

Mech 1901

Chapter 1901 Delegation Angs

Ves felt incredibly relieved after he confirmed that the MTA frigate departed from the Kesseling System shortly after reaching orbit.

When he traveled to the LMC's headquarters, he reunited with Lucky and the Larkinson Mandate.

"Meow."

Nyaaa.

"Oh, you cuties. I missed you so much!"

While the Golden Cat enjoyed his ministrations, Lucky dodged his attempts and floated beyond his reach!

"Damnit, Lucky! Did you miss me at all during the last week?"

"Meow meow."

"This is not a vacation! You better work hard to pump out another gem! As a gem cat, don't you find it shameful that you produced so few gems? I could easily order a replacement mechanical cat from Centerpoint and not see any difference!"

"Meow!"

This raised Lucky's hackles! After throwing Ves a dirty look, he disappeared by phasing through the roof.

Ves hoped that Lucky was attempting to work hard to produce another greater gem, because he was seriously short on them right now after utilizing five of them at the same time!

When Ves settled into his chair, Gavin soon arrived with a data pad in his hand.

"Welcome back, boss."

"Cut the crap and tell me how our situation has changed."

"Well, it's pretty clear that you've managed to create a masterwork mech. That much has become public."

That was to be expected when the MTA delegation insisted on piloting the Quint in open space. There was no way to hide its masterwork state from someone who knew their mechs! Practically any competent mech designer should be able to tell that the Quint was a masterwork after studying a few seconds of footage!

"Great. How have the Ylvainans responded?"

"While you were preoccupied with hosting a Master Mech Designer, Calsie made sure to liaise with the Curin Dynasty in order to keep the locals at bay. The Ylvainans have expressed a lot of interest in your latest work."

"My Bright Warrior design has nothing to do with the Ylvainans."

Gavin shrugged. "They don't seem to understand that fact. In their view, any mech design you came up with is always tied to the Ylvainan Faith! You're the Bright Martyr after all. Some Ylvainans have even begun to spread a rumor that claims that the main reason why you managed to become the youngest masterwork mech designer in the star cluster is because your Quint has been blessed by Prophet Ylvaine!"

"THAT'S NONSENSE!" Ves banged his table, scaring the Golden Cat in huddling inside the Larkinson Mandate! "Ylvaine had nothing to do with my work! The Quint stands for the Larkinson Clan, not the Ylvainan people! Attributing my masterwork mech to someone else devalues my contribution!"

Of course, Ves conveniently left out that he himself relied heavily on both 'Mr. S' and 'Mr. L' to elevate his Quint to masterwork quality!

"We knew you would respond like that, boss. Calsie made sure to keep the Ylvainans from disturbing us while doing her best to encourage them to squash this rumor."

Ves expected this measure to be of limited effectiveness. Perhaps the Curin Dynasty as a whole was glad to see this rumor spread! The more he became tied to the Ylvainans, the better!

"Do I need to speak with the Ylvainans in person?"

Gavin shook his head. "Unless you really want to play the diplomat, you can leave everything to us. Your clan's Executive Council has done pretty in managing most major issues. Your relatives addressed a lot of important matters such as security, starship delivery, materials supply and many other concerns in accordance with the directions you've set. You don't have to lead every major initiative anymore, boss."

That was true. Ves expressly delegated many of those responsibilities to others. As far as everyone was concerned, the governance system he established was working as intended.

I was just.. he somewhat missed exercising greater control. He felt somewhat ill at ease with all of the delegation that went on these days.

In his worst moments, he even felt trapped within the structure he created for himself!

It was as if he had no choice but to squeeze himself into a certain mold because everyone else around him expected him to behave in a certain manner!

He shook his head. His situation hadn't come to this point yet. He still possessed an enormous amount of power, wealth, prestige and standing to be able to take charge if necessary.

He decided to change the topic.

"Tell me about the publicity we've planned."

"Well, since the MTA delegation departed on schedule, we can hold a press conference tomorrow at the soonest. Everything is ready. We've reserved an appropriate venue on a space station and invited a decent amount of reputable industry reporters on short notice. We even managed to score an interview opportunity immediately afterwards with your favorite news publication, the Rimward Star Herald."

Ves looked very pleased at that. In truth, he didn't really have the time to scour the news every day, so it wasn't as if he was a loyal subscriber to the Herald. It was simply one of the prestigious news portals in this region of space. That at least counted for something.

"How should I approach this interview, Benny?"

"I've consulted with a couple of public relations managers and other media specialists. We came up with a likely list of questions the reporter from the Herald will ask. We also took the liberty of coming up with suggestions on how to best answer these questions to ensure we gain as much advantage from this publicity opportunity as possible. Unlike last time, your accomplishment will truly capture the attention of the star cluster's mech community!"

Masterwork mechs were mainly a big deal to industry insiders. They weren't as notable to the mech market because of their extreme scarcity and lack of clear performance enhancements.

As for laymen who weren't involved with mechs, they couldn't even tell the difference between a standard mech and a masterwork mech!

For this reason, only industry reporters attended tomorrow's press conference. The interview conducted by the Rimward Star Herald might expose Ves to a wider audience, but his accomplishment would only be remembered by those who worked with mechs on a daily basis.

"Okay then. Let's talk about the bad news. How much trouble have we attracted?"

"I'm not the right person to answer this question." Gavin replied. "I believe one of your own men, Michael Crindon, is ready to fill you in. From what I have gathered, there are signs pointing to potential trouble. It's not very clear if anything is happening, though, so that means there are no acute threats."

Ves still didn't feel reassured.

"You know, if you don't feel secure enough, you can remedy that by hiring mercenaries."

"Mercenaries?" Ves adopted an ugly look. "My experiences with hiring mercenaries has been less than stellar."

The Battle Criers turned out to be alright, but that was because they consisted of Kinners.

He still recalled his disappointment in the Oodis Mudriders when he hired them to protect the Mech Nursery during his Apprentice days.

"Are you thinking about the Mudriders?" Gavin asked.

He nodded.

"We don't have to repeat that experience, boss. At that time, there weren't many mercenary corps available for hire. It's different now. Our budget is vastly higher and our reputation ensures that we can approach the largest and most reputable mercenary outfits without getting turned away!"

His assistant had a point. Ves seriously mulled over this option after he bought into those reasons.

While his mech forces grew in strength every day, Ves wasn't confident that they could fend off all of the threats that might be targeting him right now!

A thousand mechs was not enough! The protection of the Glory Battalion was also not enough!

With all the attention he attracted, he wouldn't feel safe until he enjoyed the protection of at least another thousand mechs!

"Explore this option." Ves commanded. "Reach out to any reputable mercenary organizations in the vicinity and see if they're willing to accept a contract from us. I hope we don't have to scrape the bottom of the barrel this time."

"Don't worry. The LMC is not the company of the past, and your personal reputation has vastly exceeded that of any Journeyman in the local region. We won't be forced to pick an outfit with a black mark on its record again."

"Good." Ves paused for a moment before a serious issue popped up in the mind. "If we successfully managed to contract some mercenary corps, suppose we encounter an ambush prepared by the Friday Coalition. Will the mercenaries even fight against the Fridaymen mechs?"

Gavin briefly consulted his data pad again. "I'm afraid not, boss. There is a standard clause in each mercenary contract that states that mercenaries aren't compelled to fight against mechs that are a class higher than what they are capable of fielding. Third-class mercenary corps will only fight against third-class mechs."

This meant that the mercenaries wouldn't hesitate to give way to the Fridaymen!

While Ves already anticipated something like this, he still looked troubled. The only other way to defend against the Friday Coalition was to hire a second-class mercenary corps, but these kinds of outfits were hard to find in lesser states!

It was still useful to hire regular mercenaries. They might not be able to resist the Friday Coalition, but they would always be able to lighten the burden against regular opponents.

"Okay, then proceed exploring this option, but make sure that they have a good reputation. The last thing I want to see is my own mercenaries turning their mechs around to attack my forces!"

"Will do, boss."

After that, they discussed some miscellaneous issues before Gavin left to enact his latest instructions.

Ves sat in his office and fiddled with the Larkinson Mandate for a moment. The Golden Cat purred comfortably as Ves massaged her intangible body with his spiritual projection.

He began to consider his upcoming agenda.

First, he planned to hold a press conference and conduct an interview. Shortly afterwards, he wanted to proceed with the long-delayed implantation surgery.

While he was out, he wanted his organizations to prepare for the long migration to the Sentinel Kingdom.

Along the way, he wanted his large and sprawling fleet to stop by the Bentheim System. He wanted to meet with the members of the old family in person for what might possibly be the last time.

Aside from that, he also wanted to witness the possible end of the Sand War. Perhaps he could grant one of Davia Stark's favors during this time so that she could move on from her trauma.

Ves knew that it wasn't really safe to travel back to the Bright Republic. If necessary, he was willing to split up his fleet so that only a small and expendable portion entered the Bentheim System while the rest continued on its way to the Sentinel Kingdom.

All in all, depending on how long his surgery incapacitated him, he needed to depend on his subordinates to hold the fort and keep his enterprises together.

"I really hope they are up to the task of running my organizations in my absence." He muttered.

Fortunately, if everything went well, he'd be out for a week at most before he could manage to regain confidence.

Even if he was stuck on a hospital bed for another week, he could still keep tabs on any developments and issue instructions from the infirmary.

"It's almost time." He whispered with anticipation.

The Archimedes Rubal that he was about to integrate would be a game changer for him. By expanding his cognitive functions and digitizing a portion of them, Ves would gain some considerable advantages that would skyrocket his productivity!

He expected to become a much better mech designer once his implant came online. This was extremely handy to him because he was just about ready to design his first proper second-class mech!

"No matter how much more complex these mechs can be, with the help of my implant, I'll never get lost!"

Chapter 1902 Grounded

In the Friday Coalition, there existed many prosperous star systems.

One of the more notable ones was the Warsaw Giant System. It hosted what many Fridayman arguably considered the best mech design institution in Coalition space!

The Clarion University of Mech Design was a sprawling behemoth that established extensive symbiotic relationships with the Gauge Dynasty.

While there were several rival institutions that possessed the capital to compete against Clarion's prestige and influence, it was nonetheless the foremost school in every aspiring mech design student's mind!

Those who managed to receive an invitation to study at Clarion were some of the most fortunate individuals.

Those who managed to rise up from obscurity and pass the notoriously difficult and grueling entry examinations were valued even higher!

This was how an ordinary young woman managed to do so well and catch the attention of one of the great Master Mech Designers residing at Warsaw Giant!

Years of frantic study, extensive augmentation, assisting her Master in various projects ensued. Soon enough, she became qualified to design her own mechs, even managing to publish a few modestly-successful mech designs in the Friday Coalition's notoriously oversaturated and ultra-competitive mech market!

In recognition of her talent, ability and contributions, the Gauge Dynasty invited her to become one of its retainers.

If she worked hard enough and continued to increase her value, then a day might come where she might receive an offer to be adopted into the great dynasty!

This was always one of her greatest goals in life! To become a member of the Gauge Dynasty meant that she would be granted the greatest amount of support in her future climb towards Master!

To any mech designer, the promotion from Apprentice to Journeyman was like a natural moat that blocked all but a random number of lucky mech designers.

Even the smartest, talented and most promising Apprentices never managed to find an opportunity to advance. Meanwhile, many of their lesser-deserving rivals breezed past this threshold as if it was nothing more than a curtain!

On the other hand, no amount of luck and random chance could ever allow a Senior to reach Master. Only hard work, a solid foundation, a huge amount of funding and a willingness to plunge into the unknown could give Seniors a sliver of a chance to advance to Master!

While Lady Aisling Curver was confident in her ability to become a Master through her own efforts, if she enjoyed the full support of the Gauge Dynasty, then her ascension was much more assured!

Just like the famed Master Carmin Olson, reaching Master at 100 years old was her ultimate goal! Advancing quickly would not only provide her with more time to perform true cutting-edge research, but also do wonders in raising her profile!

Of course, achieving this feat was not the only way for an ambitious mech designer to stand out from the mech industry and attract attention.

In a private estate situated in a pristine forested landscape, Aisling sat on her sofa while tuning in to a public broadcast.

[The rumors are true.] The voice of the man she obsessed over rang clear through the advanced speakers of her room. [The mech you see before you is a certified masterwork mech! The Quint is an exceptional copy of our Bright Warrior design, which is based around a modular mech platform with four different configurations. Through the assistance of an anonymous benefactor, my partner and I not only managed to design the best mech our collaboration has produced, but also managed to turn our inaugural copy into a masterwork!]

She pinched her fingers and spread them out in a diagonal fashion, causing the projection of the broadcast to grow larger until it dominated half of the elegantly-decorated leisure room!

The brilliant-looking woman in a dress spoke up next. [Not only has a Master of the Mech Trade Association conveyed her appreciation towards the Quint, she has also confirmed in person that Ves and I have substantially contributed to the making of this masterwork mech! After the honorable Master Moira Willix inspected our work in person, the MTA has officially bestowed us both with masterwork certificates. Starting from today, Ves and I have officially become the youngest masterwork mech designers from the Yeina Star Cluster!]

"That could have been me." She growled from her gritted teeth as she glared at the grinning woman standing next to the man that could have been hers! "That cow doesn't deserve Ves! She's ruining him! She already ruined him in fact! If she hadn't brainwashed him into becoming a Hexer slave, he wouldn't have hijacked our ship!"

A more demure-looking woman wearing a plain suit shook her head. "Let it be, Aisling. What's done is done. You have had your chance. Your Master has rejected your proposal to chase after Ves again. He's a problem for the Coalition Reserve Corps now. You should instead focus on redeeming yourself and get back in your Master's good graces."

The aftermath of the Scarlet Rose's hijacking hadn't gone well. Ves Larkinson not only managed to kill off the entire crew of the Scarlet Rose, but subsequently managed to take over the ship and her complement of mechs long enough to return to safety!

What was worse was that Hexer reinforcements also defeated the Terrinac and her mechs, taking the ship as an extra prize!

While Lady Curver wasn't responsible for these losses, her decisions to kidnap Ves and bring him back to Warsaw Giant directly led to these unfortunate turn of events.

Suffice to say, the CRC was quite displeased with Lady Curver! Her Master had to bail her out and keep her in place to minimize the repercussions of her missteps.

She hated it! Aisling was not only stuck on Warsaw Giant, but also had to go back to assisting her Master's design projects. This meant that she was unable to devote any time to her own projects, thereby slowing down her own progress!

What was worse for Aisling was that while she returned to doing marginal grunt work for Master Huron, Gloriana Wodin proceeded to reunite with Ves and design the most impressive mech up to his point in this career!

[Let me be honest.] Ves spoke. [We did not achieve this remarkable accomplishment alone. If you access the MTA's public record on the Quint, you will notice that Master Willix reserved a considerable amount of credit to a mech designer known as 'Mr. S'. Due to his own wishes, I cannot speak any further about his identity. All I can say is that Mr. S is one of my greatest benefactors and one of the most important reasons why I managed to reach this point. Master Willix herself expressed great respect for Mr. S's abilities. Not only did he assist us in perfecting the Bright Warrior design, he also facilitated our entry into the ranks of masterwork mech designers!]

Gloriana took over in addressing the crowd of reporters. [Let me be clear. We are true masterwork mech designers. Without the months we've spent on designing the Bright Warrior and the value we've provided to the Quint, our first mech built exclusively for the Larkinson Clan would have never become so remarkable! If you have any cause to doubt our masterwork certificates, then you can always take it up with Master Willix of the MTA!]

Naturally, no reporter at the press conference dared to issue a challenge. Nobody was crazy enough to call a Master Mech Designer a liar, let alone one who was part of the hierarchy of one of the most powerful organizations in the galaxy!

Gloriana smiled at the crowd and the recorders with supreme satisfaction. She even leaned into Ves in order to show off her affection for her lover!

"THAT COULD HAVE BEEN ME!" Aisling repeated with a heated face!

The impressive and sublime appearance Quint looming over the heads of the loving pair practically taunted her. The masterwork mech's existence was like a dagger stabbed into her heart. It physically hurt her to continue staring at the mech that bore the touch of both her greatest crush and her most hated rival!

While Aisling stewed over what could have happened if her scheme went according to plan, Patricia calmly observed the words and mannerisms of the two mech designers.

She picked up plenty of clues and made several important observations.

"My guess is true." She softly noted. "Ves Larkinson used to be an average mech design student at Rittersberg. He should have never been able to rise so quickly. Even before he managed to become Master Olson's apprentice, his trajectory had already started to jump upwards. There was no way he could have risen so remarkably without a benefactor. The question is what makes Ves so special in those early days?"

"His design philosophy, I bet!" Aisling shouted. "Ves has developed a great design philosophy! It would have matched so well with mine, but instead he hooked up with a Hexer who possessed a much more boring design philosophy! How could he possibly be so stupid to favor her as opposed to me? We could have designed the most powerful teamwork-oriented mechs in the star sector! With his glows and my neural networks, we could have empowered entire mech armies and give our side a decisive advantage against the Hexers!"

There was no way to turn back time for Aisling. Even if the rumors were true that the Big Two developed or adapted alien technology that enables them to travel through time, someone like Aisling would never be able to access such restricted technology!

For all intents and purposes, Aisling forever lost her moment to convert Ves to her side!

Patricia directed a veiled look at her colleague and superior. She suffered her own share of problems after the hijacking of the Scarlet Rose.

Though she managed to escape greater punishment as well, she sometimes regretted her decision.

Spending time with a jealous and lovesick fool like Aisling was wearing on her patience! It became increasingly harder to maintain a calm and rational mood when she was in the presence of a petulant child!

Even though Patricia respected Aisling's talent and accomplishments in mech design, the latter's rapid success also came paired with strong mood swings and an extreme personality!

"It is odd how the pair frequently refer to Mr. S and Master Willix." She observed while ignoring Aisling's outbursts. "I believe they are trying to protect themselves by implicitly sending the message that they enjoy the support of a genuine Master and a suspected Master."

The other mech designer in the room paused her tantrum. "That.. doesn't sound very clever. If they're working too hard, then that suggests that their supposed protection

might very well be an illusion. It is well-known that the mech designers from the MTA aren't allowed to meddle in private affairs and state affairs."

"That is true." Patricia nodded. "And I think Ves and Gloriana are aware of this fact as well. Even so, Master Willix likely favors them in private. This counts for at least something, as it is never a good idea to earn the ire of one of the Masters presiding over our entire star sector."

This meant that the pair would still be able to achieve their goals of deterring potential troublemakers from going after their lives!

What Patricia could see, others could see as well.

Therefore, even if a lot of powerful people throughout the star sector began to notice the pair for the first time, they didn't do more than seeking ways to reach out to them with attractive offers.

When Gloriana proceeded to mention that the Wodin Dynasty of the Hexadric Hegemony officially supported the pair, most of those plans evaporated into dust.

Almost no one who was already on the side of the Hexers wished to become associated with those rabid women!

"Ves is rooting for the wrong side." Aisling said glumly.

As the Quint began to demonstrate its performance by deploying into space, she no longer wanted to watch the broadcast any longer. She flicked her finger, causing the projection to fade.

"You're right, Patricia. Mulling over my regrets won't get me anywhere. If I want to keep up with that Hexer witch and remain worthy to Ves, I have to work earnestly to get back in my Master's good graces!"

She wasn't willing to give up!

Chapter 1903 New Relationships

Inside a highly-congested space station in the Bentheim System, a lot of spacers and mech pilots were idling and relaxing at its many bars and other establishments of varying repute.

Ever since the sandmen stopped throwing their fleets against human territories like a flood, the defenders of the star systems that had been pushed to the brink all sighed in relief.

When the latest developments became known, the Bright Republic quickly grew alarmed while the other states thanked their lucky stars that they weren't in the way of the final sandman offensive!

Several months had gone by since the Sand War entered into an entirely different phase. As far as the more far-flung states like the Reinald Republic was concerned, the Sand War was pretty much over!

Only the states in the vicinity of the former Coman Federation still sweated like buckets. The Bright Republic may have been the obvious target, but the Vesia Kingdom, Ylvaine Protectorate, Independent State of Pillis and various other states might very well be next!

For this reason, the diplomats from the Bright Republic worked overtime in trying to solicit help from the surrounding states and beyond.

In the meantime, the Mech Corps and the Starfighter Corps eagerly took advantage of the months-long lull in battle to reorganize their deployments and prepare for the clash that everyone saw coming.

Though a lot of Brighters wanted to mourn and take stock of the immense amount of death and loss they suffered, the government didn't allow its population to let down its guard!

A large amount of Peaceful Soldiers regularly patrolled the streets of the major cities. They not only helped with enforcing martial law, but also instilled the correct moods among the citizens who simply wanted to forget about the sandmen!

"The Sand War isn't over."

This phrase was repeated over and over across all manner of official communication. The Brighters had to avoid falling asleep just when the sandmen were about to come back to strike one, last blow against the state that had stopped them in their tracks!

Since the Bentheim System was the likely target of the rumored sandman planet, the Mech Corps and Starfighter Corps reassigned a large amount of regiments and divisions to this star system!

Despite the congestion, despite the logistical challenges, Bentheim grew more and more formidable as soldiers and defenders from all over the state converged on the port system!

This naturally led to a lot of congestion, especially at sites where all of them liked to spend their time while on leave!

At a particularly dingy drinking establishment that had clearly seen better days, rhythmic music blasted softly from the ceiling. A low light left much of the interior in shadow, with only a scarlet-purple glow providing enough light for the patrons to pick up their glasses of beer or banter with the right comrades!

At a cramped booth located in the corner of the top floor of the bar, two young women were waiting for their third companion to return with their orders.

Ordinarily, a serving bot should have brought their drinks to their table, but all of the bots long gone out of order!

"Really now." Ketis scowled. "Of all the places we could have chosen, why did he settle for this drinking hole? The ventilation system is on its last legs! The floor is sticky with spilled liquids! The walls and ceiling are already starting to corrode!"

Through the laughter and banter of the other patrons, the noise also started to grate on her ears. While the former pirate was not unaccustomed to rougher crowds, she could always count on her fellow Swordsmen to back her up if someone looked at her wrong.

Now, plenty of the men sitting in the nearby chairs, booths and barstools were openly leering at the two women!

Though everyone here had the good sense to avoid going any further, the uncouth stares still bothered Ketis to no end!

If not for the very tight security systems keeping the space station in order, she would have felt tempted to march towards her 'admirers' to poke their eyes!

"Those mercenaries and gangers are not worth your time." Raella spoke from the other side of the booth. "Don't forget why we are here. Soon enough, we might have to depend on them as comrades in arms."

A solemn silence passed between the two women.

"Heya, babes! Why the glum faces?!" A loud and very male voice interrupted their musing.

Three large mugs of beer slammed against the tabletop. The newcomer soon sat down next to Raella and placed her hand on the curve of her bottom.

Raella swatted his arm with a slap. "Not here! Keep your hands to yourself!"

"I wasn't doing anything, babe!" Vincent Ricklin retorted with mock innocence. "I was just appreciating your Larkinson charm. Have I told you that you're gorgeous?"

"I really don't know why the two of you got along in the first place." Ketis interrupted as she took a swig of her beer.

"Vincent isn't so bad once you get to know him." Raella smirked as she partook in her own drink. "He's kind of like Dietrich but better in every way! I like some excitement in my life, you know. It also helps that he pilots an impressive mech."

Vincent laughed as he swung his hand around her shoulder. "Hahaha! I really do have to thank your cousin for designing my Adonis Colossus. A lot more people have begun to admire my mech ever since he appeared on the news again. I can sell my mech for a fortune if I ever accept one of the many offers that people have sent to me. You can't believe what some of these rich guys are prepared to exchange for a custom mech developed by your cousin!"

"I really hope you aren't letting your greed get the better of yourself." Ketis frowned. "From what I know of Ves, your Adonis Colossus is only designed to work with you. You'll desecrate your mech if you pass it on to someone else."

"Hey, I was just talking, babe! I love my Adonis Colossus! It's the best mech that I could ever pilot! It has brought me so much fame and success! I'd be a fool to give it away!"

The only mech designer at the booth nodded with satisfaction. "At least you know your priorities."

"I feel kind of jealous, actually." Realla sighed. "The Prideful Soldiers and other mechs I've piloted recently are not as good as yours. I really wished I pressed my relation with Ves a bit harder. Maybe that masterwork mech of his could have been mine!"

"Hey. The light skirmisher that I'm designing for you won't disappoint you, Raella. I'm already planning to show it to Ves so that he can make a pass on my design and instill it with one of his glows."

"Is that even possible?" Vincent scratched his head.

"I'm not sure, but I've tried my best to adhere to his guidelines, so I think it will work."

"It won't be entirely your design anymore, though."

"You'll get to pilot a better mech."

"Ah, that's right."

Despite the ongoing Sand War, everyone was already starting to think ahead. What would they do after human space was no longer being threatened by the sandmen? With so many devastated states and star systems, a huge wave of reclamation and reconstruction would soon take place.

Just like the invasion of the Red Ocean, there was plenty of treasure to find among the wreckage of the former border states!

Where there was treasure, there would doubtlessly be a lot of rivals looking to harvest most of the gains.

Vincent Ricklin saw a great opportunity here!

As long as he and his Ricklin's Rollers picked up a lot of valuable salvage, he could grow his mercenary corps further.

Perhaps he might even be able to claim his own planet!

As Vincent grinned and laughed at the prospect of ruling his own planet, both women shared a peculiar look.

"Really, Raella. Why date this dolt?"

"He's fun and he's great in bed! What's not to like?"

"You're not growing any younger. You should start looking for something more permanent than a casual fling."

"Hey, babe, don't call me a casual fling!" Vincent pulled himself out of his latest daydream. He squeezed Raella's shoulder. "I'm really serious about my girl here! Raella is much more than the girls I've been seeing in the past. She can be quite the tigress on and off the battlefield, if you know what I mean."

Ketis did not look amused at Vincent's obvious wink. "Ugh. I don't even know why I bother."

"Hey now, Ketis." Raella began to look concerned. "Having someone by your side who you can click with is a great way to spend your time. I would have gone stir-crazy from all the drilling sessions if not for Vincent here. Maybe you should take a page from our book and start dating yourself."

"I feel like a Hexer. None of the boys here are great. They don't understand me. Not like him..."

"Female Hexers who are disgusted with boys like to hook up with their own kind, right?"

Ketis offered them a grim smile. "The women here are not much better. It's.. not what I want. Back in my old outfit, I always considered my fellow Swordsmaidens to be sisters. I don't want to distort that impression by looking at them in a different way."

"Do you have the hots for Ves?"

Raella immediately slapped her man on the cheek! "Vincent! Don't be rude! We talked about this! This is a sore point for Ketis! Oh, you poor girl!"

"I'm not as fragile as you think I am." The young mech designer sighed and shook her head. "Ves has Gloriana now. They look happy with each other and I'm happy for them. I.. I always felt that Ves was too good for me. It's best that things turned out this way."

"Oh, Ketis.." The exiled Larkinson stretched out her arm in order to hold Ketis' hand. "If I was still with Ves, I would have smacked some sense in him. If I knew he had a fetish for Hexers like Gloriana, I would have smacked his face until he turned back to normal! He really missed out on a sweet girl like you who looked up to him all the time!"

"That part of my life is over. Just let it be. I have already started to look ahead."

"Do you need me to introduce you to some buddies of mine?" Vincent offered. "I know all kinds of fellows who would love to—"

"—I'm fine, Vincent. I can manage on my own."

"Your buddies are all thugs and lowlives." Raella complained. "I know they have been covering your back during your rebel days, but you should really professionalize your outfit. At its current state, it's far from my Blood Claws and barely better than Dietrich's pathetic Whalers!"

"Didn't that loser get kicked out from his own gang?"

"That's not the point. I'm telling you, Vincent. There's no future for you if you continue to run Ricklin's Rollers like a terrorist cell."

"I'm working on it! This isn't something I can change in a day."

He said this the last time, and the time before that. Nothing seemed to have changed. To Raella, Ricklin's Rollers acted more like a bunch of bros with mechs rather than a reliable fighting force.

"I heard Ves and his followers are about to return to the Bright Republic, if only briefly." Raella changed the topic. "My family is quite abuzz about this. What have you heard, Ketis? Are you looking forward to returning to his side? You've already spent quite a lot of time with me. While I'm glad to keep you company, I feel like you are missing out on opportunities."

Ketis frowned. She wasn't quite sure how to answer this question.

Would it be better for her to return to Ves, or try to find her own way to success?

Chapter 1904 Excessive Precautions

Ves spent several hours in the public eye. He not only held a press conference with various reporters from the Protectorate and other states, he also held an interview for the Rimward Star Herald.

He reiterated much of the same points he mentioned during the press conference. He also revealed some innocent details about the Bright Warrior design and the Quint.

In addition, he had an opportunity to present an image of himself that was a bit more eccentric and exaggerated than he was in reality.

Though Ves hadn't outright donned his crazy hat during that time, he put on a lighter version that hopefully made him appear less than right in the head in some instances.

He didn't care whether people thought less of him. He always kept Master Willix's words in mind that his mechs should do the talking in these cases!

As long as he continued to design great mechs, all of the criticism and naysayers against him would lose their sting.

Even if Ves claimed that his mechs were literally the embodiments of vile, ancient demons from the abyss, his customers would still pilot his mechs with glee as long as their machines brought them victory in battle!

In the mech industry, the mech designer was an important brand, but not the main determination in whether a mech model achieved commercial success.

Plenty of poorly-regarded mech designers managed to make the right choices and design a successful mech. In addition, plenty of reliable mech designers wasted months on a design only to achieve a fraction of their expected sales!

Though Ves enjoyed a greater share of success than his peers, that was due to various reasons.

For one, he never designed a commercial mech he didn't believe in. While that led to a severe dearth of choices in the LMC's mech catalog, pretty much every mech for sale was useful in some capacity!

He always thought carefully on what the market demanded and what he could offer to meet those demands. His desire to uphold his reputation and grow the reputation of the LMC as a supplier of high-quality mechs caused him to care a lot about the market reaction of his products!

So far, Ves was quite happy with his progress, but he could always do better. After receiving Master Willix's tutelage for an entire week, he had a much better picture of his strengths and shortcomings.

One of the best and most comprehensive ways to upgrade his design capabilities was to integrate a cranial implant in his brain.

This was the key to catching up Gloriana! It didn't miss his notice that his girlfriend probably harvested much more gains from turning the Quint into a masterwork mech and receiving lots of valuable insights from Master Willix.

Though Gloriana wouldn't be advancing to Senior any time soon, Ves estimated that all of the lessons she learned and insights she gained could very well bring forth her promotion by a decade!

This was catastrophic news from Ves!

Feeling the surgery from Gloriana's very obvious glee, Ves slogged through the press conference and interview with a touch of impatience.

While he knew that these events were vital opportunities to shape his public perception and send out the right messages, his mind no longer lingered on the present.

When the interviewer from the Herald finally wrapped up the session and departed the venue, Ves sighed and stroked Lucky's back.

"Finally!"

"You look like you have to go to the bathroom but had to hold it in. I know you're eager to start the surgery, but this is important as well."

"I know, Gloriana. It's just that I can't wait much longer! Do you know how long I've waited for this moment? Now, there is nothing that can delay my augmentation any longer! I'm going to be a completely new mech designer after this surgery. I can finally enjoy some of the benefits that you've been enjoying for years!"

His girlfriend smiled and leaned against his arm. "Cranial implants do improve the design experience, but never forget that it is the brain you were born with that is supposed to be in charge. Don't use the implant as a crutch. If you stop exercising your mind like you did up until now, you'll stop advancing."

"I already know that, Gloriana. Master Willix has also helpfully reminded us that we shouldn't grow too dependent on each other. Maybe we should design some mechs on our own from time to time, if only make sure we can still produce hits by ourselves."

The prospect of designing a mech without Ves did not sit well with her! She scrunched her face and pinched his cheek. "Let's discuss that later! For now, you should head to Ranya and prepare for your big day."

They left the public venue the LMC had rented and traveled back to the Avatar base.

There, the Frozen Leaf sat parked in the large landing zone. Dr. Ranya decided to bring her personal ship down in order to transfer some of the advanced medical machine and equipment to the surgery room prepared specifically for this purpose.

Due to his paranoia and fear that anything might go wrong while people operated on his brain, Ves made a huge number of ridiculous demands.

The room where the surgery would take place was located underground. The main chamber was built like a bunker surrounded by other bunkers. A decent amount of Breyer alloy and other advanced materials lined the walls, causing the underground fortification to be strong enough to withstand both nuclear explosions and asteroid impacts!

An independent redundant power system powered a whole host of life support systems, allowing for a completely closed circulation of air and water, thereby preventing any outside contaminants from infiltrating the operating room!

A robust array of antigrav modules precisely regulated even the tiniest tremors and gravity fluctuations. They also acted as inertial dampeners in the event the underground fortification suffered a severe impact.

As for the security arrangements, nearly all of the available Avatars of Myth had been deployed to defend the base and remain alert against any possible infiltrations or unauthorized intrusions!

The security suites had been beefed with a multitude of high-powered scanning arrays that were all tuned to detect different kinds of stealth systems.

All non-essential employees had been given a day off, leaving the Avatar base noticeably less noisy. Without the mech technicians, administrative staff and other workers, only the mech pilots and guard infantry remained at their assigned positions.

Hundreds of gold-and-black mechs bearing the Golden Cat of the Larkinson Clan and the Vesuvian mech that represented their troop patrolled the base in concentric circles.

Above in high orbit, the spaceborn contingent of the Avatars of Myth kept a very close watch on any elements in space that might pose a threat to site on the surface!

The revised Shield of Samar with its tough and incredibly sturdy Breyer alloy attracted a fair amount of attention.

Yet what impressed outside observers even more was the two mech companies of Bright Warriors!

Forty Illuminating Warriors, Twenty Nova Warriors, Ten Solar Warriors and Ten Shining Warriors all made for an imposing sight as they patrolled in formation!

When Ves tasked his Avatars and others to implement this expensive and extremely excessive security cordin, Commander Melkor quickly decried the waste!

"Are you crazy, Ves?! Do you know how many mechs we could have built with the money you are investing in these security measures?!"

"It's my money." Ves answered back then. "In my opinion, these precautions aren't good enough, but I can't wait any longer. I'm taking a very risky gamble here."

Melkor laughed. "Risky? With all of these guards and security equipment in place, not even a drop of rain can approach your treatment facility!"

"Well, regardless of what you think, my Avatars belong to me. If I choose to deploy your full rustur to stand guard, then you better obey my instructions!"

Aside from arranging the Avatars to stand guard, he also assigned a considerable amount of Living Sentinels to guard the outer perimeter.

In addition, he also requested Gloriana to assign as many troops from the Glory Battalion as possible!

She managed to assign at least twenty second-class mechs and mech pilots to guard the inner perimeter! Now that the Wodin Dynasty guaranteed his safety, the Glory Warriors did not disdain to guard a foreign boy anymore!

Perhaps the most important piece of the defense plan was the presence of Venerable Brutus. His Star Dancer silently hovered above the fortified entrance of the underground facility with its laser rifle warmed and ready to take out any approaching threat!

In addition to the mechs, a few guards on foot also stood guard at strategic locations within the underground fortification. They guarded the interior of the facility alongside the more numerous guard infantry.

A day after the press conference, Ves wore a simple gown. He inspected the highly-fortified and completely isolated operating room with his Vulcaneye scanner for the tenth time in the last two hours.

Lucky lazily floated from one corner to another corner as he watched out for any spy bugs and other unwanted intrusions.

"Did you find anything, Lucky?"

"Meow."

"I know you didn't find anything fifty-three times before, but you never know if someone slipped something in at the last minute!"

"Meow meow meow!"

Don't complain! If anything goes wrong, I can easily die! This is the most precarious moment of my life!"

Though everyone around him was quite exasperated with his paranoia, Ves didn't care. He would rather be overprepared than underprepared! If nothing went wrong in the next couple of hours, then he would gladly accept this outcome!

Even if it seemed that all of his preparations went to waste, Ves would still believe that his security precautions formed an effective deterrent against his enemies.

Moments later, Dr. Lupo briefly entered the operation room. He was garbed in a high-tech operating uniform that provided a lot of conveniences while at the same time keeping him completely sterile and free of contaminants.

"It's time. Please put away your possessions and lay down on the main operating table. We will start with the final steps before the surgery within a couple of minutes."

"Understood."

Once Ves put away his Vulcaneye with the rest of his possessions, he laid in place, but not before looking at each of the guards assigned to keep watch in the operating room.

Aside from Nitaa, Ves assigned a handful of guards with close ties to the Larkinsons as well as a handful of Glory Warriors that his girlfriend personally recommended.

Each of them could potentially pose a threat to him, but Ves already had some measures in place to watch the watchers.

In fact, he also enlisted some other personnel to watch the watchers that watched the watchers!

Once the final preparations were complete, the surgeons entered the operating room.

Dr. Ranya entered first. She held a secure case which stored the highly-modified Archimedes Rubal bioimplant.

Dr. Lupo entered immediately afterwards. Though he lacked the depth and breadth of Ranya's knowledge, his high learning ability allowed him to gain a lot of relevant competences that would doubtlessly be of help for this delicate operation!

Aside from the two exobiologists, six more older-looking individuals entered the room.

The newcomers wear very different operating suits. Their markings each signified that they were senior implant surgeons and nurses employed by different medical facilities from the Ylvaine Protectorate!

Ves wasn't relieved with letting Dr. Ranya and Dr. Lupo perform the entire surgery by themselves. Months ago, he specifically ordered Calsie to reach out to the Curin Dynasty and dispatch some of the best implant surgeons the Protectorate could offer.

After Ves, Crindon and Nitaa personally verified their reliability and ability, they cleared surgeons and nurses to participate in the operation.

Because their addition happened on short notice, both Ranya and Lupo objected to this sudden development.

Ves overruled their objections, though. He wanted those Ylvainan medical professionals to be on hand to act as another check.

Even though Ves was well aware that the Ylvainans might very pose a threat to him as well,

"We can begin now. Is there anything you wish to say or do before we begin?"

"In fact, there is something I want to do before we begin." He spoke and withdrew a device. "Please proceed with the surgery immediately after I'm done."

He activated the device, causing an energy screen similar to that employed by Master Willix to surround his operating table.

Now that he gained some privacy, he moved quickly in summoning his System comm. Once he activated its interface, he quickly browsed the Skill Tree and spent a hefty chunk of Design Points on another Mastery!

[Light Skirmisher Mastery I]: 40,000 DP

Ves grinned. "Since I'll be out for at least a week, I might as well be productive and make good use of my temporary hiatus!"

As the System comm quickly dematerialized, an intangible hook quickly latched on to his consciousness and dragged it out of his mind!

Chapter 1905 Vulnerable

"He looks so vulnerable." Gloriana commented as she observed the macabre-looking operation from the observation room. "I understand now why he fears this operation so much. He's completely defenseless if anything goes wrong."

Ves had always been a proactive person to her. He liked to take action because he was often forced into situations where he needed to react.

For him to place himself at the mercy of others seemed uncharacteristic.

He was placing a lot of faith in his precautions and subordinates. Though his preparations seemed excessive, there was still a chance that something might go wrong.

"I won't let anything happen." Gloriana whispered to herself. "Ves needs to make it through!"

For the operation, it was better if the patient was as inactive and dormant as possible. This was because the bioimplant had to root inside the brain tissue and form active new connections.

This delicate and extremely precarious step could easily go wrong if the wrong wires got plugged in the wrong sockets!

With Ves seemingly out cold, his brain activity had dropped at an unusually low level, but that was not entirely bad. While this made it a little bit more difficult to identify which parts of his brain was responsible for a specific function, Ranya and Lupo had already performed this task beforehand.

With the relatively low levels of brain activity, it became a bit easier to forge a smooth connection and determine whether it functioned properly.

A mind that was inactive also produced less clutter, thereby providing their scanners with a clear view of what went on in the patient's mind.

The surgery began shortly after the surgeons confirmed that Ves was out for at least a while.

The Ylvainan implant surgeons cooperated smoothly with Dr. Lupo and Dr. Ranya.

Though they were older and more experienced, Ranya insisted on taking the lead this time.

"Let her take charge." Gloriana commanded after she patched into a channel. "Ranya is better trained and can fully utilize all of the tools and machinery at her disposal."

She trusted Ranya to do right by Ves and turn her boyfriend into a much more productive mech designer!

"Hihihi! I can't wait to design a mech with the new Ves! With his new implant, he can partially digitize his mind. I can form a connection with him with my own implant!"

This would negate the need for speech as they could just transfer a lot of data to each other without the need to package it. This would doubtlessly push their collaboration to the next level!

Melody, who stood behind her, tutted her voice. "The Archimedes Rubal implant is quite formidable, especially when it comes to data storage. Has it not come to your attention that Ves has decided to go through with the surgery because of you? He is very concerned about the possibility that you will overtake him. With this new implant, he might be able to even the score."

Gloriana smirked. "He can try. I've made some massive gains lately. As long as I process my gains and figure out what they mean to me, my upcoming designs will definitely be an evolution compared to my previous works!"

In fact, she preferred it if Ves became better. Only when he could keep up with her would Gloriana be able to design the best mechs!

His contribution was indispensable to her, so she was truly pleased that Ves worked hard to avoid falling behind.

While she would still love Ves even if his progress no longer matched her own, she would still feel disappointed. She partnered with Ves with the expectation that he would be able to stimulate her design philosophy and push her to greater heights.

She sighed. She really hoped nothing went wrong during the next couple of hours.

"Miaow."

Clixie passed her paw through the projection that depicted the operation. Her furry limb passed through the table right next to the operating table where Lucky vigilantly guarded the surroundings.

"Do you want to go to Lucky?"

"Miaow."

"We can't. You'd have to be put into a sterile suit and I know you hate that. Besides, you just need to wait a few hours before the surgery is done."

The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat's paw subsequently passed through Nitaa's projection.

Unlike before, her high-quality combat armor featured an attachment which held a very important object.

In order to guard his body against threats with a more spiritual nature, he insisted on keeping the Larkinson Mandate in the operation room!

Though none could see the Golden Cat barring Ves, the presence of the Larkinson Mandate in the room had a noticeable effect on the surgeons and nurses.

Each of them felt considerably more determined in trying to make this operation a success!

Gloriana frowned and wanted to look away when some implements managed to 'open up' her boyfriend's head. While various advanced machinery went to work in trying to keep it in a stable condition, she still didn't want her memories to be tainted by Ves in such a vulnerable state.

She didn't allow herself to look away. Ves was her boyfriend, and he could easily become something more. She owed it to him to witness his operation in person, if only to stay alert and intervene if something went amiss.

Of course, she knew that she likely wouldn't be needed to step in. Ves prepared so many security precautions and formed so many different contingency plans that almost every possibility had been taken into account!

More than an hour went by as the surgeons carefully prepared the patient's exposed brain for the implantation procedure. Gloriana didn't understand much of what Ranya and Lupo were doing with her boyfriend's head, but the assisting Ylvainan surgeons and nurses voiced no complaint, so they must be doing something right.

At some point, the implant was ready to be inserted in the brain.

This was the most important step of the operation, as the initial insertion and integration would determine how quickly Ves could assimilate the Archimedes Rubal and turn it into his own strength!

Anything that might go wrong at this stage would easily lead to complications that prolonged the recovery period.

If the complications were serious enough, then permanent brain damage or even brain death was a very real possibility!

Ranya and Lupo carefully worked together to control a delicate machine that slowly lowered the multi-layered bioimplant to the patient's cranium.

A lot of reactions started to take place. As the implant sank between Ves' brain tissue, the initial neural connections slowly took shape.

All of the implant surgeons carefully observed the projected sensor data and multispectrum scans for any anomalies and complications.

At the same time, the bioimplant began to sink deeper as it headed closer to the center of the brain.

In order to ensure that the Archimedes Rubal formed the best possible integration with Ves, it had to be set in a very specific portion of his brain!

Settling it in any other possible part would definitely degrade the implant's functionality. If this step was botched, then the implant might warp the patient's personality and cognition to the point where their friends and family wouldn't be able to recognize them anymore!

Though Gloriana didn't understand most the readings projected by the interfaces in the observation room, they all looked relatively stable.

Time passed by. As the implant started to settle in the right place, more and more connections formed between the exterior connectors of the implant and the brain.

Due to the Breyer alloy shell and Synthra Umbra sleeve enveloping the Archimedes Rubal, Ranya had to develop a special organic outer layer in order to ensure it would stay in place.

Various curled tubes that were enveloped by multiple different layers of materials extended from the implant from multiple directions. Their addition made the implant look like a very small and exotic octopus-like exobeast.

The unnerving bioconnectors extending from the tube started to bond with specific portions of brain tissue. Ranya and Lupo had to guide this process manually.

Fortunately, both of them proved very adept with this critical process. Gloriana slowly relaxed as no major complications had occurred as of yet.

While Ves wasn't exactly the easiest patient to integrate with an advanced implant, the surgeons were managing the operation with great care and expertise.

It was at this point that Dr. Lupo jerked his hand, thereby manipulating the controls to botch the integration process in a fatal fashion!

"HALT!"

An alarm immediately swept the operation chamber while more alarms rang throughout the observation room and everywhere else!

"What is going on?!"

"Ves! Is Ves okay?!"

"MEOW!"

Nitaa and the other guards immediately brought their rifles to bear on the surgeons. Lucky instantly jumped from his perch and floated above Lupo's head, ready to slice it apart!

The Larkinson Mandate glowed as the Golden Cat sensed that something had gone awry!

No one moved except for Ranya who still needed to guide the integration process!

Even though she was forced to concentrate on her work, she still looked aghast at her fellow exobiologist!

"You! You could have killed him! How can you betray us? How can you betray your own employer?"

She was shocked because Ves should have definitely died or at least suffered serious damage to his brain!

This was because despite all of his precautions and despite all of the security measures, the implantation surgery still had to be done by hand!

All of the tools and equipment that Ranya brought from her ship only played an assisting function. She didn't own any surgery machines that could perform the operation by themselves without any human intervention.

This basically meant that Ranya and Lupo had full access to the patient's most important organ.

Even though there were safeguards in place meant to prevent accidental slips or harmful sabotage, they only kicked in when they recognized a serious threat!

Lupo, who familiarized with the machines and their rules of operation, neatly avoided tripping long enough until it was too late!

Ves should have suffered a nasty hole in his brain. Some brain tissue should have been damaged beyond repair, and the Archimedes Rubal's integration process should have encountered serious problems that couldn't be fixed!

Yet to everyone's astonishment, ever since Lupo started to jerk the controls, his body started to freeze.

An energy field surrounded his body that restricted his movements and forcibly kept him in place!

Even though he succeeded in his attempt to relay harmful instructions in the device he was controlling, it failed to execute his commands!

This wasn't supposed to happen! Lupo was supposed to have direct control over the device due to the need to react spontaneously if any critical complications arose!

The safeguards should have kicked in half a second later at the very least!

"Are you surprised your sabotage failed to kick off?"

A shimmering form appeared into existence behind Dr. Lupo.

Calabast, garbed in an infiltrator suit, pointed an unknown device at the exobiologist and culinary enthusiast!

Despite all of the anti-stealth scanners installed throughout the perimeter and interior of the underground facility, Calabast's hidden presence went completely unnoticed!

Well, all but a couple of cats failed to detect her presence!

Nyaa?

"Meow?!"

"This was why I was here. Thank you for keeping my presence quiet, Lucky."

"Meow!"

"Ves should be okay. I was keeping my eye on Lupo Guernica for the entire time. I suspected that he might have some issue, and it turned out that I was right!"

She pressed a button on her device, allowing Lupo to gain enough control to speak.

"I failed." He spoke flatly, not even bothering to deny that he showed ill intent.

"You did. Would you like to tell us why?"

Dr. Lupo smiled ruefully. "I have no excuses, only regrets. I know my fate is sealed. I'll be going now. Enjoy your impending defeat!"

His body suddenly went limp as if it lost all life!

Before Calabast and everyone else had time to process his abrupt death, a second alarm began to ring!

The guards shifted in their combat armor as they all received urgent transmissions.

"We are under attack!" Nitaa announced! "Thousands of mercenaries have emerged from hiding to launch an attack on our positions! Some of them are even fielding second-class mechs!"

Calabast looked surprised. "That's not possible! What of the Ylvainans?!"

Nitaa looked grim. "There is a total communication lockdown. The Kronon Dynasty and the other Ylvainan forces have shown no signs of stopping the incoming mercenaries. In fact, the local Ylvainan forces are actually forming a blockade around our forces."

A look of realization appeared on her face. "We have been betrayed."

Chapter 1906 Counterintelligence

No matter how many alarms were ringing, the surgery had to proceed. Halting at this moment would not only hamper the functioning of the implant, but also lead to massive complications that would certainly cripple the patient!

"Assist me!" Dr. Ranya shouted at the Ylvainan surgeons. "Take over from the late Dr. Lupo and make sure to maintain the right rhythm! This interruption and stall has already led to adverse effects!"

While the damage wasn't significant, it was very difficult to remedy the minor flaws that occurred when the integration process of some of the bioconnectors proceeded without direction.

Not did they have to prolong the surgery to undo some of the damage, but Ranya also feared that her patient required much more time to recover from the operation!

Waking up after a week of slumber was out of the question!

While Ranya and the Ylvainan surgeons desperately sought to get the operation back on track as best as possible, the guards all became a lot more alert. They no longer showed any signs of remaining as unobtrusive as possible and loomed closer with their weapons on a hair trigger.

The corpse of Dr. Lupo disappeared through the floor which folded apart upon someone's command.

As Calabast swiftly swept the chamber one last time, she exited the operation room and entered the adjacent observation room.

"Calabast!" Gloriana turned around and shouted while her comm was active. "What is going on?! Why are we under attack?! What is the Ylvainan government doing?!"

"We've been betrayed." Calabast responded.

Though she didn't activate her own comm, her eyes flitted about as if she was manipulating an internal interface with her mind!

For some reason, Calabast managed to circumvent the jamming and receive crucial information!

"Explain!"

"The reports I'm receiving are sporadic, but.. the agents I've installed in the Protectorate's government are being cleaned up at a rapid pace. This makes no sense!"

"Why?"

"The Ylvainans shouldn't be able to identify more than a handful of them! I've been exceedingly thorough in inserting them to turn them into my informants. The only way they could have swept so many of my assets is if they had help from the Friday Coalition, and not yesterday. I fear that at least some portions of the Ylvainan government has been collaborating with the Fridaymen for months or years!"

"WHAT?!"

Gloriana furiously marched up to Calabast and pointed an accusatory finger at her! "You were supposed to be on guard against these kinds of schemes! Ves always complained that you weren't pulling your weight, and he's right! Some spy you are. A true DIVA agent would never allow herself to be blindsided by some lowly Ylvainans! What have you even done for us lately?!"

"I've been guarding against your Wodins." Calabast hit back. "In addition, I have done more than inserting my agents in the Ylvainan government. You'll see the results soon enough."

"That doesn't address the fact that we are under attack! What is even going on outside?"

"Numerous mercenary corps that have been hiding in various places in orbit and on the surface are bearing down on our people and assets. Commander Magdalena and Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson have taken temporary charge over our military and non-military personnel. Fortunately, due to the extreme preparations and precautions that

Ves insisted upon, none of our people have wandered off and most of our critical assets are already secured aboard our ships."

The LMC and the Larkinson Clan had already been planning to leave Kesseling VIII, but Ves insisted on moving the schedule ahead in case something awful happened during the operation.

Even though most Larkinsons objected to the hasty and disruptive schedule, it worked out quite well in the end as no one was caught outside!

Gloriana gritted her teeth as she felt as if everything around her was falling apart. She couldn't stand unexpected surprises!

"We've managed to make limited contact with the Glory Battalion through the backup hardline communication channels." Melody suddenly announced. "Your brother Brutus reports that he is preparing to go into action! An unknown and indeterminate amount of third-class mechs and second-class mechs are approaching our location from various hidden locations strewn throughout Krent!"

"What is he doing?! Tell my brother to shoot them down before they get close! The Star Dancer's effective range should be long enough to cover the entire city!"

"The unknown hostiles are using civilian houses and structures as cover."

"Shoot. Them. Down." Gloriana repeated. " Why is he showing concern to our lessers when our lives are at stake? Since the Ylvainans are in collusion with the Fridaymmen or whoever is targeting us, then they might as well reap their rewards! Brutus should be trying to save our lives, not the lives of some strangers!"

"I.. will convey your instructions to Brutus."

A few moments after Melody silently corresponded with the expert pilot, she turned back to Gloriana. "It's done. Brutus is sniping the initial wave of hostile mercenary mechs."

"Good." The female Wodin smirked, but widened her eyes yet again immediately afterwards. "Wait! Don't we employ a huge amount of Ylvainans these days?! They're practically in complete control over our fleet!"

"Ahem." Calabast coughed. "About that, you don't have to be concerned about the loyalty of Fleet Coordinator Ophelia Kronon and the other Ylvainans we've employed."

Gloriana turned back to the spy. "Explain!"

"One of my other major preoccupations in the last couple of months has been to screen our new recruits and determine their loyalty and dedication to the 'Bright Martyr'. After a

lot of investigation, I've discovered that they are all genuinely devoted to Ves. There is no doubt that they will fight and die on his behalf!"

"How can that be when their very own government has stabbed us in the back!? Shouldn't the entire Protectorate be up in arms about this betrayal? The Ylvainans are acting against their very own Martyred Follower!"

This did not conform to their existing priorities! Calabast had genuinely been caught off-guard by their government's sudden turnaround!

As sporadic information kept transmitting into her own cranial implant, she gradually reconstructed the events that led to this disastrous situation!

"The Ylvaine Protectorate is the only Hexer-aligned state in an ocean of Coalition-aligned states." Calabast reminded Gloriana. "During the centuries of peace, this situation persisted without much friction because the Fridaymen never showed much interest in this little stain on their maps."

"The Komodo War changed all of this, I take it." Gloriana guessed.

Calabast nodded. "The Ylvaine Protectorate took on another meaning to the Fridaymen after the war broke out. Even though it is an inconsequential third-rate state, its inconvenient placement poses a considerable threat against its dominion over the Coalition-aligned states! It is a liability that has to be removed!"

"If you could figure that out, then why didn't you guard against this possible betrayal?"

"I did!" Calabast defended herself! "As I've mentioned before, I built up an extensive information network in the Ylvainan government in order to be on the lookout for any overtures to the Fridaymen. What I didn't take sufficiently into account was the possibility that the government forged ties with them in advance! I fear that most of my clandestine actions have been exposed because the Fridaymen have placed their own spies in the Ylvainan government to work on counterintelligence!"

In other words, Calabast entered a spider web weaved by the Fridaymen without knowing it! She had been caught in the web while being none the wiser!

Gloriana frowned and rubbed her chin. "Okay, I understand why the Coalition would target the Protectorate, but why did the Protectorate play along? The will of the Ylvainan people is highly in favor of Ves! The government should never be able to get away with their actions!"

"The three leading dynasties have a responsibility to protect the Ylvainan people and preserve the Ylvainan Faith." The spy explained. "While the Ylvainans can come across as dogmatic, do you really think the leaders of the Protectorate are ready to doom their

entire state, people and fate in order to stand up to their own beliefs? Between total annihilation and selling out their Bright Martyr, the latter sounds a lot more attractive!"

"What about their people?! A huge proportion of the Ylvainan population would definitely be in up arms against this betrayal!"

"The leaders know that." Calabast shook her head. "It appears they have implemented two separate measures. First, they instituted martial law and locked down communications throughout all Protectorate space! While it is impossible to impose a complete and total communications blackout, their attempts are working out quite well so far, meaning that the events on Kesseling VIII are unlikely to spread to the rest of the Protectorate!"

"What about their soldiers? There is a considerable garrison of Protectors of the Flock in the Kesseling System! Are they really going to stand by while the Bright Martyr himself is in danger?"

"The Kronon Dynasty are obliged to protect the flock. Just like their leaders, the soldiers will choose to protect their own friends, family and people! You should also remember that the Kronons have always been trained to obey orders. They can never bring themselves to break the rules and regulations that have been drilled into their minds since they underwent military training."

"Traitors!"

"It's called realpolitik, Gloriana. The Ylvainan government and military may be based around the Ylvainan Faith, but it is their people they truly care about. The Friday Coalition forced them to make a very painful choice. Either they must choose to give up their state, beliefs and way of life, or they must stand aside while the Bright Martyr dies or loses his freedom."

If Gloriana was in their position, she would definitely choose to save Ves, but the problem was that she was not in charge!

She looked glum. "Then.. is the entire Protectorate against us? Will they stop us from leaving?"

"I wouldn't be so sure about that." Calabast smirked. "First, just because their superiors ordered the Kronons to blockade us doesn't necessarily mean they will obey these orders to the letter. Second, not every Ylvainan has betrayed us or decided to stand aside. The folk who joined the LMC or joined the crew of our expanding fleet are all on our side!"

"How do you know that?!"

"Because.. they all belong to a faction called the New Ylvaine Dynasty."

"What?! You mean the terrorist cult led by a clone of the Great Prophet?!"

"I'll let the so-called Living Prophet explain the situation to you himself."

Calabast snapped her fingers, causing a projection of a young man in a piloting suit to appear in the observation room.

"Miss Wodin, Miss Arnlend, I am pleased to meet you both." He bowed.

"Are you supposed to be Ylvaine?" Gloriana frowned. "You look younger than I thought."

"No matter what form I take, I will always be the Great Prophet that has founded our faith!" The handsome man fervently claimed before composing himself again. "You can call me James if that makes you feel more comfortable. Mr. Larkinson knows my current incarnation better by this name."

Gloriana did not look amused. She ignored the projection of 'James' and turned to Calabast. "Why did you befriend this clone?"

"Please don't call me a clone." The projection insisted and spread his arms while tilting his head in the air. "I AM YLVAINE REBORN! I AM THE PROPHET WHO ASCENDED INTO THE HEAVENS BUT CHOSE TO DESCEND TO LEAD MY PEOPLE TO THE PROPER PATH! THE STATE THAT MY FLOCK HAS FOUNDED UNDER MY NAME HAS GONE ASTRAY! I SHALL—"

Calabast pinched her fingers, muting the projection! "Okay, that was a bad idea. Regardless of what you may think of James, his True Believers are rife within our organizations! For better or worse, we need to keep the New Ylvaine Dynasty as our allies. Without their help, the majority of our ships won't fly. Now that I think of it, it seems that the Living Prophet may have anticipated this crisis!"

Inwardly, she felt ashamed of herself! A crackpot clone managed to predict and prepare for this calamity while she herself had failed to detect any clues!

The suspected Fridaymen counterintelligence agents stationed in the Protectorate may have been able to hinder her attempts at gathering information, but they weren't capable of stopping the supposed prophetic powers of a delusional terrorist leader!

Chapter 1907 Not Alone

Everything was a mess.

Dr. Lupo attempted to ruin Ves' brain.

No one figured how the Fridaymen managed to compromise an exobiologist who had always been passionate about his research and not much else. Whether he was bribed, coerced or manipulated to commit his sabotage, that was something for later.

Right now, their enemies sprung another surprise attack after their first attempt had failed!

"Where did all of these mercenaries come from?" Gloriana wrung her hands in worry. "I thought the Ylvaine Protectorate didn't have a strong mercenary tradition!"

"They're all foreign outfits." Calabast noted. "Not a single Ylvainan will agree to raising their arms against the Bright Martyr and his people. This is why the attackers aren't counting on the Kronon Dynasty to do their dirty work, but instead invited various mercenary corps from neighboring states to act as their cannon fodder."

The Friday Coalition seemed to have inserted a lot of mercenary outfits in the Kesseling System.

Now, they stepped out of hiding and all began to launch an offensive against Ves and his people!

What was even more shocking was that the True Believers under the lead of their 'Living Prophet' had been infiltrating the LMC, the Avatars of Myth and the Living Sentinels for months!

Fleet Coordinator Ophelia Kronon and virtually every enthusiastic Ylvainan that chose to join one of Ves' organizations turned out to be a hidden member of this prohibited but widespread Ylvainan cult!

Gloriana detested chaos. She vastly preferred to operate during a time of order where she could calmly think and come up with a plan to address her many challenges.

A time of crisis was one of her worst nightmares! When every assumption became questionable and when the ongoing situation changed by the second, she felt swamped by the deluge of emergencies that required clear direction to resolve!

Where was Ves when she needed him? He seemed to thrive whenever a crisis erupted!

"Oh, yeah, he's out."

The timing of this attack couldn't have come at a worse moment! With Ves out of action, his enterprise not only lacked a unified direction, but also a figurehead who could rally his family and subordinates!

Not only that, but an unconscious Ves meant that they didn't have a Bright Martyr who could confront the Ylvainan people and solicit their support in resisting this vile betrayal!

"Ves.." She picked up Clixie and hugged her in concern. "What am I going to do without you?"

Fortunately, she wasn't alone in this. The Larkinson Clan was under the lead of the Executive Council in times of war and crises. Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson and eight other councilors took charge of the LMC and other dependents.

Their steady leadership and high authority prevented the spread of panic and made sure to keep the evacuation efforts on track!

The ships parked at various sites throughout Krent were being filled with mechs, assets and people at a rapid pace. Though the Larkinson Clan and the mech forces had to leave a lot of valuable behind due to lack of time, right now no one cared about those heavy goods and supplies.

Their lives and freedom were much more important!

The Avatars of Myth under the lead of Commander Melkor displayed absolute dedication in defending Ves and the Larkinson Clan, whether in orbit or on land!

Meanwhile, Commander Magdalena and her Living Sentinels assisted the Avatars. What the Sentinels lacked in quality, they made up for it with quantity!

Soon enough, the first waves of foreign mercenary mechs arrived to assault the targets!

Their offensive was split up in two different prongs.

A smaller group of mechs assaulted the spaceborn mech contingents of the Avatars and Sentinels in high orbit. Their goal was to secure orbital superiority and prevent any ships on the surface of Kesseling VIII from escaping the planet!

Even though almost a thousand mercenary mechs bore down on the outnumbered Avatars and Sentinels, the Larkinsons and other fellow mech pilots did not shy away from the fight!

"Defeat these mercs at all cost!" Commander Melkor shouted over the command channel. "We must keep the passage open in order to provide all of our people a window of escape! No retreat!"

"No retreat!"

As the waves of mechs started to pelt at each other with long-ranged weapons before clashing against each other up close, the foreign mercenaries finally found out why their targets refused to give way.

Two of their mech companies were vastly more powerful than their other companies!

Unlike the Dawnbringers, Desolate Soldiers and Aurora Titans, the Bright Warriors were uniformly better than them in every possible metric!

The Shining Warriors heedlessly charged forward and smashed their nigh-indestructible lances through the armor of the few second-class mechs that had been assigned to bolster the mercenary horde!

The Solar Warriors flew alongside the Aurora Titans and other space knights to defend the more vulnerable mechs of the Avatars and Sentinels against a barrage of lasers, missiles and projectiles!

The Illuminating Warriors proved to be exceptionally tricky to defeat! Not only did they pour a huge amount of laser fire as if heat management was not an immediate concern, they also endured returns volleys without showing any damage!

Even as light skirmishers and other melee mechs sought to close in on the resilient rifleman mechs, the Nova Warriors intercepted these swift opponents and struck their opponents down while making no pretense at parrying their attacks!

Hardly any Bright Warrior suffered a scratch during this clash! What should have been a stomp by the mercenaries turned out to be a one-sided massacre as none of the enemy mechs managed to inflict more damage than a couple dents onto the tough new mech model!

A larger horde of landbound and aerial mechs emerged from hidden warehouses, containers and other hiding locations strewn throughout Krent.

What was remarkable about the ground attack was that it featured a lot more second-class mechs! Around six mech companies in total had been smuggled onto the Kesseling VIII for the last couple of months.

As the Glory Battalion directed its long-ranged scanners at these mechs that could pose a real threat to it, the sensor operators discovered that many of the second-class mechs turned out to belong to CRC instead of some mercenary outfit from the Coalition!

The appearance of these mechs with clear CRC markings proved that the Fridaymen were ultimate aggressors!

Inside his Star Dancer, Brutus practically saw red when he observed these Fridaymen mechs coming closer.

It was clear to the expert pilot that Ves Larkinson was the primary target of this surprise attack.

That did not sit well with Brutus! The Fridaymen were his most hated opponents. Not only did they threaten to kill the source of his sister's happiness, they wouldn't let her off either!

"So this is what you've been hiding in your secret base of yours! You can shove your equality of yours in your throat!" He cried out as he fired his gauss rifle as fast as its firing rate allowed!

The magnetically-accelerated projectiles sliced through the planet's atmosphere and punched through at least one structure or obstacle before punching through the chests or legs of the CRC mechs!

Yet for every CRC mech that fell, several more took its place! There were more than a couple of hundred second-class mechs storming towards the underground facility where Ves' crucial implantation surgery was taking place.

What was almost as bad was that almost a thousand third-class mechs approached as well!

The Glory Battalion could have mopped up these inferiors in a breeze if not for the CRC mechs bearing down on them. Even if he was an expert pilot, Brutus would have to expend a lot of time and effort to defeat so many enemy second-class mechs!

"The odds are against us." Commander Magdalena spoke in a private channel to a select few mech officers. "The Glory Battalion can't contain the second-class mechs of the Coalition Reserve Corps. If even a single squad directs its attention against our inferior mechs, our casualties will quickly mount."

"We have no choice, commander." A mech captain from the Sentinels remarked. "We have our own problems to contend with. We need to prevent the third-class mechs from getting through our lines. Once they breach our defenses, they can easily envelop us or proceed to attack underground facility!"

There wasn't much time to discuss. Soon, all of the ranged mechs started to exchange fire regardless of collateral damage!

While the Avatar base boasted thick, sturdy walls and various defensive emplacements, they could only hinder the attackers at best.

As mechs from land and from the air, the amount of firepower exchanged between the two sides reached an intensity that was rarely seen outside of war!

Krent, the capital city of Kesseling VIII, instantly turned into hell as both sides completely disregarded any considerations to limit their fire!

The unwitting Ylvainans residing in Krent all cried in panic as hundreds of them died whenever a mech-grade shell or laser beam landed in a building!

Even the Grand Church of the Grey Martyr and the Grand Cathedral of Ylvaine's Mercy failed to escape the rain of fire that chaotically swept throughout the entire city!

The Kronon Dynasty, which had largely stood aside and pretended that the fighting didn't exist, finally moved into action!

The duty-bound soldiers did not attack the mercenaries and CRC mechs responsible for provoking this destructive battle.

They did not attack the Glory Battalion or the mech forces that belonged to Ves that generated the most collateral damage.

Instead, they enveloped the church, cathedral and other structures of great signature with their mechs in order to prevent any further harm from befalling them! Though many of the mech pilots and grunts wanted to do more, they received strict orders not to take any sides in the current battle!

As the waves of attackers started to approach the outnumbered defenders, Commander Magdalena looked increasingly grave.

"They're coming!"

Even though the Crystal Lords and other ranged mechs managed to soften up the wave of mercenaries, plenty of third-class mechs still made it through!

"We should have hired our own mercenaries sooner!" She angrily muttered to herself.

Perhaps it was better that they didn't. She recognized some of the markings on the enemy mechs and discovered that they belonged to some of the mercenary corps that they were hoping to hire to protect them as they made their way to the Sentinel Kingdom!

The collision between melee mechs was a violent affair. Landbound and aerial mechs from both sides dropped in rapid tempo as the mech pilot fought as if their lives depended on their efforts!

The Sentinels fared the worst out of the defenders. The cockpits of their mechs continued to launch into the air as the mercenaries seemed to take a sadistic amount of pleasure in bullying the weakest link!

The furious offensive pressured the defenders immediately. If not for their glows and their strong commitment to their duty, the Sentinels would have already started to falter!

The Star Dancer flew furiously in the air as it wielded both its gauss rifle and dual-type laser and particle beam rifle in both hands!

Bright blue beams of penetrating particle fire impacted the various CRC mechs which exerted a huge amount of pressure on the heavily-outnumbered mechs of the Glory Battalion.

Gauss round after gauss round spat out from the other rifle in a different direction, causing some of the more formidable and heavier-armored second-class mechs to drop after suffering critical damage to their weak points!

Even though the expert pilot was downing Fridayman mechs left and right, his Star Dancer was only a single mech!

Just as the enormous mob of mechs under the command of the Coalition Reserve Corps threatened to breach the defensive lines, a sudden volley of laser and ballistic fire struck the rear of the attacking outfits!

"The Ylvainans! Have they come to help us?!"

The mechs that appeared behind the waves of attackers all belonged to the Kronon Dynasty. Their mech pilots all violated their orders and went AWOL after they figured out that their own dynasty and government was prepared to throw the Bright Martyr to the wolves!

At the lead of this modest group of renegade mechs were two very familiar and very noticeable mechs.

"That's Zeal! Did Taon Melin defect?! But what is that other Transcendent Messenger? It doesn't fit with the other five copies!"

The Transcendent Messenger next to Zeal was noticeably different in many ways. It looked a bit rougher, and it possessed a distinctly different external appearance.

Yet there was one aspect about the mech that was remarkable. Its Ylvainan glow radiated throughout the battlefield as if a god had descended onto the surface!

Inside the cockpit, a very familiar-looking mech pilot smiled with absolute certainty as he beheld the chaotic battle. He activated the speakers of his mech as its rescue particle generator went into overdrive by surrounding his mech with an overpowering white glow!

"Attacking one of my Martyred Followers is heresy! Let us smite these unbelievers and show my fallen Protectorate how far they have strayed from the truth!"

Chapter 1908 Mech Colonel Adrian Jeivz

Kesseling VIII managed to escape the ravages of the Sand War.

It didn't escape the Komodo War.

Swept by the increasingly heated conflict between the Friday Coalition and the Hexadric Hegemony, the Ylvaine Protectorate finally buckled under the pressure!

With the survival of its faith, people and state at stake, its government chose pragmatism over idealism.

What Bright Martyr? What blessing of Ylvaine?

Would saving or shielding the Bright Martyr stop the Friday Coalition from annihilating their state?

Would allowing Ves Larkinson to escape from its territory unscathed save the Protectorate from being ganged up by the surrounding states?

The treaties the Protectorate signed with the Bright Republic, Vesia Kingdom and other states were worth nothing. The Deliverers that used to save their star systems from getting overrun by the relentless sandman swarm configurations completely lost their value!

As long as the Friday Coalition exerted some pressure, those states that should have felt grateful to the Protectorate for saving their people and star systems could easily turn into its mortal enemies!

This was the tragedy that befell all lesser states! No matter what kind of diplomacy they pursued, everything they built could easily collapse with a single word from a greater state!

In a hidden starship parked in an unknown location inside the Kesseling System, a dark command center lit up with the glows of dozens of projections.

Various officers and specialists garbed in the uniform of the CRC studied and manipulated the consoles with great attentiveness.

A single individual sat on a center command chair placed in the center of the command center. A whole array of projections displaying both battle footage and tactical overviews surrounded him from every side.

"The battle in orbit is proceeding poorly, sir." An aide remarked to the man sitting on the throne. "Resistance is greater than expected. While our numbers estimate has been on the mark, we have grossly underestimated the battle effectiveness of this new 'Bright

Warrior' model. It is far more resilient than we have expected, which makes it difficult for our mercenary friends to damage any of the configurations of this modular platform. At best, the battle will devolve into a stalemate, but that depends heavily on whether our second-class mechs can fend off the Bright Warriors."

Mech Colonel Adrian Jeivz rubbed his stubbled chin. "It is a shame if we are unable to achieve victory in space, but we invested most of our assets on land for a reason. Killing or capturing Ves Larkinson is our only objective. Taking him off the board is a crucial step in our plan to subdue the Ylvaine Protectorate and consolidate our control of the local region."

His salt-and-pepper hair and curled moustache gave the 80-year old mech officer a dignified and valiant impression.

As a senior officer from the Vanguard Group, Colonel Jeivz had worked hard to climb up the ranks of the CRC.

Compared to the Gauge Dynasty or the Konsu Clan, the Vanguard Group was one of the weakest partners of the Coalition. Though it possessed a decent military presence, its economic and industrial might was too poor to keep up with the development of the other partners, thereby causing it to grow less relevant over time.

For the sake of the existence of the Vanguard Group as a worthy partner of the Coalition, officers like Jeivz had to excel in as many aspects as possible in order to make their group respected!

That meant he was determined to succeed in his plan this time. One way or another, Ves Larkinson had to die or fall into the custody of the CRC.

Allowing this valuable element to continue its associations with the Ylvainans and Hexers would definitely hinder the Fridaymen in several ways!

As long as the Bright Martyr remained on the board, the Ylvainan people could never be pacified!

If the Bright Martyr took his alliance with the Hexers to a deeper level and designed one of his characteristic mechs for them, he might be able to swing the Komodo War just like he swung the Sand War!

Though the latter concern sounded a bit too alarmist to Jeivz and his fellow Fridaymen, the possibility of it alone was too much to bear.

Since one of their targets of opportunity just happened to be in the neighborhood when the CRC was about to subdue the Protectorate government, it might as well target one of its recent annoyances!

"The battle on land is still in our favor, sir, but the insertion of the so-called True Believers and their Living Prophet is dividing the attention of our mercenaries. Our land assets are less likely to achieve a breakthrough if they are forced to split their attention."

"The True Believers don't have the numbers to sway this engagement." The mech colonel sneered. "The only purpose of the lesser mercenaries is to occupy the third-class combatants of our enemies. No matter how many surprises our foes present, only second-class mechs can defeat second-class mechs in this battle!"

"Our CRC mechs are succumbing too rapidly against the Star Dancer, sir. Venerable Brutus Wodin possesses too much of an advantage in this battle."

"Does he really think we haven't taken his presence into account? Valentine will take care of him soon enough."

Though the CRC hit some snags, together with the mercenaries it hired, the defenders were being pressured at every turn!

In space, hundreds of mercenaries flooded against the Avatars, Battle Criers and Sentinel mechs as if they were completely disregarding their safety!

In truth, the CRC promised to reimburse all of their losses as long as the mercenaries made a decent effort to fight. This caused the foreign mercenaries to adopt a strategy where they pursued mutual destruction!

They disregarded the safety of their mechs and only chose to prioritize the lives of their mech pilots! As long as the pilots had enough time to eject and return to safety, it didn't matter if their mechs were trashed.

In fact, the mercenary corps participating in the attack wanted their mechs to be wrecked so that they could use the compensation from the CRC to buy brand-new mechs with better specs and modern components!

The regular mechs of the defenders couldn't keep up with the intensity exhibited by the attackers.

Only the Avatars handled the pressure the best, and of their mech companies, two of them happened to perform valiantly!

The Bright Warrior model unexpectedly performed far beyond the other mechs fielded by the defenders!

Though their regular mechs succumbed to the onslaught at a worrying pace, sometimes taking their mech pilots with them, the Bright Warriors dished out several times as much damage!

Even when they were outnumbered three-to-one, the defenders were slowly gaining the upper hand!

"Hahahaha! This new mech is great, sis!" Imon laughed over his private channel with his captain and superior officer. "The Nova Warrior is so tough! Enemy attacks are crashing against my machine like sand hitting a wall. They can't do anything but scratch its coating!"

The gold-and-black Nova Warrior in question had fallen out of formation in order to rampage in the midst of a squad of mercenary mechs!

Since the swordsman mech configuration had gotten too close, the foreign mercenaries all ganged up on the interloper. They even employed a rudimentary formation that was supposed to surround the hostile mech and cut off all of its escape routes!

Yet a dozen seconds later, the Nova Warrior withstood a score of hits while making sure to evade any powerful blows directed to its slightly-vulnerable flight system.

In return, Imon Ingvar boldly bulled through whichever mech was in the way and cut their frames with brute force!

Though the Nova Warrior seemed to be doing well, Casella Ingvar worried about her brother! Even as her Illuminating Warrior sniped at the assaulting mechs with its laser rifle, she used her authority to order some elements of the 2nd Spaceborn Company to advance in her brother's direction!

Unfortunately, they were already preoccupied with their own opponents. Even though the Bright Warriors were faring well against their current opponents, there were too many enemies to go through!

She decided to solicit help from another direction.

"Joshua!" She opened a channel to her friend. "Please help my brother! The mercenaries are encircling his Nova Warrior!"

"I can't!" Joshua replied with a strained voice. "Commander Melkor needs me to take out the second-class mechs that are propping up the mercenaries and massacring our own forces!"

Salvation came from a different direction, though. Casella observed with astonishment from her Illuminating Warrior's sensors as a large and deceptively-slow mech bulled its way to her stricken brother!

Even as more and more mercenary mechs attempted to down the overextended Nova Warrior, a lastgen space knight suddenly imposed its considerable bulk in their way!

The Shield of Samar finally showed its worth against an onslaught of melee opponents as Jannzi Larkinson smashed through their mechs!

Despite its mobility disadvantage, the Shield of Samar cleverly waited for its opponents to make their approach before bashing its heavy tower shield or stabbing with a sword!

If the defense of the Nova Warrior was already perverse enough, then the Shield of Samar conveyed an image of total invincibility!

Paired with its protective glow that mingled fairly well with the brotherhood-oriented glow of the Bright Warrior model, the Shield of Samar demoralized the mercenary mech pilots who continually failed to achieve any measurable results!

"Press the attack!" Jannzi barked to Imon. "I'll cover your back. If we want to break the mercenaries, we must wreak havoc in their lines! Go forth!"

"W-Wait a moment!" Casella interrupted. "My mech company can't keep up with your mechs!"

As Casella argued with the expert candidate and her brother, the Quint finally made its first true debut in battle!

Joshua King interfaced deeper with the masterwork mech than he had ever done before. With the survival of his boss and the Avatars at stake, Joshua felt as if he had been thrown right back into the Sand War!

The biggest difference was that he was piloting a much better mech than a Desolate Soldier!

Though Joshua somewhat missed the Deliverer he practiced with for months, he knew in his heart that he wasn't completely suitable to pilot such a mech. It had been designed to pair with an Ylvainan, and even if Joshua tried to play nice with their faith, showing respect was not enough.

Instead, a mech designed to serve the Larkinson Clan and embody all of its values was much more to his liking!

With the high-capacity neural interface offering greater depth of immersion than before, Joshua did not hesitate to merge his psyche deeper with his mech than ever before!

Despite the lack of practice, Joshua became increasingly more in tune with his fantastic masterwork mech over the course of the abrupt and chaotic engagement.

A true battle was the best practice ground! The high stakes and the lives that depended the outcome of the battle drove Joshua to push himself to the utmost!

"We can't afford to lose! The space corridor must remain open!"

Right now, due to the extreme threat of the second-class mechs that were downing Avatar and Sentinel mechs every other second, the Quint entered into battle with its lancer mech configuration!

With a valiant cry, Joshua drove his Quint straight towards a powerful CRC swordsman mech.

"Hahaha! Do you think your pitiful charge can stop my Ecstralis? My mech's defenses are more than you can possibly comprehend!"

The advanced mech held a sword in one arm and projected an energy shield from its other arm. It had noticed the Quint charging in its direction and braced itself to meet the impact!

There wasn't much time left for additional maneuvers. As the Quint reached the Ecstralis mech, its spear impacted the energy shield in a violent collision!

After a bright flash, the Quint zipped passed its target with only a moderate reduction of speed!

Though the point of its lance looked severely compromised, Joshua grinned as he exulted in his first victory!

Floating behind the Quint was a debris field composed of several large chunks that used to belong to the Ecstralis mech.

Its arrogant pilot hadn't overestimated the defense of his well-rounded second-class mech.

Instead, he failed to realize that the damage the Quint could inflict with its charges was thirty percent higher than the Shining Warrior mechs!

This distinction was crucial, and failing to recognize this difference led to the downfall of yet another precious second-class mech!

Chapter 1909 Damning Decree

The Bright Warriors and the Quint of the First and Second Spaceborn Mech Companies of the Avatars slowly tilted the space battle in its favor.

Even though the Avatars, Battle Criers and Sentinels were losing a lot of mechs and a fair number of mech pilots, the defenders denied the CRC from taking orbital supremacy over Kesseling VIII.

This was extremely crucial for various reasons! Control over the space above the planet not only prevented the Fridaymen from blocking the ascent of the starships that belonged to Ves, but also stopped them from flinging artificial meteorites and all sorts of ordnance down to the surface.

Though the battle in space went well for the defenders, the battle on land was not as smooth!

As Krent's idyllic peace was shattered by the lasers and projectiles exchanged between the two sides, the heavily-outnumbered defenders tried desperately to stop the attackers from advancing to the underground facility where the surgery still proceeded!

With Ves out the picture, it was up to the remaining leaders of his organizations to hold the line and keep up morale!

The number disparity on land was much greater than in space. The CRC prepared much more assets for their land attack because their only goal was to take care of Ves!

Once this crucial leader and mech designer died or fell into its hands, the rest of his enterprise became irrelevant!

For this reason, more than a thousand mercenary mechs and a hefty amount of second-class mechs assaulted the defenders like a flood crashing against a dyke.

Among the defenders, the Glory Battalion served as the bulwark. Yet even the Glory Warriors found themselves outnumbered by the opposing Fridaymen mechs!

During the furious battle, Venerable Brutus fired his rifles continuously at the approaching waves of second-class mechs. Even though his Star Dancer was wielding two rifles at the same time, his aim remained inhumanly impeccable as ever!

Gauss rounds smashed through weak points with ease! Most of the time, the stricken mechs immediately lost a lot of functionality, opening themselves up to easy follow-up blows from the other Glory Warriors!

His dual-type energy rifle was even deadlier. Supplied with an abundant amount of power from the Star Dancer's powerful reactor, Brutus did not hesitate to switch his rifle to particle beam mode.

Rays after rays of bright blue beams tore through the enemy mechs like unstoppable needles!

Sometimes, the particle rays even tore through half-a-dozen mechs at the same time as the lesser mechs operated the mercenaries hardly possessed the capacity to resist the extremely destructive antiprotons that made up the thin beams!

Though the firepower exhibited by the Star Dancer single-handedly stalled the advance of the CRC mechs despite their overwhelming numbers, Brutus was far from relaxed.

The main reason why his Star Dancer swayed the battle on the surface so much was that it was designed to deliver as much peak performance as its frame could allow.

It fared much less in an extended engagement and battles of attrition! The Star Dancer only carried so many magazines for its powerful gauss rifle. Its energy reserves, while prodigiously huge compared to regular second-class mechs, were being rapidly consumed in order to fuel the dual-type energy rifle's hungry appetite!

Therefore, it was crucial for Brutus to make the most of his firepower. He needed to take out as many CRC mechs as possible to decrease the losses suffered by the defenders and give them a chance to turn the tide of the battle!

Just as Brutus figured that the trend of the battle was slowly moving in his favor, his mech signalled an acute threat was approaching from his flank!

With a series of thoughts, the Star Dancer glided out of the way of a barrage of powerful pulses of energy!

A very distinctive CRC light mech emerged out of the crowd of attackers and flew in the air in order to close in on the retreating expert mech of the Glory Battalion.

No mech would ever close in on an enemy expert mech unless it had the strength to stand a chance!

The reason why Brutus took this single adversary far more seriously than the other mechs of the CRC was because his sensors alerted him to a crucial fact.

The light mech that was closing in on his own mech was an expert mech!

"Brutus Wodin!" The light mech's speakers broadcasted a female voice in the open!
"You'll have to get past me if you want to bully my younger brothers and sisters!"

"Your strength is wasted on the weak and divided Coalition, you delusional apostate!" Brutus shouted back as his Star Dancer returned its gauss rifle to its back.

"Don't call me apostate, you bootlicking boy! I am Venerable Raen Valentine! Remember my name because I'll be the only woman who will be owning you in this battle!"

The light mech Brutus faced was a marauder type. Though it was a little heavier and bulkier than light skirmishers, it possessed a versatile offensive profile.

By default, marauder mechs wielded both one-handed swords and submachine guns, sometimes at the same time. Optimized for harassment and opportunistic close-ranged flanking attacks, a marauder mech pilot had to be well-versed in multiple difficult skills in order to make the most out of this risky mech type.

So far, the Star Dancer's mobility staved off an interception, but Valentine's Screaming Blade was narrowing the distance with each second that passed!

"My saber screams for your blood! Stop running so you can obediently offer your eunuch body to my blade!"

Brutus scowled. Of all the opponents he faced, he hated fighting against women the most!

Every woman from the Friday Coalition he encountered on and off the battlefield were tragic figures. Raised in the ignorance and lies of their state, they each fought against the truth espoused by the Hexers.

It hurt Brutus that he was unable to persuade his foes into acknowledging that women deserved to rule over men rather than settle for the false notion of equality.

Each time he tried, the female Fridaymen rebuffed him in the strongest terms. There was no saving these deluded women!

He ignored Venerable Valentine's taunts and instead attempted to rebuff her Screaming Blade by pelting her mech with precise bursts of particle beams!

He switched his rifle from a persistent beam mode into short, pulsed activations.

He did so in order to ration his Star Dancer's energy expenditure. Longer beams might make it easier for him to inflict at least some damage onto the Screaming Blade, but his target's superior mobility would ensure that most of its power went to waste!

While over eighty percent the pulsed beams went wide, this was still a win in his book as the marauder mech exhibited an extraordinary degree of evasion.

While Brutus was skilled enough to ensure he landed his shots at least 99 percent of the time against regular opponents, Venerable Valentine excelled in dueling against ranged expert mechs.

She slowly adjusted to his firing patterns, causing her Screaming Blade to suffer less and less damage!

"Taste my blade!"

The Screaming Blade spurt out a burst of speed, boosting it forward while being surrounded by the characteristic glow of true resonance!

Brutus, though under acute danger, did not flinch from this expected occurrence. Instead, he smoothly danced his expert mech out of the way of a glowing red saber that would cut off one of the Star Dancer's crucial arms!

Though he managed to evade the first significant attack, he was still in trouble! Ranged mechs like his Star Dancer never held the upper hand against swift and agile mechs.

Whether he could fend off the Screaming Blade therefore depended hugely on whether he had the skill, experience and resonance strength to overcome this considerable disadvantage!

"You are not the only one who can resonate with your mech." Brutus grunted with a scowl. "Let me show you my dance!"

The Star Dancer began to glow as the resonating materials built into its frame began to react to his force of will.

The mech started to shimmer in various rainbow colors while exhibited several unpredictable staccato evasive movements!

While the Screaming Blade had turned around to land another lethal blow, the Star Dancer impossibly moved out of the way at the last second!

Though the Screaming Blade's saber could have nicked the Star Dancer with its resonating weapon, the ranged mech managed to remain unscathed!

"Urgh!" Venerable Valentine grunted in irritation. "You're a fool if you think that trick will save your mech from getting butchered. I like peeling the shells of tricky mechs like yours the most!"

While the two expert mechs danced against each other in the air, on the ground the larger engagement still continued without any interruption.

The absence of Brutus Wodin instantly doubled or tripled the pressure directed against the defenders. The Glory Battalion faced the brunt of this adverse development as the CRC mechs were no longer suppressed.

The Fridaymen mech pilots could finally put their advantage in numbers to good use!

Their mechs assaulted the Glory Battalion without any further ado.

Both sides fielded different mechs and employed different fighting methods. However, the quality of their mechs and the training of their mech pilots were roughly on the same level.

The CRC mech pilots exhibited a bit more discipline and coordination while the Glory Warriors were significantly more spirited.

Not only had the Wodin Dynasty trained the Glory Warriors to be absolutely obedient and devoted, they also received another mental boost in the form of many of the glows exhibited by the nearby LMC mechs!

The Blackbeaks, Crystal Lords and occasional Desolate Soldiers all turned the crowded and chaotic battlefield into a heroic stand to the mech pilots on their side.

Even the handful of Deliverers piloted by the newly-recruited Ylvainans added a touch of righteousness and fanaticism to the moods of the Glory Warriors!

That wasn't all! While all of the glows blended together to produce a dynamic aura that lifted the spirits of the defenders, the attackers weren't left off either!

Regardless if the glows affected a foreign third-class mercenary pilot or a well-trained second-class mech pilot, they both received the same degree of mental suppression!

The mercenary mech pilots exhibited a lot more hesitation in their attacks after becoming affected by the targeted hostility from the glows. It was as if the mechs they faced all couldn't wait to end their lives!

The Fridaymen mech pilots, whether they belonged to the CRC or one of the mercenary corps it contracted on a long-term basis, exhibited a considerably greater degree of mental resilience.

By relying on the strength of their superior training, the direct opponents of the Glory Battalion only displayed some suppression despite the effects piling onto their mentalities!

Even so, the impact of the glows shouldn't be discounted. Without them, the defenders would have already lost a lot of morale while their attackers would have kept their spirits long enough to breach the defensive lines!

As it was, slowing the offensive gave the defenders an opportunity to reverse the battle trend.

The arrival of the Living Prophet, Taon Melin and their band of defecting Kronons made a considerable difference.

Forced to defend their mob from multiple sides, the attacking mercenaries were forced to defend their rear.

What was worse was that the sacred glows radiating from the prototype and production copy of the Transcendent Messenger design became increasingly more obnoxious!

Ylvaine himself seemed to descend onto the battlefield as the prototype piloted by 'James' began to radiate the purest faith and certainty that an Ylvainan mech had ever showed!

"LET MY WILL BE HEARD!" The young Living Prophet broadcasted in the open. "The Curin Dynasty, Kronos Dynasty and Poxco Dynasty has forsaken the tenets of my faith! By choosing to ally themselves with the Friday Coalition instead of abiding by their beliefs, I decree that they shall be stripped of my blessings! From this moment onwards, the fallen Protectorate will never enjoy my grace again!"

The moment the Living Prophet made his decree, something remarkable occurred throughout the territories of the Protectorate.

Every single Holy Soldier, Deliverer and Transcendent Messenger aside from the ones piloted by the defectors lost their glows!

Almost every Ylvainan mech pilot, mech technician and other people panicked as they discovered that the Great Prophet had disappeared from their mechs!

Due to the state-wide communications blackout, nobody knew what was taking place in the Kesseling System, but the sudden withdrawal of all of those glows couldn't be hidden at all!

Mass panic erupted throughout the entire Protectorate as the Ylvainan people collectively became hysterical!

Chapter 1910 Emerging Heroes

The influence of the Living Prophet's damning decree couldn't be understated.

The sudden disappearance of all of the glows that had continued to reassure and inspire the Ylvainans was immense.

Mournful shouts and yells rang throughout the streets as the patrolling Holy Soldiers suddenly lost their sacred quality!

Angry shouts and ferocious accusations started to fling in every direction as mech pilots, mech technicians and mech designers mistakenly blamed each other for 'killing' their mechs!

As the parties that made the decisive choice to defect to the Friday Coalition, the leaders of the three leading dynasties immediately came under an immense amount of pressure.

Though they had instituted a communications blackout that cut off every Ylvainan's awareness of what was going on in a different city, planet or star system, not all of the quantum entanglement nodes connected to the galactic net fell under the government's sway.

Many starships possessed their own individual quantum entanglement nodes, and if they weren't controlled by the three leading dynasties, then there was a considerable chance that their captains defied orders to block their nodes.

Furthermore, some obstinate Ylvainans also defied the orders of their superiors, especially when they learned that this was all part of a plot to hide an attack on the Bright Martyr!

All of this defiance meant that a scattered and sporadic network of communication was still in place when the Battle of Kesseling VIII erupted!

Not only did billions of Ylvainans learn about the battle, a portion of them even figured out that the Protectorate government was complicit in the attack!

While the authorities managed to exert enough control to suppress the unrest and limit its spread, all hell broke loose once the damning decree came into effect.

The wrath of Great Prophet descended on the Ylvainans without warning and with no chance for mercy!

Aside from the score of mechs piloted by the Kronon defectors at Kesseling VIII, every other LMC mech that was under the protection of Ylvaine's spiritual fragment suddenly lost their greatest and most valuable property.

All life went out from the mechs as the Great Prophet seemed to have forsaken the people that allowed the three leading dynasties to turn the Protectorate away from his faith!

Millions, if not billions of Ylvainans collapsed onto their knees! They cried and pleaded forgiveness towards the heavens!

"PLEASE! I'M SORRY FOR CHEATING ON MY WIFE! I WILL DO EVERYTHING TO ATONE FOR MYSELF!"

"It's not our fault! It's not our fault! It's not our fault! I'll overthrow our greedy leaders ourselves if that is what it takes to bring our Protectorate back to the light!"

"Please enlighten me, prophet! What will it take to regain your grace? I want nothing more than to deploy my mechs against the Fridaymen that are targeting the Bright Martyr, but I'm in a completely different star system!"

No matter how much the Ylvainans decried the unfairness, the Great Prophet had made his choice.

Through his actions, the founder of their faith had signalled that the state founded by the three leading dynasties no longer represented his will!

As more and more Ylvianans came to this conclusion, their rage, despair and desperation instantly reached new heights!

Many Ylvainans began to flaunt martial law in order to protest or riot against the administration. Some of the enforcers and soldiers that were supposed to maintain actually joined the civilians instead of trying to suppress them! Their own mechs had all lost their blessings in front of their eyes, causing them to experience just as much despair!

Though the entire state rapidly descended into fury, anguish and chaos, the Battle of Kesseling VIII still raged on! Regardless if the entire Protectorate was on the brink of collapse, the CRC still wanted to win this battle!

With Brutus Wodin pressed to his limits by Raen Valentine, the rest of the combatants had to fend for themselves without the support of their expert pilots.

This was very bad news to the defenders as the influence of the glows and the intervention of the Living Prophet and his band of defectors was not enough to overcome the disparity in numbers in and might!

The crucial advantage held by the Fridaymen was their crushing numbers of second-class mechs. Each of them were able to fly or run on the ground, and all of them were clad in superior alloys consisting of alloys that cost as much as several third-class mech companies!

Not only that, but the mercenary mechs that screened these precious mechs posed a very huge hindrance against any attempts at ganging up on them. The Avatars, Sentinels, Battle Criers and Kronon defectors failed to gain any advantage against the flood of mercenaries that numbered roughly a thousand mechs at the beginning.

Even though the quality of mercenary mechs and the training of the foreign mech pilots weren't stellar, their huge advantage in numbers and willingness to trade blows for blows caused the Larkinson mech pilots and their comrade to fall back again and again!

Unlike the battle in space, the battle on land featured less individual heroes that could rally the defenders and serve as a beacon of hope in this crucial clash.

The best that the landbound mech contingent could offer was Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson!

His aerial light skirmisher darted through the skies with immense speed! The Blazing Zephyr dodged and weaved through a huge barrage of enemy fire, evading most of it while enduring just a couple of hits on its light layer Breyer alloy that had recently been applied to the mech.

While the hasty replacement of its armor system severely affected his light skirmisher's balance, Tusa thanked himself for accepting this offer to upgrade his mech, because in a major like this, his Blazing Zephyr would have already been downed if he insisted on maintaining the original form of his mech!

As he took out aerial threat after aerial threat, he zipped and weaved past several enemy light mechs that constantly tried to take his Blazing Zephyr down!

"Damnit! These second-class mechs are unshakeable!"

Against regular mercenary mechs, his mech possessed a decisive advantage, but the mechs fielded by the Coalition Reserve Corps proved to be unassailable.

Their superior performance and vastly tougher armor caused Tusa to feel profoundly helpless!

Even if his considerable skills in battle allowed him to outmaneuver his arrogant opponents, the heated daggers wielded by his Blazing Zephyr barely sank into his targets even if Tusa specifically targeted the seams or weak points!

"Goddamn Fridaymen! I'm never piloting a mech as weak as mine again if I have any say about it!" He murmured to himself. "Ves should better design a new mech for me after this is over. I can't stand letting these Fridaymen get the better out of me. Just because your mechs are tougher doesn't mean you're better!"

The disparity in skill could not overcome the disparity in performance, at least not to this degree.

Every Larkinson, retainer and employee shared Tusa's frustrations. The mechs fielded by the CRC were better than their own in every way!

Not only that, but their mech pilots exhibited superior skill as their training allowed them to make the most out of their machines!

If not for the flank attack and the initial suppression from Venerable Brutus, the CRC would have been able to overrun the defenders at this point!

Even though the Larkinsons lost the protection of a friendly expert pilot, none of them despaired. Instead, their will to fight burned hotter as they resisted with as much valiance they could show!

While the Avatars and Sentinels were unable to pose a threat against the CRC mechs, they could at least assist the Glory Battalion by shielding them from the tides of cheap but voluminous mercenary mechs!

The mercenaries showed little cohesion between their outfits or even within their outfits. The Fridaymen hadn't been very discerning when they hired them, which meant that the skill of their pilots and the quality of their mechs were noticeably below standard.

Yet for every skilled Larkinson mech pilot, there were at least two or three uncouth mercenary mech pilots who were more than willing to gang up on their opponents!

Such a significant number disparity caused the defenders to suffer continuous losses in both mechs and mech pilots!

Though many mech pilots managed to eject to safety in time, some attacks were simply too sudden to avoid. In a large and intensive battle like this, deaths couldn't be avoided.

The amount of Larkinson blood being spilled would make many clan members weep!

However, this was no time to think about the losses. The continued survival of the nascent Larkinson Clan was still in question!

If the Avatars and Sentinels collapsed, if the CRC managed to reach Ves or if the Larkinson Clan lost heart, then all would be lost!

It was in these moments when the courage and duty displayed by the Larkinsons showed their true value.

Even if they were at a disadvantage, even if they weren't entirely sure why the Fridaymen wanted to kill them, the Larkinson mech pilots each fought as valiantly as they did against the Vesians.

"For the clan!"

"For the Larkinson bloodline!"

"For the cat!"

"What?"

"Never mind, just fight!"

With the Larkinsons setting an inspiring example, the non-Larkinsons employed by the Avatars and Sentinels also endured. While their morale was not in the best condition, at the very least they weren't trying to abandon the fight and flee the battlefield!

Of the combatants taking part in the battle, the modest number of Battle Criers made a significant difference as well.

Their unflinching dedication to hold the line was absolute! As Kinner bondsmen, the Battle Criers were bound to defend their owner at any cost!

Dietrich Krotz was one of the few members of the Battle Criers that wasn't part of the Kinner Tribe. As such, he possessed a much more sober outlook towards this battle than his Kinner comrades.

"They're mad! They would rather die than fail their orders!"

He didn't understand the Kinner. Despite serving with them for quite some time, Dietrich still failed to learn why the Kinner were so absolute in their obedience to their employers or buyers.

He even felt as if they weren't human sometimes!

Humans were selfish. Humans only looked out to themselves. Humans would never die for the sake of a stranger!

Throughout his time growing up among Walter's Whalers, Dietrich thought he already understood the depth of human nature.

The betrayal that occurred after his father's death showed him that he had been too naive in his outlook!

After losing his father's legacy and suffering an immense blow to his confidence, he thought that no one was different from the Whalers.

For example, he believed that Raella refused to take their fling any further because he didn't bring enough benefits.

He guessed that Ves only desired to hire him because he still possessed some value.

He thought the Kinner were only pretending to be absolutely loyal in order to maintain the reputation of their people and tribe.

While all of that may be true, in this perilous battle, Dietrich discovered that the Battle Criers viewed loyalty in a much different way from other people.

Whereas other people were like fickle and duplicitous cats, the Battle Criers were more akin to slavishly loyal dogs!

Though he always knew that the Battle Criers he fought alongside with were reliable, this was the first time that Dietrich saw their true nature.

"For the Battle Criers!"

"For the Kinner Tribe!"

"For our sons and daughters!"

Though the Battle Criers showed plenty of fervor and enthusiasm, their foes still downed their mechs one by one at a worrying pace. While the attackers lost their mechs faster than their defenders, soon the latter would run out of mechs to fight!

Meanwhile, the CRC's advantage over the dwindling number of Glory Warriors continued to increase!

As the battle seemed to turn for the worse for the Larkinson Clan, a rear formation consisting of rifleman mechs and other ranged mechs suddenly suffered a major upheaval!

The vulnerable mercenary mechs all exhibited cuts that separated their arms from their torsos or outright cut their frames in half!

Several companies that predominantly comprised of swordman mechs emerged from another flank!

"The battle is not yet over, Larkinsons! The Swordsmaidens shall fight by your side!"

With Commander Dise's announcement, the mob of mercenary mechs came under heavy pressure as their other flank were being savaged by a ferocious band of sword-wielding mechs that employed both savagery and skill!