

Chapter 9

“Captain Lorenn, Captain Arnea is down!” a bridge member reported to the command carrier’s captain. “The Wall and the enemy mobile suits are taking out our people, but slowly.”

Captain Lorenn looked at the young man. “How much damage has *Dawn of Crimson Light* taken?” he asked.

“Not enough to be debilitating, so we’re still in the fight,” the crewman answered.

“Turn half of our weapons on the enemy Nexus suits,” Lorenn commanded as he returned to his multi-screen view of the fight. “The sooner we take those down, the better.”

“Aye, Sir!” the entire bridge responded.

“Captain, Captain Arnea just went down completely, Sir,” a woman reported to him. “*The Kingfisher*... it moved like a human who knows martial arts. It was so fast.”

Lorenn looked at the woman, and she had never seen an expression like the one currently on his face before. “Did our cameras capture the fight?” he asked.

“Coming to your screens now, Captain,” she told him.

A streamed video started playing on his display of the fight. A few bridge crew who were not monitoring the battle itself turned to watch out of curiosity. Captain Lorenn watched the silent battle as Captain Arnea threatened *The Kingfisher* and then the Nexus suit’s quick response. Within seconds, three mobile suits were down. Captain Lorenn glowered, baring his teeth in disgust.

“I need to speak to the High Imperator immediately—my office!” he barked, taking the video playback screen. “Continue the battle and do not disturb me unless the battle turns completely against us.”

He stormed from the bridge, his eyes not moving from the video.

“YOUR HIGHNESS!”

The cry went out across all friendly communications systems. Shiori felt her heart stop at the pain she heard in her Captain’s voice, but she knew she had to

concentrate on the battle in front of her. No matter how much she wanted to know what was happening, she needed to be alive to find out.

She smashed two more enemy suits together and fired at some more, the bullets going wide with her distraction, but they still managed to strike and take out a mobile suit that was heading for Kii's blind side.

"Thanks," Kii told her, not realizing it had been an accident. "What do you think is going on with the Prince?"

"I don't know," Shiori told her, forcing herself to stay focused, "but I've never heard Captain Ikehara react like that before. Captain, what's going on? Talk to us! We're lost up here!"

"Mizuko says she left her mobile suit," Rumiko reported to them. "Why would she leave her mobile suit in the middle of a battle?"

Asa jumped down to the ground, rolled, and rushed for *The Kingfisher*, which was slightly hunched forward on one knee, one fist planted in the ground for support. No lights seemed to be working on it, and the mech's red eyes were dark. She pressed a button on the mobile suit's leg, and the glide-hook lowered to the ground. Asa rode it up to the hatch and pressed the button to get inside. She had to swing away slightly as steam billowed out from within the cockpit. When the heat had dissipated, she peered inside and saw that both Princess Yumisa and Prince Kiminobu were passed out.

Asa grabbed the side of the cockpit hatch and pulled herself inside, nearly slipping out once when her foot touched the slick rail that moved the two seats in and out for easy access. She checked first on the Princess and saw that she was alive, though her body was covered in a heavy sheen of sweat. But at least she was okay. Asa removed Yumisa's helmet and placed it in its holder.

Then Asa grabbed the back of Yumisa's seat and pushed up towards the Prince's, and she fell straddled into his lap. Asa tried to yank his helmet off, but it did not move because of the way he had strapped it. She saw her Prince's face covered in sweat. His body started to convulse slightly as the heat vanished into the slightly cooler air outside, and she wondered if he was cold. But Asa knew that was impossible—he had not felt heat or cold except in his face since he was sixteen.

“Your Highness, wake up!” she pleaded with him, shaking his shoulders gently. She reached down and laid her hand on a canister of water that all the mobile suits had in them and opened it. She raised his visor and splashed some water on Kiminobu’s face, but he barely registered it.

“Oh... what happened?” Yumisa asked weakly.

“There’s some water by your seat on the left, Your Highness,” Asa told her. “Drink some now!”

Yumisa floundered around for a moment before she touched the water canister. She grabbed it, opened it, and brought it to her lips. She drank and drank.

“It creates water from the air, so make sure you cap it again,” Asa reminded her. “Just rest for now. And don’t undo your straps—you might fall out.”

Yumisa looked out of the forward hatch and saw the ground below her. Her eyes went wide, and she instinctively pushed herself backwards into the seat.

“What happened?” Asa asked her as she continued trying to awaken Kiminobu.

“All the systems... went dark...” Yumisa told her, her voice weak and tired. “I could feel... the mech moving... and it got so hot in here. I passed out after just a few moments. I don’t know what happened.” She opened a camera screen and shoved it towards the back of the cockpit so she could see Kiminobu. She saw Asa straddling his lap and had to count to five before she asked, “How is he?”

“I don’t know,” Asa told her, not looking at the screen, just keeping her eyes on the Prince. Then she opened a screen herself, scrolled through a short list of menu options, then pressed one of them. “The readings say his pulse is weak, and he looks pale...”

“*Kingfisher*, this is Commander Kinji on the troop transport—what is going on?”

“Transport, this is Captain Ikehara in *The Kingfisher*. What’s going on with the fight? It sounds too quiet out there.”

“Captain,” Commander Kinji said, his voice uncertain, “you’re not going to believe this, but the Uprising seems to be... retreating.”

“What?”

Asa leapt off the Prince and slid outside to the hatch. She grabbed the glide-rope and hooked her foot in it and swung out to look at the sky above, where she saw the commander carrier and remaining troops flying away. She saw the

Nexus suits hovering high above, and if Asa didn't know better, she'd think the Nexus Suits were confused. Two mobile suits landed next to the fallen black mech belonging to the person who had tried to capture the Prince and Princess and started helping it up like a wounded soldier.

"To the pilot of *The Empress*," the familiar voice of her opponent said through the mobile suit's speakers, "this fight isn't over, but we're leaving you alone for now."

"Why?" Asa asked. "Just because we kicked your ass? You're just cowards, the lot of you!"

"To the pilot of *The Empress*," a new voice said, "this is Captain Braunleaux Lorenn of the Shezar Armed Forces. When you get back to your castle, you might want to ask your King about something called The Fading Shadow System. It was from many centuries ago, but... you might find it educational. We're withdrawing. The loss is turning too great for what should have been a simple snatch and carry mission. But your Wall has taken a ton of damage, as have a good number of your mobile suits. Good luck getting it working again any time soon. We'll be back, though, before you're ready."

"We'll be ready," she told him, and she ended the communication.

"*Kingfisher*, what is wrong with Prince Kiminobu?" Yumisa asked worriedly. "Why hasn't he woken up?"

The mobile suit was silent.

"*Kingfisher*, answer me!" she barked at it.

No answer came.

"Stay here," Asa told her. "Keep an eye on him. I'll call in a medical unit. I'd rather not move him until I know what's going on."

Kiminobu gasped suddenly and came awake, and the mobile suit lurched, nearly tumbling Asa to the ground below as the glide-rope swung mightily. Asa grabbed the hatch opening and pulled herself inside and saw the Prince staring up at the top of the cockpit with a blank expression on his face. Yumisa braced herself, released the straps holding her against her seat, then turned around to look at her husband. Asa started to climb back inside when she saw the Prince's entire body suddenly relax, his eyes blinked, and he looked at his wife with a pained expression. *The Kingfisher* fell back on its haunches, leveling the cockpit out.

Outside, steam began releasing from *The Kingfisher*'s entire body.

"What happened?" he asked.

WE WON

Yumisa shoved the screen with the Kingfisher's answer out of the way and climbed over the seat into Kiminobu's lap worriedly. She touched his face and found it cooling off.

"Are you okay, Highness?" Asa asked him from outside the cockpit. "Are you hurt? What did this machine do to you?"

"Calm down, Captain," he told her in a weak voice. "I'm all right. I just have a bit of a headache from information overload, that's all. I'll be okay."

"I'm calling the medical corps," she told him, reaching for the communications button.

"I'm fine," he repeated, his firm voice holding her hand. It was the firmest she had ever heard it, and the tone of his voice almost scared her. While he was the Prince, he had never really spoken to her or anyone else with a stern voice, especially one that brokered no argument. He was no longer the scared man he had been. Something had changed during the battle.

"Captain, we're going home, and I'm going to have the military get started repairing the Wall. We're vulnerable until the shield is back up. *The Kingfisher* has admirably protected Yumisa and I, and it will continue to do so on the trip home. You and the others will act as our honor guard on the way back. But first, we're all going to disembark and see to this marriage. It was never finalized, and I will not take Yumisa until I am her husband."

"You're weak," Yumisa told him worriedly. "You look like you've been through hell."

He looked at her with a cocked eyebrow. "Are you saying you don't want to get this quick marriage over with so we can spend the night together?" he asked her. "Because I will not take you until we are married. It would not be right."

"No, I'm not saying that," she told him. "I want to get married, of course."

"Highness...." Asa objected.

“It won’t take long, Captain, and then we can head back to the protection of the castle and you can put whatever guard up around us that you want.”

“After you’re looked at by the doctors,” Asa told him. “That’s an order, Your Highness.”

“After Yumisa and I are married,” he countered. “*That* is an order, Captain.”

Asa sighed. “Fine. I’ll find the Lord Chamberlain.”

“Kiminobu, you’re not well,” Yumisa told him, and she could see how tired his eyes looked. “I want to get married, yes, but I want to make sure you’re all right, first. It can wait a couple of hours.”

Kiminobu removed his glove, revealing a hand that was severely burned, scarred, and had bubbled flesh. Yumisa gasped when she saw it, but she reached out and took hold of his hand to show that she wasn’t afraid. She looked up into his eyes, but he was only staring at her hand holding his. He quickly pulled his hand away and slipped the glove back on.

“You’ll have to get used to more of that,” he told her sadly. “That’s how I look almost all over. I’m so sorry I’m not the man I should be.”

“You’re perfect,” she told him, and he knew she meant it. “I’m the one who’s part wolf, remember?”

He smiled at her and touched her face with his gloved hand. “You’re perfect, too—even if your makeup is running a lot.” He took her chin to look at her face and realized—

Yumisa screamed and covered her face. “Oh, I must look a mess! I had makeup all over my face! I’m going to kill Chiharu for making me do that! You definitely can’t marry me now!”

Kiminobu grabbed her shoulders gently and pulled her to him so he could kiss her. He put his arms around her and held her close, and he moaned gently into her mouth as his body responded to her nearness. Yumisa slipped her arms around his neck and held him to her for several moments.

They broke the kiss, and Kiminobu told her, “You can never be a mess. Even with your makeup running, you look like the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen.”

She kissed him again. “I don’t know about that—your guards are pretty devastating.”

“They’re... reptiles compared to you,” he told her, staring into her golden eyes.

Yumisa smiled. “Keep talking like that, and you’re going to have the best night of your life, my husband-to-be,” she said, running her finger down his nose. “Let’s get this helmet off you so you can cool off more.” She reached under his neck and unstrapped the helmet and pulled it off. *The Kingfisher* suddenly went dark other than the light coming in from outside.

I just hope I can be the lover you want, he thought to himself, but he did not tell her his fears.

“I’ve never heard of a battlefield wedding before,” Chiharu Yamashiro said as she and Ruri Wakita quickly tried to fix Princess Yumisa’s running makeup. “Not really an ideal location.”

“I don’t care,” Yumisa told her. “This isn’t the actual wedding, it’s just to resolve the treaty. We’ll have the real wedding in a couple of months, and until then, Kiminobu and I can start making babies.”

“You can technically make babies without getting married,” Ruri told her.

Yumisa cast her a look out of the corner of her eye.

“I’m just saying,” Ruri said plaintively.

Chiharu stepped back when she and Ruri finished, and they smiled at her.

“Perfect,” they said, and they held a mirror up for Yumisa to see herself.

They had done away with the makeup they had used to make her look more like a woman wearing wolf-makeup and gave Yumisa her natural complexion. If Kiminobu was going to try to love her, Yumisa decided he needed to see the real her. It was the first time she had shown the real her to anyone outside of her family and handmaidens. She was scared of his true reaction to the real her.

While she did not have hair covering her body, Yumisa’s skin had the same coloring, brown highlighted with grey. It blended seamlessly with her hair, ears, and her wolf’s tail, making her look more feral, more dangerous, far less human but far more delightful. This was the real Yumisa, even more real than the Yumisa Kiminobu had met after the concert and even this morning. She wore no makeup now.

“I want lipstick,” she said. “And maybe a little... something to highlight my cheeks,” she instructed her handmaidens.

“And honey eyeshadow for your eyelids,” Ruri decided. “We want to highlight the natural golden hue of your gorgeous eyes. And a natural peach color for your lips, I think—you want them looking full, luscious, and moist for your husband’s kiss.”

She worked quickly and then let Yumisa see the finished results.

“Wow... that’s me?” she asked, turning her head back and forth. “Kiminobu won’t recognize me!” She swallowed hard. “What if he hates the real me? What if I’m not... human enough for him?”

“If he doesn’t consider you more beautiful now than before, he has no taste,” Ruri told her. “And you should drop him like a hot potato!”

“Why does everyone seem to actually be against this marriage?” Yumisa asked. “We’re bringing an end to two hundred years of war!”

“We just want you to be happy, Your Highness,” Ruri told her. “We don’t want you to feel pressured into doing anything you might regret.”

“I love him,” Yumisa told her handmaidens. “I know it sounds weird to say that, but... I know he’s a good man. I’m going to be happy with him. I don’t doubt that for a second.”

Her handmaidens hugged her. “Then we’re happy for you, too,” Chiharu told her. “And we’ll never leave your side. If Vadora is going to be your home from now on, then it will be our home, as well.”

“I love you,” Yumisa told them. “You have all been so good to me since you came into my life! I wouldn’t know what to do without you there.”

“You’ve been good to us, too, Your Highness,” Chiharu told her. “We’re just returning the love. Besides, we’re famous because of you, too.” Chiharu smiled. “Now that you’re ready, we should get going—your husband-to-be awaits.”

“Do you think my dress looks okay?” Yumisa asked. “It got kinda wrinkled during the fight.”

“You’re right,” Ruri said. “It is not appropriate for a wedding at all in it’s condition. You’ll have to change with me.”

“No, with me,” Takē said. “I have a pure white dress, after all.”

They rather quickly changed kimonos, and Yumisa felt more bride-like in Takē’s pure white one. She thought about using Takē’s belt, but she instead chose to keep the white belt she had worn with her kimono to make the kimono as pure

white as possible. They helped her into her shoes and then they went out to find where everyone had gathered for the ceremony.

As Chiharu had said, it was not the ideal location for a wedding, but Princess Yumisa knew this was not the true wedding. This was a joining of families so the Vadoran and Kareneth militaries would be forced to work together after centuries of animosity—and considering the threat of the Unbound Uprising, they would need to work together more than ever.

Yumisa had to wonder if it would actually work, but she knew anything was possible.

She found Prince Kiminobu standing among a circle of the Nexus suits, who were all facing outward, ready to defend from an attack. *The Kingfisher* still hunched on the ground, looking like a sulking child. Yumisa joined Kiminobu, and they listened to the Lord Chamberlain and said their vows. She smiled up at him as they looked at one another, and when the time came, they kissed. Everyone applauded, and the Wall even set off fireworks that surprised and delighted the Princess, who laughed at the joyous display.

After the ceremony, the mobile suits and troop carrier started back for the castle. *The Kingfisher* stood up when Prince Kiminobu put his helmet on and flew back to the castle quietly, no alarms sounding, among the other Nexus suits.

Yumisa could not keep the smile off her face as they flew back and the countryside passed the viewports. She was glad her helmet covered her face so Kiminobu could not see the ear-to-ear grin plastered there.

His vows had been filled with love. But she knew, as he said them and he stood holding her hands, that something in his tone had been off. She thought he seemed detached, as if he wanted to truly be a part of what they were doing but part of him was cut off from it at the same time. She decided it must have just been fear. If he hurt as badly as she suspected, maybe he did not know how his body was going to react when it came time for them to make love. She decided, in that moment, to let him take all the time he needed.

She pressed a button, making sure no one outside of *The Kingfisher* could hear her. She had spent a few moments learning about her controls while thinking.

“Kiminobu—?” she asked.

“You can just call me Nobu,” he told her. “My family does, and you’re definitely family now. My guards call me Kiminobu out of respect for my position, most of the time. I want you to call me Nobu.”

She smiled at that. A nickname that even his guards did not use.

“And you can call me Misa,” she told him. “Nobu, what have you been through since you were... burned?” she asked as tactfully as she could. “And how did that happen to you? I haven’t heard too many stories, but I did overhear my father talking about it with a general once when he didn’t think I was around.”

Kiminobu shrugged as he concentrated on piloting the mech. *The Kingfisher* moved easily for a mech of its size, the controls very responsive.

“Not much to tell,” he said. “When I was fifteen, my mother and father left the kingdom to get these mobile suits.” He paused for a moment, unsure of how to put the next part delicately, but he finally sighed and said, “The Kareneth military attacked, hoping to kill them while they were beyond the Wall.”

“Why were they beyond the Wall?” Yumisa wondered.

“They were in the Broken Lands, where these Nexus suits came from.”

“I thought the Broken Lands were abandoned?” she asked.

“Again, I don’t know all the answers, I just know they were there.”

“Oh. Sorry. Please, continue.”

“The Kareneth military attacked, hoping to kill them, and I found out. I took a prototype mobile suit out to help them, against the advice of like a thousand people, even though I had very little mobile suit training. I also did not know that the particular mobile suit wasn’t finished, had a few oil leaks, and it also had no protective foam to protect the pilot from fires.”

“Oh, dear,” she said, seeing where this might be going.

“There was a spark—not from enemy fire, mind you—and the mobile suit caught fire... and so did I.”

She turned her head to look at him. “Oh no! You had no protection?”

“The entire mobile suit went up like a matchstick house,” he said. “One thing caught fire, then another, then another, then me. I couldn’t even get the hatch to open to get out because the fire caused an electrical short. I pretty much cooked alive in an oven.”

“How did you possibly survive that?” she asked worriedly.

“A Kareneth mobile suit that was coming to kidnap me doused my mobile suit with its own protective foam and put most of the fire out. *The Empress* pulled the hatch away, then she and the Kareneth pilot just filled the cockpit with as much foam as they could. But by that time, it was almost too late. They said they could hear my screams for miles until I passed out from the pain. So, I spent the next year in a regenerative bath, but our regeneration technology wasn't that great at the time—it still isn't—so while my body was able to scar, I lost most of my ability to feel anything.”

“Oh dear...” Yumisa swallowed hard before asking gently, “May I ask... how is your...?” She cleared her throat uncomfortably.

“I'm not a eunuch, if that's what you're asking,” he said. “I'll be able to give you a baby, don't worry.”

“I wasn't worried about that,” she said. “I was just hoping that you can still feel the pleasure of the act.”

“I've never been with a woman, so I don't know, but I should be able to,” he said. “I think my loins were protected because I kinda peed myself when the accident happened. You cannot tell that to anyone,” he warned her sternly.

“My lips are sealed,” she told him. She released her straps and turned around to look at him. “You must hate us.”

“There's no point,” he said numbly. “You weren't responsible, so I won't hold what happened to me against you. Though, I have to say, I'm not sure how I'll react when I meet your parents. I'll try to be nice, though. I know we were at war, and I disobeyed not only my parents but my Royal Guard and everyone else who told me to stay in the castle and not get involved. I did something stupid, and I suffered the results of it.”

“So you've never been... with anyone?” she asked him. “Not even to see?”

“To be honest, you're probably not going to want to be with me, either, after you see me with my clothes off,” he told her. “I'm not a pretty sight. I don't even like taking a shower because I have to see myself. I cry a lot.”

“That's terrible.” She turned completely around now and knelt in her pilot seat to look at him. “I want to see you,” she decided. “Now. We have a few minutes before we get back to your castle.”

“I'm piloting a mobile suit,” he told her. “I can't just—”

Yumisa reached down and clicked on the autopilot. She climbed over the back of her chair and sat down in his lap. She reached for his shirt and started to unbutton it, but he took her hands and stopped her.

“I’m not ready,” he said. “You promised you’d give me time. Just... give me until tonight. I promise, I’ll be with you and I’ll let you see everything, but... please just give me a few hours.”

She nodded. Instead, she removed her helmet, tossing it into her seat, and snuggled against him. “Do you mind if I stay like this for the rest of the ride?”

“Not at all,” he said, and he put his arms around her. He held her close against him and let the autopilot take them home. She felt warm in his arms and against his body.

He just wondered for how long.

“We had them!” Dietang Arnea spat at Braunleaux Lorenn in the Captain’s office a few hours later. “We had them, and you just let them go?!”

Lorenn looked at Arnea from above his interlaced fingers. He had let the Captain rant for over twenty minutes, but he was now starting to grow tired of it.

“Shut up and sit down, Captain,” Lorenn told him calmly. “I’ll try to explain why I and the High Command made the decision we made during the battle.”

Arnea growled in frustration but sat down across from the other Captain at his desk. He sat respectfully.

Lorenn put his hands down and sat back in his chair. “I don’t expect you to understand what we’re dealing with, Captain Arnea,” Lorenn told him calmly, “but you saw how fast that mobile suit moved.”

“It didn’t move like a machine,” Arnea responded. “It moved... like a person, like one of our soldiers doing hand-to-hand combat.”

“Exactly right,” Lorenn said, glad to see that Arnea was observant. “You saw how quickly it took not just you down but the two mobile suits with you. Those pilots died instantly. You were lucky to have made it out of there alive. I don’t think Prince Kiminobu had the control over the machine he hoped he was going to have—or at least, the type of control.”

“What do you mean?” Arnea asked. “It’s just a machine. It’s strength cannot increase past what the manufacturer’s gave it.”

“How hard did that machine kick you?” Lorenn asked.

“Enough to ring my bell,” Arnea stated, putting his hand to his head. “And throw me across the field, but I’ve had that happen before.”

“Did you look at your mech after you got out of it?” Lorenn asked. “Or did you just come to the bridge to yell at me for calling off the assault?”

“I came to the bridge,” Arnea answered. “Then I went back to my quarters to calm down.”

“They had to use the jaws of life to get you out,” Lorenn said. “That machine crushed your machine’s chest hatch. You’re going to need a new mech before you face them again. Thankfully, Command does not blame you for what happened, but you had the latest generation mobile suits, and *The Kingfisher* destroyed them like toys.”

“*The Kingfisher* damaged my mech that badly? How? REAPER Squad has the best mechs in the entire Shezar Military. I was told they could stand up to and surpass the Nexus suits!”

Lorenn stood up and walked over to a window. “In that moment in time, when *The Kingfisher* attacked, the Prince and the mech were a single mind, Captain—a single entity. Whatever the Prince thought of doing, the machine did. The Prince did not know to hold back, though, because he thought *The Kingfisher* was still just a machine.”

“But it wasn’t?” Arnea asked in confusion.

“The Fading Shadow System is basically a puppetmaster system for mobile suits—highly effective but also highly dangerous to the mind of the pilot. It was outlawed centuries ago, before even the Kareneth Empire began their conquest. We are not allowed by international law to use any system like it in mobile suits without facing the death penalty. Do you honestly think with our level of technology that we should still be piloting mobile suits with joysticks and foot pedals?” He grunted scoffingly. “But anything more advanced has consequences that the leaders of the world agreed to avoid.”

“Then how do the Vadorans have such a system in *The Kingfisher*?” Arnea asked.

“Not just *The Kingfisher*, but all of the Nexus suits, I’ll bet,” Lorenn said. “The fact that the King and Queen of Vadora have such systems in their Nexus suits is a crime against humanity.”

“Why did I not know about this?” Arnea asked. “I’m a captain of the military!”

“Because it’s a simple matter that no one has mentioned it to you,” Lorenn told him. “Why give ideas to people and then have to give them a long explanation as to why you can’t do it? If anyone mentions the idea of a direct mind-link between a pilot and a mobile suit, we quietly take the person aside and kill them.”

“What?” Arnea demanded, rising to his feet.

“We tried commanding them to be quiet, but they would work on it anyway in secret. Killing them and destroying all of their notes proved to be the best way of dealing with them.”

“Under whose authority?” Arnea demanded.

“The High Emperor’s—who else’s?” Lorenn asked. “But the fact that the Vadoran Kingdom has such mobile suits means that the King and Queen have broken the law that their grandfathers agreed to—The Treaty of the Lands. We can have them executed for that, meaning all we would have to deal with is the Kareneth Empire.”

“What about Prince Kiminobu? He’s still Prince of Vadora.”

“According to the laws, any nation that builds mobile suits with the Fading Shadow System—or whatever they might call it—forfeits their lands, titles, and deeds. It was a very good incentive to keep it from coming about again.”

“Then why would King Nakamoto risk it?”

Lorenn looked at him. “That is a very good question. In my opinion, he wouldn’t... unless he didn’t know.”

“How could he not know?” Arnea asked suspiciously.

Lorenn pressed his lips into a thin line. “That is another good question.”

He sat down at his desk. “Computer, access logs for Lieutenant Braunleaux Lorenn, Opu 24, Age of Mortals 5871.”

“What are you looking up?” Arnea asked curiously.

“Where the Nexus mobile suits were coming from,” Lorenn told him. “I was serving with Kareneth then and was in that battle as a mobile suit pilot. The Nexus suits were coming from somewhere else, but I can’t remember where.”

“You think someone else built them.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Possibly.”

“And if someone else did?”

Lorenn shook his head. “That doesn’t change the fact that the Vadorans are using them.” He held up his finger to silence Arnea as the log in question came up. “That’s what I thought: They were returning from the Broken Lands when we attacked. They were racing for the protection of the Wall.”

“The Broken Lands?” Arnea asked in confusion. “There’s nothing there now. The Kareneth wiped the Mist Elves off the face of the planet a century and a half ago because they refused to surrender. Though, from what I understand, their technology was pretty powerful. They would have made great allies to the Shezar Union.”

“Did the Kareneth wipe them out?” Lorenn wondered. “Or did the Mist Elves use their technology to go somewhere else? I read histories on the attack, and when Kareneth got there, there were no Mist Elves, only empty forests and... poisoned air.”

“You think they’re still alive? Where?”

Lorenn took a deep breath and sat back. “That’s another good question.”

“What do we do about the Nexus Suits if what you’re saying is true?”

“We’ll have to ask the High Imperator about that, but it won’t be good for anyone involved.”