**New Dragon Homeworlds, Yrranth & Zokyrth**

**Unnamed Continent**

**September 5, 2019**

**08:22**

Tessa and my sisters ended up joining us in the Grasshopper, as it would allow the four of them to scan any animals we might come across as well. We elected to stay on the continent we were on for the time being. Since we were primarily looking for animals, I activated the shroud so we didn’t scare any of them away. I also went ahead and tuned the sensors, looking for any lifesigns to make everything a little bit easier.

It didn’t take long at all until we found the reptiles that previously held the title of the largest flying animals to inhabit the planet. Similar to the quetzalcoatlus that were around in the Cretacous period, these large animals would look very similar to giraffes when on the ground, albeit with large, bat-like wings and being three or four times the size.

They were the animals that the dragons were most worried about. While quetzalcoatlus were too small and weak to pose any threat to an adult dragon or dragonkin, the same wasn’t true for their offspring. They weren’t even willing to leave their cattle on the surface of the planet, otherwise they would need to guard them all day to ensure that none of them got picked off by the many predators that roamed the planet.

It was curious that there were none of the large reptilian flyers near the mountain we had landed near, but a few kilometers away there were many of them, flying around or roosting on a nearby mountain. They lived very high up, creating large nests on whatever relatively flat surface they could find. In one case, we saw a nest in the mouth of a decent-sized cave.

After getting close enough to scan them, we moved on. We did see a few dragons flying around as we traveled, which were likely those who didn’t have anything to do for the time being. There was only so much room inside of the areas they were excavating, so it was understandable that they would do some exploration.

We flew around for a few more hours before we landed in an open area so my sisters, Tessa and I could all transform into our dragon forms. Ben had plenty of practice inside of Battlestate, and Abi would always be on hand to take over if he made a mistake. Once we were in our dragon forms, the five of us jumped in the air with the Grasshopper following a few hundred meters behind us. The five of us activated our camouflage as we flew, so to animals it would seem like the sky was clear.

We saw some pretty incredible sights as we flew several hundred meters over the surface. The planet was entirely untouched, so there were many beautiful clear water lakes, with a wide variety of animals calling it home while others used it as their primary water source. While reptiles were quite prevalent on the planet, there were a large number of mammals that grazed next to the lakes we found.

If you compared them to animals on Earth, they would probably be a mix of a bison and a porcupine. They were roughly twice the size of a bison and had what looked like sharp, foot-long quills that sprouted all over their bodies. The quills, along with some prestigious horns probably meant that they were a hard target to take down, especially if they grouped up tightly.

We flew around for a few minutes watching before scanning them and moving on. We continued to find and scan many more animals as we flew, but decided a change in scenery was in order. After finding a place to land, those of us in our dragon forms switched back to our human forms and loaded back onto the ship. Turning, I headed towards the ocean.

There were said to be a large number of whale-like creatures that called the ocean home, so I wanted to check them out and see what other interesting animals might live down there. It didn’t take long at all before we arrived, and I activated the shields before gently lowering the Grasshopper into the water.

“You’re sure the shuttle can handle this?” Ben asked as we descended past two hundred meters.

“Absolutely. As long as the shields are up and there is enough mana, we could descend pretty far. If I see the mana start to drop then I’ll just take us back up a few hundred meters and it should start regenerating.”

Like the large reptilian birds, it didn’t take long to find the large mammals that dominated the oceans. They were about three quarters the size of Blue whales, but were much more aggressive. Where Blue whales operated like a massive vacuum cleaner, sucking up several tons of krill each time they fed, the large mammals here fed on much larger fish and other animals. They were the apex predators of the ocean, but the calls they made underwater made them pretty easy to find.

Abi could pick up their calls from where she was several hundred kilometers away, so she tuned the sensors on the shuttle, allowing us to listen to their calls and follow them right back to the source.

“They sound just like whales,” Anja said. “Aside from the large reptiles, it is amazing how similar life is here, compared to Earth.”

“It’s to be expected,” Ben said. “The animals here and on Earth are all carbon-based lifeforms, so there are bound to be animals that look very similar between the two. It’s when you get to silicon-based lifeforms that things get weird. If we ever come across any, they’ll look unlike anything we’ve ever seen.”

The large whale-like mammals were like something we had seen before, in movies at least. Around seventy feet long, the creatures looked like mammalian versions of a mosasaurus rather than a whale. Unlike whales, they didn’t have a massive flat tail to help propel them through the water. Instead, they had four flippers, two at the front and two at the back that they used, along with their crocodile-like tail to quickly move through the water.

They seemed pretty intelligent, staying away from the shuttle even though they could clearly see us. A few smaller ones came up closer as they investigated us, but they soon went back to feeding. We observed them eating a few different types of small fish before we scanned them and moved on.

I wanted to test what sort of depth the ship could handle, so I had Abi plot a course to the deepest part of the ocean. It would also give us a good opportunity to see what life might be down there. We easily descended twenty kilometers below the waves before Abi let us know that the shield already would have collapsed without my current mana regeneration. She estimated that we could go another ten kilometers before the pressure got too much, so we gave it a shot.

“Uhh, I’m picking up a pretty big life form over here,” Ben said, typing on his console. “Whatever it is, it puts those whales or whatever they are to shame.”

“How big are you talking?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe two to three times the size? Abi can you help me out here?”

“I’m scanning it now to get some more information. It is curious that it was able to remain undetected during my orbital scan. Perhaps it is able to slow its metabolism to hibernate for long periods of time, and was awoken by the shuttle. I would suggest turning around immediately, however. The shields would likely hold up if you were attacked, but I wouldn’t want to risk it.”

It took us over thirty minutes to descend to this depth, so I definitely wasn’t going to ignore her advice. I didn’t turn around though, instead I just used the attitude controls to help propel us back to the surface. If we did get attacked, I wanted to hurt whatever sea monster was down here with us.

We kept track of its movements, but it never came within a kilometer of the shuttle as we ascended.

“It appears to be sensitive to the light, which is why it hasn’t approached,” Abi said. “Keep the spotlights pointed towards it and you should be able to surface without issue.”

That turned out to be very true, and after about ten minutes the creature had begun moving away until it once again disappeared from our sensors. We called it quits on the ocean after that, instead heading out into orbit so we could check out Zokyrth as well.

We flew around for a while, checking out the sights and scanning land-based animals before heading over to see what we were truly interested in. The oceans on Zokyrth were dominated by dolphin-like mammals that showed extreme intelligence and worked together to take down prey. The difference between the dolphins and these alien versions was that they were extremely aggressive. Almost like piranhas in that way.

The initial scan determined that there were tens of millions of the animals living in the oceans, causing scientists to theorize that they had hunted larger species to extinction before rising to be the apex predator of the ocean. From what we had seen recently, it was very possible that there were some larger predators, they just lived much deeper.

The report wasn’t kidding at all about their aggressiveness. When we found a pod of the animals, they immediately started charging towards us. It was just two or three at first, who swam right into the forcefield but soon there were dozens of them swimming around us, trying to figure a way in. They apparently determined that that wasn’t going to happen, so they turned around, allowing us to follow them.

They found other prey shortly after, and we watched with morbid fascination as they tore into fish and other smaller mammals whenever they came across any. They seemed to possess very sharp teeth and strong jaws, allowing them to tear animals apart their prey and crush bones with ease. We ended up following them for twenty or thirty minutes before heading back to the surface. We would definitely be checking out those forms sometime soon.

We decided to head back to Yrranth, but not before seeing how things had progressed over here. We would probably also be able to take a portal back to Yrranth, which would save a little bit of time. It had been over nine hours since we had eaten last, and some of us were getting pretty hungry.

There were a lot more dragons and dragonkin around than there were when Olmith was here, but the only sign that they were actually working were the two huge piles of stone that had been excavated thus far. They had already used up a good portion of the land they had cleared, so it seemed like they would soon need to expand it further.

We hovered over the settlement for a few minutes as we watched, but soon descended and waited until a portal was available. It didn’t take long, and one of the Spectres operating the portals expanded theirs so the Grasshopper would fit through. The other two Grasshoppers were in use as well, as we didn’t see them at all by the time we landed.

\*\*\*\*\*

While we were gone, Abi had undergone her next growth and was now quite a bit larger than she was when she left. I took the opportunity to open my phone to check how long it would be until her next growth, noting that it wouldn’t occur until just before 21:00 tonight. It was perfect timing, ensuring that everyone who wished to sleep aboard Abi would be able to.

My mom intercepted us as my friends and I headed towards the buffet line that had been set up, so I invited her to join us for lunch.

“How’d the exploration go?” she asked while we were in line.

“It was very interesting. I’ve already got a few thoughts on new forms, but I’m not sure when I’ll mess around. We did find something that the dragons should know about. Especially the Blue dragons since they spend a lot of time in the water.”

“Oh?”

“We wanted to see how far down we could dive in my Grasshopper, so Abi found us the deepest spot on the planet and we started descending. When we got close, a massive lifesign was detected. It headed towards us, but seemed very sensitive to light. When I shined the spotlights on it, it wouldn’t come within a kilometer of the shuttle. They should also be wary of the dolphin-like mammals on Zokryth as well. They tried to actually attack the shuttle before giving up, so we followed them around for a little bit. They absolutely decimated any other animals they came across.”

“I’ll let Selalea know about the oceans next time I see her. It sounds like they will be safe on Yrranth as long as they don’t descend too far, but they’ll have to see how deadly the animals are for themselves. I think they’ll be able to handle themselves.”

“I know the adolescents and adults won’t have any issues, but their young could be vulnerable. It didn’t take them very long to figure out that they couldn’t get through the shuttle’s forcefield, so they could easily ambush a young dragon if older ones weren’t vigilant.”

“True,” she said. “So what are you guys going to do for the rest of the day?”

“I think I’m going to work on some skills, now that my mana is insane. I think I’m going to try to get Teleport up to rank one hundred by the time we leave for Veria.”

“What’s it at now?”

“Five,” I answered.

She laughed. “I think you’re underestimating just how much you need to teleport to finally reach rank one hundred. I got there, but it took me an extremely long time. Rank fifty requires you to teleport about fifteen million kilometers. After that things begin getting crazy. I don’t remember the total amount of kilometers you need to travel to max it, but I believe it is somewhere in the four hundred fifty billion kilometer range. I’ll be interested in seeing how far you get by the time we depart.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad,” I said. “I think I can teleport close to five hundred thousand kilometers at a time now, with less than twenty seconds between each teleport. It definitely won’t take me long to get to rank fifty.”

“It slows down a lot after rank fifty. At that point you’ll be able to teleport a distance of five million kilometers at a time, but rank fifty-one will take you one hundred teleports, minimum.”

“Those numbers are absolutely insane. I knew you could teleport to the moon, but I didn’t realize you could teleport much, much further than that,” Sonja said. “Does Portal have a similar range?”

“Not nearly,” my mom replied. “I can only open a portal about a tenth of the distance that I can teleport to. Opening a portal requires a big chunk of mana, and then you also need to spend mana to keep it open. The bigger the portal, the more mana that has to be channeled into it to maintain it.”

“Actually, maybe I’ll work on Portal instead,” I said. “None of us have been able to make a full-sized portal as of yet. Perhaps it’s time we rectify that.”

“You absolutely should,” my mom said. “You used it pretty well in your last boss fight, but there are so many more applications. One of you could open a portal allowing Ben to fire spells or Sonja to fire arrows indirectly, or use Portal to send monsters falling to their death. There is also the fact that not all of you will be able to teleport to the same spot, either because you can’t teleport that far or you haven’t been to that location. Portal solves that. All it takes is one person using Portal to evacuate an entire team to safety.”

“You could also move large, heavy objects from point A to point B really quickly, just like the dragons have been doing with the gravel and shipping container,” Ben said.

“Exactly. Portal is an amazing skill in it’s utility. It can be the edge you need in a fight, or it can be something that helps your quality of life. Once you’re able to open a stable full-sized portal, you’ll find so many different uses for it going forward.”

\*\*\*\*\*

After lunch, the five of us got started on that right away. My mom was on hand to give us some tips, but we got it, after a while. Neither Mason or Sonja could keep their portals open very long, but they could keep them open long enough for one or two people to run through while they held it open. Ben, Anja and I, on the other hand, could keep our portals up for much longer. I could even keep a portal open for hours, depending on the distance.

The initial mana cost of Portal changed with almost every cast of the spell, because the distance between the two points played a big factor in that. It also increased the drain while it was active, but not by a huge amount. Once a portal was open and stable, all that was needed was a steady supply of mana and it would remain open. To close a portal, you simply ceased channeling mana into it

We all continued practicing for a few hours, trying to rank up the ability as much as we could. Doing so would increase the range and slightly lower the amount of mana needed to maintain a stable portal, while also increasing the maximum size of the portal we could open. Of course that also came with the side effect of increasing the mana cost, but as Portal ranked higher and higher, it would allow us to move more and more people through at once.

We had first started opening portals with the two ends about two meters apart, making sure we could open them up to their maximum diameter. Once we had achieved that, we moved the two ends a little bit further apart and tried again. Slowly but surely, we were leveling up the ability with each and every successful portal.

Unlike Teleport, you didn’t need to physically travel through your portal to level it up. Instead, everytime a stable portal was opened, progress would be made. The amount of progress depended entirely on how far apart the two ends of your portal were, however. Going from rank one to rank two required us to open portals for a combined fifty kilometers. That ended up taking all of us varying amounts of time, simply because of the disparity in how much mana we had available, as well as how fast we regenerated that mana.

My mom was an absolute taskmaster, making sure each of us reached at least rank two before dinner time. That was easier said than done, because it required opening portals with a total distance of one hundred fifty kilometers. There wasn’t sufficient room to level it up quickly in the area around Abi, so we picked one of the large open areas we had found and repeatedly opened portals to it.

We saw some rather interesting sights through our portals during that time, as portals don’t make the same loud noise that Teleport does when used. They just simply appeared in the desired place, as long as we had been there before. It meant that we were able to ‘closely’ observe the porcupine-like animals among others, even though we were several kilometers away.

I ended up hitting the rank two mark far sooner than my friends were able to, but I stuck around and continued to level up, reaching rank three by the time everyone was gathering for dinner. It was still outside, as Abi wouldn’t be ranking up for a few hours yet. After we had eaten dinner, we were invited to check out the progress the dragons had made thus far.

The entrance they had made in the mountain was big enough to carry even the largest of dragons with ease, which was a far cry from the much smaller tunnels I had seen on Earth. In the previous fourteen hours they were also able to fashion a massive door out of two chunks of granite. They weren’t yet on hinges, but they would be pretty hard to get through once they were enchanted.

Walking through the entrance, it was easy to see the very slight inclination in the tunnel before us. When asked about it, Olmith stated that it was to prevent rainwater from entering the city while the doors were open. There was no risk of flooding because of the elevation we were at, but rainwater would always be an issue.

The tunnel was much shorter than I was expecting, and was still quite rough, not yet having been sanded and polished to make everything smooth. We came across another set of thick granite doors, though these ones were sitting on their side, stacked up next to each other. Beyond that, the sight had our group collectively gasp.

The dragons had already excavated an absolutely massive spherical area that was at least two kilometers in diameter. Around the room were a number of tunnels in various stages of completion. There were nine, in fact, evenly spaced throughout the room. There was also another, much larger tunnel in the bottom of the sphere, but that had just started being made.

“This is our portal chamber for Yrranth,” Olmith said. “You’ll note the nine alcoves currently being carved out around the chamber. When finished, nine portals will be installed. The outer eight leading to the main city for each dragon type, while the central one will lead to the dragon council meeting chamber. I’m sure you’ve all noticed the large tunnel being carved out in the bottom of this sphere. When finished, it will lead to the capital city. Or at least the underground part of it. We do plan on creating a city above ground, but that won’t be for a while yet. We’ll soon be creating a chamber that splits off from the tunnel below, which is where we’ll be storing our eggs for the time being. It should only take another five or six hours, and then we’ll start transporting the eggs down there.”

“What about the portal to Zokyrth? Where is that going to be?” Ben asked.

“In the center of this chamber. I have a team that is slowly and carefully chiseling out the slab of granite that the portal will sit on. When done, four massive chains will anchor it to the ceiling, allowing it to hang in place. This chamber, as well as the tunnel in the bottom are meant to allow dragons to fly around, instead of walking. There will be a number of smaller portals and tunnels to allow dragonkin to move around with the same amount of freedom. We want to build big, now that we have the freedom and space to do so.”

“How are you preventing the ceiling from collapsing down on us?” I asked.

“We aren’t, not yet at least. We’ve only hollowed out a small part of a very large mountain, and we’ve been sure not to do too much damage as we continued to excavate. It’s still extremely stable, but an earthquake could change that. In the next few days, we’ll be carving enchantments into the rock itself to make things even stronger. Later on, we'll be putting up netting which will prevent this chamber from collapsing long enough for everyone to evacuate. It would require a massive earthquake, or this mountain being fired on from orbit for that to happen though.”

“So is the one of Zokyrth going to be identical to this one?”

“The chamber, yes, but other parts might be different. It all depends on what is found while we’re expanding the tunnels and creating chambers. They’ve already needed to drain the water out of a reservoir that was in the way, though that is a rather simple matter. It’s when we get too close to magma pockets or rivers that we need to be careful. Dragons are pretty good at withstanding the heat, but even we couldn’t survive if submerged in magma.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Even though they had done a lot of work in the short time since we’d arrived, there wasn’t much to see. Things would definitely change in the next day or so, but for now we exited the chamber and headed back over to the Grasshoppers. None of them were presently in use, and night had fallen a short while ago. We had seen some of what was out there during the day, now it was time to see what was out there during the night.

We had some additional people come along with us this time, however, which necessitated using all three shuttles to fit them all. The dragon council wanted to see more of their new worlds, but they didn’t quite have enough time to fly around before we headed to Veria. Some of them would be staying, but others wouldn’t see Yrranth or Zokyrth for many months.

Rather than explore the supercontinent we were currently on, we headed over to the next closest one. It would have been an hour or so flying through the atmosphere, though it only took a few minutes of sub-orbital flight. My friends, sisters and I hadn’t checked out this continent yet, so everything would be new to us.

The continent in question was one that took almost the entirety of the northern pole of the planet. It wasn’t buried in ice like the Earth’s poles were, but it did have a few snow-capped mountains. Aside from that, it was heavily forested with thousands of lakes in various sizes. The fact that nature was allowed to grow unimpeded meant that there weren’t any grasslands to speak of. Trees and shrubs had claimed the entirety of the continent, which would likely have a big impact on what types of animals we saw there.

It was too dark to see anything when we arrived, and I didn’t want to use the spotlights, as those would likely scare away any animals that were on the prowl. Instead, I hit a button on my console and the display changed. Where we were previously looking through a window, it was now as if we were all wearing a pair of thermal goggles. We could see a huge number of heat signatures beneath the canopy, but it was hard to actually see the animals themselves.

We ended up flying around for twenty minutes before we finally saw something of note.

“Over there!” Ben pointed.

I looked where he was pointing and saw a heat signature, though it wasn’t all that different from the creature’s surroundings. It had six legs, and looked very similar to an image of some of the predators on this planet. I called out to the other Grasshoppers so they could see it, while rotating the ship until we were looking directly at it. It looked up in the air for a moment, sticking out it’s long tongue a few times, before turning as it continued through the trees.

It wasn’t the easiest thing to follow, so I hit another button on my console which changed our view from thermal to night vision. The Scyftans among us took the time to scan the large creature, while others just watched it.

It seemed to be hunting something as we watched, and we found out what it was a short while later. It climbed up in one of the large trees before pouncing on a smaller creature that was feeding on foliage below. It killed its prey almost immediately, and then jumped back into the tree to eat it’s meal. We watched for a little while before moving on and seeing what else we could find.

One point of interest for us was a very large lake that was about one thousand kilometers inland. If you took every lake on Earth and added them together, they wouldn’t even come close to this one in size. Olmith and Pharomna were particularly interested in the lake, as it could prove to be a good spot for the Blue dragons to build around. When we got there, however, we realized that it wasn’t really a lake at all.

“I’m seeing at least a dozen of the whale-like creatures we saw in the ocean,” I said, drawing their attention to the large shapes on the sensors.

“I’m also detecting some sort of underground river as well, Jonathan,” Abi said. “It could very well connect to the ocean. Interesting, I’d never seen such a thing before.”

“That would be one massive underground river if those things are able to swim here,” Ben said.

“How about we check it out,” I said, switching the shroud for the shield as I began lowering us into the water. The other three Grasshoppers followed and we began our trek through the river. There were a few of the large whale-like creatures coming and going from the ocean, and we had to squeeze by them to continue on. They weren’t afraid of us though, and just kept on swimming.

There were a number of underground openings along the way, but we just gave them a cursory look before continuing onwards. It really did seem like it did connect to the ocean, though it would take hours for us to actually transit it. To get around that, my mom took her helmet out of her dimensional storage, donned it, and then teleported through the water ahead of us. She was gone for about five minutes, but soon a portal had opened in front of us. I took us through, followed by the other two Grasshoppers, and then my mom teleported back inside.

I took us back out of the water and we could see the southern tip of the continent we were just on.

“Amazing,” Pharomna said. “Can we go back to the lake? I want to see the depth and get an idea of how big it truly is.”

“Sure,” I nodded.

Rather than start flying towards it, I took us up for another sub-orbital flight before arriving back at the lake less than ten minutes later. We descended back into the water and then checked things out in more detail. It wasn’t the deepest of lakes, it’s deepest point only being fourteen hundred meters, but that suited Pharomna well. She didn’t want to build her city anywhere where a massive sea creature could easily get to.

“There!” she pointed when she found what she was looking for.

It was the mouth to an underground cavern, which was perfect for the beginnings of a new base. While Blue dragons were very proficient flyers, they were even better swimmers. I’d learned that they prefer to take off from the ocean rather from land, so this would be perfect for them. They would have a very large source of water to fish in, and they would be relatively isolated. They could even block off the river leading to the ocean if they wished, just for some additional security.

Pharomna wanted to check out the cavern, but the mouth was too small for the Grasshoppers to fit. It would definitely need to be widened out so dragons could fit through it, but we just marked the location and then continued. Pharomna was one of the dragons who would be remaining here, so she could work with Olmith to get started as soon as their two portal hubs were complete and the eggs were secure.

An energetic feeling swept through my body, a telltale sign that Abi had grown yet again. A bunch of us had been waiting for that, so I turned the ship around and headed back. The dragons were rather disappointed, at least until I told them that Spectres could continue to fly them around. I’d been up for close to eighteen hours now, it was time to get some sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

**New Dragon Homeworlds, Yrranth & Zokyrth**

**Unnamed Continent**

**September 6, 2019**

**07:00**

I awoke with a big stretch before I leaned over and pet Vixa. She’d had a pretty exhausting day, playing with Imuna and all the other Phenidae who had made the trip. They all needed to be in their suits, of course, but that didn’t stop them from teleporting all over the place and wrestling. We just let them do their own thing, confident in the fact that they would be able to elude any predators, and that they wouldn’t run off.

Having gone through three growths since we had arrived on Yrranth, Abi’s layout didn’t change, everything just got bigger. While the room that Mason and Ben shared was rather tight, now it was quite spacious, and where mine was huge, now it was massive. I could now lie down on the floor in my Seotross form if I needed to restrict the flow of mana, but a bed would be a much better option.

Abi could have changed her layout with her first growth since arriving, but even the dragons were still sleeping on the ship. They were working in shifts, allowing their work to be done day and night as they tried to get their temporary egg chamber done and link the two planets together with portals. It was going well so far, and we would be meeting with Olmith later in the day to do another walk through and see how things had progressed.

First, though, was food. I took a quick shower and got suited up before walking over to Vixa so I could suit her up as well. I had initially wondered how she was able to eat, drink and go to the bathroom in that suit. I found out that the suit was designed to reduce the chance of contracting a disease or introducing a new disease to a planet, rather than prevent them altogether. If she wanted to eat or drink, the suit would retract away from her mouth. It would do the same at the opposite end if she needed to go to the bathroom.

While her suit was designed to keep her healthy, my own was meant to keep me alive. There were few animals on this planet that could harm me now, especially considering the fact that Precognition was up twenty-four seven, but didn’t mean that I was safe. If Dhir knew that I was so close, he would probably send assassins at least, and a fleet at worst.

Vixa had leapt off the bed to go to the bathroom before I was allowed to put the suit on her, and then the two of us left my room to grab some breakfast. We didn’t head to the deck below and instead promptly left the ship and headed over to the buffet line. There wasn’t nearly as much variety as there was on the ship, but there was a pretty good selection.

Rather than follow me, Vixa immediately bolted, heading over to where the dragons were roasting meat. Laughing, I grabbed my own plate of food before seeing what she was so interested in. When I arrived, I saw that they were roasting an animal, but it certainly wasn’t a cow.

Walking over to the dragon in charge, I asked what they were cooking.

“Quillbeasts are what we’re calling them, for now. Abi deemed them safe to eat, so we went hunting and grabbed a few of them from some nearby plains. This is the first one we’re cooking, the rest are over there,” he said, pointing.

Following his finger, I saw that there were slabs of granite that were laid out on the ground. On each slab was at least one of the porcupine-like cows that we had seen the day before.

“If it’s as good as it smells, then you may not have needed to bring the cows along with you,” I laughed.

“Ah, but if we didn’t bring any cows then we wouldn’t have an easy supply of milk,” he replied. “We brought four bulls and thirty-six heifers, with half of those being dairy cows and the other half being beef cattle. We wanted to make sure that we had a good herd to start with, though we’ll probably need to have new bulls delivered periodically, to prevent inbreeding.”

“I’m sure that can be arranged,” I said.

While the majority of Scyftans would be departing Earth in the months ahead, we would undoubtedly continue to maintain a presence there. To just pack up and abandon the planet would create a power vacuum, as Scyftans had largely been in control of the Adventurer’s Guild. Besides, Earth would likely end up being a second home, of sorts.

“What about the female quillbeasts? Do they produce milk?”

“None of the ones we captured were producing milk, but we stayed away from all of the ones who were nursing calves. They’re probably like beef cows, in that they only produce milk when they’re nursing. Dairy cows are different in that they produce milk almost year round. The only time they’re not producing milk is when they’re getting ready to calve.

“I see. So how long until the quillbeast is done? The little princess over there is practically salivating over it,” I said.

She turned and barked at me before looking back up at quillbeast as it rotated slowly.

He smiled at Vixa before responding. “About ten minutes or so. If you want to take a seat and eat your breakfast, I’ll bring a small plate over when it’s done.”

I nodded. “Thanks.”

Calling Vixa over to me, I grabbed a few pieces of beef that had just been cooked and put it on a plate for her. She could snack on that while she waited.

She followed me over and jumped up on the slab of granite, sitting next to me.

“You can have this for now, and when that meat is done cooking they’ll bring some over for you, alright?”

She yipped and then backed up a little bit, allowing me to set the small plate down in front of her. She quickly ate the small morsels and then laid down next to me while she waited.

My friends showed up just as the man I had previously spoken to arrived with a small plate full of steaming meat. Handing it to me, he then went back to overseeing the operation.

“What’s that?” Mason asked, sitting down next to me.

“Quillbeast. Want some?” I asked.

“Quillbeast? You mean those porcupine-looking things we saw yesterday?”

“Exactly those. The dragons went hunting earlier and grabbed a few of them after Abi said that it isn’t harmful. This is the first one they cooked.”

“Sure.”

He reached for a small piece, which caused Vixa to bark at him.

“Hey, there’s more than enough to go around,” I said, chuckling.

Mason wasn’t deterred, and picked up a small piece, popping it in his mouth. The moment he chewed, his eyes closed and his head tipped back a little bit. To those of us sitting or standing around him, it looked as if he suppressed a moan. As soon as he finished the small morsel, he opened his eyes and reached for another piece. This time Vixa teleported between him and the plate of food, causing us all to laugh.

“Looks like you’ll need to go get your own,” I said, setting the plate down on the granite for Vixa.

“I didn’t think anything would taste as good as the beef, but they’ve outdone themselves. That is damn good.”

“I can believe that. As soon as we came outside Vixa ran over to where it was being cooked. Usually she looks over there while following me to the buffet, but this time she bolted.”

“It smells pretty damn good to me. I can’t imagine how it smells to her,” he said. “Anyways, I’m going to grab some breakfast, be back in a few minutes.”

I nodded and went back to my own breakfast as my friends headed off to the buffet table. Looking over, I saw that Vixa had already cleared everything off her plate and was looking longingly at the quillbeast that was being carved up a short distance away.

“You can have some more for lunch, alright?” I told her.

She made a sound that sounded like an affirmation and then lay down, resting her head on my leg.

\*\*\*\*\*

“So what are our plans today?” Ben asked after we had finished eating and brought our dishes over to be cleaned.

“I’m supposed to meet with Olmith again this morning, but I honestly have no idea after that. I’ll take any suggestions.”

“We could always do some more exploring,” Anja said. “These planets are absolutely massive. There’s a ton that we haven’t seen. Maybe we go up to orbit and see if we can find any interesting-looking areas.”

“I saw a desert on the south-most supercontinent. Maybe we check that out,” Ben suggested. “I wonder what sort of animals call the desert home on this planet.”

“We could get some practice done with our gauss pistols or pulse rifles. There’s one hell of a backdrop,” he said, gesturing to the pile of gravel and rocks that had to be at least twenty meters tall.

“I think that would be way too disruptive around the ship. If we went further away that could be an option, but we might attract all sorts of attention.”

“That’s true, I suppose. I vote for exploration then. Our parents have been staying around here. How about we take them up as well?” Mason said.

I knew he meant his mom, Ben’s parents and the parents of the twins, which was perfectly fine with me. There wasn’t much to do aboard the ship, or even around the ship, but there were two planets to explore.

I saw Olmith heading towards me, a Black dragonkin beside him as they conversed. “That’s fine with me,” I said when I turned back to my friends. “Looks like Olmith is heading over, so maybe in thirty minutes to an hour?”

“That should be fine,” Anja said. “I don’t even think our parents are up yet. Which reminds me. Do you know if your mom brought any Telepathy Skill Gems with her? Or if the dragons might have any? It’s really convenient being able to send to each other, but none of our parents have the skill.”

“I don’t think my mom brought any, but the dragons probably have a few. I’ll find out. If not, I’ll buy a couple when we get to Veria. They shouldn’t be too expensive.”

They nodded and then went to go find their parents.

“Good morning, Jonathan,” Olmith said. “I don’t believe you’ve met Sernu. She’s in charge of one of my teams, and she’s also our foremost expert on computer coding and systems.”

“I haven't. Nice to meet you, Sernu. So am I to assume that you’ve agreed to allow the Pygmaeans make Yrranth and Zokyrth impregnable?”

“We have,” Olmith nodded. “A unanimous decision. We didn’t find anything in the tablet about the facility we’ll need to build to serve as a control center. Sernu and I were wondering if there is anything special that needs to be done for that?”

“I don’t believe so, you’ll just want to make sure that it is as secure as you can possibly make it. If anyone broke into that facility they could, in theory, drop the planetary defense shield and deactivate the defense platforms. It would take a hell of a lot of planning, but it could be done, so you need to make sure that it is well protected. I’m sure you read through the security protocols involved in shutting down either of those systems?”

“Four council members need to verify their identities and input a code unique to them, yes,” Sernu said. “We’re very happy with those protocols, but were hesitant to start clearing out the facility before we’d spoken to you about it. One thing we want to do is install all the computers and other equipment that is needed planetside, just so we're confident that the location remains hidden.”

“That should be fine,” I nodded. “The rest of Tala Telar’s strike group arrived last night, as did the second strike group which was escorting cargo ships and the workforce. Oya Warvyn is up in orbit as well, so I can have her come down and discuss things with you, if you like. She can also begin the initial design phase of your new ships while she’s down here.”

“What is a strike group?” Sernu asked.

“I’m not sure how it is for other species, but the basic Scyftan naval group is a strike group, which is made up of three strike wings composed of forty ships, for one hundred twenty ships total. Each strike group is built around a command ship, and those one hundred nineteen other ships are basically their escort.”

“After that, you’ve got a battle group, which is five strike groups working together. You’ll only ever see them together during war situations, but they’re usually spread out patrolling borders or drilling to keep their people sharp. Rarely four or more battle groups will form into an armada, and you’ll know something serious is going on then.”

“So the fleet on its way to Earth is a battle group?” she asked.

“Exactly,” I nodded.

“I think it would be best if we met with Oya Warvyn before getting started on everything,” Olmith said. “Can you set that up for this afternoon, perhaps?”

“Sure, give me a moment.”

I stepped away and then sent to Tich.

[Good morning, Tich. The dragon council would like to meet with Oya at around noon, down on the planet. Can you set that up?”

[Sure thing. I take it the council wants to go ahead?]

[Yes. They’ve got some questions before they get started on the ground, so they want to talk to whoever is in charge of the work that will be done. That’s Oya right now, right? Besides that, it’s probably a good idea for them to work on designing their first generation of spaceship so the shipyards can get to work.]

[She is, but she’ll only be here for about two weeks. After that, she’ll be heading back home. She’s an extremely busy woman because of how good she is at her job. After that, one of Ercan’s top people will be in charge.]

[Okay, cool. Anytime after noon is fine for the meeting.]

[Alright, I’ll get in touch and let you know when they’ll be down.]

[Thank you.]

[No worries,] he replied.

I walked back over to join Olmith and Sernu.

“Tich is getting in contact with her ship and he’ll let me know what time they’ll be coming down shortly.”

\*\*\*\*\*

I sat with Olmith and Sernu as they each ate a massive plate of quillbeast meat before the three of us headed back inside the mountain. The massive granite doors were now on four heavy hinges each, though I had no idea where they got them. They were open all the way, and a Purple dragon in her human form, judging by the color of her clothes, was up on a ladder, chiseling into the hard rock. I looked over to Olmith and he answered before I could even ask.

“She’s carving the beginnings of an enchantment in the door. When she’s done, the door will be incredibly durable.”

I nodded and we continued, where the scene repeated itself with the second set of doors. We walked past, and it was easy to see how much progress had been made. The nine alcoves around the room had been finished, and circular slabs of polished stone had been placed in them. They would form the bases for the stone portal rings. Up above, two huge chains were hanging from the ceiling, and another one was being anchored in as we watched. The slab that would form the base for the portal to Yrranth was nowhere to be seen, and I wondered how they would get it in here.

“When Purple or Chromatic dragons and dragonkin work together, they can form much larger portals. They can’t increase the range at all, but they allow us to transport much larger objects around than we would be able to otherwise. The same is true for Black dragons and dragonkin. Working together, we can lift much, much more. It will easily take a least fifty of us on each side of the portal to lift the slab into place so it can be secured,” he answered when I asked about it. “Shift into a form that is able to fly and we’ll go down and check the progress below,” he said.

I did as he asked, though I switched to my eagle form, rather than my dragon form. While I could fly, I wasn’t confident flying in a confined space, like the tunnel below. When we had both shifted forms, Sernu climbed on Olmith’s back before he jumped in the air. He started diving after a moment and I followed after him.

We flew down about one hundred meters before the tunnel began to gently curve until it formed a spiral. We only ended up flying for about twenty seconds before Olmith turned at a fork in the tunnel and landed in a huge rectangular room. Sernu jumped off his back so he could shift into his human form, and then he waited for me to do the same.

“This is the new egg chamber. A team will be back shortly to start adding structural supports, but this room will offer much more security than our old egg chambers did. Once the supports are in, then we’ll have four large platforms that eggs will be on, rather than hundreds. They’ll still be hanging from the ceiling like before, but we’ll be working on other solutions as well. We’re thinking about anti-gravity generators, but we’ll need to have dedicated power in here before that will happen.”

It was definitely much bigger than the previous egg chamber I had seen, and it would have to be to hold over half a million eggs. There wasn’t a whole lot to see, so we shapeshifted again and continued to descend. We did come across another chamber similar to the egg chamber, but Olmith continued to fly down until we finally exited the tunnel. There were dozens of dragons and dragonkin down here, all hard at work.

“It may not seem like it, but we’re two kilometers underground right now,” he said. “This is where we’ll begin construction on our capital city. We’ll have to sleep in our human forms for a while, but after enough room is cleared and the ground is flattened, we’ll begin building houses. You can see alcoves on either side of the tunnel we just exited. That’s where short range portals will be installed. The left one to the platform to Zokyrth, and the other to the ground level so they can exit to the outside.”

“You know, there’s a Dvergr up in orbit. I bet she would absolutely love this,” I said.

“Dvergr?” Sernu asked.

“Dwarf, as they would be known as on Earth. They primarily live underground as well, though I doubt they could’ve excavated as much as you have in a bit over twenty-four hours. If you’re familiar with dwarves in fantasy, then you’ll know that they’re supposed to be ale-loving masters when it comes to blacksmithing and mining. Apparently Dvergr are the same, but they focus on more high-tech stuff nowadays.”

“Invite her down, by all means,” Olmith said. “She is the one who will be commanding the ships up above after you leave, right?”

“Yes. Xigios and his daughter are here on Tala’s ship, but both of them will be moving over to Abi for the trip to Veria.”

“I’d be happy to meet her.”

“I’ll see what I can do. Anyways, on the way down here, we passed another chamber after leaving the egg chamber. What is that one for?”

“All the livestock currently in stasis. I believe a woman named Tamara sent along some people to help us set up indoor enclosures. All of the animals will live there until we’re able to set up an area on the surface where they won’t get picked off by predators.”

“Oh, right. I’d forgotten about that. I guess the chamber will be a lot bigger than it looked as well, because they’ll be setting up an Enlarge enchantment, right?”

“Indeed,” he replied. “We have used the same enchantment in the past, but not on such a large scale.”

“You mentioning Tamara just made me realize that there is a much safer way to store all your eggs, and one that doesn’t require them all being in the same place. Give me a moment.”

[Abi, did you get everything sorted out with the artificial sanctuary? You said that you needed to wait until the dragons were dropped off.]

[Nope, I totally forgot. Give me a minute though and I’ll have it sorted. To access it, simply throw the Beacon up in the air and the portal will open. I’ll let you know when.]

[Thanks.]

“So Tamara created an object that is able to hold a large enclosure inside of it. You could say that it is similar to a dimensional storage, but nothing bad happens to you when you enter it. It’s like your own little pocket world. She’s a beast master, and has many animal companions. She needed a way to bring them along with her wherever she goes, so she created a miniature enclosure that they all live in.”

“How do they work?” Olmith asked.

“No idea, honestly. Abi could definitely tell you all about them though, as she scanned one of Tamara’s cubes. When activated, they create a portal that allows you to access the enclosed space. Somewhere inside that enclosed space are a series of mana crystals which store mana to keep the space open. Each cube is only usable by a single person and is fueled by channeling mana into the cube. Apparently a full charge will last a week, so you don’t need to channel mana into it each and every day. Let me show you,” I said.

Abi had replied while I was talking, so I took the Beacon out of my storage and threw it up in the air. A forcefield appeared around the Beacon before a portal opened in front of it. Looking through, I could see that the space was entirely empty.

“Let’s go,” I said, walking through the portal.

Olmith and Sernu followed me a moment later, and then all three of us were standing inside the space that was much larger than I expected.

[Hey, how big is this space?] I asked Abi.

[Twenty-five square kilometers. I could go bigger, but that’s all I’m comfortable with right now. Once the ship is manned full time, then I can greatly expand the space inside.”

[How big was the space inside Tamara’s cube?]

[About a square kilometer. She could have gone much bigger as well, but she probably wanted something that almost everyone could power.]

[Makes sense.]

“Abi said that this space is about twenty-five square kilometers, though the ones made by Tamara are only about one square kilometer in size. It’s pretty bare in here right now, but you could add soil, rocks, plants and animals, or you could set it up to store eggs. As long as the vessel isn’t destroyed or doesn’t run out of mana, you could store your eggs safely within.”

“This is so cool!” Sernu said.

Olmith chuckled. “How would we acquire one of Tamara’s cubes?”

“I think Tamara has the only ones right now, and they’re on Earth. I suppose that I could have one made for you by the Pygmaeans while they’re here, assuming I got permission from Tamara to do so. She recently patented the design and is working on producing them. There should be a pretty big market for them.”

“I would have to agree. Please try to get permission to manufacture a small number of them. I am certain that every dragon would sleep just a little bit easier every night if we knew our eggs were safe. It would also allow us to repurpose the egg chamber above.”

“I’ll get started on that as soon as possible then.”

“Thank you. Should we head back up?” he asked.

I nodded and we left the little pocket world. The forcefield around the Beacon was still active, as was the portal to access it. Finding no way to deactivate it, I sent to Abi again.

[Raise your hand up towards it and watch.]

I did as she said and the portal immediately winked out as the Beacon began floating towards me. Just before it reached my hand, the forcefield around it dropped. After I had put it away, I shifted to my eagle form and followed Olmith and Sernu.

Going up seemed like it was slower than going down, but that could probably be attributed to how little I fly. When we got to the main chamber, I saw an odd bluish-purple light coming from behind us. Turning, I saw that the portal to the council chamber had been finished, and it was currently active. Olmith immediately banked back around and roared before flying through. I followed, and was surprised to see another, smaller, but fully complete chamber. Just in front was a set of double doors, which, presumably, lead to the council chambers.

Olmith began shifting back to his human form, and I followed.

“Excellent. They got it finished faster than I expected,” Olmith said.

“I think they’re just finalizing the council chamber now, but it should be ready in a few hours,” Sernu replied.

“I wasn’t aware you were making the council chamber already. I thought it would wait until other things were finished first.”

“It doesn’t take a lot of dragons or dragonkin to do what we’ve been doing, especially when they only have to make a small vertical tunnel. We’re currently ten kilometers below the surface in a nice hidden area we found. This chamber will also act as a safehouse for the council members, should the capital cities be attacked. There are only two ways in and two ways out, and it’s easy to turn them off in case of emergency.”

“I see. I assume you’ll be doing the same thing for the control center for the planetary defenses?”

“Precisely,” he answered. “The control center will be much harder to get to, however. There will be only one way in and one way out, and it won’t be as simple as walking through a single portal. The reason that this chamber is so deep and the control center will match it is to make it as hard as possible to detect from orbit. When we asked Abi about it, she said that five kilometers underground were sufficient. We just wanted to be sure. I suppose the depth we’re currently at doesn’t affect Abi’s sensors though, does it?”

“If it did, she would know exactly where I was simply because of the Beacon I carry. It is meant to get me out of dangerous situations, no matter how deep within the earth I might be, or what defenses might be in place.”

“We thought as much, but we aren’t too worried about it. You and Abi have proven to be valuable allies, and I get the sense that you wouldn’t part with this information easily,” he replied.

“It’s safe with us,” I nodded.

\*\*\*\*\*

With the progress update over, we finally ended up leaving the chamber. Olmith had stuff that he needed to do, and I’d been gone almost an hour. I teleported over to the Grasshoppers where my friends were all waiting with their parents.

“Good morning,” I said as I walked over. “Sorry for the wait.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ben’s mother, Ellie, replied. “We’re all pretty excited to get going though.”

“Well, let’s go then.”

The ramp started lowering and I led everyone onto the ship. Ben took his spot up front, while everyone else sat in the back, for now. Just as I was raising the ramp, there were two quick pops. Looking back, I saw that Vixa and Imuna had elected to join us. They were immediately picked up by the twins, who began cuddling them.

Laughing, I hit the button which would prevent them from teleporting out of the ship, and then took off. We were heading to the only continent we hadn’t been to yet, which had a large desert in the middle of it. Rather than take a sub-orbital route just to get there quicker, I instead took us into geosynchronous orbit over the continent so we could choose where we wanted to check out first. We let the parents decide, and they picked the area around the largest of the many oases in the desert.

It was a good choice as there were likely many animals living around it. The average temperature in the desert was about forty degrees celsius, so the animals living there would need to congregate around sources of water if they wanted to survive. By the time we descended past five kilometers above sea level, we could easily see a large herd of animals as they drank from the only water source within tens of kilometers.

They weren’t the only animals there, as we could see large numbers of birds, reptiles and other mammals. The most interesting of all of them was an animal that was most similar to a giraffe, though it was twice the height and had six legs. There were a few dozen of the tall animals, and not a single one of them drank from the edge of the pool of water. Instead, they walked in until the majority of their body and long neck was submerged. Only then did they bend their neck slightly so they could begin lapping up water.

“I think giraffes have a hard time drinking water, and these things take it to the next level,” Ben said. “Those are some long necks.”

The animal drank for about a minute or so before suddenly raising its head, as if listening for something. It had apparently heard something that it didn’t like, as it immediately turned and began heading for land. It never made it. We didn’t even see what grabbed it, but it was pulled beneath the water in an instant. The other animals all evacuated the water, but eventually made their way back in so they could drink.

“Note to self: never, ever, set foot in an oasis on Yrranth,” Mason said.

We all nodded in response. The dragons could figure out what was living down there.

There were over a dozen different species of animals that surrounded the body of water, and they all drank from it, often taking turns. It was extremely similar to a situation you would see in Africa, where animals come from miles to drink. You’ll see lions basking in the sun as elephants and other herbivores walk by to get a drink of water. The herbivores are cautious of the apex predators, but turning around isn’t an option. The same was true here. There were obviously predators around the pool as well as in it, but animals made their way to the water, either in groups or by themselves.

After watching for about an hour, I turned and headed for another area we wanted to check out, but not before scanning all of the animals down there. I even scanned the animal in the bottom of the pool, but I’d need to wait until later to see what it looked like.

So far the only forests we had seen were temperate, but the one that bordered the desert was a rainforest. The density would make it hard to pick out animals under the canopy, so we headed to one of the two large rivers that ran through it. I found a wide area with relatively shallow water, and then we waited.

Up until now, we’d come across animals almost right after we arrived. This time, though, we waited for thirty minutes without spotting a thing. We were about to turn and head to another location when a number of animals exited the treeline. They were some of the smallest animals we had seen so far, being about the same size as Imuna. They were each covered in midnight black fur and had tails that were twice as long as their bodies. They looked almost like cats, except for the particularly large ears and four eyes.

Shortly after they exited the forest, they walked to the edge of the river, and then turned until their backs were to it. Turning their heads around almost one hundred and eighty degrees, they all submerged their tails in the water, swishing them from side to side. Within a minute or so, one of them flicked their tail into the air, causing whatever had latched on to be sent flying. As it was descending, the animal turned and leapt into the air. Catching the animal, it shook its head side to side a few times before sitting down to enjoy it’s meal.

The scene repeated itself as the other three animals did the exact same thing. A few of them even went back for seconds or thirds. When they were full, though, they all drank from the river before heading back into the forest.

“Well that was pretty cool,” Anja said. “It’s an interesting evolutionary trait they developed; the ability to fish with their tails. It seems like it would be a good way to get eaten, though.”

“I think that’s why they have two pairs of eyes and the extra large ears,” Ben said. “They might be able to see a bit better, but their hearing is definitely better. They can probably hear animals swimming below.”

“True,” she said.

We had time to check out one more location, so I piloted us to an area that looked quite different from the rest of the landscape we’d seen so far. When we arrived, it was easy to see why. The area was very rocky, with only the odd tree here or there. The tips of the rocks were very pointy, and even the corners looked sharp.

“I’ve seen something similar to this before. In Madagascar, I think,” Ben’s dad said.

“Tsingy de Bemaraha,” Ben said. “This looks quite a bit different though. It looks almost like Tsingy de Bemaraha and the Giant’s Causeway had a baby.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Mason said.

“Tsingy de Bemaraha is a geological formation where limestone had been eroded by water levels that raised and lowered often. It looks like thousands of blades or needles. The Giant’s Causeway, on the other hand, was formed by a volcanic fissure eruption, which formed interlocking columns of basalt. I’ll see if I can find some pictures.”

He searched on his phone for a while before he turned around so we could see it. We all had to huddle around the small screen, but we could see what was on it.

“This one is Tsingy de Bemaraha. As you can see, the rock looks jagged and sharp,” he said before swiping to the side. “And this is the Giant’s Causeway. Look at the long columns of rock and how they interlock together. This formation has both interlocking columns and jagged, knife-like tips, which really makes me wonder how it formed like that. If the tips formed like that from erosion, then the lower parts should be eroded as well, but they’re not.”

“What about erosion from wind and sand?” I asked.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Check it out,” I said, pointing to the south and rotating the ship so we could see a little better. “We’re at a pretty high elevation here and the part we’re looking at is in the middle of the formation. Is it possible that the wind is being blown over the top of all these rocks, causing the tips to be slowly eroded while leaving the rest fully intact?”

“Maybe? I have no idea. I think the wind would have to be moving at several hundred kilometers per hour though. Can you tell how fast it is moving?”

“Not without flying inside of it. How about we go take a look?”

I began flying at the oncoming sandstorm, arriving within only a few minutes. Rather than fly into it, however, I stopped a few kilometers away and spun the ship around. The moment it arrived, the wind began pushing the ship forward.

Ben typed on his console before whistling. “Those winds are definitely fast enough. I’m reading three hundred eighty-eight kilometer per hour winds right now. I would not want to be out there, especially not with the massive amount of sand that is in that storm.”

“I guess that explains it then. The wind is blowing so fast, but it’s being redirected by the edge of the formation so it blows overtop. Eventually the edge will erode so much that the wind will blow through the depressions, but I think that is going to take an extremely long time.”

“Yup, millions of years, probably. It all depends how often the sandstorms occur. The dragons could probably prevent it from eroding anymore. It would take some work, but they could build a wall to shield the formation from the wind, preserving it for a very, very long time.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Time flew by, so we ran out of time to do any more sightseeing. The dragons would be meeting with Oya and the lead engineers soon, so I wanted to grab a quick bite to eat before sitting in on the meeting. It would also give me the opportunity to meet both Tala and Oya, as both of them were going to be there.

Vixa crawled into my lap after she finished her lunch of quillbeast meat, and stayed there the entire time I was eating. She wouldn’t even budge when I was done, necessitating me carry her around as I headed over to the entrance to the portal chamber. She seemed pretty sleepy, but her suit wasn’t giving me any alarming readings.

As I was walking to the entrances, two sonic booms could be heard, grabbing everyone’s attention. Even Vixa looked up for a moment before dropping her head back down and closing her eyes. When the two shuttles were close, it was easier to see that they didn’t look similar at all. The first shuttle was the same one that had landed here the day before, while the other one was a sleek white ship that looked almost like a yacht. Oya definitely traveled in style.

The ramp on the black shuttle lowered first, revealing an impressive sight. Xigios had told me about it, but words didn’t give it justice. Tala walked down the ramp in her bright red mech, though it was a bit taller than I was expecting it to be. As she walked closer, I could see that there was something attached to her back, adding an extra foot or two to the mech’s overall height. Upon examining it further, I saw that there was a second faceplate above the one that would be where the head would be, which didn’t really make any sense.

She stopped about ten feet away and her faceplate covering her face retraced, while the other stayed in place.

“Tala Telar at yer service,” she said, curtsying.

“Nice to meet you. Can I ask what’s on your back?”

“Oh, aye,” she replied, kneeling down a little bit while the upper faceplate retracted. Inside was a baby with hair just as red as her mother’s, wrapped in a blanket and surrounded by some plush pillows. “This is me little one, Marra. I needed a way to carry ‘er around, so I had the boys make this for me. What do ya think?”

“I was confused at first, but it makes a lot of sense. How do you not bump into ceilings all the time though?”

“I only use it when I know I’ll be off the ship. I already need to bend to get through doorways. Trying to do it with ‘er on top would be impossible.”

I chuckled. “I can imagine. Anyways, I’ve only requested that you come down to the surface because I think you’ll enjoy seeing what the dragons have accomplished so far. Besides, it has to be pretty boring sitting up in orbit twiddling your thumbs, and you’ll be doing that a lot, I think.”

“I certainly will,” she replied. “The sooner tha’ the planetary shield and orbital defenses are in place, the better.”

Oya Warvyn arrived a few moments later, with what looked like an assistant and two engineers in tow. She, surprisingly, was in a mech as well, but it was one that was much more sleek, and was white, like her ship. Tala looked over and laughed, just as Oya’s own faceplate retracted into her mech.

“Nice to see you again, Tala. What do you think?” she said, turning in place so Tala could look over the mech.

“I think I’ll be gettin’ a free fifty thousand credits. Tha’s what I think,” she said. “Yer still going for beauty and speed over power. I’ll admit tha’ I’m interested in see how it performs though.”

“I think you’ll be surprised,” Oya said.

“What am I missing?” I asked.

“My apologies. I am Oya Warvyn,” the Pygmaean woman said, bowing slightly. “My father asked that I send his regards, he’s looking forward to hosting you and your sisters in a few days' time.

“I’m looking forward to it as well. Nice to meet you, Oya.”

“Dvergr are uncontested when it comes to building mechs, but I’ve been using my free time to come up with a design that rivals theirs. Everytime we’re in the same system, I pit my mech against hers to see how mine performs. So far they haven’t done very well, but I have a good feeling about this one.”

“It definitely looks cool,” I said. “Stuff like that on Earth is only a fantasy.”

“It’s not easy, believe me. It took me months of trial and error to finally get full range of motion, without causing too much wear or losing speed and power. I had a breakthrough, though, and this is the result.”

“I think I’d like to watch your little competition. If the two of you don’t mind, of course.”

“It’s fine with me,” Tala said.

Oya nodded. “Me as well.”

“Cool. Anyways, the dragon council is already assembled. If you’ll follow me.”

The doors were closed as the woman enchanting it was continuing to work on them, but they opened as we approached. Some additional lighting had been placed in the few hours since I’d been here, lighting it up quite a bit more. Like the first door, the second door was also closed, but it opened so we could enter the portal chamber.

“Oh, wow,” Tala said from behind me. “I knew tha’ they were building underground, but I didn’t think it would be this big.”

“It’s only the beginning. This is the portal chamber, which will act as a central hub. The active portal in front of us leads to the council chambers, while the rest will eventually lead to the main cities of the different types of dragons, eight in total. Down below is the entrance to the main part of the city. If you’d like to check it out when the meeting is over, I’m sure that it can be arranged.”

I turned to my right and began leading us around the edge of the gigantic chamber. With the chamber being about two kilometers in diameter, it meant that we had to walk for roughly three kilometers before arriving at the portal. It did give me time to answer some questions and ask some as well, so it was well worth the time.

The previous time I had been here there was only one portal active, but now there were two. It meant that the group on Zokyrth had nearly completed their portal chamber as well. Instantaneous travel between the planets was now possible, which meant that the Spectres likely wouldn’t need to be relied upon as much.

The guards were also new, as there were two dragonkin guards flanking each portal, as well as two that flanked the double doors in front of us. The two guards reached over to open the doors as we approached, and we entered the long hallway that would take us to the council chamber. We could see the two double doors at the end of the hall, but there were another of additional doors along the sides. Each of them had dragonkins of different types guarding them, which made me think that they are offices or apartments for the council members.

Thankfully we didn’t need to wait at all as the dragonkin guarding the council chambers opened the door when we got close. I led Tala and Oya and her retinue through the doors before stopping a short distance from the large round table.

“Council members, this is Tala Telar, the commander of The Indomitables fleet in orbit, and Oya Warvyn, daughter and representative of Ercan Warvyn. She’ll be in charge of the construction effort in orbit for a few weeks, and she’s also the one to talk about ship designs,” I said before turning to face the two women and gesturing to each of the council members as I said their names. “Tala, Oya, these are council members Selalea, Pharomna, Olmith, Bonakr, Bonanem, Shaemu, Linvalma, and Savarnei.”

“It’s nice to meet both of you. Please, sit,” Selalea said.

They certainly didn’t waste any time when things got started. The dragons had many questions and Oya and the two men who joined her did their best to answer them. Even Tala had a few questions to answer about the fleet that would be protecting them for the foreseeable future. The dragons were quite happy when things came to a close. The machinery involved with controlling the planetary shield and orbital defenses would be delivered, allowing the dragons to install it on their own.

Work crews would need to come down to the planet sooner or later, however, as the planetary shield would be generated by eight separate strategically placed generators. Each of them would eventually be connected so power could be transferred between them, but within two weeks the planetary shield would be active and the aperture would be in place. Two months after that, each of the generators would be connected to a series of power cores placed deep underground.

With the power cores active, it would take a strike group days to finally drop the shield, if they were unmolested and didn’t have to worry about defending themselves. Even a battlegroup or armada would struggle to get through the shield, though they could probably each do so in under a day. Additional power cores could be hooked up as well later on, increasing the strength of the shield even more.

After the meeting adjourned, Oya and Tala were shown around the fledgling city, and each were impressed by what they’d seen. We all headed back up to the surface before long, however. It was time to watch two girls in metal suits kick each other’s asses.