

## The Mech 4851

### Chapter 4851 Questionable Candidates

Davute cared a lot about the major mech design commissions that Patriarch Ves Larkinson agreed to fulfill.

If his promised mech designs impacted the Federal Military of Davute just as much as his Hexer mech designs had done for the Hex Army, then that was already worth the price of constructing half-a-dozen multiple fleet carriers!

The Federal Military demanded more than that, though.

Anyone who studied the only war between two major second-rate states where living mechs were utilized on a massive scale learned that these special machines could not single-handedly win a war.

They could make a difference alright, but there were many other factors that could also affect the chances that a state could win or lose a massive conflict.

Davute had an extensive staff of military officers, strategists and other clever people that had conducted a lot of research and information gathering on the living mechs designed by Patriarch Ves Larkinson.

This investigation went deeper than many people realized. The Davutan investigators did more than collect a lot of news articles on the galactic net or watch a lot of the public battle footage of Ves' mechs in action.

The colonial state had already sent out lots of spies to the Friday Colonies and the Hex Federation over at the neighboring Magair Middle Zone.

These spies had been tasked with gathering first-hand information on the performance and the impact of notable mech models such as the Valkyrie Redeemer.

It was not that difficult for the spies to gather deeper information on how the living mechs designed for the Hexers changed this group of people forever.

Much of what the spies had learned over the course of their covert intelligence gathering activities frightened the Davutan analysts.

However, as scary as it was to discover that a single mech designer literally hijacked the beliefs of the people of an entire state so that they could worship a fictitious matronly goddess, it was undeniable that this very same belief had united a people and kept them together throughout their migration to the Red Ocean!

A lot of people in the colonial government were rightfully afraid or ambivalent about asking Patriarch Ves Larkinson to perform a similar service to Davute.

There were control freaks who treated Davute as their own personal kingdom and wanted to make sure it remained completely in their hands.

Fortunately, the chief of staff of the federal president was not in their camp.

Reina Kernsk had access to almost all of the information that President Clive was authorized to know, and she understood that Karlach's military buildup was frightening.

Karlach went all-out on winning the upcoming war. Davute had to do the same in order to keep up, and that included enlisting the help of a mech designer who was notorious for possibly

Causing the downfall of not one, but several states!

There were good reasons why President Yenames Clive had never assumed an antagonistic posture towards this infamous mech designer.

He did not want the Colonial Federation of Davute to follow in the footsteps of all of those doomed states!

The chance that Patriarch Larkinson would somehow engineer the downfall of Davute due to being slighted by a Master Mech Designer in the service of Davute was low, but the female government official did not want to take any chances.

"The main problem with Ves Larkinson is that he does not have sufficient credibility among the Seniors and Masters of our colonial state." Reina Kernsk analyzed. "We need to change that by providing solid proof that collaborating with him is not a waste of time and effort. We will need to start with finding one or more Masters that are truly willing to cooperate with the Larkinson Patriarch to the point of surrendering the initiative to the younger mech designer. So long as this initial collaboration produces fantastic results and sets a clear example of what is possible, it should be easier for us to convince the more stubborn mech designers such as Master Manuel Terrence to work with the Larkinsons."

Master Hergard Elroy remained silent for a time as he thought about how this sequence might play out. His expression remained troubled but it lightened up after a minute.

"Your plan is sound. I agree with your approach. The issue is finding the right Master that can break the ice. That is a considerable challenge. I am considering a handful of names that may be able to put down their egos to allow a younger mech designer to take the lead, but their work and design philosophies may not entirely be ideal. Since your administration has only convinced the Larkinson Patriarch to accept three of your mech design commissions, then it is imperative to make them broad and widely applicable enough to be fielded in many of your mech units."

The representative of the federal president nodded. "That is a given. As I have stated before, we need to assure that what we can gain from Ves Larkinson exceeds the value of 9 fleet carriers. The stability of our administration and the approval rating of our president will suffer greatly if this does not happen. What do you think about Master Layla Wall?"

Master Layla Wall was one of the deans of the Davute University of Technology, so Master Elroy knew her well. The female mech designer was notable for her Class I Design Philosophy which centered around transformable mechs.

Elroy shook his head. "She is in a similar position as myself. She is mature and advanced enough in her career that she is no longer concerned about the difference in status, but I am struggling to think of any synergy between her and the Larkinson Patriarch. Not every mech designer is suited to collaborate with another mech designer. There needs to be a clear justification for them to pool their efforts into a single line of mechs, or else it is better to allow Ves Larkinson to work with his own team."

"That is not good enough for our administration."

"You have made that particularly clear. Is it acceptable if I propose foreign Master Mech Designers who are unaligned with Davute? They may not have formed any existing ties with our colonial state, but you can sign a contract with them that ensures they will not aid Karlach for a specified period of time. I have a rich network of contacts. I am confident that a handful of them may be amenable to collaborating with the young patriarch under these terms."

Madame Kernsk shook her head even before the Master Mech Designer was done with bringing up his latest proposal.

"That is unacceptable. We must strictly keep this collaboration in-house. It is already concerning to us that we are commissioning mechs that may be of great importance from a mech designer whose heart is not set on our state. We need a loyal insider that can not only represent the interests of our state during the collaboration, but is also able to tweak and alter the mech design after Patriarch Ves Larkinson has completed his work. The mech lines that we are ordering from him may be in use for years if not decades."

It was troublesome to commission additional work after the original completion of the contract. States had a big appetite for variants of the same base model. It would be a lot easier to obtain these variants on order if one of the participants of the original mech design project was a Davutan mech designer.

Confidentiality was also important. While it was impossible to hide all of the details of a mech model utilized on a wider scale, Davute did not want to make it easy for Karlach to discover all of the nuances of a machine of great military importance.

It took Master Elroy a lot of thought in order to propose a name.

"Given your demands and expectations of this collaboration, I suggest you start with Master Tilda Orkin. She has expressed a notable degree of interest in the works of Ves Larkinson in the past. I believe that the two mech designers possess a considerable amount of shared interests that can encourage greater cooperation between the two. The resulting product may not be as widely applicable as you would like, but this should not be a serious problem as long as your state is willing to invest in the right infrastructure."

"No." Reina Kernsk shook her head yet again. "Master Orkin is an excellent mech designer, but she works exclusively on biomech designs. We support her research because we do not want to remain blind and ignorant of the latest developments in the biomech industry, but that is as far as we are willing to invest in this sub-sector. Despite our claims of openness and plurality, our administration is not a proponent of promoting the use of biomech designs within our state. The redundancy is too great and too many of our citizens are uncomfortable with overt use of biotech products."

That was a missed opportunity in Master Elroy's opinion. He could clearly see that Ves Larkinson's design philosophy had a lot of potential synergy with the specialty of Master Tilda Orkin.

"Are you sure you wish to cross out Master Orkin's name?"

"This is the will of President Clive." Reina said in a warning tone. "I should also add that the key figures of the Davute Biotechnology University are under investigation for the incident that

occurred within the Government District not too long ago. Master Tilda Orkin is a known friend and coworker of Professor Murmillian Granse. She has even contributed to the deadliness of the warbeasts that went out of control."

That caused Master Elroy to look severe. It was never good to become the target of such an inquisition. Though he was convinced that Master Orkin was not truly guilty of collaborating with the Karlachs, this black stain on her record would probably haunt her for the rest of her life.

Hergard Elroy sighed. "Very well. I can think of a few other names that reluctantly meet your criteria. One of them is Master Decimus Horst. He may be working for ZUTA University, but he is a relatively younger and more adaptable Master Mech Designer that is noted to teach and mentor many students. He is a social individual who should know how to build an accord with a young talent such as Patriarch Larkinson. His specialty is also relevant to your needs. He is greatly invested in heavy artillery mechs, both on land and in space. While I cannot immediately think of any strong synergies between this pairing, I am certain that they can form their own ideas."

The latest suggestion actually caused Reina Kernsk to think. She did not reject this name out of hand, but it was clear that she still harbored reluctance towards this proposal.

"Our administration is indeed interested in the works of Master Decimus Horst." Reina Kernsk slowly said. "We are not entirely certain about his commitment to our state. He is only loosely related to ZUTA University. From what we know of him, he is mostly engaged in his own private projects and affairs. We heavily suspect that Master Horst is on the fence with regards to our upcoming conflict with Karlach. If our state is at a disadvantage, then we expect him to depart well in advance of our other stakeholders. We do not wish to work too closely with such a fair-weather friend."

Her description of Master Decimus Horst was not unfair. It was actually pretty common for mech designers like this to hedge their bets and avoid committing too much. This was especially prevalent because Davute was still a brand new state that barely had a history to speak of. Too few people were truly loyal to its cause.

In fact, Master Hergard Elroy was not much different in this regard. He may have made a more serious bet than others, but he would not hesitate to abandon a sinking ship if the forces of Karlach approached the Davute System!

## Chapter 4852 Master Decimus Horst

The Davute University of Technology and ZUTA University were both based in the Academic District of Kotor City.

Despite their geographic proximity, they were pretty different in everything else.

The DUT was a state-backed school that mainly hired the best mech designers with promises of huge research grants and the right to work on classified research projects.

Another strong reason for mech designers to work for the DUT was to participate in the design and upgrade processes of the high-ranking mechs of the Federal Military.

All of the expert pilots and ace pilots in the service of Davute needed to be assured that their mechs always kept up with the latest advancements in technology. Failing to do so would cause them to lose more battles against their Karlach counterparts than necessary!

This was why the mech designers working for the DUT were so respected. They had been thoroughly vetted by the state and possessed all sorts of useful expertise that could help in the design of military mechs and high-ranking mechs.

The students who enrolled in the DUT also found it easier to receive job offers from a state institution or a high-tech development company that was engaged in sensitive research.

In contrast to the Davute University of Technology, ZUTA University possessed a completely different focus.

The latter was a private for-profit technical university that mainly catered to the needs of the commercial market.

Although its prestige and funding was not as extravagant as the DUT, it made up for it by hiring more free-spirited professors and allowing students to gain preferential treatment by paying lots of additional money.

For example, a rather average mech design student who failed to pass the entry requirements of the DUT could easily get into ZUTA University and even receive light tutoring from one of its Masters by paying thousands of MTA credits!

Not a lot of students could pay this kind of money, though. Many families could afford to enroll their descendents into better and more exclusive universities.

Nonetheless, ZUTA University managed to stand out as a gathering of free spirited researchers as it collected a large variety of random and sometimes unconventional researchers.

It generally did not impose too many demands on its professors, but the downside was that it could not offer too many government contracts and connections.

However, ZUTA University managed to develop a lot of useful contacts in the private sector. Several of its most prominent Master Mech Designers even brought over their connections with large trans-galactic enterprises!

Master Decimus Horst was one of them. In fact, he possessed a connection that was incredibly valuable but also deeply concerning.

As Madame Reina Kernsk called up the intelligence reports that summarized the thorough background checks and investigations conducted by several Davutan spy agencies, her expression worsened.

"Master Horst is hardly the ideal selection that we have in mind for a collaboration with Patriarch Ves Larkinson." The woman steadily said. "It is still a mystery why he has decided to come to Davute and take up a teaching position at ZUTA. He does not have any existing friends or contacts in our state, and what contacts he has made since he has arrived are not too intimate as far as we are aware of. He has no mech company under his name and has refused to establish one within our colonial state. He has not signed any extensive binding contracts with his current employer or our state, so he can easily abandon his current duties and leave this star system in an instant."

The description of a fellow Master did not faze Hergard Elroy. He already had a good idea of what his fellow Master from another institution was like.

"Master Horst may be a more transient visitor to Davute, but this can always change in the future. It may be that he has yet to receive the right offer from your side. Regardless of whether he intends to commit to our colonial state or not, you can at least be certain that he will not disgrace the identity of a Master Mech Designer. If he makes a promise, then he will abide by it. A Master without principles does not exist."

"There are ways to get around promises. I do not believe that intelligent individuals such as yourself are unable to create loopholes."

"There is no need to resort to such measures if there is no coercion or undesirable elements at play. You do not understand Masters such as ourselves as well as you think. I am willing to offer my guarantee that Master Decimus Horst will abide by a contract if you agree to let him collaborate with Patriarch Larkinson on a mech design commission."

That was a heavy promise! The chief of staff might not have faith in the integrity of a transient Master working for ZUTA University, but she put a lot more stock in the words of a cooperating Master from the DUT!

There was one more complication that held Reina Kernsk back, however.

"Our investigation in Master Horst's background has revealed that he possesses unknown but non-trivial ties to the New Rubarth Empire. At the very least, he has past business dealings with one of its trans-galactic corporations." She explained. "The man is a second-class mech designer for the most part, but he differs from most of his peers in the same star system for mastering a greater amount of high technology than usual. He has also gained an understanding of phasewater technology remarkably quickly. All of these data points paint a concerning picture. Do you understand?"

"Are you suggesting that he is a disguised Rubarthan Master Mech Designer, madame? I can assure you that he is not. His design philosophy is too narrow and his design style lacks the extravagance and excessive features that are more characteristic of first-class mech design."

"This is not enough to rule out the possibility that he may be a plant or at the very least an exile from the New Rubarth Empire." Reina Kernsk said. "Do not forget that Davute falls within the umbrella of the Red Ocean Union. It is not preferable for us to maintain too many active ties with a first-rate superstate. We cannot afford to get embroiled in political conflicts at this level."

Master Elroy deeply understood the need to maintain enough distance from the Terrans and Rubarthans. People who thought they could form connections with either of those two groups and uplift themselves to this level would often get in for a rude awakening.

It was much more likely for these associations to turn gullible individuals into expendable assets. These unwitting cannon fodder would then be used to fight in all manner of shadow conflicts.

If they managed to survive this gauntlet, then their Terran or Rubarthan patrons might like what they saw and extend the highest citizenship to an absolute talent.

However, the more likely outcome was that they would eventually get chewed up and torn apart in the process of completing risky assignments!

This was not a good way to become a first-rater as far as Master Hergard Elroy was concerned.

He and many other intelligent Master Mech Designers understood that they needed to complete at least one grand research project and attain massive progress in order to appeal to the most powerful states in human space!

In addition to that, second-class Master Mech Designers also had to develop design philosophies and applications that could substantially contribute to the strengthening of first-class multipurpose mechs.

Master Elroy personally hated this classification, but the first-raters were exceedingly snobby about judging different design philosophies by their grades.

Any mech designer with a rather boring design philosophy such as ablative armor or secure communications had no hope of getting accepted in the closed circle of first-class mech designers!

This was why Master Elroy was convinced that Master Horst was not a Rubarthan in hiding. The latter's specialization was too mundane and low-grade to fit in with the snobby and elitist first-raters.

Reina Kernsk and Master Elroy continued to discuss Master Horst's possible background, but in the end the former just had to believe in the assurances of the latter.

"Our intelligence services are already strained with the need to spy on Karlach and engage in counterintelligence." She said. "We did not allocate as much resources into investigating his story as we could. That changes now that he has become the primary candidate to collaborate with Patriarch Larkinson first."

"Despite what I have said, his background may not be entirely clean." Master Elroy cautioned. "The Red Ocean attracts a greater proportion of problematic individuals than usual for obvious reasons. Your colonial state has explicitly marketed itself as a refuge where people of all kinds can gather and start anew without prejudice and persecution. Do not be surprised when this immigration strategy delivers the sort of people that are attracted to your message."

"We are not blind to this phenomenon. Let us pivot this conversation to another topic. How do you think Patriarch Ves Larkinson will fulfill his first mech design commission for us if he is able to gain the cooperation of Master Decimus Horst?"

"That is an interesting question." Hergard Elroy answered with a bemused expression. Let me think for several minutes.

The two mech designers in question diverged greatly in age, rank, experiences, completed mech designs and more. They possessed different design philosophies and developed distinctly different design styles.

Although the overlap between Patriarch Larkinson and Master Horst was not that great, they could still develop interesting heavy artillery mechs that could outperform other mechs of the same archetype.

"Are you familiar with the selling points of Master Horst's works?"

Reina Kernsk nodded. "Our Federal Military employs several lines of heavy artillery mechs that bear his signature. His landbound heavy artillery mechs are well-regarded for the range and

precision of their indirect cannons. We expect them to play a major role in sieging enemy strongholds and preventing enemy forces from doing the same."

Master Horst's tended to adopt a utilitarian approach towards designing heavy artillery mechs. The mech designs might not pack the greatest punch, but they tended to be more efficient and more affordable.

Their precision and higher muzzle velocities allows the heavy artillery mechs to do their jobs without wasting as much ammunition. This enabled them to shell more targets and get more work done per deployment.

Their downside was that they usually weren't as deadly at closer ranges. They only truly excelled when angling their guns upwards and firing their projectiles at distant targets at a high arc.

"One of the advantages of Master Horst's heavy artillery mechs is that they are capable of striking targets a hundred kilometers away or further." Master Elroy explained. "It is exceptionally difficult to deal effective damage to mechs at such distances. Moving targets will not remain in the same place to make it easy for them to get targeted. This is especially the case when they have received advance warning of incoming artillery strikes which is often the case. Furthermore, heavy jamming and other forms of interference prevent the effective use of guidance methods. It may not even be possible to confirm whether any of the shells or kinetic projectiles have struck the intended targets."

Reina Kernsk already knew where this was going. "Patriarch Ves Larkinson has designed special ranged mechs in the past that enabled their pilots to gain an unerring sense of accuracy. Their effective hit rates have always reached far outside the bounds of normality when put into action. Are you thinking about combining the traits of the Larkinson Clan's famous Transcendent Punisher model with one of Master Horst's long-ranged heavy artillery mechs?"

"That is correct, madame. I do not presume that this is the only viable option for the two mech designers. It may be the case that Patriarch Ves may have developed a better or more appropriate design solution as of late. Barring any of these exceptions, I do believe that designing an unusually accurate heavy artillery mech can become a substantial boon in any ground campaign."

That attracted the president's confidante a lot.

## Chapter 4853 Extolling

Ves was aware that a lot of people were talking behind his back.

It came with the territory. He had chosen to become a high-profile mech designer. It should not be surprising for lots of people to question his design skills or whether he was cheating.

The power of fame was a double-edged sword. It magnified all of his successes and enabled him to use it as leverage to make other parties agree to requests that they would normally not fulfill.

However, the other side of fame was notoriety, which he also happened to possess in spades. An increasing number of people thought he was an upstart, a disruptor or even a mass murderer!

Ves knew that he could ignore the negative responses as long as he possessed enough strength and backing. He had enough successes along with support from the MTA to ignore low-level concerns that would have bothered him a lot in the past.



Still, he didn't feel entirely comfortable with living a high-profile life. The downside to relying on fame and reputation to shield him from harm was that he needed to maintain his performance. The moment he stumbled was the moment where he lost a lot of protection. The knives would come out at that time.

He inwardly shook his head. There was no point in thinking about these matters. His greatest priority was to design his competition mechs and ensure they possessed the strength and capabilities of making it all the way to the end!

As a mech designer who already participated in numerous different mech design tournaments, he understood quite well what he needed to do in order to increase his chances of making it to the finals.

There were 71 teams in contention. In a single elimination bracket, that meant that his competition mechs had to win 6 matches in a row to win the entire contest.

A pair of well-designed mechs designed for the tournament shouldn't encounter too much challenge in winning a single match. The odds of making it through was quite high as most of the competitors were probably not as good as Ves.

The problem was trying to keep a winning record again and again without failing in between.

If Ves wasn't lucky enough, then his competition mechs would be randomly matched against the other favorites of the Twin Weapons Tournament.

With the added variable of adding obvious weak points to the frontal armor of every mech, it only took one significant mistake for the mechs designed by Ves and Juliet to stumble!

"This damn single elimination bracket is truly brutal." He muttered under his breath.

The lack of second chances meant that prudent mech designers couldn't afford to take too many chances. Every contestant had to make sure to shore up the weaknesses of their works, leaving them with less room to experiment and pursue more radical mech designs than in other circumstances.

Ves did not agree with this mindset. Taking the safe and steady approach was not his style. He willingly made it a lot more difficult for himself because it aligned with his heart and because he knew he needed to go beyond the confines of what was safe in order to make it all the way to the end.

The hybrid mech design that he had begun to shape reflected his stubborn and crazy mindset.

He could feel from the increased stares directed towards his body that his performance dazzled the more knowledgeable members of the crowd once again!

The skills he displayed along with the speed in which he filled up the draft design with concrete details did not match the standard of an ordinary Journeyman!

In fact, even the older and more experienced Journeymen who had been in the business for many decades could not hope to match his speed!

The panel of Seniors who served as the commentators for the Twin Weapons Tournament frequently emphasized how much better Ves performed in this regard.

[I have heard many praises about the design prowess of Patriarch Ves Larkinson. I do admit that he possesses a certain flair in his design style and work ethic when I studied his performance in past competitions. It has been around six years since he last took part in a series of mech design tournaments in Chance Bay. Despite the fact that he was a Journeyman back then as well, the difference between his past self and his present self is enormous! I cannot believe that any other industry expert has predicted that Patriarch Larkinson has progressed to this extent!]

[Oh?] The female host, who happened to know little about technical matters, raised her eyebrow in curiosity. [Six years is a decent amount of time. It is more than long enough for high school graduates to complete an education in biotechnology and mech design. Is it not plausible that a famous mech designer such as Patriarch Larkinson has made a massive leap in progress?]

[It is not... unheard of, but to say it is common is wholly inaccurate. I believe I can speak on behalf of my fellow experts that there is no other Journeyman in the Krakatoa Middle Zone that has made as much progress as him. His knowledge base has grown to a substantial extent, but that is not all. He displays an excellent mastery and deftness in utilizing the advanced knowledge that he has under his command. The only other mech designers in this tournament who can compare to Patriarch Larkinson's performance are the experienced veterans who are more than a century old.]

[Wow! Are you equating Patriarch Larkinson to Journeymen who are twice or thrice his age?]

Another commentator shook his head. [That is an unfair comparison to make, but not in the manner in which you expect. Patriarch Larkinson is in fact better than those veteran mech designers. He is still fairly young in his journey. He is also much more augmented than his peers. The rich rewards he has managed to earn from the MTA may have allowed him to acquire first-class implants and genetic treatments. Look at how much faster he is able to crunch the numbers and resolve complex technical problems.]

[That is impressive!]

[Only in the right hands. Powerful augmentations alone are not enough. A pig with a first-class cranial implant is still a pig. What truly enables Patriarch Larkinson to make effective use of his expanded cognition is his combination of bravery, curiosity and imagination. His younger and more flexible mind allows him to explore changes and variations with considerably greater ease than the older ladies and gentlemen who are largely set in their ways. He is not afraid to try out new and untested ideas even though a mech design tournament is not the best venue for him to engage in experimental mech design. This is the brilliance of youth. He is hundred times a mech designer compared to the older and frankly more decrepit fossils in the hall.]

[T-That is ageist!]

[The mech industry does not discriminate on age. It discriminates on ability, as it rightfully should. There is a difference, young lady. What my fellow colleague is alluding to is a common fault among Journeymen who have failed to advance after they reach their first century. There is no hard bottleneck that prevents Journeymen from becoming Seniors. I shall spare you the details, but it takes more than spending a great amount of time on studying and designing mechs. A Journeyman Mech Designer must expand his horizons, conduct successful research and push the limits of what can be done in the field of mech design. It is this most of all that sets Patriarch Larkinson apart from his much older peers.]

[I am not actually all that surprised that the good patriarch stands out in this aspect. His proclivity for adventure and combat is well-known. While it may seem foolhardy and illogical for him to accompany his soldiers to the frontlines of thrilling battles against all manner of alien warships and phase whales, there is no doubt that he has most certainly expanded his horizons and obtained access to new forms of technology that present new possibilities for mechs. Even a mediocre Journeyman who has graduated from a lesser university can outpace the geniuses who have never traveled outside of their home planets in their lives.]

[That is not to say that we recommend Journeymen to copy the dangerous lifestyle of the Larkinson Patriarch to a fault. The true lesson that other hopeful mech designers can learn from his example is that it is not enough for mech designers to stay within their comfort zones. One of my favorite phrases is that a static mech designer is a stagnant mech designer.]

[Whether you are a Novice who has recently completed your studies or the founder of a large and successful mech company, there is never a time where you have nothing more to learn or discover. It is not a coincidence that the word 'journey' is included in Journeyman. That said, traveling around is not enough. Otherwise, all of us who have taken the drastic step of relocating the Red Ocean would be Seniors and Masters by now. Any mech designer that seeks to progress his design philosophy must not only become exposed to new phenomena, but also take proactive action to master the new possibilities that come to mind.]

The panel of Seniors clearly didn't spend all of this time fawning over Ves Larkinson as if they were fanboys. They clearly aimed to educate and enlighten the other mech designers that were watching the show.

A lot of students of the Davute University of Technology as well as other educational institutions had visited Spencer Hall in person. Many of these future mech designers of Davute became inspired by the incredible skills and mastery displayed by Ves. The viewpoints and advice shared by the panel of Seniors spurred these ambitious students and mech designers to go on their own adventures at the first possible opportunity!

Meanwhile, the subject of all of this discussion remained ignorant of all of this talk.

One of the reasons why the more knowledgeable mech insiders spoke so highly of his work was because the progress he has made was astonishing on multiple levels!

His hybrid mech looked more complete than the other mech designs in progress, yet his work did not exhibit too many obvious signs of rushing.

In fact, Ves had actually slowed down a bit as he couldn't help but spend more time on correcting small and fairly subtle imperfections. Years of working alongside his wife meant that Gloriana's tendencies had rubbed off on him. She had elevated his design style regardless of his own wishes.

Ves wasn't complaining. He already took this factor into account when he made his initial design choices. The result was that what progress he made in the first hours actually looked a lot more refined than it should!

While the incomplete mech design was still sloppy compared to his usual standards, the works of other mech designers including that of Juliet fared considerably worse in comparison!

The only mech designers who managed to come close to the level of quality of his hybrid mech design were the older and more experienced Journeymen who decided to rip off their old mech designs as best as possible.

Their familiarity with the mechs they designed in the past allowed them to skip many design challenges and reduce their uncertainty to a minimum. They only needed to invest their time and effort into adapting their fairly modern designs to weaker and outdated tech and materials.

This was not cheating.

It was a valid strategy to employ in a mech design tournament. The older and more experienced the mech designer, the more they could draw from their prior work to quickly fill in the gaps of their competition mech designs.

For Ves to not only match the pace and refinement of these veteran Journeymen, but also exceed them in these aspects was absolutely astonishing!

Even though the combat phase of the Twin Weapons Tournament was still two days away, a lot of mech insiders already had an inkling that the team with Ves Larkinson would definitely be able to go far!

#### Chapter 4854 Altered Weapons

There were a lot of possible explanations why Ves could work faster and more effectively than his fellow competitors.

The most obvious factor that enabled him to work so effectively was that he had augmented himself far beyond the level of a second-class Journeyman!

The sublimation that transformed his entire being and elevated all of his cognitive capabilities improved his productivity to the point where his performance started to match that of a first-class mech designer!

"What a rich bastard. Did he have to rub his superiority in everyone's faces? Why can't he move to an Upper Zone and take on mech designers of his own size? There is no need for him to show off in front of plebs like ourselves."

"You're just being jealous. Didn't you read his profile? He used to be a third-rater! For a mech designer from a third-rate state to rise to this point in less than two decades is nothing less than a miracle. Whether he has received help or not, you have to see that no other third-class mech designer is able to make so much use out of the opportunities that he has won. He's the definition of a self-made mech designer."

"I wonder how many mechers he has seduced to obtain so many MTA merits to augment himself to this point. I bet he is called the Devil Tongue for more reasons than the obvious..."

A lot of people had the mistaken impression that Ves had stuffed his body with advanced first-class augmentations.

He wouldn't blame them if he heard their remarks. It was his remarkably high productivity that his wife wanted to catch up to him by acquiring her coveted 120 million MTA credits cranial implant!

Although 120 million MTA merits did not sound like an impossible figure to him anymore, in practice it was absolutely remarkable for any human to have that much MTA merits to spare!

Let alone second-raters, many first-raters never had the capability to earn so much in their lifetimes. They would have to settle with lesser cranial implants that weren't able to amplify their cognitive functions to the same degree.

It was rather ironic. Ves' cranial implant was originally an outdated CFA bioimplant that mainly granted him an insanely high amount of memory space.

Other than being able to dump a lot of digital junk inside its astonishing memory banks, it did not actually provide him with a lot of design-oriented conveniences during his work sessions.

Much of that changed during his recent sublimation. During the time he got hit with lots of inexplicable lightning strikes, his entire brain along with the integrated Archimedes Rubal bioimplant transformed in a direction deliberately established by Ves.

The Archimedes Rubal had evolved into a radically different product. It still retained its huge capacity to store a lot of data, but also received considerable enhancements to its processing power and other useful functions.

On top of that, his brain as a whole also transcended to a higher level, allowing him to perform mental calculations and make inferences far beyond the level of a baseline human.

Out of all of the mech designers taking part in this tournament, Ves was convinced that he was the furthest removed from normal humanity!

He normally had mixed feelings about distancing himself from humanity, but at this moment he fully embraced his transhuman advantages.

After going through much of the database of parts and materials, he had performed rapid comparisons and cost-benefit analyses before making the most optimal choices that best matched his vision.

There was nothing particularly special about most of the components and mech systems that he selected for his work. The database did not include anything too remarkable or exotic in isolation. This was likely an attempt to force the participating Journeymen to invest their time in building up their own custom solutions that could grant their competition mechs unique advantages that could not be duplicated by their rivals.

Some mech designers invested their precious design time into formulating better alloy formulas for the armor systems of their mech designs.

Other mech designers sought to increase the mobility of their works by enhancing their legs or mech engine.

Ves spent much of his time on selecting multiple different weapon systems and upgrading them with the help of his considerable expertise.

He did not start from scratch for the most part. There was nothing wrong with taking an existing weapon system and altering their design in order to quickly squeeze out extra power.

The greater challenge was to integrate them into the frame of the hybrid mech as seamlessly as possible. That was absolutely not a simple task.

He started with the easiest weapon module, which was the shoulder-mounted missile launchers.

The extensive rulebook of the tournament heavily restricted the use of missiles and other explosive weapons.

This made sense as the tournament organizers did not want the matches to devolve into a race of which side was able to saturate the enemy positions with as many explosive missiles as possible!

A lot more competition mechs would look like missile launchers on legs if not for this rule!

Ves still went through with adding a pair of small and relatively compact missile launchers because he had no intention of filling them up with explosive munitions.

Instead, he borrowed a page out of some of his previous works and designed these missile launchers to carry a number of utility warheads.

The database offered a selection of EMP missiles, smoke missiles, sensor-boosting missiles and more.

They weren't as useful as they sounded. Ves scrunched his face as he read through the specifications of these utility missiles. Their performance was incredibly weak and could only mildly inconvenience opposing mechs at best.

"Hm. I'm not surprised."

The tournament organizers did not want the entire arena to become filled with blinding smoke or for mechs to turn into crippled machines all of the time.

If anyone wanted to make effective use of these utility missiles, they had to put in the work to upgrade their meager capabilities.

Ves chose to do so. He had worked on mechs with comparable capabilities before. The Valkyrie Redeemer and his more recent Buzzy Bee both possessed functions that could blind the sensors or disrupt the electrical systems of opposing machines.

He allocated much of his formidable design capabilities into altering the key working mechanisms of these utility missiles.

There was no need for him to reinvent the entire wheel. The missiles themselves were fairly basic but serviceable. He just needed to modify the warheads themselves.

For example, he improved the effectiveness of the EMP missiles by reducing its range, increasing its energy density and upgrade horribly basic and outdated components with more modern advancements.

He did the same for the smoke missiles. He increased the volume of particles the missile could carry while also using the materials at his disposal to formulate an entirely new particle formula that was substantially more effective at its job.

It took a lot of specialized knowledge in ECM systems and materials science in order to be able accomplish the latter. Ves also had to rely heavily on his enhanced cognitive abilities and his intuition in order to solve these problems as quickly as possible.

On top of everything else, he couldn't forget about modifying and upgrading the sensor systems of both the hybrid mech and the light skirmisher!

It would be embarrassing if his own machines would get blinded by their own disruptive measures!

Ves wasn't entirely pleased with his solutions. He knew extremely well that he could have improved the effectiveness of the utility missiles and the sensor system by 20 if not 40 percent if he spent a lot more time on exploring alternative solutions and optimizing their implementations.

Unfortunately, Ves had chosen to add a lot more systems to his hybrid mech, so he reluctantly moved on to other modules.

The next weapon system he decided to work upon was the wrist-mounted flamethrowers.

He wanted his hybrid mech to possess the fighting power of a striker mech, as he expected a lot of enemies to take the speed route like his own team.

Flamethrowers were excellent choices because they not only reduced the maneuvering space of light mechs, but also dealt fantastic damage to internal components if they could get past the exterior armor layers.

Normally, this was difficult to achieve because the armor systems of modern mechs were great at insulating heat and energy. It took a lot of time for flames to melt through solid heat-resistant armor and expose the internal components that were much more susceptible to extremely hot flames.

The introduction of an obvious frontal weak point had changed the equation!

As long as the flames were able to breach the relatively flimsy material that covered this gap, they could deal all manner of ruinous damage to circuitry, power lines and delicate mechanical subcomponents!

The damage potential of flames towards internal components exceeded that of a kinetic projectile or a laser beam in that sense!

The flamethrowers that Ves decided to add to the wrists of his hybrid mech were relatively weak in order to save on capacity.

In his opinion, the flamethrowers should solely be used to hinder light mechs and finish off vulnerable machines by targeting their frontal weak points.

There was no need to add large propellant tanks to the hybrid mech so that it could light the entire arena on fire.

Of course, Ves made a few focused adjustments to the flamethrowers. He added a setting that concentrated its output so that it could melt through light armor plating as long as the narrow jet of fire struck its mark.

He also changed the propellant formula to increase its density and make it more potent. He had to reinforce the components of the flamethrower in order to prevent them from melting, but he did not need to make too many changes as the hybrid mech wouldn't be able to spray fires for long.

While he would have liked to increase the longevity of the flamethrowers, he could not do so without compromising the mobility of his hybrid mech.

Speed remained a priority for his hybrid mech. He wanted it to catch up to the light skirmisher as best as possible so that the two competition mechs could run circles around most of their adversaries.

Once he completed the missile launchers, he moved on to adding two integrated luminar crystal guns into the upper torso of the hybrid mech.

A hybrid mech could not call itself a hybrid mech if it did not feature integrated weapons into its massive torso!

While the addition of these integrated weapons added extra weak points to the hybrid mech, Ves believed that the tradeoff was worth it. The hybrid mech already possessed a huge gap in its frontal defenses, so the addition of two more didn't seem to alter the fundamental equation.

His hybrid mech just had to utilize its superior offensive capabilities to take the initiative and finish off its opponents before the enemy could do the same!

Unlike the other modules that he had added to his mech design, Ves had to design the compact integrated luminar crystal hardpoints from scratch.

This was one of the instances where Ves truly showed what he was capable of! While he wasn't able to design a version of his latest generation of luminar crystal weapons, he was still able to come up with a simplified variant in record time.

The dumbed down version of luminar crystals weren't all that powerful, but any additional offense helped a lot in a fight. They were remarkably energy efficient and took up less space than conventional energy weapon systems.

More importantly, Ves was able to fabricate the simplified luminar crystals with the native capabilities of the superfab without relying on any confidential or proprietary technologies, so he wouldn't inadvertently break his deal with the MTA either.

"It will have to do." He sighed as he completed his integrated energy weapon designs in less time than anyone expected!

#### Chapter 4855 Loaded With Weapons

None of the weapons integrated in his hybrid mech were particularly powerful so far, and that was a deliberate design choice on his part.

Ves wanted his hybrid mech to leverage its versatility and massed firepower to overwhelm the opposition.

The general idea was that his hybrid mech would throw everything it had at a target mech all at once and see what worked!

Even if a particular weapon system proved ineffective against a specific enemy, using it still exerted a lot of pressure onto the target mech's defensive systems, so it was not completely useless.

In no way should his hybrid mech ever be put in a situation where none of its weapon systems could harm the opposing machine!

No matter whether it was a blazingly fast light skirmisher or an indomitable knight mech, the versatile arsenal of his hybrid mech should always have an effective solution at hand!

This was one of the defining strengths of the hybrid mech archetype. The mech type traded away the possibility to wield a singular powerful weapon in order to mount multiple smaller ones.



Of course, this also highlighted its weaknesses. There was always a dilemma involved with configuring the weapons loadout of a hybrid mech.

The general rule was that the greater the quantity of weapon systems, the weaker and more constrained they became.

No hybrid mech could completely escape this dilemma.

This also applied to first-class multipurpose mechs, which many people equated to hybrid mechs on steroids!

The reason why multipurpose mechs became mainstream at the first-class level was because relying on single weapon systems did more harm than good at that level.

Mech combat at this height operated by substantially different rules. The ordinary paradigms that were valid in third-class and second-class combat no longer applied anymore. Extreme miniaturization along with the abundant use of high-grade exotics and high technologies allowed many mech designers to avoid a lot of tradeoffs and simply have it all as long as they could afford the exorbitant prices!

Naturally, the hybrid mech that Ves was working on did not come close to matching the standards of first-class multipurpose mechs.

This was physically impossible given the rather poor tech and relatively weak materials at his disposal.

Ves even had to fall back to his dormant third-class mech design expertise in order to reduce the load that various design elements exerted onto his mech design!

For example, the compact integrated chest-mounted luminar crystal weapons were able to fire highly efficient laser beams without too much fuss because Ves fell back to outdated third-class luminar crystal technology!

Although it pained Ves a lot to go back in time and recreate luminar crystals that looked more at home in the original iteration of the Crystal Lord rather than the upgraded second-class version of this mech line.

It was as if he was a nouveau riche entrepreneur who lived in a mansion, only to go back to living in a rotten shack for whatever reason!

Nonetheless, a mansion and a rotten shack both served their purposes. The latter made more sense in specific circumstances.

In the case of the Twin Weapons Tournament, Ves needed a variation of luminar crystal guns that were compact, low-powered and easy to design and fabricate.

It didn't matter that the luminar crystals he designed for his hybrid mech used a mix of third-class and second-class elements. They were the right tool for the job and that was what mattered the most.

Their burst damage was weak, but Ves believed that their sustained damage was not negligible. It could deal consistent and fairly precise damage onto slower mechs at longer ranges.

Better yet, the luminar crystal guns did not drain the energy reserves of his hybrid mech too much.

This made it possible for his hybrid mech to kite slower melee mechs over time. Sure, winning a match by running circles around clumsy mechs that did not possess the capacity to retaliate was one of the more pathetic ways to win a mech match, but a win was still a win.

What Ves found the most important was that the integrated luminar crystal weapons possessed enough power and precision to deal serious internal damage to a mech as long as the laser beams struck the frontal weak points of enemy machines.

If not for the existence of these weak points, Ves doubted whether he would have bothered to add these relatively lackluster integrated luminar crystal weapons to his mech design.

After completing this weapon module, he worked on the final weapon system.

As a humanoid mech, the hybrid mech was able to wield one or several handheld weapons.

Ves had considered many different possibilities, but eventually settled for a shotgun.

He had to admit that he was partially inspired by the Mars when he determined the weapon configuration of his competition mech.

There was no way to copy the full experience of piloting an absolute powerhouse ace mech like the Mars. It was packed full of so much advanced technologies and extremely valuable materials that its effective firepower could easily match that of a warship!

Ves did not even see his current mech design as a derivative or a little brother to the Mars. That would be an insult to the masterwork ace mech and strip his current work of its own identity.

The real reason why he opted to pair his hybrid mech with a shotgun was because it truly made the most sense under the circumstances.

His mech design already covered closer ranges with its flamethrower and longer ranges with its integrated luminar crystal weapons.

A shotgun rounded out this weapon selection by offering a versatile and fairly powerful weapon that was most effective at medium ranges.

Of course, Ves utilized the term medium range in the context of the arena space inside Spencer Hall. The internal space of this structure was not cramped, but it was hardly the largest mech arena on Davute VII.

A shotgun configured in the right way should pose a decent threat towards light mechs as well as other mechs as long as they exposed their weak points.

Just as with the other weapon systems, Ves dove into the design of the shotgun and altered it to fit his vision.

Shotguns were fairly low-tech in nature as their basic working principles had roughly remained the same for many millennia.

Certainly, human technology made a lot of different advances that Ves could apply to the weapon. From loading it with smart ammunition to making it so that it could fire a plasma spray, there were many different ways to spice up the weapon.

Ves had neither the time nor the inclination to add all of those fancy functions to a simple weapon.

"A basic lightweight option will do the job."

The hybrid mech already carried a lot of different stuff that weighed it down and reduced its available capacity. Equipping it with an oversized shotgun might allow it to blast through thicker armor, but its ability to maneuver quickly in the arena would take too much of a hit as a response.

Ves constantly had to remind himself that he wanted to design an offensive shock unit, not a defensive bulwark. It was fine to sacrifice a bit of firepower in order to make his mech more flighty and nimble.

As such, he first made the shotgun lighter and replaced sturdy and robust materials with more lightweight alternatives. He also removed a few redundant options to shrink it even further.

Though the durability of the weapon took a substantial hit due to his design choices, it turned into a product of beauty.

"The ammunition is a little limited but its firepower makes up for it." Ves determined.

One of the downsides of a shotgun was that its shells were quite bulky and hefty. That was partially where it got its power from. If he wanted to be more frugal about it, he would have equipped his hybrid mech with a lightweight submachine gun, but that did not quite fit his vision for his hybrid mech.

"A submachine gun is an excellent complement to a harasser-style ranged mech, but it doesn't have the shock value of a shotgun."

This was a concept that Ves found important for his competition mechs. He did not want them to win their matches by whittling down their targets in battles of attrition.

Lighter and more offense-oriented mechs were too fragile and lacking in capacity to excel in this mode of combat.

What he wanted to see instead was his competition mechs take over the offensive rhythm of the match from the start and keep overwhelming their targets with attack after attack!

This was a risky approach as his mechs would definitely fare much worse as long as they were put on the defensive, but this was a price that he was willing to pay.

"With this many weapons, the chances that my mech will be forced to go on the defensive is slim."

A defensive pair of mechs could still outlast his own pair of machines, but the existence of those weak points should make a turtle strategy a lot less effective.

No matter whether the opposing mechs defended from their front or rears, they should always have at least one vulnerable side!

"Should I add more weapons to my hybrid mech?" Ves wondered. "I actually have a bit of time to spare."

He was just too fast compared to his previous self half a year ago. One of the main reasons why he was able to design his mech so quickly was because his artificial cyborg leg actually possessed a smaller copy of his own brain!

This not only allowed him to process data faster, but also made it a lot easier for him to split his attention and work on separate problems at the same time!

Ves tallied the current weapon loadout of his hybrid mech.

Shoulder-mounted missile launchers. Wrist-mounted flamethrowers. Chest-mounted integrated He decided to go all-in on this crazy and unconventional idea.

The throwing axes he designed were extremely simple and only featured basic alterations to make luminar crystal guns. Handheld shotgun.

"Hahaha! There is so much!"

There shouldn't be another competition in the Twin Weapons Tournament that could match the quantity of weapon systems of his mech design!

If not for the restriction that the ranged mech was not allowed to wield a melee weapon that was greater than a knife, then Ves would have felt tempted to equip his mech with a simple axe.

His eyes suddenly lit up. "Wait a minute. A throwing axe can also be classified as a ranged weapon!"

As long as it was obviously designed to be thrown, Ves should be able to get away with adding it to his design.

Although the addition of one or more throwing axes would significantly weigh down his hybrid mech, Ves didn't care all that much.

His machine just had to throw them all out at the start in order to unload its excess weight as quickly as possible!

He quickly called up the rulebook and skimmed through the documents at a rapid pace.

None of the rules explicitly prohibited the use of throwing weapons.

His grin widened as he imagined his hybrid mech armed with a bandolier of throwing axes.

"Hahahahaha! It's viable!"

He decided to go all-in on this crazy and unconventional idea.

The throwing axes he designed were extremely simple and only featured basic alterations to make them more aerodynamic and stable during 'flight'.

Ves wished that he could spend weeks on testing and optimizing the design of these handheld projectile weapons, but there was not much he could do in this regard.

He deliberately made the axes fairly hefty and thick so that they could definitely inflict significant damage upon a solid hit.

Their flight speeds weren't the best and they could easily be dodged by a fairly maneuverable opponent, but that was fine. The throwing axes could serve as distractions or a means to cut off the escape route of enemy mechs.

In order to prevent the opposition from throwing the axes back, Ves designed a mechanism where the shaft automatically separated from the axehead several seconds after getting thrown. This was a fairly simple mechanical solution and did not take much time to integrate in the weapon design.

This meant that only the axe heads should remain after they had been thrown. It was possible to throw them back, but doing so was so difficult and awkward that most enemies simply wouldn't bother.

#### Chapter 4856 The Power Of Family

"There. That should do it. These axes are going to be fun!" Ves grinned.

He ultimately rigged up a temporary bandolier that enabled the hybrid mech to enter a match with up to five throwing axes!

If the Davutan mech pilot did not want to start off a match with so much added weight, he or she could always opt to leave a few axes behind.

The addition of the throwing weapons substantially threw off the original aesthetic of his hybrid mech.

It gave his mech design a sloppy and haphazard pirate look.

"It's as if my mech is too poor to buy a proper weapon and instead chose to scavenge all of the available weapons that it could scrounge from a junkyard!"

His wife would absolutely hate his current hybrid mech if she could see it, but Ves absolutely loved the current evolution of his work!

This hybrid mech began to personify mayhem and that was exactly what he wanted to unleash upon its foes!

Any pairs of competition mechs that expected to enter a match with a set plan in mind should definitely be in for an axy surprise!

"Hahaha!"

It took a while for Ves to rein in his enthusiasm for these axes. He recognized that their actual threat was probably not as great as he hoped once he became a little more sober.

The main limitation was the low physical arm strength of his hybrid mech. He hadn't designed it with melee combat or throwing weapons in mind, so it was impossible for a thrown axe to cripple an entire upon a direct hit.

It could still deal considerable damage to the rear or the obvious weak points of mechs at closer ranges, so the axes were not completely useless.

After Ves was done with designing and configuring the weapons along with completing much of the work of integrating them into the mech design, he felt it was time to summon his design network.

"Juliet. Are you ready?"

"I suppose so, Ves. What do you have in mind, exactly? You told me your plan before, but I am not entirely clear what you want to accomplish."

"You'll find out when we establish the network, but in short I want to design these two mechs as a set of two connected machines. You can consider them twins, or better yet two mechs that share the same 'soul' for a lack of a better word."

"Is that even possible?" Juliet skeptically asked.

Ves smirked and tapped the side of his skull. "Some of us have companions in our heads, remember? That is what I am trying to accomplish with our mech designs. You might not notice it right away, but since the moment we started to design our mechs, I already made sure that your light skirmisher design is on the same page as my hybrid mech design. They are kindred and part of the same family. Once they are complete, I hope they will share a strong and unbreakable bond right from the start."

"That... sounds fantastical, Ves. I believe in your vision."

"Thank you. That is all I ask from you. Let's share our minds and work as one. The bond we form through the network will partially mirror our desired results. The key concepts of paired mech designs are twin souls, speed and disruption. Our light skirmisher and our hybrid mech must share all three traits in order to make sure there is enough symmetry between the pair. I think that will help with strengthening their special bond."

He quietly roused Blinky and commanded the cat to form an invisible spiritual bond.

Mrow.

Though nothing obvious happened in front of the spectators, the team of Ves and Juliet suddenly worked a lot more effectively than before!

Previously, the two Journeyman Mech Designers worked alongside each other but did not demonstrate higher than average coordination. They were mainly focusing their efforts into improving their own assigned mech designs.

This time was different. Ves spent a lot more time and effort contributing the design of the light skirmisher while Juliet did the same for the hybrid mech.

They did not do so sporadically, but wordlessly coordinated their efforts and made sure that none of their additions stood in the way of the work of their partners.

This might not sound so special, but the degree of coordination between the two had improved so much that they matched or exceeded that of married couples and long-term partners!

The more experienced mech designers who closely tracked the work of Ves and Juliet figured out that tacit cooperation and sharing of ideas was unnaturally high!

While this could easily be explained by using their cranial implants to form a private communication network, there were many other pairs of mech designers who were doing just that, only to fail to reach this level!

[It is not that difficult to guess that the remarkable cooperation between the two is another application of Patriarch Larkinson's design philosophy. He has several lines of mechs under his name that are known to establish special communication lines that work on entirely different principles. I believe that he and his current partner are making use of similar tech but in a non-combat related capacity.]

[Wait. If he is able to use his proprietary technology to communicate with others in private through means that cannot be jammed or intercepted, how are we able to know whether he isn't secretly

working with a secret team of mech designers who are located in another design lab? Maybe this is why he is able to work through his design problems faster than any of his other rivals!]

[Hahaha! Do you think that the position of chief judge is symbolic? Master Hergard Elroy along with other Master Mech Designers behind the scenes are constantly tracking the progress made by Patriarch Ves Larkinson as well as the other 141 participants of our tournament. They understand mechs so much better than anyone working in the hall. They can spot any abnormalities and investigate further if there are any doubts. Our judges would have notified us by now if a single mech designer has broken any of the rules that we have set. Since that did not happen, the team of Larkinsons are in the clear.]

[I do not need to borrow the judgment of Masters to see that Ves Larkinson is working earnestly on his projects. Do you not see how high his motivation has become after he invested himself in his mech designs? That is the mark of a mech designer who loves his work to a greater extent than many other professionals. An individual who loves mechs so much would never defile the sanctity of his work by breaking the rules. It would taint his effort and dishonor him in front of the entire mech community.]

Though the subject of cheating had sprung up among the critics and the skeptics in the audience, the Davute University of Technology enjoyed such a high prestige that most people accepted the judgment of its mech designers.

[Humanity has developed many forms of high technology. The more delicate but life-changing technologies are related to human augmentation. Many states and groups have developed their own proprietary tech that they rely upon to surpass the competition. What is not to say that the Larkinson Clan has received a boon from his powerful patrons from the Mech Trade Association? As a favored friend of the mechers, it is not unusual for Patriarch Larkinson to exchange powerful high technologies or receive them as gifts.]

[Remember, mech designers. Building up a relationship with the Mech Trade Association is also a skill. Many of my fellow colleagues think that the mechers are so much better than us that it is impossible for us to open up a dialogue with them. Admittedly, their impression is not wrong. The mechers are only willing to speak to mech designers that are capable of contributing to the body of work related to mechs and any related tech. As long as you have conducted original research that no other mech designer in human space has touched upon before, you should be receiving an invitation from a member of the esteemed Association any day.]

[...]

[...]

[...]

[I hate you.]

[You make it sound much easier.]

Though people mistook the effects of Ves' design network as another wondrous effect of MTA-approved tech, it conveniently settled the controversy related to this matter.

Ves and Juliet did not care at all what people were saying about them, not that they could actually listen to all of their words due to the isolating barrier that supposedly cut off all outside communication.

In practice, Ves could abuse the hell out of the Larkinson Network to secretly work together with any other Larkinson Mech Designer.

He would never do that. He outright ignored the Larkinson Network and pretended that it didn't exist since the start of this design session!

Ves was still committed to winning this tournament fair and square. He set the limit at intrinsic abilities and no further. Using Blinky's design network was a reflection of his own strength, while borrowing Goldie's vast spiritual network was clearly a form of cheating by using outside help.

Regardless, Ves had become way too invested in designing the two mechs concurrently while doing everything he could to turn them into 'twins'!

"Haha!"

"It's working."

"This is really fun!"

It was not unusual for Ves to spontaneously burst in laughter or become impressed at his own work.

The innovative and interesting vision that he created for these paired mech designs was slowly turning into a reality!

"Our work is going to amaze the judges and the crowd!" Ves exuberant boasted. "What we are making is a first for me and my clan. I don't dare to claim that no other mech designer has made anything comparable in the past, but this will definitely be a new and promising advancement for our clan as long as it works!"

Though Juliet did not share his abundant enthusiasm for their paired mech designs, his strong enthusiasm and boundless optimism infected her own mood.

Even she started to get caught up in the excitement!

She could already see how the twin-souled concept could become a boon for the Larkinson Clan and more specifically the Penitent Sisters where she hailed from.

Close Penitent Sister mech pilots could cover each other's backs to an even greater degree than before.

It would be even better if these strong mech-induced bonds could encompass more than two mech pilots!

Of course, Juliet recognized that Ves still needed to learn how to walk before he could run. He still needed to prove the most basic implementation of this new design application could work before he could expand its scope.

Though Ves was already thinking about the future, he was pretty certain that the original twin-souled concept was the strongest possible iteration of this idea. The bond between an intimate couple was stronger than any other relationship!

It was like the bond between husband and wife or mother and child.



"This is the power of family." Juliet Stameross spoke out loud.

Ves nodded in agreement. "I agree. If humans have family, why not mechs? They can become siblings within the same model or even outside of it. The only material I need to forge their bonds is love."

It was strange for him to say this, but it made a lot of sense as he continually poured his heart and passion into these competition mech designs.

Despite their transient nature, their value to him was much greater because they would be the first machines to debut his provisionally named Twin Souls System in physical form!

"This is going to be awesome." Ves grinned. "I only hope that the mech pilots assigned to our works are able to recognize and take advantage of this unique capability."

He needed to remind himself to add this to an instruction manual.

Better yet, he should probably spell it out in a loud and obvious tutorial message.

#### Chapter 4857 Personal Life

Through the passionate and concerted efforts of Ves and his partner, the designs of the light skirmisher and the hybrid mech started to approach their final forms.

Despite the many odd and unconventional design choices that Ves indulged in, he did not continue to go crazy with regards to the more basic and fundamental properties of his mech designs.

He did not do anything too special or out of the ordinary with regards to the armor system, the energy management, the heat management, the control systems and many other aspects of the mech designs.

Juliet naturally improved and optimized anything related to the mobility of the mech designs, but otherwise did the same with regards to everything else.

Neither Ves nor Juliet had any special expertise when it came to tweaking the armor systems and so on. Rather than waste their time on improving anything critical and risk getting it all wrong, they would rather stick to the blueprints provided by the database.

Two days was not much time and the pair of Larkinson mech designers had already invested a lot of time and effort on more critical parts and systems.

"We did work on the stuff that actually matters." Ves reiterated a few hours after Blinky's retracted his design network after getting exhausted. "Our mechs are solely geared towards speed and offense. Everything will be fine as long as they remain on the attack."

"And what if they fail to maintain their offensive rhythm?"

Ves shrugged. "...They will just need to fight harder. There is only one maximum speed setting for our mechs, and that is maximum throttle. The moment they slow down is the moment they get torn apart. I really hope that doesn't happen."

This was the high risk high reward strategy they adopted by settling for this combination of mechs.

Ves was confident that it would play out in his favor because he knew that he was better than any other Journeyman in the competition.

That was not to say that he could get away with underestimating the works of his rivals and peers.

Their mech designs might not be as elaborate, detailed and packed with tech as his hybrid mech, but the right combination of competition mechs could easily pose a serious threat to his own works!

"What sort of mechs do you think our mechs will struggle against the most?" Juliet quizzed.

Ves furrowed his brows for a moment. "Hm, that is a difficult question. A striker mech directly counters our light skirmisher, while a solid melee mech should be able to power through the attacks of my hybrid mech. The actual situation is a lot more complicated in practice. Since the matches are two-on-two, factors such as teamwork and synergy play a major role in swinging the outcome."

This was what he was banking on to make the difference, actually.

"I think that a defensive knight mech may be difficult for our mechs to handle as well." Juliet explained her own views. "Neither of our two mechs possess the raw firepower or penetration force to punch through the defenses of a defensive mech that easily."

"A slow and unwieldy knight mech might be able to defend a small stretch of space, but that most certainly means that its companion is a light mech. Our machines should easily be able to gang up on or outmaneuver the latter despite the help of the former."

It was a positioning game. The light skirmisher could circle around and threaten to attack from the rear while the hybrid mech could use its overwhelming firepower to occupy the enemy at the front.

Unless the knight mech possessed a weird defensive system that could defend itself as well as its companion from attacks in a 360 degree circle, it was impossible to cope with a classic pincer movement!

The reduced effectiveness of a defensive approach due to the special rules was the entire reason why Ves rejected it to begin with. He did not think highly of any mech designer teams that wanted to rely on defense to outlast the opposition during the combat phase!

Still, Ves shouldn't underestimate the creativity and competence of his rivals. Perhaps certain mech designers who excel in defense such as Sara Voiken managed to find a decent workaround to the additional challenges.

He actually looked forward to testing his mettle against his fellow Larkinson mech designers.

The odds that his team would get matched up against the Voiken siblings or the Power Pair was low, but he could still dream. He pitied them if they actually had to compare their works in the mech arena. His works had a high chance of ending their tournament run.

"You are being overconfident again, Ves. Please focus on the present. We still have to finalize our designs and fabricate our twin mechs."

"Oh. Sorry. I tend to get a little off-track."

The remaining design work did not pose a challenge to the pair of Larkinson mech designers. They already settled all of the major design choices and did all of the hard work in the previous hours.

What work they had left did not require the assistance of a design network.

In fact, even if Blinky had already retracted this handy function, the lingering understanding and harmony between the two mech designers continued to propel them forward.

Ves even had time to chat with Juliet about personal matters.

"So how is your life going these days?" He idly asked as he optimized the energy feeds to the integrated luminar crystal guns of his hybrid mech.

The female mech designer directed a suspicious look in his direction. "My personal life is not relevant to our projects."

"Oh, come on, it's fine. I haven't really talked to you on a personal basis for a long time. Our only interactions with each other entirely consist of work-related discussions. It is always this mech design project or that mech design project. Don't get me wrong, Juliet. I don't want to intrude in your personal life and poke around your private business, but I find it odd that I do not really know you that well outside of your professional persona. We have been working alongside each other for years, so it is high time I get to know the woman underneath your mech designer shell."

Juliet pressed her lips. "Your design network should have given you a decent impression of myself. I do not lead an active personal life outside of my work. I do keep in touch with the Penitent Sisters, but that is because they are my sisters."

"Have you made friends outside of that circle?" Ves asked. "What about dating? Have you ever looked into forming a deeper relationship with anybody?"

"I am not looking for that kind of love, Ves. I am perfectly content with my current life. My work is my sustenance."

"What? You're missing out on a lot, Juliet! You are already at an age where many other women either have kids or are thinking about getting them. While you can rely on genetic treatments and other stuff to remain young and beautiful for a long time, I think it is better to get this stuff out of the way first. It will interfere with your design activities a lot more if you get married and have kids a lot later in your life."

Juliet actually grew a little annoyed at his pushing. "Drop it, sir. I have made my decisions in life. Please respect them. My work already occupies all of my time. Unlike you and your wife, my talent in mech design is not as good. I have to spend much more time on my studies in order to progress my design philosophy and find new methods to express my specialty. I do not begrudge the opportunity to work with and learn from excellent mech designers such as you, but please do not assume that my life is as carefree as yours."

Her tone betrayed the struggles of her life. She was not a normal person to begin with. Not only did she start out life as a Hexer, she also became involved in a cult that was too extreme for her former state.

"I never actually noticed it before, but you don't seem to be into the Superior Mother all that much." Ves cautiously spoke. "The rest of your fellow Penitent Sisters still remain radically devoted to her, but you... I never saw you pray as much in front of her altar as my wife."

The female mech designer's expression turned stony. This was clearly another touchy subject.

"It is hard to believe in a god when I am working alongside her son on a frequent basis." She quietly said. "I used to be a strong believer in a strong interpretation of hexism, but after I joined your clan and came into touch with other viewpoints, it has become increasingly clearer that... I have been lied to. Now that I have stepped away enough so that I can look into my past self without the bias I had before, I realize that the life of a Penitent Sister is... rather sad, really."

This topic started to become a little dangerous as it pertained to the cherished beliefs of many members of the Penitent Sister Mech Legion.

Still, Ves had started this. He could not suppress his curiosity.

"I am not displeased that you have broadened and altered your mindset towards your life. Hexism is a poisonous and illogical ideology and does not deserve anyone's worship. That said, the other Penitent Sisters that I have spoken to in the past still sound as if they cling strongly to the principles of hexism and the Superior Mother who personifies them. Does that not make you feel awkward among your fellow sisters?"

"No." Juliet strongly replied. "We are friends regardless of how much we diverge from each other. I respect the beliefs of my sisters even if I disagree with them. This difference hardly stands in the way of all of the years I have been part of their group."

"That sounds... great. I see you have this situation handled."

"If I didn't, I would have brought my problem to your attention. I did not inform you about this because I have no need for your intervention."

"That is fair enough. I apologize for asking a bit too many questions. I feel like I am compensating for years of focusing my attention on other matters."

"You do not need to say sorry. It is enough to rein in your curiosity when I am not in the mood to share anything further."

Ves made the smart decision and pivoted to another topic. "So what are you working on that is relevant to your design philosophy?"

"Shouldn't it be obvious, sir? I have been pouring a lot of effort into learning and understanding phasewater theory. I think my design philosophy can make a substantial leap if I am able to design transphasic flight systems for our future expert mechs and other high-end mechs. My products may not be as good as the products released by the likes of Morton Tech, but it will be completely in-house. This means that I can make far-reaching customizations that fit much closer to the needs of individual high-ranking mechs."

That sounded fairly simple, but it was actually a lot more profound.

Mastering phasewater technologies was clearly the future of the mech industry in the new frontier. If Juliet was able to become proficient in this broad and difficult field, she could apply what she learned in her work and gain massive rewards in the process!

Those rewards would subsequently fuel the progression of her design philosophy and bring her closer to advancing to Senior.

Now that he thought about it, it became a lot more reasonable for Juliet to put so much time in her work. She needed to do all of this extra work to keep up and never become a burden that could easily be cast aside.

Ves quietly sighed. Juliet's challenges were much greater due to her lack of major recent progress.

## Chapter 4858 Fabrication Wizard

Though Ves stumbled a bit during his conversation with Juliet, the two did not compromise their ongoing collaboration. They were too mature and invested in their work to let their personal feelings interfere with their work. Both of them were professionals who strongly cared about finishing what they started to the best of their abilities.

Besides, Ves made up for his mistakes in the following hours. He talked about all kinds of topics with

her during their ongoing design session.

None of the topics were all that sensitive. There was no harm in talking about simple matters such as Ves' children or what hobbies they were interested in. The sharing of information caused them to develop a closer friendship than before.

This put them in an excellent position to start the fabrication process.

Ves reiterated his plan to Juliet. "Good work. Our designs truly encompass both of our strengths.

Before we begin, I want to remind you that I prefer to fabricate our two competition mechs as concurrently as possible. I suspect that almost all of our rivals will decide to fabricate their mechs sequentially rather than in parallel. It is easier to keep track of stuff as they only have to concentrate

on a single mech at a time. We won't have that luxury when we start our own fabrication run."

Though Juliet understood his reasoning for taking this approach, she still felt it was necessary to express her doubts.

"I would be remiss in my duty if I do not warn you that we are making our jobs harder than is necessary. The more variables we have to take into account when we start to fabricate the parts and assemble our two mechs at the same time, the greater the probability of making mistakes. Are you sure you want to proceed with this risky plan?"

He took her warning seriously and went through his internal calculations once again. Ultimately, he believed that he possessed the competence to pull off this approach.

"It is worth it. This may be the first time we do anything like this, but I think it is truly essential to the Twin Soul System if we bring these two mechs to life at the same time. It is impossible to forge a

strong and immediate bond between our hybrid mech and our light skirmisher if they are born hours apart from each other. The older of the two mechs would become a lot more accustomed to existing by itself rather than with a close sibling."

His overall message that the payoff was worth the considerable risk and that he would have it under control.

He also had another reason to be optimistic about his chances.

"Blinky has rested enough to be able to deploy the design network again. It might not last the entire way, but it should tide us over during the most challenging phases of the fabrication run. Shall we proceed?"

"We might as well." Juliet looked resigned. "I truly envy what you and your wife can do with your

'cats'."

"Don't worry, Juliet. I haven't forgotten about your needs and that of the other Journeymen. I should

have done this sooner, but I will be granting each of you pets of your own." Ves reassured her. "You all deserve it for contributing so much to our clan. Even if that isn't the case, I still expect you all to use the advantages I bestow to tackle greater projects and accomplish even more."

That certainly perked her up! Juliet and many other Larkinsons in the know had become incredibly envious of companion spirits.

However, considering that only the people that Ves favored the most possessed this rare and special advantage, Juliet had long assumed that the price was too great for the Larkinson Clan to share the benefits on a wider scale.

She was grateful that Ves did not leave her out much longer.

This promise along with the reactivation of the design network had improved her mood to a massive extent!

She did not need to borrow Ves' enthusiasm as much as before to pepper her up and invigorate

herself after many hours of non-stop design work.

Just like every other participant in the Twin Souls Tournament, Ves and Juliet had opted to forgo

sleep and work all night in order to complete their competition mechs!

The superfab began to activate under their joint manipulation.

The pair of mech designers already explored the settings and the capabilities of the

university-owned superfab before. They learned that it was possible to conduct multiple different

processes at the same time as long as its users were fine with increased automation.

Ves and Juliet jointly manipulated their own projected interfaces. They activated different

fabrication orders and took greater control whenever it was possible and convenient.

Despite the fact that there was a considerable chance that their fabrication orders might overlap

with each other and subsequently get crossed somehow, their coordination remained so perfect that

none of their fears came true!

The audience once again had the privilege of witnessing another impressive performance.

[The team of Ves Larkinson and Juliet Stameris is doing it again. Do you see

how much in tune they  
are with each other? I can scarcely believe their superfab is producing so many  
different parts for  
two different mechs at the same time. The two mech designers hailing from the  
Larkinson Clan  
most certainly disabled numerous safety measures in order to make this  
possible.]

[Is it that special to fabricate parts of two different mechs in a single run?]

[It is. You do not realize the magnitude of how much they are flexing in front of  
mech designers such  
as ourselves. They are showing that fabricating a single mech at a time is not a  
real challenge to  
them. I do not blame this pair of Larkinson mech designers to be honest.

Patriarch Ves Larkinson

has 7 masterwork certificates under his name. Juliet Stameross has 5  
masterwork certificates, and she  
can largely thank her immediate superior for earning them in the first place.

Even I am envious of

their proven accomplishments in mech fabrication. I am a Senior Mech Designer  
who has designed  
many more mechs than the Larkinson Patriarch, but I have yet to earn a single  
masterwork  
certificate myself!]

[The ability to make not just one but several different masterworks at this stage  
of his career is an

unquestionable mark of a genius. This most of all is hard proof that the  
renowned patriarch is not a

simple Journeyman Mech Designer. Let me make a prediction. If any of you are  
lucky enough to be

alive a century from now, then you will thank yourself for watching this mech  
design tournament

live. This is because you have witnessed a small part of the ascension of  
humanity's latest Star

Designer!]

[That is absurd! I admire Ves Larkinson as well, but that does not mean that he  
is a future Star

Designer candidate!]

[Let us not get overboard, please. We are living in the present and not the  
distant future. The Red

Ocean is still in flux and anything can happen in the future. We should return to

detailing the fabrication work done by the participants of this tournament.] If Ves heard that an expert panel of mech designers thought he had a high chance of reaching the top, he would feel flattered but also make an effort to diminish his heroics. He could not withstand the heat of being regarded as a Star Designer in the making! Fortunately, he did not pay any attention to what the public was thinking about his current performance. He became completely invested in fabricating the parts of his two mechs. With the help of the design network, Ves and Juliet melded their work-related thoughts and emotions on a deeper level than before. The two trusted each other a bit more and became a lot more willing to delve into each other's minds.

They learned a bit more about their design philosophies and how they saw mechs from their own perspective. This sharing subsequently helped with fabricating mechs that not only carried their own signature, but also that of their partner! It was a profoundly strange and novel experience for Ves to meld with another mech designer during the process of fabricating two mechs at a time. The model and capabilities of the superfab helped a lot in this regard. The device was more user-friendly than normal and took away a lot of the finicky tedium that could prevent Ves from appreciating the beauty of his current workings. As the parts started to stack up more and more, the duo finally completed the most important fabrication work! Now, they just needed to assemble the parts into complete and functional mechs. This did not prove to be much of a challenge either. Special mechanical arms and sophisticated machinery popped up in their isolated area. These additions enabled the two



mech designers to  
assemble the mechs that they had envisioned for more than a day!  
Anticipation welled up inside Ves and far beyond. Many more people than his  
clansmen began to  
wonder increasingly more if this remarkable pair of mech designers might be  
able to produce a  
miracle upon the two competition mechs!

[This is the ability of a sevenfold masterwork mech designer. Watch and learn,  
folks. What Patriarch

Ves Larkinson is doing goes far beyond work. His actions and his decisions are  
expressing art in his  
own style. He is shaping life from metal and composites. He is elevating his  
mechs from crude and  
debased machines into vivid tapestries of craftsmanship. If nothing else, the  
Larkinson Patriarch can  
win many prizes if he takes up life as a professional artist! The good ones are  
always in high  
demand.]

[You may admire Patriarch Ves Larkinson for his artistry and such, but do not  
follow his example too  
closely. His distinctive design style is radically different from everyone else's and  
there are many  
good reasons for that. Those same reasons do not apply to yourself. What you  
need to do is explore  
your own preferences and mech design style and apply proactive measures to  
form your own style.]

[My colleague is correct. We do not broadcast this tournament in the hopes that  
many of you will  
become the next imitation of Ves Larkinson. We want to expand your horizons  
and give you a taste  
of what is possible.]

Not all of the talk was relevant to the design tasks related to Ves and Juliet.  
This was fine as they became hyper focused towards their own work. None of  
them exchanged any  
words out loud and it sometimes looked as if the two had turned into drones of  
the same hive mind!

The two looked a bit eerie as a consequence, but it played well with the theme  
they had going.

The two mechs started to look more complete and also feel more alive as a  
consequence.

Ves felt gratified enough to exhibit a rare smile. That was how happy he had become after seeing a strong and fully active spiritual connection between the two works in progress. He should have been fabricating more mechs like this. The Twin Souls System was taking concrete shape and would be incredibly handy in his other mech design projects that relied a lot on teamwork.

The two mech designers slowed down a bit as they approached the end of the fabrication phase.

Ves meticulously inspected and evaluated his work. He did not make any significant mistakes as far as he could see, but he always wanted to make sure and double check his efforts because a mistake could truly ruin his chances to win the finals.

"Now these... are mechs fit for a pair of champions."

The two competition mechs were complete and most probably fully functional!

"We did it, Juliet!"

"I can see that, sir. These mechs have turned out to be better than I hoped.

Whatever you have done

to make them more inseparable to each other is truly giving me a special feeling about the two

works. The two simply belong together. I can scarcely imagine a circumstance where they have to fight by themselves."

This was a clear sign that Ves succeeded!

Chapter 4859 Sense and Fury

[Impressive! Impressive! Impressive!]

The panel of experts exploded with praises as soon as Ves and Juliet were finally done with putting the finishing touches on their pair of competition mechs!

[I almost cannot begin to describe how the mechs fabricated by Patriarch Ves Larkinson have reached an entirely different grade. They are not masterworks by any means, but they exhibit refinements and a level of finishing that is more commonly seen in well-designed production mechs. How the Larkinson duo is able to fabricate so many high-quality parts in so little time is a mystery.]

[It is not a mystery in my opinion. There is a simple answer that can explain why these two mechs are qualitatively better. The answer is 7 masterwork certificates.]

[You are putting too much stock in masterwork mechs! It is not essential for a mech designer to fabricate a masterwork mech in order to progress much further. Granted, understanding the physical

and tangible properties of mechs before improving them in many small ways can massively aid that individual's chances to advance to Master and beyond.]

[Let us briefly examine the physical appearances of the two completed mechs, shall we? The first comment I want to make is that they look harmonious together in a manner that I am missing in the other mechs completed thus far. Now that I am actively comparing this pair to the pairs of earlier completed mechs, the difference is truly too great to ignore. I cannot describe in exact or concrete terms why my judgment is skewed towards this conclusion, but looking at the mechs designed by Ves Larkinson and his partner Juliet Stameross plants the suggestion that they cannot be separated from each other under any circumstances.]

[That is an interesting opinion, because I happen to share the same thoughts.]

[I as well.]

[Oh, we have just received confirmation on the names that the two impressive mech designers have bestowed on their completed mechs! The light skirmisher that appears nimble enough to dance in the wind is called the Sensia. The hybrid mech that is armed with a multitude of weapon systems is called the Furia. Together, they constitute the Twin Souls!]

"Sensia!"

"Furia!"

"Twin Souls!"

"What is up with that, anyway?"

[Names are merely labels. They do not grant any additional power to mechs. What truly earns them respect is how well they can fight against other machines. The so-called Twin Souls do not have the most obvious synergy between their mech archetypes. I have already mentioned previously that a light skirmisher paired with a hybrid mech on a diet can turn into a recipe for disaster. I do not presume to question the wisdom of the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan, but I 'commend' his courage in committing to an all-out offensive combination.]

[I can see how the Sensia and the Furia can run roughshod over half of the competing combinations while holding their own against the rest. The Twin Souls will most likely struggle against a number of teams that are likely to make it far, however. Can this rare pairing of mechs continue to power through every match or will a solid obstacle be able to stall their momentum before they reach their intended destination?]

[Let us not be dramatic. Barring any unlucky early matchups, the Twin Souls shall definitely enter the top 18. It becomes more difficult after that as the wheat is separated from the chaff. The surviving combination of mechs have all been tested at least twice. Their assigned mech pilots have also been able to learn their characteristics and build up a better accord with each other.]

[The same advantages apply to the Twin Souls as well, so these arguments are not necessarily decisive. Let us at least make it past the first round before we make any judgments regarding the learning curve and the potential that can yet be tapped from the competition entries. I have good reason to assume that the Sensia and the Furia may rise in performance the hardest out of all of the other mech duos.]

[That is a brave prediction. Are you willing to make a wager?]

[Bring it on! Patriarch Ves Larkinson is a proven winner, and I have utmost confidence in his ability to add another victory to his name!]

As the panel of experts continued to exchange their opinions, Ves and Juliet finally received a chance to enjoy a welcome respite.

Even though they could easily persist for many more hours, they did not resist the offer to retreat to a private suite where they could rest and recuperate.

The design phase had reached its end. It would take less than six hours for the combat phase to commence.

Many more casual viewers had already retreated after the design phase had ended. They either got what they came for or wanted to enjoy their own breaks before returning later.

A surprising number of people showed great patience and continued to stay in Spencer Hall.

Sure, they retreated to the restrooms in order to freshen up or visited one of the attached restaurants in order to fill their stomachs. Yet even the Seniors and Masters finished their meals quickly before returning to their seats.

Their anticipation was palpable and their expectations built up with each passing minute!

The Twin Souls had made a strong impression and pretty much outshone every other pair of mechs in the competition.

Although there were definitely several competing combinations of mechs that could probably give the Twin Souls a hard time, these alternatives did not look as dominant as the mechs designed by Ves and Juliet.

From a psychological standpoint alone, the Sensia and the Furia already carried the air of champion machines!

Hours went by as the tournament organizers prepared for the next phase of the Twin Weapons Tournament.

They not only shifted the layout of Spencer Hall in order to accommodate frequent high-intensity mech combat, but also inspected each and every submitted mech.

That latter step was extremely important. Even though all of the competing mech designers had been working in sight of the public as well as the judges, who knew what these enterprising Journeymen had slipped into their mech designs.

The inspections behind the scenes were meant to prove once and for all that none of the competing mech designers had cheated in any fashion.

What many people did not know was that a lot of the mech designers and other officials that had initially left their seats had quietly gathered in an underground chamber.

They had all been invited to inspect the newly completed Twin Souls up close in advance.

Having seen Ves Larkinson design and fabricate the two mechs over a span of 48 hours already granted them a good understanding of these works.

However, their impressions of the Sensia and Furia improved now that they were able to see and touch the living mechs up close!

"They are truly alive."

"The two mechs are twins. That is what they are conveying."

"The closer they are together, the more effectively they can bounce off each other."

Of the notable collection of people that had gathered in front of the Twin Souls, Master Hergard Elroy and Madame Reina Kernsk were among the more important ones.

"Has your opinion on Patriarch Larkinson changed?" The female chief of staff of the federal president asked.

"What I am able to detect from these mechs is similar to what I receive from studying other living mechs. There are a number of anomalies, but they do not pose a particular threat to us and our fellow human beings. What Ves Larkinson has made is strong in ways that I cannot replicate. I can rely on my own advantages to design a mech that exceeds the Sensia and the Furia in performance, but it is difficult to say for certain with so many intangibles at play."

"Should we maintain our high priority on the Larkinson Patriarch?" Reina Kernsk asked directly.

"Yes. Continue to arrange a meetup with Master Decimus Horst and the journeyman in question. What Ves Larkinson has just demonstrated is that he is ready to tackle the greater responsibilities of supplying strategically important mech designs to the military."

This was high praise, but nobody felt like correcting it. The Furia especially provoked a lot of discussion due to being a rare hybrid mech in these parts.

It may seem silly for a lot of important people to pay an excessive amount of attention to the properties of a competition mech. It was even more ridiculous for these folk to use their observations to make decisions of great import to an entire colonial state! A mech design tournament hardly showed the full capabilities of a mech designer, but it was one of the few instances where interested individuals could take the measure of a subject of interest.

Certain individuals still found it important to track the initial experiences of the target subject. Their regard for the Twin Souls improved even further now that their impressions had become a lot more optimistic.

As more time passed, the sleeping mech designers eventually woke up. They got ready for the day and stepped out of their suites so that they could cautiously hear what the others slipped from their own sneaky mouths.

A lot of competitors paid close attention to Ves as he entered a communal hall. Fame came with the territory and it had the potential to grow into an even greater hassle. He needed to become accustomed to this sort of attention soon.

The six participating Larkinson mech designers soon managed to gather together.

"Hey, everyone. How good do you think your chances are now that you have completed your works?"

Dulo Voiken haplessly shrugged. "From the way that everyone is talking about your 'Twin Souls', I think it is safe to assume that my sister and I are the underdogs."

Janassa Pellier smirked. "Tifi and I know your tricks, sir. Our beast mechs may be able to knock your light skirmisher and your hybrid mech out of the competition."

Beast mechs could be difficult to handle as they traded away versatility for hard power. If Janassa Pellier and Tifi Coslone designed at least one tiger mech as Ves anticipated, then it could pose a considerable threat to both the Sensia and the Furia as long as it was able to pounce on its target!

It was at this time that numerous other mech designers on standby noticed the arrival of the most famous journeyman among them. They quickly converged onto his position!

"Patriarch Larkinson!"

"May I have a moment of your time, please?"

"Do you have any job openings in your clan?! I have 40 years of design experience!"

Ves became irked but tried his best not to show his irritation on his face. He turned to the crowd of eager Journeymen and immediately labeled them all as pathetic. There was no way he would take the initiative to invite any of these wannabe sycophants into his clan.

He still had to go through the motions and talk politely to everyone.

"Are you planning to recruit us after this tournament has passed?"

Ves smiled. "My clan has a number of openings in our Design Department. We are particularly interested in hiring ranged weapon specialists and defensive specialists, but we do not reject mech designers who excel in other areas. I have a comprehensive set of criteria that determines whether I am willing to hear you out or approach you. The better your competition mechs perform during the combat phase, the greater your chances of entering my clan."

He did not mind inviting mech designers whose competition mechs got knocked out in the first round. The losers may have been unlucky enough to match up against Ves and Juliet or any of the other favorites. It all depended on the actual performance of the competition mechs along with the soundness of their designs.

"The matches are about to start soon! The military mech pilots have already acquainted themselves with our works. Each of them are about to bring out the competition mechs under their control and begin to test the recently completed machines in an actual fight!"

How exciting! Ves and the others couldn't wait!

## Chapter 4860 Team One

It did not surprise Ves in the slightest that the Twin Weapons Tournament selected the team of Ves and Juliet to take part in the opening match of the combat phase!

With 1 team receiving a bye due to uneven numbers, that left 35 teams matching up against 35 other teams.

The Sensia and the Furia were already being brought to the main area of Spencer Hall.

The place looked close to an actual mech arena now. A combination of strong energy defenses and physical defenses should do well to contain the damage that could threaten the spectators.

What Ves noticed from the start was that the arena had been separated into two distinct arenas.

The first round matches had to be held inside reduced areas that limited the maneuvering space and escape routes of any mechs placed inside.

"Cheapskates." Ves muttered under his breath.

This change did not favor Ves and Juliet all that much because more mobile mechs tended to fare better when there was more room for them to maneuver around.

[The initial matchups have been set. As stated earlier, 1 team has the fortune of receiving a bye. All other teams are expected to fight each other's team.]

The announcers continued to chat about different stuff. None of it was really important to Ves as the man mainly explained all of the rules in a more accessible manner.

Ves mainly wanted to know what sort of mech pilots the tournament organizers had stuck to his Twin Souls. The right pilots could make and break his duo of competition mech designs!

"Don't worry, sir. We designed our mechs with many familiar elements that anyone should be able to recognize and master in an instant."

"I hope so, Juliet. I hope so..."

The information on the matchup soon projected above the middle arena!

[Team Larkinson vs Team One!]

Ves entered into business mode again. His expression turned impassive as he looked around to spot the right pair.

"Ah. So old."

The man and woman both looked older than many other mech designers in the tournament. The two exuded a lot of harmony that was typical for married couples.

The two had probably been together for many decades or perhaps even a century!

This was truly a lifelong commitment, and from the vibe that Ves was able to pick up from them, their love still remained as strong as when they first dated over a century ago!

The Larkinson mech designers steadily moved in the direction of Team One.

"Ah, if it isn't the illustrious Patriarch Larkinson. Well met. I am Haza Ronan and this is my dearest wife Claire Ronan." The older man greeted Ves without showing any signs of nervousness at all. "I am afraid that my participation in this tournament may come to an early end."

Ves curled his lips. "Don't sell yourself short, Mr. Ronan. You have been in the mech industry for such a long time. You should definitely have a lot of tricks up your sleeve. You and your wife look foreign to me. Are you visiting Davute for the duration of the founding ceremony or are you thinking about settling down in this state."

Claire Ronan spoke up at this time. "We are travelers for the time being. We have no intention of ending our journey in Davute, especially in light of the massive security break that happened almost a week ago. You should know better than anyone how badly the colonial state has failed its people."

"Davute is still being built, one government institution at a time." He said. "This place will become a lot more stable and secure, especially once the upcoming war against Karlach has died down."

"That is interesting to hear, but my husband and I shall no longer remain within the borders of the Krakatoa Middle Zone. We are still searching for a suitable home for us to settle in, but Davute is already off our list."

"I see."

The two sides chatted a bit more about their travels and their vacation destinations. This shared interest successfully broke the ice and allowed Ves to become more acquainted with the elderly couple.

"So what are old fogeys like you doing in a mech design tournament for Journeymen?"

"We need to keep our design skills fresh somehow." Haza Ronan replied. "My wife and I are both fairly old, and we have not made enough progress to advance to Senior Mech Designer. Tournaments are good places to receive enlightenment. Since the Davute University of Technology has not imposed an age limit, we felt free to sign up and take part in this special exercise."

The elderly duo did not sound as if they cared too much about winning the top prize for this tournament. They instead treated the event as a party where they could let loose a bit.

Oh well. Their mechs would soon make an appearance.

"Look! Team Larkinson has entered the arena!"

Ves whipped his head towards one of the two arenas in Spencer Hall.

There, standing like confident fighters that were ready to get dirty were the Twin Souls!

The reddish coating of the Furia caused the hybrid mech to look even more violent and explosive than before!

Although its frame was packed with different weapon systems, it did not look bloated at all. It even looked a little more handsome with its light battle skirt.

Ves had actually tried to add a more substantial version of the Battle Skirt System to the Furia, but couldn't fit a bigger one without exceeding the mass limit that he set for himself.

He made due with a smaller and flimsier version of the Battle Skirt System that could still play a decent role in blocking initial damage.

The Sensia looked a lot less attention-grabbing with its more subdued dark blue coating. It was too much to expect military mech pilots to fall for it, but Ves still hoped that enemies would dismiss the threat of the light skirmisher.

Ves briefly grinned but quickly wiped it off in order to preserve his dignity.

Soon enough, the mechs of Team One came into view.

"Oh?" Juliet jerked as she stood by his side. "You and your wife went for the classic knight and rifle combination. That is difficult to pull off in a competition such as this. They won't move around too much."



A short moment passed by as the mechs of the opposing teams received their final checks.

Their weapons warmed up while their power reactors switched to more intensive modes.

Ves still hadn't learned much about the pilots assigned to his two living mechs, but he would soon find out what they were made of, he supposed.

[START!]

The mechs of both sides exploded into action!

Ves first focused on the mechs designed by Team One. The knight mech and the rifleman mech both looked like they couldn't really run. They were so weighed down by armor and deployables that their only choice was to turtle in place.

They did exactly that. The knight mech slammed its thick tower shield onto the arena ground and activated a function that caused it to extend side panels.

A strong metal wall had formed in the front!

At the same time, the rifleman mech's oddly armored back deployed as well, unveiling a thinner but fairly protective wall that covered its back to a reasonable degree.

Then, the rifleman mech started to get ready to open fire!

It was not only armed with a kinetic rifle that looked like it could fire both powerful rounds and a rapid series of less powerful projectiles, but the machine also came equipped with a net launcher!

In the meantime, the knight mech revealed a lengthy flail which it could use to launch attacks beyond traditional sword fighting range.

"Too slow!"

Yet before the mechs of Team One could properly lay siege to their opponents, the Sensia and the Furia took action sooner!

The Sensia had dashed to the side and started to circle around right from the start.

The Furia on the other hand jogged forward at a moderate pace before opening fire with all of the weapons it could bring to bear at this range!

A single smoke missile soared from its left launcher and struck the metal wall head-on, releasing a dense cloud of smoke and sensor blocking particles!

Although the smoke cloud wouldn't linger in the air for too long, the mechs of Team One still lost a lot of effective sensor coverage!

"We can't see them anymore!"

"Amplify your sensor strength!"

The mechs were too slow! Before they could do anything to mitigate the blocking effect, a torrent of weapons struck the metal wall!

A shotgun slug thudded against the front surface.

A pair of laser beams struck the shield as well.

A jet of hot flames started to strike the metal wall and heat up the surrounding temperature!

Even though these attacks did not harm the mechs sheltering behind the wall, the Furia's attacks still exerted a lot of pressure on the turtling mechs!

What was even more ridiculous was that the Furia kept extending one of its arms to fire its flamethrower while using its other hand to draw out a throwing axe from its bandolier.

The hybrid mech took aim before throwing the spinning axe over the metal wall at a high arc before causing it to land on top of the head of the rifleman mech!

"Ah! The head of my rifleman mech is dented!"

"Careful! Another axe is on the way!"

The relatively static mechs could do little to evade the throwing axes being lobbed in its direction. Though it randomly landed on top of the heads or shoulders of the rifleman mech and the knight mech, they did not really deal that much damage.

They were still extremely annoying! The cascade of attacks launched by just a single hybrid mech completely threw the mech pilots assigned to Team One off-balance.

Though the military mech pilots of Davute were not that easily distracted and eagerly wanted to retaliate, their own defensive posture did not leave them with many options to strike back.

"The hybrid mech is flanking us! Careful!"

The coverage of the deployed walls was not perfect. A flurry of attacks from a shotgun, a pair of integrated lumina crystal guns and a flamethrower caused the turtling mechs to be thrown off-balance yet again!

If that wasn't enough, an EMP missile along with a fourth throwing axe struck the defending mechs as well!

The Furia occupied the attention of the opposing mech pilots so much that they couldn't help but guard themselves more against the powerful hybrid mech.

However, doing this was a mistake, because both the knight mech and the rifleman mech inadvertently opened up their rear.

Just as a fifth throwing axe struck the chest of the knight mech and almost came close to striking its exposed weak point, the Sensia had finally struck!

"Turn around! The light skirmisher is launching its attack!"

The knight mech actually responded remarkably quickly. It did not need to turn around in order to swing its lengthy flail backwards.

However, the defensive mech was too slow!

Before it was halfway in its motion to swing its formidable flail, the light skirmisher had already snuck up to the rear of Team One's rifleman mech and continually stabbed the latter's exposed rear with dozens of rapid dagger strikes!

At the same time, the Furia raised its shotgun and fired a solid slug through the gap in the defenses that just so happened to strike the arm of the knight mech that held the flail.

This caused the attempted attack onto the Sensia to go slightly off-course!

[Wow! The Furia has actually helped its partner mech dodge a serious attack!]

By the time the Sensia evaded the flail attack and beat a quick retreat, the rifleman mech collapsed as the arena projected an emergency energy shield to protect the cockpit of the fallen machine.

[Team One is down a single mech within the first minute of the match! What an astounding result! The Furia has started off strong while the Sensia has picked the perfect time to assassinate the opposing rifleman mech!]