Can Ci Pin | The Defective

Author: Priest

Ship: Charismatic dumb space baby scientist x Calculating space mafia boss asshole

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# Book 4 - Rose of the Azure Sea (Part 2)

## Ch 101 - I Hope He’s Already Dead

Before the old capital planet Cayley turned into stardust, there used to be a place not suitable for minors floating above the skies of the planet that also acted as the main source of the whole planet’s gross income. Within this floating wonderland, a popular energy drink called the “tornado” once swept through the community. One drink could let a single adult man stay awake for 72 hours without trouble, and for people that took to the drink better than others, they could run a whole marathon while singing the anthem of the Independent Navy without breaking a sweat. Of course, plenty of people still died every year from overdose.

The day Lu Bixing reached adulthood, he stole a sip of a drink from his father. The impact of the energy drink was so powerful that he could still remember its effects clearly over a decade later--just like how he felt right now.

Following the schedule, it should be time for Lin Jingheng’s morning run right now. Aside from the few days the commander was stuck inside the medical capsule, he never missed a day of his training until today. He leaned on his arm with his hair slightly messy, grey eyes closing gently as he fell asleep. Following the influence of his slightly pinked lips, his sharp features relaxed into a rare smoothness, giving the man a sense of warmth and gentleness.

Lu Bixing’s eyes were entirely glued to him. His heartbeat drummed faster as the minutes passed, as if he had just downed a whole bottle of the old “tornado”. He felt as if he could shoot up into the clouds and run a whole marathon around the planet, but he also didn’t want to leave Lin Jingheng, so he could only embrace the planet’s gravitation while running miles in his own mind instead.

His heartbeat grew louder to the point that it not only shot his own soul up in the air, but also woke Lin Jingheng up from his light nap. Lin Jingheng opened his eyes lightly, pulled a hand up to gesture for the young man to stay quiet. Lu Bixing couldn’t stop his racing heart and could only shift his body to block out the rays of sunlight peeking in from the windows, then leaned down and gently pressed his lips on the commander’s fingers.

He felt as if he was a knight receiving an accolade that was blessed by a holy light, and at the end of his long journey as a trainee he could finally step out and face any challenges without fear.

“Lin.” Lu Bixing knew that Lin Jingheng wasn’t asleep and annoyingly rolled in closer as he spoke quietly into the commander’s ears, “Did Zhanlu’s main mech body really got destroyed? What if I made you a new one? I’ve seen the standard specs of a Grade-A Union mech in a book before, and the factory’s blueprint is already onto its fourth draft. I can start programming the robots from the engineering team, and when the factory is done...hey, don’t laugh!”

Lin Jingheng’s voice was a little hoarse: “Think about what you want to say before you say it.”

“But I’m the best mech engineer of the Eighth Galaxy.”

Lin Jingheng’s eyes remained closed, but the smile on his face dimmed down--back when he was still in the Black Orchid Academy, the most common insults were “you’re the something something of the Eighth Galaxy” or “that’s Eighth Galaxy level”. Victims of these insults often took it as the highest form of offense which would usually lead to a round of vulgar fights.

“Eighth Galaxy” was only a little bit more sophisticated than vulgarity.

The self-proclaimed Number One mech engineer of the Eighth Galaxy breathed intimately by Lin Jingheng’s ears and continued bragging like any average man trying to impress his lover: “I also want to incorporate a small section in the factory for ‘training mechs’ like those training bikes for new mech pilots. But a friend in the engineering team told me that even a training mech was still a dangerous weapon, so it wouldn’t be safe to mass-produce them; I think he’s right, so I’m planning on only using them for academic lectures...Qiming will have a new Starry Sea Academy, and it will soon be like the Black Orchid Academy of the Eighth Galaxy...Oh, maybe Qiming will be like Wolto in the future. Uh...of course, we’ll have a larger population than Wolto, it’s not fun if we just have a whole planet filled with elites. We’ll also have layered walkways and roads so that we don’t run into car accidents anymore...Right, there’s a lot of open land on Qiming, I can go ask the Prime Minister for a piece and rebuild your mansion from Wolto here, how about it?”

Lin Jingheng said: “No.”

“Then we’ll rebuild my old house on Cayley--that place is huge so we’ll need a lot of robots to clean it up, we can even use Zhanlu as the central control system like a personal butler.”

Lin Jingheng said: “Zhanlu’s annoying.”

“Don’t worry, if you think we’re annoying, you can kick us both out so that I can be annoying with Zhanlu when you’re not around.” Lu Bixing quickly gave a solution and then lowered his voice, “But...don’t kick me out too often, please.”

Lin Jingheng could feel the person beside him crawling closer. Lu Bixing held his arm up above Lin Jingheng for a while before finally reaching over to grab the commander like a child playing with a toy.

Lin Jingheng opened his eyes and shot a glance at Lu Bixing, the latter quickly stopped his itching paws as the invisible tail behind his back raised up in alarm: “Let me hug you a bit longer, I promise I’ll stop moving around.”

Lin Jingheng lightly slapped the back of Lu Bixing’s hand.

Lu Bixing took in a breath of air silently as he buried himself in the warmth of the other man’s body. Now that he’d tasted the sour grapes and discovered it was actually sweet, he knew that he would continue picking those grapes and felt a little restless. Being somewhat apologetic to Turan- he once bluffed to her face as a naïve child- he didn't know if he could take back his pretentious façade and make it up to her.

Even though Lin Jingheng didn’t show it, Lu Bixing had a hunch that he also hadn’t done a very good job in making the commander feel completely at ease. It was as if this young scientist had discovered a new field of study along the road; as he opened up the new book to the table of contents, he was suddenly engulfed with an incredible thirst for knowledge. He almost couldn’t hold in his desire to pick up some new textbooks and study materials from Captain Turan to expand his knowledge.

Lu Bixing let his mind run for a while until he realized his thoughts were going down another dangerous path, then quickly pulled his thoughts back with a red face.

“When we get old, the war would be over as well.” He said, “I’ll go teach and write books; I’ll write a lot of books. I’ll talk about how I rebuilt the most powerful mech of the Union, I’ll also write a memoir; half of it will talk about the standard stuff, the other half will talk about the most important part--how I won the heart of the Union’s most-wanted man today…”

Lu Bixing wanted to plan out every second of their lives until their death; he could spend two weeks making a bucket list of what they would do together in the future. Lin Jingheng listened in to the beginning and felt that if this young man continued, the rest of his 200-year life might not even be enough to check off everything on that bucket list. They might need to pray for another genetic revolution to extend the average human lifespan to 500 years.

The future that Lu Bixing painted was like a dream where all the rough currents of life disappeared, the concept of separation at death never existed.

“Do people nowadays still like these pipe dream stories? …Until death do us part and stuff.”

In the City of Angels, a 3D screen beside the statue of the tearful goddess was playing a movie trailer. In times of crisis, the entertainment industry in the City of Angels didn’t plummet, and instead saw a growth that was ever higher than its golden times in Wolto. Perhaps to the poor people that were kicked out of Eden, entertainment was the only thing left to fill the empty holes in their souls.

The sudden boom of the industry allowed a small portion of movie studios to earn enough money for a ticket to the City of Angels. A single concert ticket to Yvgenia’s live performance was extremely hard to find with a price equivalent to a bouquet of Azure Seas.

There was a telescope in Chief Woolf’s breakroom that could be used for stargazing at night, and to look down on the central plaza at daytime. He took a sip of his tea as he finished watching the trailer of the movie; it was a movie called “The Hallway of Happiness” that told the story of a couple from the time they met until they aged. The story was quite romantic and was even filmed in Wolto--of course, now that Wolto had been taken over by pirates, most of the scenery in the movie was artificial backgrounds.

“I heard the new movie is already trending among the people, the premiere showing tickets are all sold out.” The secretary of the Chief Commander bent down and courteously filled the empty cup with hot tea. The secretary was a tall, skinny man over 200 years old by the name of Wang Ailun.

The famed Chief Commander had a strange preference to hire living humans around him as secretaries and didn’t like using AIs. Wang Ailun had been following him for over 150 years and took care of his everyday life like a butler. This top secretary normally didn’t talk when there were others around and had very little presence even in public; most of the time, he acted more like a robot than a real robot. Only during private occasions would he chat with Chief Woolf for a little: “Everyone’s living on the edge right now, so they’re naturally more inclined to cling onto concepts like eternal love...or something else. Everyone wants to return to Wolto. The reason why the Azure Sea has taken over the market lately is its meaning in flower language of “the place of no return.” This movie portrays both of these themes that touch the hearts of the people; perhaps it will be the newest hot topic during afternoon tea in the City of Angels.”

“You’re right. I’ve heard that you have an investment in the farmland of the Azure Sea, did you make quite a handful already?” Chief Woolf glanced at his secretary tauntingly, and before Wang AIlun could answer, the chief added, “people want to return to Wolto, but that place is no longer the old Wolto you knew. The people around you have changed, and by the time you reach the age of whitening hair, you’ll notice that you changed as well. Everything you once believed in has perished, your beliefs and morals have at least collapsed a hundred times over the years, the organs in your body have been changed numerous times by medical capsules. Yet even then, you still want to reminisce about the past, until you find out that you can’t remember anything and need to rely on artificial memory storages; Ailun, don’t you think that’s quite pitiful?”

Wang Ailun listened quietly like a wallflower without interrupting, not even a single line of “I will always follow you” to show his loyalty.

“Some would think…you’re just a zombie taking control of someone else’s body. They were right to halt the project on human genetic research. Why do people need to live that long? We weren’t born with a soul that can last that long, what’s the point of extending the lifespan of the flesh? People want to live until they become a cinerary casket and force society’s metabolism to slow down until it becomes a fossil, now the whole world stinks of rotten flesh.”

Chief Woolf paused as he stared at his teacup in a daze.

The old Chief Commander never married in his whole life. Rumors had it that there was a scandal when he was young that sounded almost too comical to be real, but the other individual of the scandal passed away before the new Interstellar Union was established. Out of respect for the deceased, nobody brought up the incident again after that. From the days of a handsome young man to an aged old man, he was as old as the Union’s historical museum. When he wasn’t working, he would spend his time in his residence. He didn’t have many hobbies, and perhaps the only pastime he enjoyed was to stare at his teacup and look back on his past.

Some have said that if it wasn’t for the fact that all the most promising commanders had passed on at an early age within these years, the old Chief Commander should’ve already retired.

Suddenly, a small sound clicked inside the breakroom and a wall slowly opened up to reveal a hidden room.

The old man liked his peace and quiet, so his private breakroom was never opened for anyone. Aside from his secretary, anyone that needed to see him had to make an appointment, though there were clearly some exceptions.

Wang Ailun took out another set of teacups as if he was already prepared. He placed the teacups before the visitors and skillfully poured his freshly brewed tea in the cups.

The visitors were all wearing long robes with a strange mask. On the front of their robes, a visible silhouette of a woman with a snake body was embroidered onto the fabric representing the Nuwa Project and AUS; nobody knew that these fearsome space pirates could freely walk in and out of the highest commanding post of the City of Angels.

“You’re all here.” The old Chief scanned the group, “The City of Angels automatically set the internal temperature to 26℃, aren’t you all hot in those robes?”

“Our hearts are filled with fear.” A masked individual answered, “even the air particles under the Union could have nanomachine surveillance, we’d rather not show even a strand of our hair.”

Another masked individual added: “But we pray that the world we create in a century will no longer face digital terrorism.”

They were used to speaking in the language of the prophets, making all of their greetings sound like a script. Their voices and tone dragged in a strange rhythm that made it sound more like they were singing rather than talking.

Woolf waved his hand and said: “That’s enough, don’t worry about the future if you all can’t even handle those pawns from the Glory Troops. The organization is also in shambles right now with countless voices of complaints, worry about yourselves first.”

Wang Ailun walked up and held his arm up to display a 3D screen from his arm. A plainly dressed middle-aged man appeared in front of everyone as his worried gaze looked into everyone in the room.

A few masked individuals of the AUS were shocked; they exclaimed desperately without a care for their image: “Alexander Harris!”

“What happened, is he still alive?”

“He’s alive,” the quiet secretary responded. “Prophet Harris disguised himself under the name of Hope. He hid under the Cayley pirates in the Eighth Galaxy for a while, and through a reliable source, we’ve recently heard that he came back and is secretly looking for support within the organization. My friends, because of your mistakes and short-sightedness to ally with the Glory Troops, these traitors are now chasing you all down after they took over Wolto. You’re all stuck within the Union and can’t escape under the pursuit of the Glory Troops, so naturally the voices of concern within the organization grew. Harris is known to be a charismatic leader, and now that he’s returned, you should all know what to expect.”

Chief Woolf slowly sat down in his seat: “We’re allies, my friends. Now that the storm’s out, we can’t afford to fight amongst ourselves.”

The masked members of the AUS grew silent until one of them stood up and said: “Chief, since you have your connections, can you give us some hints as to where he is right now?”

Wang AIlun smiled and said: “The last coordinate Prophet Harris sent was near Planet Egret in the Eighth Galaxy. He will pass through a public terminal into an interstellar checkpoint. According to reliable sources, someone from the organization will meet up with him in the Seventh Galaxy. I suggest not letting him show his face publicly and best get rid of him while he’s still in the Eighth Galaxy, what do you all think?”

Another masked individual spoke up: “Chief, is this source correct? What’s the connection you have?”

Woolf lifted his head. Those aged eyes shot a sharp gaze that pierced through the mask, and the speaker trembled slightly, intimidated. Two comrades behind that person pulled them back a little, and the speaker immediately turned his head down: “Sorry, I don’t…”

“It’s okay if you don’t believe us, you can wait until Harris is back and fight him to see who comes out in the end.” Wang Ailun answered with a courteous smile still on his face, “I can say I look forward to that if it happens--it’s getting quite late now, the Chief has a medical checkup later, please watch your steps.”

The masked group were on Woolf’s territory and didn’t dare to cause a scene, so they quickly made their ways out as the hidden door closed up. Wang Ailun took their teacups and crushed them inside a heavy smasher, then shot a glance at the old Chief as if he wanted to say something.

Woolf asked: “What is it?”

Wang Ailun hesitated a little before he asked: “You asked someone to escort Harris and give him arms, then gave his whereabouts to those wild dogs of the Mania Factions. Do you plan on helping him or taking his life?”

“Harris is an intelligent man and much stronger than these barking dogs. He was also very close to those rebels in the White Tower in the past; when Laura Gordon sacrificed herself back then, the ‘forbidden fruit’ and the biochip research was lost. After so many years, these fools didn’t succeed in their research, but I suspect that Harris is still keeping something we don’t know. He simply never revealed anything because he was against the Nuwa Project.” Woolf said, “This person could’ve been a threat to us, it’s only unfortunate that he’s getting old and still holds on to his naive dreams of peace. Our goals have never aligned.”

Wang Ailun said: “Yes, these level-headed men are much more troublesome to deal with.”

“But they are also the only ones that can stir up the biggest storms and become the eye of the hurricane.” Woolf said, “He’s too invested in his old farm fantasy, we need to wake him up the hard way. We need to let him know that beliefs are nothing under gunpoint, authority and power must come at the cost of blood, and that he can only rely on us--by the way, what even is in the Eighth Galaxy that can make him stick around for that long?”

Wang Ailun lifted his head and met the old Chief’s gaze.

Woolf’s face was hidden behind the shadows like a sculpture dead in time.

“Whatever it is, clean it up too.” Woolf waved his hands. “Saves him from trying to go back and farm--that old man needs some hatred in him to stand on top.”

Wang Ailun nodded in understanding and then asked, “Chief, about the Eighth Galaxy and Lin Jingheng...do you believe what Harris said?”

Woolf remained silent for a long while.

The secretary felt that he’d asked a bad question and lowered his head as he got ready to leave.

“I want to believe.” Woolf said, “I want to believe that he’s already dead.”

## Ch 102 - Please Help--

The flames of war powerful enough to burn through the NSC era took too long to finally spread - how could they let peace-loving cowards put out the fire before it could sweep the world?

The flesh and blood of every man would become its fuel; like how the ignorant and mad people of the Union had once foolishly helped create numerous tragedies in the past.

That was why it was better if Lin Jingheng was dead.

That way, his life of glory and fame could rest eternally in the spirit of the Union.

Intergalactic terminals were not like the highways on land that have a permanent location; all the transfer portals, planets, space stations, and even entire galaxies were always orbiting and rotating. Therefore, the coordinates of a terminal were often extremely complex and used dynamic coordinates that were difficult for most people to remember.

The construction of an intergalactic terminal also took a large amount of work to complete. Construction must take into consideration all orbital patterns of the celestial bodies it passed through and potential miscalculations along the way before a draft of the terminal could even be drawn out. Once the map was completed and published, all mechs and starships within signal range would automatically receive an update on their navigation systems.

Non-military terminals often had stricter regulations for construction; they were required to incorporate emergency rescue systems and make sure all supply stations on the route met the minimum requirements of intergalactic law. The supply stations would need to be mobile and follow along the terminals, and to ensure that each station had sufficient sources of supplies; all of them had close ties to the nearest planets on the axis.

Dwarf planet Egret was an important axis planet for multiple intergalactic terminals, but after its annihilation, the new government had no choice but to readjust and move the new axis planet to Egret’s neighbor, Alpenglow.

Hope’s mech landed on the closest private supply station near Alpenglow.

A “private supply station” was really just a better name for an illegal black market shop.

While the new government was busy repairing the terminals, ex-smugglers in the Eighth Galaxy had crawled out of their caves and reopened their supply stations to loot off of the businesses in the terminals. The government hadn’t officially passed any laws regarding the existence of these private supply stations, so it was still considered a grey area business.

Most private stations remained fairly lowkey and offered slightly cheaper services and supplies than an officially recognized station. If a merchant was smart enough to know where to find one of these stations, they could save quite a bit of traveling costs.

The little station had quite a few customers, but most of them were quite unrefined and looked clearly like regulars of the black market, making the station look quite messy. The restaurant area in the mech station also looked a bit run-down with only one small diner and a syringe vending machine. There weren’t enough tables and chairs, so the people sat on the ground and chatted among themselves as they ate. It would sometimes turn into small arguments around the corner without physically throwing hands, giving the small station a sense of liveliness. Interstellar merchants that would stop by a black market station were like lone wolves that hunted for their own food within the vast land, so they knew when and when not to pick fights.

Hope exchanged a nutrient syringe for a small table and ordered some food from the diner.

Open fire was banned from mech stations, so the food they ordered was actually just frozen meal packs that had been transported from planet Alpenglow and heated up. It wasn’t fresh and had a strange taste, almost like airline food on ancient earth.

A new follower and technician of the Eighth Galaxy beside Hope asked: “Prophet, what do you plan on doing after leaving the Eighth Galaxy?”

“Our sponsor will provide some arms for us,” Hope said. “But those will only be for self-defense. My opinion is that we should avoid warfare as much as possible; interstellar war is not a children’s fight, you can’t throw fists at each other and then hold hands to apologize the next minute. The moment you press that missile button, you’re forcing everyone on the battlefield to choose a side regardless of who they are until the field is covered in blood; by that time, everything will be too late.”

In a time where everyone was blinded by hatred and madness, carrying the blood and flesh of their comrades as they march into vengeance, Hope’s unshakable belief in peace was like a rare streak of light amid the darkness. The technician nodded subconsciously and said: “We’ll follow you to the end.”

Hope turned to him in an amiable manner and said: “the betrayal of the Glory Troops was within expectation. Even if we helped each other out in order to survive outside of the Union, it was only because we had no choice but to do so; it doesn’t mean we will walk down the same path when we step within the Union.”

Another AUS member added: “I dare say that they already planned on abandoning us even before they invaded the Union; they’ve already hooked up with Yelvich from the Hummingbird Fortress, said they will share the supplies and terminals with us, but immediately turned their backs the moment they took over the Silver Fortress and claimed Wolto. They even borrowed Yelvich’s authority in the Union and forced us out of the First Galaxy.”

Hope nodded calmly: “That is true, but from an objective point of view, our ultimate goals don’t conflict with each other. They want political power, and have two goals in mind--first, we need to fulfill the wills of the last two directors of the White Tower and destroy Eden to free the souls of mankind. Next, we want to obtain legal status for our organization within the Union. I feel that there is room for negotiation here, but why did the Glory Troops abandon us? This clearly has something to do with those uncultured madmen in the organization always causing trouble. Do we really have to protect those lowly men that even their allies look down on?”

The technician said: “Prophet, will the people in the troops accept our organization’s ideals?”

“The organization’s ideals need to be flexible and adaptable. I’ve spoken with Professor Lu before, and I feel like his opinion is insightful and reasonable. A belief or idea, no matter how righteous it is, is dead if it can’t adapt and evolve. It will either become an empty shrine or rot in time. Society has already reached the age of galaxies, it’s laughable to expect people to return to the ancient grasslands as hunter-gatherers. We have to see the value of certain technologies that have improved human life; for example, nutrient syringes and meal packs--no, it’s not tasty like real food, but it has certainly saved many lives. Pushing to ban such things isn’t helping mankind, it’s almost an act of evil.” Hope said, “We are against the abuse of technology and dangerous weapons, so our future agenda should be to push for a more comprehensive interstellar environmental protection law and a stricter policy for special field technological research. We shouldn’t be raising super soldiers to fight violence with violence, nor should we support the idea of sending everyone back to mother Earth to live like the ancients.”

The newly converted technician felt his heart grow as he listened to Hope’s speech and felt obliged to help the future of mankind.

Hope took a break from his talk and reminded everyone to eat before the food got cold, but as he picked up his utensils, he heard someone yell from the side: “It’s here, yahoo--!”

The crowd in the diner began cheering as Hope lifted his head towards the sky. The terminal to Alpenglow was about to meet with the space station during its orbit.

The planet in the sky grew closer as if it was about to crash into the station at an alarming rate; the crowd on the space station panicked at the sight and felt as if the sky was about to fall on them. Yet the servers on the space station remained calm and even laughed at the panicked customers for losing their minds. After getting their laughs for the day, the servers walked over and helped the scared customers up from the ground.

There were tiny telescopes on the table that could be used to gaze upon the planet. When Alpenglow’s range was at the closest to the station, people could even see the individual cities and lights on the planet through these telescopes.

Hope’s very first farm was built on Alpenglow; he purposely chose this route in order to give one final look at his project on the planet before he left the galaxy.

The energy tower on the large farmland was maintained by robots; its light was always on and also acted as a landmark of the farm. Hope heard a person on the table next to them explain passionately to their new followers: “Did you see that? The lit-up tower over there, that’s the farm we passed by earlier. That place is beautiful!”

A smile slowly appeared on Hope’s face.

Indeed, it was a beautiful place.

There was a natural lake besides the farmland with rare minerals inside that created a unique reflection on the water, as if there was a layer of rainbow covering its surface. The climate of the planet leaned more on the humid and warm side and during seasons of higher temperature, the lake water would rise and reach toward the valley around the lake. On a good sunny day, the colorful lights from the mineral water would glisten and create a dazzling scenery.

Hope protected this area, fixed the roads and resting spots around it and named this place “The Terrace of Jewels”.

Planet Alpenglow was originally just a small planet at the edge of the Eighth Galaxy with a very small population. However, it would become the first successful base for food production of the new galaxy, and now that it was the new axis planet of numerous terminals, it would grow more populated and livelier.

As for the Terrace of Jewels, Hope thought, perhaps one day people would write poems about it, or even turn into a new hotspot for marriage proposals.

The planet quickly flew away from the station’s view and the chatter inside the station returned as the broadcast in the diner started playing the anthem of the Independent Navy--which quickly received numerous complaints. Ever since the network of the galaxy had been repaired, the new government had been zealously advertising their next projects by playing the anthem, to the point where everyone was starting to grow tired of hearing it. To counteract against the overplayed anthem, these traveling merchants started forming their own little concerts in the diner and fought for the microphone, creating an almost comedic scene in the crowded diner.

A follower of the AUS turned to Hope and said: “Prophet, the people we’re meeting sent us a message. It’s not a long-distance one, so they should be nearby already; I just checked our coordinates with them and they suggested that we should meet them over here on the station.”

“Okay,” Hope answered, “then let’s eat up and get going.”

Before they could all turn to finish their food, the loud diner suddenly broke into silence like someone had cast a spell on the crowd. A large man next to their table stood up abruptly, creating a loud sound that echoed throughout the diner. Hope and his crew turned in confusion towards the direction of the crowd’s gaze on the large screen in the diner’s main area. The screen was split in half, with the upper half displaying each individual mech’s remaining energy sources and repair status and the bottom half displaying a live view of space outside the station.

There was an armed mech fleet on the screen sailing maliciously toward the station.

The fleet was made up of mid-sized mechs sailing in an orderly fashion, each carrying a full load of ammo and weapons. Yet anyone that had been doing intergalactic trades knew that a proper fleet of the new government would never sail to a private station to resupply and rest.

A server dropped a freshly heated pack of food on the ground out of fear and yelled in panic: “Oh shit, boss! Someone’s here to take down illegal businesses!”

These groups of merchants in the diner were conflicted; on one hand, they were afraid of being arrested, but on the other, it was a great chance for them to take some food amid the chaos and leave. A few of them with sharper senses quickly made their way back to the launching dock and prepared to flee. The owner of the space station ran around frantically as he yelled at the customers and robots, not knowing what to do at a time like this.

“Is it them?” The technician in the AUS asked quietly, “are these the people that are picking us up?”

“That shouldn’t be.” The follower that had reported earlier checked their personal device. “I just sent our coordinates not too long ago, they couldn’t be that fast. Even if it was them, they can’t possibly make such a dramatic entrance on someone else’s territory.”

Hope’s eyes locked on the screen as the fleet sailed closer. His bad feeling grew worse by the second before his expression changed suddenly: “We’re leaving too!”

Hope’s followers quickly followed the fleeing crowd. At the same time, Hope grabbed a server about to make their way out of the diner and said: “this is an enemy attack, not patrols from the government. Tell your boss to turn the shield of the station to the maximum and run!”

The server looked at him in awe and then ran off to report it to the owner of the space station.

However, the owner didn’t take the warning in and shouted from across the diner with his mini robots: “Enemy attack, my ass! You still haven’t paid yet!”

“Prophet, quick!”

The small mech they’d brought over was already fully charged up and was sent onto the launching tracks in the dock. Hope pushed a few panicked followers and technicians up onto the mech and could see the fleet with his own two eyes before he had the chance to connect onto the mental network. Within an instant, a wave of missiles fired down upon the space station.

The first few merchants that had left the station were piloting old merchant starships and not military grade mechs. A single missile demolished the defenseless starships; those people who had been planning on stealing food earlier were now stardust before they even realized what was happening.

At the same time on Qiming’s Military Operational Headquarters, Lin Jingheng ignored Turan’s endless questioning on why he’d missed training in the morning and stepped onto the Model 3.

Zhanlu: “Good morning, sir. Today you….”

Lin Jingheng: “Shut up, you’re banned from talking.”

Zhanlu: “......”

The powerful AI, worth six million per gram, could not fathom what he had done wrong with a single “good morning”.

Turan stared at Lin Jingheng’s slightly curled-up lips and felt that her boss was growing more and more sadistic; he was starting to actually enjoy bullying an AI.

Lin Jingheng raised a hand to stop Turan’s questioning and asked: “Did we recapture Hope yet?”

“Not yet, he probably ran off through an underground tunnel. We’re increasing patrol around private stations right now. Also this is just my own thoughts, but I think we should really start controlling these little black market shops.” Turan’s personal device flashed as she spoke. She gestured towards the commander and picked it up, “Ninth…. uh, I’m the Top Admiral of the Eighth Galaxy’s Galactic Defense Force, Elizabeth Turan, what is it….say what!?”

Lin Jingheng stopped in the hallway.

The first starship that left the target space station noticed something was off and managed to escape the first wave of deadly missiles. Its shield crashed into to another wave of particle cannons and sailed at top speed towards the nearest transfer portal, triggering the alarm on the transfer portal.

“An unidentified fleet of mechs suddenly opened fire on us, please, help---”

Another wave of cannons shot through the tail of the starship. A starship’s shield was not strong enough to withstand the blows of a military-grade mech, so its core energy system at the end immediately self-destructed, swallowing up the entire starship in a ball of fire before the starship could successfully pass through the transfer portal.

The energy field of the portal was also interrupted by the abnormal energy signal while a vague image of an explosion was sent directly to the operational base on Qiming.

Hope turned on the automatic acceleration of his mech and shot up into the sky directly without passing through the launching tracks. Almost at the same time, the entire launching tracks of the station were shattered while the gravity control system shut down. Mechs parked on the station flew up into the sky while the rest of the supplies on the station floated aimlessly in space. Remnants of missiles and mechs crashed down onto the station, piercing through the rooftop of the launching dock. Everything on the station shattered like glass; everyone that couldn’t manage to escape, along with all the robots, the diner...all turned into a destructive mess of flesh and blood against the light visible through the mental network of the mech.

The small mech that could only manage to save itself watched from afar as the alarm of its shield rang inside.

Hope managed to dodge a missile and threw a fist against the wall inside the mech.

After receiving the emergency call, the closest military station on Alpenglow immediately sent out respondents.

The director of the military station on Alpenglow was a former soldier of the Ninth Squadron who had brought a few of his old colleagues to restation on the axis planet, but most of the forces were new soldiers who had been recruited after the formation of the new government. Most of these people had come from Alpenglow and only received a proper name and status after enlistment. They were barely six months into training and had only had experience escorting broken or malfunctioning starships; they were not at the level to handle a fully armed force of enemies.

Yet they had 1.5 billion newly settled populations behind them, a fresh new life awaiting them in the future…

Therefore, they had no choice.

The invaders were blocked off for a moment before they spread out and faced the station fleet on Alpenglow.

The follower from the AUS quickly pulled himself from the almost solidified protection bubble and called out: “Prophet, the people that are picking us up will….”

Hope didn’t answer him as he stared wide-eyed through the mental network at the massive body of a heavy mech slowly sailing out of the transfer portal behind the invaders. Its fearsome figure exposed itself like a monster from behind, followed by numerous mid-sized mechs surrounding it.

The symbol of the AUS pierced through the night sky onto everyone’s eyes.

The fragile Alpenglow forces were like a sandcastle facing an enormous wave.

“Prophet!”

Hope sailed the mech towards the Alpenglow forces without a second thought.

Yet it was too late.

Within less than a minute, the Alpenglow forces were essentially annihilated under the violent waves of cannons and missiles. Even Hope’s small mech received collateral damage with its broken shield and weaponry that caught on fire.

A few of his followers attempted to force Hope into an ecopod for escape as the mech was counting down to self-destruction.

The people that were picking them up finally arrived and attempted to send out a communication request under the unstable signal connection.

The invading fleet of the AUS didn’t even bother giving a second look at their fallen enemies and quickly sailed towards the fleeing survivors of the Alpenglow fleet, ready to destroy every last one of them.

Through the half-broken mental network, Hope saw a nuclear missile finally land on planet Alpenglow during the deadly chase.

The mushroom cloud spread in space and immediately wiped out all the lights on the planet; the imperishable light of the energy tower disappeared.

The Terrace of Jewels, the farmland, and the lives of billions perished.

It was as if axis planets on galactic terminals were cursed since the fall of Egret.

Hope’s mech self-destructed and his connection to the mental network was forcefully cut off. He fell unconscious while the people beside him turned into ashes in an instant; the ecopod was like a small grain of sand that escaped through the cracks while the ashes spread quietly into space.

## Ch 103 - “Lin Jingheng”

The moment Hope’s ecopod flew out of the exploding mech, another mech hiding amongst the larger AUS fleet quietly located the pod and sent out a disruption signal to cover up its existence from the enemy radar. Then, a capture net quickly tossed out as it pulled Hope’s ecopod to safety.

Meanwhile, the armed AUS fleet chased down the last of their enemies like a desperate beast towards Alpenglow, which was not far from the battlefield in space.

Inside the internal communication network of Alpenglow’s rescue team, the only survivor and a former soldier of the Ninth Squadron desperately called out to his teammates: “Spread out! Don’t get too close to the planet! The missile will land on…”

A missile pierced through the back end of his mech before he could finish, and his voice disappeared into noise from disruption. His words didn’t even manage to pass onto his teammates because the team leaders were all gone, the surviving members of the fleet were all newly enlisted young men that couldn’t even focus at a time like this and sailed back towards their command post like fearful animals...which also exposed the direction of the post to their enemies.

Nobody could blame these new soldiers; nobody could ask them to think of others while fighting for their lives on the frontlines and avoid dragging down the rest of the planet. The people that could keep their cool and think of the people they’re protecting were all heroes of their times, but the people that couldn’t weren’t evil nor cowards either; everyone was a person with flesh and blood.

The command post on Alpenglow immediately activated their anti-missile shields, but there was no way their fragile and incomplete shield could withstand an interstellar nuclear missile. Without proper equipment and protection, the newly built system began to break as more and more missiles shot through the atmosphere and created more mushroom clouds on the small planet.

When Hope was safely captured, a group of people rushed up to his ecopod inside the mysterious mech and pulled him out to relocate him inside a medical capsule.

“He’s still alive, this is likely just the side effect of being disconnected from the mental network…”

“My god, he almost...that was scary, who would’ve known he’d rush into the frontlines at his age, that’s too reckless. We almost had to be the messenger of bad news.”

“One shot of relaxant should do.”

The relaxant shot into Hope’s veins, and the unconscious man screamed reflexively as his whole body twitched in pain.

“We need to update the medical capsule’s programming, what’s wrong with this? How could it possibly inject an extra-strength relaxant, where’s the painkiller and saline, he’s not a young man anymore.”

“Be careful, press his head down but don't close the cover...is he awake?”

“Prophet Harris, how do you feel right now? Can you hear me?”

Hope’s vision was still blurry as he struggled to pull himself up. His conscience was still stuck inside that blown-up mech with his comrades, swallowed up by the mushroom cloud above the farm tower: “No…”

The medical capsule sent out a robotic warning: “Patient is too aggressive, please consider the use of sedatives.”

“Prophet Harris, you....”

“I don’t need sedatives.” Hope’s trembling hands pushed away the syringe on the capsule as he desperately tried to crawl out. “My Terrace of Jewels, I must…”

A man walked through the crowd and kneeled down before him, locking his gaze in Hope’s eyes as the latter stiffened up in alarm inside the capsule.

“Prophet Harris,” the man said, “I’m the person in charge of escorting you this trip, my codename is ‘Parrot’---’daybreak rises from the peak of the White Tower’.”

The codename and code message matched up.

It was as if the relaxant burnt through his head, Hope’s mind went blank as he mechanically responded in a small voice: “‘and shine above the land of darkness’...why are you here? What’s with these people?”

“We came to meet you in the Eighth Galaxy on the higher-up’s orders, but didn’t expect to run into these people by the border of the Seventh Galaxy.” The man codenamed ‘Parrot’ explained to Hope. The man had large but clear eyes and an unforgettable demeanor that made him feel very dependable, like a mysterious but righteous rescuer in a movie. When he spoke quietly to Hope, it felt like the words of a reliable ally that arrived by the side of the protagonist at an important time. “We lied and said we followed the orders of ‘that person’ and came to investigate the rumor of the Silver Ten. Their explanation was even more vague, saying that they were here to chase down a traitor of the organization; that’s when I knew something was wrong.”

Hope lifted his head and met his eyes with Parrot’s eyes; the latter’s pupils were like a mirror that reflected the silhouette of a shaggy old man.

“I was worried that their target was you, so I asked them to escort me over with the excuse of hiding from the Union troops within the Seventh Galaxy, only to find that you *were* their target. If you didn’t have the tracker on you, we would’ve almost lost you to them.” Parrot asked in a heavy tone, “Prophet Harris, what’s going on? Do you know who the traitor that exposed your whereabouts was?”

Hope didn’t answer and only stared at him: “Why didn’t you give me any prior notice when you found out that their target was me?”

“What?” Parrot was confused for a second, then his expression immediately grew grim. “I’ve sent an emergency message to your messenger to have you escape immediately. I even asked them to change the meetup location, where is the messenger? I was wondering why you didn’t leave after my message!”

The messenger fell out of the mech the first time Hope’s mech was hit. The situation was too chaotic at the time, and Hope’s attention had all been on Alpenglow so he hadn’t paid much attention to the messenger. Now that he recalled the scene, the broken opening happened to be at the tail end of the mech where a few ecopods were kept.

Was this a coincidence?

“You can check our contact history,” Parrot said and sighed, “But...of course, all records could be faked. If you don’t want to trust us, nothing will convince you. Prophet, can you remember who the messenger was and why your team decided to let him be the messenger again?”

The messenger was an old member of the AUS who had been captured by Lin Jingheng along with him. He was the first person who’d listened to him talk after they were imprisoned on Qiming; he was also the person who volunteered to become the messenger and take care of the crew along the way.

But what did that prove?

Perhaps the messenger that stayed alongside him betrayed him. Perhaps this man that called himself ‘Parrot’ in front of him was trying to push the blame onto the dead.

Or perhaps they were all together since the beginning, and that mad old man in the City of Angels had long planted a spy beside him in order to play out this dramatic movie of friendship to make Hope a puppet in his hands. How else would he be able to survive under these situations? Was he just simply blessed with luck or was this someone else’s script all along?

Hope’s head started aching from the aftereffects of forcefully disconnecting from the mental network. There were plenty of injuries on his body, and the effects of the relaxant were still in his body; yet none of the pain could compare to the horror and coldness that swept his heart.

Who else in this world could be trusted? Who else were his friends? Who else was still holding onto their initial belief? Who else had already changed completely?

At that moment, the sharp and piercing alarm inside the mech rang. Hope turned his head up in awe to the screen at the center of the mech, showing a mysterious fleet of mechs that suddenly appeared through the emergency rescue route and blocked off the invaders of the AUS. They were like a sharp and long blade that forcefully cut between the AUS fleet.

The AUS was still under the impression that this joke of an ‘Eighth Galaxy Government’ could only pull out a laughable army like the militia of Alpenglow and were completely caught off-guard by this powerful force. Yet the enemy didn’t even bother giving them a chance to catch a breath and sliced through the organized fleet of the AUS like a knife cutting through tofu, immediately turning the tables of the battlefield.

Immediately after the first wave of vanguard attacks, the mech fleet finally showed its true face behind the smokes of fire---it was the Galactic Navy of the Eighth Galaxy’s Defense Forces, and the commanding Model 3 loomed behind the fleet like a menacing monster.

Lin Jingheng showed up personally to the frontlines.

Hope stood up in shock.

*This junk of an emergency rescue system actually works!* He thought. If it wasn’t for the fact that Alpenglow was ridiculously close to the frontlines, if only they could be at least a transfer portal away, they could’ve avoided such a loss on the planet. Yet the saving grace was that the few months of construction from the engineering team wasn’t in vain! At least they could still save the few survivors of Alpenglow.

Parrot: “Inform our men, get ready to escape!”

Hope: “No, join in the Eighth Galaxy Defense Force’s internal communication channel, listen to me…”

The crowd looked at him strangely as if they all felt he needed another shot of sedative.

Parrot spoke up: “Prophet Harris, do you know their channel code?”

Hope: “......”

The old man then raised his voice: “Then request for connection, I have some words for...my friend…”

Hope forcefully swallowed the desire to say ‘Lin Jingheng’ and changed to ‘my friend’, but before he could finish, the mental network of the Model 3 already expanded throughout the battlefield. Even with its specs limited by old hardware, the former great mech of the Union was still a fearsome blade on the frontlines.

All human-mech ports that were under Zhanlu’s mental network trembled in terror.

The pilot of the small mech Hope was on almost couldn’t handle the blow while a few backup pilots connected onto the network to support their mechs. At the same time, they skillfully dodged the wave of particle beams shot towards them and immediately accelerated into escape right after they managed to break away. The internal gravity system had a few seconds of hiccup during the acceleration and Hope was thrown into a pile of protection airbags.

“Run!”

“Watch out!”

“What’s going on? My god, is the rumor of the Silver Ten real?”

“Commander,” Turan spoke up within the channel, “if there are traitors from the Union within the AUS fleet, do you think they will recognize Zhanlu?”

“The AUS sent out a fully armed heavy mech fleet for a single person. This Hope person that knew the language of the Prophets sure is a master of disguise,” Lin Jingheng commented coldly, “what’s the point of me hiding now that we’ve reached this point?”

“Headmaster Lu was wrong,” Turan’s voice was a little stiff as if she was speaking this through ground teeth, “I was also wrong.”

They had all thought that Hope had at least a bit of redeeming qualities and even had moments where they’d lived in the delusion that they were all friends. Even though this old man was quite naggy at times, he was different from the crazy people of the AUS.

Yet reality once again proved them wrong--he was no different than those members of the AUS.

Looking back now, it seemed as if Hope had stayed in the Eighth Galaxy only to wait for the right time to return; who knew what kind of internal strife went on in that shady cult anyway?

To make matters worse, perhaps he had spent so long in the Eighth Galaxy to see what Lin Jingheng had in his sleeves; now that he saw through everything from this former weapon of the Union, he could safely return and gift the newly established grassroots defense force in the Eight Galaxy to the bloodthirsty monsters of the AUS armed forces.

Ah, that’s right, he also wanted to destroy the newly built farmland on Alpenglow. How ironic.

Was he trying to leave the enemies with not a single piece of grain?

Was Alpenglow really just a toy for him to kill time?

Was he really named ‘Hope’?

“Lu Bixing always likes to give the benefit of the doubt to others,” Lin Jingheng said, “but what about you? A naive and pure angel like him can stay, but one is enough.”

Turan couldn’t respond.

It was quite strange, truly. In a place like the Eighth Galaxy that couldn’t even provide basic necessities for its people to stay alive, it somehow managed to instill a sense of homeliness in people. Everyone that spent an extended period of time here would grow attached to it and soften up the part of their hearts that shouldn’t be weakened--the unaspiring free soul like Monoeyed Hawk was like this, the harsh and unconventional Captain of the Ninth Squadron was like this...and even Lin Jingheng himself was no exception.

“What is expected will come eventually,” Lin Jingheng said darkly, “focus on the frontlines first, Captain Turan.”

Parrot’s quick reaction saved his fleet and fled the battlefield the moment both sides opened fire, backing towards the edge of the AUS fleet.

Both sides of the battle immediately took notice of this small mech that escaped during the mess and shot missiles at it.

The few mechs on Parrot’s team immediately shot out from the corner of the fleet and blocked Hope’s mech, running head-first into the cannons and missiles with their shields.

This sacrificial act of protection bought enough time for Parrot’s mech to escape as he ordered in a loud voice: “Turn on max acceleration, run!”

Hope could hear the particle beams hitting the mech’s shield and disrupting the electromagnetic field of the mech, turning the broadcast and radio inside into a noisy mess. The gravity system inside the mech had completely malfunctioned during the desperate run, and Hope could still feel the impact of the crashes outside the mech inside the protection bubbles. A missile flew right past the tail end of the mech, and thankfully the pilot was quick enough to detach the backup engine before it exploded into dust. The powerful impact of the explosion pushed the mech into a transfer portal ahead as it managed to escape a fatal blow.

The AUS had much higher technologies in the area of warp disruption and signal scanning, which also meant that they were better at fighting against them. The moment they sailed into the transfer portal, the pilot placed a signal immobilizer inside the portal--the enemies could still scan for their signals but would be faced with some delays. Yet this small delay was enough for the small mech to make an escape during the heated battle on the frontlines.

The mech passed through a number of portals before the battlefield completely disappeared from sight as they sailed into the silent space. As the mech gradually regained its balance, the protection airbags slowly deflated back and were sucked away through a window like balloons.

Parrot turned towards Hope and said: “Prophet Harris, you guys were no longer friends the moment you left without a word. How do you plan on explaining to them now?”

Hope closed his eyes.

“Activate long-distance communication, the code is…” Parrot turned back towards his pilot and ordered, “send the last military recording of the battlefield to Mister Wang.”

A large crew of robotic rescue teams was sent onto ground on Alpenglow. Through the ripped atmosphere of the planet, the lost electric charges crashed into each other and sparked little bolts of light that lit up the ashened land of the planet.

At the same time, the protected recording of the battlefield was sent to the City of Angels and was being processed by numerous supercomputers to decode the visuals. The AIs carefully scanned through every bit of the code, and a thorough report of the recording was sent to Wang Ailun’s hands sixteen hours later.

The lean man walked quickly into Woolf’s break room with a stern face: “The pattern of frontline assault is very familiar, and after running through AI analysis, we confirmed that the battle style matched up to 85% similarity with the former Silver Ninth Squadron.”

“Silver Ninth Squadron,” Woolf said in a deep voice, “Elizabeth Turan. She isn’t a guard dog, she’s a cold-hearted female wolf that just crushed the neck of Commander Lee. Who could she possibly be fighting for in the Eighth Galaxy?”

“The commanding ship is an old Model 3,” Wang Ailun said, “according to the battle record we received, we calculated its estimated mental network range with a sextile probability distribution and narrowed the rate of deviation down to less than 1%. The result was that the mental network range was way beyond the standard of a Model 3, and even beyond the modern superdimensional heavy mech of the current models used by the Council…”

Woolf raised his head in shock.

Wang Ailun: “It’s Zhanlu.”

Woolf said in a voice that was almost too small to be heard: “He took Zhanlu’s core with him, the body left in the Silver Fortress was just a shell.”

Wang Ailun: “He’s still alive and managed to hide from Eden, but the core technicians of the Silver Third Squadron had been under our surveillance in the City of Angels, they didn’t…”

Woolf held on the edges of the table and carefully stood up: “The core technician is following me. They’ve built a center of communication around me and the Council--he originally planned on making me the backup central, but it’s clear that he is now suspecting me...for many years, everyone thought he was just a vengeful pawn of the Union. Not even I could have expected that the ‘forbidden fruit’ was in his hands.”

He paused for a moment before adding, “if Lu Xin had even half of his cunning, he wouldn’t have met his end like that.”

“How unfortunate.” Wang Ailun said, “Lin Jingheng.”

“What did you say? Lin Jingheng?” The news also quickly made its way into the AUS.

And through the spies of the AUS, the news quickly leaked back to Wolto and crushed the headquarters of the Glory Troops: “Lin Jingheng!”

Not too far away on the Hummingbird Fortress, Lu Xin’s ex-subordinate Yelvich crushed a spoon in his hand in fury: “Lin, Jing, Heng.”

## Ch 104 - You’re Too Savage

White felt his waist being crushed by the suit on him and could only see a large crate on the ground. That was where a nuclear missile had landed and demolished the surroundings; there were no corpses to be seen within over a ten-kilometer radius from ground zero.

The survivors were forced to migrate. Alpenglow was like Egret, Cayley and Beijing; they would become deserted lands for the next few decades with no forms of life surrounding them.

“Professor,” White turned towards Lu Bixing. “How can we revive a planet that’s been showered by nuclear missiles? Is there some sort of research on it?”

“Yes, it’s like the technology used to artificially change a natural planet to be suitable to live on,” Lu Bixing answered. “Not all planets are blessed with the qualities of mother Earth, so virtually every planet you see nowadays has been artificially adjusted for humans to live on. This process takes a long time; a fully-functional ecosystem is dependent on countless variables that requires generations of people to build, refine, and perfect.”

“Professor, let’s change our research topic then, I don’t want to study mechs anymore.”

“Planet revival is a pretty big topic,” Lu Bixing said, “it may take a few centuries.”

“What about shield systems?” Mint asked, “Teach, let’s work on improving the anti-missile systems!”

“Anti-missile systems require a large amount of funding and support in military factories. Our manufacturing industries are still too new,” Lu Bixing said, “we don’t have the tools needed to start this research.”

“Can we improve the strength of the shield then?”

“We can,” Lu Bixing answered, “but increasing even one unit aspect of a shield would take decades and it’s difficult to estimate the amount of labor and supplies needed to complete this task. Are you all prepared to delay your graduation?”

“Teach,” Huang Jingshu asked quietly, “what if we just continue on the training mech research?”

Lu Bixing answered: “take one more term to perfect the finer technological details and you all can apply for a patent.”

This was the strange part of the NSC era; creation and protection were extremely hard and took a lot of effort to even move one step forward, but the development of galactic-grade weapons was leaping ahead in an unprecedented way.

They were like Sisyphus, forever pushing a giant boulder.

“Professor,” Rickhead suddenly asked, “what have we been doing for so long anyway? What’s the difference between this place and Beijing-β?”

Robots scanning for radioactivity walked back through the small alleyways as Lu Bixing took his students past the broken roads and onto the Model 3’s quarantine rooms in silence. The equipment in the rooms carefully scanned through everyone’s body and removed all radioactive contents on their suits; a special type of white mist filled each individual room and covered the number embroidered behind Lu Bixing’s isolation suit.

“We...we once established a basic social security system and supply fund on Alpenglow and completed a census on the planet.” He spoke.

Rickhead: “And then?”

“So we have a list of names for the deceased.”

After “sanitizing,” Lu Bixing and his students walked through a small tunnel as the isolation suits on their bodies fell off.

Zhanlu greeted them from within the mech and courteously called everyone’s names. By the time he was done, they had reached the end of the tunnel.

Zhanlu added: “Headmaster Lu, perhaps you should head to the meeting room. The Prime Minister and my master are waiting for you.”

Lu Bixing quickly gestured for the students to take a break as he turned towards the meeting room.

“Hey Xiao Huang, let’s go!”

Huang Jingshu stood blankly for a moment until she looked up towards the security camera and asked: “Zhanlu, do you have data on the Silver Fortress’s defense and anti-missile systems?”

“Yes I do, Miss Huang.” Zhanlu answered patiently, “the defense system on the Silver Fortress was at the top of the Union.”

Huang Jingshu hesitated as if she didn’t know what to say, and after pondering for a while she asked: “Then...can you ask Commander Lin for us if there’s any part of the data we can read?”

The other three students were shocked and turned their heads up to wait for Zhanlu’s response.

“Academic references and technological data are not protected. Master Lin had set up unique access for Headmaster Lu and you all to flip through them at any time.” Zhanlu said, “but the data is quite complex and is very different from Headmaster Lu’s curriculum from before, shall I organize them in a more accessible manner for you?”

Huang Jingshu looked a bit shocked at the camera and asked: “How do you know what we’re studying?”

“Sorry, this part is protected information.” Zhanlu paused, “I will send the reorganized data onto everyone’s personal devices in ten minutes, please wait for me in the break room.”

The vaccuocerebral young girl in the Eighth Galaxy who liked to solve problems with her fist and beer was supposed to grow up in a land of ashes and smokes. Yet due to a mistake she once made, she stepped into a completely different course in life.

And faraway in the City of Angels, the blooming flower of the Union that shared her name had just gone through a kidnapping--

Lin Jingshu was on her way back home from her office when a car driving automatically on the higher-level highways malfunctioned. Someone hacked into her system like the time she plotted the assasination of secretary general Gordon, the weapons on the car all pointed towards her. However, the security guards around her this time were much more careful than the arrogant late secretary general. Two of the guards quickly jumped in front of her, yet within an instant one of the guards took a laser knife to his body while protecting her, buying a few seconds of time for her to escape. The other guard pulled out a knife from his pocket and forcefully opened the car door as he escorted her towards the emergency exit off the side of the road.

The heels of her stiletto snapped automatically and transformed to comfortable flats for running; the tip of her shoes revealed a small opening with a hidden blade she could shoot out at any time. She swiftly passed through the emergency tunnel while escaping pursuit, but a sudden quiet sound inside the tunnel stopped her footsteps. Lin Jingshu stared wide-eyed at the glass wall at the other end of the tunnel that exploded into pieces. The guard turned his back and protected her from the impact of the explosion; at the same time, a broken service robot on the side suddenly moved. Within the blink of an eye, the robot’s arm pierced through the guard’s chest. The moment the robot hand passed through human flesh, the outer metal layer began heating up; before the guard could utter a final word, his body stiffened and fell onto Lin Jingshu, the hole on his chest reeking of burnt meat.

Lin Jingshu quickly tossed the corpse on her to the side, but the heated metal buttons on the person’s clothing still slashed through her arms. Her smooth and white skin suddenly gained a fresh bright-red mark.

All the robots around the tunnel turned towards her eerily and surrounded her.

Lin Jingshu lifted her uninjured arm up to fix her fringes and smiled as she spoke, as if she was making a public service announcement on behalf of the Eden Committee, “Who are you? Are you out of medication and mad that I no longer allow the use of these drugs anymore?”

The robots didn’t answer and only held a laser gun to her back.

Lin Jingshu shook her head in defeat as she walked under the pressure of gunpoint and gave a difficult laugh: “I’m merely a tragic widow who doesn’t even know whom she’s grieving for anymore, if you…”

Another robot three steps away from her shot towards her before she could finish.

Lin Jingshu’s eyes widened as she watched the laser bullet shoot past her and accurately hit the robot behind holding her hostage. The core energy on its chest shattered as the crowd of robots began to panic and fight among themselves. Immediately after, Lin Jingshu felt the ground below her disappear as she fell straight down into the hole.

The next moment, a silhouette flashed in the night sky as an armed mobile parked right below the hole of the tunnel and caught her from the fall. The protection airbag shot out the moment she landed and quickly enveloped her; Lin Jingshu stared in shock as she landed safely inside the mobile. There were two men in the front seat, one of them furiously typing something out on his personal device, while the other turned his head over and tipped his imaginary hat off to greet Lin Jingshu.

“Good evening, beautiful.” The man’s voice was cheery and friendly even as it reeked of conceit; he was the type that would praise his own good looks in front of a mirror on a daily basis. “I’m the Captain of the Silver Ten’s Third Squadron, Thomas Young--not ‘that’ Thomas Young, this one here’s much more handsome and chic--I’m your personal knight and guard today, please don’t forget to give a five-star rating and a smile for my service.”

Confusion flashed across Lin Jingshu’s face for a second before she cordially gave him a smile.

The self-proclaimed Captain of the Third Squadron Thomas Young immediately turned his head to punch his partner’s shoulder: “Check it out, doesn’t that feel like the commander just smiled at me?!”

The person beside him frowned at the gesture and answered: “That’s probably a sign that you won’t live long---Good evening, Miss Lin, I’m Poisson Young from the Silver Third Squadron.”

His gaze rested on the burn on Lin Jingshu’s arm for a second; then, a robotic arm reached out from the side of the armed mobile and gently sprayed some medicine on her wound, easing the pain and burning almost immediately.

Lin Jingshu only noticed now that despite looking similar, the two men were clearly twins with very distinct demeanors.

Before she should thank him, Poisson turned his gaze up and warned: “Watch out.”

The armed mobile shook violently as it dodged a wave of particle beams. Lin Jingshu turned and looked down below to see another armed mobile pass through the pedestrian roads. Soon after, another group of armed mobiles appeared around them and blocked them off, firing without hesitation.

Thomas chuckled lightly and said: “Looks like the news about our commander is already making people restless.”

Lin Jingshu’s heart jumped.

The former location of the Union Parliament was now fully under pirate control. The Glory Troops re-established themselves as the “Glory Empire Presidential Office” within the former parliament building.

The old parks and woods around the area were replaced by concrete that shone with a unique light, packed fully with tanks and armed mobiles.

A row of armed mobiles quickly drove into the parking lot and parked neatly in a line. There was a small car in the middle of the fleet; a middle-aged man wearing a black coat walked down from the car. His lips turned down coldly as his expression remained stern--he was the President of the new Glory Empire.

“Mister President, General Yelvich is on the line.”

The president nodded and quickly walked into his office. His secretary followed him and connected to General Yelvich, the former subordinate of the Union Commander Lu Xin; Yelvich’s image floated on the screen beside the President like a ghost as he spoke in a taunting manner while still in his pajamas: “What, did that dream lover of all masochists in the Union also get to you?”

“We need to act first.” The president wasn’t in the mood to joke around with him. “Lin Jingheng isn’t the type to stay undercover for so long. The reason why he’s still hiding in the Eighth Galaxy must be because there is something stopping him from reassembling the Silver Ten; and now that everyone knows he’s alive, we need to take him down before he has the chance to gather up his forces. Unfortunately, I don’t have any forces in the Eighth Galaxy, what about you?”

Yelvich answered emotionlessly: “All my forces are near Wolto, shouldn’t you know that already?”

“I’m talking about your old comrades,” the president said, “the ones that are wandering in the Eighth Galaxy.”

Yelvich’s expression hardened: “If Lu Xin knew that I’m working with you right now, he would crawl out of his grave and beat my ass. You really want to use his men to fight against Lin Jingheng? Even if that little shit is a heartless bastard, he is still a commander of the Union raised by Lu Xin and someone remembered by the Union, are you stupid or what?”

The president wasn’t fazed by the comment and shot a sharp glance at Yelvich: “Someone remembered in the spirit of the Union? That’s doubtful, General. How did the Silver Fortress get annihilated completely so easily? And how did we manage to take over Wolto without any trouble? Did your old comrades not question you? I’m sure you won’t be able to answer either way...but didn’t we just find the answer to those questions?”

Yelvich lifted his head.

The president lifted his lips. When he wasn’t smiling, he had an unshakable aura of a dependable politician, but his smile added some hints of corruption to his image: “Commander Lin Jingheng had always been a dependable ally of the Glory Empire. For the past years, we’ve helped him build his reputation on the battlefield and helped him rise up to the high ranks of the Military Council. Five years ago, we even helped him stage his fake death to escape the Union, and in return he gave us the key to entering the First Galaxy and the Silver Fortress. How’s that, General Yelvich? Doesn’t this story make sense?”

Yelvich: “You’re too savage.”

“You can’t show mercy when you need to be heartless,” the president responded. “General, if this isn’t the ‘truth’, you wouldn’t be able to explain your way out of being in the Hummingbird Fortress. Plus, you’ve also helped us chase down those rabid dogs of the AUS without knowing already; you wouldn’t want to lose the trust of your old comrades, right?”

Yelvich couldn’t respond.

Lu Bixing could feel the heavy atmosphere in the meeting room the moment he stepped inside and heard Lin Jingheng speak to Prime Minister Edward.

“...I’ve already made an emergency summons to the Silver Ten through the backup central. Either way, I’ve already exposed myself to every armed force within the Union. I must remind everyone; among the three large pirate forces, I’ve kicked the asses of two before and recently kicked the asses of the third. They won’t be too happy about this news. As for the Union, they may also treat me as a traitor for leaving…”

The Prime Minister wanted to speak up at this point but was interrupted by Lin Jingheng before he could say anything. This commander never really gave much respect to his elders and was rumored to be this arrogant back in the Union Parliament as well, earning him a lot of political enemies.

“This war exposed everyone’s weakness; everyone who has lost Eden is suffering in times of crises as they struggle to survive. Pain and anger may be a motivation to fight in the beginning, but as time passes it will simply become hatred towards the uselessness of the Union government. The Union can’t fight off the pirates right now so they desperately need a new target to distract the attention of the people.” Lin Jingheng’s gaze lowered as he looked at the concerned faces in the meeting room. He was used to keeping a blank face on, but when he lowered his gaze, the corner of his eyebrows would lift up on instinct and create a colder expression. “I’m saying this to remind you all that you need to make a decision on behalf of the Eighth Galaxy government right now--I can remove the Ninth Squadron from the Eighth Galaxy’s Defense Force and take them outside of the galaxy. That way, even though you all still need to rebuild the defense department, the Eighth Galaxy is less likely to be dragged into war by me. The other option is that I can still stay here and publicly announce that the Eighth Galaxy will be officially under the control of the Silver Ten. I can continue to protect you all as part of the Defense Force, but the galaxy will also be forced to walk on the frontlines because of me. Am I clear, Prime Minister?”

Prime Minister Edward’s eye twitched uncomfortably as he remembered the incident of Alpenglow. In ten minutes, he would need to speak on behalf of the new government on the incident to the entire galaxy.

The draft of his speech was still in his personal device, but Lin Jingheng had forcefully dragged him over to make him decide the fate of the Eighth Galaxy within ten minutes.

“I….” The old Prime Minister wiped off some cold sweat off his face. “Commander Lin, can you give me some time to think?”

“Then you better be quick,” Lin Jingheng said, “since both the Silver Ten and people that want me dead are all fighting against time right now.”

Minister Edward grew more anxious at this comment. Then, the secretary walked over, frantically fixed the Prime Minister’s clothing and reminded him: “The broadcast is ready, it’s almost time.”

The Prime Minister nodded and got ready to leave, but before he walked out he turned and asked Lin Jingheng as if he had suddenly remembered something: “Commander Lin...is it true then that you never betrayed the Union?”

Lin Jingheng lifted his lip mockingly as he heard the question; Lu Bixing instinctively knew that the next word out of his mouth would not be pretty and quickly intercepted: “Prime Minister, if the Silver Ten really betrayed the Union, the government wouldn’t have stood a chance against the pirates when they invaded Wolto.”

Not only did he choose not to explain, but the master of snapping aggression was also determined to mock the Prime Minister back without hesitation. However, the fearless commander feared offending his accidental spokesperson Lu Bixing and pulled back his sneer as he sat quietly, pretending he hadn’t heard the question.

## Ch 105 - He’s the Stain of My Life

Monoeyed Hawk, who had been watching silently on the side, finally spoke up lazily when the Prime Minister left the room: “You’re making the Prime Minister choose between staying a sewage rat in the dark or mustering up their guts to peek out of the window.”

Lin Jingheng shrugged in response without denying it.

“You know what he’s going to choose,” Monoeyed Hawk said, “you don’t know how many people in this world could spend their whole lives struggling to survive until they reach their ends, but nobody would be willing to crawl back under the mud after they’ve seen the light. You didn’t need to push the Minister like that--and you, Lu Bixing, since when did you become the spokesperson for the Silver Ten?”

Lu Bixing walked quietly beside Lin Jingheng; he didn’t dare to show any PDA in front of his own father, but still discreetly slid his leg underneath the table to tap the tip of the commander’s boots. It was a meaningless gesture that could only be explained as a strange obsession of wanting to touch the commander--he calls this the “Lin Jingheng Syndrome” that makes him crave physical contact when he sees the commander within reach to satisfy his itching heart. The young scientist then said: “Hey Commander, hurry up and help me out here, hand me that certificate of appointment to be your spokesperson.”

“Don’t mess around.” Lin Jingheng kicked him lightly with the tip of his shoe and asked earnestly, “what are you going to do if I have to leave the Eighth Galaxy temporarily?”

Lu Bixing questioned back: “didn’t you say that you’ll come back no matter how far you go as long as I’m still here?”

Monoeyed Hawk cleared his throat loudly: “.... you two. Am I a ghost that didn’t know I’m already dead?”

“How could that be?” Lin Jingheng gave him a rather kind but fake smile. “I believe you should at least be self-aware enough to know this isn’t the case, old Lu.”

Monoeyed Hawk felt that Lin Jingheng was mocking him again but couldn’t pick out exactly how he was being made fun of, so he could only glare in frustration with a cloud of smoke above his head.

Lin Jingheng saw that the old cat had its tail up in anger and took back his mischievous attitude: “I activated the backup central of the Silver Ten, which is built around Chief Woolf in the City of Angels. Under normal circumstances, the Silver Ten will reorganize after receiving my message and gather up; now that most intergalactic terminals in the Union are virtually deserted, it will take a while before they can all make it over here. On the other hand, the AUS would arrive sooner since most of their forces are centralized in the Sixth and Seventh galaxies.”

Monoeyed Hawk didn’t grow up with books and a proper education; other than trading and selling mechs, he had very little knowledge in other fields and didn’t quite understand what the young commander meant: “So you’re saying you contacted the Chief Commander of the Union? Is he reliable? Should we ask Minister Edward to say something to him?”

“A ‘backup central’ means that I merely use his coordinates as a reference to send out my orders, it doesn’t mean I’m contacting the man personally and having him do all the work in my place. The old Chief isn’t my subordinate, does it look like I can order him to summon the Silver Ten for me? If I already openly betray the Union when I gather the Silver Ten up again, how could I possibly drag the old Chief in the middle of this?” Lin Jingheng already got tired of explaining after two sentences. “Please use your brain a little here, old Lu, you won’t even catch a rat if you keep that empty head of yours.”

Monoeyed Hawk slammed on the table and stood up: “You little…”

Lu Bixing slid his teacup on the table between the two men and frowned: “Gentlemen, am I also a ghost that didn’t know I already died?”

Monoeyed Hawk and Lin Jingheng both took back their cold gazes. Monoeyed Hawk mumbled as he sat back down: “he started it.”

Lin Jingheng finally explained the situation without the taunts: “before I left, I arranged for the Captain of the Third Squadron and a few of the core technicians to join the old Chief’s personal team of guards. Normally, as long as Chief Woolf is alive, his personal guards will never leave him; because the coordinates of the Third Squadron’s Captain are public and secure, it could serve as the coordinates for the communication center under extreme circumstances...but Chief Woolf had been holding the seat for the top director of the Military Council for over 200 years, it would be almost impossible to do anything behind his back while working as his personal guard.”

Lin Jingheng paused a little; his hands slowly clenched together on the table as he hesitated. He had been growing more and more suspicious of the old Chief recently, but for the first time in his life, he prayed that he was wrong about the old Chief. He wanted to be proven wrong so that Thomas and the rest of the crew wouldn’t have to be stuck in the City of Angels now that he activated the backup central.

This thought flashed across his mind for a moment before Lin Jingheng tossed it aside; now that they’d reached this point, he couldn’t afford to be anxious.

Chief Commander Woolf was already over 300 years old and a founding father of the Interstellar Union, an important spiritual figure of the Pledge Freedom, and the first principal of the Black Orchid Academy. Everyone he could name in the Military Council was once his student...how could someone like him betray the Union? What would he be planning?

*I hope I’m simply overthinking this*, Lin Jingheng thought.

Yet the heavens laughed whenever Lin Jingheng prayed.

The poor Young twins were in fact, almost hopelessly stuck in the City of Angels right now.

“Y’know, wouldn’t the City of Angels be considered a refugee camp right now if it was back in ancient times? It’s a damn camp just to keep people safe, how did it manage to avoid overpopulation and even build beautiful natural scenery? Look at it, there isn’t even a single residential building...tsk,” Thomas attempted to activate the alarm, only to find that the signals had been blocked. He was about to curse in frustration at not being able to crack the code until he caught a glimpse of Lin Jingshu from the corner of his eyes, then swallowed his vulgar language and censored himself, “.... ew, gosh, this is so frustrating, even energy fields are blocked off.”

Poisson: “Disgusting, talk normally for once!”

The two worked seamlessly as if they shared the same mind; one worked on hacking into the network’s signal blockage while the other controlled the armed mobile. The armed mobile swiftly passed through the web of laser beams in an attempt to break out of the barricade, only to be dragged back by two other armed mobiles from the side. Poisson pulled the lever and forced the car to fly up, almost hitting the highway terminal above. Thomas yelped and complained: “Did you buy your land mobile driver’s license from the black market!?”

“Yeah I did,” Poisson taunted back, “it was also buy one get one free, didn’t I give the extra one to you?”

“Hey there pretty miss, let me properly introduce you. This Mister Poisson Young here is not only a top technician of the Silver Third Squadron, he’s also the three-time champion of the ‘impersonate Commander Lin’ tournament.” Thomas chatted without delaying his work; he pulled out a laser gun and locked on their target outside - the target dodged the beams too quickly and crashed into the highway terminal above. The poor enemy mobile almost immediately fell to the ground after the crash and dented the terminal tracks--yet the alarm that would panic even at any bit of littering on the tracks was dead silent while the entire terminal started to fall apart.

Thomas cursed at the sight: “damn son, there’s no way you can fix that shit anymore---by the way, this little shit here spends all his free time reciting Commander’s lectures in front of a mirror, I’ve seen it with my own two eyes.”

Poisson pulled back and dropped the armed mobile suddenly as it passed by a pursuing enemy mobile emerging from the dark.

Thomas immediately followed up with two shots; the first laser beam pierced through the safety lock of the engine at the bottom of the mobile, the heat of the beam melting the metal of the outer layer. The second shot was a mini blast projectile into the body of the enemy mobile. Within an instant, Poisson drove the mobile away from the enemy.

The projectile exploded and destroyed the engine of the enemy mobile, creating a chain reaction of smaller explosions around it until they turned into a ball of fire.

The explosion was finally large enough to pull the attention of the dead auto-repair system of the terminal as a bright light shined to indicate the robots were heading back to work.

The internal security system of the City of Angels quickly caught this area with signals all blocked off; the pursuers caught on and immediately made their escape through the energy fields.

Poisson let out a sigh of relief and finally found time to shoot back at his brother: “You have proof? I bet you proved that when you shoved your head in the toilet to replenish your sad brain cells. Sorry Miss Lin, we came in a rush and didn’t have enough people so I can only bring my embarrassing little brother out to help, I apologize for making you see this unsightly thing.”

Thomas complained: “I’m your older brother!”

Perhaps she was too used to keeping her dignified image and had learned to constantly watch her mannerisms, or perhaps she did have some psychological problems; Lin Jingshu wasn’t born with the emotion called ‘fear’.

She had just experienced a life-or-death situation of kidnapping and attempted assassination with the blood of her guard still staining her skirt, but there was no trace of anxiety or sadness on her face. She sat in the backseat of the armed mobile as if she was drinking afternoon tea and looked at the twins in curiosity and slight envy: “Are you two twins? You both sure get along well.”

Thomas turned his head and pretended to puke, Poisson sneered; then as if they had been practicing this line, both of them answered in unison, “He’s the stain of my life.”

Lin Jingshu lowered her head and let out a chuckle, then asked; “so, can I ask what’s going on now?”

“To make things simple,” Poisson said as his expression grew stern, “your brother Commander Lin Jingheng is still alive, and this news spread to the space pirates not too long ago. Because the Union’s network is completely destroyed, he summoned the Silver Ten through us, but when he received the order and attempted to send out long-distance signals to our comrades, the signal suddenly cut off. That’s when we noticed that the communication network within the City of Angels had been blocked off.”

Thomas followed up seamlessly: “In other words, someone inside the City of Angels is working with the pirates, found out about our plan, and is attempting to stop us from contacting the rest of the Silver Ten.”

“If the culprit is really in the City of Angels, as the only blood sibling of Commander Lin, you’re in an extremely dangerous position right now. The enemy may attempt to kidnap you to threaten the commander,” Poisson said, “so we decided to come over after a short discussion and ran into these people, thank god we made it in time.”

Lin Jingshu pressed her hand to her lips as if she was shocked by this news.

“It’s going to be a pain to explain to the law enforcement teams, it would be best if we can leave right now.” Poisson said, “the enemy’s energy field blockage is gone now, do you have anywhere safe that we can stay at temporarily?”

Lin Jingshu thought about it for a second and said: “go to my house, there’s a private mech dock in my backyard. You can pass through a protected portal the moment you leave the atmosphere and head directly to the Eden laboratory.”

The twins glanced at each other--the special terminal directly connected to the lab was likely built after Lin Jingshu was attacked by space pirates and was forced to abort her child.

Thomas responded carefully: “Uh...sorry, we were also quite upset when we heard the news, we haven’t even dared to tell our boss about it.”

“Thank you.” The corner of Lin Jingshu’s lips curled up slightly as she changed the topic, “is my brother doing well?”

“He looks pretty good,” Thomas said, “doesn’t seem like a guy who’s about to be chased down by the entire Union. Also, I can’t believe he’s hanging out with the Eighth Galaxy’s new government right now. You know ‘hanging out’ isn’t a phrase that normally applies to him.”

Lin Jingshu laughed. When she was truly laughing from her heart, her eyes would curl up like the moon while her sharp chin lifted up. She was covered in a blood-stained long dress, but the smile on her face was like a spring breeze through the fields.

“Oh no,” Thomas covered his eyes, “my lady, the more I look at you the more I wouldn’t be able to live in this mortal world.”

“Shush, kiss-ass.” Poisson said, “we’re preparing the energy field, please let me know if you feel uncomfortable, Miss Lin.”

The armed mobile let out a sharp sound as it shot out a protective airbag around Lin Jingshu. They arrived at the backyard of the Gordon household and immediately made their way out of the City of Angels through a private mech from the backyard.

Lin Jingshu’s passport was extremely powerful, and within half an hour they arrived safely in the Eden lab.

Lin Jingshu looked quite similar to her brother, but after interacting with her it was almost as if these two were completely unrelated.

She wasn’t very talkative but was great at maintaining a conversation by commenting at appropriate times, making it quite pleasant even if she didn’t contribute much to the conversation. It was very enjoyable to be around her despite her quietness. Even though it was clear that she felt quite uncomfortable when they passed through the energy field, she never once complained and even asked for stories about her brother in the Silver Fortress.

Thomas Young was almost like a male version of Turan and would lose his mind when he saw a beautiful woman. In the heat of the moment, he answered everything and exposed all of Commander Lin’s everyday shenanigans in the Silver Fortress...as if the person that recited the commander’s words in front of the mirror everyday wasn’t his brother.

As the Captain of the Third Squadron’s spirit was floating in a dream and felt he was going to find another lover of his dreams, they arrived at the lab.

The doors of the mech slowly opened up as it connected to the lab’s landing dock. There was a decorative sign of the Eden lab on the side of the dock, and underneath the dock were numerous cars driving within the clean and organized lab.

The lab didn’t seem particularly interesting from the outside. Even though the Third Squadron spent most of their time working in the background, they were still soldiers. Thomas’ gaze quickly scanned past the large Eden sign on the dock--there was something behind the sign, and from experience working with mechs, he could tell that it was the size of a standard missile launcher.

As they made their way into the lab from the mech dock, an eerie feeling tingled the sixth sense of the twins. The deeper they walked in, the stronger the bad feeling got; it was as if there was a frightening aura surrounding the entire lab. The Young twins exchanged a quick glance as they noticed the suspicion in each other’s eyes.

A few researcher-looking people seemed to have already received the news that Lin Jingshu would be arriving and were waiting outside the mech dock. They politely escorted the group inside the lab; aside from a simple “Miss Lin” greeting, they didn’t speak a second word. Nobody asked why there were two strangers following beside her and didn’t even bother looking at them, as if the twins didn’t exist at all.

Thomas shot another glance at Poisson and asked with his eyes: *are these real people?*

Poisson watched Lin Jingshu’s back in front of him, shook his head and frowned: *they wouldn't even look her in the eye.*

The entry into the Eden laboratory was supposedly of the highest protection level, and if they didn’t arrive through a special terminal, there should be armed soldiers and heavy security outside the lab. Would they really not question the arrival of strangers into their territory? Was it simply because they were following Lin Jingshu?

But...wasn’t Lin Jinshu just a puppet spokesperson for the Gordon family?

The twins communicated wordlessly with each other.

Poisson narrowed his eyebrows down even more: *Her reaction when she first heard that the commander was still alive was also very strange, she was too calm.*

Thomas: *Right, she didn’t even show any sign of disbelief and simply accepted the fact as if she already knew.*

Poisson pressed his fingers together and discreetly made a unique gesture: *The guards around her when she was kidnapped were also strange.*

Most bodyguards and personal guards were salaried professionals that worked for their clients; it was hard enough to expect them to remain loyal to their jobs, but the two guards around her acted like sacrificial lambs that gave their lives to protect her.

People who would give up their lives without hesitation to protect someone else did exist, but someone like that was either a true hero or someone that had strong emotional attachment to the person they wanted to protect.

Yet a hero is a hero because they are one in a million; could it be possible that Miss Lin had such luck that she was able to find all the heroes in the world to protect her? And if the guards sacrificed themselves for her out of personal feelings, Lin Jingshu’s reaction didn’t match up…. she was still as calm and collected as if she hadn’t just lost two human lives, and instead broke two human-like AIs.

“All the equipment and communication networks here are independently built, they’re not under the control of the City of Angels,” Lin Jingshu said, “all the transfer portals around the area are protected so you can build your long-distance communications here without getting intercepted.”

Thomas nudged Poisson's arm and nodded: *She’s still Commander’s sister.*

He then asked Lin Jingshu in a nonchalant tone: “Once the long-distance signal is set up, the enemy could easily scan and find it. Are you sure this won’t cause trouble for you?”

Lin Jingshu smiled: “Don’t worry.”

Poisson also attempted to gauge a reaction: “That’s true. We will meet up with the rest of the Third Squadron immediately after we send out the message and head to the Eighth Galaxy. Miss Lin, perhaps you should check and see if you need to prepare anything for this long journey?”

Lin Jingshu was stunned and then responded: “you two have already helped me a lot by saving me. If there’s anything I can do to help you all and my brother, please let me know, but I am safe within the committee, I’ll make sure to bring more guards with me next time.”

“Are you…. not planning on leaving with us?”

“This place is still my home; I can’t just leave it.” Lin Jingshu said with a smile, “please follow me, I’ve already prepared the communication network for you both. Please don’t forget to say hello to my brother for me and tell him to take care. If there’s a chance in the future, perhaps I can visit the Eighth Galaxy...I haven’t left the First Galaxy since I was born, what a pity.”

## Ch 106 - A Damned Bloodline

The twins could never have imagined that there would be a day where they would be forced to hide under the Committee and use a protected portal in the Eden lab to send out their long-distance signals.

The massive long-distance communication network passed through countless portals like a fish in the water, leaving a signal on every portal it swam by. When the rest of the Silver Ten teams passed through the portals carrying their keys, their mechs would automatically pick up the signal and create a channel between both parties. During this time, the sender end would not be allowed to change their coordinates, so the twins had no choice but to settle in the lab temporarily.

Lin Jingshu prepared a deluxe guest room that was almost comparable to a VIP room for a top politician in the Union. Thomas walked in like a curious peasant and stretched his back lazily, then turned to the mirror and made a victory sign above his head: “This is super fancy, glad she’s so generous!”

Poisson eyed him quickly--almost all mechanics who grew up together during their teenage phase have made codes that only they could understand at some point. Theirs had started off as a joke in spy games to “save the world,” but most of it later turned into useless codes they used in games or exchanging adult videos.

The sign for the twins to start speaking in code was to make a victory sign above their head; every sound in a sentence they spoke followed a certain pattern and could be rearranged into a new sentence.

Thomas’ line earlier meant: “Is there surveillance?”

Poisson: “Let me try finding it.”

“Be careful, I secretly scanned a researcher earlier, the radiation on him was more like what I'd expect from a signal post for communicating with all the lab equipment. I thought they’d made a mini-Eden inside the lab at first, but the radiation is way above the safety threshold of the Union standard. My personal device later sent out an alert that this thing might be directly controlling the brainwaves of the person.”

“Opium.”

“Yup, opium.”

“With how highly protected the Eden Labs are, how could they possibly let any unrelated personnel inside like that? And none of the researchers have complained about it, Lin Jingshu supposedly shouldn’t have this kind of control over them.”

“Do you trust her? She is Commander’s only sister.”

“.......A sister he hasn’t contacted in decades.”

“Then the Gordon family sure is cursed. Do you think old man Gordon is still alive?”

“If she really is dangerous and cunning enough to obtain control of Eden behind the backs of everyone in the central government, do you think she would be that careless and let us find her weakness the moment we walked in the lab?”

“Why do you say it like we’re about to get silenced?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. Do we really need to risk our lives and stay here?”

“If we leave, who’s going to receive the messages and connect the networks for the rest of the Silver Ten?”

Thomas laid haphazardly on the soft bed inside the suite and rolled around like a restless child. Yet his gaze peeking out from the pillow was heavy as he looked at his brother. He mumbled like a tired rural soldier complaining about enlisting into the military and whined about wanting to go back, but the translated code was: “I was going to say, we barely received the order from our commander to activate the backup central and the portals around the City of Angels were immediately shut off. Who could have such an immediate reaction? Who’s been keeping an eye on us?”

The two had been working with the guards of the old Chief; Lin Jingheng had personally handed a letter of recommendation to Secretary Wang, and the old Chief personally arranged their new positions in the team. Aside from them, nobody knew that these two were the famous engineers from the Silver Third Squadron, and even Thomas himself bragged about being a dandy that fit in seamlessly with the rich boys of the Wolto elites…

Then...who could it be?

A chill ran down Poisson’s back so cold he felt as if he was floating in an icy ocean, the ocean water consuming his limbs with no escape.

Poisson fell silent for a moment before he spoke up: “don’t embarrass yourself in front of Miss Lin...I haven’t watched the news in days, give me a few minutes of quiet time.”

Of course, he didn’t really want to watch the news, the decoded message was: “Does Miss Lin have anything to do with opium? Perhaps...she is the mastermind behind them?”

Thomas faked a laugh and responded: “how would I embarrass myself, isn't the commander's family one of us too?”

*If that’s the case, what would the Commander think if he found out?*

Poisson didn’t respond, and in fear of surveillance inside the room, he sat on the side and pretended to flip through the news on his personal device as he had mentioned earlier.

The ‘news’ nowadays was merely rumors from unreliable sources. Ever since the network was destroyed, mass media collapsed, and people could only gather among themselves to create small internal networks with the help of network engineers. Different providers had different contracts and terms of uses, but under specific conditions they could still connect with each other and pass on information or sell illegal drugs and products--essentially, they were the dark side of the internet.

Unfortunately, they were only left with these underground networks now.

Poisson skimmed through this pointless news with his mind still stuck on this fearsome little sister of Commander Lin; that was when something suddenly caught his eye.

Thomas noticed his brother freezing up and leaned forward to see what had happened.

It was a video recording that was going around the internet titled “The secrets to the fall of the Silver Fortress that you didn’t know about (military video record included)”.

Military-grade visual records were considered a top-grade technology difficult to recreate by the public, making these videos much more valuable as news sources.

The video seemed to be taken inside a mech launching dock from a mech that forgot to turn off its recording after an irresponsible pilot left. The camera pointed towards a mech parked right across from it that clearly displayed the model and number of the mech.

In order to stage a peaceful coup in the eyes of the public, the Glory Troops had been very active in their propaganda in the underground networks ever since they took over Wolto. Therefore, a lot of people recognized that the mech on the camera belonged to the President of the pirate group.

In the next instant, the President himself appeared on screen as he spoke with his secretary. Poisson quickly opened up his lip-reader app on his personal device and deciphered their conversation.

The President said: “How did the news of him being in the Eighth Galaxy get leaked to the AUS?”

His secretary responded: “It’s likely an accident, but this is bad. We used these rabid dogs in the AUS back then and fooled them into the Union to become sacrificial lambs for him, but now they must’ve realized they were fooled and will likely take vengeance on him.”

The President then said: “Lin Jingheng is our old friend. He’s helped us greatly for so many years to let us reach our status today, so we have to to help him out. We’re stuck in the First Galaxy right now with no reach over there, see if you can use the old Union military to hold out those dogs from the AUS for now.”

The secretary responded with something, but due to the angle of the camera it was impossible to see their faces anymore, and the video promptly ended.

This news spread like the virus within the underground networks and riled up waves of unrest.

What does “Lin Jingheng is our old friend” mean?”

An hour later, another military recording with a full analysis appeared in the trending topics.

The video was a clip of Lin Jingheng chasing down the AUS near planet Alpenglow that skillfully avoided catching the AUS logo on camera. It was short and quick; the viewers could only make out that there were two forces fighting each other and not who or why they were involved.

Under the video was a long analysis report on the battle style of the Silver Ninth Squadron and the impossibly large mental network range of the old Model 3.

Of course, most people didn’t understand what a battle style analysis is and wouldn’t know what the standard radius of a heavy mech’s mental network should be, but everyone believed it after drawing the same conclusion from the two military recordings--Lin Jingheng was still alive in the Eighth Galaxy and was formerly a spy for the Glory Troops.

Nobody questioned whether the logic made sense; the public weren’t inquisitors and had no obligation to make sure all the evidence lined up.

If they wished for something to be true, then it would be the truth in their eyes.

Everyone who had lost Eden to the war were like stray dogs on the street, yet suddenly they found the answers to why the unshakable Silver Fortress fell and why their lives had been destroyed.

Prior to this, they hated the uselessness of the Union government and the foreign pirates who took over their homeland...and the anger towards the pirates would sometimes even split into two camps as people fought over whether the AUS or Glory Troops should be responsible for everything.

But now, their anger and frustration united into a stream of rage as they turned towards one common target--Lin Jingheng.

The rabid dogs howled in unison as they exploded in rage.

The angry voices of the people quickly shook the grounds of the Union government.

Three hours later, the central government of the City of Angels made a long public announcement that essentially meant “the government is still currently investigating the situation and will not be easily talked into dispatching troops.”

Yet the hidden message in this speech was quite clear--Lin Jingheng ‘died’ in the First Galaxy and was supposedly under the surveillance of Eden. How could anyone forget how much time and effort the Union had put into his memorial back then? If the rumor was true, shouldn’t the City of Angels step up and explain themselves?

The attitude of the central government therefore confirmed that Lin Jingheng indeed had a way to escape from the control of Eden.

Meanwhile, in the Seventh Galaxy--

“General, the AUS is retreating and gathering more troops, could it be that rumor is true?”

Before the war, the seven galaxies had no military autonomy. All stationed troops outside of the First Galaxy were called the “Galactic Base Central Militia” that had no real authority and were essentially decorations around the galaxies. Without the order from the Council or the Silver Fortress, they were not allowed to dispatch any troops nor open up their armories; a general assigned to a central militia force was essentially exiled.

The ‘exiled’ general of the Seventh galaxy was a portly middle-aged man named Ankur, an old subordinate of Lu Xin who was a little over 200 years old. He had been oppressed by the young Commander Lin Jingheng and sent to the Seventh Galaxy.

He was a man who usually wouldn’t show his hand easily and was rather easy-going, so he managed to maintain a good relationship with both the central militia inspection commission and the local government after moving to the Seventh Galaxy. The old general didn’t cause a lot of trouble for the local authorities and acted as if he planned on retiring in the galaxy.

Nobody would have guessed that the minute war broke out, Ankur would forcefully make his way into the inspection commission and demand military autonomy. Within a short time, he took control of the entire armed forces in the Seventh Galaxy and made them into his personal military troops.

The AUS forces in the Seventh Galaxy had been held back by the aggressive forces of the general, and it was precisely due to this that the Eighth Galaxy had a short break from the pursuit of the AUS.

“Lin Jingheng,” Ankur tapped the table rhythmically and said, “it’s most likely true, I got the message from Yelvich.”

A soldier asked: “What should we do then? Why don’t we just wait until both the pirates and the traitors fight it out?”

Ankur groaned as he stood up and walked in front of the large intergalactic map. He squinted his eyes and breathed out a cloud of smoke: “But I’ve heard…. Zhanlu is in his hands. That was Commander Lu’s most prized weapon; how will I face my old comrades and the commander when I die if it falls into the hands of the AUS?”

The young soldier always enjoyed hearing the old stories of tragic heroes and looked up at the general with excitement in his eyes.

Ankur let out a deep sigh: “He was raised by the hands of the commander...how disappointing.”

By the end of September, NSC 276--the later generations also called it the first year of the new Era-- the first missile fired by the AUS dragged the Eighth Galaxy out under the spotlight of this warfare.

The AUS forces pushed through the border of the galaxy, Captain Turan personally entered the frontlines to defend the terminals leading to the Eighth Galaxy. Using dwarf planet Transition as the base, Turan’s forces carried out a series of counter attacks against the pirates. Meanwhile, the central militia of the Seventh Galaxy remained within their territories while they ceased fire against the AUS.

Built and expanded on the legendary Silver Ninth Squadron, the Eighth Galaxy Galactic Forces displayed a fearsome vitality and aggression on the battlefield with the invading pirates.

In the beginning of October, dwarf planet Transition fell into enemy hands. Turan feinted a retreat to lure the AUS fleet in an ambush, which later went down in history as one of the most famous battles, ending with a decisive victory to the smaller Eighth Galaxy Forces. The entire battle lasted a total of 48 hours with the total annihilation of a fully armed heavy mech fleet of the AUS.

Mid-October, under the silent approval of General Ankur from the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia, the AUS expanded their forces by deploying more troops from the Fifth and Sixth Galaxies. The Eighth Galaxy forces were pushed to the edge and returned to the defensive as they retreated eighteen sailing days back from the frontlines.

By the end of October, the voices of complaints within the Union grew louder than ever. Even though Lin Jingheng himself hadn’t appeared in public and all evidence of him being alive was still just speculation, the man was alive and well in the minds of the people’s delusions. The rumors had already made their way into everyone’s hearts as they painted him into a demon from ancient myths through their anger.

The Prime Minister of the Eighth Galaxy had made a few appearances to ease the angered crowds with no luck--the Eighth Galaxy was sewage in the eyes of the Union. These sewer rats were uncultured, and the image of the Prime Minister was less than appealing, who would want to listen to what they have to say? Could they even speak in the standard Union accent?

Villains always emerged from the poor and disadvantaged, so no wonder the Eighth Galaxy became a hub of demons and evil during a time of war. As the homebase of criminals, the Eighth Galaxy held up their flags of rebellion to fight against humanity and society like madmen, truly despicable!

General Ankur of the Seventh Galaxy had been swarmed by heated debates and discussion for the past month, and finally decided to deploy his troops carrying the anger of the people to the border between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies.

“Prime Minister Edward, our supplies won’t last if we continue like this.”

“If Alpenglow hadn’t been destroyed, we could’ve eased the pressure of supply shortages within six months, why are we suddenly caught in this mess?”

“The draft around the galaxy has been receiving a lot of responses. Virtually every newly settled person is eagerly signing up to fight for the military, but galactic forces aren’t land forces, and we can’t send people off to the frontlines with just basic training.”

Stressed out, the Prime Minister started throwing all options on the table: “What about those training mechs Professor Lu and his students were working on? If we don’t have time we can produce an emergency batch of those!”

“Our factories are not prepared for that yet, Prime Minister! Our missile inventory is almost empty, and even the Central Militia of the Seventh Galaxy are making their way over. If this continues we wouldn’t even last until the Silver Ten arrives!”

Prime Minister Edward stood up abruptly and announced: “I’ll go meet with the central militia personally! Prepare a starship and mechs for me, I’ll head off today! Aren’t they all old subordinates of Commander Lu Xin? The Independent Navy of the Eighth Galaxy was also soldiers under the late commander, I’ll speak with them as former comrades. We can’t just sit here and wait for death, don’t we also deserve to stand up and speak for ourselves!?”

“Prime Minister, that’s too dangerous!”

“Please calm down, Prime Minister…”

Monoeyed Hawk felt his head spin from the commotion and quietly left the meeting room to give himself a cigarette break, only to bump into Lin Jingheng right outside the door.

He wasn’t sure how long Lin Jingheng had been standing there, but the commander stood silently as he listened into the conversation without going inside.

“I was here to discuss preparation for war since our supplies are being used up at a faster pace than we all expected.” Lin Jingheng pulled out a cigarette from Monoeyed Hawk’s pack and gestured for the latter to light the fire for him. Monoeyed Hawk rolled his eyes but still lit the cigarette as Lin Jingheng leaned his back onto the wall and said, “It seems like the Prime Minister is now regretting his decision to let me stay.”

“If his head was clear right now, he wouldn’t think that” Monoeyed Hawk responded almost emotionlessly, “If you were to leave the Eighth Galaxy, you can disappear and hide on your own, who’s stopping you from going anywhere you want? Then look at the Eighth Galaxy, can it also disappear like you? Those oversized infants who grew up in Eden have nowhere to let out their anger so they’re also directing their fire at the Eighth Galaxy; we’re the common target for everyone. The truth is that these babies don’t dare to rebel against the people that are stepping on them and can only let out their frustration on the people they can’t step on. I know this for a fact.”

Lin Jingheng remained silent in the cloud of smoke.

Monoeyed Hawk: “The central militia of the Union…”

He closed his mouth almost immediately after uttering those words and met his gaze with Lin Jingheng. Both of them knew in their minds--the Seventh Galaxy Militia had the power to tip the scales of the warfare in the Eighth Galaxy right now. Even if they chose to remain as bystanders, they could greatly increase the chances of the Eighth Galaxy’s survival.

The top commander of the Seventh Galaxy Militia was General Ankur, a former subordinate of Lu Xin. To him, one hundred old Prime Ministers of the Eighth Galaxies would be worth nothing against one Lu Bixing.

If they knew...

Monoeyed Hawk and Lin Jingheng both opened their mouths at the same time.

Lin Jingheng: “No.”

Monoeyed Hawk: “If you dare use my son…”

Monoeyed Hawk only realized what Lin Jingheng said halfway through his sentence and stared in shock with a cigarette in his hands.

A shadow flashed across the commander’s face. He had chosen to hide Lu Bixing’s real background to protect the young man in the past; even when they were stuck inside the same mech together as they searched for the vaccine to the mutated Rainbow Virus, he had ordered Zhanlu to send Lu Bixing’s information to all of Lu Xin’s old generals.

However….

What would Lu Bixing think if he were to find out about this damned bloodline?

What would he think of this one-sided protection that Lin Jingheng had decided on his own? Would he think that their relationship...was all because he was Lu Xin’s son?

*What am I supposed to say to him?* Lin Jingheng thought.

Monoeyed Hawk stared at him for a while and gradually saw a hint of emotion from the young commander’s face.

Lin Jingheng turned his gaze away in a hurry and said: “Does it look like I would bow down to a useless old man like Ankur? What a joke, I can still crush him even if I only had a broken mech.”

He turned around and left without another word, then contacted the command post: “Tell Lu Bixing to come see me.”

After half a minute, the worker at the post responded: “Commander, the frontline mechs are gravely damaged, so Professor Lu took his engineer team out to the frontlines for emergency repair.”

Lin Jingheng felt his head combusting.

## Ch 107 - Pissed Off at the Union

“Why didn’t you say anything about the temperature being so high, aren’t you scared of melting into goo?” Lu Bixing connected to the mental network and spoke to the small repairing robot onto the side: “The ventilation panel is broken.”

Saturday wiped off the sweat from his face. After countless battles and frontline experiences, he was no longer the foolish baby-faced boy who tried to solve everything with his fist. Perhaps the harsh military training had straightened his slouching back or perhaps he just never hit puberty in a timely manner, but he grew a little taller than before - even at the age of 30.

He hadn’t properly rested in over 30 hours and the exhaustion from using relaxants was still clear on his face. Despite that, he still forced himself to stay beside Lu Bixing and snatch every opportunity he could to learn: “Professor Lu, is this caused by the leakage of high-density particle waves?”

“Yes, but the leakage isn’t the main issue. Check your shield,” Lu Bixing said, “see that? The leakage happened because the energy consumption mode on your shield got blocked off--you had your mental network hijacked, right? During network battles, the stability of the human-mech port will lower, and it can sometimes cause partial areas of the mech to malfunction and even cause automated blocking of certain functions. If you feel something is off, don’t forget to reset immediately or you might end up with a lot of issues...although it’s not entirely your fault, this model is way too old.”

Saturday nodded as he made notes on his personal device.

“You don’t need to make notes of these things, just focus on what you need to.” Lu Bixing disconnected from the mental network. This was the 46th mech he repaired, and the constant logging on and off of the mental network was starting to take a toll on his body. He rubbed his eye and felt that he may also need a relaxant. “I wrote a small repair app to fix up common mech malfunctioning issues last night and passed it to the engineering team to revise. After three rounds of revision, it should be ready to install onto mechs...how’s the supply level here?”

“We have more than enough for food,” Saturday said, “one shot of nutrient syringe could make us go without food for two months so we’re not using it up as much right now. We’re mostly low on weapons and ammo. Captain Turan’s going insane and making us upload all our battle recordings after every battle for two supercomputers to analyze, and if she finds that any of us has a high rate of misfires…”

Saturday shivered a little: “Don’t mention it, she’s crazy--can you mention to the Prime Minister sometime and ask when we can build a human rights commission or something? We have nowhere to report her.”

“Let’s protect human lives first before we talk about human rights,” Lu Bixing twirled the digital pen in his hand before it disappeared into a dot back into his personal device. “Ok, I know about the missile issue, what else are you guys missing?”

“Mechs,” Saturday said. “The number of mechs we have is significantly lower than our enemies. I guess you can say it like this: if they have 1,000 mechs, even if their casualty rate rises to 90%, they still have 100 mechs left. As for us, any mech that gets shot down means we rise up 1% in casualty rate. Also pilots...even if we have enough mechs, we don’t have enough pilots for them.”

As the former Captain of the Ninth Squadron, Turan was always the vanguard during wartime. In a time where they were at a disadvantage in terms of numbers, it was natural that she would choose to plan out all her strategies around maximizing their firepower in the shortest amount of time.

“To be quite honest, Professor Lu, even I have trouble following her up in the frontlines,” Saturday said, “Mint told me about the training mech before, and I was hesitant at first because it was too dangerous. But looking back at it now...man, when can we start producing them?”

Lu Bixing’s mind was on something else as he answered without even lifting his head: “Anytime.”

“What?” Saturday was dumbfounded. “Didn’t you say they all changed their research topic?”

“I designed the blueprint of the training mech when I was little. I gave them this topic to study because I wanted them to learn from it.” Lu Bixing said, “I couldn’t leave the house when I was younger, and since I had nothing to do at home, I once drew a whole book of galactic-scale weapons of mass destruction. Even though most of them were imaginary doodles, I did notice that some of them could be realized in theory later--the training mech was one of them.”

Saturday stared at him in great fear.

“What, haven’t you also gone through some foolish teenage years? Although to me it looks like you’re still not done with your puberty.” Lu Bixing stood in front of the shiny outer shell of the mech and used it as a mirror. He noticed that his jacket was wrinkled up and quickly took it off. “Look, I…”

The air defense siren of the armed base interrupted his sentence.

Saturday acted on reflex and pulled Lu Bixing, dragging him into a mech that looked more completed. Aside from a dumbfounded young engineer, everyone else in the base immediately took cover swiftly and efficiently.

The poor young engineer wanted to scream but stood awkwardly with their mouth open as everyone else kept quiet and hidden.

The next moment, a giant shield lifted as the anti-missile system warned of an enemy attack.

Lu Bixing quickly waved to take over the mental network of the mech he was hiding inside. All the mechs parked in the post needed to be repaired, so he naturally scanned the mech for any issues while giving out repairment orders to the robot next to him. At the same time, he connected onto the Defence Force’s internal channel and noticed that the patrolling teams reacted to the siren in merely three seconds.

*That’s too fast*, Lu Bixing thought, *if we had more time on our hands with frontline forces like this, we would be almost invincible.*

The more easy-going Turan only came out during her off hours, otherwise she ruled her squadron with an iron fist. Even if running naked was a joke, a lot of her punishments were borderline unethical and unnecessarily brutal. As a refined gentleman, Lu Bixing was never quite fond of those methods; however, he had to admit that it was certainly effective. Everyone that survived under her draconian military rule came out anew.

Saturday: “Professor Lu, this mech’s shield is broken and can’t protect against enemy attacks, we should move to another soon!”

Lu Bixing answered without lifting his head: “Don’t worry. Are ambushes like this common?”

The mechanical sound of the mech’s AI system announced in the background: “Reopening the shield---failed to reopen---attempt second reopening---”

“Yeah,” Saturday said, “Captain Turan takes us out to fight guerillas with them a lot, so the enemies learn from us and keep sending scouters. Most of them travel in small groups of three to five small mechs that won’t be caught easily even if they draw near us. Compared to them, we’re like giant targets; once a scouting team finds us and report it to the higher ups, the enemy will launch a suicide attack--you know. They’re willing to die with us even if they’re scouts, it’s like none of them are afraid to increase their casualties or lose mechs. There’s too many madmen in the AUS, I swear I’m getting neurotic these past few days because of them.”

The mech continued to report: “Second attempt at reopening unsuccessful---third attempt at reopening----”

Lu Bixing turned on the repair mode of the mech and connected his personal device to it as he swiftly typed at someone from his device.

Saturday couldn’t help but remind him again: “Professor Lu, I think we should…”

Before he could finish, a sharp alarm went off as a single missile shot through the anti-missile system and landed right in the center of the station. The emergency 3D-printed camps and architecture perished instantly as deadly radiation and particle waves spread out around the station.

Saturday’s voice cracked: “Professor Lu!”

The shield wasn’t repaired yet!

A heavy aftershock burst through the entrance of the mech repair station. An invisible demon made its way into the station as Saturday stared in terror. Then, Lu Bixing quickly pressed on his wrist and closed down the screen of his personal device. At the same time, a low buzz came from the mech as the shield light turned on, meeting the aftershock with only a tremble.

“Shield opening successful, all functions are running properly.”

“Lu Bixing!” Saturday screamed as he drenched himself in cold sweat.

“Repair completed,” Lu Bixing said, “signed, Engineer ID 001.”

Turan’s voice came from the communication channel: “There’s quite a few rats this time, team 2 get ready to support the frontlines, everyone else be prepared to retreat.”

Lu Bixin jumped directly into the conversation and asked: “If their scan range is the entire galaxy, I don’t believe they can possibly find you all that quickly. Even though the AUS were much better in the department of warp scanning than the Union, they’re still too efficient; I suspect that they can lock in on all the portals you all pass through and shrink down their searching area to a smaller radius, then send out suicide troops to scout.”

Turan almost choked on her spit: “Professor Lu, what are you doing on the frontlines? Did the commander agree to it? Did the Prime Minister allow you to come in? The old man’s even planning on having you succeed him, who said you can jump to the frontlines like this!?”

“Nonsense, if I don’t come to the frontlines to see for myself, how can I possibly allocate the rest of our supplies? Am I supposed to decide behind closed doors blindly? You can’t expect that old Prime Minister to come to the frontlines.” Lu Bixing said, “Captain, don’t shoot down all their mechs, leave one for me to dissect when I get back.”

Turan: “No, listen, you…”

Before she would even finish, the connection got cut off--it was the signature disruption from the AUS.

Lu Bixing placed a hand on the cold walls of the mech: “Hey babe, you just got repaired, can you do it?”

The small mech had no AI built in for chatter and couldn’t respond. The mental network glowed as Lu Bixing pushed the mech onto the launching tracks as if he wanted to get closer to the battlefield.

Saturday watched him and suddenly said: “Professor Lu, I feel like you’re a little off today.”

Lu Bixing turned around to glance at him: “Is it obvious?”

Saturday shook his head: “No, just my hunch.”

“Good hunch, I’ll have you be my personal advisor next time we gamble.” The anti-missile system on the small military station was much more mobile and flexible than the ones on a planet. The artificial atmosphere was essentially destroyed and all the winds blowing by the mechs were deadly aftershocks and particle waves that could easily take a human life. Lu Bixing swiftly pulled the mech up out the atmosphere and said, “I’m extremely pissed off at the Union right now, but the only people left on Qiming are either old and anxious citizens or subordinates and younger students; I can’t just express my anger nor say anything harmful….fuck that.”

Saturday: “......”

*What did the scholarly and gentle Professor Lu just say?* He rubbed his ears and felt like his hearing might also need repair.

The enemy above them immediately locked on these fleeing mechs. A cannon fired at them as Lu Bixing was about to leave the general area of the military base, and the young man quickly took a sharp turn to dodge the fire before he accelerated his way right into the enemy fleet.

The enemy was getting used to Turan’s wolfpack strategy and didn’t expect to deal with a delinquent today. Panicking, about three or four enemy mechs fired their missiles at him. Lu Bixing dodged two of them in style then fired a shot of particle cannons to distract the enemy, turning off the engine of the mech at the same time. Losing its engine power, the mech floated behind the wave of particle cannons and dodged a missile coming for him from behind. Another missile that approached him from the front quickly turned towards the target mech but crashed into the other missile charging the opposite direction and exploded.

Through the loud alarm of the mech, Saturday could hear Lu Bixing say in a low voice as with clenched teeth: “How can they treat him like this?”

Saturday asked: “Who? What?”

The intercepted signal finally returned and Turan screamed as she almost lost her mind: “Lu Bixing! Get your ass back here!”

“Roger that, heading over right now.” Lu Bixing sailed in front of the enemy fleet for a short while before he turned back behind the Eighth Galaxy Galactic Forces. He then connected his personal device to the military-grade recorder and scanned through the data he’d collected earlier during the short confrontation. “The quality of the AUS mechs is clearly superior to ours, but their pilots are average and lack experiences to think on the spot--I suggest lowering the density of ammunition and firepower for missiles. Sacrificing a bit of weapon quality can save us a bit on ammo; is that acceptable, Captain Turan?”

Turan bluffed in response: “I can shoot directly into their air vents even if you give me a brick.”

Lu Bixing quickly followed up: “I’ve already finished revising the blueprint and construction program for the training mech, it will be built upon the regular mech production line with a few adjustments on supply allocation. I will determine the total production based on the number of current mech damages, the amount of newly enlisted soldiers, and the output of our current factories right now...but even then, I’m afraid we might not last until the Silver Ten arrives. So I’m suggesting we physically build a firebreak around the area.”

Turan: “What do you mean?”

“In other words, block off all roads. Ancient people would form a man-made firebreak by burning off an area to prevent the spread of wildfires; by eliminating all burnable materials within the area, they could contain the fire behind a certain point.”

Saturday and Turan both spoke up at the same time: “You mean the transfer portals?”

If starships and mechs were vehicles for transportation, then transfer portals were like roads in space.

Without transfer portals that could warp through space, it would be impossible to sail across galaxies that were hundreds of lightyears apart. The transfer portal system was a miracle built by hundreds of generations of people during the Galactic Age of Exploration; it was precisely this foundation that allowed mankind to continuously expand and conquer the vast universe.

“Exactly, the great transfer portals. It was like the entirety of human civilization since the old Sidereal Era has regressed for almost a whole millennium straight. Aside from entertainment and personal well-being, technology as a whole has been regressing to the point that we are still using ancient artifacts from the Age of Exploration.” Lu Bixing continued and sighed, “If we can’t hold our enemies back, let’s relocate the residents of the planets closer to the frontlines and blow up the transfer portals. We’ll turn the Eighth Galaxy into an isolated land where no one can leave or enter; at least that way we can keep the disease of stupidity out.”

The communication channel fell into dead silence. Blowing up a few transfer portals during wartime wasn’t a huge deal and wouldn’t even affect the larger communication networks, all it would take was some repair after the battle. However, what Lu Bixing was suggesting was different; this was grand-scale work that would physically alter the ‘geography’ of the entire universe.

The Galactic Laws of the Union clearly stated that this was an act of treason categorized as anti-society and anti-humanity.

“No…no wait,” Saturday stuttered as he asked, “isn’t this...does this mean we’re going to walk out and turn the Eighth Galaxy into a foreign land outside of the Union?”

Lu Bixing returned his question calmly: “is there something wrong with that?”

“We should’ve fucking done that much sooner,” Turan bursted out into laughter, “Hey little Lu, I sure love people like you who look like a goodie-two-shoes normally but can drop a bomb when you’re looking for trouble. If our commander gives you a hard time today after we get back, I’ll cover for you!”

Lu Bixing gave a courteous smile in response and didn’t poke at the blatant lie from the Captain.

“Captain, we caught signals of large fleets sailing over.”

“The stars aren’t aligned today,” Turan cursed under her breath and then ordered, “be careful and protect the workers on land, prepare to retreat!”

The non-combat personnel on land had already been prepared to retreat since the first air raid. Under Turan’s order, all mechs that could fly took off in an orderly fashion as the other people who couldn’t make it onto mechs got into individual ecopods and stuck to the capture nets of the mechs. All unrepaired mechs had no choice but to stay; Turan could almost cry at those poor mechs that would be left behind.

Her heart was dripping blood of pain for her mechs so she was naturally more brutal in action; the few scouting teams that had been discovered earlier were immediately annihilated by her cannons. Soon after, a heavy mental network pressed down on her as a heavy mech fleet of the AUS suddenly appeared out of nowhere. The entire frontline of the Eighth Galaxy Forces suffered a wave of mental network attack.

Turan: “Shit, Professor Lu, you. Go ahead…tsk….”

The signal interruption returned.

Lu Bixing frowned as he felt his mental network tremble violently---the enemy heavy mech’s network range was too large, and this old mech had a human-mech port too unstable to handle the pressure. The moment their network got hacked, the engine of the mech once again shut down abruptly; to make matters worse, this mech that’d just gotten repaired didn’t have a backup engine or energy source.

Immediately after, a wave of particle cannons swept the tail of his mech, sending the mech flying off into the distance uncontrollably. The enemy immediately noticed the problem with his mech and shot a missile at him.

It was too late for Turan to turn around and save him.

A hair’s breadth away from death, Lu Bixing once again turned the mech back into repair mode through the unstable human-mech port; Saturday panicked and felt his legs turn into jelly.

The mech that had lost its power ran head-on to the missile; the alarm inside the mech pierced through the mechanic and pilot’s ears as it reported: “engine system attempting to reboot---”

A buzz rang inside the mech. Saturday thought they’d been hit by the missile and closed his eyes subconsciously.

At that moment, the mech’s engine successfully restarted and made a sharp turn immediately as it passed by the missile.

Saturday’s heart sunk to the ground: “That was too…”

Before his heart touched the ground, this ventilation panel on the mech melted from overheating, completely rendering its engine useless.

Saturday: “......”

He figured he might need some medication for heart disease soon.

“Man,” Lu Bixing let out another sigh, “you should’ve told me if you can’t handle it sooner, I guess we’ll need to jump into ecopods now.”

Of course, the enemy didn’t give him a chance to get into an ecopod and chased after him. The alarm inside the mech rang up again within the next instant---large energy signals were detected ahead, a large armed fleet was closing in with nowhere for them to hide.

Nobody could tell how large the incoming fleet was under high speed, yet within seconds a large capture net with protective airbags slapped onto the battlefield like a giant web and captured their mech in it. The mech’s internal gravity system also shut off as both Lu Bixing and Saturday floated in midair inside the mech.

Saturday frantically connected back onto the mental network as the backup pilot in a desperate attempt to hold off another battle of mental networks.

Lu Bixing was shocked and thought, *Did the AUS learn how to capture their enemies alive?*

The half-broken mech was like a bug that flew onto a giant spider web and was quickly consumed by the large capture net as it got pulled towards the heavy mech. The next moment, the communication signals returned and Lu Bixing heard Turan scream inside the channel: “Commander!”

Com...mander?

Lin Jingheng’s sudden appearance took both sides by surprise. The AUS was still fearful of him from their last encounter, but before they could even react with a clear head, they were already scared out of their wits and thought they had run into another trap.

The scales of the battle tipped within a blink of an eye.

At the same time, the small mech that had lost control was dragged to the launching deck of the heavy mech. Lu Bixing and Saturday both fell to the ground as they heard Zhanlu’s familiar voice greet them: “I’m sending the commander’s greeting on behalf of him. Professor Lu, he said you’re a genius of many talents; you don’t need to pilot mechs anymore, build a toy tank with a tin can and you’re ready to kick yourself up the atmosphere.”

Lu Bixing crawled up from the ground and dusted off the ashes in defeat as he disconnected from the mental network. He jumped off the small mech to see two medical capsules already waiting from them by the entrance into the Model 3.

Lu Bixing: “I don’t need it, wait….”

The medical capsule ignored his refusal and rolled behind him, then quickly pulled out a few robotic arms as they dragged Lu Bixing into the capsule and restrained him---like the time he’d done it to Lin Jingheng back then near the small dwarf planet outside the Eighth Galaxy.

Saturday shivered in fear and crawled into the medical capsule like a good child: “I can do it myself, I can do it myself.”

Lu Bixing: “Zhanlu, I want to speak to him!”

Zhanlu: “He refuses.”

Lu Bixing exhaled and said: “Okay, tell him I love him.”

Zhanlu was silent for a second until he gave the response: “He said ‘fuck off’.”

Lu Bixing: “Then connect to Captain Turan for me and have her explain to the commander.”

Zhanlu fell silent again and responded: “Captain Turan said she lost her voice.”

Lu Bixing: “......”

Who was the dumb bitch that said she was going to cover for him earlier!?

Lu Bixing attempted to struggle out of the restraint for a bit, but if the great medical restraint of the machine could hold down Lin Jingheng, Lu Bixing had no way to break free.

Lu Bixing thought about it for a second and said: “Hey Zhanlu, can you ask him if he’s tying me up like this because he wants to do dirty things to me?”

Zhanlu didn’t respond this time, probably because he’d been ordered to stay silent again. Soon after, the cover of the medical capsule lowered and completely closed Lu Bixing inside the capsule, forcefully shutting his mouth.

“Commander,” Captain ‘I lost my voice’ Turan said inside the communication channel, “the enemy is retreating.”

“Go after them,” Lin Jingheng said, “don’t leave until every single mech is shot down.”

Turan: “But Professor Lu said to save him one earlier…”

Zhanlu interrupted before she could finish: “Sir, we’ve detected an unidentified armed fleet closing in.”

Lin Jingheng frowned.

Turan ordered immediately: “Vanguard, retreat temporarily!”

A fleet of armed mechs appeared behind the AUS fleet as she finished. The seemingly formidable support opened fire before Turan’s vanguard could turn around; yet to everyone’s surprise, the fire was aimed at the AUS and not the Eighth Galaxy fleet.

## Ch 108 - I Only Have You Now

“What’s going on?” Turan was confused. “Commander, are these your backups?”

She then quickly rejected her idea before he could respond: “Nah, they look rich, so definitely not.”

“Turan,” Lin Jingheng said, “you’re in the middle of pretending to lose your voice; I didn’t know you also got intermission time for this act.”

Turan: “......”

Lin Jingheng: “Ignore them.”

The AUS fleet had the Eighth Galaxy chasing from behind and a third party blocking their way in front and suffered a wave of cannon fire as they attempted to retreat. The commanding ship fell during the encounter while the rest of the fleet fled like headless chickens without a leader. At the same time, the Eighth Galaxy fleet took this opportunity to take them down one by one.

A single mech that tried to flee the battlefield was caught by Zhanlu’s vast mental network before it could escape. The pilot was immediately knocked off the mental network, the backup pilots frantically reconnecting in an attempt to reclaim their mech. Yet before any of them could do anything, Lin Jingheng turned on the broadcast inside the mech and asked: “you all can choose to be a hostage or die.”

The backup pilots were stunned for a moment before they responded with their action--they chose death.

No planet outside the territories of the Union, where civilization failed to reach, was suitable for life, so these followers of nature could only live on artificial space stations. They were exiled from the comfort of earthly nature to the void of space.

Anyone who hadn’t struggled with their faith in the darkness of space would never be able to understand the kind of madness driving these people.

Lin Jingheng answered their plea for death without hesitation and turned on the air pressure system inside the mech the moment the AUS pilots attempted to retrieve their mental network. Within seconds, the air pressure vent sucked out all the oxygen inside the mech and those fearless soldiers almost instantly turned into deformed corpses. The enemy mech was then captured by the old Model 3.

It took less than a minute before the entire AUS fleet was virtually annihilated once the unidentified third party fleet joined in, and after cleaning up the battlefield, the Eighth Galaxy forces sailed forward to face their accidental support.

The unidentified fleet was a well-equipped superdimensional galactic fleet that outshone the Eighth Galaxy forces, who looked like a bunch of civilians carrying broken maces in comparison.

Neither side spoke up first and stared at each other in silence.

“Sir,” Zhanlu said, “a portion of the fleet before us don’t have a ‘gap’ on their human-mech connection port and have a sync rate of 100%. That means if the pilots are not AIs they must be biochip humans.”

Could it be the Freedom Corps?

Lin Jingheng’s suspicion grew as he recalled the small space station selling ‘opium’ near the old planet Cayley.

Turan attempted to send a communication request to the fleet with no response.

Soon after, this mysterious fleet split into two as the group of mechs in the back sailed forward while the leading mechs in front slowly retreated into the nearest transfer portal right before Lin Jingheng’s eyes, leaving the battlefield. The rest of the mechs that didn’t leave stayed silently in their same spots and entered an awkward staring contest with the Eighth Galaxy Galactic Forces.

Turan: “Uh...is this supposed to be a space version of Red Light, Green Light? I…should we try shooting gently at them?”

Lin Jingheng silently approved this violent request and Turan ‘gently’ fired a round of particle cannons at the closest mech in front.

Yet as the cannon shots disappeared upon contact with the enemy mech’s shield, something even stranger happened--every single one of these floating mechs voluntarily gave up their mental network access.

From the visuals on the mental network, it looked as if a small breeze blew out all the candles before them.

A vanguard mech of the Eighth Galaxy Forces carefully sailed forward and took over a mech’s mental network to look inside these strange mechs: “Captain, the mech is well-functioning and fully-equipped with arms.”

Turan asked: “What about the pilots?”

The vanguard answered: “there are no traces of life inside the mech.”

Zhanlu added: “there are also no AIs we can communicate with.”

Turan felt goosebumps crawling all over her skin: “Then who was piloting that mech earlier? Are you telling me it was a ghost?”

The truth was the pilots were indeed ghosts--the fleet later spent over 20 hours total with the help of the engineering team to open up all 50 of those new and functioning mech as if they were disarming a bomb. Even Lu Bixing was freed from his little space jail to help out; to everyone’s surprise, they found a corpse on every heavy mech they opened up. The corpses all died standing by the wall in the same pose, cause of death still unknown.

It was like those ancient supernatural myths where they all had their souls sucked out of their bodies within an instant.

Every one of these corpses had a biochip on their napes, ones very similar to opium but still slightly different. By the time they were taken out of the body, the chip was already dead and rendered useless.

The armories of the mechs were also as the vanguard soldier reported: aside from using up a few missiles against the AUS earlier, they were all virtually fully loaded.

What did a fully loaded heavy mech mean?

Back when Lin Jingheng stole two backup supply storages from that old fart and loaded all important military supplies onto the Model 3, he’d only managed to fill about 90% of the mech.

Turan felt like she was dreaming; a day ago she was still weeping over her bad luck at losing a dozen or so mechs that had still been under repair, now she felt like she’d won the lottery with this sudden gift from the heavens.

All 50 heavy mechs were very new with functions far superior and updated than Lin Jingheng’s old Model 3. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that it was almost on par with Zhanlu’s original mech body back in the Union minus the AI core--of course, while heavy mechs usually come with their own AI systems, the commander would not be willing to use an AI from an unknown source.

Because the Eighth Galaxy did not have the ability to produce their own heavy mechs right now, all of the heavy mechs of the military were gathered through various means throughout the galaxy; none of their existing models could compare to the new and fancier models they found from the last battle.

The Freedom Corps pirates were like a group of clowns at first; their fleets were made of small mechs from all around the universe and worked with a small cult like the Toxic Nest for a living. They didn’t seem particularly well-off compared to the other two big pirate organizations, almost as if they were a group of farmers carrying axes and butcher knives on their shoulders.

Yet with every encounter, the Freedom Corps seemed as if they would grow more organized than before. It was almost terrifying to think what could possibly be behind their expansion and development.

It had only been less than a year since the war broke out -- how far had opium spread within the Union to the point that the mastermind behind the drug became a billionaire almost overnight?

“That space station from before was at least a war prize, now this is straight-up a gift.” Lu Bixing nudged over shamelessly as if he forgot that Lin Jingheng was still mad at him and asked, “This mystery person is pretty interesting, are you sure this isn’t from your secret admirer? Do you have any idea who it might be?”

Lin Jingheng shook his head as he thought about Laura.

Whoever was bringing opium out right now must be someone that was very close to Laura and Lin Jingheng himself; of course, there were not many people that fit these criteria.

When he was still in the Union, Lin Jingheng spent most of his time around the higher-ups of the Military Council. If it was someone among them, they could easily have access to the factories in the Union and could equip the Freedom Corps with supplies from the beginning. There would be no reason for the pirates to loot supplies to make a living.

As for Laura...she had been the director of the White Tower and allied with the Committee in name.

Lin Jingheng himself didn’t have a very close relationship with the Committee and his only connection to them was...

Lu Bixing noticed that the commander’s expression was growing anxious. In hopes to ease his worries, Lu Bixing instinctively wanted to make a joke to distract the commander. The young scientist placed an arm around Lin Jingheng and messed around with the commander’s chin and hair flirtatiously as he leaned in to say: “Commander, you sure are a heartthrob despite looking so serious all the time. Should you give me…”

Lin Jingheng grabbed his wrist.

Lu Bixing was stunned; the commander’s grip was so tight it felt as if his fingers were digging into Lu Bixing’s bones. Lin Jingheng’s expression remained cold, yet his lowered gaze reeked of concern as if his soul had been hurt underneath his flesh.

Lu Bixing: “Lin, what happened?”

When Monoeyed Hawk and William had sailed around the Eighth Galaxy to contact their old comrades, they were betrayed by an old friend. The Freedom Corps then chased them down for intercepting their opium sales.

Monoeyed Hawk once said that the traitor was a brother whom he’d shared life and death with, someone he'd spent 50 days together in a mech with...back then, Lin Jingheng had taunted Monoeyed Hawk and said that even sharing the same womb wouldn’t prove anything.

He had said it so heartlessly and so sternly as if he wouldn’t regret his own words.

“I only have you now.” Lin Jingheng grabbed onto Lu Bixing’s wrist as if it was his only hope left.

In the Eden lab, the Young twins said their goodbyes to Lin Jingshu.

“We didn’t realize the Glory Troops would receive the news before us and even do such an underhanded move.” Poisson said, “now that everyone knows Commander Lin is in the Eighth Galaxy, our backup central is completely useless now. We’re going to meet up with the rest of the Third Squadron and head over immediately.”

To their surprise, Lin Jingshu didn’t force them to stay nor give them a hard time for leaving. Instead, she even prepared enough supplies for them to last the trip.

“I have a mech that’s fully disguised. All eight galaxies are in turmoil right now, please be careful. I’ve heard that you two are back-end technicians --I’m sure neither of you would normally enter the frontlines during war, right? So stay cautious, take a detour if you run into any locked down area. Remember, safety first.” Lin Jingshu paused after she gave her warning and then added, “My brother never did any of the things they said, I know. Everything will be okay.”

The twins almost threw all their suspicion of her away with these words.

“That’s right,” Thomas shot a smile at her. “Associating Commander Lin’s name with those pirates and whatever dumb president is absolutely slander, but some people will believe anything that’s being said, and others will purposely paint the situation that way. Miss Lin, the Union is very dangerous right now, are you sure you don’t want to come with us? If there really is a spy within the City of Angels, you will be in danger.”

Lin Jingshu shook her head and repeated herself patiently: “Didn’t I say already? I’ll be fine.”

The twins tried to talk her into fleeing with them a few more times, only to have Lin Jingshu insist on staying. Unable to convince her, the twins could only leave by themselves.

Right as they left, the First Squadron closest to the First Galaxy responded to their message.

“What did they say?” Lin Jingshu asked.

“Nothing too important,” a researcher said. “They only reported their coordinates and stated that they are on their way to the Eighth Galaxy. The original message was ‘we’re avoiding the Hummingbird Fortress as per Commander’s request, we’re stopping by…’”

“Hummingbird Fortress,” Lin Jingshu interrupted him, “that’s...what’s his name again?”

“General Yelvich, a former subordinate of Lu Xin. Some have said that he had been holding a grudge against the Union for a long time.”

“Oh, that’s good, then he’ll be it.” Lin Jingshu lowered her head as if she’d just ordered her food at a restaurant, “ex-subordinates of Lu Xin are all in a questionable position during wartime; even my brother had suspected them before, it’s perfect. Regardless if it really is him or not, let’s use him as the fuse for this war.”

The researcher looked at her carefully and said: “Madame, but what if he’s actually innocent….”

Lin Jingshu looked at him as if she couldn’t understand his question: “And what does that have to do with me?”

The researcher swallowed the rest of his words and lowered his head.

Lin Jingshu: “We’ve already reached this point, it’d be pointless if we’re still scared about saving faces and maintaining a fake relationship. Let me be the bad guy here who jumbles things up.”

“Madame, what about the City of Angels? They discovered the corpses of your guards and traces of battle, and now that you’re missing the news headlines are all over this incident.”

Lin Jingshu squinted slightly: “Then let me stay ‘missing’.”

Meanwhile, the Hummingbird Fortress reached its aphelion in orbit as Yelvich returned back home from the military base with a heavy heart.

For some reason, those voices of hatred towards Lin Jingheng reminded him of how the people spoke of Lu Xin in the past.

Those people claimed with pride and confidence that the most powerful evidence was what Lu Xin had said out of anger during his attempt to fight for the rights of people in the Eighth Galaxy: “Look at what the Eighth Galaxy is right now, you all might as well let the pirates govern them!”

Lu Xin rose to fame too early and stood on top at a young age. He might have been a bit reckless, but he wasn’t a fool that didn’t know how to control his mouth in public.

This was something he’d said to a subordinate during a vacation on a private starship parked outside a supply station. He already had a few drinks prior to this and didn’t bother hiding it in a private situation, but the words fell on the ears of a robot mechanic who happened to pass by at the time.

This mechanic was also a strong believer of the Pledge of Freedom who personally attended almost every demonstration and protested against threats of his belief. Like the child of a murdered father, he loathed space pirates with all his heart---even if he had never seen what pirates looked like.

After hearing these words, the mechanic thought he had mistaken someone else for him and snuck back to check. He used his worker access to look up Lu Xin’s customer profile and confirmed his identity. Shocked that this backbone of the Union military would say such a politically incorrect thing, this patriotic mechanic carried his frustration and worry back home that night and turned them into tears. The next morning, he finally fell under the pressure of fulfilling his civic duty and took this recording and reported it to the government.

They said that Lu Xin betrayed the Union and betrayed his faith.

They said he was too conceited and that his character and morals were not fit to be a leader. They said he had too many ambitions; he controlled the Military Council and wanted to extend his hand to the Parliament in order to make the Union his playground.

They also said that he was putting on an act to show off his happily married life, when in reality the marriage was already dead, and the couple were both on their own. The marriage rate in the NSC era had already dropped down to 15%. A long life and youth spoiled the concept of marriage between young couples as most of them ended in breaking up after they got tired of playing family. What even was a partner for life, why would anyone believe such a lie in the modern era?

What could possibly be a more satisfying victory than to rip up the mask of someone and expose their true colors to the world?

What else could better show the fearsome power of truth?

“Pour me a glass of vodka,” Yelvich mumbled to his guard, “and ask if the temperature control is broken, it’s damn cold in here.”

The guard responded: “Sir, the temperature is 24 degrees with no abnormalities. Do you need to check your health?”

“No,” Yelvich complained in frustration, “move it, I want my vodka.”

The guard delivered the vodka at his request and poured a glass for him. The strong alcohol shot straight to his head as Yelvich took a sip and noticed that the guard in front of him was a new face. He spat out the sip of vodka and pushed the glass forward: “Put some ice in this thing...you weren’t part of the guards before, right?”

“No,” the guard responded calmly, “I used to be security at the front gate of the base. Someone on your personal team called in sick recently, so I spent some money and bought my way in as a replacement through some connections.”

Yelvich recalled him vaguely as he remembered the young man who would always greet him by the door every day and relaxed a little: “You’re still relying on these shady methods to climb up the ladder during a time like this? Why don’t you earn some honor the right way and make your way up?”

The guard answered: “Getting recognized for military feats is too much of a risk, I’d rather apply as your personal guard. Not only is it safe and a great start for a career, but I could also earn an impression from my boss.”

“I hate investors like you that come from rich families.” Yelvich tossed his hand up in the air with a displeased expression. “None of you all ever take the legitimate path.”

The guard laughed a little and added the ice into his glass without a word.

Yelvich stared at him and quietly opened up his personal device behind the glass. He scanned the young man’s face and asked casually: “What does your family do for a living that they can afford to buy a position in the military for you?”

The guard answered vaguely: “They run a business.”

Yelvich lowered his gaze and “Oh’ed” in disinterest as he quickly pulled up the guard’s profile and sent out an alert quietly: “What kind of business?”

The guard lifted his head and met his gaze with Yelvich’s. His eyes were cold and filled with an eerie glow that didn’t seem human.

“Biochips,” he said, “General, are you not going to drink your alcohol?”

The profile Yelvich pulled up of the young guard clearly indicated that he was an orphan, date of birth unknown.

The general quickly pulled out a gun from his waist and shot the guard in the knee: “Bullshit!”

Yelvich might have been a coward, but he still had some skills as a soldier from working in the military for years and aimed directly on his target. He’d simply planned on disabling the enemy before he continued the interrogation, but little did he expect that a shot to the knee would only cause the man to lose balance on the spot for a short second.

The guard even looked down at the hole in his leg, pulled up his pants slightly and walked towards Yelvich without any trouble.

Yelvich was shocked: “What the hell are you?”

The guard didn’t respond and only gave a ghostly smile as he slowly walked towards Yelvich. Goosebumps covered the general’s skin as he fired a few more rounds at the enemy, then turned towards his personal device once again--normally, his guards should arrive within two seconds after he sent out the alert, but…

“You don’t need to check, General. Your signal won’t send and the surveillance will not capture anything.”

Yelvich backed up to the corner of the room: “Who are you working for? The AUS? City of Angels? Or that president from the Glory pirates?”

The face of the guard slowly transformed into a completely different person. None of the security cameras nor anyone within the Hummingbird Fortress noticed this event: “You can ask that question in hell; farewell.”

Assassination--this was the last straw that indicated the fall of modern civilization.

Three hours later, another guard on shift discovered Yelvich’s corpse.

The injuries on the corpse and the surveillance indicated that he had desperately shot at something inside an empty office and screamed in fear about something as if he had gone mad. Then, he pointed the gun at himself and shot right through his own head.

According to his medical history, Yelvich was an alcoholic that also abused a lot of mood control medication. The mix of medication and alcohol was the main reason that drove him to madness, and his personal device also had records of him contacting the president of the Glory Troops in private.

General Ankur of the Seventh Galaxy received this news almost the instant it came on the news through his own sources.

At this time, General Ankur stood before Lin Jingheng--

Beginning of November, the Eighth Galaxy somehow gathered an entire fleet of superdimensional heavy mechs under turmoil. Now that they were back in the saddle, the Eighth Galaxy Forces pushed the AUS out of their territory, and under desperation, the AUS could only request more backup from their headquarters.

At the same time, the Eighth Galaxy deployed a large fleet of military mechs to begin relocating all the residents near the frontlines.

## Ch 109 - Commander, We Can’t Hold Out

“Yelvich admitted that he was working with the pirates so he committed suicide to atone for his sins? Right, the location of the Hummingbird Fortress is strategically awkward, and Yelvich’s attitude about protecting the Union from the AUS after the Glory Troops took over Wolto was also quite questionable. So? Today Yelvich was acting strange, tomorrow will be Chief Woolf’s turn, and I might be next after them.” Ankur smiled as he carefully blew on his hot tea and nodded towards his advising team behind him. “Ignore all these trivial matters in the Union, you all can continue.”

“General, the AUS deployed a few hundred heavy mechs today and are ready to charge into the Eighth Galaxy. Should we also make our move now?”

“Don’t rush it, it won’t be that easy. Do you know how many heavy mechs the Union sent out when they were forcing Lin Jingheng to disarm the Silver Fortress?” Ankur lowered his head and buried himself in various data collected from previous battles. “Keep an eye out for a little longer, I’m afraid the AUS might need to dispatch another hundred heavy mechs. If Lin Jingheng was that easy of an opponent, I’d already be out on the battlefield right now...by the way, does anyone know where he got those heavy mechs from? Was he just disguising as a pig before?”

“We haven’t been able to plant a reliable spy in the Eighth Galaxy yet, but according to credible sources, he found them on the battlefield.”

“Nonsense, have you not seen what model the AUS fleets use? Is it the same model as these?” Ankur interrupted, “Lin Jingheng sure built a powerful force outside the Union these years behind our back, no wonder he decided to hide in the Eighth Galaxy.”

“General,” another advisor added, “please don’t forget to pay attention to the Eighth Galaxy relocating its people.”

Ankur’s expression stiffened a little: “Talk to me.”

“Lin Jingheng suddenly ordered all residents near the frontlines to take refuge and even moved all supply stations. According to our analysis, he might be attempting to build a chain of military command posts there…”

“Is he bored out of his mind?” Ankur grew frustrated and once again interrupted this intelligence idiot. He felt like he only summoned these “intelligence advisors” from the Seventh Galaxy for the sake of showing off his own brilliance. “Lin Jingheng’s advantage right now is his mobility with a very condensed fleet. His current strategy is using offense as defense with his significantly smaller navy, so what’s the point of building large military posts? You think he’s as stupid as you are?”

The advising team didn’t dare speak up anymore.

The entire meeting room was dead silent for a short while. Ankur ignored everyone else as his gaze fell onto the table, and after a short moment, he suddenly asked: “Did everyone retreat?”

“Yeah.”

Ankur suddenly remembered something and stood up abruptly: “Why the hell didn’t you guys tell me earlier, prepare the navy!”

He was complaining about how difficult it was to deal with Lin Jingheng earlier and wanted to wait for another hundred mechs from the AUS; this sudden change in attitude confused all the subordinates in the room.

His personal guard quickly walked up to him baffled: “General, didn’t you say…”

“It’ll be too late if we don’t act now,” Ankur said gravely, “can’t you tell? Lin Jingheng can’t hold up anymore so now he’s planning on blowing up all the transfer portals to physically isolate the Eighth Galaxy!”

Lin Jingheng stayed at the frontlines personally to watch the battlefield and the migration of the residents. Because the AUS had been desperately dispatching troops from other galaxies, both sides had been exchanging fire for over ten days.

The frontlines were still okay; as long as there were enough missiles, Turan wouldn’t die that easily. It was sending the residents off into refuge that took up most of his energy.

To lower the risk of an attack, they needed to separate the residents into many groups onto different mechs. Yet Lin Jingheng didn’t have that many hands to help nor did he have the time to take things slowly; if he wanted speed and to fill mechs and starships with people, he wouldn’t have time to keep an eye out for them. He wouldn’t be able to guarantee that no accidents would happen along the way, and the cost of one accident could be thousands of lives; this wasn’t something Lin Jingheng nor the Prime Minister could shoulder responsibility for.

He’d thought for decades that he was powerful and capable, only to realize now that protecting was a much harder task than destroying; it would require at least ten of him to accomplish.

Lin Jingheng barely slept over the span of ten days.

Lu Bixing had just finished helping a group of residents settle and was notified that the last group was already on their way, so he took the opportunity to sneak into the frontline command post.

He discussed with the Prime Minister and his cabinet Planetary Planning in the Galaxy while he was on his way.

“Regardless if we end up closing off the Eighth Galaxy or not, condensing the population is still necessary,” Lu Bixing said. “First of all, it would cut down the cost of galactic transportation; second, it would promote urbanization on more planets. Most places in the Eighth Galaxy are sparsely populated so at least we don’t have the problem of running out of natural resources within the next century, and once the population grows, we can then expand residential areas.”

“I understand this is the best option,” Prime Minister Edward sighed. “But...I still wish we won’t end up in a situation where we must close off the Eighth Galaxy.”

It was quite ironic that the new Eighth Galaxy government was built on the belief in the Pledge of Freedom, yet they were now ready to betray the Union.

People understood that this was the most logical thing to do, but it was difficult to accept it emotionally. It was like an angry girlfriend that still couldn’t cut ties with her exes after many unhappy breakups.

The truth was Lin Jingheng himself was also quite reluctant, but he didn’t say anything because it was Lu Bixing’s suggestion.

Lu Bixing always had a feeling that Lin actually loved the Union, even if this love was deep and contradictory beneath that coldness and hatred. He still loved the Union even if it hurt him deeply.

At the core of his complicated and conflicting soul, some things were from the Union that he couldn’t cut off.

Lu Bixing nodded at the guard at the entrance, scanned the genetic lock and walked directly into the command post. His footsteps stopped right at the door as he saw the scene inside--Lin Jingheng had two different telecom clouds over his ears, one side connected to Turan and the other side connected to the refugees. It was a rare moment of silence from both sides so the commander had taken this opportunity for a quick nap.

His posture remained upright as if he was still on0call; Lu Bixing couldn’t imagine anyone else being able to sleep like that. It was as if the commander simply blinked once and kept his eyelids closed even before he could relax the rest of his body as his consciousness fell into deep slumber.

Zhanlu stood beside the commander in his human form and noticed Lu Bixing walk in.

Lu Bixing put a finger up to his mouth to keep Zhanlu quiet before the AI could speak.

Zhanlu thought about it for a second, then returned to his robotic arm form and hung himself behind Lin Jingheng’s chair.

Lu Bixing spoke to him soundlessly with his lips: “Are you out of batteries again?”

Zhanlu opened up his robotic palm as two rows of small green text appeared above his hand: “My battery is sufficient. According to research, when a couple is together, the presence of any third party individual or even a shape of a person would make both parties uncomfortable.”

“It doesn’t matter what you turn into,” Lu Bixing typed out a line of text from his personal device towards Zhanlu and even changed the text color to match Zhanlu’s green, “your presence is impossible to ignore, you’re way more eager to join in your master’s life than a house pet.”

Zhanlu’s green text corrected him: “I am not ‘joining in’, I am simply observing and recording.”

Lu Bixing took off his shoes at the door in order to not make a sound as he walked in and snuck in front of Lin Jingheng. He carefully kneeled before the commander and looked up at him.

The commander had one hand resting on his knee; Lu Bixing’s heart itched as he looked at those long fingers and wanted to touch his hand but stopped himself as he didn’t want to wake Lin Jingheng up. He put a hand up awkwardly in midair pondering what to do before he gently placed it on top of the commander’s.

The robotic arm on the chair moved forward slightly as Zhanlu stared curiously, trying to decipher this strange act: “Is this some sort of special magnetic force field? I’m sorry, I wasn’t able to detect it.”

“......I’m not using the force here.” Lu Bixing timidly pulled his hand back. “Aren’t couples supposed to be sticking together every day, sharing the same drink together with two straws, and wasting time doing all these useless things together? I’ve only said three lines to him these last few weeks, one was ‘expected to complete on time’, another one was ‘we’re safe’, and the only line that was important was ‘I miss you’. That’s not even fifteen words total.”

The robotic arm responded: “Due to the signal disruption, we weren’t able to receive the last message here.”

Lu Bixing: “......”

If the Eighth Galaxy got locked up, this small galaxy would perhaps become an Arcadia outside of the Union. The blown-up transfer portals could be rebuilt from old maps, but it might take at least a century to fully repair the tunnels. They could leave an underground tunnel for the Silver Ten and give up the rest; with only one entrance, even if the enemies found them, it would be difficult to make a full invasion into the galaxy.

Would the Eighth Galaxy still be inferior to the mess that was the Union a whole century from now?

Lu Bixing was willing to do anything if it meant that he could live a life where he could wake up to see Lin Jingheng every morning.

At this time, a sound suddenly called from one side of his headphones: “Commander!”

Lin Jingheng woke up immediately but caught Lu Bixing’s gaze the moment he opened his eyes and was dumbstruck. It was rare to see such an expression on his face, and with his quick reaction, Lu Bixing captured this photo with his personal device. As Lin Jingheng was about to reach over and grab him, Lu Bixing jumped up and backed off two meters as he held up that 3D photo proudly on his wrist: “I’m going to build a 3D model with this when I get back.”

Zhanlu: “Headmaster Lu, according to the Civil Law of the Union, building a 3D model from unsolicited photos is punishable as sexual harassment.”

Lin Jingheng didn’t know how to respond and could only lift up a slight smile from the corner of his lips. Then as he recalled how Lu Bixing had gone out to the frontlines without telling him, he pulled the smile back and forcefully lowered his eyebrows as he shot a displeased glance at Lu Bixing.

He answered the communication as if he hadn’t been sleeping earlier and asked Turan, “What is it?”

“The AUS is deploying more troops, we’re estimating another hundred heavy mechs from the energy level.”

Lin Jingheng pressed the bridge of his nose in frustration, the AUS’s love for him was way too heavy: “Don’t face them head on, try and make a few rounds outside the fleet. Once those civilians are fully settled, I’ll send you some backups…”

“Commander,” this time was from the escorts for the civilians on the other line, “the Seventh Galaxy Militia are suddenly on the move. It looks like they’re planning on sailing in front of the escort starships.”

Lin Jingheng closed his eyes and said: “Send out a ‘passing permit’.”

A ‘passing permit’ was a special kind of light signal that could be sent out in space to surrounding starships and mechs that had all the information of its passengers and itinerary. Any spacecraft that sent out this signal were spacecraft carrying unarmed civilians, and according to the intergalactic laws of the universe, nobody was allowed to attack any spacecraft that showed their passing permit.

Of course, this was a rule created based on mutual respect, so pirates wouldn’t care. However, as the Central Militia of the Seventh Galaxy, they had to have some reserves.

“General.” On the other side, one of Ankur’s soldiers said, “it seems like they’re sending out a civilian passing permit signal.”

Ankur was slightly shocked: “This is the first time I’ve ever seen Lin Jingheng take a step down.”

Even if underhand methods of any nature in war were common, everyone had their own style of strategizing on the field. Some people were brutal and ruthless even when they try to stay under the radar.

“His friend outside the Union sent him military supplies, but why didn’t they also send him some soldiers?” Ankur said as he held up his hand to gesture the fleet into the transfer portal. The fleet sailed in like a current and landed on the route of refuge as they pulled up their cannons in silence. The Eighth Galaxy escort was forced to stop as the escorting mechs surrounded the starship filled with unarmed civilians.

“General, we can’t attack unarmed civilians according to law.”

Ankur asked back: “Did I order you all to fire?”

“Commander,” Turan spoke into Lin Jingheng’s ear on the left side, “the AUS is currently making their way towards the public terminal, have the escorts retreated already?”

“Commander, Ankur blocked the terminal and refused our communication request, what should we do?”

“Keep the AUS busy for a while, the escort fleet is still on their way so we can’t let them onto the public terminal.” Lin Jingheng said to Turan.

Turan didn’t have enough troops under her, as a good half of them had joined on the escort side. She bit her lips and said: “Understood--but Commander, tell them to hurry up, I can only hold the AUS for another half hour at max or I’m a goner.”

Lu Bixing asked: “What kind of person is this General Ankur?”

Lin Jingheng stood up and clipped Zhanlu onto his arm: “He doesn’t seem like someone that would keep a hidden agenda. He’s expressive with his emotions and sometimes a little vulgar, but he was quite popular among Lu Xin’s old subordinates. He was once a Vice Admiral for Lu Xin with an impressive history, and was eventually sent out by the late Commander to gain some frontline experience so that he could return in a few years to the Military Council as a top general…”

Yet Lu Xin himself never made it to see his subordinate return.

“Hm,” Lu Bixing nodded. “Sometimes it’s hard to tell how sincere someone is to someone else. You can’t tell if they are truly exchanging their hearts or playing games for their own benefit.”

People often fell for stereotypes; they would believe people that were hard to get along with, the ones that were a bit more vulgar or isolated were ‘true friends’ that wouldn’t backstab anyone.

Lin Jingheng: “Prepare a mech--and send another communication request to Ankur, I want to talk to him.”

“Lin Jingheng.” Ankur scanned the communication request quickly during the short stalemate as he rubbed his hands and spoke as if he was mumbling to himself, “sometimes you will think this world is truly unfair. We were all flesh and body on the frontlines, but whether or not you came from the Black Orchid Academy or an orphanage will determine how you were treated--and even within the Academy, the one honorary graduate every year was automatically given a military title upon graduation. You were guaranteed to be at least a lieutenant colonel. And for the students of that year, the person that got this honor was determined the first year they entered the academy. This Commander Lin’s starting line was the goal line of other people, yet he still managed to choose a path like this in the end...haha, it’s not like any average Joe like us could understand what he’s thinking anyway. I have nothing to say to him.”

The request was once again rejected.

Inside the transporting starship, this was most of the passengers’ first time traveling in space. These people that hadn’t grown up in the cradle of Eden spent most of their lives struggling to live, and at least one-fourth of them grew up with some sort of trauma from the past. Despite being in a starship that was much more comfortable than a mech, the silent space environment still amplified anxiety and fear among the people.

As the stalemate dragged on, the atmosphere inside the starship also began to grow dire. Someone broke down first and started crying; while the medical capsules on the side quickly reacted to it, the sense of fear and helplessness had already triggered a chain reaction among the crowd.

At the same time, seeing the AUS fleet closing in towards the public terminal, Turan was forced to take action. However, it wasn't the best time to act--public terminals were much easier to navigate and had a lot less transfer portals, making it difficult for guerilla troops to move around in. Turan could only force her way in front of the AUS fleet to physically block from the terminals and fired a missile at them.

The AUS fleet quickly dispersed as they could now see the true colors of their enemies and physically surrounded the Eighth Galaxy fleet with their heavy mechs. They blocked off all the transfer portals nearby and closed in the entire Eighth Galaxy fleet in the center.

“My friends,” Turan said inside the communication channel, “our mission today isn’t to annihilate them, we…”

The AUS fired waves of particle cannons at them before she could finish.

Turan: “Scumbags--move it!”

The Eighth Galaxy forces were pushed back over 20 kilometers out under the violent wave of enemy fire.

“Captain, check the map.”

Turan took in a deep breath; the next transfer portal was half a sailing day away, but if they closed in any further, they would expose the civilian starship and escort team under the heavy mech’s radar range.

“Did they get stuck in some space-time distortion? Why the hell haven’t they left yet!?”

The Eighth Galaxy forces had no choice and could only confront the enemy head-on. Both sides opened fire in a heated battle as the lights on the communication channel began to disappear one by one---each light dot that disappeared indicating a mech that had fallen.

The alarm inside the mech indicating shield damage pierced through Turan’s head: “Shut up!”

Suddenly, the AUS fleet seemed to have noticed their enemy was protecting something and split their fleet in half. The main fleet continued to fire at Turan while another 30 mechs sailed around the Eighth Galaxy forces towards the transfer portal ahead.

“Commander, we can’t hold up anymore!”

Ankur rejected Lin Jingheng’s third communication request. He refused to talk and refused to open fire as if he was determined to continue this stalemate.

Lin Jingheng; “Open fire with a missle, force your way through!”

“Commander, if we fire first, our passing permit will be nullified…”

Lin Jingheng ignored him and sent out the order with an expressionless face. The mechs shielding the starship suddenly changed their formation.

Ankur let out a relieved smile and said: “See what I said? That Lin Jingheng pretending to pull out that humanitarian peace card on us, prepare…”

His personal guard stood up suddenly: “General, you need to take a look at this.”

Ankur: “I’ll check lat…”

“It’s from the Union, all the central militia forces have responded, they’re looking for you!”

Ankur froze up.

## Ch 110 - Pledge of Freedom

Unlike the Eighth Galaxy that had spent much of the time hiding away and cutting off communication with the rest of the world, Ankur had his own galactic navy and post within the Union. In the year since the war broke out, he had been actively rebuilding a strong communication network among the Central Militia of the eight galaxies and the central government.

Especially with the Central Militia; thanks to Lin Jingheng, the commanding generals of virtually all fleets around the Union had been ex-subordinates of Lu Xin. After the passing of the late commander, the government funding for the Central Militia also ceased, so they naturally formed a support group amongst themselves to supply resources whenever necessary.

Therefore, Ankur could not ignore the messages from them right now.

The secretary quickly walked up to him and leaned into the general’s ears to explain the situation: “Yelvich’s death was too sudden and the messages inside his personal device were leaked too quickly, so the Hummingbird Fortress is still insisting that it was an assassination. They’re currently doing another round of thorough investigation at the scene.”

Ankur asked: “What’s so urgent, what did they find?”

“A lot, including a message for his personal guards written right before his death that for some reason didn’t get sent out--but that’s not that the point. The point is that there was something they found inside his personal device that proved the Eden Committee of the Union to be the ones responsible for accusing Lu Xin of his crimes years back.”

Ankur turned his head around in shock as if he couldn’t care less about the current stalemate between the two navies before him. His eyelids twitched instinctively as he asked carefully: “Commander Lu was a victim of the Union’s political war inside the central government, isn’t this common knowledge?”

If a prominent figure in the high ranks of government died as a criminal, to the eyes of the public, they either deserved the punishment or they were a sacrificial lamb for a political conspiracy.

For the people who refused to believe Lu Xin ever betrayed the Union, of course they would believe that he was intentionally silenced by certain people inside the central government.

Yet this was all speculation with no real evidence nor a target to direct their anger at.

Ankur took in a deep breath: “Talk to me.”

The secretary said: “You should know that back when Commander Lu Xin fought for the Eighth Galaxy’s military autonomy, he angered a number of people in Parliament….”

However, the story didn’t start off with military autonomy. Lu Xin originally fought for social security, financial support, government support, and establishment of a defense system the Union had promised. The last two demands were especially important due to the Eighth Galaxy being too close to foreign land and bases of pirate organizations. They were at the highest risk of pirate invasion, and ensuring security was the basis of building a sustainable community within the Eighth Galaxy.

But the Eden Committee kept intervening with the excuse of the Eighth Galaxy having the highest rate of vaccuocerebral population and therefore lacking the basic requirement to build the Eden system. A place without Eden was like a land the Committee couldn’t control - why would they waste their time and energy to help out the Eighth Galaxy?

Lu Xin spent most of his life out on battlefields and had significant control of the Military Council, so he was never the type of person that could sit down and discuss politics patiently with others.

Therefore, he proposed that the Union could keep the promises empty and not give any money, but the Eighth Galaxy must have military autonomy and that he would personally build the defense forces for them. This eventually earned him a line of supporters from the other galaxies that also wanted military autonomy. Lu Xin was a man of his word, and after turning against the Eden Committee, he bypassed the parliament and personally approved the construction of the Eighth Galaxy’s military base.

“Someone had reported to the Eden Committee back then that Lu Xin adopted Lin Jingheng because he wanted his hands on Laura Gordon’s ‘forbidden fruit,’ because it contained massive amounts of top-secret data and files from the Union. This included the identity of the reporter and the original voice recording, but for some reason Yelvich obtained this piece of information and now it’s made its way onto the news. All the Central Militia have ceased fire and are pressuring the City of Angels to give an explanation, otherwise they will no longer fight for the Union.”

Ankur never heard of the ‘forbidden fruit’, and because of differing fields, he almost couldn’t remember who Laura Gordon was. However, this didn’t stop him from being able to piece out the vital information from these words.

A piece of a top-secret file related to the death of Lu Xin was suddenly made public, so the Central Militia and ex-subordinates of Lu Xin that had been keeping quiet for over 30 years all united in a riot during a chaotic time like this.

“Commander,” the person in charge of the escort fleet for the Eighth Galaxy residents asked Lin Jingheng, “our cannons are locked on the enemy fleet.”

“General,” Ankur’s secretary said, “please give your next order.”

Lin Jingheng raised his hand.

Ankur commanded: “Pull in the teams on the side, reorganize into defensive formation.”

“Sir,” Zhanlu said, “the enemy seems to be preparing to retreat.”

Lin Jingheng caught his hand in midair: “Wait.”

“I captured the enemy’s long-distance signal; it seems to be coming from outside of the galaxy.” Lu Bixing said, “I have to put that AUS communication technology into good use, let me try decoding it. It might not work but it’s still worth a try, too bad I haven’t been able to fully utilize their methods.”

The heavy mech sailed slowly as Ankur’s gaze extended out the mental network; complex lines of data flashed before his eyes.

“What’s the ‘forbidden fruit’?”

“It’s a legendary program that can fully block out Eden, which would explain why Lin Jingheng is still alive right now.”

“Who doesn’t have a few programs that can block off Eden? Under the Pledge of Freedom, this isn’t even considered illegal!”

“It’s not the same, General. A normal immunizer could only block off the functions of Eden; you can let it not scan your health and reject any medical intervention. You can even stop it from giving primary education to your child, but the system itself still exists. It will record every move and interaction you have with programs, AIs, and robots; even if you were simply getting on an elevator or using the restroom, all data will be kept inside Eden. It can collect this data and analyze your behavior using predictive technology, with almost impossibly high accuracy. There was a list of ‘criminals’ and ‘potential criminals’ that were discovered within Yelvich’s personal device--unfortunately the file was too large so I can’t fully explain it here, but once the system determines a person has the potential of being anti-Eden and anti-Union, they will be listed on the potential criminals list. This person will then be secretly watched, and the moment they step out of line, the Union will immediately silence them.”

Ankur answered slowly: “No wonder why the crime solving rate is so high, they’ve basically perfected predictive policing. I’m on this list too, right?”

The secretary confirmed in silence and then continued: “But the ‘forbidden fruit’ is different. It’s a back door system that was created behind the backs of the Committee in the White Tower. It can completely hide your whereabouts and revise the database inside Eden. According to the published data from Yelvich, once the ‘forbidden fruit’ locks on a single person, it can even alter this person’s entire life data based on the person’s profile to be fitting of their personality.”

In other words, the forbidden fruit was the epitome of terrorism in the eyes of Eden; it could create an umbrella protection for countless criminal to disguise them as the good guys.

“The Eden Committee needed the forbidden fruit otherwise they wouldn’t know how many ‘spies’ were inside the Union and how many people had their data revised by it. And Lu Xin had to die because anyone with no ulterior motives wouldn’t possibly keep the forbidden fruit program to themselves. Even if he hadn’t committed a crime, the fact that he kept the forbidden fruit meant that he could still become a criminal in the future.”

“That’s why they fabricated a crime and evidence; the truth had concrete records within the Committee. From the data leaked out by Yelvich, they called this act the ‘ghost hunt’; but unlike normal political games, during the ‘ghost hunt’ against Lu Xin, the Committee broke the bottom line of the Pledge of Freedom and law. They meticulously plotted a plan from rumors, fake reports, to every evidence that would surface afterwards and spread it out to the public using Eden. Everyone who hadn’t blocked off Eden that received this news was also given a slight dose of shock that helped amplify their suspicions, anger, and jealousy.”

Ankur nodded without a word and thought, *no wonder*.

No wonder why even though Lu Xin had never done the things he was accused of, he had to run the day before his public court hearing.

The court hearings of all high-ranking officials of the Union government used a national jury of all citizens in the Union, and all non-government officials were free to enter the jury system as they listened to the hearings real-time online.

“Inform all our comrades and brothers across the galaxies,” Ankur said, “we will stand with them--retreat!”

Whether or not Yelvich was a spy inside the Union, whether Lin Jingheng secretly worked with the pirates or not...none of these mattered anymore. If the Central Militia of the Union stood up against the government, that must mean they’ve already fact-checked the published information.

The moment these top-secret documents that were supposed to be hidden in the depths of the Committee’s files got exposed, everyone that had followed Lu Xin and made a place for themselves in society thereafter must voluntarily carry the name of being a traitor.

At first, Ankur thought that pirates were responsible for Yelvich’s death in an underhand move to target Lin Jingheng. It wasn’t until this very moment that he realized there was a much bigger story behind all of this. Whoever was behind everything had the ability to pull out the top-secret files from the Committee and bring it out under the spotlight during a time like this to further complicate the war. They upheld the Pledge of Freedom for so long only to trample it underfoot on stage for the world to see.

The entire Union--no, the entire civilization of the NSC Era was shattered at its core. From now on, glory and the Pledge of Freedom were nothing more than lies and jokes.

For the Eighth Galaxy, the only thing left for them in the vast sea of stars was the desperate struggle to survive in a universe full of enemies.

“Commander, the Seventh Galaxy fleet made their retreat!”

Lin Jingheng: “I saw. Ignore them and escort the civilian starship to refuge as soon as possible.”

“The Seventh Galaxy Militia left you a message.”

Lin Jingheng looked up in surprise.

“A greeting from General Ankur of the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia for Commander Lin: I still remember 30 years ago, when I joined Commander Lu Xin to attend your opening ceremony in the academy. Times are rough, take care.”

“Ah wait, they left, I haven’t finished decoding their long-distance signal!” Lu Bixing listened in the whole time he was working on decoding the signal and asked, “Does that mean he suddenly remembered your school’s opening ceremony during the middle of ordering fire, got emotional and decided to put his gun down?”

Lin Jingheng didn’t answer him. Turan was already pushed to the edge by the AUS fleet and had lost her weaponry during the crossfire. The shield on her war-torn mech already shattered, she felt as if she could charge into the enemy fleet and self-destruct at this time.

They were less than 20,000 kilometers from the transfer portal; they couldn’t afford to back up anymore.

Turan bit her lips and said: “Gather up! Send out your last words.”

“My comrades,” Turan had heard these words countless times since she enlisted in the Silver Fortress, but this was the first time she said them. It was slightly embarrassing for her to say, but she had no choice because this was the tradition. “If we perish in space, our corpses will float in the endless night until the day we crash and shatter into stars. Our souls will return to our homeland, return to the place we began our journey, the place you had once sworn to protect with your life--all hail the Pledge of Free…”

“Captain, emergency warp and retreat!”

Turan couldn’t even finish saying the word ‘freedom’ when the order from the command post came through the channel.

Turan was speechless and could only smile in response: “Asshole, did you really have to say this after my performance!?”

The next moment, these half-beaten-up fleets of the Eighth Galaxy Forces made an emergency warp all at once. The AUS followed closely and sailed through the transfer portal only to run directly into Lin Jingheng and the backup forces from the escort team. Before they could even pass through the portal completely, they also stepped foot into the enemy’s trap.

“It’s a trap, retreat!”

The pirates frantically reorganized and got ready to retreat, yet at that moment a sudden wave of cannons and missiles fired from behind. The Seventh Galaxy Militia that had been blocking the public terminal earlier suddenly appeared behind the AUS and fired into this mess, blowing up the powerful heavy mech fleet.

The AUS quickly made their escape as the Seventh Galaxy Militia stopped and lowered their cannons at the Eighth Galaxy Fleet. They flashed the flag of the Seventh Galaxy Militia on their mech bodies and made their ways out.

Meanwhile, the Union was in absolute chaos; within three hours since the reveal of the secret files from Yelvich, the Eden lab suffered an attack from an unidentified fleet of armed mechs. The entire base was annihilated, and the spokesperson of Eden, Lin Jingshu, also went missing.

The annihilation of the Eden experimental base was labelled as an open act of vengeance. Soon after, all major military bases within the Union also suffered attacks while the pirates took advantage of the chaos to expand their influence.

24 hours later, the central government announced that they would thoroughly investigate all related individuals involved with Commander Lu Xin’s case and confirm the validity of all records. They requested for everyone to remain calm during a time like this and avoid falling into the trap of unconfirmed rumors.

Yet this announcement was too weak and too late---

While the central government was attempting to ease the complaints, a military fortress in the Union called Alaska was attacked by an unidentified armed fleet. Due to the slow reaction of the defense department, a missile pierced through the shield of the fortress and landed in a non-militarized zone--the residential area for the friends and family of the military. The casualty also included a pair of underaged siblings, which fueled the anger of the commanders of the Alaska Fortress. They fought back against the invaders and fought all the way over near a Central Militia post around the area.

This time, there was no Eden to control the mood and emotions of people. The conflict between the Central Militia and the Union grew more heated as if people were purposely fanning the fire, and within a short time the internal warfare escalated to an unprecedented scale.

The Union, the former Union-controlled Central Militia, and the space pirates entered an all-out war among each other, ripping apart the Union that was already covered in darkness.

At this time, a ghost-like mech sailed out from the City of Angels, passing through the dark universe towards the secret base of the Freedom Corps. Lin Jingshu, who supposedly turned into stardust along with the Eden lab, and her zombie-like researchers who had taken off their white lab coats were alive and well on the mech.

Lin Jingshu passed through a glass tunnel inside the heavy mech into the innermost lab. Behind the protective glass window was the scene of a human experiment; sixteen people of different ages and genders stood naked in a line as they trembled in fear. A man wearing a bright orange vest stood before them with a twisted expression of excitement.

A researcher spoke through the speaker to the orange vest inside: “Tell the odd numbers to step forward and reorganize into two lines.”

The person in the orange vest pressed on their headphones and nodded towards the surveillance. They didn’t speak nor make any gestures as if they communicated through air, the sixteen individuals reorganized into two rows as ordered.

The researcher glanced at the clock and took some notes. Then, a row of heavy and sharp axes dropped from the ceiling inside the experimental room and landed right between the two rows of guinea pigs.

The researcher said: “Order the people in the back row to pick up the axe and kill the people in front of them in the fastest time possible. The people getting killed must remain standing until death.”

The orange vest person made an OK sign at the camera; then the next moment, the sixteen people perfectly carried out the order of “kill and be killed” as if they were puppets on a string.

An old man inside the experiment room turned his head in distaste to see Jingshu walking in.

“Good evening, doctor, seems like the second generation of opium is quite successful.” Lin Jingshu said joyfully, “Second generation chips can suppress first generations, and we’ll eventually develop a third generation to suppress the second generation as well. This will encourage everyone to climb up the social ladder and create a clear hierarchy. It’s effective and an ideal model of society. Fools should have their own lives as fools, am I right? Don’t let them wave around the flag of the Pledge of Freedom like idiots.”

The old man remained silent for a few moments: “That wasn’t your mother’s intention when she made this chip.”

“But we never received the full instruction manual,” Lin Jingshu chuckled, “so we can only take our liberties with it now. Isn’t that right, Doctor Hardin?”

The old man was the first director of the White Tower, and the man that was supposed to already be dead from suicide in prison--Doctor Hardin.

The doctor said: “You’ve messed with the war this much already, have you not thought of how Lin Jingheng would not have enough troops in the Eighth Galaxy because you’ve stopped the Silver Ten along their way?”

Lin Jingshu shrugged: “Are you saying the Silver Ten would voluntarily join in this mess? Besides, wasn’t he stuck in the Eighth Galaxy before because he lacked resources? Now that their enemies have turned against each other, and he has all the troops and arms in his hands, why would he waste more time in the Eighth Galaxy? Grandpa Hardin, Lin Jingheng isn’t that stupid.”

## Ch 111 - Drenched in Blood

After the Eden lab was destroyed, their neighbor City of Angels was in a state of panic.

What remained of the Union Parliament made an urgent decision to place all members of the Eden Committee, aside from the missing Lin Jingshu, under heavy surveillance.

Wang Ailun glanced at his personal device and whispered to Woolf: “The Parliament is requesting to speak to you.”

Like an old turtle that didn’t even want to bother turning his gaze away, he stared off into the distance in silence for a while before responding: “Tell them my old heart is feeling unwell so I’m resting inside a medical capsule, let them wait.”

Wang Ailun nodded and wrote a long but proper response back to the Parliament on behalf of the old Chief.

Woolf turned around to knock on the wall lightly, pulling up a 3D screen from the wall that automatically played a recording. The recording happened to be the segment where Lu Xin’s possession of the forbidden fruit was reported to the authorities. A trembling man’s voice explained: “Before Laura Gordon ran away, she paid a visit to Lu Xin. General Lin Wei wasn’t asleep at the time and stood behind the window as he watched her leave the house...I happened to be on duty that day...he…. General Lin asked me to keep quiet. He said that Doctor Gordon had something important, but she doesn’t trust him right now so she could only hand it to someone else…”

“This person was born in the Fourth Galaxy and has a younger brother who was a vaccuocerebral. He was once a personal guard of Lieutenant General Lin Wei. When Lu Xin adopted Jingheng, the boy was still young, so he decided to bring a guard from the Lin family to go along with him in order to stay by the boy’s side. The guard himself also left voluntarily since staying with Lu Xin meant that it would possibly benefit his future career. Lu Xin later gave him a place within his own personal guards and valued him like his own men.” Wang Ailun explained, “There’s a special department for vaccuocerebrals within the White Tower that worked with patients daily. The patients’ job was to cooperate with brain wave scan testing every day but were treated as full-time researchers within the tower. You should know that in a world under Eden, vaccuocerebrals had no place in society except as these ‘researchers’ in the White Tower. This guard’s brother was 20 years old that year, and with their family background they were almost doomed to be exiled to the Eighth Galaxy. In order to protect his family, the guard decided to betray Lu Xin and negotiated with the Committee behind the commander’s back. However, when he heard bits and pieces of the ‘ghost hunt’ and learned that the result of the national jury was set up, it was too late. He regretted his decision and told Lu Xin about it in guilt; his efforts playing a spy never ended well.”

“Thanks to this two-faced informant, the Committee wasn’t able to find where the forbidden fruit was after Lu Xin’s death. So they began to believe that perhaps the program wasn’t in Lu Xin’s hands, and had perished in Laura Gordon’s hands.”

Wang Ailun nodded: “Correct. The only thing they couldn’t touch was Zhanlu because his backup access permission was in Jingheng’s hands. This child was under heavy surveillance for many years because of this. However, I’ve heard that all his data levels were normal, almost too normal--appropriate levels of societal frustration, appropriate levels of harshness in personality, and even finely touching the bottom lines of Eden and the central government. Even when he got riled up occasionally and reached above the safety line of the ‘potential criminal’ list, his entire character was determined by Eden to be safe. If even this data was falsified, that would be absolutely terrifying; he was only a teenager at the time.”

“All these years, the forbidden fruit system had been operating secretly on Zhanlu and fabricating a complex web of fake data. It seems like Lu Xin never told Lin Jingheng the real functions of the forbidden fruit, letting the child think that it was simply a transmission blocker.” Woolf let out a sigh, “Lu Xin didn’t say anything in order to protect that child, including all the complicated relationships he had with the Committee...including the fact that he had once seen my name on the criminal list inside the forbidden fruit.”

Woolf slowly made his way towards his desk with an arm on his table. The hard wood top of the desk shone under the light of the room as he opened up the drawer and pulled out an old photo frame--it was impossible to imagine that anyone still used these ancient relics during the NSC era.

The photo inside the frame was a group shot of three young boys. A special type of preservation made this over 200-year-old photo look as if it had just been taken this morning.

“That’s me in the middle,” Woolf mumbled, “can you tell? I sure don’t look like that anymore.”

Wang Ailun lifted a slight smile and said: “Of course I can tell, your features hadn’t changed much over time. The other two must be Doctor Hardin and Chief Commander Lin Ge’er then.”

“All three of us grew up together, but now they’re both gone,” Woolf spoke softly as if he was retelling a story, “They’re all gone...the last thing Senior Ge’er told me was to let us see the world for him; see the world flourish and live in the world the Pledge of Freedom once painted so that we can tell him about it when we meet him again. He said he could no longer see the light of the sun shine on Wolto and wouldn’t be able to see the birth of his little Lin Wei; he said that he was only seconds away from dusk.”

Wang Ailun knew that the old Chief wasn’t talking to him, so he stood on the side in silence as if he was a statue.

“The original concept of the forbidden fruit was brought up by the Committee themselves. They wanted to use Eden to keep an eye on everyone but didn’t want to be watched themselves. They wanted to build a special bypass system for their own people but didn’t expect Hardin to upgrade it into a weapon that could pierce through the entire Eden system on his own. He came to me at that time and told me that he wanted to build an Anti-Utopian organization using the forbidden fruit outside the Union in fear that Eden would become an unstoppable monster. I was foolish back then and got angry at him; I said that while the Committee was indeed getting too greedy, how could a person like him work with pirates outside the Union, isn’t that an act of treachery? Hardin was like a brother to me - I couldn’t possibly take him to the authorities and endanger his life, so my only choice was to cut off all relations with him.”

“He didn’t argue with me at the time and only said that he would record my thoughts and beliefs back then into the forbidden fruit. If one day I changed, I would still be that model individual everyone sees in the Eden database--he told me that he hoped that he would never have to see that day where the fake data will be used.” Woolf continued quietly, “He was mocking me, but I knew he was right. If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t have lived so long.”

His friend, the person he could never let go of for the rest of his life, the child he raised personally, the students he had placed his hopes on had all left him. One by one, they took the handles and steered this giant ship called the Interstellar Union further away from their initial destination.

By the time he could count his regrets, his body had already aged to the point where he could only remember those old beliefs and morals through artificial storage of his memories.

For a split second, a scene flashed and revived inside Woolf’s head. He could still clearly remember that a young boy dressed shabbily speaking to him in a playful manner: “I think I’ll just live to about 200 years old and it should be enough. Imagine if I accidentally made it to 300 years old; I’d have trouble seeing and hearing and become a stubborn old man that couldn’t remember anything. I’m sure I’d think differently by then too; wouldn’t I just be a completely different person at that point? That wouldn’t be me anymore, I’d hate for that to happen.”

Woolf sat as Wang Ailun stood, both remained silent for a long time. Wang Ailun’s gaze scanned over the old photo inside the drawer and remembered Lu Xin.

*How did Lu Xin feel when he decided to run away from Wolto?*

The man swore loyalty to the Union with his life, only to find out that when all his teachers, friends, and seniors were encouraging others to use Eden, they were secretly trying to block off the system on their own.

He spent his life fighting for the freedom and equality of every citizen, only to have the same people decide he was guilty during the national jury.

Time was running out, he didn’t know how to explain everything to Lin Jingheng, who was still a child at the time...perhaps he never had the time to figure it all out himself and could only put a lock on Zhanlu to keep it all a secret.

Did Lu Xin still believe in everything he had fought for with his own blood and tears the night he escaped out of Wolto?

“It’s not over.” Words were beginning to slur in Woolf’s mouth. “The Glory Troops invaders are still in Wolto, the trash in the AUS still hasn't been cleaned. It’s still far from the new world that I promised Ge’er and Hardin. The Union still has one last breath left, I can’t give up now…”

Wang Ailun suddenly realized something: “You’re saying...Jingheng.”

“He still doesn’t know what the forbidden fruit is, but he will find out eventually as the unrest continues even if the Eighth Galaxy isolates itself. He will eventually see that list and have all his beliefs shattered like Lu Xin,” Woolf said, “That’s too tragic, I don’t want him to suffer like that. I want him to live like a hero and die like a hero; do you know what I mean?”

Wang Ailun understood and nodded, then learned in toward the old chief and asked: “What about Jingshu?”

Woolf remained silent for a few moments and sighed: “No matter how careful we are, we are no match for the child of the Eden Committee who spent her entire life there. All of us old folks have underestimated her. The Committee sure is a cradle of poison; no flower that was nurtured from it can be non-toxic. We need to find her as soon as possible; we can’t let her go missing--ask someone to make an announcement immediately to say that the Union will be purging ‘opium’ from the inside out. Tell the public that this was the conspiracy of the Committee behind Eden and order an official arrest for Lin Jingshu.”

The poisonous flower--Lin Jingshu stood before Doctor Hardin and placed her hands behind her back. The smile on her face disappeared as she stared through the glass window towards those heartless killing machines. She tiptoed slightly as she leaned in closer, her nose touching the cold glass window.

“If this world treats you horribly and hurts you, and lets every foolish man that thought they were innocent drink your blood, yet you decide to forgive them and sacrifice yourself to...what’s that called? ‘Doing the right thing’, then you’re also part of the problem.” She said, “Because you let the dead rest in injustice and let the fools of the living bathe in their false sense of innocence. You let history fall into the false narrative where all evil and shameful acts of the past can be saved by tragic heroes. You let the story become a fabricated lie of ugliness by swallowing that hatred and anger down your throat.”

Doctor Hardin’s old figure stood in the shadows as he asked quietly: “My child, do you not have a sense of justice and compassion for humanity in your heart?”

“I am human nature itself,” Lin Jingshu said, “What is human nature? Human nature is to eat when you’re hungry, to drink when you’re thirsty. When someone is good to you, remember them and return the favor; when someone steps over you, you must take your revenge at all cost--this is human nature. Justice, hah, that’s a performative lie that corrupts you, nobody that upholds it ever sees a good end.”

She gently placed her lips on the glass window and left a bright red print as she finished speaking.

“How disgusting.” She turned around and walked away.

All eight galaxies became drenched in blood behind her.

Thomas and Poisson Young originally planned on reorganizing the Third Squadron near the border of the Second Galaxy near a large intergalactic base. The base was the home center for the trading and selling of private starships as well as for repair and supplies for merchant ships. After a while, various supply stations and intergalactic travel services began to gather around this base as it turned into a large community of its own. The Third Squadron was made up of technicians and engineers, so it was natural for them to hang around this area. They expected to take off after a summoning order only to be blocked off by a large crowd of private starships asking for refuge from the base.

“We’re from the Second Galaxy, I’m a professor of the Second Polytechnic University. Our school is located in a satellite base that was a bit further off from natural planets and all our students live on campus.” A middle-aged man took a group of lost young students into the station. He rejected Thomas’ offer for a cigarette and said, “Thank you, but I don’t smoke, there’s quite a few minors among the students as well--one day, a group of people came in and took over our satellite base with mechs and forced us to inject a biochip. They claimed it was a substitute for Eden. Our principal said that while having an Eden substitute was a good thing, it required extensive paperwork and medical preparation for any invasive procedures, and the school couldn’t possibly sign off waivers in place of family members for underaged students...but they didn’t listen and shot the principal dead! My colleagues and I quickly took the students out to escape, but most of them were shot down and we were the lucky ones. I want to send these kids home, but the terminals into the Second Galaxy have all been blocked off and fights have broken out over there, so I had no choice but to take temporary refuge here.”

A student suddenly yelled as he finished: “Professor!”

A few students connected to the underground networks and pulled up a screen with a shaky recording. It looked like a small space station--the Second Galaxy’s natural resources were not abundant and its economy was mostly driven by intergalactic transportation industries, so over half of its population lived on space stations. Within the next few seconds, a sharp alarm rang out inside the recording as a crowd of people quickly ran for their lives as they screamed “missiles”. A bright white light cleared the screen in the midst of the cries as the video ended.

“This is the Kenny Station near the capitol planet of the Second Galaxy.”

“All connections to stations near the capitol planet were lost.”

People began to panic. Some people frantically attempted to contact friends and family that lived near the capitol planet, and the ones that didn’t receive a response broke down in tears moments after.

Thomas silently put the cigarette he hadn’t managed to give away into his mouth as Poisson walked beside him with his arms crossed: “This place is not safe. A large base like this will soon become a refugee camp filled with people with nowhere else to go. Those pirates selling opium will also have their eyes on here soon. What do you say, Captain, should we retreat?”

Meanwhile, the First Squadron of the Silver Ten had also been stuck in the Third Galaxy for over a week--simply because they saved a group of refugees that were being chased down by pirates along the way.

With the flames of war showing no sign of dying down and refugees increasing at an exponential rate, people who lived near the frontlines lived in fear every day that a missile would fall from the heavens and land in their backyard. Everyone that could afford a ticket on an intergalactic starship ran for their lives. Rumors had it that these tickets in the Third Galaxy had raised to an all-time high, and not only did it cost families all of their immediate wealth to purchase tickets, but larger families also often had to decide who they had to leave behind.

Refugees couldn’t handle emergency warping, and high speed in space could cost a fragile life. Now that all detectable transfer portals around the area were blocked by various armed forces, the First Squadron was stuck in the barricade of the pirates with this giant baggage of refugees.

In the Eighth Galaxy, Lin Jingheng didn’t have a chance to let out a sigh of relief after dealing with the wave of AUS forces with the help of Ankur’s fleet before Zhanlu said: “Sir, we received a long-distance communication request. The request is from Captain Thomas Young of the Silver Third Squadron.”

Lin Jingheng turned his gaze over.

The Silver Ten were well-trained soldiers of the military. Normally after confirming that Lin Jingheng was in the Eighth Galaxy, they would immediately make their way over without any delays nor attempts to communicate with anyone along the way. Only when they closed in would they send out a communication request through the transfer portals, in order to avoid exposing their coordinates during travel.

Lin Jingheng: “Bring it in.”

Even with the help of the transfer portals folding spacetime, it was still impossible to do real-time communication between the Second and Eighth Galaxy. It took at least 50 hours for the long-distance connection to be received on the other end and for Thomas to appear on screen.

“Commander.” Thomas’s screen finally appeared. He fixed up the hat resting sloppily on his head and put on a stern expression as he greeted his boss. “The terminals have been blocked off, we’re currently at the Nebula Transfer Station in the Second Galaxy. There are at least six million refugees here with about 50 heavy mechs from the Freedom Corps closing in right now; they’re planning on forcefully injecting the biochip drug opium into everyone.”

Lin Jingheng clenched his fist.

Due to the delay in these kinds of long-distance communication, it was difficult to have a free-flowing discussion from both ends. Thomas thought about it for a second and decided to report everything at once: “Poisson and I have made contact with Miss Jingshu while in the City of Angels, but she refused to come with us. The news we heard right now is that she went missing--sorry Commander, we should’ve forcefully made her come with us back then.”

“The Third Squadron is ready to take off; we can easily escape from the barricade of the pirates if we do multiple rounds of emergency warping. Should we immediately make our emergency warps towards the Eighth Galaxy or stay and protect the Nebula station; please give your orders, Commander.”

Lu Bixing, a few other engineers, Zhanlu, and even Turan who had just crawled out of the medical capsule all had their eyes on Lin Jingheng.

“These pirates forcefully selling their opium call themselves ‘Freedom Corps’ - who are they mocking?” Lin Jingheng paused for a moment before he gave Thomas 50 hours into the future his order, “Did you all forget who the Silver Ten swore to protect back then? Don’t even ask for my order!”

“Sir, long distance-communication request from the Silver First Squadron….”

“Sir, request from the Silver Sixth Squadron….”

……

“Sir, Captain Young responded, ‘hail the Pledge of Freedom’.”

Inside the meeting room of the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia, a notification popped up on Ankur’s personal device while he was listening to the real-time reports of all battlefronts within the Union.

He was caught by surprise and gestured for his secretary to stop. He adjourned the meeting and waited for everyone to leave the room before he locked the door all to himself.

“It’s me,” Wang Ailun’s face appeared from his personal device. “Good afternoon, General Ankur 65 hours into the future. Please make sure there is no one else beside you as you listen to the following message.”

## Ch 112 - Severely Lacking in Vitamin Lin Jingheng

“We’ve estimated that with Qiming and its surrounding satellites alone, we can safely resettle around six billion people, so this small migration won’t be too much trouble. The 3D architecture printers have been working day and night these past few days and we’ve already overheated 16 machines, so now they’re being sent to repair. The immigrants are all stopping temporarily on satellite bases, but their personal devices will gradually be registered into the social welfare program of the Capital planet. If all things go well, we should be able to complete everything within a week; all departments are working hard right now to determine the amount of resources and people we need to finish everything in time. Professor Lu, we just need you and your engineering te-...department.”

“The department always needs more people, we welcome anyone that wants to join. You don’t need any certificates or educational history, we have room; although we do require professionalism. Applicants only need to take a test after they come in and they’ll be given a position if they pass. If they don’t pass, they’ll need to go through training before they get a position. Applying isn’t the hard part, getting through training and probation will be what’s difficult. Oh, don’t forget to remind them that they’ll only be paid minimum during the training period, so if they want to make more money they should probably consider applying to be the Prime Minister’s secretary so they should really think it through.”

The secretary in question let out an unimpressed grunt in the video channel.

Thanks to Ankur’s sudden change in attitude, the pursuing fleets of the AUS finally retreated temporarily, giving the Eighth Galaxy some time to reorganize.

All transfer portrals near the border of the galaxy had been installed with heavy explosives in preparation for the worst-case scenario, like the ancients holding a torch ready to burn down the ropes of a bridge.

Meanwhile, Lin Jingheng personally dragged the frontline partyboy Professor Lu back onto Qiming.

The mech slowly passed through the ozone layer and heavy clouds, land already visible through the window to the naked eye.

The 3D printers quickly filled the designated residential areas with rows of little houses and buildings. Lin Jingheng remembered the area had still been empty land when he left, yet now the area had been cleared for building and constructions as crowds of construction robots worked restlessly on paving roads. The shape of a city could already be seen...although it seemed as if some unfortunate designer had a hand in choosing the colors of the buildings so now these little houses were all in obnoxious macaron colors. The vibrant colors of these houses struck a huge contrast with the monotoned military base of Milky Way City not too far away, it was like a group of cartoon mushrooms that made the scene almost comical to look at.

Lu Bixing asked: “Who did this? This is way too distracting, it looks like the planet grew some rashes if you look from the sky.”

The Prime Minister’s secretary sneered: “Your father.”

Lin Jingheng lifted an eyebrow on instinct: “The old cat’s maiden heart is still alive? It’s been centuries since he gave himself heterochromia, it seems like his delicate soul hasn’t changed.”

Lu Bixing: “......”

Lin Jingheng glanced at him from the corner of his eyes and said: “Unreliability is probably hereditary in your family, I can’t let either of you guys off the leash.”

Lu Bixing gladly accepted the comments and smiled back at him. Lin Jingheng raised his hand, as if he was about to say something, only to see that secretary on the side looking excitedly towards their direction. He held in the desire to make more comments and frowned as he poked on Lu Bixing’s shoulder, then turned to order Zhanlu: “Connect to the tracks, check the passcode and prepare for landing.”

The heavy mech responded with a low buzz as if it was also happy to be back home.

“We’re back!” Lu Bixing cheered towards the signal post inside the base through the large noises from landing. “Did the old Prime Minister miss me?”

Something inside Lin Jingheng’s heart moved slightly as Lu Bixing announced, *“We’re back.”*

He discovered that he could trace out the signature buildings inside the Milky Way City base and even the curves of the connecting tracks on the launching deck when he closed his eyes. From the launching deck to the command post, then outside the main lobby towards the little stone road, he could see it clearly in his mind. When Zhanlu announced that the mech had safely landed on the tracks, he could almost feel the little uneven stones underneath his boots.

Smokes and fire on the battlefield were suddenly a distant dream to him.

This was a strange feeling for Lin Jingheng. That mansion he had on Wolto was like a foreign land to him; without the help of a navigating robot, he’d be lost inside that house. As for the Silver Fortress where he spent most of his time, it had a naturally strict and heavy atmosphere that never gave him a sense of relaxation like a home.

The next moment, Prime Minister Edward’s howl pierced through the broadcast of the signal post: “You little rascal, why did you go out to the frontlines again!? Didn’t you promise to stay at the immigration station!?”

Lu Bixing gave an insincere excuse: “I was hanging out on the immigration station like you said, it just happened that Commander Lin picked me up along the way, right Lin?”

The Prime Minister didn’t dare to speak to the commander in the same manner and cleared his throat as he was about to run off.

That was when he heard Commander Lin immediately betray the young scientist: “Nonsense.”

Lu Bixing: “......”

Prime Minister: “Lu Bixing!”

The Prime Minister was getting old and naggy; he opened up all the broadcast inside the mech dock and chased Lu Bixing down with his speakers. The angry scolding followed Lu Bixing, giving him lectures ranging from being a reckless non-combat personnel to how irresponsible he was as the director of special advising.

Prime Minister Edward had a whole stomach full of anger as he continued criticizing the young man: “When you represent the Eighth Galaxy, your life is not only yours, it belongs to all the citizens! Look at you right now, you’re like an unreliable young man, aren’t you ashamed!?”

Lu Bixing held his hands out: “But I am an unreliable young man, mister Prime Minister. How did you just realize this now?”

Prime Minister Edward almost choked on his own spit and decided to have a talk with this young man’s father. The old man opened up the window inside the signal post only to see those colorful townhouses not too far away.

Prime Minister: “.....”

If it wasn’t for the fact that he was also broke, the old Prime Minister also wanted to give Monoeyed Hawk some grants to fix that awful colorblindness.

Lin Jingheng’s eyes curled up slightly as he turned and walked towards the direction of the command post. Lu Bixing ran up to him from behind and pulled his arm.

Lin Jingheng: “What do you want?”

Lu Bixing answered in a serious tone: “You promised me.”

Lin Jingheng: “Promised you what? Giving you a leash?”

Lu Bixing didn’t answer and dragged the commander towards a different direction. They passed by the mech dock and discovered a newly constructed road for armed mobiles.

As the most powerful vehicle on land, armed mobiles can go as fast as the speed of sound at their highest speed. Before the areas were developed, the land between Milky Way City and the military base was a desert land where they could drive around freely. Now that the area was slowly being constructed into residential areas and expanding cities, armed mobiles would need to follow traffic laws and drive inside enclosed terminals during non-emergency times to ensure the safety of residents.

Lin Jingheng: “What is this?”

“A special terminal.” Lu Bixing said, “Non-military staff that work in the base need to go home after work, and government officials often need to go between the government building and the base, so we planned a specialized terminal for ease of transportation. Here, get on.”

He pulled Lin Jingheng’s hand and pressed his finger on the fingerprint scanner as he spoke, registering Lin Jingheng’s identity on the machine. An armed mobile quickly pulled up from an underground storage and opened its door.

“This terminal goes directly into the main area of Milky Way City and is a little faster than running out in the wild. It will only take twelve minutes and six seconds total to the end of the track,” Lu Bixing said, “But we’re not going into the city today.”

The mobile slowly started up as he finished his explanation and accelerated to its highest speed within a minute. A few moments later, the mobile stopped outside a platform by the terminal; the total travel time was less than two minutes.

Lu Bixing: “Follow me.”

Outside the platform was a newly built residential area filled with houses of different sizes. The smallest houses were only one-story while others went up to two or three stories tall. The streets between the houses were clean and all pedestrian roads, banning any vehicles from entering. The small gardens around the roads and houses were already filled with beautiful plants and flowers welcoming their new residents.

There was a stone sign outside this residential area that said: Milky Way City Military Base Residence.

“This area wasn’t designed by my dad.” Lu Bixing said, “this is the first Military Base residence area. If the troops in the main base increase in the future, we’ll need to build more. It takes only a minute and 56 seconds from here to the mech dock in the base, which is about the same time it takes for you to walk from your command post to the dock.”

Lin Jingheng: “A minute and 56 seconds? My leg isn't broken.”

Lu Bixing stopped his footsteps in defeat and turned his head to look at Lin Jingheng’s cold face. He waved for the commander to walk closer toward him, then leaned in and bit Lin Jingheng’s ears as he whispered: “If you’re going to keep pretending you can’t read the room, I’m going to publicly harass you on the streets.”

Lin Jingheng glanced coldly at him--*I dare you*.

Lu Bixing: “....Nope, how about you harass me instead?”

Lin Jingheng pushed his face away and Lu Bixing softened his voice: “The best engineers always need to have first-hand information ready. Everytime it goes through a messenger, the truthfulness and accuracy of the information gets lost along the way. Didn’t your Third Squadron friends ever step out to the frontlines back when you were still in the SIlver Fortress?”

Lin Jingheng was unmoved: “When did the Third Squadron enlist you?”

Lu Bixing felt like this person was difficult to talk to and always shifted the subject and topic. Unable to convince him, Lu Bixing could only hold the commander’s chin and place a kiss on his cheeks.

“Go away, don’t give me that.” Lin Jingheng leaned back slightly. “Why didn’t you inform me beforehand and went up to the frontlines on your own?”

Lu Bixing played dumb: “What? Did Captain Turan not inform you when she called for engineers to do some emergency repairs….hey, no no no, why are you frowning so much like that? I can be worried about you too. If I can’t personally go up front and experience what supplies we’re running short on, how can I solve the problem, give timely support to you all, or even protect you?”

The word “protect” jabbed at Lin Jingheng’s heart a little as the commander stood speechless on the spot: “You really think I need you to protect me?”

“Of course, an on-site engineer that follows the navy is like the sheath of a sword; our job is to protect the soldiers on the frontlines.” Lu Bixing said, matter-of-factly, “hey, let’s talk it out from now on. Do you ever see me playing cold war with you when I get mad? Don’t you think you’re being unreasonable here?”

Lin Jingheng nodded expressionlessly and said: “I do, so what? Is this your first day knowing me?”

He lifted Lu Bixing’s collar up and moved him aside like an annoying log on the road, then continued walking on his own.

Lu Bixing caught the commander’s reddening ears and held in his laughter: “Do you even know which house it is? Why are you walking like you know where you’re going...okay, I guess you do know where you’re going.”

Even though it was the first time Lin Jingheng walked into this area, he didn’t get lost because he had already spotted the strange looking building towards the very end of the houses. The front yard was decorated with two dancing robots that guarded the gates like stone lions. The robots weren’t particularly good-looking, and it was unclear whether Lu Bixing had simply tossed random parts together or not; they seemed to have a strange ancient hip-hop feel to them.

Above the dancing robots was a wooden placard framed by artificial flowers that said: “The Home of Commander Lin and Engineer 001”.

Commander Lin’s steel-like heart that held out throughout the entire cold war broke down at this moment. The two dancing robots performed a strange samba before him as they leaned down with their robotic hands holding onto each other. Then, the robot on the left picked out a small flower petal from the bushes on the side and gave it to the commander on its metal palm. The robot on the right pulled its head out as if taking a hat off, then Lu Bixing’s voice recording played from its chest: “Welcome Home.”

Lu Bixing nudged over from behind and said shamelessly: “I had people move all your stuff over, you promised you were going to move in with me. My dad lives next door and yelled at me because I didn’t want to stay with him. I’ve been living with him for 20 years already, it’s time for a change.”

Lin Jingheng’s cold face finally softened as he let out a sigh in defeat.

Lu Bixing watched his expression change and immediately turned his tail up in the air and blew a whistle at the two dancing robots...unfortunately, the act this time was a little too excitable, and one of them ripped the limbs of its partner on accident. The robot with the broken arm immediately exploded a little in its chest as it short circuited into a broken record, playing “Welcome Home” endlessly. Lu Bixing quickly ran over and dragged his embarrassing little subordinates into repair.

Lin Jingheng: “......”

Mister Engineer 001 sure was an unreliable young man, were those mechs that he personally fixed before doing alright?

“The port for installing the digital butler at home is already ready, when Zhanlu comes in he can automatically connect...oh right, where is Zhanlu?

“On the mech,” Lin Jingheng said, “I’m dropping you home right now, I’ll need to leave soon. I think I have to get in touch with Ankur, I feel like he...hmph.”

He was pushed onto the sofa by Lu Bixing before he could finish.

Lin Jingheng wrapped his arm around the young man out of instinct and sunk into the sofa. The sofa was made from a special kind of transformable material that could adjust its hardness according to the seated position of the master. If the person sitting on it was sitting upright, the sofa would turn into a hard surface; if the person was rolling on it, it would turn into a soft waterbed and warp around the person like a seamless burrito.

Lu Bixing: “Where did you say you were going?”

Lin Jingheng responded sternly: “To the frontlines, I need to arrange a security post at the border.”

Lu Bixing’s eyes narrowed slightly as he licked his lips. He leaned down and gently bit the fringe covering the commander’s eyes and swiped it to the side. The sound of his breathing fell into the commander’s ears as a familiar yet strange sensation swept through Lu Bixing’s body: “Say it again, where are you going?”

Lin Jingheng: “Stop messing around, I have to…”

Lu Bixing leaned in and licked the commander’s lips the moment Lin Jingheng opened his mouth. Lin Jingheng held his breath instinctively and felt a strange shock through his nerves, poking into his body from his lips, almost instantly numbing his whole body.

Lu Bixing looked at him with a mischievous smile: “Please mister, can you just spare a night for me out of your busy schedule? My medical report says I’m severely lacking the essential vitamin Lin Jingheng from my body, and if I don’t take it soon it would be life-threatening.”

Commander Lin had never in his life faced this kind of threat, and before he could even build up an effective defense, he was already defeated.

He very much felt the need for the Eighth Galaxy to pass a law banning unnecessary cravings for a spoiled child.

The battle near the border of the Eighth Galaxy stopped temporarily. The night of Milky Way City was gentle and quiet. People leaving from work were slowly making their way home from the plaza; even the small merchant shops on the streetside were closing up as the merchants chatted on their way home. Lu Xin’s stone statue watched them quietly from the plaza; there was a row of flowers beneath the statue that were left by people in memory of the lives lost on planet Egret. The stone eyes of the late commander looked out to the direction where the sun of the Eighth Galaxy rested and rose every day.

Three days later, Lin Jingheng signed off on the completed plan of the frontline security post. Before he could even investigate Ankur, the old general himself tossed a ball to to the Eighth Galaxy from the Seventh Galaxy---

“Commander, they sent us a request for a long-distance connection in hopes to connect into the Eighth Galaxy internal network. They want to build a relationship with us. The Central Militia of the Seventh Galaxy even sent an official letter requesting a truce.”

Lin Jingheng lifted an eyebrow.

## Ch 113 - Can’t Catch the Thug if You Don’t Sell Yourself Out

Within this official negotiation between the two galaxies, the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia under Ankur presented themselves as the outsiders seeking a truce and apologized for blocking the public terminal last time. They gave a very thorough explanation for their actions, from the details of the Glory Troops leaking out evidence of Lin Jingheng being in the Eighth Galaxy to the Union suspecting him of working with other pirate organizations.

“Ankur said that the Seventh Galaxy Militia was only following orders, they didn’t realize that the AUS pirates were also closing in when they blocked the terminals, which almost cost thousands of lives.” Lin Jingheng reached his hand out and opened up the digital reader as he spoke to the Prime Minister, “They said they want to repay us for the trouble they caused.”

The Prime Minister had just gotten back from hearing the monthly financial report and was drowning in concern over the cost of military supplies. As he sat in anxiety and suddenly heard the word “repay,” the old man’s eyes lit up instantly and he asked: “What kind of repayment?”

As the director of the special advisory board, Lu Bixing cleared his throat loudly on the side to remind the Prime Minister to watch his posture.

The Prime Minister pulled back his gaze and quickly put his rusty brain to work: “Uh...I don’t think this is an excuse from him. While they did block off our terminals, they didn’t actually fire at us and even retreated to kick the butts of the pursuing AUS when they left--by the way, did they not mention.... why they suddenly retreated even though they were ordered to stay with the Union?”

“They did. Ankur claimed that he only wanted to kick the AUS out of the Seventh Galaxy and didn’t care about working with the Union. He was only being performative.” Lin Jingheng said lightly, “and just as he was blocking our roads, the former director of the Hummingbird Fortress Yelvich committed suicide. His death leaked proof that the Eden Committee set up Commander Lu Xin’s death as well as the handful of direct evidence they falsified. From illegally using Eden to trigger anger among the citizens to tipping the scales and influencing bias during the national jury, there was more than enough proof. Most Generals stationed in the Central Militias were former subordinates of Lu Xin, so they immediately announced their secession from the Union. Ankur was one of them, so he was more than happy to join his old comrades and retreated.”

Lin Jingheng soon realized that everyone in the meeting room that was over middle age was staring blankly at him after he finished his explanation.

The Prime Minister sat dumbstruck for a few moments until he mumbled: “So...it wasn’t that they did him wrong, they purposely set him up...but why? What kind of crimes did he commit for people to want him dead so badly?”

Monoeyed Hawk slammed on the table, got out of his seat and walked out.

Lin Jingheng’s gaze lowered; it was unclear whether he was looking at the corner or Monoeyed Hawk’s coat or simply dozing off.

He didn’t answer and fell silent along with the crowd for a moment. The commander then spoke up in his signature emotionless voice: “My apologies for bringing up all this clownery in the Union.”

Lu Bixing was the only person in the room that was young enough to not have any personal relationship to Lu Xin but could have a say in the meeting. He noticed that everyone else was busy swallowing their complicated emotions and quickly spoke up to change the topic: “Without any other sources of information for now and judging by the contents of the letter, I think it makes sense. But what does this General Ankur want from us?”

“Spatially speaking, the communication between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxy is more closely connected than the Seventh and Sixth Galaxies. The other side of the Sixth Galaxy is also the territory of the AUS, so Ankur can’t possibly turn towards that direction. Now that the Union is broken up by warfare, he’s attempting to appeal to us to become allies.” Lin Jingheng said, “His offer included but is not exclusive to the connection between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxy’s internal networks, opening up both galaxies’ terminals, signing Military cooperation contracts, and rebuilding intergalactic trade. To show his sincerity, he even mentioned that he was willing to offer needed supplies to the Eighth Galaxy.”

Lu Bixing asked suspiciously: “Why is he so generous - is this charity work?”

“That’s not the case. He said he can give us a free set of medical equipment as an apology for blocking our terminals. However, if we want anything else, it will be seen as an intergalactic loan with interest that can be discussed in detail later. I will say this: the interest rate during wartime will not be low, but we can slowly repay it once the Eighth Galaxy’s manufacturing returns to standard. Of course, the supplies will be limited to public services only, they won’t provide military resources.”

Lu Bixing nodded slowly.

Interest not being low in diplomatic language essentially meant an extremely high interest rate; however, asking for such high rates was not uncommon in a time like this. Ankur’s conditions were still within reason and clearly stated what he wanted yet were frank about his demands, displaying his trust towards Lin Jingheng and the Eighth Galaxy in a roundabout way. If this “government” of the Eighth Galaxy broke down in a few days, these loans and interests talk would all become a joke.

In other words, there was nothing wrong with these demands.

“That sounds rather believable, at least more reliable than a free lunch,” Lu Bixing turned to ask Lin Jingheng, “what do you think?”

Lin Jingheng shot him a glance.

Lu Bixing only then noticed that he asked an unnecessary question. The commander had already gone from the head of the house responsible for hunting food for the family to a bankrupted ex-CEO.

The ‘business’ of stealing from pirates made some profit in the beginning, but as the war grew fiercer and more complicated, it became almost impossible to sustain this lifestyle. The Eighth Galaxy could only rely on their incomplete and new military factories to supply necessary resources. Yet military factories were like a black hole for funding that collectively ate up a large portion of the government budget along with the training required for all the newly enlisted soldiers.

As a bankrupt business owner, the fact that Lin Jingheng didn’t immediately jump on this offer as a new source of income already explained his opinion on the matter.

The Prime Minister asked: “Commander Lin doesn’t seem to trust in Ankur’s offer, is it because this person isn’t trustworthy?”

“I’ve never had much contact with Ankur personally, so I can’t say much. He was transferred out of the Council very early, and then made his way to the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia. He’s never caused any issues these last few years nor made any significant accomplishments. My only impression was that he seemed to have a good social network, so this will depend on what the Prime Minister thinks.” Lin Jingheng paused before adding on, “However, I tend to look at the bad side of others, so I have two things I will point out for you all to think about--First, we were in an emergency when Ankur came out and blocked the terminal. We’ve attempted to request communication with him multiple times with no response; second, if everything he said is true, then we’re extremely lucky. I’ve personally never had much experience with being lucky in any way.”

“Good luck” was also a strange concept to the people of the Eighth Galaxy; everyone in the room was a veteran in the department of bad luck. The crowd collectively stared greedily at this gift from the heavens until Lin Jingheng poured the harsh reality over their heads; their minds clouded with concern, and they could only adjourn the meeting with heavy hearts.

While nobody else was around, Lu Bixing quickly made his way over towards Lin Jingheng and kindly gave the commander massages on his shoulders and legs: “Here's a reward for our Commander that worked hard running between the capitol and the frontlines.”

Lin Jingheng was still thinking about Lu Xin’s case; he wondered how that man would feel if he found out that his innocence was proven 30 years after his death under these circumstances, and how great of an impact it made for the war. The commander’s gaze softened as he turned towards Lu Bixing, he lifted a hand up against the fringe on the young man’s forehead and gently touched the corner of those bright eyes.... only to crush that last bit of kindness after five seconds as Lin Jingheng grabbed Lu Bixing’s hand and said: “Where are you touching?”

Lu Bixing quickly turned to hold the commander’s hand and said: “Don’t worry about it, Commander. Didn’t we already set up the explosives in the portals? This time we can remote control the explosives and won’t need to sail over to fire a missile. If Ankur is really up to no good, we can physically block him out of the galaxy, and then you’ll completely be my….”

Lin Jingheng shot a glance at him.

Lu Bixing corrected himself without hesitation: “....be one of us in the Eighth Galaxy. We can run without paying back, isn’t that exciting?”

Lin Jingheng felt extremely conflicted as Lu Xin’s own son talked about wanting to isolate himself from human society all day and now run away from debt, planning on dropping the ball on Lu Xin’s ex-subordinates without guilt.

Why couldn't there be a proper certification to becoming a parent? These people couldn’t control the child they gave birth to, clearly there needed to be some regulations.

“Professor Lu, is this something an educator like you should say?”

Professor Lu laid his arms out: “You can’t catch the wolf without bait, likewise you can’t catch the thug without selling yourself out.”

The thug in question loosened up his shirt collar and said: “Leave.”

Days had gone by without a response from the Eighth Galaxy, and Ankur once again sent a message to announce that he wanted to personally visit the Eighth Galaxy.

Lin Jingheng responded courteously to his request but gave a list of demands: military mechs shall not sail into the Eighth Galaxy, the visiting starship shall not carry any arms including guns, security guards shall not exceed ten persons total, and everyone must go through security after landing on the capital planet.

Ankur almost threw a fit the moment he received this clearly unfriendly response. In the heat of the moment, he wanted to bypass the official spokesperson of the Seventh Galaxy to say he will arrive at the Eighth Galaxy completely naked and cleanly shaved, in case the delicate young Commander Lin would get offended by his intimidating chest hair--of course, this vulgar message was immediately shot down by the Seventh Galaxy. The Seventh Galaxy Central Militia eventually responded that they would gladly accept the invitation and follow the requests of the Eighth Galaxy and were looking forward to meeting with the government.

It wasn’t a time of peace, so negotiations didn’t take long to settle; four days later, Ankur arrived all by himself with only two secretaries to take care of his daily life and paperwork.

Even though Ankur himself was quite crude and thick-skinned, he was very careful and thorough during work. When he arrived in the Eighth Galaxy, he parked his own starship outside the border, gave all the medical supplies to the Eighth Galaxy Galactic Forces, and personally asked to step onto the Prime Minister’s starship. He didn’t rush to Qiming the moment he stepped inside the Eighth Galaxy and instead stopped by Cayley for half a day to pay his respects to the ex-capitol by placing a bouquet of flowers on the burnt land before returning to Milky Way City.

Back during the Union Parliament meetings, the Prime Minister had his share of experience with fake politicians. Meeting someone as sociable and sincere as Ankur gave him confidence to hold a smooth meeting with the Seventh Galaxy. The Prime Minister was very fond of Ankur’s bold personality and almost wanted to take him as a friend; if Lin Jingheng wasn’t right beside him watching the negotiations, he would have almost agreed to pay the Seventh Galaxy a visit himself.

The group very quickly and efficiently settled the negotiations with Ankur and Prime Minister Edward representing the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies respectively, signing the military cooperation treaty and the first loan supply contract. They agreed to send out a fleet of escorts from each galaxy and build an intergalactic supply station near the border of the two galaxies as the main connection between the two galaxies’ terminals.

The Prime Minister then arranged some free time to give Ankur a tour of Milky Way City as they both strolled towards the central plaza.

Ankur stared at Lu Xin’s large stone statue dumbfounded as he rubbed his eyes and spoke to the Prime Minister with a smile on his face: “There used to be one of these on Wolto as well, but the statue got taken down later...this...is this Commander Lu Xin? I’m not mistaking it, right?”

The Prime Minister placed his hand on the general’s shoulder.

Ankur nodded quietly; his facial muscles stiffened as if he was biting his lips harshly, then opened his mouth a few times in an attempt to say something. Yet nothing came out of his mouth. His head raised and lowered multiple times as if he didn’t know how to face his former boss until his eyes grew red, he stood still under that statue wordlessly for five whole minutes.

Everyone that had once followed Lu Xin’s footsteps and joined in the battle to fight for the Eighth Galaxy stood in silence with him.

Monoeyed Hawk felt his eyes itch and walked to the side as he hid himself in the corner with a cigarette in his mouth. He turned only to see Lin Jingheng watching emotionlessly on the side with a human-formed Zhanlu standing beside him like a bodyguard. Lin Jingheng and Ankur didn’t get along very well and had already sparked a small disagreement during the negotiation for supplies, so he didn’t actively participate in the escort and only stayed along the sidelines to keep an eye on Ankur.

Monoeyed Hawk said: “Since we haven’t blown up the portals yet, we still need to have some foreign relations. The Seventh Galaxy Central Militia should at least be more reliable than those pirates and dogs of the Union.”

Lin Jingheng: “Why do you think he’s still alive and standing here?”

Monoeyed Hawk answered in exhaustion: “Say, are you so used to pretending to be a villain that you’ve forgotten how to be a good person?”

Lin Jingheng relaxed his stature a bit to lean on the wall by the small alleyway and crossed his arms: “There needs to be someone who kills the fun and someone who takes the overly cautious route. Besides, we still don’t have an answer to the two suspicions I pointed out last time--Zhanlu, send a message to the Prime Minister’s personal device. Tell him to bring it up to Ankur that we want to look at the full report leaked out after Yelvich’s death, not a summary. Or...didn’t he want to connect the Seventh and Eighth Galaxy’s networks? Ask him to give us a code to connect with other galaxies.”

Monoeyed Hawk asked suddenly: “Where’s that little rascal Lu Bixing?”

“He’s setting up a satellite inspection for the refugees by the Prime Minister’s request.”

Monoeyed Hawk’s eyes narrowed as he looked towards Ankur’s back and said in a low voice: “Everyone knows what Lu Xin’s stone statue means to them, he’s the only one that doesn’t.”

“I was just about to bring this up to you.” Lin Jingheng’s gaze scanned the surroundings quietly, and after making sure nobody else was around, he lowered his voice, “Zhanlu, protected file number 081, the data result of his brain scan…”

Monoeyed Hawk realized what he was saying and turned his head over.

Lin Jingheng: “Destroy it.”

Zhanlu asked: “Sir, once I destroy this file, I will no longer remember that I have scanned…”

Lin Jingheng: “I know, trash it.”

The instant he confirmed the order, lines of code flashed inside Zhanlu’s human-like pupils as the AI stood still on the spot.

Monoeyed Hawk looked at Lin Jingheng in shock.

“From now on, only you and I know about this, there will not be a third person that finds out.” Lin Jingheng’s voice was almost a whisper as he said this

Monoeyed Hawk’s gaze swam between Ankur and Lin Jingheng: “You’re saying you don’t trust…”

Lin Jingheng shook his head: “I’ve been thinking about something for the past few days.”

“What?”

“Back when I was investigating the underground terminals from the Eighth Galaxy outside the Union, I found an illegal transfer portal Lu Xin left near a small planetary belt codenamed ‘surprise’. This portal wasn’t recorded on any of the internal documents within the Union...not even on Zhanlu.” Lin Jingheng’s whisper was almost gentle as he explained, “When the Ten Great Swords were first being designed, the mental threshold required to use them was set extremely high and only very few people were able to meet the standard. Zhanlu had always been created for him, and when he rose up to the ranks of Top Commander, Zhanlu was upgraded to include a genetic lock for him that fully turned Zhanlu into his personal mech...so who erased Zhanlu’s records? If he did it himself, then why? Who was he trying to hide from?”

Monoeyed Hawk’s brain couldn’t follow this train of thought and he forgot to tap the ashes of his cigarette off.

“I can feel that Lu Xin lost trust towards a lot of people before he died.” Lin Jingheng’s gaze stared deeply toward Ankur’s figure. The men under the statue had finished paying their respects to their idol and were about to make their way back to the Executive Building of the central government with heavy hearts. Lin Jingheng gestured for Zhanlu to follow them and continued, “I don’t trust anyone. I can cooperate, but will keep my reserves--old man, unless someone is dead, you can’t make any decisive conclusions about anyone.”

Monoeyed Hawk trembled slightly, unable to give a response.

After signing the contracts and treaties, Ankur received an emergency summons from the Seventh Galaxy on the same day about the AUS forces within the galaxy making a move. He quickly took off and left the Eighth Galaxy before he could stop by for dinner to take care of the situation at home.

Lin Jingheng asked Turan to escort him to the border and watched as Ankur left with his own men back towards the Seventh Galaxy.

Ankur threw all the paperwork to his secretary then ordered them away as he claimed to need some rest.

Then, using a special passcode, he connected to the City of Angels.

“The Eighth Galaxy already completed the move of their citizens, and based on the deployment of guards around the border, I’m guessing they already set up the explosives in the portals. Lin Jingheng’s a careful and meticulous man, we can’t give him the chance to close off the Eighth Galaxy. Secretary Wang, it seems like we’re going to need to go harder this time, what can you guys give me? I won’t accept a blank check.”

## Ch 114 - Troubled Times

With the help of both galaxies’ governments, completing construction on the connecting terminal between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies didn’t take long. Soon after, using a transfer portal as the border, both sides stationed their own troops nearby the portal and prepared to trade supplies. The first batch of supplies were ready almost as soon as Ankur left the Eighth Galaxy. The Seventh Galaxy also sent over a batch of recording robots to invite Prime Minister Edward to sign the supplies and attend a ribbon cutting ceremony for the reopening of the terminal, as if both galaxies were ready to shake hands and call each other friends.

Yet Lin Jingheng’s request to connect to the Seventh Galaxy’s network and share long-distance communication kept getting delayed. Ankur gave plenty of excuses from the network getting hacked to the Seventh Galaxy was fighting an intelligence war with the AUS.

The fact was that despite making a dramatic scene for sharing supplies and rebuilding connection with the Eighth Galaxy as if the whole world had been at peace for 500 years, the moment the question of sharing communication networks got brought up, Ankur would turn his back as if pirates were suddenly knocking on his door.

“The feeling they’re giving me is like they’re purposely keeping us from receiving information from the Union.” Lu Bixing said, “This time I’m with Commander Lin: anyone that purposely keeps you blind and ignorant must have other plans behind your back.”

Monoeyed Hawk spread his hands out: “What ‘this time, that time,’ when were you ever not on his side? I bet you’d still be on his side if he farts at you.”

Prime Minister Edward asked: “Commander Lin, did you not receive any messages from the Silver Ten?”

“I did, they all know about the first time the Glory Troops mentioned me. But after Yelvich’s death, I could only get a gist of what happened that matched up with what Ankur said. I’m assuming only the higher ups in the Union government and Central Militia know the details, but sometimes it’s exactly these details that can cost a life.” Lin Jingheng thought about it for a few moments before adding, “And if my guess is correct, then the leak of Commander Lu Xin’s case was intentional by someone’s hands and Yelvich was just unfortunate collateral damage. If the reports on Lu Xin’s case was that easy to obtain, I would’ve already gotten my hands on them when I was still in the Silver Fortress.”

The Prime Minister asked; “What kind of details?”

“For example, why the Eden Committee was willing to risk everything to get rid of him,” Lin Jingheng said, “I’ve fought with them for many years, and even though they’re a bunch of shameless bastards, they were alway very careful. They would never let anyone grab a hold of their rat’s tails and were very careful about their public image. Would they really go to such lengths because Lu Xin ignited the fire for military autonomy? I don’t think so; there must be something else in this that Ankur is hiding from us.”

Prime Minister Edward was still confused after all of these explanations. When he still attended the meetings on Wolto before the war broke out, he would feel as if his brain juice would spill onto the floor of the Union Parliament from all these political battles and complained: “Do any of you high-ranking politicians in the Union have anything else better to do?”

“I’m quite fond of your innocent heart, Prime Minister, but the central government of the Union is like a small stage in theater. People that climb up the stage all have their own ideals, but the people already standing on there want to expand their territories; at the same time, the people below you all want to drag you down and climb up themselves. In the end, everyone can only spare energy to fight for their positions. So those people that are ‘all talk and no work’ would disappear from the stage very quickly.” Lin Jingheng explained calmly, “The point is, I don’t agree that you should attend Ankur’s waste-of-time ceremony. Tell the Seventh Galaxy that if they have any bit of sincerity, they will send a merchant fleet with the supplies, and I’ll ask someone to pick up the goods at the border.”

Prime Minister Edward let out a long sigh: “Commander Lin, do you always keep this attitude when you are borrowing money from someone?”

Lu Bixing interrupted: “He’s had this attitude even back when he was sweeping the grounds of Beijing-β, don’t worry about it, Prime Minister.”

Monoeyed Hawk couldn’t even stand to look at him and gave him a kick under the table. He didn’t understand why there was a need to flex about something like that. The old cat suspected that this brat got spoiled to the point where he grew to crave some harsh words, and purposely found a partner to step on the old cat tail when he grew up.

“Commander Lin, we can’t just do that, otherwise wouldn’t all the treaties and contracts we signed with the Seventh Galaxy turn into jokes? It would defeat the whole purpose of that paperwork.” The Prime Minister explained heavily, “the pirates have their eyes on us, we can’t simply ignore a potential ally or enemy like Ankur.”

Even the infamously rude Commander Lin had to hold in some of his insults and didn’t straight-up toss something like “fuck that Ankur” on the table.

He frowned slightly instead and asked: “Prime Minister, Ankur spent over a century of his life in the military. He can tell from the positioning of our patrol teams that something is off; if he really thought hard about it, he would know that we’re planning on cutting off all transfer portals in case of an emergency. Have you perhaps thought about a scenario where he would keep you and a few other government officials hostage there and then send more pirates to the Eighth Galaxy? What will we do? We don’t have that many troops - do we protect you or the Eighth Galaxy? Should we blow up those portals or not?”

The Prime Minister couldn’t answer his question.

Lu Bixing took this opportunity to interrupt: “How about I go in place of you, Prime Minister? I’m young and can run; Lin can be with me, and I can even hack into their network while I’m there. Their long-distance network system and passcodes are very complicated, I want to try my hands at it, and in case…”

The other three men in the room responded all at once: “No.”

Lu Bixing: “......”

The old Prime Minister sighed and tapped on the young man’s hand in defeat: “I’m getting old, so even if I make a mistake and get held hostage, you all can leave me. Blow up the portals if you all need too...but you’re different.”

He looked at Lu Bixing deeply and thought to himself, *you and all other unreliable young adults here are the future of the Eighth Galaxy.*

“The day we were evacuating the residents, Ankur blocked off our terminals and rejected all our requests to communicate. They later said it was a misunderstanding but I’m doubtful of that. As for the situation in the Seventh Galaxy, it has always been more talk and rumors than action, so I think we should consider the worst-case scenario...for example, what if Ankur is actually working with these pirates behind our backs?” Lin Jingheng tapped lightly on the meeting table and a real-time galactic map appeared on top. He reached over to change the date to Ankur’s invitation while the stars shifted on the map with his touch. “I have two proposals. First, clean up all transfer portals leading opposite the direction of the Union.”

The little dots representing the transfer portals on the map disappeared as Lin Jingheng spoke: “Most of these portals were remnants of old smugglers from generations ago and should have already been cleared out. Engineering department, take Saturday and Weasel out and quickly get rid of all these half-hidden and hidden transfer portals, leave only one for the Silver Ten to use. Then send out a small fleet of terminal guards to watch, that should be enough.”

Lu Bixing: “Sure, no problem.”

“Second, no matter what Ankur wants to do--whether it’s filming for publicity, holding a ceremony, or getting married, we will be the ones to decide the location. Let Ankur bring his unarmed mercenary fleet to the Eighth Galaxy, we won’t be entering his territory.”

The Prime Minister nodded slightly: “Of course, this would be the best-case scenario, but they may not accept this request. Last time General Ankur already visited us without arms. Commander Lin, as diplomatic courtesy and etiquette, we should be visiting them this time or else how will we show our sincerity?”

Lin Jingheng answered without hesitation: “My profession is war, not diplomacy. I never even had a single bit of sincerity toward Ankur in the first place.”

Thus, the problem returned to square one--Lin Jingheng was only concerned about the safety and security of the galaxy, and all these other friendly treaties were like a joke to him. He didn’t care if anything went through or not.

But the Prime Minister cared, and the Minister of Finance cared.

The noble master Lin was someone who didn’t know responsibility unless he was put in charge; for him, having enough food to not starve and enough missiles to fight his battles were all that mattered. Everything else was secondary on his priority list. However, the problem the Prime Minister currently faced was rebuilding the economy of the Eighth Galaxy, reestablishing the trust in the government and monetary system. It wasn’t something as easy as huddling up and handing out nutrient syringes to the population to make sure people weren’t dying of hunger.

To put it simply, the current supply of nutrient syringes the government could provide would solve the general issue of starvation, but the syringes themselves had more meaning in the current economy than a simple meal for the next two months. Thanks to the mess left by the late Prince of Cayley, nutrient syringes were also the current currency of the Eighth Galaxy---before the weak economic system of the Eighth Galaxy could flourish and enough trust could be earned to circulate fiat money, the system of nutrient syringes would be the core of the Eighth Galaxy economy for a long time to come. However, nutrient syringes themselves did not even fit the physical criteria to be a commodity currency; they can’t be stored for a long time and were a perishable item used in everyday life. It would be difficult to find a replacement for them during a time like this, and in order to find a way out, the Prime Minister needed to cling onto the help from other galaxies.

Ankur had already shown his cards and given his offers; in addition, his status as an ex-subordinate of Lu Xin and bold personality struck a chord with the Eighth Galaxy. Lin Jingheng’s suspicion that Ankur was associated with the AUS was almost starting to sound unreasonable--what could Ankur even get from the pirates?

Aside from Lu Bixing who insisted on staying by Lin Jingheng’s side, everyone under the Prime Minister wanted to keep the relationship with the Seventh Galaxy.

Lin Jingheng was like a stern legal worker in the office that was so obsessed with security to the point he nitpicked at every little threat, making it hard for the office to function normally under his suspicion.

“How about this,” Monoeyed Hawk broke the stalemate, “since we’re now allies, we still need to attend his ceremony if we were invited to go. But we will need to outline an emergency plan just in case. If Ankur really has connections to pirates, then during the ribbon ceremony, we’ll….”

While the Eighth Galaxy was struggling internally with their actions moving forward, Ankur’s hostile message passed through spacetime and arrived at the City of Angels.

“To make sure Lin Jingheng doesn’t close off the Eighth Galaxy, there needs to be someone outside the transfer portals whom he can’t give up--I think that Prime Minister of the Eighth Galaxy is a good candidate. Even though I still don’t get why he can’t just get rid of that old man and take charge if he really plans on staying there long-term. If this old man isn’t enough to stop him, we’ll try and physically drag Lin Jingheng out himself; he can’t possibly isolate himself outside of the Eighth Galaxy, right? The Eighth Galaxy Galactic Forces were born from the Silver Ten; they are quite something, yet even a ferocious tiger can’t stand against a pack of hungry wolves. They may be elites but they are also lacking in numbers - don’t you guys pride yourselves on the size of your troops? You can split up the fleet into two, have one side hold the Eighth Galaxy forces down while the other sneaks in from the back, and then charge in before they can isolate their galaxy. I’ll send in a cargo of supplies and work with you guys as a bait to lure them out.”

Wang Ailun turned off the screen after he relayed the message and turned to Woolf, “Ankur is an old and sly fox who won’t hesitate to sell out anything or anyone around him. He only wants to benefit himself with minimal effort. Lu Xin scolded him back then for this and tried to send him out for a few years, yet unfortunately these few years outside didn’t turn him into a better soldier, only a better parasite that latches onto whatever benefits him. He can calculate behind Lin Jingheng today, see the tides turn the next day and turn against us; he’s not trustworthy.”

Woolf shook his head.

Ankur might seem harmless and easy to manipulate, yet Woolf was well aware that he had at least three different connections behind his back right now. He had more faces than the social butterflies of the Union and could cry by the graves of Lu Xin while holding hands with pirates behind his back.

Wang Ailun added: “His plan to deal with Lin Jingheng also won’t work. You should know the boy; he’s been a ferocious wolf ever since he was a kid who won’t trust a single word from any man alive. Why would he fall into Ankur’s trap so easily?”

Woolf commented lightly: “Neither of the siblings took after the Lin family, they’re both more like Laura Gordon--how’s the situation with Harris?”

“Harris is already on the move in the shadows. If this plan goes well, we can finally engrave Lin Jingheng’s name on the memorial of heroes in the Union and clean out the toxic pests inside the organization with his hands. It’s to kill two birds with one stone.” Wang Ailun pulled out a biochip as he spoke, “Also, I decoded his personal device while he was unconscious in the medical capsule and made a copy of the data inside.”

The modern human lives for too long, so human memory can become unreliable sometimes. Therefore, some people would choose to use digital devices to record their memories like how ancients wrote diaries. For people like Hope who were constantly engaging in intellectual activities, it was an especially good tool that could record all his memories and interactions in real-time.

“Harris used the fake name Hope in the Eighth Galaxy. He deleted a lot of his memory records when he was first captured in the Eighth Galaxy, so we only received information during the times he was kept hostage. There is quite a bit of information on here that we just finished decoding; there’s a lot of interesting people, one of whom is a young man who seemed to be naturally immune to the Rainbow Virus called Lu Bixing.”

Woolf was slightly shocked: “His last name is Lu?”

“Oh, his father is an admirer of Commander Lu Xin so he changed his name to Lu.” Wang Ailun said, “RV-II-type Rainbow Virus is highly contagious, and while we discovered that vaccuocerebrals tend to have some sort of immunity stronger than the average person, we’ve never run into a case where anyone who was in close range with the virus would not be infected. Isn’t that quite interesting? However, the person I wanted to show you today is not him.”

Wang Ailun inserted the chip into his personal device as he spoke and the photo of someone popped up before Woolf--it was Saturday.

Woolf asked: “Who is this?”

“This person is one of the core members of the Eighth Galaxy Galactic Forces named ‘Saturday’. He used to be from a family of smugglers that coincidentally ran into Lin Jingheng; he seemed quite fond of Harris and would often come chat with the old man. He’s quite young, and it seems like he does have some of his own personal issues.” Wang Ailun said, “After going through the history of his conversations, we discovered something interesting...this young man called Saturday’s whole family was killed for being engaged in human trafficking, which was related to a horrific experiment constructing human pets that would threaten the ecosystem of the black market.”

Woolf’s head slowly lifted.

Wang Ailun gave a courteous smile: “That’s right, they were the errand boys of the Nuwa Project in the Eighth Galaxy. And the young man doesn’t seem to know that the person who took him in was the same person who outed his whole family. His friends that raised him were all the same people who chased after his father; and one of his best friends, the Mister Lu I mentioned earlier who was immune to the Rainbow Virus, also has some strange connections with the Nuwa Project--say, isn’t this quite interesting?”

December 20th, NSC 276----the first year of the New Era.

It was a time of trouble.

The Union found the directors of the Eden Committee and its higher-level staff guilty; at the same time, the Parliament and Highest Court of Justice announced that they would uphold the justice and right of the late loyal Commander. They called for the unity of the people to fight against their common enemy.

At the same time, the General of the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia signed the treaty with the Eighth Galaxy and officially opened up the terminal between the two galaxies. On the outermost planet of the Seventh Galaxy, Planet Sabien, the grand red carpet and ribbon cutting ceremony was held as if they were celebrating a galactic holiday, earning a crowd of curious residents to watch.

Ankur proposed to rename Plant Sabien to Planet Peace.

## Chapter 115 - Eat Shit, Lin Jingheng!

The Seventh Galaxy was located in a very unique place in space, especially near the borders: it was between the commonly acknowledged “civilization” and “uncivilized territory”. It wasn’t like the Eighth Galaxy where order didn’t exist, yet at the same time the sheer number of immigrants and smugglers from the Eighth Galaxy cast a different kind of light on the Seventh Galaxy.

On the newly renamed planet Peace, security was tight and the streets were considerably deserted. Many people had died since the war broke out, but more people survived in the midst of chaos and maintained order in their small society. The survivors were healthy and looked to be keeping a decent quality of life, even at the frontlines.

“When the war started, General Ankur immediately took over the military reserves of the Seventh Galaxy,” an escort from the Seventh Galaxy explained to Prime Minister Edward, “he might have used some force, but...how do you say it, during times like this you can’t leave any room for negotiation or hesitation. The cannons from the pirates don’t wait, you’ll be dead if you don’t react fast enough.”

Prime Minister Edward attempted to sound them out and said: “I’ve heard that the Seventh Galaxy was also more peaceful compared to the other galaxies.”

The escort smiled but didn’t respond.

The old Prime Minister might have been an honest and straightforward person, but he wasn’t stupid; he could tell from the response of the escort that Lin Jingheng’s suspicion that Ankur had some connections with the pirates might have some truth behind it. Back when Ankur fought on the same front as the Union against the space pirates, he might have already been making secret negotiations under the table while the battlefield was busy.

Yet as he passed through the clean and peaceful roads of the planet, the Prime Minister felt he couldn’t criticize an ex-subordinate of Lu Xin for betraying their commander’s ideals to side with the pirates.

If he had skin thick enough to play games with different forces to exchange for the peace of a galaxy, Prime Minister Edward would also hold the hand of the devil if he was given a chance to choose.

Crowds of residents waved and greeted them as the Prime Minister’s escort slowly drove by.

The Prime Minister also held out a hand to greet the residents out of courtesy; he didn’t know why someone like him would deserve such a warm welcome on foreign land and was caught by surprise. He turned his head back and asked his escort: “How did you all manage to get so many people over? This ceremony must have cost the Seventh Galaxy a lot of money.”

The escort was a strange individual that Ankur hired who would answer anything as long as it didn’t touch on sensitive topics: “We didn’t, the only people we hired to attend were the ones already waiting at the site. These people all came on their own; perhaps they were all immigrants from the Eighth Galaxy that recognized you.”

However, the cheering crowd wasn’t here because they were bored; the enthusiasm down the whole street of over ten kilometers was clear. Some people tossed flowers toward the car, others wanted to blow kisses--only to be blocked by the security guards along the street, who instead received the kisses from these citizens.

One guard’s face had a moment of awkwardness but wasn’t angry. The crowd’s optimistic vibes might have affected the overall mood; the guard was unable to scold such inappropriate acts.

The escort said: “These immigrants have been living a rough life ever since they moved here. They were like the outcasts of the Seventh Galaxy’s society, but nobody was willing to move back either...ah, sorry, I didn’t mean that the Eighth Galaxy is bad….”

Prime Minister Edward shook his head.

The escort then added: “But it’s better now since Eden is gone. The Seventh and Eighth Galaxy also signed a treaty, we’ll be a family from now on. Perhaps these people also finally found their sense of belonging again.”

Prime Minister Edward held out his hand towards the crowd. A child being held up by his father poked his head out and held the old Prime Minister’s hand with a look of surprise.

The child’s hand was a little wet, perhaps he just ate.

The Prime Minister smiled and thought, *I sure wish that cold Commander could see this place*.

For this trip, the Prime Minister took the directors of the Finance and Planning departments and a few engineers along with him. The engineers came in place of Lu Bixing, who temporarily held the position as the director of special advisory with the authority of the Prime Minister. Thus, the unwritten rule was that between this young man and the Prime Minister, one of them must stay on the capitol planet while the other was out.

Lin Jingheng had deployed an elite security team to escort them that carried anti-disruption energy fields. If Ankur really turned on them at the last minute, the guards could immediately take the Prime Minister directly through the energy field to the starship they arrived on.

The starship was filled with a newly produced batch of training mechs the Eighth Galaxy had recently made. These mechs were small enough to fit only one person, and after removing their armory they barely passed the security check of the Seventh Galaxy--but it was a successful move in getting past the Seventh Galaxy. It seemed that while the director of the Engineering Department, Mister Lu, may often be an embarrassing mess at home, he was still quite a reliable mechanic during times of need.

As for the decision to remove the armory of these training mechs, it was to protect these old government officials from hurting themselves by firing aimlessly. Therefore, all training mechs had all their energy sources reserved for emergency warping through a dummy system that would activate automatically once it left the gravitational field of the planet and would send the mechs to the border of the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies.

And Lin Jingheng himself would be waiting by the border with his missiles ready to fire at their enemies.

This was the result of the two completely opposing opinions being forcefully merged together.

Of course, the Prime Minister still thought they were being a little too overprotective.

Ankur was already dressed up and waiting by the ceremony plaza as he heard the escort driving over from afar. He looked up at the sky knowing that Lin Jingheng’s missiles were watching over him and curled his lips up, then thought: *You don’t even have the Silver Ten with you during a chaotic time like this, how many mechs could you possibly bring out even if you planned ahead?*

They only wanted Lin Jingheng’s life. It was a small price to pay if one man’s death could bring a happy ending for everyone.

Besides, even if Lin Jingheng managed to isolate the Eighth Galaxy, one side was the Seventh Galaxy and the empty void of space, the other was the AUS headquarters - where would he run? He would be locking himself in with no escape.

A proud smile lit up Ankur’s face as he thought about his plan and turned to welcome Prime Minister Edward.

At the same time, the engineers that followed the Prime Minister quietly connected into the Seventh Galaxy’s internet network to use it as a medium to hack into the Seventh Galaxy’s long-distance communication system.

Lu Bixing, who was forcefully made to stay on Qiming received the message that the connection was successful and jumped from the sofa in his house: “Man, that was slow. If I were there myself, I could hack into the internal network by the time I closed in on the atmosphere--wait for me, I’ll go over to the command post and find a supercomputer to give you guys instructions.”

A large screen suddenly appeared on a wall the moment he finished his sentence and automatically connected into the main control system of the Milky Way City Military Base.

Lu Bixing: “Wow.”

Zhanlu’s voice rang up inside “The Home of Commander Lin and Engineer 001”: “Please let me assist you, Headmaster Lu. If you want to, you can even work from home.”

“Zhanlu?” Lu Bixing asked, “Didn’t you head out to the border with Lin?”

“The commander connected me directly into the digital butler system you built in the house, which is equivalent to me building a backup inside the house. Of course, this backup is only my system and not my physical body. I hope you don’t mind the electricity bill caused by me as well.”

“Why would I mind?” Lu Bixing laughed, “Remember how many times he told me to leave and go away when I asked to borrow you on Beijing? Hahaha...by the way, can I ask you to relay messages for me to Lin?”

“Of course,” Zhanlu said, “but please let me confirm that you two are not currently fighting before I relay your message, or I will be banned from speaking by the commander.”

“We’re not fighting this time...what should I tell him?” Lu Bixing thought about it for a moment before telling Zhanlu, “give him a kiss for me.”

Lin Jingheng just received a report that the Prime Minister had safely met with Ankur and that the Eighth Galaxy Forces were also ready to activate the explosives for the transfer portals leading outside the Union.

Lin Jingheng: “Received. Do one last round of inspection to check if there are any signs of life around the area, get ready to activate the bombs and stay on guard.”

“Yes sir!”

That was when Zhanlu interrupted with absolutely no care for the atmosphere of the room: “Sir, Headmaster Lu asks me to bring a kiss for you. Should I deliver it verbally or change to human form and deliver it in action?”

Lin Jingheng: “......”

The soldiers inside the meeting room couldn’t laugh and lowered their heads as their shoulders trembled from desperate attempts to hold in their laughter.

The corner of Lin Jingheng’s eye twitched: “Shut up. No talking for three hours unless it is an absolute emergency.”

“Outer layer transfer portals inspection complete.”

“Explosives on standby.”

“Sending out an alert to all residents’ personal devices---”

Every citizen of the Eighth Galaxy received three alerts on their personal devices, and soon after the first round of cleanup began.

In the void of space, the small ‘miracles’ connecting spacetime disappeared one by one. All stations and planets around the area set up their shields as powerful streams of high-energy particles flew by, sending disruptions all the way to the Seventh Galaxy.

Lin Jingheng suddenly remembered an old documentary he watched when he was little about how the very first transfer portal in the world was built.

Back then, the ancients had very limited reach in space and held curious imaginings about the vast universe. Thinking that there would be other civilizations outside of the Milky Way, people risked their fragile and short lives to explore the unknown.

They used transfer portals to connect with each other in the realm of the unknown and found their own sense of belonging.

It began with particle experiments, then a few centuries later they expanded their test subjects into inanimate objects; two generations later, they sent out a white mice, then a sheep, gorilla...the first person that walked out of the transfer portal was a hero with his name engraved in history. There were only two sentences he said after he returned.

The first one: “I’m back.”

The second was “I’ve never felt such a strong sense of belonging towards human civilization.”

These two lines opened up the great Age of Exploration in space.

Transfer networks were then called the umbilical cord of human civilization in space.

Perhaps nobody would’ve imagined back then that two eras later, their descendants would personally cut off this umbilical cord.

On Sabien--now Peace, the multimedia equipment around the ceremony received a strong disruption before Prime Minister Edward could even begin his speech. Soon after, the alarm for high-energy particle waves rang as it indicated a disturbance larger than a solar storm from the Seventh Galaxy’s sun.

The crowd grew restless as Ankur’s expression changed.

Prime Minister Edward paused as the microphone malfunctioned from the disruption, then turned towards Ankur who had a grave expression on his face: “It’s nothing, General Ankur. The pirates have been quite active within the Seventh and Eighth Galaxy lately. To stop their advances from the outside, we are currently cleaning up all the illegal terminals into the Eighth Galaxy. Don’t worry, aside from around two hours of signal disruption it will not affect the Seventh Galaxy directly.”

For a split second, Ankur mustered up all his professionalism to maintain a calm expression on his face as he returned a fake smile: “Is that so? Commander Lin sure is careful and thorough.”

The noise from the disruption hadn’t passed and the engineers were all frantically repairing the equipment onsite. Most people on the Seventh Galaxy were more collected than the Eighth Galaxy and didn’t run around in panic regardless of where they were.

Prime Minister Edward clapped his hands together and made a small gesture of apology behind the podium then turned to Ankur: “The Eighth Galaxy doesn’t have a large military, nor do we have as many supplies and resources as you, so we can only attempt to shorten the frontline…”

Buzz--

Another round of noise rang from the speakers before the Prime Minister could finish.

“My apologies, it seems like the second batch of portals got blown up.”

Ankur clenched his fist tightly behind his back and walked away quickly, his secretary following behind him.

Ankur hissed in anger: “He could’ve chosen any other time to blow up those portals, but he purposely did it now to mock me!”

The secretary leaned in and whispered: “General, the people over there said they will take care of it, we just need to follow the plan and don’t worry about it.”

“How will they take care of this?” Ankur harshly pressed his finger into the palm of his hand. Then, he let out a sigh and said, “Lin Jingheng cut off the terminals leading outside the Union...if the pirates want to make an invasion, they will have to pass through the Seventh Galaxy. I can’t let them turn my territory into their battlefield with Lin Jingheng; I can lend a hand if necessary, but I won’t let them mess with the Seventh Galaxy.”

The secretary quickly caught the intention behind his words: “General, you’re saying…”

“Inform all planets and stations to pull up their shields,” Ankur said in a low voice, “be prepared for battle. Lock down all terminals near the planet and keep a close eye out on ‘those people’ that snuck in, get rid of them if they do anything funny.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Also keep an eye on these people in the Eighth Galaxy and their guards, blow up their starship if necessary.”

The secretary: “....Huh?”

The secretary was confused and didn’t know who his boss stood with for a moment. He felt as if Ankur was playing with fire on both hands and asked: “Then...General, who are we helping?”

“Can’t you judge by how things play out?” Ankur slapped his secretary’s head, “You dumb…”

The ground suddenly shook before he could finish, and immediately after, a sharp siren rang out inside the ceremonial hall. The crowd inside the hall began fleeing out of the building in a panic.

The secretary was also shocked: “Who did this? I haven’t even given out your order, General.”

Within an instant, Ankur’s personal devices received a flood of messages.

He picked up the director of the closest defense squad near planet Peace: “What happened!?”

Perhaps they didn’t expect Lin Jingheng to blow up the portals at this time and weren’t prepared for the signal disruption; the voice of the guard was cutting out.

“General Ank….suddenly...we….”

Ankur: “What?”

The screen on the personal device was like a glass window that had gotten scratched by a sharp rock; the director of the defense squad opened his mouth through the screen but no sound came out.

Ankur grew furious at this awful signal: “I fucking swear, eat shit, Lin Jingheng!”

The director’s eyes suddenly widened on his screen and he turned his head abruptly, then within an instant, the screen returned to normal quality. Ankur watched as a wall of fire rose behind the patrolling director of defense on the screen and immediately realized the mech had been hit.

The next second, the entire screen was consumed in flames and the connection cut off.

Ankur’s eyes widened as the ground shook violently again--the aerospace shield of this planet was activated.

Was it Lin Jingheng?

No, that wasn’t it; the Eighth Galaxy’s Prime Minister and government officials were still on the planet. The ceremony was being broadcast live throughout the entire Seventh Galaxy, and the large batch of supplies Ankur planned on using as a bait was still on standby, there would be no reason for Lin Jingheng to act right now….

Ankur pieced together the puzzle within a second.

He was the real bait himself!

The transfer portals leading outside the Union in the Eighth Galaxy had been cleared aside from one underground terminal that was currently being protected with two layers of code. Saturday finished reporting in, and before Lin Jingheng could respond, Zhanlu spoke up despite being ordered to not talk: “Sir, the long-distance scan detected that a large fleet of armed forces suddenly appeared within the Seventh Galaxy.”

“Large fleet of armed forces?” Lin Jingheng said coldly, “Looks like Ankur is way more dedicated than I thought. Let the Prime Minister and his team retreat immediately, we’ll go pick them up. Line up!”

“Sir, are we preparing to illegally pass through the Seventh Galaxy border?”

“We’re not illegally passing through,” Lin Jingheng said, “we’re ‘illegally’ opening fire on them. Let me see how thick Ankur’s skin is to do such a thing under Lu Xin’s statue!”

Meanwhile, the newly named Peace was in complete chaos in direct contrast to its orderly atmosphere earlier. A guard quickly made their way through the fleeing crowd towards Prime Minister Edward. The energy field was already in preparation, but a laser shot fired through the chest of the guard amidst the disorder. The guard fell to the ground before they could make it into the energy field; soon after, the ceremonial hall shook violently as Prime Minister Edward tripped. A hand pulled him up before he fell to the ground.

Sounds of gunfire quickly filled the hall while the Prime Minister turned his head to see Ankur holding him up. The old Prime Minister attempted to struggle out of the General’s grip with no luck.

At the same time, another alarm came up within the ceremonial hall: “Galactic missile passed through anti-missile system, galactic missile passed through anti-missile system!”

## Ch 116 - Do You Have an Answer?

Prime Minister Edward looked at Ankur as if the latter had gone mad.

“What are you looking at, I didn’t fucking blow this up!” Ankur yelled at him, “These are my people, my soldiers, and my planet! Do you think I’m crazy!? Guards--”

The door of the ceremonial hall broke open as a whole line of tanks busted in. The armed tanks followed energy reactions and locked on their targets regardless if the people were armed, then shot dead any suspicious individuals that stood in its way without hesitation.

Ankur ordered frantically: “Get the people on the armed mobiles and tanks, quick!”

The guards inside the hall set off the alarms, and after a short moment of panic inside the hall, some people stood up to help maintain order for the crowd.

Once the crowd had settled down, all of the Prime Minister’s guards ran up and pointed their guns at Ankur. The guards on Ankur’s side also reacted at the same time while the Prime Minister’s guards opened up an energy field, ready to leave at any time.

Ankur immediately caught on, pressing down the gun from his guards and walking up to the Prime Minister while holding his hands up. He didn’t mind the guns pointing at him and quickly told the Prime Minister: “There will only be a few minutes before the missiles land once they pass through the system, are you guys sure you want to waste your time arguing with me? The energy field leads directly to your starship, right? You passed through security so it’s impossible for you all to carry galactic-grade weapons, which means you guys have something that can let you all escape this place in an instant--are you all sure you have the technology to warp under the AUS disruptions? What happens if you guys can’t get past them? Fly out of the atmosphere right into the enemy’s firing range?”

Prime Minister Edward wiped off the spit on his face in disgust, thinking Ankur was getting a little too close with that big mouth.

Yet within an instant, the Prime Minister also made a decision as he held his hand out and gestured for his guards to lower their guns, turn off the energy field, and keep quiet. He then turned back to Ankur and said: “You’re also not better than them!”

Ankur let out a loud sneer in response while another four armed mobiles drove by. Within the short exchange of words, the entire crowd inside the ceremonial hall was cleared as people fled on the tanks and armed mobiles.

Ankur waved at Prime Minister Edward and said: “Get on!”

The ceremonial hall was in shambles by the time everyone left. Prime Minister Edward noticed that the large structure collapsed almost immediately after their armed mobile flew out of the hall. Soon after, the missile landed about twenty kilometers away, its aftershock almost piercing through the shields of the tanks and armed mobiles making their escape. All of the drivers inside the fleeing vehicles opened up their energy fields, then disappeared before the bright light of the missile explosion. Prime Minister Edward could almost feel the seatbelt inside the vehicle choking him as the world around him blanked out.

The next moment, they passed through the rough ride of the energy field and drove right inside the mech launching dock of the planet. The old Prime Minister caught his breath and almost found himself crawling out of the armed mobile only to be greeted with a crowd of people clearly not from the military.

“This planet just made its way into the middle of two intergalactic terminals, it’s doomed to be caught in crossfire,” Ankur explained quickly, “Eastern half of the hemisphere gets twenty minutes of time to retreat and escape, the Western half will stay against the sun temporarily for up to one hour. Send out a broadcast, announce it multiple times because the public signals are unstable right now. This bastard Lin Jingheng, how dare he disrupt my signals at this time!”

Prime Minister Edward turned to him in shock: “How is twenty minutes enough to retreat!?”

The guard beside Ankur said: “All residents’ houses are equipped with an energy field that’s automatically set to the closest coordinates near aerospace launching docks. They don’t need to do anything; it’s all pre-programmed into the energy field.”

The Prime Minister let out a sigh of relief: “That’s good, can everyone manage to escape?”

Ankur waved him off rudely: “You’re fucking kidding me.”

“What will happen if they can’t escape in time?”

“They can crawl into their underground bomb shelter.”

The Prime Minister was stunned and wondered why his engineers didn’t think of this: “Do bomb shelters work?”

Ankur was losing his temper at this point: “Kiss my ass if they work! Can you block off a galactic missile by digging up a hole in your backyard?”

He turned his bloodshot eyes to the sky and saw the eerie and demonic looking clouds past the countless shields set up by the mechs on the dock. Lights of misfortune created from the clash of missiles and anti-missiles on ground passed through the clouds every once in a while, as if counting down the impending doom.

Only ancient battlefields could create a ground filled with corpses and deserted land, allowing survivors to still have words to describe the hellish scene.

What were they left with now? Under the threat of galactic-grade weapons, human lives were like grains of sand that disappeared into stardust within a blink of an eye.

Perhaps this was the lingering effect that began when the Union crushed the old Era with force and established a new order.

Missiles and cannons built the strong foundation of the great Interstellar Union that lasted over two centuries, and today that same gunfire was ripping the peaceful civilization apart from the inside.

“Retreat! Hurry up and retreat!” Ankur yelled, “If they want to fight, let Lin Jingheng fight them, we’re retreating! First Fleet, let all unarmed starships flee first, everyone else stay behind and come with me! Contact neighboring planets and space stations on the terminal to take refuge---”

“Announce entering a state of emergency for the Eighth Galaxy,” Lin Jingheng said, “Turan, I'm leaving it up to you. If anything happens on our end, be prepared to cut off communication between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies, don’t wait for me. If I need to, we’ll find time to return to the emergency terminal from the other side.”

“No problem.” Turan answered without hesitation, “Don’t worry, I’ll leave you alone to do what you need to do.”

Lin Jingheng’s lip curled up slightly at the response; if it were someone else, he’d probably need to give a longer lecture, but this was Turan. This Captain of the Ninth Squadron was infamously harsh and cold-hearted, every order she received was an order through and through. Even if her own family was outside the galaxy, she would not hesitate to block off the terminals if she was ordered to do so.

As for the pirate fleets that arrived through the intergalactic terminals, they were as fast as lightning and were closing in on the formerly named planet Sabien as they surrounded the small planet like a massive cloud. Even with Zhanlu’s mental network range it was impossible to see the full fleet from end to end.

“They sure came prepared.” Lin Jingheng was like a deadly bayonet that pierced through the side wing of the pirate fleet with his men and fired their way into enemy territory with their cannons. The pirate tsunami was completely forced to the defensive for a moment as he said, “Tell the Prime Minister he can get out of the atmosphere now, we’ll retreat once we pick him up.”

They didn’t expect Ankur to summon such a grand fleet of pirates. The old planet Sabien had a very small population and had two other satellite towns neighboring the same terminals, so casualties would be unavoidable if war broke out in this area. Of course, Ankur couldn’t possibly hurt his own people, right? Therefore the tools they designed for the old Prime Minister were to help him make a quick escape in case anything went wrong.

Yet facing a whole fleet of heavily armed pirates was a completely different story. Perhaps even the original designer of the training mechs Lu Bixing himself couldn’t guarantee that these little fly-like mechs could successfully make an emergency warp within this web of pirates. To be safe, Lin Jingheng could only personally escort the old Prime Minister and their team.

“Commander, the Prime Minister responded that Ankur is not the mastermind. The Seventh Galaxy Militia is currently helping the residents out, he can’t get on the same public terminal as the residents…”

Lin Jingheng interrupted the guard: “Cut the nonsense, we don’t have much time left, tell that old man to hurry up!”

The next moment, through Zhanlu’s mental network he saw a team of what seemed like a vanguard mech fleet fly out of the atmosphere of the planet and shoot right into the weak spot of the pirate fleet that Lin Jingheng had forcefully opened up earlier. They desperately attempted to force their way out of the barricade as a swarm of unarmed starships followed behind them. It was dangerous to keep large amounts of untrained civilians on a military-grade mech; even if they were just passengers, they could only stay inside the limited ecopods provided inside the mechs. It would be possible to flee with a few people, but a mass migration like this would require a large and heavy starship.

Due to the equipment and supplies on civilian starships, a filled starship was almost like heavy baggage that could not compare to a military-mech. Even at full speed, it was impossible for the starships to catch up to the vanguard fleet attempting to pave the road for escape. As the guards that were ordered to protect the starships, the vanguard team could not leave the civilians behind and naturally had to give up their speed to let the starships keep up.

Yet during a scenario like this where the enemy had a significant advantage in numbers and firepower, giving up the mobility of the vanguard fleet was a fatal drawback for the Seventh Galaxy.

Lin Jingheng’s expression grew grave, yet before he could do anything, the large pirate fleet they cut through easily like paper earlier gathered back up again and surrounded the poor starship fleet in a deadly triangular barricade.

The starships were like a harmless large fish in a pool of man-eating sharks. In the spur of the moment, the starships all pulled up their civilian passes like a giant glowing olive branch through the mental network.

However, it was already too late; the pirates ignored the signs and fired a round of merciless cannons toward the glowing olive branches.

Lin Jingheng clenched his fist on the side quietly.

“Sir, a communication request from the Seventh Galaxy---”

“Lin…..buzz…”

The signal disruption was clearly still in effect as it cut off the communication the second after it connected.

Soon after, the Prime Minister’s signal connected in. The Eighth Galaxy’s internal network was protected by a special passcode that could withstand disruption and connect smoothly under this situation--yet the person speaking from the Prime Minister’s personal device was Ankur.

Ankur: “There’s about two billion people living on the planet and the surrounding satellites, Commander Lin, you….”

“Without your silent consent, how could such a large pirate fleet show up here without warning?” Lin Jingheng cut him off ruthlessly, “You were the one that invited the wolf in the house because you tried to outsmart the pirates, what does it have anything to do with me? You deserved it.”

Ankur: “You….”

“I’ll give you three minutes, turn my men in,” Lin Jingheng said, “otherwise your satellites won’t even survive to see the cannons from the pirates!”

It was clear that Lin Jingheng wasn’t joking around this time. The Eighth Galaxy fleet was right near a satellite by the planet, and by the time Lin Jingheng gave his ultimatum, their missiles were locked on that tiny satellite city.

Ankur cried out from the other end: “Lin Jingheng, you’re the director of the Silver Fortress and Top Commander of the Union, did not you swear into the military the day you walked in the Black Orchid Academy? Did you not say with your own mouth that you would protect all legal citizens of the Union, regardless of age or gender, with your own life until death!?”

Lin Jingheng sneered back, “Sorry, you guys ripped the claws off your ‘Top Commander of the Union’, so now he’s just a poor man who doesn’t even have enough power to protect the Eighth Galaxy. I don’t have energy to join your dogpile.”

Ankur: “Do you even have a good conscience!?”

He didn’t even hesitate at saying the words ‘good conscience.’

Lin Jingheng’s heart was set in stone: “Give me my men, or I’m opening fire!”

Ankur howled back: “Fuck off!”

Prime Minister Edward knew that Lin Jingheng really didn’t have that many tricks up his sleeves and had no way to protect two whole galaxies from this large pirate fleet.

It was already difficult for the Eighth Galaxy Forces to be able to safely pull back the Prime Minister and his team from this mess. The most reasonable course of action from here on out would be to return to the Eighth Galaxy, blow up the transfer portals, and block off the pirates. Was the situation here in the Seventh Galaxy not a result of Ankur reaping the seeds he’d sown?

“Prime Minister, let’s go.”

Under Lin Jingheng’s pressure, Ankur could only open up the terminal and let the Prime Minister leave.

At the same time, the footage of the first fleet of starship being blown up by the pirates finally arrived on land after passing through the layers of signal disruption. Cries of despair filled the mech dock within an instant. An old man, perhaps who had a relative on that starship, ran out from the crowd and fell to the Prime Minister’s feet as he hit his head on the ground and called out a name. Two guards pulled the old man off the ground and carried him to the side.

“Prime Minister!” A voice called out from the crowd, “Prime Minister, please save us! I used to live on planet Cayley in the Eighth Galaxy!”

“I’m from Qiming, please take me back!”

“Prime Minister, help!”

“Prime Minister, please take us….”

Prime Minister Edward turned his head abruptly to see the same child who hadtouched his hand earlier before the ceremony. The child was still being held by his parents, but unlike before the small face was filled with tears and snot as the poor child didn’t understand what was happening.

A guard from the Eighth Galaxy called out: “Prime Minister!”

The old Prime Minister felt as if his soul was being ripped into pieces. Yet he had no choice, because even though the Military and government of the Eighth Galaxy were separate, Lin Jingheng would not listen to him.

Though he knew this was slightly biased; even if Lin Jingheng listened to him, could he possibly make such a big decision on his own?

The Prime Minister finally turned around and entered the mech with a heavy heart.

Ankur also realized at that instant that nobody would help him anymore. He summoned all the forces on the planet to personally lead them against the battlefield, but he also didn’t have many troops.

He held bad intentions to lure out all the important figures of the Eighth Galaxy, but because he was fearful of alarming Lin Jingheng, he cut down a lot of armed forces around the planet and its surrounding satellites to the point where he had even less people than Lin Jingheng had brought with him to the border.

He was like a hopeless grasshopper that ate his own poison as he held out his arms hopelessly against a fate of darkness.

The cannon fire and missiles of the space pirates pressed down on this small grasshopper.

“Prime Minister, look, the commanding ship of the Seventh Galaxy fleet!”

The Prime Minister was still recovering from the migraine caused by the ascension of the mech when he stumbled towards the camera of the military recording. He saw that Ankur’s commanding ship was like an old and broken spear that attempted to open up a path of survival amidst this chaos.

He was too angry, too aggressive; he’d sailed out too quickly.

A missile scratched the tail of Ankur’s commanding ship as the mech fell out of the terminal from the side. The mech almost hit its guard as the guarding mechs quickly dispersed. Before Ankur could return to the terminal, another missile pieced through the Seventh Galaxy fleet and landed right on the commanding ship--

Bang.

The lingering cover of the coffin closed up as stardust sprinkled against the backdrop of gunfire.

Commander Lin, do you have an answer now?

## Ch 117 - Dust and Smoke

Everyone was stunned.

Lin Jingheng almost thought he was hallucinating and asked subconsciously: “Zhanlu?”

Normally, a commanding ship would be a heavy mech surrounded by a team of mechs closely guarding it, making it difficult to shoot down. Ironically, a place like the frontlines in space was sometimes much safer than on the ground, so it wasn’t surprising for Ankur to come out. Zhanlu quickly pulled up the last recording from the mech and replayed the footage in slow motion on a large screen. The screen expanded like a flower and clearly displayed how that missile had passed through the group of dispersing mechs, flying past an armory of a guarding mech and right through the commanding ship's armory.

Ankur made the right decision in the moment and removed both armories as soon as the missile passed through, but the detached armories and flying missile coincidentally created a deadly angle with no way to escape. Within a short time, both armories exploded simultaneously and created a massive explosion that engulfed the entire commanding ship.

The Seventh Galaxy Central Militia was still a proper military that could remain calm even after realizing they’d lost their commander. Ankur’s vice-commander immediately took on the commanding post and ordered the fleet to charge out amidst enemy fire.

They needed to open up a road of survival for the people praying towards the sky on the planet and the satellites.

“Sir, we have successfully captured the target mech--target mech has landed on the dock--”

“Air pressure is normal, target life signals are normal, medical capsules are on standby--”

Lin Jingheng turned his gaze. The Prime Minister’s escaping mech had safely entered his commanding ship, which meant that they could now make their escape.

In the distance, the Central Militia were like moths flying into a fire as they charged forward together, then turned into dust and smokes under gunfire.

Lin Jingheng ordered quietly: “All ships aim on the enemy's side wing in single-side formation, turn on full acceleration, switch to missile number RA610...be prepared to break through with force. Once we escape the enemy’s disruption range, prepare to emergency warp back to the Eighth Galaxy.”

The entire fleet switched their formation the moment he finished his orders, their large cannons quietly turning. Lin Jingheng could hear footsteps coming from behind and turned slightly to see the Prime Minister limping over to him.

Lin Jingheng exchanged a quick glance with the Prime Minister. The young and handsome commander’s eyes were cold like ice, their surface covered in a layer of steely light. That sharp gaze stared out and pierced through the empty glory of the Eighth Galaxy and turned into a faith of the past.

Lin Jingheng quickly pulled back his gaze.

Zhanlu’s eternally mechanical voice rang out inside the vast mech body: “Persons older than 220 years, younger than 20 years, persons whose physical stats do not meet standard aerospace requirements, persons with external bleeding injuries, or persons with health concerns, please enter the medical capsules or ecopods inside the medical chamber immediately. We will be entering frontline fire range and performing continuous emergency warping…”

There was blood on the Prime Minister that clearly wasn’t his. The old Prime Minister looked more exhausted than usual as he stepped inside the medical capsule. Everyone else got ready into their positions as the physically weaker individuals followed the Prime Minister into their capsules. A few engineers joined the commanding ship’s engineering team to continue their work to fight off the enemy disruption.

Soon after, the entire Eighth Galaxy fleet charged into the side wing of the AUS fleet and very precisely located the weak point of the formation. The deadly RA610 type missile was like a giant tsunami that swept through the enemy fleet as the Eighth Galaxy fleet slid through the openings like a venom that stunned the enemy pirates with a single bite.

The main AUS fleet turned abruptly as Lin Jingheng took his fleet and sailed past the remnant of his enemies. The heavy mech’s shield pushed through all the space waste caused by the explosions as the rest of the AUS mechs that blocked the Eighth Galaxy fleet’s path were knocked off their mental network by Zhanlu. These controlled mechs then crashed towards their own comrades and before the backup pilot could retrieve control of their own networks, Lin Jingheng backed out and forcefully caused a space traffic jam so the pirates would all lose control within that split moment.

If the AUS fleet was like a large web that covered the sky, Lin Jingheng was a deadly hand that forcefully ripped apart the web and temporarily stopped the whole fleet, opening up a hole for the poor fishes caught in the net to escape.

Ankur’s vice commander reacted very quickly and opened fire during this opportunity, then sent a signal down on land for all the civilian starships to take off and escape. During this short moment of stalemate on the battlefield Lin Jingheng made possible, almost all of the starships made it out of the atmosphere successfully.

The starships were like little insects running away from a large storm as they sailed together back towards the center of the Seventh Galaxy to join in with the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia’s main fleet.

Lin Jingheng didn’t comment on them as if he wasn’t the one who purposely opened up a chance for the civilians to escape and ordered: “Retreat.”

The Eighth Galaxy fleet shot out a blinding wave of particle beams at that moment. While the frontline of pirates pulled up their shields and switched to a defensive formation, the Eighth Galaxy fleet took this distraction as a chance to regroup and sail past the stunned pirates in small groups of three before their enemies could react.

Suddenly, an engineer to the side gasped in delight. Both the original Zhanlu on the mech and the backup system at home with Lu Bixing announced in unison: “The Engineering Department has successfully hacked into the Seventh Galaxy Military’s internal network!”

Lin Jingheng almost laughed as he watched these excitable nerds work on hacking into the network system under deadly cannon fire. It was as if they completely ignored the fire around them as they followed Lu Bixing’s lead to pluck out all the garden plants in the enemy’s backyard.

Lu Bixing used up all four walls around him and even the ceiling in the living room as his work screen. The entire room was dark with only the lights of the data glowing like little stars in the galaxy. He spoke to Zhanlu as if he was also mumbling to himself: “This is quite an impressive long-distance network they’ve set up, almost comparable to standard networks before the war. It looks like the other galaxies don’t seem to have many issues with their network compared to us...hm, Ankur used a double-layer line here. One layer is for contacting the Union government and other galaxies’ Central Militia, the other is much smaller that’s used for...who are these people?”

Zhanlu answered: “These are all of General Ankur’s old comrades.”

“Ah,” Lu Bixing scanned the large amount of data, “Yelvich’s personal device signal was cut off before he was assassinated so the surveillance didn’t catch anything...why does this sound like the earliest batch of ‘opium’ we were researching? Oh right, Lin mentioned that he wanted to know the truth behind Commander Lu Xin’s death, so the keyword here must be ‘Lu Xin’....”

The words “Lu Xin”, “Forbidden Fruit”, “Eden Committee”, and “Lin Jingheng” popped up on the screen.

Lu Bixing skimmed and read over the data with incredible speed, quickly capturing the main points of these records. The abyss of darkness hidden behind the Union was instantly exposed before the young man’s eyes as he held his breath and stared in shock for a moment. Then, Lu Bixing pulled himself back to reality and said: “Password protect it, don’t let him find out yet!”

It was already too late.

When Lin Jingheng backed up Zhanlu at home and shared the AI’s powerful data processing and computing functions with him, it was almost like giving the young man a backup credit card to the account. The original Zhanlu was still inside the mech. The second the file was pulled out, before Lu Bixing himself could even look through it, the same file information got sent to the main mech in real-time.

The informer met up in secret with the secretary of the Eden Committee and ratted out Lu Xin. The informer told the Committee that Lu Xin adopted Lin Jingheng in order to get his hands on Laura Gordon’s forbidden fruit.

The forbidden fruit was the ultimate protection for terrorists and criminals of the Union, therefore it must not fall into the hands of others, so they must…

Raging flames engulfed the frontlines.

A moment was too long. It was like a violent gust of wind that blew away all of the questions Lin Jingheng held in his memories. Why was the Committee so insistent on having Lu Xin dead even if it meant dirtying their own hands? Why did Lu Xin live a life of honor and glory only to be forced to escape down the path of no return the day before his public court hearing? Why were the pirates here on the frontlines storming in like madmen, desperate to take his life? It was all because he had the forbidden fruit. Even though he was deaf and blind and ignorant enough to not know the real secrets behind the forbidden fruit, people on this criminal list were still alive. There were still people in the City of Angels trembling with fear that there was even the slightest chance that Lin Jingheng would learn their dirty secrets.

Yet a moment was too short. It was too short for Lin Jingheng to collect his thoughts. Lu Xin had held the forbidden fruit in secret and had Zhanlu protect the system...but why?

Why did the late commander decide to walk down into the depths of hell without even saying a single word to him until death?

An engineer reported to him at that moment: “Commander, the Seventh Galaxy noticed that we hacked into their network.”

Lin Jingheng no longer had the time to worry. The result of him being in a daze for a few seconds was the commanding ship almost being captured by the reorganized pirate fleet. Thankfully, his guarding mechs reacted in real-time and blocked off the enemies with another wave of particle cannons.

This was the dark and ruthless battlefield in space with no room for reminiscing about the past and no room to ask a second question---

Whose name did you see on that list?

Were you in despair when you left the Union?

Did you still believe in the Pledge of Freedom in your heart until the very end?

Lin Jingheng forcefully pulled back his thoughts and said: “Forget about them, we’ll…”

“Commander, the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia is calling for help through their internal network.”

This small but powerful fleet of the Eighth Galaxy that followed Lin Jingheng out already made their way out of the AUS firing range; they were one more warp away from the transfer portals back to the Eighth Galaxy.

“Sir, large fleets of pirates are coming in from the direction of the Seventh Galaxy’s main terminal.”

“Commander, Captain Turan sent a message from the Eighth Galaxy Defense Command Post. She said the preparations for the explosives are ready, they can activate the bombs anytime; she wants to know how much longer you need.”

Meanwhile, as the Seventh Galaxy Militia successfully escorted a large fleet of civilian starships to refuge near the central part of the galaxy, an alarm was suddenly sent out from the Seventh Galaxy’s Military Command post--they had been fully surrounded by the AUS!

That wasn’t the end. Immediately after, all navy posts around the Seventh Galaxy’s alarm sounded off.

The AUS wasn’t only targeting the small former planet Sabien, their target had been the entire Seventh Galaxy all along.

Looking at the big picture, the Freedom Corps were continuing with their biochip business within the Seventh Galaxy while the Central Militias around the Union led by Lu Xin’s old generals continued to rile up their battle with the Union Military forces. The Glory Troops snuck in during the mess only to be blocked off by the Silver Ten that were still within Union territory. This gave the AUS the perfect chance to gather up all of their troops around the eight galaxies to invade the Seventh Galaxy.

“Everyone that deserves to die will die like a hero.”

Ankur never understood the real meaning of this line and would never be able to in the future.

In the starry sea of the Seventh Galaxy, countless emergency starships sailed out of the atmosphere in a desperate attempt to find a path for survival, only to be shot down mercilessly one by one. There could’ve been a whole city’s population on a ship, perhaps the entire team of workers on a satellite city; there was no good or evil, no right or wrong, no rich or poor. All lives were like weightless dust in the air under these deadly weapons.

“Commander Lin, the temporary Commander of the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia is requesting on behalf of the entire fleet for you to open up the intergalactic terminal between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies and take in refugees from the Seventh Galaxy.”

“Sorry,” Lin Jingheng answered lightly, “I have to consider the safety of the Eighth Galaxy as well, I’m unable to help.”

“Commander Lin!” Through the hacked network, that former vice-commander of Ankur called out from the other side, “We’ll block off the pirates, we don’t need any backups from the Eighth Galaxy. We’re only asking you to please don’t close up your doors and turn your cannons away from the refugees!”

Lin Jingheng didn’t recognize this vice-commander; perhaps he was someone who had made his way up the ranks after Ankur came to the Seventh Galaxy.

All the wealthy students from the Black Orchid Academy graduated with a rank in the military and were steps ahead of others even among elites. Occasionally, some were stationed further outside the First Galaxy, but even then it was considered a learning opportunity. Their futures were destined to be higher ranks in the military with even more complicated political games, in return for more publicity and fame. However, not many soldiers outside of the elites had heroic tales to tell in their lives. After completing their education, students would often enter a boot camp before getting sent off to various navy stations to train from between 30 to 50 years like a normal government worker. They would receive decent compensation and social benefits but almost surely not a chance to climb up the ranks. A ‘Top Commander of the Union’ was like an unreachable dream, an idol that stood above all else, someone that they were destined to never catch up to.

Perhaps there would be the one or two lucky individuals among millions who caught the eye of a high-ranking general and made their way up. Perhaps these lucky individuals would even have the chance to visit the First Galaxy for a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Yet who could have predicted that the powerful Union would fall into the abyss of warfare across the universe?

Lin Jingheng still refused to say yes and only responded: “We won’t attack any starships with a civilian passport.”

Perhaps this single line was enough for that vice-commander of Ankur.

“Seventh Galaxy Central Militia, all fleets gather up!”

In Lin Jingheng’s standards, the Seventh Galaxy Central Militia was certainly not considered ‘elites’ but was still made up of well-trained soldiers. Under the vice-commander’s order, all the mechs of the Central Militia turned and gathered up before the pirates and managed to pull together a sizable fleet.

Soon after, the first vanguard fleet opened fire without any warnings and charged right into the enemy fleet. The violent crossfire triggered countless mech alarms around the area as if they were out of control. Then, amidst the gunfire, the vanguards of the Seventh Galaxy followed the missile, crashing into the pirate fleet with their own mechs and self-destructing.

The exploded armories triggered a chain reaction that caught more and more unprepared pirate mechs into the massive explosion.

The second team immediately flew in before the first team could finish completely. The AUS were also stunned by this suicide tactic by the Seventh Galaxy and backed off in fear as they watched the second team close in. They drew back in a hurry in an attempt to pull distance to use long-range weapons against these mad soldiers.

This series of violent confrontations forcefully opened up a path within this ocean of pirate forces.

The starships waiting outside the range of fire quickly pulled up their pass signals and sailed through the opening like a herd of cattle rushing towards the Eighth Galaxy’s transfer portals.

The Seventh Galaxy Central Militia was like a wolf bitten by a deadly venomous snake: the poisonous fangs had already sunk in the most fatal area on the wolf’s neck, yet the wolf was still struggling to fight it off until its last breath.

No mass migration had ever been this thrilling and stressful.

The terminal of life was fragile and unstable. Every opening meant that a portion of starships could pass by, but an equal portion of Central Militia troops lost their lives in their suicide attacks.

“Commander.”

Lin Jingheng fell silent for three seconds: “Let them through.”

The footage of the frontlines on the Seventh Galaxy were sent real-time to the Eighth Galaxy, Qiming Command Headquarters, Turan’s Defense Command Post...and finally, the patrolling Galactic Forces guarding the secret terminal in the back.

Saturday was feeling the adrenaline rush when a mysterious signal requested to connect to his mech.

Saturday thought it was an order from the command post and picked it up by accident.

Yet what appeared on his personal device was instead a strangely familiar video.

## Ch 118 - His Hand Fell from His Chest

Inside a small space station, people were running away in panic. The looming clouds of smoke chased after them and consumed the world.

Saturday stared in a daze and thought he was watching live footage from the Seventh Galaxy. Soon after, he noticed the battered-up buildings in the background and the rough roads as the sense of familiarity grew stronger. The young man stared at the screen blankly and thought: *huh, is the Seventh Galaxy also this run-down?*

Yet that unexplainable feeling of familiarity kept hitting his mind with every heartbeat until a few seconds later, Saturday could hear the noise in his head.

His memories began to resurface from a nightmare.

*No, this is...*

A small, old merchant ship shot out from the rain of gunfire on the screen, desperately sending two connecting ecopods out of the atmosphere. The next moment, the merchant ship turned into ashes under concentrated gunfire and missiles.

This was the scene that woke him up from countless naps, the scene that he couldn’t let go of--

Space was dark and cold with no rays of hope that could shine through. The two connected ecopods carried a young boy and young girl like two chicks inside a floating bottle. They couldn’t communicate and could only see each other’s face through the tiny window on their ecopods...until a misfired missile passed through the girl’s ecopod.

The small pods lost their balance. The little boy was thrown around inside the ecopod’s balancing fluids as he struggled to get back on his feet, only to see the tail end of the connecting ecopod crack open, fluids leaking out into space. The air pressure inside the young girl’s ecopod was out of control, the boy watched his beloved little girl struggle within the half of the broken pod. Her little face pressed on the window until her pained expression froze in time.

No matter how much the little boy struggled, the ecopod was only a machine programmed for survival. The ecopod removed the damaged part of its body, the other half that protected the little girl; this was the first time the little boy witnessed life and death.

From then on, he no longer had an identity, no longer had a background, and no longer had a name; he became a pitiful ‘Saturday’.

Saturday’s blood ran cold as goosebumps raised on his skin: “Who are you?”

There was no response.

Saturday’s hands were trembling uncontrollably. His mech detected his abnormal state and propped up a medical capsule without a word. The capsule followed him around the mech, almost tripping Saturday until the young man yelled in frustration at the capsule: “Go away!”

He ran towards the supercomputer inside the mech without thinking. Yet the Eighth Galaxy was vast and unreachable, how would he be able to find the sender of this message? Saturday wasn’t well-educated and had very limited knowledge of working with mechs; he attempted a few times in vain and could only make out the signal coming from somewhere within the Eighth Galaxy.

“God damn it.” Saturday opened his personal device and got ready to contact the engineering team on the frontlines.

At that moment, the person that sent him the footage sent him a message: “If I were you, I wouldn’t trust the people around me.”

Saturday: “What do you mean? Who are you!?”

“The first time you heard people mention the ‘Nuwa Project’ was when you were in the Eighth Galaxy Defense Force, and I’m sure you didn’t pay much attention to it, right? Your whole family was dragged into the Nuwa Project and died for it, yet you’re completely oblivious to the truth. You followed them around without knowing anything. My goodness, how could anyone be so foolish...young man, even I can’t stand to see you like this and decided to tell you the truth myself.”

Saturday bit down his lips, his head completely blank.

“I’m about to leave the Eighth Galaxy. I know you’re near the border of the Eighth Galaxy towards the outside of the Union, so I’ll send a long-distance passcode in your direction that you’ll be able to receive when you pass through the next transfer portal. Come find me if you want to know the truth, young man.”

Coincidentally, Saturday passed through a transfer portal inside the secret terminal right as he received this message and activated the passcode. The mech asked Saturday if he would like to accept the long-distance connection request.

Saturday’s hand trembled.

The fundamental science behind a long-distance communication and passcode was something the Engineering team and Lu Bixing had personally lectured them on. Even though Saturday only managed to pick up a few points in the lecture, he at least knew the basic concepts of it after being enlisted for so long.

All of the transfer portals leading outside the Union from the Eighth Galaxy had been cleared up aside from a secret terminal they reserved for their own troops. All portals within this terminal were protected and could not be scanned by outsiders. It would be almost impossible to detect by luck in this vast space environment even with the most powerful supercomputer of the time.

However, after narrowing down to a general direction of where the protected portals are, as long as someone who was within range (usually within the same galaxy) sends out a long-distance signal, the chances of the signal getting caught by the portals are extremely high. Of course, as long as nobody connects to long-distance signals, these portals are safe. Though once a connection has been successfully made through one of these portals, the risk of exposing the terminal would greatly increase.

Saturday thought: is this person trying to mock my lack of education and trying to make me expose the coordinates of the secret terminal?

He grew more alert after this moment and immediately deleted the shady passcode. Soon after, he called the communication center on Qiming with his mech in hopes of getting technical support.

The communication post took a short while to pick up his call due to the busy frontlines; all the engineers on shift right now were loaded with messages to the point where even interns were dragged over to help record messages. Coincidentally, the intern that picked up Saturday’s call was Lu Bixing’s student, Mint.

Meanwhile, the first batch of refugees from the Seventh Galaxy had just passed through the last transfer portal between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies. Turan had already prepared security inspections to let unarmed civilians and starships in.

The last starship that passed through the portal caught its tail on fire like a lizard cutting off its own tail. They had witnessed their comrades behind them get swallowed up by the missiles from the pursuing pirates and could not afford to turn back to help.

“Holy shit, are they playing pass the torch or something!?” Turan cursed under her breath and extended her mental network to forcefully take over the starship on fire. She quickly disarmed the part that was caught on fire but as the tail end was about to fall off, the fire triggered a massive explosion. The mechs from the Eighth Galaxy Defense Force quickly surrounded the ship and pulled up their shields instantly to block off the impact.

Turan: “Block off that starship! Their engine malfunctioned and can’t be manually controlled!”

Two mechs sailed out at the order and extended their capture nets as they sandwiched the starship, then forcefully dragged it out to a safe distance.

“Air pressure abnormality detected; air pressure abnormality detected--”

To make matters worse, something else inside the starship also broke down as the air pressure inside dropped at a rapid speed. Turan, who was remotely controlling the starship on her mech couldn’t detect the problem and yelled: “What the fuck! Is there a goddamn idol statue of Lin Jingheng on this starship or something!?”

She turned on the broadcast inside the starship and quickly announced to the passengers: “Everyone, due to the breakdown of the starship’s main body, the air pressure is dropping rapidly inside--quiet down! Listen to me! Please immediately make your way down to the lowest level of the starship, there are some backup ecopods in there. Don’t push around! Let the elderly and sick in first!”

The passengers panicked the moment they heard that the starship had broken down and rushed towards the bottom level of the starship. The crowd pushed and shoved each other as a heavy cloud of despair fell on their heads until someone finally broke down and cried.

This cry had a sort of piercing effect that immediately changed the mood inside the starship.

Turan was furious: “How do you all still have time to cry!? You…”

“Everyone listen!” An old man from the backseat suddenly stood up. Perhaps he was a manager of some sort before, a group of people surrounded him as he called out three times. The people surrounding the old man also attempted to calm down the other passengers around them as a small light gathered around this area. The old man stood up with an arm on the wall and said, “I am the mayor of Sabien---now named Peace’s satellite Number 1, I’m sure everyone recognizes me. Please follow me, if we can make it past the barricade of pirates, we won’t die that easily here. Don’t you all see that people are here to save us now?”

The two mechs sandwiching the starship had already dragged the half-broken ship hundreds of kilometers away as it forcefully put a break on the engine going on a rampage. Most functions on the starship were already damaged, so this forceful move by two military mechs fully shut down the gravity-control system inside the starship as people began floating inside.

The old mayor quickly grabbed onto a handle on the ceiling and called out: “Hold onto the hands of the people next to you!”

People quickly reached out and grabbed onto one another, creating a giant web. The old mayor was already feeling a shortness of breath as he continued: “On the count of three, everyone slowly move down---”

Turan quietly turned off the broadcast and watched these people struggle together through her mental network. It was almost comical to watch, but the desire to live and the power to fight within the eyes of these people created a mesmerizing scene.

The mechs dragging the starship rolled out their connecting tunnels to the pod room inside the starship. Soldiers in space suits flew out from the mechs with loads of medical capsules and ecopos from behind as they rushed into the starship.

Turan let out a sigh as she turned her gaze back towards the direction of the transfer portals. She mumbled to herself: “Would Professor Lu turn against me if I blow up the portals before Commander Lin comes back? What if he hacks into my personal device and posts all my nudes for the world to see?”

The subordinate beside her thought: *You’re saying you’re actually thin-skinned enough to think about this at a time like this?*

The Captain then answered her own question: “But what if a sexy icon like me gets blown up on the internet on accident, I’ll even have to share that advertisement money with him….this is my own face and body, why should I share my profits with him? What a scam, I might as well just post the nudes myself.”

Her subordinate couldn’t stand it any longer and responded back: “Captain, Commander Lin hasn’t given us any orders yet, don’t be so pessimistic.”

Turan shook her head as her playful expression disappeared. She sighed and said: “At this point, he won’t leave the Seventh Galaxy on its own anymore.”

The subordinate looked at her in confusion.

“He’s not the director of the law enforcement in the Eighth Galaxy.” Turan said in low-spirits, “he’s the director of the Silver Fortress, the last Top Commander of the Interstellar Union.”

No matter what he said, no matter how much he loathed the Union, he would do everything he could until the last second of his life to protect these two galaxies.

It was almost as if this was common sense and the natural course of action.

Even if the Union never acknowledged him, even if those people all wanted him dead.

Perhaps the Black Orchid Academy really was a brainwashing school.

“Captain, Professor Lu is here.”

“Speaking of the devil.” Turan rolled her eyes. She thought about it for a few moments before turning back to her subordinate and whispered something to his ear, then picked up Lu Bixing’s call as if nothing happened. “I knew it, all handsome lads have telepathy with me, I was just about to ask someone to contact you. Hurry up, figure out how to relocate those refugees, I can’t handle this on my own when the Prime Minister’s not here, take over for me!”

“I’m on my way.” Lu Bixing had already seen the chaos up on the frontlines and sailed up to Turan’s commanding ship. He quickly organized all the terminals in the Eighth Galaxy; he’d already memorized all the terminals of the galaxy so only scanned through the situation briefly before making a few calls to various directors and mayors of surrounding planets and stations. The young man was very sociable and worked very efficiently: it took only ten minutes for him to find places to settle these refugees before he turned back to Turan. “When is Lin coming back? Tell me the truth, I don’t have Zhanlu’s main system access permission and he refuses to give me real-time updates.”

Turan stared at him for a few seconds before pushing a cup of coffee towards Lu Bixing.

“I shouldn’t be telling you this, but I hate lying in front of people.” Turan thought about for a few moments before she finally explained gravely, “I suspect the commander never planned on coming back from this side.”

Lu Bixing’s expression changed.

Turan reached out a hand and pressed onto his shoulder: “Don’t worry, he already informed me that he will return from the back through the underground terminal. Headmaster Lu, since he said he will return himself, can you also stay calm for a bit? If even Lin Jingheng can’t make you trust him, nobody else in this world will be trustworthy.”

Lu Bixing picked up the coffee cup with a conflicted heart, then put it back down as if he suddenly remembered something.

Turan watched him as he pulled the coffee over and took a sip of her own: “I’m not afraid to tell you that I won’t stop you from doing what you want. Are you suspecting that I’ll drug you? I don’t even do such an underhand move when I hook up at clubs, who do you think I am?”

Lu Bixing cleared his throat awkwardly and didn’t want to poke at her bubble to say her boss was the one that showed him what an underhand move was.

Turan said: “Take care of the mess for me over here, and you can go find him if you want, I’ll pretend I don’t know.”

Lu Bixing let out a sigh of relief. Some types of friends will warn you and stop you from doing anything stupid for your sake, but others are the type that would give you a hand when you want to do something crazy and pretend they didn’t see anything. The former are all good friends that one should keep, but sometimes the existence of the latter is much more valuable.

Lu Bixing: “Thanks.”

He had no power to control what Lin Jingheng thought, nor did he have the right to interfere with the man’s decision. Even a kind ‘threat’ like ‘I will wait for you behind the portal’ wouldn’t be effective. Yet at the same time, there was no way Lu Bixing could wait at home during a time like this. He could only follow the commander to the other side of guns and fire; if Lin Jingheng could safely return from the underground tunnel, he’d follow him, but if…

Turan knew what he wanted to do. It wasn’t because the Captain was all-knowing, it was because Lu Bixing wouldn’t have it any other way.

Lu Bixing had once opened up a school for the underprivileged and built a space station for smugglers, it was as if he naturally had the talent to create order amidst chaos. He very quickly established a simple system to receive the refugees into the Eighth Galaxy and cleaned up the clogging of the terminals. At the same time, the second batch of refugees entered the galaxy. They were much more battle-worn than the first batch, and a few of the starships were only pieces of remnants by the time they passed through the portals, leaving them with the job of cleaning up the corpses.

Lu Bixing bit his lip and ran towards the mech dock inside Turan’s commanding ship; he couldn’t wait any longer.

The guards on the launching deck didn’t stop him, perhaps Turan had already informed them ahead of time, and even opened up the elevator for him. Lu Bixing nodded in gratitude as he walked into the elevator with no suspicion of his ‘friend’...until he noticed that his personal device’s signal had been blocked.

Lu Bixing looked up in shock, but the elevator door already closed up.

Lu Bixing: “Elizabeth Turan!”

Nobody answered as the elevator shot down. At the same time, a strong mist of anesthetics shot from the ventilation holes inside the elevator and consumed him.

Little underhand tricks were clearly a tradition of the Silver Ten, she had been lying under his nose this whole time!

Lu Bixing held in his breath, but these little particles were contact-type anesthetics that quickly dissolved through his skin. His limbs began to numb as his muscles relaxed; Lu Bixing used the last bit of his strength to pull at the crack of the elevator doors. The young man’s numb fingers began to lose strength as his nails cracked on the door…

In the end, those hands slid from the elevator door and left a bloodied mark.

Inside the Seventh Galaxy, the AUS and Central Militia fought desperately against each other, almost like a physical brawl of ancient battles. Despite the Central Militia’s efforts to drive out the pirates, they were still at a disadvantage against the sheer number of the AUS fleet. All planets, satellites, and space stations within the vast Seventh Galaxy needed to be protected, so the Seventh Galaxy was forced to decentralize their military power.

But even a broken rock still had its strength.

Countless people dropped out from the Seventh Galaxy’s network without a sound as dots of light disappeared on the screens like a darkening night sky.

“Commander,” a guard spoke to Lin Jingheng, “let’s go. The pirates have noticed that the Seventh Galaxy refugees are escaping towards the Eighth Galaxy and are blocking off the terminals. The Seventh Galaxy won’t be able to escape, I doubt there’s any starships that will be coming in anymore.”

Lin Jingheng ordered without turning his head: “Send an escort for the Prime Minister, tell them to leave first...connect to Turan.”

Turan responded promptly: “Commander.”

Lin Jingheng’s gaze scanned through the screen and locked on the medical capsule Lu Bixing was sleeping in behind Turan. The young scientist was in deep sleep as if he was in a neverending dream.

“I did it, it’s only anesthetics.” Turan gave him a complicated laugh, “You have to come back, Commander. If you manage to come back safely, I’ll shave my head bald in apology at most, otherwise Professor Lu will have a knife at my neck for the rest of my life. You can’t underestimate a technician!”

Lin Jingheng gave her a slightly meek smile: “I’ll get you a wig net from the Seventh Galaxy when I return...Captain Turan!”

“Yes, sir.”

“I need you to activate the portal explosions in 20 minutes regardless of if I make it back, and regardless of if all refugees have made it through. Can you do it?”

Turan: “Roger that.”

“We’ll meet at the underground terminal.” Lin Jingheng swiftly cut off the communication and turned to Zhanlu, “What’s the name of that suicide team commander from Ankur’s fleet?”

Zhanlu: “He’s…”

“Whatever his face is.” Lin Jingheng waved it off. “Tell that garbage to hand over his commanding authority.”

Zhanlu responded: “Sir, codename ‘whatever his face is’ General responded that the Seventh Galaxy Militia will follow all orders from the Silver Fortress without question.”

“You’re trying to play dodgeball in a glass house and you still expect the enemy to play by your rules?” Lin Jingheng let out a laugh, “Fools, listen to my command!”

The Eighth Galaxy forces charged into the pirate fleet straight towards the civilian starship trapped in the center. The passengers in the starships were all stunned by this sudden act as the powerful heavy mechs shot past their starship from the side. Soon after, the Eighth Galaxy forces slashed through the AUS mechs and met up with General ‘whatever his face is’ to clear up a large hole within the pirate fleet.

Lin Jingheng: “Don’t block the way, dumb dogs.”

The AUS pirates gathered up like a hawk that had smelled rotten flesh and were dragged away from the terminal towards Lin Jingheng’s fleet. The defense near the terminals weakened while the Central Militia quickly split up into two teams to fire at the enemy while the main pirates tailed Lin Jingheng.

The tables turned within an instant. The pirates’ one-sided massacre ended as soon as the Eighth Galaxy Forces entered the battlefield.

The civilian starships within the Seventh Galaxy fled like lost lambs, making it impossible for the AUS to capture any of them as hostages. A swarm of refugees passed through the border between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies. Prime Minister Edward refused to leave first and lingered near the transfer portal towards the Eighth Galaxy with his escorts to wait for the refugee starships.

Turan grabbed onto her wrist; there were fifteen minutes left.

Saturday looked at the young girl’s innocent face through the screen. Mint’s face overlapped with the face of the little girl inside the ecopod in his mind as words stuck in his throat.

He remembered the message from the mysterious person: *If I were you, I wouldn’t trust the people around me.*

Mint grabbed a cup from the side and chugged some water: “What’s going on?”

“......Nothing.” Saturday looked at her longingly and said quietly, “I just wanted to see you.”

“Are you stupid?! We’re damn busy right now, nobody has the time to chat with you!” Mint cut off the connection in anger.

At that moment, Saturday’s personal device once again flashed as the mysterious person said: “Do you suspect I’m lying? Why don’t you go ask that Old Fart who took you in about who exposed your family?”

The former smuggler was still locked up inside his own space station. After Lin Jingheng relocated all the residents and supplies on the station, he turned it into a prison to lock up war prisoners.

Saturday wasn’t too far away from the underground terminal. After he changed his shift with his colleague, Saturday found an excuse to leave the fleet and returned to the place he grew up in to find the prisoner locked in for over a year.

The Old Fart almost lost his mind as he saw a human being after spending countless days and nights inside this prison cell and crawled his way over to Saturday: “Saturday! Saturday! I knew you had the biggest heart, I knew you would come save me. I was the one that raised you, bloodline doesn’t matter when we share family bonds, right? You will forgive me…”

Saturday’s heart sank.

Meanwhile, there were five minutes left before the transfer portals were scheduled to self-destruct, but Saturday was completely unaware.

“I’m about to leave, otherwise I’ll be stuck inside the Eighth Galaxy.” The mysterious person once again sent out another passcode. “Do you want to know the truth behind the Nuwa Project? Contact me.”

The demon inside the abyss whispered temptation into his ears--Come, contact me....

Lin Jingheng reorganized the Seventh Galaxy Militia and pulled the AUS fleet further and further away from the intergalactic terminal.

Zhanlu sent out a coordinate for emergency warping to all the Central Militia’s mechs.

There was one minute left before the scheduled explosion.

“Contact me…” Saturday grabbed the long-distance passcode as the siren’s song serenaded him.

“Contact me…”

*I already left the underground terminal,* Saturday thought, *if he uses the portals inside the Eighth Galaxy to connect, the signal will be going through both the Seventh and Eighth Galaxy networks, there will be no risk of exposing the underground terminal*.

He connected the passcode subconsciously as he calculated carefully in his mind.

At that moment, Turan blew up the transfer portals as per Lin Jingheng’s order.

The high-energy waves engulfed everyone and everything around the area, from space waste to corpses...this time, even the highly disruption-resilient internal network of the Eighth Galaxy was cut off.

The connection Saturday made at the moment cut off and reconnected almost immediately--the signal was forced out of the Eighth Galaxy network and automatically jumped onto the portal inside the underground terminal.

Within a split second, the portal inside the underground terminal was detected while the mastermind behind this war smiled behind the screen.

Lin Jingheng ordered everyone to make an emergency warp to the designated coordinates. The Seventh Galaxy Militia dropped their guns against the pirate fleet and disappeared on the spot. The commander had already planned out a route of escape; after three emergency warps, they would be able to use the transfer portals near the outside of the Seventh Galaxy and flee the battlefield to the Eighth Galaxy.

At the same time, the other AUS fleet waiting outside the Eighth Galaxy sailed out quietly. They split up into two teams: as one passed through the underground tunnel, the other stood by the path the Seventh Galaxy would have to pass through to reach the Eighth Galaxy. They carefully hid their energy levels while hundreds of missiles pointed at a transfer portal.

When the unsuspecting Seventh and Eighth Galaxy fleets passed through the portal, a wave of missiles shot down and blew up the transfer portal.

The massive firepower slashed through the entire fleet of mechs while timespace warped under high-energy beams.

Lu Bixing struggled subconsciously in his sleep as if he was being haunted by a nightmare while his hand fell from his chest--

What did he dream of?

Would he attempt to fight off his nightmare?

What he didn’t know was that the real nightmare was only about to begin.