

## Mech 4381

### Chapter 4381 Sympathetic Materials

It was hard to imagine that Ves was conducting serious research at this time.

For the last few days, he became so engrossed in his latest pet project that he behaved a little different from a little boy who had just received a brand-new toy.

The truth was not that far from the truth. Though Ves had created his fair share of innovations over the past few years, none of them were as powerful or impactful as the discovery of design spirit channeling.

By anchoring a design spirit to an object in a specific way, Ves could create a condition where the entity in question was able to interfere with the operation of the item in a material way.

This went beyond the traditional operation of design spirits in mechs and totems that had been implemented in the past.

Mechs such as the Ferocious Piranha or totems such as the Four Aspects of Lufa mostly derived their special value from their glows.

However, Ves always felt disappointed with his implementation of design spirits because entities such as Lufa could not really do anything aside from playing the role of a distant supervisor.

The only concrete actions that these spirits could take to influence the humans making use of living mechs or totems was to radiate their auras.

If they were feeling generous towards specific individuals, the design spirits could also reach deeper and communicate directly with people.

The only products made by Ves that were able to channel more than a symbolic amount of might from their design spirits were his living expert mechs.

The Riot, the First Sword and the Shield of Samar prominently demonstrated this capability in the last battle. Ves could have made the connection earlier if he studied these cases more thoroughly.

It did not surprise him that these three expert mechs happened to demonstrate power similar to what he was able to reproduce in his lab under different conditions.

Three aforementioned expert mechs were all living mechs as well as prime mechs. Not only that, but they all happened to be watched over by Qilanxo, a fairly old creature that had spent centuries growing up in an anomalous environment that was enriched with higher-dimensional energies.

The unique environment along with the wars and rivalries against other spiritually active exobeasts allowed Qilanxo to develop a rich mastery of spiritual manipulation.

Ves recalled that Qilanxo had also made a permanent pact with Venerable Orfan, Venerable Dise and Venerable Jannzi through a mysterious spiritual technique.

When Ves looked down at the weapon in his hands, understanding began to dawn in his eyes.

"It turns out that I have inadvertently reproduced this phenomenon in a simplified manner.

The relationship between Qilanxo and her so-called chosen was deep, profound and mysterious.

The relationship between the Phase King and the blessed weapons that Ves had made were not as complex.

However, these two phenomena shared a lot of similarities, which convinced Ves that their underlying principles were the same!

"It makes a lot of sense!"

The key principle was that Ves more deeply anchored the design spirit into a living product through the use of a crucial material.

Qilanxo was somehow able to substitute this material by paying another price, but Ves wasn't able to do so through his current means.

So far, the only way for him to anchor a design spirit into his living products was to use a material that possessed a high compatibility for a specific attribute of spiritual energy.

He identified two viable materials up to this point.

Black Demon Steel played well with Helena, but Ves had no way to obtain more of this metal. He had discreetly scoured the galactic net and the resource markets of Davute for any trace of it, but Ves had not even found a single record that matched its properties.

It was extremely unlikely for Ves to be able to gain more of this mysterious metal unless the System threw him another bone.

In comparison to the complete lack of availability of Black Demon Steel, phasewater could be found in every corner of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy!

Sure, the demand of this liquid exotic was so extreme that ordinary people had no chance of obtaining a single drop, but the Larkinson Clan was different.

The deal he recently made with the Hexadric Hegemony ensured that the clan would receive 5 kilograms of phasewater a year!

While this was far from enough phasewater to meet all of the Larkinson Clan's growing needs, it was more than enough for Ves to build up a modest collection of powerful weapons and equipment that was blessed by the Phase King!

The central importance of materials that could anchor design spirits inside a living product was so great that Ves coined a new term to describe their role in this context.

"Let's call them sympathetic materials."

He used the word 'sympathetic' for multiple reasons. It was not only a word that described how a material might relate to a powerful living being, but also emphasized the conditional nature of this relationship.

If the design spirit refused to cooperate as was the case at the start of his first testing session, then the use of a sympathetic material made no difference.

The reality of blessed weapons was that they derived a substantial portion of their power from the source of blessing.

Fortunately, Ves had just forged a new accord with the Phase King.

The agreement essentially obliged the Phase King to lend his power to the blessed weapons that were tied to him without holding back.

In exchange, Ves would periodically bring more spiritual fish-whales to life. This way, the Phase King would have more little brothers to boss around.

Although Ves felt annoyed for adding another long-term commitment to his plate, in truth the price he paid was far less than what he got in return.

Blessed weapons performed so much better than their regular counterparts that they could truly make a difference in a battle!

Expert mech duels that would have ended in a draw or a defeat could end in victory by leveraging the strength of the Phase King!

Of all of the design spirits that Ves had at his disposal, none of them were more suitable for this situation than the Phase King!

The entire frontier and this entire time period revolved around phasewater. Groups that were able to draw out the huge potential of this exotic to a greater degree would inevitably get ahead of the competition.

Right now, Ves was pretty certain that no human rival had developed anything comparable to his blessed weapons!

Even if a couple of cults or fringe groups managed to create a comparable product, Ves seriously doubted that they had a handy design spirit like the Phase King at their disposal!

"Only I can utilize phasewater to this degree!"

Every state or organization that managed to develop powerful new phasewater applications were on track to becoming the leading players in the new frontier.

This was because they could effectively gain more value out of the same quantity of phasewater than others.

For example, if the Larkinson Clan and a rival pioneering group both gained 100 kilograms of phasewater each, Ves was confident that his own forces would be able to wipe the floor with the opposing forces!

This was because the Larkinson Clan could apply the phasewater they received in ways that made it seem as if they had received 150 or 200 kilograms of phasewater!

This hypothetical scenario highlighted one of the main forms of competition in the Red Ocean.

Only the stupid pioneers sought to defeat the competition by trying to obtain as much phasewater as possible.

The smarter and more farsighted pioneers invested more of their time, effort and resources into supporting R&D institutions.

By inventing new means to gain more power out of smaller quantities of phasewater, the most successful groups were bound to become the rulers of the new frontier. This was because they steadily became more efficient at utilizing their existing reserves!

Ves had a feeling that he and his clan had just set foot in this exclusive club.

What he had just invented was different from the powerful transphasic products developed by institutions such as Melmen Advanced Systems or Morton Tech.

Though the Larkinson Clan made extensive use of their minidrives and other products, none of the Larkinsons mastered the underlying technology.

It would take decades before the Larkinson Clan could come close enough to building up a research and development institution that possessed comparable capabilities.

That was far too long for his liking. Ves needed an advantage in the short term, and the emergence of his new design spirit channeling technique neatly solved an urgent problem!

"I need to discover more sympathetic materials. I can't pin all of my hopes on the Phase King."

The downside of blessed weapons was that the design spirit connected to them had to expend a considerable amount of spiritual energy to support their full usage.

"There is a limit to how many blessed weapons that the Phase King is able to support at any single time."

This meant that Ves had to be careful about increasing the quantity of weapons or objects blessed by the Phase King.

If Ves wanted to maximize the use of this new class of weapons, then he needed to diversify his products and involve other design spirits.

That was his biggest problem at the moment.

Ves was glad that it was easy to find a connection between the Phase King and a sympathetic material that he could easily obtain in the Red Ocean, but what about other ones?

He tried his best to figure out whether the materials he worked with in the past possessed similar ties to other design spirits, but his mind did not supply him with any answers.

Perhaps there might be a connection between Rorach's Bone and Gaia, but it was not as if he had samples of this regenerating material in his vault.

Aside from performing a long and exhausting manual search, there was no way for Ves to identify other sympathetic materials.

Ves had a feeling that it might not even be necessary for him to do this in the first place.

"If I can make my own sympathetic materials from scratch, then I don't need to bother with so much work."

Unfortunately, he had no clue how to make one himself, so he put this matter aside for the time being.

The most important task right now was to figure out how he could successfully apply his latest invention to his existing mech designs.

"It goes without saying that our existing and upcoming expert mechs could all use blessed weapons." He decided. "Even if the Phase King can't support the use of so many items at once, there are still ways our expert pilots can ration the design spirit's power."

The Phase King essentially offered a common pool of resources that every Larkinson expert pilot could draw upon to gain an extra boost in combat.

Those that had it difficult could borrow the Phase King's blessing to overcome a crisis while those that were doing well had no need to draw upon the resource pool.

As Ves continued to flesh out the usage and the rules surrounding his new blessed weapons, he became increasingly more enthusiastic about introducing this new tech to his clan!

His only regret was that his new innovation had nothing to do with the Eye Project. He still wanted to find a way to enhance the combat effectiveness of his upcoming commercial mech design project, but he would have to develop a completely different solution that wouldn't strain the limited resources of his design spirits.

He momentarily fell into thought. "Is there a way for me to apply a part of the principles of design spirit channeling in a way that is viable for mass production mechs?"

This was a difficult question for Ves to answer. He tried his best to come up with new ideas, but it appeared that he had exhausted his creativity for the time being.

He shrugged. "Oh well. One powerful new innovation is already enough."

### **Chapter 4382 Accessible Extraordinary Power**

The development of design spirit channeling and the emergence of blessed weapons had the potential to power up all of the high-end expert mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

The massive changes would alter a lot of plans and force numerous people to adjust to the new developments.



After a bit of thought, Ves decided to take it step by step and invite Gloriana and Ketis to his lab to share his latest results and obtain their feedback.

Both women had already been working on their own design projects when Ves called them over, so they both wore pristine white lab coats as they entered his workplace.

"So what new toy have you made that warrants our attention?" His wife asked as she came close and stared down at the work table where Ves had placed a few objects. "Is this what you wanted to show to us? They aren't different from any other transphasic products aside from the fact that they are alive."

Ketis stepped forward and briefly swept her gaze over all of the gear before settling her attention on the basic sword that Ves had made.

Her face scrunched in disapproval as she picked up the weapon and swung it around a few times. The edge produced sharp slicing sounds.

"You should have called me over sooner if you wanted to make a sword. This sword is too crude and its balance is off. I don't even know why you still bother to design and make it yourself when my services are available."

Ves twitched his mouth. "This isn't a serious end product, Ketis. It's just a test object that I have cobbled together in order to demonstrate my latest advancement. Before I explain any further, can you tell what is special about this sword and the other gadgets that I have made?"

Both his wife and his former student accepted his challenge and began to examine the test objects with utmost attention.

Ketis continued to observe and probe the sword that she had picked up while Gloriana opted to study the luminar crystal pistol that Ves initially made.

It was difficult for them to ascertain any obvious changes at first. Neither of them possessed a strong affinity towards life and their spiritual perception

wasn't as good as his. Combined with the fact that they didn't really know what they should be looking for, it did not surprise Ves that they failed to come up with an answer.

That soon began to change when Ketis gave up relying on her own senses and called up her companion spirit.

"Sharpie, come here and familiarize yourself with this sword."

A miniature version of Ketis flew out of the floating greatsword that followed the swordmaster around.

"Sharp! Sharp!"

Sharpie's tiny form floated around the mystery sword for a moment before diving forward so that she could take residence inside the weapon.

The blessed sword began to glow with power as Sharpie spread out her energy and explored every nook and cranny.

It did not take long for Ketis to notice the differences. Her expression became more inquisitive as she gathered a few clues that showed how this sword differed from other comparable weapons.

"Interesting." She finally spoke. "This sword has too many shortcomings in my opinion, but it bears an undeniable charm that is typical of your style. This is exactly what a mech designer like you would have come up with. You just can't let go of your dependence on relying on external sources of power to improve the performance of your works."

As Ketis shared her opinion, Gloriana used the same trick and called up Alexandria to study the luminar crystal pistol on a deeper level.

The red companion spirit soon fed her with the necessary information.

"Oh. I understand now as well. You found a way to increase the connection between one of your design spirits and the products that you have made, isn't that right, Ves?"

Ves nodded in confirmation. "That's right. Would the two of you like to give them a try? I can guarantee you that you will be astounded by their performance."

Neither of the two women adopted a skeptical attitude towards his claims. Ves may be a little crazy and ridiculous at times, but he had a long history of making real gains.

"Let me go first." Ketis impatiently said. "Do you have a practice target for me to test this blade?"

Ves already anticipated her request. "Sure. I've already called up ten of them that you can destroy at your leisure."

"Good!"

She moved over the the testing area where a number of humanoid bots were ready to do their jobs.

The bots all wielded swords themselves. Together with the extensive combat programming that Ves had downloaded into their memory banks, they could give any soldier a considerable challenge.

Of course, Ves did not expect that any of them would be able to last more than a second in front of Ketis.

Aware of this discrepancy in power, Ketis pulled Sharpie from the experimental sword and began to show a lot of restraint when sparring against the practice bots.

So far, nothing special happened.

"This isn't enough." Ves told Ketis. "You need to reach out and communicate with the weapon in order to draw out the power of its design spirit. Try your best to request the Phase King to enhance your attacks."

"I will try."

Half a minute passed by before Ketis finally succeeded in activating her blessed weapon.

Her arm swung the one-handed sword to perform another casual slash that the practice bot should easily be able to block, but this time the move produced a different result!

"Ah!"

A bright flash of light exploded from the sword as the Phase King's powerful presence seemed to descend upon it for a moment!

Though Ketis managed to uncover the true ability of the sword, she did not expect the explosion of might that this simple-looking weapon had unleashed!

Much to the surprise of the two women, the sword slash whipped out an exaggeratingly large and imposing spatial blade that not only cut cleanly through the practice bot, but also continued to slice forward and cut up the next three practice bots that Ves deliberately placed behind!

The bottom part of the spatial blade even struck the deck below and cut up to half a meter through the reinforced alloy before running out of steam!

"..."

"..."

Neither Ketis nor Gloriana had anything to say at the moment. They were too astonished with the might the sword just unleashed.

"Ketis?"

"Yes, Gloriana?"

"Did you employ a special sword style or technique that released that energy manifestation?"

"No." The youngest mech designer in the compartment shook her head as she carefully brought the sword blade closer to her face. "I did not. I only swung the weapon in the same way as an ordinary person. It doesn't matter whether I'm a swordmaster or not. If my theories are correct, then even a child can unleash that attack!"

Ves grinned as Ketis correctly deduced the characteristics of his latest invention. What she had just described was the greatest advantage of blessed weapons!

Unlike ordinary swords that needed to be wielded by a swordmaster in order to display extraordinary power, a blessed weapon could produce exceptionally powerful attacks without imposing any cumbersome requirements on the wielder!

This was a revolution in a society where expert pilots and other spiritually activated individuals possessed a monopoly on extraordinary combat power!

If his hunch was correct, then this might be the first time that ordinary mech pilots might be able to exert power comparable to that of expert pilots with the help of his new invention!

In order to hammer home this point, Ves stepped forward and stretched out his hand. "Please give me the sword."

Ketis promptly passed over the weapon.

Though Ves was not a trained swordsman, he still knew a thing or two on how to wield them. His prior Mastery experiences along with all of the time he

spent with Ketis and the Swordmaidens at least prevented him from embarrassing himself.

He adopted a standard sword stance and performed a simple slash.

At the same time, he reached out and communicated with the blessed weapon.

The Phase King's silhouette briefly became visible shortly before the sword produced a sharp spatial blade that was just as large and lethal as the last one that appeared!

Though Ves hadn't aimed the spatial blade at anything, neither Ketis nor Gloriana could deny the power of this powerful energy manifestation.

Ketis became especially impacted by this dramatic display.

"If even a non-combatant like you can produce an attack of this magnitude... then is there still a place for swordmasters?" She asked in a heavy tone.

The implications of this new creation were so severe that Ketis already began to worry about the future of traditional swordsmanship!

While Ketis fell into turmoil, Gloriana eagerly wanted to give this a try as well.

The only problem was that she didn't trust the weapon in her hand. Who knew whether the small and flimsy luminar crystal pistol would explode because it was unable to contain the massive power it was able to produce.

If the magnitude was anything comparable to the spatial blades that appeared a moment ago, then an accident would most certainly mutilate Gloriana at the very least and tear her body to shreds at worst!

She looked around and gestured at one of the intact practice bots.

"Can a bot or any other inanimate source unleash an attack of this power?"

"Ah, no." Ves shook his head. "These are weapons that I have expressly designed to work with humans. The wielders need to communicate with the living weapons and respectfully plead for the Phase King to extend his power. He is the source of the powerful attacks that you have just witnessed. There is no way to tell him when and how he should apply his strength if you can't effectively communicate with him. This is why these weapons can't do anything when held by unthinking bots."

In truth, the matter was a lot more complicated than he described. If he truly wanted to, Ves might be able to develop a version of a blessed weapon that could be fired without the direct involvement of a human.

This may be useful in cases where he might want to enhance the power of a warship weapon for example.

The main cannon of a battleship was already stupendously powerful. How much more damage could it do if it was blessed by the Phase King?

Of course, Ves would never voice such a possibility to anyone!

"Give me the gun if you don't trust my work." Ves said and extended his other hand. "I will show you what it can do in the hands of a mech designer."

Gloriana instantly passed on the luminar crystal pistol as if it was a plague rat.

Ves inspected the weapon for a moment before he lifted it up and pulled the trigger.

Just like before, the weapon radiated a lot of power before unleashing a biting sharp laser beam that struck the solid metal barrier on the other side!

"How deep did it go?" Gloriana carefully asked.

"Over three meters I think. The exact power varies a bit because of differences in the way that Phase King applies his power and techniques. He

is still not used to all of this so you should expect the damage output of these weapons to be a bit inconsistent."

This was hardly important compared to the results of this little demonstration session.

It was already impressive for a sword to be able to imitate the attack of a powerful swordmaster by itself.

If Ves was able to implement the same tech on a ranged weapon, then that showed that he had the potential to revolutionize the offensive power of all of their mechs!

However, Ves wasn't finished yet. He put away the sword and the pistol and picked up a simple round shield.

"The Phase King can do more than empower attacks. He is also good at leveraging his spatial manipulation abilities to enhance the defense of a transphasic object."

"Your innovation can boost defense as well?"

Ves grinned. "There is nothing that prevents me from assuming that my new design application can be used to amplify the speed of a mech. Anything the Phase King can do, our mechs can do as well. That is the true goal that I am striving for! Our design spirits are no longer mascots anymore. They can provide serious help to us in the battles to come!"

### **Chapter 4383 Conflicting Values**

Ves patiently demonstrated a bunch of equipment that he had created for the express purpose of demonstrating the power and versatility of blessed gear.

One of the strong points of phasewater was that there were many possible ways to leverage its powerful properties.



Most exotics only possessed narrow applications. There were materials that could enhance the firepower of a weapon and there were other materials that could make a solid metal plate more resistant to damage.

Phasewater escaped these narrow use cases because it could be utilized to enhance almost every technological product!

It could be used to enhance the penetration power of weapons.

It could be used to strengthen the defenses of protective systems, particularly against transphasic attacks.

It could be used to make mechs and starships move faster by enabling warp travel.

It could even be used to enable scanning systems to peer deeper through solid obstacles.

Humanity had only scratched the surface of how phasewater could be utilized to amplify the performance of different pieces of tech that had little in common with each other.

This special quality of phasewater easily allowed Ves to create a lot of different gear on short notice that all gained a boost in performance through design spirit channeling.

Of course, much of the reason why all of these tools were able to outperform their regular counterparts was because the Phase King had mastered the art of phasewater manipulation to an incredible degree!

Even if his death and subsequent conversion into a design spirit caused him to lose chunks of himself, what he had left was more than enough to fill up an entire library with spatial manipulation techniques!

With the help of this enormous accumulation and legacy, the Phase King was practically the perfect complement to high-quality transphasic gear!

Ves even harbored doubts whether a typical phase whale possessed as much depth and understanding of phasewater as the fish-whale king.

In any case, by the time that Ves was done with showing off his toys, the two mech designers he invited in his lab became thoroughly shocked and numb at the wonders that he had introduced.

It took a bit of time for the two women to come to their senses and hold a serious discussion with Ves about his dramatic innovation.

Their question focused on both the strengths and limitations of his new tech. They soon found out that the greatest limitation to the spread of blessed weapons was that the Phase King only had a finite pool of resources to support their active usage.

"That makes sense." Gloriana said. "I was wondering where all of the power came from. It is impossible to produce such dramatic results by relying on electrical energy alone. Just the sword alone would never be able to release spatial blades unless it integrated advanced phasewater technology that is beyond our current means."

Ketis grew concerned as well. "All of this gear is powerful, and they are remarkably easy to use to good effect. I won't deny these advantages. However... I don't like it that the power doesn't come from a source that we have mastered. A typical mech or expert mech derives their power from factors that we can touch and manipulate such as technology, materials and mech pilots. This is no longer the case for these 'blessed equipment' because their strongest source of power is an inscrutable existence to us that hides in a part of reality that we can't even access, let alone observe."

This was a massive weakness that could bite the users of blessed equipment in the rear one day. Even Ves couldn't deny the danger of developing a reliance on borrowed power.

"I don't disagree with you, Ketis." He said. "This is why I want your help and that of others to formulate a thorough framework and set of rules on how we should design, make and use blessed weapons and equipment. We need to show moderation in how many of them we make and end up getting used, but we shouldn't cut off our access to a tool that can allow our mech pilots to burst with incredible power in the battles that matter the most."

"We shall help you, Ves." Gloriana responded. "Who knows what you will end up making if you are left to your own devices. We will have to formulate a thorough and detailed set of rules and guidelines that applies to both mech designers and mech pilots."

The three mech designers proceeded to do just that for the rest of the day. Ves, Gloriana and Ketis all possessed substantially different perspectives that allowed them to come up with different solutions to problems.

While that also meant that they frequently argued against each other, they were already accustomed to finding compromises.

Once they were finally done, they not only set a framework that would dictate how the Larkinson Clan would utilize blessed equipment in the far future, but also told them how they should explore this tech in the short term.

"I am incredibly impressed at what you have managed to do with all of those weapons and equipment, but that doesn't mean your new design application is ready to be utilized on a wider scale." Gloriana explained to Ves. "I am sure you are in a hurry to equip all of our expert mechs with impressive gear, but we do not have enough reliable data and results to conclude that we are better off with adopting your new tech."

"What do you propose, then?"

"My suggestion is that we should cautiously test out this new tech by developing new weapons for our existing expert mechs one by one. Start by

giving a mech like the Amaranto an upgraded version of its existing rifle. Let's see what Venerable Stark can do with the new blessed mech weapon. As long as the new transphasic luminar crystal rifle doesn't explode or malfunction, we can proceed with testing a different blessed weapon such as a sword. Ketis, are you up for developing a new weapon for the First Sword?"

The swordmaster paused for a moment. "The First Sword and the Decapitator are made for each other. Venerable Dise is able to exert her strength through the latter so well that giving her expert mech another sword is not entirely necessary."

The Decapitator was designed to be extremely sharp. It already possessed a lot of inherent penetration power.

Venerable Dise also developed a form of swordsmanship that maximized this quality, enabling her expert mech to cut through stronger materials!

However, that did not mean that the Decapitator was good in every situation.

"Don't forget what kind of opposition we are facing as of late." Ves tried to remind his former student. "We have fought against fish-whales that managed to pull off lots of tricks with phasewater. We also fought against a powerful human military organization that has already implemented transphasic parts and systems onto expert mechs on a wide scale. This means that defenses boosted by phasewater have already become common enough to give us a lot of trouble. Transphasic weapons make it a lot easier for our mechs to deal effective damage to powerful opponents."

He was right. Times had changed and everyone needed to keep up with the latest developments.

The problem was that while the rational side of Ketis agreed with this argument, her emotional side remained stubbornly attached to her original vision.

It had always been her belief that the human factor trumped the power of technology. It was the basis of her ability as a swordmaster and it also defined her views regarding the use of swordsman mechs.

Ordinary mech pilots might not be skilled or powerful enough to do anything special, so their mechs still had to rely heavily on powerful technology to gain advantages on the battlefield.

Expert pilots such as Venerable Dise were different because they could produce powerful results with relatively ordinary tools.

The Decapitator was not an ordinary tool, though. It was a masterwork mech sword that primarily consisted of Unending alloy. These factors gave it qualities that allowed Venerable Dise to channel her powerful sword style to an even greater degree than with any other weapon.

Ketis could already foresee that a transphasic sword and one that derived a part of its power from an external source would change the way that Venerable Dise practiced her swordsmanship.

"Just do it, Ketis." Ves spoke up. "I think Venerable Dise would welcome the option. She can still use the Decapitator against most enemies, but it is always handy to have an appropriate alternative at her disposal in case she needs to fight against an opponent comparable to the Shockshell. There is no harm in using the right tools for the job. I think it is stupid to stick to a mech and configuration that no longer fits the circumstances of a battle when we clearly have access to better options."

"I agree with you, but... it is not so easy for me to accept your words..."

In the end, the reason why Ketis hesitated so much was because her values as a mech designer conflicted with her values as a swordmaster.

Mech designers were accustomed to keeping up with the latest trends in the mech industry.

As soon as a new technological development such as phasewater technology came out, then people like Ves and Gloriana eagerly wanted to gain access to it so that they could apply it to all of their upcoming mech designs.

Swordsmen and especially those that adhered to its traditional customs despised the habit of developing an overreliance on technology.

The strength of a sword wielder must always be based on the person rather than the blade.

Traditional swordsmen weren't opposed to employing modern technology to forge stronger and more optimized weapons, but as long as they started to carry the fights by themselves, then that was a direct contradiction of the beliefs of every authentic sword practitioner!

Right now, Ketis behaved as if her mind had gotten stuck in an infinite loop error. No matter how much she tried to twist her thinking, she could not come up with a way out unless she violated one of the principles she held dear to her heart.

Both Ves and Gloriana shared a glance with each other. They understood that Ketis might not be able to cooperate as much as they hoped.

"Don't worry too much about this issue, Ketis." Ves eventually told her as he gently placed his hand on her shoulder. "I suggest you have a good talk with Venerable Dise and find out what she thinks. Maybe the problem isn't as big as you think. If it turns out that Dise doesn't want to make use of a blessed sword, then we'll just focus on upgrading the weapons of another expert mech."

The swordmaster slowly nodded. "I suppose that is for the best. I'm sorry, Ves. It wasn't my intention to stand in your way."

"You don't have to apologize for your beliefs. You are your own person and there is no reason why you must support my vision. If you think your design

solutions will make Venerable Dise and her First Sword better off, then you need to prove that with your actions. Just know that phasewater technology in human society is continuing to improve at a rapid rate. If your own technological applications fall too far behind, then there is a point where you need to put your ego aside in order to properly serve your mech pilots."

He hoped that Ketis would be able to find a satisfactory solution to her dilemma.

This was the downside to becoming both a mech designer and a swordmaster. The former required a person to be flexible and versatile in their thinking, but the latter made a person far more rigid and intractable in their thought processes.

Even though it was technically Sharpie that possessed the power of a swordmaster, the companion spirit was still a part of Ketis so the woman wasn't able to turn her back on her values and principles so easily.

#### **Chapter 4384 Dependency**

Though Ketis expressed great reluctance to provide the First Sword with a new blessed weapon that derived much of its power from the Phase King, everything else proceeded smoothly.

Ves gathered a sufficient amount of empirical data to gain confidence in his ability to scale up this tech to a state where it was applicable to mechs.

The Gray Lotus already proved that this tech was viable at this level. Ves just had to make sure that he figured out the right quantities of phasewater needed to plant a strong enough anchor.

The larger the object, the more sympathetic material needed to allow the design spirit to exert power through a medium.

Ves also suspected that certain sympathetic materials were more effective at this job than others. Black Demon Steel was probably highly effective in this

role due to its special spiritual qualities, but because Helena's death attribute did not completely align with it, the overall efficiency dropped to an extent.

In contrast, the fit between phasewater and the Phase King was practically perfect!

The more Ves experimented with creating different pieces of blessed equipment, the more he became astounded by how fortunate it was that he had the perfect design spirit at his disposal!

Perhaps it was not an exaggeration to say that the spirituality of the Phase King was his most valuable prize from the Purgatory Campaign!

As Ves made more use of this ascended exobeast, his estimation of the fish-whale king's value rose by the day.

In fact, with the awareness that he possessed at this time, he would have been willing to give up on gaining more than a hundred kilograms of phasewater to secure the Phase King.

Ves would have also been willing to trade away all of the expert pilot breakthroughs if that was what it took to get back the Phase King!

It didn't matter that he possessed the ability to create his own design spirits from scratch. The only way to create a spiritual product with the relevant domain was to harvest a spiritual fragment from a phase whale, and that was a suicidal act.

Even if he managed to obtain the right spiritual ingredients through certain means, the resulting design spirit would start off young, inexperienced and completely devoid of any mastery in phasewater manipulation.

There was no way that such a juvenile form of life would be able to equal the understanding and accumulation of an entity as ancient as the Phase King!



Ves also found it fortunate that it had been rather easy to gain the cooperation of the Phase King.

Despite his immense age and wisdom, the Phase King's personality and desires were rather simple. His background was exceptionally poor considering he spent the vast majority of his years locked in a barren pocket space that only featured a rudimentary form of civilization.

With only a bunch of lesser fish-whales to keep him company, it was not surprising that the Phase King lacked sophistication.

Another favorable circumstance was that Ves was confident in his ability to keep the Phase King loyal and under his control.

The Phase King wanted to recreate his former kingdom in the imaginary realm, but the only way to do that was to gather a large following of subordinate spiritual entities.

Ves was the only individual who was capable of providing the Phase King with new spiritual fish-whales.

If the Phase King didn't want to cut off the supply of additional spiritual fish-whales, then he would have to make sure to abide by his end of the deal!

Naturally, Ves wasn't stupid enough to include the ability to procreate to the spiritual fish-whales he provided to the Phase King.

The original fish-whales did not exhibit sexual reproduction so the spiritual variants derived from the spiritual fragments of the Phase King were no different. This was the biggest shortcoming of the artificial origin of the fish-whale race.

In the past, it was Oooruganioaus, the Flesh Conqueror and the creator of the Purgatory pocket space, that controlled the fate of the fish-whale.

Nowadays, control over this group of fish-whales passed over to Ves. His leverage over the Phase King allowed him to exploit the design spirit's powers to an extensive degree.

The very idea gave Ves an enormous rush of power!

It was hard for him to rein in his hubris and develop an overreliance on the Phase King's services.

"Life always finds a way. This applies to both organic and intangible life forms." Ves reminded himself.

Just because the Phase King and the spiritual fish-whales lacked the ability to procreate and expand their numbers by themselves did not mean this would always remain the case.

Given how much the powerful design spirit cared about this issue, it was practically a guarantee that the fish-whale king was cooking up a way to solve the procreation issue.

The spiritual fish-whale race would never be able to obtain autonomy if it wasn't capable of replenishing its numbers by itself!

Once the Phase King solved this difficult problem, his relationship with Ves and the Larkinson Clan would undergo an instant change.

If Ves no longer possessed as much leverage of the fish-whale king than before, then the blessed equipment tied to a more assertive design spirit might lose the power that made them so effective.

This would set Ves back to an enormous degree, but he did not consider it a nightmare scenario.

Just as the Phase King was likely preparing for a way out, Ves also came up with a plan to deal with this potential outcome.

"I'll just create a replacement."

Since the Phase King regularly needed to donate his spiritual energy so that Ves could create new spiritual fish-whales, it was not difficult to embezzle a few spiritual fragments every once in a while.

As long as Ves collected enough spiritual fragments, he could quickly bring life to a new phasewater-oriented design spirit!

If Ves happened to collect a lot of spiritual fragments, then it might even be possible for the new spiritual product to replicate a fraction of the Phase King's impressive skills and abilities!

Ves actually made similar preparations for most of his other design spirits.

The abrupt removal of Nyxie in his design spirit collection created a momentary crisis for the Living Mech Corporation. Ves hastily had to alter the design spirit makeup of the Doom Guard line in order to preserve its value.

This event taught him a lesson about the impermanence of design spirits.

"Each of them are alive, and that means that each of them can change over time. None of them are static existences that will remain exactly the same. It is foolish to assume that I can keep using them in the exact same manner a decade or a century later."

This was why Ves gradually harvested a few spiritual fragments here and there without using them up in his projects.

Instead, he piled them all up in a hidden stash that he prepared in case one of his design spirits became unavailable for whatever reason.

"I can never be too careful." Ves quietly affirmed.

His preparations along with his constant growth and progression gave him the confidence to be able to deal with any crisis related to design spirits.

Perhaps his dependence on the Phase King may be high in the early stages of the product life cycle of blessed weapons, but Ves was certain his

dependence on this single entity would drop as he continued to develop this new tech further.

"No design spirit should be indispensable to my work."

Ves was well aware that his core design philosophy did not revolve around design spirits. The invention of blessed weapons may have excited him, but it did not stimulate his design philosophy.

This told him that working on the Dullahan Project was much more important to the progression of his design philosophy.

He wasn't in a hurry to develop Venerable Jannzi's new expert mech, though. Ves still needed to generate more ideas on how to tackle the many new problems associated with this experimental project.

In the meantime, working on the new blessed weapon concept not only allowed him to exercise his creativity, but also allowed him to give his clan a power boost in the immediate future!

"According to Calabast's intelligence reports, the border region between Krakatoa and Zelmar has seen a massive increase in conflicts. Most of them amount to scuffles between different pioneering fleets. I need to strengthen my clan's ability to fight against hostile mech forces as much as possible."

The presence of an ace pilot in the form of Patriarch Reginald Cross should be enough to deter many potential enemies from taking action, but those that decided to proceed anyway would most definitely have the ability to fight back!

If this was the case, then the Larkinson Clan urgently needed to bolster its combat power to guard against these situations.

As the expeditionary fleet was just about to enter the chaotic border region, it became more urgent than ever for Ves to upgrade the weapon loadouts of his expert mechs.

"I should normally start small and work my way up to bigger and more important weapon projects, but that's too slow for me. I need to make the biggest impact in a short amount of time."

Ves settled for developing a new weapon for the Amaranto.

In order to make sure that Venerable Stark was onboard his plans, he needed to meet with her to discuss her wishes.

As soon as the expeditionary fleet transitioned out of FTL, Ves boarded a shuttle that brought him over to the Wild Torch.

Ves had not visited the fleet carrier often enough for his liking, and that was a shame because it was the most modern capital ship in his fleet.

Originally built for the Wild Fighter Association, the Wild Torch inherited the rambunctious organization's flair.

The aggressive lines, the bold colors and the tribal vibe went a long way into turning her into a vessel that constantly kept up the fighting spirit of her crew.

Most of the mech pilots assigned to the Wild Torch hailed from the Flagrant Vandals, the Swordmaidens and the Penitent Sisters.

This led to strange sights that Ves never encountered when he walked the halls of his flagship such as fistfights taking place in random compartments.

It wasn't just the personnel that exhibited less restrained behavior. Even the pets that were present aboard every Larkinson vessel engaged in playful wrestling and sparring!

"Miaaaaaaaaaw! Miaaw miaaw!"

"Hisss!"

"Woof-woof-woof!"

"What a madhouse." Ves quietly shook his head in mild disapproval.

Ves walked past all of this rowdy behavior without pause and continued to head towards the upper decks until he reached a large and expansive park.

Even the roughest warriors possessed a need to immerse themselves in a peaceful environment at times.

The general noise levels in the park were much lower and those that met each other tended to keep their voices down. The animals that roamed around the massive compartment also abided by the rules.

Ves eventually found the middle-aged expert pilot sitting on a bench that was placed in front of an artificial lake.

Venerable Stark looked a lot tamer as she had opted to change her sharp and dashing uniform for a more casual outfit.

Much to his surprise, Stark was currently holding an old-fashioned fishing pole. Given the empty bucket besides her feet, it didn't look like the fish were biting today.

"Hey, Davia."

The woman nodded beside her. "Take a seat if you want."

He approached and sat down on the bench and stared out at the calm and peaceful lake. The zen-like view strangely calmed him down, causing him to remain silent so that he could enjoy a rare moment of peace in his life.

Sometimes, he wondered what he would have been like if he lived in a peaceful and idyllic environment.

He probably wouldn't have been able to build up so many impressive accomplishments as he did in his current life, but that didn't sound like a bad thing.

Ves only stepped up by necessity. He would have been more than content with living out a mediocre life if his life and the lives of his family weren't under threat.

He imagined that the same applied to Venerable Stark. If not for the great tragedy that had befallen many states of the Komodo Star Sector, she would have continued to live on her life as an obscure mech pilot from an unremarkable third-rate state.

It was unfortunate that the outbreak of the sandmen changed her life forever. Venerable Stark became forever scarred by the Sand War, and even now she continued to carry a heavy burden in her mind, as evidenced by the heavy weight of her presence.

#### **Chapter 4385 One Rifle Or Two Rifles?**

"It's nice out here, isn't it, Ves?"

"It is." Ves gradually smiled. "I have enjoyed too few moments like this. Is this what you seek in your life?"

Venerable Stark let out a soft snort. "I wish I could embrace peace, but there is only war in my heart."

Ves frowned at her words.

"We talked about this, Davia. Years have passed since the sandmen have been wiped out by the Big Two. You need to move on. Everyone else has already done a good job at that. The Red Ocean offers a new start to everyone including you. There is no need to hang on to old and forgotten grudges anymore.

"I WILL NEVER FORGET THE DEAD!" Venerable Stark burst out as her force of will briefly pressed upon the lake environment!

Ves almost recoiled from her and quickly raised his palm. "Calm down, please! You don't need to raise your voice!"

"My apologies." She spoke as she quickly reined in her fury. "From the moment my people died en masse, I have given up on living a normal life. Not a day goes by where I wish death and suffering on those that have callously allowed my former friends and many other innocents to get slaughtered by the sandmen without lifting a finger."

Her words still remained acrid despite lowering her voice. The pure resentment in her words remained just as intense as in the past!

This told Ves that Venerable Stark had not really experienced any change of heart on this matter.

"The Larkinsons never forget the dead. Isn't that supposed to be the case?"

Venerable Stark referenced one of General Verle's previous funeral addresses with her words, which made it impossible for Ves to refute the statement.

"Uhm, yes." He said. "Those words express a determination to never forget the contributions our fallen have made to further the survival and growing prosperity of our clan. The meaning they convey is that we, the surviving Larkinsons, should not shy away from doing our duty when our fellow clansmen are backed into a corner. General Verle encourages our mech pilots to focus on protecting those who are still alive. It is not our intention to encourage the mindless pursuit of vengeance. We prefer to spend our lives productively rather than pursue a road that only goes downhill."

If Venerable Stark understood his underlying meaning, she showed no indication of agreeing with him. She instead opted to adjust her fishing pole as if that would help with catching a fish.

Ves quietly sighed.

Of all of the expert pilots in the Larkinson Clan, Venerable Stark was certainly the one that was most out of place.



This was an undesirable situation because the Larkinsons had to rely on a guest pilot to supply a large chunk of firepower at the expert mech level.

Ves always held out hope that the Larkinson Clan would eventually succeed in assimilating Venerable Stark in its ranks.

Unfortunately, the guest pilot remained as unmoved as ever. She remained as dead as a rock towards any friendly entreaties from the clan.

The Larkinsons that had been tasked with warming Venerable Stark's heart all returned in failure.

The clan eventually figured out that active persuasion was useless at best and counterproductive at worst.

In order to avoid annoying Venerable Stark too much, the clan stopped disturbing her and left her to her own devices.

Whether this was the right decision or not, Ves found it difficult to accept that such a powerful expert pilot with excellent growth potential would slip out of his grasp almost a century later.

Ves had taken the time to study Venerable Stark's record and documentation during the shuttle ride to the Wild Torch.

Her strong conviction, her constant dedication and her excellent cooperation with her masterwork expert mech enabled her to grow just as fast as Venerable Jannzi.

After she consolidated her gains from the Battle of Pima Prime, her resonance strength measured at 38 laves on average according to the logs of her most recent live practice session.

The best Larkinson expert pilots still struggled to reach half this number, which meant that Venerable Stark was still on track to become the first high-tier expert pilot among her peers!

There was also an excellent chance that she would take another step and become the first ace pilot that was at the Larkinson Clan's disposal!

This turned her into an indispensable asset to the Larkinsons. Even if she promised to stay in the clan for a single century, it was better to enjoy the protection of an ace pilot for a couple of decades than to have nothing at all. Ves could not afford to compromise the safety of his clan by adopting a harder attitude towards her obstinacy.

It all came down to leverage. Ves needed Venerable Stark's combat power more than she needed his mechs.

She was perfectly capable of leaving the clan and hiring herself out to another employer if it came down to it. The main reason why she continued to stay was because she still believed that sticking with the Larkinsons offered her the fastest way to grow stronger.

She was right about that. Ves could at least count on her to abide by her promise. He only needed her to watch over the clan long enough to eventually replace her with its own cohort of Saints.

"So why did you visit me this time?" Venerable Stark asked as she finally broke the silence. "If you wanted to talk to me, you could have contacted me over the comm."

Ves nodded. "I wanted to talk to you about a new technological development that I want to apply to your expert mech. Let me share the details."

He spent a bit of time on giving her a simplified explanation on blessed equipment and what it might mean for her Amaranto.

He also gave her a few samples of handheld blessed weapons and gear that his bodyguards had brought for this trip.

"I see." Davia Stark said as she understood how much this new type of equipment could help her during combat. "You're saying that this is essentially a way to borrow a greater amount of power from a design spirit, is that right?"

"That is correct. I have already struck a deal with the Phase King that ensures that he will do his part to empower our mech equipment."

The female expert pilot frowned. "I am not familiar with the Phase King. The only design spirit that I have worked extensively with is the Illustrious One. Can't you make a blessed weapon that is tied to him instead?"

"It's not that simple." Ves regretfully shook his head. "I already thought about it before, but the empowerment he is able to provide is too insignificant. It has to do with his traits and his abilities. The reason why the Phase King works especially well with blessed gear is because he can take transphasic products and manipulate their power in much more efficient and effective ways. The Illustrious One doesn't have that much room for manipulation because he does not have many ways to draw more power out of luminar crystal weapons."

The full story was too technical and complicated for Venerable Stark to understand, but Ves told her enough to understand that the Phase King was their best option going forward.

"So we will all be relying a lot more on phasewater." She remarked.

"That's correct. Maybe you don't entirely approve of this measure, but blessed gear are still strong even if the supporting design spirits have withheld their assistance. The extra power boosts should only be employed in situations where they are truly needed."

"I can understand that. It is still undeniable that the power of these blessed equipment will change the way we fight. I will also have to adjust my approach and take this new complication into account."

"I wouldn't call it a complication, Davia. It's a boon. Think about the difficulties you've experienced in the last battle. The Star of Liberation wouldn't have been able to suppress your Amaranto that much if you had the ability to bite back harder. Blessed weapons exist to solve these kinds of problems, and right now the Phase King offers the greatest and most accessible form of empowerment."

This would definitely change in the future when he found more sympathetic materials that worked well with different design spirits, but for now their options were limited.

Venerable Stark eventually relented.

"Very well. Let us go with the Phase King then. What is your plan?"

"It depends on your wishes. You can choose from two general solutions. The first one is that I will develop a brand-new transphasic rifle from scratch that incorporates all of my latest advancements in luminar crystal technology. It will be larger, heavier, more powerful and more capable of penetrating existing targets than with your current Instrument of Vengeance rifle."

That definitely sounded good to Venerable Stark. "What about the other plan?"

"If you are highly attached to your existing weapon, then I can work on upgrading it instead. Much will change and become unrecognizable to you, but the weapon will ultimately come close to matching the performance of the new rifle that I intend to build if you choose the first plan."

Venerable Stark understood why Ves presented these two plans for her. No matter which one she chose, she would inevitably have to make a tradeoff.

"What do you advise, Ves?"

"Both options are good." He replied. "If you go for the first plan, then your Amaranto will have two different weapons at its disposal, which ensures that you will not be rendered useless if the enemy happens to disable one of them. Preserving the Instrument of Vengeance rifle will also ensure that all of the effort you have put into learning how to utilize it in its current configuration will not be wasted. However, do take into account that your existing weapon will be the only one that has integrated Opticonium, the resonating alloy that is responsible for allowing you to bend your energy beams."

"Hmm. I understand. What if I go for the second plan?"

"Then you will not have as much choice as before." Ves replied. "The upside is that your Instrument of Vengeance rifle not only keeps its old advantages, but will also gain new ones as I convert it into a weapon blessed by the Phase King."

Venerable Stark grew concerned about a potential consequence to embracing this plan.

"My current rifle is already heavily associated with the Illustrious One. Will that relationship worsen if you bring in the Phase King?"

"That.... Is difficult for me to give a precise answer. I estimate that there will certainly be problems considering that the Illustrious One has to give up space to accommodate the Phase King. In essence, it is up to you to decide whether you want your Amaranto's first weapon to keep its focus on energy manipulation or put more emphasis on spatial manipulation."

This would have massive implications in the future when Venerable Stark came a lot closer to becoming a god pilot.

She closed her eyes and kept her silence for a couple of minutes.

Venerable Stark ultimately made her choice.

"I don't particularly like phasewater technology to be honest." She told Ves. "Maybe I'm being old-fashioned, but the way that transphasic weapons and armor is changing the mech landscape and making it harder for grassroots forces to defeat stronger armies is disgusting."

Ves slowly nodded. "You're right about that, but feeling this way won't change anything. Times are changing and everyone else around us is adapting to this new era. If we want to ensure that we retain our agency, we can't fall behind this technological development. So what will you choose, Davia?"

"I... would like you to make a second rifle for my Amaranto." Venerable Stark announced.

"I can definitely do that. I'll work on it right away since our clan urgently needs this boost of power. I expect I will have a blessed weapon ready for you within a month. Can you tell me why you went for this option?"

"I'm not giving up on the Illustrious One." Venerable Stark lips curled into a smile. "You explained to me earlier that you will continue to find ways to allow you to make blessed weapons that are tied to other design spirits, correct? I will be waiting for you to succeed with the one that I am most familiar with. Once you do, I hope you will upgrade the Instrument of Vengeance as soon as possible."

Ves grinned back. "No problem, Davia. I can promise you that your original weapon will be among the first to benefit from this development."

### **Chapter 4386 Losing Sight Of The Bottom**

Now that he handled the most urgent issue, Ves tried to converse with Venerable Stark about other topics.

"So..." He trailed as he sat next to the expert pilot on the bench. "Have you thought about starting up a relationship with someone? Many of our clansmen including our expert pilots who were previously single have married and

gotten kids by now. Each of them have become happier and gained more fulfillment in their lives as a consequence."

Venerable Stark shifted her gaze from her fishing line to pin Ves with her sharp eyes.

"That is their business, not mine. Don't try to persuade me to move on from the past and join your clan by marrying one of your Larkinsons. I have forsaken all of my thoughts about starting a new family. There is no void inside me that needs to be filled by this redundant distraction. Only my hatred drives me forward. I have little room for love or affection in my heart, and that little space is already occupied by my Amaranto."

Ves wanted to palm his face. He still believed that her insane crusade against the Big Two was doomed from the start. There was no way she could ever threaten the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance when both organizations were at their heyday!

At least Venerable Stark was sane enough to remain discreet while she was traveling with the Larkinson Clan.

Many people in human space did not hold back in criticizing the Big Two, but that did not necessarily mean the mechers and the fleeters were so tolerant.

The idle chatter from space peasants was harmless and did not threaten the hegemony of the Big Two.

As soon as someone of greater weight and power started to speak against the current order, Ves was almost certain that the MTA and CFA would be keeping score!

This was also why Ves was partially relieved that Venerable Stark maintained a certain degree of separation from the Larkinson Clan. She was officially just a guest pilot which meant that her misdeeds would not reflect on the Larkinsons.

"Are you happy in the clan?" Ves simply asked as he gave up on persuading her to move on from her current obsession.

"I wouldn't say that I am happy." She told him. "I am... content. I have access to a strong expert mech and I am growing quickly. Sooner or later, I will grasp the strength I need to fight for the people that the vast majority of leaders ignore or disregard. By that I mean the people you have increasingly acquainted yourself with. You have moved up so quickly that you are increasingly becoming one of them. I cannot blame you for that, but it is disappointing to me that you have forgotten your roots."

Ves grew defensive after he heard her accusation.

"I have not forgotten my roots, Davia! There is nothing wrong with climbing my way up from the bottom! Everyone has ambitions, and just because I am more successful than most doesn't mean I have turned my back on my roots."

The look she gave him showed how little she believed in his statement.

"Sure, Ves. You and your clan don't seem to care at all about the third-raters you originally came from. Your latest mech designs are all second-class machines that exclusively serve your kind. Your mech company's activities back in the old galaxy have gone on life support and you have done absolutely nothing to give back to the third-rate states of your old star sector."

He sighed. "Okay, I admit that my mech company has not been releasing a lot of mechs back in the old galaxy, but it isn't as if the market over there needs our machines. Many people are doing fine without ever knowing that living mechs exist."

"And that is your excuse for abandoning the people you once professed to serve?"

"Too few mech designers in our clan have acquired PPs that allow us to radiate our influence across the Yeina Star Cluster. Also, many of our mechs



designed for the Red Ocean are built to different standards and materials than what is common back in the Milky Way. It is much better and more convenient for everyone if our clan focuses on servicing our customers in the new frontier while the local mech designers over at the old galaxy attend to the needs of their own markets."

Though his argument was sound, it didn't make him look good. He could have put a greater effort into maintaining a more active business network in the Yeina Star Cluster.

Ves simply decided not to bother with this anymore. It took too much of his precious time to design or update mechs that were specifically oriented to his previous home region.

The money situation had also changed. The revenue the LMC earned in the old galaxy was only a fraction to what his mech company earned in the Red Ocean!

The paltry amount of profit generated by the LMC's business activities in the Yeina Star Cluster simply wasn't enough to fund all of the expenses of the Larkinson Clan anymore.

Ves could earn much more money starting new ventures in the Red Ocean these days!

"I don't owe anything to the people back home." Ves argued. "The Bright Republic and the Ylvaine Kingdom stabbed me in the back. The moment they deprived me of my rights is the moment when I am no longer obliged to contribute to their societies. Besides, all of these third-rate states that I have an association with have fallen under the sphere of influence of the Friday Coalition. The Fridaymen have become the rightful custodians of the entire star sector after winning the Komodo War."

Those words did not placate Venerable Stark at all. Instead, her willpower and emotions roiled even more when she thought about how much the Fridaymen had 'contributed' to the Sand War at the time.

"Be that as it may, you have become unrecognizable compared to how you were back when you still resided in the Bright Republic." She told him. "You only care about your ambitions and occasionally your clansmen. I am confident that once you climb even higher and begin to design first-class mechs, you will quickly abandon your activities in the second-class mech market even if a vastly greater amount of people have come to love and depend on your products."

"That... that's not true." Ves responded even though he inwardly admitted that this was exactly how he would proceed if this situation came to pass! "I am not going to abandon the customers who are responsible for my success and have given their support to my company for many decades. I will arrange the necessary solutions to ensure that the second-class mech market will not lose access to the products that they have come to love. I can bring up second-class mech designers who have inherited a part of my design philosophy. It is also possible for the competition to have caught up to me. In that case, there will be a lot of rival mech companies to fill the void that I have left behind."

Though Ves only thought up these solutions on the spot, he was genuinely sincere about making sure the transition would proceed in an orderly manner.

As an entrepreneur, Ves understood that it was always essential to treat both his current and former customers with sincerity.

The relationships that he had built with them in the past were still valuable in many ways even if his focus had shifted away from them. The reputation and legacy he gained from his older customers would still benefit him long after the last transaction. It was just good business.

"I hope you maintain that attitude in more ways than one." Venerable Stark said as she shifted her attention back to her fishing pole. "No matter how far you are able to go in the future, I hope that there will still be a part of you that remembers that you originally started off as a space peasant. I hope that recognition will guide your decisions and encourage you to do more for the underserved communities in human space."

"I will take that into account."

To be honest, Ves wanted to do his best to forget his humble roots. He did not hate his low birth but he definitely did not harbor any nostalgia towards those simple times.

Ves had long learned the truth that remaining at the bottom had no agency in their lives. It was horrible to go through life knowing that his circumstances could change at any time due to whimsical decisions made by the people who were sitting above his head.

After getting screwed over too many times by the mistakes and intrigues of different leaders, he had made up his mind to become one himself!

At the very least he would be able to control his own life rather than allow others to dictate his trajectory!

If that meant losing touch of his former compatriots that still remained stuck at the bottom layer of society, then so be it. Ves was not a philanthropist nor an idealist.

He was just a mech designer.

After Ves ended his trip to the Wild Torch, he returned to the Spirit of Bentheim and immediately started to design a powerful new luminar crystal rifle for the Amaranto.

Since Ves was able to start this side project from scratch, he had the freedom to make fundamental design choices that would ensure the Amaranto's second rifle would be effective in situations where the expert mech's original weapon was inadequate.

In order to determine the configuration of his new luminar crystal weapon, he first needed to figure out the scenarios in which Venerable Stark might prefer to use it instead.

"The Instrument of Vengeance has decent penetration characteristics, but it does not excel in this area." Ves recalled as he brought up the design schematics of the latest version of this precision rifle. "The weapon's damage output is not as high as it could have been. I needed to make plenty of compromises to ensure that its firing rate and energy efficiency are reasonable enough to make the gun practical enough in a serious battle."

The Instrument of Vengeance certainly possessed high damage potential per individual shot, but Ves could have made it even more extreme.

There were good reasons why he refrained from going overboard, but a part of him still wondered what it would be like if he stuck to his original vision.

"Maybe... I can explore this notion anew with this side project!"

The more he thought about it, the more the idea appealed to him. The Amaranto already possessed a fairly versatile and practical weapon in the form of the Instrument of Vengeance rifle.

One of the biggest situations where it might fail was when Venerable Stark needed to strike a highly protected warship or high-ranking mech.

The firepower required to penetrate their shields and armor could reach extreme levels if the Larkinson Clan bumped into much more powerful enemies!

Increasing the fire rate or lowering the energy consumption of a weapon didn't mean anything if all of the shots failed to harm the target in the end!

Ves understood what kind of weapon he needed to design.

"I need to equip the Amaranto with a weapon that gives up everything in exchange for maximum firepower and maximum penetration!" His eyes lit up as he became flooded with ideas.. "It doesn't matter if it can only fire once every minute or if a third of the Amaranto's energy reserves are drained after a single pull of the trigger. As long as firing the shot will produce a positive result, it will be worth all of the inconveniences!"

He immediately proceeded to draft a weapon that was much larger and more exaggerated than the original Instrument of Vengeance rifle.

Whereas the older weapon still looked fairly streamlined even if it was a bit oversized relative to the mech frame, the new concept that Ves came up with could not even be called a rifle anymore.

He turned it into a luminar crystal cannon!

### **Chapter 4387 Siege Weapon**

One of the greatest advantages of humanoid mechs was that they could change their external equipment with minimal fuss.

It was not an advantage that the Larkinson Clan utilized often. Ves designed most of his mechs with a singular purpose in mind where they only had to do great in their own intended roles.

There was nothing wrong with this approach, but the emergence of mechs such as the latest generation of Bright Warriors showed that there was still a huge amount of value in providing more choice of loadouts.

From a mech designer's perspective, the ability for humanoid mechs to utilize their limbs to grab any pieces of equipment they could was the oldest modular mech system in existence.

The modular connection system was virtually universal, allowing for any mech to pick up any weapon or gear no matter whether their purposes matched.

A rifleman mech could theoretically hold a tower shield while a swordsman mech could wield a cannon.

The mechs might even be able to achieve acceptable results under the right circumstances!

However, there was a big difference in being able to hold a weapon and being able to utilize it well!

If Ketis wielded a sword, then she could probably slaughter an entire infantry battalion by herself!

However, if she was armed with an assault rifle instead, then it was questionable whether she could defeat an infantry squad!

The same dynamic applied to mechs.

Mechs designed for melee combat usually featured great mechanical strength but did not possess enough stability and fine control to facilitate accurate shooting.

Mechs designed for ranged combat were the opposite in this regard.

What was relevant in this case was that rifleman mechs and cannoner mechs were not identical to each other.

Perhaps laymen assumed that they were almost exactly the same and only truly differed by the size of their primary armaments, but there were many deep and fundamental differences in their designs.

Rifleman mechs occupied the middle ground among ranged mechs. They were decently fast, accurate, agile and possessed good staying power.

Cannoneer mechs leaned towards the more hard-hitting and cumbersome side of ranged mechs. Their mobility was usually low to average but their armor was a bit better to compensate for their lower evasion ability.

Mechs such as the Eternal Redemption line designed for the Penitent Sisters also featured large to monstrously-sized cannons.

While heavy artillery mechs generally relied on multiple cannons to sustain a high consistent output of damage, cannoneer mechs expressly relied on one immensely powerful gun to deliver piercing shots.

While big and heavy cannons most certainly had their uses, they were not as accurate or as efficient as smaller and more controllable rifles. It was difficult to maintain perfect accuracy at long range unless the target was a fortress or a huge and lumbering starship.

Therefore, different ranged mechs equipped with different weapons generally excelled in diverging modes of combat.

Rifleman mechs just happened to be the most popular in both spaceborn and landbound combat due to their excellent combination of traits.

Cannoneer mechs were less common but there were certain mech forces that succeeded in maximizing their value.

When Ves studied this topic on the galactic net, he found that cannoneer mechs worked best in large, set piece battles like the previous engagement.

That was because there were a lot of rigid formations and large, static targets such as orbital space fortresses where the cannoneer mechs could unleash their firepower without worrying too much about missing their shots.

Their huge but relatively inefficient cannons would not waste their firepower in such a target-rich environment!

However, cannoner mechs performed progressively worse when the scale of an engagement grew smaller.

Their lack of flexibility and other faults increasingly weighed them down.

All of this was interesting information and helped him put the Amaranto's second weapon into context.

Ves gained a much clearer idea on how he wanted to expand the masterwork expert mech's weapon options.

"The Instrument of Vengeance rifle is a good general purpose sniper rifle for a marksman mech. It is already sufficient against most targets, but it still has trouble with taking down the biggest or the most well protected targets."

The Amaranto's current weapon was not a sieging weapon and it didn't have to function like one. Ves originally envisioned it as a powerful precision weapon that could take down its targets by focusing on their weak points.

This was why the weapon integrated the resonating exotic known as Opticonium. The express purpose of this exotic was to enable the Amaranto to bend its energy beams, which would enable Venerable Stark to avoid the strongest frontal protection of her targets and strike their weaker sides instead!

However, there were situations in battle where precision and flexibility couldn't cut it anymore.

Replacing a sniper rifle with a cannon provided Venerable Stark with a different set of advantages that worked especially great against large astral beasts such as the Titania or alien warships like the ones that regularly roamed the deep frontier!



In fact, granting the Amaranto the ability to effectively deal with non-human enemies was the primary reason why Ves decided to embrace the cannon as the basis of its second weapon.

"This way, the Amaranto can still stick to the Instrument of Vengeance rifle when fighting against human mech forces but switch over to its new cannon when fighting against alien forces.

The indigenous alien races still fought their battles in a similar fashion to humanity before the Age of Mechs.

Warships and large guns were ubiquitous among their warfleets. Though it was not unheard of for certain alien races to employ small craft such as starfighters, their roles were often supportive in nature.

"In short, it is better to carry a bigger gun in battle that can more effectively overcome the thick hull plating of the most threatening warships." Ves concluded.

Transphasic cannons happened to be even more effective against these targets!

Their amazing penetration capabilities might come at a cost, but it didn't matter if the Amaranto only needed to fire a handful of shots to cripple a threatening alien vessel!

As Ves continued to flesh out the design for the luminar crystal cannon, he completely embraced the idea of turning it into a siege weapon.

The design choices he made during this time constantly increased the cannon's damage output at the cost of accuracy, control and energy efficiency.

One of the more difficult choices that Ves had to make was to add an external battery module to the weapon frame. There was no other way for the Amaranto to keep its hungry cannon active for over five minutes!

While the new addition made it easier for the Amaranto to swap spent battery modules for fresh ones, their considerable size and mass added even more bulk to a weapon that was already overburdening the Amaranto.

When Ves took a step back, he could see that the proportions of the cannon and the mech did not match at all! The Amaranto literally looked like a skinny man that was attempting to hold a tree trunk!

The cannon looked so out of place that it completely ruined the majesty of the masterwork mech!

Ves didn't care for that, though.

"I would rather use a crude shovel than an exquisite spoon if I need to dig a hole in the ground."

This encapsulated his thought process towards the cannon. Whether it harmonized with the Amaranto or whether Ves was able to turn it into a masterwork weapon did not fall under his consideration at all. He just wanted to equip his expert mech with the right tool for the right job.

Ves showed little restraint and went almost completely wild as he became more engrossed in the design process.

His passion became more and more stoked as he developed various small but novel design solutions that made the cannon more savage.

However, his progress slowed to a crawl after reaching a certain junction in the design process.

Though he was able to complete the weapon all by himself, it would miss out on numerous advantages that couldn't have been added to the cannon if he brought in contributions from other mech designers.

This was why he invited Gloriana and Master Benedict to a virtual meeting. He first presented his half-complete weapon design to them before inviting them to help design the rest.

"What are you asking from us, Ves?" Master Benedict asked.

"My new cannon can't become a qualified expert mech weapon if it can't effectively resonate with Venerable Stark." Ves replied. "The Instrument of Vengeance is embedded with Opticonium, and I think my new weapon ought to be matched with another powerful resonating exotic. I have a decent collection of materials in our strategic materials reserve that can potentially play a useful role here, so I would like you to help me maximize the firepower of the Amaranto's upcoming sieging tool."

The Master Mech Designer of the Cross Clan thoughtfully studied the incomplete design schematics.

"I can do that, but... I cannot stand the internal architecture of this weapon. It may not be representative of the final version, but there are fundamentals here that are unnecessary wasteful in my eyes."

Luminar crystal weapons worked differently from conventional human energy weapons, but science and engineering was still universal. Master Benedict could still implement many tweaks to make the weapon more efficient in its use of energy.

Ves nodded in agreement. "I was just about to ask you that. My luminar crystal cannon could sorely use your help."

"What about me, Ves?" Gloriana asked. "What is my role in this project?"

He turned to his wife. "I would like you to apply your god body tech to this luminar crystal cannon. If you have studied its design closely, you will see that I have already taken this factor into account, so it should be relatively straightforward for you to enable this weapon to evolve its quality by absorbing external energy."

Gloriana did not immediately agree.

"I can understand why you would want to do that, but it would make this weapon even more out of tune with the Amaranto."

"That will only be a temporary condition, Gloriana. We already formed a plan to upgrade all of our existing expert mechs into god bodies, remember? While it isn't time yet for us to revise the overall design of the Amaranto, we can start with a preview by applying your design solution to the luminar crystal cannon first. Besides, this will be an excellent test case for you to study its characteristics from a different mech from the Mars."

"Hmmm... you are right. I agree, then. However, I want to add a number of touches of my own to your weapon design. It is too barbaric in its current state."

"That's the entire point of this weapon, Gloriana!"

Bringing in other mech designers brought a lot of trouble, but Ves had little choice. He could not replicate the strengths of Gloriana and Master Benedict so he accepted the need for compromise in order to elevate the power and capabilities of his upcoming weapon.

Fortunately, the three already had a lot of experience with collaborating with each other, so they resolved their disagreements fairly quickly.

Progress accelerated as two more mech designers shared the workload that Ves originally bore by himself.

Both his wife and Master Benedict developed an increasing amount of interest in the outcome of this project.

How powerful would a new blessed weapon become after incorporating several powerful design solutions in a single package?

Was Ves right in claiming that this powerful luminar crystal cannon would enable the Amaranto to efficiently take down alien warships from afar?

The only way this could come true was if his new blessed weapon concept successfully amplified the penetration capabilities of the cannon by an enormous margin!

The Phase King had already shown that it could do so for smaller infantry-sized guns, but could the design spirit still accomplish the same task for a large and imposing cannon?

This was the mystery that all three mech designers wanted to solve!

### **Chapter 4388 Existing Technology**

As the design of the Amaranto's new weapon became functionally complete in a surprisingly short amount of time, Ves and his fellow collaborators only had to optimize it before they could complete the project.

One of the difficulties of doing so was that the new luminar crystal cannon made use of extremely expensive materials.

Ves did not limit the budget of this weapon design project too much. He made liberal use of expensive high-grade exotics and tried to maximize the amount of phasewater he could stuff into the cannon without making it too unstable.

This made it unviable for him to build a prototype and forced him to make do with testing the performance of the new weapon in simulations.

The MSTS provided him with a surprisingly effective simulation environment. It was capable of testing the basic performance characteristics of the new energy cannon with a high degree of accuracy.

This was mostly because the MSTS already possessed countless pieces of data on the performance of many different luminar crystal weapons.

The only issues that the MSTS had trouble with was reproducing the effects of newer and less familiar phenomena.

The MSTS could not accurately produce results on blessed weapons because no such items existed in the past. Ves did not possess a database that could be used to accurately model and extrapolate the performance of different blessed weapons.

This was not a new occurrence to Ves or any other mech designer that worked on high-ranking mechs. So much about these powerful machines defied established natural laws so the only way to verify a lot of features was to build an actual copy.

Ves could only rely on his confidence in his latest innovation to carry this weapon design project forward.

Still, both Gloriana and Master Benedict believed that the final product would be able to present revolutionary results once it was made!

"The estimated firepower and penetration characteristics of this new energy cannon are so exaggerated that it may cause alarm once it is put into use." Master Benedict told him one day.

"What do you mean by that?"

The projection of the Master Mech Designer gestured at the latest iteration of the energy cannon design.

"According to our latest estimates, our upcoming weapon has the potential to become so effective at its job that it can almost match the firepower of an ace mech. In other words, it can threaten weaker ace mechs by piercing through their Saint Kingdoms and high-quality armor."

Ves briefly smirked. "That doesn't sound like a bad outcome to me. It is unlikely that the Amaranto can strike an actual ace mech, though. If the target is anything like the Neo Amadeus and the Mars, then the enemy machine moves way too fast to guarantee a successful hit. We need to impair the mobility of the hostile ace mech before the Amaranto can come into play."

"Be that as it may, the MTA has always paid close attention to the destructive potential of any weapon. The mechers may be willing to tolerate weapons that bend or break the limits in the case of high-ranking mechs, but they are only willing to extend so much leeway a second-class expert mech. If this new energy cannon allows a mid-tier expert pilot such as Venerable Davia Stark to come close to matching the offensive power of an ace pilot, then that will spark alarm within the halls of the Association."

Ves relaxed his posture. "Oh, that? Don't worry, Master. I already thought about this problem beforehand. I already shared my plans to Master Dervidian of the Transhumanist Faction. I have a decent relationship with him so he gave me his blessing without too much fuss."

That surprised Benedict.

"He let you off too easily. I would have expected the MTA to exert more scrutiny towards this weapon design project."

Ves smirked in response. "You may not have paid attention to this, but the MTA officially recognizes me as a senior contributor of restricted technology, specifically with regards to luminar crystal technology. That means I have much greater leeway to try out different stuff related to this tech. I just have to

make sure to abide by the conditions that the mechers have specifically imposed on my work."

Master Benedict didn't buy this excuse. "The key innovation of your upcoming weapon isn't limited to luminar crystals. It can be applied to more than luminar crystal weapons."

"Hahaha!" Ves laughed. "That may be true in the future, but for now my blessed equipment concept should be treated as an extension of luminar crystal technology."

"That... is not an intellectually honest statement, and you know it, Ves."

"Didn't you advise me to cozy up with the MTA so I can get away with more stuff? I am still working on it. I need to buy more time right now so I can seek out a new patron that can offer stronger support to my research. I can make a better case for myself if I can present dramatic examples like our upcoming energy cannon. Nothing excites mechers more than introducing them to powerful new tech!"

Seeing that Ves already took this potential problem into account, Master Benedict did not pursue this matter any further.

As the lead designer of this project, Ves bore all of the responsibility for its success and failure. It would be him who would attract all of the heat if anything went horribly wrong.

Just as the weapon design project neared the point where Ves was about to finalize it, the expeditionary fleet had reached an important waypoint.

"We've arrived in the border region, sir." General Verle spoke to Ves over the comm. "Not only that, we have entered the Norbit System, which is an important and highly frequented stopping point for many pioneering fleets that come from the same direction as us. It is highly advisable for us to travel to



the inner system and visit the temporary trading post that a coalition of highly entrepreneurial pioneers have established."

"Oh?" Ves raised his eyebrow. "What is this trading post that you're talking about?"

General Verle transmitted an image that depicted a large and well-defended commercial space station.

What was special about this space station was that it was not a single enormous space construct.

Instead, Ves could clearly see that the overall structure of this floating space station was made up of five different capital ships that had been merged together!

"This is Pentahull Station, a temporary hub that is engaged in commerce and entertainment." Verle introduced. "It is owned and managed by the Pentahull Coalition. I think you can already guess how it works. The coalition regularly searches for regions that have become hotspots and moves its entire fleet to a traffic node before setting up its semi-modular space station."

Ves was impressed by the guts of the Pentahull Coalition. This clever business model was anything but cheap!

Not only that, but operating a huge space station in dangerous territory exposed a lot of expensive assets to potential bad actors!

It took a huge amount of military might to protect such a valuable asset from sabotage and destruction.

When Ves looked up the star system, he did not exhibit any surprise when he saw that the Pentahull Coalition had a lot of mech forces at its disposal.

The most powerful member of this coalition even had an ace pilot on retainer!

The presence of a Saint was enough to make every visitor honest, including the Golden Skull Alliance.

Ves could already see from the plot that over thirty separate fleets had approached Pentahull Station.

Of course, the fleets weren't allowed to park close enough to pose a threat to the temporary space station, but there was no doubt that their owners were already taking advantage of the available services.

"Is it necessary for us to visit this space station as well?" Ves asked.

"It is not strictly necessary, but it would be helpful for us if we do, sir. Director Calabast and her Black Cats have issued a strong request to approach the space station. They can gather a large amount of intelligence from this site, much of it will be relevant for our subsequent actions in the border region."

Ves consider the situation for a moment. "While that sounds helpful, we already formed our own strategy to handle the search for the missing lordling. Is it worth it to delay our journey to allow our agents to collect more gossip on the ground?"

"It's not just about that, sir. Our fleet could also use this opportunity to obtain rare materials that are unique to this region. We can also give our clansmen the chance of enjoying shore leave. It is fairly safe for them to visit the space station. The same goes for you and your family. If you want to expand the perspectives of your children, then I think it would be a good idea to bring them along, provided we can convince the Pentahull Coalition to make more security guarantees."

He did not expect General Verle to make this kind of a suggestion. Ves immediately uneasy at the thought of visiting an environment that was under the control of others.

It was fairly fine for Ves to reside on a planet as well-developed and orderly as Davute, but Pentahull Station did not exactly give him the same impression.

The place looked rather sketchy in his opinion.

"I'll think about it." Ves replied. "If the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan are okay with it, then go ahead and approach the space station. I suppose if Lord Pearian Yoril-Tavik hasn't been found yet, there is little harm in taking a small detour."

The Golden Skull Alliance soon decided that it was worthwhile to visit this temporary trading hub.

One of the main reasons for visiting Pentahull Station was because it was a popular place to get in touch with other pioneering groups.

Weaker parties could band together and form a larger fleet before heading into dangerous waters.

Even if the Golden Skull Alliance had no intentions of joining forces with unreliable pioneers, it would still help with reducing suspicion if Ves and the others succeeded in their mission.

Though Ves mostly spent his time on finalizing his ambitious new weapon design project, the expeditionary fleet swiftly moved to the inner system before arriving at a location that was isolated from the space station and other visiting fleets.

The Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers quickly sent out their first batch and transports to Pentahull Station.

No major problems took place. The Pentahull Coalition maintained a proper and robust security force that made sure that everyone, including the members of the coalition, abided by the house rules of the space station.

This gave the visitors a lot more confidence that no one would mess around in this place.

Seeing that Pentahull Station was both safe and welcoming to its visitors, Ves seriously considered the suggestion to take his little family on an excursion to the curious space station.

No matter how much effort the Pentahull Coalition put into maintaining order, it was still undeniable that its greatest asset was a product that fit with the rougher parts of the new frontier.

The vibe, atmosphere and culture of Pentahull Station was substantially different from that of Davute or Karlach!

Ves did not want his children to grow up in insular environments where they might develop the mistaken assumption that the rest of the cosmos was just as prim and proper as the Davute or the expeditionary fleet!

He decided to share his idea with his wife.

Her response was predictably explosive.

"ARE YOU CRAZY?! PENTAHULL STATION IS A HAVEN FOR SCOUNDRELS AND DESPERADOS! IT IS ALREADY BAD ENOUGH THAT YOU WANT TO GAMBLE WITH YOUR LIFE AGAIN, BUT I WILL NEVER ALLOW YOU TO DRAG OUR CHILDREN INTO YOUR ESCAPADES!"

Ves let out a sigh. "You're being unfair to Pentahull Station and its visitors. No second-class pioneering group is made up of lowlives and bottom feeders. They wouldn't have been able to earn enough MTA merits to enter the Red Ocean if that was the case. I'm sure it will be fine to pay a brief visit as long as our forces are closer at hand."

"LIAR!"

## Chapter 4389 Pentahull Station

Ves already predicted that his wife would be less than amused at the idea of bringing their children on a field trip to a frontier space station.

This was why he did not put much effort into trying to sway her to his side.

He just informed her in order to show that he was willing to hear her input and to prevent her from feeling betrayed if he sprung this trip as a surprise.

Now that she knew what he wanted to do and expressed her objections, Ves quickly separated himself from his wife and made other arrangements with the help of other Larkinsons.

Minister Shederin Purnesse opened up a dialogue with the Pentahull Coalition in order to discuss additional allowances for the Golden Skull Alliance.

Normally, the Pentahull Coalition did not make exceptions to its rules because any compromise weakened its own security position.

The Pentahullers only needed to slip up a single time to expose their precious space station to potentially catastrophic damage!

Ves reacted with surprise when Minister Shederin came back in less than half a day.

"The Pentahull Coalition has agreed to practically all of our conditions."

"What? They just rolled over for us? Why?"

"There is nothing suspicious about the coalition's response." Minister Shederin smiled. "We are still benefiting from the halo that we have obtained after winning the Battle of Pima Prime. You may have moved on from that already, but it is not so easy for other parties to forget how much ferocity and combat power we demonstrated in battle."

Comprehension dawned on Ves' face. "Oh. Are you saying that we intimidated the Pentahull Coalition into agreeing with our terms?"

"You can say that, sir. I would prefer to see it as a situation where the Pentahull Coalition has a vested interest in avoiding conflict with us. At the same time, the members of this coalition also admire and maybe even worship our strength. Some of them are interested in developing closer relationships with us. It doesn't hurt to make friends with a stronger power."

That put Ves in an odd mood. "It sounds strange to be considered a bigshot. I'm too accustomed to treating ourselves as the little guys."

"The truth is that we fall somewhere in between at the moment." Minister Shederin voiced his own opinion. "We have amply proven our ability to survive and do well in the Red Ocean, but we are far from challenging the leading powers. You must take care not to develop too much hubris from this event. Just because the Pentahull Coalition is eager to acquiesce to our demands does not mean that other comparable groups are willing to roll out the red carpet for us. Sometimes, a reputation for being strong can produce adverse responses from other parties."

"Hmm. You're right. I'll be sure to take that into account."

With the security situation dealt with, Ves only needed to persuade one more group of stakeholders in order to proceed with his plan.

He returned to his grand stateroom and met with his children while Gloriana was elsewhere.

"Aurelia, Andraste, Marvaine. Come over here for a moment."

His three adorable kids scampered up to their father in the company of Lucky and Clixie.

"Papa!"

"I want a hug!"

"Meow."

"Hahaha!" Ves joyfully laughed as he greeted his kids. "I have exciting news for you all. Did you see that cool space station that our fleet has approached? Well, what do you think about going on a field trip to Pentahull Station?"

The children were caught off-guard by this question, but they soon understood what this meant for them. None of them had ever visited such a far away place!

"I want to go! I want to go!" Andraste gleefully cheered while hopping onto her feet like an energetic bunny.

"I would like to visit the space station as well." Aurelia replied in a more cultured manner as taught by her mother. "I always wanted to visit more places and meet new people."

Marvaine's response was a simple nod. He was too young to understand the full implications of this visit, but seeing as everyone else in his family wanted to go, there was no way he wanted to stay behind!

Ves grinned as he obtained the response that he wanted. "Great! My people are already preparing for this trip. We'll be leaving in two hours. Get ready and make sure you wear the outfits that I have prepared for you all. I know they can be a bit clumsy but we still need to take the necessary safety precautions."

"Okay, papa~"

By the time the three children donned their thin but highly protective suits, Gloriana finally learned what Ves had done when she returned to the grand stateroom.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU, VES! YOU WENT BEHIND MY BACK!"

"Calm down and keep your voice down!" Ves made a calming motion with his palm. "Please don't yell when our kids are nearby! Don't ruin this moment for

them. This will be the first time that each of them will be able to enjoy a real excursion to an exotic location that is well outside the region around Davute. We can't lock them up inside our starships all the time, honey."

"DON'T CALL ME HONEY, YOU IDIOT! WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?! YOU ARE THROWING OUR FUTURE TO THE WOLVES WITH THIS RECKLESS ACT!"

"Hey! You are mischaracterizing this trip once again! Nothing will go wrong during our trip, my clan and I made sure of that! I will be taking my kids to Pentahall Station whether you agree with this or not. You can stay behind if you don't want to come along."

Though Gloriana wanted to explode yet again in front of Ves, she had not lost her reasoning.

She already recognized that this was a losing battle. Since Ves and everyone else had already set all of this up, there was nothing she could do to prevent her children from going.

"Fine." Gloriana spoke through gritted teeth. "If this is what you want, then I will come along for this excursion. I am not about to leave you alone with our impressionable kids on a completely unfamiliar space station!"

The concerned mother quickly changed her outfit into a stylish, multi-layered protective outfit and made sure to inform her own people of the trip.

This was how Ves and his little family boarded an armored shuttle in the company of a large contingent of honor guards.

Ves himself did not opt to wear a suit as imposing and aggressive as the Unending Regalia because the safety factor at Pentahall Station was still good.



Most people visiting the frontier space station either wore their regular uniforms or clothing on top of skin-tight vacsuits.

The rules set by the Pentahall Coalition prohibited guests from bringing in heavier weapons and armor, but it extended certain privileges to pioneers and other VIPs.

What was not common was that the fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance was allowed to move closer to the space station!

This enabled the fleet to respond faster to any possible crisis that might erupt at Pentahall Station, but it also put the Golden Skull Alliance in a better position to launch an attack.

This was why both sides maintained a vigilant posture towards each other.

Though it was not good to generate so much tension, nothing would happen as long as they abided by their terms of the agreement.

Ves didn't worry too much about these complications. His subordinates had the situation well in hand.

He was more interested in planning out his upcoming field trip. There was a lot of ground to cover.

The dutiful father began to introduce the basic situation to his children while their mother was sulking.

"What is interesting about Pentahall Station is that it is made up of five capital ships." He explained as he projected a simplified image of the space station.

"Each of these sizable vessels have opened up a substantial proportion of their internal volume to the public. You can think of them as five large city districts that can move around in space."

"Ooohhh." Aurelia looked impressed. "Is this station like our Vivacious Wal?"

"That's a good comparison, my dear. The Vivacious Wal is more oriented towards meeting the needs of our own clansmen nowadays, but it is still possible for us to employ her as a mobile tourist destination if we want. Pentahall Station is the same, but it is more than five times bigger and a lot less mobile."

The children were already familiar with the Vivacious Wal and her two iconic cities, so it was not hard for them to understand what Pentahall Station was all about.

"It's essentially a much bigger city and playground." Ves claimed. "Although many areas are not designed to accommodate kids like you, I still want to take you to some of them just so you know what goes on in those places. This will help you a lot once you grow older."

Gloriana couldn't help but interject at this point.

"I will not allow you to bring them to any sketchy locations!"

"Hey, they're my kids as well. I don't want to bring them to those places either. I know what I am doing here. I have a few interesting sites in mind for the first day."

It took a bit of time for the shuttle along with the escorting mechs of the Larkinson Clan to pass by the heightened security measures of Pentahall Station.

The established security forces exhibited a lot of caution towards the First Sword, which was the only expert mech that was part of the escort force.

Of course, the Pentahallers considered the Mars to be a far greater threat. It just wasn't necessary for Patriarch Reginald Cross to deploy his ace mech into space at this time.

Soon enough, the shuttle landed in a private hangar bay that was reserved for distinguished guests.

A bunch of Larkinson mechs touched down while others parked themselves outside of the space station's hull.

A lot of honor guards wearing lighter and less imposing suits of combat armor marched out first.

Ves and his family stepped out moments later.

Gloriana held Marvaine in her arms while Ves held the hands of his two daughters.

Their two cats followed suit but generally didn't attract much attention from the officials who had been sent to receive the new arrivals.

A distinguished looking middle-aged man wearing an odd business suit in a style that was characteristic to a specific star cluster of the old galaxy stepped forward.

"Patriarch Larkinson, welcome to Pentahall Station. We are honored to host you and your family for the duration of your visit. I am Reynard Clarke, the relations manager of the Clarke Clan. If you would have me, I would love to accompany you and offer my services as a guide to our fine space station."

Ves smiled and briefly shook the man's hand. "Thank you for receiving me here. We could definitely use your guidance to navigate this impressive station. So you are a part of the Clarke Clan?"

"I am." The man answered as the entire group proceeded to the exit of the private hangar bay. "I am not afraid to say that many Clarkes are fans of you and the Crossers. Our mech pilots have especially fallen in love with your eclectic mech models. They also respect the combativeness of your alliance's ace pilot. It is not common for ace pilots to take the initiative to participate in a

battle and duel against another ace pilot. Our own clan's ace pilot has rarely taken action so we understand how difficult it is for pilots at this level to commit to a fight."

The Clarke Clan was not the largest member of the Pentahall Coalition, but supposedly earned the highest share of the profits from this venture.

The reason for that was because the Clarke Clan was protected by an ace pilot!

It was therefore especially significant that a representative of this formidable clan met with Ves upon his arrival.

### **Chapter 4390 Clarke Clan**

Just as the name suggested, Pentahull Station was made up of five different capital ships that had tightly integrated with each other to form one large space construct.

On the one hand, Pentahull Station technically functioned as a single whole. The hulls were designed in a way that allowed them to reduce the barriers between them as much as possible in order to present the illusion that it was one big happy place.

The Pentahull Coalition maintained a common set of rules that applied to the entire station, so most people did not have to worry about watching their behavior after crossing over to a different hull.

On the other hand, there were definitely a lot of distinctions between the different station sections.

Every capital ship that made up Pentahull Station featured vastly different cultures, aesthetics, venues and layouts. They were like cities that had been plucked from random star systems before being mashed together without too much regard for whether they matched each other.

The people manning the shops and keeping the peace in a particular hull predominantly came from the coalition partner that owned and operated the capital ship in question. This led to moderate differences in how the locals interacted with the guests and how they interpreted the rules.

Relations Manager Reynard Clarke of the Clark Clan decided to start off the tour with a flyover.

He led Ves and his little family to a sightseeing shuttle reserved for the purpose. The vehicle gently took off and soared into the open skies of the enormous internal space of Pentahull Station.

Of course, a small escort of Larkinson mechs accompanied the vehicle. The First Sword along with an Avatar mech flanked the tourist shuttle, which was a highly unusual sight in Pentahull Station as the only mechs allowed to patrol inside belonged to the Pentahull Coalition.

The Larkinson Clan was one of the few groups of visitors to have ever received such a rare exemption!

The sight from up high was incredible. Though a lot of structures, monuments and other sights were situated in the distance, Ves already gained a quick preview of the rich variety of culture and architecture available for visitors to enjoy.

"Ohh! Look! The floor is see-through!" Andraste exclaimed as she lowered herself to her knees and pressed her covered hands on the surface.

The other two children gathered around and dropped and began to make exciting sounds as they admired the changing views.

Reynard Clarke smiled as he began to narrate the origin of the frontier space station.

"Pentahull Station is an initiative formed by five different groups from different parts of the old galaxy, our Clarke Clan included. Prior to forming our coalition, we were strangers to each other. We all resided in our own star sectors without having any ideas to team up with groups that are too far away to effectively work together."

"I suppose the opening of the Red Ocean changed all of that." Ves astutely commented.

"That is correct, patriarch." Reynard affirmed. "To be more precise, it is the establishments of beyonder gates that have introduced an epochal change to our society. Even if the Big Two ended up keeping the Red Ocean to themselves, human civilization was already becoming more connected as distant parties could suddenly meet each other in reality in a matter of months rather than decades."

He was right. Ves did not really think too much about this because he and his clan emigrated from the old galaxy to the new frontier as quickly as possible.

This caused him to become separated from the Milky Way which was continuing to change at a rapid tempo due to many different civilization-wide events such as the Crown Uprising and the construction of the Milky Way Galactic Gate Network.

The latter was definitely the most shocking development in the old galaxy!

While the Crown Uprising petered out after a few years, the ripple effects created by the placement of many different lesser beyonder gates across human-occupied space continued to snowball with each passing day!

Whereas the pioneers of the new frontier had become obsessed with utilizing phasewater to upgrade their war-making potential, the established powers from the old galaxy were mostly preoccupied with taking advantage of the

brand-new transportation channels opened up by all of the new beyonder gates.

Reynard turned and gazed down at the structures that were part of the hull owned by his clan.

"We always had the galactic net to connect with people from all across human space, but that has never brought us much closer to people from the other side of the old galaxy due to how much time it takes to cross these distances. The recent changes at the start of the current mech generation changed all of that. Our Clarke Clan recognized some of the new opportunities earlier than our peers. We decided to take action as soon as possible, but quickly concluded that we did not have the numbers or resources to start an ambitious enterprise in the Red Ocean by ourselves."

"Well, it makes sense for you to team up with other groups." Ves remarked.

"How come you decided to band together with four other pioneers that are located far away from you? Isn't it easier for you to team up with friends who are closer at hand?"

The relations manager gave the Larkinson Patriarch a wry smile. "Our Clarke Clan doesn't have that many friends back in our old home. The same goes for our coalition partners. Each of us were not in the best of situations. Instead of opening ourselves up to our neighbors that may have conflicts of interest with us, we instead sought out like-minded strangers on the galactic net that have no reason to be hostile to us. Through our shared values and goals, we decided to form the Pentahull Coalition and use our own means to commission five new capital ships in our own home star sectors. That has all led to what you see around you. Doesn't it sound amazing?"

Ves understood more than most people how impressive it was to forge a close cooperation between those who were complete strangers to each other just a decade ago. The Clarke Clan and the four other coalition partners involved in

this venture had to show a great amount of trust that everyone else would stick to the plan and cooperate with each other over the long term.

Though the coalition partners undoubtedly formalized their cooperation by signing contracts that were enforced by the MTA, that still couldn't prevent every potential disaster.

It still remained to be seen whether the Pentahull Coalition would be able to stay in one piece after a decade, but Ves wished the Clarkes and their new pals the best of luck.

Reynard Clarke continued to explain what happened after that. Unlike the Golden Skull Alliance, the Pentahull Coalition did not fool around as much and only spent a short amount of time upgrading their most essential assets to Red Ocean standards before starting their business operations in the Krakatoa Middle Zone.

Given the lack of colonies, trade hubs and other forms of civilizations in human-occupied space, Pentahull Station soon found success in fulfilling an urgent need. Many pioneers eagerly took advantage of the safe harbor provided by the frontier space station that just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Pentahull Station mainly earned a profit by charging higher fees and setting higher prices for its goods and services.

The fact that the coalition partners owned almost all of the businesses operating on their respective hulls allowed them to capture most of the profits generated by their activities.

Though Ves wasn't overly impressed with the earning power of this venture, it was remarkably stable and allowed the coalition partners to get in touch with all kinds of pioneers.



There was an air of adventure around Pentahull Station as it most often roamed the more remote and less secure regions of the new frontier.

A part of Ves wished that his clan had been a part of the Pentahull Coalition. He imagined that he would come across a lot more excitement than holing up in Davute all the time.

Still, it was not as if the Golden Skull Alliance was any worse. Ves built up excellent bonds of trust with his two allies and they were almost just as willing to explore the deep frontier as him. The lack of a large and lumbering semi-modular space station meant that their expeditionary fleet was a lot more nimble and mobile.

In the end, while Ves admired what the Clarke Clan had accomplished, he believed that his Larkinson Clan did not follow the wrong trajectory.

Everyone had their own paths. There was no need for Ves to grow envious at another group's success when he was doing more than fine himself.

Reynard Clarke began to explain the structure of Pentahull Station.

"As you can see all around you, our station is formed out of five different hulls. They are the Armidia of the Clarke Clan, the ReVez II of the Bonsai Company, the Silverbore of the Travis Group, the Otus Reconstructor of SCQ Incorporated and the Samir Ohansa of the Vhunan-Royce Family. The layout and the architecture of our hulls generally correspond to the cultures where we originally came from. Our coalition considers that to be an advantage because Pentahull Station has something to offer to almost every human."

Ves nodded in understanding. The strength of the Pentahull Coalition was that it was a mashup between partners that all differed a lot from each other. They were all good at marketing themselves to the kind of customers that were similar to the ones they dealt back in their native star sectors in the old galaxy.

"Tell me about your Clarke Clan, please." Ves requested. "What do you excel at compared to the other four partners of your coalition?"

The representative gestured down below. "Our Armidia offers a friendly and highly regulated location for people who have accumulated a great amount of stress to recuperate in a safe environment. We come from a fairly plain and unexciting part of the old galaxy, and our hull environment reflects that. We have the most family friendly sections and our soldiers strongly abide by their honor. We also have strong taboos and we do not engage in more unseemly business activities. Fans of bloodsport and red light districts will have better luck at the other hulls."

"What's a red light district, mama?" Andraste curiously asked as she looked up at her mother.

"You don't need to know that!" Gloriana quickly replied as she bent down to lift her second daughter. "Do you want to go shopping, my dear? There are many stores down here. I found out that some of them even sell exclusive handcrafted toys! Doesn't that sound fun?"

"Papa and mama already make the best toys, hihhi!"

"You're so right!" Gloriana grinned with pride. "We'll still go shopping though. You might not need any new toys, but mama also has needs."

While Gloriana took care of the kids, Ves continued to learn more about the Clarke Clan from one of their own. Reynard Clarke certainly went out of his way to portray his side in the best possible light.

"Our Clarke Clan actually shares much in common with your Larkinson Clan." The man claimed. "Oh, our histories are vastly different and our original homes are separated far away from each other, but our values and our heritage have much in common with each other. Do you know why that is so, Patriarch Larkinson?"

Now that sounded interesting. Ves wasn't sure where Reynard was going with this argument.

"Uhm, no. I haven't read too much about your clan."

"Well, let me give you the answer. The reason why we hold similar values is because we share a common root. You see, our Clarke Clan originated from the New Rubarth Empire, just like the Larkinson Family which your clan is derived from. Isn't it a nice coincidence that our respective clans are closer to each other than what is apparent on the surface?"