

Captain's log, stardate 49200.5:

We are now in our fifth day adrift. Commendations to Ensign Jeffery Bloom, my engineer, and Doctor Azriel Dourden, my medical officer, for their successful efforts to keep us alive since the Jem'Hadar attack that disabled the Hudson. Unfortunately, our runabout's systems are on their last legs and we estimate less than 24 more hours of life support. This will likely be my last log entry.

Koester, out.

The runabout *Hudson*, one of the Danube-class ships converted into a preliminary survey vessel to assist in the Federation's exploration of the Gamma Quadrant with the starship *USS Sarek*, slowly spun. Its warp nacelles nothing but slag, the impulse engines long since powerless, the anti-matter core ejected, the small ship resembled drifting refuse more than a working Federation starship. Inside, five beings clung to what life remained in them.

"Status, Mister Bloom?" Captain Peter J. Koester, the terran commanding officer of the small survey ship asked his Vulcan engineer.

"I've done all I can do, Captain," the human-raised Vulcan replied. "At current depletion rates, life support will fail in about twenty hours."

"Damn," Koester hissed under his breath. "What'll happen if we boost our distress signal? Unless they're headed toward Dominion territory, the *Sarek* can't be more than a few sectors away. If we can just get their attention..."

"If we boost our signal, we might attract the Jem'Hadar, who left us for dead!" exclaimed Lieutenant Virgil Dylan Kane, a human who became 'Bajoran-by-choice' after he had quit Starfleet and joined the Bajoran resistance against the Cardassian occupation of Bajor when his parents had been killed years earlier.

"Whether we die by the Jem'Hadar or by suffocation and hypothermia, we'll still be dead! It's worth the chance."

"By my calculations," reported Bloom, "boosting our signal to 115% of standard levels will deplete our remaining power in just six more hours."

"Mister Karg," Koester said, turning toward the Klingon sitting at the tactical station. "Make it so."

"Yes, Captain," the red-haired Klingon replied.

A moment later, Kane reported, "Our signal has increased in strength." The science officer turned to look at his captain.

"Well..." said Koester, taking his seat in the Hudson's specially installed center seat, "all we can do is sit... And wait."

Space, the Final Frontier...

Star Trek: Dauntless

"Dauntless Awaits!" By PJK

Five and three-quarter hours later...

The ship dropped out of warp less than a thousand meters from the drifting wreckage of the *Hudson*. A proximity sensor in the runabout's cabin notified Ensign Karg first.

"We may have trouble," the young Klingon growled. "A ship just dropped out of warp just off our stern. We're so low on power, I can't even tell you who or what it is."

"The *Sarek*?" asked Dr Sir Azriel Dourden, the Avalonian medical officer as he slowly walked over to Karg's station across the cabin.

"Doubtful. It approached from the wrong bearing. If it were the *Sarek*, she would have..."

Before Karg could finish his report, the hum of a transporter formed in the center of the runabout's cabin. Captain Koester began to raise his phaser but Karg leapt out of his seat to shield his commanding officer from the unknown danger.

The beam coalesced into the forms of two humans, one in a gold Starfleet uniform, the other in blue.

“Thank God they’re still alive!” said Dr Julian Bashir as he pulled out his tricorder and began scanning the *Hudson* crew.

“I’m Chief Miles O’Brien. This is Dr Bashir. We’re from the starship *Defiant*. We just managed to pick up your weak signal as we neared the wormhole, and from the looks of things, just in the nick of time.”

“Yes, Chief. Another hour and all you would have found here would have been five frozen corpses to identify,” remarked Koester without humor.

“Well, you’ll be just fine now,” Bashir commented as he returned his tricorder to its holster. “They’re stable enough for transport, Chief.”

“Aye, Doctor. We’ll rig your runabout for tow, Captain, and have you back at *DS9* in no time.”

Koester simply managed a wan smile as Bashir tapped his combadge and announced, “Seven to beam over. Energize.”

* * * *

Two days later - Space Station Deep Space Nine - Bajor Sector

Four-fifths of the *Hudson* crew passed their time at Quark’s Bar, waiting for the absent fifth member, their commanding officer, to return from a debriefing with Captain Sisko. That debriefing would include news of their disposition now that the *Hudson* was gone and the mission of the Preliminary Survey Vessels cancelled. Bloom was playing dabo while Dr Dourden and Lieutenant Kane competed at Chief O’Brien’s dart board. At one corner table Ensign Karg sat sipping a mug of warnog as he discussed the Federation’s current tense state of relations with the Klingon Empire with Lt Commander Worf.

A few minutes later, Captain Koester walked into Quark’s and tossed a padd he had been carrying onto the top of the bar and ordered a synthale from the bartender as he ran his hand through his close-cropped, slightly graying hair. He took a pull at his ale and let out a long, deep breath.

Kane, noticing his captain now sitting at the bar, tapped Dourden on the shoulder and the two walked over to Koester.

“Hey, Skipper, how’d the meeting go?” Kane asked.

“Well, it’s the old good news-bad news routine,” Koester replied as he took another sip from his mug. “You want the bad news first?” Both Kane and Dourden nodded.

“Well, with the loss of the *Hudson*, just the latest of the PSP ships to be lost or disabled, and the ongoing tensions with the Klingons, after only six months Starfleet has decided to shelve the Preliminary Survey Program. We, gentlemen, are out of the Gamma Quadrant for the foreseeable future. If anything, they want to assign the new Leviathan-class starships there instead.”

“That’s **bad** news?” the doctor asked.

“Glory and respect...,” Koester started to mutter.

“Hey, Skipper, we’re still alive! That’s more than the crew of the *Odyssey* can say.”

“Yeah, I suppose. But as one of Starfleet’s youngest captains, I needed to prove...”

Koester’s comment was cut off by his exec’s foul look.

“Yeah, I suppose,” the captain admitted.

“Well, what be thy good news, Captain?” Dourden asked in his heavy Avalonian accent.

“Oh yeah,” Koester said, startled from his reverie. “Starfleet is keeping us all together as a crew, and giving us a new ship. A real starship this time.”

Both Kane and Dourden’s eyes brightened at the news, and having lost his last spare strip of latinum, Bloom meandered over to join his crewmates.

“What ship have we been assigned to?” Bloom asked. Koester put his mug down on the bar and just stared at his engineer.

“You heard that? All the way over at the dabo table?”

“I may have been raised by humans, Captain,” the engineer said, smirking slightly, “but my ears are still 100% Vulcan.”

Koester just slowly shook his head, then turned toward the table his security chief occupied.

“Ensign Karg, will you join us please?” Koester called over the noise of the crowd, drawing several drunken stares as he did. Karg grunted over toward his shipmates, concluded his conversation with Worf, then sauntered over to the *Hudson* crew.

“Commander Worf was just informing me why the Federation and the Empire are no longer allied, and of the decision he made to remain with Starfleet.”

“Yes, I know. Captain Sisko and I discussed the situation during our debrief,” Koester confirmed. “It seems you have a hard decision to make.”

“Actually, Captain,” the flame-haired Klingon warrior said, “I had a hard decision I’ve already made.”

Koester, Kane, Bloom and Dourden all looked at Karg expectantly, but the Klingon simply proceeded to straighten the emblems on his baldric sash. Finally the captain prompted, “And that decision was...?”

“The honor is to serve,” Karg said as if it was the only possible answer, bowing slightly toward Koester.

“Very well,” Koester replied with a curt nod, satisfied. “Then I’ll announce that we are all assigned to the command staff of the Intrepid-class starship *Dauntless*, due to be launched in two months. We all have been authorized two weeks leave, then must report to *Earth Station McKinley* to assist with the final phases of construction.”

Smiles spread on Kane, Dourden and Bloom’s faces while Karg remained stonefaced, only giving off an air of smug pleasure.

“Mister Bloom, Doc, I need to speak with you further. The rest of you, dismissed.”

Kane spun and returned to the dartboard, where he challenged Chief O’Brien as the station’s chief of operations entered the bar and Karg approached the Ferengi barkeep and inquired about procuring a holosuite to reenact the Battle of Klad’dach against the Romulans. After the two had departed, Bloom and Dourden stood in front of their captain. Koester stood up from the barstool and faced the two young officers.

“As you both know, my final log entry aboard the *Hudson* included commendations for both of you for your efforts that kept us alive after our runabout was crippled.” Both men nodded as Koester continued. “Well it seems other people were highly impressed with your work as well. Doctor Sir Azriel Dourden, as of this stardate, you are hereby promoted to the rank of Lieutenant (Junior Grade).”

A smile spread on Dourden’s face as he shook the captain’s offered hand. Koester then turned to the emotional Vulcan before him.

“And in recognition of your extraordinary efforts that extended the runabout’s life support from near-nothing to five days, keeping the *Hudson* crew alive long enough for rescue, Jeffery Bloom, you are hereby promoted to Lieutenant, effective this stardate.”

As strange as it looked to those gathered around them in the bar, the Vulcan also smiled as he shook the captain’s hand.

“Gentlemen,” Koester said, returning their smiles. “Dismissed.”

* * * *

Two weeks later - Roosevelt Recreational Facility in the Beta Quadrant

Koester boarded the transport, his dufflebag full of uniforms, civilian clothes, souvenirs and one special book carried on his left shoulder.

He turned back once more, looking among the crowd for one last glimpse of the very special friend he had spent the past two weeks with, blowing her a kiss as he passed through the airlock. Across the crowd, the young woman with the brown Trill spots running down each side of her face and neck smiled and waved back, her smile turning mischievous, obvious she was hiding a secret, once Koester had disappeared from view.

As he stepped through the transport’s hatch, Koester bumped into a tall Starfleet officer wearing a red command-division uniform. The ensign stumbled and stepped on the foot of the distracted senior officer.

“M... m... my apologies, sir,” the ensign sputtered.

“Relax, Ensign. I won’t court-martial you for stumbling.” As they spoke the two officers moved toward the transport’s passenger cabin.

“I... heh, heh... didn’t think (gulp) you would, Captain, sir. It... it... its...”

“Ensign, you’re too nervous,” Koester said in his most commanding tone. “Take a deep breath, relax and tell me who you are.”

The ensign took a deep breath and very slowly released it. A moment later his composure had somewhat returned.

“My name is Ensign Francis Lenny. I just received my first deep-space assignment.”

Koester’s eyebrows knit in apparent confusion, though in reality he simply felt like stringing the niece young officer along for a little while.

“I hate to break this to you, Ensign, but this isn’t a starship. In fact, it appears you are a long way from where you’re supposed to be! What happened? Did you take a wrong turn at Betelgeuse?”

“Captain?” asked Lenny, genuinely confused.

“This is just a high-speed transport back to Earth. You’re not where you’re supposed to be! Explain yourself, Ensign.”

“Well... I... ah...,” Lenny responded, easily getting flustered again.

“Well, what is your answer, Ensign? Do you even know where you are?”

“I... um... It’s just...”

“Is what you mean to say, that you’re on leave right now pending reporting to your new command?”

To avoid further sticking his foot in his own mouth, the Ensign simply nodded.

“Ensign, mind if I offer you a bit of advice?” Koester asked, his tone easing.

The two officers stopped walking momentarily as they neared the door to Koester’s quarters. Lenny again nodded to answer the captain’s question.

“Relax! You’ll come to find life in Starfleet, especially aboard a starship, is like being part of a small town... Or a large family. Your shipmates will help you when you need it. You just need to be less high-strung. I could tell you stories about when I first reported aboard the *Al-Batani* that would keep us up all night, but I believe you need to spend some time unwinding. Enjoy this time of your life, Ensign.”

An uneasy smile crept across Lenny’s face.

“Yes, sir. I’ll try, sir.” And Lenny turned to find his own cabin, leaving Koester to watch bemused at the confused young officer.

“God help his new CO,” the captain said to himself as he finally entered his cabin door, never once noticing the padd Lenny held in his hand, the ones containing his new orders that started, “You are to report to *Earth Station McKinley* where you will join the crew of the Intrepid-class starship *Dauntless*...”

* * * *

Two Days Later

Koester boarded the shuttle moments after stepping through the transport airlock into the Earth orbit office complex. And considering the state of affairs with the Klingon Empire, a virtual state of war, the name of the *Dauntless*’ number one shuttlecraft, *Khitomer*, surprised him.

The shuttlecraft’s pilot, Chief Petty Officer Casey, introduced himself to the captain as he stowed the officer’s gear in the rear, and a conversation started between the two as the type-8 shuttle lifted off the deck of the complex docking bay and exited the atmosphere retaining field into open space. The conversation, however, did not last long once the captain’s attention turned toward what he saw.

“My God, she’s beautiful!”

Casey followed Koester’s gaze out the viewport. Ahead of the shuttle, looking like it was trapped within the crushing claws of some huge predatory crustacean, the *Dauntless* floated in orbit within the structure of *Earth Station McKinley*.

Recognizing the look of wonder on the captain’s face, Casey turned the shuttle away from a direct path to the starship’s shuttlebay and instead flew an inspection tour around the various section of the ship, a tradition started by a transporter accident when James Kirk took command of the refitted starship *Enterprise* a century before. The shuttlecraft maneuvered under the main hull, past the port that would soon house the aerowing, a combination shuttle/fast-fighter, and up around the starboard warp nacelle. Pressing a few controls, the chief’s flying skill soon impressed Koester as much as the tour when the shuttle pitched upside down and coasted by inertia backward over the *Dauntless*’ engineering section, soon passing the aft end of the starship. Rolling the shuttle rightside up again, the chief yawed slightly, pitched the nose down and fired the maneuvering thrusters, sending the shuttle toward the open shuttlebay.

Turning toward Casey with a smile, Koester said, “Thank you, Chief.”

“Anytime, sir.”

* * * *

Kane and Bloom studied the readouts displayed on the padd that Bloom held in his hand. The bustle on the bridge around them did not even register.

“What do you think?” Bloom asked the executive officer. “Bad omen?”

“I just hope these shuttle names are no indication of what’s in store for us. What desk-bound admiral decided on naming our shuttlecraft after famous massacres? And what is the status of loading?”

“The shuttlepods *Alamo*, *Cestus III* and *Salem One* are aboard and properly stowed. The aerowing will arrive from the *San Francisco Yards* by 1800 today. The personnel shuttle *Fredericksburg* will arrive with our photon torpedo casing loadout on Tuesday. Shuttlepod *Pearl Harbor* will arrive with your assistant science chief on stardate 49367.9. And it’s my understanding that the captain will be shuttled over in the *Khitomer* this afternoon,” Bloom reported.

“Very good. Carry on.”

“Yes, Lieutenant.”

As Bloom returned to his engineering station at the side of the bridge, but before Kane could start another task, the computer’s voice sounded throughout the ship.

“*Dauntless*, arriving.”

“Ahh, here’s the Skipper now. Mister Karg, will you see to his reception?”

Looking up from his security post, the Klingon ensign grunted his ascent and stepped into the nearby turbolift.

“Exec,” called out the ensign at the ops station at the rear of the bridge. “Currently seventy five members of the crew have reported aboard. Thirty two remain on leave and forty three have yet to be assigned.”

“Very good. Over the intercom, announce that all crew members not on duty report to the shuttlebay.”

“Aye, sir.”

* * * *

Karg stepped out of the turbolift just as the voice of Ensign Natchez sounded from the bridge.

“Attention all personnel, this is the bridge. All off-duty personnel report to the shuttlebay for arrival of PCO.”

A small crowd, already aware from the announcement of Captain Koester’s arrival, had started to gather near the door to the shuttlebay. Karg took his place near the door’s control panel. A moment later, upon confirmation that the bay was pressurized, he opened the door and entered first, followed close behind by the thirty five or so off duty enlistees and officers, which the security officer organized into ranks in front of the descending ramp of the newly arrived shuttlecraft *Khitomer*.

The doors to the shuttlebay opened once more to admit Lieutenant Virgil D. Kane and Lieutenant Jeffery Bloom, who took their places as First and Second Officer at the foot of the ramp. A moment later, Chief Casey stepped down the ramp and played an electronic bosun’s whistle. The crew all snapped to attention in unison.

Koester emerged from the rear of the shuttle, carrying a padd. He paused at the end of the ramp, activated the padd and began to read from it.

“*To: Koester, Captain Peter J., stardate 49227. You are hereby and immediately assigned as prospective commanding officer, Intrepid-class starship Dauntless, registry number NCC-74658. Signed, Necheyev, Fleet Admiral Alynna.*”

Koester looked up at the crew, shutting the padd in his hand off.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have a lot to do in the next six weeks. I’ll be counting on all of you to get the job done, properly and on time. Our launch date is set for stardate 49368.4, and I don’t want to be a second late.”

Koester took a moment to look over the assembled crew, spending an extra few seconds on his known crew from the *Hudson*.

“You have my confidence,” he finally concluded. “Dismissed.”

As the muster broke up, the captain turned his attention to Kane and Bloom. He did not notice the tall, nervous looking ensign who quietly snuck out of the shuttlebay amidst the crowd.

* * * *

Six Weeks Later - Launch Date: T-Minus Six Hours

The transporter materialized the humanoid form on the platform. The man in the gold uniform took a step forward, placed his hands on his hips, and in a thick southern accent said, “Hoo-ey! Ain’t this the darned prettiest ship y’ever seen?”

The transporter chief, not knowing quite how to respond, simply stared at the newcomer as he activated the comm channel to the bridge.

“Transporter room two to Lieutenant Kane. You asked me to inform you when Commander Russell arrived?”

“Yes,” responded Kane’s voice.

“Well, Commander Russell has arrived,” the transporter chief reported.

“Understood,” the XO replied. “Have him remain there. I’ll be down in a minute.”

The chief closed the comlink and looked back at Commander Ray Russell, the ship’s new Chief of Operations.

“Lieutenant Kane, our First Officer, will be here to greet you in a moment, sir.”

“No need, m’boy, no need,” Russell said as he picked up his bag and started out the door in spite of the transport chief’s protests. A minute later, Kane entered the transporter room.

“Where is the Commander?” Kane asked, looking around in confusion.

“I told him you were coming down to greet him, but he simply left anyway.”

“I was afraid of this. Russell’s was busted down recently for insubordination. The Skipper’s gonna love this guy.”

* * * *

Koester stepped out of his ready room doors onto the *Dauntless* bridge. To his surprise, someone was sitting in his command seat, and it was not the XO.

“Can I help you... Commander?” Koester asked after looking at the three pips on the man’s collar.

“No, I’m fine, thank ya,” the man responded in a heavy southern drawl. Koester continued to stare at him, but the commander simply seemed engrossed in the activity going on around him as if he was supervising it all, ignoring the captain without effort.

Finally, with anger rising in his voice, Koester said, “Well, then maybe you wouldn’t mind getting up from my seat?”

“Whoa!” Russell exclaimed as he jumped out of the command seat like a jolt of electricity had shocked him. “Y’all hafta fogive me. Y’see, my last assignment was as CO of a starship and I’m kinda used to...”

“I’m well aware of your record, Commander Russell. I trust it will improve in the future?”

Russell did not respond, but simply glared at the Captain, a look of danger in his eyes.

“I asked you a question... Commander.”

“Yes’m....., sir,” Russell finally responded, then walked around up to the ops station where his bag already sat on the deck. Kane, having witnessed the end of the exchange from the turbolift alcove, walked down toward the captain.

“Problem, Skipper?” he asked as he glanced toward the disgraced former CO at ops.

“Not yet, Exec. Not yet.” Koester eyes Russell warily as the operations manager entered the turbolift with his bag and the doors slid silently shut behind him. “...But I have a feeling we’re going to have to keep an eye on that one.”

Koester was about to sit in his seat when the intercom sounded.

“CMO to captain.”

“Go ahead, Doc.”

Koester smiled to Kane as he heard Dourden’s annoyed huff of breath at the use of his nick name, followed by, “It will either be I or this thing in my sickbay, Captain.”

Koester and Kane exchanged confused looks before Koester shrugged his shoulders.

“I’m on my way, Doc.”

* * * *

Captain Koester entered sickbay, Kane following close behind.

“What’s the problem, Doc?”

Dourden, who had been testing medical tricorders and placing the ones that passed into storage, turned to face the two officers.

“Watch this,” he said, holding up his right index finger. “Computer, activate EMH program.”

Almost instantly a bald-headed human in a blue medical uniform materialized in the middle of the sickbay.

“Please state the nature of the medical emergency,” the newcomer said blandly.

Dourden pointed at the holographic doctor and said to Koester, “Doest thou now understand what I mean?”

“Doc,” Koester started, blinking in amusement and trying not to laugh out loud. “It’s a holographic program. It’s designed to aid you when you need help.”

Dourden’s face became rigid. “I whilst not argue every small diagnosis with this... this... soul-less demon!”

The holodoc walked over to the three officers and addressed the captain.

“Sir, if I am not needed at present, then my program should be turned off.”

Dourden stared at Koester. Koester looked back and forth between Dourden and the EMH. Kane just looked on, covering with his hand the giggle escaping his lips, trying hard not to have to leave to prevent laughing in Dourden’s face.

“Computer,” Koester finally said, “deactivate the EMH.”

The holodoc faded away as a smile of triumph appeared on Dourden’s face, who then started to say, “Computer, delete emergency med...”

“Computer, disregard,” Koester ordered, speaking over Dourden. The smile quickly faded from Dourden’s face.

“Doc, we haven’t got the largest medical staff. The program is there to help you if you should need it. I’m not asking you to live with it. Just... well, live with it,” Koester ordered as he walked out of sickbay, Kane again close behind.

As the doors slid shut, Dourden huffed once again and shouted, “And for ye last time, I am Sir Azriel, not Doc!”

* * * *

“Before I do this, I just want to make an announcement,” Koester said to the assembled group in the *McKinley Station* observation lounge. Outside the large window could be seen the forward hull of the starship *Dauntless*. “I’d like to go on record that this ceremony is in honor of my dear friend, Captain Kathryn Janeway, and the crew of our lost sistership, the *Voyager*.”

The murmur of the crowd silenced for a moment. A few heads were bowed in respect. Then Koester lifted his three year old daughter Gem up to a control panel near the big viewing windows. The little girl, excited by all the activity, pressed a control on the panel her father had pointed out. Outside in the vacuum of space, a champagne bottle was flung mechanically across open space in a tradition dating back on Earth many centuries.

As everyone raised their glasses, Commander Deanna Troi, Ship’s Counselor of the recently launched Sovereign-class starship *Enterprise-E*, addressed the crowd as she likewise continued to watch the bottle as it increased its distance from the observation lounge.

“I hereby christen this starship the *Dauntless*. May all who voyage upon you be blessed and may your journey’s be fruitful. May you always come home.”

And in the soundless depths of space, the champagne bottle struck the hull of the *Dauntless*, shattering into thousands of sparkling shards that quickly evaporated in the open radiation of the sun, leaving pieces of green glass drifting away from the station and ship. The thunderous applause on the station slowly died down as light after light lit up the new starship, bathing the vessel in brightness. The new crew gathered by the windows, with pride in their eyes, to look upon their new life ahead.

The End ...for now

Author’s Note: This story was (quite obviously) the very first USS Dauntless story written. It was developed by myself and my small crew of members in mid- and late 1995, while I was a fresh-faced student attending US Naval Submarine School in Groton, CT.

It changed quite a bit between the initial drafts and what was eventually printed in the first issue of Subspace Chatter in late 1997. New scenes and new characters were added as new members joined and took their place on the bridge of a not-so-famous starship.

In fact, looking back, it is also evident that this story was not among my best entries in the genre, but still I look back proudly on it as it served the purpose for which it was intended. To introduce the new characters and newest Federation starship in the same tradition as was done by the USS Arcturus and USS Sarek before it.

I hope you enjoyed our very beginning.

~Cap’n Pete – March 2016