

*Previously in Star Trek: Dauntless...*

*When informed that his ship is ready for inspection following major repairs, Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester pilots a Workbee to personally examine the exterior of the USS Dauntless while it remains moored inside spacedock at Starbase 719. The view of his starship from afar prompts memories of events with deep emotional meaning to the starship captain to surface.*

*And now the continuation...*

Space, the Final Frontier...

## Star Trek: Dauntless

### “Recollections – Part 3” By PJK

Slowly, Koester maneuvered the Workbee over the top of the oval-shaped primary saucer hull, turning the small ship over so that the Dauntless appeared to be directly above him. So far, everything looked as it was supposed to. Perhaps the hull of the Dauntless did not gleam quite as brightly as she had the day he first laid eyes on her, but to her commanding officer, the Sovereign-class starship was still a thing of beauty that had taken severe punishment in the years he commanded her.

He maneuvered the Workbee directly toward the bridge module of the starship, slowly passing over an area of the hull along the way where – six years later – he could still make out the slight dents and uneven hull plating where major repair work had been performed if he looked closely enough. The view took him back to perhaps his worst day as commanding officer of a starship...

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*Stardate 60020.5*

*January 2383*

*Drydock 3 - Antares Shipyard*

Captain Peter J. Koester entered the inspection pod with the yard supervisor. The pair were going to assess the damage to the *USS Dauntless* inflicted by the Zaqri – a species that had kept themselves isolated from the galaxy for fifty years because their religion stated the belief that they were the sole intelligent life in the universe and proof of other civilizations was considered blasphemous, before emerging and attacking not only the Federation but the Klingon Empire, the Romulans, and the Tzenkethi in coordinated terrorist attacks under the cover of peaceful, diplomatic contact. The starship had entered the shipyard under its own power, but was badly damaged by the Zaqri attacks; the main shuttlebay all but completely destroyed and two explosive-laden vessels nearly the size of Federation runabouts remained embedded in the primary hull, one just below the bridge, the other having crashed into the ship from below.

“I haven’t seen damage as bad as you’ve got since the end of the Dominion War, Captain,” Mr. Ifantis, the civilian yard supervisor said as he powered up the inspection pod and detached it from the office level at the top of the drydock, maneuvering the small craft toward the hull of the damaged starship below. “We’re going to have to do a complete replacement of the bridge module. Total rebuild of decks 2 and 3. Replace the entire primary hull

ODN core. We're going to have to tear into the support structure and make sure the spaceframework is still intact. This is shaping up to be a major endeavor, Captain."

"I'm sure your yard workers are up to the task, Mister Ifantis," Koester assured as the inspection pod moved closer to the gaping hole where one Zaqri vessel was still embedded.

"I appreciate your confidence, Captain, but it may be a moot point," Ifantis said as he turned the pod in the direction of what was left of the main shuttlebay, where eight members of Marine Special Contingent 41 had been killed in the initial attack on the Federation starship.

"What do you mean?" Koester asked.

Ifantis looked over at the captain with a serious expression as he said, "I assessed the damage report you transmitted en route to the shipyard, as well as the preliminary inspections just after you pulled into the drydock. It is my professional opinion that your ship is too badly damaged to repair in the given amount of time. I will be forwarding to Starfleet Command my recommendation that the *Dauntless* be decommissioned and scrapped."

"Excuse me?!?" Koester exclaimed, unwilling to believe he heard the shipyard supervisor correctly. "Decommissioned and scrapped?!? It's been less than a decade since the ship was first commissioned, and she underwent a major overhaul only three years ago! The Sovereign-class was designed for a functional life of 100 years. I think Starfleet is going to be a little upset that you want to scrap a ship that's only eight years old."

"Be that as it may, that is my professional opinion, Captain," Ifantis replied.

"You had your mind made up before we even began this inspection!" Koester accused.

"True."

"Then why in hell did you drag me out here??"

Ifantis huffed in frustration before saying, "So you wouldn't make a scene in front of either your own crew or my shipyard workers, Captain. As you can probably guess, I've been in this position before, having to tell a commanding officer that his or her ship is no longer space-worthy. It happened more times than I can count during the Dominion War."

"And did all those other captains just accept your opinion and leave it at that?" Koester demanded to know.

"Most of them did," Ifantis replied. "Those few who didn't learned the hard way that my opinion carries a lot of weight in Starfleet."

"So you're telling me that every ship you've recommended for scrap was sent to the wreckers?"

"All but one," Ifanti admitted. "This one captain – a real pain in the neck – apparently had some high-placed friends back in San Francisco."

"And what happened to that ship?"

"Still in service as far as I know. I'll be damned if I know how that crew is holding her together, but she's still out there."

Koester stewed silently, staring out the large observation windows of the pod at the hull of his starship beyond. Ifantis looked at him sidelong, unsure if he was capitulating to the supervisor's argument or preparing to lash out. Finally Koester quietly said, "Just take me back to the drydock offices."

"As you wish, Captain," Ifantis replied, turning the inspection pod around and maneuvering back toward the upper framework of the drydock.

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Koester sat in the office he had been assigned aboard the drydock. Across the small desk from him sat Commander Kevin Fry, his second officer, and Lt Commander Alan High, one of his engineers. High was studying schematics displayed on an engineering padd as Koester spoke.

"I wish Carrie and Dar were here to discuss this with," the captain remarked, referring to his first officer and chief engineer respectively. "But with Carrie recovering from her injuries and Dar on leave taking care of her, I need to depend on the two of you." Koester looked at High and asked, "What's your opinion, Commander? Is the *Dauntless* salvageable? Or would I be sticking my neck out on a fool's errand?"

“Mister Ifantis is right about one thing,” High said. “The *Dauntless* received a lot of damage during the terrorist attack. More than initially believed. But nothing that would prevent her from being repaired given the proper work and materials. After all, the secondary hull received almost no damage beyond a few shorted circuits caused by the overload to the EPS power conduits in the primary hull. It’s true the spaceframe has to be inspected carefully – after all, that was where the damage went unnoticed for almost five years after the Dominion War – but the job won’t be as difficult as Ifantis is trying to make it sound.”

“What do you think, Kevin?”

“I think you should pursue every avenue open to you to save the *Dauntless* from scrap,” Fry replied. “She’s a good ship, and she deserves to be put back into full service. And if you don’t mind, I’m going to do some digging into Mister Ifantis’ background and the history of this shipyard. Something about this whole situation sounds funny to me.”

“Permission granted, Commander. In the meantime, I’m going to pull a few strings of my own. If Mister Ifantis thinks he’s got connections back in San Francisco, just wait until he sees who I know in Paris.”

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Two mornings later, Koester was sitting in his office reviewing crew casualty reports when his new yeoman entered the room.

“Excuse me, Captain. Supervisor Ifantis is here to see you.”

“Send him in, Yeoman,” Koester ordered, but before the yeoman could even get back through the door, Ifantis pushed his way past her and into the office.

“How dare you go over my head, Captain!” the civilian shipyard supervisor exclaimed, pointing a finger accusingly at Koester.

“Come in, Mister Ifantis. Please, have a seat,” the captain said calmly. But rather than take a seat, Ifantis continued to pace back and forth in front of Koester’s desk as he ranted.

“I’ve been doing this job for almost thirty years! No one dares question my expert assessments! No one!”

“Mister Ifantis, I have not questioned your expertise or experience,” Koester said as he watched the civilian move back and forth in front of him. “But I wouldn’t rely on a single doctor’s opinion if he told me I was dying of a rare disease either. I requested a second opinion, and that opinion differed enough from yours that I felt I needed to bring it to the attention of some higher authority.”

“But to the Office of the President of the Federation?!?” Ifantis exclaimed with a tone of disbelief.

“You weren’t listening to me the other day when we were supposed to be making an inspection of my ship. I wanted to make sure I had your attention now. And President Retseok is an old friend of the family.”

“And what are you going to do when it takes a year or more to put your ship back into service? What then? I certainly don’t want one of my drydocks being tied up for an indefinite period just because of some stubborn starship captain who refuses to listen to reason!”

“Do you have something scheduled for that particular dock immediately after the next six months, Mister Ifantis?” Koester asked.

“Not yet. But who knows when the yard may get awarded a new contract for repairs or new construction?” Ifantis replied. “I need to keep my options open and my schedule clear.”

Koester gave the civilian supervisor a dubious look just before his yeoman appeared at the door once again.

“Excuse the interruption, Captain,” she said. “But Commander Fry is here to see you.”

“Very good. Send him in, Yeoman.”

A moment later, Kevin Fry entered the office, about to read something from a padd he was carrying until he noticed Ifantis in the room.

“Did you find that information you were looking for, Kevin?” Koester asked as he gestured for Fry to take a seat. Fry slid the padd across the desk as he sat down.

“Yes, Captain, I did.” Fry’s eyes turned to look in the direction of Ifantis as he asked, “Do you want me to make my report now?”

“Make your report, Commander,” Koester ordered.

“I looked into the records of Antares Shipyard in comparison to other similar civilian shipyards located in the Alpha and Beta quadrants. In recent years, since about halfway through the Dominion War, Antares Shipyard had a spike up in the number of vessels they recommend for scrapping.”

Koester looked at his other guest, who had stopped pacing the moment Fry started making his report.

“When did you say you had been promoted to Shipyard Supervisor, Mister Ifantis?”

“I didn’t,” Ifantis replied with almost a growl.

“Well, in that case, when were you promoted to Shipyard Supervisor, Mister Ifantis?”

“Late 2374,” Ifantis replied. “A few months after Starfleet liberated the Bajor Sector.”

“That’s what I figured,” Koester remarked. “Continue, Commander.”

“As I’m sure you understand, the contract to scrap almost every vessel decommissioned in the shipyard was awarded to the shipyard rather than add on the expense of warp-towing a decommissioned vessel to another yard.”

“And I imagine those contracts can be quite lucrative?” Koester asked.

“Especially considering Antares Shipyard has, on average, decommissioned 57% more ships than any other shipyard in the quadrant,” Fry reported. “Then on top of that there are the contracts for new construction.”

Koester noted Ifantis’ face start to turn pale as Fry brought up new construction.

“While Starfleet Shipyards like San Francisco Yard and Utopia Planitia maintain the bulk of the construction, just over 51% of all Starfleet vessels are built in Starfleet yards, the remainder are supposed to be awarded on a rotating basis, as long as the yard in question is capable of building the type of ship required. But my research has determined that for the last decade, Antares Shipyard has received more than 25% of new construction contracts, well above the average.”

“And why do you think that is?” Koester asked. Fry answered, even though the question was really directed at Ifantis.

“Unable to determine exactly, though I suspect it has something to do with lobbying Starfleet flag officers in the Bureau of Ships and planetary representatives in the Federation Council. But my inquiry seems to have caught someone’s notice.”

“Caught someone’s notice?” Ifantis asked. “What do you mean?”

“Shortly after making my inquiries, I was contacted by a member of the Starfleet Judge Advocate General’s office. They are beginning an investigation into the awarding of new ship construction contracts. And in the meantime, I understand the Admiralty is appointing a new supervisor, someone who answers directly to Starfleet, to oversee the Antares Shipyard...” Fry referenced the information displayed on the padd on Koester’s desk before saying, “...A Captain Orfil Quinteros, formerly in charge of the repair yard at *Starbase 74*.”

Without saying a word, Ifantis left the office. Koester watched the man disappear through the outer office door, then said, “Good work, Kevin. I think you just saved our ship. ...Again.”

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Koester remembered his first meeting with Captain Quinteros, just days later, and the officer’s assurance that the *Dauntless* would not only be repaired, but that the job would be completed in the promised six month timeframe. Koester smiled, knowing Quinteros had kept his promise.

The Workbee skimmed over the top of the port warp nacelle. Koester paid careful attention, making sure all the hull plating was restored in its proper place, that no extraneous items or tools had been left behind by the yard workers, and that the field grille remained consistent and whole. Eventually Koester moved beyond the nacelle and maneuvered his Bee back around, facing the aft end of the ship, where the open secondary shuttlebay used by the Marine air wing loomed ahead. The view brought another memory flooding back to him, one less anxious about losing the *Dauntless* than the *Dauntless* losing him.

Speaking directly to his vessel, he said, “Who knew? Who knew that my path in life, my destiny, would bring me right back to you, not once but twice?”

*To Be Continued...*