

*Somewhere in the Alpha Quadrant*

The sound of a centuries-old guitar riff filled the bridge, followed by two severe drum beats. The riff and beats were repeated before the guitar continued playing a tune and a voice started singing, *“Saturday night I was downtown, working for the FBI. Sitting in a nest of bad men, whiskey bottles piling high...”*

The music was probably louder than it needed to be, but it was what Andrew Miller required to stay awake during the first night watch after leaving their on-load coordinates. The doorway at the rear of the bridge opened and the merchantman *SS Seattle*’s captain, Ruhan Toma, stepped through as the singer’s voice continued; *“Bootlegging boozer on the west side full of people who are doing wrong. Just about to call up the DA man when I heard this woman singing a song...”*

“Fan of classic Earth rock music, Mister Miller?” the captain asked as he moved up to the helm station where Miller sat, startling the younger man. “I could hear this all the way down in my cabin.”

“Sorry, Captain. Just trying to keep myself awake,” Miller explained. “To be truthful, I hate having the first night watch after an entire day of loading cargo. And yeah, my parents gave me an appreciation of ancient Earth arts. I love classical music.”

*“A pair of 45’s made me open my eyes, my temperature started to rise,”* the singer crooned. *“She was a long cool woman in a black dress, just a five-nine, beautiful, tall. With just one look I was... I was... I was...”*

Both the captain and his first mate looked toward the communications console to the starboard side of the bridge, from which the music had been originating, but before either could move toward the station to see what had gone wrong, another piece of music, ominous and threatening, began to play; the prelude from the Alfred Hitchcock film “Psycho.”

“What in hell...?” the captain started to ask as he moved toward communications just before all the lights around the bridge went dark and system after system shut down.

“What’s going on?” Miller asked, holding his hands up and away from the helm. “I haven’t touched anything!”

The merchantman’s captain felt around the console in the dark until he found the old rocker switch that activated the intercom. “Bridge to engineering. What’s going on down there, Mister Bogdanov?”

“Captain, we seem to have experienced some sort of cascade failure,” the *Seattle*’s engineer replied. “I’m trying to locate the cause. Stand by. I should have primary power restored in just a minute.”

As the engineer continued his troubleshooting, heard barely through the still-open intercom, the captain sat down at the communications console and activated emergency power.

“We still have back-up communications,” he said to Miller. “I’m going to issue a general distress call, just in case Mister Bogdanov takes longer than his estimate of one minute.” The captain activated the general hailing frequency and said, “To any ships operating in the Berengaria sector, this is the cargo vessel *Seattle* on emergency frequency 100.5. We have experienced a power failure and are currently adrift. Requesting any assistance you can...”

The captain’s message was cut off as the communications console suddenly went dark, as if purposely shut off.

“Captain?” Miller asked, looking confused.

“I just lost emergency back-up power too,” Toma stated. “What’s going on with my ship?”

Miller checked readings on the helm console, confirming that not all the emergency power had been cut off. “We still have containment, life support, running lights and the ID transponder broadcasting, Captain,” he said. Then an idea occurred to him. “Hey, Captain, I think I can reconfigure the ID transponder to broadcast a general distress call. It won’t be very detailed or powerful, but it should be enough to get someone’s...”

“Do it,” Toma ordered just prior to the lighting returning to normal on the bridge. A second later, the voice of the *Seattle*’s engineer returned over the intercom.

“Got it! For some reason the electroplasma breakers tripped in sequence. I have secondary systems back on-line and will have primary systems back up in the next five minutes.”

“Good work,” the captain said. “Once you have everything back up and running, perform a diagnostic on the breaker panel. I want to know what caused the breakers to trip so it doesn’t happen again.”

“Will do, Cap... Hold on a sec.” Toma and his first mate could hear the engineer moving away from the intercom pickup. It sounded like he was talking to himself for a moment, the words unclear, until they heard him shout, “No! You shouldn’t be here! NO! Don’t do that!”

Music once again sounded from the communications console, this time sharp string instruments playing the Murder theme from “Psycho.” A second later the magnetic bottles containing the merchantman’s anti-matter fuel ceased functioning, and the *SS Seattle* erupted in a spectacular fireball of anti-matter annihilation.

Space the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Dauntless*!

## Star Trek: Dauntless

### “Going Rogue” By PJK

*Captain’s log, stardate 68182.9:*

*The crew of the Dauntless have just completed a visit at the Sagion colony on Woodron Prime. We are now heading toward a rendezvous with a Morain patrol ship that has been monitoring the Kairn border for any sign of activity since the Kairn Empire cut all diplomatic ties to the rest of the galaxy following the recent Mothrai incidents.*

*Koester, commanding Dauntless, out.*

Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester, commanding officer of the Sovereign-class Federation starship *USS Dauntless*, was sitting at one of the larger tables in the starship’s 10-Forward lounge with his first officer, Commander Setton To’Lock Arbelo, Arbelo’s daughter and ship’s science officer Lieutenant (JG) Annika Arbelo-Eeta, the starship’s COB Pono Kyman, joined-Trill Ship’s Counselor Tanzia Gera, and the still-newlywed young couple Lieutenants William Hyland-Faggio and Joella Faggio-Hyland. The group had just finished dinner together and were conversing over coffee and dessert.

“...And so there was Ensign Karr’rinak, just standing where he was, holding what was left of the package with this incredible look of surprise on his face! I don’t think I’ve ever seen a look like that on a Kairn’s face before!” Koester was saying to the laughter of all those around him.

“What did Karr’rinak do after that?” Counselor Gera asked after wiping a tear from the corner of her eye from laughing so hard.

“Well, he just turned to me and said...”

“Bridge t’ Cap’n Koester.”

Koester shared an expression of frustration with his executive officer before tapping his combadge and saying, “Koester here. Go ahead, Alasdair.”

“Cap’n,” said the voice of chief science officer Alasdair Wallace. “We’ve just received orders t’ return to Federation space.”

A look of shock now appeared on Koester’s face.

“Did Starfleet give us a reason why?” he asked.

“The communiqué stated details will be transmitted shortly, but that the *Dauntless* was to immediately cease our current mission and set course toward the Daminian system.”

“Daminia?” Koester repeated, glancing across the room to where one of his two Daminian crew members, Dot, was making use of her mobile holographic humanoid body to help serve the crew in the lounge, her current appearance that of a teen-aged Andorian female with the now-familiar pink dot on the middle of her forehead. He then told Wallace, “Very well. Set course for the Daminian system.” He then added to Arbelo, “I’m going to head up to my ready room and see if I can get a few answers to why Starfleet is sending a ship from the Fifth Fleet AOR all the way to Daminia. ...Though I suspect I know at least part of the reason.” Again he glanced at Dot’s humanoid body. Dot happened to look in the captain’s direction as he stood up and she smiled at him. He nodded back at her, then headed toward the door.

“I understand we’re the only ship in Starfleet with a Daminian officer aboard, XO,” Chief Kyman said to Arbelo once Koester had left. “But do they really need to send us halfway home for some mission another starship could perform just as well as us?”

“Until we get some answers, we have to assume Starfleet feels either Commander Spot or his daughter are required for whatever situation has arisen,” Arbelo replied.

“I hope this isn’t a situation like some relative of Spot’s is dying and they want him back for a final visit?” Gera remarked.

“I guess we’ll find out soon enough,” Arbelo replied, glancing at the doors Koester had just passed through leaving the lounge. “The Skipper will find out what’s going on.”

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A few minutes later, Koester entered his ready room just off the bridge and sat down behind his desk, activating the monitor there. In moments, he had opened a communications channel with Starfleet Command via the relay at *Starbase 719*. He was expecting to be connected with Vice Admiral Kalin Kale, Starfleet’s official liaison with the Federation Fifth Fleet. He received another surprise when he recognized the face displayed on the screen even though it was not Kale.

“Kate!” Koester said to Admiral Kathryn Janeway. “I wasn’t expecting to be connected with you.”

“It’s nearly 2100 hours in San Francisco. Did you really think you were going to reach Admiral Kale right away?” Janeway asked with a knowing smile.

“Well... Anyway, it’s good to see you again, Kate.”

“You too, Peter. I assume you’re communiqué is in regards to your ship’s recent change in orders?”

“Yes,” Koester replied. “We’re a long way away from Daminia. Why the *Dauntless*?”

“As I’m sure you are aware, the major export from Daminia II... well, the only export, to tell the truth, is dilithium,” Janeway explained. “Over the last few weeks, numerous cargo ships contracted to ship Daminian dilithium to processing plants within the Federation have gone missing.”

“Pirate activity?” Koester asked, immediately suspicious.

“We’re not sure, which is why Starfleet wants its only Daminian officer to be involved in the investigation, in case we need a direct liaison with the planet.”

“Seems an awfully long way to travel just so one officer can participate in an investigation that will probably just lead to the Orions or Breen as usual,” Koester remarked.

“I know, but the Commander-Starfleet insisted. Said it would not only allow for better interaction with the native Daminians, but would make your Commander Spot’s role in Starfleet more prominent to the public at large. Perhaps encourage more Daminians to join Starfleet. Spot has, after all, been a great asset to your crew.”

“That he has,” Koester agreed. “Very well. It’s going to take us at least two weeks to reach the Daminian system, but we’re on our way. Let us know if anything changes or you get any new information in the meantime.”

“We will. Sorry for the detour. Good luck, Peter. Starfleet, out.”

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The next morning, with the official change of orders logged, Fleet Captain Koester held a briefing with the starship's senior staff in the observation lounge behind the bridge.

"I've asked Commander Spot to join our briefing this morning," Koester said to everyone gathered around the conference table, gesturing toward the small five centimeter wide circle of red light sitting on top of the table near the end where the captain traditionally sat. "He may have some insight into the situation we're going to face."

"What IS the situation we're facing, Skipper?" Chief Kyman asked.

"Over the course of the last twelve weeks, nearly every civilian cargo ship that has made a stop at Daminia II to pick up a shipment of dilithium for transport to processing stations at Deneb and Arbazan has disappeared without a trace," Koester explained. "Starfleet Command suspects piracy and that the Orions or the Breen may be operating more extensively in that area of space. A few analysts have expressed concerns the disappearances may be connected to the Daminian population themselves, in which case we need to tread cautiously until we can determine who has been causing this and why it has been happening."

"I thought the Daminians were an entirely non-corporeal race, Captain?" Commander Kyler Saya, the chief of security asked. "How can a non-corporeal race be causing spaceships to disappear?"

"Frankly, Commander," Spot replied through Kyler's combadge in his typical British-accented, slightly mechanical-sounding voice. "All a Daminian need do is get aboard a spacecraft and, as long as it does not have the same security measures found aboard Starfleet vessels, he can make it do whatever he wants. He can interact directly with navigation and fly the ship into the planet's atmosphere or into the nearest star. He could interact with the engineering systems and cause the ship to come to a dead-stop or even blow itself to pieces! There is almost no limit on what a determined Daminian could do. The proper question to ask would be; WHY would any Daminian want to do such a thing?"

"That was going to be my question," Arbelo remarked. "Why would any of your people want to do anything like that, Commander?"

"They wouldn't. Which is why we're heading there to find out what actually IS happening on... or near... my homeworld."

"Daminia II has been a Federation member world for a couple of decades," Koester pointed out. "Yet the average Federation citizen still knows almost nothing about your homeworld, Mister Spot. Perhaps you would take over this briefing and give us a quick history lesson...?"

"I haven't anything prepared, but I will endeavour to do my best," Spot replied. "While geological tests have determined the planet Daminia II is more than five billion years old, our own history is significantly shorter. As far back as racial memory allows, we have always been a non-corporeal species, though the question of how or why is probably best left to philosophers. You could say our modern history begins just twenty five standard years ago..."

*Stardate 43278.5*

*Approaching orbit over the second planet of the Daminian Star System*

The Federation Galaxy-class starship slowed as it approached the gleaming white planet.

"Standard orbit, Mister Crusher," the starship's captain ordered as he stood up and tugged down the front of his uniform top. It had only been a few months since Starfleet had issued the new design, and he was still getting used to the new two piece uniform.

"Standard orbit, aye," Acting-Ensign Wesley Crusher replied as he entered the commands into the conn and the *USS Enterprise NCC-1701-D* settled into orbit over the lifeless desert world.

Captain Jean-Luc Picard turned to the bearded man sitting in the seat to his right and said, "Standard survey team, Number One."

“Aye, Captain. Alans and Prixus are next on the duty roster,” Commander William T. Riker replied as he got up out of his chair and pointed at several of the bridge crew members. “Data, Worf, Counselor.” He then tapped his combadge as he said, “Riker to LaForge.”

“LaForge. Go ahead, Commander,” responded the starship’s chief engineer.

“Report to Transporter Room One in ten minutes for away duty,” Riker ordered.

“On my way,” LaForge replied before closing the communications circuit. Riker then looked back at Picard once again.

“In spite of the fact that planet looks like one big snowball from orbit, sensors are showing a vast desert covering almost the entire planet. With your permission, I’m going to beam the away team down about ninety minutes ahead of the terminator going from day to night around forty degrees north latitude. That should give us enough time to conduct a proper mineral and geological survey without being beaten down by intense mid-day heat.”

“Good idea, Number One,” Picard agreed. “Sensors are indicating the equatorial region during mid-day is experiencing temperatures between fifty-five and sixty-five degrees Celsius.” A gleam appeared in the captain’s eye as he added, “I don’t envy you THIS mission, Number One.”

“Are you sure?” Riker said as he, Data, and Troi stepped up to the turbolift on the upper level of the bridge, where they were joined by the Klingon security chief Worf. “I think I may be willing to forego the regulations this one time and let you lead the away team.”

“I’ll take a rain check, Number One,” Picard remarked as he returned to the center seat and a couple of reserve officers took the place of Data and Worf.

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The materialization process had barely ended before the entire away team – with the exception of Lt Commander Data – started sweating profusely under their uniforms.

“At least it’s a dry heat,” LaForge cracked wise as the away team began setting up a survival shelter and small refrigerated water storage tank that had been beamed down with them just to provide some relief from the persistent heat for the time they would be on the planet’s surface conducting their survey.

“Data,” Riker said, approaching the android officer once the shelter was in place and the tank of cool potable water set up. “What do we already know about this planet? There must be some reason we were sent to survey the place.”

Data, who had already pulled out his tricorder and begun scanning the vicinity of the desert, looked at Riker with his inhuman golden eyes and replied, “Daminia II was first mapped by the science vessel *USS Yosemite* a few months ago. Prior to that, the system did not appear to contain anything of much interest, so had been virtually ignored for a number of decades as the Federation grew to completely surround the system. While the planet still seemed unremarkable at first look when the *Yosemite* arrived for a routine survey, the science team was able to detect unusual sensor readings that they later confirmed were produced by an unusually large deposit of dilithium. If the *Yosemite* crew’s initial readings are correct, we are standing atop the largest vein of dilithium ever discovered. We are here to confirm the *Yosemite* crew’s initial report.”

“At least we don’t need to worry about being attacked by any wild animals,” LaForge said as he stepped over to the first and second officers. He wiped at his brow above his VISOR with the sleeve of his uniform as he added, “Nothing could live here for long.”

“The crew of the *Yosemite* detected no life-form readings anywhere on the planet,” Data said. “Only the unusual energy readings that led to the discovery of the dilithium pockets.”

As Data and LaForge began their work, Counselor Troi stepped up to Riker, a look of concern on her face.

“Will, are you sure we’re alone down here?” she asked.

“Every indication we have says we’re the only living beings on this planet, Deanna,” Riker replied. “Why?”

"I'm sensing... something," Troi answered vaguely. "It's not emotion. But I'm not sensing a typical consciousness either. At least, not like any I have encountered before. It's hard to describe. I only know I feel... something. I don't think we're as alone as we believe we are, Will."

"I'll make sure Lieutenant Worf knows to keep a good lookout, just in case," Riker assured.

The away team began their survey, taking readings deep under the ground to confirm what might be hidden from sight as well as collecting samples from the surface and just below the surface. After some time, LaForge broke off from what he was doing and stepped into the shade of the shelter and grabbed a drink from the water tank. As he swallowed a gulp of the cool refreshing liquid, he noticed something unusual visible through his VISOR and leaned forward as if trying to get a better look. Riker noticed and stepped closer to the chief engineer.

"Something catch your attention, Geordie?" the first officer asked with concern.

"Maybe it's just the heat getting to me, Commander," LaForge remarked. "But my VISOR is picking up some very unusual energy patterns. It's pretty much all around us. Almost looks like what would happen if you shine several lights on a ball covered with little mirrors in a darkened room."

Riker looked in the direction LaForge was gazing in, but saw nothing but the blinding desert floor, not even a mountain or dead tree to break up the monotony.

"Let me know if it gets worse, Geordie. We may have to send you back up to the ship so Doctor Crusher can take a look at you."

"I will, Commander," LaForge promised before finishing his cup of water and returning to his assigned task.

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As the away team was finishing their work, the shadows were starting to grow extremely long as the Damianian star began setting on the western horizon. Alans, Prixus, and Data were gathered with Commander Riker discussing their survey results.

"It is confirmed, Commander," Data was explaining. "We are standing on perhaps the largest discovery of dilithium ever found."

"How big?" Riker asked with a grin.

"We estimate more than fifty percent of the planet's crust is composed of dilithium, sir," Alans explained. "And for a class-M planet such as this one, that is a very significant amount."

"And with this star system well within Federation borders, we need not worry about any rival claims to this planet, Commander," Worf pointed out.

"This is great news!" Riker enthused. "Well worth the discomfort we all suffered today. Good work, everyone. Let me contact Captain Picard and tell him the good news. Then we can start packing..."

Riker paused when he noticed the strange look on Troi's face. She was staring at the ground right in the area covered by the shadow of the shelter. He stepped over to see what she was looking at, followed by Worf, LaForge, Data, and Prixus. On the ground, moving in and out of the shadow of the shelter in random patterns, were multiple circles of colored lights.

"What are they?" the first officer asked.

"They're beautiful," Troi remarked.

"That's what I was seeing earlier, Commander," LaForce stated.

"Apparently in the bright sunlight, only your VISOR could pick them up earlier," Riker said.

"They look like sunlight being refracted by a prism of some sort," Alans suggested. "Could it be some sort of trick of the light here?"

"Is it possible light from the Damianian star is being reflected off something in space and refracted through the planet's atmosphere?" Riker asked.

Data had again withdrawn his tricorder and was scanning as he replied, "Commander, this planet has no satellites, natural or otherwise. There is nothing in orbit – aside from the *Enterprise* – that sunlight could be

reflecting off of, and the *Enterprise* is currently over the night side of the planet. This light is not coming from space.”

“Then what’s causing...?” Riker asked as he started waving his hand over the colored lights to see if his own shadow would block them out, but no matter where he placed his arm or stood, nothing seemed to interfere with the colored lights on the ground. They simply continued their random movement unimpeded.

“Commander, the dilithium deposits we confirmed in this immediate area are located not very far beneath the surface at these coordinates,” PRIXUS remarked. “Could the presence of dilithium so close to the surface have something to do with these lights?”

“That’s something we can determine at a later date, Lieutenant,” Riker responded. “Let’s get our gear packed up and get back to the ship before it gets much darker.”

The other away team members agreed, and in short order the shelter was dismantled, the water tank prepared for beam-up, and the scientific gear stowed. However, the Damirian sun had set before Riker could call for beam-up. It was as the last of the equipment was piled together that the first officer noticed one of the colored lights – a small red circle about five centimeters in diameter – just sitting motionless about a meter away from his feet. It had drawn Riker’s attention because, until now, it appeared the colored lights were always moving.

Riker shrugged, then took a few steps away from the small circle of red light toward the equipment pile. He noticed the light circle move the same distance in the same direction. Frowning, he took a step to his left, and the circle of light moved likewise.

“Worf, come over here,” Riker said. When the Klingon chief of security arrived, Riker pointed at the red light and said, “It seems that... whatever it is... is following me.”

Worf looked at the stationary circle of light and smirked slightly as he said, “It does not appear to be moving now. Perhaps it is an illusion you are seeing? Confusing several of these light patterns for the same one so it appears one of them is following you?”

“No, Worf. That thing moves when I move, stops when I stop...” Riker pulled out a tricorder and opened it to scan the energy pattern. Immediately the circle of light disappeared from the ground.

“Where did it go?” Worf asked, looking around in the twilight-darkness.

“Right here, apparently,” Riker said, holding the tricorder out at arm’s length. The five centimeter circle of red light was now sitting squarely on top of the tricorder. Suddenly the device’s small screen started displaying images and text, as if its memory was being accessed. Worf reacted with alarm, pulling out his hand phaser.

“Drop the tricorder, Commander. I will destroy whatever that is!” the Klingon said.

“Hold on, Lieutenant. It doesn’t seem to be doing anything dangerous,” Riker remarked.

“You cannot be certain of that, Commander,” Worf warned. “It could be searching the database for our weaknesses!”

The tricorder stopped flashing images on its screen, and Riker began to wonder if Worf may have been right when his combadge started sputtering with strange noises. The noises resolved into a series of clicks, then again changed into an extremely mechanical-sounding voice asking, “What...? What are... you?”

Riker looked around, as if expecting to see someone new on the scene, then asked, “To whom am I speaking?”

“A name...? You wish... to know... my name...? I am designated...” Suddenly a sound like a short burst of static came from Riker’s combadge. This was followed by a repeat of the question, “What... are you...? Why... are you... here?”

By now, the entire away team had gathered around Worf and Riker, each looking amazed in their own way as they listened to the halting conversation going on.

“What are you?” Troi asked.

“I... do not... understand... the question...,” was the response.

“If you do not mind, may I scan you?” Data asked.

“You may... proceed.”

As Data performed his scan of the apparently-sentient circle of light, Riker proceeded to introduce himself, “My name... my designation... is William T. Riker.”

“That is... a very curious... designation,” the voice commented. “Why... are you... here?”

“My away team and I represent the Starfleet of an interstellar alliance called the United Federation of Planets,” Riker continued to explain. “We are here to explore what we believed was an uninhabited planet.”

“Ex... plore?”

“Commander,” interrupted Data. “This entity is more than simply an energy pattern. I am detecting neural patterns within the energy signature analogous to humanoid thought patterns.” He scanned in the direction of the various other colored lights darting every which way along the ground, nodding subtly. “The same is true for each of the other lights we are seeing.”

“Data, are you saying all these colored lights are a sentient, intelligent being?” Troi asked.

“Yes, Counselor. Though whether they form a single large mind or are individual entities I am unsure, but from what I can tell, there are hundreds of them,” Data confirmed.

“Thousands, actually,” LaForge added, looking around where they stood. “Perhaps even hundreds of thousands.”

As the sun finally set over the horizon, Riker looked around in amazement at all the varied colored lights moving around the away team for as far as the eye could see. “Wow!” is all he could say.

“What are they, Commander?” Alans asked, also looking around, slight fear showing in his eyes.

“Non-corporeal life forms,” Data replied.

“Non-corp...? Huh?”

“They have no physical bodies like most life forms we have encountered, Lieutenant,” Data said, folding his tricorder and returning it to its holster. “But intelligent life-forms none-the-less.”

“Away team to *Enterprise*,” Riker said after tapping his combadge.

“*Enterprise*,” responded the voice of Captain Picard. “It’s about time, Number One. Sunset occurred several minutes ago in your region of the planet, and we were starting to grow worried that something untoward may have happened to your away team.”

“Nothing wrong, sir,” Riker replied. “We were able to confirm the *Yosemite* crew’s discovery of vast dilithium deposits beneath the planet’s surface.”

“Excellent!” Picard remarked.

“We were also able to establish contact with the planet’s dominant life-form.”

There was a slight pause for a few seconds before Picard’s confused-sounding voice responded back, “Excuse me?”

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*Stardate 68184.5*

*Present Day*

“A few minutes later I beamed up to the *Enterprise* with Commander Riker and the away team and was introduced to Captain Picard himself,” Spot explained. “A short time after I arrived aboard I learned I could not only access portable technology like tricorders and communicators, but ship-board computer systems. Lieutenant Worf believed I was a potential threat to the ship, but I quickly earned the trust of most of the rest of the crew. Aboard the *Enterprise* I allowed Commander Data and the science staff to study me, and they were able to determine each Damianian is an individual life form – not an element of a single hive-mind like Data at first hypothesized. They then returned me to the surface of Damiania II, where I shared what I learned about Starfleet and the Federation with the rest of my people.”

“How did it come about that you eventually joined Starfleet, Commander?” Counselor Gera asked.

“Once the *Enterprise* crew realized Damiania II was not uninhabited, they knew they needed to obtain permission to mine the dilithium they had discovered,” Spot replied. “They requested the Damianians appoint an ambassador to negotiate on their behalf. Since I was the Damianian with the most experience interacting with solid humanoids at that point – actually the only Damianian to interact with humanoids – the Damianians appointed me to

negotiate on their behalf, and I was transported most of the way to Earth aboard the *Enterprise*. I spent a good portion of that voyage learning what I could of Starfleet technology, and discovered my only real vice – a relaxing swim in the plasma stream going to the warp nacelles, particularly when the ship was traveling at greater than warp 4.” Spot made a noise that sounded almost like a sigh as he recalled the memory of his first immersion in the plasma stream, then resumed his story. “On Earth I quickly negotiated a mutually beneficial treaty that allowed the Federation to establish an embassy on Daminia II and begin mining our dilithium. In exchange, the Daminians were given access to Federation knowledge and technology. The cooperation between our people quickly led to Daminia being invited to join the Federation, and Daminia II officially became a member in 2368, only two years after first contact.”

“But how did that lead you to joining Starfleet?” Commander Kyler asked.

“I spent the majority of those years in San Francisco, working with the Federation Council, but I had a lot of interaction with various members of Starfleet, and grew to appreciate and admire their service to the Federation. Once Daminia II had become a member world of the Federation and an official ambassador to the Federation Council was appointed, it was expected I would return to my home world. Instead I expressed a desire to enter Starfleet Academy and become an officer. It took almost a year for them to figure out how I would meet the physical standards required of all cadets to that point, before the Commandant finally decreed those requirements would be waived in my unique case. It was at the Academy that I was given my nickname, Spot, since my own Daminian name is unpronounceable by humanoids. I quickly found it helped me ‘fit in’ better with my underclassmen peers. I excelled at my studies while at the Academy and graduated an Ensign from the Sciences College in 2374. Over the new few months I completed several post-graduate apprenticeships in my field of sciences, then early the next year received my first deep space assignment, to the *USS Dauntless NCC-75310*. I’ve been assigned to the science division aboard the *Dauntless* ever since.”

“I remember the day I first met Mister Spot,” Koester remarked. “I’d never met a Daminian before – had never even heard of them. Shortly after the ship was launched I was holding check-in interviews with newly arrived crew members, and had never been kept waiting before, but ENSIGN Spot’s scheduled time came and went and no one arrived at my ready room door. After several minutes I was starting to get a little hot under the collar and was just about ready to kick this new officer off my ship if I ever saw him. It wasn’t until I contacted my First Officer at the time, Virgil Kane, that I learned Mister Spot had not only arrived for his appointment on time, but had been sitting there on top of my desk the entire time I was waiting for him.”

“I made a point of announcing my presence wherever I went after that little misunderstanding,” Spot added.

Koester nodded, then looked at his gathered crew and asked, “Does anyone have any more questions in regard to our mission?”

“What is expected of us, Skipper?” Commander Arbelo asked.

“Once we arrive in the Daminian star system, which will be in about...” He looked in the direction of the Bolian Lt Peck.

“ETA to Daminia II is three weeks, three days, fifteen hours at present speed, Captain,” the chief helmsman answered.

“Once we arrive in the Daminian system in about three and a half weeks, we will make contact with the Daminian government and see if they have any information on how or why the missing cargo ships have gone missing. At the same time, we will investigate to determine if some natural impediment in that region of space is responsible for the losses. Perhaps some rogue asteroid or uncharted wormhole is responsible for the missing ships. Does everyone understand our mission?” There were general nods of agreement. “Very well. I recommend we get as much routine maintenance and training done while we’re en route to Daminia and we have the spare time, as long as we can maintain our current speed. Thank you all. Dismissed.”

As the crew started to depart the conference lounge, Koester called out, “Mister Spot, remain a moment longer. I want to speak to you.”

“Yes, Captain.”

Once the command staff had all departed, Koester addressed his non-corporeal science officer. "Mister Spot, what kind of relationship exists between the Daminian government and the Federation Embassy on your planet?"

"Admittedly, it has been quite some time since I have managed to pay my home planet a visit," Spot remarked. "But as far as I know, there have been no problems between my government and the Embassy. I have not personally met the recently appointed Ambassador Hart for obvious reasons, but I understand he is working toward closer ties between Daminia and the Federation as a whole. With his encouragement, dilithium production has near-doubled since he was appointed Ambassador. Why do you ask?"

"Just wondering," Koester admitted. "Considering the situation we are being sent to investigate, I would have expected we would be put in contact with Ambassador Hart right away, but I have not heard anything, nor been invited to communicate with him."

"Do you suspect a connection between the lack of contact with the Embassy and the missing ships?"

"I suspect we haven't been told everything. Not yet, at least," Koester remarked. "Whether Starfleet knows the whole story or not is another thing. Very well, if you think of anything else that may help or provide insight, let me know as soon as possible."

"At the speed of light, Captain," Spot agreed.

"Thank you. Dismissed, Commander." And faster than the eye could comprehend, Spot was gone from the room.

\* \* \* \*

*Captain's log, stardate 68252.8:*

*After a long transit, the Dauntless is finally entering the Daminian star system. Hopefully we will soon find out what has been going on and what has happened to all the missing cargo ships carrying Daminian dilithium.*

*Koester, commanding Dauntless, out.*

"Slowing to three-quarters impulse power," Lt Peck announced as the *Dauntless* dropped out of warp just within the Daminian star system.

"Very well, Helm. Set course for Daminia II. Prepare for standard orbital insertion," Koester ordered from the center seat. He then looked over toward the science console, which the young Lt(JG) Annika Arbelo-Eeta was sharing with the small circle of red light sitting atop the console.

"Lieutenant Arbelo-Eeta, scan readings? I want to know if there is anything out of the ordinary in the system."

"Aye, Captain," the first officer's daughter replied as she started her detailed scans of the star system. Meanwhile, Commander Kyler Saya, the starship's chief of security, was performing a sensor scan of her own.

"Captain, I'm detecting something unusual," the young-looking Bajoran/El-Aurian woman reported.

"What is it, Commander?"

"I'm detecting more than the number of vessels I would normally expect in orbit of Daminia II, and the orbital patterns are odd," Kyler replied.

"Odd in what way, Commander?" Koester asked.

"Distance and overlap fit the pattern of an orbital blockade, like we would use to make sure nothing leaves the planet without being observed and intercepted. Or reaches the planet from space," Kyler explained.

"An orbital blockade? Who is blockading Daminia II? And why?"

"I don't know, Captain. None of the ships in orbit are broadcasting Starfleet IFF IDs. In fact..."

Koester got out of his seat and took several steps toward Kyler as he asked, "What is it, Commander?"

Kyler looked up at Koester as she replied, "According to my sensor readings, every single vessel in orbit over Daminia II is a civilian cargo vessel."

"Looks like you found all the missing cargo ships, Skipper," remarked Chief Kyman from his post at mission ops. "Good job, sir."

Koester glanced at the smiling El-Aurian man with an annoyed look, then asked Arbelo-Eeta, "Scan the ships in orbit of Daminia II. Are they armed? And are there crews on board?"

"Already working on it, Captain," Spot's voice replied from Koester's combadge. "I'm detecting twenty four cargo ships in various orbits that, as Commander Kyler remarked, would be ideal to blockade the planet. That's two less than the number of ships Starfleet told us were missing." There was a pause for several seconds before Spot's voice returned, reporting, "Not detecting any humanoid life signs aboard any of the vessels, Captain, which is of course highly unusual. Nearly half the ships have basic defensive weaponry. Not detecting any currently armed."

"Mister Peck," Koester said, turning to face the main viewscreen once again. "Slow to half-impulse. Approach the planet with caution."

"Aye, sir. Slowing to half-impulse," the Bolian responded.

Koester then looked back at the science console again and asked, "Mister Spot, Mister Arbelo-Eeta... If there are no humanoid crew members aboard those ships, how are they maintaining orbit? Is there any way to determine if there are Daminians aboard those ships?"

"Not from this distance, Captain," Arbelo-Eeta replied. "Perhaps once we've passed the system's asteroid belt and crossed into the inner system."

"Keep me informed," Koester ordered.

It took the better part of an hour for the *Dauntless* to reach the inner system. During that time, Koester had decided to play things safe and called away yellow alert, readying the starship for whatever awaited it.

"Captain," the voice of Commander Spot said. Koester had been standing at the rear of the bridge near the master systems display, discussing options with Commander Arbelo and Chief Kyman.

"Yes, Commander?"

"We're closing on Daminia II. Sensors are now detecting innumerable Daminian life-signs aboard all the cargo vessels in orbit over the planet. You were right, sir. They are interfacing directly with the ship systems; helm, engines, and – in the cases of the ships that have them – weapons."

Koester looked toward the main viewscreen, where the bright half-circle of the day-side of the planet was visible, and asked, "Why are the Daminians blockading their own planet? And where are the cargo ship crews?"

"We are close enough to communicate. May I attempt to open a dialogue and see if I can get some answers?"

"By all means, Commander," Koester said as he stepped past his chair and sat down in it. "Ensign Cerilli, open a hailing frequency to the blockade fleet."

"Aye, Captain," Ensign Wyatt 'Five' Cerilli, the former Borg drone, responded. "Hailing frequencies open, sir."

"Go ahead, Spot," Koester said.

Spot's voice now seemed to be coming from everywhere as it was heard over the bridge speakers while being transmitted to the fleet of missing cargo ships. It sounded like loud static punctuated with electronic noise – the Daminian's 'native language.' It was hard to tell, as the sounds were so completely foreign, but Koester thought he could detect more than one 'voice' among the static, which lasted less than seven seconds before Spot said, in English and through Koester's combadge once again, "I have spoken with the leader of a faction of the Daminian population. They no longer want the Federation mining the dilithium from our planet. They also expressed the desire to withdraw Daminia II from membership in the Federation."

Koester looked again at the planet growing larger on the viewscreen as he asked, "Did this... faction leader... tell you why they no longer want the dilithium mined and Daminia II to be a Federation member world?"

"Yes," Spot replied. "He said the mining of dilithium is affecting the life-cycle of the Daminians."

"Affecting the life-cycle...? In what way? And do they have actual proof it is the mining that is causing these alleged life-cycle changes?"

“He said he can offer proof, but I need to interface with him directly in order to receive the required information. He is located aboard the lead freighter, a vessel called the *Odin*, in orbit over Daminia II.”

“Very well. I’ll accompany you over there,” Koester said.

“But, Skipper...,” Arbelo started to object.

“Don’t worry, Exec. I’m not going unarmed or unprepared. And it’s not like this is a typical away mission. As a Starfleet captain, I have the authority to agree to the Daminian faction’s demands if I feel it worthwhile. If it is you over there, you would have to contact me and get approval before making almost any moves or offers that could result in the release of all those ships and – hopefully – their cargos.” Koester got out of his chair, adding, “The ship is yours, Exec.”

\* \* \* \*

For Spot, the process of beaming was much like his normal movement from one point to another. As a being of pure energy, there was little difference with being beamed by transporter except a complete lack of control over where he was going and the ability to travel across the vacuum of space – a medium that would normally kill a Daminian. But unlike many humanoid species, Spot was conscious of the entire trip through the transporter until his energy pattern materialized on the deck of the freighter *Odin*, where the separatist faction leadership was located.

Fleet Captain Koester materialized right beside Commander Spot. The human Starfleet officer looked around, uncomfortable with what appeared to be an unmanned bridge. His discomfort did not decrease as he started to notice many of the lights on the consoles around himself were not indicators, but other Daminians. Looking down, he noticed a circle of orange light about the same size as Spot slowly moving toward his feet. Spot moved forward until the two lights were almost touching. Koester then saw the brief spark pass between the two – as he had seen many times between Spot and his daughter Dot when the two would converse – and the orange light withdrew back toward the forward end of the freighter’s bridge.

“The faction has some valid points. I’m sorry, Captain,” Spot then said through Koester’s combadge. The captain was confused at first.

“What do you mean, Commander? What are YOU sorry for?” Koester awaited an answer that appeared would never be spoken as Spot started moving away in the same direction as the orange Daminian had. It was only then that Koester heard the pump noises and realized how thin the air in the bridge was getting.

“Spot! What’s happening?” Still, Spot ignored the captain’s desperate questions. Koester pounded at his combadge, intending to call for an emergency beam-out, but the device would not function and the atmosphere on the freighter bridge was already too thin. All that emerged was a gasping sound seconds before Koester blacked out.

\* \* \* \*

It was not the first time in his life that Koester opened his eyes, convinced he was dead. Bright light filled the white room in which he found himself, and the bed upon which he was laying was extremely comfortable, more so than his bunk aboard the *Dauntless*. He felt no vibrations or sounds that would indicate he was aboard a space vessel of any kind.

Koester sat up slightly and looked around. He was in a well-appointed bedroom with a gauzy-curtained window on one wall and a closed door on the opposite wall. The first thing Koester tried was activating his combadge, but like aboard the freighter, it would not function. He then got off the bed and walked over to the window, which he noted was sealed shut, and looked outside. There was a high mountain range in the distance, but nothing but bare desert between the building he was in and the mountains many kilometers away.

“I’m on the surface of Daminia,” he said to himself. “But where...?”

Koester turned and looked at the door suspiciously, then stepped toward it. He fully expected it to be locked, and was very surprised to find the knob turn easily and the door swing inward. He stepped out into the hallway beyond, where several other humans were waiting. They looked at the opening door with anticipation.

“You’re awake!” one of the men exclaimed as Koester emerged.

“Where am I?”

“The Federation Embassy on Daminia II,” another man replied. “You materialized inside the compound about two hours ago, unconscious and struggling for breath.”

“The Ambassador wanted to speak to him as soon as he was awake!” the first man said to the other.

“You’re right,” the second man said. “Please follow me, sir. I’ll take you to Ambassador Hart.”

Koester followed the two men along the hall, down a flight of stairs, and through several elaborately decorated rooms. Each room was filled with people of various Federation races, all looking at him with curiosity. Eventually he was led to a closed door at the end of another short hall near what appeared to be the front entrance of the building. One of the men touched the chime next to the door and a moment later the door swished open to admit all three.

“Ambassador,” the first man said to the person sitting behind the desk across the room. “That Starfleet officer is awake.”

“Good!” the ambassador said, getting up and approaching Koester, his hand extended. “I’m Bernard Hart, Federation Ambassador to Daminia II.” He shook Koester’s hand.

“Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester, commanding officer of the starship *Dauntless*,” Koester replied, returning the handshake. “What’s been going on here?”

“We were hoping perhaps you could tell us, Fleet Captain,” Hart remarked. “About eight weeks ago, the Daminians trapped my staff and I here in the Embassy compound. Then, from time to time, a new crew from a freighter or cargo ship would be beamed in. Some, like you, were unconscious due to oxygen deprivation. Others reported their ships malfunctioning without explanation and having to abandon ship, only to find their emergency transporters beaming them here. No one knows what is going on.”

“The *Dauntless* was dispatched to Daminia to investigate why more than two dozen vessels carrying dilithium from Daminia II had gone missing,” Koester explained. He noticed a brief look go between the ambassador and one of the two men who had escorted him to Hart. “We arrived to find almost all the missing ships blockading the planet with only Daminians aboard. We were contacted by the self-proclaimed leader of a faction advocating the end to both Daminia’s membership in the Federation and the mining of dilithium on the planet who claimed the mining is affecting the life-cycle of the Daminians. When my Daminian science officer and I boarded the cargo ship that faction leader was aboard, my officer suddenly seemed to have turned on me. Next thing I knew, I was waking up here in your embassy.”

“The Daminians want us to stop mining the dilithium?” Hart asked.

“That was one of their demands, yes,” Koester agreed. “Why?”

“All this started happening just days after I approved the start of a new mining operation at the planetary coordinates 69.9 South, 138.1 East – an area that had never previously been exploited but which sensor readings indicated contained a large and highly unusual strata of dilithium. I wonder if there is a connection?”

“Perhaps if you asked...?” Koester suggested.

“Easier said than done, Fleet Captain. The Daminians have not allowed us any communication in or out of the compound.”

“It appears this Daminian separatist faction doesn’t want us talking to anyone at all,” he remarked. He then started feeling around himself, pleased when he located the tricorder he had carried with him in its holster under the back of his uniform jacket. Pulling the device out, he moved toward the front main entrance of the building. “Just as I figured.”

“What is it, Fleet Captain?” Hart asked as he and the two other men that had escorted Koester followed along.

“I’m detecting Daminian life-signs within the embassy equipment, directly interfacing with the building systems – door locks, environmental controls... No wonder you’re trapped here.” He looked at Hart and then asked, “I don’t suppose you have any tools here, Mister Ambassador?”

“I’m sure the maintenance staff have tools around here somewhere. Why?”

“I have an idea,” Koester replied.

\* \* \* \*

Chief Kyman stepped over to the center seat, where Commander Setton To'Lock Arbelo sat, his right hand holding his chin as he stared intently at the main viewer.

"Commander, it's been almost three hours and we still haven't heard anything from the Skipper," Kyman remarked.

"We just heard from Spot less than thirty minutes ago," Arbelo remarked, looking up at the COB. "He explained that the Captain was busy negotiating terms of surrender with the leaders of this separatist faction."

"Aye, I know. But it's not like the Skipper not to report in personally from time to time. After all..."

Kyman's observation was interrupted by Lt Commander Riker turning around at Ops.

"Commander," Riker said, a confused expression on his bearded face. "I'm picking up a weak signal on a radio carrier wave frequency."

"Radio?" Arbelo questioned, suddenly sitting forward in the command chair. "What is its origin?"

"The planet's surface," Riker replied. "Coordinates 40 degrees north latitude, Zero degrees longitude."

Kyman, who had quickly returned to his own console on the port side of the bridge, looked toward Arbelo and stated, "Records indicate that is the location of the Federation Embassy on the surface of Daminia II, XO."

Arbelo looked at Riker and said, "Why would the Embassy be trying to contact us using radio? Can you boost the signal?"

"I can try," Riker confirmed before running the incoming signal through several filters. Eventually a familiar voice could be heard through the bridge speakers counting numbers.

"...Six... seven... eight... nine... ten... Repeating, one... two... three..."

"Skipper, this is the *Dauntless*," Arbelo said aloud. "Is that you?"

"Monster!" Koester's relieved-sounding voice could barely be heard. "I'm glad you're receiving this!"

"Skipper, what are you doing on the planet's surface?" Arbelo asked, obviously confused. "Commander Spot said you were in negotiations with the faction leader aboard the *Odin*."

"To tell you the truth, Exec, I'm not entirely sure what is going on. I only know that somehow Mister Spot was complicit in incapacitating me and beaming me down to the Embassy on the surface."

"Why would Spot do that?" Arbelo asked, obviously confused.

"I don't know. But we can discuss that once I'm back aboard," Koester said. "You have the coordinates for the Federation Embassy?"

"Yes, Skipper. We'll have you back up here in just a moment..."

"Actually, Exec, I need emergency beam-out for myself and..." There was a pause for several seconds before Koester's voice returned. "...And about one hundred and eighty other people."

"A hundred and eighty?!?" Arbelo exclaimed. "What's going on, Skipper?"

"The crews of most of the captured cargo ships, plus the entire embassy staff, are all being held captive here in the embassy building by the Daminians," Koester explained. "No one here seems to know why, and even though the Daminians are interfacing directly with the compound's systems, they have not made any verbal demands of the captives here."

"Stand by, Skipper," Arbelo said, then activated the intercom on the arm of the command chair. "Bridge to Chief Blackman."

"Transporter room one. Blackman," came the quick reply.

"Chief, we need to beam more than a hundred and eighty people up from the planet's surface," Arbelo advised. "Emergency evacuation. We're going to need every transporter system we have on-line to do this as quickly and efficiently as possible."

"Understood, sir. I'll notify all transporter operators and have systems ready to energize within five minutes."

"Very good, Chief. Inform the bridge when everything is ready. Bridge, out." Arbelo then returned his attention to Koester's radio signal. "We should be able to beam everyone down there aboard in a few minutes. Have everyone gather as close together as feasible."

“Acknowledged. I’ll see you in a few minutes. I’ll brief you about what has happened and the facts we know as soon as I get to the bridge. Koester, out.”

\* \* \* \*

A few minutes later, Fleet Captain Koester emerged on the bridge, followed closely by Ambassador Hart.

“Exec, I want a meeting of the senior staff right away,” Koester ordered from the turbolift alcove as he moved toward the nearby door to the conference lounge. “And make sure Dot is included this time.”

“Dot? Mister Spot’s daughter?” Arbelo asked, just to make sure he heard the captain correctly.

“Yes. She might have some insight into why Spot turned against us like he did.” Koester and the ambassador then disappeared into the conference lounge.

Arbelo, still showing an expression of surprise, looked over toward mission ops and said, “You heard the Skipper, COB. Senior staff and Miss Dot to the conference lounge right away.”

“Aye, XO,” Chief Kyman replied.

A few minutes later the entire senior staff of the *Dauntless* and Ambassador Hart were gathered around the table in the conference lounge when the port side door opened once more and human girl with bright red hair and freckles across her nose – looking as if she had just left the Emerald Island of Ireland – entered with an unsure look on her face.

“You wanted to see me, Captain?” she asked.

“Yes, Dot. Come in,” Koester said. “Are you aware of what is occurring at Daminia II?”

“My father told me we were sent here to investigate the disappearance of several spacecraft,” Dot replied as she took several steps toward the table, the pink dot on her forehead that matched her own non-corporeal form barely visible on the pale skin of her forehead.

“On the journey here, did your father mention anything that may have led you to believe he knew more than he was telling me about the situation here at Daminia?” Koester asked. “Or that he might hold any grudge against the Federation and its involvement with Daminia II?”

Dot’s holographic humanoid form looked more confused and puzzled than ever. She looked at the captain, sitting at his usual place at the head of the table, and said, “With all due respect, Captain, what is going on? Where is my father?”

“Your father turned against me when we boarded the ship where the leaders of a Daminian separatist faction were located,” Koester explained. “For some reason they are trying to drive the Federation away from Daminia II.”

“That doesn’t sound like my father at all,” Dot protested. “He has never been anything other than completely loyal to you all the years he has served aboard this starship, Captain!”

“I know, but for some reason he participated in the Separatists effort to immobilize me and beam me down to where they had all the captured ship crews locked away in the Federation Embassy on the planet’s surface.”

“By chance did my father perform an information exchange with any of the rogue Daminians before he turned on you?” Dot asked, her expression indicating perhaps she did know more than she first assumed..

“Yes. He said he needed to interface directly with the faction leader in order to fully understand the Separatist’s claims that the mining of dilithium on the planet was somehow affecting or influencing the Daminian’s life-cycles.”

Dot’s humanoid face looked thoughtful for a moment. Finally she said, “I cannot help but feel my father has somehow been influenced himself by the faction leaders.”

“Is it possible their proof is so convincing that Spot would join them without even discussing the issue with me?”

“Unlikely. I think it is more likely one or more members of this faction can manipulate him...” Dot looked like she was trying to remember a specific word. “I suppose the best humanoid equivalent would be that he has been brainwashed.”

“Brainwashed?! Daminian’s can do that to one another?”

“It is not an ability my father has ever told me was common.”

“If Mister Spot has been brainwashed, what can we do to help him?” Commander Arbelo asked. “Especially with us here and him over there aboard one of those cargo ships.”

“As far as we know,” Koester corrected. “He and the faction leader could have beamed down to the planet in the time I was unconscious.”

“How do we find out?” Ambassador Hart asked.

“I think I know of one way...,” Koester remarked vaguely.

\* \* \* \*

“Mister Cerilli, hail the *Odin*,” Koester ordered.

“Frequency open, Captain,” Ensign Cerilli responded.

“Freighter *Odin*, this is Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester aboard the *USS Dauntless*. Please respond.”

It took only a second before a mechanical-sounding voice responded, “My compliments, Fleet Captain Koester. Your ingenuity in finding a way to return to your ship surprises me.”

“Am I speaking to the same Separatist faction leader that Commander Spot was in contact with when we first arrived in this system?”

“You are,” the voice responded.

“I would like to speak with Commander Spot, if you would please.”

“I’m sorry, Fleet Captain Koester, but I find the use of a humanoid designation such as that demeaning and insulting. You may speak with your officer if and when you refer to him by his proper given designation.”

Koester exchanged a look of annoyance with Arbelo before replying, “You know as well I as do that Daminius designations are unpronounceable by humanoids. That was the very reason Mister Spot was given his nick-name to begin with.”

“Then you cannot speak with Cdtkkhttn,” the voice said matter-of-factly, the name again sounding like a brief burst of static.

Again Koester shared his frustration with Arbelo, huffing under his breath slightly. He then cleared his throat and said, “I would like to point out that my starship’s shields can easily withstand an attack by the simple defensive weapons aboard the freighter you are currently occupying.”

“Your point, Fleet Captain Koester?” the Daminius voice responded.

“My point is the same cannot be said about your freighter’s shields against the power of my vessel’s phasers.”

The Daminius leader sounded almost amused as he said, “Are you threatening me?”

“I am simply stating fact. Just like the fact that I know Daminius such as yourself can survive extremely harsh environments, but I also know that you cannot survive in the vacuum of space for very long.” Koester paused for effect for a moment before adding, “Put Spot on the transmission or I WILL open fire.”

“You wouldn’t dare open fire on Federation citizens!” the Daminius leader retorted.

Koester could not help but chuckle slightly before saying, “It was you who renounced your Federation citizenship by demanding your planet withdraw from Federation membership, then went and hijacked more than two dozen Federation-registered space vessels. As far as I’m concerned, you’re nothing more than a group of terrorists. You can’t have it both ways!” Koester then turned around and faced his tactical officer. “Commander Kyler, arm phaser banks and lock weapons on the *Odin*,” he said loudly enough to be heard over the subspace transmission.

“Phasers armed, locked, and ready, Captain,” Kyler responded.

“Very well. Fi...”

“FLEET CAPTAIN KOESTER! WAIT!” shouted the Daminius voice through the speakers. A second later a more familiar sounding British-accented, slightly mechanical-sounding voice was heard through the speakers.

“I’m here, Captain.”

“I want an explanation, Commander,” Koester said, looking back toward the viewscreen, where the freighter *Odin* could be seen at the center of the screen. “Why have you suddenly sided with the Separatist faction?”

Why did you join with them – or at least stand by idly – as they assaulted me and tried to hold me captive on the planet’s surface?”

Spot sounded slightly unsure of himself as he replied, “The Daminians need to be left alone, Captain. The Federation has exploited Daminia II for far too long. The time has come for us to part ways. Our dilithium must be returned and all Daminians off-world must return home in order to restore the proper balance of our ecosystem. Once that is done, the Federation should simply forget Daminia II exists.”

“I find it hard to believe that you have had such a radical change of opinion, Commander,” Koester remarked. “You, who advocated for a greater role for the Daminians in both Federation affairs and in Starfleet!”

“You are mistaken, Captain. No Daminian should leave their home world. I never wanted to leave. The Alliance is too dangerous. It is time for us all to return home!”

Now Koester was truly puzzled. The voice sounded like his science officer, but the opinions being expressed were completely opposite those his science officer had expressed in all the years he had known and served with the Daminian officer. The captain began to wonder if one of the other Daminian Separatists was somehow mimicking Commander Spot in the hopes of driving away the *Dauntless*.

“That is not what you told us when this mission began, Commander,” Koester replied.

“That was just a story, Captain,” Spot insisted.

“NOT just a story, Spot. As I recall from what you told us that morning, it was YOU who made contact with the away team from the *Enterprise*. YOU who volunteered to represent Daminia II during negotiations for the mining rights on your planet. YOU who requested admission to Starfleet Academy in order to reach the stars once your work with the Federation Council was complete. I cannot... I refuse to believe your hopes and objectives have changed so utterly, so completely, as to be polar opposite to what you expressed to us all not that long ago!”

“I... that was... but it...”

“Remember, Spot? Don’t you remember how you felt the first time you left your planet and made your way to the stars?” Koester asked.

The captain half-expected communications to be cut off. Instead, there was silence for several seconds followed what sounded like a loud electrical arc created by a Van de Graaff generator, followed by Spot’s voice, sounding much more like his normal personality, saying, “Captain! The leader of the Separatist faction somehow has the ability to impose his will upon other Daminians! He has...”

As Spot’s voice suddenly stopped, Koester looked at Cerilli at Ops, who looked back and reported, “Transmission cut off at the source, sir.” Koester quickly turned and looked at his emotional Vulcan chief engineer, who was standing beside the engineering console on the port side of the bridge.

“Jeff, any way you can lock onto Commander Spot and beam him back aboard?”

“Impossible, Peter,” Commander Jeffery Bloom replied. “There’s no way we can determine which Daminian life-sign is Spot’s. To scanners, they all appear pretty much the same, and there are more than a dozen Daminians over there on that ship!”

Koester then spun to face Ambassador Hart, who has silently watched everything that was going on. “Ambassador,” he said. “The one common thread running through all the Daminian leader’s comments and demands is the dilithium we have been mining. Why would the Daminians be so concerned with dilithium? It’s not like they have any industry or interstellar vessels of their own that would be in need of it.”

“Actually, Fleet Captain, the Daminians have great need of the dilithium just beneath the surface of their planet,” Hart explained. “Since Daminia II joined the Federation, we have had scientists studying the planet’s environment, geology, and structure as well as studying the non-corporeal Daminians themselves. One of the things they learned is certain strata of dilithium convert the planet’s geothermal energy into a form the Daminians can use.”

“So what you’re saying is, in essence, we have been mining and removing their food source?” Koester asked.

“No wonder Spot and Dot enjoy swimming in the plasma streams of the warp core,” Arbelo remarked.

“Not exactly, Fleet Captain,” Hart said. “Most of the dilithium we mine is of the same grade normally used by Federation and similar culture’s anti-matter reactor plants. But as I said, there is a special strata of dilithium on Daminia II whose molecules are aligned a little differently. It makes the dilithium unusable in anti-matter reactors

since the flow through the crystal is too random. It is these crystals, which the Federation has made more easily accessible to the Daminians, that they use for their... food source, for lack of a better description.”

“Then why...?” Koester started to ask.

“Our relations with the Daminians were nothing but cordial until just several weeks ago,” Hart continued. “The incidents of us being held captive in the embassy compound and the cargo ships carrying dilithium being hijacked coincided with the start of mining of a newly discovered strata of dilithium deep underground in an area that had never been explored before. Analysis showed this newly-discovered dilithium had unusual properties that Federation scientists believed could improve warp drive efficiency by more than fifty percent!”

“What kind of unusual properties?” Koester asked.

“I don’t know the details,” Hart admitted. “But I know where there are samples of the crystals.”

“Where, Ambassador?”

“As I’m sure you are aware, the surface of Daminia II is a relatively inhospitable place.”

“The entire planet is one big desert,” Koester agreed.

“The Federation decided it would be more efficient to build one large compound instead of multiple smaller ones once we established diplomatic relations with the Daminians. There is an analysis lab in the sub-basement level of the Embassy where the samples are located.”

“Jeff,” Koester said, again turning his attention on his chief engineer. “Do you think you can lock onto those samples and beam them up so we can determine just what kind of special properties those crystals may contain?”

“It depends on how well shielded the Embassy and the analysis lab are,” Bloom replied.

“We were all able to be beamed out of the Embassy after Fleet Captain Koester contacted your ship,” Ambassador Hart remarked. “That means the Embassy Compound’s primary protective shield is down. Probably taken down by the Daminians when they took control of the compound. The lab may have some isolation shields to protect samples from contamination, but I don’t think the dilithium samples would be among them.”

“Can you do it, Jeff?” Koester asked.

“I can only try,” Bloom remarked as he headed toward the nearest transporter room.

\* \* \* \*

Bloom and Chief Gregory Blackman were standing at the control panel on the bulkhead behind the transporter control console in Transporter Room 1. From the deck in front of the transparent aluminum control booth, Fleet Captain Koester and Commander Alasdair Wallace watched the two engineers work.

“Commander,” Chief Blackman said as he finally started receiving sensor readings. “Take a look at this. What do you think it means?”

“That’s... impossible!” the emotional Vulcan said as he studied the readings himself.

“What is it, Jeff? Something blocking you from locking onto the crystals in the lab?” Koester asked.

“No, Peter. Here, come take a look at this,” Bloom said, configuring the technical readout displayed on the monitor into a graphic display. As Wallace and Koester stepped into the control booth and up to the control console at the rear, Wallace’s eyes widened in surprise. The graphic display appeared as a gridded surface to Koester, with what seemed like a sudden and deep indentation right near the middle.

“What am I looking at here?” Koester asked.

“This is a graphic representation of subspace in the vicinity of the planet’s surface, Peter,” Bloom explained. “Normally subspace will appear as a nearly flat surface in a graphic such as this. In the vicinity of a planet you would see a slight indent. In the vicinity of a star or other large mass, a slightly more significant indent.”

“But that looks almost like someone had drilled a well through subspace,” Koester said, pointing at the graphic.

“You’re no’ far from th’ truth, sair,” Wallace remarked.

“What does it mean?” Chief Blackman asked.

"I don't know," Bloom replied. "But it's centered right on the area of the lab where those crystal samples are stored. Perhaps once we perform some tests of our own, we can figure out the significance."

"So this won't prevent you from beaming up those samples?" Koester asked.

"It shouldn't," Bloom assured. He touched a few more controls on the console and said, "It appears we're locked onto the crystal samples."

"Very well," Koester said as he and Wallace exited the control booth and once again stood by the door. "Beam the samples directly to Science Lab 1." He then said to Wallace, "Alasdair, see if you can figure out what makes these crystals so special that it would turn the Daminians against us."

"Aye, sir," Wallace replied before turning to leave the transporter room.

"System is locked on and ready, Captain," Chief Blackman reported.

"Very good, Chief. Energize," Koester ordered.

As Bloom watched, Blackman activated the transporter. Unexpectedly, the lights in the room darkened, the only illumination coming from the wall behind the transport platform which turned a dim red in color. It seemed to Koester that the transport process was taking longer than usual, but eventually the system disengaged and the lights in the room returned to normal.

"What happened?" Koester asked, looking through the transparent aluminum window at Bloom.

"Not sure, Peter. It took twice as long and required fifty percent more power than usual to beam aboard those samples."

"Run a diagnostic on the transporter systems and make sure there aren't any faults in the system," Koester ordered. "I'll be back on the bridge if you need me."

"Aye, sir," Bloom replied as Koester exited the transporter room and turned toward the closest turbolift before he was alerted by a voice from his combadge.

"Bridge to Captain Koester," said the voice of Commander Kyler Saya.

"Go ahead, Commander."

"Captain, the *Odin* has launched some kind pod in our direction. Lieutenant Arbelo-Eeta says it looks like a work pod of some sort. But the *Odin* has also energized its defensive weapons array."

Koester increased his pace and quickly entered the turbolift as he said, "On my way now." He then ordered the lift, "Bridge!" Seconds later he stepped out onto the bridge of his starship.

"Status?" he requested as he replaced Arbelo at the center seat.

"Sensors are detecting a lone Daminian life-form reading in the work pod, Captain," Arbelo-Eeta reported.

"They may be attempting a suicide run at us in the hopes of overloading our systems, Captain, since they know their lasers can't even dent our shields," Kyler said. "Recommend destroying the pod before it gets too close to us."

"I'm not so sure the work pod is attacking us, Commander," Koester said, looking at the tiny utility ship approaching on the viewscreen. He then glanced at Arbelo and remarked, "What are the chances that Spot is aboard that pod?"

"You really think so?" Arbelo asked skeptically.

"Captain, the freighter is locking its weapons!" Kyler reported.

"On us?" Arbelo asked.

"No, sir. On the pod!"

"Helm, move us between the pod and the *Odin*, fast!" Koester ordered, stepping forward and putting a hand on the back of Peck's chair.

"Activating maneuvering thrusters," the Bolian helmsman acknowledged. Moments later the bridge crew could hear the laser strikes against the starship's superior shields. "The pod is in our lee," Peck reported.

"No damage to shields, but the *Odin* is starting to maneuver to come around us," Kyler informed.

"Kyler, drop shields on the side where the pod is located and have the transporter room beam the Daminian located there aboard," Koester ordered.

"Aye, sir. Informing Chief Blackman now." The Bajoran/El-Aurian woman then reacted to something her sensors were displaying. "Captain, the *Odin* has cleared our hull! They're opening fire on the pod!"

Koester looked at the viewscreen, where the freighter's laser beams struck the small work pod, which erupted in a spectacular explosion. The captain slapped his combadge as he exclaimed, "Transporter room! Do you have Spot?!"

\* \* \* \*

Down in Transporter Room 1, Chief Blackman ignored Koester's frantic voice. Instead, he was trying to boost the energy signature before he lost the pattern in the buffer mid-transit.

"Cross-circuit channel 1 with amplifier B!" he called to the petty officer at the panel behind him. "We need to boost the gain!"

"What happened?" Petty Officer Solari asked as he quickly complied with the Chief's instructions. "We were locked on just fine a moment ago!"

"There was a sudden energy eruption just as we dematerialized," Blackman explained as he re-cycled the transporter controls for a third time. "The small ship the life-form we were locked on to must have exploded just as we energized. And it doesn't help that we're beaming a Daminian aboard. They're pure energy to begin with. Now, synchronize circuits C and D and return the pattern to the buffer!"

Again Petty Officer Solari complied unquestioningly. The transport chamber dimmed slightly, then brightened to its normal appearance as the materialization pattern appeared. The pattern faded quickly, returned, then faded again. Blackman pressed one more control on the transport console, then re-energized the device. The transporter hummed to life once again and the materialization pattern appeared. Seconds later, the red circle of light that was Commander Spot – appearing very dim – was visible on one of the transport pads.

"Commander Spot doesn't look right, Chief," Solari said as he looked through the booth window. "Should I call for sickbay or something?"

"I don't know if sickbay can do anything to help a Daminian," Blackman remarked. Then an idea occurred to him. The transporter chief activated the intercom and announced, "Miss Dot to Transporter Room 1 immediately. Miss Dot, please report to Transporter Room 1 ASAP. Your father has been beamed aboard from an exploding vessel and doesn't look well."

Before Blackman could even deactivate the intercom, a pink circle of light a little smaller than Spot appeared on the transport platform. "What happened?" Dot's voice asked through the Chief's combadge.

"His ship was destroyed just as we began beaming him aboard," Blackman replied. "He was probably exposed to radiation, extreme heat, and hard vacuum momentarily before he was dematerialized. Is there anything you can do for him?"

"I can try," Dot replied, and moved closer to her father, the two light circles almost merging.

\* \* \* \*

On the bridge, Koester was trying to resist the urge to rush down to the transporter room – particularly after the ship-wide announcement looking for Dot – and concentrate on maneuvering his vessel away from the freighter *Odin* before the Daminian Separatist leader tried to ram the *Dauntless* with the smaller bulk carrier when another voice sounded through the intercom.

"Science Lab 1 to the bridge."

Koester reached over and activated the intercom on the arm of the command chair. "What is it, Jeff?"

"Commander Wallace and I have completed some preliminary tests on the dilithium sample we beamed aboard," Bloom reported. "We have confirmed several highly unusual properties associated with these crystals."

"What kind of properties?" Koester asked.

Now Wallace's voice cut in, explaining, "All dilithium crystals share certain subspace properties. It's what differentiates dilithium from common forms of quartz and allows the crystals to regulate anti-matter in intermix chambers. These crystals not only pierce subspace, but likely pierce the boundary between parallel universes as well."

Koester was astonished. His mind reeling, he asked, "Are you suggesting what I think you are, Alasdair?"

"Aye," Wallace replied. "Our tests have revealed these dilithium crystals are providin' some form o' conduit between our universe and a parallel universe. From the readin's we are gettin', I would be willin' t' hypothesize that the so-called Daminian Separatists are bein' influenced by what Starfleet refers to as th' 'Mirror Universe.'"

"The Mirror Universe...," Koester repeated to himself. "That could explain a lot, actually." He turned his attention back to the intercom and asked, "Are you suggesting that Daminians from the Mirror Universe have crossed over into our own?"

"Unlikely," Bloom replied, his voice returning. "What is more likely is, since Daminians are beings of pure energy, the leader of the Separatists was somehow 'brainwashed' by influence coming from the other universe much like what you saw happen to Spot, and the effect spread."

"Is there any way to cut off this influence? After all, it seems Spot managed to regain control of himself."

"The only way we can close this rift in the boundary between realities is to destroy the crystals in question that are creating the conduit," Bloom replied.

"Very well," Koester replied before looking toward Kyler. "Commander, have Ambassador Hart escorted back to the bridge please."

"Aye, sir," Kyler replied. A few minutes later, one of the security department's Starfleet Marines emerged from the turbolift with Hart close behind.

"You wanted to see me, Fleet Captain?" he asked.

"Yes, Ambassador. I need to know the planetary coordinates of the location of the strata of dilithium those samples we recently beamed up came from."

Hart's expression changed – a mixture of suspicion and regret. "Why do you need to know?" he asked.

"Because those crystals are what is influencing the Daminians to turn against the Federation," Koester explained. "The strata must be destroyed to close a rift that has apparently been opened between our universe and a different though parallel one."

Hart's expression became one of disbelief as he remarked, "Those crystals displayed an unusual level of quality which could prove useful in not only anti-matter reactions but other applications. They are valuable beyond description! You cannot simply destroy them!"

"Ambassador, it is not the mining of dilithium that is affecting the life-cycle of the Daminians. It is the adverse influence of another universe that has changed the Daminians, and it is only going to get worse the longer you allow this subspace conduit to exist!"

Hart looked conflicted. He certainly did not want the Daminians to drop out of the Federation, taking their natural resources with them. But likewise he knew the potential value of the recently-discovered crystals and the potential breakthroughs in propulsion and power-generating technology they could provide.

"Ambassador," Koester emphasized. "The coordinates!"

Hart looked at Koester and asked, "Are you sure this is the only way?"

"Absolutely," Koester replied.

Hart sighed, then finally said, "Roughly 70 degrees South latitude, 138 degrees east longitude."

Koester looked at Lieutenant Arbelo-Eeta at the science console and said, "Scan those coordinates for any signs of mining activity."

"Scanning the planet's surface at those coordinates," Arbelo-Eeta confirmed. "Detecting mining equipment and structures at 69.88 degrees South, 138.12 East. The mine extends roughly 1.2 kilometers beneath the surface."

"Suggestions, Commander Kyler?" Koester asked.

"For that depth, at least five quantum torpedoes should be enough to destroy the crystal strata in question," the security chief replied.

"Very well. Load forward tubes with quantum torpedoes. Inform me when torpedoes are ready in all respects."

Kyler pressed the controls on her console. A moment later all indicator lights turned green.

“Tubes armed and ready, Captain.”

“Very well. Target coordinates 69.88 degrees South, 138.12 East. Place a .01 degree spread in the volley. Stand by to fire.”

“Torpedoes aimed and synchronized,” Kyler confirmed.

Koester looked at the screen once again. The nearly pure-white surface of Daminia II could be seen slowly turning below as the *Dauntless* orbited the planet. Koester then muttered to himself, “I hope this works.” He then ordered, “Commander Kyler... Fire!”

Kyler activated the trigger on the tactical console. Immediately, all three forward-facing torpedo tubes launched a volley of two blinding-white quantum torpedoes. The torpedoes streaked away from the starship and quickly passed through the planet’s thin atmosphere before striking the surface. Even from orbit, the bridge crew of the *Dauntless* could see the destruction as an enormous fireball erupted.

“Captain, energy readings indicate a blast yield of more than 100 megatons,” reported Lieutenant Arbelo-Eeta. “I’m detecting blast effects for almost 900 kilometers from ground zero. Sensors are detecting a crater thirty five kilometers in diameter and more than two kilometers deep at the center has formed in the vicinity of where the mine used to be.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Koester said before looking at his first officer. “If this hasn’t worked to seal the conduit between universes, nothing will.”

Before Arbelo could reply, Ensign Cerilli said, “Captain, we’re receiving numerous hails from the cargo ships in orbit with us. It seems many of the Daminians aboard the ships are confused as to why they are aboard spacecraft to begin with. Some are requesting help in returning to the surface of Daminia II.”

“Sounds like it worked, Skipper,” Arbelo remarked.

“Exec, have the cargo ship crews we have aboard stand by to return to their vessels so we can evacuate the Daminians.” He then looked back to Ops and said, “Ensign, hail the *Odin*. I want to speak to that Separatist leader.”

“Frequencies open, Captain,” Five replied.

“Freighter *Odin*, this is Fleet Captain Koester aboard the *USS Dauntless*.”

It took less than a second for the mechanical-sounding voice of the Daminian leader to respond, “Fleet Captain Koester, I do not know how to explain my actions or motivations. I only know my deeds over the past several weeks has been atypical of my normal routine. I apologize to you and Federation Ambassador Hart. I only wish I understood what has happened.”

“My science and engineering officers believe they have determined the cause of what happened here. If you are amenable to the idea, I would like to suggest a meeting at the Federation Embassy Compound within the next twelve hours after we have returned all the cargo ship crews to their correct vessels to discuss what happened and make assurances that such an occurrence does not happen again.”

“I look forward to such a meeting, Fleet Captain Koester,” the now-former Separatist leader replied.

\* \* \* \*

*Captain’s log, stardate 68261.6:*

*All twenty four freighter crews have been returned to their proper vessels and their journeys toward the dilithium processing plants resumed. Meanwhile, Commanders Wallace and Bloom and I met with Ambassador Hart, representatives of the Daminians that had tried to force their planet’s separation from the Federation, and representatives of the actual Daminian governing leadership in the Embassy compound on the surface of the planet and explained how consciousness from an alternate reality had influenced the Daminians here, starting with those who worked closely with the new mining operation and spreading through a large segment of their population almost like a computer virus.*

*It was fortunate that we managed to destroy the crystals responsible before the entire population of Daminia II was affected.*

*Our work here done, the USS Dauntless is now heading back toward the Fifth Fleet AOR. We expect it will take just over three weeks to reach Starbase 719.*

*Koester, commanding Dauntless, out.*

Fleet Captain Koester looked up from his monitor screen as the door chime sounded. "Come," he ordered.

As the door swished open, Commander Spot stepped into the Captain's ready room, using his mobile holographic humanoid body. Unlike his daughter Dot, Spot preferred to keep and make use of the first human-like body he had programmed, though Koester felt there was something different about it. Something he could not quite put his finger on until Spot paused at attention in front of his desk.

"Sporting a mustache and goatee now, Mister Spot?"

Spot unconsciously felt the short beard with his hand as he replied, "Considering recent events, it seemed appropriate, Captain."

"How are you feeling?" Koester asked as he gestured for his science officer to take a seat across from him.

"Much better than when Chief Blackman first beamed me aboard, thank you. I doubt I would have survived had Dot not been available to nursemaid me back to health."

"Yes, unfortunately Doctor Kelley and his staff have very little capability to treat Daminians that have been exposed to the hard vacuum or space. But I'm glad you're feeling better. What can I do for you today, Commander?"

"I wanted to personally thank you, Captain. You saved my life when you could have simply destroyed the work pod I had escaped the *Odin* in. And were it not for your persistence, it is doubtful I would have overcome the evil influence that had overtaken me in the first place."

"I didn't do anything any other commanding officer wouldn't have done," Koester assured. "I'm just glad we were able to determine you and your fellow Daminians were in fact being influenced by an outside source and that we were able to bottle up that source so that it would not unduly affect your people again."

"Well, with the 'mirror' dilithium now destroyed, including the samples we beamed up to the ship, I'm sure relations between Daminia and the Federation will resume as they were," Spot opined.

"Still, you have to admit, the properties those crystals contained were incredible. I wonder what other abilities the use of those crystals could have made available? Trans-dimensional travel...? True transwarp...? The possibilities were perhaps infinite!"

"With that strata of crystals destroyed, and for good reason, Captain, we shall never know," Spot remarked.

\* \* \* \*

Back on Daminia II, Ambassador Bernard Hart entered his office in the Federation Embassy, closing and locking the doors behind him. With the Daminians no longer under the influence of the so-called 'Mirror' universe, things had returned to normal in the Embassy. In fact, without all the cargo ship crews that had been trapped there with Hart and his staff for nearly two whole months, the compound seemed empty in comparison.

Hart looked out his office window for a brief moment, then smiled and stepped over to a nearby wall behind his desk. He touched a control panel on the desk, and a painting directly behind his chair slid sideways into the wall, revealing a heavy safe door one square meter wide. He entered another code into the small panel beside the safe door and the shield that prevented the safe from being detected or scanned deactivated. He then tapped the combination into the keypad on the door. With a whir, the locking bolts retraced and Hart pulled the heavy door open.

Inside the safe was located a packet containing a small fortune in Federation credits and several bars of gold-pressed latinum for use should the need arise, a fully-charged type-1 hand phaser for use in emergencies,

sensitive data about the Federation contained on an assortment of isolinear chips and rods, and a fairly large sample case. It was the case that Hart reached in for, placing it on his desk and entering yet another combination into the lock. The case opened with a click, and Hart lifted the lid, revealing 5 kilograms of dilithium from the same strata that had recently been destroyed by the starship *Dauntless* and a survey report indicating potential sites around the planet that might hold more strata of the unusual dilithium deposits. Hart reached into the sample case and pulled out one of the crystals, studying it in the light from the window, and smiled a cruel smile.

### **The End**

#### **Song Notes:**

- “Long Cool Woman (In a Black Dress)” written by Allan Clarke, Roger Cook, and Roger Greenaway and performed by the British pop group The Hollies. The song originally appeared on the album *Distant Light* in April 1972. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIRHTBvZRzU>

- “Prelude” and “The Murder” written by Bernard Herrmann for the 1960 Alfred Hitchcock film “Psycho.” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFEwjnhopIQ>