

The Fault of Dunmar

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Foreword

version: 1.3

This Star Trek fan-fiction intends to fit Stardate 48749.52 when the Enterprise is rejoining the Captain on his beloved Stargazer returning after his much awaited shore leave. The existence of the Planetary system named "Aumegon Vera" is little documented in the Alpha quadrant, with the residents following a xenophobic course of life.

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Acknowledgements: Thanks to two souls - *infernalproteus* and *amby* for keeping the Star Trek spirit alive in me and driving me to complete my first fanfic story. They've gone one step further in spellchecking and providing valuable advise before I could create the second (definitely the more readable) draft. Thanks to *taral* for having read the next draft and helping me correct errors. The third draft was created on the basis of his feedback.

For a better understanding of the "Star Trek - TNG" universe it is recommended that you watch Seasons 1-3 of the Series. This is my first attempt at Star Trek fan fiction

Chapter 1

Distress Call

Riker sat down in his quarters after one more uneventful day. "First Officer's log, Stardate 48749.52, The *Enterprise* is scheduled to rendezvous with the *USS Mayoin* 6 hours. Captain Picard is joining us after his shore leave. The shield deflectors have been fixed after a rough ride through the Aurelian asteroid belt. We are now ahead of schedule for our rendezvous by at least 2 hours. The crew has been missing Captain Picard after his shore leave aboard the *Stargazer*. I must add that I am looking forward to his return more than anyone else."

Suddenly he heard Data's voice on the comm, "Commander Riker to the bridge, we have a distress call from Aumegon Vera III". "Transfer it to my quarters immediately", he said, a little worried but excited, the spirit of adventure suddenly overcoming him.

There was a crackle on the comm panel, followed by a very worried voice. "Enterprise, our planet has been experiencing violent volcanic activity for over a week. It seems to be escalating every moment. We have no choice but to evacuate the planet. We need all starships in the vicinity to assist us in evacuation. Please relay this message to all starships you can reach, we are running out of time. It is under these difficult circumstances that we have chosen to abandon the sanctity of our home planet. Any help you can render will never be forgotten."

The Verans were an advanced humanoid civilisation who had chosen not to use their warp capability and instead explore the realms of logic at their home planet. They were very active in the Federation's Science council. They were particularly advanced in their understanding of geology. It was indeed grave news that their Planet was on the verge of destruction.

the Veran's earlier xenophobic reaction to the federation had rendered all but their philosophy and spirituality a mystery to the fed-

eration and its participation. Knowing so little about them at such an event of grave danger, was an extra risk, if nothing else.

He quickly strode out of his room and headed to the turbo lift. His strides, a brisk march as usual. He only wished that Picard were here. Hope hadn't visited Aumegon vera ever and wanted to do so before it was too late. As he stepped into the lift, he noticed there was no one inside. "Bridge", he said in his usual inarticulate voice and waited for the lift. As he stepped out, he noticed Worf feeling more irritated than usual. He quickly turned to young Crusher sitting at the helm.

"Mr. Crusher, set a course for Aumegon Vera, Maximum Warp!", he said in a stern tone which was very unlike him on a regular day. Wesley seemed most excited, and acknowledged almost immediately. He walked around, unusually stepping behind Worf, taking the longer walk around, swiftly settling down on the Captain's chair. Looking ahead at the stars, he surmised that they were going to be busy for the next few days. He looked to his left, noticing that Deanna wasn't on the bridge.

"Commander Data, send out a distress beacon. Contact the USS Mayo and inform them of our course alteration." He was following standard regulations. Deep in his mind, he was wondering what he could do to save billions of civilians with just one starship. He was sure that the USS Mayo would be shifting course in response to the distress beacon anyway. But, were there enough ships in the vicinity to help? He wasn't sure. He needed more options.

He tapped his comm badge, "Geordie, I want you to find out all that the Federation knows about Aumegon Vera. We might have to count on more help from our Veran friends. Data and Wesley will be joining you shortly. We need to come up with an evacuation plan with all the resources we have." He was louder than usual. Data and Wesley were quickly on their way to the turbolift. He would need all the ship's transporters to transport even a fraction of the population. It wasn't just daunting, it was close to impossible. He didn't want the Enterprise to be a spectator or an escape pod. Surely, there must be something he could do.

He sat there mentally counting his options. What could a ship, the size of Enterprise do to evacuate an entire planet? The answer seemed grim. The last time they had come close to see a whole planet destroyed, they had Q back with his powers returning a favour (meddling with the gravitational constant then). What could they possibly do now? Of that, he didn't have a clue. One thing that he did know was he had the best crew in the Federation. He only wished Picard was with them.

"Lieutenant Worf, you have the bridge.", walking out to the turbolift, trying to hide his excitement. Worf looked more bored than irritated. Stepping into the lift, "Engineering", he said, waiting for the turbolift to speed into action.

Meanwhile, Deanna was concerned about the crew. They were about to make a decision that would cost lives and that wasn't going to be easy. This was not the first time they'd be doing it without Picard. Yet, she herself wished Picard was around. He always seemed to soak the pressure away from everyone.

Chapter 2

The game's afoot

Riker stepped into Engineering and saw young Crusher in a spirited discussion with La Forge. "What do we have Geordie?", he asked in his usual authoritative tone. Crusher beamed, "I've studied the Verans for one of my history projects, and I know for certain that Aumegon Vera has strangely had no historical record of earthquakes or tectonic stress of any sort, at least not in the 3000 years of their known history."

"At the present rate of decay, the planetary surface would completely disintegrate in the next 60 maybe 72 hours. That's about all the time we have Commander," said La Forge, excited and assertive as usual.

Data was quick to add, "72 hours, 59 minutes and 31 seconds commander. With the present efficiency of all our transporters with modifications to the cargo bay transporters, we can manage to evacuate 72,523 people in the next 73 hours. We'll need Dr.Crusher's help to keep them in stasis before we can relocate them to the nearest Class M planet."

The Saviour Drill

"Geordie, How soon can we have the transporters up?" "In about two hours commander." "Then, lets get started with it." beamed Riker, his voice more serious than usual. "Data, I want you to join Dr.Crusher at sick bay to setup the cargo bays to hold the Verans in stasis." Data started out towards the turbo lift, "On my way Commander."

Troi strolled in, in a a bit of a hurry. She added in that the Verans were a proud society divided by classes of honour. Some of these classes looked at the others with almost feudal contempt. Though it would be possible to get them into a state of stasis before moving

them to the holding fields, waking them up for feeding and other emergencies are bound to be interpreted as hostile acts.

They needed to come up with a map of the Verans during their stasis phase that did not affect their class differences. This could take about 3 hours to compute optimally. As there seemed to be no quick optimal solution, the crew decided to insert their own members at critical places to maintain the balance of the Veran class differences in the stasis fields. This did decrease the number of the Verans who could be accommodated, but only marginally.

Hardly a fraction of the population on Aumegon Vera - 75,000 would be all that would survive. Little would remain of their grand culture and all the knowledge. He wasn't sure whether he could live with it.

Geordie interjected, another transmission from the surface, appeared part broken, "we .re unab.. to sust...n ..r radi. l..k beep beep ..", followed by many minutes of radio noise. Riker had the channel silenced. It was evident that they were running out of time and their options were closing soon enough.

If the Verans had anything worked out, it was choosing those Verans who would be rescued by the "Enterprise". With the heightened emphasis to their class differences, this was going to be a tough and more often a biased decision for the Verans. Some of the members of the crew couldn't quite agree to this.

For now it seemed like a race against time, to select as many as they could save and have them suspended in the stasis fields. Lists of those who would be part of the first few picks were already out and this was the Veran cooperation they could have ever dreamt of having.

Geordie and Dr.Crusher were working their best to get the stasis containment fields in operation. Lt. O'Hara was in charge of ensuring that the Verans never lay next to one of his/her higher/lower cast. The gaps were left free or had a dummy or had a starfleet cadet assigned with monitoring the stasis fields.

It would take them at least one full month (Earth time) to maintain the stasis fields before preparing them for the next Class M planet. Within their current scans the new home for the relocated Verans looked like "Ursa 3".

Chapter 3

Code Red

Riker was just getting convinced at Engineering that they would indeed be able to transport almost 75000 within the 3 day deadline they had. He was still hoping Picard would be closer to suggest a better course of action.

As Riker was calmly making his way back to the turbolift, young Crusher, came running with all the ounce of energy he had. He had to tell Riker that the container fields were failing and most would fail within 4-6 hrs of containment.

Riker could always handle the stress of battle. He had his cards to play and he could play poker with any adversary, whatever was at stake. Yet, this wasn't exactly a battlefield and there weren't true opponents. They had to better their own containment fields and their stability in an impossible frame of time. Less than 3 hours remained for the initiation of the operation and yet millions and lives would be eventually lost.

He returned back to the bridge, which was relaying images from different parts of the decaying planet showing one tectonic collapse after the other. Structures on the surface were collapsing, melting down and becoming part of the lava too quickly for any team to react. Riker loved the chance to play poker with the situation, but the helplessness imprisoned him, as he sat in the Captain's chair delicately gnashing his teeth. The transmission on the screen was interrupted scream after scream as more and more of the residents succumbed to the violent tectonic storms on the surface. Evidently, nothing was progressing as they had anticipated and that had its nerve wracking effect on Riker. If these events continued, there would be no life signs left on Aumegon Vera. Surely, he couldn't let that happen.

Finding Fault

An excited Wesley threw himself out of turbo lift. He'd found something! He had been browsing through all records of ancient civilisations in Aumegon Vera III and he'd found something titled 'The Fault of Dunmar'. The more interesting fact was that this event wasn't too far behind in Veran history.

Although the Verans have had almost no history of tectonic violence in their 3,000 year peaceful history, they have a certain event recorded as "The Fault of Dunmar", Wesley's voice went on, gasping for breath.

The existence of Dunmar's fault was known only for the last few hundred years. Discovered during a subterranean excavation by Vilhem Dunmar who was exploring the planet interior. He was conducting research on planetary formation theories. The result he had come up with was so baffling that it was ignored in the council of planetary studies and forgotten as a fact never to be re-opened. Aumegon Vera was a planet that was cooling down rapidly and had a core that was completely unlike any class-M planet studied earlier.

The 'chilling' truth about the interior was that there were no geothermal cores discovered like in other class M planets. What they seemed to have found, were control rooms to machinery that seemed ages beyond their technology. In his insatiable curiosity, Dunmar turned on (or at least modified) controls that neither he nor his team understood the very least. These immediately started initiating what eventually became the formation of central planetary core dominated by high temperatures. No immediate changes were observed on the planetary surface and the incident was suppressed.

Ever since this mistake which the planetary council prefers to refer to as a "Dunmar's Fault". There is a school of thought which believed that the rapid heating of the planetary core followed this exploratory event and has been the cause of the severe tectonic instabilities which we are experiencing. The planetary council holds Dunmar in high esteem and therefore does not perpetrate any further investigation of these accepted mistakes. Their xenophobic roots make any study almost impossible.

At that moment Lt. Barclay walked in, to deliver his report on the planetary spectrograph readings and pointed out that they were concentrated on the south pole. He wasn't very confident about it, but he was half confused about why the spectothermal readings in a tectonically active planet might seem to originate from its south pole instead of being spread across the equator or the continental issue.

Riker looked at his comm-tablet, half reclined, far from convinced that there was indeed a solution to the problem. Their rendezvous with the Stargazer was still scheduled in 3 days, and no amount of warp speed violation would get the any closer in time for some hopeful miracle from Picard. The buck was with him and it was his turn to play. He had never shuddered at the possible outcome of a game, this one was different.

Dunmar's Fault

Riker had finally lost his patience (if one could call it that), with just an hour and a half to go, he stood up and requested the formation of an 'away team' led by Lt. Worf accompanied by himself (against the rules of the Federation that were in place). Young Crusher would be part of the away team. The trio would beam towards the south pole to the last known coordinates of Dunmar's expedition. Riker was more than convinced that the state of the planet had been triggered by an intrusion only a few hundred years ago, and the only chance of reversing this intrusion would happen if they could get a team right to the heart of Dunmar's fault, where it all began.

Federation rules dictated that no Commanding Officer of a starship may ever be involved in away missions, a lesson bitterly learnt and hence enforced across all ships of the Federation. Riker wasn't willing to follow codes, he wanted to get to the bottom of this faster than anyone could possibly have. The only way that seemed open to him was to examine the very same controls Dunmar had seen during his expedition. They did have a few hours ahead of the USS Mayo which couldn't reach a better speed as a result of its obsolete warp nacelles.

There was always the risk of something critical going wrong, an accident that will leave the ship without the Commanding Officer. Picard would definitely not be impressed, and this wasn't Riker's time to play poker.

Riker had finally passed through his moment of truth. He was joining the away team himself. He had Data taking over the bridge for the moment (and was sure Picard would be pleased.) They adorned new generation assault uniforms and beamed into the nearest opening to Shaft Alpha of the Fault of Dunmar. The new uniforms had a dark plastic sheen that were a combination of assault armour and camouflage. They appeared darker than the standard federation issue uniforms. They also passed readings of vital signs and observations to the nearest monitoring team.

The entry into the shaft was a primitive excavation site (by Federation standards) which attempted to hold the caving in with long

cross-bars of high tensile strength. The heavy silver coloured bars criss crossed and appeared more like debris from a cave-in. The trio had beamed themselves aboard a platform held on the adjunct of two of these crossbars. The feeble lighting was provided by pulsating prosaic crystals and necessitated the crew to have their night vision goggles on. The whole site looked like the remnants of a battle field, far less a ruin. Creatures wearing druid-like costumes were reported found dead or injured along the way during the first expedition. They were presumably the protectors of the portal which Dunmar had seen. No bodies remained now though and those figures could well be figment of Veran imagination.

The team had their night vision lights on as they tread carefully through the only known (and well explored) fault in all the planet. As they approached further down toward the core, the temperatures started soaring almost exponentially. A metre toward the visible controls of what had been observed by Dunmar, the ambient temperature shot up by well over 3-7 degrees Kelvin each step. The place was slowly becoming a cauldron. Of the three of them, Riker was the only one carrying an B16-Assault Rifle. He wasn't getting too tired by the looks of it either.

The last few steps closer to the controls, they treaded with more caution than ever. They had barely covered 300 metres on a steaming floor. Worf was the first to reach the panel of controls first. This is where they wished they should've had Data along, as the panel was coded in a script that did not seem to belong to Aumegon Vera III. The enterprise had encountered a similar picto-script on an earlier mission near the neutral zone.

The Verans by themselves were a civilisation that thrived in sub-zero conditions and matched all their technology and gadgets to function within those parameters. This panel was clearly alien to Vera and the worst part was it did not seem to be from any known race in the Federation database.

Core Morph

All this while they were oblivious to the fact that the interior temperature of the shaft was on the rise of a few hundred centigrades every minute. A fact that became too obvious after almost a half hour of getting close to the control panel. This was contrary to a century of observations made by the Verans about the possibility of the planetary core subsisting in sub-zero temperatures. Clearly, whatever had caused this deviation must be responsible for the violent tectonic activity that had now taken on most part of the planet.

As soon as they were close enough to discern the controls, Wesley shouted, "we have already seen these commander", and Riker cleared his serious face for the while. The controls were the same as those that had been witnessed when the enterprise had chanced on a pre-historic arkonian outpost that had become a feudal bargain between the Romulans, the Klingons, the Ferengi and the Federation. The Arkonian portal itself was to lead them to a weapon of mass destruction that could grant military control to the winning party. That outpost was destroyed using its self destruct sequence. Data and Picard initiated the sequence with the little understanding of the script Data gained from reading the script.

At least by now, the trio had some common ground to cover. They seemed to have identified the portal at least, if not the technology guarded by the portal. Despite all the background noise, young Wesley managed to obtain the activation codes to the comm panel which had been used then. During the earlier exposure to Arkonian technology, Data however had lost several positronic functions immediately after the first encounter with the Arkonian weapon to have information of any further help. Their only respite was that Data was not part of the away team this time and could help them from the Enterprise.

This was the last hour they had, and then the stasis operations had to begin. Time did not seem to be the luxury they had (or when was the last time they remembered having it!) The technology they were looking at that seemed so alien wasn't Veran, it was Arkonian. Now, the piece of the puzzle they had to solve was what was this Arkonian control doing deep inside the south pole of Aumegon Vera.

The last Arkonian device they had seen was an automatic exploratory probe with a portal that connected worlds that were many light years away. Worf had been part of that mission and could not find any similarity between the control room they had seen earlier. This seemed unique and different, worse still this seemed to be causing the tectonic disturbances and escalating them by the minute. At least, they found graphic readings they could correspond to the external temperature.

Further down, at the corner of the chamber they were in, they could notice the walls of the chamber changing colours, giving out a bronze sheen from its crystal caked white. Worf remembered that this at least resembled the earlier chamber they had seen. The change seemed to be approaching them carrying with it a plume of super-heated gas. The away team ran back from the approaching vent of gas taking cover between the caked white rock protrusions. Wrong decisions, the rock protrusions started disappearing (or actually vaporising) as the vent of gas hit them and slowly the area surrounding the controls began acquiring the same bronze sheen.

The entire subterranean shelf was changing and it seemed to be the intense heat causing the change. They had to keep running away from the plumes of gas that seemed to be coming out of the vent until they finally found a fork in the tunnel. This one did not seem to house any.

while everyone was clambering through the darkness of the fork which seemed safer than the main tunnel, Riker, all the while was sensing that something was amiss, at least with their course of action. He ordered the rest of them to pursue their current course on the double and contact the Enterprise and perform a code 41 on his comm badge in exactly 30 seconds starting now. Riker handed his B-16 assault rifle to Worf, they didn't seem to need it here. Everyone else, particularly Worf was quite baffled at his decision as Riker ran back to the entrance to the fork and out into the steaming plumes of gas. They could hear his footsteps racing away as they made their way to the end of the fissure they were in.

There was a small door guarding the entrance to the tunnel locked with a class 3 device. Worf used his phaser first and then started forcing it open. it seemed suddenly that they might actually run out of time, but Worf managed to dislodge the metal door, much like uncapping a metal bottle. Wesley borrowed everyone else's comm badges for creating a composite comm signal for the ship to pick up.

As soon as they received an acknowledgement from the ship (that was 30 seconds!), they heard something behind them blow up. 41 was the transporter code to transport anything that was tagged with the signal and then replace it with a vent of plasma from the engines. It was a wartime procedure, a modern-day replacement to suicide bombing.

Everyone waited for their signal locks to be beamed back aboard the enterprise. They were all quite pleased to see Riker looking bruised, charred yet beaming, welcoming them back at the transporter room. He explained to them that the Arkonian comm panel had been replaced with plasma which should effectively shutdown the core morphing that was happening. it was a long shot, but the results seemed to indicate that it was working.

Aftermath

The Enterprise had managed to disable the core transformation by destroying the Arkonian control panel. It was rumoured that the Arkonians had a way of terrafarming that took over an entire planet's functioning right from its core and had planted it for activation when their target planets cooled down. The Verans were possibly experiencing their coolest times, just before the earthquakes started, which

is what should've triggered them. Whether it was Dunmar's fault still remains a matter of debate in the Veran councils.

The Verans in stasis were being returned to the surface, almost back to the homes. The President of the Veran federation requested Riker not to reveal this incident to respect their closed culture. Back on the planet's surface the skies seemed to become more icy than ever, something the Verans seemed to enjoy.

Riker, reclined and resting his arms on the panels of the Captain's chair, waited for the ship to resume course. They were still only a day away from their rendezvous with The USS Mayo. He now had an interesting story which Picard would hate to have missed! Wesley was back at his seat as Ensign. Riker smiled, back to his usual charming self and added, "Engage!"

Afterword

Glossary

Stardates: I am yet to research the exact Stardate possible for this work of fiction, hence the one used is a random guess.

USS Mayo, USS Stargazer: The Stargazer being a sub galaxy class vessel, will rendezvous with the USS Mayo to get Capt.Picard this far. I haven't managed to explain the reason for this double rendezvous or use it as an element in the story.

Transporter Code 41: A blatant long shot, I am yet to read the engineering manuals of the NC-1701-E, if you know (anything close to) this, please send me an email.

FIXME: Do we erase the memory of the whole crew, in the interest of the xenophobic Verans?

Source: The source text (in TeX) of this fanfic is available on request by email.

ChangeLog

1. tried my best with capitalisation of proper nouns.
2. ran ispell with english-british, instead of english-us (and intend to maintain it this way.)
3. corrected horrendous sets of typos all over the place. I am still not convinced that there aren't any typos around.
4. Revised some statements for political correctness (Verans not Aumegans, etc.)
5. Added more text just before and after the climax.