

Commander Chekov took advantage of the lull in activity on the bridge to retreat briefly to his office. He opened the visual comline to his wife in his cabin. "Catrina, you can relax now."

"What happened?"

"Nothing." Chekov shrugged. "Posturing mostly. Four hours from now it may get more serious. But right now, it is ok."

"I don't understand." Cathy shook her head. "There was one ship. Now there are three. Why didn't you do something about it when there was only one?"

"Like what?"

"What are the phasers and the torpedoes for?" Cathy asked. "They killed close to two hundred people. They destroyed four ships."

"We don't know that." Chekov said. "And even if we did, it is up to the diplomats to solve. We are not here to start a war."

"That's not what you said before." Cathy said. "You said war could break out any time."

"But we will not start it." Pavel said.

"So you're just going to forget what's happened?" Cathy asked.

"No." Pavel assured her. "But we have our orders. And I must get back to the bridge. I will talk to you later."

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When Chekov returned to the bridge. Gonzoles was in the center seat. The third Cardassian ship had returned from its patrol of the Cardassian side of the border along the Badlands. The first officer stopped at the communications station. "Anything from the Potemkin?" Rand just shook her head. "Spock?"

"Not yet."

"Captain in the ready room?"

"With Smith." Rand nodded.

"I need to talk to a Mr. Gan Nurr." Chekov had to check his padd for the name. "He's with security at one of the civilian ship yards in the Rigel system. If you need any more details check with my wife."

"Aye Sir." Rand said. After he had left the bridge, Rand just shook her head and whispered to herself. "Besides locating ambassadors, securing long range channels, and giving C.J. unprecedented access, now I have to single out one low level Rigelian out of twenty five billion people. I love my job."

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When Chekov walked into the ready room, Smith and Sulu were looking at Sim Soble's crude silhouette. "I know it's rough, Captain. But it's only because Soble was working from memory."

"It is close." Sulu agreed. "Now what is this about closing one eye?"

"It's a trick I learned as a teenager from a freighter pilot who used to fly in and out of Starbase thirty six regularly." Smith said. "He was part Haliian and had some telepathic abilities. If you close one eye and squint with the other you can sometimes see things you don't

see otherwise."

"Interesting." Sulu tried Smith's suggestion. The ship on the screen did seem to flow in and out of his focus. "I see it."

Chekov also tried but shook his head. "It is the power of suggestion. He says it is j class so you see j class."

"How did you see the classified ship, Mr. Smith?" Sulu asked.

"I was in the command chair when Lexington was coming into the Vega system." Smith reported. "Three unidentified fighters came around one of the moons of Vega Three flying in formation. When I hailed them, they ran for it. I reported to the Captain. When all was said and done, it turned out to be the j-class fighter on a test flight."

"Which of the convoy ships was recently in the Vega system?" Sulu asked.

Chekov shrugged. Smith answered. "The Terhara, Sir."

"The Rigelian Tug." Sulu said.

"Yes Sir." Smith said. "The Terhara's command escape pod was picked up by the Eagle. Captain Kove was severely injured. Last I checked with Gonzoles, they still hadn't gotten a statement from her."

"Captain." Rand interrupted.

Sulu switched the com connection to visual. "Yes Commander?"

"Ambassador Spock is waiting to speak to you."

"Put him through, Rand." Sulu said. "Resume your station, Mr. Smith."

"Aye Sir." Smith left the ready room as Ambassador Spock appeared on the Captain's view screen.

"Ambassador." Sulu smiled. Even years after Spock's retirement from Starfleet, it was odd to see him in traditional Vulcan robes instead of a duty uniform. "Thank you for getting back to me so soon."

"What is your situation, Captain Sulu?" Spock asked.

"The Potemkin is searching the Badlands for the attackers." Sulu said. "Three Cardassian warships are just on their side of the border observing our search. They will attack if we have not left the disputed area in less than four hours. The Eagle is escorting all smaller ships to rendezvous with medical transports. The Tian Nan Men and Excelsior continue the investigation."

"And what has the investigation uncovered?" Spock asked.

"Unfortunately, we have little to work with, Mr. Spock." Chekov said. "All command logs of the convoy were lost. Transfers of logs to the escape pods were ordered but never completed. We suspect sabotage of the emergency systems and at least one of the ship's shields."

"And there was one ship in the attacking force that transported something off the lead ship and left the battle." Sulu said. "The first officer of the Verillian ship saw it and attempted to reconstruct the configuration from memory. It looks very much like a j class fighter, Mr. Spock."

Spock sat back in his chair and thought about the report. "I see."

Sulu and Chekov waited a moment, but Spock did not continue. The Captain observed. "You do not seem surprised by this turn of events, Ambassador."

"The knowledge that a j class fighter has been stolen from the test sight at Vega Three has been on a strictly need to know basis." Spock said. "Our best information suggests it was taken

by the Herlan Resistance Force."

"I am not familiar with this group." Sulu said.

"No reason you should be, since the Herla system was destroyed almost forty years ago." Spock said. "It was a system rich in natural resources that was conquered by the Cardassian Union more than a hundred years ago. The system contained three class M planets. As the resources were stripped from the planets, the populations were displaced. It was thought that no organized Herlan society remained. In the last ten years, rumors started circulating of a resistance that had survived in exile. I will transmit the details to you, but of course it must remain classified."

"Of course." Sulu nodded.

"Do they wish to draw the Federation into war with the Cardassians?" Chekov asked.

"That is a possibility, Mr. Chekov." Spock said. "The resistance movement has been charged with several recent terrorist acts aimed at the Cardassian military. And a war with the Federation would certainly weaken the Cardassian Union."

"And these tactics would leave both sides feeling provoked." Chekov nodded. "With each blaming the other for starting the war. Effective."

"What was transported off the lead ship?" Spock asked.

"We don't know." Sulu said. "The ship's manifest reads computer parts. Cathy wishes to speak to the company who shipped the missing cargo, but I did not want to arouse any suspicions until we knew more."

"Let her make the call. See what answers she gets." Spock suggested. "I will monitor my resources for reactions to the contact. As for the fighter, it is not to fall into Cardassian hands. Find it, Captain Sulu. If you can't reclaim it, destroy it."

"Yes Sir." Sulu nodded.

"Keep me informed, Captain." Spock said. "Spock out."

"Well." Chekov said after the screen had gone blank. "What do we do now?"

"I'll have to talk to Mac." Sulu said. "We may have to go find the Potemkin. I don't know what Meuller is going to do if she runs head into a Starfleet fighter. And I don't want to send this across subspace."

"The very fact that Starfleet has developed a deep space fighter may start a war." Chekov agreed. "As far as we know, the Cardassians have nothing like it."

"As far as we know." Sulu said. "Have you spoken to the security man at Rigel?"

"Not yet." Chekov said. "I am waiting for Rand to make the connection. And now I have a little more to go on."

"Talk to Cathy." Sulu ordered. "Have her ask the Deneb Co. about the missing cargo. Do not mention the fighter."

"Of course." Chekov nodded and left the ready room.

Captain Sulu walked onto the bridge. The ship was at yellow alert and the senior staff was on duty. Smith was at the helm station. Gonzoles consulted with Mirek at the science station. Commander Rand was very busy at the communications station.

Because of the alert, several extra officers were on the bridge. Armed security guards Lt. Heiss and Ensign Ramirez stood their duty by the main turbo lift. Two junior science officers monitored sensors from the second and third science stations. Both were first year, both male.

Ensign Remek was Vulcan and Ensign Bianco was Human. Ensign Hoban manned one of the redundant stations on the bridge. It was presently configured as weapons control.

Captain Sulu walked down to stand in front of the forward station. He turned and faced his crew. They were all busy. "Your attention." The Captain's deep voice carried through the bridge. There was no need to raise it. They all turned towards him. "What I am about to say is classified top secret. It is not to leave the bridge. The ship that the Potemkin is seeking in the Badlands is a stolen experimental Starfleet vessel. Regardless of the out come of our investigation into the attack on the convoy, our orders are to find this ship. Reclaim it if possible. Destroy it if necessary. It must not come into Cardassian possession. Any questions?"

"Do we know who took the ship, Captain?" Gonzoles asked.

"A resistance group that has been fighting the Cardassians for years. They are called the Herlans. We believe their intention is to start a war between the Federation and Cardassian Union. Any more?" Sulu looked around the bridge at his crew. Each met his eye. There were no more questions and no hesitation to take on the orders they were given. The captain nodded and directed himself to communications. "Commander Rand, please hail the Tian Nan Men."

"Aye Sir." Rand nodded. "Channel open and secure."

Sulu walked around to the command chair and turned towards the main view screen. Captain MacLean appeared on the screen. Sulu spoke seriously. "We need to talk, Mac. In person."

"Mi casa, su casa Hikaru." Mac responded.

Sulu smiled. A few phrases were all Edwin MacLean was willing to learn of his wife's native language. "She may have taught you the phrase, Mac, but your accent is awful. I'll be there in a minute. Sulu out."

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"Can I go to the gym, Dad?" Peter asked. "The red alert is over."

"Go, Peter, and take your brothers with you." Pavel said. "I need to talk to Mom privately anyway."

"Come on." Peter grinned and called to his younger brothers.

"Wait boys." Pavel said. Peter, Joey, and Jamie stopped just inside the cabin door and turned to face their father. Peter was the fairest of the boys with his mother's blond hair and blue eyes. Even though many people thought the twins favored him, all Pavel saw when he looked at his sons was Cathy. "We must talk about red alerts and what they mean."

"We know Dad." Joey said. "It means danger."

"Yes Joe, it does." Pavel nodded. He sat down on his bunk to look the boys in the eyes. "Come here. Now, if another red alert sounds you come right back here or go to sickbay. Which ever is closer. If you go to sick bay, call your mother so she doesn't worry."

"We will." Jamie promised.

"And stay together." Pavel spoke quietly to the boys. They listened intently. "Peter, watch your brothers. And you two make sure you stay with Peter. This is very important. I need your cooperation on this."

The three boys stared at their father very seriously. They answered in one subdued tone. "Yes Sir."

"Go." Pavel smiled gently. "I will see you for dinner."

"I think you scared them." Cathy said after the boys had gone. She was sitting at desk going over the casualty lists. She had already contacted half the families of her crews. She had spoken to the families of the dead first and was now working her way through the injured list.

"That was not my intention. But the situation requires that they know what to do." Pavel said. "Hikaru wants you to contact the Deneb Co. and ask them what was beamed off the Odessa."

"Why the change of heart?" Cathy asked.

"We are further along in the investigation." Pavel said. "Mr. Spock wishes to see what reactions your inquiries bring."

"What aren't you telling me, Pavel?" Cathy asked.

"It appears there may be terrorists involved." Pavel shrugged. "But I don't know for sure. This will help us find out."

"All right." Cathy shrugged and swiveled her chair back to the desk.. "I'll ask Commander Rand to make the connection. Although I get the feeling she is tired of talking to me."

"Bridge to Mr. Chekov." Commander Rand called on the ship wide comline.

"Speak of the devil." Cathy smiled over her shoulder at Pavel.

Chekov got up and walked over to the desk. He leaned over Cathy's shoulder to open the comline. "Chekov here."

"I have Mr. Gan Nurr for you, Pavel."

"Thank you, Janice." Pavel said. "Please put him through."

"Pavel. Janice." Cathy teased as she got up and made room for him. "Is that allowed on duty?"

"Quiet." Pavel whispered. "And stay out of sight." Cathy stuck out her tongue and sat on the bed. Pavel sat at the desk and turned on the desktop view screen. "Mr. Nurr, I am Commander Chekov."

"What can I do for Starfleet today, Commander Chekov?" Nurr asked. He was Humanoid, probably Rigelian. His complexion was light brown with long black hair pulled back and sectioned into several pony tails. He wore light blue coveralls typical of shipyard workers in the Rigel System.

"Answer a few questions that concern the Vasco ship the Odessa." Chekov said. "I understand there was a security breach while the Odessa was in your yards."

"A security breach?" Nurr shrugged. "Hardly."

"Really?" Chekov said. "I spoke to Ms. Vasco about it. She is concerned that the recent attack on her ships was accomplished by someone getting her security codes while the Odessa was in your care."

"I'm sorry to hear about the convoy, but the problems did not originate here." Nurr shrugged. "Of course she's going to look for some one to blame."

"Of course." Chekov nodded. "But she couldn't have just made this up. It's too easy to check. So what happened?"

"Nothing happened on the Odessa." Nurr insisted. "We had a little trouble with a disgruntled employee. She crashed the repair logs of the largest ships in the yards when she was

fired. There was some suggestion that she might have downloaded some of files."

"And you reported this to the owners of the ships?" Chekov asked.

"Yes. And C.J. Vasco was the worst!" Nurr said. "She wanted to change all the security codes and have all the upgrades retested. Of course she wasn't going to pay for the extra time. The Odessa was done. Ready to go. She wanted all this testing done overnight so she could stay on schedule. She's a real pain in the--"

"Well," Chekov cut him off. "I suppose she is used to getting what she wants. I imagine Vasco means a lot of business for your yards."

"Yes." Nurr agreed. "Vasco's a big account and she knows it. So my bosses were on my back to give her what she wants but not have it cost us anything."

"What did you do?"

"We changed the security codes." Nurr said. "The algorithms based on random search patterns. No way anyone could recreate the codes."

"But if one of those downloaded files was the security access file, an attacker could change the security codes without knowing the algorithms." Chekov said. "Which would be a definite breach of security."

"There was no evidence of that." Nurr protested.

"Except that certain security systems were bypassed on the Odessa to hide the identity of the attackers." Chekov said. "Has any attempt been made to track down just which files were downloaded?"

"The system crashed." Nurr repeated.

"There are still ways to tell." Chekov said. "I suggest your company look into the incident further."

"You won't tell Vasco about this. Will you, Commander Chekov?" Nurr asked. "It could mean my job."

"Well, I will have to answer their questions." Chekov said. "But I won't volunteer anything."

"Thank you, Commander." Nurr smiled.

"One other thing, Mr. Nurr." Chekov said. "What was the name of this disgruntled employee?"

"Ripti." Nurr said. "Cros Ripti."

"That's an odd name." Chekov said. "What species?"

"She's humanoid." Nurr shrugged. He accessed the personnel files. "According to this, she came to Rigel Three thirty two years ago as a refugee from a planet called Herla Four. Must have been just a kid."

"Thank you for your help, Mr. Nurr." Chekov said. "Chekov out."

"So I'm a big pain." Cathy had not been able to sit still during the conversation. She was pacing around the cabin. "I guess I'll have to find someone else at Rigel to do business with."

"I should not have had that conversation here." Pavel smiled at her. "You can not use what he said against him. I would have left such personal comments out when telling you about this conversation."

"I noticed you also left out that we are married and that you own a substantial amount of stock in Vasco." Cathy said.

"Mr. Nurr would never have been that honest if I had mentioned that." Pavel said.  
"Besides it makes no difference in my investigation."

"Right."

"I have to go back to the bridge." Pavel said. "Let me know what happens when you talk to the Deneb Company."

"I'll see you for dinner, right?"

"Yes." Pavel gave her a quick good-bye kiss. "I'll see you then."

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When Chekov returned to the bridge, Gonzoles was in the command chair. She stood up as he approached. "Captain Sulu is still on the Tian Nan Men. The Potemkin reports no contacts so far. The Eagle has transported all her wounded to the medical transports and is returning here to take our wounded. The ship stands as yellow alert."

"Did you say anything to Captain Meuller about the fighter, Gonzoles?" Chekov asked as he took command of the bridge.

"No Sir." Gonzoles said and returned to the navigation station.

Commander Rand acknowledged the transporter room's signal and reported. "Captain Sulu is returning to Excelsior now, Mr. Chekov."

"Thank you." Chekov said.

"Gonzoles." Sulu said as he came onto the bridge. Chekov vacated the command chair. Since all three science stations were manned, Chekov remained next to the command station "Set course to intercept the Potemkin. Heading 040 mark 5."

"040 mark 5. Aye."

Captain Sulu sat down and ordered. "Ahead at full impulse."

"Full impulse." Smith answered. "Aye."

"Captain we are being hailed by the Wolmof." Rand reported.

"Of course." Sulu sighed. "On screen."

"Captain Sulu." Rowkant said. "Your heading is for Cardassian space."

"My heading is to intercept the Starship Potemkin." Sulu said. "I do not plan to violate Cardassian space. I merely need to speak to Captain Meuller in person."

"About?"

"Starfleet business." Sulu said. "Nothing personal, but I don't plan on sharing it with you, Gul Rowkant."

"Hold your position, Captain Sulu." Rowkant warned.

"The Wolmof has locked phasers, Sir." Mirek reported.

"Red alert." Chekov called, immediately activating the red lights and alarm. "Bring all weapons systems to the ready. Target weapons and propulsion systems."

"The Wolmof is moving in a parallel course." Smith reported. "Matching our speed."

"Staying on their side of the border." Gonzoles added.

All over the bridge orders were being given and acknowledged. Sulu stood so he could be seen and heard in the confusion. "Gul Rowkant. There is no need to escalate this into a fire fight."

"Hold your position." Rowkant smiled. The intelligence reports were right. The

Federation had no stomach for a fight. The Humans were all talk. "And power down your weapons. Then we can talk about your departure from the disputed area."

"I'm afraid that's not possible." Sulu shrugged. "I have my orders."

"This is your last warning." Rowkant said. "Come to full stop immediately or be destroyed. Wolmof out."

The main view screen returned to a view of the stars and the Wolmof with her remaining flank ship. Lt. Mirek reported. "The Wolmof and the other two are changing course to intercept us."

Sulu sat down and calmly said, "Hold your course, Mr. Smith."

"Aye Sir." Smith hoped he sounded as calm. He glanced at Ensign Hoban at the weapon's station. He had barely had time to even meet the officers in his department and this was his first chance to evaluate one on the job. From across the bridge, Smith could see the tension in her face. He could almost feel the stiffness in her fingers poised over the controls ready for the order to fire.

"The Wolmof is firing disruptors." Chekov warned from behind Mirek. He was looking over her shoulder taking in as many readings as he could.

"Fire phasers at will, Ensign Hoban." Sulu said. "Target all three ships. Keep them guessing. Evasive action, Mr. Smith."

"Aye." Hoban called as the phaser energy leaped out of the portal towards the Cardassian warship. It hit and was absorbed by the ship's forward shield. She continued firing the phasers at the enemy ships as rapidly as possible.

"Direct hits to Wolmof's forward shields and the second ship's port shields." Remek reported. "Negligible damage."

"The second Cardi ship has changed its heading for the Tian Nan Men." Ensign Bianco reported. Chekov walked back and forth behind his science officers. He stopped to check Bianco's readings. "And firing phasers at her."

"Photon torpedoes." Sulu said. "Target that second ship. Fire!"

"Firing one and two." Hoban said. Now that the battle was under way, she handled her job as trained. Smith glanced her way again and noted the obvious signs of tension were gone.

"Direct torpedo hit to the second ship's starboard shield. It's buckling." Gonzoles reported.

"The Wolmof continues to concentrate fire on our forward shields." Ensign Remek reported from the third bridge science station. "Our shield strength is down to eighty five per cent."

"What? I don't understand." Mirek said to herself. She looked from the sensors to Mr. Chekov and reported. "Sir. The Tian Nan Men just jumped to warp."

The Excelsior rocked with a torpedo hit. "Direct hit to our aft shields, Sir." Remek called over the battle noises. "Shield Gamma six is down. Damage to the antimatter converter assembly. Warp engines are off line."

"Reconfigure gamma four through eight to cover." Chekov ordered. Ensign Remek nodded and started working before Chekov had finished the order. "Divert auxiliary power to reinforce."

"The Cardassians?" Sulu glanced at Chekov.

Chekov took a quick glance at the sensors. "All still with us."

"Good." Sulu nodded. "Hoban, fire torpedoes at the farthest ship."

"Torpedoes three and four away." Hoban said. "Continuing to fire phasers."

"Both torpedoes scored a direct hit on the third ship, Sir." Mirek smiled. "Her forward shields are down."

"Phasers. Target that hole in their shields." Sulu said.

"Aye, Captain." Hoban concentrated fire on the third ship before the Cardassians had a chance to repair or reconfigure shields. The phasers passed through the shield bubble and impacted on the Cardassian warship. Small sections of the hull disintegrated. Exposed circuits sparked and flared.

"Captain." Bianco turned in his chair towards the center of the bridge. "The second Card ship is following the Tian Nan Men. She's just gone to warp."

Excelsior rocked again. Sulu could hear Rand directing repair crews to affected areas. Sparks flew from the second science station. It exploded with enough force to knock Ensign Bianco out of his chair. Automatic fire suppression chemicals sprayed on the hot station from above changing the flames to smoke and steam. The security guards ran from their stations to pull Bianco out of harms way. Chekov reached into the thick cloud of smoke that hovered over the station to cut off any power that might still be flowing to the damaged station.

"Port shield beta 3 and beta 5 have collapsed." Remek reported.

"Reconfigure." Chekov said.

"I'm not sure it is possible, Sir." Remek said. Chekov passed the damaged station to help Ensign Remek. The fire suppression system was now sucking the cloud of smoke off the bridge but the bits of the chemicals lingered, making it hard for the science officers to work. It irritated their eyes and throats. The harsh chemical smell could not be avoided by any of the bridge crew.

"Evasive Smith, keep our port shields away from their phasers." Sulu ordered.

"I'll try, Captain." Smith turned the ship again.

"The third ship is coming around to our port side." Gonzoles said. "The Wolmof is now concentrating on our aft shields. We can't take much more of this Captain."

"What about that hole in her shields?" Sulu asked.

"They've reconfigured." Chekov said. "But her shield strength is down about fifty percent. Another torpedo should do it. Our shields are sixty percent over all. Only twenty five on the port side."

"Hoban." Sulu called.

"Torpedo six away."

"Direct hit!" Gonzoles shouted. "Her shields are gone. Her warp drive is... inactive. But she still has weapons."

"The third ship is slowly retreating." Mirek added. "She is experiencing multi-system failures."

"Incoming." Smith called before anyone had a chance to celebrate the retreat of the other ship. "Torpedo from the Wolmof."

The Excelsior rocked again. The weapons station blew up in Hoban's face. Screaming in pain she grabbed her eyes and fell on the floor. The medics that had come to check on Bianco rushed over to Hoban.

"Engineering reports small hull breeches in sections thirty two and thirty four, Captain. Structural shields holding." Rand reported. Sulu nodded to her that he had heard. She knew he did not have time to respond to anything but the battle. "And the civilians on board are taking a beating. Sick bay is overwhelmed again."

"Transferring weapons control to navigation." Gonzoles said.

"Torpedoes to helm." Sulu said.

"Aye Sir." Gonzoles nodded. "Phasers to navigation. Torpedoes to helm. Resuming phaser fire. Targeting Wolmof's weapons systems."

"Torpedoes reloaded and ready." Smith reported.

"Weak spot, Pavel?" Sulu asked.

Chekov quickly checked all the shield readings for the lead Cardassian ship. So far she had taken the least damage of the three battle ships. "Wolmof's shields around her port nacelle are at seventy five percent."

"Target that nacelle, Smith." Sulu ordered. "Fire torpedoes one and two."

"Torpedoes one and two away." Smith said. No one had time to watch the torpedoes speed towards the target. They were all busy with the battle itself or damage control.

"Good shooting, Mr. Smith. Both torpedoes on target. Shield strength has been cut in half. It would only take one more well placed torpedo." Chekov adjusted the sensors at Mirek's station. He turned to Sulu and said. "We are in similar shape. Just a matter of who gets the fatal shot first. How far are we going to take this, Captain?"

"I'm almost done, Pavel." Sulu got up and looked at the readings over Smith's shoulder. "Mr. Smith, one more shot. Their disruptor ports. Can you take them out?"

"I think so. With shield strength down, I may be able to get it through." Smith adjusted his targeting scanners and relayed the new target to the torpedo computer. "Ready, Sir."

With the captain just inches above and behind him, now Smith felt the tension. Sulu's order was barely above a whisper, but it made Smith jump. "Fire."

"Torpedo away."

The two seconds they watched the torpedo fly towards its target seemed an eternity before it impacted on the Cardassian ship with a spectacular explosion. Commander Chekov reported. "Direct hit! Several sections of her forward shields have collapsed. She still has torpedoes but can not fire her forward disruptors."

"I suppose that's far enough. Hail the Wolmof, Commander Rand. Stand ready with torpedoes four and five just in case, Smith." Sulu returned to the command chair. "Cease fire, Gonzoles."

"Aye Sir." Rand, Smith, and Gonzoles responded at almost the same time.

Sulu glanced at Chekov and smiled. "Did I have you worried?"

"Me worry?" Chekov just shook his head and turned back to Mirek's station. He started gathering and prioritizing damage reports. The bridge hadn't been in this bad shape in quite awhile.

Gul Rowkant appeared on the main view screen of the Excelsior bridge. His Cardassian pride would not let him concede defeat or admit that he had underestimated his opponent. All he said was. "Captain Sulu."

"Gul Rowkant." Sulu said. "As I said before, I need to speak to the captain of the ship

patrolling the Badlands. I have no intention of crossing into Cardassian Space. I have no desire to escalate this incident into all out war. Call your ship that followed the Tian Nan Men back and give me your word that there will be no more attacks on our ships during this investigation. Then I will consider this incident as a misunderstanding."

"And if I do not do as you say?" Rowkant asked.

"I will continue with my mission." Sulu said. "If that requires that I destroy every Cardassian vessel that stands in my way, then that is what I will do. If that brings war between our governments, then that's what happens. Do I have your word, Gul Rowkant?"

"You have it, Captain Sulu." Rowkant said and terminated the connection.

"Good." Sulu said even though the Cardassian could no longer hear him. "Mr. Smith, resume course to rendezvous with the Potemkin. Best speed."

"Aye Sir." Smith nodded.

"Bridge to engineering." Sulu called on the senior staff comline.

"Williams here."

"When will we have warp power back, Willie?" Sulu asked.

"I haven't got all the reports yet, Captain." Willie said. "But looks like three or four hours work at least."

"As soon as possible, Willie."

"Aye Sir."

Sulu got up and walked over to the science stations. "What a mess."

"Smells good too." Mirek said without looking up. The captain laughed. Everyone was busy picking up the pieces. They worked diligently on repairs, reports, and evaluations but the mood was lighter. Jokes and smiles made the work go faster.

Chekov turned away from the burnt and melted controls that had been science station two. "I assume Mac is talking to Captain Meuller."

"Yes." Sulu said. "We actually thought that two of the Cardassians might follow since there would be two Starships in the Badlands. But the Cardassians obviously had other things in mind."

"Sick bay to bridge." Patrick called on the senior officer priority comline.

Sulu walked down to the command chair, but did not sit down. "Yes Doctor."

"Are you quite done?" Patrick asked.

"For the time being." Sulu said. Chekov walked down to joined Sulu as the captain asked. "Are we inconveniencing you?"

"Hell yes." Patrick said. "I still have some severely injured people down here that need treatments. Red alerts and epidermal grafting procedures just don't mix."

"Well you can go back to work now, Pat." Sulu said.

"Back to work?" Pat said. "I've got civilians and crew members with bumps, bruises, and burns from this battle. What do you think I've been doing?"

"What about three little boys?" Chekov asked. "Are they with you?"

"No." Pat said. "I haven't seen them. Are they missing?"

"No." Chekov said. "But I told them to go to sick bay if they were not close to home when the alert sounded. They must be with their mother."

"Go check on them." Sulu said.

"When I'm done here." Chekov shrugged.

"The damaged station is not going to be fixed today. Mirek and Remek can handle the rest. Go." Sulu said. Still Chekov hesitated. "That's an order, Mr. Chekov. Take all the time you need."

"Just a few minutes." Chekov smiled as he headed for the turbo lift. The doors were closing on him when he added. "I will be right back."

"So, everything's ok up there?" Dr. Patrick asked.

"Just fine, Pat." Sulu said. "I should be ready for a dinner break in about an hour. If you're free?"

"Give me a call when you're ready." Pat said. "Patrick out."