

Enterprise stayed in orbit of Starbase 68 for the next three days to provide added security during the arrival of the treaty negotiating teams. The Della Mir team came in a stately ship with a long narrow diamond shape. It was a diplomatic cruiser named the Flummox-roh. The computer translated the ships name to approximate the standard word victory.

Since the Della Mir arrived first Captain Kirk, Commander Spock, and Commander Von Maltz served as welcoming committee. Della Mir team consisted of three distinct species of humanoids. The first to come through the airlock was a male of the same species that they had met earlier.

"I am Ambassador Henn-ray of the Della Mir Community." The tall vividly green man said. His bald head was larger than a human and almost triangular in shape.

"Welcome Ambassador." Von Malts said "I am Commander Von Maltz, in command of this starbase. May I present Captain Kirk and Commander Spock of the Starship Enterprise."

"Captain. Commanders." Henn-ray nodded formally. Both Kirk and Spock returned the acknowledgment. "May I present Ambassador Rekke-dah of my home planet, Mirta. And our assistants Iphi-doh and Fren-kak both of our sister planet Lirta."

The two Lirtan were smaller, paler beings who were less angular and had more hair than their bosses. Also accompanying the delegation but evidently not to be introduced were several compact humanoids with golden skin tones and bronze colored hair.

"Ambassador, the Federation delegation will arrive later today." Commander Von Maltz said. "Ambassador Ahmed sends his respects and invites your party to join us for an informal gathering this evening."

"Please send your ambassador my regrets." Henn-ray said. "We will await the beginnings of formal negotiations in the morning."

The entire Della Mir delegation turned and retreated back into their ship. Kirk and Spock exchanges glances. Kirk said. "Friendly types."

"I guess I better cancel the party." Von Maltz shrugged and left Kirk and Spock standing there by the airlock.

That evening instead of a diplomatic party the Federation delegation met to prepare for the initial meeting with the Della Mir delegations. The Federation team consisted of several humans as both ambassadors and assistants. Two Vulcans served as technical advisors. T'Yuhn was the senior Vulcan on the team. She was an expert in Federation law and intergalactic treaties. Slevon expertise was in weaponry and computer technology. Three young Andorians also accompanied the team as students of the process since the violent nature of their people made the skills of diplomacy difficult for them to conquer.

As soon as Captain Kirk, Commander Von Maltz, and Chief Ambassador Rashid Ahmad agreed that there was no danger to the members of either negotiating team, the Enterprise left orbit. They set course for System K328 to complete the survey of the system.

The Enterprise dropped to impulse power as she came into the solar system designated only as K328. It was a four planet system, but only the third planet supported life. It was also the only planet with the unfamiliar magnetic field. So of course it was this planet they were interested in studying first.

"Bring us into an extended orbit, Mr. Sulu." Captain Kirk ordered from the center seat. "Standard plus one third."

"Plus one third. Aye, Sir." Sulu responded as he brought the ship around. The senior staff was on duty. Chekov was at the navigation station. Uhura manned communications. Spock served at the science console. Dr. McCoy was also on the bridge. Since he had no station to man, he simply stood next to Kirk's chair.

"Spock?" Kirk asked.

"Sensors are being reflected by the magnetic field, Captain." Spock said without looking up. "I am attempting to recalibrate to a frequency that will penetrate the field. Mr. Chekov, your assistance please."

"Aye." Chekov responded and left his station to help Mr. Spock with his adjustments of the science equipment. As a certified science officer as well as chief navigator, Chekov often assisted Mr. Spock. He went to the second science station next to Spock's and started checking the readings as Spock made adjustments.

"Could it be a planetary defense system?" Kirk asked. No one answered. It was anybody's guess at this point. "You said they were unaware of space travel, Sulu?"

"Yes, Sir." Sulu turned around to look at Kirk as he spoke. "Of course the people I met were barely surviving. They had no access to any government or information."

"Captain, the magnetic field is strongest in the northern hemisphere, on the largest of the three major continents." Spock reported.

"That doesn't make sense." Kirk said going over to the science station. It wasn't that he could do anything there, but Kirk sometimes had trouble sitting still.

"Not for a natural phenomenon." Spock agreed. "At least none in my experience."

"The field does cover the entire planet?" Kirk asked.

"Yes Captain." Spock said. "But the intensity varies widely. Basically a ripple effect emanating from a point thirty eight degrees north of the planetary equator."

"Starbase 68's runabout went down in the northern hemisphere of the largest continent." McCoy observed leaning on the rail between the upper and lower levels of the bridge. "I take it that is not a coincidence."

Spock touched a few controls to bring up a graphic representation of the flight path of the runabout on the science station's monitor. Then he added the information of the relative strength of the magnetic field to the picture. Kirk and McCoy studied the monitor as Spock explained. "It appears the runabout was caught in one of these magnetic ripples and pulled down along this parallel."

"Spock do you have any theories what this magnetic ripple effect comes from?" Kirk asked.

"Insufficient data, Captain." Spock looked at his monitor, perplexed.

"Mr. Spock." Chekov said. "This does not make sense. I am reading positively charged electrons."

"Where?" Spock asked adjusting his controls to look at the same information that Chekov was studying.

"In the atmosphere. It seems to follow the pattern of the ripple effect." Chekov said

incredulously. "I don't understand."

"Are you still reading the magnetic field or are you reading the planet, Chekov?" Kirk asked.

Chekov checked his readings again. "In areas where the effect is smallest, I am reading the planet Captain. There appear to be many magnetic storms in the atmosphere however they are in an inverted pattern to the rippled effect."

"It would appear." Spock added "That where the field is less intense there is also less stability in the atmosphere, hence the storms."

"Do you have any idea why, Spock?" Kirk asked.

"It is as if somehow there has been a change in the polarity of the planet." Spock theorized. "And now the planet is attempting to right itself. However that is only one possibility. I do not know how this would be accomplished."

"Why would anyone try to change the polarity of an entire planet?" McCoy asked.

No one seemed to have an answer to that question. So Kirk tried a different question. "What happens if you do change the polarity of an entire planet?"

"One effect would be that all power systems of normal polarity would drain to the ground." Spock reported.

"A problem both the runabout crew and the landing parties had to deal with." Kirk observed. "Mr. Sulu was able to use hand phasers on the surface. Why?"

"The hand phasers were losing power." Mr. Sulu reported "Until we reconfigured the power flow."

"If I recall the report accurately, a negative point eight from the standard." Spock said. Sulu nodded. "That is not a logical setting. How did you arrive at that configuration, Mr. Sulu?"

"I didn't, Sir." Sulu said. "Ensigns Cicero and Gonzales found it through trial and error sometime before we located them."

"Perhaps a similar methodology would be appropriate." Spock said to himself as his fingers moved rapidly over the sensor controls.

"I am starting to get sensor readings, Mr. Spock." Chekov said after Spock had made several adjustments. "There are major power sources in the southern hemisphere. I am reading a heavy concentration of atmospheric pollutants in the regions of these power sources. It is like two different planets. The northern hemisphere is reading no power sources at all. The population is small and spread out where as it is much more concentrated in the southern hemisphere."

"What about those magnetic storms, Mr. Chekov?" McCoy asked.

"They are intense but sporadic, Doctor." Chekov answered. "In the southern hemisphere the storms do not seem to effect the areas of population concentration."

"A force field?" Kirk asked doubtfully. That was not consistent with an industrial age technology.

"I am not reading any kind of force field, Captain." Chekov said. "Perhaps it has to do with the topography of cities. They are all located in valleys with surrounding mountains."

"Spock, could all of this magnetic effect and polarity anomalies be caused by a weapon of some kind?" Kirk asked.

"That is a logical conclusion, Captain." Spock answered carefully "However, I am unaware of the technology that could produce the effects we are seeing."

"What are you suggesting, Spock?" Kirk asked.

"All reports indicate that this society is in an industrial age." Spock said. "A weapon such as you suggest is far beyond that development."

"Perhaps, we should ask them." Kirk suggested. Nothing wrong with the direct approach. "Mr. Sulu do you think you could find this P.R. Alkimi again?"

"I believe Captain that if someone was to beam into that area, P.R. Alkimi's troops would locate him in short order." Sulu said. To Sulu their strategy appeared to be that of the spider web. With Alkimi and his experience as the spider and his troops spread out as the web to catch any stray flies they could find."

"Can he be trusted?" Kirk asked.

"Alkimi has his own agenda, of course." Sulu said thoughtfully. "But he has acted honorably. I find him basically trustworthy."

"Good." Kirk smiled. Here was something he could do. "Then Sulu and I will beam down and see what information we can ascertain directly from the inhabitants."

"Captain, this is a war zone." Spock reminded Kirk. The Captain's safety was the first officer's responsibility. However Kirk couldn't stand to be left out of any action and constantly pushed the safety net to the limit. Normally Spock would insist on accompanying the Captain. However one apparently different species imposed on this group was enough.

"Then you'll need a doctor to come along." McCoy said. Kirk was about to object, but McCoy added. "The last time we were here eight crew members required medical attention. You are not going without me."

"Fine, Bones." Kirk said, ignoring Spock's warning. "Get your gear and meet us in the transporter room."

McCoy nodded and left the bridge. In the transporter room Kirk, Sulu, and McCoy were each checked out a phaser and communicator. Sulu also took a tricorder and McCoy had his basic medical kit plus a few extra medical supplies based on all the reports of the landing parties. They beamed onto the same roof top where Sulu and Gonzales had met Preem Hawn a little over a week before.

It was a bright sunny afternoon. Sulu took out his tricorder and started scanning. He had reconfigured it along with the phasers and communicators. The readings he was getting made more sense than before, although not much.

"Well, Mr. Sulu." Kirk said. "Which way?"

"I am not reading any life signs in the immediate area." Sulu said continuing to scan. "However, I wouldn't trust the range of this tricorder down here. The route we took before was down these steps and along the alley in back of this building."

Kirk and McCoy followed Sulu down the steps. Sulu had his tricorder in one hand and his phaser in the other. They looked in every doorway and every window as they walked along.

"Mr. Sulu, you seem very wary of these teenagers." Dr. McCoy observed. It was only a week ago that Sulu had been shot on this planet and McCoy was always on the look out psychological repercussions of such an incident.

"Well, Doc." Sulu said as he carefully looked in a door. "These kids tend to shoot first and ask questions later."

"Growing up in a war zone will cause that." Kirk observed quietly. They had been in this type of situation many times before. They knew what to expect from each other. "Sulu, how will these kids react to you showing back up?"

"If we're lucky, confused." Sulu said. He stopped and turned back towards Kirk and McCoy. "Anything they don't understand they go right back to Alkimi."

"The only adult." McCoy clarified. Sulu nodded. They were at the edge of an intersection with another alley of a similar size. Sulu was trying to remember which way he had gone last time. The intersection seemed empty. They turned right. But when the Enterprise landing party cleared the building, Preem Hawn stepped out of a doorway to challenge them.

"Stop!" Sulu found a rifle leveled at his chest less than a meter in front of him. Kirk and McCoy stopped behind him instantly.

"Preem Hawn." Sulu said. He tried to appear nonchalant and consulted his tricorder. "Good to see you. We need to talk to P.R. Alkimi."

"Put down your weapons." the boy demanded.

"Hawn." Sulu smiled "You only have one round of ammunition in that rifle."

"How do you know?" Hawn asked suspiciously.

"I know." Sulu assured him. "So if you're going to shoot, you better decide which one of us it will be."

"Who are they?" Hawn asked pointing his rifle at Kirk and McCoy.

"I am Captain Kirk." Kirk smiled pleasantly, following Sulu's lead with the boy. "And this is Dr. McCoy."

The boy stared at McCoy wide eyed. "You're a doctor?"

"Yes." McCoy said carefully. He wasn't sure if Hawn would take this as good news or bad. But the boy looked at him hopefully.

"My brother's sick. Can you fix him?" Hawn asked.

"I don't know." McCoy said. "I'd have to see him."

"But you got medicine?"

"Yes." McCoy nodded. "I have medicine."

"But first we need to talk to P.R. Alkimi." Kirk reminded Hawn pointedly.

Hawn lowered his rifle slightly, but not enough that he couldn't have it back on them in a second. He did not take his eyes off the three men as he yelled loudly. "Du! Come here, Du!"

A thin blond boy came out of a doorway down the street and slowly walked towards them. He was a couple of years younger than Hawn with bright distinctive spots that were almost orange. As he got close he seemed irritated "What do you want?"

"You're going to take my post until Rekka shows up." Hawn ordered. He jerked his head towards the men "I have to take them to see the Purahl."

The boy looked at the three men, then back at Hawn. He held his hands out to Hawn "Give me your gun."

"No." Hawn said holding onto his gun tightly. He didn't want to walk into camp with Sulu, unarmed again. The older guys of his troop were still giving him a hard time about that.

"How can I take your post without a gun?" Du protested. He adjusted his pants. They were too big for him and he had them tied at the waist with a piece of leather.

Hawn frowned and reluctantly handed the younger boy his rifle. "Whatever happens, don't shoot it!"

Du grinned, fondling the rifle. "I'll take good care of it. Don't worry."

"Come on." Hawn said with resignation to the Enterprise officers. He led them through the maze of alley ways that led to the safety of the camp. When they came to the open square that was outside the room where Sulu had met Alkimi, children of all ages ran and played. P.R. Alkimi was sitting on the steps that went into his office. He had a three year old boy balanced on his knee. The children stopped playing and stared as Hawn led the strangers into the camp. Alkimi looked up to determine what had quieted the horde. Seeing Sulu and two more officers coming his way, he whispered in the boys ear then set him down on the ground. The three year old boy ran for his mother.

"Sulu." Alkimi said standing as they reached him. "You didn't bring Rosita with you. She wouldn't be avoiding me, would she?"

"Ensign Gonzoles is on assignment." Sulu explained briefly. But he would be sure to tell Gonzoles that Alkimi had asked. He got back to business. "P.R. Alkimi, this is Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy. We have some questions we'd like to ask."

"In a more Private setting than this." Kirk added.

"Well, Captain." Alkimi said. "Come into my headquarters."

"P.R. Alkimi." Hawn stopped them as Alkimi was started to lead the way up the steps. Hawn grabbed Alkimi's arm and whispered desperately. "He's a doctor."

"Yes, I heard. Let me handle this." Alkimi said calmly to the boy. He looked at Hawn questioningly and asked. "Hawn, where is your gun?"

"I left Du covering my post." Hawn explained sheepishly. He let go of Alkimi's arm. "He needed a weapon."

"I hope you only left him one round of ammunition." Alkimi smiled at Hawn and patted him familiarly on the arm. Hawn returned the smile and nodded. Alkimi returned his attention to the Enterprise officers. "Gentlemen, this way."

The four adults went into Alkimi's commander center. It was the same as Sulu remembered it. Even though the windows were open, there wasn't much light. The thick stone walls had kept the room a bit cooler than outside. A small fire burned in the back of the large stone hearth for added light. A figure laid on the bench against the wall.

"I didn't think you'd be back." Alkimi said to Sulu. "How are things in the south?"

"The south?" Kirk asked.

"That's where you come from, right?" Alkimi asked. "I know we are just a forgotten outpost of this war, but something big must be happening if you don't want your own occupation force to know about it. They have nothing like the weapons you have."

McCoy walked over to the apparently sleeping figure on the bench. He had his medical scanner out. A teenage girl sat up as McCoy touched her shoulder. Sorlee didn't say anything at the strange man's touch, she just sat up and pulled the thin blanket tightly around her.

"Sorlee." Alkimi said. "I didn't know you were still in here. I am using this room. Go

sleep somewhere else."

"Has she been sleeping a lot lately?" McCoy asked. He sat on the bench next to her and scanned with his medical equipment.

"Bones." Kirk said "This is not what we're here for."

"What are you here for?" Alkimi asked. He briefly wondered why Sorlee had not followed his order. She did seem unusually lethargic lately. But she did her assignments and she didn't complain. Alkimi hadn't thought there was a problem.

"Captain, if I may ask Sorlee a question?" Sulu asked. Kirk nodded. Sulu went over to her and crouched down to ask "Sorlee, last time I was here you said something about space ships. What do you know about spaceships?"

"I've seen them." Sorlee said quietly. She was sure no one would believe her. After all no one ever had.

"She sees lots of things." Alkimi dismissed it as he always did. But Kirk was interested.

"Can you describe these space ships?" Kirk asked the girl.

"Mostly you see the blue light." Sorlee said. She showed more interest and spark than Sulu had seen from her previously. She was amazed that they were listening. "They are in the sky some nights above the roof tops. The blue light flies along. Sometimes it stops and just stays in one place in the sky. Then when it knows you're looking at it, in the blink of an eye it goes straight up until you can't see it any more."

"When was the first time you saw them?" Kirk asked.

"It was just after the last day." Sorlee said.

"What last day?" Kirk asked.

"The day that lasted all night." Sorlee looked at him like he was stupid. Even the children who had been very young remembered that night.

"She means the day they used that bomb that was suppose to end the war." Alkimi said. He obviously assumed Kirk knew exactly what he meant. "Why are you interested in these blue lights, Captain?"

"I'm afraid I can't explain that right now, P.R. Alkimi." Kirk said turning away from Sorlee. "Perhaps you can fill in the blanks that she is leaving."

"Surely you know about the bomb." Alkimi couldn't understand why the Captain was feigning ignorance of it.

"If you could explain it from your perspective, it would be helpful." Kirk said.

"Sure." Alkimi said. He leaned against the heavy wooden table in the middle of the room and collected his thoughts. He hadn't had to make a report in years. "It was five, maybe five and a half years ago. I was with my unit about twenty miles to the east of here. Fighting was heavy and we had very little verifiable information. But when the bomb went off, there was no mistaking it. It was the loudest sound I had ever heard. Everyone was knocked off their feet. There was an eerie yellow light over the hill that lasted for several days. When we got up, everybody ran. It was mass confusion. None of the vehicles worked. Nothing worked. If it required electricity forget it."

"How did you end up here?" Kirk asked. "And what happened to the other adults?"

"One by one, my comrades were picked up by the enemy. I was lucky. I lived in the

woods for almost two years." Alkimi said. "I was about gone when I came to the edge of this town. I found the kids, or really they found me. They were still fighting the Dentry. With stones. They told me that a few days after the bomb went off the enemy came and rounded up everyone over the age of sixteen and took them away. No explanation."

"Sorlee." McCoy said taking a hypo spray out of his kit. "This won't hurt. It will help you feel better."

"What's wrong with her?" Alkimi asked as McCoy administered the hypo.

"She's pregnant." McCoy said simply. "And she's malnourished."

"Sori. Why didn't you tell us?" Alkimi asked gently. He sat down on the other side of the girl and put his arm around her shoulders. She leaned against him.

"Would you be the father?" McCoy asked.

"No, Doctor. I am not." Alkimi said. "The father doesn't matter. We are Sorlee's family. We'll take care of her and her baby."

While McCoy occupied Sorlee and Alkimi, Sulu and Kirk talked quietly in the opposite corner of the room. They stood shoulder to shoulder so they could both keep an eye on Alkimi as they conferred.

"Captain, is it possible that the Della Mir are using this planet to test new technology?" Sulu asked.

"That's a bit of a jump, isn't it Sulu?"

"Maybe." Sulu admitted. "However the technology is far beyond this planet. The interference with power reminds me of their attack on the base. And if someone else was visiting this planet, wouldn't the Della Mir have known? Why didn't they tell us?"

"Well, if the Della Mir do have a hand in this, they are showing a flagrant disregard for humaniod life." Kirk said. "It may have an impact on the treaty negotiations. But we have to be sure of our facts, Sulu."

"Jim." McCoy called him. "There hasn't been a doctor here in over five years. With your permission, I'd like to look them over."

"Fine Bones." Kirk said much to McCoy's surprise. He had expected the Captain to sight the prime directive to him. "I'll leave Mr. Sulu here to assist you. I want to check back in with Spock and Chekov."

Kirk, Sulu and Alkimi walked back into the sunshine. Several teenagers had been sitting on the steps waiting for them. Preem Hawn was among them. They cleared the steps for the three men to come down. Alkimi draped a protective arm around Hawn's shoulder. He knew the boys had been giving Hawn a hard time about his stories regarding the strangers and that he was worried about his younger brother.

Before Kirk could contact the Enterprise to beam up, the children started yelling excitedly. "They're back. They're back. Come see."

"A raiding party." Alkimi explained to Kirk and Sulu. A group of teens both boys and girls came into the square carrying bushel baskets of a variety of vegetables. One of the boys was the was the teen that Gonzoles had a scuffled with. He came up to Alkimi. "Report, Rad."

"They never saw us." The teen smiled proudly. "No injuries. Everyone accounted for."

"Good work." Alkimi said. "We'll have a good dinner tonight."

"What about Dorn?" Hawn asked Alkimi.

"Dr. McCoy will see everyone." Alkimi said. "The sick first. Then from the youngest to the oldest. In my command room. Rad you get everyone organized."

"Yes Sir." Rad replied and immediately went to carry out his orders.

"Mr. Sulu." Kirk said looking around. There were more children than he had thought. "This looks like it is going to take awhile. Continue to maintain regular communication. Anything unusual, I want to know about it."

"Aye Sir."

"Kirk to Enterprise. One to beam up." Sulu backed off and Kirk beamed out creating quite a stir. Hawn was glad someone else had finally seen one of them disappear.

Before long McCoy had children surrounding him on all sides. Alkimi carried Dorn, Hawn's younger brother into the room. He was sandy haired and baby faced just like his brother, but about two or three years younger. He was a skinny kid who was running a high fever.

"Put him on the table." McCoy said. The boy had a massive infection. As he scanned McCoy asked. "What's your name, son?"

"Dorn." the boy said through droopy eyes.

"How old are you, Dorn? And how long have you been sick?"

"I'll be thirteen next season." The boy answered. "I been sick a couple of days."

"It's been more than a week." Hawn said. He had come in with Dorn and was standing across the table from McCoy. "He sometimes doesn't know where he is."

"This is your brother?" McCoy asked Hawn gently. He nodded. "Don't worry. He's going to be fine. The infection comes from the wound on his leg. I can take care of it."

Several more kids with infections were brought to Dr. McCoy. He administered general antibiotic and gave each child vitamin shot to make up for basic deficiencies. Alkimi set up a sick room on the floor above his command room so that McCoy could monitor the children with fevers.

On the Enterprise, Spock turned command back over to Captain Kirk. Lt. Rashad was at the helm station as Kirk took the center seat. Spock did not immediately return to the science station.

"Did the mission prove informative, Captain?" Spock asked standing next to the Captain's chair.

"It was interesting." Kirk said. "According to P.R. Alkimi they had functioning electric power in the northern hemisphere until a bomb to end the war was detonated about five planetary years ago. Since then nothing works. I also heard from a very vague looking girl about blue lights in the sky that move, hover, then fly away in the blink of an eye."

"Interesting." Spock agreed considering the new information. "The time lag of a major event will make a difference in the computer's analysis. And the suggestion of extraterrestrial involvement does seem consistent with the level of technology involved."

Spock went back to the science station to make adjustments in the parameters of the computer analysis. Kirk followed him over. "Did you find out anything more?"

"We have more information that is consistent with what we saw before you left the ship."

Spock said as he worked. He took a minute to finish his changes before he turned back to the Captain and summarized. "The planet appears to be politically and economically split in half, roughly along the equator. The land mass which we have designated as continent one is heavily industrialized to the south of the equator and shows no signs of industrialization to the north. This is the only continent which has any significant population."

"What about the other two major land masses?" Kirk asked.

"The northern most land mass is ice covered and apparently not populated." Spock replied. "The other large land mass is plagued by magnetic storms. We will not be able to get any detailed readings until the storms pass."

"Sulu raised the possibility of the Della Mir being involved." Kirk said.

"It is conceivable." Spock allowed. "Our knowledge of the Della Mir Community is extremely limited. However the construction crew on Starbase 68 reported close monitoring by their scout ships. So they were in this area quite a bit over the last two years. If another ship was visiting K328, the Della Mir would know."

"We need to know one way or the other, Spock." Kirk said. "Negotiations are on going and this could change everything."

"Agreed." Spock said.

"Uhura." Kirk looked over to the communications station. "Have you learned anything from their radio signals?"

"The magnetic storms make picking up their signals erratic at best, Captain." Uhura reported. "There are no radio signals at all emanating from the northern hemisphere. From the south I am getting a mixture of advertising, music and propaganda."

"Propaganda?" Kirk asked.

"They refer to themselves as the Dendry Clan and this land as their ancestral domain." Uhura continued. "According to the official government announcements the economy is good, the peace is stable, and the conquered people in the northern provinces are happily intergrated into the world economy."

"Sounds like propaganda to me." Kirk agreed. "You haven't gotten anything about the resistance in the north or the magnetic storms?"

"Not yet, Sir." Uhura said. "I am continuing to monitor."

"Perhaps we should visit one of these mountain cities." Kirk suggested to Spock. "How long is this computer analysis going to take?"

"It is difficult to estimate." Spock replied. "I have input all the information we have gathered. I would suggest that any recon missions to the cities wait until the analysis is completed."

"Agreed." Kirk said. "However I will inform our negotiating team of the possibilities."

On the planet, now designated K328.3, McCoy and Sulu had their hands full. Most of the children were in remarkably good shape considering their lifestyle. However they were all undernourished and vitamin deficient. Most of the girls over fifteen had given birth, however many of the babies had died

Sulu sat on the steps outside waiting for a few medical supplies that McCoy had requested to be beamed down. McCoy had wanted a nurse to join him but Kirk had denied that request. They would have to make do. Sorlee was feeling better and helping out. Dr. McCoy sent her to see what was keeping Sulu.

"Mr. Sulu, Dr. McCoy needs..." She stopped, trying to remember the unfamiliar word the doctor had used. "It started with hype."

"Was it something he already had asked for or something new?" Sulu asked patiently. It wasn't clear to Sulu if the girl was slow or just had shut down due to her hard life.

"He wanted to know why it was taking so long." she shrugged.

"It will be here in another minute." Sulu smiled. Slow or not she was a survivor and that impressed Sulu. "If you wait with me, we'll take them in together."

She nodded and sat down next to him. "Is it different where you come from?"

"Yes." Sulu smiled. But there wasn't much he could say without revealing that he was from another planet. "I grew up near an ocean."

"No war?" Sorlee could hardly remember a time without war of some kind. When she was a young child it had been far away. As she grew it came closer and closer until she became a part of it.

"No war."

"Could you take me there?" Sorlee asked hopefully.

"I don't think so, Sorlee." Sulu said gently. The supplies they had been waiting for materialized in front of them. Sulu retrieved them and carried them inside. Sorlee held the door open for him and followed him in.

"I could make you happy." Sorlee pleaded. "I don't cause trouble."

"Here you are, Doc." Sulu put the two boxes of supplies on the table.

"I don't eat much." Sorlee added.

"Sorlee, it's just not possible." Sulu said firmly.

"Who's next, Sorlee?" McCoy asked.

"Ree and her little girl, Pella." Sorlee said and went out to get them.

"I see you are getting the same kind of requests and offers that I've been getting." McCoy said. Sulu nodded. "These kids would do anything to get out of here."

"You can't blame them." Sulu said. "Their families are torn apart, they don't have the bare essentials, and they are fighting a war that's already been lost."

McCoy nodded. There was nothing else to say. The next young mother had come in with her baby. Both appeared listless and anemic. McCoy took the baby out of her arms. Sulu moved the boxes to the side of the large table to give McCoy room.

"This is Pella?" he asked. The young woman nodded distractedly. The child was awake but didn't seem to notice that she had been handed to a stranger. McCoy laid the baby on the table and started scanning. "How old is she?"

"Be a year soon." The mother answered slowly. McCoy was about to ask her another question but as he glanced at Ree, her eyes fluttered closed and she fainted. Luckily she fell towards Dr. McCoy and he grabbed her with his free hand.

"Sulu, pick up the baby." McCoy ordered. Sulu did as he was ordered so that McCoy

could get the mother onto the table. The doctor started scanning.

"I'm no expert, Doc." Sulu said smiling at the little girl. "But isn't she a little quiet and unaware for her age?"

"Yes, she is." McCoy said administering a hypo spray to the baby's mother. He checked his scanner before looking up at Sulu. "How do you know that?"

"I have a nephew and a couple of nieces." Sulu explained. His sisters constantly sent him letters with children and babies playing a prominent role. He must have retained more information on the subject than he thought. Ree stirred on the table.

"Don't get up." McCoy said putting his hand on her arm. "How long have you been feeling tired?"

Ree tried to think, but it was hard to concentrate. "I don't know. A few days."

"You and your daughter have a parasite." McCoy explained. Ree was barely able to keep her eyes open. "Do you know what that is? Well, don't worry about it now. We'll take care of it and you'll feel better soon."

Dr. McCoy finished with Ree and Pella and sent mother and daughter to the sick room so he could monitor their recovery. These people were very close to humans in their apparent physiology however he would have to closely monitor reactions to any medication. Some differences might not be so apparent. With the babies and toddlers taken care of, next came twin eight year old boys.

Back on the ship Captain Kirk sat at the desk in his quarters. He was talking to Carly Lightfoot who was a member of the Federation negotiation team. Fortunately she was also an old friend of Jim Kirk's. The Captain never could understand how she could leave Starfleet for the Diplomatic Corp.

"Are you sure, Jim?" She asked. Carly, like Captain Kirk, was in her early forties. She wore her dark hair in a short sophisticated style that emphasized her coal black eyes. Kirk had always been drawn by her quick dry wit. Even though they didn't see each other often anymore, they had remained good friends for years.

"No, I'm not Carly." Kirk said. "I just wanted to let you know what we are running into here. We are continuing to investigate. Do you think you can get any answers from your end?"

"Maybe." Carly said thoughtfully. "If I can ask some questions off the record and on the side. If I come up with anything, I'll let you know."

"Thanks Carly. Enterprise out." Kirk said. His door buzzer chimed. "Come."

Spock came into the Captain's cabin. "The computer analysis is completed, Captain." Spock said. Kirk nodded to the chair and Spock sat down before continuing. "According to our analysis five planetary years ago in the northern hemisphere a device was detonated that caused what can best be described as an extended and extremely powerful EMP."

"You're kidding." Kirk said. "How could an electro-magnetic pulse have caused all this destruction? Any interruption of power should have been temporary. How could an EMP change the polarity of the planet? And what about the interference the buildings caused with transport and communications.?"

"An EMP as we know it could not cause all these effects." Spock agreed. "To account for the extended lose of power and the magnetic field would require an EMP twelve point three times more powerful than the Enterprise could generate and it would have to be sustained hours or possibly days."

"The ripple effect?" Kirk asked.

"That is harder to explain." Spock admitted. "However I suspect that the ripple effect may be caused be an ongoing pulse. The strength of the magnetic field at the ripple's center has prevented us from obtaining any clear sensor readings."

"An ongoing pulse?" Kirk asked. Spock wasn't sure, but it was a workable theory. "If the pulse is ongoing and the Della Mir are visiting this planet to monitor their experiment, then they have the technology to counter act the power lose experienced by the runabout."

"Indeed." Spock had already been thinking along these lines. "Possibly by using a different type of power source. Possibly by some sort of shielding. It is also possible that their experiment has nothing to do with the EMP itself but with developing a defense to it. If it is the Della Mir at all."

"There must be others in this sector." Kirk agreed. "But the scout ships of Della Mir Community are the only ones we've run into."

"Bridge to Captain Kirk." Uhura called on the comline.

"Kirk here."

"Captain, Sulu is checking in." Uhura reported. "He says Dr. McCoy needs more time. Did you need to talk to him?"

Kirk scratched his chin, thinking. "Yeah, let me talk to him."

"Go ahead, Captain." Uhura said.

"Sulu, have you heard any more about extraterrestrials?" Kirk asked.

"No Sir." Sulu answered. "I've been busy with Dr. McCoy. He's checked over half the children. None of them have mentioned anything about the blue lights."

"Sulu, I want you to question Alkimi more about this incident five years ago." Kirk said slowly. He was thinking out loud.

"Anything in particular, Captain?" Sulu asked.

"Spock suspects that something is ongoing in the area to generate the ripple effect and to influence the magnetic field." Kirk explained. "Try to find out if anyone knows what is going on at ground zero. We can't get any good readings from there."

"Perhaps the occupation force knows something." Sulu suggested. "They would have more access to current information."

"Perhaps." Kirk agreed. "But don't take any crazy chances. Get everything you can out of Alkimi first. He may not be telling all that he knows."

"Aye Captain." Sulu said.

"Enterprise out." Kirk terminated the connection. He looked over at Spock. "I assume it would not be possible to beam down to the sight of this ongoing pulse."

"Highly unadvisable." Spock agreed. "If it is possible at all, the chances of beaming someone out again are extremely small."

"Well someone is flying around regardless of the magnetic field or the power drain."

Kirk said with irritation. "Spock, is there anything we can do to one of our shuttles so it can operate in that atmosphere?"

"Unknown, Captain." Spock said thoughtfully.

Mr. Sulu put his communicator away. Several preadolescent children had gathered to watch him talk to the Captain. They were all skinny with long hair and bare feet. It was hard to tell the boys from the girls. The buildings were casting long shadows into the square in the late afternoon. As soon as he closed the communicator, they all started talking at once.

"Can I see it?"

"Where are you from?"

"Is there a space ship?"

"Do you have any food?"

"Can we come with you?"

"How does it work?"

"Can I hold it?"

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute." Sulu yelled for quiet. "I need to talk to P.R. Alkimi. Does anyone know where he is?"

"He went to check on the food that the raiding party brought home." one kid said.

"What's your name?" Sulu asked him.

"Berk." The young boy answered with a big smile. He was happy to have been singled out.

"Can you show me where Alkimi is?" Sulu asked. The boy nodded proudly and started down the street with Sulu following him. The rest of the group went back to whatever they had been doing before Sulu came outside to contact the ship. Berk led Sulu to a building across the square from Alkimi's headquarters.

"This is where we store and cook our food." Berk explained. Inside the front door was a large room with several long tables. On the tables was a collection of kitchenware of all kinds. Plates, bowls, flatware of many different colors and materials. They must have scavenged every kitchen in the small town. They went through to another room which was serving as a pantry. It was a hub of activity. Two teenage girls sat at a table cleaning and chopping vegetables. Several younger children filled the room either eating or begging for food. Berk motioned for Sulu to continue to follow him. "The Purahl Rem is probably in the kitchen."

They went through one more door and found themselves in a summer kitchen of sorts. The room had only three walls. The back wall of the building had been carefully dismantled. To Sulu's right was a massive cooking hearth that ran the length of the wall. A large pot hung over a low fire. On Sulu's left was a counter covered with kitchen tools. P.R. Alkimi was in the small yard behind the kitchen talking to a boy and girl who were skinning a small animal.

Sulu walked up to Alkimi and smiled pleasantly. "What's cooking?"

"Yumpa stew." Alkimi said.

"Yumpa?" Sulu asked. Alkimi indicated the animal the two were working on. It appeared to be a good sized rodent. Hardly enough meat to feed a few children. In a stew for this

many it would add little more than flavor.

"We caught him in our trap." the girl said proudly.

"Not many around anymore." Alkimi added. "But I doubt you came looking for me to talk about dinner."

"We have other things to talk about." Sulu agreed. He turned to the boy who had led him here. "Thank you, Berk."

"Anything else you need, Commander." Berk smiled hopefully at Sulu. He thought if the Commander found him useful, he might take him away with him. "Just ask for me. I know where everything is."

"I will. But I need to speak to P.R. Alkimi now." Sulu said. Berk nodded and left them alone. "Privately, Purahl Rem."

"You get the most privacy around here by walking, Commander." Alkimi said. They left the yard and walked along a back alley parallel to the main square. They headed in the general direction of the headquarters turned hospital. "I take it you've been talking to Captain Kirk."

"Yes." Sulu admitted. "He's asking for more details about this bomb that was suppose to end the war."

"Just between you and me, Sulu." Alkimi asked as they walked along. "Where are you from?"

"What do you think?" Sulu asked.

"I've tried several explanations, but none hold up." Alkimi said. "Despite how different you look, I had myself convinced that you were some elite force of the Dentrey. But if you were, you'd have no reason to help us. And if the Dentrey had the kind of abilities I seen, we wouldn't be here anymore."

"Ok." Sulu agreed with his evaluation so far.

"I even thought you might be from the land across the Terra Sea. But as far as I know, it's uncharted. And I've never heard of anyone from there coming here." P.R. Alkimi continued. "Then your Captain was so interested in Sorlee's story about the spaceships. And he didn't know about the bomb."

"And so?"

"So, you are here offering medical help." Alkimi said. "Which I am grateful for, don't misunderstand me. But I've seen how you move supplies. You could feed these kids and I bet you could get us all out of here. But you are not doing that. Why?"

"It's classified." Sulu said. "I don't have the authority to explain."

"Then bring your Captain back." Alkimi said. "He had questions, well so do I."

Sulu stopped walking. They appeared to be alone. If Kirk felt he needed to come down to the planet, he would have. He had given the assignment to Sulu to get the information and Sulu did not take his assignments lightly. "The Captain will return when he feels it is necessary. I will tell you what I can, but understand that is not much."

"Ok." Alkimi said. "Then where are you from? And why are you here?"

"This is highly classified. Not to be discussed with anyone else. I can not stress that enough." Sulu said quietly and seriously. Alkimi nodded. "All I can say is that we are not from here."

"Here? As in Tellus?" Alkimi asked. Sulu did not understand the reference. Alkimi expanded. "The world? The planet?"

"You can infer what you wish." Sulu avoided directly admitting that he was from another planet. "All I can say is that it is the first law of my people that we may not interfere with the affairs of the people we meet. Now I need you to answer my questions. About the bomb?"

"I really told Captain Kirk everything I know." Alkimi said. "It was the middle of a fierce battle. A loud explosion in the distance. Everyone was knocked down. When we got up we ran."

"Was anyone killed by the blast?" Sulu asked.

"Killed?" Alkimi hadn't really thought about it before. "I don't know. It was over the hill. I went the other way."

"What was there?" Sulu asked. "Were you trying to get to the other side of this hill?"

"No." Alkimi said. "We were defending our position. The Dentrey were coming from the other side."

"Why would they bomb their own position?" Sulu asked.

"I never considered it before." Alkimi said. "We had heard about this bomb. We knew they were going to use it against us."

"Has anyone ever gone back to see what's left there?" Sulu asked.

"I don't think so. But I don't know for sure." Alkimi said. "We were barely holding on when the shockwave knocked us down. My unit was almost gone. We had a designated rendezvous point, but when I got there it was over run by the enemy. They had taken a lot of prisoners."

"But not you?" Sulu observed.

"I had the good sense to lie low." Alkimi said. "When I realized what was going on I decided to go home. A farm, west of here."

"Is it far?" Sulu asked.

"Traveling on foot without provisions....I might make it in a week." Alkimi shrugged. "But I don't know if anyone is alive there. And I've got the kids to take care of."

"I better go see if Dr. McCoy needs me." Sulu said. They walked around the side of building.

"One last question." Alkimi said as they walked into the square. "If you can't interfere, why are you here?"

"Do you know what they say about curiosity, Alkimi?" Sulu asked as he went up the steps to the makeshift hospital.

"No, what?"

"It killed the cat." Sulu said and went inside.

"What's a cat?" Alkimi asked standing on the steps by himself. He followed Sulu. Dr. McCoy was up to the ten years olds. Berk sat on the table craning his neck trying to see what the scanner said about him.

"Hello Berk." Sulu said patting the boy on the knee. "How's it going, Doc?"

"You're fine, Berk." McCoy said. He showed the boy the scanner as he had promised. It was the only way he could get Berk to stop talking long enough for the examination.

"I could have told you that." Berk smiled. The boy studied the scanner even though he

had never seen anything like it before. "This is me?"

"Anything new from the Captain?" McCoy asked ignoring Berk's question. Sulu shook his head. McCoy turned to Alkimi. "Is there ever any meat or milk in these kids diets?"

"Not often." Alkimi admitted. "But a couple of them caught a pretty big yumpa to put in the stew. It's not much. But..."

"Yumpa?" McCoy asked.

"Rat." Sulu translated.

"Some of the older girls and boys go to the Dentrey's headquarters to trade for food." Alkimi said, his voice subdued. "Sometimes meat. More often cheese."

"Yes." McCoy had already talked to several of the girls regarding their trading. "I take it this is how Sorlee became pregnant?"

"Probably." Alkimi said "We do what we have to do to survive around here."

"These kids deserve better." McCoy said under his breath. He sighed and went back to work. "Ok, Berk. Give me back my scanner and send in the next ruffian."

Berk handed McCoy the scanner and jumped down from the table. "Yes Sir."