

Mech 4221

Chapter 4221 Specialty Machines

The main fight most definitely centered around defeating the large amounts of mechs and defensive installations within the Pima Prime System.

However, defeating the strongest mechs of the Sundered Phalanx also played a crucial role in Operation Saturday Market!

The Hex Federation would have never agreed to target a star system as valuable as Pima Prime if not for the fact that the Golden Skull Alliance was willing to lend its complete support.

To be more precise, the participation of Patriarch Reginald Cross and his powerful Mars was the greatest factor that made this offensive operation viable!

While the Cross Patriarch had already committed to defeating or at least stalling the Gauge Dynasty's ace mech, there were still a lot of enemy expert mechs that needed to be taken care of. Each of them were more powerful enough to fell over a thousand mechs during a single deployment if left unchecked!

"I have already given you the bad news." General Verle said. "The Sundered Phalanx will be able to field around 50 modern heartland-level expert mechs, and the most prominent among them are equipped with transphasic mech systems."

"What about the Hex Army, sir?" Venerable Joshua asked. "The Hexers surely have enough expert mechs as well, right?"

"That is not entirely true, Joshua. You must certainly be aware that the Hexers have lost a disproportionate amount of expert mechs and expert pilots during the Komodo War. While it is true that a lot of their mech pilots have broken through during the hard fighting, they are not adequate replacements for the

older mid-tier and high-tier expert pilots. The result of all of this is that the Hex Federation is only able to commit up to 30 expert pilots to this operation, of which the majority are rather weak."

Venerable Joshua and the others grimaced. This meant that the Hexers were unable to fend off the enemy expert mechs by themselves.

"The Hex Federation should have more expert pilots than that, right?"

Venerable Rosa Orfan asked. "Why don't those women send out more of their champions?"

"The reason why they can't send more is because the Hex Federation needs to maintain the defenses of its own colonies during this period of time."

Commander Casella already guessed the reason."

"So?"

"Don't forget that the weaker coalition partners originally instigated us and the Hexers to launch this attack in the first place. Their ultimate goal is to increase their margin of safety and weaken their enemies. To them both the Gauge Dynasty and the Hex Federation need to be weakened. Ruining Pima Prime satisfies one of the conditions. Attacking a core colony of the Hexers while much of their available combat strength is occupied elsewhere is even better! In order to prevent this third party from taking advantage of the situation, the Hexers must make sure to maintain the strength of their own defensive garrisons."

Taking away too many expert mechs from their own colonies made it a lot easier to breach their defenses.

If it came down to it, the Hexers could still afford to lose the majority of their attack force, but they could absolutely not afford to lose any of their core colonies!

The allocation of forces showed that the Hexers still hated the Fridaymen enough to launch a daring assault on a strategically important port system, but also retained enough caution and hesitation to hold back.

In any case, the operation was still viable. The participation of the Golden Skull Alliance played a crucial role in making up for the shortfall of champions!

General Verle quickly summed up the numbers. "When it comes to expert mechs, our clan is able to field 10 of them. The Glory Seekers can bring 4 to the table while the Crossers will also bring 4. That technically means that we are only short of 2 expert mechs compared to our opponents, but we cannot assume that this will actually be the case. The intelligence we have on our opponents may not be entirely complete or accurate. It is much easier to hide five or so expert mechs than to hide an entire extra mech division."

It could also be the case that there were less expert mechs in Pima Prime than normal, but the chances of that happening should be low, especially when they detected the Hexer movements.

In any case, the overall picture painted by General Verle was not optimistic. While the Hex Army was able to supply enough low-tier expert mechs to block the enemy low-tier expert mechs, the Hexers did not have enough solutions to handle the stronger and more troublesome Fridayman expert mechs!

"So it is up to us to beat up their biggest and baddest expert mechs, right?!" Venerable Vincent bombastically asked. "Then let's get it on! I'm more than ready to beat up their vaunted high-tier expert mechs with my C-Man! There's no way that the enemy can handle my transphasic stuff!"

General Verle shook his head. "You are forgetting the fact that the Fridaymen most certainly incorporated phasewater tech in their own expert mechs. Enough time has passed for them to harvest a decent quantity of phasewater and develop powerful new mech systems around this substance. I admit that

your C-Man is strong, but it is still a stretch for you to compete against a high-tier expert pilot and expert mech. Your resonance strength is still too weak."

None of the Larkinson expert pilots had a good idea how they would fare against the more formidable Fridaymen expert mechs.

General Verle already thought of that and brought on a more qualified individual to discuss the particulars of the enemy expert mechs.

"When it comes to explaining the properties of the expert mechs that you will likely face in battle, I believe it is best to leave this job to a mech designer. Patriarch Ves, please share your thoughts on the machines our expert pilots will have to defeat."

General Verle flew to the side as Ves finally turned from observer into presenter.

When everyone turned their attention to Ves, he smiled and commanded the current simulation to display a depiction of each known expert mech behind his back.

The mockups of a total of 50 expert mechs made a profound impression on the Larkinson expert pilots.

The quantity of enemy expert mechs was enough to intimidate almost anyone, even expert pilots!

"That's a lot of machines." Venerable Tusa said. "They come in all shapes and sizes as well. There are expert space knights, expert striker mechs, expert heavy artillery mechs, expert light skirmishers and even expert lancer mechs."

Ves nodded in agreement. "That is indeed the case. Let me state upfront that the intelligence we have on these Fridayman expert mechs is not that complete or reliable. The leaked intelligence did not mention too many details about them and our spies aren't able to dig out too much solid information about their performance parameters or their special features. We haven't even

been able to gather any solid images of half of these expert mechs. They have rarely if ever shown up in public and they haven't participated in enough battles for footage of them in action to end up on the galactic net."

He waved his hand, causing the projections of numerous notable individuals to appear in front of the Larkinson expert pilots.

"Now, before I briefly go over what we know about each individual machine that you may very well bump into on the battlefield, I think it is useful for you to understand the design approach and direction of the Sundered Phalanx's cohort of expert mechs. The first lesson is that just like our own expert mechs, the ones designed for the Sundered Phalanx are strongly defined by the specialties of their lead designers."

Ves gestured at the simulated figures of the older ladies and gentlemen.

"Each of these esteemed and celebrated figures before you are some of the more prominent Master Mech Designers who come from the Gauge Dynasty. They have been involved in the development of the expert mechs in Pima Prime, at least that we know of. Many of them have actually worked on multiple expert mechs, which means it is essential for you to familiarize and learn how to deal with their powerful design philosophies and design applications."

He started off with the Master Mech Designer he was most familiar with among the Gaugers.

"This gentleman here is Master Toqueman Huron. You all owe a lot to him because he is the source of the inspiration that eventually led me to developing spiritual networks, battle formations and design networks. He also happens to possess 2 percent ownership of the LMC."

That was a considerable surprise to some of the expert pilots that never paid attention to this kind of news!

Venerable Imon Ingvar scratched his head. "He's a shareholder of our mech company? Doesn't that mean he's on our side? Is it okay for us to trash the expert mechs he designed?"

A few other expert pilots snorted and looked at him as if he was stupid.

"Don't pay attention to this stuff." Ves responded. "An enemy is an enemy. Don't show any mercy to the enemy expert mechs. Shareholder or not, Master Huron and his work are still obstacles to our clan. It will do us a lot of good to demolish the expert mechs he painstakingly designed and show that continuing to oppose us is a bad idea."

Since the patriarch said so, then the Larkinsons did not have to treat Toqueman's work any differently.

The majority of expert mechs behind Ves' back dimmed, leaving only a few ones untouched.

Ves highlighted two of them in particular and caused them to grow in size so that their distinctive design features became more evident.

Venerable Vincent looked confused. "Are these expert mechs twins? They look almost the same!"

"These are the Tensars. They are one of the latest representative works of Master Huron. Built upon his most recent advancements in neural networks, they are a matching pair of mid-tier expert rifleman mechs. While we are not certain whether they have incorporated any transphasic systems, even without them they are still formidable in battle."

"Why?"

"Well, the most important reason is that the Arma Tensor and the Fila Tensor are both closely connected. What I mean by that is that the expert mechs are capable of pulling their expert pilots into a deep and extensive neural network,

essentially binding the minds of two different expert pilots together, allowing them to share their battle instincts, judgment and perhaps even their special traits with each other!"

Since the Larkinsons made good use of spiritual networks, the gathered expert pilots did not underestimate the power of Huron's neural networks!

Though Ves' description was lacking in details, the implications of his words were considerable!

"I am sure you can guess what that means." He continued. "Through a state that the Gaugers call Complete Coordination, Venerable Anastasia Choi and Venerable Geraldine Fameuse are able to synchronize and coordinate their individual battle actions to a near-perfect level. They can coordinate their attacks precisely. They can fend off the enemies that target each other's expert mechs. They can borrow each other's perception and judgment to improve their own individual reactions. We have also obtained hints that they can even share each other's domains and distinctive strengths!"

It was as if the Arma Tensar and the Fila Tensar were part of a single cohesive system!

Rather than treating them as two separate expert mechs, it was more accurate to think of them as a single package!

Ves gazed at the simulated versions of the Tensars with great respect. "Unlike Master Huron's rougher and more experimental design applications, the neural network that he has especially developed for these projects is both refined and reliable. The strength of the expert pilots and their close trust towards each other play a large role in this. By the accounts that we have received, the teamwork between the expert pilots assigned to the Tensars are so great that the two of them can even defeat their high-tier counterparts!"

This meant that the pair stood a good chance of defeating Patriarch Reginald Cross and the Bolvos Rage in the past!

Considering that the Larkison Clan lacked a high-tier expert pilot of its own, who could possibly contain the threat posed by the Tensars?

Chapter 4222 Master Johnny Bates

The soldiers of the Hex Army had already developed a close familiarity with the mech models fielded by the military branches of the Friday Coalition.

The Hexers even developed a personal familiarity of the traits of the Master Mech Designers that defined the characteristics of the mechs they were tasked with defeating.

The Fridaymen did the same. They even went as far as dedicating entire research teams led by honored and respected Masters to develop an effective counter against the ubiquitous glows of the Hexer mech models that were designed by Ves!

Though those research teams never managed to develop a universal counter, the researchers gained a lot of understanding of living mechs and came up with limited solutions.

One of the more general lessons the Fridaymen had learned after fighting off so many Valkyrie Redeemers was that it was better to take them out at a distance than to allow these thunderous marauder mechs to complete their attack runs!

This was why the Sundered Phalanx, the Blue Cavalry and many other Fridaymen military organizations put a greater emphasis on ranged combat during the last decade.

The expert rifleman mechs known as the Arma Tensar and the Fila Tensar were beneficiaries of this change in policies!

In order to emphasize the threat of these special pair of expert mechs, Ves went over all of their known strong points.

"The Tensars are not only strong due to how their expert pilots can link and share resources with each other. Their individual technical design and specifications are also formidable in their own right. Take a look at their rifles. Though we do not possess the full technical specifications of the current rifle models, the Hexers already developed a thorough understanding of the chief developer."

He pointed towards one of the men standing in the row of Master Mech Designers in the service of the Gauge Dynasty.

"Master Johnny Bates is perhaps one of the most hated mech designers within the Hex Army. The reason for that is because he is an energy weapon specialist and responsible for leading the design projects of many ranged mechs that have gone on to down Hexer mechs in droves."

Master Mech Designers came in all shapes and sizes, but if they had a few things in common, it was that they were always extremely clever and good at innovating in their own field.

"At over 250 years old, Master Bates has not only mastered his craft to a high degree, but developed a lot of mechs across different mech generations." Ves explained with obvious respect in his tone. "His specialty lies in the design of Multi-Ray Energy Weapon Systems."

"What does that mean, sir?" Venerable Vincent asked. "Doesn't that sound like a rifle that can switch from firing laser beams to positron beams and back? We already have those weapons. In fact, our rifles come with six different firing modes!"

Ves shook his head. "I personally designed the luminar crystal rifles that you have mentioned. My work is not the same as the weapons designed by

Master Bates. They are based on radically different design principles and tech bases. To summarize the essence of his work as simply as possible, he is capable of designing energy weapons that are capable of firing two beam types at once. Whereas most dual-type rifles can only switch from one energy beam to another, the rifles designed by this Fridayman Master can fire both of them at once at pretty much full power!"

His explanation was met with mixed reactions. Half of the Larkinson expert pilots looked confused. The others looked intrigued, but Ves had the sense that they also struggled to understand the implications of his description.

Ves sighed. "Take a look at these clips."

He inputted a command that briefly changed the simulated setting to a recording of one of the major battles of the Komodo War.

The Sundered Phalanx along with the Blue Cavalry had gone out in force and deployed a massive mech army against one of the fortified star systems at the border of the Hexadric Hegemony.

Millions of mechs collided against each other in many different parts of space!

What was notable was that the ranged mechs of the Sundered Phalanx packed a considerably greater punch than that of the Blue Cavalry! The former managed to mow down the Valkyrie mechs and other Hexer mechs with visibly greater ease!

Part of that was because the Gauge Dynasty was wealthier and could afford to raise the quality of its military mech models.

However, another part of it was because numerous ranged mech models fielded by the Sundered Phalanx were deliberately designed to excel in short, high-impact battles rather than long, drawn-out engagements.

Though the rifleman mechs in question frequently ran out of juice and had to return to their motherships in order to replenish their energy cells, their performance when they were on the battlefield was quite impressive!

Armed with energy rifles that essentially fired a laser beam and a positron beam at the same time from the same muzzle, the damage output from these weapons was not simple!

Initially, the mechs got struck by a high concentration of electromagnetic waves. Though there was virtually force behind the blows, the extreme transfer of thermal energy could melt almost any metal the beam came in contact with in an instant!

Immediately afterwards, a thin but deadly stream of positrons arrived afterwards and essentially annihilated matter when it came into contact with substances that contained electrons. This process not only weakened materials directly, but also released a huge amount of heat at the impact site! Generally speaking, energy weapons fired either laser beams or positron beams because it was much more efficient to specialize in a single firing mode.

There was no obvious rationale to develop a weapon that could fire both at once. It made the weapon a lot more costly, complicated and finicky, which was indeed one of the biggest complaints of the products developed by Master Bates.

However, the fact that the man successfully realized his design philosophy and became one of the most prestigious mech designers of the Gauge Dynasty, his odd ideas about energy weapons had proven to be truly effective!

Ves sent a mental command to the MSTs, causing it to conjure up a typical mech rifle developed by Master Bates.

"This is one of the mech weapons that the Hexers have managed to capture and analyze during the Komodo War. The newer rifle models utilized by the modern mech divisions at Pima Prime are considerably better than this model, but the principles should still be the same."

He waved his hand, causing the rifle to fire at a metal plate.

In order to make the effectiveness of this weapon clearer, Ves also called up a luminar crystal rifle and commanded it to fire a laser beam and a positron beam at the same spot.

What was notable was that firing the two beam types separately did not penetrate the metal plate as deeply as firing them simultaneously!

"The penetration factor of Master Bates' laser-positron dual-ray energy system is famed throughout the Komodo Star Sector." Ves explained. "You can think of it as the energy version of a two-stage projectile. The laser beam strikes first and heats up the targeted area, making it softer and more vulnerable. The positron beam strikes the same area immediately afterwards and exploits the weaknesses created by the first hit. The key that makes this work is that both beams are fired from the same barrel at the same type, which in practice means that they are guaranteed to strike at the exact same point unless the range is extreme. To put it into simpler terms, the rifle comes with a built-in combo attack!"

This was quite remarkable! If anyone else wanted to replicate the same feat, then they would have to employ multiple weapons and somehow have them strike at the exact same spot.

This was almost impossible to accomplish, even if a single mech wielded a rifle that had two weapon barrels that were closely aligned with each other!

The gathered expert pilots looked extremely impressed at this technology.

No Master Mech Designer was a pushover!

Even the ones with the most boring and unambitious design philosophies were able to stand out and excel in at least one aspect of mech design!

"While Master Bates has developed multiple different applications of his offense-oriented design philosophy, you will mostly encounter his SLPDR or 'Slipdream' energy weapon systems on numerous standard mechs and expert mechs fielded by the Sundered Phalanx. It is not entirely ubiquitous among the Gauger ranged mechs due to its higher costs, higher maintenance requirements and drastic energy drain, but it will certainly be the most troublesome weapon that we will face on the battlefield."

Out of all of the gathered expert mechs, the ones that specialized in ranged combat developed the greatest respect towards the Slipdream energy weapon system!

"How powerful are the Slipdream rifles compared to our luminar crystal rifles?" Venerable Stark asked.

"That's a good question. There are many variables that can affect the performance of different energy weapons, but assuming that everything else is the same, the Slipdream rifle can deal up to 50 percent more damage than any equivalent attack from a luminar crystal rifle. In fact, the problem is even worse with the Tensars. If both expert rifleman mechs whose pilots are completely linked through a specialized neural network are able to fire both of their powerful expert-grade Slipdream rifles at the exact same spot, the combo effect will effectively amplify the penetration factor by 200 percent! This is one of the greatest reasons why the Tensars can counter high-tier expert mechs. Even Unending alloy will not be able to remain unscathed when faced with so much concentrated heat and energy damage!"

Ves expressly issued this warning to Venerable Joshua and the others who were paired with expert mechs clad with Unending alloy. He did not want

these pilots to develop blind faith in the defensive prowess of the Unending alloy armor systems of their respective battle partners!

"It is not all that bad, though. Slipstream rifles pack a powerful punch, but they sacrifice a lot in order to realize their abnormally high damage potential. Aside from the rapid energy consumption that I have mentioned before, it is also constrained to firing laser beams, positron beams or both at once. One of the biggest advantages of our own luminar crystal rifles is that they can output a lot of different damage types, which guarantees that you are bound to deal the most effective damage against the majority of opponents that you face."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that our luminar rifles are a lot more efficient and will last you a lot longer. Given the scale of the battle that we are about to fight, this will definitely be an advantage in itself. There is no way you can quickly defeat a mech force that encompasses over 140.000 mechs that is also backed up by a formidable orbital defense network. The rifleman mechs armed with Slipstream rifles will hit hard at the start but quickly run out of steam when the larger battle is just ramping up. All of our soldiers will need to pay attention to that and be prepared to launch a counterattack once the depleted enemy mechs have to replenish their energy cells."

"What about the Tensars? Will they exhaust themselves quickly as well?" Commander Casella Ingvar asked.

Ves shrugged. "I don't know, to be honest. It is hard to gather intelligence about the design and properties of expert mechs because the related information is not as widespread and much more carefully guarded than normal. In my opinion, the Gauge Dynasty has invested significantly in their development. Master Huron, Master Bates and the other lead designers should be well aware of the energy problem. It is likely that they have invested in much better energy cells and much more efficient heatsinks in order to

extend the operation time. Don't expect to outlast them if that is what you intend to do. The Tensars can inflict a lot of damage before they need to retreat to their motherships."

All of this information caused the Larkinson expert pilots to develop even more vigilance towards this pair of unique expert mechs.

Ves hadn't even gone over the other strengths and advantages of the Arma Tensar and Fila Tensar!

Chapter 4223 Powerhouse Mech

Ves did not spend too much time on presenting the other strengths imparted by other contributors to the Tensars.

The improvements were rather basic and more fundamental such as enhanced heat management systems and the like. Ves merely had to mention them once in order to make the expert pilots take note that the Tensars would not heat up as rapidly as with other mechs.

Inwardly, Ves sighed in admiration as he examined the design of the Arma Tensar and the Fila Tensar.

To a mech designer like himself, he understood the brilliance of the Tensars more than the people gathered in this simulated space.

In order to develop this pair of expert mechs, the mech designers needed to overcome a huge amount of technical and conceptual challenges.

Just the difficulty of finding two expert pilots with similar skills and approach towards combat was already a cumbersome demand.

The two then needed to undergo special training and instruction in order to develop a deep and profound trust towards each other.

They then had to train in numerous combination tactics that allowed them to maximize the combination of their two expert mechs.

This was just the demands that the mech pilots had to meet!

As for the expert mechs themselves, the Tensars had to be as identical as possible while still tailoring themselves to the individual characteristics of their unique expert pilots.

When Gloriana initially studied the information that the Hexers had managed to gather about the Tensars, she practically drooled over their exquisite designs!

"Those conniving, treacherous and dishonorable Fridaymen are all lowlives, but I have to admit that they know how to design their mechs." She said in a mix of contempt and admiration. "Master Huron and Master Bates have both worked in this industry for over two centuries, so it is not a surprise that they have become extremely good at tailoring mechs to individual pilots. I can definitely do a better job than them, though!"

Whether her boast was accurate or not, her remarks made it clear that the Master Mech Designers entrusted with the design of mid-tier and high-tier expert mechs were all old foxes that had managed to accumulate a dazzling list of accomplishments!

The expert pilots slowly comprehended this as well. Their faces turned grave as they thought about how they could possibly defeat the Tensars.

Fighting against just one of them in isolation was already bad enough. Fighting against them when they exhibited perfect teamwork was much worse!

This was also one of the scary factors of Master Huron's work. His obsessive focus on neural networks and synchronized pilot was driven by the need to develop solutions that allowed the weak to defeat the strong.

Just like how battle formations allowed large groups of Larkinson mech pilots to inflict an enormous blow that was comparable to an attack launched by an ace mech, neural networks allowed varying numbers of mech pilots to

completely coordinate their actions so that they could achieve maximum synergy!

"How should we fight against the Tensars?" Venerable Isobel Kotin asked with concern. "Is it possible to defeat them in a ranged duel, or do we have to get close and fight them at close range?"

Ves looked uncertain. "As far as I know, it is especially tricky to defeat them in melee combat. The Tensars are two machines that always maintain a respectable distance from each other. This not only allows them to attack a target from multiple angles, but also allows them to cover for each other. If an opposing melee mech such as our Dark Zephyr manages to get into point-blank range of the Arma Tensar, then the Fila Tensar will accurately strike the light skirmisher's exposed back or sides!"

"If that's the case, then what about dispatching another light skirmisher to the Fila Tensar?"

"It still won't work. First, the expert mechs need to get close enough, and that is already a difficult ordeal because it will expose them to a lot of fire. Second, the Tensars are pretty quick themselves and can run away or prolong the interception long enough for reinforcements to arrive. Third, their teamwork and synergy most definitely surpasses that of any other pair of expert mechs. This massively boosts their effective performance and allows them to defeat a lot of opponents that should have gained an advantage."

"Then how the hell are we supposed to beat them, then?" Venerable Orfan asked in an exasperated tone.

"You will have to figure that out yourself." Ves replied with a helpless shrug.

"We will make it as easy as possible for you. The Hexers have developed fairly interesting estimations of the Gauge Dynasty's expert mechs. While their modeling is largely based on guesswork and extrapolation, I think they have

done a decent job in developing virtual mech designs that can give you a reasonable expectation on what it is like to face them in battle. I have uploaded all of these virtual mockups of the enemy expert mechs to the MSTS so that you can practice fighting against them. They'll be much trickier in reality due to all of the advantages conveyed by their expert pilots, but at least you should be able to get a grip on their basic technical functions."

The Larkinson expert pilots all smiled. This made it a lot easier for them to prepare to fight against the more formidable Sundered Phalanx expert mechs. None of them wanted to be taken by surprise or get caught without answers when they got locked into combat against weird and unknown opponents.

After Ves was done with explaining the Tensars, he resumed his presentation by introducing the other known enemy expert mechs.

He did not spend too much time on explaining the low-tier expert mechs. Their design budgets were considerably lower and the Master Mech Designers rarely applied their best design applications to them. They were much more standardized in order to give recent expert pilots the chance to discover and develop their new post-breakthrough fighting styles.

Besides, even if these low-tier expert mechs came with a few brilliant features, their overall combat strength was so low that any of the Larkinson expert mechs could crush them with ease.

Unlike the Sundered Phalanx that was weighed down by a huge amount of cost posts, the Larkinson Army enjoyed a considerable amount of largesse from the clan!

Every expert mech design project was an opportunity for Gloriana and other collaborators to go wild and explore the limits of their design philosophies. Low-tier expert mechs simply weren't interesting enough for them, so even the

most modest and 'affordable' Larkinson expert mechs were already equivalent to mid-tier expert mechs!

This was why Ves was more than confident enough that his expert mechs and expert pilots could wipe the floor with the weaker enemy expert mechs.

There was no need for him to devote any additional attention to explaining the strengths and weaknesses of these average machines. Gloriana had already written a comprehensive report about them that the Larkinson mech pilots could read in their free time.

What Ves truly felt concerned about was the prospect of defeating the strongest champions among the Sundered Phalanx. Their strength was the real deal and they looked so formidable that the chance was great that not every Larkinson expert mech might be able to return from the battlefield intact!

There was even a chance that a number of his precious expert pilots might perish on the battlefield!

Ves would feel extremely pained at the loss. Each expert pilot was a strategic asset to the clan and they were difficult to nurture.

Of course, a battle as massive as this would certainly produce its fair share of breakthroughs. As long as the Larkinson Clan wasn't too unlucky, the amount of newly-ascended expert pilots would definitely surpass the amount that died!

His eyes briefly narrowed.

If he was truly desperate, he could activate a few secret functions of the MSTs that should hopefully cause a lot more mech pilots to break through in a short amount of time.

He had not done so yet despite the obvious temptation because he did not want to attract too much attention and because the Transhumanist Faction did not want the truth to come out too soon.

He focused his attention back on his presentation. After going over a few irrelevant expert mechs, he came across another notable machine.

"The Skorpion Kommando is a lot more special than the ones I've mentioned before. As you can see, this high-tier machine comes in an offensive space knight configuration. Don't get fooled by its silly name. The Skorpion Kommando is one of the strongest powerhouse mechs of the Sundered Phalanx in Pima Prime. If the Gaugers hadn't stationed an ace mech in the same star system, then the Skorpion Kommando stands a good chance of becoming the lead mech!"

A new expert mech appeared in front of the Larkinson expert pilots.

The design and appearance of the Skorpion Kommando was radically different from that of the Tensars.

It quickly became evident that the Skorpion Kommando was designed for dueling and upfront combat. Its frame wasn't as thick and massive as that of the Shield of Samar, and its rounder shield also didn't look as if it could withstand as many attacks, but its role was not to provide cover for other assets.

"If it isn't obvious to you yet, then let me explain it to you quickly. The Skorpion Kommando is designed for independent combat. It is not a team player and is loaded with features that allow it to fight alone without support from other friendly elements. Its main responsibility was to seek out enemy expert mechs and defeat them in crushing duels."

While the Skorpion Kommando was most definitely a tough and resilient machine, its streamlined design that looked more balanced than anything also showed that it was able to move a lot faster and more nimble than many other space knights!

"Each of you should already be familiar with the Gatecrasher that once opposed us during the Battle of Fordilla Zentra." Ves said. "The Skorpion Kommando is similar to that, but it is also different in many different ways. For example, the Gatecrasher is largely a momentum-based expert mech that can inflict a lot of impact damage by launching devastating charges. The Skorpion Kommando on the other hand is much more optimized for standing battles where it can outfight its opponents without giving them space to pull off any fancy maneuvers."

The Skorpion Kommando's inherently high defenses allowed it to brush aside a lot of weaker attacks while absorbing the ones that hit a bit harder.

The high-tier expert mech could easily crush ordinary opponents by bashing them with its shield and slicing them with its thick and hefty sword.

However, what truly allowed it to overcome other high-tier expert mechs was its killer feature!

Ves pointed towards the arcing and segmented tail that stretched out of the rear of the expert mech.

"The Skorpion Tail is extremely dangerous. Developed by Master Charise Denton, otherwise known as the Viper, this tail can strike in any direction with devastating speed and force. It is like an additional limb to the expert space knight, able to launch an attack when the Skorpion Kommando ordinarily should have been occupied already."

This threw a lot of less experienced opponents off-guard. There weren't many people that were accustomed to fighting against mechs that essentially wielded an extra melee weapon at the same time!

"The force and penetration capabilities of the Skorpion Tail are immense." Ves continued as he ordered the simulated expert mech to demonstrate just such

an attack! "As you can see, the stinger can punch through damn near anything, but especially excels at punching through solid armor."

"Can the Skorpion Tail pierce through Unending alloy?" Venerable Orfan asked.

"Yes." Ves plainly stated. "It is that powerful. It's not just the tech behind the Skorpion Tail that is powerful. When paired with the true resonance generated by a high-tier expert pilot, the Skorpion Tail received an immense boost in performance that no unprotected mech can block the damage. The point is that whatever you do, don't get locked in a melee duel against the Skorpion Kommando. None of your expert mechs are strong enough to stop its tail."

Venerable Vincent looked skeptical. "Even mine?"

"Your transphasic smart metal armor system won't help you, because if my guess is correct, the Skorpion Tail has likely integrated phasewater technology as well!"

That caused the Larkinson expert pilots to view the Skorpion Kommando with a lot more fear!

They already learned how well transphasic weapon systems were capable of penetrating armor.

When paired with a component that was expressly made for this purpose, none of the Larkinson expert mechs could shrug off a fatal blow!

Chapter 4224 The Viper

One of the lessons that Ves learned about human society was that people who obtained a widely acknowledged nickname were special.

There was an entire story around Master Charise Denton that led her to be called the Viper.

It was not necessary for Ves to explain the female Master's colorful history, though. He merely wanted to make it clear that her work was absolutely poisonous to his own expert pilots!

"In truth, the initial strike from the Skorpion Tail is just the first stage of an attack. What truly makes it deadly is that it can rapidly inject a concentrated stream of corrosive fluids that can quickly spread and eat through strong and tough metal alloys. If not for the fact that the Skorpion Tail itself is made out of a specific material that can resist the corrosive package, then it would have melted away entirely!"

In order to make the power of this characteristic 'venom' clear to everyone, Ves ran a quick simulated battle where the Skorpion Kommando poked its deadly tail through the torsos of various other expert mechs.

No matter whether it struck the Dark Zephyr, the C-Man or even the Shield of Samar, the Skorpion Tail never missed the mark and never got hindered by any solid obstacles!

A flash of sickly green light shone as the stinger rapidly injected a scary quantity of corrosive fluid in the opening.

Much of this dangerous liquid substance spread out in the interior of the targeted mech. A huge chunk of the internals of the victimized expert mech literally melted in a matter of seconds!

So many crucial internal components became inoperable at once that the damaged machines either locked up for a time or shut down right away!

Either way, the paralysis granted the Skorpion Kommando more than enough time to launch additional attacks that guaranteed its opponent's demise!

"This is an expert mech that is made to overpower other expert mechs." Ves emphasized. "The Viper specializes in Hyper Corrosive Substances, which means that she is very good at concocting new formulas that can melt

powerful mechs in many powerful ways. There are even rumors that she has taken to integrating phasewater in her latest formulas, but we aren't too sure about that. Even without the ridiculous boost provided by phasewater, the venom is already amply powerful enough to rot the insides of your expert mech no matter the situation!"

Ves admired Master Mech Designers once again. There were plenty of them that dedicated their lives to furthering new and unusual technologies in an attempt to give mechs new ways to defeat their opponents.

Equipping mechs with corrosive substances was not a popular method. The fluids were extremely dangerous to handle. Any accidents could easily inflict a lot of harm on friendlies!

The more effective corrosive fluids were also expensive to produce. It was a lot more economical to resort to conventional weapon systems to defeat opponents.

Ordinary mech designers would have never wasted their time on turning this attack method into a serious mech weapon system.

Only someone as daring and eccentric as Master Denton would have been able to persist for so long!

While she was actually one of the younger Masters of the Gauge Dynasty, she had succeeded in proving her vision and made her preferred attack method a bit more popular within the Sundered Phalanx.

Being able to co-design a high-tier expert mech like the Skorpion Kommando was a powerful validation of her work and progress!

As Ves continued to explain the other powerful parameters of this tailed expert space knight, the expressions of all of the Larkinson expert pilots did not look good.

Venerable Jannzi looked disturbed most of all. Unlike her noble Shield of Samar, the Skorpion Kommando was clearly a space knight that was not altruistic.

It was a selfish, egoistic expert mech that played to the aggressive tendencies of its expert pilot. The user of the Skorpion Kommando clearly did not pay a lot of respect towards the ideals of knighthood!

"I have a question, Ves. Can my Shield of Samar block the attacks from the Skorpion Kommando?"

"It can... for a time." Ves reluctantly answered. "There are many different variables at play, so I cannot give any solid answers. In my judgment, the Skorpion Kommando shouldn't be able to penetrate through the successive defensive layers of your expert mech so quickly. There are too many of them and each of them are strong. As long as you and your battle partners are fully prepared, you can probably withstand its attacks for a time. You should even be able to block a direct strike or two from the Skorpion Tail."

Venerable Jannzi lightened up after she heard this judgment. "That is great to know."

"I wouldn't celebrate just yet. The Skorpion Tail can strike multiple times. It can just chip away at your defenses until it finally breaches the interior of your Shield of Samar. While a heavy knight mech is able to take a lot more punishment than other machines, the injection of corrosive fluids will definitely weaken your machine by a significant margin, though it probably won't be able to finish the job entirely due to the high redundancy and compartmentalization factors."

There were just too many internal components and systems inside a big machine like the Shield of Samar. Its internal architecture was basically

armored from top to bottom in order to make it as resilient and long-lasting as possible.

The Skorpion Kommando truly had to put in a lot of effort to take down the Shield of Samar!

"I don't think the Skorpion Kommando will bother with your Shield of Samar, Jannzi." Venerable Joshua remarked. "It is mobile enough to outrun or circle around your expert mech. It can inflict a lot more damage if it stays away from an annoying defensive machine like yours. The only benefit to your presence is that you can deter the Skorpion Kommando from wasting its time on attacking a critical starship like the Spirit of Bentheim by parking your fat mech in the vicinity."

This was the most logical course of action that the expert pilot could make, but Venerable Jannzi developed a strange intensity in her eyes as she looked at the mockup of the Skorpion Kommando.

"I have a feeling that the Skorpion Kommando won't avoid me. This mech is designed to break the unbreakable and torment any heavily-armored mech. The enemy expert pilot will probably see my Shield of Samar as a challenge to be defeated. Taking out a key defensive mech such as mine will also make the rest of our fleet more vulnerable, so there is a good excuse to attack the Shield of Samar instead of another mech."

There was no way the Shield of Samar posed a threat to the Skorpion Kommando. The former was not only controlled by a younger and weaker expert pilot, but was also a lot more deficient in terms of offensive power.

Even if the Shield of Samar was backed up by an offensive mech such as the Amaranto, the Skorpion Kommando would still be able to handle the situation by virtue of its high defensive properties!

Venerable Stark did not know if her Amaranto was up to the task even after it had been upgraded recently.

"Ideally, we should take down the Skorpion Kommando from a distance before it can get close enough to threaten any of our expert mechs, but I'm not certain that this is doable."

Ves nodded in agreement. "It is built to withstand a lot of punishment during the time it takes to approach its target. It is similar to the Dark Zephyr in this way, but instead of relying on evasion, it relies on pure hard defenses to weather the storm. I am afraid that the only way to stop this expert mech from rampaging through our lines is to block it with an melee expert mech that is capable of keeping up with it at close range."

That put a lot of pressure on the gathered expert pilots. None of them felt confident that they were able to lock the Skorpion Kommando in place without getting torn apart!

"The last time we fought against a high-tier expert mech, Patriarch Reginald Cross and the Bolvos Rage successfully blocked Venerable Orthox De Massie and the Gatecrasher." Venerable Tusa stated. "This time, Reginald is not available for this job anymore. Someone else needs to step up..."

"We shouldn't be alone in this." Venerable Orfan complained. "Aren't we trying to help the Hexers out this time? Why don't they take care of this problem? They should definitely have a few high-tier expert pilots on hand."

Ves sighed. "They do, but it is difficult to assign them to this operation. We are still in talks with the Hexers in charge. They will probably send at least one or two high-tier expert pilots in order to make Operation Saturday Market viable, but don't forget that the Sundered Phalanx have multiple of them at their disposal as well. It is better to assume that we will have to fight at least one of these powerful machines. That way, we'll come in prepared."

A heavy atmosphere descended upon the Larkinson expert pilots. Fighting against a difficult opponent like the Skorpion Kommando was already bad enough. At least it had a relatively simple design concept.

The other enemy high-expert mechs were substantially trickier!

"Let me try to degrade the Skorpion Kommando's defenses if it is necessary."
Venerable Isobel Kotin spoke up.

"Are you sure, Isobel?" Commander Casella frowned. "Your fire attacks work well against ordinary enemies, but a high-tier expert pilot is easily capable of suppressing them through sheer force of will. You are much more effective in burning down weaker expert mechs."

"That's not entirely true anymore. I have learned a few new tricks as of late."
Isobel smiled as she threw a grateful look towards Ves. "My ability to deliver instant and explosive damage has improved a lot recently. I will test it out against the simulated version of Skorpion Kommando and see how well my detonated strikes can wear down its defenses."

The discussion continued. Ves proceeded to introduce more tricky expert mechs and also mentioned the key Master Mech Designers responsible for making them so good.

The Larkinson expert pilots all developed a deep and profound appreciation of the enemies that they would likely face.

None of the stronger champions were easy to deal with. Each of them were veterans of the Komodo War and had fought against their fair share of Hexer expert mechs throughout the years.

When Ves repeatedly mentioned the possibility that these mechs might have incorporated phasewater technology, then their threat against the Larkinson Clan's own champions was very real!

Ves gave his audience a bit of good news. "If there is one upside to the Gauge Dynasty's implementation of transphasic mech systems, it is that they are quite frugal and sparing in their usage of phasewater. They are nowhere near as exaggerated as the Abasis Armor of the Mars or the TESMAS of the C-Man. You have to understand that there are a lot of parties who want a lot of phasewater in the Gauge Dynasty. It is extremely costly to spend them on powering up a handful of expert mechs, so the transphasic mech systems developed for them are slimmed down to achieve maximum efficiency. They're not as wasteful but overpowering like the ones that we have utilized."

The Larkinson Clan was much smaller and simpler. It didn't have that many applications of phasewater to begin with, so Ves could easily allocate tens of kilograms of phasewater to upgrade the few crucial expert mechs that were crucial to the survival of the Larkinsons.

Ves did not look down on the enemy expert mechs, though. The Sundered Phalanx received a huge amount of support from many different sectors. Their components were more specialized, optimized and powerful in a few ways. Whatever shortcomings they had, they surely made it up in other areas.

The reputation of the Gauge Dynasty's military was not built on falsehoods.

Chapter 4225 New Scimitar System

"Grandma!"

"Granny!"

This was the first time Madame Constance Wodin met her grandchildren. Five little munchkins of varying sizes and personalities ran up to the woman that they had always known that she was family but never met in reality.

Though Gloriana's mother had hugged and talked to her growing number of grandkids plenty of times with the help of virtual reality and physical

projections, they were no substitute to being able to meet with loved ones in reality.

The warmth, love and physical affection of being able to touch and kiss one's blood relatives instantly warmed everyone's hearts.

Even the stiffest high-ranking Hexers couldn't help but melt into a puddle at this sight!

There was no shortage of high-ranking dignitaries present in this expansive hexagon-shaped palace courtyard.

After a long journey through space, the Golden Skull Alliance had finally reached its first pitstop.

The New Scimitar System was the first destination that Ves wanted to visit. This booming colony was not only the place where the Glory Seekers planned to pick up the Vengeance of the Hegemony, but also the site where Ves and the rest of his little family could meet with his in-laws!

Ves met a lot of familiar Hexers shortly after his escorted shuttle landed on the ground.

Amarintha Wodin, the first daughter of Constance Wodin, and Kellandra Wodin, the second daughter of Constance Wodin, both led the civil and military delegations of their dynasty.

Along with a large procession of Wodin Warrior mechs and soldiers in uniform, the reception that the Wodins had prepared for their honored guests and family was especially grand!

Of course, his kids did not notice this in the slightest. They just saw their grandmother along with two of their aunts and happily ran up to them to receive kisses and to babble about all kinds of nonsense.

Gloriana, who wore an elaborate blue dress for this occasion, smiled when she saw that her offspring were already enjoying their time on New Scimitar IV.

"Don't you see, my dear? Our kids will love it here. There is family everywhere and their grandmother will never treat them wrong. The New Scimitar System is completely safe. Why not reconsider your decision and leave a part of our fleet behind?"

Ves twitched his mouth. He already expected his wife to revisit this topic numerous times since the expeditionary fleet arrived in this star system.

There was no way he was going to leave Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine on a planet filled with Hexers!

It was already bad enough that he agreed to stop by here for three whole days.

Ves could not imagine how much all of his children would stray from their identities as scions of the Larkinson Clan if they got immersed in the culture of the Hexer people for at least an entire month!

He might not even be able to recognize his own kids anymore when he got back!

His heart grew firm as his protective tendencies towards his children drove him to stick to his chosen course. "We've already discussed this. I am not changing my decision."

"Why not?! Don't you see, Ves? This is paradise for us! The New Scimitar System is completely in the hands of our Wodin Dynasty. No enemies will possibly be able to do anything to our children. They are far safer here when they are under the watchful eyes of their grandmother and aunties than in the middle of a fleet that is just about to barge into the most important strongholds of the Gauge Dynasty!"

"I'm not changing my mind, Gloriana!"

A few minutes passed before the entire procession was ready to proceed to Crescent Palace, the seat of power of the Wodin Dynasty and the main residence of the most prominent Wodins.

Since Gloriana couldn't get her husband to agree with her suggestion, she took refuge in her brother who was leading his own two children along.

"Do you think it would be great if Wexel and Terina get to stay with their grandmother and aunties for a while?"

"I don't know, sister." Venerable Brutus said in a subdued tone. "Personally, I am not opposed to it, but it is best not to make a split decision. Besides, I do think it is more reassuring to be able to remain close enough to them. I can take action whenever someone threatens my son and daughter."

Legion Commander Sendra, who was walking beside him, nodded in agreement.

"I don't care what you feel, Brutus. I am not letting my kids behind in this Hexer paradise. I like it better if I can keep my distance from your old family. The only reason I agreed to bring our son and daughter down here is because they should meet their grandmother at least once in their lifetimes."

Wexel Larkinson and Terina Larkinson did not understand the disagreements between their parents. They just loved it here. Everyone around them was family and eagerly wished to entertain them. They also looked forward to getting introduced to their cousins!

Soon enough, the procession entered the Crescent Palace and entered a banquet where they could all enjoy the finest delicacies of Hexer cuisine.

Plenty of Larkinsons and Hexers tentatively mingled with each other. Though the differences in their cultures prevented them from growing too close to

each other, the friendship and mutual support between the two groups meant that they soon found ways to get along.

The Larkinson kids were already having a good time with their cousins. All of the kids around the same age had been seated at the same table, allowing the visiting ones to talk and befriend their local counterparts without too much interference.

Naturally, Aurelia already showed a trend of leading the conversation. Though she was still young, her natural talents along with Gloriana's education allowed the first daughter to develop a confident demeanor that already showed hints of promise.

As Ves began to partake in a hearty soup, he did not miss the intense looks that many Wodin women directed towards his eldest offspring.

It appeared that he underestimated the significance of Aurelia to his in-laws!

The way they gazed at her made it seem as if they were looking at a crown princess rather than just a relative!

Madame Constance's face couldn't help but bloom into a proud and satisfied smile.

"You have raised her well, my daughter." She spoke in her naturally-commanding tone of voice. "I had my concerns about how well you are able to instill the necessary qualities of leadership and domination to your heir. You are my lastborn daughter after all, and I have raised you in a different way. I am glad to see that you still hold true to your Hexer roots even though you are residing with the Larkinsons these days."

Gloriana preened with pride as she basked in the praise of her mother.

"I know my responsibilities, mother. You have taught me well and I have received plenty of advice and lessons. Don't worry. By the time Aurelia has

grown into a big girl, she will be fully capable of leading the Larkinson Clan no matter how much it has scaled up in the future."

Amarintha Wodin, Gloriana's oldest sister, looked fondly at Aurelia as well.

"Aurelia reminds me of myself when I was her age. I agree with our mother. You have done well, little sister. The Larkinson Clan will be in good hands once she has come of age and learned how to govern a state. You should send her to one of the universities that we have recently built. We have picked up some of the best professors during our evacuation from the Komodo Star Sector. Many talented professionals have taken refuge with us, as we are the dynasty that is closest to the Superior Mother and her son."

Gloriana continued to talk about Aurelia with Constance and Amarintha as if Ves was not sitting next to them. It was as if his opinion about Aurelia was completely irrelevant.

Though Ves strenuously objected to any of the suggestions that they were making, he felt it was undesirable to speak out at this time.

The banquet had proceeded pleasantly so far and he did not want to cause any friction in this family occasion.

Besides, talking did not equate to action. His children ultimately belonged to the Larkinson Clan, and he held a huge amount of sway over there. There was no chance that any of his children would follow a course of action that benefited the Wodins and the Hexers more than the Larkinsons!

Ves simply decided to endure it all and hope that he could leave this all behind once this three-day visit came to an end.

Not all of the discussions taking place in the banquet hall centered around nonsense.

While Ves found it pointless to talk about anything sensible with Constance and Amarintha Wodin, he found it much more pleasant to exchange with Colonel Kellandra Wodin.

In accordance with Hexer tradition, the second-born daughter of a prominent Hexer family almost always dedicated herself to martial or military pursuits.

Kellandra played the same role as Andraste. The former paid a lot of attention to the latter for that reason.

"Her tenth birthday is an important event." She spoke in a quiet voice. "I am not certain how much you have imparted to your second-born, but you should be careful to manage her expectations. When I reached this stage in my life, I managed to pursue the career in my dreams. I do not know how ashamed I would feel if I did not possess the right genetic aptitude. My mother already held high expectations towards me at that period. She believed it was my fate to become a mech pilot and mech officer, but I think it is mostly down to random chance and providence that my genetic aptitude was satisfactory."

Ves grimaced. "You're right. It is unreasonable for me to plan out Andraste's future life and career in advance when she is just a toddler at this moment. It's just that we had to make a choice when my wife and I decided to formulate our second designer baby."

"I envy you sometimes, Ves." Kellandra quietly admitted. "Your birth is much lower than mine, but your accomplishments far surpasses anything our entire dynasty achieved since its existence. Certainly we are larger and have more people, but none of us has ever reached the point where we can directly influence the rise and fall of the Hexer people. Though your crucial mech designs hasn't allowed us to save us from being driven out of the Komodo Star Sector, they have kept us strong and united through these trying times."

While Ves found it enjoyable to receive praise from other dignitaries, he wasn't stupid. He turned to Kellandra with a piercing glance.

"You don't need to pump me up. Just tell me what you want."

Colonel Kellandra Wodin helplessly smiled. "Well, since you ask, then let me be frank. We have committed a mech division of the Wodin Warriors to Operation Saturday Market. I do not wish to impose too much on you and your clan, but if possible, I would ask you to keep an eye on our soldiers and offer support if possible. Do not let them suffer too much torment from the Fridaymen. The more our soldiers return alive, the better and more secure our development."

"Hmm..." Ves paused for a moment. "That is not a light request, colonel. Our Larkinson mech pilots have an obligation to protect their clansmen most of all. If our clan is under great threat, they cannot spare any attention to any other considerations. Even if they are free enough to cover your Wodin Warriors, you are adding a significant burden on their shoulders. Can't you Hexers take care of yourselves? Your Wodin Warriors should have fought in the Komodo War."

"Not as much as you think. They are well-equipped but still relatively green compared to the core of the Hex Army. This is why I am hoping that you can pay extra attention to our troops."

Ves looked intrigued. "Well, perhaps we can come to an arrangement. The question is, can you pay the price?"

Family or not, he was not about to do anything for free. If the Wodin Dynasty wanted special treatment from his clan, then it must be ready to reciprocate the favor!

Chapter 4226 Emberan

The Golden Skull Alliance's brief stay in the New Scimitar System granted Ves and the other members of the expeditionary fleet time to handle both personal and official matters.

There were plenty of officials within the Larkinson Clan that could deal with all of the official matters. Goods were being transported and mechs were being delivered on a constant basis in orbit.

What was even more important was that the Golden Skull Alliance finally met with elements of the Hex Army.

The officers and soldiers could finally get together in order to discuss their strategies, flesh out their planning and become more familiar with each other's mech units.

While all of this was taking place, Ves and his family were free to enjoy the hospitality of the Wodin Dynasty in their own colony.

As far as colonies went, New Scimitar wasn't too bad. While it wasn't a port system, it held a good amount of resources, which gave the Wodin Dynasty a good chance to turn their colony into a formidable industrial powerhouse.

With the abundant amount of support from the six matriarchal dynasties, the Wodin Dynasty rapidly built settlements, space stations and defensive measures in order to deter the Fridaymen from launching raids on this star system.

As far as population centers went, the capital city that the Wodins called Emberan was well-developed and meticulously planned.

While it was not as large and industrious as Kotor City, it already hosted a respectable population of 2 million Hexers, many of whom belonged to the lineage of the Wodin Dynasty.

The proportion of Hexer refugees was higher at other settlements, but Emberan was clearly built to serve as a paradise for the Wodins.

As Ves, Gloriana and the rest of their direct family toured the city a day after they arrived, they all noticed how clean and structured it was. The streets were completely straight and geometric while the structures were all shaped in different forms of hexagons.

Statues of the Superior Mother and other notable Hexer icons infused the city with culture, and monuments dedicated to the fall of the Hexadric Hegemony reminded the colonists of their greatest shame.

Nonetheless, the mood among the locals was quite optimistic. The greatest scars of the Komodo War had already begun to fade and a lot of colonists had already begun to start the next chapters in their lives.

The Wodin Dynasty was doing quite well for itself. The local economy was based on a broad and balanced mix of trade, industry and agriculture.

The only major shortcoming of New Scimitar was that its R&D sector was relatively small and underdeveloped. The Wodins weren't able to attract as many researchers, developers and mech designers as the matriarchal dynasties.

Even so, the place wasn't that half-bad. Ever since Constance Wodin became the prime minister of the New Scimitar System, she pursued measured policies that may be a bit too heavy-handed on control and regulation, but ensured that everything developed in an orderly and predictable manner.

To Gloriana, it felt as if she had returned to her childhood home in the original Scimitar System.

"Don't you love it here, Ves? We aren't surrounded by cramped metal bulkheads and simulated skies. The air we breathe and the environment here

are much more authentic. Our children would definitely enjoy the best possible growth conditions on this planet."

"Give it up already. Our children are Larkinsons, honey. They deserve to grow up in the Larkinson Clan. Besides, this place is far too rigid and inflexible. Everyone's place in life is already fixed in place. There is hardly any upward mobility and whatever passes for 'men' around here still isn't treated as generously as I wish. I would never leave Marvaine to the clutches of your dynasty!"

To be honest, the Hexers had made a lot of progress compared to before.

The big flight from the Komodo Star Sector to the Magair Middle Zone had actually done the Hexers a lot of good. Losing the war allowed them to leave behind much of the negative baggage that weighed them down.

Factors such as the subtle influence of the Superior Mother, the deaths of many crazy diehards during the Komodo War along with suffering so much humiliation that the Hexers could no longer maintain their arrogant attitude all played a role in making the modern Hex Federation a lot more tolerable.

Ves had already noticed that the Hexers had become a lot more pragmatic, most likely by necessity. After all, they were no longer dominant in their own region of space. They needed to temper their actions and beliefs in order to avoid turning themselves into the public enemy of the entire Magair Middle Zone!

He could clearly see the effects of this newfound pragmatism and tolerance by looking at the 'men' on the streets.

Many of the male Hexers that Ves along the way were only up to 1.66 meters long, but about 20 percent of them were significantly taller!

This was remarkable progress since boys who were taller than the proscribed height used to be as rare as expert pilots in the past.

Though the Hexer boys still had a long way to go before they could regard themselves as men, at least they were making progress.

While Gloriana and the kids continued to spend a lot of hours with their Wodin relatives, Ves met with different Hexer dignitaries in order to discuss their upcoming joint operation as well as other forms of cooperation.

"The Wodins and the Hexers want to increase the degree of cooperation between us." Minister Shederin Purnesse told Ves during a break between meetings. "They have correctly figured out that you and most of our clansmen aren't too eager to maintain our relationship with the Hex Federation."

Ves nodded. "They're correct. We don't need them anymore. If not for the fact that my wife is a Wodin and all of the friendship and support I have received from the Hexers in the past, I wouldn't have bothered with these tedious meetings in the first place."

"The Hexers are being quite sincere towards us, Ves. They are offering numerous business deals related to giving our LMC greater preferential treatment within the Hex Federation to supplying our factories with raw materials. There are even further suggestions on the agenda such as sharing advanced research and granting us access to exclusive phasewater tech."

The Hexers may have lost their enormous state in the old galaxy, but they have managed to evacuate almost all of their top researchers, developers and mech designers!

The strength of their research and development sector was still comparable to that of a major second-rate state. This gave the Hex Federation a powerful advantage to the point that Ves felt tempted.

However, thinking of all of the business agreements he had made with other parties such as the Cross Clan, Melmen Advanced Systems, Morton Tech and so on, Ves already had sufficient access to most of the tech he needed.

There was no need for him to grant concessions to the Hexers in order to gain access to their new technological library.

He dismissively waved his hand. "We can make a few business deals with the Hexers in order to placate Gloriana and Wodin, but they have to align with our development strategy. If there is no strong benefit to us, then I would rather not sign any contracts."

Minister Shederin understood the patriarch's meaning. "The LMC and our other institutions have a great need for raw materials, so I will instruct our negotiating teams to be more open to concluding any related agreements. We shall be more critical towards other kinds of deals."

Ves smiled. He loved working with smart people.

From a strategic perspective, the entanglement between the Larkinson Clan and the Hex Federation did not increase that much if they forged trade deals that centered around the supply of raw materials.

As much as there was a persistent shortage of resources in the Red Ocean, it did not really matter where the Larkinson Clan obtained its metals and exotics from. The Hex Federation was far from the only place that could meet the resource needs of the Larkinsons!

This meant that if Ves ever decided to cut his ties with the Hex Federation, his clan and all of its branches would only suffer temporary supply disruptions. It might take months or years to find new suppliers to remedy the shortfalls, but that was a minor inconvenience to the clan.

Ves was much more interested in the discussions related to the upcoming military operation.

Perhaps the Wodins had already noticed that he got along better with Colonel Kellandra Wodin than anyone else among his in-laws, because he spoke with her during multiple important meetings.

"Operation Saturday Market centers almost entirely around the decisive battle that will presumably be fought at the Kosic Ring." The middle-aged woman spoke as both of them sat in comfortable chairs that gave them a magnificent view over the city of Emberan. "The numbers that we have committed to this assault is great, but our margin of error is thin. We can handle a number of unpleasant surprises, but if the deviations are too great, then I am afraid this hard-fought battle will lead to a pyrrhic victory at best."

Ves slowly nodded as he sipped his cup of tea. "These are my concerns as well. I have suffered from faulty and incomplete intelligence in the past. While we are definitely a lot better prepared than any operations that I have participated in the past, we are about to plunge deep into someone else's territory. That is never a pleasant experience."

"Of all of the Fridaymen militaries that our people have fought against in the past, the Sundered Phalanx has always caused us to suffer more casualties." Kellandra said. "The quality of their mech pilots might not be the best, but their military mechs are just better."

Ves looked intrigued.

As a veteran of the Komodo War who personally took part in at least several major campaigns, Colonel Kellandra Wodin understood the Fridaymen military forces quite well!

It would be a waste not to take advantage of her knowledge!

"Between the Gauge Dynasty's Sundered Phalanx and the Konsu Clan's Oni Guard, which one is better?"

"That depends on your definition of 'better'." Kellandra responded with a smile. "Personally, I believe the Oni Guard are strong enough to stand on equal terms with the Sundered Phalanx. They both have their strong points. The Gauge Dynasty is richer and is able to pour more funding and resources into

the development and production of better-performing mechs. The Konsu Clan is not as wealthy, but it holds its military mech pilots to considerably higher standards. The mech pilots of the Oni Guard have always been the best at fighting against our living mechs. Our Valkyrie mechs aren't even able to shake their minds anymore!"

This was a powerful achievement. This was a quality that Ves had only truly seen among MTA mech pilots. It was too difficult for other people to improve their mental resilience and discipline to the point where they could resist the suppressive auras generated by mechs such as the Valkyrie Redeemer and the Ferocious Piranha.

"Does that mean that the minds of the soldiers of the Sundered Phalanx are easier to shake?"

"No." Kellandra immediately shook her head. "They all possess the natural confidence of fighting in the service of the strongest coalition partner. Their arrogance is annoyingly persistent. Even in defeat, they still cling to the belief that the Gauge Dynasty is the greatest part of the Friday Coalition and that their brethren will take revenge on their behalf. You will see this for yourself once Operation Saturday Market begins."

"I see. I guess we won't see them surrender anytime soon."

"This battle will likely be especially bloody. The defenders of Pima Prime will not retreat. They cannot retreat. Once they allow our forces to land on the surface of Pima Prime V, the Gauge Dynasty's most important investments in the Red Ocean will become ruined. That will permanently set the Gaugers back by an enormous degree. No defender will be able to account for such a massive failure. Expect each of them to fight to the bitter end."

Ves grimaced. "Great."

Chapter 4227: Dreams of Rulership

Among all of the Larkinsons that stayed with the Wodins, no one received more attention and affection than Aurelia Wodin-Larkinson!

Of course, the hosts never showed any neglect towards Andraste and Marvaine Wodin-Larkinson, but it became clear that they mainly had Aurelia in their eyes.

It was kind of like how only the heirs of different monarchies got recorded in all of the history books while their younger siblings did not even merit a single sentence.

If the younger siblings did get mentioned for whatever reason, then either the crown fell upon them when the previous heirs got disqualified or because they got involved in coups.

Fortunately, none of the Larkinsons felt bothered by this. In Ves' opinion, the less attention the Wodins directed towards any of his children, the better.

The only reason why the Hexers spent time with them at all was because they knew that their powerful parents would do their best to raise them into great people.

Andraste Larkinson had the potential to become an exceedingly powerful mech pilot as long as she developed the right genetic aptitude.

Even if she didn't, she could still pursue a pure officer career and become a military leader comparable to General Verle in the future.

Meanwhile, everyone could figure out that Ves treated Marvaine as the heir to his mech design tradition.

The entire reason why the Hexers valued the Larkinson Clan so much to begin with was because of Ves!

Ves had already played an enormous role in changing Hexer society. The development of his Hexer mechs along with making the Superior Mother more tangible and approachable all turned him into their greatest benefactor!

If Marvaine, a son of a genuine Hexer, could continue Ves' good deeds, then that would definitely be great!

Still, important figures such as Constance Wodin and Amarintha Wodin mostly hovered around Aurelia. It was as if they saw the girl as the most important continuation of their dynasty!

At this moment, Aurelia sat on Constance's lap. She looked fascinated at the parade of Wodin Warriors that were showing off a part of their mechs and other troops.

"What do you think about our forces, my dear?"

"Our clan is stronger." Aurelia instantly answered.

"Oh? Why is that the case?"

"Our mechs are prettier and better than yours!"

"Hahaha, maybe you have a point." Constance chuckled in a good-natured manner. "Our dynasty is not able to spend as freely on mechs as your clan. Building a colony like New Scimitar is extremely expensive, do you know that? All of these structures, all of these streets and everything that is needed to keep everything running costs an unimaginable amount of money. In order to make our living environment as safe and pleasant as possible, we spent more on building up this colony than on strengthening our mech forces."

The little girl frowned. "Papa always said that becoming stronger is more important than becoming rich."

"Your father is not wrong, my little doll, but the burden he bears is smaller than mine. Our dynasty is responsible to many more people. They cannot live their entire lives on starships like your Larkinsons. Only planets can give them the room they need to live their lives to the fullest. It takes far too much capital to build up a complete industrialized planet and economy from nothing. Our progress has been nothing less than amazing. Once you grow older and take charge over planets yourself one day, you will understand that you cannot lavish your military with as much money as you wish. You will have to set a more comprehensive budget that ensures that the civil part of your society does not fall too far behind."

"Huh?" Aurelia looked confused. "Papa didn't say that I will take over a planet. Our clan doesn't have any colonies."

"Not yet, at least, but that may change at any time. People can change, and your father will eventually understand that he can only grow stronger and develop his clan further if he builds his own kingdom. There is no other choice. I expect that his demand for phasewater will rise explosively in the coming decades. At that point, he will have no choice but to acknowledge that there is no other way to obtain large quantities of phasewater at regular intervals than to take control over his own territory."

Even Aurelia learned the value of phasewater at her age. It was one of the reasons why the Larkinson Clan managed to leap ahead all of a sudden in the last 5 years.

"Phasewater..."

Constance Wodin smiled as she softly stroked Aurelia's head. "Yes, phasewater is the key to everything. Those who hold the greatest amount of phasewater holds the greatest amount of power. With great power, you can defeat every enemy that wants to do you harm and obtain whatever you need by force. We wouldn't have tolerated the Friday Colonies for so long if we possessed greater force. It is a pity that our Hex Federation doesn't have particularly abundant reserves of phasewater."

"Is that why you want to get closer to my clan, grandma?"

"Haha, what a clever little girl. Gloriana truly raised you well. That is right. We are family, so we should help each other. When your father and your mother were weak, we helped your clan survive and grow stronger. Once you have all grown stronger than us, I hope you remember everything we have done for you and do the same. My Wodins and your Larkinsons go hand to hand. As a child descended from both of our groups, it is up to you to lead us both into a glorious future."

"Wooo..." Aurelia said as her eyes grew wide.

"Does that sound fun to you? If you want, we can even persuade the other Hexers to turn you into the Empress of the Hex Federation. Nothing is impossible as long as you are brilliant enough. Just say the word, and we will lay the groundwork for your future coronation."

If any normal person heard that they could become the leader of an entire state, they would probably jump at the opportunity without any delay!

Aurelia was different, though.

"...I'm thirsty, grandma. I want to drink juice."

"...A bot is on the way to deliver your juice."

While Constance kept Aurelia company, Ves who sat further away continued to evaluate the parading mechs and soldiers of the Wodin Warriors.

He could sense that the main troops of the Wodin Dynasty were adequate. They were probably strong enough to put up a good fight against the regular Sundered Phalanx mechs, but it was doubtful that they could achieve more.

The Wodin Warriors did not lack for living mechs or experienced veteran mech pilots. Their organization was highly disciplined and well-run, and their mech officers all looked competent.

Yet as Ves continued to scan the Wodins that were about to fight a battle that the Hexers had not experienced since the end of the Komodo War, he felt that they were still short of a couple of elements that could have increased their chances of winning the upcoming engagement.

“What is wrong, Ves?” Colonel Kellandra Wodin asked. “Is there anything about our fine troops that displeases you? Give me your honest opinion. After everything I have lived through, I can take honest criticism.”

Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. “I’m reluctant to share my honest opinion with you. It is not my place to tell you how to organize your own troops.”

Kellandra was not satisfied with this response. “Don’t be too reserved. I have learned that withholding critical opinions can lead to untold mistakes and death on the battlefield. We cannot afford to ignore our vulnerabilities when we will soon collide against the Sundered Phalanx.”

“Hm, if that is the case, then I’ll say it. Why is the Hex Army is still reserving its strongest mechs to its female mech pilots while leaving all of the weaker machines to its male mech pilots?”

“That... has always been the case with us, Ves. We place our mech pilots into different specialized training programs from the moment they enter the mech academy. It is not so easy for the boys who graduate from an academy to pilot a more aggressive mech. They simply don’t have the skills to pilot machines such as the Valkyrie Redeemer to the fullest.”

Ves snorted. “That is a stupid policy in my opinion. You are wasting the talents and endowments of far too many mech pilots. I bet there are plenty of men who can make great use of swordsman mechs, but are forced to pilot auxiliary mechs solely due to their gender. The same applies to the women. They are all forced into piloting these powerful mechs that require great judgment without necessarily checking whether they are suited to their aggressive orientations. If I was in your shoes, I would rectify your mech academies as soon as possible and begin training your male and female mech pilots in a more objective manner.”

Kellandra visibly grew more uncomfortable. “I have seen proposals that move in this direction, but they are politically untenable.”

“Why? Don’t you understand the logic of my argument? I think the outcome of the Komodo War has taught your people that reality does not necessarily conform to your ideals.”

“I know that. Many of us are beginning to realize that we might not be entirely right about everything, especially now that we have traveled around and become more aware of how other states are running their own affairs. However, it is not so easy to change our ways. The more we conform to the galactic standard, the more we lose our original identities. Let us not speak about this further. This is a political issue more than anything, and that does not fall within my sphere of responsibility.”

“Very well. I think there is nothing wrong with adaptation.”

“Do you have any other feedback that we should hear?”

Ves took another look at the parading Wodin Warriors.

“You guys don’t have access to our MSTS and deep exchange technology, right?”

"That is correct." Kellandra replied. "I was planning to bring up this topic with you. You have shared these features with the living mechs of the Glory Seekers, but you have not extended it to the rest of our Hex Army."

"There are good reasons for that." Ves said without elaborating on them. "However, I can see the need to change my original policy on that. I will see what I can do to give every possible mech that is allocated to Operation Saturday Market access to some of our latest training methods. I can even extend these benefits to the rest of the Hex Federation, but I am a businessman. I am not in the habit of running a charity."

"We can discuss the details later, but I suspect that the matriarchal dynasties will be highly receptive towards your offer." Kellandra said with a smile. "We need strength more than anything else, and our first major operation against the Fridaymen since the end of the war has reminded us the importance of raising our combat power through whatever means possible."

In the past, it was unimaginable that the Hexers would beg a 'boy' like Ves for help.

Nowadays, the Hexers wouldn't bat an eye towards this action.

The Hexers had been losing their original identities for a while now. Their culture became more hollowed out by the year and they began to get along increasingly better with foreigners.

Perhaps the Hexers saw these changes in a negative light, but Ves was the opposite.

He celebrated these changes!

The more the Hexers dumped their most unlikeable traits, the more they became of use to him. He did not mind propping the Hex Federation up as long as he wasn't ashamed of associating with its people.

His eyes twinkled as he thought of how much influence he could exert over the Hex Federation these days.

He realized that as the Superior Mother and the mechs he designed for the Hex Army played an increasingly more essential role to its people, he could take advantage of his increasing leverage to extract more benefits out of this relationship!

In fact, if the current continued in the future, then there might come a time where he could actually take control over the colonial state and become its effective ruler!

The mere notion of gaining control to all of the manpower, wealth, resources and properties of an entire state sounded increasingly more attractive to his ears!

"Ah, what am I thinking? I'm just a mech designer. I should stick to what I'm good at. There is no reason for me to shackle myself to a traditional state."

He quickly discarded this ridiculous notion out of his mind and focused his thoughts on more immediate concerns.

Chapter 4228 Annual Usage Fee

After a three-day reprieve, the main fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance finally resumed its journey again.

In order to avoid alarming the Gauge Dynasty, the Wodin Warriors did not accompany the expeditionary fleet.

The Hexers already planned out their own movements. Every mech regiment and mech division assigned to Operation Saturday Market were scheduled to go on 'routine patrols' or fulfill other missions.

To be honest, the Fridaymen weren't stupid. When a lot of mech units from a lot of different parts of the Hex Federation departed in quick succession, the enemy would surely notice that something was wrong!

The mood in the fleet became more tense. In order to keep the offensive operation as secret as possible, the Golden Skull Alliance had to restrict people's access to the galactic net and curb many forms of communication.

While Ves and the other leaders did not doubt the loyalties of their own people, it was better to be safe than sorry. They were not traveling to Pima Prime in order to see the sights.

Many Larkinsons did not take the restrictions well at first. They had grown accustomed to living in an idyllic environment. The clan usually did not impose too many rules on its clansmen. As long as everyone applied a bit of common sense, then nothing would go wrong.

However, this time was different. No matter whether they were about to fight human or alien forces, information was a weapon that could easily save or doom thousands of lives!

The Black Cats took charge of this matter and implemented plenty of precautions in order to curb the outflow of information. It became increasingly more common to see clansmen in black uniforms throughout every ship.

While all of this was happening, the Larkinsons continued to prepare for the upcoming assault.

With the help of the MSTs, the mech pilots had all grown so familiar with Pima Prime and its defenses that they had grown sick of this place!

General Verle wanted to add more variation to the rotation of training scenarios.

"We can't allow our mech pilots to become so used to the current scenarios that they are unable to adapt to new scenarios that they have never practiced before. We need to shake everything up and increase their ability to react to unexpected surprises."

Ves therefore agreed to inject more chaos into the MSTS. He altered the parameters so that the Larkinsons bumped into situations that exercised their fault tolerance and crisis management.

For example, there were situations where 20 additional enemy expert mechs showed up out of the blue.

There were situations where reinforcements dispatched by the Konsu Clan or the other coalition partners arrived much earlier than expected.

There were situations where an overpowering nuser warfleet dropped out of warp travel and began to bombard both sides with crushing attacks.

Though the loss rate drastically shot up due to subjecting the mech pilots to so many difficult problems, they became more fired up as a result!

Many of them saw the added difficulties as challenges to be overcome!

As long as they adapted well to the changes and as long as they fought well enough, there was always a way to squeeze out a win or at least minimize the losses suffered by the Larkinson Clan.

Sometimes, the MSTS even threw the mech pilots into completely different battle scenarios.

Since there was a possibility that the Gauge Dynasty might learn about Operation Saturday Market in advance and increase the defenses of the Pima

Prime System ahead of time, the Hex Federation might opt to change course to the Rotes Cewna System or the New Rammes System instead!

What was even more remarkable was that the Larkinsons even started to train with their counterparts in the Hex Army in the last few weeks before the start of the operation!

Usually, there were massive security concerns about holding joint simulation sessions across different star systems. The galactic net was one of the least secure communication networks in human space and nobody had any confidence that the confidential training sessions would escape the attention of the Fridaymen.

However, the MSTS was different. Since it was based on a completely different tech base, most hackers and virtual security specialists didn't even know how to gain access in the first place!

All of their fancy hacking tools and algorithms seemed to disappear into the void whenever they tried to access it from an LMC mech like the War Squire.

The Golden Skull Alliance and the Hex Army put so much faith in the security of the MSTS that Ves even received requests to expand its scope.

General Verle came with a clear demand. "We have found that the MSTS is not only a secure place to hold joint training sessions, but can also be used to conduct confidential meetings between us and the Hexers. It would be even better if we can upload information into a common database that can be accessed by both of our groups. If you can do this, we can plan out our actions to a considerably greater degree than before."

Ves thought this was a good suggestion. He never saw the need for all of these additional features before, but now that the Larkinsons had to coordinate a complex assault operation with the Hexers, it became a lot more important to communicate securely with external allies!

"I will see what I can do, general. It shouldn't be too difficult or time-consuming to program all of these additional amenities."

"Thank you, sir. It is up to you to decide how much access you want to give to the Hex Army, but so far the MSTS has most definitely proven to be a game changer for all of us. The training opportunities it provides are so effective that I would even choose it over any powerful living mech model that you can provide to our troops."

"Really?" Ves raised his eyebrow. "The mechs that I have designed for the Larkinson Army have grown increasingly more impactful over time. For example, there's the new Nullifier model that have given the Battle Criers a lot more teeth against powerful opponents."

"I won't argue with you on that, sir. The Nullifier is strong without a doubt and adds a lot more capabilities to our Larkinson Army. However, mech models like these only directly strengthens one of our mech legions and only a part of our mech pilots at a time. The MSTS is a lot more universal than that. No matter the living mechs we use, our boys and girls can always look forward to mastering their use and actively develop better relationships with them in simulations with unsurpassed realism. I think our clan could easily become one of the richest and most successful organizations in one fell swoop if you released it to the public without any restrictions."

"That is out of the question." Ves shook his head. "A former military officer and intelligence operative such as you should know better. While it is true that we can indeed get rich quickly, the problem is that we will make way too many enemies when our foundations are still too weak to fend them all off. Relying on the MTA and other benefactors to protect us against our opposition is no real solution at all. The mechers might value me and my work, but they have no qualms about abandoning assets once there is no profit to them anymore."

He was under no illusions about his increasingly more cozy relationship with the friendly factions of the MTA.

Both sides were merely making use of each other. Transactional relationships tended to be more honest than normal, but they could also be cut at any point if they became inconvenient.

His cooperation with the MTA hadn't progressed to the point where he felt confident enough to unscrupulously spread his MSTs to the general public. It was already a considerable risk for him to grant access to the Hex Army.

At least he managed to gain extra concessions out of the Hex Federation in exchange for gaining access to his exclusive simulation training system. In addition to securing an additional channel of raw resources for the LMC, Ves managed to extract an even more important concession from the Hexers.

According to the confidential agreement that Ves had signed with the colonial state, the Hex Army obtained unrestricted use of the MSTs as long as the Hex Federation supplied the Larkinson Clan with 5 kilograms of phasewater a year!

In other words, the Hexers accepted an expensive subscription from the Larkinson Clan!

This was definitely one of the most significant business deals that Ves and the Larkinsons had made in years!

While a colonial state as large as the Hex Federation definitely had access to a lot more phasewater than this relatively modest amount, the Hexers had way too many uses for it. There were a lot of Hexer dynasties that sought to equip their most important mechs and starships with superdrives, minidrives and other transphasic systems.

Even if Ves was the son of the Superior Mother and even if the Larkinson Clan was about to help the Hexers defeat the Friday Coalition, the Hexer matriarchs still had to prioritize their own interest.

In the end, both parties agreed to set an annual fee of 5 kilograms of phasewater. It was low enough for the Hexers to be able to retain most of their phasewater projects while still being high enough to ease the concerns of the Larkinsons.

"Giving away 5 kilograms of phasewater on an annual basis is a significant burden to a colonial state such as Hex Federation." Minister Shederin Purnesse explained to Ves at the time. "There are not that much phasewater deposits in the Magair Middle Zone or any middle zone for that matter. If prospectors have managed to track one down, the chances are great that they are nonrenewable. Once they are depleted, there will be no way to obtain more phasewater from those places."

Ves frowned. "Does that mean that Magair will run completely dry in a century?"

"That is unlikely. There are still many undiscovered deposits of phasewater in many star systems. The difficulty lies in finding them as there are not too many hard rules that determine where they can form. In addition to that, there are also rare phasewater deposits that are actually renewable, though the output is dreadfully low."

Ves nodded in understanding. As someone who invested a decent amount of hours into studying phasewater and phasewater technology, it was important for him to know where it showed up and how it could be produced.

Up until now, humanity did not master any technology related to producing phasewater.

That didn't mean that aliens were just as incapable. Certain past and present indigenous alien races had cracked the secret of phasewater and learned how to produce it in many different ways.

Species such as the phase whales occasionally used their vast understanding to generate artificial phasewater wellsprings in various star systems.

Most of the methods behind these wellsprings were modeled after natural phenomena.

One of the main distinctions between upper zones and middle zones was that the former was much more rich in resources!

To be more precise, natural phasewater wellsprings were much more abundant in the upper zones!

The bulk of phasewater harvesting took place in the parts of the new frontier that fell under the control of pioneers hailing from many different first-rate states.

The Terrans, Rubarthans and other first-raters fiercely competed against each other in order to secure these seemingly endless wells of phasewater!

Regardless, the long-term importance of controlling territory became a lot clearer after Ves learned about the existence of phasewater wellsprings.

The larger the colonial state, the greater the income of phasewater!

Since the Larkinsons did not colonize any planets, there was no way for them to gain possession of phasewater wellsprings.

This was one of the greatest shortcomings of the Larkinson Clan.

However, as a businessman, Ves wasn't bothered by this fact.

"If I can't own a phasewater wellspring, I can still obtain a portion of its output by trading away a benefit of equal value."

The most recent trade deal that the Larkinson Clan had made with the Hex Federation opened his eyes to the possibilities that he had never thought about before.

What if he forged similar deals with other colonial states?

"Maybe I should look into this possibility in the future."

Chapter 4229 Endex System

As the main fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance silently fell out of the public eye, the distance to the Pima Prime System became increasingly smaller.

The offensive operation that had always seemed far away to the Larkinsons became a lot more acute as the days counted down!

The mech pilots trained with considerably greater urgency than before, especially when the fleet was about to enter the territories claimed by the Friday Colonies.

Not just the Larkinson Clan, but also every other party that signed up for Operation Saturday Market became a lot more serious about the upcoming action.

Once the different attack fleets crossed into enemy space, the chance of encountering hostile Fridaymen forces became a lot greater.

Perhaps the intruding forces might very well end up fighting a battle before they could even reach the Pima Prime System!

Fortunately, one of the advantages to attacking a port system like Pima Prime was that the attackers did not have to travel so much through the territories of the Friday Colonies to reach their destination.

They only needed to get moderately close enough before they could leap across many more light-years than normal in order to arrive at the doorstep of the Gauge Dynasty's more important colony!

At this stage, speed and security mattered more than secrecy. The different Hexer fleets that previously split up and followed all kinds of obscure routes rapidly converged with each other in order to form a large and unstoppable hammer that was clearly aiming to smash one of the key star systems of the Friday Colonies!

Many important leaders paid close attention to the reactions of the Fridaymen.

So far, the actions that the Fridaymen had made in response to all of the weird and alarming movements did not fall outside of expectation.

The different coalition partners retracted most of their patrols and raised the alert level of all of their colonies.

The most reassuring sign that everything was still going according to plan was that none of the coalition partners lent their forces to their rivals.

None of them wanted to be the unlucky victim that the Hexers chose to beat up with their increasingly more massive fleet!

Lending forces to their rivals was pure foolishness to the coalition partners. If close friends such as the Carnegie Group and the Vermeer Group did not even agree to cover each other's backs, then the chances were nil that they would offer their aid to the Gauge Dynasty!

"Division is the greatest weakness of the Friday Coalition." Calabast contemptuously sneered. "If the Friday Colonies was managed by a single central state authority, then our opponents would have been a lot more proactive about tracking us and forcing us into a confrontation by a united fleet. We would have never been able to pass through hostile space so easily."

"I guess what they say about the Friday Coalition splitting apart is becoming increasingly more true." Ves smiled.

"Maybe so, but I doubt that the state will disintegrate entirely. They need each other too much at the moment. None of the coalition partners including the Gaugers and the Konsus benefit from seeing their united front fall apart into a handful of smaller and more vulnerable polities. They have to worry about a lot more external pressure than Hexer aggression if that happens."

"Do you think we are on track of being able to take the Gauge Dynasty by surprise?"

Calabast confidently nodded. "The signs are optimistic so far. Pima Prime should still be the most unlikely target as there are so many easier targets in our reach. It's not rational for us to risk an attack on the crown jewel of the Gauge Dynasty. The Hexers haven't even dispatched any of their own ace pilots for this operation. They have even exposed the current whereabouts of their ace pilots through various means in order to lull our opponents in a false sense of security."

"That is good to hear."

"You don't sound convinced, Ves."

He did not hide his unease from his strategic partner. "I am not used to everything going so well. The Fridaymen are not sloppy pirates or crazy cultists. Their upper layers are comprised of competent and rational individuals. Their decision-making during the Komodo War was excellent. Good leadership was one of the most important reasons why they vanquished the Hexers in the end. To see them behave so passively is... suspicious. I am always waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"It is good that you maintain a cautious attitude. Overconfidence helps no one. That said, our Black Cats have done everything they can to monitor the movements of different Fridayman mech units. So far, none of them have shown any signs of departing from their garrisons. The time frame to reinforce

Pima Prime and the other core colonies of the Gauge Dynasty is closing within days. After that, it doesn't matter anymore if our actual intentions have become exposed."

Fear of accidents caused the Larkinsons to become a lot more cautious as of late. The clan had suffered plenty of bad experiences in the past, so the clansmen were determined not to get caught off-guard this time!

However, not everyone in the expeditionary fleet maintained the same attitude.

While the Crossers remained professional, the mood among them was a lot more combative!

Under the leadership of a powerful ace pilot, the Crossers did not fear their opposition as much.

Each of them had faith that their Saint along with the amazing ace mech that was named after as wargod would vanquish any foe!

While this sentiment caused the Crossers to become even more eager for the upcoming battle, Ves thought it was dangerous to assume the fight was already won before it started.

There were no guarantees that Patriarch Reginald could actually defeat or stall the strongest individual mech stationed in Pima Prime!

Since the outcome of the entire offensive operation largely depended on how well the Cross Patriarch could do his job, Ves found it important to hold at least one serious discussion with the Crossers about this topic.

One day, he boarded a shuttle that took him to the Hemmington Cross.

Just like the capital ships of the Larkinson Clan, the flagship of the Cross Clan had received a major overhaul that improved all of her major systems.

She looked considerably thicker and more massive than before. The Crossers had invested much to clad the large fleet carrier with a thick layer of exterior armor plating.

When combined with a massive upgrade to her sub-light propulsion system, the Hemmington Cross was able to withstand much more punishment while still being able to accelerate forward as much as before!

"The Hemmington Cross will definitely need all of this reinforcement." Ves guessed.

She was too big of a target. Not only that, but her symbolic value was great as well.

As the ship that carried the name of Reginald's impressive father, the Hemmington Cross served as the eagle standard of the entire clan!

Once his shuttle touched down in the hangar bay of the upgraded fleet carrier, Ves and his small escort followed a familiar route to one of the confidential meeting chambers of the vessel.

Though the Cross Patriarch had not arrived as of yet, the second-most important member of the Cross Clan greeted Ves with a friendly gesture.

"You have come."

"Hello, Master."

Master Benedict Cortez smirked. "You don't need to call me by my title, Ves."

"I am calling you this as a mark of respect." Ves replied as he took his seat at a table. "After all, I am still a Journeyman. I still have a long way to go before I can realize my design philosophy like you. The more I become exposed to high-level mech design, the more I understand how impressive it is for people like you to have made this massive leap."

Just the spiritual strength that Master Benedict had gained from his recent ascension was enough to make Ves sigh in admiration!

Both the quality and the quantity of Benedict's spirituality had increased by several orders of magnitude!

The difference between a Senior and a Master was so great that the latter could probably interfere more directly with reality!

Of course, their ability to do so was not nearly as strong as that of high-ranking mech pilots. Their influence and reach was much wider, though. It might even be universal, though Ves had no proof of this assertion.

Despite Benedict's dramatic increase in power and capabilities, the former Skull Architect still did not put on any airs in front of Ves.

"I wouldn't have been able to grasp my opportunity to realize my design philosophy without getting exposed to your work. As far as I am concerned, you are at least 50 percent responsible for helping me find the right way. Also, don't forget that your mech business is much more successful than mine. Our sales volume cannot even come close to yours."

"That's because my expertise and that of my colleagues in our Design Department are a lot more practical for mass production and mass adoption than yours." Ves pointed out. "Your strongest innovations are your Magma Vein System and your Energy Bridge System, but both of them are so high-end that there is no way you can implement them onto standard mechs."

The Magma Vein System largely relied on expensive materials and high-quality components to raise the energy management system of a mech to a dazzling height.

The energy bridge which Master Benedict referred to as the Endex System these days was even more demanding. The easiest way to implement one

was to make one out of the skull of an expert pilot or the biological remains of another powerful extraordinary organism.

This was a highly impractical demand!

Fortunately, the main reason why Benedict was able to advance to Master Mech Designer was that he had worked long and hard to develop substitute materials and components that could achieve the same effect.

While Master Benedict succeeded in creating a version of the energy bridge that was made completely out of inorganic materials, the cost of all of the exotics and the complexity of production made it far too difficult to mass produce the initial version of his Endex System.

The newly-ascended Master probably had to devote decades of research in order to optimize and increase the affordability of this powerful innovation.

"I don't have the time to spare on increasing the affordability of the Magma Vein System and the Endex System." Master Benedict dismissively said. "Only the better mech pilots can make the most out of its benefits. Giving weaker mech pilots access to these systems is a losing proposition. It is much more efficient to design tougher mechs and arm them with stronger weapons with the same amount of money."

"I suppose you have a point. This is a much more foolproof approach." Ves nodded. "What will you be working on instead?"

"I have accumulated a large amount of ambitious ideas and concepts over the decades. I did not have the strength to explore them in the past, but my circumstances have changed. I cannot say what I will be working on next, but I will probably be able to introduce new technologies that are just as impactful as my previous two innovations in the following five to ten years. This is a brand-new era for me. When you reach this level, you will find that you can make a lot more of your dreams come true. The only major difficulty is

deciding which projects to work on. Just because you can accomplish more doesn't mean it is worthwhile to pursue them. It is not unusual for Masters to spend a century on a single research project."

"I see."

Ves already knew of at least one Master Mech Designer that committed so much to a massive research project. While the rest of human space moved on, Master Moira Willix still remained stuck in the Komodo Star Sector.

Chapter 4230 Saint Jeremiah Gauge

Ves and Master Benedict continued to talk about general mech design-related matters until Patriarch Reginald Cross finally attended the meeting.

Both mech designers could clearly sense his approach from a distance. It was hard not to notice the blazing will that radiated from the ace pilot!

Even outside of the cockpit, an ace pilot's domain field was not so easy to ignore. The powerful dominance that Reginald exuded could easily make average people obey his decrees.

It was a power that could easily be abused. Ves already knew of plenty of instances where he had used his new 'talents' to good effect in various negotiations.

These days, potential business partners knew better than to meet the Cross Patriarch in person!

"Ves." Reginald nodded with genuine respect towards his guest. "Welcome to the Hemmington Cross again. Are you ready for the fight?"

"Always." Ves grinned. "My clan is fully prepared to meet the enemy in combat. We have trained extensively against many different configurations of defensive forces. Our mech legions are strong and versatile enough to deal with any mech divisions and expert mechs that the Gauge Dynasty can whip

up in Pima Prime. However, it is not necessarily us that will decide the outcome of the upcoming battle..."

Master Benedict nodded in agreement. "My younger colleague has a point. Over 200,000 mech pilots and even more civilians are relying on you to block the sharpest blade of the Gauge Dynasty."

A combative atmosphere spread from Reginald's body! Just the mention of a duel against a genuine ace pilot was enough to fire up his engines!

Ves winced as he had to put more effort into blocking out the unwanted influence. "Calm down, please. We are still a week or so away from Pima Prime. Please save your energy for the real battle."

"Ah. My apologies. I tend to do that a lot." Reginald said as he put a lot of effort into suppressing his powerful will.

There was no way that Reginald could completely suppress his extraordinary qualities. That was the same as denying himself. The best he could do was to tone it down to the point where he was accumulating for an even greater outburst in the future.

Once he settled down on a seat that was tactfully positioned further away from the mech designers, the meeting finally commenced.

Master Benedict spoke up first.

"Each of us knows what we are here for. There is only one topic on the agenda. How can we best defeat the enemy ace pilot?"

"You mean how I can defeat the enemy ace pilot." Reginald spoke.

"We can't just rely on pure brawn to squeeze out a victory on the battlefield." Ves retorted. "If we can analyze the information we have gathered about the enemy ace pilot and ace mech and formulate our strategies and tactics in advance, then we stand a much better chance of making it out of the Pima

Prime System alive. Tell me what you prefer. Do you want to have a 40 percent chance of winning your upcoming duel or would you rather have a 60 percent chance of winning instead?"

Patriarch Reginald frowned. "I don't like the odds that you have chosen. Where did you pull those numbers from? Have so little faith in me and my Mars? You should add at least 40 percent on top of those figures!"

Master Benedict coughed. "Let him speak, Reginald. What we have recently managed to uncover about your future target is well worth hearing out. You can speak your mind after you have heard the latest update."

"Thank you, Benedict. Now if I may continue, let me share what we know. The initial intelligence leaks shared a lot of information about the more common defenses of the core colonies of the Gauge Dynasties. Unfortunately, they did not mention a lot of details about the expert mechs that were stationed over there, and spoke even less about the ace pilot and ace mech. The Gaugers are extremely clear that keeping details about their ultimate trump card as confidential as possible can make a real difference in a conflict. It has been extremely difficult for our spies and the spies of the Hex Federation to gather critical intelligence while at the same time keeping our enemies in the dark."

"Did you get anything worthwhile?" Patriarch Reginald impatiently asked.

Ves smiled again. "Luckily, we did. These additional details came a bit late, but they should be enough to give us a more clear idea what you are about to face. Let us begin with what we know of the ace pilot."

He waved his hand, causing the central projection to light up. The appearance of a powerful and impeccable middle-aged man appeared in view!

At first glance, the man exuded a similar vibe to Patriarch Reginald. His orange-and-black uniform did not do much to his lean muscular form. A sense

of superiority strongly emanated from the powerful individual even though this was just a static image!

"We already knew that the Gauge Dynasty had stationed Saint Jeremiah Gauge in Pima Prime." Ves explained. "That is no secret. Publicizing the presence of an ace pilot has done much to make Pima Prime feel a lot safer to its residents and visitors. We also know that he has undergone his second apotheosis fairly recently. He was one of the few lucky high-tier expert pilots that broke through during the later stages of the Komodo War. After that, he disappeared from the frontlines and never showed up in public again."

"It can take a long time to design a proper ace mech for a new ace pilot. The Gauge Dynasty would never risk the life of an ace pilot by prematurely deploying him on the battlefield. Any other ace pilot that has a lot more years until his belt could easily cut off the wings of this freshly-matured chicken. I imagine his last name also has a lot to do with this matter." Master Benedict remarked.

Much like the Hexer dynasties, the Gauge Dynasty was mostly comprised of people who didn't have any family relations with the dominant family lines. However, those that did often possessed a lot more opportunities in their lives!

For example, Jeremiah Gauge was a designer baby who had already been bred for piloting mechs. By investing in expensive augmentations and excellent training, the privileged mech pilot fully proved his talent in the following century.

Even during times of peace, the Sundered Phalanx still had plenty to do. Occasional border scuffles against the Hex Army along with regular foreign assignments to conflict-ridden places provided enough battle opportunities for Jeremiah Gauge to temper himself in battle.

It was only after he had become a high-tier expert pilot that his growth had stalled.

Just like many talented mech pilots, his progress halted before the difficult bottleneck that barred his way to advancing further.

However, the Komodo War proved to be a blessing in disguise. While many mech pilots met their end on the battlefield, Jeremiah Gauge successfully advanced and fully proved vindicated all of the resources that the Gauge Dynasty invested in his development!

"While we don't know too much about what he is capable of as an ace pilot, we can still extrapolate his abilities by looking at how he has fought when he was still an expert pilot." Ves said as he instructed the central projector to display images of the enemy Saint's past expert mechs. "Jeremiah Gauge is a pure melee mech pilot, and he has always piloted different expert swordsman mechs. What is special about his fighting style is that he has always pursued excellence in skills. He emphasizes skill over power or technology. His expert mechs are always simple in function but extremely solid in performance."

"I can respect that a lot." Patriarch Reginald said in an appreciative tone. "This warrior was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He could have requested much fancier expert mechs that are loaded with much more weapons and other gizmos from his dynasty. Instead, he has stuck to mechs with more austere loadouts. There is only the sword and the body. Nothing else. A pilot has to possess a lot of faith and confidence in himself. Persistence is also crucial."

"What is also important to note is that he is not unfamiliar with traditional swordsmanship." Ves continued. "When he was in his twenties, he decided to go on an exchange and reside in the Heavensword Association for five or so years. He trained in different sword schools over the years before returning home to the Friday Coalition. While he has never exhibited any extraordinary

sword styles throughout his career, Ketis has told me that his basic fundamentals in swordsmanship are extremely solid and that he has already developed his own exquisite sword style that is almost entirely centered around dueling strong opponents."

As an expert pilot, Jeremiah Gauge never showed a penchant for mass destruction or crushing his opponents at range.

It looked as if he had inherited the competitive spirit of the Heavensworders during his foreign exchange and became passionate about dueling other opponents.

One of the lessons that the Hex Army learned during the war was that Venerable Jeremiah Gauge often sought out powerful opponents and tried to win by virtue of superior swordsmanship rather than overpowering them by force!

It was a testament of his skill that he managed to defeat so many powerful Hexer expert mechs!

If Venerable Jeremiah Gauge was already that strong during this period in his life, how much stronger would he be now that he has become a Saint?

Ves waved his hand, causing the central projection to show a rather spotty image.

Patriarch Reginald immediately sat up straighter in his seat. He stared intensely at a spotty, grainy image of what appeared to be a powerful swordsman mech!

"Is this...?!"

"Yes. An intelligence operative managed to make a long-ranged image capture of Saint Jeremiah Gauge's ace mech not too long ago. I won't tell you how much effort it took to get into position to make this observation and

transmit it securely to us, but there is a 95 percent chance that what we see is the real deal."

None of the people in the room could remain calm and composed when they saw this ace mech.

The lack of fidelity and resolution of the image could not take away from its inherent majesty!

The ace swordsman mech was predominantly coated in orange and black. It still maintained a rather simple humanoid shape, but the difference from the expert mechs that Jeremiah Gauge piloted before was that it actually carried three swords, with more bladed weapons mounted on different parts of its body!

"This is the Neo Amadeus." Ves introduced. "As you can see, it is still a swordsman mech, but presumably it can do much more than swing a sword these days. I am not sure about the reasons why it carries so many weapons all of a sudden, but the Neo Amadeus is not too encumbered by the additional weight and bulk."

There was a streamlined look to the ace mech. Its lines were elegant and conformed closely to the ideal human physique in relation to swordsmanship.

"Based on this single capture, we have managed to identify the classification of at least two of its main swords. The one you see in its hands is a transphasic sword. Another one appears to be a plasma sword. We haven't been able to determine the nature of the third one yet, but it is probably a high-tech contraption that grants the Neo Amadeus a different means of dealing damage."

"What about the daggers?" Patriarch Reginald asked.

"We haven't been able to figure anything out about them other than that they exist." Ves replied. "By my guess, they should all be transphasic, or else it

wouldn't be worthwhile to add them to this mech. What is clear is that the design of this ace mech clearly reflects a radical change in Saint Jeremiah Gauge's fighting style. We cannot completely take his prior performance when he was an expert pilot as a model for his current approach to battle. That is what we must figure out during this meeting."