

Lacuna Blue

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Chapter Twenty-Seven: Death Knell

Passing the final airlock door and entering Lagos Depot, the Bannockburn swiftly docks beside the Governor Parr. With the cargo lift lowered, the ship has already been emptied. George looks to his crew, who wait for orders.

“Alright... Head to your homes and grab your most valuable possessions; only take what you can’t live without. Come back here *immediately* and lock down the Bannockburn until May and I get back. Is that in any way unclear?”

“No.” A wave of voices responds.

“Good. We’ll be back.” George assures them.

Contacting the control room via his V.I. bracelet as they all ride their cargo lift down, George and the others are appalled to discover that no one has checked in after the Governor Parr docked. While they acknowledge that permission was requested and granted, using Michael’s codes, they simply assumed he was returning for some

unknown reason; perhaps George had recalled captain Cost himself. Realizing that his signal must have been jammed or otherwise failed to send, Lagos Depot had no idea that Michael was being decommissioned.

Fearing foul play, the entire crew of the Bannockburn draw their weapons and board the nearby Governor Parr. Even Catalina and Marissa, the former slaves and girlfriends of Donovan and Prat respectively join them in searching the gunboat. Almost immediately, they find Colette's corpse, still quite warm.

"Fuck..." George growls. "I was sure it was her..."

"Pardon?" Rakshasa asks.

"I just thought that if anyone would betray me, it would have been Colette; she's as soulless as they come... Came..." He sighs.

"I knew that fucking mouse was up to no good." Prat grumbles.

"Oh, really? What's his next move then, Prat the Magnificent?" Donovan facetiously inquires.

"Fuck you, man. Michael's loose on the station!" Prat snaps.

"I know that! And we need to deal with him!" Donovan barks back.

"Alright, enough!" May shouts. "We'll deal with this."

"All of you should go home and pack. My orders stand. I'll go to central control and tell them what's going on, in

person. We'll hunt that motherfucker down and end it right now." George explains.

"Hell yeah." Prat grins, holding up his submachine guns.

"That's a hot pose." Marissa coos, sliding up to her lover.

Quickly dispersing, the crew of the Bannockburn obey their captain's orders. Racing off to their apartments, they prepare to pack. Meanwhile, George and May dash toward the central control room, collecting every active duty Slaver's Union guard they pass. By the time they reach central control, there's an army of nearly fifty armed and armored guards. In black and purple uniforms and with respirators and tinted visors, they are a formidable sight. Surely Michael won't stand a chance against his forces.

"Mr. Woods! W-what's going on, sir?!" A nervous Slaver rises to her feet.

"At ease. Captain Cost is being decommissioned. I want you to lock him out of the base computer right now, lock down his ship and alert the guards." George begins.

"... Sir?" She asks in confusion.

"Now!" He growls.

"Y-yes, sir!"

Quickly following his orders, the Slaver alerts the guards first and begins to erase Michael's codes, however,

she is soon locked out of the central computer. Michael anticipated this move and beat them to it.

“Hello there!” Michael’s voice rings out from the speakers of Lagos Depot’s intercoms.

“Michael?” May asks.

“Show yourself, you fucking coward!” George growls.

“Now why would I want to do a thing like that? I’ve got big plans, and if you kill me, well... So much for those. Haha.” He coolly laughs.

Lying together in bed, James and Erica hear the voices through the intercom; George is projecting himself throughout the base as well. Sitting up, the unclothed James looks around the room for his underwear, taking hold of a blaster that sits atop his nightstand. Erica too is quick to find her clothes and weapon, joining her lover as they prepare for the inevitable.

“I know you’re going to kill me, George. I’m sorry about the kids. I thought you had vision, but you’re sightless and emotional; you aren’t a real Slaver!”

James and Erica stop in their tracks. James’ blood boils. What did the psychotic Michael do to children that has George out for blood? Whatever it is, James is automatically supportive of his brother, and not even Erica could stop him, not that she wants to.

“You’re one to talk, you sick little shit! I should have killed you when James told me to. I can’t believe I thought you were worth keeping! For trying to sell children into slavery, I’m going to execute you in front of everyone! We’re going to have some new rules here, and one of them is a simple moral code! No kids, no elders and no infirmed, so get out here and make this easy on all of us!” George barks.

“I don’t think so, George. I’m in control now. Any Slaver who wants amnesty can side with me. Kill George and serve me, or die.”

Worried that the army of guards might turn on her lover, May draws her blaster and spins around. The guards look at each other for a moment before one raises his GS-2 rail rifle. Glancing back over his shoulder, George waits for the shot. He turns around slowly to face the guard. Raising the weapon high, the guard pulls the strap from over his shoulders and sets it down on the floor.

“... W-what are you doing?” A nervous May asks.

“Showing you both that I serve Admiral Woods; I won’t ever serve captain Cost.” The helmeted guard replies.

The others soon follow. Showing their loyalty to George, he silently breathes a sigh of relief. A short time passes as they stand in silence.

“... Well?! Is George dead yet?!” Michael barks over the intercom.

“Nope! The Slaver’s won’t serve you! You’re on your own Michael, and soon, all two hundred and fifty of my fine soldiers are doing to stomp you flat!” George taunts him.

“This is far from over, George! You all made a big mistake! You think I didn’t anticipate this? I’ve made preparations since I was still running that base on Earth. I’ve been skimming slaves for months for test subjects. I spent most of my own credits to keep their tanks replenished, but now that my research has borne fruit, I’ll show you what I can do!” Michael boasts.

“Skimming slaves?! How?!” George asks in shock.

“I was in charge of acquisition, George! Even after I lost that title, I had a backdoor to our servers! I’ve simply changed the numbers on every order so no one would notice, and who’s counting crates?! You?!”

George’s heart sinks; Michael is right.

“It was easier than I could’ve hoped for! Hahaha! Well, it’s been fun, but I have work to do. I’ll let my *two-thousand* Marionettes take care of you for me, then the Union will be all mine! HAHAHAAH!!!” Michael cackles maniacally.

Almost immediately, shots are fired from just outside. Other guards quickly call over their encrypted comms channel. Reports of men and women of both races and various ages come through. Filthy, partially dressed or entirely nude, they bear only cheap blasters, they don’t speak or cry out in pain, nor do they move with much intelligence. However, wave after wave of lightly armed

slaves pour out of various rooms, previously thought unused and firing wildly at everyone not serving Michael Cost.

Michael's brainwashed army serve their master, doing all that they can to destroy every Slaver in Lagos Depot. They sweep through the hangar and cut it off from the base proper within minutes, moving like a swarm of insects.

"I want all guard units to fall back to central command! Fall back, now! If you can't make it back here to regroup, then fall back and reinforce your current position!" George orders over the comms.

Outside, the blaster fire grows louder and the Slaver's race outside to deal with the situation. Highly trained commandos, often the best and most expensive of the mercenary or pirate factions, joined the Slaver's Union as a status symbol; the most feared warriors should serve the most feared faction. Aside from the wealth that even the lowliest guard earns, far more than any contemporary pirate or mercenary, their uniforms and equipment is a sight to behold.

Michael's Marionettes are no match, but outnumbered nearly nine to one, captain Cost has a real chance of winning his little war. Shooting their way through hordes of disorganized slaves, James and Erica stumble upon Kira, Ein and Rakhasa. Teaming up with over a dozen Slaver guards, plus Harvey Crippen and his crew, most of whom worked for James, they make their way to central command. As they

travel, they meet with Donovan, Prat, Catalina, Marissa, and even more Slaver guards.

Now with a strong force, they find a horde of Michael's slaves, which he's dubbed 'Marionettes', fighting their way through the very hall to central command. With a tactical advantage, they begin shooting into the side of the horde and circle around their group. James leads them as they cut into the horde, shooting the Marionettes down and wedging themselves between the two forces. After killing nearly one hundred Marionettes, they meet up with George, May and the Slaver's Union guards that are with them.

Combining their strength at central command, they are just in time for Michael to send another wave of Marionettes down the already bloody hallway. Though horribly outnumbered, they've yet to lose a single guard. A combination of training and armor have kept them alive this far, but will it outlast Michael's horde?

"When my slaves capture you, George, I'm going to make you watch as Garin and my male Marionettes rape May and Kira to death! Then, I think I'll skin you alive! HAHAAH!"

"This motherfucker has to die." James growls to George.

"No argument here, bro." George smirks, taking out his blaster and several spare magazines.

"Here!" Prat interrupts.

Stepping up to George, he hands him the second of his two JV-8 submachine guns and three spare magazines. George and the rest of his crew stare in shock. Prat's never surrendered *any* weapon before.

"That purse gun isn't going to help you here, and we need you alive." Prat continues.

Looking around, he glares at the gawking spectators.

"What are you looking at?" He snarls at Donovan as he passes him by.

"Does that mean you two are going steady?" Ein quips.

"Fuck you!" Prat barks.

"Alright, alright! Save the hostility for Michael and his goons! If you burn it all up now, how are you going to have the strength to shove your boots up his ass?" George asks.

"Hell yeah!" Prat primes his submachine gun.

Exiting central command as the shooting recommences, they find the Slaver guards, now nearly one hundred strong, filling the hallway and shooting hordes of Marionettes. Firing back at the Slaver's, their rounds ricochet off of their armor or strike portable ballistic shields, reinforced with small energy barriers to protect against blaster fire. So many Marionettes fall to the Slaver's that their blood runs throughout the hall; it appears to pool nearly an inch deep, coating their boots and knee pads.

During the battle, a lucky shot from one Marionette finds the weakest part of a Slaver guard's helmet; he is the first Slaver to die at Michael's hand, but he won't be the last. Though the Marionettes try their hardest to destroy the Slaver's, the highly trained and well armored guards are simply too strong. Though a second and then a third eventually fall, the Marionette's bodies are piling two layers high throughout the hallway. The stench of their unwashed bodies and the metallic scent of their blood chokes the Slavers.

"Push forward!" George orders, standing just behind the last row of guards.

Without armor or shields to protect him, or any of the other captains, crew, or technicians, the guards who loyally serve George act as a living barrier. Obeying their leader's orders, they push forward. The Marionette's don't appear to have morale of any sort. They continue to attack without fear as the small but formidable Slaver's Union army pushes forward. Some of them stumble as their boots steps on bloody wrists, ankles, arms and shins. They move at a snail's pace, simply to maintain their balance in the battlefield that is the hallway.

The Marionette's don't scream or exclaim, and the soldiers are hardened and cold. It's an eerie scene. The only sounds are that of blasters firing, rounds pinging off of walls, armor and shields, magazines clicking, rifles reloading, and the faint trickling of a river of blood. Soon,

however, they can hear a true cacophony. At the end of the hall, more Slaver's fight the Marionettes. Attempting to follow George's initial orders, they push through the horde of zombie-like combatants on their way to central control.

"This is George Woods! We can hear another group at the end of corridor 3-A! Do you read me?!"

"Captain Silva, at your service, Sir!" A female voice chirps over the radio.

"We're moving through the corridor! We'll regroup with your unit and move as one toward the hangar! Is that understood?!"

"Affir-GET THE FUCK OFF ME! ..." Blaster fire is heard. "Sorry! Affirmative, Sir!"

"Watch your crossfire!" George orders his men, as well as Captain Silva over the radio.

Though they were shooting the Marionettes before, in order to limit potential friendly fire, they switch to sidearms and their melee weapons. Consisting of electron-whips, retractable metal batons and combat knives, they take a considerable risk allowing the Marionettes to come closer. As they slam into the opposing force, handheld blasters fire rapidly, knives jab into bodies and click off of bones, and Marionettes are bludgeoned and whipped to death. Soon, however, they two Slaver forces collide.

After crushing the last Marionette between them, George extends a hand to Captain Silva. The olive skinned,

human female shakes his hand, eager to meet her leader. With a lull in the fighting, she gives him a brief report. Her squad was just beginning their active duty when they were attacked, along with all of the guards about to change shifts with them. Hearing George's order, she was the second in command, but her superior caught a round to the throat and bled out.

Taking control of the warriors, who numbered nearly thirty strong at that time, she pushed toward central control. Along the way, they encountered more Slavers, and many guard detachments. Saving them little by little from the flesh and fur hordes of the Marionettes, they merged into a single, large, cohesive unit under her command. Upon reaching George and his men at the end of the hall, they now make up the bulk of the entire Slaver's Union guard detail, while ever captain but Michael, and all of their living crew are with them.

Now nearly three hundred strong, of which nearly two hundred and twenty are heavily armed and armored warriors, they press onward for Lagos Depot's hangar. George has a plan; if they can board their ships and evacuate, he can use a special command override. A secret backdoor that only one programmer and George himself know about, he could lock out Michael and regain control of the space station. With the station once again under his command, he could open all of the airlocks at once, as well as every door in Lagos.

Michael, Garin and his minions would die from the void of space, and the station could be salvaged before it's too late. First, however, they need to reach the hangar and secure their ships. The only other computer he can use to input this special code is on the bridge of the Bannockburn. Marching through the hallways, they check their weapons.

"How many of these brainless husks have you taken out so far?" Donovan asks a Slaver guard.

"Unsure. My group joined Silva's halfway between the armory and central control. Since then, we've probably wasted a few hundred." He answers.

"We've probably killed about the same." Prat interjects.

"Not even half of them gone? That's not good." Ein remarks in an uncharacteristically serious tone.

"Let's just hope they're not..."

James ends his sentence unfinished at the massive doors to the hangar slowly open. There stands what appears to be much of, if not the entirety of Michael's army. Near the front of his force and on a little pedestal, Garin stands with a bandaged left arm and leg.

"Hello, George!" He calls out.

"That's Admiral to you!" George barks back.

"Heh... Not for long. Would you like to make this easy and commit suicide? Or do I get to have some fun?"

George looks back at his crew and then glances around at the others. He takes a deep breath and holds up his weapon high, so that everyone can see it.

“You see this?! I’m going to ram this whole thing down your putrid little throat!” George exclaims loudly.

“Good. I was hoping for a fight.” Garin grins.