

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

"Muscle"

Teleplay by

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Author's Note

Since the following draft was completed, we have learned of the likelihood of of the Dax character leaving the show. This will present no problem in any revisions which may need to be made.

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - DEEP SPACE NINE (OPTICAL)

As WE'VE normally SEEN the station, except that several ships are docked, including a large Ferengi craft. Another, different ship approaches, about to dock.

SISKO (V.O.)

Captain's Log, Stardate xxxxx.x.  
Ferengi Grand Nagus Zek is on the station for talks with Gamma Quadrant representatives aimed toward opening up new trade. I have to admire the Ferengi Alliance in the face of the Dominion Threat: business goes on!

INT. DS9 - DOCKING GATE, CORRIDOR xxx

WORF and a SECURITY DETAIL processes Gamma Quadrant Trade-Envoy PERSONNEL utilizing a new, portable transporter portal.

SISKO (V.O., CONT'D)

And the station is beginning to hum with activity as the delegations arrive. Starfleet has installed a number of new security portals employing a special transporter screening method designed to identify and secure any surgically altered Dominion infiltrators who might try to come aboard with the arriving Gamma Quadrant visitors.

One after another, each visitor transports a few feet from one end to the other of the portal (OPTICAL), and thereafter, steps out and heads off down the corridor. To one side, a special detention chamber stands with active force fields, awaiting possible detainees.

Standing together, monitoring the arrival, ODO and DR. BASHIR observe the processing.

INT. DS9 - PROMENADE

The Promenade swarms with VISITORS: filling the aisles, taking every table and bench, crowding the shop entrances. Some are unusual alien races, Gamma Quadrant visitors, anxious to see and experience everything "Alpha."

Amidst the throng, a group of familiar aliens, NAUSICAANS, arrogant and brash, pushes its way through the crowd. They seem in a hurry to get--nowhere in particular--but they brook no obstacle, even so.

The Nausicaans enter a shop on the Promenade, a small cafe.

INT. CAFE - LATER

The Nausicaans are sitting at a table, drinking from some unusual goblets. They watch another group, a FERENGI--one of the Grand Nagus's AIDES--and TWO GAMMA QUADRANT VISITORS, talking together, quietly, at a nearby table.

After a moment, the two Gamma Quadrant visitors bid the Ferengi goodbye, and exit the cafe.

Finishing their own drinks, the Nausicaans stand to leave. As they pass by, one of them picks the Ferengi off the floor with one hand, and moves him out of their way.

Pushing past him, another of the Nausicaans, GLAAH, tosses off an implied threat:

GLAAH

Stay out of the Gamma Quadrant,  
Ferengi.

They exit the cafe, leaving him staring after them.

INT. DS9, PROMENADE.

The Nausicaans exit the cafe, and head off down the Promenade.

Further down the Promenade, the Nausicaans encounter the two unsuspecting Gamma Quadrant visitors. AS WE OBSERVE AT A DISTANCE, they engage them in conversation.

At first, it appears they are trying to be friendly, but after a moment, it grows more confrontational. The two aliens are somewhat intimidated, but talk to them for several moments.

They don't seem to agree about something, and one of the Nausicaans angrily lifts one of the aliens into the air, bringing him face to face, and admonishes him for something. After a beat, he drops him roughly.

A scuffle ensues. The huge Nausicaans surround the two smaller aliens and begin tormenting them by pushing them from one to another of them.

One of the smaller aliens stands for no more, and boldly confronts the nearest Nausicaan. Before anything further can occur, however, a station security team moves in and breaks it up.

Though the Nausicaans don't put up a fight with the security team, it is clear they aren't through having their fun. They walk off down the Promenade, brash as ever.

EXT. SPACE - DEEP SPACE NINE (OPTICAL)

Another, smaller ship of Ferengi design approaches the station for docking.

INT. DS9 - OPS

MAJOR KIRA and JADZIA DAX are at their stations.

KIRA  
Ferengi ship Sekanda, you are  
cleared to dock.

She looks at Dax, mildly shocked. Dax is even more surprised.

INT. DS9 - OUTSIDE AIRLOCK DOOR

The door opens to reveal a TRIO OF FERENGI WOMEN, dressed Ferengi women. In fact, *these* Ferengi women are dressed to the nines. And cocky, too.

They (RUTTA, TRULLA, and SALACIA) strut into the corridor as though they owned the place. Or will...soon.

INT. DS9'S GUEST QUARTERS DESK

An officious-looking CLERK looks up to see the three Ferengi women standing before him.

CLERK  
(mildly nonplussed)  
Uhh, c-can I help you?

INT. DS9 - THE PROMENADE

ODO walks with Kira amid the thicker than usual throng.

KIRA  
They've taken the best suites on the station rather than using their ship's quarters.

ODO  
All except one. She seems to be staying aboard ship. At least she hasn't ventured off yet. Garak said they've been throwing their money around pretty heavily, too.

They stop, looking down at the crowd. Suddenly, the Ferengi women stride into view, and enter Quark's. Odo gives Kira a look which she returns with interest.

ODO  
Excuse me.

He heads off to follow them.

INT. QUARK'S - THE BAR

QUARK and ROM are talking as they work behind the bar.

ROM  
Come on, brother. It can't be as bad as all that. The station has twice as many visitors as it ever had before, with more coming. Look around. We can't keep up with it all, we're getting so much business.

Quark looks at the Promenade and the passing throngs, then the game room, and the overflowing tables. Next, he scans the bar, without an empty seat. Finally, he fixes his gaze on Grand Nagus Zek, playing with abandon at one of the dabo tables.

QUARK

(almost to himself)

We're getting the "business," alright.

ROM

(picking it up)

What's that supposed to mean?

QUARK

Do you have any idea how much the Nagus's visits cost me?

ROM

I didn't know the Nagus played that well.

QUARK

He doesn't! He plays lousy. At my tables, however, he plays wel---

He looks up and, mouth agape, stops in mid-word. Rom stops and looks up to see what happened, and he, too, drops his jaw.

ROM

(whispering)

*Sekundiss!*

Quark stares a moment longer, and then, at a SOUND from the gaming tables, he looks in their direction. WE SEE GRAND NAGUS ZEK surrounded by his entourage--his AIDES and a bevy of DABO GIRLS--happily playing and apparently winning every game.

Quark looks back at the Ferengi women who head for the far end of the bar, then back to the Nagus.

QUARK

(putting his hand to his head)

Ohhh, I've got a feeling this is not gonna be a good night.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. SISKO'S OFFICE

Someone signals for entry, O.S. SISKO works at his desk.

SISKO

Come in.

The door opens and WORF enters. Sisko acknowledges him with a glance, and continues working.

SISKO

What can I do for you?

WORF

Captain, we've had a few "incidents" with a group of Nausicaans who have recently arrived at the station.

SISKO

(not looking up)

I find that unsurprising, given that they are Nausicaans. I suggest we just keep an eye on them.

A beat.

WORF

(reluctantly  
pressing)

Captain, the Nausicaans are part of a trade delegation attempting to take advantage of the increased presence of Gamma Quadrant traders meeting with the Ferengi Alliance.

Sisko stops working and looks up at him, waiting for him to continue.

Worf considers his words for a few beats.

WORF

As you know, there have been rumors circulating in Starfleet that the Nausicaans may have plans to build a station of their own adjacent to the wormhole. If the rumors are true, and if the Nausicaans find little access to the Gamma Quadrant delegations due to Ferengi manipulation, the plans might be accelerated.

Sisko considers this.

SISKO

(after a beat)

I suspect the Federation might find increased Alpha Quadrant presence near the wormhole in the form of a race such as the Nausicaans curiously comforting, rather than worrisome, given the Dominion threat.

A hint of a smile crosses Worf's face.

SISKO (CONT'D)

It might be worth the effort to persuade the Nausicaans to build at the other end of the wormhole provided they didn't see it as a maneuver to create a gate-keeper, or first line of defense.

WORF

Knowing the Nausicaans, I think they would look at their role with a station in the Gamma Quadrant as a *bridge-keeper*.

SISKO

(smiling)

A *troll*? I don't know about you, but I'd somehow sooner my troll was a Nausicaan than a Ferengi.

INT. A FAIRLY LARGE BALLROOM ABOARD THE GRAND NAGUS'S SHIP

Ferengi Grand Nagus Zek and his full entourage are throwing a party for Gamma Quadrant visitors.

It is a soiree of the first order, with hordes of DABO GIRLS, circulating MAGICIANS and JUGGLERS, the occasional FERENGI MIME, and endless trays of drinks constantly being replenished and moving through the crowd in the hands of Zek's SERVANTS.

Many of the aliens WE SAW EARLIER on the Promenade are present. Everyone is having a great time. You've got to hand it to him, Zek knows how to throw a party.

Zek, too, is genuinely enjoying himself: he's the center of attention, with a dabo girl on each arm, and a drink in his hand.

He speaks to an AIDE, and after a moment, several CHIMES ARE HEARD. The room quiets, and Zek commands the floor.

ZEK  
(smiling, full of  
himself)  
Gamma Quadrant visitors. On  
behalf of the Ferengi Alliance,  
I welcome you to my humble ship-

He is interrupted by applause, begun by one of his aides at the back of the room.

ZEK (CONT'D)  
Thank you, thank you. I pledge  
to you that our hospitality will  
match the wonderful friendship  
and good faith I sense among  
everyone here in this room--

Again, applause.

ZEK (CONT'D)  
The Ferengi Alliance is the  
foremost trading culture in the  
Alpha Quadrant. We are known for  
our honesty, our generosity, our  
innovative business approaches,  
and our willingness to find a  
way to transact business despite  
every adversity--

The applause resumes, if a tiny bit muted.

ZEK (CONT'D)

Thank you, thank you. So I want all Gamma Quadrant visitors to rest assured, when it comes to a business commitment, not exploding novae, not particle storms, not even immense galactic distances shall keep us from our appointed rounds. If we have a deal with you, it will remain a BIG deal for the Ferengi Alliance!

The applause is enthusiastic despite itself.

Zek is overwhelmed. He shakes his head, then wipes a tear (?) away.

ZEK (CONT'D)

Please, eat, drink, get to know us. We are all here for the same thing: TRADE! And LOTS OF IT!!!

The applause is deafening, and as it goes on, Zek steps away, and joins some of his group. Moving to one side, he turns to an aide...

ZEK (CONT'D)

(to the aide, alone)

Now get me to Quark's and those tables of his without anyone here noticing.

EXT. DS9 (OPTICAL)

WITH THE STATION in the F.G., the Wormhole opens. Two more ships emerge, and swing around for DS9.

INT. THE DOCKING CORRIDOR FOR ZEK'S SHIP.

People are going in and out, Zek's party now running on its own steam.

Down the corridor, our now familiar party of Nausicaans approaches, heading for the Ferengi ship's airlock,

At the entry door, several Starfleet security guards stand with their Ferengi counterparts. They check for the required invitations.

The Nausicaans come up, and attempt to pass. Moving together, the Ferengi guards stand their ground, barring the way.

FERENGI GUARD

This is an invitation-only affair, gentlemen. May I see yours?

Ignoring him, the Nausicaans try to push past. At this, the Starfleet security guards move up behind the Ferengis and stand in the way, too.

The largest of the Starfleet guards, as big or bigger than the largest Nausicaan, pushes between the Ferengi guards and stares them down.

GUARD

(stonily soft)

No invitation, no entry.

The Nausicaans fix him with a glare, and head back the way they came.

Breathing, finally, the Ferengi guards look at one another, and smile, sheepishly. The Starfleet guard just grins.

INT. THE INFIRMARY

Dr. Bashir is completing some task or other, when CHIEF O'BRIEN enters, dressed for a river run in the holosuites.

O'BRIEN

(up for some fun)

About ready? Our river awaits.

BASHIR

I wouldn't miss it. It'll be good to get away from all these crowds.

O'BRIEN

That's an understatement. You know how much I've been offered for our holosuite reservation?

Bashir looks at him, surprised.

O'BRIEN (CONT'D)

Quark even offered a dozen free holo reservations once this Trade Convention is past. Begged me. He said he needed it for that Ferengi, Zek.

BASHIR

I don't know, Miles, I might've taken him up on that one.

O'BRIEN

(shaking his head)

I thought about it, but I've been working double shifts all week getting ready for this thing, and I need the break.

BASHIR

(grabbing his satchel)

It's just as well. So do I.

They head for the door.

INT. QUARK'S - LATER

Odo stands near the entrance, observing the three Ferengi women at the bar. After a moment, he comes in and sits next to one of them.

The Ferengi woman, Salacia, looks him up and down, not sure what to make of him. Then she turns away.

One of the other Ferengi women, Rutta, shouts down the bar to Quark for service.

WITH QUARK. He waves to her that he'll be right with her.

QUARK

(to Rom, working nearby)

Suggest to the Nagus that he try Holosuite x. Tell him I've saved a special program just for him. Tell him it's ready, waiting, and...

(with some difficulty)

on the house.

WITH THE NAGUS. Rom strides up and whispers in an aide's ear. The message is relayed to Zek. A big grin crosses his face and he rises to leave.

WITH QUARK. He serves the Ferengi women, and then looks over at the silent Odo.

The women flirt with him even as they seem to expect everything from him. One of them, Salacia, leering with Ferengi eroticism takes the lead.

SALACIA

I'm Salacia, that's Trulla, and she's Rutta. Quark's is known throughout the Alliance as the finest saloon on the frontier.

She looks to her companions for agreement. They nod.

SALACIA (CONT'D)

The best drinks, the best games, nearly the best holosuites.

Quark is soaking it all up as Odo, shaking his head, looks on. But at the last, Quark starts, and shoots her a look.

QUARK

(after a beat)

Why don't you try one of our games? I'm sure you'll find them... diverting.

Salacia and her companions pick up their drinks and head for the tables, laughing as they go.

Quark begins to walk away.

ODO

Quark!

Quark stops, turns, and comes back as Odo eyes him menacingly.

ODO (CONT'D)

Ferengi women. Dressed Ferengi women.

(looking about the room)

This place must have more charm than I'm aware of.

QUARK  
Not just any females, Odo,  
Sekundiss!

Odo just stares at him, tiredly.

QUARK (CONT'D)  
On Altair 6 they're known as the  
Skang; on Earth, the mob, the  
mafia--

ODO  
(interrupting)  
--Criminals! *Female* criminals?

QUARK  
Only females. On Ferenginar,  
Sekundiss are all females.

Odo digests this for a few beats, then seems to understand.

ODO  
Yesss, I see. The largest  
disenfranchised group. I don't  
know why I hadn't thought of it  
before.  
(he snorts a laugh)  
It's almost comical.

Quark looks at him as though he might be mad.

QUARK  
Ruthless, utterly ruthless. I  
suggest you give them a wide  
berth. They have a very long  
memory, and there's nowhere they  
can't go, no one they can't get  
to.

Odo shakes his head in mock sympathy.

ODO  
And dressed, too.  
(shakes his head)  
It must be hard for you.

QUARK

They hide weapons in those clothes, just as our women did in ancient times. That's why we required them to be naked in the first place. They couldn't be trusted. And now they're here while I'm handling the Grand Nagus. I don't know what I've done to deserve this, but if anything more happens, I'll need to see Dr. Bashir.

Odo stands to leave.

ODO

Why are they here?

QUARK

(shaking his head)

That's what *I* can't figure out.

A beat.

ODO

I recall hearing an old Ferengi proverb: "The Universe is not merely more profitable than we know, it's more profitable than we *can* know."

Quark nods.

QUARK

It must have something to do with the Nagus and the Gamma Quadrant. That has to be it. The xxx Rule of Acquisition, no doubt, applies.

Odo looks at him.

ODO

And that is?

Quark looks at him as though he should have known it.

QUARK

"Follow the latinum."

A cheer goes up from the gaming tables, and they look over to see the Sekundiss winning the first of many games. Quark puts his hand to his forehead and just groans.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. DS9 - OPS

Present are Odo, Sisko, Kira, and Dax.  
SUPERNUMERARIES as appropriate. Odo explains...

ODO  
(finishing)  
Apparently, on Ferenginar women  
are worse than second-class  
citizens.

Dax gives Kira a look. Both smile to themselves.

ODO (CONT'D)  
So, as the disenfranchised are  
known to do, they've taken  
control of their own destiny.  
They've become...

He just can't get it out in such a context. So Sisko  
completes it for him:

SISKO  
(enjoying this)  
--Criminals?

Odo acknowledges this with a microscopic nod.

SISKO (CONT'D)  
(getting serious)  
Still, it is troubling. We've  
never had these *Sekundiss*--is  
it?--at the station before. It  
may have something to do with  
the presence of Zek. Under the  
circumstances, Federation policy  
regarding the Ferengi is to  
avoid any "incidents" which  
might upset the tenuous  
relationship we have with the  
Ferengi Alliance.

He makes eye contact with Odo, Dax and Kira.

SISKO (CONT'D)

Let's keep watch as we keep our distance.

EXT. DS9 (OPTICAL)

The station bristles with docked ships. Others move in and out from their docks. If it weren't a trade convention, it'd be a war.

INT. QUARK'S - LATER

The place is busy. The Sekundiss continue their winning ways, as does Grand Nagus Zek, who seems oblivious to them.

Quark watches from a short distance away, suffering supremely.

One of the Sekundiss, Trulla, moves for an open spot at the Nagus's table. Quark intercepts her and walks her toward another, whispering in her ear.

As they arrive at the table, he passes something to her--a bribe. She accepts it, smiling, and sits. The table, a mixed lot, react to her "beauty."

Breathing easier, Quark looks about his room.

At the front, the Trio of Nausicaans enter and head for the tables. Immediately, his anxiety level ratchets up several notches.

INT. DS9 - CORRIDOR INSIDE DOCKING RING

Odo and Dr. Bashir move side-by-side down a corridor toward one of the dock entries.

BASHIR

Have any "infiltrators" been found?

ODO

None. But the genetic profile you provided for the transporter pattern buffers will find them if they try to come in.

They arrive at the dock entry. They join Worf and a SQUAD of SECURITY, already processing a delegation of visitors.

ODO (CONT'D)

This is another delegation from the Gamma Quadrant, here to meet with the Ferengi.

As WE HAVE SEEN, the Gamma Quadrant delegation must pass through the specially rigged transporter portals which will weed out Dominion infiltrators and send them to special "stasis-cells" set up in the station brig.

ODO (CONT'D)

Chief O'Brien has a fine set of stasis-cells awaiting any surgically-altered Dominion infiltrators that try getting on the station.

Worf and his security detail process each arrivee, one by one, in the transporter portals. As each comes through, s/he moves down the corridor and into the station. Odo and Dr. Bashir watch the process for several moments.

ODO (CONT'D)

I'm surprised this hasn't been tried before.

BASHIR

It has. The problem has always been getting a narrow enough genetic "fingerprint" to work from. And the various Dominion species: Jem'Hadar, Vorta, and Founders, not to mention allies like the Cardassians, haven't made it easier.

ODO

Well, while it is a great help, it does nothing for Alpha Quadrant hirelings: terrorists, mercenaries, the Orion Syndicate, and the like.

BASHIR

And there's nothing to prevent the Dominion from coming up with some genetic alteration which will beat my profile.

ODO

True. By the time you counter it, they've already walked on and off the station, their handiwork completed. But it is better than what we had before: standard scans and the computer.

BASHIR

Captain Sisko says it gives us some room in which to maneuver.

Finishing with the delegation, Worf, his security team, Dr. Bashir, and Odo all head back the way they had come.

INT. DOCKING RING, MAIN CORRIDOR

As they enter the main corridor, WE SEE that it is FILLED WITH TRAVELLERS, far more than normal.

INT. A DARK SHIP, UNKNOWN DESIGN - SOMETIME LATER

Dax, holding a Klingon 'bat'leth', moves cautiously across an empty chamber. She is silently stalking something. Or, is it the reverse?

Somewhere else on the ship, Worf does likewise.

WITH DAX again. She moves around a corner with maximum stealth.

Suddenly, a huge NAUSICAAAN rises up in THE FRAME, holding a WEAPON of some kind. Dax swings hers, and he efficiently dodges it.

Swinging his own weapon, the Nausicaan cleverly anticipates her response, and uses it to take her off her feet. Continuing his movement, he spins rapidly, right into the point of Dax's bat'leth. He drops to the floor beside her.

WITH WORF, TWO more NAUSICAAANS close in from each side. He swings once, killing the first at the beginning of the stroke, and the second at the end.

Dax joins him, and they look down at the dead Nausicaans.

WORF

You did well. That makes nine,  
all of them.

DAX

(smiles)

That was inspired, changing them  
to Nausicaans. We've got to try  
it in our other programs.

WORF

(nods)

They are worthy opponents.

DAX

Computer, end program.

Their surroundings transform (OPTICAL), and WE SEE  
the familiar holosuite grid-lines.

They head to the door to exit.

INT. QUARK'S

Worf and Dax walk past and over to the bar.

DAX

(to Rom)

Set 'em up, Rom. Two for the  
road.

Rom gets two glasses, as Worf scans the room.

The Sekundiss continue to win at Quark's tables. The  
Nagus is matching them, win for win.

In fact, the Nagus's party has begun to loosen up and  
some are at other tables, winning, themselves.

Off to the side, by himself, Quark has begun to  
drink.

WE SEGUE TO:

LATER, Worf and Dax have gone. The place still hums,  
however.

At one of the tables at which both a Sekundiss,  
Rutta, and the Nausicaan, Glaah, are playing, the  
Ferengi female wins a particularly large jackpot.

Glaah stands up, outraged. He bends low to examine the underside of the table. After a moment, he comes up with a small, self-adhering device which had been directly adjacent the position of Rutta.

He examines it a moment, cracking open the case with his powerful grip, and growls in triumph, holding it high.

GLAAH  
(glaring at Rutta)  
Ferengi design!

She grins back at him, uncowed, and then stands and steps out to meet him.

Glaah, easily a meter taller, moves forward, and in a flash of lightning movement by Rutta, he's on the ground, stunned by a flurry of jujitsu-like moves.

The other Sekundiss, who have been standing since the altercation began, step away from their chairs, ready to mix it up with the Nausicaans.

The Nagus, still playing with abandon, remains oblivious to the Sekundiss and their confrontation.

Quark moves to one of the Nausicaans, whispers in his ear, and after a moment, the fellow reluctantly agrees to whatever Quark offered. He and his companion pick up the still-dazed Glaah, and carry him out.

After the tension subsides, everyone goes back to their games, and the room returns to normal.

Quark watches for several moments as Rutta, despite the device having been removed, wins again.

As some of the other players, disgusted with their chances at any table occupied by a Ferengi woman, rise and drift away, Quark walks over.

QUARK  
My, you seem to be doing well.  
Can I buy you a celebration  
drink?

Rutta smiles, coquettishly, and nods her assent. They move for the bar.

At the bar, they each take a seat. Quark motions at Rom, and he pulls down a special decanter. Filling two glasses, he puts them in front of the two Ferengis.

QUARK (CONT'D)

Look, this place will empty out inside of twenty minutes if yours and your 'party's' luck doesn't change!

Rutta considers this for a moment, then smiles at him.

RUTTA

You do have a problem, then.

QUARK

I'll cover all of your losses. With interest! Just lose for a while!

Rutta drains her glass and stands, nodding once in agreement. She strides back toward her table, now half-filled with newcomers. Sitting, she begins to play.

Odo enters the bar and takes Rutta's vacated seat. Silently, he and Quark watch the goings-on for several moments. Finally:

ODO

There's been a report of a fight.

QUARK

Nothing. All over.

At Rutta's table, one of the newcomers wins loudly. She looks over at Quark.

Seeing this, Odo smiles slightly to himself after a beat. He stands to leave.

ODO

They seem to be losing now. I hope you can afford it.

He begins to walk off toward the entrance.

QUARK

(to himself)

So do I...

Odo stops, turns, and looks back at him.

ODO  
If you want to make a complaint,  
I can get involved, but you may  
not like everything I find.

Glum, Quark stares out at his tables.

ODO (CONT'D)  
Still, I'll be watching, and  
fraud is fraud, even if you own  
the table and deliberately lose.

INT. INFIRMARY - THAT NIGHT

Dr. Bashir helps the Nausicaan, Glaah, off an  
examining table. The huge alien dwarfs him.

BASHIR  
Stay out of trouble, and avoid  
any heavy lifting for a few  
days, or that back will need  
surgery.

Glaah just glares at him. After a beat, he turns and  
walks out.

BASHIR  
(looking after him)  
You're welcome.

INT. DESERTED CORRIDOR - SOME MINUTES LATER

Glaah walks purposefully down the corridor, heading  
for his quarters aboard the Nausicaan ship.

Reaching the end, he rounds a corner and stops,  
seeing something or someone ahead. He's surprised,  
but smiles, as much as a Nausicaan can, in  
anticipation.

INT. ODO'S OFFICE

Odo sits at his desk, scanning his computer screen. A  
CALL SIGNAL is HEARD O.S.

ODO  
(tapping his com  
unit)  
Odo, here.

KIRA'S COM VOICE

Commander, a member of the  
Nausicaan delegation has just  
been found dead in a corridor  
not far from the docked  
Nausicaan ship.

ODO

(tapping a button and  
standing)

On my way, Odo out.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. QUARK'S - THE NEXT DAY

Quark sits in an almost empty bar-room, staring at a similarly underpopulated gaming room. The Nausicaan's murder has cooled business, somewhat, and he is miserable.

Only MORN, Rom, the Nagus's party, and SOME FEW, scattered, die-hard GAMBLERS can be seen in either area. Quark almost cries into his glass.

INT. CORRIDOR, SCENE OF THE MURDER

CHIEF O'BRIEN is having some wall panels removed by an engineering TEAM. One of the team takes a small device out of the wall cavity and shows it to O'Brien, who shakes his head.

O'BRIEN

The 'Cardies' were like squirrels. It's been years and we're still finding them.

He hands it back to the man who examines it.

ENGINEER

Looks like Obsidian Order.

O'BRIEN

Yeah... Unmarked circuits, illegal power-source, rugged design, built to last.

He taps his com badge.

O'BRIEN (CONT'D)

O'Brien to Odo.

ODO'S COM VOICE

What have you found, Chief?

O'BRIEN

It's all come up negative. But these Cardassian bugs are top-of-the-line and running perfectly. Whatever happened in this corridor didn't involve technology, *known* technology, anyway.

ODO'S COM VOICE

Thanks, Chief. Odo out.

INT. QUARK'S, AT THE BAR - LATER

Quark still sits there, grim-faced, as, in the gaming room, the Nagus wins again.

Quark turns away, and stares down into his drink resignedly. After a moment, a hand lands on his shoulder.

He looks up and turns to see Zek staring at him, a big grin on his face.

ZEK

Quark! Why so glum? Your hospitality has lived up to its legendary reputation. I'm having a wonderful time in between my talks with the trade delegations.

Trying to smile, Quark nods, looking at him.

ZEK (CONT'D)

That holosuite program you let me try--STUPENDOUS, my boy!!! I really must get a copy for my personal suite back home.

Quark just keeps nodding, accepting his lot. Finally:

QUARK

How are your talks going? Has this been a profitable trip?

ZEK

Immeasurably, my boy.  
Immeasurably!

QUARK

You don't know how happy that makes me.

ZEK

And you shall be rewarded,  
Quark, rest assured. The Nagus  
takes care of his allies.

Quark's ears perk up at this.

ZEK (CONT'D)

But now we move into the  
endgame, and I've got to be on  
my toes in order to wring out  
every last dust mote of latinum.

Quark is watching his face, now, more interested.

ZEK (CONT'D)

I'm going to ask another favor  
of you, Quark. You run a  
scrupulously honest casino,  
here, I know. The Federation  
sees to that, I'm sad to say.  
And even a skilled player such  
as myself finds himself losing  
occasionally.

Quark digests this with restraint.

ZEK (CONT'D)

But I need you to risk that  
honest reputation, Quark. I  
can't abide those Sekundiss any  
longer. Until you intervened,  
they were winning more than I  
was! It's bad for appearances,  
both mine and the Race's. Yes, I  
know you're covering those  
recent losses you've asked them  
to sustain to maintain your own  
appearances.

Quark looks at him, stifling, as best he can, his  
incredulity.

ZEK (CONT'D)

I want you to cut them off,  
Quark. They must keep losing,  
and they must know the losses  
are real! Only real losses will  
make them leave.

Quark, a knot of despair, is beginning to sink in his  
chair.

ZEK (CONT'D)

You know as well as I do, you give a Sekundiss your ear, she'll take your lobes! You've got to take a firm stand and, 'damn the photon torpedoes with the consequences.' Remember, they can't afford to lose face over and over, loss after loss. They've got an image to maintain, too. This is merely a bluff they're running against you, my boy. Buck up! Cut them off as of now!

Zek returns to his game, obligingly awaiting him.

Quark looks heavenward and closes his eyes, perhaps in prayer.

INT. ODO'S OFFICE - LATER

Odo is questioning the other two Nausicaans, VORK and PWAHHH, about the murder of their crew-mate. Sisko stands in the background, listening to the proceedings.

ODO

So, you picked him up and took him to the infirmary.

Vork nods once, glaring.

ODO (CONT'D)

From there, you went back to your ship for the night. You never saw him alive again.

VORK

That's right. We demand to see the Ferengi female. Is she in your custody?

ODO

No--

--Pwaahh and Vork react violently.

VORK

WHAT?!!!! Where is she? We are Federation citizens! Ferengis are not!

ODO

(unfazed)

Our investigation is proceeding according to Federation law. The Ferengis have been asked not to leave the station until it is complete.

PWAAHH

"Asked not to leave,"?!!! This Ferengi woman murdered Glaah. Everyone on this station of yours knows that--

ODO

--And her attorney will get her off when we fail to make our case.

PWAAHH

(throws up hands in disgust)

This is an outrage! The Ferengis get special treatment because we are only Federation *Member*, while Ferengis are potential ally.... Against the Dominion!

Sisko can take no more. He steps into the fray.

SISKO

Unlike the Ferengis, Nausicaans, as Full Federation Members, can request and get the right to an independent investigation. Furthermore, all decisions can be put before an independent Board of Arbitration and any decisions can be reversed. The Ferengis, as non-members, are entitled to none of this, and as visitors to the station, must abide by Federation law in all matters.

Angry, now, despite himself, he turns for the door, and stalks out.

INT. UNIDENTIFIED CORRIDOR ON THE STATION - LATER

An airlock opens and Zek comes out dressed in a great cloak, complete with hood. As he hastens down the empty corridor, he pulls the hood over his head, and keeps his gaze down, hiding his face.

Zek moves through the station corridors, heading somewhere within the docking area. He carefully avoids any prying eyes as he rushes past various station VISITORS and PERSONNEL.

Arriving at a particular corridor, he heads down it, making for the dock entry at its far end.

Reaching it, he hits a button alongside the door, requesting entry to the ship beyond.

WE SEGUE TO:

EXT. THE WORMHOLE ENTRANCE, WITH DS9 IN F.G. (OPTICAL) - LATER

The Wormhole opens, and another Gamma Quadrant delegation ship emerges and swings around for DS9.

INT. DS9, OPS

Kira receives their hail, O.S.

KIRA

Venn-Kobii ship, you are cleared for docking. Automated Docking will bring you in. Yield control on my mark....MARK.

After a moment, she taps her com badge.

KIRA (CONT'D)

Kira to Dr. Bashir. We have another Gamma Quadrant delegation arriving at Dock xxx.

BASHIR'S COM VOICE

I'm engaged in an autopsy, Major. I'll send a substitute.

INT. ODO'S OFFICE

He finishes interrogating the Nausicaans. As they EXIT the room, he gets a com signal O.S.

KIRA'S COM VOICE

Ops to Odo. We have an arriving delegation at Dock xxx.

ODO

I'll have to excuse myself this one, Major. I'll see that suitable coverage is dispatched. Odo out.

He taps his own com badge.

ODO (CONT'D)

Odo to Security. Proceed to Dock xxx for visitor processing.

INT. INFIRMARY - LATER

Sisko enters to find Dr. Bashir cleaning up after the autopsy.

SISKO

Well, what did you find?

BASHIR

Nothing. He was in perfect health. Young, for a Nausicaan Trader of his rank. And there's no sign of attack or injury. He just stopped living, simply no evidence of murder.

Sisko digests this for a moment. Finally:

SISKO

Odo's scans of the corridor turned up nothing, as well. And the Chief says the Cardassian monitoring devices yielded no evidence other than the sound of his walking past and then falling dead.

BASHIR

(fixing him with a sober look)

The Nausicaans are not going to accept these results, you can be certain of that.

Sisko has no reply.

INT. ODO'S OFFICE

The Ferengi women arrive for their own interrogation session. Salacia, Trulla, and Rutta enter the room, with Odo rising to receive them.

ODO  
'Ladies,'

Salacia steps forward.

SALACIA  
I don't think you've met one of  
our party. Allow me to introduce  
our... *employer*--

A striking Ferengi woman steps into the room, dressed even more extremely than the others. She smiles in an 'abandon hope' kind of way, as Salacia continues:

SALACIA (CONT'D)  
--THE LOW VULGUS!

INT. DOCKING AREA

Worf, and a SECURITY TEAM smoothly process an arriving delegation, with a MEDICAL TEAM observing.

EXT. DS9, DOCKING PYLON (OPTICAL)

Adjacent to one of the few remaining available docks, an approaching Ferengi ship moves into position.

INT. DS9, PROMENADE - LATER

The Promenade is crowded with visitors. Sisko encounters Odo coming out of Quark's. In the B.G. Quark looks panicked, and is firing orders at Rom while nearly running toward his office. Sisko looks from Quark back to Odo, and they match stride.

SISKO  
What's got Quark in such an  
uproar?

ODO

We've just received word that Grand Nagus Zek's chief political rival, High Lingus Bonk, has just arrived for his own talks with delegates from the Gamma Quadrant, including some of the same ones talking to Zek.

SISKO

Quark's got his hands full, now.

ODO

(nodding soberly)

So do we.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. QUARK'S - THAT NIGHT

Business has slowly returned and it is humming once more. But Quark is at his wit's end:

At one table he's got Zek and his entourage winning as usual.

At several others, he's got the four Sekundiss women, and he's still covering their losses just as much as he's covering the Nagus's winnings by paying his opponents for *their* losses.

And at another table, he's got Zek's rival, HIGH LINGUS BONK, winning, as well, thanks to Quark's political savvy (not to mention his instinct for self-preservation). Hang onto your lobes, it's gonna be a rough night.

Quark moves about the room on 'used oil,' feigning pleasure at his illustrious and notorious cast of VIP's.

As he passes the Nagus, he gets a wink, to which he *almost* promptly winks back.

Passing the Low Vulgus, he gets a pinch on his behind, prompting him to look at her. She shoots him a wink from amidst her otherwise sadistic and threatening leer. Grunting out a smile, he winks back, miserably.

When he passes Bonk's table, he is summoned to the Lingus's side. He bends down.

BONK

Your hospitality is wonderful,  
Quark. I want you to know I've  
got my eye on you. There will be  
a place for you in my Gamma  
Quadrant!

Quark rises and walks away smiling and nodding back.

QUARK

(sotto voce)

The Gamma Quadrant... Not--far--  
enough.

INT. PROMENADE, UPPER LEVEL

Odo and Sisko look down at the bar as Quark goes around and behind it. Sisko smiles and shakes his head.

SISKO

The place is as full as I've ever seen it. Morn can't get up or he'll lose his seat for good.

ODO

Four bladders come in handy, I guess.

SISKO

Look at Quark. It's a good thing the conference ends in two days.

ODO

I don't know how he's managing it. Aside from him, nobody's losing. One more Ferengi 'high mucky-muck' and he'll need hospitalization.

Sisko loses his smile and looks at him.

SISKO

One more dead Nausicaan and we'll need new careers! I think it's time we have a talk with our Ferengi casino-owner.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE SISKO'S OFFICE - LATER

Quark stands before Captain Sisko's door. It opens. Inside, WE SEE Sisko at his desk.

SISKO

Come in.

INT. SISKO'S OFFICE

Quark enters to find Odo and Dax present, as well.

SISKO

Have a seat.

With a measure of trepidation, Quark hesitantly sits.

SISKO (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming. I know you've been busy with all the visitors to the station.

QUARK

(with a mildly  
cynical smile)

"Busy" is one word for it

Sisko eyes him, trying to read more.

SISKO

Perhaps you might enlighten us with a few others. I'm sure your staff can spare you for a few moments despite the full house and the record sales that come with it, down there.

Quark squirms, unable to bear being reminded of all the latinum he's losing, despite the heavy traffic.

QUARK

Oh, I've got the time. In fact, by tomorrow, you might say I'll have 'all-the-time-in-the-quadrant.'

SISKO

Well, we're all happy that this trade conference has resulted in a windfall for you. And, you *do* choose your vacation times. But the station would appreciate your not leaving, just now.

Quark can stand the sarcasm no longer.

QUARK

(nearly shouting)

Captain, do you think I'm enjoying this? I've got three powerful Ferengis all trying to muscle me. Why? I don't know! If I defy any of them, I might as well take a runabout into the Wormhole and never come back. I can't juggle them much longer.

Sisko has been listening patiently, looking at nothing. After a pause:

SISKO

Well, you're just going to have  
to find a way.

(he fixes him with a  
gaze)

Because I'm your 'fourth ball.'  
I've got a probable murder on my  
hands. The other side of the  
Gamma Quadrant won't be--

WE FIX ON QUARK'S FACE as he lipsyncs to Sisko's  
words:

SISKO (V.O., CONT'D)

--far enough--

WE RESUME ON SISKO as he continues:

SISKO (CONT'D)

--to escape me if I don't get  
that killer.

INT. OPS - LATER

Kira and Dax are at stations. A hail is received O.S.  
Dax looks from her screen to Kira, saying:

DAX

Oh oh, we've got a Nausicaan  
ship out there requesting  
docking space.

KIRA

(absorbed in her  
task, shakes her  
head)

Full up. Tell the Nausicaans  
they'll need to transport--did  
you say Nausicaans?

DAX

(nods)

Uh huh. I think it's the  
investigative team sent to look  
into--

KIRA

(interrupting,  
hitting her com  
switch)

--Ops to Sisko. Captain, we've  
got a problem here.

SISKO'S COM VOICE

What is it, Major?

KIRA

All docks are full and we've got a Nausicaan knocking on the door. Jadzia thinks it may be the team sent to check our investigation.

SISKO'S COM VOICE

Have O'Brien take Defiant out for a run, inspect the plasma vents, or something. Give the Nausicaans our berth. Jadzia can stall them a moment while we make room for them. The Chief can transport aboard later, if there is no available dock-space.

KIRA

Aye, sir. Ops out.

INT. DOCKING CORRIDOR FOR DEFIANT'S BERTH

Sisko, Odo, Worf, and a beefed-up Security Team, stand before the airlock, waiting for it to open.

Suddenly, it does, and TWO of the meanest-looking NAUSICAAANS WE'VE SEEN YET come out and take up positions on either side of the airlock door. Nobody says a word.

After a long moment, ANOTHER NAUSICAAAN emerges, and looks the Starfleet group up and down with a sneer. Behind him, finally, an obviously high-ranking member of their party, PRO-COUNSELLOR SKREE, steps through, and comes forward.

Sisko eyes him for a moment, and then says:

SISKO

You must be Pro-Counsellor  
Skree...

The Nausicaan grunts an acknowledgment, apparently assenting.

SISKO (CONT'D)

I am Captain Benjamin Sisko,  
Commander of Deep Space Nine.  
(indicating the  
others)

This is our investigative team:  
our chief law enforcement  
officer, Odo, and our Chief of  
Security, Commander Worf...

INT. QUARK'S - APPROACHING THAT EVENING'S END

Quark is as depressed as we've ever seen him. The tables have nearly all emptied, save for that of the Vulgus. Quark tries to keep his mind off his troubles by keeping busy.

INT. THAT UNIDENTIFIED CORRIDOR AGAIN

The airlock opens and a cloaked figure emerges as before. It--Zek?--heads off, moving quickly in the same direction.

The figure keeps its face down, passing VERY FEW other PEOPLE along the way, due to the lateness of the hour.

As it approaches the turn it took earlier, another figure, similarly cloaked, comes out from the turn, and hustles past the first figure.

After they pass, and they are fifteen meters or so apart, they both stop and begin to turn to look at one another. Their faces are both shrouded in shadow.

Seeing that the other is also turning to look, they both quickly turn back and hustle off, each on their way again.

INT. QUARK'S - EVENING'S END

The bar is completely empty, (except, of course, for Morn). Quark sits at a table, watching the last occupied table--the Vulgus's--play its last round.

As her last opponent defeats her, and she graciously concedes, the Vulgus rises and comes over to Quark's table. The others stagger off, exhausted.

Quark acknowledges her with a glum nod.

QUARK

It's already being deposited in your new station account.

She sits, watching him closely.

THE VULGUS

Oh, I wasn't concerned about that, Quark. I've never had to be. I trust you completely. No, I just wanted to let you know that I'm aware of the strain you've been under these last few days.

He returns her gaze carefully.

THE VULGUS (CONT'D)

And I'm not one to push an advantage. I propose we end our little subsidy program here and now.

Quark's eyes open.

QUARK

Excuse me, did you just say, "end" the relationship we've been 'enjoying'?

THE VULGUS

That's right. After all, how deep can a bar-owner's pockets be? Besides, I've got appearances to maintain, myself. All this losing... It's not good for *business*. You understand, don't you, Quark?

Quark just looks at her, now, slack-jawed, not believing his good fortune.

THE VULGUS (CONT'D)

But, your strain has really begun to show, Quark. And it isn't pretty. Have you noticed the dark rings around your lobes? You need your burden lifted, and I've just the idea.

He looks at her, spirits deflating rapidly. His eyes seem to say, 'here it comes.'

QUARK

What might that be?

THE VULGUS

Well, as I've said all along, you've been a splendid and gracious host. I propose to pick up part of your burden by taking over your holosuite business, starting tomorrow morning. I've even brought some special programs we've used to great success in other parts of the quadrant.

Quark looks at her, wild-eyed.

QUARK

You want to *buy* into the most profitable part of my business with some of those losses I've made good on, with interest? My own money?

She smiles at him.

THE VULGUS

Did I say, "buy"?

Quark just drops his head in resignation as her meaning sinks in.

QUARK

Sure. Right. Why didn't I think of it?

She stands, smiling coldly. After a moment, she struts off, saying, over her shoulder:

THE VULGUS

We'll deliver the holo-programs in the morning, along with the rate increases.

She heads out the door.

Quark's chin drops to his chest. He's a beaten man.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

INT. DS9 MEETING ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Sisko, Odo, Worf, Kira, Dr. Bashir, Chief O'Brien, and Jadzia Dax assemble in a meeting room. The tension is high, something is definitely 'up'.

They take seats.

SISKO

Alright, let's come to order.

He looks around the room, fixing them with a sober gaze.

SISKO (CONT'D)

I want you to know that I have complete confidence in everyone's efforts in this investigation. You are all professionals, and I've never had reason to doubt anyone's word.

WE GO AROUND THE ROOM, FROM FACE TO FACE, as he continues:

SISKO (CONT'D)

Starfleet, however, has only your service records to work from in evaluating whether to back you in the face of the conflicting evidence. Those records are among the finest in the Fleet.

WE RESUME ON HIM.

SISKO (CONT'D)

And, of course, as your commanding officer, I will have the opportunity to make my case. But any decisions, as you well know, will be made at a higher level.

He looks at their faces.

SISKO (CONT'D)

But we've got the Nausicaans to convince. The Ferengi Alliance has taken an entirely neutral position, considering it a Federation matter. I want all computer logs and records available on Nausicaan request, nothing delayed or held back for my clearance. It is all cleared as of now.

They listen, expressionlessly.

SISKO (CONT'D)

The Nausicaans will be repeating your steps with any additions they may desire. I want each of you to run through your procedures exactly as you performed them, explaining anything and everything.

This is met with barely detectable disgust on the faces of Worf, Dax, Kira, and O'Brien. Odo, whose entire investigation has been called into question, registers nothing.

SISKO (CONT'D)

I've sent requests to the Ferengis involved, to meet with the Nausicaans should they desire it, and they are cooperating under protest. Since their government is not backing them, they are aware that Federation law will be final. They will not be a problem. However, given the dubious reputation of the individuals involved, I've had one of them detained to assure her availability when needed.

This gets a positive smirk, from Bashir and Kira, at least.

SISKO (CONT'D)

Alright, people, let's keep it on the highest professional level. Keep any personal responses to yourselves. These are, after all, Nausicaans.

He hits a button on his console.

SISKO (CONT'D)  
Admit the Nausicaan team.

After a moment, the door opens, and a trio of huge Nausicaans strut in, anger and suspicion written all over their faces.

The DS9 staff stand to meet them, and Sisko cordially begins the introductions despite the Nausicaans refusing the traditional handshakes.

SISKO  
Ah, Pro-Counsellor Skree, allow me to introduce my staff...

INT. QUARK'S - LATER

Rom and Morn are talking at the bar as Rom keeps the area straightened.

ROM  
(wiping down the bar)  
You wouldn't believe how fast word has gotten around about those new Sekundiss holo-programs.

Morn smiles, knowing who's responsible.

ROM (CONT'D)  
I've heard there are two that were banned throughout the Ferengi Alliance. Garak said they have a notorious and legendary reputation across the entire quadrant.  
(laughs)  
Of course, as a married man, I wouldn't know.

Morn continues to smile the smile of a man who does know.

The bar has been filling up rapidly, and the spill-over heads to the gaming tables, awaiting their turns at the all-too-few holosuites.

ROM (CONT'D)  
(looking about)  
Look at the crowd. You wouldn't  
have thought it possible after  
that murder.

Down the bar, Quark sits, taking it all in, somewhat encouraged by the boom in business. Having overheard them, he looks over and cautions:

QUARK  
It'll all change if any of those  
*females* show up.

He mulls this for a second or two. Then:

QUARK (CONT'D)  
You know. They'll appreciate  
this, too. I'm gonna make it a  
stipulation of my new  
arrangement with the Vulgus: no  
Sekundiss!

ROM  
(coming over)  
I'm surprised at your...  
(mis-pronounces)  
...chutzpah.

Quark looks at him, puzzled.

ROM (CONT'D)  
It's a hu-man word. I heard it  
used to describe the Sekundiss.  
But you have it now, too,  
brother.

QUARK  
What's it mean?

ROM  
'Strength'... 'Muscle'... Sort of.  
I guess... 'Courage' describes  
it.

Quark nods at this.

ROM (CONT'D)  
Brash courage.

Quark nods again, pleased.

ROM (CONT'D)  
Bordering on the suicidal--

Quark gives him a look.

ROM (CONT'D)  
--in some cases.

Quark remains positive.

ROM (CONT'D)  
Such as this one.

Quark's face falls.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS: VARIOUS DS9 STAFF TAKE THE NAUSICAANS THROUGH THEIR INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE; NO AMBIENT SOUND; MUSIC ONLY

Worf, with a security team shows them the location of the fight in Quark's. He's uncowed, but stiff. At a question from one of the Nausicaans, Worf hesitates, bringing himself under control.

O'Brien shows them the gambling device, pointing out certain features. His face belies his anger at their distrust. He snaps at them when they question him on some point.

Odo shows them the scene of the murder, the corridor on the way to the docked Nausicaan ship. He's all business.

Bashir discusses his autopsy findings with them in the Infirmary. His expression is mild, but checked, annoyance.

Odo shows them the 'detained' Ferengi woman, Rutta, in her holding cell. He seems distant, unfazed.

INT. QUARK'S OFFICE - LATER

WE SEE him from above, enclosed in the little room on four sides, boxed in.

He sits there, thinking things through, depressed. After a moment, he suddenly comes out of it with a growl:

QUARK  
(to himself, but  
loudly)  
NOOOO!!! No more of it! I don't  
care what happens, that  
Sekundiss witch is not gonna  
have her way with me!

EXT. QUARK'S OFFICE, AT DOOR

Rom, working nearby, has overheard this, and his face reveals how troubled he is.

INT. DOCK ENTRY FOR THE SEKUNDISS SHIP

Quark arrives before the entry door, and signals for admittance.

The door opens, and Trulla stands before him. A questioning look on her face, she looks him up and down.

QUARK

I want to see the Vulgus.

TRULLA

Do you have an appointment?

QUARK

(losing patience)

Look, just tell her the  
'arrangement' as agreed is  
ended, as of now.

Before she can reply, Rom pushes out from behind her, embarrassed to find his brother outside.

Quark is, of course, speechless at this.

Rom heads off down the dock entry corridor.

TRULLA

Well, she's free, now. You want  
to come in?

She steps aside, allowing him to pass. He steps through, and inside.

INT. SEKUNDISS SHIP

Quark is ushered into a chamber. Awaiting him is the Vulgus, seated at a desk of sorts. He ignores the chair placed before it.

She gives away nothing, preferring him to take the first step.

QUARK

(awkwardly)

Look, I'm willing to 'play ball' with you concerning the holosuites, but I've got reasonable concerns about my business. I'm feeling pressure from four sides, now--

THE VULGUS

(interrupting)

--*Four* sides?

QUARK

Have you forgotten the dead Nausicaan? Captain Sisko expects me to solve the killing for him. The Federation will stop at nothing to solve this murder.

He stares at her for a beat.

QUARK (CONT'D)

Both of us will come up empty-handed if the casino is closed down.

He lets this sink in for a moment.

QUARK (CONT'D)

And I'm being 'romanced' by both the High Lingus *and* the Grand Nagus concerning the Gamma Quadrant delegations. They expect favorable terms in all of my--*our*--facilities for every partner they engage.

The Vulgus considers this for a moment. Finally, she makes a decision.

THE VULGUS

You can have her.

Quark shoots her a questioning look.

THE VULGUS (CONT'D)

Rutta. She's my sister. But the Gamma Quadrant's bigger. It wasn't murder, though. It was self-defense. She was merely finishing a fight that hadn't ended earlier. Now, Lingus Bonk-

-

Quark can only stare at her as she discards her sister. She goes on:

THE VULGUS (CONT'D)

--was merely acting in my interest. He works for me. I needed to use him to get the Nagus moving on opening up the Gamma Quadrant. I want you to operate as my front for our expansion efforts. I'm prepared to pay for your efforts, even share in the rewards. After all, acting as my surrogate places you in some risk with the Federation, not to mention the Ferengi Alliance.

Quark is reeling. It's all happening too fast. After several beats, he tries to stammer out a response:

QUARK

W-w-w-what about the necessary capital to finance such an effort? The Nagus would see immediately that I'm incapable of such an outlay. We'd have to create some other partner as a front, a *silent* partner to remain un-named, but obviously present. Someone we can *give* them if it becomes necessary--

At that moment WE HEAR:

ZEK'S VOICE O.C.

EXCELLENT!

Grand Nagus Zek steps into the room from behind a curtain.

Quark nearly faints.

ZEK (CONT'D)

Relax, my boy. You've passed with... 'flying colors,' as the hu-mans say. The Vulgus and I have a little relationship.

QUARK

(in a quavering voice)

You're in league together, too? But what about the Lingus?

ZEK

Mine, obviously. Things go a lot easier with the Council when one owns his chief rival.

Quark looks from Zek to the Vulgus. She just listens, enjoying every Machiavellian detail.

ZEK (CONT'D)

The reason I've been delaying our move into the Gamma Quadrant is because even *I* don't have sufficient capital. But now, with my new partners--

(he smiles at the Vulgus)

--I'm in a position to jump in with both ears.

QUARK

But where do I fit in? Surely, you don't need--

ZEK

(interrupting)

--Shut up! My finances are well known and obviously insufficient for such a huge undertaking. This will all run through you, my boy. Once we're up and running, the profits will be so great, the historians will write what I tell them to write. History is written by the victors, Quark. This will be my legacy.

Quark finally sinks into the chair he never sat in. Zek looks down at him with some pity.

ZEK (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to have put you through so much, Quark. But I had to test your mettle. Your betrayal didn't occur until the profit was in place, the deal with the Vulgus struck. I couldn't ask for a better partner, my boy. You are a Ferengi in the finest sense of the name.

Quark is feeling better, now, even good, no...GREAT!

ZEK (CONT'D)

Here's the breakdown: 50%  
Vulgus, 40% Nagus, and, as our  
agent, operating from your bar  
on the station, 10% Quark!  
Acceptable?

Quark looks at him incredulously.

QUARK

Of course. But...

ZEK

What, the Vulgus's cut?

She smiles like a sated cat.

ZEK (CONT'D)

Sekundiss don't come cheaply.  
But the galaxy is huge, and I've  
got a back-end deal if we move  
on to the Delta Quadrant.

The Vulgus stands, signalling that the audience is  
over. After a moment, he rises, turns for the door,  
and then looks back.

QUARK

Excuse me, but would you mind  
telling me what my brother was  
doing here earlier?

THE VULGUS

(laughs)

He came to lobby for your life.  
But if that was impossible, he  
offered to operate the bar as a  
Sekundiss front from now on.

Quark nods, and continues out.

INT. DOCK ENTRY CORRIDOR

Quark passes through, still stunned at it all,  
talking to himself. Behind him, Zek and the Vulgus  
fill the entry door.

QUARK  
(to self)  
Imagine. He's got a little  
'chutzpah'--  
(mis-pronouncing it  
as had Rom)  
--of his own.

He walks off down the corridor, as the confused Nagus  
and the Low Vulgus stare after him.

EXT. DS9 (OPTICAL)

A ship moves out of its dock, and swings around for  
the Wormhole entrance.

SISKO V.O.  
Captain's Log, Stardate xxxxx.x.  
The investigation of the murder  
of the Nausicaan Trader has been  
closed. The Ferengi Sekundiss  
turned in one of their own who  
confessed to the murder, and  
provided evidence of the means:  
a metabolizing poison--harmless  
to someone who's taken the  
antidote--administered through  
hand contact during the fight in  
the corridor. The Nausicaan  
authorities have registered  
their satisfaction with the  
investigation, and will be  
departing the station shortly.  
In the meanwhile, the Ferengi  
talks are proceeding without  
incident.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

THE END

