

Captain Sulu sat in his ready room going over everything that had happened. He was looking for something he could have done differently. He had let his prior experience with Brady color his judgment. Sulu never did know what Brady's motive was the day Brady had protected the shuttlecraft that Sulu piloted from a Romulan ship. But because of that day, he had let himself trust Brady. That would not happen again.

He turned to his computer station and accessed everything he could find on Matthew Sean Brady. He studied every detail available on him from the time he left Earth until present. When he was done that, he brought up the star maps on sector 15. Sulu was studying the star maps when Dr. Patrick interrupted him.

"Got a minute, Captain?" Dr. Patrick was leaning in the doorway to Sulu's office.

Sulu looked at the Doctor. He mentally shook himself and managed a smile. "Sure, Pat. What can I do for you?"

"I heard about the cloaking device." The doctor said coming in and sitting down.

"I suppose I should have anticipated that." Sulu said.

"Why? Was there any indication of a cloaking device?" The doctor asked. "In the ship's registration or in Brady's actions?"

"No." Sulu shook his head. "But he had one before. Different ship. Different situation. The entire incident turned out to be about partial cloaks. I should have known."

"Cloaking devices don't just grow on trees." Pat said. "Is this cloak anything like these partial cloaks you're talking about?"

"No."

"Then you've suddenly developed mind reading abilities?" Patrick asked.

"No." Sulu laughed briefly. "I hear you, Pat. But you'll forgive me if I don't like being bested by a common criminal with a pieced together hunk of shipyard junk."

"As long as you are being honest with yourself."

"Meaning?" Sulu asked.

Patrick took a deep breath. This was the first time he and Sulu had this kind of conversation. And both knew that this conversation might set the tone for their future working relationship. Pat was careful not to sound accusatory when he asked, "Are you evaluating the mission's status or nursing your wounded ego?"

"Is that how it looks, Doctor?" Sulu said. Patrick said nothing, so Sulu continued.

"Well, I admit to being upset that Brady got away. I admit to having an ego that is invested in completing my assignments. Is it your medical opinion that I am not handling the pressures of the job?"

"Not yet, Captain." Dr. Patrick said. Sulu looked Patrick in the eye. He had no other answer for the Doctor. So Patrick asked, "What is your assessment of the situation?"

"My orders are to detain the Mattrix at all costs. Those orders have not been carried out because I underestimated Mr. Brady. I will not make that mistake again." The Captain answered.

Dr. Patrick nodded. It was enough for now. He did not want to push his new Captain too far; they were still getting to know each other. They would talk again when this was over. Patrick turned to the other matter that had brought him to the Captain's office. "I also wanted to talk to you about Lt. Lee."

"Lee? Why?" The Captain asked, glad to have the focus of the conversation on someone else.

"She also has a tendency to blame herself." Dr. Patrick said.

"She did nothing wrong." the Captain said. "The cloaking device surprised us all. It was not possible to activate the tractor beam in time."

"Agreed." Pat said. "But it might help if she heard that from you."

Sulu checked his chronometer. It was time for the briefing. "I will speak to the lieutenant. Let's get to that briefing. Perhaps Mr. Kyle has found some answers."

In the briefing room Captain Sulu and Dr. Patrick joined Commander Kyle, Lt. Johnson, and Lt. Lee. "Well, what do we have?"

Lt. Johnson started. "The Mattrix filed a flight plan with the dock master. Their next scheduled stop is Pascal City, a station in the Anu Bel System."

"That's a long ride between stops for a freighter." Sulu commented. "Anything on the crew?"

Lt. Lee took over. "All have records of run ins with Starfleet. There is an outstanding warrant for Lando Pall. He is wanted for gun running across the neutral zone. Apparently he was acting as an agent for the Barolians. Fallcar is Toscana, which speaks for itself. Most of the trouble he runs into is because of a very short temper. He is not wanted at this point in time. Rykker was harder to research. She is evidently only part Klingon. She was wanted for questioning in a murder four years ago on Rigel Four, but she disappeared into Cardasian space. There are no records of her in Federation space until now."

"Is she still wanted?" The Captain asked.

"No, the murder was solved without her help." Lt. Lee reported.

"What about this company that owns the Mattrix?" Sulu asked

"We can not find a record of such a company in any Federation database." Lee said.

"According to our records, the Mattrix is registered to Lando Pall and Rykker Varoon out of Kali Guari."

"Kali Guari?" Dr. Patrick asked.

"A planet on the edge of the Della Mir Community." Lt. Lee said. "They do quite a business building and repairing space ships. And the Della Mir noninterference treaty saves them from a lot of Federation regulations."

"Well, Lando Pall's warrant gives us a legitimate reason to follow the Mattrix to Pascal City." Sulu said.

"Pascal City is less accommodating of Starfleet than New Freedom." Commander Kyle noted.

"What about Kountrah Three?" Sulu asked.

"A planet twenty light years inside Cardasian space." Commander Kyle reported.

"Information is limited. The Kountrah system was conquered by the Cardasians over a hundred years ago. It is an agrarian economy. Oriah Betre Helb is the native governor of that planet. And any off planet transactions must go through him. Evidently the Cardasians leave these people mostly to themselves."

"I am not prepared to violate Cardasian space, at least not yet." Captain Sulu said. "We'll set course for Pascal City and see if we can pick up the Mattrix's trail there."

"Captain." Mr. Kyle said. "What makes you think they will go there? Won't they deviate from their flight plan knowing that we are following them?"

"Pascal City is in sector fifteen?" Sulu asked knowing the answer. Kyle nodded. "Brady told me he had a deadline in sector fifteen. Let's see if he's a man of his word. Dismissed."

The officers stood and started filing out. Captain Sulu remained seated. "Lt. Lee."

Lee stopped and turned to face him. He waited until they were alone. Sulu stood and said, "I don't know about you, Lieutenant, but I don't like being tricked by the likes of Matthew Brady."

"I'm sorry, Sir, that I wasn't faster on the tractor beam control." She said.

"It wasn't your fault. He tricked us both, Lieutenant." Captain Sulu said walking over to her. "Between the two of us, we won't let that happen again."

"Aye, Sir."

"If the Matrix went to Pascal City," Sulu said as they heading back to the bridge together. "We'll assume she went at top speed. When we come into orbit I want to do it at our top speed. I don't want to give anyone time to think. Set the course, Lt. Lee."

"Aye Captain." Lt. Lee took her station.

"ETA Pascal City?" Sulu asked.

"Six hours, present speed Sir." Gonzoles answered.

"Long range sensors on maximum. I want to know where everything is before they see us coming."

"Aye. Sensors on maximum range." Mr. Kyle reported.

Dr. Patrick stood next to the center seat. He glanced at his chronometer. He looked at the Captain. Sulu saw the Doctor check the time. He raised his eyebrow at the Doctor and smiled. The Captain was hungry.

"Mr. Kyle." Sulu said. "Get some relief personnel up here. I want senior staff on duty when we get to Pascal City. Give everybody a four hour break."

"Aye Captain."

"Doctor, would you like to join me for some dinner?" Sulu asked. "I'm starving."

The Captain and Doctor had a quick dinner and then each went to his quarters to rest. Sulu was amazingly good at shutting down his mind and getting some sleep when it was necessary. Dr. Patrick was not as successful. He found himself laying in his bunk thinking for the entire break. Tim Patrick had been in space his entire medical career. He had always wanted the adventure of space. His mother had insisted on the medical degree. Now he had both, but being chief medical officer was harder than he thought. He wasn't sure how far to press the captain. He had to find that line before he stepped over it.

Before he knew it, it was time to get back to work. When he reached the bridge, Excelsior was about one hour from Pascal City. All the senior staff had reported. The atmosphere was one of all business. Commander Kyle was studying the sensors from his station.

He also had Ensign Preston monitoring the sensors. They weren't taking any chances of anything getting by them.

Pascal City was a busy station that was populated by many different species. It was not a

large as New Freedom and offered no guarantee of sanctuary. It orbited the eighth planet of the Anu Bel System and had originally been built with Federation help as an attempt to bring peace between the warring fifth and sixth planets of the system. The fighting had ceased and the station became the one place the people of the two planets could interact; however both populations resented the Federation involvement.

When the Mattrix arrived, none of the regular air locks were available. Dosto Tre cleared them to land on pad three on the outer ring of the rotating station. This made the loading and unloading of cargo difficult but passengers could disembark by climbing down a ladder through the service airlock in the belly of the ship.

Today Captain Brady personally saw to the needs of his passengers. Hankler Basu had been living on Argus Prime. He was not a native, but was working there as a techno-advisor to the fledgling space program. He and his family had been living there for years. The Mattrix had many dealings with the Argons. Basu and Brady had become friends. When Basu's political beliefs started causing trouble, he called Brady for help. Rykker of course thought Brady was crazy to come to the aid of this Barchin family who had no money and no influence. She also suggested they should have dropped them somewhere else. They should have gone anywhere other than sector fifteen. Now that they were at Pascal City, they should drop their cargo and go.

"Hankler," Matthew said after all three of the Basu family stood in the service corridor of the station. "I have very little time."

"You have done enough, Matthew." Basu said. "I can take it from here."

"Nonsense. I have arranged a small apartment for you and the children on level sixteen." Matthew said grabbing two of the bags. "I'll take you there and introduce you to my friend here. Come on."

"Mara, Tomom." Basu spoke to his children. "Come quickly." Mara was a twelve-year-old girl, strong and almost as tall as her father. Her brother Tomom was half her age with large golden eyes. Except for their subtle topaz coloring and their somewhat shorter stature, it was hard to distinguish their species from human. Captain Brady was the only human they had ever met and Mara found his black hair and pale skin tones exotically beautiful.

Brady and Basu walked quickly through the corridor. The children, each with a bundle in their arms, ran to keep up. "The apartment belongs to Cindy Keller. She rents several apartments and owns a jewelry shop here on the station. You can stay as long as necessary."

They took the turbo lift to level sixteen. Brady led them to the apartment. He knocked with his fist, a signal that it was him. Cindy Keller, a short human woman with coffee colored skin and multiple long black braids, opened the door. Brady walked in and dropped his bags on the floor. The Basu family followed him

He wrapped his arms around Cindy and momentarily lifted her off the floor in a bear hug. They kissed affectionately. "Cindy, it's good to see you again. These are the people I told you about. Hankler Basu and his children; Mara and Tomom."

Hankler reached out and shook her hand. "It is good to meet you Ms. Keller."

"Call me Cindy, please." She smiled warmly. "Matt has told me all about your situation. My sympathies on the loss of your wife."

"Thank you." Hankler said softly. She had been killed in their escape from Argus Prime. The family hadn't been safe long enough for them to have dealt with the feelings of loss yet.

"Captain Brady." Mara whispered. "I thought your friend was human."

"She is, Mara." Brady explained. "Unlike your people, humans come in several different sizes, shapes, and colors."

"You mean all your people have this beautiful bronze colored hair?" Cindy asked Mara. But the young girl was embarrassed and did not answer. "Come on, let's get some food for you and your brother."

Cindy took the children to the kitchen. Brady had obviously been in the apartment before. He and Basu took the bags into the bedrooms. Brady showed his friend the computer system and explained a bit about the station's set up. But he was running out of time.

"You better go, my friend." Hankler said.

"Yes, I better." Brady sighed. "I don't think Captain Sulu will give up looking for me."

"Where will you go?"

"If I get out of here, I only have one choice. I'll have to leave Federation space." Brady said. "But I don't know that I will get out of here."

"Then you better hurry." Hankler said. "The military can be a dangerous enemy. Be careful."

Matthew went into the kitchen and hugged the children goodbye. Tomom asked. "When are you coming back Captain?"

"As soon as I can." Brady said to the boy.

"Promise?" Tomom asked holding onto Brady's hand.

"I promise. And I always keep my promises, Tomom." Brady smiled at the children. He looked at the father. "When you leave, let Cindy know where you are going. No matter where I am, I will keep in touch with her."

"You better." Cindy added.

"Thank you again, Matthew." Hankler said. The two men embraced briefly, then Brady left quickly. The rest of the crew had stayed on the ship watching for the Excelsior or any other Federation ship. As he was heading back to the ship, Excelsior came into sensor range. Rykker called frantically on his personal communication device.

He pulled the PCD out of his pocket and shouted. "What?"

"The Excelsior is here." She hissed. "We have to go now!"

"I'm on my way." Brady said into the PCD. "Don't panic."

"She is hailing us." Rykker said. Brady could hear her the panic level rising in her voice "If you are not through that air lock in thirty seconds I am leaving you here."

Brady stopped in his tracks. "Then leave."

"Lt. Lee, bring us in right above the landing pad." Sulu said. "I don't want the Matrix going anywhere."

"Captain." Commander Rand said. "The dock master is hailing us. They claim we are too close to the station. And order that we move to a standard orbit."

"Mr. Kyle, beam up everyone on that ship. Commander Rand, put the dock master on screen." Sulu said. A senior humanoid woman with gray tinted skin and gray receding hairline appeared on the screen. "This is Captain Sulu of the Federation Starship Excelsior. We have a

warrant for the arrest of the owner of the Mattrix. We will serve our warrant and be gone in short order."

"This is the dock master, Dosto Tre. You may execute your warrant Captain but not at the risk of the safety of this station. Assume a standard orbit." She said. Her species had a long flexible neck that allowed her much more movement of her head than a Human.

"I understand your concerns, dock master. However this ship has escaped us before. We will not allow that to happen again."

"I repeat, Captain." Dosto Tre said, holding her head as high as possible with her eyes wide open. In her culture, it was a sign of a readiness to fight. "You are endangering this station. If you do not comply with my order, we will open fire."

Sulu looked over at Kyle. He nodded to the Captain. Sulu said, "Lt. Lee, assume a standard orbit. Dosto Tre, I apologize for the inconvenience. Excelsior out."

"Captain, we have beamed five crew members of the Mattrix directly to security. Lt. Johnson has them in the brig." Commander Kyle reported.

"Five?" Sulu asked as he turned the command chair to face the science station. "I thought we were talking about a crew of eight."

Mr. Kyle shrugged. "I suggest we put security on the Mattrix. In case some crew members were on the station and attempt to take the ship."

"Good idea, Johnny. Do it." Sulu said. He got up and headed for the turbo lift. "In the mean time, I am going to see who we have in the brig."

Sulu walked into security to find it full. The brig was a large room lined with small cells each closed with a force field. There were six cells. Lt. Johnson had put each captive in a separate cell. Lt. Johnson was sitting at his desk where he could watch all the captives. He stood when the Captain came in.

"Busy, Mr. Johnson?" Sulu asked. He had to look up at his chief of security.

"I was a few minutes ago, Sir. But it's all locked down now." Mr. Johnson reported.

Captain Sulu looked into each cell. He was surprised to find that Matthew Brady was not among them. He recognized Fallcar, Lando, and Rykker. The other two humanoid males he did not recognize. Lando Pall sat dejectedly on his bunk. "Well, Lando Pall. We have a warrant for your arrest. We will transport you to the nearest starbase for prosecution. Fallcar, we don't have anything on you."

"So release me." Fallcar demanded standing defiantly as close to the force field as possible.

"We'll give you a ride to that starbase. If command doesn't want to talk to you, we'll process and release you there. Mr. Johnson, ID these other two so we can decide what to do with them." Sulu slowly turned his attention to the Klingon/Romulan woman. "Rykker Varoon, first officer, where is Matthew Brady?"

"You have nothing on me." Rykker hissed at him while she paced the small space.

"To the contrary, I believe you are part owner of the Mattrix." Sulu said calmly.

"So?"

"So, it is equipped with an illegal cloaking device. Command will want to talk to you about that." Sulu said. "Help me out, and I may be able to help you. I want Matthew Brady."

"Bridge to Captain Sulu."

"Sulu here."

"Sir, Matthew Brady has called to request a meeting with you. He is prepared to beam aboard." Commander Rand reported.

"By all means, Rand. Have him escorted to my ready room." Sulu said.

"Aye Sir."

"Well Rykker." Sulu said. "Looks like your friend is about to sell you out. Is there anything I should know before I go and talk to him?"

"You can ask him about the cloaking device. He was the one who installed it." Rykker said. Sulu turned and left security. He felt much better as he made his way to his office. Things were going along nicely. He had to remind himself not to underestimate Brady. He would not have come aboard without a plan of some kind.

He walked into his ready room to find Matthew Brady sitting in front of his desk. A security guard stood just inside the door. The Captain walked around behind his desk. "Wait outside, Mr. Marin." The security officer nodded and left. Sulu took his chair. "Well Mr. Brady, what do you have to say?"

"You don't deem me worthy of the title Captain anymore?" Brady sat comfortably in his chair.

"Captain of what?" Sulu asked. "Your ship is mine now."

"True." Brady acknowledged. "What else do you want?"

"Oh, I want a lot of things." Sulu said. "First of all, the ship itself. Where did you find a cloaking device?"

"Anything can be had for the right price." Brady shrugged it off.

"Names, places, times, Mr. Brady."

"Kali Gauri was the place. A couple of years ago the time. Names, I don't remember." Brady answered, and then smiled charmingly. "As you can see I'd like to cooperate fully, Captain Sulu."

"Yes, I've seen how you cooperate." Sulu said. He touched a control on his desk. "Sulu to Commander Kyle."

"Kyle here."

"Commander, have you reached Oriah Betre Helb?" Sulu asked.

"Commander Rand has the connection but there is a bit of red tape." Kyle said.

"Keep me advised."

"Aye Captain."

Brady's smile widened. "He's a bit of a self important bureaucrat at least if you can believe Rykker."

"While we wait tell me about Captain Warren and the cigarettes that killed him." Sulu ordered. Matthew Brady straightened in his chair and took on a more serious tone.

"I didn't know the cigarettes were deadly. I'm sorry about Captain Warren." Brady said sincerely. Sulu didn't want to believe him, no matter how convincing he was. "Rykker knew Oriah Betre Helb on Kountrah Three. That's where they grow the bloody tobacco. She said everyone there was addicted to the things."

"So you decided to create a market and supply it?" Sulu asked.

"That was Rykker's idea. One cigarette and you're hooked. That's what they told her."

She and Oriah thought it would make them rich. Ask Oriah Betre Helb." Brady said.

"Don't worry. We will." Sulu said.

"You wouldn't happen to have a cigar handy?" Brady asked.

"Against regulations aboard ship."

"Regulations." Brady shook his head. "Always hated those."

Commander Kyle entered the office. "Captain, Governor Oriah informs me that he had a deal to sell the planet's tobacco cigarettes to Rykker Varoon. According to the Governor, he's never met or talked to Matthew Brady. He doesn't do business with underlings."

"Did you mention the cigarettes had caused Warren's death?" Sulu asked.

"Aye." Kyle answered. "He commented that Humans must be a delicate species."

"Anything else?"

"No Sir. He was too busy with his matters of state to talk to Starfleet for long."

"Thank you, Johnny." Sulu said. Kyle left. Sulu waited, watching Brady. He wasn't sure what to say next.

"You don't trust me, Captain." Brady stated.

"No. I don't." Sulu said. "You've given me no reason to."

"But I did give you the information you needed to solve the mystery of Captain Warren's death." Brady pointed out.

"Yes, but why?" Sulu asked.

"Does it matter?"

"It does to me." Sulu said. "Why would you turn in your friends?"

"Friends? Not likely. It was just business, Captain." Brady explained. "I may not be a straight arrow, but I am no murderer."

"The charge will likely be wrongful death." Sulu corrected him. "But that is up to command. And they will still want to talk to you."

"Fine." Brady relaxed again. "I finished what I needed to finish."

"Which was?"

"Nothing illegal, I assure you."

Sulu smiled "You'll forgive me if I don't take your word for it."

"Captain Sulu, I have given you Rykker. At considerable risk to my own safety, I might add. I even told you where to fine us after my deadline, for which I may pay with my freedom. I had a promise to keep, I kept it, and I don't intend to discuss it with Starfleet." Brady informed him.

"Fine." Sulu touched the control on his desk that would alert the security guard to come in. When he did, Sulu said. "Mr. Marin, take Brady to the brig. We have one cell open and it has your name on it."

After they left the ready room, Captain Sulu returned to the bridge. Commander Kyle gave up the center seat as Sulu approached. He asked, "How'd it go?"

"Strange. I believe he was telling me the truth." Sulu said thoughtfully as he sat in the command chair.

"He is an accomplished liar." Kyle reminded him.

"Oh, I have no doubt that he would have lied if it suited his purpose." Sulu agreed. To Sulu's mind, the refusal to answer was much more believable than any story Brady could have

told him. He reminded himself not to trust the pirate. "Luckily, all I have to do now is hand him over to command. Let them sort it out."

"Aye, Sir." Kyle said. "What about the Matrix?"

"Inform the dock master that we are confiscating it." The Captain said. "But I would rather not tow her all the way home."

Lt. Gonzoles turned her chair toward the Captain and said, "I am familiar with the Della Mir control systems, Sir."

"I remember, Gonzoles." Sulu smiled at her. How many times had he told her to ask for assignments? "How big a crew would you need to follow us to Starbase 23?"

"A crew of three could handle her easily, Captain."

"Then pick your crew, Gonzoles." Sulu nodded. "Advise us when you are ready to launch."

"Aye Captain." Gonzoles locked her station and left the bridge. She tried not to smile too broadly at least until she was on the turbo lift.