

Mech 1999

Chapter 1999 Spreading Love

The Redfeather was one of many light carriers in the Larkinson Clan's fleet. She was not very exceptional. Light carriers were unimpressive ships to begin with, and the Redfeather exhibited no pronounced strengths other than its relatively affordable price tag.

Still, the ship served as the flagship of the Avatars of Myth because the elite troop didn't possess anything better.

The crew and mech pilots aboard the Redfeather threw lots of envious glances at the Penitent Sister ships.

Their fleet predominantly consisted of heavily-armored combat carriers! Though they carried the same amount of mechs as the Avatar ships, their protection had reached a whole other level!

Capable of withstanding sustained attacks from second-class mechs, the fifteen Hexer-built vessels were collectively worth more than the total net worth of the LMC!

Joshua King adjusted his uniform and entered one of the piloting lounges.

None of his fellow comrades were present inside the compartment barring a single person.

Jannzi Larkinson sat quietly on a couch while sipping a cooling drink. A fresh scent wafted from her body as she had recently completed another intensive exercise session.

The young Brighter stepped forward until he reached her position.

"Can I sit down?"

"You may."

Joshua carefully sat besides the expert candidate, feeling very much self-conscious about the disparity between their statuses.

In the time he joined the Avatars, he more than proved his mettle to his fellow comrades. His training results were stellar and his skills kept improving.

Fending off the sandman fleets during the Sand War provided him with some needed battle experience. The constant grind and the punishing attrition forced out his potential and transformed him from an inexperienced rookie into a fully-fledged mech pilot!

Winning the Battle of Kesseling VIII in space was his proudest moment. Entrusted with the Quint, Joshua fully committed his heart and soul to the Larkinson Clan, risking his life over and over in order to defeat the formidable second-class mechs of the CRC!

He was immensely appreciative that the clan patriarch entrusted him with the first masterwork mech of the LMC. Ever since Joshua paired up with the Quint, he felt he had become more and more in tune with the Larkinson Clan. Every mech pilot who had been lucky enough to pilot a Bright Warrior mech felt the same way!

Right now, Joshua wasn't thinking about mechs. He approached Jannzi for a different purpose.

"How are you today?"

"I'm fine." She responded calmly as she drew her attention away from her inner thoughts. "I'm trying to think how our clan will change with the addition of people like you. Personally, I welcome anyone who wants to become a Larkinson."

"You sound confident that everything will go well."

Her lips curled upwards. "I have met a lot of wonderful people among the Avatars. It will be strange to change my old views about who constitutes a Larkinson, but at this point everyone is in it together."

"I'm happy that you think so. Joining the Larkinson Clan is a great honor to me. I have always admired the Larkinson Family back when I was just a mech cadet. Joining the Avatars of Myth had always been my biggest goal. Now that I wear this uniform, I have been living in a constant dream."

The two chatted a bit. They talked about work, the evolution of the Larkinson Clan and the potential threats they might face.

The mood grew more relaxed between the two as Jannzi slowly loosened up in his presence.

Joshua made his move.

"Jannzi, I.. like you. Would you like to have some fun and play some games with me? We can watch a live drama broadcast if you aren't in the mood! While there isn't much the Redfeather has to offer, I heard that some of the mech technicians configured a spare compartment into an entertainment room."

The female mech pilot blinked and directed a scrutinizing glance towards Joshua. The way she looked at her was markedly different from before!

Though an expert candidate lacked the pressure of a fully-fledged expert pilot, Jannzi still exuded a presence that already elevated her stature!

"Are you asking me out, Mr. King?"

"Yes." Joshua boldly responded. Now that he revealed his intentions, he no longer hesitated! "I like you, Jannzi. You're pretty and you're also a great mech pilot. I admire your work ethic and how you diligently train your skills even though you're already better than all of us. I.. would like to get to know you better."

A dozen seconds passed before Jannzi finally deigned to respond.

"You hardly know me, Joshua. I'm not looking for a relationship at the moment."

Joshua lowered his head.

"However.. I'm not disinterested in you." Jannzi smiled coyly. "You are quite intriguing compared to the other men I've met. I'll give you a chance."

Yes!

While Joshua reacted to Jannzi's response with exuberance, more men and women started to hook up together.

The roving fleet was filled with men and women. Ever since they departed from their homes, they abruptly had to get used to living and working on the same ship.

Though the transition was hard on many people, many Larkinsons and workers eventually found a couple of coping mechanisms to make their lives in space a little more familiar.

Forming a relationship was one of the ways to stabilize their moods. The leaders of the various organizations all came together and formed an initial policy.

As long as the relationships didn't pose a problem to the hierarchy, then the pairings were allowed!

This was a much looser rule than the one that applied to a professional military like the Mech Corps.

The circumstances of the fleet was much different than that of a mech military. The Executive Council had taken a close look at this problem and decided to see what happened when they adopted the model used by spaceborn clans.

Ever since this interim rule came into force, a lot of people started to muster up their courage and ask their crushes to go on a date.

Aboard the Scarlet Rose, Merrill O'Brian just finished her shift at the design lab. Working for workaholics like Ves Larkinson and Gloriana Wodin wasn't easy, but she learned a lot during every design session!

As she began to loosen her coat, her comm suddenly chimed as she received an incoming comm request.

She curiously lifted her wrist and read the name of the caller.

"Oh?" The former pirate designer lifted her eyebrow. "Let's see what you have to say."

When she accepted the call, a projection of a familiar-looking man appeared in front of her. Dietrich Kotz, wearing the uniform of the Battle Criers, made for a dashing figure!

"Hello, Merrill!"

"Hello, Dietrich. I haven't talked to you in a while."

"I know. You're busy designing mechs."

The young woman coughed. "Technically, I'm assisting the design process. You should be more precise with your terminology."

"Ah." Dietrich scratched his head in an affable way. "Sorry about that. I'll remember that. Anyway, I've been thinking about you. We got along well the last time we met. Would you like to go out on a virtual date?"

"...I'm too busy."

"Wait! Don't end the call yet!"

Merrill resolutely pressed the button that cut off the connection.

Now that the distraction was out of the way, she headed towards the bathroom of her cabin in order to take a relaxing bath.

BEEP!

"Merrill! Don't you want to relax every now and then? If you keep working all the time, you'll get stressed! Why not spend some time with me so that you can ease your mind? I'm sure you'll perform better at work the next day!"

This time, the woman looked a little more amenable to his suggestion. The benefits he described sounded quite compelling.

There was one problem, though.

"We're stationed aboard different ships, Dietrich." She said. "You're assigned to the Ion Tracker while I am stuck on the Scarlet Rose."

"That's not a problem. We can still meet with each other in person when the fleet is at rest. I can give you a good time even when we're apart from each other!"

Merrill didn't say no. Instead, she contemplated the offer for a time before looking back at Dietrich's projection. "Let's see if you can deliver on that claim."

While love was spreading throughout the fleet, Ves and Gloriana returned to their shared stateroom after a long design session.

Ves looked a bit more strained than before. He plopped his butt down on a chair while Gloriana immediately dove into the bathroom.

"Meow."

His gem cat floated in front of his face and gently flicked his tail against his face.

"I don't know, Lucky. I'm surprised how quickly Calabast and James managed to convince the Larkinsons to accept their proposal to invite thousands of outsiders into the clan. I expected the clan elders to resist."

They did at first according to Gavin. Yet Ves had underestimated the capabilities of the troublesome pair.

In hindsight, he shouldn't have felt so confident about the stubbornness of his family members.

While this proposal was unthinkable in the Larkinson Family, the clan was different. It was not only open to change, but also needed to expand its ranks!

Calabast and James recognized this and tailored their message to the decision makers of the clan. The two worked constantly behind the scenes to sway the opinions of the Larkinsons!

With her intelligence background, Calabast understood the Larkinson Clan better than Ves. With his predictive tendencies and amazing charisma, James never failed to persuade a Larkinson to support their proposal!

What surprised Ves the most was that the Larkinsons didn't object to the inclusion of the True Believers. Their surprising shift to worshipping Ves as a god had made the Ylvainans a lot more palatable to the clan!

Ves had scheduled a personal meeting with Raymond and Ovrin Larkinson the next time the fleet emerged from FTL. He needed to hear their opinions in person in order to

determine whether they genuinely supported this massive move. If Calabast and James browbeat them into agreement somehow, then there would be hell to pay!

"Lucky?" Gloriana asked from the bathroom as the door slid open. "Could you take Clixie out for a time?"

"Meow!"

Lucky stopped swooping around Ves' head. He darted over to Clixie, who was lying comfortably on a floating cat perch.

"Miaow?"

"Meow meow."

"Miaow."

After their brief exchange, the two cats departed from the stateroom.

Shortly afterwards, the armored guards of the Avatars and the Glory Battalion filed out of the stateroom as well! Even Nitaa, who took an oath to guard Ves' life, followed the guards out while carrying the Larkinson Mandate attached to a harness on her armor!

Ves immediately became concerned. As far as he knew, aside from entering the bathroom, his guards never left his presence!

What was even stranger was that Nitaa took orders from Gloriana! That wasn't supposed to happen! The Kinner was his bondswoman!

"Gloriana?" He asked. "Why did you send everyone away?"

He smelled her approach first. An intimate scent wafted from the entrance of the bathroom. The intensity of the perfume was a lot more concentrated than the one she carried before!

A slender leg slowly emerged from the bathroom. Wearing an elegant black dress that hugged her body contours, his girlfriend slowly undulated her hips as she approached Ves with a smile.

He immediately gulped. "Gloriana..?"

Her lustrous black hair was curled up in wavy tresses that adorned her head like a crown. The makeup applied to her face not only accentuated her eyes, but also enhanced the redness of her lips!

When she reached his side, she took her hand and encouraged him to stand. Once he did so, she slowly drew him towards the center of the compartment.

"Am I beautiful?" Gloriana smirked.

"You.. are.. I mean, you look stunning!"

"Hihihi!"

When they reached the bed, Gloriana slowly pushed Ves onto it until he sat on the edge. Gloriana lowered herself afterwards until she sat on his lap.

Her face lowered onto his to exchange a passionate kiss. Her overpowering scent intoxicated Ves, causing him to feel very hot!

Once their lips parted, Ves lifted his fingers to brush his lipstick-stained lips. "What.. what's going on, Gloriana?"

"I'm tired of waiting, Ves." She replied and gently placed her palm on his chest. "We belong to each other. Your heart belongs to me, and my heart belongs to you. Tonight, let me show you how much that matters to me. Let me be your first!"

Before Ves could reply, Gloriana threw herself at him and engulfed his mouth in another passionate kiss!

Chapter 2000 Transcending Existence

"How did they find out?!" A bedraggled-looking pirate commander complained as he tried to pilot his impressive-looking mech out of the secret entrance. "I shouldn't have accepted that blasted deal!"

Though the pirate looked worse for wear, that was because he hastily entered his mech in order to escape the sprawling pirate base built into the depths of one of the many floating planetoids of the Nyxian Gap.

Just an hour before, the pirate commander didn't look as scared as now.

Known to the cutthroat pirate community as Commander Nicolas Vortan and the leader of Vortan's Blades, he made a name for himself due to his excellent dueling skills!

Before he took over his current pirate organization, he risked his life for fame and riches by dueling others to the death for the entertainment of the depraved scum of the Gap!

In his prime, he became known as the Heart Striker! He gained this dreaded moniker for his penchant to stab his mech's incredibly hardy dueling sword through the cockpits of his opponent's mechs!

Though the hard living in the Gap and his aging caused him to lose some of his excellent reflexes, Commander Vortan was still a force to be reckoned with. This was especially the case when he usurped the leadership of a sizable pirate organization in charge of an entire pirate base!

Frederick City was one of the many semi-obscure but highly-frequented pirate hideouts of the Nyxian Gap.

Situated deep enough in the anomalous space of the Gap to avoid Peacekeeper retaliation, it was also close enough to the border to civilized space to make the base a welcome stopping point for many pirates looking to raid the Sentinel Kingdom!

Having fought and dealt with the Sentinels for so long, Vortan's Blades forged an increasing amount of ties with certain allies among their supposed enemies.

The nobles of the Sentinel Kingdom and the pirate leaders of the Nyxian Gap were not as diametrically opposed to each other as the public was led to believe.

These secret partnerships resulted in a lot of profit to Vortan's Blades. The Nyxian Gap may be fairly blessed with rare exotics, but the pirates and other scum who reside in them weren't able to gain any other essential goods! Even criminals couldn't escape the need for trade to keep their mechs and ships in working condition!

For several years, Frederick City expanded and grew into an increasingly more active pirate base with the help of all the deals that Vortan Blades had cut with some of its hidden Sentinel partners.

Though the nobles never revealed their identities, Commander Vortan didn't care so long as the goods kept flowing!

"Haha! I'm finally out!" He laughed.

His brilliant-looking swordsman mech finally darted out of the tunnel. A lightless, crater-encrusted landscape greeted his mech. Complicated, radioactive rock formation surrounded the clearing his Devosh entered.

"My ride is just ahead!"

Like any pirate commander, Vortan had long prepared an escape route for himself. In fact, the attackers of his base managed to find and block three of his routes, but he had at least seven more to choose from! He only selected this route because it was the fastest way out of the chaos that engulfed his base!

"You'll pay for that, you bastards!"

Though the pirate commander was glad he managed to preserve his life and custom mech, he lost almost everything. Vortan's Blades existed no more.

The invaders were never supposed to sneak so many mechs in his base!

Commander Vortan put all of the blame on the security leaders he entrusted to keep Frederick City safe. If not for their failures, he still would have been able to lord over others!

"First, I'll take revenge. Next, I'll rebuild Frederick Base! I won't let this setback drag me down!"

He was not an average pirate! He used to be one the most skilled of the Nyxian Gap! He led a pirate organization that ran an entire base!

Yet just before his Devosh reached the hole where he stashed his escape vessel, his swordsman mech slowed down and halted.

A mech stood in its way.

"Nicolas Vortan. I knew you would take this route. I've been awaiting your arrival." The opposite mech broadcasted.

"You." Vortan hissed! "You! It's you! Why did you attack my base?!"

He was both angry and afraid! He was filled with rage due to all of the losses he suffered. He was gripped with fear as he recognized his famous opponent!

A reddish-brown tiger mech slowly stepped forward on its four legs as its form comfortably traversed the reduced gravity of the planetoid.

A large, thick tiger tail playfully swayed back and forth as the snarling head and shining red eyes of the mech pinned the Devosh in place!

"The blood of billions of innocents stains your hands. Entire cities have succumbed to the crimes perpetrated by your men!"

"Why the hell do you attack us, then?! We're just the ones who accepted the job. You should go after the masterminds instead!"

"That's the problem, Commander Vortan. I can't track the ones responsible for plotting the heinous attacks. That's why I am knocking on your doors instead. Now, please answer this question. Who gave you those Spyre Helixes? Where did they come from?!"

"I don't know! The only contact who I got in touch with was some snobby noble prick called Finlay! You know how careful those Sentinel houses are with making deals with

pirates. They never expose their true identities, especially to scum like us! That's all I know, I swear!"

"DON'T LIE TO ME!" The tiger mech pilot bellowed! "I have interrogated hundreds of craven pirate leaders like you. I can smell a lie from a light-year away! You know more about your business partner than you claim!"

Commander Vortan grimaced. "I'm not afraid of you, Dark Cleaver. Your Oblivion Hand may have caught my boys by surprise, but I don't see you goons anywhere close! Did you come alone?"

The Devil Tiger nodded its huge and menacing head. "As a former duelist, I figured you deserve the courtesy of fighting one last match. Come. Let us test our battle prowess against each other!"

"Are you serious?"

"I am the Dark Cleaver. I never break my word."

"Then.. it's your funeral!"

Even though Commander Vortan hadn't dueled anyone in years, he still kept up his skills and participated in several large battles!

He didn't halt any longer. With a wordless battle cry, Commander Vortan entered his best battle condition! He drove his Devosh straight towards the infamous mech of the Black Cleaver with its sword raised above its head!

The swordsman mech closed in on the tiger mech incredibly rapidly! The Devosh was not only a mech that Commander Vortan poured a huge amount of money and resources in developing, but it was also highly adapted to the 0.76 g of the lifeless planetoid!

Compact boosters built into the back, arms and legs of the mechs flared into life as they pushed the graceful swordsman mech forward with incredible momentum!

This was one of the secret weapons of his custom mech! Commander Vortan managed to surprise his opponents time and time again by the rapid advance of his mech!

Barely a second passed before his mech reached the tiger mech. Borrowing the momentum of its advance, the Devosh rapidly reoriented its grip so that its famed sword pointed its tip straight at the throat of the hostile tiger mech!

Its chopping stance had just been a feint! The famed Heart Striker intended to stab the tiger mech from the start!

An angry roar rang through their private comm channel. The mech sidestepped out of the attack, but not in time to escape a scratch onto its head armor!

Though Commander Vortan wanted to exult over his successful hit, he felt through the Devosh's systems that its sword failed to penetrate as far as he expected!

"Your Devil Tiger is just as tough as in the rumors." The pirate commander muttered as his Devosh turned around to sustain the offensive! "I'll just have to break you down piece by piece if that's the case!"

Though the Devosh went all out in unleashing a punishing combo, the Devil Tiger was no slouch! It lifted its unusually strong paw and blocked the sword strikes with its immensely hard claws!

The Dark Cleaver was a wily opponent and one who keenly utilized the properties of the tiger mech to his advantage!

The Devil Tiger moved swiftly and managed to repel most attacks even as the Devosh sped up. Commander Vortan became increasingly more worried about the lack of progress he made in damaging the enemy mech!

The Devosh briefly darted back to pause its assault.

"It looks like I have to go all out. I'll show you the true power of my Devosh!"

Several lights began to illuminate the Devosh at certain sections. Soon enough, an illuminating purple glow began to form around the mech as it began to excite a lot of energy!

"HAHAHA!" Commander Vortan laughed as he got caught up in the rush of power of his fully-unlocked mech! "I never revealed the full power of my Devosh until now. Though you've put up a decent fight, we were never playing on the same level to begin with! Though strong, your Oblivion Hand can never match the flow of resources passing through Frederick City! I obtained some of the best exotics the Nyxian Gap can provide and used them to build a mech that transcends this standard!"

When the mech attacked next, its speed had doubled! Its acceleration was off the charts and its attacks landed with greater force than before!

The tiger mech sustained more than a few scratches this time! Its resilient armor plating actually exhibited deep cuts as a strange force field covered the Devosh's sword!

"False resonance!" The Dark Cleaver uttered with surprise!

"Yes! Not all of the resonating exotics can be found in the Nyxian Gap, but I managed to trade much of it from my noble trading partners! That's an advantage that a nomad like you can never match! I'm going to chop your mech up until I'm left with tiger meat!"

His initial success only fueled his momentum! Commander Vortan showcased why he almost never lost in the dueling ring as his mech never let up the pressure as it built up its attacks so that the tiger mech would be unable to fend off its killer strikes!

Cut after cut formed in the bestial mech's armor as it appeared incapable of fully resisting against the might of false resonance! Though immensely draining, the Devosh carried lots of high-quality energy cells that could sustain its special state for at least ten more minutes!

Just as Commander Vortan was about to land his coup-de-grace, the unbalanced tiger mech began to glow on its own!

With just a single paw strike, the Devil Tiger managed to bat aside the Devosh's next attack!

The swordsman mech's momentum broke as Commander Vortan awkwardly tried to prevent his mech from tipping over!

"What? What is this strength?"

When he directed his attention to the Devil Tiger, his eyes practically widened into balloons.

The tiger mech glowed red and brown in the same fashion as his own mech! No, it was different! The glow around the tiger mech was a lot more condensed!

Realization struck Commander Vortan. He didn't need to direct his attention to the resonance sensors to know that the Devil Tiger was a lot more formidable than he thought.

The glowing Devil Tiger began to radiate a field that put the Devosh and Commander Vortan under significant pressure! The swordsman mech began to groan a bit as some of its parts worked less smoothly than before.

This strange reaction confirmed Commander Vortan's greatest fears!

"Since when did you break through?"

"A few months ago."

The Devil Tiger wasn't standing still. Even as it continued to swish its tail, the metal debris that the Devosh had managed to carve out of the armor of the tiger mech began to fly back to the mech and fill up its gaps!

The mech was self-repairing!

"Congratulations.. for becoming an expert pilot." Commander Vortan morsely said. "I suppose your Devil Tiger is also an expert mech."

"Not.. exactly, but close enough. It's still an ongoing project."

This turn of events had completely extinguished the pirate commander's battle spirit. As impressive as his Devosh performed, it was just custom mech. The most it could do was imitate resonance. It could never stand up to the genuine article!

"Why this charade? Why give me the illusion of victory?"

"I just want to give you the fight that you deserve." Ryncol Larkinson answered.
"Regardless of your crimes, I respect your martial skills. Experiencing your famed swordsmanship first hand has been worth it. Now, will you surrender?"

The Devosh stood frozen a time before dropping its sword. "I.. surrender."

The Devil Tiger was too strong!