

Spock and McCoy were already on the bridge when Admiral Kirk joined them. From the science station Spock reported. "We are approaching the Hanolin system, Admiral. ETA three minutes twenty three seconds. The asteroid belt lies between the fourth and fifth planets."

"Any ships in the area?" Kirk asked after he had taken his seat at the command station.

"Two freighters and the Hanolin mining platform." Spock said. "No scout class ships, Admiral."

"What do we know about this asteroid belt?" Kirk asked.

"It is class eight." Spock said. "Rich in many industrial minerals. The orbits of the larger asteroids are relatively stable. It has been mined extensively for the last fifteen years."

"Slow to warp one, Mr. Sulu." Kirk ordered.

"Warp one." Sulu nodded. "Aye."

Dr. McCoy leaned close to Kirk and asked quietly. "What did you have to promise her?"

Kirk hesitated and looked his friend in the eye. Then he shrugged and admitted. "My next leave."

"And just when will we be swinging by Starbase 68?"

Kirk couldn't help but laugh. "Soon."

It was only a couple of minutes before they dropped out of warp near the Hanolin mining platform. It was a large space station that served as home to over twenty five hundred miners and support personnel.

"The platform is hailing us, Admiral." Uhura announced.

"On screen."

"U.S.S. Enterprise." A Hanolin woman appeared on the screen. Her dark chestnut brown complexion was accented by bold red make up and she wore her dark hair cropped short as was the custom of adult women in her culture. "I am Ren Orpic, in charge of this station. Please state your business."

"I am Admiral James T. Kirk." Kirk said. "I am looking for a Della Mir ship commanded by a Mirta officer, Rilyn Heren-tre."

"Heren-tre was here." Ren Orpic said. "We were negotiating trade agreements but he was called home by his government."

"May I ask when he left?" Kirk asked.

"About three standard hours ago."

"Did you notice his heading?"

"I did not ask his course. There was no reason." Ren Orpic shook her head. She glanced down at her equipment. "He left in the general direction of Della Mir space. He appeared to be in a hurry. Jumped to warp as soon as he cleared the belt. Is there a problem, Admiral?"

"Nothing that should effect your negotiations, Ren Opric." Kirk smiled. "Thank you for your cooperation. Enterprise out."

After the screen returned to a view of the mining platform and the asteroid belt beyond, McCoy asked. "Do we follow?"

"Spock" Kirk turned toward the science officer. "What is the top speed of the Mirta scout ship?"

"Our best information suggests warp six." Spock said.

"Tactical." Kirk turned the command chair back towards the main view screen. "Let's

see the star map of the shortest course between here and Mirtal-shey."

"Aye." Chekov answered. He plotted the course and put it on the main view screen with all the systems the Mirta ship must pass to get home. "He must go through the heart of the Federation. Passing close to the Rigel, Epsilon, and Gamma systems."

"Uhura, I want to send an order to the commanders of every ship, base, and colony along the way." Kirk said.

"That may take a few minutes to set up, Admiral." Uhura said.

"Let me know when you're ready." Kirk nodded. "Spock. How long will it take him to reach Della Mir space?"

"At least nine days." Spock said.

"Assuming constant speed and a straight line." Kirk said. Spock nodded.

"Everything we've heard so far says he'll run for home." McCoy said.

"You may be right, Bones." Kirk said. "Mirta officers seem to have no trouble following orders. Even recall orders."

"Ready to record, Admiral." Uhura said.

"This is Admiral James T. Kirk." Kirk said with all his official authority. "For the next twelve days hail and question the destination of any and all Della Mir ships that you encounter. Report all contacts to me on the Enterprise."

When Kirk had finished recording, Uhura reported. "That order will go out to three starships, eight freighters, five ag-colonies, twelve science settlements, four star bases, and three fleet hospitals."

"Rilyn Heren-tre will probably find that order quite annoying." McCoy smiled.

"I hope so." Kirk smiled. "And his superiors will get the message."

"Which will make Ambassador Lightfoot happy."

"I hope so, Bones."

After a long run and some work with the weights, Sulu was on his way home when Admiral Kirk called him. "Sulu."

Commander Sulu stopped in the corridor of Enterprise and turned towards his commanding officer. "Sir?"

Admiral Kirk caught up with Sulu and continued walking. Sulu fell into step with him. "Ambassador Muldaur was not happy with your involvement in this incident."

"I see." Sulu said.

"That's your answer, Commander?" Kirk raised his eye brow.

"I don't know what I could have done differently, Sir." Sulu said. "There was no way to avoid the mines or the pirates. I did not know the motivations of Brady, the Romulans, or the Tegra. So I could only react to their actions. If there is a different perspective on the situation, I'd like to hear it."

"Unfortunately, the Ambassador keeps his perspective to himself." Kirk said. "But we do the best we can. And I don't have a problem with how you handled it."

"Admiral, I believe I will send a full report to Admiral Reese for use in his command seminar." Sulu said. "The situation had many aspects in common with the seminar tests. Imperfect knowledge. Political constraints. Weapons and equipment failure. Sudden and unexpected turns of events."

"That's a very good idea, Sulu." Kirk smiled. "When you have it together, give it to me. I will add a few choice pieces of information that will make the test even more difficult."

"Yes Sir." Sulu nodded. "I would be interested to see what type of solutions other command officers devise."

"I'd like to see how the ambassador would have handled it." Kirk said.

"That would be interesting." Sulu agreed.