

Wednesday  
September 8th, 2028  
13:00 hours (PST)

Ensign KJ Ford walked down the long corridor on his way to Commander Tate's office, unsure of why he had been summoned. He'd only been issued a clean bill of health by Dr. Mitchel less than thirty minutes prior, and while he was eager to return to work, it seemed odd to him that he wasn't asked to be part of the morning briefing with the other members of D-Squad.

He stood outside the office door, taking a deep breath, then pressed the door chime to announce his presence.

"Enter," a voice said from the other side of the door.

The doors parted, and KJ stepped in, standing in front of the Commander's desk, saluting him.

"Ensign KJ Ford reporting as ordered I, sir," he said.

"At ease," KJ loosened up a bit, but remained standing. "Have you had the opportunity to meet Lt. Commander Martin yet, ensign?" he asked.

"No, sir. Not yet."

"Admiral Cruger and I recently transferred him to C-Squad. He is currently serving as Serenity's first officer," he said.

"I see, sir," he said with a slightly disappointed tone in his voice.

With a new member on D-Squad, it stood to reason that someone would have to be removed from the team. Squads usually consisted of five officers, or in some cases, six, but with the inclusion of Lt. Commander Martin, D-Squad was up to eight members including him. *Looks like I'm about to get pulled off the team*, he thought to himself, though he couldn't imagine why.

While he had been a bit down on himself for being taken prisoner by the CaAn, no one on SPD seemed to be upset with him. In fact, the commanding officers had gone out of their way to express how pleased they were with his efforts.

Yet, there he was, about to be pulled away from his team. He hadn't been the most personable officer with his teammates, but he was trying, and he had been looking forward to reconnecting with them and getting to know them better.

"I have assigned them to the Astro Omega Ship on a full time basis, and i have them dealing with some very *sensitive* information. With them otherwise occupied, I am sending you on an important mission," he said.

While he was disappointed, mostly because whatever they were doing was referred to as *sensitive information*, which implied he wasn't going to be briefed on their mission, he was hopeful about the mission he was being assigned. While his last mission didn't go exactly as he planned, he had still developed the reputation for being dependable when called upon.

"Whatever you need, sir," he assured him.

"You've been in the infirmary the last few days, so you no doubt have had some questions about the former Phantom Ranger," he brought up.

"Yes, sir. A few."

"Lt. Commander Martin was seriously injured during the last mission, as you know, but the Phantom Ranger relinquished the red energem to save him. The problem is, while our guest has a clean bill of health, he is in a coma-like state. There is no medical reason for it, which leads us to believe there is a *mystic* answer to this problem," he explained.

"I'm afraid i do not follow you, sir."

"I am sending you to retrieve a legendary mystic. She was responsible for training the Mystic Force rangers and supplying them with their ranger powers. Her name is Udonna, and we believe she may be able to snap him out of his condition."

"Understood, sir."

"I am assigning you shuttlecraft *Challenger*. It has long range capabilities and should serve you well for this mission. You are yo retrieve Udonna, bring her yo SPD so she can do what she can for our guest," he told him.

"Understood, sir. But where am I going?" he inquired.

"To a small town called Briarwood, about 70 miles west of here. Our intel suggests that Udonna lives in... in a tree in the forest nearby," he said.

"A tree, sir?"

"I know how it sounds, but reports claim that the forest has mystical properties. Intel says that at least two of the former mystic rangers still live in the area. It will be your job to find them, and have them escort you to a place called Rootcore. Udonna will be there, and you are authorized

to offer her anything within reason to accompany you back to SPD to assist our guest," he ordered.

"I will do my best, sir," he paused. "I understand that the D-Squad have other duties, but may I be allowed to have Chief Martin accompany me? He may prove to be beneficial to my..." he was interrupted.

"Negative. The chief has been assigned to something else, but i will not send you alone on this mission. Report to the shuttle bay at 1400 hours and meet the C-Squad there. They will join you for this mission," he said.

While *technically* moving to C-Squad was a step up, KJ wasn't thrilled about the idea of following orders from a complete stranger. He'd grown to trust Serenity, and he had mutual respect for the other members of D-Squad, but now it was back to square one with an entirely new team. He wasn't the most social person, so endearing himself to a new team was not what he wanted to do.

"Yes, sir. I see, sir," he said, hoping his less than enthusiastic tone wasn't noticeable.

"Before you go," he stood up. "I'm going to need your insignia," he said, extending his hand to him.

*Well this is just great, he thought to himself. It's bad enough I'm getting stuck with a team full of unknowns, I'm getting demoted? What's lower than ensign? Crewman? he wondered. Well, at least I still have the shadow morpher, unless he plans to take that from me, too.*

KJ begrudgingly removed his insignia from his uniform, handing it to the commander. Commander Tate simply tossed it in a drawer, but then reached inside pulling out another.

"KJ Ford, by the power vested in me by Admiral Cruger and the SPD council, I hereby promote you to the rank of Lt. Commander," Commander Tate announced.

KJs posture changed completely. "Sir?"

"You were right; you needed an opportunity to show us what you could do, and you did. Even when we made it clear there was nothing in it for you, you rose to the occasion. This has been a long time coming, KJ. Congratulations," he said proudly.

KJ placed the new insignia on his uniform, then shook the commander's hand firmly.

"Thank you, sir," he said, overcome with pride.

"You earned this, son. Great work. Now report to the shuttle bay. Your team is waiting for you," he said.

"Yes, sir," KJ said proudly, saluting the commander, then turned to walk out the room.

He walked down the corridor on his way to the shuttle bay, but was stopped by Gabbi, the Commander's receptionist.

"Congrats Lt. Commander. We knew you had it in you," she said cheerfully.

Gabbi was probably the most underrated and underappreciated member of SPD. She was responsible for all the logistical operations of SPD. On a daily basis, she went through the mission logs of *every* officer on assignment in SPD, organized and filed said logs, yet still had time to run errands for the commander.

She was as much in the loop of all the goings on in SPD as the admirals were.

"Thank you," he said.

"Good luck out there," she said with a smile.

KJ simply nodded, walking away.

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Lt. Commander Ford stepped into the shuttle bay, where there were four officers standing in formation near the shuttlecraft *Challenger*. As he approached, they all stood at attention.

"Sir!" one of them said, speaking for the group.

"At ease," he said. The entire group loosened up a bit, but remained in formation. "I am Lt. Commander Ford, and by order of Commander Tate, I hereby assume command of C-Squad," he announced.

"Yes, sir," they said in unison.

"I admit that I am not familiar with any of you. How about you each tell me your name, rank and function on this squad?" he suggested.

The first officer took a step forward. KJ quickly noticed that he was a human male, average build with short red hair. "I am Lt. Derrick Herrington, sir. I have a year of pilot experience and I am majoring in astrophysics," he said proudly.

"Good to meet you, Lt. Herrington," he said warmly.

"Thank you, sir," he said, taking a step back and falling back into formation.

It was a young woman who stepped forward next. She, too, appeared to be completely human with a honey brown complexion. "I am Dr. Elaina Rheas, sir," she said.

"No rank, doctor?"

"No official rank in SPD, sir, but i am a certified physician and I dabble in science," she told him.

"I look forward to serving with you, doctor," KJ said.

"And I, you," she replied, stepping back.

Next to step up was the shorted member of the team, a few inches shy of five feet tall, but had long flowing golden hair, almond shaped eyes a warm sun kissed complexion.

"I am Ensign Mya Crane, sir. I am a certified counselor and helmsmen," she said.

"I'm sorry, but i do not recognize your race, ensign," he brought up.

"I am an Allurian from Devron IV, sir," she said.

"Isn't your race known for having..." he had to stop himself from saying the wrong thing. Devron IV was known throughout the quadrant as the *pleasure planet*. The women of that planet had ways of sensing your innermost desires, then fulfilling them. They secreted pheromones that lulled men into submission. *Makes sense she would be a counselor*, he thought. "... you have a certain way with men," he mentioned.

"Not just men, sir. All genders, all species. I can be very persuasive," she said in a tone that he was convinced that she was flirting with him.

"It's going to be interesting serving with you, ensign," he said.

"I hope so, sir."

The last officer stepped forward. "I'm Lt. David Oliver, sir. I am chief of security," he said.

KJ paused. "Oliver? I've heard that name before. Are you any relation to Dr. Thomas Oliver from Angel Grove?" he asked.

"He was my grandfather, sir."

"Was?"

"He passed away three years ago," he told him.

"Sorry for your loss. Tommy Oliver is a legend and an icon. It will be an honor to serve with you," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

"I assumed you have a been briefed on our mission," KJ brought up.

"Yes, sir," Dr. Rheas said.

"Good. Lt. Herrington, you have the helm. Once we are on board, set a course for Briarwood and proceed at transwarp 2," he ordered.

"Sir, the Challenger does not a transwarp drive. Shall I proceed at the highest possible velocity?" he asked.

"I suppose that will have to do," he turned to David. "Dr. Rheas will more than likely head up our sick bay, and with Mya on sensors you will be my first officer," he said.

"Yes, sir. And please, call me Ollie," he requested.

KJ nodded. "Ollie it is. Let's get moving," he said, heading towards the shuttle.

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KJ couldn't help but silently compare the Challenger the the Astro Omega Ship, even though he knew it was an unfair comparison. The Challenger was simply a shuttle. *We could fit a dozen of these shuttles in the Omega Ships bay*, he thought to himself.

This was his first time in command, in *actual* command, and he was determined to make the best of it.

“Sir, we will arrive in Briarwood in approximately four minutes,” Lt. Herrington announced. “Will we all be going on this away mission?”

KJ shook his head. “Negative. Ollie and Ensign Crane will head into town and attempt to track down the Mystic Force rangers. I want you here giving me a detailed scan of the forest. Reports say the forest has mystical properties, but I'm sure we should be able to track down Rootcore,” KJ explained.

“Aye, sir,” Ollie stood up. “Mya, you're with me,” he said.

Mya stood up, following him to the lift.

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“This is going to be like finding needles that don't want to be found in a haystack,” Mya sighed as they walked through the city.

“What do you mean?”

“Most ranger teams concealed their identities from the public. It isn't as though they are just going to reveal themselves because a couple of officers from SPD started snooping around,” she said.

“You don't know your Earth history, do you ensign? The city of Briarwood actually assisted the rangers in defeating the darkness. Their identities are not only public knowledge, they are treated as heroes in the city. They will not be hard to find,” he assured her.

“Sorry, sir.”

“Don't worry about it,” they stopped in front of a record shop. “According to the history logs, the rangers use to work here. I'm willing to bet we'll find what we need here,” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

They stepped in, getting a look around. While the store wasn't overly busy, they did note that there seemed to be more employees than customers. Ollie wondered how they afforded something like that, but it was pertinent to the mission.

A young woman approached them with a smile on her face. “Welcome to the Rockporium. How can I help you?” she asked cheerfully.

“Ma’am, we are here on official SPD business. We have a situation that requires the aid of the Mystic rangers. Do you know where we might find them?” Ollie inquired.

The woman's smile faded slightly. “The rangers have not been in action in years. Everyone in Briarwood lives in peace,” she said.

“The city is in no direct danger, but a former ranger is laying in our infirmary in a coma. He had...” he stopped as he caught himself about to reveal sensitive information. “If we are going to save the man's life, it is imperative we find a mystic ranger,” he said.

The young woman looked around, then pulled the two of them to the side.

“It's not exactly the kind of thing we do anymore,” she said softly. “We don't even have our morphers anymore.”

“You're a...”

She nodded. “Yes. My name is Madison, but I try to leave that part of my life behind me.”

“We do not require you to take up arms. A former ranger is in a coma that we believe has mystical properties. All we want is to find a sorceress named Udonna to come back to SPD with us and see if he can be helped,” Mya mentioned.

“None of us has seen Udonna in... almost 20 years now. She left Briarwood with her husband and son, and they never came back,” Madison told them.

Ollie stepped forward. “Would you be willing to assist us?”

“I... I don't know. I probably...” she was interrupted.

“Believe me when I tell you i know what it's like to want to leave your past behind you. Even after his passing I have not been able to escape the shadow of my grandfather's legacy, but the man we're trying to save is a hero. Please, all we asl is that you take a look at him and see if you can help. From there, we will leave and never return,” Ollie promised.

Madison sighed. “Fine. I can give you two hours tops, then I'm leaving. But i promise i will do my best to help your friend,” she said.

“Thank you.”