

## Mech 1761

### Chapter 1761 Second-Class Mechs

"Not now."

"Meow."

Lucky landed on his head and treated his hair like a mat.

"Are you getting fatter? You're heavier than last time!"

"Meow!"

Ves no longer bothered with his misbehaving cat and turned his attention back to the four battle bots he almost finished servicing.

A large number of workshop bots were installing the parts he disassembled and repaired. Ordinarily it would have taken at least a week to effect these repairs on his own, but the Scarlet Rose's well-equipped mech workshop came with many of the same advanced tools as those owned by Gloriana.

While the machines all came from Coalition manufacturers, their functions and operation methods closely abided by the standards set by the MTA.

Standardization made everything easier. If an equipment manufacturer refused to conform to standard, then hardly any customer would seek to purchase their products!

Taking advantage of his familiarity with the same type of equipment, Ves managed to get the hang of them pretty quickly, to the point where he operated them just as well as Aisling!

"Second-class mech designers sure have it good." He sighed with admiration.

Of course, elite Journeymen like her weren't very common even in a large state like the Friday Coalition. Ves just happened to meet two of the brightest young Journeymen from their respective states, which somewhat skewed his perspective.

Not every Journeyman was as freakish as these two young women!

His perceived disparity towards these mech designers lit a fire under his butt. With the replenishment of his spiritual energy, his passion and motivation returned, and with it an unrelenting drive to catch up to the likes of Aisling and Gloriana!

Ves could accept many circumstances, but he could not accept remaining inferior to his girlfriend and his would-be kidnapper!

Though they possessed vastly different backgrounds, their ages were similar. There was no excuse for Ves to be unable to design at the same level as them! With all of the advantages he possessed, becoming proficient in designing second-class mechs should be well within his capabilities!

For this reason, Ves decided to stop increasing his control over the Scarlet Rose and instead focus all of his efforts on deciphering and understanding Aisling's former bodyguard mechs.

The more he spent time with them, the more he grasped the paradigms related to this class of mechs.

The performance on these mechs were on another level compared to the toys he used to fiddle with. The results of the previous battles spoke for themselves. Against hundreds of enemy mechs, the pilot-less machines were still capable of crushing and disheartening entire mercenary corps with their awe-inspiring might!

Touching, servicing, repairing and witnessing the battle bots in battle rapidly accelerated his comprehension of second-class mechs and second-class technology.

As a mech designer who always liked to be hands-on, working with machines was a lot better than reading hundreds of textbooks!

This was not just because he could see the cause and effect in person, but also develop a natural feel towards this class of mechs!

Ves vaguely sensed that his design seed and his intuition both experienced some growth and changes as a result of his activities.

He believed that as long as he returned to safety, it would only take a couple more months of focused study and tinkering to gain a satisfactory proficiency in second-class mech design!

Though it sounded a lot, Ves knew that this process couldn't be rushed! He was already progressing at the limits of his learning capacity!

"As long as I get to keep these battle bots, I'll definitely be able to harvest more and more from Aisling's work!"

Of course, relying too much on studying the converted mechs had its downsides as well.

Ves had to be careful not to get swept up in Aisling's approach to her work.

By studying her design choices, Ves would doubtlessly copy some of them without making sure they conformed to his own design style.

However, Ves was very confident about his design capabilities. It wasn't easy for someone else's design style and design philosophy to contaminate his own approach.

"Study always involves adopting someone else's best practices." He muttered. "As long as it is better, there is hardly an excuse to ignore it in favor of an inferior solution."

Ves didn't have the time to take it slow and steady like Patricia. With Gloriana's mother expecting him to prove himself in less than three years, he rapidly needed to master a higher class of mech design!

Not only that, but Ves also had to earn a humongous amount of MTA merits to become a galactic pioneer and take part in the great phasewater rush.

He would definitely feel regret for the rest of his life if he missed the first waves of humanity's invasion of this new and exciting dwarf galaxy!

Ves had always been someone who worked better under pressure. With so much on the line, his passion burned hotter, stimulating his emotions and causing him to be utterly consumed by his determination to master this class of mechs!

What aided him a lot was that the four pilot-less second-class mechs each consisted of a different archetype.

Not only that, but they happened to be among the most fundamental and common mech types in the mech market!

The Paravin was the simplest mech of all. As a space knight, it featured a simple but very sturdy internal architecture. Even with more advanced tech, Aisling still abided by the same common principles that governed all defensive mechs.

Simplicity did not necessarily equate to inferiority. The Paravin's solid design and construction elevated its damage resistance and shock-absorbing capabilities to a level Ves had scarcely witnessed elsewhere!

The Selzer was the standard of ranged mechs. As a rifleman mech, it possessed a great balance between firepower, endurance, mobility and range. Aisling managed to find a great balance with all of the materials tech at her disposal. Her design brought out all of the strengths of her resources without exhibiting any excessive waste.

Its dual-type weapon was a great object of interest to Ves. The commonalities between laser weapons and particle beam weapons meant that it was not impossible to design a weapon that accommodated both weapon types.

As Ves was very familiar with laser weapons, he only studied this aspect for a brief period of time before he thoroughly comprehended how they could be scaled to second-class standards.

"Particle beam weapons are much more interesting." He muttered.

Particle beam weapons were basically weaponized particle accelerators. They electromagnetically propelled charged atomic or subatomic particles to relativistic speeds.

Though the mass of these particles were almost trivial, when their speeds approached the speed of light, the kinetic energy they carried was incredibly powerful!

Upon hitting a target, all kinds of detrimental effects occurred. The energies involved in a collision dealt both physical and energy damage that was extremely damaging against any manner of defense, but worked especially well against physical armor!

Of particular interest the type of particles the weapons accelerated. The Friday Coalition's particle beam weapons mostly accelerated ionized atoms, which was a lot easier to work with compared to subatomic particles.

"It seems the Friday Coalition can't easily make use of more sophisticated particle beam weapons." He observed.

The Selzer was already a fairly advanced mech in the standards of the Friday Coalition.

Yet its particle beam rifle simply didn't compare to the positron beam weapons utilized by the first-class multipurpose mechs that Ves witnessed during one of his Mastery experiences!

A positron was a subatomic antiparticle. In simple terms, it was the mirror version of an electron.

When a single electron and a positron met together, they annihilated each other, converting all of their matter into energy!

The release of energy was incredibly tremendous and surpassed that of a nuclear reaction of the same scale!

Compared to this awesome destruction, Ves felt a bit underwhelmed by the modest parameters of the weapon wielded by the Selzer.

"It probably doesn't help that the rifle also has to fire laser beams." He muttered.

Particle beams were incredibly destructive, but they differed from pure energy weapons by their dependence on particles. Incorporating a backup option that purely relied on energy extended the deployment time of the Selzer, as its heat and energy capacities were quite formidable for a machine of its size!

Ves already designed multiple rifleman mechs. The Crystal Lord was his first proper landbound rifleman mech, while the Desolate Soldier was his first ranged product for battles in space.

Developing the Deliverer increased his depth in ranged mechs. Yet when he compared his previous works to the Selzer, Ves realized that he had a lot more to go before matching its sophistication.

The Kravon was the big brother of the Selzer. Though not a heavy mech, its mass and properties closely approximated one. In exchange for increasing its capacity and armor, Aisling decisively sacrificed a lot of mobility.

Due to the limitations of its weight class, it only incorporated two weapon systems, both of which were burdened by the fact that they used up a lot of ammunition.

This turned the artillery mech into the opposite of the Selzer. Whereas the rifleman mech was capable to outputting continuous damage over the course

of a long, drawn-out battle, the Kravon hit hard but expended its ammunition very quickly!

It was all worth it though as the Kravon's damage reached an astounding level. Leaving aside the missile launchers which could fire all kinds of specialized missiles with different payloads, its massive gauss cannon was a sight to behold.

Compared to the Executor that Ves had paired with the Deliverer, the Kravon's main armament was a weapon that could pose as the primary of secondary armament of a warship!

It was too bad that a weapon of its power and potency was too advanced for Ves to reproduce. Just the materials capable of handling the forces the weapon had to withstand were too difficult to obtain!

Compared to the size and bulk of the Kravon, the Fliskin was a lot slimmer and smaller.

As a spaceborn light skirmisher, its armor was the worst out of the four machines, but its insane mobility made it even harder to destroy than the Paravin!

As long as the Fliskin possessed enough energy, it could dance circles against almost any foe!

"It's too bad that energy is also its main limitation." He sighed.

As a small and compact mech, the Fliskin really didn't have much room for energy cells and other essential components.

Ves could practically sense Aisling's pain as she had to make many unsatisfying compromises in order to avoid making the Fliskin too uneven.

For all of the Friday Coalition's technologies, the light skirmisher only made use of a pair daggers and a submachine gun.

He always found that to be a bit disappointing. Couldn't a mighty second-rate state manage to achieve anything more?

Yet once he delved into the Fliskin's design, Ves realized that Aisling didn't want to bite off more than she could chew.

Just like with the Paravin, instead of stuffing too many systems and modules in an already-compact mech, she instead focused most of her efforts on elevating its fundamental specs!

For a light skirmisher, nothing was more important than its acceleration and agility! As long as its comprehensive mobility attributes were high, the mech fulfilled an indispensable role in the team of four mechs.

"What's not important is how these four mechs perform in isolation. Instead, what matters more is how well they work together!"

He couldn't help but be intrigued by Aisling's design philosophy. Her paradigms partially overlapped with his own, and he always exhibited an interest in increasing the coordination between the users of his products.

Any method which improved the performance of mechs without increasing their cost was of great value to mech designers.

Those who merely relied on expensive materials to improve the performance of their products were the laziest mech designers of all!

If Ves wanted to gain a foothold in the second-class mech market, then Ves had to refine his own specialty and design style to compete against mech designers who were just as good if not better than Aisling!

Chapter 1762 Strange Entry

Though Ves missed designing mechs, he benefited from his forced respite.



By taking him away from his previous routine, Ves essentially returned back to basics. Crossing through the territories of the Ordent Republic and the Great Zona Republic in almost complete isolation put him in a calmer state of mind.

The days he spent in his low period temporarily suppressed his emotions and caused him to reflect on his prior decisions from a more rational perspective.

Though Ves eventually recovered, he felt he had become more self-aware of himself. He knew that many of his decisions were mainly driven by his urges rather than any rational considerations.

He could no longer believe in the lie that he was a rational and enlightened mech designer. Compared to a true rational mech designer like Patricia, Ves was pretty much a brat who was very prone to mood swings!

While that didn't sound very flattering, Ves believed this weakness also served as his strength!

"Only when my emotions are the strongest will I be able to design my best mechs!"

He believed in Patricia's description that passionate mech designers were able to achieve great feats as long as they were determined enough!

In his mind, no amount of logic and rationality could ever match the sheer motivation of a driven mech designer!

The lack of doubt and second-guessing often led to mistakes, but also resulted in unimaginable successes that no one could have ever predicted!

In order to become a great mech designer, Ves believed his current path was the most suitable one for him. After reflecting on himself over this period, he became more determined than ever to continue as usual.

Just looking back at his many accomplishments filled him with pride!

With mechs like the Aurora Titan and the Desolate Soldier, Ves fully found his groove!

Besides, whatever shortcomings he possessed, working alongside Gloriana mitigated many of them! With her presence, Ves felt free to continue to deepen his specialization, preventing him from getting bogged down by the need to spread his skillset too widely.

Ves felt more than ready to return to his organization, however. He missed Gloriana. He missed his double-dealing Benny. He missed his Avatars of Myth.

Above all, he missed designing mechs.

"At least I'm not lacking inspiration now." He chuckled.

Each adventure and each exciting experience always injected him with compelling ideas. Mech concepts and potential visions haunted his imagination.

His fingers itched to call up a design interface and draft a brilliant new draft design!

Yet he resisted the urge. Instead of expending his creative energies, he wanted to bottle it up in his mind and let it ferment for some time. Only when he was truly ready to design a new mech would he unleash it all and come up with a grand new mech design that surpassed the Desolate Soldier and Deliverer in impact!

"Besides, I don't even know whether I'll be in the position to design a third-class or second-class mech."

All of this depended on what he encountered when he returned to safety. If he returned to safety.

His return was anything but guaranteed. After overcoming the Echo Spears and two other ambushes prepared by greedy mercenaries, the Scarlet Rose and the four battle bots all suffered from attrition.

The Scarlet Rose endured a lot of weapon impacts. Though none of the arms the mercenaries brought to bear managed to breach her armor, much of her exterior still bore a lot of cracks and ugly marks!

This wasn't necessarily bad in ordinary circumstances. A competent crew could easily patch up the holes and replace some of the damaged plating.

Yet that was clearly impossible at the moment. Aside from lacking a crew, the ship couldn't rest in place long enough to affect meaningful repairs!

This essentially meant that whatever external damage the ship suffered, her durability permanently dropped, making it easier for his subsequent enemies to cripple the vessel!

As for the battle bots, Ves did his best to patch up the holes and minor battle damage, but the Scarlet Rose simply didn't carry enough materials to sustain a full campaign.

Ves threw a dirty look at Lucky, who was resting on a metal console as if there was nothing wrong in the galaxy!

Ever since he gorged himself stupid, his gluttonous cat had done nothing but napping all day! It was as if his cat needed entire months to digest all of his gains!

"Where is it even going, anyway? At least give me some gems!"

Evidently, Lucky focused all of his efforts on improving his capabilities rather than performing his primary function.

His changes became evident when his bone-white exterior began to exhibit tiger stripes. Though these black stripes were still rather faint, they grew more solid by the day.

Ves had no idea what these stripes even represented. All of Lucky's previous changes in appearance directly corresponded to the materials he ate.

He became curious what kind of abilities Lucky developed after he finished his evolution. So far, his System sight did not notice any new additions to his pet's skillset.

"You better make it worth it, though!"

The stronger Lucky grew, the safer Ves would be. This adventure already proved his cat's value as a protector who could accompany him where others could not! No matter how much he valued Nita, his Kinner bodyguard couldn't turn intangible like his cat!

"Maybe Lucky won't be my only intangible bodyguard in the future." Ves grinned with anticipation.

That was something to look forward to much later on. For now, he should focus on his current circumstances.

Right now, the Scarlet Rose already managed to traverse two-thirds of the Great Zona Republic.

While unflinchingly sticking to her obscure route sometimes landed her in trouble, the Scarlet Rose nonetheless managed to avoid more formidable ambushes, which was a great win in his book!

Yet even as Ves and his stolen ship continued to foil the best efforts of the mercenaries hired to stop them, his enemies were doubtlessly learning.

The three battles he had been through had provided the Fridaymen with enough information to confirm the strengths and assets at his disposal!

Ves had a very awful hunch that his fourth and potentially last encounter would be the greatest of them all!

At this time, the Scarlet Rose had almost finished cycling her FTL drive.

To his dismay, the standard cycling time already began to last longer than the 5 hours it was rated for during standard operations.

Extending it by just ten minutes might make or break his escape attempt!

Yet what could he do? Though he dabbled somewhat in FTL drive technology, he was far from being able to service this complicated device.

What was worse was that if he wanted to effect meaningful repairs, he would certainly have to deactivate and disassemble some of its subcomponents, thereby extending his stay in the star system!

Ves did not dare to linger in a single location longer than he really had to! With so many listening posts and scouts tracking his movements, Ves was sure that a lot of hostiles were on their way to his location at this moment!

"I hope the FTL drive can last."

While it was unlikely that the FTL drive would suffer a malfunction, the longer this flight went on, the greater the chance of calamity.

Without an engineering crew, Ves could do nothing to mitigate its deterioration!

As Ves contemplated ways to decrease the load on the FTL drive, the bridge suddenly sounded a small alert.

The Scarlet Rose detected something unusual had intruded on the ship!

"What?" Ves looked confused. "How could anything sneak on my ship? All of her anti-stealth sensors are running at full blast!"

Though the load on those sensors was great, Ves did not hold anything back on that end! While their integrity had already started to decrease, they were capable of enduring the strain for now and shouldn't have any blind spots!

"Lucky!"

Ves grabbed Lucky's napping body and shook his cat until the lazy critter woke up.

"Meow meow!"

"This is no time for you to nap! There's an intruder aboard the ship!"

"Meow?"

Lucky became a lot more alert upon hearing that. Ves didn't have to encourage his pet any longer.

Anything or anyone that snuck aboard his ship was a threat!

"Let's see what we are dealing with." Ves muttered as he controlled the monitoring system to show him where the ship discovered something anomalous.

The compartment projected in front of him turned out to be the same one which held many of the escape pods.

Two prominent spaces should be empty, signifying Aisling and Patricia's escape.

At least that was how it should have been.

According to his memory, the Scarlet Rose was short of two escape pods.

"Then why is one of the spaces filled?" He questioned.

Were his eyes deceiving him? How could one of the spaces which he never filled up with anything else host an escape pod now?

Did some kind of rogue bot relocate an existing escape pod?

"That shouldn't be. All the other escape pods are still in place!"

Ves carefully counted each and everyone of them through the various monitoring feeds and found that none of them were out of place! The information transmitted from the compartment showed that all of those escape pods belonged to the Scarlet Rose and had never been moved!

The only exception was the mystery escape pod that showed up out of the blue!

"How did it enter this compartment?!"

The Scarlet Rose was fully sealed in normal circumstances. The only way the escape pods could enter and exit the compartment was if the connected hatches opened up, which they would never do under ordinary circumstances!

Ves pulled up the logs of the monitoring system and also rewinded the footage backwards on an accelerated rate.

He managed to pin down the exact the moment the strange escape pod showed up and registered on the Scarlet Rose's monitoring system.

Just after the ship sounded the initial alert, the empty cavity suddenly hosted a new escape pod!

It didn't slide into the space from the exterior of the ship, nor did some bot transport it from the mech workshop where some kind of production AI had automatically been programmed to produce a replacement.

Instead, the escape pod simply showed up in the slot like magic!

"Magic doesn't exist!" Ves firmly declared. "What the monitoring system captured is not necessarily representative of what has actually happened!"

The sudden appearance of the escape pod reminded Ves a lot of how it looked like when he abruptly shut off his Full Stealth augment.

It could be that this mystery escape pod snuck into the ship from space sometime earlier. It was just that its stealth and other detection avoidance abilities kept it hidden from him and the Scarlet Rose.

Ves began to sweat a bit. If a random escape pod managed to sneak aboard the Scarlet Rose, then what about something more dangerous?

What if the same vulnerabilities or backdoors that allowed the escape pod to sneak onto the Scarlet Rose allowed for the entry of shuttle carrying elite Fridaymen commandos?

"Dammit!" Ves slammed his fist against the armrest of the captain's chair. "How many backdoors have I missed?!"

His control over the ship was anything but complete! By spending much of his time on the battle bots, Ves neglected to continue his gradual conquest over the various systems of the Scarlet Rose.

Ves had a feeling this decision might have been a mistake now that the Scarlet Rose unknowingly allowed for the entry of a foreign escape pod!

He called up the logs and performed an expansive search. Had the outer escape hatches opened up anytime since he hijacked the ship?

The logs didn't note anything unusual, and none of the footage exhibited any abnormalities aside from some cleaning bots performing their routine duties.

"Can these logs even be trusted?!"

Ves became more and more alarmed. Had the Scarlet Rose been compromised without his knowledge?!

He quickly made up his mind. If he wanted to know the truth, then confronting the unwelcome escape pod was the first thing on his agenda!



## Chapter 1763 Misplaced

Ves did not race down to the compartment in question without preparation.

Fearing a trap or a plot on his life, Ves resisted his immediate impulses to make some preparations.

He first put the Scarlet Rose on red alert and locked down all of the compartments and corridors. If some kind of infiltrator left the escape pod and skulked across his ship, then locking all of the spaces should pose a significant hindrance to the sneaky bastard!

Second, he withdrew all of the bots from the affected areas and ordered most of them to remain dormant and in place.

If any bots still moved during this time, then that was a very clear sign that someone managed to subvert a part of the Scarlet Rose!

Third, he withdrew to his quarters in order to don his second-hand combat armor. With a solid layer of armor protecting him from outside threats, Ves felt a lot more secure about confronting any potential intruders!

He armed himself with the triple-type heavy assault rifle while slotting the compact laser pistol in a dedicated holster.

Aside from that, he also checked his other gear, which encompassed various gadgets ranging from a jamming device to a multiscanner.

Only after he prepared his full loadout did Ves feel secure in investigating the mysterious intrusion.

"Alright, let's go, Lucky."

"Meow."

With Lucky in tow, they descended from the upper decks and approached the suspicious compartment.

Before Ves reached the entrance to the escape compartment, he halted a fair distance away.

Having learned his previous lesson, Ves no longer dared to act as a vanguard.

Who knew if the escape pod was a missile in disguise? Wouldn't Ves be making the exact same mistake as last time if he entered a compartment which was filled with unknowns?

"Meow?"

"Stay on guard." Ves spoke and summoned up an interface from his combat armor's wrist. "We should scout the situation first."

He summoned a random scanning bot used for routine inspections from a nearby maintenance compartment. After it arrived in front of the entrance, Ves ordered the hatch to open long enough to allow the bot to enter.

Once inside, Ves switched his view to the sensor bot's optical vision.

After issuing an order, the bot did not immediately approach the strange escape pod. Instead, he instructed it to scan every corner of the compartment, from its escape pods to the sensors that made up the monitoring system.

He wanted to find out if the hardware had been tampered with. As long as Ves discovered anything suspicious, then he'd be able to confirm that someone hostile had been messing with his ship!

Surprisingly, Ves encountered nothing amiss.

It was as if the sensors and alert systems hadn't been touched at all!

Nothing else had been touched as well. The bot found no holes cut into the bulkheads, no breaches in the other escape pods, no radioactive particles or other traces that signified that something in space had intruded in the compartment.

This was actually the weirdest observation of all. How could all of the customary traces of space exposure be absent, especially when a foreign escape pod somehow managed to sneak into this compartment?

"What is going on?" Ves asked in puzzlement.

Many of his paranoid suspicions turned out to be a bust if the scanning bot's results could be trusted.

Had the scanning bot been fooled? Was his mystery opponent more formidable than anything he had imagined?

Whatever the case, Ves guessed that the answer lay in the peculiar escape pod.

When Ves directed the bot to approach the escape pod, the feed suddenly cut off.

"What..?"

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He blinked at the interface as if he expected the feed to restore.

Yet as several seconds passed, the scanning bot didn't resume its transmission!

Had it gone on a strike or something?

Ves furrowed his brows and switched the feed. When Ves watched what took place from the footage recorded by the monitoring system, he observed the scanning bot had shut off and crashed against the deck.

This inexplicable malfunction instantly doubled his apprehension!

If the earlier signs had succeeded in stoking his suspicions, then this latest occurrence definitely proved that something was wrong!

Ves knew that all kinds of strange and inexplicable technology existed. Ves had witnessed all manner of technological wonders that could result in such a strange escape pod appearing out of nowhere.

He even experienced many strange sights related to spirituality. From surviving an encounter with an assassin with spiritual potential to dealing with all of the strangeness of the Temple of Haaatumak, Ves did not rule out that some spiritual shenanigans might be at work.

Yet Ves did not take these possibilities too seriously. If he set aside all of these unrealistic and low-probability scenarios, then the simplest explanation was that the escape pod simply managed to infiltrate the Scarlet Rose by exploiting her backdoors.

Though Ves had made a lot of progress in closing all of these backdoors, he was under no illusion that he addressed all of them. Even if Calabast sent him a lot of supplementary data that pointed out these vulnerabilities, was it truly complete?

"Evidently not." Ves grimaced. "This is getting more and more precarious."

While he was tempted to dispatch another bot, he began to run out of patience. What if he tipped the escape pod off? What if he triggered some kind trap?

Ves decided to throw some of his caution to the wind. He turned his attention to Lucky.

"Go in and investigate the escape pod in the center."

"Meow?"

"Go do something useful for once and scout the escape pod!"

"Meow meow meow!"

"Don't jerk me around! You've been eating so many exotics that your debt has only increased! The least you can do is to see what's wrong!"

After a bit of arguing, Ves managed to browbeat his pet into entering the escape compartment.

"Meow.."

"Get going!"

Lucky reluctantly flew towards the compartment and phased through the hatch. After entering the area in question, he did not let go of his intangible state.

With utmost care, Lucky floated closer and closer while exhibiting a lot of vigilance.

When the gem cat passed by the place the scanning bot malfunctioned, nothing strange occurred.

It seemed that Lucky appeared to be immune to the effect that downed the scanning bot.

"Good." Ves sighed.

Whether it was due to Lucky's intangible state or his extremely strong resistance against hacking, as long as he remained functional, he could probably get close to the escape pod.

"Lucky, transmit a feed of your vision to the ship."

His cat did as instructed and the view of his projection changed.

The moment Lucky came within touching distance of the escape pod, the cat paused for a moment.

"It looks kind of.. old."

The escape pod looked as if it had been floating in space for at least a couple of decades.

Its surface was worn and pitted by a combination of damaging radiation and micro impacts.

None of the damage breached the inner chamber of the escape pod. However, some of the scarring did appear to have affected some of the components responsible to keep the pod functioning.

What was clear though was that this pod was likely very old!

"The model is unfamiliar as well."

Ves tried to find a match of its model in the Scarlet Rose's internal database. Sadly, his search did not produce any matches despite the countless different models it stored in its archives.

This basically ruled out that the escape pod was built by the Friday Coalition.

Yet that only confused him even further.

"If it's not from the Friday Coalition, then how can it access the backdoors of my ship?"

Did he guess wrong? Did the escape pod sneak onto his ship using other methods?

His doubts continued to grow along with the questions in his mind.

An inexplicable sense of fear grew within his heart as he began to contemplate various frightening possibilities.

"What is wrong with this escape pod?!"

After a bit of observation, Lucky finally gathered the courage to touch the surface of the escape pod. He reached out with a paw and materialized it long enough to bump the surface.

Nothing happened. No bomb exploded. No commando jumped out of the pod.

Lucky grew a little more courageous when he found out that no threat was forthcoming. After a bit of sniffing, he took advantage of his intangibility to dive into the escape pod.

The feed temporarily darkened before showing off a screaming face!

"AAAH!!!"

Ves practically jumped in his combat armor as Lucky panicked and floated out of the escape pod!

"What the hell?!"

"Meeooow!"

Lucky zipped out of the compartment and returned to Ves and clung on the surface of his armor!

"Meow meow meow!"

Ves ignored his panicked cat and his own distress in order to rewind the footage. The moment he locked the frame which displayed the screaming face, Lucky jumped again!

"Stop being a scaredy cat, Lucky! How can you even be afraid of this sight?!"

The moment Ves repressed his primordial instincts, he finally saw the truth of what was locked inside.

"It's just a dead body!"

The escape pod contained the body of a dead woman, one who was wearing nothing but a worn-out vacsuit whose markings and identifiers had faded due to some erosion that shouldn't be happening.

In fact, the wear and tear on the vacsuit contrasted remarkably with the condition of the body, which had completely dried up and turned dark! The

mummified state of the body made it seem as if the escape pod had actually been used as a coffin!

Yet if this was true, why did this coffin sneak aboard his ship?

"If it's an honorable space burial, then it should have been hurled into a star. If it's a less-than-honorable burial, then it should have been flung into the nothingness of interstellar space."

Anything thrown into the void of space between star systems should have been floating for millions of years before ending up in another star system!

The aging of the mummified corpse and the escape pod did not suggest that they spent entire eons in space!

Ves was no forensic scientist, but as someone who worked with mechs, he could glean several clues from the appearance of the escape pod.

First, while its model, manufacturer and origin was still in question, the standards governing escape pods mostly remained the same barring some minor updates.

Ves happened to know some of these changes. When Ves inspected the damaged and pitted surface of the escape pod, he found out some outdated implementations that had been phased out in modern escape pod models.

"Some of these modules stopped showing up around 150 years ago."

That meant that if this escape pod wasn't some kind of historical reproduction, it might be around this age!

Yet how could this be?! Any escape pod that lingered in space for some time should have been picked up by rescuers or flown off in the middle of nowhere!

Ves had never heard of instances where escape pods casually lingered in space for at least a century before automatically entering ship while its occupant was long dead!



"What is even going on?!"

A complication like this was the last thing Ves wanted to deal with! He had the feeling that the arrival of this escape pod heralded something very significant!

"This isn't the time for me to indulge in mysteries!"

The rational part of him wanted to minimize any unexpected incidents that did not facilitate his escape.

The chances that this mystery escape pod would aid him was extremely small. There was nothing about this strange occurrence that signified that it was meant to aid his escape!

Yet.. another part of him grew curious. What was the secret behind this escape pod? What was the story of the mummified corpse? Why did the escape pod choose to enter the Scarlet Rose? Did it even have a choice at all, or did some outside influence manipulate its entry onto his ship?

Ves needed answers, and it seemed that he had no choice but to investigate in person!

#### Chapter 1763 Mystery Pod

Ves did not race down to the compartment in question without preparation.

Fearing a trap or a plot on his life, Ves resisted his immediate impulses to make some preparations.

He first put the Scarlet Rose on red alert and locked down all of the compartments and corridors. If some kind of infiltrator left the escape pod and skulked across his ship, then locking all of the spaces should pose a significant hindrance to the sneaky bastard!

Second, he withdrew all of the bots from the affected areas and ordered most of them to remain dormant and in place.

If any bots still moved during this time, then that was a very clear sign that someone managed to subvert a part of the Scarlet Rose!

Third, he withdrew to his quarters in order to don his second-hand combat armor. With a solid layer of armor protecting him from outside threats, Ves felt a lot more secure about confronting any potential intruders!

He armed himself with the triple-type heavy assault rifle while slotting the compact laser pistol in a dedicated holster.

Aside from that, he also checked his other gear, which encompassed various gadgets ranging from a jamming device to a multiscanner.

Only after he prepared his full loadout did Ves feel secure in investigating the mysterious intrusion.

"Alright, let's go, Lucky."

"Meow."

With Lucky in tow, they descended from the upper decks and approached the suspicious compartment.

Before Ves reached the entrance to the escape compartment, he halted a fair distance away.

Having learned his previous lesson, Ves no longer dared to act as a vanguard.

Who knew if the escape pod was a missile in disguise? Wouldn't Ves be making the exact same mistake as last time if he entered a compartment which was filled with unknowns?

"Meow?"

"Stay on guard." Ves spoke and summoned up an interface from his combat armor's wrist. "We should scout the situation first."

He summoned a random scanning bot used for routine inspections from a nearby maintenance compartment. After it arrived in front of the entrance, Ves ordered the hatch to open long enough to allow the bot to enter.

Once inside, Ves switched his view to the sensor bot's optical vision.

After issuing an order, the bot did not immediately approach the strange escape pod. Instead, he instructed it to scan every corner of the compartment, from its escape pods to the sensors that made up the monitoring system.

He wanted to find out if the hardware had been tampered with. As long as Ves discovered anything suspicious, then he'd be able to confirm that someone hostile had been messing with his ship!

Surprisingly, Ves encountered nothing amiss.

It was as if the sensors and alert systems hadn't been touched at all!

Nothing else had been touched as well. The bot found no holes cut into the bulkheads, no breaches in the other escape pods, no radioactive particles or other traces that signified that something in space had intruded in the compartment.

This was actually the weirdest observation of all. How could all of the customary traces of space exposure be absent, especially when a foreign escape pod somehow managed to sneak into this compartment?

"What is going on?" Ves asked in puzzlement.

Many of his paranoid suspicions turned out to be a bust if the scanning bot's results could be trusted.

Had the scanning bot been fooled? Was his mystery opponent more formidable than anything he had imagined?

Whatever the case, Ves guessed that the answer lay in the peculiar escape pod.

When Ves directed the bot to approach the escape pod, the feed suddenly cut off.

"What..?"

??

He blinked at the interface as if he expected the feed to restore.

Yet as several seconds passed, the scanning bot didn't resume its transmission!

Had it gone on a strike or something?

Ves furrowed his brows and switched the feed. When Ves watched what took place from the footage recorded by the monitoring system, he observed the scanning bot had shut off and crashed against the deck.

This inexplicable malfunction instantly doubled his apprehension!

If the earlier signs had succeeded in stoking his suspicions, then this latest occurrence definitely proved that something was wrong!

Ves knew that all kinds of strange and inexplicable technology existed. Ves had witnessed all manner of technological wonders that could result in such a strange escape pod appearing out of nowhere.

He even experienced many strange sights related to spirituality. From surviving an encounter with an assassin with spiritual potential to dealing with all of the strangeness of the Temple of Haaatumak, Ves did not rule out that some spiritual shenanigans might be at work.

Yet Ves did not take these possibilities too seriously. If he set aside all of these unrealistic and low-probability scenarios, then the simplest explanation was that the escape pod simply managed to infiltrate the Scarlet Rose by exploiting her backdoors.

Though Ves had made a lot of progress in closing all of these backdoors, he was under no illusion that he addressed all of them. Even if Calabast sent him a lot of supplementary data that pointed out these vulnerabilities, was it truly complete?

"Evidently not." Ves grimaced. "This is getting more and more precarious."

While he was tempted to dispatch another bot, he began to run out of patience. What if he tipped the escape pod off? What if he triggered some kind trap?

Ves decided to throw some of his caution to the wind. He turned his attention to Lucky.

"Go in and investigate the escape pod in the center."

"Meow?"

"Go do something useful for once and scout the escape pod!"

"Meow meow meow!"

"Don't jerk me around! You've been eating so many exotics that your debt has only increased! The least you can do is to see what's wrong!"

After a bit of arguing, Ves managed to browbeat his pet into entering the escape compartment.

"Meow.."

"Get going!"

Lucky reluctantly flew towards the compartment and phased through the hatch. After entering the area in question, he did not let go of his intangible state.

With utmost care, Lucky floated closer and closer while exhibiting a lot of vigilance.

When the gem cat passed by the place the scanning bot malfunctioned, nothing strange occurred.

It seemed that Lucky appeared to be immune to the effect that downed the scanning bot.

"Good." Ves sighed.

Whether it was due to Lucky's intangible state or his extremely strong resistance against hacking, as long as he remained functional, he could probably get close to the escape pod.

"Lucky, transmit a feed of your vision to the ship."

His cat did as instructed and the view of his projection changed.

The moment Lucky came within touching distance of the escape pod, the cat paused for a moment.

"It looks kind of.. old."

The escape pod looked as if it had been floating in space for at least a couple of decades.

Its surface was worn and pitted by a combination of damaging radiation and micro impacts.

None of the damage breached the inner chamber of the escape pod. However, some of the scarring did appear to have affected some of the components responsible to keep the pod functioning.

What was clear though was that this pod was likely very old!

"The model is unfamiliar as well."

Ves tried to find a match of its model in the Scarlet Rose's internal database. Sadly, his search did not produce any matches despite the countless different models it stored in its archives.

This basically ruled out that the escape pod was built by the Friday Coalition.  
Yet that only confused him even further.

"If it's not from the Friday Coalition, then how can it access the backdoors of my ship?"

Did he guess wrong? Did the escape pod sneak onto his ship using other methods?

His doubts continued to grow along with the questions in his mind.

An inexplicable sense of fear grew within his heart as he began to contemplate various frightening possibilities.

"What is wrong with this escape pod?!"

After a bit of observation, Lucky finally gathered the courage to touch the surface of the escape pod. He reached out with a paw and materialized it long enough to bump the surface.

Nothing happened. No bomb exploded. No commando jumped out of the pod.

Lucky grew a little more courageous when he found out that no threat was forthcoming. After a bit of sniffing, he took advantage of his intangibility to dive into the escape pod.

The feed temporarily darkened before showing off a screaming face!

"AAAH!!!"

Ves practically jumped in his combat armor as Lucky panicked and floated out of the escape pod!

"What the hell?!"

"Meeooow!"

Lucky zipped out of the compartment and returned to Ves and clung on the surface of his armor!

"Meow meow meow!"

Ves ignored his panicked cat and his own distress in order to rewind the footage. The moment he locked the frame which displayed the screaming face, Lucky jumped again!

"Stop being a scaredy cat, Lucky! How can you even be afraid of this sight?!"

The moment Ves repressed his primordial instincts, he finally saw the truth of what was locked inside.

"It's just a dead body!"

The escape pod contained the body of a dead woman, one who was wearing nothing but a worn-out vacsuit whose markings and identifiers had faded due to some erosion that shouldn't be happening.

In fact, the wear and tear on the vacsuit contrasted remarkably with the condition of the body, which had completely dried up and turned dark! The mummified state of the body made it seem as if the escape pod had actually been used as a coffin!

Yet if this was true, why did this coffin sneak aboard his ship?

"If it's an honorable space burial, then it should have been hurled into a star. If it's a less-than-honorable burial, then it should have been flung into the nothingness of interstellar space."

Anything thrown into the void of space between star systems should have been floating for millions of years before ending up in another star system!

The aging of the mummified corpse and the escape pod did not suggest that they spent entire eons in space!



Ves was no forensic scientist, but as someone who worked with mechs, he could glean several clues from the appearance of the escape pod.

First, while its model, manufacturer and origin was still in question, the standards governing escape pods mostly remained the same barring some minor updates.

Ves happened to know some of these changes. When Ves inspected the damaged and pitted surface of the escape pod, he found out some outdated implementations that had been phased out in modern escape pod models.

"Some of these modules stopped showing up around 150 years ago."

That meant that if this escape pod wasn't some kind of historical reproduction, it might be around this age!

Yet how could this be?! Any escape pod that lingered in space for some time should have been picked up by rescuers or flown off in the middle of nowhere!

Ves had never heard of instances where escape pods casually lingered in space for at least a century before automatically entering ship while its occupant was long dead!

"What is even going on?!"

A complication like this was the last thing Ves wanted to deal with! He had the feeling that the arrival of this escape pod heralded something very significant!

"This isn't the time for me to indulge in mysteries!"

The rational part of him wanted to minimize any unexpected incidents that did not facilitate his escape.

The chances that this mystery escape pod would aid him was extremely small. There was nothing about this strange occurrence that signified that it was meant to aid his escape!

Yet.. another part of him grew curious. What was the secret behind this escape pod? What was the story of the mummified corpse? Why did the escape pod choose to enter the Scarlet Rose? Did it even have a choice at all, or did some outside influence manipulate its entry onto his ship?

Ves needed answers, and it seemed that he had no choice but to investigate in person!

#### Chapter 1764 Mummy

When Ves approached the compartment holding the escape pods, he slowed his pace while keeping his heavy assault rifle pointed forward.

With all of the weirdness surrounding the escape pod that inexplicably entered his ship, Ves couldn't afford to take anything for granted. What if this was just a ruse by some infiltrator with a sick sense of humor?

Though he felt tempted to dump the escape pod from the ship remotely, Ves nonetheless felt a little bit curious about the occupant of the derelict escape pod.

He could still remember the frightening face that Lucky transmitted. The screaming mouth, the dark, dried skin, the scared expression and the sense of age all signified that there was something very weird about the corpse!

"How long has this escape pod been drifting in space?"

Ves didn't know the answer to this question. He still hadn't managed to match the model of the escape pod yet, nor did he study any of its markings or properties that could explain its origin.

Whatever the case, Ves had a feeling that it didn't belong to the Friday Coalition or any of the nearby states.

When the hatch slid open and Ves tentatively entered the compartment, Lucky was still shivering while clinging on the shoulder of his combat armor.

Lucky, who never exhibited fear, now appeared completely afraid! This was something that Ves had never seen from his brave but fool-hardy cat!

"What is wrong with you, Lucky? It's just a body! You've killed plenty of people! Why should you be afraid of another corpse?"

"Meow meow meow!"

Ves ignored his cat and slowly shuffled over to the escape pod resting in one of the center spaces left open by the departure of another escape pod.

His rifle muzzle aimed straight at the center of the pod, ready to fire a deadly particle beam if a threat ever happened!

The moment he passed by the scanning bot that shut down for some reason, Ves felt as if he entered into a strange field.

He quickly checked his combat armor and rifle's telemetry and saw that they were still running at normal power.

Whatever affected the scanning bot didn't appear to affect his gear.

Strange.

Very strange.

His apprehension towards the mystery escape pod increased and his vigilance rose to a greater height.

There was definitely something suspicious about this escape pod!

The moment he came within reach of the escape pod, Ves paused and waited for something to happen.

Nothing.

Seeing that he failed to elicit a reaction, ves slowly put down his rifle and whipped out a multiscanner.

He carefully activated it and began to scan the escape pod via a number of different methods.

He quickly encountered an anomaly.

"No results?"

Aside from optical scans and some other scanning methods, his multiscanner failed to pick anything up! It was as if there was a chunk of indescribable matter in front of it that they simply failed to grasp!

Ves became a bit alarmed! Either the escape pod was wrapped in some kind of anomalous energy field that interfered with his scans, or its materials were naturally resistant to scanning methods!

Whatever the case, Ves knew that he wouldn't be able to obtain any usual data from his scanning efforts.

"It looks like I'll have to take a closer look."

He felt very leery about investigating the odd escape pod in person, but the corpse resting inside the escape pod was simply too strange to be left alone!

Once he put away his multiscanner, Ves held his rifle at the ready while slowly examining the surface of the escape pod for any control panels.

He eventually found a small and damaged cover which had become stuck to the surface. Ves had to leverage the strength of his combat armor to pry off the cover.

After he did so, Ves spotted a few buttons which no longer worked and a simple lever that served as a backup option to open the escape pod.

Ves slowly grasped the lever and pulled it with a forceful jerk!

The pod seemed to come alive for a bit. A few surface lights that hadn't been destroyed by all of the microimpacts began to light up in a strange pattern.

After a few seconds, the front surface of the escape pod abruptly slid open.

At least that mechanism still worked.

The front cavity exposed a tube-shaped interior that held enough room for a single person and some supplies.

"What the?!"

"MEOW!"

Ves expected to encounter a mummified woman locked in a frightening scream.

He did not expect to see a pristine body of a woman sleeping peacefully in the pod!

"Where did you come from?!"

Ves jerkily jumped back and brought his heavy assault rifle to bear on the body!

Had Lucky been pranking him?! No! His cat looked just as scared and confused at this unexpected turn of events!

The dried, mummified corpse turned out to be a living human body! Not only that, but the woman didn't appear to look dead at all! He carefully perceived her slim chest rising and falling at a very gradual pace, as if she was deep in hibernation!

Even as his heart started to beat faster, Ves study the woman's appearance as carefully as he could in order to figure out her identity.

She was a slim woman with a thin figure and a face that emanated classical beauty. There was an indescribable charm to her, as her pale-as-white skin made her out to be a ghost.

Was she a spaceborn clansman, or was she pale for some other reason?

The strange thing about her skin was that it appeared to be completely healthy and moisturized, as if the image that Lucky transmitted was completely false!

Her hair was lustrous brown that seemed to shine in an eerie fashion underneath the harsh light of the escape compartment. Her hair trailed down her face in curls so bouncy that it seemed as if her hair was as lively and vibrant as a living person!

Her vacsuit, which should have been aged and eroded to the point of becoming unidentifiable, now appeared to be factory new!

Ves could immediately tell that the quality of the vacsuit was something else. He failed to identify its materials, but he could tell they were all very high quality.

The grey vacsuit also came with all kinds of modules that assisted in various survival scenarios. Unfortunately, it didn't come with any markings, emblems or serial numbers that could help him identify its providence.

This was very strange!

The same went for the escape pod. The interior should have contained a bunch of information such as the manufacturer of the escape pod, the company who purchased it, the date when it was launched and so on. This was a widespread custom meant to identify escape pods in case they met with calamity.

Losing one's life in space was very depressing for those who have been left behind.

The fact that the completely-intact interior did not print out this information meant that there was definitely something wrong with the escape pod and its occupant!

As Ves began to get over his latest shock, he carefully investigated the sleeping body by poking it with the muzzle of his rifle.

It was like poking an actual human body. The woman's skin bent and sprung like the skin of a living person as opposed to a mummified corpse!

Ves began to doubt whether Lucky observed a dried corpse at all. However, he refrained from dismissing Lucky's prior observation. He still trusted his cat to an extent!

"Take a sniff, Lucky. Is there anything dead about this corpse?"

"Meow.."

"No smell at all?"

"Meow!"

"How can that be?! Almost every body releases an odor!"

"Meow meow!"

This exploration just got odder and odder.

Acting out on a suspicion, Ves concentrated his mind and attempted to find out whether the dormant woman or the escape pod was affected by spirituality.

The moment he switched to his spiritual vision, he discovered to his horror that a lot of spiritual energy wrapped around the escape pod! Little of it affected the body, but Ves noted from the flows that it appeared to be the source of all of the spiritual energy!

Though Ves hadn't touched it directly, it became clear that the quality and strength of the spiritual energy was beyond his own level!

This sleeping woman was definitely capable of beating him on a spiritual level!

His discovery immediately prompted him to reevaluate the risks of dealing with this anomaly.

Despite his superiority in arms and equipment, he began to doubt whether he could gain the upper hand in the event the woman woke up and turned hostile for some reason.

Without sufficient leverage, Ves wouldn't be able to remain in control, and that was very bad!

Since he already fell victim from a loss of control, Ves did not relish the prospect of falling into the same trap!

Ves no longer wanted to delve into the secrets of the escape pod and its occupant. Whatever was behind its mysterious appearance on his ship was clearly above his ability to cope with the situation!

Though Ves often liked to gamble every now and then, even he realized what a loser's bet it was to continue his investigation!

Besides, he was already in a very precarious situation! With the Coalition Reserve Corps breathing down his neck, he had to do his utmost to evade pursuit!

He didn't have the time or desire to delve into this matter any further!

Since the risks vastly outweigh the potential gains, Ves made the only choice that minimized the risks.

He pulled the lever on the escape pod again to close its cover. Once he did so, he punched a button on a control panel on the side, activating an emergency measure that automatically flushed the cavity of the escape pod!

A suction occurred as the escape pod rapidly shot through a tube and emerged back in space!

"Good riddance!"



"Meow!"

Both Ves and Lucky became a lot more at ease once the weird escape pod left the ship. The relief was palpable.

Ves relaxed and holstered his rifle on a mount on his combat armor. Lucky stopped clinging onto him like a scaredy cat and began to float leisurely in the air as if he never shamed himself!

"Let's forget about this, Lucky. This is one anomaly that is best left forgotten!"

Both of them exited the escape compartment and returned to the bridge.

There, Ves settled down and inspected the condition of the Scarlet Rose while she was slowly distancing herself from the ejection site of the escape pod.

Hours went by as her FTL drive finally finished cycling. As soon as the ship was ready to go, Ves instantly punched in the command to transition out of the star system.

With the ship entering the higher dimensions, Ves finally let down his guard.

No mercenary, Fridayman or mummy ought to be able to threaten or infiltrate his ship while she was traveling in FTL!

Ves often considered this period to be a form of respite, as no external threats should ever be able to affect the functioning of the ship.

Only threats from within should be able to endanger the ship, but Ves was pretty sure that no one managed to sneak aboard the ship.

Just to be sure, Ves performed an escape sweep. The ship and her monitoring system automatically began to search the entire interior of the Scarlet Rose for any anomalies and unanticipated presences.

What was out of his expectation was that the bridge immediately rang an alarm.

"An intruder?! Where?!"

After manipulating the interface, the projection displayed a very familiar compartment!

The room which held a lot of escape pods suddenly contained a very familiar presence!

He spotted the same damaged and outdated escape pod that he just ejected earlier!

"What?! How could it go back to my ship?!"

Ves quickly rewinded the footage and discovered it appeared just seconds earlier!

"That's impossible!"

The Scarlet Rose had just transitioned into FTL travel! Nothing should have been able to enter the ship in this state!

"Get rid of it! Now!"

Ves activated a remote command that forcibly flushed the weird escape pod from the ship yet again!

Even though it was highly inadvisable to eject an escape pod while in FTL travel, Ves did so anyway! Ves did not care whether the escape pod would disappear or get strung out over a thousand different dimensions. He just wanted to get rid of this eerie object!

#### Chapter 1765 Haunted

Ves thought that was the end of it. Something flung from a ship while traveling in FTL space rarely if ever made it back to reality.

The higher dimensions bore only a loose connection to the material realm. Time, distance direction, mass and energy behaved very differently in these dimensions!

Many races including humanity took advantage of the properties of the higher dimensions to travel faster than light.

Technically, the ships weren't traveling faster than light in the higher dimensions. It was just that distance was getting more compressed the higher the dimensions went, which allowed for a slow-moving ship to reach an incredibly distant destination in a reasonable amount of time.

The key was the FTL drive. As long as this complex ship component worked as advertised, the vessel was able to enter and exit the higher dimensions without becoming affected by all of the reality-bending transformations that could turn entire bodies into a string of spaghetti spread across numerous dimensions!

As soon as the Scarlet Rose ejected an escape pod while traveling in FTL, the object should have disappeared.

Whether it drifted aimlessly in the confusing higher dimensions for eternity or got torn apart because one end stretched too far from the other end of the object, something ejected into the higher dimensions without protection almost never made it back!

Of the countless times this occurred, only a rare couple scraps ever made it back to the material dimensions, let alone bump into another ship traveling through FTL.

Ves was almost sure he got rid of the mystery escape pod. To see it return into the same space as before spooked him to no end!

"This is impossible! This can't be done!"

Barring perhaps the Big Two and the first-rate states, no one should ever be able to retrieve something lost in the higher dimensions!

Even if it was possible, then at the very least the object in question should have its own FTL drive!

Yet the escape pod contained nothing that suggested that it incorporated a means to travel through FTL! It was too small to carry a full-sized FTL drive, and even a minidrive that had recently been announced by the MTA was a little too big to fit the interior of a typical escape pod!

Ves suspected that he wasn't dealing with anything technological at all! Instead, he encountered an anomaly that was likely related to the spiraling spiritual energy empowering the escape pod in some unknown fashion!

Whatever the sleeping woman was doing, she had accomplished something that only high technology should be able to do! For her and her escape pod to literally cross through space and maybe time and emerge onto his ship again without passing through any barriers was incredibly freaky!

"What is going on!? Am I stuck in some kind of ghost incident?!"

The spacer community circulated a lot of ghost stories. Many people who traveled in space sometimes encountered some strange anomalies and other unexplainable phenomena.

Whether they were true or merely the figments of a drunk spacer's imagination, plenty of stories got passed around.

Some people treated them as entertainment. Others considered these tales to be superstition.

Only some spacers truly bought into the tales no matter how outlandish they sounded!

Ves refused to believe that he was caught up in a so-called ghost incident. He was merely the victim of some kind of spiritual stalker who chose to snuck aboard his ship for some reason! There shouldn't be any ghosts involved!

"Get out! I don't want you here! Go find some other to haunt!"

Ves activated the same commands as before and flushed the escape pod into the ravages of the higher dimensions without any hesitation!

An escape pod shouldn't be able to surface exposure to the higher dimensions without the support of an FTL drive!

He didn't leave the bridge during this time. He forgot about every other task on his agenda for the day and carefully observed the feed of the escape compartment like a hawk.

Nothing appeared out of the blue. The space which formerly held the escape pod remained completely empty as if nothing was about to sneak into it. Several hours passed by until hunger eventually affected his stomach.

"I should grab a bite."

Though he wasn't sure whether he and his ship was in the clear, he still had to take care of his needs.

He left the bridge and entered the mess hall where he cracked open a nutrient pack and dumped its contents in his mouth as quickly as possible.

With everything that happened, Ves wasn't in the mood to savor the unique tastes of Coalition-standard nutrient packs.

The moment he finished his meal, he reflexively activated an interface on his combat armor and called up the feed to the escape compartment again.

What he saw almost caused him to spit out a mouthful of nutrient mush!

"Why are you back?!"

The familiar old escape pod was alive and well! Even after ejecting it into the higher dimensions multiple times, this clingy space derelict kept returning to the Scarlet Rose over and over again!

Ves became incredibly angry. Who asked to be haunted by a ghost?!

"If I can't get rid of you, I'll just kill you first before I throw you out!"

Ves raced down the compartment in question in his full battle loadout. Once he entered the chamber, he approached the escape pod, ripped off the cover, pulled the lever and aimed his rifle at the sleeping beauty resting peacefully inside the pod.

Ordinary people couldn't bear to ruin such a pretty image. The hibernating woman possessed a charm that reminded him of some of his mechs. He knew that this was one of the side effects of strong spirituality.

Yet even without this indescribably quality, the woman was still beautiful enough to attract a lot of appreciation. Ves wasn't sure whether the woman was wearing makeup or not, but she hardly looked like she needed the help!

"Who cares if you're pretty or not! I'm telling you once! Leave my ship and never go back!"

The woman did not wake up. The flows of spirituality spiralling out of her body did not exhibit any changes either.

It was as if the woman was truly unconscious!

Yet from everything that happened, Ves seriously suspected whether the sleeping beauty was truly slumbering.

How could her escape pod return to his ship again and again despite throwing her out for three times straight?

Enough was enough! Ves was still determined to avoid the problems surrounding the escape pod as decisively as possible!

Seeing that Ves elicited no reaction at all, he steeled himself while Lucky carefully peeked from behind the shoulder of his combat armor.

His heavy assault rifle released a whine as Ves modulated the power and the frequency of its particle beam module.

In order to avoid damaging the rest of the compartment, he tuned down its power. Even when set at a lower setting, the power of the weapon was more than enough to kill an unprotected human body!

The moment he fired his rifle at the body, a bright glare flooded the optical sensors of his helmet.

The moment his vision returned, what Ves saw was different from his expectations.

He expected to see a bunch of broken, burned, scorched and vaporized remains. The sheer amount of power released by his rifle ought to be enough to shatter the sleeping woman's body while damaging the interior of the escape pod!

Though the latter did indeed took place, the body parts separated from the main body looked anything but fresh!

A dried, blackened head with an expression locked into a scream stared dully at Ves!

The rest of the remains that survived the brief weapon discharge all consisted of black, mummified body parts! Due to their lack of hydration, whatever heat and energy affected them quickly started to burn up, causing the remains to turn into ashes at a very rapid rate!

The moment the fire engulfed the upper torso, neck and head, the spirituality released from the body parts still circulated as usual!

It was as if Ves had never broken the mummified body at all by firing a deathly weapon at it! He began to become more and more frightened as his

intuition sensed something very huge was about to take inside the escape pod!

Before he became engulfed by panic, Ves quickly snapped himself out of his paralyzed state.

"Begone!"

He employed the same solution as last time. His armored palm slammed against an emergency button that caused the escape pod to forcibly shunt through a tube and launch from the ship!

This time, Ves did not bother to close the escape pod. He just wanted to get rid of everything in the tube without concern for exposing the interior to the lethal conditions of the higher dimensions!

Ves remained fully alert even after he ejected the escape pod. He lingered at the compartment for a couple of hours.

He had Lucky to keep him company during this time, but unfortunately his cat quickly lost interest and phased out of the compartment.

"Will this pod truly return?" He frowned.

It took several hours for it to come back. This was a very long interval, and Ves couldn't afford to remain on guard and neglect his other tasks for so long.

The Scarlet Rose still required his attention! Without a crew, many of the routine but very necessary maintenance tasks had languished. If Ves didn't address these minor issues, they would eventually grow up into major problems!

Rather than allow such misfortune to happen at the worst possible moments, Ves would rather perform some like maintenance and repairs to prevent the problems from snowballing.



Just as Ves let down his guard and turned towards the exit, his intuition briefly compelled him to turn around.

He did so.

"AAAHH!"

The escape pod not only reappeared, but returned in a pristine state!

The escape pod's front had already slid open, revealing the same mummified female body as before!

Though dead and dried, the body was completely intact, as if Ves had never fired at it with his rifle at all!

"THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE!"

His mental gymnastics was unable to keep up with the strange phenomena he witnessed from this darned escape pod!

"I don't believe you can keep this up forever, you witch!"

Ves mercilessly changed the firing mode of the heavy assault rifle and unleashed a steady laser beam that quickly burned the dried skin and flesh from the mummified body!

The woman's hair went up in smoke in an instant while the rest of the dried tissue followed suit in a matter of seconds!

Only blackened bones were left, but under the incredible heat of a sustained laser beam, even they broke down!

Yet as Ves carefully observed with his spiritual vision, an invisible human body shape continued to release spiritual energy as if the body was still intact!

Evidently, Ves failed to kill the mysterious woman completely! Her flesh and bones may have been gone, but her spiritual presence still remained!

Out of an irrational burst of fury, Ves continued to fire his laser at the interior of the escape pod.

However, the power of his heavy assault rifle failed to inflict material damage to the escape pod!

After penetrating the softer surface layers, the laser beam bumped into an extremely hard layer that completely withstood the heat and energy!

This escape pod was anything but simple!

It was more resilient than he expected!

"No wonder it survived so long in space!"

Regardless, Ves still decided to dump it into higher-dimensional space.

After annihilating the physical body of the unknown woman, it should take a lot of effort to reconstruct it again!

Yet a very ominous hunch prevented him from lowering his guard. Having figured out some rules, Ves forcibly shifted his thoughts and looked away.

He only turned around for a second before instantly turning back.

"DAMNIT!"

The escape pod was back, this time exposing a pretty, sleeping woman with brown curly hair!

Chapter 1766 Endless Source

Nothing about this made any sense!

How could something he threw out return to his ship so quickly and so silently?

The moment he stopped thinking about the escape pod and its indeterminate occupant, it instantly returned into the same space as before!

Ves began to grow angrier and angrier at this anomalous object.

He really wanted to get rid of it in a permanent fashion!

A part of him feared that if he failed to solve this problem, he might be haunted by this semi-living mummy forever!

At best, the mummy would stick to the Scarlet Rose, allowing Ves to get rid of it by giving up the ship.

At worst, not even this solution would allow him to get rid of this ghost woman!

If she was homing in on him rather than the ship, then Ves would always be confronted by this escape pod until the woman stopped insisting on following him for some reason!

Ves feared that the only way to truly get rid of this half-dead witch was to wake her up while her body was in a healthy state.

Whatever she wanted would soon become clear once they talked.

Yet the strength and power of her seemingly unconscious spiritual manipulation frightened Ves to no end. He really didn't want to deal with the woman when she became conscious!

If Ves was really unlucky, then the woman might be aware that Ves attempted to throw out her escape pod and destroy her body several times!

No one would forgive such an affront!

Ves shuddered in his combat armor in fear. Despite gearing himself up with second-class equipment, he suspected that it was completely useless against an opponent who manipulated reality to such an extreme extent!

It didn't make any sense!

Against such a powerful and inscrutable entity, Ves would rather deal with her while she was dormant rather than awake!

The chance of an amicable conversation was too small in his eyes! This woman was definitely targeting him! Otherwise, she wouldn't be haunting him so persistently!

Though everything about the mummified woman and her escape pod confounded him to no end, Ves firmly stuck to his conviction that it couldn't be repeated forever!

There has to be a price! Whatever magic this witch had cast must expend some energy each time she restored and relocated her body and escape pod!

Ves would just have to find a way to consume this energy until he scared her off or drained her empty!

"Since getting rid of you isn't working, what about crushing you entirely?"

A devious idea entered his mind. He stepped back and activated his integrated comm. He called up a bunch of bots from the workshops and waited for them to arrive.

It didn't take too long as the escape pods were situated very close to the mech workshop compartment. Evidently, the mobile supply frigate put mech designers first!

This came in very handy right now as he only had to wait a couple of minutes before a number of lifter bots arrived.

He first allowed a conventional lifter bot to approach the escape pod.

Just like with the forgotten scanner bot, the lifter bot suddenly shut off after entering the strange energy field surrounding the escape pod.

The heavy bot collapsed against the deck and just happened to crush the fragile scanner bot resting underneath!

Ves shrugged. He expected something like this. The energy field didn't seem to do anything but prevent bots from coming close.

Fortunately, he also called in a different bot.

A mech workshop always came with a variety of production equipment, production tools and production bots.

Because mechs were so big and heavy, many of the bots and equipment were rated to handle very heavy loads.

For a typical escape pod, just a regular magnetic or gravitic lifter bot was sufficient to elevate it from a distance!

The bot that Ves pinned his hopes on halted ten meters away from the mystery escape pod.

The air became more charged as the lifter bot activated its remote gravitic lifting system.

The gravity effecting the escape pod suddenly disappeared. Not only that, the gravity also started to shift further, allowing the lifter bot to retract the escape pod from the launcher tube and carry it out of the compartment while continuing to maintain a distance.

Ves followed after the bot and its cargo. The bot crossed the corridor and entered the mech workshop.

He approached a forging machine that was ordinarily used to process very difficult metals. He had already sent a remote command to activate it and warm up its chamber.

"Let's see.. 7000 degrees Celsius. Still not hot enough."

He patiently waited for the internal temperature to rise. While the maximum temperature limit of the forging device reached an astounding height, the amount of energy it expended and the amount of waste heat generated in the process made it very troublesome to sustain.

Ves also had to wait several hours for the temperature inside the forging machine to reach its limit, so he merely waited for fifteen minutes before making his move.

"This should be hot enough to process the metal of the escape pod."

Ves had already noticed that the core structure of the escape pod was made of extremely resilient compressed alloy. Such metals were often utilized as armor plating for mechs and ships.

Ordinary production equipment wouldn't be able to process this kind of material once it had been set.

Fortunately, the mech workshop was equipped to a very high standard. The Friday Coalition often handled comparable materials, so the forging machine they utilized should still be capable of handling this grade of materials.

"Here goes nothing!"

The gravitic lifter bot had placed the escape pod on a giant ramp. This ramp suddenly tilted, causing the escape pod to slide down a chute, which quickly closed in order to form an isolating seal.

Soon enough, an internal partition suddenly opened, exposing the escape pod to enough heat to melt most kinds of mech-grade armor plating!

Though the structure of the escape pod was a lot more resilient than he initially expected, it couldn't withstand the heat of the forging machine!

According to the internal sensors, the escape pod quickly melted and deformed. No matter whether the body inside was alive or dead, the awesome heat instantly burned and vaporized all of the organic tissue without any resistance!

The softer metals melted just seconds later, leaving just the internal structure which still held the vague shape of the original escape pod.

The heat continued to affect this extraordinarily resilient against heat, there were still limits to its endurance!

Slowly but surely, the internal structure melted until it formed a piping hot pool of metals.

Ves issued some follow-up instructions that caused the forging machine to stop generating heat. The internal temperature rapidly declined and the molten pool of metals, some of which had separated from the alloys, no longer grew hotter either.

As soon as the internal environment of the forging machine stabilized, a bunch of compressors began to press and shape the materials into a tight and compact cube.

"Since I have a bunch of materials at my disposal, I might as well make use of it!" He grinned.

He repurposed the materials he salvaged and fabricated a number of replacement armor plating.

In his previous battles, the four battle bots sustained a lot of hits, particularly the less agile ones like the Kravon and Paravin.

The escape pod wasn't very large, so Ves only had enough materials at his disposal to fabricate some smaller plates.

Once he finished making them, Ves inspected them carefully with his tools and spiritual vision and found out that it no longer contained anything suspicious.

The invisible spiritual entity was gone. The strange energy field that prevented bots functioning was gone, and Ves did not notice any spiritual energy circulating in the materials at all.

Had Ves truly managed to get rid of the ghost woman this time?

"Now that your escape pod and your ashes turned into replacement, there's no way you can replenish yourself so easily!"

Ves did not dare to make use of the spare armor plating he just produced. What if they disappeared when the mummy restored her body and her escape?

Even now, Ves did not rule out the possibility that this ghost woman managed to defy time and space yet again! She had already done so too many times for Ves to remain confident!

"Let's see what happens."

He relaxed a bit and tried to think about something else rather than the escape pod.

Once he believed enough time had passed, he revisited the escape compartment. The closer he came, the more his apprehension grew.

The moment he opened the hatch, his heart suddenly sunk.

The escape pod and the woman had returned, just as he feared!

This time, the open front cover displayed a mummified corpse with a face locked in a scream.

Perhaps it was his illusion, but the empty eye sockets seemed to glare at him as if the woman despised his actions!

Ves shook his head inside his helmet. "You should be dead!"

Seeing that the escape pod and its occupant had returned despite what had happened, Ves quickly left the compartment and returned to the mech workshop.

To his astonishment, the replacement armor plating he made out of the materials of the escape still remained!



"THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE!"

Ves knocked the knuckles of his gauntlet against the surface of the armor plating.

Ding!

The metal still remained completely real! As Ves inspected the newly-made components with a scanner, he discovered that absolutely nothing had changed!

The armor plating still retained the same mass, density, toughness and other parameters! It hadn't lost anything!

"Wait a minute.. does this mean I can produce an unlimited amount of high-quality alloys?"

The moment he considered this option, his mood suddenly turned.

What if he kept this up?

What if he could keep taking advantage of the ghost woman until she eventually ran out of energy?

As long as the ghost woman's reappearances didn't affect the materials he extracted from the continually-duplicating escape pods, he could probably produce enough supplies to supplement his fighting strength!

"I can fabricate enough armor plating to upgrade the defense of the Paravin and Kravon!"

"I can produce enough high-quality gauss cannon slugs that are tough enough to penetrate the thickest ship hulls!"

"I can even produce some hull plating that can reinforce the exterior defense of the Scarlet Rose!"

Though Ves still feared the seemingly-immortal ghost woman, the practical benefits began to outweigh his common sense!

Instead of fearing the escape pod's continuous renewals, why not treat it as a renewable materials source?

As long as this escape pod kept coming back, Ves could potentially sustain this extraction cycle forever!

A greedy grin appeared on his face.

"Hahahahal changed my mind! Keep haunting me! Don't ever stop!"

Ves returned to the workshop and inputted an elaborate set of instructions in the forging machine and a number of gravitic lifter bots.

Once he finished his preparations, he activated the routine, causing the lifter bot to leave the mech workshop and return minutes later with the mystery escape pod in tow.

The bot placed it in the forging machine, which soon began to melt it down and extract the valuable metallic exotics, this time segregated by material, allowing Ves to form alloys with different properties!

No matter what he repurposed the materials for, Ves bet that he could definitely profit immensely from this 'renewable source'!

As for the mummy woman.. Ves was completely uninterested in engaging with her. He didn't even bother to instruct his bots to remove her body from the escape pod before chucking it inside the forging machine!

At most, the forging machine just had to expend a bit more effort to separate the impurities from the rest of the metals.

Ves believed that as long as he wasn't stupid enough to wake her up, she would continue to robotically replenish herself and escape pod!

"Hahahaha! Keep renewing yourself! I'm going to build entire mechs out of your magic!"

#### Chapter 1767 Breyer Alloy

Once the routine Ves established went to work, the forging machine spat out a steady amount of raw materials.

Like an assembly line, the gravitic lifter bot kept retrieving the mysterious escape pod from the escape compartment and brought it into the mech workshop. From there, the bot threw the object into the forging machine, which carefully melted it down and separated the various high-value exotics and metals left behind.

Wary of the power of the mummified woman, Ves remained alert and stayed awake for the entire night in case anything changed.

The moment the woman did something to escape this loop, he would immediately shoot her dried corpse down with his heavy assault rifle!

To his relief, no deviations occurred. Even if the escape pod and its half-dead occupant continually underwent a brutal transformation inside the forging machine, Ves saw no break in the pattern!

"It seems that I can really sustain this loop indefinitely!" Ves uttered with astonishment.

He really had no idea what was going on. Stuff did not materialize out of nowhere for free. Reality simply didn't work this way.

Yet what he witnessed all night seemed to defy what was possible!

Gloriana would probably call this miracle!

Of course, Ves did not let his ignorant and gullible side take over.

From a rational perspective, just because he didn't understand what was taking place didn't mean it was a miracle.

Just like how ancient humans looked up at the sky and witnessed a thunderstorm, many people had a tendency to believe such might and power came from gods rather than nature.

As soon as science advanced and the secret behind thunderstorms became known, humanity's fascination towards thunder and lightning subsided.

In fact, humanity even began to harness its understanding of electricity to great effect!

Ves was not at that level yet. He truly had no idea why the escape pod kept renewing and coming back to the Scarlet Rose. Even when he clearly exploited its perpetual reappearances to accumulate a stockpile of valuable exotics, the cycle showed no signs of stopping!

Observing the escape pod and its sometimes-living, sometimes-dead occupant was an exercise in futility.

No sensors or scanners aboard the Scarlet Rose noticed anything unusual about its appearance.

It simply materialized in place at an instant as long as the old escape pod disappeared or broke down.

Studying the pod and the body inside with his spiritual vision yielded a bit more results, but not as much as he expected.

Something was clearly going on at the spiritual level. Careful study revealed that the flows of spiritual energy followed along a large number of very mysterious patterns.

These patterns reminded him of the Grand Dynamo inside his mind, but of a different nature.

It was as if he was observing a form of spiritual circuitry! Many patterns showed up in different places, reinforcing his suspicion that the corpse or underlying spiritual entity actively maintained some sort of spiritual process!

Due to the potency of the spiritual energy emanating from the woman, Ves did not dare to investigate too carefully. He mainly relied on his spiritual vision and passive observation methods to avoid triggering a counterattack or disturbing the process.

He would feel endless regret if his spiritual prodding inadvertently interrupted the loop and ended his source of free exotics!

As long as this process continued, Ves could build all manner of fantastic machines out of these high-quality materials!

"It's really absurd!" Ves muttered in confusion. "Am I being delusional or can I really repeat this process ad infinitum?"

He really couldn't believe such a powerful witch whose spiritual strength rivaled or surpassed that of Qilanxo could fall victim to his trivial scheme.

Was she really dead?

Did her powerful spiritual remnant lack consciousness?

Or was she stuck in some sort of semi-dead coma?

Ves indulged in all kinds of speculation, but without any solid proof, he had no way to tell for sure.

He tried to identify the woman. In the moments before chucking the escape pod and the body in the forging machine, Ves took many samples and performed many scans.

When handling the corpse, Ves did not dare to touch it directly anymore in case of waking her up. He doubted the witch would be pleased to find out that Ves mistreated her and her powers for his own gain.

In fact, before he took an organic tissue sample from both the dead and living to the infirmary, he stopped and reconsidered his actions.

"Does it matter if I know her identity? Do I really find out who she is or where she comes from?"

The woman obviously carried a lot of mysteries, and as a curious mech designer, Ves felt compelled to figure out the answers.

Yet Ves also dreaded the woman. Why did she come in the form of both a dried husk and a living woman? Which was fake and which was real?

Why did she decide to haunt him? Was she calling for help or was she attempting to recover by siphoning his powers?

Whether she was friend or foe, Ves did not think he would benefit by finding out the answer!

If she turned out to be a malicious enemy who wanted to take advantage of him, then it was in his best interest to keep her suppressed!

It was a bit more complicated if the opposite turned out to be true. What if this woman was some sort of ally or friendly entity who could offer him all kinds of benefits in exchange for rescuing her? Perhaps he could trade all sorts of favors with her in order to learn some of her spiritual tricks!

Yet... regardless of whether she was friend or foe, the chance that she would overpower him when she woke was very significant!

The strong had no patience for the weak! Just comparing their respective spiritual strength and prowess was enough to make him understand that he would definitely be the disadvantaged party in any interaction!

"She's way too strong! Even in her supposedly dormant state, she's already strong enough to sustain this renewal process!"

Ves had no idea how her powers even worked. Whether she manipulated time, space, causality or other fundamental forces and concepts of nature, it appeared she wasn't running out of energy anytime soon!

Perhaps her spiritual powers had reached a more advanced level, allowing her to sustain this continuous renewal process by drawing her energy from some other source!

For a brief moment of time, Ves entertained a very dreadful possibility.

"What if... the body belongs to my mother?"

His mind almost blanked out. What would his mother think if she found out he treated a part of her as a renewable exotics mine?

"Let's stop here!"

Though he didn't consider this possibility to be likely, he nonetheless decided to cease all attempts at investigating the woman any further.

The risks were too great while the rewards were too uncertain! Rather than risk losing control and put himself at the mercy of a wrathful spiritual sorceress, Ves would rather maintain the status quo and secure his current arrangement!

Besides, someone who tried to deceive him by camouflaging her ugly, mummified corpse with the visage of an attractive, living body was bound to be untrustworthy!

Whether she was a helper or not, whether she came to assist him in some way, Ves did not wish to follow along someone else's arrangements!

Compared to the potentially wondrous opportunities he missed out on, he would rather follow his current trajectory and climb to power through his own efforts.

Only by relying on himself rather than others would he be able to maintain control over his own life! Neither the Bright Republic, the Ylvaine Protectorate, the Friday Coalition or the Hexadric Hegemony had the right to dictate his life!

For this reason, Ves resolutely threw out any desire to investigate the woman or wake her up. Even if he was making a colossal mistake, he trusted in his judgement and his belief that it was better to rely on himself!

"Sorry woman, but if you came with good intentions, then it was a mistake to come to me! I don't need your help!"

He disassembled the escape pod after annihilating the corpse in order to see if he could spot any serial numbers, manufacturer markings and the like. He also retrieved the advanced processors that were tasked with regulating the escape pod's many functions.

Since the escape pod was still somewhat functional, Ves finally managed to retrieve some useful information. After supplementing his investigation by referencing some information from the galactic net, he finally figured out its origin.

A company called the VZI Corporation used to produce the escape pod model over 170 years ago. What interested Ves the most was that the VZI Corporation exclusively operated in the galactic heartland.

There was a huge distance between the Komodo Star Sector and the area of operations of the VZI Corporation!

The escape pod model only sold for a couple decades, and according to the production date embedded in the operating system, the pod that fell into his hands had been manufactured roughly 150 years ago.

Curiously enough, Ves did not find any data about the ship that carried the pod or the people or organizations who bought it. He also didn't find any information regarding its occupant or any human for that matter.



"Someone scrubbed this data!"

Barring some marginal tidbits, the only data the escape pod's operating system retained were those related to its functioning.

Without this essential data, the escape pod would cease to function!

Still, Ves was happy with what he learned so far. The escape pod was a standard product from the galactic heartland instead of some mysterious creation that originated from some alternate universe.

Pinning down the concrete origin of the escape pod helped demystify it in his mind. Ves feared the escape pod and the unknown female corpse a lot less now that he could definitely conclude that their origins were less than magical!

After learning all he could know about the escape pod model, Ves directed his attention to the valuable materials he stood to gain.

The escape pod produced by the VZI Corporation had to meet all kinds of industry requirements.

The escape pod had to be tough enough to survive all kinds of anomalous hazards in space, including radiation, microimpacts, asteroid collisions, proximity to stars and other possible threats.

While an escape pod could never sufficiently protect against any hazard, they should at least be able to give their occupant a decent chance to survive.

The specifications of the VZI escape pod were much more superior than the special escape pods used by Aisling!

The bountiful resources available in the galactic heartland allowed the VZI Corporation to apply a high-quality alloy formula that incorporated various medium to high-grade exotics to form a very strong core structure.

Ves tested the samples in some of the analysis equipment in the mech workshop and correlated the results with the information he retrieved from the galactic net.

The name of the formula was officially registered as 235-C Breyer Alloy.

Breyer alloy actually stood for an entire family of alloy formulas, of which 235-C was one of the cheaper and more affordable ones in the galactic heartland.

Of course, its cheapness was only relative. Whereas the alloy was only useful for lesser products such as escape pods, in a barren place like the Komodo Star Sector, such a material could absolutely stand equal to many of the common armor systems in the Friday Coalition and the Hexadric Hegemony!

"Breyer alloy is absolutely valuable!"

And Ves just secured an endless, renewable source of this material!

As long as he retained the Scarlet Rose and perpetuated the loop, he could steadily produce enough Breyer alloy to produce a lot of powerful and expensive mechs at a much lower cost!

He could even save up a lot of Breyer alloy to build an extraordinarily resilient ship!

Since the mysterious woman functioned as a source of Breyer alloy, Ves decided to call her Cassandra Breyer.

Regardless of her true name, as Cassandra Breyer, producing Breyer alloy was her only use to him! Nothing else mattered!

#### Chapter 1768 Valuable Exotics

Ves developed a very warped appreciation for 'Cassandra Breyer'. Not only did her appearance solve the Scarlet Rose's shortage of tough, metallic exotics, she also had the potential to empower his organization and fund many of his future endeavors!

He no longer questioned the absurdity surrounding her endless duplication.

How she gained the energy to produce so much valuable Breyer Alloy out of nowhere, Ves had no clue. The spiritual engineering centered around her body was as complex as any electronic circuitry.

Without a comprehensive foundation in spiritual engineering, Ves couldn't even begin to decipher all of the wondrous spiritual interactions and mechanisms!

He suppressed his greed to master this ability for his own. He was far too weak to perform such a reality-defying feat!

Rather than aim for the miniscule chance of winning the jackpot, Ves would rather keep his modest but guaranteed gains!

Adopting a risk-averse solution was very uncharacteristic for Ves. However, anything related to spirituality always succeeded in stimulating his greatest fears.

Ves was a mech designer. He understood technology. He excelled in many disciplines related to mechs.

For this reason, when it came to taking risks in mech design, Ves always possessed the confidence to succeed when failure was probable!

Yet when it came to this inexplicable ghost woman and her horribly frightening visage, Ves did not feel assured at all. His Larkinson blood completely cooled when he considered the prospect of waking a very angry and powerful woman.

"It's better to let sleeping dogs lie!"

"Meow!"

Lucky comfortably perched on a table while he munched a bar of solid colchis iron.

Aside from Ves, Lucky benefited from the current arrangement as well! The endless amount of exotics produced from the loop essentially meant that Lucky would never go hungry!

Ves did not forget about his current circumstances. He still had to run through the territories of the Great Zona Republic and the Crecia Republic in order to reach the Ylvaine Protectorate.

While the production loop resulted in a continuous supply of fairly dense Breyer alloy, accumulating too much of it increased the total mass of his ship.

Ves still had a lot of use for the materials in repairing and reinforcing the Scarlet Rose and her complement of battle bots. As long as he could make good of the Breyer alloy, he didn't mind paying a price.

However, Ves could not afford to go too far. Producing an excessive amount of Breyer alloy would definitely increase the mass of his ship over time, causing her acceleration to decrease.

The slower the acceleration, the greater the likelihood that pursuers would catch up to the Scarlet Rose!

If Ves had his way, then he would order the gravitic lifter bots to stop feeding the escape pod to the forging machine.

He did not dare to do so. Who knew what would happen if the escape pod remained intact for more than an hour.

Would Cassandra Breyer wake up? Would her body resuscitate and bring her back to life?

Fearing a complication, Ves insisted on destroying her body and her escape pod on a continuous basis for good measure!

Ejecting the escape pod out of the ship was not a good idea.

Who knew what happened if it was thrown in the higher dimensions or the material dimensions. Rather than risk the witch waking up in space, Ves would rather destroy her body and her accompanying escape pod entirely!

The question therefore moved on to determining what he should do with the excess materials. Throwing it in space after he processed it seemed wasteful.

It also risked exposing his 'renewable Breyer alloy mine'! After all, there was no native source for the constituent materials of Breyer alloy in the Komodo Star Sector!

While it was possible to import the materials, it was not economic to do so! If someone found a lot of Breyer alloy chucked into space, Ves might inadvertently attract a lot of unwelcome attention!

Therefore, aside from slowing the production process and dumping the materials from the ship while she was engaging in FTL, Ves found another outlet for his excess materials.

"Keep eating, Lucky!" Ves grinned. "There is enough colchis iron and lesser geonode to stuff yourself stupid!"

"Meow meow!"

Lucky blinked his eyes as if he was in bliss. His teeth effortlessly crunched a chunk of lesser geonode as if it was nothing but a crispy snack!

Although 235-C Breyer alloy blended over a dozen different materials, the forging machine aboard the Scarlet Rose could extract four of the most important materials.

As for the other exotics, they simply lost effect and broke down entirely due to the destructive recycling process.

While it was a shame to lose those valuable trace materials, what the forging machine managed to retrieve intact was enough to make Ves ecstatic!

The most abundant material was a medium-grade exotic called colchis iron. Making up 67 percent of the alloy, the iron-like material was responsible for most of its basic properties!

Without its hardness and toughness, Breyer alloy could never be as resilient!

The second-most abundant material was lesser geonode, which made up 29.4 percent of the alloy. Though this was a very large proportion, the medium-grade exotic did not actually strengthen the Breyer alloy.

Instead, it mostly served as a binding material that allowed the colchis iron to play nice with other potent exotics without provoking an undesirable reaction.

Lesser geonode worked wonderfully as an auxiliary material that stabilized many different exotics and was used in many other alloy formulas for this reason.

The third-most prevalent material was Tommen metal, which was a high-grade exotic that patched up the main weakness of colchis iron.

Though colchis iron was very hard and tough, thereby making it very resilient against physical damage, it did not fare very well against heat and energy damage!

For this reason, 3.58 percent of the Breyer alloy consisted of Tommen metal, which massively improved this shortcoming, though at great cost!

Tommen metal was not cheap in the slightest! The fact that 235-C Breyer alloy only incorporated so little of it was already a very generous proportion!

In fact, some of the better variants of Breyer alloy actually blended in a greater proportion of Tommen metal!

The last important material in the alloy formula was a high-grade exotic called Amris. Consisting of just 0.02 percent of the alloy that made up the main structure of the escape pod, just a little bit of it significantly improved the

shock-absorbance attribute. Any shock exerted onto the Breyer alloy partially disappeared into nowhere due to the strange effects of Amris!

Aside from that, Amris also seemed to strengthen Breyer alloy in more subtle ways. Ves didn't have enough information to find out more. The sources he had at hand did not really explain the full potential of this trace exotic.

With his knowledge of metallurgy, Ves could slowly figure out its properties by performing some research. He could also scour the galactic net for information or seek detailed information from the MTA or an exclusive library in exchange for payment.

Right now, Ves did not have the time to figure out its properties and uses. He could only put Amris aside.

Due to its high value and small volume, Ves did not allow Lucky to eat it. With how little of it the forging machine produced, he did not fear weighing the Scarlet Rose down even if he recycled a million escape pods!

In total, these four exotics each had their own uses. Whether Ves alloyed them back together or blended them with different materials, he could produce an endless variety of alloys!

Of course, trying to preserve the original 235-C Breyer alloy was a little difficult. If Ves wanted to retain its properties, then he couldn't melt it down and destroy its original structure.

After spending some at the mech workshop, Ves discovered that Breyer alloy was still malleable enough to be reshaped as long as he applied enough force.

This was very difficult, especially when the Breyer alloy was still as thick as the layer applied to the escape pod!

For now, Ves did not have the equipment to reshape the Breyer alloy into armor plating or other end product. He would have to take care of this after he ended his flight.

"Regardless, just the four exotics is enough to form all kinds of resilient alloys!"

Perhaps the best use he found was producing a large batch of gauss cannon projectiles.

Such products often came in the form of solid slugs made out of very hard materials.

The rounds produced from this new supply of materials were absolutely better than the conventional ammunition!

Almost nobody could bear to waste high-grade exotics on a consumable product! Yet the effect of doing so often yielded greater results!

With his new batch of gauss cannon projectiles, the Kravon became a lot more deadly!

Against very tough targets, the rounds wouldn't shatter as easily. The armor-penetrating properties of the new batch was at least multiple times better!

If Ves had more time, he would have incorporated some of the materials in the missiles, but that was far too much work for him to accomplish on his own. The benefits were also a bit too marginal as missiles generally relied on their payloads to deal damage.

Time passed by. As Ves and Lucky became obsessed with Breyer alloy, the Scarlet Rose quietly made it through the Great Zona Republic without encountering another prepared ambush.

Whether his enemies gave up or failed to catch the ship at the right star system, the Scarlet Rose managed to escape trouble for two weeks!



By the time the mobile supply frigate left the Great Zona Republic, Ves had entered the final stretch of his flight.

As long as the Scarlet Rose managed to pass through the territories of the Crecia Republic, Ves would be safe!

The chance of encountering hostiles in the territory controlled by the Ylvaine Protectorate was minimal!

Just as Ves started to hope for a safe and quiet return, the Scarlet Rose finally bumped into a hostile force.

The alarm that rang from his comm and the mech workshop shocked him to no end! After realizing what was going on, he dropped his tools, pulled Lucky away from his perch and ran to the bridge!

Once he arrived, he seated himself on the captain's chair and called up the data gathered by the sensors.

The threat just arrived at the same emergence zone that the Scarlet Rose had entered a few hours ago!

With two hours to go until his ship finished cycling her FTL drive, Ves did not expect any dangers to occur once a sensor sweep revealed no starships in the vicinity.

For a new ship to arrive in the same emergence zone was very alarming! This was especially the case when the new arrival also happened to be close enough to intercept the Scarlet Rose within an hour!

The new arrival did not hide her identity. Her transponder not only broadcasted her ship identity, but also her allegiance!

The ship just happened to belong to the Coalition Reserve Corps!

"Damnit!" He cursed. "The Fridaymen finally caught up! I knew the good days wouldn't last!"

The CRC did not dispatch some harmless scout ship either. The ship that emerged happened to be a frigate that was somewhat similar to the Scarlet Rose!

This explained her speed and ability to catch up to his flight.

Unlike his own ship, the new CRC vessel did not appear to be a mobile supply frigate. She looked sleeker, faster and much more oriented towards combat action!

Her mech hangar compartment looked a bit larger as well, which hinted that the hostile ship probably carried more mechs as well!

Because of the lack of mech pilots, his battle bots weren't capable of fending off an equal number of mechs.

If his battle bots happened to be outnumbered by a bunch of second-class mechs, then defeat was almost assured!

#### Chapter 1769 Terrinac

The doom that hung over his head never went away.

Ves just forgot about it when he became obsessed with exploiting the production loop. He came up with a lot of ideas on how to make use of this seemingly-endless source of Breyer alloy.

After several weeks had passed, the loop showed no signs of stopping! Whatever technique Cassandra Breyer performed, its programming obviously did not account for the absurdity that Ves subjected her to! If she was conscious, there was no way she would approve of his exploitation!

Fortunately, she never showed any signs of waking up after the forging machine burned her body up over a thousand times!

Just like a cleaning bot that kept bumping into a wall after its programming glitched, Cassandra Breyer seemed incapable of changing her current fate! Perhaps she wasn't even aware of her current circumstances!

Ves was especially surprised when her spiritual energy levels remained constant despite the constant creation of Breyer alloy.

Matter didn't come out of nowhere. Ves believed that not even gods were capable of circumventing this fundamental truth!

Matter was energy and energy was matter.

The human race had long invented ways to convert energy into matter and vica versa. It was just that this process was extremely inefficient. A humongous amount of energy was needed to generate a modest amount of matter. Tech constraints also made it impossible or impractical to create valuable exotics.

Otherwise, the Big Two wouldn't have needed to launch an invasion of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy! It could simply sit on its Dyson spheres and transform an endless amount of solar radiation into phasewater!

This was why Ves continued to find the current situation absurd. What Cassandra Breyer casually managed to do in her strange undeath state ought to be impractical at best and impossible at worst!

Ves had the sense that he had inadvertently come in touch with a facet of human civilization which was very dangerous!

Could Cassandra Breyer be an associate of his mother? Was she an agent of the Five Scrolls Compact?

Whatever the case, if some random mummified corpse casually performed a feat that could only be replicated with extremely advanced technology, then there must doubtlessly be other people out there who wielded greater powers!

Ves had a feeling that he would definitely be able to bump into these spiritual adepts if he traveled to the galactic center. The chances of bumping into someone as powerful as Cassandra Breyer shouldn't be too large in the expansive galactic rim.

This was also why he suspected that the woman must be targeting him specifically rather than the Scarlet Rose.

"How troublesome." He muttered.

He couldn't wait to return and find out whether he could sustain the loop while stepping out of the ship. If it turned out that he could only keep up production while he was physically present on the Scarlet Rose, then he wouldn't be able to profit as much from this process!

Yet before he could return to safety, the Friday Coalition finally managed to catch up to his flight.

The Coalition Reserve Corps hadn't been sitting on its thumbs all this time. Aside from putting a bounty on his ship and encouraging masses of mercenaries to do its dirty work, the people in charge also redirected their own assets!

The hunter frigate that showed up just happened to be in a prime position to intercept the Scarlet Rose. Not only did she emerge a stone's throw away from his ship, but her relative motion to his ship even provided her with a head-start!

The Scarlet Rose's navigation systems went to work. By measuring the relative position, speed and acceleration of the new arrival, Ves quickly found out that he had only 66 minutes left until the hostile ship came close enough to start a battle!

"What awful timing!"

According to the transponders, the frigate bore the name of Terrinac. Ves tried to search up her name and ship class in the internal database of the Scarlet Rose as well as Aisling's personal terminal.

No match. The Terrinac was probably one of the CRC's more clandestine vessels. Her amazing acceleration made it clear that she probably excelled in pursuits!

This signified that the Terrinac would definitely catch up even if Ves managed to escape this star system!

If she was fully crewed, the Terrinac's comprehensive performance was leagues better than the Scarlet Rose.

Ves had to shake the Terrinac off right away if he wanted to complete the final leg of his journey!

Out of curiosity, Ves attempted to hail the Terrinac.

The other side did not accept his transmission request. It appeared that his hunters were very professional. There was no need to talk between each other.

As far as the crew of the Terrinac was concerned, the capture of the Scarlet Rose was inevitable!

Both sides knew the score. The CRC had slowly dug out many of the cards that Ves depended upon to escape from its clutches.

All of the earlier battles against the mercenaries gave the CRC plenty of footage to study his battle bots in-depth!

With Aisling Curver, their original designer, in their employ, the CRC probably figured out all of the weak points of her former mechs!

Ves briefly grinned. "Many of those weak points aren't as vulnerable as before."

With a steady supply of Breyer alloy, Ves did not hold back in strengthening the overall structure of the battle bots.

He not only supplied the Paravin with a brand-new tower shield that consisted entirely of Breyer alloy, but also modified the structure of all four battle bots to vary their existing structure!

By and large, Ves substantially added a lot of armor plating to strengthen their resilience. While their mobility dropped, the boost in defense was more than worth the tradeoff in his eyes!

Yet will this unexpected change be enough to hinder the Terrinac?

"Probably not." He sighed.

The Friday Coalition came prepared! As the Terrinac slowly closed the distance, Ves tried to figure out every possible way he could avoid a confrontation.

To his distress, Ves failed to come up with a way to forestall the inevitable.

He entertained options he already ruled out such as overloading the propulsion system.

He also considered some unconventional plans such as throwing the mysterious escape pod in the flight path of the Terrinac.

A part of him hoped that Cassandra Breyer, or at least a duplicate of her, would wake up when the Terrinac picked her up and wreak havoc inside the ship!

However, Ves quickly discarded this unrealistic option.

If Cassandra woke up, she was liable to turn her ire towards him rather than the Terrinac!

To pin his hopes on her was pure folly!

"I don't really have that many options." He helplessly observed.

His options hadn't changed since he first contemplated them. In fact, they probably diminished a bit as Ves did not believe he could abandon ship and sneak away unnoticed with the help of Aisling's special escape pod.

The CRC must surely be aware of the existence of this escape pod! The Terrinac could easily configure her sensors to detect the minute emissions the special escape pod couldn't cover up while in stealth!

Where could he go, anyway? This star system was just as barren and lifeless as his other stops.

The only possible ship that Ves could board in order to escape the star system was the Terrinac!

There was no way the CRC would make the same mistake twice! Ves bet that the internal security complement of the Terrinac had gone into high alert the moment the ship confirmed the presence of the Scarlet Rose!

Ves did not have weeks to tamper with the Terrinac's internal security systems. The entire frigate would definitely fight him every step of the way if he happened to board the ship!

It didn't matter if Ves obtained better gear. He salvaged much of his combat gear from the former crew of the Scarlet Rose.

It didn't matter if he extended the runtime of his Full Stealth augment. He exchanged 1 million DP for this gain, but the crew of the Terrinac wouldn't be stupid to allow an invisible infiltrator to kill them off one by one!

Perhaps Lucky stood a greater chance at wiping out the Terrinac's crew. His capabilities recently improved a lot by consuming so many expensive exotics.

With his intangibility and invisibility powers, it should be impossible for the crew to pin Lucky down!

Yet even if his cat somehow managed to succeed, where would that get him? Taking over the Terrinac was of no benefit at all as long as her mechs kept the ship at gunpoint!

Ves suspected that the enemy commander wouldn't be so stupid to keep all of his mechs close enough to be within reach of any nearby threats.

While Lucky was capable of flying in space, he merely moved and accelerated as a bird!

It was too impractical for him to cross the vast distances in space and attack all of the mechs!

As Ves ruled out option after option, he finally couldn't escape the unfortunate fact that only a frontal battle between his battle bots and the Terrinac's mechs would allow him to overcome this crisis!

"Looks like we're at the end of our rope, Lucky."

"Meow."

"Yeah. We might as well try."

Seeing that he could do nothing else, Ves left the bridge and entered the mech workshop. He methodically activated his battle bots and put them on standby while he inspected the machines.

All four machines exhibited a bit more armor plating. The Breyer alloy added to their frames ruined their aesthetic contours, turning them into machines that significantly diverged from Aisling's original vision for her bodyguard mechs.

Ves had no choice but to place his faith on these tainted machines.

Compared to facing hundreds of third-rate mercenary mechs, he held little confidence that his battle bots would succeed this time.

Yet, he did not give up. He had come too far to stop at this point!



"Even if I'm defeated, it's not the end."

As long as the Terrinac was out to capture him, Ves would still be able to bide his time and attempt another escape, especially if Lucky stayed hidden.

Of course, the Friday Coalition wouldn't be as complacent as last time. Now that he became known as an escape artist, they'll probably keep him confined until the Terrinac brought him all the way back to the Warsaw Giant System!

"Does Aisling even want me still?" He frowned.

If not, then Ves was in big trouble!

As time continued to pass, the time to deploy his battle bots had come.

He stepped behind a familiar control panel. Four separate projected interfaces came online as the battle bots launched into space one by one. Each of the machines lined up next to the Scarlet Rose in order to greet the appearance of the enemy mechs.

Soon enough, the Terrinac showed some activity. Ves directed the Scarlet Rose's optical sensors to observe the opposite ship carefully.

A second-class mech appeared into space. Ves instantly studied its visual design and figured its basic properties.

"One offensive space knight. Armed with a lance as well as a sword. Excels in charges. Secondary systems unknown as of now."

"Two light skirmishers. Their models are identical, with only small divergences to account for the preferences of their mech pilots. Armament unknown, but likely consists of daggers."

"Two rifleman mechs. Both armed with powerful gauss rifles. Good choice. Energy weapons take too much time to penetrate the armor of my battle bots. Too bad they didn't account for my Breyer alloy."

"One striker mech. Armed with some sort of energy projector rather than a shotgun. Extremely deadly in close range. Forms an extreme deterrent against my melee battle bots."

Six second-class mechs. Each of them also looked formidable. At the very least, their quality did not lose out from Aisling's bodyguard mechs too much!

#### Chapter 1770 Battle Modifications

One space knight, one striker mech, two rifleman mechs and two light skirmishers formed a fairly small but effective team.

As Ves studied their appearances, energy signatures and other data captured by the Scarlet Rose's sensors, he continually discovered new aspects and nuances that distinguished their designs.

"They're not civilian designs. They're built according to a higher standard. Not military, but reasonably close to it. Their designs also don't share anything in common."

Each design was the product of a different mech designer, or rather design teams. All of the mechs featured mature designs with hardly any pronounced weaknesses aside from the ones inherent to their mech types.

The degree of optimization in their technical makeup caused Ves to feel a lot of professional respect for their designers.

"These are some really great mechs!"

Their designs were definitely the work of Seniors, which only increased the disparity between the mechs and his battle bots.

Though Ves modified the Kravon, Seltzer, Paravin and Fliskin considerably, they still retained the characteristics of their original designs.

Lady Aisling Curver designed and built each of the mechs. Though she employed some of the best tech and materials a direct disciple had access to,

her design style still showed many traces of immaturity. Her professional experience simply couldn't catch up to those Seniors who were predominantly over a century old!

To be honest, this was a problem that could hardly be solved aside from collaborating with an experienced mech designer.

Even the mechs designed by Ves and Gloriana still contained some quirks that weren't very ideal. Fortunately, Gloriana's specialty excelled at stamping out faults, which allowed each of their recent products to approach the quality and polish expected from a mech designed by a Senior!

Ves did not enjoy that advantage right now. In a serious battle, the shortcomings of the four former mechs designed by Aisling Curver would probably become critical vulnerabilities to his opponents.

"The CRC is definitely aware of the characteristics of Aisling's works!"

Right now, Ves faced a pretty severe information disparity.

His opponents knew almost everything about the original designs of his battle bots.

In contrast, Ves could only glean the properties of the six enemy mechs by observing their surface appearances.

If Ves had to analyze third-class mechs, then he would immediately feel at ease. Not only did he grew up with third-class mechs, their low tech base, cheap construction and large components didn't leave much room for complexity.

By looking at a third-class mech on the surface, Ves confidently believed he could glean at least 80 percent of their characteristics.

It was different this time. Watching the six approaching mechs gave him the feeling as if he was only perceiving the outermost layer of an onion.

His lack of fluency with regards to second-class mechs and their inherently higher complexity prevented him from making solid judgements about their internal characteristics.

He did not forget the lessons he learned from Gloriana, Tristan and the textbooks left behind by Aisling.

Second-class mechs rarely featured only one main system. Due to their higher tech and material base, many essential components had been miniaturized, thereby freeing up a considerable amount of internal volume that could be filled with all kinds of offensive and auxiliary systems.

His four battle bots each incorporated multiple weapon systems and auxiliary systems, so the mechs deployed from the Terrinac should be no different!

While Ves had to painstakingly tease out the secret capabilities of the enemy mechs, his opponents held no such burden!

The six mechs formed into a loose formation and steadily sped up to the vainly-fleeing Scarlet Rose as if the outcome was already set in stone!

Though Ves felt affronted by the arrogance radiating from the Fridayman mechs, he had no right to speak at the moment.

"I should focus on the battle instead of depressing my confidence."

He knew that if he continued to lament his inferiority, the Fridaymen didn't have to defeat him. He already defeated himself in his mind.

In order to remain stable, Ves concentrated his mind and started to cast out most of his unnecessary thoughts.

Only the battle mattered!

It was time to enact his plan!

"Deploy defensive fixtures." He commanded.

The mech hangar disgorged a pair of containers, which the battle bots quickly grabbed hold of. Under his direction, the machines placed the containers on the hull of the Scarlet Rose, upon which the magnetic nodes installed on their bottom surface anchored them against the surface of the ship.

The bots carefully opened the containers and began to pull out moderately thick metal sheets before pressing them against the hull.

The bots continued to place more and more metal sheets against the hull, each of them shaped in a way that allowed them to slot together like puzzle pieces!

Within minutes, a very clear shape came into existence.

The four battle bots pieced together a bunker!

The bunker stuck on the hull of the ship like an ugly pimple. The aesthetic of the Scarlet Rose was completely ruined by this crude metal bunker made out of modular sheets.

Ves tried to guess what his opponents thought about his actions. They must be scratching their heads right now!

He already guessed from the configuration of the team dispatched by the Terrinac that his opponents aimed to capture him and ship intact.

As long as they destroyed his battle bots, they could easily restrain the Scarlet Rose long enough to transfer over a team of commandos!

Since they wanted to avoid damaging the ship, Ves did not have to worry too much about the Scarlet Rose suffering an excessive amount of damage.

Only two out of six enemy mechs consisted of ranged mechs, and Ves already observed they wielded dual-type laser and particle beam rifles.

"It's similar to the rifle of the Selzer."

The two enemy ranged mechs clearly acted as fire support. The three melee mechs clearly played the main roles, while the striker mech with its devastating close-ranged firepower acted as a reserve if the opposition was more formidable than expected.

The key here was that the latter four mechs were only effective at close range!

While the battle bots under his control lost out badly in terms of close-ranged combat strength, at longer ranges his side actually held the upper hand!

"If I want to win this battle, I'll have to maximize my ranged advantage!"

In the last couple of days, Ves hadn't been wasting his time. The constant supply of Breyer alloy allowed Ves to come up with all kinds of preparations in the event of an arduous battle.

Aside from cladding his four battle bots with more armor, he also formed the moduled metal sheets to serve as the building blocks of an improvised bunker!

Though the sheets weren't very thick, his battle bots stacked another batch of sheets on top of the first one!

By the time the bots finished constructing the bunker, at least five separate layers sheltered the Kravon and the Selzer from outside damage!

Only small openings remained that were large enough to allow their weapons to fire outwards.

The bunker only barely accommodated the two ranged mechs, so the Paravin and the Fliskin were left out by the time they installed the final pieces of the puzzle. Ves instructed the two mechs to shelter behind the Scarlet Rose.

At this stage, they weren't needed! Their limited ranged armament was of no use at this moment!

The bunker didn't just contain the Kravon and the Selzer. The bots also retrieved various supplies such as energy cells and weirdly-shaped heatsinks from the two containers.

Right now, the Selzer picked up one of the heatsinks, which happened to consist of the same material as the bunker, and slotted it onto his dual-type rifle.

The Kravon held its gauss cannon upwards and slotted it through the hole directly above the bot.

The Selzer followed suit, the heatsink attached to the rifle sticking very prominently from the weapon.

"Fire!"

The range was a bit too far, but Ves didn't care about wasting ammunition and energy. This was the most difficult battle of his journey so far and he could not afford to hold anything back!

The gauss cannon fired first! The bunker and the rest of the ship shuddered as a considerable portion of its recoil transferred to the Scarlet Rose!

The projectile that the Kravon fired was not the conventional slug it fired previously!

Not only had Ves fabricated a large batch of gauss cannon rounds out of Breyer alloy, but he also modified them in a special way!

If Ves tried to hit the Terrinac or the six mechs with a single slug, the chance of hitting them was too small!

This was why the Kravon released something other than a normal slug. When the round reached medium range, its outer shell suddenly broke apart!

Several dozen shards slowly diverged and spread out as if fired by a shotgun!

Although their angles didn't diverge very much, their extremely high speed and the huge amount of distance they traversed quickly caused them to spread out across several hundred meters by the time they reached their targets!

One sharp shard dug into the shield of the space knight with considerable force, surprising the Fridaymen sent to recapture their property!

"Active countermeasure!"

The team of mechs quickly responded to this unexpected offensive! Ports built into the exterior of the two rifleman mechs abruptly opened and released several jets of particles!

These jets quickly bloomed around the loose formation, engulfing the mechs in a particle dust cloud that hindered many sensor types from distinguishing what was hiding within!

"Damnit!" Ves slammed his fist against the console.

The sensor arrays of the Scarlet Rose and the battle bots completely failed to penetrate this masking cloud! The particles deployed by the two ranged mechs just happened to be tailored against the configuration of his own hardware!

This was the advantage of going up against their own machines! The Coalition Reserve Corps used their information advantage to maximum effect!

Nonetheless, the particle cloud only encompassed a decently-sized area of space around the formation.

As the Selzer began to fire random laser beams, Ves had the sense that none of them hit their intended targets.

It was too difficult to land a hit in this obscuring cloud!



This happened to be very effective against the Selzer which mainly fired concentrated beams that absolutely had to hit in order to deal effective damage.

Ves grimaced, but quickly recovered. His fingers danced over the control panel.

"Defocus the laser beam!"

He minutely adjusted the Selzer's rifle to fire a laser beam that minutely expanded as it traveled through space!

Though the angle only expanded by a tiny fraction of a degree, at longer ranges the 'beam' quickly expanded into a 'cone' that stretched up to a hundred meters by the time it reached the cloud!

While Ves failed to see any results, his intuition told him that at least some of these laser blasts managed to hit the mechs!

"The problem is that the energy is too dispersed!"

Even if a portion of the expanded laser blast managed to clip a mech, the dispersal of energy meant that the affected target only suffered a small portion of damage!

The Selzer had to fire its weapon hundreds of times in order to damage a mech this way!

Ves briefly grinned. "Heat and energy are of no concern this time!"

Rather than letting the Selzer control its fire rate in order to avoid depleting its energy, Ves forcibly ordered it to fire its dual-type rifle as fast as possible!

Ordinarily, this would have heated up the rifle and the mech rapidly, but the heatsink made out of Breyer alloy just happened to absorb a decent amount of heat!

When the heatsink started to reach a limit, the Selzer detached the heatsink and just threw it out of the bunker before slotting in a new one!

Heat management was no problem this time!

As for energy, the Selzer had to worry even less! Ves already prepared plenty of spare energy cells. Even if the battle bot consumed much of their charges in earlier battles, Ves had already replenished them by tapping in the energy provided by the ship's power reactor.

Energy weapons were extremely convenient to use in extended battles and campaigns for this reason!

Now that Ves solved the heat problem, the Selzer could fire its rifle without any risk of overheating its weapon!

The enemy mechs already started to note the abnormalities. They never expected to meet such vigorous resistance at this range!