeton out!"*

"Since this planet values the unscrupulous, your high-level communications mean nothing in terms of relevancy. Therefore, I'm next for screen time," BOB said as Ensign Dan joined Clingten in the turbolift to press him for more rumours. BOB's PADD alert then went off and the main viewer clicked on to a view of a distracted Ferengi inside a *Na'Far*-class shuttle.

The lowest of low, caught-trader named Wenk became shook. *"What the hell is this? I've been hacked! How dare you encroach on a miserable, snivelling little Ferengi snake like myself."*

"Wow. You really embraced that," BOB blinked. "Anyway, I'm breaking into your systems today to ward you off any actually-bad collaborations you have going on. You know what I mean. Like, wartime stuff."

Now Wenk blinked. *"You know how we Ferengi are constantly getting in over our bumpy heads! It's not like I have a choice, Your Majesty. Besides, this world makes the grey sooo grey, and ambiguity is Ferengi cocaine! You know, next to Hupyrian beetle snuff."*

"I've prepared a two-page essay debating the merits of consorting with the enemy. Section 1: Why You're an Actual Moron," BOB began, reading off his PADD before Wenk could be seen tapping a few buttons to purge the connection.

Armond turned to BOB. "I can't decide whether you just took the direct approach or some terrible version of passive-aggressiveness."

On the outskirts of the marketplace sector, hidden in a field, Wenk's parked *Na'Far*-class shuttle *Gren* was rendezvoused with Cora's approaching Flortarian hovercar. Both Odo and a nose-diving, shuttle-splattering Bald Eagle Daniel liquified themselves as infiltrators onboard as the cargo was being transferred.

"You know, you really shouldn't be wearing any clothes," criticized Wenk to a deadpanning Cora while she entered the shuttle and took a seat. "Whatever! Do I at least get to know what's in my cargo? Is it clothing-related?"

Cora sighed. "You once attempted to trade Federation weapons to the Dominion, only to be captured and released by the Flortarians, so why a moral quandary now?"

"Ferengi do not process quandaries! We just like making conversation after our business partners leave us to go Gormagander space whale

hunting," Wenk defended. "So odd when starships are equipped with giant, archaic spears."

The female clenched her fist. "Are you going to keep expositioning, or am I going to have to hold your collection of gameshow prize barbeques and sailboats hostage like I held that Doyle guy's collection of cannibalized collar bones?"

"We all have a thing. That's what I like," diverted Wenk before seeing she was serious. "I mean, I'm flying, I'm flying! Wow. Like everything has to be a conflict all of a sudden."

The *Gren* then took off onto a trajectory out of the atmosphere, into space, toward the Flortarian system's Georgios ice belt.

Meanwhile, the *Rio Grande* dropped warp and approached the same ice belt required to enter the Flortarios system.

"It's weird how small craft have to deal with this here," Gotens observed. "And, before you ask, yes, I've been through one of these before. Of course, I was in a huge ship and the rocks just vaporized off our deflectors, but tomato toh-mah-toh."

Dax perked. "What!?"

As the *Rio Grande* entered the asteroid belt and began dodging and circumventing large chunks of ice, the occupants on the *Gren* suddenly came to notice they were not alone.

"What is that?" Cora squinted through the front windows. "It's the Federation!?"

Wenk did a double-take. "Oh, crap. That one-trick pony organization is a perpetual goody two-shoes claptrap! Seriously. Allying with the Klingons, despite their ongoing conquering-of-worlds practice? Is the Federation not complicit in that?"

"Stop deconstructing things and take us out of the system," Cora grumbled. "I swear. People are in a perpetual analysis state these days. Also, I'd fly the ship myself, but apparently all Ferengi craft are subject to very specific lobe scans that no shapeshifter could ever replicate."

The pilot chuckled. "Ohh yeah. We're auditorially-obsessed in terms of day-to-day operations. Especially our giant ear swab compartments."

After reconning the cockpit, Daniel and Odo took shape in the cargo hold of the *Gren*.

"It's the *Rio Grande*, from Deep Space 9," Odo reported. "Just saying my space station's name releases interminable Changeling-version endorphins."

Daniel tilted. "It's weirder that we can feel them swimming around in us. Also, that must be Commander Gotens. A message said they were going to drop him off and have you picked up. Not that I haven't enjoyed our discourse."

"Perhaps much of our contest could be equalized through a link?" Odo suggested. "Just a thought."

Meanwhile, the orbiting *Phoenix-X* opened scans for any Ferengi shuttles entering or exiting Flortarios III, only capturing their side of the planet.

"There's a whole other planetary bisection we have missed," conjectured Prime Minister Clingten as he rejoined the Bridge. "I'd patch you in to our orbital security network, but it's been so compromised that it's now just a series of aimless space hulks crashing into our cities every few weeks."

BOB squinted. "There is so much about your world that is terrible and all I want to do is fix it."

"Enough! I won't have political reminiscings on my ship," Armond argued.

Red turned. "It's not your ship? You know if Captain Daniel were here he would say you were an irrational, illogical human being for taking a position like that."

"You know the law. Never, ever mention that name in my presence!" Armond then clutched his head, feeling more Hamlet's Claudius than ever. "This power is corrupting me. If anyone needs me, I'll be in Sickbay."

After he left, BOB activated his hacking program, reconnecting another way to the shuttle *Gren*. "Wenk! You must put an end to whatever it is you're doing. Sure, there are a lot of unscrupulous Ferengi but, overall, it's still not meant to be our way. If you're looking for over-indulgence, book your contract signings in an Orion den."

"Ah! Not you again," Wenk jumped as Cora was too busy working in the background to notice. "*Also, those dens are stenchy as hell. Also, I remember you now. You were the betrayer during our Dominion trade mission. Also, are you a Beguiler?*"

BOB sighed. "I'm with the Ferengi Alliance, exchange-serving on a Starfleet vessel. As you can see, we can operate earnestly, with something they call... self-respect? Am I saying that right?" he asked to a shrugging Kayl.

On the *Rio Grande*, both Dax and Gotens tapped frantically at the consoles, getting ready for almost anything.

"The shuttle *Gren* is sharing the same mother-ship transponder code as the shuttle *Yone*, that other craft that Meloneus destroyed," Dax reported from her data collection.

Gotens positioned the *Rio Grande* to approach. "I kind of feel like we don't have a choice but to investigate now? We see each other, so looking away would just be paaaainfully awkward."

"They're closing in at an intercept course," Dax continued. "I'm detecting one Ferengi and three other fluctuating lifeforms. Oh, and the shuttle is powering up its arms."

The Commander smirked. "Watch out for its elbow. Ha! Get it?" Then, to a deadpan, he added, "Well, a Trill is just trying to liven up the mood. Consider yourself relieved." But the *Rio Grande* was suddenly hit with a phaser beam from the *Gren*. "Ah! Okay, consider yourself reinstated."

"Now you want my help, huh?" Dax tilted before the runabout shook even more from a higher-set phaser beam. "Okay, truce. Your Trill angle may hit me as sideways as it and you stealing the *Defiant*, but we're both still officers. I say we give these guys a taste of Starfleet bureaucracy."

Gotens nodded seriously at that. "Yeah, I still have imbalance-hangover. You do not want to know who's Captain's desk I stole, for a baseball card, and is sitting in this runabout's rear conference room right now."

Before she could react, both shuttles began arcing around within the ice asteroids, firing and dodging each other's beams and the area's scattered matter.

On the *Gren*, both Odo and Daniel become part of the surface of the rear cockpit and shapeshifted their lips off the back wall.

"Hey, change the colour of your lips," a subdued-volume Daniel said, to a complying Odo. "Okay, good. Also, our suspicion was right about that other Changeling."

But the *Gren* was suddenly shaken by running into an asteroid. "Hey, watch where you're going!" a distracted Odo yelled. "I'm having flashbacks to the *Phoenix-X* knocking the station into the wormhole."

"I'm trying!" Wenk argued, before realizing. "Hey. Who said that? I must be losing it. Computer, decrease temperature by five degrees and play some music from that Earth game, *Mortal Kombat XXXV*."

Getting back to the lips, Daniel said, "Damn, Odo. You know that *Phoenix-X* thing was the accidental result of an all-too-well-known button-mashing. Also, you have to be careful. Just do what I did and not shapeshift a tongue. Do you have a tongue?"

"I certainly do," came a third mouth from Cora, seconds before all three Changelings emerged off the wall and took their full humanoid forms.

While Wenk was busy, he saw the commotion from the corner of his eye. "Ahh! Where did you come from? And you? I need a vacation. I hear Risa has treasure-hunting."

"Shut up, Ferengi. Meloneus foolishly destroyed one of our own transports for his own personal issues, but at least you could erect a level ten forcefield around those two," Cora ordered. "And prepare the Ferengi Genesis Device prototype from our cargo hold, for full-scale going-too-far."

Instead, Wenk dropped his attack against the *Rio Grande*, stopped the *Gren*, and fired a phaser at Cora before putting the forcefield around her. He stood to confront her unconscious form. "I knew it. The Dominion is harvesting Ferengi technology. How rude! Also, me changing sides allows for a transitional grace period."

"It does. And, Ferengi genesis device prototype? But that's a Starfleet thing?" Daniel protested.

Wenk continued. "You know how we are. We're like intellectual parasites. Also, your Ferengi advisor BOB was right that my kind does not have to betray ourselves by indulging in over-illegal behaviour. Just regular illegal should be good enough. Like, copyright infringing on you guys."

"*The Flortarian government thanks you for your self-imposed limitationing*," came the nearby screen hack that still displayed Clingten and the others, on the Bridge of the *Phoenix-X*. "*It's not more rules that we need; it's better people.*"

BOB squinted, "*Agree to disagree.*"

"*This is the runabout Rio Grande. Prepare to be boarded*," came the authoritative onscreen hail from Commander Gotens before he saw everyone. "*Oh, a settling-climactic scenario involving all side-plots. I'll leave you to it.*"

Later, Daniel, Gotens, Dax, Odo, BOB and Clingten all stood, wrapping up a meeting in the *Phoenix-X*'s conference room.

"As a leader of the Flortarians, I am fully prepared to admit we shot ourselves in the foot with our backward practices," Clingten admitted. "There will be much debate on the mud wrestling floor this November. Our cells are also made of clay, so we will leave Cora to the Federation."

After he left, Dax turned to everyone. "Deep Space 9 crossing paths with the *Phoenix-X* is a mesh that never really meshes, but you do come through for us in the end."

"And I learned I need to better-train Armond in backup commanding, a step towards also improving as a Trill," Gotens added. "He's in Sickbay doing Riker-flashbacks to start, but there's sooo much more to it. Like, leg-lifting over regular-sized chairs."

Both Trills exited and Daniel looked to BOB. "Exchange officer, huh? Just like that contingent of Klingons on our lower decks. The only difference being, I hope the Ferengi don't have pain-stick rituals."

"Our sticks are financially absorbent. As in, once the stick hits you, an electrical current connects to the card in your wallet and several slips of latinum are eliminated from your bank account," BOB admitted. "Perhaps now I can make a difference in those kinds of archaic practices."

When BOB walked out of the room, Odo and Daniel were the last ones. "Well, I can't say I approve of a Ferengi counsel, but you do you, I suppose," Odo said. "Also, this deviation has enabled self-awareness of my uncharacteristic behaviour stemming from an inability to process my feelings for Kira. Since redemption lies elsewhere, I do not need to link."

"Oh," came the disappointed pause from Daniel. "Well, I'm glad to have helped even a little bit. You really need to sort that out with her. Either way, good luck, Constable."

He nodded. "Do me a favour. When people find out what you really are, look to our kind. We may be the enemy now, but as long-lived as we are, time usually sorts things out for all Changelings. As for now, we have a war to fight and, according to your XO, your Gul Meloneus is back."

"Yeah, sorry for leaning and infringing so hard on Deep Space 9 stuff," Daniel replied. "We'll have original ideas later."

With both Odo and Dax returning to the runabout, the *Rio Grande* backed away from the *Phoenix-X* and shot itself out through the ice field before going to warp. A few more Starfleet ships, likewise, entered in the opposite direction, through the belt, and approached Flortarios III.

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