

"Report." Captain Sulu said as he and Commander Chekov returned to the bridge. Three Breen warships were in the center of the main view screen. They traveled in a standard V formation. Lt. Lee relinquished the command station to the Captain.

"The Breen ships are still on the edge of our sensor net. Viewer magnification on maximum. They have reduced speed to warp one point five and are still on an intercept course." Lee reported then relieved Mr. Jacoby at the helm station.

"Time?" Sulu asked.

"One minutes and fifteen seconds before they have to drop out of warp, Captain." Lt. Barrett said from the navigation station.

"Lt. Lee, extend our shields around the Aces Over Trays." Sulu ordered.

"Aye Sir. Extending shields." Lee said as she complied with the order. "Shield integrity holding at ninety seven per cent."

"All right. According to command, these three ships are a diplomatic delegation." Sulu said to the bridge crew. "But the Breen also have a history with Captain Lenin. So everyone stay alert. As soon as they drop out of warp, Ensign, hail the Truuk."

"Aye Captain." Ensign DuBois watched his board. When the three ships dropped out of warp, Lt. Lee adjusted the view screen to maintain contact. As they slowed the ships broke formation and shifted position to surround the Excelsior and her protected companion. Ensign DuBois hailed them. "Channel open, Captain. Coming on screen now, Sir."

"This is Hikaru Sulu commanding the Federation Starship Excelsior." Sulu sat in the command chair and spoke to the view screen. "Please identify yourself and your purpose in this sector."

"I am Primot Nersk Retnec." A humanoid man appeared on the screen. The differences from humans was minor. The Breen commander's skin was light brown, almost bronze. His nostrils opened to the sides of his nose instead of under it. His dark eyes seemed large and set wide apart to the Human eye. "In command of the Truuk. Along with my flank ships, the Emor and the Dycam, I am escorting the First Ambassador to Della Mir space. Your government is aware of our mission."

"Yes, they are." Sulu nodded. "However, between Starbase Sixteen and marker beacon Sigma Delta V you have executed a twenty degree change in course. "

"Yes." the Breen commander said. "We monitored a distress call and came to offer assistance."

"Thank you." Sulu said. "But we have it covered."

"I can see that." Retnec said. "What is so special about this small ship that you protect it with your shields, Captain?"

"There was an explosion on board." Sulu explained. "We are using shields to maintain hull integrity until repairs can be effected."

"Ah." Retnec was joined by a tall Breen man who was considerably older than the captain. He was tall and straight but his beige skin was worn and wrinkled. He leaned close to the Primot and whispered in his ear. Retnec nodded. "The First Ambassador wonders if there were any survivors?"

"Yes." Sulu said. Chekov left his station and joined Sulu at the center of the bridge.

"The ship's captain and her passengers were all rescued."

The Breen Ambassador and Primot exchanged a few words. The Ambassador turned back to the screen and spoke in a deep and commanding voice. "We are familiar with this ship and her captain."

"Indeed?" Sulu said. "I am aware that Captain Lenin has conducted business with Perviso Ianis. But I am surprised a First Ambassador would be familiar with one small transport captain."

"Agen Ianis is an officer on this ship." The Ambassador stressed the rank of agen. "As such it is his duty to keep me apprised of all pertinent information."

Chekov turned his back to the view screen and whispered to Sulu. "Sounds like he's been demoted."

"Two full grades." Sulu lowered his voice so that only Chekov heard.

"Maybe three." Chekov continued to whisper. "Agen is roughly equivalent to ensign. And I believe that is him in the background."

"Captain Sulu." The First Ambassador brought Sulu's attention back to the screen. "Is the small ship repairable?"

"Here and now?" Sulu asked. "No. At a fully equipped ship yard, possibly."

"Then you will tow it to a Starbase?" Primot Retnec asked.

"Why?" Sulu asked. "Are you interested in salvage operations?"

"Salvage?!" The young Breen man who had stood impatiently in the background suddenly came forward. He was not quite as tall as the Ambassador and wore the red and gold uniform of Breen Vidtre officers. "You will stand for these insults."

"Silence!" the Ambassador ordered. He lowered his voice to a menacing snarl. "Haven't you done enough?"

"Pavel. Bring Lenin in." Sulu whispered to his first officer. Then he turned back to the Ambassador. "Ambassador, is there a problem?"

"The ship's captain has been positively identified as Michael Lenin?" The Ambassador asked. Sulu nodded. "He is wanted in Breen space for theft and sabotage. I officially request that you turn him over to us to face trial."

"Ambassador, our governments do not have formal diplomatic relations." Sulu said. "I don't see how I can comply with your request."

"My lucky day." Michael Lenin said as he came onto the bridge flanked by Mr. Chekov and Dr. Patrick.

"However, if you wish to log a complaint against him in Federation courts I can deliver him to the proper authorities." Sulu said.

"Unacceptable." The Ambassador bristled and turned away from the view screen. He conferred with Primot Retnec.

"Hi Layg." Lenin grinned. "How's Enez?"

Agen Ianis growled a word that the universal translator did not translate. "I will find you, Lenin. There is no place you can hide."

"So you said before." Lenin shrugged.

"Sit down and be quiet, Lenin." Chekov grabbed Lenin by the arm and forcibly sat him in

the empty chair at the unmanned engineering station.

"Captain." Lt. Lee said. "The Truuk is powering weapons systems."

"Red alert." Chekov said on his way back to the main science station. "Shields on maximum. All weapons systems at the ready."

"Primot Retnec." Sulu stood up. He raised his voice slightly to be heard over his bridge crew's battle preparations. "May I remind you that you are in Federation space. And that my superiors are aware of our situation."

"Captain Sulu." Retnec responded. "May I remind you that you have one ship. I have three."

"I can count, Primot. And I have no problem with the odds." Sulu said. The bridge crew became quiet. "However, my government issued you safe passage. That assumes your government was truthful about your reasons for wanting to cross Federation Space. Or was it just a ruse to locate Captain Lenin?"

"Lenin is a fugitive from Breen justice." The First Ambassador said. "But he was not the reason for this expedition."

"Then stand down your weapons." Sulu said. He sat down, forcing himself to at least appear calm. "And let me continue my investigation."

Primot Retnec cut the audio connection to the Excelsior. Sulu and his bridge crew watched a heated exchange between several officers of the Breen crew and the Ambassador. Sulu turned his chair towards the engineering station. "Just what do they want you for, Lenin?"

When Lenin did not immediately answer, Chekov added. "Theft and sabotage they said. What did you steal? What did you sabotage?"

"It's all a matter of how you look at it." Lenin said. "To me, it was a matter of personal choice. I did not take a thing that wasn't freely given."

"Captain." Lt. Lee said. "The Breen ships are setting their weapons systems on stand by."

"Do the same with ours, Lee."

"Aye."

"Captain Sulu." The First Ambassador reestablished the audio connection. "We do not wish to jeopardize the tenuous relations between our governments. I have instructed Primot Retnec to contact the Federation Council. I will ask them directly for custody of Michael Lenin. We will remain here until I receive an ruling on the matter."

"I see." Sulu said. "Then to keep this meeting on a diplomatic level, I request that you move your flank ships to a less aggressive position."

"It will be done." The First Ambassador said.

"Ambassador." Retnec interrupted. "I advise against it. There is no reason to give up tactical position."

"Agreed!" Ianis was now standing behind his Primot's station. "Terrans are not to be trusted. We must maintain full alert!"

"It will be done." The Ambassador repeated and terminated the connection with the Excelsior.

"A Breen diplomat." Lenin shook his head. "I thought that was a contradiction of terms."

"Be grateful, Lenin." Sulu walked over to the engineering station. "It would not be

possible to take on three Breen warships and still protect your ship. Now tell me, in plain language, what they want from you."

"The ship is secondary." Lenin said. "Sure it's got a Breen cloak. And they don't want you to have that. But mostly they want me dead."

"Why?" Chekov asked.

"To satisfy what passes for honor in their society, I guess." Lenin said.

"Ensign DuBois." Sulu had finally remembered the young man's name. "Contact Starfleet command. I want to talk to Admiral Reese if possible."

"Aye Captain."

"More specifically, Lenin." Sulu turned his attention back to Lenin. "Why do they want you dead?"

"Layg Ianis has a cousin. Her name is Enez." Lenin grinned as he told the story. "When I met her, Layg was taking her to meet her new husband. She's a pretty girl. You know they marry young over there."

"No, I didn't." Sulu said. "Continue."

"Well, she must not have liked the looks of the guy, because she called me a couple of weeks later. She said she'd pay anything to get away."

"And you helped her out?" Chekov said.

"The price was right. All her jewelry and more." Lenin smiled. "Of course I had to teach her the meaning of anything. But she was an eager pupil."

"You didn't!" Dr. Patrick had stood silently by up to that point. Sulu turned as if he had forgotten the doctor was there. "Captain, I know a little about Breen physiology. When they mate, the woman's body retains the man's DNA. Any child that girl has for the next two or three years will be part human. That is why the women are expected to remain virginal until marriage to ensure a clean blood line."

"That explains the threats made by Agen Ianis" Chekov said. "Why is the whole government interested?"

"Her future husband would have been Socr Eul." Lenin shrugged.

"And you knew this?" Chekov asked. Lenin just laughed at Chekov's incredulous tone.

"Captain." Ensign DuBois said. "I have Admiral Reese standing by."

"In my ready room Ensign." Sulu started towards the door to his office. "Mr. Chekov, bring Lenin."

Lt. Lee gave her station to Ensign Jacoby. Before assuming the command chair, she stopped in front of Dr. Patrick. "Who is Socr Eul?"

"Only the future ruler of the Breen empire." Dr. Patrick said.

"Marvelous." Lee said as she slowly took her place in the center seat. "I hate to sound stupid, Pat. But how do you have sex with a species that breathes an atmosphere that is toxic to us?"

"I guess where there's a will..." Pat shrugged.

Sulu sat at his desk and activated the screen. Chekov and Lenin had followed him into the ready room. Lenin made himself comfortable in the chair across the desk from Sulu. Chekov preferred to remain standing.

"Admiral Reese." Captain Sulu addressed his immediate superior. "The Breen have requested that I turn Mr. Lenin over to them to stand trial."

"Yes." Reese nodded. "I understand they are talking to the office of the ambassador to nonaligned worlds right now. But without an extradition treaty..."

"Yes Sir." Sulu said. "And when the First Ambassador on the Breen ship exhausts his diplomatic options, they seem fully prepared to try to take Lenin. It would seem he prevented the delivery of Socr Eul's bride to him."

"More than that." Reese said. "She is no longer considered suitable for marriage into the ruling family. That killed the unification of the two major warring factions in the Breen empire. That put the Ianis family in a very bad spot. Mr. Lenin's involvement could spill the Breen civil war into our space."

"Mr, Lenin does not seem concerned." Sulu noted.

"Then he is not very smart." Admiral Reese said. "Because to top it off, the girl's father is required to take revenge on Lenin."

"The girl's father?" Sulu asked.

"First Ambassador Binor Ianis." Lenin supplied the answer.

"Great." Sulu sighed. "Admiral, I believe I could use some back up."

"I have already ordered the Lexington to be available and on the alert, Sulu." Reese said. "But I am keeping her out of sensor range as long as the Breen are keeping contact on a diplomatic level."

"One other thing, Admiral Reese." Sulu said. "Lenin's ship is equipped with a Breen cloaking device."

"Really?" Reese leaned forward slightly with interest. Sulu nodded. "Then be sure to bring that ship or the cloak home, Captain."

"Aye Sir."

"Starfleet Command out."

After the screen had darkened to black, Sulu turned to Michael Lenin. The transport captain leaned back in his chair and smiled. Sulu frowned. "I wouldn't be smiling if I was you, Lenin."

"Why not?"

"Mr. Chekov." Sulu ignored Lenin's question. "Can we beam over to the Aces Over Trays and remove the cloaking device without lowering our shields?"

"It's never been tried that I know of." Chekov turned Sulu's terminal towards him and started calling up the data on the shields covering the transport. He leaned on the desk and made some changes. "If we lower the shields of the Aces, and adjusted our shields accordingly, it would be almost the same as intraship beaming. It would be risky."

"Because of the unknown configuration of the transport." Sulu said. Chekov nodded. "I'm sure Mr. Lenin knows that ship like the back of his hand."

"You're going to beam inside your ship's shields to my ship?" Lenin asked. "You're

crazy!"

"Pavel, what do you need to make this happen?"

"Command codes and exact layout of the transport." Chekov straightened. "And a couple of hours to run some computer simulations."

"Lenin will give you the codes and layout." Sulu said.

"I don't trust him." Chekov said. "Pirates have been known to rig booby traps in their command codes to prevent tampering."

"I'm no pirate." Lenin said.

"He will have to give you good information." Sulu said. "Because he is going with me."

"You?" Chekov shook his head. "Hikaru, that is not a good idea!"

"Never been done. Risky. That's what you said." Sulu countered. "I'll take the risk. Lenin will show me where it is and will help me remove it."

"Like hell!" Lenin said. "You are crazy."

"You will follow my orders Mr. Lenin, or you will find yourself in my brig and charged with espionage." Sulu said. Before Lenin could object, he continued. "I will charge you with attempting to disrupt a independent government of a sovereign state in an attempt to keep the Breen fighting among themselves instead of with the Federation."

"That's a damn lie."

"Your point?" Sulu asked.

"Captain." Chekov said. "I can not allow..."

"Who would you suggest I send, Commander?"

"Gonzoles and Yazdani could handle it. They both have been aboard her and they are capable of returning with the cloaking device." Chekov said. "Gonzoles would positively jump at the chance."

"Why should they have all the fun?"

"Hikaru."

"I know, Pavel." Sulu smiled. "Run your simulations. I have a few things to take care of myself. We'll talk about this later. Alone."

Pavel considered voicing his objections more forcibly, but Sulu was right. Better to discuss it freely without Lenin around. "Aye Sir." Chekov turned to leave, calling over his shoulder. "Lenin, you are with me."

Hikaru gave his sleeping wife a gentle shove to make enough room to lay down. She moved over and opened her eyes a crack. "About time."

"Go back to sleep." He whispered. "I only have enough time for a short nap."

"What's going on?"

"I'll tell you later." Hikaru kissed her. "Right now I need some sleep."

Sulu had developed an internal clock of sorts over the years. When he opened his eyes and checked the bedside chronometer, slightly more than two and a half hours had passed since he laid down. He quietly put on a fresh uniform and stopped at the dining hall for a quick cup of coffee before returning to the bridge.

The third shift was on duty when Sulu returned to the bridge. The command chair was empty. Chekov was at the science station. "How are the simulations going?"

"I believe we are ready." Chekov turned his chair towards the captain. "The transport has responded to remote commands as Lenin said. Her shields are down except for the section securing the blown hull. That will not interfere with beaming."

"We've heard nothing more from the Breen?" Sulu asked glancing at the three ships on the main view screen.

"Not a word." Chekov said.

"Where is Lenin?"

"Dr. Patrick took him back to sick bay for a final examination." Chekov explained. "I told him to try to get some sleep. And that we would call him if we need him."

"If?" Sulu asked. "Then you still want to have that discussion regarding assignments?"

"Yes Sir."

"All right, Pavel." Sulu sighed. "In my ready room."

"You know what I am going to say." Chekov said when they were in the privacy of the captain's ready room. "Your safety is my responsibility and this is just too risky."

"Pavel." Sulu said. "I understand what you are saying. But I can't ask Gonzoles or Lee or anyone else for that matter to take a risk I am not willing to take myself."

"Yes you can." Chekov insisted. "That is their job. And while it is possible for you to do their job, it is not possible for them to do yours."

"Well put, Pavel." Sulu smiled. "And part of my job is to simultaneously control and protect Lenin. I am reluctant to ask anyone other than you or me to take that on."

"That I can understand. He is not trustworthy." Chekov nodded. "But if you agree, why take Lenin on the mission? One of our engineers would be much better."

"Lenin caused this whole mess." Sulu said. "And he's going to help get us out of it. Besides, according to his file he is a certified engineer on class H equipment. And who knows his ship better?"

"All right." Chekov conceded. "But the diplomatic situation demands that you stay on board. Who else will be able to handle the Breen?"

"You will." Sulu said. "Pavel, I understand your concerns and I will log your objections, but I am overruling you this time. And I want to do this as soon as you're ready."

"I can not change your mind?" Chekov asked. Sulu only raised his eye brow. "Then let's get this over with."

"Sulu to sick bay."

"Patrick here."

"Doctor, have Lenin escorted to transporter room four." Sulu ordered.

"Aye Captain."

"This won't take long, Pavel." Sulu said. "Why don't you get some sleep."

Chekov nodded. He was tired. "As soon as you are safely back on the Excelsior."

Captain Sulu and Michael Lenin materialized in the engine control room of the Aces Over Trays. It was a small room with only two computer terminals and a single wall of interferometer relays. Sulu inspected the relays. "Good god. How old is this ship?"

"The technology may be old, but it's sound." Lenin defended his ship. "And these relays make the retro fit of the cloak possible. You couldn't plug her into the Excelsior without some radical adjustments."

"All right. Let's get to work." Sulu commanded. He opened the tool kit he carried.

Lenin accessed the computer terminal and called up the schematics of the Breen cloaking device. "We have to disconnect it here and here." Lenin pointed out the necessary connections. "Be careful of the power flow and the feedback. You do know how to use that, right?"

Sulu lifted the multiplex phase inverter and asked. "It's a monkey wrench, right?"

"A what?"

"Never mind." Sulu laughed. "Just one of my wife's jokes. Transmit those schematics to Excelsior."

"Sounds like a hilarious woman." Lenin's tone was extremely sarcastic. He did not acknowledge the order, but sent the transmission.

"She's a historian." Sulu explained as he took the cover off the appropriate relay. "It was a hand tool used a couple of hundred years ago. She once threatened to throw one into the Excelsior's warp drive."

Now Lenin laughed. He went around the corner of the control room into the engine room proper and started dismantling the cloaking mechanism. Captain Sulu continued working on the relays and antiquated interfaces. It was then that the ship suddenly rocked to port and then righted itself.

"What the hell was that?" Lenin yelled.

"Keep working." Sulu yelled back. He grabbed his communicator. "Sulu to Excelsior."

"Captain." Chekov said. "Prepare for emergency beam out."

"Report Chekov."

"The Truuk has fired disruptors without warning and does not answer our hails. At this point the two flank ships have not fired. I have alerted the Lexington." Chekov said. "We have suffered a direct hit to the graviton field generators. Shields are down to eighty five per cent."

"Eighty five percent?" Sulu said. "That should hold."

"Not stretched around the transport, Captain." Chekov said. "I can not guarantee your safety."

"Stand by." Sulu ordered. He yelled to Lenin. "How long?"

"Two minutes. Maybe three." Lenin yelled back.

"Make it two!" Sulu yelled. "Chekov. Give me two minutes. Once you beam us out, cut the transport loose and close the shields around Excelsior."

"Acknowledged." Chekov said. He kept the channel open to Sulu.

"The Emor and Dycam are breaking formation and starting attack runs." Lt. Commander Dole reported from the helm station. "Their weapons systems at full power."

"Fire phasers as they pass." Chekov said. "Target engines and weapon systems."

"Aye Sir." Dole said. "Firing phasers."

As he continued to work, Sulu recognized the sounds of battle. The Aces rocked again. He worked as fast as he could and tried not to berate himself for not being on the bridge of his ship. "Rip it out, Lenin."

"Direct hit on Dycam's engines." Ensign Sola reported. His voice sounded very calm to Sulu for his first real battle. "She's lost warp drive and internal power. Glancing hit on the Emor aft shields. Minimal damage."

"Damage report." Chekov called out.

"Direct hit to shields number three and ten. Shield strength down to forty three percent." DiMario reported from the science station. "I think they are trying to dislodge the transport, Mr. Chekov."

"Arm photon torpedoes." Chekov ordered.

"The Truuk is moving closer to the transport." DiMario reported.

"Target the Truuk, Mr. Dole." Chekov said. "Fire torpedoes."

"Torpedoes one and two away, Sir." Dole said. "The Emor is making another run."

"Phasers on the Emor as she passes." Chekov said. "Ready torpedoes three and four. Targeted on the Truuk. Captain, stand ready."

The Aces rocked again. Lt. DiMario reported on Excelsior. "Direct hit to shield number three again, Sir."

"The Truuk has dropped her shields, Mr. Chekov." Sola reported. "And the Lexington is coming in fast. Bearing 309 mark 34."

The Lexington came in firing phasers. She was able to maneuver, while Excelsior had to hold position to protect the Aces Over Trays. She scored direct hits on all three Breen ships. The damage done to the Truuk was substantial since she momentarily had her shields down.

On the Aces, Lenin yelled out that he was ready. Sulu called over his communicator. "Now Pavel."

"Forward shields are collapsing." DiMario reported. "The Aces is exposed."

"Energize!" Chekov sent the order to the transporter chief.

Sulu felt himself dematerialize. But when he materialized again he was not on the Excelsior. Both he and Lenin found themselves facing armed Breen guards. The guards wore green and gold jump suits that appeared connected to the brass and black helmets that entirely hid their faces. Even their hands were gloved so that no part of their skin was touched by the oxygen atmosphere.

Agen Layg Ianis stood out from the rest. His Virtre uniform was red and gold. And his helmet had a clear face mask. He walked up to Lenin. "I told you that I would find you, Lenin!"

"I guess I won't need this anymore." Lenin shrugged and dropped the cloaking device that he carried. It crashed on the deck, shattering into a hundred pieces.

Layg Ianis relieved Sulu of his phaser and communicator. The Breen ship took another direct hit, knocking everyone in the transporter room to their knees. Sulu dove for his phaser that had dropped to the deck. Three of the four guards scrambled after him. One grabbed his hand and wrenched the phaser free. The weight of the other two tackling him slammed his head against the deck. Captain Sulu lost consciousness.

On Excelsior, the transporter chief called the bridge. "I've lost the pattern lock, Mr. Chekov. I don't read any life signs or communicator signals."

"Mr. Chekov." Lt. DiMario looked up from his scanners. "The Truuk has just activated transporter beams."

The Emor fired disruptors at the exposed Aces Over Trays. The small ship exploded into a brief fire ball momentarily blinding the Excelsior bridge crew. The Lexington fired phasers at the Emor. The Emor activated its cloak and disappeared from sight.

"Lt. Epstein." Chekov turned the command chair towards the communications officer. "Get the Lexington. Now."

"Channel open, Sir."

"Lexington. Hold your fire!" Chekov urged.

"Commander Chekov." The view screen changed from the battle scene to Captain Piazza's image. She was a tall woman with short white blond hair and steady blue eyes. She had served a short time on Enterprise early in her career. "We are holding fire. Report."

"I believe Captain Sulu is now on board the Truuk." Chekov reported.

"He was still on the transport when the Truuk activated transporter beams?" Piazza asked. Chekov nodded. He had already explained the situation to her when he alerted the Lexington earlier. "How do you want to proceed, Commander?"

"The Breen have sustained considerable damaged." Chekov said. "The Dycam is operating on reserved power only. And your last hit on the Truuk has knocked out her cloak. I believe it may be time to talk."

"I am here to back you up, Commander." Captain Piazza nodded. "Let me know what I can do."

"I will keep you apprised, Captain. Excelsior out." Chekov said. "Now Lt. Epstein, the Truuk please."

"I have an open channel, Mr. Chekov."

"This is Pavel Chekov commanding the Excelsior." Chekov said. "You have fired on a Federation ship without cause or warning. You have destroyed a civilian transport. You have taken a Starfleet officer and a Federation citizen prisoner without due process. I demand that you surrender yourselves and return with us to the nearest starbase to face charges."

"Captain Chekov." Primot Retnec smiled. "So you are now commanding the Excelsior? I hope my first officer is not so ambitious as to take my place so quickly. Are you aware that your government has granted us safe passage through your space?"

"I am aware." Chekov nodded. "Any safe passage is based on an assumption of non aggression. That assumption does not hold here. I must insist you do this my way."

"And if I don't?"

"Then you leave me no choice." Chekov said. "I will destroy your ship if necessary. You are in no position to resist two starships."

"What about your Federation citizen?" Retnec asked. "Don't you take a pledge to protect them?"

"I will worry about my pledges." Chekov advised calmly.

"I need to consult the First Ambassador." Retnec said. "That will take some time. He

was injured in the battle."

"I will give you two hours to make up your mind." Chekov said. "Excelsior out."

"What do you hope to accomplish in two hours?" Dr. Patrick asked.

"First shift is due on in a little less than an hour. Epstein, get them up here now."

Chekov said. "DiMario, start scanning for human life signs on the Truuk."

"It will take some time, Sir." DiMario said. "The difference between Breen life signs and human..."

"I know." Chekov said. "Start now. Look for pockets of oxygen atmosphere. As soon as Mirek reports put her on it too."

"Aye Sir."

"Mr. Dole." Chekov turned to the helm. Lt. Commander Dole would normally command third shift. "Take a security team, heavily armed, and stand by in the transporter room. We may want to board the Dycam."

"Yes Sir." Dole nodded and contacted the security office from his station.

Chekov finally turned back to Dr. Patrick. "Two hours will not be enough time for the two damaged ships to be repaired. It will also not be sufficient time for help to arrive from the nearest Breen outpost. It will give us enough time to locate the captain and Mr. Lenin."

"The Truuk still has shields." Patrick pointed out. "You won't be able to just beam them out."

"One step at a time." Chekov repeated the phrase he had heard Captain Kirk say in similar situations. It had always seemed logical and reassuring to him. He now found himself wondering just how often Kirk had no idea what the next step would be when he said it.

First shift started reporting for duty. Lt. Sareth manned the helm station, freeing up Dole to carry out his orders. Lt. Commander Dole was Excelsior's second officer. He was not a large man. Lean and muscular with light brown skin and short black hair, he was all business on the bridge. But his reputation on shore leave was all play. When he left the bridge, Mr. Dole went to the security office to confer with Lt. Johnson and the security crew. Johnson was taller, broader, and darker than Commander Dole, but much more reserved. Fifteen security officers crowded around the large screen on the wall that showed the detailed scan of the ship.

"It's not a large ship." Dole pointed at the strategic areas of the ship he wanted to attack. "I think three teams. Here. Here. And of course the bridge."

"Agreed." Lt. Johnson nodded. "You take the bridge. I'll take engineering. Lt. Ortega, you will lead the third team."

"Aye." Ortega nodded. "We will have to assume all crew members will be carrying personal weapons. There will be a fight."

"Yes." Dole said. "But they are badly damaged and everyone should be busy when we arrive. If we all beam in simultaneously, we should be able to maintain the element of surprise."

"If the situation was reversed, I would be expecting a boarding party." Johnson said. "I doubt they will be surprised."

"Perhaps directly after the battle they were on the alert." Dole said. "But it is difficult to

maintain alert status. They have other problems to take care of. Believe me, by the time we get the order to go they will have let their guard down a bit. The biggest problem will be the atmosphere."

"Their atmosphere is not poisonous to the touch, but if they break your face mask or disconnect the oxygen pack, you will only have a minute or two." Lt. Johnson agreed. "Each team will be monitored by a separate transporter tech. We will maintain open comlines and transporter lock. If you are in any trouble at all, call for immediate beam out."

"Any questions?" Dole asked. No one said a word. "Then let's go. I don't want to tell Mr. Chekov he has to wait for us."

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On the bridge, Ensign Mirek joined Lt. DiMario at the science station. They divided the Truuk into sections and started a systematic search for the two humans onboard. When Gonzoles came onto the bridge, Chekov took her and Dr. Patrick into the ready room. Chekov sat at the captain's desk and brought Gonzoles up to speed.

"Do you think we will find the command codes for the Truuk on the Dycam, Mr. Chekov?" Gonzoles asked.

"It is a possibility." Chekov said. "But it is questionable if we could find it in time. I don't know what Breen protocol is, but they've been fighting a civil war for the last two decades. I am sure it is not just there for the taking."

"Then how are we going to get past their shields?" Patrick asked.

"I don't know." Chekov admitted. "If you have an idea, I'd like to hear it."

"Sir, the Breen will not give up a starship captain lightly." Gonzoles said. She did not want to think about what their methods of interrogation might be. "He just knows too much."

"We will get him back." Chekov assured her. "Take command of the bridge, Gonzoles. I will join you shortly."

"Aye Sir." Gonzoles left the ready room.

"How long since you had any sleep, Pavel?" Dr. Patrick asked.

Chekov checked the time. "About seventeen hours. And after I talk to Captain Piazza again, I will take a break. It seems to me you've been on duty quite awhile also."

"I've caught a couple of hours here and there." Patrick said.

Chekov leaned back in the desk chair and rubbed his eyes. He looked around the ready room. "A couch."

"I beg your pardon?" Patrick asked.

"I was telling Hikaru yesterday that my office needed something." Chekov explained. "A couch. A long soft couch seems like a good idea. I would be able to stretch out on days like this and still be back on the bridge on a moments notice. I will suggest the Captain have one put in here too."

Dr. Patrick started slowly for the door. "I will be back in one hour and forty five minutes with some very strong coffee. You better be able to tell me you've closed your eyes for at least one full hour."

"Bring sugar." Chekov said. After the doctor had left the ready room, Chekov opened the com line to the bridge communications station. "Commander Rand, I need to talk to Captain Piazza on the Lexington on a secured channel."

"Yes Sir." Rand responded. Chekov waited just a short time for Captain Piazza to appear on the screen.

"Captain, did you monitor our conversation with Primot Retnec?" Chekov asked.

"Yes, I did Commander." Piazza nodded. She was also in her ready room. It was time to speak candidly. "I have my people scanning the Truuk for human life signs."

"Yes." Chekov nodded. "So do I. The Truuk does not have her cloak or warp drive, but she still has her shields. I was hoping you might have an idea how to get around them."

"Not off hand." Piazza said. "What is this Ambassador like? Is there any chance of a diplomatic solution?"

"Prior to the attack, he had been able to keep things on a diplomatic level." Chekov said. "But he was obviously overruled. Perhaps now that his tactical position has deteriorated, Primot Retnec will be more inclined to listen to the Ambassador again."

"I hope so, but I would not count on it." Piazza said. "The Breen have been self absorbed for the last decade. We have had few dealings with them."

"Then they know as little about us as we know about them." Chekov said.

"True." Piazza sighed. "I would like to turn that to our advantage. The Dycam has no shields? No internal power?"

"Correct Captain."

"Have you considered boarding her?"

"I have a detail standing by." Chekov said. "But we know nothing of their computer or security systems. The chances of getting the command codes from them are small."

"I have a Haliian officer in my crew. Are you familiar with them?" Piazza asked.

"I have heard of Halii." Chekov shrugged. "But I have never met anyone from that world."

"Lt. Orrint is a computer expert." Piazza explained. "More importantly he is telepathic. Now, it doesn't work with every species. With some he is merely empathic. With others fully telepathic. There are some he can't read at all. No guarantees, but it's worth a try."

"Yes." Chekov nodded. "I will have Lt. Commander Dole and his detail board the Dycam. He will notify you as soon as he has secured it."

"Very good, Commander Chekov." Piazza smiled. "We await your signal. Lexington out."

"Chekov to Mr. Dole."

"Dole here."

"Mr. Dole, secure the Dycam." Chekov ordered. "When you have the ship and crew under your control, notify the Lexington. Lt Orrint will beam over to assist in retrieving the Truuk's command codes. Any questions?"

"No Sir." Dole answered. "We are on our way."

Chekov leaned back in the high back desk chair. He stretched out his legs, crossed his arms across his chest, and closed his eyes.

Jimmi opened her eyes and felt the other side of the bed. Since she was alone there was no need to whisper. "Computer, what time is it?"

"Oh four thirty six." The computer replied.

"What is Captain Sulu's location?" she asked the computer.

"Captain Sulu is not on board the Excelsior."

"Not on board?" Jimmi sat up in bed. She rubbed her eyes and tried to think. "Where is Commander Chekov?"

"Commander Chekov is on the bridge."

"Alert status?" Jimmi asked.

"The crew stands at condition white." The computer said. "General quarters."

"All right." Jimmi laid back down and tried to sleep. It wasn't easy. She had only started to drift off when the red alert sounded. It woke Harry and sent him running to his mother's bed. She held him and reassured him while her own mind raced with disastrous possibilities.

Eventually the red alert was cancelled and replaced by a yellow alert. Harry drifted off to sleep in her arms. Jimmi laid with him as long as she could stand it. Hikaru did not call her to say everything was all right. Pavel did not call to say there was a problem. Jimmi told herself they were busy and she would hear something soon.

She got Harry up and dressed for breakfast. When she walked into the gym where the Versat children were playing and nibbling on breakfast, Harry quickly joined in the games. A long table in the corner held an ample selection of kid friendly finger food and drinks. Eddie Pascal, the assistant cook who had befriended her on her first trip on Excelsior, brought her a cup of coffee.

"Are you ok, Ms. Sulu?" Eddie asked handing her the mug with Excelsior's seal and registry number on the front. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Thanks Eddie." Jimmi took the mug gratefully and carefully sipped the hot drink before she said. "It must have been some battle, huh?"

"Yeah." Eddie nodded. "Some of the third shift bridge crew went right back to work after a dinner break. That's not typical. But then it happened on their shift, so I guess they want to see it through."

"What happened on their shift?" Jimmi asked.

"You know." Eddie said. But the look on her face made it obvious she did not know. Eddie hesitated to explain further.

"Tell me, Eddie." Jimmi lowered her voice and leaned close to him. "Please."

"The Captain was taken captive by the Breen." Eddie voice was barely above a whisper. "And the ship these kids came on was destroyed."

"Captive?" The word turned over in her mind. She had no idea what to do or where to turn. She stood motionless with her mouth open and the coffee cup in her hand. She closed her eyes for a minute. When she opened them she handed the coffee back to Eddie. "Watch Harry for me."

Without waiting for an answer, Jimmi turned and left the gym. Eddie Pascal put the

First Officer

coffee cup down on the table. He accessed the communication station on the wall and reported the incident to sick bay. Dr. Ghali took the report and promised to relay it to Dr. Patrick on the bridge.