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[edit] History See: Cardassian Union history

Prior to the militarization of the Cardassian government, Cardassia was home to some of the finest art and architecture in the quadrant. However, the once great Cardassian civilization fell into severe decay and its starving population plundered the planet's ruins for treasures that could be sold. The Cardassian military continued this destruction of its heritage in order to fund the Federation-Cardassian War. (TNG: "Chain of Command, Part II")

At the end of the Dominion War, determined to punish the Cardassian people for their acts of rebellion against the Dominion, Weyoun ordered that Lakarian City be destroyed, resulting in the deaths of two million civilians. This could not, however, have prepared the Cardassian people for an even greater tragedy. After the destruction of Lakarian City, the Cardassian forces switched sides to aid the Federation Alliance. Enraged by the turn of events and betrayal, the Female Changeling demanded that the Cardassian people be wiped out. After planetary bombardment from the Dominion and Breen fleets in orbit and mass slaughter from the Jem'Hadar on the planet surface, the death toll stood at an estimated eight hundred million Cardassians, with a large portion of the cities in ruins. (DS9: "What You Leave Behind")