

Mech 1921

Chapter 1921 Gion Greybeard

So far, Ves was wholly unimpressed by his current Mastery experience.

Compared to the splendor of the Terran Confederation he witnessed while he rode in Axelar's mind, the shabby conditions on Desala X were completely opposite!

Was this the System's attempt to express its perverse need for balance? Since Ves learned a lot from how some of the most powerful humans lived in one of the most prosperous territories in human space, perhaps it was only fair for him to be dumped in one of the poorest star sectors of the galactic rim!

"What am I even supposed to gain this time?" Ves mentally scratched his head. "Rion is even worse than an academy cadet when it comes to his expertise in piloting mechs! He is hardly representative of the huge group of properly-trained light skirmisher specialists who will become my next customers!"

There was little Ves could gain from observing a mech pilot operating a virtual mech. There were various aspects that were simplified or outright absent from a real piloting experience.

Rion didn't even possess his own mech!

What was Ves supposed to do in Rion's head? Was the System attempting to screw him by abiding by the letter but not the spirit of the transaction?

"I'd like to contact customer service to file a complaint!"

As Ves inwardly vented his ire at the System for sticking him in the head of one of the worst 'light skirmisher specialists' in the history of the Age of Mechs, Rion finally entered a tent where a number of solemn-looking dwarves garbed in various scrap-covered suits had gathered around a makeshift conference table.

The dwarves all looked the same. Genetic diversity seemed to have been a low concern to House Kantis. Each dark-skinned dwarf looked uglier than the rest.

It was very hard for Ves to muster up any sympathy for these rebels!

While he found the ill treatment of the dwarves to be repugnant, enslavement and exploitation happened in many places.

Ves was not a politician, visionary or liberator. He was no saint who made it his life's mission to better the lives of the oppressed.

He was a mech designer. His job was to sell mechs to paying customers like House Kantis!

Certainly, Ves didn't like being confronted with how his customers abused his products, but strictly speaking it wasn't his responsibility to act as the galactic police!

When Rion stepped up to his seat, the dwarves around him all greeted him with respect.

"Our savior!"

"How many mechs have you defeated in the simulations?"

"Haha, with your 'genetic aptitude', defeating a hundred mechs is trivially easy!"

Instead of telling the truth, Rion conceitedly thrust out his barrel chest and slowly slapped his meaty hand against his belly!

"I can crush a mech in my sleep! Piloting a light mech is as easy as operating a mining vehicle to me! The guard mechs that keep up trapped inside Outpost 35 are as good as dead as long as I can pilot a mech!"

A voice that was deeper and older than the rest of the dwarves suddenly interrupted the banter.

"Good. You will have your chance to prove your skills against the tall folk very soon."

"Master Gion Greybeard." Someone uttered with utmost respect.

Every dwarf bowed as an old, robed dwarf entered the tent. Though his dignity was marred by his dirty clothes and the scars of age, Ves noted that Gion seemed to be a rare individual who possessed a talent for command!

No wonder the shabby Desala Resistance Movement managed to survive so long without a single rebel dwarf selling the organization out! With a leader like Gion presiding over the poor but motivated rebels, the dwarves were much better organized than he expected!

Then, Gion opened his mouth.

"Rion, our ace pilot, are you ready to crush the machines of the tall folk?"

"I am!" The enthusiastic but equally-ignorant dwarf answered in reply!

The old dwarf leader's eyes began to cloud as he recalled a memory. "Long ago, I have eavesdropped a conversation between the tall folk about the mythical ace pilots. They are able to defeat a thousand mechs with just a single machine! One of the traits that

turns a mech pilot into an ace pilot is their high genetic aptitude. According to the machine we used on you, your genetic aptitude is B+, which is one of the highest scores you can receive!"

"I have not wasted my talent!" Rion incredulously boasted! "While I am not ready to defeat a thousand mechs piloted by the tall folk, I am confident I can liberate Outpost 35 as long as I have a mech!"

"NONSENSE!" Ves inwardly screamed.

If Rion was an ace pilot, then Ves was a Star Designer!

These dwarves were basing almost all of their understanding of mechs and pilots from scattered hearsay and blind observation!

Due to their lack of understanding, the dwarves completely misinterpreted the information they gathered from the tall folk!

Ves even suspected that the guards and overseers were deliberately exaggerating what they said in the presence of the dwarves! It was a good way to instill more fear in the slaves!

"I really can't believe that these dwarves believe that Rion is an actual ace pilot." Ves mentally shook his head.

"You will have your chance very soon, my hero." Gion declared, causing the surrounding dwarves to look surprised!

"We.. we aren't ready!" Someone protested. "Our mighty tanks are not fully under our control! We have been studying its programming for years, but we barely managed to identify some of the secrets that make the battle wagons surrender control to the tall folk!"

Gion grimly shook his head. "We must do what we must, because our time is running short. Have you heard about the recent mining tunnel collapse?"

Everyone nodded, including Rion.

"It is not an accident. The large mining vehicle responsible for collapsing the tunnel was driven by one of our brothers!"

That caused every dwarf to sit up straighter on their short and stubby seats.

"What has happened?"

"I am not aware of the full details. However, before our brother drove the vehicle to collapse the mining tunnel, he passed on something remarkable to one of our other brothers. That heroic dwarf managed to take the excavated mineral away and hide it in one of our dead drops where we have stashed it somewhere safe."

"What did our miners excavate?"

Gion answered by activating a rickety projector that displayed the mineral in question.

Everyone fell silent as they stared at a projection of a shimmering chunk of ore the size of a dwarf head.

The dwarves were genetically engineered to possess a greater understanding of materials, but even Rion didn't have to rely on his half-baked schooling to realize that the chunk of ore was different from the junk exotics they extracted from the planet on a regular basis!

There was something about extraordinary valuable exotics that always seemed to reveal how much potency they possessed. Almost no one was able to mistake a low-grade exotic for a high-grade exotic because the latter always seemed more impressive!

"This.. this is nothing like Xantur iron." A dwarf stated the obvious. "What is it? Does anyone know?"

Ves tried to study the lustrous exotic ore, delving deep within his Metallurgy and other knowledge in order to identify its name and properties!

He came up with nothing!

Whatever it was, the ore was definitely at least a high-grade exotic. Even through a projection, Ves could clearly observe that it was too exceptional to be put in the ranks of anything lesser.

In fact, there was even a possibility that the exotic transcended the quality of a high-grade exotic! All of the money House Kantis spent on setting up and operating mines on Desala X was probably less than how much money this exceptional ore was worth on the open market!

"The overseer who was present at the mining tunnel called for an immediate halt of the excavation once this ore became visible." Gion recounted. "After consulting the database on his 'comm', the overseer failed to identify this new exotic."

A few dwarves looked dismayed. "Then do we know anything at all, Master Gion?"

Ves inwardly cringed at the rebel leader's title. In much of civilized space, the title of Master had gradually become exclusive to mech designers who broke through the shackles of Senior-rank and realized their mech design!

These exceptional mech designers were truly worthy to be regarded as Masters of their profession!

As for a dwarf like Gion, no matter how commanding he looked, there was no way Ves would ever call him a Master! His appropriation of this sacred title was a profound insult to the mech designing profession!

"While the overseer and our brothers at the dig site have failed to identify this exotic, once it fell into our hands, we employed our own ways to identify it. This wasn't easy." Gion lowered his head. "We had to sacrifice several of our brothers and sisters in order to access the 'internal network' of the tall folk for just an instant. After cross-referencing the descriptions of high-value exotics to the ore we have secured, we have managed to learn the name of this material."

Every dwarf, including Rion, leaned forward to capture every word that escaped their leader's mouth.

The rebel leader smiled and stroked his scraggly grey beard. "The wonder material that we have obtained from our mother planet is one of the greatest treasures on this planet! When this ore is processed, it will yield a supreme material called 'Timpala Steel!'"

Though none of the dwarves had any clue what Timpala Steel could actually do, they all reacted as if a million MTA credits had fallen into their laps!

While the dwarves went wild, inside Rion's mind, a mental earthquake struck Ves!

Timpala Steel!

"Why does that sound familiar?!"

Ves did some mental digging. His existing knowledge base did not contain any mention of this simple-sounding name for what was clearly an exceptional exotic.

It wasn't until he dug through the dusty memories he stuffed in some forgotten hole that he suddenly realized why Timpala Steel evoked so much attention from his consciousness.

"Timpala steel is one of the materials demanded by the System!"

Now that he dug out one of his neglected memories, he quickly recalled the relevant mission details.

[Supply Mission]

Mission: Material Supply 3

Difficulty: S-Rank

Prerequisites: Advance to Journeyman Mech Designer

Description

The Mech Designer System needs to be supplied with several rare materials to facilitate future upgrades.

This Supply Mission can be completed by offering 49.53 kilograms of Timpala Steel.

Reward: 1 use of the Inventorize ability, 10 golden lottery tickets.

"I didn't remember wrong! The System truly asked for 49.53 kilograms of Timpala Steel!"

"How much Timpala Steel can this ore yield?" Someone who worked at an ore processing plant asked.

"At least fifty kilograms." Gion answered with certainty. "From what little the database entry has taught us, even a single gram is enough to buy all of our lives! With fifty kilograms, the escape plan that we have been preparing all these years is finally complete!"

Everyone nodded in understanding.

"Our plan has always been to defeat the guards, overthrow the overseers, and hijack one of their 'transport ships' while it is parked on the other side of Outpost 35 and escape from this 'star system'!"

"We will definitely succeed with an ace pilot by our side!" A dwarf jubilantly boasted.

Gion shook his head. "That is true, but that is not the end of our enslavement. In my long service to the tall folk, I have overheard many conversations. There is a fabled organization called the 'MTA' that is purportedly a guardian of all humans. The guards and overseers are clearly afraid at this righteous organization. Each time one of our brothers has mentioned this name, the guards always beat them up until they die!"

"The MTA will save us fellow humans from captivity!"

"We are dwarves!" Gion slammed his powerful fist against the metal table! This was very impressive considering the gravity amplifying the impact! "After much investigation, I have discovered to my dismay that the MTA consists almost entirely of tall folk!"

"What?! This cannot be? Surely they must have dwarves among their numbers? The MTA stands for all of humanity!"

"This is where our Timpala Steel comes in." Gion grinned, making his ugly face look exceptionally terrifying! "We may not know much of the ways of tall folk, but the transactions they conduct amongst themselves is something that is known to us. Timpala Steel is the key of our salvation, because as long as some of our brothers manage to take control of a ship and leave this cursed planet, I hope that they will be able to take this treasure and offer it to the MTA as tribute in exchange for freeing those who are left behind!"

Ves' consciousness reacted with shock! He was impressed by Gion's astuteness. He was also abhorred at the thought of giving this valuable exotic!

"This cannot stand!"

Chapter 1922 Vulcan

The moment 'Master' Gion Greybeard revealed that they managed to obtain an ore that could be processed into Timpala Steel, Ves couldn't help but feel shocked!

Timpala Steel! This was the essential exotic the Mech Designer System demanded from Ves!

For a long time, Ves paid no mind to the five Supply Missions the System issued.

None of the materials mentioned by the System were average products that Ves could casually order from the galactic net.

After realizing how impossible it was to obtain the materials needed to complete the Supply Mission, Ves simply decided to pay no further mind to them. He consciously pushed them to the back of his mind where they lay forgotten and covered in dust.

In truth, a part of Ves simply didn't want to dance to the tune of the System anymore. In the last few years, Ves felt that he had largely outgrown the System.

While he was very grateful for the help the System provided him during his early years, that didn't mean he was committed to making it essential to his progression!

Now that he had reached his current strength, it was very much possible for him to work towards Senior and Master without relying on the amenities provided by the System!

Even if the System decided to abandon Ves and take away all of its toys such as the Amastendira and his System comm, Ves would still be okay as long as his permanent enhancements were still intact!

For this reason, he always adopted an opportunistic attitude towards the Supply Missions. As long as Ves caught word of one of the extremely valuable exotics demanded by the System, he didn't mind diverting from his current goals in order to pursue one of these exceptional materials.

However, if Ves had to travel through half the galaxy in order to reach an auction house that sold one of these materials, then he would just forget about it! He was not ready to waste decades of his life and disrupt all of his long-term plans just to chase after some shiny rocks with a higher rarity than other high-grade exotics.

"It seems the System isn't happy about my disregard for its missions." Ves ruefully thought.

This was a ridiculous situation! In order to push Ves towards completing one of his neglected Supply Missions, the System straightforwardly took advantage of his decision to acquire Light Skirmisher Mastery I to send him on an adventure that just happened to make him bump into enough Timpala Steel to satisfy one of its needs!

"This is a conspiracy!"

It wasn't enough for the likes of Ghanso and Aisling to plot against him. Now, even the System showed that it wasn't beneath manipulating his circumstances so that he would be compelled to dance its tune!

"You're really forcing me down this road, is that right?"

For some reason, Ves had absolutely no doubt that the incompetent dwarves had misidentified the ore. It truly radiated a sense of excellence that hinted at the awesome power hidden within.

As long as Ves managed to secure the ore and stash or ship it somewhere safe, it might be possible for him to obtain the Timpala Steel once he returned to the present!

"So it's not a coincidence that my Mastery experience is situated in the Smiling Samuel Star Sector."

The System accounted for almost everything to get the Timpala Steel within its reach. The various hindrances that deterred Ves from completing the Supply Missions no longer applied in this case!

It was clear what the System wanted Ves to do. It wanted him to assist the dwarves in their wild scheme to overpower guards and gain at least partial control over Outpost 35.

That in itself would not help the dwarves gain their freedom. Desala X was a lifeless giant planet that was completely devoid of life. No other life existed on the planet instead of other dwarves, guards, overseers and various other people working for House Kantis.

Therefore, no matter if the dwarves managed to take over Outpost 35, there was no way for them to go any further because the forces under the control of House Kantis would certainly retaliate!

Each of the dwarves knew in their hearts that the retribution from the tall folk would be terrible. Every dwarf from this underground outpost might be purged in order to squash any word of this rebellion!

For this reason, Gion Greybeard's plan also included a follow-up plan. He wanted to capture one of the transport ships and dispatch as many dwarves as possible out of the star system.

The rebels didn't expect to evacuate the entire population of dwarves at Outpost 35. There wasn't enough time, the ship likely didn't contain enough food and water to keep them all alive and her life support systems were only able to accommodate a couple of hundred or so dwarves at best!

Gion instead wanted to allow the most worthy and deserving dwarves to board the ship before hastily sending her off to a star system where they might be able to deliver their precious tribute to the MTA!

As Gion patiently reiterated the steps of his plan, Ves became more and more dismayed.

The more he heard, the more he wanted to palm his face!

"These stupid dwarves don't know anything! There are too many holes in his plan!"

The worst part about this flawed escape plan was that neither Gion nor the other dwarves knew any better! None of them had ever lived a normal life or enjoyed a proper upbringing that was more in line with what the rest of humanity enjoyed.

"The dwarves aren't to blame for their ignorance." He mentally shook his head. "House Kantis may be miserly and inattentive, but they made sure to keep the dwarves in the dark."

How could they ever fathom the power of a mech when they never witnessed them in true combat?

How could they be so confident that their improvised battle wagons could actually become a worthy opponent to the mechs piloted by the guard force?

How could they ever mistake Rion Aaden as an ace pilot?

How could they ever believe that hijacking a starship was anything but simple?

There were so many loopholes to their plan that there was not a chance in hell they would succeed in their rebellion!

Forget reaching the spaceport situated in the 'tall folk' section of Outpost 35, the underprepared rebels wouldn't even make it past the first couple of steps in their wildly-inflated plan!

Ves didn't really care about the dwarves. He possessed very little sympathy for Rion. His Mastery experience was supposed to enrich his understanding of how mech pilots made use of light skirmishers.

Where was any of that when Rion didn't even have access to an actual mech?

Surprisingly, the dwarves didn't elevate Rion to an 'ace pilot' to serve as their mascot. Gion abruptly turned to their star and revealed something very impactful to the plan.

"Our mighty war machines may be able to overwhelm some of the mechs under the control of our enemies, but they possess at least a dozen of them. In order to crush these mighty weapons made in the image of the tall folk, we must rely on your strength to ensure our victory is total."

Rion looked solemn for a moment. "I am confident I can single-handedly defeat all of their mechs, but..."

"You need a mech."

"Yes, Master Gion. I long to pilot one of the machines of the tall folk. Once I become as tall or taller than our enslavers, I can finally exact revenge for all of the oppression they inflicted on us with their own weapon!"

Every dwarf either laughed or roared as they foresaw the punishment they would mete on their oppressors!

Ves was starting to boil over. The sheer hubris and ignorance displayed by the dwarves was too much for him to bear! There was no way the dwarves would ever succeed in their wild schemes!

Unfortunately for him, if the dwarves failed to overpower the guards and hijack a transport ship, there was almost no chance for him to secure the Timpala Steel for himself!

He needed the ore that the rebels managed to obtain. He needed it not because he was eager to obtain the mission rewards. He instead wanted to appease the System!

"Will you stop screwing with my Mastery experiences as long as I secure this ore for you? I really hope this is the last time you put me in the head of a dwarf!"

In the meantime, Gion finally revealed his plan to provide Rion with an actual mech.

"We will enable you to do what you have promised." The old dwarf smiled in an ugly fashion. "The reason why I wanted you to learn how to pilot a light skirmisher is because there is an exiled son of House Kaltis in this outpost!"

Every dwarf gasped! The mere mention of this hated noble house was enough to evoke both fear and fury in their short and muscular bodies!

"This son pilots a mech that the tall folk state is superior to the mechs piloted by the guards!"

Gion switched the projector to display a light skirmisher coated in white and bearing various noble emblems and insignia.

The dwarves all gasped at this beautiful machine. They had never seen something so graceful before! They spent their entire lifetimes surrounded by rust, corrosion and cheap materials. The serviceable mining equipment and the poorly-maintained mechs operated by the guard force were anything but elegant!

To the unknowing dwarves, this light skirmisher might as well be an ace mech!

"This mech is the other key to our salvation. It is just as valuable as the wonder ore we have excavated. According to what we have been able to gather, the Genie Pearl is the personal mech of Richard Kantis, a scion of the hated house! For whatever reason, he and his mech have been exiled to this planet."

To Ves, the mech actually wasn't half-bad. The Genie Pearl was clearly a cut above the budget and bargain bin mechs of the guard force. He would classify it as a premium mech on the same level as the Blackbeak or the Crystal Lord, though the light skirmisher was a few generations older.

Unfortunately, all of the might of the Genie Pearl would probably go to waste if Rion took control!

"The Genie Pearl is ours!"

"Richard will be the first of House Kantis to die by our hands!"

Gion grinned. "This mech is ours, no doubt about that. We just have to give Rion an opportunity to reach this mighty machine. The entire purpose of our initial attack is to breach the central district of Outpost 35, reach the facility where the tall folk have parked the Genie Pearl, and take control over the mech! Once our ace pilot enters its cockpit, this prison is as good as ours!"

"For victory!"

"For Rion!"

"For the dwarves!"

Ves couldn't take it any longer. Gion's plan was based on so many faulty assumptions that he could drive a battleship through its holes!

There was no way the dwarves had any chance of success if they launched their foolish plan at this juncture!

Since the success of one of his Supply Mission was dependent on the success of the dwarf rebellion, Ves was not willing to hide in the depths of Rion's mind any longer.

"Make way, Rion! I'm going to make much better use out of your body than your ignorant self!"

With practiced ease, Ves repeated the same action he performed against Axelar and bumped Rion's consciousness out of its place!

Due to the enormous spiritual strength disparity between the two, Ves hardly expended any effort at all!

Soon, his consciousness began to take over part of Rion's mind and body.

Heavy!

Immediately, Ves fell victim to the divergent conditions of his temporary body! The dwarf physique and the heavy gravity acting on the body exacerbated his clumsy attempts in gaining full control over the foreign body!

"What's wrong, Rion?"

Unfortunately, his new body's jerky movements and abnormal convulsions immediately attracted the attention of Gion Greybeard and the other senior dwarves.

Uh oh.

Ves wanted to address the rebel dwarves, but he wouldn't be able to impress them if he moved like an imbecile!

He panicked a bit and did some quick thinking. He decided to resort to the most extreme possibility he had in mind to command the attention of the dwarves.

He concentrated his consciousness. Due to some rules that Ves wasn't familiar with, he somehow had access to much of his spiritual energy and spiritual strength, especially now that he had grown stronger.

He began to construct a hasty image and inflated it with a dash of spiritual energy before donning it onto Rion's mind like a mask.

Due to his haste and lack of time, the aura that Rion began to emanate was almost exactly the same as his own!

To the dwarves, Rion seemed to have changed. His eyes shone with an edge as the glow centered around him began to grow in strength until not a single dwarf was blind to how their 'ace pilot' seemed to have become a different dwarf!

"Rion.. what.."

"You are not talking to the friend you know." Rion spoke with a shaky and slightly unstable voice.

"Then.."

"Rejoice, my children! You have received the honor of witnessing my descent to the mortal plane!" Ves dramatically lied. "Your cause is worthy, and as the patron of your people, I have decided to possess your hero's body in order to bestow my divine blessings to your rightful cause!"

Every dwarf widened their eyes! Even the old and wise Gion looked flabbergasted!

The glow he emanated began to impress upon each the dwarves, lowering their instinctual shock, fear and suspicion towards their suspected friend.

"Who.. do we have the honor of greeting?"

Rion's body grinned. "I am Vulkan, the great and powerful God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship! As long as you worship me, I shall lend you my divine assistance and lead you to freedom!"

A god had descended upon the rebel dwarves!

Chapter 1923 Ves the Benevolen

The glow emanating from the dwarf known as Rion Aaden was unlike anything his fellow rebels ever experienced!

The dwarves of Desala X were completely cut off from the rest of the galaxy. House Kantis held a vice grip on their slave population and would never let them learn more than they needed to mine the planet.

In fact, in this suspected time period, the existence of glows shouldn't even exist because Ves hadn't even been born yet!

Let alone regular people, the dwarves completely blanked out for a time as Ves strengthened his glow.

Ves did not filter his glow too much. His Spirituality was a reflection of his values, principles and design philosophy.

In essence, that meant that Ves was currently expressing his love for mechs and life. He exposed some of his typical Larkinson traits such as duty, courage and fellowship.

His mask filtered out some of the more irrelevant traits, such as his mixed feelings for dwarves.

Instead, he tried to form a slightly favorable impression towards the dwarves.

It was difficult. Ves didn't exactly possess a lot of optimism about the dwarves, but lying to others was a practiced routine for him by now. He just had to exert enough effort to come across as a friendly entity.

So far, it was working! Many of the dwarves did not question the fact that a god had descended upon them at all! In fact, many of them weren't really familiar with the concept of gods, but the naked glow acting upon their minds at close proximity immediately converted many naive dwarves by virtue of the persuasiveness of the method!

However, a few of the older and more jaded dwarves slowly shook themselves out of their stupor. Master Gion Greybeard adopted a stern expression as he faced the possessed Rion with obvious suspicion.

The old dwarf had been screwed around too many times by the tall folk to take a gift for granted!

"Vulcan.." Gion carefully spoke with his low voice. "We are honored by your presence. We are very poor dwarves. We have never heard of your existence. Please excuse us, but could you..."

"I am aware of your lack of awareness of my august existence." Ves spoke through Rion's mouth. "You are fortunate that I am a generous god. Out of all the variants of humans that exist, I cherish dwarves like you the most. The hardships that dwarves like you endure on an all-too-frequent basis is tragic, but this makes me love you even more. I know the dwarves have the potential to be great. Life is a test, and some tests are harder than others. It is best if dwarves like you are able to overcome your challenges by yourself."

His control over Rion's body gradually increased as time went by, but he still needed to stall in order to proceed with the next steps of the plan!

"Great Vulcan, if you are the protector of dwarves, why have you not shown yourself to us before now?" Master Gion pressed, unwilling to surrender himself to what could possibly be a prank from the tall folk!

Rion's possessed head adopted a solemn expression. "Many dwarves throughout human space require my assistance. As powerful as I may be, I can only assist the ones who need my aid the most. I am being hindered by other gods, demons and eldritch entities at every turn. The entire galaxy is trying its best to prevent dwarves like you from ascending to your rightful throne!"

"Do the tall folk possess their own god?" Someone else asked.

"Yes. In fact, they enjoy the care and protection of many gods!" Ves spontaneously spun a tale. "The tall folk are the favored variant of humans in the galaxy. They are the original breed of your race, and while they are weak in many aspects, they excel at being cunning, deceitful and strong."

Many dwarves looked shocked! They bought his tale without any skepticism because it conformed to their elevated view of the tall folk.

No wonder the lengthy humans were so powerful! They possessed the backing of many gods!

"How can you resist the might of these gods when they are so many?"

Ves randomly supplied the first answer that came to his mind. "The tall folk have many gods, but there are too many normal humans to count! Most humans never even know of their gods because the great beings already have their hands full with their existing worshippers!"

"And we are different?"

"Yes. You are dwarves. You are special." Ves purposefully flattered them. "As a powerful god, I have chosen to turn my back against the cruel and duplicitous tall folk. Instead, I chose to favor your race because I see greatness in you! Do not believe in the

poisonous lies of the tall folk who are doing the best to press your people down. Dwarves are the most superior variants of humanity!"

Every dwarf, including Gion, perked up at his words. Their self-esteem was so low that any positive affirmation by someone greater than a dwarf evoked a lot of ecstasy and irrational pride in their bones!

In the meantime, Ves not only gained more control over Rion's body, but also refined his application of his Spirituality.

He had become increasingly more adept at manipulating people over the years. He especially liked to persuade crowds because it was easy for him to affect the overall consensus pattern through his spiritual manipulations!

Lies alone weren't enough to hoodwink a crowd of people. Most words didn't go much further than confusing someone's logic.

In order to make his audience believe his words, he needed to manipulate their hearts!

Even if their mind and logic warned them that his words had issues, as long as Ves managed to capture them on an emotional level!

As Ves observed the rebel dwarves through Rion's eyes and his spiritual senses, he noted that aside from a couple of old dwarves like Gion, the others quickly fell under his sway.

The dwarves of Desala X were pretty much the opposite of the rational and enlightened people who populated much of human space. They developed many scattered beliefs of their own. Adding yet another myth in the form of Vulcan, the God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship did not sound so strange when their rudimentary culture was already rife with superstition!

Of course, the holdouts just happened to be the most senior dwarves. Their age and wisdom elevated them slightly above their more gullible dwarves.

These skeptics just happened to be the people that Ves needed to persuade the most!

Though Ves could easily fool the younger dwarves among the rebels, they weren't capable of launching a rebellion on their own. Respect for their elders was ingrained among the dwarves, and witnessing a split between their familiar leaders and an unfamiliar god would prove devastating to his attempt to correct the course of their foolhardy plan!

Gion Greybeard stared straight into Rion's eyes. "You stated earlier that you are a god who helps the dwarves that need your help the most. Since you have decided to appear before us, does that mean that our escape plan is flawed?"

Finally. Ves had been waiting for this question. His possessed body grinned.

"I admire the audacity of what you are planning. I applaud the resourcefulness of your rebel movement for setting up this secret base. Dwarves like you are strong, honest and talented in craftsmanship. The mighty battle wagons that you have built are impressive considering the limitations constraining your efforts."

A couple of dwarves wearing tool belts and technician overalls beamed with pride!

"We have spent years to arm and modify our mining vehicles. The tall folk will tremble at the might of our great war weapons!"

Rion's face turned serious. "Is that what you believe?"

"We.. do?"

A tense silence descended in the tent as the conversation took a darker turn. In order to emphasize the seriousness of his next statement, Ves tweaked his glow so that it started to restrain his positive attributes while amplifying his negative attributes!

An invisible aura that expressed his worry, paranoia and fear of greater threats began to engulf the dwarves in an illusion of hell!

"The battle wagons may have been the best that you have managed to build, but the tall folk are so much greater than you. The guard force hired to guard Outpost 35 possess much better gear and machines. Even a single mech can crush all six of your battle wagons without falling in battle! As the protector of dwarves, I implore you not to attack the tall folk in your current state. This dwarf body of mine will never have the chance to pilot the Genie Pearl because it is impossible to breach the central district at your current strength!"

Despair struck the dwarves as they believed in his words! Even Gion seemed swayed as the doubts he carried in his mind suddenly came to the fore.

As the leader of the Desala Resistance Movement, the dwarf master was used to fostering optimism among his dwarves. If he didn't do so, morale among the slaves would quickly drop, thereby splintering his rebel group before it even had a chance to fulfill its purpose!

Though Gion tried his best to set a good example for his fellow rebels, in his heart he possessed a lifetime of scars inflicted by the tall folk.

It didn't take that much effort for Ves to reach inside the old dwarf's heart and tear open the scars!

A couple of dwarves howled and cried with grief! Were the dwarves meant to suffer their entire lives? Were their children and grandchildren destined to become the playthings of the tall folk?

It was only in the darkest of times that a single light reached its maximum value.

Like a profiteering merchant who purposefully starved a planet of food before arriving with a shipment of nutrient packs, Ves inwardly grinned like a shark as he completely reversed his glow back to normal.

All of the doom and gloom in the tent disappeared. The breath of life and the limitless potential of mechs started to lift up their darkened moods and grant them some much-needed hope!

Before the dwarves could question Ves further with their inane and ignorant questions, he forestalled them by slowly standing up from his short and sturdy chair.

"Words are the weapons of the tall folk. I am aware that dwarves aren't as good at them. Let me borrow your tools and show you a glimpse of my power!"

Rion's body slowly turned around and stepped forward with shaky but increasingly more confident steps.

The other dwarves robotically followed after the descended god as if they were no longer in charge.

Even if leaders such as Master Gion wanted to assert their authority, no one would listen to them right now as long as Ves commanded the full attention of the rest!

As Rion's body stepped out of the tent, the other dwarves in the vicinity all stopped and stared at the dwarf they previously hailed as their ace pilot.

"What is the matter?"

"Why is Rion different?"

"He is no longer Rion! He is a god!"

"A what?"

"Make way, make way! A god called Vulcan has descended upon us! He is a patron of dwarves, a master of mechs and the embodiment of craftsmanship! He is on his way to prove his might and demonstrate his godly power among our blessed people!"

That certainly caught every rebel's attention! Word quickly spread and dwarves continued to hobble over as quickly as possible! Their bodies strained against the heavy

gravity as they reached one of the central workplaces where a lot of tools and materials were strewn around.

Once the dwarves came within a certain distance of Rion, they noticed that he was the source of the odd and pleasant aura that affected their moods!

None of the dwarves came up with a reasonable explanation of why Rion seemed so special. What was happening to them right now was completely unprecedented in the history of the dwarves of Desala X!

Gion trailed after the rest of the curious and eager dwarves. Both worry and hope welled within his eyes.

Would the rebels

Chapter 1924 Showmanship

As much as Ves could keep droning nonsense to the crowd of dwarves, he knew it wasn't enough to secure his command over the rebel group.

To put force into his words and convince the most jaded among them that Ves was an actual god, he needed to demonstrate his divine might!

He had to impress the dwarves by doing something so far out of their reach that they were unable to rationalize what they witnessed.

In other words, Ves had to hoodwink the rebels into believing that he was performing a miracle!

As Ves calmly used Rion's senses to inspect the shabby tools and stock of low-quality parts and materials at hand, he tried to figure out the best way to convert the dwarves into his believers.

He thought back on his interactions with religion. In particular, his thoughts strayed in the direction of the myth built around Prophet Ylvaine.

Of all the religions he came into contact with, he was most familiar with the Ylvainan Faith. While his knowledge of the scripture and tenets of the faith was not that extensive, he still knew enough about its founder that he was a good showman!

Naturally, some people preferred to use the less charitable description of a conman to describe Prophet Ylvaine. The ease in which he seemed to convert decent, rational people into fanatical believers was too unreal!

How could the so-called prophet amass a following of trillions if he didn't possess a talent for scamming people?

Whether the Prophet acted in good faith or bad faith, Ves had no doubt that this historical figure excelled in showmanship!

It was not enough to convert people to a new belief than dropping some religious scripture in front of their faces. People needed to be persuaded in a more visceral way.

As a designer and seller of mechs, Ves knew all about how necessary it was to impress his customers with his product offering.

He treated this opportunity in a similar fashion to his product reveal events. His goal was to turn his audience into his customers or supporters.

As long as he managed to dazzle them with his show, Ves would succeed in solidifying Vulcan's place as their god!

Of course, because Ves aimed to perform a good show, he couldn't take too long to demonstrate his divine might. The dwarves might be a patient folk, but they probably weren't willing to wait for hours until Ves produced a great tool!

He needed to do something that would impress the dwarves without taking too much time. He had to make an immediate impact so that they were much less likely to question the truth behind his inexplicable appearance!

As Ves finished his brief survey of the tools and resources he had at hand, he couldn't help but feel a little disappointed.

The dwarves obtained most of their tools and resources from junkyards and discarded piles.

House Kantis didn't bother to invest too much in trash disposal on this planet. Valuable salvage would be shipped out of Desala X when the next transport ship arrived.

Scrap that was too poor in value would cost House Kantis more to recycle than dumping them into the nearest pit.

Evidently, the overseers failed to take into account that their slaves managed to find a way to smuggle all kinds of goodies from these junk pits.

The upside to this was that the dwarves managed to salvage all kinds of goods, both intact and broken.

The downside was that the goods they appropriated for themselves were inevitably awful. Their quality ranged from poor to abysmal.

What grated Ves the most was that the dwarves failed to establish a proper recycling operation. Their limited technical competence and lack of proper equipment meant that

their attempts to break down scrap and separate its constituent materials was half-hearted as best.

Every bar of metal and alloy contained a substantial amount of impurities.

Not only did this weaken the properties of the materials, the varying proportions of materials in each poorly-refined bar of alloy also caused them to be highly inconsistent!

This was a massive no-no in the mech industry and many other industries. If one bar of steel was weaker than the other bar of steel, the resulting product built with these materials would inevitably be riddled with weak points.

Ves imagined that Gloriana would go berserk if she saw the state of this workplace. Nothing was proper and everything was wrong in some way.

Fortunately, this wasn't the first time he worked under awful conditions.

Right now, Ves wasn't trying to impress a crowd of knowledgeable mech insiders. He only needed to exhibit enough flashiness to impress the dwarves. It didn't matter if his creations failed to pass muster if he presented it to Gloriana or someone who actually knew something about real craftsmanship!

As Ves contemplated many possibilities, he decided to opt for an expedient but very impactful creation. His choice would also make the Desala Resistance Movement a little stronger!

He started off by grabbing a hefty plasma cutter the size of Rion's current legs. Plasma cutters were common enough tools, but they devoured a lot of energy to operate, so the dwarves only used them if they had no other choice.

Another downside to plasma cutters was the myriad of precautions built into the hardware or software of the heavy devices. They were never supposed to be used as weapons and would forcibly shut its systems down if it detected any flesh or organic materials in their way!

With all of the knowledge that Ves had at his disposal, this was an easy problem to solve.

It also happened that the plasma cutter was a very outdated model from his modern perspective. He easily managed to gain access to the core of its programming by hooking it up with an interface and exploiting one of the known security exploits that had long been patched in the present time.

After fiddling a bit with the programming, he managed to override the software locks and tweak many different settings to the point where the plasma cutter operated completely different from the norm!

"This isn't enough." He mentally concluded.

To truly impress the dwarves, he needed to reengineer its hardware as well!

With the clock continuing to click, Ves tried to move faster. As his control over Rion's body continued to improve, Ves began to disassemble portions of the plasma cutter in order to remove or modify the parts.

He wasn't able to implement a better version of what he wanted to create due to the lack of proper facilities, but he was still inventive enough to craft a lesser version.

His knowledge of jury rigging and extensive familiarity with hands on work served him well. Despite the lack of options, he managed to make do with what he had in order to effect substantial changes.

All this time, Ves also made sure to keep his Spirituality active. Rion's body continued to emit the glow that the gathered rebel dwarves all started to associate with Vulcan, the God of Dwarves!

He wasn't improvising something at random either. He followed a truncated design cycle that was tailored for modifying existing mechs or objects.

Ves may not have designed and built this specific plasma cutter, but he could slowly make it his own as long as he worked on it long enough!

As he hastily managed to tweak the internals to his liking by applying a couple of fast and easy tricks, he looked at the plasma cutter and saw that it still looked too much like a mundane tool.

The dwarves wouldn't be as impressed by his work if he showed off something that looked identical to what they were using on a daily basis.

He needed to show the dwarves the true meaning of craftsmanship!

Ves looked around the workplace and identified some rudimentary hammering and forging machines. While they weren't as capable or versatile as a 3D printer, there was no way the dwarves could steal something so advanced and expensive under the noses of the tall folk!

He wasn't discouraged, though. This may be one of the worst workshops he'd been exposed to, but at least it was better than working with medieval tools!

Though Ves extended the completion of his creation, the dwarves showed no impatience.

The way Ves worked with the tools and equipment of their makeshift workplace was a sight to behold.

Unlike the dwarves whose technicians had only been taught the basics of maintenance, Ves was a fully-fledged Journeyman Mech Designer.

The disparity between their technical expertise was as vast as the void between star systems!

Though Ves had to move slowly in order to maintain his control over Rion's possessed body, every move and decision he made expressed his skill and confidence in craftsmanship.

One surprising advantage of dwarves was that their movements were surprisingly precise when needed. Ves was able to manipulate Rion's limbs as if the dwarf was an experienced mech technician.

This didn't surprise him very much. Dwarves were designed to perform manual work. Operating tools and driving vehicles were literally programmed in their genes!

However, just because dwarves possessed an excellent aptitude in manipulating tools didn't necessarily mean they were born craftsmen.

The dwarves of the Desala X lacked the systematic education and upbringing that proper professionals enjoyed!

By applying the wealth of techniques that Ves learned from school and experience, he easily managed to open the eyes of his audience to what they could have become!

What made the sight even more impressive was that Rion's body was doing all of the work!

The sight of a dwarf expressing so much skill and expertise presented a model of what a dwarf could become.

Their people weren't worthless! Dwarves were capable of matching or exceeding the tall folk in creating great works. Vulcan himself demonstrated what their stocky bodies were capable of as long as they were free to follow their own pursuits!

A tear streaked down the eye of Master Gion Greybeard. There was a sense of beauty in the craftsmanship on display. To a dwarf who yearned to free his people and lead them to paradise, the sight of a 'dwarf' operating the machines with greater skill than the tall folk in their better-equipped workshops was a dream come true!

"It is complete." Rion's body announced.

Anticipation welled among the dwarfs surrounding the workplace. They tried to lean over the shoulders of their fellow dwarves in order to catch a better glimpse of what Vulcan had produced!

Ves mentally wiped the sweat from his nonexistent brow. It wasn't easy trying to modify a low-quality plasma cutter into something different. Along with all the previous disadvantages, he also had to account for the heavy gravity!

Fortunately, adjusting to the gravity hadn't hampered his end product that much. As Ves picked up his creation, he showed off its full appearance to everyone.

It looked like a magnificent piece of art.

Gone was the functional barrel-like contours. Gone was the scratches and marks of corrosion. Ves completely stripped the exterior of the plasma cutter and put brand-new parts in their place.

Each of the exterior components were not only smooth and polished, but Ves also applied a bit of creative artistry by decorating them with some aesthetic flourishes.

The plasma cutter had become something different. It had become something more.

The dwarves all gasped with admiration as they beheld one of the most beautiful objects they had ever seen in their lives!

The plasma cutter now resembled a barrel shaped in the form of a green dragon. The most impressive part about the cutter was the way Ves managed to work the metal until the front muzzle was shaped like the jaws of a celestial beast!

Aside from its visual appearance, its intrinsic glow also appealed to the dwarves on an emotional level.

The dragon-shaped creation exuded an aggressive and inviolable impression. This immediately enhanced the impression that the object was a genuine divine creation that could have never been produced by anyone other than god!

"What.. what is it, Great God?"

Rion's body grinned as he grabbed the handles of the object. He carefully turned it online and waited for it to finish its warmup cycle. He then proceeded to look around before aiming it at a stash of broken plates.

PWHISH!

When Rion's body pulled the trigger, an unstable bolt of plasma propelled from the muzzle! Almost instantly, the plasma bolt impacted the messy pile of plates, instantly engulfing them with superheated matter!

Some of the dwarves yelled in fright. The closest ones jumped away in order to avoid the wash of heat and nasty fumes

As soon as the light and dust settled, a huge chunk of metal plates had turned into debris!

"It's a weapon." Ves addressed the dwarves. "As long as you embrace my help, I shall craft many wonders that will help you defeat the tall folk! Now, will you kneel before me and accept me as your god?"

It only took a few seconds for the dwarves to drop to their thick knees en masse!

"Vulcan! Vulcan! Vulcan!"

Chapter 1925 Too Many Disadvantages

Once Ves completed his weapons, the dwarves instantly regarded it as a divine creation.

In their ignorant minds, only a god could turn a regular plasma cutter into something that was both powerful and beautiful!

As Ves inwardly grinned at the sight of the dwarves prostrating before he possessed his body, he knew he succeeded in commanding their obedience.

Even the oldest dwarves such as Gion Greybeard bent his weary knees in front of the entity known as Vulcan.

His willingness to surrender authority to this powerful but unfamiliar god reflected his recognition that he was no longer the ultimate dwarf in charge!

No matter how much Gion worked to build up the Desala Resistance Movement, his diligent efforts over several decades paled in comparison to the show that Ves performed in just over an hour!

This was the hour that marked a permanent shift in direction for the dwarven rebellion.

No longer would the dwarves be forced to fend for themselves. With a god on their side, their fear towards the tall folk inevitably dropped!

The dwarves possessed even more confidence that their escape plan would succeed!

Though Ves was glad he managed to fool the dwarves, that didn't mean that success was guaranteed!

In his heart, he knew that he wasn't really Vulcan. He was Ves Larkinson, a Journeyman Mech Designer from the Komodo Star Sector.

He couldn't waste too much time on this Mastery experience. The LMC and Larkinson Clan needed him as well, and the longer he took to free the dwarves, the more time he would waste in the present time!

As much as he looked down on the inadequate security arrangements of House Kantis, the mechs guarding over Outpost 35 were still formidable war machines.

No matter how cheap they were or how much their maintenance had suffered, they were still capable of crushing any insurrection attempt with ease!

The main reason he wanted to take charge of rebel dwarves was that their plan was completely doomed from the start if they continued to hold their false assumptions!

Half an hour after Ves managed to convert the dwarves, he met with Gion Greybeard in a private meeting.

No further shows were necessary. Even if a couple of skeptics still remained, the consensus of the crowd ensured that alternative viewpoints wouldn't be accepted!

He retracted his glow and weakened its outwards expression in order to lighten the burden on his Spirituality. While he still emanated enough of a glow to make it clear that he was more than mortal, his presence wasn't as blinding anymore.

He still managed to make Gion nervous, and that was good. Ves did not want this wise and sober dwarf to question his godhood.

"What is it you require, my lord?"

Rion's body slowly strode forward until it reached a projector placed on a table. Ves activated it and navigated its heavily-outdated interface until it projected a view of one of the dwarven battle wagons next to a view of one of the guard mechs.

"Tell me honestly, Gion. If this battle wagon confronts this mech, which one will win?"

"Our mighty tank will win!"

Bang!

Rion's fist slammed against the surface of the metal table! Due to his dwarven physique and the heavy gravity, the slam actually dented its surface!

"You are the greatest dwarf among your rebels! You are responsible for their lives! While it is commendable that you have managed to keep up their spirits, it is not the time to boast on the eve of your breakout attempt! Now, tell me your true opinion. Which machine will win?"

Greybeard lowered his head. "..The mech."

"Now that wasn't so hard, was it? Tell me in your own words why you believe the mech will vanquish over the battle wagon."

The old dwarf sighed. "I may not be anywhere close to good with machines as your godly eminence, but I fear that our large tanks may not be as good as a mech. According to the technicians who turned the scrapped and discarded mining vehicles into fighting machines, the battle wagons are large and slow. A normal mining vehicle is already rather slow, but mounting all of the extra armor and weapons onto its chassis will slow it down even further."

"Your battle wagons possess a decisive mobility disadvantage." Ves nodded in agreement. "That wouldn't be so bad if not for the inadequate protection. Don't think that they are tough enough to withstand mechs because they are big. In the eyes of a divine craftsman such as myself, there are countless holes in their design and construction! Mining vehicles themselves aren't built to resist mechs, so your so-called tanks have inherited their weak internal structure. Not that it matters, because the reinforced shell your dwarves have built around them is just as poor at keeping them alive."

Ves began to describe all of the major issues he discovered. The list could go on and on, but after pointing out a dozen critical flaws, Gion had already gotten the message!

"I.. I knew our battle wagons weren't as good as we all made them out to be, but.. I never knew they were so weak!"

"It is not necessarily a detriment if your battle wagons aren't as promising as you boasted. It is only a problem if your opponents are able to field stronger machines."

Rion's body put the projection of the battle wagon aside to focus on one of the typical frontline mechs of the guard force. "Look at this mech. It is a medium mech that has very few virtues compared to other products of this nature. Yet despite its many constraints and obvious neglect, it is still a serviceable war machine."

"What makes this mech better, my lord?"

"There are too many aspects to count." Ves replied. His borrowed body pointed at the laser barrels mounted at the side of the armless mech. "Since ballistic weapons encounter all kinds of constraints in heavy gravity environments, House Kantis opted to arm the guard mechs with laser weapons as their primary ranged armament. Laser weapons are characterized by their lack of impulse and relatively weak penetration

power against well-armored mechs. This normally makes this frontline mech model weak against other machines. Just not this time."

"How fast can this mech defeat our battle wagon?"

"It depends." Ves didn't answer straightforwardly. "There are ways to stack the deck in your favor by employing clever tactics and making use of the advantage of surprise, but even then the mech will still be able to burn holes through your battle wagon before it suffers any serious damage."

"That bad?"

"Any mech-scaled laser weapon will be able to penetrate the poorly-designed armor cover of your battle wagons with ease. The plating is highly heterogeneous. On top of that, their fit isn't even seamless, which means that their surfaces are riddles with weak points that almost entirely negate the work your dwarven technicians have done to reinforce their outer surface!"

The words struck Gion like a barrage of punches. The old dwarf looked completely defeated!

"What about our own ability to harm the mechs? Will we be able to inconvenience the tall folk at all?"

"The extra mining lasers and other mining implements that you've managed to mount on your battle wagons are fairly interesting. Assuming that you have managed to override all of their safeguards and backdoors, they can indeed threaten a mech.. but only until the mechs of the guard force promptly crush your hardware with their superior machines and numbers. The quality and quantity disparity is simply too big. Even if you try to split up the guard force and make the most of your initiative advantage, you will still run out of battle wagons long before the guard force runs out of mechs."

"This..." Gion looked downcast for a time before he suddenly lit up a bit. "Wait, our battle wagons aren't the only machines we intend to use against the tall folk! As long as we hijack the Genie Pearl and put.. the dwarf you possess inside its cockpit, we can turn the tall folk's own weapon against them! With this great mech under our control, we will certainly be able to defeat our oppressors!"

Rion's body looked grim, causing Gion to lose his optimism.

"It won't work. As I've said, the battle wagons are too weak to allow you to breach the walls impeding any dwarf from entering the central district. Even if you managed to smuggle Rion into the central district, mechs are anything but easy to hijack. In many cases, the machines are locked to a designated mech pilot, meaning that anyone else won't be able to commandeer the mech. Did you dwarves even account for this problem?"

"No.."

Rion's body shook its head. "Let me ask you an important question. Is this body the only mech pilot among your rebels?"

The old dwarf nodded. "Yes. We have managed to salvage a scrapped medical machine that can be used to detect whether someone possesses the right genetic aptitude to pilot mechs. Rion is the only one among us who scored positive in the machine. We had a number of other dwarves who possessed the right genetic aptitude, but.. They are no longer among the living."

"I see. So in effect, out of all of the dwarves in your band, the only one who is capable of wielding the weapons of your enemy is this body's owner. That.. is certainly problematic."

Ves paused for a moment in order to list out his available resources and assets.

He quickly realized that any attempt at breaking out of this mining planet would not succeed if he attempted to put all of his hopes on a single mech pilot.

It was still possible to succeed, though. The dwarves may be weak on their own, but with a Journeyman from the future by their side, they could turn into something completely different by the time Ves was done with his preparations!

"You can still succeed." Ves spoke, causing Gion to look towards the God of Dwarves with hope. "We need time to overhaul the battle wagons. They need to be a lot hardier in order to ensure they will be able to fulfill their roles before they inevitably fall against the enemy mechs. As for hijacking the Genie Pearl, the plan needs to be changed if we want this risky gambit to succeed."

Ves briefly outlined a revised plan that refined the straightforward assault the dwarves had in mind.

Though Ves wasn't a tactician or military officer, he had lived through plenty of battles. The key that he kept hammering on when he offered the revised version of the dwarven plan to Gion was that they needed to make the most out of the few advantages they possessed!

"The tall folk can field at least a dozen mechs. They have eyes and ears everywhere. The outpost features many checkpoints and fixed defenses. The guards on foot can easily wipe out your poorly-equipped dwarves. These are the advantages of our enemy. They are large and they are significant, but that does not mean they are invincible!"

Gion prostrated himself before a god yet again! "Great Vulcan. I implore you. Please teach us how to defeat the tall folk!"

"As long as you follow my instructions and provide me with unrestricted access to all of your assets, I shall bless your rebels with my divine creations and godly wisdom! As the protector of your race, it is my obligation to rescue you from this prison of a planet! It is just..."

The old dwarf questioningly raised his head at the god.

"What is it, my lord?"

"I require sacrifice from you in return." Rion's body stretched out its large and rough hand. "I believe you have come into the possession of a very remarkable ore. Instead of offering it to the MTA as tribute, I demand that you hand it over to my possession! This is my price for my blessing!"

The dwarf widened his eyes! "My lord! That is the precious treasure that we are all depending on to free our folk!"

"You don't need to offer the MTA such a special treasure in order for them to exact justice on behalf of your dwarves."

Gion looked dismayed. "Then what will we be able to use to encourage this mighty organization to rescue my people?"

"I have my ways." Ves vaguely replied. "I will address this issue once our escape plan succeeds. Right now, I want you to make a choice. Surrender the Timpala Steel to me or try and escape this planet without the blessing of a god!"

Chapter 1926 The First Human Produc

It was strange.

How did Ves end up in this situation?

He just wanted to enjoy a normal Mastery experience for once. How did that lead to possessing the body of a dwarf and hoodwinking a large number of height-challenged miners to accept him as a god?

If he ever told what happened to Gloriana, she would probably collapse in laughter!

Of course, then she would likely jump on him and attempt to strangle him for deifying a male god instead of a female god!

Rion's body awkwardly coughed.

Controlling the body of a dwarf was a novel experience. Ves certainly never expected to view reality from a height he had never experienced since he was a younger boy.

Living through the life of a dwarf, even for an instant, gave him a brand new appreciation of the benefits and downsides of a divergent breed of humanity.

Heavy gravity variant humans were different from baseline humans. They were designed and cooked up by geneticists in highly-advanced labs and institutions to fulfill specific purposes

In other words, they were both humans and products married in a single, compact package.

As their official name suggested, dwarves were excellently adjusted to living on giant planets with elevated gravity.

A lot of planets like this existed in the Milky Way Galaxy and probably the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy as well.

The usual method to make them livable was to break some pieces of the planet up and chuck them into space to make the gravity more tolerable for baseline humans.

This worked fine when the gravity was only 20 percent stronger than standard gravity, but what about a superplanet like Desala X where the gravity was 4.6 times stronger than the gravity of Old Earth?

Turning Desala X into a livable planet for normal humans was too costly! Cracking it up until only a fraction of the original planet was left would not only throw countless resources away, but also result in an enormous financial loss!

It simply wasn't cost-effective to transform these giant planets into normal planets.

Therefore, humanity much preferred to adjust to the heavy gravity environment rather than the other way around.

The next solution was to rely on antigrav technology and other advanced solutions to adjust the gravity downwards.

This was a realistic solution, but one that made humans too dependent on a piece of technology to survive.

What if an antigrav module malfunctioned? What if terrorists or enemy saboteurs managed to cripple the antigrav network of an entire city?

The fact of the matter was that humans did not fare well in heavy gravity environments under a sustained period.

In the Age of Stars, some colonists attempted to live on a 1.5 g or 2 g planet without any gravity adjustments!

What happened was very interesting. Though the rate of injuries increased and childbirth became a lot more problematic, baseline humans actually managed to cope in this environment.

With the passage of years and decades, their bodies slowly morphed in response to the constant gravity acting on their body mass.

Their bones became denser, their muscles became stronger and their hearts became more vigorous.

They also tended to stop growing taller. This was especially evident over the generations as their descendants became increasingly shorter and stockier!

Despite these encouraging developments, the human descendants that naturally adapted to a heavy gravity environment failed to pass muster.

Their brains started to regress as it came under a lot of pressure. The gravity acting upon its sensitive tissue combined with the difficulty of supplying it with lots of blood meant that the descendants were actually becoming less intelligent with each subsequent generation!

Evolution didn't work very fast. A couple of hundred years was not enough to remedy all of these issues!

Since natural adaptation appeared to be ineffective, why not resort to artificial adaptation?

The controversy this decision ignited among the bright and adventurous humans during the Age of Stars had led to a lot of outrage.

Was it ethical to modify a new breed of humanity? Would these 'new humans' supplant baseline humans as the new masters of humanity? Or would the opposite happen were natural humans lorded over an entire caste of subhuman slaves?

Regardless of the arguments, humanity back then was far more divided compared to the present time. Even if the powerful Terrans were too squeamish to explore this option, plenty of smaller and more radical star nations were eager to try!

The first true human product was born.

The earliest incarnations basically took human descendants of settlers of heavy gravity planets as a starting point and extrapolated their evolution over the span of millions of years!

They were shorter because being tall was a huge discomfort under heavy gravity.

Their bones were thick and strong to endure various accidents such as falling.

They were very muscular because they needed the strength to fight against the enormous gravity as they went about their day.

Their brains were significantly altered in order to better cope with the gravity pressuring them downwards.

Their heart and blood circulation grew more robust in order to sustain the prodigious needs of their oxygen-hungry brains and muscles.

Their skin grew rougher and thicker in order to withstand the external pressures of living in a heavy gravity environment.

Their metabolism grew a lot more efficient and robust in order to keep up with the enormous demand for energy and nutrients of their bodies.

Due to various coincidences, the resulting breeds of heavy gravity variant humans just happened to resemble the race of dwarves in human fantasy.

Before long, no one used the term 'heavy gravity variant humans' anymore to refer to this specialized breed of humanity. It only showed up in official documentation and academic literature.

Everyone called them dwarves these days.

Soon, the amount of dwarves in human space exploded in numbers! Their popularity rose among many rulers of human star nations and star empires because they solved a problem that many of them had grappled with over the years!

The introduction of dwarves allowed human space to utilize the abundant real estate of heavy gravity planets in a cost-effective manner!

Many superplanets in human space that had previously been passed aside suddenly became hot again as a lot of groups started to dump dwarves onto their surface!

With minimal investment, a star nation or a commercial mining company could easily turn an empty heavy gravity planet into a profit-generating machine!

Of course, the overt commercialization of dwarves led to a very worrying trend.

Dwarves were predominantly used for resource extraction. Hardly anyone intended to develop a heavy gravity planet beyond what was needed to rob its immense supply of valuable exotics and other minerals.

Why should the people in power waste any effort trying to develop these planets past this point?

Why should the 'true humans' work so much to better the lives of their miners?

To many people in the ruling classes, there was no benefit to providing further opportunities in this tailor-made heavy gravity mining race!

It didn't help that heavy gravity variant humans inherited many of the traits associated with fictional dwarves. Everyone considered them to be so good at mining and manual labor that they could hardly envision these strong and stocky humans as scientists or administrators!

The abuses had gotten very bad over the years. Dwarves were being increasingly treated as subhumans. This meant that the vast majority of humanity basically kicked out their shorter cousins outside of their group!

Part of the reason to do so was to make it easier to exploit the dwarves. Enslaving humans had become taboo as the Age of Stars made way for the Age of Conquest, but what if the slaves weren't 'human'?

It was a sad truth of human race that they were capable of committing countless horrors on others as long as they no longer recognized their victims as their own people!

Once the mainstream branches of humanity no longer regarded dwarves on the same level, the abuses that ensued resulted in a very shameful chapter in the long history of human civilization!

"It should have been better these days." Ves inwardly muttered.

Even though Ves had traveled a bit in the past for this Mastery experience, dwarves like Rion Aaden should still enjoy the rights of actual human in this day and age!

To see that greedy groups like House Kantis still employ this out-of-fashion method of exploiting heavy gravity planets by enslaving an entire population of dwarves was very perplexing.

From a rational perspective, this decision made little sense.

Keeping dwarves on Desala X and forcing them to mine all day without their consent was not really needed.

As long as House Kantis paid them a meager but decent salary and gave them the option to exit the planet freely would not cost them all that much.

While Ves wasn't very knowledgeable about the planetary mining industry, he had seen enough mining equipment at Outpost 35 to know that all of the hardware was a much bigger expense than manpower to House Kantis!

Paying the dwarves nothing as opposed to paying them minimum wage would not increase the total expenses all that much.

Desala X would still be able to turn a healthy profit for the nobles.

Yet... it was undeniable that the bottom line would be impacted. Even if the drop in profits was modest, for some reason the greedy nobles couldn't stand such a minor loss!

As a result, Desala X became home to another egregious abuse of human rights. Ves continually wanted to shake his head at this idiotic decision.

House Kantis would incur a lot of outrage and possibly sanction if their exploitation of dwarves became known!

Yet... from what Ves had observed so far about this entire arrangement, it seemed that no one really cared what was being done to the local dwarves.

House Kantis operated a slave mine with complete impunity.

The Paramount Kingdom which should have been receiving a share of the proceeds of the planet in the form of taxes also didn't show any intentions to stop the abuses.

The MTA's Smiling Samuel Branch shouldn't be ignorant to what was going on inside the star sector. Desala X was a huge planet that orbited its star on a stable orbit. There was no way to hide this huge satellite from the many forms of observation at the Association's disposal!

Yet just like in the Komodo Star Sector, the local MTA branch seemed to be taking a lax approach towards the enforcement of its rules.

"This isn't even a coincidence anymore." Ves frowned.

He always thought that the MTA in his home star sector was just being lazy, but to see the same thing taking place seventy years in the past was an eye-opener to him. Had the MTA started to rot from within? How long ago did the mighty organization stop standing up for the weakest and most vulnerable populations of humans?

"Gion Greybeard is rather smart to realize that the MTA will remain apathetic to his pleas."

The MTA predominantly consisted of tall folk, after all. Ves had already experienced how high-and-mighty they acted towards space peasants.

This was also why the batch of Timpala Steel was the key to reversing the fortune of the dwarves. As long as the dwarves managed to shock the MTA and attract some genuine attention, there was a very good chance that it would finally meet its obligations!

It was too bad that Ves could not allow this wondrous exotic to slip out of his grasp. Vulcan may be a generous god, but he didn't work for free!

For now, Vulcan made an agreement with Gion Greybeard and his rebels. The God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship promised to help their plan succeed in exchange for the Timpala Steel they excavated.

As for how to convince the MTA to intervene? The god promised to take care of it. With his divine powers, it should be as easy as cake to attract the MTA's attention!

"What is a cake?"

"A yummy food."

"What is yummy?"

"Imagine a nutrient pack that you actually enjoy eating."

The dwarves in Vulcan's presence blanked out.

Chapter 1927 Divine Vacation

Knowing the history of the dwarven race was not the same as living like a dwarf.

Certainly, Ves grew impressed by how well the dwarven physique coped with 4.6 g. Rion's body remained vigorous and strong even after walking around or working all day.

Plenty of blood was being pumped into the brain, keeping Rion fully cognizant throughout his day.

A typical dwarf was multiple times stronger than a baseline human. Though the difference wasn't felt on a heavy gravity planet, Ves imagined that a dwarf would be able to lift several people with ease on a standard gravity planet!

As the first human products created by human civilization, the dwarf breeds underwent numerous updates and revisions throughout the centuries.

Each generation that passed, the geneticists continually optimized their genes a little further. Ves guessed that the dwarves of Desala X belonged to a fairly recent version of

dwarf breed, because Rion's body experienced no discomfort at living in this environment at all! It was as if his species of dwarves had naturally evolved from this heavy planet!

The dwarf breed that Rion belonged to also didn't contain any of the illegal cognitive impairments that turned them into primitives. The extreme breed of dwarves on Aeon Corona VII were aptly called wildlings for their intellectual degeneration.

Ves suspected that the only reason that House Kantis veered away from the illegal dwarf breeds was because they didn't want to waste too much funding on schooling.

The dwarves on Desala X still needed to be smart enough to learn how to read and write and study all kinds of technical knowledge to operate the mining equipment.

In fact, Ves didn't consider the local dwarves to be mentally handicapped at all. As Ves observed the dwarves following Vulcan's orders and trying to cobble up new parts by following his precise instructions, he found that they were adapting faster than he expected!

Though their knowledge and technical foundation was full of holes, as long as he instructed them on how to do something, they didn't require much time to internalize his lessons!

"Are they actually.. smart?"

After days of observation, the enterprising dwarves continued to impress him on their speed of adaptation. As they partially disassembled their battle wagons and started to produce proper replacement parts, his impression on the rebels gradually improved.

Their earlier works were awful because they didn't know any better. With House Kantis restricting much of their knowledge, they were millenia behind the development curve when compared to mainstream human civilization.

What they managed to accomplish under all of these adverse circumstances was actually rather commendable.

Yet now that a veritable god had descended onto the rebels, some of their promising potential finally found purchase!

As Ves continued to parade as a god, he patiently treated the dwarves as if they were his students.

Ves could not do all of the work alone. He needed to activate all of the manpower that the Desala Resistance Movement had at their disposal to finish the preparations of his revised plan!

He taught the eager dwarves how to purify their metal scrap, how to forge uniform armor plating that fit seamlessly with each other and how to put parts together with greater precision.

He showed them how their tools should actually be used, he corrected their many misconceptions around technology, he instilled many of the rules and customs that proper mech technicians took for granted.

At some times, Ves truly felt he was embodying the god he invented and pretended to be. The lie was slowly becoming true as he continued to uplift the dwarves into something better than House Kantis wanted them to be. He felt as if he had become the father of a promising new race of humans!

The more Ves taught, the more he became impressed by his students.

They rarely failed or disappointed him. Their eagerness to please the God of Dwarves caused them to exhibit an incredible amount of drive. Their motivation and passion for their work had skyrocketed and reached a level that they had never achieved in their entire lifetimes!

At best, working for House Kantis was drudgery. At worst, it was torture!

There was practically no reward for the dwarves to work harder or more earnestly for their slave drivers. The only reason to keep up their work at all was because they would be punished if they failed to meet their daily quotas!

Their bodies were very demanding in terms of consumption. All of the power exerted by their bodies did not come for free! Dwarves ate at least three times as much as regular humans in order to supply all of the nutrients and calories needed to go about their day!

The moment the overseers curtailed their food rations was the moment a dwarf might starve to death!

For this reason, fear constantly motivated the dwarves to work diligently.

They had never worked with something to look forward to. Vulcan's simple encouragement and illusions of hope was something completely novel to the dwarves.

Once Ves corrected their work methods and provided enough guidance, the productivity of the rebel dwarves soared!

A week into his Mastery experience, Rion's body stood on a ramp and looked down on the battle wagons as they turned into partial skeletons.

Their crude and improvised designs were profoundly ugly to Ves. While he worked best with mechs, he was still able to reengineer the battle wagons into better machines!

Design work was something that was still out of the reach of the local dwarves. The amount of upbringing needed to turn a typical dwarf into a competent and well-rounded designer of mechs or other hardware was too much!

Vulcan had to supply the designs. Each of the ones he issued managed to impress the dwarves beyond reason.

Their impression of him as a god continued to rise! Worship in him increased and the dwarves became more overt in their attempts to please their god so that they might be rewarded with his blessings!

It was all rather funny to Ves. This charade was becoming increasingly more impactful as his stature among the dwarves continued to rise after every day.

"Great Vulcan, are you proud of us?" Gion Greybeard asked from his side.

The robed dwarf had been spending the most time with Vulcan. Just as Ves learned more about the dwarves, so did Gion become more familiar with their new patron.

"Your dwarves are quick learners." Rion's body grunted. "I have seen worse dwarves. They are.. not as quick on the uptake as your rebels. I am proud to count these dwarves among my people."

"You have given us hope when no one extended their hand to us. For that, you have earned our eternal gratitude."

"That is good to hear, but I will only be able to assist your people up to a point. The tall folk enjoy the protection of many gods. While I am capable of displaying far more power than I have shown up until now, I will inevitably draw the attention of cruel and deceitful deities if I persist."

"We will make sure to meet your expectations, my lord! The hardships we have suffered has readied us for the challenges to come! No matter how much the tall folk wish to keep us trapped, they cannot deny our humanity forever!"

Rion's body smiled. While Ves did not expect to become a savior of dwarves in his Mastery experience, he no longer held any animosity towards the System for forcing him to give the rebels a chance.

It was odd how much satisfaction he derived from guiding the dwarves. The previous problems he faced in the present time such as trying to escape the clutches of the Friday Coalition or the immense pressure to make a masterwork mech all faded away.

This diversion in his life was completely divorced from his actual life. It was a much-needed vacation that not only exposed him to a completely different setting, but also allowed him to experience the weight of responsibility from a different direction.

It was difficult to be responsible for so many people. He needed to think over every decision and find creative ways to overcome many problems.

He enjoyed it. He enjoyed pretending to be a god. Even though it was built upon an enormous lie, he became increasingly more immersed into his roleplay.

Unfortunately, Ves wasn't in charge of Rion's body all the time.

Even though the dwarf had been hailed as both an 'ace pilot' and an 'avatar of Vulcan', Rion was still a miner as far as Outpost 35 was concerned!

Rion couldn't hang around in the underground base all the time. His absence would quickly be noticed if he didn't return, and that might cause the guards to search the outpost of his whereabouts!

For this reason, Rion still needed to show up at his regular shifts and operate his mining vehicle for long hours.

In these times, Ves surrendered control of the body back to its rightful owner.

Though Rion was initially confused about his possession, after a long talk with the other dwarves, he turned into one of Vulcan's most devout worshippers!

"Great Vulcan, will you really be able to deliver me to the Genie Pearl and help me take control of this mech?"

"Can you bless me with the knowledge on how to defeat the tall folk mechs?"

"Are there more gods like you who we can worship alongside you?"

"SHUT UP!" Ves mentally yelled in the inquisitive dwarf's mind! "I am in the process of designing newer and greater weapons! Do not interrupt my holy labor!"

Aside from dealing with the stupid dwarf's nagging, Ves also had to keep his composure together when it was time for Rion to practice his piloting.

The first time Rion returned to his abode, Ves directly took control of his body in order to fiddle with the simulator pod.

There was no way for the escape plan to succeed if Rion still remained incompetent! Forget about piloting a frontline mech, there was no way the incompetent, self-trained mech pilot would be able to make good use of the Genie Pearl!

For this reason, Ves took direct charge of Rion's future training sessions. He threw out all of the default training scenarios and programmed some scenarios from scratch based on his knowledge on how mech pilots were trained.

"What.. what is this gravity?!" Rion exclaimed when his virtual light skirmisher immediately tripped because he mistimed his steps!

"Welcome to standard gravity." Ves mentally replied. "This is the gravity of the tall folk. It is weak and light, which is proof of how your oppressors are weak. You can defeat them at their own game, but to do so, you must first go back to the beginning and learn how to pilot a mech the proper way."

"This.."

"Don't complain that this is useless! I have studied the stolen footage of the Genie Pearl, and it hasn't escaped my notice that it is equipped with an antigrav backpack! This means that the mech will be able to move just as fast and effortlessly as it does in standard gravity conditions! We need to take advantage of this speed in order for you to outmaneuver and defeat as many enemy guard mechs as possible!"

"W-What about piloting mechs in familiar gravity, my lord?"

"Forget about it!" Ves immediately responded. "We need to end the battle faster before the antigrav backpack runs out of energy. We also need you to become so proficient in piloting light mechs that you will be able to avoid damage to this critical module. In short, you will need to learn how to make the most out of leveraging the speed of this mech type!"

"I can't! This mech is too fast! I am afraid it will fly into the open sky if I do something wrong!"

"Don't be silly, you dolt! Mechs don't randomly float into space if it jumps! Gravity doesn't work that way!"

Ves could already foresee that it would take weeks to instill the fundamentals of mech piloting into Rion. There was no way he could turn the dwarf into a passable mech pilot within a week!

Chapter 1928 Ambrosia

Was it possible for a mech designer to train a mech pilot?

Ordinarily, Ves would answer with no, but now that he was forced into this position, he somehow had to make it work!

Certainly, Ves stumbled a lot when he tried to make Rion forget about his self-taught methods and start over from the beginning.

It wasn't easy to shake off habits, especially bad ones! The dwarven mech pilot spent years trying to figure out how to pilot mechs without anyone knowledgeable or intelligent telling him what was right or wrong!

Fortunately, as a Larkinson who grew up in a family of mech pilots, Ves picked up a lot of information on the general structure of how they were raised.

Combining that with his mech designer expertise and the lessons he learned in his previous Mastery experiences, Ves was not a novice when it came to training mech pilots.

He was not a proper mech instructor, though. He possessed plenty of holes when it came to training mech pilots, and that showed when Rion continually stumbled during his training sections due to an oversight!

"Pick yourself up and complete the obstacle course!" Ves shouted as Rion's virtual light skirmisher failed to climb up a wall! "A light skirmisher is both fast and nimble! You must capture its essence and turn it into your strength! So long as you are unable to master this speed, you will never be able to defeat so many tall folk mechs!"

"I am trying!" Rion teared up as he attempted the obstacle course again. "I have never moved so fast in my life! I'm too scared!"

"Get over your fear! You can do it! Just because you are a dwarf doesn't mean you are destined to remain slow. Speed is life. Speed is freedom. Speed is the key to victory!"

Becoming a mech instructor certainly wasn't one of the jobs he signed up for. He really didn't want to depend too much on Rion to succeed.

Unfortunately, after a lot of thought, Ves still couldn't avoid giving Rion the starring role in his revised plan.

No matter how many surprises he planned, no matter how much better the battle wagons performed after the dwarves implemented his redesign, the guard force still held an overwhelming advantage!

With at least twelve functional mechs at their disposal, the tall folk possessed a nearly insurmountable advantage over the dwarves.

As long as at least one mech remained functional, the insurrection attempt would definitely fail! The dwarves could forget about hijacking a transport ship if the guard force still possessed the power to crush any opposition!

As a mech designer, Ves often admired the power and might of the machines he learned to design.

Yet now, he was forced to respect the power from an entirely different power! Taking on the side the oppressed was a very jarring experience to him. As a proponent of mechs, he truly found it disturbing when they suddenly became his biggest obstacle to turning this Mastery experience into a success!

"Great Vulcan.. is relying on the Genie Pearl the only way we can succeed?"

"Yes."

"But you are the God of Mechs and Craftsmanship as well, are you not? Can you not perform another miracle for us and bestow us with a dwarven mech?"

"INSOLENT!" Ves spiritually stung Rion's mind, causing him to fail the virtual obstacle course yet again! "I already told your people that I cannot bestow your people with too much help! You and your fellow dwarves must fight to earn your freedom. All I can do is give you a chance. Now get back to your training and make sure you become good enough to perform the job you are expected to fulfill!"

Ves really tried to find a way to design and fabricate a mech for the rebels.

Sadly, the underground base was too shabby compared to a mech workshop. The dwarves were forced to work with the few production equipment they managed to salvage from the junkyards.

The lack of a 3D printer meant that he was unable to fabricate much of the delicate and precise components that was necessary to make a mech work.

The dwarves also lacked many of the critical materials that were necessary to produce the more advanced components

Even if Ves dumbed down the design to the point it was one of the weakest mechs in existence, it was still too impractical to fabricate!

The logistical challenges were so bad that Ves saw no choice but to abandon any attempt at fabricating his own mechs.

Instead, he turned his creative energies towards designing and supervising the production of all kinds of other equipment.

Converting the old battle wagons into his improved version consumed the majority of everyone's attention.

Yet that did not mean that Ves was done. He offered many different adapted designs. Aside from the improvised infantry-sized plasma cannon he created to dazzle the dwarves, he also offered them various other designs such as armor-piercing swords,

knock-off railguns, combat armor that actually protected them against small arms fire and more.

Ves was particularly proud of all of the ECM and electronic warfare equipment he designed.

While he didn't specialize in this field, he knew enough about it that he could easily leverage his future knowledge into making effective gadgets that would certainly disrupt the coordination and communication between the guards!

Sadly, this was one of the few ways in which he could leverage his future knowledge to his advantage.

If he had access to enough resources and facilities to create what he wanted, he could easily reproduce a mech that was seventy years ahead of its time and soundly crush the inferior mechs that were too far behind the tech curve!

Yet that was impossible. The underground base was more of a slum than a mech workshop. Ves had to dumb down all of his designs and withhold many of the goodies that he would have liked to include in his equipment and vehicle designs due to their lack practicality.

Nonetheless, the quick-learning dwarves were making headway in producing all of the equipment that Vulcan demanded.

The pile of finished gear continued to grow larger as the dwarves proved to be inordinately productive.

Three weeks had passed since Ves revealed himself as Vulcan. More time had passed than he wished, but Ves wasn't confident in launching the plan sooner.

"I hope Gloriana and the people back in the present time don't mind if my vacation takes longer than usual." He inwardly muttered.

It should be fine, he hoped.

Even though Ves wanted to stall the plan as much as possible in order to make sure their preparations were as effective as possible, the tall folk wasn't giving them a chance.

"Great Vulcan! This is bad!" A rebel dwarf slowly waddled up to Rion's possessed body. "The tall folk are searching everyone's homes!"

"What?! Explain!"

"The guards have received orders from the overseers to comb over the entire outpost. From what we have learned, the guards are on the lookout for a valuable exotic!"

Damnit! The worst-case scenario had occurred! The tall folk managed to recover the logs of the mining machine that collapsed the tunnel or something. Whatever the case, it was clear to him that the tall folk somehow managed to discover the existence of Timpala Steel!

"How much time do we have left."

"A few days, we believe. There aren't enough guards to inspect all of the buildings in the outpost in one day. However, they are searching a lot more diligently than before."

All in all, Ves expected the guards to stumble upon the underground base in three days at most.

"Our preparations may be a little insufficient, but we have produced enough gear to give your people a chance! That is all you need to earn your own freedom!"

Ves decided to launch the plan in two days, which was far sooner than any of the dwarves expected!

Both Gion Greybeard and Rion Aaden were alarmed!

The former knew how tough it was to overpower the well-equipped guards. The latter was still struggling a lot in trying to perform basic maneuvers with his virtual light skirmisher!

Ves couldn't really supply any good solutions to both problems. If there was one thing Ves had learned during crisis periods, it was better to pull the trigger decisively rather than hesitantly!

"DWARVES!" Ves shouted as he flared up his Spirituality once again! "Silence your quails! I know you are afraid, but gaining your freedom is anything but easy! The tall folk may be aware that there is something hidden underneath their outpost, but that is no excuse to falter when you are closer to success than ever before! As long as we take one more step, the rest of the galaxy will open up for your people!"

"B-But my lord! We don't have enough weapons! Our battle wagons aren't fully armored yet! Our other preparations aren't close to finishing!"

"Your strength has already grown by leaps and bounds since my presence has graced upon your people." Rion's body calmly spoke while radiating a sacred aura. "Believe in my craftsmanship. Your god will not forsake you! Are you willing to continue to live the rest of your lives in the dark and dangerous mining tunnels of Desala X?"

"NO!"

"Are you willing to fight and possibly sacrifice your lives in order to give your children a life without shackles?"

"YES!"

"Are you able to prove through your thoughts and deeds that you are humans?!"

"WE ARE!"

"Then count down the final hours and prepare for the greatest struggle for your fellow dwarves, because we will rain hell on the tall folk!"

"FREEDOM TO THE DWARVES!"

"DEATH TO THE TALL FOLK!"

"GLORY TO VULCAN!"

The rebel movement worked harder than they had ever done. Motivated by Vulcan and urged on by the tall folk carpet search, the dwarves were fully committed to finishing what they started!

There was no room for hesitation or doubt. Though plenty of dwarves feared what was to come, Ves observed them very closely to see if any of the rebels might crack and spill the beans to the tall folk.

As long as a single traitor emerged among their group, the rebellion would definitely fail!

Master Gion Greybeard knew this as well, and he already had his loyal cadre in position to keep an eye on every dwarf.

After an exhausting and frenetic day of work, Ves gathered the dwarves in a corner of the underground base.

"You have worked hard." Rion's body smiled at the sweaty and exhausted dwarves. "It brings me joy to witness your diligence and dedication. Work is not just about bettering others. It is also about bettering yourself. In order to give you a taste of what it is like to work for yourself, here is one of the rewards you can look forward to once you become free!"

He pulled a large sheet covering a large object, exposing a dozen barrels!

"What is this, my lord?"

Ves did not reply immediately. Instead, his possessed body approached one of the barrels, cracked it open and retrieved some of its contents with the help of a transparent mug.

The yellowish, bubbly liquid and foreign fermented aromas immediately attracted the attention of all of the dwarves.

"This.. is the nectar of the gods, the ambrosia loved by gods and deities, the liquid that does more than quench your thirst! This is nutrient beer!"

Every dwarf looked both shocked and fascinated at this divine creation!

Ves couldn't help but chuckle. He knew that heavy gravity variant humans developed a peculiar liking for alcohol due to their altered metabolism and physique.

Whether purposely or accidentally, the geneticists who developed these breeds of humans continually reinforced their affinity for alcohol.

Ves wanted to take advantage of this well-known trait in order to motivate the dwarves once more.

As he handed his mug to Gion Greybeard, the dwarf thanked Vulcan profusely before taking his very first sip.

His eyes lit up with wonder and ecstasy. Every other dwarf waited for the verdict of their eldest and most respected leader.

Gion practically shuddered as his eyes rolled backwards. "This.. this.. is truly a divine creation! Thank you Vulcan for giving me an opportunity to taste such a wonder medicine!"

Rion's body smiled and clapped. "What are you waiting for, dwarves? Grab a mug and drink to your heart's content! All of you deserve it for gaining this god's approval!"

A huge cheer erupted from the gathered dwarves before they stormed over after picking up the mugs that Ves had prepared for their convenience.

Ves inwardly smiled as he saw the dwarves begin to drink and revel for the first time in their lives.

He never expected to express his craftsmanship in the form of homebrew beer. He never expected to utilize his casual knowledge on how to ferment the contents of nutrient packs in this way!

Though his first attempt at brewing craft beer was a piss poor attempt, none of the dwarves said no to a drink!

"For freedom, victory and Vulcan!" The dwarves toasted.

Chapter 1929 Liquid Courage

The time had come. Almost two days after the tall ones began their search, Ves noticed that the guards had grown more vigorous in their search.

In order to give the impression that everything was still normal, the dwarves still showed up on their assigned shifts. Rion had to waste precious time at work in order to avoid drawing any suspicion towards him. At this crucial moment, arresting him early would immediately spell the end of their escape plan!

As Rion numbly drove his mining machine deeper, Ves constantly lectured him on how to pilot a mech against the guard force.

"The Genie Pearl is a cut above the other mechs. It's not only a premium model, but also the only mech that retains much of its original speed characteristic. The antigrav backpack it is wearing exerts at least 3.6 g's of counter gravity on the mech, allowing it to move as swiftly as any other standard planet. Do you realize what an advantage this brings? It will be the only rabbit in a mob of snails!"

"Forgive me for asking, Great Vulcan, but what is a rabbit? What is a snail?" Rion ignorantly asked.

"Forget about that." Ves mentally waved his hand. "The point is that the speed of your mech is the key to victory. The guard force is fully alert and ready to respond to any incidents, so we can't completely catch them by surprise. Their main shortcoming is that they have dispersed their mechs to cover the entire outpost. This is the critical vulnerability which we can use to dismantle their mechs one by one. The premise is that you are able to run and defeat the separated mechs fast enough to prevent them from converging together!"

A light skirmisher was known as a supreme one-on-one duelist. Popular in mech arenas, a skilled mech pilot could make these mechs dance against even the most formidable machines.

They were often known as the underdog mechs, both in the dueling arena and the battlefield. Light mechs were cheaper and easier to maintain than larger mechs.

As long as the mech pilot was skilled enough, a light mech could easily defeat mechs that were ten times as expensive!

Of course, results like these did not come for free. The disparity in skill between mech pilots was crucial.

The good news was that the mech pilots of the guard force were not up to standard. Though Ves could only infer their actual strength, from everything he had seen so far, the tall folk were so used to bullying the dwarves that they didn't bother to keep up their training and fitness!

This was a crucial weakness!

The bad news was that the dwarves weren't in a better shape either. None of the dwarves underwent any systematic combat training. The only remedy that Ves could offer was a half-baked crash course in tactics and maneuvers based on his personal experience.

Though the dwarves lacked decent training, they made up for it with enthusiasm and drive.

Though the rebels were lacking in other aspects, Ves in his guise as Vulcan managed to reduce many of their shortcomings.

Each rebel dwarf possessed a suit of makeshift combat armor. While the reinforced hazard suits were not comparable to actual combat armor, they at least prevented the foot soldiers from dropping after getting hit just once.

Ves also made sure the dwarves possessed the weapons to crack open the shells protecting the guards on foot.

He already observed their combat armor in detail and realized that most of them consisted of cheap models of light and medium combat armor.

Though Ves was not impressed by their gear, the guards did not need anything more to keep a population of slaves in line. If not for the extensive preparations made by the Desala Resistance Movement, the foot soldiers alone could have easily crushed any attempted rebellion without resorting to their mechs!

Even so, the rushed and makeshift equipment fashioned for the dwarves only evened the odds. The dwarves still had to fight an uphill battle, and that caused many of the rebels to grow nervous as the final hour arrived.

Once Rion finished his shift and sneaked into the underground base, a large group of rebels had already gathered.

Clad in their crude and bulky barrel-shaped combat armor, the dwarves looked more valiant than ever. In order to prevent the patchwork armor from reinforcing their shabby impression, Ves ordered the dwarves to coat their armor in a uniform red-and-blue coating.

The red stood for Vulcan and his domains.

The blue stood for freedom and the boundless void of space.

Painted on their broad chest was a giant black X surrounded by a stylized cog. The X stood for the planet that they had called their home, while the cog stood for their future potential.

To be honest, Ves wanted to bestow the dwarves with a more sophisticated emblem to unite around. However, the symbolism would doubtlessly be lost to their inadequately educated minds.

The large X's surrounded by cogs made a very powerful impression on the dwarves. The rebel movement had never adopted a simple symbol before. Now that so many dwarves were wearing the same colors and symbols, an unprecedented feeling of unity emanated from their group!

This simple transformation completely elevated them from a collection of disgruntled miners. If their gear was of a higher quality, then the dwarves could easily be mistaken as a professional troop!

"The reckoning draws close." Ves in his guise as Vulcan declared. "The tall folk have enslaved us long enough. Now, it is time to pay back all of the enmity we have accrued!"

Every dwarf looked solemn as they tried to psyche themselves up for battle.

None of the dwarves had ever fought a battle against the tall folk!

Though the rebels largely consisted of the most reckless and resentful dwarves, all of them bore the scars of decades of tall folk suppression.

The superior human oppressors cast a very long shadow in their hearts and minds.

It was all well and good to talk about rebelling against the tall folk when a confrontation was far away.

Now that they actually had to put their lives at risk, the dwarves began to waver in their determination.

Fear was a powerful deterrent. Fear was one of the most important weapons employed by the tall folk.

Ves studied the fearful expressions of the dwarves and mentally shook his head in disappointment.

The rebels weren't the trained combatants he was used to. The soldiers of the Mech Corps, the privately-groomed troops of his mech forces and the ferocious gangsters from various gangs were much more firm in the face of combat!

The dwarves lacked the training and discipline to suppress their fear. Ves didn't want to see this. In his heart, he hoped that the rebels were able to find enough determination to steel through their fears.

Sadly, that wasn't enough. The scars they incurred from a lifetime of tall folk oppression caused many of the dwarves to hesitate when the critical moment drew close!

Ves could not allow the dwarves to second-guess their motives! They needed to focus on their roles and fight the guard force with as much courage and determination as possible!

Fortunately, he anticipated that these untrained dwarves might exhibit the flaws plaguing many unprofessional forces.

Rion's body faced the crowd of dwarves with a proud expression. "My dwarves, do not feel discouraged. The tall folk may be strong, but we are stronger! The difference between you and them is that you have a god at your side! With all of the blessings that I have bestowed upon you, none of the tall folk can escape our retribution!"

The dwarves hardly looked any better. Words no longer had effect. It was not easy for Ves to cure an affliction to their hearts through his words alone!

Fortunately, Ves anticipated that as well. He directed his possessed body to a corner where he withdrew a long pole of Xantur iron along with a folded sheet of fabric.

He returned to the center of the crowd and lowered the end of the pole to his chest. He then proceeded to unfold the fabric and attach it to the end of the pole.

His movements were slow and precise. Yet every dwarf in the crowd felt compelled to look.

Once Ves was finished, he raised the pole until a long and fairly narrow banner fluttered from the top!

The banner looked no different from the armor worn by the guards. Dyed in both red and blue, the large X surrounded by a cog immediately drew everyone's eyes!

Unlike other objects, the banner radiated a glow that was similar to what they felt from Vulcan!

It was as if Vulcan sacrificed a part of his divinity to impart the banner with his blessing!

This was not that far from the truth. While Ves hadn't imparted the banner with a spiritual fragment or a spiritual product, he empowered it with an empowered image of Vulcan.

While this didn't make the banner as potent as the Larkinson Mandate, the banner still made a very powerful impression on the deprived rebels!

"This.."

"This is the Banner of Vulcan!" Ves announced as he raised the pole in the air! "This will be the flag that represents your people! I bestow this sacred gift onto you in order to bless your courage. Even if this body is not able to fight alongside you, I will always be watching over you through this banner! Fight for freedom, fight as if your life depends on it, because a god will always be on your side! FOR VULCAN!"

Every dwarf raised their fists in unison! "FOR VULCAN!"

"FOR FREEDOM!"

"FOR FREEDOM

"FOR THE DWARVES!"

"FOR THE DWARVES!"

Instilling this shouting ritual was yet another tool that Ves employed to rally their hearts and unify their thoughts. There was something intrinsically encouraging about shouting the same cries as your comrades.

For a moment, the dwarves actually resembled disciplined and eager soldiers!

Of course, how long their temporary boost of courage would last was still in question. In order to shore up their confidence once again,

Rion's body approached a pile of barrels. "Let us toast our impending victory!"

"Hooray!"

No dwarf said no to a good drink!

The dwarves, who never ate or drank anything other than water and nutrient packs in their lives, eagerly partook in the nutrient beer as if it was literally the nectar of the gods!

The ambrosia succeeded in driving away their fears. The positive atmosphere along with the encouraging glows of Vulcan and his recently-made banner infused each of them with hope and determination.

They were willing to risk their lives in order to free their people!

Death was not so scary as long as they proved themselves worthy enough to earn Vulcan's grace!

Ves happily looked on as the dwarves required no further encouragement to confront the tall folk!

He wasn't worried whether the dwarves drank themselves stupid. There wasn't enough nutrient beer to satisfy their desires. In addition, their formidable dwarven physiques raised their tolerance for alcohol to a ridiculous level!

Of course, after a bit of deliberation, Ves forced his possessed body to take a few sips as well.

He knew that Rion was just as prone to fear and hesitation as the rest of the dwarves. 'Ace pilot' or not, Rion was far from an actual half-god in terms of will and determination!

Fortifying his heart and mind with some liquid courage might affect his coordination and precision when piloting a mech, but Ves believed the tradeoff was more than worthwhile!

"You're not a bad kid, Rion." Ves mentally addressed his host. "You shored up decently well in the last week of training. As long as you can overcome your mental block, I'm sure you will be able to perform well in battle!"

Once the barrels ran out of nutrient beer, the dwarves started to move into action.

"Let's go."

Chapter 1930 Tunnelers

The rebel movement split up into two.

The main element consisted of the bulk of the dwarves. They were further divided into battle wagon crews and foot soldiers.

Though lightly-armored and lightly-equipped, the foot soldiers played an essential background role in the plan. The dwarves on foot were needed to stall their tall folk counterparts and prevent them from effectively supporting their mechs.

In contrast, the battle wagons were supposed to occupy the enemy mechs as much as possible. After several weeks of overhauls, their armor coverage was much more cohesive and resistant against damage.

Not only that, but Ves also reimagined their weapon systems. Their improvised mining lasers were capable of outputting much more damage, and their huge and bulky chassis also hosted a few other surprises.

Even so, Ves did not expect any of the battle wagons to defeat any mechs on their own without heavily stacking the deck in their favor.

Their armor might look thick and formidable, but the underlying materials all consisted of low-quality scrap. There was nothing praiseworthy about their armor systems aside from their thickness, which also meant that the giant vehicles possessed no mobility advantage!

The battle wagons also possessed no effective means of defense against melee mechs.

Fortunately, the guard force predominantly fielded frontline mechs, but they did boast a number of knight mechs that could resist any firepower the vehicles could throw at them before they drew close!

For all of these reasons, it was impossible for the dwarves to stall the mech force for long!

The true purpose of the battle wagons was never about defeating the mechs. They were merely supposed to distract the enemy mechs and buy enough time for the other group of rebels to complete their mission!

Right now, Rion, clad in a piloting suit, moved forward while surrounded by a squad of better-armed dwarves.

The group snuck forward like a band of tipsy commandos. What they lacked in precision, they made up for it with better equipment and greater courage.

Gion Greybeard specifically selected these dwarves to perform the most critical part of the plan.

The dwarven 'commandos' were tasked with sneaking Rion into the central outpost and escorting their only mech pilot all the way to the mech stable where the Genie Pearl was stashed!

The rebels needed the premium light skirmisher in order to defeat the enemy mechs. Without this high-quality machine, it was only a matter of time before the tall folk regained the initiative!

After a bit of sneaking, the group finally reached a tall but corroded prefab alloy wall.

Though the wall section looked like it had endured at least three decades of environmental exposure, it was still sufficient enough to keep the dwarves outside the central district.

Ves already made sure to compromise the monitoring system of this section. With his modern modern knowledge of hacking and security exploits, Ves could easily tamper with the functioning of the monitoring system.

"Let's go under."

Instead of trying to drill through the wall, the dwarves instead opened a hidden entrance and squeezed into a tunnel.

The smell of corrosive chemicals suffused the narrow tunnel. The dwarves already started to prepare this tunnel days ago when the dwarves embraced his revised plan.

While the soil of Desala X was extraordinarily hard, it was easy for Ves to soften it up by synthesizing some chemicals. The dwarves utilized the chemicals to weaken the soil and dig a tunnel that bypassed the wall by circling underneath its foundation!

Ordinarily, a proper base should have boasted underground defenses. Tunneling was a real concern and many seemingly impregnable fortifications had fallen due to underground shenanigans.

Unfortunately for the tall folk, House Kantis refused to invest more in the security of their outposts.

Due to the nature of their mining model, the outposts only occupied a single location for a couple of years to a decade. After the local ore veins were exhausted, the tall folk disassembled the prefab structures and moved them to a fresh new location.

All of this assembly and disassembly meant that no outpost resided in a single location long enough to warrant any further investment.

Since the guard force all believed the dwarves were incapable of mounting any significant resistance against their might, they never adopted any thorough precautions against tunneling!

This was a big mistake. The dwarves may not be good in many things, but they happened to possess a wealth of experience in tunneling and mining!

The only complication was that the tunnel had to be established quickly. The guard force wasn't completely derelict in their duties and regularly patrolled the perimeter. They also deployed various technical gizmos to detect any irregularities in their surroundings.

"Careful. Keep an eye on your sensors and make sure your ECM systems are active."

Though Ves hadn't been able to outfit the dwarves with infiltrator suits, he did incorporate various rudimentary ECM systems into their combat armor that worked particularly well in reducing their signatures against long-ranged sweeps.

This was vital in their attempt to sneak in the central district. Ves could only trust in the superiority of his future knowledge to carry them deep into the central district.

Eventually, they emerged aboveground in a yard where a number of storage containers were stored.

They emerged in the grounds of one of the warehouses that stored all of the ore excavated by the miners.

While the warehouse was tightly-monitored, it was light on guards. The technology bestowed by 'Vulcan' managed to fool the former, while the sparse number of the latter meant the dwarves were easily able to circumvent their lazy patrols.

Due to the importance of the warehouse, the mech stables just happened to be situated next door.

Rion observed the shiny, spotless exterior of the prefab structures of the central district.

Unlike the outer districts, the tall folk regularly cleaned and maintained their own living environment. The dwarves all exuded jealousy as they observed the cleanliness of their environment.

"Don't get distracted." Ves took control of Rion's body. "You'll be able to live in much better homes once we manage to succeed. All of this can be yours as long as we can sneak into this stable!

The mech stables adopted a modular layout just like the rest of the structures. Each tall structure accommodated at least four mechs.

While the dwarves managed to determine that the Genie Pearl was stored in this specific stable, they weren't able to find out if there were any other mechs. The rebels could not allow the tall folk to activate any of the mechs!

"Security is low." Ves softly whispered as the dwarves halted before a side entrance.

Just as he expected, the guards were understaffed and not at all alert against intrusions.

In the history of the mining operations, hardly any dwarf had succeeded in breaking into the central districts! No dwarf had ever managed to intrude in one of the mech stables!

Due to the latest carpet search, the guard force redirected many of their available manpower to scour the outer districts. This left the guards in the central district woefully undermanned.

After making sure there wasn't any human presence at the side entrance, the dwarves crept forward. Rion's body held a device and brought it close to the entrance.

Ves fiddled with the settings until the door slid open.

"Get in quick! I don't know how long it will take for the guards to discover this anomaly, but we don't have long!"

The dwarves hurried as fast as their short feet and the heavy gravity allowed.

Their armored boots should have made a lot of noise as they clanked against the metal deck if not for the sound dampeners built into the combat armor.

While the dwarves didn't make a lot of noise, there was nothing Ves could do to stop the slight vibrations and tremors from their movements.

"Contact!" One of the dwarves hissed in the local communication channel.

Ves observed a handful of off-duty mech technicians sitting next to a table and playing some kind of virtual card game out of boredom.

Further in the distance, Ves heard the footsteps and echoing voices of other tall folk. Some of their steps were light, denoting mech technicians garbed in light suits and overalls.

Other steps were noticeably heavier, which suggested the active presence of guards!

"This is it." Ves told the dwarves. "On my mark, storm in and shoot everyone taller than you. Clean them up as fast as possible, because the alarm will soon attract a lot of other guards!"

After he made sure that everyone understood their instructions, Rion's body clutched the pistol in a determined grip.

"Three, two, one, MARK!"

"For Vulcan!"

"Death to the tall folk!"

The dwarves kept their battlecries in their communication channel. Aside from the increasing tremors, the unsuspecting tall folk had no idea that a bunch of murderous dwarves were sweeping forward!

Once the dwarven rebels came close enough, they chaotically opened fire!

Dwarves armed with plasma projectors instantly enveloped the card-playing mech technicians with superheated matter! Their thin work uniforms offered little protection against the plasma devouring their bodies into ash!

Ves wanted to curse at the dwarves. They were meant to reserve this weapon against armored targets!

Instead, the dwarves armed with laser cutters and other eclectic energy weapons began to pelt the other mech technicians and guards with rays, heat and other types of energy.

"Attack! We're under attack!"

"AARRGH!"

"Sound the alarm!"

The dwarves successfully caught the tall folk off-guard! Though the enthusiastic and tipsy dwarves missed the majority of their shots, the sheer volume of fire meant that hardly any normal human escaped the rain of fire for long!

The only issue was that the pair of guards on patrol managed to resist the opening volleys long enough to dive into cover!

Huddling behind a giant mech component, the guards were probably trying to sound the alarm and call for backup!

"Heh, it's not that easy to call for backup!" Ves inwardly grinned.

The ECM and jamming equipment he cobbled up for the dwarves successfully most remote forms of communication in the mech stable!

Unless the guards were able to reach a console and rely on a hardwire connection to pass on their distress, there shouldn't be any way for them to call for help!

"Encircle the guards!" Ves quickly commanded. "You three, go left! As for you guys, circle to the right!"

Pinned down and with no way to pull back safely, the dwarves quickly managed to get a good firing angle on the outnumbered guards and melt through their combat armor after bombarding them with badly-aimed plasma bolts.

Though the plasma projectors proved to be effective, they already lost two-thirds of their charge due to the lack of trigger discipline exhibited by their wielders!

Ves was very much aware that while the dwarves managed to clear this facility, they didn't have much juice left to resist a counterattack!

A very loud alarm rang throughout the entire outpost. They had been discovered!

"Damnit!"

Time was against their side. Ves needed to crack open the Genie Pearl as soon as possible in order to allow Rion to pilot this pivotal mech!

"You know what to do." He told the dwarves.

"We will stall the tall folk as long as possible to buy time for you to perform your miracle, my lord. Please bless our souls and reserve a place for us in your paradise!"

"You will no longer have to fear any tall folk in the afterlife." Ves shamelessly lied. "The suffering you have endured in this life will all be washed away once you have fulfilled your duty to the end."

The fatalistic dwarves nodded. All of them knew the score. Separated from their comrades and armed with shabby weapons, the dwarves wouldn't be able to hold back the guards stationed in the central district for long!

Rion's body saluted the dwarves for their sacrifice before turning to one of the two mechs in the stable.

Ves ignored the large and ugly knight mech in favor of the beautiful white light skirmisher.

The machine may be locked and secured against unauthorized intrusions, but Ves designed and built many mechs for a living! Intruding into one was not impossible for a mech designer!