I was born on an agricultural world, Persia VI. It was the sixth planet from a yellow star in a corner of the Union of Humanity. The Union controlled over 600 inhabited star systems but was far from being a power of human race. My father and uncle were assigned as teens with their wives to a harvester. The harvester was a massive behemoth which we all lived on. The machine was square and just over 120 meters to a side. The juggernaut had four levels. The bottom three levels were all the mechanicals for movement, planting, watering, fertilizing and harvesting. The top level had a small corner for living quarters and the rest of the floor was storage for incoming fertilizer and exported products. Our harvester, C3-8, covered 600 square kilometers on the planet.

I had one older brother, three younger sisters and three cousins. I learned when I was ten from my mother that the corporation who ran the harvester had limits on children, each couple was limited to three children. What that meant for me and my older brother was we would be conscripted into the the Union’s navy or marines. Which branch would depend on our education scores.

Our education was done via a terminal. Education programs were free to use and when we passed a course we received education credits. The credits allowed us to buy entertainment videos. I started watching animated series when I was young but after I learned of my fate I soured on the shows.

What I figured out was essentially my entire family was trapped. My father and uncle received a small percentage of the crop each cycle but they were charged high fees by the corporation for transportation to market effectively minimizing gains.

Well, I had helped my parents and uncle since I was six on the harvester. I had an innate understanding of the mechanicals. When I learned of my fate I threw myself into my school work and used my education credits on advanced coursework rather than buying movies and shows. By the time I was fifteen I had obtained 17 certifications for mechanical repairs and 2 certifications for electrical repair. I was hoping to get drafted and enrolled into the navy’s ship engineer track.

I was also hungry for the free educational programs to earn educational credits to buy the more advanced courses. I became semi-proficient in 6 languages, earned 4 era literature completion certs, scored in the top one percentile in math aptitude, and passed 7 advanced history courses just to earn more education credits.

I didn’t have an eidetic memory but was able to think and problem solve in four dimensions. Shortly after my fifteenth birthday I got the notification my mother told me was coming when I was 10. I would be enrolled into the navy’s starship engineer program, life support specialization. I had 203 local days left before I would be picked up and transported. My brother received his notification at the same time. He was destined for the marines, infantry logistics.

I felt relief. At least I wouldn’t be in the marines who had a survival rate of around 40% after their 20 year tour. Yes, that was the minimum length of a commitment, 20 years. Sometimes they auto re-enlisted you up for an additional 10 year term depending on needs of the fleet, which was always high. So me and my brother would most likely lose 30 years of our lives.

The next 200 days flew by. I added two more languages to earn extra credits to learn as much of the mechanical and electrical life support system courses I could get access to. My older cousin, Camille, taught me how to kiss. I was an introvert and rarely socialized with my siblings and cousins and she had taken pity on me being drafted into the navy. We never got past the kissing but I like to think I got pretty good at it and found I liked doing it.

The day finally came and a small shuttle landed on our harvester. My brother and I boarded nervously. The interior of the shuttle was well used and the other three teenagers inside looked as petrified as us. We stopped at seventeen more harvesters adding more passengers destined for the navy or marines. The shuttle, full with 35 young men and women went into space. Everyone was pretty quiet during the flight. There were no windows but you could feel the gravity leave us when we left atmosphere. Two kids vomited which caused a chain reaction. The pilot activated the light grav plates so it caused the vomit to settle and a cleaning bot came out to handle the mess. We landed on a large transport ship and were scanned and sorted. I felt like shit because I had never said goodbye to my brother. He was going to be bunked in another area of the transport. I was worried I may not see him for a very long time...if ever again.