[Chapter Rigel]

“*Rigel (Beta Orionis) is the brightest star of the well-known constellation, Orion. It appears as a white-blue colored star and it is the seventh brightest star in the sky. Despite appearing in the sky as one star, Rigel is a multiple star system that consists of 3-5 stars. The star that you can see is called Rigel A, a supergiant star that is 120,000 to 279,000 times as luminous as our Sun. Its luminosity varies and is classified as a Alpha Cygni variable, a group of stars which exhibits uneven expanding and contracting. Rigel B can only be seen with a telescope and is part of a binary system itself. Rigel is located to the bottom right of Orion’s belt*”

*In all three arenas, the pilots quickly entered the arenas to see and fight these mysterious bots that suddenly appeared…*

Reality: \*Manages to kill off a foreign bot.\* What an interesting group of bots…

Madara: But they’re so annoying!!!

Munch Munch: You can sure say that again.

Madara: They’re so annoying!!! \*Dashes towards the bots while firing off lasers.\*

Arkham: And most of them are on that leaderboard too...I’m not letting this happen! \*Aggressively chases after a bot.\*

DarthFriends: These bots feel different if you know what I mean.

Arkham: Definitely merciless and programmed to kill-wait, that’s essentially the same as the bots we know. Except they’re hardcore.

Strange: They’re basically upgraded versions of dr.’s bots.

Arkham: Hm, we’ll see about that! \*Activates his 10 blue-white crystals and starts charging his lasers\* This will surely kill them all off… \*Aims his laser cannons towards an area where the bots are the most concentrated and fires a ginormous laser.\*

Munch Munch: Direct hit! >:0

Arkham: Hahahaha! Bye bye, puny bots!

*After the attack was finished, the bots remained…Unharmed.*

Arkham: WHAT?!? THAT DID NOTHING?!?

Reality: They’ve been programmed to be immune from attacks created by the crystals. Just great.

Arkham: My precious shards...They had a purpose to obliterate all who stands in my way...Gone to waste...My plans have been foiled again. \*Death glares at the bots.\*

Reality: Well, they must have some kind of weakness.

Munch Munch: We just haven’t figured that out yet. :/

Strange: This is the bot war all over again. Not to mention that they’re also attacking the other two servers right now.

DarthFriends: Something like this happened before?

Strange: Yeah, it happened a few months ago. The one responsible for them was someone called “\_ai\_overlord”. I remember we watched his bots become more advanced so quickly right before our very eyes. \*Watches the merciless bots continue to fire lasers at the pilots.\*

DarthFriends: So, where is he now?

Strange: Who knows? Maybe he’s watching all of this or he’s the one behind all of this? ;)

*Meanwhile, a few pilots were watching the bots from afar.*

Cyan: Those bots are a lot meaner than any other bot I’ve seen… \*Shivers.\* >m<;;

little dr.: I certainly can make mine “meaner” if I wanted to. But, I stay true to being a *friendly hacker*.

ThePilot: Same here. I don’t want to ruin the game for anyone. I’m curious how these new bots are coded.

little dr.: Luckily...I captured one of them. \*Sets a ship bot on the table.\*

dein Bruder: Nice going! This will make it easier to decipher a possible weakness quicker.

little dr.: \*Pulls up the code onto a holographic screen and skims through it.\* Hold on a sec…

Spaace: \*Also looks at the screen.\* What kind of programming language is this?

little dr.: \*Continues looks at the code.\* ...I hate to admit it, but I have no clue.

dein Bruder: Perhaps it’s in an alien language?

HOG: That may be the case here; there’s nothing I can recognize.

little dr.: Hm, maybe they left something hidden in here? \*Scrolls through the code carefully.\*

ThePilot: At least it’s in English.

Cyan: So, maybe it wasn’t written by an alien?

dein Bruder: Probably not…

little dr.: \*Gets to the end of the code.\*

Spaace: Oh! There’s a message at the end…?

little dr.: “If you are reading this, then this bot will explode in 5 seconds”

\*Everyone except dr. quickly backs away from the bot.\*

Cyan: Whaaa?! ;O;

Spaace: A trap?!

little dr.: Wait- \*Scrolls down.\* “Just kidding”

HOG: Nearly gave me a heart attack there...

little dr.: Sorry, there were a few spaces in between.

ThePilot: That was clearly intentional.

little dr.: Well, the coder intentionally did it on purpose, not me.

dein Bruder: Thank goodness it didn’t explode. \*Looks at the bot.\*

little dr.: ...I think we’re all good.

Cyan: Continue, I guess~ ^^;

little dr.: “Anyways, we are aware that you have some idea of what is going on, regarding those shards, since we noticed that someone intercepted a message. Might as well give some info, as a reward for your troubles, since you found out about us. To keep it short, we are converting the energy expelled by stars to shards in order to power up a portal to the distant past, as ordered by our boss. This portal requires shards and energy from other sources”

dein Bruder: Other sources?

little dr.: “Our alternative sources of powering this portal up include the energy from living beings” They’ve been taking advantage of us this entire time.

ThePilot: What do you mean?

little dr.: “Whenever you guys kill another with an attack powered up by shards, that “life energy” is then transferred over to us. It’s a complicated process to explain how that works”

Cyan: How can someone have the technology to do something like that…? =o=;;;;

little dr.: Beats me. There’s more. “By the way, we’ve captured one of your pilots and currently holding her hostage. If you want her back without having a bad time, I recommend coming here to me to discuss how you can rescue her and probably reveal more classified info”

dein Bruder: They captured one of our pilots?!

Cyan: How dare they…

Spaace: They definitely want to lure us there.

HOG: I wouldn’t be surprised if they fill their ships with traps.

ThePilot: This whole message could be a lie.

little dr.: “You can interpret this message however you like. I understand that this is suspicious, but if you want to talk to me, send me a message on this bot and release it back out. I’ll receive it firsthand because I’m the one responsible for these bots. Until then, I await your response. - Zone of Avoidance”

Spaace: So, this person wants to help out?

Cyan: There’s the possibility that he may report whatever info we send him to his boss and then they have the upper hand.

dein Bruder: The more time we waste, the more likely that something will happen to the captured pilot...I think we should give this person a chance.

Cyan: The guy called himself, “Zone of Avoidance”. It is an area of the sky that is covered by the galactic plane of the Milky Way Galaxy. Astronomers don’t know what’s on the other side because there’s so much dust that obscures radiation from other space objects. Based on that, perhaps there is more to him than it seems.

little dr.: We don’t know much about this organization and the people who run it. It seems like this individual wants to rebel or something.

HOG: If we’re really going to send a message, what should we say?

little dr.: It’s best to keep it simple: Ask where he wants to meet up and how we can get to that location without running into complications? Sounds good?

ThePilot: \*Nods.\* Better be super careful not to reveal too much about ourselves.

little dr.: Of course…

dein Bruder: We should quickly send this bot out and hopefully we’ll get a response soon.

*A message was typed into the code and a few minutes later, the bot was released. After 2 hours, the bots disappeared from the arenas. However, the aggressive foreign invaders made another appearance 6 hours later. War resumed again in the arenas. Noticing the return of the bots, dr. immediately captured one of the machines and brought it to his office.*

Strange: \*Sips her coffee.\* Got another bot, I see. \*Watches dr. walk over to his desk with a bot.\*

little dr.: \*Places the bot on his desk.\* I sure did. I hope that we’re not walking into a trap…

Strange: Just what do they think they’re going to accomplish by using this “life energy” along with the energy gathered from the stars?

dein Bruder: Exactly what I want to know. So far, we know that they are trying to activate a portal and attempting to bring someone here. Both of them sound like bad news to me.

little dr.: Only one way to find out. \*Accesses the codes, displays them on a screen, and scrolls through to find a message.\* Ah! Here we go.

Strange: So he did respond, huh? \*Glances at the screen.\*

The message read the following:

“Glad to see that you decided to reply. I wish I could contact you in a convenient way, but I’m currently limited with what I do without getting caught. Meeting up in person is crucial. Here’s what you need to do: Send a minimum of seven people, preferably pilots who are trusted, knowledgeable, and experienced with the game from different arenas. There must also be astronomers, leaders, and coders over there, right? Otherwise, you wouldn’t have found out all about this in the first place. Once you get your group together, let me know what time you all can come out here. The plan is for you all to head to the star Sirius B, the white dwarf star. I’ll open up a portal that will teleport you to my personal office and then we’ll continue from there. If you are willing to continue, please reply within 6 hours, as I will be recalling all bots again by that time. I apologize in advance if this may not seem like a lot of time, but I’m getting a bad feeling that something bad is going to happen... - Zone of Avoidance”

Strange: Looks like he’s doing this for real. I know we should make rescuing that captured pilot as a priority, but we need to be vigilant.

dein Bruder: Right. I’m assuming he wants us admins to go, along with four other people.

little dr.: My question is, how does he know that we have experienced pilots? He must have been spying on us somehow.

dein Bruder: I bet. We can just ask him that while we’re over there.

Strange: Hm...He mentioned astronomers, so I guess Cyan should be included?

little dr.: Makes sense, unless there are other pilots who also have knowledge of astronomy. So far, only Cyan has been monitoring what is happening with the stars and has been able to explain the shards’ association with the stars.

Strange: That’s four people. The remaining three can be the other players, unless if we should bring along another coder.

little dr.: I can just message the others what we learn about or what we need to do.

Strange: Gotcha.

dein Bruder: I think the reason why he wants experienced pilots is either to protect the others in the group or to see what we’re capable of. Then again, we could be walking into a trap.

Strange: We’re taking a big risk here, but we can’t just sit here and let these guys do whatever they want without a fight.

little dr.: How are we going to determine who else goes…?

dein Bruder: Maybe two pilots can be from the West and one from EU. He did say he wanted to see pilots from other servers as well.

*An hour of discussion passes before the bot was released with the message of confirmation. Three days passed until a single bot appeared. dr. manages to capture it and calls those who were participating in a secret meeting to come into his office.*

little dr.: Thank you all for coming in for a sudden meeting today. I just got the latest reply from the “Zone of Avoidance”.

Cyan: Nice~ Have you read it yet?

little dr.: Nope, I haven’t even accessed it yet.

1: I’m really curious how he’s going to pull this off.

Imperial Fleet: I agree...And doesn’t he work for the organization?

Strange: It seems like it, but at the same time, he might be planning something in the shadows.

DreamWeaver: I guess we won’t know until we actually go over there.

little dr.: Let’s see what he has to say... \*Displays the message on a screen.\*

“Hello all, hope you all are doing well. Since constantly sending out bots is time-consuming and probably annoying at this point, I’ve attached a unique device that consists of two black, medium-sized cylinders that are bound together by a cord. Unbind it and flip the switch on the side. This will allow you to expand the flexible, holographic tablet up to 1 meter. To turn it on, press the orange, diamond-shaped button that is next to the switch. I will explain all about the Electronic Clandestine Scroll (ECS) once you turned it on, but this will now be used to communicate directly with each other. I’ve tweaked this model so it emits transmission waves at a frequency that isn’t detected by our fleet. This will be my last message via bot, unless something went wrong. If everything has gone smoothly, then message me by using the scroll. - Zone of Avoidance”

little dr.: ...I’m guessing he’s referring to this. \*Takes out the bounded cylinders.\*

Cyan: It looks so simple, but I bet it’s super cool. \*^\*

Strange: A flexible, holographic tablet/scroll…Such a thing exists?

dein Bruder: I wonder if he made this?

little dr.: Heh, I have a feeling that he might have. \*Unwraps the cord around the device, flips the switch, places the two cylinders apart, and presses the ‘on’ button.\*

*The device flickered on and a tutorial appeared on the screen. After a few minutes of interacting with the scroll and being overly amazed by its capabilities, the group sent the message to the mysterious, possible rebel. Less than a minute later, they got a response...*

“Hello, glad to see it’s working! How are you doing?”

Cyan: Oh, that was pretty quick. .o.

Strange: I guess he was waiting around for us.

little dr.: Yeah. \*Sends a reply.\* “I’m well, thanks for asking. And you?”

“I’m doing alright. Anyways, I guess it’s about time I introduce myself. I’m Enzo, the Lead Programmer of Astral Passageways, an organization that grants people’s wishes. Yes, we actually do make people’s wishes come true”

Imperial Fleet: Sounds 100% legit…

Cyan: Haha, that’s cute. -w-

little dr.: Heh, based on what we know so far, I bet they’re hiding a dark secret. “Nice to meet you, Enzo. Whatever you’re doing over there, it sounds sketchy”

“Sketchy? Depends what side of the story you’re on. If you’re the customer, everything seems fine and dandy. Be part of the organization, it’s a completely different story...That’s why, along with a few others and I, we are trying to expose them and hopefully get them arrested”

little dr.: Called it. ;)

1: So, Enzo and the others are basically working undercover. I’m cool with that.

dein Bruder: I guess we have more allies on our side then. :)

Imperial Fleet: But, we should stay cautious around them...You never know when they could backstab us.

Strange: Of course…

little dr.: Just to make sure, we’re all going to this meeting, correct?

1: I know we’re supposed to go tomorrow, but what time?

little dr.: I was just about to ask him that. ;) “I see...I’ve got the whole group with me and we’re interested in meeting you. Do you have the details for it today?”

“Yes, I do. Just give me a moment”

*The discussion about the meeting continued for 15 minutes until it concluded. The next day, the seven pilots teleported over to Sirius B via dr.’s Ansible. They spotted an ominous portal nearby and flew into it. After what seemed like a short, but dizzying trip through the portal, the pilots arrive at their destination.*

Strange: I never knew teleporting would make me feel a little off…

DreamWeaver: It’ll go away eventually. That’s something I wouldn’t want to do too often.

Cyan: Um...Where is he? ;;owo)

Enzo: \*Walks into the doorway and notices the pilots.\* You guys came here pretty quickly.

\*Everyone turns around and sees him.\*

little dr.: Ah ha, so this is the man behind those bots.

Enzo: \*Chuckles.\* Guilty as charged! \*Holds his right hand out.\* Oh...right. I never learned your names. Sorry about that.

little dr.: No worries, it’s not too late. I’m little dr., a “friendly hacker”. \*Shakes Enzo’s hand.\*

Enzo: Friendly hacker, hm? Nice to meet you, dr.

Strange: Heh, his bots sometimes say otherwise. ;)

Enzo: You’re a bot builder too?

little dr.: I’ve built some a few months back. There are other pilots who also code bots and occasionally send some to an arena.

Enzo: Nice, nice.

Strange: Hi there, I’m Strange, one of the three admins here today.

Enzo: Nice to meet you, Ms. Strange. And, three admins…?

Strange: Mhm, little dr. dein Bruder, and I.

dein Bruder: \*Nods.\* Glad to have some allies outside Spaceone to fight against a common enemy. We’re all looking forward to working with your team. \*Shakes Enzo’s hand.\*

Enzo: \*Shakes dein Bruder’s hand.\* Same here. I’ve informed my group about you all and they are thrilled to have more allies to take this organization down.

Strange: We also have with us a few pro pilots, as you requested. Do keep in mind that we have a lot more pros. ;) 1 is from EU, Imperial Fleet and DreamWeaver are from the West, and Cyan is from the East; she’s also our astronomer.

Cyan: Eh, not officially. ^^; More of a hobby, hehe~

Enzo: \*Notices Cyan’s pointed ears\* …!? Are you a space elf, by any chance?

Cyan: Yes I am. :0

Enzo: Haha, I bet that you’re the one who intercepted that transmission…

Cyan: So, you did notice that...Sorry…? (\ ;;>w<)/

Enzo: No, it’s fine. Besides, it kind of gave me a hint that you have noticed us and thought it was about time to contact you guys. Actually, one of our members is a space elf…He’s responsible for spying on you guys to see how the pilots fight. He’s been making a ruckus over there and probably bringing some attention to himself in the arenas, hasn’t he?

Imperial Fleet: Who is he then?

???: Does the name Zebulon sound familiar to you? \*Walks up to Enzo.\*

Cyan: Zebulon…? ;-w-)?

1: I remember seeing you a few times and we’ve fought before, both on the East and EU servers.

Imperial Fleet: I’m assuming that you’ve been playing ever since the fragments first showed up?

Zebulon: Well, I’ve been visiting the arenas longer than that. It’s just that I’ve been playing more frequently to um...spy on you all and sometimes procrastinate by playing the game.

Enzo: Zeb, didn’t I tell you to stay low? \*Gives Zebulon an annoyed look of disapproval.\*

Zebulon: Sure, but that gets tough when the pilots on the leaderboard eventually die off or leave, so I eventually end up in 1st place. The organization doesn’t seem to care about it that much. \*Shrugs.\* But seriously, this game you guys play is *addicting*.

Cyan: Hehe, I totally agree~ (b >w<)b

Zebulon: Based on what I’ve observed and experienced, you guys are absolutely capable of fighting against this organization with your fleets. There’s also the fact that you can easily gain ships by shooting at a dead ship or at asteroids and you can easily dodge by dashing too. If everyone were to attack the enemy fleets all at once, it’ll certainly overwhelm them.

Strange: But, are the enemy ships immune to the abilities from the shards? Enzo’s bots have an immunity from those attacks, from what I recall.

Enzo: The good news is that the fleets are not immune to those types of attacks. However, the ships are equipped to be able to counteract them.

little dr.: Mind if you tell us what we’re up against?

Enzo: Probably the most annoying thing about these ships is their reflective shields. Whatever you throw at them, it’ll simply be reflected back at the attacker. It can stay active for as long as needed. A pretty cowardly move, I say, if I were to attack them.

dein Bruder: Is there any way to disable it? Imagine if all of us were to attack a ship at once and the shield activates...

Enzo: Well, you can’t do much about it from the outside. However, if someone can get inside the control room, then one can easily turn it off. There’s high security to worry about, though.

Cyan: Couldn’t you just hack into their systems? ;oAo)\_

Enzo: I’ve thought about that; while it would be fun to toy with them, the issue here is that other officers are watching what modifications I do to the system. I’d be caught immediately and that’d be the end of me. ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯

Cyan: Eh...Don’t do that then. ^^;;;;

Zebulon: One important thing to mention is that these ships aren’t the only ones that are part of Astral Passageways. They stationed other ships at six other stars as well to create shards from the stars they’re located at.

DreamWeaver: Hang on, does that mean that we’ll have to attack them too?

Zebulon: \*Nods.\* This is where it gets complicated. Let’s say if we were to attack the fleet here. The ships would send out a distress call to the other fleets and teleport here to aid them. There are 5 ships per fleet, so that would make a total of 35 space vessels coming after us, shooting plasma lasers. \*In a sarcastic tone.\* *Sounds like fun*.

dein Bruder: I guess we’ll have to attack them all at once then, in order to keep them all busy. I’m sure we have enough pilots to break up into groups.

little dr.: Looks like I’ll have to open up more portals to those other stars.

Cyan: Also, it’s important to keep in mind that messages transmitted from other stars will take awhile, even with the tech we have. These stars are super far apart, after all. ^^;

dein Bruder: Ah ha! Maybe we can use that delay to our advantage. We could just intercept those SOS transmissions, so the other ships won’t be aware of what’s happening.

Enzo: We’ll have to work quickly though. They’ll eventually realize that something is wrong if they hadn’t gotten any updates from the main fleet.

Imperial Fleet: Adding on to dB’s idea, once we destroy one fleet, we can just teleport to another star and do the exact same thing, intercepting the SOS message while trashing their ships.

Enzo: That sounds like a good place to start off. But, let’s go rescue your pilot first.

Strange: Do you know who they captured?

Zebulon: I heard them overtalking while I was spying on them and I think her name was GUCCI-

Cyan: GUCCI?!? ;o;

Strange: Why her…?

Zebulon: Of course they’re going to pull of the “Surrender or else she dies” trick. Enzo and Iris tried to talk them out of it, but they wouldn’t listen.

Enzo: Whatever they’re up to...They’re really motivated to make it happen.

*A notification sound goes off and Enzo went over to his computer to check it.*

Enzo: \*Reads the message and his eyes widen.\* What?! They’re going to do it now?!

Zebulon: ?! \*Runs over to Enzo and skims the message.\* Didn’t they say they’ll do it tomorrow…?

Enzo: Yeah...Zeb, go over there right now! Contact Alice and see if she can do anything to stop it.

Zebulon: Understood! \*Dashes out of the office.\*

Strange: What’s going on?

Enzo: They’re...performing the ritual to sacrifice her...Did they found out that you guys are here?

*The messaging system on Enzo’s computer started to beep continuously as if it was some kind of phone call.*

Enzo: Shoot, the big guy wants to have a video chat with me. Uhhh-just hide behind that wall over there. Whatever you do, don’t give away anything that’ll blow your cover…!

*The pilots hurried over and hid away behind the wall.*

Cyan: \*Whispers as tears start to form.\* Are they really going to kill her…?!

Strange: They better not dare…She’s innocent in all of this.

1: They’re taking this life energy thing too far. Just what are they going to do after all of this?

DreamWeaver.: Whatever happens, we will not tolerate this.

*Meanwhile, Enzo was attempting to negotiate with his boss…*

Enzo: I recall that we’ve agreed to not perform this ritual until tomorrow, correct?

???: What’s the difference of doing it today than doing it tomorrow then?

Enzo: You’re too impatient to lure in other people...Did you even notify the pilots about this like you said you would?

???: Of course...Not. This is just an experiment anyway.

Enzo: \*Facepalms.\* Ugh… \*Grumbles.\* *Why haven’t we left you yet…?* Look, just wait until tomorrow, like you said you would. Didn’t the Underground Engineer say that it wouldn’t be ready until tomorrow anyways?

???: I’m sure it’ll be fine at 96% completion-

Enzo: Quit being so reckless! What are trying to do, blow up the ship?!

???: \*Looks at another screen.\* Oh lookie-the experiment was a success! Yay!

Enzo: \*Stares blankly at the screen.\* What…?

???: You see, we already started the experiment yesterday. Technically, the subject died last night. It was much easier than we thought it would be, all we had to do was forcefully push her through the convergence portal. And out popped a compact orb of life energy. What a fitting day for someone to die on a rare lunar event.

Enzo: I’m assuming you didn’t even ask her to initiate it…

???: Nope! If I did, she would have refused. To prevent her from intervening, we sealed her-

Enzo: \*In a low, threatening tone.\* Let her go. Now.

???: Sheesh, no need to get so worked up. They already released your wife after it was done.

Enzo: Well, now that you’ve done it...If you’re going to even bother listening to one of your co-leaders, let me give you a warning: Miscommunication and dishonesty are one of the reasons why a group can fall apart. Iris isn’t going to be happy about this either when she gets back.

???: All that matters is to satisfy the energy required to open up the portal just before the 20th of March. It’s early February; we’re going to have to work faster to be able to summon *her*.

Enzo: \*Sighs heavily.\* Fine, fine. Then, let me continue working on the next project so we can meet the deadline.

???: Heh heh, of course. I’m just happy that it went well, despite what you guys say. That makes me an amazing leader, yeah?

Enzo: *You’re more than a child than anything*.

???: Enzo, you know I’ll do anything to meet the quota.

Enzo: \*Shakes head.\* Don’t be surprised if Karma decides to hit you back twice as hard.

*The video chat ends and Enzo stares at the screen before burying his head into his arms on the desk. The pilots looked over the wall to see if the video chat was over and then walked over to him.*

Enzo: \*Looks at the pilots with a sorrowful expression.\* Sorry about your loss...They were one step ahead of us…

Cyan: She’s really gone…She’s really gone… \*Covers her face with her hands and starts to sob.\*

Strange: \*Hugs Cyan as tears run down her face.\*

1: Damn...They really went that far.

DreamWeaver: That’s just plain messed up...

dein Bruder: These guys are really asking for it. They really think we can easily be used to accomplish whatever they’re up to?

Enzo: I should have known that he would go ahead and do it anyway, even if we told him not to. Us seven officers are all guilty of her death; we couldn’t do anything more to prevent it. Even I find this very disturbing and that’s coming from someone who’s been arresting/bounty hunting shady people undercover for decades...

Cyan: \*Wipes away her tears.\* Now that it worked, they’re going to capture more pilots, aren’t they…?

little dr.: I wouldn’t be surprised if they repeat this again. We must act quickly before another one falls victim.

Enzo: Right. It’s best we create a plan ASAP before they do it again. We have only little more than a month to put an end to all of this...

*End of Rigel.*

\*\*GUCCI requested me to put her death in the story and apologizes for not giving her farewell earlier before she left.

Previous Part: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qHz2GERP20g4AvX2pxnEoJzcCLFIvgIw0NU5ubTNNdw/edit?usp=sharing>

Next Part: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1llM8yEC5FrVaWfyrETRBU68Mw1iCtw4y6c3-7YlcgKY/edit?usp=sharing>