Can Ci Pin | The Defective

Author: Priest

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

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# Book 7 - Sword of Freedom

## Ch 169 - As If Generations Passed

The First Galaxy was occupied by the Freedom Corps inside and surrounded by the threatening AIs outside with no safe places left. The alliance troops had no choice but to retreat into the Heart of the Rose.

Both the Union Troops and Central Militia were completely baffled by the situation.

Going back home was no longer an option, and the Union’s central government now ceased to exist after this catastrophic event.

The commander of the Union Troops, who had hooked up with Wang Ailun and attempted to loot off the conflict between the pirates and Central Militias, had fallen in the line of duty in the confrontations earlier. The only person that could somewhat represent the Union Troop forces right now was a nameless Vice Admiral of the fleet who had barely gotten promoted after the war; not even Lin Jingheng could remember his name. Overwhelmed by the dazzling party filled with legendary figures, the Vice Admiral could only follow wordlessly behind them.

In addition, there was the strange AUS fleet that gave them a helping hand at the last minute...along with billions of Woltorian refugees on board.

The civilians that had never been through proper training all sat through a violent rollercoaster ride within the mechs. The injuries sustained were especially severe among the elderly and disabled, to the point where the medical capsules on board were almost filled. Aside from physical injuries, the survivors also had to witness the breakdown of their own homes throughout the galaxy.

Settling down the refugees was another tough job--thankfully, they had Lu Bixing around. The young Prime Minister was an experienced individual when it came to dealing with refugees and quickly settled the civilians.

“It’s been over 50 years since the last time we escaped from Wolto into the Heart of the Rose.” Zheng Di’s airy voice rang out through the communication channel, “The future was bleak, we only had our passions to light the path ahead. We’re too old now, despite still not being able to see the future, but our blood can no longer boil like it did in our youth; the road ahead is much hazier than it was before.”

Lin Jingheng didn’t speak. When the armed mobile was thrown up into the air aboard the heavy mech, he had been so busy covering Lu Bixing’s eyes that he didn’t realize a deformed vehicle door had broken a bone in his arm. The situation was too urgent at the moment that the sharp pain of the broken bone didn’t sting until much later.

He found an empty corner to lean on as he stretched out his arm, allowing the medical capsule to treat his injury. His gaze fell onto Lu Bixing subconsciously--the young man was currently adjusting Zhanlu’s system.

Lin Jingheng lowered his head to look at his own hands.

Nobody blamed him for letting the Freedom Corps go; in fact, nobody even noticed that it was a misfire.

The mental networks of the alliance fleets had been severely damaged during the battle with the AIs; virtually every one of them collapsed the moment the Freedom Corps charged with their attack. Both sides had just escaped the range of the super mechs and were stuck in a state of utter chaos, disarrayed during battle while Zhanlu’s mental network disconnected from the shock. That single shot fired by Lin Jingheng was already enough to be considered a small miracle from the number one sacrificial lamb of the Silver Fortress.

Yet only he knew that his hand had trembled the moment he locked the missile onto the Freedom Corps’ commanding ship.

“Does it still hurt?”

Lu Bixing’s voice rang out, pulling Lin Jingheng’s floating thoughts back to reality. The latter retracted his gaze and shook his head, then responded nonchalantly to General Zheng’s words as if he had been paying attention earlier. The commander spoke up in a composed manner: “Why are you dragging the conversation back to ancient times?”

Zheng Di choked up: “You little rascal, can’t you show some sentimentality!?”

“Sure, but that’s reserved for more romantic times and not for showing-off during ordinary times.” Lin Jingheng pulled back his arm that had already been treated by the medical capsule and moved it around for a bit before putting his clothes back on expressionlessly. “The First Galaxy has too much complicated politics, the rest of the galaxies are all being held hostage by biochip humans, and the size of Eighth Galaxy’s military is not on the same scale as the Union’s. Besides, even if we call for backup now, it takes at least ten days to pass through the wormhole; I can’t even tell what will happen ten hours from now, so can we take this time to have a meeting to discuss our next steps instead of dwelling on the past right now?”

“Let me have a few words on behalf of the Eighth Galaxy.” Lu Bixing put down Zhanlu’s robotic hand and walked over. He pulled on Lin Jingheng’s sleeves and personally checked to see if the wound had been fully treated while saying, “The Eighth Galaxy can temporarily take in these refugees; we’re all about being humanitarian here, so we can supply all necessities, don’t worry about paying us back. Our anti-biochip technology is still effective against the enemies so we don’t need to worry about pirates sneaking in. The only problem is that all these refugees are elites and nobility of Wolto with many lingering connections; some are even officials from the Union government. It would be impossible to let them stay in the Eighth Galaxy for extended periods of time.”

“Right, we can’t possibly let our homelands fall into the hands of the pirates as well,” the General of the Fourth Galaxy responded anxiously. “But the chips...can the chips be forcibly taken out?”

“From my understanding, it’s possible to pull out lower grade chips within a certain time frame from the first injection. Due to the addictiveness of the chip, people who have the chip taken out will go through a period of withdrawal; it may be about as painful as the withdrawal from Eden or less.” Despite being the youngest, Lu Bixing had a calming and tranquilizing aura surrounding him amidst this storm of uncertainty. His voice was clear and content, creating a soothing effect on all the anxious hearts around him. “It’s hard to say for more veteran chip holders; the biochip will cause irreversible changes to the human body after long periods of time, so we should find a proper solution as soon as possible.”

General Nagus from the Third Galaxy chimed in: “It would also be unrealistic if we launch a counterattack right now. The land is now the enemy’s territory, it’s almost like they have a knife at our throats. What are we going to do, blow up Wolto like that crazy old man Woolf?”

“Woolf…” Zheng Di grumbled under his breath before asking, “Jingheng, are those things they said earlier all true? The pirates, and the Seventh Galaxy…”

Lin Jingheng didn’t hesitate this time and cut him off: “Yes, it’s true. It’s pointless to denounce the dead, say something more productive.”

“I actually have an idea,” Lu Bixing strolled over to Lin Jingheng and stood side-by-side with the commander. Perhaps due to his young age, this mysterious Prime Minister of the Eighth Galaxy showed no signs of fatigue even after a restless day and remained quite spirited. “First, if he’s a super AI that has the highest authority and permission access of the First Galaxy’s military, why didn’t Woolf chase after such a big target like us when we fled earlier?”

Zheng Di responded promptly: “Because it’s likely that we’re not his first target.”

Woolf’s first target was Lin Jingshu.

Lin Jingshu emergency warped away from the transfer portal after she was let off the hook. As one of the most important galactic transportation passages, there was no doubt that transfer portals were already controlled by that terrifying super AI. No matter where they went, the enemy AI would immediately track them down.

The Freedom Corps attempted multiple ways of hiding their tracks, but the fearsome AI always had a way to take down their facade.

After all, the First Galaxy was Woolf’s home ground.

The fleet could not land on the ground right now. Even though the land was now the homeground of the Freedom Corps, fighting against superhumans was still better than facing the super AIs. Woolf had been an infamous madman even before his death; he was even more terrible as an AI. That last bit of humanity in him was completely wiped out. Even Wolto wasn’t spared from its deadly attacks, who could guarantee that any other planet would be safe?

Humans had weaknesses, but AIs didn’t.

An escorting mech exploded beside the commanding ship in a desperate attempt to protect its leader. Lin Jingshu was on her way towards the border of the First Galaxy to flee the range of the super AI.

“Master, there are mechs blocking our way near the border!”

Lin Jingshu responded chillingly: “Don’t be scared, force our way out. They’re merely…”

Within the blink of an eye, she thought of something. As her face grew pale, she suddenly ordered: “Wait, retreat back where we came from!”

The sirens inside the mech were already screeching in horror.

“Let’s try thinking from Woolf’s perspective,” Lu Bixing continued on at a smooth pace, “if what Miss Lin said is true--the part about how she will become an AI if we kill her--why would Woolf continue to chase after her life? Her biochip empire won’t collapse even if she’s dead;there would be no point in doing so.”

Lee fell into deep thought as he said: “What the Prime Minister is saying is that either the Freedom Corps was lying to us to get us to surrender or her grand ‘scheme’ of a biochip empire is still incomplete.”

“I personally lean towards the latter,” Lu Bixing replied. “I’m not familiar with these ridiculously anti-humanitarian super AIs, so I’m just going to use Eden as an example for now. I’ve heard that Eden’s system was built on the entire galactic transfer portal network throughout the galaxies and requires unimaginably massive hardware to support its functions. The entire White Tower served to provide technical support to running Eden, so we can imagine the amount of energy it takes to run the system. The type of ubiquitous AI that Miss Lin mentioned would require even greater hardware spaces and power sources than Eden to run properly. I can believe that biochips have the ability to sneak into crowds of people and infect humans like a virus, but can a massive engineering project like a super AI be done so discreetly as well? Even with someone as powerful as Woolf, who held the highest authority within the Union, after mobilizing all of the Union’s resources to build the AI, it seems to me that he could still only cover certain areas within the First Galaxy. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have spent so much time luring everyone into his active range.”

Poisson from the Silver Third Squadron was the first to catch on to this train of thought: “Lin Jingshu can directly control certain chip carriers to pass her voice on; she chose a generation five, which made it look as if she was giving us some respect by choosing a higher-ranking individual. But this could also mean that she only has direct contact with very few high ranking chip carriers and can only indirectly control her pyramid structure with a trickle-down method from one level to the next. Is that right, Prime Minister?”

Lin Jingheng raised his head slightly: “In other words, if we can manage to kill the ‘queen bee’ while her biochip empire is still incomplete, we’d solve half of the problem already, right?”

Lu Bixing pressed down on the commander’s shoulder and said: “That’s not necessarily true, we can also just block out her--”

The communication channel was intercepted before he could finish.

Lu Bixing turned in shock: “What’s going on?”

“Prime Minister, it’s a wave of extremely powerful high-energy particles,” a technician on the heavy mech reported.

“Is it a solar storm from the First Galaxy’s sun?”

“No…”

Before the technician could speak, another wave of high-energy particles clashed with the fleet. This time, the interiors of the heavy mech shook under the impact as the shields were pulled up.

This level of high-energy impact was quite familiar.

“This is…”

“Prime Minister, Marshal, please look at the galactic map!”

Lu Bixing’s gaze shot up to see the real-time map jumbled into a mess.

“Transfer portals.” Lin Jingheng spoke up in a low tone beside Lu Bixing, “This aftershock was brought about by massive explosions of transfer portals; it’s the same as when we closed off the Eighth Galaxy back then--”

Lin Jingshu’s reaction was fast as she turned around immediately after arriving near the border of the First Galaxy. Despite her efforts, she and her vanguard mechs were still dragged into the explosive storm caused by the transfer portals. An invisible tsunami of high-energy particles swept through the entire First Galaxy; all digital devices, from space down to the ground, momentarily malfunctioned at the same time.

Near the border of the First Galaxy, all transfer portals leading out of the galaxy self-destructed simultaneously.

The entire natural wormhole area within the Heart of the Rose also shook through the aftershock; all members of the alliance fleet that lost contact with each other temporarily had no choice but to stick close together and hide behind each other’s shields.

With his own actions, Woolf showed what Lu Bixing couldn’t finish explaining earlier: the AI’s plan was to isolate Lin Jingshu along with her biochip followers that were spread throughout the galaxies and lock the queen bee inside this massive, isolated island.

And the only thing this mighty super AI couldn’t control was the natural wormhole zone within the Heart of the Rose; this was the only portal that connected directly to the Eighth Galaxy.

Lu Bixing felt a chill run down his spine.

He heard Lin Jingheng let out a breath of air and speak up self-mockingly: “I always thought that Woolf’s decision to send Lorde to me was either another conspiracy or that he was really at his wit’s end and wanted to beg me for help while holding the Union’s seven galaxies hostage. I guess I was wrong, he was simply giving me a heads-up out of respect back then.”

There were no biochip humans nor horrifying super AIs within the Eighth Galaxy. It was tied to the First Galaxy through the wormhole and was destined to become a battleground for political and military power; even if they had the ability to single-handedly block off the wormhole zone right now, its effects were still dependent on modern technology. The Eighth Galaxy would be dragged into this warzone sooner or later...regardless of if they took the initiative or not.

Merciless and vicious, calculating and manipulative; if Lin Jingshu was the epitome of the former, Lin Jingheng could only barely count himself as a master of the latter.

It was already formidable to achieve one of the two characteristics, yet Woolf managed to hone his skills in both to the extreme. What a truly unprecedented game-changer.

Lin Jingheng let out a bitter laugh.

“What is it?”

“Nothing,” Lin Jingheng sighed in response, “I’m just thinking that it’s quite a shame that even if Jingshu and I were to team up, we still would be no match for that old man.”

“Think about the good side, at least we still retain the initiative instead of being forced to concede,” Lu Bixing spoke gently. “Wait, is that an image on the military camera? Did someone sail in?”

Lin Jingheng already ‘saw’ the visitor through the mech’s mental network.

It was a fleet of small mechs that stood like a harmless animal before the massive alliance fleet, staying a courteous distance away.

The insane aftershock of the explosions was finally over and the communication channel within the alliance troops was being repaired amidst the noise. At that moment, a small mech from the fleet before them sent in a contact request.

Lu Bixing lifted an eyebrow. “Connect them in.”

Harris’ familiar face appeared on the communication channel and faced Lu Bixing once again after two decades. That gentle farmer from the past had aged significantly, the fringe at the side of his face whitening over the years as he transformed into a reserved Prophet of the AUS. That young man who once carried luggage full of naive dreams had already trudged through countless trials and tribulations, becoming the revered Prime Minister Lu of the Eighth Galaxy.

The reunion felt as though generations had passed.

“Mister Hope?”

“Long time no see, Headmaster Lu.”

## Ch 170 - A Battle of No Return

The world seemed to have flipped and turned over countless times these last two decades.

The bustling First Galaxy filled with vitality turned into a hellish living nightmare within the blink of an eye, while the no-man's zone of the Heart of the Rose transformed into a refuge site.

The sacred throne of the Union’s Guardian collapsed; former foes and sworn enemies that had fought in bloody battles stood side by side in solidarity.

Former comrades dropped their old allegiances, former enemies shook hands in a newfound truce.

Inside the newly repaired communication channel was filled only with static noise. The AUS was the next largest group of mad terrorists after the Freedom Corps, the innocent death counts on their hands unparalleled even amongst pirates.

In the eyes of the alliance, this run-down fleet of small mechs before them was like a wolf with a broken leg, wagging its tail before its human prey to win their trust, fresh blood still dripping from its mouth.

“My real name is Alexander Harris,” Hope responded earnestly, “the current Great Prophet of the AUS who represents the peaceful faction of the organization. The ones that raised the violent flags of war against the Union in the past were the pro-war faction of the group. Thanks to Commander Lin, the pro-war faction suffered fatal damage back during the Seventh and Eighth Galaxy battle, which finally allowed me to regain my position in the organization.”

Lu Bixing’s back stiffened up.

He’d had many friends of opposing morals and ideals; Hope was among those with morals that clashed directly with his own, but was also one of the very few friends he truly appreciated.

Lu Bixing’s people-pleasing nature drew him to these ‘harmless’ rural folks. To give credit where it was due, this person had also saved his life once--they had put on an act together before the AUS headquarters and successfully brought back the vaccine for the mutated Rainbow Virus.

Yet even with all of these memories, the first thing that consumed his mind the moment he saw Hope was the most painful memory of his lifetime.

Hope had fled and Lin Jingheng’s existence was exposed. Woolf borrowed the butcher knife from the AUS and had used the entire Seventh Galaxy as bait to create that...despite how long it had been since the incident, Lu Bixing still couldn’t muster up the courage to recall the details of that bloodied tragedy.

Just then, Lin Jingheng’s cold voice rang out beside him: “Oh, that was part of my job anyway, you’re welcome.”

Hope: “....”

Lu Bixing: “....”

A single aloof line from the Marshal ruthlessly shattered the nightmare, retracting the cold sweat gathering in Lu Bixing’s hands. The young Prime Minister let out a small chuckle in defeat: “I figured as much, since I imagined lower-ranking followers wouldn’t know how to speak the language of the Prophet. Now I’m going to make another wild guess: the data you deleted from the AUS database back then was all information relating to Woolf, correct?”

“I thought he truly understood the spirit of the White Tower and was someone who sincerely wished to protect the world.” Hope let out a sigh. “The pro-war faction was enchanted by power and began dreaming of ruling the world. I was sternly anti-war and ended up souring my relationship with some of the pro-war members, to which they responded by locking me up and finally exiling me. Thankfully, I had followers who saved me from the mess as I managed to escape. That’s when I had the fortune to meet you on planet Qiming, Headmaster Lu. Regardless if you believe me or not, I will confess that while I left without a word back then due to circumstances at the time, I have never exposed any information about the Eighth Galaxy to anyone. During the seventeen years where I finally managed to retrieve my position as the Great Prophet back, I still stood firmly on my position of anti-warfare even to this day.”

Lu Bixing fell silent for a few moments before responding to everyone’s surprise: “That I will believe of you.”

While everyone else--barely recovered from the news about Woolf--remained utterly confused, as one of the few who had been in the loop since the beginning, Lu Bixing remained calm.

The Seventh and Eighth Galaxies were not the only players that suffered a great loss during that battle: the AUS fleets within the two galaxies were also hit hard by Lin Jingheng despite their successful ambush. Since then, they no longer had the power to get back on their feet and naturally stepped off the stage.

As long as they still had their brains intact, the AUS would also realize that they were being used as pawns by Woolf. They couldn’t possibly sit alongside that crazy old man after that.

Yet all these years had passed; Woolf not only avoided chasing them down and destroying the entire organization, but the AUS also cooperated by keeping silent about Woolf’s identity and plot.

Their decision to keep quiet about everything in order to maintain peace was almost Lin Jingheng-like.

Harris took in a deep breath; his aged face trembled slightly with indescribable emotions. After moments of silence, he finally managed to give words of thanks: “Your single line saying that you believe me really is…”

“But Mister Hope--would you mind if I continue calling you by this name?” Lu Bixing interrupted the older man. “Whether or not it was your intention in the first place, we’ve still walked down different paths over the last decade. The Union will never forget what the AUS has done, and the Eighth Galaxy will especially engrave it into its heart. There’s no way we can simply forgive the AUS like that. Is there anything else you’d like from us now that you’ve chosen to approach us directly?”

“I know,” Harris responded in a low tone, “we’re also at our wit’s end, so I’m here to seek a temporary alliance.”

Under the ubiquitous rule of the super AI and the forces of superhumans from the Freedom Corps threatening the remaining survivors, all humans in the First Galaxy were finally forced to stand together regardless of their differences.

Harris: “To show my sincerity for the alliance request, I am willing to share some additional information regarding this super AI.”

In the Second Galaxy, the Second Polytechnic University.

Both students and staff were woken up in the middle of the night and asked to gather on the sports grounds.

On both sides of the grounds were lines of biochip humans dutifully carrying out their missions like robots. The now unfamiliar Director Zhao stood on the podium as he continued giving his brainwashing speeches; though in all fairness, the Director was still an educated man with a gift in public speaking, making it still worthwhile to listen to his words.

Yet, clearly, most people were not in the mood to sit down and listen to the speech with guns pointed at their heads.

The grounds were filled with young faces clouded by anxiety and fear. All the underaged students were dragged out of their dorms without time to change out of their pajamas like a crowd of lost baby chicks following behind the dorm supervisor. The supervisor was a kind middle-aged lady who looked to be about 200 years old. She was doing her best to ease the anxious hearts of all her students at the moment: “Keep quiet, shh…my children, follow behind these people quietly, don’t do anything out of line.”

A young boy who had been watching the Principal’s speech earlier couldn’t help but speak up timidly: “Miss Alyssa, where’s the principal? Did those people already…”

The dorm manager lifted her lips in a smile to the best of her abilities: “Don’t worry, the principal is someone who had escaped from the old campus, he’s experienced.”

“Will we also be injected with the biochip?”

“They said that people who get injected with the chip will lose their--”

“Quiet!” Out of the corner of her eye, the dorm supervisor noticed a few biochip carriers walk over and sternly cut off the words of the students.

A biochip soldier approached the group. With their powerful hearing, they clearly overheard the discussion among the students earlier. The whole crowd of students froze under that intimidating gaze; the young boy who had spoken up earlier lowered his head skittishly as fear consumed his mind.

“They’ll lose their what?” A soldier asked.

The dorm supervisor Alyssa took half a step forward, standing between the students and the soldiers as she gave a pitiful smile that looked even more disheartening than a frown: “It’s just silly words from kids, sir, please…”

“Move!” The biochip soldier shoved her aside.

The students began screaming in panic.

Yet the next moment, all of the biochip soldiers on the sports grounds froze on the spot; even Director Zhao stopped his speech abruptly at the podium. The same bewildered expression took over their faces as all the biochip humans lifted their heads up simultaneously--these chip carriers had no idea why they decided to do this and only felt as if something inside them had suddenly vanished.

Soon after, the sound of a gunshot pierced through the night sky. Lady Alyssa, who was still on the ground, witnessed the biochip soldier before her fall facedown onto the floor. A laser gun shot drilled through his nape; fresh blood from the soldier splattered all over the dorm supervisor. She felt her heartbeat drum violently in extreme shock, unable to even let a scream out of her throat.

Sounds of footsteps came from behind them as the newcomers announced their identities: “We’re the stationed troops of the Second Galaxy’s Central Militia!”

Alyssa’s eyes widened; the next moment, she felt her vision blur as a disheveled soldier pulled her up from the ground. The supervisor saw the face of the soldier--despite being under the darkness of the night, her heart almost stopped at the sight. The soldier no longer had a face: it was as if his entire face had been burnt off by raging fire, bloodied flesh and burnt skin jumbled up his features. Only his left eye that still glistened under the moonlight proved that it was once the face of a person.

The self-proclaimed ‘Central Militia troops of the Second Galaxy’ was no more than a small team of soldiers that had been hastily put together. Behind them was the campus security, who didn’t even carry any useful weapons in their hands. Compared to the orderly Freedom Corps pirates, these soldiers looked as if they were civilian volunteers.

“Run, miss,” that soldier with only one eye left said hoarsely, “the children can only give up freedom and their future when the last one of us is dead---now go!”

Alyssa turned her head abruptly and called out to the students behind her: “Follow me!”

The soldiers from the military barged into the school like fearsome beasts struggling until their very last breath even while carrying severe wounds. They charged towards all the biochip humans and helped evacuate all the students and staff that had been forced to gather on the open field, turning the sports grounds into another chaotic battleground.

Alyssa ordered the students to evacuate through the back valley of the campus and subconsciously turned her gaze back--

The soldier that had pulled her up earlier had already blended into the night sky. She could only hear cries of anger and screams from behind them. Strangely, those terrifying biochip humans suddenly didn’t seem as scary as she imagined them to be; they were still panicking in the face of these desperate human soldiers.

Director Zhao was the leader of the biochip forces who had taken over the Second Polytechnic University. As a generation two chip carrier, despite his gift at persuasion, he clearly lacked experience in commanding his followers. After witnessing this sudden attack, fear overtook him as he almost tripped while running off the podium.

A generation two dropped the ball, so the first generation clearly couldn’t do any better.

Despite having superhuman strength and enhanced physical attributes, the majority of these biochip humans were frightened by this sudden counterattack by the military, dropped their guns, and fled the scene.

Didn’t they say these biochip humans fought like machines and were fearless souls that wouldn’t hesitate to give their lives in battle? Didn’t they say that they didn’t even need commands and could carry out their leader’s orders like their commander’s own limbs?

Was it all simply a rumor fabricated by others to instill fear among people?

Alyssa didn’t have time to think in depth and quickly led the students out of the battlefield.

People born in the cradle of Eden never would have thought that they were encircled by a massive and intricate web of lies. As long as nobody went out of their way to expose the cruel truth, humanity could forever live comfortably in this lucid dream while occasionally questioning whether modern technology infringed on individual freedom--as if they weren’t victims themselves.

Yet as soon as these people were let out of their cage and finally tasted the sweetness of freedom, no matter how harsh the storm was outside, they could no longer allow themselves to be locked back inside that dark cage.

The military forces of the government that had been severely hit by the pirates now led civilians and volunteers on a counterattack against their enemies.

Voices of rebellion grew louder as time passed; people quickly discovered that these biochip humans weren’t as invincible as they were said to be, and some even went as far as to say that the biochips had completely broken down.

Of course, the biochip hadn’t actually broken, it was simply that the chip carriers had suddenly lost connection with their superiors.

Due to the rapid spread of the biochips, most of the carriers had been average citizens before they joined this organization. The chips had modified their bodies and granted them unparalleled physical and mental power, allowing a completely inexperienced individual to gain enough mental strength to match up to an elite galactic soldier. In addition, the hierarchical oppression from the higher-ups could let them fulfill their duties without hesitation and forget the fear of death; a team of these biochip humans was an extremely terrifying opponent.

But the rapid growth came at the price of instability.

The First Galaxy was now an isolated land that trapped Lin Jingshu and the majority of the generation five chip carriers inside. Generation fours were completely at a loss, generations threes were even more puzzled...the communication cut-off created a domino effect that knocked down the pirates from top to bottom. In just a short while, that unbreakable ‘order’ within the Freedom Corps collapsed; first generation chip carriers began to panic and cry in fear, turning into a group of lost lambs in the blink of an eye.

No matter how powerful an individual was, a disorganized group of headless chickens was no match against proper military. A gorilla might have unparalleled raw power against an adult human, but billions of years had passed and humans as a species still remained at the top of the food chain.

The Second Galaxy, Third Galaxy…everywhere, from school campuses to the streets, was filled with rebelling civilians.

Twenty years ago, mankind woke up from the long dream of Eden and witnessed how their own homes and the heavens fell; many saw how the galaxies collapsed and had fallen into despair, helplessly begging for mood control medication or commited suicide to run away from this world.

Yet after this vicious wave tore through the galaxies over these shattered rocks, remnants still remained on the shore. The survivors fought to stay alive and struggled to adapt to this new world outside of Eden.

Now, the same people that once cried in anguish over the loss of Eden picked up their weapons and faced their own nightmares courageously.

The First Galaxy.

The newly formed Human Alliance troops gathered in the Heart of the Rose. Harris generously gave the safe and activator he’d dug up in the City of Angels to the Silver Third Squadron. At the same time, Lu Bixing sent a message through the wormhole back to the Eighth Galaxy and summarized the situation, asking Turan to prepare to receive the refugees and stay on standby to send in backup forces at any time.

The alliance stationed at the Heart of the Rose; behind them was the last paradise in the universe, before them was the hub of demons and devils. With nowhere to escape, they had no choice but to prepare for this final battle of no return.

## Ch 171 - An Unprecedented Migration

“We need to get these Woltorians off the mechs as soon as possible otherwise they’ll end up burdening us if we really have to engage in battle. One emergency warp would end up costing half of my medical supplies.” Lin Jingheng said, “Send them off in batches. It’s easy to disrupt the wormhole’s signals and difficult to maintain stability, they’d be easy targets if we sent them all in at once. If anything happened along the way, they’d be cattle waiting on the butchering board....Poisson!”

“Marshal, Poisson and his crew are busy taking apart that activator,” Captain Liu from the Silver Sixth Squadron’s voice rang out like a ghost in response, “I have a few wormhole specialists from the Expedition Team on-board my fleet, do you need them to help?”

“Where the hell did you come from?” Lin Jingheng almost jumped at his sudden appearance.

Captain Liu, who was already used to this treatment, simply responded with an innocent but bitter smile.

“Yes, tell them to write up an evacuation plan immediately. I need it to include all details from transport frequency, batch scale, and method of transport for all the refugees, prioritizing the safety and efficiency of the transport.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Send a dispatch order to Turan as well, I need to pull out some backup from the Eighth Galaxy.”

The soldier in charge of sending the order froze momentarily: “Marshal, the backup will have to go through the wormhole too, will they make it in time?”

Lin Jingheng pressed on the bridge of his nose in exhaustion: “If they can make it, great, if not, that’s just our luck. Give me an estimate of all military supplies and arms from all fleets present right now. Ho…where’s that AUS old man with the really long name again?”

“You can simply call me Harris, Commander Lin, no need to be so courteous.”

Perhaps the word ‘courteous’ didn’t exist in Commander Lin’s dictionary, so he didn’t hesitate to lift an arm and pull out a massive galactic navigational map in response. The center of the map was the Heart of the Rose where they were currently stationed; all of the closest intergalactic terminals near the Heart of the Rose were circled out as he spoke up: “There’s nothing around the Heart of the Rose, which the Freedom Corps knows just as well as we do. If Lin Jingshu hasn’t died under Woolf’s guns yet, she’ll eventually make her way over.”

Harris nodded quietly in understanding.

When the Eighth and First Galaxies cut off communication, the Eighth Galaxy had once faked a believable shutdown of the wormhole. The abnormal energy waves caused by the massive disruption had completely annihilated all of the artificial equipment within the area, transforming the place into a real deserted land. To the AI version of Woolf, this place was a true vacuum.

It was a perfect temporary base for the Alliance troops, and similarly the perfect fortress for biochip humans.

“The AUS’ warp disruption technology could be useful, so you’ll all be the first line of defense watching the transfer portals.”

Harris bowed slightly: “My pleasure.”

Lin Jingheng lifted his head and finally locked his grey eyes on Harris’ face through the screen. He fell silent for a few moments before continuing: “You guys don’t have enough men on hand and are with very limited firepower, so I’ll send over a fleet of backups--First Galaxy’s Border Patrol fleet, Old Duke’s subordinates, anyone still alive?”

Someone immediately responded through the channel: “Yes, Commander Lin!”

“How many troops do you all have left?”

“Yes, sir! Minus the spies and traitors from the Freedom Corps and the brothers that lost their lives during the confrontation, the First Galaxy Border Patrol still has a total of 28 heavy mechs, 73 mid-sized escort mechs, and 106 backup small mechs! This used to be our territory, we will be more than happy to stand on the frontlines.”

“Okay.” Lin Jingheng nodded. “I need you all to become vanguards once again to support our temporary ally, any problems?”

Despite calling it backup support, it was actually a way to keep an eye on the AUS. Hope smiled and didn’t mind the implications--if Lin Jingheng were to fully place his trust in anyone, he wouldn’t be Lin Jingheng anymore.

“Then, my fellow comrades, we’ll contact each other through the communication channel.” Harris turned and got ready to depart.

“Wait,” Lin Jingheng suddenly called him out in a unfathomable manner, “Prophet Harris, Lin Jinghshu ran away with her tail between her legs back on Wolto because she didn’t foresee Woolf’s last trump card, but there’s no way she couldn’t have seen you coming.”

Harris was stunned.

“Using Wang Ailun to lure the Central Militia down to the ground so that she could capture them all at once, then using all galaxies that had been taken over by pirates to force the Central Militia to surrender--even though this plan looks workable from the outside, it didn’t consider a lot of variables and problems that could arise. For example, what would happen if the AUS put a foot in the mess, what if the Union Troops and Central Militia didn’t engage in conflict up in space, or what if the people on the ground escaped up to space? To make matters worse, what if these old generals were truly iron-hearted and cold-blooded enough that they’d rather give up their family and homes than surrender, swearing to fight against her to the end?”

Zheng Di’s voice rang out from the channel: “Hey hey hey, who are you badmouthing under your breath again? We still have arms on our hands and can fight, so as long as we have a small ray of hope we have a chance to get our revenge. We’d be really stepping into our own coffins if we disarmed. Besides, we might as well be dead if we betray our morals and become a biochip human! Even if they kidnap my daughter and bring her up to me, my stance will not change! How dare you call us iron-hearted and cold-blooded!?”

“Old war veterans would usually think like him,” Lin Jingheng ignored Zheng Di and continued on, “Lin Jingshu wouldn’t have been so careless as to not consider this possibility. She didn’t climb her way up by cheating, so she must’ve kept another trick up her sleeve to prepare for facing a proper military unit. Unfortunately, Woolf came out of nowhere and flipped the entire game board, so she never had the chance to show her card. We’re still lacking knowledge in the department of biochip technology, so don’t go in like naive fools. We all need to prepare for the worst.”

Harris gave him a deep look: “Thank you for your advice.”

This time was such an emergency situation that the Silver First Squadron had no spare time to do pre-war information gathering for Lin Jingheng, yet the commander knew his enemy too well.

Harris let out a sigh and waved his subordinate off; the small AUS mech fleet slowly followed him and sailed out of the Heart of the Rose.

Lin Jingheng watched them leave through the mental network then turned immediately: “Old Zheng, you also need to stop chit-chatting in the back, get over here to take the second line of defense.”

General Zheng became Old Zheng, but the Commander of the Second Galaxy didn’t complain and instead slid over to listen to the orders.

Back when the Union’s military authority was highly centralized in the hands of the Military Council, the Silver Fortress had been in charge of dispatching and arranging all troops while the Central Militias of all galaxies remained on standby at all times. Lin Jingheng was used to sending out his commands, and all the old veteran generals were used to listening to this arrogant little boss yap out orders. When they ran into problems, Lin Jingheng wouldn’t hesitate to fire back; everyone present was his senior, and with Lu Bixing playing the mediator beside him, the most they could do was spit at each other through the screens.

Lin Jingheng was a master of efficiency; the evacuation plan for the refugees had just been passed when he almost simultaneously delivered a complex and interlocking blueprint of a ‘fortress’ among the Alliance around the Heart of the Rose.

“Marshal,” a somewhat familiar voice called. Lin Jingheng lifted his head in surprise to see that the Expedition Team’s technician representative was Mint, who also followed the Sixth Squadron out. “We’re done with preparations for sending all unarmed personnel through the wormhole, when should we take off?”

“If you’re all ready then leave now, don’t waste time here.”

“Yes, sir.” Mint was clearly prepared as she got ready to take off.

“Wait, kid.” Lin Jingheng took a quick glimpse at the Prime Minister beside him who looked as if he had something to say, then under Mint’s unreserved and shocked expression, gave her a reminder, “Stay safe and come back as soon as you’re done, we’re short on wormhole technicians here.”

The first fleet of Woltorians sailed into the wormhole under his single command.

Mint followed as a technological advisor with the Sixth Squadron and the individual in charge of escorting these poor souls that had left their homeland into the Eighth Galaxy.

People gathered silently before the screen as they all gazed toward the direction of the First Galaxy...of course, nothing could be seen aside from a void of darkness.

The government clearly said that this was only a temporary refuge during wartime.

But when would this war end? The world was virtually taken over by the biochip humans of the Freedom Corps, and on top of that there was a terrifying super AI looming above their heads; this was even more horrifying and insane than the pirate invasion of the Union twenty years ago. Was this truly a situation that could be overturned and fought by mere humans? How long could the refugees in the Eighth Galaxy stay safe?

Even if the heavens pitied their loss and let them return to the First Galaxy one day, Wolto was no more.

Yet, nobody cried. The starship was deathly silent in an almost heroic solemness--these people on the starship were volunteers from the Woltorian refugees who had stood up to enter the land of the unknown for their friends and family. The entire First Galaxy was turned upside-down, anything could happen at this time; nobody dared to say that the wormhole would be completely safe.

It was possible that the wormhole zone had also been tampered with by their enemies; they could be shredded into fresh meat by the warped timespace the moment they stepped inside.

“Don’t you think the scene feels a little familiar?”

Mint turned around to see that the person standing behind her was Rickhead.

“I heard the technician the Expedition Team sent in was you, so I requested to join the fleet.” Rickhead smiled; the military uniform on him also seemed to have turned the silly and tall young boy into a dependable young man. “I’m the captain of the escort team.”

Huang Jingshu was a little vaccuocerebral girl from the slums, Mint was an orphan, White was a rural landlord’s son in the Eighth Galaxy, and Rickhead was a little street gangster that only knew how to speak through his fists. Their future back then had already been painted for them; a vaccuocerebral would perhaps grow to detest society due to oppression, the greedy young girl from the orphanage would perhaps earn some black money by stealing some knowledge, the little rural noble’s family was ready to migrate to another galaxy to become a secondary citizen.

“As for me,” Rickhead said, “I might end up becoming one of the punching bags in underground territorial conflict or get sent to prison. I can’t even tell which life would be better at that point, if only parallel universes existed.”

Mint asked: “What?”

“Parallel universes, you know those popular tropes in ancient novels,” Rickhead continued, “like maybe I’ll die in the line of duty and my soul transmigrates back to planet Beijing when I was still only seventeen. Then as someone who came from the future, I could completely change the fate of everyone else around me in this parallel universe.”

“I’d like to think you deserve to get transmigrated back to when you were still a fetus,” Mint said. Despite walking down completely different paths as young adults, the four of them always treated each other like real family. Of course, Mint didn’t hesitate to insult her brother when necessary, “Please develop your brain properly. Tsk, why do you always have to say such pessimistic words...we’re nearing the wormhole, everyone, get ready!”

Rickhead lightly pressed a hand on her shoulder.

Both in and out of the wormhole, everyone held in their breath.

Lu Bixing looked up to stare at a lit-up signal light. The escort team would keep sending out signals to the outside, and as long as the light stayed lit, the team would be safe.

Outside the wormhole, the second batch of refugees were also ready to enter the wormhole in an unprecedented mass migration.

They all faced the uncertainty of life and death.

The first evacuation team completely vanished into the wormhole. The signal light began flashing; nobody dared to speak up within the entire communication channel.

The Alliance troops felt as if their hearts sank every time the light went out, waiting until at least a small glow came back before their heartbeats could return back to normal.

This anxious waiting lasted for about half an hour until a small ‘ding’ rang up within the communication channel. It was followed by a long line of noise that almost made the soldier in charge of monitoring the signals jump on the spot.

“Stay calm.” Lu Bixing pressed a reassuring hand on the soldier’s shoulder. “Decode the signal.”

“Prime Minister, it’s…there’s a sound message.”

“Time flows differently within the wormhole; slow down the sound message’s playback.”

The soldier’s throat rolled uneasily as he followed Lu Bixing’s orders robotically with a blank mind. After that noise had been slowed down significantly, the sound was finally clear enough to hear.

“We came from the capes, sealed-off and voiceless mountain ranges.

On the grasslands abandoned by starlight, we sparked the blaze of freedom---”

The Eighth Galaxy’s Independent Navy’s anthem rang out, the signal had been stabilized.

The natural wormhole was safe to pass!

The communication channel was filled with cheers of joy like a galactic holiday.

Lin Jingheng let out a discreet breath of relief; thank goodness, at least this meant that they could wait for the backups to arrive and have a place to return back to.

It wasn’t until now that he finally realized his throat was dry from all the meetings. He turned to a corner and pulled out a cigarette from his pocket, sinking deep in thought to consider if there was anything else he had missed.

This was the first time Lin Jingheng openly broke the rules on the mech after decades of commanding galactic troops.

Suddenly, a hand reached over and took the cigarette from him.

“Open fire, smoking, and aerosols are all prohibited on space mechs. I’m taking this, Marshal.” Lu Bixing took in a small mouthful of smoke playfully as he took it away, then tossed it onto Zhanlu’s robotic hand. He then handed a cup of warm water to the commander and said, “Look, your lips are drying up, have some water before they crack.”

Inside the communication channel, the General of the Sixth Galaxy who was already in position overheard this line and praised: “Lu...ah, I don’t really want to call you Prime Minister Lu, that sounds too distant. Can I call you Bixing?”

Lu Bixing agreed without hesitation.

“Attentive and thorough with everything you do.” The General of the Sixth Galaxy was normally reserved and quiet, so it took him a while to dig up some good words from his own vocabulary bank. He complimented Lu Bixing in a dry voice before letting out a sigh, “And you sure have a good temper, much better than Commander…your father. I’ve met our brother Monoeyed Hawk from the Eighth Galaxy once, he’s also another mouth full of bullets. Sheesh, who are you like? Professor Muller?”

Lin Jingheng stood a few steps away and studied the young man before him as he heard the question: “He’s not like any of his elders, he grew up like this himself.”

This was the short silence before the storm; these old generals finally had a break and began chatting among themselves within the channel. They started asking how Lu Bixing was over in the Eighth Galaxy, had it been rough over there? Did his adopted father Monoeyed Hawk take good care of him? After learning that Monoeyed Hawk had already passed, the channel was filled with another few minutes of whimpering and sobbing.

General Nagus from the Third Galaxy said: “Our old comrade already stepped off the stage at a young age, yet we old useless ones are still out here wasting space. Ah, don’t worry, good child, if that little bastard Lin Jingheng pisses you off in the Eighth Galaxy, you can come talk to us anytime.”

Lin Jingheng let out a mocking snort: “You guys?”

General Nagus also realized his phrasing earlier was a little awkward and jokingly responded: “Man, why did that line sound like I’m marrying off my own daughter?”

Lin Jingheng: “......”

He swallowed the insult that was already waiting at the tip of his tongue and took another sip of water.

The rest of the crew from the Eighth Galaxy followed his lead and pretended to not notice; only Lu Bixing held in his laughter and gave a playful wink at the commander.

The two hadn’t had the chance to speak in private after that chaotic situation earlier. On the outside, it seemed as if their relationship was simply a partnership between an executive minister and a military marshal; Lin Jingheng suspected that if these old generals knew the truth, this old circus would put on a show and dramatically point fingers at him about how much of a disgraceful child he was.

Lu Bixing reached an arm out and placed a hand suggestively on Lin Jingheng’s shoulders as he responded, unashamed: “He’s very good to me and always takes good care of me. He lets me do what I want and always gives in to me...in various aspects.”

Lin Jingheng could hear the mischief behind the ‘various aspects’ part in the last line and kicked the young man in displeasure.

Zheng Di gave an understanding smile in response, then let out another sigh: “Anyone could treat you poorly, but he will never do so. You know, back then, Commander said that Professor Muller was busy with work and didn’t like children, so he complained that his dreams of holding his own child in his arms was crushed. He raised Jingheng like his own child; he wouldn’t stop mentioning the boy even when we chatted in private. It got to the point that even one of our female colleagues commented once that Jingheng wasn’t even like ‘his own child,’ it was more like ‘he personally gave birth’ to this child. The whole fleet even knew how many centimeters the boy grew in a year.”

Lu Bixing’s eyes lit up excitedly and continued pressing on for them to talk more about Lin Jingheng’s childhood.

Lin Jingheng growled angrily: “Don’t you all have better things to do?”

Zheng Di clearly didn’t like little Lin’s ‘holier than thou’ attitude and dramatically answered: “When Commander first picked him up, he was like a baby with a big head who ignored everyone around him. Kid was also a picky eater, he hadn’t grown a centimeter or even gained a kilogram over the first year. Commander worried about him every day and even asked a few pediatricians for advice; the doctors said ‘the kid’s fine,’ and ‘the kid’s certainly fine.’ At about twelve years old, the kid was like a fully fertilized sprout that grew over ten centimeters within the span of a year. Man, it was like stretching out rubber; his bones and flesh couldn’t keep up so he was as thin as a twig. This kid would cover himself up in layers of clothes like a ball just to make himself look like a healthy child. Oh, he even snuck hangers inside his jacket once to give himself wider shoulders, but Commander didn’t know, so one time he smacked right on the kid’s shoulder, beep---”

Lin Jingheng blocked off Zheng Di’s screen from the channel with his pilot’s permission.

## Ch 172 - ...You Asked For It, Oh Well

The poor General Zheng who had been mercilessly blocked on the channel didn’t give up; after gathering a few other old comrades and friends, the group opened up a separate channel outside of the public channel with the help of excitable partyboy Prime Minister Lu.

Even though everyone was stuck inside their own commanding ships, physically further apart than ancient sayings of ‘across mountain ranges and oceans,’ the connection through the communication channel still made it feel as if everyone was gathered together for a fireplace chat--the unfortunate Heart of the Rose being the fireplace.

Lin Jingheng had once soured his relationship with Lu Xin’s old subordinates to the point where it was almost a taboo to mention his name to the Central Militia. Back when he would appear publicly on the news, some people would always quietly turn off notifications and temporarily block the news report in distaste. The bitterness was lasting and real; everyone had been holding in too many stories and opinions about him for far too long.

Now that they found the opportunity to speak, it was like opening the sluice for these middle-aged veterans to talk about anything and everything.

“Within the first month of entering the Black Orchid Academy, this little rascal picked three whole fights on campus and sent everyone involved to the infirmary. The school nurse Doctor Lance would call our commander at least once every other day to complain about it and say this little shit was a professional liar; what bullshit about ‘being the first person to drown in the flood,’ he’s the one who triggered the flood.”

“Too bad the Black Orchid Academy didn’t have an academic focus in troublemaking, otherwise he’d have been an honors student in that department.”

“Man, if there really was a curriculum for that, I think he’d have the qualifications to be a professor.”

“He had little dinosaur pajamas when he was a kid, hahaha! I saw it with my own eyes before when I visited the commander's place to give my report.”

“Did you get a photo?”

“Nope--he was only a wee lad, who knew he’d grow up to be such an asshole? I didn’t think about saving evidence back then, that was my bad...oh hey, but I do have some photos that were taken from the surveillance cameras when he picked fights with the other kids in school.”

Lu Bixing was like a kid holding out his arms to receive all the gifts and treats from his elders; two hands weren’t enough for all the surprises, he felt like it was an early holiday celebration.

Lin Jingheng had nowhere to hide and had no choice but to shove a pair of headphones into his ears, ignoring the conversation on the side and letting the crowd chat amongst themselves.

The veteran generals gathered up to blow off their old steam with exciting gossip. The conversation grew lively as they finished mocking Lin Jingheng and shifted to dragging their former boss Lu Xin.

According to the General of the Fifth Galaxy, Lin Jingheng was an impolite little rascal who had no respect for his elders. Before he grew familiar with his new adopted father, he would distance himself and call “Commander Lu Xin”; after a while, he dropped the courtesy title and decided to straight-up call the man by his full name. Commander Lu had been dreaming of becoming a father for almost half of his life and ordered Zhanlu to play nursery rhymes and children’s songs at home everyday, such as “My Good Daddy” to “A Mountain’s Worth of Love for My Father.” The attempt to brainwash little Lin Jingheng into calling him ‘dad’ at least once was quite a feat.

Yet everyone underestimated Lin Jingheng’s stubborn character that seemed to be engraved deep into his genes as he refused to be brainwashed by these songs. Instead, Lu Xin himself ended up getting caught up in those catchy children’s tunes and would begin humming some lines during work. Those big-name politicians on Wolto couldn’t understand those words and began to suspect that the great Commander Lu had grown to be a much more fearsome and complex character.

Nagus slapped his own thigh and said: “Oh I see, no wonder why he kept singing children’s songs day and night during those times! Our Commander here had horrible alcohol tolerance with an even worse drunkard persona. See, we galactic soldiers were always patrolling and going on expedition missions out to other galaxies. The higher-ups kept telling us to keep a reputation on not relying too much on Eden, so Commander took the order to heart and blocked it off as much as he could, to the point where he’d let his own body digest and metabolize alcohol naturally. He was a typical lightweight that lost his mind after three drinks; he couldn’t even hold one without getting tipsy. This one time during a banquet on Wolto, he ended up drinking a little too much, so I had to take him home. During the trip back, he was completely unrestrained inside the car and rolled Zhanlu up into a mic as he sang a whole ride’s worth of ‘Daddy and Honey’ until he got home.”

The crowd burst out laughing.

Lu Bixing snuck a glimpse at that already grown-up mister “Honey” only to see the latter had headphones in his ears while staring at the galactic map with a frown on his face. He sat with his back straight like a sword inside its sheath, his whole body stiff, his lips pressed together into a thin line. Though, upon closer inspection, that pressed lip line was slightly curled up at the edge--as if he was desperately trying to hold in a smile.

Nagus began gesturing wildly inside the channel: “When we got back that day, Professor Muller, who was supposed to be out of town, was actually home. So I thought, oh shit, Wolto’s number one germaphobe Professor Muller absolutely despises smokes and alcohol. Commander’s caught red-handed this time and would probably have to suffer drinking three whole buckets of bleach and then sleep in the study for at least six months. Though as soon as he stepped into the mansion, I saw our commander drop to his knees without a second word, slide across the marble floor for at least a meter and grab onto Professor’s Muller legs as he cried out loud ‘Daddy, please forgive baby!’”

Lin Jingheng’s shoulders trembled as he suspiciously lowered his head.

Commander Lu Xin’s reputation had remained stately and majestic at the place of his death. If his soul was watching from the heavens, perhaps he’d have to jump out from the wormhole’s warped spacetime to complain at this conversation.

The crowd used their unique sense of humor and remembrance to pay respects to the man they had once followed as they immersed themselves in light-hearted laughter.

Suddenly, someone within the channel commented: “If only the commander could see you right now too.”

The sounds of laughter within the little illegal chatroom began to fade out into the cold night sky. Every General of the Central Militia held onto their own thoughts and prayers in silence. The song ringing out through the wormhole drummed majestically in the background, the tune richer than the original version, as if thousands of voices from the past harmonized together across time.

After a long silence, Zheng Di let out an audible sigh in the channel. Through the 3D screen, the General’s muddied pupils looked as if they were layered in a warm glow as he studied Lu Bixing’s exceptionally kind and friendly face. His voice softened instinctively: “You know, it was only a few years ago when Eden could control everything for you. No matter what kind of happiness you wanted to experience, Eden could fulfill your wishes; this cursed technology stripped away the value of natural hormonal influences. Nobody had the patience to really sit down and invest in real romance; marriage rate declined steadily everywhere else. Only Wolto remained at an unprecedented high because we treat marriage as a form of political alliance. But your parents weren’t like that, Bixing; if you could have grown up on Wolto, who knows how wonderful your life would have been.”

Lu Bixing relaxed himself in the break room and rested his chin on a hand: “I know, Uncle Zheng.”

Over fifty years had passed and Zheng Di had never heard an ‘Uncle Zheng’ from Lin Jingheng’s mouth. He froze on the spot and felt so moved he could almost feel tears rolling down his face. He stuttered for a while and muttered some words to himself on the screen.

Nagus chimed in with a question: “What about you, Bixing, do you have a home in the Eighth Galaxy?”

“I do, it’s on planet Qiming,” Lu Bixing nodded honestly, “along with a lover and a few pets.”

A little pebble on calm waters triggered a wave of gossip within the middle-aged veteran squad.

“Where are they from? A local from the Eighth Galaxy or a migrant?”

“Do they have a job? What do they do?”

“How old are they, older or younger than you?”

“Are they good to you? Do you have a photo?”

Marshal “I didn’t hear anything” Lin sitting on the side stood up casually and prepared to flee the scene.

“Not a local, but he’s working in the Eighth Galaxy’s Galactic Forces.” Lu Bixing’s gaze scanned over that slightly distressed silhouette on the side as he gave a naughty smile. “Forget about a photo--he’s actually here on this trip out with me, so I can introduce the person in question to you…”

Harris’ warning came out of the channel before he could finish his sentence: “Commander Lin, gentlemen; someone is attempting to emergency warp near the Heart of the Rose.”

Both Lin Jingheng and the group that was chattering amidst the eye of the storm froze.

Lin Jingheng lifted his gaze slowly: “What’s the size of the fleet?”

“Not particularly large, we estimate about two or three heavy mechs with other mid-sized and smaller mechs,” Harris responded gravely. “We stopped the emergency warp from the other side with our disruption, but now they’re attempting to build a communication platform with us.”

The Alliance had faced Lin Jingshu briefly while fleeing Wolto and had witnessed how bold her fleet was. The Freedom Corps had a whole fleet of heavy mechs with no smaller mech sizes visible as they all parked inside the heavy mechs as backup.

“It seems like a team that was only left with a few heavy mechs was forced to bring out some smaller ones as backup,” Harris said. “Marshal, shall we disregard this connection request?”

Lin Jingheng stared wordlessly at the screen for a few moments before answering: “Keep the disruption of the warp running; if you see any mechs popping out of the transfer portal, don’t hesitate and shoot them down on the spot. Connect the screen over to me, I want to see what they have to say.”

The long-distance signal was still quite unstable, so Lin Jingshu’s figure on the screen was a little blurry. Yet even so, her disheveled state from being chased down by Woolf was quite obvious. The interior of the Heavy Mech behind her was a complete mess that seemed to have been a result of multiple crashes caused by the protection airbags.

A medical capsule rested beside her; Lin Jingshu’s pale face looked almost ghostly through the screen.

If an average person’s unkempt, exhausted appearance looked pitiful, a beauty’s disheveled appearance would look almost tragically alluring.

Lin Jingshu opened her mouth on the screen, yet before any sound could come out of her mouth, she quickly lowered her head. She then turned her back towards the camera and waved at someone behind her, summoning another biochip human to speak on her behalf.

“Good evening, fellow generals, we meet again.” The biochip human’s demeanor was clearly much more humble than the one that had spoken to them earlier on Wolto. “We may have had an unhappy encounter last time, but this time we are here to sincerely request an alliance.”

“Is it some galactic holiday today? First we have the AUS swearing allegiance to us, now the Freedom Corps is also holding their hand up for an alliance,” Lu Bixing said. “Are we going for some ‘all-humans united under the same sky’ thing here? Miss Lin, I thought that you didn’t need our help with your abilities and troops on hand.”

“We took over a majority of the natural planets within the First Galaxy,” the biochip carrier said, “but these few planets were also small problems that could be solved with a few missiles in Woolf’s hands. Humans can destroy an AI without any sense of guilt or moral burden weighing on their shoulders, but it’s also true the other way around.”

Lin Jingshu avoided her brother’s gaze through the screen and spoke directly to Lu Bixing: “Prime Minister Lu, you can consult your own technician about this as well: Chief Woolf as a human is a completely different being than Woolf as an AI despite sharing the same memories.”

“Of course, I have an engineering background,” Lu Bixing nodded. “There’s an ancient saying that accepts the idea that ‘memories’ determine the identity of a person, which carries a certain level of truth. However, this only applies on the grounds that the subject in question is considered human, with a functioning body and brain. This theory can’t be applied to other non-human species of high cognitive abilities--is Poisson around?”

“Yes,” the cold voice from the Third Squadron rang out within the channel. “Prime Minister, we’ve managed to give an approximate analysis of the activation system Mister Harris brought over. We believe that this is an unlimited permission framework super AI.”

No matter how powerful an AI was, like Zhanlu, they were all built under a permission framework; to put it simply, the AIs must all have an owner. Without an owner, the entire AI built under the framework would be nothing but useless lines of code and junk metal that only maintained a chat function.

Yet an AI with an unlimited permission framework fundamentally changed the existence of the AI itself; despite being similarly referred to as an artificial intelligence, the difference between this AI version of Woolf and Zhanlu was even greater than the difference between a monkey and man.

The most fearsome part of an unlimited framework AI wasn’t its powerful computing abilities nor its range of control--it was the fact that it was completely independent as an AI.

Like any lifeforms in existence that sought to expand and live on as a species, these unlimited framework AIs were also programmed to have an instinct of survival and expansion in order to remain functioning.

As individuals, humans were complex creatures that often didn’t know what they wanted and strayed from their animalistic instincts; this was called human nature. Yet AIs had no humanity programmed in them and instead had clear logic programmed into their system that allowed them to prioritize their tasks.

The biochip carrier said, “Maybe Chief Woolf thought that this super AI was another way for him to exist in the world after death, a way to fulfill his ideals and duties from when he was still alive. But this decision was too rash and idealistic; it’s impossible to achieve in the long-run because a self-sufficient AI’s number one priority will always be to expand and maintain its extenence. Prime Minister Lu, Commander Lin, we’ll be quite honest here: the 306th decree was signed by Wang Ailun while he was under our control with the purpose of forcing the Eighth Galaxy to close off the wormhole and stay out of this. Back when Woolf was alive and sane, he had once openly opposed the idea of labeling the Eighth Galaxy as an enemy and even went as far as to accept the independence of the galaxy. However, an AI will not do this; as long as there’s an opportunity, it’ll continue to expand its influence through any means possible.”

Lu Bixing lifted an eyebrow: “So you’re trying to say that we’re all on the same side in the face of the super AI.”

“It’s a matter of life and death,” the biochip carrier said. “We must stand with you all this time!”

Lin Jingshu let out a small sigh: “The Eighth Galaxy may be safe for now, but we can’t say the same for the other galaxies. All the transfer portals within the outer layers of the First Galaxy have been destroyed and we’re completely cut off from the outside world temporarily. However, the First Galaxy is different from the Eighth; as the center of the Union, its geographical position is closely tied to all other galaxies. Without transfer portals, it would take almost a whole century for us to travel between the Seventh and Eighth Galaxies with modern interstellar travel; it would take only about six to seven years between the First and Second Galaxies, though. If this AI version of Woolf annihilates us, within a matter of years, it would be able to expand throughout the whole world. Don’t you all think this is horrifying, my friends?”

All the generals of the Central Militia looked at each other sternly.

Lu Bixing stared at the face that looked almost too similar to Lin Jingheng and said: “I’m almost convinced by your words.”

“The decision as to whether or not you all accept us is in your hands.” Lin Jingshu finally gave her brother a look by the time she said this line. Soon after, as if she couldn’t stand looking into those cold eyes for too long, she shifted her gaze away again while a hint of helplessness appeared on her face. “The Eighth Galaxy is behind the Heart of the Rose. You all can call backup anytime and even close off the wormhole if you wish; we don’t have any other bargaining chips in our hands.”

Everyone else’s gaze followed her to rest on Lin Jingheng.

The young Marshal stood up from his seat, his expression blank as if he had completely forgotten that the person before him was his precious sister and only family he’d had since he was young.

“You have no more bargaining chips?” Lin Jingheng responded airly, “I don’t believe you.”

Lin Jingshu looked at him in an indescribable manner, as if someone had given her a violent whip to her heart.

Lin Jingheng remained unfazed: “I don’t believe you’re the kind of person who would go beg others without any bargaining chips in your hands. Reinforce our frontline patrol, maintain the warping disruption.”

“I also knew you’d respond like this,” Lin Jingshu said softly before cutting off the connection and pulled back her delicate demeanor. She lifted the corner of her lips and said, “Though I couldn’t help but try asking anyway...you asked for it, oh well.”

Just as she finished, Lin Jingheng’s side could clearly hear the sirens inside the Freedom Crops mechs through the channel. The screen drowned in background noises as someone cried in panic: “My lady, they’re here!”

“They have eyes anywhere with transfer portals, what’s so surprising about them finding us?” Lin Jingshu responded coldly, “Retreat. It’s just a bunch of code and programs, you think I really have nothing else to fight with? The battleground on land is still mine!”

The long distance communication finally cut off.

“Marshal,” the soldier in charge of monitoring and recording the communication whispered, “I saw the Union’s super mech ‘Chengying’ from the Freedom Corps’ military camera; it seems as if Woolf’s AI fleet is chasing them down.”

Lin Jingheng remained composed and only said: “Got it; prepare to enter battle at any minute.”

Yet it didn’t seem like the AI fleet had any intention of targeting the Alliance. After firing a round right outside the transfer portals against the Freedom Corps forces, triggering another wave of high-energy aftershock, the fleet turned back to chase down Lin Jingshu instead of pursuing the Alliance.

“Looks like AI Woolf’s number one priority really was to destroy the biochip empire.” Nagus mumbled, “Woolf…perhaps he already predicted this when he was still alive. The biochip humans really give off the same vibe as the machine empire. The Freedom Corps are pirates unafraid of bloodshed and murder, so the whole world would become their hostage if they manage to overtake it; we’d be pushed into a disadvantage, so Woolf decided to fight machines with machines.”

Poisson let out a sigh: “What they said earlier was actually right: an autonomous AI is indeed terrifying. You can kill human enemies, but super AIs like this are even more troublesome; you’ll never know where it might leave a backup--destroying one might even trigger the awakening of another one.”

Bayer laughed bitterly: “So are we being forced to choose between the lesser of two evils now?”

If it came down to this, no matter how one looked at the situation, there was less risk in taking Lin Jingshu’s side.

“Marshal,” Lee thought about it for a moment before speaking up to Lin Jingheng, “what the Freedom Corps said earlier actually matches up to our strategic analysis. She...certainly didn’t want to drag the Eighth Galaxy into this situation and therefore made Wang Ailun do their bidding.”

The AUS was always also a pirate organization; taking one or two in didn’t seem to be much of a problem at this point.

Despite the fact that the biochip empire was growing infinitely close to an insect society, the ‘queen bee’ still retained some familial feelings toward Lin Jingheng.

Someone let out another light sigh within the channel: “When General Lin Wei was still alive, I remember seeing that little girl once…”

Lin Jingheng’s expression instantly grew grave: “Am I the one giving commands or are you all making the decisions yourselves!? Fire and kill on spot if the Freedom Corps comes any closer to the Heart of the Rose!”

## Ch 173 - The Girl He Swore To Protect With His Life

Lin Jingheng's reinforcement order was the first to pass through the wormhole and arrive at the Eighth Galaxy.

"Man, there really is no worst case scenario, only worse news," Thomas mumbled beneath his breath as he quickly scanned Lin Jingheng's order and passed it to Turan. "If only we can also blow up the wormholes. "

"Didn't the expedition team calculate it before?" Turan received the order without lifting her head. "Even though it works in theory as long as we don't care about both the First and Eighth Galaxies--how should we arrange the reinforcement?"

"Wait," Thomas said, "let me call for some backup. "

The connection to the Milky Way City's command post channel successfully linked as he finished his line. White rubbed off the sweat on his forehead and announced: "General Turan, General Young, I brought Doctor Hardin over!"

"Send a message back to Jingheng: ‘don't trust Lin Jingshu.’" Doctor Hardin pushed his wheelchair up hastily as he ordered, "And don't go near the biochip humans, they're not human at all!"

Turan shook on the spot.

Back in the Heart of the Rose, the atmosphere grew stiff ever since Lin Jingshu unexpectedly knocked on the Alliance's door. The Silver Third Squadron and the wormhole technicians held an emergency meeting as they decided to send the second batch of refugees through the wormhole earlier than scheduled.

After a quick repair, Zhanlu returned to his human form and pulled up the data of the last battle before the foundation of the Union at Lin Jingheng's order.

"Your grandfather, Chief Commander Lin Ge'er, died a month before the Pledge of Freedom memorial holiday during the NSC era. That was also during the final battle against the machine empire of the old Sidereal Era." Zhanlu meticulously reconstructed the galactic map of the old Sidereal Era. "At that time, the Union Troops had already surrounded Wolto while the last tyrant of the old Era, King Hertz, committed suicide on the capital planet. Soon after, super-AI King Hertz appeared on the battlefield and invaded multiple military bases of the Union Troops across the galaxies, causing severe damage to the Union. "

Lu Bixing made his way behind Lin Jingheng's back and chimed in as he heard this line: "This sounds a lot like AI Woolf. "

"No, Headmaster Lu," Zhanlu said. "AI King Hertz was not a completely autonomous unlimited framework system. In fact, the human Hertz had a son when he was still alive who held the backup permissions of the AI; only when the backup permission was not activated would the AI become infinitely close to an unlimited framework system. "

"In other words, its existence is somewhere between you and this 'Woolf' we're facing right now, right?" Lu Bixing said, "A normal AI needs owner permission to be activated, but this 'King Hertz' AI needed owner permission to close off its autonomous mode. "

"Yes, this was because King Hertz still had his own desires and wished to maintain his family's authoritative position in the world. That was why he created this super AI in the hope of completely destroying the Union. He set his own son up to be the savior of the world to protect everyone from this horrible monster in order to extend the rule of their empire far into the future. " Zhanlu said, "It was later when Chief Lin volunteered to be the bait of the Union Troops, luring the successor into using the AI's backup permission, that the Union managed to overturn the war. At the same time, the Union also paid a hefty price for their victory. "

"My grandfather died during this battle, " Lin Jingheng said. "The AI King Hertz was actually annihilated by Chief Woolf's hands."

Lu Bixing pondered for a moment before asking, "Clearly, Woolf doesn't have a successor nor personal ambition this time; what else can we use as a reference here?"

Zhanlu: "The successor back then thought he had won the battle and took over King Hertz's permissions with his passcode. The Union Troops completely cut off all signals connecting to Wolto and temporarily turned the entire planet into a galactic prison. Then, the Union Troops that were already waiting on Wolto shut down all power sources on the planet at the same time. The entire planet temporarily returned to prehistoric times for twenty minutes. "

Lu Bixing let out a sigh: "Are you serious, Zhanlu, baby? Wolto and the entire First Galaxy are on completely different scales. Besides, our situation now is completely opposite of how it was in the past--we're the ones being surrounded this time. "

Lin Jingheng didn't speak and let his mind wander off in silence on the side.

Lu Bixing studied the man for a short while before reaching out to pinch the commander's waist.

Lin Jingheng was suddenly pulled out of his own thoughts by this sneak-attack grope and felt a numbing sensation down his spine. He lowered his voice and gave Lu Bixing a warning glare: "What are you doing?"

Lu Bixing leaned in by his ears and said: "The Freedom Corps certainly chose a bad time to come in. I didn't even get the chance to introduce your 'real identity' to those old folks; I was hoping to see their old jaws unhinge from shock."

Lin Jingheng wasn't interested in picking up those old men’s broken dentures nor was he in the mood to chit chat with Lu Bixing. He waved off the young man hastily and said: "Go away. "

"There's a very eco-friendly individual who said he would lock up his heart when he wasn’t sweet-talking romance with his lover in fear of racking up too much energy bills. " Lu Bixing asked, "So what's up, why are you locking yourself back up again?"

Lin Jingheng rolled his eyes: "Get to the point."

"You misfired when we were outside of Wolto, but why are you still sitting around like it's none of your business as you watch her get chased down by the AI?" Lu Bixing's voice softened, "Some people think that now that we've ended up in this situation, we should aim to gather all potential power to fight against our common enemy. Even the AUS is siding with us now, am I right?"

Lin Jingheng sneered back: "So which of those dumbasses asked you to come convince me?"

Lu Bixing hissed backed in response: "Come on, be a little bit more sophisticated here, you've single-handedly spewed out a whole Wolto's worth of insults--I know you have your own reasons. Hope is...different from her, right?"

Lin Jingheng fell silent momentarily: "They're two different types of people. "

Lu Bixing waited patiently for him to continue. His contacts were still intact, pupils still green from the disguise like the tranquil surface of a pond. For some inexplicable reason, Lin Jingheng felt a good half of the raging fire within his heart extinguished by those eyes.

"Do you know what 'the beast at bay' means?" Lin Jingheng said in a voice almost as low as a whisper.

Lu Bixing was taken aback.

"Only when a ferocious beast truly feels cornered by threat will it glare with hostility, showing signs of weakness means it's ready to prey on its target." Lin Jingheng analyzed clearly, "We're both the same in this aspect."

Lu Bixing: "But..."

"Hm?"

Lu Bixing's mouth opened, but the last part of his sentence didn't voice out--*what if you were wrong?*

*You protected the last line of defense and shouldered responsibility for the Eighth Galaxy behind your back; your heartstrings tightened into an inflexible cord, afraid to relax even for a second. It's always wiser to play safer...so what would happen if you were wrong? Are you going to watch the last of your family walk away from you one final time?*

"......no, nothing." Lu Bixing watched as Lin Jingheng was ready to turn around and continue discussing the super AI with Zhanlu. He suddenly called out, "Jingheng, can you hug me whenever you're feeling sad in your heart?"

"No need," Lin Jingheng responded without lifting his head, "I tucked it away already, save some energy. "

Yet Lin Jingheng wasn't a god, he couldn't always be correct.

Just like how he had once distrusted Harris with every suspicion and ended up exposing himself, it seemed as if he had wrongly made assumptions about Lin Jingshu this time as well.

Forty-eight hours after the Human Alliance retreated to the Heart of the Rose, the third fleet of refugees finally entered the wormhole and sailed towards the Eighth Galaxy.

At the same time, the outermost layer of transfer portals around the Heart of the Rose saw another round of activity.

This time, Lin Jingshu was left with only one commanding ship and a few small mechs around her the size of ants. Outside one of the transfer portals, she frantically sent out at least sixteen long-distance communication requests within a span of less than a minute. The vanguard team of the Alliance troops finally but hesitantly answered the call; yet before they could speak, Lin Jingshu's hasty voice rang out from the other side: "Send a message to your Marshal for me: tell him that large fleets of AI mechs are sailing towards the Heart of the Rose as we speak, don't sit around. The AUS' disruption technology may work on me, but you all won't stand a chance against Woolf!"

Her voice was simultaneously sent to Lin Jingheng's commanding ship. This time, Lin Jingshu seemed to have retrieved her vain pride after receiving a rejection once. After sending off the warning, she no longer brought up the topic of forming an alliance and left without another word. She didn't even wait for Lin Jingheng's figure to appear on screen and single-handedly cut off the connection to flee.

"What's she plotting now?" Captain Liu asked Poisson beside him discreetly. "Don't tell me she risked running back here just to give us a warning."

Poisson didn't respond.

That year when he escaped the City of Angels with his brother Thomas, they had hidden inside the Eden labs with Lin Jingshu's help. Her position as the representative of the Committee back then made her seem like a proper and gentle young lady, graceful like a single bulb of the Azure Sea resting in the corner. She had listened to him bicker with Thomas and gave them a strange reaction, asking "Are you two twins? You two sure get along well."

Poisson could still clearly remember her expression at that time to this day; it was filled with envy and surprise, like a child that had never tasted the sweetness of candy.

Yet her evil deeds left a bloodied trail over time; she may have once gifted Lin Jingheng mechs, but she also almost made him quietly disappear on a nameless planet in the Sixth Galaxy.

Now that they were all standing at the edge of the cliff, would someone like her also reminisce about the family she had once walked away from?

"Marshal," Poisson said, "please dispatch the Third Squadron up to the front lines just in case. "

Only technicians and engineers could fight a battle against AI fleets; Lin Jingheng hesitated momentarily before he finally nodded his head in approval.

Lin Jingshu's warning this time was as timely as a rare rain during a drought. Within less than half an hour after she left, the front line vanguards detected a violent abnormal energy wave outside the transfer portals.

"Marshal," Harris reported sternly, "it seems like Miss Lin certainly didn't lie this time; we're estimating it to be a heavy mech fleet closing in."

"They're coming!"

"Watch out!"

It was a fleet made entirely of heavy mechs with AI control. As the former sponsor of the AUS, Woolf's research on the pirate group's disruption technology was very thorough; Harris and his team had no way of stopping the fleet!

The AI-controlled heavy mech fleet passed through the AUS disruption line with ease and was already within firing range of the AUS fleets. Harris and his subordinates were not combat personnel; the small mechs from the pirate forces fled the scene as soon as possible. The First Galaxy Patrol fleet stationed in the front lines sailed up without hesitation and quickly exchanged fire with the enemies.

Poisson dodged a missile through the mental network while his own two eyes were still glued to the computer screen before him. The supercomputer was currently analyzing the enemy's battle style; Poisson's eyes scanned the results and captured the main points of the data. "Chengying is the core AI of this fleet, all mech's mental networks are centrally controlled by it. Send out disruptions to the enemy's communication signals!"

As the last word came out of his mouth, the main fleet of the reinforcement troops arrived and shot a row of high-energy particles from a visual dead-end of the battlefield. The reinforcements attempted to physically break through the AI troops, attempted to sail out of the transfer portals while the Silver Third Squadron quickly set up the disruption signals--freezing up all the internal connections within the AI mechs.

The First Galaxy vanguards repaired their missile systems moments faster than the frozen AIs and shot out a tsunami of missiles, knocking down a whole wave of enemy mechs.

Unlike humans, AI fleets didn't have the kind of heroic spirit in them to fight until the end. Once it detected that they'd been put at a disadvantage, Chengying immediately ordered its fleet to flee the site and disappeared from the sights of the Alliance.

Yet this was merely the beginning.

Soon after, it was as if Woolf's AI troops had shifted their targets as they began attempting to invade the Heart of the Rose. Every time the AIs got shot out, they would readjust and upgrade their systems based on historical data and return back with a new set of systems.

Machines didn’t need rest, but how could humans last without a break?

The enemy rolled in continuously like gears without rest over countless days and nights. Over time, the Human Alliance began feeling the toll, as the frontlines of their temporary fortress began to crumble.

On the seventh day, Lin Jingheng pulled out his third relaxant. Lu Bixing grabbed his hand before he could inject it and said: "You can't use this anymore; I'll keep an eye out for you for now, go take a nap inside a medical capsule. "

Lin Jingheng: "Oh."

He responded verbally and turned the needle head outwards toward the tip of his finger. Lu Bixing thought the man had listened and reached to take the syringe, only to see the tip of the needle head make a swift turn. It slid past his fingers as Lin Jingheng jabbed it into his veins.

Lu Bixing: "Hey!"

"Last one," Lin Jingheng responded insincerely. "Besides, there's time to rest after war. If we die here, don't even think about getting back up, so don't worry about resting now...the Eighth Galaxy's new number one relaxant certainly is a piece of work."

The number one completely eliminated the old version's problem of muscle spasms and only had the small side-effect of a slight migraine and rising heart rate. For galactic soldiers who had been through rough training, these were essentially non-problems they could easily ignore.

Lu Bixing's expression was grim: "Relaxants are emergency medication. It's exactly because of its low-risk side-effects that we have to strictly control the usage. Overdosing will cause irreversible damage to your body, don't you have a bit of common sense!?"

"I do," Lin Jingheng pressed on his chest lightly. "Shush, be good and stay quiet for a bit, my heart's racing in a bad way...isn't Lin Jingshu the AI troops' first target? Why did they suddenly change their strategy?"

"Your heart is racing because you used too many relaxants!" Lu Bixing drew his eyebrows together in disappointment. "If you dare touch the syringe again I'll knock you out--AIs have a very straightforward sense of duty with clear goals; normally they wouldn't change up their plans without reason, unless they concluded that their first target had already..."

Perhaps it was due to the effects of the relaxant, but Lin Jingheng's pupils looked almost out of focus momentarily.

Lu Bixing closed his mouth in time and suddenly felt that at least for that split second of time, Lin Jingheng regretted not seeing her one last time.

Lu Bixing: "You..."

At that moment, new activities on the frontlines caught their attention. Aside from the AI fleet attempting to break through the outliers of the transfer portals and charge into the Heart of the Rose, another fleet of AI mechs appeared; the Alliance stiffened up, these machines had backup!

Yet as this new fleet of mechs closed in, Poisson was the first to notice something and reported: "Marshal, they're pursuing a few small mechs from the Freedom Corps!"

The Freedom Corps once again appeared in the Heart of the Rose. This time, even the commanding ship was gone, leaving the pirates with a few broken mechs that flew off like headless flies. Soon after, they unsurprisingly were blocked out of the transfer portals from the signal disruption.

"Marshal!"

Without Lin Jingheng's orders, nobody dared to let them in. Lin Jingheng clenched his fist.

Perhaps Lu Bixing was right; three relaxants was a little too much--his head felt as if needles were stabbing right through his temples.

"Marshal, shall we remove the transfer disruption and let them in?"

"No." The word forced its way out through Lin Jingheng's teeth.

"Marshal, a communication request."

"......Take it in."

Lin Jingshu's figure flashed momentarily on the screen before disappearing again. The small mech she was in had already lost its gravity control, making it difficult for people inside to maintain balance.

The entire screen shook violently for a while before Lin Jingshu managed to crawl back up.

Her long hair had been blown out messily by the protection airbags and rested on her chest like seaweed.

This time, she looked deeply into Lin Jingheng's eyes without a word for a long while.

"When I was young, I begged you to stay. During adolescence, I begged you to pick me up. After I grew up...I begged you to not leave me behind," she finally opened her mouth and spoke up in a voice almost too soft to hear, "I won't ask anything from you anymore."

A strange light consumed the communication screen. Lin Jingheng's eyes widened.

A missile hit Lin Jingshu's mech, triggering a massive explosion at the very last moment. It only lasted for a split second before the connection cut off. The image on the screen thus seemed to have frozen at the moment the sparks from the explosion swept across the screen.

Lin Jingshu's mouth seemed to be calling out "big brother."

*I'll no longer ask you for anything, big brother.*

This was the girl he had once sworn to protect for the rest of his life.

## Ch 174 - Emotions Are Harmful and Useless

The side-effect of overdosing relaxants--the rapid increase of blood pressure--made him feel as if his blood was about to rip through his mortal flesh to roll out of his corpse like hot lava, melting his bones. Lin Jingheng could almost hear the sound of his heart blowing up inside of him. Every centimeter of his veins felt as if it was about to pop while fresh blood dripped out from his nose. He took in a breath of air subconsciously, swallowing the bit of blood back down his throat while he coughed as if he was ready to cough out his lungs. In a fit of pain, he reached a hand over his nose and mouth while visible drips of blood rolled out through his fingers.

Lu Bixing felt his heart stop at the scene and quickly made his way over to pull the commander into his arms: “Get the medical capsule!”

Lin Jingheng pulled out an arm to push him away and said in a muffled tone: “No need.”

He casually wiped off the blood with his hands and pulled over the smaller medical equipment that had helped treat his broken bone earlier and said hoarsely: “Some local capillaries popped, treat it for me.”

Nosebleeds weren’t a big issue and could easily be resolved by a few sprays up the nose. Lin Jingheng took off his bloodied coat expressionlessly and threw it at Zhanlu; the top of his inner shirt collar was still stained with a bit of blood that had already dried into a rusted streak.

“Jingheng,” Lu Bixing lowered his voice to keep it calm, “I’m begging you, can you please take a rest inside the medical capsule?”

Lu Bixing’s ‘I’m begging you’ had always been a powerful and peerless weapon: no matter what kind of senseless or ridiculous request came after those words, Lin Jingheng would almost never say no.

Yet this time, it was as if Lin Jingheng didn’t hear those words at all as he mumbled to himself: “If the AI troops can chase after her to the Heart of the Rose, that would mean Woolf is aware that she’s still alive and knew how to track her down---then why did the AI suddenly change its task priority under these circumstances?”

Lu Bixing: “......”

“Right,” Lin Jingheng’s eyes scanned the surroundings in what seemed like a daze, “Turan…...where’s that response from Turan, pull it up, I want to take a look at it again.”

Zhanlu pulled up the letter Turan sent back from the Eighth Galaxy. Lin Jingheng skimmed through the detailed report of the reinforcements before his gaze was captured by Doctor Hardin’s last line at the bottom and read aloud unexpectedly: “Doctor Hardin specifically mentioned that biochip humans aren’t human. I don’t believe she would die so easily under Woolf’s cannons. If we connect this to how the AI troops suddenly began closing in near the Heart of the Rose seven days ago...does anything come to mind?”

Lu Bixing couldn’t follow this train of thought because he wasn’t sure whether this was an objective analysis of the current situation or simply nonsense that was coming out of the commander’s mouth because he couldn’t accept reality.

Though judging from the stain of blood on his shirt collar, the latter seemed to be the most reasonable explanation.

“Jingheng……”

“As for the biochip humans in the Freedom Corps, they have no reason to join the Human Alliance nor any motives to cooperate with us. Biochip humans and natural humans can’t coexist; whether we win against Woolf or are forced to retreat back to the Eighth Galaxy in the end, there’s doomed to be another battle between us and the Freedom Corps. From the pirate’s perspective, their best strategy is to overtake the Heart of the Rose, utilize the wormhole’s unstable spacetime to send off information to the Eighth Galaxy and take over the galaxy amidst the chaos after cutting off the wormhole terminal. The First Galaxy’s ground battlefield is already in the hands of these biochip humans, so that forces Woolf to decide between wiping out everyone in the First Galaxy or living in harmony with the biochip humans...this is just like how the forerunners of the Union isolated Wolto back then…”

Lin Jingheng’s voice grew softer and smaller until it was barely audible at the end.

He didn’t seem like he was having a discussion of opinions with others and was instead desperately trying to find any traces of evidence to convince himself that his decision was correct by laying out all the hard facts before himself. He wanted to prove he was righteous, that the footage of death earlier was simply a fake video targeting his mental weakness.

This was his very last wall of defense before breaking down.

His whole life had been absorbed by warfare as he shined like an unmatched blade of the galaxies. From an outsider’s perspective, it was a symbol of power and authority; little did they know that these were simply scars of incompetence. The sense of powerlessness ground into his skin; from family to friends, everyone and everything fell like fine-grained sand through his fingertips to a place far, far away of no return. The fleeting regrets passed through his fingers one by one, leaving irreversible cut marks on those battle-worn hands.

Lu Bixing couldn’t stand seeing him like this any longer and quietly called for a medical capsule. He walked up behind Lin Jingheng and got ready to knock the senseless man unconscious.

At least half of Lin Jingheng’s mind was somewhere in another corner of space and didn’t notice the young man behind him as he continued mumbling: “It’s almost impossible for her to get past the technological barrier of the AUS’ warping block, yet if she’s still confident that she can take the Eighth Galaxy and the Heart of the Rose with her own hands, that would means she…”

The tips of Lu Bixing’s fingers were about to touch the nape of the commander when he stopped abruptly as he heard this line. The young man then lifted his head up to stare at the interstellar map on the big screen.

Due to the natural orbit and rotations of celestial objects, interstellar maps were always changing. Terminals were essentially ambulatory passages that mankind had already fully grasped amid all variations of orbital and rotational movements of these celestial objects, which were then accurately displayed on the maps at any given time. The movements of the terminals were extremely complicated and were normally calculated by computers connected to mechs, which would automatically reroute to follow specific terminals based on the locations of celestial objects en route.

Yet with a place as vast as the universe, there were bound to be unexplored areas aside from known terminals. The First Galaxy was where the Union’s capital was located--countless terminals connected to the capital planet from other galaxies with highly-developed transportation technologies. Likewise, unexplored territories were considerably less prominent than in other galaxies, but they still existed--especially near the forbidden zone of the Heart of the Rose.

Unexplored non-terminal areas were not only dangerous, the requirements for safety proofing routes and pilot’s competency to respond to any unexpected situations were significantly higher. However, the most important part was that these areas didn’t have transfer portals or points of warping.

Without points of warping, an interstellar trip lasting light years was almost unfathomable; the distance marked ‘one sailing day’ measured approximately the distance a mech could feasibly travel in a whole day.

Yet no matter how far the travel was, it was still only within the First Galaxy.

The First Galaxy was a hub for the elites; it was the smallest in both geographical size and human population among the eight galaxies. Back when Lin Jingheng sailed on the starship from the Silver Fortress to Wolto, he was banned from warping points so his estimated arrival on the capital planet without any mishaps on the way was thirteen days.

Yet, now it had been seven days since Chengying had haphazardly entered their first line of defense.

Lin Jingheng also noticed this point and suddenly stopped; the two men quickly exchanged a glance.

Lin Jingheng turned to the communication channel screen: “Frontline vanguards, back out from the battle for the transfer portals and retreat into the inner lines immediately!”

The entire frontlines were completely taken aback. This wave of invasion from the AI Troops was extra ferocious, unlike any they’d seen before; this sudden order from their Marshal completely shut down the brains of the entire First Galaxy Patrols and Silver Third Squadron at the front: “Marshal Lin, but those AI Troops…”

“Forget about them, retreat!”

The Silver Third Squadron was the first to react. While Poisson was just as lost as everyone else, he knew their Marshal’s orders always had a strategic reason behind them. The Third Squadron tossed one last missile into the incoming AI Fleet before they ceased all fire and began retreating. The technological unit was the core fighter in the battle against AIs. Everyone else was only there to support with brute force. After the Third Squadron left, the First Galaxy fleet had no choice but to follow; yet even as the most elite fleets of the human military retreated swiftly and orderly within a blink of an eye, there were still some that couldn’t escape in time---

In the Heart of the Rose, a fleet of heavy mechs suddenly charged in from an undocumented non-terminal area. The crossfire at the frontlines turned the energy detector into an endless rollercoaster that conveniently masked the abnormal energy waves emitting from heavy mechs closing in on them.

This fleet was the exact Freedom Corps pirates that were still ‘being chased down’ by the AI Troops.

The one waiting outside the transfer portals wasn’t Lin Jingshu…...not merely the one that ‘died’ on screen, perhaps even the one that first established connection with them was never actually her!

Plastic surgery or tampered communication, regardless how it was done, artificially creating someone that looked exactly the same wasn’t hard to do with modern technology. In addition, Lin Jingshu had the power to ‘possess’ others and remotely control a generation five chip carrier’s body; the queen bee simply needed a similar body in order to appear before everyone else.

The fleet outside the transfer portal was simply bait: the real fleet of the Freedom Corps had already left the barricade of the AI Troops.

AIs had difficulties determining who was the actual generation five carrier and who was the real Lin Jingshu; they could only run after the bait around the First Galaxy while attempting to search the main fleet of the Freedom Corps.

After losing traces of the main fleet, the computers that ran inside the AIs would automatically determine through historical data of the enemy’s battle strategy that the enemy’s next target was the Heart of the Rose and Eighth Galaxy. Therefore, the AIs would reasonably attempt to capture all terminals surrounding the Heart of the Rose. Due to the heavily dependent nature of AIs on their hardware requirements, it could safely be concluded that their connections between each other were built on the transfer portal networks. The vacuum area of the Heart of the Rose was extremely disadvantageous to them, so they would have no choice but to fight for control of established interstellar terminals.

Biochip humans and natural humans could not coexist; Lin Jingshu had never planned on cooperating with the Human Alliance.

The first knock on the door would no doubt be rejected; she simply needed to control the amount of complicated emotions required to put on an act in order to plant a seed of doubt in the hearts of people.

She didn’t continue to pester even after rejection because it wasn’t her style; it was too cowardly and suspicious by her standards. So, when he finally knocked on the door the second time to drop a warning, she displayed her prideful and determined side. Therefore, when the AI troops certainly arrived as she said, it would make her words worth more as she showed she was willing to risk her life to send a message to the enemy. At this point, even the most iron-hearted soldiers would be moved as everyone within the Human Alliance questioned whether their decision had been correct.

As they pondered, the attention of the Alliance would be driven away by those senseless AI invasions as the entire fleet’s defense shifted heavily towards the frontlines.

The third knock on the door was the finishing blow--the beast at the cliff’s edge. After a dramatic death witnessed by the entire Alliance and leaving a last bloodied scar on the burning eyes of the generals, the flames of war and a common enemy would fuel the heroic passion of these human hearts. The Human Alliance would bathe temporarily in emotional numbness for the loss of their comrades, allowing even the Central Militia to forget their hatred towards the pirates that still held their homes and families hostage.

The insides of space mechs were dry, so people who stayed on for extended periods of time would show varying symptoms of dehydration, such as chapped lips. Lin Jingshu ripped a piece of dry skin from the corner of her lips, revealing a small trace of blood. She licked up the dripping blood, feeling quite pleased by the slight pain.

Back on the nameless planet of the Sixth Galaxy, a completely disabled Lin Jingheng had deceived her once to the point where she left the man for over a decade with a mistyped “don’t cry” through the small mental network.

*I finally repaid you for that time*, she thought, *Jingheng*.

Emotions were harmful and useless; they should’ve already been thrown away in the process of human evolution.

The angle the Freedom Corps emerged from was strategically unique, like a hidden nail that stabbed right into the core of the Human Alliance camp. They forcefully cut off the back-end defense from the frontline vanguards that didn’t have time to retreat back to their post within the Heart of the Rose.

At the same time, the Second Galaxy Central Militia that served as the second line of defense ran head-first into the Freedom Corps’ heavy mech fleet.

Lin Jingheng’s arrangements were tightly-knit and Zheng Di was still a dependable old General who wouldn’t drop the ball at the surprise attack, successfully blocking off the obnoxious Freedom Corps fleet temporarily.

Lin Jingheng: “Captain Liu!”

The Sixth Squadron moved in at the command, slashing into the Freedom Corps fleet from the side, sandwiching the pirates between the Second Galaxy Central Militia. The two fleets cut off the pirates from both directions like hunters holding down a poisonous snake that crawled out of the sewers.

Zheng Di’s fragile emotions sank and rose back up in a full circle, finally yelling back in anger after realizing he had been played with: “Are you all here to die!?”

Despite the fact that the biochip soldiers from the Freedom Corps still had a raw advantage in higher mental strength, the strategic decision to charge right into their enemy’s homebase still proved to be difficult to carry out. An elite military fleet wasn’t simply determined by their mental strength and still needed equal amounts of combat experience to fully reach their potentials; for someone who was a master of deceiving others, who played with the hearts of their enemies, it seemed as if her Freedom Corps still fell short in raw fighting power.

Within a matter of minutes, this intimidating heavy mech fleet from the Freedom Corps was about to be completely broken into pieces as the Alliance troops pulled out their butcher knives.

Lin Jingshu let out a helpless sigh on the commanding ship: “I’m really not fit for warfare, huh. I even went out of my way to cram in some lectures from the Black Orchid Academy’s Battle Command department. Thank goodness I don’t often use missiles to solve my problems.”

The Freedom Corps mechs that were now scattered amongst the Alliance fleets began their final struggles, attempting to hack into the mental networks of the surrounding mechs.

Of course, the Alliance was not afraid of this at all.

The last time the Freedom Corps escaped by pushing the Alliance out of the mental networks, they lucked out in capturing the Alliance right after their initial shock of facing the AI Troops. This time was different: no matter how high the mental strength of a biochip human was, they couldn’t possibly reach a 100% sync rate with their mechs like an AI, which meant that their average percentage was not much higher than a professionally trained galactic soldier.

In addition, the pirates had already entered their territory. Even if the Alliance was full of second-rate pilots and had to rely on crowd-strategy with ever-changing pilots, they still had the power to wear down the mental strengths of these biochip humans.

As this ambush that seemed to have a doomed failure dragged on, something unexpected and frightening happened the next moment.

One of the Central Militia mechs suddenly shifted its cannons and shot right towards the Second Galaxy’s commanding ship.

The aggressor mech was originally one of the escorting mechs of the commanding ship, piloted by Zheng Di’s personal guard. It was located very close to the commanding ship when it fired, and of course, nobody expected this sudden turn of events.

Yet within this short distance, the missile fired mercilessly at the commanding ship’s armory. In the blink of an eye, the entire armory was engulfed in a horrific fire that swallowed up the rest of the commanding ship’s body.

A signal suddenly disappeared on the communication channel of the central commanding ship. Lin Jingheng stood up abruptly.

Humans were like ephemeral stardust on the battlefield of space.

Zheng Di didn’t even get the chance to say another word to him.

Liu Yuanzhong hollered inside the channel: “Watch out! Disperse!”

Among the Sixth Squadron and Central Militia fleets, countless mechs all fired towards their own comrades as he announced his warning.

A chilling sensation rolled down Liu Yuanzhong’s back--the Central Militia aside, the entire Sixth Squadron forces dispatched out here had sailed directly from the Eighth Galaxy and were all equipped with biochip disruption technology; it should have been impossible for biochip carriers to sneak in among them!

“It’s the mental network.” As a half-baked specialist on biochips, Lu Bixing was the first to come to a realization. “The early ‘opium’ chips had the ability to disrupt human-mech synchronization and had psychedelic effects. After Yelvich’s assassination, the Union’s public security department must have specifically created a firewall against opium biochips to greatly reduce these psychedelic effects. But the battle of mental networks is essentially a battle of mental strength, so these biochip humans can create illusions for their enemy pilots through their mental networks!”

A heavy mech’s mental network range was extremely vast with the ability to contract and expand as necessary, but it was almost impossible to do so during a heated battle like this. Everything from the heavy mech body out to its range of mental network was within the control of the biochip humans; there was nowhere to run.

The Alliance panicked. It was one thing if they were sailing under just the threat of friendly fire, but the most terrifying aspect was that they couldn’t even tell which of their comrades’ mental networks had already been ‘infected’ with a virus. They couldn’t tell who had already become an enemy in the eyes of their comrades inside the communication channel, nor could they even be sure if they were truly awake and still able to distinguish friend from foe.

These biochip humans had always been conspirators that plotted things in the dark and had grown to this scale with the same underhanded methods over the years. Under most people’s impression, they were simply commoners without any proper military training; little did they know that these pirates had had this final trick up their sleeves the whole time.

Lin Jingshu certainly had done all she could to prepare to fight against a proper military unit, as Lin Jingheng had once said.

The Heart of the Rose was the homeground of the Alliance. Because they had the Eighth Galaxy behind them, they could choose to retreat back to the other side of the wormhole at any time, and the Eighth Galaxy was on standby to dispatch reinforcements at any time--this was still an undisputed fact.

But what if the entire Alliance troops in the Heart of the Rose were blinded and deafened to the point where they could not even distinguish between friend and foe?

If they retreated, they would certainly bring the biochip humans along with them to the Eighth Galaxy. Then, the wormhole would no longer be able to stop the virus-like biochip and would let Lin Jingshu claim total victory without dirtying her own hands.

Meanwhile, throughout the other galaxies, the civilians and government organizations finally united in a growing rebel force against the biochip humans. The chip carriers that had lost their connection with their queen bee fell into a disadvantageous state, especially on the battlefield of space; they were simply no match against the proper military fleets that had regained control.

Yet just as people thought the tables had turned in their favor, the situation on the main battlefield once again reversed as the biochip displayed its most fearsome aspect of itself to the entire universe.

“I’ve told you all that this was simply one possible future of evolution,” Lin Jingshu said gently. “But of course, there will always be some pessimists that won’t believe that I’m doing you all a real favor.”

## Ch 175 - Do You Want to Be With Me?

At the same time, in the Heart of the Rose.

Before the Silver Third Squadron was doomed to become space waste against the AI Troops, the Human Alliance utilized the vacuum environment of their homeground and managed to hold out temporarily against their enemies.

Yet AI Troops didn’t have human-mech ports and were the antithesis of biochip humans.

The entire Human Alliance was made up of people of pure flesh and blood without any modifications; all of the information gathered from their surroundings was from their own senses. Under the psychedelic mental networks created by those cheating biochip humans, the Alliance troops were virtually powerless to fight back.

The forces created a three-way struggle within the battleground in a pandemonium of fire. Even Lin Jingheng had to admit that in some ways, Woolf was right: only the unrivaled AI Troops could be the real terminators of the biochip humans.

“Hey, Third Squadron!” Nagus’ tears rolled into his mouth, the bitterness and salt staining his voice, “Lure the AI Troops over; you guys won’t be able to properly determine our enemies!”

Poisson could feel cold sweat trailing down his skin: “That’s ineffectual, you’re fighting fire with fire, General Nagus!”

When the Freedom Corps first broke into the Alliance territory, the Alliance troops that had been fooled by the pirates’ act had retaliated in anger. To combat an enemy like the Freedom Corps where individual mental strengths were absurdly high but experience together as a military unit was lacking, the best strategy was to break the fleet up into smaller units and shoot down the enemies that way.

However, it seemed like that initial disadvantageous stage was also part of Lin Jingshu’s calculations because now those small teams were like a layer of protection for the pirates.

If the situation earlier was “the Freedom Corps fell into the barricade of the Human Alliance,” it was now “the Alliance became the security blanket of the Freedom Corps.”

The Human Alliance that had been disrupted by hallucinations was even more lawless than before; for a short while, they were like clueless balls of yarn that had been tangled up from the inside. Yet Woolf’s AI Troops clearly had no interest in cooperating with the lowly carbon-lifeforms; they didn’t care about the casualties on the Alliance side as long as they achieved their goal. If they let Chengying in at a time like this, it would immediately shoot down the battlefield, Alliance and pirate alike, which meant that the Alliance would become the meatshields of the Freedom Corps in this situation.

The most deadly aspect was that the biochip now was a completely different monster than the earliest ‘opium biochip.’

The earliest opium biochip had shadows and links to Eden; even the earliest users had been lured in by the slogan of ‘Eden’s substitute.’ The chip only affected a very small portion of the human brain, which meant it could only create very limited visual hallucinations. Even Zhanlu’s forbidden fruit that was built to combat Eden could easily fight off these earlier chips.

Yet two decades had passed and the chip’s development and research had grown rapidly over these years. Now it had completely escaped the shadows of Eden, disregarded Laura Gordon’s initial vision of bodily modification to accelerate the evolution process, and become something different altogether.

Lin Jingshu had walked too far down this path. Perhaps even Doctor Hardin could only give a rough guess as to the actual mechanics of how biochip humans could hack into the mental networks.

They didn’t have time now to study the science behind it either. The Freedom Corps were essentially invited guests at the party now that they were no longer tied down by the Alliance; if the Alliance didn’t think of a way to combat them, these biochip humans would close in on the wormhole zone.

The natural wormhole area wasn’t like a sewage pipe with a fixed path, it was a field of distorted spacetime. Within any given time, multiple whirlpools that led to different passages would appear and disappear at random. Mint and her team’s main job was to maintain the stability of a passage once anyone entered a wormhole so that it didn’t collapse midway.

Even a fleet of mechs that entered the wormhole at the same time might end up in different passages, so different fleets of mechs were even more susceptible to getting separated. Due to the different passages everyone sailed through, the time it would take to reach the other side also differed; normally the time difference would be about one or two days, but the time of entrance certainly did not necessarily correlate with the time of exit.

In other words, if the biochip fleet were to enter the wormhole right now, Turan’s side would not be able to distinguish them from the Woltorian refugees. There were hundreds of thousands of refugees inside the wormhole right now and closing off the passage would certainly cause everyone inside the wormhole, refugee and Freedom Corps alike, to perish within the distorted spacetime. If Turan didn’t have the heart to make the sacrifice, then these biochip humans would cross the chasm of space into the Eighth Galaxy, returning it once again to an endless purgatory of warfare after emerging from a mere few years of peace.

A whole galaxy versus hundreds of thousands of outer galaxy refugees, who would they choose? Who would they sacrifice?

This was a simple multiple choice question for AI Woolf.

Yet for the Human Alliance, both choices were death sentences.

Therefore, they could not afford to let this sinister choice of the devil become a real problem they must face.

Lin Jingshu opened up the communication channels within the mechs of her biochip soldiers fully, allowing everyone to hear her enchanting voice from the depths of hell: “Higher level biochips can completely control lower levels, lower level chips can completely overtake normal humans. Isn’t it obvious which life form is superior, everyone? Have any of you ever thought that you’re the only ones left fighting us while all the civilians down on the ground are currently fighting to join our biochip empire?”

“Is the tech unit dead?” Bayer cried angrily, “Block her off!”

Yet everyone was busy scurrying for their lives through the battlefield thick with missiles and high-energy particles without a moment to spare, allowing her to continue spreading her toxic words into their ears: “What’s wrong with evolving into a higher life form? My people will soon overtake the majority of the population down on the ground, and by then, all of these stubborn minorities refusing to give in will realize that they’re like wild animals on ancient earth without any ability to survive in a highly civilized society. In front of a stronger and more powerful species, their living spaces will only continue to contract until they grow extinct.”

“Prepare a mech for me; Zhanlu, you come with me!” Lu Bixing turned his head around and announced to Lin Jingheng. Zhanlu immediately turned back into his robotic arm form and curled up onto Lu Bixing’s arm. “I have an idea, maybe I’ll be able to stay unaffected by those chips!”

“Even if you’re unaffected, what about others? Would you be able to handle a missile from each one of your escorting soldiers?” Lin Jingheng’s imemdiate reaction was to shoot down this idea. “I’ve never heard anyone bringing out their Prime Minister to lead a suicide squad, so you’re not allowed to go.”

“Jingheng!”

The two men stared at each other in silence momentarily.

Another Alliance mech blew up in close proximity to the central commanding mech.

On the galactic map, the Freedom Corps mech fleet sailed towards the wormhole zone like a tornado, far past the danger zone the Alliance had previously marked off.

“Marshal, we can’t hold out anymore!”

A vein popped on Lin Jingheng’s forehead: “I can’t let you on a mech, but I can give you the piloting permission for the commanding ship---Zhanlu, take over the commanding ship’s mental network.”

Lu Bixing was taken aback for a moment before he realized what the other meant and asked softly: “This is really risky, Marshal. We’re giving the enemies a free pass if the commanding ship falls--do you want to be with me?”

Lin Jingheng gave him a quick glance: “We’re all walking on a wire right now, even a single breath of air is a risk…”

“No.” Lu Bixing took over the piloting permission but still had his gaze locked on Lin Jingheng’s eyes. “I meant--do you want to be with me? The kind where you let me tie you down with a ring so that you can share the rest of your life, not just now, but in the future, with me under the law.”

Lin Jingheng only gave a bitter laugh: “If we screw up, ‘the rest of my life’ could only be the next few minutes long.”

“Even the next second belongs to me.”

Zhanlu’s patched-up mental network finally expanded to its limit and covered over half of the entire Heart of the Rose, proving that the glory of the Great Swords was still alive and well.

Chengying seemed to have felt something from afar as its cannon aimed at an Alliance mech hesitated momentarily, allowing the lucky mech to flee out of firing range. Within the massive sea of data inside these super AI’s systems, countless ‘Zhanlu’ flashed simultaneously, eventually forming a deep sigh from the depths of darkness.

But Zhanlu’s master knew that Zhanlu’s mech core repair had been constantly delayed and had only finally begun after Lin Jingheng returned, with progress nowhere near completion. This obnoxious show could only last momentarily as the network still lacked stability. It had already shattered once back on Wolto when they had fought against Longyuan, but thankfully the pilot had been Lin Jingheng, who was fast enough to switched out before any real damage was made; any other pilot would’ve been killed or at least knocked unconscious from the direct battle against Longyuan.

“Zhanlu, please try and last a bit longer this time.”

As an AI, Zhanlu was an honest and noble character that would never bluff about his abilities. He responded within the mental network: “I’m afraid I won’t be able to do so, Headmaster Lu. I’m not fully prepared, but I can try to give you warnings before my network breaks down.”

An unprepared mech and unprepared pilot were both thrown into the frontlines without anything else, which was essentially only as useful to the situation as throwing an ill-equipped disabled person in to run a marathon. The massive mental network loomed over the biochip human mechs and Alliance mechs at the same time; the biochip soldiers were immediately alerted and attempted to hack into Zhanlu’s network to create hallucinations for the pilot.

Despite giving up all communicative functions to the outside world, the chip inside Lu Bixing now felt like a sacred relic that protected the mech as it repelled all disruptions outside. Soon after, Lu Bixing extended his heightened senses through the mech and was surprised to discover that he could ‘see’ through the mental network to determine which of the Alliance mechs had their mental networks infected by biochips.

The next moment, Lu Bixing used the commanding ship’s permissions to give an order directly to the infected mechs: “Pilots, turn in your mental network access immediately!”

These clueless pilots were still steeped in anxiety when they finally received a proper order, so they instinctively followed. Within seconds, everyone who had received the order disconnected from their mental networks and let Lu Bixing remotely take over. The transition process was virtually seamless as these infected mental networks crashed head-on with another biochip like electrodes running into an insulator.

But Lu Bixing wasn’t a robot and had no way to control this many mental networks remotely. The moment all of this access fell into his hands, he felt as if someone had grabbed a hammer and smashed it onto his head. A short buzz rang inside his head as he called out: “Backup pilots, get ready to retrieve access!”

As the last syllable of the sentence dropped, he was forced out of the remote mental networks. Thankfully, all troops that retreated back into the Heart of the Rose now were all elite soldiers and had already caught on. The backup pilots all reconnected back to this new ‘disinfected’ mental network and, without any hesitation after taking in a breath of fresh air, locked their cannons on the nearest biochip human mechs around them.

The Freedom Corps that were only a hair strand away from the entrance of the wormhole were suddenly faced with a violent counterattack that knocked them down one by one.

Lu Bixing felt his vision blackening; his back was already covered in a layer of cold sweat from his brief act earlier.

“Everyone,” he took a deep breath and spoke into the communication channel, “the biochip human’s hallucinations are ineffective against vaccuocerebrals. Luckily, vaccuocerebrals are a specialty within the Eighth Galaxy. As the Executive Prime Minister, my condition is a little bit more complicated than others, but due to some childhood illness I do have some symptoms of vaccuocerebria.”

The Central Militia generals all gasped in shock.

The unprecedented and unmatched Space Commander Lu Xin’s own son admitted with his own mouth that he was a vaccuocerebral!

And even more shocking, the genetic defect and illness that the Union had once discriminated against suddenly became the last ray of hope in this hellish situation!

Nagus pinched himself and felt that the whole world around him had turned into a spinning kaleidoscope, rotating too fast for him to see.

“I can detect any abnormal states on both sides through Zhanlu’s mental network right now, so we can do the same thing we did earlier. Pilots that have been infected, turn in your access to me immediately after I call you; I can negate and clear the effects of the chip,” Lu Bixing continued. “But while I can remain unaffected, my mental strength is limited as well. So, I need backup pilots to be on standby and prepare to retrieve the accesses; I can only last for a moment.”

The Alliance: “......”

A vaccuocerebral who was able to pilot a mech and could even remote control multiple mental networks of ally mechs, this sounded almost as surreal as someone without hands playing a piano with their foot!

Lin Jingheng gave him a quick look and noticed the young man was speaking nonsense without shame and simply responded with a wordless smile.

Certainly, vaccuocerebrals could pilot mechs; the Eighth Galaxy even had a whole specialized fleet made up of vaccuocerebral galactic soldiers, but nobody had mental strength powerful enough to accomplish such a thing. It was impossible for any of them to control Zhanlu’s exceptionally complex and insatiable mental network.

In the end, Lu Bixing still kept quiet about the biochip and single-handedly cut off the Nuwa Project’s road to further human evolution.

Lu Bixing pinched Lin Jingheng a little and wiped the cold sweat on his hands all over the Marshal’s dress shirt: “Then, my fellow soldiers, it’s time for us to launch our counterattack.”

Rebel troops across the galaxies began to back down from the biochip humans’ psychological attacks. Yet unlike Lin Jingshu had described, more and more people were standing up to fight against biochip humans; instead of giving in to join their enemies, they still struggled and fought with hope.

The Second Galaxy.

The dorm manager Alyssa from the Polytechnic University escorted the students into the temporary camp set up by the rebellion forces in the back of the campus and naturally joined the rebels.

Alyssa’s higher education was in the medical field, but she had only been an average student who hadn’t scored well in her studies. Human medical experts in this era were all elite researchers and specialists in their niche of study; normal treatment had all been taken over by robots, so most of the more average medical students had switched their careers.

Alyssa had thought she had no future with her major and didn’t expect to see a day where her knowledge would be useful in real life--now, the rebelling troops lacked medical equipment and needed large amounts of human nurses to help out, so she became a temporary military doctor.

At this time, she dragged her exhausted body after a summons and quickly made her way into the meeting room: “What is it?”

The room was filled with a row of military doctors, varying grim expressions on their faces; beside them stood a few rebel troop officers with several biochips in the center of the table.

“What are you all doing?”

“Only biochip carriers are not affected by biochip hallucinations.” A young officer said, “I volunteer to receive the injection, it’s worth a try.”

A doctor whose expression was about to be jumbled into a mess responded: “Nonsense, the biochip has a unique characteristic of following orders of their higher-ups without question. If you inject the chip, you’ll no longer be one of us; your actions and thoughts will be completely controlled by them, you won’t be able to fight!”

“No,” that officer said, “I’ve observed them before and know that biochip humans aren’t always completely under control. Without any orders from the higher ups, they’re no different than normal humans.”

Alyssa hesitated: “Indeed, this was part of their propaganda--the chip won’t affect daily lives.”

The officer added: “So my plan is a one-time ambush; we dispatch a team of people who will voluntarily take injections of the chip, disguise ourselves as the Freedom Corps, and then launch a surprise attack before our enemies notice…”

The doctor who had rebutted earlier said: “And then you all will be controlled by higher level chip carriers.”

“That’s why it’s a ‘one-time’ plan. We will destroy the enemy from within and then end ourselves before we become their puppets; if we have time, we can even surgically take out the chip. If we can’t make it, we’ll simply have to plan ahead.” The officer turned to the doctor, then pointed at his neck and smiled. “Shoot us down right here.”

The doctor was stunned and couldn’t say another word.

Alyssa mumbled: “What does this mean, we have to pave the way with human lives?”

The young officer looked deeply into her eyes. “We no longer have a road ahead of us.”

The director of the Second Galaxy’s rebel troops reached his hand out over the glass tanks on the table that carried the biochip and finally let out a deep sigh after what felt like an eternity of silence.

Thus began a revolution of martyrdom that sparked from the Second Galaxy and soon spread to the rebel forces of the other galaxies.

From within the boundless sea of stars rose the heroes who marched toward death.

## Ch 176 - Where Will the Future Lead?

The Alliance in the Heart of the Rose was quick to catch up to Lu Bixing’s pace. The initial panic was also interrupted by orders as the Alliance quickly reassembled.

Both sides began to fight for control over the area near the wormhole zone as they all mingled into a mismatched battle.

Yet, as the core figure of the entire warfare, Lin Jingshu remained relaxed and laid back as if she was simply a spectator. She only moved her lips and gave out occasional orders; in addition, her commanding ship was being piloted by her subordinate biochip soldiers. Even if the world outside self-destructed before her eyes, as long as the gravity system within her mech was still functional, she had her own way of getting what she wanted from this war.

She had a bouquet of Azure Seas that she obtained from an unknown source. Lin Jingshu carefully removed the excessive leaves from the flowers, attempting to arrange them a certain way in the vase. Yet for some reason, the more she culled and intermingled the flowers, the further off it looked from her expectations; the expensive flowers were arranged like wildflowers on the street by her hands. She studied it carefully before deciding that it looked like a bunch of weed grass bitten by dogs and pushed it aside.

Their whole family was filled with people of cold and tough natures, all of them immune to romantic aestheticism.

“Master, shall we follow our plan and launch our next round of attack? If we continue to be pushed back like this, we’ll likely be sandwiched in between our enemies once Woolf’s AI Troops sail over.”

“Stay calm.” Lin Jingshu took a glimpse at the military recording and said softly, “They’re at their limits.”

Lin Jingshu was right: the Alliance was currently only powerful on the surface and draining inside because Lu Bixing was reaching his limit. The ‘infected’ mental network kept charging in endlessly, wave after wave from these countless Alliance Troops, putting all the pressure onto his shoulders. If his body hadn’t been modified by the biochip into a ‘superhuman’ that could stay awake for twenty-three days straight, by this point his brain would have been crushed into mashed potatoes.

Of course, the worst part of this job was that nobody could switch in for him.

Lin Jingshu started her heretical speech on her own public communication channel. After being notified that she had been blocked off by the technicians of the Alliance, she began sending communication requests restlessly to Lin Jingheng’s commanding ship.

Lin Jingheng rejected her three times already, but the fourth request quickly arrived again.

The telecom technician on the commanding ship shot a glance at him for orders and got ready to reject the request once again, only to see Lin Jingheng hesitate for a moment.

Lu Bixing’s pupils were already slightly out of focus from exhausting his mental strength. He didn’t even bother saying a word and reached an arm into the medical capsule to receive an injection of another relaxant. Lin Jingheng touched the young man’s arms and felt those muscles tense up like steel--this time, neither of them had the right to scold each other.

Yet if this continued, even if superhuman Lu Bixing could last, Zhanlu might not be able to keep up.

Lin Jingheng suddenly turned back and ordered: “Take the call.”

Lin Jingshu had run away before he could open his eyes in the galactic prison. When they reunited in the First Galaxy later, Lin Jingshu had once again hidden herself behind a mask. Even with their trip out to Wolto this time, she had continued to talk to them through her subordinate biochip humans. When they finally saw her reveal her true face, they discovered it was once again another decoy--

Now that he thought about it, he hadn’t even been able to see her face.

Lin Jingshu wore an old cotton shirt that looked like it could have been on trend ten years ago but slightly outdated by today’s standards; though a beauty still maintained an air of composure even if she dressed in a trash bag. This slightly antique look highlighted a youthfulness in her demeanor, almost as though she was still that hard-working student back on Wolto--matching up seamlessly with Lin Jingheng’s own memories of her.

It wasn’t until he saw her true face that Lin Jingheng suddenly realized the puppet she’d plastered her face on earlier truly didn’t look like Jingshu at all. The puppet’s act was too superficial and awkward, almost a little too dramatic, and lacked the slight confidence behind her actions.

When he accepted this communication request, he was hoping to buy some time for the Alliance Troops by finding a way to mess with the enemy’s psyche.

Yet now as he looked into Lin Jingshu’s eyes, he knew in his mind that this was an impossible task.

Her eyes were also a deep grey color; they always seemed naturally larger with an elegant and concave curve down the tail of her eyes. Her pupils were clear and bright, the confidence behind her seeped out as she clearly understood what she was doing. And, like the Alliance Troops, she felt that there was value in what she was fighting for.

“Hi, Jingheng.” She gave a smile as she greeted her brother cheerfully, “Thank goodness siblings are the same blood without legal obligations to support each other. We don’t need any sort of legal procedure to cut relationships off either, only a farewell in words between us.”

Lin Jingheng studied her briefly before responding softly: “My reinforcement dispatch order had already been sent back to the Eighth Galaxy days ago--the fleet should be arriving any time now. You still have Woolf behind your back, you can’t pass through the Heart of the Rose; if you disarm immediately, we can hold off Woolf’s fleet temporarily and can at least guarantee that you’ll stay alive.”

“And then wait until you all put me on trial?” Lin Jingshu responded calmly, “I’m here to destroy an old world order, only to have this old world use its long outdated values and morals to determine that I am guilty; don’t you think this reasoning is quite ridiculous? By the way, Jingheng, don’t try and fool me because I’m not an expert. Regardless of if it’s a signal message or reinforcement, I’m pretty sure you don’t control the time it takes for these to pass through the wormhole. Can’t you at least be a little bit more sincere with your lies?”

Lin Jingheng: “I certainly can’t control it, so are you going to use your life to gamble with me?”

“My luck isn’t particularly great,” Lin Jingshu said, “but it seems like I have no other choice. I still have to try. The crazy old Woolf’s calculations stole the initiative from my hands, so this is my only way out.”

The relaxant on Lu Bixing’s body was beginning to take effect; the symptoms of mental exhaustion were slowly disappearing, his ears capturing a bit of the conversation amidst the chaos in his head. He suddenly felt a slight urge to laugh as if the Heart of the Rose had turned into a giant roulette, as these two faced each other across the table with all of their lifetime’s assets behind them, battling to see who’s a better cheater in this fated game of luck.

Lin Jingheng answered in a deep voice: “A madman deserves not a single path into the future.”

“Burno was tried for heresy and burned at the stake[[1]](#footnote-1); when the world tried Doctor Hardin for anti-humanity crimes and secretly pursued Laura, they also thought those two were madmen. All of you have simply been brainwashed by this so-called ‘civilization’ of yours,” Lin Jingshu looked right into his eyes as she answered. “Mankind is constantly changing their environment to suit their needs and refuses to evolve themselves; if this continues, development will eventually reach its limit. One day into the future, we’ll be like ancient humans no different than mutated gorillas and become powerless to stop the catastrophes we’ve bestowed upon this world. Did you think everything would end after the Committee collapsed? When years later you see Eden version two, three...or other similar products emerge, you’ll finally realize that I was right.”

“Doctor Hardin and Laura didn’t carry bloodied body bags over their shoulders like you, and Laura’s earliest biochip was not meant to be used for criminal acts!”

“Because both the Doctor and Laura were wrong.” Lin Jingshu said, “They simply wanted to solve society’s problems on a superficial and technical level; they were treating an open wound through a layer of bandages. As for Laura’s ‘evolution model’, that’s even more laughable; biological evolution won’t solve anything. The average human nowadays can live up to 300 years, but how much stronger are they than our ancestors that could only live short of 100 years? Her evolution theory will only create more societal discourse and more warfare--am I right, Prime Minister Lu?”

Lu Bixing had no spare moment to respond.

Lin Jingshu gave him a long look before speaking up: “Unaffected by the biochip, don’t tell me you’re a vaccuocerebral. If vaccuocerebrals could simultaneously remotely control dozens of mechs like you, they wouldn’t have to hide in the Eighth Galaxy. I guess whatever that piece of information Wang Ailun got his hands on was true and you really do have the complete Nuwa Project in your hands--but it seems like you’ve given up on it, otherwise you wouldn’t be fighting all alone right now.”

Lin Jingshu’s words were like a sharp needle that stabbed right into the darkest corner of his heart. Lu Bixing wanted to cough up blood, yet amidst this violent rainstorm outside, Zhanlu’s voice suddenly rang out within the mental network: “I’m sorry Headmaster Lu, my mental network is already overloaded and is about to break down; please prepare yourself.”

Lu Bixing was going mad: “Prepare for what!? Can you at least pull out that fighting spirit of yours to try and hold out a bit longer?”

Zhanlu: “Sorry, I have no fighting spirit, only a countdown. Thirty-second countdown ready to start---”

Only Zhanlu’s mental network was wide enough to give a panoramic view of the entire battlefield; a normal heavy mech’s mental network wasn’t as vast. If the Freedom Corps decided to spread out their troops, Lu Bixing would have no way to chase every one of them down by himself, and the Alliance Troop’s line of defense would break down immediately.

Lu Bixing: “Think about your little Popcorn, your chameleon, and the house you worked so hard to clean up! It’ll all be gone if you break down now!”

Zhanlu agreed amidst the countdown: “Ah, yes---twenty-one, twenty…”

Lu Bixing: “You can do it!”

Zhanlu: “Eighteen, seventeen--I can’t.”

Lu Bixing was in despair: “Why can’t there be a relaxant for mech cores!?”

Because Zhanlu was at the brink of destruction, everything from his mental network down to his own basic system was already extremely unstable. Perhaps some strange malfunction had occurred within his computing functions, but he automatically classified Lu Bixing’s last line as a joke and answered: “Yes, hahaha---ten, nine, eight….”

The Freedom Corps fleet seemed to also feel Lu Bixing’s power declining as they launched a more violent wave of mental network attacks than before. The entire Alliance defense line was forced to move back in retaliation.

Zhanlu: “Five...please disconnect from the mental network immediately, or you will be hurt...four…”

A large fleet of infected mental networks tossed all of their access onto Lu Bixing; he felt as if a long needle dug deep through his temples.

*Three, two---*

“Headmaster Lu!”

Lu Bixing pulled out one tiny bit of consciousness at the very last second and disconnected from Zhanlu’s mental network. The massive network from the commanding ship disappeared as Zhanlu’s robotic hand hung still on his shoulders like a robot without any batteries. Lu Bixing’s legs fell asleep but Lin Jingheng pulled him back up the next instant.

“Looks like you lost,” Lin Jingshu said as she smiled, “if you disarm now, I can at least promise to spare your life.”

*Yeah, fuck you*, Lin Jingheng thought.

He immediately cut off the communication and sent out another order: “Contract the defense line; from now on, nobody is allowed to open fire if you’re unsure if you’ve been affected by the biochip! All of you are going to become physical roadblocks!”

The commanding ship reactivated its default mental network which was significantly smaller than Zhanlu’s range and could not cover certain areas. Yet it wasn’t time to mourn as Lu Bixing pulled out another relaxant and struggled to shove it into his arms. A muffled grunt of pain rolled out of his throat.

The next moment, he felt someone gently press their lips against his own, like a consoling kiss that disappeared the next moment. Lu Bixing curled his fingers instinctively and felt Lin Jingheng connect onto the commanding ship’s mental network. The commander’s control was extremely stable and precise as he meticulously handled the mech’s mental network, perfectly keeping a fine line that allowed him to shoulder exactly half of the burden of control without kicking off the second pilot.

It was like years ago, back on that Old Fart’s space station, when Lu Bixing helped his student Huang Jingshu pull back the mech that was flying out of control.

“Locate the enemy’s commanding ship from the communication signal earlier.” Lin Jingheng didn’t hesitate to toss the plan to overwatch the entire battlefield now that they no longer had the hardware requirements to do so and decided to pursue Lin Jingshu. “You focus on handling their biochip disruptions, I’ll take control of the rest.”

This was the first time Lu Bixing witnessed Lin Jingheng piloting mechs from this unique angle. The sensation of contact through the mental network was a unique and unexplainable experience; the mech felt like an extension of his five senses but also not at the same time, it was a strange feeling of synthesis. He felt as if every nerve in his body had quietly but surely connected with the man beside him.

Within the next moment, the commanding ship sailed out of the lines of fire at an almost impossible angle; the Silver Ten fleets within the Alliance were his most trusted soldiers who knew how to cooperate without any verbal orders and immediately followed behind. Lu Bixing made sure their mental networks were protected from hacking and quickly located Lin Jingshu’s heavy mech. This time, Lin Jingheng’s missile didn’t miss.

Yet a Freedom Corps mech suddenly appeared; whether it was voluntary or the effects of the biochips, the mech took the missile head-on for their ‘queen bee’ and perished in space.

The site of the explosion was extremely close to them; after the explosion, the remnants of the mech flew out at an alarming speed along with a deadly aftershock. Lin Jingheng had no choice but to dodge the attack and lost sight of his surroundings for a brief moment. When he finally regained his position, Lin Jingshu’s commanding ship had already been completely surrounded by her soldiers.

At this very moment, a wave of high-energy particles shot out through the wormhole and stunned the entire battlefield.

Lin Jingshu felt the corner of her eyes twitch.

Lee called out: “Are the reinforcements here?”

Only Lin Jingheng, who was perhaps too used to coexisting with his bad luck, managed to remain calm and unaffected as he fired a second missile from an extremely harsh angle. The pilot on Lin Jingshu’s mech jumped in panic and didn’t dodge the missile, letting it hit right into the armory of the mech. The biochip pilot frantically worked to detach the armory from the commanding ship.

*Boom--*

The aftershock of the armory’s explosion crashed onto the mech shield; the artificial gravity system on the mech temporarily malfunctioned, sending both the flower and the vase that held Lin Jingshu’s Azure Seas flying. The flowers and drops of water floated in mid-air, the unstable light inside the mech flashed a little rainbow through one tiny drop of water.

Lin Jingshu reached a hand out from her protective airbag and grabbed a single flower.

That was when everyone got a clear look at the people who came out from the wormhole--it was only a small scale escort team.

It wasn’t the reinforcement troops, but Rickhead’s escort team that had sent the first batch of refugees to the Eighth Galaxy.

“How unfortunate, blind fire.” Lin Jingshu lifted an eyebrow. “So it looks like history is on my side now. History may go in circles sometimes, but every once in a while it makes the right decision.”

Lin Jingheng’s experiences on space battlefields told him immediately the scale of those particle cannons earlier couldn’t possibly be the reinforcements he had called. Yet even with little expectation, now that he finally saw these little mechs with his own eyes, he still couldn’t help but let out a long sigh.

Lu Bixing, on the other hand, let out a sigh of relief and attempted to ease the tension as he spoke through the mental network: “Say, next time if we run into disagreements in our household, let’s decide who to listen to with rock-paper-scissors, how about it?”

Lin Jingheng responded by lifting a hand and ruffling the young man’s messy hair: “Go after her.”

The Freedom Corps fleet was already one line of defense away from the wormhole right now. Lin Jingshu took a look through the military camera at the weak little line of small mechs and said: “Crush them.”

Lu Bixing: “Vitas, move!”

The young Prime Minister who hadn’t spoken in a while suddenly hollered into the communication channel, voice cracking as he cried.

Vitas--Rickhead--heard this hoarse cry and picked Mint up like a kitten to shove her into an ecopod. He pressed her down with a single hand to stop her futile struggles.

Then, as if mumbling to himself, he said under his breath: “Man, I can’t do it, Teach.”

That year in the Starry Sea Academy, the last homework Lu Bixing had left for the school was unheard by the four students who had snuck out of the school.

The topic of that homework was: ‘Where I think humanity will go in the future.’

*That’s too broad of a topic for us, Professor Lu*.

Mint stared in shock as the ecopod locked before her: “Rickhead you damn asshole, how dare…”

Her unique Eighth Galaxy-style cursing was sealed into the ecopod with her. The next moment, her ecopod was set with a tracking device as it was pushed out of the mech.

Rickhead turned around and announced: “Open fire!”

The escort team had disarmed most of their cannons and missiles in order to safely send a mass of unarmed refugees into the Eighth Galaxy; to avoid risks of any accidents along the way, they chose to give up a large portion of their armory, leaving only enough missiles to fire one round.

The biochip humans of the Freedom Corps were blocked off momentarily, allowing Lin Jingheng to once again lock on their commanding ship from behind.

Lin Jingshu snapped the flower in her hands: “How annoying. Fine, we’re going all out too.”

Soon after, countless little mechs shot out of the Freedom Corps’ heavy mech fleet like an arsenal. Each individual mech was equipped with its own mental network as they spread out like ants throughout the battlefield.

Each Alliance mech was facing at least three or four simultaneous mental network hacks that layered on seamlessly. Lu Bixing’s earlier toss and catch method to disinfect the networks was no longer effective.

They had been completely blocked off by the tiny mechs overlaying on top of each other.

The heavy mechs from the Freedom Corps then sailed full-force towards the small escorting team like a sports car railing through a row of ping pong balls, sailing right into the wormhole zone.

Yet, as the fleet closed in to receive a wormhole warning, the abnormal energy siren pierced through the mech fleet.

The frontmost mech of the fleet was already too far in and had no time to turn back, crashing right into the cannonfire just outside the wormhole and exploding into fireworks.

Lin Jingshu lifted her head in surprise.

The Eighth Galaxy reinforcements had finally made it at the very last second.

The biochip humans immediately responded with the same strategy and attacked with their mental network, only to discover that the reinforcement’s average mental strength was far lower than a proper human military unit. Yet despite constantly shifting between backup pilots on the network, none of these newcomers were affected by the biochips.

## Ch 177 - Its Flower Language is “The Hometown of No Return”

Mint’s ecopod was pulled into the reinforcement’s capture net; the next moment, she heard a familiar voice call to her through the ecopod: “Mint, Mint! Are you still conscious? We’re here!”

It was...White.

Mint opened her mouth, but no sound came out of it.

*Why did it take you guys so long?* She thought.

“Give me a second,” White paused and mumbled a few words to someone before his voice raised excitedly, “......what? We captured it! Are there really life signals in it still?”

Mint felt something while still stuck within the ecopod and held in her breath. Her heart drummed anxiously and she waited, but as she was about to suffocate inside the pod, she heard White’s excited voice: “We just captured a mech that was knocked off by the enemy; the mech itself was badly damaged but we’ve successfully detected life signals within the mech!”

Mint relaxed her entire body as tears streamed down her face like a faucet let loose, then cried out: “You shit-eating bastards, you can’t even make it in time to eat freshly pooped garbage!”

This fleet of reinforcements from the Eighth Galaxy was an extremely unique bunch; they were made up entirely of small mechs, but didn’t seem weak at all because of their scale.

A few dozen small mechs grouped into a team; each mech within a team was densely organized with a strange sense of connection between them. Upon closer inspection, it was a special type of energy waves that even the Freedom Corps had never seen before and couldn’t decipher--from afar, these small teams of mechs almost formed into an individual entity in space.

They lined up in an organized manner before the wormhole area, creating a striking contrast to the chaotic battleground within the Heart of the Rose.

An unprotected communication network spread out before the wormhole zone like a gentle ocean wave; due to the disruptions from the wormhole behind them, there were slight bits of noise coming from within the channel. Moments later, a hoarse but slightly exhausted voice finally rang out: “This is Anakin from the Silver Fourth Squadron speaking, we’ve arrived on the Marshal’s orders--hello again, our sworn enemies from the Freedom Corps.”

Lin Jingshu’s first reaction was to measure the enemy’s strength by her own standards.

She thought: *The* *Prime Minister of the Eighth Galaxy still gave into temptation in the end and secretly built a fleet of ‘superhumans.’* The Eighth Galaxy truly was a cursed land that could never walk out of the shadows of the Nuwa Project--even if the project originated from the Union and succeeded for the first time in her hands. This Eighth Galaxy certainly was a wild frontier that was the breeding ground for all kinds of toxins.

Therefore, Lin Jingshu questioned back with a hint of judgement: “This is the Silver Fourth Squadron, the original bunch?”

“Thanks to you,” Anakin responded calmly, “the original Fourth Squadron was virtually annihilated. When Marshal picked us all up, we didn’t even have enough people to fill a game of mahjong. As the substitute Captain, I had no choice but to recruit new members from all over the place. Man, our colleagues always bully us during drills because of this.”

Lin Jingshu chuckled: “Oh Prime Minister Lu, the historic ‘human genetic modification’ project was called to a halt in the middle and the only surviving results left today are our long and seemingly endless periods of youth. Laura was secretly tried by the Union, but they couldn’t even dare to put a name on her crimes...why is that, have you not wondered? And yet you dare to trudge down the same path as them?”

Lu Bixing’s reddened eyes were fixed on the screen showing the reinforcements that were checking on the escort team and Rickhead’s earlier situation. He gave not a spare moment to Lin Jingshu. Like how humans had four limbs, he only had four students left. Any missing one was like chopping off a limb from his body.

“Prime Minister Lu, you carry the slogan of the Pledge of Freedom on your shoulders but steal the Rainbow Project plan all for yourself so you can create your own evolved superhuman fleet in the Eighth Galaxy? And it seems like Commander Lin is also aware of this fact, am I right? If I am such a despicable terrorist and space pirate, may I ask on what ground you all stand against me in ethics?” Lin Jingshu raised her voice, “No…wait, I almost forgot. The Union government always defined any illegitimate armed forces as space pirates; the Eighth Galaxy never had any legitimacy to begin with, so I guess you all do live up to your names.”

“Evolved superhuman forces? I like that name.” Anakin laughed and called out to his comrades through the public channel, “Hey, did you all hear that? Y’all have no right to call us ‘those vaccuocerebrals’ or ‘disabled bunch’ anymore!”

The tides turned as the reinforcements arrived. A heavy burden inside Bayer’s heart was finally lifted as he let out a heavy sigh of relief, his voice becoming audibly more cheerful: “Hey shithead, the average human-mech sync rate in your squad doesn’t even reach 65%-- even public starship pilots have better numbers than you guys--what evolution! Look, I’d believe it if evolution meant physical expansion for you guys!”

The confused rest of the Human Alliance stared at each other in silence until someone suddenly let out an awed comment: “Vaccuocerebrals…can form galactic fleets too?”

At that moment, Lin Jingheng called out softly: “Jingshu, is that you?”

Lin Jingshu clenched her fingers instinctively as she heard her name being called, snapping the flower in her hands in half. Yet before she could answer, she heard a young girl’s voice respond through the channel: “Yes, Marshal, it’s me.”

Lin Jingshu was taken aback for a moment before she lifted her gaze up in disbelief. A strange girl had appeared on that unprotected communication channel. From her outfit, it seemed as if she was some sort of technician or back-end personnel; her features were considerably plain but clean, the type that wouldn’t stand out amongst a crowd of people.

An unfamiliar and unexplainable anger sparked within Lin Jingshu’s heart as boiling blood rushed into her head.

*Who is she? How dare she respond to that name?*

“Unfortunately, as vaccuocerebrals, our mental strength will never reach the level of the original Silver Fourth Squadron. Captain Anakin, please bear with us,” that strange ‘Jingshu’ said. “But thankfully we are properly equipped.”

Vaccuocerebrals made up a large portion of the population in the Eighth Galaxy. Because of deep-rooted societal discrimination and prejudice against these people, it was important for the government to ensure equality of freedom and employment within all planets of the Eighth Galaxy. The military even established a special fleet for vaccuocerebrals under the pressure to reverse segregation. The mechs that these soldiers were piloting were specially made, derived from the early ‘training mechs’ and could simplify mental networks as much as possible in order to accommodate the pilots’ lack of mental strength.

A modified mental network would surely affect its functions; therefore, this special mech force operated in units comprised of multiple small mechs. With the help of the development in planetary anti-missile technologies, every team of mechs was equipped with a miniature sized anti-missile system. Mechs of the same unit were all equipped with special sensors on their ships that could automatically adjust their combat positions based on the location of each member within their respective units.

This type of galactic force required even better cooperation, support, and more precise control amongst teammates, in addition to a more powerful battle spirit; therefore requiring much more intensive training.

Yes this was galactic naval forces they were speaking of; mere decades ago, vaccuocerebrals who had been kicked out of Eden wouldn’t even dare to dream of this forbidden zone.

But now that technology had made the first step for them and opened up a small crack leading onto this path, mankind would complete the next 99 steps; even if it meant they had to crawl their way to the finish line.

So what if the training was tougher than usual? They had waited for this opportunity for far too long.

Huang Jingshu turned her head towards White beside her: “We dropped massive funding into the research for anti-missile systems and didn’t even have a chance to use them on actual planets, you guys lucked out this time.”

“We’ll be damned if we have to use it on planets now,” White said, “show some optimism and be grateful!”

The idea of a training mech first came out of a homework assignment White had done. After coming of age, he had entered the military research institute and became a research specialist in this particular field. Back when Planet Alpenglow had been destroyed by intergalactic missiles, the four students walked down different paths. The vaccuocerebral little gangster Huang Jingshu cleaned herself up, and under Lu Bixing’s concession, dove into a field that could potentially never deliver any promising results for the rest of her life.

Little did she know these seemingly impossible fields of supporting technology that both she and White represented would become the last beacon of hope within the vaccuocerebral fleet today.

Every ten years, the world would turn upside down.

“Doctor Hardin is getting too old; he’s not fit for long-distance interstellar travel, so I will greet Miss Lin in place of him.” White’s expression grew stern, “I also have a message from the doctor.”

Various alarms and lights flashed within the mech and reflected in Lin Jingshu’s eyes, glistening like a rainbow.

She had finally calmed down and realized that ‘Jingshu’ wasn’t a rare name, so it wasn’t anything to get worked up over. Her loss of composure earlier was perhaps because it had been too long since Lin Jingheng had called that name.

Lin Jingheng wasn’t someone who liked to express friendliness, even with close friends or relatives, rarely calling anyone solely by their given name. Whenever he called her by that in the past, his voice would always be slightly more timid than usual as if he were embarrassed, retaining a hint of a conservative but special kind of affection in his tone.

But...those were all memories of the past.

Lin Jingshu scanend her surroundings and, for the first time ever, tasted something similar to fate at the tip of her tongue.

Sixteen years--aside from the Silver Ninth Squadron that was stationed within the Eighth Galaxy, the entire Silver Ten fleet that had been standing in her way all these years finally gathered before her.

Everyone in her life she had once placed her hopes on but who had failed her:Chief Woolf, Doctor Hardin, Lin Jingheng...all looked at her across time in different ways at this very moment.

Her biochip empire was unparalleled and almighty; it had managed to fool the eyes of the AI, defeated the most elite soldiers of the Human Alliance, and proved that biochip humans were far more powerful than natural humans. Yet the last obstacle that stood before her at the very end was the most defective of human defects.

White said, “Doctor Hardin wants me to tell you: ‘the White Tower has already collapsed. As someone who was still stuck inside by a single syringe of a relaxant, when will you be able to step out and look at the starry sky outside?’”

Lin Jingshu blinked and then laughed, “Oh, that silly old man is still trying to play the sympathy card again.”

Her life had been filled with extremist ideals; she believed that everyone who criticized or attempted to persuade her, or even those people who tragically attempted to give her a helping hand, were all ridiculous. She believed that they were the ones blinded by delusions of ethics and morals as they upheld their illogical beliefs for the sake of feeding their egos. She thought they were all lowlives who tried to brainwash her down to their level as they degraded her to a tragic character, one ‘trapped by a single relaxant syringe’ because of Laura’s actions in the past.

“Then please tell him that my luck ran out, but that doesn’t mean you all are excused for your crimes of foolishness. Little boy, if you manage to live long enough to witness people make the same mistakes and destroy themselves once again, please remember to laugh for me.” Lin Jingshu crushed the Azure Sea in her hands and tossed it aside into the trash bin a few steps away as she finished her line. She then lifted a hand and ordered, “Who told you all to stop? Crush everyone that stands in our way!”

The Azure Sea was born from the hands of Woltorians that were banished to the City of Angels during the war, its flower language was: the hometown of no return.

Those packs of small mechs from the Freedom Corps didn’t mind the Eighth Galaxy’s reinforcements blocking their way and charged with full force towards the wormhole area like a violent tsunami crushing the shore.

This special Silver Fourth Squadron fleet from the Eighth Galaxy didn’t drop the ball at the raging waves before them, despite often being thrown under the bus by their colleagues. Of course, the act of playful bantering was proof that the rest of the Silver Ten squadrons fully accepted this fleet as their own comrades.

Those units made up of smaller mechs had an iron wall defense that was clearly experienced in battle; no matter how hard the Freedom Corps tried, they hadn’t been able to break through the defense line. The Fourth Squadron was like a powerful fortress that stood unmoved between the pirates and the wormhole. The Alliance finally managed to get a break from the endless battle and quickly reorganized to follow up from behind, creating a massive circle trapping the entire Freedom Corps inside it.

It wasn’t until now that Lu Bixing finally realized what Lin Jingheng meant by ‘a beast at bay.’

The Freedom Corps that had been actively making public announcements earlier completely blocked off all communications as they were pushed to a dead end by Woolf’s AI Troops. The beast was finally pushed to the edge, therefore it refused to communicate nor surrender as it desperately attempted to break through the Alliance’s barricade. Those small pirate mechs were like moths flying towards the light, crashing one by one into the barricade and vanishing into stardust in order to fulfill the last will of their queen bee.

Inside the Alliance’s communication channel was a flood of battle commands, ‘open fire’ taking up the majority of orders. It was as if they planned on burning a massive hole through the murk deep inside the Heart of the Rose, the remnants of destroyed mechs crashing into mech shields. Sirens of danger filled the entire communication platform.

Sirens, cries, and noises inside the channel mixed into a chaotic symphony that pierced everyone’s ears. Yet the senses of all pilots were consumed by the fire on the battlefield through their mental networks, unable to process the horrid sounds coming out of the channels.

Suddenly, the struggling Freedom Corps collectively stopped as if someone had cast a spell on them. After a short pause, the surviving mechs all fled in different directions like flies escaping the battlefield. Some mechs even crashed right into the Alliance fleet out of utter confusion and were knocked off the mental network by the Alliance troops.

Lu Bixing finally pulled himself back from the exhausted ringing in his ears, felt something in the atmosphere was off, and swiftly turned his head toward Lin Jingheng.

Lin Jingheng stood still as if he was frozen in time.

There was only one possible explanation for this strange phenomenon: the soul of the ‘queen bee’ had vanished...

The commanding ship of the Freedom Corps was shot down, annihilated by an unidentified missile.

The biochip empire lost its soul and brain. The fearsome titan that brought fear upon people suddenly fell, the grounds shaking as massive clouds of ashes from the impact blew away with the gentle breeze.

And then it died, its corpse and ashes fading away with the wind.

## Ch 178 - Is Everything Over?

History books said that most ancient people didn’t often live to 100 years. People back then had very condensed lifespans; they went through countless encounters and separations, there were harmless and dangerous accidents everywhere, and the process of aging was all within mere decades of their lives...along with countless passages of human lives.

When humans reached the end of their time, painful memories would spring up like an underground fountain as they gradually lost their role in society, consumed by the last of their consciousness until the solitude of death quietly settled over their exhausted minds.

For a brief moment, Lin Jingheng fell into a trance that felt as if his soul was about to leave his body, overtaken by that sensation of drowning from the past.

Emotional instability could drastically affect a pilot’s mental strength. Lin Jingheng’s mental strength was powerful enough that when he piloted on his own, sync rates dropping a few digits wouldn’t affect his handle on the mech. However, he was sharing a mental network with a copilot right now, both of them stuck in a unique sync rate; any small changes to the statistics could knock both of them out of the mental network.

Lu Bixing instantly jumped off the mental network after taking a glance at his expression; thankfully he was quick to act. Less than a second after disconnecting, he saw Lin Jingheng fall slightly to the side from receiving the mental network’s warning.

Lu Bixing’s mind turned quickly: “The AI Troops are still behind us!”

Lin Jingheng froze momentarily, but his unfocused pupils quickly regained light and focus.

“Got it,” he nodded expressionlessly in response. He then opened up the communication channel and ordered calmly, “Kin, clean up the battlefield. Technicians on all mechs, make sure to check all protection and codes on all of your digital equipment. Calculate all remaining firepower and casualties and send them over immediately---Young, take all survivors off the frontlines and retreat back. Don’t worry, this is the Heart of the Rose; AIs won’t be any more difficult to deal with than biochip humans.”

It was as if that person whose soul was about to leave his body earlier wasn’t himself.

Lu Bixing let out a sigh of relief; the burden of responsibility, heavy as a thousand tons of metal, could easily fill even a massively empty hole in one’s heart--he knew that from experience.

“Marshal,” Poisson’s voice was heavy through the channel, “we’ve detected unidentified energy activity outside the transfer portals, there’s a fleet of mechs closing in.”

They had barely broken the back of one ferocious beast, only to have another awaiting them. Poisson’s one line completely silenced the entire channel.

The Third Squadron fleets in the outskirts had captured some footage with their military cameras and quickly sent the live stream to the hands of all Alliance troops.

The Alliance saw the abrupt pause of fire from the AI Troops and the retreat of the whole fleet through the screen. The fearsome enemies seemed to be staring at the Alliance fleets for a few moments before finally dispersing to the side, allowing a massive heavy mech to sail out between them.

Lu Bixing asked quietly: “Wait, this…was this that Longyuan mech we encountered back on Wolto?”

As the last syllable dropped from his mouth, everyone who had their eyes on the screen gasped in shock. Behind Longyuan was a single escorting mech, but behind that escort was another supersized heavy mech.

This wasn’t the end. These supersized mechs appeared one by one as if attending a gathering; soon, aside from poor Zhanlu who was out of batteries, the Union’s Great Swords had all gathered.

Nagus was still catching his breath as he spat out another line in between panting: “Are they planning on annihilating us all?”

Lu Bixing reached out and gave Zhanlu’s robotic arm a small pat. The super AI had malfunctioned due to overloading the mental network and was resting on his shoulder; now he was nothing but a dusty digital butler. “Question for you, pal, do you have anything you want to say right now? Have you ever regretted that you ended up in such a lousy state like this? Maybe reflect a bit on yourself?” Lu Bixing asked.

The robotic arm returned an exhausted high-five back, his robotic voice almost sounding a little disappointed for once: “I believe your Engineering Department is the one that needs to reflect on themselves, Headmaster Lu. However, I do miss Popcorn and those back home a little.”

Lu Bixing had nothing else to comment on and could only respond with a sigh at this ambitionless super mech core: “You know, you’re about to turn into a ‘home-use mech’ now.”

At that moment, Longyuan suddenly moved and slowly sailed towards the Heart of the Rose.

The frontmost Silver Third Squadron troops had already stiffened up like rocks from anxiety; this sudden act prompted them to fire a round of particle cannons that hit heavily onto Longyuan’s shield. The high energy waves violently exploded outward the moment they collided with the shield.

Poisson put up a hand filled with cold sweat and connected right into the enemy’s communication networks: “Longyuan, if you sail in any closer, it won’t be a warning round of fire anymore.”

Yet to everyone’s surprise, Longyuan actually stopped. Moments later, the mech core of this super AI spoke up: “Has the commanding ship of the Freedom Corps pirates been shot down?”

Poisson didn’t dare to respond.

Lu Bixing had once hypothesized that Lin Jingshu had been the first target of the AI Troops; Woolf had walked into his own coffin in order to fight her off.

So…what was the meaning of this now?

The first target was gone, and now they wanted to find a second target to clean up?

When Woolf was still a human, it was possible to guess his next moves from a strategist’s perspective. Yet now that this old man had stepped out of the boundaries of carbon lifeform, his thought process had gone far beyond what anyone could imagine. Nobody could understand what those crazy trigger-happy computers were thinking.

Longyuan waited exactly one minute without an answer, then repeated the same question robotically.

“Don’t worry.” Lin Jingheng’s voice rang out from Poisson’s channel this time. The Human Alliance had reorganized at an impressive speed; within this brief time, the commanding ship already received all reports of casualties from their side.

Lin Jingheng only quickly scanned the reports but determined that they still had enough combat power left and said: “You can tell them the truth and see what they want to do. If we’re doomed to clash one day, we may as well take them on right now while we still have power.”

Longyuan was like an annoying alarm that repeated his question once every minute, and once again asked: “Has the commanding--”

“Yes,” Poisson interrupted him, “Lin Jingshu’s commanding ship has been shot down by our missiles. Most of her escorting fleets were annihilated in battle; the remaining survivors have been captured already.”

Longyuan paused for a moment before finally changing his line and said in the same robotic tone: “But the biochip humans within the First Galaxy still exist.”

Poisson was utterly confused.

“Wait,” Lu Bixing said, “I feel like they’re not here to fight.”

Longyuan: “Mister Woolf wishes to speak with Commander Lin--or Prime Minister Lu of the Eighth Galaxy directly.”

Longyuan’s voice vanished into the void after he finished speaking, and Woolf’s voice replaced him.

This AI’s voice was too realistic; it triggered the still-fresh trauma of a talking corpse on Wolto the moment he spoke. The entire Alliance fleet felt goosebumps crawling up their skin.

“I am Hubert Woolf; first, I must show my thanks for your efforts in defeating our common enemy.”

Bayer: “......weren’t we in a three-way battle where they’re also a common enemy of ours and the pirates?”

Lee quickly shushed him.

“It hasn’t been long since the Glory Troops surrendered and returned Wolto to our control, but the Freedom Corps had already planted deep roots of their biochip empire into our soils. My creator was already at the limit of modern man’s lifespan; he could feel that his natural death was near and created me.” That AI spoke with Woolf’s voice, “I share his memories and will fulfill his dying wish to protect the peace of the galaxies to the best of my abilities. My first target was to annihilate the Freedom Corps pirates, and with the help of everyone present here today, I have accomplished this goal.”

Lin Jingheng responded coolly: “I should say your method of ‘protecting peace’ is quite creative.”

Thankfully, AIs wouldn’t mind his bad attitude, so it continued: “Do you mean blowing up Wolto, Jingheng? Wolto was the most likely bait the pirates would take; it was the least populated among all planets in the First Galaxy. Its citizens were well-prepared for times of crisis, making them the most well-equipped group of unarmed civilians during wartime.”

This almost made blowing up Wolto sound like a strategically smart idea.

“From individual rights or efficiency of social development, ethics, civilization, to gains and losses, every single one of these topics could be brought out for debate until the end of time,” Woolf said. “Every choice will take a toll on you and test your determination and sharpness as a commander. Our enemy knows this; in fact, she had already used all capital planets across the galaxies as hostages before. I’m almost certain she wouldn’t have given you all time to debate amongst yourselves either. I have determined my mission priorities based on the threat of our target and chose to carry out a plan that would yield the most beneficial results; and so far, facts have proven that we were successful.”

Lu Bixing: “Alright, let’s drop this for a bit and get on with the important stuff; what’s going to happen to those refugees who fled from Wolto?”

“The City of Angels still retained its most basic systems, so there are also plenty of space stations around that are fit for living with plenty of supplies. They’ve been there once already and are quite familiar with the area. Most of the refugees had their own temporary living spaces on the City of Angels during the last evacuation, so we can simply repeat the same method as before. We can appoint the highest ranking official amongst the refugees to take charge.” Woolf responded calmly, “Of course, the choice is all yours. AI mechs will perhaps scare the refugees for at least a while to come, so I must request you all to escort them one last time after you reorganize.”

This AI had thought out quite a plan.

Woolf added: “Our next step is to clean up the biochip humans on land. We will capture generation two carriers and above to put them on trial, then forcefully take out generation one chips. The generation one carriers will be put into quarantine to completely remove all side-effects the chip has on the human body; however, due to lack of data on this particular front, we must request Prime Minister Lu to provide technical support.”

Lu Bixing: “You guys want Doctor Hardin’s biochip disruption technology?”

“Yes.” Woolf responded courteously, “I promise to not abuse biochips; my first priority will be to eradicate the lifeline of the underground biochip market and circulation. The technology I obtained in the process will never be used on illegal human experiments, this will be coded right into my database.”

Lu Bixing hesitated.

Anything created in this world would never completely disappear.

Ever since ancient earthlings opened up the pandora’s box to addictive drugs, the abuse of these drugs had become an almost never-ending problem in human history. Similarly, even though the biochip empire collapsed, the addictiveness of the biochip that simulated what Eden provided still existed. This new kind of drug would become another societal issue to solve in the future; every galaxy would eventually need to create special anti-drug forces that targeted these biochips. But that would be another long battle for another time.

However, biochip disruption technology would most definitely be shared amongst galaxies; if this was any other general from the Central Militia asking, perhaps Lu Bixing wouldn’t have hesitated to give them this information.

Yet they were facing this creepy AI Troop, so Lu Bixing asked cautiously: “Longyuan won’t open fire if we refuse to cooperate, right?”

“No. I thought I’d already explained myself clearly enough: my existence is built to ensure that I always choose the most beneficial option with the lowest cost. I am not a war machine.” Woolf explained peacefully, “The technology of biochip disruptions may not be completely untraceable; I have a powerful AI system that can analyze this kind of technology. Even if you refuse to cooperate, I will simply only be spending more time on finding a method myself. However, if Prime Minister Lu refuses now, we will also refuse sharing new technology in the future if biochip related crimes increase. I don’t believe this is a win-win situation for either side.”

This was the first time Lu Bixing had negotiated with AIs and couldn’t help but test the bottomline of these supercomputers: “How about this, you can trade for it with the Great Swords in your hands.”

Humans had emotions but machines didn’t; no matter how similarly they replicated a human personality, it was still an act in the end.

As expected, despite making such disrespectful requests, AI Woolf was not angered and only responded logically: “Sorry, but this exchange is unfair.”

Lu Bixing quickly reworded: “I’m not asking for all, how about half?”

Woolf still said: “It is unfair.”

“One mech.”

“It is u--”

“Then how about the transformable material to fix Zhanlu’s mech core; that’ll do, right?”

To everyone’s surprise, this time AI Woolf fell silent momentarily and accepted the offer.

About one hour later, the AI Troops sent a small mech supply ship out of their fleet. The Third Squadron was awoken as if they had chugged down shots of coffee, then quarantined this small supply ship and almost dissected the entire ship to disinfect every physical part. After checking thoroughly in and out six times through security, they finally accepted the materials and sent back on the ship a few pieces of biochip disruption equipment with simple instructions.

Woolf generously gave them one whole ton of transformable material...and an old cardboard box.

“The Third Squadron checked already, there are no dangerous items in there.” Poisson personally delivered the box onto the commanding ship. “There aren’t any digital items in there. Marshal, take a look.”

The box was filled with various old relics: a whole bundle of frames that contained many old photos. Photos of a young Chief Woolf, Doctor Hardin, his grandfather Lin Ge’er, young Lin Wei, young Lu Xin wearing the uniform of the Black Orchid Academy; group and individual photos were all inside.

There were also a few children’s drawings, the corner of the drawings signed with a lop-sided ‘Lin Wei,’ and an old notebook. From the looks of it, the notebook belonged to Lin Ge’er. It was said that during the transition period from the old to new Sidereal Era, there was a time where the founders of the Union completely abandoned digital technology out of safety concerns and returned to ancient paper and pen. Perhaps this was something left behind from that time.

“These are some mementos,” AI Woolf said, “Jingheng, I trust that you will take good care of them.”

Longyuan took in the supply ship as Woolf finished and got ready to sail away.

“Wait,” Lu Bixing suddenly said before the connection was cut off, “one last question. Chief...Woolf, what do you plan on doing after dealing with the biochip humans on the ground? Turn the Union into a machine empire under the control of an AI?”

“I will go into sleep mode.” AI Woolf left this strange and completely undecipherable message. Then, without any further explanation, he cut off the connection. The Great Swords seemed to have been summoned only to escort this old man; after showing off a little at the party, they retreated as quickly as they arrived earlier. The entire AI fleet vanished outside the Heart of the Rose within the blink of an eye.

The silent Heart of the Rose was like a galactic cemetery--countless remnants of mechs floated around. The surviving Human Alliance troops stared at each other as if they had all just woken up from the same nightmare.

An unidentified voice asked quietly in the channel: “Is everything over?”

The channel was quiet; suddenly, someone broke out into a sob. It was hard to tell who it was; perhaps it was the Second Galaxy Central Militia that had lost their general, or perhaps a pilot that had misfired to an ally under hallucinations earlier.

Or perhaps it was simply the mournful cries finally released from the hearts of the survivors.

Lin Jingheng took a deep breath and called a soldier over: “Take control of the mental network, you’ll pilot.”

The soldier, shocked from being appointed pilot on the absolute dictator Lin Jingheng’s mech, asked in disbelief: “Me...me?”

Lin Jingheng didn’t answer and swiftly gave over his piloting permissions, then walked nonchalantly towards the medical chamber beside the cockpit.

He took a few steps forward, then as if he had run out of batteries, fell into the chamber.

## Ch 179 - I Guess I Will Sell My Body

The Eighth Galaxy.

The Milky Way City was in its transitional period between dry and wet seasons;-the temperature dropped greatly at night despite the skies clearing up at daytime. The moisture in the air and soil hadn’t had the time to be fully absorbed, emitting a natural scent of earthly smell near greeneries and gardens.

It was a kind of smell that made people lethargic, almost as if all the plants and flowers had decided they wanted to quit their jobs as the seasons changed and stopped caring about spreading their spores and unique scents. Likewise, humans were too lazy to put up their customer service persona outside of work with the change of seasons.

People were holding up their personal devices and scrolling through the news, explosive amounts of information traveling through the skies of the cities. From private vehicles driving up to highway terminals to customers waiting for their coffees to be served at cafes, the topic of the great battle in the Heart of the Rose could be brought up as a topic of discussion at any time and anywhere. Colorful opinions and thoughts from different people about the battle and the group of accidental guests into the Eighth Galaxy traveled throughout the galaxy.

Yet heated discussions about politics often sent feelings of unease to the masses.

Though despite the unease, people still had to attend to their everyday obligations at work or school. From the perspective of the people that had just returned from the battlefield, this was a rather unique sense of peaceful vitality.

The natural wormhole zone and Human Alliance created a miracle: while one side was fighting as if it was doomsday, the other side was completely cleared of even a single piece of dust from cannonfire.

Lu Bixing opened a small crack from the curtains and took a look outside, then closed it back up again, thinking it was still too bright out. He carefully placed the coffee in his hand on a small table by the bed.

Zhanlu might drop the ball quite often on the battlefield, but as a digital butler he could certainly be awarded the honor of a role model; his skill in brewing coffee was even more masterful. Lu Bixing hadn’t been a big fan of coffee before, but ever since Lin Jingheng came back home, he had been conditioned to live with this bittersweet aroma in his own home everyday-- he ended up changing up his daily menu under the lure of fresh coffee.

The steam above the coffee cup floated out; Lu Bixing reached a hand over and fanned it to let the scent fill the room faster, hoping to wake the sleeping man on the bed with its smell.

Unfortunately, that certain gentleman was immune to the temptations of good cuisine and remained unfazed.

Lin Jingheng’s sudden knockout on the commanding ship almost scared the daylights out of the pilot who had connected onto the mental network moments ago.

According to the medical capsule’s diagnosis at the time, he had no immediate illness or threatening conditions and was simply over-exhausted. Of course, the main cause still came from relaxant number 1; this new type of relaxant wasn’t the same as the ones the Union had used before. Lin Jingheng had never actually used these new ones, but still treated them like his old friends the moment he placed his hands on them. It was a natural reaction of the body to adjust to new foreign substances, so the side-effects took a bigger toll on him.

Lin Jingheng left a hand dangling out of the blankets, his personal device still lit up and connected to a home-use medical capsule; it displayed all sorts of physical statistics on its screen. He had been asleep for over twenty hours since he returned home, but even now still showed no sign of waking.

On the other side of the bed was that thick handwritten notebook by Lin Ge’er; Lu Bixing had opened it up this morning and only managed to get through one-fifth of the content.

Genetics was sometimes quite fascinating; in certain places, Lin Ge’er’s handwriting was almost similar to Lin Jingheng’s own writing. From the writing style, it wasn’t hard to tell that the owner of the notebook was a modest but amiable person, his words clear but not cold. A few pages inside even detailed his concerns and unease before his marriage proposal, which included hints and pieces of this family’s unique but immanent personality of being a little too cold on the outside--it was almost adorable in its own way.

Lu Bixing sat by the bed and closed the notebook, then gently brushed his fingers across Lin Jingheng’s face as he momentarily studied the man’s features.

The dim lights in the room drew out the shadows and hard lines on his face more clearly; his nose and jawline were clean-cut and steep, the corner of his lips sharp to a point. Even though his eyebrows weren’t pressed together, they weren’t fully relaxed either; there was an almost unnoticeable tightness between those brows.

Lu Bixing let out a sigh, leaned down and placed a soft kiss between those tensed up eyebrows: “Oh well, you really don’t get to rest this much that often anyway, sleep as much as you like.”

An ancient movie once said: “This isn’t the real world. We really only lived in each other’s hearts.[[2]](#footnote-2)”

Everyone who engraved their presence within the heart of a person would have a place of belonging in that person’s heart.

Some were warm and cozy, others were cold and dark.

Lin Jingshu’s place was like a run-down shack from the slums where the ceilings were full of holes, unable to block out the cold winds and rain. It wasn’t a pretty place, but Lin Jingheng had also once experienced the warm breeze of Wolto there as he fell asleep to the lullaby of artificial raindrops. This little shack contained his roots and childhood; without it, he had no home to return to.

Lu Bixing’s palm slid down from the commander’s face. He grabbed hold of the hand hanging out of the blanket and pressed it onto his own chest as he drowned himself in thoughts: Y*ou’re lucky that I’m willing to keep you under my shed...but what would you do if I’m not good enough to you?*

Lu Bixing’s heart pained the moment this strange thought came up. Suddenly, it felt like this person laying on the bed wasn’t the revered Grand Marshal of the Silver Ten, but a poor man shivering in the cold storm, helpless and weak, unable to even stand up for himself.

Unprompted, Lu Bixing wove a full-fledged little movie in his mind without any basis, turning himself into an evil villain that bullied Lin Jingheng. He hadn’t even considered what those ‘evil deeds’ should entail: the movie director himself already shattered his own heart with this imaginary scenario to the point where he could almost feel his muscles ache.

Right then, Lin Jingheng’s fingers that were still pressed onto Lu Bixing’s chest curled up slightly.

Zhanlu’s tempting fresh coffee may not have successfully woken him up, but director Lu’s own self-inflicted pained heartbeat was effective.

The first thing Lin Jingheng saw when he opened his eyes was Lu Bixing’s melancholic expression, frozen before him as if he was posing for a photoshoot. “......what are you doing?” he asked.

The ‘main actor’ was awake and finally called Lu Bixing’s wandering mind back; though despite having his senses back, that heartache still lingered. Lu Bixing pulled Lin Jingheng’s hand up and gripped it tighter as he locked their fingers together, then pressed a kiss on the latter’s hand. He responded in a soft tone, “Shh…I’m busy looking at you, don’t distract me.”

“......” Lin Jingheng was locked out of his little imaginary world and could feel goosebumps beginning to crawl on his skin. “What the hell are you smoking now?”

He pulled his hand back and attempted to sit up on the bed, but the moment he shifted his position, Lin Jingheng felt a stinging pain right on his temples. The dizziness and pain made it difficult for him to sit upright and forced him to fall back down onto the pillow.

Lu Bixing asked in panic: “What happened?”

“Nauseous.” Lin Jingheng responded in a muffled tone, shuffling his head around on the pillow like a restless cat, “Is this the side effect of that damned relaxant or from sleeping...how long was I asleep?”

Lu Bixing carefully pulled him back up and let the commander rest in his embrace, giving Lin Jingheng room to rest his chin on his shoulders: “Is this a little better?”

Lu Bixing’s shirt still carried that familiar smell of Zhanlu’s favorite eucalyptus scent, chilling and piercing without being too invasive, making it quite soothing to Lin Jingheng’s still-exhausted brain. He let out a muffled humming sound, feeling Lu Bixing’s body heat emitting through the clothes and engulfing him in a layer of warmth, slowly melting away his own chilly skin.

Lin Jingheng could sense that a lot of things had happened and even more troubling matters were waiting to be solved; yet no matter how much he tried, he couldn’t muster up the energy to think about them. His empty mind had nothing aside from the yearning to submerge himself in this embrace.

That was when he heard that chatterbox Lu Bixing mumble by his ears: “Feels better now, right? You know, I think you were too mesmerized by my handsomeness earlier, so of course you’re not that nauseous now that you can’t see my face.”

Lin Jingheng: “Leave.”

Lu Bixing grabbed Lin Jingheng’s rebellious hand that wanted to push him away, then rolled to the other side of the bed as he dragged the commander down along with him: “By the way, you haven’t agreed to what I asked you on the mech the other day.”

Lin Jingheng’s mind was still cloudy and didn’t realized what he was talking about, then finally asked after a few moments: “What?”

Lu Bixing asked sternly: “So when do you plan on signing the papers with me?”

Lin Jingheng: “......”

Lu Bixing then counted on his fingers: “Marriage certifications will need a lot of information. You weren’t here the last few times we did our census, so I’m assuming they don’t have a lot of your information on hand; we might even need to completely update and re-register for you. I can send the application form to your personal device--make sure to check if there’s anything you need to prepare before filling it out.”

Lin Jingheng: “Wh….”

Lu Bixing ignored him and continued: “Oh, and we might need to make a public announcement. Most public officials are required to write one for their own department with a personal statement in the back. I heard from Thomas that you would always push the paperwork onto your secretary back in the Silver Fortress, but you have to write it yourself this time!”

Lin Jingheng: “When did I say……”

“Also my situation’s a little bit complicated so I can’t really let the breeding center take my DNA, but thankfully I have a backup solution.”

Lin Jingheng’s lagging mind was still trying to process what this ‘breeding center’ was when he heard Lu Bixing ramble on without giving him a break: “The director of the breeding center was from the Engineering Department, so I can pull some strings a little and ask to bring a piece of equipment home. We can let Zhanlu manage it and make Doctor Hardin do the manual check--by the way, do you like boys or girls? I like girls, but I don’t think we’ll have time these coming years to take care of two at the same time. But if you have different opinions, I guess we’ll just have to play rock-paper-scissors to decide.”

Lin Jingheng’s still fragile mental state was completely startled, his face absent of any visible expressions.

“Oh,” Lu Bixing made a strange sound, “are you like my mom and don’t like kids?”

Something in Lin Jingheng’s heart jumped--this was the first time he heard Lu Bixing say “my mom” ever since the young man learned of his real parents.

“Then…” Lu Bixing stared at Lin Jingheng’s face for a short while, then licked the corner of his lips. “Then I guess I’ll have to sacrifice myself a little bit this time and sell my body to win a favor.”

In a quick turn of events, he wrapped his legs around one of the commander’s thighs, then pressed Lin Jingheng’s hand as he slid it seductively down his own body. In a charming, low tone, he asked, “How does it feel, Marshal? Now tell me, I’ll give you anything you want.”

Lin Jingheng’s head buzzed painfully when he tried to laugh so had no choice but to suppress the urge: “Are you selling your body or handing out flyers; why are you shoving it in other people’s hands when they clearly don’t want it?”

Lu Bixing: “......”

Lu Bixing turned his body over in a fit of anger and pressed the commander down on the bed with all four limbs: “Listen here punk, this is no longer that time you seduced me on the small mech in broad daylight to do whatever you want! Alright punk, if this is how you’re gonna be now that your body’s satisfied, I’m going to show you what forceful trade is……”

Before he could finish his arrogant act, Lee’s message came through on his personal device.

Lee: “Prime Minister, the generals from the Central Militias are asking to pay you a visit, are you available right now?”

The battle in the Heart of the Rose had been much bloodier than anyone had imagined; the Human Alliance had suffered a tremendous loss. No matter what the plan was for the future, mechs needed to be fixed, supplies needed to be restocked, and people needed rest. The First Galaxy was still under the looming shadow of the super AI; even though Woolf claimed that it was a peace-loving machine, it was still an oversized moth that couldn’t be ignored. They couldn’t possibly stay in the First Galaxy for long during a time like this, so after setting up temporary networks between the two sides of the wormhole, they only left a small fleet of watchers in the Heart of the Rose. Aside from the AUS pirates that had left without a word, everyone else decided to rest up in the Eighth Galaxy for now.

“How is this place so…” Nagus scanned the central residential area and shuffled through his limited vocabulary bank before finally commenting, “...plain.”

The central residential area was filled with small buildings that had their own little yard attached like average civilian housing. Even among the other galaxies, these were considered to be on the scale of a single-individual apartment, let alone compared to those grand mansions beside the mountains on Wolto.

“The buildings in the Eighth Galaxy, from government agencies down to basic infrastructure, are all newly built,” Lee explained as he led the generals in. “It’s still a young place, so we don’t have those kinds of big families like Woltorians. Many of our public officials and government workers are still single individuals who don’t need to worry about feeding a family--however, we are currently building more residential areas within the central region and expanding in the next two years. People who have bigger families can move to places with larger homes…we’re here.”

The General of the Fourth Galaxy looked up at the small building and shook his head: “It’s not even as big as Commander Lu’s reception parlor back in the day. I can’t say anything else, but shouldn’t an executive minister at least have a mansion? You can’t possibly tell us all foreign relations and diplomatic talks are done in the same office, right? That’s certainly not a good sign.”

“Milky Way City has a special reception area,” Lee said, “but you’re right. However, the Eighth Galaxy didn’t have foreign relations in the past so they’ve been delaying the construction; though recently many people have been starting to bring this issue back up again.”

The truth was people had mentioned this in the past, but because Lin Jingheng was still missing back then, this tiny yard was virtually everything Lu Bixing had left. If anyone dared to bring up the topic of reconstruction, their revered Prime Minister would respond with coldness.

“‘The Home of Commander Lin and Engineer 001’....” Nagus read the little sign aloud, “what, are you telling me Jingheng’s still living with him? Isn’t this a little too inconvenient? Hey, didn’t he say that his partner was also from the Eighth Galaxy’s Galactic Forces? Then why is he still stuck looking at Marshal Lin’s cold face everyday? Doesn’t he get tired of it? How does he live?”

Lee cleared his throat awkwardly and pretended he didn’t hear the complaints, then called at the front door: “Zhanlu, we’re here.”

The General of the Fifth Galaxy suddenly realized something and nudged Nagus. The latter turned and responded, confused: “What’s that for? Stop squinting at me, hey ol’ Bu, speak up if you have something to say.

The old General Bu from the Fifth Galaxy: “......”

A human-shaped Zhanlu opened the door with an albino python hanging around his neck; this strange aesthetic almost scared the living daylights out of these middle-aged guests. Lu Bixing quickly welcomed them in and took the guests around his house within five minutes, making it the quickest walkthrough these old men had ever seen.

Nagus scanned around for a bit and then asked, “Is Jingheng awake? How is he right now?”

“He’s good, it’s the same old issues with relaxant number 1. He woke up briefly in the morning; the medical capsule gave him some medication afterwards and now he’s back asleep.”

Nagus nodded his head; his purpose wasn’t really to greet Lin Jingheng. That little shit had been through tougher times and wouldn’t die that easily, so he wasn’t worried. His real intention was to find a chance to ask about something else more interesting. Nagus rubbed his hands on his knees awkwardly and attempted to ask in a natural tone: “Then...what about that person? You know, is your partner not home right now?”

Lu Bixing: “He’s home.”

Nagus’ old eyes widened excitedly as he waited for a follow-up, only to see Lu Bixing take the tea cups from Zhanlu’s hands and pass them around to the guests without any intentions of elaborating.

The General of the Fifth Galaxy once again nudged Nagus with his elbow. The latter lifted an arm and knocked that elbow off, then finally asked: “Where’s your partner, then?”

Lu Bixing lifted his head up innocently: “He fell asleep after taking some medication, didn’t I just mention it earlier?”

Nagus: “......”

The old veteran generals of the Central Militia: “......”

An invisible bolt of lightning struck down from the ceiling of the Prime Minister’s living room, breaking through the rooftop and onto the unsuspecting old men. Mister ‘humble’ Captain of the First Squadron Lee finally closed his eyes and mourned for these poor old souls in silence.

## Ch 180 - Headmaster Lu Had Nothing of Value On Him, Only His Boundless Imagination

The living room was dead silent.

Nagus’ hand seemed to have turned into an automated washboard that continued to rub back and forth on his old trousers until the thigh area was sparkling clean, ready to reflect light off the surface.

“Man, listen to yourself,” he said in one last attempt to fight back, “you make it sound like you two are planning on being together……”

The old general suddenly recalled that strange wooden sign in front of the house and was taken aback. Forgetting the rest of his words, he had no choice but to give a small, awkward chuckle.

Lu Bixing clearly had no intentions of playing the respectful younger child and before any of these old generals had time to process this information, said with a warm smile: “That’s exactly my intention, I do plan on being with him; did not I make it clear earlier?”

Nagus: “......”

The holy light from his pants wasn’t knocking him awake from a dream!

The Fourth Galaxy General picked up a cup of hot tea soullessly, but before Lu Bixing could warn him of the hot water, he had already burnt his tongue and almost spat out another piece of his shattered soul.

If this had been any of their children, perhaps this crew of old generals would already be flipping the world upside down. But Lu Bixing hadn’t grown up under their care, and even if they had managed to build some trust after sharing the same battlefield, they were still strangers to the young man. Unlike bantering with Lin Jingheng, these old men couldn’t possibly be so free with Lu Bixing.

In addition, as the Prime Minister of the Eighth Galaxy who had once openly announced his intent to break out of the Union, this seemingly friendly and harmless young man’s true powers had been exposed when he easily dispatched resources out of the Eighth Galaxy. To be fair, the Central Militia was only a guest in the name of an already broken Interstellar Union to the Eighth Galaxy right now; Lu Bixing’s willingness to still call them uncles by acknowledging the past generation’s relations was already more than common courtesy. It wouldn’t hurt for them to sit down and share some personal stories over a coffee table, but it would be overstepping a little too much if they wanted to criticize the young man’s personal life.

From a common etiquette standpoint, perhaps they should all at least give a few compliments such as ‘what a fated couple’ or ‘good taste,’ but Lin Jingheng’s infamous reputation back in the Union was still engraved in their minds. Seeing how Lin Jingheng was so well known for being an aloof individual who had been born with an air of intimidation, Nagus could not possibly find any good words to say even after digging through his limited vocabulary. He rubbed against his good conscience for a compliment and dug through his mind, still not finding a proper way to follow up as his legs began shaking in frustration.

Some people were naturally closed off and reserved, as if they were perpetually carrying a heavy burden: their entire being was like an extremely dense piece of heavy metal that sheltered a large and ambitious heart within. They would always be bouncing off others in power struggles and authorities, not allowing any room for personal emotions to enter; even romance and love had no place in their hearts.

Among these people, some may live with their endless desires for the rest of their lives, others would remain in solidarity until death. But most of them would usually end up walking down the more socially acceptable path of political marriage for the sake of their families and political power--this was the norm in the central area of Wolto. A couple like Lu Xin and his wife was considered to be the oddball case, and Lin Jingheng had always been more Woltorian than his adoptive parents in this aspect.

But Nagus also knew that even if Lin Jingheng were to let go of his restraints, he would never be the kind of person to lay his hands on Lu Xin’s son; this little shit still knew his place.

“Uh……” Old Bu was the first to open his mouth in an attempt to save the awkward atmosphere, “Jingheng...yeah, Jingheng…is not bad. At least his most respectable trait is that he’s loyal and won’t play around, so that’s a good thing, right?”

The rest of the generals quickly nodded in agreement: “Right, right.”

Old Bu desperately pulled out more words and said: “Wasn’t there that one singer a few years ago? You know, that...that one with a lot of connections in the Parliament, what’s her name? She shamelessly tried to pursue him in public and got rejected with a few words from him. I can bet you that even more shameless people who tried the same in the past couldn’t even earn a look from him.”

He roughly built a staircase to step down from this awkward stage, and the rest of the old generals barreled along as if they’d finally found an escape.

Nagus continued: “I bet it’s not just the past, he’ll still be the same from now on; heck even after he dies it won’t change--don’t worry, for the next 10,000 years, he’s absolutely safe from being the next hot model for a romance movie.”

“I’d say he has some very strong energy,” the General of the Fourth Galaxy agreed. “Those evil and shady beings that try to come near him would immediately expose themselves before him.”

Lu Bixing: “......”

He suddenly felt that he may have fallen for a magical demon-revealing mirror.

Nagus added a line: “His only bad trait is that his attitude is not very good; Commander spoiled him too much when he was a kid, and even back in the Silver Fortress he was mister ‘everyone-listen-to-me’.....”

Lu Bixing didn’t know whether to laugh or cry: “He doesn’t beat people up nor is he a criminal of domestic violence; it’s not like he’ll shoot me in the head if I find a sock underneath his pillow. Even Zhanlu’s pet chameleon likes to crawl onto him all the time--that little thing is still around, by the way, and Jingheng feeds it sometimes too.”

Nagus: “......”

A Lin Jingheng that feeds pet chameleons! This mind blowing mental image seemed to have damaged his limited imagination.

Old Bu watched as these old men got ready to once again end the conversation with awkward silence and had no choice but to pull the conversation back to a different subject: “The Eighth Galaxy used to be a completely deserted land, it was Commander...your father who brought hope to this dead land. Now it’s turned into a galaxy of miracles: even Jingheng looked more relaxed and content than he used to be back in Wolto.”

“If you like this place, feel free to come visit anytime.”

“Oh no, if us old folks come visit too often, bet you that little shit Lin Jingheng will find ways to shove missiles inside our teacups.”

The old generals finally relaxed from that ground-shattering news and joined in laughter.

The General of the Sixth Galaxy let out a sigh amidst the laughter: “We don’t even know how we’d get here in the future even if we wanted to.”

Lu Bixing set his tea cup down and asked: “What are everyone’s plans after this?”

“We certainly want to find a way to return to our galaxies soon,” Old Bu responded in a more serious demeanor. “The queen bee of the Freedom Corps died and lost connection with her biochip humans left in the other galaxies; these people are now simply a crowd of ants without a leader. While it’s certain that it would be difficult for them to threaten central authorities now, smaller threats are more widespread than ever.”

In the past, these biochip humans had been united by a clear top-down hierarchy that would carry out any orders given to them without fail, with enough power to overthrow entire societies and government systems overnight. However, while they no longer had the centralized and unified beliefs to build their empire, the effects the biochip had over human bodies still existed. Likewise, the internal hierarchy built within the chips remained; any higher-level chip carrier could gather up their own forces, which meant that anyone that wanted to cause trouble could easily do so by controlling lower-level biochip humans.

An anti-government armed force turned into a bunch of criminal groups overnight; while the former seemed more fearsome, both were equally threatening in the eyes of civilians living in a dystopian world.

Nagus pulled up an interstellar map from his personal device and said: “Woolf completely destroyed all terminals connecting the First Galaxy to the outside world, but the good news is that the actual distance between the galaxies isn’t too far off. I let our strategy team stay up last night to map out potential routes: if it works out, it will only take a minimum of six Woltorian years for us to arrive in the Second Galaxy. We can then reconnect the warping network, but six years--nobody knows what the world will become.”

Yet no matter what the world became, they would have to return. Even if they returned to be greeted by an empty land, they still needed to brush off all the ashes of war to replant trees and their homes in the war-torn soils. Even if it took sixty years or 600 years, no soldier would ever give up on their homeland.

“If we follow standard nutrient syringe usage, one soldier only needs about thirty-six syringes for the trip. If the trip goes smoothly, we can use a rotation hibernation method to save on supplies.”

“Don’t worry about supplies,” Lu Bixing said. “The Eighth Galaxy’s economy has been considerably well-off the last two years. If you all need, we can pull out some supplies from the Fourth Squadron for support along the way.”

Old Bu gave him a long look in his eyes: “The Eighth Galaxy was exiled for 200 years by the Union; the promised financial and technological support has been delayed again and again due to the greed of the Committee. This place was left to die on its own; thanks to the internal struggles of the Union, some people invited the devil into the house and allowed pirates to invade our territories. Of course, the main target was still the innocent Eighth Galaxy. Years later, this place became the disposable pawn to cover up the forbidden fruit and hold off the AUS. You were all forced to close off your terminals to stay away from the Union...ah, nobody in the Union aside from Commander Lu deserves your respect, and now we still have to rely on you…”

Lu Bixing responded with a smile: “What choice do we have? Uncle Bu, are we supposed to close up our galaxy to nurture it to become a powerful military state, then sneak in an attack to the Union while you are all in crisis so that we can become the next Glory Troop pirates?”

Old Bu had no comment to follow up.

“All eight galaxies were victims of the Committee, and the crimes of the minorities in the Union’s Central Government shouldn’t be a burden of responsibility for all of humanity. There are well-established foreign relation laws between galaxies; we’re not kindergarten kids fighting, there’s no point in seeking revenge for small grievances. Certainly, Wolto has wronged us for hundreds of years.” Lu Bixing lifted his head as he spoke, a finger on the side gently tapping the handle of the sofa. “So---what do you all think about my capital planet here? Isn’t it about to overtake Wolto already?”

Old Bu was shocked as he finally pulled his narrow eyes out from the perspective of the war--Wolto was now a completely burnt land. The First Galaxy had begun as the hub of the mad Freedom Corps and ended with the omnipresent and ever-logical super AI. This was the uncontested fate of the once almighty government of the Union.

The Eighth Galaxy lent out a helping hand at a time like this to turn the tide and became a powerful support for the Human Alliance. Whether it was during times of war or the rebuilding of society after the war, the galaxies all needed to rely on the Eighth Galaxy’s support. As for those vaccuocerebrals that had once been exiled to this land, they were now the frontline soldiers of the war against biochip humans---if all the galaxies knocked on their doors for help, perhaps even those rare soldiers of the Silver Fourth Squadron wouldn’t be enough to support everyone.

Regardless of how the Interstellar Union would exist in the future, it was undeniable that this was the era of the Eighth Galaxy.

This young Prime Minister of the Eighth Galaxy pledged allegiance to nobody, nor did he bow down to any authority; he wasn’t a political schemer that played for gains or losses either. When this turbulent world could no longer house the celestial dome of the Starry Sea Academy, the young man had had no choice but to forge a blade over sixteen years and rewrite the rules of the New Sidereal Era that had lasted for 300 years.

It didn’t matter anyway, since Headmaster Lu had nothing of value on him, only his boundless imagination.

The old generals of the Central Militia stayed for a whole afternoon under the excuse of private discussion and outlined the next steps for the Human Alliance. The rest were simply dividing up and coordinating the work; Lu Bixing courteously asked for them to stay for dinner, only to be refused. Nagus stared at the chameleon for a brief moment after shoving the heavy burden of work off his shoulders temporarily. He recalled that strange relationship between the young Prime Minister and his partner, then finally waved it all off in defeat: “No thanks, we’ve never been to Milky Way City either so I figured we all want to…take a walk around.”

And that was how a single photo from that night made it to top the Milky Way City headlines. The group of old Generals from other galaxies stood in line beneath Lu Xin’s statue in the plaza, tears worth a total of 1,000 years old covering the faces of those old men in a heartwarming photograph.

By the time Lu Bixing strolled back to their bedroom, Lin Jingheng was already awake. The awful side effects of overdosing on relaxants seemed to finally be over as he sat on the armchair beside the bed with a coat over his shoulder, quietly flipping through his grandfather’s heavy notebook. He heard the small sounds of movement and asked without lifting his head: “They all left?”

“Yep.” Lu Bixing trudged through the soft carpet and glued himself to the back of the chair, stretching his back. He then melted into the chair and turned himself into a human-shaped blanket over Lin Jingheng. “I think they’re at the plaza.”

Lin Jingheng looked up in surprise: “You think? Why didn’t they ask you to escort them to the plaza?”

Lu Bixing shoved his nose near the commander’s neck like an annoying puppy without giving a proper answer.

Lin Jingheng clutched the young man’s chin with two fingers.

Lu Bixing: “They interrupted my life’s biggest event; I was upset so I told them.”

Lin Jingheng asked in utter confusion: “Told them what?”

“I said that everything of mine, from heart to soul, every cell in my body belongs to you.” Lu Bixing couldn’t move his head in closer so he imitated the shameless Popcorn and stuck his tongue out to lick those fingers on his chin. Now that he was finally left alone, he had no restraints and continued, “If you take off my clothes, my body will be filled with all of your personal markings, Marshal, I…”

Before he could finish, he felt something slide onto his ring finger.

Lu Bixing lowered his head in shock and noticed it was a 3D printed ring; the design was the same as the one drawn in Lin Ge’er’s notebook.

“Is it too tight?” Lin Jingheng asked.

This model ring was like a magical pause button: Prime Minister Lu froze on the spot with his invisible tail still up in the air like a completely dumbfounded piece of statuary. He finally shook his head dumbly in response.

“Oh, good.” Lin Jingheng inserted some numbers on his personal device based on the model and confirmed his order, then continued the conversation as if nothing else happened, “Then what, did those old things go hang themselves in front of Lu Xin’s statue or something?”

Lu Bixing said with half of his soul still floating somewhere in another galaxy: “They said you were a demon-revealing mirror.”

Lin Jingheng: “......”

Lu Bixing finally pulled his senses back and realized he was speaking nonsense. He scratched his head in embarrassment and said: “No, no, I need to say something more meaningful; hold on, let me redo this. Ahem, I…”

Lin Jingheng didn’t give him time to finish as his shoulders started trembling suspiciously.

Lu Bixing jumped on him and said: “Hey, be serious! What’s wrong with you, why do you always keep such a bitchface on when it’s time to joke around, but start laughing whenever I’m trying to be serious here?”

The coat over his shoulders fell to the ground as Lin Jingheng finally laughed out loud.

The notebook on his knees dropped to the floor amidst their struggling, a single piece of paper falling out through the pages. Lu Bixing thought it was a page of the notebook that had detached over the years and quickly picked it up: “If this was inside a historical museum, it’d be the hottest artifact, be careful…hm?”

The page that fell out was a portrait drawing: the lines were rather rough, but the person was still quite recognizable: anyone could tell that it was the famous Chief Commander Lin from history books. The lines of his features were drawn in smooth lines, creating a striking contrast to the rough edges of the outlines.

Lu Bixing pondered: “Is this a self-portrait?”

“No.” Lin Jingheng pointed at the small signature in the corner. “It’s Woolf’s handwriting.”

Lu Bixing stared at the portrait momentarily, the playful expression on his face slowly disappearing as he mumbled: “Why did that AI also give away something like this?”

“An AI is still an AI,” Lin Jingheng said, “it’s different from a living and breathing Woolf.”

Lu Bixing’s fingers glossed over Woolf’s little signature at the corner as if he had slid his hand over a repressed but deeply engraved emotion. He muttered in deep thought: “No, I was wondering...they were the ones who single-handedly overthrew the machine era, so Woolf was perhaps the single human that understood super AIs the most in this world. He certainly knows the difference between carbon-based lifeforms and AIs.”

Why would someone so meticulous and calculating like him let an uncontrolled variable such as a free framework AI take control of the First Galaxy?

Was it only to fight off the Freedom Corps?

The AI was disposable after one use, so how would he deal with it later? An unlimited framework AI was equivalent to having its own will; would a machine like that really go to sleep like it said it would?

What had that old man really been thinking when he planned everything out?

Near the wormhole zone.

Biochip human hostages were all given signal disruptors and imprisoned by the military.

“Captain,” a technician from the Silver Third Squadron ran up to Thomas, saying, “we’ve detected traces of AI hacking within the internal communication systems of the Freedom Corps; do you need us to clean it off immediately?”

## Ch 181 - The Invisible Digital Ghost

“In situations when you can’t determine the enemy’s target, our philosophy is to prepare for the worst.” Lin Jingheng picked up the coat from the ground and said, “When the Freedom Corps biochip humans wanted to sneak into the Heart of the Rose during the battle, they said that an unlimited framework AI’s survival instinct was to expand indefinitely. If that wasn’t a lie and AI Woolf truly wanted to enter the Eighth Galaxy, how would they go about it?”

Lu Bixing sat up from the carpet in the bedroom and placed Lin Ge’er’s notebook on his knee, his gaze still fixed on that portrait drawing as he answered: “A super AI must have a main body that has network access, including but not limited to long-distance intergalactic networks and fixed communication ports between mechs. It’s likely that he would attempt to hack into any communication system through his expansive network.”

Lin Jingheng: “But the Heart of the Rose is a digital void with no transfer portals within it. Besides, we’ve always been extremely careful when we come in contact with them during battles; as long as the Third Squadron isn’t a bunch of idiots and still retained some brain cells, it’s very unlikely that Woolf could hack into the Alliance’s internal communication systems. If you were in Woolf’s position, what would you do?”

“Are you asking me to be an AI?” Lu Bixing shot a glance up at him and startled shuffling around on the carpet with a smile on his face. “This...roleplay is a bit kinky don’t you think? I’m a little shy here.”

Lin Jingheng: “.....”

Lu Bixing lowered his head again to look at the drawing by Woolf; he didn’t know what it was, but he felt something within those pencil strokes that pulled at a cord in his heart. That strange feeling had forced him to spill out another joke to finally release the suffocating feeling in his chest.

But now he pulled his joking demeanor back, and once again mumbled beneath his breath: “If it was me, I’d likely choose to hack the Freedom Corps’ networks.”

In the Heart of the Rose.

Thomas, who had been sent out to the other side of the wormhole, nodded as he listened to the soldier’s report, unfazed.

“Got it; it’d be strange if you didn’t catch anything. Quarantine the mech…oh by the way, don’t worry about cleaning it up so soon.” Thomas stretched his back as he said, “Let helicopter grandma Poisson send a few more people over--we’re going to set up a temporary tech team to analyze the AI’s hacking patterns. Prepare to report to the First Squadron and our Marshal. If we end up getting into a fight with Woolf in the future, at least we’ll be somewhat prepared.”

“The Freedom Corps were being chased around the First Galaxy by those AI fleets, they can’t avoid using transfer portals. And from the battle situation at the time, it seemed that the entire network connecting the transfer portals was under Woolf’s control,” Lu Bixing said. “When the Freedom Corps were fleeing, there would have been plenty of ‘loopholes’ for the AIs to hack into. That’s why it’s very likely that the hostage mechs we captured will carry viruses from him.”

Lin Jingheng shook his head in disagreement: “Thomas and Poisson from the Third Squadron are both in the Heart of the Rose right now; there’s no way they can’t handle a tiny virus like that.”

“Aside from mechs, there are also people.” Lu Bixing thought about it before adding on, “The personal devices and digital products of those biochip humans could have possibly interacted with the mechs they were on. If the mech was hacked by Woolf, it’s highly possible that the individual’s devices were also infected.”

The biochip human hostages were temporarily suspended in the Heart of the Rose and did not enter the Eighth Galaxy. They were all expected to remove their chips and be tried under intergalactic law in this deserted land.

Poisson personally supervised the prisoners and nodded his head after hearing the message from Thomas requesting assistants: “Send teams six and seven over: they were the ones up on the frontlines that faced the AI Troops during the battle. This is the uncut footage of the entire situation when the Freedom Corps’ commanding ship was shot down; there were no ecopods left behind nor did we detect any other forms of life around the area. Let my dumb grandson Thomas report immediately to the Milky Way City Command Post. Oh, by the way, don’t forget to send all the digital devices we seized from the hostages over as well for him to take care of. Take the war prisoners into quarantine rooms.”

“Yes, sir,” a soldier responded. “How long shall we keep them in quarantine?”

“Until we confirm there’s nothing else aside from natural human flesh left on their bodies,” Poisson commanded, “do a precise and thorough checkup down to the cellular level.”

“The first step in capturing a war prisoner is to remove their personal device and snach away every suspicious material they carry, including metal products, sharp objects, and digital devices.” Lin Jingheng said, “Personal devices operate on the energy of their host--the moment one is removed it becomes a useless piece of junk. Every other item will be quarantined like their mechs; is there anything else we’re missing?”

“Those AIs may be peerless, but you’re a master of weaving the web down to every piece of microfiber.” Lu Bixing let out a sigh and then fell back into deep thought. “Alright, I guess the only thing left would be to mess around with the biochips.”

Lin Jingheng: “I thought we had more of an advantage in dealing with biochips.”

“Right, even Woolf had to take the chip disruption technology from my hands,” Lu Bixing said. “But don’t you want to consider the worst case scenario? Like maybe Woolf already started his own analysis on biochips through some unknown method--it isn’t completely impossible. Think about it: Doctor Hardin was kicked out of the Freedom Corps’ research team and sent to a galactic prison during the early stages of the biochip development research. As for me, I had been finding ways to rebuild Doctor Gordon’s research on biochip evolution back in the early days, which was a completely different path than what the pirates took. Over these years, the Silver Ten and Union Troops were the ones with the most experience in combat against the biochip humans, so maybe Woolf knew more about those chips than we thought he did. He asked for our biochip disruption technology to let our guards down, tricking us to think that he had no way to combat them and that we had the upper hand.”

Lin Jingheng’s gaze grew grave: “So he would let us notice that biochip humans and our hostage mechs had traces of AI hacking to lure the Third Squadron into investigating the traces. This would let the Third Squadron think they’ve understood the AI’s methods of systematic hacking and its source, then he could strike when we all least expected it through the biochips inside those pirates, silently making his way into our networks.”

The Heart of the Rose.

Lin Jingshu was dead, Woolf had temporarily ceased fire. The Human Alliance finally had a chance to catch their breaths; only the Silver Third Squadron’s atmosphere was still uptight and stern.

Thomas: “Received an order from the Command Post: even if they’re stripped naked we still have to keep those hostages in quarantine. Man, I’m really scared of those biochips now.”

Poisson: “You’ve been hiding behind Turan’s back and didn’t even touch a single piece of metal from the battlefields like a coward, so drop that act.”

“Fear’s born from imagination,” Thomas responded confidently, “Look, those people who watch horror movies are always screaming louder than those who have actually seen real ghosts…”

A row of cleaning robots carrying a dead body walked past him at that moment. Of course, those who had perished under galactic missiles left no corpses, so the ones here were mostly cleaned up from the inside mechs of the hostage pirates. Some of these corpses were people who had crashed when they failed to get under the protection airbags once the mechs lost their internal gravity system. Others had died from toxic gases leaking from their mechs, some even died from the loss of oxygen and drastic air pressure change in space.

Of course, these corpses often hadn’t died with pretty faces; a ghoul-like discolored face greeted Thomas eye-to-eye right at that moment.

Thomas quickly took a step back in shock: “Don’t talk about the living during the day, don’t talk about the dead during nighttime; yikes!”

“Wait,” Poisson called to the group of robots carrying the bodies, “were all the bodies also checked thoroughly? Send them to security for one more checkup before they’re tossed away.”

The robots obediently did another thorough scan of the corpses before him. The dead biochip humans rested peacefully, with no signs of giving anyone a surprise; Poisson finally waved them off for the robots to carry off the corpses.

Yet no matter how careful one could be, human mistakes were inevitable.

The robots sent all the freshly cleaned corpses into a specialized space morgue where corpses would be identified and recorded before they were finally disposed of.

The identification method for corpses was to scan the personal device on their wrist; the device ran on the energy emitted by the human body, so when the person died the device also ‘died’ along with them. Therefore, there was no need to take the extra step to take it off when disposing of corpses.

The small identification robots turned on their scanning devices and lined up neatly along both sides of the terminal leading into the morgue, escorting the dead bodies of these biochip humans into the large incinerator after recording each body’s identity. Inside the incinerator was where these people would finally rest, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. One by one, the personal information of all the corpses popped up on the screens; these fearsome biochip humans had once all been normal citizens of the seven galaxies. From researchers, mechanics, stage actors, to tour guides--people of all ages and genders became blinded ‘insects’ under the influence of the biochips. These blinded souls all once praised and sang passionately for their crazed queen bee.

If there had been a human with emotions witnessing this scene, perhaps they would let out a sigh of regret for these lost lives, but these cold little robots were all completely unfazed.

That was when a corpse on the belt suddenly trembled before it hit the scanners; the tremble blended in with the natural movement of the conveyor belt and escaped the eyes of the robots.

A biochip that was supposedly dead suddenly emitted a small electric shock into its host’s body. The corpse twitched in response before suddenly opening its dead eyes and activating the individual’s personal device.

The next moment, this strange corpse entered the scanning device with its eyes still open; the device stopped momentarily as its screen began to flash abnormally. The code on the screen turned into error codes, prompting the surveillance robots to all lift their heads in alarm as they beeped in unison: “System malfunction, reporting…”

Within three seconds, the scanner returned back to normal while a small and evil line of green text appeared on the screen: *troubleshooting deactivated.*

An invisible digital ghost landed on the scanning device like the seed of a dandelion and overtook the system, then began spreading through the internal network of the Eighth Galaxy.

On the body of super mech Longyuan.

“Chief.” Longyuan’s mech core had the human appearance of an austere middle-aged man. “Detector seed number 26 has successfully passed through the wormhole terminal. However, I must remind you that a ‘seed’ that passes through the wormhole will lose a large portion of its original functions.”

Woolf’s voice rang out within Longyuan’s mech: “It’s alright, my creator simply wanted me to take a look at the Eighth Galaxy and pay a visit to his old friend that now resides there. The Eighth Galaxy is not an enemy; he acknowledged the independence of the Eighth Galaxy when he was alive. Let seed number 26 send out a bird’s eye-view map of Milky Way City to us; I enjoy scenes of the night.”

Lin Jingheng: “I already instructed the Third Squadron to pay special attention to the biochips.”

“To be honest, the problem isn’t too big. Due to the unstable timeflow within the wormhole terminal, whether by humans or AIs, it’s a tough stream to cross.” Lu Bixing explained calmly while still resting on the carpet of his own home, “Woolf has no hardware within the Eighth Galaxy and can only rely on remote hacking. Even if he did successfully hack into our network, he wouldn’t be able to do anything: the most he could do is take a tour…if I was an AI that wanted to invade the Eighth Galaxy, I might just charge in directly with my armed forces. But I feel like if Woolf really planned on doing something like this, it’s not a good time to pick a fight.”

“Hm.” Lin Jingheng nodded slowly. “The Human Alliance is still in the Heart of the Rose. This is perhaps the time when the alliance is still its most unified, with the most power to fight back; it certainly isn’t a good time for him.”

“Even if the Human Alliance couldn’t fight against them, if everyone retreated to the Eighth Galaxy and closed the wormhole area, Woolf would be trapped within the First Galaxy. How would he expand his influence then?” Lu Bixing shrugged. “If I was Woolf, first I’d take the time to clean up the First Galaxy and then I’d kindly welcome the Central Militias back to their own galaxies. I’d even send a group of engineers and mechanics to escort their journey back, follow the Central Militias to the Second Galaxy, and rebuild the transfer portals. Within the next ten to twenty years, the Central Militias would be busy cleaning up all the biochip humans within the other galaxies in my place while I fix the transfer portals within the First Galaxy. By the time I’m done, the fight against biochip humans would likely be done, so I’d take this opportunity while everyone else least expects it to take over the entire transfer network within all seven galaxies.”

Lin Jingheng pondered momentarily and admitted that this was a reasonable deduction. Even if they analyzed the worst-case scenario, it didn’t seem like there were any immediate threats to them. He had been lying in bed for a day and felt his body stiffening up, so he stood up from his chair to ask Zhanlu for some food from downstairs.

Lu Bixing closed the notebook on his knee and got ready to jump up to follow him downstairs, only to stop in his tracks as he turned his head to look at the chair Lin Jingheng was just sitting on.

He suddenly remembered that during the sixteen years that Lin Jingheng had been gone, someone else had also been sitting on this chair: that realistic 3D model. Aside from the lack of a soul, it looked almost like a real person from the outside. He rarely slept in the bedroom at the time and only opened the door inside the room whenever he was woken up in the middle of the night from his dreams. He would turn on a small lamp and stare at the figure from afar--too afraid to walk too close because he would wake up from his daydream. He would hear with his overly sensitive hearing that this ‘person’ had no breathing nor heartbeat and he’d be forced awake from his sweet dream.

Lu Bixing pulled out the portrait drawing Woolf had done once again. The drawing was protected with a special layer of preservation film that could maintain the freshness of the image. He scanned the drawing with his personal device to see the brand and creation date of the protective film---made in NSC 2.

It was two years after the death of Lin Ge’er.

Lu Bixing was stunned and realized where that familiar feeling of suffocation in his chest had come from earlier when staring at this drawing.

He thought: this drawing was the same as his 3D model.

“What are you doing, are you not eating?” Lin Jingheng saw that Lu Bixing hadn’t followed behind him and went back to knock on the door again. “Did your legs fall asleep?”

“Oh...coming.” Lu Bixing placed the notebook and drawing to the side and followed him out the door.

At that moment, Doctor Hardin’s message came in.

“Good evening, Doctor.”

Doctor Hardin finally couldn’t hold it in and called Lu Bixing to ask about Lin Jingshu’s whereabouts. Lin Jingheng caught a few lines of the conversation before he quickly walked down the stairs to avoid the name ‘Lin Jingshu.’

Lu Bixing had no choice but to explain the full story behind the conspiracy and fall of the Freedom Corps to Doctor Hardin.

The Doctor’s mind went blank for a while after hearing the story and cut off the communication with trembling hands, knocking over a teacup along the way.

A caretaker knocked on his door: “Doctor, are you alright?”

Doctor Hardin had his back turned to her while he waved her off. The caretaker closed the door silently, then the old man slowly curled up into a ball and cried out loud in agony.

The Doctor didn’t realize that the surveillance lights of his home-use medical capsule suddenly flashed as he bathed in his tears. The screen ‘looked’ at his pained silhouette as a silent companion.

Inside Longyuan’s mech in the First Galaxy, the large screen automatically transformed into a large drawing canvas. The next moment, a sketch of an old man’s pitiful silhouette appeared; the super AI let out an appropriate sigh in response.

Doctor Hardin spent the night by himself before finally mustering up the energy to contact Lu Bixing once again the next day. “You said that the biochip human’s psychological attack and hallucinations didn’t work on you during the last battle; can you send me all the relevant data and statistics of that battle to me? This is very important data that could help us understand the chip inside your body more.”

The digital pen on the screen inside Longyuan’s mech suddenly stopped drawing.

“Biochip.”

1. Reference to Italian Philosopher Girodano Bruno, who was burned at the stake by the inquisition for his works on the Copernican model of the universe, in which he insisted that the universe is infinite and therefore had no ‘center’ which went against Catholic Doctrines taught at his time. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quote from *Homeless to Harvard*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)