

Living together with Gloriana aboard a single ship was an entirely new experience to Ves. While he had to get used to Gloriana's idiosyncrasies such as her expression of her faith, all in all he felt as if he stepped into a paradise.

After spending so much time alone, he began to rediscover the pleasures of life. Talking, hugging, kissing and working together with Gloriana brightened his life like never before.

Whereas before his life revolved around his work, the addition of a woman by his side introduced a lot of brightness in his daily routine.

His days with Gloriana brought so much pleasure and contentment to him that his paranoia flared up from time to time. How could he be so lucky to mesh so well with another mech designer? It sounded too good to be true!

For this reason, Ves never let up his vigilance. He continually sent out Lucky to harvest more data from the Stellar Chaser's databanks. He also sent out his spiritual projections to inspect each and every crew member aboard the ship to see if they weren't hidden Compact agents or anything.

Nothing. Ves found nothing suspicious about his girlfriend among his nightly investigations. She appeared to be exactly as she presented herself as, and that confused him for some time.

As someone who frequently lied and resorted to misdirection, he couldn't really understand how Gloriana could be so honest and forthright to everyone.

From all of the communication logs he skimmed over, he never got the impression that Gloriana exhibited any hypocrisy or duplicity.

"She doesn't have to." He realized. "The life she has led is different from mine."

She never had to fight for her life. She was protected around the clock by well-equipped guards and mechs. She mostly resided in the safest places in the Scimitar System and the rest of the Hegemony.

In addition, Gloriana did not have any interactions with scoundrels, pirates, spies and other scum. She never needed to adopt a flexible attitude to protect herself or get ahead in life. Her mother and the Wodin Dynasty had already paved most of the way for her success.

Gloriana enjoyed an enviable life. Though she still had to work hard on her account in order to meet her mother's incredibly high expectations, she only needed to be a good mech designer.

She didn't even have to sully her hands by engaging in politics, which was an important factor in keeping her pure!

It made sense once Ves regarded Gloriana as a product of the Wodin Dynasty. With thousands of descendants, each Wodin born into their name was expected to fulfill a specific purpose. Just like many other noble houses or dynasties, those who disgraced their families or ended up as good-for-nothings would be stripped of their esteemed names!

As a prominent and future high-ranking mech designer, the Wodins obviously treated Gloriana as a treasure to their entire dynasty. They did not raise her to become the next matriarch. They raised her to become their principal mech designer!

Though Ves wasn't completely comfortable with this arrangement, he knew it was a fair one.

He wasn't really sure what that meant in terms of their relationship. Would he become a potency of the Wodins once he married her? If they expected him to worship the ground that women walked upon, then he would definitely take issue!

Still, the joy he gained in his life far outweighed his concerns. In any case, becoming a potency of the Wodin Dynasty meant he also enjoyed their protection.

Nonetheless, if Ves wanted to earn the Wodin Dynasty's approval, he had to show to them that he could bring much more value to them than any other potential suitor to Gloriana!

The suggestions that she put forward troubled him continually.

"Producing a bunch of masterworks derived from excellent second-class mech designs will kill two birds with one stone." She told him during their cuddling time in the lounge. Their cats cuddled together as well below their feet. "Not only will you be able to prove you're better than the Journeymen from the Hegemony, but we can also earn an incredible amount of hex credits in the process to fund our upcoming expedition! It's a perfect solution!"

Ves smiled awkwardly at her. "I admire your enthusiasm, but you ask too much of me. Crafting my first masterwork mech a few months ago was just a fluke. I keep telling you over and over again that masterworks can never be produced on demand!"

"We don't have to make too many masterworks! Just a handful is enough for us to afford a factory ship!"

"How can that be?" He frowned. "As far as I know, the factory ships up to Hegemony standard are ludicrously expensive!"

She smiled and patted her forearm. "Oh, you silly boy, you underestimate the value of high-quality custom mechs. There are many wealthy scions in the Hegemony who would gladly pay a lot of hex credits to pilot a mech that can bring out the most of their strengths. If their mech is a masterwork on top of that, they can not only be assured that they are piloting the best that their

money could buy, but they can also earn a lot of prestige from owning such a prized and rare machine!"

He understood both of those arguments. He knew that wealthy and powerful mech pilots like Lord Javier of House Eneqqin or Lady Miralix of House Laterna were willing to pay enormous sums to maximize their chances of success.

In their perspective, spending five to ten times the price of a standard mech was more than worth the expenditure if they achieved a lot of success in battle!

In their societies, success in battle directly translated into greater reputation, which would pay them a lot of dividends in the future such as being appointed to senior leadership positions.

As for masterwork mechs, they were so rare that each of them were pretty much regarded as trophies. Their excellent craftsmanship and exquisitely optimized performance would definitely earn the admiration of peers!

While their actual performance did not differ too much from non-masterwork mechs, the symbolic value they held simply couldn't be bought on demand, which justified their insane price premiums!

"In other words, wealthy people are willing to spend insane amounts to satisfy their vanity." He summed up.

"Vanity is not inherently bad when it gets you ahead." She added. "When I tell you that Hexers are willing to fund our factory ship to obtain an excellent masterwork mech, I really mean it. One thing you have to know about the second-class mech market is that it features a considerably higher price ceiling than what you are used to! The scions of the matriarchal dynasties are even willing to pay a thousand times the price of a standard mech to pilot an excellent, custom masterwork mech!"

Translated to the Bright Republic, that meant that a mech pilot from one of the founding families was willing to pay 60 billion credits or more for a custom masterwork mech!

Such an immense price tag was more expensive than many expert mechs, and it was mostly due to the fact that it was a masterwork!

Ves shook his head. "Even if I can accept that there are moneybags in the Hegemony who are willing to invest so much in a masterwork mech, that still leaves the fundamental problem of making them. Why are you so sure that we can produce not one, but several within a decade?"

Her grin widened. "Have you forgotten about my specialty?"

He had grown more and more familiar with what she was capable of. Her design philosophy and her high standards pushed her to excel in almost every matter concerning mechs. Whether it was offense, defense or mobility, she sought to develop a thorough understanding of all of them in order to ensure that every aspect of her work was as flawless as possible!

If not for the incredible capabilities and processing power of her Erestal-015 implant, she would have never been capable of keeping up with all of her studies!

In any case, her targeted focus on designing and building the perfect vessel meant that her design philosophy applied to her mech designs in a very odd manner.

The best way to describe it was that her design philosophy imposed an effect that was opposite to Murphy's law. What could go wrong might not go wrong. Any weak points and flaws in her designs became a little less serious in practice.

The reason why her design philosophy fell under Class IX rather than Class I was that this effect did not necessarily interfere with other effects applied to

mechs. Instead, her design philosophy helped them perform better by mitigating some of the flawed and suboptimal implementations!

It was no wonder the MTA regarded her so highly. Her specialty effectively amplified the specialties of other mech designers in collaborative design projects!

The extreme and diverse range of possibilities of Class IX design philosophies mostly produced garbage, but occasionally a gem like Gloriana came around to redeem her class!

Of course, at this stage the effect was barely noticeable. It also remained to be seen whether Gloriana could progress to the point where it was worthwhile to involve her in a project.

However, Ves remembered that her specialty also played a role in fabricating mechs aside from designing them. She already told him that she always fabricated her custom mechs in person to achieve the most ideal result.

Having studied some of her project logs, Ves recalled that the quality of her end products always turned out to be high. When Ves connected these outcomes to her specialty, he began to make a very bold realization.

He looked shocked at her. "Don't tell me.. your specialty is geared towards producing masterworks?"

"Hihihi! You guessed it!" She raised her hands towards her mouth. "How can I design the perfect vessel but fail in the execution? Such outcomes spoil much of what I am working towards! For this reason, achieving the highest quality possible in producing a mech has always been my second ambition! Nothing brings more fulfillment to me than succeeding in creating a masterwork mech!"

The ambition she set forward frankly scared Ves. Almost no one could reliably produce masterwork mechs! Not even Master Mech Designers could

consistently produce them, and some still hadn't managed to produce them despite their formidable skill!

"From the rumors I've heard, only Star Designers are able to make masterwork mechs on demand." He spoke.

"There are exceptions. You know that, right? Some mech designers have managed to achieve this threshold at the Master-level."

"You're not a Master." Ves pointedly retorted. "You're still a Journeyman, and a very young one at that. Specialty or not, at this stage in your progression, you are incredibly far away from producing masterworks on a consistent basis."

She never let up on her optimism. "That may be true, but as long as I make some progress, my chances of making one may become high enough that we can succeed in producing at least a couple of masterworks in the next decade!"

"Why are you so confident?"

"Because I have you, a mech designer who has already built his first masterwork! Do you know how hard I tried to approach the mech designers in the Hegemony who have made similar achievements? It's incredibly hard for them to take notice of me, especially because they are already esteemed Seniors or Masters who prefer to collaborate within their own networks!"

"And you think that working with me can solve this problem?"

"Why not?" She smiled. "I believe in you, Ves. What's more, I believe that combining our design philosophies will allow us to achieve remarkable results!"

She sure expected much out of their union! Whether their collaboration projects actually achieved the outcome she expected was still in question.

"I don't think we'll be able to make enough masterwork mechs to fund our entire grand expedition."

He was afraid she would go mad or something if they failed to meet this goal by the time he wanted to depart.

Surprisingly, she wasn't as intolerant as he thought.

"That's okay, Ves. We should just do the best we can and earn as much money as we can make in the next few years. If we still come up short, we can always cover our deficit by drawing upon outside investment. The Wodin Dynasty and various external parties would be glad to invest in our ventures as long as we show at least some promise together."

That sounded a lot more reasonable. Combining both solutions to fund their grand expedition gave them enough flexibility to go forward regardless of their results!

Chapter 1522 Retraining and Reforming

As the days went by as their combined fleet made their way out of the Hertog Dominion, Ves made sure to keep in contact with his people.

He had to borrow the Stellar Chaser's communication systems to contact others, but he trusted Gloriana enough to refrain from meddling in his affairs.

For example, Ves finally heard back from Commander Cinnabar. He accepted his call in his guest room.

"My entire crew came to a unanimous decision." The bearded man spoke over the comm. "We think that working for you is our best ticket to success."

That was surprising.

"How difficult was it for you to convince the doubters to change their minds?"

"To be honest, I didn't have to put too much pressure on them. As soon as I told them that Miss Gloriana Wodin is your girl, they connected the dots themselves."

In other words, the Battle Criers did not necessarily base their decision by weighing his own merits. Instead, they made a bet that working for Ves was their best option because of the benefits his girlfriend might provide to their organization!

Though Ves felt a bit devalued in comparison to his girlfriend, the outcome was nevertheless in his favor. He shouldn't complain too much, especially since he predicted that he would encounter this kind of situation lots of times in the future.

Hooking up with a powerful Hexer mech designer was actually pretty nice! Ves understood Patricia Schneider's situation a lot better now that he tasted the benefits himself!

"Okay." He nodded to the commander. "I will make sure your Battle Criers won't regret your decisions. While it will take some time for me to live up to your expectations, I hope you can work for me without reserve."

"Will we be piloting second-class mechs in the future?"

"It's a possibility in the far future." Ves replied, revealing some of his future plans. "A lot of focused training is required to bring your mech pilots up to second-class standards. It will be harder to accomplish this for already-mature mech pilots. The only reason I'm considering this option at all is because I value the ironclad loyalty of Kinner bondsmen. If you want me to invest in your training, then prove me right."

"We won't disappoint your expectations, sir."

While it was possible to retrain a third-class mech pilot into a second-class mech pilot, Ves believed he could lean on Gloriana for help. He only needed

her to order the Glory Battation to take charge in retraining the Battle Criers and anyone else he found worthy.

"What about the Ingvar siblings?"

Commander Cinnabar grinned. "They turned around the fastest when they realized that your relationship with Miss Wodin isn't as exaggerated as they thought. None of us really thought you actually captured the heart of a powerful and wealthy Hexer!"

It suddenly dawned on Ves that he could have hired more valuable mech pilots. Not only did he increase his own reputation and standing during his year-long trip, he also gained Gloriana's halo now that they showed to everyone that they were committed in a relationship!

Nonetheless, Ves prized loyalty above all. He would rather work with the people who had been with him for some time. Besides, he still saw a lot of value in the adaptability and scoundrel-like nature of the Battle Criers.

Once he finished discussing matters with Commander Cinnabar, he contacted Melkor and asked about the status of the Avatars of Myth.

"I'm certain that you will be pleasantly surprised at what we've managed to achieve when you return home." Commander Melkor spoke confidently. "We have passed our growth period and worked out all of the kinks. The loyalty, cohesion and skill of all of our Avatar mech pilots are completely up to standard."

Ves nodded in satisfaction. "I look forward to inspecting my Avatars in person. How much progress have you made in selecting Avatars who are willing to leave the Bright Republic and participate in my upcoming grand expedition?"

"Not much, to be honest. Even if we offer them better pay and perks, many of our men and women are attached to their families and social circles at home. Since I can't find too many takers from our ranks, I've already begun to search

out suitable candidates in the job market, though that is slow going due to the current crisis."

"Well, I can't say I expected it to be easy." Ves sighed. "I have a proposal to remedy the lack of willingness. I've made a decision with regards to the grand expedition's troop composition. I want to split the current Avatars of Myth into two!"

"That.. that's a big decision!"

"It's the logical decision to make under the circumstances. I originally founded the Avatars of Myth to serve as my personal mech troop and to demonstrate my products. Due to various reasons, we've been forced to expand the scope of the Avatars to provide protection for the LMC. At this point in time, I believe it's best to separate the latter function to a dedicated company force. What is left of the Avatars can go back to their roots."

"So you plan to split off a company force and transfer its ownership to the LMC?"

Ves nodded. "Correct. I want you to find a trustworthy leader among the Avatars who can lead this offshoot. The company force will basically be charged with providing security to all LMC assets and vital personnel. They will not be tasked to perform any offensive missions or go on any lengthy excursions. While I expect them to maintain some standards, it is not necessary to groom them into elites."

It took some time for Melkor to process the changes. The implications of this decision were vast!

"I think this is the best course of action." He eventually stated. "I've sounded out many Avatars, and few are actually adventurous and unattached enough to uproot their entire lives on your command."

"I thought they're supposed to be loyal."

"They are loyal, yes, but loyalty is conditional and can come in many forms. I think it's best to say that they are more loyal to the institution than you in person. That's why I think it's for the best if command of this new company force is transferred to the LMC."

"If their loyalty only extends this far, then I don't mind leaving them behind in the Bright Republic when it is time to set off." Ves scowled a bit. "I'm hoping to reform the Avatars of Myth into a force that truly answers to me. Not only do I want my Avatars to accompany me on the expedition, I also want you to retrain them so that they are capable of piloting second-class mechs!"

Melkor looked shocked. "You are asking for much! Even if our Avatars are better than average, it isn't so easy for them to acquire the qualifications to pilot second-class mechs!"

"That's not a problem. We have a decade to accomplish this goal, it will be easier if I ask my girlfriend's Glory Battalion to guide the retraining effort."

His cousin still frowned. "Why don't you just hire second-class pilots from the start? With your current wealth and status, it shouldn't be impossible for you to form a completely new force made up of native Hexers."

"Hahaha! Are you kidding?" Ves sardonically laughed. "I'm not going to entrust my life to Hexers! While I'm sure that Gloriana will be responsible for most of the security forces that make up the grand expedition, I want to bring at least one mech force that is in my pocket and won't be a complete laughingstock. Do you understand my concerns?"

"I do."

"As I've said, we have a decade to reform the Avatars of Myth. If we can't find enough willing mech pilots from our existing ranks, then try and recruit talented and capable mech pilots from the job market. Will you be able to manage that, Melkor?"

Surprisingly, Melkor looked confident. "With the conditions you set forward? I think we'll be able to find a lot more takers! As long as people hear that you are willing to retrain them into second-class mech pilots, I can guarantee you that we will be flooded with thousands of applicants!"

Ves blinked. He could actually envision such an outcome.

Many third-class mech designers dreamed of becoming second-class mech designers in order to earn more money.

Was it any surprise for him to learn that many third-class mech pilots wanted to upgrade themselves into second-class mech pilots?

Not only would they be able to pilot much more powerful mechs, but they also expected to earn a higher salary!

"If that's the case, then make sure to maintain a high selection standard. For now, limit your selection to talented and promising Brighter and Ylvainan mech pilots. The younger, the better. It takes a lot of effort and money to retrain a mech pilot, so I want to get a lot of use out of them before they retire."

"Younger mech pilots are also easier to retrain." Melkor agreed. "They're not yet set in their ways. It would be as if they are still a mech academy. Why open the Avatars to the Ylvainans, by the way? I think we can satisfy all our needs with Brighters alone."

"I don't want my Avatars of Myth to reflect a single origin. They need to be loyal to me rather than our state. Introducing Ylvainans will break up the insularity of your ranks and open up the possibility of recruiting more foreigners."

"If you put it that way, then I agree. It's just.. the Ylvainans are pretty strange. I think a lot of Brighters will take issue with their faith."

"Kick them out if they can't handle diversity." Ves resolutely stated. "The Ylvainan Faith is mostly harmless as long as their believers keep their faith to themselves. Considering my reputation the Protectorate, I think it will be very easy for you to recruit enough Ylvainans."

"Okay, Ves. I'll try my best and see if I can integrate the two cultures. Speaking of which, what is your stance on opening up our recruitment to Larkinsons? The mech pilots that come from our family are much better trained and I think they'll be very loyal to your cause if you give them the chance to retrain them into second-class mech pilots. I certainly look forward to this opportunity!"

"This.." Ves paused a bit as he considered bringing in his family. "It's acceptable as long as the Larkinsons are loyal to me rather than the Larkinson Family or the Bright Republic. Do you understand?"

Melkor grinned. "Oh, I think many Larkinsons will jump at this opportunity! They will form the core of our reformed outfit."

"That is not what I expected to hear." Ves admitted.

"Your impression of us is outdated. All of the changes that you've sparked has thoroughly changed our family in the past few years. The younger generation especially look up to you. I think there will be plenty of young and ambitious Larkinson mech pilots who are willing to defy the expectation of our elders and skip enlisting in the Mech Corps in favor of joining the Avatars."

"What about the family?"

"It's fine. As long as we target younger mech pilots, they'll be more eager to take the opportunities you present to them. They'll also be single and unmarried, so you don't have to worry too much about those kinds of attachments."

"I see. I'll take your word for it. In any case, my goal for the next decade is to transition the Avatars of Myth into a smaller but more capable second-class mech force. I don't expect the Avatars to match the prowess of the Glory Battalion in such a short amount of time, but the foundation should be there. As for those who are unwilling or unsuitable to become a part of this initiative, they can enjoy a stable life by transferring to our new company force."

"They'll need a name. Have you thought of any?"

"Hmm.. let's go with Living Sentinels. Their name reflects their allegiance and their purpose."

"Sounds good."

The two spent the rest of the call on hashing out the details. At the end of their discussion, Melkor conveyed a final suggestion to Ves.

"By the way, you should call Ketis. Something important has come up that has kept her occupied in the past few months."

That sounded serious. Ves had been wondering what took her so long to show off her own design work to him. He thought that she was busy refining her mech designs further on account of his previous feedback.

Chapter 1523 C

"Hi, Ves. I'm sorry I've been out of touch lately." Ketis wearily spoke.

Her projection showed a lot of stress and worry on her face. Ves doubted that she enjoyed a good night's sleep lately. He immediately grew more concerned.

"What is the matter?"

"The sandman invasion!" She burst out. "Before they crossed over into human space, they swept through the frontier! The Faris Star Region is riddled with

sandmen right now and nowhere is safe anymore! The Swordmaidens under Commander Dise have taken a battering in an attempt to avoid the aliens!"

Ves knew this, but in his preoccupation of his own affairs he overlooked the implications the invasion might have on Ketis! That was a mistake!

While Ves thought highly of the Swordmaidens, they mainly fielded swordsman mechs.

It just so happened that sandmen ate melee mechs for breakfast!

This turned the sandmen into the worst possible enemies that the Swordmaidens could face on the battlefield!

"Why didn't you tell me, Ketis?"

"I don't want to bother you while you were on your trip. I know it's important to you and that dragging you into this mess will distract you. That's why I also told Calsie and Melkor to refrain from mentioning anything."

"Well, Melkor just told me that I should speak to you. He's right."

She grimaced a bit. "Traitor."

"Why do you want to keep me out?"

"I knew you couldn't do much for the Swordmaidens. Not only are you far away from home, but even if you were here, you can't possibly do anything to save them. Besides, I already asked someone else for help. Someone who is better positioned to save them and shelter them from the sandmen."

Ves frowned. "Who?"

She glanced at him with a deliberate expression. "Your friend whose name starts with the letter C."

Calabast. It made sense. Of all the contacts they knew, only Calabast possessed the resources and reach to rescue the Swordmaidens!

Yet why did she agree to do so? Ves struggled to find the meaning of Calabast's decision.

"What did C want in return?"

"C agreed to rescue my sisters as long as they are willing to work for her. Since she was very sincere in her offer, Commander Dise jumped at the opportunity!"

Ves hadn't been the only person to go on a recruiting spree, it seemed. While Ves still doubted how useful it was for her to turn the Swordmaidens into her subordinates, she actually picked up quite a bargain!

This was because Commander Dise was actually a secret expert candidate! Their adventures on Aeon Corona VII inadvertently tied her to Qilanxo and Captain Orfan. Ever since they escaped the heavy gravity planet, the Swordmaidens would never be the same under her leadership.

In fact, Ves harbored some ambition to take them over himself, but it turned out that Calabast had already been several steps ahead of him! She hadn't been sitting still all this time!

He didn't blame Calabast for making good use of this opportunity. He had been splitting his time on way too many affairs that it might be better if his supposed partner took some responsibilities off his shoulders.

"Does this mean you work for C now?"

"You know where my heart lies. I have always been a Swordmaiden. That has never changed."

Ves accepted this answer. He did not begrudge her for staying true to her heart. Besides, working for Calabast did not mean that she left his orbit.

"So.. how are the Swordmaidens doing?"

"C managed to rescue them, or at least their survivors. Due to the current sandman crisis and the huge amount of refugees fleeing from their homes, it's not very difficult for C to arrange new identities for them and mix them among the former citizens of the fallen states. No one really cares anyway, and the veracity of their identities can't be confirmed considering that the sandmen have eaten most of the databases situated in the fallen states."

This was the perfect time for pirates and other scum to gain new identities. With billions or even trillions of refugees and dispossessed citizens on the move, it was extremely easy for someone like Calabast to make the Swordmaidens adopt the identities of those who died!

Perhaps her covert actions might have invited some scrutiny during ordinary times, but with how the crisis swamped every administration, there was no way any authority could spare the time to hunt for pirates among the refugees!

"So what will your sisters be doing?"

"Once they recover and rebuild once again, they'll do whatever C tells them to do. In any case, Commander Dise has hit it off pretty well with our new boss. My sisters are very happy with our savior."

That was something that he could easily imagine.

"Okay. I'm glad to hear that the Swordmaidens have ended up in good hands. What about you? Will you still remain with the LMC?"

She nodded. "I still have much to learn. The Swordmaidens don't need my help right now. Not in my current state."

"I'm glad to hear that. Whatever you or C decide, I'm willing to accept your choices."

As his first student, he wanted the best for Ketis. He did not particularly mind if she stopped working for the LMC, as he now gained a much better helper in the form of Gloriana.

It seemed like he needed to have a good talk with Calabast when he returned home. Ves gained the sneaking suspicion that she was up to something.

They turned to other topics. Ketis briefly reported about the ongoing testing of the prototype of the Desolate Soldier.

"So far, none of the test results yielded too many divergences from the simulations. Your mech is really basic but very well put together. Since it's not a very complicated mech, I'll have a report ready for you in the next few days."

The short testing period matched his expectations. The Desolate Soldier differed a lot from the Aurora Titan and Transcendent Messenger, both of which required weeks of continuous testing!

"I look forward to receiving the results, though it sounds like there are only small discrepancies."

They quickly ended the call after that, leaving Ves to ruminate over the revelations he heard.

It appeared that Calabast was making a move to form the shadow force he always wanted to form.

"It's better to leave this matter in the hands of an expert." He muttered.

Ves already had his hands full in managing three different mech forces under his command.

First, he planned to place most of his attention and resources into cultivating the Avatars of Myth into his premier elite mech troop.

He wanted to uplift its mechs and mech pilots to second-class standard. While this took a lot of money and effort, so long as his collaborations with Gloriana bore fruit, Ves didn't think that money would be an issue.

Second, he wanted to form a more expendable mech force in the form of the Battle Criers. Ves planned to utilize the Battle Criers in a different capacity and make them do the jobs that would sully the Avatars.

While some parts of their job description overlapped with Calabast's shadow force, the most important merit of the Battle Criers was that they only answered to him! Ves was not foolish enough to depend completely on Calabast for certain matters in the dark.

"Besides, as long as they can be retrained into second-class mech pilots, they can accompany me on my grand expedition."

The final and largest mech force consisted of his newly-established Living Sentinels. Melkor and Calsie were still in the process of setting them up under the umbrella of the LMC. Nonetheless, by the time Ves returned to the Bright Republic, Ves expected them to complete the transition of the more casual and less committed Avatars to the new company force.

Unlike the former two outfits, Ves did not care too much for the Living Sentinels. The reason why he planned to put them under the LMC's management was because they were beneath his attention.

"It's fine if they turn into glorified security guards. They don't need to do anything else."

The relentless sandmen invasion would serve as a useful test for all three forces.

Once he finished his affairs, he returned to work.

During the next few days, Ves received the complete testing report from Ketis. The prototype performed close to his expectations.

Nonetheless, the results yielded by the prototype weren't as relevant as he initially expected as Ves already implemented numerous changes to the Desolate Soldier design. Gloriana already exerted influence on the direction of his work.

While the project had already reached a very advanced stage for her to make a bigger contribution, she was already responsible for suggesting numerous small changes.

Ves applied the testing results to the second iteration of his mech design as best as possible before ordering the LMC to test his second prototype.

Due to Gloriana's meticulousness, Ves was very confident that his second prototype would incorporate a lot less flaws. He believed the Desolate Soldier design was ready to be published as soon as he addressed the flaws revealed by his second prototype.

Time began to pass as the fleet raced back to the Bright Republic as fast as possible.

Fortunately, many of their ships were quite fast. As long as they took the most direct route by passing through as many port systems as possible, Ves expected to be back within two months.

That was still too slow in his book.

"What's worrying you, Ves?" Gloriana asked as he furrowed his brows after another design session.

"It's taking too long to return to the Bright Republic. Already, my competitors at home have already begun to publish the mechs that are adapted to fight the sandmen threat."

Ves gestured his hands towards the terminal, which displayed a catalog of newly-introduced mech models. All of them consisted of mechs armed with ballistic and kinetic weapons! Even Professor Ventag published a rifleman mech design that adopted a similar premise to his own work!

"It's not too late." She spoke after she briefly studied the competition. "You'll just have to publish your mech design within a week."

"That means that I won't be able to hold a press conference in person. I've never introduced a new mech design while I was away."

"Yes, Yes, Yes. I think you are being a bit too dramatic. Many of the mech models put on the market recently haven't been accompanied by elaborate press conferences. The press and the public have better things to worry about than attending some extravagant product reveal. You don't have to do everything in person. Trust in your company to do its job to market your mech in your stead."

Ves really had a difficult time accepting her advice, but eventually he recognized that she had a point.

"You're right." He slumped. "The LMC at its current state already owns a formidable marketing operation. Combined with our existing fanbase, I won't have to be afraid that my Desolate Soldier will be buried amidst the hundreds of other mech designs that are introduced to the market at this moment."

Despite surrendering himself to the circumstances, he still worried a lot about whether his Desolate Soldier could gain enough momentum upon releases. Other mech designers weren't slacking off in promoting their new products. It was very hard for Ves to put his considerable fame in the Bright Republic to use when he wasn't there to attract the attention of the press!

"Why not rely on the Ylvainan mech market to form momentum for our product?" Gloriana suggested with a reassuring smile. "From what you've told

me, you enjoy many fans there. As soon as you release your Desolate Soldier model to the Ylvaine Protectorate, you can expect to generate a lot of sales at the start!"

Ves rubbed his chin. "You're right. And as long as my Desolate Soldier is in such a high demand, the mech market of other states will definitely take notice!"

Only two issues stood in the way.

First, he needed to spend some time and effort to adapt his Desolate Soldier to the tastes of his Ylvainan customers. This not only entailed modifying its exterior, but also find some way to introduce an element of the Ylvainan Faith in the localized variant.

Second, he couldn't rely on the Mech Nursery to produce the Desolate Soldiers. The LMC's main manufacturing complex should reserve most of its production capacity to fulfill local demand.

Exporting copies of the Desolate Soldier from Cloudy Curtain to the Ylvaine Protectorate didn't make much sense anyway. It took too much time to get his mechs in the hands of his Ylvainan customers.

The best way to solve this problem was if the LMC partnered up with some native Ylvainan mech manufacturers!

"I guess it's time to make a call to a certain woman." He muttered.

Chapter 1524 Strategic Partner

He diverted some time to call Calabast's cover identity. Miss Cecily Curin answered his call promptly from the Ylvaine Protectorate.

As Ves briefly explained the circumstances of his nearly-completed Desolate Soldier design and his intentions to sell them in the Protectorate, Calabast casually waved her hand.

"Not a problem, Mr. Larkinson. Through the Living Mech Ylvaine Corporation, I have already established partnerships with numerous local manufacturers. As long as your localized variant lives up to its promises, many Ylvainans will no doubt favor your products heavily."

She went on to explain which mech manufacturers she managed to partner up with. None of them were top-tier companies, and none of them enjoyed the support of a Journeyman.

"These companies don't sound very outstanding." Ves frowned after he absorbed the information. "Without partnering up with us, they would have shuttered and failed due to their lack of competitiveness."

"While we can forge partnerships with better companies, the terms won't be in our favor. Bright Martyr or not, Journeymen don't work for charity. The advantage of our current arrangement is that we have managed to sign agreements with many mech manufacturers without giving up control. The LMYC can draw on a great amount of production capacity whenever we need it, allowing us to produce hundreds of your mechs a day!"

She transmitted some documents about the aggregate production capacity at their disposal. Ves became rather shocked at how many mech manufacturers agreed to partner up with the LMYC! Though any individual mech company wasn't worth his time, when their numbers accumulated into the dozens, their production capacity far surpassed that of the Mech Nursery!

"Good job, Miss Cecily..." Ves reluctantly said. "These partnerships couldn't have come at a better time. If everything goes according to plan, we can saturate the Ylvainan mech market with Desolate Soldiers almost immediately after I publish the base version and the variant of my design!"

"I can read the market circumstances as well as you do, Mr. Larkinson. As soon as I heard you were working on a new design, I contacted as many

desperate mech manufacturers as I could. The sandman crisis severely affected all of their livelihoods as the sales for their staple mech models have collapsed. It turns out when your mech catalog only features melee or laser mech models, you are no longer relevant during this crisis."

The foresight displayed by Calabast always earned his admiration. Though she remained low-key so far, she had never stopped her machinations.

"How is the Ylvaine Protectorate faring during these times?"

"Not good. Our state has to guard both its front and its rear. The sandmen invaders will batter our borders first while the Star Faith Collective can sit back and threaten our rear border."

Ves frowned when he heard that. "Doesn't that go against the principle to unite against a common alien foe?"

"What are principles when there is no one around to enforce them?" Calabast shrugged in a fatalistic manner. "The second-rate states are preoccupied right now, and the MTA is strangely absent. While the Star Faith Collective probably doesn't have the guts to cross the line, they don't have to. They only have to deploy a large portion of their mech military at the border and make threatening movements."

"Which means the Protectors of the Faith can't afford to redirect too many of their mech regiments from the border with the Starrers to address the alien threat." Ves grimaced.

"Right. Technically, the Star Worshippers aren't doing anything wrong. Everytime we demand an explanation, they merely release a statement that claims that they are just setting up a defensive line against the sandmen invaders."

The sad part about this situation was that they weren't wrong. The Starrers wanted to kill two birds with one stone. By deploying their mech military in

such a fashion, they not only increased the odds that the Ylvaine Protectorate would fall, but also have their forces in place to repel the sandmen forces that the Ylvainan forces had already weakened!

It was such a dirty move that Ves could only scratch his head at the audacity of the Star Worshipers. Normally, their actions would have invited censure from the MTA or the surrounding states, but with everyone so preoccupied with their own matters, the Starrers made a bold bet that no one would have the time to spare their attention on this insignificant matter!

"Does this mean the Protectorate is likely to fall?"

Miss Cecily smirked at him over the comm. "Don't count us out yet, Mr. Larkinson. The Kronons haven't made the best impression lately, but they are anything but weak."

She sounded awfully confident about the Protectorate, so Ves no longer concerned himself with their problems.

"What about you?" He asked. "How are you doing?"

"My position here is stabilized. I set out to build a foundation in the Ylvaine Protectorate, and I have succeeded. While the sandman invasion has thrown a wrench in my plan, I am still confident for the future."

"I heard that you picked up some strays during the crisis."

"As I should." She smiled meaningfully at him. Due to the unsecure comm channel, they couldn't go in too deep. "I advise you to do the same. An uncountable number of refugees have fled from the border states to the states in the rear. Many of these refugees are worthless, but not all. Mech designers, mech technicians, mech pilots and more have lost their homes and their possessions. Many of them are so desperate that they will eagerly accept any help."

I've already instructed my subordinates to sift through the refugees settled on the planet for any useful manpower."

He did not expect that much results to come from this search. The truly valuable individuals would have traveled aboard better starships and be able to approach powerful organizations for shelter. They wouldn't have been left destitute to the point where the Bright Republic dismissively dumped them onto rural planets.

"Do the best you can to take advantage of this crisis. Once the sandman invasion dies down, all of the territory left in the wake of the aliens are ripe for the picking."

A chortle escaped from his throat. "We have to survive the onslaught first."

After a bit more discussion, Ves was about to end the call. The questions that he really wanted to ask had to wait until he could visit her in person. Now that he conveyed his initial request and found out that Calabast didn't appear to be concerned, he could rest easy for the moment.

"Mr. Larkinson, please wait a moment." She raised her elegant hand. "Before you go, let me leave you with two warnings. First, your recent rise to prominence has led to severe shifts within your Larkinson Family. Don't underestimate the impact you have on your family's long-standing traditions. Second, no matter what disaster might occur, don't act like a fool and get entangled in affairs that are greater than you. Not every problem is your problem."

Was Calabast afraid that he would place his life in the line to defend the Bright Republic against the sandmen?

"I have a duty to assist my home state." He stated with some conviction. "If the Bright Republic is in trouble, I won't stand by without doing my best."

Having worked so long on the Desolate Soldier, Ves constantly honed his mind with duty. Some of it still lingered even when he wasn't actively working on his design!

"You're just a mech designer. Isn't that your tagline?" Calabast sighed at him. "Your only purpose in life is to design mechs for other people to use. Nowhere does it state that you have to place yourself in the line of fire and spit at your enemies."

He knew that, but he still felt restless at the thought of leaving his home state to its mercy. The Larkinson blood within him compelled him to do more, but it was hard to imagine he could do anything against an inflexible foe like the sandmen!

The call ended soon after. Ves mulled over Calabast's words for a bit but did not let it distract him from his current priorities. Right now, readying the Desolate Soldier for release demanded his total attention.

As soon as he rejoined Gloriana back at the workshop compartment, she hugged him with much greater affection than usual.

"Hihihi! You're back!" She cheered.

"Of course I'm back. There is always work to be done."

As Ves sat down at his seat behind a terminal, Gloriana shifted up to him and hugged him closer.

"Hey. What's the matter?"

"Nothing." She cutely shook her head. "I just want to make sure you still like me, that's all."

"Of course I do!"

She pressed her finger against his chest and started to draw circles on his dress shirt. "Well, you just had a call with a woman you consider your partner."

"She's just a strategic partner to me." He reassured her. He knew that Gloriana and Calabast held a private chat with each other one time, but he had no idea what kind of accord they reached. "I doubt she's interested in me the way I do. I'm not her type."

"You never know. While I'm already aware of your brilliance, I'm afraid that woman will change her mind once she realizes how exceptional you truly are. I won't hold back if she thinks she can encroach upon my territory!"

Oh, out of the three of them, Calabast probably knew him the best! In his eyes, Gloriana's fears were unfounded!

"Are you jealous?" He asked with an amused smile.

Her palm slapped against his chest!

"Don't joke around, Ves! That woman is poisonous! You have no reason to cast your puppy eyes in her direction when I'm around! I know it frustrates you that we can't express our intimacy to each other, but please be patient. As long as we work hard enough, you'll definitely earn my mother's approval in time!"

Though Ves found her apparent distress amusing, he didn't have the heart to keep her suffering. He hugged her back and kissed her cheek.

"You misunderstand, Gloriana. I only have eyes for you. I'm not the kind of scumbag who will cheat on you, and I have never considered that woman to be anything other than a strategic partner. Instead of worrying your pretty little head over these nonexistent problems, why not get back to work? I still need to develop a variant and put the finishing touches on the Desolate Soldier design."

Upon his encouragement, they returned to work. As soon as they started working on their project, all signs of disharmony disappeared. Their shared occupation allowed them to share their feelings at a level that transcended ordinary conversations.

Ves already enjoyed designing mechs by himself, but sharing his passion with a loving woman was one of the greatest pleasures imaginable! He could hardly imagine going back to returning to his hermit ways and working on his designs all by his lonesome self!

Though his productivity declined a bit because he constantly had to work in tandem with Gloriana, the exchange of insights and the bouncing of ideas led to much more fruitful gains.

Not only were they able to achieve significantly better results, they also learned much more in the process!

All the while, Ves also became more and more familiar with her design philosophy, while Gloriana understood more of their principles.

Days went by as his subordinates back home tested the second prototype as fast as possible. When Ketis transmitted the results to Ves, he discovered that the solutions suggested by Gloriana did not yield a lot of problems.

"That's pretty good!"


The lack of any major issues meant that Ves possessed the confidence to make his third iteration of the Desolate Soldier design the final one. He only took the time to address some of the minor problems that had emerged from the testing into the base version and his newly-developed variant.

Since Ves placed a lot of importance on the Ylvainans to propel his new products to success, he did not dare to neglect this side project! Both Ves and Gloriana meticulously began to apply their strengths to the localized variant.

"What will you call it, Ves?"

"I call it the Holy Soldier. Faith is just as important as duty to the Ylvainans. My variant must channel both in order to rally the faithful!"

Chapter 1525 Show and Tell



Designed solely for the Protectorate's mech market, the Holy Soldier was mostly a cosmetic spin on the Desolate Soldier. Ves added some aesthetic decoration to the mostly-bare frame of the Desolate Soldier in the form of religious iconography and symbols.

This was just one aspect of change. The other aspect concerned its spiritual nature and was just as important if not more so to the Holy Soldier's success in the Protectorate's mech market!

Despite the makeover, his variant still resembled the Desolate Soldier in contour any many other aspects. One of the most distinguishing touches he added at the end was the Rescue Particle Generator.

Ves refrained from incorporating it in his previous Devil Tiger project, but he didn't want to leave it out this time. While the Rescue Particle Generator was just a tiny component, adding it to the Desolate Soldier design and its variant still added a small burden to their designs.

Fortunately, with the help of Gloriana, he minimized the impact of its addition. He puzzled more over how he wanted to express its visual impact.

"You always turn every mech design into a work of art." Gloriana observed as she cuddled up next to him. "To be honest, I don't entirely approve. Adding superfluent components and decorations to your mech affects its performance. The reason why most mech designers haven't followed suit is because the spec sheets of her products will look worse."

"The performance drop is minor, especially if I'm careful about it. To me, the technical performance of a mech is not the sole factor in determining whether it's a good product. How people react to my mech is just a factor in determining its effectiveness. If a mech looks impressive, it can lift up the mech pilot's confidence and boost the morale of friendlies. If my artistic expression can allow the mech pilot to become five percent more effective in exchange for a single percent performance drop, then that is more than worth the tradeoff!"

Though Gloriana understood his logic, it conflicted with her own principles. She placed a very high importance on the technical excellence of her mechs. To sacrifice performance for visual flair was difficult for her to accept.

Nonetheless, her definition of perfect vessel was not as inflexible as Ves initially thought. Having worked alongside her many days now, he learned the best way to make her swallow something different was to convince her that it produced a better outcome on the battlefield.

After a bit of time, she reluctantly nodded. "Morale and courage can't be measured. It's not surprising for mech designers to neglect the impact their products have on the attitudes of the mech pilots and other friends. You know more than me on this front."

"If you look at the battle reports of my mech models, you'll see that a lot of victories have been achieved because the mech pilots of my products have performed better than expected."

Since Ves managed to resolve Gloriana's difficulties, they continued to work together to integrate the Rescue Particle Generator in the two designs.

What Ves hoped to see was entire formations of Desolate Soldiers or Holy Soldiers firing at the sandmen invaders in unison. He wanted to enhance the visual impact of witnessing so many identical mechs fighting in unison,

knowing that if the footage became more striking, those who watched it became more interested in the mechs.

Since Ves still wanted to keep the Desolate Soldier and its variant as simple as possible, he limited his implementation to a small module affixed into chest plating of the mech.

The module was easily installable and removable. Its impact on the mech was kept to a minimum. Its only purpose was to release a simple vapor trail from the position of the heart of a human body.

Ves set the default tint of this vapor trail as orange, but its owners could opt to change the tint to any shade they wished, allowing it to match their outfit or regimental colors.

For example, Ves turned the vapor trail white for the Holy Soldier to symbolize the purity of the Ylvainan Faith.

"I like how it looks." Gloriana tentatively nodded as they studied a simulation of how the Rescue Particle Generator performed in a theoretical battle. "It only works best when the mech is flying backwards, though."

"Against typical sandmen threats, my mechs will predominantly be asked to fire at the sandmen while maintaining distance as much as possible."

"I like how the Desolate Soldier and the Holy Soldier both resemble each other in this regard. Despite their differences, it's immediately apparent that they belong to the same product line."

Ves placed a lot of importance on tying the two designs together. If the Holy Soldier ever grew in popularity, Ves hoped that the variant's success would also lift up the base model. Ves cared far more about the latter because of its universality.

"These changes only represent one side of the coin."

Ves snuck back to his guest room and surreptitiously recalled his design for the Transcendent Messenger and made contact with Prophet Ylvaine's spiritual fragment.

To his surprise, the spiritual fragment felt much stronger now! Though he only recreated it from a tiny spiritual remnant of the original prophet, it somehow grew exceedingly fast! Though it was still a way off from reaching the level of an ace pilot, Ves believed that it was only a matter of time!

No matter how the spiritual fragment grew so fast, Ves still had a job to do. He made his request.

Yet before he communicated his request, the fragment silently split off a mote of its spiritual energy and deposited to his mind. It was as if it already anticipated his request and accepted ahead of time!

"What?"

The fragment didn't stick around to resolve his confusion and quickly withdrew as if it had better things to do. Ves was left befuddled as his spiritual senses tried to wrap around the mote that Ylvaine's spiritual fragment had gifted without a word.

"Mysterious bastard! Keep pretending you can predict the future!" He cursed.

Whatever. He got what he wanted without the fuss he expected. Though Ylvaine's spiritual fragment only left him with a minute piece of itself, Ves could feel the same holy presence from this tiny mote.

While it didn't appear to be very impressive, just a tiny hint of its awe-inspiring presence should be enough to invigorate the faiths of every Ylvainan within the range of its aura!

While the Solemn Guardian played the leading role, the insertion of this tiny extension of Ylvaine's spiritual fragment ought to be enough to add some flavor to a monotone-tasting drink.

"Just like what I did with the Transcendent Messengers." He nodded confidently, certain that his idea would work.

Back then, he varied the individual expression of each separate mech by messing with their spiritual components. This time, Ves would extend the same idea to an entire variant rather than a couple of physical copies.

"I just have to make sure that the two components don't cancel each other out." He muttered.

He needed the Solemn Guardian and the mote to share the same space in the Holy Soldier design. Ves had never done this before.

The time had come to finalize his designs and infuse them with their design spirits.

He faced an important decision. He turned to Nitaa, who was standing guard from the side of the guest room.

"Do you think Gloriana can be trusted?"

His bodyguard did not dismiss the question out of hand. "I'm not sure. My judgement is that she is very sincere towards you, but that might not necessarily be the case of the people around her. Her secretary Melody, the crew of Stellar Chaser and the Glory Battalion responsible for guarding her life all answer to Madame Constance Wodin or the Wodin Dynasty."

Her words pointed out an uncomfortable truth. Unlike Ves, Gloriana had always been raised with the full support of her mother. The Wodin Dynasty poured a lot of resources into her upbringing and always took care of many matters in her stead.

This led to a situation where Gloriana lacked the kind of confidantes that Ves slowly surrounded himself with. He had no doubt that if her mother issued an order to recall Gloriana back to the Scimitar System in Hegemony space, the Glory Battalion would drag her back by force!

Gloriana's overreliance on forces that didn't necessarily answer to her was one of the reasons why Ves still persisted in cultivating his own forces.

"Okay, I think you have a point. I think I will let Gloriana have a glimpse of what I can do, but only her. No one else must pry."

"I'll be sure to keep an eye out on the guards."

Ves turned to Lucky, who was lounging lazily on his bed. "You have to help me too, buddy."

"Meow."

Once he made his decision, he decided to call Gloriana to his guest room rather than head back to the workshop compartment. The latter still possessed an intact monitoring system.

Some time passed until Gloriana and her assistant Melody entered the guest room.

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Larkinson?" Melody clutched her hexagonal data pad tightly.

Ves innocently held out his hands. "It's not what you think. I just want to show Gloriana something in private. You can stay in the guest room while we're busy. I swear we aren't up to anything funny!"

Though it took some convincing, Melody eventually acquiesced. She stood next to Nitaa and observed Ves and Gloriana sitting on the bed.

Once they made themselves comfortable, Ves activated his jammer. It was enough to interfere with the surrounding air without blocking Melody's view, so the latter did not object.

"What did you want to show me that's so important that you had to call me here?"

"I've been thinking about showing you some of what I can do. It will be difficult for you to perceive, but you deserve to witness this moment. What I'm about to do is putting the final touches to our designs."

She looked curious at him. "I thought we already completed the designs."

"Not quite." He smiled. "While it's true that we have declared their physical designs complete, there is still one more component missing from both designs. I think it's best for me to demonstrate."

For the first time in his life, Ves was about to reveal one of the methods that made his mech designs special to another mech designer.

While Nitaa already witnessed him in action before, her lack of understanding towards mechs had mostly left her in the dark.

Someone like Gloriana would be able to pick up a lot more. Not only because she understood mechs as well as him, but also because she was a spiritually-strong individual. Even if her spiritual perception was nowhere close to his own, she should still be able to sense something.

Ves silently activated his comm and projected two of his designs. At the same time, he concentrated his mind while dragging one of the P-stones to his side.

"What does this exotic have to do with your designs?" She questioned.

As the owner of the Stellar Chaser, she knew that Ves brought a bunch of containers when he moved onto the ship. She never understood what kind of role his exotics played.

"Observe." Ves smiled at her. "Try and feel what I do instead of relying on your conventional senses."

Ves started by placing his finger onto the surface of the occupied P-stone. He utilized his Spirituality to lift the trapped spiritual product from its prison.

The Solemn Guardian hadn't matured very much since he put it into the P-stone. This was exactly as Ves intended. It still emanated a pure and innocent aura of duty.

The moment Ves pulled it out, Gloriana shifted a bit. It appeared she sensed something remarkable, but she failed to spot anything with her eyes!

Without explaining anything, Ves ushered the Solemn Guardian into the Desolate Soldier design.

As if sensing the immense compatibility between the two, the Solemn Guardian did not resist the move. Once it settled into the conceptual space of the Desolate Soldier design, the newly-installed design spirit quickly melded into its new home, instantly empowering its X-Factor to greater heights!

"Ves!" Gloriana gasped. "Your design suddenly changed! It feels so much more remarkable, just like the Aurora Titan and your other designs! Did you just infuse it with one of your proto-gods?!"

Ves did not want to admit it directly. "I added in the final component. Pay careful attention to what I do next."

He retrieved the mote of Ylvaine's spiritual fragment and put it into the Holy Soldier design. Next, he began to do something he always theorized but never put into action before.

He projected his Spirituality and applied it towards the Solemn Guardian. He conveyed a request to the spiritual product.

Some time passed before the Solemn Guardian suddenly projected itself onto the Holy Soldier design!

The variant's close similarity to the Desolate Soldier made this interaction possible!

Chapter 1526 Smashing Noses

While Ves showed off his tricks to his girlfriend, something significant was about to happen elsewhere.

Within the Nyxian Gap, nuclear fury engulfed a massive fortification built into a cold and frozen mountain range!

A tide of doom crawlers advanced across the rogue planet's dark and desolate surface in an implacable tide. Hundreds of broken enemy pirate mechs lay fallen in their path. None of them had managed to dent the heavy armor of the Spyre Helix Annihilators!

The performance of the Annihilators exceeded the expectations of their owners! They managed to advance fast enough to catch the occupying pirate alliance off-guard while at the same time unleash a prodigious amount of ordnance towards the fortification!

With each volley of missiles or cannons, the fortifications cracked or vaporized. No matter how deep the fortification reached, the immense amount of firepower arrayed against it rendered nearly every barrier meaningless!

Plenty of pirates managed to escape the attacks by the skin of their teeth. Some of them had been tasked with defending the fortification against the advancing doom crawlers, but after seeing hundreds of their fellow pirates being struck down by immense volleys of high-energy gamma lasers, the subsequent waves all turned tail and left!

Elsewhere in the Nyxian Gap, Cynthia Larkinson sensed something amiss, but she couldn't quite tell what was wrong.

Her diminutive body rose as she interrupted her meditation. "We need to move. The Nyxian Gap is about to erupt."

Though her husband didn't know what was going on, he trusted her judgement. He sat up from his desk and affixed his crude helmet onto his head.

"Where to?" He asked.

"The border to the Sentinel Kingdom. Opportunities await us there, but we should be careful not to stick around for long."

Upon the Dark Cleaver's orders, the growing fleet of the Oblivion Hand moved out. As dark mercenaries, they earned their keep by offering their services to the highest bidder.

Though Cynthia and Ryncol Larkinson were both being pursued, they still needed to play by the rules of the Nyxian Gap. It was time for the Oblivion Hand to earn their keep!

As an enormous conflict sparked in the Nyxian Gap, elsewhere in the Komodo Star Sector another major event took place.

In the border between the Ylvaine Protectorate and the Star Faith Collective, six different strategic border systems suddenly became host to six massive fleets!

Alarms immediately rung at one of the listening posts installed by the Star Worshipers. Though nothing more than a tiny artificial satellite parked in an asteroid belt in the outer system, the handful of Star Soldiers manning the stations looked in shock as they took in the readings.

"It's the alien lovers! They've all gone mad!"

The sensor readings returned by the outlying sensors painted an increasingly more frightening picture.

Ten combat carriers, twenty combat carriers, thirty combat carriers, forty combat carriers! The sensors kept detecting more vessels, all of them packed to the brim with military mechs!

The Protectors of the Faith committed multiple mech divisions to a surprise attack on the Creinze System, a strategic star system of the Star Faith Collective!

The worst part about it was that none of the Star Worshippers had an inkling that the Ylvainans were mad enough to launch this attack!

"Warn headquarters! Transmit all of the data as we can!" The Star Worshipper in charge commanded.

The listening post scarcely managed to transmit the first batch of highly-detailed sensor data before a missile struck the well-hidden listening post!

Though situated a distance away from the translation point of the Ylvainan fleet, the Kronons already prepared this operation for at least a year. They knew the location of every listening post and already put assets into place to take them out and deny the enemy detailed readings!

Despite taking out the listening posts and other vulnerable sensor sites, headquarters still received enough information to know that something was amiss!

A fist banged against a planning table!

"How can those alien lovers sneak at least three mech divisions into our star system?!" A mech general raged!

An intelligence officer looked apologetic. "They misled our observers we've placed in their border systems. We all thought the recent movements signified that the Kronon Dynasty directed their mech divisions to the other side of their state to bolster their defenses against the sandmen."

"How can you miss something as obvious as their direction?!"

"We failed to track the progress of their fleet movements! Our current guess is that they traveled to a minor star system before turning around to cross into our border!"

The gravity of the situation became more evident as the Star Army's other bases along the border transmitted distress as well!

"Mad! The Ylvainans have all gone mad! They must have committed at least a fourth of their mech militaries to this mad venture!"

The mech general in charge of the Star Army of the Creinze System simply couldn't fathom why the Ylvainans launched an unprovoked attack on six heavily-fortified star systems at once!

Though the Kronon Dynasty committed a great number of mech divisions to their invasions, the Star Army fortified their positions at the border well. Their numbers roughly matched their opponents, but they possessed a vital defensive advantage.

As soon as the mech general thought about the defensive turrets and orbital platforms, his panic subsided.

"Why are they launching this attack?" Another mech officer asked. "They can't hope to dislodge us from our star systems as long as entrench ourselves!"

"This isn't an invasion." The general mulled. "It's a raid. The Ylvainans can't possibly mean to invade us while the sandmen are about to crash into their territory. I believe they intend to inflict as much damage as possible in order to shock us into paralysis. As long as they manage to destroy our infrastructure, we won't be able to pose a realistic threat to the Protectorate for at least a year! They can rest easy and devote most of their attention to repelling the sandmen!"

That was exactly what the Star Worshipers didn't want to see! The Star Army built up a significant presence in the Creinze System and the other star systems under assault as launching points for a future invasion into Protectorate space.

Destroying and crippling the infrastructure, supply depots and bases on Creinze IV and other occupied planets made a future invasion much more difficult, to the point where the Star Army would certainly choose to waste valuable time in rebuilding what they lost!

Three Kronon mech divisions numbering at least thirty-thousand mechs bore down on Creinze IV. Half of them consisted of spaceborn mechs, which took the lead in escorting the massive raiding fleet to the garden-like planet.

The Star Army responded in kind by deploying their spaceborn mech regiments in a defensive posture.

Yet even as they hugged their orbital defense platforms, the extra firepower and defensive cover barely made a difference!

Hundreds of huge, identical mechs deployed in front of the Kronon invasion fleet and put their huge tower shields in front of vulnerable ranged mechs.

As soon as a defensive platform fired a laser at one of the Ylvainan defensive mechs, a shimmering layer of energy appeared over the surface of the shield and withstood most of the energy!

"For the prophet!"

"For the Kronon Dynasty!"

"For the Bright Martyr!"

Though the new mechs withstood a bit less damage than the heavy space knights deployed by the Kronons, the appearance of these strange new mechs strangely invigorated all of the Ylvainan mech pilots!

Upon closer inspection, the Star Army managed to identify the new model as the Aurora Titan, a commercial mech model!

Despite its inadequacies compared to proper military mech models, its protective aura along with the significance of its designer firmed the hearts of every Ylvainan mech pilot on the battlefield!

"They just won't fall! No matter how much we fire at them, they aren't showing signs of faltering!"

The Ylvainans struck the first blow. Each and every Kronon taking part in this surprise attack had mentally prepared themselves to fight for the Protectorate and the Ylvainan Faith!

They knew that so long as they let the Star Faith Collective watch the Protectorate fend the sandmen off by themselves, the Star Army would inevitably take advantage and take the final prize!

Therefore, the brightest strategic minds of the Kronon Dynasty decided upon a very bold course of action.

Smash the noses of the Star Worshipers before the sandmen invasion arrived at their doorsteps!

With the Aurora Titans serving their vital function, the fanatical Ylvainan mech divisions managed to get close enough to destroy the defensive platforms and push back the spaceborn mech regiments of the Star Army.

"We shall grind the stars beneath our boots!"

The Star Worshipers had genuinely been caught by surprise. The short amount of time since the arrival of the Ylvainans into the Creinze System hadn't been enough to firm up their resolve. Every Star Worshiper thought that they would be the ones to invade their enemies, not the other way around!

These differences all proved pivotal as the spaceborn mechs of the defenders continued to give ground until they lost orbital supremacy over Creinze IV.

While the Star Army's spaceborn mech forces managed to retain most of their strength, they could barely keep their Ylvainan counterparts busy while they desperately tried to reconsolidate their disarrayed units.

The Kronon fleet inflicted such a shock that they easily managed to make enough room to land half of their combat carriers to the surface of Creinze IV.

All over the planet, several combat carriers landed at each local site. Nonetheless, most of the combat carriers landed near the capital city and the site of the main base and headquarters of the Star Army!

The combat carriers muscled their way through a torrent of anti-air fire. Some of the vessels opened their mech bays and released hundreds of aerial mechs, which quickly started to shoot fixed emplacements!

Most combat carriers managed to land on the ground intact. As soon as their hatches slid open, entire landbound mech companies and mech regiments started to form up into loose ranks.

Though the Kronons predominantly fielded their own mechs, some mech regiments were different.

They decided to form entire mech companies out of two distinct commercial mech models!

The Blackbeak and the Crystal Lord! When paired together, their effective performance did not fall short compared to regular military mech models, especially when piloted by highly-trained Kronon mech pilots!

What was more, the collective auras they exuded overlapped to such a great degree that they began to encompass every Ylvainan mech committed to the invasion!

"Bright Martyr! Bright Martyr! Bright Martyr!"

Before the landed mechs proceeded to assault the main base on Creinze IV, one last combat carrier landed amidst the throng of mechs and ships.

Different from the other combat carriers, the latest vessel exhibited a different coating from all of the mech regiments deployed for this assault. The vessel also lacked the standard Kronon heraldry affixed to every mech and ship.

"The Inquisition." The hushed whispers rang through the comm channels of the Kronon mech regiments.

Once the hatch slid open, a single, resplendent mech stepped forward.

One of the six Transcendent Messengers of the Ylvaine Protectorate made a personal appearance.

"Zeal."

Another series of whispers propagated through the channels. This time, they all sounded reverend, as if the Zeal deserved nothing less.

The three leading dynasties constantly argued over committing all six Transcendent Messengers to this risky operation. Yet the approaching sandmen threat convinced the radicals that the Protectorate had to succeed.

Not a single assault could fail! As long as the Star Army still retained one of their forward bases, they would always be able to press a knife into the back of the Protectorate!

Facing two existential crises at once, the leaders of the Protectorate decided that they needed to pull out all of the stops!

Taon Melin glanced at the thousands of Kronon mechs forming up on the local plot. His mech, the Zeal, raised its sword arm upwards and pointed the tip of the weapon in the air.

"The Great Prophet is watching over us. The Bright Martyr is watching over us! Will we allow these degenerate Star Worshipers to trample over the Protectorate our ancestors worked hard to build?"

"No!"

"Will we allow our faith to fall in front of the Great Prophet?"

"No!"

"Will we disgrace ourselves by allowing the great works of the Bright Martyr to come to harm?"

"No!"

"Then fight! You are the Protectors of the Faith, and it is time for you to embody your titles! Attack!"

The Zeal chopped its sword towards the Star Army's fortifications with force!

At the same time, Melin's conviction resonated with the intense faith and zeal of his hero mech, amplifying its aura! Its reach and intensity expanded considerably, causing every Kronon mech pilot within range to feel unprecedentedly sacred!

"YLVAINE SHALL PREVAIL!"

Chapter 1527 Halifax Base

The status of the Bright Martyr became considerably contentious after his arrival and departure in the Ylvaine Protectorate.

Some believed he was a charlatan. Others couldn't get over the fact that a foreigner became the next martyr. The upper ranks of the leading dynasties did their best to temper everyone's worship of the Bright Martyr. They became fearful of what might ensue if their flock demanded a new shepherd.

Though the three leading dynasties managed to reduce most mentions and calls to revere the Bright Martyr in the media, it had already gone out of control.

Practically every Ylvainan became aware of the Bright Martyr's existence, and his rise was the most exciting incident to happen in the last four-hundred years since the founding of the Protectorate.

Unless they relied on more coercive measures, there was no conceivable way to erase the name of the Bright Martyr from the lips of the Ylvainans.

Having been raised from birth to worship the Great Prophet and his handpicked martyred followers, the rise of a new martyr became an unquestionably alluring focus of their devotion!

"Prophet Ylvaine has never left us! Look at the Bright Martyr! His appearance is proof that the prophet is still with us! Just look at his works and you will know the truth!"

While the Poxco Dynasty made numerous proposals to enact such measures, the Curin Dynasty always opposed the Attendants of Ylvaine.

Even the Kronon Dynasty refused to entertain such means. As the Protectors of the Flock, it had always been their duty to protect the Ylvainans. They were not about to allow anyone to harm them in such fashion!

The belief in the Bright Martyr therefore managed to spread among the lower classes of the Protectorate without too much hindrance. It became so expected that others shared in this belief that those who were skeptical stuck out like sore thumbs!

"What do you mean you think the Bright Martyr is fake? That's absurd! You're no longer my friend if you believe in this slander!"

One of the most influential factors that reinforced everyone's worship of the Bright Martyr was the existence of the Transcendent Messengers. Anyone who witnessed the divinely-inspired hero mechs in person unquestionably believed that the Bright Martyr had been touched by the Great Prophet!

Even the middle and upper ranks of the leading dynasties started to become swayed! The more faith they possessed, the more the Transcendent Messenger demanded their acknowledgement!

The Ylvaine Protectorate slowly but surely started to change. Among the many societal changes and reforms, the Kronon Dynasty began to shift their stodgy traditions as well.

Having stagnated for so long, the Bright Martyr's rebuke prodded them into action. Military officers became more daring and started to act with more autonomy.

Outfitting some of their mech regiments with mechs from the LMC had been among their more presumptuous actions! Since when did a mech military resort to commercial mechs to fill up their mech roster?

Yet how could the critics rebuke the officers who made the decision to outfit their units with LMC mechs? Wouldn't that be affronting the Bright Martyr? Any word against the LMC mechs earned near-universal condemnation from the lower ranks of the Kronon Dynasty!

Having basked in the auras of so many mechs of the Bright Martyr, the Kronon mech pilots became fully convinced that their machines were special!

After a lot of internal turmoil, the Kronons from both sides reached a tentative compromise.

"The proof is in the pudding. Let us see the LMC mechs in action. Only a success in battle will those who support adopting these commercial mechs be vindicated!"

The adoption of LMC mechs occurred sporadically as only the most enthusiastic believers in the Bright Martyr embraced them at a wider scale. The mech pilots and mech officers who worked with the LMC mechs happened to have the most to prove in their first major action!

Their fervor to battle and win against the Star Worshippers was among the highest in the six raiding fleets!

This was the first time so many Blackbeaks, Crystal Lords and Aurora Titans had been deployed at once. Spread over six different strategic star systems in the territory of the Star Faith Collective, the initial stages of the incursions proceeded better than expected.

The Ylvaine Protectorate managed to hoodwink the Star Faith Collective and surprise them with their sudden assaults.

Yet as time went by and the Protectors of the Faith managed to land their ground forces on the surface of the fortified planets, the Star Army finished readjusting themselves.

The Ylvainans weren't the only people around who could whip up their men in religious frenzy!

Aware that the future of the Star Faith was at stake, the Star Worshippers ceased to be consumed by shock and began to ready their ground defenses!

"Crush the alien lovers!"

"The Ylvainans worship alien gods! Let us show them how little their gods care about their lives!"

On Creinze IV, a lot of infrastructure dispersed throughout the planet started to get overwhelmed or destroyed. However, the Star Worshippers concentrated most of their assets and vital infrastructure at Halifax Base.

The Star Army already gave up on defending the outlying facilities in favor of consolidating their mechs at Halifax Base.

Half underground and half aboveground, it took an immense effort to establish this base. The Ylvainans would never be able to destroy it by sitting back and letting their artillery mechs bombard the base from a distance.

"The only way to destroy Halifax Base and render the Creinze System useless as a staging point for the Star Army is to get up close!"

The Protectors of the Flock only had a limited amount of time to do their damage. They never intended to invade and occupy the star systems of their foes. With the sandmen breathing down their necks, they simply couldn't afford to fight on two fronts.

For this reason, speed was of the essence. The Ylvainan mech pilots deployed on Creinze IV did not enjoy a significant numerical advantage, so they had to rely on other factors to overwhelm the entrenched Star Worshipers.

Though the surprise factor had already faded, the Star Army had still been caught with their pants down. Many assets were still stored in containers piled up in warehouses, as the Star Army always expected that they would be the ones to make the first move.

The base commander of Halifax Base had never taken into account that the Ylvainans would be crazy enough to take the fight to them! Now, every Star Worshiper frantically started to deploy as many mobile and immobile assets as they could to reinforce the defenses of Halifax Base.

"We won't give you that time! Attack! Storm their fortifications!"

More than a dozen landbound mech regiments spread out and advanced towards an immense walled fort city shaped like a stylized star. Halifax Base was more than a city and more than a military base.

It concentrated the might of the Star Army and represented their people's hopes of conquering the stars!

"The stars are lifeless balls of plasma." Taon Melin scoffed as he piloted Zeal in the middle of the largest concentration advancing Kronon mechs. "Only life deserves worship!"

A momentous aura of zeal and faith washed over his fellow Kronon mech pilots. As long as they stayed within range, their fervor and motivation to fight on behalf of the Protectorate and the Ylvainan Faith reached astronomic levels!

The mechs under the influence of Zeal advanced considerably faster towards Halifax Base, as if they were the most eager among the Ylvainan ground forces to prove their devotion!

Already, artillery mechs and ranged mechs started to fire at the huge walls and the mechs hiding behind them. Numerous stationary turrets spat out deadly fire, but they served little more than a distraction.

"The walls of Halix Base lie before us!" Taon transmitted to all of the ground forces. "Our victory is ordained from the moment we have crossed into the Collective's territory. Let us herald the ascendancy of our faith by crushing the Star Army's ambition!"

Though his military rank wasn't high, his status as Zeal's chosen transcended the hierarchy of the Kronon Dynasty! When the chosen spoke up, every Ylvainan listened!

"Follow your orders and advance! Know that victory is assured as long as you hold the Great Prophet in your heart! Ylvaine shall prevail!"

"YLVAINES SHALL PREVAIL!"

Every Kronon mech advanced towards Halifax Base, forcing them to endure a prodigious sea of fire!

Thousands of defending mechs and turrets fired at the approaching Ylvainans, taking full advantage of the fortifications in place!

Over the air, Kronon aerial mechs tried their best to bombard the fortification from above, but the Star Army's aerial mechs successfully kept them entangled.

Fighting far beyond the range of any LMC mech, the aerial duels taking place above entered into a stalemate. Neither side was willing to take too many risks.

In contrast, the assault on the ground had become a lot more heated. Affected by Zeal, hundreds of mechs stormed forward with little regard for their lives!

Among the vanguard, the Blackbeaks led the charge! When entire mech companies consisted solely of this offensive knight model, the sheer amount of overlapping auras affected the mindsets of every mech pilot to a much greater degree than anyone anticipated.

Not just the mech pilots of the Blackbeaks, but also the mech pilots of the machines following behind them became swept up with a desire to close in on their enemies!

"Burn the Star Worshippers to ash! Let us show them what happens when they embrace their stars!"

The Blackbeaks possessed enough armor to withstand most of the defensive firepower pouring in their direction. They also moved fast enough to give the defenders little time to take potshots!

As offensive knights, the Blackbeaks were never designed to sit back and act as mobile shields for vulnerable ranged mechs.

No. The Blackbeaks performed best when they were put to their intended use, which was leading the charge towards the enemy!

A metaphorical collision occurred once the Blackbeaks reached the fortification. Despite the storm of fire pouring in their direction, their Veltrex Armor System held up admirably as it was not inferior to the armor system used by military mechs.

Other mechs, specialized for demolition, moved in and started to breach the tall walls using various means!

"We're in! Gogogo!"

Though many Blackbeaks already sustained severe damage, they succeeded in their primary goal! As the Ylvainans poured into the interior of Halifax Base, the more intact Blackbeaks kept fulfilling their functions by moving forward!

Halifax Base was both a city and a military base, so the fighting had just as far as both sides were concerned.

Nonetheless, propelled by Zeal, the Kronon ground forces continually poured through the breaches while pushing back the Star Army!

Despite the latter's defensive advantages, the differences in fighting will proved to be more decisive than the Star Army thought!

This was because just as Zeal's massive aura motivated the Ylvainans to fanaticism, it also pressed down on the hearts of the Star Worshipers within range!

Everytime a unit of the Star Army became affected by Zeal, the mech pilots became a little less confident, a little less certain and a little less convinced!

Some even started questioning their faith in the middle of an intensive firefight! Oftentimes, such distractions proved fatal!

In the complex urban environment of Halifax Base, the Crystal Lords began to shine.

These domineering, uncharacteristically resilient laser rifleman mechs danced in the streets and gunned down each and every mech in their way!

Their auras blended together and expanded across other friendly mechs, infecting them with the desire to defeat every enemy mech in order to prove their dominance!

"Our Crystal Lords are the kings of this battlefield! No other mech can withstand our fury of lasers!"

Just as in the case of Zeal, the overlapping auras of the Blackbeaks and the Crystal Lords depressed the morale of the enemy mech pilots by a small but very noticeable margin.

Not a single Star Worshipper within range felt comfortable as they resisted the Ylvainans!

With the attackers emboldened and the defenders quaking in their boots, resistance fell much easier than even the most optimistic Kronon strategists anticipated! The Star Army continually gave ground and more and more districts of Halifax Base started to fall under enemy occupation!

Taon Melin witnessed all of this at the center of the action. Zeal moved forward with implacable momentum. So long as Zeal was with the Kronons, they would never stop their advance!

Of course, the Star Army wasn't stupid. They studied their opponents well enough to realize the significance of Zeal!

Zeal stepped to the right just half a second before an extremely powerful laser beam burned through its former location!

"Expert mech!"

Just as the Starrer expert mech adjusted its aim, it suddenly rolled to the side as a powerful kinetic shell smashed the reinforced building it was hiding behind!

"Your opponent is me!" A Kronon expert mech stepped from the side.

As a national treasure, Zeal enjoyed the highest degree of protection!

Chapter 1528 Foreordained

The Star Army stationed many mech regiments at Halifax Base. Almost every mech regiment fielded at least one expert mech, and some were even luxurious enough to field more!

Yet the Kronons were no less blessed with expert mechs. Having planned this attack in advance, the Ylvainans made sure to bring at least an equal amount of expert mechs as their foes!

Amidst the thousands of standards fighting and dying for their state and beliefs, the expert mechs dueled each other with fire and fervor!

The primary objective of the Star Army's expert mechs immediately became obvious. They all identified Zeal as one of the primary force multipliers on the side of the Ylvainans.

Even if the Star Worshipers weren't aware of its aura, its symbolic significance alone made it worth diverting their top assets to take it down!

Yet each time a ranged expert mech tried to take a potshot of Zeal, it always danced aside at the nick of time! Famed Starrer expert marksmen who never failed to land their shots against regular targets somehow saw their skill and intuition fail them during this pivotal battle.

"How can this be?!"

"Is the person inside an expert pilot?!"

"The Inquisition mech isn't an expert mech! Its pilot isn't an expert pilot!
There's an expert candidate inside!"

"We have to strangle this expert candidate in the cradle before he matures!"

The Starrer expert pilots became more determined than ever to take down Zeal and annihilate the supposed expert candidate inside its cockpit!

Something that only happened in major battles between states began to take place.

The Starrer expert mechs, normally assigned to cover their mech regiments, consolidated in squads and started to fight together in coordination!

"The Starrers are finally taking this battle seriously! Consolidate!"

The Ylvainan expert mechs followed suit. A large area in the center started to form as the standard mechs of both sides started to veer away.

In the face of a struggle between so many experts, regular mech pilots would only get in the way!

Both sides started to stare at each other.

While the Star Army's vaunted expert mechs had come within range of Zeal's massive aura, their strong-willed expert pilots outright disregarded it. As esteemed individuals regarded by many as demigods, their conviction never faltered from the influence of gods and transcendents!

The same was not the case for the Kronon expert pilots. Each of them were sincere believers in the Ylvainan Faith, and none of them ever looked down on Zeal despite its inferiority in comparison to expert mechs.

The strong faith and zeal radiating from Taon's Transcendent Messenger did not clash with their wills at all. Instead, the aura empowered their conviction, as each of them dedicated at least some portions of their force of will around their faith!

Ordinarily, a low-ranking mech pilot would never dare to speak to expert pilots as if they were under his command.

Taon Melin was different. He was chosen.

As he spoke to the Kronon expert pilots, he wasn't speaking with his own voice. He was speaking with the voice of the Great Prophet!

"Zeal is with you, Venerables. The fate of the Protectorate and our faith will be determined by our victory here today. Our opponents don't know it yet, but they are already doomed to lose!"

The Transcendent Messenger raised its sword yet again! The rays of the local star that the occupants of the Creinze System worshipped so much gleamed across its blade!

"The Protectorate shall rise after this day! Our people will vanquish the sandmen! Our beliefs will propagate across the stars! Ylvaine shall prevail!"

"Ylvaine shall prevail!"

The battle between experts commenced with fire and fury! Empowered by their will and faith, both sides fought as vigorously as possible. Expert mechs glowed with energy and radiance as their expert pilots resonated with their expert mechs to achieve impossible effects!

One Starrer striker mech for example attempted to fend off the light skirmishers attempting to pass it by and attack the more vulnerable ranged mechs in the rear. The muzzle of its massive shotgun glowed before blasting out numerous shards empowered by resonance!

The sharp and deathly shards cut through the reinforced buildings like butter, but when they raked against the surface of the light skirmishers, they only left shallow scratches!

Even the lightest expert mech was far more resilient than any conventional mech! Some of the normal rules governing standard mech combat no longer applied at the expert level!

The Starrer striker mech expected this result. Even as it unleashed another spray of shards, it jumped backwards with rapid speed! Normal striker mechs moved as sluggishly as knight mechs, but this one managed to keep up with ordinary light mechs!

In the air, a trio of ranged aerial expert mechs from the Star Army attempted to take advantage of their commanding height to take down Zeal!

Nonetheless, Zeal unflinchingly dodged each and every laser beam and kinetic round propelled in its direction without fail!

In fact, it not only managed to dodge every shot with preternatural intuition, it also started to counterattack by lifting its rifle arm to shoot its exposed attackers!

Though the powerful laser rifle wielded by Zeal failed to inflict serious damage on the fantastic armor systems of the aerial mechs, the problem was that the hits never stopped! No matter how much one of the three expert mechs tried to dodge, Taon Melin always managed to land his laser beams at a specific joint in the Starrer aerial mech's flight system!

"What's with this guy's aim!?"

Of course, more Starrer expert mechs focused their firepower on the Zeal. Knowing that the fate of the battle between standard mechs depended on the presence of Zeal, each and every Starrer mech pilot set their sights on this hated Ylvainan mech!

Even though Zeal came under an increasing amount of fire, Taon never retreated! It held its central position as if the fate of the Protectorate rested on his shoulders!

Just when it became too much to bear, an expert knight mech interposed its resonating shield in front of the beleaguered Transcendent Messenger mech.

"Zeal shall never fall as long as my armor and shield of faith still hold!"

The Starrer expert mechs focused so much of their attention on taking down Zeal that their preoccupation proved unfortunate!

Most of the Ylvainan expert pilots had faith that Zeal would never fall! They devoted their full attention to taking down their Starrer counterparts!

With their faith and zeal supercharged by the presence of Zeal, their will for battle had never been stronger!

With the Starrer expert pilots becoming dismayed at their failed attempts to take down their eye-catching target, the crucial mental difference between the two sides widened to a dangerous degree!

Though Zeal did nothing else but take potshots at expert mechs while hiding behind the shield of a knight mech, its outsized presence on the battlefield quickly delivered results!

One Starrer expert mech faltered first. A Kronon light skirmisher snuck up unnoticed on a Starrer ranged mech armed with a high-powered laser rifle from a flank.

Taking advantage of the enemy's momentary preoccupation with Zeal, the light skirmisher sprinted forward with incredible speed as its legs and frame resonated with the will of its expert pilot!

"DIE YOU STAR SCUM!"

Though the light skirmisher approached quickly enough to catch the nearby Starrer mechs off-guard, the rifleman mech under threat jumped up in the air as it hastily activated its leg-mounted boosters!

Nonetheless, the ultra-sharp knives wielded by the light managed to score two serious hits on the rifleman mech's legs!

Its flight upwards immediately destabilized, forcing the damaged mech to land back onto the ground. The light skirmisher immediately pressed the advantage and launched forward with resonance empowering its entire frame and blade!

Within the blink of an eye, the light skirmisher slid across the ground on the other side of the rifleman mech!

Its entire frame glowed in heat and exhaustion as both its mech and mech pilot expended a considerable amount of energy for this single attack!

As for the target in question, the expensive and exquisitely-designed machine collapsed! A glowing knife had pierced straight through its chest plating and embedded its tip through the cockpit, killing the vaunted expert pilot inside before he could eject!

Even expert pilots were ultimately mortal when exposed to mechs!

"The Star Worshipers are weak! They fight with imaginary gods by their side! Press the advantage!"

The sudden loss of a single expert mech on the side of the Star Army only slightly jolted the defenders but invigorated the attackers to an even greater frenzy!

The small number disparity slowly widened even further as the Ylvainan expert mechs never relented on their foes. The battle on land and in the air slowly began to tip in the favor of the aggressors as their expert pilots fought just a bit more ferociously!

"Ylvaine shall prevail!" Zeal transmitted in the open.

"YLVAINE SHALL PREVAIL!" The expert mechs and the standard mechs on its side echoed across the battlefield!

The thunderous chorus did not affect the Starrer expert pilots, but it was an entirely different matter when it came to the other defenders.

The Star Army constantly gave ground since the start of the incursion. They never gained the initiative and failed to stabilize their lines.

The constant retreating did not come without a cost.

Surrendering so much precious ground continually pummeled the confidence and conviction of the Starrer mech pilots!

How could the Starrers be certain of victory when they failed to stall the advance of the Ylvainans time and time again? How could their mech pilots fight with confidence if their Venerables were being picked off one at a time?

As the battle at Halix Base gradually turned into a catastrophe for the defending side, the Starrer mech general made the unthinkable decision.

He ordered a retreat.

"The Star Army will stand, but we must not fall! Venerables, please retreat! Our brave men will cover your retreat as much as possible!"

"No! They will all perish!"

"Orders are orders! Regular mech pilots can be replenished in years, but expert pilots like you are needed to resist your Ylvainan counterparts!"

The hierarchy within the Star Army was strong. Not even the expert pilots possessed the authority to resist the orders of their higher-ups.

With great reluctance, the Starrer expert mechs started shaking off their opponents and evacuated from the battlefield.

"The Starrer expert mechs are running! Go after them! Each Starrer expert pilot dead is one less they can employ to threaten our people!"

Though the faith of the mech pilots of the Star Army failed to match the faith of their enemies, many of them fatalistically obeyed their latest order.

They threw themselves at the Ylvainan expert mechs!

"Stop them! Even if we stall them for a single second, that is one additional second our Venerables can escape!"

Though the Ylvainan expert mechs each slew the Starrer standard mechs with ease without giving most of them a chance to eject, the fanatical Starrers still proved they were willing to die for their beliefs!

"Sol will punish your cruel tyranny, Ylvainans!"

"Betelgeuse will rain down thunder and doom upon your traitorous stars!"

The Ylvainan combatants took no notice of the curses of the dying and fleeing Star Worshipers. With the departure of the surviving Starrer expert mechs, the Ylvainans gained free reign of Halifax Base!

Within Zeal, Taon did not relish in the euphoric mood that had overcome his comrades. He had already celebrated this victory long before it had been achieved.

His head turned as if he was glimpsing at five more stars in the sky.

Not only had he been certain of victory on Creinze IV, he was already assured that the other Transcendent Messengers led the mechs under their watch to victory!

He was right! The Ylvainans succeeded beyond their wildest dreams! The Starrers suffered serious losses without exception!

"Ylvaine has prevailed!"

"A new future awaits us all!"

"The works of the Bright Martyr will lead us to victory!"

Chapter 1529 Mutual Intimacy

The moment he infused his Desolate Soldier and Holy Soldier designs with their design spirits, their remarkable character intensified.

The design schematics looked exactly the same to her eyes, Gloriana nonetheless widened her eyes as a part of her sensed the enormous significance of what just happened!

Ves smiled when he witnessed her fascination. Delighting her always warmed his heart and gave him a sense of fulfillment.

"Only now has our project come to an end. My mech designs aren't finalized until I breathe life into them. Can you feel the difference?"

Gloriana nodded as she continued to admire the mech designs. Though nothing appeared to have changed about their physical makeup, the trick that Ves just pulled somehow changed her entire perception of them! If the Desolate Soldier and its variant were already noteworthy before, now they had become incredibly remarkable!

"Did you just put a proto-god into a design?"

Ves grimaced a bit. "I keep telling you, they're not gods. They're... spirits, I like to call them. You can refer to the ones I put inside mech designs like earlier as design spirits."

"Where do the proto-gods come from?" She asked, as if she completely hadn't heard about his umpteenth complaint about her terminology.

His girlfriend could be incredibly thick-headed about certain matters!

Still, he felt very good about trusting her right now, so he decided to tell her a little more.

"They don't come from nothing. The weakest ones are formed from nothing but my imagination, but they tend to be rather weak. The stronger ones all come from the exceptional minds of sentient human or alien minds, whether dead or alive. Smart exobeasts are also great sources. I can either take pieces of their spirits or capture them entirely, though their physical bodies will die if I resort to the latter."

Gloriana looked up at him with increasing admiration. "You can capture gods as they are being formed from the phases of life and death!"

His spiritual techniques had nothing to do with hexism! His girlfriend was just slotting his explanation in the framework of her beliefs!

"Whether it's expert pilots of exceptional exobeasts, each of my recent mech designs carry at least a portion of their spirits. The design spirits essentially function as a spiritual component that is invisible to everyone except me. Only I am fully aware of the spiritual components imparted to each of my mech designs, and in turn the mechs derived from them. I've never told any other mech designer this much, so I hope you can keep it a secret."

"Ves... thank you for revealing this to me." She happily leaned into him.

"Learning about this divine component you add to your mech designs has been an extraordinary revelation to me! I never viewed your specialty in this way, but now that you have opened my eyes, I've realized that all of my previous mech designs have always lacked this essential component! They had never been as close to perfect as I thought!"

Though it sounded as if she suffered a mental crisis, the glee on her face signified that she was anything but unhappy.

To a mech designer, discovering a shortcoming was not necessarily damaging to their development. Instead, they became more aware of what

they lacked, allowing them to come up with a way to remedy the flaws in their previous methods!

Ves sensed a storm raging through Gloriana's mind. This time, it was far greater than anything he sensed before!

Though Ves became incredibly concerned at what kind of mental shift was taking place in her mind, her will proved to be exceptionally strong! She quickly gained control over the storm and made sure that it only changed the parts of her that she wanted to change!

The storm only subsided once she fully incorporated the new insights she gained. From now on, her idea of the perfect vessel could no longer be devoid of a spiritual component!

Having witnessed much from his spiritual fragment stuck in her mind, Ves looked at his girlfriend with shock! Even if he didn't possess a glimpse into her mind, he could still deduce that Gloriana readily shifted the direction of her design philosophy in light of his revelation!

"Gloriana! What have you done?!"

"Ves.. I told you that I love you. I always believed your design philosophy perfectly complements mine, and you've just proved me right! Before I met you, I've always believed the most perfect vessels I could design and make for my customers would merely take the form of exquisitely-crafted shells. Now that I know that it is possible to imbue them with gods, the perfect vessel in my eyes must always include a divine component!"

"But.. you won't be able to make these perfect vessels yourself. If you follow this direction, you'll become dependent on me! Think of what it will do to your future progression!"

She hugged him tighter. "I know! I don't care! I already told you that I can't imagine living without you. No matter what my mother or anyone else thinks,

you are the man I wish to spend the rest of my life with. Binding my design philosophy to yours is not a heavy price to pay if I already enjoy your company. I simply can't ignore this option if it means I will forever be resigned to designing incomplete mechs!"

Though Ves collected abundant proof that Gloriana did not possess any ulterior motives towards him, not a single shred of doubt remained in his mind!

As a mech designer and as a woman, Gloriana decisively bound herself to him to the point where she could no longer realize her design philosophy without him by her side!

Ves couldn't imagine the sheer level of dedication required to make such a decision at the spur of the moment! He already thought he formed a measure of her adoration towards him, but this recent development showed him that he still underestimated her love!

As Ves and Gloriana both stared in each other's eyes, he voiced his deepest, heartfelt emotion.

"I love you, Gloriana." He whispered to her with affection.

A brilliant smile appeared on her. "I have waited so long for you to say those words. I love you too!"

The two instantly crashed their lips against each other! They fell onto the bed and started making out with incredible passion! His comm automatically switched off due to the movements, removing the two recently-empowered designs from view.

"AHEM! Stop this instant! Don't go too far!"

It took an enormous amount of physical effort for Melody to physically pry Gloriana off Ves! So passionate were they about their affection to each other that Melody almost resorted to calling in the guards of the Glory Battalion.

Even though Melody interrupted their intimate moment, they still smiled and laughed at each other. Both of them felt so connected to each other that merely being in each other's presence was enough.

"Meow."

"Miaow."

Even their cats responded happily to their affection towards each other!

The coming days proceeded smoothly. Now that they both completed their project, Ves transmitted the final design schematics and documents to the LMC.

"Fabricate the best copies that you can of the Desolate Soldier and the Holy Soldier and send them to the MTA for validation." He ordered Calsie over the comm. "Try and see if you can hurry up the process."

"Don't worry, Ves. Due to the recent changes, many mech designers have stopped flooding the MTA's branch on Bentheim with irrelevant mech designs. Their testers are much less busier now. They've already explicitly stated that they will fast track the validation of any mech design that fares well against the sandmen! They've also curtailed much of their certification processes to the absolute minimum!"

He became a little reassured at her response. "That doesn't sound like the MTA."

"They have no choice, really. If the MTA puts up too many administrative delays on the release of mechs the Bright Republic and other states solely need, the mech industry will simply bypass the onerous steps entirely. No one really cared whether a mech is technically sound or not as long as they can be built and put to use immediately."

"Good. Even if the validation process is shortened, don't wait for the MTA to make their judgement. Get the Mech Nursery to start churning out as many Desolate Soldiers as possible. Included in the documents I've sent you is a full step-by-step plan on how to optimally fabricate the Desolate Soldiers with our current equipment. Send this plan to our chief technicians. My latest product is already easy to produce, but we don't have any time to spare on ascending the learning curve."

"What about our current production orders?"

"They're not important." Ves waved his hand. "Halt or cancel as much as you can without getting the LMC in trouble. Right now, producing as many Desolate Soldiers is a huge priority because the sandmen invasion will reach the Bright Republic any day now. It'll be too late if we just start to roll out the Desolate Soldiers when the initial battles are already in full swing!"

His priority was obvious. He wanted at least some of his Desolate Soldiers to be present in the footage of the opening battles. As long as his mech was recognizably present in the footage broadcasted by the news, then his new product essentially enjoyed an enormous degree of free publicity!

It was not just about boosting the profile of his Desolate Soldier model. He also wanted to take away the space reserved for competing mech models!

As the caretaker of the LMC, Calsie keenly understood this dynamic.

"We'll do as you say. It is not as if we intended to do anything different. We have more than enough fixed customers to ensure that we won't be lacking in demand."

"Remember to focus solely on the Desolate Soldier. The LMYC in the Ylvaine Protectorate will handle the production and sale of the Holy Soldier. In fact, if demand happens to exceed supply for any reason, then I'll allow you to

approach third-party manufacturers to produce additional copies. Achieving volume should be our overarching priority!"

"That.. is different from what you usually prioritize, Ves." Calsie looked confused. "What about quality?"

"Times are different. We all have to lower our standards when our state is at stake. Unlike my previous works, the Desolate Soldier is not a premium mech model. Not only that, it's far easier to produce, so even dysfunctional workshops can make adequate copies. As long as they aren't too shabby, they're good enough to resist the sandmen!"

"I'll see what I can do. There are many mech manufacturers that are under threat because their usual products are no longer in demand. They'll be easy enough to persuade to produce your Desolate Soldiers, but..."

"What are you concerned about?" Ves asked.

"If we resort to this method to boost our production, it's doubtful we can earn adequate profits. The third-party mech manufacturers will still insist on getting a cut, which means our margins for the Desolate Soldiers will shrink even further!"

Ves did not expect much profit to begin with, which meant that allowing third-party manufacturers in on the action would barely put them above break-even territory.

"It's fine." he said. "Why should we worry about profits when the survival of the Bright Republic is not a sure thing? We should do our duty and support the mech pilots sent into battle as best we can by supplying them with decent mechs. Besides, the performance of our Desolate Soldiers will lay the groundwork for the LMC's resurgence in the mech market!"

As long as the mech market embraced the Desolate Soldiers, it would certainly embrace his other products! The stigma the LMC acquired would

naturally start to fade once everyone realized the benefits of using his products!

A day after Ves spoke with Calsie, he found out about the wildly successful raids conducted by the Ylvainans on their Starrer rivals.

The notable appearance of his Transcendent Messengers and the widespread use of the LMC's commercial mechs had temporarily supplanted the news on the sandman invasion in the Bright Republic!

"Ves!" Gavin called him the moment he received the news. "Have you heard what those religious nutjobs have just done!? They've gone crazy!"

Chapter 1530 Overwhelming Proof

Shock! Ves became shocked!

As Gavin sent him a bunch of news articles reporting on the successful attacks launched by the Ylvainans.

While the Ylvainans enjoyed the advantage of surprise, that shouldn't have been enough to give them a decisive victory on all six incursions. Yet the Kronons fought as if they were possessed, exhibiting much greater battle frenzy than what a stagnant, unbloodied military mech force ought to possess!

Unlike the Bright Republic Mech Corps, the Kronon Dynasty never fought any major battles since the founding of the Protectorate! Their state's isolation gave them very little chance to showcase their prowess, and they had largely been considered paper tigers by foreigners.

From the propaganda footage transmitted by the Ylvainans and the sporadic footage leaked by civilian Starrers on the ground, the battles proceeded very unevenly from the start!

"The Star Army isn't some pushover." Gavin told him over the comm. "The Star Faith Collective is a fairly belligerent state and they've had scuffles with most of their neighbors due to their hunger to take over powerful star systems."

"They are crazy for stars. They just can't help themselves."

"Well, this time, they've barked up the wrong tree. Despite possessing a considerable defensive advantage, their battle lines crumbled far too quickly against the Kronons. According to the judgement of the analysts, the

Ylvainans should have gotten stalled in at least four of the battles, but instead they overwhelmed the Star Worshipers through pure ferocity!"

The Ylvainans shouldn't have won so easily at all six battlefields. The Star Army was not a vegetable, and the Star Worshipers who fought on the defense were just as faithful in their beliefs as their opponents.

Both sides should have fought with an equal amount of religious fervor. Yet the mech pilots of one side exhibited much more enthusiasm while the mech pilots of the other side fought as if there were weights pressing down on their hearts!

A lot of analysts who interpreted battle footage for a living began to study the underlying reasons why the Ylvainans crushed the Star Worshipers so heavily.

What they discovered was fairly shocking.

The decisive factor turned out to be the mechs designed by Ves!

The difference became clear when the analysts compared the battle performance of units that contained LMC mechs and those that did not. The former fought as if they were blessed!

Entire mech companies worth of Blackbeaks and Crystal Lords fought with much greater aggression than their regular Kronon counterparts.

Not only that, but whatever influence affecting the fervor of their mech pilots also extended to the area around them! Friendly military mechs in close proximity fought just as aggressive and domineering when they kept up with the LMC mechs!

While this boost in morale and battle spirit should have only imposed a modest on the battlefield, the strangest part about the LMC mechs was that they intimidated their immediate opponents somehow!

Every Starrer mech company that faced the LMC mechs in battle suffered greater casualties and broke faster!

And this didn't just happen once or thrice. On all six battlefields, the Kronon units fielding Blackbeaks and the Crystal Lords all encountered measurably less resistance than units fielding regular military mechs!

"The data on this is so clear that there is no doubt your mechs is the deciding factor!" Gavin noted with glee!

Ves nodded with numb shock. "Although some of my customers have fielded my mechs in large numbers, few have gone as far as outfitting entire mech companies with my products."

His mechs worked best in large numbers because their identical auras overlapped with each other. Yet even if he knew this truth, others might not know about it or have the money to spare to outfit an entire mech company to put this notion to the test.

Out of all of his fans and customers, only the Ylvainans were fanatical enough to commit so many resources on fielding so many of his mechs at once! To field them in a major action in such great numbers was simply unthinkable to anyone else!

Only those who believed in the Bright Martyr were willing to take the plunge. Perhaps the Ylvainans had already bought a sufficient amount of Blackbeaks, Crystal Lords and Aurora Titans to discover and ascertain their strengths when fielded together, because the Kronons mainly grouped them together for maximum effect!

A smile inadvertently bloomed on his face. "The Ylvainans are the first customers who really get it. While my mechs mostly work fine when they are fielded by themselves, they work best when deployed together!"

He had often made this claim, but without any proof to back up his assertions, the mech market mostly brushed it off. Who was willing to invest billions of bright credits outfitting entire mech companies with the same LMC mech model?

This was why Ves banked on the Avatars of Myth to set an example. If not for its slow growth, its need to field a rounded mech roster and his various distractions, his personal mech force should have been the first ones to showcase the might of his mechs in unison!

Ves did not begrudge the Ylvainans from stealing his thunder. The authentic footage of their battles against the Star Army served as much more powerful proof than he could ever manage on his own!

This was because the Ylvainans fielded well over a thousand of his mechs at once! Ves hadn't even realized that the Kronons managed to procure so many of his commercial mechs! The Protectors of the Flock must have been responsible for virtually all of the demand for his products on the Protectorate's mech market!

A wry smile appeared on his face. He sensed the invisible influence of Calabast behind this major procurement by the Kronons. She wielded a large

amount of influence on the mech market in her cover identity, so it was impossible for her to remain uninvolved!

He mentally tipped his hat at her. Influencing the Kronons to buy and field his mechs in large numbers must have been one of her initiatives to empower Ves. He had to admit the timing of these attacks couldn't have come at a better moment!

Gavin recognized the fortuitous timing as well!

"All the analysts agree that your mechs have made an outsized influence on morale. The Ylvainans under their influence fought like they were possessed, while the Star Worshipers who fell within their sway fought as if they were haunted. There are so many data points from all of the footage that have been released that our critics simply can't refute the facts!"

This was important! While an abnormality in a single instance could have been passed off as a fluke or a difference in leadership or something, there were far more instances where the same took place. Overall, hundreds of different clashes between LMC mech companies and Star Army mech companies took place across all six ground battles.

The only other way to explain the vast differences was to dismiss the Ylvainan's battle fervor as a collective delusion.

Yet calling this phenomenon a placebo effect could only explain the raised morale from the side of the Ylvainans. It was plausible to dismiss their fanaticism in battle as a side effect of their misguided belief in the Bright Martyr's products.

But could that explain the measurably worse performance of the Starrer mech companies arrayed against them? The Star Worshipers didn't believe in the Bright Martyr. It was doubtful if they ever even heard of this figure! There was no reason why they should feel fear just because they faced mechs produced by a particular mech company!

"If your Blackbeaks, Crystal Lords and to a lesser extent your Aurora Titans already have this effect, then the effect of your Transcendent Messengers is on a whole different level!" Gavin gushed.

The effect of gathering Forty Blackbeaks at once was much less drastic than the effect of fielding a single Transcendent Messenger!

Though every Ylvainan mech pilot entered the battle with high morale, the ones who fought within a broad range of the hero mech fought particularly well! The Kronon mechs surrounding the Transcendent Messengers all

pushed forward with unstoppable momentum, while the Starrer mechs all failed to muster more than eighty percent of their usual strength!

The differences in performance had become noticeably more stark, causing lots of people to pay very close attention to the Transcendent Messengers!

Just its symbolic value to the Ylvainans couldn't explain the vast gulf in performance!

The Star Worshipers who believed in the stellar gods shouldn't have fought so poorly to the point where it seemed as if they questioned their faith!

"Proof." Ves spoke up after his shock at the Ylvaine Protectorate's insane decision to attack the Star Faith Collective had subsided. "All of this is proof!"

"Yes! Our Marketing Department has already gone into overdrive to edit the footage into compelling ads. The only problem is that demand for our existing mech lineup won't change. With the sandmen bearing down on us, no one is stupid enough to buy a Blackbeak."

Though that was a huge shame, neither of them showed any dissatisfaction. That was because they could still use the proof to raise the fame of the LMC!

Not only that, they could also use all of the material they obtained to boost their next products!

"We should take advantage of the buzz the Ylvainans have generated to promote your Desolate Soldier and the Holy Soldier models! Even if the mech models are different, all of your mechs exhibited the same effect on morale! We can put much more strength to your claim that your Desolate Soldier is perfect for shoring up everyone's sense of duty!"

Both Ves and Gavin were of the same mind on this judgement. With the dramatic success achieved by the Ylvainans so fresh on everyone's minds, the LMC needed to take immediate advantage of the favorable publicity!

Once the sandman invasion reached the third line of defense, the news of the dramatic raids would quickly fade!

"The Mech Nursery should hurry up and pump out as many Desolate Soldiers as possible. Don't hesitate in partnering up with third-party mech manufacturers to expand our initial volume. With all of the publicity my products have received, it's more vital than ever to make my mechs visible on the streets!" Ves instructed Gavin.

They hashed out a plan to field large numbers of Desolate Soldiers on the streets of Bentheim. Even if they did nothing but stand around or move back

and forth, their strong duty-focused auras would fascinate every mech buyer in Bentheim!

To the LMC, there was no better way to convince hesitating mech buyers of the unique value of his Desolate Soldiers than to verify their effects in person! Ves had no doubt that the curiosity generated by the successful Ylvainan raids would be satisfied in this fashion!

Once Gavin ended the call to convey the altered marketing plans to the LMC, Ves sat back and fell into a moment of contemplation.

He viewed the first massed use of his mechs as a turning point in his career. Along with the imminent release of the Desolate Soldier model and its variant, the LMC's fortunes would inevitably experience an incredible boost!

"From now on... the sales of my mech models won't be limited to thousands."

Ves held especially high hopes for his Desolate Soldier model. While its product margin was very thin, if he managed to sell tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of copies in the next year, then the profit he earned would amount to a considerable figure!

Yet more important than the profit would be the boost to his products. With the LMC products fielded in such large numbers, more and more proof of how beneficial they could be would spread among the mech community like a wildfire.

He had no doubt that many of his customers aside from the Ylvainans would soon come to know how formidable the LMC mechs performed in battle!

"My limelight has come!" He grinned.

At the dawning of the next mech generation, a brand new future awaited him upon his return!