

Captain's log, stardate 52587.5:

As the first mission following our commissioning, the USS Dauntless has been assigned by Admiral Ross to establish communications with a newly encountered alien species in the hopes of recruiting a new ally against the Dominion. However, things are not going as well as hoped...

"Status?" asked Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester as he leaned forward in his command chair, peering at the image of the menacing looking vessel following them closely on the main viewscreen.

"We're at full impulse on a heading of 231 mark 9," reported Lt Francis Lenny from the helm, sweat running down the sides of the young officer's face.

"The alien vessel is firing upon us again," added Lt(JG) Jason O'Brien Blackfoot T'Vet Korsal, the new assistant chief tactical officer from his post to the right of the captain's chair. The entire bridge shook with the impact of the strange unearthly weapon. "Shields down to seventy five percent!"

"Continue hailing with universal friendship messages on all frequencies," Koester ordered.

"Maintaining friendship hail," confirmed the officer at ops, Lt(JG) Nate Noorde.

"How long are you going to keep this up, Skipper?" executive officer Virgil Dylan Kane asked from the seat to Koester's immediate right, the impact shock forcing the top clip of his silver Bajoran earring to come loose from the human's earlobe and dangling for a moment before Kane reached up and grabbed the entire piece of jewelry off his ear. Koester turned to look at his first officer.

"As long as I can, Exec. As long as I can."

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Dauntless*!

Star Trek: Dauntless

"Threshold" By PJK

"Commodore," called out Commander Jeff Bloom, the ship's emotional Vulcan chief science officer from his station next to tactical. "The alien vessel is firing a form of plasma-beam weapon at us. I estimate the shields will not be able to withstand more than another two or three volleys at best."

Koester looked again at his first officer, sighing loudly, then stood from his chair and took three steps toward the viewscreen.

"Patch me through to the alien vessel," Koester ordered.

"Hailing frequency opened," Noorde confirmed.

Koester cleared his throat, then said, "This is Commodore Peter J. Koester of the Federation starship *Dauntless*. We have no wish to fire upon you. We only want to open a dialogue between our people and yours for our mutual benefit. Please break off your attack so we may talk."

A quiet moment passed, during which Koester started becoming hopeful. A couple of members of the bridge crew started breathing normally again.

Until the tactical officer spoke once more.

"They're firing again!"

The bridge once more shook violently, almost knocking Koester to the deck. He carefully sat back down in his command seat, helped in place by Counselor Sutherland who sat beside him to his left.

"Shields down to forty eight percent," the hybrid Terran/Betazoid/Vulcan/Klingon tactical officer reported. O'B - as he was called by those aboard the *Dauntless* since his recent arrival - consulted his status board and added, "Main phaser power is down. We can lock and load a few aft torpedo shots if you wish, sir."

Koester shook his head and said, "We don't want to further aggravate the situation. I'd rather just warp out of this sector and try this again at a later date."

Another impact shook the starship, as if adding an exclamation point to the CO's last statement.

"Captain!" shouted O'B. "Shields just dropped!"

Koester sprung from his seat as he barked his next order.

"Mister Lenny, warp factor 5, now! Mister Noorde, discontinue the hails." He then turned to face the tactical post. "Mister Korsal, get those shields back up again!"

The *Dauntless* quickly jumped to warp speed, just as a final plasma bolt from the alien craft struck the starship's starboard warp nacelle. Sparks erupted from the engineering console on the port side of the bridge where Lt(JG) Dar, the half-Klingon diagnostic engineer, was sitting. Immediately Counselor Sutherland jumped over to his aid.

"Damage report?" Koester ordered.

"Power taps and main phaser coils will need replacement," informed O'B. "Shields are back in place though."

"Minor structural damage to the starboard warp pylon, but no other serious damage to the hull," added Noorde from ops.

"Minor burn on Lieutenant Dar's right hand," said Counselor Sutherland as she guided the half-Klingon man toward the turbolift. "I'm escorting him down to sickbay so Q can have a look at him."

"Very well," nodded Koester. "What about our engines?"

Commander Bloom, who had been the chief engineer aboard the previous *Dauntless-74658*, quickly slipped into the seat of the engineering console and consulted the readouts.

"One of our nacelles took a direct hit just before we engaged warp, but there doesn't seem to be any damage a re-tuning can't fix."

"Very good. Mister Lenny," Koester said, sitting down in his center seat. "Set course back toward Federation space and drop out of warp."

"Yes... uh..., sir," Lenny said, acting somewhat confused.

"Is there a problem, Lieutenant?" Koester asked.

"I'm not sure, Commodore," Lenny replied. "I'm getting some very strange readings on my console. My astrogator is no longer registering correctly."

"Take us out of warp then. Let's get a proper navigational fix and go from there," Koester suggested.

"Aye, sir. Dropping out of warp now."

Koester watched the screen as the starlines, usually streaks of rainbow light from their faster-than-light travel but now just streaks of white, expanded and covered the screen.

"What the...?" Koester mumbled.

"What happened?" Virgil Kane asked.

The entire bridge crew stared with a mixture of fascination and fear at what appeared on the viewscreen. Absolutely nothing. No stars. No planets. No galaxies or nebula. Nothing but an eternity of white.

"Where are we?" Lt(JG) Noorde asked.

"I... don't know," answered Lt Lenny.

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In the briefing lounge just behind the bridge, Commodore Koester stood quietly contemplating the glassed-in display where three models representing the *Dauntless* lineage glimmered in gold. Behind him, the starship's command staff sat around the large briefing table. Behind them, through the large aft facing windows, could be seen the aft end of the Sovereign-class starship's saucer hull, the engineering hull, and twin warp nacelles. Beyond them; nothing, except the occasional spark and crackle of some unknown energy against the starship's restored shields.

"What have we determined?" Koester asked without turning toward his staff.

Jeff Bloom looked up at Koester, his right eyebrow raising in a typically Vulcan fashion, then read off from the padd in front of him.

"According to sensor logs - whatever the basis of that alien vessel's plasma weapon was - the discharge altered our warp field geometry, increasing our speed exponentially."

"Translated to English?" asked Lt Commander (Carrie) K'danz, the ship's chief of security.

"I reviewed the logs from the helm console," interrupted Lt Commander Kevin Fry, the chief helmsman. "According to the logs, the ship reached speeds far in excess of the ordered warp factor 5."

"How far in excess?" Kane asked. Commodore Koester turned to face his staff as Fry answered.

"I estimate we reached approximately warp 9.99999999."

“That’s impossible!” interjected **Q**, the chief medical officer.

“Actually, it’s not,” stated Bloom. “I was recently granted access to a highly classified report that reported an instance where a modified shuttlecraft actually attained the speed we thought impossible. Warp 10. True transwarp!”

“That’s all well and good, Commander,” said command master chief Pono Kyman from his seat near the far end of the table. “But unless that classified report included detailed instructions on how that shuttle’s warp engines were modified, where does that place us?”

“As near as we can determine,” Fry answered. “BEYOND the edge of the universe.”

“Beyond the edge...,” Koester whispered to himself as he looked out the transparasteel windows at infinite. He then turned abruptly back toward the table, sitting in his usual place at the head.

“I need suggestions for how we can get back to our own galaxy,” he said.

“Actually, Commodore, we have a more pressing problem,” said Bloom.

Koester looked at his chief science officer expectantly. “More pressing than finding a way of getting home intact?”

“Our shields are registering a constant drain,” said Bloom.

“That constant crackling?” asked Kane as he glanced out the window as well.

“Yes. Apparently this... region... is so hostile to matter as we know it, we’re barely existing out here in what I’m calling for lack of a better term, chaos. If we hadn’t been able to raise the shields before we dropped out of warp, we’d be dead already. This... chaos... is eating away at the shields. Once they’re gone, it will start eating away at the hull and other vital systems. I estimate no more than six hours before we have a breach of hull integrity.”

Koester looked with urgency toward Lt Commander Fry.

“Mister Fry, can we just turn around 180 degrees and head back the way we came?”

“I’m afraid not, Commodore,” Fry answered. “Without any stars, planets, even a galaxy, the navigational systems are lost. We couldn’t even tell exactly when we were turned around 180 degrees.”

Koester looked thoughtful for a moment. The rest of the command staff looked at each other in concern before the commodore spoke again.

“There’s only one answer. Transwarp.”

“Excuse me, Skipper?!?” asked Kane in alarm.

“It’s the only way,” said Koester. “Theoretically, we’d be in every point in the universe at the same time. All we have to do is drop out in the right place.”

“But, sir...,” said chief engineer Lt Nate Johnson. “When we dropped out of warp here, the field that brought us all this way collapsed. Our engines can’t reform that warp bubble again.”

“That alien plasma beam weapon helped create it. The sensor readings are on file. There’s the place to start,” said Koester.

“It’ll take time,” Johnson warned.

“You have five hours,” Koester said with a humorless smile. “I suggest you get to work. Dismissed.”

Koester and Kane hurried out onto the bridge, followed closely by Counselor Sutherland. However, Johnson stayed behind, moving closer to Jeff Bloom as the room emptied.

“I think I’m going to need your help on this one, Commander.”

“My thoughts exactly,” the human-raised Vulcan man replied, then turned toward the chief medical officer as she started toward one of the egress doors. “Commander **Q**, your experience as the previous chief science officer and head of stellar cartography could be invaluable as well.”

A slight smile appeared on **Q**’s face as she nodded.

“Sickbay is pretty quiet right now. Sure, I can help. Meet me in Science Lab 2.”

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“So how is this supposed to work?” Koester asked the three crew members standing on the opposite side of his ready room desk.

“As I said,” replied Lt Johnson. “We’ve jury rigged the warp nacelles to produce an altered warp field. This field should take us to transwarp or at least near-transwarp speeds.”

“I see. I hope you’re keeping in mind that even just a fraction below transwarp will mean days, weeks, even months to get back to the Milky Way galaxy and home. Plus we need to be heading in the right direction or we’ll be drifting forever. And we only have two more hours before that... that energy or lack of energy or whatever it is starts eating into the hull,” reminded Koester.

“That’s where I come in,” added Q. “As you know, I have extensive knowledge of interstellar space.” She winked at Koester, unseen by either Johnson or Bloom. “Once we’re in transwarp, I can determine where and when we should shut down the engines.”

“Very well,” nodded Koester. “My only concern with your plan is maintaining the warp field. If I’m understanding this correctly, won’t a maneuver of this kind require you to make almost constant minute adjustments?”

“Of course,” replied Bloom. “Or the field will collapse and likely destroy our warp engines.”

“How are you going to do that?” Koester asked, concern spreading on his face. “No one I know can make the those adjustments fast enough. I don’t think even the computer could do that.”

“There’s one crew member that can,” said Bloom with a definitely un-Vulcan grin.

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“Are you ready Mister Fry?” Koester asked from his seat at the center of the bridge.

“Standing by on both warp and impulse drive systems,” Fry responded.

“Very well. Are you ready too, Mister Spot?”

The mechanical sounding, British-accented voice of the *Dauntless*’ non-corporeal science officer sounded from the speakers around the bridge.

“Ready, willing, and able, Commodore.”

Koester nodded, then looked briefly at both Commander Kane and Counselor Sutherland. Both officers seemed calm yet eager.

“Mister Fry,” the commodore said, drawing the helmsman’s attention. “Warp speed at your discretion.”

“Aye, sir,” Fry responded, then pressed the control in front of him. “Accelerating to warp 1...”

As far as anyone on the bridge could tell visually, the *Dauntless* had not moved. There was no physical feeling of movement and the endless field of white still filled the screen. Fry continued to count off the speed his instruments indicated.

“Warp 2... Warp 4... Warp 8...”

“Mister Spot,” said Q, tapping her combadge. “You may begin your engine tuning.”

“Aye, aye, Commander,” Spot replied.

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Back aft in the starboard warp nacelle, where all the problems that had landed them outside the universe had begun, the non-corporeal being from Damiania II - who appeared as no more than a circle of red light about five centimeters in diameter - ‘jumped’ into the plasma stream emitted by the injectors and flowed into the heart of the nacelle where the warp coils thrummed with incredible power, generating the field that propelled the starship at speeds far in excess of light. Spot melded with the warp coils, tuning the frequency they emitted, enhancing the field output. He then followed the plasma stream back to the warp core and into the port nacelle in less than the blink of an eye, re-tuning that engine to match the first.

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On the bridge, Lt Commander Fry continued to relate the increasing speeds.

“Our speed just jumped! Warp 9... 9.5...”

Counselor Sutherland glanced over at Koester, then smiled slightly when she noticed the commodore’s crossed fingers as he stared at the main viewer.

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In main engineering, Lt Johnson monitored the warp core closely, his expression growing concerned as the central dylithium chamber and the closest surrounding constrictor coils began to glow a dull red.

“Dar, give me a level five diagnostic on the warp core,” Johnson ordered to one of his nearby engineers.

“Diagnostic indicates all systems functioning normally,” Dar reported a moment later. “Whatever it is, it must be this area of space - or whatever it is we’re in - that’s causing it.”

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“9.6... 9.7... 9.8... 9.9...”

The tension on the bridge was so thick it would have taken a phaser on power level eight to cut through it. Fry continued to count off the rising warp speed despite the fact no one could detect any movement visually even yet.

“Status?” Koester inquired over the thrumming noise of the engines.

“Shields are now down to fifteen percent, sir,” Lt Ga’gh, the chief tactical officer reported from his post.

“I’m seeing a small drop in the engine power ratio, sir,” responded Lt Kyle Sutherland from the engineering station on the other side of the bridge.

“9.95... 9.96... 9.97... 9.98...”

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Ensign Spot again rode the plasma stream into the port nacelle, having re-tuned the starboard to within a micron of the specifications calculated for transwarp. The Damirian was exhausted from his multiple trips against the plasma stream travelling between nacelles, but he understood this was a matter of life and death, not just for the rest of the crew but for himself as well. He knew if the ship were destroyed in this chaos as it was being called, his non-corporeal form would not survive any longer than the solid beings he worked among.

Spot melded with the stream in the center of the port nacelles warp coils, and re-tuned them again, bringing the engine efficiency up another notch, then moved back at the speed of light into the starboard nacelle one last time.

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“9.99... 9.995... 9.999...”

Koester jumped, startled, as the viewscreen suddenly flashed, turning black, red, blue, and every color wavelength known to the Federation all at once. Fry turned to look at his commanding officer, a look of amazement and disbelief covering his face.

“Warp 10, sir,” he said just above a whisper.

“Stand by to stop warp engines,” ordered Q. “Stand by on impulse.”

Before anyone could react, however, the entire ship shook violently. Crew members were tossed like rag dolls to the deck. Koester, Kane, and Sutherland held on to the arms of their chairs with all their strength to prevent being thrown forward. Consoles all around the bridge turned black and main lighting faded, replaced a moment later by the soft, dim light of the emergency backup systems.

“I’ve lost helm control,” Fry shouted, holding tightly to his now darkened console.

“We’ve lost the mains,” Kyle Sutherland reported as he picked himself up and returned to his own station.

“Engineering to bridge,” sounded the harried voice of Lt Johnson. “We just experienced an auto-shutdown of the warp core. Attempting to perform a warm start now.”

“Where are we?” Kane asked, standing and looking around for damage to the bridge systems while Counselor Kethry Sutherland examined the members of the crew who were tossed around for signs of serious injury.

“We’re still here,” commented Commodore Koester. “Which is a good sign... Wherever here is?”

Slowly, normal lighting returned to the bridge and consoles started, reinitializing for a moment before returning to their familiar control panels. Koester looked toward the main viewer with hope.

“Viewer on,” he ordered.

“Viewer on, aye, sir,” responded Commander Winters as he adjusted the shoulder strap of his ever-present tan satchel and then looked up expectantly at the dark screen.

Slowly, the image changed. Black. The deep black of space. Stars; yellow, red, and blue shone brightly around them. And not too far a distance away, perhaps only one hundred thousand kilometers away, the unmistakable shape of a Federation starbase glistened in the starlight. The most beautiful sight many on the bridge had ever seen.

“Well done Mister Johnson, Mister Spot. Well done everyone,” Koester said through a beaming smile.

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Captain's log, stardate 52588.1:

USS Dauntless has moored at Starbase 177 – which is five sectors away from where we started our adventure this morning – for repairs following our little ordeal. I've authorized the crew shore leave for 96 hours, to commence as soon as I finish conducting a ceremony in the 10-Forward Lounge.

I've informed Starfleet Command of our failed attempt to open a dialogue with the newly encountered alien race, and my recommendation that any further attempts be conducted via subspace radio.

Both Lieutenant Johnson and Commander Bloom have studied the sensor logs as well as the diagnostic data on our warp nacelles, and they both assure me that any attempt to repeat our transwarp experiment would blow the warp engines apart, and probably the rest of the ship as well, which means we cannot use this method for further exploration beyond our galaxy. But that's alright. I've been to the end of the universe and back. It holds no interest for me. I find our own local galaxy to be much more interesting.

Koester, commanding Dauntless, out.

Toasts were raised in 10-Forward as Commodore Koester read from the padd he held and Bloom, Q, Johnson, and Spot, all in dress uniform except for Spot for obvious reasons, stood at attention near the large forward facing windows.

“The commander *USS Dauntless* commends you for services set forth in the following citation; For commendable service and outstanding devotion to duty during the events of stardate 52587.9, I hereby award Commander Jeffrey Bloom; Commander Lotus Q, MD; Lieutenant Nathaniel Johnson; and Ensign ‘Spot’ the Starfleet Legion of Merit for their direct contributions, above and beyond the call of duty, to the return of the starship *USS Dauntless NCC-75310* safely to Federation space. Signed, Koester, Peter J., Fleet Captain, Commanding Officer, *USS Dauntless NCC-75310*.” The commodore looked toward his four officers, upon whom Commander Virgil Kane, again wearing his trademark Bajoran earring, was pinning their new medals. “My sincerest thanks, and those of all the crew, to all four of you.”

The lounge erupted into applause as the crowd moved closer to offer congratulations to the awardees. Koester, the spotlight off of himself for one of the few times in his years of command, smiled and collapsed into the nearest chair, sighed a contented sigh of relief, and for the first time in days, actually relaxed.

The End