

Mech 3781

Chapter 3781 Calabast's Master Plan

Ves, who still wore his Unending Regalia, sank down on a couch as a small storm raged in his mind.

He was in no mood to study and admire the clean and elegant decor of Calabast's office compartment. The abstract art, the visages of different alien landscapes and most curiously the tasteful statues of black cats did not catch his attention at all at the moment.

He was too preoccupied with wrapping his head around the huge scheme that Calabast had unveiled!

Her proposal to compete directly against one of the top mech designers of the Krakatoa Star Sector sounded so daring that Ves questioned whether this was still the calculating woman he knew!

While Ves remained in turmoil, Calabast looked as composed as ever. She even brought out a bottle of liquor and poured herself a drink.

"Would you like a glass?"

"No thanks. I don't feel like impairing my judgment right now. I need to maintain a clear mind."

The spymaster shrugged and began to take a sip even as she sauntered towards where Ves was seated.

Calabast oozed confidence and superiority even when she was garbed in her infiltrator outfit. Though she hung all kinds of gadgets on her torso, the shiny material covering her legs looked smooth and tantalizing.

She stood in front of Ves as she sipped her strong drink. "Well?"

"Well what?"

"What are your thoughts about designing an ECM and communication mech that can directly compete against the Xaxu Specter series?"

"I already told you that you're crazy for thinking about doing such. We are talking about beating mechs designed by a pair of Masters!"

"So?"

"I'm just a Journeyman!"

"And has that ever stopped you before?" Calabast raised her eyebrow. "You never displayed much hesitation when you designed mechs such as the Blessed Squire, the Valkyrie Redeemer, the Cherub, the Bright Boy and the Devious. Each of them have contributed significantly to the Hex Army's struggles against the Fridayman mech units. The Hexers prefer to pilot them over several mech models developed by their own Masters, who are all female by the way. Your mechs are holding their own against professional military mech models. Their performance might not entirely be up to par, but their unique properties are indispensable."

"You're right, Calabast, but that is a different situation. The Komodo War is a distant affair. Whatever waves I've made with my work is unlikely to reach all the way to the Red Ocean. I can't act carelessly here. The mech companies that have managed to climb on top of the mech markets so soon are anything but average. These are powerful companies that can exert all kinds of pressure on their competitors. The profits may be great, but risks are greater!"

The spymaster adopted a disappointed expression. "Where are your guts? Where is your fighting spirit? You have taken one risk after another for as long as I have known you. There were instances where I needed to clean up after your messes, but your successes are undeniable. I have given you the roadmap to earn more profit at this early stage of your career."

"This 'roadmap' of yours leads straight to hell!"

"Hell is a natural environment for the infamous Devil Tongue." Calabast smugly quipped. "Do not tell me that this course of action is unfeasible. According to my understanding of your design capabilities, it should not be a challenge for you to transplant the strongest features of your Cherub and the Signal Bearer mechs into a commercial ECM mech design. Do you understand what that means? The technical hurdles that are practically impossible to overcome for other mech designers can easily be overcome by your design philosophy!"

"Just because I can doesn't mean I should!"

"Has that ever stopped you from making stupid decisions?"

"I take calculated risks!"

The woman turned serious. "Then I do not see why you are opposed to this idea. The risks you are afraid of are real, but they are not insurmountable. As long as we formulate a plan and solicit enough support, it is within our capabilities to compete against Tiamon Dynamics."

“Explain, Calabast. What makes you so confident that we can challenge a behemoth and win?”

“First, you need to design the promised ECM and communication mech. For other mech designers, this is the most difficult step by far, but for you it should probably be an easy one. Just make sure you put in the effort and try to come as close as possible to the specs of the Xaxu Specter.”

“Which variant?” Ves asked. “There are over fifty different versions of the Xaxu Specter and that only accounts for the standardized models.”

“There is no need for you to challenge all of these variants.” Calabast said. “You don’t have the manpower and design resources to cover all of these areas. Just focus on competing against a small group of variants. The premium market should be your goal. The main feature of your ECM mech should be incredibly valuable, so it should be priced accordingly. It should be enough for you to design a landbound and a spaceborn variant.”

That amounted to two models in total. Calabast had chosen well. While the proposed products would not be the most affordable ones on the market, they covered the needs of the vast majority of customers.

Those with larger budgets would not blink an eye before they ordered an entire batch of the mechs! Inferior technical specifications were irrelevant as long as its killer feature delivered on its promises!

Those with smaller budgets would definitely be willing to splurge on a mech that provided reliable, long-ranged, untraceable and unblockable communications!

Ves understood the implications of this constrained approach. The LMC did not seek to replace the Xaxu Specter line entirely. The more specialized and unusual variants still possessed a lot of value in specific situations. These models should still sell decently well.

However, that did not change the fact that his own offering had the potential to dethrone the Xaxu Specter and usurp the kingdom that Master Pariant Hao had painstakingly built!

No mech designer wanted to be used as a foil for a competitor. It would be exceptionally humiliating for a Master Mech Designer to suffer a major defeat at the hands of a Journeyman!

“Then what?” He pressed. “Suppose I design two different versions of an ECM mech that checks all of your boxes. What is our marketing strategy? Assuming we have our production in order, how will we get customers to believe our mechs are worthwhile for them to procure?”

"It should not be difficult to prove the value of your new products. Hold a press conference. Show of what the mechs can do. Loan out the copies to potential customers. Contact as many media platforms as possible. Don't be afraid to spend a few thousand MTA credits on the marketing campaign. It will all pay back in an instant once sales begin to skyrocket."

It cost a lot of money to rise above the noise in the mech market. There were too many mech companies who were trying to hawk their products every hour of the day.

"Okay." Ves said and frowned. "I can see how this can work out, but do you really think we can continue to sell tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of copies with impunity? Tiamon Dynamics will not sit still. The company will attack us and pressure us in various ways."

"I am sure Tiamon will try, but we aren't pushovers. Our mech company is sound. Once I have finished training my Black Cats, I will transfer enough personnel to the LMC's headquarters in Davute. That will improve its ability to defend itself against corporate rivals. Besides, no amount of background maneuvering can fool customers entirely. They aren't stupid. The advantages of our new products are too great. Those who refuse to follow suit will slowly realize that they have fallen behind!"

Ves shook his head. He did not dare to be complacent.

"Our competitors aren't stupid either. Master Mech Designers are incredibly capable and there is always one among them that can counter my products. The reason why my Cherub model has remained effective is because the Friday Coalition only has a limited number of Master Mech Designers. Of those esteemed mech designers, just a fraction of them specialize in the relevant fields! The chances that any of them are able to mess with my exclusive communication networks is slim."

"Isn't that great news?"

"Not if the scope of the competition gets bigger." Ves replied. "If we proceed with your master plan, our new ECM mech models will not just provoke Tiamon Dynamics, but every other mech company in the Red Ocean that relies heavily on selling similar mechs! It doesn't matter if they are based in the other zones because as soon as they hear about our products, they will know that it will only be a matter of time before they are sold beyond Krakatoa! Not only will the Masters behind these companies get pissed at me, they will also pool their efforts together to develop a counter against my mechs! With so many top mech designers working together, the chances that they will succeed is extremely high!"

The Friday Coalition already had limited successes in countering his products. While they weren't practical or all that effective, they learned a couple of crucial lessons that the more formidable group of Masters in the Red Ocean could build upon!

"I am not versed in this area, so I cannot comment on the success rate." Calabast said as she emptied her glass. "What I can tell you is that the emergence of a counter is hardly the end for your products. First, in order for this counter to be effective, it has to be bought and used by customers. Second, your mechs will still be effective when deployed against alien forces and put into use in hazardous environments. Third, you can design a response against this counter."

"That will turn into an arms race that I don't want. If we don't enter this murky pool, we won't provoke all of these Masters into developing a counter against the communication functions of my spiritual networks. This will ensure that our clan will always maintain an advantage over any opponent we collide against. Our Signal Bearers will be able to relay transmissions with complete confidence because third parties have rarely confronted them directly."

Calabast sighed in exasperation.

"I can understand your logic, but your lack of competitive drive will bite you one day. What if we are confronted by an enemy who not only understands us thoroughly, but also invested a lot of effort into negating our Signal Bearer model? Our mech forces will be caught off-guard in a critical situation. If we have already gone through this cycle of developing counters and responses to them, our mech forces will be in a better position if anything happens."

She was right, but only in a part of the cases.

"If I fail to develop an effective response, then we can pretty much scrap our Signal Bearers and lose an excellent advantage against human opponents." He glowered.

"That is the risk that you will have to take." Calabast simply responded as she tossed her empty glass over her shoulder.

The glass followed an artificial trajectory until it landed in the middle of her desk.

"What is important to us is the enormous sums of money that we have earned." She stated. "Whether Master Parian Hao and your other competitors are able to develop a counter will heavily affect the future sales of your products. Yet even if our profits drop to 1 percent, we still come out on top in the end. Imagine how many mechs we have sold in the months before a counter has emerged. Earning at least 1 million MTA credits should be the minimum. Earning 10 million MTA credits is doable. This is our true reward! Earning more is no longer necessary because we have enough capital to upgrade our entire fleet and deepen our foundation in the Red Ocean. Once we have digested this enormous harvest, our clan will no longer be a pawn anymore. We will finally have the qualifications to assume the identity of a player."

Ves realized that this was the ultimate goal of Calabast's scheme. Earning lots of money was just a means to an end to her. The true purpose of taking all of these risks was to elevate the status of the Larkinson Clan!

Chapter 3782 Successful Business Model

Silence fell inside Calabast's office as Ves contemplated his spymaster's ambitious master plan.

He found that Calabast had actually come up with a realistic and doable set of steps. While she wasn't completely able to account for the responses from the competition and the enemies that the Larkinsons would certainly make, nothing of what she demanded from Ves and the clan was impossible to fulfill!

Her arguments were sound and her answers to the various problems he voiced earlier were all logical.

She was also right about the certainty of earning a huge sum of money in the initial months after the release of his ECM mechs.

Setting it up was difficult and required a lot of effort from the Larkinsons. They not only had to launch an enormous publicity campaign, but also conclude enough business deals with as many third-party manufacturers as possible.

The latter step was the most crucial one as the window of opportunity to earn a lot of easy profit would only be valid for a couple of months at most!

After that, the competition would certainly strike back with a vengeance. Those clever and brilliant Masters would definitely come up with a way to restore the viability of their own products.

Although the chance that his new commercial ECM mech models would stop earning money entirely was low, Calabast was right that it did not matter even if Ves pulled them from his product catalog.

Compared to the measly 5000 MTA credits that the LMC was earning from the Yeina Star Cluster, the huge windfall earned in the opening months was enough to upgrade and maybe even expand the expeditionary fleet!

The productivity of ships such as the Spirit of Bentheim could easily quadruple!

The replacement of lower-performing ship parts with higher-performing ones would likely make the fleet at least three times more capable of navigating dangerous situations!

The Larkinson Clan could even equip all of the capital ships with warp drives or superdrives as long as the profits exceeded everyone's expectations!

Providing his fleet with warping capabilities made it much easier to run away from threats, thereby boosting the clan's survivability to a massive degree!

Ves always considered his fleet to be his home base and his stronghold. Strengthening it by loading up on expensive and luxurious goodies was a highly attractive prospect!

Yet... he couldn't ignore the heavy price that he and his clan would have to pay.

"Can we afford to divert so many profits from the pockets of Tiamon Dynamics?" He asked his strategic partner. "I am extremely reluctant to stand out so much when we aren't ready to handle so much heat. I planned to enter the mech market gradually by starting from the bottom and working my way up. We won't be able to earn as much money so fast, but we don't have to watch over our shoulders all of the time. By the time our brand becomes a household name in the Krakatoa mech market, our clan will have grown to the point where we can handle the pressure. Disrupting the market when we are still small fry is highly precarious!"

"You are overestimating the dangers." Calabast retorted as she stepped closer to his seated position. "To be more precise, you are not accounting for all of the ways that we can mitigate the pressure. We are not alone, Ves. Do you think that Master Parian Hao, Master Rievan Miller and Tiamon Dynamics get along well with everybody? There are many people and organizations that cannot wait to tear them down! If my guess is right, as soon as we prove that our new products have the ability to compete against the Xaxu Specter line, we will receive a huge amount of support."

That was another bold statement from Calabast. Ves and his clan had struggled to make friends with local organizations ever since they arrived in the Red Ocean.

While they managed to break the blockade after the Open Consortium went into operation, that still didn't change the fact that the Larkinson Clan was hardly on friendly terms with any of the major players in the region!

Calabast smiled and activated a projection that displayed a map of the Krakatoa Middle Zone.

She pointed at Davute. "This location should be familiar to you. This is the port system where we have decided to operate from. We have not only founded the Open Consortium in this trading center, but are also in the process of setting up a major business operation here. This means that we have joined the camp of Davute for all intents and purposes."

Ves didn't quite agree with that. To him, the Larkinson fleet was his true base, and its mobile nature meant that he would never have to permanently commit to any side.

Still, he did not refute Calabast's words. Others would think differently after seeing what the Larkinsons intended to do in Davute.

The spymaster pointed towards a star system that was located in a different but still fairly central part of Krakatoa.

"This is the Karlach System, which is another port system that a group of powerful pioneers have built up as another major trading nexus. In the future, it is conceivable that both port systems will eventually turn into the economic hubs of emerging second-rate states."

Now that she pointed it out, Ves could indeed imagine this happening in the future. It was too difficult for single star systems to survive and grow when they stood on their own. Mere trade and friendly relations wasn't enough to keep them stable and secure. Only by joining an actual state would these colonies form into proper settlements!

The distance between Davute and Karlach happened to be tricky.

The two port systems were situated far enough away that it would be difficult for them to become a part of the same state.

However, they also happened to be close enough that they were destined to compete against each other in order to capture the greatest share of trade flowing through the Krakatoa Middle Zone!

"I see what you mean." Ves furrowed his brows. "Davute and Karlach are already bitter enemies against each other. Even if they haven't initiated any hostilities yet, it is only a matter of time before the pioneers behind them will fight to establish their hegemony in this zone!"

The pattern of this looming conflict looked familiar to Ves. It was the same sort of rivalry that evoked conflict between the Friday Coalition and the Hexadric Hegemony.

There could be only one!

Neither side was content to share all of the benefits of a region with their neighbors. They wanted it all, and they were quite willing to fight and bet everything they built in order to claim the ultimate prize!

"Ugh." Ves lowered his head. "I am not looking forward to seeing a return to the same stupid wars that divide people in the old galaxy. Why are people so greedy? Why can't we just live in peace and be content with what we have?"

That was quite rich coming from him. Calabast resisted the urge to snort.

"This trend is unstoppable, Ves. What matters is what we do in response to this development. The safest choice is to maintain a neutral posture, but is that truly our best choice?"

"Uhm, yes?"

"It is only safe if you are willing to lay low for a century. Our development prospects will remain slow and sluggish if we don't take any sides. You pay so much attention to planting seeds and waiting for them to grow that you are too quick to dismiss more immediate opportunities. I would not have any objections to your strategy if we are weak. We are stronger than that, though. We can play a much bigger game and win a much larger prize pool as long as you play your cards right!"

"What cards are you talking about?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Calabast grinned. "I'm talking about taking a side. By banding together with the groups that are tied to Davute's success, we can expect to receive a lot of support from them. They have no incentive to make it difficult for us to produce and sell our new mechs en masse. In fact, it is the opposite. They have many reasons to prop up any new ECM mech model that can dethrone the Xaxu Specter line. Not only will the critical success of our new models generate a lot more economic activity in Davute, it will also deprive their direct rivals over at Karlach of much of their current earnings!"

This was the nature of competition. The success of one mech company inevitably meant that another mech company got stepped upon!

When Calabast tied this dynamic to regional rivalries, her argument made a lot more sense to Ves. He could easily foresee that the business community in Davute would be glad to see the LMC rise at the expense of Tiamon Dynamics!

From this perspective, the competition between the LMC and Tiamon Dynamics would actually serve as one of the many proxy wars between the two rising regional powers!

Ves momentarily felt overwhelmed again. Since when did a simple desire to design an ECM mech morph into an elaborate attempt to insert the Larkinson Clan into a rising conflict between two future states?

"This sounds similar to how we got involved in the Hexadric Hegemony! Do we really need to wade into another mud pool once again?"

"You profited immensely from your dealings with the Hexadic Hegemony." Calabast reminded him. "The rewards and support the Hexers have provided you has allowed you to jump from an obscure third-class mech designer to a highly successful second-class mech designer that has managed to enter the Red Ocean largely through his own efforts. Best of all, you have managed to do this while maintaining enough distance from

the state that you have associated with. I do not see any reason why you cannot repeat this successful business model once again.”

She made yet another clever point. The strategy had worked once and it could work again as long as Ves was able to make his products useful to the local powers!

As long as the Larkinsons didn’t become too entrenched in Davute, they could always cut their losses and run to another zone if the situation went downhill!

In the meantime, the Larkinsons could earn a huge amount of profit by working alongside pioneers and organizations that were aiming to achieve dominance in the Krakatoa Middle Zone!

As Ves continued to go over Calabast’s various suggestions and answers to remarks, he found that she had done a good job at swaying him to her side!

Who was the actual Devil Tongue in this compartment?

Calabast had him all figured out! There was no way to win a verbal argument against an actual master of the dark arts of persuasion!

“Okay.” Ves sighed. “I no longer have much doubt about the viability of your plan. We’ll be playing with fire if we go through with this, but if we can earn at least a couple of million MTA credits from this ambitious venture, then I suppose it is worth the attempt. There’s just one question, though.”

“Hm?”

“Why?”

“You need to clarify that, Ves.”

“Why are you in such a hurry all of a sudden? Why do you want us to forgo a safer development trajectory and increase our income by at least a thousand times so quickly?”

“That is a good question.” Calabast paced her office as she crossed her arms. “I believe we can afford to take calculated risks. The business strategies you have in mind are too conservative. While I would have no complaints if you are only a regular Journeyman, we both know you are not. You have the spark of greatness in you. The successes that you have achieved in the old galaxy more than proves your potential to rise up in the Red Ocean. This makes you qualified to compete for market domination when the mech market in this dwarf galaxy is still in flux. Once you are able to sit on the throne that you have usurped, you and everyone else who follows you will become a part of the emerging power structure of the new frontier!”

Chapter 3783 Invisible Struggle

Ves had never doubted his ability to rise above the masses and become a part of the upper echelon of whatever society he lived in. He enjoyed too many advantages and he had already started to get on the good side of the MTA Survivalist Faction.

Due to this certainty, Ves was not impatient about his own development. He would work his way to becoming a Senior and a Master and gradually increase the scope of his business activities corresponding to his rank.

This was how every other mech designer worked and for good reason. It was a bit overblown for Apprentices or Journeymen to compete directly against Masters due to the enormous disparity in design ability!

Calabast's proposal forced Ves to break from this comfortable pattern and capture much more market share than he should!

The repercussions would be great and the Larkinson Clan would definitely get embroiled in different struggles.

However, the anticipated payout would be great as well. If he was bold enough with his ECM mech designs, he could easily imagine a scenario where it could become the leading product in the market for this mech type for generations to come!

Ves could not imagine the amount of money that would flow into the coffers of the LMC.

"What matters is not the millions of MTA credits that we stand to earn from this initiative, but how much we can convert it into actual strength." Calabast explained to him as she sat next to him on the couch. "The Red Ocean isn't safe. We don't face too many threats right now because we are accompanied by an MTA frigate. Have you ever thought about what we would do once your buddy Jovy is gone? Our expeditionary fleet will turn into a legitimate target to all of the human predators in this dwarf galaxy. Have you ever thought about how we will survive those future challenges?"

"Our next design round was supposed to earn us the money needed to pay for all of the necessary upgrades." He told her. "Even without this plan, we can still earn plenty of money as long as our other products achieve success."

"How much income do you expect to earn in the first months, Ves? 10,000 MTA credits? 50,000 MTA credits? Whatever the case, I doubt whether they can become bestsellers even if their designs are good. Their sales potential simply cannot compare to wresting away a huge amount of market share from dominant market players. With all of the MTA credits that we stand to gain from a high-level competition, we can upgrade our ships and mechs so that our deterrence power against the majority of powers in Krakatoa will reach a peak."

Money was power. More money meant more power. Calabast's argument was simple, but that did not mean she was wrong.

Many problems could be solved with enough money!

If it took too much time for the Larkinson fleet to get up to strength, then the clan could simply hire enough mercenaries to cover its defensive needs!

As Ves imagined all of the ways that enormous sums of money could help his situation, he became a lot less reluctant about her proposal.

The plan was not about greed.

It was about survival.

Framing the matter of earning as much money as possible in terms of keeping the clan alive was an excellent way of winning him over.

The foundation of his success in the coming decades was his ability to navigate and survive the various threats in the Red Ocean.

More money made this arduous journey a lot easier.

Stronger ships. Better mechs. Greater connections.

It was never enough. There were always bigger threats on the horizon. Becoming stronger gave Ves and his clan the capital to resist a greater proportion of enemies!

Calabast continued to share her sentiments on this matter.

"In my many discussions with Novilon and Shederin Purnesse, we have developed a view that the Red Ocean is a competitive arena. I am sure you already heard the gist of it. The Big Two has attracted the best and most ambitious players from the old galaxy so that they can fight. The goal is to ensure that humanity is strong enough to confront its enemies in the future. To accomplish this, the new frontier is set up as a game where winning and losing comes with the highest stakes."

The stakes were high because the Red Ocean's power structure was still nascent. There were no states like the Greater Terran United Confederation or the New Rubarth Empire that had built up an iron grip on their territories. Every human was a newcomer in the new frontier and that gave many ambitious people the unprecedented opportunity to found states that would go on to become enduring fixtures in the future!

Ves previously sought to stay out of this rat race.

The actual circumstances made it difficult for him to maintain this cautious stance. It was highly tempting to topple down many of the barriers that prevented his clan from gaining access to greater goods and services.

He looked into her eyes and nodded. "Alright. You've convinced me to give this plan of yours a chance."

"I knew you would make the right choice." Calabast grinned as if she had already foreseen this ending.

Ves raised his hand. "Hold on for a moment. I am only conveying my intention to play along. That does not mean we will actually go through with it. The steps we need to take before we put an ECM mech on the market are huge. From organizing an enormous marketing campaign to convincing dozens of third-party manufacturers to fabricate our new products by the thousands, all of this requires a huge amount of politicking and preparation that I frankly cannot solve."

"Then put others in charge of these matters."

"That is exactly what I have in mind. I think that your lover Novilon Purnesse ought to possess the skills necessary to pull this off. His diplomatic training will definitely be a boon in building up relations with the various external parties that we will engage with in Davute."

Calabast grinned when she heard this. "Oh, don't worry, Ves. I will make sure that your chief minister will go above and beyond to organize all of these steps. This will be a fine test of his capabilities."

Difficult work should be left to the experts. Though Calabast talked a good game, she was not as suited to solve all the problems as a born politician like Novilon Purnesse.

Even if the fellow was way over his head, he could always count on the help of other Larkinsons such as his father.

The two briefly discussed how they should tackle their plan and what they needed to pay attention to. It was not that easy to persuade the parties in Davute to buy into Calabast's master plan.

The reason for that was that it would definitely be difficult to prove that Ves' upcoming ECM mech models had the capital to compete against the Xaxu Specter line!

Most organizations didn't pay attention to unfounded claims. It was not unusual for mech designers to approach potential business partners with ideas that they had never realized.

Without a working example of an ECM mech that delivered on its promises, it would probably be ten times harder for Chief Minister Novilon to conclude a new business deal!

Calabast apparently thought that her 'boyfriend' could handle it, so Ves did not question her confidence any further.

Though she had made a few intelligence blunders over the years, she was still a frightfully competent analyst!

If Novilon botched his tasks and failed to obtain sufficient support from Davute's business and political communities, then Ves could choose not to publish his finished designs until everything was in order.

When the two had finally ended their discussion, Ves was in no mood to stay any longer. He could think about designing his commercial ECM mech later when he wasn't distracted by all of the complexities of Calabast's ambitious plan!

They left her office and walked all of the way to the hangar bay. Once they stood before the armored shuttle, Ves turned to Calabast one last time.

"You are more daring than I thought."

"I was always like this, Ves. I wouldn't have cut my ties with the Hegemony and defected to your camp so decisively if I let caution dictate my decisions. Going with the flow will never get you to the top. There are far too many humans in both galaxies that think they can achieve ultimate success by following the rules. Both of us know that the only way for us to climb above everyone else is to break the rules and force our way up by force!"

Ves had rarely seen Calabast speak as passionate as today. She truly put in her all to sway Ves to switch from a safer track to a faster track.

Although he possessed enough awareness to know that Calabast was manipulating him to further her own agenda, he did not mind it that much. After all, he benefited from success as well!

"I will need to think about the mech concept of our new commercial ECM mech design project a lot more. I don't want to design an imitation of Master Hao's work but with extra features. Each of my works must have their own identities and the same goes for this mech. Besides, we don't have any qualified ECM mech specialists in our clan. I need to consider whether our Design Department is capable enough to design a Xaxu Specter killer in-house or whether we need to team up with an external mech designer."

Calabast frowned a bit. "I suggest that you should look into the second option. The Xaxu Specter models possess excellent ECM capabilities on top of their good communication

functions. If your new ECM mech is not able to keep up in the electronic warfare department, then you will not be able to dethrone our main competitor entirely.”

Ves sighed. “We will definitely need outside help if that is the case. I will try to get my hands on a willing collaborator. I will tell our lead designers to make use of their networks as well. With eight Journeymen in our Design Department, there has to be one that can obtain the cooperation that we need!”

He finally boarded his shuttle and returned to the Spirit of Bentheim after saying goodbye to Calabast.

He studied and read up on the various developments of the Krakatoa Middle Zone on the return trip.

The various news articles he skimmed through indeed described looming tensions between the alliances between the two rival port systems.

The escalating competition between Davute and Karlach no longer encompassed the port systems alone. The colonies located close to them had also become embroiled in the invisible struggle.

Taking sides was indeed lucrative. Any pioneering organization that committed to Davute or Karlach received a lot of direct and indirect boons.

Gaining access to resource markets, being able to order starships and getting the chance to cooperate with various research institutions were just a handful of the perks that the Larkinsons could obtain!

“The premise is that we are worth the effort to win over.”

The Davute Alliance held much of the power in the star system. Its threshold was high and the Larkinson Clan shouldn’t be able to catch its attention in normal times.

“They’ve clearly never met someone like me.” Ves jested.

Ves actually didn’t feel comfortable with cooperating with such a large power. The Davute Alliance would certainly try to pull him into their orbit, but that went against his goals.

After his dealings with the Bright Republic, he never wanted to answer to a higher authority again!

He and his clan needed to dance around the Davute Alliance carefully in order to maintain the right balance. He did not mind cheering for its success, but he would definitely be the first one to run if it all went downhill!

Chapter 3784 Two Swordsman Mechs

The Blade Chaser flew out into an empty zone that was situated a fair distance away from the expeditionary fleet.

After Venerable Imon Ingvar went through apotheosis and became born anew, his brand-new custom mech no longer suited his level of strength.

He did not abandon it, though. The Larkinson Clan still needed a lot of time to provide him with an expert mech, and there were no machines available that could give him a better piloting experience.

Even if he had the option to adopt a new expert mech, he would feel extremely reluctant to make the switch.

Though he only piloted the Blade Chaser for a short amount of time back when he was an expert candidate, he already developed a strong emotional bond with his machine.

Gloriana had designed and tailored it to fit his fighting style and inclinations and that hadn't changed that much.

Sure, he was stronger and more skilled than ever before, but the Blade Chaser still aligned with his style.

He had to be careful about breaking his mech, though.

His thinking speed and combat responses had grown to an insane degree. He was able to control more aspects of his mech than ever before. This was the result of undergoing an evolution that not only granted him greater power but also allowed him to merge with his machine to a deeper degree than ever before!

Everytime he fought, it became so tempting to push the limits of his mech even further, yet he constantly had to remind himself that his mech was too weak and fragile to endure so many stresses.

"I can't wait for you to become an expert mech, Blade Chaser." He whispered to his own machine.

The Blade Chaser had gained a lot of benefits after Imon broke through while piloting the custom mech.

According to the patriarch, his custom mech was in the process of transitioning from a second-order living mech to a third-order living mech.

Imon didn't know what that meant until Patriarch Ves told him that mechs began to talk to people when they reached the latter stage.

The Blade Chaser was becoming more alive!

Although he and his personal mech already developed an intimate relationship with each other, the new expert pilot looked forward to seeing his battle partner evolve!

“Just wait until you have been upgraded!”

He looked forward to seeing the Blade Chaser transform into an expert mech. If the Design Department put in the same amount of effort as they did in upgrading the Shield of Samar, his upgraded machine would definitely turn into a worthy champion and protector of his sister!

“How long will it take to reach that point?”

Venerable Imon grew a bit frustrated at the unfortunate timing of his breakthrough. According to the mech designers, the fleet first needed to finish its business in the Garimel System and return to the Davute System in order to get the design process rolling.

This might take a while seeing that the expeditionary fleet intended to stay and mine for resources.

As Imon waited in place, another mech soon arrived to begin the practice session.

“Venerable Imon.”

“Venerable Dise.”

The First Sword was an incomparably powerful machine compared to the Blade Chaser. Even though it wasn't a masterwork, the expert mech was the singular most powerful melee combatant in the Larkinson Clan.

Dise never paid attention to whatever shortcomings it possessed. She drilled and mastered her expert mech so that it could completely perform all of the sword moves she developed with her machine in mind.

This was why no one in the Larkinson Clan had yet to beat her in a fair duel!

“How much progress have you made in progressing your sword style?”

“I have followed your suggestions and created a new framework based on the powers that I have gained as an expert pilot.” Imon respectfully answered towards his current instructor. “I'm limited to applying my power in smaller moves, though. Alarms will ring whenever I try to pull off a bigger move.”

"It's frustrating, isn't it?" The bald, dark-skinned woman said. "I've been in your situation. You have all of that power but you need to keep it bottled up lest you break your own machine."

Venerable Imon sighed. "That's right. This is torture. I can't imagine how I will be able to last for half a year."

"This is a test, Imon. You can either mope about your inability to burst out those big and flashy moves or you can make more productive use of your time and focus on controlling your newfound powers instead. There are more ways to develop your strength. The more time you spend on deepening your control, the more you will be able to defeat stronger opponents when you aren't able to match them. Don't become like those brutes who do not think about how much energy they are wasting with every move! If you want to guard your sister against a monstrous opponent one day, you must not slack off in this period of time! Now come! Show me your progress!"

The younger expert pilot's eyes flared as soon as Dise mentioned his responsibility towards his sister.

The other Larkinsons had quickly caught on to the fact that mentioning Commander Casella Ingvar always succeeded in triggering her brother!

It was so disgustingly easy to provoke a response from the young but talented man and this time was no different!

"I can't beat you with this mech, but I will sure as hell give you a run for your money!"

As Venerable Imon became more heated, his Blade Chaser became surrounded by a faint solar yellow corona that served as a distinct contrast against the bright blue supergiant star in the distance.

This corona could easily solidify into an actual resonance shield if Imon piloted an actual expert mech. As it was, the yellow glow functioned little differently from a special effect at the moment.

The Blade Chaser went into action. It raised its twin swords and sought to pressure its opponent with a barrage of quick and flexible strikes!

Silent collisions took place as the First Sword deftly managed to deflect and evade the rapid attacks.

Venerable Dise did not feel pressured at all by the offensive. The Decapitator, the masterwork mech sword wielded by her expert mech, functioned as an effective shield due to its broad width.

She did not even have to resort to any of her resonance powers in order to fend off the custom mech's attacks! The current sword barrage was incomparable to the Dark Zephyr's storm of knives!

"Is that all you've got?" Dise taunted.

"This is just a warm-up!"

Knowing that the First Sword's defenses were hard to overcome, Venerable Imon instructed his mech to move and circle around its opponent.

Although the maneuverability of his Blade Chaser was not on par with an actual expert mech, Venerable Dise had purposefully limited the First Sword's performance in order to give her sparring partner a fairer challenge.

This enabled the Blade Chaser to outmaneuver the First Sword at certain times.

Whenever the First Sword wasn't able to block the incoming attacks with ease, the Blade Chaser let loose a rapid succession of sword strikes that actually struck with the power of prime resonance and a tiny bit of true resonance!

Imon was resonating with his custom mech despite the fact that the latter did not incorporate any prime or resonating exotics!

Of course, the expert pilot had to strain quite hard in order to resonate with his mech. The only reasons why he was able to do this was because of his deep connections with his Blade Chaser.

The custom mech had also grown and aligned even closer to Venerable Imon!

Driven by Imon's stimulated willpower, the Blade Chaser minutely gained the power to distort reality, thereby significantly increasing its threat towards the First Sword!

Venerable Dise understood she needed to take this fight more seriously. The First Sword launched counterattacks every now and then which were always difficult to resolve.

The Blade Chaser had to cross its blades, use its strength to deflect a stab or thrust its frame to the side in order to evade a threatening strike.

Throughout it all, both mechs danced around each other. Their maneuvers became more intricate but never past the point where the weaker mech had to exceed its limits!

Eventually, Venerable Imon executed his first new technique based on the instruction he received!

“Sundance Flurry!”

The swords wielded by the Blade Chaser glowed brighter as they struck with a hint of Venerable Imon’s hot and fiery willpower!

One of the lessons that Venerable Imon had learned was to let his imagination empower his moves.

The use of symbols, metaphors and beliefs not only helped with shaping his raw willpower, but also influenced the subsequent development of his force of will!

Though Venerable Imon’s conviction centered around protecting his sister, he knew that he was not cut out to pilot a defensive mech.

To him, attacking and resolving a powerful opponent as quickly as possible was the best way to safeguard his sister in battle!

With her own powerful talent and abilities, Commander Casella could easily resist swarms of weaker opponents.

Her worst opponent was a singular powerful foe! If she was ever targeted by another enemy expert mech, then she did not have many options to defeat such a terrible adversary.

The First Sword’s extreme combat prowess easily stimulated Venerable Imon’s protective desire.

If he could not defeat this expert mech, how much better would he fare against an actual enemy expert mech?

“HAAAAAA!”

The Blade Chaser’s frame began to strain a bit more as Venerable Imon couldn’t help but increase the pace!

Even though its glowing swords struck with greater force and ferocity than a moment ago, the First Sword continued to block and deflect with just its greatsword alone.

The expert mech did not bother to make any evasive maneuvers!

As Imon became more intent on breaking the First Sword’s guard, the massive greatsword suddenly struck out just as the Blade Chaser was increasing its momentum!

The large weapon not only batted aside the smaller swords, but also struck the side of the Blade Chaser’s torso without any further hindrance!

The two mechs separated from each other.

As Venerable Imon came down from his earlier exertion, his mood sank a bit as he realized that he had been careless.

His Blade Chaser shouldn't have gotten hit!

"Do you understand where you have gone wrong?" Venerable Dise asked in a calm tone.

"I... tunnel-visioned on my Sundance Flurry technique. I focused so much on my attacks that I neglected my defenses."

Dise nodded. "That is correct. Your new sword technique has potential, but spending so much time on launching attack after attack can easily make you lose track of everything else. This is why it is better to spend your efforts on developing shorter and more flexible techniques. You need to polish your control in multiple aspects."

"I understand, but..."

Though Venerable Imon hadn't been able to fight at his full potential, the small glimpse of power that Venerable Dise displayed already left him with an unshakeable image.

There were so many ways for expert pilots to develop themselves. Breaking through was just the start!

Still, as Venerable Imon considered all of the lessons he received, he could not entirely embrace all of them. He had his own views and did not obsess as much over control as Venerable Dise.

"I am still in the process of developing my own fighting style." He said as his will grew firmer. "My technique is still flawed, but this is what I do best. If I already had an expert mech, I wouldn't have given you an opportunity to counterattack so easily!"

Venerable Dise smirked. "We shall see. Come again! Show me what else you have been working on since our last sparring session!"

The Blade Chaser clashed against the First Sword once again! Both swordsman mechs dueled against each other with much greater ferocity than that of ordinary mechs!

Chapter 3785 Refined Abilities

Venerable Imon Ingvar and Venerable Dise weren't the only expert pilots exercising their piloting skills today.

The latest expert pilot to emerge from the Larkinson Army was still new and unrefined in his strength expression. He required a lot of personal instruction in order to guide him into constructing his own unique fighting style that would define his career as a demigod.

There was another new expert pilot that also needed to develop her unique battle methods.

Unlike her brother, Commander Casella Ingvar had the benefit of piloting a completed expert mech, a masterwork no less!

While she spent a fair amount of her time on practicing her personal combat abilities, that was not the direction she wanted to focus upon as she evolved into a better expert pilot.

Her Command Field was her true specialty!

For this reason, she often worked together with other friendly mechs in her practice bouts against other expert mechs!

This time, she teamed up with two mech companies of the Living Sentinels.

One of the mech companies consisted entirely of the new Sentinel-exclusive mech models that had recently been released.

Although the Spirit of Bentheim did not produce a lot of copies of the new Rigid Spine and Rigid Wall models, the Living Sentinels still received enough of them to begin systematic training.

Right now, the new defense-oriented mechs formed a defensive sphere around the Minerva.

The expert command mech should never be caught in the open due to its strategic importance. It must always be covered by a sufficient escort of other machines!

This was why the Rigid Walls surrounded the Minerva from each side. Their thick tower shields did not quite link up with each other, but when combined with the bulky frames of the space knights, it was not that easy to circumvent their defenses!

If that wasn't enough, the Rigid Spines deployed behind the space knights had extended their spears through the notches of the tower shields.

This caused the formation to resemble a hedgehog!

There were multiple reasons for Casella to arrange her troops this way. Not only did it provide all-round protection against maneuverable light mechs, it also allowed the

expert pilot to extend her Command Field across all of her Commandeered mechs with minimal wasted energy!

The 80 Sentinel mechs under Commander Casella's command therefore projected a surprising amount of threat towards Tusa.

The expert mech that served as the Minerva's practice opponent this time did not immediately go on the attack because of that. The thorny melee formation had become much more formidable now that Casella had Commandeered the entire formation!

"Our expert mechs are getting more and more ridiculous!" Venerable Tusa complained. "Don't get me wrong. I think it is good that our mech designers are improving their work, but can't they give an oldster like me some slack?!"

"Fairness doesn't exist on the battlefield." Commander Casella replied to the light mech specialist. "Are you going to attack or do I have to make the first move?"

"Heh, show me what you've got!"

The shield sphere slightly expanded and opened more gaps in the sides. The reason for doing this quickly became evident as silver-coated Bright Warriors wielding luminar crystal rifles became visible!

Due to the nature of the current formation, only a limited number of rifleman mechs were able to train their weapons at the Dark Zephyr.

Venerable Tusa did not dare to underestimate these Sentinel mechs, though.

Under ordinary circumstances, his Dark Zephyr could easily break open this formation of mechs and mech pilots and cut them down with impunity.

Now that they had come under the control of Commander Casella, their coordination and power had reached another level!

This immediately became evident when a dozen lightly-empowered laser beams struck towards the Dark Zephyr!

The Commandeered ranged mechs exhibited near-perfect coordination as they each fired their weapons in a box around the expert light mech.

Venerable Tusa and his expert mech's ability to evade attacks was legendary! The pair had become so good at anticipating and evading ranged attacks that Commander Casella saw no point in trying to lead her attacks.

The Dark Zephyr encountered this kind of response many times these days. It was the standard answer to a light mech that was just too difficult to predict.

Even so, Tusa did not show any concern at all! Getting boxed in was difficult to deal with but his current opponents were not numerous enough to pin down the Dark Zephyr!

“Hah! You need a lot more ranged mechs in order to land a hit on my mech!” Tusa laughed.

The Dark Zephyr freely weaved around the shots even as it circled around the spherical formation.

The ranged mechs guided by Commander Casella always fired their weapons at the right time and in the right direction, but with so few weapons being brought to bear at the same time, it was still difficult for the Commandeered mechs to land a blow on the expert light mech!

The easiest way to increase the odds of hitting the light mech was to alter the formation of Sentinel mechs. If all 40 of the ranged mechs were able to aim in the same direction, the Dark Zephyr was bound to get hit by an empowered laser beam!

However, Casella did not choose to do so because she did not wish to break the current formation and expose the rear.

The purpose of this practice session was to figure out how she could protect herself against an enemy expert light mech!

To that end, the Sentinel Commander decided to go serious and employ her Command Field in a more specific manner.

“The battlefield is my chessboard!”

Up until this point, Commander Casella’s Command Field only extended far enough from the Minerva to cover her Commandeered mechs.

Now, she extended it by a kilometer, thereby covering the entire dome of the sphere where the Dark Zephyr was displaying its acrobatics!

The Commandeered ranged mechs under command immediately altered their firing pattern.

Instead of firing at all of the sides and corners around the Dark Zephyr in the hopes of achieving at least a single hit, the enhanced and guided ranged mechs were actively trying to track and predict the elusive expert light skirmisher!

“What?!” Venerable Tusa exploded as he suddenly had to exert a lot more effort to dodge the incoming attacks. “This is impossible! I know your Sentinel mech pilots can receive your help, but this is insane!”

Although the Sentinels had yet to land a hit, they had come a lot closer this time!

This was not just because they received more guidance from Commander Casella.

The true reason why they were able to pose a greater threat towards the Dark Zephyr was because the target in question was moving through a region of space where Commander Casella had faintly spread her will!

Though her Command Field was not even close to matching the power of a genuine Saint Kingdom, it already possessed a shadow of a domain field in advance.

No matter where the Dark Zephyr dodged and weaved, Venerable Tusa always felt that his expert mech was being tracked and observed by a cold and calculating mind.

As Commander Casella became increasingly more proficient at performing her operations, her opponent felt increasingly more cornered.

He needed to get more serious!

“Let’s try this then! Perception Distortion!”

The Dark Zephyr increased its distance from the Sentinel formation and began to display its signature resonance ability!

Although this ability was far from reaching its full effectiveness at this relatively short range, it still provided Venerable Tusa with a much-needed safety buffer!

Attacks that should have struck the Dark Zephyr instead passed through as if it hit empty space!

After a minute of seeing her sure-fire attacks fail in this manner, Commander Casella narrowed her eyes.

Her Command Field became more active as she resonated even deeper with the Minerva.

THIS FLY SHALL NOT ESCAPE OUR SIGHTS.

As Commander Casella deepened her ability to perceive the space around the Minerva, Her Commandeered mechs proceeded to fire at angles that should ordinarily miss.

However, after only a few seconds of altering her approach, one of the laser beams finally struck the Dark Zephyr’s resonance shield!

“Damnit!” Venerable Tusa groaned as he recognized that he had lost this challenge. “That Command Field of yours is too absurd. If the firepower of your Commandeered mechs isn’t so weak, you can slaughter any expert light mech that flies into your range!”

Commander Casella curled her lips in pleasure. She gained a lot of satisfaction from this success.

What was even better was that she wasn’t the only one to feel this way!

“We’ve done it, ma’am!”

The mech pilots that she connected to with the help of her command field were not mindless bots. They were flesh-and-blood humans who continued to maintain their awareness and fight alongside her as she commanded them in battle!

Now that Commander Casella had figured out the knack to tracking the Dark Zephyr despite its best efforts to distort her perception, Venerable Tusa eventually admitted defeat.

His Perception Distortion resonance ability was effective at fooling observations, but what Casella was doing went beyond that.

Her Command Field was a direct extension of herself, so as long as an enemy mech flew into her range, it couldn’t hide its actual position from its awareness!

The Minerva was a natural nemesis against stealth mechs and machines that relied on subterfuge and deception!

“Unfortunately, it is difficult to extend the range of my Command Field.” Casella softly sighed.

The patriarch speculated that there were two ways for her to be able to increase the space that she could influence in this manner.

After enough time had passed for Casella to grow her resonance strength, she had activated her Command Field to the limit and found that its range had barely increased.

By performing multiple measurements on different days, it became apparent that the Command Field’s growth rate followed the cubed root relationship.

This meant that even if she grew stronger, it was extremely unlikely for Commander Casella to engulf an entire battlefield with her Command Field. This was especially the case in spaceborn battles where fights across distances of hundreds if not thousands of kilometers were relatively common!

Unfortunately for Venerable Tusa, Casella's lack of range was not that relevant to him considering that it was always effective against melee mechs!

Seeing that there was no way for the Dark Zephyr to avoid getting hit for the time being, Tusa decided to go on the attack.

"Watch out, Sentinels!"

The Dark Zephyr abruptly changed course and charged towards the spherical formation!

The Sentinel ranged mechs no longer played a role at this point.

Instead, Commander Casella directed much more attention towards the melee mechs under her command!

"Strike the Zephyr and block its path!"

The Rigid Walls did not have to do much except to brace for a possible impact.

The Rigid Spines readied their spears and waited to stab in the right direction at the right moment.

Venerable Tusa did not choose to charge straight forward. The enemies right in front were too prepared against the Dark Zephyr's approach.

Instead, the expert light mech circled around for a few seconds before randomly deciding to launch its attack run!

"Repel!"

The spears in front of the Dark Zephyr rapidly struck forward under the guidance of Commander Casella!

However, the lightly-empowered speartips eventually struck nothing as the expert light skirmisher turned out to be an illusion!

"It's a clone!"

An instant later, the Dark Zephyr stopped behind the Minerva.

One of its Unending alloy knives was pointed towards the neck of the expert command mech.

The other knife was pointed straight onto the vulnerable expert mech's back.

“You still have a long way to go before you can repel an expert light mech.” Venerable Tusa smugly said.

Commander Casella closed her eyes for a moment as she calmly accepted this little loss.

“I will learn and do better next time. I did not expect you to go all-out this time.”

“The real enemy will not hold back on you. Remember that, commander.”

In truth, Venerable Tusa didn't want to suffer a humiliating defeat this time.

He had quietly employed the Endless Paths prime ability to create a decoy of his expert mech.

At the same time, he activated the Untouchable ability so that his actual machine could phase through the wall of Sentinel mechs in front!

After practicing with these prime abilities so many times, Venerable Tusa's application of them had become a lot more refined!

Chapter 3786 Knight Vs Knight

Two similar but different expert mechs squared off against each other.

Both of them happened to be expert space knights.

Despite these similarities, the two exceptional machines couldn't be more different in their budgets, quality, features and preferred fighting approaches!

The Shield of Samar was one of the Larkinson Clan's oldest and most defining mechs.

The mech and its pilot practically embodied the Larkinson Clan's protective ideal.

Having grown in tandem with the Larkinson Clan, the Shield of Samar and Venerable Jannzi both attained a formidable level of strength after years of growth and evolution.

The most remarkable aspect about the pair was that they still possessed a lot more untapped potential!

Both of them continued to develop at a frightfully fast pace. The only issue was that Venerable Jannzi and her Shield of Samar had never fully exerted all of their capabilities in an actual fight.

The best they could do was to try out their battle methods in sparring sessions like these.

The large, gold-coated expert heavy space knight possessed a strong and solid impression as it floated in space.

Even when Venerable Jannzi was not actively resonating with the expert mech, her deep and extensive connection with her lifelong battle partner caused it to be surrounded by a deep blue corona at all times.

Opposing her this time was not another Larkinson mech, strangely enough.

In order to make sure that every expert pilot in the expeditionary fleet learned how to handle different opponents, sometimes they challenged their counterparts hailing from different organizations.

This was the first time that the Shield of Samar confronted the Amphis.

The older expert mech was not as dazzling and spectacular as the Larkinson masterwork mech.

It was a more standard mid-range expert space knight that the mech designers formerly in the service of the old Cross Clan had cobbled together under normal conditions.

That didn't mean the Amphis was weak. It was a simple, well-designed and well-constructed expert medium space knight that packed a surprising amount of offensive power!

The design concept of the Amphis matched the sensibilities of the Garlen Empire which the Cross Clan used to be a part of before its exile.

There, expert pilots were glorified as warlords and conquerors.

Venerable Linda Cross might have specialized in piloting space knights like her current sparring partner, but her combat approach was substantially different!

This was plainly evident to the observers watching this upcoming duel.

The larger and more massive Shield of Samar possessed an aura that emphasized its protective spirit.

The smaller and more maneuverable Amphis radiated an impression that resembled that of an attack dog!

No one was clearer about these differences than the expert pilots themselves. Their invisible wills collided with each other.

Venerable Linda Cross gained more respect towards her younger sparring partner. "Your dedication to your mission is admirable. I have only come across this degree of

commitment from Saint Hemmington Cross and Patriarch Reginald Cross. I may not entirely agree with your ideals, but you are a true knight.”

“You are not as rough as I thought you were.” Venerable Jannzi replied as she readied herself for the inevitable confrontation. “I thought that every Crosser was willing to send their people to their deaths in order to earn more glory, but now that I am here, I find that you are not as obsessed about illusionary fame.”

“Your impression of me isn’t far from the truth if you met me from a decade ago. After seeing our original clan collapse and after witnessing so many of my fellow Crossers die in order to protect what was left of our people, I have found a different reason to fight. Seeing the Cross Clan rise from its near-extinction gives me much more satisfaction than thinking about taking revenge on our betrayers.”

Both of them were protectors. Both of them fought for similar reasons. They just expressed their strength in different ways.

The two spoke no further. They did not come here to chat and learn each other’s life stories. They came here to polish their skills!

“Get ready!” Venerable Linda Cross uttered as she grew serious!

The Amphis gained a sharper and more active temper! The Crosser expert pilot activately resonated with her old and trusty machine!

Since Venerable Linda was a true combat veteran and a mid-tier expert pilot with decades worth of experience, her resonance strength was considerably more formidable than that of her opponent!

However, Venerable Jannzi was not as far behind as her age and experience suggested. Her resonance strength had grown remarkably quickly ever since her battle partner turned into a masterwork expert mech.

Combined with the Shield of Samar’s formidable living qualities, Jannzi did not feel suppressed in the slightest!

“Watch out!” Linda snapped as her expert mech struck the first blow!

The Amphis threw out its defining chainsword!

Even though the attack looked rather silly, Venerable Jannzi did not dare to underestimate this opening strike.

Her Shield of Samar tightly held its massive Unending alloy tower shield in front and angled it to deflect as much of the incoming force as possible.

The heavy space knight actually bounced backwards when the chainsword finally struck!

Though Venerable Jannzi had not chosen to activate her expert mech resonance shield or energy shield, she had made sure to resonate with her tower shield in order to increase its ability to resist attacks.

Even so, the Shield of Samar was unable to negate all of the physical force from the attack. It was as if the heavy space knight was struck by a giant hammer instead of a sword!

Such a phenomenon completely violated the laws of physics, not that Venerable Linda Cross cared.

In her opinion, the best way she could protect the Cross Clan was to advance and crush her adversaries with overwhelming force!

As the chainsword bounced away from the Shield of Samar, the Amphis pulled it back before launching it out again!

This time, Venerable Jannzi was a little more prepared. Her Shield of Samar glowed and gained a little more solidity.

However, once the chainsword struck a second time, the stricken mech bounced even further backwards!

“Tch!”

Venerable Linda Cross had put more of her power behind the blow this time. Her stronger and more developed willpower directly overwhelmed Venerable Jannzi’s attempt to reinforce her own expert mech!

This was the advantage that stronger expert pilots possessed when confronting their weaker counterparts!

The duel became more heated as the Amphis began to move in earnest. It flew around the massive but sluggish Shield of Samar like an offensive mech.

At the same time, the Amphis launched its chainsword forward at different angles, speeds and intervals.

Even if the Shield of Samar had the benefit of possessing a massive tower shield, Jannzi still found it challenging to defend against the onslaught of heavy and powerful attacks!

This wasn't the first time that Venerable Linda Cross confronted an enemy space knight. She utilized her deep understanding to strike in a way that took advantage of the minor loopholes in the Shield of Samar's guard.

After the tower shield got struck a thirteenth time, the Amphis suddenly surged forward with undaunted momentum in an attempt to collide its kite shield against the Shield of Samar!

Fortunately, Venerable Jannzi reacted quickly enough and dragged her expert mech's tower shield in place in time!

The two expert mechs collided against each other! Just before their physical shields made contact, their resonance shields flared a bit in order to bleed off the force from the powerful impact.

Both of them bounced back from each other, but the Amphis clearly held the disadvantage this time.

"What a heavy machine!"

The Amphis was ultimately a lighter and smaller machine. There was a limit to Venerable Linda's ability to amplify the physical force of her expert mech.

Seeing that a frontal clash was not the best idea, Venerable Linda took advantage of her expert mech's superior mobility and circled around again.

This time, she launched trickier chainsword attacks. They not only targeted the extremities of the Shield of Samar, but also gained additional dimensions by taking advantage of the chain attached to the weapon.

"Damn!"

Venerable Jannzi cursed as the chainsword came at an unexpected angle. It flew wide, but due to the Amphis making a lateral movement and yanking the chain, the thrown weapon actually whipped its target from the side!

The large tower shield did not avail the Larkinson expert mech this time!

Venerable Linda continued to repeat this maneuver. The chainsword no longer flew straight but actually behaved similar to a whip under her skilled manipulation.

With the help of her ability to amplify her physical attacks, these whipping attacks struck with much more force than they should, thereby posing a considerable threat to the Shield of Samar!

In contrast, the Shield of Samar was not able to strike back at the circling Amphis. The reach of its relatively ordinary sword was too short!

Jannzi had an answer to that, though.

“Fatal Attraction!”

The entire Shield of Samar flared as Jannzi activated one of its resonance abilities!

A strong surge of gravitic force affected the Amphis!

Though Venerable Linda’s superior resonance strength was able to weaken its hold, the Amphis nonetheless flew uncontrollably towards its current adversary as if it was falling into a gravity well!

The smaller the distance, the stronger the attractive force!

Even though the Amphis was unable to break free from this attraction, Venerable Linda did not panic. The offensive expert space knight snapped its chainsword forward with greater power than before!

This time, the chainsword struck the Shield of Samar with so much force that it succeeded in unbalancing its target!

The expert heavy space knight actually rotated on its axis due to its inability to absorb the heavy blow that had struck the corner of the tower shield!

“Hah, your gravity trick only makes my chainsword hit your mech harder!” Venerable Linda laughed.

This was indeed an unfortunate interaction for Venerable Jannzi. Though she successfully brought the enemy mech closer, the force of gravity also caused every incoming physical attack to strike harder!

Even so, Jannzi still had a lot of faith in her expert mech’s defenses.

The Amphis no longer tried to harass the Shield of Samar from a distance. Both mechs clashed against each other more directly!

First, they exhausted their resonance shields and energy shields with unabashed attacks. This was a pure battle of attrition as neither of the two expert mechs were easy to take down!

Once they rid each other of these defensive layers, their fight became more violent.

Physical shields bashed against physical shields. Blades crossed and deflected from each other.

Although the expert mechs looked intense, in truth neither of them succeeded in landing telling blows against each other.

Both mechs were too tough!

The Amphis may possess more offensive power, but the Shield of Samar's superior defensive capabilities were able to resolve every strike.

At the same time, the Amphis was also able to handle incoming attacks with ease because the Shield of Samar's attack power was too low!

Seeing that she wasn't making much progress at this time, Venerable Jannzi tried to exert the new gravity aspect of her expert mech in a different manner!

"Gravity Pool!"

The Shield of Samar glowed brighter as it created a small gravity well at the side!

This unexpected move caused the Amphis to move uncontrollably as it became affected by a sudden attraction force!

Though Venerable Linda Cross compensated quickly enough, she could not quite prevent her expert mech from suffering a serious attack by an incoming sword!

"Good job, girl! You managed to catch me off-guard! Let me get more serious this time!"

In an instant, the Amphis launched its chainsword forward at close range!

The weapon snaked along the Shield of Samar's sword arm and somehow winded around it like a snake!

The Amphis did not stay still while this happened and circled to the side while its chainsword managed to entangle its prey!

Though Venerable Jannzi recognized the threat early on, her Shield of Samar was unable to extricate its sword arm from the snaking chain nor turn fast enough to prevent the Amphis from completing its revolutions!

By using its target as a fulcrum, the Amphis quickly circled around and continued to bind its thick and resilient chain across the Shield of Samar's frame!

Venerable Jannzi could do nothing against this unorthodox attack!

None of her Shield of Samar's defenses could cope against this capture maneuver. Its tower shield was stuck as it got pressed against the front of the enormous machine.

"I lost." The Larkinson expert pilot directly admitted.

She realized that she had lost from the moment the chainsword bound her expert mech's arm.

The Shield of Samar could have fended off the chainsword if it was still able to deploy its resonance shield or energy shield, but the Amphis had already depleted them in an earlier phase of the fight.

Venerable Linda relaxed and commanded her Amphis to circle around in the other direction. The expert mech slowly unwound its chain.

"Absolute defense doesn't exist." The Crosser expert pilot said. "There are always holes in every defense."

"I don't believe that." Jannzi replied. "You've taught me a lesson, but I won't get caught off-guard like this next time. Now that I know what your chainsword can do, I will be ready for your next attempt."

How cute.

Venerable Linda grinned. "Want to bet on it, Larkinson?"

Chapter 3787 The Main Fight

Whenever the expert pilots of the expeditionary fleet sought to polish their skills, they challenged each other in practice bouts.

While none of these fights were safe, expert pilots generally possessed a high degree of control over their own power exertion.

As long as they fought to practice their skills rather than beat each other into submission, these high-energy sparring sessions generally did not compromise the integrity of the expert mechs beyond the usual signs of wear and tear.

This was an acceptable price to pay in order to provide the expert pilots of the Golden Skull Alliance more realistic combat experience.

Today, the members of the Golden Skull Alliance enjoyed multiple good shows as the strongest mechs in the fleet displayed their capabilities.

The Dark Zephyr exhibited both its speed and its elusiveness.

The Minerva demonstrated its grasp over the battlefield.

The First Sword proved its unparalleled control.

The Blade Chaser showed off a hint of the unlocked potential of its expert pilot.

The Shield of Samar exercised its relatively new gravity control.

The Amphis reminded everyone that older expert mechs were powerful as well.

The performance of every expert mech inspired a lot of confidence in the spectators. This was because the expert pilots controlling the machines showed several signs of improvement.

They grew in strength and skill. They became more adept at responding to different threats. They also unveiled new techniques that took greater advantage of their talents and the special features of their expert mechs.

However, the practice bout that everyone had been waiting for had yet to start!

The participating expert mechs had only just deployed in space after the two expert space knights had their turn.

? ?? ??-??? ??, ??? “Who do you think will win this time?”

“It’s hard to say. This is a lopsided fight from the beginning. This is a three-against-one fight.”

“Yeah. The outnumbered expert mech will definitely win.”

“Are you kidding? Have some faith in our expert mechs, man! They’re not regular machines. Not only are they all alive, two out of three of them are masterworks! Our expert mechs are already strong in a duel. Think of what they can do when they fight alongside each other. The combination of their powers and abilities will definitely shake their next opponent!”

“I’m not too sure about that...”

Plenty of observers got into an argument about who would win the much-anticipated confrontation. It was as if they were discussing a high-profile arena match rather than a simple sparring session!

The people in the fleet even started to bet on the matches.

Which side would win?

Which expert mech would get taken out of the fight first?

Which mech would show the most distinctive abilities?

A lot of officers and leaders became exasperated as their people spent more time on calculating their bets than their routine duties!

It couldn't be helped. A handful of the greatest mechs of the Golden Skull Alliance were about to square off against each other. A bout with this combination of expert mechs had never occurred before!

The Larkinson expert mechs flew out first.

"The Amaranto!"

Although Venerable Davia Stark was just a guest pilot who had always made it clear that she was not a part of the clan, it was undeniable that she played a key role in past battles.

While multiple expert ranged mechs had emerged since then, the Amaranto had always retained the crown as the most precise and deadly long-ranged combat unit in the fleet.

"The Everchanger!"

Venerable Joshua and his expert mech had gradually showcased what they were capable of when paired together. Both of them were so versatile that they had taken part in numerous different initiatives.

People often considered the Everchanger as the expert mech that best represented the Larkinsons. Its lively aura along with its excellent embrace of multiple glows had cemented its place as the standard bearer of its clan!

Compared to the enthusiasm directed towards the two masterwork expert mechs, the third machine to emerge in space attracted less attention.

"That's the Riot."

As one of the few non-masterwork expert mechs in the Larkinson Clan, the expert spearman mech never attracted as much admiration or appreciation.

Even among its peers, Venerable Rosa Orfan's personal machine was distinctly underwhelming.

The Dark Zephyr stood out due to its dazzling mobility and odd prime abilities while the First Sword displayed a lot more combat power than usual due to the excellent skill of its expert pilot.

In comparison, the Riot never displayed any flashy performance.

Venerable Orfan's skill was great relative to ordinary mech pilots, but it was nothing special when compared to the likes of Venerable Dise.

The Riot was designed to be a tenacious mech, but its defenses couldn't come close to matching that of the Shield of Samar.

Its mobility and offensive characteristics were relatively average, but that made the Riot even more invisible when standing alongside its more extreme and specialized peers.

The relatively 'balanced' Riot couldn't even match the versatility of the Everchanger.

With all of these factors, it was no surprise that the Riot became the underdog among its peers.

As the Riot followed after the Amaranto and the Everchanger, its expert pilot did not show any signs of discouragement.

"This is my moment." She whispered to her expert mech. "We have both improved after we fought against the dwarves. The performance we've shown back then is no longer reflective of our current strength. Let's show these doubters that we can hold our own in the Larkinson Clan!"

Pure fighting intent welled up in her mind as she became eager to challenge herself against her upcoming opponent!

"You too, Qilanxo! Let's prove to Jannzi that you can do more than put up shields!"

One of the more unusual traits about the Riot was that it was being watched over by an unexpected design spirit.

Spearman mechs were usually offensive in nature so it seemed like a mistake to pair the Riot with the most defensive design spirit available.

Venerable Orfan intended to prove that the Riot and all of its facets were just right!

She simply failed to make the most out of her expert mech's features in previous engagements.

As the Larkinson expert mechs reached their position in space, everyone waited for the sole opposition to arrive.

"He's coming!"

A powerful expert mech shot out of one of the hangar bays of the Hemmington Cross!

The expert mech soared towards the rendez-vous point with greater speed than was typical for medium expert mechs!

The mech became more formidable as it accelerated. No one in its way would be able to remain calm if they were tasked with confronting this powerful machine.

The Bolvos Rage was the only high-tier expert mech in the Golden Skull Alliance!

When paired with an expert pilot that had gotten stuck in the bottleneck to ace pilot, the expert hybrid mech was a killing machine beyond comparison!

The Crosser expert mech stopped in front the three Larkinson expert mechs. Its presence quickly pressed against the combined auras of its upcoming opponents.

Patriarch Reginald Cross cracked his neck as he studied the mechs he was about to fight. He had to admit that each of these 'living' mechs possessed a lot more charm and personality than the ones in his own clan.

He felt more justified in requesting the cooperation of the Larkinsons to develop his next expert mech.

After a long period of waiting, his future expert mech was finally being developed. It would not take long before he would have to retire his trusty and dependable Bolvos Rage.

"You have done good, my mech." Reginald affectionately said. "Let us hope you can hold out for your last months in service."

There was still a chance that the expeditionary fleet might get embroiled in other battles, so Patriarch Reginald wanted to make sure his piloting skills remained sharp in case he needed to get serious.

"Come on, Larkinsons! Show me what you have learned since your last fight! Make it difficult for me. The more strength you display, the more I will be able to enjoy this session!"

The Bolvos Rage glowed red as its powerful expert pilot became stimulated!

His formidable force of will quickly resonated with the expert hybrid mech, causing an extremely strong resonance shield to appear.

Not only that, but his rising battle intent directly pressed upon the battle wills of his three opponents!

Venerable Joshua and Venerable Orfan grimaced as they found it hard to maintain their composure in the face of such a strong warrior.

“It’s almost like confronting Saint Yila Mayorka!”

There was a huge gap in strength between Patriarch Reginald Cross and an actual ace pilot, but it was already impressive for the former to acquire a shadow of the latter!

Patriarch Reginald’s willpower was so thick, strong and developed that it had almost grown solid as far as the Larkinson expert mechs were concerned!

Only Venerable Stark was able to keep her cool in the face of this overwhelming threat. She possessed a fearless attitude in the face of larger and more overwhelming threats.

How could she ever hope to challenge the Big Two and all of those alien empires if she allowed herself to get intimidated by their might?

She disregarded Patriarch Reginald’s intimidating power and moved her Amaranto backwards.

“I am moving into position!”

Her expert mech did not belong at the front! The Amaranto did not have the benefit of incorporating Unending alloy nor enjoyed the luxury of a more expensive and high-end armor system like the one that protected the Minerva.

It was by far the most fragile expert mech in the expeditionary fleet. Though Patriarch Ves already promised to address this shortcoming in a future revision, it would still a lot of time before the Amaranto gained a lot of toughness.

Until then, Venerable Stark had to pay careful attention to incoming attacks and make sure her expert mech had its resonance shield up at all times.

The Everchanger and the Riot also prepared for battle.

Venerable Orfan was able to regain her composure fairly quickly due to her challenging mindset and her veteran mindset.

Venerable Joshua took the longest to shake himself out of daze. He had been more affected by Patriarch Reginald’s hostile posture than he should, and this was definitely a problem that he intended to address once he got back!

“Joshua, keep your distance for now.” Venerable Orfan said. “Let me block Reginald’s way first. You should try to circle around and harass his rear whenever possible.”

This was a decent plan but only if the Riot could block the Bolvos Rage.

“Are you sure, Rosa?”

The former Flagrant Vandal officer smirked. “I’m a big girl, Joshua. I can handle myself. The Bolvos Rage isn’t a pure melee machine anyway.”

“Okay. Good luck, then.”

Once the Everchanger opened distance and flew around, the Riot and the Bolvos Rage only paused a few seconds before they both converged on each other!

The Crosser expert mech had already opened fire with its integrated energy weapons, but the Riot’s blue resonance shield unexpectedly endured the heavy barrage quite well!

“It will take more than that to break my defenses!”

When the two expert mechs finally struck with their melee weapons, the Riot actually gained the upper hand this time!

Even though the Riot’s comprehensive performance was worse, it was a dedicated melee mech that had the advantage of greater reach!

Before the Bolvos Rage managed to inflict damage, the Riot’s spear stabbed first and struck with greater momentum than normal!

Combined with the fact that the two expert mechs charged against each other, the physical force of this blow was not light!

The Bolvos Rage’s advance had already stagnated, causing its axe strike to deal less damage than it should.

This was quite good as it allowed the Riot’s recently-stressed resonance shield to regain cohesion!

The two mechs subsequently proceeded to clash against each other.

Although Patriarch Reginald wanted to take out the Amaranto and the Everchanger first, he recognized that he wouldn’t be able to get to them as long as this stubborn expert spearman mech kept nipping at its heels!

“I will force you back first!”

Chapter 3788 New Beam Tricks

Fighting against Patriarch Reginald up close exerted great pressure against Venerable Orfan!

The two weren’t close when it came to their resonance strengths.

One of them was a high-tier expert pilot who lived through many different tribulations!

The other was a late bloomer who originally shouldn't have the qualifications of an expert pilot!

Reginald's willpower was not only refined until it had become as solid as an iron dome, it also conveyed all of his hatred, his pride and his lust for glory!

Before Venerable Orfan could concentrate on fighting against the Bolvos Rage, she had to make sure her own willpower was able to stand firm in the face of this strong pressure!

"Ugh!" She grunted. "You're dreaming if you expect me to kneel in front of you! Our clan is growing stronger and must!! How can I keep my chin up if I let myself fall behind? Beating you shall be the first step to my rise to greatness!"

The suppression from the high-tier expert pilot still affected her judgment and combat efficiency, but she was gradually learning how to cope against this influence!

Patriarch Reginald's eyes glinted as he sensed the rising resistance from his most direct adversary.

It was not easy for a weaker expert pilot to gain momentum in front of his daunting presence!

Yet the scrappy expert spearman mech unceasingly put up a greater fight.

"It looks like I can't take it easy anymore."

Patriarch Reginald gradually ramped up his effort. His Bolvos Rage's axe struck with greater speed and force than before, though the expert mech held back its shotgun for the moment.

A couple of resonance-empowered laser beams struck the Bolvos Rage's resonance shield!

The shots came from different directions as the Amaranto and the Everchanger had taken up opposite positions!

The pressure they exerted on the Bolvos Rage was quite difficult to deal with. Although Patriarch Reginald had plenty of ranged weapons at his disposal, his expert mech could not effectively suppress enemies from every direction.

The only weapon system of the Bolvos Rage that did not pay attention to direction was its back-mounted missile launcher.

However, every expert mech-grade missile was precious. It was too much of a waste to squander them in a sparring match!

For this reason, Patriarch Reginald had opted to remove the module from his expert mech in order to reduce the encumbrance and freedom of motion of his machine.

While his Bolvos Rage was able to put up a better fight against the Riot, his expert mech possessed less means to pressure his other two opponents!

“It looks like I need to get closer!”

The Bolvos Rage no longer remained in place. The mech slowly accelerated forward.

Between the Amaranto and the Everchanger, Patriarch Reginald decisively chose to chase after the former!

The Amaranto was the definition of a glass cannon. The expert rifleman mech’s offensive threat was the highest but its other parameters were all low.

In comparison, the Everchanger was a lot more balanced. Its offensive threat wasn’t as high but it was more than capable of defending itself against a variety of attacks.

In particular, its regenerative properties made it a lot harder to defeat than usual!

“Rosa, do your best to halt the Bolvos Rage!” Joshua called.

“I’m trying, but this damned Crosser mech is as tough as a juggernaut! Hit it harder, goddamnit!”

Even though the Riot was putting up a good fight, it was unable to stall the forward momentum of the Bolvos Rage. If the expert spearman mech forcefully tried to stand in the way, then it would just get shoved aside by the opposing mech’s unreasonably powerful resonance shield!

Seeing that the empowered laser beam attacks weren’t making any apparent progress in draining the Bolvos Rage’s first defensive layer, Venerable Joshua was no longer satisfied with firing laser beams from his Vitalus rifle.

“Stark! This guy’s resonance shield is too powerful. Let’s switch to light beams!”

Both ranged mechs simultaneously changed the attack modes of their high-end luminar crystal rifles.

The Vitalus rifle held by one of the hands of the Everchanger soon began to bark out accurate light beams that impacted the rear of the Bolvos Rage resonance shield.

This time, the attacks seriously stung the powerful expert mech's resonance shield.

There was an element in the bright white light beam attacks that actually stung Patriarch's force of will. The Crosser expert pilot furrowed his brows as he began to experience significantly greater discomfort.

Although his expert mech's resonance shield was powerful enough to endure these attacks for the moment, he could sense that his protective layer was growing unstable at a disconcertingly higher rate than before.

The Amaranto did not sit still either!

The Instrument of Vengeance in its hands barked out bigger and more powerful beams. As a two-handed weapon that was expressly designed to take out powerful threats from a distance, its ranged damage output was considerably higher!

When the light beams struck from both sides of the Bolvos Rage, its resonance shield became even more unstable. The stress it endured from two different directions forced Patriarch Reginald to put significantly more effort into sustaining his protective measure.

"Not enough!" Venerable Joshua. "We need more power!"

The Larkinson mech pilots had already realized that they didn't need to withhold their power that much. The Bolvos Rage was too powerful and was still able to endure more attacks. Holding back to this extent was sheer folly!

Joshua resonated with his expert mech and its rifle to a greater degree than before. Not only that, but he explicitly instructed his expert mech to switch its glow to that of the Illustrious One!

Once the Everchanger gained a brighter and more mysterious aura, the way its Vitalus output damage had changed.

"Illustrious One! Bless my weapon!"

The crystal weapon shimmered with different lights.

A rainbow light from a mysterious source seemed to unlock more of its latent potential. Aroused by Venerable Joshua's extensive familiarity with the luminar crystal design spirit, the design spirit channeled a greater portion of his power into the weapon than ever before!

A green light from Venerable Joshua's manifestation of power fed the weapon with the power of life, causing its light beam attacks to become infused with a greater proportion of his willpower!

Venerable Joshua evoked the power of both true resonance and prime resonance at the same time!

At this time, Joshua, the Everchanger and the Illustrious One had become highly aligned with each other. Each of them resonated with each other and added their respective strengths to the bright and shimmering light beam attacks that destabilized the Bolvos Rage's resonance shield to a greater degree.

What was remarkable was that a portion of the destructive light beam energies actually persisted!

For an instant, it was as if the rainbow attack had actually turned into acid that had been flung onto the surface of the Crosser expert mech's resonance shield.

Although Joshua's attempt to make them stick only kept them active for a brief interval, this was still a completely new application of his domain that added to his versatility!

"What?" Patriarch Reginald became distracted by this new development.

He did not expect that the Everchanger could launch such a tricky attack!

The fact that his expert mech was able to 'wipe' away the sticky light beam energy so quickly did not mean it was a weak attack.

If Patriarch Reginald did not actively divert a portion of his formidable willpower to grind away the sticky attack, it would likely persist and wear out his expert mech's resonance shield faster!

All of this meant that the high-tier expert pilot had to make a difficult choice.

He could save up his willpower so that he could direct all of his power to his primary targets at the cost of depleting his expert mech's resonance shield faster. The sticky light beam energies had the potential to deal two to four times as much damage if left unattended!

He could also opt to constantly expend his willpower to grind down the sticky energy residue as soon as they appeared. The effort required to do so was not great but Patriarch Reginald would inevitably have to split his focus and strength exertion if he chose this course of action!

This wasn't the extent of his troubles.

Even as his Bolvos Rage continued to advance towards the Amaranto, Venerable Stark launched her own form of counterattack.

Even though the Amaranto was bound to the same design spirit that currently empowered the Everchanger, Venerable Stark possessed a substantially different relationship with the Illustrious One.

The Instrument of Vengeance glowed with a combination of Venerable Stark's rage against the forces beyond her power she condemned and the Illustrious One's loneliness.

Both of them were survivors in a sense!

Their commonalities caused them to develop a special relationship that was based on different values and feelings.

With the addition of the Amaranto, a masterwork expert mech that had been shaped by both influences, the combination of the three fully empowered the Instrument of Vengeance beyond the norm!

The large crystal weapon evoked a sense of retribution! Anything that stood in Venerable Stark's way must get struck down!

The older expert pilot's eyes flashed with hellfire red.

"Passing Light!"

The high-powered beam fired by the Amaranto lit up the surrounding space with pure red destructive power!

Patriarch Reginald only had an instant to reinforce the forward side of his expert mech's resonance shield before it got struck by the nakedly powerful attack!

A bright explosion of red light occurred upon impact!

Although the Bolvos Rage's resonance shield still managed to hold, the surprising part of this attack was that the surface of the expert mech's armor had actually been scorched!

"You punched through my resonance shield! No, not exactly. It was as if a part of your beam attack phased through my first line of defense!"

Patriarch Reginald did not expect that a mid-tier expert pilot like Venerable Stark could develop such a useful ability at her stage.

Being able to penetrate through the resonance shields of expert pilots was an extremely desirable ability. As far as he knew, only high-tier expert pilots and high-tier expert mechs were able to accomplish this. The only other way to pull it off was by utilizing the

corresponding resonating exotics, but the Amaranto did not incorporate any such materials.

This was a capability that Venerable Stark could only pull off with a powerful living mech and the help of the Illustrious One.

It was the design spirit that was responsible for altering the properties of the empowered light beam with partial phasing properties!

The Amaranto fired the same attack yet again, causing the Bolvos Rage to acquire another scorch mark!

However, Patriarch Reginald slowly calmed down when he realized that this attack was not as threatening as he thought.

“I see. Your mastery of this ability is still too rudimentary. Not enough energy is passing through my resonance shield.”

Perhaps her new Passing Light resonance ability might grant Venerable Stark the ability to cripple completely intact expert mechs in the future, but for now her power and her proficiency in this highly complicated technique were still up to standard!

? ?? ??-??? ??, ??? Venerable Stark halted her efforts. She had gotten what she wanted and confirmed her new ability's effects against a real expert mech.

If the Passing Light ability didn't consume so much energy and strained her mind and will so much with every attack, she would have preferred to fire a few more times.

“It should have more effect against a weaker expert mech.” She consoled herself as her expert mech fired more sustainable attacks.

The Amaranto's regular attacks weren't weak!

The fact that the Bolvos Rage was able to keep its resonance shield intact after enduring so much punishment was not because its enemies were weak, but more because its expert pilot was so unreasonably strong!

The extra pressure only further enflamed Patriarch Reginald's battlelust!

“Keep firing! Keep attacking! You Larkinsons may possess a lot of toys, but they are no match for my indomitable fighting spirit!”

Chapter 3789 - Let's Riot

Few opponents managed to stay strong when confronted by the Larkinson Clan's renowned expert mechs.

Even if the Bolvos Rage was a high-tier expert mech, its design and material composition were not that exaggerated.

The upcoming Mars Project was much more extravagant! Its design budget was a lot higher, so much so that the Cross Clan had to forgo a lot of essential investments in order to fund the acquisition of all of the medium and high-grade exotics to realize Professor Benedict's ambitious vision.

While the knowledgeable people in the expeditionary fleet would not be surprised if the completed Mars Project was able to stomp all three Larkinson expert mechs by this time, the older and aging Bolvos Rage should have struggled a lot more.

The reality was different, though!

Despite getting pushed by the Riot and despite getting bombarded by the twin attacks from the Amaranto and the Everchanger, the expert hybrid mech still maintained a dominant posture!

Venerable Joshua and Venerable Orfan both grew more uncomfortable after seeing their efforts achieve so little effect.

They were not holding back that much at this time!

"It's not the expert mech. It's the expert pilot! Look at the readings from the resonance meter. Patriarch Reginald's peak resonance strength has reached 58.6 laveres!"

That was a small step more than his previous best result! Although the jump from 57 to 58.6 laveres looked small, the reality was that the increase in power was significant!

Compared to his weaker self, the current version of Reginald Cross had inched closer to godhood!

The unreasonable strength boost he gained from this small but significant progress became evident in how tenaciously his expert mech resisted all of the attacks.

Aside from the costly penetrating attacks launched by the Amaranto, no other strike had succeeded in damaging its mech frame!

The resonance shield's unbreakable appearance was a direct reflection of Patriarch Reginald's incredibly domineering willpower!

Seeing that neither the Amaranto nor the Everchanger were able to crack the Bolvos Rage's defensive layer anytime soon, Venerable Rosa Orfan realized that it was up to her to make the difference.

She attacked with greater intensity and explicitly sought to exhaust her opponent's resonance shield with repeated resonance-empowered attacks.

"Champion's Momentum!"

Venerable Orfan even resonated with the Pierrotis integrated in the spear of her expert mech. This special resonating material amplified momentum-based attacks, causing the Riot to output significantly more damage as long as it struck with the entire mech moving forward.

While this was effective for a time, the enemy did not remain static.

"Let me increase the heat!" Patriarch Reginald called.

Even as his Bolvos Rage fought back against the Riot, it began to use its various integrated energy weapon modules to fire at the distant Amaranto!

The attacks struck the expert rifleman mech with great power, causing Venerable Stark to experience a lot more difficulties!

Not only was she obliged to divert more power and attention towards her expert mech's defenses, she also had to move her mech around in order to block the enemy's line of sight as much as possible.

Patriarch Reginald did not mind. The ranged attacks that weren't able to hit the Amaranto instead struck the Riot that was doing its best to absorb the hits instead.

"Damnit!" Venerable Orfan cursed. "This fellow hits hard!"

The Bolvos Rage was primarily a ranged mech, after all. Its axe was merely a weapon used to fend off melee opponents.

Now that it was utilizing the majority of its weapon systems, Patriarch Reginald and Bolvos Rage's power consumption had risen by a lot.

This meant that the high-tier expert mech would no longer be able to sustain its resonance shield as long in the face of all of the incoming attacks.

Still, it was worth it as long as the Bolvos Rage succeeded in taking one of the three expert mechs out of the action!

The Riot began to endure a lot of punishment!

Unlike its current opposition, its expert pilot was not an unreasonable existence among her kind.

Venerable Orfan's willpower depleted at a worrying rate as the Riot's resonance shield withstood attack after attack.

Although a part of her wanted to move her Riot aside, her desire to win and prove herself worthy was too great to prompt her to retreat.

She intended to face this threat head-on and last as long as possible!

Surprisingly enough, the Riot was holding up quite well actually. Although its resonance shield wobbled more and more, it always managed to hold strong even when the Bolvos Rage launched a powerful beam attack from its chest projector!

"Hm?" Patriarch Reginald recognized the Riot's resilience as well. "I heard that your expert mech is tougher than it looks. There is truth to these claims."

That did not worry him too much, though. Whether the Riot lasted a minute or two minutes didn't matter. Eventually, it would lose its resonance shield after reaching its limit, and that was the point where the expert mech was 'dead' according to the rules!

Due to all of this pressure, Venerable Orfan was no longer reluctant to employ her newest ability.

"So you want to pick a fight with me? Then let's have a riot! Second Skin!"

She attuned herself to another resonating material of her expert mech. Resonating with BSN-17A caused her expert mech to generate a second energy barrier.

This increased the Riot's ability to resist damage without exposing its frame, but this was not the extent of her move.

Venerable Orfan momentarily removed her awareness from the battle and reached out to a mysterious place where she came into direct contact with the design spirit she had been bonded to for numerous years.

Orfan and Qilanxo both banded together! With the addition of the Riot, the three reached a complex form of cooperation that drew out the best of each!

"Disharmony Barrier!"

The Riot's second resonance barrier began to take a more unstable quality. It shook and wobbled as if it had turned into a rebelling slime.

In an instant, the Disharmony Barrier actually attempted to engulf the Bolvos Rage's resonance shield!

The interaction between the two extraordinary energy fields produced crazy reactions that rapidly depleted the integrity of them both!

"What is this?!" Reginald became surprised as the Larkinsons pulled out yet another unusual trick!

Much to his surprise, his expert mech's resonance shield was depleting at a far faster pace than he anticipated.

The reason for that was not because the Riot's weird and unstable Disharmony Barrier inflicted more damage.

In fact, if the Disharmony Barrier struck a normal mech, it wouldn't leave much a mark at all as its material damage potential was too low!

The key to its mechanism was in the word 'disharmony'.

After piloting the Riot for an extended amount of time, Venerable Orfan gradually realized that her expert mech possessed an extra gift that could be dangerous in certain circumstances but could produce surprising results in other circumstances.

The source of this surprise factor was the Unstable Chaos Essence that Ves had integrated into the Riot for dubious reasons.

Though this gem had given Venerable Orfan plenty of grief by giving her headaches and causing her to lose control of the Riot's operations, she had gritted her teeth and slowly learned how to handle this quality!

While she was far from mastering this chaotic element, she gained just enough proficiency to use it as the basis of a new prime ability.

The help of Qilanxo was essential as the big lizard possessed a much finer control over all of these different energies.

Together with the active support of the design spirit, Venerable Orfan and the Riot unveiled their new signature prime resonance ability for the first time!

The results of the Disharmony Barrier turned out to be a lot better than Orfan had expected!

The Bolvos Rage was no longer in a comfortable position as before. Its resonance shield was collapsing at a significantly faster rate because the disharmony introduced by the Riot was making it difficult for Patriarch Reginald to resonate with his own machine!

It was as if Patriarch Reginald was playing a lovely song on the piano, only for a drunken Venerable Orfan to barge into the room while banging a pot!

It became a lot harder to appreciate the original song with the addition of this disturbing element!

Even though Venerable Orfan's strain had increased to a massive degree due to the difficulty of disturbing the symphony of a high-tier expert pilot, it was still worthwhile for her to put in all of this effort!

She grinned even as she was being worn down at an accelerated pace.

"I originally developed this ability to mess up enemy ace mechs, but I'm okay with using it on you as well!"

Patriarch Reginald couldn't take it any longer. He did not wish to bully his weaker sparring partners that much, but the Disharmony Barrier disturbed him on a profound level.

He no longer felt comfortable inside his expert mech! The Bolvos Rage was a machine that had shared wealth and woe with him. He and his expert mech had defeated so many of their peers that their fit had reached an admirable height!

Yet due to this unexpected interference, Patriarch Reginald was not able to leverage his expert mech's strength as well as before.

"Get... OFF!" He boomed!

The Bolvos Rage finally brought its shotgun to bear. The large weapon aimed towards the Riot and blasted powerful resonance-enhanced projectiles that instantly shredded the Riot's Disharmony Barrier and almost knocked apart the resonance shield underneath!

The Riot and Venerable Orfan endured so much disturbance that they were both taken out of the fight almost entirely!

Before Venerable Orfan could recover from this impactful blow, the Bolvos Rage was about to use its integrated weapons to break the Riot's lingering resonance shield entirely!

"You will have to go through me first!"

In an instant, the Everchanger had moved in front of the Riot and resisted the blow with its completely intact resonance shield!

"You!"

"Yes, me! Did you think I would keep taking potshots at your back?"

Under Venerable Joshua's deliberate control, the Everchanger blocked any attack that was intended to knock the Riot out of the fight.

Although the expert spearman mech clearly wouldn't be able to recover quickly, it was already enough for the Everchanger to occupy the Bolvos Rage's attention!

Joshua had given up on inflicting as much damage as possible towards his opponent. The Everchanger had holstered its Vitalus rifle and relied solely on its mech sword and resonance shield to resist the Bolvos Rage's mixed attacks!

Plasma attacks and positron beams collided against the Everchanger's bright green resonance shield at a constant rate.

At the same time, the Bolvos Rage also did not hesitate to strike the expert hero mech with its axe as well as its powerful shotgun!

The latter hit the Everchanger like a punch with each discharge!

However, Venerable Joshua never lost confidence in his expert mech's ability to endure. The reason for that was because he had switched its design spirit to Qilanxo!

With the backing of the former sacred god, Venerable Joshua resonated with her, causing them to activate an unnamed prime ability that moderately increased the defensive power of the Everchanger's resonance shield!

Now that the Everchanger completely absorbed the Bolvos Rage's attacks, the Amaranto at the rear gained plenty of opportunities to attack without much scruples!

The only hindrance that Venerable Stark encountered was the fact that the Everchanger was constantly in the way.

Without its missiles, the Bolvos Rage's remaining ranged attacks were unable to go around the expert hero mech!

The same limitation did not apply to the Amaranto. The highly-specialized expert rifleman mech deliberately shifted the aim of its Instrument of Vengeance and began to fire a volley of empowered light beams that actually bent as it traversed through space!

Each and every crooked beam struck the Bolvos Rage's ragged resonance shield without striking the Everchanger!

After another couple of volleys of uninterrupted fire, the Amaranto's final light beam attack finally broke the Bolvos Rage's incredibly resilient resonance shield!

" ... "

Chapter 3790 - Prime Abilities

"You know I could have beaten you three up if I got serious, correct?" Patriarch Reginald stated as he entered the briefing room on the Gorgoneion.

Almost all of the expert pilots in the expeditionary fleet were present in the compartment today.

It was actually quite rare for so many expert pilots to gather together like this. Their strong willpower and personalities brushed against each other like invisible bubbles.

As Ves stood at the head of the conference table alongside his wife, he became fascinated by what he observed.

Expert pilots were akin to preparatory ace pilots. The former possessed a shadow of the latter, and that showed in the way that each of the ones before him radiated their own domains that attempted to claim ownership in the space around their bodies.

Naturally, these domains didn't like it when they mixed with each other. It was like several different states bumping into each other.

If not for the fact that the expert pilots were all bound by family, duty and friendship, a lot of friction would have emerged by now. None of the expert pilots possessed weak egos and it was quite difficult for them to cede ground towards each other!

Venerable Stark held herself apart from the rest.

Venerable Jannzi and Venerable Joshua both acted like scalded cats when they came close.

Patriarch Reginald evoked a lot of threat from the rest, especially after he made his opening declaration.

The man did not look like a prideful expert pilot who had just lost a practice duel against three of his juniors.

Although Venerable Orfan looked as if she was ready to get into the stronger expert pilot's face to give him a piece of her mind, Venerable Dise held her shoulder and pressed the irritated woman down.

"He's right, Rosa." The swordsman mech specialist said. "His Bolvos Rage did not open up with its formidable arsenal of integrated energy weapons at the start. The mech's shotgun only fired a few times. It deployed with no missiles. Reginald did not even fight at his best until he finally experienced enough pressure. Did you notice that he has not

utilized any powerful resonance abilities of his own? Your mech would have been demolished if he fought to kill instead of trying to prove a point."

Although Venerable Orfan was stubborn, she wasn't stupid. She already recognized these points. She just felt upset that her earlier bout which she was so proud of winning lost a lot of its shine.

Perhaps the ordinary observers in the fleet might continue to believe that the three Larkinson expert mechs were able to handle the Bolvos Rage, but everyone in the briefing room knew better.

The expert pilots all possessed a decent understanding of the fight and how much the Bolvos Rage held back. Patriarch Reginald didn't go all-out against his weaker Larkinson counterparts at first.

They had agreed on this beforehand. The main purpose of the sparring match was to exercise each other's fighting capabilities.

The Larkinsons couldn't do that properly if the Bolvos Rage did its best to circumvent the Riot and utilized its superior mobility to close in on the Amaranto and smash the expert rifleman mech into submission!

Although the Larkinson expert mechs handicapped themselves as well, most notably by denying Venerable Stark the use of her strongest and most destructive attacks, they had been fighting a lot more seriously from the start of the match!

Clang!

Ves knocked the fist of his Unending Regalia against the surface of the metal conference table.

Everyone else in the meeting room were still garbed in their custom, high-quality piloting suits.

These suits were much more protective than they looked. Expert pilots were precious and it would be a shame for them to perish so easily.

What if they randomly stumbled in the middle of a firefight?

What if they got blasted by shrapnel when their expert mechs succumbed in battle?

Instances like these were preventable, so the expert pilots all received protective suits that worked better than most regular infantry combat armor!

Laced with high-quality materials and exotics, their suits offered excellent personal protection against both weapons fire and environmental hazards.

They had room for optional shield generators as well, providing them with a strong layer of protection that could give them a lot of buffer against serious threats.

Finally, their suits were quite slim and flexible, making them almost as comfortable as their own skins.

Combined with many modest survival functions, the expert pilots could easily rely on their high-quality suits to survive even when they were stranded on an untamed alien planet!

It wasn't enough, though. Ves noted an obvious difference in the quality and protective properties of the piloting suits of his own men and that of Patriarch Reginald.

The latter had already upgraded to a modern high-end suit model that was developed and sold in the Red Ocean.

In contrast, the Larkinson expert pilots still made do with rim-level equipment. The same went for everything else. The Larkinson Clan had arrived in the Red Ocean for a while now and still used the same old ships, mechs and other inferior equipment!

No wonder Calabast pushed so hard for Ves to kick his commercial enterprises up a notch. It was truly abhorrent to see how his clan relied so much on outdated and inferior technology!

He briefly shook his head to push aside this distracting train of thought and focused on the present. He could think about upgrading the protective piloting suits of his clan's best soldiers another time.

"Each of you has exercised your strengths and employed new tricks. While I am sure that you have learned plenty of lessons from your sparring matches, I am sure you can learn a few more once we share our views. Before we begin, did any of your mechs suffer serious damage?"

No one spoke up, which Ves took as a sign that everything was fine.

"It is good that you have been able to control your strengths. Duels between expert mechs can get pretty destructive if you don't show enough restraint. I understand that it is difficult for warriors like yourselves to endure perceived losses, but remember that fights at this level aren't serious enough for you to get worked up about."

He directed a pointed glance at Venerable Orfan. She was smart enough to agree with the logic behind his words, but her emotions were not in sync.

Ves was quite reluctant to have his expert mechs sparring against each other on a frequent basis. A single accident might necessitate expensive repairs that could last for days or even extend to a week.

During all that time, a crisis might break out at any time where the absence of an expert mech would be sorely felt!

Still, given all of the gains that the expert pilots had made today, it was still worthwhile to let them loose against the only ones in the fleet that could keep up with their pace.

Before Ves tackled the next topic on his agenda, the strongest expert pilot stood up and commanded everyone's attention.

"I cannot wait any longer." He said as his voice underscored his urgency. "Why are your mechs so odd?"

"Pardon?" Ves frowned in puzzlement.

Reginald waved his hand at the Larkinsons. "Your expert mechs! They're far from normal! I already understand that they are 'alive', but when I fought against a few of you today, your expert mechs displayed abilities that are similar but not like the typical resonance abilities that I have experienced!"

To Reginald and many other expert pilots, resonance abilities came from the expert mechs or more precisely the resonating materials integrated in their frames.

The use of these special materials allowed expert pilots to amplify and channel their own willpower into distinct applications that all followed their own rules.

The resonance abilities of many expert mechs weren't actually flashy.

The resonance shield that every expert mech had become a standardized feature.

Amplifying the force of the chainsword wielded by the Amphis was actually a constant resonance ability that Venerable Linda Cross could maintain for a long time.

Yet none of these abilities came close to matching the unorthodox resonance abilities that the Amaranto, the Riot and the Everchanger had displayed. Their unusual resonance abilities carried a different flavor!

"You have fought alongside us for a while, Patriarch Reginald." Ves stated. "What you have experienced isn't new to us. We just didn't bother to explain this important feature to you. In truth, I thought that you would have figured out a few details on your own after fighting alongside our expert mechs."

"Clearly your assumptions are wrong." Reginald crossed his arms in irritation.

"Professor Benedict hasn't told me about anything relating to these odd resonance abilities when he was helping your clan design your Minerva."

"That is because 'prime resonance', the phenomenon that you are likely referring to, is subject to a lot of limitations." Ves explained. "In short, every living mech with a design spirit theoretically has the potential to fight like a prime mech, but the capacity to retain the energy needed to evoke this strength is limited most of the time. In order to make prime resonance possible, I needed to make use of rare materials such as Unending alloy that we have salvaged from the Nyxian Gap. Even then, it is up to the pilots in question to figure out how to harness this potential in specific ways. I am quite proud to see that Venerable Stark, Venerable Orfan and Venerable Joshua have succeeded in inventing their own new prime abilities."

Prime abilities were unlike ordinary resonance abilities.

The latter had to be preconfigured in advance by the mech designer. The specific ways in which he integrated the resonance materials in the mech largely determined the power manifestation.

This was why Ves had taken a liking to prime abilities. A mech designer was never able to figure out how an expert pilot could best channel his power.

It was much better for the expert pilot to develop his own techniques!

Although no brand-new expert mech came with existing prime abilities, this could be remedied over time.

Ves suddenly realized that prime resonance was yet another application of his design philosophy that was predisposed towards growth.

Prime abilities were weak and unrefined at first, but as the expert pilots became more proficient in using them, they could continually improve their application and achieve greater results over time!

While ordinary resonance abilities could grow stronger over time as well, their templates were fixed due to their dependence on fixed materials.

As Ves explained a few of these nuances to his fellow patriarch, the powerful expert pilot clearly conveyed a lot of desire.

"That sounds perfect for my new expert mech! Please include this prime resonance feature in the Mars Project."

Ves adopted an awkward look.

"Ahem." Gloriana cleared her throat. "My husband's prime resonance is only made possible due to the prime materials that we have managed to find and incorporate into our expert mechs. As of now, only our first six expert mechs truly qualify as prime mechs. The Minerva and the upcoming upgrade of my Blade Chaser will not be able to

exhibit as much strength because we have already run out of prime materials to use in our other expert mechs."

"The Minerva is actually capable of employing minor prime resonance abilities." Ves clarified to everyone. "Its base energy capacity is extremely limited though, so Commander Casella Ingvar can only channel the power generated by resonating with the design spirit in limited forms."

Patriarch Reginald began to frown. "Can you obtain additional prime materials?"

"I would have turned the Minerva into a prime mech as well if I had any at my disposal." Ves retorted. "Prime resonance is a new phenomenon that I have personally invented. There are still many aspects that I need to flesh out. Right now, I have only identified three valid resonance materials, of which only one of them is available in the Red Ocean. Procuring it... is nearly impossible due to its extremely limited supply."

"What is this material called?"

"Galenta Bone."