

Lt. Commander Nik Martin was, by all accounts, a reasonable man. While he didn't have a firm grasp on everything, he trusted people who were specialists in their field to have answers. In most cases, they did. Nik tended to stick to what he knew, and that was what had gotten him so far in SPD.

His service record was nothing short of amazing. Letters of commendations in his file, the youngest in SPD history to be made an officer. At least before all the changes, he thought.

But now, he found himself in a situation that he was sure would require more than he had readily available to him.

The place, wherever he was, reminded him of a CaAn detention center. Everything was white, but instead of a force field keeping him in place, everything was white. He walked in either direction, but found nothing.

He reached for his morpher, only to discover it wasn't there. Oh great, he thought to himself.

*He relies on devices. He is not ready.*

He tried to get a good look around, to see where the voice was coming from... but no luck. "Pas?" he called out.

*He is dependent. He is not ready.*

"Ready for what?" he called out.

*He clings to ignorance. He is not ready.*

"Commander Tate?" he inquired, recognizing the voice.

He turned around only to see himself standing there, but Nik noted he was not in uniform. He wore civilian clothes; a pair of jeans and a white shirt. Nothing fancy. Nothing that would indicate he was an officer.

"Who are you?" Nik asked sternly.

"Nik Martin."

"No, I'm Nik Martin," he said.

"No. You're *officer* Nik Martin. You're a nameless, faceless grunt worker for SPD. You hide behind uniforms and morphers and hollow orders because you know the truth; life is too much for you," he said.

“What is that suppose to mean?”

“Who are you when you're not in uniform? When you're not barking orders? Who are you when you're alone? When there is no one to delegate orders to, when there is no rank to hide behind?”

“I'm still me. I just...”

“You're all about the next mission, or reviewing the last one. You're a cog in a wheel with nothing of your own.”

“That's not true. I have friends, family,” he pointed out.

“So you're dependent on others to tell you who you are? Typical, Nik. Take those friends and family away and who are you?”

“I'm the Phantom Ranger,” he said proudly.

“But if it were taken away, if your powers were lost. Then what?”

“I...”

“You're nothing. And you have the nerve to stand there and judge me? Me? I like horses and working with my hands. Me? I enjoy a beer and to sit in my easy chair to watch the game. Me? I'm a husband and father, a brother, a son. Those are things that can't be taken away from me. But you? If SPD wanted to, they could strip you of everything you think is you. And then what would you be?”

Nik stood up straight. “SPD could take my morpher, strip me of my command, but I am still an officer at heart. I worked, scratched, clawed. I gave my blood, sweat and tears to SPD, to defending others. Sure, I enjoy a beer and a game every now and then, but if that's all I am, I haven't done anything. I still like horses, but to lose myself in my own pleasures is no way to live. SPD is in blood, it's who I am... but who says I can't like horses too?” Nik replied.

“Congratulations, Nik,” a voice said.

In an instant the other version of him was gone, and Gabbi was standing in front of him. It wasn't aa though they switched places; it was as though Gabbi had always been there.

“What is this?”

“Think of it as a mirror to your own soul. A reflection of who you are,” she said.

“And what do you have to do with all this?”

“I observe. I report. I access.”

“Where am I?”

“You are here to be tested, to see if you are willing to accept yourself. We needed to test your convictions.”

“We?”

“I am an agent of Time Force. And this is the first round of recruitment,” she said.

“Time Force is... rangers? If I recall, they were from 2001,” he mentioned.

“You're going to need to let go of notions like past and future. Everything that was and everything that has yet to be are all happening simultaneously on an infinite spectrum. It's all happening as we speak,” she told him.

“And you want me to be an agent?”

“You volunteered.”

“I did? Then why don't I recall volunteering for... for this?”

“TD is the last thing people tend to let go of. It will pass.”

“TD?”

“Temporal dislocation. Just because you don't remember doesn't mean you didn't do it. Maybe you haven't yet. Maybe you will. Maybe, from the perspective of a linear progression it doesn't make sense. But once you let go of temporal dislocation, it all makes sense. Sometimes effect precludes cause, and vice versa,” she explained.

“What is it you need me to do?”

“You and your team will bring a criminal to justice. Someone is causing anomalies in the very essence of space/time. You will identify and eliminate those anomalies,” she said.

“Team?”

“Yes. You are nearly ready, too.”

“Whos on this team?”

“I think you'll be happy with the team we assembled. They were hand picked by the leader of this team... though there was an ensign that gave us a really difficult time,” Gabbi mentioned. “Or will give, rather. Sorry, I get my tenses mixed up from time to time.”

“I'm assuming that because we're dealing with time travel, when I'm done I will be returned to my time when my mission is complete,” he brought up.

“Once complete, you can be, if you desire, be returned to the exact moment of your recruitment.”

“Alright then, let's get started,” Nik said.

“What makes you think you haven't already?” Gabbi asked with a smile.