

Dr Rasa Palin leaned over the operating table in sickbay, his occasional grunts and murmurs as he worked not sounding in any way good. In the corner of sickbay near the door, Ship's Counselor Tanzania Gera stood, her arms wrapped protectively around a very worried looking Gem Koester.

"Is he going to make it?" Gem asked, looking up at the red-haired Trill counselor

"I don't know," Gera replied, biting her lip slightly.

"What will happen if he dies?" Gem said, a tear dripping down her cheek.

"Damn," the pair suddenly heard Dr Rasa curse. Gem gripped Gera's hand tightly as Rasa turned around slowly, his face a frown. He walked over to Gem and placed an object that had been on the exam bed into the teenage girl's hands.

"I'm sorry," Dr Rasa said. "He's dead, Gem."

Gem looked down into the bowl she now held, where a goldfish floated belly-up.

"I'm sorry, Gem," Counselor Gera said, patting the girl on her shoulder as she continued to stare at the dead fish.

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On the bridge of the *USS Dauntless*, watch section turnover was occurring.

"On course 121 mark 9, ahead warp 5," reported Lt Commander Thomas Lynn, the Gamma Shift Officer of the Deck to his relief, Captain Peter Koester. "On present course and speed we will reach sector 001 in two days, three hours and..."

"...Forty two minutes, sir," Lt(JG) Linda Rankin added from her position at the helm just as Lt Peck, the Bolian conn officer walked over to relieve her.

"Thank you, Lieutenant," Lynn replied before continuing his turnover. "Engineering reported a vibration in the port EPS network that they're still looking into."

"What was that shake I felt around 0300?" the captain asked.

"One of the RCS thrusters misfired during a course adjustment," Lynn replied, looking somewhat peeved. "Engineering assures me it was simply a program glitch which they are in the process of correcting. Other than that, it was a quiet watch, sir. Just how I like 'em."

"Very well," Captain Koester said with a nod and a smile. "I relieve you."

"I stand relieved," Lynn replied and with a nod headed toward the turbolift.

"Well, Phillip, I hope our watch is as easy as Delta's," Koester said to his Chief of Operations as Winters took his post at the ops console.

"We're on a straight run toward Earth, Captain," Winters replied in his refined English accent. "What could go wrong?"

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Dauntless*!

Star Trek: Dauntless

"Disaster" By PJK

"I'm sorry, Gem," Captain Koester was saying to his daughter, whose face appeared on the desk-top monitor in his ready room. "I told you that you needed to take better care of your fish."

"Can I get another one?" Gem asked, hopeful.

"We'll see, Sweetie. It's going to be a while before we stop anyplace where we can get a fish," the captain replied.

"I thought we were heading back to Earth?" Gem asked.

"We're not stopping long enough..."

"Captain to the bridge," said the voice of Commander K'danz.

"We'll finish this discussion later," Koester told his daughter as he quickly clicked off the monitor and rushed out onto the bridge.

“Report,” Koester asked.

K’danz, who was on her feet near the engineering console, looked over at Koester with a worried expression.

“We’ve got a strange reading on the port EPS taps on deck ten. Dar has already gone down to take a look at it, but from up here it looks like some sort of overload building up.”

Without another word, Koester turned to Lt Peck and ordered, “Conn, take us out of warp. Ahead one-half impulse power.”

“Ahead, one-half impulse, aye,” the Bolian helmsman responded.

“Dar to K’danz,” said the voice of the half-Klingon Chief Engineer over the intercom. K’danz pressed the intercom on the engineering console.

“Go ahead, Dar.”

“K’danz, I’m having some problems down here, deck ten, section twenty eight. I need some help.”

K’danz looked at her captain, saying, “You have the bridge?”

Koester looked confused that his first officer would rush to help the chief engineer instead of one of Dar’s own staff, but he simply nodded as K’danz rushed into the turbolift.

“Mister Winters, man the engineering station,” Koester ordered as he took his place in the center seat. As his Chief of Operations, ever-present satchel hanging from his shoulder as always, left the ops console and took a position at what was normally Dar’s post during the Alpha Shift, the captain added, “Keep me posted on what’s going on down on deck ten.”

For the next few tension filled minutes, Winters made periodic reports on the status of the potential EPS overload. It looked like things were going well, especially when Dar contacted the bridge almost half an hour after his initial emergency report.

“Dar to bridge. We’ve pretty much got this power fluctuation locked down,” he reported. “It shouldn’t be more than a few more minutes.”

“EPS systems are reading normal, all decks, all sections,” Winters added as he monitored the engineering readouts.

“Very well,” Koester replied. “Mister Peck, take us to war...”

“Bloody hell!” Winters suddenly shouted, drawing the attention of everyone on the bridge.

“Phillip?” Captain Koester asked.

“I’m reading a sudden massive power buildup on decks ten and eleven, sections twenty seven through twenty nine! Dar, get your people out of there!” Winters exclaimed.

Before anyone could react, a loud explosion rocked the starship. The bridge went dark for several seconds before the emergency lights came on, bathing the bridge in dim, blue light. Somewhere in the darkness someone muttered, “Oh God.”

“Damage report?” Koester ordered.

It took a moment for the consoles around the bridge to re-boot.

“Just a moment, Captain. I’m trying to get readings now,” Winters said, his face a barely visible mask of worry in the near darkness, as if he instinctively knew nothing like this could happen and was happening anyway. “Main power is down throughout the ship. Backup power has kicked in except on decks ten, eleven, twelve, fifteen and twenty one. Sickbay is reporting several casualties, mostly burns and contusions.”

“Where did that explosion originate?” the captain asked, hoping it was something other than what he believed that had happened.

“Deck eleven, section twenty eight,” Lt T’Pan, the Vulcan officer at sciences responded. “The explosion has apparently encompassed sections twenty seven through twenty nine on decks ten, eleven and twelve.”

“Damn,” Koester whispered before forcefully tapping at his combadge. “Bridge to Commander K’danz.” The captain waited a few seconds, then added, “Bridge to Lt Commander Dar, please respond.” Still nothing. “Bridge to deck ten engineering crew! Carrie? Anyone? Respond!”

Captain Koester sighed before turning toward T’Pan.

“Any life signs?”

“Negative, Captain,” the Vulcan woman replied. “I now have external visual.”

The main viewer, which since the explosion and power loss had remained blank, lit up with the static-distorted image of the exterior of the *Dauntless*’ main saucer hull. The image, which evidently originated from a visual pickup atop the bridge module structure, showed a large, ragged tear along the outer edge of the hull where a large section of the ship had been blown open. The image then changed to another angle closer to the devastation, showing rooms and corridors within the hull open to the vacuum of space. The captain was not sure, but thought he could see a body trapped amid the tangled wreckage.

“Shut it off,” Koester ordered, trying to figure out how something so catastrophic could have happened. His next step was to determine how badly hurt his starship actually was, what repairs could be made, and whether they could move the ship to the nearest shipyard for permanent repairs under her own power. His musings were quickly interrupted.

“Warning!” the main computer voice sudden called out. “Damage to EPS network. Damage to warp plasma conduits. Warp core breach imminent.”

“Wonderful,” the captain muttered.

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Captain’s log, stardate 59477.2:

The Dauntless has been disabled by an explosion in our electroplasma system taps on deck eleven which destroyed a large section of the ship’s main saucer hull, apparently killing my first officer, chief engineer and a thus-far unknown number of engineers. Now on top of that, the initial explosion has damaged conduits leading to the ship’s warp drive, causing an overload that will breach the core in mere minutes if we can’t find a way to stop it.

Koester, commanding Dauntless, out.

“What are our options?” Koester asked the crew on the bridge around him. In the minutes that followed the initial explosion, the bridge crew had determined all intraship communications were down, turbolifts were non-functional, and most of the doors on the upper decks, including access to the jefferies tubes, were all inoperative, effectively cutting off access from the bridge to the entire rest of the ship and quite possibly each deck from any other as well.

“We can hope someone in main engineering, if there is anyone still alive down there, sees what is happening to the warp core and shuts down the system,” Phillip Winters, who was leaning against the engineering station, suggested.

“That’s a big if, and I really don’t think we can afford to wait,” Koester said.

“Standard procedure in an instance like this would be to shut down all primary and backup systems, vent the plasma conduits to space, and restart all systems from the protected files in the archive,” T’Pan remarked.

“Is that something we can accomplish from the bridge, in our current condition?” the captain asked, hopeful.

“It is,” T’Pan confirmed.

“There’s one problem what that suggestion, Captain,” Winters interrupted.

Koester looked toward Winters as if the Chief of Ops had just cancelled his birthday party, finally asking, “What kind of problem, Phillip?”

“Well, primarily, the sequence is very specific. If it is not done properly, in the proper order, within a limited amount of time, it will cause the magnetic bottles to shut down along with everything else, and a breach in the warp core would be the least of our problems.”

“Can we do it?” Koester asked, looking back at T’Pan.

“We can... But like Mister Winters said, it is a delicate procedure,” the science officer replied. “One that would normally be handled with a higher degree of safety in main engineering.”

“Do we have any other options?” the captain asked just as the computer voice sounded again.

“Warning! Warp core breach in five minutes.”

Captain April Mendez, the Marine tactical officer who had been standing quietly at her post to this point, finally piped in.

“Can we just dump the warp core?”

“That would solve the possibility of the breach, but we still have magnetic bottles full of anti-matter that, unless we can safely dump them first, are just as likely to blow us to subatomic particles,” said Winters, a look of intense displeasure on his face. “And I don’t believe we can safely do that from up here.”

“We don’t have much of a choice, do we?” Koester commented, looking around at his bridge crew. “I wish Carrie were here right now, I sure could use her advice.” The captain looked for a moment like he would shed a tear at the loss of his dear friend before he quickly regained his composure. “Mister Winters, work with Lieutenant T’Pan. Shut us down. Do it quick, but carefully. By the book to the letter!”

Both Winters and T'Pan nodded and the Vulcan woman joined the Englishman behind the engineering console.

"We're going to need everyone's help for this," T'Pan said, prompting the entire bridge crew to man the various stations that would need to be accessed for the shutdown procedure. Chief of the Boat Piotr Zubatka moved from his usual position at mission ops to the next console, engineering user. Mendez remained at tactical while Peck moved over to Winters position at ops and Captain Koester himself manned the science console. Once each station was manned and ready, each member of the bridge crew looked over toward Winters.

"Starting with sciences, then tactical, operations, engineering user and finally the main engineering console, on my marks initiate the program shutdown," Winters said. "If everything goes correctly, we will lose all lighting, including emergency lighting, as the reserve power is diverted to the magnetic bottles. It will then take a few seconds for the system to access the protected archives and reboot." Winters made eye contact with everyone around him on the bridge. "Are we all ready?"

Koester, Mendez, Peck, Zubatka and T'Pan all verbally acknowledged Winters' directions. Winters nodded once more and then counted down, "Five... four... three... two... one... Mark!"

Everyone on the bridge pressed their respective shutdown controls in their assigned order. One by one the consoles started to go dark until finally it came to T'Pan and Winters' turn. To the Chief of Operations surprise, instead of all the systems shutting down and the bridge going completely dark, the lighting around the bridge returned to normal full brightness. The viewscreen quickly blinked to life, showing an immense starfield through which the *Dauntless* slowly moved at impulse speed.

"What the hell is going on?" Captain Koester demanded to know, seeing the looks of confusion on both Winters and, surprisingly, T'Pan's faces.

"Congratulations, Skipper," said Commander K'danz as both she and Dar stepped out of the nearby turbolift. Koester's jaw dropped for a second as his two 'deceased' officers walked over to stand near the command chair.

"What the...? How...? Where did...?" Koester stammered, still not sure he was not dead or dreaming.

"You did a remarkable job, all of you," Dar added, both he and his wife still seemingly oblivious to the reactions of the bridge crew around them. "You returned all systems to normal in near record time." Finally, Koester managed to find his voice.

"You died!" he exclaimed. "There was an explosion on the deck where you were both working and there were no survivors! We saw the area of the hull that was destroyed on the viewer! You're dead!"

K'danz and Dar exchanged looks before both broke out in laughter and the first officer handed her captain a padd she had been holding. Koester, still a look of disbelief on his face, began to read the padd, his expression changing to one of outrage.

"I'll kill her! She may be an admiral, but I'll still kill her!" the captain said, prompting more laughter from K'danz and Dar.

"What does it say, Captain?" Lt Peck asked, curiosity finally overcoming the Bolian's growing confusion. Koester started reading from the padd's display.

To: Commander K'danz, Executive Officer, USS Dauntless NCC-75310.

From: Admiral Kathryn Janeway, Starfleet Command.

You are hereby authorized to conduct a disaster drill on your vessel's bridge crews to evaluate crew reaction, readiness and level of training. The drill should be one of your own design that involves a life or death scenario where the loss of your vessel could be a very likely possibility. You are authorized to include your vessel's Chief Engineer in the planning and execution of the drill. No other member of your crew should be involved in the planning or execution of this drill and it should be kept secret at all cost until the drill is performed.

If possible, try your best to conduct one of these drill simulations on your Commanding Officer and report the results directly to me. I would like to know how he reacts.

"It was all a drill?" Lt Commander Winters asked, suddenly looking relieved, like events were once again making sense to him.

“I’m going to kill Kate, and then I’m going to keel-haul the both of you,” Koester reiterated to his first officer and chief engineer, both of whom could not restrain their still broad smiles. “Where have you been all this time?”

“We organized everything through main engineering. Simulated the EPS readings and ran a holographic simulation through the viewscreen to simulate the view of the explosion damage.”

“How did you cause the ship to shudder to simulate the explosion?” T’Pan asked. “You could not have shaken the bridge without moving the rest of the vessel.”

“That was easy,” said Dar. “Just like Commander Lynn told you, we fired off the reaction control system thrusters independent of the helm, a couple of quick bursts in all directions. Shook us all up pretty well. You should have seen Mister Lynn’s face when we ran the simulation against Delta Shift.”

“And we’ve been using the RCS program glitch story to cover whenever a member of the crew asks what is happening. You wouldn’t believe the number of calls we got down in engineering asking why the RCS system keeps firing off,” K’danz added.

The captain walked back over to his command chair, a look of murder still on his face as he said, “I swear, I don’t know whether to be happy you’re not dead or want to kill you! From now on, I don’t care who you get the orders from, all drill approval goes through the captain!”

The smiles finally faded from K’danz and Dar’s faces.

“Yes, Skipper,” K’danz replied dejectedly.

As he sat in the center seat, Koester glared at his first officer for a few seconds more before his scowl slowly turned into a grin.

“So, do I get to run this drill on Commander Fry?”

The End