

Space Race

The Legend of the White Lion

Chapter 2 : Gathering a Crew

There was a bumping sound, then a small crash. "Shit." she whispered, having just stumbled over something in the dark house. Her knee throbbed painfully.

Joanna moved by memory toward the light in the room as silently as she could, hoping she wasn't tracking mud on the carpet. Her mother would kill her. She flicked on one of the lower lights and the room lit up, her eyes adjusting to it quickly. Sighing, she turned around and just about screamed. Dade was sitting in his reclining chair, staring at her.

"Dad! Are you trying to kill me!?" she asked, but then stood up a bit straighter and lifted a finger. "Wait, don't answer that."

"You were racing?" he asked.

A blush rose to her cheeks even as she scowled. She was still in her riding gear, covered in mud and exhaust marks, and holding her helmet in one hand. Joanna merely stood there, waiting to be berated. When he didn't speak, she did. "I know you told me not to, but I HAD to! This guy Trevor claimed he could lap me twice in a bike race up at Blake Hills."

She watched as he lifted his brows and actually smirked in amusement. Her own eyes widened a bit as he stood and gestured, walking back towards the side-door she'd just entered.

"Come on, I've got something to show you."

Joanna made a strange face, and turned on her heel, wincing as she realized that she had made mud-prints on the floor on the way in.

The two walked out into the darkness together, covering the distance between the house and the huge old garage within a few minutes. "Did you win?" Dade asked her.

"Do you even have to ask?" she grinned and shrugged her shoulders. Joanna was a modest person, but even she knew her own talents. "Only reason I'm this dirty is because it apparently pissed him off." When her father gave her a look that said he'd kill anyone who harmed her, she held up both hands and grinned. "Don't worry about it. Cheina gave him a good kick in the balls. I taught her that

one."

"And I taught you that one." he said, his voice still amused as they came to a stop in front of the garage's huge door. Joanna's stomach plummeted.

"Oh god. Dad, no. Don't make me clean out this old thing, please? It'll take me WEEKS, and I've still gotta find a job for the summer!" she went on in a worried, whining fashion that she only really used with her father.

"Cool it, Jo. I've got a proposition for you. Just hear me out..." he said, typing in a long code on the panel by the huge door. The mechanical sound was loud in the otherwise quiet night, and Joanna watched in awe as the door began to lift. All of her life this had been the 'storage shed'. No one had bothered with it in years, and she never thought she'd see the inside of it. The door clattered to a halt, and she watched warily as Dade stepped into the darkness and tapped in another code. All at once there was light, and what she saw made her gasp out loud.

Joanna couldn't form words. She simply gaped at the ship that was sitting inside of their cavernous garage. Of all of the things she'd pictured in here, it wasn't this. It was a color of white that she knew would shine after a good washing. For a moment, she thought her father had bought her a new ship, but then she saw the parts. Strewed about the floor amongst tools and white panels. The ship wasn't fully finished yet. "This is yours..." she stated as her mind began working again.

Her father was staring at it too, his arms crossed over his chest, and a wistful expression across his face. "I built it, yes." he said, heaving a sigh and beginning to pace slowly around it, giving it a decent berth. "I come in here late at night to dust in here sometimes, but I can't keep up with it," he chuckled to himself, wiping a finger over one of the folded wings.

He suddenly spun on his heel and faced her, dwarfed by the ship at his side. "I built this to race in, Joanna. This was a dream of mine that started when I was about Devin's age." he looked seriously at her, then the ship. "I missed my deadline. I was too old to race it by the time I'd gotten this far, so I simply gave up."

"You built this?" she asked, when he nodded she asked another, "To enter into Space Race?" her voice was incredulous, and she was still rooted to the spot she stood in. She'd known her father was a legendary racer, but she'd had no idea his mechanical skills were this good.

"I did, but obviously I came up short. This..." he turned to look at her. "Is where my proposition comes in."

Joanna continued to gape, still holding onto her bike-racing helmet, which was flaking dried mud onto the floor.

"I've been challenged, and I am planning to enter this ship in this year's race." he said simply, holding up a finger when she'd made a 'but' sound. "I have very little time to finish the work on it, and I'll need to appoint three drivers. I'd like you to be the Captain."

Joanna gaped at him more, if that was possible, finding herself in a seated position within moments. "You..."

"You are my daughter, and I have confidence in the fact that you'll be able to drive this ship. I already have another driver ready, and I have an idea as to whom I'll appoint for the third."

Joanna's brain once again jump-started itself. "What about the money? It costs two of our houses to get into that race! "

"That's being taken care of as we speak."

"And don't we need a mech-" her eyes broke into a glaze and she sat up more. "Faine." she said softly, and when Dade didn't interrupt, Joanna stood again, approaching him with quick steps. "Dad, Faine can be the mechanic! He's a genius! Hell," she looked around at the piles of tools and parts on the floor. "He could probably finish this for you..."

"Watch your language." he said in a short voice as he turned and looked at the same thing she was. "Bring the boy over. I've certainly heard enough about him to believe you." They were both silent for some time, each taking in the other's ideas.

"Are you sure?" she finally asked, her voice barely above a whisper. She felt him put a fatherly arm around her and met his eyes. He looked from her to the ship, smiled in a wistful manner and nodded once.

"Yes. You're perfect for each other." he said, stepping away from her and grinning as he had when she was a baby. "Joanna MacArthur, meet The White Lion."

"No way."

"Yes."

"For real?"

"Mmm hm."

"You are *not* kidding me, you promise?"

"I promise."

"Woo!!!" Cheina laughed and danced in place. She grinned, hugged Joanna and fluffed her hair. "I can't believe it! I can't believe it!"

"For the love of god, believe it." Joanna replied in a dull manner. She was sprawled on the living room chair, flipping through one of her dad's space-ship magazines.

"He wants to get serious with me. Serious! You know what that means, right? He doesn't want any other girl but *me!*"

"Mmm hm." Joanna replied, glancing up to Cheina and wincing a bit. The girl was practically glowing. She sat up and closed the magazine, leaning her elbows on her knees. "So, you're really okay with your brother and I going away for a month?" she asked, not really surprised that her friend had taken the news of the Space Race entry much more carelessly than the news of her newest admirer.

Cheina sat down heavily on the chair across from Joanna's, smoothed her short skirt and crossed her legs in a ladylike fashion. She shrugged. "I figure I'll get the house to myself most of the time, since Mom's got her private vacation weeks all planned out." She was twirling a comb in between her fingers with practiced ease.

Joanna pursed her lips and nodded. "Alright then." She stood and stretched, lifting one of the hanging straps of her outfit back over her shoulder. "I'm going to head out and see how those two are doing. Wanna come?"

Cheina gave her a look that said 'Me + Mechanics = BORED', and stood with a flourished grin. "I'll go home and call Keith."

Joanna shrugged, smirked, and waved to Cheina as the girl practically bounced out. She made her way out toward the garage, which had been dusted and organized within a matter of hours. The door was now wide open (despite Dade's request at secrecy, Joanna had argued that the ship would be displayed on the starting line within weeks), and she leaned the right hand wall of the opening to simply observe.

Her father was sitting cross-legged with his nose in a stack of papers looking a bit frazzled, while Faine towered over him, spinning a tool in his hand with the same practiced ease in which his sister had spun her comb. Joanna found that amusing. As always, he wore the same goggle-glasses, what looked like two baggy shirts, and a pair of what looked like overalls. He was working hard on the ship, seemingly fascinated with it.

Dade looked up at her over his glasses and grinned. He stood and approached

her, sighing and turning to gaze at the ship from her standpoint. "He's just like you said he was..... strange, but genius." he said, obviously speaking of Faine. Joanna smiled and nodded, wondering how many words her father had managed to get out of her usually mute friend.

They stood like that for a moment, simply observing the ship in its glory. It certainly was coming together just fine.

"Come on, I need to show you around inside." Dade said finally. She moved to follow him, but stopped as she heard her phone ring.

The word "hello" didn't even cross her lips before a voice blasted over the receiver. Joanna held the phone away from her and still heard the familiar screech.

"You're taking my brother into space for 2 weeks?"

Faine looked back then, and he and Joanna exchanged knowing smiles.

His mother was so very annoying. Here she was again, wiping his face as if something was on it. As if he couldn't clean up after himself. As if he were seven. "Mom, I am eleven years old. You do not need to do that," he said, sounding much older than eleven in his choice of words and annunciation.

"I wish you'd reconsider." she protested, lifting his glasses from his face to clean them.

Elliot rolled his eyes and grabbed his glasses back, putting them pointedly on his nose and running a hand through his blonde hair. She'd made sure to comb it into what she thought was a handsome arrangement, but he couldn't stand it. "Remember who asked me, mom! Remember what school I'm attending. Dad raced when he was younger than I am."

"Only a year." she protested again, her eyes glazing over.

Elliot's hardened face softened and he shook his head. "Mom, don't do this now. I'm gonna be fine. Sara's with me!" he grinned as he felt the weight of the white Spider Monkey on his shoulder. She was being mannerly, as always, with her tail coiled around his neck for balance and looking between he and his mother as if she understood their conversation. "I've got to go." he said. "Mr. McArthur will be here soon."

Elliot's mother gave Sara an affectionate pat on the head and smiled wistfully. "You be careful. I mean it. I do not want you doing anything dangerous." she said, her face suddenly very serious. When he nodded, she bent down to hug him again. He returned it shortly, and then spun on his heel, offering his mother a

simple wave as his bag followed him on its own.

Only passengers were allowed to enter the moving pathway that would lead them from the train station, so she was left watching with a sad look on her face, dabbing her eyes with a cloth. Sara waved at her as well.

He made his way around the long winding pathway, glaring at taller men and women who didn't seem to notice him, or seemed genuinely interested in the fact that such a small child was traveling alone with a monkey clinging to him. He wasn't fond of normal people.

"Elliot Marquis!"

The blonde haired boy stopped and gazed toward the spot where he'd heard his name, and there stood the legend himself. Dade McArthur looked much older than in the pictures Elliot kept, but he was still the same shining 'hero' he'd seemed when he was younger. Elliot actually smiled. "Hello Mr. McArthur."

"And who is this pretty lady?" he knelt to Elliot's level and asked, eyeing the boy sideways and whispering, "I do hope it's a lady...."

"Her name is Sarah. She'll accompany me during the race." Before Dade had a chance to blink, Elliot was off. "I've read the rulebooks and the sidebars of each. There is a clause that states that there are to be no amphibious, arachnid, or reptilian cargo on the ship, but there is nothing that bans bringing a mammalian pet of sub-human intelligence from boarding alongside a racer."

Dade blinked.

Elliot nodded once and watched as the elder male stood. "Law brought a dog with us one year, I remember that." he smirked down at Elliot and began walking. The younger boy doubled his pace to keep up. "I'll want you to meet my daughter. She'll captain the ship, and a man named Xeno who will be your third pilot." Dade spoke to him on normal terms, which pleased Elliot. The boy was only eleven, but had graduated with a level one degree in college by now. Racing was only a hobby, but he'd been one to match his own father (who'd been famous for racing at a young age as well).

"Xeno?" Elliot asked, scrunching up his face. "That sounds like a lower class citizen's name." he spoke in a blunt fashion, and was surprised to hear Dade snort with what he thought was laughter.

"Xeno Jones. You'll meet him as well. Your mechanic will be a very brilliant, but just about mute young man named Faine Worthington."

"Worthington? Of the cosmetics line?"

Dade seemed to think a moment, and then replied in a surprised tone. "I suppose

so, yes. Cheina does seem to have a never-ending supply...."

Cheina had gotten over the fact that Joanna and Faine were going on a month long space trip. She'd yelled, then cried a bit, and then acted as though they were leaving her behind. Finally, she decided that she would take advantage of the two days she had left with her brother and best friend.

Joanna smiled in earnest as she watched the girl step back down from the ladder. She had offered to airbrush the ship's logo onto the outside of it, and she had done a surprisingly good job of it. "You really need to take up a career in this, you know." Joanna said, admiring the lion logo with her last name scrawled across the bottom.

"Mmm.. It's not done yet. I just gotta make sure it's symmetrical." Cheina said, chewing on a manicured fingernail. She'd dressed for painting, but somehow even turned that into a fashionable looking outfit. Her hair was pulled back into a messy bun, with a borrowed pair of Faine's goggles strapped on above her eyes at the moment. Finally, she nodded and smiled to herself before climbing again.

"Dad's due back any moment, I'll go out and stop him before he gets in. I want it to be a surprise!" Joanna said with a grin. She watched for Cheina's acknowledging wave, glanced to make sure Faine's legs were still moving underneath one of the ship's sides, and trotted out the front of the garage.

Apparently she'd gotten there just in time to close the door again. Dade's car pulled into the next lot and both doors opened. Both? Who.....

"Jo! Perfect timing, I'd like you to meet someone." Dade yelled as he made his way down to where she stood. The yard was on an odd incline, and though the garage floor had been built in a balanced way, the rest of it seemed to have been cut into a hill.

She watched with a curious gaze as Dade escorted a young boy, and a white monkey down toward her. What was he up to now? Jocelyn wouldn't stand for anything but cats in their house. Was this another one of their long lost cousins? Upon closer look, he definitely wasn't. Where Joanna's hair was a deep black, the boy's was a dirty blonde even lighter than her father's brown. He wore it in a messy heap upon his head, but that seemed to be the only thing messy about him. His glasses were thin and barely noticeable, and his clothes were simple, but obviously name brand.

The boy's bags followed him, and the white monkey that had been sitting on his shoulder leapt down and bowed at the same time as he did. "Good to meet you

Miss McArthur. My name is Elliot Marquis, and this is Sara."

"Marquis!" she pointed to him, and looked at her father with wide eyes. "This is the Marquis boy?"

Dade practically glared at her. "Mind your manners, Jo."

Shaking her head, she smiled down at Elliot and nodded her head. "Sorry. It's nice to meet you, Elliot." she said, leaning down to shake Sara's offered hand with a short giggle. "Does she know a lot of tricks?"

Elliot smirked and held out his arm. Sara leapt back into her place on his shoulder with ease, her long tail sliding around his neck for balance. "She knows more than just tricks, Miss McArthur. She's flown with me on many occasions."

Joanna's brows lifted. If the last name hadn't cemented it, his reference to flying had. "So this *is* the Marquis boy...." she mumbled to herself. "Do me a favor, call me Joanna." she said to him in a louder tone as Dade motioned for them to follow.

"Ship's up here." he said, eyeing Elliot as he walked, and then lifting his gaze to Joanna. The two made gestures at each other while Elliot ogled the huge garage.

'Are you serious?' Joanna's seemed to say.

'As a heart-attack,' was Dade's easily read reply.