

Starbase Sierra-39 was one of the largest starbases in the Federation's network of bases. It included a space dock that could house four starships at one time. Admiral Kirk decided to keep the Enterprise in orbit when he saw the Romulan battle cruiser already there. While the prisoners were being transported, Kirk and Spock met the base commander in his office.

"Good to see you, Jim. Spock." Admiral Coster came out from behind his desk and extended his hand to Kirk. The two admirals had known each other since serving together on the USS Farragut early in their careers. Coster was slightly taller, slightly heavier, slightly greyer.

"Long time, Nick." Kirk smiled at his old friend and shook his hand.

"Admiral Coster." Spock nodded.

"I'm surprised Ambassador Muldaur isn't here." Kirk said. "He seemed very concerned with the condition of the Romulan prisoners."

"Sit." Coster indicated informal seating group in his office. "I've asked him to keep the Romulan Ambassador busy during the prisoner transfer and our conversation. I've reviewed your report on the interrogations. Is there anything more?"

"Not really." Kirk sighed. "Spock looked into the programming we had from the pirate's mine but it gave no indication that it could detect a cloaked ship."

"There was the other type of mine. The more aggressive one." Spock said. "However, we were unable to download its programming."

"What about this Tal Shiar involvement?" Coster asked. "You spoke of an informal contact with the Heekrt's second officer."

"Commander Sulu went to the brig on his own time." Kirk said. "He established a relationship of sorts with Subcommander Solga. Although we can't find any evidence that she was telling Sulu the truth."

"She?" Coster asked. "This isn't a personal relationship, is it?"

"Nothing like that, Nick." Kirk assured him. "Sulu isn't a starry eyed kid. Even if there was an attraction, he wouldn't let that get in the way of his duty."

"It can happen to the best of us, Jim. You know that." Coster said. "I want to talk to him directly."

Admiral Kirk opened his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Sulu here."

"Sulu, report to Admiral Coster's office."

"Aye Sir." Sulu said. "I'm on my way. Enterprise out."

"What was that all about?" McCoy asked Sulu on the bridge of the Enterprise.

"Probably my conversations with Solga." Sulu said as he got out of the command chair. "They weren't exactly by the book. Chekov, you have the bridge."

"Aye." Chekov answered.

"I'm going with you." McCoy followed Sulu onto the turbo lift.

"Fine by me, Doc." Sulu said. "I just hope the admirals don't mind."

Security was tight on the base because of the presence of the Romulan ship. The transporter operator confirmed their Starfleet ID's before giving them access to the base. The Admiral's office was directly off the main operations center. Sulu spoke briefly to the executive

officer before he and McCoy were allowed to report. They found Coster sitting behind his desk and Kirk in one of the two chairs in front of the desk. Dr. McCoy immediately joined Spock standing next to Kirk.

Sulu walked directly up to the desk. He nodded to the Enterprise officers, but addressed the Admiral that he had never met. "Commander Sulu reporting as ordered, Sir."

"Sit down, Mr. Sulu." Coster directed. Sulu did. "Nice to see you again, Dr. McCoy."

"And you, Admiral Coster." McCoy returned the pleasantry. "How's your family?"

"Fine, thank you." Coster nodded then turned his attention to the officer sitting in front of him. Sulu calmly awaited the Admiral's questions. "Mr. Sulu, just how did this informal relationship with the Heekrt's second officer come about?"

"I had piloted the shuttle craft that the Heekrt had threatened, Sir." Sulu said. "I went to the brig just to see the crew. I had no intention of asking any questions. I just wanted to look them in the eye. Subcommander Solga was the only one who met my gaze. We started talking."

"About?" Coster asked.

"As one senior officer to another, we talked about not having access to all the information our superiors had." Sulu said. "And how we often had to draw our own conclusions. So I asked her what her conclusions were. She was concerned that Starfleet would mine the Neutral Zone and that the pirate to was working for us."

"Is that all?"

"In that initial conversation Solga also asked about Federation prisons and what would happen to her next." Sulu said. "Things that were of obvious concern to her."

"Initial conversation?" Coster asked. "You had another one with her?"

"Yes Sir." Sulu nodded. "Admiral Kirk directed me to talk to Solga about Commander Kcaaf and why no one questioned his order to cross the Neutral Zone. It was then that she brought up the Tal Shiar. She claimed her life would be in danger if she talked to me."

"What did you do then?" Coster asked.

"I took her out of the brig so that her shipmates could not hear our conversation, Admiral." Sulu said. "It was their knowledge of our conversation that concerned Solga."

"Took her where?" Coster stared at Sulu intently.

"Out in the corridor, Sir." Sulu looked the Admiral directly in the eye as he answered. "The deck was secured and we could speak freely there."

"Continue." Coster ordered.

"Solga claimed Kcaaf had a brother in the Tal Shiar, making him powerful, but that the Tal Shiar were also watching their ship." Sulu continued. "She thought there might be an operative on board. I returned her to her cell complaining loudly that she had not told me anything."

"And you reported both conversations to Admiral Kirk?" Coster asked.

"Yes Sir."

"Very well, Commander Sulu." Coster nodded. "Dismissed."

With a nod to the Enterprise officers, Sulu left the Admiral's office and returned to the ship. Dr. McCoy stayed behind.

"His answers are straightforward enough." Coster said. "But I don't like that he took her out of the brig."

"What are you suggesting, Admiral?" McCoy asked.

"I am not suggesting Sulu did anything improper." Coster said. "But if there are any accusations, we have a time when he is alone with a prisoner without any record other than his word."

"And his word is not enough?" McCoy asked.

Mr. Spock looked at McCoy. "Undoubtedly the Romulan Ambassador would prefer an unedited record of all conversations."

"Nick." Kirk said. "I've known Sulu for years. I trust him with my life."

"I trust him with more than that." McCoy said. Admiral Coster looked up at McCoy with eyes wide open. McCoy answered the unasked question. "My daughter."

"Really? I don't trust anybody with my daughters." Coster smiled. He turned more serious when he said. "Well, hopefully the prisoner was telling the truth and will have no desire to explain to the Tal Shiar what she was doing alone with a Starfleet officer."

Their conversation was interrupted by a call on the starbase's comline. "Jumayal to Admiral Coster."

Coster turned his desktop terminal around and answered the call. "Coster here."

"Sir." A dark young man appeared on his terminal screen. "The Romulan Ambassador is requesting permission to see the prisoners."

"Fine. As long as everything is secure, Lt. Jumayal." Coster said. "I believe I'd like to see these prisoners myself. I am on my way."

"I'll go with you, Nick." Kirk stood up when Coster did.

"Fine Jim." Coster said. "But just you and me. I don't want the Romulan Ambassador to see this as an attack."

Kirk turned to Spock and McCoy. "I'll see you back on the ship shortly."

After Spock and McCoy left the office, Coster noted. "Dr. McCoy is fervent as always. He certainly knows how to get his point across."

"He was serious." Kirk said on the turbo lift. "Sulu is involved with his daughter."

"I didn't know McCoy had a daughter." Coster said. "I thought he was just making a point he knew I would understand."

"How are the girls?"

"Jen's at the Academy now. She has one year to go." Coster said. "Teri is living here on the station. Her main concern seems to be her next date."

"Well, that is appropriate at her age." Kirk said.

"So I'm told." Coster sighed. The turbo lift doors opened onto the security deck. They walked down a small hallway and stopped at the door at the end. Coster pressed his palm to the panel on the wall and the door slid open.

Lt. Jumayal sat at a central console in a large circular room. Ten pie shaped cells lined the wall. From his station, Jumayal could monitor all cells simultaneously. The two ambassadors were talking across the force field to Subcommander Kelvew. Muldaur was a tall human whose pale skin sharply contrasted his dark hair. The Romulan Ambassador was also tall but leaner than his human counterpart.

Muldaur looked up when the admirals came into the detention center. "Admiral Coster, Ambassador, this is Admiral Kirk of the Enterprise. Kirk, may I present Matru of Romulus."

"Ambassador Matru." Kirk nodded.

Matru nodded to Kirk and Coster but spoke to the Federation Ambassador. "Ambassador Muldaur, I officially request the return of the Heekrt crew to my custody and Romulan space."

"I due time." Muldaur said. "There is no need to rush things, Matru."

"There is not reason to wait." Matru said.

"There is the Treaty of Algeron which the Heekrt broke." Muldaur said.

"The commander which ordered the ship across the Neutral Zone on his own authority is dead." Matru said. "The crew is not responsible."

"This is not the place or the time for this discussion" Muldaur countered.

"As you have said before, Muldaur." Matru said. "There is no time like the present."

"There are a few minor details I need to take care of with my staff." Ambassador Muldaur said. "We could meet in the conference room to discuss this matter in an hour."

"That will be acceptable." Matru turned back to the cell that held Subcommader Kelvew.

Ambassador Muldaur turned to the two admirals and nodded towards the door. As he walked down the security hall, he said. "Gentlemen. If you could bring me up to date on your investigation it would help my negotiations."

"The senior officers of this crew know more than they are saying." Kirk said.

"That is understood." Muldaur said. "We can not expect them to simply tell us all their secrets. Do we have any direct evidence that anyone other than the commander of the Heekrt was responsible for the ship crossing the Neutral Zone?"

"No." Kirk said reluctantly.

"Then your job is done, Admiral." Muldaur said. "I will take it from here."

Kirk stopped as the three reached a junction in the corridor. "Then I'll say my good nights. Ambassador. Nick."

"Goodnight Jim." Admiral Coster called as Kirk walked down the other cooridor towards the transporter room. Nick Coster turned back to the Ambassador. "That was not necessary, Dolyn."

"Meaning?" Muldaur asked.

"Meaning you don't just dismiss a man like Jim Kirk." Coster said.

"I do not mean to minimize Kirk's contribution." Muldaur continued walking towards his office. "But I have to concentrate on putting this situation back together. It has to be handled delicately."

"And Starfleet is not delicate enough?"

"No need to take it personally, Nick." Muldaur said calmly. "There are aspects of this problem that I am not at liberty to share. I have to deal with Matru myself."

"Of course." Admiral Coster nodded and left the Ambassaddor to his work.