

Mech 3021

Chapter 3021: Grand Catacombs

If someone really gave the Cross Clan the body of a clone and passed it off as the real deal, then Ves had to admit that the people responsible pulled off a brilliant scam!

He was pretty certain that the entire body was cloned. Ves had a special intuition about that due to his sensitivity towards life and his long and extensive experience with performing research on human test subjects.

After witnessing so many heads and bodies explode due to messing with their spirits, Ves had learned many different ways of how spirituality interacted with human tissue.

He was pretty certain that the body encased in the crystal coffin was not the ace pilot's original body.

The only factor that he found strange was that he still felt the remnant of a strong will inside the body's brain cavity.

However, Ves believed this to be a trick. Anyone could easily cut a portion of the original Saint's brain and bury it inside the skull of an identical-looking clone.

As long as it was done correctly enough, even someone like the ace pilot's own son could be fooled!

After all, high-quality cloned bodies were truly indistinguishable from the originals. Only the most sophisticated scanners in the hands of the Big Two or first-rate states should be able to pick up anomalous signs.

Everyone else wouldn't be able to detect the difference. Ves was sure the doctors and biotech experts of the Cross Clan had combed over the body in order to prepare it for entombment, but obviously they hadn't found anything amiss.

Really, the only anomaly was that the sense of presence from the clone was rather lackluster.

There were many possible reasons why this was the cause. Perhaps the natural process of death and decay had degraded it. It was unrealistic to expect the remains of an ace pilot to be as strong as he was in his prime.

As Ves swept his senses through the body in the coffin more and more, he truly sensed that he was examining a clone.

The impression he got vaguely reminded him of the times he met with James Ylvaine. The annoying Living Prophet may have become very human before his life came to a

premature end, but that did not change the fact that his birth was flawed and unnatural. The consequences of this affected his health, his spiritual development and more. Just because the design spirit version of him was able to offset some of these flaws didn't mean that he upgraded to a full human!

The supposed body of the ace pilot gave him a similar feeling. Ves knew he couldn't fully prove or explain this assertion, but he knew in his heart that he was standing in front of a charade!

Whoever was responsible for passing off the fake product for the authentic version knew what he was doing. This was a deliberate act of fraud and one that completely violated every sense of decency with regards to the treatment of ace pilots!

Where was his real corpse? Who was responsible for the swap?

Perhaps before visiting Prosperous Hill VI, Ves wouldn't be able to make any accurate guesses. However, now that he had gone through the Supreme Sage's pinnacle lab, he was burdened with lots of new information that put a dreadful context to this dreadful situation.

Ves had a very good idea who swapped the body. He was also able to come up with a powerful motive to tarnish the ace pilot's remains.

He directed a very subtle look towards his fellow patriarch.

The expert pilot looked like he had no clue that he was gazing at a falsehood. Patriarch Reginald acted as if Saint Hemmington was still alive!

Unlike a normal son, Reginald burned with ambition. Back when his father was alive, he wanted to catch up to the ace pilot! Now that Saint Hemmington was dead, Reginald hadn't actually changed his goal.

In fact, he became more determined to exceed his father's limitations in order to spite the enemies and traitors that plotted the ace pilot's demise!

Ves briefly thought about revealing the truth to Patriarch Reginald.

From an ethical standpoint, the son deserved to know the truth about the state of his father. If Ves was in Reginald's place, he would have welcomed the truth, however harsh it may have sounded.

From a crisis prevention standpoint, revealing the truth would either set off a furious denial or trigger one of the most explosive outbursts of the Cross Clan in its history!

It didn't take long for Ves to make a decision. There was no way that he was willing to reveal this bombshell! He was almost certainly within the blast radius, so why would he be stupid enough to trigger an explosion that brought no other benefits?!

While Ves sympathized with Patriarch Reginald and the Cross Clan, this conspiracy was deeply rooted and involved powers that were far above his own little head.

Small people like him had no ability to change the situation. All he would do was to poke his head out so that the powers that be could easily cut off his neck. There was no other positive benefit aside from soothing his guilty conscience.

In fact, Ves didn't think this was beneficial to him in any way. He bore so much blame and fault that he had learned how to cope under all of that weight. In fact, he pretty much denied or ignored all of the recriminations, so he didn't feel burdened in the slightest!

"Is he as impressive as you expected him to be?" Patriarch Reginald broke the silence.

"Oh, uhm, yes." Ves hastily replied. "I can certainly see how close Saint Hemmington has come to becoming a god in human form. It is truly awe-inspiring to know that this man is able to become a terror on the battlefield that could easily crush thousands of mechs and dozens of expert mechs at a time."

Ace pilots were no longer bound by the normal rules that governed reality.

Whereas expert pilots only reluctantly bent reality, ace pilots practically treated the laws of physics like toys!

Ves wished that he was looking at the true remains of Hemmington Cross. It was quite frustrating for him to examine a hollow, spiritless copy that looked the part but failed to replicate what he thought was crucial.

The relatively tiny remnant buried inside the man's head didn't cut it. It was clearly a butchered piece that had been taken out of a greater whole. It possessed the aura but not all of the facets of the man that had once transformed his will into something transcendent.

It was a huge letdown, in other words.

If he wasn't afraid of giving away his true thoughts, he would have sighed in disappointment. There was little point in studying the cloned body because there was truly nothing he could learn from it. He didn't dare touch the remnant will and spirit that was locked inside the small sample of genuine brain tissue because that would most certainly pull out the rug underneath Patriarch Reginald's feet!

"Is it customary to bury the bodies of ace pilots like this?" Ves curiously asked.

"Not at all." Patriarch Reginald shook his head. "The true way to honor an ace pilot is to induct him into a true catacomb. It is one of the greatest honors of every expert pilot and ace pilot to intern their bodies in the grand catacombs that the MTA erects in every central star system they control. Under ordinary circumstances, we should have brought my father's body back to the center of the Vicious Mountain Star Sector in order to rest my father's body in its rightful place."

"Oh? Are you fine with ending any easy opportunity to visit his body in person?"

"My father... deserves his rest." Reginald said in a grave tone. "He has fought and struggled to survive for many decades. Ace pilot or not, he does not deserve to get exposed to strife now that he has passed on. It is only right to bury him in the most impressive place of honor. No one is able to beat the MTA when it comes to erecting the grandest burial places. I don't know about how they act in other star sectors, but in Vicious Mountain the mechers stationed there have always treated the remains of ace pilots with extreme respect. It is a life-changing experience for anyone to visit one of their grand and oversized catacombs."

Ves could easily imagine that. An organization as powerful as the Mech Trade Association was able to build gigantic, moon-sized satellites in order to house the honorable ace pilots that had once lived glorious lives!

The attraction was so strong that most people and organizations in human space dreamt of attaining eternal glory by being buried in those immense burial halls.

After all, the continuation of a state or political entity was much less certain than that of the MTA.

Who knew whether a tomb located on an average planet would remain standing if an enemy state had conquered the territory. Though it was expected for people to honor deceased expert pilots and ace pilots regardless of their affiliation, humans were flawed and many dishonorable incidents had already occurred in the past.

In fact, malice wasn't necessarily required to cause something awful to the resting places of high-ranking mech pilots.

Wars that spread across the surface of planets always came paired with an immense amount of collateral damage. Stray shells or crashing mechs could easily tear through any tomb!

Therefore, it was a lot more desirable for the bodies of high-ranking mech pilots to be buried in the MTA's catacombs. It didn't always happen, and some cultures and individuals might have reasons to keep these valuable remains to themselves, but the MTA did not lack for business when it came to this aspect.

Ves had a very strong hunch that this was a deliberate development on the MTA's part.

If... if... the MTA ever needed to gain a stable and abundant supply of 'input material', then it was best for the suppliers of this rare material to give it to the MTA on their own accord!

It was such an elegant arrangement that Ves was convinced that it was a premeditated scheme!

Of course, the implications of this conclusion was quite controversial and something that he did not dare to voice out loud.

The two patriarchs eventually stepped away from Saint Hemmington's supposed remains. Ves saw no point in studying a fake any further and Patriarch Reginald wanted to give his father his due rest.

They slowly walked back the path they came from. Ves gazed at the other trophies and embellished depictions of Saint Hemmington's accomplishment with hidden pity.

Who knew where the real body of the ace pilot ended up and whether more had been done to the brain aside from taking out a small sample.

Patriarch Reginald would probably believe in the falsehood for the rest of his life. It was rather sad that a son was deceived in this way.

When the two patriarchs walked past the central display that showed off the giant mech finger, Ves attempted to harvest an intangible fragment from it. His earlier attempt may have failed, but he already had another solution in mind.

Blinky left his mind but remained in his original spiritual form. In order to avoid tipping off Reginald, the Star Cat waited for the humans to move away.

It wasn't until Ves had walked far enough for Blinky to approach the limit of how far he could be that the cat took action.

Mrow!

In one explosive motion, Blinky flew forward and approached the giant metal finger. It then proceeded to suck out a portion of the intangible energy.

Though his energy devouring ability allowed him to steal a small portion of potent energy, the cat received several powerful shocks in the process!

Mrow! Mrow! Mrow!

The most troublesome aspect about these instinctive attacks was that they were driven by a very strong and furious willpower component! This will was something completely indigestible to Blinky. It already hurt him quite a bit to hold a portion of siphoned energy

in his stomach without attempting to digest it all. It was as if someone was trying to break out of his own intangible belly!

Fortunately, Blinky succeeded in his mission. As long the companion spirit was able to return to the Spirit of Bentheim, Ves had many ways to contain the stolen spiritual remains!

Chapter 3022: Exclusionary Properties

Ves leaned back on his seat behind his workstation while propping up his feet on top of his work table.

He gazed at the metal ceiling above his head while his mind wandered off into thought.

His personal workshop fell into silence. None of the production machines were active and there were neither mechs nor materials present in the spacious hall.

The only objects of note that were present in the workshop were the four Aspects of Lufa. Ves was still undecided on how to put any of them at the disposal of the Larkinsons. Though the side project related to releasing the so-called treatment versions of the Sanctuary Project was proceeding well, he wasn't really sure whether it was wise to rock the boat when the Five Scrolls Compact was acting out at the moment.

"I need to stay under everyone's radar, but that's hard to do when I come out with groundbreaking inventions." He muttered.

He was constantly plagued by these dilemmas. If he truly got rid of all of his inhibitions, he could immediately disrupt the second-class mech market by releasing public versions of most of the mechs that he had designed for internal use.

In fact, just releasing the second-class versions of his popular third-class mech models would already succeed in causing mass disruption!

Ves had no intentions of doing so. Not when he was hunted by several major organizations.

"I should at least wait until I have left the Yeina Star Cluster far behind before I spark a revolution in the mech market." He muttered.

His sense for trouble might not be very reliable, but even he could figure out it was best to leave the scene of the crime before it erupted into chaos!

He would feel a lot safer if the consequences of his actions weren't able to catch up to him. As long as he left this corner of the galaxy, he could even turn it into his personal experimental grounds as long as he was safely on the other side of a beyonder gate!

Of course, this issue could wait for later. Right now, Ves needed to think about how to approach the kinship networks that he agreed to provide to his two allied partners.

Serving the Glory Seekers required very little thought. He knew what they were about and they were already acquainted with the Superior Mother. It also helped a lot that she was already maintaining two existing networks.

Since Ves had invented at least three different types of spiritual networks, he decided to name and define the remaining one as the population network.

It was the weakest but most easily propagated kind of spiritual network. Unlike the battle network and the kinship network, those who aligned with the network and its nexus automatically became a part of it without needing to be introduced by an existing member.

It did not come with any immediate boost in combat power like his battle networks. It also lacked the close intimacy and the ability to detect treachery like his kinship networks.

However, the population network was undefeatable and harvested large quantities of spiritual feedback. Even if every individual connection was faint and weak, when trillions of people piled up together, the sum of it all was enough to drown the spiritual feedback of any of his mech-bound design spirits!

It also had a weak influencing effect, as those who first made a faint connection to the Superior Mother always found it to be pleasant. This encouraged the Hexers who dipped their toes in her territory to go even deeper. The best way to do so was to align themselves to her motherly values, so in this way they became incentivized to abandon some of their old ways!

"It's too bad that there are limits to this shift."

It could encourage a leopard to change her spots, but it was not powerful enough to transform this ferocious predator into a tame housecat!

The Hexers were still Hexers, and their insistence on discriminating by gender had been baked into their DNA. There was no way to moderate them quickly enough to make them palatable to the rest of the galaxy.

Real and lasting change could only be accomplished over long stretches of time. If the Hexadric Hegemony enjoyed multiple decades of peace, then it might have been able to turn itself in a state where boys were nurtured and protected instead of treated like devils in the making that had to be suppressed at every turn.

Yet the Komodo War seemed hellbent on denying the female-dominated state the time to reform its culture and institutions.

Ves shook his head. "This is not a failure on the part of the Superior Mother or her population network. The Hexers only have themselves to blame for being so obnoxious."

He didn't know what he should do with his mother's population network if the Hegemony fell. Though the Hexer people would not die out anytime soon, it was a lot harder for them to gather and prosper when they were scattered and trying to survive while wandering through space.

Perhaps he should expand the scope of the population network so that it accommodated every mother.

"That might be a viable idea." He determined. "It will be just like how I am planning to popularize Lufa."

Though Ves was not short on spiritual energy and feedback these days, it always helped to secure an abundant supply before his future endeavors became more energy-intensive. He could easily imagine how he might need a thousand or even a million times more spiritual energy to create greater works!

The problem was that his level of spiritual engineering hadn't progressed to that point yet. He was quite willing but currently unable to match his mother's prowess.

Ves eventually returned to thinking on what he should do for the kinship network of the Cross Clan. He briefly glanced at the P-stone that he had placed in the middle of one of his work tables. A surprisingly strong remnant will still emanated from within the spiritually-reactive exotic.

The small fragment that Blinky had managed to harvest was a lot more troublesome to deal with than he thought.

Saint Hemmington Cross was definitely dead, but this stubborn little will fragment was still alive in a sense. Ves knew that because it rejected any intrusion, fought hard against Ves and Blinky and did not accept any of his friendly overtures.

"What a stubborn little fragment."

Ves released a small spiritual projection from his mind and cautiously extended it to the occupied P-stone.

Just as it touched the stone, the tiny spirit and will fragment violently lashed out! The indomitable will smashed and ripped apart the incoming projection with ease due to its great concentration of strength!

Ves winced a bit. He did not mind the loss of spiritual energy because he could replenish it easily enough.

What he actually found troublesome was the fact that fragments that were mostly made out of highly-condensed will appeared to possess different properties from the purely spiritual fragments that he previously handled.

"They're like oil and water. They don't mix together."

Different from the lower-quality willpower energy that expert pilots had just begun to form, the willpower that Hemmington Cross had left behind was a lot more closed.

Apparently, advancing from expert pilot to ace pilot induced a qualitative transformation of willpower. It became a lot stronger and more capable of accomplishing something on its own. It had also become a lot less dependent on spiritual energy to serve as a medium and an amplifier for its effects.

This came with a downside, though. The willpower of an ace pilot became so strong and domineering that it began to exclude other sources of energy! No matter whether it was spiritual energy or willpower from another source, an ace pilot apparently excluded all of them as long as they were external!

The little fragment had taught him a lot about ace pilots. Ves was able to glean several important clues and string them together into tentative theories that possibly explained why ace pilots were stronger than expert pilots.

When he combined his new theories with what little reliable information was available in the public, he developed a strong guess about how ace pilots fought.

"The most important difference between expert pilots and ace pilots has to be the domain!"

Expert pilots possessed domains of sorts, but they were mostly weak and fairly useless. Their only function was to allow expert pilots to resonate with their own mechs.

Ace pilots possessed much stronger domains. These willpower domains not only affected the mech around the ace pilot, but also the space around the machine. How far they extended, Ves wasn't sure, but it should at least be long enough to envelop another enemy mech if the distances were close enough.

The consequences were very dire if an enemy fell into the domain of an ace pilot! Perhaps only other ace pilots or god pilots who also possessed their own domains were able to maintain their own strength.

Everyone else would just get lost in someone else's domain!

Ves possessed a domain as well, but it was of a different kind. Since Ves did not infuse his own domain with extraordinary willpower energy, it was quite open and easy to

cooperate with. Ves could bend or combine his spiritual energy with other sources in order to achieve greater outcomes.

In other words, the nature of spiritual energy was a lot more inclusive. Their attributes might be different, but as long as they learned how to get along, they could be combined to achieve transformative effects.

This was also the basis behind much of his spiritual engineering. All of his design spirits were creations that organically combined his own life-attributed spiritual energy with powerful ingredients from other sources.

Hence this was why the will fragment from Saint Hemmington Cross gave him such a headache.

"How the hell can I combine this ingredient with other stuff when it tries its best to reject outside influences?"

Ves didn't think his usual approach of shattering it into little shards before merging it together with other shards would work. As long as their exclusionary nature remained, they would always resist merging with other sources.

Would he even be able to create any kinship network by leveraging this key ingredient?

"Probably not directly, at least."

He turned his thoughts into another direction. Instead of creating a new ancestral spirit for the Cross Clan that centered around Saint Hemmington Cross, Ves could create an alternative that did not have any direct relations to the deceased ace pilot.

This was a much more palatable solution to Ves. As an ally and partner of the Cross Clan, he did not want them to go down the path of Hemmington Cross again. The ace pilot's warmongering ways had already caused the Crossers to fall once. Ves did not want to set them up for a second fall!

He began to consider an alternate solution. He was much more inclined to create a softer and more generic ancestral spirit.

Just like how he was attempting to make the Hexers less extreme, Ves might be able to accomplish something similar to the Crossers.

Of course, the new spiritual product he intended to create still had to appeal to Patriarch Reginald and the rest of the Crossers. His client would not accept an influence that was too different from the current Cross Clan.

Ves began to draft out a profile of an entity that shouldn't elicit too much backlash.

"The Cross Warlord."

Just as its name suggested, the Cross Warlord retained the aggressive and glory-seeking traits of the Crossers. Yet the Warlord was a leader as well as a fighter, so it paid quite a lot of attention to good governance and the wellbeing of the masses.

Perhaps these additional properties were incompatible with the kinds of warlords that emerged from the endless struggles of the Garlen Empire, but this was his own version of an ideal warlord!

"This is a great way to rehabilitate the Cross Clan!"

Ves knew what Patriarch Reginald Cross and his band were like. If Reginald ever advanced to ace pilot, then there was a considerable chance that the son would follow in the footsteps of his father!

"It's best if I can nip this in the bud!"

Chapter 3023: New Heirlooms

A few days later, Marshal Ariadne Wodin and Patriarch Reginald Cross stepped aboard the Spirit of Bentheim once again.

The ship and her crew hadn't changed since their last visit. While the visitors encountered different mechs and people, the Larkinson Clan remained fairly upbeat and unconcerned about the Crown Uprising that continued to unfold across human space.

Aside from the initial explosions in the expeditionary fleet, the civilization-wide unrest seemed like a distant affair. Other than the disruption in trade and the requirement to increase their security precautions, the Larkinsons lived their lives just as optimistically as before.

Both Ariadne and Reginald wanted to restore this mood to their own people. They were both tired of the constant weight that was pressing on everyone's shoulders.

This was why they did not waste any time and urged their Larkinson guide to briskly lead them to the conference room.

When they finally entered the room, Ves was already seated at one of the ends of the oval-shaped table. Lucky rested before him on the table and graciously offered his back for petting.

"Meow~"

Two more objects were placed on the table. For some reason, both Marshal Ariadne Wodin Patriarch Reginald Cross were attracted by the items that tugged most closely at their hearts.

"Please take your seats." Ves commanded or requested as he continued to pet Lucky.

Once everyone sat down, the meeting finally began.

"Are those..."

Ves smiled. "They are the key items which you will be using to interface with my product. I like to call them ancestral heirlooms, because they are alive and can grow over time depending on how you treat them. What they house can't be seen or touched but can still be felt. The exact mechanics are a bit complicated for me to explain to you, but all you need to know is that it is a very bad idea to lose possession of them. I highly recommend you bring them with you at all times. For example, I don't carry the Larkinson Mandate personally, but my bodyguard always has it within easy reach."

When Ves reached out his arm, Nitaa strode forward and silently placed the heavy tome into his grasp.

The Larkinson Mandate had grown warmer and more vigorous since the last time he held it. Ves looked admiringly at his own craftsmanship as he brushed his palm past the solid medallion and special collar affixed to the front cover.

He could feel Goldie's rich presence from within the book. The ancestral spirit was the most important guardian of the Larkinson Clan because only she was able to protect the Larkinsons against threats that not even expert pilots were able to solve.

The Larkinson Clan would have become a much lesser organization if not for the Golden Cat. Ves was truly proud that he had managed to create such a friendly and useful spiritual product.

She had some additional company now. She was no longer the sole spirit who maintained a kinship network.

Though Ves was very possessive of this unique type of network, as someone who bore a lot of responsibilities, he had to take the bigger picture into account.

The Larkinson Clan could not meet every challenge by itself.

Even if Ves valued its future potential very highly, at the moment there were much bigger and scarier fish swimming in the same pond. The only way for smaller fish to survive under these circumstances was to band together and hope that their collective strength was enough to deter bigger predators from taking a bite out of their poor bodies!

The other leaders in the conference room also shared this sentiment. This was why they were able to come to an agreement without too much delay or arguments.

After Ves finished admiring the Larkinson Mandate, he quickly regained his composure and set the heirloom on the table.

It rested right between the two other objects that he prepared. When the three were all placed next to each other, they formed an interesting dynamic.

They were all similar in a way. Each of the items exuded a presence that was very distinct and appealed distinctly to different people.

Two of them exuded much stronger glows than the third object, but it couldn't be helped.

Ves gestured towards one of them first. "This is for the Glory Seekers. It is an ancestral heirloom that I have created specifically to serve as a uniting symbol for your people, Marshall Ariadne. I've taken some creative liberties with it since I want it to become more exclusive symbol for your subordinates rather than just Hexers in general. What do you think about your new Glory Torch?"

"I think... it looks quite amazing." The older Hexer woman uttered. "Your works have always been impressive to us, Ves. This is no different."

Ves created a high-tech handheld torch that was able to float in the air under its own power.

The torch possessed a black handle and a black cylindrical head that was made out of high-quality metallic exotics. Though Ves was too stingy to use up any of his Unending alloy, he blended in some ground P-stone matter in order to make it spiritually reactive.

What really stood out was that it projected a purple flame that crackled with hexagon-shaped sparks.

Ves initially thought about creating a torch that burned for real, but that would complicate the logistics. Even the most durable and efficient torch fuel ran out after some time. Needing to supplement the fuel of the Glory Torch on a constant basis would send the wrong message.

He thought about adding a stylized flame or source of light next. He came up with the idea of adding a crystal prism on top of the base and causing it to glow like an actual torch.

However, his research on luminal crystals wasn't quite finished and he didn't think it was appropriate to involve the Illustrious One.

This was why he settled for a projection. It might be a less technically-demanding solution, but from how Marshal Ariadne reacted, the current form of the Glory Torch already did its job.

Ves pushed his hand towards the torch, causing the hovering object to move over to the other side of the conference table.

Both the projector and antigrav module that Ves had integrated in the inner structure of the Glory Torch could last for centuries. Ves had carefully fabricated each component and subcomponent by hand. He assembled them together with so much excruciating care and precision that even Gloriana would clap her hands if she saw how diligently he had worked!

As a craftsman and product seller, Ves had his own pride. He did not wish to deliver a substandard or flawed product to his customers, especially when it was a custom job.

He had spent hours pouring over the design of the Glory Torch. He made sure to configure and optimize it in a way that every single component and system could last without requiring any maintenance.

He chose to integrate robust internal components that could withstand all kinds of shocks.

He chose to add multiple different power sources, each of which operated on different principles so that a single negative state would not knock them all out at once.

By taking advantage of miniaturization, Ves was able to integrate numerous redundant systems and components inside the torch. Yet the overall structure always remained tough enough to handle plenty of abuse.

In fact, the torch could also be used to club someone's skull!

When Marshal Ariadne reverently took hold of the base of the torch, the projected purple flared and brightened for a time.

At the same time, a small spiritual connection formed between the torch and the person who held the object.

"What was that?!"

"I've programmed it so that the first person to take hold of it will become the inaugural member of the kinship network it supports. In addition, other than the Superior Mother, you have become its highest authority. While you can't directly interface with the kinship network, you can pass on clear and solid instruction to the torch."

Marshal Ariadne had become too engrossed in the faint new sensations that had entered her mind. Connecting to a kinship network was always a magical moment to first timers.

Ves patiently waited for his customer to regain her wits.

She looked at Ves with a great degree of appreciation. "This is amazing! I feel closer to the Superior Mother than ever before! In fact, I feel tempted to never let go of this torch!"

He chuckled. He always found it enjoyable to delight his customers.

"Take good care of the Glory Torch, but treat it with respect. The Superior Mother is always present and watching from this ancestral heirloom."

He meant that literally as Ves had inserted a small spiritual fragment of the Superior Mother in the torch!

The Hexer sincerely bowed towards Ves. "We will treat it with dignity. We do not dare to do anything that dishonors the Superior Mother."

Just like Ves, she did not opt to carry the torch personally, but passed it over to one of her silent guards.

Now that he handled the Hexer marshal, Ves turned to his other customer.

"Patriarch Reginald, your case is a little more difficult." He slowly said. "While I have tried my best to accommodate your demands, I wasn't able to put your father in the position you desired."

The Cross Patriarch frowned. He already had a hunch that he would be getting something different when he gazed upon the object that was supposed to transform his clan.

"What is the matter?"

"Saint Hemmington Cross has already died and moved away. What is left of him in this realm is... not enough. He has already done enough in his past life. He deserves to move on. Keeping him here will only do him a disservice."

Though his excuse sounded rather vague and flimsy, Ves just wanted to move on from this point.

Though Patriarch Reginald found it difficult to accept this answer, what Ves said next distracted him from his current thoughts.

"I have formed an alternative solution that should serve as a proper nexus for your kinship network. I did my best to recreate the spirit of your father before housing him in this exclusive ancestral heirloom. Please accept the Cross of Rebirth that I have made for your clan."

The large, arm-sized cross looked a lot different from the torch he made. In order to reflect the Cross Clan's martial culture, Ves made a heavy metal cross that gave an angular and industrial impression.

There was nothing elegant or refined about the cross. It did not even contain any antigrav modules or other fine systems. It was just a metal block that Ves had carved in the shape of a cross.

When Patriarch Reginald took hold of the Cross of Rebirth, he underwent the same reaction, though to a much lesser degree.

Due to his much greater spiritual strength, he was able to control what happened to an extent.

"Don't resist. The connection that the Cross of Rebirth and the nexus inside is trying to make is completely benign."

It only took a dozen seconds for the relic to complete its first connection. Patriarch Reginald gazed curiously at the Cross of Rebirth. He could clearly feel a bond between him and an entity that resided inside the relic!

"What am I dealing with here?"

"The Cross Warlord is the nexus to your kinship network." Ves dutifully explained. "The Cross Warlord is based on your father, though I did not dare to copy him directly. The Cross Warlord hasn't developed much as of yet, hence why he feels much weaker than the Superior Mother, but he will rapidly develop over time as time passes and your clan grows stronger. I know the Cross Warlord isn't what you wanted, but the most important requirement is that it can serve as your nexus. You Crossers can't keep harping on the past. You need to look forward, and the Cross Warlord will help you focus on the new heroes that emerge from your ranks."

Though Ves not only took some liberties with the truth, but also attempted to steer the development of the Cross Clan, Patriarch Reginald didn't know anything better. He just nodded his head and trusted that the professional in this area knew what he was talking about.

"I will do my best to work with this... Cross Warlord. I might need your help from time to time."

"That's no problem." Ves easily replied... "After-sales support is included in the package."

Chapter 3024: Great Sweep

Ves wasn't entirely proud of the Cross of Rebirth.

The newly-fabricated heirloom along with the Cross Warlord that inhabited it were both failed projects in his eyes.

Though he tried his best to process or make use of the willpower fragment of Saint Hemmington, the darned remnant was too combative.

The impression that Ves got from the proud and hostile fragment was that it would rather die than to be converted into a tool for someone else's use!

Even when Ves attempted to communicate that the fragment would be able to help the Cross Clan become more powerful, it simply stuffed its metaphorical ears and refused any other entreaties.

Ves did not dare to do anything further to it. He was even afraid of shattering it and using it as a key ingredient to make the Cross Warlord because Saint Hemmington's willpower was too strong and exclusionary!

In the end, he decided to put the P-stone containing this hard-headed fragment aside. He decided to create a more generic and whiteboard ancestral spirit to serve the needs of the Cross Clan.

The only special decision he made was to create the Cross Warlord within the sphere of influence of the willpower fragment. Ves hoped that his resulting creation would start off with a high affinity for the Cross Clan in his way.

In order to make sure the Cross Warlord became acceptable to the Crossers, he blended in ingredients that aligned with their martial values.

Both the Solemn Guardian and the Zeigra served as the key ingredients. While the two design spirits were rather boring and one-dimensional, they both complemented the professionalism and the pursuit of glory of the Cross Clan.

Of course, Ves had tweaked the proportions so that there was much more of the Solemn Guardian and a bit less of Zeigra in the Cross Warlord. He did not want the ancestral spirit to push the Crossers into becoming more aggressive!

If Ves had a choice, he wouldn't have included a fragment of the former Crown Cat at all, but that would likely make the Cross Warlord too tame for the tastes of the Crossers.

He did not add any additional ingredients. In fact, he did not even contribute any universal life energy either. The Cross Warlord may be weak at the moment, but with several powerful expert pilots in the clan that it was about to watch over, it would have no problem receiving the high-quality spiritual feedback it needed to jumpstart its own natural growth process!

In any case, unlike the Superior Mother, the Cross Warlord was purely a product meant for sale, nothing more. Ves had no emotional connection to it and he had no reason to commit his most valuable and non-replenishable resources to an ancestral spirit that benefited someone else than his own people.

As Reginald Cross began to admire the masculine-looking cross in his hand, he became more accepting of what he received. He shouldn't be asking for more as long as Ves was able to deliver what he originally promised. The immediate priorities of his clan took precedence over his desire to get a portion of his father back.

Once Ves made sure that the products he delivered to his customers met their needs, the three moved on to the next step.

"You need to be careful about the implementation of your kinship networks." Ves warned his fellow leaders. "There are not only crown terrorists in your midst, but also other spies and people who are not actually friendly. Some of them pose a deadly threat to you and your group while others are simply bastards. The latter will probably keep complaining when the kinship network has marked them out, but the former..."

"Terrorists are terrorists. They won't surrender peacefully." Patriarch Reginald ominously determined.

"Just so." Ves nodded in agreement. "You will need to prepare extensively before inducting your people in your new kinship network in one go. The less time and preparation you give them, the lower the likelihood that they will be able to harm too many people. It's actually best to round everyone up and detain them so that they can be inducted into the Cross Clan under controlled circumstances. The key is to immediately suppress those who have been found out, either because the network rejected them or because they try their best to weasel their way out of this necessary step."

No one in the conference room dared to underestimate the crown terrorists. They had already shown their means by affecting the highest levels of the first-rate superstates!

They discussed this issue for an entire hour. Ves freely gave them plenty of advice on how they could leverage the kinship network to best secure the internal situation of respective groups.

A few days passed by as the expeditionary fleet continued to make its way deeper into Winged Serenade. The highly-developed star sector should have been a pleasant place to be in due to its high economic and cultural development.

Yet due to the constant incidents incited by the crown terrorists, the busy star sector had turned into a dangerous region of space where any random person on land or in space might turn out to be a threat!

Different fleets and individual ships kept a much further distance from each other than before. Anyone who intruded in another vessel's personal space was immediately considered suspect.

Plenty of fights had already sparked across the galaxy due to ships mistakenly straying too close to other ships!

The Golden Skull Alliance became vigilant towards strangers who might attempt to get uncomfortably close.

Even if the expeditionary fleet entered a star system that was devoid of other ships, the alliance members didn't slack off and diligently deployed their mechs and manned their stations in the event of an attack.

Yet as everyone directed their focus outwards, many Glory Seekers and Crossers were suddenly ordered to assemble in a central area!

Once they gathered in the hangar bay or some other large assembly area, armored soldiers along with their accompanying officers all compelled everyone who arrived to undergo a 'special' ritual.

Since it was too troublesome to use the Glory Torch and the Cross of Rebirth to induct tens of thousands of people in a short amount of time, Ves made sure to provide his customers with additional tools that could be used as substitutes.

Every ship hosted a simple but functional statue of the Superior Mother and the Cross Warlord. Though Ves did not spend too much time on each of them, they were more than capable enough to function as an interface for their respective kinship networks.

Ves waited quietly on the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim while his Larkinsons went on high alert. The Larkinsons had deployed all of the mechs they could put out into space. Even the expert pilots deployed with their prime mechs, though their presence was completely overkill as far as many people were concerned.

Two hours passed by as the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan both underwent drastic changes. Though Ves did not have access to direct feeds that showed what took place aboard the ships of his allies, he could imagine the confusion among the people and the delight that they experienced once they first formed a connection to a kinship network.

Yet not everything was destined to go smoothly.

"We've detected an energy spike in the rear of the Glory Seeker fleet. An explosion has just detonated inside one of their repair vessels!"

"What is the damage?" Grand Captain Daria-Maria Vraken turned to face the sensor operator.

"It appears a fuel tank has exploded. Though the ship's hull has been breached, the rest of the vessel is still sound. The explosion took place in the lower decks where she only stored her cargo. The damage appears to be purely material."

This was not the first incident that occurred in the combined fleet. Multiple explosions set off. The worst one was caused by a deranged engineer who had somehow sabotaged all of the security measures surrounding a power reactor and rigged it up to blow.

The explosion of this unit not only wrecked the entire engineering bay of the logistical ship, but also killed all of the engineers that had been vetted beforehand!

Ves sighed and closed his eyes. He had enabled all of this to happen. Rooting out traitors from the ranks of the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan was a necessary process, but that did not mean he liked it. Everyone just had to clench their fists and pull out their aching teeth as quickly and decisively as possible in order to put an end to the pain.

Several more damaging attacks occurred, but none of them were major enough to be of concern. It had become a lot harder to destroy an entire ship after the security forces woke up and performed much more stringent checks.

In the end, seven more ships got damaged. Fortunately, the damage was rather isolated and even the weakest civilian vessel in the allied fleet could take at least some beating.

Meanwhile, the Glory Seekers and Crossers managed to go through all of their members. It may have taken an entire day, but everyone left was either inducted into a kinship network or became exposed!

Ves could vaguely sense the two kinship networks expanding explosively over time. It was quite amazing to see how the networks had to stretch again and again to accommodate all of the newcomers.

When Marshal Ariadne and Patriarch Reginald contacted Ves by remote, all three of them looked tense and tired.

"It's never pleasant to go through this ordeal." Ves softly said to his peers.

"I predicted that it would be bad, but I never expected that we would find over three-hundred suspicious members in our midst!" Marshal Ariadne revealed. "Granted, the majority are not related to the crown terrorists, but the fact that they answer to another Hexer dynasty or foreign organization is already bad enough!"

"What about you, Patriarch Reginald? How is your situation?"

Anger began to well in Reginald's mind. If Ves was meeting him in person, he would probably get flooded by the expert pilot's angry aura!

"This is unforgivable! We have found hundreds of dubious individuals in our clan as well. Their motives and their true allegiances differ, but it is distressing how the Planat Clan, the Praetor Clan, the Billard Tribe, the Chardon Tribe and many old enemies managed to insert their own people in our ranks! I fear what they could have done if they were left unchecked."

Despite Patriarch Reginald's outburst, Ves didn't think it was a big deal. The spies were mostly deep agents planted by other Garleners. They weren't elite saboteurs who were trained to destroy entire ships from within. The caught spies were mostly tasked with keeping an eye on the Crossers and discreetly passing on any important information they came across. The actual damage they could do was very limited and indirect.

Of course, as someone who loathed treachery a lot, Ves would have reacted just as strongly as Patriarch Reginald when he discovered so many problem individuals.

"What will you do with them?" Ves curiously asked.

Patriarch Reginald let out a harsh noise while cutting his palm across his neck. His message was very clear.

Marshal Ariadne was more moderate. "We will perform extensive investigations into the backgrounds of our suspect crew members. We will put each and every one of them through a military tribunal."

"I see. I hope you don't judge them too softly. Regardless of the final verdict, I hope that none of them are able to leave and spread word of what has happened. It is in our best interest to hide the existence of our kinship networks. Our enemies, both current and future ones, can take much more effective measures against us if they know of our advantages."

"...Understood. We will make sure that neither the guilty nor innocent will ever have the opportunity to spread word." Marshal Ariadne vowed.

How she would be able to guarantee this, Ves didn't know. He just lamented that a lot of potential test subjects were about to be discarded! If he could get his hands on them, he could perform some extra experiments!

Chapter 3025: Extra Protection

Dang dang dang.

"Vincent! Can you stop doing that already?! You've been hitting it at least a hundred times, and it's only morning!"

"Hey! Let me enjoy my moment, Raella! It took an annoyingly long time for me to receive my custom piece. Now that I finally have it, I need to make sure its protection is up to my expectations."

The two young Larkinsons were just finishing their breakfast at the dining table in their stateroom.

Raella had a busy day ahead of her like always. As the director of the Larkinson Mech Games Circuit, her workload had practically doubled after a large number of Lifers and Heavensworders joined the clan.

The latter especially gave her a headache! The former citizens of the Heavensword Association were so accustomed to competitions that they demanded a lot more matches than her department could currently organize!

A lot more swordsmanship and swordsman mech competitions had popped up as of late. Most of the participants consisted of Swordmaidens and Heavensworders, though a number of Larkinsons from the other mech forces took part as well in order to gain more effective practice.

Though Raella was glad that the Larkinson Clan acquired a more competitive spirit, the clan didn't have enough venues to organize all of the matches.

It was rather fortunate that she received permission from General Verle to borrow some free space from the Graveyard and the Dragon's Den as temporary ground-based mech arenas.

While it was rather expensive and troublesome to reinforce the borrowed spaces and set up numerous energy-intensive shield generators, she was glad that she received the support from the higher-ups. Evidently, they agreed with her that all of the restless mech pilots in their ranks needed an outlet to experience more visceral combat and enjoy a form of entertainment that was fully Larkinson.

"Nyeow~"

Minxie had just finished her bowl of cat food and began to brush her white fur against Raella's hands. The woman petted her cat's long, white fur and smiled.

"Have you been up to any trouble lately?"

"Nyeow."

"Don't run around too much. We might stumble in a combat situation and I don't want you to be stuck somewhere dangerous. The forward observation chamber might be nice and open, but it is very vulnerable to attack. If you want to go out, then settle somewhere deeper in the ship, like New Dorum or something, alright?"

"Nyeow!"

As Raella communicated with her elegant cat, her boyfriend stood up from his chair and boldly stretched his legs and began to take long, exaggerated steps.

A gleeful smile appeared on his face as he started making exaggerated kicks in the air. The new baggy uniform pants he started wearing recently helped a lot with allowing him to exercise his recently-grown legs.

"Those Lifer docs sure know what they are doing!" Vincent admired his new limbs. "I can hardly feel the difference from my old pair of legs!"

Even though the operation already happened a month ago, it took quite a lot of time for everything to settle and for him to complete his initial rehabilitation process.

Right now, Vincent was still prohibited from running marathons and so on, but that hardly mattered since he mainly piloted mechs for a living.

In truth, the real reason why he wore a wider and baggier uniform wasn't so that he could kick in the air whenever he felt like it. He also didn't wear it in order to hide the fact that his athletic, toned physique had deteriorated a bit after being unable to exercise as vigorously as before.

No, the real reason he wore his current outfit was because he received too many complaints from others when he wore his normal, slim-fit uniform.

The source of other people's complaints pertained to one crucial addition to his daily wardrobe.

Vincent formed a fist and gently rapped it downwards.

Dang dang dang.

A sturdy metal sound rang from his waist!

The moment he received his new 'protection gear' and wore it underneath his pants, it was as if he finally turned invincible. Though the metal device was a bit bulky and troublesome to operate whenever he needed to go to the bathroom, why should he aim for comfort when protection was all that mattered?

He never wanted to end up in a position where his manhood was at risk ever again! He would rather lose his legs a hundred times than harm his original organ!

Vincent couldn't even imagine how he would end up like if he had to live his life while carrying a cloned 'third leg'. Just the thought of it was a nightmare!

A bot came to clean up the dishes while the pair prepared to go their separate ways. They briefly embraced each other for a kiss before leaving for work.

While Raella strode off to manage her expanded department, Vincent moved down to the hangar bay in order to gather alongside a special group of Larkinson mech pilots.

He approached with a casual stride and waved at his peers. "Hey! What's up, fellas?"

The three gathered expert candidates did not respond well to his casual greeting. Their rigid postures and their serious demeanors made it clear that they took their duties a lot more seriously than Vincent.

They were true professionals!

Not only that, they rarely relaxed these days. Even when they were off-duty, they constantly poured themselves into additional training.

Whether it was taking sword lessons from the Heavensworders or learning some tips on how to bolster their defenses from Venerable Jannzi, the trio standing before him were thinking day and night about how to better their performance.

Vincent couldn't imagine living like this! Life was too beautiful for him to squander all of his time on training. Though he knew this was the Larkinson way, he felt that too many people were taking it too far. He didn't sign up to the Larkinson Clan to subject himself to military standards.

Unfortunately, his current identity made it impossible for him to shirk all of his new duties.

Lieutenant Hector Larkinson voiced his usual disdain this time. "Did you take too long in gearing up your 'lower shield' this time?"

"You can't rush this important ritual. I have to make sure it won't chafe against anything over the course of my day." Vincent nonchalantly replied.

"I really don't know how you managed to become an expert candidate with an attitude like yours." Trinity said while she impatiently tapped her foot against the deck of the hangar bay. "There are many more deserving Larkinsons who could contribute much more to the clan with your strength."

"Well tough luck, babe, because my power is all mine. God or whoever is watching me from above has finally given me some slack after giving me such a hard time throughout my life. I earned my gift and I won't let anyone question my worth."

Percival Larkinson didn't even deign to comment on that. The fourth expert candidate who gathered here was consumed by much more important thoughts.

Though all of them were honored expert candidates whose skill and battle prowess had surpassed that of their regular colleagues, they were actually in a rather awkward position.

They were nothing compared to actual expert pilots.

Even if the current expert pilots of the Larkinson Clan had yet to receive their expert mechs, the prime mechs they piloted for now were already strong enough to tear through entire mech companies!

Though Vincent was very confident in his skills, even he acknowledged that he couldn't defeat so many mechs by himself.

A mech captain of the Hall of Heroes eventually approached the foursome. "I see that none of you are late this time. Good. You are all in luck for today. We've managed to come to an arrangement with our Crosser allies. We are increasing our cooperation with the other clan in several important ways, and one of them is holding joint training sessions. The Crossers are much more knowledgeable when it comes to training expert candidates and expert pilots, so we have worked hard to grasp this opportunity for you and our other expert candidates."

"What do you mean by that?" Vincent puzzlingly frowned. "We're not training under Larkinsons this time?"

"Not this time, no." The officer grinned. "We have something special planned. Our crew has already equipped the right practice loadout to your mechs. Go ahead and deploy into space. The Crossers will take over from there."

The four expert candidates received no clarification. They had no choice but to keep their questions to themselves and do as they were told.

Each of them surged into space in their own individualized mechs.

While they didn't receive any extravagant treatment, the expert candidates were still entitled to some personal accommodations designed by low-ranking mech designers.

Vincent opted to pilot a ranged mech after losing the Adonis Colossus. His near-death experience against a Fridayman expert mech had firmly taught him that it was best to keep his distance from his enemies!

This was why he settled on the rifleman configuration of the Bright Warrior IB. Though the mech did not grant a lot of possibilities to skilled mech pilots, it was a solid platform that offered decent all-round protection even when it was prepped for ranged combat.

The only personal accommodation that his individual Bright Warrior received was some added protection that slightly decreased the mobility of his mech.

The difference was clear to see once it deployed in space. Out of the hundreds of Bright Warriors on patrol at the moment, Vincent's customized machine was the only one that carried additional 'armor plating' on a very prominent spot on its frame!

From a technical standpoint, it did not make a lot of sense to armor this section in particular. The cockpit and the most important parts of a spaceborn humanoid mech were all situated around the chest area.

Yet Vincent never thought about adding additional armor to that section for one simple reason.

"I want to look like a man, not a woman!"

The four Larkinson mechs flew further ahead and reached a point in space that was fairly distant from the fleet.

It didn't take long for the Cross Clan to dispatch their own mechs.

Much to Vincent's surprise, a small group of four mechs approached. Three of them were typical military-grade mechs, but the fourth one was special.

The Crossers sent an expert mech!

"Larkinsons." The voice of Venerable Linda Cross transmitted over a communication channel. "We've been assigned to polish your training, so that is what we will do for today. Since we're not familiar with what you can do, let us start with some live sparring sessions. I have brought some of our elite pilots to challenge you on your respective strengths. Don't take them lightly. You might have the edge on talent, but these are some of the most experienced mech pilots of our clan."

The three expert candidates of the Living Sentinels soon paired up with the elite mech pilots of the Cross Clan and began to spar against each other with special practice weapons.

Vincent was the only one who was left without a partner.

"Uhm, where is my sparring partner, Venerable?"

"You're in luck, Mr. Ricklin-Larkinson. I'll be personally whipping you into shape." The female expert pilot announced.

"What?! Why?!"

"I've heard that your motivation ranks at the bottom among all of the expert candidates of your clan. I know just how I can fix that. Get ready, Vincent!"

The Amphis was a space knight, but that did not mean it lacked ranged solutions. The Crosser expert mech activated one of its compact shoulder-mounted laser turrets and fired a low-powered beam straight onto the most heavily-armored portion of Vincent's Bright Warrior!

"AAAAAAAH! WHY DID YOU HIT ME THERE?! WHY ARE YOU FIRING AT ME WITH A REAL LASER WEAPON? DON'T YOU HAVE ANY PRACTICE WEAPONS?!"

"Stop complaining and start fighting! If you want to drag your mech back with an intact codpiece, then you better work for it! We'll keep this up as long as possible until you are finally good enough for my tastes!"

Chapter 3026: Costly Shortcut

Much had changed in the week after the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan brought their kinship networks online. They simultaneously performed lightning actions that brought every loyal member to the fold while exposing hundreds of traitors and those with different thoughts.

Dealing with these people was difficult, especially since only a minority of them turned out to be crown terrorists.

The crown terrorists were easily enough to handle. These hidden sleeper agents acted very violently when they were discovered. Their personalities seemed to switch to a completely different mode and they became incredibly rabid!

Yet as long as their identities became known, they no longer had any chance to cause any further harm. They all possessed methods to end their lives without a word and did not hesitate to activate them upon capture.

Ves requested to see the bodies of these dreadfully fanatic enemies, but when he finally finally swept them with his senses, he came out disappointed.

He thought that the Five Scrolls Compact employed spiritual manipulation in order to turn random, decent people into suicidal terrorists.

Even though he failed to study a living crown terrorist, he saw no traces of obvious spiritual tampering from the bodies of the exposed individuals.

Ves had a pretty good sense when it came to detecting any tampering or other anomalies related with people's spirit. He had experimented on so many people that he would have to be an idiot if he still couldn't tell the difference between a natural condition and an artificial condition!

He became disappointed when he found out that the Five Scrolls Compact relied on some other method to turn people into their tools of destruction.

"Our findings haven't different from others who have studied the physiologies of crown terrorists." A Crosser medical expert sighed as he commanded a bot to wrap another cadaver with a shroud. "The prevailing theory on the galactic net is that these crown terrorists haven't been subjected to technological brainwashing methods at all. They were simply subjected to lots of ordinary influencing. Teaching, in order words."

This answer made a lot of sense.

The best way to avoid any unnatural traces from showing up was to teach or indoctrinate people with ordinary methods!

Was it illegal for people to teach others in a normal fashion? No! Teaching was one of the fundamental activities that kept human civilization aloft. Outlawing teaching sounded just as absurd as outlawing love or hunger. Taking it away directly undermined the future of the human race. The Big Two would probably get overthrown before they could succeed in implementing such tyrannical directives!

In order to make sure he didn't miss anything, Ves requested the doctors to vacate examination chamber before setting up a jammer.

"Blinky!"

Mrow!

His companion spirit emerged from his mind once again. The purple starry cat let out a cute yawn. It had been napping peacefully before Ves rudely woke up his spiritual cat.

"Go sniff these corpses. Try and find out if there are any unusual energy traces."

Mrow.

The Star Cat not only examined the body lying on the examination table, but also the ones that were stored in coffins stacked in an adjacent compartment.

Sadly, Blinky returned empty-handed. Ves could do nothing else than to rub Blinky's head.

"It's okay. It was a long shot anyway. You can go back now."

Mrow...

Since his own investigation had reached a dead end, Ves decided not to spend any further time on this issue. He had already solved the main problem by giving his allies the tools needed to root out traitors and prevent other ones from infiltrating their ranks.

The expeditionary fleet should not have any concerns about threats from within at the moment. The Glory Seekers and Crossers had also become very enamoured by the effects of their new kinship networks, so the wave of mistrust that previously dampened their moods was no longer casting a shadow over their heads.

This left Ves free to return his attention to his design work.

Gloriana did not look pleased when he finally returned to the design lab. "Master Willix is due to arrive soon. I want us to be able to move on to the next phase of our design projects by then. Will you be able to complete your assignments in time?"

"Huh?" Ves briefly looked surprised. "She's coming in a few days?"

"Yes, and I want to present everything that we have accomplished so far in the most perfect state possible. I can't do that when you have been spending your time on other matters lately!"

"Hey! Don't blame me! I had to bail the Glory Seekers and the Crossers out of their own predicament! Aren't you grateful that I have brought the Glory Seekers closer to the Superior Mother."

"You could have done that after we had completed our projects, Ves! You keep getting distracted by this and that. Can't you just sit down and work on our expert mechs for a long and uninterrupted stretch of time?!"

"Hey, I promise I'll maintain my focus this time. You know I want to design the best expert mechs as well. I'm still a mech designer, you know."

"Pfff." His wife crossed her arms. "Well, that's hard to tell these days. You've spent so much time managing clan affairs that your primary title should have been clan patriarch."

Ves hunched over a bit and accepted his wife's admonition. She was right in a way. Though he felt justified in securing a favorable agreement with his allies, it did detract from his main work.

Gloriana continued to rant for several more minutes before she recalled her tight schedule.

"You're behind schedule, so I don't want to see anything else but results from now on, okay? Start first with completing the improved luminar crystals that you have promised to deliver. We can't form any plans if we don't know what we're dealing with. I need you to deliver samples to me so that I can figure out their exact properties. The success of the Chimera Project and the Sentry Project hinges on this result!"

She piled up a lot of pressure on his shoulders, but Ves did not shy away from it. It was the opposite in fact. He needed a kick in the pants and Gloriana had just thrust her sharp-heeled boot right between his legs!

Naturally, he did not dare to slack off any second. After discussing some other issues, Ves left the design lab and briskly headed for his personal workshop in order to complete one of his side projects.

Ordinarily, Ves still believed he needed at least a couple of days or even an entire week to complete his objective. There were so many different permutations of formulas that it took too much time for him to narrow down a correct solution.

While he didn't mind spending a week on increasing his depth of knowledge towards luminar crystals and the odd effects they evoked, he made a firm promise to Gloriana earlier.

The downside of relying on trial and error to find solutions was that there were always way too many dead ends!

What Ves needed to accomplish right now was to find a shortcut that could allow him to skip these dead ends ahead of time. He needed to find the right direction straight away so that he could complete this chore as fast as possible.

He considered several different ideas. The most viable one was using up some of his valuable Design Points to acquire new crystallography-related Sub-Skills from the System.

Yet Ves had big plans for those points and did not want to squander it on another ordinary benefit.

He kept pressing his mind for new solutions and eventually stumbled on an idea that might actually work!

"It's been a long time since I did this. Previously, I've always been reluctant to use it because I have to expend too much of my spiritual energy to maintain this state. Now, though..."

With Blinky around, Ves no longer needed to worry about running out of his own spiritual energy. In fact, he already filled up a lot of his P-stone with excess spiritual energy converted by his companion spirit!

"Since this is the case, I guess I can try out my idea!"

He moved over to a nearby storage cabinet and retrieved a small mech figurine.

At the same time, he ordered one of his honor guards to retrieve a couple of P-stones from the vault.

The P-stones that arrived were fairly ordinary ones that did not contain any spiritual fragments or other notable ingredients.

Instead, they exuded a vibe that completely matched Ves. Every single stone had been pumped full with spiritual energy with attributes that fully conformed to Ves!

Before he engaged in his experiment, he briefly activated Blinky. The companion spirit silently emerged and settled a small distance from Lucky.

"Blinky, I need you to keep monitoring my state. If my condition ever looks dangerous to you, then do your best to interrupt it. Also, keep monitoring my actions while I am in a special state. I never really figured out how luminar technology ties in with spirituality, so I hope you'll be able to glean some insights."

Mrow.

Ves turned to Lucky next. "As for you, I hope you can keep an eye on my condition as well. You probably won't be able to help me as much as Binky, but who knows what might happen."

"Meow."

After making sure his two cats were watching out for him, Ves took a deep breath and began to connect to one of his design spirits.

"Illustrious One! Descend into my mind and help me make the crystals that I need!"

A grand presence entered his mind. This time, Ves did not form a shallow connection for the purposes of communication.

He did not establish a slightly deeper connection that allowed him to exchange more direct thoughts.

Instead, Ves opened up his mind and welcomed a portion of the Illustrious One in his mind!

Though this move was not without his risks, Ves believed this was the best way to address his current issue!

His entire demeanor changed. Since Ves knew that he had lots of spiritual energy to spare, he did not hesitate to pull the Illustrious One deeper into his mind!

This was very intensive and Ves could already feel that he was burning a copious amount of spiritual energy in order to maintain the demanding connection and keep his mind in working condition!

Yet by paying such a huge price, Ves truly began to embody the Illustrious One. The changes were too many to count. While he hadn't literally turned into a design spirit, a part of him had undeniably changed!

Under his new and unusual state, he calmly picked up the crystal cube and felt an inexplicable familiarity to this pivotal alien relic.

He no longer regarded it as a black box. Its strange internal circuitry used to look like indecipherable symbols to Ves. That hadn't changed, but he possessed a much greater insight into the major functions of the crystal cube.

"So this is why you are able to operate this device!" Ves gasped.

Ves immediately knew the value of what he learned. He already formed notes in his mind before storing it into his cranial implant. What he recorded would still be there even if he ceased to channel the Illustrious One.

Though it was tempting for him to keep recording all of his new observations, he still had to complete his primary task.

When he gazed upon the stack of luminar crystals that he created in previous sessions, he no longer viewed them as regular crystals.

Each of them shone, sang and shimmered to him in different ways.

They weren't exactly alive, but they might as well be now that he had gained the senses of the Illustrious One.

Ves was able to glean so many more details about these special crystals that he felt as if he had been blind prior to this moment.

"This... this is amazing. I've actually missed so many details about these crystals. They've got a lot more potential than I thought!"

He even identified a possible solution to strengthening the structure of the crystals just by looking at some of the samples!

Chapter 3027: Luminar Circuitry Patterns

Ves placed his hand on a P-stone and absorbed a significant proportion of stored spiritual energy.

His current state was very special at the moment. He channeled the Illustrious One to such a deep extent that he truly started to entertain illusions that he had become a luminar!

Of course, this was still an illusion. He retained enough awareness as a human to retain his original cognition. The only difference was that he had plugged in something extra to his mind that vastly expanded his perspective and allowed him to think and perceive in a completely different manner.

If it didn't cost so much spiritual energy to maintain this deep immersion state, Ves would have gladly spent hours in this state in order to understand technology and reality from a completely alien viewpoint!

As it was, he had a job to do. His glowing eyes settled onto the crystal cube and the machines he used to synthesize his crystals.

"I know what to do now."

He had already warmed up the production machines and prepared all of the necessary materials. He decided to test out his current hunch by creating a luminar crystal using a formula he had already used before.

As the production machines went to work, Ves constantly monitored the process.

He only took action when the initial form of the crystal took shape!

Different from last time where he only tentatively interacted with the crystal cube, this time he manipulated it as if he was an old hand at it. The crystal cube seemed as familiar as the design suite he often used to design his iconic mechs.

While he hadn't mastered all of the secrets and intricacies of luminar technology, the bounty of knowledge and perspective that the Illustrious One brought him had given him a lot of revelations.

Ves never knew that the luminar design spirit possessed so much understanding and technical proficiency in crystal technology. It probably inherited this legacy from both the ancient crystal builder and the Blinding One.

Yet inheriting didn't necessarily translate into understanding. Perhaps the ancient crystal builder or the powerful Blinding One was able to make extensive use of luminar technology, but the Illustrious One was a separate existence!

It had essentially memorized a lot of information by rote but completely lacked the training and skills to actually make use of it. The scattered but priceless pieces of technical information was nothing but gibberish to a design spirit that never went to school!

Ves understood now why the Illustrious One was only able to provide him with limited help before this. The design spirit wasn't actually an expert in these matters and his ability to interpret all of this inherited information was severely constrained.

Yet now that a real mech designer came in touch with all of this inherited information, the story had completely changed.

Though Ves wished he could understand even more crucial knowledge, the insights he had already managed to glean in this short time was already enough for him to figure out a solution to his current problem!

As a luminal crystal slowly took shape, Ves continued to input different commands into the crystal cube. In fact, now that he began to channel the Illustrious One, he felt as if the alien relic had truly opened up to him this time. The cube executed each of his commands with greater diligence!

Slowly but surely, a complex array of alien circuits formed within the crystal he was making. There were twice as many circuits as before as Ves had deliberately inserted a specific array that was actually quite common in the more advanced crystals that the aliens used to make!

Though this circuitry pattern was actually quite complicated and had to be rearranged on an individual basis depending on the properties of every crystal, the crystal cube was able to automate all of these calculations and ensure that each circuitry pattern integrated adequately with every crystal.

Ves suspected that a true crystal specialist might be able to perform this process to a much more effective degree, but Ves lacked the foundation to do so. He could only take a step back and activate the right settings so that the crystal cube did most of the work on his behalf.

"This is actually quite a handy tool."

The crystal cube actually had more functions than forming internal circuitry, but the Illustrious One wasn't able to figure them out yet. Perhaps that might in the future.

Soon enough, the production machines finished synthesizing and polishing the crystal. Ves picked it up and inserted it in the test rifle before handing the weapon over to his honor guard.

"You know what to do. Just fire a couple of test shots."

The loyal guard nodded and moved to the firing range. When the soldier pulled the trigger, the rifle spat out bright white beams that mainly dealt physical damage to the target dummies.

Compared to before, the conversion of thermal energy to kinetic energy was a lot higher than before! Ves didn't need to look at the sensor readings to know that the target dummies got punched significantly harder than before!

Ves wasn't that excited about the effect, though. The efficiency of the transformation was too low and a lot of energy was wasted in the process.

In fact, it was much simpler and more effective to employ a railgun or a gauss rifle in order to deal physical damage to an enemy!

"There are still a few advantages to this type of luminar crystal though."

For one, just like any other pure energy-based rifle, it produced no recoil. This led to the odd and extremely special instance of a mech being able to deal a powerful punch without worrying about enduring the opposite and equal reaction!

On the surface, it was a gross violation of Newton's third law of motion!

This opened up the possibility of arming laser rifleman mechs with specially-designed rifles that could be loaded with different crystals like the test rifle that his honor guard had just fired.

When the ranged mechs faced an opponent that was resistant to laser beams and positron beams, they could slot in a different luminar crystal in their weapons and suddenly fire odd beams that hit like solid projectiles!

In the same way, when facing an opponent that was resilient against physical damage, the rifleman mechs could swap out their physical luminar crystals for one that allowed them to fire powerful lasers or other energy-based beams!

His glowing eyes brightened. This was a great way to increase the versatility of Venerable Joshua and Venerable Davia's upcoming expert mechs!

In fact, he even wanted to apply this weapon technology to the next generation of his ranged mech designs!

"I can definitely turn the next edition of my Crystal Lord design into something special!"

This wasn't the time to design the Crystal Lord Mark III, though. He quickly reminded himself that he was actually trying to improve a different aspect.

"Please bring back the rifle."

When his honor guard passed on the slightly-heated weapon, he commanded a bot to remove the freshly-used luminar crystal.

Ves deployed some scanners and began to record a lot of readings. He noticed plenty of difference from the last crystal he synthesized with the same ingredient formula.

The increased utilization of the crystal cube had made a huge difference!

It was like the auto designer that Ves had previously used to develop the initial form of the Ouroboros. Its simplistic design interface was so dumbed down that even a child could design a working mech with this user-friendly system!

Yet without understanding how mechs actually worked and how many variables affected their performance, it was impossible for an amateur to design a good mech.

Only someone with the right expertise was able to make full use of all of the range of possibilities offered by these interfaces.

Though Ves did not feel that he had reached the level of a Master Mech Designer in the art of manipulating the crystal cube, he definitely felt as if he had graduated from a Novice to an Apprentice!

Ves did not claim to reach a higher level than that. The crystal cube possessed a lot more depth than he and the Illustrious One had yet to decipher.

When the bot removed the luminar crystal, Ves commanded it to place the object in a special chamber that he had also set up beforehand.

For safety's sake, Ves took a lot of steps back and hid behind a shielded enclosure. After activating a number of sensors, he activated a command that quickly resulted in a loud noise!

CLANG!

A solid metal rod dropped down from above and fell straight through a pipe before colliding against the luminar crystal placed directly below!

If the heavy metal rod fell right on top of Ves' body, his skull would have probably shattered on impact!

Yet when it impacted against the luminar crystal, not a single crack emerged!

Under ordinary circumstances, luminar crystals were much less capable of resisting physical damage. They were naturally good at absorbing or at least resisting energy damage, but they fared worse when hit by hammer-like blows.

Yet despite launching a powerful physical attack right away, the crystal still remained remarkably intact!

"Did I succeed?"

Ves performed extensive scans just to be certain. The scanners failed to detect any significant damage even on a microscopic level!

"Then let's amp up the damage. If it can remain functional against a second-class attack, then that is enough!"

The metal rod spontaneously floated up into the air again. Once it had reached the ceiling, it began to drop downwards but with greater momentum than last time!

CLANG!

The crystal still remained intact.

Ves repeated the test several times. It wasn't until Ves employed enough force to make a second-class light mech feel pain that the much-abused luminar crystal finally began to crack.

Of course, the prior blows must have caused it to accumulate a lot of stress, but that still didn't change the fact that the crystal he made had finally met his minimum standard!

"It's a success!" Ves grinned!

Even though he only obtained a preliminary result, he was pretty sure that he could replicate this result on other types of luminar crystals. As long as he integrated the same physical reinforcement circuit pattern on his next batch of crystals, he would be able to obtain definitive proof that this was the right way to make second-class luminar crystals!

"I don't even have to make use of high-quality exotics or other extravagant materials in order to make these new crystals!"

Previously, Ves had continually tried out formulas that utilized a greater proportion of higher-quality materials. This was actually a stupid way to make a better product. The luminars may have been successful in the past, but he seriously doubted that they were willing to squander so many resources on inefficient production methods!

Ves had plenty of hours left to refine his initial result. He did not hesitate to drain his P-stones of accumulated spiritual energy in order to sustain his deep immersion state with the Illustrious One.

By continuing to meld with a portion of the Illustrious One, he managed to make some progress in optimizing and improving his new method. The physical reinforcement circuit patterns that he applied to his subsequent crystals all became a bit better, allowing them to resist more damage before cracking!

The rate of improvement eventually plateaued as Ves hit a bottleneck, but by this time the crystals he made were so hard that they could even be used as the basis of a low-quality crystal-based armor system!

Sadly, there were so many practical problems involved with trying to design a mech that was made completely out of crystals that Ves rejected the notion of designing such a ridiculous machine.

Even so, the hardness and toughness of his latest batch of crystals were more than enough to be utilized in his upcoming expert mech design projects.

Chapter 3028: Show and Tell

When Gloriana visited her husband's so-called mancave, she expected to be let down by her husband yet again.

Didn't he realize how much effort she was putting into elevating the Larkinson Clan's first expert mechs? These stellar machines would definitely play a pivotal role to the clan for many years to come!

As a mech designer who yearned to design the most powerful mech that embodied all of her ideals, the opportunity to lead not one, but several expert mech design projects with hardly any stringent requirements was extremely precious!

It was even better that she was able to embark on these projects when she was just a young Journeyman.

As long as she successfully completed them, the experiences she gained and the lessons she learned would definitely be able to supercharge her progression to the rank of Senior!

Therefore, she did not hesitate to commit everything she had in order to succeed!

Yet how could she know that her own husband would turn out to become a major stumbling block?

His multiple responsibilities, his scatter-brained mind, his lack of regard towards her priorities and his unmerited optimism all threatened to drag down her projects!

If he didn't play such a pivotal role in providing all of the expert mechs with greater strength, she would have removed him from the projects a long time ago!

"Damn Ves." She muttered under her breath again. "Why can't you be more focused for once? You are so productive when you invest yourself in a pursuit. Why aren't you doing that this time?"

"Miaow."

Clixie felt Gloriana's frustrations and offered her support by swishing her tail.

"Maybe I should tell you to keep watch over my husband. Just claw him whenever he slacks off or gets distracted."

"Miaow."

"He's such a boy!"

When she finally entered her spouse's personal workshop, she adjusted her expression and stormed right at Ves as he was tinkering with some sort of rifle or something.

"Do you feel remorseful now?" She began. "Are you finally feeling guilty at letting us down? Your huge delays are causing all of our projects to run behind schedule. You should feel ashamed for presenting unfinished work to Master Willix when she arrives! If you just did your job properly, we could have shown her something substantial and prove that we aren't squandering this opportunity!"

"...Huh?"

"DON'T YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY FOR YOURSELF?!"

Both Ves and Lucky looked befuddled at the woman.

"Gloriana... I didn't fail this time. I finished my side project, pretty much. I've succeeded."

"YOU... succeeded?" Gloriana abruptly lost her rhythm.

"Miaow?"

Even Clixie didn't know how to respond to this situation! Shouldn't Ves be groveling and apologizing in front of his wife by now? Why wasn't he following the script this time?

Ves slowly began to grin and pointed his thumb at the array of crystals that he had prepared on the work table. "I've already prepared my samples a couple of hours ago. They're the best that I can come up with so far. The crystals not only satisfy our durability requirements, but also come with a number of really neat effects that are very difficult to replicate through ordinary means. I've become so inspired by them in fact that

I have even taken the liberty of drafting some energy rifle designs that take full advantage of their versatility!"

"..."

Gloriana looked as if she had just short-circuited. The conversation swung in a direction that she had not anticipated. Privately, she judged the odds that Ves would be able to complete this side project at less than 1 percent.

In fact, 1 percent was a very generous estimate. Having worked with luminar crystal technology several times due to Ves, she knew quite well that the alien tech was very difficult and abstruse!

It was the signature technology of an extinct alien race.

Every alien race and civilization that had reached the stars excelled at certain techs. Just like how people specialized in different professions and how mech designers specialized in different design philosophies, different intelligent species also chose to pour the greatest emphasis of their technological development in specific directions.

Perhaps their research and development in other fields of science and engineering were merely average, but as long as they poured their efforts into the tech that resonates with them most, they could absolutely surpass the efforts of other, more established species!

This meant that even if the luminars invented their distinctive crystal technology a long time ago, it was not necessarily a given that subsequent races were able to inherit and master all of this unique knowledge.

Under these difficult circumstances, someone who didn't specialize in crystallography or reverse-engineering alien tech like Ves shouldn't have achieved any results at all! In fact, Gloriana had long wanted to convince him to set aside his silly fantasies of empowering his mechs with alien tech and go back to using proper Hexer systems and components.

"You don't believe me?" Ves frowned a bit. "Give me a minute to tweak this demonstration weapon. This is going to be my concept for the Sentry Project's main rifle!"

He turned his back to his wife and quickly picked up his multitool in order to make some hasty adjustments to the rifle he had been working on. It didn't take long for the weapon to be ready for light usage.

Gloriana had to rein in her temper when she saw the rifle. Even though she knew it was just a momentary test object, the weapon had obviously been made in haste and with no regard for longevity. Just the sight of it was enough for her to feel as if her eyes were stabbing needles in her brain!

"What the hell are you doing, Ves?!"

"Hey, you just gave me a single day to come up with a working proof of concept. Don't blame me for lacking time to fabricate a proper rifle!"

"Let's just get this over with so you can take this foul piece of junk out of my sight!"

Ves knew he had to work quickly, so he skipped some safety checks and went straight to prepping the weapon for battle.

He first inserted an energy battery in order to power it up. He then moved over to the sample crystals he prepared.

Each of them looked different in several ways. Due to their different material compositions, they came in different shades. The more orthodox crystals were either transparent or white, while the more exotic ones came in shades of blue and purple.

He manipulated his rifle so that a large chamber opened up in the center. Ves picked up a crystal and slotted it into a cavity. He then rotated a cylinder and placed another crystal into the next cavity that faced the opening.

He repeated this loading action several times until he loaded the internal revolving chamber with six different crystals!

Once he finished loading the rifle, he handed it over to an honor guard, who already moved to the firing range.

Ves confidently moved over to Gloriana's side and pulled her closer to him. He breathed deeply in order to delight his nose with his wife's light and ocean-fresh scent.

"Watch carefully, honey. You're about to witness a good show."

The first beam that emerged from the test rifle was a bog-standard laser beam that melted the dummy bot on the other side of the firing range.

Though there was nothing special about this attack on the surface, Ves waved his hand and activated a projection that showed all kinds of rifle parameters and sensor readings.

Gloriana quickly interpreted the data and widened her eyes!

Compared to the current generation of luminar crystals in use by mech models such as the Crystal Lord Mark II, the Bright Warrior Mark I Version B and most notably the Bright Beam Prime, the leap in improvement was substantial!

"The efficiency of your new crystal is higher!" She gasped. "Hardly any waste heat has been generated by this shot. This rifle can fire continuously for many minutes without growing too hot to handle!"

Ves grinned even wider now that Gloriana finally acknowledged his work. "That's right. While this is merely the least exciting sample crystal that I've prepared, its value is already evident. This is the perfect crystal to use when a battle has dragged out for a time and the rifleman mech has already heated up due to firing lots of damaging beams. As long as the mech still possesses a reserve of energy, it can steadily use it up with constant attacks that won't drain the mech too quickly."

It was actually the perfect crystal to use for mechs designed for attrition warfare. The crystal practically generated no heat at all when put to use. It absorbed thermal energy instead! This allowed it to serve as a heat sink for the rifle, allowing it to be used more intensively without worrying about pushing it to breaking point!

Gloriana looked enamored by all of the possibilities, but she soon grew a bit suspicious.

"Nothing can be this good without a price. What are the downsides to this crystal?"

Ves sheepishly shrugged. "The crystals that I have prepared today all suffer the same faults. They seem to be common deficiencies that affect all crystals derived from luminar technology. First, though these crystals are harder than the ones I've made before, all of the energy pouring through the internal circuits causes them to wear out over time. The more intensively they are used, the faster they deteriorate. Perhaps they might have to be replaced after a single battle!"

"That doesn't sound so bad. They can be used like ammunition but for energy rifles."

He shook his head. "This is not a practical solution for every mech. This is their second fault. If scaled for mechs, these crystals are powerful enough to be employed in custom mechs and expert mechs, but they can cost as much as several mechs put together! They also have to be made by hand by me, since I am employing special techniques to make them. Mass producing them is pretty much out of the question."

Gloriana grew a lot less enthused once she heard that. The innovations that Ves had accomplished were very significant, but if their application was too limited, then they could forget about popularizing it in all of their products!

"Are there any other faults?"

"There are some, but I'll just write that in a report. Let's proceed to the next test shots. My rifle can discharge much more exciting attacks."

The next attack was a positron beam. Compared to a standard beam, this one hit harder and had a considerably faster propagation speed.

While positron beams already traveled to their targets at a significant fraction of the speed of light, any additional speed was absolutely useful for long-range combat in space!

The third attack was the light beam that the luminars pretty much treated as their most favorable attack method. It dealt more damage than a typical laser beam but not that much.

However, after repeated observations, Ves discovered the true value of this attack mode.

"What's the secret behind this odd light beam?" Gloriana asked.

"While this beam is effective against material targets, it is also effective against non-material targets. In fact, I think that is actually what they are mainly used for. This is an all-round attack method that is very suitable for hurting intangible opponents that can't be harmed with conventional attacks."

"This... what does that mean, exactly?"

"Don't you realize the implications?!" Ves excitedly turned to his wife. "This light beam attack can effectively hurt powerful entities like the dark gods! Though a single beam won't actually be able to hurt them that much, what about a hundred? What about a thousand?"

In theory, they could even be used to hurt his design spirits, though in practice that was difficult to accomplish. Spiritual entities ordinarily resided in a different realm where material attacks could never reach. There were also many other ways for intangible existences to avoid getting hit by such straightforward attacks.

However, against more substantial opponents, the value of these light beam attacks might be much greater.

"These light beam attacks might also be a lot more effective at harming expert mechs!" Ves revealed his most explosive guess.

Gloriana looked completely shocked.

"What?! Do you realize what kind of claim you are making?!"

Chapter 3029: Limited Use

Had humanity successfully come up with attack methods that specifically harmed expert mechs?

The answer to this question was likely yes. These special weapons were not unheard of, but they were actually very rare because they were too high-end. Their cost was so prohibitive and their material requirements were so absurd that only special mech units of the Big Two and several first-rate states ever employed them in battle.

There was just something about expert mechs and expert pilots that produced results that couldn't be fully replicated through standard methods. True resonance, while difficult to accomplish, possessed potent extraordinary properties that served as a powerful amplifier.

Countering it was very difficult. In general, employing overwhelming firepower was the easiest but also the stupidest method. Resonance shields were specifically geared to resist a lot of ordinary attacks.

It was a lot better to deploy an expert mech against another expert mech. This was because resonance-empowered attacks dealt much greater damage to resonance shields. Since they shared a common root, it was logical for them to have this interaction.

Yet was it easy to acquire an additional expert mech? No! The Hexadric Hegemony wouldn't be in such a sorry position if it could pull out expert mechs and expert pilots out of its hat.

If the Hex Army was able to equip its ranged mechs with rifles that fired light beams like the one that Gloriana witnessed earlier, then this solution could effectively solve the biggest fundamental shortcoming of the Hegemony in the Komodo War!

Unfortunately, before her optimism soared any further, Ves rudely reminded her of the shortcoming of this tech.

"I know what you're thinking about. I entertained those thoughts as well." Ves softly spoke to her. "There is no way to mass produce these crystals, though. Perhaps the ancient luminars managed to develop a viable mass production method, but I don't have the know-how. I can only make these crystals one-by-one on an individual basis. It will take centuries for me to equip every ranged Hexer mech with the right luminar crystals!"

This was a huge letdown to Gloriana. Though she didn't know why it was so troublesome to produce this special crystal, she didn't think her husband was lying.

"How difficult is it for you to develop a viable mass production method?"

"I wouldn't know where to begin. I'm still scratching the surface when it comes to grasping and utilizing luminar technology. If I perform this research by myself, I will probably have to squander my entire life to achieve a result. The Komodo War will be long over by that time."

"Then why hand over the results you've gained so that others can set up a research group around this topic?"

"Didn't I tell you already? Other people won't be able to replicate my results. One of the critical discoveries I made about luminar technology is that it is dependent on a different power. A normal approach won't work."

In truth, the real reasons why Ves didn't want to share his results or propagate his new discovery were much simpler.

The first reason was because he didn't want to lose the crystal cube. It was an extremely crucial piece of alien tech that was essentially irreplaceable. Until he was able to decipher most of its functions and replicate them on his own, the crystal cube absolutely had to remain in his possession!

It would be a huge waste to hand it over to someone else. Ves was pretty certain that there was no other human in the galaxy who was adept at spiritual engineering while at the same time possessing an insider's look on luminar technology through the Illustrious One!

The second reason was because Ves was very mindful of the general policies of the MTA. The Association always worked hard to increase the emergence of more expert pilots and higher-ranking pilots.

Whether it was because they wanted humanity to gain more god pilots or because they wanted to harvest more ingredients, the fact of the matter was that the MTA took a very dim view on weapons that threatened or diminished the role of these transcendent pilots!

Even if Ves was able to solve the mass production problem, he wasn't stupid enough to violate the MTA's bottom line and promote a new weapon that could easily strip the defenses of expert mechs!

It should be fine if he kept it to himself. Every organization developed some trump cards and special solutions that served as the foundation of their strength. The overall impact of revolutionary technology was much less if it remained contained.

While Ves didn't say all of that to Gloriana, he already told her enough to set aside her unrealistic hopes.

"Let's move on with the demonstration." He said. "I've discovered several more weapon effects that I think are useful enough to be applied to our ranged expert mechs."

The fourth attack launched by the test rifle came in the form of a so-called physical beam.

The sheer oddity of an energy attack that didn't heat up the target that much but instead hit like a physical projectile instantly distracted Gloriana from her earlier musings.

She couldn't help it! The effect of the physical beam was too inexplicable!

"How does this work?! How can the rifle let out a beam that is pure energy when it shoots out of the muzzle but somehow transforms into a kinetic attack when it reaches the target? IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE!"

Gloriana obsessively poured over the charts and other data in order to figure out the working principles behind the physical beam. Yet try as she might, she found nothing that could give her a satisfying answer.

Ves just shook his head at the sight. He tried to figure out the theory as well, but from the vague impressions of the Illustrious One, the actual mechanisms behind this attack method were far from simple.

The only reason why it worked at all was because the crystal cube had already been programmed to form such an odd crystal. Without it, Ves wouldn't know what to do. This was a reminder that the tech he was able to employ right now was not actually reliable until he mastered it to the same degree as the ancient luminar race.

Eventually, Gloriana made the same conclusions as Ves and reluctantly suspended her study. "I don't have the time to delve into this topic. It's incredibly fascinating, though. I agree with you. This crystal has massive implications to the expert mechs that we intend to arm with energy rifles."

She was already revising her own ideas about the Chimera Project and Sentry Project. She even thought about arming the other expert mechs with backup pistols that incorporated this tech on a smaller scale.

Before the honor guard fired a fifth shot, Ves cautioned her to temper her expectations.

"I managed to stumble upon the fifth and sixth crystal by chance. Their effects are very remarkable but their refinement is very rudimentary."

The only reason Ves was able to make them in the first place was because he managed to decipher some hints from the crystal cube and gleaned some vague insights from the Illustrious One.

When the honor guard pulled the trigger for the fifth time, a very narrow knife-like beam pierced right through the dummy bot and even punctured the metal wall set up to block any attacks from spreading out to the rest of the workshop!

"This penetration power is remarkable!" Gloriana instantly recognized the key property of this attack.

"It is." Ves nodded. "The efficiency of this attack is rather low though. Evidently, it takes a lot of effort to narrow a beam so that it becomes flat but also constant."

It was therefore a specialty tool against solid armor that was very hard to damage under normal circumstances. Against large, soft targets such as giant exobeasts or energy-based protection, the lower than average power of this flat cutting beam was really lackluster.

Though Ves was confident he would be able to improve its efficiency and overall performance if he spent more time on refining the relevant crystals, it would take a lot of trial and error to yield superior results.

There wasn't anything more exciting about the slicer beam, so they soon moved on to the last test.

A very odd and iridescent energy beam impacted a small energy shield that Ves had deliberately projected in front of the target dummy.

The strange energy beam easily managed to scramble the energy shield before inflicting light damage to the target dummy.

Gloriana looked slightly fascinated. "Is this an EMP attack?"

"I'm not sure yet. I haven't had the time to study all of the data and guess the working principles behind this attack method. For now, I just call it a disruptor beam attack, because it can disrupt both energy barriers and delicate electronic systems. It hardly does anything against normal components and armor plating can withstand the beam with ease."

In other words, it was a specialized attack mode that could not be relied upon to carry the entire battle.

That didn't make it useless. There were many instances where energy shields could extensively increase the longevity of both high-end mechs and powerful ships.

In fact, a weapon that was capable of firing disruptor beams could do a lot of damage against the Larkinsonn Clan!

This was because the Spirit of Bentheim relied heavily on her heavy-duty ship-grade shield generators to withstand enemy attacks. The ship possessed both an abundant number of these shield generators and could also supply a lot of power to them in order to sustain this method of protection for a long time.

If these shields could be popped with ease, it was a lot easier to penetrate her hull armor!

All in all, Gloriana completely forgot about her original intention to admonish her husband after witnessing all of the novel crystals and attack methods they enabled.

Just one of these crystal types already conveyed a lot of benefits to their expert mech design projects, but now that Ves came up with six in one go, Gloriana wanted to make use of all of them in her projects!

In fact, Ves created a lot more crystals that were able to channel even stranger effects, but their power and utility left a lot to be desired. He thought it was best to settle on a limited selection of crystals, at least at first.

"If we can design a refined, mech grade version of this test rifle, we can equip the Sentry Project with a formidable laser weapon that can switch between six attack modes. Just think about it. Venerable Davia's expert mech can employ the best and most optimal attack methods against every specific opponent!"

If they were truly able to implement this idea on an expert mech, then the versatility and effective firepower of the Sentry Project would go through the roof!

This was an amazing contribution to the design projects! Even with all of the faults that Ves had mentioned, as long as it was possible to make these crystals on an individual basis, then it was more than enough to service a handful of expert mechs!

Gloriana's eyes turned into stars as she gazed towards the man who gave her a pleasant surprise. She leaned forward and planted a kiss on his smooth-shaven cheek.

"You did a good job." She admitted. "You came very close to ruining it all, though."

"Hehe, you underestimate my power."

"Whatever you say, Ves. Let's figure out how we can leverage these new applications into our expert mechs."

The two activated a design interface and began to tweak the designs of both the Chimera Project and the Sentry Project.

While it sounded nice to be able to slot a dozen different crystals in a single weapon, it risked becoming too large and cumbersome if they truly designed such an extravagant rifle.

This was why they settled on preparing a larger and heavier precision rifle for the Sentry Project. It would be able to accommodate six different crystals at best, thereby providing it with six different solutions on the battlefield.

The Chimera Project didn't require that much choice. Since the mech had to be able to wield its weapon with a single hand, the carbine it was armed with had to be small and light enough to be employed in dynamic, mid-ranged duels.

Therefore, it would only have room for three to four different luminar crystals, but that was more than enough.

Chapter 3030: Incoming Mechers

Ves managed to save his hide from an angry Gloriana by producing solid and usable results. Though he still had a lot more room for improvement, he could deal with them later.

The most important point was that he was able to prove his concepts and provide enough solid data for Gloriana and the rest to plan their integration in the expert mech designs.

Though it was rather reckless to implement newly invented tech that had not gone through any robust testing, Ves was confident that it would work out somehow. He knew enough about luminar technology that the crystals derived from it were not unstable or prone to malfunction.

While Ves initially aimed to make Gloriana happy, he actually obtained a lot more gains besides that. He didn't even pay much thought to the fact that he managed to avoid her wrath this time.

The true gain from this side project was that he had become stimulated to employ an old method to achieve a drastically greater outcome!

In the past, Ves connected his mind to his design spirits numerous times. He usually did so in order to borrow their glows to enhance his stature.

Ves found this trick to be rather tasteless these days. He had gained enough reputation, prestige and speaking ability to be able to hold his own in front of a crowd.

His own identity was more than enough to command the attention of any group of people!

Yet that did not mean that melding his mind with his design spirits became obsolete. Ves just lacked a purpose and reason to utilize this technique.

It wasn't until today that he found a wonderful new application of this technique. Now that Blinky's existence allowed him to squander his spiritual energy reserves without worrying about running low for weeks or months at a time, he could channel his design spirits to a much greater extent and for considerably longer periods of time without paying a huge price!

Of course, this technique was not without its risks. Messing with the spiritualities of living people or entities was always fraught with danger. His attempts could have led to very severe damage to both Ves and the design spirit he was channeling if something went wrong.

If Ves was stupid enough to invite a hostile design spirit like Zeigra past his mental defenses and right into his mind, then the angry Crown Cat could easily inflict a lot of damage before being expelled!

The only reason he felt confident enough to go through with the attempts was because he implicitly trusted the Illustrious One.

Ves made the Illustrious One, along with several other design spirits. Compared to other entities that originated elsewhere like Qilanxo and Ylvaine, Ves deeply understood his own spiritual products as if he was their own father. This bond between them was very intimate and allowed him to feel completely comfortable in the presence of his own creations.

The only spiritual product that went out of control and transformed into an existence that was much more powerful and inscrutable was the Superior Mother.

He blamed Cynthia for that.

In fact, even if the Superior Mother mutated into a vastly more powerful entity than he anticipated, he bet he could still employ the same method to channel her and gain her perspective.

His back shuddered at this notion.

There was no way he was going to allow his mother to get a first-hand peek at his mind!

He had to remind himself that channeling a design spirit was not a one-way connection. Just as Ves was able to borrow aspects of the spiritual entity he invoked, that same existence would also gain a greater understanding of himself!

Ves didn't care too much if the Illustrious One learned some aspects of himself. The luminar design spirit's personality was quite muted and it was unlikely that he would abuse what he learned.

He couldn't say the same for the Superior Mother.

As loving and affectionate as she could be, Ves knew very well that he had been a naughty boy sometimes. He did not want to get smacked by a giant spiritual hand!

In any case, as long as he did not meld his mind with the wrong design spirit, he could gain a lot of other benefits from performing this action. This had a lot of potential!

If he could acquire more alien design spirits with a technological foundation, he could potentially employ more powerful alien inventions.

If he melded his mind with design spirits with a considerable arsenal of spiritual techniques like Qilanxo, he might be able to learn some of her refined applications as well as other insights.

If he channeled a design spirit that was representative of a population group, then he would be able to speak, empathise and understand them as if he was their fellow comrade!

In short, Ves did not necessarily have to figure out every problem by himself. As long as there was a suitable design spirit around, he could always request their assistance in a much more direct and effective manner than before!

Ves had become preoccupied with imagining the possibilities in the next few days. Though he made sure to allocate enough of his attention to rush his remaining tasks, he couldn't get rid of distraction.

It wasn't until Master Willix finally met with the expeditionary fleet that Ves had to drop his fanciful thoughts.

The Golden Skull Alliance already expected her arrival ahead of time. The Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers all wanted to look their best in front of an important, high-ranked member of the MTA, so they all cleaned up their vessels and adopted an elaborate ceremonial formation.

The capital ships of the allied fleet all formed up in a row. Seeing their bulk lined up in a neat line was quite impressive. What was even more eye-catching was how all of the sub-capital ships formed into a precise, angular box with a clear route running from the front.

Every spaceworthy mech deployed in space and formed into uniform rows or followed well-designed patrol routes.

"She's coming. Let's roll out the welcome mat."

A very familiar-looking portal formed in front of the allied fleet. Its coordinates fell exactly in line with the ones that Master Willix had transmitted beforehand!

The Ubiquitous Force looked surprisingly small in the face of all of the larger combat carriers and capital ships of the expeditionary fleet.

Yet no one had any doubt that the high tech frigate was more than capable enough to wipe out or at least inflict severe damage to the collective might of the Golden Skull Alliance!

Ves wondered when he would also be able to design and build such an impressive ship. It was likely that reaching Master wouldn't be enough to satisfy all of the requirements. The Ubiquitous Force was armed warship, and ordinary people weren't allowed to make and utilize those kinds of vessels.

Perhaps the only way for him to ignore this rule was to become a Star Designer!

When Ves reached this exalted height, he would no longer be subject to all of the rules.

He would get to make them instead! No one would be able to accuse him of being a war criminal if he had become powerful enough to permit all of his own actions!

Before he reached this height, Ves still had to pay due respect to Master Willix and the Mech Trade Association. Humanity might be divided, but nobody denied that the Big Two called the shots right now. Disrespecting them was a very bad idea!

A large honor guard that consisted of shiny and gleaming Bright Warriors from the Avatars of Myth began to flank the Ubiquitous Force.

Even though the MTA frigate was surrounded by several hundred second-class mechs, the vessel showed no indication of distress.

The modest-sized vessel adjusted her pace so that she wouldn't overtake the mechs and allowed them to lead her forward.

Along the way, different mechs from different mech forces went on display. The mechs of the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan might not possess any intrinsic life, but that did not detract from their solid designs and robust performance.

The mechs employed by the Larkinsons were a bit more eccentric. Each of them possessed a distinct charm that became a bit more amplified when they grouped up together.

From the Ferocious Piranha to the new and relatively unused Eternal Redemption, the Larkinson Clan showed that it had full confidence in using the products designed by its patriarch!

Even if Ves was still a Journeyman who could not match up to Seniors and Masters in many aspects, his clansmen all embraced the unique advantages he developed!

The only mechs that were missing from the lineup were the prime mechs. Ves chose not to show them off in such an ostentatious manner.

He was afraid that Master Willix would take an interest in the Unending alloy used to clad the mechs. What if she confiscated it all in the name of research? There was no way that Ves would be able to say no to her request!

Fortunately, Ves had a good excuse to keep them well away from the visitors. The prime mechs were the current trump cards of the Larkinson Clan. The less they showed up in the open, the less his enemies would be prepared to face them in battle!

Down in the hangar bay, a procession of Larkinsons had already lined up into precise ranks. Each of them wore their finest dress uniforms. The Larkinsons wanted to present a unified image to the visitors. If their ranks looked too disorderly or heterogeneous, then there was a risk that the incoming guests would think that the clan was sloppy!

This was something that Gloriana absolutely couldn't tolerate!

Ves, his wife and their cats all lined up as well. Gloriana even decided to eschew her usual dresses and lab outfits for a slim and well-fitting Larkinson uniform!

"Relax, Gloriana. I think we're trying way too hard this time. Haven't we met with Master Willix in person several times now?"

"This is different!" She hissed. "The context of this visit is a lot more formal and important than before. We cannot treat a visiting MTA Master as if she is an old acquaintance. Besides, we also have to make a good impression on the mech pilots that she will put under your care. You don't want them to look down on our clan, right?"

She had a point. Ves already tried to anticipate what kind of MTA mech pilots he would have to train.

If they were snobby, arrogant brats who thought they could run the show in his fleet, then they had another thing coming.

Since Master Willix already granted him permission to deal with them as he liked, he would not go easy on them! Otherwise, Ves might never be able to push them into becoming expert pilots within just five measly years!

The Ubiquitous Force did not enter the hangar bay of the Spirit of Bentheim. It did not dispatch a shuttle either.

Instead, a substantial group of individuals spontaneously teleported to an open area of the deck.

It only took seconds for the MTA delegation to arrive.

Ves only threw a brief glance towards the unmistakable form of Master Willix. He instead gazed at the twenty strangers wearing a varying mixture of neat, civilian outfits.

Even though the MTA mech pilots deliberately loosened their demeanors, Ves could definitely sense that they were more than what they appeared.

The members of the Big Two possessed an unmistakable sense of confidence and conceit that was rooted in their bones. Just the knowledge that they were a part of one of the most powerful organizations of humanity was enough for them to develop a superior air!

Eleven men. Nine women. All relatively young and in their prime. As Ves swept them with his spiritual senses, his heart dropped like a rock.

"Damn. You're not making this easy, are you?" He muttered.

He didn't need to take a closer look. He could already tell that none of the MTA mech pilots possessed spiritual potential!