

Mech 3561

Chapter 3561 - Dead...?

The four expert mechs took a substantial risk by penetrating deep inside the enormous fleshy body of the Titania.

Fortunately, the risk wasn't as high as before. After suffering from successive battle formation attacks including one that damaged both its flesh and psyche, the Titania's feral consciousness had lost complete control over its body!

The enormous walls of flesh around the four expert mechs did not squeeze or try to block their passage.

Just in case, all four machines maximized the power of their resonance shields just in case.

Even if the Titania was just pretending to show weakness, the expert pilots were all confident they could break out of every trap!

"Damn, all of this dead and brittle flesh looks gruesome." Venerable Orfan commented as the four mechs just entered a large but dusty internal cavity. "We should employ the dust formation attack more often."

"It doesn't work as well against mechs. Their armor is too hard. Only their upper layers get shaved off. It is much more effective against softer targets such as this giant astral beast that mainly relies on quantity for strength."

"How do you know that, Dise?"

"I spend time with the Penitent Sisters."

"Alright, that's enough! Focus on the mission, ladies!" Patriarch Reginald transmitted through their short-range communication channel. "There's a lot of organ-like bits here, but one of them must be the brain or the heart of this massive beast. Even if we aren't attacking the right organs, they must still be important in other ways! Now get to work!"

The Cross Patriarch felt rather upset that he and his Crossers hadn't contributed that much to the battle so far. Sure, the ranged mechs under his command were doing steady work on whittling down the Titania from afar, but their attacks were only doing the equivalent of damaging the astral beast's skin.

The Larkinsons and the Glory Seekers had accomplished much more with their miraculous battle formation attacks!

Though the Titania behaved as if it was close to death after suffering so many biZarre attacks, Patriarch Reginald remained vigilant in case the big monster recovered all of a sudden.

Though he wasn't a biotech expert or anything, he knew that giant organisms like the Titania tended to be extremely hard to kill!

They had evolved under harsh circumstances where they were constantly being bombarded by radiation. They could suffer under all kinds of accidents as they grew up. On top of that, they also had to be able to fend off attacks against other astral beasts.

All of these harsh circumstances pressured many astral beast species into developing an enormous amount of vitality. Their huge bodies and their redundant organs allowed them to survive even if half of their bodies became crushed.

This was why neither Patriarch Reginald nor the other expert pilots expected any immediate results. They just controlled their mechs to attack every organ within reach with the hope that they could get lucky or at least bring the Titania further away from its recovery!

Powerful resonance-empowered attacks lit up the dark inner cavity.

The Bolvos Rage generated the greatest lightshow. The hybrid mech was armed with a suite of powerful weapons that damaged multiple organs at once.

Missiles soared from the back of the high-tier expert mech and struck many random organs that had already been weakened by earlier attacks.

The Bolvos Rage's shoulder-mounted positron turrets automatically fired at different organs, seeking to burn and vaporize the grayish alien flesh without mercy.

If Patriarch Reginald encountered a particularly large organ that had not been sufficiently weakened, his expert mech let loose with its large chest-mounted positron cannon. The bright and powerful beam produced by this weapon module never failed to break open the particular agglomeration of flesh that looked important in some way!

The arms of the Bolvar Rage did not remain idle either. One arm launched plasma bolts from its wrists while the other arm swung an axe through every bit of flesh in the way!

Through these efforts, the Bolvar Rage easily inflicted damage that exceeded that of any other expert mech inside the giant beast!

The second-most damaging mech was the First Sword. The expert swordsman mech piloted by Venerable Dise was armed with a greatsword that was great at inflicting damage on large targets. No organ could resist getting cut by its masterwork blade,

especially since they were unable to put up any form of defense due to the Titania's impairment.

"This isn't enough!"

In order to amplify the First Sword's damage output, Venerable Dise resonated with her mech and blade. With the help of the resonating material called Bissonat, her force of will generated a long and sharp energy blade that extended well past the tip of the already-long Decapitator!

When the First Sword swung its weapon next, it managed to tear a large piece of flesh around the expert mech!

Slice after slice caused the defenseless tissue to be cut to pieces. The First Sword already managed to destroy the organs in the vicinity!

Compared to the destructiveness of the Bolvos Rage and the First Sword, the other two expert mechs did not do as well on this front.

Neither the Riot nor the Amphis possessed any special solutions that could allow them to inflict mass destruction. This was not a surprise to anyone as the mechs allocated a lot of their power to their potent defenses.

Even so, they were still expert mechs. The damage they dealt to the inner flesh tissue of the Titania was not light!

Spears landed like artillery shells on vulnerable flesh. A heavy chainsword slammed into organs with the force of a meteorite. Both the Riot and the Amphis were making steady progress.

Though none of the expert pilots felt that they had struck any decisive blows, the mass damage they inflicted was certainly having an effect on the Titania!

Numerous indicators such as its lack of recovery and its dwindling energy generation showed that its decline was accelerating instead of slowing down. The massive beast was dying slowly and sure.

It just wasn't happening fast enough to everyone's liking.

"This is taking forever!" Venerable Orfan complained. "Maybe we should call in the other melee mechs to speed up the demolition process."

"No." Venerable Linda Cross shook her head as she commanded her Amphis to throw its heavy chainsword at another vulnerable organ. "They cannot survive if the astral beast regains control."

Venerable Dise grunted in agreement. "We are already doing enough as far as I can tell. Can't you feel it? The beast is strong, but it is continuing to grow weaker. We might not even need to kill its brain at this rate."

Though none of them knew how critical all of these organs were, it became more and more evident that they supported many different important functions that allowed the massive organism to stay alive.

After 9 minutes of uninterrupted destruction, a change had finally occurred.

The Titania... had gone still.

The four expert mechs continued their spree of destruction just to be safe and all of the mechs outside continued to open fire as well, yet the sensation was different this time.

The utter lack of reaction from the Titania made it look as if they were beating at a dead carcass!

The astral beast's flesh parted a little easier and the blood that flowed through the monster's arteries had lost a lot of pressure.

"Is it dead this time?"

"I seriously don't know."

This was a strange outcome to the mech pilots. They were accustomed to celebrating their victory once their enemies fled or crumbled into pieces. In these situations, it was always obvious when the battle was over.

The battle against the Titania was different. While one side consisted of several human mech former, the other side only encompassed a single giant astral beast. The latter didn't operate like the former and that constantly threw the humans off their game.

Even if it looked as if the Titania had sustained so much damage that there should be no way that it could recover with the intact flesh and organs it had left, who knew how these astral beasts truly worked? They were biZarre forms of life that had evolved to be as resilient as possible against so many different threats in space.

The uncertainty surrounding the astral beast's actual state presented the Golden Skull Alliance with a conundrum.

Should they continue to beat up this huge mountain of flesh or should they slow down and see what they could do at this point?

"Is it possible to capture this astral beast alive?"

What would be the point of that? It's too big and powerful to be kept as a pet and I doubt it has any research value."

Ves frowned as he observed the distant astral beast as it continued to get hit by thousands of ranged attacks. The shower of energy beams and kinetic projectiles continued to do a lot of harm to the Titania's body, but they still hadn't penetrated all the way to the inner cavity where the four expert mechs were doing their work.

"This is taking too long and I don't think it's useful to attack the Titania any further." He opined.

"The astral beast might be deceiving us, sir." General Verle cautioned. "It has surprised us once before, remember?"

"I know, but I'm pretty sure it is dead or so close to dying that it can't pose any threat to us anymore. Let's slow down our attacks and send in additional probes to examine the Titania's current state."

"That... might give the astral beast the time it needs to recover."

"Then let us install a lot of explosives that can be triggered to blow if the astral beast is still alive!"

General Verle's projection did not look supportive of this plan. "With all due respect, this is hubris, sir. It is much safer to treat the Titania as a research subject once we truly know it is dead. The best way to do that is to damage it to such an extent that it has fractured into multiple pieces."

"No! Don't do that! Let's not try and damage this astral beast any further than we need to! Don't you realize how much we can gain if we are able to study and even recover all of the intact organs and so on? It will be a lot harder to make these gains if everything is being flung in different directions. Have you forgotten about the presumed superluminal travel capabilities of this astral beast?"

This time, General Verle could no longer remain unmoved. His projection stared deeply at Ves.

"You think there is phasewater inside the Titania."

"I'm not thinking about it. I know it. There is a lot of evidence that the Titania originally resided in another star system. How could it have possibly traveled here, then? It is so big that I doubt that any other astral beast or intelligent species went through the trouble of transporting this meat mount to this location. The only reasonable answer that is left is that the Titania moved here by its own power, and as a creature that is native to the Red Ocean, that means it must have certainly utilized an organ that acts as a natural warp drive!"

Ves grew increasingly more certain of this conclusion. The evidence was there. Though none of the scanners picked out the presence of phasewater, the valuable substance was notoriously difficult to find from afar.

Strong scanners had to be deployed a lot closer in order to uncover where the astral beast had stashed all of its phasewater.

Perhaps the attacks of the four expert mechs had already caused them to spill in every direction. Ves really didn't want to see this happen!

"Let us use one more means in order to prove the creature is dead." Ves proposed.
"Let's send in Joshua."

Venerable Joshua was famed for being able to attune to pets as well as humans... Since the Titania was also supposed to be a living organism, the expert pilot should be able to find out whether the Titania was truly as dead as it seemed!

Chapter 3562 - Cooling Flesh

The battle against the Titania had tentatively come to an end. As time passed by, the giant astral beast that had woken up and attacked the expeditionary fleet showed no apparent signs of life.

Its flesh was cooling. Its gray blood was spilling out into the vacuum and froze into crystals. Its heavily-damaged exterior was no longer consolidating but instead became more damaged as its vulnerable structure became exposed to the harsh conditions of space.

Every indication showed that the Titania was finally dead.

Yet was this really the case? The Golden Skull Alliance got fooled once and did not want to get fooled again. To that end, the Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers did not command their mechs to continue fire, but still kept them at full readiness.

A few mechs rotated back to their respective motherships in order to quickly replenish their energy ammunition and energy cells. Aside from that, every other machine could go back to firing their weapons at the Titania at any time.

Nothing happened for a while as the Larkinsons investigated the Titania's damaged and inactive body.

First, the Everchanger flew inside the hole that the other expert mechs had passed through earlier. Though Venerable Joshua had exhausted much of his mental condition in order to unleash the most powerful battle formation attack to date, he was still able to perform fairly simple maneuvers.

The young expert pilot rubbed his eyes as exhaustion set upon his mind. It truly took a lot of energy in order to direct the Superior Mother's immense death formation attack earlier.

"I shouldn't do that again unless I'm sure I can end the battle with my actions."

YOUR WILL IS WEAK.

"Geee, thanks for saying the obvious, Everchanger."

GROWTH IS OUR GREATEST STRENGTH. WHAT IS WEAK WILL GROW STRONG.

"All of that takes time. What is the point of waiting years or decades for us to get up to strength when we are already encountering enemies like the Titania? While we managed to defeat this beast without suffering any losses, it didn't look like it was in good shape to begin with. Who knows what would happen to us if we fought it when it was at its peak."

The battle was a giant wakeup call for everyone in the expeditionary fleet. While their 2-year MTA protection period enabled them to venture into the new frontier without worrying about attack from human forces, the Red Ocean was still home to countless alien species!

Whether they were intelligent or not, every non-human entity that was capable of traveling the stars were by no means weak! Some could even give the MTA and CFA's warfleets a run for their money, so how could a second-class organization like the Larkinson Clan stand a chance against these threats?

Many people in the fleet began to feel more depressed once they realized how much worse this battle could have proceeded. Even if the zones swept by the Big Two had been cleared of all major threats, plenty of alien stragglers managed to slip through the cracks.

It was always a gamble to see whether these unknown but undoubtedly hostile entities were strong or weak. Unlike back in the galactic rim, the power level of these aliens swung wildly depending on their race and origin. A poor encounter could easily lead into a clash against an alien ship whose power was comparable to that of a CFA cruiser!

"We need to make a lot of changes after this battle." Joshua predicted.

Firepower was the main shortcoming of the expeditionary fleet. There was nothing wrong with the Larkinson Clan's ranged capabilities as long as it fought against typical human forces. The Larkinson Army had enough guns to wipe out entire mech regiments before they came close!

However, from a galactic perspective, all the Larkinson mech legions possessed was quantity. Even the artillery cannons of the Transcendent Punishers had proven to be too light and meager to deal substantial damage against massive beasts or alien warships.

Though Joshua wasn't a mech designer, even he could clearly tell what the Larkinsons needed to do in order to stand a better chance against supermassive threats.

"We need bigger guns."

Just the journey through the flesh tunnel gave him a deeper understanding how desperately the Larkinsons needed more firepower. There was no way the clan could continue to rely on its trump cards such as its battle formations to drill through all of this thick and resilient biomatter.

"We're lucky that we only encountered a single astral beast."

What if the Titania wasn't alone? What if the expeditionary fleet had to fight against a small family of astral beasts?

It took several battle formations to neutralize just a single giant astral beast. After that, the Eye of Ylvaine, the Swordmaidens and the Penitent Sisters would no longer be able to repeat their feats!

The prospect of having to fight against several of these giant beasts with mech-grade weapons made him feel pained.

In warship terms, the armaments of a mech were the equivalent of secondary guns!

Secondary guns were only suitable for intercepting mechs, starfighters, missiles, drones and other 'light' targets. Warships came equipped with them in order to deal more efficiently against swarms and to avoid utilizing their main cannons against unworthy threats.

Though Joshua didn't quite think about it, he vaguely understood that the Big Two's prohibition against warships and warship-grade weapons put early pioneers at a heavy disadvantage.

This was the price for getting first dibs on the Red Ocean. By moving earlier than other humans, the early arrivals also had to deal with lingering threats that could end their entire fleets in a single day.

All of this made Joshua more urgent to improve than ever. The fire in his heart burned hotter as all of his earlier complacency disappeared. He finally recognized that the Red Ocean was just as dangerous as the Nyxian Gap, if not more!

THE MORE YOU RECOGNIZE YOUR INADEQUACIES, THE MORE YOU WILL GROW. NEVER FORGET THIS FEELING.

"How the hell do you know how to use words like 'inadequacies'?" Joshua asked. "Do mechs like you get born with a high school education or something? How does this even work?"

...

Soon enough, Joshua had to set aside his current thoughts and get back to the matter at hand.

The lights shining from his mech illuminated the dark and fleshy cavern that comprised the astral beast's interior.

Much of it had already been damaged or destroyed. Joshua could easily recognize which mechs went to work. The giant sliced and diced pieces of flesh must have been the handiwork of Venerable Dise while the large portions of charred and burned flesh must have been the handiwork of Patriarch Reginald.

The Everchanger stopped in place as Joshua closed his eyes and carefully attuned his will to his surroundings.

It was a lot harder for him to do this after he had led a battle formation earlier, but it was no problem for him to sense signs of life.

"Have you discovered anything, Mr. Joshua?" Patriarch Reginald Cross asked as his Bolvos Rage flew to a stop next to the Everchanger. "According to my instincts, the Titania should be dead. At the very least, I believe it is no longer a threat."

Joshua didn't answer immediately. He tried his best to use his sensitivity to his advantage, but did not sense much of anything.

However, the longer he searched, the more he began to sense... echoes for a lack of a better word.

It was as if a massive living presence used to be here but had left not too long ago, leaving some sort of imprint of its existence behind.

Was this death, or something else?

"I... can't say anything with certainty." Joshua respectfully answered the patriarch of an allied clan. "My guess is that the Titania is truly dead, but... who knows how these astral beasts work."

He spent ten minutes scouring through the internal cavity. Though he encountered more and more echoes, they all started to fade over time. It was as if the Titania had already departed from this plane of existence.

The more Joshua observed the devastation around him, the more he became certain that the creature was dead.

Though he did not feel qualified at all to issue any judgments on the Titania's current state, the Larkinsons needed an answer. He transmitted his findings and made sure to convey his doubts as well.

In the end, the Golden Skull Alliance decided the Titania was dead enough to begin plundering its spoils!

"Keep our mechs on standby but maintain a greater rotation. Our mech pilots deserve longer breaks, particularly the ones that have just formed battle formations. Begin probing the carcass with bots but hold off on sending any manned exploration parties. Don't forget about the ruined flesh torpedoes and other pieces of biomatter that are floating away from us. Tell the geeks over at the Dragon's Den to examine as much data on the Titania as possible. We need solid confirmation about the actual state of the astral beast before I will allow them to head inside the giant corpse."

The Golden Skull Alliance switched from battle mode to examination mode. The mechs were no longer the main protagonists. That honor went to the biotech researchers that were predominantly based on the Dragon's Den.

The half-biological research vessel had already flown a bit closer in order to improve the effectiveness of her bio-oriented sensors and scanners.

At the same time, many of the scientists inside were gleefully interpreting everything they saw. Many different theories circulated throughout the research labs and it was difficult to determine which ones were accurate.

At least the Larkinson Clan had enough skilled and knowledgeable personnel to examine the Titania. Neither the Glory Seekers nor the Crossers possessed enough exobiologists to perform a comprehensive examination of a giant astral beast!

"What have you found out so far?" Ves asked Director Ranya's projection.

"The Titania should indeed be dead." She answered with greater certainty than before. "We have tentatively managed to decipher the meaning and purpose of the strange organs our expert mechs have destroyed. Based on many different clues, we think that a number of them regulated important functions such as energy production, energy transfer and blood circulation. As long as the subject is no longer able to conduct these functions, I can hardly imagine the beast can properly function anymore. Energy is vital

to any life form, and a creature of this size requires vastly more of it than we can ever expend in a decade."

The bigger the organism, the greater their power consumption. This was an easy concept to understand to Ves. It pretty much worked the same way for mechs, starships, cities and so on. The lack of heat and energy was a pretty obvious signal that the Titania wouldn't be waking up anytime soon.

"Let's take it slow." Ves decided. "While there is a risk that other aliens might drop into this star system, I don't want to act too carelessly around the carcass. Please continue to examine it from a distance until your drones have found out what they can. Be sure to prioritize any rare and valuable exotics the beast might possess. There has to be phasewater somewhere inside. We recently purchased a lot of sensors that can sniff this material out. Make good use of them as nothing is more important than getting our hands on our first batch of phasewater."

As Ves gazed at the distant corpse that had gone completely cold, he was already looking forward to stepping inside the beast himself.

He was not content with staying aboard the Spirit of Bentheim. Ves had never encountered a single life form that was this big and massive in his life. Just the thought of stepping inside its huge body made his blood race!

"Meow?" Lucky gazed suspiciously at Ves.

"Hehehehe." Ves deviously chuckled as he grabbed his cat. "If nothing goes wrong, we're about to go on a little excursion!"

"Meow!"

Chapter 3563: Belly of the Beast

"So this is an astral beast of the Red Ocean." A researcher remarked as his suited form flew outside of the shuttle that had flown into the inner belly of the Titania. "How... grand."

Hundreds more people equipped with hatard suits and scientific gear had already arrived in previous waves.

It took a bit of time, but once the Larkinsons became more certain about their conclusions, they were finally willing to bring in actual personnel in order to explore the dead astral beast in detail.

Several many different clansmen had volunteered to undertake the potentially dangerous task of examining and poking the giant carcass. Although it was a dangerous

assignment, the Larkinsons did not lack for daredevils who wanted to experience the might and terror of the biofauna of the Red Ocean up close!

Bioresearch teams dispatched by the Dragon's Den took samples while trying to puttle out the functions of different organs and groupings of flesh.

Salvage parties sent by the Graveyard had also begun to harvest any pieces of biomass that contained valuable exotics.

More people were performing other functions such as rigging explosives, installing shield generators, drilling tunnels in different directions and other engineering-related activities.

It was an inspiring sight to many. This giant beast was previously a threat, but now humanity had subjugated it. This was the moment where they could all enjoy the spoils they deserved.

Several minutes later, a larger and more ostentatious shuttle flew through the flesh tunnel.

Its arrival had been preceded by the entry of numerous Avatar and Battle Crier mechs as well as a couple of expert mechs in the form of the Dark Zephyr and the Shield of Samar.

Both of these exceptional machines were present in case the Titania or a portion of it was not as dead as everyone thought.

Once the shuttle opened up its hatch, numerous heavily-armed and armored bodyguards floated outside. Their large and black shapes formed a protective envelope around the exit.

Soon enough, an additional form passed through. Every Larkinson knew that the patriarch had come as he emerged with his distinctive Unending Regalia.

Ves had upgraded it over the past month. Given that he was in a completely new environment, he replaced and upgraded numerous modules in order to increase its usefulness in different situations. The more advanced products and tech available in the Red Ocean had made it a lot easier to improve the combat armor's performance.

Aside from improving its functions, Ves also paid greater attention to its appearance. He upgraded its visual design and made it more grand and regal. He wanted it to reflect his identity as a leader of a prosperous and growing clan, not a Journeyman who was still in the early stages of his career.

The makeover was a success. Every Larkinson who saw it appreciated his work. The grand cape, the rich red coating along with the golden accents made him feel like a king.

"Well, maybe it should be a little bit bigger."

Of all of the sovereigns and leaders that he had met so far, none of them made a stronger impression on him than the Iron Emperor.

Though Rion Aaden was just a dwarf, his massive armored suit massively boosted his physical presence. All of that added height and mass caused the former emperor of the Vulcan Empire to come across as a giant rather than a heavy gravity variant human, and that was quite useful in certain social settings!

"I don't have enough Unending alloy, though." He frowned.

He attempted to look for more samples of this highly valuable and useful material in the resource markets based in the Red Ocean, but no one had ever heard of it. Unless Ves took a trip back to the old galaxy and revisited the Nyxian Gap, the chances were low that he would ever come across this special alloy again!

"I need to look for substitute materials." He frowned. "If I can get my hands on a substance like Galenta Bone, I can start making new mechs and gear that play well to my capabilities."

The main advantage of Unending alloy was not its resilience which was comparable to that of a cheaper first-class mech.

The real reason why he wanted them so badly was because they also functioned as spiritual energy containers!

Ves looked down at his own Unending Regalia. The suit of combat armor had gained a greater sense of presence and identity after he equipped it numerous times.

Though he didn't deliberately fill up its spiritual reserves with his energy or the energy of his design spirits, he still marked his equipment with his imprint each time he wore his combat armor.

Although the changes weren't too obvious at the moment, Ves could already sense that the Unending Regalia was evolving into something... greater.

As long as he continued wearing it for a number of years, enough of him would rub off on the combat to reach threshold where it gave birth to a natural consciousness!

"It's like piloting a mech, but slower and not as effective." He remarked.

Though he didn't interface with his Unending Regalia like a mech interfaced with mechs, the rich spiritual interactions between them served as an adequate alternative.

Once he finished admiring his own handiwork, he turned his attention back to the reason he came here. The internal cavity in the center of the Titania was large and vast. Ves could easily imagine erecting an entire city inside. If space was not a concern, then a million people could easily inhabit the belly of the astral beast!

Of course, no one was stupid enough to make such a suggestion. It was extremely reckless to build an entire city inside the belly of a dead organism that was bound to deteriorate and break up over time!

"Sir. Welcome to the Titania." A senior researcher from the Dragon's Den greeted the patriarch. "Please be careful. There is lots of work being done inside this carcass. We have already suffered a number of near-accidents in the form of blood vessels bursting out, detritus being flung out at high speeds and tunnels squeeting shut due to instinctual contractions. Although we are certain that the Titania is dead, not every portion of its body has gotten the news as of yet. They are like parts of a broken ship. As long as they still have access to their own local backup power reserves, they can still act up when subjected to certain stimuli."

"I see. I will make sure to keep my distance from the areas being worked on, then. Now, before we proceed with a tour, have you found any phasewater?"

"No, sir. We have employed all of our new scanning equipment that are tuned to track phasewater, but none of them have pinged even once. The good news is that they have not detected any trace quantities of phasewater inside this cavity."

"And why is that good news?"

"It means that the massive internal damage inflicted by our expert mechs most likely did not break apart any organs responsible for enabling the Titania to engage in warp travel. For now, we are continuing our search but it has become increasingly more apparent that this suspected organ is not present in this cavity."

Ves looked disappointed. In the worst case scenario, the organ had either broken apart at an earlier time or the Titania never possessed it in the first place!

"What are your theories?"

"We are still working on the assumption that such an organ exists, sir." The biotech researcher replied. "Phasewater is a dangerous and unstable substance, so the astral beast may have evolved to store it in a different location of its body. It is best to place it away from its key organs and closer to the exterior so that the astral beast can eject the warp travel organ if it ever grows unstable."

"That sounds similar to how an FTL drive is installed on a warship. Once it become dangerous for any reason, the FTL drive has to be dumped out of the vessel before it can trigger a greater catastrophe."

The other man nodded. "Exactly. While the Titania is not a starship, the principles are still the same. We have already deployed most of our phasewater detectors to the exterior as we believe we may have better luck outside."

"I've got something even better. Two things, actually."

Although Ves had faith in the modern scanning equipment the clan acquired back in Vulit, he possessed better solutions.

The first of which was a scanner that he had not used in a long time. He first transmitted a command that called the Everchanger over.

"What are your orders, sir?" Venerable Joshua asked.

Ves smiled as he saw his work up close. The Everchanger performed well despite not showing off its full capabilities. Just its ability to amplify glows and improve the performance of battle formations turned it into an indispensable asset for the Larkinson Clan!

For now, Ves had no use for its combat capabilities, so he quickly brought out a highly-advanced piece of equipment.

"Stay still while I install this special sensor inside your mech."

He had already brought a floating toolbox along with him to facilitate his work. Since he designed the Everchanger himself, he had no problem prying off the luminar crystal that served as the expert hero mech's symbolic eye.

In its place, he carefully installed the Odineye inside the socket, which just happened to be designed and constructed in a way that accommodated this piece of high technology!

Once Ves became satisfied with the installation, he quickly distanced himself from the massive mech and lifted his arm.

"Okay, Joshua. Please direct your attention on the sensor and scanning settings of your expert mech. A new option should have appeared. Carefully turn it on but don't go full blast yet. Try and gradually raise the power setting in order to avoid overloading this sensor module by mistake. We don't have any spares."

The Odineye at its current level had cost Ves 400,000 DP in total. It was an absolutely precious device that could play an extremely useful role in situations like these. If not for that, he wouldn't have risked bringing it out today!

Though Venerable Joshua felt nervous for handling something so valuable, he did as commanded.

Within a minute, Ves began to feel as if his body was being massaged down to his bones. This was a typical sign that he was being subjected to powerful scans.

"This... this is amazing." The senior researcher said as he received a feed of all of the detailed observation data the Odineye had begun to gather. "Whatever sensor that you have brought is much better at reading and identifying the composition of the surrounding flesh. We can accelerate our research schedule if we can continue to make use of this wonderful sensor!"

Ves raised his palm before the biotech researcher could say anything more. "I'm sorry, doctor, but our main purpose is to search for phasewater. I'll have Joshua fly his Everchanger over every accessible section of the Titania so he can help you map the creature's body, but as long as its search is not done, he won't be around to perform any detailed scans."

Aside from employing the Odineye, Ves also turned to another solution. His suited form turned back to the shuttle.

"Lucky! Are you going to keep hiding inside or do I need to drag you out?!"

"Meow!" Lucky complained through the communication channel as his tiger-striped metallic form unsteadily flew out of the hatch.

The moment his artificial green eyes gated around the internal cavity, the gem cat made a barfing gesture.

Lucky felt sick at seeing so much disgusting grey flesh! There was so much organic matter around him that it was as if he had entered an unregulated and untreated garbage pit!

"Meeeoow! Meeeoow! Meeeoow!"

"No excuses, Lucky. I brought you to a resource market once so you can become familiar with phasewater. Now is the time for you to put that familiar to good use! Start scouring the Titania's body or I'll make sure you're only eating iron ore for dinner for the next month!"

"Meeeoow!"

Chapter 3564: Unconventional Organism

Though Ves sympathized with Lucky, that did not stop him from exploiting his own cat.

After a bit more haranguing, the gem cat reluctantly got to work. Lucky phased through the disgusting flesh of the Titania and began his long search for phasewater.

Of course, if Lucky was fortunate enough to bump into a different valuable exotic substance, no one would mind if he took a bite or two. That was how Ves was able to persuade his cat to douse for phasewater.

Once Ves sent out his cat, he did nothing except watch and supervise his men scouring through the body of the dead astral beast.

It was quite inspiring to see so many underlings working under his direction. From the mech pilots growing bored as they kept guard over the site to the biotech researchers making exciting new discoveries that would likely not make any impact on the subsequent work, each of them played a part in strengthening the clan and by extension Ves.

"Oh. That reminds me. I need to get to work as well."

He did not leave the safety of his flagship just to go on a tourist trip. The Titania may be a grand and powerful sight, but it was also disgusting agglomeration of alien flesh. Those with more sensitive sensibilities would probably react a lot worse than Lucky when they entered this cavity!

Fortunately, Ves already got rid of most of his squeakiness after spending a bit of time in the Life Research Association. He had encountered weirder and more disgusting biological horrors on the surface of Prosperous Hill VI.

The encounter with the biojuggernaut known as Uranus alone had done much to desensitize him to the sight of other massive organisms.

"Uranus isn't as big as heavy as the Titania, though." He observed. "This astral beast is on another level!"

The Uranus was large enough to gorge on mechs, but the Titania was large enough to make the Spirit of Bentheim feel like a dwarf!

Before sentimentality hit Ves once again, he shook his head and tried to stay focused on his task.

"Joshua mentioned that he felt echoes inside this carcass. Let's see what is up with that."

Ves floated away from the shuttle and approached what constituted the surface of the massive inner cavity. The flock of bodyguards followed suit and made sure there wasn't anything dangerous in the way.

Mindful of the dangers of the walls of flesh, he did not dare to set down his feet directly onto the gray biomass. Instead, he maintained a certain amount of distance and closed his eyes in order to attune his spiritual senses.

"I... can feel it. It's quite obvious, actually."

It was fascinating to Ves. The Titania was once a powerful creature, but not just because of its enormous body and its resilient vitality.

What Ves had managed to discover was that the astral beast used to possess a lot of spiritual strength!

The imprint this massive presence left behind inside the corpse was so obvious that Ves did not need to make any further guesses. The Titania was not just powerful astral beast that had slowly grown to this size. It possessed other advantages that likely gave it crucial advantage in its journey to survive and grow in this hostile and dangerous galaxy!

"Well, this has become a lot more interesting!"

He should have thought about it before. Although astral beasts always tended to be on the large size, one that was as big as a moderate CFA battleship did not come around that often!

Another clue that should have pointed him in this direction was the ascertain that big creatures that grew under harsh environments likely tended to possess special powers. Galenta whales and presumably phase whales were both famed for their more exotic powers rather than their raw physical might.

"The only confusing part of all of this is the lack of intelligent behavior from the Titania."

Spirituality was always linked with sentience as far as Ves had discovered. A creature could not become a spiritual powerhouse if it was not capable of thinking beyond its instincts.

If the Titania was intelligent, why did it show little of it during its attack?

"Maybe it was already in bad shape."

This was the predominant theory among those who believed the Titania could have launched more devastating attacks if it was in its peak condition. There was no way that launching flesh torpedoes at an enemy was the extent of its attack capabilities!

Ves was inclined to believe the Titania was already close to death and that the Golden Skull Alliance merely tipped it over. This theory conformed with everything he witnessed.

Still, that didn't bring him any close to the astral beast's spirituality. Had it already departed for the spiritual realm? Ves hoped this wasn't the case. He did not want to lose out on a potential harvest!

To that end, Ves flew around in the giant internal cavity. Since it was as large as a city, Ves would have to spend a long time in order to complete a carpet search, and that only applied to this specific space. There was a much larger shell of alien biomass around it that Ves might have to search as well in order to find what he wanted!

"I really hope I don't need to dig through all of that awful flesh like Lucky."

Dirty jobs were supposed to be performed by his minions! What was the point of being the boss if he had to wade through all of the muck in person?

"Besides, the more time passes by, the greater the likelihood that what I'm looking for will have already disappeared."

He needed to move quickly and cover as much ground as possible in order to find his prize.

Half an hour passed as Ves performed a carpet search. His Unending Regalia's float modules received a lot of exercise as he flew back and forth.

Although he hadn't found anything immediately, he vaguely gained a greater understanding of the life that used to occupy this body.

The echoes of this once-enormous entity left behind acted like currents that vaguely guided Ves to a certain location that was close to the center of the cavity.

The density of organs here was larger than anywhere else. Not only that, but the complexity and concentration of higher grades of exotics was noticeably higher in this portion.

When Ves approached a nearby research team, he asked a question to one of the exobiologists.

"Is this where the Titania's brain is located?" He asked.

"Brains."

"Pardon?"

"We have learned enough about 'the Titania' that we can conclusively state that this astral beast is not a conventional organism." The middle-aged woman garbed in a hazard suit stated to the patriarch. "Look at these nodes. Individually, they are too small and low-capacity to regulate all of the biological functions of the Titania. Together, that is another story. When we examined these brain nodes in detail, we have found that they are all interconnected yet discrete in a way that we have found in few other species. Those species operate in ways that are different from organisms like you and I. Instead of being run by a single mind, they are run by multiple minds. It might not be obvious at first glance, but the Titania is actually a variation of a superorganism!"

A superorganism!

Ves did not know much about biology, but he knew enough to know that hives of bees and ants were classified as superorganisms.

Perhaps an individual ant was a rather weak and pathetic creature that likely wouldn't be able to survive the wild alone, but when they worked alongside thousands of other ants, they formed a collective that was much more powerful than the sum of its parts!

Superorganisms consisted of many individual organisms that all performed specialized roles in order to make the overall hive prosper.

A superorganism was basically a large collective rather than a single uniform life form. This also caused Ves to grow confused.

Had just a single guiding intelligence in the Titania become spiritually powerful or did the whole collective transcend their biological limitations at once?

His earlier assumptions leaned towards the latter, but the more he thought about it, the more he favored the former possibility.

Even when it was injured and almost dead, the Titania's reaction against the Golden Skull Alliance was just too weak. Ves had not sensed any strong spiritual activity from the astral beast at that time, though that might be due to distance.

In any case, Ves became more convinced that only a part of the Titania might have been more spiritually active. It may have even functioned as the 'queen bee' of this alien collective!

The biggest question now was whether this creature was still alive. Ves looked hungrily at the ugly flesh nodes, but quickly saw that more than half of them were burned or scorched away!

"Damnit, couldn't you have been more gentle, Patriarch Reginald?!"

The Bolvos Rage was capable of inflicting so much mass damage that much of the area that previously held the brain nodes had turned into an apocalyptic flesh ruin. Though the Lifer exobiologists still found plenty of intact ones that possessed lot of research value, Ves was afraid that the key organ he was looking for may have already passed away!

He quickly rushed through the ruined flesh forest and tuned his spiritual senses as much as possible in order to search for any signs of spiritual life.

"C'mon."

He suddenly stopped and turned his orientation. During his search, he sensed a faint sign of life that was distinct from all of the background noise generated by nearby glows and true resonance from expert mechs.

He quickly approached a ruined brain node that had almost completely charred and faded from existence.

The spiritual echoes were strongest at this site. Ves knew beyond any doubt that this was where the spiritual king of this little flesh empire once reigned!

Ves didn't need to rerun the footage of the battle inside this cavity to figure out that the Titania likely died when the Bolvos Rage coincidentally destroyed this key brain node.

"The question is whether there is anything left."

He failed to sense anything valuable. Though the echoes here were strong, they were like footsteps in the dirt. Just because there were far more footsteps here than in the other parts of the Titania didn't mean they were valuable!

Ves frowned deeper as he tried to make sense of all of the echoes. They hardly told him anything useful.

"Wait..."

When Ves focused on the most recent echo, he found that it actually left a trail that led to another direction.

He curiously followed this trail. He only flew around 500 meters ahead before he came to another ruined section of flesh.

This time, he came across a lot of gray biomatter that had been cut to pieces. Blood and other disgusting biomatter littered this site as Ves tried his best not to throw up his lunch.

When the trail ended at a small pile of cut and discarded flesh, Ves came close and reached out with his spiritual senses.

He sensed life.

"What?"

The life that he discovered within this ruined flesh was weak.

Not only that, it was suffering.

When Ves commanded a mech to come close and carefully lift up the heavy cuts of flesh that resembled giant pieces of ham, he finally spotted a small brain node that had been cut from its stem due to one of Venerable Dise's destructive swings.

Ves vaguely figured out what had happened. When the Bolvos Rage was just about to kill the main brain, the alien spirituality must have moved to this backup brain. Yet before it could do anything meaningful, Venerable Dise cut off the backup brain from the rest of the body, thereby removing any chance for the alien intelligence to control the rest of the Titania!

He suddenly released a chuckle. "It turned out that the First Sword managed to decapitate the Titania after all!"

While that was funny, Ves knew that time was of the essence. From what he could observe, the alien spirituality was in an awful condition due to suffering from multiple attacks that each weakened its integrity.

"I need to move quickly!"

Chapter 3565 How to Profit

The Titania turned out to be an amazing creature after all. The giant astral was not a single biological entity, but rather a collective of multiple cooperating organisms that had bonded together in a single gigantic form.

Although these kinds of superorganisms were not that uncommon in places where there was life, Ves and many Larkinsons never encountered a creature that grew to this size!

The entire creature must have led a long and difficult life as it slowly grew up in the Red Ocean. As the Lifer exobiologists kept investigating the Titania's enormous carcass, they gathered more clues about its nature, its biological mechanisms, and its life trajectory.

This allowed them to construct a plausible story about the Titania's life from birth to its demise at the hands of the Golden Skull Alliance.

"In human terms, the Titania is 6344 years old." Director Ranya's projection stated as it floated next to Ves. "In astral beast terms, this is also an impressive age. Most astral beasts eventually end up dying to space hazards, predation from other astral beasts, starvation due to an inability to find sufficient sustenance or getting hunted down by sentient alien races. If we are able to keep it whole and transport it back to a developed trade system, we can easily sell it for a fortune."

"How much of a fortune?" Ves asked as he hovered above the research teams that were working to figure out as much as they could of the fascinating astral beast.

"It's hard to give you an exact estimate, but the true value of this beast to collectors is much greater when it is in a whole and in an undamaged state. Considering all of the destruction that we have inflicted on it, its value has already dropped by 70 percent. That doesn't make it worthless, though. I estimate that we can potentially sell it off for as much as 40,000 to 60,000 MTA credits."

"That much?!"

The Titania's corpse was as valuable as a good capital ship back in the old galaxy! This was an amazing prize for what amounted to a short and quick victory!

Payoffs like these were one of the greatest reasons why people flocked to the Red Ocean so much. It was much easier to stumble upon a lucky find and earn a huge fortune!

Of course, it was easy to forget that opportunities never fell into people's hands so easily. If the expeditionary fleet wasn't so strong and if it didn't possess so many trump cards, the Titania may have been the ones to scour over the remains of the Larkinson Clan instead!

Director Ranya adopted a helpless expression. "Don't be so quick to celebrate, sir. The Titania in its current state may be worth as much as a capital ship, but our fleet doesn't possess the means to bring it to a marketplace where it can be sold for that amount. The Titania is far too big to fit into the cargo holds of any of our capital ships. None of them are equipped with FTL drives that can allow them to tow larger objects through superluminal travel. Certain warp drives and superdrives are capable of doing that but we do not possess any of this advanced tech. This means that the Titania's carcass is more akin to a fixed fortification rather than a movable ship to us. The only way we can take it away is if we break it up into many pieces and store them in the cargo holds of many different ships."

All of that was true. The expeditionary fleet contained plenty of capital ships that were all useful in their own way, but none of them possessed the capability to drag space station-like objects from one star system to another!

Ves began to feel pained when he realized how much of a loss his fleet was suffering due to lacking the necessary tools for the job.

"Have you found the Titania's equivalent of a warp drive yet? If we can find it, we might be able to make it move to a destination under its own power."

Ranya shook her head. "I wouldn't dream so much if I were you. We have already searched the Titania for several hours but found no trace of either phasewater or an organ that can possibly function as the warp drive. Not even the inspection performed by your cat has found any sign of them so far. Our current theory is that the Titania must have overburdened it in order to escape pursuit from its original attackers."

That was another piece of bad news. Although the Larkinson Clan hadn't suffered any significant losses in the process of killing the Titania, the inability to earn the best profit left a sour taste in his mouth.

"What can we do with it if we can't drag it to a marketplace in a single piece?"

"There are several possible options we can take, of which I would seriously consider two of them. The first is to employ the most obvious solution and break up the Titania entirely. This creature has lived for six millenia and it has managed to devour a lot of valuable exotics and other prized materials throughout its lifetime. Although the Titania is more akin to a garbage dump where much of its minerals comprise of relatively low-value bulk exotics, we have found organs and bones that have been laced with inconsistent compositions of medium-grade and high-grade exotics."

The Titania was still worth a lot of money due to all of the materials locked in its body. The only downside to breaking it all down in order to extract these valuable exotics was that the astral beast would no longer exist as a complete carcass. This meant the expeditionary fleet would basically throw away all of the added value of a creature that had lived for an impressively long time.

Regardless of how much value the expeditionary fleet could obtain from dismantling the Titania, its valuation could have easily been five to ten times as much if it remained whole!

This dynamic applied to any other sophisticated product. A painting made with cheap composite canvas and mass-produced synthetic paint could easily be sold for dozens of MTA credits if it was made by a famed and prestigious master!

The reason why there was such an enormous price disparity between the two was that it was a lot easier to obtain the raw materials than a finished product made by the same goods!

This process of creation and transformation generated a lot of value as the final product was oftentimes a lot more scarce and functional.

When Ves gazed around at the giant walls of grayish flesh, he could see that the Titania was truly a marvel of biological growth and evolution. To destroy it was like shattering a priceless historical treasure.

"What's the second option, then?" He asked.

"Well... just because we don't possess the capabilities to tow the Titania's carcass away doesn't mean that others are as helpless. If you are willing to remain in this star system for several weeks or months, we can wait until a fleet dispatched by a third party has arrived to bring the whole carcass away."

This was an interesting suggestion. The problem was that the Golden Skull Alliance didn't have the best negotiating position since it was a relatively small player in the Red Ocean. It would also be clear to anyone that the expeditionary fleet had no other choice but to resort to other people's help. This meant that the Larkinsons would have to give up 30 percent of the earnings if not more.

Of course, if there was no better option, it was perfectly acceptable to give away a third of the potential earnings.

What Ves couldn't accept was the amount of time it took for a third party to come all of the way here. Until the Titania's carcass was handed over to a partner such as the Wild Fighter Association, the expeditionary fleet had to remain stuck in place for months.

There was so much of the Red Ocean that Ves wanted to explore. He was especially cognizant that the MTA's 2-year protection period continued to expire with each day that passed. If he wanted to make the most of this valuable immunity, his expeditionary fleet should be moving as far away as possible!

"I don't want us to wait around." He told her. "We need to leave within a week at most. Not only do we need to make more active use of our time, I'm also concerned with encountering the enemy that has originally put the Titania in such a sorry state. The longer we linger here, the greater the chance the astral beast or alien warfleet might catch up to its prey!"

Director Ranya furrowed her brows. "That does sound concerning. So you wish to proceed with cutting the Titania apart, sir?"

"Ah, I can't make this decision alone. I'll have to confer with the leaders of the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan to decide upon a unified course of action, but I don't think they will choose any differently."

The Larkinson Clan contributed the most to the defeat of the Titania. In addition, the clan held much more weight in the Golden Skull Alliance than the other partners. For all intents and purposes, Ves led the entire alliance.

He contacted the other leaders after he concluded his discussion with Director Ranya. Just as he expected, neither Marshal Ariadne nor Reginald Cross rejected his recommendation. It made the most sense and it also avoided any further complications that might arise.

The only issue that resulted in a bit of contention was how to divide the spoils.

Ves wasn't confident enough to negotiate on the clan's behalf, so he delegated this responsibility to Minister Shederin Purnesse.

After the old man had a good talk with his counterparts working for the other two alliance partners, they came up with a fairly satisfying split for every party involved.

"The contributions of our clan is the greatest and most pivotal to the defeat of the Titania, so we are entitled to 65 percent of the total harvest." Shederin's projection told Ves some time later. "The Glory Seekers have been more influential despite their smaller numbers so they can lay claim to 20 percent of the harvest. The Cross Clan will have to make due with just 15 percent as their ranged mechs along with their two expert mechs did not play a great role this time."

Ves was quite happy to hear that his clan lay claim to such a large proportion of the useful organs and materials that could be recovered from this massive organic garbage dump. If he negotiated this deal, he doubted he would be able to give his clan more than 50 percent.

"Good job, Shederin. Are there any special conditions that I should know about?"

"Certain high-grade exotics are useful in both starship and mech construction, but their quantities are relatively limited. We have agreed to form an internal auction of sorts where we can all bid on the materials that we are truly interested in. The allocation of high-value materials will be uneven as a result. Perhaps it would be a good idea for you or your wife to bid on the goods."

Ves nodded. "I'll be sure to do so. This is a good opportunity for our clan to acquire high-value materials that we can use to upgrade our existing expert mechs or build new ones like our upcoming Minerva Project."

He had always dreamed about designing and building mechs based on salvaged materials. There was a rustic sort of romance about it that harkened back to humanity's initial foray into the galaxy.

Though it was a shame to break up such a large and ancient astral beast for this, if it allowed his clan to strengthen all of its high-value mechs, then it was ultimately worth it in the end!

Chapter 3566 Ancient Alien Beast

The Golden Skull Alliance came to an agreement to butcher the Titania's carcass in order to harvest and split the valuable materials amongst themselves.

Everyone was relatively happy with their share of the spoils. The split was fair and it wasn't as if anyone had suffered a loss in the battle against the astral beast.

Although the Glory Seekers and the Crossers had dispatched their own gear and personnel to assist in the harvesting operations, they merely played a marginal role this time.

The Larkinsons took charge of the examinations and harvesting operations because they possessed much greater harvesting capabilities. Ships like the Andrenidae, the Graveyard and the Dragon's Den all worked together to break apart the giant astral beast's structure so that the pieces could be processed in order to yield the most valuable substances out of all of the junk.

"It was worth it to acquire all of those auxiliary ships." Ves smiled as he observed the ships at work. "They are finally showing their worth."

Shuttles and mining craft flew back and forth in order to transport biomass and other materials to the right destinations. Tens of thousands of people were involved in the grand endeavor.

As much as he looked forward to getting his hands on superior exotics that may very well possess properties equivalent to first-class materials, as far as he was concerned he had already claimed the biggest prize for himself.

In the absence of either an organic warp drive or any quantity of phasewater, the most valuable and useful spoils in his opinion was the dying spirituality of the main brain node of the Titania!

Although its condition had deteriorated to an immense degree by the time that Ves had tracked it down, he had moved quickly enough to transfer it to a spare P-stone before subsequently feeding it with universal life energy in order to close its spiritual wounds and bring back a portion of its vitality.

Ves did not make this decision lightly. The energy derived from his stash of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum was limited in quantity and each use dwindled his reserves even further.

However, by sacrificing 5 percent of the high-grade energy of a single vial of serum, Ves believe he obtained a much greater gain as a result!

As Ves settled down in his office again, he curiously held the P-stone in his hand that was serving as the current abode of his latest spiritual bounty.

"Meow!..."

"Stop exaggerating. I know you took a lot of bites out of the Titania's bones. My personnel has even found a few cat-shaped bite marks, you know!"

"Meow meow meow!"

Lucky was not in a good mood at the moment. After being used as an improvised deep penetration phasewater detection device, the cat left the fleshy confines of the Titania as soon as possible and returned to the comforting metal environment of the Spirit of Bentheim.

That did help with the trauma he acquired from diving through all of that disgusting, squeaky gray flesh! Gem cats weren't made to act like maggots!

In order to wash down those awful memories, Lucky resentfully chewed on a sumptuous bowl of exotics that the Larkinsons had already salvaged from the Titania.

Ves was afraid that Lucky needed to fill his belly many times over before the cat would finally be able to move past this traumatic experience!

"Well, at least we're gathering a lot of materials. The Titania ate a lot of stuff over its long lifespan."

Although the astral beast generally excreted much of what it ate, its biological systems possessed the capability to filter out and incorporate the stronger and more useful materials. This caused its body to accumulate a relatively higher proportion of valuable exotics.

The 'compensation' that Ves was forced to pay his cat was really nothing in comparison.

He turned his attention back to the P-stone holding his precious new spiritual ingredient. He had been thinking about what he should do with it.

"You've lost a lot of yourself. Even if I brought you back from the brink of death, you're so small and feeble that you have retained more than 7 percent of your original identity.

The loss was enormous. The main intelligence behind the Titania used to be so powerful and developed that it could govern the operation of the entire astral beast!

Even if it did not directly control anything, it still acquired a vast amount of knowledge, wisdom and insight on how its body operated.

Much of that was lost.

The only consolation for Ves was that the damage to the wounded spirituality mostly affected its more marginal and peripheral parts of itself. The core essence of its identity were still present.

Ves looked conflicted at it. He basically had two different ways to process it into a design spirit.

On one hand, he could continue to feed and nurture the intelligence behind the Titania and try to persuade it to live a new life.

The advantage of this solution is that the spirituality that might work together with Ves one day still retained a piece of its original heritage. Its age, its maturity, its intuition and other traits allowed it to stand out from the rest of his design spirits and bring advantages that were out of reach to its younger peers!

On the other hand, Ves could just treat it as a valuable ingredient and smash it apart in order to create a new and better spiritual product.

The most important reason to process the Titania's spirituality in this way was to ensure that he could create a design spirit that started off with a clean slate. It would come with none of the baggage that its main ingredient was saddled with. On top of that, Ves could exert a lot of control over his new creation, thereby making sure it provided more specific help to mechs and mech pilots.

Yet... this option sounded like a considerable waste.

"It's just like the decision on how to process the Titania's corpse. If we can keep it whole, we can derive much more use out of it than if we break it up and discard much of its structure in order to salvage the most useful materials."

Ves rarely worked with design spirits that were this old. His brief experiences with spiritual entities that were ancient mostly amounted to Nyxie and the dark gods.

None of them were particularly friendly. Why should they? They had grown to become extremely formidable leaders and tyrants. These hostile entities would probably fight Ves tooth and nail if he dared to turn them into his servants!

The question now was whether the Titania's remnant spirituality would be any different. Did it possess a strong and arrogant personality? Would it be able to recognize its current reality and bow its head to Ves?

Right now, the remnant spirituality had undergone too many shocks. Even if Ves had brought it back from the brink of death, it experienced so many changes that it had fallen into a healing coma.

It would take a while for it to wake up again. Until that happened, Ves could do little except gather clues by observing its spiritual makeup.

He could already sense its age. There was nothing like an old spirituality. While it wasn't necessarily stronger than his other spirits, it was much richer and more complicated than many other forms of life that he had encountered.

Each year that passed and each event it experienced added another mark to its spirit. Over time, all of these marks built up to an impressive tapestry that served as an organic record of some sorts.

Life matured by going through experiences. That was his belief. For an astral beast to grow this old and grow into such a formidable apex predator, the value of this alien spirit was inestimable!

Ves became more determined to preserve it whole and to coax it into becoming a new design spirit. Every other solution was suboptimal in his eyes.

"I already have plenty of alternatives in my collection that are new and purpose-built. It would be boring to add a similar entity to this group. It's much more interesting to do something different this time!"

He considered it an experiment of sorts. He not only wanted to know whether he could succeed in taming such an old spirit, but also wanted to observe the differences between it and his young and artificial spiritual products.

If the former turned out to possess greater advantages that Ves had never thought about, then there might be a way for him to apply a similar advantage to his future design spirits!

As Ves thought about how to actually make use of this interesting new spirit, he tried to imagine what kind mech paired best its inclinations.

"You're like the queen bee of the hive, aren't you?"

Although Dr. Ranya had cautioned him that this was not an accurate description of the mutated brain node's actual role in the Titania, it was a convenient analogy that helped Ves understand its overall role.

As Ves examined the complicated spiritual attributes of this remnant spirituality, he could sense notes that alluded to control, coordination, planning and other related attributes.

Though these attributes certainly played a key role to the beast entity, there was a lot more to it than these essential functions.

There was another aspect of the Titania's guiding intelligence that was... like a parent.

Although this wasn't a precisely fitting description, it was the best that Ves could come up with after examining this side of the remnant spirit.

"It's strange."

On one hand, the spirit cared a lot for its offspring. While Ves wasn't sure whether the concept of gender even applied to the Titania, the astral beast was definitely capable of producing children in a way.

Those living flesh torpedoes that the Titania utilized as its main attack method in the last battle were not mindless drones but true descendants of the astral beast that had spawned them in rapid tempo.

From what Ves was able to guess, attack and procreation meant the same thing to the Titania.

During its long life, the astral beast confronted enemies by launching its characteristic flesh torpedoes at them, each of which could grow up into another astral beast like its progenitor.

However, unless the offspring successfully reached a ship or other astral beast, it wouldn't be able to gain the nutrients and energy it needed to grow into maturity.

"In a way, this is a rather cruel way of raising offspring."

The Titania produced lots of children to use as missiles, but only the ones that struck their targets and managed to take them out would gain the capital to survive.

"Survival of the fittest. Only the best projectiles get to live."

The Titania must have produced a lot of successful offspring like this over its millenia of life. Many of its descendants were probably roaming the other parts of the Red Ocean at this time!

"It's like a matriarch... of warheads."

That was the most succinct way to describe the Titania. It was an amazing lifeform that was much grander and more powerful than he initially thought. Its struggle against the expeditionary fleet really didn't do justice to it. If not for the fact that an unknown alien enemy inflicted heavy damage to it, the Larkinsons and its allies wouldn't have been able to pick up such an enormous bargain!

Ves furrowed his brows when his thoughts strayed to the enemy that had managed to cripple the Titania.

Though the remnant spirituality didn't convey any clues about this matter, the exobiologists that had spent a lot of hours examining the astral beast's massive body had already come to a preliminary conclusion on the identity of the attacker.

"A phase whale."

The hole-like wounds inflicted on the Titania's enormous body looked as if an enormous creature had taken bites out of it. While it was improbable that a gigantic phase whale had utilized its maw to chew on the Titania, they were known to possess phase powers that could essentially remove a pocket of space and everything inside it to a different dimension!

"That's certainly an effective way to separate parts of an enemy body!"

The implication here was that there might be a phase whale lurking in this region!

Chapter 3567 Useful Spoils

"Much of the materials we've gathered from the astral beast carcass are useless." Gloriana stated to Ves.

"Pardon?"

"She's exaggerating." Ketis said. "Plenty of those alloys are useful in making stronger armor plating or mech weapons. We just have to gather the right amounts."

Gloriana did not look happy. "That's the problem here. This giant beast just eats everything it fancies without any specific priority on materials. As long as it is not toxic or a regular space rock, the Titania eats whatever is in front of it with no further thought. Whatever passes for its digestion system may filter out the deadweight, but it is not that discerning. This is why it has grown to such an immense size. It can't maintain a proper diet."

Ves threw a skeptical look at his wife. "You're ascribing human sensibilities to an alien creature. Perhaps overeating and growing fat might be bad for humans, but it could be completely normal to a beast like the Titania. Considering that it lived all the way up to an estimated 6344 years, I'd say that this beast's habit of excessive consumption is probably the key reason why it has managed to win the game of life for so long!"

Of course, no one was lucky for so long. Once the Titania got into a confrontation against a phase whale, it had utterly lost.

This not only showed that even the most successful entities could run out of luck, but also showcased how formidable the phase whale species could be in the Red Ocean!

According to the inferences made by the Lifer exobiologist, just a single phase whale had attacked the Titania!

Power wasn't necessarily scary. It was only when it was directed at someone that it became a true threat!

Although no one had found any signs of phase whales lurking around in this star system so far, Ves felt very uncomfortable about staying in this place. He wanted to resume his expedition into the depths of the Red Ocean as soon as possible.

While Ves became distracted by his concerns, the mech designers continued to discuss the bounty that they had gained from the alien beast carcass.

"We've gathered varying quantities of thousands of different exotics, but none of them come in quantities great enough to build entire mechs with. There's too little of everything! Some promising exotics come in such tiny quantities that we can only make personal equipment out of them. We can forget about applying them to any mechs!"

When Ves and the other Journeymen of the Larkinson Clan examined the list of gathered materials, they saw that it was essentially like a periodic table.

There were several dozen exotics that were present in enough quantities to be useful in mechs such as the Minerva Project. In fact, Gloriana was already thinking of ways to revise its current design configuration so that it could incorporate these valuable materials.

Yet that left a large pile of other materials that came in quantities ranging from a shuttle's worth to just a couple of grams!

Although Ves felt that it was a pity that the clan truly couldn't obtain more of these materials, he did not feel too distressed about this issue.

"We can fix this when we reach another trading system. We can sell the materials we are unlikely to use and use the proceeds to gather more materials that we do wish to use but don't have enough of it. Alternatively, we can just sell our entire spoils from the Titania and use the extra money to acquire other goodies or to reduce our debt burden."

"That's a waste and you know it, Ves. If we sell these materials in any marketplace, we'll probably have to undercut the price to a point that is well below their true value. I would rather keep these miscellaneous exotics if that's the case!"

"And do what with them?! Do you want to build a decorative statue of Alexandria with them or something?!"

"DON'T YOU USE THAT TONE ON ME, VES!"

As Ves and Gloriana entered into another argument, the remaining Journeymen in the meeting room all turned into bystanders.

"Does this happen often?" Sara Voiken quietly asked Ketis.

"Not as much as you think. The two will calm down soon. They never feel upset for too long."

Eventually, the married couple set aside their silly argument and went back to the question on what to do with the salvaged materials.

"For now, our capacity to store high-value goods is still plentiful." Ves said. "We can put the miscellaneous exotics in our strategic material reserve and either wait until we find a good use for them or just make them available to other clansmen for a fee. Perhaps they can come up with an interesting piece of tech if our assistant mech designers and other technically-inclined personnel play around with the new possibilities."

"Alright. Let's do that then." Gloriana sighed. "We gained a lot more out of the Titania than high-value exotics, right?"

"Correct. We have gathered a lot of gray biomass that we have stored in the Dragon's Den and the cargo holds of other ships. We've even employed the Small Oven of the Diligent Ovenbird as a temporary holding space for excess biomass. They take up a lot of space but are generally not worth much. I suppose we can sell them for anyone interested in acquiring a piece of an ancient astral beast once we reach a trading system."

"And when will that be? Are we heading back to civilization soon or will you insist on pushing deeper into wilder territory?"

"Originally, I planned to do the latter, but now that our cargo holds are filled with frozen alien flesh, we better find a place to sell it all. There's way too many low-value materials that are taking up valuable space. What if we find another treasure? I don't want to be forced in a position where we have to dump one set of valuables to take on another set of goods."

"Where are we heading then, Ves?"

He opened up a projection that presented a regional star map. Ves pointed at one that was close enough along the current route. "Here. The Pellysa System has already emerged as one of the biggest trading nodes of the Magair Middle Zone. We'll find the most buyers for our products while at the same time have a wider selection of goods available for us to buy."

While there were other port systems and trading systems that offered access to special goods and services, they simply couldn't compete against the Pellysa System in terms of scale.

Sure, it was probably the most expensive star system to conduct business with different trading partners, but Ves couldn't be bothered to bring his fleet directly to the source of certain specialty products.

Dulo Voiken asked an important question. "Sir, is there anything special about Pellysa that is relevant to our work?"

"Hmm, there is a tournament scene over there as well, but it is not as big and extensive as the one back in Vulit." Ves replied. "What is more important is that it is also used as a local dumping ground for pioneers that have gathered valuable commodities in the new frontier but have to find a place to sell it all off. While it's unlikely we'll find anything truly valuable in these exchanges, we might pick up a few useful curiosities when we go shopping."

"That sounds good."

After making everything clear to the mech designers, the meeting ended and life went on for the Larkinsons.

The expeditionary fleet safely departed from the star system where it had left behind a substantial amount of biomass that was not worthwhile enough to bring along.

The Golden Skull Alliance never encountered the phase whale that had presumably attacked the Titania. Whether the frighteningly powerful sentient alien individual was not fast enough or did not bother to chase after its prey, no one knew. They just felt grateful that they did not have to fight another battle against an extremely powerful biocreature.

As routine settled in again, the mech designers all resumed their work on the mech designs.

Ves went back to work as well and mainly assisted Gloriana with revising the Minerva Project so that the upcoming expert mech for Commander Casella gained additional strength.

It was an interesting exercise for them to try and puzzle the new materials into an existing project. They had to start over in a few aspects because they completely changed a design element, but it was all worth it in the end.

"This will become a true Red Ocean design." Ves proudly said. "Our previous expert mechs are all strong in their own way, but they are mainly based on old materials and tech. This is the first expert mech design that will truly reflect the value of our work in our new environment."

Gloriana nodded in agreement. "This is the design that will prove that we can successfully adapt to a higher level of mech design."

The Minerva Project along with every other mech in development at this moment conformed to the standards of the galactic heartland of the old galaxy. It was not an easy transition for them as mechs of this caliber imposed greater demands in many areas.

Still, Ves and his wife weren't stumped by this challenge. They revelled in it even. Just the thought of designing a mech that would ultimately be more powerful than the ones they developed before continually drove them forward.

During these design sessions, Ves occupied himself with other matters. He and the Larkinsons had managed to harvest a lot of plunder from the Titania. The biotech researchers of the Dragon's Den had practically halted all of their usual duties so that they could spend as much of their time as possible on examining and experimenting with the collected alien biomass!

Ves talked with Director Ranya Wodin on a regular basis in order to keep him apprised on what all of the scientists were doing. He was more than aware that the excellent researchers who originally came from the Life Research Association tended to go overboard if they were left to their own devices. Regular supervision was essential to keeping them in line!

"So what new discoveries has your institute made so far, Ranya?"

"Do you recall the flesh torpedoes that we have successfully managed to subdue and capture?"

"I do. Are they still alive?" Ves curiously asked.

"That's the thing. The infant astral beasts all died out. We have tried our best to keep our specimens alive, to no avail. No matter if we feed them different materials including the tissue of their progenitors, the flesh torpedoes refuse to eat what we give them. Though we speculate that we may achieve more success if we let them loose on a ship, we cannot afford to squander such an important asset just to get a reaction out of a captured beast."

"That's correct. No ship is worth a casual experiment. So all of the flesh torpedoes have died?"

Director Ranya nodded. "Not only that, they are decomposing at a rapid rate, so we won't be able to find anything useful by studying their remains."

"Oh well. Do you have any positive news, then? There has to be more uses for all of the mountains of astral beast flesh we've gathered."

"It is too soon to report any useful findings, sir. Our research teams are just beginning to come to grips with all of the data they have gathered. What I can tell you is that once we have completed a few studies, we should be able to provide our mech units with more useful pointers on how to defeat similar astral beasts in the future. They won't be as helpless as before once we understand how they work. We can even develop special weapons that are especially effective against large organic opponents."

"Now that sounds better. Eventually, I plan to design a mech that is better equipped to fell supermassive threats, but for now it's a good idea to prepare target-specific solutions."

Chapter 3568 Light Mech Blues

Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson looked upset. He did not feel great as of late.

This was strange as there were plenty of reasons for him to be happy about. He was steadily becoming a stronger and more proficient expert pilot. His bond with the Dark Zephyr had grown closer. He was a prominent member of a clan that had finally begun to explore the Red Ocean in earnest.

Then why did he feel anything but comfortable with himself?

"What's the matter, Tusa?"

Ranya sat in front of a vanity mirror and adjusted her green, leaf-like hair. It was her most distinctive and exotic feature. When she let it out, it immediately became obvious to anyone that she was quite far removed from ordinary humans.

Though most people would have felt disturbed at coming too close to someone whose hair began to resemble plants, Tusa never cared that much. He found it to be a wonderful expression of freedom.

"I... kind of feel useless as of late." He admitted as he sat up from the bed and began to dress himself. "If the battle against the Titania is anything to go by, big guns will be the way going forward. Some enemies are just so big and so tough that a light skirmisher, even one that is an expert mech, can only play a marginal role."

"I think you're putting yourself down too much, Tusa. Light skirmishers are never useless. They can scout, they can drop off beacons, they can rescue people and so on. There will never be a situation where fast and light mechs are useless."

"Well I didn't see any of that in the last battle. I... know I'm still useful in battles against human mech forces, but with that MTA frigate hanging around, I don't think I'll find any opportunity to fight at my best. If we're fighting against anyone, it'll be against more aliens, who all have the habit of either growing big or building big."

Ranya finished grooming her abnormal hair and stood up in order to approach her current man. She sat down on the bed and embraced him in a hug.

"I thought expert pilots like you weren't supposed to have any doubts."

"It's not that simple." He snorted. "We are still human like the rest of you. We are just more driven about fighting than other mech pilots. I don't know how it is for others, but I am constantly reminded of my shortcomings every day. While this gives me a clear idea on what I need to do in order to improve, some problems are so huge that they are insurmountable."

The two cuddled against each other for a time.

Ranya sighed. "I can't help you that much, but if I were you, I would find a different way to make yourself useful. You could ask the mech designers to mount more sensor systems on your frame so that you can provide more accurate data on the aliens that we face in battle. If my research teams had more detailed observation data at their disposal, they would have been able to tell the mech pilots to correct their aim and focus on destroying the important organs that were responsible for enabling the Titania to constantly reinforce its exterior."

"I've already considered that, Ranya, but... not every light mech is a scout mech, you know. My Dark Zephyr is fully designed and built for combat, and that is how I want to pilot it as well. Performing boring jobs such as scouting our enemies is better left to the Flagrant Vandals.."

"What about delivering bombs? Maybe we'll face an enemy one day that is able to resist or intercept many ranged attacks. The only way to defeat this opponent is to get close and plant a bomb at a sensitive location. If missiles aren't able to do the job, then you and your Dark Zephyr may be able to turn the situation around."

He could see that working, but it was still a rather marginal role.

"It's not good enough. I need a more solid way to contribute to a battle. I don't want my expert mech to be relegated to a bomber. That is contrary to its purpose and contrary to my own fighting style."

"Then what am I supposed to say, then? I'm an exobiologist, not a mech strategist. Maybe you need to have a good talk with the patriarch in order to figure out a solution. Our clan managed to harvest a lot of interesting new exotics from the Titania. Maybe he can develop a special weapon that is better adapted to the current circumstances."

"Maybe I'll do that, though he's bound to be busy at the moment. He really doesn't need me dropping by to make another request."

Still, he had to do something because the prospect of wielding his daggers against enormous astral beasts such as the Titania was utterly useless even if he was able to leverage true resonance!

Later that day, Tusa took a trip to the Spirit of Bentheim in order to meet with Ves in person. He followed the directions and entered the design lab. Soon enough, he entered a private design room where Ves was engrossed with designing some kind of light mech.

"Meow." Lucky lazily greeted Tusa.

"Oh hey, Lucky. How's your meal?"

"Meow meow."

Lucky ignored the expert pilot and went back to crunching on his afternoon snacks.

Tusa had already grown distracted by Ves' latest work. As a light skirmisher specialist, he possessed a deep understanding of every light machine. Each of them may fulfill different roles, but they all possess the same advantage in mobility that he loved.

The mech in development quickly resonated with Tusa. He could already tell it was a mech that prioritized evasion first. Though the Dark Zephyr was leagues ahead when it came to acceleration and agility, this new light mech looked like it could do impressive moves in space.

There was only one little quirk that Tusa found odd.

"Is this a light ranged mech?" He asked as he walked up to Ves' desk.

The mech designer grunted. "Yeah. It's a mech designed exclusively for the Flagrant Vandals. My new Deceptor Project is a mech designed to exert a suppressive glow that can distort the perception of enemy mech pilots. While this mech isn't particularly good at fooling the sensors of the enemy mech, as long as their pilots are impaired in any way, the enemy will not be able to fight at their best."

Tusa thought about what the Deceptor Project could do and tried to imagine what it was like if it fought alongside the Ferocious Piranha.

His eyes widened. "Do these effects stack with each other?"

"I'm not certain, but that is my hope." Ves replied. "I already have proof that the Valkyrie Redeemers and the Ferocious Piranhas work well together, so there is definitely a chance that suppressive glows can work on enemies at the same time. If I can add a third one to the mix, even the better-trained mech pilots will suffer I think! This is

especially the case for my current project as I am designing it with highly trained and disciplined opponents in mind."

"Oh? How so, Ves?"

"The effect of its glow on enemies is much more subtle than that of the Valkyrie Redeemer and the Ferocious Piranha. As you can imagine, the Deceptor Project's concept revolves entirely around misdirection. It is supposed to subtly mess with the enemy's target perception and evaluation. Perhaps a mech pilot might think that the Deceptor Project is situated further away. Perhaps the mech pilot thinks that there are twelve enemy mechs instead of thirteen ones. Little tricks like that might not be easy to defeat when the enemy is fully attentive, but what if his mind is already subjected to the disorientating glow of the Ferocious Piranha? His focus is already too preoccupied!"

Tusa had to admit that this was definitely a promising idea. The Flagrant Vandals would be able to gain a lot more direct combat capabilities if it was able to exploit multiple suppressive glows.

"What's the deal with the small gun?"

"The Deceptor Project is not a melee mech like the Ferocious Piranha. It is supposed to attack its targets from a short distance, but not at point-blank range. It is a mech that is best at harassing enemy formations that are too tight and powerful to be overrun by a melee charge. Although it is true that the firepower of a submachine gun is low, it is sustainable and can be fired for a long time without exhausting the limited energy reserves of a light mech. This is a mech that is mainly meant to provide fire support and other forms of support to friendly mechs."

The mech indeed looked suitable for the purpose, but Tusa was seriously worried about its lack of punch. Unless it was able to position itself at an angle that allowed it to shoot at the enemy's rear armor, the submachine gun in their hands would not be able to fight effectively against armored units.

"Have you considered replacing the submachine gun with a gun that packs a greater punch? It doesn't have to be too big. Just a carbine would be a nice upgrade."

"I've considered that, but there are still uses for rapid-fire weaponry." Ves replied.

"They're easier to aim and require less skill on the part of the mech pilots. They can still deal a lot of accumulated damage when used en masse. Imagine a mech getting bombarded by the output of a hundred submachine guns at once. Low power or not, the sheer quantity of attacks will definitely take effect!"

Tusa recognized a flaw in this argument. "What if there aren't enough mechs on our side?"

"Then it would be hardly different from fielding too few numbers of other mech models." Ves shrugged. "A couple of Ferocious Piranhas can't do anything against five mech companies traveling together. At least the Deceptor Project is able to harass superior enemy formations from afar."

The Deceptor Project was a mech designed for large-scale battles. Though it should also be effective in smaller skirmishers, Ves mainly envisioned it fighting alongside lots of other Larkinson light mechs. They were supposed to constitute a completely cohesive fighting system.

The expert pilot and the mech designer continued to discuss the various merits and concerns about the Deceptor Project. Ves did not mind the interruption to his regular work as he was able to gain a couple of new angles on the problems he had thought out before.

Once Tusa shared a piece of his mind, he recalled the original reason why he wanted to seek out the patriarch.

"Ves."

"Yes, Tusa?"

"I want to discuss my expert mech with you. I think we should do something to make the Dark Zephyr more useful against the enemies we'll likely fight against in the Red Ocean."

Tusa quickly shared his thoughts on the matter.

Ves frowned deeper as he thought about the implications of what he heard.

"I can see why this might be a problem. Light skirmishers like the Dark Zephyr only work because they work well against other mechs."

This wasn't a problem that Ves could conveniently solve. This was a fundamental problem that plagued every light mech.

If he wanted to increase the versatility of the Dark Zephyr, then he would have to overhaul its existing design and implement a new form of high technology.

"What you're asking me will require a major revision to your design." Ves told his cousin. "Our design schedule is already packed. We can't perform any additional design work, especially on an expert mech where we cannot delegate the work to our many assistants. We will have to wait until this design round is over before we can consider this project."

"That's too slow, Ves! You'll be busy designing mechs like the Deceptor Project for half a year. After that, even if you try to rush the upgrade of my Dark Zephyr, a few more months will go by. What if we're attacked by a powerful alien force by then? Time is of the essence. You should really put more priority in lifting the performance of our weaker expert mechs."

Ves thought about it. He quickly came to a decision.

"I'm sorry Tusa, but our schedule is already full. We truly can't displace our current projects just to accommodate your individual needs. You'll just have to wait in line like everyone else." He eventually said.

Though Tusa looked disappointed, there was nothing he could do once Ves made up his mind. Only one human in this room held all of the power in the clan, and it wasn't the expert pilot!

Chapter 3569 Spiritual Equivalence

"My apologies. With everything that has happened as of late, I failed to keep track of your training progress."

Ves had called the 20 MTA mech pilots that Master Willix had originally foisted upon him. After spending a long time among the Larkinsons, each of them had changed a lot compared to before.

If Ves had to describe the changes, then he would say that they had all grown less uptight and more relaxed. Their postures weren't so stiff and their chins weren't pointed so far upwards anymore. They also exhibited more respect towards him, which was a welcome surprise.

"We understand." A man who went by the name of Yusu Tjalen said. "We have been managing fine on our own. There is plenty to do in the Larkinson Clan. Though your facilities aren't as good as the ones we are accustomed to using, we've learned other lessons while we trained and fought alongside your mech legions."

Carlton Detrivo nodded. "The swordsmanship training provided by the Swordmaidens and Heavensworders has helped me reinvent my own approach to melee combat. The guidance provided by Miss Ketis has improved my combat effectiveness with swordsman mechs by more than 20 percent. That is a much larger jump than I could have hoped. If I can continue to improve like this, I will be happy even if I don't break through."

The question whether any of them would be able to break through to expert candidate or expert pilot still weighed heavily on their shoulders, but they knew that hard work was not always sufficient to shed their mortality. Talent, luck and happenstance played an even greater role in determining whether any of them would find their chance!

Ves leaned back on his comfy chair and fell into thought.

He planned several experimental initiatives that might give mech pilots a better chance of breaking through, but with the Simile Halifax hovering so closely to the Spirit of Bentheim, he had put those plans aside.

Though Ves accepted that the MTA was probably snooping on him for the entire duration the MTA frigate was traveling with the expeditionary fleet, he did not want to be too blatant about exposing his more sensitive secrets.

In truth, he had already been a bit liberal about showing off his more innocent capabilities. Little quirks such as forming design networks, allowing Lucky to phase through solid matter and exposing the existence of companion spirits were all deliberately shown off in order to impress Jovy and inform the MTA that his clan was special without attracting too much attention.

However, once he directly exposed a more drastic secret such as the existence of a remnant of the Metal Scroll or the ability to artificially induce a breakthrough, the very top of the MTA would get involved right away!

In order to draw attention away from those extremely sensitive matters, Ves had no qualms about using other secrets as decoys.

In any case, now that he had become an associate of the Survivalist Faction, he could probably get away with a few small actions such as making use of the high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum that he stole from the Supreme Sage's pinnacle lab.

Speaking of factions, now that Ves became more aware of the inner workings of the Mech Trade Association, who did these mech pilots all belong to? Were they all aligned to the Survivalists or did they come from several other factions?

Though Ves was curious to know the truth, he did not find it appropriate to ask this question to them. They were his guests, not his captives. The matter of their factional allegiances weren't really relevant anyway.

"We developed a few plans at the start, but our situation has changed a lot since then." Ves told them. "Each of you are adults so each of you are more than capable of choosing your own training programs. Our clan can give you recommendations, but in our experience the best way for you to push yourself beyond your limits is to fight actual battles where your lives are on the line. I think you'll be able to experience plenty of that in the years to come."

Although the MTA mech pilots all knew that, it still disappointed them that Ves did not offer them anything better.

"Patriarch Ves, Master Willix assigned us to you because she is convinced that you can be of service to us." Jessica Quentin said. "While your clan has its strong points, we have yet to undergo any unique or special procedures."

Ves looked exasperated. "Master Willix was a little too overeager, Miss Quentin. She foisted you on our clan without properly considering that my clan and I don't have a ready-made solution available. My own clansmen are in the same boat as you. Few of our mech pilots have broken through as late."

"What about the Quint, sir? This masterwork mech of yours has already stood out as a mech that can help people break through."

"I believe so as well, but a sample size of 2 is hardly a conclusive indicator that the Quint is a breakthrough machine. Besides, the core identity of the Quint is an ascended Bright Warrior mech. That means it is exclusive or at least highly partial to the Larkinson Clan. None of you are Larkinsons so I do not believe the effect will be as strong on your group. Besides, there is only one Quint and twenty of you guys."

That caused the mech pilots to frown. They all knew quite well that even if they had the opportunity to pilot the Quint, they would all have to make tough choices on who was allowed to go first.

Jessica didn't give up though. "Then... can't you design a more purpose-built mech for us? It doesn't have to be as good as the Quint, but if this new mech model has only a fraction of its advantages, that will still leave us better off than piloting your modified Larkinson mechs."

Her words suddenly caused Ves to gain a new idea.

He envisioned a mech that conformed exactly with what she described. It didn't even have to be a brand new mech design. He could just design a quick variant of the Bright Warrior that was compatible with outsiders and designed with facilitating breakthroughs in mind.

He came up with two different experimental features that could help this breakthrough-oriented mech perform its job.

First, he could employ a weakened version of the glow of the Aspect of Transcendence onto the mech. Though Ves originally planned to test this glow on lab rats, those trials not only took too long, but would also make it too obvious what he was doing to the MTA.

Though the glow of this infamous statue had produced plenty of head explosions, that was only when he exposed it to his test subjects under the most extreme conditions.

What if he toned it down? What if he dampened the effect to just 5 percent of the intensity? While the glow might not be able to produce any immediate breakthroughs under this setting, the chance that someone's head might explode should drop as well!

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that this was a viable idea. After witnessing hundreds if not thousands of different glow-induced head explosions, he possessed a good understanding of what caused his pirate and dwarven test subjects to sacrifice their lives in the name of science.

They endured too much pressure.

That was it. Although the glow of the Aspect of Transcendence wasn't actually that strong, Ves had programmed it in a way that led to a constant buildup of extreme obsession.

If not for the fact that there was a possibility that it might actually succeed in letting enemies break past their limits, he would have been tempted to weaponize it already!

As long as his theory was right, it shouldn't be difficult to address this lethality problem.

If excess was the problem, then moderation was the solution.

It was just like pumping a balloon with too much gas or a human drinking far too much water. Both cases led to unfortunate results but could easily be avoided if they didn't take in so much substance.

Though Ves wasn't completely sure it was safe to apply the same concept to the Angel of Transcendence, he was confident enough to give it a try.

His eyes glinted as he gazed at the hopeful MTA mech pilots. Weren't they suitable test subjects? They literally asked to volunteer for this experiment!

Even if one of them died, Ves could just say it was their fault for consenting to pilot one of his experimental new machines.

This neatly solved the problem of guilt. Ves could never subject his clansmen to such a risky procedure without performing plenty of tests. This was why he never attempted this kind of experiment when he thought about performing a similar experiment in the past.

This was different. After spending more than a year with the Larkinsons, the MTA mech pilots had all grown impatient about their relative lack of progress. If Ves possessed a means for them to transform their lives, then they were desperate enough to take it even if he warned them of the risks.

This was not all, though.

He wasn't confident that implementing a weakened version of the Angel of Transcendence in a variant mech design was enough to produce the desired results.

Theoretically, this glow should set mech pilots on the right path, but Ves knew that truly extraordinary mech pilots did not break through just because they wanted it so bad.

They also had to go through a mental journey. In the process of becoming a demigod, a mech pilot had to discover what they cared about, how they wanted to fight and shed aside all of their doubts.

This was why Ves turned his attention back to the Quint. It was not just a masterwork mech, but also a living mech with a spiritual presence that had gone through multiple bursts of accelerated growth.

Since it was alive, didn't that mean that Ves could treat it like a design spirit in a way?

"This..."

Ves completely fell into his own thoughts as inspiration struck.

This was an incredibly promising idea!

Even though it sounded silly to use an existing mech as a design spirit when it was already being watched over by the Golden Cat, according to his theoretical framework it should be more than possible!

Ves initially thought about harvesting spiritual fragments from the Quint so that he could implant them in his 20 breakthrough mechs, but the price of doing so was too unbearable.

The Quint was a Larkinson as well, and Ves could not bear to harm one of his prized works without good reason!

By employing the Quint as a design spirit, the mech would not come to any harm.

In fact, it might be the opposite. The Quint might actually be able to accept spiritual feedback from the MTA mech pilots and thereby accelerate its growth even further!

It would also be good for the Quint to become exposed to more mech pilots. Commander Casella had complained to him about the masterwork mech's unruly personality.

Ves knew that this was mainly because the Quint had originally grown alongside Joshua. He figured that the problem would go away in time as the masterwork mech spent time with other mech pilots, but it would be even better if he was able to accelerate this process!

The wheels kept spinning in Ves' mind even as he neglected his guests. It didn't matter if the MTA mech pilots thought he was being rude. His inspiration was much more valuable than their concerns!

"What if..."

What if Ves applied this approach to his other living mechs?

It wouldn't work on his weaker living mechs. Any first-order and second-order living mech were simply too weak on a spiritual basis to support this mode.

It had to be a third-order living mech. They were so much smarter, stronger and more aware that they could be considered the mech equivalent of mutated beasts!

"They're more alike than I thought!"

A light shone in his head!

Ves had ascertained that one of the defining characteristics of spiritual potency was sentience.

Mutated beasts like Arnold and Qilanxo all showed the capacity of independent thought and the ability to assert their own identity.

Third-order living mechs like the Quint and the Everchanger all showed the capacity of independent thought and the ability to assert their own identity.

Didn't that mean... he could turn all of his powerful living mechs into his design spirits?

Chapter 3570 Marriage Between Two Concepts

Ves quickly dismissed the 20 MTA mech pilots after promising he would come up with a solution for their lack of progress.

He had become incredibly fascinated with the possibility of using his best mechs as his new design spirits!

"I really should have thought about this before!"

"Meow?" Lucky looked questioningly at Ves.

"Am I being crazy for coming up with this thought?!"

"Meow!"

The gem cat rolled his eyes again. Ves had entered into one of his frequent bursts of genial madness. Whether something would come out of it remained to be seen, but Lucky would be sure to stay as far away if another experiment took place!

As Ves continued to think about this new idea further, he soon calmed down a bit. Not everything might go as well as he wished. He already came up with numerous doubts that could complicate any implementation.

The first question was whether it was truly possible to turn a living mech into a design spirit.

Though his theoretical framework showed that the possibility should be there, his theories might not always be correct. His assumptions could be wrong and perhaps his living mechs were too far removed from other spiritual entities to function in this manner.

The only way to know for sure was to try it out. Hard evidence beat any theoretical deductions. Ves wouldn't have to rely on so many guesses if he obtained solid data to support his theories.

Still, he was reasonably confident that it should be possible. Living mechs possessed spiritual foundations which basically functioned as the spiritualities of living organisms.

There were still a lot of differences between them, but the gap started to close as the mechs became more alive.

Third order living mechs were so alive in fact that they possessed a lot of characteristics that were more commonly seen in spiritually powerful entities.

Perhaps people might be able to argue that first-order and second-order mechs weren't truly alive, but there should be no doubt when it came to his best mechs. They were all intelligent enough to think and communicate clearly with their own mech pilots.

His living mechs weren't sophisticated AIs either. Each of his mechs, not just the most advanced third order ones, all possessed emotions!

They became happy whenever the Larkinson Clan achieved a victory. They became sad when their mech pilots died or when they needed to be eliminated in order to free up space. They became angry when they witnessed enemies killing fellow Larkinsons mechs and mech pilots.

It was this distinct quality that made it impossible for battle bots and mechs integrated with highly advanced AIs to fully copy his work.

Sure, the best AIs programmed by the most brilliant specialists were able to emulate humans to an extremely precise degree, but there was no way that lines of code could fully make mechs understand the concept of love or to feel hatred against an enemy.

"That's because AIs are completely rational."

Their entire thought processes consisted of logical calculations from beginning to end. There was not a hint of irrationality in their electronic brains.

In contrast, his living mechs were much more similar to humans than AIs!

From their very first moment of existence, they hardly exhibited any coherent thoughts. Instead, they either followed their instincts or expressed themselves through emotions.

Although they weren't always strong, the ability to feel emotions unquestionably put them ahead of practically every AI!

In short, his stronger living mechs met every requirement to become a design spirit!

The only reason why it hadn't happened yet was because Ves had never connected the strings together.

"Still, just because it's possible doesn't mean I should go ahead and do it. There has to be a good reason to take such a drastic step."

He was quite wary of doing anything that might harm the development of his most precious mechs. The Quint as well as the Amaranto, the Shield of Samar and the Everchanger were all treasures to the Larkinson Clan. They had only recently come into existence and had a lot of growth ahead of them. As long as the Larkinsons continued to take care of them, they might reach an unimaginable height one day!

Why should Ves complicate this matter by turning them into a new role that was not a part of their original design?

He could not fully predict what would happen to any of his living mechs if he took this momentous step.

His instincts told him that this was a heavy decision that might have profound implications for his design philosophy.

Was it truly a good idea for him to marry the concept of a design spirit with the concept of a living mech?

What would happen if the living mechs perished in battle?

Would his living mechs still remain mechs or evolve to become something... else after receiving a lot of spiritual feedback?

Ves needed to puzzle out the answers to all of them before he was willing to attempt such an experiment.

"Let's start, then."

The first and most important matter was whether this approach conformed to his design philosophy.

Up until now, he had always treated the concept of living mechs and design spirits as separate methods to empower his mech designs.

The former was more fundamental and was the basis of his design philosophy. While it provided plenty of advantages to products, the problem with living mechs was that they needed a lot of time to grow into their power. This growth process took years until it produced a considerable improvement and that was far too long in most cases.

This was why Ves had also placed a heavy emphasis on employing design spirits. While their glows were only as strong as their originators, most design spirits were already formidable spiritual entities. When attached to any mech design, they provided a direct and immediate boost in combat effectiveness without requiring any unreasonable delays.

Design spirits therefore became a prominent solution in his arsenal. They neatly made up for the principal weakness of his design spirits and could also convey other advantages such as enabling battle formations.

"They're not directly related to my design philosophy, though. It's a side branch of my research that has taken on a life of its own."

Ves had always struggled with the question on what he should do with design spirits. Should he continue to develop it further, or should he try to go back to his roots?

Previously, he had been tempted to do the latter, but now he found a good reason to make design spirits more central to his design philosophy.

This was because a stronger design spirit also equated to a stronger living mech if he combined the two concepts!

Ves tried to imagine what it would be like to design a sniper-oriented rifleman mech based on the Amaranto.

The mech design could be a relatively straightforward interpretation of the Amaranto as a standard mech. This would help the Amaranto perform its role as a suitable and helpful design spirit to the mech pilots of this new rifleman mech.

As long as everything went fine, then everyone involved would benefit.

The mech pilots of the new standard mech model would likely gain assistance from a powerful mech that was paired with a powerful expert pilot. The piloting-specific

assistance that the Amaranto was able to provide should be a lot better than that of a generic design spirit!

"After all, creatures like Arnold aren't mechs. What do they understand about mech piloting?"

The standard mechs themselves would also benefit. They not only obtained the influence of a role model, but also had a greater chance of surviving as its mech pilots became more proficient. Perhaps they might even inherit a small portion of the Amaranto's power through constant exposure.

"It's as if they are the Amaranto's children."

Finally, the Amaranto itself would also gain a lot of benefits. Although there was a risk that the spiritual feedback would pollute, distort or unfavorably steer the living mech in the wrong direction, the acceleration in growth more than made up for it! Ves would gladly obtain a living mech that had reached its strength at 100 years in just a fraction of the time!

His eyes shone as he imagined his other living mechs following suit.

The three masterwork expert mechs would become incredibly dazzling existences in his clan!

"They're such a good combination as well."

The neglected concept of prime resonance finally had meaning again. While true resonance was still the basis of any expert mech's power, Ves had always envisioned that prime resonance could become equally as powerful one day!

Unfortunately, prime resonance was always constrained by the inherent weaknesses of the elements involved.

The problem with prime resonance was that it centered around spiritual energy instead of powerful resonating material.

Mechs did not possess a high capacity for spiritual energy. Without incorporating any P-stones or other spiritual storage materials, they simply couldn't contain a lot of spiritual energy.

Even if Ves did find a suitable material to implement in the mechs, he would still have to pump them full of spiritual energy which wasn't always abundant.

However, it was different when the living mechs grew by themselves. If a masterwork expert mech like the Amaranto grew a dozen times faster than before, then its spiritual

foundation would continue to grow stronger and more complex at a rapid pace, all without hitting any barriers!

Once the Amaranto's spiritual foundation became a hundred times stronger than now, prime resonance would no longer be a joke. As long as Venerable Davia Stark was strong and courageous enough to resonate with this powerful mech, then...

"This new form of resonance will truly be able to compete with true resonance!"

Ves almost went wild with euphoria as he imagined how much more powerful his expert mechs could become!

Though he did not dare to imagine that expert mechs such as the Everchanger would be able to compete against actual ace mechs, they should be able to obtain a pretty heavy advantage against other expert mechs!

He did not forget his fundamental purpose. The ultimate goal of doing all of this was to provide a better service to his mech pilots. He had to be careful that he did not pursue power for its own sake.

"This shouldn't be a problem. Stronger high-order living mechs will directly benefit their pilots as well as the side they are fighting for. There is little reason to reject this new method."

This could be the edge the Larkinson Clan needed in order to survive the Red Ocean after the MTA's 2-year protection period had passed!

Ves turned his attention back to the original matter that had prompted him to develop this brilliant new idea.

The best way to confirm his theories and to see whether this premise had a future was to test it out in reality.

"I'm sorry, Gloriana, but I have to pursue this side project!"

Ves planned to put his current schedule on pause and reserve a few weeks to develop the variant he had promised to the MTA mech pilots.

Properly speaking, the best course of action would be to design a completely new original mech from scratch. This way, he could integrate this new purpose into the design from the beginning.

"I can't wait for so many months."

He didn't think he needed to go for that for his first attempt at implementing this brilliant new idea. He just wanted to obtain a proof of concept that he could use as a model for a more serious implementation in the future.

The Quint was a good choice to start with. While it was a valuable mech to the Larkinson Clan, the three masterwork expert mechs were far more precious.

This made the Quint the most disposable high-order living mech to Ves.

"I'm sorry Quint, but you're going to be my test subject for this experiment."

The goal of his variant was two-fold. Not only did he want to see whether it was possible to accelerate the growth of the Quint by providing it with spiritual feedback, he also wanted to meet the demands of the MTA mech pilots and provide them with guidance from a mech that was famed for nurturing several expert pilots.

Since the Quint was originally based on the Bright Warrior Mark I Version B model, he called up its design and began to envision the changes he needed to make.

"For starters, it needs a new name. let's call it the Enlightened Warrior." Ves decided.