

The Mech 4861

Chapter 4861 Bobby And Lizzie

Pretty much everyone knew that Team One was finished as soon as it lost a mech without damaging a single opposing machine in return.

Team One's surviving knight mech did not go down easily. Its flail might be able to do serious damage if it struck a mech, but the machine holding it was simply too slow to cope with Team Larkinson's fast mechs!

The knight mech only lasted two more minutes. It was unable to defend itself against both the front and the rear.

The mech pilot had opted to rely on the naturally thick armor plating of his defensive mech and tried to spin around and make random flail attacks in every direction in the hopes of dealing a crippling attack!

Unfortunately for Team One, neither the Furia nor the Sensia ever came close to getting struck by the obvious telegraphed attacks.

The Furia continued to stay comfortably out of attacking range while utilizing its integrated luminar crystal laser weapons and shotgun to steadily chip away at the thick armor of the knight mech from a comfortable distance.

The Sensia meanwhile danced in and out of the edge of the knight mech's frontal attack arc. Its swift and agile movements took on a playful quality as its pilot clearly started to revel in the high mobility of his light skirmisher.

Ultimately, the knight mech fell down as soon as its rear armor got breached and its internals started to suffer serious damage.

It was a rather anticlimactic end to an explosive opening.

The cheers and reactions from the crowd did not grow any lesser because of this fault!

"Wow! The Furia's weapons are a lot more powerful than I thought!"

"Look at how smoothly and fluently the light skirmisher is able to move. That is not an ordinary rush job. Even if its design is not loaded with as many features as the Furia, the Sensia may very well be the fastest and most agile mech in the tournament!"

"It turns out that the Larkinson mech designers are so strong. Their mechs really didn't give the machines of Team One a chance to show their own merits. The latter got beaten from beginning to end!"

The commentators and the laymen in the crowd all showered the Larkinson mechs with praises right away.

Even if this was just the first match where the Sensia and the Furia made their debut, the strength and relatively excellent characteristics they demonstrated during the short but intense fight already showed a lot of promise!

In fact, Ves himself lamented that Team One's competition mechs hadn't been strong enough to draw out the full strength of the Sensia and the Furia.

In the end, the mech pilots assigned to the two living mechs only utilized basic tactics and maneuvers to comfortably win this match.

Ves deeply hoped the next round would make the Twin Souls break a sweat. The Sensia and the Furia could not truly shine in the arena unless there were strong enough dance partners that could put them through their paces!

None of the others understood his plight. They patted his back and congratulated him for making it through the second round so easily.

"You truly managed to do it, you crazy mech designer. I shouldn't have expected less from you, sir." Dulo Voiken spoke with a hint of amazement. "You managed to design a fully functional hybrid mech and not a perfunctory one either within the deadline. If I tried to do the same, I would have only completed a third of the design within two days."

Ves responded with a mild and encouraging smile. "Don't sell yourself short, Dulo. You are an authority on spearman mechs. I look forward to seeing your work in action. Hopefully your mechs will be up soon enough."

Though he wanted to stick around and watch the other mechs fight their own matches, he and Juliet decided to retreat to an underground workshop where they saw their competition mechs resting besides a familiar superfab.

This was the time where the mech designers could make use of the available time to repair significant battle damage, replenish spent ammunition and energy cells, make last-minute modifications to fix any flaws in the design and more.

It was also an opportunity for the mech designers to meet with the pilots assigned to their competition mechs.

Before Ves and Juliet had come close, the pilots had already shut down their machines and hopped out of their cockpits. Their piloting suits allowed their bodies to gracefully descend to the floor where they promptly straightened their backs and greeted the arriving mech designers of their current mechs.

"Pleased to meet you." The male mech pilot. "I am Sergeant Bobby Orwell. It is an honor to pilot your Furia."

"Sergeant Lizzie Cado, currently assigned to your Sensia." The woman standing next to the male military mech pilot spoke as well.

Ves curtly nodded. "Understood. The two of you should have already been briefed about us, so let us get into business. Before we talk about anything substantive, please share your first impressions of your respective mechs. I assume you have piloted the same mech types while serving in the Federal Military of Davute. Please use comparisons if possible."

It took a few seconds for the military mech pilots to formulate their words.

"The Sensia is a decent light skirmisher, sir." Lizzie spoke. "I cannot say it pilots better than the models that I am currently piloting in the service, but... your work is better than what I have been told to expect. I have been limit testing your light mech during the entire first match and found that

I can comfortably push its speed and maneuverability to its limit without straining its parts and frame too much. I am not sure how quickly the mech will wear out because of this. That is more your expertise than mine."

Ves turned to Juliet who fell into thought.

"The Sensia should be able to withstand the load at the highest intensity that you have displayed in the last match." The Penitent Sister mech designer said. "I will not lie to you. The wear and tear on the mech is high. However, I will be able to mitigate the worst of it as long as I can perform emergency maintenance after every match. The Sensia should be able to last more than enough rounds to stay in one piece, provided you have not allowed your mech to incur damage. I will warn you in person if the equation has changed."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"What about you, Bobby?" Ves asked in a friendly tone. "What do you have to say about the Furia?"

"I... can say much about it." The male mech pilot responded in an uncertain tone. "The Furia is the most exotic hybrid mech that I have ever piloted. I love its varied weapon loadout even if they are not individually powerful. A few of the weapon choices leaves me with questions. The throwing axes look intimidating, but the Furia does not have the strength to throw them with enough force to split through thicker armor or shields. I suppose they can serve as distractions, but that is not an effective use of this resource."

Ves frowned and mimed the motion of throwing an axe. "That is because you are not leveraging the full power of your mech when you throw those axes. Sure, it may be nice to quickly lob them over shields and have them fall on top of the heads of enemy mechs like a grenade, but the force of gravity alone isn't enough to make them strong."

He tried to make his point by starting to run around the expansive workshop hall. He reared up his arm before he combined his forward motion and his throwing motion to propel an invisible axe at much greater speed and power than normal!

Ves stopped and turned around. "Do you understand, now?"

Bobby Orwell looked enlightened. "I understand. I have not thrown any weapons since the earliest days of my mech academy days. The Furia needs to run forward so that it can add its speed and force to the axe."

"That isn't all, sergeant. I haven't been able to reproduce it with my untrained throwing skills, but there are techniques to better leverage the mechanical structure of the human body or a humanoid mech to add more power and range to a thrown axe. You don't need to invest an unreasonable amount of time in learning this technique, but I think it will be helpful if you look it up on the galactic net. The Furia isn't technically designed to throw stuff at the enemy, but it should theoretically be able to turn those axes into deadly projectiles as long as it has a running start and employs a more optimal technique."

"I shall take that under advisement, sir."

Sergeant Bobby Orwell did not see this study as a distraction or a wasted effort. The axes intrigued him as well and he wanted to make the most out of the arsenal at his mech's disposal.

Ves and Juliet received a bit more feedback about the Sensia and the Furia. Both competition mechs were well-designed considering how quickly they designed them, but Bobby and Lizzie were both unique individuals who possessed their own piloting quirks, styles and preferences.

The two Larkinson mech designers still had a lot of work to do to make the necessary adaptations to the mech designs.

After a few minutes of fruitful talking, Ves finally brought up the matter that he cared about the most.

"As both of you are no doubt aware of, my design philosophy is centered around synergy and living mechs. I basically design my mechs in a way that allows them to forge more proactive relationships with their pilots. Did you experience that from the moment you interfaced with your living machines?"

The mech pilots did not look weirded out at all. They simply nodded as they recalled what it was like to pilot those living mechs.

"The Sensia is a pleasure to pilot." Lizzie Cado admitted. "We have received warnings beforehand on what to expect, but the actual experience is better than I expected. I quickly fell in tune with the light skirmisher."

Bobby Orwell also shared the same opinion. "I can say the same for myself. It is a new way to handle my relationship with my mech and I do not necessarily dislike it. I was afraid that all of the extra variables would distract me from my main priorities, but I am pleasantly surprised it is the opposite. The living mech keeps an eye on everything and nudges me whenever I overlook anything important."

"Those living mechs are more than smart AI assistants." Ves explained. "The reason why I call the two mechs the Twin Souls is because they connected to each other to a greater degree than is obvious on the surface. Did you notice a clear mental connection between yourself and your fellow mech pilot?"

"...I do not recall such a connection."

"No, sir."

It looked as if Ves still had his work cut out for him. Bobby and Lizzy were probably too focused on all of the more obvious traits of their assigned mechs. They became so focused on the surface elements that they missed what was taking place on a deeper level.

Fortunately, Ves was able to correct this fault. He encouraged the two mech pilots to hop back into their cockpits and proactively seek out the connection between the Twin Souls.

"I think... I think I found it, sir!"

"This is not unlike anything I have worked with before. I am not sure how to make use of it in combat."

"We can figure this all out in the time we have left." Ves replied. "The Twin Soul System is the defining feature of your two mechs. It would be a disservice to your mechs if you do not take advantage of the possibilities of this unique bond. I think that you will find it much more useful once you are matched up against a tougher opponent."

Chapter 4862 Double And Triple

35 teams were eliminated during the first round.

35 teams defeated their opponents and managed to move on to the second round.

An additional team was lucky enough to get a bye and reached the second round without needing to do anything.

Now, 18 teams were about to square off against 18 other teams.

The tournament employed a random mixer in order to determine the matchups in the fairest and most unbiased possible way.

The mech designer duos started to learn whose mechs their own machines had to fight against next.

It was pretty much a given that no one wanted to meet Team Larkinson so early. Even the more confident teams did not want to leave anything to chance and would rather beat up a weaker team in order to squeeze through the next round as effortlessly as possible.

"No offense, but your Furia is too scary." Dulo Voiken said as he did not hide his lack of confidence in his mech's ability to win. "I mean, aside from a first-class mech designer, who is crazy enough to design a hybrid mech, and one that is oriented towards speed no less. The only pleasant surprise is that you did not employ the Ferocious Piranha's glow on any of your competition mechs. Did you leave out the glows because you thought the only way to obtain a proper challenge is to handicap yourself?"

Ves chuckled. "My reasoning is not so exaggerated. The mech already has a glow. You just don't feel it because it isn't obvious and I haven't utilized it that much. I suspect that once my Twin Souls have proven the power of its innovative new concept, I will expand the glow and the special method to many more mech designs. First, I need my machines to get past the second round."

All of the really terrible and useless teams had already been defeated. The average strength of the 36 teams that made it through the second round was considerably higher, though there was a small chance that relatively weaker teams lucked out and got through as well.

[Team Larkinson vs Team Hendrix]

Numerous gasps sounded throughout the waiting room. It was clear that these people did not just react to the appearance of the Larkinson name, but also the Hendrix name!

"Team Hendrix?"

"Team Hendrix is strong." Dulo Voiken said as he appeared to have studied the competition a lot more than Ves. "Its star is Miss Beatrice Hendrix. She is the second-place winner of the Strange Lands Tournament. She has teamed up with Kelly Mordaunt who managed to end up at eight place during the same tournament. They don't appear to know each other for a long time, but they decided to join forces in order to participate in the current contest."

"Ah, I see."

Ves turned and stared at the two well-dressed women who were standing on the other side of the room.

A beautiful woman who could only be Beatrice Hendrix possessed a confident air that could only come from a mech designer who truly knew her craft. It was impossible for a mech designer in a serious mech design tournament to rank second on a fluke. She truly earned her place as one of the best Journeymen currently in Davute!

Ves slightly clenched his fist. This was an absolutely strong opponent who probably relied on her own trump cards to get ahead of the competition.

He did not prefer to meet such a powerful adversary so early in the combat phase. However, he did not reject an early meetup either.

So long as Ves believed in the superiority of his competition mechs, he was confident that they would return from the arena in the end!

At most, Ves and Juliet would need to do a lot of work to restore the heavily damaged mechs back to working condition.

"So what are the specialties of Beatrice Hendrix and Kelly Mordaunt?"

"The former is a defensive specialist." Sara Voiken answered this time as this topic overlapped with her own expertise. "Her signature design applications are her modular armor systems. Not only are her mechs harder to take down than normal, but as they continue to incur damage, they shed more and more modular armor plating that has been spent. This is a strategy that is best suited for mechs that are expected to incur a great amount of damage and needs to shed excess weight over the course of a fight. Here. This is her Double Up in action."

She activated a projection that showed the performance of the knight mech during the previous round.

Unlike the slow and largely useless knight mech of Team One, the one depicted in the projection was already faster and more nimble in its base form.

This was despite all of the square plates of armor attached to it as if the mech was wearing a fancier version of scale mail!

As the footage of the match rapidly accelerated, Ves could see Beatrice's defensive mech undergoing a gradual evolution the more damage it resisted.

Once the modular armor lost cohesion, the knight mech transformed into a lighter and faster mech!

This changed the damage of the fight. The knight mech already soaked up a lot of damage and negated a lot of firepower. This allowed it to go on the offense in its more slimmed down form.

The key principle to making it all work was to equip the knight mech with a modular armor system that preserved the deepest layers of internals as best as possible. It could absolutely not incur a blow that was so overwhelmingly powerful that it punched through all of the modular armor plating at once.

Ves frowned. Just like Sara Voiken, he realized that neither his Sensia nor his Furia possessed a powerful penetrating weapon system!

The former mainly relied on a pair of knives while the latter was armed with an eclectic mix of weaker weapons.

He wanted to smack his palm against his face. "I sure outplayed myself this time."

The Double Up would definitely become a difficult mech for the Twin Souls to take down. It was fairly tough at first but would steadily become faster and more difficult to shake off as it incurred more damage.

The only hope of taking it down quickly was by targeting its weak point at the center of its chest. Neither the Sensia nor the Furia could waste so much of their attack power on whittling down the Double Up's modular armor system.

This was the trap that Beatrice Hendrix set for her opposition!

"What of the mech designed by Kelly Mordaunt?" Ves asked. "That should be a light mech to start with. I don't believe the eight-place winner of a mech design tournament has designed a machine that is much weaker."

"That is up to you to judge, but here is her light harasser mech in action. It's called the Triple Spray."

Dulo Voiken activated a projection that showed a light ranged mech that stood out for several reasons.

The light harasser mech was fairly light and fast, which was not that unusual, but carried a fairly oversized rifle.

The weapon was a ballistic gun that was surprisingly low-tech but also seemed to compensate for that by boasting triple gun barrels!

When the Triple Spray fired its main weapon at a target, its triple muzzles let loose a constant stream of rapid-fire projectiles.

It went without saying that the Triple Spray's damage output was not that concerning. It might not even be worthwhile to chase after it considering that it was hard to chase.

The true threat of this light harasser mech was that it could steadily keep up its fire onto a fairly vulnerable target and steadily whittle down the latter's defenses.

Since every team was forced to include at least one light mech in their lineup, there was always a guarantee that the Triple Spray would be able to inflict effective damage during every match!

Both Ves and Juliet frowned as they played out the upcoming match in their minds.

"The Triple Spray will bring its gun to bear against the Sensia right away." Ves guessed. "The latter will come under fire and cannot completely block or evade the attacks because the opponent's triple-barreled gun makes it really easy to track a moving target. The Sensia must chase after the Triple Spray and end its threat, but the light harasser mech will take full advantage of its mobility to kite our light skirmisher."

"What about your Furia? It has the weapons of a striker mech. Its shotgun should make quick work of the Triple Spray."

"That is what the Double Up is for. As long as its modular armor is still intact, it should do everything possible to get in the Furia's way and soak up the attacks directed at the Triple Spray."

No one could predict the outcome of all of this sparring. Ves recognized that Team Hendrix's mechs were all fairly well-designed and well-equipped to fight against his Twin Souls.

However, there was still a decent chance that his Sensia and Furia could overcome these new challenges and come out on top in the end!

Combat was always fluid and affected by a lot of variables. Ves hoped that the Twin Souls System that he devised for his two competition mechs would finally be able to play a useful role this time.

Now that the second round had begun, the arena was no longer split up in two smaller fighting areas.

Only 18 matches needed to be held to complete the second round, and that was easily doable. The rules and restrictions imposed onto the teams meant that it was rare for mechs to last for more than 10 minutes in the arena.

The added space was not good news for Team Larkinson. The Sensia and the Furia clearly preferred to fight in tighter quarters.

Team Hendrix gained a lot from this change as the Triple Spray needed a lot of space and distance in order to perform its job while staying alive throughout the match.

Four mechs entered the arena. The crowds all fell silent as they anticipated a much closer match than before!

The two pairs of mechs possessed different vibes.

The Twin Souls clearly carried an aggressive presence as they would always go on the attack no matter what opposition they faced. This time was no different as the Sensia and the Furia could not afford to get stalled by their opponents.

Team Beatrix's mechs exuded an air of patience and tenacity. It was clear that they were in this fight for the long haul. Their only viable strategy to win this match was to turn it into a battle of attrition where they could outlast the initial outburst of the two enemy offensive mechs.

[Start!]

The two sides exploded into action right away!

The Furia immediately fired its shotgun and its integrated luminar crystal guns at the Triple Spray, but the enemy light harasser mech had already evaded to the side, allowing it to avoid all incoming attacks aside from a few loose pellets that dug into its relatively thin armor plating.

Nonetheless, by the time the Furia was ready to fire again, the Double Up already broke its line of sight!

"Get out of the way!" Bobby aggressively spoke.

The Furia ran forward while it loaded a solid slug in the chamber. It pulled the trigger as soon as it loaded, causing it to deliver a fairly powerful kinetic punch at the Double Up.

However, the knight mech already prepared to meet this incoming blow. Its strange modular arm bracers had morphed into a thick double shield that was thicker and more reinforced at the point of impact.

When the slug finally struck this transformed shield, the top modular armor plating broke or deformed upon impact, but the strange way in which the modular shield absorbed the shock and spread out the incoming kinetic energy meant that the Double Up successfully mitigated a considerable amount of damage!

"That's impossible!"

Chapter 4863 Adaptive Modular Armor Systems

"What?!" Ves reacted with surprise at this highly sophisticated defensive response.

This was an absolutely remarkable way to minimize the amount of modular plating that got destroyed after getting struck with a powerful kinetic attack.

If the Double Up could continually absorb and direct much of the incoming kinetic blows, then the Furia's shotgun wouldn't be able to penetrate the opposition's armor layers fast enough!

"The degree of sophistication and design work that Beatrice Hendrix put into designing this automatic reactive defense system is inconceivable!" Sara Voiken spoke with genuine respect and appreciation. "Even if she is able to adapt one of her existing implementations, for her to be able to apply it to a competition mech in a matter of hours is truly amazing."

The way in which the modular armor plates of the Double Up morphed and adopted many different configurations was truly impressive.

It put the Battle Skirt System that was originally designed for the Maiden of Adversity to shame!

Against a strong offensive hybrid mech like the Furia, the Double Up had plenty of opportunities to demonstrate the defensive prowess bestowed by Beatrix Hendrix.

For example, Bobby Orwell had clearly listened to Ves' suggestion and looked up how to best launch a throwing axe. The Furia ran forward and built up a lot of momentum, but still maintained a pace that was relatively controllable.

The Furia fired its shotgun at the Double Up yet again before rearing up its other arm that already held a throwing axe.

"Fly, axe!"

After taking a special step that pivoted the entire frame of the hybrid mech and channeled a remarkable amount of force from foot to arm, the axe grasped in the Furia's other hand propelled forward as if it had been launched by a catapult!

Clang!

The automated modular defensive system already detected the incoming axe in advance and make the best possible response to stop the spinning projectile from dealing greater damage.

When the axe finally struck a solid object, it happened to strike a transformed physical shield that was set at a strange angle!

This angle was meticulously calculated so that when the sharp axe blade was just beginning to dig into the angled shield, its trajectory and angular momentum ultimately caused it to ricochet and bounce above the Double Up's head!

"What?! That's nonsense!"

Ves had never witnessed such an advanced and responsive application of modular mech armor.

There were good reasons why modular armor systems never managed to catch on in the mech industry. They were considerably more expensive and introduced more points of failure in a mech. They also weren't able to cope against strong and penetrating attacks as well as plain old solid armor plating.

However, from what Ves could observe from Beatrice Hendrix's work, she was able to utilize the fast response and wide adaptability of modular armor plating systems to form the right defensive shape at the right time.

This was an excellent way to compensate for the inherent disadvantages of modular armor systems!

Ves already guessed that Beatrice Hendrix was probably not the first defensive specialist to come up with such an automated defensive scheme. It was too slick and refined to match the work of a relatively young Journeyman.

It made a lot more sense if Beatrice Hendrix was the direct disciple of a Master Mech Designer, thereby allowing her to inherit much of the accumulation of a predecessor.

Even so, for Beatrice to be able to reproduce the effects of automated adaptive modular armor systems to such a degree during a mech design competition still demonstrated an incredible mastery in this tech!

For a moment, Ves deeply desired to recruit this talented mech designer into his clan. Though he had never put that much thought into expanding the Larkinson Clan's mech catalog with mechs that relied on adaptive modular armor systems as their primary form of defense, he did not have any objections to adjusting his plans and accommodating a greater variety of mech models.

The addition of a second defensive specialist in the Design Department would also relieve Sara Voiken from her excessive responsibilities. It was not easy for her to work on so many different mech designs as she was the only viable defensive specialist in the clan.

He just needed to convince her to put her lot with the Larkinsons, which should be anything but easy as she was more than strong enough to go independent.

He needed to investigate whether she was even eligible to recruit in the first place, but all of that could wait for later.

The match between Team Larkinson and Team Hendrix had only just begun!

"Come here, you rat! Stop running away!" Lizzie Cado yelled as her Sensia struggled to catch up to the running Triple Spray.

The light harasser mech was designed in such a way that it could turn its torso and fire its triple-barreled rifle at enemies pursuing from behind.

With a stream of bullets raining in the Sensia's direction, Lizzie could do little else but perform a lot of evasive maneuvers.

The Sensia even had to put its arms in front of its weak point on the chest in order to prevent it from getting struck by a bullet stream!

"These bullets are too unrelenting!"

The only way the Sensia was able to fight back was to holster one of its knives and pull out the weak backup pistol.

The weapon fired a weak laser beam that struck the side armor of the Triple Spray. A small scorch mark appeared on the latter, but it continued to run and gun without any change!

It would take forever for the Sensia to be able to wear down the Triple Spray this way!

It was much more likely for the light mech with the bigger gun to cripple the light mech with the smaller gun.

Lizzie Cado knew that continuing her pursuit of the Triple Spray was a losing proposition.

She should ideally turn around and threaten to attack the rear of Double Up, but that would leave her Sensia wide open to the relentless bullet attacks of the Triple Spray!

In other words, her Sensia was trapped in a chasing action.

Lizzie was not the only one who was locked into an undesirable state.

She could already feel from that weird new mental connection to the Furia that Bobby Orwell was having a lot of trouble dealing with the Double Up. The former was utilizing every weapon in its arsenal to overwhelm the latter, but the knight mech simply did not fall and did everything it could to stop the hybrid mech from going anywhere else.

"We can't keep this up! We are being grinded down by our opponents."

The two mech pilots fighting on behalf of Team Larkinson had both fallen into the enemy's rhythm, and that was incredibly bad.

Both of them therefore recognized that they needed to change the game sooner rather than later.

"Do you want to do it?!" Lizzie asked over a communication channel.

"It is not as if we have any other choice. Our mechs are being countered as we speak."

"We will have to get the timing right. Our actions won't work if we do not show a high degree of coordination."

"Then let us make use of that strange new connection that Larkinson has pointed out to us. I think I have a good understanding of how to use it now that we have been piloting our mechs for a while."

Several seconds passed by as both Bobby and Lizzie made their respective preparations. They shifted their positioning and armed certain weapons.

"Now!"

The Furia's shoulder-mounted missile launchers began to fire their full payloads at the same time!

The lack of warning completely caught the pilot of the Double Up off-guard.

Although the modular armored knight mech possessed a lot of different methods to defend against a variety of incoming attacks, the missiles launched by the Furia were all utility missiles that did not care about any fancy armor systems!

If Beatrice Hendrix had been able to spend more time on designing the Double Up, she would have been able to add a crucial missile interception system or even just a basic machine gun that could shoot down the relatively cheap and fragile missiles before they did their jobs.

Unfortunately, the Double Up was a pure melee mech that was already complex enough due to being a mech inside a mech.

The only other mech that could have intercepted all of the utility missiles was the Triple Spray. Its triple-barreled rapid-fire rifle was well-suited to taking down a lot of missiles in quick succession.

However, the Furia fired all of its missiles at a time where the Triple Up was running away while facing in the opposite direction of its companion mech!

The light harasser mech needed to turn almost 180 degrees in the other direction in order to start intercepting any of the missiles.

"Too late!"

The range between the Furia and the Double Up was not that great so the missiles instantly reached their preprogrammed positions.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A flood of EMP waves struck the Double Up from multiple directions!

While the knight mech's adaptive modular armor systems were too well-designed and shielded to get affected by these EMP attacks, the relatively weak and basic communication and sensor systems of the Double Up couldn't withstand the excessive electromagnetic discharges and quickly became blinded for a time!

Only its basic optical and other short-ranged sensors managed to retain partial functionality. Communications were down as well, preventing the pilot of the Double Up from coordinating his actions with the pilot of the Triple Spray!

If this wasn't bad enough, the detonation of the smoke missiles threw the entire area surrounding the Double Up into an obscuring fog where visibility became reduced even further!

The pilot of the Double Up knew that it had fallen into an awful position all of a sudden. He made the one decision that made the most sense.

He turned the Double Up around and ran straight in the last-known direction of the Triple Spray!

The knight mech could not possibly afford to stay in the middle of this smoke area and continue to remain blind and cut off from help!

"Hah!"

It was at this time that the Sensia suddenly emerged in front of the Double Up's path. The light skirmisher had completely abandoned its pursuit of the Triple Spray and readily allowed its rear to get struck by a lot of bullets in order to enter the smoke cloud as quickly as possible..

This not only enabled Lizzy Cado's light mech to shake off the attacks of the Triple Spray, but also put it in a position to intercept the retreating Double Up!

The pilot of the knight mech was not stupid, though. He already predicted this to happen and easily folded both of the arms of the Double Up forward to form a thick anti-puncture shield out of lots of layered modular armor plating.

"Haha! Do you think I'm alone? Think again!"

The Sensia did not back off. Instead, it continued to run forward before unleashing a flurry of light knife attacks that forced the Double Up to maintain its modular shields in a forward-facing position.

This left the knight mech completely undefended from the attacks coming from the rear!

The Furia which had just recently entered the smoke cloud had become partially blinded by the smoke cloud as well. Its sensors may have been upgraded but the overlapping effects of several smoke missiles was too strong to overcome!

Nonetheless, it somehow knew exactly where the Sensia was positioned, and in turn also figured out the position and the orientation of the Double Up.

Bobby Orwell did not hesitate to fire a shotgun slug that struck the unreinforced rear armor of the enemy knight mech! A considerable amount of armor cracked from this hefty blow!

The integrated luminar crystal guns fired next, causing them to inflict light but still significant damage to the rear of the Double Up.

The Furia quickly grasped two of its throwing axes at once and threw them onto the still-exposed back of the enemy knight mech.

Since the Double Up was still pinned down by the Sensia, those spinning axes struck the rear of the enemy machine without any hindrance, causing their blades to dig deeper into the rear armor plating.

After doing all of this, the Furia finally lifted both of its arms and fired both of its wrist-mounted flamethrowers at full blast!

"Aaaahhh!"

While the Double Up was too well-armored to succumb to the flames in an instant, the concentrated fires directed towards its rear were wreaking havoc to its least-defended side!

The cracks in the armor created by the earlier attacks enabled the damaging flames to reach deeper and begin to melt the internal components that were situated close to these weak points!

Chapter 4864 Low Margins

The Sensia continually slashed its knives against the modular shields of the Double Up from the front.

Although the strikes dealt little damage, the light skirmisher designed by Team Larkinson could swing its knives at a frighteningly high pace, enabling Lizzie Cado to employ her knife fighting skills without too many hindrances!

The Furia burned the Double Up's exposed rear armor by firing its wrist-mounted flamethrower at full blast.

The concentration of damage was low, and none of the metal that came in contact with the flames melted in an instant.

However, the transfer of thermal energy was so great that all of the modular armor situated in the rear of the Double Up's frame began to glow as they continually absorbed more and more heat!

Already, the modular armor plates that bore the brunt of flames had already begun to droop and deform.

At a certain point, these plates abruptly seemed to lose all life in them and began to fall onto the ground as the Double Up could no longer command them as before.

It turned out that the excessive exposure to overwhelming heat had shorted out the circuitry and electrical systems that held them aloft!

This normally wouldn't happen to the modular armor systems of properly designed mechs, but the lack of time put into the design along with the use of cheap, low-quality materials caused the components of the armor system to become far more vulnerable to these kinds of attacks than normal!

What happened to the Double Up was one of the reasons why modular armor systems had not broken through the mainstream.

It was fine to use it as a supplement to a regularly constructed mech like how the Battle Skirt System augmented the defensive properties of the Maiden of Adversity model, but to use it as the main source of defense for a knight mech was a risky choice!

However, the Double Up was not a regular knight mech.

The pilot of the mech knew he was in trouble. The light skirmisher and the hybrid mech were wailing on the Double Up from both sides.

Meanwhile, the Triple Spray continued to linger outside of the smoke cloud, its sensor and communication systems unable to penetrate the interference produced by all of the particles in the air.

The only way for the Triple Up to relieve the Double Up and make contact with it was by going inside.

It would be a mistake for the light harasser mech to do so because it would only allow itself to get caught by the Sensia at close range!

Since the Triple Up could not come to the Double Up, the Double Up just had to get out of this smoke cloud and link up with its partner mech again!

The Double Up did not have many options at its disposal. The Sensia at the front and the Furia at the rear tacitly worked together to pin the beleaguered knight mech in place.

If the Double Up made any careless movements, it would inadvertently expose its sensitive weak point at its front, thereby allowing either of the Twin Souls to attack its most vulnerable area and knock it out at an instant.

There was only one option left for the Double Up.

"Purge armor!"

Inside the middle of the smoke cloud, the strained and modular armor plating that covered up the entire frame of the knight mech no longer tried to hold itself together anymore.

Instead, the modular armor plating all separated from each other while exploding outwards!

Though the force of all of those purged modular armor plates did not properly constitute as projectiles, they completely caught the Sensia and the Furia off-guard!

The latter did not endure that much disruption as the Furia maintained a healthy distance from the knight mech.

The Sensia on the other hand became bombarded by lots of little armor plates at close range. As it was a light mech to begin with, getting hit by a lot of small metal projectiles was like getting blasted by a weak shotgun at point blank range!

While the Sensia wasn't fragile to the point where it could withstand this rain of metal plates, Lizzie Cado had been forced to command her light skirmisher to back off and cross its arms across its chest in order to protect its critical weak point.

This was exactly what the pilot of the stripped knight mech wanted to accomplish!

After purging its entire external layer, a much lighter and skinnier melee mech remained underneath. It held one straight shortsword that had previously been buried along the length of its arm and held a small physical shield made of what little modular armor plating that hadn't been flung away like the rest.

The smaller and nimbler knight mech successfully managed to slip away and run outside of the radius of the smoke cloud!

"So this is why Beatrice Hendrix called her work the Double Up." Ves sounded impressed as he along with everyone else watched the knight mech reach its second stage.

The arena had special optical tech that allowed observers to look through the obscuring smoke cloud and accurately witness what was happening underneath.

Otherwise, any battles involving smoke would turn into an unwatchable mess!

Ves closely studied the design of the mech underneath the mech.

Despite having lost almost all of its modular armor plating through a sudden purge command, what was left did not look like an easy machine to take down.

The second stage form of the Double Up initially looked like a light skirmisher that tried really hard to pretend as if it was a knight mech but failed.

However, Ves and many other mech designers began to look impressed as this was not exactly the case!

This was not a mere 'cute' version of a knight mech.

The current form of the Double Up was definitely a light mech, but it no longer fit into any neat categories.

It possessed greater speed and agility than before but it could not catch up to the likes of the Sensia and the Triple Spray.

Its frame was actually a little thicker and more resilient than average light mechs, but it did not strictly reach the standard of a defensive mech anymore.

It possessed a small-sized shield made out of modular armor plating that came with a bit of flexibility, but it could not resist nearly as many blows as a genuine defensive shield.

Nobody could figure out the right word to categorize this mech.

"Is it a light knight mech?"

"Maybe we should call it a swashbuckler mech."

"Its a general melee mech."

"I bet it has not even reached its final form!"

Whatever it was called, the Double Up did not take much time to demonstrate that it could still put up a mean fight even if it had shed much of its protection.

The Twin Souls had moved out of the smoke cloud and taken stock of their adversaries.

The first clash between the two sides came out in favor of Team Larkinson, but its advantage was not as overwhelming as it looked.

The Triple Spray had not yet been hit and only depleted a portion of its energy and ammunition reserves.

The Double Up may have lost a considerable proportion of its previous combat power, but its downsized form was still in good condition as its modular armor plating had absorbed the vast majority of the attacks that landed on its frame.

The Sensia did not look as fine as before. When it had turned around to attack the Double Up, it had exposed its rear to the Triple Spray.

All of the bullets that struck the rear of the light skirmisher had dented or cracked a lot of the thin and fragile armor that protected its internals.

While the Sensia had been able to shake off the attacks of the Triple Spray fairly quickly, its rear armor could no longer endure any further attacks!

The Furia had been spared of any damage so far. Its defenses were in the best condition out of the four mechs in the arena.

Its ammunition reserves had dropped by over half. All of the shotgun shells took up a lot of capacity. The hybrid mech couldn't carry too much of them so it was a grave concern that it could only fire its shotgun a bunch more times before it ran dry.

The shoulder-mounted missile launchers had served their purpose after firing their only payloads. Bobby Orwell had already activated the purge command that caused them to detach from the Furia and reduce its encumbrance.

The wrist-mounted flamethrowers also had a low capacity to begin with. After firing them at the rear of the Double Up at its maximum possible rate, its propellant reserves had dwindled down to less than 20 percent.

This was still enough to pose a threat against lightly armored mechs, but there was no doubt that the Double Up and the Triple Spray would be wary against this threatening weapon system.

The only weapons on the Furia that could still keep firing were its integrated luminar crystal guns. Their low power and high efficiency made it so that they did not burden the hybrid mech too much.

After both sides regrouped and took stock of each other, they began the fight anew!

All four mechs moved around in order to evade any incoming attacks and make it harder for their opponents to strike their crucial weak points.

The Sensia circled around and attempted to approach the down-sized Double Up, making sure to never expose its weakened and damaged rear towards the Triple Up which was not as easy as it sounded.

The reason why Lizzie Cado opted to target the Double Up was because it wasn't fast enough to outrun a light skirmisher!

Seeing that a confrontation could not be avoided, the Double Up gave up its attempt to close in on the Furia and instead started to clash against the Sensia!

Just like before, the Sensia struck the Double Up with a flurry of light unending knife attacks.

Slash after slash struck the modular buckler that the stripped mech utilized as its most solid remaining defensive tool.

The Double Up did not allow the Sensia to wail at it without any consequence!

The knight mech thrust its own shortsword forward and forced the light skirmisher to back off in order to prevent it from getting impaled.

The light skirmisher merely circled around a bit and forced the Double Up to utilize its buckler to defend against the attacks.

Throughout all of this time, Lizzie Cado made sure that her Sensia always put the Double Up in the way of the Triple Spray's rifle!

It didn't matter too much because the Triple Spray had its own fair share of problems!

In order to prevent the Triple Spray from ganging up on the Sensia, the Furia attacked the light harasser mech with numerous attacks!

Shotgun pellets struck a portion of the Triple Spray's side armor, causing its arm as well as numerous thin armor plating to suffer small but concerning puncture damage!

Thin but bright laser beams continually pelted the Triple Spray's frame.

The light harasser mech's evasive maneuvers had caused a portion of these attacks to miss, but enough of them struck the Triple Spray to inflict serious damage to whatever armor plating it managed to strike!

The only consolation for Team Hendrix was that the laser beam attacks weren't accurate and precise enough to land on the same portions of armor. The spread damage caused by the laser beams weren't immediately concerning as they had yet to make any substantial breaches.

The Triple Spray did not avoid the confrontation and continually fired its triple-barreled rifle at the Furia's frame!

The latter's frontal armor began to endure a substantial amount of pressure. The bullets might not be able to punch through its armor plating quickly enough, but its integrated weapons began to suffer a lot of little blows that they weren't meant to withstand!

Boom!

Another spray of shotgun pellets struck the left half of the Triple Spray, causing its rifle and its armor to incur even further damage.

Chapter 4865 Beatrice Hendrix

The match between Team Larkinson and Team Hendrix remained surprisingly even after a brief first round of exchanges!

So far, none of the mechs from either side had been downed, though the conditions of a few of them had deteriorated.

Each of the four mechs possessed a lot of mobility, which caused all of them to dance around each other while remaining mindful of the positioning and facing of the other mechs.

It looked as if the mech arena had turned into an intricate dance hall. There was a strange form of coordination between the maneuvers of the opposing mechs.

Rules such as never exposing the rear sides of every mech to an enemy ranged mech forced the mech pilots to make strange movements that did not make sense at first.

It was fortunate that all of the mech pilots who controlled the competition mechs on behalf of the individual teams were professional soldiers. They might not have received too much specialization on mech duels, but they were more than skilled and aware enough to minimize the chances that any of their adversaries could strike at their vulnerable rears.

The only problem was that every mech was vulnerable from attacks targeting their frontal sides as well, but this could be partially mitigated by putting shields or more simply the arms of the mechs in the way.

As the mechs continued to strike each other with all of the attacks they had at their disposal, it quickly became clear that none of them could be struck down so easily!

This did not surprise too many spectators. Team Larkinson may be the favorite to win the tournament but Team Hendrix also had a strong Journeyman Mech Designer!

[Beautiful! Beautiful! Beautiful! I just love it when four well-designed mechs make a good showing of their capabilities! The soldiers loaned to us from the Federal Military of Davute are doing a fantastic job at drawing out their potential.]

[The Twin Souls designed and built by Ves Larkinson and Juliet Stameross demonstrate enough attack power to make life difficult for many of the mechs designed for this tournament, but the combination between the Double Up and the Triple Spray have turned out to be resilient enough to withstand the fire. Can the mechs designed by the talented young travelers defeat the efforts of the most prominent Journeyman in Davute?]

[Beatrice Hendrix's journey in this tournament may end sooner than she would have liked, but that is a part of the game that we call tournaments. Nothing is ever fair and luck is also a part of one's strength. Nonetheless, I am certain that many of our esteemed viewers have taken notice of her competence. I would not be surprised if dozens of mech companies and government institutions have already taken the steps to invite her to join them. She is still a fairly young mech designer, but her potential is great.]

[I agree. It is impressive to see what she has managed to develop in a span of just two days. Her Double Up is not a simple knight mech like the others designed for this tournament. It started out as Hendrix is a talent who exposed her excellence early on. Master Relice Yovarn took a liking for Beatrice's genius and personally instructed her for over a decade. Miss Hendrix has also worked for a mech within a mech and possesses plenty of combat power in either of its forms.]

[Where did she learn how to design all of this? Her design skills and design speed exceed that of many of her other peers. There are 100-year old Journeymen in this tournament that haven't been able to design a mech that is half as good as her Double Up!]

[I wouldn't expect any less from a direct disciple of an established Master Mech Designer. Beatrice Hendrix is a talent who exposed her excellence early on. Master Relice Yovarn took a liking for Beatrice's genius and personally instructed her for over a decade. Miss Hendrix has also worked for Master Yovarn's mech company for numerous years before she has decided to go independent. Just as with many other younger mech designers these days, Beatrice Hendrix decided to emigrate to the Red Ocean by herself. Her Master on the other hand has opted to remain in the old galaxy as that is where her power base is rooted.]

[The new frontier offers countless opportunities for young and enterprising Journeymen. The mech markets here are in flux and there are many mech companies that are seeking to expand their operations. It is admittedly difficult to start an independent commercial enterprise due to the stiff and heavy competition in a busy market as the Davute System, but there are many gaps in the other star system in our newly founded colonial state. Many provinces and more isolated star systems offer valuable subsidies and government support to encourage the establishment of local mech companies that can eventually grow to support a planetary economy. I would recommend all capable mech designers to consider these offers as the outlying colonies will not offer these benefit packages forever. Snap them up while they last!]

As the mechs from both sides continued to dance and tangle with each other, Ves had taken the bold step of approaching Team Hendrix directly.

He could have waited for the match to end and follow a clever strategy in which he explored Beatrice Hendrix's circumstances before giving her a tailored offer, but that was far too slow and circumspect for his tastes.

Ves was a bigshot these days. He should make use of his higher status if that played in his favor.

He could commit actions that were unacceptable to other people.

He already tested that when he commanded his clansmen to violate the laws and instructions of the government.

Since that was the case, Ves bet that he could also break the unwritten rules and the established conventions of the mech industry.

Besides, it helped a lot that this wasn't the first time he invited other Journeyman Mech Designers to become his subordinates.

It was not common for Journeymen to command other Journeymen, but Ves could get away with it as long as the status gap was great enough.

The only potential issue this time was that Beatrice Hendrix clearly did not possess the demeanor of an average Journeyman.

She was not only the direct disciple of a Master Mech Designer, but clearly possessed a lot of confidence in herself.

Beatrice did not run off to the Red Ocean in haste but made a careful decision to find more development space in the new frontier.

Davute was probably not that important to her. While the port system may be a potential destination for her, there were still plenty of other human-occupied star systems where she could ply her trade.

If Beatrice planned to leave the Krakatoa Middle Zone and continue her journey to another zone, then this may be the only window of opportunity for Ves to approach her in person!

Ves always found it easier to convince difficult people to cooperate when he could talk to them in person.

He hoped that his charm would clinch him another deal once again.

"Larkinson." Beatrice Hendrix spoke up first as she noticed his approach. "Have you come to invite me to join your clan?"

Ves did not expect her to be so direct about this topic. Her strong opening threw him off-guard, but he quickly rolled with it as there was no harm in exposing his true intentions.

"Yes. I assume you have heard of our clan before. We are not like the other pioneering organizations in the Red Ocean. Our Larkinson Clan is young but unfettered. We have grown faster and adapted a lot more effectively to the new frontier than other organizations. Due to our high growth, we have a constant need for talented mech designers to join our team and fulfill our growing demand for excellent mechs. Would you be interested in becoming a part of our family?"

Beatrice Hendrix continued to maintain her stony demeanor. She calmly listened to Ves' opening pitch but shook her head as soon as he finished.

"You have done well yourself, and your clan is an example to every pioneering organization in the Red Ocean. That said, I have studied you Larkinsons before and concluded that I would not be a good fit in your company."

Ves frowned a bit. "How so, Miss Hendrix?"

"For one, all of the stories I have heard and documentation that I have read about your clan emphasizes that becoming a Larkinson is permanent. That is not acceptable. I do not want to devote myself to your clan for the rest of my career. I would like to reserve the right to quit my job and

either start my own mech company or join another one. Are you prepared to accommodate this demand?"

Ves could have weasled around the truth, but the permanence of joining the Larkinson Clan was one of the most important reasons why every clansmen became so intimate and trusting with each other. The clan would lose an important pillar if he made membership more transient.

"Our clan is meant to be a tight-knit community where everyone treats each other as family." He responded. "So no, I cannot make an exception to this rule."

"Then I do not see what else we can talk about. Your clan falls outside of the list of organizations that I would be happy to join." Beatrice said as she crossed her arms.

That was a clear answer to Ves. While he could probably come up with other arguments that might cause Beatrice to take a second look at his clan, he could not really do anything about the requirement that everyone joining the clan would be a permanent member of it. He had too many secrets to allow his clansmen to run around free and without any supervision.

Still, he did not give up yet. He still had a number of cards to play that might convince Beatrice to overlook a few problems.

"What if I tell you that our clan is on track to being promoted to a first-class organization?"

The female mech designer raised her eyebrow at Ves. "I have heard that before. Many mech designers and companies have tried to impress me with this claim, but none of them have ever succeeded."

"Our chances are better than theirs." Ves retorted. "For example, it is no secret that my expeditionary fleet has managed to find and rescue a missing first-class scion from an alien battleship. The story is a bit long, but what is important is that I successfully forged a connection with the Yorul-Tavik Clan that is based in the Omter Republic."

"So you have gained a few favors. That is far from being able to become a first-rater."

"Don't underestimate those favors. My clever children are all being primed to enroll into first-class virtual schools. They have already passed the demanding tests and are currently being tutored in various first-class subjects so they can keep up with their peers. Even if I myself cannot become a first-class mech designer so soon, one of my children should definitely be able to graduate as one with my support!"

That caused Beatrice to take a more serious look at him. Ves had proven that he wasn't making empty boasts, but that he pursued a concrete strategy to uplift himself and his clan!

While Ves continued to convince Beatrice to take a serious look at his clan, the fight down below continued to escalate.

As the light harasser mech and the hybrid mech continued to exchange blows with each other, both sides knew that this dance couldn't continue forever.

Just after the Furia fired one of its last remaining shotgun shells, it abruptly pulled out the last throwing axe it carried on its bandolier and began to rush forward in preparation to throw it forward.

The Triple Spray immediately backed off and prepped its legs to make a sudden evasive sidestep.

However, just before the Furia threw its final throwing axe forward, it had abruptly pivoted its own direction towards another adversary and launched its throwing axe towards the rear of the Double Up!

The pilot of the stripped mech received an alert that prompted him to move his mech out of the way. "Evade!"

Chapter 4866 Exhaustion

The mechs couldn't fight much longer at this pace.

Each of the mechs had been moving around a lot, which meant that they used their energy reserves at a much higher rate than was sustainable.

Normal mechs could keep going like this for quite a while, but tournaments usually restricted the amount of energy that mechs could have in order to prevent them from stalling matches for hours at a time.

The matches of the Twin Weapons Tournament obviously weren't meant to last that long, so the rules had been rather heavy-handed about limiting their maximum energy reserves.

The mech pilots participating in this tournament were all aware of these limitations. Even if they used their best possible means to reduce the amount of energy they were expending, their mechs were still moving closer to exhaustion with each exertion they made.

When the Furia had thrown its final axe towards the back of the Double Up, the latter had to use an extreme maneuver to get out of the way!

Its abused frame groaned as plenty of components strained under the heavy force that it was trying to summon.

The Double Up succeeded at dodging the axe, but it paid a considerable price by moving out of the way!

Two strikes from the Furia's integrated luminal crystal laser guns accurately managed to add another pair of scorch marks onto the Double Up's damaged armor.

Despite the relatively thin layers that protected the stripped knight mech, its final layer of protection held up remarkably well against the attacks it had endured up to this point.

Beatrice Hendrix might excel in designing modular armor systems, but that did not mean she was unable to design regular armor systems. The protective layers that wrapped up the lighter frame had performed admirably and highlighted their creator's talent and skills once again!

Unfortunately, all of the abuses that the Double Up had suffered caused it to be pushed closer to the brink.

Lizzie and Bobby recognized this. They might not understand the technical side of mechs all that much, but their experience, intuition and observation abilities allowed them to know that the Double Up was like a house on the verge of collapse!

The two mech pilots took action without needing to exchange any words. They inherently understood each other's intentions on a subtle level. Even though neither of them had a good idea of

what their partner had in mind, their shared training and understanding of each other's fighting methods enabled them to coordinate their actions on the fly!

"They're trying to finish off the Double Up!"

The Sensia and the Furia threw aside all considerations in an effort to take down the toughest and most resilient mech they fought against so far. The Double Up for its part could do little but to move away while raising its sword and modular buckler for a final stand.

There was no way for the Double Up to open up any distance to its current adversaries. It may have shed a lot of armor but it was never really designed with speed in mind. Beatrice Hendrix possessed a lot of strengths as a mech designer but she rarely focused on imparting her works with greater mobility.

Aside from that, the forced dodging maneuver it performed just a few seconds ago had also caused permanent internal damage that caused it to move a little less smoothly than before!

With two different mechs ganging up on the Double Up, the latter mech ultimately decided to stop its flight.

Instead, its pilot decided that if his mech was likely to go down, the least he could do was drag down an enemy mech while his machine could still fight!

"The Sensia is taking serious damage!"

While three of the mechs converged upon each other, the Triple Spray had not remained idle.

It had previously been firing its triple-barreled rifle at the Furia, but its weapon did not seem to have much of an effect against the hybrid mech.

Now that the Furia had stopped exerting pressure on the Triple Spray, the light harasser mech was completely free to turn its gun towards its original target, which was the Sensia!

Lizzie Cado winced as the light skirmisher under her control started to sound alarms due to all of the bullets that sprayed against the side of the machine.

Some of the bullets even managed to strike the damaged rear armor at an angle. This was particularly alarming because the Sensia truly couldn't afford to take much more damage from this side!

However, finishing off the Double Up was more important, so Lizzie pushed through the danger and eventually managed to bring her light skirmisher close to its target!

"Fall!"

The pilot of the Double Up was happy to meet the Sensia in combat.

Unlike the previous times where the Double Up focused on blocking incoming attacks while occasionally launching a counterattack whenever possible, the stripped mech abandoned almost every pretense at defense and committed to a full attack!

Clang!

One of the knives darting forward were deflected by the buckler that covered the frontal weak point.

The other knife managed to sink into the damaged chest armor of the Double Up. No modular armor plating or other fancy defensive measures took effect, so the knife truly managed to penetrate through the thin protection.

Unfortunately for Team Larkinson, the Sensia's success also opened it up for a devastating counterattack!

The light skirmisher attempted to pull out and either parry the incoming blow or move out the way.

The swift mech had a decent shot at doing so if not for the fact that the Double Up actually gripped the Sensia's stretched arm!

The limb that held the knife that had just sunk into the chest of the stripped mech turned into a shackle that held the light skirmisher in place, if only for a moment!

"Let go!" Lizzie Cado boomed as the light skirmisher's other knife swung and attempted to cut through half of the wrist of the Double Up!

This did not work because the damaged but still functional modular buckler had changed its shape and orientation to block this attack!

The Sensia's response to this was to stab at the Double Up's frontal weak point that had become exposed due to losing the protection of the buckler.

This forced the Double Up to let go of its sword with its other limb and lock the Sensia into place!

"Danger!"

While all of this happened, The Triple Spray had circled around to get a better firing angle. It managed to do so before it dropped down to a knee and assume a stable firing posture.

Its triple-barreled rifle soon began to spit out bullet after bullet in a straight trajectory towards the rear armor of the briefly immobilized Sensia!

These attacks were different than before. The Triple Spray showed no concern with getting chased or getting attacked and focused completely on accurately landing its shots on one of the Sensia's vulnerable weak points in the rear!

A remarkably low quantity of bullets went off-course and struck anything irrelevant.

The vast majority of bullets struck a specific section that had already incurred damage caused by previous attacks.

These bullets cut through this specific section of armor like a plasma cutter.

The stream of projectiles soon began to damage the internal components that became exposed due wrench its weight to a specific direction.

to this failure.

Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta!

The Sensia seemed to groan in pain as its frame no longer performed as optimally as before.

Nonetheless, Lizzie Cado never stopped her light skirmisher from freeing itself from this predicament.

The Sensia's whose arms were caught by the Double Up's own limbs tried to leverage its legs by kicking at the stripped mech.

This did not work quite as well because the force of the kicks wasn't all that great. The Sensia actually bruised its legs just as much as that of the Double Up!

Lizzie eventually came up with the idea of unbalancing her own mech. The Sensia tried to jump and wrench its weight to a specific direction.

Both mechs started to lose their balance and fall as a response!

"Do it!" Lizzie shouted!

She did not need to make any further clarifications because she already knew what Bobby was planning to do next.

The Furia had come close and pressed the muzzle of its shotgun on the weakest point of the rear armor of the Double Up.

The powerful weapon fired a solid slug that pierced straight through this critical point and dealt a crippling blow to the internals of the stripped knight mech!

Eventually, an emergency energy shield had to come to life in order to protect the cockpit and its occupant from any life-threatening danger.

[The Double Up has fallen!]

[What an admirable mech for one that has only been designed and built in two days.]

[Team Hendrix may have lost a unit, but Team Larkinson is also on the brink of getting reduced.]

The condition of the Sensia was awful. It had not yet shut down completely but it might as well do so on account of all of the combat power it had lost.

The precisely aimed bullets fired from the Triple Spray had damaged too many internals.

Combined with the fact that the Sensia had fallen with the wreck of the Double Up pressing its weight on top of it, there was no effective way for the light skirmisher to contribute to the battle!

[There are only the ranged mechs left now. The Furia and the Triple Spray must finish the fight, one way or another.]

This could drag on for a bit as both of them were light mechs that did not possess the means to deliver any powerful blows.

The Triple Spray only had its rifle to depend upon while the Furia had exhausted the majority of its weapon options.

Its shotgun had run empty. Its missile launchers had served their purpose several minutes ago. Its throwing axes had already been thrown out. Its flamethrowers had almost run out of propellant.

Nonetheless, the Furia could still keep fighting by relying on its integrated luminal crystal weapons.

The two mechs began to circle around each other while firing their weapons at each other.

It was a silly way to end a fight, but it was not as if they had any options left.

The pilots from both sides targeted the frontal weak points of their opponents.

There was not much the Triple Spray could do about this aside from performing evasive maneuvers and using one of its free arms to block any laser beams from striking this vulnerability.

The Furia on the other hand possessed a clear advantage during this phase of combat. Not only did it boast relatively thicker armor, but it also had an emptied shotgun which it could use as an improvised shield!

Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta!

The triple-barreled rifle of the Triple Up continually struck the body of the shotgun, causing the damage-resistant weapon to get dented. Its internal mechanisms eventually broke under the torrent of bullets.

Meanwhile, the Furia was left free to fire both of its chest-mounted weapons at the Triple Spray!

Even if the laser beams did not always manage to hit the mark, the constant shots steadily caused the light harasser mech to suffer more damage.

With the attacks it had already endured, it could not withstand so many attacks at once!

Fizz!

Disaster struck the Triple Spray as its constant evasive maneuvers had drained its energy reserves!

The mech forcibly slowed down in order to conserve what little energy it had left. This proved to be a devastating consequence as the hit rate and the accuracy of the Furia's lumina crystal guns began to concentrate their output at the weakest exposed section of the light harasser mech's armor!

Now that the Triple Spray had effectively turned into a stationary target, it couldn't stop the Furia from burning through the internals and causing the exhausted light mech to lose all of its power!

As the Triple Spray collapsed, the Furia slowly halted in place.

The match had actually been closer than many people realized as the hybrid mech's energy reserves had dipped fairly low as well.

Ultimately, only one team deserved to go through.

[Team Larkinson... has won!]

Chapter 4867 Bountiful Resources

Ves had to admit that he felt progressively more nervous as the match dragged on. The Double Up and the Triple Spray pressured his Sensia and Furia in ways that pushed their pilots to their limits.

When the cheers finally started to erupt en masse and the announcement of his team's victory echoed throughout Spencer Hall, his nerves finally relaxed as he felt at ease again.

Outwardly, Ves made sure to maintain an unceasingly confident and unflappable image.

Inwardly, he looked like a nervous wreck near the end of the match!

If not for the fact that the Double Up finally went down and the Triple Spray ultimately lost a battle of attrition, Ves might have ended up in a completely different state after the match had ended!

It was always embarrassing for the clear favorite to win the tournament to get eliminated in the early rounds. The expectations placed upon him did not allow him to fail and falter so soon. He needed to make it to the end. Only then would he be able to live up to everyone's inflated image of himself!

As the fallen and exhausted mechs were being moved off the arena field, Ves knew he couldn't stay in the waiting room any longer.

Every team received a limited amount of time to conduct repairs and perform modifications on the competition mechs. Neither the Sensia nor the Furia had come out of this match unscathed and urgently needed repairs. Their torn and dented armor particularly needed to be renewed!

He turned his attention back to Beatrice Hendrix. To her credit, the Journeyman Mech Designer maintained her composure as the announcers declared that her team was finished in the tournament.

There were no second chances in a single-elimination bracket. One loss was all it took for the Journeymen to lose their ticket to greater fame, prestige and prizes.

Ves did not think that Beatrice Hendrix entirely lost out despite her early elimination. The expressions of respect from the mech designers around them said it all. Plenty of people respected her design ability and thought that she had been eliminated too early.

This was good. Getting knocked out during the second round was embarrassing, but putting up a mean fight before barely losing to the eventual champion of the tournament did much to prop up her self-esteem!

Not only was Beatrice Hendrix able to leave Spencer Hall with a somewhat satisfying memory of the event, she also gained a much better understanding of Ves' design ability.

The way she looked at him when she learned that his Twin Souls defeated her own works had undergone a subtle shift.

The need to head down to the workshop and fix up his mechs to prepare them for the third round compelled him to finish his talk with Beatrice quickly.

He extended his hand. "Good match."

She stared at him for a second before she raised her arm so that they could shake hands. "You are truly as impressive as they say. If this contest wasn't so unfavorable towards defensive mechs, then maybe the outcome of this match would have been different."

He wasn't too sure about that, but he let her keep her rationalization.

"Your tournament participation may be over now, but my offer still stands. Think about what I have said, Miss Hendrix. Joining the Larkinson Clan may require a heavier commitment than joining an ordinary mech company, but you will gain an entirely new family as a result. Our unity and mutual support is one of the greatest benefits to becoming a Larkinson."

"I am not looking for a new family." Bianca Hendrix said with a flash in her eye.

"The Red Ocean can be a dangerous place. You'll have to join a community eventually if you want to make it any further. You can establish your own organization and build up your influence by yourself, but take it from someone who has gone through all of this work, it is far harder to stand

out than you think. There is no harm in joining an existing organization, especially one as successful as mine. You will have to play by our rules, but I can assure you that we are not interested in micromanaging your life. As a lead designer in our clan, you will have a wide variety of resources to pursue your own projects and take advantage of our rich resources."

"If I wanted access to greater resources, I can work for Davute. I have already received several offers from its institutions."

The defensive specialist that Ves hoped to recruit did not look convinced. Whether it was because she understood too little about the Larkinson Clan or because she remained unimpressed by his incentives, it was clear that she needed a lot more persuasion.

"The problem with larger organizations is that they already employ a lot of people already." Ves calmly responded. "The Colonial Federation of Davute alone employs over a dozen Master Mech Designers who knows how many more Seniors and Journeymen. Do you think that a single Journeyman like yourself can gain any preferential treatment? The only concern that the colonial government is bothered with at the moment is the upcoming war against Karlach. This means that the only mech designers that Davute cares about are the ones that can make a meaningful difference in this conflict. That small group encompasses all of its Masters, perhaps a handful of Seniors and myself."

"Is that supposed to impress me, patriarch?"

"I am merely stating a truth, Miss Hendrix. Let me finish this by sharing another truth with you. We have access to resources that you can only dream of. We have hundreds of kilograms of phasewater in our vaults that are just begging to be used in our mech design projects. Have you ever dreamt of designing and realizing a powerful transphasic mech? In our clan, you will have your chance without going through any cumbersome bureaucratic approval process."

The mention of phasewater triggered a burst of interest from Beatrice Hendrix!

Ves almost forgot about it, but the supply of phasewater in the new frontier was so tight that only a minority of mech designers could actually obtain the substance!

Only government institutions and the most established mech companies could get their hands on enough phasewater to actually do anything useful with it aside from conducting research.

Other mech designers, especially small and independent players, had no chance of getting their hands on this coveted substance!

Even a single drop of phasewater eluded them as the demand for it was just too great.

If any quantity of phasewater happened to land on the open market, then so many buyers would emerge that the price would quickly become unaffordable to the vast majority of interested parties!

This was the harsh reality of operating in the Red Ocean. Phasewater featured so prominently in the new frontier that hardly any of the dreamers who emigrated to this dwarf galaxy realized how incredibly hard it was to start playing around with this hot exotic.

One of the reasons why so many mech designers eagerly flocked to the Red Ocean was because they wanted to explore all of the possibilities that phasewater opened up. Ves guessed that Beatrice Hendrix was no different!

"Do you truly have so much phasewater?" She asked in a somewhat skeptical tone.

Ves grinned. "Just watch the recent news about our clan and you'll find out about all of the phase whales and alien warships that our expeditionary fleet has smashed. If there is one certainty in the Red Ocean, it's that the aliens always have phasewater on hand."

"How easy is it for your mech designers to tap this valuable resource?"

"Each mech designer in our clan has permission to draw from our stores as long as they know what they are doing with this exotic." Ves responded as he massively simplified this step. "If we somehow run out of the hundreds of kilograms of phasewater that we already plundered, then we'll just go out and hunt another alien warfleet. Others might be afraid of them, but after our Golden Skull Alliance departs from this star system, we will have two ace mechs and a heap of expert mechs at our disposal. That is more than enough to smash the weaker alien warfleets."

The mention of ace mechs caused Beatrice to look at Ves with a lot more respect! Normal Journeyman had no way of accessing them, so even a mech designer as snobby as her couldn't help but show a greater reaction.

"Phasewater isn't everything." She responded as if to convince herself to resist the temptation of this powerful exotic. "I have heard stories of all of the battles your fleet has fought. The dangers of taking part in your expeditions are not trivial."

Ves shrugged. "You are right, but the rewards are worth it. Plundering resources is the easiest way to get lots of valuable materials, and there are aliens abound in the Red Ocean that are valid targets for humans like us. Phasewater is just one of the goods that we can accumulate through these lucrative expeditions. We also have containers filled with advanced alien technology and materials. Do you need inspiration from studying salvaged alien gadgets? You got it. Do you need salvaged first-class materials to build a superstrong mech? You got it. We have so much of this stuff that our clan has been forced to sell it off in order to free up the cargo holds of our starships. Do you think you can gain access to all of this rich tech and materials as a mere Journeyman in any other mech company?"

The answer was most likely no. A Journeyman was not a big deal in the big government research centers and large mech companies that had the clout and funding to gain access to these goodies. It would be the Masters and the Seniors who would claim all of this for themselves!

Time was running out, so Ves could no longer continue his pitch. He started to turn around.

"Think about what I said. Do your research if you wish. I can guarantee you that no other organization is able to offer you terms that are nearly as generous as mine. Our clan is young but incredibly successful. There are no stuffy Masters hanging over our heads, just fellow Journeymen such as you and I. This is an unprecedented opportunity for you to ride the tide of the Red Ocean and start working with the phasewater that is driving so many mech designers crazy."

With that, he stepped away, leaving Beatrice Hendrix to stew over his words by herself.

Ves had planted a seed in her mind. Whether it would gain sustenance and bloom into a beautiful flower remained to be seen, but he had done the best he could to push her thoughts in the right direction.

His steps briefly halted as he swept his gaze towards the surrounding mech designers.

"I am sure you have all paid attention to what I said. If you are interested in what my clan has to offer, then you don't need to wait for me to extend a direct invitation. You are welcome to approach our recruitment office and show off your qualifications. We are looking for young but talented Journeymen to expand our team, and if you think you have what it takes, then what are you waiting for? Glory and fame awaits those who are willing to make the jump. Did you travel all the way out to the Red Ocean because you wanted to change your life, or are you resigned to doing the exact same kind of boring design assignments that you were working on in the past, just in a different environment? The choice is in your hands."

Fires lit up in the eyes of dozens of mech designers as they heard his pitch. Each Journeyman possessed dreams, but the reality of the new frontier had forced them to bury most of their ambitions.

Ves had managed to use his words to dig them up and reignite their hopes. He was sure that more than a couple of the Journeymen would be applying to join his clan by the end of the week!

Chapter 4868 Testing Skills

Though the match between Team Larkinson and Team Hendrix had passed, a lot of people and commentators still discussed the thrilling battle.

It was as if they had managed to watch the finals a few rounds in advance!

[What a thrilling match. Both of the lead designers of the two opposing teams have managed to showcase their strengths through this direct comparison. Ves Larkinson is clearly more advanced in his journey as a mech designer than any other mech designer in the field, while Beatrice Hendrix is a rising star who is quickly catching up to all of us old fogies.]

[I am intrigued by the applications of modular armor systems. They may be more expensive and cannot resist as much damage, but the adaptive shape changes that the Double Up exhibited has given me a new appreciation of this neglected defensive system.]

[You are looking at this tech with rose-tinted glasses. Do not forget that cost is not a factor in our tournament. The expense of utilizing modular armor systems is a major hindrance to its adoption. Not only that, but modular armor needs to be powered in order to reach their full potential, and that adds another significant burden to the mech in question. The logistics simply aren't worth the effort of fielding a large amount of mechs that rely on modular armor that regularly needs to be replaced.]

[You may have a point if you are talking about the use of modular armor in the old galaxy, but have you forgotten where we are located these days? We live in the Red Ocean! As long as you are rich or well-connected enough, you will be able to incorporate phasewater into your better mech designs. Think of how much better modular armor systems will perform after they become transphasic. Compared to the cost of phasewater, applying them in a more advanced defensive system is not that important anymore.]

[Hm, I can see the merits of applying this armor system to our expert mechs and maybe our ace mechs, but the dangers are not light. Remote systems like these can always be subverted by the enemy. As long as the slightest chance exists, it is not worth the risk of employing this overly complicated toy.]

[I would hardly call it a toy considering that the most famous Journeyman in this zone has almost lost to it. I can foresee many possible iterations of fights where the Double Up with the support of the Triple Spray won the field. We all happen to live in a reality where Team Larkinson managed to gain the upper hand.]

[I think this match is not centered around the Larkinson Patriarch at all. We have already seen much of what his Sensia and Furia can do during its first round match. I am much more impressed by the mechs presented by Team Hendrix to be honest. The tech and design employed by Beatrice Hendrix demonstrates a deep mastery of her own design applications. The sophistication of her modular armor system and the soundness of her mech-within-a-mech design shows that she is a talent that stands above the mundane. It truly is a waste for her to roam around the stars as an independent. She can do so much more if she has access to greater resources...]

While the commentators continued to praise Beatrice Hendrix, a different discussion took place down below.

As Ves and Juliet moved to the workshop where their beaten competition mechs awaited repairs, the latter chuckled.

"You certainly gave those mech designers food for thought." Juliet grinned at him. "At least half-a-dozen of those Journeymen in the room looked as if they had to force themselves to remain rooted on the spot. They would have swarmed you and begged to join your clan if they had less self-control."

Ves snorted. "The ones who beg the hardest are usually the most worthless mech designers in the crowd. My words are mainly directed to the mech designers who are still on the fence but who can still be attracted by the incentives that I just threw out. Whether they will bite is still a question. I find that most interested mech designers quickly turn away as soon as I mentioned that joining the Larkinson Clan is a permanent decision. The inability to back out makes it sound as if I am tempting them to sell their souls to me. How stupid!"

"Is it? Once anyone joins the clan, they turn into your property. You own us like you own your mech designs. You may care for us all, but in the end we are a means to an end."

"That is a highly inaccurate characterization! I don't treat you all like pawns. We're family. That is the core tenet of our Larkinson Clan. Sure, there is definitely a utilitarian purpose to everything that we do, but a family is no different. The best way to take care of each other is to make sure that everyone is useful in one capacity or another. All of the Journeymen that have joined our clan have progressed by leaps and bounds depending on how long they have been with us. You cannot deny this truth."

Juliet crossed her arms. "You frequently remind us all that everything has a price. Each of us who have come to join your clan have indeed received a lot of benefits from you, but is it true that you

have taken even more from us? You are the ultimate beneficiary of this trade. Do not deny it. We are not that stupid."

"I never assumed you were. Just remember that only our clan has been able to provide you with benefits and opportunities that are far in excess to the alternatives. Barring the slim chance that you would have been able to build all of this yourself, there is no way you could have made it this far without the support of the clan that I have built. We are on track to attain greatness, and that is a dream that many other mech designers are missing out on. I really hope that Beatrice Hendrix accepts my offer."

"She is definitely intrigued." Juliet shared her views. "She is resistant to giving up her independence, but the benefits you have mentioned make for compelling arguments."

Ves smirked at her description. "I applied a lesson I learned from President Yenames Clive. That guy may be an insufferable smug bastard that has a penchant for constricting his prey, but he knows how to turn skeptics and doubters into solid collaborators. I have learned that as long as you overwhelm anyone with a sufficiently large bribe, you can buy anyone's cooperation!"

Almost anyone's loyalties could be bought. Even Ves had a price he supposed. Principles and resentment all melted away in the face of greed and naked self-interest.

The only humans who were truly incorruptible were high-ranking mech pilots and swordmasters, but these nutcases introduced their own fair share of problems.

Ves sighed as he and his partner reached the damaged mechs that awaited repairs.

"Let's focus on preparing for the next round. We will need to fix up our mechs as best as we can, especially if we have another tough fight on the horizon."

While he thought that it was unlikely that they would bump into another top seed during their third round match, he could never know for certain. He could do little else than hope for the best but prepare for the worst.

This was exactly what they did. Ves and Juliet hastily stripped off the ruined armor plating and pulled out the internals that had sustained too much damage.

The mech designers rapidly fabricated the necessary replacement parts and slotted them right back in the gaps of the mechs.

The Furia was clearly in a better shape as it possessed more buffers. The hybrid mech did not actually need that much work to get back in shape.

The Sensia needed a little more work as its rear side took a beating from the Triple Spray.

The torrent of bullets that shredded its thin armor and cut into the small of its back all left behind a field of devastation.

The ruined landscape could be healed. All Ves had to do was to bring the right resources and make use of them with purpose in order to restore most of the combat effectiveness of the light skirmisher.

"I wish we had more time to conduct repairs." Juliet lamented in a rare display of frustration for her. "The time allotted for our repairs will continue to shrink in the subsequent rounds."

"I know, Juliet. We should do what we must. The upside is that our competitors are working under the same circumstances. Our skills and design choices will make the difference."

Since all of the matches needed to be held on a single day, the time it took for a team to go up again constantly dropped. After all, every round progression cut the amount of competing teams by half.

The tournament partially compensated for this by lengthening the lead-up time between matches. The announcers and the panel of experts took more time to comment on the performance of the surviving competition mechs, allowing every spectator to gain a clearer understanding of what made the different mechs stronger and more successful than others.

There was only so much they could do to stall for time, so mech designers such as Ves and Juliet had to work hard to get everything done by the next match!

Ves understood that this was partially a test of how well they designed their mechs and how well they could restore the combat performance of damaged machines.

The better a team designed their mechs, the less battle damage they would have once they won their matches.

The further into a round, the greater the concentration of good designers.

The more hands-on experience and proficiency with mechs a team possessed, the more repairs they could complete in a limited window of time.

There were plenty of elitist mech designers who never fabricated a single mech in their lives after they had graduated from their universities, but they usually did not make it far in their careers.

The truly passionate and skilled mech designers did not object to fabricating their mechs in person, even if it was only a prototype made for testing purposes.

The most common limitation that prevented them from doing so was if they worked for a large mech company that did not allow their design teams to mess around in the workshops and factory floors.

Ves smirked as he rapidly observed the damaged frames of his Sensia and Furia. He did not think he was weak in either of these areas. He particularly felt that he possessed a great advantage in hands-on work considering that he had 7 masterwork certificates under his belt.

His affinity with mechs was so strong that the Twin Souls already resonated with him in a way that he couldn't describe. The Sensia and the Furia bared their spirits to him and whispered their faults, their demands and their suggestions. The two living mechs held no secrets towards their creator!

Ves and Juliet comfortably fell into a rhythm again as they drafted up an efficient repair plan and executed it. The superfab provided by the Davute University of Technology churned out replacement parts like a machine gun.

It actually took more time to strip down the mechs and put the new parts into place than to fabricate them all! As long as the mech designers were skilled in repair and assembly, they could complete a lot of work in very little time.

Of course, there were also many points where Ves and Juliet had to cut corners and work a little sloppier than they would have liked. The two made judgment calls to determine whether they

should skip a repair procedure because it was not worth it for them to put in the time it took to get it right.

All of this required a lot of skill and judgment. The difference that this could make would definitely become clear as the combat phase of the tournament progressed.

Chapter 4869 Javelin Thrower

[Team Voiken is in trouble now! The pointed weapons of their mechs are doing their hardest to impale the mechs of Team DeVos, but the works of the older pair of siblings are holding strong!]

On the arena field, four mechs clashed and maneuvered around each other!

The team formed by Sara Voiken and Dulo Voiken had managed to make it to the second round, which reflected their overall strength in mech design.

They had improved a lot since they last competed in Chance Bay!

Joining the Larkinson Clan, gaining access to a lot of learning resources, receiving a lot of autonomy in their schedule and work tasks had done much to advance their design philosophies and expand their repertoire.

However, Team DeVos was no slouch as it consisted of a pair of brothers who were 2 generations older than the Voikens!

Perhaps the DeVos siblings might not be as brilliant as their current adversaries, but what they lacked in talent, they made up for it with experience and diligence.

Their melee mech consisted of a swordsman mech that was armed with a shield.

Although it looked like a knight mech on the surface, it was actually designed and built like an offensive mech. It could not absorb attacks as well as a more solid defensive mech, but it would be able to go on a tear as long as it got rid of its thick and heavy shield.

The swordsman mech currently used its shield to form a defensive barrier!

The mech constantly pivoted its facing as it tried its best to keep up with the circling of the opposing ranged mech.

The light javelin mech designed by the Voikens was an odd machine to say the least.

It was not the only mech that relied on a throwing weapon in the tournament, but unlike the Furia whose throwing axes were more of an afterthought, the javelins of the Voiken ranged mechs actually posed a serious threat!

This was due to several reasons.

The javelins were heavy, weighted and enhanced in different ways.

The arms along with the rest of the mechanical frame of the ranged mech was optimized for throwing.

Most importantly, the Voiken ranged mechs also incorporated a spear-throwing mechanism that enabled it to exert greater leverage and force onto every javelin it held in its right hand!

The mech demonstrated this capacity by withdrawing one of the dozen javelins attached onto its back.

The mech did not hold the javelin in the middle of its long shaft, because doing so was a relatively inefficient means of throwing a lengthy projectile forward.

Instead, it held the javelin by its end, causing it to look as if it would tip over and fall to the floor.

The firm grip of the javelin mech's right hand prevented this from happening.

"I need an opening!" The pilot of the javelin mech called.

"I am working on it!" The other pilot replied.

Accompanying the javelin mech was a heavier and more solid shielded spearman mech that surged towards the two mechs of Team DeVos, heedless of the gauss rounds fired by the opposing team's rifleman mech!

Sara Voiken might not be able to apply any fancy adaptive modular armor systems to her own mechs, but her alloy formulas and solid metal defensive constructions were superior enough on their own!

Even if the advancing shielded spearman mech received plenty of dents in its armor and physical shield, it could keep taking them on without suffering any internal damage!

Once the spearman mech came close enough, it attempted to circle around the shielded swordsman mech and poke its long spear at the enemy rifleman mech huddling behind its partner.

Naturally, the swordsman mech could not let this happen and was forced to use its sword to deflect the incoming spear jab!

The Voiken spearman mech did not let this failure suspend its attacks. Instead, it started to adopt a more aggressive posture. The unrelenting spear stabs continually struck the shield that the swordsman mech used as a barrier. The spear even came close to bypassing the shield!

Eventually, the two melee mechs became embroiled in their own little world. They could not disentangle themselves from each other without creating a huge opening for their immediate opponents!

This caused the initiative to shift to the ranged mechs. They could either choose to target the opposing melee mech or decide to eliminate their own counterparts first!

The Voiken javelin mech sought to target the enemy rifleman mech right away. This was because it only had a limited amount of javelins before it could fall back onto its relatively weak submachine gun to deal further damage.

The pilot of the javelin mech knew that it would take quite a decent amount of javelins to break past the defenses of the enemy swordsman mech.

In contrast, the light rifleman mech designed by Team DeVos looked so fragile that it would probably take three or so javelins to deal crippling damage!

As such, the javelin mech aggressively advanced towards the enemy ranged mech. Though it held a throwing projectile in its throwing arm, the pilot was not in a hurry to throw it out at this time.

It was too easy for a small and agile light mech to evade the spears at longer distances.

As the two ranged mechs circled around the arena, the rifleman mech did not simply try to run. It also brought its weapon to bear against the javelin mech and fired relatively powerful gauss rounds that could deal a significant amount of damage onto other light mechs!

The javelin mech had to evade as best it could, but it was weighed down by the spare javelins it carried onto its back.

At this rate, the pilot of the javelin mech could only ensure that the incoming attacks missed the weak point at the center of its chest.

It needed to lighten its load right away!

The attack happened in an instant. The javelin mech had already kept its right arm in a throwing position for a time. When it finally decided to attack, its arm levered forward as if it was the arm of a catapult!

As the arm swung forward and down, the hand extended into a surprisingly long mechanism that folded out of its entire wrist.

The entire hand deformed and folded out as if it was the claw of a dinosaur!

This was the atlatl-like mechanism that Dulo Voiken had designed in the throwing arm of the javelin mech.

It was derived from a relatively ancient spear-throwing tool that enabled ancient hunters to throw their spears a lot further and harder!

This time was no different. The leverage that pushed the butt of the spear forward was amazingly strong, causing the long and heavy projectile to launch forward with life-threatening power!

The rifleman mech had to abandon its latest attempt to fire its gun in order to hastily jump out of the way of the powerful javelin!

Even as the long projectile barely missed one of the arms of the ranged mech, the explosive charge integrated inside its hollow shaft exploded, causing the light mech to jerk aside while incurring light surface damage onto its thin armor!

Dulo Voiken sighed as he watched this happen from the ready room. "If the tournament gave us access to stronger explosives, the arm of that rifleman mech would have been crippled."

His sister shrugged. "It was your stupid idea to go back in time and base our ranged mech on a throwing weapon. I don't think we'll be able to get much further in the tournament with an unconventional mech."

"At least it is memorable, don't you think? A lot more people are paying attention to our javelin mech than usual."

He was right. Many mech designers loved the novelty of a javelin mech even as they dismissed it for being impractical in a real battle situation. For example, it ran out of ammunition way faster than any decent rifle-wielding machine!

This was pretty obvious as the javelin mech had thrown three of its long projectiles without much to show for it. Aside from blackening the armor of the rifleman mech, the exploding javelins failed to produce any further results!

[The velocity of the javelins are too low. Any rifle can fire rounds at much higher muzzle velocities. There are good reasons why there are hardly any mechs in use that fall back to such an archaic method of combat.]

[They make for great-looking mechs in the mech arenas. They are more common in public matches as it is an exotic mech that is truly challenging to master.]

[Don't forget about stealth. Mechs armed with javelins are also fairly common in hunting parties operating in complex terrain. Rifles often tend to make loud noises that can attract scary predators, but a mech that is designed well enough can launch a javelin without producing too much noise. The projectiles themselves can also be built to penetrate through biological armor and inject anesthetics inside the body of a resilient exobeast.]

There was a surprising amount of niche uses for javelin mechs, but none of that really mattered to the current contest.

The javelin mech threw a fourth projectile which the opposing machine smoothly dodged.

In turn, the enemy rifleman mech continually retaliated by firing back with its rifle. Some of the gauss rounds missed the mark, but enough of them struck the javelin mech!

For now, the Voiken ranged mech managed to hold on due to the surprising resilience of its light armor.

Sara Voiken may be able to do more to enhance the resilience of heavier mechs, but she was still able to optimize the defenses of lighter mechs as well!

As the javelin mech withdrew a fifth javelin, it started to bend its arm backwards before it suddenly turned around and threw it straight at the back of the enemy swordsman mech!

The pilot of the melee mech of Team DeVos wasn't stupid, though. He had made sure to maintain enough situational awareness to track the positioning of the Voiken javelin mech.

The swordsman mech quickly let go of its shield in order to jump away at greater speed.

Its shield had already been riddled with holes anyway, so it was only right for the swordsman to go on the offensive!

The opposing Voiken spearman mech was caught off-guard. It belatedly threw aside its own shield in order to pursue the swordsman mech, but its heavier armor weighed it down!

"Careful!"

The swordsman mech did not bother to spar against the Voiken spearman mech any further.

Instead, it charged straight at the javelin mech, which happened to have circled a bit too far away from its supporting comrade!

While the javelin mech tried to distance itself, it quickly retracted another javelin and threw it straight at the advancing swordsman mech at a lower angle.

The pursuing machine could see the projectile coming well in advance and already dodged to the right.

Yet before the javelin could pass by, it had actually changed its orientation mid-flight, causing it to extend as if it was made out of sections connected by chains!

This chained javelin entangled one of the legs of the swordsman mech, wrapping around it as if it was trying to turn into a lock.

This strange action did not seem to hinder the swordsman mech all that much, but the javelin mech quickly fired another javelin!

This time, the swordsman mech hadn't been able to evade the next attack as well as before. Its other leg became entangled in chains as well!

The third javelin that flung forward seemed to home in on the legs as if they were attracted by magnetism. It ultimately formed a strong bar that connected to the two chains.

This made it seem as if the advancing swordsman mech had suddenly been locked by a spreader bar!

Though the strong mechanical strength of the legs quickly caused the hasty locking mechanisms to warp and tear apart, the damage had already been done!

"Huh?!"

The swordsman mech lost its balance due to the interruption of its steps and tripped!

"Hah! It actually worked!"

Before the swordsman mech could push itself upright again, the Voiken spearman mech finally caught up and thrust its spear straight through the exposed rear of the fallen machine!

[Team DeVos has lost its melee mech!]

Chapter 4870 Repairability

As Ves and Juliet fixed up their mechs so that they could fight once again, Bobby Orwell and Lizzie Cado reviewed their performance in their past matches and figured out better ways to use the Sensia and Furia in combat.

All of their efforts produced great results.

The Twin Souls possessed significant advantages over most of the other competition mechs. Their designs were more sound while the physical frames were well put together.

At the level of competition in the Twin Weapons Tournament, these technical advantages translated to slight advantages in speed, defense, shock absorption, reaction speed, range of motion, balancing, firepower, mechanical strength and more.

Team Larkinson also had another advantage that became increasingly evident as it advanced into the later rounds

Its mechs were always in better shape than that of their opponents!

The delay between the rounds had dropped considerably. Only 9 matches were held during the third round and only 4 fights took place during the fourth round.

This mechanism rewarded teams whose mechs were stronger. After all, in theory the greater the disparity in performance, the less damage the winning side incurred.

Less damage meant that the mech designers needed less time to fix up their mechs!

This became a lot more evident during the third round.

When Team Larkinson matched up against Team Polter, the mechs presented by the latter made for an unusual combination!

It appeared that Team Polter had spent all of their time on fixing up their striker mech, which was armed with a shotgun that was larger and more powerful than the one held by the Furia.

The dedicated striker mech also carried a lot more shells, allowing it to fire its formidable weapon a lot more times without worrying about running dry!

Team Polter's light skirmisher on the other hand looked as if it had run through a battlefield and only received patches on its largest holes.

The mech designers could have repaired their damaged light skirmisher to its peak condition, but they chose not to because they needed to ration their time.

The results of their decisions became evident.

Team Polter's mechs started out strong. The striker mech immediately managed to blast the Sensia, causing the light skirmisher to get struck by an uncomfortable amount of pellets.

Bobby Orwell did not delay and immediately fired the Furia's complement of smoke and EM missiles.

However, their effect was surprisingly small!

It turned out that Team Polter had made targeted modifications to their mechs to shield their sensor systems and other vulnerable systems from disruption!

Aside from that, the striker mech that got caught in the middle of the smoke cloud had begun to move away as quickly as possible before anything else happened.

This forced the Twin Souls to fight against the mechs of Team Polter in a more straightforward clash.

The striker mech was clearly the biggest threat to the Larkinson machines. The Sensia was especially vulnerable to its shotgun as it was a direct counter to all light mechs!

However, neither Bobby nor Lizzie concerned themselves too much with the striker mech at first.

"Take out the light skirmisher first!"

While the enemy striker mech tried its best to blast the Sensia to pieces, the Furia unloaded all of its firepower towards the opposing light skirmisher!

The Polter light mech tried its best to evade the incoming laser beams and shotgun attacks. It also did its best to use the striker mech as cover, but with the Sensia circling around to pressure it from another direction, it became more difficult to maintain this strategy!

Eventually, the Furia managed to strike the legs of the damaged enemy light skirmisher, causing it to fumble at a critical moment!

Lizzie Cado immediately spotted an opening and dashed her Sensia forward!

A single knife punched through the thin covering material on the center of the opposing light skirmisher's chest. It proceeded to cut through a number of key components, causing the faltering machine to lose a lot of power all of a sudden!

The rest of the match did not last too long after that. Once Team Polter's light skirmisher had been taken out of action before a minute had passed, the Twin Souls immediately utilized a classic pincer maneuver to terrorize the surviving striker mech.

The well-armored but sluggish machine only managed to fire its shotgun at the Furia a few times before the daggers stabbing into its back finally caused it to shut down as well!

[Impressive yet again! As expected of Team Larkinson. The patriarch is well on his way to winning the championship. His mechs have only incurred surface damage this time, so both the Sensia and the Furia will be as good as new once the mech designers have replaced their damaged armor plating.]

[It ended too soon. Team Polter had more potential than this. Its mechs faltered too soon.]

[The fault does not lie in the mech pilots nor the mechs. It is the mech designers of Team Polter that ultimately bear the responsibility of losing. The designs of their mechs are rather basic but they are fairly solid and reliable given how little time the team spent on them. If the striker mech and the light skirmisher both entered the arena in their peak conditions, then the match should have become much more even than the farce that has just ended.

[Hmmm, I understand where you are going with this. Team Polter's mechs have just gone through a tough match in the previous round, so they had to repair a large amount of broken parts. Team Larkinson mechs had just concluded a difficult fight against the Double Up and the Triple Spray designed by Team Hendrix. Yet once the third round commenced, the mechs of one side are in a considerably better shape than the mechs of the other side. What does this reveal?]

[Practical skills matter! If you pull up the records of the mech designers of Team Polter, you will discover that they started out their careers in a design studio. Even after they decided to go independent, they still spent too much time in their design labs and too little time in their workshops. That makes much more of a difference than you realize. Not only is Team Polter slow to repair their damaged machines, its mech designers also do not fully understand how to design their mechs with repairability in mind. Both their striker mech and their light skirmisher take around 20 percent more time to repair than they should due to the inclusion of overly complicated components and the design choices that make the repair and replacement process more tedious and time-consuming than necessary.]

[A mech should not only be judged by their performance when they are in their peak conditions, but also the ease in which an owner can restore its functionality when damaged. Never forget that mechs are machines of war. They are expected to operate in rough terrain and take damage from enemy attacks. Repairability is a particularly important criteria for military mechs. They must be built to operate under the most punishing circumstances. If they get knocked down, they must be

able to get back up as soon as possible. No complaints! If a mech model is too much of a DIVA to endure regular punishment, then it should disappear and make way for superior products!]

The panel of experts did well to highlight the value of repairability and explain how relevant it was in a mech design tournament like this, but Ves did not believe the Senior Mech Designers employed by the DUT understood the full picture.

"They're ignorant of living mech side of our works." He complained to Juliet.

"Can you blame them, Ves? Even our pilots don't really know what they are doing yet. Unlike the other Davutan mech pilots that only need to familiarize themselves with the quirks and properties of their competition mechs, Bobbie and Lizzie must also learn how to cooperate with their living mechs."

The mech pilots from the Federal Military of Davute may have encountered living mechs before, but they never piloted them in person as the Larkinson Clan currently did not supply them with any of its products.

Bobby and Lizzie had undergone the equivalent of a crash course in living mechs!

While it helped a lot that Ves had taken the lack of familiarity of the Davutan mech pilots into account when he designed the Twin Souls, there was still a lot of depth to his works!

No amount of simplification could rob his living mechs from their varied and comprehensive features, many of which were rather subtle and obtuse.

The learning curve of living mechs was measured in years, not days. The earliest mech pilots to come into contact with living mechs such as Melkor, Jannzi and the rest of the old gang occasionally experienced surprise as they discovered another useful function of their machines.

This phenomenon illustrated a profound truth.

It wasn't just the mech pilots that were learning to work with their machines.

The living mechs also possessed the capacity to learn and adapt to their mech pilots!

Whenever Ves inspected the spiritual foundations of his two machines, he saw that they had become more and more in tune with their assigned pilots.

This was a normal process that happened everytime a new living mech came into contact with a new pilot.

What was different was that Ves had made targeted adjustments and changes to hasten the process of adaptation.

After all, the combat phase of the Twin Weapons Tournament only lasted for a single day. Team Larkinson only had to win a few more matches to win the entire competition, so Ves had to make sure that the Senia and the Furia did their utmost to assist their pilots in action!

Every period of downtime was another opportunity for Ves to covertly apply targeted adjustments to the spiritual foundations of his competition mechs.

He had worked with living mechs for many years now and he understood more about their nuances than any other mech designer or spiritual engineer.

The normal process of mech-pilot adaption was normally a gradual process that took months before it reached a threshold.

At that point, the fixed mech pilots that utilized the same living mechs on a regular basis would finally feel their machines had become uniquely 'theirs'.

Regardless of the actual status of ownerships of the hardware in question, as far as the living mechs were concerned, they only had a single true battle partner!

The mech pilot and the living mech trusted each other to such an extent that they could nudge each other and communicate wordlessly as if they were soulmates. This was a wonderful experience to the parties involved, and it was always painful to break up this wonderful partnership in order to reassign the pilot and the living mech to different units.

When Juliet learned what Ves was doing, she looked thoughtful.

"I thought that living mechs were akin to dogs that slowly imprint themselves onto their new owners over time."

"That is a decent description of the adaptation process." Ves nodded as he worked to rip out a few broken parts from the damaged rear side of the Sensia. He also tweaked the spiritual foundation of the light mech while he was at it. "Maybe I should call it an imprinting process instead, because the living mechs all start out as little puppies that latch on to the first mech pilot that treat them well."

"If that is the case, Ves, then aren't you interfering with the free will and sanctity of your living mechs? You are essentially brainwashing them into loving their mech pilots more. If you did this to a human, you would become branded as a war criminal. While I am not that well-versed in living mechs, I thought that a man of your principles would have become more reticent about mistreating the machines that you have brought to life."

Juliet brought up a heavy philosophical matter. Ves slowed down a bit as he tried his best to formulate a satisfying answer.