**Battlestate**

**August 21, 2019**

**18:52 EDT**

The Zeon-class frigates were a step below the Manticore-class frigates that the girls had, being about five meters shorter and having lesser firepower. If they had four Manticore-class frigates, then we probably would’ve turned right around to find something else to do.

Rather than push the throttle forward and fly right towards them, I instead turned the ship ninety degrees starboard and then rolled the ship until our dorsal hull was facing the enemy ships. It gave them a larger profile to shoot at, but it also allowed us to bring all ten of our pulse cannons to bear. Our new Staris-class light cruiser was ovoid shaped with the pulse cannons spread out evenly along the port and starboard hull. Because of the shape of the hull, only six cannons could fire forward or backward at a time which would greatly reduce our firepower.

The second reason that I didn’t charge towards them is that I wanted to be able to fire upon them for the maximum amount of time. If we went at them while they were coming toward us, we would pass each other so quickly that we would only be able to fire for a few seconds before they were out of range. We would then have to flip the ship end over end and slow down, before heading back for another pass.

The weapons on the Manticore-class frigates were all forward-facing, which made much more sense on a smaller, more agile craft. I had each of them spread out, and gave each of them a target to focus on. Mason, Ben and I would deal with the other two.

“Weapons free as soon as they’re in range,” I said, changing the view on the main screen so I could see the incoming ships. It would still be a minute or so until they got into range, but that was the vastness of space.

“It’s too bad we don’t have any gauss cannons or railguns,” Mason said as we waited. “We could’ve been firing this entire time and shredded them by now.”

“Or mass drivers,” I nodded.

That was the biggest pro of kinetic weaponry in space; the ability to fire a weapon and have that projectile travel forever. In theory, at least. They also carried a massive con, and that was simply the fact that battles were often fought over very long distances. It could take a projectile twenty seconds to travel the distance only to fly past its target.

Energy weapons, on the other hand, move much, much faster, but have a more limited range. As they travel through space, they’re constantly dispersing some of that energy into the surrounding space, losing effectiveness. If we fired at the incoming ships before they were in range, we would definitely hit them, but it would be like hitting someone with a wet noodle.

There was another type of weapon that was very effective in any circumstance, and that was the missile. They’re not the type of high-explosive missile that you’re probably thinking of, however. When a high-explosive missile detonates against a shield or against a ship, the vast majority of that explosive energy is dispersed, doing very little, if any damage.

That’s why you need to get creative. In Battlestate, there is a missile that is basically a delivery system for a one-use high-intensity laser. The missile’s job is to get it within range, at which point it would deploy and fire a constant beam of energy until it was either destroyed or ran out of power.

“Twenty seconds until they’re within range,” Ben said.

My heart started beating a bit faster as I looked down at the timer on my screen. This was our first time fighting on our own terms, and though I knew that there was a good chance we would come out on top, it wasn’t a guarantee.

“Ten, nine, eight, seven, six… wait a minute, I’m picking up a massive power spike.”

Looking back up, I saw that all four incoming ships were rotating until they were facing away from us. Quickly typing on my console, I switched one of the screens so it was showing the two cargo ships. They, too, were facing in the same direction.

“Fire!” I commanded.

“Firing!”

I looked back to the frigates and saw the red pulses of energy fly towards them. The first few pulses hit the two lead ships, but then four hyperspace windows opened and they jumped into them. The cargo ships were gone as well, so it seemed as if the frigates were just buying time until they could jump.

“Well that was anticlimactic,” Tessa sighed as her voice came over the radio.

“You can say that again,” I replied.

“Either they were trying to gather some information or they got here just before we did and were buying time to jump away,” Ben said. “I scanned them when they got in range and it seems like they didn’t have time to upgrade to ion cannons like they had on their old ships. We would’ve mopped the floor with them.”

“Alright, well we’re here to mine so let’s get to it. Tessa, if you wouldn’t mind looking for some high-value asteroids for us.”

“You got it!”

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It was going to be very interesting filling all forty-four crates, if we filled them at all. We didn’t have a very big area to work with, so we pushed four of the crates out into open space where my sisters would make sure they didn’t go too far away. One of the upgrades that the Wasp and the Hornet now had was a tractor beam. It was a rather weak one, but it would allow them to capture asteroids or other objects and bring them to the ship.

After helping me set up the six emitters, Mason got in the mining pod and headed over to the first of the asteroids that Tessa had dragged back to the ship. All she needed to do was drag it into place and then match velocity with our light cruiser before letting it go, and it would stay exactly where she placed it.

For this run, we weren’t going after anything that was worth less than two thousand credits per ton. It so happened that the first asteroid was just on the cut off; tantalum. It was a fairly large asteroid, filling two entire crates and still having some left over. There wasn’t enough to fill a third, so rather than break it up and fill one partially, Mason just pushed it back toward the asteroid field. Next up would actually be an asteroid containing plutonium.

“I’ve done some more reading,” Ben said as Mason was bringing it back. “Apparently we want to activate the emitters as soon as you put the lid on one of the crates containing radioactive materials. The suit you’re wearing does possess some minor ability to block radiation, but if we let enough build up, then the radiation will start causing some serious damage to your character's body. It won’t take much before the damage is irreversible, even with the technology available.”

“Is that the same for me?” Mason asked.

“Nah, you’re protected by the mining pod, but if it makes you feel safer, you can stand in front of one of the emitters when I activate it.”

“It would. Alright, dragging it back.”

The geiger counter attached to my wrist started going off as soon as Mason brought the asteroid, though it wasn’t at a very high level where I was standing. I could see small chunks of rock were sent floating around the cargo bay as he broke it down, but a fair amount also went right back through the cargo bay door.

It didn’t take long to break it up, and there was barely enough to fill the crate. My geiger counter started screaming as I began walking over to close the lid, so I had Mason do it instead. The lid was hinged and had some sort of rubber-like lining to produce an airtight seal, but required pins to secure it. Mason didn’t exactly have the fine motor control while in the mining pod to do that, so I moved over and did it now that the radiation readings had been reduced by a fair amount. The Sterium was definitely doing its job.

As soon as the lid was in place, Ben hit the button to turn on the emitters. There was no indication that anything was happening, but the readings being given to me by my geiger counter were slowly getting weaker and weaker. Within a minute, the readings had reduced by about half, but it would still be a while before the radiation was completely negated.

I was very happy to get the first crate of plutonium out of the way, as the going price was roughly three times that of platinum, at around forty-nine thousand six hundred credits per ton. I wasn’t sure how much the crate of ore weighed, but it was a substantial amount, easily worth at least two hundred thousand credits. Remembering to make sure to track which was which, I used the laser engraving tool to mark that the crate contained plutonium before going over and marking the other two as containing tantalum.

I walked over to the cargo bay door as Mason flew towards the next rock, trusting that my magnetic boots would keep me secured to the deck. What I saw was astonishing, as there was a cluster of twenty or so asteroids that were perfectly stationary floating about a kilometer away. They varied in size and it was hard to tell what they contained from such a long distance, but it was a hell of a lot more efficient doing it this way than the way we had been doing it.

As Mason flew back towards the ship, it was clear that the next crate or two would be filled with platinum. Maybe even the next three. It was a rather large asteroid, one that I estimated to be around twenty feet long and fifteen meters wide at the widest part. Even if it didn’t fill a third crate, we weren’t tossing any platinum. It was too valuable.

“What the hell?!” Mason’s voice came over the radio as he arrived back at the ship.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“A window just popped up in the middle of my vision saying that [Piloting] has reached level one. I don’t know what that means or how to get rid of it.”

I heard Ben laughing. “I was wondering when one of us would learn our first skill. I figured you would have learned [Mining] by now. To dismiss it, just think about it disappearing.”

“That did it, thanks. How do I tell what the [Piloting] skill does?”

“The same thing you just did, but think about your Skills page appearing.”

“Got it. All it’s showing is a two percent increase to reflexes while piloting a ship. That’s it?! Seriously?!”

Ben laughed again. “Skills give you more benefits as they level up, though they can’t increase the capabilities of ships. Apparently there are players that pilot fighters who have very high [Piloting], because reflexes are everything when you’re in such a small craft.”

“You said you’re surprised he didn’t learn [Mining] yet. What’s that do?”

“Makes it easier to find ore and allows for it to be broken down more efficiently, essentially reducing waste. It’s probably a much better skill when mining in an actual mine, but it has its uses in space.”

“I see. Anyways, you wanna begin breaking that down, Mace?”

“Oh, yeah.”

We ended up filling two and a half crates of platinum before he had to go back and get another asteroid containing platinum. The one he selected was a bit smaller than the previous one, but ended up filling a crate and a half, giving us four crates of platinum, total. An hour in, and we had probably already made six hundred thousand credits. The best part is that we still had another thirty-seven crates to fill.

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In total, it took around seven hours to fill the rest of the crates with an assortment of ore. I had been keeping track of how many crates we had of each, though it all ended up blurring together at one point. Thankfully I had continued to mark the crates with the laser engraving tool, so it would be easy to tell which was which when it was time to unload.

We had decided we would sell off all our radioactive materials right away, as there was a pretty hefty fee for storing radioactive materials in the warehouse we were renting. That was fine with us as we were the only ones mining the stuff, to our knowledge. We would also be selling off a couple of the crates of platinum, as the price likely wouldn’t lower too much.

As soon as the crates and mining pod were secure, Mason closed the cargo bay door to allow the cargo bay to be repressurized. The radiation readings were nonexistent at this point as well, so we disassembled the six emitters and placed them back inside their protective containers.

My stomach had begun rumbling about an hour before we finished, so after going up to the bridge to transmit the return course to the girls and take us into hyperspace, I beelined to the armory to take off my armor and head to the kitchen. Mason appeared to have the same idea, as he soon joined me there. I cooked us all up some dinner and took mine to the bridge, just in case something happened.

There wasn’t much to do on the way back to the Zecciea space station, though I was able to practice my telekinesis. Even a couple days later, I still wasn’t able to move objects around while my eyes were open, though I had gotten a little better while my eyes were closed. It was extremely frustrating and I had been tempted to contact the Straesse man who had demonstrated his ability, though held off. I wanted to figure this out for myself.

I didn’t get any better over the next three hours or so, but I did get a lot of enjoyment out of annoying the hell out of Mason. With my eyes closed, I would move one of the metal balls to brush against him, and then hide it under his chair. When he would go to look, nothing would be there. At first he thought that he was just imagining it, but as it occurred more and more he knew that he wasn’t. It wasn’t until over an hour later that he realized that it was me, at which point Ben and I couldn’t contain our laughter anymore, Ben having figured it out pretty quickly.

When we finally arrived at Zecciea, we first headed down to the planet to unload the portion of cargo that we wanted to keep until prices went higher. Thankfully we had a relatively small ship that was able to enter the atmosphere, or we would have had to rent a smaller craft to ferry them down a few at a time.

I was glad that the warehouse we rented had a couple of heavy duty forklifts we could use, otherwise it would have been an absolute pain to unload all the cargo. As it was, we had to unload all of the crates containing radioactive material and put them off to the side, giving us room to maneuver and unload the platinum, gold, rhodium, palladium osmium and tantalum. Everything but the tantalum would fetch us over ten thousand credits a ton right now, though those prices would go a lot higher in the coming weeks and months.

When everything was offloaded, we had ten crates of platinum, two of gold, five of rhodium, three of palladium, two of osmium and two of tantalum in the warehouse. That left three crates of platinum, ten of uranium, and seven of plutonium. After loading them back onto the ship, I made sure to walk around with the geiger counter to make sure that there were no radiation leaks outside of the warehouse. When I didn’t find anything, we drove the forklifts back into the warehouse and locked it, making sure to activate the robust security system.

With that done, we got back into the ship and headed up to the station to unload our cargo. It was extremely easy to get clearance to land into a berth, though that would probably change as more and more people began playing in this area of space. In the meantime, I certainly wasn’t going to complain.

It continued to amaze me that forklifts capable of lifting around one hundred tons were needed to unload a single crate from our ship, but I could move them around with ease in the middle of space. It also amazed me that they weighed that much. A decent percentage of the weight in each crate was the precious metals that we were mining, though the majority consisted of the useless rock that came along with it.

Every time a crate was offloaded, the lid would be taken off and the contents quickly scanned to determine how much of it was valuable metals, and how much was worthless rock. The numbers we got for the platinum were slightly above the usual amount, averaging nine tons of platinum per crate.

The crates containing plutonium and uranium, however, absolutely blew me away. I had estimated that each crate would be worth around two hundred thousand credits on average, but that turned out to be a gross underestimation.

Both plutonium and uranium are both a bit lighter than platinum, but the going price for both was four and four-point-eight times more expensive, respectively. The amount of each of the raw ore varied more crate to crate, but the average was about eight tons of the respective ore per crate. The lowest amount we had received was just under three hundred thousand credits, while the most was a whopping one-point-one million credits.

The girls’ jaws dropped when I showed them how much we got for half of the cargo we brought back, and Mason, Ben and I were very happy to say the least. We had thought that it would take us a few weeks to accrue the funds necessary to purchase a battlecruiser, and it very well could have, if we didn’t go after radioactive materials.

With everything said and done, I deposited ten million four hundred and fourteen thousand credits into our bank account, which would have been enough to buy one of the basic battlecruisers and still have a good chunk left over. Or we even could have gone down to the surface and retrieved all the crates we just off-loaded to sell them off too. That would have given us more than enough to get one of the better battlecruisers that came with mass drivers.

After that, the girls joined us when we returned to the light cruiser. I ended up taking them on a tour while Mason and Ben headed up to the bridge to do some research. When I was done, I led them up to the bridge to join the others to discuss what we wanted to do next.

“Alright, so I’ve been doing some searching, trying to figure out how we can maximize the amount of money we make on mining runs. Right now, we’re only utilizing something like sixty to seventy percent of the space inside of the crates, greatly reducing how much we can bring back at a time. I think I’ve found a way to do that, but it’s going to change how we mine going forward,” Ben said before hitting a button causing a hologram to appear.

The hologram was projecting a machine that had a number of conveyor belts and one large cylindrical drum in the middle. On the one end, there was a large opening that had two ridged pieces of metal that formed a ‘V’. At the bottom of the ‘V’, there was a conveyor belt that led up to the cylindrical drum, as well as another conveyor belt at the end of it, which led to nowhere.

“This is the best ore crusher I could find that wouldn’t require much maintenance and would do a good job of crushing ore. If we wanted to go really cheap, then we could just go with the front part of the machine that is called a jaw crusher. One part of the jaw is fixed to the machine, but the other one moves back and forth, generating enough force to crush ore into gravel-sized chunks. From there, the ore could just be dropped into a crate, allowing us to use a lot more of the space inside.”

“Using the whole machine, the jaw crusher will crush ore into gravel-sized chunks and then send it off to the ball mill. Ball mills use centrifugal force and metal balls to grind the chunks down further, until the ore that is discharged is much, much finer. A ball mill also comes with the advantage of being able to choose how fine we want the ore to be ground down by changing the size of the grate at the discharge end. After running through the ball mill, ore would be small enough to fill ninety-nine-point-nine percent of a crate.”

“Now usually there is another machine on the end that would separate the ore from useless rock, but that’s much more complicated and would take up too much space. Using crushers like this should almost double the amount of ore we can bring back, but there is a catch.”

“Gravity,” Tessa said. “You’ve been shutting off the artificial gravity to move things around more easily, but those machines require gravity to function. It also requires a forklift capable of lifting over one hundred tons, as each crate would easily weigh that much, if not more.”

“That’s right,” Ben nodded. “Mason wouldn’t be able to bring the asteroids inside of the cargo bay, so he’d have to break off chunks that would be small enough to fit inside of the jaw crusher. It would increase the amount of time it takes to fill our cargo bay, but it would absolutely be worth it. We probably would’ve made close to twenty million credits today if we had a machine like that.”

“I’m not sure that it’s entirely necessary,” I replied. “I don’t know about you guys, but I don’t plan on spending all of my time mining, it’s more of a means to an end right now. Perhaps if we form a clan and it grows then we could have some members who focus on mining, but I’d rather focus more on combat. I’m sure that as this area of space becomes more populated then there will be jobs to hunt down pirates and the like? That’s what I’m interested in.”

“I agree,” Anja said. “We should be spending our time mining until we’re strong enough that we don’t need to anymore. Right now we only have one other competitor, and that is the other group that we’ve seen mining. They’re probably doing the same thing we are, since mining seems to be a really good way of making money early on. If we had started somewhere more populated, then I doubt we’d have made a tenth of what we have so far. Sooner or later, more experienced groups are going to arrive, either from creating new characters here, or making the trip. I think we should be ready when that happens.”

“Okay, then what do we want to do?” Ben asked. “I mean, I don’t think any of us expected to make as much money as we did today. By tomorrow we could double the amount of money we have again and purchase a battlecruiser. We could even upgrade to better frigates at the same time. But what about after that?”

“I don’t think our plan should really change,” Lucille said. “We were planning on spending a few weeks mining anyways, so let’s continue to do that. By the time prices increase, we very well could have enough money to buy a plot of land and build a base if we wanted to.”

“How much does that cost, anyways?” Mason asked.

“It’s not as much as I thought it would be. There are two ways of doing it; the first is one million credits for a single square kilometer. After that it would be up to us to hire a construction company to develop that land. The other way is to pay up to twenty million, to basically look through an actual catalogue and choose what we want built and how everything is laid out. As soon as payment is received, a construction company will immediately start building your base. The caveat is that anything they build must be under nineteen million credits, including the construction company’s fee. Anything beyond that would, again, be up to us.”

“Huh. I’m not sure that I’d want to make a base on Zecciea, but it may be worth looking into. Out of curiosity, how much would we need to pay for even a basic space station?” I asked her.

“Ten billion credits,” she replied.

“Seriously?!”

She nodded. “They’re so expensive because they’re so formidable. Well, that and the fact that they can move around like any other ship. They’re just much, much bigger. Asteroids and dead planets, on the other hand, are as expensive or as cheap as you want them to be but we would need to do all the construction ourselves. I don’t think we’ll be looking at something like that anytime soon.”

“Definitely not,” I agreed.

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We spent a little while longer discussing things and then logged out of the game. It was much better to have said discussions in the game, as we could effectively have conversations in a quarter of the usual time. Once back in the real world, we each headed off to do our own thing. It was late but I was a little hungry so I stopped by my room to get Vixa and then we headed to the cafeteria.

Once there, I skipped most of the hot foods, only stopping to get a slice of pizza before continuing on to the deserts. I had been extremely happy to discover that black licorice was one of the types of ice cream that they had available, so I filled up a bowl of the stuff and set it on my tray.

Bria had said that Vixa could eat almost any food as long as she ate the food deposited in her dish every day, so I lifted her up and asked what kind she wanted while pointing to each. She yipped when I pointed to the chocolate peanut butter ice cream, so I put a smaller amount in a bowl for her and then headed to one of the vacant tables. Setting her bowl down on the bench beside me, I dug into the pizza before it got cold.

When we were both done eating, I let Vixa lick the remnants of ice cream in my bowl and then I carried the dirty dishes over to their proper area. With our bellies slightly-less empty, we then headed back to my room. Vixa immediately teleported over to her water dish and began lapping at it while I headed to the bathroom.

A quick shower later and I was laying on my bed with Vixa beside me. I wasn’t very tired and it wasn’t a good idea to sleep just after eating, so I turned on the TV and looked for something to watch. I ended up watching an old episode of Stargate SG-1 a few minutes after it started, though by the time it ended I was struggling to keep my eyes open.

As soon as the credits screen rolled, I shut off the TV and then shifted into my Scyftan form, having gotten into the habit of switching to it before I went to sleep. The more I stayed in my Scyftan form, the earlier the window we had to get the dragons to Mezotis 3 and 4 would be. It was still a few hours off of where my mom would like it to be, but it got closer and closer with each night’s sleep.

When I was done shifting, I made sure to set my alarm for 06:30 and then shut off the lights. There was another day of working out and then my friends and I would have a few days off.

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**Earth**

**Spectre Base, Canadian Rockies**

**August 23, 2019**

**11:02 PDT (14:02 EDT)**

The next day was pretty much a repeat of the three previous days; we’d run a marathon, eat breakfast, work out our lower bodies and then spend a few hours trying to beat the obstacle course before lunch. The warped wall was as impossible as ever, which frustrated us to no end.

After lunch, we were back to working on the fun things, like learning how to take apart, clean, and assemble a pulse rifle. Mason was naturally better at it than we were, doing it quickly and easily after it was demonstrated to him and had no problem doing it while blind folded, either. The rest of us were slowly getting better and better, though it would be a while before we were proficient at it.

That wasn’t the only firearm that we had to take apart and reassemble, as my parents wanted all of us well-versed in many different firearms and other weapons. There were smaller pistol-like pulse weapons and even massive bazooka-like heavy pulse weapons that we had to learn about.

After we spent an hour or so every afternoon learning about the weapons, we would spend the next few hours drilling on them. Included in that were a series of courses that we took turns going through. At the start, we would be seated at a table with a disassembled pulse rifle in front of us. As soon as the horn sounded, we had to reassemble it, install the power cell and then go through the course.

It was pretty much identical to a course you would see soldiers or police going through, with bad guys popping up as well as innocent civilians or even bad guys holding onto a hostage. There were some pretty big differences though, the main one being that the course we went through had personal force fields that we had to bypass to continue.

It was rather difficult to get through, as it would always take a lot of shots from the pulse rifle to collapse the force field, all while getting shot at in return. Thankfully there weren’t any hostages we had to be mindful of when dealing with the force fields as we likely would have immediately failed the course if there were.

When we got through the course we would be back where we started. After sitting down, we would be required to disassemble and clean the pulse rifle before the horn would sound again. At that point, we would be able to see our score and the amount of time it took us to complete the course.

Mason was the fastest and got the highest scores, but even he was a ways off before the instructors would pass him. His best attempt was in two minutes and thirty-four seconds, with a rating of eighty-eight-point seven. The rest of us were much, much worse, struggling to even break the three minute mark and a rating of seventy.

That wasn’t the end of our day, however. The instructors had apparently been told to hold off on any martial arts training and my mom wouldn’t tell me why, just yet. It was a recent development, which gave us the opportunity to practice with other weapons that we otherwise might not, including throwing weapons, among others. If you can name it, we probably practiced throwing it.

After finishing up and grabbing dinner, the nine of us once again retreated into Battlestate to work on making money. Before we set out to go on another mining run, we ended up spending another two million credits to upgrade the girls from their two Manticore-class frigates up to a single Kestrel-class frigate. Going off the name of the class of ship it sounded like a downgrade, but it most certainly was not.

It’s main weapon was a single mass driver that ran the length of the ship, which could fire one of two types of projectiles. The first was the usual solid projectile, which was either tungsten carbide or depleted uranium. Both were heavy metals that could do a substantial amount of damage if they hit. The second use for the mass driver was to actually propel a missile at incredible speeds. The lack of a heat signature meant that missiles fired from it were able to get a lot closer than they otherwise would be. When they finally got close enough, the rocket engine would engage and propel it even faster.

The laser missile variant was out of our price range, for now, so we settled for the nuclear variety instead. Nuclear explosions were similar to conventional explosives in space in that they did very little explosive damage but released a tremendous burst of radiation that would be able to travel through force fields and the ship to target the crew directly.

While emitters were able to reduce the impact, somewhat, they weren’t nearly one hundred percent effective. They also had to be shielded to prevent the electro-magnetic pulse produced by a nuclear explosion from knocking them out.

Aside from the mass drivers, there were also four gauss cannons that were located on the port and starboard hull as well as four forward-facing pulse lasers. The gauss cannons would primarily be used for point defense against missiles and fighters, though they would likely help quite a bit if we managed to deplete the shields on an enemy ship.

The girls were pretty sour at first when I told them that I would only purchase one Kestrel-class frigate, though they changed their tune when it finally arrived and they toured it. It would also keep them a little bit busier, as now they would have to make sure that the gauss cannons were supplied with ammo.

Once they had gotten familiar with the ship, we made the trip to the asteroid in half the time, thanks to the much better engines that came with their ship. Our rivals were pretty lucky that they weren’t there when we arrived, because the girls probably would’ve mopped the floor with them while Mason, Ben and I sat back and watched.

Having only one additional ship meant that we didn’t have anyone protecting us, but it wasn’t as if the girls were very far away, anyways. The ship also had more than one tractor beam so Tessa could go around and collect a bunch of asteroids before bringing them back to the ship, reducing the amount of time that they were away. She was rather happy that she finally learned [Piloting] as well, as that was an ability that would be much more valuable for her than it would for Mason.

By the time we were halfway through loading the ship of ore, Mason had reached rank two of [Mining] which gave him a four percent efficiency boost. It wasn’t much right now, but it would be invaluable going forward.

We did the same thing that we did the previous night, getting an even mix of radioactive and non-radioactive materials. Aleena had checked to see if there was any difference in the going price for plutonium and uranium, but it had stayed the same so we weren’t worried about offloading another twenty crates of the stuff.

It was smooth sailing the whole way through, and when we got back we unloaded a mix of platinum, gold, iridium, rhodium, palladium and osmium into the warehouse. Aleena had noticed a slight dip in the price of platinum, though it wasn’t enough to worry about. We separated another three crates of platinum from the rest and then loaded the plutonium and uranium back onto the ship to be sold. The payout was even bigger than it had been the day before, and we logged out being fifteen million credits richer.

That brings us to today.

It was amazing how things could change in a single day. While it was business as usual the day before, today the base was a flurry of activity. It was only a little more than two hours until Abi would reach rank twenty-two and enter another growth cycle. As soon as that cycle was completed, the loading of the dragon eggs and a whole host of additional cargo would be loaded. It would probably be an additional six hours before everything would be loaded, which meant that we wouldn’t be leaving until late tonight.

I was being called on a lot throughout the day, ever since my mom remembered what the Beacon could do. She had a couple of suitcases delivered to my room and those of my friends, and directed us to pack everything for the trip, including our armor and weapons if we wanted to delve into dungeons while we were there. My friends and I definitely wanted to check out what alien dungeons had in store, so we made sure we had everything we needed. I even went down to see the guys who dealt with armor and got a few more sets so I would have spares.

When my mom showed up at my room an hour later, she was surprised not to see a single suitcase in sight.

“I thought I told you to pack.”

“I did. Everything is already aboard Abi.”

“What? How did you manage that?”

I took the Beacon out of my inventory and tossed in the air before catching it.

“Oh, right. I forgot about that thing,” she said as a grin appeared on her face. “Alright, mister. I’m requisitioning your time today. Follow me.”

It seemed like I followed her all over the base as we used the beacon to load a bunch of equipment she wanted to bring but otherwise would have taken much longer to load if it had to be transported to the hangar in Toronto. All I had to do was place my hand on an item and the item would be placed in Abi’s dimensional storage. I definitely wasn’t looking forward to being dragged around the ship later so the items could be retrieved.

As soon as the clock struck 16:08:32, my mom opened a portal to the hanger that Abi was occupying as she went through her growth cycle. It was still pretty damn amazing to watch. By the time it finally stopped about thirty minutes later, she was just shy of twelve hundred meters long, three hundred thirty-five meters wide and one hundred sixty-eight meters tall. She’d come a long way in the last two weeks or so from that tiny crystal that fit in the palm of my hand.

Frankly, I was surprised that there was a hanger big enough to fit Abi inside of, but I probably shouldn’t have. They had a hangar bay reserved for her on the moon, after all, though she would probably outgrow that one in short order. Not that any of that really mattered since she had a very good shroud and could hide in plain sight, as necessary.

The flurry around Abi put the one inside the base to absolute shame. As soon as the cargo bay door opened up, a portal appeared and eight dragons stepped through in their human forms. Shipping containers immediately began floating through the portal as the eight black dragons each used their telekinesis to move them into the cargo bay.

They seemed to have practiced beforehand, because they stacked them very quickly and then came back to get another eight more. After about ten minutes they walked back through the portal they arrived from and another portal opened in its place. Eight more black dragons walked out and they continued loading their eggs.

While that was going on, doors had opened on either side and ramps extended to the floor. The moment they hit the hangar floor, people began carrying boxes and luggage inside. Everyone who was joining us had been given a floor plan that had been generated by Abi a few days beforehand. That included the quarters they had been assigned for the journey.

Even with as big as Abi was now, it was still going to be a pretty tight fit, for the journey there, at least. As soon as we got to Mezotis 3 and 4, approximately twenty-five hundred dragons and dragonkin would depart with all of their eggs. A good portion of them would protect the eggs while Olmith and his team of black dragons and dragonkin got started on building a den to store their eggs and live in.

A few days later we would arrive at Veria and several hundred Spectres and The Hellraisers would depart. The majority of the Spectres would be those who were Spectres at the time of the coup, which meant that Dhir knew who they were. With Ercan Warvyn and the Indomitables looking over them, they’d be safe and good to go the moment we’re ready to strike.

After all those people departed, there would only be slightly more than one hundred and fifty people left to make the trip back to Earth. Some of those were the parents of my friends, and the dragon council members who would be returning to assist us. The rest were made up of security and those who would be doing the cooking and laundry.

It was rather boring standing there and watching people walk back and forth, so I headed in to get started on unloading all the stuff I had put into Abi’s dimensional storage using the Beacon. My mom followed me as I did that, because there would be many stops along the way and she had a list of everything and where it needed to go.

One of the last stops was a new room that had been created with Abi’s latest growth. It was about twenty five meters long and ten meters wide, and was largely featureless. The person waiting in that room was surprising and the fact that they were here filled me with dread.

“Ah, Alexandra, Jonathan, good to see you,” Tas Dymith said as he walked towards us.

I glared at my mom who had a big smile on her face before reaching my hand towards the floor. A large wooden box appeared and I moved over before repeating the process. In total there were five identical boxes, along with four slightly smaller ones. Without even opening them I knew what the first five boxes contained. I turned around and headed right back out of the room, hearing both of them laugh as I did so.

The only remaining stops left were to my quarters and those of my friends and sisters, so I headed directly over to take care of that. Mason and Ben were sharing a cabin, as were the twins and my sisters, so there were only four stops that needed to be made.

The rooms were pretty nice, if a little cramped, but had enough space to store their luggage either under their beds or in the storage space above them. Deciding to let them decide where they wanted to put everything, I just put their stuff on their beds before continuing to the next one. My sisters actually had a slightly bigger room than my friends did, though that was because they needed it.

Once that was dealt with, I headed up over to the bridge which was on the same floor as our quarters. It was still in the center of the ship, but the center was now the thirteenth floor. I was delayed a few times on the way there with people asking for directions, but soon made my way there where I found another surprise. This time it was a welcome one as I didn’t realize he would be joining us.

“Nice to see you, Tich,” I greeted, offering my hand. “Glad to have you with us.”

“Jonathan,” he nodded, accepting my handshake. “Your mom wanted to have an experienced captain for the journey, just in case we got into trouble on the way there. I don’t think that’s going to be a problem though.”

“Why is that?”

He turned and pointed at the counter that displayed Abi’s current mana supply which was sitting at one billion six hundred seventy-five million out of one billion six hundred seventy-five million.

“I was up here shortly after Abi finished growing to her new size, and that number rose from a few hundred million to full in under five minutes. It started going up faster and faster as more of the shipping containers were loaded onto the ship. Those little unhatched young are generating an enormous amount of mana. As long as they’re on board, it would take an entire fleet just to drop the shield.”

“I’m sure Selalea will be happy to hear that,” I replied.

“Happy to hear what?” her voice came from behind me.

I spun around to see Selalea and the other seven council members were all standing behind me, having just arrived along with my mom.

“Well, to answer that, I need to give you some information about Abi. In a normal ship, there is at least one power plant that generates a constant supply of power to the ship, which all systems need to function properly. If a shield requires more energy to protect the ship than the power plant is able to generate, then it will collapse allowing the ship to be easily damaged.”

“Abi is entirely different. She doesn’t have any power plants, but instead she has a Mana Core that is able to store a very large amount of mana with one hundred percent efficiency. She is able to collect all of the ambient mana around her, as well as siphon off all of the excess mana produced by everyone aboard the ship and store it for later use,” I said, pointing up to the screen behind me. “That is the amount of mana she has to work with. As you can see, it is completely full.”

“Tich was just explaining to me that the number you see up there rose from a few hundred million to full in less than five minutes, and it started as soon as the shipping containers containing your eggs began being loaded onto the ship. Once everyone is aboard the ship and we’re ready to go, that number will rise even faster. We’ll be nigh-invulnerable for the trip to your new homeworlds.”

“Well you’re right, I am happy to hear that,” she smiled.

“Happy to hear that our young are literal batteries for their ship?” Bonanem spat.

“Oh, shut the hell up, Bonanem. If you don’t behave yourself then you’ll never make it to our new home. You’ll simply fall out along the way,” Olmith threatened.

Bonanem looked like he wanted to respond to that, but he thought better of it and closed his mouth.

“This is their first time aboard so I decided to give them a tour,” my mom said. “It’s taken less time than we expected to load the ship, so we should be good to go in a few minutes, I’m just waiting to hear back from a few people to make sure that we’ve got everything.”

I had Abi activate the screens giving us three hundred sixty degree vision around the ship, and just like she said, all the boxes that were surrounding the ship had disappeared. There were only a few more people coming and going, though it appeared like most of the people were aboard the ship.

“In that case, I need to head back to the base and gather Vixa. Mind helping me out with that?” I asked my mom.

“Sure. Imuna is already onboard, and I thought Vixa was here as well,” she replied.

We moved over to the side of the bridge and she opened up a portal just outside of the door to my room. She didn’t bother following me through, instead just holding it open while I entered my room and had Vixa follow me. It only took thirty seconds or so, and Vixa immediately began walking around exploring the bridge.

My dad, sisters, friends and Tessa and her parents showed up a few minutes later and my mom got word that we had everything and were ready to depart.

“Well, Captain?” I said, looking over to Tich while gesturing to the captain’s chair.

He chuckled before walking over and sitting down. Everyone else spread out and took a seat wherever there was space.

“Take us out, if you please, Abi.”