

Memories - Solaris

By rifleman101

Chapter 1

CHP-3P *Champion*. Four ER Medium Lasers. Ultra AC/10. Garret T-11C communications systems. Mercury IV targeting and tracking plus C3i and iNARC.

A *Champion*. Somewhat new from the looks of it, but still an odd 'Mech to see nowadays. The once popular 'Mech was seldom seen, especially here on Solaris 7. A worn paint job was on it, faded black. Two mirrors were on the tip of each of the aerodynamic arms, definitely medium lasers. A multi-barrel rotary style cannon protruded the right torso, its five barrels linked together by a thick ring. It was too big to be an Ultra Autocannon 10, the primary weapon of this model of the *Champion*. It's previous owner probably liked heavy weapons, showing it to be an Ultra Autocannon 20. He smiled; this thing had a punch that some assault 'Mechs lacked.

Evidently this 'Mech was clearly lacking the NARC launcher as well as the C3i.

He quietly walked towards it, craning his thick neck up to look at the nose of the 'Mech. This would defiantly be easy to get used to; the *Champion* had great visibility, unlike his old *Hunchback*.

He scrambled up the legs and pulled himself up, ignoring the chain ladder. Standing up on the left arm, he cautiously crawled into the cockpit.

Settling himself in a nice seat, he gently grasped the two joysticks, moving them. A slight creak sounded from the right arm, and he reminded himself to grease it.

He glanced over the control panel. It was different than on his old *Hunchback*; the control panel was more like that of a fighter jet, and no heavy autocannon blocking half your view. Also he could feel the autocannon's weight, despite the 'Mech gantry supporting the *Champion*. He might have to do something about that.

Quietly he began to sing to himself. "Another one bites the dust, another one bites the dust, another one gone, another one gone, another one--"

"Mr. MacAfee?" A voice called out from below. Sighing he climbed out of the cockpit and made his way down the 'Mech, finally dropping to the ground.

He turned around to face the stable master, Mathew Tonnage. "Yes, Mr. Tonnage?"

"I have heard you do your own grunt work, but I would like you to meet your tech." The balding man looked behind him. "Sara! Will you come here for a moment?"

One of the girls working on an *Awesome*'s foot walked over to him, ignoring Jason. When she looked at him, his heart skipped a beat.

Boy she was a looker. Wavy blonde hair danced around as she walked, a body any guy would kill his grandmother for, and an angelic face that was absolutely radiant. But it wasn't her looks that made his heartbeat increase.

A cold feeling washed over him as they made eye contact. A cool look formed across her face, and she nonchalantly crossed her arms.

"Mr. MacAfee, I would like you to meet your new tech--"

"Sara Kellings." He said quietly. He took a deep breath. "Hello Sara."

She nodded slightly. "Jason."

“You know each other?” Tonnage asked, surprised.
“I guess you could say that.” His eyes never left hers. “How’s life?”
“So-so.” She responded quietly. “You?”
“Same.”
“Well, since you already know each other, I’ll let you two catch up.” With that, Tonnage walked off.
There was a thick silence.
She broke it. “How did you end up here?”
“Found a contract I liked. Heavy ’Mech.”
“Tired of piloting mediums?”
“Yah. What about you?”
“Somewhat the same. Live here now. How’s mom?”
He shook his head. “Not too well, but she sends her love.”
Sara snorted. “Like that was ever there.” She pushed some hair behind her ears.
“What about your parents?”
He thought before speaking. “Non-existent.”
Slowly nodding, she shifted her feet. “Never thought I’d see you again.”
“Me either.”
She allowed a small smile. “So now you’re a big shot ’Mech jock. You finally got the break you’ve been waiting for.”
“Yep. I’ve had enough of those blood pits.”
Silence.
“What happened with you? You could be one to.”
She shook her head. “I’m happy with where I am now. Just an ordinary tech.”
“Quiet, huh?”
“Yah.”
Somewhere a gantry clattered.
“Meet anyone?”
She nodded. “I have a few friends.”
“Boyfriend?”
She allowed another small smile. “Not since you.”
“Haven’t moved on?”
“I’ve tried, just no one that fit the bill.”
He nodded, a bit of disappointment spread across his face.
“You fit the bill, if that’s what your wondering.”
“No, it’s that a girl like you shouldn’t be alone. It’s not right.”
A sad smile crossed her face. “No, I’m fine. Trust me.”
He sighed. “I just want you to move on, I’m history, remember?”
“Jason, don’t-”
“It’s true. You were right.”
Her hands went to her face, momentarily covering them.
After a while he said. “Good to see you again.” With that, he walked away.

Clearing his head he climbed up the back of the *Champion*. The back was open, obviously under repair. Climbing inside, he pulled out a penlight and turned it on.

Glancing around, moderate engine damage was shown in the form of autocannon holes, probably from an Autocannon 5.

“Where the hell is my wrench?” A voice screamed outside.

Jason looked up and saw a wrench attached to a nut, and began to loosen it. Slipping the nut into his pockets, he began to loosen a damaged plate. He kicked something with his shoe, and realized it was a bucket containing washers, nuts and other assorted parts. Shaking his head, he pulled the nut out of his pocket and dropped it in the bucket.

Slowly, he removed all nuts and pulled off the plate. Inside were damaged coolant pipelines. He flipped the wrench around to the other end and began to loosen it.

“I’m a marinade... of what’s hot this summer... I’m an early comer...” He loosened it and switched to the other side of the pipe. “Bought a gulf war hummer... every fad, I feel its force, every trend, I do endorse, got my genomes mapping, caught my smart dog napping...” He realized he didn’t know the rest of the song and switched. Gulf war? What Gulf war?

“Where is my wrench?” The same voice cried out.

“Deadly as the viper, peering from its coil, the poison there coming to a boil.” He loosed another nut. Apparently this ’Mech was not so new. “Ticking like a time bomb, the fuse is running short, on the verge of snapping if it’s caught. And all the pressure has been building up... for all the years it bore the load... the cracks apea-“

“You need any help?” He jumped, bumped his head against a pipe and cursed. He was not exactly accustomed to being snuck up on.

“No.” He turned around.

“Sorry about your head.” She said sheepishly, putting her arms on the edge of the armor and resting her head on it. He heard the clatter of a catwalk underneath her as she shifted her feet.

“Nah it was my fault.”

“You never were one to blame someone else.”

He put on a fake smile. “What can I do for you?”

“Well for one, you have Sarge’s wrench.” She said, smiling in an accusing way.

He looked down and pointed the flashlight at the wrench. Sure enough, the name ‘Sarge’ was scrawled on it.

“WRENCH!” Cried out a frantic voice.

“Um, yah.” He said, handing it to her. Taking it, she took a step back and yelled. “Hey Sarge!” She waved it in the air.

“My wrench!” An excited voice said, and she tossed it down.

Dang it, now how would he- “Here, use my set.” She said, pulling up a little box. “I don’t mind sharing.” Smiling, he opened it and pulled out what he needed. “So tell me, what happened since we last parted ways?”

“Not much to tell.” He said absentmindedly.

“Friends, girlfriends, what’s happened, yah.”

He sighed. “Nothings really happened.”

“Fess up.”

Jason muttered something under his breath, and then spoke. “No friends, no girlfriends, and life sucked.”

“No girlfriends? I thought you would have picked right up after I was-” He shot her a venomous glare.

“Don’t.”

She closed her mouth, swallowing. “I’m sorry.”

“You did that on purpose, you know what happened last time.” His eyes were smoldering.

She silently nodded. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t push me, you know my limits.”

She nodded, and gave him a sad smile. “I guess... neither of us have moved on because... its still there.”

He forced himself to calm down. “What is?”

“We can’t let go.”

She was right. He couldn’t let go.

“Why cant we?”

She crawled up and sat down near the entrance on a coolant pipe. “I don’t know. I just can’t.”

He looked at her. “Can’t, or don’t want to?”

She sighed and readjusted one of the straps on her tank top. “I don’t know.”

She watched him work for a while. “Can you?”

He shook his head. “I can’t. No matter how much I try to get away, I just can’t.”

“Does it hurt?”

Jason closed his eyes and rested it against an armor plate. “All the time.” He said softly.

Slowly she nodded, looking at the ground. “Me too.”

Neither moved for a long time.

“Did it hurt?”

He gave her a quizzical look.

“No I mean the...” She made a throwing motion with her arm.

A small smile grew on his face. “Mate, it always hurts when you get hit in the face with a blow dryer.”

Sara gave a bitter laugh. “Yah, I guess so.” She took a deep breath. “Sorry about that, I shouldn’t have lost it.”

“At least you didn’t impale me with that curling iron.” He chuckled.

She allowed herself a small giggle before the seriousness of the conversation set back in.

“What happened to your parents?”

“Look, I re-”

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry; I shouldn’t have brought it up.” She put her hands to her face and tried to rub some sense into her head.

“You say that a lot.”

“Say what?”

“I’m sorry. You say that a lot.”

“There are a lot of things I wish I hadn’t done; it’s the only way I know to let you realize... realize...”

“What you wish you hadn’t done?”

She nodded. “Yah.”

Slowly he went back to work, trying to keep the flood of emotions from doing anything.

She hopped out vanished from sight. “Your first match is in two days. I’ll grease the left arm.”

“I don’t need any help.”

She looked back in. “You never needed anyone’s help, Jason. You always took care of yourself. But this is my job, and I have to do it.” She walked down the catwalk.

Slowly he looked away from the opening, and removed another damaged pipe. Then, he gripped another pipe, trying to hold on to something as tears flowed down his face.

Chapter 2

“Who was that guy?”

Sara looked at the speaker, shaking her head to remove the thought of Jason. “Just some guy I knew from before.”

The girl’s head was poking out of the SRM tube of the Warhammer. She was incredibly skinny, almost to the point where it seemed dangerous. But it was natural, permanent, the doctors had said. Her growth was stunted, so she would never grow any heavier than 75 pounds. Her arms looked like bones with skin attached to them, and she was incredibly flexible. Because of this, she was able to fit inside an SRM tube, which was astonishing to say the least.

But what Sara loved about her the most was not her sweet face, but her wonderful disposition. A soft voice and caring heart gave her a kind and loving spirit. God, Sara never knew where she would be without her.

“What happened?” Alice’s soft voice asked, her large brown eyes brimming with curiosity.

“Alice, remember how I told you that was one point in my life I never wanted to discuss?” Her brown hair bobbed as she nodded. “That’s it.” Sara sighed as she went back to work, repairing the right shoulder actuator.

“Sara, what happened?” She asked again, her gentle voice filling her ears.

Sara shook her head. “Can we talk about this later?”

Alice slowly nodded, then folded herself back up inside the tube, going back to her work.

How did she do it? She could fit inside a SRM tube; she could turn herself around inside one. She had no fear of tight places, that much was obvious.

For a girl her size, she also possessed immense strength, often being the one to open the forever-tight jar of salsa that Sara loved so much.

Grateful that her thoughts were now off Jason, she focused on Alice. Although no one else knew it, she was terribly insecure about herself. Sara knew it was only a matter of time before she found someone though.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Alice’s head popped out from the SRM tube. “SRMs are done.” She climbed down into the waiting catwalk. “I’ll fix that PPC.”

“Want me to help?”

Her wide eyes met Sara’s dark blue ones. “You can’t fit though.”

“I’m almost done here, and it’s nice to talk to someone while you work. Besides, the nozzle needs replacing.”

Alice slowly smiled. "Okay." With that, she jumped down on the arm with perfect balance, and then walked to the end of the barrel. With that, she slipped into the large tube like a snake.

How did she do that... Sara couldn't help but wonder.

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"...that I'm not that kind of guy, so if you feel the same, your tired of playing games, then try to understand, that I'm not that kind of man..." He glanced up from the engine to his watch. Already it was late, but he didn't care.

Maybe tonight he would actually get sleep; he hadn't been able to get his mind off of her.

Sara. How could things have gone so wrong? How could their feelings for each other have survived so long? Why didn't they just kiss and make up?

Because it hurt too much. It all hurt so much.

"Um... excuse me..." A soft voice called out, waking him from his thoughts.

He turned to face the speaker. "Yes?"

Large brown eyes looked back at him. "Are you Jason?"

All she wore was a large t-shirt and a large blanket wrapped around her. She looked so frail...

"Yes."

"What happened with you and Sara?"

His eyes narrowed, immediately suspicious. "Why do you want to know?" He growled.

She seemed to shrink back, scared. "Because Sara is crying and she won't stop, I'm worried about her."

His face changed. "Ask her to tell you."

She shook her head. "She won't, she just keeps crying. Nothing I can do helps."

He sighed. "All you need to know was that it was my fault, alright? Everything was my fault."

She nodded and trotted down the catwalk, and Jason hoped that he hadn't been suckered.

Groaning, he turned back to his work; that was the most he had ever told to someone who wasn't a personal friend.

What personal friends? Heck, it was the first time he had told anyone at all.

The ratchet never stopped clicking as Jason worked away his troubles. He drowned himself in the enormosity of the giant.

"Jason?"

He shook his head, slowly looking at her. "What." He grumbled.

"She's crying more now, I think it upset her." Her wide eyes were filled with concern.

"Why? It's true, isn't that what she wanted to hear?"

"No, she gave me this shocked look and just started crying more."

"What do you want me to do? Stoop lower?"

"I need you to help her."

Jason laughed. "You have got to be kidding, she hates me. If I go in there-"

"She doesn't hate you!"

He blinked. "Come again?"

"She still loves you."

He blinked several times. "You are so joking. She sure as hell didn't tell you that."

"I'm not joking! She needs you!"

He fought the urge to give in. "No. She doesn't need me. I'm the last man in the galaxy she would want to see."

"Please!"

"No. I won't get hurt again."

She grabbed his arm. "Please!"

He yanked his arm away, recoiling. "No! She hurt me; I won't let her do it again!"

She looked at him, surprised. "What did she do to you?"

He glared at her. "Ask her, she knows all too well."

Slowly she walked backwards, and left.

He shook his head. He couldn't. She would hurt him again. With bitterness he remembered how he had been driven to the edge of insanity the last time; he had not recovered, and another one would send him over the edge.

Did he hate himself for being so hard? Of course. He hated the thought of Sara crying, of her being sad at all. He was the one that made her sad, made her cry.

This was why this was his fault. This was why he would never forgive himself for this.

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Red light filled the cockpit, casting an almost bloody look on everything. His swamp-green *Champion* took on a black appearance under red floodlights. Underneath, techs were running about, giving the 'Mech a last look-see. They scrambled about like ants, scavenging for anything that might not belong.

With a loud hiss, a large hose was pulled away from the *Champion's* torso, and a tech gave the thumbs up sign. Jason glanced at his readings, and it showed coolant at 100%. He returned the thumbs up sign.

Another tech loaded the last of the ammo, and Jason felt the weight of 240mm shells sliding into the ammunition drum. Jason glanced at the readings, and saw the correct amount of rounds, and gave the tech the thumbs up sign.

This match was designed to give four of the higher-ups an advantage; the other eight were merely cannon fodder.

Boy would they be in for a surprise.

Strobe lights began to flash all around, and an alarm went off. Quietly Jason began to sing to himself. "Another one bites the dust, another one bites the dust, another one gone, another-

"Mech 12, clear the channel!" A rude voice snapped in his ear.

"Sorry mate; didn't realize it was on."

"Well be careful!" Boy what a grouch. Someone slip that guy some Prozac.

Jason turned off his mic, and started to go through the main powerup sequence. "Another one gone, another one gone, another one bites the dust. Another one bites the dust..." The fusion hummed louder as the 'Mech came to life, giving Jason the feeling of a god. This much firepower at his mere fingertips, so lethal.

The door slowly opened, and bright light filled the cockpit, almost blinding him. He saw other doors being opened, and the roar of the crowd filled his ears.

Was Sara watching?

Probably not.

He shoved these thoughts from his mind as he walked his 'Mech out of the starting bay.

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"Here he comes now." Alice said, her eyes locking on to Jason's familiar swamp green *Champion*. Sara looked around, finally seeing it.

She blinked and tried to focus on it.

"You okay?"

"Yah, my eyes are just sore." Sara replied, leaning back in her seat.

"I'm sorry I wasn't able to help."

Sara put an arm around her friend. "Don't worry; there was nothing you could have done."

Alice leaned into her taller companion. "You've never told anyone, have you?"

"No."

Alice slipped an arm around Sara, giving her a gentle squeeze. "Tell me sometime."

Sara just nodded, then focused on the fight that was about to take place.

Jungle like forests dominated half of the map, giving the whole place a unique feel. Where there were no trees, deep swamps stretched everywhere. Multiple mud pathways stretched across the swamp, allowing treacherous access to all sides. Some places were only accessible with jump jets. This was going to be a very dangerous match.

All the mechs stopped before proceeding to their starting points. Three Assault mechs, four Heavy mechs, four mediums, and one light.

She knew most of the pilots by name. The *Atlas* pilot was Derrek Steele, a pilot that had come close to winning the Unlimited series last year. The *Stalker* pilot Shaniqua Miller, was assumed to be a mayfly, but she had beaten Steele in an amazing one on one duel. The *Mad Cat MKII* pilot was a bloodnamed Clanner, Jerome Kerensky, who was representing Clan Wolf.

The *Thor* pilot was a Davion called Isaak Asimov, no relation. A veteran of the clan wars, he had reportedly taken part of operation Bulldog. The *Axeman* pilot, Julie Paul, a ruthless mercenary with a reputation for killing her opponents. The last she knew was the *Artic Wolf* pilot, a spinner, known for her ambushes. She forgot the name though.

The other 'Mechs consisted of a *Warhammer*, *Bushwhacker*, *Hellspawn*, and a *Raven*.

And then there was Jason. It had been a long while since she had seen him fight. What she did remember was he was as ruthless as he was canny. Every time someone had dared to treat him like an inferior, he had shot up their 'Mechs beyond recognition with his Autocannon 20, ripping their 'Mech apart with ease. This would be most interesting.

Then the open communications was put on the main speakers.

The first voice Sara heard was Jason's.

"Hey Clanner."

"What do you want, freebirth?" Kerensky growled back.

“Not much, I was just wondering how you have adjusted to combat in the Inner Sphere. How do you find it?”

The Clanner cleared his throat. “Although I find the tactics dishonorable, I have been forced to adapt to your spheroid way of thinking. Though transition is difficult, I have managed.” Evidently, this clanner had softened somewhat on spheroid beliefs.

“Good to hear that. May the best warrior win.”

The clanner paused for a moment. “Aff, may the best... warrior win.”

Then, a rude feminine voice intruded. “Get off the comms, rookie.”

“Who you calling rookie?” Sara knew where this would lead.

“You, seatfiller.” Julie Paul, the *Axeman* pilot with a reputation for trash talking.

“You have five seconds to take that back.” Jason’s voice had dropped to a dangerous level that Sara knew all too well.

“Shut up, farmer.”

Sara knew that Jason was not going to let her go for that one. He never would let anyone get away with calling him an inferior pilot.

After a 30 second delay, the ’Mechs were given clearance to their starting points. Her intrigue turned to surprise as he walked his 60-ton war machine across the mud paths...

...Into the middle of the swamp. What was he thinking? The only way back was the way he just came, he would be a sitting duck out there! She couldn’t help but gape as his ’Mech halted at the edge, slowly slipping into the swamp.

The starting horn blared-

-and unceremoniously Jason’s *Champion* slipped into the swamp, disappearing from view. The whole stadium erupted with laughter. Sara couldn’t help but smack herself, she had bet 500 C-bills on him. Stupid frakker!

But the horn didn’t blow. Strange.

“That’s why I don’t bet.” Alice rebuked mildly, taking some of the sting out of the situation.

The instant the battle started, the assault ’Mechs began to pound the life out of each other, raining down hellfire without relent. The *Axeman* dashed around into the forest, and the *Thor* and *Warhammer* began to hammer away at each other. The medium and light ’Mechs slipped into the forest, playing a deadly game of hide and seek, while the *Bushwhacker* followed the *Axeman* from a safe distance.

Unleashing a lethal barrage of lead and rockets, the *Stalker* pulverized the mighty *Atlas*, which fired at the *Mad Cat MKII*. Shrugging off the assault, the *Mad Cat* took aim with each arm, and sent two watermelon shaped slugs crashing into the internal structure of the *Atlas*. Reeling from the impact, the *Atlas* sprawled backwards, finally falling on its back.

The *Stalker* turned to face the *Mad Cat*, only to be blown away by the superior firepower of the clan ’Mech. With a groan, the *Stalker* crashed on its side, fires emerging from its torso.

The *Mad Cat MKII* slowly walked towards the *Warhammer*, along the edge of the swamp. Walking slowly, it carefully lined up a shot-

-and with a muffled roar, the torso was shredded by heavy autocannon fire. Something slipped beneath the water just as the *Axeman* approached from behind.

On the scoreboard, a kill went to Jason.

“No way...” She murmured. This was impossible. You just couldn’t pilot a ’Mech through that muck. It had to be a fluke, something wrong with the scoreboard. The *Axeman* had to have taken the *Mad Cat* out with its heavy autocannon.

But it didn’t. It didn’t even fire.

Meanwhile the *Thor* was pounding the *Warhammer* into the dirt, raining lightning and shotgun pellets on its unholy adversary. Finally the *Warhammer* crashed into the ground, having lost its gyro. The *Artic Wolf* snuck up on the *Raven*, and hit it from behind with a full salvo of Streak SRMs. Instantly, the *Hellspawn* and the *Chimera* pulverized the clan ’Mech, and turned to face the *Thor*.

The horn blared, and everyone looked just in time to see the *Axeman* drop at the *Bushwhacker*’s feet. Then the *Bushwhacker* was ripped to shreds, strange reverse spray coming from the water. Two more kills went to Jason’s score.

Everyone knew it was impossible. It just couldn’t be done. Many had tried, none have succeeded. But the thing was, it was happening.

Sara couldn’t help but shake her head. Where had this come from?

The *Thor* backed to where the *Axeman* and *Bushwhacker* had fallen, pounding the *Chimera* and the *Hellspawn* simultaneously. The *Chimera* exploded from an ammo hit, and the *Hellspawn*’s torso was ripped to peaces by heavy autocannon fire. Another point went to Jason’s score.

The *Thor* whirled around to where the fire had come from, blasting into the water. It aimed to the side and fired again. Nothing.

The seconds began to tick by, and the *Thor* began to look around, trying to find the source of the fire. It took a step back-

-With a magnificent spray of slime water, Jason’s *Champion* burst from the water, its heavy autocannon pounding away at the *Thor*. The *Thor* reeled from the assault of 240mm shells, sprawling backwards. Desperate, the *Thor* dropped its arm, trying to get off a lucky shot at the rampaging 60-ton ’Mech. Jason stepped to the side, narrowly avoiding a stream of shotgun slugs. Firing again, the *Champion* sent a stream of slugs into the heaver ’Mech, and the mangled *Thor* fell on its back, motionless.

A fifth ’Mech was added to Jason’s score, and the crowd roared. Victory music began to pump from the speakers.

“Wow.” Was all Sara could say.

“You’re sharing with me.” Alice giggled.

Jason and Sara were going to get a lot of money from that match.

### Chapter 3

A *Champion* has room for three medium lasers on each arm, side by side. More often found are two medium lasers or a single large laser. The arms are small, as if included as an afterthought. Their ability to move side to side is limited, but they can flip completely backwards, even all the way around. On the outside of these small arms are short wings, probably designed to help the mech balance at high speeds. These wings are sharp and sturdy, contrary to the popular belief that they snap off it hit.

On some variants, there are missile racks. These usually hold SRMs or a NARC launcher, but on this particular *Champion* they are removed.

This Champion has a powerful primary weapon, an Ultra Autocannon 20. Suspended inside the body, the cannon will slowly rock back to help cope with the recoil. The firepower of the cannon is so great that the *Champion* slides back each time it fires, and slows down the 'Mech when running. A skilled pilot is needed to keep the 'Mech steady, one with experience in autocannons.

Filling the torso of the *Champion* is endosteel, as well as a thick hide of armor protecting it. In the left torso are 150 rounds of 240mm shells and a CASE, loaded into a massive ammunition drum barrel. This allows for 30 shots, or 15 in burst mode.

The engine of this 'Mech is unknown, its company markings blown away by an Autocannon 5. Its former master is also unknown, as Mr. Tonnage bought it from a vampire.

Back to the arms. On this variant, the medium lasers are attached in eight sections in eight places, like an octagon. On the top, lining the laser, are places where they are attached. A fourth of the way down, there are eight more places. This continues all around the laser.

On this model of the *Champion*, the secondary armament is four Pinpoint ER Medium Lasers, but not on this 'Mech.

Cracking his neck to the side, Jason finished attaching the last medium laser. Snatching up a fusion torch, he started welding armor plates back on to the left arm.

"Indecently, why are you getting rid of your ER Meds? You're getting rid of perfectly good firepower." Sara said, climbing up the side of his 'Mech.

"The 'Mech ran too hot so I couldn't use any lasers. I'm replacing them with ones that don't make my back open."

Alarm showed on her face. "They haven't healed?"

"Nope, some of them almost reached my spine." He looked at her and held his thumb and his finger two millimeters apart. "You came that close to crippling me."

"Jason, I-"

"Don't worry, I'm fine. I'm piloting 'Mechs, right?" He went back to his work as if nothing had happened.

"Jason I'm so sorry-"

"It's fine." Jason interrupted. He stopped working and looked up. "How's your arm?"

Lifting her left arm up, she revealed a bullet scar. "It's fine."

He nodded. "Good to hear."

"Thanks."

He continued welding the armor plate on as silence took over.

Slowly he began to sing. "It's all the same... only the names will change; Everyday... it seems we're wasting away... Another place... where the faces are so cold... I'd drive all night just get back home... I'm a cowboy, on a steel horse I ride; I'm wanted, dead or alive, wanted, dead or alive..."

Sara sat down, just watching him weld the armor plates back on.

"Sometimes I sleep... Sometimes it's not for days, And the people I meet... always go their separate ways, Sometimes you tell the day... By the bottle that you drink... And times when you're all alone, all you do is think..."

She leaned against the torso of the *Champion*, gazing at Jason. A powerful build set upon handsome features. His dark eyes seemed radiant, and his brown hair stuck to his forehead. Gods above he was so beautiful.

But what she really loved was his spirit. He genuinely cared for her, and she fondly remembered when they were together.

Now his eyes were no longer bright, and sadness seemed to emanate from him. He was no longer the Jason she knew.

If only...

"Don't bet on that *Warhammer* pilot, she's gonna die." He got up and climbed into his 'Mech.

What? How did he know that? She climbed into the cockpit after him, and saw Jason underneath the control panel.

"What do you know?"

Jason looked up at her. "What do you mean?"

She stomped her foot. Why couldn't he give her a straight answer for once? "Don't give me that, you know something is going to happen. What is it?"

He looked at her as if giving her a warning. "Don't stomp on my 'Mech."

"Gosh darn it tell me, what-" Jason climbed out, covered her mouth, and closed the 'Mech canopy.

"Don't yell it all over the place, darn it! What are you trying to do, raise suspicion against me? Everyone's gonna think I'm a Ghost or a Gremlin!" He hissed.

Shaking his head he climbed back down. "I've seen her pilot before, she's good, but she takes too many risks. She's gonna die next Assault match."

Sara blinked. "You don't know that."

He looked up at her. "Oh yes I do, and you know it good and well."

"She is one of the best-"

"I've predicted it before, haven't I?"

She sighed. "Yes."

"Have I ever been wrong?"

"There was that one-"

"The match was rigged."

She sighed again. He was right; he could see these things before they happened. It was just a gift.

"Then how come you didn't see what happened to us coming?" Immediately she regretted her words and clapped her hands over her mouth.

Too late. He shot her a look. "You know good and well, Sara Marie Kellings."

"Don't you dare-" She stopped herself, seeing the anger in his eyes.

She took a deep breath. "I'm sorry."

"That's what you always say." He pulled the navigation system down from the control panel.

"It's all I can say."

"But you don't care."

Her eyes flashed in anger. "What do you mean, I don't care?"

"You don't." He said simply. "I suspect you never did."

Each word was like a knife through her heart as the meaning dawned on her. "How could you say that?" She said, shocked.

"Whenever you messed up, I cleaned up after you. Whenever you did something wrong, I took the blame. You didn't care enough."

She sat down in the chair, her heart pounding. He was right; he had always been there for her.

“I’m so sorry, Jason.”

“Stop saying that, it means nothing.”

“I didn’t want to hurt you, Jason-”

“But you did!”

“I was horny, he was there, it happened, okay?” She blurted. Slowly she realized what she had said, and covered her face. She had done it again. Damn it!

“I never did anything to you.” He said quietly, tears streaming down his face. “But you hurt me so much.”

“I’m so-“

“STOP IT!” Jason screamed. He looked at her pleadingly. “Just stop it.” He whispered, then buried his face in his hands and curled up into a little ball.

Sara had never seen him look so weak. Just seeing him shake broke her heart. She felt for him more than she ever had before. He had no one to help him now, he never had. She was never there for him.

“What have I done?” She whispered, tears streaming down her own face.

Hours seemed to pass.

Finally, Jason regained control over himself. Smearing the tears on his arm, he glared at her. “Leave.”

Sadly, she nodded, opening the canopy. “Will you forgive me?”

He paused before answering. “I don’t know.”

She nodded, wiping away her own tears. “I understand.” Slowly, she climbed out of the ’Mech. “Jason?”

He looked at her, his eyes filled with venom.

“If you ever need me, I’m here.” She said, swallowing.

His eyes softened, and he nodded.

She climbed down the ’Mech, feeling worse than she had ever felt before.

~~~~

“I overheard what you said.”

Sara whipped her head towards the speaker. “What?”

Alice seemed to pull back inside her missile tube. “Your conversation with Jason, I heard it.”

Sara really hated herself now. “I see.” Dang it how was she so quiet?

Alice waited before talking, choosing her words carefully. “I see why Jason feels the way he does about you now.”

Sara slowly nodded. Jason had every right. “What do you think?” She tightened an armor plate onto the SRM rack.

Alice pulled herself out of the tube, and sat next to Sara. “Tell me what happened.”

Sara shook her head. “Later, tonight.” She looked into her friend’s large eyes. “I promise.”

They blinked back at her, and then she nodded before slipping back inside the missile tube.

Sara leaned back against the harness that held her in the air, giving her access to otherwise difficult to reach places on the *Warhammer*. Guilt and shame flowed over her, and for the moment she wished she had a rewind/erase button for her life.

And a mute button.

How could she have hurt him so? Now she was sure she had lost him forever.

If only she could let him know she was truly sorry, that she wanted to...

...make up for it.

But how?

She would have to think about this for a while.

Shaking her head, she began to reattach armor plates to the SRM Launcher. Focus on the task at hand. Work on rebuilding life later. It can wait.

~~~~

In battle, there is confusion, not reason.

In battle, there is no how, there is only what.

It is impossible to know everything; it is possible to know only what you see.

There is no catching up, there is only being there.

There is only confusion. There is only the now.

On the battlefield, there is always death.

There is only death.

The *King Crab*. One big mother of an assault 'Mech with killer firepower, speed, and lots of armor. A relic of the Star League that could blow the stuffing out of any 'Mech in the Inner Sphere. A giant that had no natural predators.

Except *Longbows*.

Long range rockets screech from the *Longbow*'s racks, pummeling the giant over and over again, hammering the ungainly 'Mech into oblivion as the giant struggles to get away.

Finally the *King Crab* slips behind cover, only to stumble upon a *Daishi*. Its giant arms clack open, and unleash a stream of lead into the clan 'Mech.

The thin-skinned *Daishi* is pulverized by two salvos of 240mm shells, gutting the 'Mech completely. Few 'Mechs can withstand a full barrage of five 240mm shells, and none can withstand ten, no matter how well armored. It is just impossible.

The *King Crab* dashes out of cover, pulverizing an *Imp* from behind with its massive autocannons. Hitting an ammo bin, the *Imp* explodes in a blinding light, taking the *Stalker* it was fighting with it.

With a sickening screech, the *King Crab* is sliced in half by giant axe, and the *Berserker* rockets away, sniping at a *Zeus*. The *Zeus* returns fire with its autocannon, stitching a horizontal line across the *Berserker*'s torso.

The *Zeus* explodes, and a small supernova blinds everything in the arena. When the white light fades, a *Warhammer IIC* is revealed, smoke wafting from its barrels.

The *Berserker* makes a mad dash for the *Warhammer*, having been caught out in the open. Two bright blue bolts of lightning rip into the *Berserker*'s hull, disabling the left arm. Topping 80kph, it raises its arm to swing-

-And the *Warhammer*'s missile racks blossom, sending half a dozen super-smart rockets at the *Berserker*.

The rockets automatically select targets, and three of them head for the axe arm, the most dangerous threat to the *Warhammer*. The first missiles are shot down by the anti-missile system, blowing them out of the sky. The other three hit, knocking the giant axe off the arm of the *Berserker*.

The axe flies through the air, sailing towards the *Warhammer*, and neatly slicing the *Warhammer* pilot's head off. With a groan, the massive assault 'Mech falls on it's back.

The *Berserker* glances around, just in time to see an *Atlas* slug the *Longbow* into oblivion. Heavy weapons damage is visible, even its AC/20 has been knocked out of commission.

Only the *Atlas* and the *Berserker* remain.

Calmly the *Berserker* retrieves its axe from the *Warhammer*'s head, and the *Atlas* rips off the long arms of a *Masakari*.

The *Berserker* activates its MASC, making for a mad dash towards the lumbering *Atlas*. The *Berserker* pilot knows he will win; no one beats him at melee.

Sara watched as the *Berserker* sliced the *Atlas*'s head in two, and then punched it off its torso. The final horn blared, and the *Berserker* did a victory lap.

"He was right, again." Sara said, looking at the *Warhammer IIC*. "Sure glad I played peeker this round."

Alice gave her a questioning glance. "But she didn't do anything reckless."

"I know. But Jason doesn't know how it will happen; only that it will happen." She shrugged. "He just has the gift of foresight."

"What was he like... before..." Alice hesitated to continue.

"He was wonderful. One of the most caring people I have ever known." She looked at her friend. "Even more than you."

Alice leaned back in her seat, thinking. "How did he become so bitter?"

Sara sighed. She really didn't want to open those memories again. "It was my fault."

"But he says it's his fault."

Sara shook his head. "He took the blame for everything. He was the fall guy."

"Why?"

"Because he loved me." Sara slowly bit her lip. Where to begin? Sara wondered for some time. Finally, she just decided to start where it counted. "At one time, we were... closer than anything. We were both pilots in some blood pit, and Jason was moving up through the ranks. We were both happy, and he won. There was a small party, I had too much to drink... and there was this guy there. I lost control, and... did it, right then and there. Jason saw the whole thing, and he couldn't leave either." She forced herself to go on. "But he didn't do anything. Later he questioned me about it, I got defensive, words were exchanged. I hit him with a hairdryer, and hit him on the back several times with a hot curling iron." She took a deep breath. "He still has those scars. See, neither of us have really gotten over it, or over each other."

"Why don't you just let go?"

"I cant, I want to but I can't."

"Do you really want to?"

Sara thought for a moment. "Well... I..." She sighed again. "No, I don't want to let go. I love him more than life."

Alice slowly nodded. "What about Jason?"

Sara closed her eyes. "He's in too much pain to let go."

Alice searched for something to say, but found nothing. What was there to say?

“What do you think?”

Alice sighed. “I’m...”

“Disappointed?”

Alice said nothing, letting the silence answer for her.

“It’s okay, I would be disappointed too.”

Silence. Alice squeezed Sara’s hand.

Wordlessly they got up and left, walking back to the hanger.

~~~~

The sound of thunder could be heard through the roof as the rain poured down on the giant hanger. Almost directly upside down and on his back with only a small light to work with, his endless toil never ceased. Currently he was working on a targeting glitch deep inside the weapons systems, suspecting a faulty wire.

Aiming the light around, he found what he was looking for; a green wire with a kink in it. Tracing it to its origin, he began to take it off.

Gods above he loved these things. Everything else seemed to melt away; his past, his troubles, all seemed meaningless when working on one of these behemoths.

“Hey Jason.” He heard Sara sit in the command couch. Probably here to make amends.

“Hey.”

“Great fight last Tuesday.” She got a few million out of that round, not including tax.

“Thanks.”

“How did you do it?”

“By doing it.” He smiled.

“How, numbnuts?” She kicked his leg lightly.

Jason chuckled. “By sneaking.”

“How, Tonto?” She kicked him in the other leg.

“With patience, playing the fool, experience, and more patience.”

“It certainly went better than the last time you did it.”

“That’s because a *Hunchback* has the maneuverability of a brick, especially in water.”

Jason paused his work, reflecting. The last time he had tried it, he had nearly gotten stuck because of the *Hunchback*’s box shape; the ’Mech was barely able to move in the thick water. However he had managed and the fight had been considered ugly. Because of his immobility, his ’Mech had been thrashed beyond mobility, and his ’Mech had to be lifted out by crane after he had put the *Victor* out of its misery.

“I’m surprised though.” She said, playing with his shoe.

“About what?”

“You didn’t get back at the *Axeman* pilot for dissing you.”

“She was a knievel, wasn’t worth my effort.”

“She was?”

“After trying to see where the shots had come from, she stayed in the same place and took on the *Bushwhacker*, so I nailed them both. She stayed in one place too long.”

He knew that Sara would nod and think about her next question. “Why didn’t you come in blazing?”

“They expect that from rookies.”

“What will you do next time?”

“That’s for me to know and you to find out later.” His usual answer.

There was silence as she reflected. Judging by the amount of time had passed, he guessed she was going to switch subjects.

He heard her get up, surprising him somewhat.

“Sara?”

There was silence as he lifted himself up by his arms, climbing out. He turned to face her. “I’ve been doing some thinking... and... well I’m not yet ready...” He looked into her sapphire eyes. “But if you ever need me, I’m right here for you.”

Her hand went to her mouth, clapping over it. Then she slipped her arms around his neck. Jason returned, sliding his around her waist.

“Thank you Jason. Thank you.”

For the longest time in the world, they just held each other. They had been without each other for far too long.

Silently Jason vowed to love her, no matter what she did. Reaching farther around, he pulled her closer.

He would never hurt her again.

She buried her face in his chest, letting herself melt into him. She felt so safe, so secure.

She would never hurt him again. Silently, she swore to always be there for him.

Always.

~~~

Watching from the cockpit of the *Warhammer*, Alice smiled. She could feel their emotions from there, and she leaned back in the chair.

“So they’re finally making up...” She murmured to herself. Just seeing them pull each other close made her feel warm. She smiled again, realizing this would open yet another amazing chapter in their lives. Everything seemed to be perfect.

Let the healing begin.

## Chapter 4

“...I don’t mind standing everyday day, out on her corner in the pouring rain, look for the girl with the broken smile, ask her if she wants to stay a while, and she will be loved, and she will be loved...”

Gods above, she could listen to him all day with a voice that beautiful.

Currently Jason was working on cleaning his massive autocannon. Sara was helping him, her arms covered with grease. So was her tank top.

Good gosh it was hot today. Due to a giant damaged air-conditioning unit, the cooling system was off. All the doors and windows were open, letting in a breeze every now and then. The fans were working overtime to keep the techs cool.

Standing up, she readjusted the leggings on her tech suit, and retied the arms around her waist.

Getting back down on her knees, she bent into the massive autocannon, taking off this and reattaching that. Looking down, she was quietly amused. There was still swamp water in it.

“Hey Jason, can you hand me that vacuum you were using earlier?”

The singing stopped. “I would but someone stole it-”

“I have it.” Alice walked over, carrying a small portable vacuum. “Sorry, I was using it to get rid of some stuff I found.”

Sara groped for the vacuum, and began to suck the water out. The vacuum was quiet, the only sounds coming from it was the water traveling up the tube.

This was a huge weapon, almost too big for the 60-ton mech to carry. Five 240mm barrels were placed on a revolving mechanism, attached at the front with a thick band. 240mm was no tank cannon, it was a monster. The Ultra Autocannon 10 was the true descendent of the tank’s main weapon, having five 120mm barrels on a similar design.

Due to advancements in armor, the guns had to be made heavier, and more powerful. The answer was the Autocannon 20, a massive weapon capable of ripping the most advanced armor to shreds. But this was an Ultra Autocannon 20, able to fire twice as many shells more accurately. It was devastating.

The *Champion* was known as a fleet footed heavy ‘Mech with rather weak firepower, with a tendency to run hot at times. It often consisted of a single heavy weapon, usually an Autocannon 10 or and LB-10X, with an assortment of lasers and short range missiles. The main problem was that it lacked the firepower and the armor to stand up to ‘Mechs of similar weight.

Despite its oversized engine, the *Champion* was loved by their pilots, as its 84.6 KPH speed abilities allowed it to escape almost anything it couldn’t outgun. Hundreds of *Champions* had survived, though many had disappeared over time.

Jason had a unique *Champion*, one that fixed many of its problems. The massive autocannon gave it the ability to stand up to ‘Mechs far larger than it, and added in with its speed, allowed it to get up close and use it effectively. Due to the heat problems caused by the ER Medium Lasers, they were unusable because they made the *Champion* run hot. Jason fixed this problem by removing them and replacing them with Magna IV Medium Lasers, which were not as powerful, but ran cooler. He also installed double heat sinks in the arms and torsos, dramatically increasing its efficiency. The previous owner had scrapped the C3i computer and the SRM launcher for money and free weight.

The ammo was kept in the left torso along with a CASE, a large container that would vector an ammo explosion out of the ‘Mech. 150 rounds were fit into a drum magazine, which was ejectable through the CASE.

The *Champion* did not have as much armor as Jason wanted. Sara knew he wished he could install Ferro Fibrous armor on, but there was no space for that due to the endosteel internal structure.

Yep, it was a marvel of engineering.

“Sara, can you come here for a moment? I need help with this.”

Slowly she got up. Jason never needed help with fixing anything; he was going to tell her something.

Walking around the autocannon, she knelt down besides Jason and poked her head through the opening.

“Do you still love me?”

She paused. “Of course I do, you know I do.”

He handed her tickets to the next day’s matches. “Thanks for being patient with me.”

She looked at the seat numbers. Row AAA Seats 193 and 194. Front row seats! And near the uprising too! (The uprising was a piece of land that rose well above the rest of the fighting ground, next to the wall and coveted by LRM junkies.)

“Where’d you get these Jason? Front row-”

He put a hand over her mouth. “Hush, it’s for you and Alice.”

She blinked. “Wait a second, why aren’t you going?”

“Can’t, I’m busy tomorrow.”

Well shucks, for a moment she thought she was going on a date.

“Well alright... thanks.” She tried to give him a genuine smile, even though she knew Jason would see right through it.

He just winked at her.

This meant he was up to something.

With that, he turned and continued putting the massive autocannon together. She knew it was pointless to ask what he was planning; Jason was a master at keeping secrets.

~~~

The stadium buzzed around them as the ’Mechs were pulled off the field. Another match was over. No one ever got tired of these games. The mere sight of these lumbering giants blowing the stuffing out of each other was a thrill far beyond the gladiator games of Rome.

On Solaris, there were many types of tournaments. Exoskeleton, Light, Medium, Heavy, Assault, Unlimited, Team, Lance, Unlimited Team, the list goes on and on and on. Currently Light ’Mechs were being dragged off the field after a spectacular 12 ’Mech match.

Jason was in the Unlimited Tournament. This section often gave the most money, especially if you were lighter than an Assault ’Mech. They would put eight to twelve ’Mechs in a single round, as one on one was considered unfair for pilots lighter than the Assault class.

Sara really wished Jason was here to watch the games with her.

“Sara?”

She was snapped from her imagination. “What?”

“It’s the main event.”

This was the best match of the day.

Loud music pumped from the speakers as one by one the ’Mechs marched onto the field.

First up was an *Awesome* pilot, Terry Alastar, who had mutated his *Awesome* into a *Masakari*. A Hitman, he was well known for shooting for his opponent’s ammo bins or the reactor or anything that went boom, as he was given the nickname ‘Starbright’.

Yah, weak.

A second ’Mech walked out, a *Cyclops*. She didn’t know who the pilot was, but he had been a runner up in the assault tournament last year.

Then a *Kraken* walked out of a hole.

The *Kraken* was an assault 'Mech made by Clan Jade Falcon. Armed with ten UAC 2s, the 'Mech literally put up a wall of lead, shredding any mech to pieces.

In other words, this 'Mech was bad news. Really bad news.

Next to it, a *Marauder* walked out, piloted by Mark Steiner. Steiner had been a powerful opponent in the team battles, but his partner had died. He elected to participate in the Unlimited series, which wasn't turning out for him so well.

The *Templar* pilot was a vet named Natasha Simmings. She had seen a lot of successful action against the Falcons, and already she was trash talking with the *Kraken* pilot. There would be fireworks between these two.

The rest of the 'Mechs consisted of a *Gargoyle*, a *Shadowhawk*, a *Flea*, a *Catapult*, a *Viper*, an *Ares*, and a *Champion*, painted in a familiar swamp green. The autocannon was too big to be a standard UAC 10, and it was obvious it was a customized design. What was Jason doing out there?

"He told you he was busy today." Alice said; her wide eyes still on the *Kraken*.

Oh Gods above he was in deep trouble. A *Kraken*! A 100-ton clan assault 'Mech with murderous firepower. This was bad news for everyone.

Her eyes went to the *Champion*.

It passed the stopping point. Jason's mech kept walking, even though everyone else had stopped. What was he doing?

It was walking towards her.

Finally it walked up the uprising, a section of land that was elevated enough so a pilot could walk out of his mech onto the stadium.

Jason halted his mech in front of the wall. The force field blocking the way disappeared, and the cockpit opened. Jason got out and walked onto the stadium, grinning at Sara. Merely glad to see him, Sara jumped up and hugged him. "Jason what are you doing here?"

He pulled back and smiled. "I have something to say." He took her hands in his and covered them. "Sara, I'm sorry I yelled at you, I'm sorry I hurt you, and I'm sorry for being such an ass about the whole thing. Will you forgive me?"

She just gaped at him. "Why are you apologizing? I'm--"

"Will you?" He was serious.

She nodded.

Smiling, he pulled her close, embracing her. "Thank you."

Oh man it felt so good. Everything was going perfect.

It was only then did she realize the holocameras were focused on them.

"I believe we have an audience." She said, pulling back slightly and looking into his eyes.

"Let 'em watch." He grinned wolfishly.

And the second they kissed, the crowd roared.

Slowly, they separated.

"Go on Jason, you're gonna need a lot of luck in this fight."

He just winked at her.

With that, he turned and climbed into his cockpit before proceeding to his starting point.

Sara walked back to her seat and sat down, not noticing the wide grin on Alice's face.

"Wow."

“You go girl.”

“Just wow.”

The countdown began, and reality set back in. Jason was not going to have an easy time.

The horn blared, and the *Kraken* unleashed a torrent of lead onto the *Templar*, shredding the torso beyond recognition. The *Templar* didn't stand a chance, and it fell on its back.

Immediately, the other assault 'Mechs opened fire on the clan 'Mech. The *Kraken* reeled under the weapons fire, stepping back. The *Catapult* marched up to a hill, bombarding the assault 'Mechs, only to be knocked off its feet by an alpha strike from the *Marauder*. The light 'Mechs charged into the fray, dancing around the massive assault 'Mechs.

Sara watched as Jason's *Champion* pulverized the *Viper* from behind, penetrating its back armor with its massive autocannon. The *Marauder* turned and fired at the *Champion*, its PPCs striking the left torso. Jason sidestepped just as a gauss shot rocketed by.

The horn blared again, and the *Gargoyle* fell at the *Kraken*'s feet. From the looks of things, the *Kraken* was dominating everyone on the field. Lead shells spewed forth from the multiple autocannons, tearing into the hull of the *Cyclops* with a vengeance. The *Cyclops* answered back with its gauss rifle.

The horn blared twice, and Sara looked to see the *Marauder* and the *Ares* smoking at Jason's feet. Smoke wafted from its autocannon and laser ports as it jogged off to join the rest of the fight.

The *Flea* was caught in the crossfire of the three assault 'Mechs, and literally dissolved from a clan PPC. The *Shadowhawk* was clubbed into oblivion by the *Cyclops*, cast aside-

-The *Cyclops* exploded, white light blinding everyone in the stadium momentarily. When their sight returned, a *Champion* dashed through the place where the *Cyclops* once existed.

Starbright reacted first, racketing his *Awesome* at the *Kraken*. The tremendous amount of firepower ripped into the *Kraken*'s torso, finally putting it down.

Jason lost no time, firing at the *Awesome*. The massive shells blew off the left arm, and the *Awesome* leaned right from the sudden loss of weight. The *Awesome* returned fire, hitting the *Champion* with all its PPCs.

Rocked backwards by azure bolts of lightning, the *Champion* fired off one last shot-

-A massive supernova burst from the *Awesome*, enveloping both 'Mechs. Sara gasped in horror.

No he can't be-

-the *Champion* came flying out of the supernova, crashing into the ground and skidding to a stop.

“...This is horrible, I see no movement from the cockpit, and the *Awesome* is gone. No one could have survived that kind of explosion.”

Duncan Fisher zoomed in on the motionless *Champion*. “I still see no movement, we don’t know if... wait, there’s someone running on the field!” The cameras zoomed in, and everyone recognize the girl he was with earlier. “How did she get on? She’s running up, it looks like she has a crowbar. She’s opened the cockpit-” He was cut off as the sound began to filter through.

With a hiss, the cockpit opened. Sara tossed the crowbar aside. “Jason! Jason are you okay?”

He had already removed his neurohelmet. “Ugg...”

“Oh gods above I thought you were dead.”

“Get me out of this thing, I’m bleeding.”

Sara climbed into the cockpit, and began to pull him out of cockpit. Finally getting him out of the ’Mech, she ripped off his coolant jacket and his shirt.

Massive scars on his back were bleeding profusely, oozing onto the field.

“Oh Jason I’m so sorry-”

“Sara-”

“I shouldn’t have-”

“Sara, its okay. That was the past.” He closed his eyes, trying to shut out the pain. Not a sound came from the stadium, all watching the massive screens intently.

“Will you be okay?” She kissed his head, cradling it.

“Yah.” He paused. “Are your hands burnt?”

“Yah. Your ’Mech is still hot.”

“You think?” He rebuked mildly as she brushed his hair.

She pulled him up and leaned him against her, his blood staining her white shirt. “I was so worried about you.”

“I never thought I’d see you running up to me like that.” He closed his eyes.

Gently she rocked him back and fourth as medevac units rushed up to them. “Will you forgive me Jason?”

He found her arm and squeezed it. “Yes.”

She kissed his forehead, her blonde hair covering his face. “Thank you.”

Slowly she rocked him back and forth as both silently waited for the medevac unit to pull up besides them.

Sara leaned down and kissed him again. She never wanted him to leave her again.

Chapter 5

The autocannon is always a dominant force on the battlefield. Yes, Long Range Missiles, or LRMs, have their place, and lasers and particle cannons will always be a factor. But nothing delivers more hurt than a heavy autocannon at close range.

Despite their faults and inherent risks, they are always popular. Jamming, a rare problem, is considered a part of the trade. No sensible MechWarrior goes into combat without a CASE, if possible.

Autocannons come in different weight classes, 2, 5, 10, and 20. All have a few similar qualities, such as a five-barrel Gatling system. These are not true Gatling cannons, as each fires off a clip at a time. Five barrels allow the cannon to cool off easier.

Before, autocannons were made with single barrels. Overheating and jamming were constant problems, but this changed when the five-barrel system came out. Picked up almost immediately by Emperor Autocannons and other companies, heat problems were much fewer and jamming was much less frequent. The old barrels were heavier and more cumbersome, having coolant systems running overtime. When the clan ultra autocannon came into being, all that changed.

An Autocannon 2 is a 40mm gun that fires off 40 shells. The design consists of a five barrel firing system mounted on a spinning piece, allowing each barrel to cool. Basically a high-powered minigun, it spews out 40 shells in under two seconds, putting up a literal wall of lead. The Ultra Autocannon 2 is a revolutionary design, allowing you to fire off 80 shells in burst mode.

The Autocannon 5 is the more common of the cannons to be seen, firing twenty 80mm shells. Considered to be underpowered for its weight, it is still common throughout the Inner Sphere. Ultra Autocannon 5s are supped up versions, firing forty shells instead of twenty in burst mode.

The Autocannon 10 is a five-barrel 120mm cannon, firing off ten shots per clip-

Sara shoved the thought from her mind, it hurt to keep thinking about it. That, and the fact that she was upside down. Pulling herself up, she sat on the barrels of the Ultra Autocannon 20, taking a short breather from being upside down. All that blood to the head kind of got to her after a while.

The *Champion* wasn't built for a weapon like an Ultra Autocannon 20. A 240mm five-barrel cannon had a tremendous amount of recoil, threatening to knock the *Champion* on its back. The solution was simple; the autocannon was surrounded on the back end by a recoiling system, much like the system on an artillery piece.

Since it was located in the right torso, the *Champion* was always a bit heavy on the right. This wasn't a major problem though, as many 'Mechs had this feature and the pilots were used to it.

Five barrels had a few major advantages over the old single barrel design. Each barrel was equipped with a light cooling system, whereas the single barrel design was heavy and had a large cooling system. Also, if one of the barrels were damaged, the computer would skip that barrel and move the round to the next chamber. Finally, it just looked cooler. Nothing scared a MechWarrior more than seeing one of those things pointed at them up close.

Sara shoved the thoughts from her mind again. Her head was killing her, the sunlight was making it worse, and her ears were ringing.

She needed a break. Getting up, she climbed up into the cockpit, resting on the chair. She pulled the canopy down, and activated the life support.

TZZT "OW-" *THUMP* "GAH!"

She jumped in her seat and quickly turned it off. "Are you alright? Who's down there?"

"You trying to put me back in the hospital again?"

"Jason!" She cupped her hands over her mouth as Jason climbed out of the hole.

“What are you-” His head collided with the closed canopy. Jason clenched his teeth as he prevented a stream of obscenities that you should never say around a woman, much less call them. He gave her a half smile as he opened the canopy. “Good to see you to.”

“Oh Jason!” Immediately she hugged him, and then pulled away. “Wait, your back? No one told me! Did you leave before you were supposed to?”

“No, I just didn’t tell anyone.” He moved past her and sat down in the chair, holding his head.

“Sorry about that.” She knelt beside him and ran her hands through her hair, feeling the two bumps on his head.

“Oh I’m fine.” He grumbled, protesting against her doctoring.

“Shush you, hold still.” She pulled his head closer, examining it. “You’ll live.”

“I missed you.”

She smiled. “Me to.” She kissed his head. “Sorry I wasn’t able to visit so much; Jawbreaker was pretty banged up.”

He looked at her. “Jawbreaker?”

“Your ’Mech.”

He leaned back and closed his eyes. “So you get to name my ’Mech?”

“Yah, you can name mine.”

Slowly he nodded, and then his eyes flew open. “What?”

She put her finger on his lips. “Shhh, lets just say you brought the longing back.”

“You have-”

She put her other fingers on his mouth, silencing him as she sat down on his lap sideways. “Hush, you. I’m entering into the Assault tournaments, hopefully.” Her hand stroked his cheek.

He chuckled as he wrapped his arms around her waist. “You never cease to surprise me.”

She looked behind her and closed the canopy, and then wrapped her arms around his neck. “Dang right.”

Leaning forwards, she playfully licked his three-day beard as he kissed her neck...

~~~

Alice smiled to herself. Just seeing them hold each other made her feel warm. They had been without each other for too long.

Looking at her watch, she smiled wider. They had been going at this a solid five minutes, stopping for only two breaths. What lungs they had, she thought to herself.

She was inside the *Champion*, her head poking unnoticed through the hole in the floor of the cockpit. Sighing with contentment, she rested her hands on the floor and rested her head on her arms.

Sara and Jason nearly jumped out their seat. “Alice! How did you get in here?” Sara said, blushing bright red.

“I love watching you guys, you know that?”

“Alice!” Sara hissed.

“One of these days I’m gonna record your make-out sessions so you can look back.”

Jason chuckled and gave Sara a squeeze. “I see no problem with that.”

“Sara, do you have any idea how hard it is for me to keep from laughing when your leg is kicking so hard?”

Jason burst out laughing, slapping the armrests of the chair.

“I was not kicking hard!” Sara protested.

Jason was laughing so hard he nearly dropped Sara on the ground.

“That, and you were gripping poor Jason so hard he’s lost all circulation down their by now-”

“Alice!” By now Sara had turned every shade of red possible. How had Alice seen that?

Sara was mortified, and Jason was now helpless, laughing so hard he couldn’t breathe.

“I love you two, you know that?”

In all their time together, Alice had never seen Sara so red. She buried her face in Jason’s shirt, hiding from her. Jason forced himself to recover. After five minutes he succeeded.

“Alice seriously, how did you get in?” He said between chortles.

“Crawled through the autocannon barrels, slid up between them, crawled along the clip belt, and from there it wasn’t hard to find the hole.”

“Alice I can’t believe you did that! You frakker!”

“Oh hush, Sara, It’s no big deal. Sides, its not like she’s gonna blackmail us.” Jason said, finally having calmed himself down.

“But-”

“Let her watch, make her jealous.”

A sly smile formed on Sara’s face. “I’m good with that.”

He pulled her close, drawing her into a deep kiss. Sara returned, holding his neck tightly.

And the whole time, Alice was grinning ear to ear. Great Gods above she loved seeing them so happy.

~~~~

His name was Kevin Nye. To everyone else, he was known as Kaiser Ironsides. He piloted a *Champion* CHP-3P, the only other *Champion* known to exist on Solaris.

The other *Champion* was almost identical, aside from weapons and systems changes. Jason Scebold. The boy that piloted the other *Champion*. He wasn’t worthy of that ’Mech.

Kaiser flipped on the zoom reticle, watching the young man climb out of the *Champion* and go over to his girlfriend, the same as last time. He was a fool; he didn’t deserve that ’Mech. He didn’t deserve to even touch it!

The *Champion* marched back to its starting point. Instantly he opened the comms.

“I knew the man who piloted that ’Mech, mayfly.” He said; his voice low.

The other pilot didn’t answer. He already knew where this was going.

“You aren’t worthy to so drive it.”

“I’ll save you for last, worthless seat-filler.” Jason growled back.

“Anything to get you out of that ’Mech.” Ironsides hissed.

The *Battlemaster* pilot spoke. “Hey Ironsides, lets see if you can actually hit me this time.” Ironsides glared at the *Battlemaster*, which was flanked by a *Warhammer* and a *Scorpion*. To the left of the *Scorpion* was an *Assassin*, and on its left was a *Zeus*.

A *Thug* walked into the arena, followed by a *Mad Cat*. On the other side, a *Mauler*, a *Dasher*, and a *Firestarter*.

“Keep in mind, mayfly, Solaris is no place for kids. Pack up and go home.”

“You aren’t going home, zombie. Why a guy your age is still alive is amazing.”

It was a calculated insult. Kaiser was 36, young, but approaching the point where he would lose his prime. The young man would pay for that.

He narrowed his eyes at the swamp green ’Mech. The pilot was 23, in his opinion too young to pilot.

The horn blared, and the fight was on.

~~~

BattleMechs.

Giant robots of war here stories tall, equipped with enough firepower to level a city block.

The ultimate tools on the battlefield.

The *Champion* breaks into a run, twisting its torso to the left. It lashes out with its four medium lasers, slicing into a *Firestarter*. The *Firestarter* runs behind a *Mauler*, which is hammering into a *Thug*.

Twisting to the right, the *Champion* fires a NARC, tagging a *Dasher* with it. The *Dasher* immediately turns to run, trying to get away from a stray batch of LRMs.

Across the field, another *Champion* hammers into a *Battlemaster* with its massive cannon, shredding its left torso. Spinning around, the *Battlemaster* tosses its PPC to its right arm, snapping off a shot at the *Champion*. The *Champion* ducks, and the bolt of lightning flies over it. It jumps up to the side, firing again. Ten massive shells slam into the thick hull of the *Battlemaster*, blowing out the engine.

The first *Champion* hammers into the back of the *Mauler* with its Ultra Autocannon 10, ripping into its back. The thin armor doesn’t stand a chance, and the explosive shells put the *Mauler* out of commission. It falls forward on its face, revealing a *Mad Cat*.

Jinking to the right, the second *Champion* narrowly sidesteps a barrage from a *Zeus*. Opening fire with its autocannon, it shreds the autocannon arm off the 80-ton ’Mech, causing it to stumble from the change in weight. The *Champion* fires again, this time with its lasers. Molten armor streams off the *Zeus*, pouring onto the ground.

The first *Champion* steps over the fallen *Mad Cat*, firing into a *Warhammer*. The second *Champion* finishes off the *Zeus* as a *Thug* fires at the *Warhammer*. Taking careful aim, the second *Champion* fires into the *Thug*’s backside, destroying it in a blinding flash of light.

Caught in the middle, the *Warhammer* is quickly cut down.

The first *Champion* rackets, firing its entire arsenal at the swamp green ’Mech, knocking it on its back. Slowly the white *Champion* stalks forwards...

~~~

Carefully, Jason moved Jawbreaker into an upright position. Ironsides was now twenty-five meters away. Why hadn't he fired?

Instantly, he leveled his autocannon at the other 'Mech and depressed the trigger.

It was jammed.

He glanced at his weapons readouts. The Autocannon was blinking red, and three lasers were out. The last one was losing power, already too weak to penetrate the cockpit.

But strong enough to...

"You aren't worthy to pilot that 'Mech, mayfly. Go to hell."

"You first." Jason sneered.

He ejected the ammo drum out of the CASE. Lifting up his left foot, he kicked it towards the other *Champion*.

His vision tunneled as he focused on the ammo drum and the other 'Mech. 20... 15... 10... 5... It was now only inches away from the other 'Mechs cockpit. Lifting up his left arm, he ran the crosshairs over the drum and gently depressed the firing stud. A faded jade beam sliced out-

The explosion knocked his 'Mech off its feet, sending it flying backwards. With a bone-jarring crash, it skidded to a halt.

Jason felt as if someone had punched him in the gut, and it hurt like nothing else could. His ears were ringing, rendering his hearing inoperable.

Slowly getting Jawbreaker off the ground, he glanced towards the other *Champion*. The entire torso was gone, and the legs were barely intact.

It was over.

"There is no way that should have worked." Jason mumbled to himself, watching the legs of the other *Champion* glisten in the sun.

Only then did he hear his victory music pumping from the speakers.

*Deadly as the viper, peering from its coil,
The poison there is coming to a boil!
Ticking like a time bomb, the fuse is running short,
On the verge of snapping if it's caught!
And all the pressure has been building up;
For all the years it boar the load!
The cracks appear, the frame starts to distort; ready to explode;
Jawbreaker!*

He had won.

*Crouching in a corner, wound up as a spring,
Piercing eyes that blast are shimmering!
Muscles are all contorted, claws dug in the dirt,
Every ounce of fiber on alert!
And all the pressure has been building up;
For all the years it boar the load!
The cracks appear, the frame starts to distort;
Ready to explode;*

Jawbreaker!

It was then he heard the crowd screaming something. He opened the external system and listened in.

They were screaming 'Jawbreaker'.

Leaning into his command chair, he mopped his brow and smiled. "Jawbreaker... I like that."

*And all the pressure has been building up;
For all the years it boar the load!
The cracks appear, the frame starts to distort;
Ready to explode:
Jawbreaker! Jawbreaker! Jawbreaker!*

He had pulled off one of the most impossible, no, he had pulled off an impossible maneuver. He had done it with class. He had done it with style. And he had the whole stadium breaking out in pandemonium.

As the last words were sung, he moonwalked his 'Mech backwards into the bay. He was feeling great.

Chapter 6

"I'm serious."

"You're biased."

"I'm not biased!"

"Yes you are."

"How?"

"Er... I donno you're just biased."

"How can I be biased against something I'm not biased against?"

"Er... You just are."

"Men are far too easy to judge, my dear Sara."

"One day Alice the man of your dreams will walk into your life and then you will have to watch your tongue."

"Scold me will you?"

"You deserve it."

"Oh hush you."

"Admit it, your still looking for a guy."

"I am not!"

"Yes, you are."

"I said I like seeing you two together, I'm not looking for a guy!"

"Every girl does."

"Girl? How would you know? You're a tomboy!"

"Am not! I'm much too feminine."

"You're more of a guy than Jason!"

"Why you little-" Sara was interrupted by Jason's hysterical laughter.

“See?”

“See what?”

“Even Jason knows this!”

“That’s a burn.” Jason laughed harder.

“Frakker!” Sara shot back at Alice.

“Oh go soak your head.” Alice retorted.

“Go grease a tractor!”

Jason was laughing so hard he couldn’t breathe, slapping Jawbreaker as he listened to the two bicker. They had been going at this for an hour now, doing more debating than work. Luckily for them, he was doing their work. Or trying.

He turned off his fusion torch, just as the subject changed.

“It’s not grease, its lube.” Alice retorted.

“Grease.”

“Lube.”

“Grease!”

“Lube!”

“Both.” He chortled, causing them to look at him. A short silence followed before they both spoke together. “What he said.”

Alice realized they had agreed, and tried to find something to disagree with. “Grease burns, lube doesn’t.”

“No it doesn’t.”

“Ever heard of a grease fire?”

“That’s with kitchen stuff.”

“WD-40?” Alice shot back, referring to an old greasing product that had survived a mellinnia.

“That’s old stuff; there are many kinds of grease.”

“Lube.”

“Grease!”

Those two could go on forever, Jason chuckled to himself. Fusing on another armor plate, his mind wandered as the subject changed again.

The late Kaiser Ironsides. Why had he been so mad at Jason? Probably got up on the wrong side of the bed that morning, or he was just seeing his friend’s ’Mech in the hands of a late entry.

His last fight had been all over the holonet. It was easily the most reckless stunt he had pulled off. Who ever heard of ejecting your ammunition drum and kicking it at your opponent, then shooting it with an underpowered laser? How had it even worked? That shouldn’t have worked. Heck he should be dead by now.

But he wasn’t. He had pulled off the craziest stunt he had ever seen. Kicking an ammunition drum with some 75 240mm HE shells at his opponent, then shooting it, setting it off. The resulting explosion had sent his ’Mech flying backwards, and vaporized the other *Champion*’s torso.

He knew that by then Ironsides had been running hot, and his front armor damaged. But it still shouldn’t have worked out.

But it did.

Silently he snapped at himself for going over it for the hundredth time. Switching topics in his mind, he thought about Sara entering into the open melee for the assault

tournament. He didn't know what she would be driving; she might be driving her old Enforcer, but she might have sold it.

"Ms. Kellings? May I speak with you for a minute?" Tonnage yelled from the floor.

"Coming!" She put her torch down and crawled off the 'Mech, hopping onto the gantry. Jason looked up from his work, watching the conversation ensue. He put the torch down as her face changed to one of worry. She looked up and motioned for him to come down.

Climbing down the 'Mech, he walked over to where they were talking.

"Ms. Kellings is unable to join in the Assault Tournaments, as they are in the final rounds already."

Jason's face changed as he looked at Sara. She wouldn't look at him.

"Sara... I-"

"It's not that." She said, crossing an arm and holding her head with the other.

"But she still has an opportunity to join the Unlimited Tournaments."

So that's what this was about. She didn't want to fight him, but she wanted to pilot 'Mechs again.

"Lemme talk to her for a minute." Quietly pulling her aside, he took her behind one of the *Champion's* legs.

"Sara-"

She grabbed his arms, gripping them so tightly they began to lose circulation. "I can't do it again Jason, I can't!" She whispered.

"Sara, its okay. I don't think I'll make it that far anyway." He pulled her closer and wrapped his arms around her.

"Darn it you know you will! I don't want to fight you again, I can't!" He remembered well. The last time they fought she had gone under immense trauma. She had avoided it whenever possible.

"Sara, I want you to enter. I want you to pilot again. Everything will be fine."

She looked up at him. "But what if we're put in the same match?"

He scratched her back along her spine, the way she always liked. "We'll fight that battle when it happens."

She looked down, then back up. Jason swore he never saw eyes so beautiful. "But-"

He pulled her closer, allowing her head to rest on his shoulder. "Don't worry, I'll think of something."

Gently he began to rock her back and forth. "Promise?"

He kissed her cheek. "I Promise."

Slowly they separated and walked out from behind the leg, walking towards Tonnage. "Well?" He said.

"I'll join the unlimited tournaments, sir."

"Very well, I'll make the necessary arrangements. Sara, I assume you want to pilot that... other 'Mech instead of the *Longbow*."

She nodded.

With that Tonnage walked off.

"You were willing to drive a missile boat to avoid fighting me?"

"Yah."

He let his mind chew on this.

Finally, he walked off and climbed up the gantry, and pulled himself up onto his autocannon. Crawling down through the hole above the cannon, he pulled himself into the inner workings of the 'Mech.

"Jason?"

He turned to see Sara's silhouette against the outside light.

"Yah?"

She crawled over and knelt beside him, wrapping her arms around his neck. Gently she pulled him into a kiss.

Jason sat down Indian style, pulling Sara into his lap. She wrapped her legs around him, pulling as close as she could.

Great Gods above she felt so good.

Slowly, they separated from a kiss. "You overhear, Alice?" Jason said quietly.

"Yah." Came a soft voice, probably from behind the ammo drum.

Jason felt Sara's hand slide over his back, her fingers tracing the scars. Jason toyed with the rim of her jeans before he ran his hand along Sara's leg.

"Thank you Jason."

His hand moved up and around to her stomach. "For what?"

"Everything." Sara said.

He leaned forwards and pecked the small of her neck. "Anything for you."

She arched her head back to grant him better access to her neck.

"What will we do afterwards?" She asked, her eyes closed.

He kissed the side of her neck, causing it to lean the opposite way. "Everything's planned."

Her hands felt his strong back, running over the scars. "Solaris isn't our home, Jason. Solaris kills its own. There's nothing for us here."

He kissed her collarbone, his flesh burning against hers. "We'll leave, start everything over."

His hands began to rub her back as she kissed the top of his head. He felt her ribs beneath her skin.

"I like that."

~~~

Alice watched them from a different place in the *Champion*. Her large brown eyes soaking up light, taking in the images in front of her.

"Jason?"

"Yah?"

"Is it okay if you don't watch the fight?"

"Why?"

They stopped talking for a while. Alice smiled, realizing how gentle he was with her.

"I think it's best if we don't see each other fight."

There was a brief pause.

"Alright. We should also stay away from each others 'Mechs."

"Why?"

"We shouldn't see much of each other until the tournament is over."

Alice watched as they pulled closer together, doing something she couldn't see in the dim light.

"Jason, I need to be with you, especially now that this is going to happen."

"I know. Let's just not talk so much."

For a moment, Alice wondered what their long term plans were. But she knew what would happen eventually. Heck they were gonna marry, but it wasn't the right time yet.

"How long will this happen?"

"Eight matches."

She watched as Sara buried her face in his shirt. "Eight matches! I can't stay away from you that long!"

"I know it hurts, but we did it for five years-"

"That was involuntary!"

He cupped her chin and looked into her eyes. "I know it will hurt, Sara. Look, we don't have to be away from each other. We just stay away from each other for the most part." Alice knew Jason's brain was clocking overtime, trying to compensate and compromise for everything.

She nodded and they drew close again. Alice could only imagine the powerful feelings they were having.

"Alright."

Alice slowly slipped into a better place. She knew that Jason knew she was there, so did Sara. As long as she was there, they wouldn't do anything major. Heck, they rarely did anything major. But they didn't mind, they always let her watch. It was only when Alice made it known that she was there when the situation turned comical.

"So who are we gonna talk to if we don't talk to each other that much?" Sara asked, arching her neck back again.

"Alice."

"She's a watcher, not a talker."

"I know, but I think we need to give her more attention anyway."

Alice chuckled lightly, climbing over the drum towards them. She sat down next to them, leaning against the dormant fusion reactor.

"I love watching you two."

Jason scooted closer to Alice and Sara took one of her hands, giving it a friendly squeeze. "You got no idea how much you mean to us, Alice." Sara said.

"Thanks guys." She leaned forwards to hug them, only to have her tiny frame engulfed by her friends.

"Alice, you never told us about yourself. Who's your family?"

She smiled at them, her heart glowing. "You guys."

They pulled her closer again. "Family." Jason said quietly. "I like that."

No one broke the hug or the silence for a while.

"So after this, we leave?" Alice asked.

"We leave."

"Where we gonna go?"

Jason merely winked at her.

"Jason never tells his secrets." Sara said, pulling Alice in between them.

"Aw common guys-"

"Alice sandwich!" Sara giggled.

Alice rolled her eyes, and then found herself having trouble breathing.  
“Guys, I can’t breathe!”  
“Aw common, you can breath just fine.”  
Alice responded by a surprisingly strong squeeze of her own before letting go.  
Time passed as they just sat there.  
“Jason, I never got how old you were.” Alice said.  
He smiled. “23.”  
She did mental math. That made Sara 22.  
“How old are you Alice?”  
She leaned into Sara. “17.”  
He nodded.  
Finally she got up, returning to her original position by the fusion reactor.  
“Ya’ll got till tomorrow, don’t let me spoil it.”  
“You ain’t spoiling anything.”  
“You two just have your fun. It’s entertaining enough just watching you.”  
Alice’s smile grew as they resumed their activities.  
“Jason?”  
“Mmm?”  
“When... we were separated... did you ever think of me?”  
He smiled at her. “All the time.”

~~~

Each fight would bring him closer to having to fight Sara. A battle he was not prepared to fight. A battle neither was ready to fight.

The scars ran too deep.
The pain was too much.
But it had to be done.
There was no other way.

Jason was oblivious to the other 'Mechs as they marched out to their starting points. He was oblivious to the massive rainstorm thundering overhead. He was oblivious to the rain hammering onto his 'Mechs thick hull.

What would they do?
What would he do?

He shook himself out of the trance, focusing on the matter at hand.

A small light appeared on his dashboard, informing him of the match type. One on one battles for the first two sections. The third would be a three man free for all.

He was given permission to attack the *Axeman* to his left. Slowly he turned Jawbreaker to face it.

His comm light glowed green, indicating he was being hailed. Dang, he had turned off his comm. Activating it, he flipped a switch.

“This is Osiris, the god of death. Prepare to die.”

He rolled his eyes at his opponent’s words. Lame...

Jason slipped into a battle trance as his 'Mech became a part of him, stepping to the side slightly to avoid a stream of 240mm shells. The shells sailed by inches away from his cockpit, disturbing the rainfall with their trails.

Jawbreaker burst into a dead run, its massive feet pounding into the thick mud.

“There is no escape.” The voice taunted again.

Jawbreaker turned, moving its path to approach the *Axeman* at an angle. The *Axeman* began to march, on an opposite parallel path. Jawbreaker shoved down with one foot, then slammed down with the other. Leaning his 'Mech backwards, his 'Mech skidded in the mud. The *Axeman* opened fire, spraying the area in front of the *Champion* with lead.

“So you're the god of death, huh? Prepare to meet your maker.” This guy was small fish compared to others he would have to face.

Jawbreaker suddenly made a beeline for the *Axeman*, slashing at it with its medium lasers. Four jade beams sliced into the *Axeman*'s armor, leaving molten trails in their path.

100 meters.

The massive autocannon underneath the *Champion* belched, spewing out five high explosive rounds at the offending 60-tonner, depriving it of its AC-20. The *Axeman* swung with its axe, and Jawbreaker jinked to the left.

Turning around and skidding to a halt, the autocannon fired again, ripping into the *Axeman*. Deprived of a leg, the *Axeman* spun around and crashed to the ground.

Jason glanced at his targeting data. His next target was a *Zeus*...

...A *Gargoyle* dropped to the ground, followed by a *Templar*.

Jason blinked. What had happened?

Where did the *Zeus* go?

Looking around, he spotted the *Zeus* on the ground, more than a thousand meters away. It was missing much of its torso.

He looked at his ammo display, reading 100 shells in the ammunition drum. He then looked at his damage readouts, realizing some armor was missing on his left leg.

His victory music began to pound through the speakers, trying in vain to sound above the rain.

It was then that he realized that the past six matches had passed in a blur. This made match seven.

Unnaturally fast.

Gods above it was so soon. This was far too fast, he thought. He was not ready for the final fight.

Only then did he realize that the *Gargoyle* pilot had climbed out of her 'Mech, shaking her fist at him.

Slowly a smile crossed his face. He knew exactly what to do.

The smile turned into a grin. Perfect.

Glancing up with his external viewing systems, he zoomed in on the crowd. Everyone was cheering wildly, and from past experience Jason knew he was supposed to show off a little at this point.

He marched over to the nearest wall. Opening fire with his lasers, he slowly carved his initials into the wall. Setting his autocannon to single shot mode, he put periods at the end of each letter.

He allowed his 'Mech to swagger as he entered the hole. That would be the only thing he would leave behind.

~~~

His command chair was fully reclined, and his eyes were closed. Music flowed into his ears as his 'Mech's radio played from one of his databases.

*On a warm summer's evenin'  
On a train bound for nowhere  
I met up with the gambler.  
We were both too tired to sleep.  
So we took turns a-starin'  
Out the window at the darkness.  
When boredom overtook us,  
He began to speak.  
He said, "Son, I've made a life  
Out of readin' people's faces.  
Know-*

Suddenly his mouth was parted by a familiar pair of lips, and vanilla scented hair tickled his neck. For a full minute they kept him occupied.

"You win?" He asked, his eyes still closed.

"Yah." There was a tinge of sadness in her voice.

He smiled. "Perfect." Their lips met again.

*...And the best you can hope for  
Is to die in your sleep."  
And when he finished speakin',  
he Turned back to the window  
Crushed out his cigarette  
And faded off to sleep.  
And somewhere in that darkness,  
The gambler he broke even.  
And in his final words I found  
An ace that I could keep.  
You gotta know when to hold-*

"Where do you get that music? I've never heard it before."

He smiled. "That's old music. From the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century."

He knew her eyes flew open. "21<sup>st</sup> century? Where'd you get it?"

He opened his eyes, winking at her. From his position she appeared upside down, her arms resting on the headrest.

"C'mon tell me."

He settled into the chair more. "I worked with ComStar for a while, found it in their databanks. Kept it ever since."

"How much you got?"

"All of them."

She let out a low whistle. "Wow. Nice collection."

"It was kind of a parting gift."

“How many songs are there?”  
“Millions.”  
Another low whistle. “Dang.”

*...Know when to walk away,  
Know when to run.  
You never count your money  
When you're sittin' at the table.  
There'll be time enough for countin'  
When the dealin's done.*

“Who was that?”

He lifted his head, looking at a display screen. “Kenny Rogers.”

She nodded, and their thoughts drifted to the final battle. It was going to be held at the Namless Stadium, a stadium so large and expensive to repair it was only used for special battles. It was going to be one heck of a fight.

“So. What are we gonna do?” She asked, playing with a tuft of brown hair.

“I... have a plan.” He replied.

“Oh? You... have a plan?” She said, mimicking him.

“Yes, and a good one at that.”

“Is it complete?” She said, emphasizing complete.

Jason smiled. “Well... yes... mostly.”

“Tell me.”

Smiling, he glanced around.

“Alright, here's the plan...”

~~~~

From her hiding spot in the *Warhammer's* SRM tube, Alice could see Jason's and Sara's interesting position. She knew what they were talking about, but Alice wasn't going to listen in this time; she wanted it to be a surprise.

Whatever it was, it was going to be good. These two worked extremely well together, and when they put their minds together, it was gonna be a real show.

She shifted her position so that she was lying down, resting her head on her harms behind her.

Slowly her thoughts drifted to her past, to her own shattered memories.

She would leave everything, never looking back.

Sara was right. On Solaris, you were a nobody. It didn't matter if you were a fringer, hillie, rat, Roman, or Solaris champion, you were no one. Someone would replace you. You would just be another name among others.

No. The future was not here. She had no hope here. No one had hope here.

Why leave? There was no cause to live for here. Money? Money was lost faster than it was gained. Fame? Short lived.

It was time to leave this rock, leave the games, leave the treachery, leave everything. Even Pinball Wizards had to find a cause to live for.

Chapter 7

The battlefield.
The sacred grounds where blood is spelt.
In murder.
In hatred.
In profit.
In jealousy.
In revenge.
In pain.
In honor.
In glory.
Here, legends rise and legends die.
Here, warriors live and die with a purpose.
Here, warriors live and die for belief.
Here, warriors live for glory.
This is a game, a game of life and death.
This is Solaris 7.

~~~~

Jason opened his eyes as he leaned back in the command couch. The 'Mechs were still emerging from their holes.

Which one was Sara in?

It was going to be a 'Mech with pulse lasers, jump jets, and an LBX autocannon. Not very many 'Mechs out there with that configuration.

The thing was, there were three. The first was an *Enforcer*, obviously customized with more armor. Being the second lightest 'Mech in the match, it was often overlooked.

But it wasn't Sara's 'Mech. This guy swaggered onto the field, trying to shake the ground with each step.

He glanced at the other two, a *Marauder II* and an *Annihilator*. Nope, not her style. The *Marauder* ran too hot for her, and the *Annihilator* didn't jump.

His gaze drifted over to a hole where a new 'Mech was marching out. It was a green-black *Marauder*, armed with an LB-10X autocannon on the roof. In each arm was a large pulse laser and a medium laser, and on each leg were jumpjets. It didn't march out, swaggering into the arena like the others. Its footsteps were light, barely making footprints in the ground.

It moved like a cat, softly, gracefully. It moved like a predator; relaxed but alert. Jason smiled again. Defiantly Sara.

The Huntress had returned.

~~~~

She walked her MAD-5D *Marauder* up to her starting point; next to Jason's swamp green *Champion*. Turning it to face the middle, she glanced at it, watching Jason watch

her in the cockpit. For a moment, she was amused. A demon of a pilot in a hero's 'Mech. She wondered if anyone else realized this irony.

Sara opened the tight beam frequency. "You have the rest of that plan ready?"

"Nope." His answer was calm, inhumanly calm as it always was before a fight. Great Gods above the butterflies in her stomach still wouldn't go away and he wasn't worried?

"No, I'm not worried." He said, interrupting her thoughts. "Neither should you be."

If Jason ever said anything like that, he was right.

"You sure?"

"Yep." His voice drifted off, and he seemed to look away. If anything, it was a three-mile stare.

"Ever been in a fight like this before?" She asked casually, leaning back in her seat. The butterflies were retreating, and she caressed the right joystick.

"A few."

The last of the gladiators walked out. This was it-

A winy voice sounded over the loudspeakers in the stadium. "Sorry for this interruption ladies and gentleman, but we're experiencing some technical difficulties down here." Someone in the background was screaming at someone else for being incompetent about video feed. "It will be ten minutes late."

Ouch. A ten minute delay meant people would get fired, sued, sued again, beaten, sued again, drawn and quartered, shot, shot again, and thrown in the river. Not a very pleasant, even for Solaris.

Jason's voice filled her ears again. "How many shots you got for that cannon?"

She had everything memorized to heart. "Ten buckshot, ten elephant slugs." She said, referring to her scattershot and slug ammunition types. What the heck was an elephant?

"Heat curve?"

"Zip-zip." Zero zero, minimal heat curve. This meant she could fire her pulse lasers a lot more than her previous configuration, which had two ER Medium Lasers instead of her two current Pinpoint Mediums.

"Figured. You clear with the plan?"

"Yep."

She watched his head nod inside the fighter like canopy of the *Champion*.

"Every time you look at me the gun follows." Jason chuckled, referring to her dorsal mounted cannon.

"Yep. I only got so many hands."

Silence reigned for a short while.

"Jason?"

"Yah."

"Remember... when we fought in the blood pits?"

She heard him chuckle. "Good days. Back when I had that brick for a 'Mech."

"I can't say so much for mine either."

Her old *Enforcer* had had major heat problems, due to defective heat sinks. No matter how many times she replaced them, they always-

"Sara, you have your rights to your 'Mech, right?"

She nearly smacked herself, slowing the arm from crashing into the cockpit. "Damn it, I forgot!"

She expected Jason to shoot her for that. How could she forget to claim her 'Mech?

“That’s okay.”

She did a double take. “What?”

“In fact, that’s perfect. I just found an ending to our game. Zeta Bravo.”

She looked at his ’Mech again, searching for holes near his cockpit. Someone had to have messed with his head. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Nope.”

She shook her head. Boy the crowds would love this one.

She leaned back into her chair.

“Jason?”

“Still alive babe.”

“What did you do during those five years?”

Her magnification system was locked over Jawbreaker’s cockpit. He winked at her. “You’ll find out later.”

Unwittingly she stomped her foot down, causing the left foot of her *Marauder* to stamp down with it. “Do you always have to be so cryptic?”

Jason chuckled. “Yep.”

She muttered a few choice obscenities under her breath, wishing she could just find out for once.

“This is just like the Grand Melee.”

She did a double take again. Sara was about to ask what the Grand Melee was, but Duncan Fisher started introducing the competitors. It would have to wait.

It was slow going. As interesting as it was to listen to him talk, it was still slow going. Finally it got down to Jason, pilot 22. At his mention, more than a few people cheered, but most had their money bet on the guys in the big ’Mechs.

“Sara, TCD.” Tango Charlie Delta. Plan change.

“Wilco.” She responded. She was being informed on a need to know basis.

“Eh, TCDK.” Keta? What was he thinking?

“You sure?” She said.

“Yah.” He said.

She sighed, letting him know she didn’t like it. “Wilco.”

“SS.”

She snorted. “Is that possible in a ’Mech this size?”

“You’re a lot smaller than most of these guys.”

“I’m five tons lighter than the assault class, they’ll be gunning for me. How the heck am I gonna SS?” Stay small? Seriously.

“Just SS. Look at the glass half full.”

“Glass half empty.” She replied sarcastically. Wilco.

“Be that way.” He grumbled. Love you, Godspeed.

“Fine.” I love you too, and for goodness sake don’t get yourself killed.

“You wanna do the plan?” I don’t intend to.

“Yes.” Good. No one else knows the code?

“Then SS.” Only Alice.

Sure enough, Alice was grinning in the stands at their playful bicker.

Jason laughed. “I think we just confused a whole lot of people girl.”

She giggled. “Almost starting, we missed my announcement.”

“Whad he call you?”

“Sara Kellings, still don’t have a nickname. You didn’t name my ’Mech either.”

“Wait and see.”

She sighed again. He always gave her those cryptic answers, darn him.

She sighed again. This was the man she was planning on spending the rest of her life with, so she had better get used to it. The irony made her smile a little bit. 15 years of knowing him and she still didn’t understand him completely.

She never would.

Sara glanced at the ’Mechs internal timer. Five minutes until the match started. Someone botched this one up good.

She tuned into the open frequency, listening to the *Annihilator* pilot trash talking with a *Strider* pilot.

“Sara, that *Strider* has infernos, be careful.”

She let slip with a word she had no business knowing, much less saying. If there was one thing she hated, it was inferno SRMs.

“Just stay clear of it, the Annie will probably take it out.”

“Wilco.”

She glanced up at the crowds, seeing they were getting restless. Hopefully things wouldn’t get out of hand up there. She grimly remembered the riot that took place three years ago. Two hundred and forty people got killed.

Finally, the announcement came that everything was fixed, though Sara swore she heard screaming in the background.

Fisher went through, naming all the contestants again, and the countdown timer began from twenty seconds.

“It’s just like the Grand Melee...” Jason murmured again.

What the heck was the Grand Melee?

4.

3.

2.

1.

Instantly she stepped back, her pulse lasers lashing out at the larger *Marauder II* from across the arena.

Jawbreaker burst into a run, charging the *Warhammer* that had turned to her *Marauder*.

“Only use your lasers, save the cannon for larger targets or a sure shot.” Jason’s calm voice filtered through on their private channel. A five round burst came from Jason’s autocannon, sending the *Warhammer* sprawling.

“Wilco, *Axeman* coming from behind you. I’ll take care of the *Warhammer*.”

“Wilco.” Instantly his ’Mech turned around, making a beeline for the *Axeman*.

Looking directly at the hole created by Jason’s autocannon, Sara fired a series of ten slugs into the *Warhammer*. Already suffering from internal damage, the *Warhammer* collapsed.

Looking at Jason’s ’Mech, she watched with surprise as the *Axeman* swung down, intending to cleave the *Champion* in half. Already trotting towards the ’Mech, Jawbreaker stepped to the left, and twisted, raising its right arm around so that the back of the arm connected with the shaft of the axe. Jason pulled down suddenly, and twisting more, locked the *Champion*’s arm around the shaft, and kicked the *Axeman*’s right leg

from under it. The *Axeman* fell, and Jason twisted on one foot, placing Jawbreaker's other foot on the rear torso of the downed 'Mech. Stepping down on it, Jason pulled back, ripping the axe arm off the melee 'Mech.

Its engine damaged, the *Axeman* was unable to move, and a horn blared.

By now her jaw was resting in her lap. "Jason, how did you do that?"

"*Hauptman*, Ten o'clock."

Realizing he was in his battle trance, she closed her mouth and aimed for the *Hauptman*. Twisting to the left, she jogged towards Jason's position, firing her large pulse lasers at the 95-ton 'Mech.

The giant answered back, its lasers carving into her hull. Gritting her teeth, she fired back with a scattershot blast, spraying the larger 'Mech with sub-munitions.

She cursed as a *Barghest* opened fire from behind, its lasers sliding past her *Marauder*.

Sara looked just in time to see the *Hauptman* thrown forwards, crashing on the ground. Jason's *Champion* dashed towards her position.

"Jump behind me, I have a *Fafnir* on my tail." Her heart skipped a beat. A *Fafnir*! Everyone was in trouble now.

"You want me to-"

"It's close behind me, trying to gain some distance. Close with it before it reaches its effective range."

Stomping down on the pedals, her ungainly *Marauder* lurched into the air, sailing towards the 100-ton 'Mech. A small smile crossed her face as she realized she was lined up for a DFA.

Her 'Mech began to drop, and its feet crashed into the top of the *Fafnir*, driving it face down into the dirt. She hastily engaged her jumpjets again, making a rough landing in front of it.

Its torso armor was a mess as the massive 'Mech rose, carving into her left leg with its lasers. Snarling, she jogged forwards and slugged it in the face, then brought her foot up and shoved it backwards. Aiming for the gyro, she fired all her weapons in an alpha strike, and mutilated the delicate gyro.

"Annie and *Strider* dueling behind you, fire into the flames." For a split second she watched as his 'Mech's foot sliced through the cockpit of the *Barghest*, and then dashed away behind the cover of a small hill.

Turning around, she saw the massive *Annihilator* bathed in flame, armor dripping off its hull. Opening fire with all her weapons again, the giant stumbled back, getting off a volley with its four LB-10X ACs. The sub munitions shredded the lighter 'Mech to ribbons, knocking it to the ground.

The land battleship slowly tried to take aim, but before it fired, Sara sidestepped, and the barrage rocketed behind her. Sara squeezed the two main triggers with her trigger fingers, sending two steady beams of light into the massive 'Mech. Already heavily damaged, the giant didn't stand a chance, and toppled over.

Turning back, she narrowly sidestepped a massive axe from a *Berserker*, and fired point blank for all it was worth. The *Berserker* stumbled away, trying to gain its bearing.

"*Berserker*'s mine. Four o'clock, *Sagittaire*."

"You're kidding right?" He wanted her to take out a *Sagittaire*? He must have been shot or something.

“It’s focused on a *Blood Asp*.”

Well that was much better. She would have to take on two assault ’Mechs. Great.

“Wilco.” She said, shaking her head as she ran from the *Berserker*. He had better have a good reason for this.

Glancing back, she saw Jason’s *Champion* making a beeline for the 100-ton ’Mech. He didn’t even open fire, and he wanted to do melee with a *Berserker*?

Narrowly sidestepping a PPC blast, he sidestepped again as the *Berserker* swung its massive axe around, attempting to cleave the 60-ton demon in half.

What happened next stopped her cold. Starting to spin on his left leg, Jason reached up and brought the sharp of his wing into the arm, first knocking it back, and then ripping it from the next of the ’Mech. Continuing to spin, the other arm moved backwards, slicing into the cockpit and sheering the top off the ’Mech.

Coming full circle the *Champion* began running again, turning to her. The headless *Berserker* crashed to the ground, skidding to a stop. Where had he learned to do that?

Snapping herself out of her daze, she picked up speed again, just as the *Sagittaire* turned its back towards her.

Firing an alpha strike at the ’Mech, Sara watched as it reeled under the firepower of her *Marauder*. A stream of massive slugs rocketed by her in between her right torso and her arm, blowing five huge holes in the back of the Davion ’Mech. Thrown off balance by the firepower of and its internals eaten an assault autocannon, the *Sagittaire* collapsed on its face.

The *Blood Asp* was in terrible condition. Having been too slow to escape the *Sagittaire*, it soon lost its range advantage. The thing didn’t stand a chance. Switching the ammunition type to scattershot, she depressed a button below the thumb button, which fired her medium lasers. The autocannon belched, tearing up the *Blood Asp* even more. With a groan, it fell on its back.

The only ’Mechs left were a badly damaged *Atlas*, an *Awesome* minus half its left torso, an armless *Victor*, and a *Stalker*.

“Take the *Stalker*; I’m going for the *Atlas*.”

“Wilco. Watch your back.”

As she turned her *Marauder* to face the *Stalker*, she realized that their ’Mechs were in the best condition. Raising her arms, she triggered her large pulse lasers, sending a steady stream of energy into the ungainly ’Mech.

The *Stalker* stopped firing on the *Atlas* and turned to face her, unleashing a full salvo from its missile racks.

She smiled, remembering an old trick she used to do when facing Hecktor’s *Hellspawn* back in the blood pits. Raising up her autocannon, she sprayed the trajectory course with sub munitions, and was rewarded with small fireworks display. Her ’Mech shuddered as the remaining missiles pockmarked her heavy armor.

Sidestepping an SRM barrage, her *Marauder* broke into a run. Finally, she was only meters away, and fired everything she had into the ’Mech. The *Stalker* stumbled backwards a step, only to be shoved to the ground by a kick to the torso.

Sara smiled. Not many ’Mechs were capable of kicking that high.

Turning, she saw that Jason had blown the back off of the *Victor*, while the *Atlas* had been destroyed by PPC blasts.

The only 'Mechs left were Jason's *Champion* and a battered *Awesome*, which was doing surprisingly well against Jason, miraculously dodging most of his weapon fire.

She laughed as soon as she realized what his intentions were. He wanted her to take it out.

Firing another scattershot salvo, the pellets exploded along the hull of the battered *Awesome*. Jason fired another five shot salvo from his autocannon, striking the damaged leg. Nearly immobilized, it snapped off a shot with its three PPCs. Sara gritted her teeth as two of the bolts of lightning carved into her 'Mech, shorting out electrical systems in her left torso.

She sliced into the *Awesome* with all her lasers, pouring energy into its soft innards. Marching up to it, she fired again with her cannon. Smoke pouring from its many holes, it collapsed.

At the same time, Jason and Sara turned to face each other, pointing their weapons at each other's weak spots.

She smiled as she saw his grin; everything was going according to plan.

Or at least what she knew what the plan was.

Watching his autocannon barrel spin, she smiled as his voiced sounded over the open channel. This would be broadcasted for all to hear. "Well, this is interesting."

"Sure is. Didn't think I'd end up here with you." She said back sweetly.

"Nor I. Kinda ironic."

"So this how it ends? We fire and see whose 'Mech gets up first?"

He paused for a moment, knowing the crowd was enjoying watching the drama play out. "Actually, that's boring."

"True. Nothing as cliché as a gunslinger draw."

"So what do we do?" He asked.

"I don't know." She shrugged.

"Well... let's... play a game." He said finally.

"Oh? Let's... play a game? What do you have in mind?" She knew the answer; this whole thing was for the crowds benefit. That, and she didn't know what he was planning; all she was doing was playing along.

"Hunter Hunted." He said with a wolfish grin.

She gave a low chuckle. "Really?"

"It's your favorite game."

It was. Silently she thanked Jason for solving the whole issue. Now he would sneak up on her and she would be taken out, and they would leave.

"That it is. Who's it?"

"I am." Keeping the smile plastered on her face, she fought to quell the panic rising within her. She couldn't attack him, and he knew it to. Now everything was taking a turn for the worst.

"Alright then." She tapped Jawbreaker's torso lightly with her left arm. "Don't peak." She turned her 'Mech to run towards a bombed out collection of buildings, which surprisingly no one had ventured.

"65, 64, 63, 62..." She heard over the comm.

Being careful not to make any footprints, she slipped into the miniature city. She knew the rules; she had to try to win. But she didn't know if she could pull the trigger.

Murmuring prayers to any god she could think of, she slipped down a street, between two buildings, and parked her *Marauder* in a moderately intact building. It was missing all of its floors, but the wall was intact enough to hide her *Marauder*.

She couldn't fight him again. If anything, she wanted him to blow a leg off her 'Mech, but he had decided that she would do the shooting.

Sara would rather put a bullet in her head than possibly hurt Jason. Great Gods above didn't he know this?

She listened to his playful voice from the open frequency. "19, 18, 17 ah screw this ready or not here I come." A small smile crossed her face; at least he was in a good mood.

After a while of fidgeting with her hands, she felt the ground shake lightly, and realized where he was. He was slowly walking his 'Mech to the street where she was facing.

She tasted bile in her mouth as his 'Mech slowly walked in front of her, then turned up the street she was facing, away from her.

He was leaving himself wide open to her, on purpose. She couldn't fire, she might-

And without warning, her autocannon took aim and fired, sending a stream of slugs into the knee joint of his left leg. Twisting his torso to the right, he landed his 'Mech expertly on the ground.

Her mind went into overdrive as her *Marauder* burst from the building, causing it to collapse behind her. She hadn't pulled the trigger, what had happened?

Parking her 'Mech next to the downed 60-tonner, she popped open the cockpit while throwing down the chain ladder, and scrambled down it. She hit the ground running towards the *Champion's* cockpit.

It was open, and Jason was stretching on the other side.

Running up to him, she nearly tackled him in a hug that nearly killed his circulation.

"Jasoni'msorryididntmeantoi-" She was interrupted by his laughter, and he kissed the top of her head.

Her embrace was broken as he hugged her. "Jason what is so funny? I shot-"

"Girl, don't you realize what just happened?" He had a huge grin plastered on his face.

By now she had gone through nearly ever shade of pale possible. "Jason, I just shot your ride!"

"You won!"

She blinked. "I won?"

"You're the new Solaris champion!"

He was positively beaming at her before he hugged her again. Then she realized she had picked no victory music. Jason had picked it for her.

*This ain't a song for the broken-hearted,
No silent prayer for the faith-departed.
I ain't gonna be just a face in the crowd,
You're gonna hear my voice when I shout it out loud.*

"Who is this?" She asked.

"Bon Jovi." Turning around, he took her wrist and thrust it into the air.

And the crowd roared.

*It's my life,
It's now or never
I ain't gonna live forever,
I just want to live while I'm alive!*

It was then that she realized that this was Jason's work. He had shot himself with her gun.

"By the way, you're getting a new 'Mech." He said.
She did a double take.

My heart is like an open highway-

"Jason?" She dropped her arm and faced him.
"Yah?"
"Thanks for everything."
And when they kissed, the crowd screamed louder.
Finally they separated.
"Jason, what 'Mech did I win?"
He grinned at her. "You're a true Lyran, babe. Going up."
"Common, tell me!"
He pulled her closer and whispered into her ear. "A *Turkina*, C variant."
At that moment, her heart did a back flip. "Boy, I love you."

*This is for the ones who stood their ground
For Tommy and Gina who never backed down
Tomorrow's getting harder make no mistake
Luck ain't even lucky
Got to make your own breaks*

*It's my life
And it's now or never
I ain't gonna live forever
I just want to live while I'm alive
(It's my life)
My heart is like an open highway
Like Frankie said
I did it my way
I just want to live while I'm alive
'Cause it's my life*

*Better stand tall when they're calling you out
Don't bend, don't break, hell, don't back down*

It's my life

*And it's now or never
'Cause I ain't gonna live forever
I just want to live while I'm alive
(It's my life)
My heart is like an open highway
Like Frankie said
I did it my way
I just want to live while I'm alive*

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Published by DropShip Command
(DropShip Games, LLC)
July 24, 2006

Version 1.0

www.dropshipcommand.com

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