

The Mech 5511

Chapter 5511 The Great Child

Ves definitely smelled a plot.

For whatever reason, both Director Samandra Avikon and the Vulcanites wanted to convert more people into worshiping Vulcan.

No matter whether this took place through the Creation Association or the Eternal Vulcan Church, the fact of the matter was that they wanted to hoodwink a lot more people into dedicating their lives to the God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship!

Ves would be lying if he said that he remained unmoved. Ever since Vulcan started to practice the Metal God Method, deity cultivation became an explicit part of his progression.

The more people revered him as their deity, the more spiritual feedback he would receive.

All of these worshipers also formed the basis of Vulcan's progression after he ascended to a True God.

Once his incarnation gained the qualifications to harvest the power of actual faith, then he would definitely appreciate the luxury of having a large base of faithful people at his beck and call!

Yet... Ves did not like this at all. He had witnessed too many cases where blind belief and superstition caused people to degenerate.

The example set by the Vulcan Empire stood out the most in his memories!

Ever since he witnessed how a stupid religious argument about Vulcan's race directly triggered the demise of this once-great state, he firmly became convinced that he should never do anything that would lead people down the same path!

This belief and conviction warred against his obvious self-interest in allowing Vulcan to gain more influence among a greater share of the population.

As Ves looked at Director Samandra Avikon and High Priest Joja Firebreath, he suddenly had an awful feeling about their plans. Neither of the two had been forthcoming about their motives and their own intentions.

The two certainly did not convey enough honesty and sincerity to earn his trust and ease his doubts.

Ves eventually resolved his internal conflict.

"I do not speak for Vulcan." He lied to the two. "I can only share my own opinion. As far as I am concerned, red humanity needs to look to each other to survive this dangerous new age. While it is possible that belief in certain deities such as Vulcan may give them the strength to do better in these turbulent times, I do not think that our society should become slaves to them. People are free to believe in whatever they want, but that does not mean I want to push this along."

Neither of the two visitors were pleased by this response.

"The Creation Association has already done much good to the craftsmen who have come to appreciate Vulcan's blessings." Director Samandra Avikon spoke up. "The relationship between a god and his worshipers is anything but one-sided. In fact, compared to other faiths, we are much

more benign to our flock. If you wish to prevent people from going astray, then it is better to convince them to pray to Vulcan rather than a more nefarious god."

That argument sounded pretty logical to Ves, but it was unfortunate that he still had no enthusiasm for this entire business.

"I cannot speak for the Eternal Vulcan Church, but what I can do is set the direction of the Creation Association. The reason why the latter has adopted its current form is because it promotes clear and transparent transactions that benefit both sides. There are no traps or additional obligations that Vulcan imposes onto the craftsmen that make use of his services. I think this is the most suitable way for people to interact with their 'gods'. This is my stance."

The two religious leaders tried to sway Ves a few more times, but he stood his ground the entire time.

Seeing that no progress could be made on this issue, the two eventually gave up on this cause.

"There is nothing more that we need to discuss with you together." Director Samandra eventually said. "I would like to speak to you in private in order to discuss a topic that is particularly sensitive."

Ves nodded in understanding. "We can continue our discussion in a secure chamber that is built underground. Let us go. I can guarantee you that no one will be able to overhear our discussion."

They took an elevator that took them straight to the underground complex of the branch headquarters.

A secure chamber was a standard requirement to every branch of the Larkinson Clan.

Though Ves did not have total confidence that it was secure enough to prevent any form of monitoring, that was fine.

"Meow!"

"I know that you have been enjoying a nap, but I really need your sensitive nose. Now go sweep up all of the bugs!"

A disgruntled Lucky wearily started to sweep up all of the hidden and dormant bugs and listening devices.

Compared to a year ago, the cat's ability to detect the tiniest and most hidden bugs had improved once more.

After his metallic body incorporated archtech, Lucky's sensitivity towards any form of technology had grown once more!

The cat was not the only one to conduct a thorough inspection. Ves utilized his spiritual senses as well as his spatial manipulation abilities to detect if anything metaphysical was amiss.

Nothing seemed out of place, but in order to be sure, Ves utilized his phase lord abilities to form a special spatial barrier between himself and Samandra.

The woman clearly sensed that the air had changed around her. Perhaps she was able to perceive more, but she kept her gaze low in a sign of restraint and respect.

After activating a powerful jamming device, Ves brought out Blinky who promptly established a small design network.

The spiritual connection that tied Samandra's spirituality to the design network was not too strong, but it was enough for him to get an impression of what was on her mind.

Her mental activity was... confusing.

The woman possessed a strong devotion to Ves as well as other entities.

For whatever reason, she saw no contradiction between her abnormal beliefs in multiple different 'gods'!

Ves did not know how she could be so sick in her mind, but he wanted nothing to do with her madness. He only formed this design network so that he could communicate with her in the most secure method possible.

"Tell me what you wanted to convey to me. I hope your need for caution is justified."

The woman suddenly grew a bit hesitant as she was about to reveal her purpose for approaching Ves.

"When are you having your next child with your wife?" She conveyed over the spiritual connection as if she was already proficient with this method of communication.

"Pardon?" Ves blinked.

Of all of the topics she could bring up, why the hell would she want to bring up this topic?

Ves did not see how this was relevant to a woman like Samandra Avikon!

"To be honest, the topic of having more children has slipped from my mind." He replied. "I think Gloriana has paid less attention to it as well. We both want more children, but so much has happened as of late that our lives have become busier than ever. It has become a significant burden for us to raise Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine. Though we do not begrudge their entry into our lives, it is difficult to give them the attention they deserve while also freeing up enough time to do our work. Neither of us are eager to cut our work time further by raising another batch of children. This is why neither of us have really brought this matter up, especially now that our workload has ballooned."

The former priestess frowned. "Your responsibilities may have grown, but so have your capabilities. You are a much more powerful mech designer than before, and your wife should be able to complete her work much faster once she has completed her implant upgrade."

"That may be true, but once we start to work on first-class mech design projects, the amount of work it takes to complete them to our satisfaction will definitely explode as well. I simply cannot imagine that we can reserve enough time to raise an additional bunch of brats."

"You should have been raising your fourth child by now." Samandra conveyed. "Your second son would have had a bright future ahead of him. He would have been our savior."

That sounded weird!

Ves immediately raised his guard against the woman. "What are you talking about?"

The woman hesitated for a moment, but she eventually shared what was truly on her mind.

"You may not believe me, but... I have been receiving oracles from Ylvaine for a number of years. Several of them speak of the importance of your fourth offspring. Before the Age of Dawn, Ylvaine predicted that your wife would have given birth to another baby boy at this time of year. That promised child is of great importance to us all. Despite the unexpected upheaval caused by the Great Severing, Ylvaine's prophecies still state that your second son must be born. His birth and growth is of great importance."

Samandra's emotions spiked increasingly more as she conveyed her earnest feelings about this sketchy prediction.

Ves narrowed his eyes. He hadn't interacted much with Ylvaine as of late. What the hell had this design spirit been doing all of this time?! Why did the Great Prophet become so fixated on a son that did not exist at this time?

"Can you tell me why my supposed second son is so important?"

"I cannot tell you that because I do not know." Samandra sheepishly responded through the design network. "Ylvaine has made this claim, and I believe he is right. I cannot tell you what will happen if your second son never has a chance to come to life, but Ylvaine believes that it will be detrimental to you and the rest of the people that you care about. The window of time is closing. You only have a couple of years left. You MUST conceive a son right away, if not with Gloriana, then another woman. The Great Prophet has never been particular about this requirement..."

Ves loudly coughed. "Let's not wade into this particular topic! While I can believe that you and Ylvaine think this prophecy is legitimate, that does not mean that I share the same opinion. What you are saying is way too dubious. How can a single child save everyone's lives? Why does it have to be my second son? Can't someone else fulfill the same role? There are so many talented and capable humans in the Red Ocean that they can also bear this burden. In fact, why don't you leave this matter to me? I do not think I am worse than any of my offspring."

Samandra firmly shook her head. "As much as I respect you and believe in your ability, you cannot replace your second son in this matter. It is impossible for you to take over his mission. It is even more unthinkable for others to fulfill his purpose."

"What? Why not?! You are withholding way too much information. You need to share something concrete if you want to convince me to take this prophecy seriously."

The robed woman looked conflicted. She clearly did not feel that it was the right decision to share what else she had on her mind, but Ves' obstinacy clearly left her with no other choice.

"Please do your best to keep yourself under control. What I am about to reveal to you will undoubtedly affect our future, which is not conducive to fulfilling Ylvaine's vision."

Ves let out an impatient growl. "Just spit it out. What is so important that you cannot wait to urge me to have another son?" "

"The truth is... the fourth child that carries your bloodline will carry the name of... Ylvaine." !! !!

The secure chamber started to shake. Though Ves completely fell silent, the fact that his spatial abilities grew out of control was an ominous sign that he was struggling to control his emotions!

There was no way he could maintain his composure after this explosive revelation!

Chapter 5512 The Vileness of Prophecies

How could Ves possibly maintain his composure after he heard that his supposed fourth son would be named after a charlatan and a swindler?

Ves could see no reason why he would possibly name his next son after a man he personally despised!

Ylvaine did not share any family relations with the Larkinson Family. Though the design spirit that Ves had managed to construct a long time ago turned rather decent, that did not mean he liked what the name represented!

More than that, Ves hated the determinism of Ylvaine's supposed prophecies. Though he understood the value of gaining forewarning of certain dangers, he did not like it at all that his behavior and the behavior of others had to follow a predetermined script in order to reach a specific outcome.

It made him feel that he was a prisoner to his own fate!

Ves did not like to be told what to do. Telling him a prophecy was little different from issuing an order. Just by giving him a glimpse of a hypothetical future, his expectations and his planning for the future had already changed in an irrevocable manner.

A single prediction about the future deprived all of the mystery and the wonder of what might happen in a day, in a week or in a year!

For example, after hearing that his next child would definitely be a son called Ylvaine who would go on to do great things, how could Ves possibly feel any joy or happiness about fathering such an offspring?

Part of what made parenting so fulfilling to him was that his children could develop in every direction.

By shaping and influencing his kids over the span of their childhood, he would be able to discover more about them while at the same time help them grow in surprising ways.

Ves really did not set any high expectations for his subsequent children. He had already placed an unreasonable amount of future responsibilities on his current offspring, so he felt it was unreasonable to maintain this pattern when it was not even necessary anymore.

Besides, he hadn't even decided whether he wanted to have any additional children.

While Gloriana had mentioned plenty of times in the past that she wanted to follow the Hexer tradition and have six children, their current work and obligations made it far too difficult to free up any further room in their schedules.

The timing was all wrong. The Hyper Generation and the Age of Dawn had just begun. Ves needed to upgrade dozens of existing mech designs in order to preserve the existing product lines of the LMC.

The longer it took to update all of those outdated mech models, the more his mech company lost relevance in today's mech market!

It was much easier to destroy than to create. Ves did not want to throw away years of hard work and accumulation just because he felt obliged to spend a few more hours every day to give his younger children enough quality time.

Though Ves admitted to himself that he had not been the most ideal parent to Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine, he did not want to compound this problem even further by adding another bunch of brats to his stable.

He knew that if he welcomed any additional babies into his family, he would definitely feel obliged to raise them to the best of his ability.

There was no way he could accept anything less! Caring about family was one of his most cherished ideals and principles, and he would never compromise it for anything!

This caused him to become unwilling to have another child, at least in the short term.

According to his prior planning, Ves believed it was better that he would continue to raise his current batch of children to adulthood while at the same time stabilize his current position.

One or two decades later, Marvaine would probably be ready to go off on his own. At that time, Ves would probably turn into a well-established Senior Mech Designer in a period where rapid technological progression and major geopolitical upheaval had subsided.

He would undoubtedly remain preoccupied with a lot of important matters, but they would probably be less acute than before.

That would be a more acceptable time for Ves and Gloriana to complete their 'collection'.

Ves did not even mind it if he wanted a century before having any other children.

Although it would be rather weird, it was not unheard of in modern human society.

Much of the processes related to producing children had become artificial and mechanical nowadays. The physical condition of the father and mother no longer dictated the outcomes anymore.

Since the output did not impose any harsh demands on the conditions of the parents, then what did it matter if Ves and his wife waited until they were a few centuries older before having a batch of offspring?

Doing so would probably cause his family tree to get all messed up, but that was alright.

At least it would never look as awful as the one from the Gemini Family!

Therefore, Ves felt there were many acceptable decisions he could make on having additional children, but he would definitely not choose to have them now of all times!

If for any reason he was crazy enough to change his mind on this stance, then that did not necessarily mean that he wanted his next child to become deeply entangled with an absurd prophecy.

Ves crossed his arms while staring vigilantly at Samandra Avikon.

As a former religious fanatic from the Life Research Association, the woman had the odd ability to embrace many faiths without getting mired up in their contradictions.

He could clearly feel through the design network that Samandra not only believed in the divinity of Ylvaine with all of her heart, but that she also saw the prophecy as a verdict that must come true!

It was exactly this sort of deterministic attitude that pissed Ves off! The more people expected his fourth child to become a destined savior or whatever, the less he wanted to contribute to this future!

"I do not like it." Ves conveyed through Blinky as he crossed his arms. "I do not like being told what to do. I despise the very concept of a prophecy, and this goes further than that. Don't think I have forgotten about James Ylvaine. Those crazy believers tried to bring back their prophet by raising a clone that is based on his genes. This sounds worse because instead of occupying a body that does not have a spirit, my baby's original soul might get replaced or taken over by your Great Prophet! That is no different from killing my son! How can I possibly treat such an abomination as my own child?"

Seeing that Ves became a lot more agitated, the director of the Creation Association maintained a calm facade.

She clung on the certainty of the knowledge bestowed by a future seer.

"Your second son shall not come to harm because of this. The Great Prophet has no intention of causing him any harm. Instead, your son will receive vital gifts that can help him navigate the currents of the future once he has developed his talents. The name he is meant to bear is not a curse. It is a blessing."

"That doesn't make any sense! Even if I decide to have another son, I am more inclined to call him Paul or Clyde. Ylvaine isn't even qualified to rank at the bottom of the list of eligible names."

"You do not understand." Samantha shook her head. "The name is important because it will bestow your son with a special mark that shall elevate his life. You can think of it as an inheritance, though the reality is more complicated than that. Rest assured that Ylvaine shall still be your child in body and spirit. He will not be a puppet or a nefarious attempt of the design spirit to regain his mortal coil. The two will still exist as separate and independent entities."

"I do not believe that is true. How can the two share the same name and have nothing to do with each other? Once Ylvaine the son develops similar powers to Ylvaine the design spirit, who is to say they won't merge with each other or whatever? This sounds like an obvious ploy!"

"It is not a ploy, sir! It is destiny! Your second son is meant for greatness. In a more distant future, people will need a seer who can lead them to safety in a period where you will yearn for it the most. Once you have arrived at that point in time, you will think back on this opportunity and thank yourself for making the right choice for yourself and many other humans."

The more Samantha and Ylvaine spoke of the certainty of a potential future, the more Ves wanted to set fire to it by completely ruling out the possibility of having any further children!

In fact, he even felt tempted to screw them over by turning his fourth child into a daughter rather than a son!

Ves would have liked to see their faces once Gloriana gave birth to another beautiful baby girl. The scheming design spirit would never be able to find purchase in such a child!

"I don't believe in the concept of prophecies." He said. "What Ylvaine has seen is only one of many possible futures. While He has made plenty of good predictions over the years, I have watched enough fantasy dramas to know how the heroes always end up getting screwed over by relying too

much on prophecies. The more people act according to assumptions made about the future, the less they are able to respond to accidents and unanticipated developments."

The woman in purple shook her head yet again. It was as if Ves was a stubborn child who had to be told that he was wrong over and over again.

"You are not wrong about keeping up your guard, but prophecies are not as nefarious as you think. You can think of them as sensor readouts, but instead of allowing you to gather data across space, they can give you valuable glimpses across time. There is no inherent good or evil in data. What truly determines their worth is how you use them. Just as how the readings of a long-range optical sensor can warn you that your starship is on a collision course with a distant asteroid, a prophecy made by a powerful seer can warn you that your fleet will enter into an ambush if it continues to travel along its current route."

Though the analogy sounded a bit weird, it recontextualized prophecies in a way that sounded less objectionable to Ves.

He had to admit that gathering more data was always useful than staying in the dark. Intelligence was one of the most valuable resources in the cosmos. There were many times where he and his clan took advantage of information asymmetry to trap their opponents and secure victory with greater ease than normal!

Since the Larkinsons could take advantage of this difference, then so could others!

One of Ves' greatest fears was that other powerful parties would one day force him into defeat by leading him into a trap!

He had plenty of enemies, and not all of them could be dealt with by his clan and the Bluejay Fleet.

It was much better to avoid disadvantageous situations in the first place rather than to blunder into them and be forced to fight for his life.

Ves started to look at Director Samandra with a more intrigued expression.

He couldn't believe it, but he was actually starting to consider whether it was a good idea to follow this supposed prophecy and give birth to a life-saving seer!

Though Ylvaine could already do a similar job, the design spirit experienced too many constraints.

Having a second one at hand not only introduced a lot of redundancies, but also provided more extensive coverage.

In that sense, having a second son and naming him Ylvaine was nothing different than installing an additional early warning sensor onto a starship!

Chapter 5513 Planting a Seed

"No." Ves eventually decided. "As much as your argument makes sense, it is not enough to disregard all of the reasons that object to having any further children at this time. Even if I am in favor of raising another son, I will most certainly bestow him with a name that does not sound anything close to Ylvaine."

"Will you not reconsider sir? The value of prophecies are undeniable. They have already benefited you in the past, and they can give you even more revelations in the future. We have entered the Age

of Dawn. With Messier 87 bathing us in exotic radiation, seers such as your future son will be able to make much more powerful predictions."

That made sense. The ubiquity of E energy radiation made it a lot easier to fuel costly abilities.

Ylvaine's main problem in the past had always been his inability to pay the price of gleaning the future of more powerful beings.

The design spirit was unable to make any accurate and direct readings of the future whenever ace pilots, god pilots and other supremely powerful entities became involved!

This was also one of the reasons why Ves looked down on Ylvaine. His future sight could easily be blocked and interfered with if anyone powerful became involved.

Given that uncle Ark and grandfather Benjamin had both become ace pilot candidates at this time, the Larkinson Clan would soon reach a point where Ylvaine's sight would become even more restricted!

The only ways for this design spirit to regain its effectiveness was to become more powerful or figure out a better way to leverage E energy radiation.

It would probably take a lot of time before Ylvaine could overcome these hurdles. That meant that Ylvaine was of little use to Ves in the present.

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "I do not need to rely too much on this. All of this sounds far too sketchy and dangerous to me. I have enough confidence in myself and the rest of our clan. Knowing too much about the future is not always a good thing. It is better to preserve its mystery and avoid getting lost in all of this nonsense. Living in the future is worse than living in the present."

This was what he truly believed. His Mastery experiences had a strong influence on his views.

All of the times his consciousness traveled to the past and completely altered the timeline actually frightened him a lot.

Even though the current timeline already reflected all of the time travel shenanigans, including the ones that he had yet to embark upon, Ves always felt like he was toying with forces that he did not understand!

He did not like it when he lost control. His tolerance for this sort of stuff had diminished. He just wanted to continue to engage in honest mech design work without dealing with any further complications.

Samandra did not give up, though. She presented one more argument to her superior.

"Sir, even if you look down on prophecies, that does not mean that others will have the same attitude. Prophecy and foresight can bestow undeniable advantages when they fall into the right or wrong people. What do you think will happen to you and our clan if your enemies have prophets to advise them while you have no one except for a single design spirit, who you do not even respect?"

Ves immediately frowned. "From what I can gather, none of these supposed prophets are infallible. Didn't you mention earlier that Ylvaine failed to predict the Great Severing, thereby causing all of his prior prophecies and predictions to become invalid? This shows that he can only foresee one or several futures out of an infinite amount of possible outcomes. Since this is the case, there should be ways to exploit this vulnerability and completely scramble any predictions made by hostile parties."

"That is easier said than done, sir." Samandra replied. "Prophets know each other well. When one of them makes predictions that involve another, the latter can not only sense what has happened, but make targeted countermeasures that can invalidate this potential danger. The worst enemy of a prophet is another prophet. Even if you never intend to make proactive use of the abilities of a seer, you can at least be assured that a friendly one can protect you from this angle."

That sounded both dubious and unreliable. While this dynamic sounded similar to the duality of spies working as intelligence and counterintelligence agents, it all became a lot murkier when prophets took the lead!

Ves would much rather create a purpose-built design spirit that could employ a much more effective counter against this sort of crap!

Though Samandra tried to convince Ves of the necessity to birth a son called Ylvaine, the woman failed to get past his obstinacy.

Ves couldn't help but smirk when this outcome came to pass.

"If prophecies are truly useful, then why hasn't Ylvaine fed you with a debate strategy that can successfully win me over?"

Surprisingly enough, the woman did not look too disappointed.

"Who can say that our appeal has failed? While this is hardly the most ideal outcome, we have presented our case to you. It is up to you to decide what to do with the information that you have received. There is still time for the promised son to come forth. So long as you and your wife ever change your mind in the following two years, our glorious savior shall be born."

Why did Ves feel that these words contained another trap? Now, it was impossible for Ves to casually shove this suggestion out of his mind!

Perhaps he would constantly rethink this conversation and question whether it was a better idea to follow the framework set by this prophecy.

This issue was so far out of his area of expertise that he struggled to make sense of it all. Perhaps he needed a second opinion.

"Goldie. What do you think?"

The secure chamber became brighter and warmer when the Golden Cat manifested herself.

"Nyaaaaa-"

"Mrow mrow."

The ancestral spirit playfully exchanged licks with Blinky before staring curiously at Ves.

"You should know what we have been talking about. What do you think about this nonsense? Is Samandra being sincere?"

"Nya nya nya."

"I have figured that out myself. Do you really think it is a good idea to follow her suggestion?"

Goldie looked uncertain. "Nyaa... nyaaa..."

"Ugh. So you don't know anything. Well, I can't blame you. This is way outside of your area of expertise as well."

There was only one particular entity that Ves knew of that probably knew a lot more, but he was incredibly reluctant to call her over.

He could do without her interference. Besides, who knew whether she could remain impartial when it came to her own possible grandson?

Women never made sense to Ves! The more irrational they became, the less trustworthy they tended to be. That seemed to be a universal rule.

Of course, it was not as if men were any better.

"You can go now, Goldie."

"Nya!"

Ves ultimately stuck to his decision. Though he had no way of knowing whether he had made the right choice, that was just a fact of life. He did not want his life to be dictated by vague predictions that could only ever make predictions about the highest probability future timelines.

Director Samandra Avikon eventually had to depart from the branch premises without receiving the solid promise and commitment that she was hoping to hear.

Still, the coy smile on her face showed that she still had faith that her earlier appeal might have made a difference.

The woman managed to plant a seed in Ves' mind that could sprout at any point in the next two years.

That was already enough as far as she and Ylvaine were concerned.

Ves let out a tired breath. "Next!"

Fortunately for his sanity, the next visitor did not make any insane requests such as making sure his fifth child would be born as a dwarf.

Ves would have no compulsions of kicking the dwarven envoy straight out of the Bortele System!

"The Eternal Vulcan Empire still relies heavily on mechs to fight against its enemies." High Priest Joja Firebreath gruffly explained. "We have no issue with them. We have many mech designers among our people, and they are more than enough to meet our needs."

"If that is the case, why come to me?" Ves asked.

"We came because there are mechs that only you can design. Our eternal sovereign is not pleased with the inability for our dwarven mech designers to create anything comparable to your famous living mechs."

The Iron Emperor had a good idea. He clearly recognized the strength and potential of Ves' products!

Yet whenever Ves thought about the insane plan that this crazy dwarven leader had in store for the future, his satisfaction immediately made way for dread.

There was no way that Ves wanted to get too closely involved with the Vulcanites!

Even though he was pretty sure that the Red Two already smelled an unusually close relationship between Ves and the Vulcanites, the two did not share any close relations at the moment.

The story would become entirely different if he started to design powerful living mechs for them just like what he had done for the Hexers!

"If you want me to design a batch of mechs for the Eternal Vulcan Empire, I am afraid I have to disappoint you. My schedule is already stuffed. I really do not have the time to fulfill any further commitments."

The dwarven priest smiled. "Our proposal should not slow you down. On the contrary. The opposite should happen. We wish to send a batch of young Novice Mech Designers that have recently graduated from our mech design universities. We would like you to let them work and study under you for a period of several years. This should be long enough for them to learn how to design living mechs from you. As long as they have received enough guidance for them to design living mechs in the future, they can work out the remainder by themselves."

Ves did not expect to hear such a proposal.

"If you want your dwarves to learn how to design living mechs, why not enroll them into the Eden Institute of Business & Technology? That is the most proper venue for me to systematically teach students on anything they need to know about living mechs at their stage."

"Impossible." Joja Firebreath shook his head and scowled. "Ever since you became a tier 3 galactic citizen, the Eden Institute has become one of the most desired universities overnight. The amount of applicants has skyrocketed. Only Terrans can get accepted into the school. Very few foreigners are accepted anymore, and each of them have paid heavy concessions to get inside."

"That means that there is still a chance."

A bitter expression appeared on the shorter individual's face. "Not for us. Look at us, professor. The Terrans despise our people. We do not match their aesthetic preferences. They see us as ugly, short and unkempt savages that are only fit for drudge work. Under no circumstances has any respectable Terran university enrolled a dwarf. Hardly any of our people live in Terran space in the first place. Those snobby tall folk discriminate against us so much that even the best of us can never earn their appreciation and respect."

That surprised Ves a lot. He actually never thought that the Terrans would brazenly treat the dwarven people in this fashion!

The Terrans had always been nice, respectful and polite to Ves. They never acted too arrogant or stuck-up in his presence, but he knew that was only because his identity and accomplishments had crossed the gap between classes.

It was still hard for Ves to reconcile his good impressions of the Terrans with the much less flattering description that he just heard.

Chapter 5514 Fair Trade

A seemingly simple solution became invalid because of a stupid reason.

Why couldn't the Eden Institute enroll a bunch of dwarven mech design students?

Did it matter that much that these dwarves simply did not look as beautiful and perfect as the rest of the student body?

This was one of the most nonsensical reasons for rejection that he had ever heard!

According to his own views on the mech industry, the only criteria that mech designers cared about was whether their works fulfilled the needs of their clients.

It made no difference whether a mech was designed by a human or a dwarf.

What actually mattered was their skills, their experience, their design styles and other profession-related parameters.

Mech designers were not actors or politicians. They could do their jobs just fine if they chose to lock themselves up in their design labs.

While looks could certainly play a certain role in marketing, it would be easy enough for dwarves to hire a bunch of pretty faces to act as their spokespeople to the public.

Perhaps Ves would do so as well once he became older and grew tired of this chore. Addressing the public could be exhausting when he constantly had to be careful about what he was allowed to reveal.

As Ves asked a few more questions about the treatment that dwarves received in Terran space, his expression continued to fall.

The high priest of the Eternal Vulcan Church expected to be met with such a response.

"This is the life of a dwarf. No matter whether we are third-raters or first-raters, we will always be met with scorn and derision from the tall folk. Nothing we do can change their minds and earn their respect. I do not particularly blame most of them. Our people have diverged too much from general humanity. No matter what other people may say, no human will ever call a dwarf his brother, and vice versa. They are much more inclined to treat each other as individuals of separate species."

This was the core ideology of the Vulcanites. The Iron Emperor had already made it clear to Ves that dwarvenkind should not even be mentioned in the same breath as humankind!

Ves did not want to discuss this contentious topic in further detail. He accepted the story given by the dwarven priest.

"I see. Since your dwarven mech designers won't be able to receive fair treatment from the Terrans, you would rather send them directly to me. Do you expect me to treat your people better?"

"Most definitely!" Joja Firebreath responded with much greater enthusiasm than before. "You are Vulcan's envoy and the living embodiment of his power over mechs! Our eternal sovereign has personally commended you for your honesty and integrity. Not every dwarf believes you are kind to our people due to actions that you have made in the past, but how can man who carries Vulcan's blessing ever be an enemy of dwarvenkind? We have full confidence that you and your Larkinsons will treat our dwarven mech designers as equals rather than subhumans."

Ves couldn't help but take on an odd expression. To be honest, he never expected Rion Aaden to ascribe so many virtues to him. Was it truly a good idea to let him become responsible for a bunch of dwarves?

"I am not entirely comfortable with this idea." He said. "If you want me to guide these dwarven mech designers, they need to do more than study. They need to participate in my living mech design projects as assistants. While I do not have any objections to that if they were members of my Larkinson Clan, that is not the case this time."

The high priest raised his meaty hand in a placating gesture. "There is no need to assign them any important work. They are not spies and we do not want to give you the impression that they are sent to steal from you. It is more than acceptable to block access to more sensitive mech designs and technologies. Our suggestion is that you assign them to work on less sensitive and important mech design projects. Your mech company has many commercial mech models that are so common that they hardly hold any secrets anymore. As long as our dwarven prospects can obtain enough guidance and experience on living mechs, we will be happy with the outcome."

That sounded rather reasonable.

"What can you tell me about these mech designers? How good are they? What do they excel in? How many do you intend to send? How long do you want them to work in my mech company?"

"We do not ask too much from you. We are considering 5 candidates. Each of them are among the best first-class Novice Mech Designers that have graduated from our institutions. Our mech design universities may not be as good as the Eden Institute, but we have our own strengths. Each of our Novices know how to design proper first-class multipurpose mechs, though they are most accustomed to designing them in the dwarven humanoid form. We have not yet decided how long they should stay in your clan, but we hope that they can assist you for at least 3 years."

Intriguing. Unlike his earlier talk with Samandra Avikon, Ves felt much more comfortable dealing with Joja Firebreath.

This was a straightforward negotiation on a proposal that did not contain anything objectionable.

Though Ves did not want to let in too many outsiders who could learn all kinds of stuff from him, it should be easy enough to restrict their access to anything he was not willing to share.

He understood the value of obtaining five first-class mech designers of higher pedigrees.

There was no doubt that the Eternal Vulcan Empire would be sending five of the most talented and promising mech designers. Ves could already tell from this pitch that the Vulcanites deeply wanted to gain the ability to design their own living mechs.

For what purpose, Ves did not care. At this stage of his progression, it would be better if more and more mech designers raised the presence of living mechs!

There was no way that Ves could find the time or motivation to design mechs for the dwarves. It was a good alternative for their own mech industry to solve this problem in their stead.

After all, only dwarven mech designers knew best what their own people wanted to pilot.

Ves clearly could not do as well considering that his understanding of dwarves turned out to be inadequate.

In any case, the quality of these visiting mech designers should never be low.

Even Novices could be powerful as long as they were fully fledged first-class mech designers!

Ves had met many of their kind at the Eden Institute. Even if they were not as good as Alexa, they should be almost just as skilled, knowledgeable and productive!

He would definitely be able to update all of his outdated lastgen mech lines within two years with all of this additional help!

His gaze grew sharper. He was more than willing to help the Vulcanites out, but that did not mean he wanted to trade away his services for free.

The privilege of studying under a tier 3 galactic citizen should never be given away so cheaply!

If the Vulcanites did not give enough concessions to Ves to make this trade worthwhile, then he would not be inclined to accept this deal.

This was despite the fact that he had already begun to look forward to working a bunch of dwarven mech designers to the bone!

"What is the Eternal Vulcan Empire willing to trade?"

"We are willing to give you a number of concessions, ranging from technologies, collaborations, rare materials and even starships."

Ves could easily obtain most of this elsewhere, but the last one was different!

There was no denying that the Larkinson Clan needed starships the most!

"Are you willing to buy my services for a first-class fleet carrier?"

"Unacceptable! Our dwarven people are isolated and struggling. In order to fulfill our ultimate cause, we have paid far too much to gather our diaspora and give them new homes and workplaces. All of this investment has emptied much of our coffers and left us short of everything. Each of our starships, particularly our first-class ones, are priceless to us. A first-class fleet carrier is our most strategic asset that we rely on to defend ourselves. We are not as rich and profligate as the Terran ancient clans. We cannot easily make up for a single capital ship."

Though Ves deliberately tried to keep his distance from anything related to the Eternal Dwarven Empire, that did not mean he had no clue of how large it had grown.

The Iron Emperor had done such a good job at gathering dwarves across human space that he had built up a scary following!

Even if most of his subjects were second-raters and third-raters, there were more than first-raters among them to turn his Eternal Vulcan Empire into a power that was no less than an average first-rate colonial state!

"My time and attention is precious." Ves bluntly stated. "If your empire is unwilling to pass on enough remuneration, then I do not feel inclined to accommodate your young talents. A first-class fleet carrier may be of considerable cost to your empire, but the fact that you have capital-grade shipyards that can construct more of them means that a single one is not as vital as you claim. Your dwarven state should be more than capable of transferring one into my clan. By the way, I don't want a centuries-old rust bucket that is multiple generations out of date. I will only accept a fleet carrier that was designed and constructed during the Phasewater Generation."

"That is outrageous, professor! With all due respect, I believe that not even Vulcan will approve of such a lopsided trade. The value of your teachings is great, but the value of a modern first-class fleet carrier is much greater under the current circumstances!"

"Oh really now?"

Ves smirked as he lowered his arm, pulled out the Hammer of Brilliance from his toolbelt and caused it to flare!

As the High Priest of the Eternal Vulcan Church, Joja Firebreath was most certainly familiar with the glow of his god!

The dwarf immediately made a few ceremonial gestures before bowing in respect.

"H-Hail Vulcan!"

Ves thought about letting Vulcan manifest right inside this secure chamber in order to hammer home the effect, but that would be too excessive.

This was already enough.

"Do not underestimate the value of receiving my guidance." Ves spoke in a softer tone after he slowly put his hammer back into its place. "Your dwarven talents will be working with me on a frequent basis. I will have to teach them a lot about actual living mechs, if only to prevent them from botching their work. I can personally guarantee you that I will teach them more about living mechs than what I have passed on in the course that I am teaching at the Eden Institute. You do not have to be afraid that I will give them a few words before neglecting them for the rest of their stay. I will be attentive and earnest in fulfilling my end of the bargain. You will not give up a first-class fleet carrier in vain."

That caused Joja Firebreath to fall into silence. The troubled expression showed that he felt awfully conflicted about this trade.

"I do not have the authorization to accept these terms on behalf of the Eternal Vulcan Empire." The dwarf eventually said. "I will need to return and make contact with our eternal sovereign. Only our highest leader possesses the right to approve the concession that you have demanded."

Ves smiled. "That's okay. There is plenty of time. Do not expect me to lower my demands, though. If your leader isn't willing to give me a first-class fleet carrier, then do not bother coming back. Is that clear?"

Chapter 5515 Small Concessions

Ves shook hands with the departing high priest.

The negotiations had dragged on quite a while despite the fact that it was just the two of them. Ves demanded a high price for his personal guidance, but the Vulcanites truly did not want to give up an entire first-class fleet carrier for this benefit.

Though foja Firebreath was not a professional negotiator, he was a first-rater who had managed to climb up to the upper echelon of the Eternal Vulcan Empire. His intelligence and skillset had to be impressive in order to compete against many other highly capable dwarves.

The bearded dwarf tried many ways to reduce Ves' asking price.

For example, he attempted to make Ves agree to provide his services in exchange for a first-class combat carrier or a capital ship that was not built for combat.

When that did not work, High Priest Firebreath attempted to persuade Ves to accept an older fleet carrier that could still keep up due to frequent upgrades.

Yet no matter how many times the dwarf tried to make Ves see reason, none of it worked.

"I have stated my price. It is up to your sovereign to decide whether he will accept it." Ves stated while he crossed his arms. "My time is valuable, so I would rather not waste my time on any distractions if there aren't enough incentives. Do you understand my point?"

The most powerful way to strengthen his bargaining position was by making it clear that he was quite willing to refuse this deal.

He knew quite well that it would be a considerable missed opportunity for him to miss out on an easy opportunity to obtain a valuable first-class starship. No one was willing to give away such an amazing strategic asset for free, especially in a time period where every starfaring vessel had skyrocketed in value!

Yet Ves believed he still had other ways of building up a small but formidable first-class fleet through other means.

All of the time and effort he spent on building up relationships with the mechers and the Terrans should have made it possible to conduct more serious transactions.

He could even reach out to other first-class states and organizations for cooperation if he wanted to. There were plenty of clever people who would be glad to cooperate with a rising tier 3 galactic citizen who clearly had a lot of potential.

The reality was that Ves did not need to cooperate with the Eternal Vulcan Empire.

Rather, it was the Vulcanites who yearned for his power!

As soon as Ves made it clear that he understood his real value, the dwarf no longer tried to obtain an outright discount, but instead tried to weasel in additional benefits.

If the Eternal Vulcan Empire had to give up a modern fleet carrier, then the dwarven state better obtained enough benefits to make this transaction worthwhile!

Ves was a bit more willing to give a bit of ground on these issues. So long as he obtained a powerful first-class fleet carrier, he did not mind working a bit more to secure this deal.

After all, the Iron Emperor had the ultimate say over whether his empire was willing to accept this trade. The dwarven leader was no fool. It made no sense for him to weaken his state just to obtain marginal benefits in return.

"We would like to place 50 of our Novice Mech Designers in your Design Department."

"Absolutely not! That is way too much! I do not have the time or mental capacity to guide so many dwarves at the same time! I will take 10 under my wing, but not a single dwarf more. Is that clear?"

"If we sign this contract, then we would like your promise that you will not accept similar proposals from other groups. Otherwise, our head-start in designing living mechs will lose its value. We wish to retain exclusivity for a span of 10 years."

"That is too excessive. Too much can happen in a decade. I will accept no less than 3 years, for the same reason that I have stated before. I can promise you that during the time your dwarven mech designers work in my mech company, I will not add any more guest designers to my design teams. This does not count for occasional collaborations with other high-ranking mech designers."

"We... can add these terms to the contract."

By the time they drafted a set of terms that both sides found acceptable, if only barely, the high priest needed to go back and wait for a response from his state.

Before the dwarf left, Ves asked one more question.

"Of all of the people that the Iron Emperor could have sent to negotiate this deal, why did he send you of all people?"

The Vulcanite priest turned around and adopted a pious expression.

"Your identity is too esteemed to be met by one of our more secular officials. Our government has deemed that only a devoted priest of Vulcan is permitted to approach a holy mech designer such as yourself. Many of my people do not dare to show any sign of disrespect towards our shared god."

That caused Ves to frown. As far as he knew, old Rion Aaden had turned into an incredibly ambitious and power-hungry leader.

There was no way that this once-miserable dwarf wanted to put Vulcan in charge of everything.

It was in the Iron Emperor's best interest to limit the influence of the Eternal Vulcan Church.

However, Ves could already tell from the many clues given by the high priest that Rion had obviously failed in this endeavor!

The dwarf heavily relied on the Imperial Crown forged by Ves to win over a huge amount of dwarves, including many first-raters who would not have otherwise surrendered their loyalty to a disgraced leader!

The Iron Emperor had managed to forge a powerful dwarven empire by exploiting Vulcan's glow, but the consequence of his amazing success was that their 'god' had become the sole binding factor that kept all of these disparate dwarves together!

This was the downside of using such a shortcut. The foundation of the powerful dwarven state was its church.

The Iron Emperor might enjoy a notable reputation in his own empire, but his power and influence paled in comparison to true tyrants such as the Star Emperor of the New Rubarth Empire.

It was due to this shortcoming that the Iron Emperor had no choice but to lean so much on Vulcan to stabilize his fragile state.

Should it be any surprise that the separation between church and state was nonexistent in the Eternal Dwarven Empire?

Ves couldn't help but smirk at this outcome.

It served that bastard right for forcing Ves to craft a masterwork crown to symbolize his rule.

Though the Iron Emperor still tried many ways to gradually steer the Eternal Vulcan Empire towards secularism, the fact that his dwarven state still carried the name of a god showed that he was not winning this battle!

"Don't wait too long to give a response." Ves told the high priest. "Once I am done in Bortele, I will return to New Constantinople. It will probably be much harder for you to reach me by that time. It is best if we can conclude this deal within a week."

"That does not leave us with enough time to finalize all of the terms."

"Tough luck, then. Tell your sovereign to hurry up and make up his mind. He's a decisive leader, so I am sure he can get it done in time."

As the dwarven envoy finally left the branch headquarters of the Larkinson Clan, Ves did not know whether the Vulcanites would agree to this trade.

"It doesn't really matter."

Ves was fine with either outcome. Without the need to watch over a bunch of dwarven mech designers, he would have less distractions in his life. He also did not need to withhold a lot of information whenever he was in their presence.

Time passed by as Ves continued to meet his various obligations. None of his meetings were all that important, and he was glad that he was done with this chore.

As evening rolled in, the preparations for the upcoming product reveal had all been finalized.

Though Ves could have spent more time on tinkering with the mechs that he was about to present to the public, he decided to go to bed and refresh himself for the important day ahead.

The next day, Ves woke up and went through an elaborate grooming process.

It was no longer enough to wear his usual patriarch uniform. He needed to wear a much more impressive ensemble that enhanced his stature and made him look larger than life!

Though Ves felt as if he was starting to look like a clown due to all of the excessive folds and layers of exquisite clothing, he had to admit that it would certainly make his appearance memorable.

"Have all of the mech pilots and mercenaries become proficient in piloting their respective mechs?" Ves asked with a touch of concern in his voice.

"The people in charge have not reported any issues. Everything is fine." Gavin Neumann reassured him. "Our mech pilots have taken well to the Fey Fiannas. With the help of the MSTs, they have performed well in many different training scenarios. While there is obviously room for growth and improvement, you can be assured that our mech pilots will not make any obvious blunders."

Ves nodded in satisfaction. "I hope that is the case, because each of them are expected to fight numerous exhibition matches against superior opponents. It is only when the odds are stacked against them that our Fey Fiannas can showcase their greater potential. Have you collected any indication that other rivals and competitors will seek to challenge our new mech line?"

"The local Black Cats have managed to collect a few potential clues, but they have not been able to find anything concrete. This indicates that there are definitely mech companies and mech designers that seek to use our Fey Fianna line as a springboard for their own products. The only issue is that it

is far from certain whether they are willing to pull the trigger. If they think that they will only make a fool of themselves, they will never have the guts to present their works."

That was to be expected. Ves had full confidence in his ability to hype up the Fey Fianna.

"Has SKL Mech Industries made any notable moves?"

"No." Gavin firmly shook his head. "The company is too big and powerful. It rarely gets spooked by upstarts that are looking to dethrone its mainstream mech lines. According to our investigation, SKL mainly adopts a reactive approach towards emerging competitors. The large megacorporation will only start to take action if sales are dropping, and even then the company is unlikely to escalate too quickly. I think that other possible rivals will constitute a much greater threat in the short term. Anyone who dares to challenge your work openly will definitely have the capital to succeed. It is regrettable that our intelligence agents have yet to find any clues on the planet."

Ves did not have too many expectations in this regard. "Bortele is filled with many dangerous and powerful groups. None of them appreciate people poking around their properties. Anyone who is competent enough to present a mech model that can give the Fey Fianna a run for its money should not be weak."

Though he did not have any certainty that this was the case, Ves had a hunch that the product reveal would not go smoothly.

The Fey Fianna had the chance to disrupt the mech market on a wider scale. Many mech companies was under threat of losing their cash cows if too many mech pilots swapped out their existing machines in order to pilot the brand new drone mech sold by the LMC!

Chapter 5516 Phoca Arena

After a long wait for many people, the time had come for the LMC to hold its latest event!

Millions of eager humans left their hotels and other abodes in the morning.

Although the product reveal was not scheduled to start until noon, they had all been advised to arrive hours in advance due to all of the time needed to process the incoming arrivals.

Many shuttles and other vehicles steadily converged on one of the central portions of Bortele's primary settlement.

The Larkinson Clan had reserved the largest mech arena on Bortele III for its own use!

Ordinary exhibition halls could no longer accommodate the huge public interest in Ves' first commercial work since the start of the Hyper Generation.

This was why the Larkinsons and the mechers had chosen to hold the event at the famous Phoca Arena.

As the largest and most spacious mech arena on Bortele III, Phoca Arena could easily accommodate 10 million guests by default, and could hold many more by adding in a lot of floating seats!

The fighting grounds of Phoca Arena were so enormous that it was usually partitioned into multiple smaller arenas during ordinary days.

The only times when the enormous oval-shaped arena turned into a single battleground was when entire mech companies fought against each other in glorious tournaments!

During the last week, Phoca Arena had undergone a lot of reorganization. New stages had been built and a lot of additional protective measures had been added as well.

The Red Association installed a lot of expensive space suppressors, azure shield generators, power generators and other hardware.

While the mechers would take back all of these costly assets when the product reveal had come to an end, the cost of ramping up security for this event was not low!

That did not stop them from going through with this. They did not even expect for the Larkinsons to pay the bill.

A lot of clever and observant people picked up the message that the Red Association tried to convey.

The mechers considered Ves to be one of their own! As an honorary member of the Red Association, it was natural for the mechers to take charge of his security!

This product reveal was not just an opportunity for Ves to show off his design prowess.

It was also a way for the mechers to flex their power and take advantage of Ves' momentum!

"I don't really get it." One of the more ordinary invited guests spoke as he waited in line outside of the enormous structure of Phoca Arena. "Is Professor Larkinson a mecher or an independent? The mech patrols consist entirely of RA machines. I haven't seen any mech that belongs to the Larkinson Clan."

"The man is a mecher when it is convenient, but he will have little to do with the Association as soon as he becomes a problem." An older guest responded with a knowing smile. "Rising stars as volatile and unstable as Professor Larkinson are best kept at a distance."

"Is that so? Doesn't that sound unfair? It sounds like the mechers want to have their cake and eat it too. Is this why he is cozying up to the Terrans as well?"

"Probably. The situation is not as one-sided as it looks on the surface. Let's not talk about this any further. It is not wise to dwell on this matter when we are well within monitoring range of the mechers."

"Ah, you are right."

The closer people got to the arena, the less noise they made.

The Red Association was one of the most powerful human organizations in the new frontier. It had not lost any of its prestige despite getting cut off from the Milky Way.

With 5 powerful god pilots at the top, the mechers retained full confidence in their ability to impose their rule over human-occupied space!

While the Terrans and the Rubarthans most certainly wished to challenge this assumption, the vast majority of people who wanted to attend the product reveal had no thoughts of resisting the mechers.

Of course, those who held any serious thoughts about overthrowing the rule of the Red Two never had a chance to get close in the first place!

Unlike prior product reveals organized by the Larkinson Clan, it was no longer feasible to make this occasion open to the public.

Due to all of the security concerns, guests who wanted to witness the highly anticipated presentation in person had to purchase pricey tickets. After that, they needed to subject themselves to thorough background checks.

Once the ticket holders arrived at the venue, they had to leave behind their bodyguards and any unrelated people before going through multiple inspections.

The Red Association already dispatched ample personnel and facilities to conduct extremely thorough examinations.

The mecher security officers did not make any exceptions. They could not be bribed, and anyone who was stupid enough to do so would instantly get locked up and shipped off-planet!

The stringent security checks did not bother most of the invited guests. They understood the need for all of these extra measures and already received plenty of warning in advance.

There were several groups of people who did not feel comfortable at all with the uncompromising security policies.

In particular, all of the second-raters who worked in the upper levels usually possessed a lot of advanced implants. These gadgets contained sensitive data or contained emergency weapon modules.

The RA security officers utilized means to lock any dangerous implants and forcibly scanned any internal data storage device for any dangerous software.

The heavy handedness of these security checks actually deterred a lot of visitors!

This was why many of the leading figures in the surrounding regions declined to attend in person.

Senior statesmen such as President Yenames Clive would never dare to attend this product reveal!

This was a big reason why so many important visitors met with Ves in private the day before. They would much rather discuss business with him in a more relaxed setting.

What was notable about the current setup was that very few first-raters bothered to travel all the way to the Torald Middle Zone and attend the latest product of a tier 3 galactic citizen.

As much as Ves had managed to become a prominent figure in first-class society, his second-class mechs did not arouse much interest in those circles.

Those who came held no interest in the Fey Fianna at all. They only came because they wanted to see a mech designer who had the potential to become a high and mighty Star Designer one day!

Even if the chances of that happening was low, it was still worthwhile for some first-raters to enter Phoca Arena despite having to go through so many invasive security checks.

Naturally, none of the first-raters consisted of anyone important.

As the huge rows of seats in the enormous arena slowly filled up, the enormous grounds were not empty.

Multiple classic Larkinson mechs showed off their capabilities or engaged in mock battles.

From Ferocious Piranhas to Transcendent Punishers, there were plenty of living mechs to captivate the audience.

The only major flaw was that all of them were outdated. None of the mechs incorporated any tech related to the Hyper Generation.

While that disappointed a lot of existing customers who relied on LMC mechs were hoping to receive word of additional updates, their anticipation for the new model grew even more.

Of course, their expectations remained relatively restrained due to the odd choice of mech type.

"Drone mechs are not all that practical in the current age. Spurs are too small and fragile to threaten alien warships. Their transphasic energy shields are so damn powerful that they can shrug off any small caliber fire."

"That is not entirely true, brother. Drone mechs have proven to be much more useful when they are deployed against the new alien phasefighters. SKL's most recent Sparrow Storm are able to wear down much of alien small craft by relying on the higher quantities of spurs. With the inclusion of hyper technology, their weak firepower has received an impressive boost. If not for the requirement to install a specialized multitasking implant to pilot the more advanced versions, I would have ordered a batch of Sparrow Storms by this time."

"I admit that the Sparrow Storms are good against phasefighters, but so are many other mechs. The advantage of using the latter is that they can also fight against alien warships. These drone mechs can't do anything usual aside from diverting enemy firepower."

"That is an oversimplification. No sickle mech performs so poorly."

More and more guests arrived by the minute. The seats slowly filled up. Many guests even bought snacks and drinks as if they were about to watch the finals of a massive mech tournament!

As the old but proven Larkinson mechs continued to showcase their various strengths, a calm but uplifting song played in the background.

Projected banners and other symbols of the Larkinson Clan hovered above people's heads.

The emblem of the Golden Cat was practically everywhere. This earned the appreciation of many people who had a soft spot for cats.

They even started to gather around various totems of the Golden Cat that the clan had placed at various positions around the seating areas!

While these totems were not ubiquitous, they granted enough people a feel of what it was like to become a part of the Larkinson Clan.

"So this is their exclusive glow... I wish my application got accepted."

"This is foul and evil brainwashing technology! No cat will convince me to abandon my state and leave my friends behind!"

"What is up with all of the cats? Of all of the symbols the Larkinsons could have used to represent themselves, they picked a domesticated animal of all choices."

"Hey! Don't disparage our furry overlords! Cats are way too cute! I love them all. Joining the Larkinson Clan is a dream come true for every cat lover. One day, I will be able to get in and pet all of the cats!"

As millions began to take their places, the main event drew closer.

The Larkinson mechs slowly ended their demonstrations and gradually started to leave the flat arena grounds.

The lights gradually started to dim while a countdown projected in the center of the enormous arena.

The music started to shift into a rhythm that caused many people to build up more anticipation for what was to come.

Many people began to look forward to what they were about to witness.

The VIPs who purchased the most expensive tickets were all seated at the front rows that were situated closest to the main stage.

Many other people were seated so far away that they could only rely on the projected feeds to observe anything smaller than a mech.

"Are you looking forward to what Professor Larkinson is about to present?" A senior tech developer asked the stranger seated to his left.

"I am. I care little for mechs, but I am intrigued by the 'tech' he has added to his work. The implications of his inventions are far more important than his actual designs."

"I share the same sentiments. Let me introduce myself. I am Dr. Haije Peras. I am the chief developer at a company that is working on developing stronger energy shields."

The other man maintained a placid expression as he shook the developer's hand. "You may call me Caruth Ovis. I am but a small relationship manager at the Rigal-Ovis Trading Company."

"Rigel-Ovis?! You mean the first-class shipping giant?!"

"Our company is not as great as before. With the shutdown of the greater beyond gate, our cargo vessels on this side are far from enough to maintain our previous market share. Once we reorganized our ships and renegotiated many long-term business contracts, we found ourselves lacking in hulls."

"Too few ships. That problem is all too common in the Red Ocean. At least the company in the old galaxy is still in good shape, not that it is any help to red humanity."

Caruthers Ovis responded with a faint smile "Those who we have left behind are the unfortunate ones in my opinion. They are missing out on so many wonders of the Age of Dawn. Professor Larkinson's latest work is but the latest example of this. I pity them, to be honest."

Chapter 5517 Skinny Rattlers

Ves waited backstage while wearing his exaggerated outfit. Though the people around him advised against it, he insisted on carrying the items on his toolbelt.

This made it a bit more challenging to present a strong image to the public. The Hammer of Brilliance, the Hammer of Melody and the Oceancaller looked so different from each other that it was hard to reconcile them in a single ensemble!

Nonetheless, Ves was more than satisfied with his current appearance. He looked like a hero who came straight out of an epic action drama.

"Meow meow meow."

"Just bear with it, Lucky. You need to look the part in order to match this occasion. You can get rid of your coat as soon as this is over."

"Meow!"

The archemetal cat did not look pleased at all for wearing a red-and-white coat that was especially designed for him. It actually granted a more regal and dignified look to the already impressive gem cat.

Lucky flew in the air, causing the coat to flap across his back like a cape. At no point did it come off as it was gently tied to his neck.

A few minutes passed by before three notable figures approached the protagonist of this event.

"How is the security situation? Have any incidents occurred that I should be worried about?"

"Nothing has happened that needs to be brought to your attention." Jovy said. "The Bluejay Fleet and many additional forces stationed on this planet are ready to respond to any threats. The airspace is completely locked down and we have cleared the vast majority of the starships that were previously lingering in orbit."

The removal of many orbiting ships had caused a huge disruption to local intrasystem traffic.

The mechers once again showed who was in charge by engaging in domineering behavior.

However, Ves appreciated this gesture, as it drastically lowered the risk of Phoca Arena getting assailed from above. Orbital bombardment was not good for business!

"How are our mech pilots, Alexa? Are they all in good condition?"

"They are as sharp as they can be, professor." The Terran mech designer responded. "The pilots and their living mechs are both looking forward to demonstrating what they can do in unison. They have trained hard to leave an unforgettable impression in the minds of all of the observers."

The performance of the Fey Fianna depended heavily on the skill and proficiency of the mech pilots.

Though Ves had tried his best to simplify the operation of the four fey, a drone mech was still inherently more complicated to pilot in the field.

"Gavin, how is our audience doing?"

"The people sitting in the stands are all in decent spirits." The assistant replied. "The stringent security inspections have not done their mood any favors, but they are all assuming that the ordeals are worth it in the end. We cannot afford to disappoint them. Their expectations are growing by the minute."

"And our remote audience?"

"Many people are tuning in. The viewership is particularly high in both the Krakatoa and Magair Middle Zones, but there are plenty of interested viewers in zones where our mechs have shown up in considerable numbers. A notable proportion of viewers come from the lower zones, but the numbers aren't as high as we expected."

That did not sound surprising to Ves. The LMC still retained a handful of third-class mechs in its mech catalog, but it was clear that they did not receive enough love.

Even though the Design Department made sure to allocate enough design capacity to keep them up to date, the lack of attention from Ves and other leading figures clearly caused the meager amount of third-class mech lines to diminish in priority.

Ves felt uncertain whether it was worthwhile at all to keep them alive. On the one hand, it would be a shame to let all of the existing third-class living mechs languish without any official upgrade tracks.

A lot of existing customers would probably feel betrayed by the LMC for leaving them in the cold.

Unless they liked their living mechs so much that they were willing to lean onto unreliable third-party mech designers to keep their machines up to date, millions of old LMC mechs were bound to get scrapped!

This was not an outcome that aligned with principles. Ves felt a duty to work harder to keep these old mechs alive, but his priorities left him with little choice.

More than ever, Ves wanted to have more mech designers by his side who were fully capable of designing living mechs by themselves.

Only these sorts of mech designers were the most suitable to work on established mech designs such as the Doom Guard and the Desolate Soldier!

Ves mentally shook his head. This was not the time to deal with this issue.

"How many first-raters are among our viewers?"

"Low." Gavin immediately replied. "We have seen greater numbers from New Constantinople, but that is it. There are pockets of viewers on almost every major planet, but they are mostly made up of politicians, statesmen and other high-ranked figures who have a better grasp of how important you are to red humanity. Their quantities may be low, but their impact on you and your clan are disproportionately high. If you want to spread your influence in the halls of leadership of our greater society, then you will have to do a good job at showcasing our proprietary tech, not our mechs per se. A good presentation here will result in greater interest in the future when you are ready to publish your initial first-class mech designs."

The general public definitely understood the importance of tier 3 galactic citizens, but that did not mean they paid attention to them all of the time.

It was just like how many people simply did not pay any attention to all of the boring politicians that governed their societies.

Most first-raters were spoiled for choice when it came to first-class mech designs and the people who devised them. Their scene is entirely separate from the rest.

Just as Ves had little to no idea about the most popular mech models and mech models in the first-class mech market, those snooty Terrans and Rubarthans had no clue at all what sold well in the second-class mech market.

Ves asked a few more questions. The more information he had at his disposal, the more he could adapt his behavior to the actual circumstances.

His plan for this product reveal was not entirely set in stone. There was enough play to shift stuff around if needed.

Once everything appeared to be in order, Ves waited for the final minutes to come to pass.

Up in the center of the enormous mech arena, the countdown had begun to count the final seconds.

The entire venue had fallen into darkness. People had automatically fallen silent as they held their breaths for the start of the main presentation.

[3]

[2]

[1]

[Nyaaa!]

To the utter astonishment of everyone, the moment the countdown came to an end, a cat appeared into view!

This was not an ordinary cat. The small feline glowed with warmth and looked translucent.

The cat also happened to be so small that she was practically indistinguishable to the naked eye in the enormous Phoca Arena.

A lot of people made use of the amplification function of their augmented eyes or cranial implants to get a closer look at this unusual cat apparition.

Others simply shifted their gaze to the many large projected feeds that gave every visitor a clear look at what was happening in the center.

Once the Golden Cat manifested herself, she began to show off her cuteness. She licked her paws, circled in the air and curled her tail.

Many people became fascinated by the Golden Cat's appearance. Those with sharper senses than others clearly sensed the power and the weight of this spiritual entity.

Others just thought that she was just a fun projected mascot of the Larkinson Clan.

Goldie did not impose herself on the enormous audience for too long. She frolicked around for two whole minutes before her energy manifestation disappeared from view.

After that, Ves still did not make an appearance.

Instead, an entirely different person flew above the main podium. The man was clearly a mech officer, though he was likely working for a private outfit rather than the military arm of a state.

The middle-aged man appeared to be in his fifties, though he looked considerably younger due to his augmentations. The man radiated a clear sense of strength and resilience. This immediately

earned him the respect of other soldiers who had developed similar demeanors over the course of their service.

"I'm not the man you were hoping to meet." The gruff mech officer spoke. "But since I am here, you might as well listen to what I have to say. I am Commander Ikeon Powell. I used to lead a modest mercenary outfit called the Skinny Rattlers before it got bought by a warlord. Our Rattlers is one of numerous outfits that relies heavily on mechs sold by the LMC to fight our battles."

A new projection came to life that displayed an old battle between the Skinny Rattlers and a hostile force of mechs that sought to raid a valuable trade convey.

Human-to-human conflicts were still prevalent during the Age of Mechs, so battles like these happened all of the time.

The Skinny Rattlers were tasked with defending a convoy of fairly vulnerable trade ships. Their numbers were adequate but not as good as that of the enemy side.

"During the time of this battle, we had only just begun to switch over to the mechs sold by the LMC. The mech company did not sell a full range of mech models that runs the entire gamut of mech types, but we had already fallen in love with the Ferocious Piranha and the Doom Guard."

The battle footage only showed the highlights, so it soon showed a lot of action.

Ranged mechs from both sides pelted each other under the cover of their combat carriers.

The rifleman mechs from both sides inflicted a lot of damage, but none of it stuck because the energy shields and armor of the combat carriers provided them with huge buffers.

It became clear that exchanging fire alone would not allow the attackers to gain the upper hand!

This was why they sent in their melee mechs.

A large number of space knights, swordsman mechs and axeman mechs surged forward in a bid to overwhelm the defenders.

The Skinny Rattlers were having none of it. They deployed their own mix of melee mechs in order to intercept the attackers.

Many of the mech models utilized by this mercenary outfit came from other mech companies, but there were a number of Ferocious Piranhas mixed in between!

Some of the attacking mechs tried to circumvent the interceptors and attack the convoy directly, but most of the inbound machines wanted to leverage their superior numbers to crush their opponents!

This should have been an unfavorable fight for the Skinny Rattlers. Just as their name suggested, most of their mechs were fairly light and fast, which weren't able to persist in a standing battle.

Yet when the melee mechs of both sides were about to collide, the mechs of the attacking force suddenly lost a lot of fluency.

There were even mechs that outright lost control for a moment of time!

This was enough of a window of opportunity for the Skinny Rattlers to pounce on the vulnerable enemy mechs and finish them off before they could ever recover!

Due to this powerful opening move, the Skinny Rattlers immediately gained a lot of momentum. Their mech pilots all attacked their opponents with greater confidence and fervor, knowing that the new Ferocious Piranhas had made all of the difference!

While the defenders gradually learned how to cope against the disorienting glow of these painful machines, they never managed to regain the advantage.

In the end, the attacking force had been forced to turn around and retreat, leaving over a third of its machines behind before it could ever put up a proper fight.

The outnumbered Skinny Rattlers managed to win a clean victory without suffering more than a scratch on a few of their mechs!

"This is how much of a difference that LMC mechs have made to our lives." Commander Powell spoke in a tone that conveyed utter sincerity. "For years, we have made use of living mechs to win our battles, earn our pay and increase our reputation. We thought this would go on forever, but then the Great Severing happened."

Chapter 5518 Crystal Superiority

Visions of battle projected in the mech arena.

Of course, these images did not remain confined to flat footage projected on a limited screen.

Soon enough, the large-scale projection systems that ran across the entirety of Phoca Arena came to life, transforming the gigantic central arena into realistic battlescapes.

The changes did not remain confined to the arena grounds.

The visual illusions also extended to the seats that encompassed all of the guests!

Through clever technology, the observers could no longer see each other with their eyes. The projection systems had isolated them to the point where they felt as if they had been transported back in time.

It was as if everyone had been individually plucked out of Bortele III and suddenly ended up in the middle of a battlefield!

The chaos of battle unfolded in front of them as well as around them. The immersive experience of this illusion was so encompassing that a lot of veterans immediately went on edge!

Fortunately, there was still a small sense of unreality to the illusions. The Larkinsons did not want to spook or trigger the traumas of their audience, so they had dialed down a lot of settings that could have made the experience more realistic.

The floating form of Commander Ikeon Powell also gave the ticket holders an anchor to focus on. The man's expression exuded a complete sense of control over his emotions.

The sight of battle did not appear to faze him much despite the fact that he had lived through all of these battles.

In one moment, the entire projected environment transformed into a settlement that was built on the rocky and lifeless soil of a recently terraformed moon.

Many prefab building modules had been stacked together next to a mining complex. The external environment was exposed to the cold of the vacuum.

"New Rulin IIB. A moon that is shrouded in darkness more often than not. Nobody was willing to pay the cost of terraforming this rock. The only reason why anyone would build a settlement is to mine a valuable exotic called Hachiron Theta, which happens to be buried in great quantities underneath this settlement."

A raiding force composed of several combat carriers approached from a distance.

The hostile nature of this incoming collection of ships became evident when the defense turrets of the settlement came online and shot bright rays at the incoming vessels.

The energy shields of the combat carriers easily resisted the attacks, but that did not mean that it was comfortable for them to remain exposed.

That was especially when the ranged mechs of the Skinny Rattlers made an appearance.

"At this point in time, our mercenary outfit has already replaced many of our landbound rifleman mechs with the Crystal Lord. That was the first time we made use of the luminar crystal rifles that have earned so much praise from those who had the pleasure to wield them in battle."

It took a bit of time for the mechs on standby and on patrol to take action. Dozens of Crystal Lords appeared in the span of a few minutes and began to fire at the incoming vessels.

The recently procured living mechs did not fire any laser beams or positron beams, but rather disruptor beams!

The effects of these beams were much different from the ones fired by the turrets.

For one, the energy shields of the combat carriers started to get drained much more quickly, and that was not just because of the greater volume of fire.

Though the raiders initially thought that they possessed enough strength to barrel straight into the colony and drive away all of the defenders by force, the mass disruptor beam fire quickly drained their energy shields!

Once any ship became exposed, the Crystal Lords switched the attack phase crystals of their luminar crystal rifles and began to wear down the vulnerable hull and armor plating of the vessel.

Though the incoming raiding force rotated their vulnerable vessels behind their shielded counterparts, more and more Crystal Lords emerged to apply greater pressure.

"These luminar crystal rifles are fantastic. They are light, efficient, accurate and versatile. They can inflict good damage without making too many compromises. Repairing the crystals is impossible since they are alien tech, but they can easily be replaced with spares. Their best feature is how we can quickly change their beam type."

Due to the heavy pressure exerted by all of the disruptor beams and positron beams, the combat carriers started to incur heavy damage.

No matter what sort of protection they relied upon, the Crystal Lords always applied the right kind of damage without any delays!

The hostile raiding force called off its original assault and landed on a distant location that was out of sight.

The unwelcome arrivals clearly did not give up on the assault. Their vessels carried many more mechs than the Skinny Rattlers deployed in the settlement, so they still had the capital to succeed.

As long as they completed their mission, they could gain a lot of loot and earn a massive payout to boot!

All of the losses that they incurred would be worth it so long as they won a decisive victory. They had brought additional cargo ships that contained empty holds in anticipation of salvaging a lot of broken mechs and other loot.

The scenario sped up a bit. Soon enough, the attacking force deployed a mixture of melee and ranged mechs to this assault.

The ranged mechs largely concentrated on taking down the stationary turrets before doing their best to whittle down the distant Crystal Lords.

The melee mechs simply advanced forward while making frequent evasive maneuvers to make it difficult to shoot them down.

The relatively light gravity of the moon enabled these mechs to make considerably greater steps than normal.

The aerial mechs among them also expended much less energy in order to keep themselves aloft!

In the face of hundreds of hostile mechs swarming towards the colony, the Skinny Rattlers readied their mechs to meet the incoming attacks.

A high proportion of LMC mechs happened to be among the defending machines.

Just like before, the Crystal Lords continued to shoot their lumina crystal rifles with no abandon.

Beam after beam frequently struck the distant enemy ranged mechs.

In a fight between two irregular forces, artillery and other heavy firepower was absent. Access to heavy artillery mechs was restricted and they were much more expensive to procure and maintain.

As such, the two sides primarily relied on their rifleman mechs to fight at a distance.

Though the attacking side had the advantage of numbers, the Skinny Rattlers not only enjoyed a defensive advantage, but their firepower also happened to be more effective!

The differences between two sides quickly became clear when the Crystal Lords gradually started to suppress the enemy rifleman mechs!

This was quite a surprise to all of the viewers who were not particularly familiar with LMC mechs or the unique characteristics of the Crystal Lord in particular.

The mech model had always been underrated in the mech market. Its glow did not convey any obvious advantage, which caused a lot of customers to direct their attention to machines with more impactful glows such as the Ferocious Piranha and the Pacifier.

However, in this firefight where the Crystal Lords had to fight against a collection of different ranged mech models, the crystalline machines started to gain the upper hand!

Due to the narration of Commander Powell, many observers instinctively rooted for the side of the Skinny Rattlers. They placed themselves in the shoes of these mercenaries that had chosen to adopt

LMC mechs on a larger scale, believing that these products were powerful enough to earn them success on the battlefield!

So far, it looked as if this bet paid off, as way more mercenary mechs either had to retreat or incurred enough damage to the point where the mechs actually broke down.

The attackers still valued their machines quite a bit. Their ranged mechs did not dare to fight too hard. From the moment their conditions fell below a dangerous threshold, they pulled out and ran right back to the combat carrier.

This was not the only reason why the attackers were unable to suppress the Skinny Rattlers.

"Our Crystal Lords are simply better than the ones used by our enemies." Commander Powell spoke with a smile. "Look at these beautiful machines. Can you see how little heat they emit? Their luminar crystal rifles don't build up as much waste heat. They can remain relatively cool even in a vacuum environment. Our mech pilots are able to fire them to their heart's content without needing to put so much effort into managing the heat levels of their machines."

The Crystal Lords also had another advantage.

The attackers primarily armed their own rifleman mechs with cheap but cost-efficient laser rifles.

Yet these were precisely the kind of weapons that the Crystal Lords feared the least!

The mechs embedded with luminar crystals did not remain huddled behind their defensive barriers all of the time, but boldly exposed themselves and took the time to aim their shots in order to increase their hit rates.

Since these Crystal Lords were stationary, the mech pilots found it much easier to land their shots against the approaching enemy mechs!

Laser beam after laser beam regularly struck the Skinny Rattler mechs, but the Crystal Lords easily resisted them without suffering too much damage.

"When our mech pilots used their Crystal Lords in combat for the first time, they felt as if they were the kings of energy weapons. They had little to fear from the enemy laser weapons, but they were confident that their own laser or positron beams could make the lives of their enemies miserable. Our living mechs reassured each of us and helped us keep our cool in spite of the fact that we were outnumbered."

The raiders should have been the ones with greater confidence, but the lopsided results of this firefight clearly caused them to lose their confidence in battle!

This affected the attacking mech pilots in various ways, from prematurely pulling out of the battle to causing their shots to become shakier as they put far more effort into taking evasive actions.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

However, the enemies did not give up. They had numbers on their side.

On the one hand, the raiders deployed spaceborn mechs that sought to attack the Crystal Lords from the flanks where they could fire their weapons at more favorable angles.

On the other hand, the attackers also relied on rifleman mechs armed with gauss rifles to deal much more effective damage against the Crystal Lords.

Nonetheless, the crystalline machines easily took care of these new threats!

The Crystal Lords temporarily disregarded the enemy rifleman mechs armed with laser weapons.

They weathered the laser beam barrages with relative ease as they accurately pummeled the machines armed with more threatening gauss rifles.

Once these threatening mechs had been taken care of, the Crystal Lords concentrated entirely on taking down the spaceborn mechs!

The differences between landbound mechs and spaceborn mechs immediately became evident.

Due to many technical limitations, the latter were unable to hit as hard, resist as much damage, absorb as much heat or increase their accuracy.

The Crystal Lords benefited from much simpler and more solid internal architectures. Combined with their excellent luminar crystal rifles, they easily shredded the spaceborn mechs whose maneuverability did not avail them much in the face of all of the accurate energy weapons fire!

Although it was not obvious, the more knowledgeable observers saw that the accuracy and weapons handling of the Crystal Lords were considerably better than the norm.

"The Crystal Lords are special." Commander Powell smiled. "Their glows somehow causes their mech pilots to use their rifles as if they are extensions of themselves. The mechs are also alive, and they were basically born for this. Many of our mech pilots entered into a state of zen where they continually struck the enemy mechs where they hurt."

The partially immersive battlescape continued to emphasize the impact of the Crystal Lords. Their punishing luminar crystal rifles easily caused over a third of the spaceborn mechs to collapse. The remainder all lost courage and either landed on the ground or flew back to their combat carriers!

Though the Crystal Lords had done an admirable job at reducing and suppressing the enemy ranged mechs, the hostile melee mechs had remained virtually untouched.

This happened to be the time where the latter was just about to enter the settlement and let loose all of the anger in their bellies!

Chapter 5519 A Tale of Human Resilience

Many spectators, both in and outside of Phoca Arena, wondered why the LMC had yet to introduce the new drone mech that they had all been waiting to learn about.

However, there were many other people that appreciated this presentation. The missions undertaken by the Skinny Rattlers may have taken place years ago in an age that had already come to pass, but they all served to highlight what made LMC mechs special.

Living mechs already possessed plenty of unusual traits in the past, and they did not grow any weaker or less relevant now that red humanity had entered the Age of Dawn.

On the contrary. The unique and iconic traits of living mechs had become considerably more powerful in the new era, which meant that the LMC mechs on display were actually able to perform even better on the battlefields of the present!

Even though the vast majority of people who watched this event were not in a position to buy mechs, the mech commanders and leaders of various organizations among them inevitably gained a greater interest in the mechs sold by the LMC.

It became clear that the Larkinsons were taking extensive advantage of the elevated publicity of this high-profile announcement!

They not only wanted to explain the design philosophy and the characteristic advantages of living mechs to a greater audience, but also advertise the performance of its existing mech lines.

If not for the fact that the LMC had yet to update them to the Hyper Generation, the mech company would have already started taking a lot of orders.

In any case, the battle centered around moon settlement continued to unfold.

The raiders had already incurred a lot of losses. Even if most of the damage was material, the attacking force clearly did not want to return empty-handed.

An early retreat would not only cause them to fail their mission and damage their credibility, but leave them with a lot of expensive repairs with not a single piece of loot to pay for all of the bills!

The enemy commander fell into a sunk-cost fallacy. The only way to recoup the losses and earn a profit was to go through with the mission and raid the mining colony!

As such, the melee mechs on the attacking side did not slow down in the slightest! They continued their advance and eagerly sought to crush the Crystal Lords that had caused their side to suffer a lot of damage.

"Our rifleman mechs have done their jobs at this time. It was time for them to retreat and leave the rest of the fight to more suitable machines."

The Crystal Lords were incredibly deadly at range, but they were completely vulnerable when attacked up close.

The Skinny Rattlers did not hesitate to pull them back and station them to the rear that was situated deeper inside the colony settlement.

The prefab structures that made up the mining colony were not very sturdy, but they could block enough attacks to provide moderate cover.

Of course, the structures could also provide protection to the enemy mechs, so it became a lot more difficult for many ranged mechs to maintain the same effectiveness as before.

Other mechs had to carry the fight at this stage.

Before all of the attackers came close enough, half-a-dozen or so Doom Guards emerged from cover and began to spray their flamethrowers in a broad spray that looked incredibly intimidating!

Even though the flames outputted by this handful of striker mechs was not concentrated enough to melt mechs in an instant, the enemy mechs couldn't help but stop in their tracks.

Those that did not act cautiously immediately stumbled and lost control as the disorienting glows of the Doom Guards along with the continuous application of flames messed up the enemy mech pilots in an instant!

The momentum of the attacking force immediately stalled as a result.

"We did not field enough Doom Guards to push back all of the incoming mechs, but that was not necessary." The mercenary commander adopted a vicious grin. "Our purpose in using them was to disrupt the charging mechs and cause them to lose their coordination."

The Doom Guards had been dispersed across the defensive line. They blunted the charge of half of the attacking mechs, causing the remainder of the hostile melee mechs to become separated from the rest.

With only half of the enemy mechs reaching the settlement, the Skinny Rattlers immediately began to launch their counterattack!

The continuous blows inflicted onto their side had caused the mech pilots of the raiding force to lose a lot of confidence.

In contrast, the morale of the mech pilots of the Skinny Rattlers had become so high that they fearlessly dispatched their own melee mechs and went on the offensive!

The proportion of living mechs among the attacking force was not high. Only a handful of them consisted of Monster Slayers, but they immediately started to stand out in this frenzied assault!

The Monster Slayer needed a lot of room to maneuver around, so they were not suitable for pitched battles.

They continually kept their distance from friendly mechs and boldly challenged the enemy melee mechs with their large but unwieldy greatswords.

Their performance was far better than usual!

The skill, power and ferocity shown by the mech pilots that had recently mastered the special sword style associated with their Monster Slayers caused many enemy machines to lose their limbs or suffer heavy tears in their armor.

Their impressive damage potential enhanced the psychological suppression of the Skinny Rattlers even further, causing these scrappy defenders to fight with greater courage than their opponents!

The remaining attackers found that their numbers advantage temporarily served no use due to the interference from the Doom Guards.

The striker mechs may be relatively slow and not suited for any offensive action, but they were excellent at area denial!

Numerous enemy melee mechs tried to force their way through the flames, but the disorienting glows of the Doom Guard made it difficult for them to persist.

Other machines pulled out their backup pistols or other ranged weapons, but the Doom Guards happened to be so well-armored that they could continue their efforts without experiencing too much pressure.

The enemy commander wasn't stupid. The frontal assault may have been blocked, but the attackers had also separated a few mech units so that they could circle around and attack the mining colony from different angles.

Yet before these flanking units could enter the settlement, they became assailed by groups of Ferocious Piranhas!

The light skirmishers were not strong or tough enough to beat the enemy melee mechs in a straight fight, but they cleverly took advantage of their glows along with their flight capabilities to harass the flankers from multiple sides.

"The Ferocious Piranhas are one of the LMC's most popular mechs, and there are good reasons for that." Commander Powell unreservedly praised this mech model without any duplicity. "Back in those days, there were still many mercenaries who never fought against this devilish mech in the past. You should thank your luck if you are still able to encounter them in the future, because the Ferocious Piranhas can ruin an entire mech force by themselves."

The Ferocious Piranhas showed what it could do. By utilizing their infamous glows, they frequently darted in and out of range.

Each time an enemy mech showed a lot of flaws, the Ferocious Piranhas pounced and utilized their twin knives to quickly target the weak points!

Perhaps a larger and more concentrated formation of mechs would have been able to fend off the Ferocious Piranhas with greater ease, but the enemy raiders had already begun to run out of spare mechs.

The enemy raiding force had lost a lot of fire support. The absence of friendly ranged mechs affected them badly, and it did not help that the Crystal Lords in the rear continually focused their fire on any hostile mechs that flew above ground level.

It was just too easy for them to take down flying machines, especially when the enemy couldn't pressure them back.

The consequence of all of these setbacks and losses eventually broke the raiding forces.

Too many of their machines had fallen or retreated. The mech pilots that hadn't run away or ejected from their crippled machines had lost so much confidence that their heart was no longer in the fight.

When the enemy commander finally made the right decision, the surviving enemy mechs immediately turned around and ran back to their combat carriers!

The members of the Skinny Rattlers all cheered when they sent their enemies packing. They had managed to accomplish a massive victory while suffering only minimal losses in return, all because they had made excellent use of their living mechs!

"New Rulin IIB was one of our greatest victories." Commander Powell spoke with pride. "Our decision to invest heavily in the mechs sold by the LMC paid off. We managed to fulfill our terms of our mercenary contract while earning a large amount of salvage in return. We used the profits obtained from selling all of those wrecks to acquire even more living mechs. As we expanded our forces, we became bolder and became involved in riskier but more rewarding missions."

Phoca Arena's projection systems rotated through multiple battlescapes in sequence.

In one moment, they were witnessing a battle taking place in high orbit of an enormous gas giant.

In the next moment, the Skinny Rattlers launched an assault on a secret mining operation that was taking place on territory claimed by another pioneering organization.

The change in scenery did not disorient a lot of people. The battles and the performance of all of the living mechs were so impressive that few of them minded the spectacle.

This was one of the many reasons why the Larkinson Clan decided to book this enormous mech arena!

The sights and sounds of battle were already stimulating enough, but the depicted machines also seemed to be able to convey a fraction of their glows!

Various glows affected the audience on a mild level, giving them a taste of what the LMC mechs were truly like up close.

A significant change took place as the Skinny Rattlers entered the Age of Dawn.

The mercenary outfit could no longer choose from any contracts where they could expect to fight against other mech forces.

Now that the Red War had essentially kicked off, many alien raiding fleets had begun to attack outlying human-occupying star systems!

"Many of my colleagues in the business chose to shirk away from the aliens. They feared warships so much that they refused to fight against them. We were different. We sought a greater purpose than trying to beat up our fellow humans when we needed each other the most. This was why we accepted dangerous missions where we were expected to defend vulnerable star systems against alien raids."

The projected battles that unfolded were much more brutal and damaging than others.

While the Skinny Rattlers were often assigned to fight alongside other mech forces, they all struggled to fend off the alien raiders that frequently rained down destruction with no regard to collateral damage!

Defenders had to fight battles on land and in space in order to repel the powerful alien warfleets.

"It was during these desperate struggles that we truly found our mission." Commander Powell spoke with a grim expression.

All around him, the mechs and mech pilots of the Skinny Rattlers suffered all kinds of defeats.

Mechs vaporized in an instant as they were struck by the main battery fire from alien warships.

Orbital bombardment broke through titan shields and crushed a large settlement that had only been partially evacuated.

Hundreds of thousands of people perished while the defending mechs futilely tried to attack the warships that incurred no damage by relying on the protection of their transphasic energy shields.

Without transphasic weapons of their own, the mechs of the Skinny Rattlers found it difficult to break through the defenses of enemy warships.

They still tried their best. Many other mech pilots belonging to other forces had broken down from losing so many friends and comrades, but the Skinny Rattlers all stuck together despite not doing better themselves.

Their cohesion and mental fortitude clearly stood out as they fought to defend vulnerable humans.

This was not just a tale about the excellence of LMC mechs.

It was also a tale that highlighted the resilience of human protectors.

Even though many of the 'combatants' of the Skinny Rattlers consisted of living mechs, they bravely served their purpose and did everything they could to support their human compatriots!

Chapter 5520 Perseverance

The Skinny Rattlers clearly earned a lot of success in the past by making use of the advantages of the mechs sold by the LMC.

Yet their most valuable gains only became prominent when they were facing a lot of headwinds.

It was in times of adversity where people's true character came to light!

The Skinny Rattlers transitioned from a successful mercenary outfit into defenders for hire.

Though its mech pilots were still soldiers of fortune, they no longer fought against other human forces, but made the determination to fight against the alien menace!

The strength, numbers, composition and tech of the alien raiding fleets were all over the place.

This was because many of them consisted of warships that belonged to all kinds of strange and exotic minor races.

Each of them were forced to obey the directives of the Red Cabal and send out their warships to attack human space one way or another.

While many of the alien raiding fleets were not as powerful and unbeatable as the defending side initially expected, the risks of fighting against them were still higher!

It was difficult to match the superior firepower of ship-mounted weapon batteries.

Odd alien starfighters also swarmed the human mechs in considerable numbers.

While the quality and defenses of many starfighters were generally worse than mechs in the same class, there were still outliers.

The elite starfighters that relied on their own inbuilt transphasic energy shields to shrug off damage often tore apart entire squads of mechs with relative ease!

Many people in the audience who had fought similar battles in the past year all felt as if they were reliving their nightmares.

The Skinny Rattlers incurred more losses in these dire months than they had in entire decades!

The main reason why the Skinny Rattlers managed to persevere despite suffering so much attrition was because the rewards for participating in the defense of vulnerable human colonies were much higher than anything they earned in the past.

Commander Powell remained grim in the face of all of the living mechs that got destroyed in the battle footage.

"We never had any complaints about our earnings during the last year. We earned far more cash than what we needed to replace our lost mechs. We also earned large amounts of MTA merits for the first time. We upgraded our augmentations, bought a few batches of transphasic weapons and increased the pensions for the relatives of those who sacrificed their lives."

The Skinny Rattlers did not perform exceptionally well in the first few months. Their living mechs conveyed limited advantages due to their lack of strong firepower or other hard features.

While the mercenary company partially compensated for these weaknesses by purchasing more powerful mechs sold by other mech companies, they never gave up on living mechs.

"We lost a lot of good men during those difficult times. The friends I knew for decades disappeared in the blink of an eye when warships annihilated their mechs. We had to hire a lot of mech pilots, promising them much higher pay along with the glory of defending our race. More of them died, but we did our part to slow down the alien advance."

Just like many other outfits that volunteered for service, the Skinny Rattlers started to improve after each and every battle.

The aliens exposed all of their weaknesses and forced the mercenaries to squeeze out their potential.

The Skinny Rattlers started to purchase standalone luminar crystal rifles in bulk in order to arm all of their machines with guns that could fire disruptor beams.

These energy beams were more efficient at draining transphasic energy shields.

The more elite mechs piloted by the veterans of the mercenary outfits all began to utilize transphasic weapons that enabled them to make a much greater impact on the battlefield.

The Skinny Rattlers also did not hoard their MTA merits, but exchanged them for valuable support in upgrading and modifying the designs of their living mechs.

More powerful and customized versions of familiar models such as the Ferocious Piranha and the Crystal Lord started to demonstrate their power.

They pressured their alien targets much more effectively than in the past, allowing them to attain much better results than before.

Yet still the aliens pressed on. Their raiding fleets were so numerous and their warships were so difficult to take down that it seemed as if a tide of enemy bulwarks were about to break through the frontlines!

It was during these pressing times where the mechs and mech pilots of the Skinny Rattlers started to show their true potential!

The projection systems depicted a chaotic battle in space.

Numerous defensive stations tried to hold back the incoming alien warships.

Thousands of mechs deployed in the field. The Skinny Rattlers only contributed a few hundred of them, and over half of them were piloted by rookies whose genetic aptitudes previously limited their job prospects.

Nonetheless, under the glows of the Desolate Soldier and other mechs, they fearlessly fought against the alien warships!

What was notable was that the Skinny Rattlers had altered the designs of their favorite mechs so much that they had developed a style of their own.

The Desolate Soldiers, Doom Guards, Ferocious Piranhas and so on all put greater emphasis on speed rather than defenses.

This made them more elusive and difficult to strike, but it also made them vulnerable against the fast-firing weapon systems of alien starfighters and warships.

At one point, the mechs belonging to the Skinny Rattlers suddenly became assailed by a small formation of elite starfighters!

Though their numbers were much less, the elite starfighters took full advantage of their high acceleration and transphasic energy shields to shrug off most of the incoming attacks!

The attack passes made by the elite starfighters destroyed many mechs without incurring a lot of damage in return.

Many observers could see that if nothing else happened, the elite starfighters would definitely be able to crush the mechs of the Skinny Rattlers!

The former mercenaries fought back as best as they could. The mech pilots maintained their composure and tried to increase their hit rates as best as possible, but there were limits to what they could do in this situation.

Seeing comrade after comrade getting torn apart by the rapid-fire laser beams of the elite starfighters, several Crystal Lords that were mounted onto floater platforms couldn't take it any longer.

They took decisive action!

The machines turned their weapons against each other and disabled the safety mechanisms that inhibited friendly fire.

They fired laser beams at the crystals mounted onto their exteriors.

As the Crystal Lords started to glow brighter and brighter, they unleashed all of the accumulated energies in the form of large concentrated energy beams that struck a number of the elite starfighters and broke through their defenses at once!

The sudden turn of events took the alien pilots by surprise and completely disrupted their rhythm.

Other ranged mechs armed with luminar crystal weapons pounced on the opportunity and proceeded to whittle down the remaining elite starfighters until the beleaguered aliens chose to retreat.

"Our mech pilots did not choose to fire their guns at each other. The living mechs made that decision themselves." Commander Powell made an admission that shocked a few people. "Our pilots could have superseded the decisions of their machines, but they chose to trust their battle partners instead. We are all glad they did, because those Crystal Lords were able to channel all of that rampant energy into powerful but accurate beams."

This was just one of many instances where the living mechs started to do more than take the lead of their mech pilots.

In another battle, a troop of Ferocious Piranhas that had been seeking to close in on an alien warship while carrying powerful explosives came under heavy fire!

A handful of tertiary gun batteries sought to intercept the light skirmishers with continuous streams of kinetic shards.

The Ferocious Piranhas did everything possible to evade the storm of metal shards, but they only had to make a few mistakes before they started to malfunction.

Once their mobility became compromised, it became easy for the alien gun turrets to finish off the fragile machines!

As the mech pilots of the light mechs struggled to maintain their composure when they were being targeted by such a powerful threat, the surviving Ferocious Piranhas suddenly started to evade a little better than before!

The difference was rather subtle, but less of the mechs got struck than before.

"As our men continued to pilot their living mechs, they began to experience changes in their relationships with their machines. The LMC mechs suddenly became alive on a whole other level. They became smarter and more talkative. Whenever that happened, they were able to cooperate more effectively with their mech pilots. The mech became a body controlled by two complementary minds. Each of our pilots were able to concentrate more on what was important, trusting that their machine partners will take care of the rest."

The approaching Ferocious Piranhas eventually managed to get close enough to launch their prepared bombs at the enemy warship at close range.

The bombs that were all laced with small amounts of phasewater exploded in a violent fashion.

Once the alien warship lost its relatively unsophisticated transphasic energy shield, the ranged mechs of the Skinny Rattlers immediately took advantage of the opening and punched through the inadequate armor of the enemy vessel.

Commander Ikeon Powell moved on from this battle and highlighted several more where the Skinny Rattlers managed to overcome difficult odds.

In one battle, A relatively untalented pilot of the Desolate Soldier broke through, much to many people's surprise!

When the Desolate Soldier became flooded by the power of forced resonance, the mech utilized its supercharged luminar crystal rifle to shoot down elite starfighters and save friendly mechs from destruction.

In another battle, the same mech pilot who was utilizing an upgraded version of the same machine managed to break through yet again!

The successive breakthroughs fueled the evolution of what was originally just a basic Desolate Soldier!

During the second and most important breakthrough, the Desolate Soldier seemed to come to life in a way that was difficult to describe.

"He was not the only one." The mech commander spoke. "More of us broke through. They not only managed to fulfill their dreams and become expert candidates or expert pilots, but also transformed their living mechs in the process. It is as if the mechs of the LMC can break through as well. No words can describe how amazing that is. If we had more time, then we would have been able to show you one of the expert mechs that we have upgraded from one of our living mechs."

Breaking through was the dream of many mech pilots.

However, they still found the concept that mechs could undergo breakthroughs difficult to accept.

Were living mechs that amazing?

The expansive projection systems slowly retracted their illusions now that they had run through the highlights of the Skinny Rattlers.

Commander Ikeon Powell began to wrap up his story.

"Dozens of mercenary outfits that I know of have collapsed after suffering heavy defeats in the Red War. Our Skinny Rattlers could have been one of them, but we managed to hold ourselves together and survived the worst that the aliens have thrown at us. We have proven our mettle many times. Our living mechs backed us up when we needed their strength the most. After we proved our courage and our effectiveness in battle, we finally earned the recognition that we deserved."

Projections of the Skinny Rattler mechs came to life. Each of them looked considerably better and received a lot of upgrades.

They had also been marked by a prominent new emblem that showed that they belonged to a different organization than before!

"More than a month ago, I agreed to a buyout offer that transferred my mercenary outfit to a new owner. My men and I gladly accepted this offer because Duke Rigel Armaus appreciated our performance. In exchange for becoming his loyal retainers and subjects, the nobleman awarded us with control over a modest planet called Hark Sotho VI. I have been appointed as the governor of this agricultural planet. So long as I continue my service, it is only a matter of time before my rights to rule over my dominion becomes fixed. I can become a hereditary baron who is permitted to establish my own noble house!"

This inspired many ordinary people among the audience!