

The meeting continued on for another three hours, as we discussed, in detail, how a global shield system would work. I did my best to explain everything I could but also emphasized the fact that I hadn't started making the satellites yet, so I had limited knowledge about what the final product would look like.

By the time we broke for the day, we had put together a general agreement. They would provide a satellite specifically designed to communicate with other satellites of the same type, coordinate with a ground control system and stay in a specific formation while also retaining the ability to have its orbit adjusted.

Further, their contribution would be specifically designed to break up on re-entry into Earth's atmosphere. I would then combine it with my own creation, the shield part of the project. Together we would test the result, including a weapons barrage with WSC oversight. After the tests were complete we would drop it into the ocean from orbit to make sure it retained its ability to disintegrate harmlessly on re-entry. Once that was complete we would set up the necessary control facilities, one for me on the moon and one for their use in the Triskelion.

There were other stipulations of course. No dangerous energy sources, no weapons of any sort, and no internal shield units to protect the projector itself. I argued hard against that stipulation but they argued it completely invalidated the ability to rely on the satellite breaking up if it fell out of orbit. I reluctantly agreed, eventually, but only if I could use double the number of satellites that were necessary. Redundancy would need to make up for any lack of resilience.

I was still hoping I could work the planned destructibility into the creation in such a way that it would work even when the satellite was augmented with ultra metal or sorcerous damascus.

The next day we met again, this time to discuss the Earth Defense Fleet. This meeting started off a lot more smoothly than the previous day, with Councilman Rockwell being mysteriously absent. They explained he had come down with the flu and would be taking some time off to recover. I didn't question it.

We debated what a defense fleet would look like, coming up with a general concept. They had a few specialists sit in on the meeting, most of them high-ranking officers from the US Navy, who were stunned by what they had been asked to sit in on, but were immediately excited by the concept... after they were convinced it wasn't a joke.

The first question raised, which I actually hadn't even thought of, was how much space we would actually be patrolling and if there was a point to patrolling at all. I pointed out that we weren't really restricted by materials, and having a buffer around the earth could only be a good thing. One of the experts shook his head and chuckled.

“Materials and tech might not be a problem, but I don't think you quite appreciate just how much space there is in the solar system,” He said. “The number of ships you would have to build to patrol it reliably would be astronomical.”

“That may be true, but patrols are still an important part of a ready-to-act military,” One of the Navy specialists explained. “Being set up and on duty means that they can react quickly. On top of that, you cut down travel time if you have a group already stationed in the area. It may not be much, but seconds count.”

“Not to mention, my sensors are good, but they aren't infallible or spread out enough to scan the whole solar system,” I explained. “I'm not saying you'll need to get out and take a look, but having eyes spread out around Earth would only help.”

After some more discussion, we reached a solid plan. The defense force would consist of eight battle groups and one reactionary force, with each battle group patrolling a section of space in a large sphere around Earth. The battle groups would be one carrier with four escorts, while the reactionary force would be stationed on the dark side of the moon with three carriers and ten escorts. The navy experts wanted more escorts per battle group but I assured them that the carriers would not be helpless like an aircraft carrier.

The reactionary force would be sent out as needed to any battle groups that needed support or to cover patrols, basically filling in any gaps. I assure them with a little crafting and some scaling up they will be able to send the reactionary fleet anywhere it was needed.

As for exactly how much space, the fleet would be patrolling, that would depend on how fast the ships were able to move, something I wouldn't know until I made them. They asked how fast the *Void Skipper* was, and while they were surprised at the number, I assured them that anything I made now would go much faster.

As we talked more about the restrictions, the council once again assured me that the limitations I put on where the ships could go were acceptable. What they were less okay with was the demand that I would have the ability to shut down their engines and weapons from a singular control unit, bound to myself. It took a lot of talking to eventually have them agree, but only if they could have one for themselves. I agreed as long as I could interview whoever it was bound to and enhance them to keep them safe. When they said it would most likely be bound to Nick Fury, barring any unforeseen developments, I felt much better about it. Fury was many things, plenty of them questionable, but he wasn't likely to leave Earth defenseless.

Still, I had to see about working in an emergency counter, something I would only use if the fate of the world was at stake. Maybe I could focus their control mechanism specifically into a singular location, something I set up to break if necessary.

One of the council members brought up how many crew members would be on each ship, and how we would control security. While I couldn't give them specifics because we hadn't

designed the ships yet, I did point out that the number would most likely be extremely low, as tasks like clean up, maintenance, cooking, and basically anything not directly connected to the intended function of the ship would either be done automatically or would be performed by dumb robots.

This of course led to a conversation about having a contingent of marines on board in case of boarding actions, in both directions. I argued that a couple trunks of battle bots were all they really needed, but the Navy specialists disagreed. After a minute of discussion, I realized why they were worried.

“Sorry, I think there is a bit of confusion, you don't need a contingent of marines on each ship, you could deploy them from here, on Earth,” I said, gesturing for them to slow down with their argument. “These ships aren't long-term deployments for their crew, though the ships themselves would absolutely be capable of supporting one. Every one of these ships will be part of an interconnected travel network, which would include Earth. You could have rotating crews, weekend and night shifts, holidays off, or anything like that. The ships will be capable of long-term deployment if nothing else than in case one of them gets disabled and need to spend a few days waiting for a pick-up, but that doesn't have to be the default staffing procedure.”

This of course brought up another huge discussion, namely security, which continued into the third day of meetings. By now I was beginning to get a bit tired of how much time was being spent discussing everything. But I stuck with it, after all, it wasn't as if we weren't making actual progress. They were willing to work with me, which meant a lot and was worth sacrificing some time and a bit of sanity for.

When it came to security, the WSC was hoping to keep the fleet a secret for as long as possible, at least until after the idea of not being alone in the universe had settled. Apparently, they were already working on getting that information disseminated in a way that didn't cause panic. How the hell they were going to do that was beyond me, but that was their problem, not mine.

What was my problem however was the security of the fleet. The WSC was happy to interview people, and put together a small conglomerate military force from members of the UN, but they were concerned about what kind of information would get out, especially if the crew was rotating out on a daily basis. They broached the subject of a contract, one crafted by me to be impossible to break.

I admitted that it was possible, probably even easy. I could take a half dozen different types of contracts and work them together to make a contract that literally couldn't be broken, but it existed in the same category of a device that forces people to answer questions truthfully. There were lines I wasn't willing to cross. They accepted this pretty easily, clearly not really liking the idea themselves. They followed it up by asking if there was anything I could do.

I spent some of the downtime for lunch thinking of a solution, before coming up with something. Hypothetically I could probably create some kind of scanning device that would tell us if the members had committed specific crimes, like accepting bribes or espionage. That would at least give them a better chance to get ahead of a situation. But without breaking my restriction to come up with a way to detect pre-crime, there were only so many options beyond lie-detecting gear and really good sensors.

The meeting closed a few hours after our lunch break, with WSC satisfied with the compromises. I spent the rest of the day unwinding and coming up with some basic ideas and plugging away at the list of things Tony and Pepper had finally sent me. The list was surprisingly short, and mostly dealt with things I had already figured out for my own convenience when building my apartment, like communicating between Earth and the moon without a delay. Still, there were enough things on it to keep me busy for a while, though nothing seemed to be too challenging.

The next day was the start of the fun stuff, actually designing the ships. I got together with the specialists the WSC had brought in, and talked shop for almost a whole day, working together to get a proper design worked out. It took a while for them to understand how unrestricted my building options were with the materials and “tech” I had access to, but once they understood and internalized it we got to work.

We designed the general shape of the hull, the general structure of its internal living and work space, as well as the weapon emplacements. We started with the escort ships, which we ended up calling the Defender Class. They were one and a half times bigger than the *Void Skipper*, though that wasn't the most relevant description because where *Skipper's* design was filled with added flare, the Defender Class was simple. Not to mention all of the new materials I had access to.

Ultimately it reminded me of a cross between a Star Destroyer and Dreadnaught, both from Star Wars. The spine of the ship started big but had a slow gradual slope on top that led to a horizontal edge at the tip, with the bottom being more angular and sudden. The Star Destroyer esque “wings”, which were attached to either side of the spine, started out just under half as wide as the ship was long, tapering down to about a fourth of the length as it ran along the entire length of the vessel on both sides, before ending with a hard angle into the spine.

It would be heavily armed, with a heavy cannon on the top and bottom of each “wing” and another on the bottom of the spine. The four heavy cannons on the “wings” would be raised up so that they could fire over the medium cannons, which would be sunk slightly into the hull and modified to shorten their barrels. We only included eight medium cannons, two for each wing surface, because I was promised resources to conceptually craft light cannons as something specifically designed to shoot down starfighters and missiles. These light cannons would be placed all around the ships and would likely be mostly computer controlled or automated somehow, as people couldn't reliably shoot down missiles.

The final armament was another thing I would have to build from resources given to me by the WSC, namely missiles and missile bays. This would be a large project in and of itself, as a missile for space would be vastly different from one designed for use in atmosphere. The top of the spine would hold three different rocket bays, with a heavy, medium, and light load.

With the escort design finished we got to work on the carrier, which we named the Command Class. This would be two times the size of *Void Skipper*, but again, that was a poor comparison. One of the Navy specialists aptly described it as a flattened and widened cigar shape, with an angular tip facing forward and the back bulked up for more thruster space. With the flat surfaces designated up and down, each side, pulled to the back, had six long rectangular additions, stacked two by three, that would contain deployable, remotely flown starfighters.

Each rectangle would hopefully contain two dozen starfighters, though realistically they wouldn't all be deployed at once, but instead serve as backups when a starfighter was destroyed. I already had plans to make the starfighters self-making so that any destroyed would replenish without any input.

The hangers spanned about two-thirds of the ship, and where they stopped the rocket bays began, the three levels of ordinance running all the way to where the bow started to taper off to its point.

On the top and bottom of the ship, running for most of the flat area was a raised platform, where three heavy cannons, six in total, were stationed. Six medium cannons were stationed under them, arranged around the raised platform. The light cannons would be more sparse on the Command Class than they would be on the Defender, but they were still dotted all over the ship.

"You can hardly call it a carrier." One of the older specialists said. "It's more of a weapons platform than anything."

"It's going to be effective, which is the most important part," I pointed out. "It's hard to argue for keeping solid roles when you're working with my stuff, though it does help make things more potent when I'm building smaller stuff."

The last thing we did was design the starfighter, which didn't take nearly as long as the other two had, mostly because its weapons were stationary, which meant we didn't need to worry about keeping space open or lines of fire. And because aerodynamics wasn't an issue, there was no reason for wings or anything like that. All we needed to worry about was that they tessellated well for storage.

In the end, we settled on a flat triangular-like design, mostly because I wanted them to function as impromptu kinetic missiles if needed. They would nestle into their hangars vertically, meaning that two dozen fit easily into each hangar bay. As for weapons, they would have small

light missile bays, two light cannon equivalents on the bottom, and a singular medium cannon equivalent on the top, all of them stationary and locked directly forward.

A few of the Navy specialists argued for a bomber-class starfighter, but I insisted it wouldn't be necessary. They packed an insane amount of firepower by themselves, and with the rest of the battle group backing them up, and the reactionary fleet not far behind, they would be fine when it came to firepower.

All in all the design process took a day and a half, and I enjoyed most of it. Having experts on hand made the design process less stressful to a ridiculous degree. It made me extremely excited to have access to the geniuses that would be working at the research base. When the designs were finalized, the experts took time to come up with some detailed blueprints so that when I was done building the components I would know exactly what I was building.