

Over the next two days, I built four more starships, each more technologically advanced than the one before. With this strategy, I managed to leapfrog through the starship branches, making considerable progress toward the higher-tier ships. I consistently switched back and forth between civilian and military ships, which helped clear and unlock a wide variety of vessels, from military shuttles to civilian yachts. I was happy with the progress I made, but I was even more happy to see that in at least a dozen instances, my jumping back and forth had not just unlocked smaller, closely related ships, but also significantly larger ones, ones I wouldn't have been able to make in the large production room.

Which was why Samwise finishing the massive production room on the fourth day would be such an amazing step forward. With a larger room to work in, I could massively increase the size of the ships I was making, which would, in turn, increase the size of the starships I was unlocking through osmosis. Though it was important to remember that this also increased the time it took to make each ship, as well. On one hand, that meant I wouldn't have nearly as many chances to stretch the spaceship branches to their fullest. On the other hand, the breadth of designs I could build had jumped significantly.

When I woke up early on the fourth day to a message from Samwise telling me to wake up and get ready, I nearly flew out of bed. I quickly showered and dressed, rushing to get ready to see his progress on our massive scale assembly room, which at this point we might as well just call the ship berth.

"I have configured your teleporter to include a link to the new production room, Jackson," He explained. "As it is a repurposed sports field and stadium, its primary entrances have been closed off, as they are attached to a public area."

"That's fine, not interested in taking the long way anyway," I said with a smirk, before gesturing to my teleport platform. "After you."

Samwise nodded and led me through, the flash of teleportation fading a moment later to reveal a massive cavern, one very reminiscent of the large-scale production room, the absolutely gigantic room that Noah designed and spearheaded. We were at one far end, standing on a large platform that overlooked the entire long cavern. At first, at the end we were standing, the walls started off finished and smooth, before eventually transitioning suddenly to roughly hewn stone. That section was clearly carved from bedrock and reinforced by massive beams of metal, with very little care to how it looked. This must have been when the previously created field ended and the newly carved space began.

The room was thin enough that it didn't need pillars of support, but it was more than large enough for me to make something truly monstrous, something that would likely take a large chunk of time. I could see large arms, each its own massive crane, dozens of meters long, affixed to the walls.

"How long is it?" I asked, mentally bouncing around the lengths and widths of a dozen different ships.

"Currently, it is two hundred and seventy meters long," Samwise responded. "We will continue expanding, and by tomorrow night, we should be significantly further."

"Sam... I could make something big in here... maybe even a small corvette..." I said, eyes wide as I looked around, spotting the massive construction arms connected to the sides, hundreds built into the rock walls. "How is this possible?"

"Two main developments allow this to function well," He said, responding quickly, clearly proud of his work. "First, I realized that building everything in one stroke would make it impossible, since the larger manipulator arms would not be capable of the necessary fidelity. So, the process starts at the ground, where more secure and finely tuned arms are available to assemble ships piece by piece, before being raised and attached to the frame."

As he talked, he gestured to several spots along the ground, and sure enough, there were stations set up to bring together large sections of the ship. Each one looked like the parts of a large assembly room, compacted in a ring.

"It won't be simple, but I believe it should be possible," Samwise finished. "As for how we have managed to excavate so much stone quickly, I have made an interesting innovation that is also the solution for rapidly disassembling the large-scale ship when you have finished building it."

"... shit, I hadn't even considered that," I admitted, frowning slightly.

With a ship the size I was now considering building, it would have likely taken some time to disassemble and cart off. After a moment or two trying to figure it out on my own, I turned to him, gesturing for him to explain.

"Well? Out with it, man. What did you figure out?"

"Rather than turning the stone to gravel to be carted off to a conversion site, we have instead set up a massive drainage system," he explained. "Then, using portable protomatter conversion systems, we turn the stone to water, which flows down and out to another location, where we can convert it to something useful later. That facility hasn't been created yet, since the primary use for the cavern was more critical. However, the functionality is intact. The same principle will allow us to convert the ship into water in several hours, clearing the area for you to build more."

"That is ingenious, Sam. Well done," I said, looking out over the long cavern. "When can I get started?"

"The facility is ready to begin. The teleporters are set to several production facilities, both here and at the secondary vault location. All that's left is for you to create a design, then convert that into a production schedule so it can be made chunk by chunk."

"Okay... Then let's get started," I said with a smirk. "This is going to take a while..."

Samwise quickly found a chair for me to sit in, and I dove into the possible designs available to me. Ships of several different shapes and sizes stood out, including large pleasure yachts and several UNSC combat ships. After perusing everything, I decided to go with one of the most advanced ships I had access to, the [Gladius-class Heavy Corvette](#). While technically an older design, the Gladius was continuously produced throughout the entire Human-Covenant War, with several updates being made to its design. I mentally selected the most advanced one, which went into production in 2535, and got to work.

Designing a ship that totaled at two hundred and forty-three meters was a significantly different beast from the smaller ships I had been working on, the largest of which had only been around eight meters. The frame was massive, and I would need to build a secondary frame to support it during construction, as the original ship was designed to be assembled in space, where weightlessness made that unnecessary. Luckily, I could simply overbuild the supports, since I wasn't concerned with wasting materials or the process of disassembly.

Once I was sure my design would be stable, I got to work filling out the frame, transferring the designs from my brain as fast as I could. I knew I would need a tremendous amount of time to put this all together, so I needed to save time wherever I could.

Finally, after nearly three hours of constant CAD design, I sent the plans to Samwise, who disseminated them to everyone who would be chipping in with production. While I was raring to go, desperate to start the massive project, I couldn't since the parts would still take time to accumulate, just as before with the other ships.

So, rather than waste time, I went over the tech tree, reviewing what I had made so far in between the other starships. Each bit of time between the ship production had been relatively small, but that didn't mean I hadn't used it wisely. Between my advanced design capabilities and my small-scale assembler, I could assemble anything smaller than a minicooper in record time.

One of my first tasks was to locate and complete the very first step of the [MJLONIR](#) branch, because damn did I want access to the final [versions of that undersuit](#). It was the lesser-known fact about the armor that most, if not all, of the enhancements came from the inner suit. In fact, it was the inspiration for me to create the undersuit for my original armors, though my attempt was undoubtedly inferior.

I also spent some time digging through the medical advancements and military applications, because while I wouldn't subject my worst enemy to what they did to the [Spartan II](#) and [Spartan III](#), by the time they hit the [Spartan IV](#) program, the process was stable and almost completely safe for human adults. Better yet, it was a process that was done *to* a person, rather than a series of replacements.

I was extremely excited to see what the super soldier created by combining the Fallout Institute and Spartan IV programs looked like. Depending on how invasive they were, I was very much considering undergoing whatever stable combination that Frank and I could come up with, partly because I would likely need it to safely wear my own version of MJLONIR and use it to its full potential.

Was it strictly necessary? Probably not, I was pretty much retired from combat, and any combat I did participate in was going to be through a doppelganger intermediary. Could I just make another doppelganger and have them undergo the enhancement process? Of course! Was I going to pass up the opportunity to personally become a Courser Spartan, with a Pilot jump pack and MJLONIR power armor?

Absolutely fucking not.

When I finished reviewing some of the things I had been working on, I spent about an hour creating designs for random items from across the tree, setting them up to assemble the next time I had a break. By then, enough parts for the Gladius had been gathered, and it was time to get started.

A herd of MRVNs moved together, orchestrated by Samwise, feeding me parts by the dozens. At the same time, I controlled the designated assembly locations, assembling entire sections of the ship at once, starting from the interior and working outwards, slotting in machinery, walls, bulkheads, controls, panels, computers, and more. Slowly but surely, over the span of hours, the ship took shape. By noon, about six hours after I woke up, the ship was just under fifteen percent done. When I stopped to take a break, the horde of MRVNs continued to move around parts, preparing for the next steps.

"By my calculations, you have another twenty-four hours before this is done," Samwise volunteered.

"Yeah, that's what my math said as well," I admitted with a frown. "Then let's scrap the old plan, it's no longer viable for this size ship. I say we build two more ships, this one and one final model, something hopefully bigger. Since I'm more interested in military tech, and I already have just about every luxury design you can imagine from previous ships, let's make it a military ship. If we can't reach the very edge of what the UNSC slipspace drives have to offer with that final ship, I'll make up the difference by making the modular versions."

"And then you're done with starships?"

"And then I will be done with starships," I said, raising a hand like I was taking an oath. "I'm not going to be able to complete something much bigger than this, even with full control and plenty of space. Eventually, I might get something that allows me to build on a bigger scale, but for now I will have to use what I learn here and apply it to large ships, if I ever end up building ships that size."

Samwise nodded, and after a few more minutes of talking and a quick lunch, I got back to work, immediately beginning the next chunk of construction. Over the next twelve hours, I worked constantly, barely taking breaks to eat and rest my eyes and brain. When I finally called it a day, I headed to my room to get a quick six hours of sleep.

While I knew I probably should have taken more time to unwind, to keep from overloading and straining myself, I knew I needed to push if I wanted to have enough time to finish the second ship, at least without going too far into the following week.

I worked non-stop until about two in the afternoon, before putting the final touches on the Gladius-class heavy corvette. As the last armor panel was welded into place, I barely had enough time to turn off my connection to the construction system before the knowledge washed over me. As it did, I couldn't help but smile, feeling every bit of information being downloaded and locked in my mind. I sagged into my chair, letting out a long sigh of relief.

"Have I ever mentioned how glad I am that I decided to follow up on finding you guys after you saved me from those scavs?"

I opened my eyes and turned to see Sable, leaning against the guardrail of the raised platform, looking out over the massive ship, still anchored to the ground by thick supports.

"I've never been to space before, but I know my history. I know what the O'Neil Cylinders look like, and I know what sort of ships Orbital Air uses to ferry people to the Crystal Palace," She continued, turning to lean back against the railing, before nodding back at the completed starship. "I get the feeling that this is beyond that."

"In some ways... Well... a lot of ways, it is," I responded, looking over the ship and scratching my cheek. "I honestly don't know a whole lot about what you just said, so I can't really say one way or the other... But you're not wrong."

She was silent for a long while, watching as the MRVNs were already starting to get ready to dismantle the massive vessel. I sat there as well, though I was much more focused on her.

"Jackie and Kayt might be happy not knowing how this all works, and the others don't really get it, but this is clearly more than just some inspiration," Sable said, giving me a look as she gestured behind her. "I've let it slide for a while now, but this is too much. You pulled a whole damn spaceship out of your ass! What is *actually* going on?"

I let out a long breath, belatedly realizing that she was absolutely right, this was not something I could just explain away as "inspiration." It was too big, with too many layers and too many different types of tech working together.

"Are you sure you want to know?" I asked, raising my hand to stop her from immediately responding. "It's kind of my biggest secret. This is the kind of thing that... well, walking away from it would be...difficult."

"I have no plans on going anywhere, Jay," She pointed out, giving a smile that actually reached her eyes. "I want to know."

"Alright, alright," I said, letting out a long breath. "I was given a... gift of sorts. It gives me a new tech tree from... somewhere else. I get one or two weeks with it before losing access. I then get a break, before getting a new tech tree. Sometimes they are small things like advanced genetics, other times it's a huge tree, encapsulating massive technical advancements that are hundreds of years ahead of what we have."

"That's... huh. Not what I was expecting, actually," she admitted, clearly trying to grapple with what I said. "I... I hate that I can tell that you are telling the truth. Or that you at least think you are."

"What were you expecting?" I asked out of curiosity.

"That you were connected by one of those entangled photons to a huge think tank sealed away in a distant bunker," she responded, rubbing her face. "I sort of wish I thought you were crazy now."

"No, sorry," I apologized, shaking my head. "Something much stranger."

"Right... then what's this tree, space travel?"

"No, this one is one of the larger databases I've gotten," I explained, looking out at the warship. "Last time I got something like this, it gave me my robotics expertise, the molly makers, AI, and my early medical knowledge. And that was all before I was properly set up. Now I can really take advantage of it."

"Well... you weren't wrong," she admitted with a dry chuckle. "This *is* a lot to take in."

"Yeah, I get it," I responded, looking back over the ship, which was already starting to drip, with hundreds of MRVNs slowly converting the Titanium-A hull into water. "It took me a bit to come to terms with it as well."

I made my way to her, leaning on the railing beside her. I explained some of the ins and outs of the system, including how I needed to make things from the tree to permanently benefit from it, which cleared up why I was so desperate to get certain things built in the timeframe I had.

"So, what, you're going to spend the rest of your life in a building frenzy?" Sable asked. "That sounds... tedious."

"No, thank god," I said with a chuckle. "Not sure I could keep that up. Eventually, I'm almost sure I'll reach a saturation point, where my tech will be advanced enough that new stuff won't be worth researching. New trees might have a few special things worth investigating, but there's only so many ways to build a laser, or a servo, or a way to treat cancer."

"How many ways do you have to build a laser now?" She asked, looking at me with a cheeky smirk.

"As a weapon? Three," I said with a little mental count. "Samwise takes each new one I make and works the advancements into the original one. Same with plasma, so we have some pretty advanced energy weapons at this point."

"And this doesn't change your endgame, right?" She asked, watching me from the corner of her eye. "Changing the world, giving humanity the chance to fulfill its potential?"

"Of course not," I responded confidently. "In a way, it's what cemented it. These tech trees that I am getting access to are clearly made for humans, by humans. Each new one I get access to shows me exactly what sort of potential humanity has. I'm never going to stop pushing for us to get the opportunity to push that far, maybe even further."

"Good," She responded, leaning over and kissing my cheek. "I would be disappointed if you had been hiding behind that, pretending to be a saint."

"So... you're not mad about me hiding all this from you?" I asked, after a few seconds.

"Mad? Hun, if I wasn't watching a bona fide faster-than-light capable starship slowly get turned into water in front of me, as we speak, I would have called you crazy," She responded. "I'm still thinking maybe we might just both be crazy. I can't blame you for keeping this close to your chest, it's pretty unbelievable. I'm more shocked you haven't told Jackie."

"I tried, he kinda just brushed it off," I explained, shaking my head. "I sort of just outlined it, which is where the whole 'inspiration' concept came from. Gonk is just too trusting."

"He isn't, he is just good at telling when people are being genuine," She corrected. "He didn't trust me until I came clean about a few things."

I shrugged, turning my head up to look at the ceiling. In this part of the massive, long cavern, the ceiling was still a carefully crafted illusion of the sky outside. At the moment, it was showing just an hour or so after noon, a partly cloudy sky that gently obscured the bright sun. It was a little strange that the ambient light didn't shift with the sun hiding behind some clouds, but that was hardly the weirdest thing in the cavern.

"What are you going to do now?" Sable asked.

"Well, this is gonna take a few hours to clear out, so I'm going to spend a few hours relaxing, then buckle down and design the next ship, so that there is no delay," I explained. "Once I'm done building the next ship, I'm calling it quits on ship building. Each one I make pushes my tech forward by massive leaps, but I need to start focusing on specific things or I'm going to miss out on some of the niche builds I want."

I push up from the railing and gesture for her to follow, both of us making our way to the attached teleport hub.

"What sort of other stuff does this tree have?" Sable asked as she walked beside me, casting one last glance at the large, heavy corvette being turned to water behind us.

"A pretty serious super soldier program, some advanced vehicles I plan on using to at least expand my knowledge base," I answered, ticking things off on my hand. "I already got most of their computer tech, but I want to know more about their AI. They have shield systems I want, some advanced medical tech I should at least look at, and some large-scale weapon systems I really desperately want. Other than that, it's all about the little stuff, making a foundation so that we can push humanity forward."

"That's... a significant list," She admitted as we approached the teleport pad.

I stepped through the teleporter, pausing on the other side for her to come through as well. I couldn't help but smirk at how casually we just walked through a system that, to the world around us, was something straight from science fiction.

"Yeah, it's a tall order," I nodded along, as we made our way up and out of the garage basement. "But my small-scale assembly is pretty quick at this point, so I won't be working nearly as much for them.

We made our way out of the garage and over to the test kitchen, where the day's lunch menu was focused on Frank and Jackie's attempt to create and cook with more delicate white fish. Today's menu was cod fish and chips, as well as a baked flounder with a brown butter and almond sauce. I went with the fish and chips, while Sable got the flounder, though we shared most of them.

After we were done eating, I convinced Sable to take a ride around town on one of the Mongoose, of which there were now a few parked in the garage. Samwise had apparently made a few extras so he could tinker with the design. The result of his work was a pair of ATVs with a grav panel system that kept them stable around corners, allowing you to hit them noticeably faster than you would expect.

Judging from the looks we were getting from the Nomads, I expected quite a few questions about the Mongoose. That made me *really* eager to make a warthog and some other UNSC vehicles.

Riding around with Sable was a blast, and we ended up carving out around the town, outside the walls, with Jackie and Riggs eventually joining us. Riggs was just barely too big to be able to use the vehicle in his power armor, so he stepped out and left it in town. My power armor design was significantly bulkier than MJLONIR, something I was *really* looking forward to changing.

Unfortunately, I didn't have all day to relax, and eventually I had to return to work. I had seven or eight hours left in the day, plus a full day after that, and I would need every minute of it, and a good chunk more, to complete the last design.

I thought long and hard about what sort of ship I wanted to build, exploring the options and sorting through exactly what I needed. Previously, I was concerned about getting access to large-scale MAC technology, since Sir Isaac Newton was and would always be the most dangerous son of a bitch in space. But thankfully, finishing the Gladius had unlocked a whole tree of MAC tech, ranging from the Mini-Mac mounted on the [M510 Mammoth](#), to the two [variations](#) of the [Onager](#) portable mass driver. Considering the tree continued past those into the fog, I was pretty sure there were plenty of opportunities for me to learn a lot about MAC systems.

Part of me was also looking to push my stealth knowledge forward, but I had already built a small Prowler-class ship during my previous ship builds, and while I was sure cracking a

larger, more advanced stealth ships would be nice, they were part of a separate branch, and the ships I had access to were, compared to the starships I was looking at to finish off with, mostly obsolete.

If I wanted to build a top-of-the-line Prowler, I would likely need to start low and work my way up, but I didn't have the time to do that.

So, instead, after a bit of internal debate, I settled on making an [Anlace-class light frigate](#), which was more than a hundred meters longer than the Gladius, but small compared to the other frigates I saw in my tree.

Despite the fact that building the Anlace would likely take upwards of thirty-five hours of work to complete, absolutely pushing past the allotted time I had given myself, it was still the absolute perfect ship to stop at. It was state-of-the-art, meaning every little bit of tech I got with it was the peak of what the UNSC had to offer. On top of that, it focused on powerful, large-scale energy weapons, something I didn't have another branch to work on with.

On top of all that, there were two other significant reasons. One, it was explicitly designed to be internally modular. Judging from other examples of similar modular designs, from previous builds, completing the main project would unlock any of its modular packages. So, with the price of one ship, I unlocked quite a few different variations. Two, the ever-famous [Infinity-class supercarrier](#) was designed to roll with an entourage of Anlace-class light frigates and [Strident-class heavy frigates](#), which the carrier could store inside itself.

The [Infinity](#), the only functioning version of the supercarrier class, was considered the flagship of the UNSC Navy. Therefore, not only did it receive the latest upgrades, but its escorts did as well.

Including ship-based shields.

There was a version of the Anlace with starship shields. I could see them in the designs, my experience with other shields at least let me identify the systems, even if I didn't quite understand them.

It took me three and a half hours to transfer the designs over to our systems. I looked them over for a minute before shipping them off to Samwise for production. Although I was likely about to spend the next day and a half working on the starship, I was eager to get started. With this ship, I could do incredible things, and having shields would put me miles beyond anything else in the solar system.

Now I just needed to build it.