

Mech 1721

Chapter 1721 Snark

"Are you proud to be a part of the Friday Coalition? You willingly married some loser in order to gain citizenship, after all. Now, you're an accessory to a kidnapping. You used to be a Brighter! How could you do something like this?! Don't you have any honor?!"

His provocative question did not fluctuate Patricia's mood at all! She directed a pointed gaze at Ves as if she saw through his attempt to rile her up. This wasn't the first time he poked her with his poisonous tongue.

"Pride is irrelevant. I am a mech designer. The boundaries between states and the machinations of its people are inconsequential. We are meant to fulfill a greater role than participating in the petty power plays of those who can not see the forest from the trees."

Ves blinked at Patricia.

"You sound like a sage from the MTA. I don't see how you can pretend to be lofty when you abandoned the state that nurtured you in order to become a gold digger in a more prosperous state!"

Patricia sighed and leaned back on the chair in his quarters. "I am forced to play by the rules as well. It was never my intention to be caught up in these matters."

"If you don't want to dirty your hands, you could have just stayed put. Instead, you chose to become a sellout!"

"I know you are angry, Ves. You have a right to be. I don't want you to get consumed by it. Regardless of what you think of me, I do not approve of human conflict. I would much rather be a part of the struggle against alien civilizations."

"Too bad you're not a part of the MTA. Did they reject your application?"

"The MTA is very strict when it comes to hiring mech designers." Patricia replied in an indirect answer to his question.

In fact, even the most talented and brilliant mech designers might not necessarily be able to become an internal of the MTA!

While the MTA maintained a rather open recruitment policy, their exact hiring criteria were very random! No one who applied knew for sure whether the MTA took a liking for what they had to offer!

Otherwise, how could a mech pilot such as Charlotte Hoffmeister enter the MTA while countless second-class mech pilots fail?

"Well, since the MTA hasn't deemed you worthy, I don't see why you should care about the Big Two's mission. You should let the big guys worry about defending humanity."

Patricia began to look annoyed at Ves. This was a rare occasion as she always controlled herself carefully.

Ever since he encountered her when he studied at Rittersberg, Patricia always gave off the sense that she existed on a different plane than everyone else. It was as if she was the only galactic citizen in a mob of space peasants!

Her refined conduct and reserved behavior drew a lot of admiration from everyone else.

That was all in the past. While Patricia still acted as if she was holier than thou, Ves had grown up from the naive little boy who had nothing to go on but his passion for mech design.

Her charm no longer impressed him. After falling for Gloriana, every other woman fell short in his eyes.

In fact, the more he interacted with Patricia, the more he started to grow suspicious about her origins.

Was she even a Brighter? Who were her parents? Why was she so smart? Why did she study at an average mech university like Rittersberg as opposed to Ansel? Why stay in the Bright Republic at all when she was clearly capable of studying at Leemar?

Patricia never elaborated about herself. Whenever he attempted to satisfy his curiosity, she flatly disregarded her inquiries.

Fortunately, she was more than willing to talk about other matters, which made her much more bearable.

The main reason why he insisted on talking to her was because she was a font of information about the Scarlet Rose!

While Ves did not have the courage to pump Aisling for information, he was not as apprehensive towards his old acquaintance.

For her part, Patricia did not put up her guard against his questioning. Like Aisling, she was completely assured of their security!

Ves was not only alone, but also under their control! There was no way he could do anything to change his fate!

Sadly, none of the Fridayman on the Scarlet Rose could ever anticipate that Ves wasn't alone! Not only did he have Lucky and his smuggled gadgets, he also had more potent trump cards in reserve!

Therefore, Ves took his questions a lot more seriously than Patricia, who apparently saw no harm in elaborating about the Scarlet Rose.

"The Scarlet Rose operates under the jurisdiction of the Coalition Reserve Corps. The CRC is one of the few organizations of our state that is allowed to operate throughout the Coalition."

"That's because the Friday Coalition is still a coalition of different groups." Ves sneered. "Even after four centuries, the coalition partners still haven't managed to unify! The only reason why the nine partners turned into six partners is because the weakest ones got devoured!"

"Regardless, the CRC is not involved in the rivalry between the partners. The Gauge Dynasty has no more say than the Puffer Clan. This is by design as the Friday Coalition cannot tilt the balance any further towards the powerhouses."

"Why does the CRC even need a ship like the Scarlet Rose?"

"The CRC is one of the main organizations which organizes the mech designers of the Coalition in the event of war or any state-wide mobilization events."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that during the Komodo War, any mech designer who isn't exempted from service or working for one of the mech militaries must follow the arrangements of the CRC. As Lady Curver is not a part of the Sundered Phalanx, she is obliged to contribute to the war in a different fashion. Mobile supply frigates such as this ship exist to facilitate her work in many different circumstances."

"That sounds like overkill for a simple monitoring mission."

"You're not wrong. A simple corvette is sufficient, but don't forget that Lady Curver represents the Coalition when she's on assignment. A corvette is too small to make the locals take her seriously. A capital ship is too excessive, but a sophisticated frigate-sized vessel is just right."

That made sense, but that didn't explain why the Scarlet Rose featured a full-sized mech workshop. This was far from standard when it came to other frigate-sized vessels!

Ves pretended to buy into Patricia's explanation.

"What makes the Scarlet Rose so great for this purpose?"

"A monitor is supposed to be a non-threatening presence in the state they are permitted to stay in. In line with a diplomatic treaty that the Friday Coalition has signed with a collective of third-rate states, a monitor is only allowed to bring a limited escort. That is why the Scarlet Rose can only field four mechs at most."

"That sounds dangerous. What if some ambitious mercenary corps covet this ship?"

She snorted dismissively. "Just because the Scarlet Rose has limited protection doesn't mean it's vulnerable. The four mechs we carry are very high-quality mechs! While the treaty limits the quantity of mechs we can carry, it says nothing about the quality! The mech pilots themselves are highly-trained elites!"

"That.. sounds a bit strange to me. With the Komodo War raging like a firestorm, how come the CRC is able to get their hands on elites?"

While the Friday Coalition is a lot larger and more populous than the Bright Republic, the standard for second-class elite mech pilots was incredibly high! A second-rate state only had so much elites, and Ves figured that all of them were needed to battle the Hexers!

"The elites aren't as you imagine. They aren't military. Instead, they're drafted from the private sector."

"You mean they're mercenaries?" Ves raised his eyebrow.

"Some of them are. Others come from personal forces or security companies. A significant portion are even mech athletes! Most of these mech pilots won't fit in the military, so the CRC offers them an alternate way to contribute to the state."

"Are the mech pilots of the Scarlet Rose any good?"

She hesitated for a moment. "I'm not sure. I don't interact with them. They keep to themselves. They don't respect anyone on this ship except for Lady Curver."

Ves felt rather indignant that Patricia wasn't afforded the same treatment! How dare they!

"It sounds like they all need a good kick in the butt!"

"They are only here to deter opportunistic pirate raids. Everyone else doesn't dare to lay a hand on us. The Scarlet Rose represents the entire CRC, which in turn represents the Coalition as a whole. There have been a few times in the past where 'unknown forces' attacked our monitor ships, but each time the CRC moved in full force to investigate these incidents! The people or states responsible have never escaped the CRC! They paid a very heavy price for their transgressions!"

That.. sounded rather bad to Ves. He had to admit that the CRC intimidated him a bit. If he truly succeeded in his hijacking attempt, he would definitely provoke a counterattack from the CRC!

This meant that Ves had to make some very careful choices. He also had to form a followup plan. If he failed to prepare an escape route for himself, he would surely fall victim to the Coalition's revenge!

"It sounds like no one dares to provoke CRC. We should be safe, right?"

Patricia confidently nodded. "The Scarlet Rose is nearly as fast as the Barracuda. Your corvette is a purely civilian vessel. The CRC is a paramilitary organization, so our mobile supply carrier is built with slightly better tech and materials. Her FTL drive cycles nearly as fast as that of your corvette, so the Scarlet Rose is fully capable of escaping nearly any opponent that can threaten our safety!"

"What about pursuit by a Hexer force?"

"That's unlikely. The Bright Republic and the surrounding states are all aligned with the Friday Coalition. The CRC and Coalition organizations keep track of any Hexer elements in the region. If any of them tries to intercept our ship, we'll know well in advance. Besides, it will only take eleven days until we enter the Friday Coalition. We will be absolutely safe once we return to our territory!"

Eleven days! Ves felt some urgency when Patricia revealed how little time he had left!

In fact, his safety margin was even less considering that a ship would be travelling to a Coalition-owned star system a few days before this deadline!

While it was possible to interrupt the FTL drive and throw a ship back into realspace, this was extremely dangerous and sometimes led to disintegrating the entire vessel after suffering the equivalent of a dimensional crash!

"Is there any chance you could drop me off along the way?"

Patricia shook her head. "I don't know why you keep asking this question. Lady Curver is determined to have you. I suggest you accept your situation. It is not all that bad."

"Hehe." Ves chuckled. "I'm done with people telling me what is best for me. Even if I'm wrong, I keep my commitments!"

She looked at him as if he was an idiot.

"I truly don't know what is going on in your head these days. You are so much different from the classmate I used to know at Rittersberg."

"I got better."

"I doubt that. To me, you've regressed. The fact that a man like you still supports the Hegemony over the Coalition is proof of faulty judgement."

"Is that an insult?" Ves grinned. "I never thought you of any people would employ snark against someone."

"It's tiring to argue against someone like you. Every time I talk to you, I feel as if you are dragging me to your level."

"Why do you keep coming back, then?" He cheekily asked.

"I don't know." Patricia whispered, looking a bit lost for a moment.

Chapter 1722 Damaged Soul

When the Mech Corps took Ves away from Cloudy Curtain, Ghanso left a graveyard of mechs behind!

What started off as a simple retrieval mission ended up in an exaggerated public spectacle!

It was all the fault of Ves! If he hadn't overreacted to the admittedly strong-handed request from the capture fleet, this matter wouldn't have attracted so much attention!

Everything that ensued from his refusal to play along became known throughout the remainder of the Bright Republic and beyond!

The famed Larkinson Family, known for its honor, valor and uprightness in battle, erupted into a schism!

On one side was the young expert pilot who many people regarded as the next Ark Larkinson! Ever since he advanced to expert, Ghanso constantly distinguished himself in battle against the Vesians and the sandmen!

Baptized in two different wars, his proficiency in piloting his Glittering Comet constantly increased by leaps and bounds! His marksmanship constantly grew more and more precise to the point of reaching an uncanny level!

On the other side was the first and most impressive mech designer of the Larkinson Family! Almost every Brighter heard of Ves Larkinson by now, not just because of the awards he received during the war against the Vesians, but also because of the Soldier product line he conceived!

The influence of the Desolate Soldier and variants couldn't be overstated! Its glow was so useful that the Soldier mechs sold over a million times! Almost every mech pilot and a large chunk of civilians personally experienced the legendary glows, and each of them gained an unforgettable impression of duty!

Aside from the Bright Republic, the Soldier mechs had also played a pivotal role in other states such as the Ylvaine Protectorate and the Reinald Republic!

An uncountable amount of people were grateful to Ves Larkinson for delivering a mech that single-handedly saved them from catastrophe!

The fame, honor and prestige of Ves far surpassed that of Ghanso!

Therefore, when this matter initially blew up, by far the most sympathized with Ves!

Though most Brighters held a lot of respect for the Mech Corps and expert pilots, Venerable Ghanso Larkinson's conduct during the incident had been far too ugly!

Through his mule-headed actions and words, he practically disgraced himself and his beliefs! The public no longer recognized the dignity he possessed as an expert pilot, and instead hurled insults at his name for being such a stubborn tool!

The consequences of blowing up this matter was dire! Though the government acted quickly, none of them had been prepared to suppress this matter!

Many Larkinsons witnessed the events in person or through a live feed! Plenty of them had a bone to pick with Ghanso, so they readily spread the footage all over the galactic net!

Ghanso's betrayal and the mysterious capture of Ves became known throughout the Bright Republic and beyond!

The Mech Corps became furious! How could high command stab one of the heroes responsible for helping them fight off the sandmen in the back?!

Due to the weird and exaggerated events, no one believed that the mission to capture Ves was about relocating him to a safer location! If that were true, Ves wouldn't have resisted so strongly!

The Larkinson Family became angry as well! All of the Larkinsons serving in the Mech Corps heard about the incident one way or another. To say they were mad was an understatement!

Though the influence of the Larkinsons wasn't much, when they united around a single issue, their clout turned out to be quite formidable!

When Colonel Ark Larkinson himself paid attention to this matter, he started to investigate the matter behind the scenes! He and every other Larkinsons were beginning to stir the hierarchy of the Mech Corps! Plenty of servicemen were more than willing to support them due to their impeccable honor and the injustice they suffered!

For now, Ark and the other influential Larkinson mech pilots remained silent. Yet once they opened their mouth to the public, the Bright Republic would definitely listen!

The government of the Bright Republic could not afford this outcome!

"Give them what they want! Where is Ves Larkinson? Spit him out!"

The pressure on the government and the Mech Corps increased as nothing happened for a few days! Because of their inaction, the matter boiled over to such an extent that even the Ylvaine Protectorate began to knock on their doors!

The Bright Martyr enjoyed an exalted status within their state! His disappearance alarmed the entire Protectorate, causing every Ylvainan to detest the Bright Republic with a passion!

"Where is Ves Larkinson?!"

"Did the Mech Corps kill him?! Why would they do such a thing?!"

"He's not dead! If he was, the Soldier mechs would have lost their powers by now!"

The pressure on the government increased to such an extent that the slow-moving Mech Corps had no choice but to break its own rules and force General Cavendish to answer!

Even the full might of the Cavendish Family and the Ramza Family failed to resist the overwhelming pressure from the masses!

Yet General Cavendish remained mum! As a distinguished mech general, he knew that it would be very bad if he told his interrogators the truth!

At the same time, Venerable Ghanso Larkinson came under immense pressure himself!

Both Benjamin and Ark Larkinson used all of their power and influence to corner Ghanso!

Throughout this crisis that threatened to grow into a fatal distraction that might end the Bright Republic, the three Larkinsons faced each other in a three-way comm call.

In ordinary circumstances, it was impossible for two current expert pilots and a former expert pilot of the Larkinson Family to gather together during a war! Each of the three held a lot of responsibilities.

Both Benjamin and Ark stared at Ghanso's resigned expression with indignation.

While Benjamin hadn't talked to Ves very often, he already regarded Ves as his favorite grandson!

As for Ark, his close sentiments with his missing brother Ryncol made him feel guilty that he hadn't been able to protect Ves! Who could guess that the Mech Corps he unflinchingly served for decades would start with his own cousin!?

"Ghanso." Ark began. "I'm disappointed by you. It is one thing to do your duty. It is another thing to confuse right and wrong!"

"I won't excuse myself." Ghanso defended himself. "I followed my orders faithfully, not just because I am a Larkinson or took an oath to serve the Mech Corps, but also because it is for the good of our state and every life that depends on its protection! My actions have saved the Bright Republic!"

"Absurd!" Benjamin blew up! Though he was normally amiable, this time he lost control! "Look at what is happening in the news! You've tarnished the service! This is not an inconsequential matter! Every serviceman is questioning the honor of the Mech Corps! The performance of our soldiers have dropped by five percent throughout the war theater! Not just the Mech Corps, but also the Starfighter Corps and the irregular forces are fighting with less enthusiasm!"

Ark Larkinson looked at Ghanso with condemnation. "Do you realize what you've done? You've damaged the soul of our state! The Bright Republic is a state based on laws and rights. Every Brighter is not only fighting for their lives, but also for the ideals they grew up with! If it turns out that the Mech Corps has betrayed our ideals, then what are we all fighting for?! Why must we continue to lift up our arms and sacrifice our lives?!"

"These matters are not my concern, Colonel Ark." Ghanso defiantly crossed his arms. "I am a soldier. I am an instrument. It is not my job to set policy. I merely do what I'm told. Everything else is not my problem. The only thing I regret is that our Larkinson Family will never be the same. I share some blame for that, but if I had a choice, I would do the same thing again!"

"What are you talking about, Ghanso?! What does disappearing Ves have to do with saving the Bright Republic?!"

"I'm sorry, Colonel Ark. My lips are sealed. I'm under strict orders not to reveal any details about my mission. As far as I'm concerned, high command has not issued any orders to disclose what I know. Until that happens, I won't tell you anything!"

Both Benjamin and Ark exchanged a silent glance. Due to the entanglement between three different founding families, it was unlikely for high command to resolve this problem quickly!

The oldest Larkinson closed his eyes and spoke.

"If that is how you want to play this game, then so be it. Let me send you something, Ghanso."

A priority alert quickly sounded out from Ghanso's comm!

An unsettling feeling overcame his mood. His intuition warned him that something very bad might happen!

Even though Ghanso did his best to ignore his comm, the data package he received forcefully triggered its backdoors!

His comm automatically projected a very official-looking document in front of his face! He wouldn't be able to avoid it unless he destroyed his comm, but that was disallowed under the regulations of the Mech Corps!

The moment he saw the very prominent-looking seals, Ghanso instantly knew who issued these orders!

"This.. comes directly from the office of the bright president!" Ghanso uttered in shock. "How could you obtain an exception?!"

"Do you think I have been keeping my head down at the Ministry of Defense?" Benjamin smiled. "The bright president himself wants to resolve this matter as fast as possible! Now, will you spit out the truth, or choose to defy the lawful authority of our state? Choose carefully!"

Ghanso's face turned ugly as he read through the official document. He reluctantly took a minute to verify its authenticity.

Nothing was wrong. Everything was completely in order, which meant that the bright president truly signed these orders!

"The people run our state, not the generals." Benjamin reminded Ghanso. "While the emergency laws that have come into effect have empowered the military, don't forget the person who holds the title of commander-in-chief!"

Ghanso did not need a reminder. The commander-in-chief of all of the military branches of the Bright Republic was the head of state!

Because of the high trust in the military, the Mech Corps and the other branches usually ran their affairs by themselves. Very rarely did the bright president intervene directly.

Yet that did not change that this esteemed individual exercised supreme command over the military!

In many states, the military answered to the civilian government. This was the standard throughout human space as it was the most successful model that ensured long-term stability and prosperity!

"What are you waiting for, Ghanso?" Ark prodded the silent expert pilot. "You are an obedient expert pilot, are you not? Your mission has already been declassified! There are no more excuses for you to hide behind! Whatever backing you are relying on to support you won't be able to exceed the authority of the bright president!"

He was right! Seeing that the orders sent by Benjamin were completely valid and unambiguously clear, Ghanso had no choice but to obey them! Even though he really didn't want to, he had his principles!

"Ves Larkinson is not at Rittersberg or New Foundation. When we brought him out of the Cloudy Curtain System, we did not dump him at some secret military base or transferred him to another government branch."

"Where is he, Ghanso?! Where is my grandson!"

"Under General Cavendish's unders, we met up with a monitor from the Friday Coalition and handed him over to her ship. She's a famous mech designer and she appears to be very interested in working with Ves! If I am guessing correctly, the monitor has long brought Ves away!"

"What?! Why?!"

"Have you noticed the Fridayman mercenary corps that recently participated in the Battle for Bentheim? General Cavendish made a deal with the monitor. In exchange for trading away Ves, she would dispatch a second-class mercenary corps to defend the Bentheim System for the remainder of the Sand War!"

Both Ark and Benjamin Larkinson became shocked, before turning incredibly angry!

Such a trade was not only dishonorable, but also broke the bottom line of the Larkinson Family! There was no way both of them approved of this scheme! Even Ark, who felt very sympathetic about Ghanso's commitment to following orders, felt his trust for his state beginning to break apart!

Chapter 1723 Headless Chicken

After using the bright president's authority to pry the truth out of Venerable Ghanso's lips, Ark and Benjamin Larkinson passed what they learned to a select few people.

Some of the Larkinsons and many high officials slowly learned the truth of what had happened!

To say they were all angry was an understatement! They were furious! The Cavendish and Ramzas Families boldly plotted against a war hero!

If their plans had worked, not only would they gain the appreciation of the Friday Coalition, but also be able to take credit for securing the help of a powerful second-class mercenary corps!

As for sacrificing Ves, neither of these two founding families cared about him! As long as he was sent away, then the Tovar Family would lose a popular ally who would only grow more powerful in the future!

Once the relevant people learned the truth, the Cavendishes and the Ramzas had no choice but to bow down their heads! If not for the Sand War pushing the Bright Republic to the brink, perhaps the other factions would have torn them down already!

Right now, the state needed every help it could get! The founding families who hatched this scheme knew this as well, and quickly offered many current and future concessions to placate their opposition!

Now, all of these benefits were moot. With the exposure of their sordid dealings, the conspirators lost a huge amount of respect! Once the war was over and the Bright Republic still remained standing, the balance of power would definitely shift!

The Bright Republic quickly calmed down. Everyone in the know kept the explosive news to themselves. No one wanted to damage the soul of the Bright Republic any further!

With both Benjamin and Ark taking charge, the outrage within their family dimmed.

They soon published a statement that informed the public that Ves Larkinson was safe but in hiding.

While this didn't satisfy everyone, now that the Larkinsons appeared pleased, the crisis appeared to be resolved.

Only a handful of Larkinson elders knew the truth. They kept every other Larkinson in the dark because the chance that one of them would leak the truth was too great!

While all of this was taking place, the LMC and the other organizations founded by Ves were left to fend without their leader.

Ves was the LMC, and the LMC was Ves. His absence completely tore out the heart of his company! Without his design capabilities, the remaining mech designers could never come close to designing a mech that was even close to his illustrious products!

Fortunately, the people that Ves entrusted with running his organizations quickly managed to quell the unrest and stabilize the situation.

Both Calsie Doornbos and Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson worked together to prevent the chaos from damaging the LMC.

Commander Melkor took charge of both the Avatars and Myth and the Living Sentinels. Though Ghanso inflicted great losses on their mechs, he coordinated with the LMC to bring new life to the fallen mechs!

A huge operation commenced. The Mech Nursery resumed production as the workers tried their best to fix the more intact wrecks.

As for the more damaged components, the LMC dispatched them to a local recycling company to break them down and retrieve their base materials.

Through these efforts, the Avatars and Sentinels would definitely be able to restore about eighty percent of what they lost over a couple of months!

Surprisingly little opposition emerged. While there were plenty of opinions flying around, the current leaders were firmly in charge due to the contingency plans that Ves prepared beforehand!

As a paranoid individual, Ves had long considered what might happen in the event something might happen to him. He never took his safety and freedom for granted!

Therefore, upon his abrupt departure, every leader who Ves had delegated his responsibilities to received a set of instructions and a list of priorities they should fulfill.

In addition, they also received clear mandates to do what was necessary to follow his instructions!

Calsie officially became Ves' agent once again. She gained the right to exercise the power bestowed by his 49 percent ownership in the company!

Combined with Benjamin Larkinson, who took charge of the 25 percent stake in the company, they held absolute power to decide its future!

However, some of the contingency plans prepared by Ves were very controversial!

Neither Calsie nor Benjamin dared to enact them straight away!

For this reason, a gathering between every important stakeholder of the LMC commenced a week after Ves was taken away.

The conference room filled up as some people attended the pivotal meeting in person while others showed up in the form of projections.

All of the shareholders were present. Aside from Calsie and Benjamin, Marcella Bollinger with her 5 percent stake and Leland Toll on behalf of Flashlight's 21 percent ownership attended the gathering as well.

Commander Melkor Larkinson stood up for the Avatars of Myth. Commander Magdalena Larkinson gained permission from the Mech Corps to set aside some time to take part as well on behalf of the Living Sentinels.

Calsie tried to reach out to Commander Cinnabar of the Battle Criers, but none of them were accessible at this point of time. Who knew what kind of mission Ves had given them! The rest could only hope that the Battle Criers would not object to any decisions they made today.

While Director Clinton Larkinson only represented the Ves Larkinson Foundation for Wounded Veterans, his valor during the confrontation against Ghanso earned him a lot of respect!

Miles Tovar attended on behalf of both the design team and the Tovar Family.

Ketis appeared as well as a student and confidante of Ves, though she looked as if she would rather be elsewhere!

In truth, the only reason she agreed to attend the meeting was because Calabast reached out to her! It was not proper for Calabast to attend this meeting herself, so she passed some instructions to Ketis to make sure the meeting did not produce any unwelcome outcomes!

Dr. Lupo Guernica showed up as well, though like Ketis, he looked anything but comfortable. The Larkinson Exobiology Institute was by far the smallest organization under Ves, and many people attending this meeting hadn't even heard of its existence!

Colonel Ark Larkinson showed up via projection as well! His appearance surprised many people as most expected him to be occupied with the war. He represented a portion of the Larkinson Family, particularly the old guard who valued tradition.

There was no way that anyone present would allow Venerable Ghanso Larkinson to attend this meeting! He was currently the biggest black sheep of the family!

Of all of the people who showed up, none of them could ignore the presence of the only person who was qualified to be described as Ves Larkinson's equal!

While Gloriana Wodin owned no shares in the LMC, she absolutely deserved to have a say. Ves officially designated her as a lead designer of his mech company! When Ves was absent, she was the sole lead designer in charge!

As a contributing mech designer to the Desolate Soldier and every other recent mech released by the LMC, she deserved much of the credit for their design!

Of course, no one could possibly forget that she was Ves Larkinson's girlfriend and partner! It would be bad if she agreed with any of the decisions made during the meeting. As a prominent Hexer, she could exert a lot of influence if she wanted!

Everyone looked solemn as the conference room filled up.

No matter if they were present by remote or in the flesh, everyone felt the weight of this gathering!

"Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for answering our call and attending this meeting." Calsie spoke. Though she felt slightly nervous, her years of experience as the caretaker of the LMC had long turned her into a capable speaker. "Everyone here is doubtlessly aware of the current state of the LMC and its affiliated organizations. We have done our best to prevent this crisis from impacting us any further. We've succeeded in that. Now, we must look to the future and decide where to go from here."

"Ves left behind some contingency plans in case anything happened to him." Raymond continued. "However, these plans do not fully fit the current circumstances. While he planned for the eventuality that the Bright Republic would turn on him for some reason, he never expected it to happen quite this way!"

Benjamin swept his gaze at everyone present. "At present, we have taken care of the LMC, the Avatars, the Sentinels and all of the assets owned by my grandson. Our overarching goal is to preserve everything that Ves has built! Not only him, but also our Larkinson Family depends on how much we can retain!"

"What's the matter?" Gloriana frowned. Though she was one of the most important people in the gathering, Ves hadn't included her in any of the contingency planning. "What has Ves decided?"

"Let me cut to the chase." Benjamin said. "In the event that the government has broken our trust, Ves has ordered us to relocate the LMC and everything else to a different state!"

Though some of the higher ups already knew about this instruction, it still came as a shock to most people!

Not everyone imagined that Ves would have prepared such an instruction! It said something about him that he foresaw a possible need to leave the Bright Republic!

Many people's faces grew pensive. The decision to abandon their foundation in the Bright Republic and move to another state was incredibly disruptive!

The Larkinsons like Clinton and Ark took it especially hard! They committed their lives to the Bright Republic! How could they possibly imagine leaving their home state?

Benjamin understood their consternation. "Mind you, these instructions only concern the LMC and his other organizations. He hadn't said anything about our family. The future of the Larkinson Family is not on the agenda."

"Isn't it?" Clinton retorted. "You are in control of a quarter of the LMC, Benjamin. That means our family will certainly be affected by the decision to relocate the LMC!"

"You know what I mean. Let's get back to the topic. Since Ves decided to relocate his organizations, we need to make a decision where they should settle next!"

"I can pull some strings to bring you to the Hegemony if you like." Gloriana chirped. "While the LMC is rather shabby by our standards, Ves will doubtlessly be pleased to establish a foundation in a second-rate state!"

"No!"

"NOO!"

"Absolutely not!"

"I don't agree!"

"NEVER!"

Despite her clout, almost no one agreed with Gloriana! The gathering immediately shot down the suggestion to relocate to the Hexadric Hegemony!

"Ves has already made a decision in this regard." Benjamin regained control over the discussion. "He offered us a list of suggestions. According to his criteria, only one destination stands out. No other alternative is as fitting as his first choice!"

Commander Melkor chuckled. "Let me guess. He wants to move his stuff to the Ylvaine Protectorate, is that right?"

This did not come as a big surprise. No other state was as favorable to Ves and the LMC than the Protectorate! In fact, the Ylvainans thought much more highly of Ves than the citizens of the Bright Republic!

Yet even if they knew that this decision was the clear favorite, very few felt comfortable with this choice!

Otherwise, Benjamin and Calsie wouldn't have convened this gathering!

A heated discussion soon ensued. Some of the people such as Clinton and Larkinson were deeply reluctant to see the LMC go. While they were indignant at what happened to Ves, they blamed the conspirators instead of the state as a whole.

Why should the Bright Republic be blamed for the actions of a couple of factions?

Others fully agreed with the decision to decouple the LMC from the Bright Republic! Ketis spoke up strongly in favor of this plan, as did Gloriana!

She detested the Bright Republic for tearing Ves away from her side! She regretted that she hadn't been able to protect her boyfriend during the previous incident!

Chapter 1724 Uncertain Future

To the organizers of the meeting, the outcome was already set in stone.

Ves left very clear instructions behind. While he was completely absent, everyone else still retained a huge amount of respect for him! Whether it was his ability to earn a lot of money, his contributions to the state or his embodiment of Larkinson values, no one wished to oppose his will!

It was just that the decision to relocate everything to the Ylvaine Protectorate sat very poorly with many people. Almost everyone attending the meeting consisted of Brighters.

While some were disappointed with their state, they still preferred to stick with the familiar instead of moving to foreign territory!

If they really had to leave the Bright Republic, then most of them would rather prefer it if they moved to a similar state!

The Sentinel Kingdom which Ves visited recently came up as a popular suggestion. While it was engulfed in some sort of unrest related to the Nyxian Gap, the state was still far enough away from the frontier to escape the Sand War!

It was also firmly in the sphere of influence of the Hexadric Hegemony. The Friday Coalition was on the opposite side of the star sector, so there was no way the Coalition would be able to threaten the LMC if he eventually returned!

Sadly, Ves firmly placed the Ylvaine Protectorate above the Sentinel Kingdom. To him, trust was much more important than anything else! Even if it was struggling for survival against the sandmen, Ves still had faith in the religious state!

"Moving to Sentinel is not realistic." Raymond concluded. "It's too far away from the Bright Republic. We'll have to cross through the territories of a dozen states in order to reach our destination! Even if we get there, our foundation there is very weak. In recent months, a lot of refugees have flooded into Sentinel! The state isn't able to support the influx of so many foreigners."

Calsie made her stance clear. "The Ylvaine Protectorate is the only state that will welcome us with open arms. Ves often referred to it as his second home state. With how much they worship the so-called 'Bright Martyr', they won't treat us poorly!"

Despite everyone's apprehensions towards the openly religious character of the Protectorate, that was not a good reason to reject this choice.

No other state could match its offer!! Lieutenant Dominic Kronon had been in constant contact with his superiors and already conveyed the Protectorate's stance.

"I think the Protectorate is a fine choice." Gloriana declared.

While she still preferred to bring everything to the Hexadric Hegemony, the Protectorate wasn't too bad.

As an insular, religious state, the Ylvaine Protectorate never developed a good relationship with the Friday Coalition.

Instead, it welcomed the influence of the Hexers. While their beliefs clashed significantly, they still had enough in common to get along with each other.

While the Ylvainans only possessed a shallow relationship with the Hexers, this was enough to limit the influence of Fridaymen within the state!

Something as similar as what happened to Ves would never take place in the Protectorate! No monitor from the Friday Coalition ever set foot in its territory!

After a consensus had been reached, the LMC and the other organizations began to move.

It was not that easy to relocate everything from one state to another state.

Much of the value in the LMC couldn't be moved at all. The Mech Nursery and its other real estate had to be sold, traded or abandoned.

Even moving the large industrial equipment such as the production lines imposed considerable demands on the transport capacity of the LMC!

One of the shortcomings of the LMC was that it did not own its own transport ships!

The company always signed contracts with other logistical companies to take care of its shipping and distribution needs.

A small corvette like the Barracuda could only transport a few containers at most. The ships owned by the Avatars and Sentinels mainly consisted of light carriers meant to transport mechs wherever they were needed.

Fortunately, the carriers could easily be used as makeshift shipping vessels. Their owners only had to make a couple of adjustments in order to accommodate other types of cargo aside from mechs.

Raymond, Calsie, Benjamin and Melkor did not foresee too many problems with moving the physical assets of their respective organizations.

They didn't have to worry about the intangible assets either. The Bright Republic never treated Ves like a criminal.

Due to all of the controversy that ensued, the government really could not afford to affront Ves and anything related to him again!

Any perceived unfairness would not only piss off the LMC, but also the Larkinson Family!

As a pillar of the military, the Bright Republic still needed its support! The unrest that happened previously revealed that the Larkinson Family enjoyed such a high reputation that it could affect the morale of the people!

While Colonel Ark Larkinson returned to his duties, he still kept a constant eye on the situation. He already released some hints that he would definitely step in if something happened that he did not agree with! What happened to Ves must never happen again!

"It's quite sad that it has come to this." Calsie sighed as she sat behind Ves' desk. "I guess we'll all have to say goodbye to this fancy office."

Gloriana smirked. "Oh, this office is quite bare in my tastes. I'll definitely design a more impressive headquarters for the LMC when Ves returns!"

"Will he return?" Gavin questioned. "From what I have heard, the monitor dispatched by the Coalition turns out to be someone similar to you! Lady Aisling Curver is a mech designer who specializes in neural networks."

"DON'T MENTION HER TO ME!" Gloriana growled! "I want to wring her neck with fingers! She stole my boyfriend! Poor Ves! I can't imagine what kind of torture he is enduring! This vixen is probably attempting to seduce him even now!"

"Regardless of what is happening to Ves, we can't do anything to help him." Calsie stated. "The most we can do is take care of his enterprises and make sure that they are ready to further his interests once he returns. If he returns."

"He will return." Nitaa spoke from the side. "Ves is more resourceful than you think. Don't count him out yet. If any of you have any ideas on his properties, then..."

Gavin raised his hands. "Calm down. No one here can get away with any shenanigans. You should trust the people that Ves put in charge."

No one knew what the future had in store. While it wasn't secret to them that Lady Curver received Ves from the capture fleet, no one truly understood what this meant.

Only Gloriana possessed a greater understanding of Lady Curver's identity and possible actions.

While they never intersected with each other, Clarion University was quite famous even in the Hexadric Hegemony!

She was sure that Aisling would bring Ves back to Clarion University and take advantage of Master Huron's support to settle her captive.

Once that happened, it would be extremely hard to rescue Ves! The Warsaw Giant System was situated in the interior of the Gauge Dynasty!

The Hexers would have to gain a decisive edge in the Komodo War and thrust deep into the Coalition in order to reach this well-protected star system!

The Gauge Dynasty would have never invested so much in Clarion if the school was situated in the periphery!

"I hope your confidence isn't misplaced. Ves must get through this. If he's absent for more than a couple of years, it's doubtful whether we can keep the LMC together." Calsie looked concerned.

Gavin sighed. "If you ask me, our company is already falling apart in some ways. We can take away the production lines and such, but we can't take all of the people with us. Who wants to abandon the Bright Republic and move to a state that every Brighter has looked down upon? Our employees have already started to tender their resignations."

"How many people will drop out?" Melkor asked.

"According to our projections, we'll lose the majority of our workers, say seventy to eighty percent. Many people can't bear to leave their friends and family. Others don't want anything to do with the Ylvainan Faith."

Up to 80 percent of the workshop exhibited signs of quitting! That was a very drastic figure that cut deeply in the workforce of the LMC!

"Should we do something to retain them?" Gloriana questioned. "It will be difficult for Ves to pick up where he left off if our new headquarters is empty and if there aren't any mech technicians left to produce his mechs!"

"It's fine." Calsie reassured everyone. "We have already anticipated this outcome. In truth, letting go of these people won't necessarily affect our operations. At most, we'll be stifled a little until we hire enough replacements. We don't even have to fill up all of the vacated positions as the LMC will certainly downsize in the near future. It's highly unlikely for us to sell a mech as popular as the Desolate Soldier."

"We'll still be losing lots of valuable knowledge and know-how." Gavin warned. "Some of which are common to all professions, but some are very critical to the running of our company. Think of how much expertise and familiarity our top management team has accrued."

"We can't do anything about that." Gloriana adjusted her mindset. "In my opinion, this ordeal is actually quite good for us. I'm sure the Ylvainans are much more willing to commit to Ves and the LMC."

While not everyone was comfortable with this statement, they did not refute it. Ever since they communicated their intention to move the LMC to the Protectorate, the state had practically laid down the red carpet for them! The Curin Dynasty offered so many privileges, exemptions and sweetheart deals that Calsie and Raymond found the circumstances rather surreal!

"It's not as if we are abandoning the Bright Republic entirely. We are only shifting the headquarters and our main assets to the Protectorate. We'll still maintain a subsidiary here which will continue to facilitate our business activities within this state."

"Ves is still a Brighter. I don't think he's petty enough to exclude his home state as a market."

Gloriana sneered. "If it was up to me, I would forbid our mechs from being sold in this state! However, I won't make things awkward for the Larkinson Family."

"I'm not sure what is going on in the family right now." Melkor frowned. "Every available Larkinson elder has been discussing what they should do. Ghanso's outrageous actions and Ves' attempt to usurp the leadership of the Larkinson Family has damaged our cohesion beyond the point of repair."

"What do you think the old fogies will decide?"

The Avatar Commander shrugged. "Beats me. A lot of Larkinsons want us to stick together. We're family, after all. Few of us can bear the thought of splitting up due to a disagreement. However... I don't see how the two sides can reconcile their differences."

While Venerable Ghanso disgusted a lot of Larkinsons, there were still a lot of family members who still clung to their customs and traditions!

The conservative faction within the family merely disavowed Ghanso while holding on to their stances. As they mostly consisted of current and former mech pilots, they still commanded a lot of respect!

However, they were grossly outnumbered by the more forward-looking faction that sided with Ves! If he wasn't missing, this faction would have probably taken complete control over the family already!

As it was, both sides had no choice but to come together and negotiate a way to move forward. While both sides wanted to have their way, it was impossible to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

While all of this was taking place, the Ylvaine Protectorate began to experience some changes!

The Kronon Dynasty started to field an entirely new mech model, one which made the Ylvainans ecstatic!

Chapter 1725 Eye of Ylvaine

The Ylvaine Protectorate anticipated the arrival of the Deliverer for many days. Through the three Kronon mech pilots residing at Cloudy Curtain, the leaders of the Protectorate received prior notice of this wonder mech!

The higher ups learned the purpose and some of the specifications of the Deliverer. They also received some excerpts of the testing results of the first and second prototype!

They could scarcely believe what they learned! Yet the proof was undeniable! The Deliverer truly possessed the ability to guide the aim of the mech pilot!

While the Deliverer hadn't exhibited this strength too often, it was enough to form a statistical certainty!

If leaders other than Ylvainans received this information, then they might remain skeptical. In the mech industry, it was not that rare to encounter mech designers who exaggerated or outright lied about the capabilities of their works.

Of course, in many instances, the mech designers did not set out to deceive their customers. They merely believed too much in their own specialties to gauge the actual strength of their applications.

Too many mech designers were prone to overselling the strong points of their mech designs!

After all, those who did the opposite often failed to achieve commercial success! The mech market was too competitive to provide any space for low-key mech designers! Fame, prestige and brand recognition were all essential to stand out in the market!

In this regard, Ves acted rather conservatively. Though he consented to sharing some of the details of the Deliverer to the Protectorate, he did not dare to make any bold promises.

This was because the actual performance of the Deliverer depended on the whim of Ylvaine's spiritual fragment.

Without its assistance, the Deliverer was nothing more than an uneven marksman mech with an oversized gauss rifle!

The Ylvainans nonetheless put their faith in the Deliverer. The Transcendent Messenger and the Holy Soldier already burnished the Bright Martyr's credentials.

Even if they hadn't actually seen the Deliverer in action yet, most Ylvainans who became aware of this upcoming product already believed in its promise!

"The Deliverer will deliver us from death!"

"The Great Prophet acts through the Bright Martyr's mechs! No other vehicle is more appropriate to carry his will than through his mechs!"

"The Bright Martyr hasn't abandoned us! Our faith hasn't been in vain!"

While the Ylvainan people possessed the highest morale out of all of the states in the third line of defense, the constant losses and setbacks grinded away at their hope.

For this reason, the three leading dynasties decided that it wouldn't do any harm of publicizing the Deliverer!

The hype around this mech that promised to end the Sand War built up overnight! With reputation of the Bright Martyr backing up his upcoming product, hardly any Ylvainan doubted that the Deliverer would become a dud!

After reaching an easy consensus, the Protectorate immediately prepared to make use of the Deliverer as fast as possible!

The Curin Dynasty approached some of the best and most pious Seniors to ready their best production lines. Both the government and the mech industry pooled their efforts together to build up a stockpile of materials needed to build the Deliverers!

While some of the rarer exotics required to produce the Executor rifle were very hard to get, as long as the Ylvainans united together, none of these problems posed a hindrance!

The top generals of the Kronon Dynasty deliberated on the most appropriate use of the Deliverers.

Initially, they planned to attach them to their existing mech regiments, but after finding out that their glows were as exceptional as the Transcendent Messengers, they changed their mind!

Any mech that bore the Great Prophet's will must not be profaned!

While the Kronons did not intend to treat the Deliverers as special as the Transcendent Messengers, they still intended to form an elite mech troop based completely around the Deliverers!

After entertaining a few suggestions, they finally settled on calling it the Eye of Ylvaine!

This was due to the distinctive third eye featured prominently on the forehead of the Deliverer design!

"The Eye of Ylvaine will gaze upon the enemies of our faith and smite them from existence!"

Once the formation of the Eye of Ylvaine became known, practically every Kronon mech pilot wanted to become a part of this exclusive unit!

Not only did they wish to pilot the mech that promised to save the Protectorate, they also wanted to experience Prophet Ylvaine's grace in person!

While hundreds of thousands of mech pilots aimed to pilot a Deliverer, the selection requirements were extremely strict!

The Ylvaine Protectorate could only produce so many Deliverers at a time. Besides, it was impossible to field a force that consisted entirely of Deliverers! It wasn't economical, as the mechs were very vulnerable on their own!

The Deliverer mechs only promised to neutralize the sandman swarms quickly. There was no way the Deliverers could achieve much effect against the huge and formidable sandman monoliths.

No amount of excellent aim could make their Executor rifles bypass the all-encompassing layers of sand and other particles!

Only brute force worked against the monoliths, which meant that the Holy Soldiers with their cheap and economic Sandbreaker rifles achieved more sustainable results.

At the start, the Kronon Dynasty only intended to field five-hundred Deliverers and test them in action. This was already a very significant investment! If the Kronons weren't so confident in the Bright Martyr and if the war situation wasn't so dire, they would have taken their time!

Only the most deserving mech pilots gained the right to pilot the Deliverer!

The Kronons formed a list of candidates. Every mech pilot who excelled in marksmanship became eligible to pilot the new mech!

However, that wasn't enough! The Poxco Dynasty combed through the candidates and thoroughly inspected their devoutness in the Ylvainan Faith!

It didn't matter if their beliefs differed a little from the orthodox interpretation. As long as they were earnest, they were eligible to wield Ylvaine's might!

The Eye of Ylvaine officially came into being. Five hundred excellent mech pilots left their old positions to prepare for their upcoming duties!

The fate of the Ylvaine Protectorate rested on their shoulders!

The five-hundred chosen had to go through a lot of training. In order to avoid wasting the opportunities that the Deliverers provided to their mech pilots, their marksmanship had to be as good as possible!

It would be a shame for their mechs to single out a critical target, only for the mech pilots to botch their aim!

With how chaotic sandman swarms tended to be, it wasn't always possible to track a sandman drone once someone figured out that it contained a sandman admiral!

If the Deliverer missed, the exposed sandman admiral would certainly order a bunch of drones to meld together and split apart, thereby forcing the mech pilots to start from scratch!

This training regime only lasted for two weeks, give or take a few days. This was because the mech manufacturers contracted to produce the sacred mechs had delivered their first batches at this time!

Each and every Hunter of Ylvaine as the chosen mech pilots came to be called looked up at the Deliverer mechs with awe and devotion.

Even the guards and mech technicians were stunned into silence!

Some of them had already experienced the glows of the Transcendent Messengers! The glows emanating from the Deliverers felt exactly the same, but much more pure!

While none of the Deliverers emphasized any virtues such as zeal or sacrifice, their seemingly-empty purity brought peace to every Ylvainan!

Everyone bowed in front of the mechs. They completely became immersed by the holiness of these sacred mechs!

The fact that tens of Deliverers arrived together enhanced their holy appeal as their glows overlapped!

Only six Transcendent Messengers existed, and all of their glows were different!

In contrast, the Deliverers were all completely identical as many of the mechs shipped to the various bases that hosted the Eye of Ylvaine came from the same manufacturers!

With the high requirements imposed by the Curin Dynasty, the mech manufacturers did their utmost to achieve a high and consistent level of quality!

The right to produce the Deliverer was a supreme honor to every mech manufacturer! Even Senior Mech Designers did not look down on this design, because they knew they could never make their mechs as holy as the mechs designed by the Bright Martyr!

Each mech designer responsible for the production of the Deliverer took this privilege as a badge of honor! There was no way they wanted to suffer the indignity of losing this contract!

In fact, those who weren't lucky enough to supply Deliverers to the Eye of Ylvaine also produced some mechs for themselves. The LMC officially released the Deliverer as a commercial mech design, which meant that anyone with a licence could legally produce this mech!

Ves didn't want the Ylvainans to restrict the production of the Deliverer too much. Who knew what they would do if they gained the sole right to produce the mechs!

He didn't forget his earlier resentment towards the Kronon Dynasty. In his eyes, the Kronons didn't deserve to monopolize the Deliverer!

Of course, even if various private sector outfits already planned to field some Deliverers, the effect wouldn't be as good.

The Protectorate did not possess a very strong mercenary tradition! For so long, the state had closed its borders to the outside galaxy. There wasn't much to fight for within its borders, and the prestige of the Kronon Dynasty was very high!

A few days went by as the Hunters of Ylvaine got used to their sacred mechs.

While they were already well-prepared, they still needed some time to adjust to their mechs because they became intoxicated by the sacred glows!

Fortunately, it wasn't hard to find the sandmen once the Eye of Ylvaine was ready to bare its teeth!

Taon Melin, a chosen mech pilot of Zeal, was one of the mech pilots who tested the first Deliverers in battle.

As a mech pilot specialized in piloting hero mechs, his marksmanship was almost as excellent as those committed to this specialization!

Ever since the Sand War came about, the Transcendent Messengers had mostly been used to lift the morale of the Ylvainan people instead of fighting the sandmen.

The Ylvainans couldn't help it. While the Transcendent Messengers were fantastic on land, they did not come with any flight systems!

Though it was possible to pair them with flight platforms that gave landbound mechs the capability to fly in space, it wasn't worth it because these platforms were too large and vulnerable to damage!

Taon Melin waited for this opportunity for a long time. He always bided his time throughout the Sand War as if he knew his time would come!

A familiar sensation overcame Taon as he entered the cockpit and interfaced with his mech.

As the chosen of Zeal, his ability to connect with the sacred mechs was better than any other Hunter of Ylvaine!

His Deliverer deployed from a combat carrier alongside three other Deliverers!

At this time, battle had already commenced. A large sandman fleet consisting of up to fifteen sandman admirals were bearing down on a major planet housing billions of people!

Thousands of Holy Soldiers and starfighters were desperately fighting to whittle down the swarms and monoliths before they reached their destination. Countless lasers and projectiles impacted sand and metal alike!

Amidst this intensive battle, a handful of mechs with glowing third eyes deployed in the rear of the human formation did not attract much attention.

The mech with the brightest glowing eye slowly aimed its massive rifle at the periphery of the humongous swarm.

A Deliverer fired a single shot.

Just seconds later, a tenth of the swarm abruptly became paralyzed!

The sandman admiral in charge of coordinating their movements had died!

Taon Melin only took seconds to fire his critical shot! Everyone monitoring the first deployment of the Deliverers became stunned by his stellar performance!

Something like this could never be a fluke! Ylvaine was truly on their side!

"We are saved!"

Chapter 1726 Inexplicable Mech

Not everyone achieved results as great as Taon Melin!

Most Hunters of Ylvaine required dozens of chances before they managed to score a hit on a drone carrying a sandman admiral!

This was still a great result! A typical Holy Soldier or other ranged mech might have to take down hundreds of not thousands of sandman drones in order to score a lucky hit against a hidden sandman admiral!

After an explosive week where the infamous sandman swarms were systematically dismantled, the Ylvainans became completely convinced that the prophet rewarded their faith!

Almost every Hunter of Ylvaine managed to take out a sandman admiral before their swarms were close to being consumed!

It was immediately obvious when they achieved a fruitful result. The mechs only had to fire a certain amount of times before a portion of the sandman swarm abruptly fell apart and lost coordination!

Without a higher intelligence doing all of the thinking, the disconnected sandman drones were extremely lethargic as they floated around without aim!

The defense forces didn't even bother attacking these sitting ducks. This was because the drones no longer released any attacks! The defenders could easily mop them up after taking care of the remaining threats!

While the Ylvaine Protectorate was still in the same situation as before, the constant miracles produced by the Eye of Ylvaine practically transformed the state overnight!

This was because the Protectorate did everything to publicize this turning point! The news uplifted every Ylvainan, causing them to become more hopeful and optimistic about the survival of their state!

The wondrous performance of the Deliverer even caused the civilians to strengthen their faiths! Church attendance soared as many Ylvainans became inspired by the incredible results achieved by the Deliverer!

This news did not immediately attract the attention of the Bright Republic and other foreign states.

None of them took their claims seriously. How could a mech that ostensibly channeled the will of a deceased prophet be able to defeat the indomitable sandmen?

Ever since the Sand War took off, a lot of mech designers offered various fantasy solutions that supposedly promised to end the crisis.

Nothing worked! No matter what kind of belief supported their claims, the mechs never delivered upon their promises!

Therefore, hardly any foreigner believed in the claim that the Deliverer was able to succeed where every other mech had failed!

Even the fact that the designer of the fantastic Desolate Soldier was responsible did not change their preconceptions.

It was very common for mech designers to fail after achieving success! Ves hadn't been designing mechs long enough to inspire too much confidence. This was especially so when the claims of the Deliverer were too ludicrous!

How could a mech that did not incorporate any sophisticated sensor systems be able to identify a sandman drone hiding within a vast and confusing swarm?

No amount of conventional science could explain how the Deliverer would be able to succeed where thousands of mech models had failed!

"Are we supposed to rely on a god to achieve victory against the sandmen?!"

"I would rather die than convert to a different faith!"

"Gods are outdated! How can humans keep falling for superstition?"

The Bright Republic, which possessed a better understanding of the Ylvaine Protectorate than most, suspected other motives behind the promotion of the Deliverers!

"Is this some kind of ploy to boost the reputation of that kidnapped mech designer?"

"Ves Larkinson is a Brighter! How can he possibly design a religious mech?"

"Haven't you heard about the Transcendent Messenger and Holy Soldier? Ves already managed to seduce the Ylvainans! Doing it a third time shouldn't be any problem!"

"That's different! From what I've heard, those two mech models are mainly valuable because they are very effective in hypnotizing gullible believers. The Deliverer is different because the Ylvainans are claiming that it can impact a battle more directly than affecting their moods!"

While the Bright Republic was aware of the peculiarities of the Transcendent Messengers and Holy Soldiers, its agents never experienced anything special about the mechs.

Just like the Desolate Soldier, the value of these mechs lay in their ability to increase the morale of the mech pilots and inspire confidence in the bystanders affected by their glows.

It was a little far-fetched to state that these glows were capable of doing what their best sensors failed to accomplish!

"How come these Deliverers keep assassinating the sandman admirals?"

"Maybe the Ylvainans have implemented some secret new sensor technology! It must be something built into their ships instead of their mechs!"

As the Deliverers continued to produce excellent results, foreign agents kept investigating the forces involved in the battles.

No other mech or ship stood out! None of them released any powerful emissions that denoted some active scanning system at work!

"Can it be.. That their claims are true? Are the Deliverers truly guided by their prophet?"

"Don't speak any nonsense! Ylvaine died hundreds of years ago! His entire dynasty perished as well!"

Before accepting the claims of the Ylvainans, the agents and investigators dispatched by foreign states tried to exhaust every other possible explanation!

They refused to accept that the Ylvainan Faith had an actual basis in reality!

Yet no matter how much the Brighters, Vesians, Reinaldans and such tried to pierce the truth, all of their conclusions came down to the Deliverer mechs themselves!

Each Ylvainan defense force that fielded a Deliverer mech almost always achieved better results.

Without the sandman swarms tearing apart the cannon fodder, the starfighter pilots became immensely grateful to the Eye of Ylvaine!

The introduction of the Deliverers paired with the elite Hunters of Ylvaine drastically affected their chances of survival! Casualties dropped by as much as seventy percent!

Such an achievement was too great to be dismissed! The Bright Republic and other skeptical states had no choice but to take the claims of the Ylvainans more seriously after a couple of weeks!

"How can this be? Is the supposed 'Bright Martyr' truly so blessed?"

"The Deliverers are too miraculous! We need to try them for ourselves!"

Not even the MTA could explain how the Deliverers were able to defy the odds and consistently target the sandman admirals over and over again!

When their own evaluators validated the mech design, they did not have much good to say about its design! While its offensive ability was excellent, its mobility and armor dragged down its overall performance!

The Mech Corps, the Mech Legion, the Honored Ones and many other organizations started to experiment with the Deliverers.

Yet when they licensed the mech and produced some copies to verify their amazing abilities, the foreigners completely failed to elicit anything notable!

Because the Deliverers had been produced by non-believers, their glows weren't as strong and pure as those produced by Ylvainans.

The foreign mech pilots assigned to test the Deliverers all experienced varying degrees of rejection! None of the third eyes lit up as the glow of the machines intensely rejected the pilots who dismissed or looked down on the Ylvainan Faith!

"How can this be? Why doesn't the Deliverer work for us? Did we produce a counterfeit or something?"

"It can't be! Our Deliverers are exactly the same as the ones fielded by the Eye of Ylvaine!"

"Maybe the warning that comes with this mech is actually true. Only those who are sincere believers in the Ylvainan Faith can unlock the full capabilities of this model!"

The Deliverer was too enigmatic. Not even the Seniors assigned to study the mechs could figure out its secrets! They studied the schematics over and over again and failed to figure out what made them special aside from the faint glow they exuded!

Plenty of mech designers wanted to scratch their heads until they turned bald! Each mech design from Ves Larkinson was too inexplicable! Whatever mystery he imparted to the mech designs was not something that they could understand!

Whenever the befuddled mech designers questioned the Ylvainans, they only received answers in the form of religious dogma!

"The Great Prophet is watching over us from above! He loves us all and will never abandon his faithful!"

"The past, present and future is fully in Prophet Ylvaine's grasp! You cannot imagine the vision he possesses!"

"Do you have a moment to talk about our lord and savior, Prophet Ylvaine?"

Not even the most intellectual Ylvainan mech designer provided a straight answer! Each and every Ylvainan kept praising the Great Prophet as if they were competing to be the most devout believer!

"There's no way we can hold a normal conversation with these religious nuts! Let's approach the LMC instead! At least it's a sensible mech company!"

Yet the lead designer of the Deliverer recently fell victim to a conspiracy! Ves Larkinson just happened to be missing just before the Deliverers began to make their mark in Protectorate space!

Fortunately, Ves was not the only mech designer involved in the design project.

Another Journeyman Mech Designer contributed materially to the Deliverer design, while a small design team made up of Apprentices assisted on the side.

While Gloriana was busy with supervising the evacuation of Ves' property from Cloudy Curtain, her comm suddenly became engulfed with inquiries by various different parties!

"Huh? They finally took notice of our Deliverer? It's about time!"

Since she didn't have much to do right now, she replied to some of the inquiries.

[...The Deliverer is not just a mech, but also a god in the making! Every Deliverer is a vessel that carries the touch of a proto-god, which in this case is Prophet Ylvaine himself! By relying on the power and generosity of this male god, the believers of his faith will be able to receive some blessings that will aid them in performing some miracles!...]

The questioners all received answers like these from Gloriana, which drove all of the mech designers completely mad!

"This is complete nonsense! It turns out that Miss Gloriana Wodin is an even greater religious nut than the Ylvainans!"

"How can a Brighter possibly tolerate a girlfriend like her? He must be the greatest nut of them all!"

In desperation, the mech designers approached the Tovar mech designers with the LMC's permission.

While Miles Tovar and his cousins at least answered normally, they were just in the dark as everyone else! Ves Larkinson never shared his trade secrets to them! None of them figured out the mechanics behind Ves' characteristic glows or the secrets behind the Deliverer's extraordinary capabilities!

"Dammit! Where the hell is Ves Larkinson?! Only he should be able to give a reasonable explanation! All these other helpers of his are either useless or crazy!"

All of the professionals and officials with an interest in the Deliverer became frustrated by the answers they received.

It seemed that anyone other than a devout Ylvainan mech pilot could make full use of the Deliverer!

Any foreign mech pilot, even those who had been encouraged to convert to the Ylvainan Faith, were unable to tame the picky mechs!

It was as if they had a mind of their own!

After much experimentation, each mech designer and investigation team concluded that only sincere believers could make effective use of the Deliverer!

"Since we can't field the Deliverers on our own, what about borrowing them from the Ylvainans?"

Many governments started to approach the Ylvaine Protectorate. Could they borrow some Hunters of Ylvaine?

The Ylvainan government did not acquiesce immediately. As if aware of their bargaining power, the Ylvainans set forth some demands!

While the negotiations took place behind closed doors, some of the conditions soon became common knowledge!

The Ylvainans, despite not being able to field enough Hunters of Ylvaine to cover all of their territory, expressed some willingness to assist in the defense of other states.

However, the price for their assistance was considerable!

Aside from receiving hefty remuneration in the form of money and resources, the Ylvainans wanted to spread their faith in their respective states!

Wanted the right to proselytize among the foreigners without encountering any hindrances!

So long as a foreign state rejected this demand, the negotiations instantly stalled!

Chapter 1727 Dog Person

While the states engulfed by the Sand War seethed with excitement and astonishment due to the miraculous performance of the Deliverers, the man responsible for their design remained ignorant.

He only learned about the impact of his latest product when Aisling brought up the topic during dinner one day.

"Your Deliverer design is making quite an impression in the region." She remarked when a couple of floating bots brought away their empty dishes. "Everyone except the Ylvainans are perplexed how they are able to identify the sandman admirals within the huge sandman swarms."

Ves looked up with her and grinned. "It sounds like my Deliverer is delivering on its promises."

"The other states have failed to adopt your new mech. They're forced to knock on the Ylvaine Protectorate's doors in order to borrow the strength of the Eye of Ylvaine!"

"Eye of Ylvaine?"

"That's what the believers call their new branch dedicated to fielding Deliverer mechs. While other Ylvainan forces have begun to field the Deliverer mechs as well, only elite

Kronon mech pilots are able to achieve the best results! Those who aren't skilled or devout enough won't be able to arouse or make use of the mystery of your machines."

None of this surprised Ves. He already anticipated this outcome. "I designed the Deliverer to cater exclusively to the Ylvainan people. Other people can forget about gaining the Deliverer's approval. No matter if they are Brighters, Fridaymen or Hexers, so long as the mech pilots don't have any sincerity towards the Ylvainan Faith, my mechs will never embrace them! Their attempts to take advantage of my latest product are doomed from the start!"

"You sound very confident." Aisling replied.

She was surprised by his confidence!

"I know my design the best!" Ves proudly stated.

"Why can't foreigners make full use of the Deliverers? Why are only genuine believers able to make use of their exceptional abilities?"

"Those are trade secrets."

"Miss Gloriana knows, right?"

Ves shrugged. "Maybe."

"Then why aren't you sharing this to me? I'm just as good as Gloriana, if not better!"

"You won't be able to accept my explanation."

"Says who?"

"Says me. Do you believe in anything? You shouldn't. You're a Fridayman. You're the same as a Brighter in this regard!"

"I don't see how that matters. From what I can tell, you don't believe in the Ylvainan Faith. You're not a follower of hexim either! You're just as secular as me, Ves. Clearly faith doesn't have anything to do with the power of the Deliverer design!"

Ves had to admit that Aisling made a reasonable deduction. She was truly right! While anything related to spirituality involved a lot of strange phenomena, none of them depended on any faith!

In his perspective, spirituality was just another part of reality, one which most of humanity had yet to explore.

Though Aisling was obsessed with Ves, she was different from Gloriana. The Fridayman mech designer respected his boundaries and remained fully in control.

Comparing Aisling to Gloriana was like comparing an angel to a hellcat! The two were quite different!

In ordinary cases, Ves much preferred to be in the company of the former. The more he interacted with Aisling, the more he appreciated her soberness and rationality.

The only problem he had with her was that she was too clever in other ways as well. All of her actions and decisions served to achieve a specific result. Ves had the sense that she was used to weaving elaborate webs.

In addition, her confidence bordered on the extreme sometimes. She was so assured that Ves was in the palm of her hand that she practically took his eventual defection for granted! There was no possible way that he could ever resist her charm!

"You'll tell me your secrets one way or another." She modestly grinned at him. "Once you forget about Gloriana, you'll find out that partnering up with me is a great decision! We are made for each other!"

Ves frowned. "I already told you that I'm not attracted to you. I am still committed to Gloriana!"

He spoke from his heart despite how unwise it was to pop Aisling's bubble!

Fortunately, she was way too confident in her plan to take his rejection seriously.

"Poor man." She shook her head in pity. "The Hexers have thoroughly succeeded in mesmerizing you. If you stayed with Gloriana any longer, you would have turned into her puppy!"

"I never asked to be 'rescued', Aisling."

She didn't take him seriously. In her opinion, spending so much time with Gloriana impaired his judgement! He couldn't be trusted to take care of himself! He needed someone sensible and wise to turn him back to normal!

Naturally, Aisling just happened to be the woman willing to rehabilitate him into a normal man!

"Did you have a good time perusing my library?" She asked, changing the subject.

"I have to admit that the textbooks are great. I've learned a lot while reading them, though I don't exactly enjoy handling actual paper books."

He was too used to scrolling seamlessly through text that he couldn't get used to discrete pages.

This was just a minor gripe, though.

"I think it's nice to have something solid in my hands. Projections and virtual reality are too fake for my tastes."

"My biggest complaint about the library is that it's obviously complete. There's a lot of subjects that I'm interested about that are missing."

Aisling shook her head at Ves. "I've already broken some rules by making those books available to you. If not for my Master, I wouldn't have the guts to expose you to core Clarion textbooks. Even then, I only granted you access to the literature accessible to any student at my university. The specialist knowledge that delves deeper in a subject are restricted to those who contribute to the school."

Though she didn't mention it, Ves figured that she was referring to a club similar to the Clifford Society.

Ves still regretted that he no longer had access to the Society or any other club that was comparable in nature. He missed the ability to exchange merits with exclusive goods, services and knowledge.

Fortunately, he still had the System, which offered similar benefits.

"Can I request some extra books?" He tentatively asked. "I'm getting bored with the existing selection."

"Why? I don't believe you've mastered the contents of my books! There is too much material for any Journeyman to comprehend at our age!"

"It's not that. I always learn at least something new whenever I crack open a book. It's just that I'm not very interested in their topics."

"What do you want to study, then?"

"FTL drives."

"Pardon?"

"You heard me. I want to learn more about FTL drives. I'm too bored to study anything else."

With his high Intelligence and prior knowledge, he easily supplemented some of the knowledge he needed to hijack the Scarlet Rose.

Unfortunately, all of the books pertained to either mechs or fundamental science.

"I don't see why you would possibly want to study the workings of a ship component." Aisling frowned. "As a mech designer, I thought you knew better. Studying FTL technology is notoriously difficult! Even to us, it probably takes decades to comprehend the theory as well as a chief engineer! It's not worth it to waste your time on this subject!"

"Ordinarily, you're right, but haven't you paid attention to the recent announcement by the MTA? Phasewater changes everything! With the Red Ocean supplying an abundant amount of exotics, FTL-capable mechs will become a staple in the future! It might take a century or two for this new mode of mechs to become viable in the galactic rim, but we should be ready to exploit it once that happens!"

Essentially, he stated that it wasn't a waste to start studying FTL technology early!

Aisling looked thoughtful at that. While it was far too soon to learn how FTL drives worked, perhaps every ambitious mech designer in the future had to master how they worked!

Otherwise, how could they have the confidence to add a minidrive to their mech designs?

"I'll think about it." She eventually replied. "I still don't think it's a good idea considering that our star sector will be one of the last ones to adopt the minidrive. We can focus on designing plenty of other mechs."

"It will be too late by then. At my age, I'm still mentally flexible enough to handle something that is radically new. I'm afraid I won't be able to switch gears after a few decades. I don't want to start studying FTL theory when I'm already set in my ways."

He didn't make up this phenomenon. It only happened to some mech designers, though. Most of them tended to be older and isolated. Their views hadn't been challenged for a very long time, causing them to solidify their mindsets!

Most mech designers knew that they had to exercise their minds and challenge their assumptions to prevent this outcome. As long as they were receptive to something new, they were capable of adapting to something different!

Eventually, Aisling nodded her head. "If you insist on it so much, I'll find some engineering textbooks and print them out for you. I won't allow you to get muddled by theory that is way too advanced for mech designers like us. I'll select some basic ones at first that are suitable for engineering students."

"That's okay. I've only touched the surface of how an FTL drive works. I'm mostly concerned with building up a good foundation."

He really didn't need anything more, as his goal wasn't to produce an FTL drive from scratch.

He just wanted to understand enough about FTL drives to identify which parts he should pull out to safely shut it off. A basic first-year textbook already sufficed in this role.

Whatever else he managed to learn was extra. He'd be glad if he gained a shallow but undeniable understanding of FTL drives over the next few days, but that was a bit unrealistic.

Once Ves secured this concession, he relaxed a bit as he got what he wanted.

For her part, Aisling became pleased as well for meeting one of his requests. She estimated that Ves would approach her again. Once it became a habit, Ves would slowly form a favorable impression of her. It would only be a matter of time before their relationship grew intimate!

Though Ves was aware of her intentions, he hoped she would never be able to succeed!

If Ves got his way, he could use the knowledge he learned to hijack the Scarlet Rose. Once he gained control over the ship, Aisling would cease to pose a threat to him! He could get rid of her any time he liked! Just the thought of killing her amused him to no end!

Aisling misinterpreted his happy smile. She approached him and lay a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't be afraid to ask if you need anything. While I can't promise anything, I'll do my best to make you comfortable."

Ves brushed off her hand and stood up from his chair. "Dinner is over. I should get back."

Once Aisling left, Patricia escorted him back to his stateroom.

"Lady Curver is very nice."

"So?"

"I don't understand why you keep rejecting her advances."

"I'm a cat person." He said. "Aisling is like a mutt. There's nothing wrong with dogs. I just don't like them. Does that answer your question?"

Patricia grew confused. "Brighters have much more in common with Fridaymen than Hexers. By all rights you should be a dog person."

"I'm not."

"That's because a cat got to you first and turned you into something you are not. You think you are a cat person, but you're really a dog person. You just forgot how dogs are better, that's all."

"Well, I've already spent a considerable amount of time in this doghouse, but I haven't come close to appreciating Aisling's species! Maybe it's time for you Fridaymen to admit that I'm not cut out to be a dog person!"

Chapter 1728 Fragile Shell

The Scarlet Rose traveled quietly back to Coalition space. Along the way, she sometimes made some stops in order to allow Aisling to meet with some officials and other people.

Ves shouldn't have noticed anything. Locked within his quarters, the only way he should have been able to ascertain what was going on was by tracking the intervals between FTL transitions.

No one figured out that he managed to tap into the ship's systems!

With Lucky's help, Ves managed to gain a complete overview of all of the parts and systems of the Scarlet Rose.

Though there were plenty of ship components which mystified him, after Lucky performed a thorough investigation, he ruled them out as obstacles to his ploy to take over the ship.

After finishing the survey, Ves carefully studied the diagram of the Scarlet Rose's layout and identified each and every critical part or system that he needed to subvert.

There was a lot he needed to grasp!

A mobile supply frigate might not be a particularly sizable ship class, but a ship like the Scarlet Rose was stuffed with tech!

As a ship commissioned by the Coalition Reserve Force, she was built to a very high standard! Only the military ships of the Friday Coalition contained more safeguards and backup systems!

Ves sighed and shook his head as he held Lucky while soaking in his bath.

He couldn't find any other reasonable opportunity to interact with Lucky aside from holing up in the bathroom.

To open this window of opportunity, Ves pretended to be extremely indignant about being spied upon while he was doing his bathroom business!

He acted like he was immensely shy about his body and thoroughly searched the entire bathroom compartment from top to bottom! He destroyed each and every optical sensor until he was sure there was nothing left!

He gambled that Aisling wouldn't intervene for fear of upsetting him. Luckily, she only admonished him a single time during mealtime before dropping the topic!

The monitoring system of a modern second-class vessel was very pervasive. Optical sensors only consisted of a portion of the monitoring in each compartment. There were heat sensors, sound sensors, gravitic sensors, radiation sensors, mass sensors and a multitude of other ways to track what went on inside a compartment!

Ves did not touch any of them. He only cared about disabling the only sensor type which could expose Lucky.

As for the other sensors, Lucky's ECM systems effortlessly fooled them into thinking that nothing was there!

Once he satisfied this condition, Ves interacted with Lucky without any issue. He could even summon his System comm and purchase some gadgets in order to assist him into taking over the ship.

However, with how easily Lucky could infiltrate and sabotage the various systems and subsystems of the Scarlet Rose, Ves would rather keep his Design Points in reserve.

Who knew what kind of surprise he might encounter during his hijacking attempt! Keeping over 1 million DP in reserve would definitely be able to save him in a pinch!

For now, Ves felt confident he could take over the ship by relying on his existing means.

The engineering section, the security compartment and the bridge all needed to be secured.

At the same time, Ves had to sabotage or subvert every backup system that activated in the event of some sort of failure!

As a ship built to a high standard, the Scarlet Rose featured a lot of backups and redundancies! Not even his Barracuda offered so many redundant systems!

"Every starship is just a fragile shell that protects the people inside from the ravages of space."

Radiation, vacuum, frost, space dust and other threats constantly bombarded space-faring vessels.

Unlike astral beasts, humanity never adapted to space. Fragile humans like Aisling and Patricia had to rely on external tools to master space.

Humanity's reliance on starships was the main reason why the race came to dominate the galaxy!

Though mechs had become ascendent in the Age of Mechs, no human dared to neglect their civilization's dependence on starships!

"Humans are rather helpless." He sighed and idly splashed some bathwater over his head. "Ships give us strength, but they are all potential deathtraps!"

A starship was not so easy to run. They consisted of many different interconnected compartments, components and systems. The complexity of a mobile supply frigate like the Scarlet Rose exceeded that of a mech by at least a hundred times!

This was not just due to her immensely larger size, but also due to all of the functions she was supposed to run on a continuous basis!

The more systems a ship possessed, the greater the chance that something might go wrong!

If the inertial dampeners of the ship suddenly shut off, all of her passengers might slam against the bulkheads the moment the vessel accelerated or decelerated!

If the life support systems failed, the oxygen and temperature levels might drop, causing every human to suffocate while shivering in the cold!

These were just a handful of the many essential components and systems that the crew and passengers of the Scarlet Rose relied upon to preserve their lives!

"If I wanted to, I could instantly kill each and every person aboard this vessel." Ves muttered darkly.

Due to the potential risks, expensive ships tended to offer several redundancies. For each primary system, there was at least a secondary system on standby that was ready to step up in the case of a crisis!

All of these systems were spread out. This was because a ship could easily be rendered impotent if some important compartments incurred catastrophic damage for some reason!

"When it comes to ship design, you can never put all of your eggs in a single basket!"

Fortunately, with Lucky's thorough scouting, Ves identified every relevant system. He only had to program some malicious code and pass on some instructions to his cat in order to subvert their functioning.

Ves did not dare to penetrate these systems too thoroughly. He only affected them as little as possible. The main goal of his sabotage was to make them unresponsive to any commands.

Everything had to run normally, or at the very least pose no hindrance to his plans!

Ves quietly made a lot of progress on this front. He believed it wouldn't take much longer to complete this step!

However, that only took care of the ship. Paralyzing all of the systems, especially the defensive ones, was not enough! He needed to mop up the people on the Scarlet Rose as well!

Thirty-five of them consisted of spacers. Each of them kept the ship running.

Ves decided to clean them all up!

While it was very problematic to operate the Scarlet Rose without a crew, Ves believed it wouldn't be a problem to operate her for just a week!

As a highly-automated vessel, the Scarlet Rose was designed to rely less on humans. Ves believed it was feasible to return to Cloudy Curtain without relying on the existing crew!

Each of these spacers posed a threat to him. Ves was far too paranoid to keep them alive and continue their duties under his command! They only had to perform one act of sabotage out of spite to massively screw him over!

The crew shouldn't be left alive, particularly the captain and the chief engineer!

"Only the captain and the chief engineer can mitigate my sabotage!"

The two possessed extremely high authority. As long as Ves gave them some time, they could easily reverse his sabotage and restore the systems to normal!

Ves had to take them out right away before he did anything else!

"The problem is that the bridge and engineering sections are located too far apart!"

Ves was confident he could sneak into either the bridge or engineering and take out the crew inside.

However, the moment he made a move, he would undoubtedly expose himself!

Even if he somehow took care of both, he still had to contend with the remainder of the crew as well as the security officers aboard the ship!

He wasn't too worried about the crew in the short term. As long as he moved quickly and took out his priority targets, the remaining spacers should be confused of what was going on. As long as Ves sabotaged the communications systems, he should be able to prevent them from coordinating their actions!

He had two more priorities to deal with after he took care of the bridge and engineering.

"First, I have to kill all of the guards and security officers. They're already pretty capable by themselves, but they are a lot more threatening once they make use of the internal defenses!"

Each compartment and corridor section possessed an isolated defense system that was completely cut off from any other system or network.

In the event some hostels boarded the ship, the guards could fortify themselves in each and every section by activating these independent defense systems.

"There are way too many of them for me to sabotage them all." He sighed.

If he had two months, then he could surely subdue all of these defenses. Yet Ves wanted to make his move before the Scarlet Rose crossed into Coalition space!

For this reason, he settled for sabotaging only the minimum amount of internal defenses. Ves planned his route and settled for tampering with the defensive systems located along the way.

This meant that he could not deviate from his route! As long as he stepped into a compartment he didn't control, he'd be vulnerable to the ship!

"Well, as long as I deal with all of my essential targets, the rest of the ship won't pose a threat."

Aside from the security department, Ves had to take care of one more potential threat.

The mechs.

The Scarlet Rose carried four spaceborn mechs. As long as even a single one deployed into space, it could easily apply a lot of leverage to Ves!

He did not wish to expend a huge amount of effort and succeed in taking over the entire ship only for a mech to threaten to blow her up shortly afterwards!

Therefore, he had to find some way to neutralize the mechs quickly enough.

He first thought of trying to kill the mech pilots, but that led back to the same problem of trying to kill the captain or the engineers.

Once someone died or got attacked, the entire ship would definitely be alerted!

"Instead of killing the mech pilots, why not sabotage the mechs?"

As a mech designer, his understanding of mechs is immensely great! Even though Ves did not entirely understand the second-class mechs, he could easily think up many different ways to sabotage the machines!

The challenge was to do so without letting anyone else get wiser. For now, the mechs were stowed in the mech hanger, and each of them were constantly being checked and maintained by a team of mech technicians.

Though mech technicians were normally easy to fool, Ves did not underestimate their capabilities. Unlike the mech technicians from the Bright Republic, these ones came from the Friday Coalition!

They were smarter, more educated and more competent than the mech technicians he was used to! Ves had to approach this sabotage very carefully in order to keep them in the dark!

Time was beginning to run out on him. If he didn't launch his escape plan in the next few days, the Scarlet Rose would successfully cross over into Coalition space, which meant that Ves would have to escape hostile territory!

Ves did not relish his chances. The Vandals barely managed to cut through the territories of the Vesia Kingdom, and only managed to succeed due to various factors.

This time, Ves didn't think the Friday Coalition would be that incompetent!

In fact, even if Ves launched his hijacking attempt right away, the CRC would not let go of him so easily! The Fridaymen would certainly dispatch a pursuit force to retrieve their ship!

Chapter 1729 Recurring Problem

Ves missed the presence of Nitaa and the Avatars. If he had some helpers around, he could cover a lot more ground!

Even so, Ves still believed he could succeed on his own! Having gone through various crises, he did not flinch from the danger at all!

In fact, he became excited at the thought of moving into action! His Larkinson blood boiled in his veins, encouraging him to fight!

He missed this exhilarating sensation. After his military service, Ves was no longer surrounded by enemies. Long years of peace had dulled his edge and made him complacent.

Yet now that he ended up in this situation, Ves felt as his desperation reignited his battle instincts!

Even though he was not a trained soldier or mech pilot, he still longed for battle!

"Not yet!" He hissed to himself. "I have to hold it in! I'm not done yet!"

After thoroughly analyzing the scans of the four mechs carried by the Scarlet Rose, Ves dispatched Lucky to tamper with a single component within the machines.

This sabotage was extremely subtle and shouldn't be detected in a short amount of time!

"Hehehe." He grinned.

Taking care of the mechs was trivial. With Lucky's ability phase through solid matter, he could easily sneak up to the mechs by burrowing through the deck and phase through their legs! From there, the cat could easily affect any part of the mech!

When it came to infiltration, no one was better than Lucky! Ves believed that not even Calabast was as good as his cat!

Unfortunately, Ves had been working Lucky very hard these days. His pet expended a lot of energy and often had to rest and recuperate whatever energy he expended. If not for that, he could have finished his preparations days ago!

The time to launch his plan came close. After Lucky tampered with the mechs, Ves wanted him to take a long rest before making his final moves!

Ves left the riskiest tampering for last. When making a move on the primary and secondary systems of the bridge, security department and engineering, the chances of discovery was too high!

Ves had no choice but to opt for speed instead of stealth to paralyze all of these essential systems!

While the Scarlet Rose was big, it wasn't big enough to delay Lucky from visiting all of these compartments if he moved at full speed!

There was no turning back once Lucky embarked on this frenzied sabotage spree! Ves would have to move into action whether he liked it or not! Once Lucky and him became exposed, the Fridaymen would definitely spoil his plans!

Ves behaved very carefully during these finals days. He did not wish to arouse any suspicion while he was on the cusp of crossing the rubicon.

To distract himself, he poured a lot of attention to his studies. Aisling did as she promised and provided him with a basic engineering textbook.

It was quite a good one. In addition to providing some basic explanations on FTL drives, the contents also provided an overview of the power reactor, thrusters and other ship components!

As long as he absorbed some of the basic knowledge contained within the book, he'd be able to perform minor repairs and check for obvious tampering.

In order to succeed in the second half of the escape plan, it was essential for him to be able to take over some of the responsibilities of an engineer!

While the Scarlet Rose could technically operate without a crew, there was still a chance that something might malfunction! Without a competent human crew at hand, Ves could only rely on himself to resolve any problems!

Of course, it was easier said than done to digest the engineering textbook. While Ves already learned some basic aspects about FTL drives and other ship components, he never studied them systematically.

He never possessed much of a passion for shipbuilding and ship design. As Journeyman Mech Designer, he already solidified his passion by forming a design seed based around mechs.

His design seed not only amplified his Spirituality whenever he worked on mechs, but also restricted his interest in other fields!

While it was possible for him to work hard and become a competent ship designer, he would never be as inventive and imaginative as those who dedicated themselves to this profession!

From what he knew about mech designers, Ves believed this narrow focus would persist until he advanced to Star Designer!

For some reason, Star Designers no longer limited their design work to mechs! While they were still capable of performing their old work, they all started designing other works such as cities, space stations, Dyson spheres and even starships!

Of course, that was way too far away for Ves. He shouldn't even consider branching out to designing ships until he surpassed the rank of Master!

While Ves tried to lay low by reading books all day, Aisling and Patricia never left him alone for long.

He often talked with Aisling during mealtime. Each time they met, she constantly persuaded him to turn his back to the Hexers and side with her instead.

Ves found it rather tiresome to reject her advances every day. Aisling seemed to have no shame and always presented the same arguments next time.

"The Friday Coalition is much better for you! Only by settling down in our state will you be able to progress without any hindrance!"

"Gloriana is a mean and selfish witch! She'll never treat you like an equal! Like any Hexer, she'll definitely seek to turn you into something less than a man!"

"Why don't you look at me, Ves? I'm prettier than Gloriana! Should I dye my hair black for you? Do you have a thing against blondes?"

The approach adopted by Aisling slowly eroded his resistance. Her arguments were very sound, after all. His mind partially agreed with his captor. If not for his heart constantly rebelling against the indignity he suffered, he might have actually agreed to embrace the Friday Coalition once again!

If Aisling had more time, Ves feared that she might succeed in dousing the fire raging within his heart!

While it wasn't easy to affect his deepest emotions, as long as she persisted for a couple of months or years, she might actually succeed!

Even if she failed, Aisling probably had many other means to convert him to her side! With Master Huron and Clarion University ready to assist her, Ves would never be able to resist forever!

This made it all the more important to avoid the Friday Coalition!

"Why are you so fixated on me?" Ves asked in an exasperated tone while they hung out at the lounge after dinner. "Aren't there a lot of talented mech designers in the Friday Coalition?"

The Friday Coalition encompassed a huge amount of space! Its six partners colonized thousands of star systems. An enormous amount of second-class citizens resided in its territories.

With a huge population base, the amount of mech designers in the state had reached a terrible figure!

At least some of these mech designers should have been compatible with Aisling!

"You're right, Ves." She replied and placed her palm on top of his hand. "I do know some men who I've kept my eye on for some time."

Ves immediately yanked his hand away!

Though Aisling pouted at him, he remained impassive!

"Why aren't you chasing after those other men, then?"

"While their qualifications are all good, I don't feel their design philosophies can help me as much as yours."

"Most mech designers don't specialize in fields like ours. Too many mech designers focus on enhancing the aspects that directly strengthen a mech such as making them faster or more resilient. Specialties such as neural connectivity and 'metaphysical man-machine symbiosis' are too esoteric."

"What about those who are different?"

"They're interesting." She briefly smiled as she reminisced about the mech designers she met at Clarion and elsewhere. "I know one mech designer who is obsessed with designing multi-pilot mechs."

"I thought those types of mechs went out of vogue, at least in this part of the galaxy."

"That's not entirely correct. There is still demand for multi-pilot mechs, but mostly for specialized purposes."

A multi-pilot mech was simply a mech piloted by multiple mech pilots.

Ves still remembered long ago, he designed a virtual mech featuring a large cockpit that was designed to accommodate multiple mech pilots!

That was not his proudest design, that was for sure.

"I recall the reason why multi-pilot mechs went out of vogue is because it's too risky. Connecting two mech pilots to a single mech at the same time is bound to pose some risks!"

"Most of those problems have been addressed to some extent." Aisling answered. "There is still some merit to multi-pilot mechs. They're most often seen in heavy or superheavy mechs featuring many different weapon systems."

These kinds of multi-pilot mechs basically operated like tanks. One mech pilot was in charge of the weapons, while the other mech pilot took care of the rest!

This was just the most common application of multi-pilot mechs. By splitting responsibilities, the mech pilots operating the mech concurrently did not need to be in sync.

However, more advanced multi-pilot mechs existed where the mech pilots simultaneously controlled every aspect of a mech!

Of course, the costs far outweighed the gains. Ves had never encountered such a mech in person!

"While his specialty sounds weird, I think it fits well with yours. Why didn't you hook up with this guy?"

"There's no benefit to me. Just because we are compatible doesn't mean I should partner up with him! If we collaborate, he'll certainly be able to improve by leaps and bounds! As for me, how can I possibly realize my ambition by sticking with multi-pilot mechs?"

"Ah."

She was right. Her goal was to lower the barrier of neural interconnectivity. Limiting herself to designing multi-pilot mechs was a step backwards in that regard!

"Are there any other specialties that are more helpful to you?"

"There are. I know one former classmate from Clarion who has always been good at designing mass-produced mechs. He's sort of the opposite of Gloriana in that he is very good at making his mechs compatible to many different mech pilots."

Ves blinked at that. "That sounds useful."

"It is. Nowadays, his specialty is in constant demand! Even if he's a Journeyman, he has contributed to the designs of several popular mechs designed by Seniors!"

"Why are you seducing him, then?" He asked. "As long as you exchange with him, he could probably find some way of lowering the requirements of your specialty!"

Aisling shook her head. "I think so as well. I considered this option long and hard. He's just as capable as me, and we come from the same university. There's one reason why I rejected him in the end."

"Why?"

"He's a dwarf."

"...What?"

"He's a high gravity variant human!" Aisling shouted. "I can't stand spending the rest of my life with a dwarf! His head only comes up to my chest! Think of how embarrassing it would be for us to hang out with each other!"

Ves looked dully at Aisling. "Is that really a problem? Can't he grow longer for you or something?"

"Impossible! For some variants, their bodies are fairly malleable. However, the mech designer I'm talking about is different! He's proud to be a dwarf!"

"I see."

Since that was the case, Ves could see why Aisling gave up on this fellow as a potential partner.

He would do the same if he was in her shoes!

"This shouldn't be it, right?"

"There are more, but each of them have an issue. Either they are already taken, or there's something about them that's not very pleasing to me. It's very hard to find a mech designer that ticks all of the boxes, you know! While your design philosophy is rather odd, I believe that there are many mech designers like me who recognize your value! Gloriana and I shouldn't be the only ones who want to turn you into our partner!"

Ves grimaced at her words. He had a hunch that she might have pointed out a recurring problem!

Chapter 1730 Rational Mech Designer

With one more day to go before he launched his attempt, Ves quietly bided his time.

No one appeared to have discovered the clue. Even though Ves tampered with a lot of systems through Lucky's assistance, he had always been careful to keep his changes as limited as possible!

If he made just a single mistake, the crew of the Scarlet Rose might discover his manipulations, forcing him to make his move prematurely!

With so many essential steps in his plans, he couldn't afford to miss any detail! Ves had to do far too much in a very brief amount of time!

Ves estimated that he needed to complete all of his objectives within just ten minutes! As long as he finished his plan within ten minutes, the Scarlet Rose would definitely fall into his hands!

However, if he encountered some delays, he risked giving the crew an opportunity to regain control over the ship!

All of the specialists stationed on the mobile supply frigate were much more knowledgeable about the systems of the ship than Ves! As long as they had enough time, they would certainly be able to fix his sabotage and restore some functionality to the ship!

Once that happened, it would be too easy for the crew to make use of some sort of internal defense system to take him out!

In short, Ves had to be both fast and thorough. While he could rely on many different advantages, he never forgot that he would be fighting on someone else's turf!

Even though Ves believed he gained a very good grasp on the Scarlet Rose's layout and configuration, who knew if he overlooked some important function!

Since Ves had to move quickly, he didn't have the time to follow up on some of the unknown parts and machinery that made up the ship.

However, Ves did not expect too many unpleasant surprises. A mobile supply frigate was not built for battle. All of its safeguards and precautions were mainly geared towards addressing low-probability events.

It did not make much economic sense to invest too excessively in the internal security systems like the Scarlet Rose.

While Ves tried to calm his nerves, Patricia visited his quarters once again.

"You're back."

"Would you rather have me stay away?"

"Oh, not at all!" Ves quickly said. "You're much more pleasant to talk to than Aisling."

"She's not very pleased with that. Why do you keep closing yourself off to her? Lady Curver really isn't as bad as you think."

"You already know my answer to that. I haven't changed my mind. The only way I'll change my mind about her if she lets me go! As long as I'm free to go, I don't mind corresponding with Aisling on a more cordial basis."

Of course, Ves firmly decided to block Aisling from contacting him as soon as he got back to safety! There was no way he would ever forgive this scheming Fridayman mech designer for depriving him of his freedom!

Apparently, Ves hadn't hidden his thoughts well enough.

"You don't look very sincere."

"Can you blame me? I'm still mad as hell. No matter what kind of carrot Aisling dangles in front of my head, I would rather bite off her head!"

Both of them fell into silence after he made this remark.

Ves realized that he let his fury get the better of him. Ever since he became an unwilling guest, it became increasingly harder to suppress his temper!

Fortunately, his captors did not take his spiteful words to heart. Since he fell into their clutches, it was only a matter of time before they brought him back to the light!

"You are very irritable, Ves."

"I guess I'm an emotional person."

"There is more to it than that. You're not very stable. Your mood and temperament never sit still. I fear that if you continue like this, you'll eventually cross a line."

"What's it to you, Patricia?"

"I don't want to see a former classmate and a brilliant mech designer fall."

"What do you mean by that?"

She studied him carefully with her clear and tranquil eyes. "You advanced too quickly. You grew up too fast as a mech designer."

"What's wrong with that? The MTA values those who break through before they reach thirty!"

"It's a trap!"

"What are you talking about!?"

Ves genuinely looked puzzled. He always thought that it was a good thing to become a Journeyman quickly. Those who surpassed the extraordinary threshold always had a bright future ahead of them because their potential was always high!

"It's kind of a secret within the mech industry." Patricia spoke in a softer voice while looking at him in pity. "I'm not sure whether I should tell you. It won't help you as you can't turn back the clock and undo your mistake."

"Just tell me! Don't tease me with your hints!" Ves slammed his hand against his lap!

After a brief moment of hesitation, Patricia bowed her head. "If you insist. Let me ask you first. When you.. Advanced to Journeyman, did you do anything to regulate your mood?"

"Uhh..."

Ves remembered that he advanced shortly after introducing the Aurora Titan to the public. He just holed himself up in an empty room in the exhibition center and broke through just like that.

"I see." She said. "You didn't prepare for your breakthrough, nor did you attempt to regulate it, am I correct?"

"Is there something wrong with that?" He asked defensively.

Had he made some huge mistake? Had he unwittingly squandered his potential by using the wrong method to advance to Journeyman?

"It's.. complicated. There are different opinions on this matter. Do you know that I'm still an Apprentice?"

Ves nodded. It was very obvious in the way she conducted herself in front of Aisling and him. If she was a Journeyman, she would have behaved like an equal.

To mech designers, their backgrounds and origins didn't matter as much as their competence in mech design.

As long as Patricia was able to match their prowess in mech design, she should have been able to lift her head in front of Aisling!

"If I really wanted to, I could have worked harder in order to advance faster. I might have even been able to become a Journeyman a year ago if I drop everything else and concentrate solely on elevating my design capabilities!"

"Why would you slack off?"

As far as Ves was concerned, every Apprentice longed to be a Journeyman! He couldn't imagine how anyone would want to delay their advancement and waste so much precious time!

The older someone advanced, the less time they had to work on reaching the next rank!

"The reason why I slowed down is because I needed to restore my mentality." Patricia tapped the side of her head. "Think about it. When you design a mech, do you feel enthusiastic? When you succeed in creating what you want, do you feel euphoric?"

"Yes."

"Ordinarily, your passion, enthusiasm and sense of fulfillment can do wonders for your motivation. When you get caught up in designing mechs, your strong feelings can make you more inventive and improve the quality of your work!"

Ves was very familiar with this. If he wasn't so passionate in his work, he would have never achieved so much in his career!

"That doesn't sound so bad, Patricia."

"I'm not finished. Strong feelings can swing both ways. In other words, it's a double-edged sword. Passion can empower your work, but also detract from it when something goes wrong!"

Ves was shocked by her revelation. He had never thought badly of his passion! To hear that it could be a threat to him was not something he could accept!

"Why is that so?"

"Don't get me wrong. Passion and enthusiasm are very useful. Some of the most brilliant innovations in mech design have emerged because mech designers have done their utmost to fulfill their goals! However, it's exactly because they are willing to go through extremes that they can be a danger to themselves!"

Ves wasn't stupid. He started to understand the gist of her argument.

"You mean that mech designers who get caught up in their passion and advance in such a state are too prone to be led by their emotions?"

"Exactly." Patricia. "There is a strain within the mech industry that believes that mech designers ought to be rational. One of the most essential demands is to keep a very tight control over your emotions. A rational mech designer must be in control over their emotions instead of the other way around!"

"This.. I never heard about this!" Ves responded with astonishment. "Is this what you are trying to become?"

She nodded. "This is why I've delayed my advancement. It's not wrong for me to feel passionate about my work, but I don't want to be consumed by it. I want to design mechs with a clear mind and purpose! To do so, I have to temper my emotions and unconscious impulses by letting them fade over time!"

"Is it that easy?"

"Not exactly." She shook her head. "If I pause too long between every successful design project, I'd be delaying my career progression too much. There are certain methods that can regulate your mood. Letting some time pass is just one of the simplest options."

"I see. What exactly is the advantage of doing this? Can you point me to an example of a so-called rational mech designer."

"Master Olson is a very good example." She pointed out. "While I'm not too familiar with your former Master, she obviously exhibits some behavioral traits that suggest that she has employed some methods to maintain control over herself!"

Now that he thought about it, Ves had always admired Master Olson for being so calm and collected. He could never imagine his Master in an angry or enthusiastic state!

"How can she advance to Master so quickly when she's suppressing her passion?"

Patricia shrugged. "I don't know. It's not a rule that rational mech designers are supposed to be slow in progressing their careers. Master Olson is very brilliant for becoming a Master while simultaneously maintaining a clear mind."

"What is so bad about a mech designer who doesn't bother with all of this stuff?" He asked. "From what you told me, mech designers who care a lot about their work can make brilliant achievements!"

Ves had a very high interest in the answer to this question!

"I don't look down on you, if that's what you think. It's just that mech designers who are caught up by their emotions are too unstable. This is not reflected in their work, but in

their overall judgement. Have you heard about mech designers who are so consumed by their work that they have gone too far?"

Ves thought about mech designers such as Gloriana and the Skull Architect.

As much as he felt uncomfortable about it, he put himself in the same category as them! After all, Ves couldn't deny that he often let his emotions and unconscious feelings override his rationality!

"I think I understand what you are getting at. However.. are rational mech designers really better?"

"There is no consensus on this subject." Patricia answered. "However, if you ever get in touch with certain organizations, you'll find out that rational mech designers often consider themselves superior. This is because they value control above anything else!"

"Certainly passionate mech designers like us must feel differently, right?"

She nodded. "As I've mentioned before, most brilliant mech designs and other pivotal innovations come from mech designers who don't abide by logic! As long as passionate mech designers are able to avoid indulging themselves in self-destructive behavior, their achievements can easily surpass those who are more steady and firm in mind!"

"So to sum it up, there are pros and cons to both types of mech designers, right?"

"Yes, so don't feel bad for yourself for choosing this road. I believe that you can absolutely go far in your current course. It's just that your current behavior is not helping you. The sooner you give in to Lady Curver, the better!"

"That remains to be seen." Ves smiled tensely at her. "To me, my feelings are inseparable to me! I could never imagine giving up my greatest strength!"