**Somewhere in the Milky Way Galaxy**

**Scythe II Class Scyftan Empire Vessel - The Fang of Khigil**

**01:37 Scyftan Empire Time (09:37 Eastern Daylight Time)**

**August 13, 12610 (August 12, 2019)**

Alarm klaxons started blaring suddenly in the middle of the night, waking the captain of The Fang of Khigil. Akroix Drutex was about to head to the bridge when he felt his mental shield being tapped on. He reached out with his mind and realized it was his XO. He slightly lowered his shield so he could talk to him. [Status report!] he demanded.

[Apologies captain. There is nothing showing up on the ship’s sensors, but we did receive a file that set off the alarm and requires a level 9 security clearance.]

[Level 9? Are you certain?]

[Yes captain. I am looking at it right now.]

[Send it to my terminal. Full stop and stand by for further orders. I will make my way to the bridge shortly.]

[File is sent, captain. I will pass along your orders.]

[Thank you, XO,] the captain replied, ending the connection between them and raising his mental shields again.

Every Scyftan was born with telepathy, though they call it Mindspeaking. It was a defense mechanism when their species was young. It originally allowed them to detect predators as well as find mates. When they detected an incoming predator, they would shapeshift into a perfect copy of that predator. Usually, the predator wouldn’t want to mess with multiple beasts the same size as it, so they would leave, searching for other prey.

Over time, it allowed them to speak to other members of their species with their mind, and allowed them more freedom when it came to shapeshifting. They could change their form, taking on characteristics from different animals they came across, rather than just shapeshifting into an exact copy. Female Scyftan would only mate with the strongest of Mindspeakers, and the strongest of Mindspeakers always ruled their society.

He sat down at his terminal and brought up the file. Since the Scyftan people were a race of shapeshifters, there was a very elaborate security process people must go through in order to access classified files. For level 9 security clearance, no less than a combination of ten different sources would get you into a file. These sources included retinal scans, voice prints, passwords and a mana signature match. It did make it nearly impossible to hack in, but it also took the captain almost 3 minutes to get into the file.

When he read the contents he was both relieved and apprehensive. Relieved because his over fourteen hundred year long search was over, but apprehensive because he knew he would be the one that would be sent.

The report stated that the last rightful living heir to the throne of the Scyftan Empire, Jonuth Kidravia, was alive and on the primitive planet Earth. He goes by the name Jonathan Stevens and was detected because the governments on Earth require anyone who wishes to enter a dungeon to go through an initial scan. When he went through the evaluation, his mana signature was flagged and a signal was immediately sent to the closest Scyftan vessel, which happened to be Captain Drutex’s ship.

It also stated that he was only eighteen years old, which meant that he had been in stasis for over fourteen hundred years. This puzzled the captain. *‘Why would they wait so long to awaken him?’* he asked himself. It should have taken roughly three hundred years to reach earth with the ship they had access to when his caretakers fled Scyftan space, which means he was kept in stasis for another eleven hundred years after they landed. He needed more information.

He again reached out with his mind, looking for a member of the science team assigned to his ship. He tapped on her shield and a moment later she responded. [Good morning, captain. How can I help you?] she asked.

[Good morning, Emais. I need all the information you can get me on the state of the planet called Earth in the past eleven hundred years or so. Focus on eleven hundred years ago and then move to the present. I want a report on my desk in an hour.]

[I’ll do my best, captain. Can I put my team in on this?]

[Do as you wish, just make sure you’re in my ready room in one hour.]

[I’ll get started right away, captain. See you in one hour,] she finished, closing the connection.

Captain Drutex shut down his terminal and exited his stateroom, locking the door on his way out and making his way to the bridge. When he arrived, the XO shouted, “Captain on the bridge!”

Since the ship was stopped, everyone stood at attention and saluted the captain.

“At ease,” the captain said. “Lieutenant Dhazi, send the file we just received to command, and let them know we are holding position and requesting further orders.”

“Yes, captain,” Lieutenant Dhazi said, turning back to his terminal. Less than a minute later, he added, “Message sent, captain.”

“Very well. XO, you have the conn. I’ll be in my ready room. Let me know as soon as we get a response.”

“I have the conn,” he XO acknowledged.

The captain nodded, leaving the bridge and entering his ready room. He sat down to catch up on paperwork while he waited.

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**Earth**

**Ottawa, Ontario**

**August 12, 2019**

**09:53 EDT**

While Jonathan was in the dungeon with his friends, his parents were driving to the Canadian Adventurer’s Guild Headquarters, where they both worked. Alexandra was driving while Gabriel responded to emails. His phone vibrated indicating a text. He quickly read it over and looked over to his wife, “Just got a text from Abi. She says that they now know Jonathan is alive and on Earth. A signal containing a file was sent to the closest ship. The captain ordered it to be forwarded to command and are holding position while they await new orders. Abi traced where the signal came from and found the man responsible. She ordered a team to pick him up, and they’ll be arriving here tomorrow.”

“How far away is the ship? We knew they might get a signal off when he went through his evaluation. Are we going to have the time she estimates we will need?”

“Doesn’t say. I’ll send her a message and find out.”

They both rode in silence, thinking about the news they just received. They knew this day was coming, and they had spent a long time preparing for it. Ultimately, it would be up to Jonathan to be ready when the time came.

The silence was broken when Gabriel received another text. “Abi says that in all likelihood, the ship that will be sent is the one that received the message. It will take them just over 6 months to get here. Apparently it is a Scythe II class ship. Still a formidable ship and capable of carrying 2000 soldiers, it’s just slow. If they sent a Scythe VII class instead or another newer ship, it could get here in less than 3 months. They’re all being used in the war with The Confederation, so unless that war ends unexpectedly we’ll have more than enough time. She also says she will be here tonight to meet Jonathan.”

“Good. The sooner she starts working with Jonathan, the better. Our other guests have already arrived?”

“The girls arrived last night, but last I heard the Stewarts won’t arrive until around 5pm,” Gabriel said. “The triplets are eager to finally meet their brother.”

“They’ll have to wait until later tonight to meet him. First, we’ll need to let him know about his people.”

Having arrived at their destination, she pulled into the employee entrance and stopped at the security checkpoint. She sent a small pulse of mana at the machine beside the car and a light on the machine turned green causing bollards in front of the car started lowering into the ground. While the ones in front of the car were lowering, the ones behind the car started rising to stop anyone from coming in behind them. When they were through, the front ones would rise up, and the back ones would lower into the ground again.

Alexandra drove forward and pulled into her parking spot. They got out and walked over to the employee entrance where both of them had to pulse mana at the door to gain entry. Most companies around the world employed a mana scanner since every person’s mana signature is different and is nearly impossible to forge. A very skilled Scyftan could do it, but for humans, which make up 99.999% of the population, it was impossible.

The first thing on their agenda this morning was to greet Jonathan’s sisters, and their caretakers. You see, Alexandra and Gabriel weren’t Jonathan’s birth parents, and neither were the man and woman who had watched over Aleena, Alexis and Lucille for the past fourteen hundred and twenty-one years.

Before the King’s children were born, he had tasked the Royal Guard to find him the best people they could find and develop a training program for them to keep his children safe. These people would be the highest skilled adventurers they could find, before they went through their training. When their training was over, they would be unmatched by anyone not a member of this unit. Upon seeing the teams in action, the only name he could come up with for the unit was Spectres.

Each child was assigned a two-person team, and there would always be two more nearby, practically hiding in plain sight. When the King and the Queen were slain in a coup by a rival family, the teams sprang into action to get the children off the planet. They, along with the King, had selected a number of worlds far from the core of Scyftan space where they could flee to if anything happened. When in orbit, Jonathan and the girls were separated and two ships headed in a different direction, but would eventually converge on Earth.

Alexander and Gabriel stepped into an elevator and waited for the doors to close. When they did, Gabriel stepped up to a panel and gave it a short pulse of mana. The panel retracted inwards and moved upwards, revealing a small screen, a retinal scanner, and a keypad. Having recognized his mana signature, it asked for three retinal scans and a password. He went through the process of changing his eyes between retinal scans, and finally entered his password. When everything was accepted, the panel closed and the elevator started descending. This was one of their most sophisticated security measures, and no one but a Scyftan would be able to activate the elevator to bring them where they were going.

The elevator finally stopped after a couple of minutes, having descended roughly 300 meters underground. The doors opened into a small room with two Spectres standing as security. When Alexandra saw who was on duty, she broke into a big smile and started walking towards them. “Yuki, Omar, good to see you,” she said, giving each a hug. “How have you two been?”

“Much better now that we’re here,” Omar answered. “Do you have any idea what it’s been like dealing with three teenage girls? It’s been harder than the training we went through to become Spectres. I’m never having kids. Nuh-uh, no, sir.”

“He’s been like this for years,” the petite Japanese-looking woman said with a laugh. She shielded her mouth from Omar and continued in a quiet voice, “He adores those girls. Don’t believe a word he says.”

Omar acted like he didn’t hear what Yuki said. Instead, he turned to Gabriel, “You wanna get a drink and catch up when I get off shift, Gabe? I still have some of that ale from back home that you like.”

Gabriel was already nodding before Omar could finish. “Absolutely! You know I can’t pass up some good ale. I’ll be bringing Jonathan with me, if you don’t mind. He’ll probably need a drink or ten after what we’ll be laying on him tonight.”

“Sure, it’ll be good to meet the kid, especially since I’ll be one of his trainers.”

“You two should probably head in. The girls saw you pull in and they can’t wait to see you. They’ve been watching Jonathan and his friends going through their scan, and are following their progress in the dungeon,” Yuki interrupted.

Alexandra nodded, “Abi will be showing up sometime today. Let me know when she arrives, will you?”

“Will do,” Yuki confirmed, pressing a button on her console. A door formed on the wall opposite of the elevator, allowing them access to the facility, “You can head on through.”

While it looked like a door, it was actually a portal that would teleport them a few thousand kilometers to a facility hidden deep within the Canadian Rockies.

“See you two later,” Alexandra said before stepping through the portal. Immediately she was pounced on by three giggling nearly eighteen year old girls.

“Hiya, auntie!” they chorused.

“Hello girls,” she said with a chuckle. “Something tells me you three have been spying.”

“It’s hard not to with all these monitors,” Aleena, the oldest of the triplets replied, gesturing at the large curved wall of monitors behind her.

“True enough. Yuki said you’ve been watching your brother and his friends?”

“Yup,” Alexis, the youngest of the triplets answered. “Yuki is going to be very happy! Anja ended up learning Precognition at the end of her scan.”

“Did she, really? That is a very powerful skill, though it probably would have been better if Sonja had learned it instead.”

Gabriel stayed back for a moment to talk to Omar a bit more. They’re best friends and didn’t get to talk to each other often, since they were on different details. He stepped through the portal and was swarmed by the girls as well. When they were done greeting each other, Alexandra asked, “Gabriel, are there any Precognition Skill Gems in storage?”

“Let me check.” He pulled out his phone and opened up the list of Skill Gems the Adventurer’s Guild has in stock. He scrolled through and saw that they didn’t have any. He typed Precognition in the search bar to see when the last time the ability was awarded from an evaluation, or dropped from a dungeon. It turned out that Anja was the first person to get the skill since the Adventurer’s Guild opened over a thousand years ago. “Nope. In fact, in all the time we’ve been on Earth, it has only been awarded once. Today, Anja learned it when the tier A lottery ball machine drew the only S ball in the machine. There are currently 1102 tier A skills and perks, giving her a 1 in 1103 chance of drawing the tier S ball, or a 0.091% chance.”

“I’m surprised no one has gotten lucky and learned the skill yet, especially with them becoming more common. I expect a large influx of adventurers to the Amazonian and other high level dungeons when word gets around that there is a tier S skill that is so powerful. It shouldn’t take long at all, since our list of discovered skills is displayed to the public on our website.”

Gabriel did some more searching on his phone. “It’s already been posted on multiple news sites and has been getting a lot of attention.”

Alexandra did some thinking and then looked around the large room. She spotted the head of public relations for the Adventurer’s Guild, excused herself and walked over. “Good morning, Siobhan. Do you have a moment?”

“Sure, please take a seat,” she replied. “What can I help you with?”

Alexandra sat down before answering, “There is probably going to be a large influx to dungeons that drop tier S Skill Gems. I want you to put out a press release saying the Adventurer’s Guild will offer 5 million credits to the first person to bring us a tier S Skill Gem containing Precognition. You should find the number of the gem on the Skills and Perks section of our website. The offer will be valid for 12 months.”

Siobhan noted down what Alexandra wanted and then looked up when she finished talking. “I’ll get right on it. Is there anything else you need?”

“Nope, that’s it, thank you. I’ll let you get back to work.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll have this press release out in about 10 minutes.”

Alexandra got up and saw Gabriel was sitting with the triplets and they were watching Jonathan and his friends work their way through the dungeon. She walked over and sat down, watching along with them for the next few hours.

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**Somewhere in the Milky Way Galaxy**

**Scythe II Class Scyftan Empire Vessel - The Fang of Khigil**

**02:51 Scyftan Empire Time (10:51 Eastern Daylight Time)**

**August 13, 12610 (August 12, 2019)**

Captain Drutex was interrupted by a knock on his ready room door. “Come!” he yelled.

The door opened and Emais Stosqe walked in carrying a tablet. “My team and I compiled the report you asked for, sir. Everything is on this tablet,” she said.

“Send me a copy and give me the relevant history. What happened in the last eleven hundred years?”

She made a motion on her tablet and the report was sent to his own. “As you may know, Earth was discovered approximately thirty-four hundred years ago by one of our exploration ships. A science team was deposited on the planet and the ship continued with its mission. The science team set up various research sites all over the planet to study the humans and collect data. Roughly twenty-five hundred years passed before a ship returned to take them home and place a number of hidden satellites in orbit. Some of the science team members came back, but most opted to stay on Earth after learning about the coup.”

“As long as the science team observed humans, they always seemed obsessed with delving into dungeons. So much so, that they would neglect other duties, such as producing food or caring for their children. About one thousand and seventy years ago, that all began to change. A powerful group of adventurers formed the Adventurer’s Guild and started taking control of the dungeons, bit by bit. They went on a massive campaign to recruit other powerful adventurers. They limited who could enter dungeons, and built schools to prioritize education. A rule or law was implemented that only people who were eighteen years of age or older could enter a dungeon, and it has remained to this day. The science team reported that humans were well on their way to repairing their society when the ship arrived to take them home. Apparently the structure provided by the Adventurer’s Guild has allowed them to progress to the point they are at now. Their society is built on a mix of technology and magic, similar to our own.”

Captain Drutex sat in silence contemplating the information Emais had given him. *‘It seems like the boy’s caretakers didn’t like the state of Earth when they arrived, and didn’t feel comfortable raising the boy in that environment. If they are the ones that created the Adventurer’s Guild, then they all but control the planet from the shadows. Perhaps they were waiting until they had total control before waking him from stasis?’* He shook his head, there were too many possibilities.

“...captain?”

“Hm. What?”

“I said will that be all, captain?”

Before the captain could answer, there was a knock on the door leading to the bridge. It opened and the communications officer, Lieutenant Dhazi entered. He saw Emais standing in front of the captain’s desk before turning to the captain. “High command has replied to the message you had me send. I have forwarded the response to your computer, sir.”

“Thank you Lieutenant. You may return to your post.”

He saluted the captain and left the room.

“Thank you Emais. You may resume your duties as well.”

“You’re welcome, captain. There is much more detailed information in the file I compiled if you would like to read it,” she said, turning to leave the room.

When she left, Captain Drutex opened the response and read it. He sighed before sending a response confirming his orders and then headed to the bridge to order their ship to set course for Earth.

His orders were to set course for earth at top speed and slay Jonuth Kidravia at all costs. If he couldn’t do it with boots on the ground, he had permission to glass the planet.

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**Pluto**

**Tombaugh Regio - the “Heart”**

**11:17**

**August 12, 2019**

A small white crystal sat on top of a larger green crystal on the highest peak of The Tenzing Montes. Surrounding those crystals were what looked like communications towers, but made out of the same green crystal that the white crystal sat upon.

The white crystal is very different from other crystals, including the crystals that surrounded it. Indeed, it is the only one like it in existence. The last of her species. The crystal is an artificial lifeform that was created by a race that no longer exists. It was meant to bond with a person and become stronger as their bondmate got stronger. Without a bondmate, they remain as this crystal has; small, though not insignificant. The crystal had a bondmate until he was slain by his enemies and she was crushed. Both literally and figuratively. Though she was not fast enough to save him, she was fast enough to help save his children. For over eleven hundred years, she has sat in this same place. Watching. Waiting.

Earlier this day, she had intercepted a message sent to a ship belonging to the enemies of her former bondmate. Her enemies. She had sent a message to her allies of this fact and was waiting for the captain of that ship to receive new orders.

Without warning, the green crystalline towers surrounding her lit up indicating a signal was being intercepted. It took her less than a microsecond to read the message and she immediately launched herself up off the pedestal she had been sitting on for the past eleven hundred years. When she was a few kilometers above the surface of Pluto, she changed direction and shot off towards Earth.

Her name, as given to her by King Derech Kidravia, is Abi, and she has a new bondmate to meet. Even if he doesn’t know it yet.

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**Earth**

**Gatineau Park Dungeon, Quebec**

**August 12, 2019**

**11:20 EDT**

It took us an hour and a half to complete the first level of the dungeon, and it probably would’ve taken us double that if Mason wasn’t so overpowered. With Whirling Leap, he could jump into a bunch of monsters and do a massive amount of damage. Usually it would only take a few attacks from the rest of us and all the monsters would be dead. The drawback of this strategy, however, was that Whirling Leap has a 60 second cooldown, allowing its use every other group of monsters.

The first level was a winding cavern with a lot of dead ends. It followed the same setup that many other dungeons seem to follow; The first few levels usually consist of beasts that wandered into the dungeon and mutated into what they are now. In this case, it was filled with bats and wolves. The tunnels were mostly clear of beasts, with the majority being in a number of large chambers.

We had to backtrack a few times to figure out where to go to reach the second level. It seems like we hit every chamber on the first level before finally finding the floor boss that we had to kill to continue on. There were four groups of wolf-like creatures that we had to defeat before we could focus on the floor boss. It was a massive Alpha Wolf that was lying on a raised area in the middle of the room. It had been sleeping when we entered the room, but opened its eyes when we crossed a certain point. It did nothing but watch us.

We quickly dispatched the four groups of Wolves which caused the Alpha to leap down from his overlook. He wasn’t going to give us any time to regenerate mana, it seemed. Mason used Whirling Leap which caused the flaming axe head of his halberd cut deep into its flank and the large wolf to bellow in pain. The enraged wolf focused on Mason allowing the rest of us to strike at the wolf with our own flaming weapons.

Our weapons, or parts of our weapons, anyway, were on fire thanks to Ben. He had indeed received some auras from his evaluation. The one he was using when we were fighting the boss was Aura of Flame. It allows Mason, Anja, Sonja and myself to deal additional fire damage with our attacks as long as he was able to maintain it, which wasn’t very long right now.. Anja and Sonja in particular benefit from it quite a bit, since they attack so often. Anja with her butterfly swords, and Sonja with her Triple Shot skill.

It took us about two minutes to finally beat the floor boss. I was able to move in front of Mason since I would be able to mitigate any damage the wolf would be able to do with my shield. It freed Mason up from defending from the wolf’s teeth and claws, and allowed him to focus on dealing damage. The wolf soon collapsed and now nothing was guarding the passage to the next level. We picked up all the mana crystal shards, and the mana gem that remained when the Alpha’s corpse disappeared, and descended to level two, which is where we are now.

When we walked down the ramp to the second level, a waygate powered on, which would allow us to teleport back to the surface. In the future, we would be able to teleport from the surface down to the lowest level we reached previously. For example, if we reached level four today, then we would be able to use the waygate on the surface to teleport back down, bypassing the first three levels. Every time the dungeon resets, we would have to start from the beginning, however.

“Let's take a few minutes to get a drink and spent our attribute points before continuing,” I said to the team. Thanks to the perk that makes me gain experience 50% faster, I leveled while we were killing the groups of Wolves guarding the Alpha. The rest of the team leveled up after the Alpha died, since he gave so much experience. I opened the Adventurer’s Guild app on my phone, putting 5 points into Constitution, and 2 points into Strength before putting it away and taking a water bottle out of my dimensional storage. I was taking a long drink when Ben called us over to him.

“Hey guys, check this out!” He had his phone open to the Adventurer’s Guild website. He looked at Anja, turned his phone towards her and said, “Looks like you learning Precognition is pretty big news, Anja. The Adventurer’s Guild just put up a post offering 5 million credits to the first person to bring them a Precognition Skill Gem.”

“Seriously?” she asked taking the phone to read the article. The rest of our eyes exploded open when Ben told us how much they were offering. 5 million credits is an obscene amount of money.

Sonja was looking over Anja’s shoulder as she read the article. She noticed something and spoke up. “Says that that the offer is valid for the next 12 months. There is going to be a massive influx of people trying their hand at high level dungeons. I wonder why they’re willing to pay so much for one.”

“Who knows. It is potentially the most powerful skill discovered so far. Many people will be clamoring for one. There are people out there who would probably pay more than what the Adventurer’s Guild is offering,” I added. “Did you all spend your attributes? We have about 7 more hours to get as far as we can today.”

Everyone answered in the affirmative and we continued onward.