

The Enterprise assumed standard docking orbit around the space station that was Starbase Sixty Eight. After the runabout Congo had left the starship for home, Spock left the bridge and joined Kirk in his quarters.

The Admiral was pensive. There was a book open on his desk, but his back was turned to it when Spock entered. Spock had a good idea what was bothering his friend, but he would let Kirk bring it up in his own way.

"The Congo has left the shuttle bay with the Starbase personnel." Spock reported. "Mr. Scott has gone with them to assure himself that the proper repairs will be under way in short order."

"Very good, Spock." Kirk nodded absentmindedly. Spock waited. "What do you think of this young ensign's report? What's his name?"

"McDuffie." Spock said. He sat in the chair across the desk from Kirk. "It is interesting conjecture. But there is very little basis in fact."

"Agreed." Kirk said. "But, there is a ring of truth there. I think it is something that needs to be investigated."

"That could prove difficult." Spock said. "The Kalans are not inclined to talk to Starfleet. It would be possible for the Della Mir to misunderstand our interest."

"I wasn't thinking of breaking any treaties, Spock."

"I am glad to hear it." Spock said calmly.

"The treaty merely requires that we do not interfere with their internal affairs." Kirk said. "It does not prevent us from guarding our own security. And the uncontrolled availability of a cloaking device is a threat to that security."

"Indeed." Spock said thoughtfully. "And our other orders?"

"Can wait." Kirk said more vehemently than he had intended. He took a deep breath and continued in a more controlled tone. "I understand why they want to make this change. I can see the benefit of using the Enterprise to train the future generations while Excelsior does the real work. But there is no reason to rush it."

Kirk took another deep breath. He would put off those orders as long as he could. And Spock knew it. The Admiral looked his friend in the eye and said, "First, we are going to investigate this possibility."

"How do you want to proceed?"

"First, I want to transfer Ensign Gonzoles to Enterprise." Kirk said. "Temporarily, special mission status."

"She does have experience with the Della Mir. The Kalans particularly." Spock acknowledged. "Do you have a particular plan in mind?"

"Only vaguely." Kirk said. "But I believe Gonzoles's knowledge of the ship yards could be helpful. From this base we hire a commercial ship to take a team in to inquire about purchasing a ship with special needs."

"A team?" Spock asked.

"I would only trust this mission to the most experienced personnel we have." Kirk grinned. "Are you game, Spock?"

"Who else would be on this team?" Spock asked carefully.

"You mean besides us?" Kirk asked. "We take Gonzoles with us. And leave

Sulu in command of the Enterprise. We get our information and we get out."

"Jim," Spock said slowly. "I believe this plan requires extensive review."

"I agree." Kirk said. "Review it. We have some time."

The door chimed and Kirk called out permission to enter. Dr. McCoy came in, stopping just after the door closed. He surveyed his two friends suspiciously. "Who called a meeting and why wasn't I invited?"

"Do you have to be in the middle of everything, Bones?" Kirk smiled.

"Yes." McCoy answered immediately. Since neither of his friends challenged him, McCoy leaned against the divider that separated Kirk's bunk from his desk and asked. "So, what's going on?"

"What makes you think something's going on?" Kirk asked, his eyes wide with innocence. McCoy just raised his eyebrow. "What was your assessment of Ensign McDuffie, Bones?"

"I think he was a young man who met an exciting woman in an exotic bar." McCoy shrugged.

"He did not mention a bar." Spock observed.

"Trust me." McCoy said.

"You have a point, Bones." Kirk said. "But he must have felt strongly about it to bring it up at the debriefing."

"So you think it's worth looking into?" McCoy asked. Kirk nodded. "What were you planning, Admiral? Just go in and ask them if we can buy a ship with a cloaking device and hope nobody notices?"

"Well." Kirk laughed. "I was planning to give it a little more thought than that."

"Uh-huh." McCoy said warily.

"You wanted something, Bones?" Kirk laughed again.

"Dinner."