

Mech 1931

Chapter 1931 Shorties

The moment Outpost 35 sounded an alarm, the other rebel dwarves interspersed throughout the outer districts knew it was time to make their moves.

"Our intrusion has been discovered!" Gion Greybeard announced. "Let us give the tall folk something to worry about! Attack!"

He raised the banner that Vulcan himself had passed to him! With the banner held aloft, the armored dwarves all advanced and followed their assigned routes in order to stir up as much trouble as possible!

Many guards suddenly came under fire. Though the alarm had turned them less complacent, they never expected to be confronted by a team of armed and armed dwarves!

Their surprise often proved fatal as potent plasma bolts scorched through their armor and vaporized their bodies!

Not every ambush succeeded, though. Plenty of fireteams encountered more alert guards who cleverly dove behind cover or simply took advantage of their slight advantage in mobility to disengage.

Once the dwarven teams lost the advantage of surprise, the battles turned a lot more even.

What was crucial for the dwarves was how effectively they utilized their plasma projectors. The standard batteries hooked up to the modified plasma cutters only lasted for a minute if the dwarves kept firing.

Though it was possible to switch out their batteries, this was a time-consuming process. The original developers of the plasma cutters made it deliberately harder to swap out their batteries in order to prevent the kind of abuse that the dwarves were engaging in! Normal plasma cutters were never meant to be employed as weapons!

What was even more concerning about this adapted weapon was the incredible heat build-up. There were not a lot of solutions to this problem other than swapping out heatsinks. This burdened the dwarves even further as they had to carry even more gear onto their person!

Fortunately, the dwarves were very strong and could easily handle the extra mass. The only problem was that replacing the heatsink was another time-consuming process.

Even so, the plasma weapons consumed so much energy and generated so much heat that the dwarves could only reload them a couple of times!

This meant that while their opening moves successfully tipped the scales in their favor, the tall folk would definitely regain the advantage soon enough!

"Unleash the battle wagons!"

Six heavily-armored vehicles emerged from a secret entrance. They advanced into the wide streets of the outpost and proceeded to split up into different directions!

The dwarves had long anticipated the clash between a battle wagon and a guard mech.

Was Vulcan truly correct when he said that the battle wagons stood no chance against mechs?

Many of the rebels, Gion included, hoped that the opposite was true. They poured so much time and effort into securing these wagons and building them up that they wanted their vast and mighty vehicles to prove the strength of the dwarves!

As soon as the battle wagons emerged from the underground entrance, the vehicles began to activate their jammers and other ECM modules.

In turn, the dispersed teams of dwarves activated their smaller modules as well.

More dwarves launched sudden attacks on communication nodes and sensor arrays.

Soon enough, the local guard force elements cut off from each other! Almost none of their communication channels worked anymore. Coordination broke down and confusion began to reign as the guards finally paid for their complacency!

If the guards were better prepared, they would have followed one of the contingency plans and converge at predetermined rallying points!

Instead, the guards acted like headless chickens. Some fled in random directions. Others held their ground and awaited for backup that wouldn't be coming anytime soon. The rest attempted to bring the fight to the dwarves, believing that the ugly subhumans were not as formidable as they thought!

Unfortunately, the dwarves often proved to be stronger than they expected! The guards had bullied and looked down on the miners for such a long time that they lacked the psychological preparation to treat them as actual threats!

Many guards paid for their mistakes with their lives, but the problem was that the guard force was too numerous!

The dwarves on foot were particularly unsuccessful in their attempts to overwhelm the checkpoints and other well-guarded positions!

Using these fortified positions as anchors, the tall folk eventually wisened up and converged their scattered soldiers at these miniature strongholds!

Fortunately, the plan did not rest on the outcome of the infantry struggle.

Success and failure largely rested on the performance of the bigger vehicles!

The battle wagons each drove towards the known positions of different guard mechs.

Aware that these vehicles fared very poorly against melee mechs, the battle wagons were all moving towards isolated frontline mechs!

One battle wagon was supposed to confront one enemy mech at a time.

Both Ves and Gion contemplated the option of throwing multiple battle wagons at a single mech. While the local numbers advantage might give the dwarves a better chance at defeating their opponents, eventually the other guard mechs would certainly rally together!

The dwarves could not allow the enemy mechs to concentrate their forces!

While the huge disruption in communications and sensors prevented the befuddled and isolated mech pilots from receiving orders or reaching out to their comrades, they were still able to make their own decisions!

As long as the mech pilots felt insecure enough to return to the central district or gather somewhere else, Rion Aaden and his hijacked light skirmisher would have to contend against multiple mechs at the same time!

Even with a huge advantage in mobility, how could a single light skirmisher overcome ten mechs gathered in a single location?

It was impossible!

For this reason, Ves reluctantly decided to split the battle wagons up in order to occupy at least six mechs at a time.

Their mission was never to win against an enemy mech. Their crews were merely tasked with stalling the mechs as long as possible while softening them up. Even if they held up the guard mechs for just five or so minutes, that was still a success!

The first battle wagon moved into position after being directed by a couple of dwarves on foot. The diminutive figures waved at the wagons and pointed them to move through specific streets and avenues!

Eventually, the wagon slowly turned a corner and faced the rear of an oblivious frontline mech. The mech pilot of the mech had decided to take position in the crossroads of a main avenue.

Without any orders, the mech pilot grew confused on what he should do. Though he was supposed to memorize a set of fallback options in case a situation like this arose, it had been seven years since he last brushed up on those protocols!

This gave the battle wagon a prime opportunity to ambush the mech from the rear.

Though the heavy jamming in the air prevented the mech from noticing the battle wagon's approach, once the latter rounded the corner, its huge bulk was too obvious to ignore!

The mech pilot quickly noticed the threat from the rear. In a rare act of quick thinking, the guard pilot did not attempt to turn his mech around.

Instead, the pilot ordered his mech to swivel his side-mounted laser barrels around so that they pointed towards the rear!

Almost before the mech pilot pulled the trigger, the battle wagon finally finished rounding the corner!

Five mining lasers and one improvised mass accelerated fired at the mech!

The vulnerable rear armor of the frontline mech suffered significant damage! The low-quality armor system quickly shed a few layers of armor due to all of the heat and impact damage it suffered!

Fortunately for the mech, frontline mechs often boasted thick armor belts. Even if their exterior largely consisted of cheap armor plating, even the rear armor was well-protected enough to endure several attacks of this nature with ease!

The surprised frontline mech did not allow the battle wagon to bombard its rear armor for long!

After firing a salvo of lasers in retaliation that carved deep rents into the battle wagon, the mech fought against the heavy gravity in order to orient its damaged armor section away from its opponent!

The crew of the battle wagon cursed. This was not fair! Unlike the two-legged mech, the large but cumbersome battle wagon was unable to replicate this maneuver!

"Dirty tall folk!"

"Hammer the mech from all sides if need be! This tall folk machine won't be able to resist our mighty weapons forever!"

The battle between the frontline mech and the battle wagon soon descended into a slug fest.

Once he regained his wits and shook off his surprise, the mech pilot started to battle the battle wagon with confidence.

His mech was a lot better than this abomination of a mining vehicle!

Though the mining vehicle was large and bulky, that also meant that its armor was spread relatively thin. The huge surface area of the battle wagon failed to resist the retaliatory laser beams from burning through the low-quality armor plating and cutting through its vulnerable internals!

Since a mining vehicle was never designed for battle, the battle wagon boasted a distressingly small degree of redundancy and compartmentalization! This meant that any internal damage impacted the vehicle to a much greater degree than mechs!

Not that the battle wagon managed to penetrate the armor of the frontline mech. The pilot cleverly rotated his mech so that he always managed to face the slow-moving battlewagon with the least-damaged section of his machine!

Knowing that it was relatively pointless to pound the upper armor of the frontline mech, the battle wagon belatedly directed its weapons towards the lower sections of its opponent.

The legs of the mech quickly started to incur a lot of scars!

Due to their smaller size and surface area, it was not as easy for the frontline mech to endure too much damage to its bottom side!

"Hah!" The mech pilot taunted on an open speaker. "Do you think this is enough to down my mech? You filthy dwarves are too weak!"

The frontline mech ceased fire and began to turn a corner. The mech didn't move very quickly because it didn't possess an antigrav backpack or any form of gravity compensation.

Nevertheless, the mech still possessed enough strength to maintain a faster pace than the battle wagon. Once it turned the corner, the mech huddled behind a prefab structure while exposing just a fraction of its bulk to the battle wagon.

The mech's only exposed laser mount seared into the huge vehicle with great accuracy! The mech pilot sinisterly aimed his laser at an existing wound.

Normally, opponents moved too quickly in battle to enable such precision. ECM systems and other interference technology further degraded the accuracy of ranged weapons.

While Ves managed to outfit the battle wagons with a lot of ECM systems, the distance between the two combatants was too close!

The mech pilot didn't even need to resort to any targeting systems to land this hit. The wagon was so large and sluggish that it was practically a stationary target in the mech pilot's eyes!

The crew of the battle wagon did its best to retaliate. Lasers began to rake the corner of the structure, breaking it down and exposing the mech to damage!

However, the frontline was already drawing back and turning the corner behind the next intersection once the battle wagon reached its old position.

The difference in mobility was too glaring! The frontline mech may not be able to resist an endless amount of damage, but it was easily able to run behind any available cover in order to keep whittling down the slow-moving battle wagon!

The crew of the dwarven vehicle gritted their teeth and hurled insults at the mech pilot. Their target never stood in a single place long enough for their weapons to finish the job!

Though the dwarves failed to defeat the enemy mech, at least they managed to stall it. Time continued to pass as the frontline mech attempted to whittle down its only opponent.

There was no way the mech pilot would allow these stinking dwarves to force him to retreat!

"You primitive dwarves! I'll kill each and everyone of you shorties!"

Chapter 1932 Genie Pearl

Outpost 35 became engulfed by explosions and destruction!

The rebel attack took everyone by surprise! The tall folk never expected the poor and stupid dwarves to cobble up so many weapons under their noses!

Many of the ordinary dwarves had been caught off-guard by this rebellion as well. Many confused dwarves looked around in confusion, only to be shot by a laser or hit by shrapnel from a nearby explosion!

Screams engulfed the outpost as various dwarves tried to run towards shelter. Due to the heavy gravity and their short physiques, it took a lot of time for these panicked dwarves to shelter inside the nearest structure.

"What is going on?!"

"Are you crazy?! The tall folk are our masters! You'll doom us all!"

"I'm a good dwarf! I'm a good dwarf! Don't hurt me! I don't want to die!"

The rebels did not take the cries of their fellow dwarves to heart. Vulcan was watching over all of them! With their blessed weapons and armor, they finally discovered that the tall folk were also mortal!

Bolstered by liquid courage, the rebels vented their grievances in the most violent fashion possible! Their foot soldiers ferociously picked off many isolated guard patrols, achieving a significant edge at the start.

Though the surviving guards eventually regained their footing by converging on their strongholds, losing over half of their outlying patrols significantly impacted their morale!

None of the guards who chose to work on an undeveloped planet like Desala X desired a fight. Years of boring guard duty, lack of threats and lax training sessions had eroded their fighting spirit.

Hardly any tall folk wanted to risk their lives! Especially when it wasn't necessary to suppress the dwarven insurrection!

"Hold this guard post! The dwarves don't have many heavy weapons! As long as we let our walls soak up the damage, we can easily outlast them! Backup will arrive sooner or later. There's no way these dwarves can crush our mechs!"

The guard infantry saw no reason to expose themselves in order to launch a counterattack. The weapons wielded by the dwarves may not be strong enough to demolish the fortified prefab structures, but they were more than powerful enough to penetrate the light and medium suits of combat armor worn by the tall folk!

Sadly for the trapped and surrounded guards, heavy support would not be coming anytime soon!

The mechs of the guard force were scattered and isolated from each other. The chaos and fighting erupting from every corner of the outer districts confused the mech pilots.

Their rusty preparedness and habitual complacency prevented them from taking the right course of action!

Though a handful of mech pilots attempted to converge upon their comrades, several of them encountered hindrances.

Dwarf saboteurs exploded various prefab structures, causing them to collapse onto the mechs!

Though the mechs were tough enough to withstand such damage, the saboteurs weren't done! They deployed smoke grenades that frazzled their optical sensors. They tunneled the ground and caused the mechs to lose their footing. They fired at the mech from each direction, causing the mech pilot to move around in circles!

Other mechs encountered more formidable opposition in the form of battle wagons!

Though the dwarven vehicles targeted the weakest guard mechs, the frontline mechs they confronted packed a very hefty punch!

Though the battle wagons mostly obtained an initial advantage, once the mech pilots realized what they were dealing with, they aptly made use of their mobility advantage to outmaneuver the sluggish dwarven vehicles.

The battle wagons didn't fare very well against the mechs! Their excessive volume and low-quality armor cover effectively turned them into giant punching bags for the guard mechs.

Though their mining lasers and other adapted weapons posed a threat to the mechs, their power was too low and the weapon mounts were completely exposed.

It was not that difficult for the mechs to target these weapon mounts and disable them with a couple of hits!

The dwarven crews of the improvised mining vehicles attempted to do the same, but their opponents constantly used their mobility to their advantage by ducking behind various forms of cover!

None of the battle wagons could stall the mechs for long. Their crews would be lucky if they managed to last more than ten minutes against these formidable war machines!

Though the vast majority of rebels committed themselves to attacking the guard force, none of them were expected to win their battles.

The humans possessed too many advantages! With at least a dozen mechs at their disposal, the tall folk possessed an undeniable advantage in the long run!

With time running out, the rebels needed to change the game before the tall folk succeeded in linking up!

Back at the mech stables, Ves could hear the dwarven commandos fending off the guards who were instructed to advance into the facility!

"WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!" A spoiled voice shouted from the entrance! "You filthy dwarves actually think you can steal my Genie Pearl? Fools! My mech is locked to my DNA and life signs! There's no way you ignorant brutes can unlock my mech! Lay down your arms and I will consider sparing the rest of your stupid ilk. Keep resisting and I'll kill every single short-statured freak on this planet!"

The dwarf commandos kept fighting. None of them had any illusions that Richard Kantis would keep his word! His cruelty against dwarves was too well-known for any of the rebels to believe he would show any mercy.

The lives of every dwarf on Desala X rested on their shoulders!

"Keep fighting." Ves muttered as his possessed body manipulated a console connected to the white light skirmisher resisting his intrusions.

He underestimated the security systems of the Genie Pearl. House Kantis may have developed a pattern of cheaping out and cutting corners, but they never skimped out when it came to their own interests!

The premium mech model had been excellently maintained. Its security suite was fully up to date. Ves even noticed that an experienced mech designer performed a lot tweaks and adjustments on the mech over a span of several years.

All of this meant that Ves did not encounter a smooth ride in his attempt to subvert the locks to the mech!

"This isn't enough to stop me!" His possessed body smirked.

Though Ves wasn't an adept hacker, he knew enough about mech software and their most common vulnerabilities to circumvent a security suite that was seventy years out of date by his standards!

The only problem was that it took a lot of time to accomplish this task. The extra minutes weighed on him heavily. A lot of dwarven rebels were doing their best to hold back the tall folk from rallying their troops and reorganizing their ranks.

If Ves took too long in hijacking the Genie Pearl, the sacrifices of all of those dwarves might be in vain!

Once that happened, Ves could forget about securing the Timpala Steel!

A beep sounded out from his console.

"Success! Finally!"

He didn't bother running up to the Genie Pearl with Rion's stubby legs. Instead, he directed his body to step onto a lifter platform ordered it to float up to the cockpit.

Once the dwarven body slid into the cockpit, Ves surrendered control of the body back to its original owner.

"Activate the mech, Rion. Interface with the Genie Pearl and defend your fellow dwarves against the wrath of the tall folk!"

It took precious seconds for Rion Aaden to regain his wits. "I.."

"No more hesitation! This is not the time to doubt! The longer you stall, the greater the casualties! Your fellow dwarves are dying left and right to provide you with this precious opportunity! Don't let them die for nothing!"

His alarming words succeeded in jolting Rion to action. The alcohol that Ves forced into his body earlier also played a useful role. The dwarven mech pilot was a bit more prone to action than usual!

Once the dwarf initiated the activation sequence, the entire cockpit lit up in a bright glow. Rion closed his eyes until the exaggerated light show died down.

[Genie Pearl online. Interfacing in three, two, one...]

The moment the mech initiated a connection, Rion froze in his seat.

Ves split his attention in two.

One part kept an eye on the readings projected by the cockpit interface.

Another part studied Rion's condition.

There was a very significant difference between interfacing with a simulator cockpit and a fully-fledged mech.

Rion had never piloted a physical mech in his life. This was a completely new experience for him, and the foreign sensations temporarily overwhelmed his consciousness!

"Focus!" Ves mentally barked at Rion! "Harness the mech, or else it will harness you! Premium mechs are more powerful than other mechs, but that power comes with a

price! Don't succumb to the flood of input. Do your best to filter out the irrelevant data. The sooner you get a grip on the data stream, the sooner we can fight!"

Premium mechs were mostly designed for advanced pilots who were capable of exerting more control over their mechs. The Genie Pearl was the personal mech of Lord Richard Kantis.

While the noble was a spoiled brat and a heartless bully, he was not a slouch when it came to piloting mechs!

The Genie Pearl interfaced with Rion in the expectation that its mech pilot would effortlessly adapt to its enhanced data stream.

This was something that Rion's simulator pod had not been able to replicate! The dwarf had to process at least twice as much data than he was used to, and this was something that completely stumped the inexperienced pilot for a short time!

"The Genie Pearl is a mech, not a monster!" Ves continued to encourage his host. "Don't fear the mech and don't reject the input. You are the master of this mech! You are the savior of the dwarves! Believe in yourself and tame the data stream!"

It took half a minute for Rion to begin his adaptation. Precious seconds passed as the dwarf pilot finally exhibited some of his piloting potential.

Though this was Rion's first attempt to interface with a physical mech, his potent mind began to harness the data input on its own accord. Instinct and prior training with the simulator pod both combined into an adaptation process that saw the Genie Pearl slowly bending to Rion's will!

His B+ genetic aptitude finally showed its value.

Though it was possible to pilot the Genie Pearl with a lower grade of aptitude, the mech pilot had to exert more effort in harnessing the powerful mech.

Rion didn't require too much training to gain a measure of control over the mech. His relatively high aptitude smoothed his adaptation process and finally allowed him to take the reins with confidence!

"Vulcan!" Rion shouted with glee. "I did it! The Genie Pearl is mine! I can control every limb!"

In truth, Rion's control was far from impressive. His genetic aptitude may have provided him with an advantage, his inexperience and lack of training was very telling!

The moment the Genie Pearl stepped forward, the mech almost lost its balance! Rion was completely unused to piloting this kind of mech! It was substantially different from the virtual light skirmisher he was used to practising during his training sessions!

"Stop! Don't take another step! Focus on regaining your balance!"

"Why is this so difficult?!"

"You forgot to activate the Genie Pearl's backpack module, you dolt! Your mech isn't designed to operate under heavy gravity conditions! Turn on the antigrav backpack as soon as you regain your balance."

The mech bent backwards and almost tipped over backwards!

"W-What's wrong, Vulcan?!"

"YOU IDIOTIC DWARF! Don't activate the antigrav backpack while your mech is still unbalanced! You almost made the Genie Pearl fall flat on its back and crush its vital attachment! Take a deep breath and remember your training. This mech may be different from what you are used to, but it's still a light skirmisher!"

With great difficulty, Rion Aaden slowly adapted to his powerful new mech.

Chapter 1933 Overcome Your Fears

The Genie Pearl was too much of a mech for a half-trained mech pilot like Rion. The light skirmisher was a mech tailored for duels and exquisite maneuvers.

Ves guessed that Richard Kantis, its original owner, likely used his sparkling white mech to stroke his ego and impress the ladies.

What discomfited Rion the most was the customized tweaks applied to the mech. The modifications increased the Genie Pearl's fit with Richard Kantis to the detriment of other mech pilots!

As a mech designer who designed a number of custom mechs with Gloriana, Ves knew how egregious this problem could be. It was especially bad in this situation as Rion was completely unprepared to pilot such a deviating mech!

Even Ves didn't expect the Genie Pearl to be so honed for a specific mech pilot!

As a result, Rion wasted even more time until he finally gained a grip on the idiosyncratic rules that made the Genie Pearl a fitting machine to its original mech pilot.

"Hurry up, Rion!" Ves urged the dwarf. "Now that you have activated its antigrav backpack, its power source is continually being expended to negate 3.6 g's exerted onto

your mech. Do you know what that means? It basically means the backpack module is single-handedly lifting almost four Genie Pearls under standard gravity!"

Ves wasn't sure how long the antigrav backpack would last. At the very least, it should last at least forty minutes before the Genie Pearl needed to replenish its energy reserves.

While the Genie Pearl was lighter than other mechs, its capacity wasn't very much. Its smaller size and torso profile meant that its backpack module also needed to be smaller. The lack of capacity also reduced the amount of energy cells carried by the mech.

All of this meant that Rion was under a lot of time pressure. It took a lot of time to replace the depleted energy cells of a mech under heavy gravity conditions. This provided their enemies with a generous window of opportunity to retaliate and take the Genie Pearl down when it lacked the ability to defend itself!

"Finish this off in one go." Ves instructed Rion. "The success of the entire rebellion rests on your shoulders. There are at least a dozen mechs standing in your way."

"That's too much!" The dwarf complained.

"You can do it!" You aren't piloting a regular mech. You're piloting a premium mech, a light skirmisher! As long as you gain control over your machine, you can outmaneuver any of the guard mechs by virtue of your supreme mobility! Look at the mech in front of you. Take out the Genie Pearl's primary armament and slay your first mech."

A forgotten knight mech rested silently in the opposite bay. Leaving this mech behind would only give the guard force an opportunity to bring this mech online!

Rion needed no further encouragement. After a brief pause, the Genie Pearl withdrew its knives and approached the dormant mech.

The light skirmisher stabbed the knight mech straight against its upper chest!

"STOP!" Ves mentally shouted at his host! "What are you doing?! Have you forgotten all of your training?! The Genie Pearl may be a premium mech, but it's still a light mech! Just because your current mech is more expensive than the knight mech doesn't mean it lost all of its weaknesses! If you stab your knives straight into the thickest part of the enemy mech, you'll only be dulling and chipping your blades! Target its weak points!"

"..Where are its weak points?"

Ves mentally palmed his face.

"Forget it, I'll point them out for you! Open your mind and accept my input. I'll highlight some sections on the enemy mech. Stab the Genie Pearl's knives into those spots. Make sure to put some extra heft into your stabs by leaning your mech forward. Light mechs are supposed to strengthen their attacks by borrowing the momentum of their mechs!"

This method was common to every melee mech, but it was especially vital to light skirmishers!

The artificial musculature of a light mech was lighter and smaller, but that directly translated to a reduction in strength.

It was very difficult for Rion to make his Genie Pearl exert enough force behind its blows! The mech missed its mark several times because the dwarf pilot was not very accustomed to attacking in this fashion!

Ves couldn't do much to help. He already advised Rion on how to perform the right movements. It was up to the dwarf to execute his instructions.

The Genie Pearl's clumsy movements caused it to take at least twenty extra seconds to cause the dormant knight mech to collapse.

This was a shamefully long time! Several times, the Genie Pearl's knife hit a thick armor section instead of a thinner joint or gap! If Rion's performance against a completely stationary opponent was already this bad, how much worse would he perform against a mech that could fight back?

Ves began to doubt whether he was right to rely on Rion to carry the rebels to victory.

Even though he was disappointed with his host, Ves refrained from showing any further dissatisfaction. He had to work with what he got. Right now, that meant he needed to guide Rion like a professional coach.

"Your dwarf buddies at the main entrance won't last much longer! Half of them are already dead. Hurry up and rescue your fellow comrades!" He urged.

"Damnit! I forgot!"

The din of fighting had never ceased. Rion had become so preoccupied with disabling the knight mech that he ignored everything else! His awareness was clearly very deficient!

After receiving Ves' reminder, Rion directed his mech to the main entrance of the facility. Due to the size of the mech, it didn't take a lot of steps for the Genie Pearl to reach the site where the dwarves were putting up a desperate fight against the infantry under the command of Richard Kantis!

The footsteps of the approaching mech had already caused the two sides to halt their firefight.

"It's Rion!"

"Thank Vulcan!"

"We're saved!"

While the dwarves whooped and cheered at the appearance of the mech, their opposition momentarily froze.

One particular figure garbed in a rich and frilly green outfit dropped his jaw. "That's.. my mech! Who is piloting my mech?! I never authorized anyone else to pilot my ride!"

"That must be Richard Kantis." Ves murmured, causing Rion to zoom in the mech's optical sensors onto the shouting fop. "Look at how small he is compared to your mech. Outside of the cockpit, he's just a human wearing an antigrav belt."

"Vulcan.. Can I..?"

"I am not a squeamish god, Rion. Do what you have to do. Only one side is able to survive after this day. Take your revenge against your oppressors by killing your first scion of House Kantis."

It was not easy for Rion to get over his considerable fears against House Kantis.

Throughout his entire life, his fellow dwarves taught him to respect the tall folk at all costs. House Kantis was the ultimate collection of tall folk in charge. They were responsible for everything and could easily decide the life and death of their entire people!

Even if Lord Richard didn't enjoy a very high status within his House, he still possessed a considerable amount of say in the running of Outpost 35! If he wanted to wipe out every single dwarf in this settlement, his underlings would likely execute those orders to the letter!

"Reach out and pick him up!" Ves goaded Rion on! "This is a good test of your balance and precision!"

Under the dwarf pilot's direction, the Genie Pearl started to move. It holstered one of its knives and reached out into the middle of the stunned and frozen guards.

The large fingers knocked away the surrounding guards like they were ragdolls. Richard shrieked and attempted to run away, but no human could outrun a mech!

With seemingly little effort, the Genie Pearl managed to envelop the defenseless noble in a cage of fingers.

Rion exhibited great care in lifting his captive in the air. Though the Genie Pearl wasn't gripping the human's body at all, Richard was still constrained from all sides!

"Unhand me, you dwarf! I don't know how you managed to unlock my mech, but that doesn't mean you win! House Kantis is more powerful than you comprehend! Desala X is just one of many planets under our control! We have so many ships and mechs in space that you will never be able to run away from my house's revenge! Your only chance of saving your sorry lives is to keep me alive! Take me hostage. I'll even order my men to stand down!"

Rion hesitated, and so did the other dwarves. As long as they leveraged their hostage to order the guards to stop their counterattack, the battle was as good as won!

However, Ves mentally shook his head.

"After all this time, do you still trust the tall folk to keep their word?" Ves admonished his host. "As long as you give your enemy a reprieve, they'll certainly rally their mechs and counterattack when you have just let down your guard!"

Rion's face hardened. He recalled his grievances he suffered at the hands of the tall folk. He remembered the stories shared by his fellow rebels. He imagined Master Gion Greybeard looking at him with sadness.

"Do it." Ves urged. "Make a statement and show everyone your commitment to fight!"

The dwarf hesitated no longer.

The hand caging the shouting noble in the air slowly began to clench.

"W-What are you doing?! Do you realize who I am?! I am Richard of House Kantis! I have noble blood in my veins! My life is worth more than all of the lives of your dwarves put together!"

His pleas fell on deaf ears. With resolute determination, the giant mech's fingers continued to clench until Richard shouted no more.

The noble blood that he was so proud of began to flow through the gaps. Every guard and rebel dwarf watching from below looked completely shocked as the drops of blood fell onto the smoothed soil.

"Desala X has been soaked by the blood of dwarves for too long." Ves solemnly said. "It is time for the blood of the innocent to be washed away by the blood of the tall folk. Let none survive."

Rion gritted his teeth. Even though he hated the likes of Richard Kantis with all his heart, he knew his action just then irrevocably doomed the lives of his fellow dwarves.

Unless they achieved total victory today, the tall folk would certainly wipe them all out!

"Fight!"

The young dwarven mech pilot finally overcame his mental block. Disabling a guard mech and crushing a tall folk noble completely caused him to lose his fears towards his enemies.

"Kill them all! Let no tall folk survive!"

The mech moved forward and slammed its feet against the hapless human guards!

Their small arms fire failed to scratch the coating of the Genie Pearl. Their servo-assisted legs failed to carry them far enough to outrun a mech built for speed!

After crushing each and every guard in sight, Ves prodded Rion to run to the outer districts.

"Trampling the guards on foot won't change the overall situation. You've wasted enough time here. Can you hear the sounds in the distance? Those are the sounds of battle wagons dying to enemy mechs!"

Rion understood the urgency. He urged his mech into a jog. Though he was late in moving out, the speed of the Genie Pearl finally showed its value.

With its antigrav backpack, the mech took seconds to traverse a distance that took other mechs minutes to cross!

Its light and agile steps breezed from intersection to intersection. Many of the guards and tall folk present in the street foolishly cheered the racing mech onwards.

None of them realized that its mech pilot was a dwarf! Every tall folk thought that Richard Kantis was finally coming to their rescue!

Ves noted the reaction of the guards and overseers with mild surprise. It seemed the communications blackout was a lot more effective than he thought! The fact that the tall folk were still unable to restore communications meant that their enemy had no clue of the Genie Pearl's true allegiance!

"We can use this..."

Chapter 1934 Impostor

A single mech raced through the streets of Outpost 35. The sparkling white mech contrasted sharply against the dark soil and plain metallic buildings.

Its speed was incredibly astounding to the surrounding people who witnessed its passage. On a heavy gravity planet like Desala X, nothing moved quickly. To see a mech breaking the pattern that everyone was accustomed to was a very jarring sight!

In fact, the mech could run even faster. The Genie Pearl was truly unencumbered by the heavy gravity. As long as its antigrav backpack module continued to compensate much of the gravity acting on the mech, the light skirmisher could easily sprint from one end of the outpost to the other end of the outpost within a minute!

The only problem was the mech pilot. Rion Aaden still exhibited many instances of flawed and suboptimal control. Any decent light mech specialist would probably slap Rion stupid for his abysmal running gait!

It was so bad that Ves prohibited Rion from increasing the speed of his mech. The Genie Pearl was truly liable to trip and fall if it ran any faster!

While the mech passed through the checkpoint that separated the central district from the outer districts, both the dwarves and the outnumbered guards halted their fire.

The dwarves looked towards the Genie Pearl with anticipation while the guards reacted the same!

Just as both sides expected the impressively fast mech to halt and help them out, the Genie Pearl passed them by without any hint of slowing down!

Both sides looked astonished as their promised backup left them to fend for themselves.

Rion felt immensely guilty for ignoring the dwarves who were fighting and dying on his behalf. All of those dwarves were doing their best to keep the tall folk from linking up and restoring their broken communication lines!

"Remember your role." Ves reminded Rion. "Wasting half a minute in crushing the guards on foot won't bring you any closer to winning this battle."

"I could have tipped the balance in our favor!"

"Don't blow your cover! The guards are still under the impression that your mech is piloted by Richard Kantis. We should take advantage of their misconception while they are still in the dark. Any time you display any hostility against the tall folk, you risk exposure."

"Aren't the tall folk isolated from each other?"

"Never assume anything, Rion! Battle is inherently chaotic and plans often fall through!"

"Then how can I possibly succeed?"

"Don't think too much. Just follow the plan and minimize your mistakes. Once something unexpected happens, don't freeze and let the tall folk catch you off-guard. You need to be cautious and be ready to adapt to changing circumstances."

As Ves continued to teach his host, the Genie Pearl soon headed towards the sounds of active conflict.

"Don't go forward! Turn left! There should be a knight mech in that direction that isn't being confronted by a battle wagon. We need to take it out before it links up with another mech!"

"My lord! Shouldn't we reinforce our battle wagons so they can help us fight against the other mechs?"

"Leaving the other mechs alone is a fatal error. The battle wagons are still fulfilling their mission in occupying the other mechs. We don't need these vehicles to survive to win the battle! What matters most is defeating every enemy mech, and the only way we can do so is to prevent them from banding together."

Though Ves believed he was making the most logical decision, it was very hard for Rion to go against his impulse to rescue the crews of the battle wagons.

Most of those dwarves would probably die by the time the battle ended! Knowing that he could have saved them if he came to their rescue was very painful!

Still, Vulcan himself commanded him to turn left, so he had no choice but to do so. Displeasing the god that aided the rebel dwarves so much was not an option!

Right now, neither side possessed a complete picture of where everyone was. Ves could only glean the location of enemy mechs from the intelligence gathered by the dwarves.

The guard force hardly varied their patrol routes. Though a decent amount of time had passed since the start of the battle, many of the mechs had hardly moved from their original position.

Aside from the harassment they endured, the mechs weren't able to hurry up no matter how much their mech pilots wanted to drive them forward!

Though the guard mechs had all been adjusted to heavy gravity operation, that only meant that the machines were strong enough to walk forward without risking too much damage.

While these mechs were slowly moving away from their original positions, the Genie Pearl finally confronted one of these machines.

"According to the intelligence gathered by your fellow rebels, House Kantis has stationed at least three knight mechs at this outpost. You've already dismantled one of them, but that was an unpiloted mech. This time is different."

"What should I do, Great Vulcan?"

Don't slow down. Keep jogging towards the mech but don't make any attempt to communicate with it. When you get close enough, the jamming won't be as effective, so the enemy mech pilot will definitely attempt to hail you. Just ignore the attempt and move close to the mech. Try and maneuver to the knight mech's rear without giving away that you are a dwarf. Once you get in position, I'll highlight an area you need to stick a knife in. Make sure to leverage the weight of your mech properly this time!"

Rion did his best to follow his god's advice. His concentration grew sharper as he focused less on his fears and more on the task at hand.

The knight mech easily noticed the approaching light mech. It waved its sword arm in a friendly gesture.

It paused when the Genie Pearl declined to reciprocate the wordless greeting.

Soon enough, the cockpit of the mech beeped in order to notify Rion of an incoming hail.

As instructed, Rion didn't accept or reject the hail. Instead, he let it hang, causing the enemy mech pilot to grow confused.

Ves observed the movements of the enemy knight mech carefully. Right now, the guard mech still looked unguarded, but who knew how long that would last.

If not for the strong association between Richard Kantis and his personal mech, the enemy mech pilot would have probably guessed the truth by now!

As the Genie Pearl drew close to the knight mech, it gradually slowed down. With casual movements, the mech moved to the knight mech's rear.

The light skirmisher cunningly moved to the knight mech's rear as if it wanted to take advantage of the defensive mech's shelter.

The mech pilot was so used to friendly mechs huddling behind its resilient shield and frame that the Genie Pearl still didn't draw suspicion!

Once the Genie Pearl entered stabbing range, the knight mech belatedly started to draw away.

"Too late!"

A loud rupturing sound echoed the streets as the Genie Pearl suddenly leaned forward and pushed its knife into a weak point situated in the lower back.

The strike hit home! Caught completely by surprise, the mech pilot belatedly attempted to turn his knight mech around.

Unfortunately, the backstab inflicted by the Genie Pearl was truly sinister! The knife just happened to pass through several critical power lines and connections. The mech engine instantly lost half its mechanical power.

This was truly fatal to the mech as a reduction in strength meant the knight mech was hardly able to move under heavy gravity conditions!

"Keep facing its back and stab all of the points I've marked out!" Ves eagerly instructed. "This mech can't turn fast enough to block your strikes!"

Once the mech lost half its strength, its fate was sealed. The unencumbered Genie Pearl methodically stabbed the weak points that Ves marked out. Soon enough, the knight mech collapsed.

When the Genie Pearl attempted to stomp the rear of the fallen mech, Ves jolted Rion's mind.

"Don't waste any time trying to finish the mech pilot off. This outpost doesn't have any spare mechs. As long as you finish off all of the mechs, there's no way for the tall folk to make a comeback!"

"You're right, my lord. Please point me to the next mech."

Under Ves' direction, the Genie Pearl moved straight to where the only other knight mech was situated and took it out in the exact same manner.

Through the Genie Pearl's sensors, Rion looked down at the fallen mech with astonishment. He never expected to take out these mighty machines with such ease.

"Keep moving! The tall folk won't remain ignorant for long!"

Rion regained his wits and piloted his mech forward.

Roughly fifteen minutes passed as guard mech after guard mech suffered various deadly stabs. Ves had drafted an optimal route that allowed the Genie Pearl to waste as little time as possible in moving from place to place.

Eventually, the good times didn't last.

Ves noted from the Genie Pearl's communication systems that the guard force eventually succeeded in restoring their communications network!

The survivors among the tall folk had worked hard in amplifying their signals and restoring some of the interrupted lines.

Immediately, an urgent warning proliferated throughout the network.

[LORD RICHARD KANTIS IS DEAD. GENIE PEARL HIJACKED BY DWARVES. GENIE PEARL IS HOSTILE. DO NOT LET THIS IMPOSTOR APPROACH YOUR POSITION. DATABASE UPDATE INCOMING.]

The Genie Pearl was promptly cut off from the communications channel.

"What do we do, Vulcan?! We only disabled five mechs!"

"Six if you count the knight mech at the central district." Ves corrected the dwarf. "You have already overcome half of your opposition. If we're lucky, we can still catch two or three enemy mechs as they are slowly converging on each other."

At this stage of the battle, the dwarven battle wagons had already fallen. None of them managed to defeat their opponents, but they did not go down without a fight!

The Genie Pearl eventually turned a corner and confronted a wounded frontline mech. It lost its left laser barrel mount and exhibited lots of scars across its entire torso and a portion of its legs.

Ves gleamed as he saw the state of the enemy mech. To a mech designer like him, the damaged mech was full of vulnerabilities!

"AHHH! I'm being shot at!"

The Genie Pearl finally suffered its first blow as the frontline mech resolutely fired at Richard Kantis' mech!

With communications restored, the mech pilots of the guard force were no longer in the dark! All of them received orders to treat the Genie Pearl as a high-priority target!

So far, Rion had performed well enough that Ves forgot that he was a rookie. Being shot at by a weapon was very unpleasant!

"Don't flinch! You're not facing this mech with your naked body. You're piloting a multiton war machine. Even if the Genie Pearl can't endure too many hits, it is still incredibly fast! Circle around the frontline mech and prevent it from bearing its only weapon on your machine. Use your mobility to your advantage!"

If Ves wasn't in his mind to direct Rion's actions, the dwarf would have fallen long ago! The difference between an academy-trained mech pilot and a self-taught amateur like Rion was too wide!

Though the Genie Pearl moved much less fluently than before, Rion was still able to outpace the rotation of the frontline mech. The damage it suffered to its legs caused them to move a bit slower than normal, giving the light skirmisher an excellent opportunity to face its left flank!

"Stab the points I've marked out!"

It only took three stabs to down the mech. The frontline mech had already been softened up, so Rion only had to finish the job.

"Seven down, five to go! If you hurry fast enough, we can still intercept another mech, particularly if it's damaged!"

Three minutes later, the Genie Pearl slowed down its advance as a wide plaza came into view.

Standing in the center of the plaza was a team of five mechs!

Though none of them were melee mechs, the frontline mechs all adopted a formation that allowed them to cover each other's back!

As soon as the Genie Pearl came into view, the mechs locked onto the light skirmisher and unleashed a torrent of laser beams!

The light mech failed to dodge due to Rion's momentary surprise. The Genie Pearl instantly incurred a lot of damage!

Chapter 1935 One against Five

The dwarves had gone mad. To the guards and workers in the employ of House Kantis, the actions of their slaves completely made no sense.

Where did they get their gear? How could they have armed themselves with serviceable armor and deadly weaponry?

Where could they have possibly hidden their battle wagons? Why had the guards failed to sniff out something so enormous?

Half an hour after the start of hostilities, most of the fighting at Outpost 35 died down.

Most of the unarmed dwarves and tall folk already managed to flee to the nearest shelters and hunker down. Most of the deaths occurred in the first ten minutes as plenty of dwarves and tall folk got caught up in the firefights that erupted all over the outposts.

The battles between the dwarven battle wagons and the guard mechs resulted in a lot of destruction. The prefab structures may have been tough enough to endure the heavy gravity, but they were wholly insufficient in withstanding enemy fire!

Plenty of civilians huddling inside those structures died when their buildings got crushed by collisions or raked with lasers as the mechs used them as cover!

On the street level, the vigorous battles between the foot soldiers produced much less collateral damage, but a lot more deaths!

Master Gion Greybeard observed silently from the top of a tall prefab as the bodies on the streets of the underground outpost increased.

What pained him the most was that most of the bodies were fairly short. Ever since the rebels launched their offensive, the tall folk showed no restraint in killing as many dwarves as possible!

The old dwarf held the Banner of Vulcan with an iron grip. Though few of the rebels were able to see the banner or feel its strong and distinctive glow, the rebels still fought as if their god was watching over each of their actions!

"For Vulcan!"

"Kill the tall folk!"

"Freedom is within our reach!"

Some of the street fighting turned exceptionally cruel as the dwarves fought far beyond what was asked of them! Combatants from both sides became so engulfed by violence that they took as much advantage of the situation as possible to unleash their darker urges!

Dwarves formed roaming hunting parties and began to seek out the hiding holes of the overseers who tormented them for all their lives. Once the armed dwarves broke into their homes or offices, the defenseless overseers finally paid for all of the punishments they doled out when they were drunk on power!

The tall folk did not restrain themselves either. Several guards or armed tall folk snapped and started to proactively seek out dwarves to massacre!

Neither side considered the other to be human anymore. Hardly any dwarf showed any respect or restraint towards their opposition.

In their eyes, every fellow of the wrong height needed to die, no exceptions! Throughout the outer districts and parts of the central districts, the streets and interiors of the prefab structures were dyed in red as the stink of blood and weapons discharge suffused the entire surroundings!

Though Master Gion Greybeard felt increasingly more squeamish at the sights and sounds of battle, he knew that this was a necessary consequence of battle.

He had already made peace with all of the dwarves that would perish as a result of an insurrection that he had plotted for more than a decade!

The old dwarf gazed up towards the red-and-blue banner with an X surrounded by a cog in the center.

"Do you see our determination, Vulcan? We are more than slaves. We are more than miners. Each of us are ready to sacrifice our lives in order to regain our freedom! We shall never put down our arms until we have finally escaped this planet! This we swear!"

Eventually, an armed dwarf approached the leader.

"Master Greybeard, our ace pilot has achieved a magnificent victory! With the white mech of the tall folk, Rion has managed to demolish seven of our enemy's blood-soaked mechs!"

The old dwarf gruffly grunted. "How many enemy mechs remain?"

"That.. is what I am here to report. The white mech is confronting five of the armless mechs at the southern plaza. Once the tall folk restored their communications, they have become much more difficult to deal with. Their surviving guards have stopped attempting to counterattack. They are all huddling in their fortifications."

"What of their mechs?"

"Their mech pilots haven't taken our bait. They're stubbornly staying in place."

"As expected. Vulcan is right. Once the tall folk suffer too many losses, they will no longer go on the offensive." Gion slowly smiled and turned around. "Let us proceed to the next step of the plan. Now that the tall folk are all locked in place, their 'spaceport' is exposed!"

The dwarves around him roared in jubilation! The ultimate objective of this attack was never about taking over Outpost 35!

They didn't even have to defeat the enemy mechs! As long as the fighting forces of the tall folk were eliminated or occupied, the rebels possessed a straight shot at the spaceport situated on the far side of the outpost!

"Let's go capture their ship! Don't let it escape!"

As the dwarves proceeded to complete their most essential objective, back at the southern plaza, the Genie Pearl slightly pressed its frame against a prefab structure.

The mech was quickly forced to move elsewhere as a volley of laser beams systematically melted holes in the structure!

"There are too many lasers!" Rion panicked as he clumsily piloted his mech backwards! "I can't beat five of them at the same time! It's impossible!"

Any light skirmisher specialist who heard those words would probably feel ashamed for Rion!

Sure, it was not very realistic for a single mech to overcome a formation of five alert mechs.

Yet the odds weren't as lopsided as Rion thought.

First, there was a significant difference in quality. The Genie Pearl was the personal mech of a scion of House Kantis, while the surviving hardware of the guard force consisted entirely of cheap and worn frontline mechs!

In fact, Ves estimated that the Genie Pearl might even be more expensive than all five frontline mechs put together! Even though the latter consisted of a lot more metal and components, their market positioning was completely different!

That said, even if the difference in market value between the two sides was negligible, the side with more mechs usually possessed an advantage.

In normal situations, the side with more mechs would be able to surround and flank the outnumbered side.

This was not a normal situation.

"Calm down, Rion." Ves mentally conveyed to his host.

He began to concentrate a bit and increased the glow his consciousness emanated.

Feeling the familiar presence of Vulcan strengthening in his mind did wonders in calming Rion down. The dwarf had become his devout believer!

"Don't forget who I am. I'm the God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship. I might not be as omnipotent in other areas, but when it comes to mechs, hardly any mortal or immortal being can compete against my mastery of these machines!"

Though Ves exaggerated a bit, his host was too naive! Rion completely bought into his claims!

It helped that Ves had already showed off his prowess. Not only did he manage to unlock the Genie Pearl, he also assisted Rion in battle by directing his actions and exposing the most critical weak points of the enemy mechs!

"Please guide me, my lord." Rion humbly beseeched the god in his mind. "How can I defeat the enemy mechs?"

Ves inwardly smiled. "You don't necessarily have to defeat them. You merely have to keep them in place. This outcome is already within my projections."

"Pardon?"

"As long as these mechs are trapped in place, they won't be able to reinforce their spaceport! If the spaceport doesn't receive any heavy support in the next twenty minutes, our dwarves will probably be able to overrun the undermanned defenses and capture a transport ship!"

Rion's eyes widened. "Oh."

"The problem is that once the mech pilots find out the truth, they'll probably march to the spaceport in unison!" Ves cautiously warned. "While the frontline mechs are rather slow, they can probably reach the spaceport in fifteen to twenty minutes while covering each other's backs."

Once the mechs reached the spaceport, the escape plan was as good as over!

"What do I need to do?"

"Fight." Ves answered simply.

"Against all five?"

"You have no other choice. While it's enough to keep them occupied, it's best to take them out entirely because capturing the transport ship and trying to gain control over its systems can't be done without my help! And the only way I can offer my assistance is if you aren't needed anymore."

In the end, Rion still needed defeat the mechs in order to ensure that the tall folk possessed no more means to foil the escape attempt!

"Don't waste anymore time. Remember that our antigrav backpack has already consumed more than half of its energy reserves. You effectively have only ten minutes to make the most of your mobility advantage."

In addition, the dwarven rebels needed to hurry up in capturing a ship and launching into space!

Outpost 35 was just one of many outposts on Desala X. There were larger outposts which hosted a more substantial guard presence. Once they dispatched their reinforcements, it was only a matter of time before the tall folk recaptured their fallen base!

Ves conveyed some instructions to Rion.

"Your Genie Pearl is a light skirmisher. Not only that, but your mech is countless times faster than those sluggish frontline mechs! While their formation looks formidable, it's primarily geared towards keeping enemy mechs at a distance. Once you brave the fire and manage to close the distance, they're completely exposed! Even if they turn their weapons on your Genie Pearl, they're liable to hit their own side!"

"I see!"

Though Rion wasn't the brightest dwarf, even he could see how poorly the enemy mechs would be able to fend him off!

Once Rion understood what he needed to do, he hesitated no further and rushed his mechs out of cover.

The frontline mechs never lost track of the Genie Pearl. Once the mech dove out of cover, the enemy mech pilots instantly opened fire with their warmed up laser weapons!

Each mech fired twin beams of searing hot lasers. Though a medium mech could easily withstand a series of hits without suffering any significant damage, it was different for light mechs!

Even if the Genie Pearl was a premium mech, even if it was clad with compressed armor plating, its exterior was still too fragile!

"Dodge!" Ves urged! "Never advance in a straight line! Just trust in your instincts and side step as much as possible!"

"This street is too narrow! The distance is too close! Their lasers are too accurate!"

"Don't complain! Even if you can't avoid getting hit, lateral movement will still reduce the damage by spreading out the energy of laser beams across a wider surface!"

"What?"

"Just do as I say!"

Though Rion was right, all of the side stepping and turning succeeded in spreading out the damage of the laser beams.

If the frontline mechs managed to concentrate their fire on a single point, then the Genie Pearl would have definitely collapsed by now!

Yet because the light mech was using its mobility advantage to good effect, the light mech succeeded in closing the distance!

Even though some of the laser beams succeeded in penetrating the armor, the internal damage only resulted in a slight reduction in performance.

The light skirmisher was still functional enough to retaliate!

"Don't stop! Keep moving! Weave between the mechs and stab your knives in the sections I've pointed out! Even if you miss, it's okay! What's more important is that you always need to put an enemy mech in the way of the other mechs!"

Rion did as instructed. His Genie Pearl clumsily danced around the befuddled frontline mechs and got in a couple of cheap shots.

However, the enemy mech pilots weren't stupid. Once they realized that they failed to keep the Genie Pearl away, they fired at the light mech regardless of the friendly mech in their way!

The light skirmisher suddenly suffered several malfunctions, interrupting Rion's rhythm!

Chapter 1936 The Critical Hi

A trained light mech pilot would have kept fighting with as little interruption as possible. Even if his mech was falling apart around him, a true daredevil never gave up until he had no other choice but to eject!

Unfortunately, Rion was far from reaching that standard. As one of the Genie Pearl's legs lost some strength, the mech temporarily stalled, giving the enemy frontline mechs a golden opportunity to concentrate their fire!

Four of the mechs concentrated their fire on the Genie Pearl's left arm!

Due to the damage the left arm already incurred, the sudden laser barrage soon caused the limb to go limp!

Though the energy damage failed to cut off the arm, the lasers successfully severed all of the internal connectors that provided power to the lower half!

The loss in power caused the left hand to become limp as well, causing the Genie Pearl to drop one of its knives!

"I lost a weapon!"

"Then just make do with a single knife! The fight is not over yet! Your Genie Pearl is not the only mech who sustained damage! Look at the mech on the right! It has suffered a lot of friendly fire to its rear and lost most of its mobility! One more push will topple it over!"

Due to the tactics employed by Rion, none of his attacks managed to fell an enemy mech, but that did not mean their enemies were feeling good!

Many of the places the Genie Pearl stabbed were debilitating weak points. While the damage wasn't enough to disable the frontline mechs, their energy transmission, motive power and weapon functionality all dropped as a result of the hijacked mech's sinister attacks!

What was even more infuriating was that the frontline mechs suffered plenty of damage as a result of friendly fire!

Though the mech pilots made the right choice, some of those lasers softened up entire armor sections while occasionally inflicting crippling damage to the exposed internals!

The enemy was practically doing half the work for Rion! The only thing the dwarf needed to do was to land the killing blows!

Though the Genie Pearl kept getting raked by laser after laser, Rion no longer paid attention to his fears.

Ves saw the potential of a great mech pilot in Rion. Even though his skill and training was anything but passable, the ability to set aside your fears in order to achieve a greater goal was an essential quality to a soldier or warrior!

Many mech pilots, particularly poorly-trained mercenaries and pirates, frequently fled the battlefield at the first sign of danger!

Even so, Ves would have rather ride in the mind of a proper mech pilot like Axelar, Eloise or Barley.

Any half-decent light skirmisher specialist would have been able to dismantle these frontline mechs at all! This was the power of a melee mech in the hands of someone skilled!

Instead, Ves had to keep refraining from admonishing Rion as he made a hundred tiny mistakes.

Throughout the course of the battle, Rion had grown a lot. Much of his shakiness and lack of fluency slowly smoothed out as Rion learned many lessons.

However, this did not turn the self-trained dwarf into a proper mech pilot! The problem became worse as the Genie Pearl suffered more and more damage.

Rion failed to orient his mech so that its damaged side faced away from the bulk of his opponents.

Rion forgot that the left side of his mech could no longer attack. Several seconds went to waste as the Genie Pearl attempted to stab a knife that the mech had already dropped!

Rion did not sufficiently compensate the Genie Pearl's balance as it started to lose mass and power over several different sections. Several times, the Genie Pearl came close to tripping!

What pained Ves the most was that Rion no longer attempted to shield the Genie Pearl's rear. The fragile light mech only managed to remain functional up until now because its antigrav backpack kept compensating for the planet's gravity!

Although its power was already close to running out, the Genie Pearl still needed it to last long enough to finish off the ranged mechs!

"KILL!"

One of the five frontline mechs finally succumbed! Surprisingly, the guard mech on the right didn't fall from a stab.

Instead, its comrades ruthlessly poured their laser fire in its direction in an attempt to pile up the damage on the nimble ranged mech! A few laser beams just happened to burn through a critical node that caused the mech to lose all motive power!

The frontline mech soon tipped over, causing it to crash against the ground with a hefty impact due to the heavy gravity!

The fall of one of their comrades shocked the mech pilots. Their attack rhythm momentarily slowed, giving Rion a chance to approach another mech!

"Kick at the damaged knee section of the nearest mech!" Ves urged his host. "A battle wagon has already peeled off some of the armor protecting this joint. Once you damage the knee, the mech will buckle. Use this opportunity to stab into its exposed rear while using its bulk as a shield against enemy fire!"

The dwarf did as instructed. Though the light kick wasn't enough to snap the frontline mech's knee, it was enough to lock it up as several failsafes came online to freeze the leg in order to prevent the mech from falling!

The Genie Pearl, its coating marred by dozens of laser attacks, circled around the immobilized mech's rear and finished the job.

"Two down, three to go! You can do it, Rion!"

The dwarf released a wordless cry and threw all of his caution to the wind. His damaged mech advanced at one of the mechs and rapidly circled around in order to hinder the fire of its comrades.

"Three down!"

At this time, Rion finally understood the essence of light mechs. Though he wasn't a good mech pilot, all of those long hours of simulator practice hadn't been in vain!

His connection with his stolen mech deepened as Rion became more and more in tune with the mobility of his mech.

His performance slightly increased as Rion became more used to piloting a mech built in the image of the tall folk!

"I have to move faster!"

The Genie Pearl, though far from pristine, still had some fight left in it! With just a single functional arm and an antigrav backpack that was close to running out of energy, the light skirmisher was still an unfathomable opponent to the guard mechs!

"As long as I'm fast enough, I can outrun any laser!"

This was a ridiculous statement to Ves! He suppressed the urge to groan.

The only way for a mech to outrun a laser was to travel faster than the speed of light, which was a ridiculous notion in itself!

However, Rion's meaning wasn't entirely wrong. What he actually meant was that his Genie Pearl was still fast enough to outpace the enemy's weapon tracking!

"Our mech is close to collapsing!" Ves warned. "We can't incur anymore damage, especially to the antigrav backpack. Focus on taking out a laser weapon mount from each mech! Reducing their firepower is key to attaining victory!"

Defeating three of the five mechs had substantially lightened the pressure on the Genie Pearl.

This gave the light skirmisher enough of an opportunity to close in on a frontline mech and disable one of its weapon mounts!

Though frontline mechs often reinforced their exposed weapons against incidental fire, it did not take long for a melee mech to put it out of action!

Instead of trying to disable his current victim's other laser weapon mount, Rion listened to his god's advice and approached the last mech in order to do the same.

Soon enough, the enemy only possessed two intact laser weapons.

Even as the fourth enemy mech kept firing its sole intact laser beam at the Genie Pearl, Rion cleverly used the fifth frontline mech as a shield!

Because the light mech was hugging the damaged side of the fifth mech, its mech pilot was completely unable to bring its sole weapon to bear!

"It's over!"

One mech fell.

Just as the Genie Pearl turned towards the final enemy mech, a critical laser beam happened to land on an exposed section of its backpack armor!

After enduring so many laser attacks, the Genie Pearl exhibited a considerable amount of holes in its armor coverage. What was more, its vulnerable antigrav backpack also suffered some hits!

It only took one more attack to shut it down, and the only surviving enemy mech managed to land the critical hit!

The Genie Pearl abruptly slowed down as 3.6 g's suddenly acted on its frame. The abrupt transition not only slowed it to a crawl, but also caused its damaged internal structure to suffer further damage!

"No! I'm so close!" Rion despaired.

"DON'T GIVE UP!" Ves shouted. "THE FIGHT ISN'T OVER YET! YOUR MECH CAN STILL MOVE!"

Even though the Genie Pearl was almost on the verge of collapse, the mech slowly managed to regain its balance once Rion righted the machine.

"Advance!"

With heavy, heaving steps, the burdened light mech slowly approached its final opponent.

The only frontline mech left kept firing its only laser at the approaching light mech. Due to the Genie Pearl's loss of mobility, it was completely unable to stop the ranged attacks from targeting its weak points!

Not only that, the frontline mech also started stepping backwards, thereby lengthening the distance the Genie Pearl had to traverse in order to reach knife-fighting range!

"I won't make it! My mech is falling apart at the seams! I can feel its pain!"

"Don't give up! You're already very close to it! Just a dozen more steps! Rotate the torso of your mech to the left! The left arm is already useless, so just let it absorb some hits!"

Once the Genie Pearl rotated its torso, it not only exposed its most useless side, but also shielded its only remaining functional arm!

Therefore, even as the enemy frontline mech kept landing solid hits against its opponent, none of them managed to land the decisive blow!

It didn't help that the enemy mech pilot lacked the vision of a mech designer. Many of his attacks landed on sections that weren't very optimal!

In addition, the sequential fall of every other guard mech severely frazzled the mech pilot's confidence. Outpost 35 had largely fallen in the hands of the rebels and friendlies were nowhere to be seen!

His comm channels kept transmitting calls for distress and orders to retreat and guard the headquarters, the materials warehouse and the spaceport at the same time!

In contrast, Rion tried so hard to advance his half-crippled forward that he no longer paid attention to anything else! Not even the voice of his god could distract him from his final task!

"I... am.. faster!"

The difference between a light mech and a medium mech was still relevant. Though the Genie Pearl's mobility dropped even further due to all of its accumulated damage, its inherent advance in speed was not something that could be negated so easily!

Step after step, the smaller and lighter mech came closer and closer to its opponent.

After an agonizing couple of seconds, the Genie Pearl finally came within range!

"You're finished!"

The knife swept forward at a much-reduced speed. The gravity weighing down the mech along with the loss in power transmission weakened the force the mech was able to exert in its attack.

The knife missed its target!

Instead of hitting one of the holes in the enemy mech, the frontline mech possessed enough time to rotate its torso and lean backwards!

This caused the knife to bounce off an intact armor section!

"NOOO! THIS ISN'T OVER YET!"

Desperate to finish off the final mech, Rion madly drove his mech forward! The Genie Pearl only drew back its knife enough before driving it into a weak point with substantially more speed and force!

Ves looked stunned at the final attack!

Instead of relying on the failing systems of the Genie Pearl to deliver the final attack, Rion madly decided to trip his mech and rely on the falling motion to drive the knife into the frontline mech!

Two mechs collapsed on the ground with an earth-shattering impact! The Genie Pearl's cockpit justled as the light mech fell on top of the frontline mech!

"I did it! I defeated the final mech!"

Chapter 1937 TR-3851

Vanquishing the final mech of the guard force sealed the outcome of the battle. The dwarven rebels succeeded in their insurrection attempt!

Though the guard force still retained some combatants, their numbers were too few to overcome the surviving rebel dwarves.

There were too many rebels and too few tall folk!

Therefore, even if the dwarves lost their sole borrowed mech, the rebels still shouted in victory!

Outpost 35 was theirs! The rebels finally succeeded in their revenge against the tall folk! Most of their overseers and guards turned into corpses as the vengeful dwarves eagerly took advantage of their local superiority!

As the rebels declared victory, the rest of the dwarven population cautiously began to celebrate.

They weren't aware that this was only a temporary victory. They didn't know that reinforcements were probably on their way to recapture the fallen outpost.

All they cared about was that the tall folk were finally deposed! Many dwarves started to go crazy as they slowly waddled over to the central district in order to break into the luxurious homes and apartments of the tall folk!

Soon enough, the dwarves looted the possessions of the tall folk to their heart's content!

The jubilant dwarves dressed themselves in ill-fitting clothes.

They drank their first bottle of wine.

They filled their bellies with organic bread, crispy fresh fruit and other actual food.

For a time, Outpost 35 turned into a paradise for the liberated dwarves. With no tall folk in sight, the former slaves liberally acted on all of their repressed needs!

"No more rules! No more punishment! This outpost is ours from now on! We will never let the tall folk terrorize us again!"

While many of the dwarves were occupied with their newfound freedom, the rebels quietly started to head to the spaceport.

Situated a small distance away from the districts where the dwarves ordinarily resided, the spaceport was strictly off-limits to any of their ilk!

For years, the only reason a dwarf passed through the spaceport was if they were transferred in to bolster the existing workforce. Other than that, any dwarf who attempted to sneak into these restricted grounds were shot on sight!

An hour after the dwarves achieved victory, groups of rebels and their families continued to reach the spaceport.

They didn't reach this site by walking. They were far too slow to reach the spaceport on foot. Instead, they used lifter platforms, mining vehicles and other means of transportation to bring the dwarves to the only exit of the outpost.

Every rebel and their family looked forward to leaving.

"Look at that giant hole above our heads. Is that really..?"

"Master Greybeard told me that this hole leads outwards into 'space'. He said that as long as we board a ship, we can escape the gravity of our planet and fly to the heavens!"

Some of the dwarves looked happy. Others looked scared. A few even glanced back in the direction of the outpost districts.

"Are we abandoning the dwarves in the city?" A teenage dwarf asked his mother.

"We are."

"Why? Some of them are my friends! I can't leave them behind!"

The short-statured woman shook her head. "We can't fit too many dwarves on the ship."

"That's stupid! Just look at the size of that ship! Entire mining vehicles can fit inside the belly!"

"How much food do we have? How much water? How much oxygen?" The dwarven mother looked sad. "Great Vulcan personally told us that the transport ship won't be able to fit more than a couple of hundred dwarves, and only for a limited time. The more dwarves we bring, the more we strain the ship. This is why we can't bring your friends."

"What.. will happen to them, mother?"

"I don't know."

In fact, every adult dwarf knew that the dwarves who were revelling in the outpost wouldn't meet a good end. Once the tall folk reinforcements arrived at the outpost, they would probably retaliate against any dwarf in sight!

The rebels, though furious at this possible outcome, could do nothing to stave off the wrath of the tall folk!

The rebellion only won because they overwhelmed an undermanned, underequipped and unprepared guard force.

Now that they emerged in the open and lost the element of surprise, the rebels were completely vulnerable to retaliation!

Not only their lives, but the lives of their fellow dwarves were forfeit!

Since their fate was sealed if they stayed, the only way out was to flee the planet and escape the reach of House Kantis.

At least this way allowed a portion of the dwarves of Outpost 35 to live on and spread their deeds.

An armored dwarf eventually approached the crowd of milling dwarves.

"Alright laddies, the 'ship' is ready to take you in. Step onto the lifter platforms as they come and they'll bring you into the 'cargo hold'!"

As the dwarves began entering the massive cargo hold of the ship, elsewhere on the vessel a group of dwarves were observing their god hacking the systems of the transport vessel.

In fact, Ves could have gained access to the ship much faster if the dwarves took the captain and crew hostage.

The vengeful rebels were too eager. They forgot about their orders to force their opponents to surrender and just shot their bodies until they were no longer in one piece!

Fortunately, the security systems of the ship were fairly awful. Although her crew was diligent enough to keep them up to date, the ship called the TR-3851 was far from matching the security of the Scarlet Rose.

The only reasons why Ves took longer into taking over the TR-3851's command privileges was because he lacked good hacking software and because he wanted to do a thorough job.

It would be a catastrophe if Ves somehow overlooked a backdoor that allowed her owners to regain control of the transport ship!

Time was running out, though, so Ves wrapped up his explorations for later. "The ship is under my control. Since none of you are able to crew the ship, I'll be operating her in dummy mode. Her performance will drop, but that won't affect our escape too much."

Ever dwarf in the compartment bowed in front of their god.

"Thank you for your blessing, Vulcan!"

"You're welcome." Ves casually shrugged his possessed body.

A few minutes later, the hatch to the bridge slid open and a dwarf slowly strode forward.

A handful of dwarves had already gathered here. The most prominent among them was Gion Greybeard, who still clutched the Banner of Vulcan as if it was the most precious treasure of the dwarf race!

"Great Vulcan!"

Each of the dwarves bowed and conveyed their deepest respect towards their god! None of them believed their rebellion could have ever made it this far if not for Vulcan's many blessings!

Their eyes glowed with worship as they beheld Rion's body.

It was clear that Vulcan was in control. The god adopted a much more confident posture than a typical dwarf, and his glow was unmistakably divine.

"All of the dwarves we intend to bring out have entered the cargo hold." Gion stated. "Are we ready to leave? I am rather concerned the tall folk will cut off our escape."

Ves didn't reply immediately. He directed his possessed body to step onto a small crate and sit in the captain's chair.

He used his new command permissions to access the captain's interface and slowly bring the ship online.

In fact, the previous captain had already gone through most of the startup sequence. It was a pity that he and many of the tall folk at the spaceport underestimated the ferocity of the dwarves!

It only took ten more minutes for the TR-3851 to finish her startup sequence. As Ves activated the vessel's dummy mode, he didn't even need to take direct control over her helm.

Like a bot, the vessel turned into an obedient artificial pet, especially after Ves flipped a few emergency switches that allowed for such widespread control.

While Ves commanded the ship to ascend and overcome the planet's heavy gravity, he accessed her sensor and communication systems.

He let out a sigh of relief. "Our way shouldn't be blocked. According to the logs and previous observational data, House Kantis didn't bother to station any guard forces or defensive platforms in orbit. The tall folk are also too late in dispatching reinforcements. While a couple of ships are already on their way to our outpost, as long as we ascend into the air first, the tall folk won't be able to catch up as they're carrying at least a squad of mechs!"

House Kantis did not station a single dedicated carrier vessel on this planet. Instead, a couple of transport ships made the rounds.

Not every outpost of base housed a ship. The transport vessels were constantly needed to transport ore, water and other goods between Desala X and Desala V.

This was why it took a lot of time for the tall folk to dispatch one of their transports to an outpost with a larger guard presence and load up all of their mechs and troops!

Even though the tall folk attempted to dispatch their forces to Outpost 35 as fast as possible, the delays still bought enough time for the TR-3851 to blaze upwards and escape the humongous gravity well that had kept the dwarves trapped for their entire lives!

In order to make the dwarves understand where they were heading to, Ves helpfully projected a view of the outside as well as a map of the local star system in front of the other dwarves.

"This.. this is incredible! Have we entered heaven?"

"No! This isn't heaven! This is emptiness! There is no rock in the sky! We are falling into an endless pit!"

"I'm scared! There is only darkness up ahead! Where are we going?!"

Though the ignorant dwarves weren't coping too well, Gion Greybeard and the other leaders among the rebels did their best to reassure the hysterical dwarves and assuage some of their worries.

Even if they didn't know what they were talking about, they at least managed to calm everyone down.

Right now, every dwarf believed Vulcan and Gion Greybeard. The two had worked together to achieve the impossible and give the dwarves an entirely new lease on life!

That said, even Gion didn't really understand the complete picture.

After the TR-3851 entered deep space, Ves programmed her trajectory to head straight to the edge of the star system. Because of Desala X's distance from the sun, it shouldn't take long until the ship was ready to engage her FTL drive!

While worn and neglected, the transport ship was still capable of FTL travel! Ves dutifully studied Smiling Samuel's star map and identified the nearest star system which the dwarves could apply for asylum in person.

Along the way, Ves also wanted to make another stop.

Once he programmed the route into the navigation systems, he slid off the captain's chair and approached Gion Greybeard with a spry step.

Once the ship left Desala X, every dwarf became subject to the ship's artificial gravity.

Unfortunately, the maximum setting did not go higher 1.5 g! Ves couldn't crank up the gravity any further!

This caused many of the dwarves to grow busy or walk around like they were drunk and on the verge of floating in the air.

Only Ves managed to retain his dignity as he moved his possessed body forward.

"We need to talk." He softly told Gion.

The old dwarf nodded. "Please lead the way, my lord."

The two dwarves exited the bridge and entered a nearby office compartment.

Ves didn't bother taking a seat. He wanted to get right to the point!

"Where is the ore? Where is my Timpala Steel?"

"It is with my men in the cargo hold." Gion steadily replied. "Is there any way we can keep this

rock?"

"No. We made a deal. Your freedom for this rock. I have upheld my end of the deal. It is time for you and your people to pay the price for my assistance."

The bearded dwarf looked troubled at this response.

Chapter 1938 Vindictive

TR-3851 belonged to a bog-standard transport ship class. Ves had even seen similar ships flying in his native star sector, which showed how much value the class provided to its customers.

For a ship built to last for a century, their robustness and ease of maintenance was paramount. This was not easy to achieve if the starship manufacturer wanted to minimize the cost of construction, but somehow this specific transport ship class managed to achieve an appropriate balance.

The TR-3851 wasn't the fastest, safest or most secure transport, but she was definitely one of the more reliable vessels he had seen.

Even in dummy mode, the ship exhibited very few problems despite lacking a crew. House Kantis also exerted a bit more effort into maintaining the TR-3851, but this was likely due to the ship's frequent trips to Desala V, the jewel of House Kantis.

Regardless, aside from her sturdy construction and resilient components, the TR-3851 was still a ship characterized by the demands of the market. Aside from the need to make her last as long as possible, the ship designers cheated out in many different aspects.

One of the areas she obviously lacked in was the low upper limit of her artificial gravity system.

Even confined in the manned compartments, the ship was unable to replicate the gravity of Desala X.

This gave the dwarves a lot of discomfort. Many dwarves had already grown nauseous to the point of vomiting. Ves had to raid the very limited infirmary and issue sedatives to the most severely-affected dwarves.

In the long-term, the dwarves risked growing weaker. Human bodies constantly adapted to the environment, and just like transport ships, they always sought to minimize their costs and increase their efficiency.

Why maintain a body that was strong enough to withstand 4.6 g when it only needed to adapt to 1.5 g?

Usually, dwarves venturing outside their optimal habitats tended to wear gravity belts that constantly amplified their weight.

It was too bad the former miners of Outpost 35 lacked such luxuries. The rebels possessed much higher priorities when they planned their escape. They never seriously considered their next steps after gaining their freedom. They were seriously lacking in information of the rest the galaxy.

While most dwarves became sick or lethargic due to the change in circumstances, a group of armored dwarves were quietly gathering in front of the entrance of the cabin that used to belong to the captain.

Eight of the most loyal and committed rebels that Gion Greybeard could command had answered his call.

He left behind the Banner of Vulcan in his own cabin down the corridor.

"Are you ready?" Gion quietly asked.

The armored dwarves softly stamped the deck with their armored feet. They were fully helmeted and they were all carrying fully-replenished plasma projectors, handheld mining lasers and even a sledgehammer!

The dwarves were geared for combat.

"As soon as we breach this hatch, don't slow down no matter what. Remember what we are fighting for. For the sake of our fellow dwarves, we need to do everything possible to better their lives, even if it means condemning our souls to eternal torment!"

The notion of attacking a god, especially one that had aided their people so much, was almost unthinkable to the rebels!

This was why Gion only invited the dwarves who were most likely to obey his intentions.

"Don't show any mercy. Just kill whoever is inside regardless if you are facing Rion or Vulcan. Both of their lives are tied. Even if Vulcan has left, he can always return so long as our comrade stays alive. For the good of our people, we need to sacrifice Rion so that we can stave off Vulcan's wrath!"

At this point, no one pleaded for Rion's life!

Even though he was their only mech pilot, even if he single-handedly defeated a dozen guard mechs, even if he was the chosen vessel of a god, Rion needed to die to retain possession of the wonder ore!

As long as the dwarves were able to offer Timpala Steel to the mighty MTA, the humans would never ignore their demands!

Once Gion made peace with his choice, he chopped his hand forward.

"Breach the hatch."

A couple of armored dwarves stepped forward. They held some old-fashioned plasma cutters and loudly began to cut a rectangular section through the hatch!

The ship's cheap interior design meant that the dwarves only encountered some hindrances in their attempt to breach the captain's cabin.

Eventually, the dwarves shut off their plasma cutters and pushed the cut-off section forward.

Once the block of metal had been pushed aside, the dwarves stepped into the cabin as quickly as they could under the unusually-light gravity.

As Gion carefully stepped over the heated portions with his short legs, he halted in surprise.

Their target was awake. Even in the middle of the night shift, Rion sat on top of the bed with his simple miner uniform as if he had never gone to bed!

What was even stranger was that the dwarf was crying despite his calm expression!

The incongruent sight briefly weirded out the rebel leader, but that did not deter him from his goal!

"What are you waiting for?" Gion puzzlingly frowned. "This is not the time to second-guess our choice! Shoot him before it's too late!"

"Our weapons aren't working!"

"What?!"

The dwarves hadn't withheld their fire because they were caught off-guard. Their armored fingers were constantly pulling the triggers or buttons of their improvised weapons, to no avail!

The crying dwarf stared calmly at the befuddled rebel dwarves as their weapons all ceased to function without exception!

"Vulcan is too powerful!"

"It was a mistake to attack a god!"

"How could our weapons fail?"

Ves observed their confusion with grim amusement. "Turning your weapons against your god? Foolish dwarves! I crafted those weapons myself! Each of them are extensions of my own will!"

Gion slowly looked at the possessed body with horror. "You knew."

"I've been betrayed too many times to count to let down my guard. I have become accustomed to accounting for betrayal, especially when others possess very compelling reasons to stab me in the back. I really hoped you dwarves turn out to be better than the tall folk, but in the end you are just as human as your taller cousins! Besides, did you really think your infantile plot was hidden from my eyes? I am the master of this ship. Her monitoring system is under my complete control. I may not be here in my full guise, but I am as good as omnipotent on this ship!"

The dwarves hardly doubted his words. Every time they met Vulcan, the god had performed one miracle after another. His power was far more encompassing than any of the rebels anticipated!

Something suddenly snapped inside Gion's mind. "It's an act! Vulcan wants to scare us into submission! Don't buy into his words! Even if our weapons can't fire, we can still beat him up with our hammers!"

The armored dwarves immediately did as instructed. They threw aside their inert plasma projectors, handheld mining lasers and other weapons blessed by Vulcan.

Afterwards, they held their sledgehammers, pickaxes, knives and other implements. Their low-tech nature provided Ves with no opportunity to hack their systems!

Even though Rion's body never stopped crying, his expression still remained calm and in control.

Just as the armored dwarves stepped forward, they all began to float in the air.

The thick soles of their improvised combat armor failed to find any purchase on the deck!

"We're flying!"

"Vulcan has eaten our gravity!"

"Forgive us, Vulcan!"

Ves released his finger from a small projected interface from the comm he commandeered from the former captain of the ship.

He openly shook his head in disappointment at the sight of the floating dwarves. They truly knew nothing about ships. Even if Ves was alone, his command privileges allowed him to manipulate every system of the ship without limits!

The dwarves attempted to throw their melee weapons at Vulcan in desperation, but the heavy objects merely stopped in place before travelling too far.

Though the dwarves couldn't see it, Ves had already turned half the cabin into an invisible gravity trap!

If the dwarves wore proper combat armor, then their magboots would have been able to anchor bodies onto the deck.

If the dwarves were actually knowledgeable about ships, then Gion would have chosen to betray Ves earlier.

If the dwarves hadn't been so greedy about retaining the wonder ore for themselves, then they wouldn't have attracted the ire of a god!

Both Ves and Rion knew these truths. The reason why the dwarf pilot's body was constantly leaking tears was because its original owner knew that a tragedy was about to ensue!

As the dwarves impotently flailed around in the air, Ves no longer felt the need to give them any further chances. His possessed body slid off the bed and calmly stepped forward until he reached a discarded plasma projector.

Ves still remembered cobbling this specific weapon together. He casually fiddled with its frame in order to trigger a hidden backdoor.

Several indicator lights on the weapon began to glow as the plasma projector came to life. A low whine sounded as the weapon's chambers started to heat up the cooling plasma.

"It's truly a shame." Ves muttered without guilt. "Your people need your leadership. Without you all, the remaining dwarves on this ship will have to navigate this heartless galaxy without your guidance."

"Spare us, then!"

Ves chuckled. "You should have thought of that before launching this ill-conceived betrayal. Even if I am the God of Dwarves, I will never allow my subjects to tarnish my dignity! The punishment for attempting to break a divine contract and slaughtering my avatar is death!"

He fired a plasma bolt at the first armored dwarf. Searing heat and light instantly engulfed the cabin before a cloud of ashes and an ugly collection of scorched flesh and metal parts took his place!

Ves fired a second time. He fired a third time. He fired a fourth time.

Dwarf after dwarf met their end regardless of their pleas and cries for mercy. Ves completely closed his ears to their remorseful begging.

Since they made the choice to attack a god, they should suffer the consequences of their blasphemous betrayal!

Even after the plasma projector ran out of plasma, Ves simply dropped the weapon and picked up another one to finish the job!

In the end, only two dwarves in the cabin remained alive.

Gion Greybeard watched on with a grim and lifeless expression as his god slaughtered his fellow conspirators without any mercy!

Ves dropped the half-spent plasma projector and activated his comm again. Soon enough, a port in the ceiling opened up which sucked away all of the floating ashes, debris and body remains!

Some fresh air pumped through the ventilation system, allowing Ves to get rid of the nasty smell of death.

"You're not a god." Gion suddenly said.

"Pardon?" Rion's body raised its eyebrow.

"You are not a god." Gion repeated. "Even if you have us in your grasp, you are just like the tall folk. They always throw their weight around when they think they have all the power. Yesterday showed that they are far weaker than we thought. I think the same applies to you. Am I right, Vulcan?"

A sly smile appeared on Rion's face. "I like your spirit. More dwarves should think this way. However, just because you think the gods are fallible, it is a grave mistake to turn your back on our deal. This wasn't needed, Gion. I would have found a way to save your people without using up the Timpala Steel."

Gion bent his head in regret. "You're right, but.."

"It's too late."

The bearded dwarf nodded.

"I have one last request, my lord."

"Ask. You deserve at least that much, Gion."

"Will you continue to guide our dwarves to safety? Please don't hold our actions against the hundreds of dwarves who are huddling in the cargo hold. I've never involved them in our betrayal because they are too devoted to you to go along with our plan. They are good, honest dwarves who will continue to worship you as long as they are alive!"

The tear-streaked face of Rion gradually nodded. "I will ensure that the dwarves on this ship and the dwarves left behind on Desala X are saved. I won't punish them for your transgressions. I am a just god, not a vindictive one. Any last words?"

"Death to the tall folk!"

The rebel leader died after Ves stabbed his neck with a knife picked up from the deck.

The tears on Rion's face doubled as his body collapsed after his god surrendered control of his body.

Chapter 1939 Undeserved

Days after Gion Greybeard's attempted betrayal, TR-3851 emerged in a quiet red dwarf system.

According to the transport ship's database, there was practically nothing of value in this worthless, lifeless star system.

Though it was a bit too close to the Desala System for his liking, Ves was running out of time. This Mastery experience lasted far too long already. He really didn't have the time to leave the territory of the Paramount Kingdom and bury his treasure in an even more obscure star system!

As a result, Ves had to make do with the Trion Enze System.

After making sure there wasn't any ships or signs of human life, Ves instructed the ship to travel to the inner asteroid belt.

While the ship made way, Ves continued to move his possessions around the ship in order to tweak the transport ship's systems.

While TR-3851 wasn't the most sophisticated ship he had ever seen, Ves wanted to make sure to erase every single log or record of her route.

No one was allowed to find out that TR-3851 visited the Trion Enze System!

It was easy to keep the dwarves in the dark. Most of them were confined in the cargo hold where they did nothing but sit on their thumbs while trying to adjust to the reduced gravity.

While Gion Greybeard and his most trusted men had died, Ves decided to withhold the news from the rest for the time being.

While the dwarves in the dark were already starting to ask questions, their trust in Vulcan was still strong! After Ves instructed the rest of the rebel cadre to keep their people in line, the dwarves no longer posed any trouble for the time being.

No one else had access to the ship's systems except Ves and his host. For the time being, Ves did not give Rion any chance of respite except for sleep.

Every waking moment, Ves continued to scour through every section of the ship. He tampered with the sensor system, the navigation system, the communication system and more in order to ensure the ship was as untrackable as possible.

In fact, one of the first steps he did was to manually dismantle the quantum entanglement node that connected the ship to the galactic net.

He didn't just isolate this crucial component or switched off its control system. He ripped the entire component out of its place and wrecked it until it was nothing but a pile of broken scrap!

This was just one of the many extreme measures that Ves resorted to in order to ensure the ship would not leave any clues behind. He just needed to retain enough functionality to reach a couple destinations while keeping his passengers alive. Everything else was completely redundant!

Once TR-3851 reached the asteroid belt, Ves observed the sensor input closely until he identified a large and distinctive-looking hook-shaped asteroid floating in the belt.

He memorized the mineral composition and other characteristics of this specific asteroid.

Though no asteroid remained completely the same after many years of floating alongside countless other rocks, Ves had no other choice but to draw the equivalent of a treasure map in his mind in this fashion.

There was no way Ves entrusted his Timpala Steel to anyone else.

He considered several alternatives.

For example, he thought about mailing the ore to the Komodo Star Sector, but how could a dwarf ever pay for it? How could he trust a courier company to faithfully keep his parcel secure for several decades?

He also ruled out stashing the ore in a bank. If Timpala Steel was just a regular chunk of high-grade exotic, then Ves didn't have much to fear that a bank would stoop to robbing its own customers.

It was a difficult case for a substance that was worthy enough to earn the System's notice!

Ves wouldn't put it past the MTA or the Paramount Kingdom to swoop in and serve an official document to the bank that allowed them to commandeer the Timpala Steel!

He was so paranoid that he even ruled out the Shadow Couriers, who even in this time period already fostered a reputation of reliability in the underground community!

"I won't be there to 'get my money back' if the Shadow Couriers fumble my parcel." Ves dryly noted.

Ves possessed no identity, money or reputation in this time period. It was seventy years in the past, so he wasn't even born yet. His grandfather Benjamin was likely still a young but prominent expert pilot in the Mech Corps.

For some time, Ves felt tempted to take advantage of his future knowledge to affect the course of history.

He could have sent a message to his grandfather that would warn him of the battle that led to his crippling.

Even if his grandfather didn't take the message from a random stranger seriously, he might still keep some of Ves' words in mind and avoid permanent damage to his brain!

Yet Ves resolutely refused to resort to this option in the end. He instinctively felt that interfering with the course of history might lead to very severe consequences, both to the timeline and to himself!

What if his grandfather died in battle? What if his grandfather never met the wife that would birth Ark and Ryncol?

What if his grandfather raised his children in a different way?

What if Ryncol was born as a girl rather than a boy?

What if Ves never had a chance to be born because his father never came into existence?

All of these what-ifs continued to frighten Ves so much that he resolutely swore off any attempts to affect the Larkinsons!

Even if he had good intentions, Ves truly did not want to return to a future where the Larkinsons no longer existed or where his mother had never met his father!

While he didn't exactly like his current life, Ves didn't want to exchange it for anything else. All of the good and bad he experienced throughout his lifetime turned him into a successful and exceptional mech designer.

Of course, even if Ves did not wish to affect the course of history, his actions during his Mastery experiences had already altered the original timeline.

Whether the present time he lived in was already affected by his actions in the past before he underwent his Mastery experience was a question that Ves did not bother entertaining.

He doubted the System would allow Ves to do anything that affected its own interests. Confining his actions to the Smiling Samuel Star Sector was the most Ves could get away with. Even if the changes in this star sector rippled out to the rest of the galaxy, it was doubtful that his actions resulted in a major upheaval elsewhere.

Once TR-3851 maneuvered close to the hook-shaped asteroid, a hatch opened up. A small floating mining vehicle emerged from the hatch. Ves piloted the vehicle to the surface of the asteroid and landed it into the deepest pit on the immense rock.

Soon enough, the mining vehicle began to drill into the rock at a steady pace. Ves continued to dig until he reached the center.

After that, the vehicle planted a heavily-reinforced crate in the asteroid before retreating back to the surface, collapsing the tunnel and fusing the drilled rock back together as it gradually emerged in the open.

Once the vehicle reached the transport ship, the ship slowly withdrew from the asteroid belt and moved to translate out of the system.

Just to be sure, Ves also commanded the ship to approach the orbit of one of Trion Enze's gas giant in order to dump the mining vehicle and some other potentially-incriminating objects.

By now, large portions of the transport ship were already crippled, but Ves didn't care. The TR-3851 just had to make it far enough to reach a star system with a substantial MTA presence.

After the transport ship transitioned into FTL, Ves planted some improvised explosions and programmed some timed instructions into the ship's systems.

Time was running out. As soon as Ves dug the wonder ore into the asteroid, his consciousness faintly started to feel some attraction.

The System was calling him back. Now that he secured the Timpala Steel, there was no point to prolonging this Mastery experience any longer!

Ves hurried up with his final preparations before surrendering control of Rion's body to its original owner.

Rion looked numbed at the incomprehensible consoles of the bridge.

He hadn't gotten over Gion Greybeard's death.

Though his grief had settled, the memories of his own body stabbing his leader's neck would always haunt him in his dreams!

"Are you leaving, my lord?"

"I am." Ves mentally replied. "I am no longer needed here. There are countless dwarves in human space who still need my help."

"I.."

"Whatever you may think, once you made your bed, you need to lie in it. Gion Greybeard acted against my intentions on his own accord and suffered the consequences of his own decision."

"He didn't have to die!"

"You're still too naive. If you ever have a chance to grow up, you'll learn that the galaxy is a hundred times crueler than Desala X. The indignities you've suffered at your former home are trivial compared to the tragedies that take place on the galactic scale!"

While Rion wasn't the brightest tool in the shed, he couldn't help but shudder in fear.

"You.. are you going to kill me?"

Ves didn't answer.

"Why? I never thought about violating your dignity! I devoted myself to you! I surrendered my body to you! I had nothing to do with Gion's betrayal!"

"You know too much. I don't need to kill you after you have betrayed my trust. I just have to end your life before the MTA has a chance of extracting all of your memories and secrets from your body. You can't imagine how powerful they are and how much their technology is capable of. Even if you are determined to keep your mouth shut, the MTA has countless ways of extracting information out of you. In order to prevent you from leaking my divine secrets, you'll need to make the ultimate sacrifice."

"This.. this isn't fair.."

"Life isn't fair, kid." Ves mentally shook his head. "I don't like this anymore than you do, but it is the only solution that minimizes the risk that someone manages to dig my treasure."

Rion practically collapsed onto his seat. The dwarven mech pilot fought so hard to achieve his promised freedom. Now that he finally liberated himself from the oppression of the tall folk, his god wanted to kill him because he couldn't be trusted!

He wanted to live!

He wanted to see the galaxy!

He wanted to lead his dwarves to freedom!

Why did his god force him on the road of death?

What could he do to save his life so that he could fulfill all of his ambitions?

"Please! I'll keep your secrets! I promise!"

"Promises aren't enough."

"You're a god, aren't you?! Can't you scour my memories from my mind?"

This suggestion actually didn't sound that bad. Ves seriously considered this question. The problem was that even if Ves messed with Rion's mind and spirit, his flesh would still hold a copy of the memories that Ves wanted to wipe.

If Ves was a doctor or had access to Ranya Wodin, then he probably would have been able to fulfill the dwarf's wish.

Sadly, Ves lacked this vital expertise, so he had to resort to a more drastic solution to silence this potential vulnerability.

All the while, the pull to his consciousness increased. The System really wanted to end this Mastery experience!

Ves mentally sighed.

"I'm sorry, Rion, but time is running out. I'm sorry I can't give you the time to bid farewell to your comrades or make peace with your end. However, I have already made sure to include a record of your life and accomplishments in the database of this ship. Your physical body may die, but your memory will always live on through the memories of your fellow dwarves. You are a hero to your people, Rion. You will be honored as such for times to come."

"I.. thank you, my lord." Rion looked downcast.

"Are you ready?"

"I'm not."

Ves ruefully smiled. "No one looks forward to their death. I don't blame you for feeling this way. Again, I'm sorry, Rion. In a different time and circumstance, I would have been able to preserve your life."

He no longer let Rion speak. Instead, he hijacked the dwarf's body once again and slowly withdrew a ballistic pistol from a belt holster.

Ves had looted the weapon from the former crew of the transport ship. He personally serviced it in order to make sure it functioned properly.

He lifted the pistol and pressed its muzzle against Rion's temple.

"This is goodbye, dwarf. Even if your fellow dwarves forget your name, I will always honor your contributions!"

A loud boom echoed in the bridge as a dwarven finger pulled the trigger!

Chapter 1940 Salvageable

When the TR-3851 transitioned out of FTL, she emerged in a populated star system under the control of a different noble house of the Paramount Kingdom.

The ship still flew under the identity of a transport ship under the control of House Kantis.

Though her arrival at this star system was unexpected, the ship did not catch anyone's notice.

It was only when the ship started flying straight towards an MTA space station while transmitting a lot of data in every direction that people started taking notice!

Though Ves had already trashed the TR-3851's quantum entanglement node and many other systems, he still retained enough unidirectional broadcast arrays to flood the local space with mountains of data!

Most of the data consisted of extensive documentation and footage of the exploitation of the dwarves by House Kantis.

Plenty of trade ships and other vessels flying in and out of the star system captured the data first.

Soon enough, one of the vessels rapidly proliferated the data through the galactic net!

Enemies and rivals of House Kantis quickly pounced on the data and tried to publicize it as much as possible!

Even if they were already aware of the shenanigans that took place at Desala X, every noble house had made an unspoken agreement to avoid airing each other's dirty laundry.

However, this rule didn't apply if third parties were already doing their best to besmirch a noble house's reputation!

The data that Ves collected and organized all consisted of strong proof. From raw and untampered footage to a mountain of official documentation, Ves provided a very

compelling collection set of files that strongly indicated that House Kantis egregiously robbed the dwarves of their basic human rights!

This wasn't enough to condemn House Kantis. However, it was more than sufficient to evoke outrage and call attention to what was truly going on at Desala X.

Regardless of whether the accusations were true or false, the public outrage quickly grew to a point where a greater authority within the Paramount Kingdom was forced to investigate the suspected slave operation!

Naturally, if the royal house or a branch of the kingdom led the investigation, then there was a good chance the misdeeds of House Kantis would be swept under the rug.

Every member of the upper echelon of the Paramount Kingdom was in collusion with each other to an extent. The diminished state was far from its height and the rot continued to seep into its roots.

Ves already anticipated Paramount's desire to suppress the scandal, so he never directed his message to the nobles to begin with. He just wanted to spread the word among the public in order to keep another party in check!

While the TR-3851's data broadcasts was primarily directed towards the MTA, the local branch of the powerful organization was not inclined to pay attention.

Paramount was a poor and insignificant third-rate state to the mechers. They had much more important concerns to worry about!

Gion Greybeard was right to suspect that the MTA wouldn't be moved by the obvious injustice that took place on Desala X.

To be fair, injustices to the same degree happened all over human space. The dwarves were hardly the only deprived folk who lived under oppression.

At the very least they were still properly clothed and fed!

However, the MTA quickly changed its tune when the TR-3851 transmitted a very explosive message.

"Timpala Steel can be found on Desala X. A small sample of the ore that can be refined into Timpala Steel is stored on this ship."

The data stream then proceeded to transmit detailed scanning data of the sample. The evidence was so convincing that a lot of vessels in the star system immediately began to divert to the TR-3851!

However, a half hour after the bystanders attempted to reach the ship, a small portal formed at the side of the hijacked transport ship!

A small but deadly MTA frigate emerged from the portal! The ship immediately deployed a couple of mechs to patrol the perimeter.

The MTA vessel didn't need to dispatch any shuttles to secure the transport ship.

Instead, the frigate directly teleported a boarding crew throughout the ship!

A group of tall folk in armor immediately emerged in the cargo hold, panicking the distressed and confused dwarves!

Another group of MTA marines emerged on the bridge and immediately started to take control of the transport ship.

A third group teleported at the infirmary where a number of dwarves were in the middle of mourning their hero's passing.

When a couple of dwarves finally encountered Rion Aaden's corpse at the bridge, they were devastated!

Gion Greybeard's disappearance already caused them to lose one of their pillars of support.

The death of their only mech pilot completely caused them to despair!

The MTA lieutenant that led the small squad observed the grieving dwarves and the body stored in the shabby medical chamber with a stoic expression.

"Tall folk!"

Once the dwarves realized that a group of normal humans emerged in their midst, they senselessly charged at the armored figures!

One of the marines discharged an energy wave that caused the dwarves to lose strength and collapse onto the deck!

"Interesting." The lieutenant murmured as he stepped past the crowd of dwarves until he loomed over the chamber.

The corpse made for an ugly sight. The gaping hole in the head and the poor condition of the rest of the body meant that the dwarf was undeniably dead!

"Is this the source?" He softly asked.

"Get away from our ace pilot, tall folk!" One of the stunned dwarves managed to regain some of his strength! "Our great Rion is blessed by Vulcan! The God of Dwarves will smite you for murdering our hero!"

The lieutenant furrowed his brows. "We did not kill this dwarf."

"You lie! You tall folk always lie!"

"Would you still accuse us of this if we bring him back to life?"

"You.. what?"

"We are part of the Mech Trade Association. This body might be a corpse in your eyes, but in our perspective, there is plenty of tissue left of your 'hero' to reconstruct his body. While we are unable to guarantee he can be restored in full, his body is anything but unsalvageable."

Hope started to well in the eyes of the dwarves.

As the MTA took stock of the TR-3851, Ves' consciousness travelled far and wide across space and time!

After an indeterminate time, his consciousness eventually sunk back into his own mind and body!

Ves was ready to resume his old life!

There was just one problem.

"Why am I not waking up?"

After a few sluggish minutes passed, Ves discovered to his horror that his body seemed unresponsive!

His current state was unprecedented! His consciousness hadn't fully integrated back into the center of his mind, therefore causing it to be detached from the state of his body!

"This is weird. What is going on? What has happened to my body?!"

Ves slowly took stock of his situation and realized that while his body remained unresponsive, his Spirituality was fully accessible and under his control!

Perhaps he could take advantage of this to make sense of his current condition.

He focused and forced a portion of his Spirituality to venture outside his mind.

He soon discovered what while he was capable of sensing some spiritual senses such as Gloriana, the Golden Cat and some of his mechs, he wasn't able to observe his surroundings with his normal senses!

His current condition resembled the time where he astrally projected a part of his Spirituality into the imaginary realm.

The biggest issue right now was that he was blind to the material realm!

Could he solve this problem?

"There's probably a way. Otherwise, how else can my intangible mother interact with the material realm?"

His mother could obviously see and hear what was going on around her. Despite her lack of flesh outside the crystal builder leader's body, she was still able to interact with Ves and Lucky without any issue!

Ves tried to fumble around for a bit. He tried but failed to shape his Spirituality in a way that allowed him to reconstruct his sense of sight or sound.

"This is harder than it seems!"

He possessed no foundation in this kind of technique. His half-baked theories and guesses all turned out to be nonsense as his experiments continually failed.

"Wait a minute. Why should I reinvent the wheel when others have obviously already figured the required techniques?"

He wasn't alone in his spiritual wizardry! Aside from his absent mother, Ves could beg for help from a range of spiritual entities!

After a bit of thought, he decided to approach the Golden Cat. He still possessed an active spiritual bond with the ancestral spirit, so it didn't take very long for him to spiritually hail the cat.

"Hey Goldie, I'm back! My body seems to be recovering from the implant surgery, but my consciousness is back to normal!"

Nyaa?!

The Golden Cat, who was likely residing in the Larkinson Mandate, reacted with surprise at Ves' spiritual reappearance!

Nyaaa~!

Like a kitten yearning after her mother, Goldie affectionately embraced his spiritual projection.

"Hahaha, I missed you too. I've been out for a while. How is the Larkinson Clan faring?"

Nyaaa... nyaa....

"What?! A lot of Larkinsons have died?! Who killed them? When did they die?"

The Golden Cat wasn't able to communicate the full details, but she conveyed enough information to get him up to speed.

"The Ylvaine Protectorate surrendered to the Friday Coalition?! The CRC launched an ambush on our clan with the help of foreign mercenaries?! Larkinson mech pilots died to repel the surprise attack?! My personal chef tried to assassinate me?! What the hell?!"

Ves first became alarmed. Then he turned furious!

The betrayal of one of the men he trusted to operate his brain was a horrible misstep. He had failed to investigate the exobiologist! He never imagined that the Friday Coalition was able to compromise one of his closest subordinates!

What happened afterwards made him even angrier. The Friday Coalition not only targeted his life, but even convinced the Protectorate government to dance to its tune!

Though the Golden Cat didn't convey too many details, Ves could easily figure out the reason why the government turned against the Bright Martyr.

He didn't blame the Ylvainans too much. They were under heavy pressure from the Friday Coalition and the surrounding hostile states to defect to their club.

What truly made him angry was that the Friday Coalition and the CRC simply wouldn't let him go!

"I was already planning to leave this stupid star sector! Why must you hound me and threaten my life?! It's not enough for you to aim at my life. Killing my fellow Larkinsons is a step too far! Blood must be repaid with blood!"

Ves was not a vindictive mech designer, but right now his entire Spirituality thrummed with fury!

He wanted to make the Friday Coalition pay!

He wanted the Hexadric Hegemony to win the Komodo War!

He wanted to kill Lady Aisling and Patricia in person for embroiling him into a feud with the CRC!

"I need to wake up! I can't remain stuck into a coma forever!"

He remembered why he contacted the Golden Cat and quickly requested her to teach him how to observe his surroundings in a Spiritual fashion.

Nyaaaaa? Nyaaaa.

Though the Golden Cat was surprised that Ves wasn't able to do so, she was eager to show him how to perceive the material realm through pure Spirituality.

The technique was very profound. It was so complicated that Ves immediately grew confused!

"Stop! Don't teach me this method! Don't you have a simpler one? I just need to observe my immediate surroundings."

Nyaaa.

Several hours passed by as the Golden Cat slowly instructed Ves on how to construct a 'spiritual eye', for a lack of a better description.

Once Ves figured out the broad strokes of the Golden Cat's techniques, he began to run with the idea and added his own touches to the spiritual eye. He incorporated several principles of mech sensor technology into the eye in order to increase its sensitivity and resolution!

The moment he infused the spiritual eye with energy and brought it to life, he finally gained an omnidirectional view of his body's surroundings.

Though the 360 degree vision disoriented him a bit, he couldn't help but perceive something very alarming!

"Gloriana? Why are you licking my face?!"