

Mech 3501

Chapter 3501: Good Student

Ketis possessed a special affinity with swords. Or was it Sharpie? Ves wasn't quite sure.

Whatever the case, the fact that she managed to fabricate a masterwork mech sword was already proof that she could make standalone swords beyond compare. No one else in the clan could come close to her when it came to designing and making swords.

"I already implemented something special in the sword design." She told Ves. "Once Lyain Kepper finally gets to pilot this mech, he'll find completely new and better ways to fight as a swordsman."

"Like what you did with the Everchanger?"

Ketis nodded. "Yes, but to a lesser degree. I can't do as much for this design due to all of the constraints we are working under, but it should be enough to give Lyain another edge in battle."

"Then what is the factor that you want to add to our mech design?"

The swordmaster didn't speak for a time. Instead, she silently held his hand and conveyed a silent message through her companion spirit.

Swish swish.

Ves raised his eyebrow at her. "Are you sure? I mean, can you even do this? I thought only the Decapitator is capable of..."

"Ordinarily, you're correct." She said. "I know you can do it as well, but I'm different from you. As long as a sword sings to me, I can reach out to the weapon. It doesn't have to be a masterwork."

What?!

Ves would have shown a greater reaction if he wasn't working in public at the moment!

"Are you certain?"

"I'm sure." She said. "It just requires a little sacrifice and a lot of energy. You'll see soon enough. I ordinarily wouldn't do something like this, but winning this tournament is really important for the both of us. I want to reach first place and obtain a fleet carrier as well. In addition, if I am able to show enough capabilities, I can help our clan impress potential business partners and make it easier for us to get the ships and supplies we need."

Her main motivation for going all-out was to help the clan. Ves was gratified to hear that Ketis was looking out for her fellow Larkinsons.

"Then let's go through with your plan. What exactly are you trying to do, anyway?"

"Why don't you find out more directly? I don't dare to say it directly in the open."

He understood what she was talking about. To be honest, Ves had not been going all-out for the past two days of constant mech design. He was saving the best for last because he could only employ his strongest methods for a short amount of time.

He also thought that they were doing well enough to win the Wild Brawl Bowl by relying on their current strength.

Still, the difference between winning first place and second place in this tournament was quite big.

The former was able to win a whole fleet carrier. A small one, but still a capital ship!

The latter could only go home with 5 combat carriers. That was an immense drop in value and mech capacity. Hundreds of mechs were at stake, so Ves shouldn't be sanctimonious and think that he could make do with a regular approach.

The other design teams were certainly doing their best as well. Winning was everything to them. No one who signed up for the Wild Brawl Bowl wanted to end up second place or lower.

He looked at the clock and understood that they were already close to moving on to the fabrication stage.

"This is as good a time as any, then. Get ready, Ketis."

Ves commanded Blinky to silently form a small design network between himself, Ketis and Lyain Kepper.

Adding the latter person to the design network was a considerable risk, but the potential reward was more than worth it. Ves just had to make sure that Blinky properly filtered the connection to the mech pilot so that Lyain did not learn anything sensitive.

Before Ves did so, he gave the mech pilot a brief warning.

"We're about to do something special." He quietly said to the Wild Fighter. "Whatever you do, don't resist. Open yourself up to us. It will not only be beneficial to us, but for you as well. You'll understand."

When Blinky's invisible spiritual bonds finally connected the three minds together, Lyain immediately became exposed to a completely new set of stimuli!

Although the connection initially overwhelmed him, Ketis' powerful presence provided him with a lot of reassurance. His trust in her was near-absolute!

"This..."

"Ah!" Ves raised his palm. "Don't speak. Stay still. This is an honor that few mech pilots have enjoyed. Try your best to cooperate with us as much as possible now that you're in this state. You will understand the reasons why soon enough."

Both sides already began to experience the benefits of bonding their minds together in a design network.

Lyain Kepper gained a lot of direct understanding about his upcoming mech that he wouldn't have been able to understand under normal circumstances. It was only now that he was able to borrow a portion of Ves and Ketis' acumen to interpret the more complicated engineering nuances of the mech he was about to pilot.

His eyes widened as he began to understand Team Larkinson's swordsman mech on a much deeper level than the older mechs that he had piloted for several years!

At the same time, Ves and Ketis were not only able to cooperate and synergize with each other on a deeper level, they also picked up various useful details about Lyain Kepper that weren't obvious on the surface.

Most of it had to do with his specific approach to piloting mechs. Though Lyain had already explained how he preferred to pilot his mechs, words couldn't never fully convey all of his points!

Armed with the comprehension gained from peeking directly into Lyain's mind, Ves and Ketis immediately worked to tweak and alter the configuration of their mech design so that it aligned just a little bit better with its mech pilot.

"The mech needs to fit like a glove." Ves said as he echoed his wife to an extent.

As they continued to work, Ves finally felt the time was right to employ another solution.

He didn't need to exchange any words with Ketis. They just looked at each other until the female half of their team nodded.

Ves raised his fist and quickly tapped it against her temple.

As soon as she got struck, a heap of inspiration began to well up from the depths of her mind.

Even Lyain Kepper noticed that the swordmaster had become a lot more mentally active.

"What is going on, Mr. Larkinson?"

"It's nothing important." Ves tried to act as nonchalantly as possible. "Ketis is just getting started."

The aura surrounding Ketis grew stronger as she became visibly more excited as she managed to come up with solutions to a couple of long-standing problems!

She had always been able to figure out how to resolve them, but she hadn't been able to connect the dots until now. Ketis was quite ecstatic with the burst of progress she had made all of a sudden!

When she directed her attention to their almost-complete mech design, she didn't actually see that many areas of improvement.

However, she still spotted numerous subtle details that she previously thought were alright but were actually sub-optimal! She quickly corrected all of these subtle faults and quickly managed to make the mech run even smoother once it was made!

"Let's fabricate our mech!"

"Okay. The superfab is already warmed up and ready to start."

Ves had already checked it over. All of the diagnostics showed that the machine was working in prime condition, not that he expected anything different. It would have been a huge scandal if the machine was faulty in any way.

Both Ves and Ketis began to operate the superfab together. While that didn't make their work faster, they were able to divide their responsibilities and become a lot more thorough about their output.

Ketis was eager to make the most out of the false inspired state that was already fading from her mind.

Ves noticed to his surprise that the state decayed a bit faster than he expected. It was a lot harder for Vulcan to maintain his influence in her powerful and will-reinforced mind.

"I see."

It made sense. Expert pilots became more resistant to external influences as they became stronger. Once they became ace pilots, they were able to completely control and block any spiritual influence in an area around them as long as they weren't confronted with an equal or stronger adversary!

Though Vulcan was already one of Ves' most powerful design spirits, his influence was less strong when working on other people's turf!

"I don't regret my decision, though."

Ketis was already familiar with the advantages of this special state and tried her best to make the most of this temporary advantage. She had worked on fabricating the mech sword first in order to ensure it was as excellent as possible.

During the production process, Ketis made a completely unexpected move. She temporarily halted the process in order to feed another ingredient into the machine!

[What is Swordmaster Ketis doing?]

[I am uncertain. She has been doing well in fabricating her mech sword even though this is clearly her first time operating a superfab. Wait, why is she pulling out her sword? IS SHE CUTTING HERSELF?!]

To the shock of everyone who had been paying attention to Team Larkinson, Ketis used the sharp edge of her Bloodsinger to slit her palm!

A small stream of blood poured from her wound and dropped into a tray that was ordinarily used to insert small and delicate exotics into the superfab's material stockpile.

Though human blood was anything but normal, the superfab was versatile enough to accept the input and properly store it in its reserves until Ketis wished to integrate it into the mech sword that she was making.

"What are you doing, Ketis?" Ves couldn't help but ask.

"Similar to what you have done to the Everchanger. I'm making my new sword sing."

"With blood?!"

Ketis responded with a grin. "What better way to make a sword alive than to put a piece of myself inside it? This is what you have taught me. Aren't I a good student?"

"Uhh..."

Though her idea sounded extremely dubious to Ves, she had already made her move. Even he grew curious whether she was able to pull off her new but potentially valuable idea.

A medical bot arrived to quickly treat the cut that Ketis had made on her palm. After a rapid cell regeneration cycle, the wound was almost entirely gone, allowing her to go back to operating the superfab with no distractions.

Hours went by as the mech chainsword as well as the other main components of their swordsman mech slowly came into existence.

Compared to the time he made the Pontifical Lance, Ves was a lot more confident about the output of his work this time.

Not only was he collaborating with another mech designer on a deep and intimate level, he also had a lot more time at his disposal this time.

Since they were able to take their time on fabricating and assembling the mech with the superfab, it became increasingly clear that their swordsman mech would reach an impressive level of quality!

Although the final outcome was still marred by haste, both Ves and Ketis were quite happy with what they had managed to put together!

When the swordsman mech finally emerged out of the superfab, many people in the audience admired the brand-new machine.

"It's not a masterwork, but it's still something." Ves stated with a satisfied expression.

Its green-and-gray coating reflected the contributions that Ves and Ketis had made to the design. Its blood-bound mech sword was on the lighter side, but it was connected to its mech by a fairly long and sturdy chain.

Yet what truly impressed much of the audience was its glow. Though the distance made it difficult for the spectators to fully appreciate this trait, the swordsman mech was still able to stir their hearts!

"This mech... is the second-finest competition mech that I have ever developed."

"The second-best? What's the first one, then?"

"Oh, eh, nevermind."

Chapter 3502: Diverse Melee Mechs

The design phase had concluded!

After a quiet period of three whole days, the mech designer teams all worked day and night to develop their competition mechs.

Each of them designed different melee mechs that fully conformed to all of the rules and limitations of the Wild Brawl Bowl.

Despite the relatively low budget and average resources at their disposal, the mech designer teams each stretched their design capabilities as best they could to make their melee mechs more pronounced.

Differences in background, education, career progression and ideology resulted in 32 different mechs.

When they were all moved in a single long row, everyone could make basic comparisons between them. There were plenty of similarities and differences between all of the mechs, and both the commentators and spectators eagerly discussed the points that stood out in their eyes.

[There are 20 humanoid mechs and 12 bestial mechs this time. The proportion of bestial mechs is somewhat higher on average considering the overall degree of popularity of the former.]

[This is the Wild Brawl Bowl! The humanoid mech frame possesses numerous advantages in melee combat, but the combat prowess of bestial mechs should not be underestimated!]

[Humanoid mechs conform greatly to the human physique.] A commentator explained to a less informed audience. [This allows mech pilots to transfer their personal combat skills to their mechs when interfacing with them. The use of weapons adds a lot of flexibility to a relatively weak base form. An extremely skilled fighter could easily defeat a superior mech by relying solely on excellent weapon handling.]

[All of that sounds great, but the effectiveness of humanoid mechs scales greatly with the strength and skill level of their mech pilots. If they are all piloted by elites who have attended the best academies of their respective states, then it is definitely worth it to pair them up with humanoid mechs, but what if they aren't available?]

[What do you mean by that?]

[Remember that many of the mech designer teams with older mech designers had to make do with second-string or third-string mech pilots. It is risky to rely on their skills to outfight their betters in a direct duel. I think it was a smart choice for the older teams to settle for bestial mech pilots. Even if these Wild Fighters are ranker lower, bestial mechs have a greater fault tolerance and is not as reliant on finesse and skill to overpower their opponents. Simple brute force is sufficient to defeat their opponents!]

War machines such as tiger mechs did not possess the flexibility and range of motion as swordsman mechs. Yet these bestial mechs didn't need to rely on these sophisticated attributes!

Bestial mechs were often constructed in a way that allowed them to make great use of their momentum to add a lot of force to their simple but brutal attacks. Blocking was only partially effective and the only way to truly negate their attacks was to dodge aside!

As long as a mech pilot overcame the initial hurdle of learning how to pilot a non-humanoid mech, they could rapidly increase their battle effectiveness as there were only a limited amount of moves they needed to master!

The appearance of all of these melee mechs made Ves more vigilant towards the teams behind them. The choice of designing bestial mechs was quite deliberate. Their reliance on mass and force to overpower opponents was quite a nightmare for mechs that could not easily deal with their aggression.

The swordsman mech that Ves and Ketis had designed was not that good at avoiding their charges, but their work could still defeat them in a straight battle by leveraging its bulk and physical might in a skillful manner.

[Which mech interests you the most at the moment?]

[The Zenomon Gamma definitely stands out from the other 31 mechs. The latter are all designed by duos that possessed different and mostly complementary specialties. The Zenomon Gamma developed by Miss Janessa Pellier and Miss Tifi Coslone is the only mech that possesses only a single pronounced advantage. The physical might of this axeman mech is quite immense. Its movements might not be fast, but one solid hack from its greataxe is enough to split most of its competitors into separate halves!]

[Does that make Team Destiny into a strong championship contender?]

[I would not go that just yet. Its chances will mostly depend on the opponents it will face in the fighting phase. If it encounters one of the few light mechs with blazing fast mobility, then the Zenomon Gamma's tournament run will come to an end. If this greataxe-wielding mech is matched with anything slower, then it will easily hold an advantage!]

The axe wielded by the Zenomon Gamma was a monstrous weapon. It was large and heavy enough to split shields and sunder armor in a single blow, but it wasn't as unwieldy as a great hammer. When piloted by a skilled mech pilot, the Zenomon Gamma could easily exert an enormous amount of pressure against most opponents!

"How do you think our Heart of Victor will fare against the Zenomon Gamma?" Ves quietly asked his design partner.

Ketis made a scoffing noise. "You are badly underestimating our swordsman mech if you think it is threatened by the Zenomon Gamma. That greataxe is dangerous, I admit, but just like greatswords, it takes a skilled mech pilot to make the best of them. Mr.

Lyain Kepper may not be that more skilled than the enemy mech pilot, but when he steps inside the cockpit of our swordsman mech, he won't be fighting alone."

That was true. Everyone who piloted a living mech could always rely on their partner to lend a hand. It was just that not many mechs were capable of providing as much assistance as purpose-built machines like the Heart of Victor!

[Speaking of slow and heavy mechs, Team Hammerfall has made an even stronger mech! The Fallen Retribution wields a hammer that is significantly heavier than the greataxe of the Zenomon Gamma. If Team Hammerfall's dwarven mech isn't so strong and stable, it wouldn't have been able to swing this hammer, let alone hold it in a solid grip!]

The pair of dwarven mech designers designed a dwarven mech that reminded Ves a lot of the Forgehammer mech regiment that the Larkinson Army once fought against.

Though the Iron Crusher model fielded by the Vulcanites was a spaceborn mech, the Fallen Retribution was fully landbound, and that made it a lot more convenient for the competition mech to exert its power!

Although it looked as if the Fallen Retribution was too slow and lumbering to repel faster mechs, Ves didn't think the Crenstin couple were that simple. They had to have implemented a way for the dwarven hammerman mech to fend off attacks from the rear.

When Ves studied the mech a little closer, he observed a few clues that made him increase his evaluation of the formidable dwarven mech.

[Team Youngbuck has managed to design quite a strong swordsman mech. Their Rayvin is armed with an impressively-designed plasma sword that does not not have to rely on physical force to cut through armor. With the temperatures this plasma sword can reach, it can burn through every obstacle as long as it is able to concentrate its attacks!]

[That is easier said than done. No enemy mech pilot will cooperate with the enemy. As long as the opponent of this plasma-wielding mech can drag the battle out, the Rayvin will rapidly lose its energy and become a sitting duck!]

[Before it runs out of juice, the Rayvin will definitely be one of the strongest mechs in the first minutes of a match. Unlike the prior two competition mechs, the Rayvin is one of the few mechs that possesses both strong offense and high mobility while still possessing decent defenses. It is the definite mech to beat in the early stages of a mech duel.]

Ves was surprised that a fellow competitor dared to design such an energy-hungry weapon system given the relatively limited resources at their disposal. However, he quickly recalled that Olivander Peese of Team Youngbuck excelled in energy swords.

He should have come prepared and must have made deliberate choices about how he implemented this plasma weapon system.

Overall, Ves was quite familiar with Team Youngbuck's strategy. The Pontifical Lance he designed in the last tournament followed the same concept but with a different mech type.

[As long as the Rayvin can leverage its momentary advantages to fell or at least cripple its opponent, it can easily achieve a lot of success. However, the Rayvin is only half as scary once its plasma sword loses power. Even the worst mech in the lineup can defeat a Rayvin that can only rely on its residual power to resist its opposition!]

Aside from admiring all of the humanoid mechs, the commentators also directed enough attention on the bestial mechs.

[Out of all of the bestial mechs in the competition, Team Blackspot's tiger mech or should I say panther mech is the most special.]

[I'm surprised that Team Blackspot has the guts to design a stealth mech. Then again, one of its two mech designers specializes in stealth systems. He must have a lot of confidence in the stealth and assassination capabilities of his Shadowclaw.]

The Shadowclaw was a black-coated feline mech that was slim, agile and surprisingly quiet. It incorporated a lot of design elements that expressly dampened its emissions and made the mech as hard to detect as possible!

[The existence of the Shadowclaw will test its opponents on whether they have invested enough in their sensor systems. Usually, detection capabilities are an afterthought in arena battles, but this time they are extremely relevant to the unlucky teams who are matched up against Team Blackspot. I can already loosely state that at least 70 percent of the mechs in the competition do not possess the sensors that allow them to detect the Shadowclaw in advance!]

That turned Team Blackspot into an unexpected dark horse in this tournament! The possibility that a mech could get pounced from an unexpected angle without any forewarning was an extremely grave threat!

Although the Shadowclaw's stealth systems prevented it from mounting any substantial form of armor, it didn't have to worry about getting hit if none of the other melee mechs knew where to swing their weapons!

[Another interesting bestial mech is the Parnast designed by Team Caper. It's one of the most advanced mechs of this cohort and can utilize its limbs in a surprising manner.]

[This octopus-like mech can easily turn into a nightmare to any mech as long as it is able to grapple and hold on to its target. If employed in the right way, the Parnast can neutralize the attack power of the enemy mech!]

[The Parnast has to be able to latch onto the enemy mech, though. A sufficient fast and agile mech can torment it while evading any grappling attempts. I doubt this octopus mech possesses any combat effectiveness against targets that have eluded its grasp.]

[There are plenty of mechs that are not too fast. The Parnast has a viable chance of winning several rounds if it encounters the right opponents.]

As the commentators kept pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of every mech, they finally turned to the swordsman mech that had already received a lot of appreciation from the audience.

[The Heart of Victor is a beautiful machine. I can hardly believe it was put together in just three days. Patriarch Ves Larkinson and Swordmaster Ketis Larkinson have exceeded my expectations. Though their mech design is rather basic, it is considerably more refined and smooth than the works of other teams. The reliability and resilience of this swordsman mech will undoubtedly be high as a consequence!]

[I hate to burst your bubble, but the design's simplicity means it has a lower ceiling. How will the Heart of Victor fare against stronger mechs? Without any apparent special solutions, it will hold no advantage in duels where every little detail matters.]

[Who says that the Heart of Victor is too basic? Just feel it. I can sense its battle lust from this distance. I have never experienced this from any other mech. In addition, the chainsword alone is something special. Did you all forget that Ketis has spilled her own blood to enhance this weapon?]

Everyone wondered what Ketis' little blood ritual had accomplished. No one knew whether this was a purely symbolic gesture or whether her blood truly made the Heart of Victor stronger.

They would soon be able to find out, as the first round of matches was scheduled to begin shortly!

Chapter 3503: Different Swords

Before the Wild Brawl Bowl moved on to the most exciting phase of the tournament, the staff quickly inspected the 32 competition mechs in order to verify they were all safe and valid.

Though the monitoring system had already tracked their creation from start to finish, the tournament organizers had to be strict and leave no doubt for cheating in order to maintain the credibility of the event.

This did not take long. As soon as the competition mechs were all cleared, the Wild Fighters quickly employed an unusual procedure to match the competition mechs against each other.

[For the first round of the fighting phase of the Wild Brawl Bowl, sixteen separate mech duels will take place. The loser will end its run right away while the winner shall advance to the next round. Now, let us fill in the tournament bracket!]

A large branching diagram projected in the middle of the enormous hall. Ves and every other tournament participant watched closely as its bottom side was about to become filled with names.

The method that the tournament organizers used to determine the order of names soon became clear as 32 voribugs appeared in a closed-off portion of the hall. Bots injected each of these native alien pests with a special chemical that completely scrambled their ability to distinguish allies from enemies.

The adult voribugs all uttered loud screeches as they charged each other and brawled in the middle!

There was no sense of order and reason in their behavior. Each of the voribugs acted like berserk animals that would not rest until every other enemy was dead!

The Wild Fighters had clearly marked the upper side of the voribug exoskeleton with the names of the different mech designer teams, so there was no ambiguity with regards to the order of names that appeared on the tournament bracket.

To be honest, it didn't really matter whether a voribug died early or late. The only wish the mech designers held was that their work wouldn't get matched up against a mech that could counter their efforts.

[Team Larkinson shall face off against Team Youngbuck in the first round!]

Ves almost jolted from his place. Of all of the possible opponents he might face, Team Youngbuck was certainly one of the more 'interesting' ones!

He quickly glanced in the other team's direction.

Neither Gerxer Dardan Nor Olivander Peese looked happy with this outcome. If the voribug associated with their team didn't perish at the exact wrong moment, they would have been able to avoid confronting the tournament favorite in the first round!

Now, all of their hopes and dreams could come crashing down after just a single match. Their proud Rayvin might not have the opportunity to show its impressive capabilities for long if the Heart of Victor managed to defeat the plasma sword-wielding mech!

Ves sympathized with the pair of young centrist mech designers. He used to be in their shoes less than a week ago. It was always an intimidating prospect to confront a tournament favorite.

He still felt odd about that. Ves had the feeling that his team turned into the bad guy in everyone else's eyes! Though the other mech designers regarded Ketis with a lot of respect, they definitely didn't want to become her opponent in any way!

"What do you think about Team Youngbuck's mech, Ketis?"

"It's is a good warmup for Lyain Kepper." She quietly responded. "The Rayvin is strong, but not too strong. Although it is powerful in the first few minutes, it is still within a tolerable range."

"Are you sure? That plasma sword can burn through anything, even weapons. It can even cut through the chain connecting the Heart of Victor's weapon to the mech frame."

"If Lyain Kepper fights carefully enough, he will never give the Rayvin a chance to cut the chain."

"That assumes that Mr. Kepper is able to outfight Mr. Giles Harnacher. Haven't you forgotten that Team Youngbuck has managed to snag the strongest and most skilled swordsman mech pilot?"

Ketis grinned. "Oh, I haven't forgotten. I was looking forward to challenging Team Youngbuck because of that. I admit that Mr. Dardan and Mr. Peese can design a good mech, but that has never been the sole victory condition. What actually matters is how well a mech can draw out the strength of its mech pilot and vice versa. I think that no one is able to do a better job at that than us in this tournament."

Ves felt the same way as well, but he didn't grow arrogant because of that. Establishing a good fit between a mech and mech pilot was valuable, but there were times when another combination of mech and mech pilot were simply too powerful despite their inferior cooperation.

As long as their raw strength was high enough, there was no need to rely on exquisite cooperation to win their matches!

Both the Rayvin and Mr. Harnacher were strong in their own right. The former was an advanced mech designed by a pair of centrist mech designers. The latter was the best swordsman mech pilot in the tournament.

Though Ves was confident in his own setup, it was never wise to underestimate an enemy. Team Youngbuck had the capital to pose a serious threat even if Mr. Dardan and Mr. Peese were the youngest pair of mech designers in the Wild Brawl Bowl.

Once all of the voribugs had their fun, the fighting stage soon began in earnest.

Unlike the High Tide Tournament, the Wild Brawl Bowl preferred to conduct its matches one by one. This would inevitably slow down the pace of the event, but would also draw much more attention to every match.

When the mech designers received the schedule for the first round, Ves and Ketis immediately noted that their match against Team Youngback was left for last.

"Figures." Ves grimaced. "The tournament organizers want to save the best for last. They don't want all of their remote viewers to tune out as soon as the most anticipated match has come to an end."

This meant that both Team Larkinson and Team Youngbuck had to remain in suspense for a long time while the others went ahead.

At least the other matches kept the mech designers entertained. Ves keenly observed the duels that erupted in the arena.

Ves had witnessed plenty of collisions between different mechs throughout his life, so the matches taking place before him weren't too special.

The mechs that fought against each other were all landbound mechs that were developed with relatively low design budgets. This led to fights where the mechs mostly relied on their basic combat capabilities to overpower or outmaneuver their opposition.

Although Ves was initially disappointed with the lack of high technology and advanced solutions, he soon developed an appreciation for the more basic and visceral combat that these conditions produced.

Heavy weapons slammed into solid mechs. Cutting weapons tore through armor. The mech frames sometimes collided against each other, causing both of them to become jarred!

Many of the more notable mechs that he was keeping his eye upon such as the Fallen Retribution each displayed some or all of their unique tricks.

In fact, when the Fallen Retribution got matched up against a light skirmisher, many people already thought the dwarven mech was destined to lose.

Yet Team Hammerfall's work defied everyone's expectations. Even though the Fallen Retribution failed to hit its opponents even once in the first minute, all of that changed once the light skirmisher was finally done with testing the hammer-wielding mech and circled around to attack it from the rear.

Even though the rear side of the Fallen Retribution had been reinforced with extra armor, the inability for the hammerman mech to quickly turn around meant that any light mech could deliver a lot of uninterrupted damage!

Yet instead of stabbing its knives through the rear of its target, the Fallen Retribution abruptly spun its entire upper torso by 180 degrees!

The dwarven mech did so while its two short legs were still firmly planted on the same position in the arena!

This unexpected move not only allowed the Fallen Retribution to defend attacks from the rear, but also impart a lot of rotational momentum on its greathammer!

The upper torso's rotational speed was surprisingly high. Ves didn't know how the pair of dwarven mech designers did it, but the speed and force of its rotation was terrifying!

The light skirmisher fighting against the dwarven mech stood no chance. Even if its mech pilot recognized the danger and wanted to turn away, the light mech had already committed to an attack.

It still took a bit of time for it to divert its trajectory or turn around, but by then the hammerhead had already arrived!

BANG!

That was the end of the Fallen Retribution's first opponent. The dwarven mech that many people thought was too slow to resist a light mech was actually able to release its strongest attack at its rear!

The mechanical systems needed to produce such a powerful rotational movement was quite difficult to implement in a mech. There was only limited space and even a broad dwarven mech could only offer so much capacity. Ves held a lot more respect towards Mr. Rondal Crenstin and Mrs. Gisella Crenstin for realizing this capability in just a limited amount of days.

"Looks like we should never attack the Fallen Retribution from behind."

That was quite a troubling conclusion as the dwarven mech was not weak when attacked from the front!

"This mech can only work against melee mechs."

If the Fallen Retribution had to fight against a ranged mech, then any decent rifleman mech could maintain its distance and slowly grind down the dwarven mech's thick armor plating at a steady pace.

More matches ensued. Some of them started and ended quickly while others turned into attrition battles where both sides did not dare to make any mistakes.

The mech designer teams weren't trying to achieve high scores this time. The only criteria for advancement in the next round was to win, and if the slow and steady approach was safer, then it was often the better course of action!

As a result, there were times when both Ves and much of the audience grew bored when they saw two spearman mechs cautiously poking each other from a respectable distance or two bestial mechs chasing each other's tails until one of them began to run low of energy.

Finally, the last and most anticipated match of the first round was about to commence!

Two different swordsman mechs stepped into the arena that had recently been cleared of all debris.

The green-and-gray swordsman mech exuded an unmistakably strong impression. Its glow caused everyone to develop the impression that it was a champion in the making. Just its sight inspired everyone's belief that it would achieve victory!

[The Heart of Victor is true to its name. It hasn't even made a single move and already I am thinking about how quickly it will crush its subsequent opponent.]

[Don't count the Rayvin out just yet. If you compare their specs, the mech designed by Team Youngbuck is unquestionably stronger in the first three minutes or so. Mr. Giles Harnacher is also a formidable swordsman mech pilot. Now that he is armed with the most lethal sword in the Wild Brawl Bowl, he will soon be able to terrorize his opponent!]

Though most people possessed an inexplicable confidence in the Heart of Victor, there were still plenty of people who placed their bets on the Rayvin.

The design prowess of a pair of centrist mech designers shouldn't be underestimated! The Rayvin was considerably faster and more agile than the Heart of Victor. As long as Harnacher made the most of his momentary advantages, it was not inconceivable for him to disarm his opponent!

Lyain Kepper knew this. He was anything but nervous, though. With the confidence instilled by his mech, only victory was on his mind at the moment!

"I won't let you beat me again, Giles!"

Chapter 3504: Rayvin

The two mechs squared off against each other. Neither Lyain Kepper nor Giles Harnacher were in a hurry to begin the fight.

Both mech pilots studied each other's swordsman mechs carefully.

It was obvious that while they belonged to the same mech type, their configurations were completely different.

The Heart of Victor was the larger and heavier of two. Though all of its mass and armor slowed it down, it also offered the mech a lot of buffer against powerful attacks, including those inflicted by a plasma sword.

While the mech designed by Team Larkinson would have been too rudimentary if that was all it had, the machine possessed at least two more advantages.

First, its chainsword weapon system granted it additional attack options. It did not have to get up close in order to deal damage, and that was a rare capability in a contest that prohibited ranged weapons.

Second, the glow of the mech exerted a dual psychological influence.

Lyain Kepper had always been a little intimidated by Giles Harnacher. The Wild Fighters who volunteered to take part in the Wild Brawl Bowl mostly knew each other as they regularly sparred and practiced with each other.

Harnacher had always established his superiority during these sessions. Though Lyain was able to win a few bouts, more often than not he had to admit defeat in front of the more skilled and talented swordsman mech pilot.

If Lyain was piloting any other mech, he would have entered this match with a lot less confidence than normal. Giles had left a considerable psychological shadow in his mind.

Yet with the Heart of Victor constantly propping up his confidence, Lyain no longer thought that he would necessarily have to be the lesser this time.

"I can beat you! I'm piloting the best mech in the Wild Brawl Bowl and I've received personal instruction from a swordmaster. There is no reason for me to lose this time!"

Just this mental shift was enough to ensure that Lyain Kepper would go all-out this time!

As for Giles Harnacher, he had always been confident in his own abilities. He did not need to be stimulated in order to chase after victory.

The only anomaly this time was that the glow of the Heart of Victor impacted him as well. Though the influence wasn't particularly significant for now, the foreign glow still affected his mental balance, if only slightly.

"How annoying."

Giles Harnacher knew that the only way to get rid of this sensation was to take out the mech in front of him! Nothing less would be able to restore his peace!

"Enough delays. Let's start."

The Rayvin finally activated its powerful plasma sword. A line of fixed plasma began to appear along its length! The deadly hot matter was solidly suspended in place by magnetic fields, which essentially turned it into a powerful cutting implement.

In fact, the tech wasn't actually too advanced. Industrial-grade plasma cutters were common tools in many plants and factories.

The most crucial difference was that ordinary plasma cutters could take their time to part through metal while the Rayvin's plasma sword had to accomplish the same in just a second!

This meant that the plasma sword actually expended a lot more power even if its scale was taken into consideration. Just leaving it active already outputted so much heat energy that the air around the weapon became distorted due to heating up the surrounding molecules!

This was an undesirable phenomena to the Rayvin. The mech only carried a limited amount of energy cells and could not afford to waste it all by acting as an oversized oven!

This was why the energy level of the plasma sword quickly receded to a more sustainable level. Though it was still outputting a considerable amount of wasted energy, it would only get back to full power when it was about to strike a target!

Even so, the Rayvin couldn't maintain this state for long.

Harnacher's main priority was to make sure that the Rayvin's plasma sword transferred as much energy as possible to the Heart of Victor. He no longer delayed the confrontation any further.

"Burn!" He roared as the Rayvin rapidly dashed forward with its plasma sword ready to strike!

Yet before the Rayvin could move past the halfway point, the Heart of Victor had issued its own response.

Kepper moved his mech to the side. His mech constantly had to stay on the move in order to remain responsive. It did not have to move as quickly as the Rayvin, but as long as it remained in motion, it was able to handle its weapon with considerably greater ease.

[The Heart of Victor is taking action! Watch its sword!]

The swordsman mech launched its sword at the Rayvin!

Chains continued to clatter as they grew more taut as the weapon it was attached to kept moving away.

Due to the mech's sideways motion, the trajectory of the chained sword was not straight, but instead flew at an angle. The Heart of Victor was even able to affect the flight path of the thrown sword even further by pulling one end of the chain in a specific direction!

Clang!

While a tossed weapon was a considerable threat, a mech pilot as good as Harnacher easily dealt with this attack. The Rayvin turned the flat of its blade against the attack and managed to deflect the incoming projectile with a lot of effort.

Even though it was not easy to deflect such a substantial metal object, the Rayvin did so with minimal exertion!

Harnacher even instructed his mech to step to the side before the chainsword returned akin to a boomerang!

Lyain already expected his adversary to be able to defend against this attack with ease, but he did not give up on his course of action. The Heart of Victor immediately threw out its sword once again!

Though the Rayvin successfully deflected the weapon once again, the flat side of its surface began to show numerous scratches and slight stress marks.

A plasma sword was not as sturdy as a plain sword made out of solid alloys!

As a technological weapon system, the plasma sword contained plenty of internal components and circuitry. While all of these parts enabled the weapon to maintain such a hot edge, it also weakened the structural strength of the entire object!

This was a well-known weakness of the plasma swords. They simply couldn't withstand as much physical force, especially when it was applied at a perpendicular angle along their length!

All of this might sound complicated, but there was a simple way to preserve the plasma sword's integrity.

"I have to take out my opponent as quickly as possible!"

There was no way that the Rayvin would allow the Heart of Victor to launch its chainsword over and over again. Harnacher was already under considerable time pressure and the constant chain attacks only prompted him to go faster!

When the Rayvin almost caught up with the Heart of Victor, the latter had already retracted its weapon.

Lyain did not intend to throw his weapon again!

Instead, the Heart of Victor held the sword solidly in its grip and eagerly awaited the arrival of its enemy.

Fzzz-Clang!

A strange noise erupted as the two blades finally crossed in earnest!

The plasma sword attempted to cut through the flat of the chainsword, but the latter was too resilient to burn through in a short amount of time!

Although its surface layer was already beginning to melt in a distressing manner, the Heart of Victor quickly retracted its weapon before it began to launch its counter-attack!

The two swordsman mechs quickly began to exchange blows with each other. The differences between them became more clear over the span of a dozen seconds.

The Heart of Victor struggled to catch up with its adversary's moves. It was slower, bulkier and sometimes even failed to stop the plasma sword from moving past its guard!

The armor of Team Larkinson's mech sizzled at the plasma sword attempted to cut through the thick plating, to little avail.

There was plenty of buffer for the Heart of Victor to sustain this attack for a time!

Lyain Kepper did not waste this chance. The Heart of Victor's chainsword stabbed out and quickly forced the Rayvin to jump back before it suffered a strong blow.

"Tch! If I can do it once, I can do it again!" Harnacher spat.

The Rayvin jumped in again and utilized its superior agility and maneuverability to move its plasma sword past the chainsword and land another burning strike against the Heart of Victor's frontal armor plating.

Unfortunately, Harnacher was unable to land the attack on the surface that had previously been burned. His opponent was doing its best to keep its damaged sections out of the way of the plasma sword.

"So what? Your mech will keep incurring more scars until there is nothing left untouched!"

The Rayvin turned into a devil for the next minute. It continued to outmaneuver and land blow after blow on the Heart of Victor.

The beating was so one-sided to the audience that their expectations for Team Larkinson abruptly crashed to a halt.

"Why isn't the Heart of Victor fighting back?"

"It's too slow!"

"Doesn't that mean it's a bad mech?"

"I guess it is. How can Team Larkinson leave out a way for their work to fight against faster opponents? This match has become completely absurd!"

"I waited hours to see this mech win! If I knew it was going to get burned by this, I would have left this place a long time ago!"

As the disappointment and dismay among the crowd kept building up, neither Ves nor Ketis showed a lot of concern.

A few of the expert commentators also noticed a few clues.

[Have you noticed that while the Heart of Victor is continually incurring damage, Mr. Lyain Kepper has always been able to ensure the damage is spread out as much as possible? He even turns his mech a few times in order to make sure that the incoming heat damage is dispersed to the sides!]

[You're correct. There is little the Rayvin can do about it. It is fast, but not to the point where it can precisely control where its plasma sword can land. If this pattern continues, then the Rayvin might run out of power before it can breach the Heart of Victor's armor!]

The commentators were flabbergasted by this conclusion. The Rayvin was a powerful mech that showed a lot of superiority at the moment. How could it falter in such an ignoble manner?

Giles Harnacher realized his predicament as well. Although a large part of the Heart of Victor had already melted, much of it only affected its surface layers!

He had to try harder to concentrate the Rayvin's attacks on the same section of the enemy mech. To that end, he began to pilot his mech more aggressively! He needed to make bolder moves in order to inflict real damage onto the Heart of Victor!

It was at this time that Lyain Kepper finally smirked.

"I've been waiting for this, old friend. You've lost your cool."

Though the Rayvin's ferocity put the Heart of Victor in a much worse position, Lyain made a surprising move.

It stopped attempting to block or evade the incoming plasma sword and instead struck out with an all-out offensive strike!

The timing that Lyain had chosen was almost perfect! Even though the Heart of Victor was not capable of reacting too quickly, its move was still launched at a time when the Rayvin would find it difficult to change its course!

"Oh no you don't!"

The Rayvin's legs burst with lots of power that forcibly displaced the swordsman mech to the side!

Yet even as the mech evaded the incoming sword attack with a lot more speed than normal, the Heart of Victor turned its thrusting attack into a throw attack and launched the sword forward!

Though the blade of the sword failed to impact the distancing Rayvin, it cleverly threaded between the legs. The chain soon collided against one of the limbs, causing the Rayvin to act as a temporary fulcrum that caused the sword to spin around and fly straight back towards the Heart of Victor!

Lyain was already prepared for this and made sure his swordsman mech caught the blade. Once it did, the Heart of Victor entered a stable stance and began to yank the chain, causing it to press tightly onto the Rayvin's trapped leg!

Giles Harnacher had never imagined that one of his overreaching attacks would lead to such a result! As the Rayvin began to trip and fall due to one of its legs being pulled back from the angle, he belatedly realized that his opponent had been in control of this match from the beginning.

CRASH!

The Rayvin suffered one of the greatest humiliations a mech could suffer in a duel.

It fell flat on its face.

Though the swordsman mech quickly tried to climb back onto its feet, the Heart of Victor soon arrived and pressed its foot against the Rayvin's back, thereby completely removing its ability to move.

Harnacher was still in disbelief as he tried and failed to extricate his mech from its trapped position.

Unfortunately, the Rayvin lacked far too much physical strength to dislodge the weight that was pressing on its back.

Its plasma sword was completely useless as well! After all, how could the swordsman mech possibly swing its weapon so far back?

Giles Harnacher wasn't stupid. The more he pieced together the course of the battle, the more he understood that his opponent had held back.

"If you're this good, why did you endure so many attacks from my mech?" He transmitted.

"Because the chance of winning this match was higher this way. I just needed to wait for you to make a mistake before I could end you in a single move." Lyain Kepper responded. "Victory is my only goal. The damage that you have dealt to my mech will get fixed anyway."

Although Lyain was right, the strategy he adopted was still dangerous. If he wasn't good enough to prevent the plasma sword from cutting through the same section of armor, the Heart of Victor might have easily succumbed before the Rayvin revealed an opening!

The mech pilot wasn't interested in talking any further. It stepped up completely onto the Rayvin's helpless back. The excessive weight of the Heart of Victor quickly crushed the immobilized mech's armor and squashed all of the structural parts underneath!

[Team Larkinson advanced to the second round. The Heart of Victor has decisively crushed the Rayvin!]

This was a quick but bizarre victory! The audience clapped, but only reluctantly... The Heart of Victor hardly showed any brilliance this time. Was it strong or did everyone misjudge its strength?

Chapter 3505: Friendly Exchange

Team Larkinson easily passed the first round of the fighting phase. Though Ves and Ketis were both pleased with this straightforward win, they did not become too overconfident.

Numerous other mechs in the tournament showed great strength as well. Ves couldn't say whether the Heart of Victor could defeat them 100 percent of the time.

"It's a pity that those two kids have to bow their heads in defeat so quickly." He muttered as he threw a gaze in the direction of the Journeymen he defeated.

The mech designers of Team Youngbuck probably deserved to advance from the first round. Mr. Dardan and Mr. Peese had managed to design a considerably more advanced mech than other Journeymen. The integration of the power systems and the complete design of a functional plasma sword out of limited materials and components was nothing less than genius!

If the criteria for winning Wild Brawl Bowl was solely based on the sophistication of a mech design, Team Youngbuck would have definitely taken first place!

The problem for the centrist mech designers was that their mech still needed to prove its chops by defeating opposing mechs. The fact that their Rayvin entered the arena with great fanfare only to suffer a humiliating defeat signaled that their approach was flawed!

Their defeat was especially egregious considering that the swordsman mech was piloted by Giles Harnacher, the best swordsman mech pilot available in the tournament!

As the shock of the abrupt defeat began to fade among the public, plenty of people began to discuss the odd progression of the final match in the first round.

[Team Youngbuck is made up of talented, young mech designers, but they have made the same mistake that everyone from the galactic center has made.]

[And what is that, sir?]

[Mr. Dardan and Mr. Peese have overengineered their mech design.] The old and wise voice stated. [Their augmented heads are filled with advanced theories and methodologies and they have always been trained to make the best use of them. That's fine in a normal work environment, but the Wild Brawl Bowl is different. As its name suggests, it is all about wild fighting. Somehow, the theme and conditions of this mech design tournament have eluded their clever heads. Instead of working to use the relatively low-tech materials and mech component designs as intended, Team Youngbuck stretched these resources in order to design a vast array of advanced parts and systems.]

[The efforts of Dardan and Peese paid off, though. Their Zemonon Gamma is truly powerful according to its spec sheets. Their upfront power ranked close to the top in the first few minutes. Their only fault is to get matched against the tournament favorites right away.]

[I don't rate the Rayvin as highly as you. There is a considerable chance it would have lost even if it fought against another mech. The reason for that is the same reason why

the Heart of Victor managed to overcome this plasma swordsman mech with relative ease. Their fault tolerances are too far apart.]

[Fault tolerance?]

[There are in fact more reasons behind the Rayvin's loss, but this is the principal reason. Did you count how many plasma sword strikes the Heart of Victor withstood? Even with the clever maneuvering of Mr. Kepper, it is still difficult to keep a mech fully functional when hit with such a sustained barrage of attacks. Yet the mech pilot had absolute faith in his mech! This is not a coincidence, but the result of Team Larkinson's great attention towards the integrity and fault tolerance of their machine. The Heart of Victor isn't as high-tech as the Rayvin, but their structural integrity is so far apart that the latter is practically a house of cards! High-tech cards, but that made little difference!]

The explanation of the expert commentator finally illuminated one of the subtle brilliances of the Heart of Victor.

On the surface, it was just a fairly basic swordsman mech that was armed with a chainsword.

What few laymen understood was that there was a lot of strength beneath its exterior. The internal architecture was solid and robust. It could incur a lot of damage and still keep going. Both its redundancy and compartmentalization factors ranked among the top of all of the competition mechs!

The commentator let out an admiring sound. [This is a design approach that harkens back to third-class mech design. Many people here in Vulit probably looks down on lesser mechs, but they have their own advantages. Nothing can make mech designers more efficient than if they are forced to work with limited resources. It should be no surprise that the Heart of Victor embodies this design approach so well considering that Patriarch Ves Larkinson and Swordmaster Ketis Larkinson were originally third-class mech designers.]

[From a strategic perspective, Team Larkinson managed to make the most gains from this victory. Sure, the Heart of Victor does not look good at the moment, but all of this is surface damage that can easily be repaired before the next round commences. What is more important is that the Heart of Victor and Mr. Kepper has refrained from showing their true strength. This will leave the other fifteen competitors who have managed to advance to the second round in the dark. Whoever is unlucky enough to get matched against the Larkinsons will not be able to make a lot of preparations.]

Ves nodded when he heard the commentary. In competitions like these, it was important to take the bigger picture into account. Team Larkinson had a good shot at winning the championship, but that didn't mean that the other mech designer teams were pushovers.

He fought through enough battles to know that information was power. The more he understood an enemy, the more he could prepare counters for the next battle.

The same concept applied here. With four more rounds to go, the Heart of Victor should ideally save the best for last. Though Ves had instructed Lyain Kepper to go all-out if the opposition was strong enough, he hoped that moment wouldn't come too soon.

Now that the first round had fully concluded, a short break ensued before the Wild Brawl Bowl commenced its second round.

Only half of the sixteen competition mechs in contention would be able to proceed from that point.

Entering into the top 8 already guaranteed the survivors a worthwhile payoff. No one would be unhappy if they lost after that point, though everyone hoped to climb higher and attain more carrier vessels.

When Ves and Ketis headed to the backstage area, they quickly worked to supervise the rapid repair process of the Heart of Victor.

Since hardly any of the internals incurred damage in the previous match, Team Larkinson did not have to put much effort in bringing the mech back to peak condition. The automated repair processes could perform most of the monotonous work themselves.

What interested the Larkinson mech designers more was to discuss the previous fight and prepare for the next one with their mech pilot.

"Did I do well?" Lyain Kepper earnestly asked Ketis.

"You did well enough. You made the right choice to hide the full extent of your improved swordsmanship. It must have been hard to restrain yourself."

"Not really." Lyain grinned and shook his head. "I'm eager to show off my improvements, but it's much better to do that in the last round rather than the first round."

"That's a good mindset, but remember that winning is our ultimate goal." Ves cautioned. "Be careful not to get too clever for your own good. Listen to your mech and your instincts. Both will guide you in the right direction."

After a brief but fruitful discussion, the second round of the fighting phase quickly commenced. Every mech designer had to get back to the spectator platform where they were no longer able to instruct and advise their mech pilots.

Though only half of the design teams were still in contention, the Journeymen who had lost the first round were still around.

The two mech designers of Team Youngbuck took the initiative to approach the team that defeated them in the first round.

"Good fight." Gerxer Dardan said as he shook hands with Ves.

"Likewise." Ves replied in a friendly tone. "I would have preferred to fight against you in a later round."

"I know, but this is the way that single elimination brackets work. Luck is also a factor in determining how far you can go, although strength is the greatest guarantee for advancement."

While the two got to know each other better, Olivander Peese had already starting to exchange with Ketis. Both of them were avid about swordmaking and happily shared their own insights about the topic.

Nothing needed to be said about Ketis' qualifications. Her basics and depth of comprehension was extremely solid, but Olivander Peese surprisingly introduced her to a lot of new material.

Though Olivander's foundation was not as deep, he was a talented centrist mech designer who mastered a plentiful amount of high technology. Developing a plasma sword was actually one of his more basic applications!

As the matches of the second round took place, Team Larkinson and Team Youngbuck continued to grow closer to each other. They even exchanged comm contact information so that they could get in touch more often.

Of course, Dardan and Peese were not that interested in Ves. Their fields of expertise diverged too far from each other. Though they were able to teach a lot new insights to each other, their lack of shared understanding meant that most of what they said wasn't useful to the recipient.

It was like a physicist trying to teach quantum mechanics to a pianist. It was absurd to think that the latter would easily pick up the advanced knowledge without knowing any science!

Ketis was Team Youngbuck's true goal. Though her engineering foundation was not as good as that of Ves, her expertise in swordsmanship and swordsman mech turned her into an authority in these fields!

Since Team Youngbuck no longer took part in the Wild Brawl Bowl, the two centrist Journeymen were no longer competitors. Ketis did not feel the need to hold back as

much as she began to point out the issues that Dardan and Peese needed to work on in order to design a more effective swordsman mech.

For their part, the two impressed Journeymen happily reciprocated the lessons they received by passing on a bit of the advanced knowledge they possessed.

Ves looked enviously at the trio of sword maniacs. They had already erected a jammer field around their little group in order to keep their discussion private. There was no reason to share their valuable insights to others without receiving anything relevant in return.

"I wish there were more mech designers like me around here." He quietly muttered.

It would have been nice if he was able to exchange or collaborate with other mech designers whose specialties resembled his own. He knew it was unlikely that those mech designers existed.

Even if there were a handful of mech designers out there who specialized in some aspect of life, the chance of bumping into them was miniscule! Human space was just too enormous and the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy was already filled with trillions of humans!

He knew that the only realistic way to surround himself with mech designers who shared the same interests as him was to raise them himself. He could steer students like Maikel Larkinson into a related specialty, but his best option was to raise the right mech designers from the people he could trust the most, his direct family!

"I need more kids." He quietly said.

As Ves wondered about how long he needed to wait until Gloriana was ready to have her second child, the matches of the second round slowly concluded.

It was finally time for Team Larkinson to show off their work once again!

[The final match of the second round will pit a humanoid mech against a bestial mech! Will Team Larkinson be able to fend off the tentacles of Team Caper? Let's find out!]

Chapter 3506: Parnast

Team Caper designed an unusual mech for the Wild Brawl Bowl.

Just like the mech designers of Team Youngbuck, the pair of Journeymen of Team Caper originated from the galactic center.

While Ves did not fear second-class mech designers who came from this prosperous region as greatly as before, they were still formidable in their own ways.

Ves considered Team Caper to be a much graver threat than Team Youngbuck.

While Team Youngbuck designed a strong swordsman mech, its young and inexperienced mech designers fell too much in love with their own advanced tech and failed to adapt to the circumstances of the Wild Brawl Bowl.

Team Caper did not make the same mistake. The duo were older and probably had plenty of tournament experience. They chose to design a mech that not only aligned with their specialties but also happened to counter a lot of competition mechs in this tournament!

"Of all of the teams we could fight against in the second round, Team Caper is the least desirable one." Ves said.

"Our mech can take the octopus mech." Ketis reassured him. "Lyain Kepper just needs to follow the brief plan that I have passed on to him. The Parnast is definitely a tricky mech, but its fighting approach is quite simple and one-dimensional. As long as our Heart of Victor can overcome it, then it should easily be able to win this match."

The two mechs appeared in the arena once again. The public became a lot more interested now that two strong machines faced off against each other.

Though the Heart of Victor did not perform in an impressive manner in the previous match, it was still a mech developed by a highly-rated team. Much of the audience hoped that it would show its true strength this time.

As for the Parnast, the octopus mech was definitely one of the weirdest machines designed in this tournament.

It looked exactly as it sounded. The Parnast was a giant, mechanical octopus that traversed the ground in a weird manner with its eight segmented limbs.

What was impressive and fearsome about this Parnast was that its limbs were all strong. This mech was all about exerting as much mechanical power through its octopus limbs as possible!

To that end, the strength of each limb was equivalent to the strength of a leg of a humanoid mech.

This did not sound too alarming at first, but when eight of them were installed on a single mech frame, then that led to a considerable transformation that could easily grab and crush any target within range!

[In its previous match, the Parnast has already shown that it is the nemesis of melee mechs. The poor humanoid mech it fought against was barely able to inflict surface

damage on the sturdy tentacles before those sinuous limbs entangled its limbs and frame!]

The sight of the octopus mech literally latching onto the humanoid mech before it used its superior mechanical strength to steadily crush its prey was horrifying!

No mech pilot would want to get caught like this. If the octopus mech grappled an enemy mech in the right manner, it could neutralize all means of retaliation.

The biggest priority of Lyain Kepper was to prevent his Heart of Victor from getting caught by the Parnast!

"This isn't going to be easy." He muttered inside the cockpit of his swordsman mech.

He did not let that discourage him, though. He and his mech were still confident that they could handle this strange bestial mech.

Once the match commenced, both mechs began to move!

The octopus mech had only one means of attack, so it directly slithered over to the Heart of Victor.

The closer it got to its prey, the faster it could submerge the swordsman mech with its limbs!

As for the Heart of Victor, there was no way that Lyain was stupid enough to let the Parnast get close for free.

Even though the swordsman mech was not a particularly fast-moving machine, it was actually a bit lighter than the octopus mech, so it was able to maintain a continuous distance from the approaching threat.

This was not a permanent solution, though. The Parnast may be a larger and heavier machine, but it also moved with eight limbs at once!

Though it expended a lot of energy in order to power all of its strong and heavy limbs, the octopus mech had plenty of reserves to spare due to its large size.

Therefore, Lyain's actual goal wasn't to outrun the chasing octopus mech, but to delay the moment of contact as much as possible.

In the meantime, the Heart of Victor turned its torso just enough to throw its chainsword at the eight-limbed machine!

Clang!

The sword collided against one of the eight tentacles before bouncing away. Lyain already expected this result and quickly commanded the Heart of Victor to retract its chain and manipulate it with its two arms so that the chainsword would fly at the Parnast once again!

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

The Heart of Victor made the most out of its ranged advantage and constantly struck the Parnast with repeated blows.

The impact of these strikes was not that impressive, though. Each of the Parnast's limbs were thick and strong and there were eight of them. If the mech pilot of the octopus mech thought that one of the limbs took a bit too much abuse, he could just turn the orientation of this mech around and not lose any speed in the process!

"It's an omnidirectional mech." Ketis noted. "There are no real sides or rear for the Parnast. It can move and attack in any direction."

Ves nodded. "Team Caper is certainly an interesting bunch for designing such an odd mech under the circumstances."

He had already studied the background of the duo that made up this team. It turned out that one of them was actually an amphibian mech designer.

Although the Parnast wasn't optimized for amphibian combat, Ves could easily imagine it becoming a terror in water environments with a few changes.

Though the arena did not feature a speck of water, the Parnast was still able to move quickly. Together with its tough frame and strong mechanical power, it seemed as if this mech was impossible to overcome in a direct collision!

[The Heart of Victor's chain attacks are not dealing enough damage. It is difficult to damage one of the eight limbs when the Parnast is easily able to rotate its orientation. All of the damage it has incurred so far consists of moderate surface damage. I cannot see the swordsman mech doing any better unless it commits to a stronger attack.]

[That sounds dangerous. Entering into melee range with an octopus mech is a recipe for disaster!]

[Who knows. No mech is invincible. The Parnast is strong in several areas, but its design also contains numerous tradeoffs. I am curious to see whether the Heart of Victor can exploit these weaknesses.]

After several minutes of constant running and chasing, the octopus mech almost managed to catch up to the swordsman mech!

The Heart of Victor had stopped throwing its chainsword at this point as it would not be able to maintain its best speed when doing this. Just running wasn't enough to win this match, though.

[It's pouncing!]

Though the Parnast still had to overcome a short distance in order to grapple the Heart of Victor, it simultaneously used all of its eight octopus limbs in order to leap ahead!

Lyain Kepper already expected his opponent to do this. Though the Heart of Victor did not excel at evasion, the mech had already dashed aside before the Parnast could get close!

"My chance is here!"

Just like the previous time, Lyain had been lying in wait until his opponent revealed an opening.

The Parnast was ordinarily a dangerous mech to attack, the leap it had just performed was a hefty move that required plenty of time to recover from! To be more precise, the octopus mech had to bear the heavy impact of its landing by utilizing all of its limbs as temporary springs.

This left the Parnast briefly open and completely unable to make any other moves!

The Heart of Victor had already turned around to approach and stab one of the Parnast's limbs!

Since the swordsman mech held its weapon properly and attacked with a bit of momentum behind the move, the stab had finally managed to breach the armor of one of the eight tentacles!

The Parnast quickly tried to retaliate even as the Heart of Victor pulled back. Several limbs surged forward, but the swordsman mech already pulled back out of range.

A new and more intense stage of the battle had commenced as the two mechs began to tussle against each other at close range.

The Heart of Victor had to concentrate most of its power on trying to evade the enemy machine's powerful tentacles. It barely had any opportunity to launch any attacks, but to Lyain's credit he was still managing to inflict slow but consistent damage onto the octopus mech.

As the struggle continued, many people in the audience expected the Parnast to catch up and grasp the Heart of Victor, yet as the minutes went by, nothing of the sort had happened.

For some reason, the Heart of Victor continually succeeded in anticipating and evading the Parnast's powerful leaps!

When the mech designers of Team Caper witnessed their mech's continual failure to capture the Heart of Victor, they grew increasingly more concerned.

As this dangerous pattern continued to unfold in the arena, something had finally changed!

When the Parnast leapt and missed its prey before landing onto the ground with a strong impact, the force of its landing had finally caused one of its tentacles to malfunction!

The discordant element became obvious as the Parnast struggled to move forward with one crippled limb.

It was no coincidence that the failing limb happened to be the one that the Heart of Victor had managed to stab from the start!

Though the Parnast's fault tolerance was quite respectable, the damaged tentacle simply wasn't capable of withstanding so many kinetic impacts. All of those jumping and landing motions rattled the damaged limb and put more stress on the weakened part.

Now that it finally broke from all of the abuse, the Parnast decisively ejected the limb from its frame. The damaged and useless tentacle detached from its connection point and fell onto the arena ground.

The movement of the Parnast had changed. A hole had formed in its limb coverage. Though its mass had lightened, it also had one less limb to move around.

"It's leaps have become easier to dodge!"

"The Heart of Victor can attack the Parnast more easily!"

"The fighting rhythm of the Parnast has been disrupted!"

The octopus mech had grown weaker while the Heart of Victor still retained the same battle effectiveness. Though the changes were rather small, Team Larkinson's swordsman mech was able to deal with its opponent a bit more effectively than before.

The Parnast soon had to part a second tentacle!

This time, its mobility and performance was affected in a more serious way. Just when everyone thought that the Heart of Victor would continue with its scumbag strategy of playing hard to get, Lyain Kepper abruptly switched his approach and launched an all-out attack, much to the surprise of the audience!

The spectators weren't the only ones caught off-guard. The mech pilot of the Parnast also didn't expect the swordsman mech to turn around and go on the attack.

After so much time spent on chasing after the Heart of Victor, he had long developed contempt towards the swordsman mech. All of the hype and dread surrounding this mech had long faded from his mind.

Though the Parnast already moved to repel the attack, the chainsword had already stabbed deeply into one of the limbs!

This time, the blow was more serious. The third tentacle had to be scrapped right away!

When the octopus mech finally launched an attack that looked close to succeeding, the Heart of Victor did not retreat.

Instead, it jumped and actually climbed on top of the octopus mech's structure!

It had let go of its sword and grasped two of the closest tentacles to block them from doing anything detrimental.

Though there were three other intact tentacles that had managed to grab hold of the mech frame, they were not strong enough on their own to stop the Heart of Victor from getting into position!

The Parnast groaned and collapsed onto the ground. It was unable to move as all of its limbs were preoccupied with trying to grapple and crush the Heart of Victor!

[There's too few tentacles! Three of them are not strong enough to crush through the tough exterior of the swordsman mech!]

In a strange repeat of its previous match, the Heart of Victor began to stomp the mech underneath its feet once again!

The Parnast was tougher than the Zenomon Gamma, so it took a bit more stomping in order to crush its armor.

However, the match had already been decided as soon as the Heart of Victor had managed to reach this position.

Crush!

With one final stomp, the swordsman mech broke through the top armor of the Parnast and destroyed enough systems to cripple the octopus mech's powerful engine!

[Team Larkinson... has won again!]

Chapter 3507: Zenomon Gamma

Team Larkinson managed to advance into the third round in an odd manner once again.

The audience managed to enjoy a more thrilling battle this time, though the truly exciting moment only happened at the end.

No one blamed the Heart of Victor for evading the Parnast for so long. No mech would feel good after getting embraced by eight strong tentacles. It was the right course of action to harass it from a distance while waiting for opportunities to inflict serious damage.

The extended battle also revealed additional details about the Heart of Victor's overall strength. The mech was not only tough, but also quite powerful when it was able to launch committed attacks.

What was especially concerning to the remaining rivals was its mech pilot. Mr. Lyain Kepper not only displayed plenty of foresight and planning ability, but also piloted the Heart of Victor with great skill!

The Heart of Victor's first fight did not properly display this advantage, but its second fight left no doubt that not any mech pilot would be able to dismantle the Parnast as easily as Mr. Kepper!

[They say that one of the great strengths of Patriarch Ves Larkinson is how well his customers adapt to his mechs. It sounds rather trivial when you only hear about it, but seeing the Heart of Victor being operated in such a smooth manner makes me think that there is real value in this advantage. The other competition mechs are also powerful, but their operation is still not optimal.]

[That's normal. The mech pilots are all decent but that doesn't mean they can master a new mech instantly. The situation becomes even more complicated when we're talking about competition mechs that were designed and built in just three days. Such machines are often burdened with many flaws and inefficiencies that hinder a smooth piloting experience.]

The Heart of Victor obviously broke this pattern. Everyone recognized that this swordsman mech would definitely be more challenging to overcome when it was being piloted as if the mech pilot had already spent months on mastering its controls!

The first day of the fighting phase had ended. The first and second round consisted of so many individual mech duels that the remaining rounds could only take place the next day.

This offered the mech designer teams that still had a shot of winning the Wild Brawl Bowl a precious moment of respite. They not only received additional time to repair and tweak their mechs, but could also discuss more extensively with their mech pilots.

There were only 8 teams left in the tournament. At this point, it became a lot easier to prepare for every remaining opponent. Neither Ves nor Ketis expected to win their subsequent matches as easily as before.

"The Heart of Victor has exposed much of its strength by now." Ves explained. "Even if not all of its capabilities are clear, those Journeymen aren't stupid. Our competitors should be able to infer a lot of clues based on our mech's actions in the previous two rounds."

Ketis nodded. "The mechs that have managed to win twice in a row shouldn't be weak either. Lyain, I think you need to show actual swordsmanship this time in order to beat the other seven competition mechs. It will be especially important when you fight against a humanoid mech armed with a weapon. Skill and judgment will be decisive in defeating your opponent."

"I understand." Lyain Kepper nodded in a serious manner. "I will do my best to prepare for the next match."

The day came and went. The next morning, the arena began to fill up again. Many spectators from last time had returned, but they were also joined by hundreds of thousands of additional ticket holders who wanted to witness the finals of this increasingly more exciting tournament.

The fights became more intense as the winners of the previous rounds all encountered tougher opposition. The tournament organizers also introduced more delays between the matches in order to create more room for commentary and analysis.

The remaining eight competition mechs and the teams that made them received a lot more attention than before. The hype surrounding the top 8 escalated as any of them had a realistic shot of making it into the finals.

After witnessing three thrilling matches, the Heart of Victor finally received its turn.

[Now this will be a proper bout! Team Larkinson must fight against Team Destiny! Will the Heart of Victor be able to outfight the Zenomon Gamma, or will this formidable greataxe-wielding mech be able to crush the defenses of this tricky swordsman mech once and for all? Whatever the case, neither mech will be able to defeat the other with ease! This upcoming match should be a lot more exciting this time!]

Expectations were high this time as both the Heart of Victor and the Zenomon Gamma appeared to have met their match this time.

When the two mechs stepped onto the arena, it became clear that the Zenomon Gamma was a little larger. The mech held a formidable greataxe that could even cut through the Heart of Victor's armor system if it unleashed a powerful chop!

"Team Destiny, huh? Their mech is certainly interesting compared to the rest."

What made the Zenomon Gamma stand out was that it was a mech that was affected by only a single design philosophy. Janassa Pellier and Tifi Coslone were both direct disciples of the same Master Mech Designer.

As a result, their collaboration yielded a different mech that only benefited from a single specialty but implemented it very well. The performance of the design was also a notch above the rest because its two designers knew each other's work so well.

"It makes the Zenomon Gamma look as if it was designed in 6 days instead of 3 days." Ves muttered.

Many other people recognized this difference as well. The Zenomon Gamma was more optimized and ran considerably smoother for that reason.

What was strange was that the Heart of Victor enjoyed similar advantages, but for different reasons.

Which one was stronger? Which mech designer team managed to strengthen their work the most?

Everything was about to become clear to the audience!

[Start!]

The Heart of Victor acted the same as before and tried to keep its distance towards the Zenomon Gamma at first.

Yet when the swordsman mech launched its chainsword at the axeman mech, the latter merely used the flat of its thick greataxe as a makeshift shield. The hard structure of this enormous bladed weapon easily repelled the thrown sword!

The Heart of Victor threw its sword a few more times, but the Zenomon Gamma repelled each and every single strike without any difficulty!

Lyain Kepper stopped throwing his chainsword out again. He recognized that his sword was likely to incur more damage than the enemy's greataxe with these repeated collisions.

The Zenomon Gamma possessed several advantages that made it difficult to defeat it by relying on tricks. While it was a relatively large and slow mech, its lack of mobility was not as exaggerated as the Fallen Retribution developed by Team Hammerfall.

The axeman mech possessed enough mobility to adeptly defend against attacks coming from different directions. Its entire frame also moved relatively fluently and efficiently given its mass.

All of this reflected a good design that only an unusual combination of Journeymen such as Team Destiny was able to accomplish in three days!

All of this exerted a significant amount of pressure on Lyain Kepper. Clashing weapons against the Zenomon Gamma was dangerous, but he had no other choice this time!

"Let me put my swordsmanship to good use this time!"

The Heart of Victor no longer continued its ineffective strategy. The swordsman mech decisively turned around and began to charge at the Zenomon Gamma!

Clang!

The two mechs finally began to fight each other in earnest!

Since the Heart of Victor was just a bit lighter and faster, it held the initiative during this exchange of blows. Lyain Kepper constantly urged his mech to circle around and attack the Zenomon Gamma from the sides whenever possible, but his opponent was just a bit too capable to expose its vulnerabilities so easily.

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

The Heart of Victor's chainsword continuously collided against the flat of the Zenomon Gamma's large greataxe.

Although the large weapon was mainly supposed to hack into enemies, its blade was so broad that it could serve as a convenient shield in this instance!

When the Zenomon Gamma was operated by a skilled mech pilot, the mech was easily able to block every frontal attack launched by the Heart of Victor!

[This can't go on. The Heart of Victor needs to break or circumvent the Zenomon Gamma's guards. The Zenomon Gamma must go on the attack instead of sticking to passive defense.]

The longer this state continued, the more both sides expended their energies in vain!

The Zenomon Gamma altered its approach first. Though its mech pilot recalled that Lyain Kepper was good at exploiting openings, he still chose to attack because that was the only way to beat his opponent!

When the Zenomon Gamma finally turned its axe and chopped towards the Heart of Victor, it was impossible for the latter to block the attack.

The greataxe was considerably larger, heavier and tougher than its chainsword!

If the chainsword directly tried to block an incoming axe strike, then it was more probable for the relatively fragile sword blade to crack or break!

The problem was that the Zenomon Gamma had attacked at a tricky timing. The Heart of Victor had already committed to an attack of its own. If it went through with it, then it wouldn't have time to evade the incoming greataxe!

[The Zenomon Gamma is quite fast for a large and substantial mech!]

[That's the design superiority of Team Destiny at play. The two mech designers have managed to optimize and improve many of its motion parameters, allowing it to move and attack faster than equivalent mechs.]

Lyain's eyes heated up as the incoming axe chop was close to tearing through the armor of his Heart of Victor.

The swordsman mech shifted to the side but did not abort its attack. Instead, its chainsword continued to slash forward until it managed to strike one of the Zenomon Gamma's shoulders!

The attack managed to tear through the armor of the axeman mech but failed to get through this layer of protection.

The Zenomon Gamma's greataxe on the other hand almost managed to tear through the frame of the Heart of Victor, but something surprising occurred at this time.

The swordsman mech continued to exert force on its weapon. Together with its forward motion, its upper body began to lean backwards.

This caused the Heart of Victor to lower its body just enough to avoid the brunt of the threatening attack!

Though the sharp edge of the axe managed to tear through the surface layers of the Heart of Victor's chest armor, the swordsman mech ultimately managed to slip away without suffering internal damage!

The two mechs separated for a moment as both mech pilots examined the damage that their mechs had incurred.

Neither machine suffered any loss of performance, but the attacks they received had dangerously exposed their armor.

"Again!"

The two mechs did not shy away from each other. Lyain Kepper was not afraid of taking risks and brought his swordsman mech up close in order to target the vulnerability that his previous attack had made.

The Zenomon Gamma did not remain passive either. It wielded its axe with great force and ferocity, so much so that the Heart of Victor had to abort several promising attacks.

[Neither side is backing down!]

[Which mech will be able to gain the upper hand?]

[My bet is on the Zenomon Gamma. Though the Heart of Victor is quite an impressive mech, that axe is simply too powerful. The Zenomon Gamma almost succeeded in taking out its opponent in a single blow. If it manages to get lucky once again, I don't think the swordsman mech will survive!]

Would this truly happen? No one knew!

Chapter 3508: Shifting Approach

Lyain Kepper and his Heart of Victor did not encounter a true challenge until they had entered the third round.

The Rayvin and the Parnast were both formidable machines, and they certainly deserved to go further in the tournament, but it was undeniable that they possessed clear vulnerabilities.

As long as he exhibited enough patience and cunning, the Heart of Victor could eventually exploit their weaknesses and defeat them in a relatively clear and unambiguous manner.

The Zenomon Gamma was different. Though the mech did possess a number of weaknesses, none of them were easy to take advantage of. The axeman mech was too well-protected and also possessed the power to cripple the Heart of Victor in a single blow!

Combined with surprisingly adequate speed for such a hefty frame, the Zenomon Gamma presented a package that was stronger than the Heart of Victor in almost every parameter!

[The physical might of the Zenomon Gamma is incredible! The systems that allow it to exert so much power with every movement is not only useful for adding a lot of extra bite in its attacks, but it also enhances its mobility by channeling extra power in its legs and other mechanical parts. All of this means that this mech is an embodiment of power and cannot be stopped, only avoided!]

Everyone in the audience could clearly see that the Zenomon Gamma had the upper hand in this fast-paced brawl. The Zenomon Gamma was constantly pressing forward while the Heart of Victor regularly dashed back or jumped to the sides.

Axes excelled at tearing through shields and armor! The bigger the axe, the bigger the threat of a single crushing chop. When it was paired with a melee mech that could add a lot of extra force to the blows, an axe turned from a severe threat into a doomsday weapon that could sunder a planet!

What also impressed the spectators was how the Zenomon Gamma became increasingly more adept in wielding its axe. As its mech pilot became more accustomed to the axeman mech's traits, he began to display more proficiency and skill in his movements.

The Zenomon Gamma's moves became more efficient! It spent less time to execute an attack or recover from a big movement!

This was a big problem for the Heart of Victor. The Zenomon Gamma's gradual improvements reduced the windows of opportunity for the swordsman mech to slip in its own attacks.

The specter of defeat loomed closer than ever to Lyain Kepper. The Zenomon Gamma became an enormous shadow that risked engulfing him and his mech!

"I won't bow down!"

During all this time, Lyain Kepper became more and more ready to unleash the full capabilities of his mech.

Yet when he thought that he needed to fight two more matches, he tried his best to contain his urges.

He considered it a loss if he had to draw upon the greater capabilities of his mech when he was still fighting in the third round.

As he continued to struggle against the Zenomon Gamma's unceasing attacks, Lyain became determined to win the battle on his terms!

"I can still do it! I'm not alone!"

He wasn't the only one who was fighting against the Zenomon Gamma. His active mech also became indignant at the prospect of losing against this axeman mech!

Their shared struggle slowly bonded them together. Their thoughts became more aligned as they both desired to achieve victory and earn permanent glory by winning the Wild Brawl Bowl!

Lyain's eyes grew a lot more intense as he reached a new level of cooperation with his mech!

Though his relationship with the Heart of Victor had always been good, his drive for victory had not yet reached a sufficient level. The previous two matches had pushed him quite a lot but never beyond his limit.

This was different! His adversary was truly strong and his current level of piloting skill and control over his own mech weren't quite sufficient to defeat the Zenomon Gamma at the moment!

If he wanted to win this battle while still preserving enough advantages for the subsequent round, then the only variable that he could truly rely on to increase his performance was his own skill!

"I need to become a better swordsman!"

He rapidly recalled all of the guidance that Ketis had passed on to him. Some of what she said didn't sink in to him until now. After evaluating his own movements so far, he realized that he wasn't piloting the Heart of Victor to the fullest.

Lyain Kepper's fighting style ordinarily involved a lot of maneuvering like he was doing now. The problem was that he was accustomed to piloting lighter and more agile swordsman mechs. These mechs may be lacking in power and defense, but their good maneuverability had always allowed him to pick his battles and retreat whenever a situation became too difficult.

The Heart of Victor didn't allow him to fight like he used to! Though he had already adjusted to the current circumstances by planning out his actions and predicting the enemy's movements, he wasn't going far enough for his liking!

"I haven't fully embraced the fighting style that is needed to make the most out of my current mech!"

The dots finally started to connect in his mind. The Heart of Victor was suited for a different fighting style that did not place such a high emphasis on maneuverability.

Though Lyain had always fought this way in his career as a mech pilot, he already felt he had reached the limit of how far he could push his current approach.

There were two ways for him to break this limit. He could either force a breakthrough or change to a more suitable sword style!

Lyain had always focused on the former solution, but the chance of breaking through to expert candidate was too miniscule. It was never wise to put all of his hopes on such an unlikely event.

The more effective way to comprehensively increase his battle effectiveness was to change the very nature of his fighting style!

This was difficult. Even if Ketis pointed out all of the ways he could change in order to do better, he had spent at least thousands of hours honing his own sword style. It had become a part of his fighting system and represented his core accumulation as a swordsman mech pilot!

After a moment of hesitation, Lyain finally made a drastic decision.

He no longer stuck to his old routines and decisively broke the rules that he had set for himself long ago. Though it was difficult for him to initiate such a drastic shift in the middle of an intensive battle, the pressure prompted him to maximize his efforts and commit entirely to a different fighting approach!

The shift immediately became obvious. The Heart of Victor no longer strained its frame to evade and dodge the incoming axe attacks.

Though the swordsman mech still took effort to protect its weak points and minimize the incoming damage, Lyain decided to take calculated risks in order to launch an all-out assault!

The chainsword in the hands of the Heart of Victor turned from a bee sting into a precision missile. The swordsman mech took more risks and became more willing to incur a certain degree of injuries in order to inflict damage that mattered!

Lyain did not target the chest of the Zenomon Gamma anymore. The axeman mech's torso was too thick and sturdy to penetrate through easily. Though it was possible to wear it down over time, the powerful enemy machine would be able to retain all of its battle effectiveness throughout this difficult period!

"Your arms are much more vulnerable!"

Although it was more difficult to attack the arms of the Zenomon Gamma, they were considerably less protected.

Though the mech pilot of the Zenomon Gamma immediately noticed that the Heart of Victor had changed its strategy, he struggled to protect the limbs of his mech.

The axeman mech performed at its best when it was on the attack! It had to keep launching attacks in order to avoid getting pestered to death by the Heart of Victor!

"I'll crush your mech first!"

The match became increasingly more brutal as the axe began to tear through the chest armor of the Heart of Victor with greater effectiveness!

Yet even as the swordsman mech incurred all of this damage, Lyain had always managed to prevent the axe from digging any deeper.

He was deliberately using the thickest section of his mech as bait in order to succeed in his own attacks!

The Heart of Victor's blade persistently chipped away at the upper arms of the Zenomon Gamma. Though it was difficult for Lyain to concentrate his attacks on the same damaged arm sections, he took advantage of the fact that the axeman mech he was fighting against was not that flexible in its movements!

The Zenomon Gamma's emphasis on strength and physical might meant that it had to make a lot of tradeoffs in other areas such as range of motion. What this meant was that the powerful mech moved rather stiffly and could not easily fend off attacks from difficult angles!

In response to this targeted aggression, the Zenomon Gamma became increasingly more aggressive. It became more determined than ever to chop the Heart of Victor in half before its limbs succumbed!

This heated exchange of blows could not last for a long amount of time. The buffers of both mechs began to run out as the damaged armor layers offered less and less protection to the crucial internal components!

It was at this time that Lyain finally judged that he inflicted enough damage to pull off his next move!

The Heart of Victor threw its chainsword at its opponent at an unexpected angle!

Everyone became bewildered that the swordsman mech chose to throw its main weapon at such a close range.

[The sword is going wide!]

The chainsword did not even come close to hitting the damaged sections of the Zenomon Gamma. Instead, it sailed over the mech's shoulder and continued to fling further away until the chain grew taut.

At this point, the mech pilot of the Zenomon Gamma thought that this was part of a trap. He studied the Heart of Victor's previous battles and knew that Lyain Kepper always managed to use a single moment of weakness to deal a decisive blow against his opponent.

"That's not going to happen!"

The Zenomon Gamma attempted to preempt whatever the Heart of Victor was attempting to do next by releasing one of its hands from the grip of its axe and grabbing hold of the chain that was draped over its shoulder!

As long as the axeman mech was able to keep hold of the chain, the Heart of Victor could forget about retracting its weapon!

Even if the swordsman mech tried to circle around and bind the Zenomon Gamma with the chain, the enemy mech pilot wasn't worried.

The axeman mech was so strong that it could definitely break the chain by relying on brute force! It would be a severe mistake if the Heart of Victor tried to beat its opponent by imitating the Parnast!

Yet the swordsman mech's next actions caught the Zenomon Gamma's mech pilot off-guard.

It broke its chain from the connecting point on its arm. This separated the Heart of Victor from its own sword, but that was okay because it already pulled out a second weapon from its back!

Even though its backup knife was far smaller and less imposing than its chainsword, it was still a proper weapon that Ketis had invested a significant amount of attention in its development.

The Heart of Victor dashed forward just as the Zenomon Gamma tried to respond to the developing situation by chopping its axe straight in front of its chest with its only remaining limb!

Lyain smirked as his swordsman mech barely managed to evade the worst of this blow.

This time, the huge and heavy axe was held by only a single arm, so the speed and power of this chop was not as great as before!

This allowed the Heart of Victor to slip close without incurring as much risk this time!

The swordsman mech used its free hand to grab and press onto the axeman mech's limb that previously held the chain. The momentum of the Heart of Victor briefly allowed it to overpower the arm, thereby negating its threat.

This gave the Heart of Victor a precious moment where it could stab its dagger straight into the arm that the swordsman mech had already damaged in prior attacks!

The knife slammed through the damaged armor plating and quickly managed to sink halfway inside!

Though the weapon did not cut as deep as Lyain Kepper had hoped, the damage was still crucial enough to cripple the limb!

The arm abruptly lost a lot of power and control, so much so that the Zenomon Gamma's arm could no longer hold onto its greataxe!

The weapon was already a challenge to hold with a single limb. The critical damage that the Heart of Victor managed to inflict instantly caused it to exceed its limit!

The audience gasped as the Zenomon Gamma lost its primary weapon as well as most of the functionality of its arm.

Though the disarmed mech was already leaning forward in order to slam the Heart of Victor away, that did not change the fact that the axeman mech lost its most effective means to deal damage!

The Heart of Victor turned frenzied as it wielded its knife in a skillful manner. It easily evaded the clumsy kicks and grappling attempts and soon managed to scrap the Zenomon Gamma's other arm!

At this point, the match had already been decided. It took two more minutes for the axeman mech to succumb, but everyone already knew that Team Larkinson had managed to advance to the fourth round!

Chapter 3509: Deflated Expectations

[Team Larkinson has defeated Team Destiny! Miss Janassa Pellier and Miss Tifi Coslone may still have a chance of fighting for fifth, sixth or seventh place, but this young and talented duo's run to the top has ended. Ves Larkinson and Ketis Larkinson shall advance to semifinals where they will have to fight against one of the remaining three winners.]

Despite the Zenomon Gamma's prodigious strength and other advantages, it failed to crush the Heart of Victor despite its impressive performance.

The axeman mech just needed to land a couple of powerful blows in order to fell the Heart of Victor! This should have been a relatively doable task considering that the swordsman mech was also a power-oriented mech rather than a speed-oriented one. How could the Zenomon Gamma fail?

[The Zenomon Gamma's mech pilot is not to blame. He piloted the axeman mech in a proficient manner. His own choices and tactics were also sound. His mech managed to land numerous hits on the Heart of Victor's mech frame.]

[That is true, but none of these potentially-fatal axe strikes succeeded in diminishing the Heart of Victor's battle performance. That is a failure in my book.]

[The Zenomon Gamma did not fail! It just had to overcome the Heart of Victor's buffer. Who knew that the swordsman mech succeeded in breaking through the axeman mech's buffer first.]

[This is an underrated aspect of the last match. The Heart of Victor managed to land over a dozen consistent strikes on both of its opponent's upper arms. Do you know how difficult it is to do that against an enemy that knows full well what is going on? It is a miracle that the Heart of Victor hasn't suffered any crippling damage as it pulled off repeated successful strikes on the arms of the Zenomon Gamma.]

[I think the crucial factor here is that the mech pilot of the Heart of Victor has grown stronger over the course of this tournament. Did you not notice how the swordsman mech began to make more skillful movements at the end? It is absolutely not easy for the Heart of Victor to give up its main weapon and take advantage of the diversion it created. The axeman mech could have easily chopped up the approaching swordsman mech regardless if the latter didn't act so decisely.]

Though the Heart of Victor had managed to pull off another win by relying on trickery, not every mech or mech pilot could have accomplished the same.

After three victories in a row, many people already began to acknowledge the Heart of Victor's strength. It didn't matter that it hadn't been able to crush its opponents in a one-sided manner. Many of the other competition mechs were all close in strength so it was too difficult for them to defeat their opponents in an instant.

The hype surrounding the semifinals rapidly built up as a result! The final four mechs that were in contention for first place were all strong without a doubt!

Though it was difficult to formulate an accurate ranking of the four mechs, it would soon become clear which of them deserves to move on to the finals.

The mechs needed to be fixed before the fourth round could commence.

The mech designers teams received another break to repair their mechs and brief their mech pilots for the challenge to come.

While Ves supervised the repairs to the Heart of Victor's savaged chest armor, Ketis took Lyain aside to discuss his performance.

"You did quite well last match." Ketis praised the mech pilot, much to the man's delight. "The Heart of Victor is designed to take a beating. It's worth it to sacrifice its armor in order to land more solid hits on your opponent. The key is to make the most out of these trades and make your attacks count."

"Thank you. I tried my best to concentrate my attacks on just one arm, but the Zenomon Gamma's guard was too tight for that. I had no choice but to split my attacks and target both arms in order to divert my opponent."

A more capable mech pilot would have been able to disable one of the Zenomon Gamma's arm much faster and more efficiently, but Lyain Kepper had not reached that level. Ketis did not blame him for that at all. The man did his best given his current circumstances.

"Let's move onto our next opponent." She changed the topic. "The Wild Brawl Bowl likes to keep the matchups for each round hidden in order to generate more excitement, but there's only three potential opponents left. We can use the time that we have left to make more thorough preparations. There is one thing I want you to do when you step into the arena again."

"What is that?"

"Make full use of your mech."

"Are you sure? We're still in the semifinals." Lyain noted.

"That is true, but the competitors who are left are not weak in the slightest. Holding back is too dangerous at this point. Besides, part of the reason why Ves and I are taking part in this tournament is to advertise our design capabilities and raise our reputations. We can't do that if everyone believes the Heart of Victor is only so-so. Starting from the next match, you need to become my standard bearer. Teach the Wild Fighters and spectators that my mechs can give them what they really want!"

Ketis became increasingly more upset when she noticed so many people changed their views towards her. While she did not consider herself to be a vain person, her pride could not tolerate the increasingly more dismissive attitude that people held towards her work! They all thought her design applications were vastly overrated!

"I will do my best to demonstrate that your mech truly deserves to defeat all of our competitors." Lyain solemnly promised.

"That's all I need to hear. I'm pleased to see that your bond with your mech has reached a deeper level through all of the duels that you have fought so far. That will make the next step considerably easier. Remember, your mech wants to win as well, you need to trust it in order to unlock its full potential."

As Ketis kept instructing the mech pilot, the time had come to commence the much-anticipated fourth round of the fighting phase.

The Wild Brawl Bowl attracted more attention than before, but the crowd no longer assumed that Team Larkinson would be able to cruise its way to first place.

The hype and expectation surrounding the Heart of Victor had thoroughly cooled after the first three rounds. Though there were still optimistic fans who assumed that the swordsman mech was still holding back, many other people dismissed this ridiculous notion.

"Didn't you see how much the Heart of Victor struggled in the last match? If the Zenomon Gamma managed to get lucky even once, it would have been the end of Team Larkinson's chances of getting any further."

"Hey! Don't look down on a swordmaster! Her mech still has untapped power. Just watch. The Heart of Victor will definitely prove you wrong in the next match!"

As the discussion raged amongst the spectators, the fourth round finally commenced.

Before the top 4 could decide who among them could advance to the finals, the four mechs they defeated in the last round had to fight each other first in order to determine the ranking of the fifth to eight place.

There were real prizes at stake, so the competition mechs fought at their best and displayed great fervor.

Ves did not look surprised when the Zenomon Gamma ultimately felled its current opponent. The axeman mech was genuinely strong and had a decent shot at making it to the top 4 if it fought against any other mech.

The superiority displayed by the Zenomon Gamma made some viewers reevaluate the strength of the Heart of Victor, but not enough. There were even people who thought that the Zenomon Gamma would have been able to put up a better fight in the semifinals!

Once the ranking of the losers of the previous round became clear, the actual fights were finally allowed to commence!

[Team Larkinson shall have to overcome Team Voiken in order to make it to the fifth and final round! Will the Heart of Victor be able to overcome the relentless stabs of the Thornbearer? Let's find out in this crucial fight!]

Team Voiken!

Ves glanced at the pair of siblings who he had spoken to some time ago. Sara and Dulo Voiken of the Voiken Family performed surprisingly well considering their relative youth and inexperience.

It appeared that growing up in a large family that contained hundreds of high-ranking mech designers had prepared them well for competitions at this level!

The two Voikens met his gaze and nodded with respect. Ves could sense plenty of challenge in their confident gazes. They did not regard the Heart of Victor as an insurmountable opponent.

Ves merely smiled in return before he directed his attention back to the arena down below.

The Heart of Victor calmly stopped in place while the Thornbearer halted on the opposite side.

The mechs were both humanoid and about the same size. Sara Voiken was a defensive specialist while Dulo Voiken excelled in designing spearman mechs. The work they produced leveraged both of their advantages in a well-engineered package that looked simple but solid!

Ves studied the design of the Thornbearer a little closer and picked up a lot of clues. Although its mass meant that the spearman mech couldn't move too fast, the design of its arms were quite peculiar and led him to conclude that the mech was able to thrust its weapon forward with great speed and force!

"This is a stabbing monster!"

When the match finally commenced, the Thornbearer immediately made that clear as soon as it closed in on its prey.

The Heart of Victor threw its chainsword forward a couple of times, but the Thornbearer easily deflected the weapon aside with its weapon.

The Thornbearer did not possess excellent agility, but its ability to move forward was quite strong!

As soon as the spearman mech came close enough, it performed a short leap forward and unleashed a lethal thrust attack!

Clang!

The Heart of Victor had to bat the incoming spear aside while evading to the left and backwards at the same time.

However, the Thornbearer already retracted its spear and stabbed it forward once again!

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

The spearman mech displayed unrelenting aggression as it steadily paced forward while stabbing out its spear with increasing force and momentum.

This was the most difficult part about fighting a spearman mech! It was difficult to block a stab attack and the Thornbearer's rapid attack rate gave opponents in front of it no respite!

Even if the Heart of Victor tried to make a risky attempt to move close to the Thornbearer, the spearman mech's formidable armor plating could withstand nearly any surprise attack!

This was how Team Voiken's work managed to win three matches in a row. There was nothing secret about this mech. Its offensive and defensive capabilities were so strong that it did not need to rely on any unusual tricks or gimmicks to overpower its opposition!

Now, the Heart of Victor risked becoming its fourth victim if it did not find a way to overcome the spear storm!

Inside the cockpit of the swordsman mech, Lyain Kepper eyes flared to life as he and his mech leveraged their full strength for the first time in this tournament!

"What is it doing?!"

As the Thornbearer unleashed another unstoppable spear stab that forced the Heart of Victor to move aside, the latter keenly struck at the spear shaft very particular timing!

The sword did not manage to parry the incoming spear stab, but diverted it just enough to make it miss.

The Heart of Victor then proceeded to inflict a rapid stab with its chainsword that caused the Thornbearer to incur its first wound!

Although this little move didn't look impressive at first, when the Thornbearer attempted to unleash a second stab, the Heart of Victor managed to repeat the same moves.

[The Thornbearer has missed again!]

[How is that possible? Its thrusting power is quite strong. Even if it is possible for the Heart of Victor to deflect its trajectory to the point where it misses the mark, the swordsman mech needs to strike at the right spot on the spear shaft at the right timing. Succeeding once can be chalked up to luck, but succeeding four times in a row is definitely a pattern!]

Even when the Thornbearer began to vary its movements, the Heart of Victor instantly managed to keep up with the changes.

With every exchange of blows, the swordsman mech always managed to evade damage while the Thornbearer incurred another wound!

"What's going on? How has the Heart of Victor become so good all of a sudden?"

Chapter 3510: Helping Hand

The Thornbearer possessed an extremely powerful attack method. Its entire design was based around delivering fast and powerful stabs. Any mech that got struck even once would definitely receive a painful blow. The chance would be great that such an attack could easily breach through the armor of its opponent.

Once that happened, the performance of the damaged mech would definitely become impaired, thereby giving the Thornbearer an even greater chance of succeeding in its next attack!

The Heart of Victor could not allow itself to get stabbed even once. Yet instead of pursuing the more prudent course of action and assuming a more defensive posture, Lyain Kepper sought to lay a mark on the enemy mech with each exchange of blows!

Though it was extremely difficult for any mech or mech pilot to divert the course of a powerful and rapid spear stab, it was not impossible to pull off this risky move.

As long as the spear attack failed to hit its mark, the Heart of Victor always gained a brief window of opportunity where it could use its chainsword to land a fierce blow on the Thornbearer!

The only issue was that the frontal armor of the spearman mech was too strong!

If the Heart of Victor landed the same attack on the Zenomon Gamma, the axeman mech would have lost a decent amount of armor integrity.

The Thornbearer on the other hand was the product of a collaboration between a spearman mech specialist and a defensive specialist. The latter invested a considerable amount of attention and resources in making the Thornbearer as difficult to damage as possible!

[Even though the Thornbearer is not in a good situation at the moment, it is still not a great concern for Team Voiken. Their spearman mech's excellent armor system provides it with an enormous degree of fault tolerance. It will take forever for the Heart of Victor to penetrate through its opponent's thick frontal armor at this rate. In the meantime, the Thornbearer's mech pilot can keep varying its attacks in order to land a successful attack.]

[The Heart of Victor's is almost just as heavy as the Thornbearer but its defenses are definitely a tier below. The disparity is quite glaring and fully demonstrates the difference that a defensive specialist can make. Mr. Dulo Voiken deserves great credit for implementing such strong defenses with limited resources and severe time constraints!]

Though Ves briefly became concerned about the snail's pace of progress his competition mech was making, he became more reassured when he saw that the Heart of Victor maintained the upper hand throughout these exchanges.

Sure, the swordsman mech only dealt light damage with each successful attack, but so far the Thornbearer failed to succeed even once.

The difference was very glaring, and that made this sight so perplexing!

The more knowledgeable mech designers and mech pilots among the crowd were able to understand this current sequence of events much better than all of the laymen.

The mech designers clearly understood the strengths of the Thornbearer and expected the mech to hold a clear advantage in this duel. Although the Heart of Victor was also a respectably strong mech, it was supposed to experience a lot of trouble when fighting against an opponent with much greater weapon reach!

Meanwhile, the mech pilots tried to imagine how the battle would unfold if they were sitting in the cockpit of the Heart of Victor. They quietly admitted that they wouldn't have been able to hold out nearly as long as Lyain Kepper.

Many of them knew their way around with a sword, but it was practically a superhuman feat to parry so many powerful and threatening spear stabs in a consistent manner.

[Has Lyain Kepper broken through already?]

[That's impossible! We would have been able to witness a manifestation if that happened. From what I can see, the Heart of Victor isn't being affected by forced resonance at all. It's operating well within its existing parameters.]

[Then how can the Heart of Victor defy all of your earlier analyses and hold out so well against the Thornbearer? The strengths of the two mechs should be well-known by now! I don't see the Heart of Victor moving any faster or performing any stronger attacks.]

[It's not the mech that has changed... it's the mech pilot.]

Lyain Kepper's abrupt increase in skill and judgment did not go unnoticed. It began to dawn on more and more people that he was fighting way better than he used to in the first three rounds!

While Lyain was already a good swordsman mech pilot, the skill he displayed this time was insane!

An occasional feat of brilliance might not be that special, but pulling off a high-risk maneuver on a consistent basis was impossible at this level!

The only other conclusion that people could make was that Lyain Kepper had broken through to expert candidate, but that was clearly impossible. There were no signs of a breakthrough, and if the man had already broken through beforehand, he would have been barred from participating in the fourth round of the tournament!

After ruling one possibility after another, the expert commentators finally settled on a single, improbable explanation.

[If we assume that Mr. Lyain Kepper is still the same mech pilot as before, then an external factor must be responsible. The only explanation that makes sense is that the Heart of Victor is making up the difference.]

[But how? It's a mech, not an autonomous warbot!]

[Perhaps... we have unfairly judged Swordmaster Ketis' design capabilities. The swordsman mech that she has designed is more effective than what is obvious from the surface.]

Though not everyone agreed with this explanation, more and more people began to come around to Ketis again.

The results were just too dramatic this time! The only reason why the Heart of Victor hadn't defeated the Thornbearer already was because the latter was too tough.

Even so, after getting struck for over forty times, its chest armor was already bearing a lot of scars!

In fact, Lyain Kepper would have preferred to attack the arms like he did the last time, but the Thornbearer recovered too quickly for that. He had no choice but to attack whatever was convenient, which resulted in a lot of spread attacks.

Still, the current trend was highly favorable for him. As he actively cooperated with his living mech, he gained a massive boost to his fighting capabilities and his sword style.

He was not only able to react faster and more precisely than before, but also executed all of his sword techniques with far greater skill than he had ever thought!

It was as if Ketis was directly conveying a portion of her superhuman fighting skills to him. Though Lyain did not reach the level of an expert pilot because of this powerful influence, his performance already exceeded the limit of a mortal pilot and firmly placed him in the territory of an expert candidate!

With the help of all of this borrowed skill, Lyain became a champion beyond compare who could pretty much outfight any other regular mech pilot based on skill alone!

As the Heart of Victor continued to neutralize every threatening stab attack without fail, Ves briefly glanced to the woman responsible for making it all possible.

Ketis may look calm as she held her Bloodsinger in her arms, but Ves could sense her will being exerted.

The biggest reason for her difficulties was that Sharpie wasn't around her anymore! Her companion spirit had left her greatsword and quietly slipped into the chainsword of the Heart of Victor.

Ordinarily, this was impossible to pull off. A mech designer was only able to extend a piece of themselves to their masterwork products.

Ketis managed to circumvent this rule, though. She had conducted an experimental blood ritual on the chainsword that essentially allowed her to form a bond with the mech weapon.

A weak bond, but a valid one nonetheless. This connection allowed her to pass Sharpie on to the weapon and massively enhance Lyain's piloting abilities!

In fact, the Heart of Victor did not need to rely on this demanding trick in order to augment Lyain's performance. The mech already possessed this functionality itself and was able to strengthen and optimize his sword style to a lesser degree.

"I thought you wanted to save this trump card for the finals." Ves quietly said.

Ketis gritted her teeth as she continued her exertion. "The Heart of Victor alone can't fend off the Thornbearer by itself. It needs my help."

Ves reluctantly agreed with her judgment. He could see that Team Voiken truly designed an excellent mech. Their Thornbearer's comprehensive strength should have been enough to defeat most swordsman mechs!

Yet if Sara Voiken and Dulo Voiken were allowed to leverage their own specialties to increase the performance of their mechs, Ves and Ketis should be allowed to do so as well!

Nothing needed to be said about his own specialty. The Heart of Victor already provided a lot of active assistance to its mech pilot.

It was Ketis who was truly capable of revolutionizing the performance of her swordsman mechs. Though her toolbox of solutions was still limited at the moment, she was already capable of boosting the performance of individual mechs to an insane level as long as she was willing to make an effort!

She made the greatest possible use of all of her relevant advantages to give the Heart of Victor a powerful boost in effective performance, so much so that the power of her contribution exceeded that of any other mech designer in the tournament!

Only a swordmaster was able to provide so much active and direct assistance to a mech pilot!

The Thornbearer did not passively accept this slow march towards its own defeat. Its mech pilot, who was highly-skilled with wielding spears, kept varying the speed, force, timing and direction of its attacks in order to throw off Lyain's predictions.

Yet no matter how much the Thornbearer tried to surprise its opponent, the Heart of Victor managed to parry every confounding attack with as much ease as before. It was as if Lyain was able to read the mind of his counterpart in real time!

Crunch!

After inflicting yet another successful sword strike, the Thornbearer's armor simply couldn't take it any longer. Its sturdy chest had already become riddled with scars, but the latest slash had parted its final armor layer and exposed its internal structure!

Lyain did not relent even as the Thornbearer grew more desperate.

The spearman mech's erratic counterattacks did not avail it at all as the swordsman mech skillfully resolved these threatening attacks and stabbed its sword inside the exposed wound.

Smoke began to escape from the widening hole as the internal structure incurred more and more damage.

Surprisingly, the Thornbearer managed to hold out for five more minutes as its internal architecture was extremely well put together. Even if its entire left section had been savaged, it still retained 70 percent of its combat power!

Yet that did not change the outcome at all. The Heart of Victor continued to perform as if an expert candidate was in control, and such a level of strength was more than enough to defend against any desperation attack the Thornbearer might unleash.

The mech never pulled out any further surprises. This was no surprise to Ves as he already understood that this was a mech that concentrated all of its strengths onto its basic parameters, particularly attack and defense power.

Its mech design didn't have any room for trump cards or other surprises. It was just an extremely good basic mech that just happened to meet its nemesis.

What was most egregious about the Thornbearer was that it was so dedicated to performing the strongest stabs that it was highly inefficient or even completely unable to perform any spear moves. The mech was unable to slash or sweep with its spear because its thick armor layout was too tough, inflexible and confining!

After an agonizing display of torture, the Heart of Victor finally managed to land the killing blow onto the Thornbearer.

[Team Larkinson... has advanced to finals. The Heart of Victor has successfully toppled the Thornbearer!]