

## The Mech Touch

### Chapter 4751: Block L

As Tristan Wesseling and Professor Zin Galbraith continued to talk among each other from their seats in the Commercial District, the VIP guests were slowly being led to their assigned seating blocks.

Ves felt more apprehensive as he and his fellow Larkinsons approached Block L.

The seating blocks all floated up in the air, so everyone either needed to float over by themselves or board one of the many ornate platforms that acted as ferries.

The Larkinsons opted to move onto the same floating platform on account of the kids they brought along.

"We're so high above the ground." Marvaine said as he walked up to the side and gazed below the streets and the bannered government structures.

Large crowds of guests melded into a river of moving energy at this altitude. The boy grew so wondrous that he continued to lean forward until a cat moved forward and pressed him back from the edge.

"Miaow miaow miaow!"

"I want to go back, papa! Clixie is so mean!"

Ves grabbed his son and held him close. "Marvaine, have you forgotten the safety rules that I have explained to you? Your anti-grav clothing or powerful shield generator can always fail or fail to protect you under specific circumstances. Clixie was protecting you for your own good!"

He admonished his son and made sure to repeat his warnings to all of his children.

He couldn't help but remember that blasted day back in Prosperous Hill IV where an entire biological mech arena turned out to be a giant death trap. So many people up high fell to their deaths during the ensuing chaos that Ves never wanted his children to meet their end in such an awful fashion!

The fact that all of the seating blocks were floating structures did not please him at all. Their elevation made them painfully vulnerable to surprise attacks from many different locations in Kotor City. The mechanisms responsible for keeping them aloft could also

be hacked or destroyed, causing everyone to be brought to a destination against their will unless they were able to flee from their seats.

However, as the Larkinson delegation arrived at the entrance of the seating block and slowly moved their way to the inner area, Ves only had to take one look above his head to see that a strong energy shield enveloped the floating structure.

If Ves was lucky, then the energy shield allowed for free passage in one direction. If not, then it could easily produce a cage that kept everyone trapped inside!

The personal security arrangements also left much to be desired in his opinion.

"We can't bring in our guards?!" Ves complained to a Davutan security captain.

"Our sincerest apologies, Patriarch Larkinson, but Skyline Palace directly set these rules." The completely armored and full-helmeted officer replied. "Each party of representatives can only bring a maximum of 10 guards, and each of them cannot go further than this checkpoint."

In other words, the guards had to wait outside and remain out of sight. They could not be allowed to threaten the other guests or ruin the appearance of the seating block in the historical footage.

Everything related to the founding ceremony was destined to be captured in historic footage that would be viewed by countless descendants in the future. Given the significance of this, the colonial government wanted to make sure that everything looked as neat and organized as possible!

Ves was still able to accept this situation as the distance between his group and his honor guards was not too much.

He waved his family to go on ahead. They all got through without a problem as the shield generators they carried were permissible equipment. Even Lucky and Clixie managed to get past without a problem as they made an effort to look as harmless and adorable as possible while they were carried by his two daughters.

Meanwhile, Ves approached his tallest honor guard.

"Stay alert, Nitaa."

"I am always alert, sir." The helmeted woman dutifully replied.

They did not have to exchange that many words. Nitaa had been in the same room when Calabast unveiled the possibility of a deathly conspiracy to Ves.

The real reason why Ves approached his chief guard was because he wanted to take an important item.

He reached out and took the thick and heavy metal suitcase from her grasp.

Despite the recent upgrades made to the armor of all of the honor guards that Ves had brought along today, none of this would be of any help if the two remained apart from each other.

If a circumstance ever took place where the honor guards could not fulfill their primary responsibilities and come to Ves, then he would have to rely on himself and whatever tools he had in his possession.

There was no way that Ves wanted to meet any impending crisis while wearing nothing but his ceremonial patriarch uniform!

Although it was a lot tougher than it looked, there was no substitute for genuine armor!

Besides, his Unending Regalia also integrated a lot of other useful modules and systems that he wanted to have at his disposal.

He exchanged a few more short and terse words with Nitaa before he turned around and tried to pass through the security checkpoint.

The same security captain stepped forward and raised his palm. "Halt. The rules do not permit you to carry any form of heavy combat equipment into the inner seating area. Please leave your gear behind."

A tense silence ensued as Ves stared at the obstructing officer without making any move to obey the latest instruction.

"I can accept the rule that prohibits us from bringing in our guards, but if you do not want us to have any of our own troopers close at hand, then at least give me the option to defend my own life."

"The rules do not permit that, sir. I am going to have to ask you to put down your equipment."

"It's not a weapon, goddammit!" Ves shouted back as he grew impatient. "It's just a suit of combat armor! Look, I can show you what it can do. It doesn't contain any offensive module or any powerful servos."

"Be that as it may, the mass, volume and quantity of features of your equipment exceed the limits set by Skyline Palace. Please do not cause an incident and follow the rules."

Ves scowled and leaned forward. "I am not budging on this matter. If you have studied my history and the history of my clan, we Larkinsons have a history of getting caught up in violent incidents in times where we least expect it. I have accrued a lot of trauma because of that that has made it impossible for me to go anywhere without sufficient protection that I can trust."

"Our colony is guaranteeing the security of this founding ceremony. We employ a large amount of mechs, foot guards and automated security measures to prevent any malicious actors from threatening your lives. The safety of our guests is our highest priority."

Ves dramatically rolled his eyes. "Others have made the same claims. They let us down in the worst possible ways. No more. I have learned my lesson. I will not go anywhere with solid protection of my own. Be lucky that I can restrain myself from bringing in any firearms."

"Sir—"

"—Oh shut up! Do you know who I am?! President Yenames Clive himself visited me the other day! I am not going to cooperate with his vain pageantry if you won't allow me to bring my defensive gear. You can either drag me to my seat or you will have to proceed with the founding ceremony without my attendance. Trust me, you don't want either of these scenarios to happen. Now go contact your superior and request an exemption from the rules."

It took another minute, but the security captain eventually received instructions to let the Larkinson Patriarch have his way.

Ves smirked and saluted the security officer before he proceeded forward with his Unending Regalia in his grasp.

"Stay alert and be ready to respond at any time. I don't want you to slack off if my fears come true. Anything can happen today."

The unsettling feeling produced by his intuition had become stronger now that time was running out. It was as if a damaged violin was playing an off-tune song in his ears.

It wouldn't have been such a problem if Ves remained ignorant of the possibility of a surprise attack, but now that Calabast warned him of this possibility in advance, it was impossible for him to miss this mysterious undercurrent.

His danger senses had become attuned than they had ever been in his life. His recent sublimation had clearly improved them, but that was not always a good thing as he had become a lot jumpier than before.

Every anomaly, every suspicious individual and every loud sound could be related to a possible threat to his life and the lives of other people.

What weighted Ves down the most was that he was not sure whether his previous warning to Master Benedict Cortez made any difference.

He was afraid that this was not the case. If so, then Ves would have to take more drastic action in order to prevent the Crossers from falling victim to a conspiracy designed to create an irreconcilable vendetta between Patriarch Reginald Cross and Karlach.

"I still have options." He reminded himself as he tapped the heavy tome in his arms.

He moved forward and landed on his seat that was conveniently placed at the front row. His wife and children had already settled onto their own places and were already talking about the arrival of the first mechs on parade.

"Whose mechs will be going first, mama?" Marvaine asked as he held Lucky in his arms.

"Rorsh & Rorsh will be presenting its mechs first according to the schedule." Gloriana said as she glanced at her husband.

She rolled her eyes when she saw that Ves had managed to bring his Unending Regalia past the security checkpoint.

"Look look look! Look over there! That's an ace mech!" Andraste excitedly shouted as she pointed in the direction of Block A. "Oh, oh, I recognize that machine. That is Saint Megan Roonzin's Koi Riser! It's so pretty~"

Gloriana pressed her hand on top of her daughter's perfectly braided red hair. "Control yourself, Andraste. We are about to witness a solemn and historic occasion that will be recorded for the ages."

Ves took a look at the other people assigned to Block L. There were hundreds of guests who came from over a dozen different organizations.

The composition of organizations was fairly random as far as he could tell. There were representatives who hailed from an ordinary university, a farming consortium, a large energy cell production company, a hospital chain and an IT company.

Ves looked disappointed. He already had a good idea about the companies assigned to Block L, but he hoped that whoever was in charge had changed the assignments.

Though he shouldn't underestimate any of the senior figures who managed to earn a seat in this event, there didn't appear to be many professional soldiers among them.

Only the Larkinson Clan diverged in this aspect as a lot of its leaders were either current or former servicemen.

Ves especially held high expectations for the Swordmaidens such as Ketis and Legion Commander Sendra.

However, the biggest complication was the lack of weapons and equipment. Everyone attended the founding ceremony while wearing their fanciest outfits as opposed to wearing their most practical and defensive gear.

The Swordmaidens had to leave behind their favorite greatswords. There was no way they could provide any legitimate excuse to bring these intimidating cutting weapons past the security checkpoints!

The clan also brought plenty of non-combatants who were not only useless in combat, but imposed a significant burden to their protectors!

Ves became concerned at the excessive proportion of senior leaders of the Larkinson Clan who were currently present in the same seating block.

If a fatal accident ever occurred, all of the chief ministers, normal ministers, directors, legion commanders and so on would be gone at once!

The loss of so many critical leaders would devastate the Larkinson Clan!

## **Chapter 4752: The Grand Stage**

As Ves settled in his seat and occasionally chatted with the Larkinsons around him, the seating blocks simultaneously moved into position.

They floated above the center plaza and gardens of the Government District and assumed a wide U-shaped formation that granted every seated guest a clear view of the grand stage that was floating up in front.

The stage was a magnificent piece of work. It blended advanced metals and ornate stone into a construction that formed an artistic tapestry of what the founders of Davute aspired to create.

The various carved and molded shapes depicted settled planets, powerful mechs and huge starships. The stage also added a strong human factor by showing many different professionals working together to make their new homeland prosper.

From an artistic standpoint, Ves could definitely tell that the colonial government put a lot of effort into hiring the right artisans and coordinating their individual efforts.

Over a hundred different artists had worked on the stage. Yet despite being marked by a large amount of individual touches, the craftsmen all blended their efforts into each other without producing any form of conflict, thereby producing a coherent collective artwork that possessed a strong collective meaning.

Aurelia was clever enough to pick up on the underlying message as well.

"The government desperately wants people to work together." She spoke. "It also wants to conquer the entire zone."

Minister Shederin Purnesse who sat behind the front row voiced his approval. "That is correct, but that is not the extent of the message that the artists have been tasked with conveying. Look deeper, young lady. What else stands out in your eyes?"

There was another meaning to the grand stage? Both Ves and Aurelia put more effort into analyzing what profound message may be hiding in the details.

Aurelia was too young to figure out a good answer. Her face scrunched up in confusion as she habitually hugged and stroked Clixie's furry body.

"Miaow miaow~"

"I don't know. Do you have an idea, papa?"

Ves grinned at his girl. As an artist himself, it had been easy enough for him to put himself in the shoes of the artisans and simulate their thinking towards their work.

It also helped that several of the participating artists also happened to be card-carrying members of the Creation Association!

With the help of Vulcan's vast insights in craftsmanship, Ves saw that the artisans responsible for creating the human figures had been instructed to shape their facial expressions in specific ways.

"Look at it from an emotional perspective, Aurelia. What mood does it try to impart in its viewers?"

"It is... cold due to the use of pale colors. It is also grand and distant. However... the people shown on the surface don't look unhappy at all. Instead, they all show a range of positive expressions. They are happy, hopeful, expectant and loving. It resembles the people of our clan."

"That's a good observation, my dear!" Ves praised. "The humans depicted on the exterior are optimistic, that is true. They are also exhibiting another pattern, which is the direction of their gazes. Each of the figures are looking straight in the direction of the

dais where the founding president of the colonial state is about to hold his historic speech."

The message it tried to convey was clear. Davute may be composed of people from all regions and all backgrounds, but only a single person was capable of bringing them hope and joy.

It was a rather symbolic message that sought to unite the disparate immigrants and stakeholders of Davute into a single cohesive group.

This was incredibly difficult at the best of times, but as Davute's regional holdings continued to experience rapid growth, it would become even more challenging to keep everything together.

A state that was experiencing rapid growth and change could easily be led astray if it was ruled by a committee of rivaling interests. Rivals and political opponents would constantly try to steer the development state in one direction or another. Nothing would get done and the situation on the ground would evolve in a chaotic and uncontrolled fashion until it all crashed down!

This was why it became so critical to put forth a single voice.

Even though it was risky to invest a lot of executive authority over an entire colonial state in a single person, an effective leader could cut through the confusion and force squabbling factions to work in the same direction rather than oppose each other all of the time.

Could President Yenames Clive become that person? Ves had no idea, but there had to be a lot of reasons why the original backers of Davute settled on him rather than any other viable candidate.

A good performance on this historic day was a great way to start his presidency on a good footing.

It was too bad that Ves became increasingly certain that the most important phase of the founding ceremony would never proceed according to plan.

He held the collapsed form of his Unending Regalia closer to his body so that he would be ready to deploy it as soon as possible.

"Look! The dark mechs have come!"

As a lengthy column of black mechs approached the center of the Government District. Their quantity along with their uniform dark gray color scheme contrasted strongly against the brightly colored architecture of the surrounding government buildings.



At the same time the mechs moved close enough to pass underneath the floating seating blocks, a figure weighed down by a multitude of yellow robes stepped forth.

The predominant color scheme of the robes was yellow. President Yenames Clive ponderously stepped forward. He gave everyone the illusion that it was a heavy burden for him to move forward with all of the layers of clothing weighing him down.

Many people shifted their attention from the mechs of Rorsh & Rorsh to the man appointed to lead their new state.

Large amounts of projections came to life in order to give everyone a good view of their new leader.

If that wasn't enough, the air above the center of the Government District turned into a giant mirror of the grand stage. Even those with poor eyesight could not claim to have seen the image of Yenames Clive!

"He's so big." Marvaine commented.

Gloriana patted his small body. "Shhh. Do not speak out of turn. It is rude and disrespectful to the people who worked hard to make this possible."

The little boy's comment was understandable. Not just children, but also adults gained the impression that the prospective president had become larger than life.

The elaborate pomp and the enlargement of many elements did not make Yenames Clive smaller.

Instead, it was the opposite. The grace and dignity that flowed from his expression and appearance made him look as if he belonged on the grandest stage in Davute. His presence elevated the entire founding ceremony.

Yenames Clive was no amateur. That was for sure. His carefully controlled movements exhibited just the right cadence to convey as much gravitas and regality as possible.

It was no coincidence that his heavy ceremonial robes harkened back to the regal garments of traditional kings and emperors.

Those who knew almost nothing about Yenames Clive would see this image of the man as the truest representation of their new leader!

As Yenames Clive stopped before an ornate lectern, the man raised his arms, causing many conversations to die down as everyone got ready to listen to what may be the most consequential speech of their lives.

"Colonists of the Red Ocean." Yenames uttered in a deep and thrumming voice that seemed perfectly modulated to shake the hearts, minds and bodies of his listeners. "Today, Davute shall rise."

He only spoke a couple of words so far, but somehow they resonated in the hearts of many colonists.

No matter where they originally came from and no matter how long they resided in Davute, billions of immigrants had already developed an immediate attachment to their new homes.

There were good reasons why this was the case.

Different lights shone on the yellow robed figure body, creating the illusion that Yenames Clive was a god that watched down onto his subjects in his domain.

"Davute is a crossroads." The president continued to speak. "To many humans, our colonial state is but one stop among many in their journey into the frontier. To other humans, it is their new home. No matter whether your plans end in Davute or beyond, we welcome all visitors, because that is our way. We are the managers of the crossroads. We are the caretakers of this important nexus of trade. We ensure that goods continue to flow where they must. Do you know why we must undertake these responsibilities?"

The man lifted up an arm as if he was reaching towards the skies.

"Because we are Davutans."

That sentence sounded ordinary if said in any other circumstances, but when spoken in this context, it generated an immediate sense of righteousness and belonging.

Ves found it interesting that Yenames Clive chose to start his speech by emphasizing the trade and commercial aspects of Davute. He truly wanted to associate their new home state with commerce in everyone's minds.

This was not enough to create a shared identity, though. The new president needed to do more in order to create a national identity for his new colonial state.

"What does it mean to be a Davutan?" President Yenames Clive asked. "There are many answers to this question. I will share with you the answer in my dreams."

The heavily robed figure gestured with his arm, causing a projection to appear behind his back that showed the early days of the colonization of the planet.

Davute VII used to be a promising and prosperous life-bearing planet. Once humanity arrived and made it suitable for human habitation, the site that eventually became

known as Kotor City became host to a large amount of prefab modular structures and landed starships.

"A Davutan presses forward." Yenames Clive said as the projected footage continued to display all of the difficult work required to build the initial shape of a settlement. "We have voluntarily distanced ourselves from the steady structure of the old galaxy so that we can build our new lives on our own terms. We are the pioneers, the settlers, the wayfarers and the workers of the Red Ocean. We are not afraid of challenging the status quo. We do not know how to stop."

The man created an image of a Davutan who was willing to abandon an easy life and work in a rough and developing colony in order to build a better future.

Even Ves felt taken by these words as the man's message about hardships and work aligned with his own values.

"A Davutan takes pride in honest work. We are decent people, and we must not forget this side of us as we work towards a better future in our new home state. Davute is a crossroads, but it is not the only one in the Red Ocean. If we desire to keep it alive, we must set aside our differences and present an open, tolerant and inclusive society to the foreigners that come to trade or settle among us. Tolerance pays. Inclusiveness allows us to build a stronger state. By becoming a people that can accept anyone, we can ensure our crossroads will be frequented the most. Every Davutan shall live like kings as long as we stay true to our collective mission!"

Ves had a feeling that President Yenames Clive may have taken inspiration from the Larkinson Clan when he and his writers drafted his speech.

He didn't blame the Davutans. The Larkinson Clan was a success story so it made sense to imitate its best practices.

Of course, Davute could not fully replicate the clan. The former did not possess a spiritual network to bind so many strangers together. The scale and living spaces were also entirely different. It was not wise to blindly copy the model of the Larkinson Clan to an actual colonial state.

## **Chapter 4753: Painting An Enemy**

Many people concentrated solely on President Yenames Clive's speech.

His words continued to enthrall and lure more Davutans into his narrative. President Yenames Clive single-handedly tried to shape the culture and values of his new people to fit his chosen ideal!

By bringing up themes such as tolerance and inclusiveness first, the former businessman clearly prioritized the need for his people to become excellent hosts to the foreigners that come to engage in trade and commerce.

"Our economy shall be our greatest strength." President Yenames Clive continued to hammer on this broad issue. "Our colonies cannot thrive without investment. Our salaries cannot be issued without revenue. Our mech pilots cannot fight effectively without quality mechs. Everything costs money, which means that earning more of it will make Davute stronger than any other colonial state!"

It was hard to argue these basic truths when everyone who emigrated from the stale but well-developed Milky Way experienced the many downsides of lacking funds.

This was especially awkward when the circumstances of the Red Ocean demanded more from people and organizations!

President Yenames Clive apparently thought that people's experiences over the last years had given them a profoundly greater appreciation of the importance of money.

Though Ves agreed with the man's words, his message presented an interesting contrast to the silent parade that was taking place on the ground.

It was a bold choice to hold this speech while letting the parade continue in a more diminished form.

Though the mechs that had marched through the streets of Kotor City were no longer accompanied by bombastic music and projected footage, the columns of war machines still evoked a martial atmosphere that contrasted against the peaceful message conveyed by President Yenames Clive.

The dichotomy carried the implicit message that for all of the leader's welcoming words, Davute was not a soft target. It had the mechs to back up its ambitions. A welcoming hand could easily turn into a clenched fist at any moment.

The variety of mechs on parade silently showcased the diversity and prosperity of the regional mech industry. The abundance of homegrown mechs along with their rich set of features could not have emerged without a strong economic base.

By silently showing that Davute was able to house and support so many strong and distinctive mech companies, it was cleverly marketing its strong military industry.

Anyone who wanted to buy the best mechs in the greatest quantities should turn to Davute!

At the same time, those who thought that Davute was nothing but a big and vulnerable marketplace would get confronted by its many defending mechs!

More and more people took pride in the strength and prosperity that Davute had already accumulated in such a short amount of time. The uplifting words of President Yenames Clive clearly caused a lot of people to feel a sense of ownership towards the colonial state that they had adopted in their hearts.

When Ves shifted his gaze to the people seated in Block L, he noticed that Yenames Clive managed to capture an awful lot of people.

It was not that big of a surprise to see the people working for local companies and institutions to strongly identify with the president's narrative.

However, what Ves did not like as much was how even his own Larkinsons became swayed by the belonging and identity espoused by the ambitious leader!

Though there were plenty of clansmen such as Ketis and Commander Valerie Chancy that showed no apparent interest in becoming a Davutan, there were other people who showed a faint yearning to become a contributing citizen of the new colonial state!

"You can take an individual out of a state, but you can't take the state away from that same person." Ves muttered.

Certain individuals who had built up successful and memorable lives in a state such as Chief Minister Magdalena Larkinson and the Purnessers showed a clear preference of working within the framework of a traditional state.

They were all old and possessed a lot more confidence in their ability to navigate the confines of Davute. They wouldn't have to confront the many limitations of trying to run a sovereign clan that possessed no real territory of its own that they could treat as their homeland.

To many of these nostalgic individuals, the Davute Branch may not be as important as they liked, but it was a good first start.

The seating block did not contain a lot of younger clansmen, but Ves bet that the Larkinsons from the later generations were much less interested in what Davute had to offer.

The mech pilots from the same generation as him were still hungry for more and possessed the courage to confront greater dangers in the hopes of obtaining a greater payoff.

President Yenames Clive continued to speak about the importance of building a strong economy for another minute. Not everyone was able to understand his full reasoning and arguments, but that did not prevent them from knowing that wealth was the key to transforming Davute into a dominant state in the Krakatoa Middle Zone!

The man finally pivoted to the military affairs of the state.

There was no way he could speak about Davute without bringing up its fated archrival.

"As much as we aspire to become the first crossroads that everyone considers when their journey passes through Krakotoa, there are adversaries that seek to deprive us from plying our honest trade."

Many faces became angry or disgruntled as they thought about the rival colonial state that had already started to frustrate Davute in many different ways.

"Karlach." Yenames spat the name as if he was referring to a demon. "Karlach yearns to become Davute. Its leaders are less forgiving and more tyrannical. Its port system has not been able to match the quantity of traffic that our own capital has attracted. It does not respect the rights of its satellite star systems as much as us. Make no mistake. Karlach is a disease that has taken root in our zone. What is worse is that this affliction is spreading and encroaching on our territory. Will you permit this plague to take root in the colony that you have built with your own hands?!"

"NO!" Millions of people in Kotor City simultaneously thundered a reply!

It didn't matter whether they were sitting on a floating construction or standing on the streets. Each of them had developed enough of a sense of belonging to Davute that they became protective of 'their' state!

Ves had to hand it to Yenames Clive. It was clever of him to emphasize everyone's contributions and build up Davute's prosperity before introducing a clear enemy.

The narrative that the president built up was that the evil Karlachs envied the Davutans and sought to take away everything by force!

There was no way the colonists that had settled in Davute would be willing to let an aggressor take advantage of them. They invested too much in their own colonial state to be willing to let others deprive them of the fruits of their labor.

The mechs that marched down below took on a greater emphasis as a result. Everyone gained a reminder that these machines were not just products meant for export, but also war materiel that could be used to defend the sovereignty of their new colonial state!

With mechs from companies such as Rorsh & Rorsh and Renewal Tech & Design parading through the Government District while Yenames Clive held his speech, Davute showed that it was more than ready to step up and defend its precious holdings!

"You may be wondering why we must paint the subjects of Karlach as our enemies." Yenames Clive spoke as the man adopted a sympathetic expression. " They are

humans who appear no different from ourselves. Is it not better for us to unite and form a united front in a galaxy that is still filled with hostile aliens that hate us both?"

Ves wordlessly rolled his eyes. As if there were any Davutans that possessed the courage to take up the fight against powerful alien warships that could blow up a starship with a single salvo of their main cannon batteries.

The president did not take notice of a single mech designer's reaction. His dignified face grew more severe.

The projections behind him began to show raw battle footage taken from the mechs that fought against the machines in the employ of Karlach.

"Before we can confront a greater mission and work towards freeing this dwarf galaxy from the clutches of the savage and undeserving aliens, we must first guarantee our own safety. Even now, our unfriendly neighbors are gearing up for a destructive invasion that will not cease until it has reached the heart of our colonial state! The Karlachs seek to break our resolve, drive us from our new homes and appropriate all of the work we have done to make our colonies great! Will you let this aggression stand?!"

"NOOOO!"

The man spoke as if Karlach had already initiated a military offensive into Davute!

Ves knew that this was not the case. At most, the mercenary outfits hired by either side had begun to dance around each other at the contentious border region.

The quantity that got trashed was quite considerable, but actual deaths among mech pilots and support personnel were fairly low.

The mercenaries weren't stupid. They knew that their employers wanted to create an image of active hostilities for their own ends. The mercenaries contracted to fight at the border were merely a means to an end.

As such, the mercenary outfits that performed their missions would put up a dramatic show that was sure to look incredibly violent in all of the footage, but actually consisted of a lot of smoke and mirrors.

From employing an abundance of explosives that hit useless ground to cutting off the limbs of enemy mechs but failing to follow up, both sides tried to fulfill their contracts but avoid making it any bloodier than necessary.

Davute and Karlach weren't stupid either. They knew that the mercenaries that accepted their contracts only worked half-heartedly, but as long as they created the illusion of a destructive and escalating conflict, everyone got what they wanted!



"Just because we embrace peace does not mean we are unable to go to war."  
Yenames Clive continued. "The repeated provocations of Karlachs has made it clear that our neighbors do not intend to stop until they have engulfed our entire state and everything that we have worked towards. It is not enough for us to become traders and producers. If we want our Davute to remain ours, then we must become willing to take up arms and defend our state against the murderous forces of Karlach!"

As President Yenames Clive continued to demonize Karlach in order to reduce everyone's reluctance to start a bloody conflict against a rival colonial state, Ves had not forgotten about his original priorities.

Ves understood that the time had almost come to trigger whatever measures the conspirators had prepared.

The speech drove up all of the dark and negative emotions of the citizens of Davute. Each of them started to gain a lower and lower opinion of Karlach.

However, words were still words. There was a limit to how many Davutans would become susceptible to such a limited form of indoctrination.

Therefore, the best way to persuade them that Karlach was a real and actual threat was to make it tangible!

While everyone continued to listen to the speech, Ves had raised his alertness to the highest level.

He held a handmade totem of Ylvaine in his hands and quietly communed with the design spirit in order to identify the timing and nature of a possible attack.

Though the proximity of several ace mechs was still causing plenty of interference to Ylvaine, the Great Prophet was still able to tease out a few clues as long as he did not cast his gaze further than a couple of minutes.

Ves almost froze when Ylvaine silently communicated a concerning message.

In three minutes, the probability that hundreds of people would have their futures cut off had spiked!

## **Chapter 4754: The Other Secret Agent**

"We must not show any mercy to the aggressors that seek to take over our colonies."  
President Yenames Clive continued to rail against the greatest threat of the Davute Project. "Karlach will remain an ever-present threat to our wealth, our possessions, our livelihoods and the future that you have promised to your descendants. Only by ending



this threat on a permanent basis and taking custody of all of its colonies will we be able to safeguard our new homeland."

As the man of the hour continued to impress his audience upon the importance of eliminating Karlach as a threat, Ves no longer had the mind to think that much about what the president was saying.

He was much more concerned about the nature of the threat that would soon doom the lives of hundreds of people if not thousands of them in the coming minutes!

Despite how little time there was left for a possible attack to occur, Ylvaine still couldn't provide Ves with a lot of certainty.

After working with the human design spirit for several years, Ves had gradually gained a general understanding of how Ylvaine's predictive capabilities work.

The mechanism behind the ability to see the future was still a mystery to Ves, but it wasn't necessary for him to know all of that if he just wanted to comprehend its limitations.

From what Ves was able to piece together, there were many possible futures. There were ones where Ves might spontaneously combust and die, though the chance of that happening was so exceedingly small that Ylvaine did not spend a single thought on these outlandish timelines.

What interested the Great Prophet more were the futures that had a realistic chance of coming true.

However, just because an event had a 70 percent of coming true did not mean it was guaranteed to happen.

This was why his ability to predict future possibilities became a lot fuzzier and more abstract the further he cast his gaze. Every subsequent prediction built upon a previous one which in turn rested on another probable event. Ylvaine's prophecies could become entirely wrong if a crucial early event that had a high chance of coming true did not actually happen!

In theory, the design spirit could largely avoid this problem if he only looked forward a couple of seconds to a couple of minutes at best, but Ylvaine still became confronted by the same cloud of uncertainty as before.

This suggested to Ves that a large amount of dramatic events could take place in the following minutes!

Each crucial action completely changed the subsequent equations, thereby invalidating a lot of scenarios that Ylvaine previously considered.

It all reminded Ves about the confusing mess that was quantum mechanics. It was exceedingly hard to apply it at the macroscopic level, but the most advanced civilizations had somehow managed to develop working applications that should have been impossible to realize in any other circumstance.

Since high technology was capable of playing around with quantum mechanics, it was not that big of a stretch to assume that metaphysics could interact with this difficult field as well.

In any case, the problem with quantum mechanics was that it could never make a 100 percent prediction of the future. A simple question of whether the founding ceremony would get disrupting within the next 3 minutes became an event that was 60 percent likely to happen.

Still, despite the fact that there was a whopping 40 percent chance that Ves had been overreacting for no reason all of this time, he felt it was better to assume the worst.

"60 percent is already far too great of a risk." Ves muttered under his breath.

The apparent fact that an attack would happen 60 out of 100 times was already strong proof that nefarious parties definitely intended to cause a lot of disruption during the founding ceremony!

Enemies, traitors and other malicious actors had already put a lot of work and effort into circumventing the extremely tight security arrangements of the main event.

They just needed to pull a series of crucial triggers in order to launch a devastating strike that was sure to produce a major tragedy on this day!

"C'mon, help me out here. What is going to happen?"

What Ves had to do right now was to narrow down the possible causes of the possible mass killings.

He directed his gaze towards the many military mechs that stood guard or patrolled the surroundings with great diligence.

Any of them could turn their armaments against the seating blocks at any moment, though the chance that they would succeed was minimal as they would immediately get shot down by the ever-watchful ace mechs.

It was a lot more probable for a strike to originate from a long distance. For example, a stealthed satellite hovering in orbit or a hidden artillery cannon emplacement installed in a remote area over a hundred kilometers away.

It would be difficult for highly alert ace pilots to anticipate threats from extreme ranges. Their intuition may have reached a superhuman level, but their ability to predict threats in advance was nowhere close to comprehensive as that of Ylvaine!

Ves tried his best to look around in each direction, but to no avail. Neither he nor Ylvaine came any closer to ruling out any possibilities.

What was worse was that they couldn't even rule out the chance that he and his fellow Larkinsons might fall victim in the ensuing chaos.

Unlike with the Crossers, Ylvaine did not foresee a strong certainty of death among the Larkinsons.

That didn't mean that Ves was happy with this knowledge!

It told Ves that whatever chaos that might ensue had a decent chance of spilling over the other seating blocks.

He had hoped that this probably would drop as the critical moment drew closer, but it appeared that he was hoping for too much.

He subtly shook his head.

This wasn't working. Since Ylvaine could not pin down the potential in advance, that left Ves with few acceptable choices.

Fine then.

He concentrated his mind on another part of himself.

He did not focus on Blinky or Vulcan this time as they were both intangible in nature.

Instead, he shifted his attention to a third incarnation that no one should know about except himself.

He had never told his wife, his children, Calabast, Ketis or anyone else about his masterwork cyborg cat. Ves could never explain where it came from or how he managed to make such a transcendent marvel.

Though Ves planned to employ her as a backup to his own life, he had yet to find a quality home for his living divine artifact.

For now, he was content with leaving her with the fleet whenever he was stuck on the surface of a planet and vice versa.

It was only after his eventful talk with Calabast that Ves secretly decided to bring his third incarnation to the surface of Davute VII as well.

This did not align with the rules he set for himself, but he broke them because he wanted to save the Crossers that were marked for death.

Of course, he also agreed with Calabast that he could exploit this situation to his advantage.

Right now, Secret Agent Veronica was on the job!

Myaow.

The Cyborg Cat was currently hiding within the solid floor directly underneath the seats of Block M.

It was quite risky to sneak Veronica into the right position. Just getting her there was a little troublesome as she had to smuggle herself onto the same floating platform as the one that carried the leaders of the Cross Clan in order to bring her to Block M.

Throughout this period, Veronica constantly made maximum use of her strong inherent hiding abilities.

Her inbuilt ECM functions prevented most electronic sensors from detecting her body.

Her phasewater affinity allowed her to integrate a higher proportion of phasewater in her partially organic body than Ves. It also enabled her to execute a variety of basic abilities such as placing her body slightly out of phase with the material realm.

Her Permanent Mimic Arcutuleum Platinum body allowed her to mimic any material she came into contact with, allowing her to blend into structures.

She possessed a variety of other advantages, many of which were geared towards making her more difficult to detect through both material and spiritual means.

Veronica was actually a better version of Ves in that sense. As his 'divine artifact', she partially represented what Ves could become in the future if he continued towards Spiritual Ascension.

Ves designed Veronica with clear strengths in mind. As a simple mech designer who just wanted to stay alive so that he could do his work in peace, he designed his cyborg cat with survival in mind.

More specifically, Veronica was supposed to excel in survival by making sure that no one knew she existed in the first place!

Of course, if any did happen to know about the existence of the cat, that was still fine as well. People would never think that this 'simple' silver mechanical cat actually possessed a lot of transphasic and electronic warfare capabilities!

Sneaking Veronica into Block M and keeping her hidden from all of the high-tech sensors and scanners was her first test.

Preventing his cyborg cat from tripping the unnaturally sharp and prescient intuition of patrolling Saints was her second test.

Once Veronica did the deed that Ves had mind, getting away completely undetected was her third test!

The cyborg cat needed to pass through all three tests in order for Ves to declare her mission a success.

For now, Veronica easily managed to pass the first test. Reaching the right position turned out to be manageable. Sneaking past the powerful sensors and scanners that protected the outer perimeter had also been easy enough.

Sensor systems that were specifically developed to detect any transphasic phenomenon failed to sense anything wrong. The cyborg cat relied on multiple different measures to escape detection, so if one of them failed, the other methods still had a chance of working!

Passing the second test was a lot more nerve-wracking.

Of the half-a-dozen ace mechs that were active in the Government District, the Indormeon piloted by Saint Yorvick Clive was hiding right behind the grand stage where the president held his speech.

The impressive machine remained out of sight of most people and recording devices in order to avoid stealing the show from his cousin.

The Koi Riser piloted by Saint Megan Roonzin took over the Indormeon's previous task and shadowed Block A. The ace swordsman mech thereby guaranteed the safety of all of the important representatives of the Clive Consortium, the Dogen Collective, the Serenitas Foundation and the other original investors of the Davute Project.

Ves tried to find the Mars but couldn't see the machine piloted by Patriarch Reginald Cross from his seat at Block L.

Since the Mars was an absolutely stellar masterwork ace mech, the Davutans feared that it would have stolen President Yenames Clive's thunder during the time he held his speech.

That was why they presumably assigned the Mars to a guard position that was far enough away from the center of the Government District!

This was bad news for Ves, but he already took this possibility into account.

The only ace mech that Ves had to worry about was the Shotgun Shogun, a destructive ace striker mech piloted by Saint Antai Shogi.

Though the Shotgun Shogun was a hefty machine that could never be overlooked, Saint Shogi tried his best not to steal the show either.

For this reason, Saint Shogi tried to minimize the amount of disruption that he could cause. He only made a few rounds before the start of President Yenames Clive's speech before he slowed down. He also tried to keep his ace mech out of sight as much as possible while utilizing his Saint Kingdom at a lower intensity to sweep through the seating blocks with the lightest of touches.

Though the Shotgun Shogun had swept Block M while Veronica was hiding inside it multiple times, the ace mech showed no sign that it picked up on the fact that a strange cyborg cat was secretly hiding inside.

Ves minutely narrowed his eyes. Everything looked clear so far. After another second of contemplation, he decided to go through with his radical plan.

## **Chapter 4755: Saint Antai Shogi**

The cyborg cat silently moved through the solid floor until she had reached right underneath the seat of Arthur Pennyane, the Chief Executive Officer of the Pennyane Planetary Shipping Company.

While Ves did his best to pretend that he was listening attentively to President Yenames Clive's speech, he silently apologized to the innocent CEO.

In order for his plan to work, he needed a high-value sacrifice. Arthur Pennyane definitely met his requirements.

Besides, the old man was already getting on in his years, and he had already raised a bunch of qualified successors. The overworked CEO would probably appreciate the opportunity to go on an early retirement!

After completing his apology in advance, Ves gave the greenlight for Veronica to make her move!

The hidden cat's purple eyes gleamed as she exerted a tiny amount of her power.

Myaow!

"...Every Davutan must play his part in our struggle to defend against the aggression of the Karlachs. Whether you can pilot a mech or not, each of you--"

Bang!

"--can contribute to the survival of our precious colonial state..."

President Yenames Clive almost interrupted his speech after he received an emergency notification, but he managed to maintain control well enough to keep going without skipping any beat.

On the other hand, Block M quickly descended into panic as the body of Arthur Pennylane spontaneously burst into pieces!

"HE'S DEAD!" The executive sitting next to him rose to his feet in horror as blood and flesh spilled over from a body that should have been whole. "HE'S BEEN ASSASSINATED!"

The dramatic and explosive death of Arthur Pennylane triggered immediate reactions from a host of people!

President Yenames Clive may be carrying on with his speech while maintaining the same unflappable bearing and demeanor as always, but to say he was upset was an understatement!

The man did not want this strange assassination to completely ruin the most important occasion of his extensive lifetime.

A part of his mind already transmitted numerous urgent commands through his cranial implant. He wanted his subordinates to handle the situation right away and keep the disruption to a minimum!

Meanwhile, Block M became a lot more disarrayed as soon as a body burst apart as if a bomb had gone off inside his body.

It wasn't just the fact that someone spontaneously exploded that triggered so much panic and screaming.

It was the fact that it happened to an individual that should have been protected against assassination that truly shocked the people seated in Block M!

Strangely enough, the guests sitting at the other seating blocks hadn't actually noticed anything, which was exactly the result that the authorities wanted to keep.

This was because shortly after the powerful monitoring systems detected that an important guest had lost his life at Block M, a powerful projection overlapped the surface of the energy shield, depicting a simulated image of the guests while they were completely fine!

Nothing unusual seemed to have happened and Arthur Pennylane looked as if he was still completely healthy and breathing.

The founding ceremony therefore continued to proceed without getting marred by any awful accidents.

While the government officials were happy that it managed to prevent this incident from spilling over, that still didn't make up for the fact that one of their VIPs died under their watch!

A lot of activity took place within the false projected image.

For one, practically everyone rose from their seats as if they feared they would be next!

A lot of clever people had already guessed that the attack may be positional in nature. For example, a tiny bomb may have been planted beneath their seats.

For this reason, they not only relocated elsewhere, but also floated in the air so that they at least had a chance of detecting an incoming attack.

The security guards moved into action as well. Those that were closest immediately raced forward to examine the immediate area and determine whether there were any other explosives in the vicinity.

Dozens of other guards poured in from the other sections of the seating block. They either moved to calm down the panicking guards or fanned out to inspect the emptied seating areas.

Seconds later, a powerful Saint Kingdom engulfed the entire seating block.

"The Shotgun Shogun has arrived!"

"Get us out of here!"

"We demand restitution!"

"SILENCE." The amplified voice of Saint Shogi thundered into everyone's ears!

Though the heavy willpower of the ace pilot did much to calm and silence the VIPs by force, many of the invited guests were anything but average people!



Leaving aside the children and spouses that accompanied their important family members, the true VIPs were all highly intelligent or highly competent leaders in their own fields.

Their mental strength and determination were considerably higher than average. Though the prospect of death was enough to scare them out of their wits, they were not willing to allow an ace pilot to cow them into submission!

This counted double for the Crossers! A part of their leadership consisted of current or former mech pilots. The rest received some measure of combat training as the Garlen Empire where they originated from was an incredibly martial state where strength was admired.

It did not surprise anyone that the Crossers therefore exhibited the best reactions in response to the recent events.

At first, they flew out of their seats and spread out to prevent themselves from getting taken out at once by a single explosive attack.

Then, they started to converge into groups of 6 to 10 people. The most competent warriors among the Crossers surrounded the young and the vulnerable with their bodies.

Although there was not much they could do without their mechs or combat equipment, not all of them were as weak as they appeared on the surface!

Those with combat-oriented implants and genetic modifications could be surprisingly deadly under the right circumstances.

Not even the arrival of a powerful ace mech could sway them from their determination to bring themselves and their families to safety!

"It is not safe here anymore."

"We need to evacuate from this deathtrap as soon as possible!"

"Unlock the exits or get this damned energy shield out of the way!"

An ace pilot paired with a good machine may be more than capable of challenging enemy ace mechs and alien warships in a head-on clash, but Saint Shogi was not equipped to deal with the massed objections from hundreds of VIPs!

Many of these individuals controlled or contributed to a significant part of Davute's commercial, logistical, industrial and military sectors.

If too many of them lost their trust in the ability of their hosts to protect them or decided to take their business to another colonial state, then that would inflict an unimaginable amount of damage to Davute!

The state that President Yenames Clive dreamed of building was one that became strong due to accepting as much trade and commerce as possible.

If a large number of disgruntled groups pulled out their investments at once, then that might hinder the Davute Project's development plan and cause the once-promising state to falter in a war against the much more solid Karlach!

One of the reasons why Saint Shogi had been assigned to patrol the seating blocks was because he was not a single-minded brute that only knew how to solve problems by blasting his ace mech's formidable shotgun at them. He could be mindful when he needed to be and he was also frank enough to admit his own shortcomings.

"CALM DOWN. ADDITIONAL FORCES ARE ALREADY ON THEIR WAY TO SECURE THIS STRUCTURE. YOUR SAFETY IS OUR HIGHEST PRIORITY. NOTHING WILL HAPPEN AS SOON AS OUR ELITE TROOPERS ARRIVE. I HAVE ALREADY EXAMINED THE ENTIRE SEATING BLOCK WITH MY SAINT KINGDOM. I HAVE NOT DETECTED ANYTHING THAT CAN POSSIBLY POSE A THREAT TO YOUR LIVES."

The answer along with the powerful strength exuded by Saint Shogi made it difficult for the VIPs to directly challenge his words.

Though there were a number of CEOs or board directors that looked ready to step up, it was at this time that Master Benedict Cortez rose up and offered a retort.

"How can we possibly trust in your ability to detect danger when you have swept our seating block multiple times before? I know for certain that you have examined our location several times when Mr. Arthur Pennylane was within the range of your domain field. For you to be unable to detect anything amiss in his body or his immediate surroundings is a failure of the highest order. The CEO of one of the most largest and extensive transportation companies on the planet entrusted his safety to you and the security detail, but what has that got him? His body has fallen apart and his head has shattered to the point where we cannot preserve his brain anymore!"

Master Benedict had already entered into high alert from the moment that Ves sent him a cryptic warning.

Though Ves was not exactly the sanest mech designer he knew, the young Journeyman was a wily survivor and had likely possessed an excellent sense for danger.

The warning along with the dramatic death of Mr. Pennylane had completely awakened a beast that the Master Mech Designer previously locked up in the depths of his being.

Benedict had roused the Skull Architect part of his life again. As a mech designer who had been forced to live the life of a pirate lord for a number of decades of his life, he had learned how to question everything.

"MASTER CORTEZ, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, I HAVE EXAMINED YOUR SEATING BLOCK FROM TOP TO BOTTOM AT FULL POWER. THERE ARE NO BOMBS, TRAPS OR ANY OTHER SOURCES OF THREATS IN THE AREA, IF THERE WERE ANY AT ALL. PLEASE--"

"Do not speak empty platitudes!" The Master Mech Designer shot back! "Your security measures have already failed once as any assassin that has sought to kill us has been able to circumvent them despite your best efforts. How can we expect that a repeat event will not happen when the circumstances have not fundamentally changed? You are still using the same tech and the same people to inspect our seating block! If the input remains similar enough, the outcome is unlikely to change. The probability that another person among us will die in spite of your raised alertness is still too high!"

The two kept arguing against each other. Saint Shogi wanted to placate the VIPs, but Master Benedict kept demanding to evacuate this cursed seating block.

This was unacceptable to the Davutans as it would ruin the perfectly choreographed founding ceremony!

"The only circumstance where we feel adequately protected is if you permanently stand guard next to our seating block." Master Benedict attempted to offer a compromise. "If your Saint Kingdom covers us for the remainder of this phase of this ceremony, you may convince us to return to our seats."

"I AM AFRAID I CANNOT DO THAT, MASTER. MY MISSION IS TO PATROL, INSPECT AND GUARD EVERY SEATING BLOCK. I AM NOT MEANT TO SERVE AS YOUR PERSONAL GUARD."

"Bring over another ace mech, then!"

"ALL OF OUR CURRENT ACE MECHS ALL HOLD IMPORTANT REPONSIBILITIES. THEY CANNOT BE REASSIGNED."

"Then let our clan recall our own ace mech! Saint Reginald Cross and the Mars are stationed not too far away in the same district. Bring him over so that we can take care of our own security!"

"YOUR SAINT IS NEEDED THERE. HE IS NOT PERMITTED TO APPROACH THE CENTER OF THIS DISTRICT."

Just as Master Benedict was ready to respond with another counter-argument, a series of dramatic events took place in a matter of seconds.

It started when the strong interference field that engulfed the center of the Government District malfunctioned all of a sudden.

"What happened?"

"I feel a lot more comfortable?"

Master Benedict knew enough about what had disappeared. He widened his eyes in alarm.

"The spatial interdiction fields responsible for blocking warp travel, teleportation and other forms of spatial manipulation have disappeared!"

By the time he finished that sentence, a large crowd of exobeasts of varying shapes and sizes appeared right in the middle of the plaza down below!

This eclectic swarm of exobeasts immediately went berserk and started to rampage in every direction!

What was worse was that this was not the only group of alien beasts that managed to get loose.

More clusters of violent and dangerous exobeasts had been teleported to multiple different streets throughout the Government District!

"Ahhh!"

"Where are the guards?!"

The heart of Davute had come under attack by an unlikely category of hostiles!

As alarms rang in the air, three of the oddest-looking beasts suddenly turned into different directions and opened their maws.

Each creature released a supremely powerful transphasic heat beam that was targeted towards three seemingly random seating blocks!

One of them happened to be Block M!

Even as two of the heat beams overcame the energy shields protecting Block E and Block Y with disturbing ease, the Shotgun Shogun had placed itself directly in front of Block M and utilized all of its formidable defensive capabilities to block the third heat beam!

## Chapter 4756: Second Thoughts

Many minutes before a monstrous surprise attack disrupted the most important phase of the founding ceremony, Prospective President Yenames Clive patiently waited as a team of professionals fluffed up the exquisite layers of garments that had been piled onto his body.

Another attendant had already brushed up his makeup and slightly modified it so that he would look as commanding as possible when he held the most important speech of his life.

Standing by the side was Reina Kernsk, who wore a dark ceremonial uniform of her own that looked suitably refined but did not overshadow the president or any of his senior officials.

As Yenames Clive's confidant and chief of staff, Madame Kernsk was in constant communication with the different arms of the government apparatus.

She wielded the power of the prospective president on behalf of the man himself. This not only allowed her to command a huge variety of departments, but also granted her unparalleled access to government systems and databases.

Naturally, Reina Kernsk could not wield all of these powers on an indiscriminate basis. She was not the president herself, but she was merely his trusted agent.

As such, there were entire control departments based inside Skyline Palace that constantly tracked and monitored the actions of the chief of staff and other important personnel.

Numerous intelligence agencies empowered by the government to undertake counterintelligence duties covertly spied on public officials in order to catch for any acts of treason or severe misconduct.

Then there were the president's most solid and reliable protectors.

Anyone who served closely by the side of Yenames Clive had to make sure to hold no duplicitous thoughts. At the very least Reina Kernsk was not allowed to act on them in any way!

This was because the slightest sign of treachery or malice could trip the suspicions of the ace pilots assigned to guard their principal!

Ace pilots paired with ace mechs possessed many metaphysical powers that could not be described or reproduced through conventional means.

Nonetheless, this was the Age of Mechs. Despite the inability to figure out the mechanisms behind their amazing abilities, many powerful leaders had come to trust the Saints and their inexplicable powers.

The active intervention and promotion by the Mech Trade Association had led to a rapid degree of acceptance of ace pilots and all of the benefits they could bring to the table.

Barring a few exceptions, ace pilots always abided by their word. They could be trusted to discharge their duties faithfully and without any hesitation. If they ever entertained any doubts, they were always honest enough to discuss them openly with their employers rather than lie or scheme behind their backs.

In a day and age where trust was never absolute and where a whole array of advanced technology could assassinate or sabotage damn near anyone and anything, the introduction of ace pilots and their miraculous powers urgently served an essential need for powerful states and organizations.

In fact, one of the unofficial but essential requirements to found and run a second-rate state was to have at least one dedicated ace pilot on retainer!

Those that attempted to run a second-rate state without the protection of a Saint became far too susceptible to manipulation, blackmail, sabotage and outright decapitation strikes.

This was also why no one was eager to cooperate with ambitious parties that tried to build a powerful state, which subsequently hindered their plans of succeeding in their ambitious ventures.

One of the fundamental reasons why Davute and Karlach had entered into the forefront of the Krakatoa Middle Zone was because both of these rising powers had multiple ace pilots under their command!

Not only that, but through establishing extensive cooperation agreements with powerful pioneering organizations such as the Cross Clan, the two colonial states substantially increased the amount of ace mechs they could deploy on the battlefield!

Of course, the latter group could not be relied upon to fight for Davute on an unconditional basis. Powerful individuals such as Patriarch Reginald Cross only fought for the colonial state when their goals happened to be aligned. Once this was no longer the case, it would be difficult for the government to rely on these mercenary Saints.

Only a small group of hand-picked ace pilots received the privilege of guarding and watching over President Yenames Clive.

This presidential guard duty was extremely sensitive and critical. Not only were the ace pilots not allowed to make any mistake, they also routinely came into contact with

incredibly important and damaging secrets. The ace pilots had to make absolute vows to never divulge any secrets they heard without the express permission of their employers.

Right now, Saint Antai Shogi kept careful watch over President Yenames Clive. His iconic Shotgun Shogun hovered right outside. His Saint Kingdom cast an invisible blanket across every individual within its extensive range, causing them to feel as if they were never truly alone.

Reina Kernsk had lived under these circumstances since the beginning of the colony. It was difficult for many people to rein in their impulses and live a more honest life, but those who managed to pass this difficult test enjoyed a lot of trust from their employers.

This was exactly the case with the female chief of staff. Every day she reported for duty, an ace pilot assigned to guard the president thoroughly verified her intentions and confirmed that she bore not a single thought of ill will towards Yenames Clive.

"Reina." Yenames Clive spoke in his smooth and commanding voice after his makeup had been adjusted. "Have the speech writers completed their final adjustments?"

"Yes, sir." The uniformed woman responded. "I have read through the speech myself. The writers have increased the proportion of targeted attacks towards Karlach. Depending on how you deliver these words, you should be able to whip up a higher number of citizens against our rival with these adjustments."

She handed over the latest iteration of the speech to Yenames Clive in the form of a secure data chip, who promptly transferred the contents to his cranial implant after verifying that it did not contain any malware.

It would have been a lot more convenient if the president received this package directly through a wireless connection, but it was way too risky for a man of his importance to casually transmit and receive a lot of data in a wireless form.

Yenames Clive possessed perfect control over his expressions, so he never needlessly displayed his disapproval.

Nonetheless, Reina Kernsk had worked for him long enough to sense that he was not entirely pleased.

"One of the important criteria that I have set for this speech is that it must be timeless and relevant throughout the years." The man slowly spoke. "Whether people listen to it today, fifty years later or even a thousand years from now, my words must remain relevant to each of them provided that our colonial state still exists in a recognizable form at that time. Specifically attacking a rival state may be highly relevant for the time being, but it will render much of my speech antiquated and irrelevant to a future audience."



The chief of staff understood his concerns.

"There are good reasons why these adjustments are necessary. Making a speech that will remain timeless is a good aspiration, but it becomes moot if Davute ever suffers total defeat at the hands of Karlach. Our hostile neighbors are making excellent strides in building up a powerful mech army by luring in many powerful mercenary organizations. If you have read the intelligence reports and military analysis reports, the Karlach mech forces will hit our lines hard right at the start of formal hostilities. If this happens, our lines will break and collapse if our defending troops do not have the motivation and resolve to stand their ground."

She did not need to remind the prospective president what needed to be done to prevent this from happening.

The colonial state already poured in a lot of funding and resources into the border systems. Each of them was being fortified at a rapid rate. A lot of newly raised mech units would soon get transferred to these strategic locations as soon as the bases and space stations could accommodate their presence.

Still, no amount of fortification work would help with stopping the Karlachs if the soldiers faltered before their defenses!

In order to motivate so many selfish soldiers and mercenaries into holding their ground against the formidable mech forces fighting under the banner of Karlach, it was crucial for President Yenames Clive to rally his new subjects against a common enemy!

"The changes are distasteful... but effective." The man admitted. "I fear that I will come across as a demagogue rather than the father of a state. That is not the start to my presidency that I have envisioned."

"We must attain victory before anything else, sir. If giving up a part of your dignity and losing the universality of your speech can help our soldiers vanquish over their Karlach counterparts, then that is a favorable transaction. You can always rebuild your dignity and legacy at a later date. You cannot regain the territories of Davute once Karlach's forces have routed our troops and conquered our colonial state."

A man as proud as Yenames Clive could not stomach this transaction easily. Nonetheless, he was no stranger to painful compromises. He knew it was best to meet his essential short-term obligations before he could address his long-term priorities.

"So be it. Please inspect the voice amplification settings and verify that they have taken the alterations to the speech into account. If I must unleash thunder and fury against Karlach, then I shall do so beautifully. Make certain that the sound engineers exercise precise control over the amplification of my voice."

"The best of the best are handling this assignment."



Once President Yenames Clive confirmed that every detail surrounding the upcoming speech was in order, he moved to make his first public appearance in front of a mass audience.

In the meantime, the Indormeon piloted by Saint Yorvick Clive relieved the Shotgun Shogun from its current guard duty.

The ace striker mech piloted by Saint Shogi proceeded to undertake his new mission of guarding the VIP seating blocks.

The ace knight mech that remained behind carefully covered Prospective President Yenames Clive and everyone else in the vicinity.

Reina Kernsk could feel that Saint Yorvick Clive paid much closer attention to herself all of a sudden.

Just as she wondered what had caused her to attract the ace pilot's elevated focus, the Indormeon's Saint Kingdom precisely vibrated the air between her ears to produce a single voice command.

"AE-3410-EFK-ASPARAGUS-TUUUUS-#34RR-CXEIE36RE-S-ROYALE."

Though this string of code meant nothing to Reina Kernsk, it triggered a hidden setting of her cranial implant.

Her entire mind froze as the cranial implant secretly became a lot more active!

Normally, activity of this level should have triggered a number of highly sensitive sensors, but this didn't happen due to the deliberate tampering of Saint Yorvick's domain field!

As such, Reina Kernsk's mind completely shifted without alerting anyone else.

It took a moment before the woman opened her eyes once again. Her gaze became minutely sharper, wiser and more assertive, though she quickly softened her demeanor so that she became indistinguishable from her previous state.

The woman did not turn to look in the direction of the Indormeon, though her altered mind clearly directed its attention towards the ace pilot.

Saint Yorvick Clive made a brief mental bow towards the woman. "Welcome to the Red Ocean, my lady."

"Report." She spoke in a soft but uncannily commanding tone that resembled that of Yenames Clive.

"The president is ready to hold a speech that puts a heavy emphasis on uniting the Davutans against Karlach." Saint Yorvick replied in an uncommonly subservient tone. "I have confirmed that all of the possible actors and elements of the plan are in place."

"Very well. Let us commence the plan."

"Please transmit the override codes to these channels with the permissions held by the individual under your control."

"Done." Reina Kersk spoke, or more precisely the elder who had managed to assume direct control over the chief of staff's body!