

*Previously in Star Trek: Dauntless;*

*When the starship Dauntless responds to a distress call from the space station Adelpia-One, in orbit of the neutral planet Adelpious III, the crew find the former Starfleet facility is still using dangerous pergium/durellium reactors to power the station, experimental reactors that should have been replaced when the station was turned over to the Adelfans.*

*While in the process of removing the dangerous reactors, which are contaminated with chroniton and isolytic radiation, and replacing them with fusion reactors from the Dauntless' impulse systems, a power spike causes the century-old reactors to explode, destroying half the station, disabling the Dauntless and tearing a rip in the fabric of subspace which will eventually grow to envelope half the solar system, including the planet Adelpious III and it's seven billion inhabitants.*

*Meanwhile, the thirty members of the Dauntless crew, including Captain Koester, Commander K'danz and Lt Commander Dar, who had worked furiously to remove the dangerous reactors when they overloaded, wake to find themselves still aboard the same space station but more than a century in the past, under arrest as intruders by Starfleet security guards.*

*After convincing the station's commander, Lt Commander Barke, to contact Temporal Investigations, the Dauntless crew are recalled to Earth where Starfleet will decide whether to try and return them to their proper time or not, transported aboard the USS Enterprise, which has just completed its second five-year mission under the command of James T. Kirk.*

*En route back to Earth, Koester and his senior officers inform Kirk and his crew what occurred to bring them back in time without giving away too much information about the future. Commander Spock convinces Captain Kirk that in order to preserve history as the Dauntless crew know it, they must help Koester and his fellow castaways in time to steal a nearly completed starship, erase it from all record, and outfit it to carry thirty people back a century to the future.*

*One hundred and six years later, the derelict starship Independence is discovered by the starship Dauntless, which transports the doubles of their own crew back to Earth and into the protective custody of the Office of Temporal Investigations.*

*And now the conclusion...*

The Temporal Investigations crew slowly maneuvered the Miranda-class starship *Independence* into a slip at the very far side of Spacedock. As the power and support umbilicals were connected to the century-old starship, down on deck seven, the thirty members of the *Dauntless* crew who had traveled aboard the vessel were being debriefed by Agents Lucsly and Dulmer and their immediate supervisor, a senior member of the Department of Temporal Investigation who went by the name of Monaghan.

"Welcome back, Captain," Supervisor Monaghan said to Koester as he entered the recreation room aboard the *Independence*. "We've been waiting for you for a very long time."

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Dauntless*!

Star Trek: Dauntless

"Paradox - Part 4" By PJK

Shortly after the *Independence* was secured in Spacedock, the thirty members of its crew were moved in the middle of the night by transport shuttle planetside to a nondescript building in the heart of Kansas. The building itself looked like one of many warehouses in the small town of Claflin, deliberately to not draw any attention to itself. It was out of this so-called warehouse and the facility that had been built deep underneath it almost two centuries before that much of the actual work of the Department of Temporal Investigations, one of the Federation's seemingly most secretive organizations, worked. Once the transport touched down inside the entrance of the warehouse, the doors of which quickly closed to hide the ship from any potential prying eyes, the *Independence* crew were moved to nearby turbolifts and taken down to comfortable though spartan dormitory, where they were each assigned rooms and given basic instructions on what they could do and where they could and could not go within the facility.

Then, after more than two days of practically being ignored, the TI agents almost literally descended on Koester's crew like locusts, asking over and over how they had gotten aboard the *Independence*, how had they stolen a Federation starship right under Starfleet's nose, and what they intended to do back in the 24th century?

The interrogations were, if nothing else, frustrating for Captain Koester and his crew. No matter how hard they tried, no matter how much the TI agents pushed, they could remember nothing prior to their last mission aboard the *Dauntless*, when Commander K'danz had run a series of drills to test the crew's reactions during an emergency. In fact, it was the century old records kept by TI itself that proved to the crew they had even been in the past, spending a third of a year aboard the starship *Enterprise-1701*.

"Let's begin again," Supervisor Monaghan said to Captain Koester, his hands clasped on the top of the table between them. "What was your intention once you and your crew returned to the present time?"

Koester huffed a breath through his nose, replying, "For the twenty seventh time, I do not know! To the best of my recollection it was simply to get back home where we belong."

Monaghan glanced at a padd that sat on the table next to his hands, saying, "You have no recollection of a danger to your ship? To your daughter? It says so right here in the report the *Dauntless* prepared shortly after finding you aboard the *Independence*."

A look verging on fear crossed Koester's face momentarily before quickly disappearing.

"That was... a vague feeling. Nothing more. Perhaps even a side effect of the stasis you say I spent more than a century in."

"What do you know about *Station Epsilon-12*?"

"Where is that?" Koester asked in return. "I've never heard of it."

"That's very strange; considering you were very concerned it was going to blow up a century ago."

"And did it?"

"What were you doing during the time you spent aboard the *Enterprise*?"

"Well, I admit I'm acquainted with Jean-Luc Picard, but I have never been aboard the *Enterprise-E*."

"Not the *Enterprise-E*, Captain," Monaghan said, sounding as frustrated as Koester. "Kirk's *Enterprise*!"

Koester looked over at the supervisor and answered, "I have no idea."

Monaghan glanced once again at the padd, and then settled his eyes squarely on those of Captain Koester.

"Let's begin again," he said. "What was your intention once you and your crew returned to the present time?"

Koester rolled his eyes, huffed his breath once again, and ran through his whole story for the twenty eighth time.

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TI's debrief of Koester's crew lasted for weeks. Each day, five members of the crew were taken to separate rooms, which ranged anywhere from the reassuring comfort of a counselor's office to the spartan furnishings and bare walls of near-prison-like conditions, where they were grilled over and over for hours at a time as to why they had stolen the *Independence* and what they intended to do with it once they reached their own time. Beyond that, the crew was treated well, living in comfortable quarters with access to almost anything they needed except communications with the outside world and the ability to leave.

Beyond the interrogations once every six days, the only way many of the crew could even keep track of just how long they were being held in TI's custody, the crew were subjected to a number of tests, both physical and neurological, to try and determine just what might account for the crew's memory loss.

It was four months later, as the Temporal Investigations agents started interviewing the crew in pairs and trios and the frustration among the crew really started to grow, that a new method was employed.

“Captain Koester, would you please come with me?” Supervisor Monaghan asked. Koester shrugged toward his First Officer, who was playing a game of Tri-D chess with her husband, Dar, and joined Monaghan down the hall. They entered one of the interrogation rooms, in which sat another Temporal Investigations agent, this one a Vulcan man.

“This is Agent Spann. For the last several months he has been on assignment on the planet Gateway.” Koester reacted slightly as he recognized the name from several Starfleet reports as the location of an artifact called the Guardian of Forever. “Agent Spann has agreed to help us.”

“Help us what?” Koester asked, genuinely interested in what the supervisor had to say.

“Our test results indicate you and your crew may be under the effects of a mind meld which is blocking your memories of the events which took you to the past.”

“If you would permit me, Captain,” Agent Spann said, gesturing to the seat across the small table from him. Koester nodded slightly, then sat down. Immediately Spann leaned across the table, placing the fingers of his right hand on the five sensory points on the side of the captain’s face.

“My mind to your mind,” Spann recited, his eyes closed as he concentrated on the meld. “My thoughts to your thoughts.”

As Monaghan watched, Koester too closed his eyes, and the two men started speaking in unison, “Our minds, one. Our thoughts, one.” The room then became deathly silent, as whatever was occurring was doing so within the minds of the two men sitting at the small, bare table. Almost a minute later, Spann broke the meld and both men opened their eyes once more.

“You are correct, Supervisor,” Spann said, looking impassively at Monaghan. “There is a strong mental wall shielding a portion of Captain Koester’s mind.”

“Were you able to break through the wall?” Monaghan asked. “Do you remember anything new, Captain?”

“The mental shield is much too strong for a normal human to have accomplished,” Spann replied with a shake of his head. “This mental block was imposed, most probably with the captain’s permission, by someone who was well trained in the art of mind melding.”

“So there is no hope of recovering the shielded memories?” Monaghan asked, sounding defeated.

“There is hope,” Spann answered. “I will just need to study the captain and a number of his crew before I can breach the mental shield. The efforts are draining. This may take some time.”

“You have all the time you need,” the supervisor replied.

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*Personal log, stardate 59499.4:*

*Captain Peter J. Koester, recording.*

*Over the last couple of weeks, Agent Spann has been working with me and a number of my time-displaced crew, particularly the more senior officers like K’danz, Dar and Windsor, in an effort to unlock the memories we have stored in our brains. On some occasions I feel like I can remember some of the events that occurred to me, almost like remembering a dream shortly after waking up, and then quickly the memory fades once again.*

*The impressions that have stuck with me the longest is that of a cat with large yellow eyes watching me intently, and working with Dar and Windsor, though where or on what I cannot yet recall.*

*I’m hoping we can make some sort of breakthrough soon. I’m as frustrated by this situation as our hosts in Temporal Investigations have been.*

Once again, Koester sat across the small table from Spann, the Vulcan’s hand pressed against the side of the captain’s face, looks of intense concentration on both their faces. Agent Dulmer observed the meld, both to record anything that may be said during the session and to monitor the pair in case something went wrong and the meld might need to be physically broken. He was therefore surprised when Spann broke the meld, almost flinging both men back off their chairs.

“Are you alright?” Agent Dulmer asked as he helped Spann straighten up.

“Yes,” the Vulcan agent replied in a horse whisper. “I was almost through. I could sense images... feelings... I have a strong impression...”

“An impression of what?” Dulmer asked.

“I could hear a word, spoken over and over and over again,” Spann replied.

“A single word?”

“Yes. A nonsense word, actually. The word was... Rumpelstiltskin.”

“Rumpelstiltskin?” Dulmer asked. “That’s an old fairy tale name.”

What neither agent noticed was at the moment Spann had first said the name, Captain Koester reacted like he had been shocked with a mild electrical charge. Memories long buried came flooding back into him. Suddenly, he could remember everything that had happened since the moment the *Dauntless* had responded to the distress call from *Adelphia-One* to working with the crew of the *Enterprise* modifying the starship *Independence* to mind melding with Spock just before departing San Francisco Yards in order to prevent their knowledge of the future from becoming known when the *Independence* was found by the *Dauntless* to the knowledge of what he and his crew now had to do.

“How about you, Captain?” Dulmer finally asked Koester. “Do you remember anything new?”

Koester rubbed his temples as he said, “That was the most intense meld I have experienced so far. If they are going to continue to be like that I don’t know if I’m going to be able to withstand them. Felt like my brain was being torn apart. As for memories... All I have is impressions, like how you might remember a dream after waking up.” The captain hoped his lie was not as transparent, especially to the Vulcan Spann, as it felt.

“We’ll give you time to rest, Captain,” Dulmer replied as he gestured toward the door. A few moments later, Koester was back in the lounge with the rest of his crew while Spann and Dulmer left to report to Supervisor Monaghan the results of the latest mind meld attempt.

“Dar,” Koester said, trying not to look suspicious. As the half-Klingon Chief Engineer approached, the captain asked him, “What is the likelihood TI has us under surveillance in here?”

Dar looked around casually before replying, “I haven’t seen any indications of surveillance devices, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t any hidden ones.”

Koester too looked around, as if looking for a particular member of his crew, before finally saying, “I’ll have to take the chance.”

“Chance for what, Captain?”

Koester simply held up a finger to indicate Dar should wait a minute, then called out, “Can I have your attention please?” One by one, the crew all stood and looked at their commanding officer. Koester glanced around the room, seeing if there was any indication he and his crew were under any surveillance, if TI agents were going to suddenly burst into the room. When nothing happened after several seconds, he finally remarked, “I have only one thing to say to you all... Rumpelstiltskin.”

Suddenly the room was filled with groans as twenty nine people suddenly had their minds flooded with repressed memories.

“I remem...,” K’danz started to say until Koester held his finger up to his lips. He motioned for everyone to continue whatever it was they were doing, still half expecting a squad of Temporal Investigators to burst into the room at any second to drag members of his crew away and find out what they now knew. When no agents arrived within ten minutes, the captain started feeling a little more confident. He gathered the senior members of his crew together in the center of the room to discuss their next step.

“We must work quickly,” Koester said. “We can no longer hide what we know from Agent Spann. We must find a way out of this facility and back aboard the *Independence*.”

“What are our chances of breaking out of this facility?” K’danz asked.

“Slim to none, and Slim just left orbit,” Dar replied. “We’re in a secure underground facility that belongs to an organization most common people assume is a myth. We would be lucky to get one of our crew out. It would be impossible to get all thirty of us out, and a single person can’t pilot a starship by themselves, and we can’t complete this mission without the *Independence*.”

“So what do we do? We only have three weeks until the accident on *Adelphia-One*. We have to start heading toward the Adelphous system in the next few days or we’ll never make it on time, especially with a century old starship,” Koester commented.

“I have an idea,” K’danz said. She got up from the circle of officers and walked over to the recreation room door. To prevent the time-displaced crew from wandering too much around the TI facility it was rigged to only be opened from the outside, but shortly after pressing a chime next to the door, an agent soon arrived. K’danz requested to speak to the Supervisor, and a couple of minutes later Monaghan arrived, joining K’danz who had resumed her conversation with Koester and Dar.

“What can I do for you, Commander,” the Supervisor asked.

“The Skipper was just telling us about his latest session with Agent Spann, and something he said brought back some memories,” K’danz said. Koester’s face turned pale as he began to believe his First Officer was about to tell the TI supervisor their whole story, but Monaghan did not notice the captain’s reaction.

“You believe if you had another session with Agent Spann you might be able to remember more?” Monaghan asked hopefully.

“Not quite,” K’danz replied. “I think if we could go back aboard the *Independence*, it might help us remember.”

Monaghan looked dubious, as if trying to figure out what K’danz might be trying to pull, but if Temporal Investigations wanted to know what exactly had happened to the *Dauntless* crew and if there were any violations of time that had to be dealt with he would probably have to go along with K’danz’s suggestion.

“You need the entire crew to go back to the ship?” Monaghan asked.

“Well, I suppose it might work with one or two of us individually, but I thought you might have a better chance of finding out the information you’re looking for if we were all there,” K’danz bluffed. Koester smiled to himself, proud that his First Officer’s time spent with James Kirk had not been a waste of time. Monaghan thought about what K’danz had said, finally nodding his head slowly.

“Yes, I guess it makes sense. Why hadn’t I thought to try this earlier? We’ll do that then. Tomorrow morning, we’ll transport you all back up to the *Independence* and see if that triggers any of your memories.”

\* \* \* \*

The next morning, the thirty members of the *Dauntless* crew were escorted back up to the warehouse hanger where the transport sat. In a short time, they were back in orbit and closing on Spacedock. As the transport entered the orbiting structure and maneuvered around the slips where starships were being repaired or overhauled between missions, the *Independence* eventually came into view. It was the first time Koester and his crew had seen the vessel since they had left San Francisco Yards 106 years earlier, and what they saw surprised them all.

“I’m amazed we survived our journey back in that,” Koester commented as he glanced out the viewport at the pitted and scarred hull plates, a couple of the decks exposed to vacuum from the asteroid collision decades before.

Moments later, the transport touched down in the Miranda-class starship’s last remaining functional shuttlebay. As the doors closed and the bay pressurized, everyone emerged from the transport and headed into the corridor. It had been decided before leaving the TI facility that the crew would split up, with two agents escorting every five of Koester’s crew.

Agents Dulmer and Lucsly accompanied Koester, K’danz, Dar, Kelly and the Selay Ensign S’Shaathii to the bridge. The control room of the Miranda-class vessel looked much like any other bridge of its era, the only exception the thin layer of dust that coated everything except for the areas of the helm and engineering station that the TI agents had used when they maneuvered the *Independence* into the slip. Each of Koester’s crew spread around to the various bridge stations while the two TI agents moved toward the captain’s chair.

“Well, Captain? Are you remembering anything?” Dulmer asked.

Koester turned around, running his hand across the communications console he was standing in front of, eventually resting it on top of a small storage hatch.

“Yes,” Koester replied. “Yes, I’m remembering something.”

“What is it?” Lucsly asked, sounding encouraged.

“The location of the emergency weapons lockers,” Koester replied, turning toward the two TI agents with a 23rd century phaser in his hand, aimed straight at Lucsly’s chest. The two agents, taken completely by surprise, looked around to find phasers in all the *Dauntless* crew’s hands, all aimed at them. The captain stepped forward, removing the agent’s communications devices and padds, before tapping his combadge.

“Team one to all teams. Report?”

“Team two, engineering secure,” replied Windsor.

“Team three, shuttlebay and transport secure.”

“Team four, sickbay secure.”

“Team five, the gadget is secure.”

“Team six, main recreation room is secure. Ready for our guests.” Koester smiled at the final report, since it meant their plan had gone exactly as hoped and none of his crew had been lost.

Looking toward K’danz and S’Shaathii, the captain said, “Take our guests down to the main rec room with the rest of their agents.” As K’danz acknowledged the order and then gestured toward the turbolift for the two

prisoners to proceed her and the Selay engineer. Meanwhile Koester took a seat at the helm while Dar manned the engineering station, aided by Kelly.

"Bridge to engineering," Koester said as he opened an intercom circuit. "Bring the warp core on-line. Mister Dar, clear umbilicals. Thrusters at my command."

As Dar acknowledged the command, Lt Commander Windsor replied, "We're going to have to attempt a cold start, bridge. If we're successful, we'll have warp engines on-line within ten minutes. The good news is, you have impulse."

"Thanks, Amanda. Stand by." Koester looked over toward Dar and his assistant and said, "We're going to be setting off every alarm in Spacedock as soon as we start moving. Are you ready?"

"Let's do this," Dar responded. Koester smiled and then pressed the intercom once more.

"Attention all hands, this is the captain. We just need to wait for our opportunity, which is going to come any minute. Stand by. This ride could be a little rough."

Koester took a moment to say a prayer to whatever deity might be listening. As the seconds ticked by, a drop of sweat started dripping down the side of the captain's face. It seemed like it might be hours before anything would happen when a series of lights on the far side of Spacedock started flashing. It was the signal Koester had been waiting for. He quickly pressed a control on the helm. Thrusters around the hull pushed the *Independence* away from its slip, after which the impulse engines activated. Immediately, red alert klaxons sounded throughout Spacedock.

"We can make it as long as we can get through the spacedoors, as long as they don't shut them again," the captain commented.

As Koester watched the viewscreen, a Nova-class starship moved through the spacedoors into the dock. It seemed to take forever for the small starship to pass through the doors, finally clearing the way for the *Independence* to escape.

"Going to full impulse. Everybody hang on!" Koester exclaimed.

The captain shoved the impulse control all the way forward, sending the starship quickly forward. It appeared that the spacedoors were already starting to close. Koester crossed his fingers and maintained his course.

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"He's not stopping!" the commander in the spacedoor control booth high over the docking slips shouted to the lieutenant who manned the control console.

"The doors are already closing," the lieutenant commented. "What do we do?"

"Is the *North Carolina* clear?" the commander asked.

"Yes, Commander."

The booth commander hesitated a moment, then finally ordered, "Open 'em up! Let that ship go. Starfleet can handle chasing them down, but if we wreck the doors, Spacedock will be out of commission for months, perhaps years."

"Aye, sir," the lieutenant replied. "Opening spacedoors."

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"The doors have stopped closing," Lt Kelly reported from the science console, where he had moved when it looked like the doors would shut before the rapidly approaching starship. "They're re-opening!"

Captain Koester smiled slightly to himself, pleased that he had wagered correctly that the crew of spacedock would rather let his stolen starship go than risk major damage to one of Starfleet's largest facilities. The *Independence* sailed through the spacedoors unmolested and into the vacuum beyond.

"What are we going to do to keep from being intercepted, Captain?" Dar asked as Koester turned the vessel away from Earth.

"I have a plan," Koester replied, then looked at Dar with a wry grin. "I only hope it works."

Almost immediately upon breaking Earth orbit, Koester took the *Independence* into warp. The starship remained on course until just beyond the orbit of Mars, at which point the captain changed course almost 180 degrees, passing close to Earth's orbit before dropping out of warp to slingshot around Venus and head, jumping back into warp, back toward the outer solar system. The whole course out of the solar system, which encompassed another half dozen major course changes, took almost ninety minutes to complete before the *Independence* finally moved beyond the system, but the result was that most of the Starfleet vessels that had been dispatched to intercept Koester and his crew wound up chasing each other, never once cornering the *Independence*.

“Report?” Koester asked as the vessel passed the orbit of the outermost planets.  
“Short range sensors detect no further signs of pursuit,” Kelly replied. “We’re clear of the solar system.”  
“Very good,” the captain said with a smile. “Setting course for the Adelphous system, maximum warp!”

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*Captain’s log, stardate 59556.5:*

*We are rapidly approaching the Adelphous system, where we hope to reach the Dauntless before the rift the explosion of the space station’s reactors causes envelopes the ship and the planet Adelphous III.*

*Koester, commanding Daunt... Commanding Independence, out.*

“Skipper, I’m detecting a starship coming up fast from behind,” K’danz reported from the science station.

Koester, who had been taking with Lt Commander Windsor, the officer currently manning the helm, looked over at his First Officer and ordered, “On screen.”

The viewscreen blinked to the image of a large starship traveling at high warp speed behind the *Independence* and rapidly closing. It took a moment for Koester to realize why the ship looked strange until he realized it was a modified Galaxy-class starship with three warp nacelles, the only so-called battleship in Starfleet, the *USS Sarek*.

“We’re being hailed, Skipper,” K’danz added.

Koester sighed under his breath before finally repeating, “On screen.”

A second later the image on the viewscreen changed to the view of the bridge of the starship *Sarek*. In the center seat, placed high on a set of steps within the horseshoe of the tactical station behind which a tall Capellan warrior in a blue feathered sash stood, sat a Centauri man sporting a grey-flecked mustache and trim, pointed beard on his chin. To the man’s right stood a woman in a blue-necked uniform who looked as surprised as Koester felt.

“*Independence*, this is the starship *Sarek*. Come to a complete stop and prepare to be boarded.”

“Good to see you again, Fleet Captain Kale,” Koester said with a disarming smile. “You too, Kethry.”

“Captain Koester?!” Kale responded, not expecting to see a familiar face in the *Independence*’s center seat. “What are you doing? Why have you hijacked that starship from Spacedock?”

“Fleet Captain, it’s a long and complicated story, which we really do not have the time for. All I can say is we’re trying to reach the *Dauntless* in the Adelphous star system and attempt to save over seven billion lives. So either give us a hand or get out of our way!”

Kale looked back across the viewer with a grim, determined look.

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On the bridge of the *USS Dauntless*, Ship’s Counselor Gera, her fire-red hair hanging loosely around her shoulders, stepped over to the command chair where Commander Kevin Fry currently sat.

“What’s happening over on the station?” the Counselor asked, taking her usual place in the seat to the command chair’s left.

“The engineering teams reported successfully installing the two fusion reactors and shutting down two of the stations original cores. They should hopefully be done within another ten hours. Which won’t be soon enough, considering I’ve had the watch for the last ten hours.”

“Lieutenant Kelly to *Dauntless*.”

Fry and Gera watched as Lt Robert Lockley, the Delta shift ops officer, responded to the call.

“*Dauntless*, go ahead,” Lockley replied in his rich British accent.

“*Dauntless*, Engineering Team Three has successfully shut down reactor three.”

Lt Commander Alan High, who was likewise pulling a double shift as one of the few engineers still aboard the starship, clicked on his console’s communications channel and with a smile responded, “We copy you, Engineering Team Three. Good work.”

High was about to pass the report on to Fry, the Officer of the Deck, as was normal procedure when Kelly’s call was interrupted.

“Engineering Team Four to *Dauntless*, emergen...”

The comm channel went dead. Fry quickly stood and asked, “What happened?”

"I don't know, Commander," reported Lockley. "I've lost..."

"Kevin, I'm picking up a massive energy buildup aboard *Adelphia-One*!"

"Bridge to transporter room one," shouted Fry. "Lock on to all the engineering teams! Beam them aboard now!"

The transporter chief's frantic voice replied through the intercom circuit, "I'm trying my best, sir, but there's too much radiation interference to maintain a lock!"

"Isolytic radiation is peaking!" High exclaimed. "We have to get out of here! Now!"

"Helm, move us away from the station," Fry ordered just as a bright flash overloaded the viewscreen. Before anyone could react, the starship was knocked on its side. Sparks flew from almost every console on the bridge as the crew were all knocked to the deck. Every light went out and the alert klaxon sounded briefly before quickly cutting off in an almost sickening gurgle.

"Is everyone alright?" Fry finally asked as everything grew quiet. From around the bridge came slow, confused acknowledgements. Then the lights returned as the starship's systems rebooted and one by one the bridge consoles returned to life. However, it was the image on the main viewer that captured everyone's attention.

"My God," whispered Lt Lockley.

On the screen, what remained of the space station *Adelphia-One* tumbled in space. Half the station had apparently vaporized.

"Life signs?" Fry asked, holding out some hope.

"Sensors are reading fourteen life-signs," Jorruss reported, looking up at Fry with a disappointed expression. "All of them are Adelfan. And Commander... The entire station's power core... It's gone. No survivors."

"We've got bigger problems!" added Lt Commander High. "The reactor explosion has opened a subspace tear." High pressed a control and the screen image changed to a view of a rip in the fabric of space. "The tear is growing larger. At its current rate, it will destroy this solar system within six hours. And to make matters worse, our warp drive is down and with two fusion reactors missing, we're down to only one-third impulse. We can't outrun the tear, and neither can Adelpous III."

"What do we do?" Gera asked.

"There's not much we can do," High remarked. "According to these readings, that rift will envelop us in seven minutes. The planet in less than half an hour. And there are no starships close enough to help us. Nearest Federation forces are at least two days distant."

"Well I'm not ready to give up just yet," Fry growled. "Do what you can to restore the warp drive."

"I'll try, but as I'm sure you're aware, I'm a little shorthanded down in engineering."

Fry turned to look directly at High and nodded, saying quietly, "Just do your best, Alan."

The *Dauntless* struggled to remain ahead of the rapidly expanding subspace rift, which several minutes later enveloped the smallest of Adelpous' three moons. The natural satellite disappeared into the tear like a ball falling off the edge of a table. With the sudden loss of the nearby gravity source, the *Dauntless* increased speed slightly, remaining ahead of the rift, but it was a pointless race, the tear growing faster than the damaged starship could evade.

"Three minutes until the rift envelops us," Jorruss reported, his bald head covered with perspiration. Commander Fry looked over once again at Lt Commander High, who only glanced up and shook his head.

"Commander!" Major Sean McIntyre exclaimed from his post at tactical. "Proximity alarm indicates two vessels incoming at high warp!"

A hint of hope appeared on Fry's face as the starship *Sarek* dropped out of warp only five hundred meters off the *Dauntless*' bow. That emotion changed to one of disbelief as he recognized the second starship as it too dropped out of warp and moved quickly past the other two starships.

"That was the *Independence*!" McIntyre said, as if anyone on the bridge needed an explanation.

"Commander, we're being hailed!" reported Lockley.

"On speakers."

"*Independence* to *Dauntless*, are your transport systems functioning?" asked the voice of Captain Peter J. Koester. Fry's mouth gaped open, speechless. "*Independence* to *Dauntless*, are you copying us?" It took a moment for Fry to come to his senses.

"Captain? How did...? You were killed! How did you get aboard the *Independence*?"

"The time for questions will come later, assuming we all survive this, Kevin," Koester replied. "Are your transporters working?"

Fry looked over at Lockley, who consulted his ops console before nodding and responding, "Transporters are still operational... so far."

“Yes, Captain,” Fry reported. “We have transporters.”

“Very good. This is going to get dicey, so pay attention. There are forty two of us aboard the *Independence*. Lock onto all life signs and stand by to transport on my mark. Timing is everything!”

The *Dauntless* crew immediately sprang to action, manning every transporter aboard the starship, including the two man unit aboard the runabout *Merrimack* in the main shuttlebay.

“One minute until the rift envelops us,” Jorruss reported.

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“Status, Dar?” Koester asked over the intercom.

Down in main engineering aboard the *Independence*, Dar was reviewing all the indicators attached to the makeshift isolytic device which in turn was attached to the resin storage chamber near the linear warp core, what the crew had been referring to as ‘the gadgit.’

“We’re as ready as we’re going to be, Captain,” the half-Klingon engineer reported. “The idea of keeping the warp drive humming at bare minimum for a century has provided more than enough trilitium resin than we’ll need for our purposes. The storage tank is almost overflowing. Much more and there would have been no way this could have been hidden from the TI inspectors.”

“Very good,” the captain replied. “Time to get out of here. Head for the outer areas of the ship so the *Dauntless* can lock onto you easier.”

“We’re on our way,” Dar replied, then turned to the six other engineers who manned the space. “You heard the captain! Let’s get out of here!”

\* \* \* \*

On the bridge of the *Independence*, Captain Koester was the only person remaining.

“Computer, link my communicator directly with the gadgit in engineering.” A moment later, the computer beeped acknowledgement. Koester then touched the communications panel on the command seat and said, “*Dauntless*, stand by to energize.”

“Standing by, Captain,” Fry replied.

Koester nodded, even though no one was around to witness the gesture. He then stepped over to the helm console and pulled back on the control. Immediately, the Miranda-class vessel reacted, slowing, and then finally stopping.”

\* \* \* \*

“Commander, the *Independence* has stopped energizers. Their momentum is slowing,” Jorruss reported.

“They’re dead in space,” Lockley added.

“Captain, is everything alright?” Fry asked, worry returning.

“No time to explain. Beam us aboard, now!”

Fry’s tone turned completely serious as he quickly opened the intercom.

“Bridge to all transporters. Energize!”

Moments after the order had been given, the heavily armed and powerful warship *USS Sarek* locked a tractor beam on the *Dauntless* and started towing it away from where the rift continued to expand.

“The *Independence* is meters away from the event horizon,” Jorruss reported as the bridge crew watched the century-old starship on the main viewscreen, barely visible against the overpowering brightness of the rift. Seconds later, Captain Koester, K’danz and Dar rushed out of the turbolift, the captain stopping at the arm of Kevin Fry.

“Report when the *Independence* has crossed the event horizon,” Koester said to Jorruss, ignoring the looks of the crew around him.

“The vessel will cross the horizon in 5... 4... 3... 2...”

Koester quickly tapped his combadge, practically shouting, “Computer, detonate the gadgit!”

All eyes watched the rapidly disappearing starship on the viewer. For what seemed an eternity it appeared like nothing was going to occur. Koester and Dar exchanged looks while K’danz said, “The *Sarek* can tow us out of here at warp, but what about Adelphous? Seven billion people are going to die!”

Suddenly, the viewer went black as the image overloaded the screen. Captain Koester barely had time to shout, "Brace for impact!" before the subspace shockwave struck, knocking both the *Dauntless* and *Sarek* on their sides. If not for the tractor beam that still connected and separated the two vessels, they surely would have collided.

Once the shockwave had passed, Koester looked toward his Chief Science Officer. "Status?" he asked.

The Deltan activated the starship's sensors, reporting, "Scanning with short-range sensors, sir."

"Put it on the main viewscreen," the captain ordered, and a moment later the viewer showed the image of space around the *Dauntless*.

Far in the distance, like a serene island in the ocean of deep space, the planet Adelphous III appeared. However, neither the smallest, most distant moon nor any remains of the space station *Adelphia-One* were visible. Neither, miraculously, was the subspace rift the station reactors had torn open.

"It's sealed!" Jorruss said, sounding amazed. "The rift is completely gone! Whatever you did, Captain, it worked!"

Koester breathed deeply, for the first time in months, perhaps since as far back as the day the *Dauntless* first encountered the starship *Independence* almost a year ago from his own prospective, he actually started to relax. Wordlessly, he collapsed into the first officer's seat next to Fry, smiling up at K'danz when she placed her hand on the captain's shoulder, squeezing it reassuringly.

\* \* \* \*

*Captain's log, stardate 59556.9:*

*Our mission complete, we have managed to save the Adelphous system and its seven billion inhabitants with the loss of only the space station Adelphia-One and the uninhabited class-D moon Adelphous III-C. The only adverse result of the accident is the strange weather patterns the loss of the moon has created on the planet, which both scientists on the planet and our own computer simulations say should correct themselves within six months to a year.*

*Once back aboard the Dauntless, I authorized a week of shore leave on Adelphous for the entire crew, mainly to give those that had been aboard the Independence with me time to rest, relax and recuperate from recent events. During that time, Fleet Captain Kale's engineering crew helped repair our warp drive and replace the fusion reactors from our impulse systems that were lost aboard Adelphia-One.*

*We are now en route back to Earth where I will be facing an inquiry by both Starfleet Command and the Office of Temporal Investigations.*

*Koester, commanding Dauntless, out.*

Commander K'danz stood beside Chief Blackman at the console in transporter room number one.

"The Captain has signaled he's ready," the chief reported.

"Very well," K'danz replied. "Energize."

The transporter systems hummed to life and seconds later Captain Peter Koester materialized on the platform.

"How did it go, Skipper?" K'danz asked after the captain greeted Chief Blackman and then both he and his First Officer walked out of the transporter room.

"Well, I'm still commanding officer of the *Dauntless*," Koester said with a wry grin. "For now... Both Starfleet Command and TI agree that in spite of some... irregularities... we never actually broke the Temporal Prime Directive. In fact, I think saving the population of an entire planet helped our case a great deal. But I think TI is going to be keeping an eye on us from now on. Supervisor Monaghan compared me to Captain James T. Kirk."

"A compliment if ever I heard one, Skipper. Anything else?"

"Well, we've given Starfleet R&D a new weapon idea to perfect. Their representative at the debriefing seemed very interested in the results of our isolytic-trilithium device and believes within a few months they can have torpedoes armed with such a warhead to counteract the use of any isolytic weapons in the future. They want us to stick around until we can test them."

"Wonderful," K'danz said unenthusiastically as the two officers entered the nearest turbolift.

"Bridge. What else has happened since I've been gone?" Koester asked.

“The latest crew rotation has started. We’re expecting a number of new Academy graduates to arrive over the coming weeks.”

“Wonderful,” Koester said, deliberately echoing his First Officer. As the turbolift reached the bridge, the two officers stepped out, acknowledging Lt Commander High, who manned the command chair while the ship was in Earth orbit, and walked straight into the ready room, where Koester offered K’danz a drink from the replicator. “At least I’ll have something to do while we’re here in orbit,” he said as he sipped his drink.

“And then?” K’danz asked, taking a gulp from her own cup. “What do we do once we’re done being R&D’s guinea pigs?”

“Then we go back to doing what we do best. Exploring the unknown.”

K’danz grinned, nodding.

“Aye, sir.”

**The End**