

Stardate 70776.8
USS Dauntless NCC-75310
Typhon Sector in the vicinity of
Federation Starbase 719

Captain Amanda Tomkins of the *USS Triton* had just beamed aboard the Fleet Flagship and was directed to the office used by the Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Penji Fil. After locating the office to which she had been summoned, she entered to find a human man in an enlisted Chief Petty Officer's uniform sitting behind the desk.

"Captain Tomkins reporting to meet with Admiral Fil as ordered," the woman said with a British accent.

"Yes, Captain," Chief John Messer acknowledged, quickly checking the admiral's schedule on his monitor screen. "The Admiral is currently meeting with Captain Foxwell, but will be ready to see you shortly. Can I get you anything? Tea? Water?"

"No, thank you, Chief," Tomkins replied, taking the only other seat in the reception room and wondering who Captain Foxwell was. She had never heard the name before and was not aware of any other starship commanders in the Fifth Fleet with that name.

She had been sitting only a few seconds when the door to the inner office swished open and an unfamiliar man wearing a red-shouldered Starfleet uniform with the four square pips denoting the rank of captain on his chest stepped out, still in conversation with Fil. "Yes, Admiral. I look forward to beginning the mission. I will inform my crew immediately. Again, it was a pleasure meeting you."

The unfamiliar captain looked at Tomkins sitting in the chair and nodded politely in greeting before offering his salutations to Chief Messer and departing the office. It was then that Tomkins noticed Fil standing in his door, waiting on her.

"Come in Captain Tomkins," the Catullan admiral said. "I'm glad you could meet with me today."

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Admiral Fil invited Tomkins to sit down, then took his own seat behind his desk.

"I suppose you're wondering who Captain Foxwell was?" Fil said. Tomkins found herself instinctively glancing back at the door.

"I would have to assume he's in command of one of the new starships assigned to the Fifth Fleet," she finally offered. "After all, you said in your briefing a few weeks ago that with the opening of the new sectors of space, Starfleet would be assigning a few new starships to the fleet."

"Yes... and no," Fil said, confusing Tomkins. "While the *USS Broadsword* has officially been assigned to operate with the Fifth Fleet under my authority, Captain Foxwell and his crew have volunteered for a very specific and special mission. One that I hope you will be able to help with."

"Help? In what way?" Tomkins asked.

“Captain, do you recall a special mission the *USS Christa McAuliffe* was assigned to several years ago?” Fil asked, calling up the log entries of the *McAuliffe* from between the years 2385 and 2387 on his desktop monitor screen.

“Yes. That ship was assigned an extreme deep-space exploration mission deep within the Beta Quadrant,” Tomkins replied. “In spite of returning to home space infested with an alien parasitic species that took over the majority of the crew before being contained, the mission was considered a rousing success.”

“Yes, it was,” Fil agreed. “Which is why Starfleet wants to build on that success with a new longer-duration mission!”

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Aboard the *USS Triton*, Commander Shaun T. Peehs was sitting in a chair in the captain’s ready room. Captain Amanda Tomkins had just retrieved two cups of tea from the nearby replicator and handed one to her first officer before taking a seat beside him.

“A five-year mission along the Beta/Delta Quadrant border? Alone?”

“Not alone, exactly,” Tomkins replied. “While the *McAuliffe* mission consisted of a single starship on a long-range, long-duration mission in the Beta Quadrant, they were never really outside of delayed communications range from Federation space. In this case, Starfleet wants two starships to operate together and explore hundreds of light years further than any vessel ever has before.”

“Well, any vessel except for the *USS Voyager*,” Peehs remarked.

“True, except *Voyager* wasn’t assigned by Starfleet to explore the Delta Quadrant, and while the information Admiral Janeway and her crew brought back with them was invaluable, they were more concerned with getting home than with exploring that area of the galaxy. And the two starships assigned to this extended mission would be exploring a region of the galaxy that *Voyager* literally jumped over on their way back home.” Tomkins took a sip of her tea before adding, “I find the prospects of such a mission to be quite exciting.”

“I agree,” Peehs said. “But five years? Without any hope of assistance from Starfleet? That seems an awfully long time.”

“Well, the Gamma Quadrant Exploration Mission was conceived as a decade-long mission to be conducted by a single Galaxy-class starship and a couple of smaller support ships,” Tomkins countered.

“Which, if I recall, was cut to only two years because the Dominion made its existence known,” Peehs stated. “What happens if we do decide to volunteer for this mission and we have members of the crew not willing to be assigned to such duty for so long a period?”

“I asked Admiral Fil that same question,” Tomkins said. “Planning and preparation for such a mission will take several months at least. If we decide the *Triton* will take part in this mission – and I promised the Admiral he would have my answer in the next couple of days – then we immediately brief the crew on what can be expected. Any crewmembers who do not wish to participate can request a transfer. Starfleet will then re-staff our starship with volunteers. We cannot force anyone who does not want to go.”

Peehs sat back in his chair, satisfied with the answer. The Typhon Sector and Fifth Fleet AOR was far enough from Federation home space. He was concerned crew morale would suffer should they be forced on a multiple-year mission so far away from Federation space.

“Do you have concerns, Commander?” Tomkins asked, her expression looking apprehensive. “If we choose to accept this mission, I would much rather have you remaining at my side than lose you.”

“While I need more detailed information, I’m not against the idea of participating in this mission,” Peehs replied. “For example, what kind of ship is the *Broadsword*? What are its capabilities? And what would be expected of each of the ships involved?”

“The *Broadsword* is an Akira-class starship, very similar in capabilities to our own Luna-class ship, except more heavily armed and not as diverse in laboratory and science facilities,” Tomkins answered. “Basically, the way I understand it, we would be the explorers, and the *Broadsword* would be our security.”

Peehs stood up and, after placing his teacup on the captain's desk, activated a monitor screen and called up a star chart of space along the Beta/Delta Border.

"The *McAuliffe*'s mission only went so far. There's a lot of unexplored space out there."

"But that's our business," Tomkins said before downing the remainder of her tea. "And right now, business is very good."

Peehs stared at the monitor screen for several more seconds. Finally, he said, "Opinion, Captain?"

"I think I want to be a part of this mission," she replied. "True, it may keep us away from home for quite some time. But I think the benefits outweigh the disadvantages."

"Very well, Captain," Peehs said as he turned and stood at his full height, his hands clasped behind his back. "When do you want me to call the crew together?"

"Tomorrow at 1400 hours ship's time will be fine, Number One."

"Aye, Captain!" Peehs replied.

To Be Continued...