

For months now, gathering materials, exploring the lands, bargaining with locals, all with one goal in mind. Ever since Seelight had been ripped away from its home on skire and fused to the new land of Astronia, a way back home had been on the minds of not only Seelight residents. Many other lands from countless other worlds, searching for a way home. And now, finally, after almost ten years, a means of dimensional travel was discovered. Unfortunately, pinpointing home in a sea of eternity was nearly impossible, and while some continued to look, others gave up, accepting the fact Astronia was their new home.

One who remained undeterred from this obstacle was Astril, and that's because they had an ace up their sleeve. The portal deep in the forest of the Savgon kingdom, held an ancient portal that connected to Skire, and before the lands were ripped from their homes, Astril had altered the portals destined location, allowing it to travel not only to one set portal location, but allowed it to travel to several portals across skire. While the original Seelight portal was now also on Astronia with this portal, there was still the portal connecting to meteor lake.

Astril worked constantly, intriguing the new dimensional technology with modern skire portal technology, and the ancient base technology the portal originally functioned on. To say it was a mess would be an understatement. Even the greatest minds could have trouble understanding the madness that was taking place inside of this machine, only a madman could even consider taking on the challenge. Or in this case, an extremely determined Astril, though perhaps madman wasn't a terrible title for them.

“Tío, Abuela wanted me to bring you some water and some food, you've been out here for hours. Seriously, you need to take a break every now and then...” Midas walked up to the old portal with a plastic baggy with a sandwich inside, and some chips, along with a bottle of water. Astril was under the hood of the front panel of the portal, completely unaware of their nephew's presence.

“Tío? Tíoooooo...” Midas glare only narrowed as he reached his hand up, turning up the volume dial on his TV head. “**ASTRIL**” Midas voice echoed the surrounding area, causing a few birds to fly off, and causing Astril to sit up quickly, slamming their head into the inner workings of the portal. They hissed before crawling out from under the contraption.

“WHAT?” Astril yelled at Midas, who was casually lowering down his volume dial.

“Abuela wanted me to bring you food.” His voice was neutral as he walked over, setting the food down next to Astril, who only sat there for a moment, trying to register what just happened. Astril only sighed.

“Thanks kid.” Astril didn't touch the food as they went back under the portal. Midas only rolled his eyes at the sight, not wanting to argue with someone who clearly wasn't listening or paying attention. He instead walked around the portal, looking at the detailing, old metal and technology fused to new, it was an interesting sight for sure. Finally, Midas once again stood in front of where Astril was working.

“Do you... maybe want some help?” Astril stopped at Midas words, only to slowly crawl out and look at him. In the many days and weeks they had been working, no one had offered to help, not really in any way that mattered. Most thought what they were doing wasn't crazy, insane even. To say Astril was shocked at the offer was an understatement.

“You... you want to help?” Astril's words were slow, as if not even they could believe what they were saying. Midas nodded, getting down on his knees.

“Of course, mind if I crawl under there and take a look? I'm not a genius or anything but, Screen did show me a bit of the dimensional technology you're integrating into this thing.” As Midas spoke, Astril tried to ask how he knew they were using Screens technology, but he only answered their question before they could even ask.

“I recognized some of the attachments on here that are similar to the Mega link.” He shrugged, saying it as if it was something as casual as the weather. Astril's dumbfounded expression soon turned into a smirk as they let out a chortle.

“Of course, by all means! Just know if you break anything I break your screen, got it kid?” Astril joked as they crawled back under the portal. Midas only let out a small laugh as he too crawled under. Both laid on their backs next to each other, staring up at the inner workings of the portal.

“I think I'm close, I just... can't seem to get the power core to divert energy to the frame without it overloading the system.” Astril said as they looked over the bundles of wires that transferred energy from one part of the portal to the next.

“That's because you have too much power being diverted to the main frame, it's not that it's not transferring, it's overloading, and it's using a failsafe to not implode on itself.” Midas quickly went ahead and started to disconnect a few of the unneeded wires. Astril only stared in amazement as he worked.

“How... did you-?” Astril couldn't find the words. Nearly a year of working on this thing, and the answer was right in front of them?

“Dad would... always show me stuff when he worked on his own head...” Midas recalled the times his father would show him how to do minor repairs and services on his TV head, a trait the two of them shared. “Let's just say I got really familiar with wires and power outputs pretty quickly.” Midas was already crawling out from under the portal. “Should we test it?”

Astril followed, and stood there for a moment. Working on something for so long, it felt unreal to think that it could be finished. If this worked... if it didn't explode on them... then that means...

“Yeah, let's do it.” Despite everything, Astril was ready, ready to see what had become of their fractured world. Had time passed much? Was it still like before? What had changed in the time since they've been gone? Astril walked over to the side panel, taking a deep breath as they flipped the lever, before quickly running over to Midas, pulling him back to a safer distance.

The portal hummed to life, a spark, then two, then more and more appeared in the center as the machine shook slightly, before a hole was punched through the fabric of reality, the sparks turning into colorful swears of light as the portal opened. Astril jaw nearly fell to the ground. They couldn't believe it, after all this time... all that work...

“It works!! Holy- it actually works!” Astril was practically jumping for joy as they shook Midas. “Come on, we have to go! Let's go!”

“We? Wait, are we sure this is even safe? Lets think about this-” but Astril wasn't listening.

“You can see meteor lake! You get to see where I grew up, maybe meet some magic mentors- oh this is going to be great!” Astril was already dragging Midas in, despite Midas almost being twice Astril's size they sure had a grip of steel. Midas braced himself as Astril dragged him through the portal, as it soon closed behind them.

Midas had shut his eyes tight, bracing to be broken apart and shredded to pieces by the pull of the universe, but it never came. As he opened his eyes he saw the sky was a strange dusty twilight, with a strange pale aurora that hung in the sky.

“What...? What is?” Midas muttered as he took in the strange sight before him.

“Welcome to Skire! it's... different than what it used to be, but home is still home!” Astril nodded as they looked around the small town next to meteor lake. People were already staring at them, especially at Midas, who wanted to shrink away from their gaze.

“Astril? Is that you?” A voice from the crowd called out, as Astril turned their head, they saw none other than Price staring back at them. “Holy shit... Astril- everyone thought you and the

rest of sealight were dead!” Price said as he quickly ran over, not believing that this was true. “Is your brother with you? Are the others okay? What even happened? And uh, who's this?” Price let out a spew of questions as Astril waved their hands.

“Calm down Price, everyone's fine, no Black Jack isn't here, and as for what happened... I'm not even sure myself. But look, we can talk more later, first I want to show my Nephew here around a bit and explore more before we head back to tell the others in Sealight.” Astril explained, causing Price's ears to perk at the mention of exploring.

“Exploring huh? You know it's convenient you say that.” Price had already started walking between Astril and Midas, guiding them along with him. “The first expeditions to the core world started not long ago, and more are set to head out here soon, one is even being set up here.” Price said as he led them to a group of Skirens preparing an airship.

“What are you getting at Price, why are you telling us this?” Astril's voice was laced with uneasiness. While the CCCat was an old pal of their brothers, Astril knew he could be manipulative at times. Price only sighed.

“Look, things have changed a lot since Sealight just vanished, we thought you all fell into the abyss below. Not to mention after that storm things got... weird down there... when we started sending exploration teams down there we discovered some strange things, things no one has ever seen! Things that are... rather profitable.” There it was, Astril shook their head.

“You want us to go down there and get you some items that you can sell in your shop don't you?”

“Exactly!” Astril gave him a deadpan look, of course.

“Look, while I like the idea of going on a dangerous exploration to get you some sketchy items so you can make a quick few crowns I'm not putting my Nephew in danger-” Astril went to gesture to Midas, but found him to be missing, Astril looked around and spotted him talking to one of the members.

“Looks like someone is ready to explore into the unknown!” Price said, getting a glare from Astril. Astril quickly walked over to Midas, pulling him aside while he was in the middle of talking.

“Kid, what do you think you're doing? You aren't actually thinking about going down there are you?” Astril asked in a panicked hushed tone, but Midas shrugged.

“You said we should explore, and besides, this sounds actually kinda cool... I guess.” He sounded as if he was trying to make himself less excited than he actually was. “Besides, this guy here was telling me they could always use more people to help them explore, isn't that what we're here to do?” Astril only groaned at Midas' question.

“Yes, explore *Skire*, not the inner world! That place is dangerous! Ichor and monsters everywhere! This is serious Midas!” Astril held out their hands, showing the black fur that spread down to their wrists. “I was lucky enough to have the ichor removed from my hands before it could kill me, but it took me months to re-learn how to use my hands again, even now I still have lasting nerve pain after all these years... I don't want that to happen to you, and that's if you get lucky like me and don't completely succumb to the Ichor.” Astril hissed, but Midas seemed to either not truly understand the severity of what they were saying.

“Look, I get it, it's dangerous, but this isn't the first time these guys have gone down there, and besides, I'm not helpless.” He turned to look back at the airship, watching the members prepare for their departure. “I'm going either way, if things get bad I can use my powers to get me out of there fast. If you want to come along then great, but either way you aren't going to stop me.” As soon as the words left his mouth, Price swooped in like a vulture.

“What an excellent choice kid! How about I introduce you to the crew properly and give you the rundown of what we're gonna be looking for down there!” He started to walk alongside Midas, pushing him along as Astril could only watch. Memories of fighting off ichor beasts and watching the world being ripped apart filled their mind, their chest tightened thinking about it. Astril grit their teeth as they walked onto the airship behind Midas and Price.

“Hey dumbass! I'm not letting you send my Nephew down there to risk his life for your profit... not without me.” Astril hissed at Price who only smirked.

“Of course of course! The more the better! Just make sure you get plenty of items for me! Take off will be soon so get ready!” Price said as he quickly made his way off the airship, preferring the safety of the land above than that of what lies below.

“Astril... you don't have too-”

“No, I do. You're my nephew, if anything happened to you I would never forgive myself. Even if I think this is a beyond stupid idea.” Astril muttered.

“Kinda like running into a portal without testing it first?” Midas asked with a smirk. Astril could help but let out a small chuckle.

“Alright, maybe we're both full of stupid ideas.” Both chuckled for a bit before a voice called out.

“Both of you! Welcome aboard! We'll be heading out shortly! I would suggest you get into proper gear! Not to mention you'll need supplies from the town, so I suggest you hurry!” The captain of the expedition called out. Astril looked up Midas.

“Ready to set sail into the unknown?” Midas looked down at Astril and nodded

“Ready as I'll ever be.”