

The two starship commanders turned the corner and headed for the door of *Starbase 719*'s most popular watering hole among the Fifth Fleet crew members; the Bastogne Lodge. The pair entered the establishment, which - being early in the day - was only half-full, and took seats at one of the tables in the corner.

"Who's buying today?" Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester - commanding officer of the Fifth Fleet Flagship *USS Dauntless NCC-75310* - asked his companion.

"If I remember correctly, it's my turn," Captain K'danz, the human female commander of the Intrepid-class starship *USS Bellerophon* replied. She gestured to the Lodge's proprietor and bartender, 'Shifty' Powers, who nodded acknowledgement and began pouring two drinks.

"Your usual," Powers said as he placed the two glasses on the table in front of the two commanding officers. "Risan rum and cola for the Fleet Captain, and a Samarian sunset for Captain K'danz." His voice took on a whispered tone as he added, "Both with real liquor, not synthahol."

The two officers thanked Powers for their drinks, then as the bartender walked away Koester raised his glass in the air. "I propose a toast," he said.

"A toast!" K'danz repeated, likewise raising her glass. "What are we toasting?"

"It's fortunate both the *Dauntless* and the *Belle* managed to be in port today. You don't realize the significance of this date?" Koester asked.

The human woman with the Klingon-sounding name - due to the fact she had married a half-Klingon Starfleet engineer and changed her name to honor her in-laws - struggled to remember the current stardate, her expression remaining blank.

"Okay, I give up," she finally admitted, lowering her glass back to the table.

Koester gave his fellow starship commander and former first officer a look of frustration before saying, "It's the twentieth anniversary of the commissioning of our first *USS Dauntless*."

A look of realization dawned on K'danz's face as she thought back to that ceremony aboard starbase *Deep Space Nine*. She had just been promoted to be the starship's chief of security because the Intrepid-class *Dauntless*' Klingon security chief turned out to be a Cardassian deep-cover spy who returned to Cardassia after several years in disguise.

"Hey, do you remember that mission right after the old *Dauntless* was commissioned?" K'danz asked as Koester took a sip from his drink, savoring the smoky mellow flavor of the Risan rum.

"The steam-punk planet? Yeah, I remember all too well," Koester remarked. "That was your first mission as my security chief, wasn't it?"

"I'll never forget how screwed up that mission was," K'danz remarked.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Dauntless*!

Star Trek: *Dauntless*

"Memory Lane" By PJK

A celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the fan club chapter *USS Dauntless*!

Stardate 49754.1

Earth Year 2372

The Intrepid-class starship *USS Dauntless NCC-74658* dropped out of warp on the edge of the Umoth star system. While the system had been charted nearly seventy years before, it had never been fully explored due to its

proximity to the recognized border of the Cardassian Union. However, with tensions between the Federation and the Cardassians growing ever more tense since the signing of the treaty that created the Demilitarized Zone - and by extension, the Maquis - Starfleet was interested in finding suitable locations for potential future outposts close to Cardassian space.

“What can you tell me about this system, Commander?” Captain Peter J. Koester, commanding officer of the *Dauntless* asked the petite woman with the twin rows of brown spots running from her forehead and down each side of her neck. Commander **Q**, the starship’s assistant chief science officer and head of stellar cartography, consulted her sensor readings and began her report.

“The system consists of eight planets orbiting a typical G-type yellow star, Peter. Planets three, four, and five are all within the star’s biosphere, though only planets four and five are M-class and capable of supporting life as we know it.” The Trill woman looked up at her commander and close friend, who was standing beside her console, and added, “Long range sensors are detecting indications of a civilization on the fifth planet of the system. Probably early industrial age, based on the pollution content of the atmosphere.”

“Very well. I think we can skip Umoth V for the time being. Helm set a course to the fourth planet of the Umoth system, one-half impulse,” Koester ordered as he stepped back over to the command chair. “**Q**, I want you to lead a survey team down to the surface of Umoth IV. Mister Karandanz...” Koester looked over the railing behind his chair at the woman with the reddish brown hair standing behind the security/tactical console and said, “You’re with **Q**.”

“Aye, Captain,” Carrie Karandanz responded as she joined the petite science officer in the nearby turbolift.

* * * *

Several minutes later, five members of the *Dauntless* crew materialized on the surface of Umoth IV. Besides **Q** and Karandanz, Lieutenant (JG) Ga’gh Schuukveldlaan provided additional security back-up, Lieutenant (JG) Dar served as the away team’s engineer, and Vulcan science officer Lieutenant T’Cah pulled out a tricorder and started scanning the vicinity.

“Commander,” T’Cah called out softly. “I’m picking up readings of man-made structures approximately two kilometers east of here.

“That shouldn’t be,” **Q** stated. “Sensor readings indicated no life beyond non-sentient animal life present on the surface of this planet.”

“Is it possible this planet hosted a past civilization that somehow died off?” suggested Dar. “Or perhaps the inhabitants of Umoth V managed to develop space flight and have colonized their nearest neighbor?”

“Unlikely,” **Q** said as she directed the team to start moving east in hopes of determining if the structures being detected were indeed man-made objects and if they might somehow still be inhabited without revealing themselves. “The inhabitants of Umoth V have only attained an early 19th century level of technology. There is no way they could possibly have developed spaceflight.” **Q** thought about what the tricorder was indicating for a moment and added, “Perhaps a technological civilization did develop here in the past and some disaster caused them to abandon this planet and colonize Umoth V instead?”

“And whatever caused the disaster made the survivors’ civilization regress to a dark age from which they are only now emerging?” Karandanz asked.

“We may find a clue among the ruins ahead that will answer that, Lieutenant,” **Q** replied.

The away team moved on through the sparse forest until they came up on a rise overlooking the structures T’Cah had detected.

“This can’t be,” **Q** remarked quietly from her position lying on the crest of a hill. She stared at the buildings with a pair of electronic binoculars.

In the shallow valley below them, a colony consisting of over two dozen relatively modern buildings could be seen. Several humanoid inhabitants could be observed moving between the buildings or walking down paved streets, but the real shock were the motorized vehicles traveling those same streets.

“This is impossible!” **Q** insisted. “This colony should not be here!”

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“Wait...,” implored Fleet Captain Koester, holding up his hand and prompting K’danz to pause in the middle of lifting her glass for a sip of her drink. “That’s not how I remember events happening. The *Dauntless* entered orbit over Umoth IV having detected the colony on its surface and with the intent of ascertaining if the Cardassians had laid claim to the system...”

Stardate 49754.2

“Are you telling me the colony is NOT Cardassian?” Captain Koester asked through his communicator.

“That’s correct, Captain,” the voice of Lieutenant Karandanz replied. She and three of her security guards that had beamed down to the surface with Commander Q had been prepared to confront the Cardassians to find out why they had established a new colony outside the Demilitarized Zone. “From Commander Q’s readings, it hasn’t been here too long, probably less than a year, but the life-form readings are definitely NOT Cardassian. More likely the natives of Umoth V.”

“I thought Q said the civilization on the fifth planet was no further along than...?” Koester started to say when he was cut off by the angry-sounding voice of his assistant chief science officer.

“I know what I said before we left the ship. But we’re telling you, there is a colony of Umothians on the surface of this planet, and their colony looks like any typical town on 21st century Earth!”

A look of shock appeared on Koester’s face. “But how...?” he started to ask when he was interrupted by the frantic voice of his operations officer.

“Cap’n! Sensors ah detectin’ a small object onna collision course!”

“Helm! Evasive maneuvers!” Koester ordered without delay.

“Too late!” Commander Russell reported before Ensign Ethan Othello could react. “It’s too close!”

Seconds later, the *Dauntless* shuddered as it was impacted by something traveling at a significant fraction of the speed of light. Alarms sounded across the bridge and the lighting shifted to red.

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“Come in *Dauntless*. *Dauntless*, please respond.” Q shared a look of frustration with Karandanz before making one last attempt at communication with the orbiting starship. “Peter, this is Q. Respond please!”

“What could have happened?” Karandanz asked, looking up toward the sky as if she could see the Intrepid-class starship in orbit. “Could the *Dauntless* have somehow been destroyed?”

Q, who had by that time opened up her own tricorder and appeared to be taking readings, shook her head. “No, the sensors are still detecting the ship in orbit. Just not sure why we lost communications.”

“Maybe we should beam back up and find out what’s wrong, Commander?” Karandanz suggested.

“The fact our away team has not already been beamed back up indicates whatever is going on, either Peter has determined it doesn’t warrant abandoning the mission down here, or they’re too busy dealing with whatever is going on to beam us back up immediately. Either way, without communications, we can’t request to beam back anyway, so we might as well continue our mission and observe this colony without being discovered ourselves, and report back once we’re capable.”

Karandanz looked resistant at first, then finally said, “Aye, Commander.” But before any of the away team could resume their observation of the colony, ten humanoids in camouflage clothing that blended almost perfectly into the surrounding foliage entered the clearing, completely surrounding the away team and outnumbering them almost two to one. Aside from the strangely mechanical devices that looked almost like tricorders, the humanoids also held what appeared to be projectile weapons, which they pointed in the direction of each member of the Starfleet crew. Reluctantly, the away team raised their hands in surrender.

* * * *

“Bridge, this is Lieutenant Bloom,” the young emotional Vulcan engineer said after tapping his combadge.

“Bridge,” Koester replied. “Report, Lieutenant.”

“Sir, I’m in cargo bay two,” Bloom stated. “Emergency forcefields are in place and holding. The object that hit us is here, apparently intact.”

“What is it?” Koester asked. “Asteroid? Some kind of debris?”

“Believe it or not, sir, it’s...” Bloom hesitated, tilting his head slightly as he looked at the object that had crashed into the *Dauntless*. “It looks like a wooden spaceship!”

“Excuse me?” Koester responded, his expression changing to disbelieving confusion.

Bloom took a few tentative steps toward the object before adding, “The hull appears to be made out of lumbered wood, fastened to a framework of wrought iron and steel. The nose of the... craft... is pointed and sharpened, almost like a net cutter on an ancient sea vessel, and is probably what enabled the craft to penetrate the cargo bay door without damaging the rest of the vessel.”

“A wooden and steel space ship?” Koester questioned once again. “How is that possible?”

“Have you ever seen the images of those fabled ancient Bajoran solar sailing spacecraft?” Bloom asked through his communicator. “The ones they supposedly used to make contact with Cardassia centuries before the invention of warp drive? It looks a lot like the drawings I have seen of those, except no masts or sails. It’s about the size of one of our Type VII shuttlecraft, and...”

Koester could hear sounds in the background, so he knew Bloom had not lost communications. The captain was about to ask what had interrupted his chief engineer when Bloom’s voice returned.

“A door! A door is opening on the craft and...!”

Bloom’s voice was cut off by the unmistakable whine of an energy weapon.

“Lieutenant! Jeff, what’s going on?”

There was the sound of scuffling, and another recognizable noise, the sound of a Federation phaser being fired.

“Security, get me a visual on cargo bay two!” Koester ordered. A moment later the main viewscreen displayed the events that were occurring in the starship’s cargo bay. Koester noted several members of his crew were pinned down behind cargo containers while nearly a dozen humanoids wearing what appeared to be canvass-covered space suits exited the wood and metal craft that looked like something concocted by Jules Verne and formed a perimeter, firing what looked like ungainly weapons that appeared to be made of pipe and wood, several dials and indicators on each device spinning wildly while a puff of steam erupted from the mechanism after each laser beam was emitted from the barrel.

“What ah those things th’ aliens ah carryin’?” Russell asked.

“They almost look like the weapons the colonists on Nimbus fashioned for themselves almost a century ago,” Koester remarked. “But more... Victorian-era in technology, I suppose?”

“Not all of them, sir,” the officer at tactical remarked. He then manipulated the controls on his console and the image on the screen zoomed in on the weapon being carried by what appeared to be the leader of the invaders. “If I’m not mistaken, that’s a Cardassian disruptor rifle!”

“You’re right, Lieutenant,” Koester agreed. “Whatever is going on here, I’m willing to bet the Cardassians have some hand in it. Bridge to security. Reinforcements to cargo bay two, on the double!”

As the bridge crew continued to watch what was going on through the main viewer, awaiting the arrival of additional security officers, the invading aliens pushed around the side of the cargo bay, attempting to flank Bloom and the other two members of the crew trapped behind the cargo containers. Koester feared his chief engineer might be captured, injured, or killed before more security forces arrived when, to his surprise - as soon as the aliens reached the inner door of the cargo bay - they blasted the door open with their weapons and poured out into the corridor beyond - almost as if they knew where they were going.

“Intruder alert!” Koester immediately ordered, the lights changing once again to reflect the alert status. “All hands, repel boarders.”

“Captain!” alerted the lieutenant at tactical. “A small group of the intruders has broken off from the main group and is heading toward the bridge.”

“Dammit!” Koester swore under his breath before ordering, “Computer, lock out all command functions on the bridge and in main engineering. Authorization Koester-theta-niner-niner-five.”

“All command functions on the bridge and in main engineering have been locked out,” the computer’s feminine voice responded. “Secondary systems, including communications, transporters, and the turbolift network have been rendered inoperable.”

“That trapped three of them in one of the turbolifts between decks three and four,” the security officer remarked. “It appears most of the others have entered the Jefferies tubes, and without internal sensors, I have no way of tracking them.”

Koester looked at his security officer, frustration covering his face, and wishing his assistant chief science officer were aboard and not leading the away team on the planet’s surface below them.

* * * *

As the away team was forced at gunpoint to toward the colony, **Q** was able to see that not all the weapons the Umothians were holding were pre-industrial projectile weapons. Some looked to be more advanced energy weapons, cobbled together from bits of wood, metal, and what could be termed steam-punk technology, though **Q**’s past interaction with the Cardassian race allowed her to recognize some of the components being of Cardassian origin. It was obvious the Cardassians were interfering with the normal development of the Umothian civilization, but for what purpose?

As the six Starfleet crew were forced into the colony village, more of the Umothians came outside to ascertain what the commotion was about. Both **Q** and Karandanz noted the architectural style of the buildings was a mixture of both Cardassian and what they assumed was the native’s own architectural design.

“I think it’s pretty obvious the Cardassians have been giving the native Umothians advances based on their own technology,” Karandanz said quietly to the petite science officer. “A lot like the Klingons did on the planet Neural in the 2260’s.”

“Why?” **Q** asked back in a subtle whisper. “What purpose would that serve the Cardassian Union?”

“Probably an attempt to annex this system, so the Cardassians can lay claim to and exploit the resources here.”

“No talking!” one of the natives shouted in halting standard, which surprised the away team again, though provided more confirmation that the Cardassians were indeed behind what was happening on the planet.

After several minutes, the away team finally reached the center of the colony, where the largest of the buildings was located, and were forced to their knees in front of the building’s steps. **Q** and Karandanz exchanged looks, half-expecting to be executed. **Q** tried to subtly move one of her hands toward the seat of her pants, but one of the natives quickly grabbed it and twisted it up along her spine. The pain was acute even for **Q**.

“The ruling council!” one of the other natives announced, and almost immediately six humanoid exited the doors of the building and lined up in front of the *Dauntless* away team. Five of the ruling council were, like their captors, natives of Umoth V. The sixth was, to no one’s shock at that point, a Cardassian legate. The Cardassian appeared shocked to see members of the Federation Starfleet captured before them.

“Starfleet cannot know my people are here working with you!” the Legate remarked to the other council members. “It is too soon! It would ruin our plans!”

One of the native council members, an unimpressed look on his face, gazed at the Cardassian and asked, “What would you have us do with them? They have committed no crime I am aware of.”

“They have committed the crime of trespassing on the property of the Cardassian Union,” the Legate remarked. “They should be taken outside the colony wall and executed.”

All five native members of the council moved to surround the Cardassian. To Karandanz, the discussion had the appearance of a huddle in the ancient Earth game of American football, but once the discussion had ended, the council lined up along the top stair once again, and the native leader said, "So let it be done."

Q and the away team began to object as the soldiers who had captured them grabbed onto their uniforms and began to drag them back out into the street and toward the nearest colony gate. At that moment, a voice emerged from **Q**'s combadge.

"*Dauntless* to away team, do you copy?"

Q twisted around, managing to slip her arm away from its captor and quickly slapped at her combadge. "*Dauntless*, emergency beam-up!" she shouted. Almost immediately the away team began to dematerialize, and before the Umothians could aim their weapons, the Starfleet crew was gone.

* * * *

On the bridge of the *Dauntless*, Koester was coordinating with his security officer, trying to locate the armed boarding parties and suppress them.

"Do we know what Jefferies tube junction they have reached yet?" the captain asked. "We don't want them to take the bridge by surprise."

"No, Captain. Last internal sensor reading placed them about here..." The security officer pointed at a schematic of the *Dauntless* displayed on his console. A second later everyone on the bridge was surprised by the flash of six bright lights right between the command chairs and the helm console. Koester fumbled for the phaser he had armed himself with before realizing it was **Q** and the away team that had suddenly appeared. It was another second before he fully comprehended that **Q** had used her powers to return the away team to the ship.

"Poe, what did you do!?" he started to say.

"Couldn't be helped, not if we were all going to survive," **Q** replied as the rest of the away team look first at themselves - as if assuring themselves they were still in one piece - then looked at **Q**, realization dawning on their faces. "Don't worry, before this is over, they won't remember a thing."

"Fine. What happened down there?" Koester asked.

"The Cardassians have been giving the natives from Umoth V advanced technology, disguised as something that may have been invented by an industrial-age civilization."

"Yeah, they used a wooden spaceship to ram the *Dauntless* and send a boarding team," Koester remarked.

"A wooden spaceship?!?" Karandanz exclaimed with disbelief.

"Lieutenant, I need you to coordinate with Lieutenant Ga'gh," Koester ordered, turning his attention to his security chief. "We have at least two teams of intruders aboard the ship, and we think they may be trying to reach the bridge. We can't let them get here."

"Aren't the internal sensors working?" **Q** asked as she sat down at her console on the port side of the bridge, noting most of its functions were inoperative.

"I ordered a lock-out of command functions, just in case," Koester replied. "I didn't want to risk them taking the ship."

"Both brilliant and foolish," **Q** remarked with a smirk. "Don't worry, I can..."

Q's comment was interrupted by a panel near the front of the bridge falling open. Everyone on the bridge with a phaser in hand, including Koester, Ga'gh, and the helmsman Othello, pointed their weapon at the opening.

"We come in peace!" a voice called out. A moment later, Karandanz recognized Lieutenant Bloom crawling out of the access panel, followed by the half-Klingon engineer whose name she did not know.

"Jeff!" Koester exclaimed, pleased to see his emotional Vulcan chief engineer. "What happened? What's the situation below decks?"

"Whatever you did to shut down the turbolift network has confounded the intruders," Bloom reported. "They would have already taken main engineering and probably the bridge if you hadn't managed to block them up on decks four, seven, and eight. Dar detected a small contingent apparently tracking us through the Jefferies tubes, probably attempting to follow us to the bridge, but by sealing and unlocking certain junctions in the network, he set

up a veritable maze that should keep them crawling around in circles for hours before they even realize they're not getting anywhere."

"Good work, Ensign," Koester said, to the pleasure of the half-Klingon engineer. "Now we need to capture these intruders and regain control of our vessel. I have a feeling the Cardassians aren't going to simply wait for us to regain control. There has to be a Cardassian warship somewhere nearby."

"There was a Cardassian legate on the planet's surface, Captain," Karandanz reported. "He was apparently part of the colony's ruling council. I have no doubt he's already in contact with any Cardassian warships in the sector and informing them about us."

"Then we have very little time. Ensign Dar..." Koester looked at the engineer as he said, "Work with Lieutenant Karandanz. You can tell her what you did to turn our Jefferies tube network into a maze and perhaps route our intruders right into the brig!"

"Aye, sir," Dar agreed with a nod, moving toward the tactical station at the aft of the bridge. Karandanz started to move in that direction as well, but paused near her commanding officer.

"Captain, a moment please?" she asked. Koester nodded, and the new security chief's voice turned to a whisper. "I take it you were aware of Commander Q's true nature all along? Commander Q! It should have been so obvious!" She glanced uneasily at what appeared to be a Trill female sitting at the science console across the bridge. Koester nodded honestly. "Aside from the dozens of regulations you have broken, have you considered allowing Q to rid us of our current crisis?"

"Lieutenant," Koester quietly said. "The Commander has pledged to both me and herself that she would, if at all possible, serve this vessel as if she were nothing more than an ordinary Trill woman. She believes... and I agree with her... that we cannot depend on her extraordinary abilities to get us out of every little calamity. It just isn't how a Starfleet starship works!"

"But she used her powers to rescue us from the surface...!" Karandanz protested.

"Which means she found the situation to be beyond the ordinary," Koester explained.

"What did she mean; she would make us all forget later?" Karandanz asked suspiciously.

"Lieutenant, work with Dar and find me a way to get control of my ship back," Koester ordered. "We'll worry about the repercussions of this mission later."

Karandanz looked at Koester for several seconds, appearing on the verge of protesting, before finally nodding and saying, "Aye, aye." She then joined the half-Klingon engineer at the security/tactical console.

* * * *

"Captain, I think we have it!" Dar called out. Koester, who had been slumped in his command chair and furiously considering his very few options, quickly got to his feet and moved to the security console, along with Q and Commander Ray Russell.

"What is it?" the captain asked.

"With the help of Lieutenant Karandanz, I have managed to activate several key security systems in spite of the command lock-out. I have rudimentary sensors and control over numerous forcefields and environmental controls."

"How does controllin' th' internal enviro-ment help us get rid o' these intruders?" Russell asked in his deep Southern accent.

"Using the internal sensors, we have determined the majority of the Umothians have regrouped in cargo bay two, where their craft is," Karandanz answered. "A smaller group is still crawling around in the Jefferies tubes where Dar left them. I can use the internal forcefields to move the stragglers back to the cargo bay, and once they are all inside, slowly start to vent the atmosphere in the cargo bay to space."

"But that will kill them!" Bloom protested.

Koester was about to express his own opinion that he would rather not kill the Umothian natives who were – after all – under the control of the Cardassians, when Dar explained, "They're not stupid. Once they realize the air in the cargo bay is getting thin, they'll retreat into their spaceship, which contains storage tanks of air breathable to

them. Once they are all back inside their wooden capsule, I can open the cargo bay door and eject their ship into space and hold it outside with a tractor beam, where it will be rendered harmless.”

“Very well. Plus, we don’t have a lot of choices,” Koester remarked.

“I can think of at least one other choice,” Karandanz stated, looking directly at Q. The petite science officer noticed the glare of the security chief and exchanged a glance of her own with Koester.

“We already had that discussion, Lieutenant,” Koester said. “Mister Dar, you may implement your plan.”

“Aye, Captain.”

Within moments, the severely inhibited sensors indicated the Umothians not already there were being forced into the cargo bay from which they had launched their attack on the *Dauntless*.

“Commander Russell,” Dar said, looking at the chief of operations. “You may begin venting the cargo bay’s atmosphere.”

“Aye. Ventin’,” Russell confirmed from his position at ops.

Koester turned to watch the main viewscreen, which still showed the interior of the cargo bay. It took several minutes, but it soon became apparent that the Umothians had run out of their own supplies of air in their rudimentary spacesuits and were starting to detect the lack of oxygen in the bay. One by one the Umothians re-entered their wood and iron space capsule, and moments later the hatch near its nose sealed.

“Commander Russell, open the outer door of cargo bay two.”

Russell again acknowledged, and the large cargo bay door yawned open. The little remaining atmosphere inside the bay propelled the small craft out toward space, where the *Dauntless*’ tractor beam grabbed hold of it and held it safely in place several hundred meters off the port beam of the starship.

“Well done! Very well done!” Koester complimented as he started to move back toward his command chair. “Computer, restore all normal command functions. Authorization Koester-theta-niner-niner-five – code word ‘Restore.’”

The computer acknowledged the command, and seconds later the lights and indications on all the bridge consoles returned.

“Now,” Koester said. “Let’s get the Umothian spaceship back to Umoth V and...”

“Captain!” Karandanz exclaimed. “Now that I have full sensors back on-line, I’m detecting a Cardassian Galor-class cruiser on an intercept course! ETA to planetary orbit, two minutes!”

Koester hissed a colorful metaphor under his breath before ordering, “On screen.” Immediately, the approaching Cardassian warship filled the main viewer. “Hail them.”

“Hailin’ frequency open, sair,” Russell acknowledged.

“Cardassian warship, this is the Federation starship *Dauntless*. You are outside the limits of the Demilitarized Zone and are in violation of the Federation-Cardassian Treaty of 2370. State your business here.”

A moment later, the viewscreen changed to the image of the Cardassian vessel’s bridge. At its center sat a non-descript Cardassian gul who appeared surprised that the captain of the *Dauntless* was in command and hailing his vessel.”

“Starship *Dauntless*, we are here merely to retrieve a member of the Cardassian military whose transport crashed on the planet you are orbiting several weeks ago.”

“So you are on a search and rescue mission?” Koester asked, not sounding entirely convinced.

“Nothing so dramatic, Captain,” Koester’s Cardassian counterpart replied. “The legate is merely stranded on the surface in the care of the locals and we are here to act as transport back to Cardassia Prime. What, if I may ask, are you doing in the Umoth system? And why do you have what appears to be a primitive spaceship locked in your tractor beam?”

“Survey expedition,” Koester replied. “We were surprised to discover that the natives of Umoth V have apparently colonized Umoth IV, so we have retrieved our away team and will be departing the system as soon as we have completed transporting the Umothian astronauts and their spaceship back to Umoth V as they have requested.”

“I see,” the Cardassian gul responded. “Then our interaction will be short. We expect to have our legate and his personal belongings retrieved within the hour and be on our way.”

“Very well. We wish you a pleasant voyage back to Cardassia Prime,” Koester remarked with utmost mock-sincerity. The Cardassian gul smiled a humorless smile and nodded before the viewer switched back to the exterior of the Cardassian warship just as it entered orbit. Koester looked over his shoulder at Lt Karandanz and said, “We’ll monitor the Cardassian’s retrieval of their official and his ‘belongings’ and then break orbit. Let me know when the Cardassians are heading back toward the DMZ.” He then got up and headed toward his ready room.

“Aye, Captain,” Karandanz replied before returning her attention to her continuing conversation with Dar.

* * * *

Just over an hour later, Q entered the ready room unbidden.

“The Cardassian warship is departing the system and on course for the DMZ,” she announced as she took a seat across the desk from Koester. “According to our sensors, it appears they retrieved the majority of the weapons the Umothians were using – mainly the directed energy weapons and disruptors – but left them with their relatively primitive projectile weapons.”

“Looks like the Umothians may have lost their sponsor, at least for the time being, but retained the advantage of spaceflight and colonization about a century before they should – and likely would – have.”

“Virgil wanted me to tell you we’re on course to Umoth IV and should have our... guests... back home before the next watch relief.”

“Good. That wraps just about everything up,” Koester remarked.

“Not everything,” Q stated, reminding Koester of her earlier revelation in front of the bridge crew and away team. I still need to take care of one other outstanding issue. And I realize I have to be extremely delicate about it this time.”

“What do you mean, you have to be delicate about it? And what do you mean, ‘this time’?” Koester asked. But before he received an answer, Q stood up and slapped the seat of her uniform pants with her open hand, and the ready room was filled with a bright flash of light.

* * * *

Starbase 719

Stardate 68459.6

“You know, now that I think about it, we have something else to toast to!” K’danz remarked, raising her glass once again.

“And that is?” Koester asked.

“It was while getting the Umothians off the ship after the away team and I beamed back aboard when I first really started to know Dar. We had our first date two night later! And you know what that eventually led to.”

“Are you sure?” Koester asked, a puzzled look on his face. “I thought you and Dar didn’t start a relationship until a couple of years later? Right before we lost the Intrepid-class *Dauntless* in that battle with the Borg!”

“No!” K’danz replied. “I remember distinctly, he showed up at my cabin two nights later with a bouquet of Kaladian thorn flowers! It was SO romantic!” K’danz again raised her glass, a motion mirrored by Koester, and said, “To first dates!”

Koester mumbled something similar, and both took drinks from their glasses. K’danz was about to ask her friend and former commanding officer why he suddenly looked so bewildered, but was interrupted by the activation of her combadge and the voice of her husband and chief engineer.

“*Bellerophon* to Captain K’danz.”

K’danz sighed before putting down her drink and tapping her combadge. “Go ahead, Dar,” she said.

“Carrie, I’ve got the dilithium articulation frame broken down for inspection. You said you wanted to take a look at it before I reassembled and installed it back in the chamber.”

“Give me ten minutes. I’ll be right there. K’danz out.” She then deactivated her communicator and looked at Koester with a sorry expression and said, “Duty calls.”

“I know that better than most.” He tipped his glass in her direction and added, “Thanks for the drink.”

“Anytime. We’ll get together again before our ships leave the base again,” K’danz said before heading toward the Lodge’s door. Koester watched his fellow captain depart, then looked deeply into his own drink.

“That’s NOT how I remembered it!” Koester insisted to himself. “There can only be one explanation. Q!”

The Fleet Captain lifted his glass once more, emptying the remaining half into his mouth and swallowing in several gulps before putting the glass back down, perhaps a bit harder than he had meant to. “But if she altered MY memories of that mission... What else has she made me forget? What else did she change in my head?”

Koester let his thoughts stew for a moment before he finally looked over and caught Shifty’s attention once more, ordering a second round for himself, and trying hard to remember what happened all those years ago...

The End