

Wednesday
September 8th, 2028
18:56 hours (PST)

“And you're sure about this?” Admiral Cruger asked him.

Commander Tate sat at his desk, staring across from a holographic representation of the admiral. In light of new circumstances, he needed to confer with the admiral, but the admiral couldn't drop what he was doing and come running from the Theta quadrant every time something happened on Earth.

“The only thing I'm sure of is that we have a chance to end this war before it even begins. You said yourself, a Vorhsoth ship is on its way here. What do your long range probes say about its compliment of weapons?” he replied.

“It is an amalgam of some of the most sophisticated weaponry I have ever seen. Nothing we have holds a candle to their ship,” he paused for a moment. “And according to telemetry, there are at least half a dozen ships in route to Terran space. On their present course they will reach Earth in approximately five months,” he explained.

Commander Tate sighed. “In light of this information, it makes this course of action our best course of action.”

Admiral Cruger didn't say a word, but he didn't have to. Even as a holographic projection, Commander Tate had seen that look on his face many times before. He knew the admiral was struggling with this.

“I will need to consult Admiral BeLue and the high council in this matter. In the meantime, you are the commander of our Earth branch. You must do as you see fit, but be prepared to accept the repercussions of your decisions,” he informed him.

“Of course, sir.”

A light began to flash on Commander Tate's desk. “*Sir, Dr. Mitchell is here to see you,*” a voice said.

“Excuse me, admiral,” he pressed a button on his desk. “Tell her to wait a moment,” he answered.

“*Yes, sir. I also have a communication for you from the Challenger shuttle.*”

"I can see you have your hands full, Commander. I will leave you to it," the admiral said, and seconds later, the hologram of Admiral Cruger faded away.

Commander Tate sighed. "Send in the doctor and patch me through to the communication," he said.

"Right away, sir," Gabbi responded.

The doors to his office slid open, and Dr. Mitchell stormed in.

"You can't be serious..." she started, but he held up his hand, urging her to wait. A light flashed on his desk, and the commander pressed a button.

"Commander Tate. This is Lt. Commander Ford on board the Challenger," a voice said from the companel.

"Report, Lt. Commander."

"We were unable to find Udonna, but we have one of the mystic rangers on board. We will return to the station in approximately 15 minutes."

"Well done. Have them report straight to the infirmary when you arrive. I will have Lt. James meet you there," he said.

"Understood, sir."

The Commander closed the channel, then turned to the doctor. "Now, what can I do for you doctor?" he asked.

"I've read your report, and there is no way I can carry out those orders," she told him.

"You have to. Do you understand what's at stake here?"

"I know exactly what's at stake. I keep hearing about this war that's suppose to be coming, but what you're asking me to do is unethical. I swore an oath to do no harm, and I will not," she insisted.

"That's hypocritical of you, isn't it doctor?" he stood up, walking around to the other side of his desk. "When you were in Lightspeed Rescue, how many demons did you and your team destroy?" he asked.

"That was different."

“Rangers of your time like to hide behind that, don't they? You say *destroyed* rather than say *kill*, but that's what you did. You killed Queen Bansheera and countless hundreds of her race. You committed genocide to save your city. We're not talking about a city here, Dana. We're talking about the human race. All of us,” he explained. “The Vorhsoth are on their way here, and I promise you they aren't having a meeting about ethics on the way.”

“What you have locked up down there is a child. According to preliminary scans, about twelve Earth years old.”

“It's a Vorhsoth child.”

“It is a child nonetheless. He has done nothing to us. And I will not let you condemn this creature for crimes he had nothing to do with,” she insisted.

“It's a creature, no more intelligent than a lab rat or one of the test subjects in your lab. Perform the experiments, or I will find someone who will,” Commander Tate ordered.

Dr. Mitchell removed her lap coat, dropping it at his feet. “Then consider this my resignation. Not only will I not be a party to this, I intend to take my grievances to the high council myself. What you're doing is wrong, and I *will* put a stop to this,” she said as tears formed in her eyes, then turned and walked out of the office.

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KJ and Ensign Crane escorted Madison to the infirmary, where Lt. James was waiting for them.

“Hello Asia,” he said.

“I heard about your promotion. Congratulations, sir. C-Squad, huh? Nice.”

“Thank you. This is my counselor, Ensign Mya Crane, and this is Madison, the blue mystic force ranger,” he introduced.

“Ensign,” she nodded, then turned to Madison. “Thank you for coming. I hope you can do something for our guest here,” she said.

“I will do my best,” she glanced behind them, getting a good look at the former Phantom Ranger. “Is this our guy?”

Asia stepped aside. “Yes. Even since giving up the red energem, he's been like this,” she said.

"I'll leave the big brains to figure out what's going on. Just contact me when you're finished here and I will see that Madison is taken safely home," KJ said, motioning for Ensign Crane to follow them.

The two of them stepped out of the room, and the doors slid closed behind them.

Madison walked over to the man on the examining table, placing her hand on his forehead.

"Hes warm," she noticed.

"I can't explain it. Typically someone in this condition shouldn't have such a high temperature, but its still within normal parameters," she said.

"And you say he had an energem?" she asked her.

"Yes, he had it for decades, but gave it up to save the life of an officer to risked everything to save us," Asia said.

"An energem bonds with its host not just on a physical level, but a *spiritual* one. One cannot simply give up an energem," she said.

"No offense, but I don't believe in the spiritual. I rely on science," she said.

"But your science cannot account for this. Where is the officer who has the gem now?" she asked.

"Hes here on the station."

"And the gem has bonded with him?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Then I know what the problem is. Both of these men are in grave danger," Madison warned.

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Commander Tate entered the corridor in the containment area, where Lt. Commander Serenity was waiting. She'd been standing there, staring at the creature for hours.

She watched as it regained consciousness, and wandered around the cell in an attempt to escape. It had tried several times to lunge at Serenity, only to be stopped by the force field. Every time it tried, it was knocked back, and howled out in pain.

It hadn't tried in over an hour. Instead, it simply sat there. If it had eyes, she would have sworn it was staring at her.

Sir," she said.

"Any change?"

"No, sir. It's just sitting there. Where is Dr. Mitchell?" she inquired.

"She... she resigned. She refused to perform the procedures. She has ethical objections," he said.

"What?" she turned to him. "This thing is a *thing*. What is she worried about?"

"She is under the impression that this creature, this *child*, has committed no crimes against SPD or the human race. She refuses to harm an innocent," he hesitated for a moment. "She makes a strong case," he told her.

"Case? Are you serious? The Vorhsoth are a force of nature. You don't argue with the oncoming storm, you avoid it. The Vorhsoth *are* coming, Sky, and they will rain down destruction on this planet. You can wrestle with your conscious all you want, but if cutting this *thing* open saves lives I'm all for it," Serenity explained.

"It hasn't done anything."

"It hasn't? Where are Bridge and Z? We found their morphers on that shuttle, but no bodies. For all you know this thing ate them, or worse, added two more soldiers to their army. This thing is far from innocent, and unless you want everyone on this planet... everyone in this quadrant to end up like Bridge, we will cut this thing open and learn what we can," she insisted.

Sky took a step back. "Nothing we have learned about the Vorhsoth indicates that they *eat* people, Serenity," he said.

"Okay, so we don't know everything about the Vorhsoth. This is our chance to learn."

"By your own admission we don't know everything about them. We could be wrong about them," he pointed out.

Serenity's face turned a flush red from anger. "I watched as these things tore through every person on this station in a matter of minutes. They ripped Syd to shreds and didn't give it a second thought. Is that what you want for your unborn child, Sky? You want you son to be ripped apart because you feel bad for this thing? EVERYONE I knew was not only killed, but they were changed. You sent me here to stop it and now..." she was interrupted.

"That is the last time you will mention my child to me, is that clear?"

"No it's not clear. I'm the only one thinking clearly here. This is a thing, a wild animal. It has no concept of good or evil, right or wrong. It has one function, kill. If tearing this thing open and learning what we can will help us, then I say..."

Just then, Serenity stopped all at once. The creature was standing up straight, and if not for the force field between them, would have been close enough to reach out and touch her.

"Help."

Commander Tate and Serenity looked at one another, then back at the creature.

"Did it just..." he allowed his sentence to trail off purposely.

"It... it's mimicking us. It heard me say a word and repeated it back to me," Serenity speculated.

"Lt. Commander..." he paused, trying to gather his thoughts. "I think we need to consult an expert on this."

"We have an expert on this?" she asked.

He nodded. "As a matter of fact, we do," Commander Tate said.

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"Whats going on, Lieutenant? Your message sounded urgent," Lt. Commander Martin said as he stepped into the infirmary, heading over to Asia.

"Nik, this is Madison Rocca, she is..." Asia was interrupted.

"The blue mystic force ranger. It is an honor to meet you," he said, extending his hand to her.

Madison shook his hand shyly. "Thank you,"

“We had Madison come to help us figure out what was wrong with our guest here. She thinks she has it figured out.”

“The red energem is more mystic energy than anything else. The gem chooses who it bonds with, and that bond is for life. Its former user gave the gem to you to save your life. It sensed your good heart and chose to bond with you, but its bond with its previous host had not been broken. It is now bonded to both of you, but there is not enough energy to sustain both of you. It is only a matter of time before you also fall into a coma, and neither of you will ever wake up,” she explained.

“So what do we do?”

“I will perform the bonding ritual. It will then combine the energies it is trying to divide between the two of you,” she said.

“But what happens then? What about the gem?”

“The two of you will be bonded, forever. Your lives as individuals will go on, but you will be required to bond regularly to maintain the connection.”

“Whoa, hold on. How exactly do me and this guy *bond*? You mean like watch the game and have a few beers? Or do you mean *bond bond*?” Nik asked.

“Nothing so primitive. The gem will allow you to live normal lives. But in order to use the gem to morph, it will require the two of you,” she said.

“What's the alternative? I mean, if giving up the gem means I'm stuck in a wheelchair and this guy lives, I'm all for it,” he said

“The alternative will leave both of you in a coma, where you will remain for eternity,” she said.

“An immortal vegetable,” Asia chimed in.