**Earth**

**Spectre Base, Canadian Rockies**

**August 14, 2019**

**12:58 PDT (15:58 EDT)**

As soon as the elevator reached the bottom floor, we separated, with my sisters going to continue their work, while I headed to my room to remove my armor again. I was leaving my room when I felt the familiar sensation that corresponded with Abi leveling up again. I took out my phone and looked at the time, realizing that it had been almost an hour and forty-five minutes since I had seen Abi. She said it would be an hour or so until she leveled, so I must have been using quite a bit of mana.

I put my phone away and turned to my left, walking towards Mason’s room. I knocked on the door and waited for him to open the door.

[Where are you?] I sent to him.

[At the firing range, why?]

[Just making sure you haven’t blown yourself up yet,] I sent with a chuckle. [Where is the firing range, anyways?]

[Gimme a minute and I’ll show you.]

[Alright, cool. I’m outside your room right now. I figured you’d be in there.]

[I’ve been bouncing back and forth between the firing range and my room while I work on this. Be right there,] he finished.

He teleported in the hall in front of me, and as soon as I saw the state he was in and what he was carrying, I burst out laughing. He had oil or grease smudges everywhere and was carrying a minigun that had a strap going around his neck. It looked a lot smaller than I was expecting one to look, but it was clearly a minigun.

“What are you laughing about?”

“When was the last time you looked in the mirror?” I asked, still chuckling.

“What, that bad?”

I nodded. “You look like a little kid that got into some black paint.”

“Ehh, couldn’t be helped. This thing requires a lot of grease to keep everything running smoothly and preventing any jams,” he answered, lifting it up a little.

“You look like you’re wearing more grease than is probably in that,” I replied. “Nah, the main reason I was laughing is because I knew you would build a minigun or some other big nasty gun. Why is it so small, anyways? I was expecting it to be quite a bit bigger.”

“Hell yeah I’m going to use something like this. I’m not going to mess with some dinky little popgun. It looks smaller than you think because Scyftan technology is a lot further ahead, so they’re able to make components a lot smaller. The de-linker is the same size, but the motor is a lot smaller, and so are the rest of the electronics for safety systems and the fire rate controls.”

“What about power? I know they need electricity to function, and how are you going to carry the ammo with the insane firerates?”

“I don’t have either of those on me. Follow me and I’ll show you it in action.”

He led me to the lobby where we went down another hallway I had never been down. It was a five minute walk before we finally arrived. As soon as he opened the door, we were buffeted by the sound of a lot of gunfire. It made me jump at first, but I followed in after him. We walked past at least twenty lanes, with most of them being occupied by people practicing. He led me into another room with a lot of tables and a counter at the back with glass separating us from the person manning the counter.

Mason walked over to the counter and talked to the man there, “Hey, Derick, can I get a power cell, and five hundred rounds of 7.62 milimeter?”

“Sure thing, Mason. Give me a minute,” he replied. The man turned and went through a door behind him. A minute later, he came out holding a small rectangular box, and an even smaller cylinder. He set them down and typed something on a tablet. When he was done, he looked up at Mason. “Mana pulse, please.”

Mason raised his hand and sent a mana pulse at a small device on this side of the glass.

“Perfect,” Derick said. He picked up the box and cylinder, put them in a small compartment and closed the door. “There you are.”

“Thanks, man,” Mason said, opening the compartment from this side. He extracted the two items and then turned to me. “Follow me.”

He led me over to one of the tables and set his minigun on it before sitting down. I sat opposite and he went over the two objects.

“Alright, this is a power cell. I don’t know how it is made, but think of it like a battery. This little thing is apparently able to supply enough power to my minigun if it was firing continuously for five hours or so. Obviously I can’t do that, because the barrels would melt very quickly, but that gives you an idea of how long I can use it before needing to replace the power cell. This little thing is responsible for reducing a lot of the weight. Without it, I would need to carry a lot of batteries, which isn’t really feasible. Alternatively, mana can be used to power it, but it burns through my mana too quickly. Until I get my mana regeneration up, I’ll be stuck with the power cells,” he explained, plugging the power cell into a slot on the top of the gun.

“This is the other way that weight is reduced,” he said, lifting up the small box and placing it in front of me. At one end, it had an opening and I could see the first bullet. “This ammo box uses the same thing that your mom’s food basket does. It’s enchanted with Enlarge and Lightweight. Pick it up and you’ll see what I mean.”

I picked it up and was surprised how light it was. It couldn’t have been more than one pound, if that.

“You’re saying this little thing contains five hundred rounds? There is no way,” I said, handing it back.

“Don’t believe me? I’ll show you,” he replied, turning the minigun on its side and picking up the ammo box. He attached it to the bottom of the minigun where there were two clips I hadn’t noticed, securing it to the gun. When that was done, he took a long, thin rod out of his inventory and showed it to me. “This is a pin that I insert to disengage the clutch, allowing me to turn the barrel cluster by hand and load the rounds.”

“A clutch, like in a car?”

“Something like that, yeah. Barrels don’t stop spinning as soon as you let go of the trigger, so without a clutch you would lose a lot of rounds anytime you stopped firing,” he explained, inserting the pin. “Now I can start loading the ammo. I need to hold the rounds up until the first two clicks, and then I can let go and rotate the barrel until the first link is ejected.”

He then pulled the ammo belt out of the case and slid the first round into a slot in the bottom. Holding it there, he rotated the barrel cluster counter clockwise. I heard two clicks and then he let go of the belt. He turned the barrel cluster three more times, which caused a piece of metal to be ejected from a slot in the bottom.

“Alright, five rounds are loaded right now, and if I turn it one more time, it will actually fire. To stop that, now I need to remove the pin from the clutch, re-engaging it. That will allow me to rotate the barrel one more time to load the sixth round, and then I can rotate the barrel cluster freely without it going off.”

He removed the pin and turned the barrel cluster once more. Another link that was holding the rounds together was ejected.

“Alright, follow me,” he said, standing up and picking up the minigun.

He turned towards a pair of doors I hadn’t gone through yet, and led me into the room beyond. Once inside, he walked up to a wall and grabbed two pairs of ear protection.

“Take these. This room is going to get quite loud, and you’ll need them.”

I put them on and then he led me down to a stall. Rather than there be sheets of paper for people to aim at, all there was in this room was a large mound of dirt around one hundred meters away. He put his ear protection down and then took a tripod and a ratchet out of his dimensional storage. He put the tool down, and then positioned the tripod the way he wanted it.

“Come over here. I’m going to lift the minigun up and line it up with the holes on the tripod. Grab the ratchet and bolt it down, alright?”

I nodded, walking around him and picked up the ratchet and three screws. He held it perfectly in place, making it very easy to secure to the tripod. When I was done, he let go and set down the ratchet.

“I’ve gotten decent enough with this thing not to need a tripod, but figured I’d set it up so you can try it out,” he explained, turning to me and moving to the side and putting his ear protection on. “Step up to the gun and grab it by the two handles. When you’re ready, lift up the red cover and flick the switch upwards. After that, you can hit one of the two triggers with your thumb and it will fire. Watch out for the recoil, so you don’t hit the ceiling.”

I nodded and walked up to it. Grabbing the two handles, I flicked the switch. A light on the back turned green, so I was good to go. I saw two black buttons close to each thumb, but didn’t move my thumbs just yet. Looking down range, I tried to aim for the middle of the big dirt pile. Breathing in, I moved my right thumb and depressed the button.

Instantly, the barrel started rising and I had to compensate to keep the rounds down. I could see a lot of casings being ejected from the gun, and after a three to four second burst, I let go of the trigger. I flicked the switch again, causing the green light to wink out, and then looked at the floor. I could see at least two hundred casings littering the floor, meaning there were a lot more rounds in that little ammo box than I thought.

“Now I’ll show you what it’s like using it without the tripod,” Mason said.

I stepped back and he re-attached the strap still dangling around his neck. He then removed the bolts and lifted the minigun with one hand, and put away the tripod with the other. With that out of the way, he grabbed a handle on top of the minigun with his right hand, and one of the handles on the back with his left hand, holding it on the left side of his body. It looked very similar to how you would hold a chainsaw.

He aimed down range and flipped the switch. After a few seconds, he pushed one of the buttons and rounds started going downrange at an incredible rate. Looking at the tracers, it seemed like he was easily able to keep the recoil under control. He fired about as long as I did before stopping. He flipped the switch and then unstrapped the minigun, setting it on the floor.

“So there you have it. Five hundred rounds gone in less than eight seconds of actual firing.”

“How big do those ammo boxes get? It would be really inconvenient if you have to take a minute to reload them after firing for a very small amount of time.”

“They get much bigger, but also get less and less feasible to carry. The one we just used was just over a pound, and that was only five hundred rounds of ammunition. I know there is a ten thousand round ammo box, but it weighs around twenty pounds. It’s still very easy for me to carry since my Strength is pretty high, and is going to get higher, but you’re right; It’s a massive inconvenience. That’s why I’m just fooling around at the moment. I’ll probably use something smaller that reloads faster until I can use the energy weapon version instead. They also have a few nice bonuses that come with them,” he said.

“What sort of bonuses?”

“Size, for one. The big thing at the bottom is called a de-linker and is the most important part of the gun. It removes rounds from an ammo belt and pushes them into the gun, while ejecting the links holding rounds together. That removes a lot of size and weight, since it isn’t needed with an energy weapon version. A motor is still needed to turn the barrel cluster, but since that’s all it needs to do, it doesn’t need to be as powerful, so it is smaller as well. Besides that, the main casing of the weapon is smaller, since there aren’t any internal moving parts. An energy weapon version also runs off of those power cells, though the power doesn’t go nearly as far as it does with this one. You can fire around eight thousand times using a power cell before needing to replace it, which is a hell of a lot quicker than loading an ammo belt.”

“Does the energy weapon version shoot as fast as the regular version?”

“It can, though you run the risk of the barrels warping or melting from the heat,” he said, picking up a shop broom. He began sweeping the expended rounds into a three or four inch opening that ran along the wall. While he swept, he continued his explanation, “They run a lot hotter than a conventional minigun, as you can probably imagine. I was talking to some guys that said I can get the barrels enchanted with some sort of frost enchantment to help cool them, which would help a lot. There are other materials that dissipate heat better, but they tend to be quite expensive since they can’t be produced on Earth and need to be shipped in.”

I walked over to the opening along the wall and bent down to look closer. “Where do the empty casings go?”

He laughed. “I asked the same question when I got yelled at for not sweeping them into the opening yesterday. They drop down to a conveyor belt where they’re deposited in a large bin and later sorted. If a shell is still in good condition, then it is reloaded, and if not, it is melted down and made into a new casing.”

“Ah, I see. So have you tried any energy weapons or railguns yet?”

“Nah, not yet. This was the first thing I built out of that kit in my room. Everything was in pieces and there was a pretty thick book on how to put it all together. I read through the book a little last night, but didn’t get started until this morning, that’s why I’m all greasy. The moving parts in a minigun move so quickly, that they need to be well lubricated for everything to run smoothly. I was just about to test it when you sent to me.”

“I’m surprised you went with a conventional gun before trying something completely alien.”

Mason shrugged after he finished sweeping the rest of the casings into the opening, “I’ve always thought gatling guns were awesome, from the original one produced in 1861 to more modern ones, like the GAU-8 Avenger used in the A-10 Thunderbolt. Just the aesthetic and the sheer firepower is amazing. I just wanted to build one and try it out.”

“I can see that. I’ve always liked the MG 42 since I first saw it in a game. I can’t remember which it was, but you could absolutely mow down the other team with that thing if you could set up in a nice spot. That wouldn’t be my first choice of something to build, though.”

“You know, now that you got me thinking about the A-10 Thunderbolt, I bet you could carry and fire two GAU-8 Avenger with your Seotross form. You carrying two of those would make mine little more than a popgun.”

“The A-10 Thunderbolt is the jet with the rotary gun built into the nose, right? Those are massive, aren’t they?”

He nodded, bending down to pick up his minigun. “A GAU-8 Avenger weighs several hundred pounds more than this little thing, and that isn’t even counting the huge ammo drum on the back. I’m pretty sure the entire thing is over four thousand pounds when fully loaded, but not entirely sure. It’s been a while since I looked up the specs for it.”

I chuckled, “There is no way I would be able to use two of those in my Seotross form, then. One, maybe, but not a chance I could carry two. Not right now, at least.”

“Maybe I’ll have to see if I can’t get your mom to acquire one, or have one built,” he said with his own laugh. “I think it would be awesome to see you firing one in your Seotross form. Those things are meant to be mounted in aircraft…”

\*\*\*\*\*

**Somewhere in the Sagittarius Dwarf Galaxy**

**The Indomitables Flagship - Nira’s Revenge**

**08:27 SET (16:27 EDT)**

**August 15, 12610 (August 14, 2019)**

Xigios was sitting in his ready room with a drink in one hand, and a picture frame in the other. The picture was of a Scyftan man and woman standing side by side, posing for a picture. The man was in his full dress uniform, and the woman was in a flowing dress. The picture was taken shortly after they were married so long ago, and is one of only three things he has left to remember her by. As he looked at the picture, he was taken back to events of the past.

A few months after he had left Scyftan space, he returned to visit their home on Edilan, intending to recover his and his wife’s belongings. When he pulsed his mana to unlock the door, nothing happened and when he tried again, he got the same result. He knocked on the door and after a few moments a woman with a baby with her hip answered the door.

“Hello. Can I help you, sir?”

“Greetings. I have been away on business for a few months, and came by to check up on an old friend. Do you know what happened to the previous owners of your home?”

The woman shook her head. “I’m sorry, we don’t know who the previous owners were. My husband purchased the home from the bank almost three months ago.”

“I see. Was there any furniture or anything left when you moved in?”

“No there wasn’t,” she said, shaking her head again. “We got a good deal on the home because it wasn’t furnished.”

“I see. Thank you very much for your time,” he said, turning and walking away.

About thirty seconds after he left, he heard the woman call out, “Sir! Wait a moment!”

Turning around, he saw the woman running towards him.

“I forgot about something,” she said when she caught up. “When we first purchased the home, we went inside to look at it to see what it needed. I found this on the floor in the master bedroom. Perhaps you can give it to your friend if you track them down?”

She was holding a ring in her hand. The ring he gave to his wife when he asked her to marry him.

“Thank you,” he said, holding out his hand so she could hand it to him. “This is the engagement ring my friend gave to his wife when he asked her to marry him. They will be very happy to have it back.”

“You’re very welcome. I hope you find them,” she said before turning and running back to her home.

He watched her until she went back inside, and then looked at the ring in his hand. His wife didn’t like to wear it since it was such an expensive ring, so she left it in her jewelry box. The fact that it was the only thing remaining in their home meant that Kaldrus Dhir had his home cleared out and everything sold or destroyed. He resolved himself to find out which, but was happy to have at least something left.

He was distracted from his thoughts by someone knocking on the door to his ready room. He finished what was left in his cup.

“Come!” he called out.

The door opened and a woman walked inside. She was in her normal Scyftan form and stood at around three foot six inches with long black hair and icy blue eyes. She looked very much like her mother. It turned out that the woman he had defeated in combat to earn the right to lead The Indomitables wasn’t Esriro Dhugal, but Esriro Dryth, his daughter, who was unknown to him for over four hundred years.

His wife had kept her pregnancy and birth of Esriro a secret from him while he was deployed, and had Esriro looked after by family friends while she was working up on the space station. When the part of the space station his wife worked in was destroyed, they continued to look after her while trying to find Xigios, her father. They knew he was alive, since the message he recorded for the crew had been shown to Naval Command, who deemed him a traitor.

After a year of no luck, Esriro’s caretakers stopped searching for Xigios and adopted her as their own. They told her all about her parents, and told her that they knew her father was alive. He just didn’t know about her. They were sure that if he did, he would have come for her.

She resolved herself to find her father, so when she became an adult at twenty-five years of age, she joined the navy. She served with them for over two hundred years, learning everything she possibly could. Before leaving the navy, she was able to download the recording her father sent his fleet before taking the shuttle and leaving. In the recording, he said he was going to avenge his wife, so that gave her a place to start.

For the next one hundred fifty years, she went from mercenary group to mercenary group trying to find him. She scanned every person she came in contact with over that time, but none of them were her father. It wasn’t until she joined The Indomitables that she found him. Immediately after she found him, she wanted to run up to him and tell him who she was, but something inside her told her to wait, so she did.

For thirty years, she worked her way up to the top of the Indomitables where her father was well situated. When Brax Krarlik announced his tournament, she knew it was time. She drew upon all her experiences over the years and made it to the final where she faced her father in the duel to determine who would lead. She knew she wouldn’t win, especially when she saw him change into his massive form, but she was determined to give him a good fight.

She was doing well, but one mistake cost her the match. In the end, though, he made the decision to name her as his XO. After Brax’s funeral, she sat down with her father and told him everything. He was skeptical, but she had him follow her down to the medbay where they both underwent a DNA scan. When the results came up declaring them a genetic match, he was completely shocked and had to sit down.

When he finally processed everything, he was incredibly happy. Happier than he had been in years. He had her tell him everything that had happened over the past four hundred years, and she did. For the last thousand years, they had both led The Indomitables while keeping their relationship a secret from the rest of the mercenaries. Most of the mercs thought they were a couple, but everyone thinking that was a lot better than them knowing they were actually related to each other.

“Ah, Esriro, come in. Can I get you a drink?”

She closed the door and then turned and nodded. “Sure, dad. I received some news from a contact that makes going to Earth pointless.”

“Oh?” he said, getting up and grabbing two bottles of Scyftan ale from the fridge. “And what have I told you about calling me dad? I don’t know what people would do if they knew you were my daughter.”

“Oh, relax, dad,” she said, emphasizing the last word. “The door is closed and this room is scanned for bugs regularly. One hasn’t been found in years.”

“Even so. What is this news you have? Is the contact reliable?” he asked, sliding one of the bottles across his desk and taking a seat.

“Very. He’s given me nothing but reliable intel for the past five hundred years or so,” she replied sitting in a chair on the opposite side of the desk. She grabbed the bottle in front of her, opened it, and took a drink before continuing, “Six hundred ships recently left the Warvyn family shipyards. They’re state of the art, built with an unknown material and possess better shrouds than we do. He couldn’t give me the exact breakdown, but said that there are carriers, dreadnoughts, battleships, battle cruisers, cruisers, destroyers, and frigates.”

“What’s so interesting about that? That family regularly churns out over a thousand ships every year.”

“Not this quality, and they don’t develop a new alloy to do it. I’m told these six hundred ships were built over the last twenty years, and were just finished recently. Does the name Kor Gidres ring a bell?”

“Who doesn’t know the Gidres name? He hasn’t been heard from since the coup when they tried to assassinate him.”

“Hasn’t been heard from in Scyftan space, you mean. He has been elsewhere. Before they froze his accounts, he took every last credit he could after he fled. He then invested all that money into businesses outside of Scyftan space. I’ve heard he cashed out over a quadrillion credits worth, which is nearly all his money, and paid the Warvyn family to build those ships.”

“Until very recently, he was living as a guest of the Warvyn family in Pygmaean space. Four months ago, he and his family departed, and no one knows where he went, or if they know, they’re not saying. And now, four months later, those ships have left? I think I know where they are going.”

“Earth,” Xigios said, the dots finally connecting in his mind. “Derech Kidravia and Kor Gidres had been best friends since childhood. He has been biding his time for the past fourteen hundred years until he could finally depose Dhir.”

Esriro nodded. “My contact thinks they will arrive at Earth in two months or so. They could transit between Scyftan space and Earth twice before we even arrive there, so there is no point in continuing.”

“I concur,” Xigios said, picking up the phone on his desk and hitting a button. “This is Xigios Dryth. Full stop and wait for further orders.”

He then hung up and tapped the shield of his communications officer.

[Captain?] the woman said.

[I need you to send contact information for the Warvyn family to my console as soon as possible.]

[I’ll have it to you right away, captain.]

[Thank you, Anuna.]

“So what are you going to do?” Esriro asked.

“I’m going to contact the Warvyn family and ask them for Kor Gidres’ contact information. I’m hoping to get the fleet to divert to our location and take you on board, so you can meet with Kor Girdres and Jonuth Kidravia.”

There was a chime and information appeared on Xigios’ console. He immediately hit the button to initiate a call. A moment later, a headshot of a small Pygmaean woman appeared.

“Greetings, you have reached Warvyn Industries. My name is Hani, how can I help you?”

“Hello, Hani. My name is Xigios Dryth. I need to speak to Ercan as soon as possible. Pass along these terms to him, if you would: Kor Gidres, Jonuth Kidravia, six hundred ships and Earth.”

“One moment, sir. I need to put you on hold.”

Xigios nodded and waited. Soon, another headshot, this time of a fairly old Pygmaean man appeared.

“My name is Ercan Warvyn. I’m told you wanted to talk to me?”

“That’s right. I have recently found out that Kor Gidres commissioned six hundred ships to be built by your company. I know those ships are currently on their way to Earth, where Jonuth Kidravia is hiding, and will be there in approximately two months. I would like to meet with that fleet and have my daughter taken aboard. If you can’t do that, then the contact information for Kor Gidres will suffice.”

“You are very well informed, Xigios Dryth. Almost as well as I am. Xigios Dryth: Deemed a traitor to the Scyftan Empire after leaving his post when it was discovered his wife was killed in the coup. Has been a member of The Indomitables for fourteen hundred years, and leader for the past thousand. Has one daughter, Esriro Dryth, who is currently the XO of The Indomitables. Is that right?”

Xigios nodded. “I didn’t find out Esriro was my daughter until I had already been named leader of The Indomitables. I was recently hired by Kaldrus Dhir to go to Earth and assassinate Jonuth Kidravia, which is something I have no intention of doing. My original plan was to head to Earth and ally with Jonuth Kidravia, giving him use of all my ships, but apparently that isn’t needed anymore. He will be long gone by the time we arrive, which is why I made this call.”

“You have a very good track record, and my family has used your services before, so I will take you at your word. It will be up to you to convince Kor Gidres and Jonuth Kidravia of your intentions. That may not be an easy task. I am passing along the contact information to you as I no longer have command over the ships. You should be receiving it now.”

There was another chime and the contact information appeared on his screen.

“Thank you very much, Mr. Warvyn.”

“You’re welcome. Good luck,” he replied, ending the call.

“Huh. I wasn’t expecting him to acknowledge you at all, let alone send the contact information. I wonder why he did it.”

“You and me both,” Xigios said, initiating the call to Kor Gidres.