

Mech 3811

Chapter 3811 Mother's Choice

"Uncle Butus..." A cute voice called.

"It's 'Brutus' with an R, young lady. Can you say Brutus?"

"Butus!"

"...You will get it right eventually."

A pink-suited figure ran towards the man who wore a dashing white piloting suit and hugged his leg.

Brutus bent down and lifted the tiny but energetic figure of Aurelia up. The little girl giggled as the expert pilot automatically retracted his helmet so he could plant a kiss on Aurelia's forehead and cheek.

"Hihihihi! Kiss back!"

Aurelia did not hesitate to lean forward so that she could plant kisses on her uncle's smooth and handsome face.

As uncle and niece showed their affection towards each other, Gloriana stepped inside Brutus' stateroom aboard the Indigo Tremor.

She approached and hugged his body before looking at him with an evaluating gaze.

"You look good, brother. You seem stronger than before."

"I made a few new insights and deepened my control over the Star Dancer Mark II. My resonance strength has grown." Brutus smiled as Aurelia's tiny hands curiously rubbed over his stubble.

"What is your current peak?"

"20.75 laveses."

Gloriana gasped with surprise and happiness! "You've already advanced to a mid-tier expert pilot! That's faster than I expected!"

There was no single uniform standard that defined the tiers of expert pilots. Different organizations maintained slightly different thresholds based on different combinations of factors such as resonance strength, actual combat strength, expert mech performance and actual battle records.

However, most people used certain measures of resonance strength as a shorthand indication of the overall tier of an expert pilot.

A demigod with a resonance strength that was approaching the upper limit was unlikely to be lacking in combat experience!

A low-tier expert pilot's resonance strength ranged between 1 to 20 laveres.

A mid-tier expert pilot's resonance strength ranged between 20 to 40 laveres.

A high-tier expert pilot's resonance strength ranged between 40 to 60 laveres.

A peak-tier expert pilot's resonance strength ranged between 60 to 67 laveres.

The latter happened to be extremely rare. These were basically old dogs who possessed many decades of combat experience and constantly worked hard to obtain their breakthrough chance.

Unfortunately for most of them, they missed the best time for them to achieve their breakthroughs and suffered from the many ailments brought by aging.

Of course, Brutus did not have to worry about this outcome as he was still in the prime of his life.

In the eyes of Gloriana, Brutus checked all of the boxes for him to qualify as a mid-tier expert pilot.

Though his combat experience was not too abundant, he had fought numerous pitched battles and never slacked off in his training.

His new Star Dancer Mark II was substantially more powerful than his previous expert mech in almost every parameter.

Now that his resonance strength had finally caught up, he had become an existence that could fight with a clear advantage against his weaker and less-developed peers!

This was enough for Gloriana to be happy for her older brother!

As the two sat down on one of the couches in the central compartment, they entered into a discussion about all of the progress that Brutus had made as of late.

The expert pilot had not only grown his resonance strength, but also polished his piloting skills and deepened his mastery of the Star Dancer Mark II.

As he became a stronger and more capable pilot, his expert mech no longer fit him as well as before. The Star Dancer Mark II was tweaked for a demigod who was weaker than his current self.

Part of the reason why Gloriana decided to pay a visit to the Indigo Tremor was to perform the necessary adjustments to her beloved brother's mech.

"Miaow miaow."

As Clixie rested on Brutus' lap and kept Aurelia company, Gloriana contemplated the tweaks she needed to make in order to increase her brother's combat efficiency.

"I think you are ready to assume a greater degree of manual control over your machine." She concluded. "The Star Dancer Mark II is one of the most agile and maneuverable mechs that I have been involved with. It is designed with quick and dexterous movements in mind, but we have locked part of it away because it requires too much fine control on your part in order to make the most out of this potential. If your familiarity, control and multi-tasking is not up to par, then you are liable to trip up your own expert mech."

"I understand that, but I am more than ready for the challenge, sister. You know exactly what I focus on with my fighting style."

Rifleman mech specialists generally excelled in two different directions.

There were the long-ranged marksmen like Venerable Davia Stark who focused most of their efforts on pursuing maximum firepower and extreme precision.

Expert pilots like these were at home in large, organized battles where they could sit in the rear and rely on the protection of their comrades to snipe distant opponents with impunity.

The downside to this fighting approach was that they usually didn't polish their self-defense capabilities.

While expert pilots were always skilled in every aspect of piloting a mech, their time was limited and they could only practice a limited skill set at a time.

Marksman specialists had to spend much of their time increasing their accuracy and precision in a variety of difficult circumstances. This caused them to fall further behind in terms of dueling and close-ranged dogfighting compared to other expert pilots.

Brutus pursued a radically different fighting style. He was the quintessential example of a mid-range duelist who could hold his own against other individual expert pilots.

His long-ranged precision might not be as great, but he was much more able to track fast-moving expert mechs while performing evasive maneuvers with his own expert mech.

Performing all of these intricate and interconnected actions demanded a lot out of every mech pilot!

Expert pilots didn't have it easy either because their expert mechs required vastly more control in order to keep up with the extreme performance of enemy expert mechs.

Gloriana took notes as Brutus conveyed his demands. She interpreted his requests and came up with an increasingly more precise plan on how to tweak the Star Dancer Mark II.

"The firepower of my rifle is falling behind." Brutus told his sister.

"That shouldn't be the case." She frowned. "The Hexacris is one of Ves' custom-developed luminar crystal rifles. It is as powerful as it can be at its size and budget."

"It's a weapon designed to fight against mechs and expert mechs. It is not designed to fight against alien warships and these space monsters we keep bumping into. What if we encounter an angry descendant of that giant phase whale skeleton one day? The Hexacris loses most of its advantages against such a large and massive opponent. What I require in this scenario is not a light and fast-firing energy rifle, but a large and heavy gun that doesn't need to be too precise but can disgorge powerful, penetrating shots."

"That... should be possible, but let me think this through." Gloriana said as she fell into thought.

The Star Dancer Mark II was not optimized for this mode of combat. While the advantage of humanoid mechs was that they could handle any sort of weapon that fit in their hands, that didn't always mean that it was wise to equip them with substantially different weapons.

If the Amaranto's Instrument of Vengeance happened to fall into the hands of her brother's expert mech, then the powerful precision rifle would not be able to output as much damage due to constraints in energy transmission.

In addition to that, the Star Dancer Mark II's configuration was not designed with long-ranged precision in mind. Many stabilizers, compensators and adjustment systems that turned the Amaranto into an excellent sniper platform were absent in her brother's machine.

The Star Dancer Mark II instead dedicated much of its capacity to enhancing its mobility and agility!

If the Hexer expert mech wasn't moving around like a nimble hummingbird, then Brutus wasn't utilizing its strengths to the fullest!

The drop in efficiency resulting from a mismatch between weapon configuration and mech configuration was so significant that Gloriana couldn't stand the thought of facilitating this approach.

However, she knew that her brother was right. Having a bigger if more unwieldy mech rifle at his disposal could make a substantial difference in a battle against one of the many native alien forces in the Red Ocean.

She let out a sigh. "I will talk to Ves about this. The design project shouldn't take much time to complete. The only variables we need to think about is deciding what materials we should use to develop a superior weapon."

Now that she accepted Brutus' request, she wanted to make sure that her husband delivered a great result rather than going through the motions.

Once Brutus finished outlining all of his preferences with regards to a possible second luminar crystal rifle for his expert mech, he addressed a different topic.

"Mother is in the process of arranging a marriage for me." He revealed in a neutral tone.

"She is?!" Gloriana became excited all of a sudden. "That's great news! Who will be your potential partner?"

"Mother is in talks with the Evern Matriarchal Dynasty about matching me with Lady Callisto Evern."

"Callisto Evern? I haven't heard about her. Is she to your liking?" Gloriana asked.

"Lady Callisto is... a gorgeous woman." Brutus admitted. "The Everns are being highly sincere this time due to our Wodin Dynasty's close relationship with your husband. Lady Callisto Evern has maintained a low profile in Hexer society, but she is a main branch descendant who has already become one of the executives of a major company that the matriarchal dynasty has founded in the Red Ocean.. If the marriage is set, Lady Callisto will move into our fleet and take charge of some of the logistical affairs of the Glory Seekers."

It sounded like a good match to Gloriana. Lady Callisto was a Hexer of superior birth and standing. Backed by one of the six most powerful dynasties of the Hexer people, her presence in the expeditionary fleet meant that the Glory Seekers stood to gain greater access to resources, womanpower and starships!

However, even as Gloriana admired her mother for forging a closer alliance between the Wodins and the Everns, she neglected to pay attention to her brother's sinking expression.

Little Aurelia noticed the changes in Brutus' expression and tilted her head.

"Uncle sad?"

"No. Not quite. Maybe. I don't know." He softly said as he rubbed her precious hair.

"Hm?" Gloriana frowned as she snapped out of her thoughts. "Brother... you are not happy with our mother's arrangements?"

He sighed. "You haven't lived with us, so you probably haven't noticed all of the changes that have taken place within our ships. Just as with my fellow soldiers in the fleet, my time in the fleet has changed me. I am proud to call myself a Glory Seeker, but... our state is dying, sister."

"That is just a temporary setback!" She insisted! "The Hexadric Hegemony may be about to fall, but a newer Hexer state will assuredly rise again in the Red Ocean!"

Brutus shook his head. "It won't work, Gloriana. The Hexer way of life has failed. The more we have traveled outside of the borders of the Hexadric Hegemony, the more we recognize how much the lessons we have learned are wrong. Each time we pray to the Superior Mother, we do not feel she is admonishing us for thinking this way. She has taught us that women as well as boys deserve equal compassion. Do you think that Lady Callisto Evern will be as open-minded? Even if she is willing to play along... I do not think I will be happy with tying my life to a Hexer who constantly wants to be in charge. I... want to spend my life with a different woman."

"..."

Gloriana froze. It was as if she was completely incapable of processing her brother's defiance against their mother!

Chapter 3812 Grown Up Boy

Gloriana looked conflicted at the expert pilot who was sitting at her side.

The brother who happily held and cuddled with his niece had just conveyed an intention that did not sit well with her. She almost couldn't believe he went as far as voicing his displeasure at his mother's latest arrangement!

Did he realize how much damage he could do to the Wodins and their mother if he single-handedly spoiled a potential opportunity to bring the Wodin Dynasty and the Evern Matriarchal Dynasty closer together?

There was more than just his happiness at stake!

The Brutus she used to know was a perfectly obedient son. He had always followed the instructions and arrangements of their mother without showing any rebellious tendencies.

He did not just follow Constance Wodin's orders because they came from their mother. He did everything he could to act according to the plan that was given to him because it was an excellent development path for a boy in a Hexer society.

His diligence paid off in spades. Not only did he succeed in becoming a powerful mech pilot in a society that was reluctant to hand over deadly mechs to boys, he had broken past his limits as a mortal and become an exemplary warrior that was entrusted with greater power!

As far as Gloriana knew, her brother's life always turned for the better when he worked earnestly to meet their mother's expectations. Why did he choose to turn away from her latest promising arrangement? Was it such a bad idea to start a family with an excellent woman from the Evern Matriarchal Dynasty?

"You don't understand." Venerable Brutus repeated. "I love our mother and I am still grateful for everything she has done. If I was still back home, I would not think twice about accepting her plans for me. However, our home is about to get overrun by the Fridaymen. Why should I continue to abide by the rules and customs of a state that constantly emphasizes its superiority but has proven to be inferior on the battlefield?"

Gloriana couldn't take it any longer!

"What is wrong with you, Brutus! Our mother isn't trying to ruin your life! She is doing what is best for you, as she has always done since she has started raising you. Don't you know how many Hexer boys would want to be in your place? I might not know much about Lady Callisto Evern, but if she is like the other main branch descendents of the matriarchal dynasty, she is bound to be an excellent woman in all aspects."

Brutus sighed again. "According to the standards of other Hexers, you're undoubtedly right. That doesn't mean my own standards are the same. They've changed, sister. Traveling through the galaxies and coming in touch with different cultures has opened my eyes. In fact, the greatest examples of how much happier men and women can be are the Larkinsons! When I compare my life to that of the other men in the Larkinson Clan, I do not see any reason why I can be as free and happy as them. If I want to start a family of my own, I want it to mirror the families of the Larkinsons rather than the Hexers."

Though Gloriana still had difficulty accepting these words, her daughter was not as doubtful.

"Uncle happy?" Aurelia innocently asked.

Brutus smiled back. "Your uncle is already happy now, but he won't be if your grandmother forces me to marry a Hexer."

"Huh?"

His answer was beyond the little girl's range of understanding. She was still a baby, after all! Her designer genetics only mildly boosted her cognitive development at this early stage. Her rapid growth process would not start until she was ready to attend school!

That didn't mean the little girl got stuck like her mother. Her thoughts were much simpler and pure.

"Family!" She cried as she stretched her tiny arms towards Brutus.

He lifted her closer so that he could embrace her small and precious form once again. He could feel the warmth flowing from his loving niece in spite of the insulating properties of their protective suits.

"Family..." Brutus said as he closed his eyes. "Family is what I am trying to strive for, sister. I am happy with how our mother has taken care of me, but I have already grown up and do not need her care anymore. I think I deserve to live my own life now. I know that if I continue to let others decide what I should do, I won't be happy anymore."

"You..."

"Do you trust me?" He asked. "Do you trust my judgment on this, or do you think I'm misguided?"

His question caused Gloriana to get embroiled in an inner struggle. Her respect for her mother was warring against her adoration towards her brother!

The problem was that she loved both of them in equal measure! She did not wish to be put in a position where she had to choose one over the other, but her brother wasn't content with her indecision!

"Why must you be so opposed to our mother, Brutus? You can still talk to her and inform her of your wishes."

"Do you think I haven't tried? She heard me out, but then she went right back into negotiating an alliance with the Evern Matriarchal Dynasty!"

"You can't blame her for that! The arranged marriage she is setting up can change the lives of all of our relatives! Our Wodin Dynasty is about to complete its complete

migration to the Red Ocean. I don't know if you haven't noticed, but it is dangerous out here. The more allies and backing our dynasty can secure, the greater the chance that every Wodin will prosper!"

"They can work for their own prosperity!" Brutus retorted. "Look, I am still willing to help our parents and our relatives, but I refuse to be their slave. Our dynasty will be completely fine without me. There are more than enough excellent Wodin 'boys' who can become the perfect docile partner to a personality as august as Lady Callista Evern. It doesn't have to be me. Let me pursue my own happiness."

Gloriana fell silent as she registered the earnest desire in his plea. As much as she wanted to stand up for her mother, she could not bring herself to put down the bother she grew up with. She loved him too much to crush his desires.

"I thought you dedicated your life to fighting for the Wodins."

"You're not entirely correct. I dedicated my life to protecting you." He replied with a firm expression. "Now, I have expanded my goals. I want to start my own family so that I can protect it as well. Everyone around me is growing older, and I am no exception. Cuddling with little Aurelia here has grown my desire to have my own kids."

"Hihihhi!" Gloriana's daughter giggled as he affectionately rubbed her head.

Brutus grew firmer in his desire to pursue a different life.

"I don't think you want to raise your daughters into discriminatory women and your sons into subservient boys. You may hide behind the excuse that Ves is forcing you to compromise, but I think that deep down you have reached the same conclusion as I. The old Hexer way of life is a disaster."

"..."

"The fact that you aren't able to respond immediately tells me that you do not object as strongly as you think you should." He pointedly remarked.

Brutus gave her time to sort out her conflicting thoughts. In the meantime, he continued playing and teasing his cute little niece.

In the end, Gloriana relaxed her posture.

"I am not our mother, so I can't speak on her behalf. Though I do not approve of your choice, I know better than to change the mind of an expert pilot when he has made up his mind. You will have to face our mother by yourself if she comes in person and asks you to account for yourself. Other than that... I will stand by your side and support you regardless of your decisions."

A few seconds passed before Brutus nodded. "Thank you, sister. I really wanted to hear that from you. I know it must be difficult for you to respect my wishes over our mother's intentions, but we will all be happier for it in the end."

She sighed and looked around her brother's stateroom. "What now?"

"I need to get married in quick order." He answered.

"You what?!"

"You know how our mother can be. She won't listen to me and will continue to engage with the Evern Matriarchal Dynasty until the arranged marriage is set in stone. I don't want to cause a diplomatic incident due to her obstinacy, so the best way to stop her plans from coming into fruition is to preempt her with news of a marriage on my own terms."

It was quite a clever plan, actually. There was no way the Everns would agree to continue treating Brutus as a potential partner for someone as important as Lady Callisto Evern if he was already 'taken'.

Hexers were prideful about that, and it only grew worse at the upper echelons.

Gloriana furrowed her brows. "Short notice as in...?"

"Weeks. I need to be married within a month."

"That's too short! You can't possibly find a suitable woman and go on enough dates to know whether you will be happy with her if you commit to her for the rest of your life!"

If Brutus was a normal person, then Gloriana might not be so bothered about it. The newly-wedded couple could just file for a divorce if their relationship was no longer sustainable.

He was an expert pilot, though, and people like him tended to take their vows of marriage more seriously.

"I know, Gloriana, but what else can I do to stop our mother? She cannot be reasoned with. Only actions will force her into surrender. This is why I am asking for your help. As much as I like and respect my fellow female soldiers among the Glory Seekers, they are still too Hexer for my liking. I would like your help with introducing me to a lovely Larkinson woman who is open to a fast-track relationship."

"...You're asking a lot from me, you know that?"

"That is why I don't think I can manage this on my own. You've been a part of the Larkinson Clan for years. You must know plenty of women over there. Some of them will not say no to me, right?"

Gloriana pursed her lips. She could think of several women who would love to hook up with a young and dashing mid-tier expert pilot who was directly related to the Larkinson Patriarch's wife.

She was not sure whether their love for him would be pure, though.

"I need to think carefully about this." She replied. "Don't worry. I will help you as much as I can. I just need time to form a list and investigate their relationship potential. Since your happiness is at stake, I am determined to do this right. The fit between you and your future wife must be perfect!"

"That's great. I hope you will be able to get everything done within a few weeks."

The Journeyman Mech Designer treated this challenge as another project and switched to her work mode. She considered all of the possible steps that she could take to make this search faster and more reliable.

She suddenly came up with an expedient course of action!

"I know how I can find a date for you within a day!"

"How?"

Gloriana grinned. "By using the same method that has led me to my husband. We can make use of an automated matching process to quickly seek out the most compatible women among thousands of Larkinsons!"

"Are you sure it will work?"

"Of course it will! Don't worry, brother. I will whittle down the list of eligible candidates by using my own judgment. Your new wife cannot be too average! She has to be as perfect as possible!"

Chapter 3813 Making the List

The Larkinsons maintained an extensive and detailed personnel database. This was pretty much standard practice among many organizations.

None of them wanted to lose track of their own people. That would be stupid and potentially dangerous as the ones they neglected might turn into spies or saboteurs without their notice!

Keeping track of people's movements, actions and other parameters was much easier when they spent most if not all of their time aboard starships that were fully under the control of the respective organization.

The Larkinson Clan recorded more information about its people than normal. Its patriarch was a bit paranoid and valued his ships. The outbreak of the Crown Uprising had spooked him quite a lot, causing him to push for greater monitoring and tracking.

An entire department existed within the clan that primarily busied itself with checking up on and managing over 200,000 clansmen. Though each of them were relatively free to make their own life choices, the Internal Affairs Ministry regularly nudged or advised those that were feeling lost or out of place in the Larkinson fleet.

If Gloriana wanted to get started on forming a list of suitors for her brother, she could just call the Internal Affairs Ministry and ask to run the matchmaking software on its entire database.

She had a better alternative in mind, though.

Although Internal Affairs did collect a lot of details about the lives of every clansman, she happened to know about another wing of the Larkinson Clan that collected even more data!

"I need to make a call." She told Brutus and passed over her daughter to his care. "Look after my baby for me while I get that list I promised."

She raised herself to her feet and stepped away so she could speak to one of the more annoying women in the Larkinson Clan.

Though she did not like to talk to the woman in question, Gloriana had to admit there was no one else who knew the Larkinsons better.

After she fought over her hesitation, she made the command and initiated the call.

A small bust projection of Calabast soon appeared above her suited wrist.

Calabast looked as attractive and dangerous as ever. Her luscious black hair and her fully-equipped infiltrator suit gave her an impression of a woman who knew what she was doing.

The spymaster of the Larkinson Clan would have been a model Hexer if she didn't renounce her original citizenship!

"Gloriana." Calabast spoke without much pretense for politeness. "It is rare for you to approach me on your own initiative. What is it now? Do you want logs of the women that

Ves has spent time with the last month? Do you want to download footage of him in the bathroom?"

"None of that today. I am calling because I need the help of your Black Cats in finding a future wife for my brother Brutus. This needs to be done quickly before we run out of time."

"Oh? This sounds interesting. Please explain his situation to me. I take it that this is not a regular request."

Gloriana straightforwardly summarized her brother's predicament and the need to get married quickly.

Calabast didn't laugh, fortunately. She did look amused.

"The boy has finally decided to grow into a man. Bravo. I expected him and the Glory Seekers to diverge from the culture that we all grew up in, but his translation has reached this stage a lot faster than I expected. What a pleasant surprise. Your news has already made my day."

As a former Hexer, Calabast had first-hand experience in transitioning from a typical Hexer to a more reasonable human being that was more aligned to galactic norms and standards.

She applauded any other Hexer that managed to climb out of the pit of ignorance and hatred that was formed by the poisonous culture they grew up with. It was not easy for the Hexers to renounce all of the fundamental teachings they embraced as truth.

"Will you meet my request or not?" Gloriana asked in an irritated tone.

"I will. Don't be so impatient. I will cooperate to the best of my abilities. In my opinion, Venerable Brutus deserves a reward for making a brave decision. His success will serve as an example and an inspiration to the rest of the Glory Seekers!"

As a former Hexer and a spymaster, how could Calabast possibly be ignorant of the developments taking place within the Glory Seekers?

Although the mech force was nominally a part of the Wodin Dynasty and the Hexadric Hegemony, both of these organizations had become increasingly more distant entities to all of the boys and women serving aboard the Indigo Tremor and sister ships.

Due to the strength and prominence of the Larkinson Clan, the Glory Seekers constantly witnessed and came into contact with people who were having a much better time in the expeditionary fleet. This persistent exposure exerted a constant influence on those that had previously lived highly insular lives.

Though few of them had taken the crucial step like Venerable Brutus, it was only a matter of time before the estrangement grew too great.

If the Hexers back home were more aware of how people changed when exposed to different environments and cultures, they would have implemented more measures to prevent the Glory Seekers from straying from their culture.

It was too bad that the people in charge were so conceited about their superiority and so inexperienced with cultural assimilation that they completely missed what was happening!

This content is taken from [.com]

Calabast grinned wider. She loved a good show and looked forward to seeing how the situation would develop further.

For now, she had to help Gloriana's older brother complete his own transition.

"I know just what to do. Let me set this up. Give me a few minutes."

After Calabast accessed the database, activated a matchmaking program and configured its settings, she turned her attention back to Gloriana.

"Before I begin with the initial matching process, what specifications do you wish to impose?"

"Please limit the search range to female Larkinsons who are between 20 and 40 years old. They must be healthy, able and have an attractiveness index that is above 0.80. They should not be married or committed to a serious relationship. The candidates must either occupy at least mid-level positions in the clan or have parents that occupy upper-level positions. They must be at least moderately attracted to a male person with my brother's parameters. Please exclude any candidates who are members of the Eye of Ylvaine, the Swordmaidens and the Penitent Sisters."

Most of Gloriana's specifications sounded reasonable if a bit picky, but her last specifications went a bit too far in Calabast's opinion.

"Those groups happen to hold plenty of women who could easily get along with Brutus." Calabast responded. "Why do you want to filter out their names?"

"Do I even need to explain it? Fine. The Ylvainans believe in the wrong god. The Swordmaidens are too crude and uncivilized. I don't think I need to explain why the Penitent Sisters are wholly unqualified to pair up with my brother. Does that offer enough clarity?"

"At least you put thought into the matter. Let me initiate the search."

As soon as Calabast started the process, the Blinding Banshee's processors and Als became fully active. Every spare processing power was being used to perform an immense amount of calculations, all for the purpose of analyzing as much data on eligible women as possible so that the matchmaking program could estimate the compatibility between them and Brutus!

The software that Calabast employed was not a basic one that only analyzed brief records and documents. They also looked through thousands of hours of footage in order to look for specific patterns of behavior that could enrich the data used to formulate the list.

Neither Calabast nor Gloriana spoke as they patiently waited for the matchmaking program to crunch all of the numbers.

Soon, a chime sounded at Calabast's end of the call. The woman looked at her terminal and curled her lips in amusement.

"Well, well, well. These matchmaking programs indeed know what they are doing."

"Give me the list." Gloriana demanded.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you will be wasting far too much of your time in investigating each of the names in person. I am also afraid that you will harass them with invasive questioning." Calabast answered. "There are over a hundred names on the list. Let me help you by leveraging my expertise in presenting you the women that I think you will find particularly interesting."

"Hurry up, then. I don't have all day."

"Well, you should know the first name quite well. Sara Voiken is a successful Journeyman Mech Designer with bright career prospects. She is single, polite and respectful. Her greatest apparent personality defect is that she is a workaholic as well as somewhat boring. If you want a safe choice, I think you cannot go wrong with Miss Sara."

Though Gloriana agreed with Calabast's points, she happened to know Sara more personally.

"This match will never get off the ground." She judged. "Sara Voiken may be available, but she maintains her own pride as a Journeyman. She will insist on starting a proper relationship before she is ready to marry. This will take years that we do not have."

"The matchmaking program shouldn't be wrong. If it has been judged that Sara Voiken is highly compatible with Venerable Brutus, then I think you should give it a shot. She may be more open-minded towards your conditions than you think." Calabast insisted.

"Let's leave her name in reserve. Please provide me with another suggestion.

The spymaster glanced at the list for a few seconds before presenting a second name.

"If you are interested in matching your brother with a future stalwart of the Larkinson Clan, then Vivian Tsai is a compelling choice. The chief shipwright may be young for her current position, but she already occupies a key position in our upper hierarchy. She possesses a more assertive personality than Sara Voiken due to fulfilling her leadership duties."

Gloriana had only spoken to Vivian a handful of times since their work hardly intersected with each other. She had heard mild praise about Vivian from other corners of the clan, and never heard anything egregiously bad about the chief shipwright's competence or personality.

"Miss Vivian Tsai is an interesting prospect, but I know too little about her to make an immediate decision. I will put her on the shortlist as well. What else do you have, Calabast?"

"Isobel Kotin may not be an expert pilot like Brutus, but it is only a matter of time before she undergoes apotheosis. As a future expert pilot that possesses a highly similar specialty and piloting style to your brother, Miss Isobel can serve as a great training partner and battle companion. She possesses a milder and more introverted personality compared to the other candidates on the list, so it is unlikely that she will order Brutus around. What is also important to note is that Isobel's personality and attitude are still malleable since she is just an expert candidate at the moment."

Though Calabast's logic was sound, Gloriana still looked down on Isobel Kotin. The woman wasn't prominent in the Larkinson Clan at all and wouldn't have attracted any notice if not for being the latest pilot of the Quint.

"I will issue my judgment on her later. What else do you have?"

Calabast grinned. "If you want to aim for the top, then how about introducing your brother to Commander Casella Ingvar? Our clan's latest expert pilot is the most promising talent that has risen up from the ranks. With her personal strength as well as her rapidly-rising command capabilities, she is one of the favorites to take over General Verle's position as the highest military leader of our clan. Although she has zero relationship experience as far as I am aware of, the matchmaking program actually thinks that there is a good chance that a relationship between Casella and Brutus will work. The downside is that the two will have to click at first sight in order for their marriage to have any hope of getting realized."

Of all of the candidates on the list, the Sentinel Commander was by far the most ambitious choice!

Chapter 3814 Expert Guard Dog

"No."

"Please reconsider. I truly have a great proposition for Commander Casella, but how can I present it to her when you are blocking my way to her cabin?"

"You don't need to meet with my sister. I can smell your intention a light-year away. Your thoughts are so impure that you will unnecessarily distract her from her upcoming mission. Do you know what is at stake right now? Our troops will soon pass through a portal and enter a mysterious pocket space where we must leverage as much power as possible to cut apart a gigantic skeleton. That is what is important right now. We are all operating under heightened alert right now. This is no time for fun and games!"

Though Venerable Brutus tried to remain graceful as his mother had taught him, it became harder for him to maintain his composure.

After paying a visit to the temporary surface base set up by the Larkinson Clan, he asked around and found where the expert pilots were residing when they weren't on duty.

Ordinarily, it shouldn't have been a problem for him to meet with Commander Casella. He was one of the most important soldiers of the Glory Seekers and possessed the necessary status to meet with the Sentinel Commander.

Unfortunately, his attempt to present his case to the Sentinel Commander was interrupted by the forceful blockade of the latest expert pilot of the Larkinson Clan!

Even though Venerable Brutus was certain that neither he nor Gloriana spread any word about his plan to escape his mother's arranged marriage plans, Venerable Imon Ingvar somehow derived his own conclusions about the Glory Seeker's approach and took offense!

The two expert pilots stared down at each other with both their eyes and their extraordinary willpower.

In his view, Venerable Brutus merely wanted to present a 'business' proposal to the woman in his mind. Though he didn't approach her purely out of love, he did not see anything wrong with a transparent and open discussion about how they could both benefit from forming a marital union.

Commander Casella should be rational enough to weigh his proposal on its merits. An expert pilot that was able to become smart and intelligent enough to retain her

command position should not be overly swayed by her emotional impulses. This was also why Brutus thought it was a great idea to approach the Sentinel Commander first.

It was a pity that he miscalculated.

Her brother not only possessed the opposite inclinations, but also stood before the entrance of her cabin like a loyal guard dog.

Now, this hound had become agitated and would not stop barking against Brutus!

Venerable Imon's fiery and aggressive willpower collided against Venerable Brutus' firm and protective willpower.

In truth, there was no contest.

Brutus had just become a genuine mid-tier expert pilot and had already gone through a lot of tempering over the years.

Imon was like a recent graduate of a mech academy who fearlessly issued a challenge towards a veteran pilot!

If Venerable Brutus truly wanted to, he could leverage his considerable strength to defeat and humble this recently-advanced expert pilot.

This was not a wise course of action, though. Venerable Imon Ingvar was an ally and a powerful comrade who Brutus might be relying upon in future battles. Generating bad blood with such a pivotal figure was not wise.

Aside from that, Brutus hadn't forgotten that he had come here to appeal to Commander Casella. How could he possibly make a good impression on her when he just humiliated her close sibling?

The lack of good options frustrated Brutus. He tried to reason with the agitated hound a second time.

"My plan should not disturb your sister's preparations. I will only require a brief moment of her time. After I have made my case, she can decide by herself whether she is willing to cooperate with me. As long as she indicates her lack of interest, I will depart immediately and bother her no further."

Imon snarled and showed his teeth at the older and stronger expert pilot.

"You can get lost right away. I already know what my sister wants and you are not on her mind at all. Emasculated Hexer boys like you have no place in our Larkinson Clan! Go back home to your fellow Glory Seekers and hook up with the shrews over there instead!"

Brutus finally couldn't stand it anymore. Imon went too far by insulting the brave and honorable female soldiers that had risked their lives in past battles!

"Do not insult my fellow female soldiers! They are not shrews who deserve mockery!"

"I will call you and your Hexers whatever I like! None of us in the Larkinson Clan have ever liked you Glory Seekers to be honest. We all know the only reason why you are even a part of the expeditionary fleet is because we couldn't have turned you away when we were weaker. That's no longer the case now. You Hexers are becoming less and less relevant, so do us all a favor and get out of our way, boy!"

Brutus took a few steps forward. "You are entitled to your opinions, but it is clear to see that your sister has inherited the bulk of your family's intelligence. Your attempt to obstruct my path is not only unwise, but also counterproductive. Drop your animosity and let me proceed forward."

"No." Imon stubbornly repeated while raising his fist. "Don't test me, Brutus. I will punch you if you take one more step forward!"

"You are too weak to beat me in a fight. If you were smart enough to take stock, you would know that already."

"MY SISTER IS MY LIFE!"

Just as Imon was about to dive onto the other expert pilot, the door to the cabin slid open without warning!

"Imon, stand down!" Commander Casella barked out as her suited form emerged into the open.

Though Venerable Imon had become so agitated that he was only a single thread away from brawling against Venerable Brutus, the voice of his sister instantly froze his momentum.

He could not defy his latest order, so he forcefully pushed back his indignation and took a few steps back. His eyes still smoldered with resentment as he took up a guard position in front of his sibling.

Casella placed her hand on his shoulder and pushed him to the side.

"You have disappointed me, Imon. I am never unaware of what takes place around me, so I know exactly how you have conducted yourself earlier. I trust you to fight alongside me in battle, but this is no combat situation. I am more than able to take care of myself outside of the cockpit, thank you. Your misguided attempt to serve as my honor guard is completely superfluous and detrimental to your own rest."

"I chose to stand by your side by my own choice." Imon turned around and argued. "My entire life revolves around you now. I can't relax unless I am personally assured of your safety!"

"You are going overboard, Imon! This is not normal! You have your own life!"

"But sister—"

"Take a break." Casella ordered in a firm and uncompromising tone. "Go back to your own cabin and enjoy a proper rest. You cannot fight at your peak if you keep ruining your own health by insisting on this foolish pattern of behavior of yours. I do not need your protection in the middle of other Larkinsons. Before you say anything, Brutus is not a threat. I can handle him myself."

It was clear that Imon was not welcome here anymore. He glared one last time at Brutus before he reluctantly walked away.

"Come inside."

When Brutus and Casella entered the cabin and took their seats next to the latter's work desk, the two gauged each other for a moment.

Unlike Imon, his older sister was much calmer and more measured as a person. She looked at Brutus with clear awareness.

"I apologize for Venerable Imon's attitude towards you." She began. "His aggression towards you is misplaced, but his heart is in the right place. What can I do for you, Brutus?"

This was it. Venerable Brutus could finally make his case. He took a deep breath and let the earlier incident fade from his mind as much as possible.

"I have a proposal. Please allow me to explain it in full before you react."

He proceeded to explain his own circumstances and present his proposed solution to his predicament. He revealed his intention to form a relationship with Casella and laid out several reasons why it might be good for them to form an intimate partnership.

"Neither of us are normal people anymore." He told her. "We are demigods and more than human. It is hard for us to have relationships with ordinary people who do not have the strength and experiences to understand all of our facets. Though I am aware that I am making a presumptuous request by pushing for an expedited marriage, I am truly attracted to you. Together, we can form a union that will remain in parity for many years to come. Neither of us have to worry about the other falling behind. Will you give me a chance to prove that I am worthy of your affection?"

"..."

Commander Casella abided by his terms and did not make any comment before he finished his case.

Now that he had completed his pitch, Brutus waited tersely for the potential marriage candidate in his mind to offer her response.

Casella eventually spoke her mind.

"Relationships are a distant priority to me. Ever since I have joined the Larkinson Clan, I have thrown myself into my new duties and responsibilities. My life entered the right track and I continually managed to step up and meet everyone's expectations in me. I have no intention to change this. Becoming an expert pilot is not the end of the road to me. It is the beginning of a new journey. The coming years are a sensitive period to both the Larkinson Clan and my own development. I will not allow outside factors to distract myself from my work and my responsibilities to the clan. As one protector to another, I believe you understand where I am coming from. A relationship between us will never work because I am already married to my work."

"Oh..."

Casella sighed. "Even if the Larkinson Clan is no longer in a critical period, I still would not be inclined to accept your proposal. What you seek in a relationship is different from what I seek. Others may feel blessed for starting a relationship with an expert pilot, but I do not fall into this category. It is the opposite. I already have one stubborn fool in the form of my brother. I do not have the patience to tolerate another trying to become a part of my daily life."

"I see." Brutus flatly replied as he wearily stood up. "I understand your reasoning. I will not waste any more of your time. I will leave you to your preparations for the coming operation."

The Sentinel Commander stood up as well and exchanged a handshake with the Glory Seeker expert pilot.

"I may not be open to a relationship with you, but I am still glad to fight at your side. I hope my answer does not discourage you from fighting as we did before."

Brutus gave her a reassuring smile. "Have no fear of that. I will fight as vigorously as ever before. I am more concerned about your brother, though. I hope that his current feelings will not hinder him in future battles."

"I will sort him out after this. I can promise you that. Imon's breakthrough is too recent and he is still not accustomed to the changes he has undergone. He should still listen to me, though. He will get better as long as he is open to my instruction."

"I hope so, Commander. I hope so." Brutus replied.

Chapter 3815 Brutus the Blockhead

Venerable Brutus Wodin did not accomplish his objective when he managed to gain an audience with Commander Casella Ingvar.

He did not let this defeat affect his composure. So what if a woman rejected his proposition? There were thousands of eligible women in the Larkinson Clan. He had many chances to find a suitable life partner and succeed in his plot to foil his mother from binding him to another Hexer lady.

"Don't worry, Brutus. Casella is an expert pilot and a legion commander. It is normal for her to hold different standards." Gloriana soothed him when he called her after his failed meeting. "You are still an attractive man that women would be lucky to have in their lives. You are strong, nice, well-mannered, well-educated and well-bred. Not only that, you are related to me and by extension the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan! If women can overcome their prejudice against people raised in the Hegemony, they will surely recognize the value of becoming your marriage partner."

Venerable Brutus sighed. "I hope you are correct in your assessment. I shall continue to go down the list and hope that one of the candidates is more receptive to my offer."

The response from Commander Casella had humbled him and diminished his confidence a bit. While he was aware that convincing someone as powerful and busy as the Sentinel Commander had always been an uphill battle, he had hoped that his charm and his sincerity would have been enough to sway her mind.

"A pity."

He tried to remove everything about Casella from his mind and focus on developing his liking for the next woman on the list.

After all, it wasn't appropriate for him to be pining for Casella when he was trying to convince another woman!

He sought out and approached Isobel Kotin with renewed hope.

Under the shadow of the Quint, Venerable Brutus waited for the rising expert candidate of the Larkinson Clan to give her reply.

An unexpected source spoke up before Isobel could share her thoughts.

GIVE UP, BRUTUS. HER HEART IS IN A DIFFERENT PLACE. YOUR ATTEMPT TO OVERCOME YOUR OWN PERSONAL CRISIS BY DRAGGING IN A LARKINSON IS

SELFISH AND SHAMEFUL. I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO DISTURB THE PROGRESSION OF MY LATEST STUDENT.

Venerable Brutus turned and frowned at the dormant mech. "While I respect your strength and contributions, it is not your place to intervene in the personal lives of the humans you serve. Please allow Miss Isobel here to make her own decisions."

A source of strength buried deep inside the Quint began to rouse all of a sudden. Both Brutus and Isobel stepped back in shock as the Quint's eyes flashed with power even as the machine spontaneously booted up on its own!

"What?!" Isobel lost her composure. "The cockpit is empty. There shouldn't be anyone in the piloting seat at the moment!"

The Quint did not seem to play by the rules and completed its emergency start-up sequence in a matter of seconds!

More power and fury radiated from the Quint as the living mech brought its strong and formidable fighting intent to bear against the presumptuous Glory Seeker!

The terrain around the site shook and rumbled as the Quint purposely lifted its leg and stomped it down with force!

Then, the Quint quickly shut down its systems and went offline again. If not for the fact that it had remained in a stepping posture, the two expert pilots would have thought that the living mech's autonomous actions were just an illusion!

Both of them fell silent for a time even as nearby mech technicians became alarmed.

"...I think you should go." Isobel eventually said.

"Maybe that is for the best." Venerable Brutus said and nodded. "Good day, miss."

He was not stupid. Even without the Quint's overblown response, Isobel's attitude and response towards him already told him what he needed to know about his chances.

In the next few hours, he sought out several more female Larkinsons.

Since they were not stationed on the surface of Iron Crusher, Venerable Brutus entered his expert mech and flew back to the main fleet where he entered a few vessels and approached his targets.

"I have no interest in helping you avoid an arranged marriage by rushing into one myself." Vivian Tsai responded with a bewildered expression. "I am sure you are nice and all for a male Hexer, but how can I possibly feel comfortable with marrying you after less than a month of dating? This is crazy! My father will kill me if he hears about this!"

Maybe others will be glad to marry an expert pilot on the spot, but I am not like those women. Please leave. I have ship design projects to work on and they will not get any more complete the longer stay."

Venerable Brutus left as instructed. It was fortunate that he had entered the chief shipwright's department with little expectations to begin with. He already had a hunch that a woman that worked with starships all day would not be enamored with someone involved mechs.

"Let's see if I have better luck with a mech designer."

When he sought out Sara Voiken, the woman did not show any enthusiasm towards him. Her reasons for rejecting him were the same as that of his previous target.

"I am sorry, Venerable Brutus, but this is no way to start a relationship." She said as she crossed her arms. "Besides, I am a Larkinson and you are a Glory Seeker. I do not think either of us will be able to spend enough time together if we are assigned to different ships."

After Brutus walked away with the latest rejection on his mind, he wondered why he got rejected multiple times in a row.

"Is the matchmaking software faulty? Why have none of these women shown any willingness to marry me? Am I that bad of a marriage prospect?"

Venerable Brutus was normally confident in his own qualities, but the way that Commander Casella and all of those other women shot him down caused him to fall into a spiral of doubt.

Was he ugly?

NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON

Was being a Hexer that bad?

Were expert pilots too troublesome to marry?

"Maybe it's not my fault. Maybe it's the Larkinsons who are wrong."

Was Brutus barking up the wrong tree? Perhaps he should approach the Crossers instead.

As the Glory Seeker expert pilot contemplated his next moves, a pair of Larkinsons chuckled at what they saw through the footage projected in front of their eyes.

Both Ves and Calabast smirked as they enjoyed the sight of Brutus failing to seduce a single woman on his list.

"This dolt is so dumb." Ves snorted. "He doesn't know how to approach a woman at all. How can he possibly expect them to take a liking to a shotgun marriage?"

Calabast shook her head. "It's not his fault. It's the fault of how the Hexers raise their 'boys'. Brutus grew up in an environment where he had little to no control over all of his major decisions. He was raised to follow orders. Taking initiative is an alien concept to him and he is only beginning to shed his passivity at this time. Back in the Hegemony, the women arranged everything for their boys. Brutus never had to worry about trying to seduce a woman because his mother is expected to match him to a lady."

This confirmed with the Hexer premise that boys were too immature to make their own decisions. There was no way that Brutus could approach a normal woman and receive a positive response when his romantic sensibilities were nonexistent!

Calabast turned to Ves. "As funny as it is to see Brutus fumble, do you want to end this farce and help him succeed?"

"Oh? You actually think you can make Brutus succeed?"

"I do. I haven't remained idle, you know. Even as I formed the list that Gloriana has demanded, I performed my own analysis of the situation. Seeing how Brutus presented his case to his candidates has given me more data that has refined my own model of his 'seduction game'. Most of the women on the list will surely turn him away if he maintains the same approach."

That happened to be his judgment as well. Ves knew quite well from personal experience that those matchmaking algorithms were hardly perfect. The data that could be fed to them were always limited and not always reliable. The formulas used to calculate all of the variables never completely reflected reality either.

It was a lot better to rely on good old common sense, a quality that Hexers such as Gloriana and Brutus both happened to lack!

Not all Hexers possessed glaring blindspots, fortunately. Calabast had worked hard to regain her common sense and was able to analyze this situation from a more objective perspective.

She activated her comm and summoned a different list than the one she handed over to the Wodin siblings. She looked through the names and crossed out many of them until she finally came across a candidate that looked a lot more compelling than the rest.

Her lips curled in anticipation. "I think this one will be more receptive to Brutus' overtures."

Ves leaned in and saw the name that Calabast had marked out. "Her? I admit, this is certainly a bold choice. There is one problem, though. I am pretty sure that this name falls outside of the criteria set by my wife."

"Oh, relax. Her rules do not matter in the face of her brother's happiness. There are few women that can truly handle a man with an upbringing as unnatural as that of Brutus. The name that I have chosen will not be bothered by this. Instead, I think she can do a lot of good to him. He needs a partner who can take the initiative and lead him to a different life than he has experienced before."

Though Ves was not certain whether this potential match would work out for the two, he could see the logic in this choice. She was certainly a firecracker!

As Ves weighed the pros and cons, he eventually decided that tying Brutus down with this particular woman was actually a good idea.

"Do it." He told his spymaster and secret matchmaker. "Push her into Brutus' arms. Make sure you work discreetly."

"Don't worry, Ves. It doesn't take much to nudge her in the right direction."

An hour passed by as Brutus looked at the names that he had already crossed on his list. Though there were plenty of candidates that he could approach, he had a feeling that none of them would react any better.

As Brutus tried to muster up the courage to request a meeting with the next name on the list, a strong and firm hand unexpectedly squeezed his bottom!

"I beg your pardon?!"

An arm suddenly wrapped around his shoulder.

"Heya, hotshot. I heard you were looking for a date. Leave all of those sluts and prudes behind and follow me. I know a place in Twilight City where we can get loose. I can give you a much better time. What do you think?"

Brutus had faintly felt the woman's approach but thought nothing of it at first. He did not expect that he was her target!

"Commander Sendra. Uhm, I still have a mission to perform, so..."

"Your mission is over." The Swordmaiden Commander announced even as she dragged his body towards the hangar bay. "Rumors have spread throughout the fleet of your deeds, you know. Something about how you are desperate to receive a real woman's touch. Well look no further, because I am here to save the day!"

"Commander! This is truly inappropriate." Brutus said as he tried but failed to pry Commander's arm from his body. "My sister will not have good words for you if you persist in accompanying me. She does not approve!"

Sendra snorted when she heard his feeble protest.

"I thought you were trying to get under the skin of your mother. How is letting your sister dictate your love life any better? You should follow me instead. I can teach you how to be a real man..."

Chapter 3816 Clean

"Looks like you made a good pick, Calabast." Ves smirked as he observed the live footage.

Seeing how Legion Commander Sendra of the Swordmaidens overwhelmed the Glory Seeker expert pilot and took him on a spontaneous 'date' to the most exciting ship in the expeditionary fleet almost made his day.

"Why did you think that Commander Sendra is a good choice for Venerable Brutus?" Ves asked his spymaster. "I mean, the two are completely different people. Though both of them are mech pilots, Commander Sendra does not appear to be the sort of woman that Brutus has in mind when he is looking for a potential wife."

"I don't disagree with you, Ves, but I am certain that Sendra thinks differently. She may be a Swordmaiden, but don't underestimate her shrewdness. She harbors a lot of ambitions, you know. She is keen enough to recognize the political benefits of marrying someone as important as Venerable Brutus and also unscrupulous enough to do her best to convince her 'prey' that he should look no further."

Perhaps a more assertive man might be able to muster up the courage to reject Commander Sendra's advances, but Venerable Brutus was still too inexperienced in this regard.

From what Ves knew of his hapless brother-in-law, there was no way that he could shake off a female shark once she had sunk her teeth in his flesh!

Still, this might be exactly what Brutus needed in a partner. A more normal woman probably wouldn't be able to tolerate the consequences of his Hexer upbringing.

"Keep track of their relationship and make sure that Brutus doesn't end up miserable." He instructed. "As much as I think it would be funny if Brutus learns how to stand up for himself by a Swordmaiden of all people, I don't want to deal with Gloriana's constant complaints if anything goes wrong."

"I'm already on it, Ves. Do you think I am that careless? I never leave a job half-finished. My Black Cats are constantly in the vicinity. I am also paying personal attention to this matter. Nothing will go wrong. I can guarantee at least that much."

The Black Cats possessed a wide latitude to take action in the expeditionary fleet. While handing over a lot of permissions to a spy group could easily backfire in many circumstances, Ves wasn't particularly worried.

Calabast was one of the few people he trusted with his greatest secrets. Sure, she had inserted herself forcefully in his life, but as long as she depended on his success to fuel her own rise, there was no way that she would abuse her power to her own ends!

As for the Black Cats serving under her, their connection to the Larkinson Network should keep them straight for the most part. The Golden Cat was not an illusionary existence and her constant influence over the clan kept everyone united to a degree.

With this affair over with, Ves turned back to his main preoccupation. After several days of brainstorming, experimentation and preparation, the Larkinsons and allies tasked with developing an action plan were finally ready to present their progress.

Ves entered a conference room inside a building located in the temporary base on the surface of the moon.

A couple of expert pilots, officers, scientists and other staff were already present.

"Everyone here has worked hard, and I am grateful for that. You all know what is at stake. While we could have settled for our current gains and left this phase whale enclave to the MTA who are undoubtedly better equipped to take advantage of it, this is our discovery. It is not the turn of the mechers to profit from this amazing find. I hope to hear enough good news to start our upcoming operation with confidence. Director Ranya, let us begin with you. What can you tell us about the properties of the phase whale skeleton?"

Gloriana's cousin stood up and activated a projection that showed the known parts of the enormous skeleton.

"The exobiologists under my command have performed extensive studies and consulted tens of thousands of different books and articles on the phase whale race. While humanity's direct interactions with them are rather scarce, the Big Two as well as numerous pioneers have already fought and studied them enough times to get a good understanding of their direct properties. The Big Two has also plundered a lot of alien libraries which contain knowledge of what the native alien races know about the phase whale race. We finally have an understanding of what kind of an existence this deceased specimen may be. There are only a few phase whales that have ever grown this large and heavy."

Director Ranya activated a second projection that showed an image of a phase whale that matched the proportions of the partially-obscured skeleton that the Larkinsons had found!

"There is still much about the phase whale race that humanity does not know, so there are only scant sources that directly mention an existence such as the one depicted in this composed image."

The image of the intact phase whale looked odd and even disconcerting.

Everyone in the conference room knew what normal phase whales looked like. Though the powerful alien race did not think like humans at all, they possessed a remarkably elegant and beautiful aesthetic. They took great care of their bodies and made sure they were as smooth, uniform and graceful as possible.

No healthy phase whale looked ugly in people's eyes!

Even if phase whales suffered injuries and incurred scars, they were so adept at augmenting and modifying their own bodies that they could easily work away these temporary imperfections.

The phase whale in the image was completely different. The creature looked more cruel than normal as it snarled and revealed giant, pointed teeth.

The gigantic phase whale's hide was rough and irregular. It was marked by wounds, irregular growths and other horrible-looking scars.

"Is this creature diseased or something?" Ves puzzlingly guessed. "Is the phase whale suffering from a form of incurable cancer maybe?"

"No." Ranya shook her head. "A phase whale that looks like this did this all to itself. You see, when normal phase whales reach maturity and leave the gas giants that they grew up in, they give in to their curiosity and explore different star systems and phase whale enclaves. Over the course of their travels, they gain inspiration from what they witness and develop their own plans for self-improvement. Once they have made enough gains, they will settle onto a gas giant or other site and slowly begin to research methods to strengthen and augment their own bodies."

"We know that already. What makes this abnormal phase whale different, then?"

"I was getting to that, sir. This process is a slow and repeating cycle. Phase whales continually explore new curiosities, perform new research on self-augmentations before enacting their upgrades. A single cycle can take decades if not hundreds of years. There are even examples where phase whales have shut themselves in their biolabs for millenia just to get everything right."

That... sounded remarkably similar to how mech designers like Ves approached their work.

Of course, the time frame for human mech designers was a lot more compressed. Ves would turn into a skeleton long ago if he dared to spend millenia on developing a new innovation!

"One of the disadvantages of the phase whales is that they do not easily pass on their own research and accomplishments to others. The only exception is their direct offspring, but even then not everything gets passed on. This has led to a pattern of long-term stagnation as the phase whales have only marginally grown stronger over many eons."

The phase whales must have been extremely assured of their superiority. Such a pattern of behavior was only fine if stronger external threats did not show up. Their presence across the Red Ocean allowed them to keep an eye on every alien race. Ves wouldn't be surprised if the phase whales secretly inhibited the progress of the stronger alien races over the years so that the status quo would never be broken.

"Still, the advantage of this custom is that the phase whales have grown to become quite diverse from each other." Ranya continued. "Every phase whale is a fundamentally different subspecies. They had taken an active hand at their own evolution and attained power and abilities that are never completely identical to that of others. For a long time, this has been the state of the phase whale civilization. There are many different individual talents that each developed their own advantages."

The director of the Larkinson Biotech Institute stared deeply at the two projections.

"No intelligent race is monolithic, however. There are bad apples in every alien civilization. Though the vast majority of phase whales are avid researchers who are constantly engaged in deepening their understanding of reality, there are also 'delinquents' among them who lack the patience or mental fortitude to spend hundreds of years on developing minor biological enhancements."

"So what do they do, director?"

"Isn't it obvious? Rather than working hard for many years, they hunt down another phase whale and take their victim's best enhancements for themselves!"

That... sounded remarkably human. These phase whales might not be as alien as Ves had initially thought.

"The delinquent phase whales are able to plunder the hard work of others by one of the simplest and crudest methods possible. They defeat their targets in combat and eat the biological parts and organs that they value the most. Through an unexplained process,

the winner can forcefully assimilate the stolen biological augments and gain strength in a fraction of the time it takes to develop these improvements the proper way!"

A lot of people in the meeting reacted with disgust at this story. Even though they did not necessarily care about the phase whale race, cannibalism was one of the universal taboos that never failed to arouse the disgust of humans!

Ranya gestured towards the scary mutated phase whale image. "The cannibal phase whales do not end up like this straight away. In the beginning, the changes to their bodies are relatively modest. It takes multiple hunts and assimilation attempts for them to slowly lose control over their own bodies. The reason for that is that the assimilation process is never completely flawless. There are always faults and unintended side effects that disrupt their bodies. One biological error does not make a difference, but what about a thousand? Each of these faults can interact with each other in unpredictable ways, thereby forming mutations that significantly impair the bodies of the cannibal phase whales."

"I understand." Ves looked enlightened. "The cannibals only know how to steal. They have never put in the hundreds or thousands of years or research into fully understanding every biological augment. Another problem is that the ones they plundered from their fellow phase whales aren't adjusted to a different physique. The mismatch between biological parts will only grow more severe as the predation continues, thereby causing their bodies to grow progressively more painful and weak!"

Ranya nodded. "This is why these criminals are referred to as 'unclean whales' by the phase whale race. Once the unclean whales set upon this taboo path, they fall into a vicious cycle. They need to consume more phase whales in order to become stronger and stave off their biological time bombs. That leads to further conflict and mutation in their bodies that spurs the unclean whales to go on another hunt. This can go on and on until their heavily-degenerated bodies turn into such a biological horror that they explode by themselves."

Everyone looked at the projections of the simulated whole unclean whale and the actual skeleton found in the Royal Tomb.

"Is this... the skeleton of one of those self-destructing whales?" Ves curiously asked.

"Not quite." Ranya shook her head. "If our theories are correct, you are looking at a whale that has overcome all of those malignant mutations. Such an existence is a myth that is so obscure in phase whale society that we are still not certain whether our preliminary conclusion is correct. This... is a so-called clean whale. It is a cannibal whale that has devoured many fellow phase whales yet achieved perfect assimilation. It... is one of the most fearsome tyrants that the Red Ocean has ever birthed!"

Chapter 3817 Overcoming Resistance

Phase whales came in many shapes and sizes, but few grew to exaggerated sizes like the one that grew the gigantic skeleton.

Now that everyone learned about the so-called unclean whales and clean whales, they immediately harbored more vigilance towards the Royal Tomb.

What kind of phase whale was the one that had been buried in this space pocket?

Was the monstrous creature truly related to the extremely rare occurrence of cannibal whales that had mastered their own mutations?

Ves and the others stared at the simulated image of the unclean whale that had grown to an immense size. Real and accurate depictions of the delinquent whales didn't exist as every source that mentioned them did not dare to offer too many descriptions.

Perhaps the people that wrote those entries did not wish to entice other phase whales into committing the same taboos.

If the skeleton truly belonged to a mythical clean whale, then it was no wonder why the Mech Trade Association insisted on taking over this site! That skeleton could provide many key insights on the phase whale race as well as directions for higher biological development!

Even if not a single speck of living whale tissue was left in the Royal Tomb, the MTA's research teams probably possessed more than enough examination methods to derive a lot of clues out of the remarkably preserved skeleton!

Still, did the skeleton truly belong to such a fearsome existence? Everyone looked at the projected images once again.

Due to the lack of detailed information, the exobiologists working for the Larkinson Biotech Institute could do little else but to use their imagination and expertise to shape an approximation of an unclean whale.

"Which one is it?" Patriarch Reginald Cross spoke up as he tried to estimate his chances against these super whales. "What sort of enemy are we dealing with? If we have truly barged in the territory of one of these peak monsters, then maybe we should reconsider this whole operation."

A few people looked surprised at him. The Cross Patriarch wasn't exactly known for his timidity. Although the Crossers had been beaten black and blue in the past, the high-tier expert pilot always maintained his fighting spirit. For him to beat down his courage and voice his hesitation meant that even he didn't think he could stand a chance against threats of this magnitude!

Everyone turned to Director Ranya, who responded with a modest smile.

"Let me respond to your doubts by laying down the facts. First, despite its powerful star, the Garimel System has never attracted much attention from the native alien races. Second, we have only found faint traces of past phase whale visitations. Third, the space pocket that we have managed to uncover was hidden in an unusual manner. Fourth, unclean whales are extremely rare and we have found no record of clean whales emerging in hundreds of thousands of years. Fifth and most importantly, we did not come across a living whale. We have only managed to uncover the skeletal remains of one in the ovoid cavern. Evidence suggests that the once-powerful creature has been dead for millions of years."

While everyone had made a lot of guesses and inferences based on flawed and limited data, they could trust at least this much. Director Ranya deliberately iterated these points so that they could all make decisions based on reality rather than their fears.

She flicked her eyes at everyone and inwardly nodded in satisfaction.

"The nature and context of the space pocket is still unclear, but it is hard to imagine that the phase whale is still alive after all these years. Biological life forms all follow the same rules. The only significant threats that we can expect are from the arrangements made by the entities that have made the Royal Tomb."

"Are you suggesting that the giant phase whale did not make this pocket space in the first place?"

"My staff and I have been wondering why the skeleton is suspended and fixed in place in the center of the space pocket." General Verle spoke up. "It may be that our assumptions about the Royal Tomb are wrong. What if it is not an honored burial place for a great or important figure among the phase whales. What if... we are looking at a prison that has solely been created to hold one of the most powerful and heinous criminals among this race for eternity?"

"That... sounds plausible."

Everyone fell silent as they mulled over the alternative idea and found that it might actually be true!

Given what they heard about clean and unclean whales, these powerful but detested figures probably did not wish to perish so easily!

Perhaps the orthodox phase whales managed to gang up on one and forcibly imprisoned their captive in their version of a prison.

There were still a lot of holes in this story, though.

"This doesn't quite make sense." Ves said. "If the Royal Tomb is actually a prison that holds an unwanted captive, then why did the phase whales sprinkle so many random

resonating exotics underneath Violet Ridge? It's as if they built a maximum security prison only for them to bury the keys underneath a rock located outside the main entrance! The phase whales can't possibly be this stupid. They're one of the smartest races in the Red Ocean!"

It did not make sense! NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON COM

Many people grew confused again. What were they supposed to believe? Was the Royal Tomb a prison or a hideout?

Commander Casella Ingvar crossed her arms. "If the logic does not make sense, it is because we do not have the complete picture yet. The only real insight we have gained so far is that the Garimel System is much more significant than we initially thought. We need to keep searching for clues so we can fill in the missing variables and gain a clear understanding of what we face."

"We don't have time for that." Ves impatiently said. "We are working on a time limit here. We do not have the expertise and tools to reconstruct an entire saga of what has happened here nor are we able to trace this deceased phase whale's entire life story. It isn't even necessary for us to figure all of this out. All we must do is to get in, cut off a few bones, and get out. While I would like to obtain a greater harvest than that, if we aren't equipped to harvest more, we will leave it at that and remain content with what we've gained."

The circumstances were way too difficult. They did not need to make it more complicated for themselves by wasting too much energy on deciphering the backstory of the Royal Tomb.

Ves brought the meeting back on track. "Let us proceed with discussing more concrete plans on how to take advantage of this situation. Director Ranya, please tell us what is hindering us from chipping away at the bones."

"I cannot tell you much as our sensors and scanners have only made partial readings of the skeletal remains." She stated. "What we can tell you is that any attempts to damage them must overcome at least two barriers. The most obvious hindrance is the immense hardness of the bones. While they are not as heavy or dense as I expected, we have gained clues that their structure and material composition are absolutely incredible. Our probable estimation is that the whale bones are as tough as the materials used to plate the hulls of first-class warships!"

That was an amazing standard! At the very least, that implied that the whale bones were at least as tough and difficult to damage as Unending alloy!

While the Larkinsons might possess weapons that could damage the bones, the sheer volume and thickness of the whale bones meant that it would take a huge amount of time and effort to cut off a single spine bone!

"That isn't all." Ranya spoke as she activated another projection that depicted a hypothetical cross section of the phase whale bone. "If we only have to overcome the hardness of the bone, then we work at it by making gradual but persistent progress. Our earlier examinations have found another obstacle, though. All of our attempts to take samples of the bones have failed because the bones are suffused with an unknown energy field that forcefully repels any attack."

They ran footage of a bot that was equipped with a powerful plasma cutter. Despite striking the same spot for several minutes, the whale bone looked as pristine as ever!

The bone did not even grow hotter!

"This protective energy field reinforces the entire structure of the skeleton." Ranya stated. "You can forget about cutting through the bones if we cannot find a way to neutralize or overcome this effect. The most notable aspect about this energy field is that it gradually becomes stronger the further you move towards the front of the skeleton. We believe that there must be an alien 'shield generator' around the skull of the deceased creature."

Most people already knew about the energy field but Ranya was able to provide more data on its protective properties.

Overcoming this shield would be extremely hard!

"The good news is that the energy field has likely weakened after millions of years have passed. The protective measure likely would have been much stronger and more impregnable if we stumbled upon the Royal Tomb when it was still fresh."

That might be true, but the tech utilized by the phase whales was still extremely powerful!

"The direct implication of this protective energy field is that piling up a lot of weak attacks will not necessarily inflict any damage." Ves concluded. "So long as the energy source and the shield generator hold up, we can go at it for months and still fail to make a single mark. We will have to rely on our top strength to overcome this obstacle."

That meant that the Golden Skull Alliance needed to rely on its expert mechs and other trump cards in order to achieve results!

Ves turned to Ketis. He had invited her over because she had been working on a special solution to this problem.

"Ketis, tell me about your progress. You started up a special project with Professor Benedict Cortez of the Cross Clan, right?"

"Yup." The female swordmaster acknowledged. "One of the most obvious ways we can overcome all of this resistance is to rely on a powerful expert pilot and expert mech to force a cut. My specialty is well-suited to this, but I am not sure whether the First Sword and its Decapitator sword are strong enough to do the job. This is why I decided to work on another solution that could exceed the cutting power of Venerable Dise's expert mech."

She turned towards Patriarch Reginald. "The strongest expert pilot in our fleet is the Cross Patriarch. If true resonance empowerment is the key to breaking the phase whale bones, then there is no one better than I can work with. The only problem is that his Bolvos Rage is not the suitable mech to wield a heavy melee weapon."

"My upcoming Mars Project will do a better job at this." The Cross Patriarch boasted.

"That will only be the case in the future." Ketis responded. "While the Mars Project doesn't exist yet, that doesn't stop me from designing a powerful weapon for it in advance. I teamed up with Professor Benedict to design a monstrous saber that we have expressly designed to hack through the toughest materials."

She fiddled with her comm and projected the nearly-completed design of a thick and heavy mech saber!

Compared to the Decapitator that accompanied the First Sword, the latest weapon designed by Ketis was much more optimized to cut through hard bone without breaking or getting damaged in the process!

Ketis had also tried her best to maximize its sharpness as much as possible without compromising too much on hardness.

In fact, she didn't need to worry about the weapon breaking easily. As Ves studied the diagram and its technical parameters, he discovered that it was actually made out of extremely luxurious materials!

Patriarch Reginald looked hungrily at the projection.

"Since this saber will be one of the future weapons of my Mars Project, we have readily agreed to put the high-quality materials that our Cross Clan has accumulated at her disposal. If this saber is strong enough to cut through that massive skeleton, then it is strong enough to cut through any phase whale!"

This was a whale-cutting saber!

Chapter 3818 Whale-Cutting Saber

The plan that Ketis and Professor Benedict had chosen to work upon was not the most optimal solution to the problem.

Patriarch Reginald Cross may be decent in melee combat, but he did not develop this aspect too much.

The powerful expert pilot's true forte was his skilled and aggressive use of integrated ranged weapon modules!

While the Bolvos Rage's firepower was impressive, they did not excel in penetration and overcoming the toughest possible resistance.

The best way to enhance its penetration capabilities was to leverage Ketis' specialty to outfit it with a new cutting implement.

Its axe might be a strong and sturdy weapon, but the Decapitator was actually superior when it came to sharpness!

While it would have been great if Patriarch Reginald and his Bolvos Rage could wield the Decapitator if Venerable Dise and the First Sword weren't strong enough to do the job, there was a big problem with handing over such a powerful weapon.

Part of the reason why the Decapitator was so unnaturally sharp was because it was laced with Bissonat. Venerable Dise was highly compatible with this resonating exotic, so she could easily tap into the potential of the remarkable weapon.

The biggest shortcoming of relying on her was that her resonance strength and expert mech were not quite good enough. Venerable Dise was only an expert pilot for a few years and the First Sword was only a mid-tier expert mech according to the standards of the mech industry.

In other words, there was a huge gap in absolute power. What if all of the techniques and tricks that Venerable Dise could bring to bear simply weren't powerful enough to overcome the phase whale skeleton's protective energy field?

The only viable choice was to turn to a more powerful expert pilot.

If the Golden Skull Alliance could rely on Dise and her expert mech to do the job, then Ketis wouldn't even need to design the whale-cutting saber in advance!

The same could not be said for Patriarch Reginald. He was a high-tier expert pilot that was already approaching the resonance strength of a peak-tier expert pilot. Unfortunately, he was also a completely different expert pilot and favored a completely different fighting approach and skillset.

Ketis could not rely on a material that was able to provide a powerful amplification to cutting power because there weren't any related resonating materials in stock that were compatible with Patriarch Reginald.

However, the presence of these resonating materials weren't necessary to achieve superior cutting power. Even with more general materials, the whale-cutting saber that Ketis was working on could still overpower the protective measures keeping the phase whale skeleton intact through brute force!

This was the gap between a low-tier expert pilot and a high-tier expert pilot! Patriarch Reginald's force of will was so much more powerful that mere numbers couldn't adequately describe the gap between him and Venerable Dise!

As Ketis finished explaining her progress on the whale-cutting saber, Ves turned to its intended user.

"Reginald, how confident are you in hacking through the skeleton once you are able to wield this new saber?"

The other clan leader fell into thought and made his own estimations.

"I cannot say whether I will succeed." He admitted. "From what I have learned about this new saber, it is capable of cutting through your Shield of Samar as long as I launch enough attacks. Whether that is enough to overcome the defenses of the phase whale skeleton is another matter. My best chance is to cut the tail end of the skeleton. According to the information that we have received, the protective energy field is weakest when it is as far away from the head of the skeleton as possible."

The harvest that they could gain from that would be disappointing. While the tail bone was still incredibly large and massive, it was only enough to build a handful of bone mechs and no more after the MTA took away its 90 percent share.

This was not enough to make this effort worthwhile. The spine bones at the rear half of the skeleton happened to be the smallest ones! The ones that were closer to the front were many times bigger!

"I want more than just the tail bone at the end." Ves stated. "It would be great if we can cut the skeleton in the middle or at least the rear third section. We only need to saw through one bone in order to separate an entire string of spine bones. As long as we are able to overcome the suspension effect, we can drag it out the portal and break it down at leisure."

It was incredibly troublesome to cut through each and every single spine bone, but the Golden Skull Alliance did not have to rush this effort.

As long as the Larkinsons and their allies managed to retrieve a section of the spine, they could bring it back to Davute. There were plenty of industrial companies in the booming star system that likely possessed much better means to process all of the remarkable bone material!

In fact, the Golden Skull Alliance might not need to go through all of this effort. As long as the spine section became disconnected from the rest of the skeleton, the protective energy field generated from the skull would no longer cover it anymore.

Perhaps the Graveyard's salvaging and processing machines would be sufficient enough to break down the gigantic bones into more manageable portions!

The more Ves thought about all of the fantastic bone material that he could gain, the more he wanted this operation to succeed!

After the people gathered in the conference room finished their discussion on the plan to equip Patriarch Reginald with a whale-cutting saber, Ves concluded this topic with one final question.

"Will developing and fabricating the whale-cutting saber in advance affect the outcome of the Mars Project in any way?"

"I prefer to wield an axe rather than a saber if I have to fight with a melee weapon." Patriarch Reginald replied. "We will retain the whale-cutting saber as a backup and an alternative option for my Mars Project. The only inconvenience is that we are using up rare and expensive materials that we have initially reserved for my future axe. We will have to return to Davute and purchase another batch of materials in order to fill this gap."

"Will this be problematic for your clan?"

"We can easily absorb the additional costs. Our Cross Clan is not as poor as before. Professor Benedict has early earned a considerable amount of money by lending out his design ability to well-paying clients. Besides, the whale-cutting saber is not a waste of money and resources. It can play an even greater role against well-armored opponents than my future axe."

"Oh. That sounds good." .

It was nice to have multiple options available.

The axe favored by Patriarch Reginald was actually designed to be wielded by a single arm. It was a fine weapon to hack apart weaker mechs with ease while being handy enough to duel against more powerful opponents.

The whale-cutting saber was a larger, heavier and more unwieldy weapon. It could only really be wielded by two arms, which made it less convenient for the Mars Project to fight like a discount hero mech and by wielding a shotgun at the same time.

However, Ves could see the advantages of deploying into battle with the latter. The name said it all. There were hardly any better weapons to chop through gigantic astral beasts than this weapon!

Ves turned to Ketis. "You are designing the whale-cutting saber according to the specifications of the Bolvos Rage, right? Will it still be fine if it is passed on to the future Mars Project?"

"I can always modify it afterwards so that it better fits the new expert mech. I don't think there will be a problem."

That was good to hear.

The meeting moved on. The people in the conference room brought up other plans on how to cut through the phase whale skeleton.

They ranged from using energy fields to counterbalance the protective one covering the gigantic bones to bringing in heavy-duty mining lasers to drill through the same spot day and night.

Although Ves admired the creativity of these plans, he did not possess a lot of confidence in these measures.

"What about the plan to overcome the defenses of the phase skeleton with our ranged expert mechs?" Commander Melkor asked. "Do we have enough firepower to succeed?"

Several expert pilots were a part of this plan. Patriarch Reginald, Venerable Brutus Wodin, Venerable Joshua Larkinson, Commander Casella Ingvar and most notable Venerable Davia Stark would be doing all of the work this time.

Each of them piloted expert mechs with powerful ranged capabilities. If they all empowered their attacks with true resonance and concentrated them on a specific point, they could overcome a lot of resistance!

Since Ves had designed much of the ranged weapons used by these expert mechs, he possessed a good understanding of this plan.

"We do not know whether this plan works better than the ones that rely on using melee weapons to cut through the bone. The main difference is that all of our ranged expert mechs are equipped with energy weapons. The way they deal damage and the way that expert pilots empower them are different. While the firepower of five ranged expert mechs should not be underestimated, it might not end up doing anything if the protective energy field is especially effective in neutralizing energy damage."

This was always a possibility. Even if many of the ranged expert mechs were armed with versatile luminar crystal weapons, the phase whale tech responsible for preserving the gigantic skeleton was probably superior.

The Golden Skull Alliance's only hope was that persistent attacks from all of those expert mechs would be enough to exhaust their target!

Personally, Ves was afraid that the protective energy field could not be exhausted through these means. Quantity might not be enough as long as the attacks did not surpass a high threshold.

Perhaps only the Amaranto had a realistic shot of overcoming the defenses of the phase whale skeleton. A powerful enough attack from Venerable Davia Stark and her masterwork expert mech might do the trick.

"What if all of this is not enough?" General Verle asked. "We are relying on the mechs, weapons and equipment that we have on hand, but they are hardly the most powerful tools at humanity's disposal. What if we are too weak to defeat the remnant of what might possibly be the most powerful single organism in the history of the Red Ocean?"

"Then... we may need to resort to other solutions." Ves replied. "Perhaps the Royal Tomb is a puzzle. The phase whales or whoever constructed all of this may have implemented a sequence that will allow us to deactivate this powerful protective energy field. Once it is done, it should be a lot simpler to saw through these spine bones."

"How can we do that, sir?"

Ves smiled and pointed at the projections. "I don't know, but if I have to make a guess, I think the head of this giant skeleton must hold answers."

"Are you sure about that, sir? It sounds too good to be true. Isn't the forward part of the skeleton unreachable?"

"That is true. We have only attempted to go deeper with probes, bots and other autonomous devices. They are all weak and incapable of handling increasingly more dangerous conditions. Perhaps the story will be different once we attempt to push through the hazard zone with our best and strongest mechs. I am thinking about whether it is a good idea to send in the Shield of Samar."

The expert heavy space knight wasn't designed to operate under these conditions. Who knew what kind of dangers loomed ahead. Without a key or a countermeasure, even a mech as tough as the Shield of Samar might get sliced apart by the residual defenses of the Royal Tomb!

Chapter 3819 Second Portal

The Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers each contributed a lot to the upcoming operation.

After everyone gained a better idea on what they were working on, they resumed their preparations and hoped that their efforts would pay off. They did not want to open up another portal at great cost only for the gigantic skeleton to remain as pristine as ever!

Several days went by as the different parties completed their work.

Ketis and Professor Benedict have worked day and night to design and fabricate the whale-cutting saber.

Ves became so intrigued by this project that he decided to see the new weapon for himself. He shuttled over to the Cyclical Engine and entered Professor Benedict's high-end workshop.

Once inside, Ves briskly approached the two mech designers as they gazed at their work.

It did not look like a rushed product at all. Despite developing it for less than a week, the heavy saber looked as if it took weeks if not months to design this impressive armament!

While it was not a masterwork weapon like the Decapitator, the new heavy saber was remarkably high in quality.

Ves had no doubt that Ketis had poured in all of her passion in this rushed project, but that wasn't enough to explain how this mech weapon became so good.

The only explanation that made sense was that Professor Benedict had learned a lot about quality and masterworks during his last collaboration with the Larkinson mech designers.

If Ves studied the nuances of the whale-cutting saber carefully, he could spot a few elements that vaguely looked as if Professor Benedict took inspiration from Ves and Gloriana's approach.

Ves had no reason to be unhappy about this. Any solution was fine as long as the whale-cutting saber performed better in the end!

"What do you think? Are you satisfied with your work?"

Ketis shrugged. "I wish we had more time to make this weapon, but we did the best we could. This is a worthy weapon for the Bolvos Rage and only needs modest changes in order to be just as good in the hands of the Mars Project."

"Professor?"

"I have never designed a melee mech armament that is as odd as this work." Benedict said as he sounded as if he still had trouble recognizing his own work. "Miss Ketis here is able to impart her weapons with several advantages, a few of which I have never seen from other mech designers. I cannot say whether Patriarch Reginald will take a liking to all of its features, but I do not doubt its cutting power."

"I couldn't implement as many of my design solutions as I liked since Patriarch Reginald is neither a saber wielder nor a Swordmaiden." Ketis let out a regretful sigh. "I had to cut back on what I could add from my swordmaster powers. I developed a new saber style that I have adapted from my other styles and condensed the moves into just a handful of powerful moves. If Reginald accepts my teachings and takes the saber style seriously enough, he may be able to master the moves within a week. That will give him a better chance at cutting through the resistance."

"Will it be necessary, though?" Ves wondered.

Ketis thought for a moment. "Maybe not. Patriarch Reginald is not a novice in combat. He has developed his own methods and techniques to enhance the strength of his melee attacks. Still, the new techniques I've imparted to this saber perfectly matches the properties of this weapon. They also make the most out of the sharpness that I have tried my best to maximize for this weapon."

The whale-cutting saber was a departure from many of her other weapon designs. Unlike the greatswords that she designed for the Monster Slayer and Second Sword designs, the heavy saber made no pretense about its unsuitability for dueling.

Its blade was way too long, heavy and thick to be swung around with skill and precision. The weapon was solely made to perform the simplest swings. Nothing more was needed to leverage more power from the blows!

With the mechanical strength of the Bolvos Rage, the expert hybrid mech was not able to swing the weapon quickly at all, but it was worth it as long as the individual attacks were powerful enough!

Ves came closer to the finished weapon and examined the cutting edge closely. He clearly identified the influence of Ketis' core design philosophy.

"This saber is designed for cutting and nothing else." Ketis said as she approached her own work and knocked her armored fist against the flat surface of the gigantic blade. "The Decapitator is more refined and benefits from having Bissonat, but my new work is designed in a way that can give a high-tier expert pilot a better chance at condensing and converging his power. I couldn't have done it without this guy's help."

"This saber incorporates a large quantity of materials that we intended to save up for the Mars Project's axe. I could not allow their efficacy and potential to go to waste." Professor Benedict said.

The Cross Clan supplied all of the resources to make this saber, so Ves did not feel bothered by its cost.

"Have the two of you come up with a good name for this weapon?"

"...I'm happy with calling it the Whale-Cutting Saber." Ketis replied after a few seconds. "With capital letters, that is. It's a simple and unpretentious name, but one that will hopefully strike fear in every space whale's heart one day."

Ves turned to the Senior Mech Designer. "Are you okay with this name?"

Benedict looked as if this was a childish matter. "Miss Ketis is the lead designer of this project. She deserves to name the weapon."

Since he did not object to the name proposed by Ketis, the weapon would henceforth be known as the Whale-Cutting Saber.

Ves wondered whether this direct and brutal-sounding name would attract the hatred of any phase whales. How would these space creatures feel if they stumbled upon a weapon that was expressly designed and named to kill the strongest of their kind?

"Let us pack this weapon up and bring it to the Bolvos Rage." Ketis said. "Patriarch Reginald must get accustomed to it as much as possible. I will personally advise and help him master the techniques associated with this saber."

"You do that. I will talk with Crossers a bit longer before I return to my flagship."

Ves lingered for another hour as he talked to Professor Benedict about their recent challenges in the Garimel System.

Surprisingly, Benedict showed substantial concern towards Ves.

"You are heavily committed to this operation. Maybe too much. Have you ever thought about what state you will be in if we have used up much of our time and resources in vain?"

Ves pressed his lips. "We are indeed taking a big risk, but I would not feel good about myself if I passed on this attempt to obtain a fantastic material that is definitely unique. These bones are not only strong and light compared to the other materials, they are also organic."

"And that matters?" . Com

"It does to me. I have... a special affinity for organic materials and components." Ves replied. "While I am not a biomech designer, I have always wanted to incorporate more biological components in my classical mech designs. Any mech that I design with this bone material will probably possess a lot of extra advantages that cannot be easily substituted with other materials."

Ves had a strong hunch that he could develop mechs that were stronger than the expert mechs he had designed so far! Unending alloy was great but it was ultimately a cold, hard metal material.

The bones in the Royal Tomb were not only organically grown, but also accompanied the life of an ancient phase whale for many years!

This should have left a strong imprint of the enormous beast in the bone. If Ves could extract or take advantage of this property in another way, he had a strong suspicion that his design philosophy would be able to advanced by leaps when he succeeded!

This was why Ves was determined to go through with this gamble. Costly or not, this might be his only opportunity to get his hands on the bones of such a stupendously powerful organic existence.

Considering the rarity of creatures of this power, it might take a century before Ves stumbled upon a similar chance!

After Ves had made his determination clear, Professor Benedict no longer tried to temper the younger mech designer's expectations.

"We will see tomorrow whether our work is sufficient."

The next day arrived pretty soon. A lot of mechs and personnel got ready as they prepared to open the space portal a second time.

This time, the Golden Skull Alliance prepared to use up almost two-thirds of all of the resonating exotics excavated from the site.

This was a hefty sacrifice, but also a necessary one according to the calculations.

The Glory Seekers had actually taken it upon themselves to calculate the exact quantities and usage of the resonating exotics.

While they did not possess any strong advantages in this area, they still possessed ties to many Hexer organizations.

The Glory Seekers therefore supplied all of the relevant data to a distant research institution. After a lot of research, the external scientists came up with a way to open a

portal that was large enough to accommodate the giant bones with moderate room to spare.

There was no need to waste more resonating materials in order to make the portal any bigger.

Ves looked impassively from a commander center as lots of bots as well as gravitic modules slowly brought the resonating materials together.

Each of them had been lightly processed so that they touched each other as much as possible.

Once all 49 resonating materials pressed together, the same changes occurred as last time!

"The resonating exotics are disintegrating!"

"Detecting strong spatial fluctuations. The space portal is larger and more powerful than before!"

"How long will it last?"

"Unknown, sir, but our preliminary readings suggest that it will last beyond the deadline."

The formation of the portal was a lot slower and more violent than the first time. It was as if this unknown process had to put a lot more effort into ripping reality apart to form this portal!

Ves grew a bit nervous as several minutes went by. The space around the entire underground site seemed to shake.

"Pull back! Don't stay too close!"

Many shuttles, mining mechs and other assorted vehicles and equipment left the mining tunnel entirely.

The Living Sentinel mechs backed off as well but still maintained their battle-ready posture. The Minerva floated behind them as Commander Casella Ingvar began to feel less at ease with the developing portal.

After four minutes of spatial convulsions, the portal finally stabilized!

An opaque surface came into form. Just like usual, its surface did not offer people at this side a glimpse of the other side.

A large collection of bots and probes immediately flew through the portal.

Strangely enough, none of them returned.

Ves began to frown. "What is the matter? The first bots should have arrived up to a dozen seconds after they entered the Royal Tomb."

As other people grew confused as well, an unexpected development occurred.

A biological monster that was half the size of mech emerged out of the large portal!

The creature looked like a fat and oval fish that had somehow swam into space.

"What... is that?"

"Unknown organism. We have yet to find a match in the database."

"Our scanners have detected partial phase whale DNA from this new creature."

"What?!"

Just as Ves tried to figure out what was going on, a second fat 'fish' flew out of the portal. The unsympathetic-looking monster bumped into the first one.

Then a third one appeared.

A fourth one arrived right afterwards.

The fifth and sixth fish monster squeezed through the portal at the same time!

The stream of fish monsters kept pouring out of the portal as if this was just the start!

In the meantime, the first fish monsters to appear on this side of the portal finally regained their bearings.

They observed the expanded mining tunnel and quickly set their predatory sights on all of the mechs in the vicinity.

The monsters seemed to take offense at the mechs and rapidly dove forward in order to smash the metallic machines!

"WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!"

Chapter 3820 Fish-Whales

Underneath the hot and burning star that brought heat and light to the Garimel System, a major turn of events had occurred!

After an unknown amount of years, the star system finally became host to a battle!

The eruption of conflict happened unexpectedly. When the Golden Skull Alliance meticulously prepared to open the space portal a second time, none of its members expected to be met by a horde of strange fish creatures!

The small whales or large space fish were terrible creatures that exhibited no intelligence but plenty of aggression!

When encountering the mechs and vehicles of the Golden Skull Alliance, they did not attempt to communicate or understand the unprecedented situation.

Instead, they gave in to their feral nature and used their own meaty bodies to surge forward and bull through the first wall of mechs!

Fortunately for the surprised and bewildered humans, the Larkinson Clan had never loosened its precautions.

Even though there was little evidence that opening the portals would unleash so many bloodthirsty monsters, the Larkinsons mustered up many mechs and put the ones stationed close to the portal site in a battle-ready state.

The formidable shield wall composed of both the new and old mech models of the Living Sentinels finally faced its first real test!

"Hold your ground!"

"Steady your position!"

"The fish monsters keep colliding against our shields!"

The majority of the fish monsters that emerged from the portal appeared to be simple creatures. They did not bother to take a look at the situation. They just mindlessly followed the lead of their charging brethren and went on the attack as if they were facing their archnemesis!

"Damn, these monsters are crazy!"

"These white beasts aren't as scary as you think they are! One good attack is enough to debilitate them. Focus on wounding as many of them as possible!"

Over a hundred partial whale creatures had already emerged out of the stable portal. These large and aggressive beasts could have generated a fair amount of confusion and deaths if they managed to spread out and surround individual mechs.

However, their inability to break through the shield wall of the Living Sentinels caused many of them to be unable to bring their swarming threat to bear!

Ranged mechs arrived from the rear. The Bright Warriors armed with luminar crystal rifles helped suppress the influx of fish-whales with their laser beams and positron beams, but the effect of their firepower was less than expected.

"The fish monsters have too much meat and blubber on their bodies! Our energy attacks are being diffused by their body mass!"

The fish-whales turned out to be a lot more resistant to energy damage than physical damage!

"Stick to melee mechs and mechs armed with ranged kinetic weapons! Do we have any mechs armed with gauss weapons on hand?!"

"We only have a handful of Eternal Redemptions on standby!"

"The Cross Clan are dispatching mechs armed with gauss rifles!"

"Good!"

As soon as the situation stabilized a bit, the Living Sentinels realized that the monsters weren't that strong at all. Many mech pilots and many analysts stationed in the fleet frantically studied the behavior and parameters of the white miniature whale beasts.

Soon, they figured out the threat posed by the mindless creatures and how to cope with their seemingly endless numbers.

"Report! What do we know about these giant fish?!" Ves demanded as he pointed his finger at the projected footage of the ongoing battle.

"Sir, the unknown bestial species designated as 'fish-whales' are artificial hybridized life forms that contain phase whale DNA and genes taken from other species. They have not evolved naturally but show numerous signs of degeneration and mutation."

"What do you mean by that?"

"We do not have evidence yet, but we believe these species were originally more docile. Over a long period of unknown development, their physiologies and mental activity have become more aggressive and war-like. It is as if they were being bred into becoming cannon fodder!"

When Ves glanced at the continuous outpouring of white fish-whales or whatever they were called, he could easily agree with this tentative conclusion.

Whoever or whatever was in charge on the other side did not mind sending all of these mindless fish-whales to their deaths!

Of course, it could also be that no intelligence was in charge of the other side of the portals. These fish-whales could have evolved into their current form by adapting to the needs of a cruel and deadly environment.

Either way, none of this bode well for the Golden Skull Alliance.

Ves was sure that the second portal opened up a space channel to an entirely different destination than the first portal!

Let alone being able to harvest a portion of the extremely valuable and unique giant phase whale skeleton, Ves didn't know if the threat from the other could be contained!

"Let us leave their DNA and origin aside for a moment. Tell me more about their offensive and defensive capabilities."

"According to our observations, an individual fish-whale does not pose a great threat to our mechs. Their bite force is rather powerful but the physical shields of our Bright Warriors and Rigid Walls can withstand the attacks for the moment. They pose a considerable threat if they are able to bite through our lighter mechs or the weak points of our heavier machines."

In other words, keeping them contained was a high priority! As long as they unleashed their offensive against the strongest defenses of the battle line, the fish-whales wouldn't be able to deal any significant damage.

"As for their defenses, most of the fish-whales appear to be juvenile and underdeveloped. Though they have a shadow of phase whale physique in their bodies, their growth environment appears to be too limited to provide adequate nutrition and growth for them. The vast majority of the white beasts are soft targets. Their skin and exterior can easily be cut and punctured and their flesh isn't dense enough to absorb incoming blows. The only notable advantage that individual fish-whales possess is that they are rather meaty. Their brains are protected by a thick skull and their internal organs are buried deep within layers of flesh. Injuring them is easy but killing them will take more work!"

That was evidenced by the large amount of pained and bleeding fish-whales that had been pushed to the side of the expanding battlefield. .com

Whether they were cut by the swords of the Rigid Walls or punctured by the spears of the Rigid Spine, the heavily-injured beasts silently cried and convulsed as they tried to cope with their pain.

More and more injured fish-whales were pushed to the side. The reddish blood escaping from their wounds started to soak the rock and soil underneath while the occasional fish-whale carcass fell onto the diagonal mining tunnel and slid down into the depths below.

In the meantime, more brethren joined the ranks of the wounded as the arriving fish-whales mindlessly charged towards the shield wall only to be cut down or pierced through their bodies with ruthless efficiency!

"Watch the sides! The fish-whales are beginning to spill beyond the shield wall!"

More fish-whales arrived through the portal at a time than before. So many of them charged forward that more and more of them were forced to move around the side.

This was bad because the amount of Sentinel mechs weren't enough to block the flow of fish-whales!

Fortunately, the Living Sentinel mechs weren't the only ones that were present!

The several squads of Valkyrie mechs of the Glory Seekers swept in and impaled the fish monsters with their spears!

The Crossers dispatched numerous mech companies that consisted entirely of tough and sturdy mechs.

The Avatars of Myth that had remained on standby entered the mining tunnel as well to hunt down the ones that threatened to outflank the defending mechs.

For a moment, the situation stabilized a bit. More mechs were gathering at the entrance as well, but each of them received orders to hold position because the mining site could not accommodate anymore machines for the moment!

As the various mech commanders and other officers steadily gained control of the situation, Ves and many others began to relax a bit. Though the threat of the endless tide of fish-whales was still considerable, they were manageable as long as they did not do anything else aside from charging forward with their bodies.

The shield wall held even if the tower shields of the Rigid Walls and the Bright Warriors started to dent from withstanding all of the collisions.

"These fish-whales are crazy! They don't hesitate to smash their brains silly in order to collide against our shields!"

"Our energy shields can't hold long against these continuous physical impacts! The incoming kinetic energy is too big!"

"Just rely on your physical shields for now! The Cross Clan has already sent additional space knights. They can take our place once our tower shields are on the verge of falling apart."

No one was able to guess how long this would last. How many fish-whales were pressing forward on the other side of the space portal? A thousand? A hundred-thousand? A million?

No one knew! Even if the Larkinsons managed to capture a fish-whale alive, there was no point in interrogating them. These cannon fodder fish were too stupid to communicate with! They were completely unlike the sagely and intelligent phase whales that had likely created their race!

While General Verle and many other commanding officers were initially happy that they managed to hold the line, they grew increasingly more concerned as the flow of fish-whales continued to rise.

This was a sign that the amount of fish-whales on the other side might be far more terrible than they hoped!

"Sir! The injured fish-whales are cannibalizing each other!"

"What?!"

Over a hundred fish-whales had perished from their wounds, but hundreds more only came away with severe injuries.

These fish-whales grew weak and unsteady, but their ferocious eyes and their snarling maws made it clear that they had not retracted their aggression at all! Each of them glared hatefully at the metal machines that were responsible for making them bleed.

The humans initially expected these injured beasts to pick themselves up and charge forward again.

They instead turned against each other and proceeded to bite and chew at their fellow fish-whale brethren!

Many people grew sick as they watched the giant fat fish tear each other's flesh and crush each other's bones!

Unlike the smaller and cleaner wounds inflicted by human weapons, the damage that the fish-whales dealt to each other was much more savage.

Blood of their kin soaked the sharp teeth of the fish-whales as they gorged upon their defeated brethren with insatiable hunger.

"The injured fish-whales are rapidly regenerating as they eat!"

Many people became shocked when they saw how fish-whales were healing their grievous injuries in less than a minute. As soon as they devoured the biomass of their own species, their wounds and missing biomass rapidly squirmed and expanded until the fish-whale became whole again.

"This isn't natural! This is definitely a product of sophisticated genetic engineering!"

"Damn, those fish whales are charging forward again! Our shield walls are getting pushed back!"

The constant collisions were hard to counteract, especially when multiple fish-whales in a row were trying to press forward.

None of the mechs in the mining tunnel were standing on solid ground. They had to rely on the forward thrust of their flight systems in order to avoid ceding ground to these mindless beasts.

More fish-whales emerged than what the mechs in the tunnel could kill. Now that the injured ones cannibalized their weaker siblings, the influx of fish-whales had become even greater!

"We need backup!"

It was then that a detachment from the Flagrant Vandals had from the rear!

The Ferocious Piranhas and other light mechs flew forward and stopped behind the shield wall.

While their daggers and other light weapons were not suited to slaughter the thick and meaty fish-whales, their presence nonetheless brought a substantial advantage to the defenders.

Their infamous glows were beginning to act on the approaching fish-whales!