

A guard stood outside the door of the cabin assigned to Marty Choi. In the middle of the shift there was very little traffic in the crew quarters. He watched Lt. Commander Gonzoles strolled up to him. She smiled. "Hi Muhammad. How's it going?"

"Fine Commander." Ensign Amhar nodded to the door behind him. "Not a word out of him."

"I'm going to take Mr. Choi for awhile." Gonzoles said. "Why don't you take a break?"  
"You're sure?"

"Yes." The second officer nodded. "I've cleared it with Mr. Johnson. If you need to check with him, I'll wait."

Ensign Amhar walked over to the communications access panel on the wall and punched in his security code. Lt. Commander Johnson appeared on the small screen. "Sir. Requesting authorization of transfer of prisoner to nonsecurity personnel."

"Transfer authorized." Johnson nodded. "Take a half hour, Ensign."

"Aye Sir." Amhar terminated the connection and returned to Gonzoles who leaned against the wall. "I'll be back in thirty minutes unless you need me sooner, Sir."

"Ok." Gonzoles smiled. After the guard had left she lightly touched the door chime. A couple of seconds passed before Marty Choi appeared at the door. "Mr. Choi. How are you doing?"

"Ok, I guess." Marty looked up and down the hall. "What happened to the guard?"

"I thought you needed a break." Gonzoles smiled. "Join me for lunch?"

"Sure." He shrugged. "Are you sure it's ok?"

"Sure. I have a little bit of pull around here." She smiled and nodded towards the turbo lift. He tentatively walked out of the cabin and followed her. "We have another guest on board. I thought we'd ask him to join us if you don't mind."

"Is there a guard outside his door?" Choi asked.

"Probably." Gonzoles said. They past the turbo lift and rounded the corner. Another security guard stood outside a door. "Morning Karen."

"Commander." Ensign Carlsen said. "Lt. Commander Johnson has authorized transfer. Call me if you need me."

"Thanks Carlsen." Gonzoles nodded and sounded the door chime. Terrel Lebner came to the door. "Mr. Lebner. We were wondering if you were hungry."

"We?" He asked.

"I am Lt. Commander Rosita Gonzoles. This is Marty Choi." Gonzoles said. "He was an assistant engineer on the Odessa."

"Mr. Choi." Lebner nodded formally. "Terrel Lebner."

"Mr. Lebner." Choi returned the formal greeting.

"Captain Sulu is concerned about the state of my stomach?" Lebner asked.

"As second officer, ship's guests are part of my responsibilities." Gonzoles said. "I just thought you two would like a little company. I, myself, hate to eat alone. If you feel we should clear this with the Captain, I can certainly ask him."

"No." Lebner smiled for the first time and stepped into the hallway letting the door close behind him. "Anything would be better than sitting alone. I appreciate the invitation."

"Were you in one of the other ships in the convoy?" Choi asked as they walked down the

hall together.

"No." Lebner said. "I'm with the Herlan Resistance."

"I don't know it." Choi said.

"That's the group that attacked the convoy." Gonzoles explained.

"What?" Choi stopped in the middle of the empty hallway. "And you want me to sit down and have lunch with this guy?"

"It's just a meal." Lebner shrugged.

"Where I come from, you don't sit down at the table with the people who just tried to kill you." Choi said.

"Nothing personal." Lebner said.

"It's damn personal to me." Choi turned to Gonzoles. "I'd rather go back to my cabin than sit down with this... What did you call him?"

"Herlan." Lebner said.

"Cros Ripti is from the Herla System." Gonzoles said.

Marty Choi stared at her for a minute. "That's what makes Captain Sulu think she was using me? That she was involved in the attack?"

"We know she was involved." Gonzoles said.

"Did she steal my access codes? Sabotage our emergency systems?" Choi demanded of Lebner. Even though the Herlan was taller than the Human, Choi's menacing posture made Lebner back up a step. "Was she on one of the attacking ships? Did she leave me to die?"

"She had her assignment." Lebner said.

"That's cold." Choi shook his head and turned away from the Herlan. "I didn't know her at all."

"Cold?" Lebner looked to Gonzoles.

"Calculating and unfeeling." Gonzoles explained the human reference.

"I guess it is." Lebner said. "But we all do what we have to do."

"I've lost my appetite, Commander." Choi started back down the hall towards his cabin. "I'll be in my cabin."

Gonzoles walked down the hall to the nearest communications access panel. "Gonzoles to Ensign Amhar. Return to your post. Mr. Choi has returned to his cabin."

"On my way, Sir."

"Still hungry?" Gonzoles asked Lebner.

"Sure." Lebner said. "What do Humans eat for lunch?"

"A variety of things. I prefer something light. A sandwich or a salad." Gonzoles said. "I'm sure we'll find something you'll like."

Once they were seated and the Herlan had thoroughly examined his vegetable soup, Terrel Lebner casually asked. "Did you get what you wanted, Commander?"

"What do you mean?"

"Putting Mr. Choi and me together." Lebner said.

"Actually," Gonzoles shrugged between bites of her salad. "It did not go as I expected."

"Just what did you expect?"

"I thought Marty might ask you where Cros Ripti is." Gonzoles said. "And I thought you might tell him."

"What made you think that?" Lebner stared at her with unblinking gray green eyes. "He wouldn't even stay in the same room with me. I doubt he would talk to Cros."

"I don't know." Gonzoles shrugged. "But I've seen love do some strange things to otherwise rational people. It was worth a shot."

"A shot?"

"An attempt."

"And this is the result when I trust Starfleet?" Lebner said. "You try to trick me?"

"Have you really trusted Starfleet, Mr. Lebner?" Gonzoles asked. "Or are you merely trying to distract us while your other ship reaches your base?"

"My ship is damaged. My crew injured." Lebner said. "I made my priorities clear to Captain Sulu. I was encouraged by his willingness to let the Dekka Two go. But now..."

"Now?"

"He tries to trick me with your shot, as you called it."

"This lunch was not Captain Sulu's idea." Gonzoles put her fork down and looked Lebner in the eye. "It was mine."

"As a senior officer." Lebner said. "By Starfleet's own rules, your captain is responsible for your actions."

"Technically. But any mistakes I may make are my own." Gonzoles insisted. "Not the captain's."

"Really?" Lebner asked.

"I could explain to you what it means to be a command officer on this ship." Gonzoles said. "But I doubt you would understand or believe me. Regulations or no, this shot was mine."

"Your captain inspires loyalty."

Gonzoles sighed. If she was going to learn any more from the Herlan, he would have to do more of the talking. She picked up her fork and resumed eating. "I am surprised that you are familiar with Starfleet regulations."

"There is an old Terenat saying." Lebner said. "Know your enemy."

"Interesting." Gonzoles couldn't help but smile. "Our first officer claims that is an old Russian saying."

"I've never heard of this Russian system." Lebner shrugged. Before Gonzoles could explain, he continued. "But then I've been too busy with my own problems to explore other sectors."

"Then you stay pretty much in this area?" Gonzoles picked up her coffee cup to keep from staring at the Herlan.

"I am fighting the Cardassians." Lebner said. "I fight them where ever I can."

"You are fighting the Federation also." Gonzoles observed.

"The Federation has declined our requests for support." Lebner shrugged. "Your government has made us your enemy."

"If you're not with us, you're against us." Gonzoles said. "That's a bit childish in my opinion."

"Sorry you don't approve." Lebner mumbled and pushed his chair away from the table. "I believe I am ready to return to my cell, Commander."

She would have reminded him it was a secured cabin, not a cell, but it was obvious to her

that communication between them had become impossible. Gonzoles escorted him back to his cabin and called the security guard back to her post.

\*\*\*\*\*

When Gonzoles returned to the bridge, the Potemkin shared the main view screen with the Dekka One. Sulu turned to command chair towards her and asked. "How did it go?"

"Not as I had hoped." Gonzoles reported. "Mr. Choi would not talk to Mr. Lebner."

"Well." Sulu shrugged. "I guess that is understandable. His ship was blown out from under him."

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles nodded. "As for Mr. Lebner, I believe I made matters worse."

"How?"

"He saw my attempt as a trick and blames you, Sir." Gonzoles said. "I tried to tell him it was my idea, but he didn't believe me. I doubt that he will cooperate any further."

"The Tian Nan Men has just signaled the location of the Herlan base." Sulu said. "We no longer need Mr. Lebner's cooperation. Ensign Schlieman already has the coordinates. Take your station, Commander."

"Aye Sir." Gonzoles relieved Schlieman at the navigation station.

"Warp six, Mr. Smith." Sulu ordered.

"Warp six." Smith said. "Aye."

It took less than an hour for the Excelsior to catch up with the Tian Nan Men in a system with no indigenous sentient population. She was waiting in orbit around a planet one and half times the size of Jupiter. It was the seventh planet from a system's star and had fifteen moons. Excelsior dropped out of warp and into a standard orbit near the other Starfleet star ship.

"The Tian Nan Men is hailing us, Captain." Commander Rand reported.

"On screen."

"Hikaru." Mac nodded. "Glad you could make it."

"Sorry I'm late." Sulu smiled. "The Herlan base must not have much in the way of sensors. They haven't detected you?"

"They've given no indication that they know we're here." Captain MacLean said. "Perhaps they've chosen to put their best equipment on the raiding ships."

"I guess that makes sense." Sulu said. "So, what's the set up?"

"The base is located on the largest moon on the other side of the planet." Mac said.

"Their shields are up and reading at level twelve. The Theta cruiser landed on the moon's surface forty minutes ago. Several small two-man ships are flying patrols. But they have limited range and weaponry. Other than that there is no traffic."

"No readings inside the base?" Sulu asked.

"Shields were down only long enough for the cruiser to land." MacLean said. "We got a few power output readings that indicate the base is large. But no idea of how many ships are on the base."

"But our information says the fighter is there." Sulu said. "I see two options. One. We both attack and take out the shield and as many ships on the ground as possible. Two. We send in one ship and try to lure the fighter out."

"Three. We talk." Mac said.

"Normally I'd agree, Mac." Sulu said. "But I doubt they'll talk. As you said, they are a stubborn people. I've had no luck with the commander of the Dekka One. And our orders are to take the fighter or destroy it at all costs."

"All right." Mac resigned himself to the task with a short sigh. "I'll go in, give a half hearted effort. They'll think they have a chance and send out everything they've got. You come in and take the fighter. And we'll try to keep loss of life to a minimum."

"Agreed." Sulu said. "We will monitor from here."

The Excelsior waited while the Tian Nan Men slowly changed her orbit to carry the ship into the range of the moon that was a large as a small planet. The base immediately went on alert. Eight of the two man ships that were patrolling changed course to meet the ship that dwarfed them. They circled the star ship keeping clear of her phaser ports. They fired energy pulse weapons on the run.

"No damage to the Tian Nan Men." Chekov reported. MacLean ignored the ships that circled his ship like insects and fired on the main shields of the base. "Captain MacLean is using phasers only. The base shields are down by fifteen percent."

"Rand. Have Lt. Kim and Lt. Briscoe report." Sulu ordered. "Gonzoles, you understand the mission?"

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles turned towards Sulu. "Capture the fighter at all costs. If we can't take it, destroy it."

"Mr. Smith will be the pilot. A full security crew is waiting in the transporter room." Sulu said.

"The Herlans have dropped shields at their landing bay and are launching ships." Chekov reported. He waited while several ships joined the battle. "Four Theta class cruisers. Another ten of these two man ships."

"No fighter?" Sulu asked.

"Not yet."

"Damage to the Tian Nan Men?" Sulu asked.

"Nothing substantial yet." Chekov said. He studied the readings of the battle again. "However, these Herlans have experience fighting larger more powerful ships. The two man ships are keeping up a continuous barrage of forced energy pulses on the shields. It's a small but steady drain on the shields. The cruisers are also adhering to a coordinated flight plan."

"They're better than I thought." Sulu said. "Put the battle on screen."

"Aye." Chekov adjusted the controls. All he could put on screen from this vantage point was a tactical display of the battle.

"Interference?" Sulu asked.

"It's a big planet." Chekov shrugged. "To get a full view would put us in danger of being detected by their sensor nets."

Lt. Kim and Lt. Briscoe came off the turbo lift together. They quickly and quietly relieved Smith and Gonzoles. But neither senior officer left the bridge. Both stood next to the station and studied the main view screen carefully. Any bit of information might help on their mission.

"They're flying formation." Gonzoles said.

The four Theta class cruisers flew directly at the Tian Nan Men at full impulse. Just

before impacting on her shields they veered off in four different directions to go around the starship as they fired. Each cruiser scored direct hits. The ships regrouped at the other side of the starship and adjusted course to bring them in at a different angle.

"They're good." Smith said.

"Where's the fighter?" Sulu asked himself out loud. "It's their most powerful ship. Why hasn't it joined the fight?"

"Maybe they think they can take the Tian Nan Men without it." Chekov said.

"Maybe they have other plans for it." Commander Rand said. "And they don't want to risk it now."

Captain Sulu glanced at Rand. "If that's the case. We'll have to change tactics. Make them think the only way they will survive is to use the fighter."

"Tian Nan Men's shields are down to eighty percent." Chekov said.

"Smith, Gonzoles to the transporter room." Sulu said. "Take us into the battle, Mr. Kim."

As the second and third officer left the bridge, they could hear the captain giving orders as the Excelsior came around the planet. Smith confided. "I don't like leaving the bridge during a battle."

"Neither do I." Gonzoles agreed. "These Herlans are not going to give in easily. We better be ready for a fight on the fighter."

"A little hand to hand doesn't bother you, does it Gonzoles?" Smith smiled at her.

"Bother me?" Gonzoles returned the smile. "Hah! I'll bet I take down more Herlans than you to take control of the ship."

Smith extended his hand to her. "A week's pay?"

"You're on." She shook his hand.

"Are you always this easy?" Smith laughed as they left the turbo lift and hurried down the hallway together.

"You haven't won the bet yet, Mister." Gonzoles said. "Talk to me when this is over."

"If we both survive." Smith said a little more seriously than he intended.

Gonzoles stopped outside the transporter room door. The chances that some members of this detail would not come back were high. "The order is at all costs. You know what that means."

"I know." Smith took a deep breath. "Ready?"

"Yeah." She was surprised by the comfort Smith offered just by his presence. She barely knew him, but Gonzoles knew she could rely on him in this fight. Together they walked into the transporter room. Fifteen security guards waited for them. Gonzoles knew them all. She spoke to the most senior officer. "Lt. Destino. I assume you've been briefed."

"Yes Sir." He nodded. "I've studied what information we have on the configuration of this ship. And I've chosen four beam in points: the bridge, the engineering section and the two weapons access ports on the wings."

"Access ports?" Smith asked.

"Yes Sir." Destino had the configuration on the view screen on the wall. "Besides the bridge weapons station, there is a duty station in each wing specifically to control the two phaser cannons there. So there are at least three weapons officer on duty at all times. All phasers can be

fired from each station. So if one station is destroyed or officer disabled, the others can take over."

"There would be maybe five officers on the bridge." Gonzoles said. Destino nodded. "I'd say the odds were good. Everyone knows where they are going?"

"Yes Sir." Destino nodded. "I'll be on the bridge team. Lt. Miller will lead the engineering team. Ensign Dorn and Sanchez will each lead the wing teams. We only expect one officer on duty in each wing, so the majority of us will be on the bridge or in engineering."

"Do they have a weapons locker?" Gonzoles asked.

"Unknown."

"All right. Then we are ready." Gonzoles said. "If we are to beam in simultaneously, will need to use transporter rooms four and five as well. Deploy your people and signal when ready."

"Aye Sir." Destino nodded. The security team knew what they were doing and those that needed to be in other transporter rooms left quickly.

After the transporter operator had handed her a phaser, tricorder, and communicator, Gonzoles signaled the bridge. "Sulu here."

"We're ready, Captain."

"The fighter has finally joined the fight, Commander, and she is fast." Sulu said. "Stand ready on transporter pads. This may get a little tricky."

"Aye Sir."

\*\*\*\*\*

On the bridge of Excelsior, the main view screen was full of small ships attacking the two large star ships. When Excelsior came around the planet, four more of the Theta class cruisers and ten more of the two man patrol ships had joined the fight.

Sulu and MacLean had a quick conference and changed from phasers only to a full attack on both ships and the base. The sheer numbers of the smallest ships made them hard to ignore. Their size made them extremely maneuverable however; Lt. Kim managed to score direct hits on several of them. Three of the eight cruisers were disabled with one on fire when the J class fighter finally lifted off the base launch pad.

The fighter's crew knew their ship. They flew at top speed between the two star ships. The ship did a continuous three hundred and sixty degree roll while firing all six phasers. Both Star ships fired phasers and scored hit, but they did not want to destroy their own ship unless necessary. The fighter circled and came back at them from a different direction.

"We can not get a coordinates lock for the transporter, Captain." Chekov called over the bridge battle noises. "We've got to slow her down."

"Suggestions?" Sulu asked as the fighter sped past again. Lt. Kim returned the fighter's phaser fire. As the fighter rolled, the phasers impacted on two separate shield sections. But the compact fighter absorbed the hits and stayed on course.

"Another direct hit to forward shields section alpha eight." Briscoe reported. "Shield strength holding at eighty nine percent."

"Fighter shields still relatively unaffected. Holding at ninety six percent." Kim said. "It's going to take a torpedo to slow him down."

"Sir." Mirek said to Chekov. "If we disrupt the space directly in front of the fighter, it could slow them down. Plasma or directed shock wave."

"Chekov?" Sulu asked.

"Maybe." Chekov turned to his station and started the computer working on the problem. He was speaking to himself as much as to Sulu. "If we alter the torpedo's war head. It would have to detonate close enough to the ship that they could not turn to avoid it. And if he is rolling the wrong way he will go right by it without any effect at all. And it will not stop him. At best it will only change their speed and course."

"Will it slow them enough to beam the team onto the fighter?" Sulu asked.

"Perhaps." Chekov said. "Give me a minute. Mirek, do a Davis-wave analysis on the forward shield composition."

"Standard?" Mirek asked. Chekov nodded. Lt. Mirek unconsciously steadied herself with one hand when a torpedo hit rocked the bridge, but her eyes never left her work.

"Theta cruisers coming in again." Lt. Kim warned.

"Torpedoes, Mr. Kim." Sulu turned back to the battle while Chekov and Mirek worked on the plan. "Fire."

"Direct hit on lead ship." Kim reported. "Her engines are off line. Life support failing."

"Shields?" Sulu asked.

"Gone." Kim reported. "She's drifting. The fighter is coming in to try and draw fire away from the damaged cruiser."

"Accommodate them, Mr. Kim. Phasers only." Sulu reminded him. He glanced at the science station as Chekov and Mirek compared results. "Fire."

"Chekov to all transporter rooms." The First Officer called on the comline. "Override and yield all controls to the bridge."

"Aye Sir." Lt. Hwang answered from transporter room three where Gonzoles and Smith waited with five security officers. "Transferring control to the bridge science station."

Chekov quickly covered the few steps to the command station. He did not wait for Sulu to ask. "We can do it. But there are some problems. The window of opportunity will be small. I will not be able to obtain transporter lock on more than one location on the fighter. A simultaneous beam in is not possible."

"But you will be able to locate the bridge." Sulu said.

"Yes." Chekov nodded. "But it is a small area. I hesitate to beam in more than four or five people. We have to consider that the fighter crew may not stay at their stations during transport."

Captain Sulu met Chekov's eyes. Even though he was fairly sure of the answer, he asked. "And if one of our crew is materializing while one of their crew is moving through the beam in coordinates?"

"Two deaths." Chekov said. "No way to avoid it."

Sulu opened the senior officer comline. "Sulu to Commander Gonzoles."

"Gonzoles here."

"There is a hitch, Rosita." Sulu now ignored the battle. "The simultaneous beam in is out. We can only send four of you at a time. We will disrupt the space in the fighter's path to slow it down. That will give them a rough ride and make the transport dangerous. There are no

guarantees."

"Understood Captain. I will call for volunteers." Gonzales said. After a couple of seconds, she added. "We're ready, Sir."

"Top priority is to stop the ship so that we can beam in the rest of the security team." Sulu said. "You will be materializing on the bridge."

"Aye Sir."

"Stand by." Sulu said. He closed the comline and looked at Chekov. "Do it."