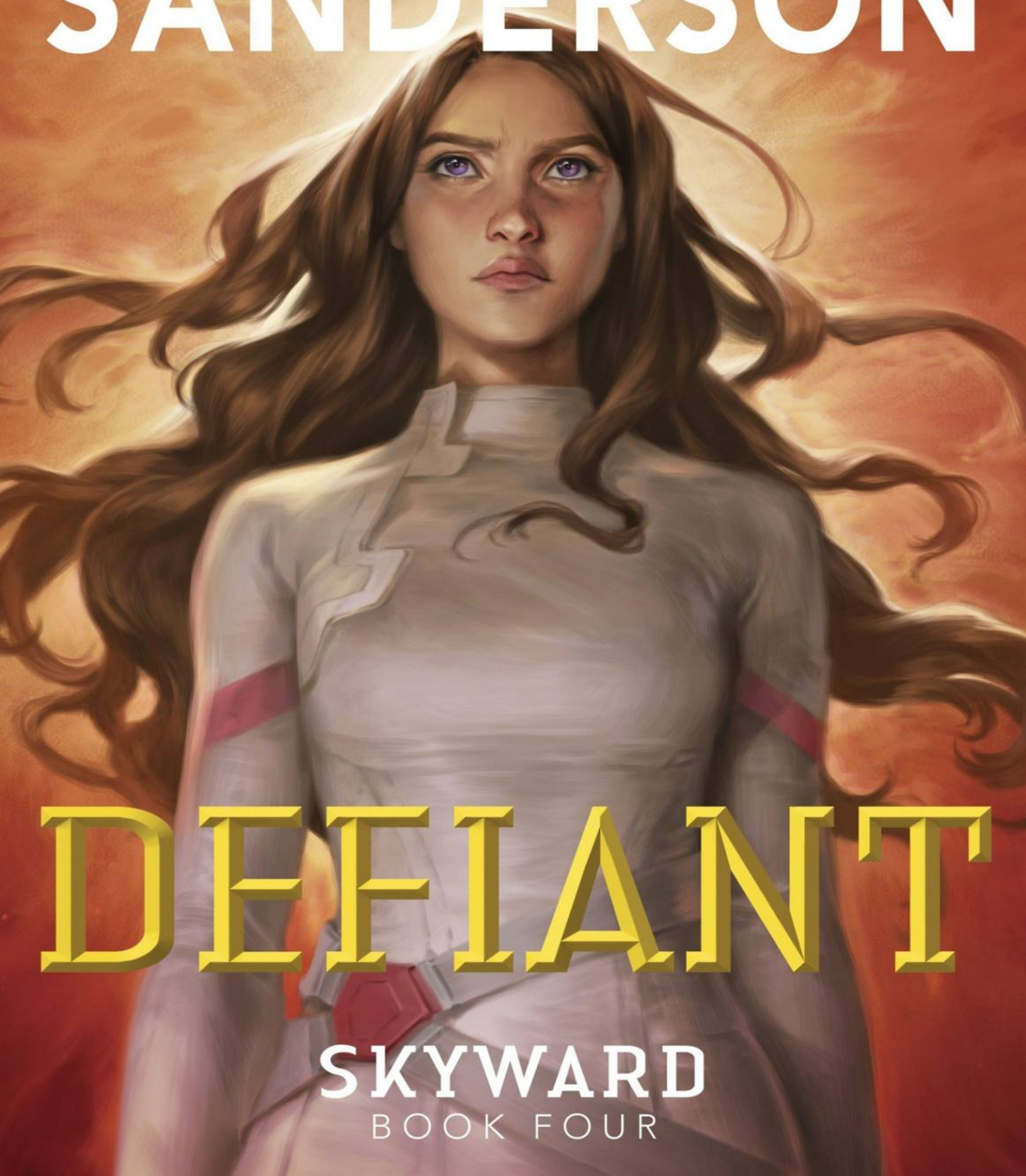


#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**BRANDON
SANDERSON**



DEFIANT

SKYWARD
BOOK FOUR

BOOKS BY BRANDON SANDERSON[®]

SKYWARD

SKYWARD
STARSIGHT
CYTONIC
DEFIANT

with Janci Patterson

SKYWARD FLIGHT: THE COLLECTION

THE RECKONERS®

STEELHEART

FIREFIGHT

CALAMITY

MITOSIS

an original e-novella

MISTBORN®

MISTBORN

THE WELL OF ASCENSION

THE HERO OF AGES

THE RITHMATIST

DEFIANT

BRANDON
SANDERSON

DELACORTE PRESS

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Text copyright © 2023 by Dragonsteel, LLC

Cover art copyright © 2023 by Charlie Bowater

Interior illustrations by Ben McSweeney and Hayley Lazo © 2023 by Dragonsteel, LLC

All rights reserved. Published in the United States by Delacorte Press, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

Delacorte Press is a registered trademark and the colophon is a trademark of Penguin Random House LLC.

Reckoners®, Mistborn®, and Brandon Sanderson® are registered trademarks of Dragonsteel, LLC.

Visit us on the Web! [GetUnderlined.com](https://www.getunderlined.com)

Educators and librarians, for a variety of teaching tools, visit us at [RHTeachersLibrarians.com](https://www.RHTeachersLibrarians.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sanderson, Brandon, author.

Title: Defiant / Brandon Sanderson.

Description: First edition. | New York : Delacorte Press, 2023. | Series: Skyward series ; [4] | Audience: Ages 12+ | Summary: Spensa needs all the knowledge she gathered in the Nowhere to end the Superiority's quest for galactic dominance, but first she must determine how far she is willing to go for victory.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023011612 (print) | LCCN 2023011613 (ebook) | ISBN 978-0-593-30971-1 (hardcover) | ISBN 978-0-593-30972-8 (library binding) | ISBN 978-0-593-30974-2 (ebook) | ISBN 978-0-593-70997-9 (int'l ed.)

Subjects: CYAC: Science fiction. | Survival—Fiction. | Air pilots—Fiction. | Extraterrestrial beings—Fiction. | LCGFT: Science fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PZ7.S19797 De 2023 (print) | LCC PZ7.S19797 (ebook) | DDC [Fic]—dc23

Ebook ISBN 9780593309742

Random House Children's Books supports the First Amendment and celebrates the right to read.

Penguin Random House LLC supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to publish books for every reader.

ep_prh_6.1_145398172_c0_r0

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Books by Brandon Sanderson®](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Part One](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Part Two](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Part Three](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Chapter 50](#)

[Chapter 51](#)

[Chapter 52](#)

[Chapter 53](#)

[Chapter 54](#)

[Chapter 55](#)

[Chapter 56](#)

[Chapter 57](#)

[Chapter 58](#)

[Chapter 59](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[*Appendix: Illustrations in Plain Text Format*](#)

[*Acknowledgments*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

145398172

For Kara,

Who carries my books to the world.

PROLOGUE

I floated in a void of nothing.

And felt like I belonged there.

So strange. I was a creature of flesh and blood. I *knew* that. Yet my soul—part of it at least—felt more at home here. In a vast void of meaningless time. The nowhere.

I was a person of two worlds. Spensa, the girl from Detritus, a warrior. Chet, the delver, a being outside space and time. We had become one.

We'd become a weapon.

I still didn't know how that worked. But I had some connection to this place that I believed would let me attack the delvers. Delvers—the terrible, strange beings that had destroyed planets and threatened my reality. I could *hurt* them. I didn't know how yet, but the thing I'd become...it could *destroy* them.

They were frightened of me. So they hid.

How can they hide? I thought. *All time and space is one single point here.*

They are looking inward, Chet responded. Part of my soul, yes, but we were still two individuals. It had been just over a week since I'd returned from the nowhere, and I was still learning how all this worked. But I did feel much more like myself now than when I'd first arrived.

I don't understand, I sent to him.

We have no bodies, Chet explained. *So you can only see us—what you call the eyes—when we are looking. It is complicated...as light only becomes visible when you interact with it, when it hits your eyes, you can only be aware of us when we are aware of you.*

Yeah. He might have been stapled to my soul—and I might have felt like I belonged in this void—but a ton of this still broke my brain to think about.

How do we fight them? I asked him.

I don't know, he replied. *We need to learn. For now, isn't it enough that they're afraid of us?*

It should have been. But something about that bothered me. An issue with their fear that I couldn't quite explain yet. So for the moment I hovered, considering. Worried, but unable to explain why. Alone. In a place that was populated by thousands upon thousands of my enemies.

M-Bot? I thought, questing out with my cytonic senses.

No response. I didn't know what had happened to him. Chet said he'd survived somehow, but despite searching each day since my return—coming here to the nowhere via cytonic mental projection—I'd not been able to find any sign of my friend. The ship I'd once flown, a delver in embryo.

I sighed and tried experimenting with my powers. Melding with the delver had changed me in two significant ways. First, in my vicinity the border between somewhere and nowhere seemed more...flimsy. Second, I had a connection to the delvers—and to others. I could enter minds more easily. I could feel emotions more easily.

Here in the nowhere, time was meaningless. Each person entering it, however, pulled a little bit of the *somewhere* in with them. Left an imprint, like a picture. On my journey, I'd been able to touch similar pictures left deliberately for me. Now I began to get glimpses of ones left *unintentionally*. Traces of what my friends had experienced while I'd been gone.

As I reached out, I found images. Impressions. Residual bits of emotion and experience left as my friends hyperjumped in and out of the nowhere. Bread crumbs that helped me experience what they'd been through while I was gone. They'd told me, of course, but now I saw it.

I saw their panic when I vanished to go to Starsight. I saw them befriend Alanik, the purple-skinned alien who had crashed on Detritus. With her, they'd eventually gone to rescue her world from the Superiority, bringing a small planet's worth of people to our cause.

I saw the National Assembly, my people's political leaders, try to make a deal with the enemy. And I saw a tragic betrayal as Winzik gleefully turned that summit into a trap—setting off an explosion that killed most of our leaders. I saw Gran-Gran and Cobb vanish into the nowhere, propelled by her talents, to protect them—and I saw them get trapped there.

Finally, I saw the kitsen. Small foxlike aliens who walked on two feet, and whose entire planet was in danger when the Superiority decided to attack. I saw interactions between them and my people, with Skyward Flight doing hard work to forge an alliance. Jorgen reluctantly taking up leadership not just of our flight, but of the entire military. Using his powers to rescue not only Gran-Gran and Cobb, but the kitsen cytonics, who had been trapped in an interdimensional prison for centuries.

These were mere glimpses—likely only possible because of my deep ties to my friends. When I tried to use the same abilities to spy on my enemies, I got nothing. But these images helped me fill in what had happened in my absence, and also left me feeling sorrowful. Because I hadn't been there to help. Because they'd all learned so much, accomplished so much, and I was left as an observer to their lives.

What you were doing was important, Chet said to me. I nodded, as I knew it was true, but still...

I left the nowhere, coming aware in my bunk back on Detritus. I still had a problem, one bigger than my own emotional baggage: I didn't know how these new powers would help me defeat the delvers. It was my job to protect my people from them. It was why I'd gone to the nowhere; I was supposed to become the weapon that could defeat them.

Despite all I'd learned, all I'd accomplished, I felt like I was still so very ignorant. I had no idea what I was doing.

Chet vibrated my soul in a way that was comforting. He was doing his best to help. I sighed, climbed out of my bunk, and prepared for the day. By all accounts, it was going to be a doozy. Fortunately, for the time being all I had to do was stand in place and try to look imposing. I stumbled to the mirror, and what looked back was anything *but* imposing. Frizzy hair, down past my shoulders now. Bags under my eyes.

And something within those eyes, something haunted. Something dangerous. Something I didn't understand.

Myself, and what I'd become.
I shook my head. Heaved a long sigh.
Then took out my dress uniform.

PART ONE

1

Five hours later, I stood at parade rest on stage.

I'd survived innumerable starfighter battles. I'd escaped the destructive power of the lifebuster bomb by a fraction of a moment. I'd traveled the nowhere itself, teasing out the memories and wisdom of the ancients. I'd looked straight at the delvers—the terrible, eldritch monsters that lived outside of time and space—meeting their eyes and refusing to back down. I was Spensa Nightshade, warrior.

Which meant, I had come to learn, that I was an important political tool.

And so today, instead of being out fighting, I had to wear something far less comfortable than a good flight suit. My chest was laden with medals—I was pretty sure they'd invented a few new ones to give me, just to make me look more impressive. Despite that, today's ceremony wasn't about me. I was, like the medals themselves, an ornament. A way to lend credibility to what was happening before me.

Jorgen Weight being named Defiant Defense Force admiral of the fleet. And, since the National Assembly had been destroyed, we were under martial law—meaning that as the DDF admiral of the fleet, he was also provisional head of our government. Until something else could be arranged.

Even with my glimpses of what had happened in my absence, I felt like I was behind. Still struggling to catch up.

Jorgen leaned forward as one of our elders placed the appropriate epaulettes on his shoulders, conferring his new rank. Then he stood up tall. Looking at his strong, determined features, you'd never have known that

he'd broken down a few days ago, crying in my arms over the death of his parents. They had been Assembly members.

A part of my soul echoed with the cry of pain he'd made as the blast had killed them. What a fool's errand that had been. I couldn't believe the Assembly had really tried to make peace with the Superiority. They'd walked right into that trap. Still, I tried not to blame them. While I'd never gotten along with the Assembly members I'd met, for Jorgen's sake I mourned. It was a major blow to all of us, not just those who had lost family. It blared out an insult loud as the galaxy itself: we weren't even worth negotiating with.

Applause erupted in the long, broad hall where we'd gathered for the event. I stood to the side of the stage, along with Kimmalyn, FM, and several other distinguished DDF officers. My spot gave me a good view of the audience, which was strikingly varied. Despite what I'd seen, it was hard to believe that in my absence, my friends had accomplished so much. Two entire planets had joined with us in defiance.

Prominent among them were the kitsen, who stood on an array of floating platforms, with speakers to magnify their chirps of approval. In rescuing their long-lost cytonics, we now had a force of people with powers like my own—if more compact, in their fifteen-centimeter-tall furry frames.

Alanik's people, the UrDail, were also there—though in smaller numbers. They had violet skin and prominent bone-white facial protrusions. The ones I'd met this week treated me cordially, but I could sense the awkwardness there. Alanik herself was near the front of their group, and although she and my flight had become good friends, she avoided my gaze. Fair enough. I'd impersonated her, and had done quite a bit in her name. Though she said she understood why...well, I wouldn't have liked the idea of anyone running around impersonating *me*.

Jorgen stood before the crowd, accepting the applause. I could tell from that strained, too-responsible look in his eyes that he didn't think he deserved it. I was proud of him for accepting it anyway. He had never wanted this; he, like me, just wanted to fly. But I hadn't heard a complaint out of him since my return.

Someone had to step up and take the lead, and Jorgen was one of our most battle-hardened and experienced pilots. That itself was terrifying, considering his age, but it was the truth. We needed him.

Once the applause died down, FM barked an order, and those of us on the stage snapped to attention and saluted. Jorgen returned the salute, then walked to the podium to make his speech. That was the sign that the rest of us could break salute, step backstage, then make our way to our seats.

I ducked out first, wondering if maybe I could—

“Hey, Spin,” a voice said, and I turned to see Kimmalyn hurrying toward me. Kimmalyn wore her hair long, naturally forming tight curls that reached to her shoulders. She’d been forced to pin on nearly as many medals as me. “You all right?” she asked. “You look distracted.”

“Fine,” I said as others filed around us. Then I just stood there, silent.

Scud. I still didn’t know what to say to my friends. How did I even begin to explain what I’d been through? That I had a delver stapled to my soul? That I’d seen the origins of cytonics, then nearly lost myself in a place where time frayed like the edges of an old coat? That I’d almost decided to *stay* and abandon them?

“If you need—” Kimmalyn started.

“I’ve gotta hit the head,” I said, accidentally talking over her.

Her expression turned concerned again. Maybe a little hurt that I hadn’t opened up to her, as I once had.

I fled, but not to the head. I got “lost” on the way, and in under ten minutes I was in the cockpit of a Poco starfighter, boosting out into space to do a quick patrol of the region.

It was a selfish move. Someone might notice my empty seat, and it might start rumors. But scud...I’d been going to far, *far* too many meetings lately. One week since my return, and I’d barely had any time in a ship. Plus, I’d heard Jorgen’s speech six times already as he’d practiced.

So I flew, enjoying the sensation of the g-forces pushing me back in my seat. Enjoying the sight of Detritus’s many layers of platforms rotating above me, with the soft blue-grey stone ground extending before me. And in a moment of exultation, I activated my cytonic abilities and hyperjumped toward outer space, just beyond the planet.

The moment I jumped, Chet stirred, his soul stuffed inside my body like a parachute packed in its ejection pod.

I don't know what to make of my new powers, I thought at him as—once again—we hung in the void and saw only blackness. The other day, I hyperjumped something without touching it.

Yes, he thought back. You are part delver now. Distance and space are...not as relevant to you as they once were.

Here, floating for a moment in the nowhere—and once again not seeing any delvers—I felt I understood a little better why I was dangerous to them. It had something to do with my deeper intrinsic connection to the nowhere and the delvers. One thing I'd learned in my travels was that they had hidden away parts of themselves, had intentionally forgotten their pain.

Now that I was part delver, I could see the truth. I could see what Chet had done to hide that same pain. I thought...I thought if I could figure it all out, *this* could be the secret to their destruction.

I took a moment to quest out for M-Bot again, but felt nothing, so I completed the hyperjump. I appeared back in the somewhere, in my ship, outside Detritus's shell. And in that moment I realized something. Why I'd been concerned earlier in the day when Chet had noted the delvers were afraid of me.

He stirred. *Yes, he thought at me. Why are you worried? It's good that they're frightened, yes?*

Good, I thought back, and bad. Chet, they're desperate. And desperate people do unpredictable things. I'd spent all this time learning to anticipate them—but now, who knew what they would do?

He settled back against my soul, like a person leaning back in a chair, and pondered on that. Because we were linked, he understood instantly what I meant. And soon I saw that he understood my worry as well.

Still, I tried to put those concerns out of my mind for the moment, so I could just enjoy the flight. Tried to ignore the weight upon my soul. The lingering sadness—though I tried to stamp it out—at having left the nowhere, where I could have explored without responsibility, behind. The worry about M-Bot. The sense of disconnect I felt, returning to a place where time flowed normally.