

Dr. McCoy immediately headed for the turbo lift when he heard that the Romulans were on board. Admiral Kirk jumped up to follow him. McCoy stopped in front of the turbo lift door and said. "Let me check them over first, Jim. I don't want any chance of contamination."

"I have a few questions for them Bones."

"Don't you think Mr. DuBovoy deserves a shot at these Romulans." McCoy suggested. "After all this is his area of expertise."

"And he's put up with a lot, eh Bones?"

"I didn't say that." McCoy grinned. Without waiting for a response, McCoy stepped onto the lift. Kirk turned and reluctantly returned to his chair.

The trip that took hours on impulse power took only minutes at warp four. By the time they arrived at Outpost Six, Dr. McCoy had examined the Romulans. Four had been exposed to enough radiation to be taken to sick bay and isolated there. The other five were treated for minor injuries in the brig. The two senior officers were detained in one cell while the three junior officers were in the other.

"Standard orbit, Mr. Sulu." Kirk ordered as Enterprise reached the outpost.

"Aye Sir."

"Uhura, open a channel to Outpost Six." Kirk said.

"Channel open." Uhura said. "Commander DuBovoy is standing by, Admiral."

The main view screen's image changed to the operations center of Outpost Six. Commander DuBovoy stood stiffly in the center of the room as he had before. Kirk smiled his most charming smile. "Good news, Ed. We have nine Romulans in custody."

"We monitored the Maak crossing the Neutral Zone." Commander DuBovoy nodded.

"Yes." Kirk acknowledged. "But it's not the Maak crew in our brig. It is the crew from the Romulan ship that threatened the Galileo and was damaged by the pirate's mines. The ship that self destructed as it tried to get back across the zone. We managed to beam the crew off at the last minute."

"Do they have an explanation for being in Federation space, Admiral?"

"I haven't even had a chance to talk to them yet, Commander." Kirk said. "I thought you might like to be present for that discussion."

"Yes Sir, I would."

Admiral Kirk, Mr. Spock, and Dr. McCoy met Commander DuBovoy in the briefing room. Kirk had the two senior Romulan officers brought to the briefing room under guard. After all were seated, he asked the prisoners to identify themselves. Subcommander Kelvew had been the ship's first officer. He was tall massively built Romulan with heavy eyebrows that dominated his face. Subcommander Solga was next in command. She was also tall and muscularly built. Both wore Romulan Star Force uniforms and had their black hair cut short in regulation Romulan military style.

"Let's get right to the point." Kirk leaned on the table between them. "You are in violation of the Treaty of Algeron. What is your explanation?"

The two Romulans looked at each other then back at the Starfleet officers. Finally Subcommander Kelvew said. "We were following orders."

"Of course." Kirk said "But what were those orders?"

Again Kelvew and Solga exchanged looks. Again it was Kelvew that answered. "We do

not know."

"You expect us to believe that?" DuBovoy asked.

"Commander Kcaaf ordered the Heekrt across the Neutral Zone." Kelvew said "He did not share his orders or his reasons with the crew."

"You were his first officer." Spock said. Kelvew nodded. "And you did not question an order that violated a key treaty? An order that was in essence an act of war?"

Kelvew met Spock's gaze but said nothing. Subcommander Solga spoke up instead. "It was not wise to question Commander Kcaaf."

"Oh?" McCoy asked. "Why?"

When neither Romulan answered McCoy, Kirk continued. "Subcommander Kelvew, what happened to your commanding officer?"

"Commander Kcaaf died of radiation poisoning." Kelvew said. "I have been in command of the Heekrt for the last five of your hours. My first and only priority was to get home."

"Why was your ship decloaking momentarily as she passed the outpost for the last couple of months?" DuBovoy asked.

"I do not know." Kelvew's voice was steady.

"I guess you don't know either." DuBovoy looked Solga in the eye.

"Commander Kcaaf did not explain his orders." She explained. "Perhaps he crossed the Neutral Zone without authorization."

"Right." Kirk's tone was skeptical. "But Kcaaf is dead, so we can't ask him. And the Heekrt is destroyed, so we can't check her logs."

"Admiral." DuBovoy shifted his attention from the Romulans to Kirk. "My staff has come up with a theory regarding these sensor contacts."

"Continue Mr. DuBovoy."

"At first the contacts had no apparent pattern." DuBovoy explained. "But once we eliminated the pirate's ship, a pattern appeared. It seems the Romulans have been mapping our improved sensor net. They would decloak until we came to alert status then cloak again."

"But your sensor net extends into Romulan space." McCoy noted. "You know what ships are in orbit around their outpost."

"It is the short range sensors that were improved Doctor." Spock said.

"So what do you think of our new sensors, Subcommander Kelvew?" Kirk asked. "Did they meet with your commander's approval?"

"I do not know Admiral Kirk." Kelvew said.

"Mr. Esteban, take them back to the brig." Kirk said. "Perhaps they need to think about their situation for awhile."

"Aye Sir." The security guard nodded and took his prisoners out of the briefing room.

"Are you sure about this Ed?" Kirk asked after the Romulans had been taken from the room.

"Admiral." DuBovoy said "The patterns are consistent. It is the only answer that makes any sense."

"Just how good are these sensors?" McCoy asked.

"Still can't read through the cloak." DuBovoy smiled at McCoy. "But when they aren't

cloaked you can hear the Romulans breathe. There is nothing about their ship we can't ascertain."

"Such as?" Kirk asked.

"Methods of propulsion, shield compositions, energy flow and consumption, what they are cooking for breakfast." Commander DuBovoy could not resist the joke. And it did produce a grin from Kirk and McCoy. Ed DuBovoy was just glad the Admiral was finally listening to him.

"As for the crew not only can we tell the numbers of individuals but the individual's gender. And with someone who really knows what he's doing, we can tell the individual's approximate age."

"I understand from command there is a downside to this new equipment." Kirk said. "Have the improvements solved the problems discovered in early testing?"

"The problem with imaging generator has been solved, Admiral. However it does require an immense amount of energy and computer memory." DuBovoy said. "At present, it is not practical for a ship. But since sensors are our business it made sense to continue the tests here."

"So what happens to our Romulan guests now?" McCoy asked.

"I'm sure they know more than they are saying." Kirk said. "Just how much more is the only question."

"The Romulans are not known for openness among the ranks." Spock observed. "It is quite possible the commander kept his mission to himself."

"Well." Kirk shrugged. "We'll report what we have and turn them over to command. I assume the appropriate ambassadors will have a field day with this one."

Commander Sulu strolled into the brig when his shift was over. Lt. Esteban was behind the main desk where he could keep an eye on all the prisoners. The security guard was bent over the desk reading a book. He looked up when Sulu stopped in front of his desk.

"Evening Miguel." Sulu smiled.

The young officer closed his book and stood up. He was several inches taller than Sulu. "Evening Commander."

Sulu motioned to him to sit down and he did. "Good book?"

"A mystery." Lt. Esteban shrugged. "But I haven't worked it out yet. Did you want to question the prisoners Sir?"

"Nothing so formal." Sulu glanced towards the cells. "I don't often get a chance to look the person that recently tried to kill me in the eye. Do you mind?"

"Help yourself, Sir." Esteban said. "The senior officers are in cell one."

"Thanks." Sulu walked over to the cells. He looked in the cell with the junior officers first. All three were men. They did their best to ignore him. Slowly he walked over to cell one. Kelvew was laying on one of the bunks apparently asleep. Solga was the only one who met his gaze. She got off the bunk she had been sitting on and walked over to the doorway. She stood on the other side of the force field looking at him expectantly. "I am Commander Sulu."

"I am Subcommander Solga." She responded evenly. "Your Admiral has sent you?"

"No. I am off duty." Sulu said. "For my own information, I wanted to see the crew that threatened my ship."

"Your ship?"

"I was piloting the shuttle craft."

"So, you are the privateer's friend." Solga said.

"Friend? No." Sulu shook his head. "One of his mines had damaged the shuttle. I was doing my best to avoid him."

"He protected you." Solga said. "Why?"

"I have no idea why." Sulu met her gaze. "Were you following the pirate ship?" Solga did not answer. "We know she was crossing into Romulan space. Was she laying mine fields in your space also?"

"I do not know." Solga said. "I was only following orders."

"We all do that." Sulu smiled. "I can't imagine you get to be second officer on a bird of prey without being able to read between the lines."

"Between the lines?"

"An expression." Sulu explained. "To discern the meaning of something without being told outright."

"I see. And you are a senior officer on this ship?" She asked. Sulu nodded. "Do you often read between the lines?"

"They don't tell me everything." Sulu smiled. "It is often necessary to draw my own conclusions."

"Yes." Solga nodded. She understood what he was asking her. "I have no direct knowledge of my Commander's motives."

"But?"

"It would make sense to me that command would be concerned about these mines." Solga said. "Should Starfleet mine the Neutral Zone...."

"You should know that Starfleet does not use a cloaking device." Sulu folded his arms across his chest. "And that these mines are not ours."

"Perhaps Starfleet would use independent operatives." Solga suggested. "To distance themselves from such a project."

"I can see why you would draw that conclusion." Sulu nodded. "Of course the conclusion is incorrect. And it does not explain why you were decloaking while in range of the outpost's sensors." Solga tried not to change her expression. She merely stared at Sulu. "Unless you don't know how far the sensor nets extend. Is that it?"

"I do not know." Solga stated flatly. She sighed and changed the subject. "What happens now?"

"The investigation will continue until Admiral Kirk and Starfleet are satisfied." Sulu said. "If you cooperate, it will go faster."

"We have very little information about the Federation." Solga said. "What are your prisons like?"

"Chances are after the investigation the diplomats will arrange your release." Sulu assured her. "I shouldn't worry about it if I was you."

"Well." Solga smiled slightly for the first time. "Perhaps I could say the same if I was on that side of the force field."

"I see your point." Sulu said and started to walk away.

"Commander." Solga called. Sulu turned and faced her from half way across the security

office. "Did you get what you came for?"

"Yes Subcommander." Sulu nodded. "Thank you."

On his way back to his cabin, Sulu ran into Admiral Kirk in the turbo lift. "Good evening, Sulu. I haven't had a chance to ask how the seminar went."

"A very interesting experience." Sulu smiled. "It was quite challenging but I believe I held my own."

"Admiral Reese agrees." Kirk nodded. "He was impressed."

"Really?" Sulu said. "He doesn't show it."

"No. He doesn't." Kirk agreed. "I've had a letter from Jean Marie. She's hinting about some changes in her life. Any ideas what that's about?"

"She and Lenny are going to open a place on Starbase Twelve." Sulu said. "She's going to call it the No Ranks Cafe. She's very excited about it."

"No Ranks? Interesting name." Kirk said. Sulu followed Kirk off the lift. "I'll bet she hasn't told Bones about it yet."

"Not as of the last time I talked to her." He laughed. As they walked along towards Kirk's quarters, Sulu turned more serious. "Admiral, I was down in the security office just now."

"Oh?" Kirk glanced at Sulu. "What did you find out?"

"Solga denied knowing anything directly." Sulu said. "But she did say there was concern that Starfleet would mine the Neutral Zone. And she did not deny that they wanted to know more about the outpost's sensors."

"That's certainly more than she admitted in the briefing room. I believe we will have to talk to her again. Perhaps without her commanding officer present." Kirk stopped outside his door. "What made you go down there?"

"I'm not sure." Sulu admitted. "I wasn't planning on asking any questions. I just wanted to see them. To look them in the eye."

"Yes." Kirk nodded. "I can understand that. Goodnight Sulu."

"Goodnight Sir."

Chekov was running a little late. He rushed into the dining hall and got his tray. Sulu was already finished his breakfast when Chekov sat down. He mumbled his good morning and quickly attacked his meal.

"Relax." Sulu sipped his tea as Chekov shoveled his breakfast into his mouth. "You have plenty of time."

"I hate being late." Chekov said. "But I just could not get out of bed this morning."

"Double shift." Sulu said. "It will do it to you every time. You need to take time to relax, Pavel."

"I'd be very relaxed if I just came from home after having spent a week living with my girl friend." Chekov grumbled.

"You don't have a girlfriend." Sulu laughed.

"A minor detail." Chekov finally laughed too. "I don't seem to have any problems meeting women. It is just holding on to one that I can't master."

When Chekov had finished his breakfast, he and Sulu reported to the bridge for first shift.

They were no longer in orbit around Outpost Six. Sulu and Chekov silently relieved the third shift while Admiral Kirk was recording the captain's log.

"...as advised by Starfleet command." Kirk continued recording through the change of shift. "Enterprise is on course for Starbase 39-Sierra to deliver the Romulan crew to the diplomatic office. Ambassador Muldaur should be there by the time we arrive. I intend to continue questioning the Romulan command officers separately. I believe we will get more information with this tactic."

Admiral Kirk touched the control pad on the arm of his command chair to stop the recording of the log. Except for Spock, the senior staff manned the bridge. Dr. McCoy came off the turbo lift. Kirk turned to him expectantly. McCoy reported. "All the Romulans in sick bay are now being transferred back to the brig. And I am glad to be rid of them."

"Really Bones?" Kirk raised his eyebrow at McCoy. "Why?"

"Force fields and security guards have no place in sick bay." McCoy grumbled. "They are only in the way making it impossible to practice medicine effectively."

"Oh." Kirk shrugged off McCoy's concerns. "I want to talk to Subcommander Solga again."

"She did not seem inclined to talk yesterday." McCoy said. "What makes you think today will be any different?"

"Sulu had a conversation with her last night that we might be able to build on." Kirk said. "Spock will meet us in the briefing room. Sulu you have the bridge."

"Aye Sir." Sulu answered as Kirk and McCoy left the bridge.

As the turbo lift came to a stop and the doors opened, Kirk said. "I understand Chekov has some real competition in the wrestling bout this year."

"Lt. Silber held the championship in his weight class on Starbase Twenty Six." McCoy nodded. They walked into the briefing room. Spock sat waiting for them at the computer terminal. "And Silber out weighs Chekov."

"Should be an interesting match." Kirk sat down.

"On Starbase Twenty Six." Spock said. "The wrestling matches are played according to Rigelian rules."

"So?" McCoy asked

"On Enterprise, the matches are held to Daran rules." Spock said. "There are several holds not allowed in Rigelian wrestling that are legal by Daran rules."

"The Argos Lock." Kirk said.

"Indeed." Spock nodded. "And the Daran Twist."

"Really?" McCoy said. "Is this common knowledge?"

"Just how big a bet were you planning on, Bones?" Kirk laughed.

Before McCoy could answer, security guard Ensign Costello brought Subcommander Solga into the room. Solga sat across the table from Admiral Kirk. Ensign Costello posted herself just inside the briefing room door.

"Good morning Subcommander." Kirk gave her one of his most charming smile. She simply nodded and waited. "Commander Sulu tells me the Romulan Star Force is concerned with these mine fields."

Subcommander Solga did not venture an opinion. Spock asked, "Did the Heekrt encounter mine fields in Romulan space?"

"Yes." Solga said.

"On more than one occasion?" Kirk asked.

"Yes." Solga said again.

"Just how many times, Subcommander?" McCoy asked.

"How many times did Starfleet send the privateer's ship into Romulan space, Commander?" Solga asked McCoy.

"It was a pirate ship." McCoy said. "Starfleet had nothing to do with it."

"But this so called pirate protected the small transport craft." Solga said. "And when it was discovered we knew of the mine fields the starship destroyed the mines. I assume so there would be no evidence."

"Interesting theory, Subcommander." Spock said. "However if the Heekrt was in the area when Enterprise destroyed the mines, you would have known that we were attacked by the mines as well."

Solga did not answer Spock's assertion. She merely stared at him with open hostility. Kirk asked. "Just how many times did the Heekrt encounter a mine field in Romulan space?"

"Seven." Solga turned to Kirk. "Did we miss any?"

"According to Outpost Six's sensor logs. The pirate ship crossed into the Neutral Zone twelve times in the last two months." Kirk said. "We can trace five explosions that correspond to those trips."

Solga could not help but lean forward slightly when she asked. "Five?"

"Did we miss any?" Kirk asked. Subcommander Solga sat back in her chair and studied the admiral across the table. She took a deep breath to center herself.

"Not to my knowledge." Solga answered evenly.

"I see." Kirk said slowly.

"According to the logs of the shuttle craft." Spock spoke up again. "You're commander was surprised by the mine field in Federation space. There was a question about a ship that could fire while cloaked. He did not destroy the mines that attacked your ship. Why?"

"My commander was not in the habit of discussing his reasons with the crew." Solga said crisply.

"But you were on the bridge at the time?" Kirk asked.

"Yes."

"Were you surprised by the mine field?" Kirk asked.

"Yes."

"Why?" McCoy took a turn.

"Because we were in Federation space." Solga said. "Perhaps you were laying a trap."

"Why there?" Kirk asked. "Do Birds of Prey routinely cross the Neutral Zone and take that course between Outpost Six and Five?"

"That would be a violation of the treaty, Admiral." Solga said.

"Yes it would, Subcommander." Kirk said. "Just how many times has the Heekrt crossed into Federation space while you were on board?"

"Once."

"Incorrect." The computer said.

"How many times, Subcommander?" Kirk asked again.

"I don't know." Solga said. It was the one factual statement the computer could not judge as true or false.

"Uh-huh." Kirk said. "And this one time you do know about, what happened before you crossed the Neutral Zone to make your commander order the ship across?"

"There was no incident or obvious reason." Solga said. "Commander Kcaaf simply issued the order."

"And you did not question him?" Kirk asked.

"As I said that was not wise."

"Yes, you said that." Kirk repeated. "Why?"

Subcommander Solga looked Kirk in the eye and said. "You would not understand."

"Try me." Kirk said, but Solga merely stared at the Admiral and said nothing. Finally Kirk said. "Ensign Costello, return Subcommander Solga to the brig. Put her in a cell by herself."

"Aye Sir." Costello said.

Costello put her in the cell next to the other senior officer from the Heekrt. Solga waited until the Ensign was busy on the computer before trying to talk to Subcommander Kelvew. While keeping an eye on the guard, Solga knocked lightly on the wall. Kelvew answered. They both moved as close as possible to the force field.

In their native language, Kelvew whispered. "Report Solga."

"More questions." Solga said. "But Kirk said that the Outpost had recorded five explosions attributed to the privateer in our space."

"Only five?" Kelvew had to strain to hear her report around the wall between them. "Interesting."

"It would seem their improved sensors are not as good as they would have us believe." Solga said.

"What did you give them, Solga?" Kelvew asked.

"I admitted to encountering their mine fields in our space. And that the Heekrt was in Federation space once." Solga said. "But that's all."

"What methods of torture did they use?"

"None yet." Solga said. "Except that the Vulcan participated in the questioning again."

"Do not let your own prejudice be your down fall, Solga."

"It is an insult to have to answer his questions." Solga fumed. Her anger caused her to raise her voice more than she intended. Ensign Costello looked up from her work at the prisoners. Solga and Kelvew broke off their conversation. Each turned and retreated to the bunk at the back of the cell.

Back in the briefing room, the Enterprise command team discussed the interrogation. McCoy turned to Spock and smiled. "I don't think she likes you, Spock."

"Hardly relevant, Doctor."

"To the contrary, Spock." Kirk said. "Solga does seem to have a problem with you and if

that keeps her off balance we will get more answers from her."

"What is this effect you have on women, Spock?" McCoy asked, still grinning. Spock just ignored the doctor.

Kirk leaned on the table when he asked, "Spock, do you think it is worth the time to look at the Outpost sensor logs again for more explosions?"

"There were three energy fluctuations on the edge of the sensor net that may have been the results of explosions." Spock said. "I will attempt to enhance the readings."

"Is it that important?" McCoy asked.

"If she's smart." Kirk said. "She'll take that information home as further indication of the limits of the new sensors. And as far as we can tell, that was the Heekrt's mission. At least in part."

"That and trying to figure out these pirates." McCoy observed. "But she doesn't seem to accept our explanation."

"That's not exactly a surprise." Kirk said. "Given what they've seen, I'm not sure I'd believe our explanation."

"Admiral." Uhura appeared on the briefing room's terminal view screen. Kirk turned the screen around. "Ambassador Muldaur wishes to speak to you."

"Put it through, Uhura."

"Aye Sir." Uhura's image dissolved and was replaced by Brandon Muldaur. The Ambassador was an expert on the Romulan Star Empire. His coal black hair was salted with grey and his clear green eyes were steady and serious.

"Admiral Kirk." Muldaur said. "It's good to see you again."

"And you, Ambassador." Kirk nodded. "We are on course for Starebase Sierra-39 and should arrive in three days."

"Good." Muldaur said. "I shall be there before you. The Romulan Ambassador to the Federation will be there also. Can I assume the Romulan crew will be in good health when you arrive?"

"Some of the crew died on the Heekrt. Some of the crew that were beamed off the Heekrt were effected by the radiation on their ship." Kirk said. "They have been treated and released from sick bay. The rest are in good health. I have sent a report to your office with the details and identifications."

"I received it, Admiral." Muldaur said. "But I assume you are continuing interrogations."

"I am."

"I don't want you to take this the wrong way," Muldaur said slowly. "But I would not want to further complicate this situation with accusations of civil rights violations."

"I understand, Ambassador." Kirk said. "And I assure you that will not be a problem. On my ship interrogations are handled strictly by the book."

"Thank you, Admiral Kirk." Muldaur smiled for the first time in their conversation. "I look forward to the arrival of Enterprise."

"Enterprise out." Kirk terminated the connection.

"Well, wasn't that nice?" McCoy said. "I guess we better put the rubber hoses and neural pain stimulators away."

Kirk laughed at McCoy's sarcasm. To Spock he said. "Check those logs again and we'll

try talking to Kelvew after lunch. Let's see if he gives any different answers when questioned alone."