

## Epilogue -- The Machine King

In the moonlit night, high above the Edaran capital there could be seen the slightest flash of steel.

It would be paid no heed by the people walking below, and even to those who looked out from the staggering towers of the nation's largest city it would be lost in the twinkling of the evening lights.

But if they had looked closely, they would have seen a man clad in iron and steel, with a whirring and clicking arm, leg, and eye built from one and the same.

If the people of Mandas had known that Kyrie Krona looked down upon them from the heart of their very capital city, they would have cried out in panic and run.

But they did not know, and the people of the city went about their lives in bliss.

Behind the man, the door to the balcony opened, and a woman dressed in black and marked with his insignia exited onto the balcony.

"Machine King," the woman said, falling to a knee, hand across her chest.

The metal man waved two fingers, indicating for her to continue. She stood and approached him.

"Operation Ember," she said, "was a... *nearly* complete success."

There was a pause that indicated that she was to continue, which she did after gathering herself.

"Four attacks went off exactly as planned," she began, looking down at a piece of parchment in front of her. "However, there were two... irregularities. At Sunsetton, the bomb achieved maximum damage in the port, but our Gifted in the city detected an irregularity, a form of power that matched nothing that they had ever sensed. The same force was detected on the edge of the city later, by the Western Expanse."

"And the other?" he asked. "The village?"

The woman paused again.

"What happened?" he asked.

"No report," she said. "We've heard nothing from them."

"Not a single one?" he asked.

"Not a single one," she said. "Our estimations are that they were wiped out, but we have no concept as to what or why."

"Or who..." the man said, before speaking again.

"And the damage total?" he asked.

"Our estimations are one thousand dead, with thousands more to come in the resulting food shortages from Sunsetton's bombing," she said.

"Rather low," he said.

"The four successful raids yielded on average one hundred and fifty," she said. "They were small towns, mostly evacuated for winter."

"Edara will be on high alert nonetheless," he said. "My main concern is the elimination of our northernmost company. The village... it was close to Rene, was it not?"

"Yes, sir," she answered.

“Then I will attend our next phase directly,” he said. “Expect me gone for Rene by the morning.”

“Yes sir,” she repeated. “Is there anything else?”

“Yes,” he said. “Notify Nightmare, and prepare the Clockwork Soldier.”

“Sir?” she asked.

“I will not take chances,” he said. “Not again.”

“Yes sir,” she said, and with that she left the balcony.

The Machine King turned as the door behind him fell shut, leaving him alone to walk once more to the balcony, looking out above the city, and then out to the country, the lands far afield, and finally to the stars that awaited beyond the horizon.

“I suppose you think I’m a monster,” he said with a smile. Towards who, it was not clear. “But that betrays your small-minded ignorance. Besides, I imagine the ants you crush beneath your feet think you to be quite the monster as well.”