

Chapter 1231 He Speaks

Even though Ves made a startling declaration, some of the inquisitors realized that letting the situation proceed any further would not be good!

At the very least, the lack of control being exhibited by the inquisition might paint them as weak!

"Security!" High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco yelled from the bench as she shook off her inexplicable fascination. "Lock down the courtroom! Separate Mr. Larkinson and shut him up! He is grossly speaking out of turn!"

Indignation crept up inside Ves as both he and Ylvaine's spiritual fragment refused to be muffled! How dare an Ylvainan try to stifle the voice of their prophet?!

"You dare, Your Excellency?!" Ves exclaimed as his resonance with his mask suddenly peaked. "The Ylvainan Inquisition is supposed to protect the faith! Since when did that change into stifling it in your grip? Your organization has gone astray!"

"What gives you the right to admonish the inquisition! We have protected the Ylvainan Faith for centuries! Without our efforts, our faith would have been diluted by secularists such as you!" High Inquisitor Xefin Lin Poxco shouted from the side.

Ves turned his gaze at Xefin Lin Poxco, causing the high inquisitor to pale as his conviction quivered for some reason!

Although Ves knew that he was doing something extremely reckless right now, he exhibited no doubt at all. The absolute faith that Ylvaine's spiritual fragment granted him had boosted his confidence to untold heights!

The aura he radiated was absolutely remarkable! While it wasn't as focused as an expert pilot's force of will, it combined the strengths of both Ves and the fragment!

Although the two entities were completely different, right now their interests and some of their opinions aligned. This alignment resulted in a peculiar outcome in which the partial fusion between Ves and the spiritual fragment resonated to a strong degree!

It was so strong in fact that Ves managed to enthrall everyone in the courtroom like his mechs! Not only that, but everyone watching the tribunal proceedings from a live broadcast were caught in his spell as well!

Spirituality was a wondrous medium which possessed the remarkable power to disregard distance! Practically the entire Ylvaine Protectorate tuned in to the broadcast in order to watch the trial as it happened!

Now, almost every Ylvainan became affected by the aura emanating from the foreigner! Right now, the faith in their hearts and mind minutely resonated with this oddly attractive and compelling aura!

The judges sitting on the bench, the people in the gallery and the Protectors of the Faith that kept the peace all stared at the accused in a manner that was completely different from normal!

Although none of them could explain why they regarded Ves differently, the faith in their hearts demanded that they listened!

The stronger and more ardent their faith, the stronger this impulse warred against their minds!

All of the inquisitors and the Attendants of Ylvaine frowned and gritted their teeth as they sought to break themselves out of their spells!

They failed! Their faith was too strong! The more they worshipped the great prophet, the greater their inability to resist!

Practically everyone in the courtroom had been vetted extensively for their devotion to the faith!

This meant that almost no one at the court could bring themselves to stop Ves from speaking!

Although it seemed that Ves had the entire Protectorate under his thrall, his mind was under incredible strain right now! Wearing a spiritual fragment that was as strong as an expert pilot as a mask was a very dangerous act! The two were constantly corroding each other! If not for the growing resonance between them, the forceful merger would have already ended!

That wasn't all. The empowered aura he radiated right now did not come without a cost. Ylvaine's spiritual fragment somehow employed a drasted technique that amplified their aura by consuming both of their spiritual energy!

The longer the spiritual fragment maintained this consumption, the greater their losses!

In short, Ves was on a time limit! He needed to make the most out of this extraordinary state while it lasted!

Although High Inquisitor Xefin Lin Poxco was constantly warring against his faith, he still summoned up the strength to open his mouth.

"You foreigner.. what are you doing to us?! What sorcery have you employed to paralyze us all!? You won't get away with this! Not only did you destroy our holy relic and attempt to corrupt us with your mechs, now you have resorted to dark magic! The Inquisition will burn your body to a crisp to purify it of its evil spirit!"

Ves peered at the high inquisitor with contempt. The man looked more and more sick! "You call me a sorcerer, but do you truly believe that in your heart? The truth cannot be hidden! Ask your heart of who I am! What answer will it provide?"

The inquisitor bit his lip but stayed silent.

That didn't stop some of the people from the gallery expressing their current sentiment!

"My faith tells me we should listen to the foreigner!"

"He is a transcendent among men!"

"How come I feel I'm looking at a sacred figure? That shouldn't be possible!"

Every devout Ylvainan possessed a high affinity to Ylvaine's spiritual fragment. This made a lot of sense, as Ves originally refined the spiritual fragment from a considerable amount of spiritual accumulation from the worship of countless of Ylvainan worshippers!

Ylvaine's spiritual fragment was practically the embodiment of their collective devotion!

When confronted by this collective devotion that was centered around the great prophet, they had no choice but to submit in the presence of someone who exhibited a shadow of Ylvaine himself!

Ves swept his arm towards the raptured gallery. "Do you hear them, Your Excellency? Do you hear the judgement of the faithful? Right now, I am not a foreigner. I am not a defendant. Right now, I speak with the voice of the prophet, and I demand that you listen!"

That last word seemed to echo in the courtroom and press into the hearts of every Ylvainan. They had all been taught from young that when the prophet spoke, everyone should listen!

The act of listening carried a special meaning in the Ylvainan Faith for that reason!

"Ylvainans!" Ves loudly addressed the public. "After more than four centuries of isolation, the great prophet is no longer among you, but even if he is, he would feel ashamed! He is ashamed because his followers have lost sight of the purpose of his teachings!"

The tone of condemnation that he adopted struck a powerful blow against the faith of the Ylvainans!

"When the prophet was alive, the Ylvainan Faith was a prosperous and dynamic movement! The faithful numbered in the many trillions, many of which constantly traveled outward to continue to enlighten the unenlightened! Why has this missionary drive disappeared? The prophet has always advocated for spreading his gospel! How can you do that when you wall off your state and drive away almost every foreigner who wants to explore your faith?!"

The two high inquisitors looked incredibly furious! They wanted to say something, but Ves cut them off!

"Do not speak, inquisitors! You of all Ylvainans have perverted the great prophet's intentions the most! Rather than assist in spreading the faith, you would rather obsess over purity and mindlessly persecute anyone who offends your sensibilities! Is the Ylvainan Faith so feeble that some careless cursing poses an existential threat to it? Have you no confidence in the strength of your beliefs?!"

While the high inquisitors remained firm against this attack, their subordinates were not so firm! The tirade struck straight at their beliefs, magnifying the doubts they hid within!

Ves raised his hands in a dramatic fashion and clenched them into fists! "The faith is as strong as its devout! It is the people who matter, not the institution! Treating the citizens of this great state as children who need to be shielded from the dangers of the galaxy is a great disservice to them, and by extension their faith! Centuries of perpetuating the insecurity of your forebears has hollowed out your conviction! The great prophet has always fought back against despair by offering hope, so why is the Protectorate gripped with fear of the new and unknown? You have forgotten the fundamental meaning of our faith!"

This time, the words managed to open a crack in the indomitable defenses of the high inquisitors! Both Xefin Lin Poxco and Kelly Ixef Poxco looked mildly stricken as they couldn't summon up a counterargument against this point right now!

"The great prophet is disappointed! He is disappointed that your faith has flipped his intentions!"

"Instead of expanding the faith, you narrow it by refusing to interact with foreigners!"

"Instead of bearing a message of hope to cast away the darkness encroaching the galaxy, you douse the torch and huddle fearfully in the dark!"

"Instead of furthering the development of the church and state, you have become content with freezing everything in time, thereby depriving the Ylvainans of progressing history!"

It was as if the tribunal put the Ylvainan leadership on trial instead of Ves! His accusations viciously jabbed at their scars, causing them to bleed!

"The fault in this lies in each of the leading dynasties!" Ves swept his arm all around, encompassing Curin, Poxco and Kronon in the process! "Every leading dynasty has failed to nurture the inheritors of Ylvaine's will! Each of

you have taken your roles to such an extreme that you have failed to step up when the Ylvainans needed better guidance! The leading dynasties have become so narrow-minded that none of you are capable of stepping into the void left behind by the passing of the great prophet!"

None of the Ylvainans listening in right now felt good about themselves. They hated what Ves had said and wanted to dismiss his accusations, yet their faith kept compelling them to listen! They had become prisoners to their own beliefs!

The aura radiating from Ves burned with even greater fury as he got caught up in his own tirade!

"No greater example showcases how far the Ylvainan Faith has fallen by your obsession over trivial relics! Who in their right minds would revere a discarded nutrient pack wrapper as a holy relic? What would Prophet Ylvaine think of you by valuing a piece of trash over someone's life? He would be ashamed of you all! Rather than do something useful like spreading the gospel, you would rather enshrine the prophet's trash!"

"The holy relic is a representation of the prophet!" Xefin Lin Poxco managed to resist the pressure. "We do not revere the object itself, but its owner! The faithful need proof that the prophet existed!"

Ves shook his head in evident disappointment. "Your excellency, have you listened at all to me? How insecure are you that you don't have the confidence that the citizens of the Protectorate can remain devout from Ylvaine's teachings alone? Valuing material objects over your people is misguided!"

"The holy relic you destroyed is an indispensable cultural treasure!"

"The Ylvainan Faith has never advocated for the worship of idols!" Ves furiously retorted! "It is the faithful and the exemplary among the Ylvainans who deserve to be revered! Ever since the First Calamity and the Great

Retreat has passed, has any great figure emerged since then? No! No figure among the faithful has ever come close to matching the brilliance of Martyred Followers!"

This was true! Although many prominent Curins, Kronons and Poxcos have emerged from the leading dynasties, none of them had managed to elevate themselves into becoming the spiritual leaders of their people!

Perhaps the expert pilots and handful of ace pilots in the Protectorate came close, but most of them were Kronons who were bound by the restrictions of their dynasty!

Ves turned around and swept his gaze over the entire gallery. "Is there anyone here who knows someone that can equal the likes of the Grey Martyr or the Battle Martyr? So many brilliant followers of Ylvaine had emerged during the time he spread his beliefs! How come not a single Martyr has emerged ever since the founding of the Protectorate? It is because your leaders have led you astray!"

This was not an attack on the inquisition alone. It was an attack aimed at the entire leadership of the state! Ves didn't want to drag in the other institutions at first, but his bond with Ylvaine's spiritual fragment became so strong that he no longer paid attention to restraint!

Chapter 1232 Accusing the Accusers

"I admit it. I stole the trash you considered a holy relic and tore it apart. I did so for a good reason, and that is to put the leading dynasties to the test. I wanted to see if the three surviving dynasties are discharging their responsibilities. And what did I learn? All of them have gone astray!"

Ves turned from the gallery and focused his attention on the bench. He swept his arm towards Okin Fillis.

"First, the Curin Dynasty! As the shepherds of the flock, your responsibility is to lead the Ylvainans to prosperity! Although you are on the right track, you are too complacent! You wield so much power over the lives of so many Ylvainans, but why are you so reluctant to share it? Does anyone even have a chance to run the state if they don't share the Curin surname? The lack of diversity in the government has led to enduring stagnation! How can the Protectorate grow strong if it lacks the dynamism to sustain its development? Shepherds are only good at their job if the flock grows larger and stronger!"

As the highest-ranking representative of the Curins, Judge Fillis lowered his head under the weight of these accusations.

He had seen enough of how the Curin Dynasty hated sharing their existing responsibilities. They maintained the same government policies for centuries and agonized over every change, no matter how much the Protectorate needed it. The Curins had grown too comfortable in the status quo that they no longer saw anything wrong with stagnation!

If not for the emerging threat of the Star Faith Collective, the Curins would have probably kept the Protectorate stuck in time forever!

"The Shepherds of the Flock must act more like their namesake! Guide the people instead of controlling them! Don't limit their ambitions and don't rob them of the opportunity to develop themselves! I hope that you will begin to figure out ways to make the Ylvainan Protectorate stronger and more prosperous in the future instead of remaining content with keeping everything the same barring some minor, half-hearted advancements!"

He had plenty more to say about the Curins, but they weren't worth his time to expound upon at this moment. Ves couldn't forget that he was burning more and more spiritual energy while he donned Ylvaine's spiritual fragment as his current mask! This was not the time to treat the courtroom as a lecture hall!

His gaze shifted to the right until they landed on the stoic and remarkably self-controlled eyes of Judge Kelber Kronon. His self-control was a lot more solid than the others!

"I see much good in the Kronon Dynasty. It is similar to the Larkinson Family that I'm apart of. Yet it is due to my familiarity with your military heritage that I see the rot lurking from within! The problem with you is that you are too focused on serving the people in a military capacity that you have forgotten what it's like to be one of them! Your intense devotion to your duties has turned your dynasty into an insular sect that stands apart from the people! Even if you are soldiers, you shouldn't forget that you are also people!"

"Service requires sacrifice. I thought that you of all people knew that, Mr. Larkinson. Isn't that what your family is known for in your state?" Judge Kronon replied with only mild unease.

"Sacrifice must have meaning!" Ves retorted. "What is the point of entrusting the protection of the church and state to emotionless Kronons who know nothing but how to fight? The Protectors of the Faith might as well replace all of their mechs and guards with appropriately-sized bots! While the mission of the Protectors of the Faith is noble, that does not mean you Kronons have to evolve into a different species that stands apart from the rest of the people!"

"It is because we are devoted to our duty that we have remained strong!"

Ves sharply shook his head. "Wrong! Your strength is an illusion! It is strong from afar, but brittle up close! Your pathetic performance against the Star Faith Collective already proves my point! While part of that is due to your weak mechs, the grit of your mech pilots also plays a role! Do you know why I have more confidence in the Bright Republic's Mech Corps? It is because they care! Certainly, they are neutral in most matters, but when it comes to something that threatens the state or its citizens, they are not afraid to stand up for what is right!"

The criticism he laid against the Kronons was a lot more abstract than most Ylvainans could follow. However, as a main branch descendent of the Kronon Dynasty, the military judge keenly felt this blow.

Ves was right! The Kronons were becoming more and more distant from the civilians they were supposed to protect!

After he addressed the Kronon, Ves finally turned to the representative of the Poxco Dynasty. High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco continued to glower at him, but the fervor in her eyes had slowly begun to dim!

"While the Curins and Kronons share part of the blame for letting the Protectorate stagnate, the Poxco Dynasty has failed to live up to your prophet's intentions! You are far too focused on history and tradition to the point of forcing the present to conform to the past! While there are many places where tradition remains useful, prioritizing it to this extent will only strangle the Ylvainan Faith under your merciless grip!"

The two high inquisitors present in the courtroom were mad! Yet when they attempted to draw on their faith and conviction for strength, they found it even harder to move!

Why did the very thought of opposing Ves become so difficult all of a sudden?!

Ves grinned sardonically at the paralyzed inquisitors. "How much did the Ylvainan Faith grow when the prophet first started proselytizing his beliefs? The population of entire states fell under his sway in just a single decade! Has the Attendants of Ylvaine ever come close to converting so many people since the founding of the Protectorate? No! The fact that the faith hasn't spread beyond the borders of the Protectorate is proof that it has grown too weak under your care!"

This was an especially fatal attack against the Poxco Dynasty! Many times, the great prophet sought to expand his following during his lifetime! He was never afraid of stepping on the toes of established factions and powers in order to enlighten the masses!

"You regard yourselves as the handmaidens of the great prophet, is that right?" Ves continued. "For those who are ostensibly the closest to Ylvaine, why are you the most eager to trample over his grave? Your fear of diversity and of others who don't share your beliefs is crippling you all! Since when has the Ylvainan Faith ever wavered against those who scorn or dismiss its tenets? Even during the darkest days of the Great Flight, the fleeing Ylvainans never gave up on converting new believers along the way!"

While this sounded quite impressive, the reality was that few people in the star regions that the refugee fleets passed through actually converted to the Ylvainan Faith. To most people who saw them pass through their space, the Ylvainans came off as crazy cultists who received their just deserts. Only the most desperate and poverty-stricken bystanders hitched a ride on the Ylvainan refugee ships!

Even so, the attempts to gather new believers even when they were at their lowest point was still a point of admiration for the Ylvainans of the time. The Ylvainan Faith still possessed a missionary drive back then! The followers of the great prophet still dreamed of a day when their beliefs swept throughout the entire galaxy, uniting both humans and aliens under a common faith!

Ves turned his back to the high inquisitors in order to face the gallery in the rear of the courtroom.

"The Poxco Dynasty pride themselves on being the most devout, but this is nothing but a fantasy that obscures how far they've deviated from Prophet Ylvaine's will! While it is fine for the inheritors of his legacy to adapt his ways in order to better fit the circumstances, they have gone too far! The trauma of

the First Calamity and the Great Flight has scarred the Attendants of Ylvaine to such an extent that they listen to their fears rather than their hopes!"

One of the central messages that the great prophet tried to convey was hope! Hope for an end to endless war and slaughter! Hope for different races to embrace each other as fellow brothers and sisters! Hope for a time where everyone would transcend into a higher state where hunger, death, war and deprivation no longer existed!

Every Ylvainan learned of the great prophet's hopes from seminaries and classes when they were young, but how much of it was left in the modern Protectorate?

Ves forced his listeners to recognize this painful disparity!

It was so painful in fact that the shells around the high inquisitors finally broke! Both Xefin Lin Poxco and Kelly Ixef Poxco looked devastated!

Although they did not believe they acted wrongly, they recognized that the Attendants of Ylvaine exerted too much of their efforts on the wrong activities!

As much as they wanted to deny this conclusion, the words that Ves forced into their ears forced them to question their conviction! Had they truly advanced the will of the great prophet, or were they merely perpetuating the power of the Poxco Dynasty?

Ves was glad that he managed to crack open the high inquisitors, because he knew that his time was short. The strain was eating up his mind and his spiritual energy was constantly diminishing! He needed to wrap up his speech!

Ves waved his hand back towards the three silent judges. "This tribunal may have come into being in order to judge my supposed crimes, but make no mistake, it is not me who is on trial today! It is the three leading dynasties who should actually be judged!"

He closed his eyes in a theatrical fashion. "I believe the Ylvaine Protectorate still has a chance to return to the light. The great prophet may no longer be with you, but as his inheritors you bear the opportunity to decide whether to follow in his footsteps or walk a different path!"

To many Ylvainans, this was the first time they heard someone say that the Ylvainans had deviated from Ylvaine's will! Such a thought was completely unimaginable for them because they had been taught from birth to revere the prophet!

His eyes opened up and seemingly flared into the eyes of the people in the gallery.

"Right now, your path has been deviating too far from Ylvaine's footsteps. What's worse is that your people have done so for all the wrong reasons! You can't have it both ways! If you want to make a mockery out of the great prophet's beliefs, then don't pretend you revere him to the point of turning one of his nutrient pack wrappers into a priceless relic!"

Essentially, Ves tore down the illusion that the Ylvainans could be both devout while deviating from many of the core beliefs that the prophet once held!

Causing such a schism in the minds of many believers caused them to feel highly uncomfortable! Hardly anyone was equipped to solve the turbulence in their hearts and minds!

Ves couldn't take it any longer. He gradually and carefully drew back his mask. His exhausted mind and spirit couldn't sustain the partial fusion any longer.

What he said was enough. The tired and muted spiritual fragment in his mind had expressed everything it wanted to say through Ves. Now that it said its piece and helped Ves out, it quickly drilled out of his mind and flew back

towards the conceptual space of the Transcendent Messenger in order to rest and recuperate!

As for Ves, he might have lost his sacred and awe-inspiring aura, but that did not lessen most people's admiration and astonishment for him! He calmly sat back down to his seat and smiled.

"Pardon me for the interruption, Your Honors."

A tense and awkward silence ensued.

Eventually, Judge Kelber Kronon filled in the void. "This tribunal is adjourned. It will convene again in two hours."

The judge struck his gavel, causing every Ylvainan present in the courtroom and those who followed the broadcast to be released from their spell!

"What have we witnessed?!"

Chapter 1233 Divine Providence

Ves nursed his aching head as he sat alone in a waiting room in the courthouse building. Protector guards were placed both inside and outside the room in order to keep him apart from anyone else.

This protection was quite necessary, because he just shocked the entire Protectorate!

Now, he was paying the price. He expended quite a bit of spiritual energy when he got caught up in his extraordinary rant.

He didn't mean to say all of that much to the Ylvainans! He just wanted to use their blind faith against them in order to turn black into white and get them to lay off on stealing and destroying one of their relics.

Instead of doing that, he went far beyond the pale and exorciated the entire Ylvaine Protectorate! Not only did he admonish the Poxco Dynasty, he also torched the other two dynasties whose backing he depended upon to go free!

How could he be so stupid to directly disparage his own backers?!

"It's because I wasn't myself back then." He whispered to himself.

Some of what he said reflected his inner thoughts, but the bulk of it definitely came from Ylvaine's spiritual fragment. During the time it rode in his mind, it had observed enough to the Protectorate to develop a very good idea on its strengths and shortcomings.

It turned out that the spiritual fragment had bottled up a considerable amount of fury due to all of the shortcomings it found in the modern Protectorate!

The fragment's fury blended with Ves' fury, causing them to become way more indignant than before!

Ves regretted that he had lost control over himself to such an extent. The reckless abandon that the spiritual fragment showed was both a reflection of its absolute faith and its nonchalance towards its own safety.

The Ylvainans didn't know the fragment existed, and even if they did, they would never be able to bring themselves to kill something that had been derived directly from the prophet!

What this meant was that it didn't matter how far Ylvaine's spiritual fragment went. It wouldn't have to suffer the consequences of its actions!

Due to donning the spiritual fragment as a mask, Ves adopted some of the fragment's recklessness. That and other traits caused him to act way beyond the pale, so much so that Ves was already itching his hands for his System comm and the Amastendira.

Should he make his escape now or later before an enraged mob of Ylvainans wanted to tear him apart?

"Maybe it won't come that far."

While Ves definitely went too far, he succeeded at what he set out to do. Who would ever look at the prophet's nutrient pack wrappers the same after this day?

It was too shameful for the Ylvainan Faith to continue to idolize such worthless pieces of trash! While they still held a lot of historical value, they were too absurd to be used as vessels of worship!

"What would Ylvaine want?"

He'd probably laugh or scorn the practice. It was one step away from putting his excretions on a pedestal.

As Ves struggled to decide whether he should make a move to free himself, the door to the waiting room opened. A Protector guard captain motioned him to stand.

"Two hours are up. The tribunal is reconvening. Please follow me back to the courtroom, Mr. Larkinson."

"Very well. Lead the way."

Though Ves felt remorseful and exhausted, he tried not to show any of his febleness right now. Presenting a strong and confident image to the judges and the public would help give the impression that he was still the man who dared to confront the entire Protectorate!

As an excessive number of guards surrounded Ves as they left the waiting room, he wondered whether the trial would still continue. Two hours was a rather short time to digest what had happened. Perhaps the judges wanted a quick end to this abnormal situation.

Whatever the case, Ves wanted to put this ordeal behind him as well, preferably alive and free.

A few minutes later, he finally returned to the courtroom.

Surprisingly, the judges and the authorities hadn't vacated the gallery, nor deactivated all of the recorders broadcasting the tribunal proceedings to the rest of the state.

When Ves noticed the reaction of the average Ylvainans, he quickly found out why.

"Look! The speaker has returned!"

"Mr. Larkinson! Please enlighten us more! Bestow us with your wisdom!"

"You idiots! Why are you idolizing this foreigner?! He's a blasphemer who has led everyone astray! He should be shot this instant!"

"What are you saying?! The Bright Martyr must not be taken away from us! He is the first person in centuries who has been possessed by Ylvaine himself!"

"That's nonsense! There's no proof that Ylvaine has descended! The foreigner must have released something in the air to hypnotize us all! We are all being deceived!"

"The Bright Martyr is an enlightener, not a deceiver!"

"Bright Martyr! Bright Martyr! Bright Martyr!"

The handful of skeptics in the gallery were quickly drowned out by the sheer amount of people chanting the moniker they came up with for the foreigner who had touched the very essence of their faith!

When Ves heard them call him by this name, he almost collapsed on his feet. Why the hell did he suddenly become the Bright Martyr?! He wasn't even a real convert to their faith!

Yet as Ves sat down at the counsel table and turned to regard the gallery, he saw that many of the people there saw him in a profoundly different light!

Witnessing his earlier state up close was a lot different from watching the proceedings from a broadcast! The sacred aura emanating from Ylvaine's spiritual fragment affected them directly in person, causing them to experience its profound conviction at close range!

Some of the enthralled Ylvainans had raised their comms in order to rewatch his earlier tirade. The prior effect wasn't there as Ylvaine's spiritual fragment was no longer radiating its aura. None of the footage that recorded his speech could ever fully convey the spiritual aura and pressure he exerted on everyone.

It was a unique moment that could only happen once. Ves already knew that these kinds of shenanigans couldn't be propagated through recordings. When he previously watched the product reveal for the Aurora Titan, Ves did not sense much of the extraordinariness of the show models."

However, he did find out back then that a remnant of the remarkable impression still remained. Those who witnessed the event live would be able to recall some of their sentiments at the time from memory.

Those who hadn't witnessed the event as it happened would not feel much different. The effect was weakest on these people.

Even so, Ves managed to charm a lot of Ylvainans earlier, so much so that some of them even started calling him the Bright Martyr, which was very crazy to Ves! How could a single rant put him in the same company as the Grey Martyr and the other esteemed followers of the prophet?!

In any case, the fanatic support exhibited by the people in the gallery made it difficult for the authorities to remove them. The fanatic Ylvainans were convinced they witnessed the birth of a new Martyred Follower! They wouldn't miss such a pivotal event even if the entire galaxy was burning down!

When Ves finally turned his attention away from the gallery, his lawyer looked at Ves with a very odd expression.

"Mr. Larkinson.. what happened earlier.. have you been really touched by the prophet?"

Ves groaned. "Not you too. Shouldn't you be focusing on representing me rather than entertain some superstition?"

"Forget about the tribunal! I was sitting next to you during the entire time you stood up and addressed us all. I could feel it in my bones that you were different at that time! I'm convinced that you were possessed by the great prophet! It is an incredible honor for you to become his chosen vessel!"

"Goddammit!" Ves palmed his face.

His counsel kept mooning over Ves until the judges finally entered the courtroom and took their places on the bench.

"This tribunal is convened." Judge Kelber Kronon spoke in an odd tone. It was as if the judges were the accused, while Ves was the actual judge! "I believe that many of us are in turmoil due to the drastic revelations that Mr. Larkinson has spoken. While it might be prudent to postpone this tribunal, the rules must still be followed. A single outburst, no matter how remarkable, should not be a reason for us to descend into anarchy."

This was typical to the Kronons. They were the most rule bound out of all of the Dynasties.

High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco spoke up next in a slightly shaky voice.

"Before we issue our verdict, we would like to emphasize that even if this is an extraordinary day, we are still Ylvainans. No matter how many questions you are harboring, the Attendants of Ylvaine will always be there to ease your doubts. Please speak to your fellow Ylvainans and visit your local churches if

you are in need of spiritual guidance. Together, we will all grow stronger in our conviction!"

That was a bit milder than Ves expected. He would have thought the high inquisitor wanted to take the opportunity to push back against Ves, but perhaps the current climate didn't make that wise.

Judge Okin Fillis spoke up last. "Whether you are taken in by Mr. Larkinson's outburst or not, please do not dismiss his words just because of his origins. Sometimes, the most insightful criticism comes from those who are looking in from outside. If the prophet's grace has touched him, then this may be an indication that Mr. Larkinson may have a point. Otherwise, why would the great prophet descend on a Brighter instead of an Ylvainan?"

Ves liked what Judge Fillis said. Each of the judges expressed their own sentiment on what happened. As a loyal Curin, Judge Fillis made sure to put Ves in a good light.

High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco spoke again. "We do not see any use in letting the tribunal proceed any longer. My colleagues and I have already decided our judgements. In the interests of transparency, we will reveal and explain each of them in turn. Judge Fillis?"

"Mr. Larkinson should be acquitted on both charges." Judge Fillis stated. "I should not have to explain my reasoning for the inquisition's charge that the mech that Mr. Larkinson has designed are blasphemous. As for the charge of sacrilege, it is of my opinion that Mr. Larkinson has acted with good cause and mayhap divine providence. A nutrient pack wrapper, even if it belonged to the great prophet, is worth nothing compared to the enlightening we have received!"

While the reasoning of Judge Fillis sounded a bit dubious and way too inclined towards divine meddling, Ves nonetheless breathed a sigh in relief while the gallery erupted in cheers.

One judge let him off at least. Even if it was the only judge which he was sure would acquit him from his charges, it nonetheless put him at ease now that his guess was confirmed!

Judge Kelber Kronon struck the gavel in order to quiet the gallery. "I have deliberated on the charges, and I agree that the second charge is groundless. Mechs are mechs. Not a single surface of Mr. Larkinson's design contains any sacrilegious elements."

Of course the judge wouldn't buy the nonsense the inquisition tried to sell.

"However, by his own admission during this tribunal, Mr. Larkinson is guilty of sacrilege! No matter whether it is appropriate for Ylvainans to worship a nutrient pack wrapper, that does not change the fact that it is a revered relic of inestimable historical, cultural and religious value during the time of its theft! Whether Mr. Larkinson acted due to divine providence or not shouldn't change anything! The law is the law, and even if Prophet Ylvaine came back to life and stole the holy relic in person and set it on fire, we would still find him guilty!"

This judgement completely shocked everyone! The entire gallery immediately erupted into boos and objections!

Meanwhile, Ves felt a chill in his heart. The most neutral judge, the one he placed all of his hopes upon, had declared him guilty! He was only one step away from a guilty verdict!

Chapter 1234 Impressionable Sheep

This was an unforgettable day for the Ylvaine Protectorate. Most of the Ylvainans present in the courtroom and watching the live broadcasts had been thrown in confusion.

In that fateful moment where Ves stood up and and spoke those words, all of them felt compelled to listen.

The more devout they were, the more difficult it became to resist the impulse to listen!

This was because the words struck right at the core of their faith!

Many Poxcos were deeply affected by the attacks on how the Ylvainan Faith developed during the Age of Mechs. Compared to the unsurpassed glory it enjoyed while the great prophet was alive, the faith only encompassed a single third-rate state in a remote star sector!

Where was their missionary drive? Why was the faith still confined in a single state? How much courage did they really have left after closing themselves off from the galaxy for so long?

Whereas most of the other states in human space moved on from the trauma of the latter days of the Age of Conquest, the Ylvaine Protectorate was still in its grip!

For centuries, the Ylvainans had grown more and more insular. Even though the upper levels still stayed in touch with foreigners, if only by necessity, the rest of the population had become more and more focused on themselves.

Was this Ylvaine's will? For an extremely long time, very little Ylvainans thought about this question. Compared to trying to survive and lay low in a hostile galaxy, they didn't have the luxury to consider whether they were expressing their faith in the right direction.

What Ves had done was to force the Ylvainans to confront this long-standing contradiction. Even if he didn't benefit from the sacred aura emanated by Ylvaine's spiritual fragment, Ves would have still been able to throw much of the population into a crisis of faith!

Ves singlehandedly opened up a Pandora's box in the Protectorate! It was too late to close it now that the horrors flowing out of the box afflicted the conviction of many devout Ylvainans!

Perhaps the Ylvainans aligned to the reform agenda would not feel that much of a crisis, since they had already accepted the argument that they needed to open up their state.

Yet the traditionalists suffered a much more severe crisis of faith, as the criticism laid out by Ves struck right at their heart!

The traditionalists always believed they were the most devoted worshippers of the Ylvainan Faith! Their zeal drove them to become more militant in their beliefs, yet they focused most of their energy on maintaining their purity in isolation, which was in great opposition to the intentions of the prophet they worshipped and idolized!

As the Ylvainans began to come to terms with the wounds that Ves had opened up, several of them began to rationalize the strange and alarming mood that swept over everyone.

This unreplicable phenomenon sent many Ylvainan doctors and scientists into a tizzle!

They couldn't explain why everyone felt compelled to listen!

Some turned hostile and accused Ves of being a black magician. Others guessed that Ves was in the possession of super-advanced high technology that enabled him to brainwash every human by taking advantage of their psychological vulnerabilities!

Yet the skeptics were in the minority as the sensation sweeping over every watching Ylvainan resonated with their faith!

This was incredibly strange! It was so remarkable that a large number of Ylvainan had already made up their minds on what had happened!

When the foreigner addressed the Ylvainans, he spoke with the voice of the prophet!

No one knew who came up with this rumor first. Perhaps some savvy Curin saw an opportunity to elevate Ves from a sinner who was facing the death penalty into a blessed figure who would continue to benefit their dynasty as long as he was alive!

Yet once this rumor started spreading around, it immediately caught fire in the vast swathe of the Protectorate! No matter whether they were Curins, Kronons or Poxcos, at least a third of every Ylvainan took this rumor as fact!

They all believed that the transcendent prophet had spoken to them this day!

It was both a great honor and a very deep shame for the prophet to have emerged in this manner.

It was an honor because the prophet hadn't forgotten about the descendants of the survivors of his cult!

It was a shame because the prophet chose to convey his words through a foreigner rather than an Ylvainan!

A very strange kind of stubbornness therefore crept up to these ardent Ylvainans. No matter how much the other Ylvainans cast doubt on what had happened, the more superstitious Ylvainans deeply wanted to believe that the great prophet had spoken to them in person!

No matter if they were aligned to the reformers or the traditionalists, their desire to feel special caused them to become extremely defensive about this rumor!

For this reason, the rumor quickly acquired a life of its own, to the point that even the most senior figures among the Attendants of Ylvaine couldn't suppress it anymore!

Compared to Brighters who had always been taught to regard supernatural phenomena with skepticism, the Ylvainans as a whole were much less capable of critical thinking!

Ordinarily, this was good for the Attendants of Ylvaine as they would be able to dictate the beliefs of the citizens of the Protectorate. Discouraging critical thinking and encouraging them to accept the existence of miracles allowed the Ylvainan Faith to remain strong and relevant long after the great prophet had died.

Yet now this policy backfired on the Attendants of Ylvaine! The impressionable sheep all believed they witnessed an embodiment of the prophet!

Since the Attendants of Ylvaine weren't quite sure of what had happened, they hadn't moved to stifle this interpretation of events in time! Now, it had spread throughout the entire Protectorate, and as time went by, more and more Ylvainans settled their doubts by accepting this explanation!

Throughout this vortex that affected the entire state, these Ylvainans started to regard Ves in a very different light.

Some called him the voice of the prophet. More extreme Ylvainans even claimed that Ves was the second prophet who inherited Ylvaine's holy mission!

Then someone started calling him the Bright Martyr. This new moniker happened to fit very nicely with the narrative adopted by many Ylvainans!

Although the core leaders within the Attendants of Ylvaine deeply disliked referring to Ves with this honored name, they couldn't stop it from spreading either! Even if the traditionalists media outlets didn't broadcast the name, the reformer media outlets mentioned it at least once every thirty seconds!

They went all out to propagandize the new name for Ves!

Even though the courtroom fell into silence as the judges spoke, the people in the gallery all looked at Ves as if they completely accepted him as the Bright Martyr!

Ves didn't have to guess who was responsible for making all of these Ylvainans accept this favorable interpretation.

Only someone as astute as Calabast could have pulled it off so quickly and effectively! Her profession and her outsider's perspective of the Ylvainans enabled her to find the best way to manipulate the citizens of the Protectorate!

Now, as two of the judges had already issued their judgement, Ves deeply hoped whether his extraordinary speech and the interpretations that gained wider acceptable managed to sway the last judge!

With one judge declaring him innocent and another judge finding him guilty, only the third judge who presided over this tribunal would be able to break the tie!

High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco looked sternly at the gallery, forcing them to contain their excitement. She then swept her gaze towards Ves, meeting his calm and resigned eyes without displaying any of her earlier conviction.

The Ylvainans who were present in the courtroom during the time that Ves spoke out faced the full brunt of his aura!

Those who watched the tribunal proceedings many light-years away simply couldn't imagine how those who were physically present basked in the glory of that sacred glow!

Yet Ves still doubted whether he managed to change the heart of the most hostile judge in the tribunal. He targeted the Ylvainan Inquisition directly, meaning that the high inquisitor could react in two different ways.

The most hopeful outcome would be that High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco experienced a change of heart! If she accepted the criticism that Ves and Ylvaine's spiritual fragment had expressed, then she might absolve him from his crimes!

Yet Ves knew that humans were not always so open-minded. Inquisitors happened to be the most narrow-minded Ylvainans in the Protectorate, so they possessed a strong tendency to dig into their heels despite being told they were wrong!

No one in the courtroom had ever imagined that the judge from the inquisition became the deciding swing vote of the tribunal!

Judge Kelber Kronon received a lot of backlash for his judgement! The entire Kronon Dynasty entered into deeper turmoil as they struggled to balance their strong adherence to the rules to the extraordinary event they witnessed!

In fact, the judge's comment that he would even declare the prophet guilty of a crime had thoroughly tarnished the Kronon Dynasty's halo!

Kelber Kronon's rigid judgement thoroughly echoed the Bright Martyr's accusation that the Protectors of the Faith were caught up in their own circle and had become wildly out of touch!

Even if many Kronons hated Kelber Kronon for single-handedly ruining the reputation of their dynasty, the damage had already been done!

Aware that the entire Ylvaine Protectorate hung on her words, High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco carefully issued her judgement.

"This has been an eventful day. I agree with the opinions of both of my fellow judges on the bench. Perhaps the Ylvainan Faith may have gone astray in fetishizing trivial objects, but Mr. Larkinson has still done wrong. I have thought long and hard these last two hours, and I still find myself no closer to a decision than before. Is Mr. Larkinson guilty? If this was a regular court session, then maybe I have no choice but to say yes. Yet this is an Inquisitorial tribunal! We do not decide upon our verdicts by mindlessly following law and precedent!"

Many people in the gallery held their breaths. Was the high inquisitor trying to paint the Ylvainan Inquisition in a good light?

That was very encouraging to Ves! With how much support he enjoyed from the public, the Ylvainan Inquisition should definitely be reluctant to earn their ire!

"The Inquisition has always endeavored to find the truth." She continued while maintaining as much calm as possible. "While most fellow Ylvainans believe that we are preoccupied with hunting down heretics, blasphemers, traitors and other enemies of the faith, our holy mission encompasses much more than that. We find the truth behind every claim of a miracle. We determine whether a witness truly experienced divine providence or if they were just hallucinating while overdosing themselves on stimulants."

If not for the stakes, Ves would have scoffed. As if he would believe such drivel!

"It is due to our mission that this tribunal doesn't necessarily have to cast a narrow judgement Mr. Larkinson's actions. To the question whether an extraordinary event has occurred, I cannot bring myself to answer it. I am still

in doubt and I believe the rest of the Inquisition is the same. Reviewing the footage and studying the analyses written by many experts during this time, it is clear that no conclusive answer can be given for what has happened. For this reason and after much thought, I choose to abstain from issuing a judgement!"

Shock swept through the entire gallery and all the other Ylvainans watching the proceedings! The third judge refused to break the tie!

As everyone tried to figure out what would happen next, someone realized something very important!

"In the event an Inquisitorial tribunal is deadlocked in a tie, the final verdict will always favor guilt!"

"Ves Larkinson is declared guilty by the tribunal!"

What?! Ves widened his eyes! How could the Ylvainan Inquisition follow such a ridiculous rule!?

Chapter 1235 The Prophets Will

The Ylvainan Inquisition tried many heretical Ylvainans over the centuries. Some of them openly defied the Ylvainan Faith. Others were exceedingly careful in expressing their deviant beliefs.

When the inquisition caught on to the heretics and dragged them to their tribunals, it was quite hard to know for certain if someone was guilty. While many tribunals generally issued a unanimous judgement of guilt, sometimes an extreme case would appear where it was truly difficult to be sure of someone's guilt.

In cases where an inquisitor was deeply conflicted about someone's guilt, they could choose to abstain from issuing their judgement.

This was a rare event, but fairly problematic. These kinds of edge cases might also prompt another inquisitor to take the rare step of acquitting the accused!

This resulted in a tie, whereby the tribunal became stuck between two verdicts!

After a lot of thought, the Ylvainan Inquisition decided that if a tie ever occurred, they would gravitate towards the guilty verdict!

The argument for this policy was that it was better for the Ylvainan Inquisition to be safe than sorry! Letting a potential heretic go free meant letting a potential threat return to society! In the interest of public safety and the integrity of the Ylvainan Faith, the inquisitors couldn't take the chance that they were releasing a monster!

Of course, whether Ves deserved to be treated in this fashion was still in question. Many Ylvainans in the gallery and watching the broadcast thought it was deeply unfair!

Yet while the Ylvainan Inquisition caught a lot of flack for following this rule, it was better than outright declaring Ves guilty!

Judge Kelber Kronon still attracted most of the blame! If not for judging the Bright Martyr guilty, the tribunal wouldn't have fallen into such an awkward situation!

Ves couldn't help but reveal a mocking smile at how this tribunal developed. He immediately came up with a guess for why High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco refused to issue her judgement.

She wanted to have it both ways! She wanted to declare Ves guilty but avoid most of the blame for condemning a potential Martyred Follower! By abstaining from the decision, she elegantly preserved most of the reputation of the inquisition while still ensuring that Ves would no longer be a problem to their interests!

What a dirty move! If Ves hadn't been the target, he would have applauded the shrewd woman for coming up with this brilliant solution!

"Outrageous! The Bright Martyr is innocent!"

"The rules shouldn't be applied anymore!"

"Kill this devil before he bewitches us again!"

The controversy that erupted from this result threw everyone into disarray yet again! Those who were inclined against Ves celebrated this result, while those who deeply believed that he was the Bright Martyr found it to be a travesty!

Yet no matter how they regarded the process, it didn't change the fact that the tribunal essentially declared Ves guilty of sacrilege!

While the judges hadn't even addressed the sentencing yet, there was really only one possible sentence they were allowed to make. For the vast majority of the crimes the Ylvainan Inquisition enforced, the punishment was death!

This was why despite Kelber Kronon's repeated strikes with his gavel, the Ylvainans in the gallery simply wouldn't stay still!

"Order! Order!"

Through a variety of technological means, the audience in the gallery experienced increasingly greater suppression!

Even though the Ylvainan observers felt stifled, the most fanatical among them had to be dragged out by the guards before the entire gallery subsided!

Just as a tense and forceful silence descended on the courtroom, a Protector captain suddenly stepped out and approached the bench from the side!

The captain whispered something to the judges. The news was so alarming that none of the judges managed to maintain their composure!

"Ahem! A highly unusual disruption is taking place outside the court building! Please remain seated while the Protectors attempt to reassert order!"

The Ylvainans seated in the gallery frowned. They raised their comms and attempted to access the galactic net to see what was happening, but their connections had forcefully been cut off!

Several uncertain minutes passed by as the judges became preoccupied with what was happening outside.

It must be something incredibly serious to prevent the judges from moving onto the sentencing! Ves glanced around and saw that the Protectorate guards increased their alertness. They were gearing up for a fight!

Was someone trying to rescue Ves? But how? The Protectors of the Faith deployed an entire mech regiment around the court building, and placed a lot of units around the city district in order to guard every direction! They even took precautions against both aerial and underground threats!

Yet for some reason, the Protectorate guards looked increasingly more tense as they acted as if a great force was about to descend upon the court!

Ves felt it first. Despite his exhaustion and his spiritual depletion, his spiritual senses hadn't turned entirely numb. He felt a very familiar sensation approaching him from the direction of the main entrance of the court building.

He doubted it at first, but as the sensation slowly grew stronger, his eyes widened as he realized what was approaching!

"My prototype is back!"

He sensed the pale but incredibly strong X-Factor of his prototype! He knew it was his prototype and not one of the authorized copies of the Transcendent Messenger because its X-Factor hadn't been affected by a virtue! The mech radiated a strong sense of absolute faith that was incredibly similar to the aura that he emanated during his extraordinary tirade!

The Ylvainans in the gallery, the Protector guards on duty and the judges on the bench all began to sense something familiar in the air.

Their sensitivity towards spirituality wasn't as good as Ves, so it took quite some time before they realized the similarities!

"The prophet has returned! He is outside the courtroom!"

"Is there another Martyr outside?!"

"Let us see! Let us see!"

Something incredibly significant was happening, but the courtroom was completely isolated right now. Yet despite the attempts of the inquisition and the Protectors to calm everyone down, the aura that continued to resonate with their faith made it increasingly more difficult to temper everyone's excitement!

Ves knew more than most. He knew that the True Believers made off with the prototype while the Transcendent Messenger design was still incomplete.

Its aura wasn't very strong back then, but now was different! Now that the Transcendent Messenger gained a design spirit, the prototype's pale X-Factor seemed to have gained a lot more strength!

It was enough to affect the entire court building while standing outside!

What Ves wondered right now was whether the True Believers were responsible, and why the Protectors of the Faith allowed the prototype to approach without halting it. Were they afraid to bring their weapons to bear on the mech for fear of harming the great prophet's will or something?

Eventually, the three judges came to some sort of consensus after a furious discussion with the Protector captain!

Judge Okin Fillis spoke up. "While this is highly irregular, the event that is taking place outside the court building has forced us to adjust this tribunal. Please remain calm as we project the scene of what is happening outside."

A wide projection came to life. It depicted a stupendous scene of the prototype standing in front of a humongous mob of Ylvainans!

Hundreds of thousands of residents of Krent stepped out of their homes in clear violation of martial law! They outright ignored the warnings of the patrolling Protectors of the Faith and marched towards the court building!

This was not a spontaneous act! Instead, the presence of the prototype made it clear that it was orchestrated by the New Ylvaine Dynasty!

Even as hundreds of thousands of Ylvainans arrived at the court building, millions more became inspired by the sight and exited their homes as well! The entire city appeared to be converging on this location, much to the Kronon Dynasty's consternation!

They might be able to contain and subdue a mob of millions by employing a variety of crowd control measures, but the entire star system was under the control of the Curins! They would make sure that the heavy-handed suppression of the mob would be broadcasted to the entire Protectorate!

After suffering a heavy blow to their reputation due to the rigid judgement issued by Kelber Kronon, the Protectors could hardly afford another blow to their reputation! Their legitimacy would take a nosedive if they were seen as suppressing the very people they were supposed to protect!

This consideration also held the Kronon forces back from attacking the prototype. Regardless of how much reluctance the mech pilots exhibited against a mech that touched their faiths, the prototype was too close to the mob!

If the Protectors started to fight the prototype, then the collateral damage that ensued would definitely kill tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of innocent bystanders!

All in all, while the Protectors of the Faith still possessed a decisive edge in military might, they were rendered impotent in fear of harming so many Ylvainans!

The people outside the court building already knew what went on outside. Only now did the people inside the courtroom catch up to this alarming event!

"This mech...!"

Ves realized that he wasn't under any suppression, so he couldn't help but stoke the fire!

"That mech is my work! It is an early prototype of my Transcendent Messenger design that went missing at the hands of the True Believers! It is a rough copy of the same design that High Inquisitor Xefin Lin Poxco has accused of being a blasphemous design!"

The high inquisitor in question looked sick at this revelation, but the Ylvainans who had joined the mob or watched the broadcast all gasped in shock!

The mech that made them feel close to their faith was anything but blasphemous to them! Not even the greatest churches and cathedrals of the Ylvainan Faith made them feel this intimate!

"It is a holy mech!"

"If the inquisition thinks this mech is blasphemous, then they are the true heretics!"

"What are you guys thinking?! Don't you see that this mech is brainwashing us all! It's the same thing that its designer has done!"

Although some Ylvainans were dubious about the nature of the prototype, they were outnumbered by the Ylvainans who were convinced that the mech was something holy!

Although the leaders of the Ylvainan Inquisition and the Attendants of Ylvaine deeply wanted to suppress the news, Kesseling VIII was a stronghold of the Curin Dynasty! The Shepherds of the Flock gleefully broadcasted everything that was happening inside and outside the court building as long as it favored their agenda!

Due to the inaction displayed by the Kronons, there was no stopping this procession!

Once the people in the gallery started to subside in their rapturous excitement, the prototype began to activate its forward projectors.

The mech projected one of the most notorious figures in the Protectorate!

The projection depicted an old man dressed in a very accurate replica of an iconic robe. His face shared a lot of similarities to the face that adorned many statues and other religious artwork!

Ves was shocked at the sight as well, because there was only one living Ylvainan who wore that face!

"Many of you know who I am." The projection spoke. "I am Prophet Ylvaine come to life. I am the head of the Ylvaine Dynasty that many of you believe has committed terrible terrorist attacks. I would dearly like to dispute that, but I've made an agreement not to go into that at this moment."

A lot of mixed feelings emerged from the spectating Ylvainans. While they enjoyed the backing of many sympathizers, the majority firmly regarded the True Believers as terrorists! They believed that the figure who possessed the same DNA as the prophet should have never existed in the first place!

Yet now, under the influence of the aura emanating from the prototype, the Ylvainans didn't exhibit any of their disgust towards the self-proclaimed incarnation of the prophet right now!

The living prophet smiled. "It is presumptuous for the Curins, Kronons and Poxcos to cast judgement on my Martyred Follower without asking the true leading dynasty of the Protectorate!"

Ves felt like he wanted to puke. Who the hell was his Martyred Follower!? Ves didn't even agree to his latest title, but now even the living prophet accepted this interpretation!

Just as everyone in the courtroom was glued to the projection, the courtroom doors suddenly opened!

Escorted by a number of very tense Protector guards, the living prophet himself entered the room in the flesh!

"For this reason, I have forced the inquisition to accept a deal!" He spoke. The voice from his body echoed with the voice from the projection! "In exchange for letting me enter the courtroom and join the bench, I will place myself at their mercy! I do this for the good of my people and my beliefs!"

What?! Ves and every Ylvainan experienced yet another shock!

Chapter 1236 Bright Martyr

Ves didn't know what kind of deal that the living prophet had struck in order to be allowed to enter the courtroom.

Even though he claimed to be the current incarnation of Prophet Ylvaine, the authorities all considered him to be a terrorist leader and a menace to society!

He should have never been allowed to walk in the open like this, let alone barge into the courtroom of an incredibly sensitive tribunal!

To the Ylvainan Inquisition, the living prophet was their biggest enemy! The New Ylvaine Dynasty he headed was responsible for leading many Ylvainans astray! His very existence as an organically-grown clone of the true prophet was a walking violation of the orthodox faith!

Yet as the living prophet calmly entered the courtroom and approached the bench, none of the Protectors or the inquisitorial staff on guard moved to halt the terrorist.

They received instructions to leave him alone!

Both High Inquisitor Xefin Lin Poxco and High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco glared at the living prophet. Their hands were itching to strangle the bogeyman of the Protectorate. Yet their superiors already issued their orders! The living prophet was allowed to join the bench!

As for Ves, he couldn't even fathom why the supposedly risk-averse living prophet decided to expose himself all of a sudden. He heard that the living prophet was delusional, but this was something else!

Every Ylvainan remained silent as the living prophet finally took his seat. His presence contrasted starkly against the other three judges.

The sight was so incongruous to many Ylvainans that they even forgot about the prototype for a moment!

The living prophet benevolently smiled. "My fellow Ylvainans. While I have many things to say to you, I have promised to keep this short. I am here today to issue my own judgement. I have already predicted what would come to pass this day. I cannot allow my Bright Martyr to be subjected to persecution by my own flock!"

Many people doubted his claim. Ves momentarily expressed some doubts as well. Did the living prophet really predict the tribunal would proceed in this fashion? It might explain why the living prophet smuggled himself onto

Kesseling VIII ahead of time! It also explained why the True Believers exerted so much effort into stealing the first prototype!

Perhaps the living prophet truly foresaw the need to intervene in this fashion!

Yet Ves quickly shook his head as his habitual skepticism asserted itself.

There was no way this delusional clone could predict the future!

Ves wasn't gullible enough to buy this story. He suspected that the living prophet moved to Kesseling VIII and stole the prototype for other reasons. Yet once the tribunal took place, the living prophet must have seen an opportunity to make a splash and spontaneously decided to join the fun!

This possibility sounded much more likely than the claim that the living prophet foresaw everything!

The living prophet continued with his speech. "My will to be defied! The Ylvainan Inquisition is doing their best to stifle the revelations spoken by my chosen vessel, but I cannot allow them to proceed with their transgression! Let me be clear. The Bright Martyr is innocent! I acquit him of both charges!"

This judgement didn't surprise anyone. His attitude towards Ves already expressed his inclination! As long as the tribunal accepted the living prophet as its fourth judge, then that meant that the majority was in favor of acquitting Ves!

Ves would be allowed to walk out of the court building alive and free!

Yet would the Ylvainan Inquisition really accept the judgement of a terrorist leader without doing anything to stop it? Ves and many Ylvainans continued to listen with rapt attention as the living prophet commanded everyone's attention!

"The Bright Martyr may have admitted to taking away and promptly destroying the object enshrined in one of my cathedrals, but as far as I am concerned, he

has not committed any sacrilege! What the Bright Martyr has confessed to was something that really should have been done in the first place! As much as all of you revere me, it is absurd of you to worship my trash! As far as I'm concerned, the nutrient pack wrapper should have been destroyed a long time ago!"

Many Ylvainans looked at the living prophet strangely as he offered this explanation. To those who weren't sympathetic to the living prophet, they truly became astonished by how deeply the clone believed he was the actual prophet!

Part of the reason why most Ylvainans hadn't become swayed by the living prophet's claims was that the man lacked the sacred aura emanated by the prototype.

While the living prophet was an excellent speaker and knew how to handle a crowd, he didn't exhibit any of the gravitas carried by Ves during his tirade.

It was like watching a clown wearing the costume of the prophet! If not for his current role in saving the Bright Martyr's life, most Ylvainans would have hurled insults at him already!

"As for the second accusation, I think the Bright Martyr's work speaks for itself! Does the inquisition truly dare to declare the mech that is standing outside this courtroom to be a blasphemous existence?"

High Inquisitor Xefin Lin Poxco kept his head down and did not offer any reaction to the living prophet's attack.

He really didn't dare to speak against the Transcendent Messenger design when a copy of the mech made many Ylvainans feel as if they were in touch with Ylvaine's will once again!

"The Ylvaine Protectorate has entered into dire straits." The living prophet grimly warned. "Even as my children continue to bicker amongst themselves,

you are all blind to the threats outside our borders! The Star Faith Collective is the least you should be worried about!"

Many Ylvainans expressed a lot of surprise when they heard this. Ves himself thought that the living prophet was one of the most extreme proponents of the traditionalist agenda. Who knew he was actually more inclined towards the reformers!

"Mechs are the ultimate weapons of war! This age is defined by them, and the ages following it will always offer a place to them! It is my will that the Protectorate should learn how to harness this weapon better. As the Bright Martyr is also a mech designer, I have tasked him with a holy mission to enlighten you all to what mechs our people truly need! Take a good look at the mech standing outside, and you will know the difference!"

Ves didn't know whether he should appreciate the free advertising or not. Having a terrorist promote his mechs was a mixed blessing!

Still, even if most Ylvainans didn't believe in the living prophet, they accepted his acknowledgement of the mech. It truly appeared as a blessed creation!

At this time, High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco couldn't help but interrupt. "Your time is almost up."

The living prophet smirked at her. "Impatient, are we? It is insulting for the inquisition to regard me with so much skepticism. While I truly want to teach you all a lesson, I do not require nor demand your obedience. I have never forced anyone to become my follower and I never will! Unfortunately for you inquisitors, while I have agreed to place myself at your mercy, I did not specify in which state!"

High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco's quickly suspected what was about to happen. "No! Protectors! Restrain this terrorist!"

It was too late! Even before the high inquisitor reached out to grab the madman, the living prophet cackled madly as he pressed a button on his comm!

"Hahahaha! Do not be afraid, my children! I will return to you once again!"

His entire body lit up in flames! The fire that engulfed the living prophet was so hot and scorching that the other judges on the bench immediately jumped away as best they could!

The hand of High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco suffered an awful burn as she hastily drew it back! If she hadn't reacted faster, her arm and the rest of her body would have gone up in smoke as well!

The accelerants the living prophet carried burned the clone so thoroughly that even the fastest fire suppressant couldn't do anything to save the terrorist's life!

The self-proclaimed incarnation of the prophet and the delusional head of the New Ylvaine Dynasty sacrificed his life without any hesitation!

As the Protector guards tried to assert control over all of the unrest that ensued, Ves and many of the Ylvainans watching the proceedings didn't know what to think anymore!

Ves was thoroughly confused. The moment the living prophet entered the courtroom, he was already destined to fall into the hands of the authorities. His subsequent treatment in their hands would definitely be awful, because despite his many claims to innocence, the True Believers were still terrorists who killed many Ylvainans over the years!

From this perspective, Ves understood that the living prophet would rather die than suffer through the indignities that the Ylvainan Inquisition had in store for him. Since he would definitely die in their custody, he might as well make another point and die on his own terms!

Yet why did the living prophet feel the need to sacrifice his comfortable life on the behalf of Ves? Did the living prophet delude himself into thinking that standing up to Ves would help him and his forbidden dynasty?

"There's little point in guessing the motives of a madman." He whispered to himself. "The living prophet is too crazy to comprehend!"

Regardless of the reason why the living prophet behaved so altruistically, Ves shouldn't look at this holy gift horse in the mouth! He directly benefited from this selfless and seemingly benign intervention!

Ves glanced towards the judges.

High Inquisitor Kelly Ixef Poxco looked pained and furious. She glanced at the pile of ashes that used to be the most infamous Ylvainan in the state as if she wanted to burn it again!

However, the living prophet was already dead, and there was no way she could extract any information out of the man. She currently looked back at her severely-burned arm as Protector medics applied emergency treatment to triage the wound.

The other two judges looked uncomfortable, but they didn't do anything else. While Judge Kelber Kronon quietly conferred with the Protector guard captain, Judge Okin Fillis quietly exited the courtroom while everyone else was distracted!

The lawyer sitting next to Ves jerked. "Now that Judge Fillis has left, the tribunal is over! The verdict it has issued should be final!"

Ves looked hopeful. "Does that mean.."

"The vote is two against one in favor of acquittal! Congratulations, Mr. Larkinson! You are free!"

The word quickly spread among the Ylvainans in the gallery. Many of them stood up and cheered!

"The Bright Martyr is saved!"

"The living prophet redeemed himself before he died!"

"This is absurd! Why should we accept the judgement of a terrorist?! The foreigner is guilty! He deserves to be executed!"

Although not every Ylvainan supported the narrative that Ves was a vessel of the prophet, the ones who believed in the Bright Martyr enthusiastically supported this result!

The entire city district that hosted the court building erupted into festivity as the millions of citizens who took to the streets celebrated the outcome of this epochal tribunal!

The Ylvaine Protectorate would never be the same from this day onwards!

No matter how much the stubborn inquisitors, Poxcos and traditionalists opposed this development, they could hardly reverse the verdict.

Too many people believed the Bright Martyr! With one of his mechs continually allowing everyone to bask in its sacred presence, the amount of people who sided with Ves continued to grow!

It was no longer possible for the Ylvainan Inquisition to invalidate the living prophet's judgement and change the verdict!

"You should be free to go now, Mr. Larkinson!" The lawyer happily declared as he regarded Ves with an increasingly more intense stare. "Or should I say the Bright Martyr? It is an honor to represent the newest Martyred Follower!"

Ves became increasingly disturbed by his counsel! It was as if the lawyer couldn't wait to kiss his shoes!

"Aren't the Martyred Followers regarded as such posthumously?" Ves asked. "You Ylvainans only started calling them that after they died one after another during the First Calamity and the Great Flight."

A martyr was someone who died due to their beliefs! Ves valued his life to an incredible degree, so he would rather not be called by this ridiculous name!

Unfortunately, his lawyer and many other Ylvainans disagreed!

"Even if you die today, you will still be the Bright Martyr to us! You have already made your contributions!"

Chapter 1237 Superpower

Practically no one expected this day to end in this fashion.

No one except the living prophet perhaps.

Through this rollercoaster of a tribunal, Ves turned from the biggest enemy of the state into a revered figure!

Naturally, not every Ylvainan thought the same of him. There were plenty of Ylvainans who maintained their skepticism against him.

Those who hadn't watched the broadcasts believed that Ves had used some kind of sorcery or technological gadget to charm the more gullible Ylvainans into believing he was a saint!

The upper levels of the leading dynasties also exhibited a lot more reserve. Unlike the average citizens, the leaders of the Protectorate possessed a higher vision. The shepherds weren't as impressionable as the sheep.

Nonetheless, enough people bought the story that Ves became the Bright Martyr that there was very little anyone could do to dispel this belief!

As Ves looked out from the opaque windows at the upper level of the courtyard building, he beheld the monster that he had inadvertently unleashed!

"BRIGHT MARTYR! BRIGHT MARTYR! BRIGHT MARTYR!"

In front of his stolen prototype, a crowd of millions religiously chanted his new moniker. The authorities feebly tried to maintain order over the spontaneous mob, but there was very little they could do to stop the masses.

Viewing the masses with his own eyes and feeling the collective euphoria they exhibited was extremely scary to him. Ves had kicked up a much bigger fuss than he intended!

"To think that the citizens of Kesseling VIII used to hate me the most." He muttered.

Due to the machinations of the Curin Dynasty, almost every Ylvainan managed to follow what had happened inside and outside the court building. Even if the media outlets aligned with the other two dynasties shut down the broadcasts, the enthralled Ylvainans merely switched over to the media outlets operated by the Curins!

This enabled the reform-minded dynasty to shape the opinions of a much wider audience than before!

If not for this proactive media manipulation, this crowd of millions wouldn't have emerged!

While the Ylvainans who lived on other planets didn't spontaneously leave their homes to celebrate on the streets, the enthusiasm there was just as euphoric!

Many citizens of the Protectorate shared the sentiment that they were witness to a new page of history!

After centuries of isolation and stagnation, a new Martyred Follower had emerged! Not only that, but many Ylvainans received a deep shock to their systems as they witnessed the Bright Martyr speak the voice of the prophet!

This pivotal moment in the courtroom invigorated the faith in the hearts of many Ylvainans!

Although the Bright Martyr mostly expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction, the belief that Prophet Ylvaine himself had descended to the mortal realm to do so made the pain all too bittersweet!

The prophet was alive! The prophet still cared! The prophet expected more from his children!

These beliefs and more propagated in such a swift fashion that the Attendants of Ylvaine failed to shape the narrative in their favor! The hysteria that had erupted all over the Protectorate was like a beast that couldn't be tamed!

As one of the principal instigators of this collective, state-wide hysteria, Ves gained a very different status after his acquittal.

"At the very least, no one cares about the holy relic anymore."

He originally intended to weasel his way out of a guilty verdict. He managed to accomplish that and more!

A Protectorate guard officer entered the room. With a case in hand. Once he arrived in front of Ves, the case opened up, revealing the belongings confiscated by the inquisition.

Ves took back his Peaceful Repose, his toolbelt, his regular comm, his shield generator and some other odds and ends. It felt good to have some actual protection on his body again.

"Mr. Larkinson, your transportation has been arranged. Due to safety concerns, we will bring you out of Krent through an underground evacuation route. We'll escort you to a secure facility under the management of the Curin Dynasty."

At least this Ylvainan didn't call him the Bright Martyr for once.

"Very well. Let's go."

None of the authorities wanted him to step outside the court building to address the crowd. Not only couldn't his safety be guaranteed, but they were also afraid that Ves would use his new status as the Bright Martyr to influence public opinion further!

Under the lead of his escorts, Ves boarded a heavy-duty shuttle escorted by several companies of mechs and set off towards his new accommodation.

Due to all of the unrest in Krent, the Protectors arranged for him to be moved out of the capital city. All of his staff and Avatars had moved from the guest compound to the new location ahead of time.

He arrived at the highly-guarded villa reserved for esteemed guests with a small amount of fanfare!

"Ves! You're finally back!" Ketis cheered while waving Lucky in her hands. "Look! Lucky missed you too!"

The cat limply meowed.

Ves chuckled. "I missed you too, Lucky."

"You worried us all today, cousin!" Melkor said with evident relief at Ves' return. "I have no idea what possessed you to steal that stupid relic, but please don't do something like that again! The entire Larkinson Family is depending on you to rise to a higher station!"

"Haha, don't worry Melkor. It takes more than that to kill me, you know!"

"I don't know how you managed to convince so many Ylvainas in believing that you're divine, but it's practically pandemonium out there!" Gavin exclaimed with both panic and excitement in his eyes. "Regardless of how you did it, the popularity of your mechs has surged! The orders the LMC has

received from the Protectorate has quadrupled! The demand for the Transcendent Messenger has broken into a higher dimension!"

"Benny, I know you're excited at all of the business opportunities that opened up, but let's not be too hasty. Besides, I'm not going to change my mind about the Transcendent Messenger. It's a commissioned design that has never been intended for the market."

After he finished greeting all of his friends, Ves entered the villa and settled down.

Just as Ves wanted to have a moment for himself, Ketis came up to him with a coy smile while hugging Lucky.

"I want to talk to you about something. Lucky, can you activate that ECM field of yours?"

"Meow."

The field quickly took shape around them. Ves found it curious that Ketis found out that Lucky possessed this ability.

"I figured out your superpower!" She proudly claimed.

"Meow!"

"You see? Even Lucky agrees!"

Ves directed a questioning glance at her. "I don't have any superpowers. I'm just a mech designer."

"Don't lie to me, Ves! I've followed in your footsteps for several years, and I've seen your power in action several times!"

"This must be good." He chuckled good-naturedly. "Okay then."

"Your superpower is charm! You're an incubus!" She proudly declared!

This guess caused Ves to be taken aback. Charm? Incubus?

"Ridiculous! I'm not an incubus!"

Ketis huffed. "Hmph! Whatever! I still nailed your superpower! Don't lie to me! Remember when you defeated the Blind Men by ranting at them? Remember when you burned that heckling professor during the Aurora Titan's product reveal? Now you've managed to charm half the Ylvaine Protectorate!"

This was ridiculous! Ves continually shook his head. "The only reason the Ylvainans were so taken in by my arguments is because the Curins went all-out in propagandizing my words. They deserve the bulk of the credit for causing this storm. I'm just—"

"—a mech designer." Ketis finished before she widened her eyes. "Maybe that's the source of your superpowers! Mayra was kind of weird in a way as well, but she hid her powers a lot better than you! Do you think that I'll develop my own superpower when I advance to Journeyman?!"

"Don't be silly, Ketis! Mech designers aren't superheroes!"

"Do all of you high-ranking mech designers decided to keep your powers a secret? Don't worry, Ves, I won't tell anymore! I'll be joining your ranks soon when I develop my own superpower! When I advance to Journeyman, I want my superpower to make my weapons sharp! Sharp enough to cut through anything!"

The fantasies that Ketis entertained right now grew wilder and more unrealistic by the second! If every high-ranking mech designer could express their design philosophies into a superpower, then they wouldn't be known as cowards!

Her anticipation grew stronger! In her mind, she was already imagining herself as a swordswoman who could cut through mech armor with a single swing of her weapon!

Ves swatted her head in admonishment, deforming the poofy beret on her head. "While I like the drive you exhibit, you shouldn't entertain these crazy fantasies of yours. Superpowers don't exist."

"What do you call the stuff that expert pilots can do with their expert mechs?"

"There's an explanation behind their abilities. We just haven't fully figured out the metaphysics behind their workings."

"Metaphysics is just another word for superpowers!" Ketis fiercely stated.

"High-ranking mech pilots are already capable of subverting natural laws. I used to believe that mech designers aren't capable of imitating their powers, but watching you in action changed my mind! Your design philosophy basically gives you the ability to charm people through your mechs, right? It's not that big of a leap to believe you can apply your design philosophy to yourself! That must be the secret behind your superpower!"

Ves had to admit that Ketis developed a very logical chain of arguments. Even though Ves wanted to dismiss her speculation, in truth she came uncomfortably close to explaining the mechanics behind the operation of his design philosophy and some of his spiritual techniques!

Even though she ultimately missed the mark, Ves found it disconcerting that Ketis was so astute!

"I think you're misunderstanding something here, Ketis. Journeyman Mech Designers and higher aren't in some kind of conspiracy to keep our superpowers hidden. The truth is much more modest. Our understanding of our respective specialties allows us to harness and manipulate certain metaphysical phenomena and interactions. Since my focus is mainly aimed towards the mech pilot, I've become quite skilled at manipulating audiences."

"You can downplay your superpowers all you want, but I'm not blind! Even Lucky possesses his own superpower! I've seen how he can phase through

stuff. If a mechanical pet can develop superpowers, then so can I! I'll show you what I can do once I advance to Journeyman myself!"

Was Ketis always this headstrong? Nothing Ves could say would change her mind on this point!

In the end, he just threw up his hands. "Fine! I'll wait until you advance before you show off your so-called superpower. Don't be disappointed when your sword is just as sharp as before!"

It didn't do much harm to entertain her delusion. She looked more passionate and motivated about advancing her profession than ever! As long as her aspiration encouraged her to work harder, then Ves was more than willing to entertain her suspicions.

By the time she advanced to Journeyman and found out that her 'superpower' was actually a whole bunch of nothing, she would at least be able to console herself with her improved mech design abilities!

Ves ignored her ramblings and turned his attention to Lucky. "Did you have a good time while I was gone?"

"Meow!"

"Pff! You don't have to sound so ungrateful! I won't feed you with awful stuff anymore, I promise!"

"Meow meow!"

"Oh come on, am I that untrustworthy?"

Lucky hissed at him before squirming his body around to hug Ketis tighter.

Even though Ves had just survived a crisis, Lucky still hadn't forgiven him yet!

"By the way Ves, now that this whole circus is behind us, will we go home soon?"

Ves nodded. "I'll just have to formally hand over the mechs to Madame Cecily and wrap up my business before we go. This place is too crazy!"

Chapter 1238 Peace Offering

Hours after Ves arrived at his secluded villa, a heavily-guarded shuttle passed through the strict security perimeter.

An important guest had arrived.

Moments later, Calabast entered his room and activated four different signal jamming and shielding devices! The amount of precautions she took this time was double than before!

"Aren't you getting a little overboard?" Ves raised his eyebrow.

"I see you don't fully understand your new situation, kid. If you think that I'm being excessive, then you're severely underestimating how many people are interested in you right now! This entire villa is stuffed with sensors and recording devices! I'll leave you with some of my jammers, because you'll need it if you want to enjoy any measure of privacy."

Ves frowned when he heard that. "Is it that bad?"

"You're the most scrutinized person in the Protectorate right now. There is an army of thousands digging up your record and your history. As the 'Bright Martyr' who emerged in a spectacular fashion today, the amount of influence and soft power you possess is extremely huge!"

"You don't sound happy with that. Aren't you the person who came up with this stupid monikor in the first place?"

Calabast smiled deprecatingly at him. "Ah, at least you understand the efforts I've made on your behalf. While it's true that I prepared a number of plans depending on how the tribunal plays out, I didn't expect you to be so charismatic and so compelling to the Ylvainans! Your impact on the locals exceeded my expectations! Do you think that's good? It's not! The emergence

of the Bright Martyr has disrupted the existing power balance that has long held sway in the Protectorate!"

The severity of her words finally hit home to Ves. "Are the leaders of the Protectorate afraid that I'll take over or something?"

"You should know how significant the Martyred Followers used to be. They served as the standard bearers and figureheads of the Ylvainan Faith during their lifetimes! They enjoyed Prophet Ylvaine's trust, giving each of them a very wide latitude on how to lead the faithful!"

Ves understood the severity of her words. "That time is over. The great prophet and his dynasty are gone while the Martyred Followers only exist in the history books and scriptures now. The Ylvainan people only look up to the Curins, the Kronons and the Poxcos for leadership these days."

"And they aren't very keen on giving up the power they've gained over the years. Even if half of the common folk believe that you're the Bright Martyr, that doesn't mean a consensus has emerged. The elders of the leading dynasties are only a couple of decisions away from ordering you killed in order to prevent a foreigner from taking over the Protectorate!"

"How absurd! What do they think I am? They're basically treating me like the living prophet, but with a lot more open support!"

"That's a good comparison to make. You already know how the leading dynasties abhor the living prophet. Now that a more credible figure has emerged who has taken advantage of the beliefs of the common folk, your threat surpasses that of the living prophet!"

"I think it's best for all of us if I leave the Protectorate, then." Ves concluded. "My job is already done here anyway. There's no reason for me to stick around."

"Agreed. The Ylvainan Inquisition has already released the set of six mechs into my care, but..."

"But what?"

"Their ownership is a matter of contention."

"What do you mean, Calabast?"

"The impact your prototype has made on the public has surpassed everyone's expectations, my own included! Now that many Ylvainans have learned that there are six other mechs that are almost exactly like it, all of the factions in the Protectorate want to own a Transcendent Messenger!"

"I didn't make my mechs for those bastards!" Ves said with indignation.

"I don't have any other choice." Calabast said helplessly. "The six mechs you've named after virtues are so special that it's impossible for me to retain possession of them. Offering them up to the leading dynasties will at least allow us temper their greed and ease some of their fears towards you. Right now, the plan is to donate two of your mechs to each of the three dynasties as a peace offering."

This didn't sound very fair to him. Ves had done nothing wrong. Why should he be forced to bribe the leading dynasties to ensure his safety? Shouldn't his status as a Bright Martyr afford him more respect?

Sadly, no matter how much he objected to this concession, Ves had no choice. He attracted too much heat!

"How are the mechs going to be allocated?"

"The three dynasties already hashed the allocation themselves. The Poxco Dynasty demands both Justice and Zeal."

That caused Ves to frown. "I understand why they want to obtain Zeal. It's the most zealous of the six mechs. But Justice? Really? After the travesty of their tribunal?"

"It's exactly because the Ylvainan Inquisition has tarnished their reputation that the Poxcos prioritize Justice. They want to repair and redeem the reputation of the inquisition, and what better way than to adopt Justice as their totem?"

"This is absurd!" Ves exclaimed. "The inquisition wanted to kill me! Now they suddenly want to take advantage of one of my prized mechs, something which they accused of being blasphemous! Have they no shame?"

"They don't. The inquisition is in such a bad state that they have set aside their shame in order to regain public trust. Before you object any further, you should look on the bright side. If the inquisition plans to make use of your mechs to repair their reputation, they are indirectly reinforcing your legitimacy as the Bright Martyr. This means that they'll be very reluctant to touch you again!"

"...Ah. You're right."

The Ylvainan Inquisition couldn't denounce Ves if they proudly paraded two of his custom mechs. While Ves detested the inquisition, he really didn't want to tangle with them again!

Calabast moved on. "The Kronon Dynasty has accumulated their own grievances against you. The lower ranks of the Protectors of the Faith are very supportive of your viewpoints, but the higher ranks are displeased that you've painted them as stodgy and out of touch."

"It's the truth."

"Even if it's the truth, the Kronons didn't like it when you aired their dirty laundry. Even now, they are catching a lot of flack from the public due to

Kelber Kronon's controversial judgement. In order for them to regain their high esteem, they requested that we hand over Courage and Sacrifice."

"Well, at least they have good taste." He commented. "Courage fits best with the military, and Sacrifice is a mech that stands for their most important ideals."

Despite his criticism, Ves did not detest the Kronon Dynasty. They reminded him of the Larkinson Family but at a much greater scale. Their faults were rather mild as their intentions had always been good.

"This leaves Perseverance and Devotion to the Curins. The virtues that stand for these mechs may not be the most exciting, but they are very useful in helping the Shepherds of the Flock control the masses. The elders are pleased that they receive these two mechs as payment for all of the support they've given to us. We're pretty much even now."

Ves snorted. "How generous of them. As if my contributions to the reform agenda isn't enough. With everything that happened today, the traditionalists can't do anything to stop the reforms!"

"While that's true, the Protectorate will always remain divided." Calabast retorted. "While I'm sure the reform agenda will be able to ram through some impactful policy shifts, the Ylvainans are very conservative as a whole, so I'm sure the traditionalists will eventually bounce back. The gains you've made on behalf of the reform agenda aren't as big as you think."

He understood that he would be able to make more gains if he took advantage of his new status as the Bright Martyr, but that would ruffle too many feathers. It was better for him to step off the stage and let the Protectorate return to normality.

As Ves made peace with the distribution of mechs, he suddenly remembered an important detail.

"There's also the prototype." He recalled. "Please tell me it's back in our possession. Even if the True Believers did a good job of repairing it, it's still an incomplete mech! It has to be destroyed as soon as possible!"

Calabast looked reluctant all of a sudden, which wasn't a good sign. "About that, Ves..."

"What's the matter?"

"Part of the agreement the living prophet has made with the three leading dynasties is that they are allowed to take your prototype away from the Kesseling System!"

"What?! How could the authorities let the terrorists get away with my mech!?"

Even if the living prophet did him a huge favor for some inexplicable reason, Ves would not forgive them if they wanted to continue to make use of his prototype! It wasn't representative of the Transcendent Messenger at all! Its design contained too many flaws and weak points!

"We have no choice, Ves. When the living prophet made his demand, he threatened to order his men to attack the crowd that had gathered outside the courtroom! A river of blood would have flowed through the streets if the True Believers let loose on the crowd without any reservations!"

That was indeed a very serious threat. Ves understood why the authorities conceded the prototype to the fanatics. Although the decision left an awful taste in his mouth, he liked it even less if hundreds of thousands of Ylvainans died just because the True Believers didn't get to keep their new toy.

Still, the idea of terrorists parading the purest if primitive incarnation of the Transcendent Messenger around really did not sit well with him! If not for their extreme beliefs which put much credence to their threats, Ves would rather wish the authorities called their bluff.

"Do you know why the living prophet personally came and vouched for me at the tribunal?" He asked. "There shouldn't be any reason at all for him to stick up for me. I haven't done anything to advance the interests of the True Believers."

Calabast shrugged. "It's a mystery to us as well. The living prophet has always been erratic. That's what happens when you raise a pampered designer clone who has been taught that he's the living incarnation of a great historical figure. I don't have access to any intelligence on the New Ylvaine Dynasty, so it's hard to say what their calculus is. Personally, I think that the living prophet was already reaching the end of his life."

"Is that all?"

"Some of the analysts I've contacted believe the True Believers already prepared a successor. A newer, younger clone of the prophet has already been groomed to take over the organization."

"I see."

That explained why the living prophet disregarded his life in order to grandstand and advertise for the True Believers.

"Wait a minute, does that mean that two living prophets existed at the same time? How the hell do the True Believers justify something like that?"

"They are both the same person as far as the True Believers are concerned. The great prophet is infinitely powerful. Who says that he can only occupy a single body?" Calabast smirked.

Those fanatics could come up with any explanation to justify their odd decisions.

Although Ves and Calabast shared some of their guesses, neither of them could make up their mind why the living prophet purposefully stood up for Ves. For all they knew, the living prophet truly foresaw something in the future.

Of course, Ves did not put much stock in this possibility.

The two moved on. Calabast handed over a data pad to Ves to address some formalities. As Ves signed all of the documents, he officially completed the commission.

"Hopefully, this will put an end to all of the recent excitement." She said after taking back the data pad. "While you're a free man, I suggest you depart from the Kesseling System tomorrow. Staying any longer here will expose you to a lot of risks. I'll help take care of your future business on this end."

Ves nodded and smiled. "I get it. I'm looking forward to leaving the Protectorate as well."

This wild adventure finally came to an end. Ves could not wait to return to the Bright Republic! At least the people there were sane!

Chapter 1239 Infamy

During the evening, Ves watched the news broadcasts in order to get an idea on the overall sentiment of the Protectorate.

The excitement hadn't died down at all. Billions of Ylvainans were convinced that Ves was the Bright Martyr!

This was a frightening amount of people, and this estimate only encompassed the most ardent believers!

"The Ylvainans have always revered the Martyred Followers." Gavin commented from the side. "Each Martyr was a personal companion of Prophet Ylvaine. Accepting you as the Bright Martyr implies that you possess a personal connection to the most revered figure in their faith. It's a way of

convincing themselves that their dead prophet is still watching over them through your eyes."

"I know. It's human psychology at work. Even if they aren't comfortable about foreigners, they're willing to pretend that I'm the Bright Martyr if that means they can feel great about coming into touch with the prophet himself during the tribunal."

Even now, many scientists, priests and theologians puzzled over what exactly happened when Ves spoke out at that moment.

They could scratch their heads all day. The longer the mystery remained unsettled, the longer the belief in the Bright Martyr settled into the minds of the Ylvainans.

By now, Ves was pretty much resigned to his awful nickname. Even Calabast who came up with it couldn't do anything to rein it in anymore.

"What does the Bright Republic think about what happened in the Protectorate, Benny?"

Gavin adopted a weird expression. "Well.. not a lot of Brighters paid attention to the events that took place here. It's only when you managed to upend the entire Protectorate that a lot more foreign news portals started to report on the matter. While they aren't as gullible as the Ylvainans, they're very amazed at your ability to cause such a huge change. I don't know what the other states think about you, but the reaction from the Bright Republic is rather mixed."

Ves sighed. "Getting involved in this religious mumbo jumbo hasn't done my reputation any good, right?"

"You already built up a considerably controversial track record. Adding this crazy incident on top of your previous famous moments has pretty much solidified your image as a celebrity mech designer."

What?!

"That makes it sound like I'm famous because I'm an attention grabber rather than a good mech designer!"

"I'm sorry, boss, but no other mech designer can come close to the amount of controversies you've incited in recent times. I think what has happened here in the Protectorate put the final nail in the coffin."

"Goddammit!" Ves let out a frustrated grunt.

"It's not all that bad, boss. You're more famous than several Senior Mech Designers. You don't have to exert too much effort to attract a lot of publicity. This can be very useful whenever you want to promote a new mech model!"

"That's true, I guess. I still prefer to be known for my excellent mech designs. Can't I at least enjoy some respect?"

"Celebrity mech designers sell a lot more mechs than regular mech designers, boss. A lot of mech designers want to be in your shoes. There's only one problem."

Ves narrowed his eyes. "What's the matter?"

"Famous mech designers are often referred to by a nickname. While some of the Brighter media outlets started calling you the Bright Martyr, in general that has fallen flat. Our people aren't superstitious like the Ylvainans. Therefore, the gossipers reporting on our stories tried a variety of nicknames before they all came to a consensus."

From Gavin's reluctance, Ves had a feeling that his new nickname wasn't very flattering.

"Get out with it, Benny."

"They decided to call you the Devil Tongue."

"..."

Ves froze for a couple of seconds. If the Brighter publications wanted to come up with a nickname for him, they could at least emphasize his strengths as a mech designer!

Calling him the Mech Artist or the Pilot Whisperer or something at least gave his customers a good impression of his products!

A name like the Devil Tongue did nothing to help him promote his mechs! Ves thought that being known as the Bright Martyr was bad enough, but being known as the Devil Tongue was worse!

Who wanted to buy a mech designed by a mech designer called the Devil Tongue!?

"At least the Skull Architect sounds classy!" Ves loudly lamented. "Why the hell did the publications settle on this stupid nickname? It doesn't represent who I am at all!"

Gavin shrugged. "From what I've learned, the journalists focused on the times when you verbally scorched your opposition. The times when you defended yourself against Professor Pendleton and berated the Ylvainans were so remarkable that you've gained a reputation as the worst person to get into an argument! No one is able to win a debate against you! It seems that everyone who tried got burned!"

"And that's the reason for calling me the Devil Tongue? That makes it sound as if I'm evil!"

"To some Brighters, you are. Not only did you verbally humiliate a Senior in his face, but you also managed to manipulate the beliefs of the Ylvainans and swindled them into believing that you're their Bright Martyr! Calling you the Devil Tongue is quite generous compared to the other nicknames they've bandied about. Be glad they didn't call you the Great Deceiver!"

Okay. From a marketing perspective, being known as the Great Deceiver was a lot worse, Ves had to admit that at least!

"So what does this mean for the LMC's business prospects? Are people still as eager to buy my mechs when it's led by someone who is known as the Devil Tongue?"

"As I said, your status as a celebrity mech designer is very valuable. No matter how many controversies you're involved in, you'll always be able to sell more mechs than your peers. As long as your mechs aren't awful, I don't think you'll have any difficulty outperforming competing Journeymen."

It turned out that the public didn't take the moniker too seriously. Everyone treated it in a playful fashion, as if Ves was just a little devil instead of a big devil.

Most people could avoid the scorching ire of the Devil Tongue as long as they remained friendly. Only his enemies suffered the brunt of his tirades!

"Well, that doesn't sound so bad." Ves muttered.

"It's a great development. Your public persona is a very powerful asset as long as you manage it properly. Celebrity mech designers enjoy a lot of advantages. It's too bad that most of your fame is confined to the Bright Republic and Ylvaine Protectorate."

Overall, the fame or rather infamy he gained cemented him as a fire spitter in person, but didn't change the perception of his mechs. Ves felt a small amount of relief at that. It meant he wasn't pigeonholed into a certain style of mech design.

"What do you think about what happened here, Benny?"

"Me?"

"Yeah."

"Hmmm..." Gavin paused for a bit as Ves idly watched the muted local media broadcasts. "I think you did everything you could to beat the accusations. If I was in your place, I wouldn't have been able to do anything to prevent the inquisition from executing you. One of the reasons why the journalists from the Bright Republic have started calling you the Devil Tongue is that you managed to reverse an impossible situation by opening your mouth! One of the underlying ideas behind it is that only a devil can distort the faith of so many devout believers!"

That still painted him as evil!

"I hope this trend will fade." Ves whispered.

"I don't think you'll be able to get rid of it. A lot of mech designers who received unflattering nicknames were stuck with them for life. You might as well embrace it and take advantage of the notoriety it conveys. You don't have to worry about facing any hecklers anymore in your future announcements and product reveals."

That didn't amount to much. Ves was always confident in his mech designs. Even if a heckler tried their best to disparage his products, they would always be useful to someone.

"What do you think about our business prospects in the Protectorate?" Ves asked.

"You've definitely opened up a lot of business opportunities in the Protectorate. So much so that I don't think we should take advantage of all of them. I think at this time it's better to show some restraint."

Ves raised his eyebrow. "Why?"

"First, as great as your mechs currently are, you don't offer anything close to a full range of products. A lot of Ylvainans want to buy your mechs, but they don't fully realize what they're actually getting. The mechs you've designed so

far are only applicable in very specific situations. Some of the customers who are caught up in the hype might end up regretting their purchase when they obtain a mech they don't actually need."

"What else?"

"You're just a recently-advanced Journeyman. While that puts you on top of the vast majority of mech designers, it doesn't give you a distinct advantage against other Journeyman and Seniors. While the Ylvainan mech industry is rather peculiar, they are very entrenched in the local mech market. If we grow too quickly and eat up enough market share to threaten their dominance, we'll be making a lot of enemies in the process. Bright Martyr or not, some of the Ylvainan mech designers will be so dissatisfied that they might resort to drastic action!"

Ves chuckled when he heard that. "Some mech designers can be like that. I think the local mech designers are even willing to kill Prophet Ylvaine himself if he threatens their market share!"

"Please don't make those kinds of jokes, boss."

The two returned to business. They discussed the plans to develop the joint venture owned by Ves and Calabast.

Now that his reputation in the Protectorate had been redeemed, the joint venture possessed a lot of promise!

Gavin noted something important. "Madame Cecily has been very proactive about recruiting staff for the joint venture. While this will help us lift the subsidiary from the ground, it also means that our local partner will be able to exert a disproportionate amount of control. If we don't want the joint venture to become immune to our control, then we should really hire a number of Brighters and preside over the joint venture."

"I trust you to take care of this matter." Ves dismissively waved his hand. "I don't care who the LMC assigns to the joint venture. If there are any visa problems, you can contact Madame Cecily or her staff to sort it out. She's got enough pull in the government to solve these kinds of problems."

After passing on his instructions concerning the joint venture, Ves focused his attention back home.

"Has anything remarkable happened to the LMC while I was indisposed?"

"Sales have spiked since your exploits here became known." Gavin reported. "Your new celebrity status is already showing its value. While our production lines are already running at full capacity, the extra orders provide the company with a lot more certainty for the future. It would be even better if we offer a greater variety of mech models."

"Soon, Benny, soon. It takes time to design a good mech. I don't plan to rush my designs, especially when we are so close to the next mech generation."

Now that he advanced to Journeyman, Ves began to realize that he should really do something about his anemic mech catalog.

"Oh yeah, I just remembered something." Gavin recalled. "Calsie told me that a 'mysterious' visitor had arrived at the Mech Nursery a month ago. The man insists on meeting you in person in order to pass along a confidential message. Calsie has reason to believe this isn't something trivial."

A mysterious message?

"What makes Calsie believe that this message is worth my attention?"

"The visitor is supposedly a 'friend' of yours from the frontier."

"Ah. I understand."

Chapter 1240 Courier Service

Ves and his entourage finally departed from Kesseling VIII after boarding the Barracuda. Melkor and the Avatars of Myth had already boarded the Greenfeather in orbit ahead of time.

This time, the Ylvainans pulled out all the stops to escort the Bright Martyr out of Protectorate space.

An entire Kronon spaceborn mech regiment served as their honor guard as the two ships directly charted a course back to the Bright Republic.

Such a luxurious lineup of combat carriers hosting over two-thousand mechs was unheard of in the Ylvaine Protectorate!

The fleet encountered no threats at all along the way. It wasn't easy for an enemy to muster up the forces to overcome all of the escorts protecting the Barracuda.

The Brighter vessels eventually crossed the border without incident.

The mech regiment stopped there, as it was wildly inappropriate for the Protectors of the Faith to operate in a foreign state.

Some Ylvainans suggested that the Bright Martyr deserved a permanent guard of Ylvainans, but Ves himself rejected any such solutions.

He didn't want to be surrounded by superstitious Ylvainans who worshipped him as a vessel of the prophet! Although he felt a bit flattered to be the subject of their worship, in the end Ves was not an Ylvainan!

His new status as their Bright Martyr gave him mixed feelings.

On one hand, the high regard it afforded him would practically open up the Ylvainan mech market wide open for the LMC.

On the other hand, the crazy Ylvainans would definitely attempt to pull him deeper into their faith and force him to participate in all kinds of stupid rituals!

Ves did not feel he deserved such exalted treatment. His identity of Bright Martyr was not as important as his identity as a mech designer. The former threatened to displace the latter, which was something he really didn't want to see.

Therefore, Ves was fine with going along with the intentions of the powers that be. As long as he left the Protectorate, his prominence there would slowly fade, allowing the three leading dynasties to reassert their leadership.

Naturally, the Bright Martyr would still be present in the hearts of many Ylvainans. A cult had already been formed around him, but Ves did not wish to have anything to do with those fanatics!

"You made a lot of gains from this business trip." Gavin reported to Ves in his stateroom. "You established a business relationship with an important member of the Curins, you delivered a set of fantastic mechs that the Ylvainans adopted as their national treasures, you turned into an object of religious hero worship and you completed your initial objective of designing your fifth original mech in order to qualify for recognition as a Journeyman Mech Designer."

Ves calmly nodded. "As far as I'm concerned, that last one is the most important gain. Let's not get too excited about all of those other gains. If there's anything we've learned about the Ylvainans, it's that they're volatile and erratic."

"Yeah, the Ylvainans are really something else. You would never see Brighters acting this extreme."

"Have you already submitted my application of recognition to the MTA?"

"Yes. The MTA has acknowledged your application and are in the process of inspecting your records and your mechs. It will probably take a couple more days for them to complete your background check and issue an invitation for

you to visit their sector headquarters at Centerpoint. They're being really thorough because you claim to have advanced to Journeyman before you turned thirty."

A Journeyman who advanced before he turned thirty years old was very rare, even in the galactic center. The earlier they crossed this threshold, the more promise they held.

Although a Journeyman was already quite valuable, they were not irreplaceable. What the MTA truly valued was the potential for even greater advancement.

What kind of benefits this status afforded Ves still remained to be seen. That was the entire point of visiting the MTA's sector headquarters.

In the perspective of the Big Two, Ves was no longer a space peasant! Once the MTA officially recognized his Journeyman credentials, he could call himself a proper galactic citizen!

What that actually meant, Ves didn't know, but it sounded a lot better than being called a space peasant!

"My thirtieth birthday is coming up." Ves noted. "Maybe I should throw a birthday party for once. It's been a while."

Gavin suddenly perked up. "We can turn it into a company-wide event! It's a great opportunity to celebrate our recent successes and paint a bright picture for the future. With a Journeyman like you at the helm, the LMC will definitely climb to greater heights!"

"I don't know, Benny. I don't want to turn my birthday into a spectacle. I'm already tired of all the attention that I've received in the Ylvaine Protectorate. I don't want to turn my workforce into my personal cult as well!"

"I think you're overestimating their reactions, boss. Most of the company's employees are Brighters, not Ylvainans. Their admiration towards you won't exceed into obsession. That's not who we are. We know better!"

"Don't turn my birthday into a public spectacle." Ves firmly ordered, no longer willing to entertain a public spectacle. "Turn my birthday into a private family event. Send an invitation to my friends and the Larkinsons. I doubt many of them will travel all the way to Cloudy Curtain to attend, but it's good to spend some time with family."

If only he could invite his father to his birthday. Sadly, Ves didn't even know where to send his invitation card.

Once he finished celebrating his birthday, Ves planned to depart to Centerpoint in order to be initiated into the ranks of Journeyman. No longer would Ves hold the awkward title of de facto Journeyman. With official recognition, he could truly take his steps into the ranks of high society!

As Ves and Gavin planned his itinerary for the next couple of months, the Barracuda and the Greenfeather finally arrived at their destination after an uneventful journey.

It took less than two weeks to return to Cloudy Curtain. Although Ves felt tempted to stop by Bentheim, he preferred to return to a familiar environment.

"Home sweet home." Ves said as the Barracuda finally descended on the landing zone of the Mech Nursery.

"Welcome home, boss." Calsie greeted Ves as he stepped out.

"Congratulations for your achievement. The local MTA branch has just informed me that they completed your background check."

"Did I pass?" He asked.

"Of course, boss. Why would you ever doubt yourself? Someone as brilliant as you is guaranteed to pass!"

Ves awkwardly chuckled. "Ah, maybe I was a little too concerned."

He had a lot of skeletons in his closet that could disqualify him from receiving official recognition. Perhaps his most objectionable crime was when he designed a gamma laser rifle from forbidden research notes he salvaged from an abandoned clandestine production facility.

The System practically coerced him into violating one of the MTA's taboos.

Back then, he was frightened out of his wits. He would always carry the worry in his mind that the MTA might someday find out that he ran roughshod over one of their sacred rules.

Nevermind that it was a rather ridiculous and loosely-enforced rule!

The amazingly destructive high technology he witnessed during his latest Mastery experience showed that humanity possessed boundless creativity in weapons development. A simple positron weapon released a lot of lethal radiation in the air or on impact by its very nature, yet the Terran Confederation was able to get away with using this weapon system!

A meager gamma laser rifle was nothing serious compared to a high-powered positron rifle!

Of course, the setting mattered a lot. In the galactic rim, most states didn't possess the ability to protect a mech, ship or city from penetrating radiation.

While treatments existed that could neutralize the destructive effects of radiation, they weren't cheap and couldn't be applied to entire crowds of people at once.

It was a different story in a prosperous state like the Terran Confederation. The weapons there may be more destructive, but shielding and treatments were a lot more ubiquitous and effective.

After Ves made this comparison, he felt very silly for bearing any guilt for his crime. Ves had taken so much care in developing the gamma laser rifle that the MTA shouldn't have been able to find out!

Even if they somehow did, they might not even care all that much! Ves may have designed and fabricated a forbidden weapon, but he quickly destroyed it afterwards, ensuring that his work would not be put to nefarious ends!

He still felt relieved his background check passed without issue.

As Ves and Calsie slowly walked to the headquarters building, the woman addressed another matter.

"By the way, the visitor from the frontier has grown rather impatient. As soon as he heard that you've returned, he insisted on meeting you this instant. Currently, he's waiting outside your office."

Ves nodded in understanding. "I'll meet with him right away. Do you know who sent this person?"

"No." Calsie shook her head. "I'm guessing that he represents someone shady, because he employed a lot of precautions in order to keep his identity and his origins a secret. If a messenger is already so cautious, then the people behind him must be very unwelcome in civilized space."

"Ah." Ves grimaced. "I think I know who dispatched this messenger. I hoped he would have forgotten about me after a few years."

"Is it someone dangerous?"

"Very. It's best if I don't say anything else. Some matters are truly too dangerous to expose."

"Do we need to put security on high alert?"

"No need. I'm just receiving a message, nothing more."

Once they arrived at the headquarters, Ves took the elevator up to his penthouse office by himself. Once he arrived at the top, a robed and masked figure awaited his arrival at the double doors.

"Mr. Larkinson." A distorted voice uttered from the black face wrappings that enveloped the stranger's head. A low-intensity interference field surrounded his body, making him appear even shadier than his outfit already suggested. "It is a pleasure to finally meet you. Let me introduce myself. I am a Shadow Courier. An esteemed individual has tasked our organization with delivering an important package to you in person."

"A Shadow Courier?"

"We are one of the most premier messengers and couriers in the frontier and in the surrounding star sectors. We offer complete reliability and confidentiality no matter the identities of the sender and the receiver."

In other words, the Shadow Couriers were pretty much the black market equivalent of a regional packet delivery service. Whether they were truly trustworthy or not remained to be seen.

The two entered the office.

Ves took his seat behind his imposing desk.

The Shadow Courier remained standing, but retrieved a modestly-sized metallic cube from his voluminous robe.

The handover happened without incident. The Shadow Courier only performed a perfunctory identity check before placing the package onto the desk.

"Is that it?" Ves raised his eyebrow.

"I've also been tasked with passing on a verbal message from my client." The Shadow Courier added. "His exact words are as follows: My expectations are higher now that you have advanced to Journeyman. Do not disappoint me. You won't like what I have in store for your bones!"

Ves shuddered a bit. Although the flat, distorted voice of the Shadow Courier didn't convey any emotion when he recited those words, Ves keenly felt the threat behind the words!

"Understood. Please tell the sender that I've acknowledged his message."

The Shadow Courier gestured with his arm. "My job here is done. Before I go, I would like to inform you that whenever you are welcome to make use of our services when you wish to send a package back to the sender. We offer guaranteed delivery or your money back."

Once he finished his spiel, the Shadow Courier quietly departed from his office after he finished his job and passed on some contact information.

This wouldn't be the last time that Ves met with a Shadow Courier.