

Captain Sulu and Commander Chekov walked into the shuttle bay. The tiny capsule was surrounded by Excelsior crew members asking questions. How fast did it go? What material was it made from? How many flights had they taken? How did you sleep in such a small area?

"Excuse me." Sulu raised his voice slightly. When the crowd turned to look at him, he simply said. "Duty stations."

The crew hurried back to work to reveal two humanoids standing just outside the capsule. They were dressed in primitive environmental suits. The capsule looked as if it was hardly large enough to hold the two men. The taller of the two men looked at Sulu and said. "By the way they just scattered, I guess you are in charge around here. Captain Sulu?"

"Yes." Sulu said. "And this is my first officer, Commander Chekov."

Chekov nodded to the two men before leaning into the small hatch. "It is like a museum piece. Hikaru, look at this. You are brave men to risk your lives so."

"It was more of a risk than we knew." The taller of the two aliens said. Sulu looked over Chekov's shoulder at the instrumentation in the ship. "I am Aviant Wex. And this is Ad-Aviant Hiakly. What can we expect as prisoners of war on your ship?"

Sulu straightened up and looked Wex in the eye to assure him. "You aren't prisoners."

"Relax," Chekov added. "You are among friends."

"Captain. I must protest." Dr. Patrick strode up to the four as they stood around the small capsule. "There is a reason for medical protocols."

Sulu ignored Pat's bluster and introduced him. "Dr. Patrick, this is Wex and Hiakly. They are from the third planet."

"Nice to meet you." Pat said and opened his medical tricorder. He started scanning the two aliens. Genetically they were very close to humans. The only visual difference was that their noses were much flatter than humans and their lips so thin as to be almost invisible.

"What's that?" Hiakly asked.

"Medical tricorder." Pat mumbled.

"What?" Hiakly asked again.

"I am scanning you for any contaminants that would be harmful to our crew." Pat explained. "And checking to make sure nothing about us is deadly to you."

"And?" Sulu asked.

"Looks ok." Pat said. "Of course a lot of help that is now. Did you know they bypassed the quarantine medical scan before bringing this hunk of junk on board? Had it been infected, the entire ship would now be at risk."

"We were in the middle of a battle, Pat." Sulu said. "I will note your concerns in the log. But it was either bring them on board, lose shields, or lose the capsule."

"It may not be much to look at," Wex defended his ship. "But it's the best anyone on Tyllar has. The best minds in the world were involved in this project."

"Tyllar?" Pat asked.

"Our planet." Wex said. "You keep referring to it as the third planet."

"Our star maps call your sun Arcyba." Chekov said. "So your planet is referred to as Arcyba Three. We will adjust our databases to Tyllar."

"What's a database?" Hiakly asked.

"We should continue this in my ready room." Sulu said. "I need to confirm Captain

Uhura's position. We can talk there."

"Captain." Chekov said. "I suggest we let them get out of these environmental suits. They can't be comfortable."

Sulu nodded. "See to it, Pavel."

Patrick followed Sulu towards the turbo lift. Wex sighed and looked around. "First Officer. What does that mean?"

"I am second in command of Excelsior." Chekov said.

"And what planet are you from?" Wex asked.

"I am from the planet Earth." Pavel said. "And Earth is a member of the Federation of Planets. And Excelsior is a Federation ship. Does that answer your question?"

"It's a start." Wex said.

"I have a question." Hiakly said. The Excelsior crew that had crowded around the ship had made him very nervous. "Do all your ships have so many different kinds of aliens on them? Men and women?"

"Yes." Chekov laughed. "Let's get you out of these suits. The Captain is waiting."

When the turbo lift doors opened on the bridge, Sulu was saying "I understand the repercussions, Pat. But it can't be helped now. Status."

"Damage was minimal, Captain." Gonzoles reported. "All repairs should be completed by the end of third shift. The Jenage are still retreating. We are monitoring on long range sensors. The Artful Dodger has pulled along side and is continuing repair operations."

"Good." Sulu said. "I'll be in my ready room."

"Captain." Lt. Epstein said. "Arcyba Three's flight controller is still standing by."

"I'll talk to him in my ready room, Epstein." Sulu walked into his ready room followed by Dr. Patrick.

"Mr. Whitney has been here." Pat said heading directly for the coffee pot. He poured a steaming cup for himself and Sulu. "Bless him."

"You've become addicted, Doctor." Sulu accepted the mug and opened the audio line to the planet. "This is Captain Sulu of the Federation Starship Excelsior. Thank you for standing by. Who am I speaking to?"

"This is Poten Turym." The male voice was deeper than the voice of the flight controller.

"I am the elected leader of the Acti Consortium, the most technologically and morally advances coalition on Tyllar. I need to know the condition of our two officers."

"They are both is good health." Sulu said.

"I wish to speak to them."

"Of course." Sulu said. "I will return them and their ship to you before I go. I am afraid Poten Turym that a situation exists in this system that you are unaware of."

"And you will explain it to me?" Poten Turym sounded skeptical.

"I don't know the whole story myself, Sir." Sulu said. "I stumbled on it when answering a distress call from another Federation ship. When I came into your system, I was attacked without provocation by a group called the Dercas Jenage. They consider your planet in their space and would have destroyed your rocket had I not protected it. They're technology is vastly

superior to yours, Sir. I would advise that you not send anymore Tyllarans into space until you develop the ability to defend yourselves."

"Captain Sulu." Poten Turym said. "While you hold my people, I see little reason to take your advise."

"I see." Sulu said. Chekov walked in with the two Tyllarans, now dressed in grey coveralls. "Mr. Wex, Mr. Hiakly. I have been talking with Poten Tuym. He wishes to speak with you."

"Just talk?" Wex looked to Chekov.

"Yes." Chekov nodded. "Anything said in this room will be transmitted."

"This is First Aviant Junho Wex." Wex said

"Wex." Turym said. "Are you all right?"

"Yes Sir." Wex said. "Ad-Aviant Hiakly is here with me. We are both well."

"Can you tell me what happened?" Turym asked.

"A lot of it went over my head, Sir." Wex said. "But I'll tell you what I can. We saw four very large ships over in the direction of Kerm. One turned and came towards us. The Excelsior moved faster than anything I've ever seen. They passed the other ship and broke into our transmission with flight control. There was a battle. A few of the energy beams came close to us, Captain Sulu put his shields around us. After a few minutes they brought us on board. The battle was still going on at the time. And that is all I know, Poten."

"How have you been treated?"

"This is a military ship, Poten." Wex said. "We have not been left alone. But we have been treated well and with respect."

"And when will you be returned home?" Poten asked.

"I do not know, Sir." Wex said.

"Soon, Mr. Wex." Sulu touched a control pad on his console. "Gonzoles, report to my ready room."

Gonzoles walked into the ready room. "Yes Sir."

"What is the position of the Jenage, Commander?" Sulu asked.

"Still retreating, Captain." Gonzoles said. "They are about to leave the system and if they don't change course, I would say their destination is a star system less than five light years from here."

"Have you established the location of the transmission?"

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles said. "Actually it is coming from two locations. One is a large installation in a rural area. Probably a military base. Probably the launch sight of the rocket. The transmission is being routed from us to this location to a relatively large city two hundred kilometers to the west."

"Poten Turym." Sulu said. "Would you like your men returned to you at your location or to the military base?"

"You would bring your ship down on my capital city?"

"No Sir." Sulu said. "It is not necessary to bring my ship down. They can be returned in a matter of minutes at the location of your choice."

"The base." Turym said.

"The base it is." Sulu said. "Mr. Chekov, will you see our guests home."

"Of course." Chekov said. "This way."

Chekov left the ready room by way of the bridge. Wex and Hiakly followed, their eyes wide at the activity and the technology. Hiakly whispered to Wex. "This is the operation center?"

"The bridge." Chekov stopped and let them look for a minute. He nodded towards the view screen. "There is your planet and the moon you were going to. And that ship is the Artful Dodger. She is the reason we came into your system to begin with."

"How?" Wex asked.

"I can not share technology." Chekov said. "Against policy. This way."

In the ready room, Sulu said. "Pat, give me a minute with Gonzoles."

"Sure. I have a sick bay full, anyway." Dr. Patrick left the ready room.

"Sit down, Gonzoles." Sulu said. He checked the chronometer on his screen. "I see you are officially on duty now."

"Yes Sir."

"You did a good job on the phasers." Sulu said. "It's been awhile since you manned them in a battle."

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles said. "But I do practice on the simulator, Captain. I like to keep my skills current."

"I know." Sulu nodded. "You also keep in touch with what's happening on the bridge while you are off duty. Accessing duty logs and sensor readings."

"Is that a problem?" Gonzoles asked. "I thought I would use my restricted time productively, Sir."

"Of course it is not a problem." Sulu smiled and sipped his coffee to keep from laughing. "It is just not the typical officer's response to restriction."

"I don't have much experience to go on." Gonzoles said. "How should I be spending my time?"

"I don't think you need to worry about that." Sulu said. "Since that restriction is now lifted."

"Lifted?" Gonzoles smiled "Thank you, Captain."

"Don't thank me." Sulu said. "I don't know how I've gotten along without you. These last couple of days have shown me how woefully inadequate our junior command officers are. Ellis needs a guiding hand. Kim and Briscoe need more experience. We rely too much on the senior staff around here. I want you to take charge of their command training. Two years from now I want you, me, Chekov and Smith all to be able to take a couple of weeks vacation at the same time."

"Captain." Gonzoles said. "I've never known you to take a couple of weeks vacation."

"Maybe I'll start." Sulu said. "It would certainly make my wife happy."

"I'd like to include the science and communications staff in the training." Gonzoles said. "It seems to me any bridge officer should be able to take over if necessary."

"Good idea." Sulu nodded. "But concentrate on the command officers first. Come up with a program and run it by Mr. Chekov."

"Aye Sir."

"That's all." The Captain said. Gonzoles nodded and returned to the bridge.

"It does what?" Hiakly asked.

"It converts your body into energy." Chekov said. "We beam the pattern to the planet and convert you back into matter. One second you are here. The next you are there."

"You've done this?" Wex asked.

"I do it all the time." Chekov smiled. "I have been on a starship all of my adult life. I have transported a million times. It is fast. It is painless. And it works."

"I don't know, Juhnno." Hiakly said. "What if something goes wrong?"

"This is like science fiction to us, Chekov." Wex said. "Is there anyway we can see it work?"

"Look at this." Chekov showed them a view screen at the transporter console. He manipulated the controls until their capsule came into view. Then he opened the comline. "Chekov to bridge."

"Gonzoles here."

"Commander," Chekov said. "Contact Tyllar's flight controller again and let me talk to him."

"Aye Sir." Gonzoles said. "Stand by."

"This is Benga." The flight controller said.

"This is Commander Chekov on the Excelsior." Chekov said. "Are you near a window, Mr. Benga?"

"Yes." Benga answered slowly, cautiously.

"On which side of the building?" Chekov said.

"North side."

"Please look out your window, Mr. Benga." Chekov said. He took the transporter through it's familiar paces. To Wex and Hiakly, he said. "Watch the monitor."

They watched as the capsule shimmered and disappeared. A moment later they heard Benga gasp. "How? Hek! Megenam! The capsule just appeared on the north lawn. Get down there and check it out!"

"Thank you for your assistance, Mr. Benga." Chekov said. "Wex and Hiakly will be there in a moment. Excelsior out."

"You're sure?" Wex asked again.

"I am sure." Chekov took Wex's arm with one hand and Hiakly's with the other. He led them to the transporter pad. "Stand here. In a moment you will be home."