

Monday
September 5th, 2028
08:00 hours (PST)

The entire team, on the order of Commander Tate, assembled in the main control center awaiting a briefing. It was the first time since they returned from Temere space that the entire team was together, and there still seemed to be tension between them.

Over the last few days, Serenity had tried several times to reach out to Asia, to have a conversation with her, but Asia had been less than receptive to her. *I guess telling her was too much*, she thought to herself, but also knew that she had no control over telling her or not. The truth was, everything was out, the damage had been done, and now Serenity had to live with the fact that her mother was upset with her.

The doors to the center slid open, and it was Dr. Manx who walked into the room with a clipboard in hand. "Good morning, D-Squad," she said politely.

"Sir!" they said in unison.

"Ensign Ford has been on his mission for over 96 hour now. Considering your unique circumstances, I understand that all of you are aware of his mission and just how important it is. Ensign Ford was suppose to check in every 12 hours to update us on his progress, and his transmissions would be sent via the long range probes SPD have in orbit above almost every planet in this sector. Even on a delay, we should be receiving his logs, but he hasn't checked in in almost 36 hours. We fear something may have happened to him," she explained.

"Say no more, doc. Alright team, let's head to the Astro Omega Ship and..." Serenity was immediately cut short.

"Belay that order, Lt. Commander. You can't just go to J'sarri space. There are precautions that need to be taken. You'll all have to report to the infirmary and receive inoculations to shield you from the dangers of that region of space. The Omega Ship is designed with a reinforced deuterium hull and will shield you from anything too harmful, but any longer than 36 hours in that region of space and the hull will begin to break down. You'll have to get in there, find out what you can and get out. If for any reason the ship becomes too damaged, abandon it and retreat back to Terran space in the shuttles," she explained.

"Understood."

"Your destination will be Emberiian, it is the 3rd planet in the system. It is the last known coordinates of not only the Phantom Ranger, but the B-Squad," she said.

“Once we find them, what are our orders?” Serenity asked.

“Your goal is to find the red energem, which powers the Phantom Ranger’s armor. It is your only priority,” she said.

“What about KJ?” Ella asked.

“Everything else is secondary, ensign. That gem cannot fall into enemy hands,” Dr. Manx told them.

“Understood.”

“Does anyone here have any medical training?” she asked.

Asia raised her hand. “I have served as a field medic. I am certified,” she said.

“Very good. You’re our chief medical officer for this trip. It will be your job to patch up your wounded and get this team back in one piece,” she said.

“Understood,” Asia said.

“Serenity, as I understand it, Lt. James was serving as your first officer,” she said.

“Yes, sir.”

“She will be needed in the ship’s infirmary for the majority of the mission. You’ll have to select someone else to fill the position,”

“With all due respect, sir, everyone is already in the positions I need them in. Nathaniel is our engineer and we need him there. Garr is security. Pascal is our helmsmen and Ella in our sensors. We don’t have anyone else. If we get injured, Asia will be able to take whoever it is down to the infirmary and fix them up, but I need her on the bridge,” Serenity pointed out.

“This isn’t negotiable, Lt. Commander. If everyone on your team is accounted for, select someone else from SPD and take them with you. For a mission of this magnitude, there has to be someone in the infirmary at all times,” she said.

“Sir,” Nathaniel raised his hand slightly. “Boom and I recently completed work on a holographic doctor who could run the infirmary. It would be easy to install the program onto the ship,” he brought up.

“That’s fine, but regulations are clear. There needs to be a physician on call at all times. No exceptions. Lt. Commander, feel free to select anyone from SPD to serve as your first officer. This will be a one time mission,” Dr. Manx said.

“Yes, sir.”

“Serenity has already gotten her inoculation, but the rest of you return to Dr. Mitchell in the infirmary, then meet the Lt. Commander in the shipyard. You’re scheduled to depart at 0830 hours,” she ordered.

“Yes, sir,” they all said in uniform, saluting her, then exiting the room.

Serenity was the last to leave on purpose. As everyone headed for the infirmary, she called out to Asia. “Lt. James, a word?”

Asia reluctantly stopped, turning around and giving Serenity her attention. “Sir?”

“You’re upset with me, I get that. But I need to know you can put whatever problem you have with me to the side for this mission. If we’re going to have KJ, the Phantom Ranger and the B-Squad, I need everyone at their best,” she said.

“Don’t worry about me, sir. I’ll do my job to the best of my ability.”

She paused. “You asked to put assigned to the infirmary, didn’t you?” Serenity asked.

There was an odd moment of silence. “Permission to speak freely, sir.”

“Granted.”

“I can’t deal with you right now. I don’t like my future being decided for me. You’re my daughter, fine. I’m proud of the woman you are, but I need to know my choices are my own. You being here tells me that my entire life is already set in stone. You’re expecting us to have every memory you had *again*. I don’t know what they are, but you do, and I don’t know if I can live up to that expectation,” Asia explained.

“I don’t expect anything from you. I just want to do my job to the best of my ability and I need everyone on my team to do perform their duties. I get that it was a lot to take in, but that has nothing to do with SPD or this mission. So if you want to hide away from me in the infirmary, that’s your business. But when I give an order, I expect it to be carried out,” she said.

“You will get nothing less than my best, sir.”

“Good,” she sighed. “I’m sorry I sprung all this on you, but it isn’t my fault. I had no choice,” Serenity said.

Asia reached out, putting her hand on her shoulder. “I understand. Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine,” she assured her.

She nodded. “Good. I’ll see you in the shipyard. I have a stop to make,” she said.

Asia saluted, then turned to walk away.

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Serenity walked onto the grounds of SPD where most of the officers were training. Some were running, others were sparring with one another, and the rest were going through training simulations with one another.

She spotted Ensign DeVika Monroe standing in front of a group of officers who were doing pushups, walking over to her.

“Ensign,” she said professionally.

DeVika turned to her, saluting, then standing at attention. “Sir!”

“At ease, DeVika,” DeVika loosened her posture, but still stood at attention. “I am looking for,” she glanced down at the pad in her hand. “A Lt. Commander Nik Martin,” she said.

“He’s out on maneuvers with the C-Squad. I expect him back any minute now. May I ask what this is about?”

“No, you may not,” Serenity said coldly.

“Of course, sir,” she answered, trying to hide her disappointment.

A few moments later, a group of officers came jogging towards them. They stopped a few feet away, and man in front of the group turned to them.

“Good job out there, guys. Hit the showers and from there, we’ll head to the astrometrics lab to chart stars and see if you did your studying over the weekend,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” the four remaining officers said, saluting him, then turning to walk away.

The man then headed over to a table set up near the entrance of the building, grabbing a bottle of water and taking a swallow.

“That’s him,” DeVika pointed out.

“Thank you, ensign. Carry on,” Serenity said, then headed towards him.

As she got closer, she was able to get a good look at him. He had a slender build, and a full head of dark brown hair. Despite having no facial hair, he somehow seemed distinguished and confident.

“Lt Commander Martin,” she called out.

He quickly finished his water, turning to her. “Yes, sir? What can I do for you?” he glanced down at her insignia to determine what her rank was. “Lt. Commander, is it?”

“Yes. I need you to get in uniform and meet me in the shipyard. We have a mission,” she told him.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that. I have a team to instruct. We’re on our way to the astrometrics lab to...” he was cut short.

“I understand, but these orders come from Commander Tate and Dr. Manx. You’re going to be my first officer for a mission,” she said.

“First officer? If you didn’t notice, I’m a Lt. Commander. If anything, I’ll be in command of a mission,” he pointed out.

“Sorry if your ego is bruised, Lt. Commander, but these are your orders. I am the leader of D-Squad and you are to report to...” he interrupted her.

“That’s cute, but I’m the leader of C-Squad. And if I know my alphabet, that would mean...” he counted on her fingers quickly. “C is higher up than D. I know you and your team got to use the Omega Ship on a mission last week, but I’ve already made my official request to Admiral Cruger to be put in command of that ship. So I hope you didn’t adjust the seat or get too comfortable, because I’ll be coming for it very soon,” he mentioned.

“The Astro Omega Ship is by no means *my* ship, but I have been authorized by Commander Tate and Dr. Manx to choose a first officer for this mission. I was given my choice of anyone here in SPD, and going through your record you have experience in space and in combat situations. It says you received awards of valor and bravery, so you are the logical choice. So if I know *my* alphabet, that would mean...” she counted on her fingers, mocking him. “Commander is higher on the food chain than Lt. Commander. And since these orders came from Commander Tate, I suggest you check your ego at the door, get into full uniform, head to the infirmary to receive your inoculations for this mission, then meet me in the shipyard at 0830 hours. You’re my right hand,” Serenity explained to him.

“Yes... sir,” he said reluctantly, saluting her, then turning to walk away.

“I did not dismiss you, Lt. Commander,” she said firmly.

He stopped, turning back around, then waited for her order.

Serenity grabbed a bottle of water, taking a few sips, then glanced around at the training area, doing everything she could to ignore him. She could tell he was getting impatient, and she enjoyed every minute of it.

“You are dismissed,” she said coldly.

“Thank you, sir,” he said in a tone that was obviously trying to disguise his anger, then walked away.

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“Engineering has reported in, sir. The transwarp drive is fully operational and shield enhancements are online. We are ready to disembark on your command, sir,” Pascal announced from the helm position.

Serenity leaned back in her chair, folding her legs.

“Thank you, Lieutenant. Ensign Enrile. Anything on sensors we should be concerned about?” she asked.

Ella glanced down at her control panel. “No, sir. Everything is clear. At transwarp 7 we will be in J’Sarri space in approximately one hour, fifteen minutes,” she said.

“Very good. Set course and prepare to engage on my mark,” she said.
“Aye, sir.”

Just then, the doors to the bridge slid open, and Lt. Commander Martin stepped onto the bridge in full uniform. He made his way over to Serenity, standing at attention.

“Lt. Commander Martin reporting as ordered,” he said.

“Reporting as ordered... what?”

He groaned inwardly. “Reporting as ordered, sir,” he reluctantly said.

“Very good. Have a seat. My last first officer said that the chair wasn’t very comfortable, but I’m sure you’ll get use to it,” she said.

“I’m sure I will, sir,” he said, taking his seat. “What is our destination?”

“We are in route to the 3rd planet in the J’Sarri sector,” she told him.

“Emberiiian? I’m familiar with it,” he said.

“Good. Your knowledge of that region of space just may come in handy,” she said.

“I will endeavor to do my best, sir,” Nik said.

“I’m sure you will be invaluable on this mission,” she said.

“Helm, is our course laid in?” Lt. Commander Martin asked.

“Yes, sir. Course is set,” Pascal announced.

“Prepare to disembark and once we exit atmo, engage at transwarp 9,” he ordered.

“Sir?” he asked, turning around to face him.

“Is there a problem with my orders, Lieutenant?” he asked.

“No, sir. I was under the impression we were to proceed at transwarp 7,” he pointed out.

“I know J’Sarri space better than anyone here. We don’t want to spend any more time in that region of space than we have to. Proceed at transwarp 9,” he ordered.

“Aye, sir,” he responded.

“At that speed, we will reach Emberiian in exactly 36 minutes,” Ella chimed in.

“Very good. Let's get moving,” he said.

“How come no one fusses as Pascal when he swivels in his chair? But as soon as I do it, it's a big deal?” she asked.

The ship lifted off, and as soon as they cleared the upper atmosphere, Pascal engaged the transwarp drive. Everyone on board jerked forward slightly, and they were on their way.

“I'll be in engineering if you need me. Lt. Commander Martin, you have the bridge,” Serenity said she stood up, making her way over to the lift.

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Serenity paced back and forth in engineering as Nathaniel went over calculations on his console. “I'm tellin' you, Nate. I hate this guy. Hes arrogant, full of himself, obnoxious, overbearing. He's just a big pain in the...” she was interrupted.

“Sounds a lot like you,” he said.

“What are you talking about? I'm nothing like that,” she said.

Nathaniel walked over to her. “Yes, you are. You're in command of this team, but imagine you were pulled away from your team and told you were second in command of another team. How would you react?” he asked her.

She huffed. “I wouldn't be a jerk about it,” she said.

“Yes you would. As long as you're in charge everything is fine, but taken out of your element, could you really take orders from someone you didn't know, but was the same rank as you?” he asked.

“Probably not.”

“So don’t give this guy such a hard time. He’s the leader of his own team, and to be told to play second fiddle to someone else has to be jarring. Give him some time, he’ll come around,” he told her.

“I guess you’re right,” she sighed.

“Of course I am. You picked him for a reason. He is the best one for the job. You can’t expect him to jump right in and mesh with the rest of us, he’s an outsider. If you want the best from him, you’re going to have to let him join your reindeer games,” he said.

“What?”

“Sorry, Rudolph reference,” Nathaniel chuckled.

“I don’t know if I can deal with all this right now. Asia is still mad at me, Nik is being a jerk and we aren’t even in J’Sarri space yet. This is too much to deal with,” she said.

He stood up, walking over to her, wrapping his arm around her waist. ‘You’ll do amazing. We all grew to trust you. So will he,” he said, leaning in and kissing her gently on the lips.

She smiled. “We should have done this a long time ago.”

“Maybe, but we’ll celebrate after we get everyone home in one piece,” she said.

She stood up straighten, smoothing out her uniform. “You’re right, down to business. Carry on, chief,” she said professionally.

“Yes, sir,” he said, saluting her.

She leaned over, kissing him on the cheek. “Thanks, Nate. I needed that,” she said, then walked out the room.