

Mech 2015

Chapter 2015 Heart Bea

Ves managed to command everyone's attention.

This didn't sound so strange, but it was the methods he employed that made it remarkable.

Aside from his natural authority as clan leader and Journeyman Mech Designer, he made use of almost every trick in his arsenal to distort every Larkinson's perception!

With the silent Bright Warriors in the mech hangar on standby, their glows melded with the glow exuded by his mind and body, giving everyone the impression that he was the living incarnation of the Larkinson Clan!

Even though he fell silent for a time, no Larkinson uttered any word or showed any inattention. The expansive spiritual manipulation that Ves exerted with the assistance and coordination of the Golden Cat was too grand to be dismissed!

It didn't matter whether the assembly members possessed spiritual potential or not. Young or old, man or woman, soldier or civilian, they all perceived the glow that represented the clan from their surroundings and their clan patriarch!

What was more, each Larkinson possessed an active bond with the Golden Cat and the Larkinson Mandate. Since the great book was currently in his hands, Ves felt through his connection with the Golden Cat that he could exert an even greater degree of influence on their psyche!

Though his sudden actions shocked everyone into submission, not everyone was stunned into submission.

The wisest, most stubborn and strong-willed Larkinsons still looked as if they retained a decent amount of lucidity. People like Speaker Ovrin Larkinson who already wielded a lot of responsibility and Caratan Larkinson who was highly opposed towards the clan were among those who weren't as easy to influence!

In fact, the latter already started to frown as he found this current situation to be highly disturbing!

Ves did not pay any attention to Caratan or any individual Larkinson. Right now, he was addressing the entire Larkinson Assembly and every clan member who was watching the feed.

"My fellow family members." He spoke again. "We are all Larkinsons. For centuries, we have based our existence on our lineage. It is easy to consider each other kin when we

share the same blood. Don't we all have a part inside of us that wishes to go back to the past when everything was simpler and where we didn't have so many responsibilities?"

Certainly, nostalgia was present in every Larkinson, particularly the older ones who had gone through many good and bad experiences back in the Bright Republic!

"Those times are over now. We are facing a greater set of challenges, and this time we don't have the government to back us up. We have chosen to find our own fortune, but that means we must all step up, because if we make the wrong choice, everyone pays!"

He reminded them of the stakes. He wanted his fellow Larkinsons to realize the import of their decisions. It wasn't as if they were just a military family in a third-rate state anymore. If they made a mistake back then, there wasn't much of a risk that it would cause their downfall.

That was no longer the cause. Though everyone was aware of this concern, when Ves brought it up, they couldn't help but amplify their worries!

"It is in times like these that we must make the wisest and most farsighted decisions." Ves continued. "We can no longer think for ourselves. We can no longer think about the interests of our narrow bloodline! We have to rise up and govern our clan with a greater perspective, a broader perspective! We must take more than just ourselves into account!"

He raised his arm and manipulated his comm. A projection of some of the valiant mech pilots of the Avatars of Myth came into being. Joshua King was one of the most prominent individuals in his pre-prepared slideshow.

"Our current fleet is filled with great supporters and loyal adherents. Their contributions need no explanation. Even those who haven't stood out are still worthy of consideration! Unlike everyone else, these humble workers and soldiers have stuck with us when half the star sector turned against us! Do you know what that means? They had the choice to leave and divest themselves from their association from us, but instead they doubled down and committed to working with us even if they spat the Friday Coalition in the face! Don't you think that deserves our appreciation?"

A lot of assembly members nodded. Ves appealed to their sense of fairness, which was fairly strong but which they regally set aside whenever family came up. Not this time. He forcibly dragged it up in order to prevent his relatives from downplaying the contributions of non-family members!

While he spoke, he continually tweaked and refined his spiritual manipulation. He was already quite proficient with it. This time, he didn't just rely on glows, which were rather passive in nature.

Instead, he also expended his spiritual energy to form a psuedo-force of will! Infused with the influence of the Golden Cat, it was as if Ves was an expert pilot to the gathered Larkinsons!

Expert pilots possessed a revered status in the original family. Even in the clan, the Larkinsons never halted this long-standing custom!

Though Ves was obviously not an expert pilot, the air and vibe he evoked reminded the Larkinson of some of the great figures in the family such as Ark Larkinson!

Ves noticed that certain spiritually strong individuals such as Jannzi Larkinson were frowning or looking suspiciously at him. Fortunately, she was just an expert candidate and not a part of the Larkinson Assembly.

With no genuine expert pilot on the Redfeather, Ves had free reign to expand his spiritual influence as he saw fit! The passive glow and the active force of will both combined to put every single Larkinson in the Assembly under his influence!

Though Caratan's stubborn expression made it clear that he wasn't outright controlling their minds, it was undeniable that they were very open to his words!

"I have a vision of the Larkinson Clan." Ves continued, his soothing voice worming into the ears of the Larkinsons like velvet.

Unlike the previous times he employed his Devil Tongue, this time he traded acid for sweetener. Despite never raising his tone in fury, his fervor was very much stoked!

"In my dreams, our clan is something that is strong. United. Trustworthy. Whether we trade or fight, we are a clan that moves as one and acts in harmony! Don't you wish our clan would become like this? Don't you want to pursue a future where every Larkinson is a brother and where the most talented, capable and caring clan members are in charge?"

"That does not mean that we should put outsiders in the same category as trueblood Larkinsons!" Caratan rudely interrupted!

Though it was difficult to resist his influence, those determined to oppose him and his views were still able to shake themselves off his spell!

Ves directed his head towards the offending assembly member. "Caratan Larkinson. I was speaking."

"Ovrin didn't give the floor to you! I have a right to speak as well as you do!"

"What is it you want to say, then?"

Though Ves exuded an increasing amount of spiritual pressure onto Caratan, it still had a limit. There was only so much influence he could exert on someone without spiritual potential.

"Your suggestion cheapens our Larkinson name." Caratan spat. "Our predecessors have fought long and hard to secure the future of our original family. Even though we split off and formed a clan, we still owe our current lives to the efforts of the previous generations of Larkinsons! Each of them fought and toiled in order to provide their children and grandchildren with a better future. I can guarantee you that none of them have ever approved of the notion of recognizing those who don't share our blood as Larkinsons! Going down the path you are trying to suggest is the equivalent of trampling on the graves of our forefathers!"

Ves curled his lips into a mild frown. Though he didn't mind sparring against an opponent, he didn't like it when they were competent enough to form a good rebuttal. He couldn't wait to kick Caratan Larkinson from his clan!

"Our forefathers didn't think we would ever separate ourselves from a state they swore an oath to defend to their dying breaths. This is why I said that times have changed. We Larkinsons are no longer the simple soldiers as we were before. We have left the sandbox of the Bright Republic and entered into a greater world! So much has changed that it is more important than ever to keep up with them! With so many threats on the horizon, we cannot wait to rely on our bloodline to provide us with strength. The only way to grow strong enough to preserve our blood and our way of life is to rethink our customs!"

"That's understandable." Caratan took a step back. "Changes are necessary, that is not something that we question. The problem I have is that you are taking it too far! Why must we redefine what it means to be a Larkinson? Why must we share all of our honor and prosperity to those who should be relying on their own efforts to earn them? Our identity as Larkinsons binds us all together! No matter if we are part of the family or the clan, we are all kin to each other, and that is something that should never change!"

His words were having an effect. More and more Larkinsons seem to be escaping from the lull they had fallen under when Ves exerted his pervasive spiritual influence.

Ves needed to regain the ground he lost.

"You are too narrow-minded, Caratan. Are you so possessive that you can't stand to provide our loyal workers and soldiers the recognition they deserve? Are you so short-sighted that you can't see how much they risked their lives and their old way of life to commit to our cause? Just look at how many mech pilots who aren't called Larkinsons fought and died on the battlefield! They didn't fight for their state. They didn't fight for their own lives. Instead, they fought for our interests and our existence! Offering them some form of outer membership isn't enough. We should recognize their worth and add their strength to our clan without reserve!"

"And how will we prevent them from abusing their numbers to their advantage?!" Caratan retorted. "How can we stop them from slowly worming their way into our institutions and altering them beyond our recognition? The Ylvainans are cultists who believe whatever their so-called Living Prophet tells them to do, and they are the least of our worries when it comes to foreigners in our midst!"

"You are wrong!" Ves summoned up his full strength and influence! He let Caratan have his say in order to serve as a foil, but there were limits to his patience! "All I hear from your mouth are warrantless fears and hyperbolic situations which will never come to pass! If you have spent any time with our workers and soldiers, you would know that all of them aspire to be Larkinsons! If we give them the chance to become our kin, then they will gradually mold themselves into our image! Believe in our clan. Believe in our way."

Ves looked up to the face of one of the Bright Warriors looming behind the theater. "Where we come from and who we used to be doesn't matter anymore. We have Brighters, Ylvainans, Kinnners and other folk among us. Since we're leaving the Komodo Star Sector anyway, why should we cling on to our old divisions? It will slowly become more meaningless the further away we travel from our homes! I say that starting from today, we should all be part of the same people!"

He raised his fist before pounding it onto his chest!

"Strength comes from the heart, not from the blood! Open your eyes and look to the people we are surrounded by. As long as you look closely enough, you will recognize that the heart of a Larkinson is beating inside their chests!"

It was as if every heard the sound of a heart beat. At this instant, the hearts of everyone aboard the Redfeather beat as one!

Chapter 2016 Ostracized

The power of speech was one of the most emotive manner of conveying information to one person to another.

Compared to other means of information transfer such as plain text, speech allowed the source to convey emotion.

Many people didn't even consciously think about the emotive quality of their manner of speaking. Perhaps some people did, but they never used it to their full advantage.

What Ves did was actually a step beyond conveying emotion through sound. Though the inflection of his voice conveyed a portion of his passion, this time he mainly relied on his spiritual manipulation to permeate his passion to the assembly members!

The power of spirit possessed a powerful and more direct influence on someone's mood than regular speech.

On top of that, the effect he achieved was a lot more potent than he could achieve on his own by making use of the aid provided by the Golden Cat and the Bright Warriors!

The Larkinson Clan's ancestral spirit may not be the most sophisticated spiritual entity, but she was decently strong and possessed a direct connection to all of the Larkinson clansmen!

The Larkinson clansmen who took part in the founding ritual essentially opened a backdoor in their mind for the Golden Cat. This two-way connection not only fed the Golden Cat, but also allowed her to peek in their inner minds or exert some influence!

Of course, there was only so much the Golden Cat could do, especially against spiritually insensitive individuals.

No single means was strong enough, but it was the combination that Ves set out to convey!

The Devil Tongue moniker stood for more than his clever words. His impassioned speech, his insidious spiritual manipulation and his courage to bring up touchy subjects all combined in an experience that hardly left his audience unmoved!

There was a reason why Ves hesitated in employing his full range of persuasive tools to his own family. Employing spiritual techniques and amplifying it through the Golden Cat and the Bright Warrior was something that hardly anyone could guard against.

It strayed far too closely to indoctrination because Ves sought to win the argument by distorting their judgement! Rather than trying to convey a clear argument based on sound logic and compelling benefits, he instead sought to scramble their rationality by firing up their emotions!

From a cynical perspective, each time he utilized his Devil Tongue, he sabotaged the better sense of his audience!

Trying to sway people through such means was borderline unethical and very distasteful.

The only reason Ves didn't equate it to brainwashing was because he knew that there were a lot of impressive leaders and statesmen who could accomplish something similar!

What was incredibly frightening about these master manipulators was that they trained their speech-making abilities to the point where they could essentially brainwash anyone through clever word choice and emotional inflection alone!

Ves knew his own limits. He was far from reaching that point, especially since he never formally trained in this area. He liked to speak from his heart rather than come across as inauthentic and slimy. His spiritual manipulation worked best when he matched it with the passion in his speech!

Right now, the assembly members he addressed all appeared mesmerized. It was as if Ves cast a spell on them. Only a handful of people such as Caratan Larkinson and Speaker Ovrin Larkinson possessed the will and experience to remain lucid in the middle of his extraordinary speech.

Leavers such as Caratan Larkinson didn't want Ves to gain the upper hand. As far as they were concerned, if Ves had his way, the identity of the Larkinson name would forever be diluted! Sharing it with thousands of outsiders was a travesty to those who always felt pride in belonging to the famed and honored Larkinson Family!

After a long and solemn pause where everyone had the illusion that their hearts were beating as one, everyone slowly drew themselves out of their fugue. The Larkinsons taking part in the assembly session and the people witnessing it through a projection all came off their highs.

Ves could have proceeded with the vote right away, but he didn't think that was the right choice. Though he attempted to make his point by scrambling their minds, he didn't want them to cast their votes only to regret it later on. That would only breed further resentment from his relatives.

For this reason, he added an extra step.

"Many of you may harbor some lingering concerns." Ves spoke in a calmer and less intense voice. "There are many people in the galaxy. Each of them hold different values and abide by different principles. These are legitimate concerns."

Just as Caratan wanted to reiterate his objections, Ves raised two of his fingers!

"However, consider these two points! Once we begin our travels and embark on our expedition, we will be meeting many different people. We will become exposed to various different cultures that could make the Ylvainans and the Hexers look like normal folk! In order to rise above our local roots and fit into the galactic scene, we must develop an openness and tolerance towards different cultures! Only through developing a cosmopolitan identity will we be able to grow our clan and become a major power!"

This was not a particularly strong argument. Even if the relatives who followed Ves and joined the clan consisted of the more ambitious Larkinsons, their hopes were grounded by their modest roots.

Back in the Bright Republic, the Larkinson Family wasn't even an important entity. Though it possessed a decent presence in the military, the lack of high-ranking officers among the Larkinsons hampered their political influence.

Compared to the likes of the Tovar Family whose members regularly held the presidency, no one important listened to the Larkinson Family!

The lack of success still weighed on the necks of the Larkinsons like a stone. With their heads constantly pointed towards the ground, they were unused to raising their heads and looking up at the sky! Even if Ves cut the cords and lifted their burdens, centuries of defining their identities as loyal, upright soldiers!

Ves may have ripped their physical shackles, but their mental bonds still remained intact!

This was why he broached this point. He wanted to rip apart their bonds and liberate their minds!

Of course, an aspiration for greatness wasn't enough to assuage their concerns. Every decision revolved around weighing risk and reward.

Right now, Ves amplified the reward. Now, he needed to lower the risk."

"Secondly, our Larkinson Clan is not a weak entity. Look into your hearts. Do you feel it?" Ves tapped his heart before tapping the surface of the Larkinson Mandate. "What you sense is the living essence of our clan. It is alive. It is a part of us. As long as you believe in it, the clan will always have your back, but if you have nefarious intentions in mind, then the clan itself will mark you out and expose you for the cancer that you are to us all! Caratan Larkinson, let me be the first to show you what your ill intent and disloyal tendencies has wrought!"

Ves dramatically lifted the Larkinson Mandate in the air! Its antigrav brace caused it to float from his grip and soar until it reached the center of the assembly theater!

Everyone's attention shifted towards the book that radiated the same glow as Ves and the Bright Warriors.

Invisible to everyone except a couple of entities, Ves began to communicate and manipulate with the book and the spirit residing inside of it. The Golden Cat was perplexed at his request, but she eventually acquitted and proceeded to manipulate one of her bonds according to his intentions.

Caratan Larkinson stood perplexed as he looked at the book. Though it was a very impressive piece of craftsmanship, how was it supposed to exact its punishment? Smacking him with its heavy cover?

The attack came without warning. The invisible, almost unnoticeable bond he shared with the Golden Cat suddenly grew hot!

"Ahhh!"

The older Larkinson immediately bent over as a sensation akin to a migraine afflicted his head! He massaged his palm as the suddenness of his headache took him by surprise!

The headache was just the prelude. As a former mech pilot who fought in several wars, his mental fortitude was resilient enough to shrug off the pain!

Yet that was not the extent of the punishment that Ves announced!

While Caratan steeled his mind in order to resist the pain, his entire mind and body began to exude a discordant sensation!

Though weak and imperceptible to most people, those who were connected to the Golden Cat began to sense something weird from Caratan.

Like a fly in a soup or a stain on a shirt, Caratan no longer looked like he belonged.

Surrounded by Larkinsons and Bright Warriors, his single presence broke the uniform pattern!

The surrounding Larkinsons instinctively expressed disgust or dislike at his presence. He was like an annoying uncle spoiling their cozy family gathering!

"What have you done?" Caratan asked, his perplexity becoming more evident as the assembly members sitting besides him started to scoot away!

Ves smirked and crossed his arms. "You are a pariah upon the clan. Rather than allow you to hide behind your mask, the Larkinson Mandate has marked you out and exposed the ugliness inside you to the rest of our clan!"

"What?! That's absurd!" The dissident protested! "I am a Larkinson! I am a veteran! I fought and bled for the family! I have never disgraced our Larkinson name!"

"That may be true, but the fact that you intend to leave the clan for the family signifies that you are no longer welcome in our midst! You can join your like-minded relatives in the family all you want, but don't linger in our clan and try to sabotage us from the inside! This assembly represents the Larkinsons who are part of the clan. Someone like you who openly stands against everything the clan is trying to achieve has no place in this theater!"

"What witchery is this!? You've become stranger and stranger, Ves! What more will you do to turn the clan into your private property?!"

Caratan's flailing words might have sounded reasonable to a normal audience.

It was too bad the assembly members weren't receptive to his arguments! The Larkinson glow substantially attuned them to Ves and the Golden Cat. Any complaints from someone who came across as a pariah of the clan sounded like ineffectual whining!

"Clansmen," Ves ignored Caratan and addressed the assembly members. "There is an intruder in your midst. What will you do against this unwelcome visitor. Will you allow him to poison our discussion?"

"No!"

"NO!"

"Go away!"

Ves smirked wider and swept his hand towards Caratan. "Then cast him out!"

A brief silence ensued before the Larkinson sitting next to Caratan stood up and grabbed the other man's robe.

"What are you doing?! Unhand me!"

"Get out, you old man!"

More Larkinsons around Caratan quickly joined the commotion. Hands from all sides grabbed onto Caratan and slowly pushed, pulled and cajoled the Larkinson who didn't belong out of the seats!

"You're not welcome here anymore!"

While this ugly proceeding took place, Ves quietly passed some orders. A couple of Avatar guards quickly moved to Caratan just as a kick caused the old man to fall against the deck besides the edge of the theater!

The guards rudely picked up the former assembly member by the shoulders and dragged him out of sight.

"This is a travesty! I'm a Larkinson! I contributed more to our heritage than most of you! You won't get away with this, Ves!"

No one paid much attention to his fading shouts. Due to the Golden Cat's secret manipulation, the remaining Larkinsons continued to view the departing Larkinson in a bad light.

Now that this show was over, the Golden Cat subsided her efforts. The Larkinson Mandate flew back to Ves' palm.

"Just like my mechs, our clan is alive." He smiled. "I've shown you what that entails in case of a threat in our midst. Now, I'll demonstrate what can happen if we embrace outsiders who are actually dedicated to our clan! Joshua King! Please step forward!"

The young prodigal mech pilot strode from the crowd of bystanders in his Avatar dress uniform. Every assembly member turned their attention to him in curiosity!