

DS9: Out of Phase

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An incident affects the future of Deep Space Nine. This future must be avoided at all costs. One man who has lost everything will be the one to end the threat this future poses- at any cost.

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Chapter 1 - Phase Variance

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1 - Phase Variance

The station was rocked yet again with a blast of condensed energy. The barrage had continued on and off for two full days now, keeping station personnel on their toes.

The whaling sound of the klaxon alarms signaling their continued red alert status was interrupted only briefly when a torpedo shook the station from the habitat ring to Ops.

Quark was racing around, up on his tiptoes to prevent bottles from falling off the shelves. While doing that, he shouted encouragement to customers not to leave. Though at this point even Morn look too ready to call it quits.

Another violent shake rocked the bar. A scream sounded as part of the upper levels railing twisted and gave way, sending a Bolian female falling into a battle with gravity that she would not win.

Quirk looked away, eyes squeezed shut and tiny hands covering his large earlobes. A death during happy hour was always bad for business. He just knew that this would cut into his profits.

The screen was cut short by a squelching sound. Quark looked to see what had caused it, and found himself staring at a mass of mercury-esque material gently setting down the large blue woman and reforming into a pseudo human shape.

Odo, the chief of security, had managed to save the woman before she was nigh but a blue splat on the deck plating. Quark breathed a heavy sigh of relief, one hand on his chest as if holding his precious latinum.

“Odo, thank God! I never thought I’d be happy to see you!”

The shape shifter regarded quark with little conceived malice and just a small, sardonic smile crossing his nearly formless face.

“If you can’t keep this place up, Quark, you’re going to have to close down.”

Quark favored Odo with this same ill-concealed contempt that the security chief usually regarded the Ferengi with.

“I’ll have Rom get right on it,” Quark said, and immediately regretted.

Odo pounced on Quark’s mistake with a speedy usually reserved for those in the way of justice. Not that Quark wasn’t in the way of justice, but right at this moment he will didn’t happen to be doing anything illegal.

“Hhh.” The odd sound the Constable made sounded like he talked with phlegm in his throat. Perhaps due to his...unique body structure, maybe?

“Rom? Rom is an idiot. If it wasn’t for gravity he couldn’t tell you which way was down!”

Quark was about to fire back at Odo, but an even more violent blast made the space station shutter. A replicator in the Replimat blew spectacularly. Maybe this disaster would have an upside for Quark. One less replicator meant less competition for him. The very thought of increased profits made his lobes feel warm.

After years of trying to catch quark in some sort of illicit act, Odo had a pretty good grip on how the Ferengi's mind worked. No doubt the little miser somehow some money to be made in this situation.

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Outside the station there was a cacophony of battle noise and violence. Pouring through the wormhole to the gamma quadrant came the angry black ships of the Jem'Hadar. There was easily a fleet of 30 or so. Probably more, but nobody was counting. Everyone with a ship was either fighting or fleeing. No one doing either seem to be making much progress against the Jem'Hadar.

The mix of Starfleet ships, Cardassian vessels, Klingon birds of prey, and even Vulcan ships was in odd mix in and of itself. All of those were powerful in the Alpha quadrant. When faced with the Jem'Hadar, however, even the most overpowered warship the Cardassian Empire could muster seemed woefully inept when faced with this new threat. Even a casual observer could tell that this battle was favoring the Jem'Hadar.

A Federation *Intrepid* Class starship took sustained fire from four vessels. Even as they destroyed one, another set a collision course and wiped out the ship with a mighty explosion. All hands were lost.

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Aside from the rattling of the bulkheads, Ops was silent. Most of them there had been present when the *USS Odyssey* had been demolished in the same fashion. To see such an unspeakable tragedy twice twice...

Benjamin Sisko's powerful hand connected with the wall hard enough to dent the plating. That broke the silence and got his officers moving again.

This senseless violence...When will it end?! Sisko thought desperately. He took to pacing to fill the void of inaction. Everyone who could leave had already left, so there was no point in issuing an evacuation order. His staff was already working double-time to keep everyone alive, and there work would only be hindered by him leaning over their shoulder every thirty seconds. Waiting was the most difficult part of command for Sisko.

That Deep Space Nine herself had not fallen was a miracle. Chief O'Brien had been working overtime, forgoing sleep to keep the station intact. His modifications to the shield generator had doubtlessly kept them all alive. As for weapons, aside from the occasional photon hurled out to ward off the occasional approaching Jem'Hadar ship, Deep Space Nine was silent. Their weapons were ineffective and far too few in number to be wasted in anything but self defense.

"Benjamin..." Dax called softly. As the big man turned to meet her, he realized what she was going to say.

"I know, Dax. I had just hoped it wouldn't come to this."

Sisko was about to give the one order he had resisted for the past two days. It was tantamount to sacrificing the future of Bajor, but at this rate the Bajorans wouldn't be around to enjoy that future. So far, the Jem'Hadar hadn't reached the planet, but there was no guarantee it would stay that way.

"Chief, prepare a runabout. We've got to-"

Whenever order that Sisko was about to give was cut short when three Jem'Hadar warriors suddenly beamed into Ops. Everyone hit the deck and scrambled for their weapons. Two Bajoran officers managed to fire off a couple bursts from their sidearms, taking down one of the enemy. The other two fired, seemingly nonplussed by the death of their comrade right in front of them.

The Bajoran officers didn't manage to make it into cover in time, and both disintegrated, no trace of them left but their weapons clattering to the ground. Kira, enraged, rose and fired, hitting both soldiers. Two more materialized almost immediately. They picked up their fallen comrades and held them in front of them like shields. They marched forward with the tenacity of the androids. The crew scattered, trying to dodge the blasts from the opposition.

Chief O'Brien was ducking near Dax when he got an idea.

"Lieutenant, if we give you cover, can you operate the transporter?"

Dax was slightly shaken up, but nodded and began looking for the most secure console. She heard a sound of rage from the Jem'Hadar, and then the loud clatter of bodies falling to the deck. Staying as low as she could, she tried to get a glance at what was going on. She drew in a surprised breath.

Chief Warrant Officer Holmes had apparently tackled both Jem'Hadar from behind, sending all three of them to the floor. They had begun a three way grappling match, and Holmes was just managing to wrest a weapon away from one of them when the other took aim at point blank range.

Horror filled Dax as she realized that it that range the Jem'Hadar would not miss, and that there was nothing she could do to save Holmes.

Then, without warning, the Jem'Hadar soldier collapsed face down. Standing behind the limp form was Commander Sisko. He ripped the weapon away from the unconscious warrior with one hand, while using the other hand to haul his young Warrant Officer to his feet.

"You all right, Dan?" He asked the younger man.

"I'll live. I owe you one," Holmes quipped, wiping blood from a cut lip sustained during the brief brawl.

Sisko held up his new weapon like a trophy. "I think we're even."

O'Brien was already on his way to fix the shields yet again. Three Bajoran security officers followed him, as per Sisko's orders.

Everyone else in Ops took only a moment to collect themselves, then went back about their tasks.

It was no coincidence that Holmes, who did not have a station in Ops to himself, situated himself near Lieutenant Dax. He bent down next to her, shouldering the large Jem'Hadar rifle. He began to adjust the settings on his phaser and check its charge for the umpteenth time. This time, he only did this as a pretense to speak with Dax.

“How are you holding up?” He asked her, trying to lighten his grim tone. His hands kept fiddling with the controls on the phaser, doing nothing but buying him time to talk with her.

She favored him with a tired smile. “I’ll live, Daniel.”

Seeing that no one was watching, Holmes put an arm around her shoulders and kissed her forehead. “I hope I’ll be joining you,” he quipped. “But in case I don’t, then I want to make sure that there were no secrets between us.”

Dax and Holmes had been dating quietly for the last two months. They’d kept it a secret from everyone except for Quark and Odo, both of whom seemed to find things out quickly.

It had only been a short time, but they had really hit it off. They’d spent an increasing amount of time together, even visiting each other’s quarters on a regular basis. At first, it had been puppy love abound. They’d stayed up late talking about anything and everything to the point where each one knew the other better than they knew themselves. But as they had gotten closer, inevitably their relationship had deepened and matured.

Holmes could pride himself on the fact that he knew exactly how many spots Dax had. And she had learned that Holmes was remarkably ticklish. They were like kids trying to skirt around adults and avoid curfew. They had made up excuses for when they came to Ops together, but usually made it a point to come at least a minute apart. There was no real reason for sneaking around like this. Both of them would have been fine with the good-natured razzing that would come when others found out about their relationship. It was simply a game to them, to see how long they could go without anyone finding out.

The thought of this new found bliss ending made both of them feel ill. But with the station disintegrating around them, they could hardly afford to be selfish.

“I know things look grim, Jadzia...” Holmes said. Dax looked up in surprise -he only called her Jadzia in their most private moments together. For him to say it now, within earshot of anyone who happens to be listening...

He’s got something important to say.

She took his hand, uncaring of who saw what at the moment. She needed to support her man.

“Daniel...”

Dan laid his other hand on top of hers. As he did he gave her the most bright smile he could muster.

“I’ve been thinking... You mean so much to me, Jadzia. I can’t imagine life without you. And I’d like to spend the rest of my life with you, if he’ll have me.”

Dax put her hands to her mouth, genuinely surprised. She was older than Holmes. Not by a lot, but by enough to where she could see a difference between early twenties and mid twenties. There was a surprising amount of maturity to be gained during those few short years. Holmes might have been wise beyond his years, and in some cases even more mature, but this!

“If we get through this, Jadzia...”

Holmes courage began to falter. What had he been thinking?! He had meant every word, of course. But proposing to her had been insane enough, never mind doing it during this catastrophe!

Had he done even a year younger, he would have backpedaled and retreated right now. But being on Deep Space Nine had made him into a solid officer and a solid human being. The words had left his mouth -he wouldn't take them back and now even if he could. All that was left was to take a deep breath and finish what he started.

“...Will you marry me?”

Dax stood up quickly and enveloped Dan and a fond hug.

“Of course I-”

In the instant before she could reply, a bolt of light struck her in the back. She went slack in Holmes' arms. That allowed him to see over her shoulder. He locked eyes with her assassin.

In that instant, everything but his rage vanished. He drew the phaser ran his hip and blasted the Jem'Hadar in the face. Even as the enemy fell, Holmes was firing again and again, until he was sure the Jem'Hadar would not get up again.

Discarding his phaser, he dropped to his knees at Dax's side. Her face was set in a shocked expression, her usual cool demeanor present nowhere. She was already far too cold.

With that, Holmes abandoned any sense of duty he had and wept openly at her side.

He didn't know how long he was by her side, but anything shy of an eternity was too short. He felt commander Sisko's hand gently pulling him away from her. He found he didn't have the strength to resist.

“Warrant Officer, you need to stand up,” came the firm voice of his Commanding Officer. Then, in a softer tone: “I know it's hard, Dan. But there are more lives at stake.”

Holmes wheeled around and damn near hit Sisko. How could his commanding officer be such a cold, uncaring human being?

Apparently, Sisko could read Holmes intentions, and backed away, his hands raised in a placating gesture.

“I know it's hard,” he repeated.

“With all due respect, sir, even if you were friends with Dax, my situation is different.”

Benjamin understood the venom in Holmes' voice. It was the very tone that Sisko himself had taken with Captain Picard, when the battle at wolf 359 came up in conversation. As a Borg, Picard had it

unwittingly caused many deaths, both directly and indirectly. One of those casualties had been Sisko's wife, Jennifer.

Sisko took this opportunity to gently explain that to Holmes.

By the end of the short, sad tale, Holmes noticed that he held no anger toward Sisko. He also noticed that Doctor Bashir had finished the operation to remove the Dax Symbiont from the deceased Jadzia. It filled Holmes with renewed rage. It wasn't fair! Jadzia was gone, but Dax would survive. It was all so...

Sisko recalled Holmes attention by putting an arm around his shoulder.

"Dan, we *will* see Dax again."

"With all due respect, sir. We will see Dax again."

He paused, drawing in a shaky breath, unshed tears again lining his eyes.

"But it was Jadzia I was in love with."

His voice was barely above a whisper.

Sisko directed Holmes to his office. The bombardment had stopped for a few minutes as least, giving the two men time to talk.

Sisko drew himself up behind his desk, arms taught behind his back. He had taken this posture many times before, and always when something serious was about to be conveyed.

"Warrant Officer, I can't order you to do this. Starfleet doesn't allow temporal shifting... However, we have a unique case on our hands. This is what triggered the bombardment. The REAL reason we haven't been able to fight back."

Holmes looked at the view screen, unsure of what he was seeing. It looked like a partially cloaked ship, but seeing only it's aft section didn't mean much, other than the fact that it clearly wasn't Romulan, or at least the standard Romulan vessel.

"This is the *Defiant*, from six months ago. There is the exact same ship in our docking bay, but from today. We determined the age of the vessel through a personal message from myself, sent just yesterday but the Stardate reads six months ago. It was a cry for help."

"What happened?" Holmes asked, feeling weak. All the emotion he had spent, plus the difficulties of trying to wrap his head around time travel was really taking it's toll on him. The only thing sustaining him was adrenaline, and if he was honest with himself, a lust for revenge. Quantum theory had never been his strong point, so he forced himself to really pay attention to his Commander.

"Going through the wormhole, my counterpart and a couple of his crew members were stuck here. They can't leave because of the Jem'Hadar bombardment. But their very presence here is what altered our timeline."

"Sir?"

"Apparently, in their world, you are an Ensign, moving fast on the command track. Deep Space Nine is not under attack daily. Most importantly, the innocent people who died in this fight have not even been summoned to Deep Space Nine."

Sisko picked up the baseball he habitually kept on his desk and began to squeeze it and roll it. It was his way of relieving tension.

“The original wave of Jem’Hadar ships were led here by the *Defiant’s*- that is, the *other Defiant’s* accident. They attacked the station. We didn’t realize the other *Defiant* was cloaked beneath us, trying to conceal their presence from both us and the Jem’Hadar. The only reason we found them at all was because they suffered a hit from phaser fire that briefly lit them up on our scanners.”

“I don’t see how this caused all this...” Holmes indicated the ruined station.

“Six months ago, Chief O’Brien discovered a glitch in our shield harmonics that would render us defenseless against the right attack. In their world, he fixed the glitch and time went on. But in our world, an alternate reality was created. The glitch was not found by us. It was found by the Jem’Hadar first when they scanned the *Defiant* cloaked underneath us and found the same glitch.”

Holmes sensed an undertone to Sisko’s speech. This was more detail than Holmes needed to take action. Sisko wouldn’t be telling him this during the crisis unless there was good reason. So Holmes prompted him: “I’m not sure what you’re asking me to do, sir.”

Sisko’s eyes locked with Holmes, both sets of dark eyes unblinking and fierce. “I want you to go back in time with them. I want you to prevent this timeline at all costs. They need someone who can brief them on the situation here, and you are the only one who can do this, Warrant Officer.”

“Why me, sir?”

Sisko’s face was deadly grim, giving a perfect introspection to the words he was about to speak. And any other time, they would have been awful, harsh words he would not have said to anyone.

“Because you have the least to lose.”

Sisko’s blunt words hit Holmes’ hard. But they hit so hard because they were true. With Jadzia dead, what was left? A Warrant Officer was a half-step above Cadet. That was hardly any rank at all for two years hard work.

Holmes inclined his head. “I’ll go, Sir.”

Sisko said nothing, but clapped the young man on the shoulder. Dan found that it was difficult to tear his eyes away from the body of the woman he loved, even though it was painful to keep looking, all the while knowing that her beautiful eyes would never open again. That thought gave him the resolve he needed to get up. To fight one more time.

“Remember all you can, Dan. And remember the good more than the bad. I don’t know what affect you’ll have on this future, but for you this is how things will be.”

Sisko offered his hand to Holmes one more time. This time, he slipped an object into Holmes’ hand. Then he pulled the younger man into a hug.

“Good luck, and godspeed.”

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There was a top secret meeting being held on the bridge of the *Defiant* from the past. There were two commander Sisko's and two chief O'Brien's. There was only one of Dax, however. No comment was made; she was conspicuous by her absence.

"So it's agreed that we can repeat the phenomenon that brought you here?" The 'future' Sisko said, part statement and part question.

"That's correct, Benjamin," confirmed Dax. "The damage to subspace from the war in your world affected the wormhole. As you know, the inhabitants of the wormhole do not have the concept of linear time. So it stands to reason that they exist in more than one future or dimension."

The 'future' O'Brien chimed in: "So if you got here through the wormhole, then it stands to reason that it could send you back. That's all fine and good, but there must have been something else that caused you to wind up here. I mean, it wasn't a fluke."

"I've analyzed the sensor logs. It seems that at the moment we entered the wormhole we happened to vent plasma, and we had a strange matter-antimatter reaction. I'm fairly sure I can duplicate it." This came from the 'past' O'Brien.

"Worst case scenario, we wind up in the gamma quadrant of this future," the 'past' Sisko noted.

"Facing down a fleet of Jem'Hadar," Holmes added, a little more bitter than he meant to sound. He just kept thinking about her...

Dan didn't hear anything else of what was said at that meeting. They had started speaking in terms of quantum mechanics, and he'd barely eked out a passing grade at the academy in that subject. He knew that 'his' commander Sisko would understand.

Eventually, all the 'future' personnel except for Dan exited the *Defiant*. Each one offered him cursory words of luck and comfort. No one said 'goodbye' outright, but it was fairly obvious that this was the last look he would get of home.

He'd tied up all his loose ends, including saying goodbye to his parents who were on the station for a visit since before the attacks began. They had objected to his mission at first, but when he had told them that his fiancée was dead and that this future didn't have to be this way, they understood and accepted his decision. They had been so happy to find out that they were to have a daughter-in-law. They'd always wished the best for their son, and having met Dax at least in passing, they knew what beautiful, charming person she was. Her death saddened them as well, and added to their conviction that their son needed to do something about this future.

Holmes had been pondering that when Dax approached him carefully.

"Are you all right, Daniel?"

He found that it took a lot of effort to answer her. She was the Jadzia Dax that he could have been with, had things been different. It was the most cruel torture, being teased by an image; an illusion of the beloved departed returning to life. He wondered if he would ever accept that 'this' Dax wasn't 'his' Dax.

He wondered what his counterpart's relationship was with Dax. Since he himself was shy around girls, it would seem that his other self would be as well. But had his other self conquered that fear?

As he looked up at Dax, trying to put a convincing smile on his face as he conveyed that he was OK, he found himself torn between wanting his counterpart to be with her and wanting himself to hold her.

This mission was already a more difficult than he fathomed.

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Everyone had taken their stations, and all the *Defiant* was as ready as she would ever be for this mission.

"Systems check: All readings nominal," O'Brien announced.

"Tactical systems engaged," Holmes confirmed.

"Helm at the ready, Benjamin," added Dax.

Sisko, sitting in the center chair, gave a nod and hopped that he looked firm and encouraging as he did. Truthfully, time travel always played with his stomach, leaving it lodged somewhere in the middle of his throat. He would worry about that back in his own time.

"Set a course for the wormhole; full impulse."

The *Defiant* began to move from its position under Deep Space Nine. They had situated themselves just outside the lowermost shield of the station, allowing for additional protection at least from above. The engines hummed as they came to life, sounding as though they were happy to be moving again after functioning in Gray Mode for two days.

"Warrant Officer, fire at will. Keep those ships off our back."

"Aye, sir."

There was gusto in Holmes' voice. These murdering bastards would pay dearly for all the people they killed. Maybe Jadzia wouldn't have wanted revenge, but Holmes sure did, and he had been given the carte blanche to get a good measure. Though he'd never manned tactical on the *Defiant*, he knew what the undersized warship was capable of.

Immediately, weapons fire struck them. Dax was an excellent pilot, but even she couldn't steer through the blockade in front of them.

"They're trying to box us in!" O'Brien exclaimed.

"It's taken some pressure off the station, at least," Sisko pointed out. "Options?"

Holmes didn't turn around from his station, but offered his input: "If they're hell bent on blocking us, let's see if they'll follow us. That may give the station an opportunity to do some damage, or to allow some other ships to escape."

"That's *if* they follow us," O'Brien pointed out.

"If they don't, then we have some distance between us and them and we can take our time to think up a real solution," Holmes offered. "If we could blow a big enough hole in their blockade, we could just zip through it."

"If we could increase power to our deflectors, and we cut close, our shields might withstand it, and they might suffer some damage from their own weapons fire," O'Brien added.

Sisko frowned, thinking that these were all good points, but there was something missing. "What guarantee they won't ram us?"

"We have more power in the way of maneuverability," Dax said. "If I know they're coming, I can dodge them. Daniel will also see them and can fire on them, slowing their attack."

"But we still need something more..." Sisko noted.

"Sir, more ships on sensors- they're Federation!" Holmes exclaimed. "One *Nebula class* and four *Miranda class* vessels!"

"Incoming transmission!" O'Brien called. "Putting it on screen."

The view screen's image changed from the menacing Jem'Hadar blockade to the face of the 'future' Commander Sisko.

"Ben, we're throwing all we've got at the Jem'Hadar. Getting a running start and plow through them. We're throwing all our phasers, photons, and runabouts. I don't know what kind of damage this will do, but it should be enough to get you through that wormhole. Sisko out."

All this before Sisko could answer, his hand raised toward the screen, trying to pause his other self long enough to say his piece. But the connection was gone, replaced by the imposing blockade of Jem'Hadar ships once more.

"Damn him. He knows me too well- I'd have said no."

Stifling a sigh, Sisko steadied himself to make good of the sacrifices these other people were about to make. If anything, it strengthened his resolve to see this through. This horrible future must never come to pass.

"Open a comm channel to the other ships," Sisko ordered.

"Channel open," confirmed O'Brien.

“Starfleet vessels: Attack now!”

All at once, everything moved. Space lit up. The three *Miranda class* ships began to weave in and out of each other, cycling around the Jem'Hadar ships, firing phasers and photons. They were making headway in their attack, but that was only because they were holding nothing in reserve. This was an all or nothing gamble.

Three runabouts launched from Deep Space Nine. The *Ganges*, *Rio Grande*, and *Mekong* joined the attack, microtorpedoes flashing as they were launched in rapid-fire succession. Deep Space Nine herself came alive, firing long bursts of phaser fire, with intermittent photons lancing across the sky.

“Dax, 125% to impulse engines! Fire weapons off secondary power! Head straight for the wormhole!”

There was one major downside to the blockade formation the Jem'Hadar had taken. Having no regard for their life or the lives of others, they chose a tight basket-weave pattern. That made maneuvering through them nearly impossible. However, if any one of their ships were destroyed, it would take out the ones around it, causing a domino effect. Holmes didn't ask for permission; he just targeted the same ship as the *Intrepid class* vessel and fired four quantum torpedoes in rapid-fire succession. For good measure, he aimed a sustained burst of fire just above the ship, hoping that the energy would be somewhat conducive and tried to guide it along a path to the next Jem'Hadar ship.

Two of the *Miranda Class* vessels were destroyed now. Dax piloted through their debris, giving them momentary cover. Holmes resumed his firing pattern, noting that the Jem'Hadar vessel's shields were getting critically low.

“Dax, I'm about to punch a hole in them! I've sent you the coordinates!” he called across the bridge.

“Acknowledged. Adjusting course.” She tapped at her console, setting the new course with ease.

The other ships in the 'fleet' adjusted with the *Defiant*, providing a sort of guard. They fought valiantly, knowing their mission was suicide. All the same, their vigor was infectious to Holmes. He and Dax were quite a team, as she dodged and he returned fire. O'Brien called out coordinates in rapid-fire succession, and Holmes took care of the threat.

“Approaching the wormhole! Thirty seconds!” Dax shouted over the chaos.

“Chief, are you ready to recreate the matter/antimatter reaction?” Sisko called out. A console blew behind him, sending a crewman sprawling to the deck. Benjamin stifled a curse and forced himself to listen for O'Brien's answer.

“Aye, sir! I'm going to head down to engineering now. We need to be in the center of the wormhole, so I'll start the reaction process as we enter! After that, give me ten seconds!”

Just then, there was a major explosion. The two 'escort' ships were still intact. That left only one...

Deep Space Nine had exploded into fragments. Holmes had only caught the end of it, where the upper docking pylon spun spectacularly and hit a Jem'Hadar ship, as though getting a measure of revenge in

it's death. Debris rocketed through space, and Holmes was forced to use precious moments and phaser power to deflect a chunk that the deflectors would have had a hard time with.

There was silence on the bridge. Everyone except Holmes and Dax exchanged glances. They were too busy keeping everyone alive at this point. Sisko glanced at the man who had taken O'Brien's station. The young Ensign looked up nervously. Sisko raised an eyebrow, silently asking if anyone had survived. He knew better, though, even as the Ensign shook his head.

This cannot be allowed to happen!

Sisko was determined to find a way to prevent this from happening in his reality. And he had someone who had bore witness to the events leading up to the tragedy to help him.

"Activating the matter/antimatter reaction sequence...five seconds...two seconds...now!"

O'Brien's voice echoed through the static of the damaged comm system. Then came the bolt of white light and sudden loss of consciousness that accompanied any dimension or time shift.

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"So what exactly was the problem with the shields?" O'Brien wanted to know as Chief Warrant Officer Holmes was debriefed. The crew had been surprised to return to DS9 at just the right moment. But they had been even more surprised to find a second Defiant in the usual docking port.

"It hasn't happened in your time yet?" That made Holmes pause for a moment. Was he violating the temporal prime directive by telling people from the past about this? No, he decided. That future had to be averted, no matter what.

"The problem with the shields came from a slight phase variance caused by a temporal shifting."

"Hold on a minute! That would mean that DS9 has gone through temporal displacement. But that hasn't happened..." She leaned forward, turning the problem over in her mind. "Unless our timeline is not the 'prime' timeline at all..."

Dan looked uncomfortable as he tried to word his answer correctly. He was only guessing, of course. And he was a tactical officer, not a scientist, but he knew a few things about it, as per Starfleet command track training requirements.

"If I were to guess, I would say it's like Schrodinger's cat."

"Schrodinger's cat?" Sisko asked, an eyebrow raised.

"An old earth thought experiment," Dax intoned, now seeing what Holmes was getting at. "A cat was placed- theoretically only- in a box shielded from quantum decoherence and-" Seeing the vacant looks of the crew, Dax got to the point. "The experiment concluded that the cat could, under the right circumstances, be both living and dead at the same time. Though to us, we would see the cat as either alive OR dead. Normally."

"So it plays to the 'Uncertainty Principle'," Sisko commented. "And somehow, in this case, cause has preceded effect."

“Leaving a split in the timeline,” finished Holmes. “So this would still be the prime time line. But I would guess that we’re at a critical linchpin now, and what we do dictates how the future will go.”

Dan looked down at the shiny, reflective surface of Sisko’s desk.

“Although I suppose that’s not so different from everyday life.”

Holmes was suddenly aware that he was receiving a lot of odd looks. He looked around uncertainly, not sure how to comment, or even if he wanted to comment.

“Did I... Say something weird?”

The senior officers immediately rescinded their glances, shifting awkwardly.

“No, no, it isn’t that,” Major Kira told him reassuringly. “It’s just that we are used to that kind of talk from anyone but Dax.”

Dan nodded understandingly, a small smile creeping across his face. “That is a direct result of spending all your free time with a science officer.”

That statement certainly invited comments, and everyone was about to start making them when Ensign Daniel Holmes appeared at the office door. Sisko tapped the door control panel to admit him, which once again silenced the comments and gave way to staring.

The two version of Daniel Holmes stared at each other. There were a few differences that allowed the two to be told apart. Ensign Holmes had one gold pip on his collar; Warrant Officer Holmes had one black pip. Ensign Holmes had a set of semi-Trill spots from his previous run in with the Trill starting on his forehead and running down his sides; Warrant Officer Holmes was wearing a ring on his left ring finger.

Apparently, neither one knew what to say. The others recognized this, prompting Sisko to suggest that they take a break. Warrant Officer Holmes had been debriefing for nearly two full hours. As one, they got up and stretched, then herded toward the door.

That left Ensign and Warrant Officer Holmes by themselves. Ensign Holmes eyed the ring; Warrant Officer Holmes stared at the spots. In unison, they said:

“I have some questions for you...”

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Both Ensign and Warrant Officer Holmes led Chief O’Brien and Lieutenant Dax to where the problem in the shield generator from CWO Holmes’ future was. After a long walk down a never-ending corridor, Warrant Officer Holmes stopped and pointed to one panel.

“That one. Behind there, you’ll find the most clear phase variance.”

O’Brien ran a tricorder over the area, getting a high enough reading to be registered clearly. A .42 phase variance showed on the display. O’Brien grimaced, already working through the possible solutions in his head.

“How the hell did I correct this the first time?” he wondered aloud, glaring at the mix of Cardassian,

Bajoran, and Federation technology that could be so damned frustrating ninety percent of the time. He knew these bulkheads and their inner workings better than anyone, and he could not figure where the hell the problem had originated from.

"I hate to bring up temporal mechanics," Dax interjected, calmly collecting her thoughts. "But maybe the problem is the cause."

O'Brien sort of blinked and narrowed his eyes, not quite following that logic. "Not that damned cat experiment again..."

"No, Chief. I mean that the very time travel that is supposed to be the solution is actually causing the problem. There are two *Defiant's*, two Daniel Holmes'... People and ships from the 'future' coming back to inform us about the problem may have actually caused the problem."

It was such an abstract concept that Holmes really didn't understand it. What he heard was that his being here was more a problem. So that left only a couple options.

"What if we destroy the 'future' *Defiant*, and eliminate me?" Holmes suggested, somewhat relieved to find shocked looks on the faces of his two comrades. "That should correct the phase variance. And if not, you'll know what the problem is and how to fix it; you'll just be sure that one certain option didn't fix the issue."

"If the time stream is already polluted like this, then killing you and destroying the second *Defiant* shouldn't impact us at all. Not that we can be sure, but..."

That left an uncomfortable silence hanging over the group. It went against everything the Federation believed in to take a life like that. It felt wrong. Even Holmes knew it, and he realized that he was reacting to a mix of shock, anger, and a strong feeling of displacement. This wasn't "his" time and place. But at the same time, where he belonged was not where he wanted to be.

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Ensign Holmes and Chief Warrant Officer Holmes spent a lot of time together the next few days. It was easy to be a best friend to yourself. The same interests, for example. So far they had gone rock climbing, played pool, and ran various command training programs on the holodeck. At the moment they were engaged in a vigorous sparring match in ancient earth martial arts. It was incredibly difficult for one or the other to gain an advantage, however Chief Warrant Officer Holmes had an additional six months of combat training. Eventually he managed a surprise punch and won the match.

"Nice! I didn't see that one coming!"

Chief Warrant Officer Holmes grinned and tossed a towel around his neck. "I picked that up in the first month of the Jem'Hadar siege."

Ensign Holmes looked up from taking off his protective footwear and gave his counterpart a sympathetic look.

"That must have been really difficult for you. For everyone."

“It wasn’t all bad,” the Warrant Officer said with a shrug. “It was the most vigorous, intense, comprehensive training that I could’ve had. And I got to know a lot of my fellow officers better, since we pretty much lived in Ops. In fact, that’s how I got to know Jadzia better. I -”

The sound of a comm signal interrupted their conversation. Major Kira’s voice summoned them to Ops. There was a toned of urgency that made both of them pick up the pace.

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Everyone and everything in Ops was in motion. Orders were shouted out and instantly obeyed. It was the art of bringing order to chaos that kept everything functioning. Sisko was in his office, apparently in a heated debate with a Starfleet admiral. Holmes could only make out that Sisko was agitated, not what he was saying precisely.

When the office doors opened and Sisko came out, everyone quieted down enough to be able to hear what he had to say. From the grim look on his face, it wasn’t good news.

Sisko sought out both versions of Holmes and nodded for them to come to his office. Dax joined them a moment later, followed by Kira, and shortly after that Chief O’Brien rushed in, uttering an apology for being late. The big man was overworked at the best of times. During a crisis, forget it. He may have been the single most important person on Deep Space Nine when it came to emergencies.

“I’m going to cut to the chase, people,” Sisko began. The monitor above his desk blinked to life. It was set to show technical data rather than an image of space for the moment. Most unwelcome were the six blips on the screen.

“Thanks to some advancements made in our efforts to build a relay station in the Gamma Quadrant, we can now get at least a vague picture of what’s coming and going through the wormhole. And right now, there are six ships coming.”

Sisko paused, taking in the group before he finished his thought.

“Jem’Hadar ships.”

There were curses and concerned looks all around. This was bad news. But that wasn’t the end of it.

“I spoke with Starfleet. The nearest combat-ready vessels are a full hour away at maximum warp. They’ve been diverted to aid us, but we won’t be here. The Jem’Hadar vessels are twenty minutes away.”

Putting his hands on his desk, Sisko looked at each crew member in turn. All capable, all competent. They’d never once let him down. He had to hope that this time wouldn’t be any different.

“I need options, people.”

“Twenty minutes...we could partially evacuate the station...” O’Brien offered. “Leave a skeleton crew, and get the families out of here.”

Sisko nodded; he’d already given the order.

“None of the ships docked here have any kind of firepower to match the Jem’Hadar,” Kira noted. “There’s an old *K’t’inga* class Klingon battle cruiser primed for battle. But they won’t last long.”

“Wait. Maybe there is a way. Like Schrodinger’s cat...”

Dax launched into an explanation, and from the general reaction it seemed to be a good idea, if implausible. It involved knocking the space station out of phase on purpose. The theory was that weapons fired on one ‘level’ could not effect the station if it was on a different ‘level’.

“The problem is getting the station out of phase...” Dax murmured, working the problem in her head.

“Yeah,” Kira chimed in, “And then getting the station back in phase and *then* worrying about the effects that this little stunt will have on everyone’s health!”

“I can synthesize a vaccine to counter any effects,” Bashir added. “But with the allotted time, I can only make enough for key personnel.”

Sisko was never one to coddle his senior staff . But the fact of the matter was that they were essential to running the station.

“Doctor, get started. In the meantime, Dax, you and Chief O’Brien work on getting the station out of phase.”

Ensign Holmes spoke up at that point. “Sir,there may be a way to create a temporal shielding using the transporters. At the very least, if we put as many people as possible into transporter stasis...”

“That’s only a short step from a phase variance itself! But if the station is destroyed...”

“Not only that,” Warrant Officer Holmes pointed out, “But when we shift the station back to its regular state, we’ll need to be almost impossibly precise, or they’ll all still be lost.”

Sisko gave everyone a firm look. “Then let’s make damn sure we don’t make a mistake. Major Kira, you and Constable Odo oversee the evacuation. I authorize you to exceed the recommended occupancy by ten people per craft. Ensign Holmes, you and your counterpart begin finding volunteers for transporter stasis. Women and children get priority aboard the ships.”

Sisko gave his crew a meaningful look. He didn’t need to say anything except ‘Dismissed’.

As everyone filed out, Warrant Officer Holmes caught Ensign Holmes by the sleeve.

“Hey. We’ve gotta talk. Now.”

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The two met in a darkened corridor in one of the lower levels. They had gotten their lists of volunteers to Major Kira and Odo as quickly as possible. There was something that they had to discuss. And apparently, it wasn’t easy.

Warrant Officer Holmes paced for a minute, biting his thumbnail. It was uncharacteristic for him to do that. Ensign Holmes watched for a while before he finally got tired of this. He grabbed the Warrant Officer by the shoulders. At this angle, you could see the differences between them. Warrant Officer Holmes’ collar bore a single, black pip, and his hair was slightly shorter. Ensign Holmes had one gold pip, and his hair had gotten slightly shaggy compared to his counterpart. Their mindsets, however, were

almost identical. Except for Warrant Officer Holmes having six months more in the way of life experience. The intensity in their eyes was matched, and through it Warrant Officer Holmes understood that it was time to speak.

“Okay, I get it. Look, Dan, the thing is...” Warrant Officer Holmes stammered a bit. Why was this so hard to say to yourself? Then again, he didn’t remember it being any easier the first time he had to tell someone this. Or the second time.

“Look, I’ve only told three people this. Myself, Lt. Dax, and Commander Sisko. And it doesn’t get any easier from the first time to the last.”

He took one more fortifying breath to steady himself, then launched into it:

“In my world, I was in love with Jadzia. And I told her as much. It took me a while. I had to convince myself that it was okay; that I was worthy of her. But when I finally told her, she made it well worth my while. And things stayed happy. I was all set to marry her.”

Ensign Holmes managed to offer his stunned congratulations. But Warrant Officer Holmes shook his head.

“No. It wasn’t meant to be. She died. She died saving me from the Jem’Hadar. She was shot in the back and died in my arms.”

Warrant Officer Holmes ran his hand through his hair, starting to pace again. This time, Ensign Holmes let him go. He couldn’t even imagine...

“My God. I’m so sorry, Dan. I...”

Warrant Officer Holmes held up a hand, stopping his other self there. “No. Don’t. We were happy. I wouldn’t trade those few months for anything. And I’m not here to get sympathy. I’m here to tell you that, if you’re me, you’re feeling the same thing. So, dammit, man up and make your move!”

Ensign Holmes gave a hollow laugh. “Easier said than done! Then again, you’ve got to know that. She’s beautiful, intelligent, and such a sweet, genuine person.”

Holmes threw his arms in the air, giving himself a glare.

“How do I deserve that?!”

Warrant Officer Holmes grabbed Ensign Holmes by the front of his tunic, pushing him against a wall. “Look, either do it or don’t. But don’t give me that self-pity crap, okay? I know it- I lived it! But I made my move, and I don’t regret it. Not now, not ever.”

He dug into his pocket, forcing something into Ensign Holmes’ hand.

“Here. For luck.”

Holmes looked down. It was a commbadge. He looked up to ask about it, but his other self was gone.

That’s not good. If he’s me, then he’s going to-

An alarm sounded, warning everyone that someone had transported off the ship without authorization.

Pocketing the commbadge, Holmes ran up to Ops.

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“Damn it, get him back!” Sisko shouted. “He was wearing his commbadge!”

“I’m trying, sir,” O’Brien called from the transporter station. “But I can’t lock on. His commbadge is on him, but it’s like there’s some sort of interference...”

Dax looked up from the science station. “Benjamin, if he’s from the ‘future’, then he could be out of phase already. That’s why our transporters are can’t lock on!”

Sisko cursed. “Boost the signal!”

“Output at maximum, sir.”

“Can we tell where he is?”

They didn’t need to. At that moment, the screen came alive with Holmes’ face on it.

“I’m sorry to run, Commander. But I didn’t think you’d give me permission to do this...”

Sisko stepped closer to the screen, his eyes locked on Holmes. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“I’m taking the Defiant. The one from my time, I mean. I’m going to deal with those Jem’Hadar ships. At the very least, I’ll buy you the time to get the station out of phase.”

That was a suicide mission, and everyone knew it. Dax and O’Brien were not surprised, given their first conversation with this man had been about how his death might help them. Even if it made sense, Starfleet’s highest duty was to preserve life. It left a bad taste in everyone’s mouth to send someone to die.

“Lock a tractor beam on.”

O’Brien shook his head. “I can’t lock on, sir. He’s out of phase with the rest of us. It’ll take me too long to calculate the variance.”

Sisko nodded absently, having already known that was going to happen. But he had to make the effort. Now he turned to the screen and stared at the man on it.

“Thank you for this, Dan. We won’t waste your sacrifice.”

Holmes nodded his head in appreciation. *“Thank you, sir. I’ll give you my best. It’s been a pleasure...no, an honor. It’s been an honor, serving with all of you. Thank you so much.*

And Dan?"

Ensign Holmes looked up, feeling his mind begin to spin. He was about to watch himself go into combat. It was both fascinating and wrong on so many levels.

"Yeah, Dan?"

Chief Warrant Officer Holmes gave a big grin. *"Remember what I told you, sport. Good luck, alright?"*

With that, he was gone. Holmes looked at the screen, now focused on the *Defiant*, waiting near the mouth of the wormhole. Dax leaned over and put a hand on Holmes' shoulder.

"He's a good man, Dan. And if he's anything like his counterpart, we can trust him to do the job."

Holmes blushed, as always. He never could take a compliment, least of all from a pretty girl. And even less now that he knew about his other self. He simply gave a nod of his head, emotion overwhelming him for the moment. Dax seemed to understand. After giving his shoulder an affectionate pat, she went back to work.

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Warrant Officer Holmes braced himself. He had taken an oath to uphold the honor of Starfleet, and he would to his last breath. But that last breath was coming fast.

With a few taps, he accessed Deep Space Nine's communications array in the Gamma Quadrant. The Jem'Hadar ships were about to enter the wormhole. About forty-seven seconds until they reached the Alpha Quadrant, then.

"Computer, set auto-destruct sequence. 1 minute. Mute all vocal warnings. Authorization Holmes Omega 417."

"Auto-destruct sequence confirmed. Fifty-eight seconds remain until auto-destruct. There will be no further audio warnings."

Holmes sat in the commander's chair, just waiting. These were the Jem'Hadar from his time, so he knew their tactics. They would take out the biggest threat first- the *Defiant*. If they could capture it to learn about Federation technology, they would. And once they scanned the ship and saw one life sign, they would be sure to try.

"Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly," Holmes recited.

Jadzia, I'm coming. I'm so sorry we were never married. Did you wait for me? Even if you didn't, I'll come for you. I'll search forever until I'm back at your side, and we're together.

Right on cue, the Jem'Hadar ships came through the wormhole. They surrounded the *Defiant*.

Holmes opened a channel to the Jem'Hadar ships and Deep Space Nine.

"It's just me here, you drug-dependent mass-murders. Remember me?! You came onto my turf and did some big damage. It must really annoy you that I'm still alive. So come on! What are you waiting for!"

Cowards!”

The hum of a transporter sounded behind Holmes. He turned and ran toward it, tackling the Jem'Hadar soldiers the second they re-materialized. They began to brawl, but it was three on one. Holmes had no chance. But then again, he didn't need one. As he was slammed against a console, blood dripping from his mouth and nose, he saw the display.

Three seconds left.

A knife pierced his chest, and he slumped to the ground. But Chief Warrant Officer Daniel Holmes died with a smile on his face.

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As soon as Ensign Holmes had warned Sisko about what he thought his other self was up to, Sisko pushed harder for the station to be out of phase. A self-destructing ship that close would do massive damage if they couldn't get out of harm's way in time. Being that they were on a space station, jumping to warp wasn't an option. That left Dax's 'Schrodinger's cat' option.

As the *Definat* onscreen began to explode, Dax hit the series of buttons that would hopefully put them all in a safe pocket of space.

Realizing that it would take too long to shift Deep Space Nine itself, Dax and O'Brien created a subspace bubble using the shield generators and deflector array. That bubble became the 'box', while 'Schrodinger's cat' itself was Deep Space Nine.

They could all only hope that the old earth thought experiment would prove correct.

“Sir, level 10 shockwave coming right at us! If we're not gone in two sec-”

“Adjusting phase now!” Dax shouted.

There was an internal lurch. Sisko gripped the nearest console hard, but felt himself falling. His world went white.

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It took only a few hours, but life on Deep Space Nine went back to normal. Families were reunited; a grouchy Quark complained about being stuck in transporter stasis. There was a pronounced sadness where everyone had gathered near the promenade. The Bajorans had kindly offered the use of their temple, as it was already set up for a gathering such as this. Vedek Priam conducted a ceremony, asking the prophets to guide the deceased to the next life. He noted that sadness transcended species and beliefs, and that he was glad to have the opportunity to honor a hero, despite that hero not being a Bajoran.

After Sisko said a few words, everyone migrated to one of the observation windows that dotted the promenade. From there, they watched as a hollowed-out torpedo; empty save for a token dress uniform and a commbadge donated by Ensign Holmes; was shot into space. It was the last tribute they could give to their fallen comrade.

The crowd dispersed, muttering in low tones to one another. All except Ensign Holmes. He stood near the window, staring into space. He felt someone stand beside him.

It was Jadzia.

“Are you okay, Daniel?”

It was a standard question to ask, and didn't really need a truthful answer. But Holmes felt he owed 'himself' something. He turned to face Dax, standing as tall as possible, and put his arms behind his back formally.

“I am, Lt. Thank you. But I...well, it's a long story, and maybe this isn't the classiest time to tell it, but...well...do you have dinner plans?”

Dax was a bit taken aback. “Are you sure now is a good time? I mean, at a funeral...”

Holmes looked out to the stars. “There's no time like the present. That's what he said to me, in not so many words. And once you hear my story, you'll understand why now really is the best time.”

Dax cocked her head, a warm smile dancing across her face.

“Now you've got me curious. How about going now? I don't think I can get more dressed up,” she said, indicating her dress uniform.

Holmes offered his arm, and she took it. He gave a silent thanks to his other self, then focused completely on making things work with Dax.

Time travel had it's complications, but it was certainly not without it's benefits.