

Lt. Commander Chekov carried two cups of coffee. The turbo lift doors opened on the security deck. He walked carefully with the full hot mugs. In the briefing room, Chekov put the mugs on the table.

"Thanks Pav." Sulu tried to control a yawn as he reached for the coffee. "Only three more to go."

"Up too late last night?" Chekov sat down next to Sulu and sipped his coffee. "Celebrating my victory?"

"Beware of overconfidence, Pavel. You still have the finals tonight." Sulu teased. "And I'll bet I was in bed before you. Although it was quite a party Uhura threw."

"It sure was." Chekov nodded. "Then it is these Romulan junior officers that are putting you to sleep."

"They are extremely predictable." Sulu sighed. "They are all following orders and doing their duty. We haven't had an interesting answer all morning."

"It is boring." Chekov nodded. "Which is why we are talking to them. You know if it was anything really exciting..."

"I know." Sulu nodded. He opened the comline to the security office. "Sulu to Esteban." "Esteban here."

"We're ready for the next one, Miguel." Sulu said.

"Aye Sir." Esteban answered. Moments later Lt. Esteban walked into the briefing room with the next Romulan officer. He was not as tall or muscular as the last one. "This one is Motroni. Sit down."

Sulu touched the control pad on the terminal to start the recording. "For the record state your name and rank."

"Tyrou Nycon Motroni." The Romulan officer answered.

"Tyrou? That is your rank?" Chekov asked. Motroni nodded. "I have not heard that one before. What was your station?"

"Engine room."

"Anywhere in particular in the engine room?" Chekov asked.

"Where I am needed."

"Engineer's mate." Chekov said to Sulu.

"Tyrou Motroni," Sulu asked. "Were you on duty when the Heekrt crossed into Federation space?"

"I did not know we were in Federation Space." Motroni said.

"You didn't know?" Sulu looked at Chekov then back at the Romulan. "Just when did you know something was wrong on the Heekrt?"

"When the ship was damaged." Motroni said.

"What damage was sustained?" Sulu asked.

"I am not the engineer." Motroni said.

"We are not asking for any military secrets here, Tyrou." Chekov said. "We simply want a time line of events from your perspective."

"Why my perspective?"

Chekov couldn't resist giving back the answer he had heard so many times already this morning. "Because those are our orders."

"The damage, Motroni." Sulu said.

"There was damaged to the shields" Motroni said. "And microfissures in the hull where the shields collapsed."

"Then?" Sulu asked.

"When the ship went to warp speed, the problem with the field generators was discovered." Motroni said.

"Your commander went to warp with fissures in the hull?" Sulu asked.

"Yes."

"Was he aware of the damage?" Chekov asked.

"The engineer had reported the damage." Motroni said.

"And the fissures became breaches." Chekov said. Motroni nodded. "Was there a loss of pressure that caused the malfunction of the subspace field generators?"

"I am not an engineer." Motroni said again.

"And the engineer died with the commander." Sulu said.

"They were trying to contain the radiation leak." Motroni said.

"And what were you doing at that time?" Sulu asked.

"Following orders." Motroni said.

"Which orders?" Chekov asked. When Motroni did not answer, Chekov said. "Can we assume it had something to do with the cloaking device? It was also malfunctioning."

Motroni still did not answer. Sulu said. "A safe assumption I'd say, Mr. Chekov. I believe we are done with Tyrou Motroni, Lt. Esteban."

"Let's go, Motroni." Esteban came forward from his station at the door. "You want the next one right away, Mr. Sulu?"

"Might as well." Sulu nodded. Esteban escorted the Romulan out of the briefing room. "Engineer's mate is usually a job given to an engineering cadet during their training voyages."

"In the Federation, yes." Chekov said. "I assume you are referring to Motroni's age."

"Average age of our mates are what? Eighteen? Nineteen?" Sulu said. "I would judge Motroni to be closer in age to you or me."

"But we have no idea how that works in the Romulan Empire." Chekov said. "Perhaps it is a permanent assignment for someone with less education."

"Perhaps." Sulu said.

Lt. Esteban walked into the briefing room with the next Romulan officer. She was shorter than the average Romulan with finer features and a less prominent forehead. "Sit down. This is Paal."

Sulu touched the control pad on the terminal to start the recording. "For the record. Your name and rank."

"Second Subrand Hamma Paal." She said.

"Subrand Paal." Sulu said. "Where were you when the Heekrt crossed into Federation Space?"

"At my station." Paal answered evenly.

"What is your station, Subrand?" Chekov asked.

"Main sensor array."

"Then you know precisely when the ship crossed the Neutral Zone." Chekov said. Paal did not answer.

"How many times have you been on duty when the Heekrt crossed into Federation

Space?" Sulu asked. She just stared at him.

"Ten times?" Sulu asked. "Twenty?"

"One."

"Incorrect." The computer said.

"Want to try again?" Sulu asked. Paal waited but said nothing. "The pirate who was laying the mine field told me personally that he had seen Romulan birds of prey on many occasions in the same area the Heekrt was seen."

"So Starfleet does not deny laying the mine field?" Paal said..

"If you were on the sensor array." Sulu said. "I am sure you knew the shuttle craft I was piloting was damaged. That damage came from one of those mines. The Enterprise destroyed the mine field. Does that sound like we laid the mine field?"

"You destroyed the evidence." Paal said.

"Why would we mine our own space?" Chekov asked.

"Perhaps your pirate sought to lured us across the Neutral Zone then expose us in Federation Space." Paal said.

"Is it possible?" Chekov asked suddenly. "Can those mines detect your ship when cloaked?"

Subrand Paal did not immediately answer Chekov. She studied the two Starfleet officers across the table from her. Finally Paal said. "I don't see how that is possible."

"Then what did you mean?" Sulu asked. Paal turned her attention from Chekov to Sulu. "How else would your ship be exposed if cloaked?"

"I don't know."

"Your station is on the bridge?" Sulu asked. She nodded her head slightly. "Did Commander Kcaaf discuss the mine field with the senior officers in your presence?"

"No."

"No?" Sulu asked. "Never?"

"Never." Paal said. "And you computer does not contradict me."

"Lt. Esteban." Sulu said. "Let's have the next one."

"Aye Sir." Esteban came forward. "Let's go, Paal."

The last officer interviewed had nothing to offer of any interest. Sulu reported that they had completed their assignment. Kirk had them report to the main briefing room. When they walked in, Enterprise's three top officers were already seated and waiting.

"Well?" Kirk asked. "Anything of interest?"

"Of the seven we interviewed." Sulu said. "Only two had anything of interest to say. An engineer's mate told us when the mines impacted on the shields of the Heekrt microfissures were created in the hull."

"We knew the mines were powerful." Kirk said.

"The commander ordered the Heekrt to warp before the fissures were repaired." Sulu added.

"The fissures became hull breaches." Chekov took up the explanation. "From what the mate said, the damage must have been to the hull on the engineering deck. The hull breaches caused damage to other systems including the subspace field generator and ultimately the destruction of the ship."

"Did the commander have a detailed damage report?" Kirk asked.

"According to Tyrou Motroni," Sulu said. "The chief engineer made a full report."
"What else?" Kirk asked.
"The officer who manned the sensor array made an interesting statement." Sulu said.
"She accused Starfleet of using the pirates to lure the Heekrt into Federation space to expose them."
"So it's our fault that they broke the treaty." McCoy said.
"To expose them?" Spock asked. "Was she suggesting the mines could detect a cloaked ship?"
"She denied it, of course." Chekov said.
"Of course." Admiral Kirk said. "No indication of any Tal Shiar involvement?"
"Nothing we could ascertain, Admiral." Sulu said. "As ordered we did not asked them directly about the Tal Shiar."
"Perhaps Subcommander Solga was using her contact with you to plant some disinformation." McCoy said.
"A possibility Doctor." Sulu said. "She seemed sincere to me, but..."
"Solga may have just tried to send us on a wild goose chase." Kirk nodded. "But I don't think we can just dismiss the possibilities she brings up. I will include everything in my report to the Ambassador."
"I will look at the programming we downloaded from the mines again." Spock said.
"Perhaps there is a clue to detecting the cloaked ship."
"Good." Kirk nodded. "We'll be at the base by the beginning of first shift."
"Then we get the pleasure of the diplomats second guessing." McCoy noted.
"They may have a few questions." Kirk stood up signaling the end of the meeting. "And Chekov."
"Sir?"
"Good luck on the finals tonight."
"Thank you, Admiral."