# California Dreaming

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1699.

| | |
|---|---|
| Rating: | Teen And Up Audiences |
| Archive Warning: | No Archive Warnings Apply |
| Category: | General (non relationship-focused) |
| Fandom: | Star Trek - All Media Types |
| Characters: | Beckett Mariner, Brad Boimler, D'Vana Tendi, Sam Rutherford, T'Lyn [Star Trek] |
| Additional Tags: | Sci-Fi, Cosmic Horror, Dreams, Hallucinations, Mind Control |
| Language: | English |
| Stats: | Published: 2026-11-11 Words: 4,554 Chapters: 1/1 |

# California Dreaming

by WirelessW

Summary

When the USS Cerritos encounters an eerie structure floating in space, it's nobody's surprise which group of junior officers are sent to investigate.

The Cerritos hung motionless in space, staring at something that according to Federation science should not exist. Starfleet fairly regularly encountered things that should not exist, as opposed to things that could not exist, which it met only rarely. It appeared to be half-vessel, half-temple, and though sensors indicated there was no power supply parts of it glowed a nauseating green. The white stone structure was taller than it was long, and its spires and towers curved around each other in a way unsettlingly suggestive of grasping, entwined limbs.

While the bridge crew were studying it feverishly, the junior officers were casually debating the newest potential threat to the ship over a late lunch.

"So, wait," asked Tendi, "is it a ship or is it a living being?"

"It's a little of column A and a little of column B", replied Boimler, "With these things, it's difficult to tell what's a ship that achieved sapience and what's a sapient being that looks a lot like a ship. Or a station sometimes, asteroids, I think one time a planet."

"The official name is a God-Like Entity", Rutherford explained, "Humans often call 'em Lovecraftian, after an author back in the late middle ages who wrote about that sort of thing. You're probably gonna hear people throw that word around a lot."

Boimler paused with his fork halfway to his mouth for a moment before saying, "Huh. You know, sometimes I forget it's possible to make references to fiction instead of recent real life history."

Mariner shrugged, "I dunno, Boims, it's not like you get frequent occasions to quote Captain Proton." She sighed, "Reading Lovecraft now is really weird, he was like SUPER prejudiced in ways that don't really exist for humans any more. I can tell he's trying to insult me, but I'm not sure how insulted I should actually be about it, given I'm having space adventures and he's some dead loser from back in the gasoline age."

Boimler nodded, "I, uh, I didn't want to be the first one to bring him up. Y'know."

Tendi's eyes flicked up to his hair and she asked, "Was he a purple supremacist?"

"That's a thing people can be?" asked Rutherford before shaking his head, "Of course it is, I shouldn't even be surprised."

"Infinite diversity in infinite combinations also means infinite ways of being an asshole", replied Mariner, "I'm pretty sure Surak said that once."

"That doesn't really sound like him", said Boimler uncertainly.

"It is a not-inaccurate summary of one of the later sutras" commented T'lyn, before she abruptly stood and strode off to deposit her tray in the replicator. It was the first time she had spoken in almost half an hour.

Mariner hunched over in her seat, embarrassed. "I don't wanna tell her I was just making shit up", she admitted, "Now it just feels insensitive."

"I mean it was a little", confirmed Tendi as Boimler and Rutherford nodded.

"I know, I'm just - I'm trying to be less of a jerk, you know? About Vulcan philosophy or Orion pirates or anything like that."

Rutherford nudged her with an elbow and said, "Well, that's not very Lovecraftian of you."

Though the thing appeared inert to all scans conducted from the ship, with beings that potentially powerful it was generally considered better to be safe than sorry. For that reason an away team was to be sent to take a closer look, getting more detailed readings from more specialised tools. It wouldn't do for the Cerritos to log it as nothing to worry about, only for it to later drift into an inhabited system and turn out to be dangerous after all.

If it proved necessary, a more dedicated science vessel would follow up the Cerritos' scans with a more thorough investigation. If it proved necessary, a more dedicated combat vessel would destroy the thing instead.

Mariner was unsurprised when she and her friends were given the job the next morning. They were all just senior enough to take responsibility but just junior enough that the ship could keep running without them while they were away. Ransom was in the transporter room to see them off, though she couldn't tell if he really needed to be there or if he just enjoyed knowing that other people were doing work instead of him.

"I hope there's nobody frozen in a pod, y'know?" she commented idly.

"Oh tell me about it" agreed Boimler, "That's the last thing we need to deal with."

"How come we all had to do that frozen pod person sensitivity training?" asked Rutherford, "I mean, I can see how it'd be valuable and all in the circumstances, but it just seems really specific."

"That's because of the Enterprise actually", said Boimler, "A few years back they defrosted some capitalist bigshot. Apparently they were really cavalier about the whole thing, he ended up suing for emotional distress because they were all acting like it was no big deal that everyone he used to know was dead."

Mariner nodded, "He's from back when guys all pretended to be made of stone, musta really gotten to him if he was willing to admit it publicly like that."

"Well, hopefully that won't be an issue for you bunch this time", said Ransom, "I've got five people going out and I only want five coming back. Mr Lundy, beam them down."

The space they arrived in was less a room and more a plaza. The dark stone floor stretched out into the gloom until the only visible landmarks were distant pillars, reaching up into a black infinity and carved with bas-reliefs that had longe since faded into vague impressions with subtly unsettling implications.

“Stick together”, said Boimler, “We don’t need to go splitting up and getting picked off one by one.”

“You’d get got first”, replied Mariner.

“Hey, not… necessarily…” Boimler’s objection was unconvincing.

“In an Orion ghost story”, said Tendi, “Either me, T’Lyn or Mariner would be the first. Take out one of the more experienced fighters so the others are in more danger, y’know? Plays into the fear that no matter how well-trained you are something worse could always come along. Plus, these days it’d be a little sexist to kill one of the boys first. I mean by the goddess it’s 1718, we can’t still be doing the old boy-in-the-air-vents trick.”

T’lyn raised an eyebrow and remarked, “While Vulcans do not have a strongly codified tradition of horror fiction, in Vulcan works broadly comparable to Orion or Human horror, Rutherford would likely be the first to go. He is physically the largest.”

“Aw, that’s a shame”, pouted Tendi, “Poor Rutherford.”

“You’re telling me”, agreed Rutherford.

“Alright, nobody’s getting got, OK?” insisted Boimler, “If anyone died in here, Dr T’Ana would kill us all for it.”

Mariner cast her eye around the dark stone room and hoped that he was right. So far the crew of the Cerritos had been lucky in away missions, even the ones that had rapidly become more complicated than anyone had planned, but everyone knew what sometimes happened to junior officers in Starfleet. It wasn’t like the bad old days, when some ships had seemed to lose another security ensign every week, but danger was never a million miles away.

They stepped forward into the darkness, their flashlights painfully inadequate to illuminate such a vast space. She was glad they hadn’t needed to go over in spacesuits; things were unpleasant enough without being claustrophobically bound up in one of those. Half of her hoped the ancient and worn-down carvings on the wall would suddenly sharpen up so she could at least be sure what she was looking at; the other half hoped they would just wear all the way down to a nice, boring blank wall. At least then she wouldn’t keep seeing hideous suggestions of something that might be out of the corner of her eye. From the way the others were occasionally flinching or doing double-takes, she didn’t think she was the only one feeling that way.

At one point they realised T’Lyn hadn’t said anything for too long. When they looked around, she was several hundred metres down the hall staring at a particular bas-relief. It hadn’t leapt out at Mariner as the group had passed it the first time, but for whatever reason T’Lyn was practically entranced. It took a concerted effort for them to bring her attention back to the here and now, and T’Lyn flatly refused to tell them what had captured her attention so thoroughly.

When Mariner turned back to take one last look at the carving that had enthralled her friend, there was a dark stain on the wall uncomfortably suggestive of old blood.

“I’ve been wondering”, said Rutherford, “What’s the boy-in-the-air-vents trick?” He was obviously just trying to fill the gloom and distract them all from the tension, but Mariner appreciated the attempt and she didn’t think anyone was going to hold it against him.

“Well, there’s three main ingredients”, replied Tendi, “Your action hero girl, a boy on her crew, and somewhere out of the way on the ship they’re robbing for her to find his dead body. Bonus points if she convinced him to come along, y’know, don’t worry, I’ll go in first and dope them up, you come in after and take all their stuff.”

“Oh, so then it’s kinda her fault he gets got?”

“Yeah, exactly. Then she’ll feel bad about it for maybe a scene or two, the actress gets a chance to show off how good she is at feeling conflicted, and the poor boy never gets mentioned again for the rest of the vid.”

“All the schlocky fiction coming out of Earth lately is based on a true story”, mused Mariner, “Evil mirror universes, undercover alien infiltrators, two people trapped in a freezing cold cave having to share a blanket, real ripped-from-the-headlines kinda stuff.”

Mariner had to admit, it was nice being able to talk about this kind of unimportant stuff rather than focus on the bizarre construct in whose depths they were groping about blindly. Even as the conversation trailed out again, it was nice to have been briefly able to forget where she really was, just for a moment. In fact, she thought she’d rather be anywhere other than here.

...

It was a beautiful day in San Francisco, and Boimler was glad he had the leave time accrued to really enjoy it, without having to worry about being back on duty any time soon. He knew many Starfleet officers preferred to take their leave in more exotic climes, and he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t a little curious about pleasure planets like Risa, but sometimes it was hard to beat the comforts and charms of good old Earth.

The days of shore leave passed in a pleasant sort of ambiguous haze, one blending into the next without anything urgent to catch his attention. He enjoyed strolls around Earth’s various historical preservation districts, took in scenic views he’d appreciated a hundred times in the holodeck but never had time to check out in person, and in general passed his days without having to worry about anything. He got occasional messages from his friends, and they always seemed to be good news – T’Lyn receiving a formal apology from the senior officers of her old ship (followed swiftly by Captain Sokel falling down the stairs), Mariner having most but not all of her misdemeanours and demerits struck from Starfleet’s record. She confided in him that the only ones they were keeping on the books were the ones she still felt bad about anyway, and she hardly seemed indignant about it so he guessed she knew her own business.

One morning, perhaps a few days after beginning his time on  leave, he was sitting out the front of his family’s farmhouse and enjoying a coffee as the sun climbed in the sky. He could see Mariner coming up the garden path, looking agitated. He hoped whatever was bothering his friend wasn’t her fault, or if it was that it was at least something they could fix easily.

He waved her over and called out “Good morning!”

“Uh, yeah, sure thing” she replied. Her mood did not seem to be improving.

“Mariner, what’s wrong? Aren’t you always the one telling me to enjoy things while I can? We were due a little shore leave anyway, what’s the harm in just chilling out for a bit?”

“You  don’t chill out!” she replied, “Your idea of a vacation is nitpicking the dioramas over at the history museum! What the hell is all this? What's going on, man?”

Boimler sighed and replied “So, what, we get a run of good luck for a change and just because things are going well you think it's too good to be true?”

“Boims, how did we get back to Earth?”

“I dunno, the same way get get anywhere? C'mon, Mariner, do you remember every detail of every journey you've taken in your life? I bet you couldn't tell me what you had for breakfast last tuesday, but that doesn't mean you didn't eat anything at all!”

“Then where's everyone else? The only Starfleet people I've met since we got home are the ones who were on that last mission with us, and even then I don't think I've seen Rutherford for a week.”

“We once went a week without seeing Rutherford because he spent the whole time elbows-deep in a malfunctioning probe. Twice, actually, the second one was a weather satellite. He must just have some project he's excited about, you know how he can be.”

She wanted to argue, but she couldn't deny he had a point. No matter what other misgivings she had, it wasn't exactly out of character for Rutherford to get caught up in something and lose track of the time.

She headed off, intent on finding whatever it was that kept setting her internal alarm bell ringing. The galaxy had thrown too much bullshit at Beckett Mariner for her to ignore her instincts when they were telling her this clearly that something was wrong; all she had to do was find it and she’d be halfway to putting a stop to it. She almost wanted to crack a joke about how Spock might have said something like that once, but something gave her pause. She couldn't put her finger on what, but she had the nagging suspicion that she shouldn't make a flippant comment about what a historical figure may or may not have said.

Boimler, meanwhile, was attempting to put Mariner’s strange paranoid streak out of his mind and focus on the good around him instead. Dr Migleemo had suggested that he had a tendency to absorb other people’s stress, much like couscous absorbing juices from whatever it was served with, and that it might be better for him to try to absorb things less prone to make him worry. He wasn’t sure how well it was going so far, but he was willing to at least make the effort. With that in mind, he prepared a cup of calming tea and sat down with his PADD open to the day’s news.

The big headline of the day was an agreement between the Federation and the Orion Syndicate, that each would provide placements and specialist training for scientists from the

other nation. From what they were saying on the news, it was the first time the orions had made such an agreement about anything other than ship procurement for almost 200 years, and Boimler didn’t need to be a telepath to understand exactly what was euphemistically meant by procurement.

He was sure Tendi would be thrilled. She was always saying it was high time the orions got a little recognition for something other than piracy, and apparently someone finally agreed with her. He took another look at the article, and was stunned to see the woman herself front and center of the orion delegation. She was surrounded by other orions, and most of them hardly looked piratical at all.

He made a note to send Rutherford a message later, to make sure he wasn’t so wrapped up in whatever project he had going that he missed his friend’s big break.

The idea of contacting Rutherford came and went, soon lost in the same gentle fog of lazy days that he had enjoyed before Mariner had interrupted him. He was dimly aware that he normally wasn’t one to waste so much time just relaxing, but when he had nothing to worry about he supposed it wasn’t really wasted. Wasn’t it enough to just pass the time, not having to think about missions or deadly dangers out in space?

It was Mariner, scrambling over the top of the wall and waving her arms in the air as she raced towards him, "Boimler! Boimler, Boims, my dude you gotta see this!"

“What, what is it?”

“When I woke up this morning, my leg was killing me. I put salve on it, and look!” She yanked a pant leg up and gestured down like she was expecting to prove a point. The words WAKE UP were spelled out in pink goop on her leg.

He took a deep breath and said, in the tone of someone trying very hard to act like they don’t think their friend is being an idiot, "Mariner, anyone can rub stuff on their skin."

"But I'm only doing it to the parts that hurt."

"This surely can't all be - ow!" He fell to the ground and clutched his leg.

"Wait, hold your hands away from it! If someone really is trying to contact us, we need their message."

"Easy for you to say, you slept through your one!"

"Don't be a baby” she scoffed, “I'll give you the salve when they're done. This stuff really works, and I even like the smell."

"Let me get some of that?"

She held out a finger, and he sniffed, "Ooh, coconut! You're right, that is nice." After a long moment, he nodded and said "OK, I think they're done."

Like Mariner had, he took the jar of salve and rubbed it into the specific areas that hurt. Once again it spelled out a message - GLE DREAMING. Wordlessly, he reached out and pinched Mariner's bare arm.

"Ow! What the hell, man?"

"Well, isn't that how you wake up from a dream? And besides, if only one of us could wake up I'd want it to be you. You'll find a way to get us all out of this."

"Aaw, Boims!" She hugged him tight, "If I've gotta be stuck in some dumb eldritch dream world, I wouldn't want to be there without you at my back."

"Lovecraft can eat my pasty white ass", he declared, only slightly muffled by the hug.

She stood and punched one hand into another, “OK, we gotta figure out how to wake up all the way.”

“It’s a pattern recognition thing, right? You gotta spot one thing that’s wrong, and then the others will kinda jump out at you until you can just break the illusion altogether.”

She nodded, “Yeah, that’s what I’ve been trying to do, but there’s something I’m missing. OK I knew it was weird we were back on Earth all of a sudden, but why? What’s so unusual about that?”

Boimler began to pace back and forth, enjoying the chance to ponder a mystery just as any good Starfleet officer would. “Well, what was the last mission we were on before that? Was it something that would keep us from getting to Earth?”

“It was to check out that weird...temple…” She trailed off as the world dissolved around her. The sunny California morning became the cold, ancient dark of the stone construct the Cerritos had discovered the previous day. Even the pleasant breeze had been nothing more than her imagination, replaced with the still of the tomb.

“Woah.” From the look on Boimler’s face, it was clear the spell had been broken for him too.

Mariner spun on her heel and shouted at the walls “That’s how we get out? We remember we’re in the temple? Laaaame! You shoulda made us try way harder than that!”

Boimler put his head in his hands and sighed “Why are you taunting it?”

“So it made us hallucinate, and then what? If nothing happens after that it’s barely more than a prank. Step up your game, creepy ancient catacomb!”

“I think our perception of what counts as a prank may have been a little warped by easy access to the holodeck”, Boimler replied in that irritatingly reasonable way of his.

“This thing’s a temple, right? Bet you anything back in the day interlopers would’ve been sent off to dreamland, only to wake up and find a bunch of weirdos in black robes about to slit their throats.”

“Oh, there you are!” Rutherford came running into the room, looking a little out of breath but overall none the worse for wear. “I’ve been looking all over for you”, he continued, “I lost track of you after giving you those messages, I was checking on Tendi but by the time I got back to where I was you’d both wandered off again.”

Mariner let out a sigh of relief. If Rutherford was his usual self, the situation couldn’t be that bad. She waved and greeted him, “Oh hey man, thanks for warning us about the dream. How come you were the first to wake up anyway? What clued you in?”

He pointed to his implant and replied, “It was my eye. The real one and the implant couldn’t agree 100% on what they were seeing, and eventually the glitches got bad enough to pull me out of the dream.”

A realisation struck her and she asked "Rutherford, did you have to roll up our pants to contact us?"

"Uh, yeah. Sorry."

"It's fine, I just wish I hadn't been wearing odd socks today."

"Why?"

"I was in a rush this morning, they were the first two I grabbed. Didn’t even notice until the briefing."

“Why don’t you just ball them up-” Boimler cut himself off, “Never mind, let’s go wake the others and then get out of here.”

“Sounds good to me! C’mon, Tendi and T’Lyn are a little way down this hall.” Rutherford set out and the other two quickly followed.

“So what was it like, being the only one awake?” asked Boimler.

“Yeah, did you see us do anything funny?” She hoped he didn’t have too many embarassing videos of her sleepwalking around the temple and bumping into walls, but considering the circumstances she wouldn’t begrudge him just one or two.

Rutherford shuddered and replied, “Honestly, it was scary more than anything else. I didn’t know if any moment you were gonna yell hey guys let’s go bungee jumping and throw yourself down a flight of stairs!”

She was quiet for a long moment before saying “Yeah that’s fair, that’s a lot less funny than anything I was thinking of.”

Boimler flinched and then asked “Hey, is your leg like, still actually sore?”

“Now you mention it, yeah.” She shook her leg to try to get the feeling back to normal, but the twinge of pain remained.

“That’s no surprise”, replied Rutherford, “You guys talked about salve but what you actually did was lick your fingers and run them over your leg. That doesn’t do much good when I burned a message into your leg with my phaser.”

“Oh, ew.”

“Hey uh, we should probably pick up the pace, right? Don’t wanna let Tendi get hurt.” asked Boimler. Mariner decided to let his naked attempt to change the subject go unremarked.

“I’m less worried about her and T’Lyn”, replied Rutherford, “They’ve been moving around a lot less, at least so far. Last I saw them they were down this turnoff here, and they shouldn’t have gone too far.”

Sure enough, the duo were in a smaller room off the hall. Mariner couldn’t have guessed what purpose it might have served when the place was new, but for now it seemed to be the venue for Tendi’s acceptance speech. Mariner struggled to make out what she was accepting; from the snippets of speech she could hear it seemed to be a mix of a Nobel Prize, a VSA Chalice and the captaincy of the Enterprise-F. Mariner had to give credit where it was due, the new iteration of the Enterprise Tendi had dreamed up did sound pretty classy.

A soft noise from the corner drew their attention, and they saw T’Lyn staggering from the room with surprising quickness. She mumbled something to herself, too softly for any of them to pick it up.

Rutherford gasped “Oh shoot, T’Lyn!”

Mariner took charge, declaring “You go grab her, we’ll wake Tendi and then wait here for you to get back.”

Boimler nodded, “At least nobody else can wander off!”

“Great, thanks you two. I’ll be back as soon as I can.” Fitting action to the word he sprinted off after the wayward vulcan.

As Boimler guided Tendi to lay down and lean back against the wall, Mariner popped open the orion medic’s away mission bag and rooted through it. “There should be a stimulant hypospray in here – aha!” She picked out the hypospray with the purple sticker on the side, which marked it as Tendi’s specially crafted stimulant mix. As it was precisely designed to work on orion physiology, it would be useless or even poisonous to most other species.

Mariner put the spray to Tendi’s neck and activated it. In less than a minute, she was sitting upright and blinking her eyes open.

“Where am I- the temple!” she gasped.

“You’re OK”, said Mariner, “It put us under some kind of hallucination, but Rutherford got out and he’s been waking us up. He’s trying to wrangle T’Lyn now, then we can get out of here.”

No sooner had she said it than Rutherford and T’Lyn returned to the room, the vulcan looking much more lucid and the human looking a little sheepish.

“I, uh, may have accidentally triggered a mind-meld” he said, by way of an explanation.

“Considering it was not deliberate, I will not read too much into it” said T’Lyn in a tone that suggested she had already tried to explain this but that it hadn’t actually helped him feel better, “I appreciate your efforts to wake me. To have my mind not be my own is not a pleasant prospect.”

“Better’n getting a message burned into your leg with a phaser,” commented Mariner idly.

"How come you didn't do mine?" Tendi asked, sounding sincerely disappointed to have been woken with proper medical procedures and not an impromptu phaser tattoo.

Rutherford shrugged and replied "Because I don't know what to set this to for an Orion to make it too painful to possibly ignore, but also not enough to cause any actual injuries."

Mariner hit her comm badge and declared “Away Team to Cerritos, five to beam up. Oh, and could you ask Dr T’Ana to prepare burn salve? Coconut-scented, if she has it.” They were soon surrounded by the swirling energy of the transporter, and the ancient structure was silent once more.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!