

Mech 1731

Chapter 1731 Tenant Farming

According to Patricia, it was a lot harder to follow the path of a rational mech designer!

Those like Ves who gave in to their emotions never needed to hold themselves back!

If they wanted to pursue something, they did it wholeheartedly without being deterred by the low odds of success!

"In the higher levels of mech design, you will eventually get in touch with rational mech designers." She spoke. "The ability to control yourself is one of the hidden conditions to join the Design Department of the Mech Trade Association. This is the reason why the MTA rejects the vast majority of applicants. They don't exhibit enough control!"

"What? I never heard about that! Why does the MTA value control so much? Are they better than passionate mech designers?"

"Not exactly. In fact, we're worse in many areas. Because we have to temper their emotions, we aren't particularly adventurous or innovative. The hurdle to advancing to Journeyman is much harder for us because we often treat mech design as a chore. There are even rational mech designers who actually hate designing mechs, but nonetheless advanced to Master they have worked hard to become good at it! This is the ideal of a rational mech designer!"

Ves became stunned yet again! He had never heard of such a thing! He couldn't imagine a mech designer who hated his profession yet reached a height that most passionate mech designers would kill to achieve!

Her words prompted him to recall the time when he and Gloriana entered into low periods after expending a considerable amount of their spiritual energy.

To an energetic, passionate and creative mech designer, these low periods felt like pure torture to them! While they eventually managed to get used to this condition, they never felt comfortable remaining in this state.

It was like living with constant hunger gnawing in their bellies!

"What is the point of going through all of this torture? Is self-control even necessary?"

Patricia turned around and activated a projection of the Milky Way Galaxy. The map delineated all of the territories occupied by humanity.

"Look at this map. Human civilization spans a lot of star sectors. Each of those star sectors are filled with states that often war against each other. These conflicts generate

demand for mechs, particularly mechs with powerful advantages over the competition. Put yourself in the shoes of the MTA that governs all of these activities. What do you think they see?"

He paused and thought for a moment. He recalled his earlier speculation and combined them with the hints given by Patricia.

"The MTA.. regards human space as an incubation chamber! As long as humans keep quarrelling with each other, they'll constantly develop new toys to beat their opponents!"

"Exactly. Most of the innovation that the MTA values comes from passionate mech designers who have somehow been able to overcome every hurdle and realize their design philosophy. With how large and diverse this incubation chamber has grown, the MTA never has to worry about running out of new inventions."

"I guess that there will be a lot less innovation if every passionate mech designer tries to become rational." Ves discovered.

She nodded. "Mech designers like you play a vital role in the mech design ecosystem. While your mech designs often feature very distinct flaws, their strengths are always very pronounced as well. The MTA needs these kinds of innovations to elevate the overall level of mech design."

"Why doesn't the MTA take part in this then? What is the use of rational mech designers?"

"Rational mech designers like us may not be as good in pushing the boundaries, but we are much more capable of assimilating different specialties. We train ourselves to keep an open and objective mind. Our design philosophies aren't as exclusive as others. We evaluate ourselves by a different standard for your kind. Passionate mech designers are graded by the usefulness of their specialty. Rational mech designers are graded by their ability to imitate, assimilate and combine other design philosophies!"

This was the first time Ves heard something like this! If Patricia didn't appear so credible, Ves would have thought that she was spewing nonsense!

A very ugly image started to form in his mind.

"I see now." He spoke morosely. "It's like tenant farming. Passionate mech designers are the poor serfs who toil in the fields and occasionally harvest some crops in the form of innovations. The rational mech designers of the MTA are the landholders or farm managers who effortlessly claim all of the crops while doing almost none of the backbreaking work!"

"That's the reality of the mech industry in the era of the MTA." Patricia confirmed, not mincing any words this time. "To the MTA, a good mech designer is not necessarily

someone who can design a very unique or innovative mech. A good mech designer is someone who can consistently design good mechs that meets demand. Do you comprehend the difference?"

He nodded after a few seconds of thought. "Passionate mech designers are more focused on the journey. They have to expend all their time on navigating the paths and making sure they chose the correct ones. Rational mech designers are more about the end result. Their mech designs have to meet the requirements. Nothing more. It doesn't matter if they steal or borrow from someone else's specialty."

"It's a fair trade, Ves. It is not as if passionate mech designers are forced to give up their trade secrets to the MTA."

That was true. Ves already found out that mech designers who pass on their trade secrets to the MTA could obtain a lot of merits in return. With that, they could exchange their merits for all kinds of rewards, the most important of which was life-prolonging treatment!

Still, Ves felt a little sour about being regarded as a poor and dirt-crusting peasant. The snobby noble mech designers from the MTA didn't have to go into the fields at all!

Patricia noticed the direction of his thoughts. "I already told you that you aren't necessarily worse than mech designers like us. We have our own challenges. We can only make full use of someone else's design philosophy if it has been realized. Even then, we have to adapt ourselves to assimilate these specialties, which is quite challenging. At the same time, we can't neglect our own design philosophies either. All of this is very hard to do while actively suppressing our strongest emotions and impulses."

Hearing all of this made him dizzy for a bit. He no longer felt as much envy towards these rational mech designers anymore. They climbed a very different road, one in which they needed to depend on their will instead of their passion!

He really didn't agree with this approach towards mech design.

Ves always designed with his heart. He also valued the meaning of each mech design. While he understood the logic behind this alternate approach, he did not regret sticking to his current ways!

He understood now why Patricia said that both rational and passionate mech designers had their own pros and cons. One wasn't better than the other, and just because the MTA mainly hired rational mech designers did not mean that they belonged to a superior class of mech designers.

"You told me that mech designers who depend on passion and emotion risk going too far." He said. "Are there ways to.. mitigate the downsides of my approach?"

Since Patricia knew a lot of information that ordinary mech designers never got in touch with, Ves might as well take advantage of her willingness to share some of these secrets!

He had no idea why she was being so open about them to him, but he shouldn't look at a gift horse in the mouth!

"There are many ways to exert more control over yourself." She replied with a smile. "In fact, when mech designers advance to Senior and Master, they generally learn about the importance of control. They adopt various means to restrain their passion and prevent themselves from being consumed by their strong emotions."

"So they're basically trying to become more rational?"

"It's not a dichotomy, Ves. A mech designer is never 100 percent emotional or 100 percent rational. You can view it as a spectrum. For example, I tend to view myself as 80 percent rational and 20 percent emotional. This means that I'm purposefully muting my emotions by more than half!"

Ves didn't dare to guess where he stood on the spectrum. One thing was for sure. He was definitely more emotional and rational when it came to mech design!

"I think I understand your point. When mech designers continue to pursue their passion, they are probably sliding further towards the emotional side of the spectrum. If they go too far, their judgement will get more and more skewed. In order to regain their common sense and restore some of their humanity, they have to force themselves to become more rational!"

Patricia looked impressed by his guess. "That is correct. I see that you have already thought a lot about this matter. I'm sure you're familiar with the phrase that mech design is an art as well as a science. We humans are emotional creatures, but one of the reasons why we rose up as a dominant species is because we are able to suppress our instincts and avoid giving in to our emotions in order to achieve a greater goal!"

"I'm guessing there is a downside to these control methods, right?"

"Yes. Rational mech designers are naturally less prone to mood swings. It's different in your case. Reducing your emotions directly affects your productivity as a mech designer. The key therefore lies in tempering your mood when you don't need it, but unleashing it when you are actively designing a mech!"

"I understand!" Ves became enlightened. "However, it's probably not as easy as I think, right?"

She nodded. "Emotions are an indispensable part of you. It is against your instinct to suppress them. Many mech designers who live with their emotions for decades have

failed to suppress them because they simply can't function without them! It is very difficult to explain their pain!"

In truth, Ves already garnered a guess about it. Such a state sounded similar to his low periods!

"So is there anything concrete that you can suggest to me at the start?"

"Hmm.." She thought for a moment. "I'm not sure it's wise for you to adopt any of the strong and systematic control methods. I believe you're better off learning to adjust your mentality through natural means. Even though they won't have a strong effect because you've already become a Journeyman, they will still help in preventing you from going over the edge!"

"Tell me then." Ves looked at Patricia with earnest anticipation.

He no longer viewed her as an enemy! Privately, Ves thought that when he initiated his hijacking attempt, he should spare her life if she was at his mercy. It was the least he could do for her generous advice!

"There are three general methods which I think are useful to you." She spoke, and raised a single finger.

"I've already mentioned the first one. You should slow down between design projects. The passage of time will allow you to regain your center and reflect on yourself."

That sounded like a huge waste of time to Ves!

She raised a second finger.

"The second method to control yourself is to develop a set of principles! As long as you impose some limits to yourself, you'll recognize when you are about to go too far and can pull yourself back in time!"

This sounded very familiar to Ves! Though he hadn't always been honest with his principles, he felt very attracted by this method!

Patricia raised a third finger. "The last method I recommend is to find a hobby that you can direct your passion towards instead! Whether it's learning how to play an instrument or tinkering with gadgets, as long as you can vent your excess passion and emotion towards a harmless hobby, it's worth pursuing!"

This sounded familiar to Ves as well. The problem was that he already attempted this before! He had no other hobby aside from designing mechs!

Chapter 1732 Guiding Principles

Mech design was a very demanding profession.

Mech designers had to be rational. They had to be capable of absorbing and applying an enormous amount of scientific knowledge.

Mech designers also had to be passionate. Those without feeling were no better than auto-designers that were incapable of designing groundbreaking mechs!

As Patricia explained, mech designers had to straddle the line between these two extremes and find a position where they could maximize their success.

Patricia was very suited to become a rational mech designer due to her excellent ability to control herself. Ves never saw her exhibit any strong emotion.

He met quite a few mech designers who impressed him with their level of control. Now that he thought about it, Master Olson truly came across as someone who was in absolute control of herself!

He suspected that a handful of other mech designers he met in the past adopted the same approach as well. Professor Ventag and Mayra of the Swordmaidens stood out as two distinct suspects!

It wasn't easy to determine whether other mech designers fit this mold as well. The existence of a spectrum meant that every rational mech designer expressed at least some emotions, while every passionate mech designer exerted at least some control over their urges!

When Patricia left after she enlightened him, Ves threw all thoughts about his violent takeover plan to the back of his mind.

What he learned was simply too shocking for him to ignore!

He calmly went over what he learned. He adjusted his perspective on mech designers and tried to judge whether he should do something with what he learned.

"Am I satisfied with myself? Do I need to change my position on the spectrum?"

He knew he depended on his emotions to design his mechs. He didn't see anything wrong with that!

"I'm doing great so far. Obviously, that means my self-control is already sufficient!"

He felt very confident about his conclusion. In his opinion, Patricia thought too poorly about his ability to remain in control! He could be very rational when he wanted to be! Right?

As for the three methods Patricia suggested Ves to adopt, he promised to get back to them once he overcame his current predicament.

"I can't afford to take it slow." He muttered. "Pausing in order to regain my center and reflecting on my gains is a waste of time!"

He had to keep progressing as fast as possible! As long as he remained weak, he continued to remain vulnerable to people like Lady Curver!

In order to take control of his life and resist enemies such as the Five Scrolls Compact, he had to advance to Master as soon as possible! Once he reached this exalted rank, he believed he could finally make his voice heard!

The second method sounded much more interesting to him. Ves had already spent a lot of time on formulating a set of principles.

The only problem was that his own principles diverged substantially from the ones propagated by the MTA.

Ves felt no sincerity towards most of the principles adopted by orthodox mech designers. In truth, he only paid lip service to them and ignored them at his own convenience.

He only took some principles seriously, such as the responsibility of a teacher towards a student. He couldn't really explain why he valued this principle so highly.

He formed some other principles as well, such as offering fair treatment to his design spirits and valuing strong loyalty. While this wasn't that much of a problem right now, if he neglected this issue, he suspected that it would blow up in a huge problem down the line!

The rules that people abided by not only constrained their behavior, but also shaped their personality. When someone became used to adopting a certain attitude, they became much less likely to break the mold.

"This is actually useful to me." He concluded.

As for the last method Patricia mentioned, Ves chose to add it to his extremely lengthy to-do list.

He was already short on time. He had way too many things to do and too little time to address them all. Why should he expend his valuable design energy on some useless hobby?

To Ves, his passion and energy for mech design were essential resources! He depended on them to increase his motivation and commitment to his design projects!

Perhaps many mech designers who tried to pursue self-control had wasted most of their creative juices by wasting them on frivolous hobbies!

"There's never too much passion in my opinion!"

He believed that strong passion and emotion were not only keys to designing his best mechs, but also enabled the creation of masterwork mechs!

Ves recalled his first true passion project. The energy and enthusiasm he devoted to designing the Devil Tiger had reached unprecedented levels!

The euphoria he experienced upon fabricating the mech was unforgettable!

Ever since he made his first masterwork mech, he constantly tried to grasp this frenzy once more!

While Ves didn't know if a rational mech designer was incapable of crafting masterwork mechs, he guessed that this was extremely unlikely!

He couldn't imagine a passionless mech designer succeeding in fabricating a mech that surpassed the quality of the original design! A masterwork mech came about through an intense confluence of meaning, feelings and intuition along with a dash of serendipity!

None of those were something that rational mech designers depended upon to design their mechs!

From the impression given by Patricia, mech designers like her depended heavily on their heads instead of their hearts to design their mechs!

That said, Ves did not dismiss this suggestion entirely. He intuitively felt that hobbies weren't all that bad. Instead of guessing about it, he might as well try it seriously and see for himself if it was as beneficial as Patricia suggested!

He abruptly frowned and interrupted his train of thought.

"Why do I keep getting back to Patricia and her advice?"

He looked at the clock and found out to his consternation that three unsuspecting hours had already passed!

"Goddammit!"

As a mech designer, Ves couldn't help but be obsessed with anything related to his profession. If he hadn't reminded himself that he was about to engage in a very risky venture tomorrow, he might have spent entire days instead of a couple of hours in thought!

He narrowed his eyes in suspicion. Why did Patricia come and reveal so many inexplicable secrets and insights to him? Ves recognized that what she told him must not be common knowledge! Since the MTA was strongly involved, this must have been very high-level information!

"She knows me well enough that I'm very passionate about my work."P

Did she deliberately exploit his trait to manipulate him? If he seriously considered her words, then he might have tried to follow some of her suggestions, especially since he had nothing else to do in captivity!

Her ultimate goal must have been to encourage him to spend his time on trying out the three methods!

Since Aisling did not allow him to design any mechs, Ves really had little else to do. He would have surely spent a lot of time on the first method and perhaps the other two methods as well!

The outcome of engaging in these methods became clear to Ves! His captors wanted him to suppress his anger and to reduce his animosity towards them! As long as he suppressed his strongest emotions, he wouldn't be as hostile anymore!

In addition, as long as he became more rational, he also became more susceptible to Aisling's persuasions!

He always found Aisling's arguments to be compelling. If Ves wasn't so resentful at her, he might have become more friendlier with her by now!

"Hahaha! So this is your plan!"

Patricia visited him with a friendly smile and some very helpful advice. However, her underlying goal was nothing less than to reduce his resistance towards his captors!

If Ves started listening to his reason, he feared that he would lose his way!

He was a mech designer! He was a Larkinson! He was Gloriana's girlfriend!

He abided by all of those identities and more! The moment he began to abandon some of them was the moment he was no longer the same!

The fury in his heart spread to his eyes. He glowered at the space that Patricia used to occupy. He believed he saw through her malicious intentions!

"How poisonous! Gloriana would never resort to such tricks!"

Ves much preferred to deal with his girlfriend due to her strong and predictable personality!

As for people like Patricia, she was so rational that she was probably very adept in planning and scheming.

He consciously equated her to Calabast! Both of them were highly in control of themselves and both of them were capable of adjusting themselves when necessary!

"Maybe it's not a bad thing to be stubborn. At least I am staying true to myself!"

He suspected that rational mech designers like Patricia didn't have any principles at all! They needed to be flexible enough to assimilate many different design philosophies, after all. They were probably chameleons in this regard!

Aware that he had inadvertently wasted a lot of time on information that wouldn't help him tomorrow, Ves quickly cast out all of his existing thoughts.

Instead of wasting his time on philosophical matters, he should instead go over his current plan and make sure he memorized all of the steps!

A quiet night passed as Ves dreamt of violence.

The next day, Ves tried his best to hide his excitement. He wanted to do nothing more than materialize his Amastendira and blast every Fridayman in sight!

However, this wasn't the right time!

Ves needed to make his move while the Scarlet Rose emerged from FTL!

Trying to hijack the ship while she was travelling through the higher dimensions was very risky! As long as even a single thing went wrong in engineering, the ship might lose stability and tear apart, dooming everyone!

While Ves didn't care about the lives of the crew, he valued his own life very highly! He would never do something so stupid when he could minimize the risks by waiting a little.

As long as the Scarlet Rose transitioned back to the material dimensions, any accidents wouldn't immediately become fatal!

Through some surreptitious hacking by Lucky, Ves already learned of their upcoming destination. The Scarlet Rose was about to reach a medium-populated border system belonging to a third-rate state that neighbored the Friday Coalition.

If the Scarlet Rose sustained too much damage, then Ves could at least preserve his life by waiting for rescue from the local patrol forces!

Failure was not unacceptable to him. As long as he remained alive, he could always mount another comeback!

When Ves ate breakfast with Aisling at the dining room, he acted the same as usual.

"Patricia taught you the importance of rationality yesterday, right?"

Ves nodded. "What about it, Aisling?"

"I think it's very helpful for you if you take some time to reflect on yourself. You're so consumed by the present that you might have changed in ways you don't fully agree with. From what I've gathered, you were much different a couple years ago."

"If this is some oblique way of stating that Gloriana corrupted me, then you can save your words. My stance is still the same!"

Aisling sighed in an exasperated manner. "I'm concerned about your professional life, not just your personal life. Mech designers who are as emotional as you tend to self-destruct over time. Who knows whether you will do something unforgivable one day? Humans are different from exobeasts because we are capable of transcending our baser instincts. Don't be an animal, Ves. Be civilized."

"I would have you know that I am a very 'civilized' mech designer." Ves twitched his mouth. "If it makes you feel better, I promise you that I'll do my best to show how civilized I can be today!"

Chapter 1733 Loose Pants

Like any other day, Ves returned to his quarters after breakfast.

Ever since he stepped aboard the Scarlet Rose, he never visited any other part of the ship aside from his quarters, the dining room, the lounge and the corridors in between.

These compartments only constituted a small portion of the mobile supply frigate!

If he tried to launch his impending plan without scouting the other sections of the ship in advance, he was liable to encounter a lot of nasty surprises!

This wasn't that big of a problem if he tried to attack a cheap, third-class vessel.

Third-class ships tended to be very economical. As long as they could travel the stars and fulfill their primary functions, everything else was secondary!

It was different for more expensive ships. The CRC was not short on money and resources at all, and the Scarlet Rose cut no corners when it came to repelling hostile intruders.

Ves did not dare to underestimate the ship's security measures. Even when he gained an enormous advantage in information, initiative and preparation, he still believed that something might go out of control today!

"I've already made my preparations." He sighed. "There is nothing more I can do."

He tried his best to calm himself and continue to go over his steps again and again. He had to be as efficient as possible when he started to make his moves.

Even a single second of delay might give his opponents the opportunity to counterattack!

The key to succeeding in the first step was to launch his first attacks simultaneously. He needed to hit the bridge, security section and engineering section simultaneously with as little delay in between as possible!

It was very difficult to time his moves so precisely. He could only be in one place at a time, so he had no control over the timing of the attacks on the other two sections.

His stateroom was situated on the upper decks of the Scarlet Rose. The closest target was the bridge, which was located a bit below and towards the bow of the ship.

Ves had to break out of his quarters, cross the distance and barge into the bridge before someone closed the blast doors!

As long as the captain on the bridge received advanced warning and shut the blast doors, Ves would not be able to penetrate the bridge right away!

The bridge served as the nucleus of the Scarlet Rose. It contained some of the highest authority over the systems running the ship, and often held the most important passengers and crew in event of an emergency.

Perhaps the best way to look at the bridge was to equate it with the cockpit of a mech! The bridge was a self-contained compartment surrounded by extremely thick armor plating!

Some ships were even capable of ejecting this compartment in the event of a catastrophic event!

Fortunately, the Scarlet Rose was not as extravagant. Ves didn't have to worry about the bridge running away from the rest of the ship!

However, this also meant that he couldn't scare off the occupants of the bridge into running away. Ves had to take care of them right away, and time his approach as best as possible!

This was one of the riskiest steps of his plan. As long as anything went wrong at the start, the situation would rapidly spin out of control!

Ves nervously grabbed a book from the library and sat down behind his desk. He tried his best to pretend that he was immersed in his studies.

In truth, his eyes weren't even focused on the printed words and diagrams of the book.

Silently, Ves counted down the minutes. According to the information retrieved by Lucky, the ship would emerge out of FTL very soon, though Ves couldn't pin down the exact timing.

Due to the influence of gravitic tides and the inherent instability of FTL travel, a ship might arrive at a destination a day before or a day later than estimated!

However, Ves did not expect the Scarlet Rose to exhibit so much variance. Right now, she was travelling through low-energetic space. The barren star systems were largely devoid of highly energetic exotics that increased the gravitic turbulence in the surrounding light-years.

Since the Scarlet Rose was designed to travel through Coalition space, her FTL drive was much more stable and solid than cheaper ones!

This was why Ves expected the Scarlet Rose to arrive at the next star system on time!

After several hours of waiting, the time had finally come.

Ves experienced the strange sensation of transitioning out of FTL. A bit of nausea crept up to him, but he was so used to it that he effortlessly suppressed this impulse.

He was on a time limit right now!

Ves raced towards the bathroom as if he desperately needed to use the toilet!

As soon as the bathroom door slid shut, he nodded towards an intangible form that had been standing by for a while.

Ves did not dare to speak out loud. Aside from the optical sensors, the monitoring was still intact!

After making sure that Lucky was still onboard with the plan, he raced towards a cupboard and retrieved the beauty bot that was responsible for grooming his hair and applying makeup on his face.

He pressed the emergency shutoff button and turned its spherical shape around until he faced the backplate.

Using a stripped-down sonic toothbrush, he applied a considerable amount of force to pry open the plate. Once he did so, he yanked out some of the useless internal components until he created enough space.

This should be enough!

Next, Ves slipped his hands under his pants and retrieved the bulge he'd been hiding underneath his Synthra Umbra underwear all this time.

The moment he took it out, his pants felt oddly loose to him. He wasn't used to this loose sensation!

He shook his head. This was not the time to think about stuffing his pants again!

He tried to make as little sound as possible while carefully slipping in the jamming device between the internals of the bot.

Once he stuffed it in, he restored the backplate so that the beauty bot looked as normal as possible!

After finishing this step, he took the beauty bot out of the bathroom while Lucky followed along while remaining intangible.

When he reached his desk, Ves slipped his hand under his pants once again to retrieve his personal comm.

He activated it, knowing that the monitoring system of his quarters would probably pick up its presence.

He used his comm to attempt a connection to the galactic net and send help messages Gloriana, the Larkinson Family and the Bright Republic!

After making sure his comm would keep spamming the internal network of the ship with its requests, Ves placed it down on his desk before immediately heading to the exit with the bot in tow!

Lucky already flew ahead and phased through the bulkhead in order to reach a hidden mechanism.

After destroying a single, crucial component, the armored hatch automatically slid open!

Ves shared one urgent look with Lucky before letting go of the beauty bot!

The bot acted on its tampered programming and started to fly down the corridor. The jamming device inside activated as well, causing an interference field to form around the bot!

If not for planning its route beforehand, the blinded bot would have crashed into the bulkhead or something by now!

In the meantime, Lucky already disappeared by phasing through the deck. He had his own mission to fulfill!

While he was still in the range of the jamming field, Ves mentally flicked towards his intangible Inventory and materialized his System comm!

He quickly booted it up and instantly activated its Full Stealth augment!

"Finally!" He sighed, knowing that the powerful field would block any sound!

At its current level, the Stealth Augment installed on his System comm would only make him invisible and undetectable for ten minutes.

"Ten minutes should be enough!"

Right now, the security officers overseeing the monitor system should be quite confused!

According to the data, Ves should have disappeared from their sensors! Instead, two new abnormal signatures emerged in their sights.

First was his personal comm which lay on his desk and kept transmitting help requests!

Second was the tampered beauty bot which carried his active jamming device!

As long as the security officers took notice of these two abnormalities, they would definitely suspect that Ves was trying escape!

The route taken by the beauty bot just happened to be flying away from the bridge. Ves had already programmed it to run towards the nearest escape pods!

While the guards presumably started to react to this strange occurrence, Ves turned towards the opposite direction and ran towards the bridge under the confidence that his true whereabouts were completely unknown!

"I have to run faster!"

When he formulated his plan, he gambled that his earlier actions did not arouse too much vigilance in the crew.

After all, Ves should have been completely alone and without any gear! Even if he somehow snatched a comm and circumvented the exit of his quarters, he still wouldn't be able to do much damage while the internal security systems of the ship were completely active!

However, when the security officers tried to amplify the artificial gravity in the corridor where the beauty bot was passing through, nothing happened!

Ves had already hacked them, making them completely unresponsive to any external commands!

While the security officers started to become alarmed, Ves had finally reached the bridge!

Since his quarters and the bridge were both located on the upper decks, Ves hadn't spent much time reaching the latter.

He wanted to thank Aisling for treating him like an honored guest! His stateroom wasn't very far from Aisling's quarters. The upper decks of a ship was where the captain and the most important passengers of a ship resided.

Usually, the distance between their quarters and the bridge had to be as short as possible!

After all, the captain shouldn't be forced to cross the entire length of a ship in the event of an emergency!

Aisling should have taken a page out of Ghanso's book and chuck him into the brig! As long as he was stuck in a cell, it would have been ten times for him to sneak away!

Only a brief amount of time had passed since the monitoring system picked up something abnormal. Ves was sure that security just started to dispatch some teams to intercept his decoys.

Fortunately, Ves gambled correctly, and the blast doors still hadn't slammed shut and blocked his way to the bridge!

Right now, a more normal hatch hindered his entry. Unless someone left or entered the bridge, it was unlikely that this hatch would open!

Ves looked around and did not see any crew running to the bridge.

That made sense. It was customary for a full shift to be present on the bridge whenever a ship transitioned out of FTL.

Ves hadn't dared to tamper with the control system governing this hatch. The bridge was one of the most sensitive compartments of a ship and its entry was probably very tightly monitored!

While he could have hacked its control system, he had already tampered enough with the bridge. Every additional tampering attempt increased the risk of discovery!

Instead of hacking this hatch, Ves opted to enter through a much more convenient manner.

"As expected!" He grinned as he heard some footsteps approaching!

He half-expected Aisling to approach. Instead, her executive assistant emerged from the corner. She looked concerned as her heels clacked against the surface of the deck.

Ves stood to the side of the hatch and watched the assistant go through a brief verification process.

The hatch slid open as soon as the ship recognized her identity!

As soon as she entered, Ves slipped behind her body as close as possible without touching her and neatly slipped into the bridge with no one else the wiser!

He couldn't help but form a grin on his face. Now that he managed to enter the bridge, he overcame his first major hurdle!

Chapter 1734 Simultaneous Action

The bridge of a starship functioned as the primary control nexus of a starship. The captain held supreme authority over the vessel by virtue of his position and extensive experience.

Not even Lady Aisling Curver had the right to override the commands of the captain!

This was because the captain worked for the Coalition Reserve Force!

The captain appeared to be a middle-aged looking man with greying hair and steady eyes. He seemed to have spent all of his time on ships due to his pale skin that bordered on unhealthy.

None of the other bridge crew looked as remarkable.

Ves, still invisible and undetectable, distanced himself from Aisling's blond assistant. Though he retracted the field of his stealth augment in a very small radius, he didn't want to risk enveloping her in its range.

That would have given him away!

He swept his gaze through the rest of the bridge.

Frigate ship classes weren't as cramped as corvette ship classes. The Scarlet Rose was also a lot larger and more complex, so the bridge had to be large enough to accommodate at least six bridge officers and operators at minimum and double this figure at maximum!

Right now, the bridge only housed ten people: one captain, six crew, one assistant and two armored guards.

The latter concerned Ves the most. Both of them wore heavy combat armor that turned them into tall, metal beasts.

Ves did not dare to underestimate them. Unlike the infantry armor in places like the Bright Republic, the guards wore very resilient second-class combat armor!

These suits of armor not only protected their wearer from damage, but incorporated a huge amount of functions! They were like mechs in miniature form in that regard!

Due to their extreme threat, Ves had to take them out first!

Fortunately, Ves already expected their presence. Despite their intimidating gear, he just regarded them as obstacles to overcome.

His primary target remained the captain. Taking him would deprive the Scarlet Rose of a crucial leader during a crisis!

He quietly materialized the Amastendira. After spending so many days in peace, his Supreme-quality laser pistol felt a bit unfamiliar in his grip.

Each time he took the Amastendira from his Inventory, he marveled at its craftsmanship.

Now that he had built a masterwork mech, Ves possessed a much greater sensitivity towards masterwork objects.

He could tell that the Amastendira had touched this realm as well!

Too bad it was just a copy. Ves often dreamt of the true Amastendira. The original version should have been an awe-inspiring piece of gunsmithing!

Oh well. The System-generated copy he owned still exhibited most of the power of the original.

He adjusted the settings of his weapon before holding it firmly in a two-handed grip.

If he wanted to forestall any unpleasant surprises, then he had to kill each and every person on the bridge within a second!

Ves had two ways to accomplish this goal.

First, he could fire a wide-angle scatter blast, diffusing the energy of his weapon over a large area!

Second, he could employ a powerful penetrating cutting beam and rake the muzzle of his weapon from one end to the other end of the compartment!

When Ves formed his plan, he was torn over which option he should choose.

The first one would definitely kill the captain and every other unarmored crew member in an instant!

However, depending on the energy and heat resistance of the terminals and control panels, Ves might render every interface useless, which would pose significant hindrances to his attempts to take over the ship!

The second option would certainly be deadly enough to cut through the armor of guards, but the brief amount of time needed to sweep over the rest of the crew might give them some time to activate some defense functions!

In addition, while the cutting beam wouldn't demolish the entire bridge at once, it would probably cut through a lot of delicate systems beneath the surface!

Between the two choices, Ves eventually settled on the first one.

He wanted his attack to encompass as many people as possible! In addition, so what if the scatter blast melted all of the surface equipment? As long as the internal electronic systems remained intact, he could easily tap in to them with some replacement interfaces!

Therefore, Ves crept up to a good position right in front of the hatch he just passed through.

At this position, the angle of his attack would definitely encompass the bridge crew sitting at the periphery!

He raised his pistol and waited for the appropriate time.

In the meantime, he listened to the dialogue between the assistant and the captain.

"Captain, please lock down the ship. Mr. Larkinson is on the loose."

"We are trying, but half of our signals aren't getting through." The captain gritted his teeth as he continually manipulated his projected interface. "There is something wrong with the primary and secondary command networks! According to the diagnostics, many systems aren't responding!"

The assistant looked alarmed. "What?! How?"

"Sabotage!"

As the two exchanged their worries, the bridge suddenly shook a bit!

At the security department, a couple of off-duty guards approached the armory in order to don their combat gear.

The monitoring system detected both the comm calling for help and the active jamming field heading for the escape pods. This immediately alerted the guards, prompting them to prepare for action!

As soon as the armored hatch slid open, the interior of the armory became exposed.

At this time, all kinds of equipment suddenly exploded! Their abrupt and simultaneous blasts damaged many other equipment such as grenades and explosive rounds, causing a portion of them to detonate almost instantly!

The entire armory became awash with fury! Not only that, but due to the opened hatch, the high energy explosions also poured into the main security compartment, causing many armored and unarmored guards to be swept up by a wave of white-hot heat and energy!

Back to the bridge, some of the consoles blared in alarm!

"Report!"

"Sir, an explosion occurred within the armory of the security department! Preliminary analysis suggests that every energy cell and every explosive ordnance has blown up! We have lost contact with over half of our security officers!"

Shortly after this, bad news came from another direction!

"Captain, engineering has been attacked!"

"What is the status of the chief engineer?!"

"He's dead, sir!"

When Ves decided who should attack engineering, he quickly settled for Lucky.

With his stealth, intangibility and energy claws, he was highly suited for assassination!

The most important reason why he left engineering to Lucky was because his attacking means were too destructive!

Discharging his Amastendira across the entire engineering compartment was bound to destroy or disable many delicate machinery! Ves could not bear damaging the crucial power reactor and FTL drive!

In a situation where collateral damage was unacceptable, Lucky was the better choice!

Having phased just below the surface of the deck, the cat had been biding his time.

He wasn't staying static either. Ever since he reached the engineering compartment, he sought out the chief engineer and positioned himself just underneath his feet!

Wherever the chief engineer moved, Lucky followed right along without anyone getting the wiser!

The meters-thick deck that was strong enough to contain most catastrophic explosions posed no hindrance at all!

At most, Lucky expended a lot more energy than usual due to the high-density matter he was phasing through.

The moment the armory exploded, Lucky moved into action as well!

He shot out from the deck and raked the chief engineer from belly to head with deadly energy claws!

The victim didn't even have the time to feel any pain before his head tore in half!

Just an instant after Lucky emerged, the cat rapidly shuttled over to a pair of junior engineers and clawed through their heads!

Not even a second had passed before Lucky killed some of the other crew members!

The pair of guards assigned to guard engineering only just became alerted and tried to lock on to the small but lethal attacker!

"Meow!"

Yet before they could bring their weapons to bear, Lucky had already killed every engineer and spacer in sight!

Though one of the guards managed to discharge a spherical electrical blast, Lucky simply turned intangible and dove into the deck!

Moments later, Lucky shot out from underneath the feet of a guard and materialized his claw for an instant of a second when it was just passing through the head!

The guard instantly died without suffering any external wounds!

His partner quickly followed suit as he possessed no effective countermeasures against an intangible opponent!

Now that he cleared engineering, Lucky materialized while looking a bit winded. His earlier actions consumed a lot of energy! If Gloriana hadn't constantly fed him with treats, he would have been a lot more exhausted by now!

As it was, Lucky still had enough energy left to take care of some of the remaining threats of the ship. His eyes grew sharper as his hunting programming resumed operation. He phased through the ceiling and headed straight towards the security department. Ves tasked him with cleaning up the survivors of the armory explosion!

Back at the bridge, the bridge received a deluge of alerts! The captain and everyone else became unprecedentedly serious!

They had the impression that an entire team of saboteurs somehow infiltrated the Scarlet Rose without alerting anyone!

Was it the Hexers? How many of them were wreaking havoc on the ship? No one knew!

At this time, no one bothered to pay attention to Ves! Compared to a measly Brighter mech designer, Lady Curver was a lot more important!

"Switch to red alert! Inform everyone that we have hostile boarders or saboteurs on the ship! Redirect the surviving guards to protect our VIPs and retake engineering! Be ready to escort them to the escape pods if the latter action fails!"

Too late!

Ves made his move without breaking stealth. He fired his Amastendira while pressing his elbow against his eyes!

A powerful blast of light and heat swept throughout the bridge in an instant! A huge amount of heat elevated the temperature in the compartment to lethal degrees, causing Ves to feel scorching hot!

If not for his Jutland organ absorbing all of the excess heat sweeping over his body, he would have suffered severe burns!

Discharging a wide-area energy attack in a closed compartment was very dangerous!

While Ves merely suffered from a wash of heat and reflected light, his targets suffered the brunt of the energy discharge!

Many crew members didn't even have time to scream before their uniforms vaporized and their flesh followed suit!

Some of the luckier ones died with a portion of their flesh charred beyond recognition!

Shortly afterwards, a lot of air sucked out as the air management system of the bridge rapidly siphoned away the hot air! A fresh, cool breeze encompassed the bridge as various other measures cooled down the piping hot deck and bridge consoles!

Ves withdrew his arm from his face and moved his position. He grimaced a bit as he found that the soles of his shoes had not entirely survived the heat exposure!

He ignored the damage he suffered and tried his best to move away from his earlier position!

This happened to be a wise decision as a particle beam just shot through the location where he just stood!

An instant later, a grenade exploded and encompassed a small radius with a powerful but contained explosion that rattled the ears!

Sweat poured down his brow as he gripped his Amastendira like a lifeline.

Though his offensive power was high, he was sorely lacking protection! Just one shot was enough to take him out!

As soon as he repositioned himself, he started to count the survivors.

His eyes widened as he saw that four of his targets survived!

The two guards who counterattacked just then had survived. While their armor looked half-molten, the energy discharge failed to overcome its protection!

Ves already expected this. Without focusing the power of his Amastendira, its full-powered scatter blast was not all that deadly to heavily-armored targets.

What he didn't expect was that the captain and Lady Curver's assistant both survived the sudden attack as well!

Even now, a shimmering sphere surrounded their forms, signifying that both of them wore shield generators!

Chapter 1735 Female Benny

Shield generators shouldn't be common. Ves happened to obtain one by chance after he managed to become Master Olson's apprentice.

To an esteemed Master, shield generators weren't difficult to obtain!

However, they were still expensive enough to put them out of reach of the general population of a second-rate state!

Perhaps shield generators may be more ubiquitous elsewhere, but the Komodo Star Sector did not produce many of the key materials needed to produce them en masse.

As far as Ves was aware of, the shield generators had to be imported, which massively increased their markup!

Those who had the privilege of kitting themselves out with shield generators fell into at least three categories.

The first category were those who possessed a lot of value. Mech designers like Ves or distinguished professionals were capable of earning huge sums of money in their lifetimes.

While not all of them could offer a quick return on investment, as long as they remained alive, they would definitely be able to pay back the cost of a shield generator!

The second category consisted of those who bought the shield generator out of their own pocket or had been gifted to them without expectation of repayment.

Rich and powerful people along with their loved ones fell under this category. As long as they possessed a good enough background, they probably enjoyed the protection of a shield generator!

The third category consisted of those who scavenged or stole a shield generator. These people didn't obtain them through proper means, but that did not stop them from making use of them to protect their lives!

When Ves launched his surprise attack, he killed almost every unprotected crew member in an instant. No one who wore a uniform and an underlayer vacsuit survived the Amastendir's full-powered scatter blast!

That the guards survived was within expectation.

Yet the survival of the captain and Aisling's assistant was outside of his expectation!

Even though ship captains generally held a high status, was it really worth it to equip them with a shield generator?

What was so special about this captain?!

As for the woman standing next to her, Ves realized he underestimated this female Benny.

Many Bennies were more than they appeared on the surface!

The original Benny acted as a steward and a body.

His own Benny both assisted him and spied on him until recently!

Aisling's Benny appeared to be sharp and combat trained, because her expression was devoid of panic!

While the captain sat paralyzed on his captain's seat, the blonde assistant quickly regained her composure!

She withdrew a small laser pistol from a hidden holster in her suit before activating a command that caused her clothes to form into an airtight, flexible survival suit!

"Hostiles present! They're invisible! Activate scanning!"

The captain, though frightened beyond his wits, soon regained his composure. His professionalism kicked in as he processed the assistant's instruction.

Though his projected interface had disappeared, that didn't stop him as he projected another interface from his comm!

"Activating anti-stealth measures!"

Powerful waves of energy encompassed the entire compartment, yet none of them managed to detect any invisible intruders!

The assistant growled in frustration. "Their stealth tech is too advanced. Switch to indiscriminate attacks! Attack every corner until there is no area left untouched!"

The internal defense systems aren't deploying! They're stuck!" The captain noted with alarm as his commands failed to get through!

"Guards! Open fire!"

The two surviving guards aimed their heavy assault rifles in different directions before firing energy blasts that dispersed over a wide area!

Ves cursed in his mind. His enemies were resorting to the same tricks!

Fortunately, Ves had already huddled behind a thick workstation to the side, which offered sufficient protection.

Though the weapon discharges also sapped the energy of the shield generators, their two wearers didn't show any concern!

Shield generators were meant to protect people against mechs! While they didn't last very long against a full-powered attack from a mech, it was enough to give them a chance to survive!

Against small arms fire, shield generators came under much less strain. Their effectiveness depended on the model and battery capacity.

Ves feared that the ones blocking him from killing his primary targets might be able to withstand more than one concentrated attack!

He was already wasting too much time. Even now, the captain was constantly tapping his fingers over the projected interface! Who knew what kind of emergency measures and executive overrides he was activating!

He aimed his Amastendira at the captain, but quickly shifted his aim towards the blind-firing guards.

He had to take out the heavy guns first!

The moment he made his choice, a narrow cutting beam instantly swept over the guards.

Unlike last time, the Amastendira fully concentrated its firepower in a narrow beam as wide as a finger!

Even though the guards managed to survive the first attack, this time was different! Their damaged combat armor already lost a lot of integrity. The highly-concentrated beam swiftly cut through the armor and went on to cut through a workstation!

"There!" The assistant called and somehow managed to pinpoint Ves' location!

Ves barely managed to avoid getting hit by awkwardly rolling back into cover!

Even though his Jutland organ shielded his heart and nearby organs against energy damage, the same could not be said for the rest of his body!

The small laser pistol wielded by the female Benny packed quite a punch! The pulsed beam fired by her pistol was powerful enough to scorch the surface of the deck.

If the beam hit his limb, he would probably lose it! Ves missed wearing actual armor!

Fortunately, now that he escaped the earlier attack, his opponents lost his position.

The assistant looked warily at her surroundings while firing her laser pistol in various random directions.

Against an invisible opponent, doing something was better than doing nothing!

In order to increase the probability of hitting her target, she switched the firing mode of her laser pistol to a wide-area blast.

While her pistol was a lot weaker than the heavy assault rifles, Ves still didn't couldn't afford to get hit!

Right now, he wondered how much energy the laser pistol possessed. From how recklessly the assistant was firing her weapon, Ves suspected that it was feeding off an ultracompact battery!

In addition, the pistol didn't seem to overheat either! Any ordinary laser pistol of its size would have glowed hot from all of the energy it released!

This meant that its wielder wouldn't be stopping anytime soon!

That was bad news for Ves. She could easily keep up her reckless weapon discharges for several minutes, buying the captain enough time to regain some control over the ship.

Ves couldn't afford to delay any longer!

He briefly peeked over the workstation he was huddling behind.

Though he wanted to take out the captain right away, the female Benny had to be taken out first!

Ves waited for the woman to fire a shot. The moment she did, there was a brief delay before she could fire again!

A full-powered cutting beam tore straight towards the assistant, only to encounter an invisible wall that stopped the energy from going any further!

The shimmering shield absorbed some of the energy while withstanding the rest!

When the Amastendira stopped firing, the assistant still remained alive!

Not only that, she stormed over to the workstation that Ves was hiding behind while firing constant wide-area pulses with her laser pistol!

Ves didn't expect her to approach his briefly-exposed position! He hesitated a bit before deciding to bite the bullet!

He refused to believe her shield generator can withstand another attack from his trump card!

While taking advantage of his stealth, he silently managed to circle around the workstation in time to face her back!

Before he fired, though, the assistant abruptly raised her weapon arm overhead and fired a blind shot behind her back!

What an uncanny instinct!

If Ves hadn't been so careful to keep most of his body behind the battered workstation, he would have gotten hit!

Even now, an uncomfortable wash of heat and energy swept over his head.

As soon as this wave had passed, Ves popped out of cover and fired straight at the woman!

Though her shield generator resisted the attack as best as possible, it rapidly started to dim as it was rapidly losing power! Eventually, the shield broke, exposing the woman to the remainder of the cutting beam!

Yet before the beam could manage to fry her to a crisp, she agilely cartwheeled to the side like an agile acrobat! Ves failed to adjust his aim, preventing him from scoring a direct hit!

"Ah!"

While the woman avoided a direct hit, she wasn't feeling but better as she dove into cover herself! The close proximity to a high-energy laser beam caused her armored suit to blacken and scorch! A portion of it even melted and fried some of her skin and flesh!

Ves felt incredibly frustrated. Where did they train female Bennies like her? He wanted one as well! She was much better than his own Benny in this regard!

Though Ves wanted to finish the job, he strongly suspected that the woman was preparing to ambush him. Even though he was completely invisible, her combat intuition was remarkable!

Ves felt as if he was a sandman admiral facing a Deliverer mech! No matter how well he kept himself hidden, this woman would definitely find a way to pinpoint his position!

"At least she's out the way now." He muttered.

He hadn't lost sight of his priorities. While he still wanted to take out this threat, he still hadn't killed the captain!

At least a dozen seconds had gone by, giving the captain plenty of time to activate all sorts of commands.

Ves became more concerned. His preparations weren't comprehensive or foolproof enough. The lack of time, manpower and expertise limited what he could do. He also held back on tampering the systems of the ships because he feared tripping off an alarm!

All of this meant that the captain would definitely be able to restore some functionality given time. Whether this meant activating some internal defenses or sealing the bridge by closing the blast doors, Ves couldn't afford to delay any longer!

He took a second to sneak behind another workstation before firing his weapon at the captain!

Despite being the target of a powerful attack, his target did not flinch away and resolutely kept controlling the interface. His shield generator withstood the entire attack, preserving his life for the moment!

The second attack finally managed to neutralize the shield and end his life.

Unlike Lady Curver's assistant, the captain possessed no combat training to speak of! Up to the very end, he kept trying to regain control over the ship!

Ves sighed in relief when he saw the captain die.

"Only one is left!"

He narrowed his eyes in vigilance as he changed his position yet again. Though he was covered in a powerful stealth field, he still watched out for the female Benny!

He shifted from cover to cover, moving carefully lest this blasted woman popped up and fired her pistol in his direction!

As Ves shifted his position for the fifth time, he suddenly glimpsed the woman trying to do the same!

He instinctively lifted his weapon and wanted to fire. However, his intuition prompted him to abort his actions and draw himself back behind cover!

He moved just in time!

Though her burn wounds hindered her movements, the assistant still retained her sharpness. The instant Ves was about to fire his weapon, she snapped her own laser pistol in her direction and unleashed a shot!

If Ves had decided to fire, his hand or his head would have gotten hit!

While Ves had given up an opportunity to kill the remaining survivor, he did not regret his choice.

"I know your position now!"

He did not bother stepping out of cover. Instead, he quickly adjusted the settings of his Amastendira and began to point his weapon at the workstation he was hiding behind.

He fired his weapon, releasing a sustained cutting beam that penetrated his cover and went on to cut through his opponent's cover!

A final scream uttered from the other side, signifying the death of his final opponent!

"Finally!"

Chapter 1736 Shock Attack

Ves wasn't completely sure he killed off the female Benny. Who knew if she faked her deathcry?

The air smelled like burned metal, composites and flesh. The bridge's air filtering system worked overtime in cleaning the air, yet more fumes kept being released by the damaged and broken workstations!

In an abundance of caution, Ves carefully circled around until he finally encountered her remains.

She was dead alright. For all her combat intuition and training, she hadn't moved fast enough after exposing her position!

In truth, Ves hadn't defeated her. His weapon did. His Amastendira was so powerful that it could easily tear through most materials!

Unfortunately, Ves also expended a considerable amount of full-powered shots!

He expended one shot to kill off all of the regular crew.

He used his second shot to kill off the guards.

He took two shots to overcome the shield generator of the female Benny.

He fired two additional shots at the captain to overcome his own shield generator before killing him entirely!

He used his last shot to surprise the assistant by firing at her through the workstations.

Ves fired all of those shots with full power without holding anything back in reserve. He feared the Fridaymen possessed some sort of additional protection that mitigated the damage.

Though Ves recognized that he wasted some of the energy he expended, he would rather be safe than sorry!

"Overkill is better than underkill! It's better to kill my enemies twice than leave them half alive!"

He briefly sought the woman's laser pistol and inspected it for a moment.

Though smaller and weaker than the Amastendira, Ves rarely encountered pistols as strong as this one! He fiddled with it for a few seconds before finding out that it was locked.

He didn't dare to keep the weapon any further for fear of triggering an anti-theft system. Perhaps the weapon might blow up if he held it any longer!

After putting down the peculiar weapon, Ves approached the half-burned captain's chair and tried his best to ignore the rancid smell emanating from the ashes and charred remains of the captains.

Nothing recognizable remained! Neither the spent shield generator nor any other equipment survived his attack.

The captain's chair was inoperable, denying Ves a way to patch into the ship's systems.

Though Ves had sabotaged a lot of peripheral systems, he didn't dare to touch any of the core systems for fear of giving himself away!

While he succeeded in keeping his hijacking attempt a secret due to his caution, he gave up the ability to usurp control in a very short amount of time.

"I need Lucky to complete the takeover!"

He gave up any thoughts of taking over control and considered the remaining steps of his plan.

"Right now, no one should be left alive at engineering. The security compartment should be in shambles right now, giving Lucky plenty of opportunities to clean up the stray security officers."

Along with his takeover of the bridge, three most important sections of the ship should have fallen under his attack!

Wiping out the captain and the bridge officers meant that the ship lost central control. Though it was still possible for the remainder of the crew to get up to mischief, Ves believed it was unlikely that they could organize anything substantial in a short amount of time!

At least, that was what he tried to achieve with his original plan.

The problem now was that he had given the captain a lot of time to respond to his attack. Without the ability to access the bridge systems, Ves was completely in the dark about the captain's final actions.

"This is going to be trouble." He muttered darkly.

Right now, Ves had no idea what took place at the remaining two critical sites.

The security department should be in a very bad shape. The armory stored a lot of gear, some of which contained a lot of energy.

While it had taken Ves and Lucky some time, they managed to rig a lot of ordinance to explode.

The calculations he performed gave him enough confidence that very few security officers stationed in this section managed to survive unscathed!

The only guards that should have escaped this attack were those stationed elsewhere. The guards stationed at the bridge and engineering accounted for at least four of them, which was quite a lot.

Ves doubted that any other security officers had slipped the net aside from those guarding Aisling.

As the most important individual on the ship, at least two guards accompanied the Clarion alumni at all times!

Now, the big question in his mind was what the survivors planned to do. His attacks on the three critical ship sections must have shocked the Fridaymen completely!

The captain and the female Benny even had the mistaken impression that the ship was under attack by a team of commandos!

None of the Fridaymen actually knew that the special forces actually amounted to just Ves and Lucky!

This was rather fortunate. If Aisling and the crew knew that their opposition only amounted to a human and a mechanical cat, then they would definitely mount some sort of counter-attack!

As it was, the surprise attacks he launched at the start were incredibly forceful! Who could have suspected that one of their prisoners was responsible?

When Ves failed to gain control over the ship, he gave up on trying to control it. He looked at his Comm and saw that he still had at least four minutes left to make use of his Full Stealth augment.

This was not enough to sweep every compartment of the ship, but he didn't have to. He merely wanted to intimidate the survivors into giving up any hope of retaking the Scarlet Rose!

The ship was already halfway in his hands!

He looked down at his Amastendira and winced. He only had three full-powered shots left, which didn't give him much leeway. Without the ability to overcome the locks of the weapons dropped by the crew, Ves couldn't afford to fight a protracted battle.

He dialed down Amastendira's power setting to conserve its remaining energy and heat absorbing capability. He didn't need much power to kill off the ordinary crew anyway.

Before he left the bridge, Ves made sure to break the surviving consoles and work stations. He also sabotaged dozens of wireless receivers to prevent anyone from patching the bridge systems with their comms.

This made the bridge inoperable for a brief amount of time, giving Ves the confidence to leave the bridge!

One of the shortcomings of his assault was that he could never cover enough ground. Killing everyone at the three critical sections did not give him complete control over the ship!

As long as at least one enemy remained behind, they could always mount a comeback! Perhaps they might take advantage of Lucky's departure from engineering and sabotage the FTL drive or something!

Ves decided he needed to be proactive and actively hunt down the remaining crew!

"It's time to hunt!"

Ves left the bridge and began to follow a predetermined route. He had already memorized where the crew were supposed to be stationed.

None of the hatches on his route barred his way. He already tampered with them beforehand.

Each time the hatches slid open, Ves activated his stealth module and surprised the alerted crew with attacks coming out of nowhere!

In fifteen minutes, he swept through the living areas, life support, the mess hall and other compartments at the upper decks.

At the same time, Ves had instructed Lucky to sweep past the manned compartments of the lower decks.

As long as both of them relied on their tricks, there was no way the regular crew could stand a chance!

None of the men and women Ves encountered posed a serious threat to him. The Coalition Reserve Corps only subjected its servicemen to a nominal amount of combat training.

Ves feared that he might encounter an enemy as formidable as Aisling's assistant.

Fortunately, none of the remaining officers and ratings carried any shield generators. They were completely vulnerable to his surprise attacks!

After Ves finally rendez-voused with Lucky at the middle decks, he looked at his comm in distress.

He had completely expended his stealth charge!

It seemed that he needed to rely on Lucky to complete their sweep through the ship.

"Are you okay, Lucky?"

"Meow." Lucky replied tiredly.

"How many guards did you kill?"

"Meow."

"Did you count the bodies at the security department?"

"Meow."

Ves briefly tallied the numbers. The CRC stationed fifteen armed security officers on the Scarlet Rose. He only killed three of them, one of which he stumbled in the corridors.

As for Lucky, aside from killing the two at engineering, he only managed to kill two more survivors who survived the brunt of the explosion because of advantageous positioning.

Though it was difficult for Lucky to count the number of guards who perished when the armory exploded, the cat guessed that four of them had perished!

"That makes thirteen." Ves smiled in relief. "We took care of every guard other than Aisling's escorts!"

"Meow!"

"I know you're tired, but hang on, please! We only have one compartment left to secure!"

Neither Ves nor Lucky bumped into Aisling, Patricia and their guards.

As long as they remained alive and aboard the ship, Ves did not feel assured he could complete his takeover!

No matter what, Ves needed to get rid of them one way or another!

After becoming assured that his plan remained intact, he moved towards one of the central compartments of the Scarlet Rose.

As a mobile supply frigate meant to accommodate a mech designer, her mech workshop took up a lot of space!

Ves and Lucky approached one of the entrances of the mech workshop. He nodded towards Lucky, who flew away in order to enter the compartment from another direction.

Neither of them were sure whether Aisling and Patricia remained in the mech workshop. For all he knew, they could have hopped into the escape pods and ejected from the ship by now!

No matter what, the mech workshop remained the only major compartment that hadn't been swept yet. Ves was almost sure he could find the two mech designers inside along with their guards and some mech technicians.

When Ves approached the entrance, he was about to activate the backdoor he inserted into the hatch's control system.

Yet just as he did so, his intuition screamed with alarm!

Ves did not doubt his instincts, especially when he had entered his most alert state in years!

He jumped aside and ran away as far as possible and turned around a corner just as a mech-grade missile shot through the opened hatch and slammed against the bulkhead!

Almost instantly, the missile exploded, inflicting massive damage to the corridor!

Fortunately, modern missiles concentrated most of their damage forwards! The payload blasted through the bulkheads and damaged the compartments behind them! The structural damage was significant!

Though Ves escaped the brunt of the attack due to his timely evasion! He also flattened himself on the deck and tried to minimize his profile as much as possible!

"Ahh!"

Powerful concussive shockwaves blasted over his body, making him feel as if his inside had turned to mush! His eardrums probably ruptured!

A lot of errant shrapnel ricochet through the corridors. Some of them managed to bounce around the corner he was hiding behind and landed on his body, turning him into a pincushion!

"AAAHHHH!!!"

Though Ves distanced himself enough to preserve his life, his body was in an extremely bad shape!

Humans could never withstand the power of mechs!

Just staying within the vicinity of a small missile designed to harass enemy mechs or intercept incoming ordnance was enough to destroy his body beyond recognition!

Though his body was much more resilient compared to normal humans, he still lay helpless against the deck, vulnerable to anyone who wanted to finish the job!

Chapter 1737 Clinging to Life

Ves had been too complacent.

He underestimated the remaining survivors of his brutal slaughter.

Aisling was a bona-fide Journeyman Mech Designer while Patricia was rational enough to stay sober during emergencies. If both of them were holed up in a mech workshop during a crisis, then they could easily destroy the entire ship given enough time!

Disabling the many safeguards of a missile and rigging it to launch only took a couple of minutes for a competent mech designer.

Who knew what kind of tricks the two Fridaymen mech designers prepared when they became alerted of an attack!

"Ahh.. this hurts!"

Ves felt as if he wrong his body through the meat grinder!

His terrible body weakly jerked back and forth on the debris-strewn deck as he tried to overcome the pain wracking through his body!

"I can't afford to sit still still at this time! Aaghh!"

Knowing that he wouldn't be able to control the situation if he lost consciousness, Ves forcefully concentrated his Spirituality and did not hesitate to expend his spiritual energy to forcefully boost his consciousness!

Though his method wasted a lot of spiritual energy, his crude manipulation forcefully strengthened his mind relative to his body!

The pain emanating from his body was just a biological response! He could not afford to allow it to consume his attention!

Through the application of will and spiritual energy, Ves slowly managed to claw himself out of the pit of pain.

Soon enough, he became conscious enough to assess his current state.

Ruptured eardrums, concussed head, internal organs jarred by concussive shockwaves, entire body peppered by metal debris, the list went on and on. If his body wasn't so unnaturally resilient, he could have easily died if not for his intuition warning him of imminent danger!

Ves briefly puzzled about that. Ever since he became a mech designer, his intuition grew increasingly stronger.

Though Ves valued it most due to the instinctive assistance it provided him during a design session, it also proved its value in battle!

However, as a mech designer, why did he develop such a strong ability to detect danger? Did his mind and Spirituality develop due to all of the dangerous adventures he went through?

He suspected that other mech designers might not be as good as him in detecting imminent danger!

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger! Haha-Agh!"

Other mech designers spent most of their time in a design lab or some other peaceful environment.

Having worked alongside Gloriana for quite some time, Ves became aware that her intuition was highly sensitive towards hidden faults and flaws. She spent most of her professional life on becoming good at it, so was it any surprise that she developed an uncanny sense for imperfections?

In contrast, Ves frequently chose to take risks, causing him to end up in precarious situations! Rather than developing towards something that substantially aided his design activities, his intuition instead evolved into something close to the extraordinary combat intuition exhibited by Aisling's female Benny!

He didn't know whether to laugh or cry right now!

"I'm a mech designer, not a commando!"

Yet wasn't he trying to be the latter when he hatched this insane plan to hijack an entire mobile supply frigate with only Lucky and himself?

The fact that he had almost succeeded made him wonder whether he was more cut out to be a mech pilot or a soldier rather than a mech designer.

Ves even suspected that developing an intuition for danger came from his Larkinson blood!

After all, how could the Larkinsons be so daring and courageous all of the time while still remaining alive?

On the other hand, the evolution direction of his intuition conformed to his domain of life. As a mech designer who constantly played with life, it made sense for him to value his own life as well!

Whatever the case, Ves felt very thankful that he developed this extraordinary sense for danger!

He was confident enough in his professional ability to rely on himself to design his mechs!

His life was much more valuable! As a mech designer with many secrets and unique abilities, Ves was destined to navigate through various crises!

Continuing to hone his intuition for danger would benefit him greatly!

This was because no matter how good of a mech designer he became, it would all be moot if he lost his life!

His happiness upon realizing this truth made his pain a lot more bearable.

With the passage of time, he already felt his body starting to cope with his injuries. While his wounds didn't disappear, his flesh seemed to mitigate them a bit by stemming the bleeding.

Though it wasn't enough for him to restore his mobility, he could at least move some of his limbs.

He threw a look at his System comm. In the end, did he really have to spend his precious DP?

With his life at risk, Ves did not dare to be stingy with his resources.

It was just that he felt rather unwilling to waste his DP especially now that the System curtailed his income.

He was no longer able to earn DP by selling his mechs!

Though he earned substantially more DP when he completed a mech design, he had lost far more after the System prevented him from profiting off the sales of his Soldier product line!

Ves recalled that the LMC easily managed to sell over a million mechs since the Sand War! All of those sales should have showered with tens of millions of DP, which was enough to turn him into a super soldier!

As it was.. the System he owned was too defective to reward him properly! He never made any progress on its Supply Missions, so he pretty much had it coming.

He weakly shook his head. "Whatever."

With what little control he had over his limbs, he activated the System and browsed the Shop.

Countless items dazzled his sight. Ves suppressed the urge to snap them up by looking at their price tags.

The gadgets offered by the System were too expensive for him to afford! With less than 2 million DP on hand, how could he think of buying something that cost 30,000,000 DP?

The Shop always offered the best, but their prices were commensurate to their quality!

"Ah, forget about it! I have to get rid of this pain first!"

Ves studied some of the goods offered by the Shop beforehand. He didn't want to waste time searching its catalog for something suitable in the middle of an emergency!

Under the consumables category, Ves pinpointed an emergency remedy.

[AE-S1 Combat Trauma Stabilizer]

Price: 100,000 DP

A fast-applying remedy meant to stabilize physical wounds and prevent them from deteriorating any further. The Combat Trauma Stabilizer is most effective on external injuries, but is very strenuous to the vitality of the affected body.

The Combat Trauma Stabilizer also functions as a stimulant which energizes the recipient. After a short amount of time, this effect is lost and a prolonged period of weakness will follow.

The Shop offered a handful of ways to heal his wounds. Most of them tended to be extremely expensive and come with huge downsides. Those that didn't burden his body instead burdened his wallet!

As someone who had always been frugal with his DP, Ves could not bear to use the more comprehensive remedies that cost at least 1,000,000 DP or more! Ves could not bear to allow the System to take advantage of him so much!

In his current circumstances, the AE-S1 Combat Trauma Stabilizer seemed suitable. Though Ves worried about the short duration of the stimulant effect, he could still bear with this price.

Regardless of what happened, Ves and Lucky had almost swept up all of his opponents throughout the ship! Only the survivors in the mech workshop compartment remained alive!

As long as Ves held on for a little while longer, he would definitely be able to finish the job!

Knowing how dangerous it was to allow mech designers more time to tinker with the weapons at the mech workshop, Ves redeemed the remedy without any further hesitation!

This was 100,000 DP! That was enough to elevate a Skill to Senior-level or go on another Mastery experience!

A medical injector materialized into his hand. Ves found its shape and model to be vaguely familiar, but he didn't waste any time on figuring out who originally designed this product.

He stared at the cartridge slotted into the injector. This cartridge contained the solution meant to stabilize his wounds and pepper him up! It was also the principal reason why the System charged 100,000 DP for this item!

"What a scam!"

Next time he ended up in a crisis, he had to make sure he prepared himself better! This time, he made plenty of mistakes and underestimated the difficulty of taking over a second-class ship!

If not for the lack of time and difficulty of obtaining a suit of combat armor, Ves wouldn't have ended up in such a sorry state!

After confirming that the injector looked exactly like the one in the catalog, Ves resolutely pressed its tip onto his chest and pulled the trigger!

Ahh!

A searing heat spread from his injection point and rapidly spread throughout his entire body! His wounds rapidly stopped bleeding entirely and his flesh started pushing out some of the shards that cut into his body!

Though Ves spent a distressing amount of DP, the benefits were undeniable!

While the remedy hadn't managed to restore his hearing, the painful sensations from his head had subsided by a substantial degree, clearing his head even further.

At the same time the stabilizer worked on some of his wounds, the heat also affected his brain, causing him to become a lot more energetic than usual!

The fire in his consciousness regained its vigor, causing him to feel as if he was ready to fight a mech with his bare hands!

"What a powerful stimulant! It's probably addictive as well!"

He became so caught up in the uplifting sensations of his remedy that he almost forgot his original purpose!

"Damnit, I can't lose my mind right now! I still have a mech workshop to clear!"

The medicine he took not only closed his wounds, but also restored more control over his body. This was enough for him to pick himself up and pull out the deeper shards that had managed to embed in his body.

He should have been paralyzed in pain. Instead, he only the warmth of the stabilizer dulling his wounds and working to stem the bleeding.

Once he pulled out all of the shards, he ignored his distressed and blood-soaked appearance and materialized the Amastendira in his hand once more.

His fury and the stimulant effect both made him bloodthirsty!

However, instead of going forward, Ves instead distanced himself from the mech workshop and waited patiently.

Lucky emerged by phasing through the deck. His cat looked a lot more tired than before, showing that he was at the limit of his endurance!

"Meow meow!"

With his ruptured eardrums, Ves couldn't hear a thing of what Lucky said, not that it mattered.

His ability to communicate with life transcended sound. He merely had to focus his mind a bit and extend some of his Spirituality to his pet.

Soon enough, Ves got the gist of Lucky's meows.

"You killed off the guards and mech technicians?"

"Meow!"

"What about Aisling and Patricia? Did you kill them yet?!"

"Meow..."

"What?! They're gone?!"

"Meow!"

"Did you search the mech workshop thoroughly!"

"Meow meow!"

"DAMNIT!"

Ves wanted to punch himself in the face! He thought he would have to fight a pair of entrenched mech designers with all the tools and equipment of a mech workshop at their disposal!

For this reason, he didn't hesitate to use up an overpriced remedy!

Yet now he discovered that his final opponents had somehow managed to slip away!

"Find them!" He ordered Lucky! "If they're not at the mech workshop, they might be heading somewhere else!"

"Meow.."

"I know you're exhausted, but bear with it! The Scarlet Rose is almost mine!"

Chapter 1738 Burning Spiri

While the Combat Trauma Stabilizer forcefully boosted his body, Ves did his best to make the most of his hyperactive state.

After Lucky confirmed that he cleaned up the mech workshop compartment, Ves only hesitated for a moment before entering it through another entrance.

The original one he approached had long been blasted apart by the missile detonation. The entire deck along with the surrounding compartments sustained substantial damage!

Ves winced when he saw the damage. The structure of the Scarlet Rose was very resilient, but it fell short of matching the resilience of mechs!

Only the CFA invested a huge amount of high-grade exotics to construct their warships!

While a state like the Friday Coalition was quite prosperous, it made no sense to allocate too many resources towards strengthening ships.

In its war against the Hexadric Hegemony, the quality and quantity of their mechs decided the outcome!

This was the reason why Ves became very apprehensive about the state of the mech workshop and the mechs or parts stored within.

What else had Aisling and Patricia done when they became aware that the ship was under attack?

Just like how Ves rigged some of the ordnance stored in the armory to explode, the two Fridayman mech designers could have done the same to mech-sized ammunition!

His first priority was to inspect the ammunition stores and make sure that none of them had been tampered with in any way!

For this reason, he hobbled into the mech nursery despite knowing the risks.

No attacks greeted his arrival. When Ves stepped into the large compartment, he looked around and saw a handful of corpses leaking blood on the deck.

Lucky managed to kill each of them without giving them a chance to counterattack. The bodies of two armored guards along with several mech technicians accounted for the remainder of the crew.

Ves was pretty sure that aside from Aisling and Patricia, no one else managed to survive!

"Where are they?" He frowned in puzzlement.

He felt oddly disappointed by the lack of opposition. When he formulated his plan, he expected to confront the mastermind of his kidnapping.

Instead, she ran away after preparing one last surprise!

"Well, not everyone is like me, I guess." He couldn't help but shrug.

He had forgotten that Aisling was just a civilian.

Mech designers weren't combatants by nature. There was no reason for her to hole herself up in the mech workshop and fight for the faint chance of defeating the 'team of commandos' that expertly cleansed the ship of opposition!

Even Ves would not hesitate to abandon everyone else and flee the ship as fast as possible!

"Well, she certainly made the wisest choice if she decided to abandon ship." He muttered.

Knowing that he couldn't sustain his active state for much longer, Ves hastily picked up a multiscanner and began to scan and inspect any equipment and ordnance that posed a potential threat.

Aisling hadn't been building any mechs recently. He encountered various supplies and parts that corresponded to the four mechs standing by in the mech hanger.

Evidently, the mech technicians used the mech workshop to service and maintain the stationed mechs.

One of them employed a missile launcher system, which was the reason why the Scarlet Rose carried a batch of missiles in her ammunition stores.

As Ves swept over the remaining missiles, he found to his relief that they hadn't been tampered with. It was actually quite hard to access them in person. Due to their potential threat to the ship, the Scarlet Rose stored them in shielded containers meant to expose them to as little external influences as possible!

After he finished sweeping over the missiles, he inspected some of the other parts and gear that could pose a very significant threat if Aisling and Patricia rigged them to blow.

Fortunately, second-class states generally did not make use of ballistic weapons. While it was possible to scale up their lethality by lacing their warheads with volatile exotics, most states prefer to invest in other weapon systems!

The limitations of ballistic weapons made them very unattractive to states that could afford better. Missile weapons scaled much better with increased investment.

This saved him the trouble of inspecting thousands of ballistic shells. The rest of the mechs stationed on the Scarlet Rose made use of other weapon systems such as laser weaponry and particle beam weaponry.

The mech workshop was directly connected to the mech hangar, so Ves easily limped over to the mechs and beheld them for a moment.

He only admired these machines from the scans that Lucky had made. Seeing them for real made him feel encouraged.

"Hahaha!"

All of the mechs looked ready to deploy. When Ves launched his attack, he knew for certain that the mech pilots attempted to activate their mechs and launch them into space!

Whether to defend the Scarlet Rose against stealthed enemies or put the ship at gunpoint in order to force the hijackers into a compromise, the mechs served as a vital source of strength for the crew!

Yet none of the four mechs succeeded in deploying!

Although he couldn't see anything from the outside, he knew for certain that each of their cockpits contained the bodies of dead or dying mech pilots!

Ves had taken advantage of Lucky's ability to phase into the mechs to sabotage one crucial component: the neural interface!

As an amateur in neural interfaces, Ves was not very good at modifying them to perform better or safer.

However, it was no problem for him to make things worse!

He employed some of the lessons he learned from leading the beast rider project back at Aeon Corona VII to turn the neural interfaces into killer weapons!

He already became curious whether his tampering resulted in exploded heads!

"Well, I can research that later!"

As he started feeling his body losing its stimulant effect, Ves quickly made use of the scanners and equipment at hand to inspect the permanent mechs. While he couldn't investigate them thoroughly, he found nothing else worth noting at this time.

"I should complete the takeover of the ship and get myself some treatment!"

Fatigue already started to creep up on him by the time Lucky returned.

"Meow."

"Are you sure?"

"Meow!"

Through their spiritual communication, Ves found out that Lucky had gone over the entire ship for signs of life.

Despite his best efforts, his cat failed to find the mech designers he was looking for. The trail that Lucky followed ended abruptly at one of the exterior compartments close to the mech workshop.

"Take me there."

Ves wearily followed Lucky to a compartment that held a number of cylindrical escape pods.

He was very familiar with escape pods as he made use of one in the Detemen System some years ago.

However, the escape pod model employed by the Flagrant Vandals was a lot more basic than the ones before him! Not only were they more advanced, a handful of them clearly didn't look standard issue!

"Did Aisling bring these escape pods to the ship?"

Two of the slots next to the special escape pods were empty. Ves had no doubt that Aisling and Patricia had already slipped away from here! Perhaps the captain's warnings had already caused them to flee far away!

The Scarlet Rose used to carry four special escape pods. They must have been prepared for Aisling, Patricia, the female Benny and Ves!

Ves approached one of the special escape pods and booted it up in order to call up their specs.

"These escape pods are almost as good as shuttles!"

Their speed, armor, endurance and other parameters were very good! They also contained a powerful communication array that was very useful in calling for help.

Even if help was slow in coming, the escape pods carried enough food, water and oxygen to last for at least a year by virtue of its excellent recycling system!

However, the feature that Ves feared the most was that the high-quality escape pods also came with a stealth system!

Although activating stealth consumed a lot of energy, it was no problem for the escape pods to remain hidden from most second-class sensors for a couple of weeks!

"Fine then! I'll let you go for now!"

Ves had precious little mercy left in his bones when the missile almost killed him! If Aisling hadn't made the right choice and fled before it was too late, he would have certainly killed her for taking him away from home!

If Ves was in a better shape, he might have tried to track her down one way or another.

As it was, his mounting headache and weariness prevented him from doing anything strenuous!

Right now, his own safety and security mattered more than his desire to take revenge!

He reluctantly gave up this impulse and tried to recall the latter steps of his plan.

After he finished removing all of the opposition, Ves had to take complete control over the ship by usurping her command authority!

If he didn't do so, the ship would continue to drift in a star system that was right next to the border of the Friday Coalition!

Ves was sure that the captain or Aisling already notified the Coalition Reserve Corps of what transpired!

"The Fridaymen will definitely be mad for losing one of their official ships!"

A monitor represented an entire state! Attacking one of their ships would definitely put a target on his back!

If not for the urgency of the situation and the Komodo War consuming most of the attention of the Friday Coalition, Ves wouldn't have been so bold to challenge the CRC's prestige!

"I can't waste anymore time!"

He headed back to the mech workshop and hastily fabricated some parts from a small 3D printer.

By now, his Combat Trauma Stabilizer already started wearing off. Mental and physical fatigue threatened to overwhelm his consciousness!

In order to stave off the inevitable crash, Ves decided to expend his spiritual energy!

He felt as if he was burning his mind as he kept his mind in a highly active state! He would definitely pay the price by entering a lengthy low period afterwards, but right now he didn't care about the consequences!

It didn't take long for Ves to produce his desired parts. He placed them on a floater platform and sat down on it while instructing it to move to the bridge.

The floater platform took a few minutes to exit the mech workshop, navigate the corridors and ascend a few decks.

As soon as the floater platform reached the bridge, Ves hopped off and began to install some of the parts.

Once he did so, he activated his comm and managed to connect to the bridge system!

"Yes! Lucky! Help me take control!"

It took fifteen minutes of fiddling with the software and hardware to gain rudimentary control over the ship.

Not only did he have to hack the bridge systems, he also had to undo some of his tampering! Otherwise, the bridge systems wouldn't be able to control the rest of the ship!

Since Ves already prepared these steps beforehand, he soon managed to achieve some results with the help of Lucky's fantastic hacking capabilities.

While he failed to gain as much authority over the ship as her captain, he acquired enough control to access the navigation and communication systems!

The first thing he did was to lock down the ship's quantum entanglement node.

Ves did not want the Scarlet Rose to broadcast her location and route to the Friday Coalition! With all of that information, the Fridaymen could easily prepare an ambush at his next destination!

Due to the security risk posed by an active quantum entanglement node, every ship came with the capability to isolate them completely!

After Ves verified that the ship network disconnected entirely from the quantum entanglement node, he turned to the navigation system and started to activate the autopilot.

He instructed it to follow a route that brought the Scarlet Rose away from the Friday Coalition!

As long as the FTL drive finished cycling, the ship would immediately transition back into FTL, giving Ves some much-needed reprieve!

"Finally!" He sighed.

He practically collapsed on the floater platform. He instructed it to take him to the infirmary. Right now, he desperately needed treatment!

Chapter 1739 Muted Emotions

Much of the sophisticated medical equipment at the Scarlet's Rose infirmary depended on medical experts to perform their most advanced treatments.

However, the machines had also been designed to offer more basic treatment in the event that doctors weren't on hand.

There were many possible perils in space travels. Incidents where all of the doctors lost their lives happened often enough for medical equipment makers to add some automation to their products.

Most states prohibited medical equipment from replacing human doctors entirely. While it was possible for machines to take care of treatments entirely, this was not a good development!

Doctors not only kept the machines in check, but also took responsibility for the choices they made when confronted with ethical dilemmas!

Als should never decide the life or death of a human life!

Of course, Ves didn't care about all of these ethical and practical considerations. He only paid attention to the fact that the machines were capable of healing his wounds!

When the floater platform brought him to the infirmary, he used his remaining consciousness to make sure he gained control over the medical equipment.

With Lucky on hand, he did his best to verify that the machines did not come with any nasty backdoors.

In truth, Ves was being very paranoid for doing so. Most medical equipment were hardwired to preserve human life.

While it was possible to corrupt them into killing their patients, it took a lot of time and expertise to do so! With how fast Ves and Lucky killed off the crew, the medical officer stationed at the infirmary had no time to adulterate the equipment!

After Ves eased some of his worries, he threw himself into the embrace of one of the machines. Its manipulators already started stripping off his clothes and spraying some kind of fluid on his most serious-looking wounds.

Before he lost consciousness, Ves turned to Lucky.

"Make sure.. to stay alert. Don't let anything.. go wrong. Okay?"

"Meow."

Ves finally couldn't hold on any longer. He overdrafted his mind, body and spirit to such an extent that he slept for two days straight!

The quality of the medical equipment was beyond compare. Even when limited to performing basic treatments, the injuries suffered by Ves weren't very perplexing.

Explosions on ships happened often in space. Whether they happened due to ships suffering from malfunctions or being shot at by mechs, plenty of people suffered similar injuries.

For this reason, ship-based medical equipment became very good at treating them. Otherwise, they wouldn't sell as well as the competition would definitely fill in the void!

Technically, his treatment was supposed to last for at least a couple more days. However, he configured the machines to release him and wake him up after forty-eight hours regardless of his state!

As long as stopping the treatments and forcing him to wake didn't kill him or aggravate his injuries too much, he had to regain consciousness no matter what!

This was because the ship would be transitioning out FTL just hours later!

While Ves programmed the Scarlet Rose to re-enter FTL as soon as she finished cycling her FTL drive, he still worried about encountering other ships in the vicinity.

While he made sure to chart an obscure route that passed through various uninhabited star systems, the population density was significantly higher in regions closer to the second-rate states!

Higher populations led to higher traffic. The chance of encountering ships in more obscure star systems was quite significant!

Therefore, Ves needed to be on hand to navigate any crisis that might ensue!

Hijacking the Scarlet Rose was just the first half of his plan! Getting back to safety was his ultimate goal! So long the mobile supply frigate lingered in the periphery of Coalition space, the CRC could easily take back their possession!

"Gugh... I'd rather fall back to sleep..." He muttered as a stimulant forced him to wake.

He felt like a worn, third-hand mech that had barely been restored to functionality.

His muscles and his skin ached all over his body. His ears conveyed muted sounds as if he doused his head underwater. His internal organs felt as if someone rearranged them a couple of times before hastily shoving them back in their original places!

"My head.. it's empty!"

The void in his head was so much worse! As someone who always kept his spiritual energy reserves at 100 percent or close it, Ves felt as if he set off a firestorm to the forest in his mind!

He briefly estimated that he retained just 20 percent of his total reserves!

And this included the spiritual energy replenished by his Grand Dynamo over the past two days!

Back then, Ves must have burned so much spiritual energy that he probably risked bottoming out entirely!

His body shuddered in fear as he thought of the possible consequences for emptying his spiritual tank.

Would he be fine and just lose consciousness for some time? Or would he be depriving himself of spiritual sustenance and kill his consciousness?

He really didn't not want to find out, especially when his intuition vibrated whenever his thoughts strayed in this direction!

After he inspected his mind and Spirituality thoroughly, he became relieved that he did not seem to incur any major wounds. What damage he spotted could easily be healed over time.

While Ves estimated that he would be able to restore his spiritual energy reserves in eleven days or so, until then he had to cope with the consequences of burning so much spiritual energy.

"I'm in another low period." He moaned while holding his palm against his head.

The void in his mind made him feel listless and unmotivated. The energy of life was largely absent from him, making him feel as if he was alive because his biological body was geared this way.

His permanent passion for mechs no longer raged like a bonfire in his heart. Ves could not summon any particular enthusiasm for his profession!

Even knowing that there were four, intact second-class mechs in the Scarlet Rose's mech hangar, Ves exhibited no interest at all in studying their designs!

This was clearly unnatural to Ves! Ever since he started studying second-class mech design, he always wanted to get in touch with these impressive machines! Merely reading about them and observing their projections failed to satisfy his desire to work with something tangible!

Ves had always been a mech designer who liked to get his hands dirty every now and then! The satisfaction he gained from fabricating them and tinkering with them was irreplaceable!

For this desire to be absent from him jarred him quite a lot!

If he was in a healthier mental state, then he would have panicked by now! His identity as a mech designer mattered a lot to him, so anything that affected his passion and motivation for mech design was a catastrophe!

"My emotions are muted..."

He never emptied out his spiritual energy as much as now! Not did his condition impact his passion, but also his other feelings and emotions!

It was as if he started viewing reality in black and white instead of color. Everything seemed more lifeless and pointless in his consciousness.

Why did he enjoy designing mechs?

Why was he in a relationship with a Hexer?

Why did he reject the olive branch offered by the Friday Coalition?

Why did he recklessly attempt to hijack the Scarlet Rose?

If he was the Ves of before, then he would have just bulldozed through his doubts with his passion and conviction!

Yet now, he couldn't help but doubt his decisions. His lack of feelings skewed his judgement, causing him to lean away from his empty heart!

He couldn't help but be reminded of Patricia's description of rational mech designers.

Had Ves inadvertently turned himself into a rational mech designer?

"The description fits..."

Rational mech designers did not necessarily like designing mechs. They had to find conscious reasons to engage in their profession!

They also suppressed their feelings and emotions in order to stay as rational as possible!

Right now, that seemed to describe his current condition!

"I have to get a handle on this strange state! Regardless of what I think, I have to see my decisions through the end!"

Instead of doubting his prior decisions, Ves decided that he should stick to his original will and ignore his doubts.

Regardless whether he made the right decisions or not, quitting halfway would not lead to good results!

"This is just a temporary state." He reassured himself. "In less than two weeks, I'll be back to normal. I'll thank myself for staying true to myself in this low period."

After he finished inspecting his mental condition, he turned his attention elsewhere. He blinked his eyes and viewed his surroundings.

The infirmary looked the same as always. No one moved him while he was out like a light.

It was impossible for someone to sneak onto the Scarlet Rose when she was still in FTL.

While there was a chance that some crew member survived the massacre, with Lucky on patrol they wouldn't be able to stay alive for long!

"Lucky. Where are you?"

His cat was absent, which concerned him a bit. Due to his muted emotions, his paranoia and perpetual worries weren't as strong as they used to. Ves felt.. much more inclined to trust in his probability analysis.

The chance that Lucky encountered a setback or that some survivor managed to regain control of the ship was very small!

"Well, before my new ship exits FTL, I have to make sure I complete the takeover of her systems!"

It took several minutes for him to crawl out of the machine. Because his treatment lasted too short, his body was still too weak!

Even now, he didn't even possess the ability to walk!

The only way for him to move around the ship was by relying on a floating chair. The infirmary had plenty of them on hand. As soon as Ves activated one of them, he was able to rest his worn-out muscles and command the chair to move by gesturing with his fingers.

The chair actually provided him with an option to control it with his thoughts, but with his mind ajar, Ves did not dare to resort to this option!

Once he left the infirmary, his first priority was finding Lucky.

In order to call him back, Ves explored the settings of his floating chair and found a transmitter.

[LUCKY! MEET ME AT THE BRIDGE!]

After broadcasting this message through the loudspeakers and a short-ranged transmission, Ves commanded the chair to move him to the bridge.

Once he reached his destination, Lucky playfully phased through the ceiling and landed on his lap.

"Meow meow."

Ves narrowed his eyes at his cat in suspicion. Unlike him, Lucky looked anything but weary!

"Did you sneak into the material stores and eat the exotics reserved for repairing the mechs?"

"Meow~"

Lucky innocently looked up at him while swishing his tail with supreme contentment.

Due to his muted emotions, Ves did not feel very angry about Lucky's actions. The ship didn't belong to him in the first place.

From a logical perspective, he hadn't lost anything. He just gained less than he expected.

In any case, as long as Lucky grew stronger, Ves did not mind if his cat gorged his stomach to bursting!

"Whatever. Help me gain complete authority over the ship."

His goal was to usurp the position of captain of the ship. This was not something that could be done with an automated hack!

Ves had to make full use of Lucky's CFA-derived hacking suite to navigate the Scarlet Rose's core command systems.

However, with no virtual security expert opposing his blatant actions, he slowly made progress until he finally made the Scarlet Rose acknowledge him as captain!

"Finally."

Unfortunately, his earlier sabotage worked against him. Unless he undid some of his tampering, he wouldn't be able to exert full control over the ship!

Even then, there was always the chance that the security systems would recognize that he wasn't actually the captain! He needed to make sure that the operating system did not contain any hidden safeguards or backup functions that forcibly robbed him of his command authority!

"This is going to take a lot of time."

Chapter 1740 Decentralized

The Scarlet Rose entered a lifeless star system centered around a listless red dwarf.

Due to the absence of terrestrial planets, there was no desire to found a settlement in the star system. The couple of gas giants and their tiny moons offered very little resources to pay back the investment.

Nonetheless, the star system's close proximity to the border of the Friday Coalition demanded at least some presence.

As soon as the Scarlet Rose entered the star system, her sensors detected numerous listening posts and sensor outposts.

As Ves gained a greater mastery over the Scarlet Rose's bridge systems and other core command systems, he made numerous discoveries about his new ship.

One of the more welcome surprises was that the mobile supply frigate possessed more powerful external sensors than he expected?

As a ship purposed for monitoring duties, how could her sensor arrays be weak?

Unfortunately, he found out too late!

If he grasped better control over the Scarlet Rose back when he just hijacked the ship, he could have used the upgraded sensors to track down the stealthed escape pods carrying Aisling and Patricia!

Even if he didn't kill them, he could have at least held them hostage!

If Ves still possessed normal emotions, then he would have gloated at the irony of subjecting them to the indignity he suffered at their hands.

No one kidnapped Ves and got away with it! At least that was what he would think if his spiritual energy wasn't in a sorely depleted state.

As it was, from a rational point of view, he should be thankful that he managed to succeed in his hijacking attempt.

His first priority should be getting back to safety. While taking revenge sounded nice, he wouldn't actually gain much aside from satisfying his vindictiveness.

In any case, he wasn't sure whether the Scarlet Rose's sensors were good enough to overcome the stealth employed by the special escape pods. If Aisling was smart, then she would have configured their stealth systems to defeat the Scarlet Rose's detection methods.

The key was that he was still too close in the sphere of the Friday Coalition's influence! Even this small red dwarf system his ship just entered was littered with listening posts!

Ves knew that these unmanned outposts would soon transmit the whereabouts of the stolen ship to the Coalition!

Fortunately, the star system was a bit too obscure. The sensors failed to detect the presence of any ships in the system.

Of course, that didn't mean that Ves trusted the results. Stealthed ships might still be lurking somewhere in deep space. Even without such capabilities, as long as a ship minimized emissions or hid within an asteroid belt, it was too easy to escape the detection of long-ranged sensors.

A more complicating factor was that most of the sensor systems employed by the Scarlet Rose were limited by the speed of light.

Only a couple of long-ranged sensor types escaped this limitation, but all of them tended to return fussy results.

"Only the CFA excels in sensor technology." He muttered.

As an organization devoted to space warfare, the ability to see everything across light-hours was indispensable!

"Well, as long as nothing is close by, it's fine."

Ves did not dare to be complacent. He instructed the Scarlet Rose to keep her sensor arrays working at full power.

Knowing that the ship's location was not a secret, Ves did not hesitate to resort to full active scanning, focusing completely on observing the immediate vicinity!

No ship or stealthed vehicle should be able to escape the Scarlet Rose's detection!

While his actions meant that he was putting a lot of strain on the sensor arrays, thereby accelerating their wear and tear, Ves didn't even consider holding back.

As long as he returned to safety, he could always replace the worn-out components!

Around five hours passed as Ves quietly waited for the Scarlet Rose to cycle her FTL drive.

If the ship still received the care of a chief engineer, then her FTL drive could have finished its cycling routine in just four hours!

While this was slower than the Barracuda, the Scarlet Rose was several times bigger!

Ves already started regarding his new prize as his flagship. He faintly smiled as he caressed his hand over the temporary workstation that Ves installed in the half-ruined bridge.

A muted sense of pride emanated from his restrained heart. With the Scarlet Rose, Ves finally possessed a ship that could stand equal to Gloriana's Stellar Chaser!

Of course, right now his grasp on the ship was only tentative. During the tense five-hour period of exposure, Ves constantly delved into the internal network and deepened his control.

This was not an easy task! Just because he managed to fool the ship into thinking he was the captain didn't mean he grasped every other system and subsystem!

Mechs were much less troublesome. Though their complexity had no limits, most mech designers tended to make them as simple as possible.

The core concept of a mech was that it should be at the beck and call of a single mech pilot.

Even the rare multi-pilot mechs only featured two or three mech pilots at most.

There was never a case where fifty or a hundred people simultaneously controlled a single mech!

Ships were different. Despite not offering the ability for someone to interface with the vessel, hundreds or thousands of crew members worked in unison to control every aspect of the ship!

While the agency of a single officer or ship rating was limited, when hundreds of them pooled their capabilities together, a qualitative transformation occurred!

Under the collective power and will of a crew, the ship would run as a well-oiled machine!

The problem was that this mode of operation became a drag to Ves. Unlike mechs, the operation mode of a starship was very decentralized.

A mech always ran as a single whole. With just a single mech pilot in control, there was no need to split its control systems!

Ships abided by a different paradigm. They were run much like a government, where the captain served as the 'president'. The different officers in charge of engineering, security, life support, maintenance and so on acted as the 'ministers'.

Grasping the office of the president did not immediately mean that Ves also gained control of the ministries!

The only way to secure more control over the ship was to take over these ministries one-by-one!

All of this took time and expertise, both of which Ves was short of. Even with Lucky's hacking capabilities on hand, Ves had the impression that he had to siege dozens of castles, each of which boasted many layers of defenses.

The officers in charge of the different departments each tailored the defenses of their castles to their own quirks and preferences!

While not all of them were very diligent or paranoid, Ves encountered enough hindrances to give up on converting the entire ship!

Even when the Scarlet Rose finally transitioned back into FTL, he barely made any progress!

"I don't have to take over every system." Ves shook his head. "There is far too much work for me to do."

His priorities shifted to gaining solid control over the most essential systems. As for the others, Ves either isolated them or shut them off if they weren't necessary for the functioning of the ship.

"Looks like we're in this for the long haul, Lucky."

"Meow!"

His cat glowered at him. Lucky had an entire storeroom's worth of exotics to consume! Spending hours on the bridge was pure torture for the cat with a bottomless stomach!

Under his cat's repeated complaints, Ves finally let him go after a while.

He was getting rather tired as well. With his injured body and his exhausted mind and spirit, his mental and physical endurance had reached a low point.

Ves reluctantly pulled away from his work and decided to eat a quick meal before turning in for the night.

Once he shut down the interface, he looked around and saw that the cleaning bots had already scrubbed or cleared away the dead remains.

As he commanded his floating chair to exit the bridge, he passed through various corridors and compartments.

A large number of bots zipped back and forth, diligently closing holes and cleaning up the bodies and debris.

Due to employing the Amastendira, the collateral damage at the upper decks was very significant. Ves encountered numerous scorched and melted traces along the way.

The situation was different at the lower decks. Starting from engineering, hardly any collateral damage occurred.

Lucky's close-strike capabilities were unparalleled!

The only damage the ship sustained at the lower decks came from the futile counterattacks of the armed guards and crew members.

None of their weapons came close to hitting their fast-moving, elusive attacker!

While Lucky's mode of attack resulted in much less collateral damage, the bodies he left behind looked much worse.

If his victims were lucky, his scorching hot energy claws cauterized the wounds.

If they were not as lucky, then their torn bodies had emptied their entire reserves of blood over the deck!

It took hours for the overburdened cleaning bots to scrub all of the traces!

What was worse was that Ves only issued the order to clean up the mess after he was out for two days!

This was enough time for most of the bodies to decompose.

Since the Scarlet Rose became his possession, Ves lamented the ugly messes at the lower decks.

Even if the cleaning bots managed to wipe away all of the dirty biological traces, Ves still couldn't forget his initial impressions.

He took over a tainted ship! The Scarlet Rose was unclean!

While Ves felt a little bothered by that, his rational mind prevented him from caring too much.

Under his current condition, a ship was a ship!

Regardless of her sordid history, the Scarlet Rose was just a very huge machine. She possessed no life or spirit to speak of! Why should he regard her in the same way as a mech?

As Ves reached the mess hall and tore open a nutrient pack to have a quick, nutritious meal, he examined his strange state further.

He used to think that there were only downsides associated with the so-called low period.

Only after Patricia revealed the existence of rational mech designers to him did he look at this state in a different way.

The suppression of his emotions and the muting of his passion meant his mind wasn't subject to their whims as much.

It was as if he stopped polluting himself.

Ves never considered the influence of his passion and emotions to be a detriment to himself. Yet now that he guessed that rational mech designers entered the same state as him, his perspective on the matter had shifted.

There were always two sides of a coin. What Ves regarded as downsides, others saw them as upsides!

It was just that Ves had been so focused on his mental exhaustion that he hadn't thoroughly examined his other changes.

Now that Patricia pointed out the benefits, Ves became a lot more clear about the advantages of rational mech designers!

"Even if I'm tired, as long as I'm used to it, I can take full advantage of my clear-minded state!"

It was easy for him to enter a pure state of mind. The weakening of emotions, biases and instincts made him feel as if he was sophisticated AI in human skin.

If not for his plummeting creativity and ingenuity, Ves would have considered staying in this state permanently!

"I'm not suited to be a rational mech designer." He reminded himself.

He lost too many advantages after losing most of his passions, feelings and emotions. The benefits of attaining a clear and open-minded mentality were not very much.

Mech designers like Patricia who aimed to become rational mech designers from the start probably derived much better benefits from this state.

As for Ves, he should forget about it! Stripping himself of his passion was the same as tearing out his heart for mech design!