

Devil's Leftovers

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Devil's Leftovers

by [Hawku](#)

Summary

"I feel like your dialogue is just padding for something else entirely." - Episode 91: In the late 24th century, the U.S.S. Phoenix-X discovers a group of tricksters are swindling worlds out of goods in the Bajor system.

Notes

Author's notes: This takes place in the late 24th century. For this and my previous three-parter, I picked a series I would pull an alien species from (TNG for this second one) and used a random number generator to choose an episode. The generator pulled "Devil's Due," so I wrote something on the species in that episode. This was written in May 2016.

Devil's Leftovers, Part I

Star Trek: Phoenix-X

"Devil's Leftovers, Part I"

The *Prometheus*-class U.S.S. *Phoenix-X* sat out in deep space, scanning phenomenon and sending signals to nowhere. Commander Seifer sat expectantly on the Bridge of his ship.

"This is great. We're doing stuff. We're getting out there and making a life for ourselves," he commented.

Armond turned from tactical. "Sir, we've wasted hours of power and resources for no results whatsoever. I think it's safe to say we're the poster-ship of diminishing returns."

"Hm. Make a note that we should stop trying in general," Seifer suggested.

Ensign Dan turned from his science console. "Señor Seifer, sir, we are receiving hail from Bajoran system, sir!"

"I know I ordered you to call me that, but I'm not feeling it. Plus, you're Bajoran yourself, so, why? You know what? You're relieved."

As everyone watched Ensign Dan exit the Bridge, Lieutenant Commander Red continued the report from helm. "I believe the hail to be distressed-based. The connection request text is filled with exclamation marks!"

"Typical of lazy writing. Where's the literary umph? Anyway, put them through."

The screen blinked on to a view of a robed Bajoran leader, Alds Rohn. "*Oh, thank goodness someone replied! We are the leaders of Bajor VIII, one of many colonized planets in the Bajor system.*"

"What? But people talk about Bajor in a non-numerical sense, indicating only one planet?" Seifer pointed out.

Rohn shrugged. "*People are jerks, obviously. Anyway, we have been trying to contact a Starfleet ship for days, because we've been swindled out of two shipments of quadrotriticale grain for one shipment of fake latinum. All we got were gold bars. Worthless gold!*"

"Why didn't you contact Deep Space 9?" Seifer asked.

The Bajoran leaned in. "*That conglomerate of thieves and cut-throats? No thank you! A bald Lurian once stepped on my foot!*" He then took a breath. "*No. A starship crew will ensure anonymity.*"

"I'll see what I can do. But, chances are, I'll probably do nothing. After all, it is a Saturday."

Rohn panicked. "*But you simply must help us! We were battered by the Cardassian Occupation and the Bolians sent us rude messages as well!*"

"Ugh. The Bolians barely even know how to use a computer. Anyway, I have to go. There's an onboard tea party that I simply can't miss," Seifer replied. Then, to his crew: "Well, that was awkward."

"*I'm still here!*" Rohn argued from the view screen, prompting Seifer to cut it off, quickly.

Armond turned from his console. "Commander, I'm reading signs similar to that of quadrotriticale near the moon known as Baraddo."

"Dammit. You know you're supposed to wait until we're long gone before reporting things. You can forget your bonus this year," Seifer interjected. "And no counter arguments that Federation energy credits have no actual value! I knew a Ferengi that acknowledged their existence once."

Later, the *Phoenix-X* approached the outermost misshaped rock that orbited Bajor VII.

"Sensors are detecting the 'scent' of the grain, an indisputable smell in the cold, vacuum of space," Armond reported.

The Commander sat on the edge of his command chair, focused. "Remember that time a bunch of Klingons poisoned a shipment of it on Deep Space K-7? One of my past hosts bumped into Benjamin Sisko. Could have sworn he looked like Gabriel Bell."

"Sir, a ship is approaching off the port bow!" Red reported.

Activating the viewscreen, the crew watched as a broken down alien starship neared them and opened fire.

"Open hailing frequencies," Seifer ordered. "Enemy vessel, you have violated Starfleet shields and the consequences is immediate death. Prepare to be boarded."

Kayl turned from Ops. "Commander, that is not current protocol!"

"Uh, have you seen our egos lately? It totally is now," Seifer answered.

Then, a response came through on audio. "*Federation ship, this is the Karisag. And you may think you're seeing us, but the question is, are you really?*"

"Yes?" Seifer said, confused.

The voice from the *Karisag* then replied. "*Are we here, or...*" And as his ship disappeared, "*Or are we here?*" Then his ship re-appeared in the spot to its left.

"Is this is a bit?" Seifer tried to comprehend.

The alien ship started up again. "*Are we here?*" It suddenly disappeared once more. "*Or, are we here!*" The ship reappeared two spots to its right.

"Hey! Stop that! You're parlor tricks are not impressing me!" Seifer yelled.

Then, "*Now, for our final act, my lovely assistant here will get into the forward section of our main separation facility. Aaaaand, ala kazaam!*"

"Dammit," Seifer cursed as he and the crew watched the alien junk ship separate into two halves.

The voice on the *Karisag* finished with what he assumed was great applause. "*Thank you, thank you! You are the stars!*" Then, both halves suddenly began to cloak again.

"Armond, tractor beam!" Seifer reacted quickly.

Rolling his eyes, Armond replied. "Why do I literally control everything?"

"*Hey!*" came the shocked reply from the forward half of the *Karisag* as the *Phoenix-X* locked a tractor beam onto it. "*Stop that! You are ruining the mysteriousness of this!*"

Seifer turned. "Kayl, force their view screen on!"

"I can't do that, sir!" And then, "Wait. If I modulate a thermo dynamic pulse and direct it into a narrow band frequency, it should remotely charge their visual communication systems."

Seifer nodded expectantly, having expected as much from her. "Obviously."

"*What? You uptight Starfleet brats!*" replied an alien man in ragged clothing as he and his Bridge appeared on screen. "*You do this every time!*"

A Ferengi, also in civilian clothing, turned to the alien. "*Hexagin, just stop with the theatrics already, and get us out of here. I feel like your dialogue is just padding for something else entirely.*"

"*Quiet, BOG. I'm this close to my demands being met!*" Hexagin argued. "*Look at how confused they are. It's working!*"

The Commander addressed the two. "Uh, the confusion is self-aware. Sorry. Also, I must arrest you for swindling Bajorans out of quadrotritical for fake latinum."

"*Oh, please! Like you have any jurisdiction here!*" countered Hexagin. "*BOG! Initiate Escape Pattern: Surprise Attack!*"

Seifer blinked. "How can it be a surprise if you're announcing it? I'm literally expecting a surprise attack any second now."

"*Just wait,*" Hexagin reassured as the other half of the *Karisag* appeared and fired photon torpedoes into the *Phoenix-X*'s tractor beam emitters.

The *Karisag* reassembled and shot itself into warp, leaving the *Phoenix-X* in the wake of its exit from normal space.

"Their warp trail is undetectable, likely by their ingenuity, which we underestimated," reported Armond. "But they did leave something behind, something we can all agree on: An impression."

Commander Seifer rolled his eyes in frustration. "Set course in that general direction. Even though being off by a micron, in heading, could potentially set us half a quadrant away, I'm willing to take that chance."

"Understood, Commander. Closing my eyes and engaging engines," Red answered as he covered his vision with one hand and arbitrarily slapped the other around on the console.

Later, Commander Seifer entered the Messhall and took a seat at the bar.

"Bartender, your finest ale!" he ordered.

BOB walked over and handed him a Cardassian Sunrise. "Sorry. It's all we have left after the Klingon exchange portion of the *Phoenix-X* drank through half their sorrows for having to serve on a Federation ship."

"The Ferengi bartender, BOB?? I thought you were running that face-stretching studio on Deck 7?"

Shrugging, BOB replied, "Unfortunately, we went under after we lifted way too many cheeks over eyes. I can't count how many mumbled complaints we got from crew with chins over their mouths."

"Yeah, I was waiting for reviews before getting in on that," Seifer said. "Anyway, the *Phoenix-X* just encountered a crew of no-good tricksters, much like the hundreds of imitation-Janeways that surfaced from the Delta Quadrant a few weeks ago. But, one of these ones was a Ferengi named BOG, which I imagine is inexplicably spelled in all caps like yours."

The Ferengi put his mixer down and sighed in defeat. "Well, I knew this day would come. You see, BOG and I used to be part of a similarly named, specialized group of moneymakers and grifters. Since our group failed as business people, in general, he's likely attempting to overachieve as compensation."

"Well, he's oddly succeeding thus far. Possibly due to his joining with that group. Any idea who they are?"

BOB thought for a second. "Last I heard, he was attempting to align himself with Ardra's crew: A group of tricksters who followed a woman that pretended to be the Goddess of several worlds."

"I remember her! She was promptly proven a fraud by Picard and the illustrious crew of the *Enterprise-D*." And then, "They were always doing stuff, that crew. I never trusted them."

The bartender nodded in agreement. "They had a reputation. Anyway, in order to stop BOG, it will require a mixture of wit and guile, and pretty much anything that mentions his mother. Also, word salad confuses him."

"So, what normally works on you," Seifer reaffirmed.

The bartender was taken aback. "Whoa! Ho! You really know how to treat your drink server around here."

"Do you want to keep the bar or not?"

BOB conceded as fast as he could. "Yes, sir! I'm a nitwit, sir!"

"*Bridge to Commander Seifer,*" came Armond's voice over comms. "*We're getting a distress call from the Kriosians. Someone traded them imitation tube grubs for one of their princesses.*"

Seifer tapped his commbadge. "Acknowledged and surprised how reported events are always related. Coincidence sure is the mother of consequence."

"Not to mention the surplus of princesses that world seems to export on the regular," BOB added.

The Commander stood up. "Agreed. It's time I found a mate— err, I mean, let's put a stop to these grifters. To the turbolift that leads to the Bridge! Engage!"

He then briskly walked his way to destiny.

TO BE CONTINUED

Devil's Leftovers, Part II

Star Trek: Phoenix-X

"Devil's Leftovers, Part II"

The *Prometheus*-class U.S.S. *Phoenix-X* dropped warp at Krios III and took orbit. There, they were hailed by a Klingon facility on the planet.

"I am General Gron. You will tell us your business here, or we will rip out your throats!" the Klingon officer argued from behind his desk.

Seifer stood up. "We're responding to a distress signal, and how would you even have the man power to do what you say?"

"I don't know—" the Klingon stuttered, unsure himself. *"I'd line you all up or something? Stop questioning my tactics!"*

The Commander shrugged. "Hey, I just want to be sure the logistics check out. Anyway, is there a chance your princess was taken by a group of grifters flying a ship called the *Karisag*?"

"That's exactly what happened! Although I am a Klingon who only cares for Klingon matters, having the Sovereign Dynasty of Krios Prime constantly bicker at me is more annoying than a swarm of targ flies during mating season."

Nodding, Seifer replied, "Agreed. If you will allow us to investigate, we may be able to apprehend these tricksters and reclaim Bajor VIII's two shipments of quadrotriticale grain."

"Ugh. That bland, one-taste baktag is utterly disgusting! Just do whatever you have to do and stay out of the targ cages. My premium beast is feeding to impress the females," Gron argued before he cut the screen off.

Kayl spoke up. "He seems nice."

"Klingons do not do nice," interjected Red. "Unless it involves some sort of blood-letting. We are all over that."

Seifer, Armond and Kugo beamed down the facility to examine its main concourse, which was busy with people. Armond took out his tricorder and began scanning.

"Nothing out of the ordinary here," he stated. "But, then again, this tricorder hasn't been working for weeks."

Looking into the distance, Seifer noticed that, within a group of people, was the same Ferengi who he saw earlier on the Bridge of the *Karisag*. "It's BOG!"

"Commander, are you saying that in all caps, or standardized punctuation?" Kugo inquired. "Asking for a friend."

But, instead, Seifer moved into the crowds to attempt to apprehend his target. Upon breaching a group of Kriosians, he found no Ferengi. "Something we can help you with?" one of the Kriosians, Carv, asked.

"Uh, yeah, a check on that attitude," Seifer shot back before leaving them and making his way toward the office.

It was then he bumped into the Klingon, Gron, who he had spoken to before. "Watch where you walk, Starfleet! Assuming you represent the organization as a whole!"

"Perhaps, you should watch who you swindle, Gron. Lying comes with more caveats than a cage full of tribble," he replied.

Gron grunted. "You dare accuse me of various things!? In this case, one?!"

"You're working with Ardra's crew, and called me here to cover your tracks," Seifer exclaimed as he reached into the crowd, right next to them, and pulled out the Ferengi BOG by his shirt collar.

BOG tried to scramble free with no luck. "I swear, those Talaxian fur flies were not interbred!"

"Ugh. You insipid Ferengi, and, yes, that was a specist slur," Gron cursed before turning back to Seifer. "I merely looked the other way in order for that crew to complete their princess exchange. You have any idea how annoying I find the Kriosians. Why does the Klingon Empire even have a facility here? Is there a connection, or did we just coincidentally occupy a world with the same name??"

Seifer replied, "I don't have the answers to those questions, nor will I probably ever, but you're going away for a long time, also probably." He then noticed the Kriosians walking over, aiming their weapons to apprehend Gron. "You guys are security? Why aren't you wearing uniforms?"

"The Sovereign Guard," Carv said. "We asked you if there was anything we could help you with! Inquiries are the uniforms of our people."

The Commander nodded. "I guess that works within the confines of your particular grouping. As for BOG, he's got a date with Starfleet."

Candles, wine, cheesecake dessert, the whole shebang."

"Finally! Please just take the Ferengi already. He's been leaving tube grub skins all over the floors. They're so crunchy under our feet."

Returning back to the *Phoenix-X*, Seifer met BOG who was put into the Brig by two security officers.

"So, what's the prison schedule like? Three meals a day, therapy sessions, and a hot shower? I'm on board!" BOG said excitedly. "But none of those metal cups. You can't get the metal taste out of your mouth."

Seifer activated the force field. "Oh yeah? Well now you'll get two of those cups!! Until then, let's talk Ardra's crew. Where are they? What have you done with them??"

"Nothing! They go where they please. I think you've got your paradigm wrong. Also, I think you should know that I am an expert swindler. I was bred for it, actually," BOG bragged while blowing on his purple nails.

The Commander rolled his eyes. "Fine. Then swindle your way out of this."

"I will! Okay, here goes: To free me, I will give you five cases of tulaberry wine. Oh! And I'll throw in a package of unsealing stembolts. How's about that for swindle, huh?"

Crossing his arms, Seifer replied, "That's not even what a swindle is. Plus, I don't accept, nor was I even tempted to go for it."

"Do you want my point to be made or what? You have to take the deal to make it work!" BOG grumbled. "Okay, forget it. How about if I help you catch Ardra's crew?"

Seifer was taken aback. "After that display of deal-making? And why are all Ferengi just horrible, even at their own jobs?"

"It's a clear stereotyping thing, but, truthfully, I have had enough of the pretentiousness of that crew and how they think they're sooooo great at grifting. You know what I mean?"

The Commander shrugged. "Starfleet doesn't do that anymore. Not ever since Kirk grifted all those alien women into his bed and was banned from the Federation for a whole week."

"Well, I've only been with women who've mistaken me for other, more suave Ferengi," BOG replied. "As for catching Ardra's crew, I believe if we offer them a trade deal, based on a swindle, they will accept. I suggest the psy-wave devices of the Prytt Alliance, which Ardra's crew has been desiring for quite some time."

Seifer's jaw dropped. "What!? We'll never be able to manufacture one of those. That's crazy-talk from a crazy-Ferengi with an all-caps name!"

"Unless you borrow actual devices from the Prytt. You see, they would do anything to gain favor with the Federation, since their adversaries tried and failed once."

Commander Seifer nodded, solemnly. "Fine. But you're still not getting those therapy sessions. The counselor is very busy at the moment."

"But my mental health!? Ughh. You know that's akin to physical health in this century, right? Never mind. I'll just guess what my value system should be." He then concentrated. "Coming to conclusions without evidence? Yep, that's probably acceptable."

Seifer just looked at him awkwardly as BOG continued and then Seifer slowly backed out of the Brig.

Later, the *Phoenix-X* took orbit of Kesprytt III and Seifer beamed down to the surface to meet the Prytt representatives.

"Oh, this is surely delightful!" said Cargone, a Prytt mediator. "We are more than happy to do anything for the Federation, if it means you would consider us as a part of your vast interstellar empire of goodie-goodness."

The Commander was handed a briefcase of psy-wave devices. "First of all, that's just an assumption you made which I only alluded to in lie form. We'd never consider you, and, second, wow. You guys must be desperate? You once captured our own people out of Romulan-like distrust?"

"We envied their mysteriousness at the time. Now the Romulans are all over the map! In an effort to harken back to that, we've captured some of your very own Klingon exchange officers."

Meanwhile, in a Prytt interrogation room, deep, within the planet, Kortos, Amos and Targon found themselves sitting around a long table before a Prytt official.

"Now, you will tell me all your secrets and such!" demanded a Prytt unofficial named Maeke, who held a small whip for posture.

Targon glanced at his other Klingon warriors in momentary confusion before starting. "Well, we once ate the heart of a live Kolar beast right in front of Ensign Dan. He was puking for weeks."

"That was the best!" Kortos added, laughing.

Amos sat, unsettled. "You know the heart of those things are full of cholesterol? We really need to eat healthier."

"Oh, Amos, you are such a food health nut. Just learn to live for once," suggested Targon. He then glanced up at Maeke, honestly unsure. "Pitiful Prytt Representative, is any of this helpful at all?"

Forgetting about them, the *Phoenix-X* left the Kesprytt system and dropped warp back into the Bajor system. The Ferengi bartender BOB flew the Class-2 shuttlecraft *Dracon* into orbit of the desert world Bajor VI.

"I'm glad we could make an offscreen deal," came the sly complement of Hexagin to an out-of-uniform, robed Kugo who beamed from the shuttlecraft to the inside of a slinky Bajoran bar in the middle of nowhere.

The Vulcan tilted her head in confusion, as she extended her arm with the briefcase. "Screen? You appear to be stuck in a trope's parameters. As for these, I acquired them illegally, of course. I sent you my whole convincing backstory, as well, right?"

"It was very thorough," Hexagin said. "You once rode with Hartcourt Mudd? Honestly, I thought he'd be dead by now for flaunting that curly mustache thing in the mid-23rd century."

Suddenly, Seifer, Armond and BOG stepped out from the shadows holding phasers at Hexagin and two of his men. "Hold it right there, grifty-grifts! These devices were just a lure and you took the bait. Now you're going to jail for being horrible at sneaking around! Oh, and the legal stuff too, probably."

"Oh, am I?" replied Hexagin, smirking. "I think Bajoran Security would have a problem with those claims."

Then, out of the shadows, right behind Seifer and Armond, came two Bajoran Security officers holding weapons at them. "Don't move," said one of them.

"What!? You were in the same shadowy corners as us? Why didn't we see you?" Seifer reacted in shock.

The other Bajoran answered. "It's shadowy. Obviously you couldn't see anything!"

"That's right," continued Hexagin as BOG walked over to join him. "You were grifted by the grifters! And trading psy-wave devices is illegal in this system, thanks to laws and such."

Seifer pointed at Hexagin and BOG. "Hey, Bajorans, you need to arrest those guys! They stole your quadrotriticale and a Kriosian princess! And why did I even bring a traitorous Ferengi on this mission??"

"Hey, that Ferengi's partner just fed us quadrotriticale!" the lead security guy said. "And it was delicious. Plus, we were told you guys had been visiting several worlds in just the past few days including the moon of Baraddo, and the world's of Krios III and Kesprytt III, respectively!"

The Commander threw up his arms in dismissal. "To investigate your stolen grain situation! Why aren't you responding to logic??"

"Pfft! Ever since the Vulcan's destroyed Romulus and Remus, there has been a ban on logic throughout the Alpha Quadrant," the security officer detailed. "We even converted Cardassian labor camps into family day camps! Nothing about them was altered."

Seifer was taken aback. "Are you kidding me?? That's even worse! I don't want to be a part of a galaxy that refuses basic logic. Where did our Prime Spock even go anyway? Some alternate reality?? Just take me to jail. Anything!"

"Very well," said the other Bajoran security officer. "But along the way, you will hear all about our conversions of the Bajoran underground resistance caves into subterranean shopping malls. Oh, the cappuccinos there are to be had!"

The Commander covered his ears in disgust. "No! No more, please! I just want to be shot by your school yard phasers!" He and his crew were then led away, into the desert. They would soon find themselves the grifters turned the grifted.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Devil's Leftovers, Part III

Star Trek: Phoenix-X

"Devil's Leftovers, Part III"

The *Prometheus*-class U.S.S. *Phoenix-X* sat out in deep space, unsure what to do with itself. Lieutenant Commander Red sat in the Captain's chair.

"Are we... Are we supposed to be shooting or something? I'm a horrible commanding officer," Red explained.

Lieutenant Kayl turned from tactical. "Seifer, Armond and Kugo haven't checked in yet so we may conclude that something happened to them."

"And BOB too, right? That Ferengi bartender with which we know nothing about whom went along with them for some miraculous reason?" Ensign Dan asked, turning from helm.

Red sat up and pointed at him. "You will learn your place, Ensign! You've just bought three hours scrubbing plasma conduits!!"

"Huh. You really are getting the hang of things," Kayl observed of the Klingon exchange officer.

Meanwhile, Seifer, Armond, Kugo and BOB found themselves locked behind a forcefield in a jail cell, in a facility on the desert world of Bajor VI.

"Kind of nice of them to put us all in the same place. Convenient, even," Commander Seifer observed before picking up some food on a nearby table spread. "Oh! And complimentary hasperat."

Kugo crossed her arms, annoyed at the situation. "That incessant BOG sold us out. He claimed he was tired of Ardra's crew, but that was clearly a lie. Ferengi tire less of treachery!"

"I would agree with that assessment," BOB added. "But we're different than most Ferengi. Ours was a secret group, born and selected to be trained as the best of the best: Swindlers, cheaters, financial geniuses."

Armond perked up. "Wait. Are you saying there's a naming convention in which there are Ferengi's named BOK, BOL, BOM and so on?"

"Precisely. BOA was the first of us; I was the second; then BOC, BOD, BOE, and onwards. We were called Beguiler Operators, which are attributed to the first two letters of each of our names, then counted each of us down alphabetically."

Seifer spoke while chewing his hasperat. "But what happened to you guys? I'm assuming something happened, as is the course of all backstories."

"What happens in all historical reminscings: Irony. In this case, ours was grifter-based, as the man who sold our program manufactured a faulty and poor curriculum of training for more money than it was worth," BOB explained. "We ended up falling apart in our adolescence; failing at becoming the advanced super-swindlers, and, in fact, becoming worse than the average Ferengi."

Kugo eyed him, critically. "Except for you. You actually succeeded in becoming the best."

"What are you talking about? I'm as much a failure as any Beguiler Operator!" BOB defended.

Armond shook his head. "No, Kugo's right. You were so good that you dropped out of the money-making game all together, to live aboard the comforts of a Federation starship. From the *Phoenix-X* you've enjoyed a place excluding the lure and taste of money."

"Of course. Unlike BOG, you realized the lack of need for the latinum, but have been playing along this whole time," Seifer's jaw dropped.

BOB gritted his teeth. "Fine. Yes, I've been faking my horrible deal-making this whole time. I even tricked your long lost Admiral Theseus into bribing me onto this ship in limited-Neelix-information-giving fashion using mirrors and visual angles. I have stock-piles of latinum stored away on my own private moon from ad revenue, secret subspace web stores and insider tube grub stock market trading from within the Ferengi financial community, but I abandoned it all because money is the ruin of the entire Alliance! It's an endless cycle of wanting more and cheating each other until we're all mortal enemies of our own selves. The Beguilers couldn't even stay together even with their failings as business men."

"Well, we need your expert swindling now, BOB," Seifer claimed. "Now more than ever, to help us get out of this situation with Ardra and the Bajorans."

Armond shrugged. "Or we could do a Starfleet sciencey thing? I think I can establish a temporal vortex in this very jail cell."

"Don't make me relieve you of duty, Lieutenant Commander!" Seifer countered, stepping in front of Armond to block him from a control panel.

BOB nodded. "Very well. I believe if we give the *Phoenix-X* to Ardra's crew, they will reveal themselves and all their secrets."

"That's a very bad idea," the Commander countered. "Federation property is not to be thrown about, and protecting the onboard crew is so important, I'd give anything up for them."

The Ferengi tilted his head, indicating something unseen. "Well, we should offer something. It's not like— they can— hear everything— we're saying— right now."

"Well if that were true, I wouldn't say the command codes to the *Phoenix-X* are Psi-Delta-3-Tango-2-Alp—" Seifer began before he was interrupted by the guard.

The Bajoran carried in more hasperat. "Refill!"

"Commander, you should not be saying those codes out loud," argued Armond.

BOB turned to him. "Wait. Are you being genuine or did you actually read through my head-tiling maneuver?"

"I'm going to be honest, I've had A British Tar in my head this whole time," Seifer admitted. "Man, what a catchy tune. I'm so jealous of Worf."

Suddenly, all four of them were transported away.

They reappeared aboard the Bridge of Ardra's ship, the *Karisag*. There, the alien Hexagin, accompanied by BOG, addressed the group.

"Well, well, it would seem I now have the upper hand, thanks to my ability to bug a prison cell," Hexagin bragged.

Seifer deadpanned. "You beamed it in, didn't you?"

"—Using the power of transporter technology, I beamed it in!" He continued, not realizing Seifer's beat him to it. "That's the secret to trickery: modern techniques."

Kugo sighed. "What is the point of all this? You had us go to jail, and now you're breaking us out? I've had lurpas with less edge than this."

"Because your foolish Commander has revealed the one thing he promised he'd never give up, part of the command codes to the *Phoenix-X*!" Hexagin continued. "Now that you're here, I will negotiate the rest of them from you."

BOB crossed his arms. "Really? How?"

"Before you, on the view screen is a Son'a metaphasic distributor in orbit of Bajor VIII. Through alternate personas, we've sold them a version which, instead of killing everyone, will rejuvenate the population and all its plant and animal life!" BOG said. "The effects of youthening and betterment would be felt for one long, painful, unending generation to come."

Hexagin continued. "Now, we would be more than willing to share this revolutionary technology with the Federation, if you would allow me your ship for just three hours."

"Are you kidding me? Three hours???" Seifer reacted, shocked. "Don't tell me you're going to use it to make a trade with someone?"

BOG nodded. "With the Orion Syndicate, in fact. We've got a shipment of rare Betazed chalices from several houses to deliver as cover for a con to beam out our stolen quadrotriticale, Kriosian princess and warp core components, but the Nausicaans have it out for those green baldies and are ready to pounce at any moment of their reveal. The *Phoenix-X* would ensure our safety."

"A Ferengi who performs trickstering, huh?" Seifer observed. "Congratulations for being the first of the Beguiler Operators. Yeah, I know about that."

Hexagin handed them a torn piece of paper with a subspace code on it. "We normally have five or six going at once. It's quite a lucrative business, which can be learned in day, night or online classes, if you're interested."

"To say that I'm impressed is to say the least," BOB started. "But you losing your previously lifted merchandise skewers your credibility. Let us in on yours, give us back the quadrotriticale and the princess, and you can keep your warp core components."

Hexagin threw up his hands. "Then what is the point!?"

"According to that monitor read-out," BOB added, pointing. "The Orions also have fifteen crates of Ktarian gaming headsets. Those are quite valuable."

The other man gritted his teeth, giving in. "Uggh. Fine. But if things go sideways, I'm stealing BOG's wife again!"

Later, the *Karisag* dropped warp before the *Phoenix-X* and the group beamed onto its Bridge.

"Phew! Finally. For second there, I thought I was going to have to do something," Red commented, relieved. "Let it be known, doing things is not a Klingon pastime."

Hexagin smirked. "Actually, I'm taking command of your ship in a deal crafted by your Ferengi bartender whom which is called BOB for some reason."

"What!? That slacked-jawed misanthrope??" Kayl said, standing up in defiance.

Seifer turned to Ardra's crew. "She's right, Hexagin. I can just take us to your transaction without handing over the command codes."

"It's not the same! Do you want your crew to achieve Son'a eternal youth so they can continue to have starship adventures in the year 2410, or not??" BOG argued.

The Commander crossed his arms. "That's ridiculous and unrealistic. The crew would have at least been transferred or promoted to different positions by that year." And then, sighing, he said, "Ugh. Forget things that make sense— Computer, release control to Hexagin, for three hours only: Psi-Delta-3-Tango-2-Alpha-Singh-Noonien."

"Very good. Now I am in command of the *Phoenix-X*! Hahaha!" Hexagin laughed. "Computer, set course for the Orion Syndicate!"

The computer responded, "*Warning: Staff must be used for daily operational ship functions during regular work hours or virtual memory will overload.*"

"She's right, you know," added Seifer. "Last year, the Bridge crew went on strike and the computer decompiled from just three requests: 1) Set course, 2) Engage, and 3) Set mood lighting on Bridge."

Hexagin looked at everyone, confused. "What? Uh, okay, set course, Red."

"Gggghh," the Klingon growled, going back to his Helm position. "Did you not just hear that my people do not like doing things? I will make a seething personal log entry on your behalf later. Seething!"

When the *Phoenix-X* dropped warp in Orion space, they were met with the Orion corvette O.S.S. *Hackett*.

"*Well, well, Hexagin. It appears you really did take command of a Federation starship,*" came the on-screen hail of the Orion commander, Captain Ginyo. "*Your pre-bragging has paid off, as not-expected, and now I've lost a bet with my Chief Engineer.*"

Hexagin smirked. "We tricked the Starfleet officers by making them believe we would take their side. But guess what? We won't! Gyahahahahaha!"

"Great. Now I can't tell which parts are the act and which parts are genuine," Seifer pressed his fingers to his temple. "After we're done here, I want a staff meeting in a Parallax mud bath, STAT!"

Kugo looked at him, disappointed. "You know I cannot get the mud out of every crevice as Vulcan personal reach in certain areas are strictly off limits in our culture."

"*Ah, I see you are all wrapped up in a complex mixture of lies and deceit, as is the way of trickery and deception! Being that you are as untrustworthy as us makes you trustworthy.*" Ginyo then clapped, enthusiastically. "*Let us do the trade!*"

BOG worked the Operations console next to Kayl. "Now transporting the Betazoid chalices-of-several-houses which were definitely not stolen."

"*Hey, I have a question, does the Federation ever tax its own people? Like, how do you allocate resources without monetization or some kind of value assigned to goods and services?*" Ginyo asked, confused.

Seifer shrugged. "It's pretty much first-come, first-serve, or, in many cases, whoever whines the loudest. Ohhh, the whine-fests we have in our pseudo-democracy."

"*You know, I like you people,*" the Orion surmised seconds before his crew's console beeped with a warning.

One of his officers, Vark, turned to him. "*Sir, the Phoenix-X is transporting away all our crates of quadrotriticale and that one Kriosian princess who would not shut up about her right to be trapped on a world with a Human from Florida!*"

"*Hey, we stole that from you, fair and square! Well, at least you didn't transport off our warp core components,*" Ginyo said before realizing that they did. "*You jerks!*"

Hexagin smirked. "And don't even think about firing on us, because the *Phoenix-X* has been equipped with tricobalt torpedoes, without any explanation as to why!"

"Oh, I won't have to," Ginyo laughed as several Nausicaan ships dropped warp next to him. "Because I've got reinforcements. You see, I made a deal with the Nausicaans, to protect us in exchange for that Son'a metaphasic distributor you created, that you will be handing over the command codes to now that we've got you."

The Ferengi BOG laughed. "Shows what you know. I made a similar deal with those very same Nausicaans, before you, promising them our cargo, your cargo, Hexagin, and the distributor for my freedom and your imprisonment!"

His partner turned to him. "What!?"

"Well, well, don't you have everything in order," laughed BOB at his Ferengi counterpart. "But, unfortunately for you two, I made my own deal with the Nausicaans, even earlier than you, promising everything you just said, but including the imprisonment of Ardra's crew— which is what you two are."

Seifer laughed, himself. "Sorry, BOB. But, in fact, I made my own deal with the Nausicaans. I offered them all of that, but threw in this imitation Jewel of Thasia." And then he paused. "Crap, I shouldn't have said it was an imitation." Then, he paused again. "Crap! I just bet against you, and you're on our side??" And then he paused again. "Double-crap! I think I called on the Breen, actually."

"*You fools are now under the control of the Nausicaan Guard,*" came the hail of the Nausicaan command officer, Kuoket. "*Which of you did we make the real deal with, and which were the fakes? You squished-heads look all the same to us!*"

Commander Seifer raised his hand. "Yeah, it definitely wasn't me, sorry."

"*We've dealt with you before, Seifer!*" countered Kuoket. "*Do you not remember the five crates of yak cheese you tricked us into trading during your renegade thieving days, in 2376, beyond your Federation life??*"

Seifer's eyes widened. "Kuoket? I completely swindled you out of those Skkrrea refugees which I sold to the Ferengi for a hefty price!"

"*You did us a favor, since those refugees were sick with Varro's disease and completely turned that Ferengi crew into singing love birds,*" he cringed. "*You can go, but it's Ardra's crew and these Orions I want to punish for the mere existence of what-if scenarios.*"

The Commander crossed his arms. "Well, we are completely within our rights to imprison them, but I guess this works out because I'm anxious to see that youthening array mess with Bajoran physiology after what they did to us."

Later, the *Phoenix-X* took orbit of Bajor VIII, which was being orbited by the Son'a metaphasic distributor. Its sails opened up and just before it was about to do anything, it exploded in a ball of fire. Simultaneously, Retired Admiral Picard transported onto the Bridge of the ship.

"Got me another one of those," he said, proudly. "Well then. I'll relinquish to some quarters and you can take me back to Earth when you're ready."

The crew, in shock, watched him leave the Bridge. Everyone then turned back to Commander Seifer. "I guess we'll go there next?"

"Well, I hope you've learned a lesson in all this," said Kayl, turning to BOB.

The Ferengi nodded. "Yeah, that I'm not as good a grifter as I thought I was. Sometimes we surpass the ways we used to be."

"Hey, you got us to where we needed to be," said Seifer. "As for me, I learned that I was just like you once, and that to judge is to judge myself. Also, the past never leaves you, no matter how many databases you thought you illegally erased."

Red turned. "Lying is not honorable. It leads to mistakes and memory loss. You should all be ashamed of yourselves!"

"Oh, crap," Seifer blurted. "I forgot the rest of our Klingon Exchange officers back at Kesprytt III!"

Elsewhere, in a Prytt interrogation room, deep, within the planet, Kortos, Amos and Targon continued to regail the Prytt official with stories of their non-adventures.

"Oh! There was one time, our Doctor genetically modified a generation of Tribble into consciousness with mouths so they could speak," said Kortos.

The Prytt man, Maeke, pulled out his hair and moved for the exit. "Enough! Enough! You guys can wait out in the hall until your ship arrives! I should have been a Kes-hating farmer, like my uncle."

THE END

