

Friday
September 1st, 2028
08:13 hours (PST)

"The Astro Omega Ship is in the shipyard. I want the two of you to head over there and take a look at the transwarp drive. It currently will not go past transwarp 4. Its designed to do triple that," Commander Tate said.

"I'm no engineer, sir. I don't know how much help I'll be," Asia mentioned.

"Ensign Carson has an understanding of transwarp drives, at least that's what his SPD admissions forms said. And with your... *unique* way of seeing things, that implant of yours may pick up a defect our engineers missed," he explained.

"Yes, sir."

"And me, sir?" Pascal asked, awaiting an assignment.

"Lieutenant, you have the day off. Study, train, head over the Sim-U-Deck. Whatever you like, but you are officially off duty," he said.

"Aye, sir," Pascal said in a confused tone.

"That is all, dismissed," he said.

One by one, they stood up, exiting the briefing room, except for Pascal, who remained behind.

"I can't believe the nerve of that guy. It's bad enough that they make me an ensign, then they relegate me to babysit alien frogs? They don't know how to walk from the shuttle bay to the infirmary without someone holding their hands? I know the Anurians have smaller brains, but they aren't *that* stupid," KJ complained as the four of them walked.

Ella could feel the anger washing over him, the frustration, but she also noticed that his statement made Serenity angry as well.

"At attention, Ensign," she said plainly, but with conviction in her voice.

All of them stopped, but KJ reluctantly stood at attention. "Sir?"

"You have a problem with your orders? Take it command, but it is inappropriate for you to air your grievances in public. I will not have any member of my team behaving so... so immaturely," she told him.

“Immaturely? I was a fourth year cadet before Commander Tate decided to try a kinder, gentler SPD. I am well versed in quantum mechanics, weapons trainings, combat simulation, first contact negotiation and deep space tactical missions. I should not be escorting anyone around the base like some glorified waiter,” he snapped.

Serenity took a step closer to him. “Ensign, did it ever occur to you that tensions between the Anurian people and SPD are rocky because the Anurians backed out of the Interplanetary treaties? Maybe the commander felt he needed someone who was well versed in first contact negotiation to smooth things over when they arrive,” she pointed out.

“I... I didn't think of that,” he sighed.

“That's your problem, KJ. You don't think. You feel, then you act. I don't know how you managed to last in SPD as a cadet for 4 years with that attitude, but I promise you there will be no place on my team for someone with that sort of behavior,” Serenity informed him.

“*Your* team?” he scoffed.

“That's right, my team. I am in command of D Squad, and unless you want an official letter of reprimand in your file and a suspension for insubordination, I suggest you follow orders and keep your opinions to yourself. A team is only as strong as its weakest link, and I refuse to have you drag down this team. Am I clear?”

“Yeah.”

Serenity tilted her head slightly. “Excuse me?”

KJ stood at attention. “Yes, sir,” he said, then turned to walk away.

“You were not dismissed, ensign,” she pointed out.

KJ, who had already taken several steps forward, stopped and turned around to face her again. “May I be dismissed, sir?” he asked.

“Dismissed, ensign,” she said coldly.

KJ rolled his eyes and walked away, refusing to look back. As he turned a corner, Serenity let out a sigh of frustration. “What am I going to do with that guy? Hes impossible,” she groaned.

“The same way he has to get use to orders he doesn't act, you, as the leader, have to get use to the fact that not every officer under your command is going to be your friend. You're not always going to agree, but we're a team for a reason,” Asia mentioned to her.

The three of them resumed walking down the corridor.

“You always were smart,” Serenity signed to herself.

“Sir?” she inquired, unsure how to respond to that statement.

Serenity immediately realized her error, and did her best to cover it up. “I just mean you’re smart, you’re the heart of this team. I’m going to need you to keep me on my toes, and don’t be afraid to tell me if I screw up,” she said.

“I won’t, sir. You have my word.”

“Good,” they stopped at the lift at the end of the hall. “This is our stop. Good luck on your assignment, Lieutenant,” Serenity said.

“You, too, sir,” Asia said, turning and going down another hallway on her way to the infirmary.

The doors to the lift opened, and Serenity and Ella stepped inside. Ella walked over to a small panel near the door, pushing a button. “Vehicle requisition,” she announced. The lift beeped slightly, acknowledging her request, then began to move.

The two of them remained quiet on the lift as they headed to their destination. Ella didn’t need any sort of special power to know that there was a lot on Serenity’s mind, it was obvious from the look on her face. At first glance, it looked as though she hadn’t been sleeping well, if she had slept at all. She wondered what the problem could be, and just as importantly, what she could do to help.

Finally, the lift stopped at their destination, and the doors slid open, allowing them to step off. The loading bay was filled with various vehicles, each of them parking alongside the walls. At the end of the room was a small window, and the two of them walked over to it.

“So what kind of car are we getting? Can we motorcycles? Ooooh, or maybe jetpacks? I want a jetpack,” Ella said eagerly, breaking the silence between them.

Serenity tried not to smile, but couldn’t help it. “They don’t have jetpacks,” she informed her.

“What about hoverboards? I saw a movie once that said they had hoverboards in 2015, so they have to have them now, right?”

“You don’t believe everything you see on TV, ensign,” she said.

Just then, it was DeVika who approached the opposite side of the window, staring at the two of them. She immediately noticed the insignia on Serenity's uniform was that of Lt. Commander, and stood at attention.

"What can I do for you, sir?" she asked.

"We're headed over to the warehouse district and we need vehicles and standard issue phaser pistols. What do you suggest?" Serenity asked her.

"The jeep is pretty standard issue, sir. But if you're in a rush, we do have two hover cycles available," she said.

Ella's face lit up with excitement.

"Fine," she sighed. "We'll take the hover cycles," she said.

DeVika nodded, presenting them with a small thumb scanner pad. "Place your right thumbs on the pads for verification and authentication. Once the vehicle is assigned to you, it will only respond to your thumb print," she told them. "You'll find that the pistol is the same."

Both Serenity and Ella placed their right thumbs on the thumb pads, and they beeped, indicating they were processing. Finally, when it was complete, the pad itself turned green.

"Commander, cycle 14 is yours. Ensign, cycle 19 is yours. They are parked on their appropriate spots. Good luck," DeVika said, turning and walking away.

They headed over to the appropriate locations for their vehicles, but when they arrived, Ella found herself a bit disappointed. "Aw man, how come you got the pink one? Pink is my favorite color. Trade me," she said.

"Weren't you listening? They are assigned to us by thumb prints. I can't trade," Serenity told her.

Ella sighed. "Fine, but next I want to pick," she climbed on, placing her thumb on the scanner in front of her, and the hover cycle hummed to life, lifting a few inches off the ground. "Oooh, nice stereo," she noticed.

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KJ stood at attention in the shuttle bay, waiting for the arrival of the Anurian ship. As usual, the bay was filled with personnel going about their normal routines. Nothing had changed at SPD in that regard. *So why do I feel like everything is different*, he wondered. He joined SPD when

Commander Tate was still a cadet, and after four long years of building his way through the ranks of SPD, as soon as he was at a point where he would be graduating to being a full officer, the ranking system changed. In a way, he knew he should be happy with the rank given to him. Even if things hadn't changed, he still wouldn't have had the rank of ensign. He would have simply been known as officer, so in a way this was good thing for him. *So what's the problem,* he wondered.

It didn't take him long to figure it out. The problem was that there were first year cadets who had just stepped foot in SPD who had been given ranks higher than him. *How is that fair,* he asked himself. He had nothing against the rest of his team, but after four long years he expected to be in command of the team, not one of its lowest ranking members. He'd watched as Commander Tate went from ordinary cadet, to blue ranger, to red ranger, and then to commander of the entire station in four years. Yet there he was, after putting in the same amount of time, energy and effort, and he was merely an ensign.

I'll show them. I'll show them they made a mistake. In a year, I'll be running this place, he thought to himself.

His thoughts were interrupted as the shuttle bay doors opened, and a small craft began its landing procedures. From the size, shape and composition, he knew not only was it an Anurian vessel, but it was a vessel reserved for the diplomatic elite among their people. The shuttle touched down, and the doors hissed open, allowing two Anurians to step off the shuttle. At first glance, they appeared to be the security forces assigned to the citadel members. Each of them had a phaser rifle on their back and were in full military gear. They quickly surveyed the area, nodded at each other, then turned back towards the shuttle.

"It safe. You come out now," one of them announced.

Two more Anurians stepped off the shuttle, and it was obvious that the two of them were important in some way. They wore one piece suits that covered their entire body, with the exception of their feet, hands and heads. There was gold trim along the uniforms, and a series of medals pinned to their chests.

KJ took a deep breath, walking towards the two of them. "Good morning, welcome to SPD headquarters. I am Ensign Ford, and I am here to escort you to the infirmary," he said as cheerfully as he could. Of course there was some anger, maybe even a bit of resentment, but he made sure that it wasn't obvious. "I apologize for the confusion, but SPD has a strict no weapons policy on base. I'm afraid your security detail will have to leave their weapons behind on the shuttle," he informed them.

The oldest Anurian, the one with the most medals on his chest, let out what KJ was sure was a laugh. "Kull go nowhere without *armed* security," he told him.

"I understand, sir, but policy is policy. I cannot allow weapons onto the base," he repeated, this time a little firmer.

"You not talk to Kull like that. Kull is Citadel member. You respect Kull," he demanded.

"With all due respect, sir, I am only quoting policy. If you have issue with it, please feel free to take it up with my commanding officer, but I regret to inform you that this is as far as those rifles are allowed to come," KJ said.

"Kull not stand for this. Kull will..."

It was the female Anurian who placed her hand on Kull's chest, calming him. "Kull and Forn understand. No rifles," she said softly.

Kull snatched away from her. "Kull no understand. Kull demand..." he was interrupted again.

"Kull on Earth. Kull follow Earth rules."

He let out a sound that resembled a sigh of frustration, but there was no way to be sure from KJ's perspective. "Kull agree. No rifles. Guards leave. Kull and Forn no need," he ordered.

The guards nodded, removing their rifles and leaving them inside the shuttle.

"Thank you. I will escort you to the infirmary so you can see your son. I'm sure he will be happy to see the two of you," KJ said, motioning for them to follow.

"Human lead. Kull and Forn follow," he agreed.

KJ led them through out of the shuttle bay and through the corridors. Any personnel who were in the corridors saw them coming and completely moved aside, allowing them to pass. Everyone knew that the situation with the Anurians was still very delicate, and the last thing they wanted to do was be responsible for any incidents.

They arrived at the infirmary a few moments later, where the doctor was waiting for them.

"Welcome, ambassadors. I am Dr. Mitchell. Thank you for coming so quickly," she said cheerfully, approaching them.

"Where is Garr?" Kull asked dryly.

"Your son is resting. He is in and out of consciousness, but stable. I would like to begin the blood transfusion as quickly as possible. The sooner we get started, the sooner he will recover," she said.

“Take Forn to Garr now,” Forn ordered.

“Well, my job is done here. If you’ll excuse me,” KJ said, preparing to back out of the infirmary.

“Not so fast, ensign. We may need you. Stay,” Dr. Mitchell said.

“Aye, sir.”

“If you would come with me, ambassadors,” she said, motioning for them to follow.

The doctor led Kull and Forn, along with their guards, to the back of the infirmary where Garr was resting. The guards remained outside the door as if they were standing guard, allowing Kull and Forn to go in alone. They stepped in, looking down at Garr, who was still unconscious.

“Garr. Forn is here. Wake, Garr. Wake,” she said softly, reaching out and touching his hand, but there was no response.

“Which one of you will be giving blood?” Dr. Mitchell asked.

“Forn will give. Kull will not,” he answered.

“Very well,” she turned to Forn. “Ambassador, if you’ll come with me. We’ll prep you for the transfusion,” she said.

Forn nodded, following the doctor into another room, leaving Kull in the room. KJ simply stood in a corner, realizing that there was not much for him to do, but wanted to be there just in case. Kull reached down, placing his hand on his son’s hand.

“Garr great warrior. Garr will rise,” he said proudly.

Garr’s hand opened slightly, and a rosary slipped from his grip and fell to the floor. Curious, Kull reached down, picking it up with two fingers and taking a look at it. He turned to KJ, holding it up.

“What this?”

“I believe it is a rosary, sir. It’s a symbol of religious faith. One of Garr’s team members were here praying for him earlier,” KJ told him.

“Prey? Garr is no prey. Garr is warrior,” he said boldly.

“No, sir. Not prey, *pray*. Pray in the sense that he gave Garr warm wishes in his desire for him to get better. They are friends,” he said.

“Kull think stupid,” he dismissed, throwing the rosary across the room. It hit the wall on the opposite side of the infirmary, sliding to the floor.

KJ was by no means a religious person, but he respected that other people had their own beliefs. So to see Kull, who, from the moment they met had been demanding respect be so disrespectful towards someone who only wanted to wish Garr well, annoyed him. Instead of taking it to heart, he realized that it was more beneficial to simply let it go and allow them to do what they could to get Garr the help he needed.

“Ensign,” the doctor called from the other room. “Your assistance?”

KJ turned, walking into the next room, where the doctor had Full on a rolling infirmary cot and covered in a sheet. There was an IV in her arm, and a small machine behind them.

“Help me roll her into the next room. I can’t push her and the equipment,” Dr. Mitchell said.

KJ nodded, taking the lead and grabbing hold of the bed, pulling it into the next room. The doctor carefully followed with the equipment. They stopped Forn directly next to Garr, locking the wheels in place so the cot wouldn’t move.

“Is there anything else you need, doctor?” KJ asked.

“Not at the moment, but stand by. You never know,” she said.

KJ reluctantly nodded, returning to the corner he was standing in and stood at attention.