The *Thessalonica* Legacy

A BattleTech/My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Crossover Fanfic

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Chapter 1: The Valexa Situation

South of the Sivry River
Valexa, Capellan March, Federated Suns
2 November 3068

Ramirez pushed again on the throttle control. He knew it wouldn't go any farther forward, not without sacrificing maneuverability. And that would be suicide among these trees dotting the ridge.

Valexa's pale blue-tinged sun was starting to creep higher in the East, casting long shadows across the granite ridge Ramirez's *Valkyrie* BattleMech was navigating. The dawn brought mixed blessings. They'd be able to make better time, but the growing light meant they were running out of time. He glanced at his sensors display, floating in his vision thanks to his neurohelmet's holographic display, as his 30-ton 'Mech nimbly sidestepped a fallen log. All clear. Just himself and Din's gangly, bird-like *Osiris*.

"Ya' still with me, Din?" Ramirez was worried. Normally, Sargent Din Geremek's OSR-3D *Osiris* would easily outpace his VLK-QD1 *Valkyrie*, but an unlucky hit from that Capellan *Vindicator* –the same *Vindicator* that had killed the Leftenant—had severed myomers and smashed actuators all through the left leg of Din's 'Mech, slowing him down and giving the warmachine a pronounced limp.

That was the trade-off. The *Osiris* was fast, with a combat speed nearing 130 KPH, and carried a blistering array of lasers and short-range missiles, but paid for it with a tendency to overheat and thin armor. By contrast, Ramirez's *Valkyrie*, though massing the same, was over 40 KPH slower but had thicker armor and more powerful jumpjets.

Din's voice sounded in Ramirez's ear, "Right behind you, sir." He could hear the strain in the young man's voice. Ramirez smiled weakly. He could understand his lancemate's fear. Din was fresh out of the academy, barely in his 20s, his face still cratered with adolescent acne. This past week had been his first true combat experience.

Ramirez was young, too, only a few years older than the academy grad now following him through Valexa's wilds. Though, unlike his younger compatriot, Sgt. Brandon Ramirez had seen combat, serving with his *Valkyrie* as part of a recon lance against Steiner-loyal forces during the closing stages of the FedCom Civil War. Now, running through the backwoods of Valexa, he was in his element. Moving fast, using the terrain to control line-of-sight, he knew how to do this. He knew these woods and hills intimately. Even before he joined the Militia and became a MechWarrior, he'd hiked these very hills. Now on the run, he drew on every ounce of his knowledge. So far, it had been enough to keep the two of them alive. Even so, he could feel cool sweat beading on his bare arms and legs and he couldn't shake that sinking feeling in the pit of

his stomach.

On his holographic display, Ramirez watched the *Osiris* step out from behind a rock outcrop. Its armor was blackened and scorched all up and down the left side. A dried crust of green coolant stained the red-on-green striped paint around the gaping wounds where autocannon shells had shattered ferro-fiborous composite armor. The boxy short-range missile launcher making the left "arm" had been torn open and dangled uselessly from a handful of myomer bundles.

"Alright, stay close. We're almost to the end of the ridge. Then it's across the Sivry River, and a clear run to the pass." Ramirez paused, and then asked the question he'd been dreading since they shook that patrol. "How are your jumpjets?" With the leg damage, Din would never be able to ford the river. They would have to rely of the *Osiris'* jumpjets to launch the 'Mech over the rushing waters.

"Right are fine. Left side jets, I've got… one out and one in the yellow. I'm down to 90 meters."

Ramirez nodded, though he knew Din couldn't see the gesture "All right, stay to the ridge and keep your speed up." He realized they had been whispering, as if afraid of being heard. They had been using encrypted tight-band directional radio and laser-links to talk to each other. Completely secure, of course. Still, instincts die hard.

As the minutes ticked by, Ramirez began to relax a little. Perhaps those Capellan 'Mechs hadn't followed them, after all. If so, it would be the first thing to go right since they left on this mad dash to reach Valexa's Bimini Mountains. Hell, it'd be the first thing to go right since the Chancellor's troops arrived in system.

They'd been expecting an attack, of course. The March Militias had been mobilized as soon as the Federated Suns began their push into Capellan territory last June, re-liberating St. Ives and penetrating all the way to the worlds of Hexare, Imalda, and Glasgow—only one hyperspace jump away from the Capellan capital world of Sian.

Then things got strange. The news reports said a warship appeared over Sian and bombarded the Forbidden City. Chancellor Sun-Tsu Liao was missing, feared dead. What's more, the Capellans claimed the warship that launched the attack belonged to the Federated Suns.

Preposterous, of course. Everyone in the AFFS knew it could not have been one of theirs, not with most of the navy struggling to break the Word of Blake blockade on New Avalon. Of course, that would not assuage their ancient enemies. When *Sang-jiang-jun* Zahn, acting for the missing Chancellor Liao, launched a massive counterattack that sent the AFFS regular troops reeling, the militias were brought to full readiness.

When the counterattack became a counter-invasion, militia troops on Valexa knew trouble was coming. When Capellan troops landed on Algot and Halloran V, they knew it would be

coming soon.

Still, when the attack did come, it was much faster and much more vicious than any could have predicted. Appearing at a pirate point, two full regiments of BattleMechs supported by another of heavy armor and some seven squadrons of aerospace fighters descended on the Militia's single 'Mech regiment and still understrength armor and aerospace support. Almost as surprising as the speed of the attack was the units involved: 2nd McCarron's Armored Cavalry and Warrior House *Daidachi*, some of the most elite troops in the entire Capellan Confederation Armed Forces.

And then there were the 'Mechs painted all black. No one in the Militia could tell how many there were; at least a battalion, certainly. Whoever they were, they always seemed to show up in the wrong place. Their equipment was top-notch. Their pilots were ruthless. The rumor was, they were the Death Commandos—the Chancellor's personal special forces 'storm troopers'.

The Valexa March Militia was not a green unit. The regiment had seen heavy fighting in the FedCom Civil War. They were tried, battle-hardened troops, even if they had recently taken on a number of new recruits to replenish their ranks. Even so, they were easily outmatched by the elite Capellan shock troops. The Militia Aerospace squadrons were swept aside in a matter of minutes. The spaceport was seized in hours. While Leftenant-General Delittle led 1st and 3rd Battalions in a counterattack to reclaim the Goa Heights, a lightning-fast combat drop by elements from House *Daidachi's* 2nd Battalion flanked the Militia, destroyed their repair facilities, raided their stockpiles, and cut them off from retreat.

Ramirez and Din had avoided that disaster, but just barely. Leftenant Waldeve had led her lance—herself, Ramirez, Din, and Jayn Ricco—to intercept a Capellan recon lance spotted trying to sneak around 3rd Battalion's right flank. They ended up fighting a running battle leading away from the main force, taking full advantage of their local knowledge of the terrain. During the skirmish, Ramirez actually managed to drop a *Raven*, one of the Confederation's prized electronic-warfare scouts. The rest of the Capellan probe slipped away, but by that time the main Militia force had already been lost.

Now, broken and scattered, the Valexa March Militia was on the verge of collapse. Leftenant-General Bolan's infantry brigade had managed to hold the port city of Smithson and some of the more remote facilities in the Bimini Mountains, but without immediate help the planet would be lost. They needed the AFFS to send either reinforcements and supplies for a protracted resistance, or to withdraw the surviving Militia armored units off-planet to regroup, rearm, and reinforce defenses deeper in FedSuns territory and allow a surrender—if only temporarily—of the planet. They needed to get a message out, but with the invaders controlling both the spaceport and the capital of Valexa City with its ComStar-run HPG station, how were they to get their request for aid and their intelligence of Capellan strength and disposition to AFFS command?

There was one option, but it was risky. Though the invaders had captured the main

spaceport, there was a subsidiary airfield large enough to serve as a runway for a small DropShip on a plateau in the Bimini Mountains. So far, Bolan's infantry brigade had managed to keep it in Militia hands, possibly because the invaders had made no indication they were aware of its existence. At this remote field was a *Leopard*-class DropShip, the *Felicity Klimkosky*. This DropShip had been returning from ferrying a strike lance from 2nd Battalion to a defensive firebase in the northern deserts when the invasion came. Her captain had put the ship down at the Bimini Mountain base to avoid Capellan aerospace patrols, and as such had been one of the few DropShips in Militia possession to avoid destruction.

There was also a JumpShip waiting at the Nadir Jump Point. Most of the Militia's JumpShips were off aiding other branches of the Capellan March Militia in their rapid retreat from the Confederation onslaught. One, though, the *Scout*-class ship *Silvertongue*, had been undergoing routine maintenance to its K-F boom. As such, it was still in-system and could ferry the *Felicity Klimkosky* to wherever they needed to go. Naturally, the idea of simply radioing the *Silvertongue* and having them leave to take the message directly had come up, but quickly dismissed as the transmission could be easily traced, and with the large amount of ECM jamming the Capellans were using, the message might not get through in the first place. That jamming also led to problems contacting the *Felicity Klimkosky*. The Militia had managed to get simple messages through to the defenders in the mountains alerting them of the plan, but it had been deemed vital to get what intelligence on the Capellan forces as they could off planet as well. Such a transmission posed similar problems as radioing the JumpShip. That meant the intelligence would have to be delivered by hand. And that meant someone would have to get through Capellan lines and reach the DropShip waiting in the mountains.

And that was why Ramirez and Din were running for their lives through the lightly-wooded hills south of the Sivry River trying to make it to the Upland Pass. The higher-ups had debated long and hard on who to send. A VTOL could get there quickly, but the Militia had none left operational. A fast-moving hovercraft would be thwarted by the forested hills and high mountain passes, and any other vehicle wouldn't be able to make it across the Sivry without a bridge—which were all under enemy control. An infantry unit could make it, but would take much too long. In the end, only a BattleMech was deemed capable of making the journey.

There were precious few 'Mechs to spare, and most of the handful left in working order were heavily damaged in the fighting. Leftenant Waldeve's pursuit lance, being fast, light BattleMechs in full fighting condition, were tasked with the job. Each of their four 'Mechs carried a copy of the vital intelligence, and each of the four MechWarriors was briefed on where to go, what to say, and who to say it to. So long as at least one of them got out, there was hope of relief from the rest of the AFFS.

The operation began well enough. A diversionary raid by the remnants of Carliste's Armor Battalion in the early hours of the morning allowed Waldeve's lance to slip through enemy lines and begin their run to the Pass. The first hour barely saw any Capellan patrols.

Then, they ran into that Assault Lance.

They had been following a river valley as it wound through a narrow gorge. When they rounded a bend, there they were, painted in the colors of the 2nd McCarron's Armored Cavalry and partially hidden in the trees, waiting for them. A massive *Yu Huang* and *Cerberus*, a new type of *Marauder* Ramirez had never seen before, and the runt of the pack, a 45-ton *Vindicator*. Any one of these 'Mechs would be a deadly opponent for them. The *Yu Huang* and *Cerberus* each weighed as much as three of their own 'Mechs put together and each devoted more mass to weapon systems than Ramirez's *Valkyrie* weighed in total.

Poor Ricco was on point. A flash of silver, and a hypersonic gauss rifle slug from the *Cerberus* ripped his *Assassin's* torso nearly in half. Then, a bright flash from a particle projection cannon and his 'Mech disintegrated in a brilliant fireball as his own ammunition destroyed his 'Mech from the inside out. Ramirez looked for Ricco to eject, but saw nothing.

Ramirez's *Valkyrie* and Din's *Osiris* had jumpjets, allowing them to leap clear of the gorge and into the relative safety of the woods. The Leftenant wasn't so lucky. Her *Wolfhound* could be deadly if given room to run, but did not have jumpjets. She would have to either run the gauntlet or climb the ravine walls. Ramirez and Din ducked in and out of the woods to try and give the Leftenant covering fire, but she was pinned down under the assault 'Mechs' massive guns. Unable to help, Ramirez watched in horror as the *Yu Huang's* massive autocannon blasted armor from *Wolfhound's* chest and sent the 'Mech sprawling across the ravine floor. The *Vindicator*, fast and nimble, swept in and cut the *Wolfhound*'s leg off with its particle cannon, then with a swift movement, drove its armored foot down on the stricken 'Mech's head.

Then the assault lance moved to chase down himself and Din. They ran, trying to break line-of-sight. The *Marauder* and *Cerberus* fell behind quickly, but the *Vindicator* and *Yu Huang*, each with jumpjets of their own, pursued them relentlessly. At one point, Din got caught in the open between a couple stands of trees, and was rewarded with massive blasts from the *Yu Huang's* heavy autocannon and the *Vindicator's* particle cannon for his trouble. Somehow, the rookie pilot had managed to keep his machine upright and moving. It was shortly after that they lost contact. Ramirez still wasn't sure if they gave the Capellans the slip, or if they let them go.

That had been several hours ago, only shortly after midnight. Ramirez still anxiously watched his sensors display, but now he was starting to think they just might have made it after all. They were nearing the river, and the mountains were just beyond. Then it was just a nice, mountain hike, which would be made much easier and faster by their jumpjets, and then…

"ECM jamming to the southwest!" Din's voice cut in. He had fallen behind again and was limping to join Ramirez at the base of the ridge.

Ramirez looked at his own sensors, but didn't see anything to indicate jamming. But then, he was farther along the ridge than Din was by nearly half a kilometer. If the jamming bubble was at the extreme of Din's range he might not be able to detect it yet anyway.

"Keep an eye on it. Hopefully it's just a patrol and they'll miss us. Stay low and in the trees."

They kept moving to the north, but now his anxiety was growing. The enemy was out there, and they were close. That ECM bubble could mean anything. All combat units had sophisticated ECM which flooded any battlefield, and a bevy of sensors to try and power through it. Some combat vehicles and ‘Mechs went a step above and mounted the powerful Guardian ECM. When everyone’s ECM was screaming at the top of their lungs, the Guardian went and screamed louder. Anything within a Guardian’s effective radius was hidden from all but line-of-sight sensors. That bubble could be a lowly scout car, or it could be an elite BattleMech company. They could tell which direction the jamming was coming from, but they wouldn’t know what was in it until it came into view, and that was a dangerous situation.

The jamming bubble grew closer. Ramirez’s computer was noting its presence now, too. He wanted to get to the other side of the ridge and put a hundred meters of solid rock between him and any sensors anyone in that bubble was packing, but that would mean exposing himself while he crossed the ridge. And using jumpjets now would definitely draw attention.

Superheated air cracked as a perfectly straight line of leaves and branches suddenly flashed with an incandescent light. The laser beam had passed dangerously close to Din’s lagging ‘Mech. The young MechWarrior cursed. Whatever was in that bubble was shooting at them, and it had a large-class laser.

“Move closer to the ridge, Din. Try to keep as many trees between you and them as possible.”

“I see one, sir!” Din responded. “I can’t get a lock on it, and it’s not showing up on anything but optical.”

Ramirez swore to himself then keyed his radio “Stealth armor. The Cappies are mounting it on some of their newer ‘Mechs. Makes ‘em damned hard to hit at range.”

The ultimate in ECM, Capellan stealth armor used everything from special heat baffles to the latest radar absorbent materials to make a ‘Mech almost as invisible to sensors as possible. Most effective at long ranges, it was expensive to produce and difficult to maintain. Only the best line troops fielded stealth units.

The air cracked again as another laser beam lanced through it. This one passed harmlessly behind the two Militia ‘Mechs. Ramirez still couldn’t see their assailant, and Din was claiming he had broken line-of-sight prior to the shot. For several minutes more they ducked along the base of the ridge. Every now and then, another beam would lance out from their assailant, sometimes in their vicinity, sometimes not. Ramirez was beginning to wonder what this Cappie’s game was. Why was he firing blindly?

The granite ridge drew lower to the ground then disappeared altogether. Before them lay a broad clearing, then shallow hill dotted with a light sprinkling of tall trees. And immediately beyond, Ramirez could see the grey ribbon of the Sivry. Almost there, just another 400 meters or

so. Their ‘Mechs could cross that distance in a matter of seconds, easily.

Another laser beam cracked behind them. The growing unease in Ramirez’s mind finally boiled over. Something definitely wasn’t right. He felt like that stealthed ‘Mech was herding them, trying to flush them out of their cover in the woods.

He pulled back on the throttle. His *Valkyrie* slowed its run, coming to a stop at the edge of the woods. Din was still a hundred meters behind, and the mysterious assailant off somewhere to the left, still shrouded in its ECM bubble.

Cautiously, he eased his ‘Mech backwards as Din came up next to him.

“What’s wrong, Sir?”

“I don’t like the looks of this, Din. I’m going to take a quick look around.” With that, he slammed his throttle forward again and pressed down on the right foot pedal. The *Valkyrie* turned on its heel and dashed back into the woods, the hand at the end of the left arm automatically rising up to bat a tree branch out of the way.

He guided his ‘Mech up onto the granite rise, giving him a commanding view of the area. He was met by the crack of another laser beam sizzling right over his ‘Mech’s left shoulder. There was the offender. He thumbed his control stick and activated the zoom on his display. The distant ‘Mech was magnified in his vision. He recognized it instantly; the backwards-canted legs, the stubby torso and forward-jutting cockpit. A Hellespont Industries *Sha Yu*. Indeed, now that he could see it, his *Valkyrie’s* computer handily identified it as a SYU-2B.

Only the one, though. The ECM bubble did not seem to be hiding anyone else. That was fine by him, at 40 tons, that *Sha Yu* was dangerous enough. In addition to its advanced armor, the Capellan ‘Mech mounted four lasers—two Martell Extended-Range Large and two Diverse Optics Extended-Range Mediums. More than enough firepower to reduce his ‘Mech to scrap.

He could fight it. Even with the difficulties of penetrating the stealth armor’s ECM, he could hit it. His *Valkyrie’s* LRM launcher had a slight range advantage on the Martell lasers, and with the stealth armor running, the *Sha Yu* wouldn’t be able to fire more than one of them at a time without overheating. He would miss a lot, though. A quick glance at his weapons indicator put the idea of a fight out of his mind. His *Valkyrie* carried 16 reloads for its Valiant Arbalest LRM 15 Missile Pack. He’d expended 11 of them in the battle with the assault lance, leaving him only five shots.

No, better to try and outrun it. He turned again and sent his ‘Mech crashing back down the ridge. As he did so, the low morning sun glinted off something in the woods on the hill by the river.

Ambush. The word jumped to his mind. That *Sha Yu* had been herding them, and now his friends were waiting to blast them apart as they dashed for the river.

They did have one option. They could run to the east and cross the river farther down. So long as that *Sha Yu* pilot kept his stealth armor active, his firepower was effectively halved, and they might have a chance to slip away.

As if in response to his plan, his sensors beeped a warning. New sensor trace. The pilot of the *Sha Yu* had deactivated his stealth armor, and was charging their position.

So much for that. They needed as much distance between them and that 'Mech as possible. The *Sha Yu* didn't have jumpjets, so if they could get across the river, it would at least slow him down.

"Din! Run! Northeast! Go!" Branches snapped as the 30-ton behemoth plowed its way through. They had to get across the river. There were still the unknowns in those woods, but he'd just have to hope they could slip around them by avoiding the run straight towards the banks and instead trying to swing around to the east.

The *Valkyrie* tore into the clearing just behind Din's *Osiris*, graceful in comparison to its battered companion. Ramirez swung more to the east, trying to avoid the woods on the hill. He hoped Din would follow suit. The *Sha Yu* was still somewhere back beyond the woods along the rise, out of sight. The river grew closer. They were going to make it!

Ramirez's sensors beeped again to alert him of the new contacts. A quartet of *Po*-class heavy tanks broke out from beneath their camouflage netting.

Ramirez saw Din turn to meet this new threat. He yelled for his lancemate to stop and break off the attack. But, the young MechWarrior was trained to fight, and had been indoctrinated that the BattleMech was the king of the battlefield. As the lead tank broke free of the light woods, a stream of high-explosive shells erupted from its Class 10 autocannon with a rumbling roar. Magnesium flashes danced across Din's *Osiris* as ablative armor was torn asunder. The right leg buckled as the hip actuator was blown apart, pitching the hapless 'Mech forward and to the ground.

Ramirez only let out a frustrated grunt as he twitched his control stick and slammed on the left foot pedal. The *Valkyrie* twisted at the waist and pirouetted to the left, left arm extended for balance. He could see his 'Mech's right arm, ending in the stubby muzzle of an ER Medium laser, rising to take aim with his reticule. He thumbed the targeting circuit then waited, counting the heartbeats until the reticle flashed gold, and pulled the trigger.

Fifteen sets of armored doors slid open on fifteen cylinders arranged in a cluster occupying much of the left side of the *Valkyrie's* torso. With a faint puff of smoke, fifteen missiles rocketed forth in rapid succession and arced up high into the dawn sky. Individual missiles could be easily foiled by ECM, dodged, or shot down. As such, weapon designers had long ago learned that swarms of small missiles launched en masse were of much more use on the modern battlefield. Ramirez's VLK-QD1 carried 240 individual missiles, each weighing less than a mere nine

kilograms, which it launched in flights of 15 at a time. Individually, each missile was not much of a threat to modern ablative armor. When taken all together, they could wear down even the heaviest defenses.

The LRMs homed in on the Artemis IV targeting beam from the *Valkyrie*, racing down to shatter armor along the tank's flank. Moments later, the sound of the staccato explosions filtered through Ramirez's cockpit, loud even at this distance. Triggering the zoom on his display, he watched in satisfaction as the tank's treads sloughed off and the vehicle ground to a halt. With another twitch of his fingers on the control stick, a bright light, bright as a welding torch, flared up as Ramirez's laser scribed a black furrow across the stricken tank's side. Normally, the *Po's* armor would have been more than enough to withstand that onslaught, but Ramirez was aiming for where he had specifically watched his missiles strike. A gout of flame ripped the tank apart.

The other tanks, however, had already cleared the woods. Din was still on the ground. His *Osiris* floped around, trying to maneuver its busted legs underneath it, propping itself up as well as it could on its stubby weapons pod of an arm. The autocannons of the next two tanks caught him dead-on. One ripped into the already savaged left side, cracking the fusion engine. The second stream hit the *Osiris* right in the center and stitched upwards, shattering the cockpit. Flashes of light showed out as cool morning air rushed into the superheated reactor while the 'Mech collapsed in a heap.

Now Ramirez was alone. Against three tanks and a medium-class BattleMech still charging around the rise, he knew there was no chance.

"Sorry, Din." He whispered, and stomped hard on both foot pedals at once. The jumpjets mounted on his 'Mech's legs and rear torso let off with a whine which quickly built to a roar. The 'Mech lifted heavily into the air, his neurohelmet reading his impulses to help keep the machine stable. He set fly one last salvo of LRMs at one of the tanks, but did not bother to see whether they hit or not. He let the jets of superheated air carry him up and over the churning river. Once he reached the other side, he cut the jets and hit the ground running. Autocannon shells whizzed past, but with speed and a couple more jumps, he put a several low hills between him and his foes. Pointing his 'Mech north, he ran as fast as he could towards the mountains looming above him.