[Chapter Betelgeuse]

“*Betelgeuse, also named Alpha Orionis, is the eleventh brightest star in the sky. It is part of the Orion constellation, but it is the second brightest star, with Rigel being the brightest. This star is also part of the asterism known as the Winter Triangle. The diameter of the star is wide enough to exceed the Asteroid Belt and possibly the orbit of Jupiter, if it was placed at the center of the Solar System. It is a super red giant star with an apparent magnitude that fluctuates. It is an indication that it is nearing the end of its long lifetime. Astronomers suspect that it may supernova soon, or it already has and that the light hasn’t reached Earth yet...But if it does, then it will be observable during the daytime.*”

*All that was left for the seven officers to complete their mission was to defeat the big boss behind it all. One by one, they all went through the unlocked door and continued to walk through the dark, silent corridor that leads to the office of the Astral Mastermind. Once at the final door that separated them and their target, Enzo typed in the code to open it. The door slid open and…*

Halley: (\_\*^\*\_)?!? Where did the hooman nugget go?!

Enzo: What?! Quick, check the entire office! \*Makes his way toward the computer on the boss’s desk.\*

Zebulon: ...Well, that was super anti-climatic. I was expecting him to be sitting in his chair, with a ton of guns aimed right at the entrance. \*Runs off to check the room to his left.\*

Alice: \*Opens up the closet door and thoroughly examines it.\* Clear. Did he seriously just bail on us?

Zayden: Looks like he did. \*Points towards an empty loading dock where a ship is usually parked.\* I was looking forward to fighting him head-on.

Iris: \*Checking her messenger.\* Hey guys, I just got a message from Cyan that she’s chasing him right now.

Enzo: Tell her to make him retreat back here. With so many pilots and bots out there, it’s going to be difficult for him to escape without being detected.

Iris: Gotcha. \*Quickly sends the message to Cyan.\* While he’s away, we can look at what is contained in his computer. This is our chance to gather evidence while there’s nothing else distracting us.

Clyde: There’s got to be some really good stuff on this computer... \*Eagerly sits down in front of the computer and immediately starts searching through all of the files.\*

*Meanwhile, the rest of the pilots were on the edge of their seats, hoping for a successful victory from the officers. However, they received an urgent message from one of their missing pilots on the scroll:*

*The bad guy is running away from the ship and I’m currently chasing after him. Don’t let him get away and don’t kill him. Try to lure him back to the main ship! The officers are waiting for him to come back to capture him.*

*- Cyan*

The Pilot: Cyan is still alive! I just received a message from her on the scroll.

Munch Munch: What did she say? Did she mention anything about Ark?

The Pilot: Well, it seems like the boss decided to make a run for it and she’s chasing him down right now. She told us to prevent him from leaving the area and to lure him back to the main ship. The officers are probably waiting for him to come back. For Ark...She didn’t mention him.

Strange: I hope he’s okay…

Reality: Eh, I’m sure he is, knowing him. Who knows, maybe he’s working for the bad guy, which is more probable than Cyan betraying us.

*At that moment, the pilots saw two groups of ships whizzing past them. The chaser was aggressively shooting at the other pilot, attempting to cut him off from any escape.*

Acro: Hey, there she is! Let’s go after the bad guy!

YouWillLose: Heh heh, time to use up all of these shards on him… \*Grins evilly as he flies towards the enemy.\*

*All of the pilots targeted the squadron of magenta-colored ships. With a few adjustments to the code, all of the bots also went after the enemy. Within seconds, it became extremely difficult for the boss to avoid walls of lasers coming right at him.*

*Being cornered in every direction, the Astral Mastermind had no choice but to retreat back into the main ship. The other ships were in lockdown and he wouldn’t be able to access them in time before he would be shot down. He managed to dodge the merciless beams of light coming from all directions, quickly parked his ship, and jumped out of his ship before the pilots could blow it up with him inside. He ran back inside, prepared to face the officers that once worked for him.*

*However, he couldn’t see them anywhere, nor did it seem like they had set up any traps. Only an empty, dark hall, illuminated by the dim lights on the sides. He slowed down to catch his breath and to be on alert for the officers that could be anywhere, waiting for an assault. The moment he started to relax, he tripped and fell forward. He looked behind to see what he tripped over: a translucent pink tentacle. Before he could react, the tentacle immediately wrapped around his right ankle tightly and the boss felt himself being lifted to the face of a hungry monster…*

Halley: Hehe, I got you~ Now, will you accept your loss without any complications? c:

Astral Mastermind: Heh, not yet. Not without a good fight against you and your traitor buddies.

*The Astral Mastermind teleported out of Halley’s grasp and appeared in front of her. She watched unfazed as she suddenly felt a dark aura gather around the boss and saw a black and purple spear form in front of him.*

Astral Mastermind: \*Grasps the spear and points it at Halley.\* You’re up first, glutenous monster.

Halley: Excuse me. \*Points at him with one of her tentacles.\* I am not a monster. I just happen to be capable of eating real monsters, like you.

Astral Mastermind: I’ll take you head-on and steal the oracle jewel that you unrightfully stole from me. I’ll make sure that Asteria fully awakens once I get it back from you.

Halley: Fine then. \*Thinking\* I’ll deal with him in my human form since he’ll have a smaller target to deal with and I’ll move much quicker. But, I really can’t use much of my magic here because I’ll easily destroy the entire ship...And everyone within a 100 km distance.

Astral Mastermind: I hope you don’t bore me, Halley.

Halley: Think you can handle a fast magical girl? :3 Then, prepare yourself for a cosmic overdrive!~

*The gigantic monster began to glow bright pink and slowly morphed into a small girl. Once the light subsided, the little girl with an infamous reputation of utilizing magic to manipulate time and space appeared with a confident expression in front of her ex-employer, pointing her wand at him.*

Halley: Your first task: Can you catch up to a comet flying at 55 km/sec? ^w^

Astral Mastermind: What? \*Gives her a blank stare.\* That’s 123,031 mph.

Halley: Hmph. You did say you’ll take me head-on. You’re lucky that it’s at aphelion and not at perihelion~ How about 1 km/sec?

Astral Mastermind: That’s still 2,236 mph. No ordinary human can run that fast.

Halley: Who says you have to run? You can teleport, duh! \*Rolls her eyes.\*

Astral Mastermind: \*Thrusts his spear towards Halley’s heart without a second thought, but Halley dodges by jumping backward.\* I’ll play your game.

Halley: Okay, here we go!~ ^w^)7 Catch me if you can! \*Immediately flies away from him, leaving behind a trail of colorful sparkles.\*

*The Astral Mastermind teleported close to Halley to attempt to stab her with his spear, but he missed. He continued to chase her all over the ship while thrusting his corrupted spear at her until she suddenly halted. From the air, he dived spear first towards Halley, but she simply dodged to the left. The spear easily skewered through the floor. He glared at the girl, who was obviously having fun with this pointless chasing game.*

Halley: \*Giggles\* Hey hey, are you tired yet?~

Astral Mastermind: Not at all. But, I’d rather want you to attack me instead of just running away. \*Mumbles to himself\* Runner...

Halley: If I did attack you, then I’d destroy everything on this ship and this ship is already damaged beyond your budget for repairs~ But, I think you should stop trying to poke at me.

Astral Mastermind: Why do you say that? \*Pulls out the spear from the floor with ease\*

Halley: I’m not going to tell you. If you’re that curious, why don’t you try for yourself?~

*Without any warning, the Astral Mastermind dashed forward with his spear pointed straight at the magical girl. However, she stood in place, waiting for what was going to happen next. Instead of piercing through the girl, the spear met an opposing force that blocked the path toward the girl’s heart. The clash of both weapons produced a large clang sound that pierced the silent room they were in. The Astral Mastermind slowly looked up to see what abruptly stopped him and his spear.*

Iris: \*Standing between the Astral Mastermind and Halley, who blocked the spear with her spear.\* Isn’t it important to be aware of your surroundings while fighting?

Astral Mastermind: Where did you come from? \*Looks around.\* I thought you couldn’t teleport. \*Grips his spear tightly in disbelief.\*

Iris: I don’t. In fact, you were so focused on her that you didn’t notice me jumping in front of Halley to protect her from you.

Astral Mastermind: I get it now. \*Pulls his weapon away from Iris.\* Because she has the oracle jewel, she’s able to know what will happen before it occurs. But, that only applies to her, not you and the other officers. I’ll take you and the other traitors down first before her then.

Iris: Still looking for a fight? Spear vs. spear, boss vs. boss then. Come and get it! \*Motions the Astral Mastermind to attack first.\*

*The Astral Mastermind didn’t hesitate to quickly thrust his spear right at Iris, who moved to the right to dodge it. Halley also dodged by teleporting next to Clyde and watched Iris clash with her opponent. They seemed to be even, but Iris was at a slight advantage due to being lighter, enabling her to react faster. However, the Astral Mastermind forcefully rammed his spear toward the tip of Iris’s spear. She wasn’t prepared for the sudden attack and she lost grip of her spear, sending it flying and out of reach. Before Iris could even move to retrieve her spear, her boss blocked her path with his spear. The boss smirked at her, confident that the fight was over.*

Astral Mastermind: Do you surrender?

Iris: You think a goddess would simply give up in front of her faithful team members? I don’t think so!

Astral Mastermind: \*Thrusts his spear towards Iris’s heart without any hesitation.\*

Iris: \*Quickly ducks down and delivers a low sweeping kick at the boss’s ankles, causing him to fall, which she then quickly runs toward her spear to retrieve it.\*

Astral Mastermind: Not so fast! \*Forcefully swings his spear towards Iris, sending a dark shockwave.\*

Iris: …! Giga Stream! \*Turns toward the shockwave and fires a large, powerful beam of light from the palm of her right hand towards the wave of dark energy.\*

*The beam not only destroyed the dark energy headed toward her, but it also split into many smaller rays that were aimed at the Astral Mastermind. He got up hastily and focused on dodging the lasers coming at him as Iris ran towards her spear to retrieve it and she continued to fire more lasers at him to create a distraction. As soon as the boss finished avoiding the light beams, he suddenly found himself in front of his opponent’s spear and halted before he ran into it. Iris kept the tip of her light spear close to the Astral Mastermind’s heart. She looked to see her ex-employer’s face that was now in disbelief on how quickly she was able to turn the tide of the duel. The other officers approached the two of them, with their weapons withdrawn.*

Iris: So, do you surrender?

*Before the boss could respond, Iris quickly changed her question.*

Iris: ...No, answer this: Are you really the boss of Astral Passageways?

Astral Mastermind: \*His face twists into shock.\* W-what do you mean-

Iris: We suspected that you weren’t the real one, specifically when the war began. That’s when you took over. Plus, we took a good look at what’s on your computer in the office while you were attempting to get away. That confirmed you are not who we are looking for.

Enzo: \*Steps forward.\* With that in mind, why did you attempt to cover up for the real criminal, Arkham?

Arkham: Cover up? Hah, more like betrayed and manipulated into covering up for him. That guy knew early on that you guys were suspicious and left before you could catch him.

Zayden: \*Sighs and turns to Iris.\* What should we do with him? There’s no way that we’re letting him off the hook.

Iris: He’s clearly guilty for what he’s done for betraying his own community for self-gain in the first place.

Alice: Do they even have a governing system here? The closest thing they have are mods. I guess they can ban him from the game or something and then we take him back home for interrogation if requested by the government...Probably going to kill him in the end, regardless if he was found guilty or not.

Arkham: \*Gulps hard.\* Execution…?

Clyde: If we hadn’t agreed to the rules, I could have gone ahead and massacred the entire fleet *legally*, including you.

Enzo: \*Rolls his eyes at Clyde.\* Oh come on, I thought you were over your [Void] phase.

Clyde: \*Chuckles.\* Lorenzo, you know that I wouldn’t do such a thing anymore as I promised back then. ^-^ \*Pats Enzo’s back reassuringly\* ...I mean, I’m still capable of pulling it off, if ordered to.

Enzo: I know. And I’m still capable of tangling you with my scroll and shocking you to the point that I completely knock you offline if needed. ^-^ \*Pats Clyde’s back while Clyde looked insulted at his response.\*

Halley: Oooo, scary AI and Combatant Programmer~ (\_+o+\_)

Arkham: What? You rip apart people and eat them. \*Points at Halley.\*

Halley: Hey. \*^\*)\_- I prefer eating peaches, thank you very much. I’d much rather consume a whole orchard of yummy peaches than humans. \*Pulls on Clyde’s sleeve and looks up at him with a cute expression.\* Can you buy me-

Clyde: No. There’s no way I’m buying an entire orchard of peaches and importing them onto my ship. Sorry, kiddo. \*Pats Halley’s head sympathetically.\*

Halley: Darn... (\ ;3;(\

Iris: Aw, poor Halley… Anyways, I think we should seriously consider our options here. But first, we need to message the pilots and confirm that this war is over.

Zebulon: Perhaps they’ll come up with a punishment of their own. We’ll just have to see. \*Glances over at Arkham.\* You’ve got a lot of explaining to do.

Arkham: \*Sighs.\* Yeah yeah...I got into this mess in the first place.

*With that, Iris proceeded to send the message that all of the pilots were anxiously waiting for:*

*It is my pleasure to confirm that we have won this war. We can’t be thankful enough for all of you assisting us throughout this mission with careful planning and skilled players. However, we are not done yet. Could we request a meeting with the moderators right away, please? We have something very concerning to tell you.*

* *Iris*

*All of the pilots cheered in unison over their victory. Some hugged each other, others did a victory dance with their fleets, others bragged about it on discord, even though they all participated in it.*

Strange: Well, I guess we’ll need to meet up with them to discuss what to do from here.

dein Bruder: I’ve got this sinking feeling that they’re going to tell us something we’re not going to like…

little dr.: There’s only one way to find out. \*Looks into the direction where the NA server base is located.\*

*A few minutes later, the three mods and the officers gathered in little dr.’s office while the rest dispersed back into the arenas, discussing their victory and challenging each other to duels. The pilots had met Enzo previously in person, but not the rest of the crew. They were surprised to see the drastic height difference between the destructive duo; Clyde towered over the other members of his team being 7 ft tall while his familiar Halley was about 4.5 ft and was child-like in appearance. Everyone sat down at a table and dein Bruder started the discussion.*

dein Bruder: First off, on behalf of everyone here on the s1 servers, we’re very thankful for your help...Who knows if we would still be here without teaming up with you guys. We really owe you one for saving our arenas.

Iris: The same can be said to you and your fellow pilots; this mission could have gone on for much longer and more damage could have been done by the organization.

Alice: I still feel terribly sorry for not being able to prevent GUCCI from being sacrificed…

Strange: It’s not your fault...From what I remember, they locked you up to prevent you from interfering.

Alice: \*Shakes her head.\* I’ve failed as an engineer. I should have created a fail-safe plan for myself, in case something like that happened. I have no idea if I can bring her back, but I’ll work on it as soon as we get back home. Since the goddess was never summoned, the energy wasn’t consumed. There might be some hope for her if I can figure out how to revert the energy back...

Strange: Please don’t stress over it too much. You’ve done so much for us already.

Enzo: \*Puts his arm around Alice’s shoulders\* Cheer up, dear. I know you can do it. If you can betray the Lunarians and troll them all the way to victory and beyond, you can bring her back.

Alice: I’ll do my best...Assuming the Lunarians don’t declare another war on us. \*Sighs in annoyance.\*

little dr.: Another war, huh…? Iris, you mentioned in your message that you had something “very concerning” to tell us. What is it?

Iris: \*Exhales deeply.\* We’ve got some bad news...Two of them.

little dr.: \*Raises his eyebrows.\* Go on…

Iris: First off, the real Astral Mastermind had escaped before the war started. Therefore, he’s still out there somewhere. You would think we’d notice, but because he was so mysterious, we didn’t realize it until it was too late. We don’t even know what he looks like or his real name.

Strange: Well, that’s unfortunate. I bet it must have been difficult to even find him in the first place.

Enzo: If we didn’t have Clyde, then there’s no way we would have been able to track him down. The boss is one of those guys who you just don’t know enough about, yet causes news breaking headlines once in a while. If you’re not involved with the criminal world, then there’s little information to work off of to arrest him. But, I doubt he’ll come back here to bother you guys again now that we’re chasing him.

dein Bruder: What’s the other thing you got for us?

Iris: Um, yeah...One of your pilots decided it would be cool to join Astral Passageways and attempt to cover up for the real boss.

Strange: Don’t tell me it’s Ark…

Iris: Bingo. You hit the nail right on the head, Strange.

Strange: ...He really went that far for domination, huh?

Iris: I know. From where we are from, we would have to arrest him and have him go through a trial. Regardless if he is found guilty or not, he’s probably going to die because they don’t want us to waste the resources coming back here. I get that he betrayed us, but I don’t think he should get killed for it. He was manipulated by the real boss after all.

little dr: Manipulated? Do you know how he got himself into this mess in the first place?

Alice: It turns out he was “corrupted” in some form. By that, I mean I had to *purify* him because something caused him to lose control of himself. Ark told us that the real boss forced him to become corrupted. It’s possible the boss made Ark do that so he could control your pilot from afar without him physically being here.

dein Bruder: Have you decided what you will do with him and where is he now? If possible, will we be able to handle the punishment ourselves?

Iris: Currently, he’s resting on our own ship. When he gained control back, he looked extremely exhausted. I’ll do the best I can to give you guys more control over this situation. We’ll try to negotiate with our employers after this meeting and will give you guys an update tomorrow. I think it’s best that we all rest, after all we’ve gone through.

little dr.: Of course. It’s been an eventful past 6 months, something out of the usual for sure. I guess we’ll be hearing from you tomorrow then.

Iris: Yeah, be on the lookout for that message. I hope that we can convince them to allow you guys to handle it. Again, thanks for assisting us with our mission. I promise that we’ll give you guys a little something for helping us so much. ^^

Strange: Aw, you’ve done so much for us already. ;) \*Hugs Iris tightly.\*

Iris: It was nice to work with you guys. Maybe we might see each other again someday... \*Hugs Strange back.\*

*After a day of rest, a message appeared on the scroll while little dr. was examining the data collected from his bots from the war:*

*Hello pilots of spaceone,*

*I’m excited to say that the admins will be allowed to handle the punishment. However, because Ark was temporarily under control and he very likely has classified information on the true culprit, the government has requested to question him in exchange for allowing him to stay in your world and not press charges. Please respond to this message asap if you accept this deal. Also, we’ve got a present for you to pick up at Enzo’s office, whenever you’re available. :)*

* *Iris*

*Seeing that the deal was a fair trade-off for not letting another pilot die, little dr. responded to the message. Neither of his other fellow admins were available to pick up the gift, so he teleported to where Enzo’s office was located, using his Ansible. He saw Enzo sitting at his desk, occupied with planting a small sprout in a mini pot.*

Enzo: \*Looks up from his potted plant and smiles.\* Oh, hey dr., that was quick.

little dr.: Heh, I thought it would be better for you guys if I came sooner so you can get back to chasing. ;) You getting into gardening as a side hobby too?

Enzo: Actually, I love taking care of plants so much that I have a greenhouse back where I’m from. I can’t stand staring at a screen for too long without seeing something natural...Like trees. Anyways, as a little thank you present, we’ve decided to offer you a limited contract with our services. \*Holds up a small, blue and black card.\*

little dr.: ...Services?

Enzo: \*Nods his head.\* Remember that I told you that we’re a bounty hunting group? If you need help with eliminating bad guys, collecting intel, or need to get out of a pinch, just insert this card into the scroll. It automatically sends a signal to me. Normally, we charge our clients, based on the difficulty and the time required to complete a mission. But, we’re offering it for free for a limited time for you guys. :)

little dr.: I’m assuming that each of your members also handles different tasks, based on their specialties, right?

Enzo: Correct. Some of us are better suited for certain situations than others. For example, if you want to break into an enemy base without tripping the alarms, you’d want to have Zebulon or Alice on your team. If you want to raid a base while breaking everything, Clyde and Halley will leave behind a large crater.

little dr.: Hmm, this can become helpful at some point. \*Takes the card from Enzo.\* You really didn’t need to do this, but we appreciate everything you and your team have done.

Enzo: I’m just glad that you guys trusted me when you first encountered my hidden message in that bot. Should you call us for assistance in the future, I hope that you’ll place your trust in us once more to complete the task. \*Smiles brightly and holds out his right hand towards little dr.\*

little dr.: Of course, it would be nice to work with your team again, but hopefully not so soon. ;) \*Shakes Enzo’s hand.\* I hope you catch the real criminal soon.

Enzo: \*Chuckles.\* We’ll do our best. We’ve learned a lot from this war and gained new knowledge about this guy. However, according to Halley, she has a feeling that because the boss opened up a portal here, there may be side effects that could impact your community in the future...

Epilogue:

*After sending a farewell message to the pilots, the bounty hunters left to continue on their pursuit of capturing their target. After a long discussion, the admins decided to ban Arkham from the arenas for a couple of months for betraying the community and to assist in providing information on the real Astral Mastermind. Since the war ended, the players continued to play to their heart's content in the arenas, using the vast remains of shards floating in space from the incident. The small community remained strong and tight-knit, confident that it will last for a long time…*

*End of Betelgeuse.*

~A few months later since the Winter Hexagon incident~

*The door opened and a shadow holding a scroll can be seen walking into the room. Before he could flick on the lights of his office, little dr. noticed something in the middle of the room that seemed out of place. He walked towards it. It was an ordinary-looking floor mirror. He saw his reflection in the mirror and walked around it, looking for anything of interest that stood out to him. There was nothing unusual about it, besides the fact the hacker never had a mirror in his office in the first place. He looked at his reflection one last time before reaching out with both of his hands to move it. Before he was able to touch the sides of the mirror, someone’s hands suddenly reached out of the mirror and firmly grasped doc's wrists. The hacker tried to escape the grasp, but whoever was on the other side of that mirror, managed to make a copy of little dr...And the person tapped once on the scroll before disappearing back into the reflective surface. The hacker could only stare at the mirror, bewildered at what just happened...*

The End…?

Previous Part: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nZRPkfMCbyMCMZAhHi3xJn5oJtLokCcot34M9tAiDx4/edit?usp=sharing>