

“Approaching spacedoors.”

On the main viewscreen, the doors to *Starbase 719*’s spacedock slowly opened at the approach of the Sovereign-class starship.

“Spacedoors opening,” reported Jerry Hagan from his position at ops.

Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester, commanding officer of the *USS Dauntless*, touched the intercom control on the arm of his command chair.

“All stations, prepare to transfer to automatic,” he ordered. A moment later, the background lighting on the bridge shifted to blue. “Starbase, you have control.”

“Confirmed, *Dauntless*,” a female voice from the spacedock’s control tower responded. “Enjoy the ride. ...And welcome home.” Moments later, the *Dauntless* passed through the spacedoors into the interior of *Starbase 719*.

*Captain’s log, stardate 63992.7:*

*USS Dauntless has returned to Starbase 719 where, over the next two weeks, we will conduct crew rotation and consumables replenishment while the majority of the crew get some well-deserved R & R.*

*Koester, commanding Dauntless, out.*

“Stand by to take on mooring lines and umbilicals,” Koester ordered as his starship neared her usual slip alongside the spacedock hub. On the viewer the captain noted the presence of starship *Triton* moored in the slip directly alongside where the Sovereign-class starship was assigned.

“Slowing on thrusters,” William Hyland reported. “Forward velocity slowing to ten meters per second.”

“Standing by to take on mooring lines and umbilicals,” Hagan confirmed.

Seconds ticked by as the starship slowed even further.

“Five meters per second... Four... Three... Two... Captain, we’re at dead stop.”

“Very well, Helm.”

“Captain,” reported Marine Captain April Mendez at tactical. “Mooring tractors are engaged. Power and network umbilicals are being connected.”

“Captain, ship is moored,” Hagan reported. “All stations under computer control.”

“Very well. Excellent work everyone,” Koester said before turning to look over at the El-Aurian man sitting at the mission ops console. “COB, liberty by department head.”

“Aye, aye, Skipper,” Chief Pono Kyman replied before turning back to his console to pass on the order.

Several minutes later, Koester was walking down the corridor toward his quarters, his uniform jacket already half-unfastened, when the voice of his first officer, Commander Setton To’Lock Arbelo, sounded from his combadge.

“Arbelo to Captain Koester.” The captain paused as he tapped his combadge

“Koester here. What’s up, Exec?”

“Could you report to Transporter Room 2, Skipper? We have a couple of guests waiting to beam aboard.”

“On my way,” Koester replied, turning around back down the corridor as he fastened his jacket once again, puzzled about why the vessel’s first officer would need the captain’s presence to beam aboard guests, but simply shrugged as he stepped toward the nearest turbolift. A minute later, the doors of the transporter room swished aside to admit him.

“What’s going on, Exec? Are we expecting VIPs of some sort?” Koester asked as he stepped next to his Terran-Vulcan-Efrosian second-in-command.

“No, Skipper,” Arbelo replied. “Just a couple of people I thought you’d want to be here to greet personally.” Arbelo then turned to the transporter operator behind the transparasteel partition. “Energize, Petty Officer Messer.”

With a sweep of the crew member’s fingers, the transporter activated. On the platform, two beams coalesced into the forms of two young-looking women – one was in her late teens while the other was actually centuries old – wearing Starfleet Academy cadet uniforms. Koester’s lips broke out into a wide smile.

“Gem! Cassie!” the captain said, stepping over to hug first his own seventeen year old daughter, then the woman whom he had rescued from a doomed planet several years earlier before sponsoring her admittance into the Academy. Cassie’s hug seemed tighter and more intimate than Gem’s had, and for a moment Koester sensed Cassie

might kiss him as well before she quickly stepped away. “What are you two doing all the way out here in the Typhon sector?” he asked after the hugs had ended.

“The Academy is out for winter break, so we figured we would visit,” Cassie replied. “Gem really wanted to come, but she didn’t want to travel by herself.”

“Well, I’m glad you could make it. Come on, join me for refreshments in 10-Forward and tell me everything you’ve been doing!”

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Dauntless*!

## Star Trek: Dauntless

### “Reunion” By PJK

Based on a character created by Sara Lucia

“So tell me, Cadet Koester and Cadet Koester...,” the captain said as he put his glass of synthale back down on the table. “How are each of you doing in your classes?”

“I’m doing fine,” Cassie replied. “My simulator command crew and I have been completing our simulated missions with scores well above the curve.”

“What position are you assigned in the simulator?” Koester asked.

“Operations manager,” Cassie replied proudly. “It’s really been fun.”

The captain chuckled before saying, “Enjoy it while you can. You only have a few more months before you have to face the *Kobayashi Maru*.”

“Oh come on!” Cassie said, looking doubtful. “All the cadets know the *Kobayashi Maru* is just an urban legend they tell us cadets just to scare us.”

Koester chuckled again at Cassie’s remark, saying, “You think so, huh? Good luck.” He then turned his attention on his daughter. “How about you, Sweetie? How was your first semester?”

“Easier for me than for several of my classmates. I have an advantage, having served aboard the *Dauntless*,” Gem replied. “I’ve even been asked to join Red Squad.”

“Really? Wow!” Koester said with amazement. “First years are almost never asked to join Red Squad. Are you going to do it?”

“I don’t think so. I like being a part of Omega Squad. And besides, Red Squad is mostly all command-division cadets. I want to apply to the sciences school next year. The only problem I’m having is...” Gem’s voice trailed off as she glanced at Cassie.

“What problem are you having?” Koester prompted. Gem hesitated a moment longer before finally replying.

“I keep getting hazed by an upperclassman.”

“Hazing’s been a part of Academy life since before the Federation, Sweetie. You just have to learn how to deal with it without breaking down. Even I got hazed during my first two years at the Academy. Once they realize they’re not getting to you, it’ll stop.”

“I know, Dad, but...” Again, Gem’s voice trailed off.

“Who’s hazing you?” the captain asked, sensing there was something more to what his daughter was trying to say. Again, Gem glanced over at Cassie, whose normally tanned face flushed red.

“It’s fun razzing my ‘little sister’,” Cassie admitted with a shrug.

\* \* \* \*

The late afternoon shift in Ops aboard *Starbase 719* was generally quiet unless several of the Fifth Fleet starships were arriving or departing. Commander Cathryn Pearson, the starbase’s executive officer, was making her rounds at each station in Ops, chatting with the crew members on duty as she checked on their current status.

“I’m part of the committee organizing the base’s first-anniversary party, Commander,” Lieutenant (JG) Ashari Pel, manning the engineering monitor console, said to Pearson as she paused to confirm the latest readings on

the starbase's main fusion reactors. "Do you think it would be possible to set aside several holodecks and tie the systems together for the celebration?"

"Why not hold the party in the Botanical Garden?" Pearson asked. "That's where the ceremony that brought *Homeplate* into commission was held, and where I'm hosting the New Year's celebration in a few days."

"I understand that, Commander, but the base was commissioned before the full 10,000 member compliment was aboard. There are some concerns that the Garden may not be big enough for..."

"Commander Pearson!" interrupted the station's science officer, Ishara. "Long range sensors are detecting... something... on course for this station."

"Can you be more specific, Lieutenant?" Pearson asked, leaving the engineering monitor and stepping over to the science console.

"Not... really..." the young Deltan officer replied, sounding unsure. "I'm not getting a sustained look at the contact. Sensor readings are intermittent. But whatever it is, it's approaching from Federation space, and at high warp."

"Estimated time of arrival?" Pearson inquired.

"If it remains at current estimated course and speed, it will be within weapons range in forty seven minutes."

Pearson looked up at the main Ops viewscreen, where a tactical image of the starbase and the unknown contact were now displayed. She watched the blinking unidentified contact move closer to the base before finally saying, "Lieutenant, advise the Admiral of this situation."

"Aye, Commander," the science officer replied.

\* \* \* \*

"What can you tell me about the contact?" Rear Admiral Val'ri Raiajh, the visibly pregnant commanding officer of *Starbase 719*, asked as she, Pearson, Lt Commander B'Elanna Torres – the station's Chief of Operations and wife of one of the Fifth Fleet vessel's first officers – and Doctor Sylvan Xaran – the station's Chief Medical Officer and husband of Admiral Raiajh – watched the main viewer, which still displayed the intermittent tactical display of the approaching object.

"Ishara is having a hard time keeping a lock on the contact," Pearson reported. "It's almost as if the vessel, if it is a vessel, keeps cloaking and decloaking almost constantly."

"A cloaking device? Romulans?" Raiajh asked.

"Not coming from Federation space," Torres responded. "My first thought would be Klingons, but our long range sensor readings don't match any type of cloaking field we've previously encountered. In fact, I don't think this object, whatever it is, has a cloaking device at all. I think it's something else."

Raiajh stopped watching the viewer and looked at her executive officer. "What is the station status, Cathryn?"

"We're at yellow alert. Deflectors are raised, though I haven't ordered full shields yet. Both *Dauntless* and *Triton* have been informed of our status and are standing by to either evacuate spacedock or assist as needed."

"Very good. Estimated time of arrival?" Raiajh looked over at the lieutenant at the science console.

"Present calculated course and speed, ETA twenty seven minutes," Ishara reported.

"Orders, Admiral?" Pearson asked, looking at her long-time friend and mentor.

"There's not much we can do but stand here and wait," the Vulcan-Deltan woman responded. "We have had no indication the contact is hostile, and I do not wish to provoke a dispute when there is no need. Likewise I see no need to be unprepared." Raiajh looked toward her husband and said, "Make sure the main infirmary is standing by, Doctor."

"Yes, Admiral," Xaran said before heading to the turbolift and disappearing inside.

"Admiral! I've totally lost the contact!" Ishara exclaimed.

"Lost it how? Did it come to a stop? Did it cloak entirely?" Raiajh asked.

"Unknown, Admiral," the science officer said. "One second I was still just-barely detecting it on sensors, the next moment it was gone. Not even a warp eddy to track."

"What do you supposed happened to it?" Pearson asked.

"I don't..." the admiral started to say when unexpectedly the entire starbase shuddered, nearly throwing the crew in Ops off their feet.

"What was that?" Torres asked.

"Admiral," Pearson said, her voice barely more than a whisper as she stared at the main viewer again. "We've got company."

Raijkh likewise looked at the viewer, which had switched from the tactical view to the image of space only a few hundred meters away from the starbase. Barely visible, as if not completely in phase with reality, an object almost as large as the starbase could just be seen.

“WHY HAVE YOU DESTROYED OUR WORLD?” a loud voice suddenly said throughout the entire station. Pearson and Raijkh exchanged looks before the admiral gave her next order.

“Red alert!”

\* \* \* \*

“What are we up against?” Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester asked Admiral Raijkh. Since the voice had been heard everywhere inside the station, including all the ships docked within, both Koester and *Triton* commanding officer Captain Amanda Tomkins had joined the starbase’s command crew in Ops.

“We’re not entirely sure,” Raijkh replied. “I’ve never encountered anything like it before. And we’ve tried hailing it multiple times. Either it cannot receive our subspace transmissions or it is choosing to ignore us.”

“Well we had no trouble picking up their transmissions,” Tomkins remarked, watching the viewscreen where the half-visible object remained motionless.

“From what sensors can tell us, and they don’t seem to be telling us much, that object – whatever it is – seems to be existing in our universe and a parallel universe at the same time,” Pearson added.

“Interphase?” Koester asked.

“No. There is no indication of any spatial rift.”

Captain Tomkins seemed to be staring intently at the image on the viewscreen. “I think I’ve seen something like it before,” she remarked.

“Really? Where?” Raijkh asked.

Tomkins walked over to one of the nearby computer consoles and began tapping commands into its interface. A moment later, a computer file was displayed on the main viewer, alongside the image from outside the station. The new image looked like a space station of some sort, but like *Starbase 719*’s visitor, it appeared transparent. The notation near the bottom of the image read, ‘Stardate 41256 - *USS Enterprise NCC-1701-D*’

“This is a... life form, for lack of a better description, that was encountered by the *Enterprise-D* in the Rubicun star system. It was considered a god by the people of Rubicun III, the Edo.”

“Yes. Our visitor appears to be very similar to the Edo God,” Koester said. “But I thought the Edo God never left orbit of Rubicun III. Could this be the same... life form?”

“Unlikely,” responded Lieutenant (JG) Ishara. “The structure is very different from what the *Enterprise* encountered more than twenty years ago. This object is at least five times larger.”

“Well, if it’s been twenty years since the Federation’s last encounter, could it have... grown?” Pearson asked.

“Unlikely,” replied Ishara, “as both objects appear to be built structures housing some sort of entity rather than...”

“WHY HAVE YOU DESTROYED OUR WORLD?” the mysterious voice said loudly throughout the station again, causing the entire starbase to shudder violently.

“It would help to know what world they are referring to,” commented Pearson.

“Agreed,” Raijkh remarked. “Lieutenant Pel, hail them again.”

“Hailing frequencies open, Admiral. Still no response from the ...ship ...object ...whatever it is,” the Trill woman replied. “We have received a response from Captain McLeod, however. He’s turned the *Besiege* around and is returning to the sector at maximum warp. ETA 27 hours.”

“I have a feeling this will be over in 27 hours, one way or the other,” remarked Koester.

“THIS WILL BE OVER WHEN THOSE RESPONSIBLE HAVE PAID FOR THEIR CRIME.”

The officers around Ops stared at each other, shocked that whatever was speaking to them appeared to have heard Captain Koester. Koester looked up at the main viewer, which once again displayed only the mysterious visitor outside, and addressed it directly.

“Can you... hear us?”

The voice responded inside Koester’s head, to his utter shock, *‘Yes, in a manner. We understand your primitive thought patterns.’*

“They’re very strong telepaths. They’re projecting directly into my mind!” Admiral Raijkh remarked.

“Mine too,” Ashari Pel added.

“All of us, it seems,” Koester said before turning his attention back to the mysterious visitors. “Who are you?”

*'We call ourselves Lucians.'*

Images, indistinct yet visible, appeared in the mind of each crew member in Ops. Images of vaguely humanoid shapes, incredible technology that could almost be compared to magic, and the sense that – while not the same beings – the Lucians were in some distant way related to the Edo God. Koester got the sense that these beings were immensely powerful.

“They’re trying to tell us who they are and what they want through the mental imagery,” Tomkins said.

“They seem so powerful compared to us,” Koester remarked. “What world can they possibly think we’re capable of destroying?”

As if in answer, the minds of everyone in Ops was filled with strange images, barely visible as if viewed through a thick, rainbow-hued mist, of humanoid figures with dark tan skin, playing among fantasy creations.

As the mental projections continued, a face – barely seen, yet familiar – floated by through Koester’s mind. He began to grow uneasy as the images proceeded, the face – seemingly asleep – passing just out of reach before being replaced by the image of a blue-green world, the vague shape of what looked like a Federation starship warping away, and the destruction of that same world – turned brown and lifeless before crumbling to pieces. The feeling of dread grew in the pit of Koester’s stomach.

“Oh no,” he muttered.

“What’s wrong, Peter?” Raijah asked.

“I recognize the planet. I think I know who the Lucians are searching for. I only hope they aren’t going to be too upset when they find them.”

As Koester spoke, the minds of everyone in Ops was filled with the all-too-clear image of *Starbase 719* being crushed like an empty can.

\* \* \* \*

Several minutes later, Koester was back on the bridge of his starship. Immediately Commander Arbelo stood up from the center seat and approached him.

“What’s going on, Skipper? Whose voice was that we were hearing throughout the ship?”

“Exec, have Cadet Koester report to the bridge,” the captain said without answering Arbelo’s question.

“Your daughter?” the first officer clarified.

“No. Cassie.”

Arbelo’s expression looked grim as he nodded to the captain, then tapped his combadge.

“Cadet Cassie Koester, report to the bridge.”

A couple of minutes later, the turbolift opened and both Cassie and Gem emerged. Cassie stepped toward the middle of the bridge, snapping to attention before saying, “Midshipman 1<sup>st</sup> Class Cassie Koester, reporting as ordered, sir.”

“Hagan, tie the main viewer into the starbase,” Koester ordered.

“On screen,” the ops officer replied.

The image on the main viewscreen changed from the spacedock interior to the view of the partly-visible object not far outside the station. In spite of the fact the object was mostly transparent, it still somehow looked malevolent to those gathered on the bridge.

“Look familiar, Cassie?” the captain asked.

Cassie looked at the transparent image on the screen, her jaw dropping.

“Are they...?” she started to ask.

“They call themselves Lucians,” Koester said. “They’re trying to find those responsible for the destruction of Laxia.”

“What’s going on, Commander?” Gem asked Arbelo quietly off to the side. “Cassie and I were down programming the holodeck for a game of skatsball when we heard the voices. They sound dangerous.”

“I’m not entirely sure, Gem. It seems your father knows more than the rest of us right now.”

Cassie continued to stare, with an expression of disbelief, at the image on the screen.

“My people,” she whispered. “I thought they must have died out hundreds of years ago.” She looked at Koester with a hopeful expression. “Have they contacted you? Have they said what brought them here?”

“They contacted us, all right. And if I’m interpreting the images they projected directly into the minds of everyone in Ops, they seem to believe the *Dauntless* and her crew are responsible for destroying Laxia.”

“But you didn’t destroy the planet! The planet was destroyed by immense asteroids hitting it!” Cassie protested.

“Tell THEM that!” Koester insisted, gesturing toward the viewscreen. “Perhaps they’ll believe it, coming from one of their own?” He then gestured toward the chair to the left of the center seat. Cassie nodded before sitting in the chair and closing her eyes, appearing to be falling asleep.

“What is she doing, Dad?” Gem asked, stepping closer to her father.

“Cassie can communicate telepathically,” Koester explained.

“I know, she’s done it with me at the Academy,” Gem said.

“But she’s a much stronger telepath in her sleep. I theorize it was a genetic enhancement. In the past she’s used the ability to reach into my dreams from light-years away. If she can contact the Lucians and make them understand what really happened, this is her best chance of doing it.”

Cassie relaxed herself in the chair and quickly entered REM sleep. Her unconscious mind reached out to the Lucians, wanting nothing more than to explain to her people, long thought lost, what really happened at Laxia. The reaction was nearly instantaneous.

“YOU HAVE STOLEN THE DREAM-GUIDER!” the outraged voice yelled, heard throughout the station and aboard all the ships inside just before the entire starbase shook even more violently than before, knocking everyone, even the seated crew, to the deck. Cassie awoke with a scream.

“What is it, Cassie?” Captain Koester asked, kneeling next to the Academy cadet.

“They think you kidnapped me from Laxia and then destroyed the world to cover it up!”

“Didn’t you tell them what really happened?”

“I tried! They don’t believe me! They’re convinced I’m under duress.”

Again the starbase shook violently, and the *Dauntless* crew could hear alarms sounding from the station.

“Captain, we’re being hailed by Admiral Raiajh,” reported Marine Captain Mendez.

“On screen,” Koester ordered as he returned to his feet. “What’s the situation, Admiral?”

“The Lucians have started attacking the base. What did they mean we’ve stolen the dream-guider?”

“Cadet Cassie, Admiral. She used to watch over the dreams of the people who visited Laxia. Sort-of a living safety protocol for a planet-wide mental holodeck.”

“Something tells me they want her back.”

“I don’t want to go back!” Cassie protested. “They left me alone, in perpetual sleep, for centuries! I thought they had all died off, but they had actually abandoned me! I won’t go back!”

“No one is going to force you back, Cadet,” Raiajh assured. “But what can we do, Peter? The Lucians are too powerful. They can tear this starbase apart at will!”

“I’ll try and draw the Lucians away from the station. I need to take the *Dauntless* out of spacedock.”

Raiajh seemed to ponder the request for a moment. “You realize the Lucian vessel ...or whatever it is... is right outside the spacedocks where the *Dauntless* is moored, right?” But before Koester could reply, the starbase shuddered again. A shrieking sound, like metal tearing, could be heard through the communications link.

In the background Commander Pearson could be heard reporting, “Structural integrity field is down by 50%! Reactor number two just shut down! Shields are weakening!” Raiajh shook her head almost imperceptibly, as if struggling with a difficult decision before looking straight through the viewscreen at Koester.

“Permission to depart granted, Fleet Captain. Good luck.”

“Thanks, Admiral.” Koester then turned to look at his first officer and said, “Monster, sound red alert.”

Arbelo nodded, then activated the intercom. “All hands, this is the bridge. Red alert! Man battlestations!” Immediately the klaxon sounded throughout the *Dauntless*. As crew members came rushing to assume their alert stations, Koester stepped close to Lieutenant (JG) Hyland at the helm.

“Ever maneuver a starship halfway around a spacedock, Bill?” he asked.

“I’m not sure anyone ever has, as least not a starship as large as a Sovereign-class, sir. Miranda or Oberth maybe.”

“Think you can do it?”

Hyland looked up at his commanding officer as the entire station shook again and replied, “Like I have a choice?”

Koester nodded solemnly, then stepped back to Cassie, who remained sitting in the VIP seat.

“Any chance you can try again? Convince your people that you weren’t kidnapped, that you’re where you want to be?”

“No, sir,” Cassie replied, sounding quite formal. “They’ve convinced themselves they were wronged, that I was kidnapped against my will and the planet destroyed to cover the crime. I don’t think they’re going to give up until I’m back among them... and the *Dauntless* is destroyed.”

“Not an option I’m willing to consider.”

“Captain,” Arbelo interrupted. “The ship is manned for red alert.”

“Very well. Mister Hyland?”

“Ready as I’m going to be,” the helmsman responded.

Koester sat down in his command chair, crossing his legs as he did, and ordered, “Clear all mooring lines and umbilicals.”

“All moorings and umbilicals clear,” Lieutenant Tom Riker reported from ops.

“Very well. Mister Hyland, take us out.”

Hyland gulped, then acknowledged the order and activated thrusters. Slowly the large starship backed out of the mooring slip. Once clear of the spacedock hub, the *Dauntless* maneuvered to the left and, using thrusters only, moved around the semicircle of the spacedock. As the ship approached the doors directly opposite the ones they had entered the day prior, the spacedocks slowly parted, the stars of deep space visible beyond. It took several minutes, but finally the *Dauntless* emerged from inside the spacedock and cleared the structure.

“We’re free and clear to navigate, Captain,” Hyland reported as he wiped sweat off his forehead with his sleeve. “Ordered course?”

“Out there, that-a-way,” Koester ordered with a flick of his arm. “I don’t care which way as long as you can keep the starbase between us and the Lucians as long as possible.”

“Entering course 305 mark 2. Course plotted and laid in.” Hyland then turned in his seat to look at the captain. “Just so you understand, sir, that course will take us directly toward known Kairn space.”

“Understood, Mister Hyland. Under the circumstances, the Kairn are the least of our problems. Ahead, maximum warp.”

\* \* \* \*

In Ops, Admiral Raijeh, Commander Pearson, Lt Commander Torres, and Dr. Xaran watched the *Dauntless* enter warp on the screen.

“The *Dauntless* is away, Admiral,” Lieutenant (JG) Pel reported. A moment later she added, “The Lucians either detected their departure or sensed the *Dauntless* was the ship they were seeking and that they were getting away. They have disengaged from the station and are following the *Dauntless*.”

“I’m still having a hard time maintaining sensor lock on them,” Lieutenant (JG) Ishara reported.

“What happens next is up to Peter and his crew,” Raijeh remarked before turning to Torres and saying, “B’Elanna, dispatch damage control crews throughout the station. And get that reactor back on-line.”

“Right away, Admiral,” Torres replied.

\* \* \* \*

“Status, Mack?” Koester asked, looking at his chief of security, Lt Colonel Sean McIntyre. The Marine officer looked over at the captain with a perplexed look.

“We’re being followed... I think. It’s really hard to tell.”

Koester looked at McIntyre inquisitively. “What do you mean?”

“I can’t maintain sensor lock on the contact. It’s almost like they’re cloaking and decloaking over and over, but it’s like no cloaking device I’ve ever seen before.”

“It’s not a cloaking device,” Cassie interjected. “My people exist in multiple dimensions. The majority of their lives is in what you might call a parallel universe, but they come to this reality for vacation.”

“They transit dimensions for a... a vacation?!” Chief Kyman asked incredulously.

Cassie shrugged in the chief’s direction and replied, “Some people travel to Risa or Wrigley’s Pleasure Planet. My people travel to this universe.”

Before anyone else could speak, the *Dauntless* unexpectedly slammed forward, throwing McIntyre, Commander Alasdair Wallace at the science console, and the young ensign standing by the master situations monitor all tumbling to the deck.

“Shields down by 33%!” Lieutenant Riker announced. “They hit us with some sort of plasma weapon.”

“We can only take one more hit like that before we lose shields,” Commander Jeffery Bloom, the ship’s emotional Vulcan chief engineer reported from the engineering console.

“I really don’t want to fire on the Lucians. After all, they think they’re rescuing their Dream-Guider,” Koester said with a glance toward Cassie. “Is there any way we can explain the situation to them, Cassie?”

“They’re stubborn,” she replied. “If they really wanted to know what happened, all they would have to do is look in our minds, our memories. But once they get their minds set on something, you have to hit them with a planet to get anything through to them.”

Koester shook his head as he asked Bloom, “Any chance we can get some more speed out of the engines, Jeff?”

“The warp core is running at 120% rated output already, Peter,” Bloom replied. “But I’ll see what Windsor can...”

“Incoming!” McIntyre suddenly announced, and no one needed to ask what he meant. Another plasma charge was about to strike the ship.

“Evasive maneuvers!” Koester quickly ordered, but it was too late. The starship was in the middle of turning to avoid the charge when it struck nearly broadside. Koester gripped the arms of his chair with all his strength, only to see Cassie be flung out of the chair to his left and slam up against the back of Riker’s seat. “Cassie!” he shouted.

“Shields down to 29%!” McIntyre reported as Koester moved to kneel next to Cassie, feeling the woman’s wrist for a pulse.

“Medical emergency on the bridge!” he called out.

\* \* \* \*

Cassie woke up, confused. Looking around, she quickly realized she was in sickbay. Nearby, Dr. Justin MacMillan and several of his medical staff were handling other casualties of the Lucian attack.

“Doctor! Doctor! Put me back to sleep! Please!” she called out, drawing MacMillan’s attention.

“Relax, Cadet,” he tried to assure Cassie in his Scottish brogue. “You’re gonna be fine. ...Assumin’ we survive this encounter.”

“I can help! Put me back to sleep!” Cassie exclaimed.

“What d’you mean, you c’n help?”

“I was getting through to them. I can get us out of this mess!” Cassie tried to explain.

Doctor MacMillan looked skeptical, but tapped his combadge just the same.

“Sickbay t’ bridge. Cadet Koester is awake. She says she c’n get us out o’ this situation, but only if I put her back t’ sleep.”

“What’s your plan, Cassie?” Koester’s voice asked through the combadge.

“When I tried to contact the Lucians through normal sleep, it was perceived by them as normal telepathic contact, like two Betazoids might share,” Cassie explained. “When I was knocked unconscious on the bridge, it was like the state of consciousness I was kept in artificially back on Laxia. I had more control, and more influence. I was starting to get through to them!”

On the bridge, Fleet Captain Koester looked at his first officer. “That might explain why they haven’t fired on us since Cassie was knocked unconscious,” he said. He then returned his attention to the crew in sickbay. “Would it be safe to put Cassie back under, Doctor MacMillan?”

Back in sickbay, the dark-skinned Scotsman looked at Cassie, who gazed back with pleading eyes.

“Aye, I don’ think it would do her any harm,” he said. “Be no worse’n inducin’ a coma.”

“Very well. Proceed, Doctor.”

“Aye, Cap’n. We’ll keep y’ up t’ date. Sickbay, out.” MacMillan again tapped his combadge, then turned to the Betazoid woman standing near the equipment cart. “Nurse Den, I need a hypospray o’ sonambutril, 10cc’s.”

“Yes, Doctor,” Lana Den replied as she prepped the vial and handed the hypospray to the doctor.

“This won’ hurt a bit, Cadet,” MacMillan said, trying to reassure Cassie.

“I know. Hurry, please.”

MacMillan nodded as he pushed the hypospray against Cassie’s neck, the hiss indicating the sedative was entering her body. Cassie’s eyes fluttered briefly, then shut. Within seconds, her breathing was deep and steady.

“What now, Doctor?” Nurse Den asked.

“Now we wait,” MacMillan replied. “An’ hope.”

\* \* \* \*

Cassie quickly found herself standing alone in a fog-shrouded landscape, nothing surrounding her but blackness. She appeared once again as she had in the dreams of those who had visited Laxia over the centuries, like a human girl of 11 or 12 years in age, her skin dark tan like those from Earth’s Mediterranean or Central American regions, her dark and somewhat curly hair hanging loose all the way down her back to her hips over a non-descript orange jumpsuit.

“Hello?” she called out, but no one answered. She tried turning around slowly, peering into the darkness with her dark-brown, normally very happy looking eyes, but still saw nothing. “I know you’re there,” she finally said in a normal voice. “I can feel you.”

As if they had been playing a game of hide and seek, almost a dozen humanoid shapes emerged out of the darkness and mist. Like Cassie, they appeared human with dark tan skin. Nearly half of them appeared male, with thick wavy hair, two of them with beards. The rest were female, long nearly black hair hanging almost to their feet, swirling the mist along the ground.

“What has happened to you?” one of the men, apparently the leader of the Lucians, asked Cassie. “Have you managed to escape the humanoids?”

“I can’t escape when I’m not being held captive,” Cassie replied.

“Do you not realize what has happened?” the man questioned. “Your cocoon must have been discovered by these... Starfleeters. They took you from your home, from your safety, from your purpose. And they destroyed our retreat... our repose... to hide their crime. And they bound you in this reality, an unbearable fate!”

As the man spoke, images of the peaceful blue-green world of Laxia appeared above them all. Then a small starship, the *Dauntless*, appeared above the world, firing weapons of every description and great destructive power at the planet. Little by little, the oceans and forests of Laxia were burned away, the ground turning a dull brown before crumbling to dust. Finally, as the *Dauntless* departed orbit, it fired one last weapon from the rear, very similar in appearance to the plasma charges the Lucians had been firing at the real *Dauntless* in the real world not long before. As the dream-*Dauntless* slowly departed the now-dead world – presumably with the Dream-Guider aboard in bondage – the plasma charge struck the surface of the planet and broke it apart, exploding like a small nova.

“You have quite the vivid imagination,” Cassie said to the leader, causing the rest of the Lucians to murmur amongst themselves. “Particularly for someone who has neglected visiting Laxia for your... What did you call it? Retreat? Repose? The crew of the *Dauntless*... My friends... My family! They did not abduct me. They saved me! From both the physical danger that destroyed Laxia, and from your neglect!”

As Cassie spoke, the image of Laxia returned, floating in the air over the group. Then it appeared as if they were flying down to the surface of the planet, known as the dream-world for it’s abilities to induce vivid dreams in those who visited – the ability to bring fantasy to reality in the mind of those who experienced it. They flew above deep blue oceans, across forested plains, and finally down underground to a hidden complex where one Lucian, who had been discovered to have extraordinary mental abilities even above those of her people, was tied into a life support system that would keep her alive yet asleep for her entire life, her purpose to guide and watch over the dreams of other Lucians who visited Laxia for relaxation and play and to keep them safe. And as they watched, the years and decades and centuries passed.

Eventually, decades after the last Lucian had visited the planet, a Federation starship arrived. It took the Dream-Guider some time to realize that the new visitors were not familiar with how Laxia worked, the drug-infused atmosphere inducing sleep and vivid dreams, allowing guests to experience anything they could imagine. But the experience could be dangerous. The old legend that dying in your sleep could prove fatal in reality was not a fable to those visiting Laxia. One of the visiting Starfleet crew died in his dream before Cassie could do anything to help him.

It was during that encounter that Cassie had met the attractive captain of the visiting ship in his mind. And while it had taken him some time to figure out exactly what it was he was experiencing, once he started getting a sense of where he was, Cassie started feeling a bond with him like she had no others before.

Over the months and years that followed, Cassie would often visit the Earth man in his dreams, even though he was light years away, without his knowledge or recollection. It was through him that she was learning much about a universe she could never actually experience.

Then came the day the asteroids arrived. The Dream-Guider had no idea what was happening except that she was in danger and her world... her existence... was crumbling around her. She reached out with her powerful mind, attempting with all her might to contact her people, the people who had seemingly abandoned her. When they did not respond she reached out to the only other person who might, appearing in the dreams of Captain Koester, trying to convey her plight. Quickly, the *Dauntless* arrived once again, and as meteors pummeled the planet, Koester risked his own life to find the Dream-Guider’s actual body, hidden in the chamber deep underground.

As the image faded, Cassie found herself standing on the mist-covered landscape, now looking as she did in the real world, like a young adult, wearing her Academy cadet uniform. The dozen Lucians stood around her in a circle, most of them exchanging startled looks. Even the leader, who stood directly in front of Cassie, looked shocked.

“The Starfleeters did not abduct you?” he asked.

Cassie shook her head, replying, "No. They saved me."

The Lucians all looked at Cassie, their expressions miserable. Then one by one, as if being turned off by a light switch, each Lucian faded away until only Cassie and the Lucian leader remained.

"Is he aware of your feelings toward him?" the Lucian asked.

"No. And it would complicate things if he did. He's already married to another."

"This must... hurt you."

"I deal with it in my own way. It's no worse than being abandoned by my own people."

The Lucian's expression quickly turned to annoyance. "You were never abandoned, Dream-Guider. Simply... misplaced." Then, like the others, he faded away. Cassie slowly turned around, looking at the dark, fog-shrouded landscape disinterestedly as she commented to herself, "I hope it worked. It better have worked." As she spoke her surroundings started to brighten, resolving itself into the ceiling of sickbay.

"Doctor, she's waking up!" Nurse Den called out.

"What? With 10cc's o' sonambutril in her veins, she should'a been out until tomorra mornin'," Dr. MacMillan said, rushing over to the biobed where Cassie lay. He ran a medical tricorder over the cadet's body, a look of amazement on his face. "This should be impossible, but every readin' is normal."

"Sorry, doctor, but when it's time to wake up, I wake up," Cassie said, sitting up on the biobed. "I need to get back up to the bridge."

MacMillan sighed and rolled his eyes before looking toward Lana Den.

"Nurse, escort the Cadet up to the bridge."

"Yes, Doctor."

\* \* \* \*

*Captain's log, stardate 63998.2:*

*Shortly after Cadet Cassie was put back to sleep, the Lucians slowed quickly and came to a complete stop. I have high hopes that their actions indicate Cassie is getting through to them somehow. In that hope, I have ordered the Dauntless to a stop not far from the Lucian... vessel? I only hope we are not setting ourselves up for another attack, one we could never hope to survive.*

*Koester, commanding Dauntless, out.*

Koester sat in his command chair, staring at the image of the half-visible Lucian craft on the main viewscreen.

"Any change?" he asked.

"Negative," Colonel McIntyre replied. "Lucian vessel is stationary. No detectable power fluctuations."

"You c'n detect anythin' from that space ghost o' a ship?" Commander Wallace asked.

"Barely, but only because they aren't moving," the Marine officer replied.

"Status of shields and weapons?"

"Phasers and torpedo tubes are fully armed and ready. Shields are still down to 26%," McIntyre reported.

"Jeff...?"

"Working on it, Peter," Bloom assured.

As Bloom spoke, the port turbolift doors opened and both Cassie and Nurse Den stepped out, the Betazoid woman looking around the space with a look of wonder on her face as if she had never been there before.

"Peter... I mean... Captain, I've made contact," she said, quickly stepping over to the command chair.

"And the results are...?" Koester asked expectantly.

"Captain, we're being hailed on normal subspace channels," Lieutenant Riker announced, looking over his shoulder toward Koester.

"Audio or visual?" the captain asked.

"Visual," Riker confirmed.

Koester looked at Cassie with an impressed expression, then ordered, "On screen, Mister Riker."

The main viewer blinked, changing from the view of the distant stars and the transparent alien vessel to a man with dark-tan skin and graying hair. He appeared to be around 60 years old, but knowing what he did about Cassie's age, Koester figured he could be almost any age at all. And while Koester had no idea who the Lucian could be, Cassie recognized him as the leader of the group she had contacted while unconscious.

Koester stood up from his chair and stepped into the middle of the bridge before saying, "I'm Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester of the Federation starship *Dauntless*."

"I am Philik, of the Lucian Confederation. You are the one who... rescued our Dream-Guider from Laxia." Philik studied Koester through the viewscreen for a moment, apparently surprised he was encountering the man Cassie had shown the Lucians. "I owe you an... apology, Fleet Captain. When we had observed the destruction of Laxia from across dimensions, we misinterpreted what we believed we observed. We had no right to fire upon your space station or your vessel, and we regret our actions."

"Your apology is accepted, Philik. I'm just glad Cassie was able to contact you and explain the situation. We thought it was simply a misunderstanding that we hoped could be clarified."

Philik attempted what could be called a smile. It appeared to Koester that the Lucian probably did not exercise those particular muscles very often. But what Philik said next sent a new icy tingle down the captain's spine.

"Now that we have clarified the situation, you may return our Dream-Guider to us and we will leave you in peace."

"Return your... You mean Cassie?" Koester asked in shock, turning to look at the Academy senior cadet.

"Yes. While we now understand Laxia was destroyed by natural forces and not attack, it does not negate our need of a place for our people to relax and fantasize. We must create a new Laxia, so we will of course need our Dream-Guider to make sure none of our people are harmed should they visit."

Koester gestured to Riker to mute the viewscreen, then spun to look at Cassie.

"I thought you told them you had no intention of going back with them?"

Cassie looked a little sheepish, grinning as she shrugged her shoulders slightly before saying, "Maybe I wasn't as clear as I thought I would be."

"You have to tell them. It has to come from you," Koester insisted. "They're not going to believe it coming from me or any other member of the crew."

"I... I'll try... Captain," Cassie said hesitantly. Koester nodded, then motioned to Riker once again. Cassie stepped forward, about a step in front of and to the right of the captain as she spoke.

"Philik, I don't want to go back with you."

"What?!" the Lucian leader said, seemingly shocked. "You must return with us, Dream-Guider. You are a Lucian! It would not be proper to abandon you in this dimension, among these primitive beings, and without you, our people would be in danger whenever they visit New Laxia."

Cassie actually started to look angry, taking another step closer to the viewer when she spoke.

"You claim you need me, yet you abandoned me, alone and trapped in perpetual unconsciousness, for who knows how many decades! Now I have a life, a real life, of my own. And you're not going to take that away from me!"

With seemingly little effort, without the need to be asleep, Cassie started projecting her thoughts and memories directly into Philik's mind. Through her, the elder Lucian was able to see the life in the real world Cassie had established since her rescue, the friends she had made on Earth and at the Academy, how hard she had worked at her studies, and her goal of serving in the Federation Starfleet as an officer. He also was able to experience the bonds she had formed with her adopted family, her friendship with Gem Koester and her admiration for Fleet Captain Koester. Eventually the mental projections ended, and Cassie, weak-kneed, stumbled toward the VIP seat before tumbling into the captain's chair.

Koester looked at her with concern, gesturing for her not to move when she realized where she was sitting, before turning back to face Philik.

"I would not have believed it possible," said the Lucian leader, "but the Dream-Gui... but Cassie actually seems content to be living in your world."

"She is," Koester replied, looking back at the cadet, who smiled wanly back at him.

Philik actually looked crestfallen as he asked, "What are we to do? My people need relaxation at times. We need the release of stress that fantasy can provide. Without Laxia and the Dream-Guider, our people will never be the same again!"

Koester, in spite of himself, felt sympathy for the Lucians. Then a thought occurred to him.

"Philik, may I invite you here to my ship. I have something that may be the answer to your needs."

\* \* \* \*

Several minutes later, Koester, Arbleo, McIntyre, and Chief Kyman were in the transporter room, ready to greet Philik and two other Lucians as they beamed over. The Lucians were amazed by the transporter technology.

“I would not have thought it possible from such a primitive species as yourselves,” Philik remarked.

“You ain’t seen nothing yet,” Koester remarked, puzzling the guests, as he led the entire group out of the room and down the corridor. He noticed, with a mix of amusement and annoyance, that the Lucians seemed fascinated by the solidity of the *Dauntless* as they ran their fingers across almost every surface they passed as they walked.

“Where is it you are taking us, Fleet Captain?” Philik asked as they walked.

“It’s not far,” Koester replied, leading the way around the curve in the corridor.

Very soon the group of seven were standing in front of a non-descript door. The captain activated a control panel beside the door and spent a moment tapping commands into it. A second later the female computer voice announced, “Program complete. Enter when ready.”

The doors parted and the group entered. Koester stepped aside to let his guests pass, enjoying the look on the Lucian’s faces as they gazed in wonder at the landscape around them. Trees with brightly colored leaves covered the landscape leading to high mountains.

“This... This looks like Laxia, but without the effects of the Laxium compound,” Philik remarked, a real smile on his lips this time.

“Actually, it’s a recreation of my own home planet, Earth. A region called Vermont during the season of Autumn,” Koester explained. He then looked upward and said, “Computer, load program Koester 5.” The computer acknowledged with a beep before the scenery around the group blurred and resolved itself into an ocean scene with everyone standing on the deck of a small power boat. “My daughter and I often used this program to go fishing during our free time.”

As the Lucians looked around in amazement, off in the distance a humpback whale jumped out of the water, hanging motionless in the air for a split-second before falling back to the water with a great splash.

“Computer, load program Windsor 3.” As the computer acknowledged, Koester turned to Arbelo and McIntyre and said, “Amanda gave me permission to use her program.” He then turned back to Philik and the other Lucians and added, “My assistant chief engineer is a fan of fantasy-adventure.” This seemed to catch the Lucian’s interest as the scenery around them resolved itself into a huge castle. In the distance could be seen several characters, an elf, a dwarf, and a human-looking wizard, battling a huge cave troll.

“And we are awake all this time!” Philik said in wonder. “What do you call this wonder?”

“It’s called a holodeck,” Koester said proudly. “And it can do everything Laxia was able to do, without the need for a Dream-Guider. Computer, end program.”

“Skipper, can I speak to you privately for a moment?” Arbelo said, leading Koester aside as the scenery faded away to the grid-lined floor and holomitter-covered framework along the walls. “You realize we can’t just give holodeck technology to the Lucians. Once they have that they would also have transporter and replicator technology. Starfleet would never approve of that!”

“Trust me,” Koester said with a wink. He then turned back toward his Lucian guests and said, “All the fun of Laxia, better control than simply dreaming, and with the safety protocols built into the holodeck, no need for anyone like Cassie to keep everyone safe and alive.”

“You would give us this technology to take the place of Laxia?” Philik asked.

“I can’t give it to you, no. It’s against Starfleet regulations and something we call the Prime Directive. But I can offer you the use of the Fifth Fleet’s holodecks, whenever you want to use them. Aboard the *Dauntless*, *Starbase 719*, or any of the other vessels in the fleet.”

Philik appeared to consider the proposition, then moved away with the other two Lucians to discuss the offer. As they did, Chief Kyman joined the captain and first officer.

“Are you sure Admiral Raijah is going to agree to let a transdimensional alien race come aboard her starbase, not to mention all the vessels of the fleet assigned to that base, anytime they feel like playing Dixon Hill?”

“COB, it’s been at least 200 years since the Lucians last visited Laxia. What are the odds that they’re going to want to use one of our holodecks while Val’ri is still in command of *Homeplate*?”

Kyman considered the captain’s words for a moment, nodding grudgingly as he admitted, “You have a point, Skipper.”

“Fleet Captain Koester,” called out Philik, attracting Koester’s attention.

“Yes, Philik?”

“I have discussed your offer with my fellow Lucians. We accept.”

“That’s great,” Koester said with a smile as he held out his hand toward Philik. It took a moment for the Lucian leader to figure out what he was supposed to do, but he eventually grasped Koester’s hand in return.

\* \* \* \*

*Captain's personal log, stardate 64001.9:*

*Once the Lucians departed, back to whatever dimension they originated, the Dauntless returned to Starbase 719, where the station's executive officer hosted a New Year's party for the crews of Homeplate, the Big-D, the Duranium Raider, and the Big Stick as midnight Earth Standard Time struck.*

*In spite of our recent adventure, it's been pleasant spending time with my 'two' daughters, Gem and Cassie. But they need to start their long voyage back to San Francisco soon. Fortunately, I think I've figured out a way we can spend a little more time together.*

Fleet Captain Peter Koester walked slowly down a corridor on *Starbase 719* with Commander Cathryn Pearson, the two officers discussing recent subspace communiqués received from Starfleet Command, particularly the issue of new uniform standards. Koester had taken the opportunity to request a favor of the starbase's Vulcan-Deltan commanding officer, and Pearson was relaying the response.

"Thank the Admiral for me. And tell her we should be back on mission within two weeks."

"It's not a problem, Peter," Pearson replied as the pair exited the corridor into the starbase's recreation complex. Coming out of one of the many shops was Cadets Cassie and Gem Koester, showing each other the new outfits they had just purchased. Captain Koester called out to the pair, who rushed over, each giving the *Dauntless'* commanding officer a hug, before starting to show Dad their new outfits.

"Are you going to have room to carry all that stuff back to Earth?" Koester asked in a scolding manner. Both Gem and Cassie's expressions looked worried, as if they had not considered that fact.

"We actually need to catch a ride in the next 24 hours or so if we're going to make it back before classes resume," Gem said with worry.

"Don't worry too much," Pearson said. "Admiral Raijah pulled some strings and managed to arrange passage for you back to Earth with several days to spare before your classes resume. There is a fast diplomatic transport currently docked at *Starbase 82* that is scheduled to depart for Earth in six days."

"And how do we reach *Starbase 82*?" Gem asked.

"Those arrangements have been made as well," Pearson replied, glancing at Koester.

"The *Dauntless* will be transporting you to *Starbase 82*," the captain confirmed. "While there was no way I could take you two all the way back to Earth myself, this side-trip will give us all a little more time to spend together, and hopefully with a little less excitement than the past few days."

Both girls hugged Koester again in their excitement, Cassie reaching up and kissing the captain on the lips without thinking for a moment before realizing what she was doing.

"Sorry," she apologized. "The excitement was a little too much for me."

"No problem," Koester replied, not sure what else to say.

"Come on, Cass," Gem said, pointing back toward the shops. "Let's do some more shopping!" She then looked at her father and added, "We'll meet you for dinner in the replimat tonight, Dad."

Before he could reply, the two cadets rushed back off toward the row of stores. Koester just looked at Commander Pearson and shrugged.

"Kids... They can be a handful at times," Pearson commented. "I've seen some of the issues Val has had to deal with. Koester nodded in agreement. "But I think you're almost past the most difficult stage. The terrible teens."

Koester chuckled before saying, "So tell me, Cathryn. Why is Starfleet changing our uniforms again? I haven't seen the new design yet, but my own Exec has described it as looking like a big mustard stain across the chest."

"Don't ask me why. Starfleet doesn't request my input on uniform designs. All I know is First and Seventh Fleets are already wearing the new design, and the Fifth Fleet has a month to make the transition."

"Well, I don't think everyone is going to be happy about it, but I'll spread the word. Can I buy you a drink while I'm waiting on the girls?"

"I appreciate the offer, but no, thanks," Pearson replied. "I've got an extra shift in Ops today. I've been filling in for Val a lot lately. However, Admiral Fil is hosting a Captain's Table in the lounge tonight at 2000. I'll see you there?"

"I'll be there. Monster can watch the ship tonight. See you then, Cathryn."

As Pearson walked back toward the nearest turbolift, Koester noticed his girls rushing from one shop to the next.

“Hey! Gem! Cassie! Wait for the Old Man,” Koester said as he rushed after them.

**The End**