

The Mech 5531

Chapter 5531 First Time Trial

Though the Fey Fianna had yet to demonstrate its comprehensive performance in an exhibition match, a lot of people already became convinced that it was a remarkable machine.

How could they not? Many aspects had been carefully designed and improved by the Larkinsons. Its offensive, defensive, mobility and utility characteristics all scored high based on the configuration of the drone mech.

Not all of its specifications were good in an absolute sense, but considering what Ves and his fellow mech designers had to work with, they squeezed out a lot of value from the relatively affordable materials used to construct the machines.

That was what mattered the most!

The Fey Fianna as presented so far could already crush the likes of the Sparrow Storm Mark XII and other comparable drone mech models in terms of effective performance.

Few people were able to dispute this statement. The various functions and features revealed so far combined into a comprehensive package that was so innovative that it may be the most advanced second-class drone mech up for sale at this time.

That said, there were enough clever people among the viewers who understood that this was partially the case because the other mech companies had yet to publish a 'proper' hyper mech design.

Many people understood the product strategy chosen by companies such as SKL Mech Industries. The first hyper mechs they released at the start of the Hyper Generation did not represent their full design strength.

Once the scientific community of the Red Ocean studied hyper technology a lot more extensively, they would definitely be able to come up with much more powerful hyper mechs!

Yet... as Ves continued to present the various mech systems that he put great care and attention in the design phase, it became harder for the mech insiders to believe that follow-up hyper mechs such as the hypothetical Sparrow Storm Mark XIII could actually beat the Fey Fianna in a straight matchup.

Maybe it is because of the identity of the lead designer or how he made his work sound so attractive, but many mech buyers who possessed the slightest interest in drone mechs did not want to bother with old staples such as the Sparrow Storm line anymore.

All of this new technology sounded much more exciting!

The concept of living mechs, glows, design spirits, dominant spirits and superior spirits all sounded rather strange and confusing, but their benefits were concrete enough to make them worthwhile.

Even the mech buyers who ordinarily never bothered with drone mechs due to their well-established shortcomings reconsidered their decision.

These interested buyers were the exact sort of people that the LMC wanted to target with the Fey Fianna!

However, in order to rope in these tempted individuals, Ves needed to do more to reduce their reluctance in trying out a new mech model.

This was why Ves finally addressed the piloting experience of the Fey Fianna.

Lucky flew back to his shoulder and began to flop onto it as if he was a sausage.

"Meow."

Ves completely ignored his cat as he gestured towards the 9 Fey Fiannas standing on the floor of the enormous Phoca Arena.

"What I am about to tell you is not based on my own experiences. I am not a mech pilot, so I do not have the pleasure of being able to pilot my own work. However, I am well-versed in how my design choices impact the piloting experience of my mechs. I have also collected an extensive amount of feedback to guide my judgment and optimize my implementations. From the moment I designed my first drone mech, I set out to make use of the strengths of my living mechs to reduce the difficulty of piloting my work."

He smiled while sweeping his gaze across the expansive mech arena.

"Now, I know what you are thinking. Drone mechs cannot be piloted by the meek. It often requires higher genetic aptitudes and specialized training in order to manage so many moving parts in an effective manner. The truly dedicated drone mech pilots do not hesitate to install specialized implants in their heads that enable them to multitask to such an extent that they can control up to 64 spurs at a time. None of this makes drone mechs easy to get started with. Just the excessive mental load of manually controlling multiple spurs is enough to create headaches."

Not many mech pilots ever tried to find out what it was like to pilot a drone mech, even if it was just a virtual one in a simulation program.

It was worse when they did so when they were still studying in the mech academy. At that time, they still struggled to control ordinary mech types with enough proficiency and control to make them do exactly what they wanted.

How could they ever expect to achieve any combat effectiveness with a more demanding drone mech if that was the case?!

Once the mech cadets advanced their studies and decided on their specializations, they usually graduated with a firm selection of acceptable mech types in mind.

It was not common for graduated mech pilots to completely change the mech types they were willing to pilot.

This meant that few of them ever glanced in the direction of drone mechs. Perhaps they had already become good enough to be able to pilot these machines, but their infamous difficulty and long training programs intimidated a lot of pilots.

All of this scared away many mech pilots from trying out drone mechs.

Ves intended to change this dreary reality.

If there was no demand for drone mechs, then he would create it himself!

If many mech pilots became intimidated by the high requirements just to become qualified to pilot a drone mech, then Ves would do everything possible to lower them to reasonable levels!

"Compared to the demands imposed by other drone mechs, the difficulty of piloting my Fey Fiannas is much lower." Ves confidently claimed. "If you don't believe us, then let us show you. Do you recall Commander Ikeon Powell of the Skinny Rattlers? I have invited him back to the stage so that he can try out what it is like to pilot one of my machines."

A new light shone at one end of the oval-shaped arena. The mercenary commander floated in front of the open cockpit of a prepared Standard Fey Fianna.

Four different fey were mounted onto the harness that kept them attached to the back of the main body. That added to the difficulty of piloting the drone mech as each individual fey needed to be handled in a completely separate manner!

Ves flew over until he stopped a short distance away from the invited guest who had already changed into a piloting suit.

"Hello again, commander. I am sure that many people will doubt what you are about to say, but please answer this question. Have you ever piloted the Fey Fianna or any other drone mech for that matter before?"

"No. I can stake my honor on that." The man replied with such firmness that it did not seem he was lying. "I have never piloted any drone mechs in reality or in a simulator program in my life. I grew up in a state and attended a mech academy where such machines are completely absent. I doubt they get sold at all. After I entered the Red Ocean, I never saw any need to add any drone mechs to our mech rosters. Everyone in our community knows that you need to invest heavily to integrate mechs such as the Sparrow Storm in an existing outfit. The investment never made sense in my eyes."

"Understandable." Ves nodded. "What do you know of our Fey Fianna? How well do you expect to pilot it in the first few minutes after activation?"

"I have read the manual that you provided to me two days ago. There are many warnings and precautions, but it wasn't as demanding and convoluted as I feared. I have a basic theoretical understanding on how to use its functions and how to best pilot it on a fundamental level. I cannot say more about this as I have yet to pilot it in any way."

"Did you hear that, people? He is a true newcomer when it comes to piloting drone mechs. Let us see how he fares in the cockpit."

The mech commander entered the cockpit and soon turned the mech online.

The Fey Project did not flail or show any uncontrolled moves. As an experienced mech pilot, Ikeon Powell patiently explored the controls and slowly began to make basic movements with its limbs.

There was nothing remarkable about the Fey Fianna when it moved like any other ordinary humanoid mech. Powell mastered the basic controls quickly enough for that reason.

"Okay Commander Powell, are you ready to activate and deploy your 4 fey?"

"I am. Please be careful. I may not be able to control the fey."

Ves floated away but did not leave entirely. He proved with his actions that he had full confidence in his work's ease of use.

Additional noises emerged as the four fey detached themselves from the main body's rear.

Surprisingly enough, the fey moved so smoothly and in sync that it appeared that Commander Powell did not lose control over them, which was a common phenomenon when piloting drone mechs for the first time.

The problem was so bad that most drone mechs had to be configured so that their spurs entered into safe mode. That meant that they could not fire any weapons no matter what and automatically halted their movements if they were on a collision course with anything else.

None of that seemed necessary in this case. The four fey did not make any fast or dazzling movements, but as Commander Powell experimented with them more, he showed that he was able to make them move as he commanded!

There were only two possible explanations for this outcome.

The first one was that the mercenary commander lied and desecrated his honor by hiding the fact that he had practiced with drone mechs in the past.

The second one was that Commander Powell was truly new to the Fey Fianna, but that it was so easy to get started with that he already got the hang of coordinating the four fey at once!

How could a mercenary commander who became the retainer of a warlord and the newly appointed governor of a planet lack honor?

This was an impossible contradiction in many people's eyes!

This was why more and more of them genuinely believed that this was a truthful display of piloting control.

"You can do more than stand still while you focus on manipulating your fey. Come on, commander. Try and maneuver around as if you are on an actual battlefield. You can even try and activate the weapons and the other functions of the fey while you are at it. Go test your limits."

With the encouragement from Ves, the trial pilot gradually began to perform multiple functions at once.

Projections of enemy mechs flared to life. Each of them started to simulate attacks onto the Fey Fianna.

The mech commander focused first and foremost on evasion, as he had been trained to do whenever he was in control of a maneuverable machine.

The simulated hits automatically caused the adaptive modular armor system to replace the 'damaged' armor plating and fill up the gaps.

Yet that was not enough to keep it safe.

The energy shield fey flew in front and activated a water hyper energy shield that produced a strange vortex illusion. It effectively blocked the incoming attacks without any fuss or excessive burden to the mech pilot.

The real test came when the Fey Fianna had to fight back. It did not utilize its luminar crystal rifle, but instead pushed forth its two offensive fey and commanded them to fire at the same time!

The projected mechs were not easy to hit. Just like the Fey Fianna, the imaginary enemy units flew around in order to make themselves as difficult to target as possible.

Though the gauss cannon fey and the luminar crystal fey did not hit their targets, they continued to fire as fast as they could while constantly attempting to track the moving adversaries.

Though their accuracy and deviations were clearly poor at the start, Commander Powell managed to deliver an increasingly better performance after a few minutes had passed.

Soon enough, the luminar crystal fey finally managed to strike one of the evading enemy mechs!

"Good job! Now that you have managed to succeed once, it shouldn't be too difficult to replicate this feat."

Chapter 5532 Drone Mech Control Techniques

The Fey Fianna under the control of Commander Ikeon Powell gradually fought more proficiently.

The mercenary commander might not be exceptionally talented or clever, but the man had to possess enough skill in order to earn the respect of his subordinates.

As an experienced mercenary leader who piloted many different mechs over the course of his career, his ability to pick up new machines and quickly become proficient in their use was not weak.

The manual that the Larkinsons had given to him also contained a lot of helpful tips and thought exercises that could help mech pilots control multiple objects.

As projections of mechs continually appeared inside the vast central grounds of Phoca Arena, the sole Fey Fianna controlled by a new mech pilot organically displayed all of its basic capabilities.

A lot of mech pilots and other mech insiders gained a more intuitive grasp of the Fey Fianna's speed, maneuverability, accuracy and many other traits.

Seeing a mech in action granted them a much better idea of how the mech would fare in combat than seeing a lot of numbers on a spec sheet.

At a certain point, the projected mechs began to be replaced by battle bots. These machines were relatively cheap and disposable, but they exerted enough pressure onto the Fey Fianna that Commander Powell had to pay attention to defense.

Relying on the adaptive modular armor system had to be avoided as much as possible. It was not desirable to rely on hard armor to fend off attacks because it was a non-renewable resource.

The main defensive tool in this demonstration was the water hyper energy shield fey.

The single fey's energy shield was not as strong as a transphasic energy shield, but it did a good job at trying to close the gap.

Whenever the fey projected its energy shield in a bubble that was large enough to cover the main body, its entire surface glowed in blue.

At the same time, it produced an illusion that resembled multiple whirlpools that seemed to suck all of the energy out of incoming attacks.

Both laser beams and gauss rounds found themselves unable to wear down the energy shield as effectively as before.

Once a battle bot started to employ a hyper weapon the results drastically changed.

The battle bot armed with a laser rifle suddenly released a beam that was imbued with fire energy!

Boom!

A small explosion erupted when the fiery beam struck the water energy shield!

The collision between fire and water often produced explosive results, and this was no different.

However, the power of the laser beam could not overcome the power of the energy shield.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The firepower of the battle bot armed with a hyper weapon largely became suppressed by the water energy shield.

Even though the louder explosions looked more dramatic, the reality was that much of that power got wasted when it was directed elsewhere.

The water energy shield decisively held the advantage in this instance!

Ves occasionally narrated what was happening as the demonstration continued to unfold before everyone's eyes.

"Water energy and fire energy normally enjoy an antagonistic relationship. If everything is equal, then water usually holds an advantage, which means that it is the most suitable element to defend against energy attacks imbued with fire energy. However, the energy shield fey cannot keep this up forever. The incoming laser beam attacks will still deal damage even if they are unable to display their full power."

The Fey Fianna's other two living fey locked onto the threatening battle bot and sought to pummel it into pieces.

This was difficult as both sides did not remain stationary. The Fey Fianna and its accompanying fey were constantly moving around, which made it difficult to maintain an acceptable degree of accuracy.

The opposing battle bot did not enjoy much protection, but that made it lighter and more nimble.

It was a challenge for the two offensive fey to land their attacks, especially when the mech pilot in charge of them was completely new to attacking with the help of spurs!

However, enough time had passed for Commander Powell to understand the knack to utilizing them. Drone mechs existed long enough for mech pilots to develop a lot of standardized techniques and mental shortcuts that enabled them to improve their control of their difficult machines.

Ves had studied them as well. "Ah, I see that Commander Powell is utilizing two related control techniques at once. The manual that we have provided them has only given him a description of how to execute them, but the living mech he is piloting is actively helping him to perform these new and unfamiliar methods. This is one of the reasons why his control has improved so quickly."

The lack of proficiency at the start was quite clear and obvious to the mech pilots with drone mech experience. They had lived through this phase as well.

The difference was that it usually took weeks if not months for them to tame their spurs and make them move according to their will!

Even if those past struggles happened with more traditional drone mechs with a dozen spurs or more, it was still remarkable how Commander Powell was able to control four different fey without looking like a fool.

"The first control technique he is using is to imagine that his fey are limbs extending from his mech. Mech pilots often pull it off by visualizing their fey as tentacles. By imagining that the mech has 4 extra tentacle limbs extending out of its sides or back, it becomes easier to control the fey like they are extra hands. Of course, this mental model also comes with a number of downsides. The spurs have to stay relatively close to the main body, and they cannot make movements that would cause the extra limbs to break or perform illogical movements."

This was a tried-and-true control technique that every drone mech pilot started with. It reduced the complexity of controlling the spurs while also borrowing existing human neural pathways related to the control of limbs.

It was a lot easier to get started with this technique when the mech pilot hopped inside the cockpit of a humanoid mech that actually possessed such a limb structure.

Piloting a mech with five, six or eight arms enabled mech pilots to experience what it was like to control additional limbs that did not directly correspond to the human body.

Once they transferred to a drone mech, the gap between their past and current machines wasn't as big as before, making it much easier for the mech pilot to intuitively control spurs as if they were tentacles.

More proficient drone mech specialists usually abandoned this technique once they got enough practice under their belt. The true potential of spurs could only be unleashed if they were allowed to travel much further away from the main body or perform complicated maneuvers that could make actual tentacles get twisted into knots.

However, that was not an issue that most beginners had to worry about. The extra limb control technique was already good enough for most mech pilots.

"Aside from the extra limb control technique, do you see how synchronized the luminar crystal cannon fey and the gauss cannon fey have become? They have practically become twins with each other. They are always floating next to each other. Their guns are pointed at the exact same direction with minimal deviations in angle. They even fire their weapons at the same time despite the fact that the luminar crystal cannon can fire faster. This is usually known as the spurs-as-fingers technique or the fingering technique."

The spurs-as-fingers technique was an approach that encouraged the mech pilots to imagine the spurs as individual fingers attached to the same hand.

Doing this activated certain parts of a mech pilot's brain that was related to controlling the fingers of their own hands. This effectively reduced the burden of controlling multiple spurs as the mech pilot automatically 'grouped' them in the same hand.

This was an especially helpful control technique for drone mechs that carried many spurs.

It helped even more if the spurs were either identical to each other or possessed enough similarities that it did not matter too much.

This made it a mandatory technique for any mech pilot expected to master the Sparrow Storm!

No baseline human mech pilot could effectively control an entire mech as well as 16 spurs at once.

Without relying on augmentations, a mech pilot had to use shortcuts like these to make the process of controlling all of those spurs more manageable.

Naturally, more seasoned drone mech specialists eventually abandoned this technique as well.

The disadvantages of grouping lots of spurs to the same 'hand' were considerable. The lack of flexibility and the inability to maximize the use of every spur in a given moment restricted the mech pilots too much.

The prestige of piloting drone mechs without the use of these training wheels was considerable!

Only those who were able to control every spur as if they were individual fishes swimming around the main body were recognized as true drone mech specialists.

Their skill and lethality with a drone mech was on another level. They were highly desired among certain employers who recognized the benefits of using drone mechs. The highly specialized mech pilots were usually able to negotiate much higher salaries and other benefits due to their value.

In addition to that, drone mech specialists usually made for good battlefield commanders. Their ability to multitask and pay attention to many different moving elements at once could easily be applied to commanding entire mech units.

Once drone mechs started to age and decline from their peak, it was natural for them to switch to command mechs and start ordering around their subordinate mech units like they were spurs.

Ves did not think that would apply to the Fey Fianna. It was not a typical drone mech, and its target audience did not consist of mech pilots who were necessarily good at controlling many different pieces at once.

While other drone mechs forced mech pilots to adapt to their unique circumstances, the Fey Fianna instead took the initiative to accommodate its own mech pilots!

The demonstration that continued to unfold before him made that very clear.

With the help of the extra limb control technique and the spurs-as-fingers technique, Commander Powell exerted enough control over his offensive fey to aim and fire their modest arsenal as if they were guns on a weapon turret!

Each time the luminar crystal cannon fey and the gauss cannon fey fired their respective weapons, their output either missed or struck their targets in almost perfect synchronicity!

Most salvos missed as it was not easy for spurs to land hits against a maneuverable battle bot, but Powell was constantly improving his proficiency in his techniques.

Bang!

The battle bot eventually got struck enough times for it to malfunction and collapse to the arena floor!

More threatening battle bots emerged. Each of them were equipped with basic hyper weapons that produced different reactions when they struck the water energy shield depending on their E energy attributes.

The additional battle bots stressed the defenses of the Fey Fianna while at the same forcing it to quickly eliminate the machines by improving its hit rate.

Commander Powell endured a lot more stress than before, but he grit his teeth and persisted in this challenge!

This demonstration did not only showcase the excellent features of the Fey Fianna, but also revealed how such a mech would fare in the hands of a capable mech pilot that had yet to pilot a drone mech than before.

If such a pilot was already capable of reaching this level of combat effectiveness, then how much better would a true drone mech specialist perform under the same circumstances?

The lower limit of the Fey Fianna became quite clear after this display.

However, the true value of the Fey Fianna still remained unclear so long as its upper limit had yet to be shown!

Chapter 5533 The Real Function of the Fey

Mechs could take on many different forms, but the humanoid shape was dominant for good reasons.

It was a lot easier for mech pilots to learn how to control a humanoid mechanical form.

By borrowing the existing human brain's ability to control a bipedal humanoid form, mech cadets could easily fast-forward their way through controlling the familiar physical characteristics of mechs and move on to learning more important skills.

That was why the majority of mechs were humanoid in shape that made use of external weaponry.

Mech cadets often learned their weapon skills by practicing equivalent weapons with their human bodies. This was a shortcut that enabled them to transfer their personal combat skills whenever they piloted mechs.

Yet this was not the most ideal way to utilize a mech.

The key advantage of using mechs as combat platforms was that they could do stuff that normal human bodies could not do. They lengthen or shorten their limbs, add additional limbs to their bodies or take on a completely different shape that was much more effective for specific purposes!

The training of first-class mech pilots was often many times harder than that of their lesser counterparts due to this reason. They needed to train how to pilot mechs that deviated a lot more from the baseline human form.

First-class multipurpose mechs occasionally looked like humanoids, but it was more common for them to take on more weirder and abstract forms. As mechs that carried so many miniaturized modules and weapons systems at once, mech designers had to make many difficult design choices in order to maximize their lethality while keeping their volume as limited as possible.

Drone mechs were not comparable to first-class multipurpose mechs, but their piloting challenges were somewhat similar.

In other words, anyone who mastered the art of piloting a drone mech would have a much easier time of piloting a first-class multipurpose mech. It was the same the other way around.

Such a thought doubtlessly entered the minds of at least a portion of the mech pilots among the growing audience.

More and more people had begun to tune into the live broadcast when they heard about the increasingly more compelling properties of the Fey Fianna.

Many more second-raters had begun to develop a genuine interest in acquiring or piloting this unusual new drone mech!

Not only did it embody the Hyper Generation much better than many of the previous mechs that came out in the past half year, but it also promised them a way to improve their skills far beyond what any other mech could accomplish.

The skills that Commander Ikeon Powell learned over the course of piloting the Fey Fianna for the first time were all valuable outside of this specific mech model.

Even if it was clear that the living mech was actively helping Powell along, this was no different from having a personal tutor by his side who constantly provided him with useful guidance.

In that sense, the Fey Fianna also happened to be an excellent teaching mech that could help mech pilots master the art of piloting more complicated drone mechs!

As the current demonstration was about to reach the pre-established time limit, Ves wanted to showcase one more feature that he had yet to unveil.

"I am sure that you are interested in why this mech is called the Fey Fianna and why its spurs are called the fey. I won't bother you with the full story, but let me show you what makes the fey different from other spurs besides the fact that they are alive."

Ves transmitted a hidden signal that caused the Fey Fianna piloted by Commander Powell to unlock an important restriction.

The mech pilot clearly sensed the change and understood what he could do with the new feature. He had already read the relevant instructions from the manual.

A change occurred in the field. The remaining battle bots stopped their hostilities and retreated.

What came in their place was a projection that was so massive that much of the oval-shaped mech arena became filled with visions of metal!

Much of the spectators had to shift their views to the projected screens in order to gain a clear overview of what just appeared.

It was a warship!

The alien warship was not particularly large. She was roughly equivalent to a destroyer and possessed a range of formidable armaments.

Such a warship was beyond the capacity for any standard mech to defeat, just the transphasic energy shields alone made it impossible for a mech such as the Fey Fianna to land damaging attacks onto the hull.

This demonstration was not about proving that the Fey Fianna could single-handedly tear apart an alien destroyer by itself.

It was already enough to show that his new drone mech possessed the capital to survive a bit longer against such a powerful force.

"What you see before you is a projected simulation of an alien destroyer analogue. One of her main gun batteries is about to lock onto the Fey Fianna and attempt to blast it to pieces. Normally, a warship is quite capable in destroying lone mechs by themselves, but the Fey Fianna possess a useful trick that can give it a greater chance to survive against such an onslaught than normal. Commander Powell, you know what to do. Activate the decoys!"

After receiving that instruction, the four living fey stopped what they were doing and released a burst of interfering ECM and other disruptive emissions.

Underneath this momentary interference, the four fey had all disappeared from sight.

In their place were four identical mechs!

Each of them matched the appearance of the original Fey Fianna. The projected appearances were so accurate in their imitation that they even copied the small marks and other unique touches of the real mech.

Not only that, but the mechs also exuded the exact same glow and vibe as the original!

Since the subordinate spirits were all off-shoots of the dominant spirit, they were actually one and the same for the most part. Ves had deliberately designed them so that the former could easily imitate the latter!

While there were many powerful and bizarre means to distinguish the true mech in the midst of the false images, it was a lot harder to do so in a busy battlefield where lots of interference and frequent energy emissions degraded the effectiveness of sensor systems.

Another setting became active. A lot of people felt that their view became fuzzier and a bit more difficult to watch.

The circumstances inside the arena had begun to match a realistic spaceborn battlefield environment!

Subsequently, the projected warship's sensors behaved as if they were being affected by the interference. The vessel no longer had the ability to distinguish the true mech from the decoys.

Commander Powell knew what was coming. There was no way to effectively defend against the firepower of a formidable cannon of a warship.

The only way to preserve his mech and his life was to evade the attack entirely!

The Fey Fianna and the four fey in disguise all began to perform evasive maneuvers while keeping well away from each other!

At this moment, the decoys showed several characteristics that were highly unusual.

First, Commander Powell clearly did not have the ability to control all of his fey on an individual basis, but right now they moved around as if they were truly piloted by humans.

Second, the fey moved further away from the main body. Heavy jamming and other electronic noise usually meant that this was a bad idea, but the fey possessed an alternate means of control that was less susceptible to the current kinds of interference.

HISS!

A bright laser beam struck one of the decoys in an instant!

Although the attack was slightly off the mark, the simulated laser beam fired by the cannon was so big that it would have burned through half of a mech while melting the other half right after!

Naturally, the warship attack did not strike an actual mech at all, but merely destroyed a single disposable fey.

The water energy shield fey should have disappeared entirely if this was an actual battle, but right now it merely made a controlled descent to the ground.

HISS!

The second beam struck another decoy!

The same response happened again. The warship had wasted the power of one of her cannons yet again, just to crush a single fey that could easily be replaced after a battle.

HISS!

HISS!

Whether deliberate or not, it took four powerful attacks in total before the alien destroyer finally struck the authentic Fey Fianna!

With only one decoy left at this point, the alien warship effectively had a 50 percent chance of striking the right target.

Though the Fey Fianna struck by the gigantic laser beam had been 'killed' in an instant, the audience did not feel like the mech performed poorly in this instance.

The mech pilots among them all appreciated how long the Fey Fianna managed to last in this scenario.

Many other mechs would have been vaporized after the warship opened fire for the first time!

While the decoy function of all of the fey had not been tested in actual field conditions, as long as it was at least half as effective as now, it would already have the ability to save many human lives!

That alone made it worthwhile to obtain a batch of Fey Fiannas!

"Thank you for your cooperation, Commander Powell. You may go back now." Ves spoke as he flew back to the original 9 Fey Fiannas before addressing his audience. "What you have just witnessed is one of many possible scenarios where the decoys can play a useful role. One Fey Fianna can produce at least 4 decoys. That does not sound much, but what if there are more Fey Fiannas in a mech unit? Let me show you what that looks like."

The Fey Fiannas that were all piloted by Larkinson mech pilots began to make the same moves.

The fey under their control immediately activated their decoy functions as well.

The entire area occupied by the Fey Fiannas on standby immediately became a lot more crowded as 36 decoy mechs appeared in an instant!

Each decoys looked exactly the same as their principles. They also exuded the same vibes that made them nearly indistinguishable from each other when observed by spiritual senses.

The impact of this impressive display was not small.

If people didn't know any better, they would have thought that a mech squad had suddenly expanded into a mech company!

There was a huge difference between the two. The threat levels and other factors simply weren't in the same dimension.

If enemies noticed the approach of a mech company, they would become much more intimidated and make decisions that would be different than if they knew the truth.

Many mech pilots and mech commanders understood the potential of this decoy function!

They could take advantage of this capability to pull off so many deceptive tactics and maneuvers.

For example, they could make a false flank attack that looked incredibly serious on the surface, but only consisted of a lot of disguised fey.

When the enemy repositioned its forces to defend against this threatening offensive, the attacking side could easily form an actual attack from a more favorable angle!

In another scenario, the fey could get mixed into large mech formations that were closing in on a fleet of alien warships.

This maneuver was always responsible for killing a lot of good mechs and mech pilots. If the massed firepower of alien warships could successfully be diverted onto all of the decoys produced by the fey, then that would most definitely allow mech forces to win their battles with fewer losses than before!

No matter what, a single fey was much cheaper and easier to replace than a full mech paired with a mech pilot!

The addition of this decoy function caused the already considerable value of the Fey Fianna to increase even more!

At this time, the willingness to purchase the Fey Fianna had become so high that the LMC was already starting to receive a torrent of purchase orders!

Chapter 5534 The Real Fey Fiannas

The decoy function exploded everyone's interest in the Fey Fianna!

The product suddenly became a lot more attractive once people found out that the fey could do more than fire weapons or form energy shields!

It was not as if those primary functions were weak or worthless, but these were already jobs that other mechs could already fulfill.

In other words, a mech force did not actually gain a lot of new capabilities after adding the Fey Fianna to their lineup. They just received a bunch of odd machines that could control a lot of smaller machines to do the same stuff as usual.

While the product reveal had made it clear that the fey possessed nuances that made them better in many situations, they still failed to introduce anything that was radically new and different.

That changed when the fey showed that they could imitate mechs well enough to fool enemy sensor systems!

Of course, the decoys were not entirely realistic. Their lack of mass and the imperfections inherent to a compact projection system made it so that powerful or advanced enough sensors could expose their true nature.

That said, it was not that easy to detect which was real and which was false in most field conditions.

It was a lot more difficult to determine that the projected mechs were decoys at medium to longer distances. This was usually where alien warships tended to kill a lot of mechs. Anything that could divert their firepower was helpful to any mech force!

Another factor was that the decoy function differed in effectiveness depending on the version of the Fey Fianna.

The Standard Fey Fianna was made out of cheaper tech and materials. Ves and his fellow mech designers had to cross out a lot of items on their wish list in order to make their design reasonable and practical enough.

The emissions of the ordinary fey were quite decent, but nothing exceptional when compared to similar systems that were available to other mech designs.

The same limitations did not apply to the Elite Fey Fianna. Made out of higher grades of exotics, hypers, tech and more, the quasi-first-class fey contained a lot of tech that reached the limit of what a second-class product was able to bear!

The projected appearance and the various emissions produced by the fey were much more realistic. Sensor systems had to work a lot harder in order to determine whether they were true or false.

Even though these differences were impossible to detect by laymen, there were plenty of mech insiders who had their own ways of detecting these differences.

Ves had yet to explain the characteristics of the Elite Edition of the Fey Fianna, but the various displays already showed that they were much better than the Standard Edition.

Unfortunately, only a small quantity of potential customers possessed the qualifications to buy the Elite Fey Fiannas, but they usually stuck to using mechs produced by themselves or their long-time partners.

The LMC did not expect to receive many orders for the Elite Edition, at least when it had yet to prove its true worth on the battlefield.

This was also why Ves did not bother to elaborate on the Elite Edition. The Standard Edition was much more attainable to the majority of mech buyers.

In any case, the event had reached the next phase.

What people truly wanted to see was not the Fey Fianna when it was being piloted by an individual who only came into contact with it for the first time.

They wanted to see the performance of the Fey Fianna at its height. They wanted to see it piloted by those who possessed actual experience in controlling drone mechs. They wanted to see the performance of the Fey Fianna that had already grown for enough years to become powerhouses in their own right!

It was impossible for Ves to realize their dreams in full. None of these conditions were easy to accomplish.

That did not mean that it was futile to try.

In the month after he decided to hold a product reveal on Bortele III, the Larkinson Clan had done its best to do what was necessary to allow the Fey Fiannas to display their greater potential.

When the first batch of Fey Fiannas finished production at the local mech factory, the clan assigned them to the few Larkinson mech pilots with existing drone mech experience.

None of them were dedicated specialists that had mastered the Sparrow Storm and could control 64 Sparrows like individual birds.

Such mech pilots tended to be trained and nurtured into lifelong soldiers by specialized mech armies.

Even if these mech pilots were looking to change their jobs, they would not join the Larkinson Clan due to the lack of drone mechs in its mech roster.

The only drone mech pilots that the Larkinson Clan was able to gather in the short term were those who merely dabbled in drone mechs and a handful of new recruits.

That was already sufficient as far as Ves was concerned.

The difficulty of piloting even the most basic version of the Sparrow Storm was several times greater than the Fey Fianna.

Ves made a gesture that prompted six of the Fey Fiannas to step forward. The three Standard Fey Fianna formed a single team while the Elite Fey Fianna formed another team.

Each team was accompanied by 12 fey each, and their composition was mixed and balanced for the time being.

The most handsome and powerful Larkinson Fey Fianna did not join the rest. They simply turned around and left the arena grounds.

It was enough for the Larkinsons to show off their exclusive edition of this mech line. Ves did not actually want these Fey Fianna to reveal too much too soon. No matter how much they restrained their performance, mech designers would always find a way to detect a lot of clues and form a lot of accurate estimations.

"Now, I am sure you have been waiting to see how our Fey Fianna will perform as a team and under the control of more skilled mech pilots. The people who are sitting the cockpits of these 6 machines are all part-time drone mech pilots. Their fundamentals and their experience are much stronger. Aside from that, they have already trained with their Fey Fiannas for several weeks on end. They

have worked hard to deepen their control over their drone mechs as much as possible in order to give you a preview of what Fey Fiannas can truly do with a bit of effort."

In order to make the upcoming demonstrations more realistic, the Larkinsons no longer deployed any projected mechs or disposable battle bots.

An entire squad of ranged mechs showed up this time!

This was a generic lineup of 12 identical hyper rifleman mechs. The model of the mech was not important. It was enough to know that they were pretty sound if lacking in any distinctive qualities. Even their hyper laser rifles closely matched the template released by the Red Association.

Even so, the opposing squad had twice as many mechs than their adversaries!

The only factor that made this comparison a bit unfavorable for the rifleman mechs was that none of them reached the standard of a quasi-first-class mech.

There was an easy way to balance this matchup.

Only one team entered this fight!

The Standard Fey Fiannas began to move forward while the Elite Fey Fiannas deliberately back away.

"Does anyone dare to bet which side will win?" Ves playfully asked. "I know what it looks like. 3 mechs are unlikely to defeat 12 mechs. Something questionable has to happen in order for the outnumbered side to win. I can promise you that the Fey Fiannas will not be cheating in this demonstration match. The mechs will be fighting at each other at full power. The mech pilots of the rifleman mechs are all skilled and reputable mercenaries who are entitled to win massive prizes if they succeed in beating my Standard Fey Fianna. Under all of these conditions, even I cannot say for certain whether my work will win this match."

The situation was not as lopsided as it looked as rifleman mechs were not the best choice to fight against drone mechs. The former usually found it difficult to eliminate a lot of individual fey.

However, rifleman mechs were usually capable of sniping drone mechs directly on open terrain!

"Fight!"

That was exactly what happened at this time!

The experienced and motivated mercenary mech pilots all commanded their machines to split up and engage in independent movements.

At the same time, the mechs all aimed their rifles at the Fey Fiannas and opened fire while on the move!

The 3 Fey Fiannas did not remain still.

From the moment this match had begun, the Fey Fianna split up and covered themselves in energy shields produced by their only defensive fey!

The shields immediately took damage, but just like before, fire laser beams failed to display their full damage potential against water-attributed energy shields.

"Those energy shields look a lot differently."

"What are those projections?"

"These energy shields are much better at resisting damage than the one we have seen before!"

Even though the Fey Fiannas in the field were identical to the one piloted by Commander Powell, their actual performance deviated quite a lot!

The main cause of this was that the mech pilots and the living mechs were able to utilize E energy to amplify the performance of their energy shields a lot better!

As the Fey Fiannas tried to block the incoming damage as best as possible, the mechs stuck close to their energy shield fey and actually combined forces with each other!

It was difficult for a single fey to attract a lot of water-attributed E energy from the environment. This was why the main body also pitched in. Their defenses all happened to be based on water energy as well, so they could easily work together with a fey of the same attribute!

That was not all. The dominant spirits and the subordinate spirits were all a few weeks old. They had become a lot more proficient on how to manipulate E energy to produce specific outcomes.

The mech pilots also spent weeks of time cooperating with their living mechs. The power of a cooperating human contributed a lot.

The most visible consequence of all of the improvements was that the energy shield fey utilized more advanced and effective methods to strengthen their defenses!

The energy shield fey consciously formed their own artistic conceptions and cultivated them with the hopes of fulfilling their roles a lot better!

Every subordinate spirit was free to cultivate whichever way it liked. Neither Ves nor anyone else had imposed any restrictions on them. Their existence was so new that no optimal methods and solutions had emerged.

One of the energy shield fey visualized a hurricane. This was a step up from a whirlpool. Not only did it create a much larger and more three-dimensional energy manifestation, but it was also a lot better at dispersing the energy of all incoming attacks!

This happened to be especially effective against energy beam attacks!

Much of their potency came from the fact that they were able to concentrate their power.

The impressive miniature hurricane that formed over the energy shield could not do much to neutralize the power of the incoming beam, but scattered it to a small extent.

That might not sound like much, but it was enough to reduce the strain on an energy shield by a significant margin.

The fey only had weeks of time to form and strengthen its artistic conception, but the fact that it was able to do this much was shocking to a hidden group of observers!

Those who enjoyed sufficient access to the legacy of ancient cultivators saw that the defensive fey delivered a performance that exceeded the current boundaries of hyper technology!

They effectively gained the power of a qi cultivator and utilized it in an effective way!

This was a sight that could not be produced by any other hyper mech released up to this date!

Chapter 5535 The Flashier, the Stronger

The performance of the three Standard Fey Fianna stood out in many ways.

From the ease in which the Larkinson mech pilots controlled their four fey to how much power they were able to draw from E energy radiation, it became clear to everyone that the Fey Fiannas represented a generational change among mechs!

A lot of mech designers understood much deeper of how exceptional it was for the LMC's Design Department to make so much progress in such a short time.

It had only been a year since the Age of Dawn had begun, and only now did they managed to see a true hyper mech!

Yes, the Fey Fianna was one of the few machines that utilized hyper technology and more importantly E-technology to such an impressive extent that it had the capital to be called a true hyper mech!

Just the fact that the mech and its fey were all alive and could imitate qi cultivators to an extent was already enough to regard them as a core product of the Hyper Generation.

No matter what, after the product reveal was over, a lot more mech designers would definitely conduct a lot of investigations into living mechs.

The majority of them had no interest in changing their specializations or studying the creation of living mechs to the limit.

However, when faced with an epochal field of technology that may be just as big as space suppression technology if not more, the mech industry may not have a choice in denying its usefulness and universality anymore.

If no other technological field was able to present a viable and competitive alternative to living mechs, then there may be a time where living mechs became just as essential as hyper technology!

By that time, every mech designer would not be able to escape the necessity of grappling with living mechs.

Those who did not gain at least a basic proficiency in this strange and unorthodox field would continue to fall behind. Only those who were able to design and create comparable machines possessed the capital to be at the forefront of the mech industry.

This was what many mech designers saw as they continued to observe the current exhibition match.

Even if it was ludicrous to expect that 3 drone mechs could win a match against 12 rifleman mechs, the Fey Fiannas merely had to hold out long enough to prove their mettle.

When the former managed to resist the combined firepower of the latter while also launching counterattacks, there was no way to deny the crushing strength of the new Fey Fianna model!

Naturally, there were many subtle ways for the Larkinsons to cheat this process. From tampering with the selection of mech pilots to secretly telling them to alter their behavior, there were many ways for a mech company to produce the desired outcome of an exhibition match that it had organized themselves.

Yet would a tier 3 galactic citizen stain his honor and desecrate his professional reputation just to gain an advantage in such a trivial matter?

Even though Ves mostly acted as if he was still an independent mech designer, he was also an honorary member of the Red Association. An entire escort fleet followed him day and night to protect and monitor him at all times.

How could a 'mecher' like Ves possibly break the rules as well as the code of conduct that the Red Association held dear?

It was not a secret that the mechers possessed many flaws and shortcomings. They were only human, after all. Yet when it came to their former namesake's duties, they had always gone above and beyond in performing all of the duties of a real trade association.

Given how heavy the Red Association's presence had become in and around Phoca Arena, everything that happened during the product reveal must have received the powerful organization's implicit or explicit approval!

The obvious presence of the mechers also made people draw other conclusions, though whether they were right or wrong remained to be seen.

"How can our works possibly surpass the continual increase in potency that comes from the growth of living mechs? Professor Larkinson is practically cheating! All of the progress that living mechs are able to make is no longer the result of his direct design work. He is just sitting back while letting his mechs grow stronger by themselves! That is no longer mech design. It is more apt to call it mech husbandry."

"If the general progress of hyper technology cannot keep up with the development of living mech technology, then the latter will become an essential component in any mech design going forward. Only a few mech designers have managed to turn their design philosophies into a universal requirement in their field, and an unusually high proportion of them went on to become Star Designers."

"Professor Larkinson is playing with fire. Designing autonomous mechs that can think and act by themselves is already dangerous enough. Giving them the power to evolve and develop without any human direction or supervision makes them even more dangerous! Has he learned nothing from the AI accidents of the past? It only takes a couple of accidents for his living mechs to turn them against their own owners. These living mechs must be castrated in order to prevent such an occurrence. It would be too late to strain these crazy machines when they have spread all across our society."

Many mech designers continued to argue with others as the Fey Fianna continued to stage an impressive performance.

At this time, the energy shields of the Fey Fiannas were absorbing heavy punishment, but they stubbornly drew on a lot of E energy to increase their resilience.

The enemy ranged mechs tried their best to focus their fire in order to eliminate a Fey Fianna quickly and reduce the pressure by 33% in a single go, but the drone mechs simply covered for each other as best they could.

The rifleman mechs did the same. While they were not equipped with powerful energy shields, it still took concentrated firepower to penetrate their defenses and damage their internals.

With 12 mechs on their side, it was easy enough to shift into formations that allowed damaged mechs to shield behind more intact mechs.

However, this was not an absolute. None of the mechs excelled in defense and the constant maneuvers frequently exposed the mechs in the rear.

What ultimately decided this fight was not tactics, but how well the mechs were able to produce effective results with the limited resources at hand.

In this, the Fey Fiannas were clearly superior to the other mechs!

To the laymen among the crowd, the simplest and most intuitive way for them to discern the differences between the two sides was to compare their 'light shows'.

The mechs that glowed brighter and produced flashier illusions had to be the stronger ones!

After all, that was usually the case in all of the action dramas where the mechs piloted by the protagonists produced illusions of mythical heroes or animals before going on a killing spree against thousands of cannon fodder mechs!

The current display coincidentally produced this association among many people. What they were seeing was practically an action drama come to life!

For example, one of the Fey Fiannas had developed a penchant for rotations.

Its water hyper energy shield fey manifested its artistic conception in the form of a miniature hurricane that seemed to swallow and disperse anything that got inside.

The projectiles launched by its earth hyper gauss cannon fey seemed to turn into drills that spun much faster than they should, causing them to punch through anything they hit considerably better than usual.

The fire hyper luminar crystal rifles shot out flaming energy beams that took on the form of brief fire vortices. They happened to break through opposing water hyper energy shields much better and transfer their heat energy a bit deeper when striking armor.

Meanwhile, the main body of the mech began to produce an artistic conception of its own. It had begun to generate a much larger whirlpool that seemed to draw in vastly more water-attributed E-energy at its location!

"Everything about this Fey Fianna is spinning. It is a mech that has discovered how to exploit the power of rotations to a greater extent."

Another Fey Fianna followed a completely different tack. This one seemed to have developed an affection for humans.

Its primary artistic conception was a large human that strongly resembled its own mech pilot. It was unclear what sort of benefits it brought to the main body, but its defenses were still respectable!

Its fey differentiated themselves much more. Each of them produced their own human artistic conceptions that were aligned with their E energy attributes.

The water energy fey seemed to cope with incoming attacks by tweaking its settings and performing constant optimizations at a greater efficiency than before. It was as if the intuition and the intelligence of the operation system of the defensive fey had gained its own pilot!

The performance of the offensive fey had increased as well. While the gauss cannon fey and the luminar crystal fey did not gain that much more damage, their accuracy and their targeting had improved by a large extent.

These two fey might not hit the hardest, but they often managed to strike the opposing rifleman mechs where it hurt the most!

Boom!

Fzzzz!

Two rifleman mechs suddenly lost power and threatened to crash onto the arena ground if the safety systems hadn't come online and cushioned their sudden descent!

The firepower directed towards the three Fey Fiannas had dropped considerably, enabling them to endure the incoming attacks a bit longer.

This reprieve was all thanks to the odd Fey Fianna that had chosen humans as its artistic conception!

The third Fey Fianna adopted the most striking artistic conception of its team.

"What is that?"

"Is that... a phase whale?"

"No. Phase whales can come in many different shapes and sizes, but they still conform to a number of rules. These aquatic beasts resemble phase whales, but there are obvious signs of hybridization."

The third Fey Fianna took advantage of the connection between its space suppressor fey and the Phase King and tried to imitate the race of the latter.

By creating multiple artistic conceptions based on fish-whales, this Fey Fianna managed to gain several notable advantages.

The first was that it became easier to borrow the power of the Phase King!

Unfortunately, the Phase King's ability to exert its power was limited when there wasn't any phasewater present, or else it could have empowered the Fey Fiannas a bit more.

Even so, just a fraction of his power was already enough to strengthen the drone mech's performance.

The energy shield fey gained the ability to imbue its energy shield with a faint spatial barrier.

Though the effect was so weak that it could not replicate the defenses of a transphasic energy shield, the small change was already enough to increase the longevity of its defense.

The two offensive fey meanwhile did not necessarily inflict more damage, but managed to perform more penetrating attacks, thereby showing that their fish-whale artistic conceptions were not decorations.

"Impressive."

There was no order or standardization to these artistic conceptions. Ves and the Larkinsons allowed their living mechs to do whatever they wanted, mostly because they did not have a proscribed formula that could guide the living mechs towards the best outcomes.

Experimentation was essential to fleshing out the power system of his living mechs!

Though all of these artistic conceptions looked gimmicky, inconsistent and unreliable, their effects were undeniable.

Even the skeptics had to admit that these odd methods enabled every living mech to absorb and utilize E energy much better than mechs that could only manipulate E energy through fixed design structures.

This was the essential difference between living mechs and lifeless mechs!

The former could effectively imitate the power of a qi cultivator, while the latter could only rigidly harness E energy through the hyper design solutions embedded in their mech frames.

To Ves, this was comparable to the most fundamental difference between a high-level artifact and a low-level artifact!

Chapter 5536 Resource Utilization

As the demonstration battle proceeded onwards, the endurance of the mechs started to reach their limits.

The rifleman mechs could barely be considered hyper mechs. The differences in E energy absorption and conversion were so much that these machines could already be regarded as lastgen mechs in front of the Fey Fianna!

Nonetheless, the advantage of numbers had the potential to trump any technological edge.

It was extremely common for more powerful and sophisticated mechs to get defeated by swarms of lesser adversaries that might not even cost as much in total.

The rifleman mechs may be weaker in every aspect, but they had numbers by their side. That not only increased their firepower, but enabled them to surround and flank the outnumbered Fey Fiannas.

This started to make an increasingly greater difference even if the rifleman mechs started to get picked off over time.

The mechs all fought hard against each other. All of the machines kept flying across the expansive arena perimeter that was completely enclosed by strong energy shields.

After getting struck by so many laser beam attacks, the Fey Fiannas and their defensive feys had been stretched to their limits and more.

Each of their energy shields had been depleted. No matter how much water-attributed E energy they attracted from the environment, it was hard for them to do anything useful when there was no foundation for them to enhance!

The only way the Fey Fiannas could persist for a longer time and resist more attacks was to rely on their adaptive modular armor system to consume incoming attacks.

Fzzt! Fzzt! Fzzt! Fzzt!

Fire laser beams continued to strike water modular armor plating, depleting the latter at a steady but concerning rate.

The rifleman mechs tried their best to penetrate or bypass all of the water-empowered armor so that they could inflict serious internal damage, but time and time again they got stymied.

The Fey Fiannas made the best use out of their maneuverability and modular armor to mitigate the incoming attacks in absence of their energy shields!

In this kind of situation, the artistic conceptions mattered less as there was not as much room for them to alter the properties of stating armor.

Nonetheless, the artistic conceptions based around a whirlpool, a human and a fish-whale wrapped around the mechs and seemed to give the Fey Fiannas an indeterminate blessing that elevated their overall performance by a slight margin!

The momentum had been on their side from the beginning, and never abated due to the fact that their mechs lasted for so long.

The dwindling number of rifleman mechs continually had to endure constant attacks from the different fey as well as the luminar crystal rifles in the hands of the drone mechs themselves.

The key to tipping this battle in the favor of the rifleman mechs was to eliminate a single Fey Fianna!

"Take one down, and the remaining two won't have as much firepower and cover anymore."

"Should we target the fey instead? They are smaller and more fragile."

"No! There are too many of them, and they are more difficult to hit. Wasting our firepower will only cause us to play into their hands. Focus your fire on the mechs directly!"

Alas, their wish was not easy to fulfill. In many cases, the fey physically interposed themselves between their principals and an enemy ranged mech.

Unlike the small and skinny spurs of other popular drone mechs, the fey happened to be large and chunky enough to serve as adequate shields!

Many times, the rifleman mechs found their attacks landing on the more disposable fey rather than the crucial mechs themselves.

Getting rid of the drones was not that easy either.

"Those modular armor plates keep filling up the gaps made by our weapons!"

As long as attacks continued to pour from the same direction, the Fey Fiannas could patiently draw out modular armor plates from other fey and bolster the defenses of the one under attack.

The mercenary mech pilots strengthened their efforts to focus their firepower on a single Fey Fianna and encircle it from multiple directions.

Yet their attempts constantly failed to produce the desired results because the fey and their shared modular armor plating always got in the way!

Every Fey Fianna had 4 fey at their disposal. Disregarding their main functions, each of them could effectively serve as 4 physical shields that could potentially block the attacks of at least 4 rifleman mechs.

The difficulty of doing so was high in practice because it took a lot of effort to change the positioning of four fey at once while at the same time anticipating the aim of the opposing rifleman mechs.

Yet for whatever reason, the Larkinson mech pilots and the living mechs controlled their fey so well that the rifleman mechs only sparingly managed to land their shots onto the main bodies of the drone mechs.

The Fey Fianna that developed an artistic conception based on a human appeared to possess the weakest defense among the three.

However, it also happened to be the trickiest mech to defeat!

Its control over its fey was considerably better than the other two Fey Fiannas. The energy manifestation of its artistic projection grew increasingly brighter and more solid as the living mech enthusiastically learned a lot of practical lessons in actual combat.

The human illusion actually started to become more animated after a while!

It gained life and began to make gestures that made it seem as if it was coordinating the movements and actions of the fey.

The aim of the offensive fey improved even further, enabling them to eliminate another rifleman mech after successively hitting the same weak point.

The space suppressor fey functioned as the primary 'physical shield' of the Fey Fianna, as its main function was not relevant in this particular matchup. It steadily sacrificed all of its modular armor plating and endured steady attacks to its internal components, but still it stubbornly clung to life in order to prevent the main body from incurring any damage!

The other three fey started to donate a portion of their own modular armor plating, yet the focused attacks caused them to get depleted at a rapid rate.

The scorched and half-molten space suppressor fey still did not give up at this junction. Instead of compromising the defenses of the main body, it instead began to borrow modular armor plating from the fey belonging to the other two drone mechs!

Ves had already warned his audience that this was not a recommended setting. However, the Larkinson mech pilots intrinsically trusted each other. They did not fear that anyone would abuse this feature at the expense of the lives of their fellow clansmen.

"They are actually doing it! The other two mech pilots have agreed to lend their own modular armor plates to their colleague."

"How long can this single spur last? I have counted the amount of times it has been struck. This single device has endured enough damage to destroy four to six mechs on average. That is far greater than what I can ever expect from any other spur!"

"These illusions aren't as empty as they seem. They are affecting the living mechs in a profound manner."

The rifleman mechs had been whittled down to half their number, and many of the ones who still remained operational all bore many marks of damage!

The Fey Fiannas might be outnumbered, but they actually possessed three ranged weapon systems each!

With the combined output of a luminar crystal rifle, a small luminar crystal cannon and a small gauss cannon, the three Fey Fiannas actually possessed the capital to come close to matching the firepower of the rifleman mechs!

The biggest difficulty was that every Larkinson mech pilot had to be responsible for the control and targeting of the mech and the fey that possessed these crucial armaments.

Yet for the Fey Fianna that produced a human artistic conception, the living mech and its mech pilot were able to coordinate their available resources much better!

It even gave people the illusion that the Fey Fianna was not a composite between a multi-spirit mech and a human mech pilot, but a single united 'human' entity that possessed complete command over its own 'body'!

"What an imaginative direction!" Ves couldn't help but praise this living mech. "The benefit of allowing living mechs to choose their own growth directions is that they can always give us surprises every once in a while. The greater the quantity of living mechs, the greater the occurrence that you will encounter one that has attained greater success! I believe that this particular living mech can serve as a model for other machines of its kind."

He was very serious about this. Perhaps this artistic conception may not be useful for every living mech, but the focus on coordination and unity happened to be an excellent for a drone mech with multiple moving components!

In fact, this cultivation approach was actually a lot more suitable for a drone mech that commanded much larger quantities of spurs.

Regardless, the excellent control of the human Fey Fianna combined with the unlimited sharing of all of the modular armor plating between the 3 drone mechs caused the demonstration match to swing decisively in their favor!

"They're losing... they're actually losing."

From the moment the rifleman mechs had lost half their number while the opposing side still retained three healthy mechs, the outcome had almost been set in stone.

People were basically waiting if the Fey Fiannas and their living fey suffered any sudden and drastic breakdowns due to being squeezed to their limits, but that never happened.

Though a couple of fey that had been stripped of all of their modular armor plates eventually suffered fatal strikes that caused them to collapse, their elimination hardly reduced the overall combat effectiveness of the 3 Fey Fiannas.

The constant modular armor reinforcement effectively caused the firepower of all of the rifleman mechs to get dispersed across a much larger surface area.

It was the equivalent of firing a lot of individual shots once onto the entire exterior of a mech! None of the attacks managed to strike the same location twice, which meant that the attacks were unable to effectively take advantage of any weak points and inflict serious damage.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Fzzt! Fzzt! Fzzt!

Overcoming a squad of 12 rifleman mechs was not easy, no matter how well the Fey Fiannas managed to distinguish themselves in this bout.

The gauss cannon fey started to run out of ammunition. The only other way they could contribute to the battle was use their physical forms as an additional shield, but even that became less tenable since the Fey Fiannas were rapidly running out of spare modular plates.

The luminar crystal cannon fey never inflicted the most damage, but they were so efficient and steady that they were still able to fire their weapons with hardly any difference from before.

Yet it was not until the energy shield fey reluctantly managed to restore their functionality and redeploy their energy shields that the victory and defeat became certain!

The mercenary mech pilots did not give up and admirably fought to the very end, allowing their actions to emphasize the superiority of the Fey Fianna model just as the last rifleman mechs succumbed to all of the attacks.

A few seconds of silence ensued. It was as if hardly anyone could accept that this outcome had turned into a reality.

"WOOOOOOO!"

"FANTASTIC!"

"THIS MECH MUST BE MINE!"

Millions of people stood up from their seats and expressed their utmost admiration and enthusiasm for the Fey Fianna model in every way possible!

Ves smiled as he took in the huge amount of respect and acknowledgement from so many people. This was why he became a mech designer. There was nothing that could satisfy him more than for his earnest works to receive the validation of the masses.

He already knew that no matter, the momentum of the Fey Fianna mech line could no longer be stopped!

Chapter 5537 Mixing Up The Fey

Ves felt incredibly gratified that he lived during the Age of Dawn.

Only in a more energy-rich environment would his living mechs gain the opportunity to tap into their greater potential.

Back in the Milky Way, his living mechs weren't exactly useless, but they had no choice but to live and fight with one hand tied behind their backs.

Ves had no doubt that he would have been able to climb up the ranks by continuing to develop his design philosophy in a low-energy environment, but his works would never be able to display as much overt power as his Fey Fianna had displayed during this shocking exhibition match!

[A blow against the establishment! The triumph of Professor Ves Larkinson and his Living Mech Corporation is a condemnation of the rest of the mech industry. How is a single Senior Mech Designer able to trump over thousands of design teams led by Master Mech Designers? The explosive performance of the new Fey Fianna has exposed the truth of the mech industry: innovation has stagnated and the leading mech designers have become creatively bankrupt. If the megacorporations want to regain any credibility, then they must turn off their autopilots and design real hyper mechs for a change!]

[The second year of the Age of Dawn has only just begun, but the winner for the awards of best mech, best second-class mech, best drone mech and most innovative mech has already been set! No other mech model released for the rest of this year can possibly exceed the stellar reaction to the introduction of the Fey Fianna. The only possible way for this revolutionary mech model to get outclassed is if Professor Ves Larkinson trumps it with another mech of his own design!]

[Do not believe in the hype! The Fey Fianna is an overpowering mech at first glance, but the demonstration match is filled with flaws. Drone mechs are known to be effective counters against rifleman mechs. Why hasn't the Living Mech Corporation shown how the Fey Fianna fares against melee mechs? Does the LMC have the courage to match its latest work against the drone mechs of other mech companies?]

As many different journalists tried to vie for attention while they commented on the Fey Fianna, Ves attracted everyone's attention once again now that the mechs had their fun.

The Standard Fey Fiannas left the arena grounds in order to undergo repairs while all of the broken debris had already been swept out of sight.

The way that people looked at Ves had changed.

The strength of his mech design directly affected people's respect towards its maker!

Many people who were already familiar with his works already held him in high regard, so their opinions did not change that much. They were already accustomed to his miracles.

It was the folk who were less familiar with his works that became impressed by his ability to design such a powerful mech. There were still plenty of second-raters who resided in middle zones further away from Krakatoa and Magair that began to develop a serious interest in living mechs this time.

The LMC's market penetration was not as good in those distant zones. Perhaps the Pacifier models might have started to show up on various planets, but Voiken Industries was primarily responsible for the sale and distribution of those mechs.

The Fey Fianna could be the breakthrough that the Living Mech Corporation needed to properly enter those markets!

To be more specific, the Fey Fianna could single-handedly enable the Larkinsons to establish a presence in the second-rate colonial states of both the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact!

More sales not only translated in more revenue, but also increased the influence that Ves could wield in human society.

This increased his political weight and allowed him to gain a greater say in affairs relating to the running of human society.

More importantly than that, changing the lives of more mech pilots and their dependents through his works validated his design philosophy. This helped to promote his progress and bring him closer to advancing to the rank of Master Mech Designer.

How could Ves not be pleased at this time? He graciously smiled at his audience even as he stroked Lucky's back while he held the cat in his arms.

"Meow-"

"What you have just seen is an early taste of what you can expect from our latest work. No matter whether the Fey Fianna is controlled by general mech pilots or skilled drone mech specialists, it can bloom in anyone's hands. Its low barrier of entry and endless depth can allow the Fey Fianna to fit in nearly any mech force composition. With subsequent training and more refinement, I believe that each mech force can turn them into their own characteristic mainstays."

Ves briefly raised his hand as a signal.

Three more drone mechs stepped forward. They were the more expensive and exclusive Elite Edition of the Fey Fiannas!

The Standard Edition of our new mech line should already satisfy the needs of most of you, but if you want to gain much more assurance in becoming a warlord, then investing in our Elite Edition is a wise choice. So long as you are willing to pay the extra price in phasewater, our best mech factories will carefully fabricate your new quasi-first-class mechs with exquisite care and attention."

When the Elite Fey Fiannas initially stepped forward, they were accompanied by a mixed configuration of fey.

Instead of showing what they were made of in their current state, an unexpected change occurred.

New fey appeared and swapped places with the current ones!

The three Elite Fey Fiannas had changed their configuration so that they were accompanied by 12 transphasic fire hyper luminar crystal cannon fey in total!

This completely altered the threat level and the role of the Fey Fiannas.

A small swarm of target dummies entered the other side of the arena grounds. The target dummies were little more than moving constructs of layered armor plating. They possessed no combat power, but were so sturdy that it would take any typical mech a lot of effort to break.

The Elite Fey Fiannas opened fire. Their luminar crystal rifles as well as all of the luminar crystal cannon fey under their control simultaneously shot at different targets each!

Not all of the attacks struck a target dummy, but those that managed to do so quickly burned through the layers of armor while leaving lingering flames behind!

Bright and fiery laser beams continually struck the target dummies over and over again. Each and every salvo silenced the crowd and caused them to become amazed at the firepower that these three mechs commanded.

Just 3 mechs commanded 15 energy weapons, and none of them were weak!

The fourth generation luminar crystal weapons were not only transphasic, but integrated much higher grades of fire hyper materials in their construction.

All of this caused their penetration power and absolute damage levels to vastly exceed the weapons utilized by the Standard Edition!

It was like comparing a second-class mech to a first-class mech!

"The Fey Fianna can approximate the firepower of five times its number in the short term." Ves boasted as he appreciated the sight himself. "Compared to fielding 15 rifleman mechs, you can produce similar results by bringing in the right amount of offensive fey. The fey responsible for launching these attacks are smaller, cheaper and much easier to store on a starship. If they run out of energy, you don't have to bring them back to their mothership and manually replenish their energy reserves. You can just swap them with a fresh batch of fully charged fey to resume their fire support mission without interruption."

The transphasic luminar crystal fey had already demolished two dozen hardy dummy bots in a short amount of time, and could definitely eliminate more with their remaining energy reserves!

However, they prematurely swapped places with the 12 gauss cannon fey that showed up next.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

The firepower of these fey was domineering in a different way! The sheer penetration and impact characteristics of the transphasic gauss rounds was so impressive that every target dummy could only endure one or two hits before they lost the ability to maneuver above the ground.

The earth energy empowering the gauss rounds caused them to hit harder and dent the target dummies even more!

"Every Fey Fianna can be molded according to your needs and your purpose. You can raise them as individuals or you can mold them into soldiers of a single cohesive unit. The choice of fey models can further specialize them and enable them to perform specific tasks much better than more traditional mechs."

Once the Elite Fey Fianna had pounded all of the unarmed target dummies into scrap, they sent away the gauss cannon fey and gained 12 azure energy shield fey in return.

Each of the latest fey were equipped with the best energy shields that they could fit into their relatively compact forms.

Soon enough, these 12 fey spread around the 3 Fey Fianna and activated their azure energy shields at the same time!

Many different spheres of remarkably powerful energy shields came into existence!

None of them were able to overlap or combine with each other, but that did not stop the main body as well as all of the fey from forming a 'wall' of shield bubbles!

The area coverage of this energy shield array was remarkable. An entire wall had formed that could shield an entire mech company from a hefty amount of damage!

40 fresh battle bots appeared on the other side. They immediately opened fire with their relatively ordinary hyper weapons, but their combined firepower failed to do more than give all of the fey a modest amount of stress!

The differences in tech, materials and design between the two sides had grown so exaggerated that just three powerful fey effectively held back the equivalent firepower of an entire mech company!

That was not all. The battle bots ceased fire and backed away.

In their place was an enormous cannon that the Larkinsons had especially brought into Phoca Arena after receiving permission from the Red Association.

"Is that a warship-grade laser cannon?!"

"It looks like an alien laser cannon that someone has directly stripped from a derelict warship."

"No way!"

"That is illegal! Arrest the Larkinsons immediately!"

"The Larkinsons possess a Warship Token, didn't you know that? They have the right to make use of warship armaments."

The relatively large and imposing transphasic laser cannon was one of the many salvaged war spoils that the expeditionary fleet had sent back to Bortele.

It was not that difficult to restore its basic functionality and gain control over its alien systems.

As the authentic warship-grade laser cannon started to charge up, the three Elite Fey Fiannas did not attempt to defend against this threat by performing evasive maneuvers.

Instead, they lined up and stacked all 12 azure energy shield fey in front of them so that they formed three layers of shield bubbles in front of the mechs!

FZZZZT!

The laser cannon opened fire at full power, causing the entire mech arena to light up with overwhelming brightness!

As flash disappeared almost as quickly as it came, everyone eagerly tried to see how the three Elite Fey Fiannas managed to fare.

"They're alive..."

"None of them suffered any damage!"

The price of resisting this direct attack had been heavy. 10 out of 12 azure energy shield fey failed to resist the transphasic energy beam as they cut through all of the layers of protection and easily vaporized the small fey.

Yet as the laser beam struck the defenses of the final surviving fey, its potency had finally been exhausted, causing this powerful attack to fall short of eliminating the more crucial mechs.

The precious mechs and mech pilots remained safe!

All they lost was a bunch of transphasic fey, and while their cost was much higher than their regular counterparts, they were still much easier to give than the alternatives!

"Amazing!"

"Give me 200 of these elite Fey Fiannas! I can overwhelm several alien warships with these babies."

Chapter 5538 Licensing Fee Multipliers

Ves could practically feel the money rolling in at this time.

The presentation had been an undeniable success. Millions of guests reacted with overwhelming enthusiasm towards the Fey Fianna.

Ves had proven without any doubt that he had advanced the state of hyper technology and E-technology by developing and publishing the Fey Fianna design.

A disproportionately large number of mech designers had already licensed the Fey Fianna design before the presentation had come to an end. Each of these mech designers wanted to study and learn the secrets that Ves had applied to his complicated drone mech design.

This was not an easy job! Since his spiritual engineering existed as an invisible layer of data attached to the actual mech design, mech designers faced an uphill battle in accessing it, let alone trying to decipher his work without a proper understanding in living mechs.

The mech designers would probably have a working copy of the Fey Fianna within their reach in order to make any actual progress, but Ves still did not have high hopes for them. The best that they could do under normal circumstances was to develop their own variants of his new drone mech.

Whatever the case, Ves did not mind it if lots of people studied his work. The Red Association had set the licensing fee for an unrestricted 10-year license of the Standard Edition at 75,000 MTA credits!

Ves had no idea what kind of criteria the mechers utilized to determine the licensing fees of published mech designs. According to private studies, they usually hovered between a hundred to a million times the average production cost of a mech model.

However, there were always outliers where the licensing fee fell way outside of this range, so this was not a hard rule.

What complicated this situation even further was that the standards used by the mechers frequently changed over time. The phases of a mech generation and other macroeconomic conditions could drastically raise or lower the multiplier, which the mech industry used as an unofficial measuring stick of the actual worth of a mech design on the date of its release.

The Red Association was also not entirely identical to the Mech Trade Association.

Ves had read industry publications that suggested that the administrators in charge of this sort of stuff wanted to encourage more knowledge sharing, which in practice translated to legal technology theft.

That meant that many licensing fees set by the Red Association tended to be lower than the historical trend!

The production cost of a Standard Edition was around 2 MTA credits, so that meant that the multiplier of its design had reached as high as 37500. While that was still far from the normal upper boundary, it became exponentially harder for mech designs to surpass a multiplier of 10,000. Only Master Mech Designers and higher could design anything that earned a multiplier of over 100,000, and they did not reach it everytime.

For example, the average production cost of the Sparrow Storm Mark XII was estimated at around 1.4 MTA credits, though Ves did not know for sure as the information was not public.

Yet the up-front licensing fee was priced at only 25,000 MTA credits, which was a huge reduction from the licensing fee of the Mark XI during the previous mech generation!

The Sparrow Storm Mark XII essentially reached a multiplier of only 17857, which was a paltry figure for a megacorporation as dominant as SKL Mech Industries!

This effectively showed that even the Red Association thought that this stopgap model was a disappointment!

Even though the Mark XII came out in the early days of the Hyper Generation, the lack of innovation, the high retention of many old design elements from the previous version of the mech design and the lack of added value to the mech community all negatively impacted its 'score'!

The only saving grace was that the existing market dominance of the Sparrow Storm mech line ensured that customer demand would remain high despite all of these shortcomings.

Ves personally thought that the multiplier for his Fey Fianna was set rather low, though he could guess why the mechers did not make it higher than 37500.

The mech design lacked a high degree of optimization and refinement. Ves could have waited a year or hired a lot more assistant mech designers to improve the Fey Fianna by many small increments.

His work also contained a lot of missed opportunities that he should have taken if he wanted to be more serious about topping the sales charts. He could have brought in knowledgeable specialists who could do a better job at improving the hyper energy shields and the gauss cannon fey.

All of these shortcomings combined with the uncertain prospects of a brand-new mech design that had no existing equivalent in the mech market depressed the multiplier of his Fey Fianna.

He smirked. 75,000 MTA credits was not chump change.

In absolute terms, this was still a large amount of cash. Very few second-class mech designers were willing to spare that much money to study other people's work, but it was practically trivial for first-class mech designers!

Normally, first-class mech designers had little reason to license any second-class mechs, but this might be one of the rare exceptions. Ves was pretty sure that the majority of the people who licensed the Standard Edition of the Fey Fianna came from the upper zones!

One of the indications that this was the case was that over a hundred of them also chose to license the Elite Edition of the Fey Fianna!

Its up-front licensing fee was as high as 6,000,000 MTA credits, which became a new record for Ves!

With a record-breaking multiplier of 70588 for Ves, it became abundantly clear that the mechers appreciated the Elite Edition a lot more!

This was not surprising as its complexity and its absolute combat power were much higher.

The Elite Edition combined more advanced and developed applications of phasewater technology, hyper technology and E-technology. The results accomplished by this variant provided a lot more value to the Red Association and the mech industry at large.

In addition, as a quasi-first-class drone mech, it only took a few targeted upgrades to the power reactor and other sub-standard mech systems to make the Fey Fianna usable in first-class combat.

Even without these steps, the Elite Edition was still a good mech that could produce an outsized impact in any second-class mech force!

Ves' only regret was that virtually no one who licensed Elite Edition intended to develop their own variants and put them on sale. The first-class mech designers only paid 6,000,000 MTA credits for the right to research one of his best works to date.

The story was different for the Standard Edition of the Fey Fianna. As a much more commercially viable mech model, the LMC easily expected it to sell millions of copies!

So long as the Fey Fianna lived up to all of its promises, it could continue to become an enduring seller in the long run.

That could tempt plenty of ambitious mech designers in designing and selling their own variants of the Fey Fianna.

The relatively high multiplier meant that a third-party mech company needed to sell tens of thousands of copies in order to justify the investment.

This was a bit much, as many mech buyers often flocked to original products unless they absolutely demanded features that were not present in the most authentic mech models.

Ves checked the figures yet again.

Over a thousand mech designers and mech companies licensed the Standard Edition, while around 150 of them licensed the Elite Edition.

With the sudden infusion of this amount of cash, the Larkinsons could already afford to fund the establishment of hundreds of branches of the Larkinson Clan in distant middle zones!

It could also be used to place priority orders at second-class shipyards.

The money that Ves earned today might not come close to the profits earned from defeating a large alien fleet, but the difference this time was that he did not have to fight any battles to earn this much money!

This was how mech designers usually solve their money problems.

Even if the LMC did not do anything else with the Fey Fianna, money would continue to roll in so long as there was sufficient demand.

The Living Mech Corporation could just pretend to be a design studio and rely entirely on licensing and royalty fees to profit from the Fey Fianna.

Ves did not mind it if other mech companies succeeded in selling their own variants of his products.

The current policies of the Red Association seemed to set the royalty fee somewhere between 5 to 30 percent of gross sales, though the mechers occasionally adopted other formulas for specific reasons.

Whatever the case, the LMC was entitled to a cut of all of these proceeds, so the more variants got sold, the better!

Ves felt quite gratified that he had managed to solve the LMC and the Larkinson Clan's latent money concerns.

It was rare for a new line of mechs to become so popular at the start. The vast majority of commercial mechs published onto the market failed to attract so much customer demand, let alone rake so much licensing fees!

To think that Ves initially wanted to keep the Fey Fianna to himself. Turning it into another Larkinson-exclusive mech was a waste of its potential and an enormous missed opportunity.

The LMC would assuredly be able to use the Fey Fianna to become prominent again. So long as Ves sustained its momentum by releasing other good hyper mechs in the coming months and years, his mech company would definitely have a chance to become a larger player in the second-class mech market!

As Ves processed all of these thoughts in the privacy of his mind, he continued to address the crowd while holding Lucky in his arms.

Once the Elite Edition had unveiled a portion of their amazing combat potential, Ves explained the pricing, the availability and other commercial information about his new mech line.

"The production of the Standard Edition of the Fey Fianna is likely to fall far short of current demand, so we would like to ask you to be patient. Each of you who orders a batch of this mech will enter a waiting list. The wait times will likely ease in 3 to 6 months as our mech company is actively seeking to outsource production to many more third-party mech manufacturers."

The demand for the Fey Fianna had actually exceeded everyone's expectations. Gavin and the upper management of the LMC must be tearing their hairs out due the huge amount of work required to persuade other mech factories to produce copies of the Fey Fiannas according to a specific production approach!

"The Elite Edition of the Fey Fianna can only be ordered by a select clientele that is willing to draw from their own stock of phasewater." Ves proceeded to add a bit more exclusivity to the current top product of the LMC. "We offer customization services for every acceptable client, so you can be assured that our products can fit into your existing mech roster as seamlessly as possible."

Customers who were able to afford quasi-first-class transphasic mechs always demanded a lot more personalization. Even the best mechs might not be suitable for their needs if the fit was too poor.

"We shall continue to hold numerous demonstrations and exhibitions of the Standard Edition of the Fey Fianna. You can continue to remain in your seats and observe our mechs and fey in use. If that is not enough to satisfy your curiosity, you may send an application to us to test pilot the Fey Fianna for a short amount of time. The arena grounds here will be split in many smaller spaces to allow as many of you to try out our new product. It's first come, first serve, so apply quickly!"

That immediately aroused the interest of a lot of mech pilots in the crowd!

It was one thing to hear and see all of the amazing stuff about the Fey Fianna.

To be able to experience these benefits first-hand was a dream come true for many mech pilots!

For the LMC to allow its invited guests to try out the Fey Fianna on the spot was a definite mark of confidence in its latest product line!

Chapter 5539 Naughty Journalists

Now that Ves had ended his main presentation, he took a short break before holding a question-and-answer session in a more personal setting.

Hundreds of journalists along with many other VIPs gathered inside Phoca Arena's largest hall reserved for press conferences.

The energy among the crowd was electric. Journalists and mech insiders were still buzzing with excitement from what they had witnessed up to today.

Though not everyone appeared to be taken in by all of the hype, the general consensus among the gathered professionals was that the Fey Fianna may have earned its place in the mech history books!

People wanted more. The information that Ves presented so far only explained his latest commercial work to a shallow degree.

The exhibition matches and other demonstrations revealed a lot more details about the performance of the two main editions of the Fey Fianna, but that generated even more questions among the experts!

Hence the need for a Q&A session. These obsessive journalists and mech nerds would not rest unless they gained all of the clarifications they needed to soothe their restless curiosity!

Before Ves went up the podium, he briefly conferred with Gavin and Alexa on what he should and should not say.

"The public reaction so far had been overwhelmingly positive." Gavin spoke in a satisfied tone.

"That means that you can take it easy, boss. The worst thing you can do is to put your foot in your mouth. What you need to do at this point is to consolidate our gains and prevent any accidental losses. Saying nothing is sometimes better than saying anything, do you understand?"

"I get it. We should play it safe. Alexa, have our people detected any challengers among the VIPs?"

"There are dozens of potential candidates who have the reason and the motivation to challenge the Fey Fianna." The former Terran mech designer replied. "The exceedingly high publicity surrounding your latest work has shifted the dynamics surrounding this matter. The probability that mech designers intend to challenge your Fey Fianna with drone mechs of their own has dropped. The technological and design differences between our latest product and any direct competitors have become insurmountable at this point of time. None of the existing drone mech manufacturers are willing to make a direct comparison that can turn this speculative idea into a concrete fact."

That made a lot of sense. It was what Ves would do if he was in their place. There were still other ways for established mech companies to stem the bleeding and retain as much of their existing customer base as possible. They just had to draw attention away from these painful comparisons!

"If our Fey Fianna stands to dominate the market for second-class drone mechs, then why should we still fear challenges?"

"Drone mechs occupy a smaller niche in the mech market, so hardly anyone invests their full resources into them, sir. In the first year of the Age of Dawn, SKL Mech Industries and many other well-established mech companies have devoted much of their effort into designing better versions of their top sellers. The quality and performance of their latest rifleman mechs, swordsman mechs, light skirmishers and so on are much better than the general standard. Many of them may still be in the prototype stage, but have already made so many gains that they can compete against our Fey Fianna. These are the potential threats we need to be prepared to meet."

Gavin agreed with the younger mech designer. "This is an excellent way for rival mech companies to obtain a large amount of free publicity. The risks are great. Losing will damage their reputation and destroy much of the hype around their new product. Winning can give their upcoming products a massive boost. They might even steal our thunder if they crush our Fey Fiannas in a fight."

Ves furrowed his brows. The temptation for rival companies to challenge his new mech was high. It might be a little shameless for them to earn publicity during another mech company's product reveal, but these sorts of challenges were not uncommon in the mech industry!

Mech designers needed to stand behind their work. As long as the matchup was not so obviously lopsided, then they were expected to prove the combat worthiness of their own mechs.

Although Ves felt that he had nothing more to prove due to the obvious strength and superiority of the Fey Fianna, his honor and his obligation as a mech designer prevented him from refusing every challenge.

That did not prohibit him from gaming the system, though.

Ves continued to pet Lucky who had been lounging in his arms for a while now. The lazy gem cat paid little attention to all of the excitement happening all around.

"Meow..."

"Properly speaking, the Fey Fianna should only accept challenges from other drone mechs." He said. "I should have much more leeway if rivals want to force the Fey Fianna into matchups against other mech types."

Drone mechs were not omnipotent, though it had made a close impression of it during the demonstrations. They were subject to clear counters that could easily tear them apart under the right circumstances.

After a few more exchanges, the time had come for Ves to address the representatives of the mech industry more directly.

He still wore his overly dramatic and multilayered outfit, but he wore his clothing with so much confidence that it did not look awkward in the slightest.

As Ves stopped behind the podium stand, he briefly swept his gaze across the thousand-or-so people.

The journalists among them were easy to spot. They were all accompanied by their own recorder bots and possessed weak to non-existent extraordinary power.

It was the ones with greater strength that Ves was wary of. There were plenty of Master Mech Designers and other figures with strong demeanors who may or may not intend to issue a challenge.

He felt both fearful and excited at the prospect. He still found it difficult to decide whether he should proactively embrace these challenges or try to avoid them as much as possible in order to lower the risks.

After all, there was not much more that he could gain after the Fey Fianna already attracted a lot of positive interest.

"Good afternoon, my esteemed guests. Now that we have introduced our new Fey Fianna mech line to you all, I am sure that you are brimming with questions. I am willing to spend a few hours here to answer them so long as they remain on topic. Please do not use this Q&A session to ask any irrelevant questions. You will be silenced and removed without exception. Now, let's begin."

A lot of hands went up into the air. Ves made use of a randomizer to select the people who would have an opportunity to address him directly.

"Who are you, sir?"

"Nevander Emmerich of the Monthly Mech Report. Let me say that it is an honor to ask the first question to a renowned tier 3 galactic citizen such as yourself." The slender teal-haired man respectfully said before he quickly went on to business. "As far as my question is concerned, it is clear that your new Fey Fianna models will capture a large share of the market for second-class drone mechs. Do you have any intention of adapting your work for the first-class or third-class market?"

That was a tricky question, and one that related a lot to the business strategy of the LMC.

Ves did not hide his frown as he issued a calm reply. "The Fey Fianna is conceived as both a second-class mech and a quasi-first-class mech from the onset. Since it is an innovative mech that introduces several radical new technological applications, we will need to observe our products while they are being put to use. Once we have a better understanding of how our Fey Fianna operates in diverse circumstances, we will be able to make more informed decisions about whether to expand its class range."

That was not a good enough answer to the reporter.

"Can you give us any informal indications of what you have in mind? As a former third-rater, does it not make sense for you to give back to the original community you came from and grant your fellow third-raters the benefit of piloting a more appropriate variation of your Fey Fianna?"

"The Living Mech Corporation is driven by rational decision-making. Our mech company will be glad to adapt the Fey Fianna line to the third-class mech market if it is viable and practical enough. For now, there is not enough evidence to support such a move."

The randomizer picked another reporter before the man from the Monthly Mech Report could badger Ves once more.

"Elza Godark of the Davute Star Telegraph. As a former resident of Davute, you have established a deep and special relationship with the Colonial Federation of Davute. You have already accepted several commissions to design exclusive mechs for our colonial state. Will a more exclusive and powerful variant of the Fey Fianna be included in those special commissions?"

What a devious question. This was pretty much a propaganda attempt from Davute.

"Any information related to mech commissions is confidential. It is not proper for any mech designer to divulge private contracts and agreements with clients. If Davute sees fit to share details on any possible agreements or transactions with my clan and I, your colonial state is welcome to disclose them on its own accord."

A first-rater finally received the opportunity to ask a question.

"Icarus Hallweather of the Rubarth Daily. How widely will the Fey Fianna be distributed? Will it be available for sale in every middle zone?"

"That is what we are attempting to accomplish." Ves steadily replied. "Our mech company has a sufficient presence in the middle zones of the Red Ocean Union, but we are still in the process of establishing new company branches in both the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact. In the meantime, we are actively looking to cooperate with local mech manufacturers to produce Fey Fiannas to meet the market demand in the immediate regions."

"Thank you for your clarification, professor. Do you have any intentions of selling a first-class adaptation of the Fey Fianna in either the Rubarthan Pact, the Red Ocean Union or both?"

Ves twitched his lips. What was up with journalists and pushing political agendas?

"As I have stated earlier, it is too premature for the Living Mech Corporation to consider adapting the Fey Fianna to any first-class market. Drone mechs have a very different positioning in the first-class mech community. We may have to convert it into a fully-fledged multipurpose mech in order to fully satisfy the needs of first-raters. This is a major undertaking that our company is not ready for. If this changes, then we will try our best to sell our new first-class mechs in every upper zone unless we are hindered from doing so by the politics in question."

"Do you think your first-class adaptation of the Fey Fianna will receive a friendlier and more enthusiastic welcome from the Rubarthan mech market as opposed to elsewhere? Our mech community is much more open-minded and willing to experiment with new and experimental products. I am afraid that your upcoming mech will not be received well in a staid and stagnant mech market where many customers are accustomed to buying the latest editions of mech lines that have largely remained the same since the beginning of the Age of Mechs. You should consider whether-"

Ves loudly coughed even as he transmitted a certain command. The annoying Rubarthan reporter immediately lost the ability to transmit sound from his mouth.

A few seconds later, the floor beneath his feet turned into a hole, causing him to quickly drop out of sight.

Nobody exhibited any surprise that this had happened. No press conference or Q&A session proceeded without at least one journalist trying to cross the line.

"Next."

Chapter 5540 Pritchard & Terse

The Q&A session proceeded fairly normally after that. A lot of journalists were not unscrupulous by nature. They were already satisfied if they could gain answers to fairly normal questions.

"How much market share do you expect to capture with your latest product, Professor Larkinson?"

"We do not have a clear indication of that, other than that sales will likely exceed our minimum acceptable target. It is much more difficult to anticipate how much market share the Fey Fianna will gain because of its low barrier to entry and obvious attraction to non-traditional buyers of drone mechs. I am confident in stating that our latest commercial products will most certainly expand the market for second-class drone mechs. It may even double or triple in size. How can you possibly calculate the expected market share in such malleable circumstances?"

The female reporter from the Stein VI Daily Cord smiled. "Then let me rephrase my question, professor. As you are most certainly aware of, the Sparrow Storm Mark XII currently occupies the greatest share of the second-class mech market at around 30 percent. Do you have the confidence that your Fey Fianna will match or exceed this share by the end of the year?"

Definitely! Ves had no doubts at all about this question!

However, it would be too ugly for him to show so much overconfidence or even hubris. Ves quietly reminded himself that he needed to maintain his caution and dignity.

"No one can say, miss. Much can happen in a single year. Just think of how much our mechs and technologies have leapt ahead since the start of the Age of Dawn. The Hyper Generation is still in an early phase, so hyper technology and E-technology will continue to advance at a rapid rate. Perhaps my Fey Fianna can be regarded as a mech model that is ahead of its time, but it is not certain whether it is 6 months or 6 years ahead of the rest. I have the greatest respect for an old and trusted megacorporation such as SKL Mech Industries. Its award-winning design teams may choose to update its Sparrow Storm line later this year."

Ves was almost certain that this would not be the case. The analyses conducted by Gavin and Alexa came up with many logical arguments that this year was not the time to act hastily.

Of course, Ves was not particularly afraid if SKL surprised everyone by releasing the Sparrow Storm Mark XIII anyway. He just wondered whether the drone mech would still be competitive enough to stop the momentum of the Fey Fianna.

"Acacia Bratislava of the Terran Telegraph. Professor Larkinson, your current permanent residence is located on New Constantinople VIII in the Terran Alliance, which you have emigrated to at the first possible opportunity. Since you are both teaching and studying in the best mech community of human-occupied space, how soon will you debut your first Terran mech design?"

Ves ignored the political undertones of this 'question' and answered it in a straightforward fashion.

"Unless I work on commission, I generally do not wish to restrict the market availability of my products. The only exceptions are the colonial states that my clan and I have conflicted with in the past. That means the Friday Colonies by the way. As far as I am aware, I am on good terms with every other colonial state, no matter whether it is first-class, second-class or third-class. As a mech designer and an entrepreneur, I prefer to make friends rather than enemies. It is my principle that my mechs should benefit our society as a whole, and not a select clique or subgroup that only represents a part of our great civilization."

"Yet you refuse to add the Friday Colonies to your generous list."

Ves narrowed his eyes and leaned forward. "The Fridaymen have been murdering, kidnapping, stealing, exiling and slandering my fellow Larkinsons and I for at least a decade. Thousands of my blood relatives as well as my adopted relatives have died at the hands of unprovoked aggression

from the citizens of the Friday Coalition and its Red Ocean counterpart. A formal declaration of war has never been made, but we have never signed a formal peace treaty either. Current developments may not allow either of us to pursue open hostilities against us anymore, but that does not mean that I am eager to do business with the Fridaymen. There are plenty of alternative products on the market."

Perhaps this was not the most politically elegant way he could have responded to this question, but he did not want to back down on this matter.

The current trend in red humanity was that even when people ceased to fight against each other, the competition that existed between them had never faded.

They just chose to fight against each other by fighting against the aliens instead!

"Next question."

The randomizer happened to give the word to a man that clearly did not look like a journalist.

There were more than enough clues that pointed to this conclusion. He was not accompanied by a personal recorder bot. His understated but excellent formal suit was made of excellent materials. Most importantly, his spirituality clearly matched that of a Master Mech Designer!

"Thank you for giving me the word. Let me introduce myself. I am Master Aulaus Kreshnik, the current Acting Chief Designer of Pritchard & Terse. Have you heard of our Rubarthan mech company?"

"I am afraid not." Ves shook his head. "I have yet to travel and spend time in the Rubarthan Pact, but I intend to do so in the future. We might be able to get into contact more often when that happens."

"That... is a possibility." The Rubarthan Master Mech Designer said. "Your lack of familiarity with P&T is excusable. Let me state my purpose. As one mech designer to another, I challenge you. I challenge your Fey Fianna. Our mech company has recently finalized the development of a defensive rifleman mech model for the second-class mech market. Let us see which one can defeat the other in this mech arena."

Oh boy. This was it. The first challenger had arrived. How should Ves respond to this development?

He needed more information. Fortunately, Alexa had rapidly collected a lot of details and compressed it all in a succinct report before transmitting it to his cranial implant.

The context of this challenge immediately became a lot clearer.

Master Aulaus Kreshnik definitely had strong reasons to challenge Ves and his work!

The reason for that was the mech company that did not bore his name. Pritchard & Terse might not be a megacorporation, but it used to be a fairly large player in the Milky Way. It had only dipped its toes into the Red Ocean in the past decade, and hired additional mech designers such as Master Kreshnik in order to coordinate R&D activities between the galaxies.

Yet when the Great Severing occurred, the former owners and chief designers of Pritchard & Terse could no longer access their branch in the displaced Red Ocean!

This caused a huge legal and financial mess as the P&T branch was never meant to operate as a completely independent mech company in isolation!

Nobody could have foreseen this accident. Not even P&T. The result of this was that the company had so few applicable contingency plans in place that its very existence was at stake!

Although the proof was not present in the report compiled by Alexa, she suspected that the Smokestack Principality that wielded a disproportionate influence over the economies and industries of the Rubarthan Pact was willing to sort out this mess in exchange for other favors.

Alexa boldly speculated that Master Kreshnik was deliberately sent to challenge Ves. Once the fight began in earnest, it may be possible for the Rubarthan Master's work to trounce the Fey Fianna by relying on advanced first-class knowledge tech that he had downgraded to second-class standards!

This challenge was not fair on the surface. Ves was merely a Senior Mech Designer, while Master Kreshnik was over 200 years old!

According to the galactic net, Master Aulaus Kreshnik transferred to the Red Ocean because it provided a lot of inspiration and new research material that could spark a renaissance in his specialty.

Master Kreshnik possessed a Class III design philosophy. His strength lay in fast-regeneration energy shield systems.

The attractiveness of transphasic energy shield technology was the primary reason why the Master Mech Designer found himself stuck on the other side of the greater beyond gate!

Now, the Master coincidentally got rid of anyone who was more senior or more deserving to take over P&T in the Red Ocean.

It was a pity that Master Kreshnik's claim was not strong. He only possessed a modest amount of stock in the mech company, and this became his greatest stumbling block.

Right now, challenging the Fey Fianna was a possible way for the Rubarthan Master to strengthen his claim!

No mech company could do without mech designers. Its business model literally depending on their work!

Delivering a brilliant victory during this product reveal would assuredly win over all of the holdouts of P&T!

Not only that, but Alexa strongly guessed that the Smokestack Prince personally commanded Master Kreshnik to challenge Ves' latest work!

Although Ves had pushed the Rubarthan Pact out of his mind for the time being, he did not forget that he had already become a de facto member of the militaristic faction led by the Inferno Spear Prince.

From the moment it became known that he was 'acquainted' with the Destroyer of Worlds, Ves had automatically taken the side of the peak Rubarthan ace pilot and prince!

That was not good news for the industrialist faction led by the Smokestack Prince!

Both descendants of the legendary Star Emperor vied for power in the Rubarthan Pact. The first-rate colonial superstate would never be able to unite and rally around a single leader figure so long as the Rubarthan princes kept fighting for the Red-stained Throne!

From this context, this challenge was not as innocent as it seemed.

Should Ves accept it knowing that it would deteriorate his relationship with a powerful faction of the Rubarthan Pact?

"You have yet to present the mech model that you have high hopes for." Ves spoke.

The Master smiled in response before activating a projection that displayed a snapshot of a dark blue-coated mech. "I was waiting for you to ask this question. What you see before you is an image of my new Nelerat ANEN-733-2 Mark I, which is classified as a defensive rifleman mech. I am confident that it shall pose a much greater and more authentic challenge to your Fey Fiannas in the arena."

Defensive rifleman mechs were not too scarce, but they showed up from time to time. They were rifleman mechs that carried physical shields and enhanced energy defenses. That practically turned them into artillery mechs with better mobility and not enough punch.

Despite all of these shortcomings, the Nelerat Mark I truly had the potential to become a valued mech model.

However, for all of its defensive prowess, Ves seriously doubted that this shield-carrying rifleman mech was able to resist the direct attacks from an alien warship, but it probably did better elsewhere.

"Alright, Master Kreshnik. You have my interest. Proposed terms?"

"Minimum 3 mechs on one side. Quantity and quality of the mechs assigned to the opposing side is variable depending on cost, tech and the counter factor. No time limit. No terrain features. Flight allowed."

Ves frowned again. He had the strongest feeling that these terms benefited Master Kreshnik more. Which variable was responsible for setting a trap?

Gavin's words discreetly transmitted into his ears. "You need to invite the mechers to preside over this formal challenge. Otherwise, a Rubarthan magistrate who is on good terms with Master Kreshnik might find a way to give his side access to another mech by skewing the interpretations."

"Good idea. I shall mention that right away."