

## Mech 2461

### *Chapter 2461: Untransferable*

Several hours went by as Ves frankly attempted to teach Master Willix how to design a living mech.

His student failed every time.

Her ability to concentrate her mind was exceptional. Not even Gloriana could keep her mind as clear and free of distractions as a Master Mech Designer who was used to imitating other design philosophies.

As a rational mech designer, her ability to impose a precise and specific order on her mind was key to emulating the perspectives of other mech designers.

Yet no matter how much Ves deconstructed his passions and beliefs, Willix continually missed the mark.

In his eyes, she was far too clinical in her work. She approached her work as if life consisted of building blocks that she just needed to piece together.

While that was partially true, Ves felt she wasn't appreciating the mystery and wonder of life. A part of him always accepted that life was too special to be understood by rational means. While his design philosophy centered around it, he never delved any deeper.

He instinctively felt there was no point. Comprehension would come when he was ready for it. What he learned by doing was much more practical and relatable to him than forcing him ahead.

Yet this organic learning approach that was devoid of structure and proper theory happened to be Willix's biggest stumbling block.

The values and beliefs that Ves always took for granted sounded utterly alien and conflicting to Master Willix.

He might as well be spouting religion!

She grimaced at him as her latest attempt failed to yield the desired result.

"Class IX design philosophy indeed. Your approach is just as unique and beyond the boundaries of known paradigms as Mr. Armalon's specialty of probability manipulation."

Ves was pleased by her conclusion. The harder it was for her to replicate his design philosophy, the greater his ability to retain his competitive advantage.

It also meant that he was irreplaceable! Anyone who wanted to obtain a living mech had a vested interest in keeping him alive.

Of course, there would doubtlessly be others who wanted to get rid of living mechs at all cost, but that was why he invested so much in the mech forces of his clan. The new expert pilots and battle-hardened mech pilots he obtained from battling through the Nyxian Gap formed a significant deterrent against his enemies.

Master Willix seemed to know what he was thinking. She had gotten better and better at reading his true thoughts.

"Don't be so satisfied so soon, Mr. Larkinson. While the benefits of adopting an abnormal design philosophy are lucrative, so is the difficulty of propagating it. This isn't a concern for you now, but once you reach Senior or Master, you will find that this condition will form a significant hindrance in your subsequent progress. The ease of which you can pass on your teachings will not only affect your relationship with MTA, but also determine the speed at which you progress beyond Senior."

"What? Is this truly the case?"

This was new to Ves! While he already knew that unconventional and irrational design philosophies were harder to pass on, he never really considered this to be a downside.

"Everything has a tradeoff, Mr. Larkinson. While you are not ready to know what is up ahead, you should know that becoming a Master Mech Designer or even Star Designer does not revolve around designing the strongest or most unique mechs. What truly matters is how applicable and universal your innovations are. The easier you can spread your design philosophy, the easier it is for you to progress in the latter stages of your career. One of the original reasons for setting up the Mech Trade Association is to facilitate this essential process."

Yeah right. Ves was truly skeptical about the MTA's intentions. While the MTA may very well provide mech designers some help with spreading their design philosophies, the Association gained most of all out of these transactions!

As the gatekeeper and keeper of so much exceptional knowledge, the MTA obtained unrestricted access to every possible way to design and empower a mech.

Since knowledge was power, the MTA continually strengthened its stranglehold over human society!

Even so, if Master Willix was correct, then Ves might truly experience some difficulties once he reached Senior.

The only consolation was that he was far from reaching that point. Despite designing a lot of fantastic mechs, his design seed had barely changed.

"Is this the case for every mech designer with a difficult design philosophy?" Ves asked.

"High-grade design philosophies such as yours are considerably more exotic and potent. In turn, they are also significantly harder to progress at every stage." She taught. "In fact, most mech designers who have chosen to specialize in difficult design philosophies mostly fail to realize their design philosophies."

"Even within the MTA?"

She nodded. "Our Association offers substantial assistance to mech designers such as Mr. Armalon. The success rate of our mech designers is substantially higher for that reason, but it is not that high in absolute terms. We cannot do all of the work on their behalf. The mech designers must still rely on their own efforts to realize something that could not be previously done."

This fell in line with his own theories on how the MTA nurtured its mech designers. Aside from investing in rational mech designers, the Association also raised mech designers with extremely valuable design philosophies that likely wouldn't go anywhere if they were left in the hands of native mech designers.

"Do you think it is hopeless for me to progress in the later stages?"

Master Willix gave him a reassuring smile. "While the odds are small, they are not miniscule. I truly can't estimate your chances because each mech designer faces unique circumstances. What I can say is that as long as mech designers work hard enough, their chances are always greater. Those who are most deserving of advancement will grasp it with their own power. Never forget that."

That was all he needed to hear. He no longer felt as apprehensive as before.

From the moment he designed his first virtual mech, Ves was already accustomed to working hard. While the System provided him with an enormous amount of help, it mainly accelerated his progress. It never substituted his work.

Only Superpublishing his mech designs came close, but its limitations were so onerous that it was impossible for him to rely on it. In fact, many mech designers who enjoyed the tutelage of a Senior or Master were able to obtain comparable assistance, so it wasn't as if Ves enjoyed a unique advantage in this aspect.

He regained his composure. "I am confident that I'll be able to reach Master. It may take a while, but I have never stopped moving forward since I stepped on this path. There is too much at stake for me to stop at this point. If I have to face danger comparable to what I faced in the Nyxian Gap, then I will gladly do so a hundred times if that is what it takes to realize my mech design!"

His conviction resonated with his declaration! There was no doubt he was sincere!

His words did not sit well with Master Willix. She raised her palm in a gesture to calm him down. "Let's not be so dramatic, shall we? We are mech designers, not mech pilots. Our progress is not correlated to the degree of danger we face. As your mechs become more valued by the mech market, it becomes increasingly more important to safeguard your life. Taking risks, especially the life-threatening kind, is completely redundant. There are other ways to stimulate yourself than confronting illegal warships in person."

He clearly noted her overt and implied criticism of his conduct. While he agreed with her, she just stated earlier that mech designers who pursued more difficult dreams had to work harder than anyone else. How was he supposed to make any substantial progress without having his skin in the game?

Without any institutions like the MTA facilitating his progress, he had to climb his way up through his own means!

The two eventually returned to the main topic. With Master Willix continually unable to spark any life in her mech designs, there was little point for Ves to pass on his other teachings.

"You don't have an affinity for life." He concluded. "Based on my own experiences, psionic power is not monolithic. It comes in many flavors. Mine just happens to be weird and unusual enough that it is difficult for others to replicate or substitute."

Willix looked displeased. This setback severely impacted her plans.

"I see. Then we have no choice but to conclude this session for now. You must try hard to advance to Master and realize your design philosophy. Once you have made this attainment, we can revisit this session. The results will be different as Masters such as myself are much more capable of spreading our philosophies."

That was something else that Ves hadn't known until now. It seemed that realizing a design philosophy was a much bigger deal than he previously thought.

Though he eagerly wanted to know more, Master Willix remained mum of what he needed to face. According to her, he was not ready to receive this knowledge. He needed to reach the rank of Senior first and go on another pilgrimage to the MTA in order to receive enlightenment.

"As a Journeyman, you have become a qualified mech designer, but only just." She stated as she waved her hand and removed all of the projections. "You have just found your research direction but have not yet developed enough applications to elevate your mech designs sufficiently."

"How many applications do I need to develop before I reach Senior?"

She shook her head at him. "Don't be too anxious. You will become a Senior when you have made enough progress. It is different for everyone. Those with higher-grade design philosophies such as you must work harder. The magnitude of your applications matter as well. Don't let your prior rate of progress fool you. Advancing to Journeyman is a completely different process than advancing to Senior. You are in a marathon, not a sprint. Pace yourself appropriately."

He already expected that it would take at least a couple of decades for him to reach Senior. It was just that he didn't exactly know why it took so long. Now that he received some clarification, he no longer remained as ignorant.

"So what now, ma'am?"

Master Willix sighed. "While it is regrettable that I cannot follow your steps, that merely means that I will have to wait longer before our Association can benefit from your gains. I will not lie, Mr. Larkinson. I have a keen interest in designing a mech that is comparable to the legendary Ouroboros. Even if my attempts do not measure up to its level, any mech that can facilitate the growth of a mech pilot is commendable. Tell me the truth. How certain are you able to turn mech pilots into expert pilots?"

Ves hesitated. He didn't like to answer such a direct question, but considering that he had already extended so much trust to her, there was no reason for him to obfuscate his answer like usual.

"This is not a straightforward process. Just like how most Apprentices are unable to advance to Journeyman for their entire lives, most mech pilots lack the 'psionic potential' to transcend their mortality. However, to the mech pilots that do possess this potential, I have 80 percent confidence that I can turn them into expert pilots in the span of a couple of years!"

That was quite a high degree of certainty! Unfortunately, this only applied to a tiny proportion of mech pilots.

Master Willix seemed to know what he was referring to. "Your success rate, while questionable, is vastly higher than the other methods than I know of. It is a pity that it does not apply to more mech pilots. Do you have any solutions for this underserved group?"

"I'm still working on that. I haven't given up on the majority of mech pilots who lack potential. In my opinion, potential isn't innate. There has to be ways to acquire it. I've already seen at least one instance of that after our previous battle. My research in this area is very preliminary, though. Don't expect any quick answers."

She smiled. "It is already revolutionary to achieve this much progress. Don't belittle your advancements, but don't underestimate the difficulty either. The fact that you are able to make any progress in this area at all is exceptional. The more I learn about you, the

more I admire Mr. S. His master plan is so deep that just a glimpse of it is enough to impress me. Your mentor's ambition is boundless!"

"Uhhh.. yeah.. he's pretty good.."

Ves wanted to scratch his head. What was this supposed master plan?

#### *Chapter 2462: Private Alliance*

After spending half a day aboard the Ubiquitous Force, a familiar shuttle launched from her hangar bay.

Ves sat in his seat as he contemplated how much changed as a result of his pivotal meeting with Master Willix.

For the first time in his life, he had laid bare much of the core tenets of his design philosophy. He never exposed so many of his self-developed mechanics to anyone else, including his soon-to-be wife!

He even explained how he worked without adding any misleading elements. It took a lot for him to be so forthcoming about his design philosophy. He was so used to hiding his secrets that he had to force himself to teach Master Willix earnestly.

It turned out that he shouldn't have been so worried. His life domain played such a great role in his design philosophy that other mech designers simply couldn't get their foot in their door if they attempted to copy his methods.

While Ves passed on his teachings, he paid close attention to Master Willix while she worked.

It was challenging for him to observe her. Looking straight at her mind with his spiritual vision only blinded him. He had to resort to indirect means of observations in order to track what she was doing.

Apparently, while Master Willix was quite good at emulating other domains by leveraging the power of her mind, she never managed to come close to reconstructing his life domain.

To imitate a domain, she needed to understand its principles. In fact, she needed to understand life at a much deeper level than Ves! This was one of the essential conditions that rational mech designers had to meet in order to make use of multiple design philosophies.

No wonder the requirements of rational mech designers were so high. In order for them to reach their full potential, they couldn't lean on their passion like ordinary mech

designers. They needed to draw on the power of their rational thoughts to a much greater degree just to reach parity with passionate mech designers.

However, once rational mech designers reached this level, they were able to call up and channel any design philosophy they deciphered. With the passing of time, these individuals accrued more and more design philosophies. They could draw upon each of them by switching some mental gears.

This meant that at the later stages, a rational mech designer was able to design much more comprehensive mech than any passionate mech designer!

Though Ves felt jealous that rational mech designers gained so much capability, he respected them as well. They had to work incredibly hard to grasp the essence of other people's design philosophies. That was something that he would never be able to accomplish. He might be brilliant when it came to his own specialty, but he completely lost his advantage with the design philosophies of other people such as Gloriana or Ketis.

He didn't mind too much. He was already content with his own specialty. To believe in his work meant having the confidence that his mechs were already good enough by themselves.

Certainly, his mechs may be even better if he was able to collaborate with other mech designers, but it didn't mean his solo products were defective.

The Devil Tiger and evidently the Ouroboros proved that Ves could already rely on himself to design great mechs.

In fact, the intrinsic value of his design philosophy was so great that Master Willix saw fit to cooperate with him on the matters that they previously discussed. Of course, her misconceptions of Mr. S. also played a great role in her willingness to accommodate his demands.

As promised, Master Willix would do her best to keep the MTA at bay. She may have to ask a favor from a Star Designer in order to accomplish this, but once that happened, the outcome was absolute. There were few people within the MTA who dared to make light of a Star Designer's prerogative!

Though Ves felt very uncomfortable about coming in touch with one of the top authorities of the MTA so soon, the chance was small that a Star Designer would even pay attention to a small figure like him. He was just a Journeyman in her eyes.

"The story might be different once I reach Master, but I'll worry about that in the future." He whispered.



Aside from that, Master Willix also promised to collaborate with him to design his expert mechs. She readily agreed to let Gloriana and him take the lead in the projects so that they retained as much ownership in the designs as possible.

She even approved of this approach. Her time was precious and she needed to take on a lot more responsibilities in order to repay the favors she owed. Ves and Gloriana also gained more from their design projects if they did most of the work.

This was the extent of what she promised. As Ves was not a part of the MTA, anything that Master Willix to assist him attracted more scrutiny and pushback. In order to avoid ruffling too many feathers within the Association, she needed to make sure to keep an appropriate amount of distance.

This meant that Ves was pretty much on his own most of the time. He couldn't count on the MTA to bail him out. That was fine. He never asked for its protection in the first place.

Overall, his meeting with Master Willix was a success in his book. He successfully established an alliance of sorts with a powerful authority figure within the MTA. With the cover she was able to provide, Ves no longer had to worry about the rest of the Association looking over his shoulder all of the time.

The only price he had to pay was to occasionally keep Master Willix apprised of his latest advancements. He had to offer her detailed explanations of all of his innovations so that she could archive his valuable knowledge for safe keeping.

Ves didn't quite understand why she insisted on this when she had no hope of replicating his methods.

"Knowledge is valuable regardless of its applicability." She replied to him back then. "Just because I am unable to apply your methods does not mean I can leverage them in other ways. One of the best ways a mech designer is able to advance is by studying different approaches."

He agreed with her. Ves owed much to Master Huron's work on neural networks. While he couldn't steal the Fridayman Master's methods, he became inspired by them to put his own spin on networks.

Ves realized that 'borrowing' the work of other mech designers was a pretty good way of developing new applications!

He just had to be careful not to develop a dependence for relying on other people's work.

In any case, Master Willix did not demand anything further from him. She did not foist him with a difficult mission or prohibit him from traveling to the Red Ocean or anything.



She didn't want to encroach on the supposed master plan set by Mr. S. In her eyes, since this mysterious Star Designer provided no structure to Ves, she had no right to impose any demands on him. There must be a reason behind every decision.

Ves simply rolled with the punches. He never thought that one of his casual lies would balloon so much. The Ouroboros that Ves had casually designed in the past had become his strongest dependency in keeping him safe from the MTA's clutches!

This was a precarious situation. Once someone managed to pop this bubble, there was nothing stopping the MTA from bringing him into custody!

He needed to remedy this fragile circumstance as much as possible!

"It's been a long time since I last went on 'vacation'..."

While it cost a lot of merits to obtain another Mastery from the System, too much was at stake.

"The only problem is that I can't disappear right now. I can't shirk my responsibilities!"

It used to be simpler in the past. Now, with the wedding and many other important developments taking place, there was no way he could excuse taking a week-long leave of absence.

"Ultimately, not a lot has changed." He concluded as he recalled the entire meeting.

He may have been forced to cough up the secrets of his design philosophy, but this was an acceptable price to pay for what he obtained in return.

What truly reassured him was that Master Willix never strayed close to the System or his ties with the Five Scrolls Compact. He knew that she would have been much less generous about her treatment of him if she discovered that he held the Metal Scroll.

As far as Ves knew, of the Five Sacred Scrolls, the MTA and the CFA only managed to obtain the Fire Scroll!

The chance of doubling the amount of Sacred Scrolls in the Big Two's possession was such a big temptation that Master Willix would not hesitate to spit Mr. S. in the face!

Therefore, despite feeling cross that he had to reveal so many secrets, Ves never felt ungrateful about the entire ordeal.

"From now on, I don't have to be so careful about design philosophy anymore." He muttered. "As long as my work isn't too outrageous, I can continue to benefit from Master Willix's cover."

Securing such an important ally within the MTA was his most important gain! Ves definitely planned to leverage it. The MTA no longer loomed so tall over him now that its threat to him was no longer as acute.

As his shuttle returned to the Scarlet Rose, he acted as if nothing special had happened. His clansmen weren't suspicious at all. They all thought that Master Willix summoned him to debrief her about the captured warships and the recent battles he fought.

When Ves entered his stateroom, Calabast was already waiting for him. She idly laid on a couch while holding Lucky between her bosom.

"Meow~"

The cat glinted his eyes with pleasure as the woman comfortably massaged his darkening metallic exterior.

Ever since Lucky digested a bunch of Unending alloy and B-stone with great difficulty, his appearance had morphed even further. His exterior became a bit more defined as some strange reliefs appeared on his face. His appearance also darkened to an extent as the high-grade Rorach's Bone he ate so long ago no longer dominated his material composition.

"How did you fare up there?" Calabast asked.

"I survived. I'm pretty happy with that. While I've made some concessions, they're not a big deal. All I care about is that our plan succeeded."

"That's good to hear." She smiled. "With the burden you carry, managing your relationship with the MTA is of utmost importance."

"At least the CFA isn't at our doorsteps." Ves joked. "Right?"

"Don't worry. While the CFA definitely wants to confiscate the captured pirate warships, the MTA already called dibs. Maintaining internal order is the MTA's mandate. The only problem is that the CFA is also responsible for regulating warships. How the Big Two will resolve their turf is none of our business."

The combined fleet moved on after the ships cycled their FTL drives. As the Larkinsons and the Wodin Warriors traveled back to the Cinach System, the Ubiquitous Force and her companion vessels accompanied them as well.

This was a welcome surprise to Ves. The MTA delegation would stay until he concluded his wedding. Once the Larkinsons no longer needed to show off their battle prizes, the mechers would bring the pirate warships to Centerpoint.

Until then, the MTA would continue to maintain an active presence. Master Willix even promised to attend his wedding in person!

This not only enhanced the prestige of the Larkinson Clan, but also served as a powerful form of deterrence against any potential troublemakers.

"There is no way that someone will crash my wedding!"

As far as Ves was concerned, Master Willix alone provided much more security to his wedding than an entire mech division of Wodin Warriors!

#### *Chapter 2463: The Grand Sum*

Once Ves concluded his meeting with Master Willix, he also received the MTA merits that he had long been waiting for. The Larkinson Clan risked much to defeat the Allidus Alliance. If the MTA wanted to encourage others to fight the Nyxian pirates, it had to be generous in its rewards.

As Ves settled back on his ship, he eagerly studied the detailed breakdown of merits he managed to earn. There were a lot of individual items.

Ves was already aware of the outstanding bounties on the Pirate Lord and the flagship of the Allidus Alliance. While the process of defeating them was a little murky, his clan managed to bring back both the warship and the remains of Lord Hivex's corpse. The nitpicking MTA inspectors couldn't argue against that, so they had no choice but to award the full amount!

Lord Hivex's bounty amounted to 1,500,000 MTA merits while the Gravada Knarlax was worth 4,500,000 MTA merits.

"That's 6,000,000 MTA merits in the bag."

The only sour point for Ves was that the latter bounty included everything associated with the heavy cruiser. This meant that Ves was not allowed to claim the individual bounties of the Gravada Knarlax's captain, senior officers and illegal superweapons. Not even the Hallowed Abyss Temple presence aboard the ship warranted any special treatment.

Fortunately, Ves was able to derive additional merits from other sources.

The pirate armada consisted of much more ships than just the flagship. The Larkinson Clan successfully blew up the Mortis Greyson, though Ves didn't exactly explain the exact process. How was he supposed to explain that he launched a torpedo at the pirate destroyer that unleashed a very angry dark god from within?

While the Larkinsons couldn't preserve the Mortis Greyson, they did manage to bring back the Ailing Frey, Cartin Motiva, Livid Seven, Artis Fly and the Sundown.

The bounties on each warship was quite disappointing to Ves. The stingy MTA only awarded him with 750,000 MTA merits for destroying or capturing an armed destroyer and just 250,000 MTA merits for doing the same to an armed frigate.

These bounties were all-inclusive as well so it didn't matter how many nuclear missiles, warship-grade armaments and other violations the warships carried.

"Well, at least the pirates brought more destroyers than frigates to the fight." Ves resentfully muttered.

He didn't agree that a pirate destroyer was worth only 750,000 MTA merits. Sure, they weren't comparable to a behemoth like the Gravada Knarlax, but they were still strong enough to chew apart his mechs and ships!

Since the Larkinson Clan defeated 4 destroyers and 2 frigates, the total amount of merits he obtained from defeating the escort warships amounted to 3,500,000 MTA merits.

That wasn't as much as he hoped, but the MTA's judgement was final.

Aside from these large bounties, the Larkinsons also earned a host of smaller bounties. The MTA worked hard to analyze the footage and logs provided by the Larkinson Clan. Even if they stopped making sense in the second half of the battle, there was still a wealth of data on the other pirate assets for them to examine.

It helped that the Larkinsons also provided them with an abundant amount of proof. In addition to providing detailed footage of the aftermath of the battle, the Larkinsons also captured numerous pirate carriers in order to serve as their temporary cargo transports.

Even though the pirate armada was largely made up of these vessels, the pirate carriers weren't worth any bounties by themselves. The MTA only awarded him merits for the various violations of the rules such as mounting cannons onto the ship or carrying nuclear missiles.

What especially disappointed Ves was that he obtained no rewards for defeating 8000 pirate mechs!

He only gained a handful of individual bounties by defeating some notorious war criminals and fugitives, but this was also commensurate to the effort it took to defeat such a massive force.

The miscellaneous pirate gangs the Allidus Alliance recruited were generally too small and inconsequential to draw any higher bounties. It didn't matter to the MTA that they all

grouped up and formed a huge deathball of mechs. Since these mechs were technically legal, the MTA didn't pay a single merit for destroying thousands of machines that the pirates could have used to terrorize innocent people!

In fact, Ves shouldn't complain so much. A lot of pirate mechs and ships easily fell into the hands of his forces after defeating the dark gods.

The presence of so many extraordinary entities was too much for mortals to bear. Pretty much every pirate and Larkinson lost consciousness once the powerful spiritual entities arrived onto the battlefield. The Larkinsons only managed to obtain a cheap victory because Ves woke them up first.

"Luckily, the pirates brought a lot of ships, many of which contain at least some trump card." He muttered.

The Allidus Alliance were some of the best shipbuilders of the Nyxian Gap. Their pirate carriers incorporated some of the same secondary armaments that made their dedicated warships so deadly.

As for the smaller pirate outfits that tagged along with the big boys, their strengths were weak but their numbers were large. Each little violation added up to a considerable sum.

In total, the MTA awarded him with 3,243,652 MTA merits. Despite defeating more than double the amount of mechs, this was about a third of what he obtained from conquering Ulmo Citadel.

Ves hoped that Master Willix would put in a good word for him and secure additional merits on his behalf.

After all, defeating the pirate armada directly precipitated the end of the Allidus Alliance. The Larkinson Clan ought to receive a reward for that as well, right?

"It's too bad the MTA doesn't agree."

The MTA did not award merits for nebulous contributions. Perhaps sick of all of the merits that Ves already obtained, it did not listen to any further arguments and put an end to any further considerations.

This meant that Ves earned a total of 12,743,652 MTA Merits for the Battle against the Abyss!

"And this is not the end of the story!"

The MTA promised to double the merits it awarded for any actions taken against the pirates of the Nyxian Gap.

Since this promise still applied when the Battle against the Abyss took place, the MTA had no choice but to honor it despite the enormous cost!

Ves lowered his gaze until his eyes fell on the final sum.

25,487,304 MTA merits.

"Twenty-five million merits." Ves whispered.

His spine tingled and his entire body shivered. He became increasingly more excited as he took in the astronomical amount of merits he gained after making so many sacrifices.

"TWENTY-FIVE MILLION MERITS!"

He was rich!

Combined with his previous earnings, his account currently held 36,910,402 MTA Merits!

That was already more than a third of what he needed to redeem a second-class beyonder ticket!

His excitement quickly died down a bit. Though he earned an astronomical sum, he also lost a lot to secure his hard-fought victories.

Aside from losing hundreds of valuable mech pilots and thousands of support personnel, he also lost Nyxie, the high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum and the Grand Dynamo.

The value of these three assets was immense. If Ves was able to exploit these resources in full, he would have been able to obtain much more rewards than 25 million MTA merits.

Yet the circumstances didn't let him. Perhaps the only reason he didn't blow up about their loss was that he gained much more than a lot of merits from winning the Battle against the Abyss.

Defeating a great enemy from the Ruined Temple, obtaining enough Unending Alloy to build three to five expert mechs, empowering his mother, adding a lot of expert pilots and expert candidates to his clan, accomplishing several new innovations and so on couldn't be expressed in simple numbers.

"Overall, I've made a handsome profit." He smiled.

He could live on after losing Nyxie, the high-grade serum and the Grand Dynamo.

Truthfully, losing the last one hurt the most. In the long run, the vast quantities of spiritual energy it generated could have provided him with an immense amount of value. Losing this renewable source of energy when he only enjoyed it for a couple of years was really frustrating!

"Maybe I can regain what I lost."

He already formed some plans to recreate the Grand Dynamo. While he still needed to puzzle out the mechanics behind deriving usable energy from a spinning galaxy, he had hope that he might be able to crack some of the puzzles.

"It doesn't have to be as good as the original one. Even if it's just 1 percent as productive, that's already a win in my book."

The downside of making use of the Grand Dynamo was that it was a finished product that didn't offer any room for improvement.

In contrast, once Ves successfully developed a homegrown version, he would be able to iterate on it whenever his spiritual engineering ability improved. By building up and improving his shabby dynamo from the ground up, he might be able to create something that surpassed the original some day!

"What is even better is that it won't be scarce anymore!"

Depending on the difficulty of obtaining the necessary ingredients, Ves might be able to build a second dynamo or a third one.

"Maybe stuffing my mind with a hundred dynamos is a bit overboard, but there shouldn't be a problem if I carry a couple of them, right?"

An even greater advantage of being able to build his own dynamos was that he could also supply them to other people!

Once Ves inserted some of his dynamos into Gloriana, he no longer needed to wait for months for her to recover whenever they created a new design spirit.

Perhaps he might gift Ketis some of his dynamos as well since her 'superpower' was very overbearing.

"It's not just the mech designers who benefit. What if I hand them out to expert pilots?"

While his expert pilots primarily cultivated their will, spiritual energy played an indispensable role in empowering them. Ves was just a bit unsure how increasing the regeneration of the latter affected them in battle.



Still, achieving all of this remained a fantasy so long he couldn't solve the two main mechanisms of a spiritual dynamo.

How was it able to derive energy from the galaxy? How did the dynamo convert this energy into usable spiritual energy?

These two steps continued to frustrate him. He scratched his head and frowned as he tried to wrap his mind around it. Since spiritual energy normally didn't interact with the material realm, he didn't see how the dynamo was able to interact with the spinning galaxy on a physical level.

"Perhaps it does so on a spiritual level instead."

Yet whenever he cast his awareness into the spiritual realm, he encountered nothing but emptiness and a lot of corrosive winds.

Unlike back when he was travelling through the Nyxian Gap, the imaginary realm in ordinary space wasn't dominated by a vortex.

Ves failed to observe anything massive.

"Maybe I need to look deeper, or maybe it just doesn't exist."

He became so wrapped up by the question on how he was supposed to derive energy from the galaxy that he suddenly jerked when he made a very basic realization.

"Who says I need to use the galaxy as my power source? I can make use of a more accessible source of energy instead!"

Ves palmed his face. He should have thought about it earlier! Why go to the moon right away when he couldn't even climb a shallow hill? He needed to start with the basics before aiming higher!

He commenced his first true spiritual engineering project at that point. Numerous ideas flowed into his mind as he contemplated his initial energy source for his homemade dynamo. It had to be both accessible and easy to convert in order to work.

#### *Chapter 2464: Developing Specialties*

The Wodin Warriors, the remnants of Task Force Predator and a small MTA delegation led by Master Willix traveled deeper into the Sentinel Kingdom in unison.

Though the MTA vessels could have reached the Cinach System in a single jump, they chose to accompany the fleet that emerged out of the Nyxian Gap in order to stay close to the dangerous captured warships.

Word had already spread. Every time the combined fleet transitioned out of FTL, the locals in the star systems eagerly gawked at the might on display!

The powerful Hexer second-class mechs, the rugged and damaged vessels of the Larkinson Clan, the small but incredibly authoritative presence of the Ubiquitous Force and of course the crude but enormous Gravada Knarlax captured everyone's attention.

A large number of sensors and scanners directed their arrays at the heavily-damaged heavy cruiser. The buzz surrounding the pirate warships turned contentious as the local Sentinels regarded them with a mix of dread and excitement.

Though the Big Two did their best to paint warships as threats to human civilization, their allure could not be denied. Though damaged and tarnished, the sheer size of the former pirate flagship exuded a brutish charm that captivated the imagination of anyone who desired power.

What would it be like to control this destructive warship?

How many ships would they be able to demolish with her guns?

The sight of the captured warships inspired plenty of deviants! The problem got so bad that the MTA felt compelled to set up a simple interference field. Many long-ranged sensors and scanners failed to gain a detailed glimpse once this field enveloped the fleet.

As the reunion between the task force and the Larkinson Clan approached, Ves split his time on several priorities.

Now that the Design Department completed all of its ongoing projects, Ves gained some time to evaluate the performance of his Braves and provide them with some useful guidance.

He also made sure to check up on Maikel and Zanthar's studies.

With all of the Attribute Candies they ingested, their learning capabilities were only modestly behind that of Ketis. They devoured textbooks quite quickly. While their 1.6 Intelligence provided them with a substantial boost, the real reason why they were able to persist in their study sessions was their 1.8 Concentration.

As far as Ves was concerned, Concentration mattered more than Intelligence. Human geneticists developed a large amount of gene mod templates that directly improved the latter. The former did not receive as much attention. Any genetic augmentations that purported to improve this attribute were considerably less refined.

Yet the benefits of high Concentration were evident. Not only did it make his mech designers more dedicated to their studies, it also ensured they remained focused and free from distractions when they were working on a mech design.

It was with the help of their high Concentration that the two Larkinson seeds made good strides in their studies.

That said, they hadn't rushed ahead of the curriculum that Ves had set. Since he was determined to turn them into second-class mech designers from the start, he insisted on instilling them with a deep foundation.

They had to be just as knowledgeable and competent as Gloriana when she graduated from Kelma University!

As Ves finished going over the latest exam results, he smiled as he turned to his students.

"I am satisfied with your progress. Your grasp on mechanics, electromagnetism, calculus, data analytics and so on is quite extensive."

"Thank you, teacher!" Maikel smiled at the praise. "We both worked hard to catch up to your level."

Zanthar also showed a lot of eagerness.

"With all of the action going on, I want to be able to contribute as well. I would love nothing more than to see my clansmen pilot my mechs!"

Ves responded with a good-natured chuckle. "You are far from reaching that level. It's good to set a lofty goal for yourselves, but don't delude yourself that you'll be able to design a good mech right away upon graduation. The standards of the Larkinson Clan keep getting higher, so the two of you will need to study a lot more to design a worthy mech for our mech pilots. Properly speaking, Novice-grade mechs don't cut it. The Larkinson Clan will only pilot Journeyman-grade mechs at a minimum."

The two students immediately lost their cheer. They were working hard to become Novice Mech Designers. They had to work some more in order to reach the rank of Apprentice. Then, they faced the biggest test of all. Only a small proportion of Apprentices were able to move forward, and there was no guarantee that Maikel and Zanthar would be a part of this group!

They only had to look at the Braves to see how difficult it was to become a Journeyman. The two Larkinson seeds had befriended many of the mech designers aboard the Scarlet Rose. Each of them were smart, talented and capable in many ways.

Yet out of all of the Braves, only Ketis possessed the confidence that she was getting close to achieving this transformation.

"Don't be so depressed." Ves said. "Back when I was a Novice, I wasn't nearly as good as now, but I managed to practice my craft and earn a profit anyway. There is a place in the market for Novices as well. Just because your design ability isn't up to par yet for the clan doesn't mean that every other customer is as strict."

That caused them to regain a bit of optimism. Ves was right. A proper independent mech designer always started off from the bottom. While the performance of mechs designed by Novices and Apprentices weren't that impressive, they were much more affordable than the products designed by the likes of Ves and Gloriana!

"Do you have a better idea on how you will specialize in the future? While we haven't reached the juncture where you must declare your future direction in your studies, you have already gained a good overview of the varieties of mechs that can be made."

"I want to design living mechs like yours, teachers!" Maikel answered without hesitation.

"I'm more interested in arming my mechs with powerful guns." Zanthar spoke.

The two of them hadn't changed their minds about their orientation. Ves wasn't entirely comfortable with their choices.

While Ves did not object to Maikel's choice, the young mech design student might not have the right aptitude to design a living mech.

What determined a mech designer's spiritual attributes?

Were they born with them, or did they develop them over the course of their life by taking after their environment?

Ves believed the latter was definitely the case. It explained how Venerable Joshua managed to develop a very rare life domain.

In fact, as LMC became more prevalent, Ves predicted that more mech pilots like Joshua might emerge. Millions of LMC mechs were already put to use in the star sector. Many mech pilots had already become devoted fans of his products, just like Joshua!

Ves held the highest hopes for his Larkinson Clan. His mech pilots excelled at piloting LMC mechs. Once he rounded out the mech roster, his clansmen would be surrounded by so many living mechs that they should definitely embrace life!

Perhaps the only uncertainty was the age of the mech pilot. Ves noticed that younger people were more malleable to change. They possessed impressionable minds and were still in the process of forming their principles.

In contrast, the old dogs who had gone through hell and back were remarkably stable and static. Their strong core was unassailable by most external influences. At best, their constant proximity to living mechs may make them slightly more compatible with them, but only to an extent.

Ves wondered how other mech designers managed this problem. Was it as easy as surrounding their students with a specific kind of mechs? Somehow, he didn't think it was that simple.

Perhaps the rarer and more exotic spiritual attributes were harder to acquire than others. The trueblood members of his clan had spent years around LMC mechs, but Ves hadn't seen anyone developing a life attribute yet. None of them came close to following Joshua's footsteps.

From what he knew, the mentality of the person in question mattered as well. Passive exposure wasn't enough. The individual in question had to believe in the concept represented by the attribute.

"Maikel."

"Yes, teacher?" The young Larkinson seed looked attentive.

"Let me warn you that following footsteps is not for everyone. Many mech designers are completely unsuited to designing a mech that is comparable to mine. You may not have the right 'talent'. Do you know what that means? No matter how much you force yourself, you won't be able to inherit some of my legacy."

"Do I have the right talent?"

"I don't know. It's not something that is easy to acquire, but I believe there is still a chance. Don't worry. Since I accepted the responsibility to become your teacher, I will do my best to set you up. I can't do it without you, though. Whenever you are free, you should spend more time with my mechs. It doesn't matter which. Bright Warrior, Aurora Titan, Doom Guard or whatever. Just go ahead and work alongside a crew of mech technicians as they service the machines. Don't go through the motions. Be earnest about it. As long as you are sincere, I believe you'll be ready to design a living mech!"

Maikel regained some of hope. "I'll do my best! It's just that my studies already eat up my time. I barely enjoyed a day off in the last year."

Ves tapped the kid on his head. "I won't tell you that breaks aren't allowed. I'm pushing you hard, too hard maybe. However, achieving greatness can't be done by settling for mediocrity. I set my expectations high because I'm setting you up to become the best. If you don't think you can keep up, then you can choose to lighten your workload. Just know that investing less in yourself will decrease the chances of achieving the success

you desire. That is something that every student must grapple with over the course of their adolescence."

In truth, he did not expect his two students to have any problems in this regard. Their artificially high Concentration always ensured that their motivation remained high.

"What about me, teacher?" Zanthar. "Is my choice as difficult as well?"

"Not quite." Ves shook his head. "There are many mech designers who excel in increasing the damage output of their mechs. It's quite easy to get into, but that isn't an excuse to take it easy."

"How so?"

"Maikel's problem is that he needs to work hard to get his foot in the door. You're different, Zanthar. It's easy for you to step through the door. Your real problem is that you'll be entering a crowded room. The crowd will do its best to push you to the back of the room. What you need to do is push forward and make it to the front. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"You mean I'll be struggling with a lot of competitors?"

Ves nodded. "Precisely. The ease of which you'll be able to reach the front of the room depends on how you approach your specialty. It needs to be both strong and distinct from the rest in order to stand out from the crowd. Therefore, don't think you have to work any less than Maikel."

Though Zanthar looked troubled by this, Ves didn't worry as much about him. Even if Zanthar failed to live up to expectations, he would still be able to become a decent mech designer. That was the benefit of choosing a more accessible design philosophy.

For the remainder of the session, Ves provided them with some advice on how to prepare themselves. While they were a bit too early in their studies to lock in their choices, Ves believed the two had already made their considerations.

The earlier they devoted themselves to their specialties, the faster they were able to start with developing their future domains!

*Chapter 2465: Remote Domain Fragment*

Whether Maikel or Zanthar achieved success largely depended on their own efforts as well as a bit of luck.

The main variable was whether they would be able to develop spiritual potential. Ves still didn't understand how it came about, though he developed a couple of theories. He did not believe it was impossible for someone who was spiritually weak to break through

this shackle. It was just that the requirements were so harsh that few people managed to bridge this gap.

Most leaders surrendered to these circumstances. It was impossible for them to even sense whether people possessed spiritual potential, so there was no way for them to pick and choose potential talents.

Ves was different. He met a lot of different people over the course of his career. No one was able to match his exceptional spiritual perception. Even Master Willix was like a child in front of him when it came to this area!

The only exceptions were those who possessed some relation to the Five Scrolls Compact. Both his mother and that weird freak Tektak from the frontier both showed that Ves was not unique.

"I can't expose what I can do. Who knows whether people will lump me in the same group as those insane cultists." He muttered.

Despite possessing some of their heritage, Ves was nothing alike those crazies! He was an orthodox mech designer who purely dedicated himself towards mechs!

After reflecting himself, he turned back to what he needed to do before he reunited with Gloriana.

"Time is running out. I need to work on my wedding rings."

This was a project he had been stalling for quite some time because he wasn't sure how to approach it. He collected a lot of interesting materials from the pirates he defeated. Some of them weren't safe to touch, but there were plenty of materials that he could use. Each of them came with interesting effects that might or might not be helpful.

"If I just want to make some pretty rings, then I don't need to think that much."

The problem was that he knew that Gloriana wouldn't settle for that. She was just as knowledgeable of materials as him. If she saw that he misused high-grade exotics just to make something pretty, she would chew his head off! To her, a precious material must be used well.

"What do you think, Lucky? What kind of ring does Gloriana like to wear?"

Lucky idly swished his tail.

"Meow."

"What?"



"Meow meow?"

"That's a stupid idea. No offense, Lucky, but using a cat theme for our wedding rings is a little overboard. People wear those rings for fun, not represent their bond with someone."

"Meow!"

What could Ves expect from a cat? It seemed he needed to fall about on his own ideas, then. He activated his desk terminal and summoned up over fifteen different sketches.

Over the past few months, he occasionally developed several interesting ideas. He noted them all down and stored them into his archive. Now that he was ready to make his rings, he pulled them all up again.

"Hmm.. they're all serviceable, but they are lacking in creativity."

He pulled out the blank black rings from his pocket. His mother had gifted to him a few years ago. According to her, the material the ring was made out of was not only a high-grade exotic, but also spiritually reactive!

Though he possessed them for some time, he was unable to decipher the exact effect. Ves probed them many times without obtaining any results. If his mother hadn't told him that the rings were special, he would have vented them in space a long time ago like any piece of trash!

"I can only trust her, I guess." He shrugged.

Now that he looked at them, the rings did look as if they were made out of a material similar to Unending alloy. Perhaps they were related to each other in some way.

Ves studied his ring designs and became unsatisfied with what he had devised. They did the job, but didn't earn any exceptional marks.

If he truly wanted to delight his future wife, he had to do better.

"Let's approach this from a different angle. Instead of starting with the appearance, maybe I should consider its function first."

Aside from the effect inherent in the base of the rings, Ves intended to add at least another function. This largely depended on the material he chose to plate the ring.

For example, if he opted to use B-stone, then the ring became slightly more repellent towards spiritual phenomena.

"B-stone isn't a suitable material." Ves shook his head. "It's too breakable and too low-class to Gloriana's sensibilities. Perhaps keeping it too close to her might affect her work as well."

Ves had already settled on using Unending alloy. The material was not only incredibly hard, but also able to store spiritual energy.

Granted, the capacity of a ring made out of Unending alloy was rather small, but having some of it was better than nothing.

The main issue that held him back from making this choice was that his fleet did not possess the tools or production equipment to manipulate such insanely hard material.

He briefly turned to Lucky. His cat stared with a vigilant expression.

"Meow."

It was too impractical to use Lucky's teeth as precision tools. Ves wasn't confident he could shape Unending alloy into the precise shapes needed to plate his ring.

"Relax, Lucky. I don't need to rely on your teeth anymore. I'm sure I can ask Master Willix to borrow her tools."

When he visited the Ubiquitous Force, he spent some time in the lab. While Ves didn't recognize many of the machines, there were bound to be at least one that was capable of processing first-class materials.

It would be weird if something like that wasn't present aboard an MTA Master's ship!

The question was how Ves intended to employ the properties of Unending alloy.

Its insane resistance against damage merely made the ring more durable. While that was definitely good, he could do more.

Ves first contemplated stuffing them with a pair of small design spirits.

"No. That's just wrong."

The rings didn't possess much capacity, which meant that they would basically be tiny cages. Any life that Ves stuffed inside would quickly run out of room to grow. Staying in the rings would become increasingly more uncomfortable.

He settled for spiritual constructs instead. Even if he made them alive, he was confident that he could restrict their growth so that they wouldn't strain against their boundaries.

Since spiritual constructs were more machines than living entities, Ves had many options.

"What kind of spiritual construct is both helpful and comes with a small footprint?"

If Ves just wanted to empower Gloriana in some way, then he didn't have to limit himself to rings. He could just create a medallion instead.

"It has to be related to our relationship somehow." He whispered.

The rings needed to be special. They were symbols of love, not tools.

What if.. he could impart Gloriana with a small portion of his specialty?

Ves recalled how Master Willix failed many times in replicating his design philosophy. No matter how close she got, each of her designs were similar to clones. They resembled his work, but were devoid of actual life.

He knew that Gloriana was no better in this regard. She tried many times to accomplish what he could do, but her spiritual attributes didn't contain any life.

To be honest, Ves thought that it might be different. Some time ago, he had deposited his spiritual fragment in her mind. He hoped that Gloriana might be able to draw on its power, but other than keeping her warm and fuzzy, it didn't really do anything.

"Maybe I can change that!"

His eyes lit up as an idea came to mind.

He wanted to pair the ring with the spiritual fragment. Doing this solved the capacity problem, as the latter was considerably more powerful than anything that he could stuff inside the ring.

Ves began to draft another sketch. This time, he wanted to make two spiritual constructs.

The main one pertained to his spiritual fragment. He wanted to mold it into a form that allowed Gloriana to borrow from its traits.

Of course, he didn't want to make himself redundant by granting her the same capabilities as his own. He just wanted to make life a bit easier for her by allowing her to borrow some of his life attributes.

Due to the limited strength of his spiritual fragment, its domain was very weak. Gloriana wouldn't be able to do much with it except infuse her designs with a little life. Yet this should already be sufficient enough to keep her happy!

The problem was channeling it. Gloriana lacked the sensitivity and control needed to manipulate it. That was where her ring came in. By implanting it with a simple control mechanism, she would be able to transmit commands to his spiritual fragment that was trapped in her mind.

"The wedding ring controls the remote domain fragment. It's useless in someone else's hands."

While the ring itself wouldn't be impressive by itself, it would serve as the key to accessing some of his abilities.

Ves had to extend a lot of trust to Gloriana if he wanted to go through with this idea. However, he knew that Gloriana wanted this for a very long time. Ever since she forcibly shifted her design philosophy to take spiritual components into account, she had become incredibly dependent on him to design what she considered to be a proper mech.

Giving her the ability to infuse some life in her solo designs meant that she still had options even if Ves wasn't there to help.

"This is especially useful in design competitions where mech designers are often forced to work by themselves." He considered.

Not only that, but gaining better control over her remote domain fragment might also improve their collaborative work. Ves might be able to connect with her better if she became more attuned to his design philosophy. He expected their synergy to increase as a response, which would translate into higher-performing mech designs!

Of course, as Ves intended to make a pair of rings, he didn't want to be left out either. As long as he carved a spiritual fragment from her mind and implanted it in his head, he might be able to borrow from her domain as well!

His face grew a little difficult. "Do I even want to do that?"

To be honest, it didn't sound as appealing to him. While Gloriana adored his specialty, Ves was a lot more lukewarm towards her own abilities.

Certainly, it would help if he could borrow her ability to spot flaws and gain a better sense on how to polish his designs. Yet if these benefits came paired with her obsession for perfection and her inability to tolerate sloppy work, then it might be better if he left this option aside!

"I can't do that, though." He shook his head. "The rings have to be similar. If I design asymmetrical rings with different capabilities, Gloriana will probably explode!"

He wasn't too worried, though. He was confident he could keep her remote domain fragment contained if he didn't want to make use of it. To be honest, he didn't need to instill his ring with a control interface, but it would make it a bit more convenient if he did. Besides, there might be some benefits if his own ring mirrored that of his beloved.

"There's one more element to consider."

Ves pulled out the pair of Unstable Chaos Essence gems that Lucky produced some time ago. He had his eye on them for quite some time, and it wasn't just because they looked pretty.

Though their names sounded dangerous, Ves read something different in them. Chaos may be dangerous in most people's hands, but he was different.

"Some people thrive in chaos..."

*Chapter 2466: Converter*

[Unstable Chaos Essence]

A terrible essence of chaos is locked within this gem. The essence is stolen from a great and ancient horror that would dearly wish to regain it. Carry this gem at your own risk.

Anyone who read this description might shy away from using this gem. Yet where others saw trouble, Ves spotted opportunity.

Lucky had produced them while he was in the Nyxian Gap. Something about the environment caused the gem cat to form these abnormal gems.

If Ves took the description seriously, then these gems might contain either spiritual energy or some other vital energy related to the indigenous 'dark gods'.

Having encountered the dark gods up close, Ves was quite impressed by their power. While each of them were different, he noted that they all possessed the same origin.

They were entities rooted in chaos.

The Unending One, the Inexorable One, the Blinding One and even Nyxie were distinct from other spiritual entities such as Qilanxo.

Ves considered the former exobeast to be a more classical spiritual lifeform. While she was quite powerful in her own right, she mainly existed beyond the material realm. That meant it was difficult for her to affect reality.

The dark gods were different. Something about them caused them to be able to channel their powers in the material realm more easily. Of course, the unique environment may have something to do with it, but that did not detract too much from this powerful advantage.

Ves wondered whether he could borrow this trait.

While exposing himself to some of this so-called chaos might have negative repercussions, a part of him was excited at the prospect.

"There has to be a use for these gems!"

Otherwise, why would Lucky make them? None of his gems lacked a purpose. Ves just had to find the correct application for each of them. Since each of the gems revolved around containing energy, he needed to find some way of accessing it. That was difficult as the gems were very hardy shells.

"Still, these gems can be broken if enough force is applied!"

The Highly Unstable Chaos Essence gems exploded and unleashed a lot of energy during the Battle against the Abyss. While the damage of the explosion failed to deal as much damage to the Gravada Knarlax as he wished, he was still impressed by the eruption of chaotic energy.

Ves guessed that exciting this chaos energy might be a way of closing the gap between the imaginary realm and the material realm.

The way the realms were separated represented a kind of order. Chaos was something that could cause them to loosen their strict boundaries. It would explain why the realms were considerably closer to each other in the Nyxian Gap.

"Hmmm, this is pure speculation, though. I don't have enough proof to back up my assertions."

Ves didn't care, though. His intuition didn't send him any warning signals and he had a feeling that he might be on the right track. Even if his aim was off, at least he was looking in the right direction.

What mattered was that he was convinced that the Unstable Chaos Essence gems would be very helpful in some way. That was his judgement as someone who dabbled more than once with forces outside of his control.

In the next few hours, Ves designed a simple but elegant pair of wedding rings that incorporated the gems in various ways.

He wasn't sure whether it was possible to split the gems up without breaking their effect. Depending on the outcome, he could either incorporate a whole gem in the ring or split them up into smaller pieces and spread them out. This might also help with making the energy inside more accessible.

Once he completed the design, he stored it in his implant.

Before he went ahead and translated the design into reality, he needed to figure out the properties of the Unstable Chaos Essence gem.

"It's a good thing I have several of them. I can afford to break a few."

He carried five grey gems and one purple gem. He reserved the latter for Gloriana's ring and intended to use a grey one for his own one. This meant that he could play with four grey gems at most.

As Ves studied the grey gems, he grew a little suspicious. When the three dark gods showed up, their energies came in different colors.

The Unending One released black energy. The Blinding One radiated white energy. The Inexorable One released grey energy.

"Is this gem related to the Inexorable One?"

Ves didn't know. While he possessed her spiritual remnant, he wasn't sure whether they came from the same source.

"Well, it shouldn't matter too much. The Inexorable One excels in speed and manipulation."

He didn't care about the first trait, but he was quite interested about the second one. Out of all of the three dark gods that his mother beat up, Ves was most impressed by the Inexorable One's ability to conjure up area attacks. This signified that the big bird was quite good at manipulating her own energy.

Ves visited the vault to take out the P-stone holding the Inexorable One's spiritual remnant. He moved to the lab compartment and entered an enclosed testing chamber in order to keep out the curious Braves.

He took out one of the grey gems and placed it on a table.

"Now how should I go about this experiment?"

He decided to split it up in half. He needed to know whether damaging the gem would cause the energy to release and how violently this reaction took place.



However, just as he was about to take out a cutting tool, he froze.

"Wait a minute. Am I taking all of the risks into account?"

It might not be the best idea to conduct this experiment on his own ship travelling through FTL. The eruption of an uncontrolled amount of energy might very well interfere with the operation of the FTL drives.

If this disruption caused the Scarlet Rose to go astray, enter into dangerous and unknown dimensions or outright blow her to pieces, then Ves would certainly meet a good end!

Properly speaking, he should wait until the Scarlet Rose transitioned out of FTL travel. Once the fleet emerged into realspace, Ves could easily transfer to a less important and conduct his experiment here. He didn't even need to be aboard the same vessel, so if the gem inadvertently blew up with the force of a nuclear bomb, he wouldn't lose anything important!

"Damn. I could have potentially killed myself, and for the stupidest reason imaginable!"

His ability to assess risks could use some work. Everytime he became excited for one reason or another, he tended to go overboard.

"Ugh. Let's leave this for later."

He took back the gem and put away the tools. He took back the occupied P-stone and moved back to the vault in order to stow it away.

Before he did so, he briefly pulled out the P-stones containing the remnants of the Unending One.

Each of them were very valuable. Ves already used the remnant of the Blinding One to upgrade one of his existing design spirits into the Illustrious One.

The new design spirit for the Crystal Lord line was settling in well. His power and intelligence was fully up to standard. Ves expected a lot of growth out of the entity that possessed a portion of the power of a dark god.

"How should I use the two of you? Should I use you to upgrade one of my other design spirits?"

Ves didn't see the value in that. The Blinding One stood out because he belonged to the same race as the crystal golem. Merging them together made a lot of sense.

That didn't apply to the remaining two dark gods. Certainly, an argument could be made to fuse the Black Phoenix, the design spirit of the Blackbeak, with the Inexorable One, but Ves considered that to be a waste.

"The Blackbeak is a landbound offensive knight mech. Even if I design a successor with aerial or space maneuvering capabilities, it's not a mech that excels at speed."

The concept of the Blackbeak merely demanded that the mech was fast enough to take part in offensive maneuvers. It was similar to the Blessed Squire in that regard.

What truly made sense was to use the Inexorable One to create a speed-oriented spiritual product. By creating a new entity that took full advantage of the dark god's excellence in speed, Ves would finally obtain a design spirit that was perfectly suited for the light mechs he intended to design.

"Venerable Tusa will be happy, I'm sure!"

He overlooked the fact that Tusa bitterly struggled against the Inexorable One and almost died as the avian dark god completely smashed his mech apart.

As for the Blackbeak design... Ves didn't feel very passionate about updating it. Its concept was exceedingly simple and it didn't really possess any special properties.

Also, without spending resources to upgrade the Black Phoenix, the product line would always pale in comparison to his more modern mechs.

"I think.. it's not worth it to design a Blackbeak Mark II."

The Blackbeak's core concept was too limited in his eyes. He would rather design a new landbound knight mech from scratch with a more unique vision and concept.

Having decided to end one of his product lines permanently, Ves turned to the most powerful spiritual remnant.

He could sense the hunger of the Unending One's spiritual remnant. While definitely intended to use it up to create another spiritual product, he had something greater in store than obtaining just another design spirit.

His eyes sharpened as he studied its current state. "These devouring and digesting attributes are special."

In order to prove that, he created a small spiritual projection and pushed it towards the remnant.

As expected, the remnant automatically swallowed the projection!

A tiny amount of energy entered into its depths. Ves lost contact with his projection. He watched keenly as he observed the remnant of the Unending One trying to digest his own energy.

Apparently, his energy was quite nutritious, as the Unending One quickly completed the digestion process within a single minute!

Though Ves didn't sense an obvious increase in strength, he felt it was slightly more content.

"I see!"

Even though the Unending One was 'dead', the spiritual fragment that his mother managed to preserve from his dead existence still possessed some of his abilities.

His eyes lit up! This was exactly what he sought!

"I can use it as a universal energy recycler!"

No matter what kind of spiritual energy he fed it, as long as the Unending One was able to digest it, it was quickly able to break down and transform the energy into its own strength!

In the simplest terms, this meant that Ves might be able to use it as a renewable source of spiritual fragments.

He could just feed it with any undesirable or unusual spiritual energy he came across, thereby causing it to grow. Once it grew big enough, Ves could carve out fragments which he could use in many other applications!

"Not only that, but I might be able to leverage its energy absorption properties more directly!"

It sounded like a great base for a possible spiritual energy converter that could replace his Grand Dynamo!

If he was able to induce a change which caused the digestion process to generate spiritual energy that matched his spiritual makeup instead of that of the Unending One, he might be able to solve his energy problems!

Before Ves obtained a remnant of the Unending One, he always thought that he wouldn't be able to convert one form of spiritual energy to another form of spiritual energy.

It was different now. While Ves didn't understand how the Unending One was able to accomplish this feat, he felt confident in his ability to take advantage of it somehow!

"Using the dead remains of my enemies to make new applications, how wonderful!"

*Chapter 2467: Cultivating Helpers*

The spiritual remnant of the Unending One was one of the most valuable gains of the Nyxian Gap.

The dark god's strange ability to convert heterogeneous spiritual energy into a form more suitable for himself held a lot of attraction to Ves. How could he not be greedy of this ability himself?

"Energy is a resource! The more energy I possess, the more I can do with it. I can't let myself be slowed down because of my restraints!"

He even thought about merging himself with the spiritual remnant in some way. Since he managed to merge the spiritual remnant of the Blinding One with the crystal golem, it should be theoretically possible to apply this same technique to himself!

Ves slapped his face.

"What am I thinking! This is crazy!"

Altering his Spirituality in this fashion would completely transform him as a person. Sure, he might be able to gain the ability to absorb spiritual energy to a much greater extent than his mother, but there were bound to be repercussions!

Right now, his domain mainly centered around life and mechs. If he added another major attribute to the mix, Ves wasn't sure how it would affect his ability to design mechs.

Since he always considered himself to be a mech designer first and a spiritual engineer second, he could never allow the latter to threaten the former.

If Ves really went through with this insane procedure, he feared he might cross a line he might never be able to walk back from. Perhaps he would be no different from the insane cultists of the Five Scrolls Compact!

"I need to pull myself back and cool my mind. I'm letting my excitement get ahead of myself too much."

His eagerness fueled his passion, causing his heart to burn hot and bright. It was too easy for him to tunnel vision on his goals and disregard every potential danger.

Ves recognized that he wouldn't have attracted so much trouble in the Nyxian Gap if not for his lack of self-control.

He fell into a moment of introspection.

"The biggest problem is that I can't share my considerations with anyone. Having a second opinion at hand would definitely be able to keep me sober."

He already had access to a bunch of advisors who fulfilled this role.

Gloriana collaborated with him on everything related to mechs.

Major Verle provided him with deep insights on military and occasionally political matters.

Calabast mainly served as his spymaster, though she also advised him on matters of diplomacy.

James was the closest to a spiritual advisor that Ves could get. Even so, the former cult leader was an obnoxious bastard that didn't inspire much trust.

Ves viewed anyone who leaned on faith and unquestioning belief with deep suspicion. Religious nuts simply didn't inspire any confidence in him. The so-called Living Prophet's motives also remained something of a mystery.

"If not for this, I could actually confide in him more." Ves regretfully muttered.

Despite founding a clan that largely centered around his ambitions, he found that he still couldn't completely trust the people around him very much.

Sure, the Larkinson Network ensured that everyone connected to it became aligned to the Larkinson Clan, but that did not immediately entail unquestioning loyalty to himself.

It wasn't that he was tempted to do so, but Ves knew that performing such overt brainwashing would definitely trigger some alarms from the Big Two. Developing rapid loyalty to his clan could still be explained, but developing a cult of personality that was so unflinching would definitely invite a lot of unwanted scrutiny!

Perhaps the only people he could truly trust were the bonded Kinners. Yet people like Nitaa were simply mass-produced human products with limited imagination and talent. It was okay for them to serve as his footsoldiers, but he shouldn't expect much more from them unless he got his hands on some high-class Kinners.

The point was that Ves felt more and more frustrated that he was still unable to share all of his burdens to someone without reserve.

Perhaps in time, Gloriana might become that person to him, but for now his instincts warned him against doing so. He loved her, yes, but that didn't mean he had to trust her to such an extent.

He didn't forget that she possessed her own motives and ambitions, some of which weren't aligned with his own. There was no way he was willing to embrace her entire agency!

Ves crossed his arms and frowned. He really couldn't go on like this. He knew that whenever he spent his time alone for an extended period, he always came up with increasingly more radical ideas.

With no one grounding him to reality, he might have very well went on to perform the stupid stunts he just considered. After living through all sorts of crisis, it would have been incredibly stupid if he finally met his end by his own hands.

"Still, the problem is that I really don't have anyone I can trust without reserve."

From his future to his strategic partner, everyone around him supported him because he was useful to them in some way. Even Gloriana wouldn't be as enthused about marrying him if he didn't benefit her mech designs so much.

The moment he stopped being of use, much of that support would probably evaporate. That made him very nervous. While this wasn't a unique problem to anyone with valuable capabilities, he felt he couldn't go on like this for much longer.

"I need to cultivate a group that is truly dedicated to me." He concluded. "The Larkinson Clan doesn't qualify. It has grown into its own existence."

Since the Larkinson Clan was initially made up of his trueblood relatives, he refrained from being too overbearing. Back then, he possessed a lot less power, wealth and prestige. In order to attract a part of the Larkinson Family into following him, he had to make sure to offer them concessions.

Overall, Ves was still pleased with the Larkinson Clan. While his control over it was slipping a bit due to its rapid expansion and rise of capable leaders, its strength was undeniable.

"It's too bad that my clansmen can't help me with my current problems."

When it came to mechs and combat, the Larkinsons were like fish in water. Yet when it came to spiritual sorcery and spiritual engineering, almost all of his clansmen were pretty much dunces in those fields.

Outside of capturing and brainwashing some Compact cultists, Ves needed to cultivate this kind of group from scratch.

"This will definitely be a very long-term project. The requirements are too harsh."

His confidantes had to meet some very harsh requirements.

First, they needed to be spiritually capable enough to become a spiritual engineer. Obtaining a certain amount of sensitivity was vital.

This alone ruled out the vast majority of candidates.

Second, they had to be unflinchingly loyal to him from the beginning. As long as anyone leaked anything sensitive, Ves would definitely be in trouble.

If the leaks were bad enough, the MTA, CFA and the Five Scrolls Compact might all be after him! There was no way he could live a normal life if he entered their crosshairs!

The only way Ves could be certain of someone's loyalty was if he started to indoctrinate them when they were still young.

There were other requirements as well, but the first two were critical. No one else around him met this requirement so far, and he didn't think that this would change in the future.

If he wanted to raise a number of trusted confidantes, he needed to do it himself.

"I think.. the best way for me to do so is by training some of the children of the Larkinson Clan."

The clan had grown very big and many of the talents the Larkinsons recruited also brought their own families. There were already plenty of children who became Larkinsons.

With his power, it was no problem for him to set up a special institute that secretly raised these children into diehard loyalists.

The only issue was that this only addressed the loyalty issue. While Ves would be able to raise an army of capable subordinates, Ves doubted that he was able to turn them all into capable spiritual engineers.

Most people simply lacked the ability to manipulate spiritual energy like himself and his mother.

The only way for him to produce both loyal and capable confidantes was to... start with his own bloodline.

His eyes grew grave. "In other words, my children."

Though he felt very uncomfortable about it, he truly saw no better alternative than to choose one of his offspring.



As long as he raised them the right way, his children would definitely be trustworthy enough to inherit his legacy. And as long as they inherited his mother's side of his bloodline, their spiritual perception and manipulation should also be decent.

Only his own children were qualified to keep up with him! While Ves did not expect all of his six future children to inherit his talents, he would be happy if at least one of them was suitable.

"Compared to my own offspring, others simply can't come close."

Those who wanted to imitate him such as Maikel Larkinson could only follow him up to a point. While Ves believed that Maikel might very well be capable of designing mechs if he kept up his efforts, the younger mech designer's path was destined to follow a different direction.

"Still, cultivating just one or a couple of my children isn't enough. I need more helpers." He furrowed his brows.

If he wanted to raise an entire organization of loyal spiritual adepts, he needed to look towards mass production.

He briefly became inspired by the Kinner way of producing manpower. Should he follow their method of producing large batches of offspring by utilizing a host of artificial wombs?

"This idea has merit, but... I don't think it will work out. Children who are raised this way are always spiritually deficient."

He only had to look at his Kinner bondsmen. While they were definitely human, their upbringing was too monotonous and devoid of love. None of the Battle Crier mech pilots managed to break through to expert candidate. They were much worse than trueblood Larkinsons in this regard.

"This isn't the right way. If I want to produce suitable children, they need to be raised normally."

In order to do this, he needed to insert his genes in the wombs of a large number of women. The more, the better. That way, even if only a fraction of his offspring inherited the right talents, he would still have plenty to choose from. Over time, he might even be able to raise an entire army of spiritual engineers!

His face suddenly cracked as he made a very important realization.

"Gloriana will kill me if I do this..."

There was no way his possessive girlfriend would tolerate such an act! Even if he was doing it for the right reasons, his girlfriend simply wouldn't be able to accept any of his logic!

"Damn!" He cursed. "Marriage is no different from a shackle!"

He wouldn't have as much scruples about enacting this plan if he was still single. He wouldn't feel much guilt with spreading around his seed. Yet because he valued loyalty so much, he couldn't bring himself to betray Gloriana's trust.

Still, he felt frustrated at losing this option. It sounded so good! While it would have taken a lot of time for his plan to come to fruition, once it did, Ves wouldn't be short of any spiritual assistance at that point!

"How else will I be able to obtain a large amount of spiritual assistants?"

Maybe he could enact his plan behind Gloriana's back. If he implemented his plan on a group that was unrelated to the Larkinson Clan, then the chances of keeping his wife in the dark should be much more optimistic.

"As long as the genes I pass on are sufficiently altered, the children who emerge from them won't exactly be my offspring anymore. That should be okay, right?"

#### *Chapter 2468: The Coalition Strikes Back*

As Ves worked on his radical ventures during the journey back to the Cinach System, the center of the star sector underwent another huge upheaval.

After toppling the Crestfallen Stars ahead of time, the Hex Army rampaged through the space of the Carnegie Group!

Hundreds of star systems fell in the grasp of the Hexers as the Fortune Legion struggled to put up a defense against the motivated Hexers!

After losing a large chunk of territory, the eager Hexer mech army groups finally reached the limits of what they could bear. It was untenable for them to push further when they had essentially exhausted much of their pushing capabilities.

The downside of capturing so much territory in one fell swoop was that much of it still hadn't been pacified!

Though the cities and settlements fell into the grasp of the Hexers, some local Fridaymen weren't resigned to living under a matriarchal society!

The well-prepared resistance movements that rose up gave the occupation forces a lot of headaches! Unaccustomed to forcibly taking over any star systems, the Hexer garrison troops had to resort to increasingly more brutal methods to repress the rebels.

This only inflamed the Fridaymen partisans even further!

Having long anticipated a possible invasion and occupation from their hated rivals, the Carnegie Group and the Vermeer Group had long set up and buried a large number of well-hidden weapon depots.

This ensured that each organized group of rebels gained access to a plentiful supply of firearms, combat armor, infiltration equipment, explosives and even mechs!

Even if the equipment mostly consisted of outdated military surplus goods, in the right hands they could still frustrate occupiers.

Across hundreds of planets, city halls burned, ammunition stores blew up, manufacturing complexes collapsed and middle rank officers were being assassinated!

"The Coalition shall prevail!"

"Down with the matriarchy!"

"We will die like men, not boys!"

Though the Fridaymen normally weren't as patriotic to their own state as the Hexers, the Komodo War had enflamed everyone's passions!

The strict and heavy-handed rules set by Hexers immediately rubbed the Fridaymen in the wrong way. Everywhere, men were stripped of much of their rights, causing them to feel especially threatened!

Though the growing resistance effort didn't threaten the Hegemony's hold on the occupied systems, it generated enough trouble to burden the Hexers. Troops and supplies allocated the frontlines had to be diverted to many different planets in order to suppress the recalcitrant Fridaymen.

Combined with the increasingly more stretched lines, the forward positions of the Hex Army became increasingly more tenuous!

It was at this moment the Friday Coalition finally launched its counterattack!

With the Carnegie Group and the Vermeer Group under existential threat, the other Coalition partners couldn't hold back any longer. If they still insisted on holding back and keeping most of their troops in the rear, then the trust that held all of the partners together would no longer have much meaning!

Large quantities of ships and mechs crashed against the overextended Hexer frontline units and beat the women back with overwhelming might!

Though many Hexer spies had noticed the massive troop movements of the Friday Coalition in advance, the Hex Army had been too reluctant to pull back its forces.

The decision makers were too confident in their inherent superiority! After collapsing the defenses of their foes and continually pushing them back, the Hexers increasingly looked down even further on the Fridaymen.

This was why the initial counterattack achieved so much success. The Hexers weren't fighting against the Carnegie Group's Fortune Legion or the Vermeer Group's Blue Cavalry anymore.

The two strongest Coalition partners, the Gauge Dynasty and the Konsu Clan, finally committed many of their premier frontline units to this counteroffensive!

Across many different occupied star systems, Hexer mechs were falling left and right while Hexer vessels tried to beat a hasty retreat. Showers of positron beams, stupendous volleys of missiles and entire mech regiments worth of melee mechs soared forward against their Hexer counterparts.

Entire star systems became filled with debris. Each battle generated large amounts of broken mechs and ships from both sides.

With all of these recyclable materials floating in space, controlling the star systems became more important than ever. The side that won the most battles were always able to stave off their resource shortages a little longer. This would become very relevant in the later stages of the war.

In the Leemar System, the resplendent universities existed no more. The vindictive Hexers razed every single education institution to the ground. Even if the value of the structures and monuments weren't high, the Leemar Institute of Technology and other renowned schools had lost all of their pride!

Yet not long after Leemar fell into the hands of the Wrathful Doves, the Fridaymen hit back with unprecedented ferocity!

"Kill these witches!"

"Take back our land!"

"Our heroes are with us today! Don't flinch!"

Two distinct mech militaries acted in unison. The orange-and-black mechs of the Sundered Phalanx of the Gauge Dynasty spearheaded the assault.

In space, the Phalanx's famed lancer mechs charged forth with blazing force. They closed in on the Hexers with so much momentum that the glows of the Blessed Squire didn't even have a chance to disrupt the Fridayman mech pilots!

Subsequently, large formations of spearman mechs soared forward in unison. They moved as one whenever needed and split up into smaller squads whenever the Hexer mechs dispersed.

The Sunderers displayed such impeccable teamwork and discipline that the Hexers were no longer able to rely on their fervor and aggression to overcome their foes.

The elite troops of the Gauge Dynasty were so firm in mind that the glows of the space-adapted Blessed Squires simply couldn't shake their resolve!

Though not every unit of the Sundered Phalanx consisted of highly-trained elites, they comprised much of the vanguard in the Leemar System.

By opening their counterattack with some of their best mech pilots, the Sundered Phalanx successfully managed to breach the Hexer lines in a single thrust!

The rapid collapse of the initial Hexer defenders initiated a chain reaction. This time, it was their turn to try and organize their defenses as their enemies continually thrust forward!

When the Sundered Phalanx succeeded in pushing the Hexer spaceborn forces back, the Oni Guard of the Konsu Clan showed off their prowess as well!

Heavily-armored combat carriers landed on Leemar II and the other occupied planets of the Leemar System by the thousands.

Even when the Hexers did their best to shoot them down, the well-prepared Oni Guardsmen managed to intercept or block most of the incoming fire.

Once the battered but functional vessels made landfall, a large amount of landbound, aerial and aquatic mechs contested for supremacy against the occupiers!

Though the Hexers had set up a considerable amount of defenses, not enough time had passed for them to strengthen their fortifications!

The partially-exhausted and recovering troops of the Wrathful Doves tried their best to fend off the liberators, but the purple-and-blue mechs of the Oni Guard exhibited much greater resilience than the Fortune Legion!

"Damn, why aren't the glows of our Blessed Squires doing anything? These boys should have been pissing in their piloting suits by now!"

Of all of the mech militaries of the Friday Coalition, many people considered the Sundered Phalanx to be the strongest.

The Gauge Dynasty was the wealthiest and largest Coalition partner. This allowed it to invest considerably more funds in its military assets. The Sunderer mechs were higher in quality and therefore tougher to defeat.

Although the Konsu Clan was not as wealthy, its mech military of the Konsu Clan still earned a lot of respect.

While the mechs of the Oni Guard weren't actually higher in quality than that of the Fortune Legion or Blue Cavalry, the Konsu mech pilots were consummate warriors!

The soldiers of the Konsu Clan enjoyed noble positions in their society. Many mech pilots and soldiers were descended from the same class. The training intensity of the Oni Guard was the highest among all of the Fridayman mech militaries. The Konsu Clan instilled so much discipline to the troops that they unflinchingly obeyed any orders even if it led to their deaths!

The Hexer defenders on land discovered to their consternation that the Blessed Squires were even less effective against the Oni Guard.

Even if the Konsu mech pilots respected their mothers, their dedication towards the Konsu Clan trumped everything!

What made the Oni Guard harder to deal with was that unlike the Sundered Phalanx, even the most ordinary Konsu mech pilot possessed a disciplined mind and will!

The elites of the Oni Guards were completely unassailable while the regular troops hardly showed any indication of slowing down.

If not for the fact that the Blessed Squires were very useful in helping the Hexers maintain their morale under pressure, the glow-oriented mechs would have lost their value on this battlefield!

Of course, this was not enough for the Fridaymen to win the day. In order to reverse the trend of the entire war theater, the Sundered Phalanx and the Oni Guard launched many different offensives at once!

This caused Fridaymen to spread their troops rather thin just like their archenemies.

If the Hexers finally managed to overcome their shock and rally their troops, they might be able to force their enemies into a stalemate!

However, the Friday Coalition had another card to play.

"Our entire star sector is on our side!"

Across many different battlefields, the Sunderer and the Oni Guard mechs fought alongside dazzling, radiant machines! These powerful machines performed far in excess of any other regular mech!

The Fridaymen attached a considerable number of expert mechs to the assault units. With the protection and cover of these powerful machines, many ordinary Hexer formations collapsed ahead of time.

Though the Wrathful Doves dispatched their own expert mechs to stem the tide, the Hexers found to their horror that the Fridaymen sent out a second wave of expert mechs!

"Are these Fridaymen crazy?!"

"This is impossible!"

The Hexers were shocked by the number of expert mechs their Fridayman counterparts committed to the battlefield.

They briefly wondered whether the units invading the Leemar System borrowed a lot of expert mechs from other units.

Yet soon enough, the truth came out.

The Sundered Phalanx and the Konsu Clan were able to field up to 20 percent more expert mechs because they were piloted by foreigners!

The Friday Coalition quietly pressured the surrounding third-rate states to loan their expert pilots some time ago. After many months of preparation, the Fridaymen were finally capable of fielding their hired help on a wider scale!

While the expert mechs assigned to the foreigners were not as powerful or rigorously-designed as proper Fridayman expert mechs, they still exerted enough raw power to make a difference!

The Wrathful Doves found itself hard pressed to hold the line in space and on the surface. The disparity in numbers was considerable, especially when the Sundered Phalanx and the Oni Guard concentrated the foreign expert mechs.

When Hexer expert mechs were forced to fight three times as many enemy expert mechs, the results could easily be imagined!

"Damn, we can't hold anymore!"



"Don't give up! Expert mechs aren't invincible, and these new expert mechs aren't as tough as the older ones!"

The Hexers barely managed to counteract the additional enemy expert mechs by resorting to costly tactics.

Even so, the Fridaymen attackers continued to maintain the upper hand! Not only the Leemar System, but many other occupied star systems threatened to fall back into the hands of their original owners.

Once the direction of the Komodo War turned around, it would be hard for the Hex Army to retain its momentum!

Uncomfortable and unaccustomed to being on the defensive, the Hexers might not be able to hold their ground as well as the Fridaymen.

"We can't let the Sundered Phalanx and the Oni Guard rescue the Carnegie Group!"

It was under these rapidly-changing circumstances that a peculiar new mech model emerged onto the battlefield.

#### *Chapter 2469: Bringers of Death*

"The Superior Mother is with us." Mech Captain Dorsa Avinx prayed.

"The Superior mother is with us." Her subordinates echoed.

The Hexer mech pilots weren't praying in front of an idol or statue or anything. They weren't praying in a church.

Instead, the Hexer mech pilots of the Wrathful Doves Mech Army Group were kneeling in the middle of a mech hangar. In front of them rested a large number of brand-new aerial mechs.

No other mechs with wings resembled these new machines. While the machines took on the contours of a woman, the design style of the mech diverged from the Hexer standard in many ways.

However, one look at the heads of the mechs was enough to realize why the mechs looked different from the norm.

The dark third eyes placed in the forehead of the mechs resembled the third eyes of the Blessed Squires. The black hexagon surrounding the third eye exemplified the Hexer nature of the mech, not that Captain Avinx and her subordinates needed the visual cues.

This close to the mechs, every single Hexer kneeling in front of them felt the glows of the machines. With so many glows overlapping with each other, the slight differences between them caused the mech pilots to be doused in their majesty.

Compared to the Blessed Squire, the new mechs projected a different air.

The Blessed Squire was mainly a supportive mech. It projected six different glows depending on the situation. Most of the time, the glow encouraged the Hexers and inspired them to fight more ferociously.

The new mech was a bit different. It only projected a single type of glow, and it happened to be a bleak one. The Hexers who were praying in front of the aerial mechs did not feel as if their blood was pumping.

Instead, the newly-introduced Valkyrie Redeemers carried an air of doom and inevitability towards its enemies.

Every mech pilot who had secretly tested and trained with the new machines for a couple of weeks had to get accustomed to the different mindset the mechs inspired.

Ordinarily, aerial mech pilots tended to be hotheaded and excited. At the same time, they needed to keep their heads cool in order to maintain situational awareness.

Combat in the air was very precarious. Cover was very scarce in the air. Any mech that recklessly flew over the battlefield easily attracted fire from many different places.

Even so, the advantages of flying meant that no one wanted to give up contesting in the air.

When Captain Avinx initially piloted the Valkyrie Redeemer, she thought that the marauder mech was mainly suited for harassment.

It wasn't until later that she discovered that it could be so much more.

As the praying session ended, the mech pilots rose up to their feet. Captain Avinx turned to her mech pilots. Each of them looked quiet but eager.

Almost all of her mech pilots consisted of women. Only a handful of boys stood at the back. Due to their inferior height, their heads did not peek out over the shoulders of the female mech pilots at all. It would have been easy to discount their presence from the front.

In the Hexadric Hegemony, the superiority of women had to be maintained in as many ways as possible. How could their boys possibly be taller than the superior gender?

For this reason, the matriarchs mandated that boys were not allowed to grow taller than 1.66 meters.

Only a small number 'good boys' were allowed to grow taller, but only under exceptional circumstances. This was also a good way to distinguish them from other boys.

At the same time, every adult woman had to be at least 1.70 meters tall, though most were far taller.

If not for the fact that being too tall was a hindrance to mech pilots, the Hexers would have all chosen to be at least 2 meters tall!

The Hexers invested considerably in biomedical technology in order to impose this standard across their space.

By creating a distinct disparity between height, the women felt much more assured in their own superiority. After all, it was hard to respect boys when they were physically shorter and weaker.

"You all know what is at stake." Captain Avinx addressed her women. "Our grasp on the Leemar System is rapidly weakening. With the Sundered Phalanx pushing us back in space and the Konsu Clan beating us back on land, our sisters are rapidly losing ground. The additional expert pilots the Fridaymen scraped from the lesser states are also pressing us hard. Are any of you afraid?"

"No!" Her women immediately replied.

"Good." The mech officer smiled. "We have all familiarized ourselves with the power of the Valkyrie Redeemer. This new mech model is blessed by the Superior Mother. Not only that, it's a female mech, which means we can finally borrow the Supreme's power more directly."

She had fought hard for her unit to be one of the first to pilot the new mechs! While the Wrathful Doves were trying to produce more Valkyrie Redeemers at a rapid pace, not every aerial mech company had the fortune of receiving a batch of the new machines.

Although their training should have taken longer, the rapid reversal meant that they couldn't wait any longer.

Despite the hasty change in orders, Captain Avinx wasn't afraid. She and her women all believed in the Valkyrie Redeemer. Though the mechs might not be able to fight an expert mech, the Hexers were still confident in their ability to defeat every other foe!

"Our time is up. Let's move out and hunt some Fridaymen!"

Soon enough, thirty-six Valkyrie Redeemers and four support mechs flew out from the massive hanger.

The aerial mech company flew in a moderately tight formation as it flew across friendly territory.

Down below, numerous mechs and vehicles moved back and forth. Several transports were already being loaded up with valuable supplies and expensive production equipment.

The Wrathful Doves knew they couldn't hold onto this territory anymore. In order to stand a chance at stalling the attacking Oni Guard, the Hexers had to pull back and tighten their defensive lines.

The role of Captain Avinx's mech company was to fly into the vicinity of the battlefield and pick off any targets of opportunity.

The Fridaymen had to be slowed down in every way possible. Even delaying their advance by one hour was enough to evacuate billions of hex credits worth of war materiel!

As the mech company began to observe distant explosions and weapon discharges, it was no longer safe to fly in an open manner.

"You know your orders. Split up and choose your targets carefully."

"Yes, captain!"

The mech company split up into four separate squads consisting of nine Valkyrie Redeemers and one support mech.

The Valkyrie Redeemer piloted by Captain Avinx herself led the other nine remaining mechs closer to where the main battle took place.

They approached a small but ruined city. Though there weren't many tall buildings to provide them cover, the aerial squad was not deterred.

"Pilot Anders, activate the stalking field."

"Yes, ma'am!"

The lightly-armed male mech flying in the center of the squad began to activate its backpack module.

A strong energy field suddenly wrapped around the Valkyrie Redeemers. Different from glows, this technological field did not have a strong effect on humans.

Instead, the stalker field caused the mechs to become harder to see. While the squad hadn't become outright invisible, most long-ranged sensors would definitely fail to pick up their energy signatures!

This was enough for the aerial mechs.

Aware that the stalker field drained a lot of energy from the support mech, Captain Avinx became more hurried in her search.

Though her mechs were straying dangerously close to the sites where active fighting took place, she quickly stumbled upon a suitable target.

"Enemy supply train up ahead! Distance, 8 kilometers."

"Detecting three supply transports and sixteen Oni Guard mechs up ahead! Eight of them are melee mechs while the other eight are ranged mechs."

Captain Avinx immediately became more focused. Her squad of mechs ascended higher in order to gain a steeper angle on the detected enemy mechs.

"Target the melee mechs. I will designate individual targets for each of you." She commanded. "Ignore the ranged mechs for now. While these Konsu mech pilots are notoriously difficult to shake, we have faith in our Valkyrie Redeemers. We're women, not boys. The glows of our mechs are stronger!"

As the squad of mechs gained enough altitude, the Valkyrie Redeemers began to dive towards the enemy supply train.

A short time passed by as the Oni Guard mechs remained oblivious of what loomed overhead. It wasn't until the sensors of some of their mechs started to detect something unusual in the air that they finally noticed the incoming threat.

"Enemy raid!"

The mechs of the Konsu Clan reacted quickly! The melee mechs all formed protectively in front of the ranged mechs.

Numerous positron beams hit the Valkyrie Redeemers as they approached. Though the hits all caused the mechs to lose some chunks of their armor, none of them sustain any fatal damage.

The diving Valkyrie Redeemers did not bother to retaliate. Their pulse submachine guns were too weak and inaccurate to deal any meaningful damage under these conditions.

Instead, the mechs gripped their spears and shields tightly as they descended from above.

"Mark your targets!" Captain Avinx ordered. "Let us show them a taste of death!"

Each female mech pilot transmitted a mental command to their mechs.

Soon, the third eyes of the Valkyrie Redeemers suddenly brightened up. Though the mech pilots had the option to hide this effect, the Hexers didn't mean to do so this time.

Strong, narrow beams of light shot out from the third eyes and instantly landed on the melee mechs that were positioning to meet the incoming charge.

As soon as the light beams landed on the Oni Guard mechs, their mech pilots suddenly experienced a sense of doom and discomfort.

Though each of the Konsu Clan's mech pilots had gone through special training in order to firm up their minds, the glow of the Valkyrie Redeemer was something different.

It reached much further ahead. In addition, it was also new and relatively unfamiliar. Due to the narrowing of the glow, much of the intensity was directed towards a specific target.

Though the Konsu mech pilots did their best to maintain their grip on their emotions, they couldn't help but begin to sweat and feel uncomfortable.

It was too difficult to resist this new glow!

"This glow.. wait! This is a new mech!"

As the Valkyrie Redeemers came closer, the targeted glows became more intense. The defending mech pilots not only had to resist this effect, but also fight against the psychological fear of trying to resist a diving attack.

The famed discipline of the Oni Guard began to fray a bit as the mech pilots of the melee mechs lost focus. The creeping sense of doom disordered all of their hearts.

They didn't have much time! As soon as the Valkyrie Redeemers came close enough to unleash their targeted glows, it didn't take long for them to reach the surface!

"Death to the Fridaymen!"

With thunder and might, the Valkyrie Redeemers slammed their spears through all of the melee mechs!

Even the thickest knight mech failed to come out unscathed as its shield only managed to block the thrust of a single Valkyrie Redeemer.

Another Valkyrie Redeemer piloted by Captain Avinx herself managed to impale the mech from another angle!

Loud impacts sounded as the shock-absorbing systems of the Valkyrie Redeemers tried their best to keep the mechs together as they landed. Their feet sank deep and various other systems came online to prevent the mechs from collapsing.

As for their targets, their inability to brace themselves resulted in devastating damage!

Five of the Oni Guard mechs were downed entirely. The spears either ran straight through the cockpits or hit something vital enough to disable the machines.

Three other mechs weren't better off. Even though they still showed signs of life, they received so much damage that they weren't able to put up a resistance when the Valkyrie Redeemers impaled them a second time!

"Hahahaha! These mechs were sitting ducks! So much for the discipline of the Konsu Clan!"

With the simultaneous takedowns of the melee mechs, the ranged mechs were sitting ducks! Though each of them possessed at least some close combat capabilities, they stood no chance against the might of superior mechs!

It was a complete crush!

#### *Chapter 2470: Shock*

The Friday Coalition's counterattack hit the invading Hexers hard!

Many occupied star systems turned into contested territory after the Fridaymen launched their offensives. The battered Fortune Legion took a backseat in this operation. Instead, the Sundered Phalanx and the Oni Guard led the charge and broke upon the fragile Hexer lines with great fanfare!

With the assistance of foreign expert pilots, the Fridaymen combat troops frequently managed to overwhelm their Hexer counterparts.

For most mech pilots, one of the most terrible outcomes that could happen was losing the support of an expert pilot!

These supreme warriors often acted as guardian angels for their respective mech regiments.

Up until recently, both sides adopted the same approach towards expert pilots. Each mech regiment had to be watched over by at least one Venerable.



They did not necessarily have to make a move. Their main purpose was to stay in reserve and act as a deterrent against enemy expert pilots.

As a result, expert pilots actually did not clash against each other that often. Only under special circumstances such as when the expert pilot enjoyed an absolute advantage would they make a move.

Of course, there were plenty of other scenarios where expert pilots sought out battles.

For example, the now-famous Venerable Ghanso Larkinson eagerly utilized the numerical advantage bestowed by his Scarra to hunt down as many Hexer expert pilots as possible!

In a battle on another planet, several dozen glowing positron beams weaved a precise net at some rapidly-retreating Hexer mechs.

By now, no Hexer mech pilot underestimated the notorious Unit L anymore!

With a mech company of quasi-expert rifleman mechs backing up the Charlemagne, not even several Hexer expert mechs stood a chance!

"Damn cowards!" Venerable Ghanso snarled as his shots only inflicted severe damage against the evacuating expert mechs. "These Hexers are all talk!"

An expert swordsman mech flew alongside the Charlemagne. Different from the Charlemagne, the Jeanne D'Arc was almost purely geared towards melee combat. With the firepower at Venerable Ghanso's disposal, the feminine expert mech had no chance to show off its prowess.

"Your aim is getting worse." Venerable Foster noted in a bored tone. "This is the sixth time you've let the Hexer expert mechs go. Is the strain getting to you or are you just getting soft?"

"Shut up, Vesian! I can't help it if the Hexers run at the first sight of our mechs!"

Though the two were forced to fight alongside each other, their animosity hadn't lessened much. Just because they were fighting for what they thought was right did not mean they had to like their comrades.

With foreigners such as Venerable Ghanso Larkinson and Venerable Relia Foster taking part in the offensive, the war continued to tilt in the favor of the Fridaymen!

While the Hexers were scrambling to defend their hard-fought gains, a new mech sprung onto the scene.

On more and more contested planets, the brand-new Valkyrie Redeemer model emerged with high expectations!

The Blessed Squire had immediately showcased its value in battle. The Hexers hoped that the Valkyrie Redeemer might do even better!

After all, compared to a modest supportive knight mech, the aerial marauder mech was much more offensive-oriented. Its manufacturing cost was fairly high, but it was a machine that was completely geared towards women.

A lot of Hexers looked forward to piloting such a unique machine!

The effectiveness of the Valkyrie Redeemer did not disappoint. Against ordinary mech pilots such as Fortune Legionnaires, the narrow death beams were usually capable of disrupting their focus.

Sometimes, the marked mech pilots even froze, causing their mechs to turn into vulnerable targets!

The Valkyrie Redeemer pilots all learned to take advantage of this state by driving their spears through the cockpits of their targets!

Against more disciplined opponents such as the Oni Guard, the Valkyrie Redeemer still retained a degree of effectiveness.

Now that the Konsu mech pilots knew what to expect, they no longer allowed the Market For Death ability to consume their minds. Yet even so, each human was vulnerable to an extent.

Once the Valkyrie Redeemers shifted to putting multiple Marks on a single target, even the most disciplined mech pilots lost their concentration!

As time went by, the Valkyrie Redeemer quickly generated a lot of notoriety. It couldn't be helped as the aerial mechs proved to be wondrously effective at conducting small and sudden raids!

The Fridaymen mech forces on the ground reacted by grouping their mechs into larger units. While this slowed down their counterattack, the Valkyrie Redeemers could no longer use their inherent advantages to annihilate individual squads!

This defense reaction frustrated many Valkyrie Redeemer mech pilots. They loved swooping down from the air in order to demolish individual squads. Now, the stubborn Fridaymen no longer moved out unless they could gather at a mech company.

When at least forty mechs traveled together, their ability to defend against aerial attacks increased remarkably.

The mech pilots of most dive-oriented aerial mechs no longer wanted to tangle against these targets. Even if they brought twice as many mechs, it was impossible to disable the entire mech formation. In fact, due to the fears of colliding against each other, entering into a dive with too many mechs was quite detrimental!

The Valkyrie Redeemer mech pilots weren't reconciled to this outcome. They had tasted the power of their new mechs and became more attuned to their capabilities.

While they could still play a useful role by hovering at a distance while taking potshots with their pulse submachine guns, the results were not comparable.

"This isn't working! The Oni Guard will overrun Leemar II entirely if this keeps up!" Captain Avinx growled.

"Then what do we do, ma'am?" A trusted lieutenant asked.

"We throw the rulebook out of the window. Who says we can't dive in greater numbers? Follow me and stay together!"

In the span of a single week, her mech company sustained numerous losses. Though her mech regiment attempted to replenish her mechs and mech pilots, she was left with 28 Valkyrie Redeemers including her own along with just three auxiliary mechs.

Not every attack run resulted in a one-sided crush! Even with the various advantages of their Valkyrie Redeemers, the Oni Guard were still capable of shooting them down at a distance.

In fact, the increased amount of ranged mechs accompanying each unit was one of the biggest reasons why the Valkyrie Redeemers felt restrained!

After scouring the edges of the frontline for a time, Captain Avinx's mech company encountered several enemies on the ground and in the air.

None of them were suitable targets. Their numbers were either too much to handle or enemy support was too close at hand.

It wasn't until several hours later that the Valkyrie Redeemers sniffed out a retreating element of Oni Guard mechs.

Though around seventy Fridaymen machines were retreating in good order, their condition varied considerably. Some only bore some dust marks while others had lost entire limbs.

Many mechs bore terrible scars or exposed fragile internals. The ammunition and energy reserves of the ranged mechs must dipped below a certain point as well.

The problem was that the quantity still posed a threat to Captain Avinx's unit. The melee mechs each had the potential to surround and mob the Valkyrie Redeemers at the end of their dive.

Even so, the Hexers did not feel deterred!

"This is a golden opportunity! Let us move and teach these beaten dogs the might of the Superior Mother!"

"For the Mother!"

The Valkyrie Redeemers soared forth while gaining a bit of altitude. The retreating Oni Guard mechs did not take much notice at first. It wasn't until later the Fridaymen realized that the Hexer aerial mechs were actually about to commit to an attack run.

Fearful of what might happen, the Oni Guard machines no longer ran away but instead stopped in place in order to meet the incoming attack.

Defeated or not, seventy mechs still posed a considerable threat! With the melee mechs standing by, a large number of ranged mechs began to fire volleys at the diving Valkyrie Redeemers.

"Mark the ranged mechs!" Captain Avinx gritted her teeth. "Two on one!"

Each mech automatically received a targeting instruction from Captain Avinx's mech. This allowed the Valkyrie Redeemers to target their Marked For Death abilities onto a specific mech in the best possible distribution.

Over half of the ranged mechs suddenly began to slow and miss. It was already a challenge for their mech pilots to maintain their focus when Marked a single time. With two Marks on them, it was no longer possible for them to keep their aim straight!

The affected ranged mech pilots had little choice but to leave the targeting entirely to AIs.

This hardly helped! The stalker fields projected by the Hexer auxiliary mechs continually confounded detailed scans and targeting calculations.

By effectively incapacitating half of the enemy formation's ranged mechs, the Valkyrie Redeemers managed to close in without losing any of their numbers!

"Rotate!"

The Valkyrie Redeemers at the front of the diving formation flew back, allowing the mechs in the second line to take the brunt of the damage.

The Hexer mech pilots adopted a specific formation that exposed only some of their mechs to enemy fire.

Ordinarily, the formation wasn't practical, but the Valkyrie Redeemer model just happened to be equipped with a modest shield and a high-quality armor system. It was no problem for them to endure enemy fire for a short time!

"Rotate!"

Though the damage to the mechs wasn't easy to repair, none of the Hexer mech pilots cared at the moment. It only took a short time for their Valkyrie Redeemers to dive within a kilometer of their targets!

As the ground rapidly came closer, Captain Avinx issued a quick command!

"Widen glows by thirty degrees!"

The Hexer mech pilots obeyed in an instant. The dark third eyes of their mechs that previously shone narrow beams of light at their Marks suddenly widened.

Each third eye shone like torches! The directional light they emitted no longer affected a number of specific targets, but attacked the entire formation of Oni Guard mechs at once!

Seventy Fridaymen mech pilots suddenly felt disturbed! It was as if the diving mechs turned into a giant hammer of doom that was about to slam right on top of their heads!

With so many glows overlapping on top of each other, it didn't matter if they were all dispersed. The strength of facing so many of them at the same time was not much different from being targeted by a narrow beam!

"DEATH TO THE FRIDAYMEN!"

The ground thundered with force as the Valkyrie Redeemers successfully drove their spears into the chests and other parts of their targets!

The Valkyrie Redeemers may have targeted their Marks towards the enemy ranged mechs at first, but their spears mostly punctured through the enemy melee mechs!

Though not every target struck succumbed from the dive attack, at least twenty of them were no longer a factor!

Unfortunately, that left around fifty Oni Guard mechs. As their mech pilots were slowly trying to recover from being subjected by the Valkyrie Redeemer's glow, Captain Avinx already made her next move.

"Shock and Awe, five second intervals!"

A module on the Valkyrie Redeemers suddenly launched a grenade into the ranks of the Oni Guard. An instant later, the Starburst grenades exploded, unleashing a strong but very localized burst of ECM and other disruptive measures!

As the closest mechs became affected by the detonation, the Valkyrie Redeemers spread out and surged forward while at the same time unleashing a strong pulse that shocked the minds of the closest enemy mech pilots!

The combination of technological and mental disruption generated a brief but very crucial window of opportunity.

At least twenty more mechs were struck by the Valkyrie Redeemers! The Hexers mechs easily inflicted either crippling or fatal attacks as the disoriented Oni Guard mechs failed to put up an adequate defense!

Before the remaining Konsu mech pilots were able to regain their composure, they received yet another shock as a second volley of Starburst grenades detonated in their midst!

Together with the release of yet another shock pulse, the Valkyrie Redeemers managed to down even more mechs!

Five more seconds passed in no time. Following a third dual pulse attack, the Valkyrie Redeemers completely went on the offensive.

Just a minute later, every single Oni Guard mech had fallen. Captain Avinx grinned as she took stock of her own unit. She hadn't lost a single Valkyrie Redeemer!

Though many of her mechs were not in good shape anymore, the damage could always be fixed. The dead could not be revived!

"This is the true purpose of the Valkyrie Redeemer!"