

When Admiral Kirk walked into the research lab, he found Spock staring intently at the cargo box they had beamed up from the planet. He sat very still in his chair with the tips of his fingers pressed together in front of his face. If Kirk didn't know better, he would have thought Spock was meditating. Kirk walked slowly around the cargo box and faced Spock across it.

"Have you made contact?" Kirk asked with just a hint of a smile.

Spock shifted his gaze to Kirk and slowly raised one eyebrow. "A very interesting mechanism."

"Is it so hard to generate life signs?" Kirk asked as he pulled up a chair and sat down.

"In theory, no." Spock said. "In practice however, that the Enterprise sensors were deceived is surprising."

"Any idea how that was accomplished?" Kirk asked.

"It utilized a small invisibility screen similar to the ones used by the mines to cloak the device and only let the life signs through." Spock said.

"Meaning both mechanisms came from the same source." Kirk said.

"So it would appear." Spock nodded.

Kirk sat back in his chair to think. Staring at nothing, he drummed his fingers on the lab's computer console. After a minute he focused back on Spock and asked. "Klingons?"

"The Klingons originally got their cloaking technology from the Romulans." Spock crossed his arms in front of him. "To my knowledge, neither has ever used this type of screen concept before."

"I thought the cloak was only one sided because of the energy constraints." Kirk said. "Due to the size of the mines."

"True." Spock said. "However this device suggests another usage for the screens. To cloak items on a planet's surface from passing space craft."

"It doesn't sound like Klingons, does it?" Kirk asked. Spock waited. An answer to that question wasn't necessary. "Brady said the source was in another quadrant. The Della Mir?"

"As far as we know," Spock said. "The Della Mir Community does not have any cloaking technology."

"I am not convinced we know everything we should about the Della Mir." Kirk said.

"It is possible the source is not a society that is known to us." Spock suggested.

"Possible, yes." Kirk shrugged. "But from what Brady said both the Romulans and the Federation were targeted. We may not know them but they know us. And they know who our enemies are."

"Perhaps we should ask Mr. Bartell."

"He's still sleeping it off." Kirk said. "What else can this thing do?"

"Besides generating false readings and communication abilities, it is a fully functional computer." Spock said. "There are several files in the database that need to be studied. I have not yet derived the access code."

"Too bad we can't ask Brady." Kirk said. "I doubt Bartell will be willing to share."

"Hmm." Spock reached out and touched a couple of the controls on the top panel. "Access Brady."

The computer beeped a couple of times then spoke in an computer generated monotone. "Directory Brady available."

"List files in Brady." Spock said. The front of the box silently slid open revealing a computer screen. A short list of files names written in Standard appeared.

"Change directory to Bartell." Spock said.

"No directory Bartell exists."

"List all directories." Spock ordered. The computer listed three directories.

"Change directory to G-582."

"Access code required." The computer said. "Enter access code."

"Change directory to Ulthe-D."

"Access code required." The computer said. "Enter access code."

"Is Ulthe-D the system in Romulan Space that was mined?" Kirk asked.

"Yes." Spock nodded. He turned back to the computer. The list of files from the Brady directory were still on the screen. The logical place to start was at the top of the list. "Access Brady A1."

"Working." The computer replied. Spock studied the text that came up on the screen.

"Interesting." Spock said.

"What?" Kirk swung his chair around so he could see the screen.

"This file is listed as A1." Spock observed. "Mr. Brady evidently considers a list of drinking establishments as of prime importance."

"He rates them too." Kirk laughed. "He seems to favor a place called Smitty's on New Freedom. What else has Brady given us?"

They went through each file in turn. One was an apparently random list of star systems. Another listed businesses through out the quadrant that any freighter pilot might carry. All were text files and all carried letter/number designations, until they came to the last one.

"Access Brady Baby." Spock said.

"Hello Baby." Brady appeared on the screen. He looked just the same as they had seen him in the visual contact Galileo had with the pirates except that his hair was loose instead of in a pony tail. "Bartell is driving me up the wall. He's gotten absolutely paranoid about those Romulans. The bird of prey got pretty close last time. He thought they had found a way to track us when we saw them on our side of the zone. I am starving. That's all for now, Baby."

"Stop." The computer froze the picture at Kirk's order. He turned to Spock. "A correspondence file?"

"No indication of an addressee." Spock noted and touched the control pad again to check the file's attributes. "And there seem to be numerous short entries."

"Brady's idea of a personal log?" Kirk asked.

"Perhaps." Spock said. "We should not be viewing this without Mr. Brady's consent or a court order."

"Brady not only left this on the planet, he pointed us right to it." Kirk said. "He could have just let us take Bartell and go, but he gave us this device. I'd say that is consent."

"Computer, continue." Spock said.

"Hello Baby." Brady leaned back in his chair with his eye closed. "How Bartell ever came up with this idea, I'll never know. If he hadn't met Heren-tre we'd be on Rigel right now. The herailey races have always been kind."

Brady opened his eyes and looked past the screen. "Go away, Bree. I am off duty."

"Captain wants you now." Bree's voice squeaked and hissed between words. "Said to carry you if necessary."

"Bye Baby." Brady reached for his controls.

"Stop." Kirk said. "Heren-tre."

"It does suggest a Della Mir name." Spock nodded. He opened the comline to the bridge.

"Spock to Chekov."

"Chekov here."

"Mr. Chekov, check the databases for the names Heren-tre and Bree." Spock ordered.

"That's not much to go on, Mr. Spock." Chekov said.

"I know." Spock replied.

"Yes Sir." Chekov said. "I'll get right on it."

"Computer, continue." Kirk said.

"Damn him!" Brady paced angrily in front of the screen. "When is Bartell going to learn? There is no profit in making Starfleet mad! I tell you, Baby, this partnership is not going to last long. He is going to push me too far."

"Calm down, boy." He admonished himself. He took a deep breath and sat down.

"You're right, Baby. Don't do anything rash. Think about your options. Starfleet won't stop until they get answers. I've just got to find a way to give them what they want and still get what I need. I'll let you know what I come up with, Baby."

The picture faded and changed to Brady sitting in front of his screen smiling. "Hello Baby. Well, my methods may have been unorthodox, but I am now captain of this hunk of junk. It took two days of heavy drinking but Bartell finally gave me his access code. I don't know who Natalya was but she must have been important to him."

"Now if my luck holds, that shuttle pilot will be assigned to Enterprise and not just delivering personnel. I'll have to check the log. I'm pretty sure he gave his name." Brady grinned. "Don't worry, Baby. We'll be out of this mess and back at the races before the Mirta or the Tegra even knows we're gone."

"End of file." The computer said.

"Who are the Tegra?" Kirk asked. "That's the first question for Mr. Bartell."

"Computer." Spock said. "Change directory to G-582."

"Access code required." The computer said. "Enter access code."

"Natalya." Spock said. The computer listed the files in directory G-582. "Perhaps we'll find the answer in here."

"I'm going to get something to eat and then sleep." Kirk stood up. "Let me know what you find."

When Kirk got back to his cabin, he sat down at his desk and asked the bridge for a connection to Admiral Coster. "Hi, Nick. I have one of the pirates in custody."

"And what kind of answers have you found, Jim?" Coster asked.

"The pirate captain Bartell was stranded on the planet after an apparent mutiny." Kirk reported. "They left him shelter, food, and enough whiskey that he was good and drunk when we arrived. He's sleeping it off now."

"So you don't know any more now than when you left." Coster said.

"Not exactly." Kirk said. "The pirate who left Sulu the message also left us a database which Spock is studying now. There is some evidence of Della Mir involvement and another culture referred to as the Tegra."

"So the Romulans aren't involved in this?" Coster asked.

"From what we have right now, the Romulans were targeted as we were." Kirk said. "I think the Romulan ambassador would be very interested to see our findings."

"I'll bring Ambassador Muldaur up to date." Coster nodded. "We'll meet with you as soon as you arrive. Once we know what we are dealing with, we can decide what to tell the Romulans."

"See you soon, Nick." Kirk nodded.

The senior staff was due back on duty for the third shift. Admiral Kirk called a staff meeting for half an hour before change of shift. Chekov was already in the briefing room when Sulu arrived.

"There you are." Sulu said. "Missed you at breakfast."

"I have spent the last five hours studying the mine we brought aboard." Chekov said. "Mr. Spock found some interesting clues to the source of the technology in the database the pirate left behind."

"Why did he leave a database behind?" Sulu asked.

Chekov shrugged. "Why did he protect the Galileo? Perhaps Mr. Spock will have some answers."

"Morning Sulu, Chekov." McCoy walked into the briefing room.

"Morning Doc." Sulu said.

"Good morning, Doctor." Chekov said. "I had a letter from Jimmi this morning."

"She's been busy." McCoy smiled as he sat down. "I talked to her yesterday."

"She told me that she was spreading the news of her new venture among the cadets that came to the Palace." Chekov grinned. "Trying to drum up business. She seems a little nervous about it."

"Really?" McCoy said. "She sounds so damn sure when she talks to me."

The conversation died down when Kirk and Spock walked to the briefing room together. Less than a minute later, Uhura and Scotty followed them and sat down. Once they were all seated, Kirk said. "Spock, bring us up to date on Brady's database."

"The database included a log of Mr. Brady's actions. The reason seems to be to shift any responsibility to Mr. Bartell and away from Brady." Spock said. "There were also files on the two systems that were mined by the pirates. Systems G-582 and Ulthe-D both have four uninhabited planets orbiting stars of similar magnitude. Both are relatively close to the Neutral Zone. And both are on known military flight paths."

"Sounds like these two systems are mirror images of each other." McCoy said.

"According to the information in the database, these systems were carefully chosen for that very reason." Spock nodded. "There are numerous references in these files to a society called the Tegra and specifically an individual called Drellam. However there is no indication of

a home planet for the Tegra. There are also references to the Mirta military. Specifically a Commander Heren-tre. Chekov?"

"I found nothing in the Federation databanks regarding Heren-tre." Chekov said. "So I contacted Deputy Ambassador Lightfoot and asked her to check her sources in the Della Mir Community. According to her, Heren-tre is a large family with a long history of service in the Mirta military. Several members of the family hold the rank of commander and commander minor. Without more information it would be impossible to tell who Mr. Brady was talking about."

"What about the name Bree?" Kirk asked.

"We simply need more information, Admiral." Chekov said. "The computer search shows Bree to be a family name in at least three different societies known to us. And as a given name, some variation of Bree can be found in over twenty five different cultures."

"What about the mine we brought on board?" Kirk asked.

"A beautiful mechanism." Scotty smiled. "The design is simple and clean. Not an inch of wasted space or an ounce of wasted energy. This one had a complex communications array where the others stored explosive charges, but other than that it appears to be identical to the mines in and around System G-582."

"We had the basics of the mine's command language." Uhura said. "But the programming is quite complex. And it was protected by a progressive encryption code. Mr. Chekov and I have made progress, although we are still studying the program. While the programming of each mine operates independently, all the mines in the field maintain communications and sensor contact through E-5 emissions."

"Don't E-5 emissions lose cohesion over distance?" Kirk asked.

"Yes Sir." Uhura nodded. "But inside a star system the E-ban emissions can actually carry more complex information than more traditional methods of data transmissions. It is a very effective set up."

"The communications between mines was very important." Chekov said. "Even though the mines were not activated before a vessel closed to 50,000 kilometers, the sensors were aware of approaching vessels at much greater distances. As soon as a ship approaches the mine field the type 2 mines turn their invisibility screen towards that ship."

"Are the mines themselves different or is it just the programming?" McCoy asked.

"The type 2 mine has everything the type 1 has, Doctor." Chekov said. "In addition it has the invisibility screen and the programming that goes with it."

"You found no indication of the mine's builders?" Kirk asked.

"None, Sir."

"I think it is time to talk to Mr. Bartell." Kirk said. "He should be up by now."

"I don't know about that." McCoy said. Kirk turned to McCoy, his eyes wide with surprise. McCoy answered the unasked questions. "He had more alcohol than blood in his veins when we brought him on board."

"He didn't seem that drunk." Kirk said.

"No he didn't. But from his bio scans," McCoy said. "I'd say that he is rarely sober."

"Get him on his feet, Bones. I want to talk to him." Kirk stood up. "Sulu, you have the conn. Advise me when we reach the base."

"Aye Sir." Sulu nodded.