

Mech 4231

Chapter 4231 The Multi-Armed Designer

As a mech designer, Ves acquired a fascination for adapting mechs to the unique characteristics and preferences of mech pilots.

Spending lots of time with Gloriana and learning a couple of tricks of her trade deepened his appreciation for custom mechs.

High-ranking mechs were all personalized by definition. The configuration of all of their customized aspects resulted in a unique machine that was extremely unlikely to exist in any other place or time.

What further differentiated them was that their mech designers exerted a large influence on the design style and the traits of the mechs in question.

Every expert mech and every ace mech existed as a unique marker in the long history of the mech industry.

As Ves, Patriarch Reginald and Master Benedict continued to stare at the spotty image of the Neo Amadeus, they began to make all kinds of associations based on their backgrounds.

Master Benedict frowned in frustration. "This capture is taken at extreme range. While I can understand why it is difficult to get within this range of the most sensitive combat asset in the Pima System, I would have appreciated it if the spy could get 20 percent closer or brought a larger sensor. I could probably discern at least twice as many details if that was the case."

"It is already a miracle that the spy could grasp this window of opportunity." Ves said. "Getting any closer will likely trigger the ace pilot's vigilance. There will be no second attempts."

"A shame."

Obtaining a fuzzy image was better than nothing. The Gauge Dynasty had done a good job at hiding their latest trump card.

"I think it might be best if we start from figuring out the mech designers who participated in the ace mech's development." Ves spoke. "Who designed the Neo Amadeus?"

Master Benedict smirked. "I can answer that. I'm quite familiar with the design styles and design philosophies of the Masters of the Friday Coalition. I can identify the distinctive characteristics of at least three Masters. For a machine of this caliber, at least two more Masters are also involved, but I believe their work is applied to the internals of the Neo Amadeus."

The new Master Mech Designer paused for a moment as he carefully evaluated the design of the ace mech.

"There are plenty of Masters in the Friday Coalition, but the amount in the Gauge Dynasty is not as big. Of this group, only a small proportion have the seniority, experience and competences to lead the design of an ace mech. As such, I am fairly confident about the identity of the lead designer of the Neo Amadeus."

"Who is it, Benedict?"

"Master Ishi Veldam, otherwise known as the Multi-Armed Designer."

Ves recalled the information he read about the Gauge Dynasty's eminent mech designers.

"Master Ishi Veldam was more than 280 years old and had become one of the most senior surviving mech designers of the Friday Coalition." Benedict said with obvious familiarity and respect in his tone. "Her prestige was great and she had designed so many different mechs that she has made a considerable mark in the Sundered Phalanx. She has always specialized in designing offensive melee mechs, most particularly ones that wield multiple weapons at the same time."

Benedict waved his hand, causing the central projector to display a sample of the Multi-Armed Designer's work.

Patriarch Reginald quickly became intrigued as the commercial and military mechs on display all wielded at least two weapons in the same hand.

Most of them wielded swords but there were also ones that carried a combination of axes, maces, picks and spears.

One of Ves' personal favorites was an expert mech that wielded a pair of morningstars.

The skill and control required to pilot such a mech was stupendously high!

In fact, this was one of the common themes of the Multi-Armed Designer's work. Her mech designs all demanded greater skill and mastery over weapons in order to make the most out of their expanded options.

As far as dual-wielding mechs went, the ones designed by Master Veldam are certainly the best and most advanced that Ves had ever seen!

"Dual-wielding mechs is not what Master Veldam is famed for." Benedict told the other two. "The actual reason why she gained her extra moniker is her successful research and implementation of quadruple-armed and sextuple-armed humanoid mechs."

The projected slideshow changed to display all manner of larger and odder mechs.

What immediately stood out was that the humanoid mechs all featured four arms or six arms!

More limbs meant that the mech was able to wield more weapons at once!

When these powerful monsters could unleash their full potential, they could easily overwhelm multiple conventional melee mechs at once!

Of course, the downsides were also obvious. The frames of the multi-limbed mechs needed to be considerably larger and more massive in order to support so many additional arms.

The extra arms themselves also couldn't be too strong because there simply wasn't enough capacity to channel as much strength to so many simultaneous limbs.

Each pair of limbs added a massive load on the mech, which meant that the mech parts needed to be tougher and made out of higher-quality materials in order to prevent the machine from wearing out prematurely. All of this significantly amplified the cost of production.

However, the biggest downside of these four-armed mechs and six-armed mechs was that it took extreme training for mech pilots to master their usage!

Even if the Gauge Dynasty poured lots of money into the Sundered Phalanx, it was impossible to raise too many mech units centered around multi-limbed mechs because there weren't enough talented mech pilots that could meet the insanely high control requirements!

In fact, without specialized augmentations, ordinary mech pilots could forget about piloting these humanoid monsters!

"Master Veldam has a great desire to design the strongest and most unbeatable offensive humanoid melee mechs. It is a must for her work to be able to defeat any other mech in a close engagement." Master Benedict continued to share his understanding. "In her mind, that equates to humanoid mechs with additional limbs. Humans such as you and I may be limited in how many swords we can wield due to our physical limitations, but technology always has answers."

It took a lot of daring to commit to the design of four-armed and six-armed humanoid mechs. Most other mech designers wouldn't even dream about designing them because the downsides were too great.

What Master Veldam essentially sought to accomplish was to reverse this truth and make it so that the advantages of these odd machines far outweighed the costs!

So far, it appeared that the Multi-Armed Designer managed to achieve her goal when it came to high-end mechs.

The greater the design budget and skill of the mech pilot, the more these multi-limbed humanoid mechs demonstrated their incredible combat power in combat!

Master Benedict most certainly appreciated this persistence. "There have always been many skeptics that have always questioned whether it is worthwhile for the Sundered Phalanx to invest in Master Veldam's work, but the Komodo War vindicated her design approach. I believe that might also be one of the reasons why the Gauge Dynasty has agreed to let her take charge of the development of the Neo Amadeus."

Everyone turned their attention back to the spotty image of the Gauge Dynasty's latest ace mech.

Now that Ves had seen plenty of images of the Multi-Armed Designer's work, he could easily spot a few common design elements in the exterior Neo Amadeus. From the proportions of the limbs to the shape of the torso, it could definitely fit into Master Veldam's mech catalog.

There was just one incongruity, though.

Ves stated the obvious. "For a Master Mech Designer who is crazy about quadruple-limbed mechs and sextuple-limbed mechs, it's kind of odd that her most powerful and advanced work to date only comes with a single pair of

arms. With her pattern of adding more pairs of arms as her expert mechs become more high-end, I would have expected the Neo Amadeus to come with eight, ten or even twelve arms!"

This was not as ridiculous as it sounded. Ace mechs were even further detached from the normal limitations of mechs. Money solved many problems, and as mech pilots became more superhuman as they advanced up the ranks, they could effectively control much more complex mech systems.

As such, if Master Veldam truly wanted to design an ace mech with twelve whopping arms, then she should easily be able to do so! Ves could not understand why someone with her dreams and ambitions would settle for designing a more conventional and boring swordsman mech.

"This is odd. The Neo Amadeus doesn't quite match with Master Veldam's pattern." Ves spoke. "Is this because she has to compromise with the other Masters in her design team or is it because Saint Jeremiah Gauge insists on piloting a 'simple' swordsman mech?"

As Patriarch Reginald took in all of the information and studied the snapshot of the Neo Amadeus with his own eyes, he formed his own judgment.

"I have a theory." He began. "From my impression, Jeremiah is a warrior who knows what he wants. His discipline and training throughout the years has always focused on mastering his swordsmanship. His expert mechs only ever carried a single sword in battle because he believed it is pointless to utilize other weapons when he still has to master the usage of a single weapon. Now that he has become a Saint, the story is different. If he sees his time as an expert pilot as a preparation period for the next stage, then his time as an ace pilot is his breakout period. This is what he has been working towards!"

Ves widened his eyes. He understood what Patriarch Reginald was saying. Jeremiah Gauge essentially treated his time as an expert pilot as an extremely long training period.

The man could have exhibited more strength on the battlefield by piloting more advanced expert mechs, but he stuck to simpler designs all this time because he didn't think he was good enough to deserve all of that luxury.

The implication of this theory was that Jeremiah Gauge somehow became assured that he would advance to ace pilot early on in his career.

Perhaps his exchange to the Heavensword Association and his subsequent pattern of piloting simple swordsman mechs was all part of a 100-year long training plan that was meant to transform him into the ultimate swordsman mech pilot of the Friday Coalition!

If Jeremiah Gauge never succeeded in becoming a Saint, then much of his hard work and effort would eventually amount to nothing. It took a lot of guts for him to stick to this deliberate training strategy to the end, especially when the Komodo War broke out and forced him to fight against one powerful Hexer expert pilot after another!

Master Benedict felt that Reginald's theory made sense. "It would explain why the Multi-Armed Mech Designer led the design project that resulted in the Neo Amadeus. If Saint Jeremiah Gauge wanted to pilot a more conventional ace swordsman mech, then there are several other Masters that are much more appropriate for the job. Instead, Master Veldam ended up in charge."

"What... does that mean?" Ves asked in confusion.

"It means... the Neo Amadeus may be a multi-limbed mech after all. The Neo Amadeus would never carry so many weapons without a reason." Benedict said as he gained a whole new appreciation of the enemy ace mech.

"How? I don't see any extra arms on this frame. Wait, is this ace mech capable of wielding additional swords and daggers by relying on miniaturized arms that are ordinary hidden inside the frame?"

That didn't entirely make sense. The mech looked too lean for that. If the arms were too small and thin, then it would have been far too easy to break them in half.

"No." Patriarch Reginald said. "I think I get it now. The reason why it carries so many swords and daggers is because that is probably the limit that Saint Jeremiah Gauge can control to a strong enough degree. Any more and his concentration and strength exertion will drop to an unacceptable level."

"Wait! You mean...!?"

"This guy doesn't need to rely on the physical limbs of his ace mech at all. His Saint Kingdom has become his arms!"

Chapter 4232 Neo Amadeus

What?!

Ves almost couldn't believe what he heard!

Then he recalled all of the ace mechs that he had witnessed in person or through footage on the galactic net.

The pairing between ace mechs and ace pilots resulted in extremely powerful combinations that could easily overturn entire battlefields!

When ace mechs resonated with extremely powerful Saints, they became extraordinary to a degree that defied the laws of nature!

The power of an ace mech was so much greater than that of any expert mech that there was no instance where the latter could overcome the former.

Although the physical frames of ace mechs did not tend to look that different from any other high-end mech, their basic parameters as well as their list of features were completely different!

Ace mechs far surpassed the boundaries of pure technology and tended to perform as if they were driven by magic!

In this context, Ves felt as if he had finally lifted the veil that obscured the secret of the Neo Amadeus.

It was no wonder that the Gauge Dynasty tried so hard to keep the ace mech as confidential as possible!

Anyone who was able to capture this image and analyzed the available information would be able to figure out the real charm of the Neo Amadeus.

If this deceptively simple ace swordsman mech made its first appearance in the upcoming battle, then the Golden Skull Alliance and the Hex Federation would definitely be caught off-guard by Saint Jeremiah Gauge's drastic evolution in fighting style!

The difference was no less than entering into a duel against a single swordsman mech only to fight against five of them at once!

"These damn Gaugers!" Ves cursed. "This descendant of their dynasty is especially devious. Even if the surprise factor would already become invalid after his first proper battle as an ace pilot, it is still a nasty surprise when enemies come to challenge Saint Jeremiah expecting a more conventional swordsman mech only to get bombarded by over a dozen different blades at once."

"All is fair in love and war." The Master Mech Designer in the room smirked. "While the Gaugers are arrogant, they are still professional. The Komodo War has tempered many of their leaders and officers. Considering the threat posed by the Hex Federation towards the Friday Colonies, it is only natural for Saint

Jeremiah Gauge to hide his strength until it is the right time to unveil it on the battlefield."

The Neo Amadeus became a lot deeper and more mysterious in Ves' eyes. The ace mech's rather basic appearance could not be used as a reliable guide to its actual performance on the battlefield.

Ves scratched his head. "Assuming that the Neo Amadeus is able to wield so many swords and daggers at a time, how is it able to do so? Is it possible to control the blades by relying purely on true resonance? Reginald, what do you think? Are you capable of replicating this feat?"

The man pressed his lips. "An ace pilot's domain field is strong. As long as I have complete and uncontested control over my own field, I can theoretically take control of different weapons and swing them around by relying on pure force. I don't prefer to do so, though. It's too exhausting for the amount of power I can exert, and it gets harder to control the weapon when it gets further away from my mech. In fact, I wouldn't utilize this method against another ace mech at all. Once I end up in a duel against another peer, that person's Saint Kingdom will fight with mine for control over the surrounding space. There is no way I can reliably maintain control over a free-floating weapon under those circumstances."

"There has to be more to the Neo Amadeus, then." Ves concluded. "It probably incorporates a strengthened control method that can ensure that its free-floating weapons don't go out of control when an enemy ace mech enters the field. There is no point to designing an ace mech this way when it cannot even exhibit its full strength against an equal opponent."

"I think I know how the Neo Amadeus might be able to maintain strong control over those additional blades." Master Benedict said. "The answer is obvious now that I think about it. You should know the person responsible for this control system already, Ves. You have already stolen a few of his ideas. "

Ves furrowed his brows. He grew confused for a second, but then he thought about which Master Mech Designer fit this description.

"Wait... are you saying that Master Toqueman Huron is responsible for designing the control system?!"

It seemed that Ves could not escape the influence of this Master that he had never even met in person!

From brushing against Lady Aisling Curver and the Charlemagne to figuring out how to defeat the man's iconic Tensars, Ves had developed quite an unofficial rivalry against this Master.

To learn that Master Huron even contributed to the design of the ace mech that would likely become his greatest nightmare in the upcoming battle made him feel as if this direct confrontation was arranged by fate!

After all, Ves had contributed significantly to the design of the Mars that Patriarch Reginald piloted these days.

This began to look more and more like a design duel but in real life. Both Ves and Master Huron sought to prove their superiority over each other by comparing their work on the battlefield!

While the collision between the Mars and the Neo Amadeus was primarily a contest between the Multi-Armed Designer and the Skull Architect, the contributing designers also put their reputation and commitment at stake!

Ves became more fired up about the upcoming conflict. It was already crucial for the Mars to to at least stall the Neo Amadeus long enough for the rest of their troops to overpower the Sundered Phalanx, but now he wanted to secure an all-out victory!

The discussion continued. Both Ves, Reginald and Benedict possessed unique perspectives and had plenty to say about the ace mech depicted in the spotty image capture.

Though not all of their words were solid, they at least opened up each other's horizons.

What was ultimately important was that Patriarch Reginald entered the battle with a much more thorough understanding of his principal opponent. As long as he was on guard against the various means of Saint Jeremiah Gauge and the Neo Amadeus, his chances of winning this crucial duel were considerably higher!

"We're fortunate that the Gauge Dynasty chose to transfer a relatively new ace pilot to the Red Ocean." Ves said as his mind became filled with all of the power the Neo Amadeus might be able to exert on the battlefield. "The Gaugers could have sent another Saint that has advanced much earlier and has developed for a significantly longer period of time. Even with all of the insane tech we put into the Mars, I wouldn't have dared to seek this confrontation."

Patriarch Reginald only advanced a few years later than Saint Jeremiah. Though this time difference gave the latter a significant head-start, Ves was confident that Reginald was able to catch up in terms of resonance strength.

This was because the Mars was a masterwork mech!

Even after Master Benedict meticulously upgraded the original design from a high-tier expert mech to an ace mech, he completely respected the origins design concept and did not break the essence of what made the Mars so great.

Masterworks significantly facilitated the growth process of an expert pilot!

While their ability to boost the growth of an ace pilot was much less obvious by comparison, there was still a difference!

Therefore, Ves predicted that the resonance strengths of Patriarch Reginald and Saint Jeremiah should not be that far apart.

This was an extremely important detail because one of the main factors that decided the outcome in duels between ace pilots was how much they could impose their domain fields on each other.

If their resonance strengths were too far apart, then the superior ace pilot could take almost complete control over the surrounding space, thereby trapping the inferior ace pilot in a hostile environment!

Master Benedict clearly stated the equation. "What will truly determine the outcome between this duel is the design of the ace mechs, the absolute performance parameters of the two machines, the inherent advantages and disadvantages of their fighting approaches, the tech put into them, the amount of phasewater integrated into their frames and the individual skills and domains of the ace pilots. If we wish to win, then we must gain more advantages in these areas than our opponent. What we must do is go over each of them and discuss how we can still strengthen these aspects before we arrive at Pima Prime."

It was difficult to strengthen their hand any further at this short period of time. While Ves and Master Benedict explored plenty of ideas, none of them were practical enough to implement in a short amount of time.

The Mars was essentially fixed and Patriarch Reginald did not have enough time to conduct too much practice against a high-end multi-limbed swordsman mech.

"Reginald." Ves turned to the ace pilot. "How confident are you in your ability to defeat Saint Jeremiah and his Neo Amadeus?"

The leader of the Cross Clan had fallen silent for a while. He was not that good at technical discussions so he could not contribute that much in that area.

,m However, that did not mean he was an idiot when it came to mech combat.

"If I can maintain my distance to the Neo Amadeus, I will probably be able to suppress my opponent." Reginald answered. "My Mars is principally a ranged mech, and its ability to project force far outside of the range of my Saint Kingdom is strong. The ARCEUS System will allow me to pound my opponent's mech with a torrent of empowered transphasic energy beams."

Both Ves and Reginald nodded. While there was a possibility that the Neo Amadeus integrated smaller ranged armaments that allowed it to take out targets at range, the Gauger ace mech was clearly oriented towards closer ranges!

There was no way the Neo Amadeus could win a duel against the Mars from a distance!

Ves grimaced. "The problem is that Saint Jeremiah won't stupidly let you pound his ace mech into melted slag. It is practically a given that the Neo Amadeus has either incorporated a minidrive or a transphasic flight system. Hell, maybe it has access to both! There is no reason for the Gauge Dynasty to be stingy in this regard."

An ace mech was already much faster than an expert mech by default. When it was equipped with a combat drive or similar, it could soar across one side of the battlefield to another side of the battlefield in no time!

Not even the Dark Zephyr Version 2.0 could match the speed of a proper ace mech equipped with a proper minidrive!

It was not difficult to say that the invention of the minidrive largely solved one of the greatest disadvantages of melee mechs.

"At least the Neo Amadeus won't be able to appear in the middle of our fleet." Ves said with a bit of relief. "The new Warp Interdictors that we have acquired should be able to prevent any mechs or vehicles from relying on warp travel to get too close."

Warp interdictors essentially projected a special field that made it almost impossible to maintain a warp bubble.

Without a warp bubble, mechs and starships weren't able to move at such an exaggerated pace.

While there were ways to overpower this inhibition effect, the minidrive had to be a lot more powerful than the device responsible for blocking warp travel. This was practically impossible because the latter was almost always a large object that could only be mounted on large starships!

"Our Warp interdictors will help us prevent the Neo Amadeus from getting close enough to demolish our fleet, but they can't prevent the enemy ace mech from shortening the amount of time it is exposed to long-ranged bombardment." Ves stated. "Sooner or later, the Neo Amadeus will get close enough to be able to fight the Mars at its optimal range."

How the battle would proceed at that point was difficult to say. Swordsman mechs ordinary chopped hybrid mechs apart at close range!

Chapter 4233 Confidence Booster

Ace mechs could not be judged according to common sense or the conventional rules of mechs.

It was not necessarily the case that the Mars would lose against the Neo Amadeus at close range.

Though the Mars undoubtedly possessed an advantage at range, it was still a highly capable fighter at other ranges!

Patriarch Reginald's lust for battle became stoked as he mapped out his upcoming duel against Saint Jeremiah Gauge.

A fresh new ace pilot like him who never fought against another of his kind on an equal basis needed this kind of opponent!

As long as he vanquished his counterpart or at least fought the other ace pilot to a standstill, he would be able to validate his combat prowess and learn where he stood as a Saint.

One of the worst nightmares for Patriarch Reginald was that he would have no one else to test his strength against.

Ever since he advanced to ace pilot, he found that his old sparring partners simply couldn't challenge him anymore.

Even if every expert pilot of the Larkinson Clan, Glory Seekers and Cross Clan joined forces against him, the combination between an ace pilot and the Mars was simply far too outrageous.

It was lonely at the top!

Though the Cross Clan attempted to approach the other power blocs of Davute to arrange secret sparring sessions, these talks pretty much went nowhere.

No one wanted to expose the details of their own ace pilots and ace mechs so easily, especially towards their immediate rivals!

Though there was no reason to blame these parties for maintaining the secrecy of their trump cards, Patriarch Reginald developed a low opinion of these groups.

If the Larkinsons managed to nurture an ace pilot, then there was no question that he would have a good time!

True friends and comrades did not shy away from comparisons!

As of now, Patriarch Reginald's greatest problem was that he lacked real combat experience against his peers. This was a considerable shortcoming that might cause him to fall into a disadvantage at first.

In other words, the upcoming battle was Reginald's baptism of fire as a Saint! Either he would survive the storm, or perish at the hand of Jeremiah Gauge!

Several hours passed by as Ves, Reginald and Benedict continued to chat and share each other's views. They thoroughly picked apart whatever details they could glean from the Neo Amadeus and came up with several possible tactics to deal with whatever the ace mech could do with its many bladed weapons.

Ves stood up at the end of the discussion.

"I've enjoyed our talks, but it remains to be seen whether the Neo Amadeus will fight as we anticipated. While it is true that the Multi-Armed Designer has a penchant for designing certain kinds of melee mechs, I'm not sure whether the mech is capable of wielding its additional swords and daggers with phantom arms."

Patriarch Reginald did not look impressed. "It doesn't matter how many blades Jeremiah wields. I'll be able to beat him whether he holds one of them or twelve of them. Quantity does not equate to quality."

Ves curled his lips. That was quite a statement considering that the Mars was loaded with weapons as well!

The ARCEUS System, the transphasic shotgun, the modular shoulder hardpoints, the transphasic axe, the whale-cutting saber and the close-ranged offensive capabilities of the Abasis Armor resulted in a fantastic offensive package that allowed the Mars to effectively exert strength at any range!

The ace hybrid mech was so outrageous that it did not possess any obvious shortcomings.

"Reginald."

"Yes, Benedict?"

"No matter what you do, you need to maintain a strong and confident demeanor."

Ves nodded in agreement. "You're a symbol and a source of confidence to everyone. If you do badly against Saint Jeremiah, then the morale of all of our troops will drop. If you do well, then everyone on our side will fight with greater vigor and confidence. The progression of your duel can have a real and drastic influence on the rest of the battle. Do you understand?"

Patriarch Reginald slowly nodded. "I understand. I am not unfamiliar with this responsibility. My father... my father used to fulfill the same role. Every warrior from the Garlen Empire knows the score. You don't need to worry. I am more than capable of shouldering this responsibility."

That was probably what Lord Hemmington Cross thought as well before he foolishly got stabbed in the back by two of his supposed allies!

This example illustrated that even if ace pilots were powerful assets on the battlefield, they could still be fooled and lured into traps!

"The same applies to the Gaugers." Ves noted. "If the Neo Amadeus is obviously struggling against the Mars, then the Sundered Phalanx will lose a lot of confidence."

Master Benedict shook his head. "It is a fantasy to assume that Saint Jeremiah and the Neo Amadeus can be bullied so easily. The Gauge Dynasty is not weak and its Masters have done good work. Considering how powerful the Neo Amadeus may be at close range, the best we can hope for is that

Reginald can go even against Jeremiah. As long as we can force a stalemate at this level, we can rely on our advantages at the lower levels to achieve a breakthrough."

"Hey! Don't count me out soon! I'm going to school this ace pilot!"

Ves suddenly thought of the man's name and identity. As a direct member of this prominent dynasty, Jeremiah possessed greater significance than just his combat strength!

"Saint Jeremiah Gauge is probably one of the pillars of the Gauge Dynasty." He analyzed. "He carries both military and political weight. I bet he is one of the assets used to ensure that the Gauge Dynasty maintains strong control over its colonies as well exert strong influence in the rest of the region. If Jeremiah gets taken out, then that will have major geopolitical implications to the Magair Middle Zone."

Regardless of the outcome of Operation Saturday Market, the domino effect of this direct collision between the Gauge Dynasty and the Hex Federation was bound to produce a lot of ripples!

It was a pity that neither Patriarch Reginald nor Master Benedict cared about the implications of capturing or killing a personality as important as Saint Jeremiah Gauge.

Everything would change for the Friday Colonies and the Hex Federation, but what did that matter to the Crossers? They didn't even have any major industries and commitments in Magair!

Before Ves returned to his flagship, he considered whether he should make one more move.

He struggled to decide whether it was wise for him to expose one of his secrets to the Crossers, but eventually figured that it was worthwhile to make this extra effort.

The Cross Clan had proven numerous times that it was a solid ally. Ves was also good friends with Patriarch Reginald and Master Benedict. The trust they forged over the course of numerous critical and dangerous battles could not be replicated through ordinary means!

"I would like to give you a gift." He told the two leaders of the Cross Clan. "I can't explain it right now, but I will show you what I have in mind if you can bring me the Mars. Can you take me to its hangar bay? I think it is best to show you in person."

The two Crossers were confused, but they complied without much hesitation.

The three moved to the private hangar bay that was solely reserved for the Mars.

As the most important asset of the Cross Clan, the Mars needed to be well-protected. Simultaneously, it also had to be quick and easy to deploy into space in case the expeditionary fleet encountered an acute threat.

Of course, Ves did not need to be too concerned about its security. The entire compartment was almost entirely closed off from the rest of the Hemmington Cross. Master Benedict personally remodeled it in order to prevent spies from leaking out the details of his own work.

When Ves finally laid sight of the Mars up close, he couldn't help but sigh in admiration.

The original version of the Mars was already a groundbreaking mech. After Master Benedict thoroughly elevated it to ace mech standards, it had become even more exceptional!

Ves actually didn't fully understand the design anymore because of that. It had grown beyond his ability to understand, and that was a pity.

This reminded him that the Mars officially belonged to the Cross Clan. Despite his crucial contributions to the ace mech, it was Benedict that led the design project and the Crossers that supplied the extreme amount of funding and phasewater to make it possible.

Now, Ves was about to suggest a measure that would substantially increase its performance in a way that the Crossers could not control.

After waiting for Master Benedict to activate all of the security precautions in the compartment, Ves calmly pulled out a special pouch from his suit pocket. He pulled it open and retrieved a number of gems.

Though it had been years since Lucky last fulfilled his primary function, Ves had not forgotten about the last batch of gems that he produced.

The most annoying part of that time was that the System had already started to take an extended break during that period!

That prevented him from learning the properties of the five gems. Ves had even been forced to integrate one of them into the Everchanger in order to ensure it surpassed the masterwork threshold.

In any case, now that the Mech Designer System became accessible again, Ves easily identified the properties of the gems that he had left.

[Lament of Exod]

The regrets of a fallen artisan are locked within this gem. Increases the resistance of a mech against physical forces by 50 percent.

[Tear of Nerys]

The depression of a water demon is captured by this gem. Amplifies the performance of all transphasic parts of a mech by 25 percent.

[Rage of Ayef]

The fury of an unwilling warrior is stored within this gem. Increases the damage of all energy weapons of a mech by 50 percent.

[Doom of Remis]

The negative energy of a failed prophet is gathered by this gem. Increases the failure rate of all surrounding enemies by 25 percent.

All of their effects turned out to be strong!

Each of them could easily change the outcome of a duel or a greater battle!

If their effects fully applied to ace mechs without any weakening due to the law of diminishing returns, then their value was immeasurable!

There was even a gem that specifically amplified the power of transphasic mech parts! This was extremely strange to Ves as he had obtained this gem before he entered the Red Ocean.

As Ves became more exposed to the wonders of the cosmos, he no longer felt these gems were as incomprehensible as before.

While he still wasn't able to study whatever energies or substances that the gems stored inside their forms, he became increasingly more convinced that they derived their exceptional properties by taking advantage of the reality-defying abilities of powerful spirits!

This was the only reasonable way to explain why these tiny gems could change the properties of every mech they were attached to in such a broad and universal manner!

Though he still felt the System embellished the descriptions of Lucky's gems, he did not dismiss them as nonsense anymore.

The recent Spiritual Ascension upgrade track exposed Ves to an entirely different facet of reality. The existence of pre-divinity and post-divinity spiritual entities had opened up his perspective regarding energy life forms.

More specifically, learning about the nature of so-called True Gods suggested to Ves that Lucky's gems might have actually captured some of the essence of these powerful entities!

Making these realizations was incredibly important to Ves. Not only was he able to decipher some of the mystery behind Lucky's mechanisms, he also gained a possible roadmap on how to reproduce them without relying on a temperamental cat!

Chapter 4234 Matching Gem

Ves could think about possibly replicating Lucky's gems in the distant future. The 'tech' involved in this incredibly deep and profound process was probably anything but simple!

He instead turned his thoughts towards his more immediate concerns.

If he had a choice, he would have preferred not to utilize any of these gems.

Considering Lucky's continued lack of productivity, the supply of gems was truly too low to satisfy all of his needs.

Their greatest value lay in their ability to elevate the quality of a mech past the masterwork threshold. This was the most critical usage of these gems, and the more powerful their effect, the greater their ability to transform what would otherwise be a serviceable mech into a stellar work of craftsmanship!

Aside from that, these gems could also provide his most important mech pilots a powerful boost in battle. Mechs such as the Amaranto and the Riot possessed considerably more combat power than they had any right to be due to the unusual gems he added to their construction!

Ves counted Patriarch Reginald as one of his friends, so he did not actually object too much to giving away such a valuable asset.

It was also clear that any of his gems would have the greatest effect on the most powerful individual mech in the Golden Skull Alliance.

Boosting the performance of any aspect by 30 to 50 percent would make a much more drastic difference if it was applied to an ace mech as opposed to an ordinary Bright Warrior mech!

Yet as Ves stared at the mysterious gems that had also caught the attention of Patriarch Reginald and Master Benedict, he hesitated whether he should go through with this step.

If the upcoming confrontation between the Mars and the Neo Amadeus represented a design duel between their respective mech designers, then Ves would have preferred it if he could win this contest by relying on his own design efforts.

Putting in a gem produced by his cat did not reflect his core design skill. It was an external object that enhanced the performance of a mech through a method that he did not understand and could not replicate through his own effort.

In other words, it was a cheat.

His honor and integrity as a mech designer detested the thought of relying on such a means to win a design duel.

Victory would have no meaning if Ves tainted the process with an external factor.

However, Ves quickly squashed this misguided sentiment to the back of his mind.

So what if he was cheating?

So what if the improvement provided by Lucky's gem was not strictly honorable?

This was war!

There was no place for fairness on the battlefield!

Ves had overcome so many adversities and vanquished over so many opponents because of his willingness to use any means possible to gain advantages over his enemies.

If the upcoming clash between ace mechs was part of a formal design duel, then Ves probably wouldn't have tainted his integrity as a mech designer through this method.

Yet just because he equated it to a design duel did not mean this was actually the case!

The battle at the top needed to be won at all costs!

When Ves was about to put his life as well as the lives of his wife and children at stake, there was no excuse to deprive the Mars of a massive power-up.

He did not even object to relying on additional means to interfere with the duel and tilt the battle in the favor of his side.

For example, if the Sundered Phalanx was not able to match the expert mechs of the Golden Skull Alliance and the Hex Army, then Ves had no qualms about ordering Venerable Davia Stark and Venerable Isobel Kotin to attack the Neo Amadeus from a distance!

Even if an ace mech was easily able to repel the attacks from the Amaranto and the Promethea, if the distraction caused Saint Jeremiah to split at least 5 percent of his attention and power to fending off the incoming energy attacks, then that was more than worth the effort!

Ultimately, his responsibility as a leader compelled him to use one of his precious gems on the Mars.

The stronger the Mars, the greater the chance it could defeat the Neo Amadeus. Once Patriarch Reginald won this duel, he could instantly let loose

on the expert mechs and the ordinary troops of the Sundered Phalanx, harvesting hundreds of enemy machines with each passing second!

p As an ace hybrid mech, the Mars was actually much more comfortable with slaughtering tides of weaker opponents!

In addition to rolling over the mech units of the Sundered Phalanx, the Mars could unleash its great offensive might against the titan shields that protected the critical space stations of the Kosic Ring.

Once the Mars was able to break them all open in quick succession, the orbit of Pima Prime V would no longer be able to offer as many defensive advantages to the defending forces!

The sooner all of this took place, the shorter the time that the expeditionary fleet got exposed to deadly fire.

Many Larkinsons including Ves and his family no longer risked calamity at this point.

Considering that his very life was at stake, Ves no longer had any objections to this course of action.

What Ves was more concerned about right now was how he could possibly explain his intentions. These gems defied reality to such a degree that it could shake up the entire mech industry if everyone learned of their existence!

By now, both Reginald and Benedict had come close enough to get a good glimpse of the four shiny gems.

Neither of them were average people. As people who had come much closer to hitting the ceiling of a pre-divinity life form, their perception and intuition were much stronger than that of average people!

"What did you bring out, Ves?" Master Benedict asked. "From the way your demeanor has changed, I surmise that they do not merely serve a decorative purpose."

"I can sense power in these gems." Patriarch Reginald simply stated. Ves looked at the ace pilot in mild surprise. "That's sharp of you. You're right, Reginald. These gems are special. I won't say much about them, but I am comfortable enough with the two of you to reveal that these gems can bring an additional boost to the performance of a mech. Each gem can improve a specific aspect."

"What are the requirements? How much power do they consume?"

"There are no requirements other than that the mech has not previously integrated one of these gems. They don't consume any power either. They are completely self-contained and are easy to install." Ves answered.

That did not satisfy the Master Mech Designer at all. Benedict bombarded Ves with a torrent of questions, each of which was met with answers that sounded more and more incredulous to the older mech designer!

Master Benedict had encountered a lot of fantastic innovations and wonders over his long career, but he had never come face to face with a small and unassuming item that could unconditionally improve the performance of major mech systems in such a ridiculously easy manner!

The man clearly did not believe in all of the outlandish claims, but Ves offered a simple answer.

"The Quint, the Dark Zephyr, the Amaranto, the Riot, the First Sword, the Shield of Samar and the Everchanger are just a handful of mechs that I have enhanced through this method."

This caused Master Benedict to fall silent. His formidable mind went to work as he recalled the past instances where he had witnessed the amazing performance of each of these mechs.

Although there was a lot of weirdness involved with Ves' work, certain performance characteristics could not be fully accounted for. There was a limit to how much true resonance, living mechs and design spirits could enhance the performance of a machine.

When Master Benedict compared the aforementioned mechs to the other works of Ves, it became clear that the first six expert mechs truly performed abnormally well!

Perhaps ordinary mech designers might not be able to make this observation, but Master Mech Designers were different. Now that Ves explicitly pointed it out, Benedict finally understood why he had always felt that the Larkinson expert mechs were a bit too exaggerated in terms of their performance.

The Dark Zephyr was a bit too nimble.

The Amaranto inflicted noticeably more damage.

The Riot was unpredictable.

The First Sword was abnormally capable of cutting through obstacles.

The Shield of Samar's metaphysical growth was too fast.

As for the Everchanger...

Master Benedict's eyes twinkled in an unusual manner before he looked up at the Mars. He no longer doubted Ves' claims.

"If your gems can truly strengthen the Mars, then that would be a boon to our Cross Clan. We will owe you another favor if you are willing to share this benefit with us. We stand a much better chance of surviving the upcoming operation with this additional guarantee. However, the decision does not lie

with me. Ultimately, it is up to Reginald and the Mars to decide whether they want to obtain this power. They will also have to conduct last-minute practice in order to acclimatize themselves with the latest improvements as soon as possible."

Both Ves and Master Benedict turned their attention to Patriarch Reginald.

The ace pilot threw a brief glance towards the Mars and scoffed.

Obviously, the Mars did not get a say in this matter.

When Ves studied the mech that he had once imparted with life, he couldn't help but feel sad.

The unusual collision between Patriarch Reginald and the Mars during their first interfacing attempt ended up badly for the latter.

The personality and character of the latter became so suppressed by the newly-advanced ace pilot that there was no measure of equality between the pairing!

Whereas people like Venerable Joshua and Venerable Jannzi had no qualms about treating their living mechs as equals, the Mars had practically devolved into Patriarch Reginald's machine servant!

The growth pattern of the Mars had become completely distorted as a response! Ves never accounted for this possibility and did not have any good solutions for the living mech to regain its dignity.

"Which of these gems should be added to the Mars?" Patriarch Reginald eagerly asked.

As an ace pilot, any performance improvement to his ace mech was a cause for celebration! He couldn't wait to pilot his Mars again after it had been enhanced to a further degree!

Ves thought for a moment. "Each of these gems can improve your ace mech in different ways. It doesn't really matter which one you choose as long as you are satisfied with your choice. Since you can feel them out, try and focus on them and feel which one speaks to you the most."

Surprisingly enough, Patriarch Reginald did not take a long time to make his selection. He only stared at them for a few seconds each before he announced his preference.

"This purple one resonates the most with me." He said as he expressly picked up the shiny gem with his fingers. "I can sense that the other ones will not disappoint me if I make use of them, but this one is more special. I have a feeling that this gem longs to prove itself in battle the most."

Ves did not expect that Reginald would base his selection based on this reason, but it fit with his character.

[Rage of Ayef]

The fury of an unwilling warrior is stored within this gem. Increases the damage of all energy weapons of a mech by 50 percent.

When Ves studied the gem one more time in order to confirm its properties, he felt it was ultimately a good choice.

Not only did its 'personality' match with that of Reginald, but the offensive boost it granted to the ARCEUS System of the Mars expressly strengthened its primary role!

As an offensive mech, it was natural for the Mars to excel in launching attacks!

Strengthening its powerful array of transphasic integrated energy weapon hardpoints not only increased its chances of defeating enemy ace mechs, but

also allowed the Mars to gain a lot more lethality against alien warships and other powerful threats!

Ves smiled. "Good choice. Let's install the gem into the Mars and test out the difference. I can already promise you that you will not be disappointed with the attack power of your ace mech!"

Chapter 4235 Mech General Alisky Victrix

Integrating the Rage of Ayef gem into the Mars made an enormous difference to the Golden Skull Alliance.

The ARCEUS System of the Mars was already considerably powerful due to its extremely high specifications and the fact that it integrated 650 grams of phasewater in total.

The designers of the Mars would have to make far too many sacrifices in order to increase the firepower of the Mars by just 5 or 10 percent.

Yet after successfully installing a single gem in the ace mech, its firepower truly increased by 50 percent without any side effects!

During a few short but highly impactful testing sessions, Master Benedict's jaw dropped so many times that it should have been dislocated by now! The Master Mech Designer simply couldn't explain how such an unassuming object could produce such a massive difference!

"This doesn't make any sense!" He roared as he studied the incoming telemetry and sensor readings. "The ARCEUS System isn't consuming any additional power! Its efficiency hasn't increased. All of its parts are exactly the same. The Magma Vein System and the Endex System are both operating exactly as before. Heat levels have remained within normal parameters. How can the output of all nine integrated energy weapon modules increase by a factor of 0.5?! There isn't even any variance in the amplification factor between the different hardpoints! The tiny energy weapons mounted on the

head of the Mars have been boosted by the exact same proportion as the main energy weapon module mounted in the middle of the chest!"

Perhaps a younger and less accomplished mech designer may have been ignorant and flexible enough to accept the changes without asking any critical questions, but Master Mech Designers were different.

Their understanding of mechs had reached an insanely high level, and it was because of their strong ability to comprehend their mechanisms that they could not handle these situations well.

It would have been one thing if Ves brought out an alien device salvaged from an alien ruin or a product of high technology that he had redeemed from the MTA.

At least there was a solid technological basis that Master Benedict could eventually deconstruct and reverse engineer.

This was different!

The gem was not only as small as a thumbnail, but also did not contain any obvious presence of mechanical components, advanced circuitry or pocket dimensions that could be hiding an enormous machine.

It was just a gem!

Ves looked at the increasingly more unhinged Master with evident amusement. Even people at this level could still be stumped by unexplainable phenomena.

"Don't bother yourself too much over my gems. You need to possess a certain kind of expertise in numerous obscure fields before you can unlock the truth about them. As good as you are at designing mechs, I doubt you have been able to master every field of science like the Polymath."

In fact, Ves doubted whether the Polymath was up to the task of cracking the secret behind Lucky's gems, but he did not need to mention that little detail.

Master Benedict eventually closed his eyes and sighed. "You are correct. I suppose you know better since you hold them in your possession. I am still curious about them. Are you open to trading one of them to me? I will owe you another favor."

"No thanks." Ves shook his head. "It's not easy for me to get my hands on them. If it wasn't for the risk factors of Operation Saturday Market, I wouldn't have chosen to offer one of them to you guys."

In fact, a part of him even regretted the decision to allow Patriarch Reginald to choose his own gem.

Though the Rage of Ayef gem undoubtedly matched well the Mars, the problem was that its compatibility with the Promethea was even higher!

The fire-oriented expert rifleman mech placed an even greater emphasis on energy attacks. It did not have any good offensive solutions aside from relying on its luminar crystal rifle and flamethrowers to defeat its opponents.

The Mars was a much more rounded mech in comparison. Though the ARCEUS System was its bread and butter, it possessed so many other options to beat up its opponents such as its transphasic axe and its powerful shotgun.

Given how the design of the Mars was stuffed with so many powerful transphasic mech systems, Ves would have chosen to integrate it with the Tear of Nerys gem that could directly increase their overall performance by 25 percent across the board!

Ves did not actually regret the current outcome, though. If the origin or the 'character' of the gem also played a hidden role in how it functioned, then it

obviously made sense to match an aggressive gem with an aggressive mech pilot!

Besides, the Tear of Nerys gem was also powerful in its own right. It was not a bad choice to reserve it for the moment he was able to develop another 'phasewater supermech' comparable to the Mars for his own clan in the future!

After confirming that the Rage of Ayef gem did what it was supposed to do, Ves no longer paid attention to the Cross Clan and went back to handling his own affairs.

Time continued to pass until all of the primary fleet elements of the Golden Skull Alliance and the Hex Army gathered together in an empty star system.

At this location, they were only one FTL transition away from entering the Pima Prime System.

If they wanted to, the combined assault fleet could still change course and head to other, more vulnerable star systems.

Rotes Cewma and New Rammes remained attractive choices, but the attackers could also opt to attack many other core colonies within the Friday Colonies if they wished.

Still, most of those choices weren't port systems, which meant that it took a lot more time to reach those targets.

If all of the starships chose to travel to Pima Prime at this junction, then that was the equivalent of crossing the Rubicon.

There was no turning back from this point!

All of the leaders of the Golden Skull Alliance as well as the Hexer general in charge of the massive Hexer task force gathered together one last time to confirm their decision.

Of all of the people who had gathered in the conference chamber aboard the Mother's Wrath, the massive flagship and fleet carrier of Task Force Fury, only three of them were powerful enough to affect the actions of the combined forces.

Patriarch Reginald's assent was absolutely crucial. His role was so important that his disapproval could single-handedly sink this entire endeavor.

Ves held significant sway in both the Golden Skull Alliance and the Hex Federation, so his voice was also fairly great.

Mech General Alisky Victrix officially led Task Force Fury that the Hex Army had formed for the upcoming operation.

As her name suggested, Alisky Victrix was a member of the highly militant Victrix Matriarchal Dynasty. Not only that, she was a member of its main branch, which meant that she possessed the background and prestige to command all of the scattered Hexer mech divisions whether they came from the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty or the Wodin Dynasty.

To be honest, Ves did not have a good impression of General Alisky Victrix.

It started with her matriarchal dynasty. The Victrixes had an awful reputation among outsiders. The stories about how they castrated all of their boys, diminished their proportion of the total population within their territories to just 30 percent and never extended any courtesy towards the male prisoners of war that ended up in their hands were not rumors, but facts!

Though Ves had heard that the Victrix Matriarchal Dynasty had gone with the times and 'phased out' a number of their ridiculous policies, he had little doubt that a lot more needed to happen before boys were able to regain their dignity.

To be honest, Ves did not even look up how the boys under the Victrixes fared in the Hex Colonies.

He was afraid he might stumble upon unpleasant news that would cause him to revise his decision to fight alongside the Hex Army.

In any case, the new trend had already been in motion for a number of years. The less extreme and more secularist groups of Hexers such as the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty had shifted faster than the other ones.

Eventually, even the slowpokes had to complete the reforms! It would be unacceptable for parts of the Hex Colonies to remain stuck in the past. The other matriarchal dynasties would certainly put a lot of pressure on the more backwards Hexers to change their ways.

This was a matter for the future, though. For now, Ves and everyone else in the combined fleet had to accept the fact that the Hex Army put General Alisky Victrix in charge of Task Force Fury.

Problematic origin or not, her competence could not be called into question.

There were many prominent mech generals in the Hex Army that had proven their ability to keep up with the enemy during the Komodo War, and General Alisky was definitely a suitable choice.

According to the Glory Seekers, General Alisky was a firebrand military leader who constantly advocated for proactive action over passivity.

She had first earned her chops during the early stages of the Komodo War. The mech units under her command blitzed through the territories of the Carnegie Group, smashing aside the defending Fortune Legion time and time again!

Each star system occupied by her command eventually turned into ruins that were filled with bodies and especially male bodies!

In the later stages of the Komodo War, she had done her best to reverse the losing trend by organizing and launching desperate counterattacks.

Though most of those attempts failed in the end, General Alisky still earned a lot of appreciation from the higher-ups for her earnest efforts to swing the war back into their favor.

A high-risk high-reward attack attempt such as Operation Saturday Market was right in her ballpark.

Her rich track record for brute-forcing her way through fortified defenses and leaving absolute devastation in her wake was exactly what the leadership had in mind for Pima Prime!

"According to our scouts, spies and informers, the Gauge Dynasty has not made any unexpected movements during this period. The Fridaymen have not conducted any major troop transfers or made any significant alterations to their defensive setups." General Alisky Victrix spoke in her steely voice. "If this is the case, Operation Saturday Market will proceed to the next phase as planned. Any objections?"

"No." Patriarch Reginald spoke. "Let's get this show on the road. The sooner I can challenge Jeremiah Gauge, the better!"

His eagerness to test his mettle against the Gauge Dynasty's trump card had risen to a meteoric height now that his Mars turned into an even greater powerhouse than before!

"You will have your wish, patriarch." General Alisky reassured the ace pilot in a patronizing tone.

The female leader clearly regarded the Cross Patriarch as an attack dog that could go out of control as soon as he slipped his leash.

Of course, it would be ideal if General Alisky was the person holding the leash.

"I don't have any objections either." Ves shared his opinion. "The only concern I have is that we should make certain that we are fully able to monitor all of our possible escape routes. Achieving a victory in Pima Prime is only half of the battle. Getting out alive and without bumping into any further Fridaymen units is another ordeal. Once we suffer significant losses in the upcoming battle, we will likely lose a lot of deterrence. If there is any chance for the Fridaymen to pool their forces together and drive us into a trap, it would be after we have finished our jobs!"

"Our preparations are sufficiently thorough in that regard." General Alisky said in a neutral tone. "This is far from the only deep strike operation that we have launched against the Fridaymen. Besides, with how cowardly, treacherous and selfish the different coalition partners have behaved up until this point, they won't have the guts to intercept us after we have demonstrated our overwhelming superiority in Pima Prime!"

Ves truly hoped that was the case.

Chapter 4236 Favorite Niece

"Papa?"

"Yes, my cute little pumpkin?"

"Will we win?"

"Victory is never certain, Andraste. While we have done our best to prepare for our upcoming offensive operation, no one can ever say for certain which side will win."

The red-haired girl cradled in the arms of her father looked down at all of the mechs that were undergoing last-minute tweaks and adjustments for the battle ahead.

There was little that Ves could do at this stage.

The people involved in the offensive operation had already formulated enough plans. Now, they just needed to follow the script and execute them all while remaining open to changes.

The spies lurking in the Pima Prime System had yet to detect any major movements. Though the Sundered Phalanx mech units entered into a state of higher alert and intensified their security protocols, it did not appear that the Gaugers thought that the invaders would have the guts to attack their core colonies, let alone their crown jewel.

With everything going according to plan, Ves was left in a rare period where his presence wasn't particularly needed.

A clan with over 600,000 members was different from a group that merely numbered in the hundreds. The former possessed a lot more layers in the hierarchy, and each person on the ladder possessed their own strengths and responsibilities.

Ves was not a military officer so he barely possessed any ability to contribute to the complex operations of a major military action.

General Verle and his formidable staff already covered all of the high-level tasks while the individual mech legions easily took care of the smaller chores.

Though Ves could have spent his time in the design labs and finished his current batch of design projects, he was in no mood to think about his actual work when he was on the eve of commencing a hostile attack!

He found that spending time with his family was an excellent way to soothe his nerves and keep him occupied.

This time, he thought he would give his second daughter a little tour through the Spirit of Bentheim and allow her to witness all of the clansmen preparing for battle.

Ship engineers meticulously inspected all of the shield generators and other essential defensive systems of the factory ship.

Logistical personnel brought out tons of energy cells, ammunition racks and other essential supplies out of deep storage.

The administration did its best to calm the civilian population and transfer vulnerable clansmen from the smaller starships to the larger and more defensible ones.

All of the activity opened up young Andraste's eyes. Though she was far too young to understand the full context behind these actions, she was sensitive enough to sense the solemn and humorless mood among the personnel.

The difference was quite obvious to a kid. Normally, the Larkinsons were much more relaxed and at ease.

Now, they acted as if a dark cloud hovered over their heads. The specter of death frightened them. Each of them became acutely aware that they were heading right into the jaws of the Gauge Dynasty.

Whether they could break the teeth of the most powerful coalition partner of the Friday Coalition or get chewed up by the formidable Hexer killers would become clear in a week!

"What is your favorite mech, Andraste?" Ves playfully asked as he rocked his daughter in his arms.

"That one! It's so pretty!"

It did not surprise Ves at all that her finger pointed straight towards a Valkyrie Redeemer Mark II.

Yaika, Andraste's companion spirit, suddenly emerged from her head and voiced her support!

Maaw.

Mrow mrow~

Blinky appeared from Ves' head and eagerly dove in to lick Yaika's intangible fur!

Maaw! Maaw! Maaw!

"Hihihi! Papa! Don't lick me so much!"

"I'm your daddy, little pumpkin. I'll lick you whenever and wherever I want!"

As Ves and his feisty daughter continued to fool around, a new presence quietly emerged behind his back.

"Ahem! What is the meaning of this, brother?! What are you doing to my lovely niece?"

"Helena!"

Ves paused in his effort to shower his baby daughter with kisses and turned around to see that Helena had manifested herself.

As usual, the young lady in black exuded a still and stagnant aura. Most people would feel uneasy at the sense of doom and gloom that the design spirit naturally invoked due to her unsettling domain.

Fortunately, neither Ves nor Andraste were average people.

Andraste's eyes even lit up after seeing her favorite intangible relative!

"Helly!"

Andraste somehow managed to squirm out of her father's grasp so that she could run up and get picked up by manifested design spirit.

"Hihihi!"

It cost a lot of energy for Helena to interact with the material realm due to her nature as a spiritual entity.

As a pure energy life form, she needed to concentrate a lot and burn an excessive amount of energy just to lift a small child with her arms!

Nonetheless, Helena did not act frugally just so that she could hold and embrace her relative.

The Larkinsons prized family above all, and Helena was no exception!

Her aspiration to become an authentic goddess of death was just a job description to her. She was way less scarier if people bothered to get to know her in person.

It was a pity that most people either got frightened to death or prostrated before her when she appeared in front of their faces.

This was why she cherished her family even more. If she didn't have Cynthia, Ves or Andraste to grounded her, she probably would have grown up into a much more somber and lonely Daughter of Death!

It was not a coincidence that Helena appeared at this time.

"How much help can you provide in the upcoming battle?" Ves asked.

"Not as much as you wish, but more than you expect." She answered.

"What does that mean, exactly?"

"Well, I can pull off a few tricks here or there, but it is difficult for me to exert any influence if I don't have any anchors nearby." The spiritual entity explained even as she tickled Andraste's cute nose. "I can probably exert the greatest effect on the battlefield when a lot of Valkyrie mechs have gathered in a single place. I was born at the end of the Komodo War, so I never got to test what I could do when millions of Valkyrie mechs deployed in space at the same time."

The Valkyrie mech line was easily the most favorite product of the Hex Army, though the latest batch of mech models had quickly built up their share of fans as of late.

Still, Task Force Fury easily carried tens of thousands of copies of the Valkyrie Redeemer Mark II and its numerous variants.

"Can you kill people without the help of a battle formation?" Ves asked.

"Technically, I should be able to do so, but in practice it's too difficult." Helena shook her head. "I'm not a full god yet, and it is hard for me to affect the souls of enemies by myself. In addition to that, I have learned that when people are trained, disciplined and in a state of high stress and excitement, it becomes several times harder for me to overcome their resistance."

"So in short, you're too weak to give us a hand."

"Hey! I'm still a goddess-in-training, you know! Not even our mother can do much better in the same circumstance! Space outside the Nyxian Gap is too rigid and unfriendly towards our kind. I truly can't understand why the barriers between the planes of reality are so strong outside of my birthplace."

Ves snorted. "It's probably a good thing that is the case, or else every galaxy would get flooded with would-be gods that try their best to suppress reason and promote ignorance in our society."

"You traitor! Don't you want your mother and I to be able to manifest easier and spend more time with family?"

"No thanks. While I like the occasional visit from you, I don't think the rest of my clan will be able to handle frequent visits."

"Spoilsport."

Helena drowned her sorrows by playing with Andraste for a while. The two female Larkinsons continued to generate giggles and joyful banter as they shared their love for each other.

"Can you do anything else to help us out in the coming battle?" Ves asked his 'eldest sister'. "I would really appreciate it if you can give my troops a hand."

"You sound awfully worried for your soldiers when you and your buddies are the ones that actively pushed to take part in this attack." Helena retorted.

"When you send your soldiers out to war, you need to accept the fact that not all of them will return alive."

"I know that, but I take no pleasure in this. To me, all of this is necessary to temper my troops and prepare my clan for the turbulent times to come."

"I thought the MSTs of yours already took care of that. I kind of like teasing innocent mech cadets and grumpy mech pilots as 'Little Helly'. I've made sure to put just enough fright into your mech pilots to respect the power of death over their own lives."

"You've done a great job over the years. I won't deny that, Helena. However, I haven't invested so much in their training and mechs just to achieve better scores in simulation programs. They are meant to be my instruments and should be utilized in ways that bring me profit. The potential benefits of winning this battle is enormous, but this is also the first real battle after our clan's 5-year long rebuilding and expansion phase. The more insurance I can add, the better."

"So that is what you're seeing me as? Am I just a security blanket to your fragile and sensitive mech pilots?"

Ves did not look amused at her tone. "Cut the crap, Helena. You know what I want. Can you offer any additional help that can tilt the battle in our favor? Think about this. The worse our mech units will fare in the upcoming battle,

the greater the chance the enemy will be able to attack this ship directly. Not only will this expose me to danger, but all of my children including Andraste will also land in the crosshairs of the enemy. Don't forget that the Fridaymen absolutely hate my guts! They will never miss an opportunity to aim at my life!"

The Daughter of Death frowned a bit. Andraste noticed the change and poked Helena's cheek with her tiny finger.

"What's wrong, Helly?"

"Oh, nothing much. Your father is just being a bother right now. He isn't confident that he can clean his own mess so he thinks his eldest sister can bail him out of his predicament."

"Can you, auntie?"

"You're so cute when you call me that, Andraste!" Helena gushed as she planted another series of kisses on her niece. "Well, I have been thinking about what I can do. There may be one way I can give our side an advantage on the battlefield."

Ves grew intrigued. "Tell me more."

Helena gestured towards the Death Lotus that she pinned on her hair. "Is it possible for you to make a large gun or cannon that is tied to my Death Lotus? If you can make one for one of your expert mechs, I may have an easier time in lending my strength to your troops."

"That... is an interesting idea. Why didn't I think about this before?!"

The Death Lotus was Helena's primary weapon, but it was also a living spiritual product in itself!

Even though Ves had made it so that it wasn't as sentient and expressive as Helena herself, the Death Lotus was technically an existence that was equal to his other design spirits!

If this was the case, Ves could fabricate an artifact similar to the Hammer of Brilliance or the Rod of Ylvaine that was especially attuned to channeling the power of Death Lotus!

"I need to start my design work right away! Time is ticking so I need to design and fabricate this new weapon as soon as possible!"

Chapter 4237 Unprecedented Weapon Project

Ves found a new project to occupy himself with after his talk with Helena.

Though Operation Saturday Market loomed closer than ever, he no longer spent as much time on worrying about the Sundered Phalanx mech divisions his troops had to fight against or whether the Neo Amadeus carried any nasty surprises.

Instead of worrying about matters that he had no control over and could not meaningfully affect with his intervention, Ves instead returned to what he was originally good at, which was creating ground-breaking new innovations!

Of course, given the time constraints, Ves knew he had to work extremely quickly in order to design a functional product and fabricate it before the decisive battle commenced.

Ves quietly drafted up a list of requirements as he carried his cute little daughter to the design studio. He put her down a floating kiddy chair and quickly began to draft a concept of what he had in mind.

"What are you doing, papa?" Andraste curiously asked as she grew fascinated by how Ves drew glowing lines in the air with his mind and fingers.

"I'm making a flower. A deathly flower. Kind of like the one I made for Helena, but at a far bigger scale."

His little girl looked impressed. "Wooooo."

Naturally, Helena appeared as well. Ves carried a totem of his 'eldest sister' on his person most of the time so that she could manifest in his presence whenever she wanted.

As the principal design spirit who would be lending her death energy to this hypothetical new product, Helena gained a huge personal interest in the outcome of this project.

She exhibited a similar interest in the work of her brother when he had tackled the Valkyrie Redeemer Mark II Project in the past.

That had been a fun time. While Ves and Gloriana had mostly focused on updating the older rim-level marauder mech design up to heartland-level specifications, Helena provided numerous suggestions on how to better allow her to channel her death energy through the mech line that she had 'inherited' from her mother.

She also insisted on cosmetic changes that better reflected her personality!

For example, each copy of the Valkyrie Redeemer Mark II and its variants carried a decorative black lotus on their upper torsos!

Now, Helena looked to repeat that experience. Any weapon based around herself or her Death Lotus needed to be pleasing to her eyes before she was willing to extend her blessing!

"What are you making, exactly?" She asked.

"A mech pistol." Ves answered. "One that will vaguely resemble your Death Lotus when it is in its weapon mode but scaled to the proportions of a mech. Of course, its internal design will be a lot different because it is not a spiritual construct like your personal weapon. It has to be a real luminar crystal weapon that is especially attuned to channel your specific energy."

This was not an easy task. Ves had never developed a weapon that was completely centered around the idea of channeling the energy of a spiritual entity.

He never developed the need to create such a weapon because his mechs already possessed all of the weapon solutions they needed to defeat their opponents.

However, considering the formidable reputation of the Sundered Phalanx and the many dangers of fighting against so many veteran, battle-tested military mech divisions, Ves felt ill at ease with the current situation.

Though there weren't any obvious indicators that showed that their predictions were off, Ves couldn't help but worry about the amount of casualties his clan would suffer in the ensuing combat.

There were plenty of possibilities where Operation Saturday Market succeeded but only after the Larkinson Clan lost over half of its mech pilots!

Ves also considered possibilities where the Sundered Phalanx gave up all pretense of defending the Pima Prime System and went all-out to destroy the Spirit of Bentheim and the other vulnerable starships of the Larkinson Clan in an act of retribution!

The Gaugers might even do their best to aim at his life and the lives of his immediate family. In the past few weeks, he had spent a considerable amount of his time bolstering the stealth detection measures of his flagship and all of the other capital ships.

The Senior-level Stealth and Cloaking Skill that he had acquired from the System 2.0 came in extremely handy during that time. Ves became a lot more assured that his fleet would be able to detect any sneaky bastards approaching his flagship while most of his clansmen were preoccupied with the enemies in the open.

He never got over that instance where a whole bunch of Haatumak cultists were crowded in the same compartment but somehow pulled off a trick that caused him to overlook their presence.

With all of the additional precautions he made, he was certain that this would never happen again, especially on the Spirit of Bentheim!

After a few minutes of hasty sketching, Ves completed his initial draft of his proposed weapon design.

It looked like an elegant black pistol at first. It shared obvious resemblances to the Death Lotus, which in turn was inspired by the Amastendira.

Unlike Helena's favorite flower, the mech pistol he drafted did not come in an alternate lotus form.

He didn't think it was necessary to add a transformation function. Mechs carried weapons all the time. They only looked more awesome when they carried an additional gun.

Besides, it was much easier to add a transformation function to a spiritual construct than on a solid object.

Unless the latter was made of smart metal, it was incredibly troublesome to design a pistol that could transform into a flower shape. The amount of mechanisms he needed to add was excessive, and he would be forced to make so many compromises that the firepower of the weapon would definitely suffer.

The last reason why he skipped the transformation function was that it added way too much time to the design process.

An energy pistol was one of the simplest weapons that he could design. Ves was extremely familiar with luminar crystal weapons of all kinds.

His last significant mech design project where he had to explore and push the limits of what he could do with luminar crystal technology was the one that resulted in the Nullifier model.

Ves applied the lessons he learned from designing the Nullifier and many other recent ranged mech models to the initial design of this new black pistol. Helena and Andraste both watched on as Ves zoomed in on the internals of his draft and began to draw crystals and other essential components to make the weapon work.

The two young ladies did not understand anything about the science and engineering behind what Ves was doing, but that didn't stop them from voicing their appreciation.

"Pretty!" Andraste giggled as she clapped. "I want it! I want it! Papa, give me one! I want to shoot!"

Ves grinned and leaned over to kiss her adorable cheek. "Hehe, let's wait until you've grown a little older. You're too young to hold a real weapon. Let's wait a few more years and I'll prepare a special gift for one of your birthdays. Is that alright?"

"I want it now!"

Ves had to spend a bit of time to placate his daughter before he could resume his design work.

He not only refined the initial appearance of the pistol, but also detailed its core components so that he could gain a better estimate of its technical performance.

Energy weapons could be quite complex, but one of the charms about luminar crystal technology was that it made several conventional components redundant.

Luminar crystals designed for different functions could wear multiple hats at the same time, so Ves could not only spend less time on designing a weapon, but also simplify its design.

Another benefit to weapons based on luminar crystal technology was that they were remarkably efficient. Luminar crystals were extremely good at converting electrical energy to pure output without generating too much waste heat.

This allowed Ves to place much less emphasis on heat management as his luminar crystal weapons simply didn't overheat as much.

The only major concern was that crystals endured such great strain when converting one form of energy into another form of energy that they could break after enduring constant stresses.

Still, everything was fine as long as Ves put a ceiling on the power output of his weapons.

All of this happened to make luminar crystal weapons particularly suited for compact weapon designs.

When it came to outlining the attack phase crystal which was one of the key components that defined the performance of the weapon, Ves paused for a time.

"What are you hesitating about, Ves?" Helena curiously asked.

"If... if I want to design a pistol that can effectively channel your death energy, then I can't rely on conventional luminar crystals." Ves answered. "The attack phase crystals that I have developed before mostly output conventional energy such as laser beams, positron beams and kinetic beams, which are all great at dealing material damage. None of the existing attack phase crystals that I have made in the past focused purely on channeling spiritual energy."

Before Helena's birth, the idea did not sound practical. Though there were design spirits that could probably inflict at least some hurt on people, the price-to-performance ratio was far too low to make it worthwhile.

For example, if he tried to make a luminar crystal weapon that channeled the spiritual energy derived from the Illustrious One, then he would probably end up with an overengineered flashlight that could only blind people at best!

Helena thoughtfully rubbed her smooth, porcelain chin. "So you have to invent a new 'attack phase crystal' in order to get the pistol to do what you want?"

"Yup."

"Do you know how?"

"Not really." Ves admitted. "This is the greatest hurdle to my project. I know that the luminar race used to be able to leverage spiritual engineering in their luminar crystal products, but I don't have that knowledge. I will have to spend my limited time on research and experimentation to whip up something quickly."

"That sounds like it would take weeks or months instead of days. Do you even have enough time to complete such an important task?" Helena asked in a skeptical tone.

Ves slowly grinned. "If I was working on my own, then I probably wouldn't be able to get it done in time. However, when did I say that this is a solo project? Don't I have you, Helena? You're the Daughter of Death. There is no one else in my orbit that knows more about death energy than you! As long as we work together, we'll be able to crack the secret sooner than later!"

Helena blinked. "While that may be true, I'm not a maker like you. I don't know the first thing about crystals and luminar crystals, let alone all of this engineering stuff."

"Don't worry about that. I can already cover this area, and if that's not enough, I have another crystal expert at my disposal."

"You mean that Illustrious One fellow?" Helena frowned. "He's weird."

"He's derived from a couple of long-dead aliens. Of course he's weird. It doesn't matter as long as he lends his expertise on luminar crystal technology to me. His knowledge base might not be complete, but he possesses a much greater affinity for luminar crystals than myself. I will need to borrow that in order to succeed."

"Is that all? Do you want to bring over our mother as well?"

"No." Ves shook his head. "She will probably refuse to give me any helpful information as usual. I have another assistant in mind that is much more helpful for our project. In fact, I would say that he is made to develop unique relics like these!"

"Who?"

"Me."

"Really, Ves?"

Ves chuckled for a moment. "I mean it, Helena. Of course, I am not referring to my base self. I am instead referring to Vulcan!"

This was an excellent opportunity for Vulcan to finally put all of the knowledge that he had absorbed from lots of craftsmen, mech designers and other worshipers of his totems over the years!

Chapter 4238 New Attack Phase Crystal

In the past, Ves engaged in many collaborative design projects.

He usually worked with different combinations of lead designers to design a lot of different mechs.

The selection and configuration of every design team differed based on the needs of every project.

For example, when Ves wanted to update his Transcendent Punisher design to modern standards, there was hardly any point in pulling in melee mech specialists such as Ketis and the Power Pair.

The general rule was that up to five mech designers could effectively impart the strength of their design philosophies onto a mech design.

Ves usually attempted to fill up all of these slots whenever possible, but it was a lot easier for people like him or other mech designers to make their mark on a mech design if they did not have to share so much.

In any case, the new weapon design project that he had spontaneously started was different from all of his previous projects.

His express goal was to design a powerful weapon that could expressly unleash pure beams of death without demanding too much from Helena.

Though he had witnessed instances in the past where Helena was able to fire a powerful concentrated beam of death in the material realm with the help of her Death Lotus, the efficiency was simply too low under ordinary circumstances!

Perhaps she might be able to save a few people in an emergency, but she would only exhaust herself trying to do so over the course of a massive mech battle involving hundreds of thousands of mechs.

If Ves wanted to give his clan the ability to repeatedly fire beams of death without squeezing Helena dry or straining her to exhaustion, then he had to create a weapon that could bridge the gap between the material realm and the imaginary realm!

Luminar crystals happened to be the key medium that could make this possible. Their reactivity to spirituality at least opened the door to such an application. All Ves had to do was to invent a new kind of attack phase crystal, preferably within a single day!

Ves already recognized that he did not have the expertise and understanding to complete this kind of research by himself.

This was why he thought about doing something that he had rarely done in the past, but should have done more often due to how useful it was to work in this way.

He formed a design team composed of himself and a bunch of design spirits. It was quite difficult to make this team productive at first.

"I don't know anything about science and engineering! I'm a goddess! I simply make stuff happen!" Helena complained.

"#\$%&#&\$." The Illustrious One silently communicated in a way that only Ves could clearly understand.

"That's not the way you should design a mech pistol!" Vulcan complained while swinging his intangible blacksmith's hammer. "It's way too skinny to endure the rigors of battle. If you want to make a relic that lasts forever, then I insist on thickening up its body!"

Ves let out a breath in exasperation as he rubbed his palm against his face. An hour hadn't even gone by after he brought all of these design spirits together and already they were bickering with him and each other about countless little details.

None of them were on the same page!

This wouldn't have happened if he worked with professional mech designers who were accustomed to working alongside their colleagues.

"QUIET EVERYONE!" Ves eventually shouted. "This isn't working! Time is short. We need to complete a weapon before our fleet is about to engage the enemy at Pima Prime V. Please bear with me as I try another solution. Blinky! Come out, you lazy cat!"

Mrow...?

The purple Star Cat floated out of Ves' head while letting out a yawn. It looked as if he had just woken up from a pleasant cat nap.

"I need you to form a design network with everyone here. This is the only way we can effectively pool our knowledge and coordinate our design work."

Blinky blinked as the companion spirit directed his gaze at Ves, Helena, the Illustrious One and Vulcan in turn.

"I'm being serious, Blinky. I know you've never done this with me and a bunch of design spirits before, but there's a first time for everything! Just make sure to limit the connections so that I won't get flooded with too much incomprehensible data."

Mrow...

Blinky did as instructed, taking extra care to limit the amount of data throughput over the spiritual bonds.

Spiritual entities were much different from organic life forms such as Ves.

The latter were largely constrained in their thinking by the finite capacities of their brains.

The former did not have to deal with those limitations and could easily scale up the magnitude of their thinking processes so long as they had the spiritual energy to spare!

What this meant was that it was quite dangerous to form an unregulated spiritual bond between normal people and spiritual entities.

So-called 'gods' could quite literally crush mortals to their deaths with the magnitude of their mental activity!

At first, Blinky definitely experienced a lot of strain. He actively had to shrink the bonds and implement more filters in order to make the design network bearable to Ves.

Once Blinky got everything right, Ves simply sat in his seat and took in all of the new input while actively sharing what he wanted to accomplish with his weapon design.

There had been instances in the past when Ves actively embodied a couple of his design spirits by channeling them directly with his mind and spirit.

The experiences back then were much different because Ves actively tried to align his thoughts with the spiritual entity in question.

This time, Ves tried to maintain his own persona and mental state as a mech designer while opening himself up to other influences to broaden his horizons and recognize new possibilities.

It was working.

As Ves gathered all of the unique knowledge and perspectives of three different design spirits, everything mashed together in a way that allowed him to notice a lot more details about his weapon design that he had previously missed!

Ves concentrated on the attack phase crystal that he wanted to make. The biggest problem with it was that no matter what kind of materials he used to synthesize a new luminar crystal, it probably wouldn't be capable of effectively channeling death energy.

What he needed was a spiritually-reactive material that was compatible enough to Helena that it could impart this key quality to an attack phase crystal.

"Wait a second..."

He paused for a moment before a black alloy bar 'spontaneously' appeared on the work table in front of his seat.

Helena immediately perked up when she felt an instinctive affinity for the new object. She hovered closer and experimentally poked it with her finger.

Much to her surprise, it easily sucked in and stored her death energy!

With the help of the design network, Helena already had a good idea on what it was and what Ves had in mind for this material.

"Can you truly combine this 'Black Demon Steel' into the right crystal?"

"It's worth a try." Ves responded. "I will have to experiment and develop the right combination and proportions of different materials. I'm not starting from scratch, though. The light beam attack phase crystal most closely resembles what I am looking for. If I take it as my starting point and swap out one material for Black Demon Steel, I can probably make a working crystal. After that, I just have to keep adjusting the proportions and such until I end up with the most efficient implementation."

This was exactly what he proceeded to do in the following two hours. Blinky kept up the design network in order to keep the design spirits engaged and invested in the weapon design project.

The first-class lab machines that he had acquired a while ago facilitated his work enormously. He had also spent a bit of his MTA merits to acquire additional lab and workshop equipment that were specifically developed to produce crystals.

This allowed him to produce dozens of different samples that slightly differed from each other.

Ves' approach towards this exploration process was fairly simple. He made a minor change to a single variable, and if that caused the next crystal to perform better than before, then he would make the change more drastic and see if that led to further improvements in performance.

Once that stopped happening, Ves knew that he had hit a sweet spot and proceed to change another variable and start the process anew.

This was hardly the most ideal and effective process to be honest. Ves might have been able to find an adequate sweet spot the first time, but overlook a superior one if he had just pushed through!

There were also instances where he could create a more perfect sweet spot if he made a lot of changes that did not seem beneficial at first.

However, all of that took a lot of time and calculation work. For now, Ves would be happy with a quick and dirty solution as long as he ended with a weapon that was strong enough to change the course of the upcoming battle.

"Alright, I think I have found a good-enough crystal formula!" Ves announced as he held a small gray crystal in his palm.

Based on the principles that allowed his luminar crystal weapons to fire light beams that dealt a lot of damage to spiritual targets, his new attack phase crystal successfully channeled and fired Helena's death energy in a way that was practical enough for his needs!

Ves glanced at the large amount of lab mice and other test animals that the Design Department routinely kept in stock.

Each of the unfortunate creatures were technically still alive, but all fell into a coma as their spirits had all been wiped away by the tiny crystal!

"That's interesting." Helena remarked. "The crystal itself has actually harvested small fragments of the spirits of those poor animals. I think that might be useful."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I think I have a few ideas on how I can leverage that, but I don't have the time to explore any further. I need to complete the design of the mech pistol and fabricate it. I want to complete a basic product first. I can think about upgrading it later on when I am not so pressed for time."

He proceeded to do just that. Blinky no longer maintained the design network as Ves finalized his black pistol design. He had gotten what he wanted from the design spirits, and none of them were needed anymore after the end of the design stage.

Helena, the Illustrious One and Vulcan still stuck around, though. They were incredibly curious to see what their collective efforts had yielded.

While this was not the first time that Ves had blended obscure forms of spiritual engineering with conventional engineering, it was probably the more extensive hybrid development project he worked on up to this point outside of mechs!

Ves hardly even paid attention to the news that the combined attack fleet had successfully arrived at the edge of the Pima Prime System.

General Alisky Victrix, General Verle and all of the other military higher-ups had everything in hand!

Since it took a decent amount of time to enter the inner system, sweep up the outlying settlements and shoot down isolated space stations, Ves still had enough time to fabricate a working mech pistol and test out its performance.

"I have a feeling that this weapon is worthy to be called a relic." Ves stated to his fellow 'collaborators'. "Black Demon Steel is anything but ordinary, and

using up 2.5 kilograms is just enough to produce my newly-developed gray beam attack phase crystal that can fit inside a mech pistol!"

p If he wanted to make a larger weapon such as a luminar crystal rifle or luminar crystal cannon, then he would have been forced to make the attack phase crystal larger, thereby reducing the proportion of Black Demon Steel in the object.

This would have caused the larger weapons to perform little better than a pistol!

Therefore, Ves might as well settle with the most compact form. This made it smaller, lighter and easy to carry for many different mechs.

Chapter 4239 Gray Lotus

"I can't believe you, Ves. Instead of taking care of your actual responsibilities such as leading our clan in a moment where we have entered an active warzone, you instead squirrel away in our private workshop just so that you can work on your latest obsession!"

Ves completely ignored his wife's complaints as he gazed appreciatively at the end product that he had meticulously handcrafted in cooperation with Vulcan.

He had been able to elevate the quality a lot more than usual with the active assistance of his design spirit.

Ever since Vulcan acquired the Heart of Steel and the new mantra associated with it, his affinity, understanding and workmanship with metal had reached an entirely new height!

To be honest, he would have been able to grow his Heart of Steel to a considerably stronger state if he practiced the mantra, but the stubborn design spirit insisted on modifying to his own needs.

This was probably one of the reasons why the new mech pistol hadn't been able to reach the masterwork threshold.

Of course, the main reason why the new gun did not reach the second rung of the craftsmanship ladder was because it was a rush job!

If Ves had an extra week or month to develop a better version of the attack phase crystal or optimize the design of the whole pistol, then he would have probably been able to make a much more exquisite work!

As it was, the iteration that Ves ended up with attracted both admiration and disgust from his wife.

While Gloriana was able to appreciate the forward-thinking aspects of its design, she also grew aghast at all of the corners that Ves had cut in order to

"You should have involved me in this project, Ves. I could have done a much better job at perfecting its design."

"And delay its completion for at least several weeks. No thanks, honey. I can manage it myself. I'm the mech designer with the greatest expertise in luminar crystal technology, after all. It is also not a personalized weapon that is especially tailored to any of our expert mechs. This new relic weapon is meant to be compatible with all humanoid expert mechs, whether it is the Dark Zephyr or the Shield of Samar."

Ves had actually taken a liking to developing this kind of mech equipment. The intimate cooperation with his design spirits along with the use of rare or exclusive materials resulted in the creation of a brand new weapon that was both powerful and unique!

Unless he was able to get his hands on another batch of Black Demon Steel, there was no effective way for him to make a second weapon of this kind.

The best way he could make a weapon that was close enough was to find a substitute material that possesses similar properties to Black Demon Steel, but neither Ves nor anyone else in his clan specialized in this kind of research.

In any case, that did not diminish his enthusiasm for this sort of side project at all. As long as the end product was powerful enough, it was worth it for him to spend a significant portion of his time and resources into making these so-called relic weapons!

Ves briefly thought about all of the other rare or unique materials that were available to him. He recalled that the Larkinson Biotech Institute still had large quantities of fish-whale meat and bones in cold storage.

While a part of these organic materials had already been used up in different development projects and experimental research activities, there were so many tons of them left that he was glad to get rid of the rest to be honest.

Once the Trailblazer Expedition kicked off in earnest, Ves expected to fill up all of the storage spaces with much more valuable loot!

Clang!

Gloriana punched the rear of his Unending Regalia with her suited first!

"...Are you listening to me, Ves?! Sometimes, I can't believe how distracted and scatter-brained you can be. This is probably one of the worst possible moments you can choose to shut yourself off from reality and lock yourself up in your own little world. The fact that you did so without involving me makes it all worse!"

Ves turned around and leaned over in order to lock Gloriana in a surprise kiss!

This was certainly an excellent way to shut up his wife provided she didn't bite his face apart!

"Quiet, Gloriana." He said as he retracted his lips. "Nothing bad happened in the last few days, am I wrong? The clan is in good hands and I don't need to hold everyone's hands all the time. We haven't arrived in orbit of Pima Prime V just yet, so the chance that something will happen is fairly low."

"Mmph! You rascal!"

Once his wife calmed down, Ves finally had an opportunity to introduce his work properly.

"You have the honor of witnessing the first of a series of relic equipment for mechs!" Ves proclaimed as he waved his arm towards the large, gray-coated weapon.

"Why call it a relic?"

"Because it is both valuable and one-of-a-kind." He said. "I have come up with more ideas about developing other powerful equipment for mechs, but I will leave that for another time."

"Why doesn't the color of your final product match your design? Isn't it supposed to be black?"

"It is, but then I thought that it resembled Helena's Death Lotus a bit too much. Since it spits out gray beams of death with the help of its new attack phase crystal, I thought it would make more thematic sense to coat it in this color."

"So what is its name?"

"Gray Lotus. It doesn't need to be more complicated."

When Ves compared the design of the Death Lotus in pistol mode with the design of his new Gray Lotus, he found that they matched quite closely.

This was deliberate on his part because the Gray Lotus was supposed to echo the Death Lotus!

With the help of the new gray beam attack phase crystal as well as other spiritual engineering shenanigans that Ves had hastily cobbled together, the two lotuses had formed an active spiritual bond!

Ves looked at the time and noticed that Gloriana did not seek him out without reason. A lot more time had passed. It would only take one more day before the combined attack fleet was ready to attack Pima Prime V-A!

This left him with precious little time to test out the weapon in its complete form. In fact, he probably wouldn't be able to preside over the testing session in person.

He turned to his wife. "Can you handle the follow-up process for my Gray Lotus on behalf? I'm not asking for much. As long as the pistol is effective enough to be used against Sundered Phalanx, I will be happy."

"I can do that..." Gloriana answered in a reluctant tone. "Which mech do you want to bestow this weapon? The Everchanger?"

Ves shook his head. "No. This is no time to play favorites. Venerable Joshua already has more than enough power at his disposal. It will have to be an expert melee mech because the Gray Lotus is just icing on the cake to mechs like the Amaranto."

"The Dark Zephyr, maybe? The mech pistol is a handy weapon to wield at close range and it vastly increases its versatility."

That was a good suggestion, but Ves eventually shook his head.

"Maybe it is useful to equip the Dark Zephyr with the Gray Lotus in some situations, but don't be deceived by its relatively compact size. This gun consumed a lot of power. It's the only way to make it powerful and sustainable enough to be useful in mech combat. The Dark Zephyr simply can't supply enough juice to keep it firing often enough to be useful in an extended battle."

One of the brilliant successes that he had achieved with the development of the Gray Lotus was that it successfully reduced the load on Helena.

The weapon did so by substituting a portion of her death energy with conventional energy!

Instead of sucking Helena dry, the Gray Lotus induced a smaller load on her energy reserves.

Meanwhile, the special attack phase crystal also drew in electrical energy from other sources and effectively amplified the original output of the mech pistol!

The resulting gray beam possessed slightly different properties than a gray beam, but to Ves it was just as lethal to organic life forms as Helena's original attack methods!

"Then what else do you have in mind, then?" Gloriana placed her hands over her hips. "In my opinion, there is nothing better than the Dark Zephyr. They are almost a perfect match in my eyes."

"I was thinking of handing it over to either the Riot, the Shield of Samar or the Blade Chaser Mark II."

These were all great choices in his opinion. The Riot would definitely be fighting against many enemy expert mechs, so equipping it with an extra weapon gave Venerable Orfan a way to poke at targets that were out of range.

The Shield of Samar was the guardian of the main fleet and was the final line of defense against any threats that sought to decapitate the Larkinson Clan. Venerable Jannzi might be an obstinate fool at times but she always abided by her duty.

The Blade Chaser Mark II also had a responsibility of defeating a lot of enemy expert mechs. The difference between it and the Riot was that Venerable Imon Ingvar possessed wonderful synergy with his sister.

When Ves thought about the Blade Chaser Mark II wielding the Gray Lotus while it and its pilot was Commandeered by Commander Casella Ingvar and the Minerva, the new relic weapon would perhaps be capable of outputting the maximum possible damage in the upcoming battle!

Gloriana likely had the same idea in mind, because she made the same suggestion.

"I think the Blade Chaser Mark II is a good alternative, but only if Venerable Imon Ingvar is open to using a ranged weapon."

"That won't be a problem, I think. Imon may be a mule head, but he's not a traditional swordsman. As long as I come up with an argument that is centered around protecting his precious sister, he'll likely agree."

"Let me handle this, then." Gloriana offered. "Even I can pull off this argument. You should go back to where you belong and take charge of everything. You can't remain absent in these kinds of situations. Now go make your presence known and function as the figurehead of this entire operation."

"Okay."

Ves left the design lab after entrusting the remaining handling of the Gray Lotus to his wife.

As he headed to the bridge of his flagship, he quickly called General Verle to get appraised with the situation.

"So how are we doing, Verle?"

"Nothing that merits your immediate attention, sir." He said. "Aside from entering a higher state of alert, our forces have been standing by without incident. Task Force Fury under the lead of General Alisky Victrix has been sweeping every outlying settlement, space station and other construct in our way."

"What about the defending troops?"

"The Sundered Phalanx has moved exactly as we expected. The Gaugers aren't even making a pretense at defending their exposed holdings. They have all been evacuated in advance with whatever valuables they can bring away in a hurry. The bad news is that the local troops are all converging onto Pima Prime V in order to make their stand at their most important and best-defended stronghold. We have a hard fight ahead of us. The enemy mech divisions will be able to confront us in their peak conditions."

"A pity. Whoever is in charge is not an idiot. Are there any unexpected surprises that I should know of, general?"

"There are a certain number of foreign visitors in the star system. Many of them are trade convoys that are guarded by a considerable amount of escorts. There is a chance that the Gauge Dynasty might hire or outright commandeer them in order to bolster their immediate defenses."

"I see. I've read about this in one of the reports. Is it likely that this will happen?"

"It depends on how desperate they are." General Verle stated. "Our spies are monitoring this development closely. So far, a lot of foreign trading fleets have evacuated in haste, but there are a number of them that are slower to move. I am afraid that we may have to fight thousands of additional mechs."

"Damn."

Chapter 4240 The Witches Have Come

"THE WITCHES HAVE COME!"

From the moment the local authorities detected the arrival of an enormous fleet that was projected to carry well over 200,000 threatening mechs, it was as if a bomb had exploded throughout the Pima Prime System!

In fact, it was not just the millions of colonists in the star system that reacted with a combination of shock and dread at the news.

The rest of the Friday Colonies and even the entire Friday Coalition back in the old galaxy all became gripped by nightmares of the Komodo War.

Had the remnants of the former Hexadric Hegemony gone crazy?

It was one thing to launch opportunistic raids at the vulnerable and frankly overstretched outlying outposts of the Friday Colonies.

It was another thing to launch a bold and brazen assault at the richest, most valuable and most developed stronghold in the colonial state!

For years, a significant portion of the economy of the Friday Colonies centered around Pima Prime. The Gauge Dynasty poured so much investment in the port system that it had quickly turned into a major trading nexus as well as an industrial powerhouse.

By drawing in a lot of resources and converting them into vital processed goods such as strong alloys, powerful mechs and vital starships, Pima Prime had quickly risen up to become the biggest economic engine of the Friday Colonies.

This granted its residents an unsurpassed sense of superiority and security. None of the Gaugers that had taken the opportunity to apply for transfer to the Red Ocean ever thought that an enemy would dare strike at Pima Prime directly.

Not only was it located in the interior of the Friday Colonies, but also hosted a vast array of defenses.

Every important settlement and major city district enjoyed the protection of formidable titan shields.

Around 14 formidable mech divisions and a scattering of other miscellaneous units of the Sundered Phalanx were garrisoned at Pima Prime.

The Kotic Ring that had taken up a lot of valuable construction capacity over the years had steadily grown more challenging to overcome.

The ring of space stations and defensive platforms surrounding Pima Prime V could even be observed with the naked eye at certain times of the day.

Along with the awareness that Saint Jeremiah Gauge, one of the supernovas of the last war, watched over the entire star system had given its residents the impression that the risks and dangers of the Red Ocean simply did not apply to them. They all believed themselves to be better than the other poor folk that had to endure the constant fear of getting targeted by pirates, aliens or other frontier scum.

"They lied to us! Pima Prime was supposed to be one of the safest harbors of the Friday Colonies!"

"Have the Hexers programmed the wrong coordinates in their navigational systems? They can't attack us! They're crazy! Have they forgotten about our Saint!? Why haven't they chosen to attack Rotes Cewma or New Rammes instead?!"

"I should've stayed home like a good boy instead of accepting a 20-year contract to help build up our colonies in the Red Ocean."

What the local residents couldn't not come to terms with was how the Hex Army skipped over all of the other weaker colonies in the entire region and aimed their offensive straight at the strongest pillar of the Fridaymen's colonial ambitions in the Magair Middle Zone!

Not even the aliens dared to confront ace mechs so easily. Many times these angry but powerful aliens underestimated the comparatively tiny mechs that

produced all kinds of anomalous fluctuations, and many times the aliens learned why high-ranking mech pilots were so revered in human space!

It did not take much time for many people to figure out why the Hexers were so confident about provoking Saint Jeremiah Gauge.

"What the hell is the Golden Skull Alliance?"

"Wait, this private group actually has an ace pilot? I've never heard of that!"

"Damn, Saint Reginald used to be a member of the Garlen Empire! Every mech pilot from that state is mad, and that counts double for their high-ranking mech pilots!"

As the prospect of a dramatic escalation in hostilities between the Friday Colonies and the Hex Federation began to dawn upon all of the citizens, many of them quickly sought to secure their own safety by whatever means possible.

Passenger vessels became stuffed to the brink of overloading their life support systems as the most wealthy and well-connected colonists quickly secured passage out of the star system!

The local administration also acted quickly and activated the appropriate contingency plans.

Though the people in charge of the important port system still maintained their confidence in their own defenses, they nonetheless contracted or commandeered every single trading vessel within reach.

Hasty movements took place as the local factories and other critical production centers quickly transported their most valuable and critical goods and industrial assets into one cargo hold after another.

"We don't have any cargo space left!"

"Then make more room, you useless oaf! We are not leaving until we are able to load this 3D printer into your ship. It is worth over 40,000 MTA credits and we are not leaving it behind for the Hexers!"

Though the sudden evacuation proceeded more chaotically than planned, the Gaugers nonetheless managed to transfer a lot of valuables to various different starships on short notice.

In line with the attitude of hoping for the best and planning for the worst, a lot of assets that were prohibitively expensive or difficult to replace were sent out of Pima Prime as soon as possible.

As the cargo ships headed towards the nearest Lagrange points in order to transition out of the star system as soon as possible, a few of them began to encounter hostile Hexers way in advance!

"What?! How can the Hexers be here already?!"

"Where did these women come from?!"

"Wait! Those combat carriers! They're... they're the Warp Ravagers!"

Just minutes before the first attacks arrived, Hexer-built combat carriers had whizzed across space at a pace that allowed them to exceed the speed of light!

This not only enabled the special squadrons of the Hex Army to enter the inner system without any warning, but also put them into positions where they could intercept crucial cargo vessels carrying goods worth at least hundreds of millions of MTA credits!

As the Valkyrie mechs and other fast and maneuverable Hexer mechs rapidly approached their prey, they either hijacked, looted or outright blew apart the cargo ships depending on the circumstances!

Whenever the Sundered Phalanx dispatched nearby patrols to intercept the Hexer mechs and starships that were wreaking havoc to the evacuation plan, the culprits in question all warped away well in advance, making it nearly impossible to chase after the destructive Hexer units!

The abrupt raids that had begun well before the main invasion fleet had arrived at the doorstep of Pima Prime V generated a lot of commotion within the floating Palace of New Beginnings.

"No cargo ship leaves Pima Prime without escorts." System Governor Mabrius Gauge dictated. "We cannot allow the Hexers to set our development back further."

"But sir! The more escorts we assign to the outgoing cargo ships, the less mechs we have left to defend Pima Prime V."

The appointed governor of the port system did not show any signs of panic or consternation. As a stalwart who had lived for over two centuries, the leader entrusted with taking charge over the Gauge Dynasty's holdings in the Magair Middle Zone knew it was crucial for him to maintain his composure.

Still, the dilemma he was faced with troubled him to no end. The Hexers may be aggressive, but underestimating them often led to disaster.

Since this had all of the appearances of a well-planned offensive operation, the Hexers must be confident in their ability to overcome the defenders.

If that was the case, then the Gaugers needed to do their best to minimize their losses by evacuating as much critical industrial equipment as possible.

As long as those productive assets made it all the way to New Rammes, then the Gauge Dynasty would still retain enough industrial capacity left to make a possible comeback in the future.

However, with the infamous Warp Ravagers of the Hex Army harassing their evacuation lines, it became a lot more dangerous to proceed with this action!

"The Warp Ravagers are a problem." The governor of the powerful and wealthy port system stated the obvious.

Of all of the Hexers that have harassed the Friday Colonies over the years, the most infamous and feared ones belonged to the Warp Ravagers!

Officially, the Warp Ravagers constituted a new special operations unit within the Hex Army.

In reality, the Warp Ravagers merely gathered the most bloodthirsty and aggressive Hexer soldiers who were filled with hatred towards the Fridaymen.

When these ferocious soldiers obtained control of special combat carriers that were equipped with additional standalone warp drives, they eagerly took revenge against the Fridaymen for the outcome of the Komodo War by raiding the shipping in and around the Friday Colonies!

Though the various forces of the Friday Coalition tried to catch and corner these raiders whenever possible, the Warp Ravagers hardly suffered any losses over the years due to the enhanced mobility of their warp-capable combat carriers!

Now, these professional raiders openly taunted Pima Prime's defense forces by performing their raiding activities barely a stone's throw away from Pima Prime V!

Unfortunately, space was big and it took a lot of time for the local patrols to rescue the beleaguered trading vessels.

"What do you think, cousin?" Governor Mabrius Gauge asked in the open.

The powerful presence of an ace pilot who had interfaced with an ace mech spread across the main hall of the Palace of New Beginnings.

Though the ace mech wasn't visible, the system governor knew that the Gauge Dynasty's trump card was hidden in a secret space that was built right in the middle of the floating palace!

"There is no room for half-measures." Saint Jeremiah Gauge voiced his own opinion. "The Hexers are too strong for that. Trying to have it both ways will only result in ending up with nothing. Either we make a stand with everything that we have, or abandon Pima Prime to the mercies of the Hexers."

Though the ace pilot gave the impression that the Gaugers had multiple options, in truth there was only one viable choice that Governor Mabrius could take.

"The Gauge Dynasty never flinches from the Hexers!" He declared as his courage and his fury towards the Hexers flared! "We have defeated the Hex Army in the past, and we shall defeat it once more! We cannot afford to lose everything we have built in Pima Prime, and we must not besmirch our reputation by losing a battle against our archenemies. Our honor and our duty demands that we must hold our ground and protect our colonies to the last man if need be! Not a single soldier in Pima Prime is allowed to retreat!"

It was politically and culturally unacceptable for the soldiers of the Sundered Phalanx to surrender or run away from this massive clash. The lives of millions of citizens who have settled on Pima Prime V were at stake. Governor Mabrius Gauge and the rest of his leadership council would become the sinners of their dynasty if they failed at this junction!

Saint Jeremiah Gauge apparently liked what he heard from his uncle, because his combative aura began to expand until it enveloped the entire Palace of New Beginnings with the desire to fight the Hexers to the death!

"Good! Good! Good! I have always felt we have left the job unfinished by leaving the Hexers in the Red Ocean alone. Now that they have brought the

fight to us, we can finally begin to exterminate this misandric scourge from human civilization. This battle shall be the beginning of the end of the Hexer people!"