

The Mech 5551

Chapter 5551 The First Challenge Match

Master Aulaus Kreshnik gave Ves a decent amount of well-meaning advice.

Though not all of his tips were new to Ves, the man provided a valuable high-level perspective on the Rubarthan mech market.

"The Rubarthan Pact should normally be ruled by a single central administration under the Star Emperor, but since the Great Severing has largely cut us off from the old galaxy, we have entered into a new and much less stable circumstance."

The ruler of the New Rubarth Empire maintained such a strong grip on Rubarthan society that his absence led to severe disruptions among his former subjects in the Red Ocean!

"So how has that affected the mech industry and the mech market of the Rubarthan Pact?"

"There are far too many changes for me to explain in a single sitting." Master Kreshnik replied in a light tone. "Our central government previously maintained a competitive balance in our mech market. No single mech company is allowed to become too dominant. Every mech company is supposed to have a 'fair' chance to market their products to every Rubarthan. Now, that is becoming increasingly more difficult. The Rubarthan Pact is split up into multiple principalities, and each of them have begun to adopt their own rules and policies in the absence of a central authority."

That sounded interesting.

"I heard that the Smokestack Prince has gathered a lot of allies."

"He has. Out of all of the direct descendants of the Star Emperor, the Smokestack Prince is the one that has the greatest chance of unifying our economy and industry. I may not like all of his proposals, but his attainments in these fields are undeniable."

"Yet you have chosen to make an exit from the Rubarthan mech market and come down to our playing field instead."

"It is much easier to compete in the second-class mech market." Master Kreshnik admitted with a smile. "Small design teams are fully capable of designing mature products that can easily earn modest amounts of profits. The chances of failure are small so long as our mech designs are good enough. The requirements to design a second-class mech is a fraction of a first-class multipurpose mech. The former is much simpler and contains less high-tech parts than the latter. I almost cannot believe how extensively this simplification cuts down on all of the work and other requirements."

Designing a second-class mech must be akin to playing a game in easy mode to the likes of Master Kreshnik.

Nonetheless, second-class mechs had their own characteristics that superior mech designers often overlooked.

When Ves studied the defensive rifleman mechs that had just completed their final inspections, he could pick up dozens of little elements that a native second-class mech designer would never add to his works.

Master Kreshnik evidently designed the Nelerath Mark I as if it was a dumbed down version of a first-class mech.

The greatest sign that this was the case was the fact that its mech frame contained well-hidden ports that contained an unknown quantity of small modules.

Even if Master Kreshnik tried his best to hold himself back, he just couldn't help himself.

The Fey Fianna was not a simple mech either, but Ves and his fellow collaborators had done their best to cut down on the bloat and focus on maximizing its primary functions. This was the most appropriate strategy for mechs at this price level.

Master Kreshnik had to know that as well, but he had chosen to add a lot of bloat to his mech design anyway. The additional mass and thickness helped to make that possible, but it remained to be seen if the additional complexity translated into actual results.

Both mech designers suspended their discussion once they had received word from the inspectors that their mechs passed all of the tests.

The Fey Fiannas and the Nelerat Mark I's proceeded to move to the opposite ends of the main arena.

Since the enormous venue was roughly shaped like a hippodrome, it was possible to simulate battles where ranged mechs could fight against their adversaries at more realistic distances.

Neither Ves nor Master Kreshnik had any objections to starting the match at maximum distance.

The Nelerat Mark I clearly preferred to put as much range between itself and its adversaries as possible.

That did not mean it was unable to fend off attackers at closer ranges. As a machine designed to counter fast and agile phasefighters, the Nelerat Mark I was able to track fast-moving enemies so long as it was not burdened by too much armor.

The Fey Fianna was a bit more flexible, but it was pretty adequate in fighting at longer ranges as well.

Precision was not its forte due to obvious reasons. It was much easier for the ranged weapon fey to consistently land hits against bulkier targets with low mobility.

As the countdown started, many people started to go quiet as they waited for the opening of the first challenge match.

"START!"

The two sides immediately went into action!

The Nelerat Mark I's attracted the most attention in the beginning. The four defensive rifleman mechs did not open fire right away.

Instead, they quickly deployed the modular external armor plating on the arena floor. It did not take much time to set them up as they automatically linked up with each other.

The quantity of mechs mattered a lot. More mechs translated into more construction materials. The four mechs were able to form a cozy little fortress where they barely managed to squeeze inside with enough room to orient their gauss rifles in multiple directions.

Ves could clearly see that the bulky external armor plating could be used to form a defensive sphere in space.

The fact that this battle took place in planetary conditions meant that the Nelerat Mark I could take advantage of the ground as a virtually impregnable layer of armor. They did so by thickening and reinforcing the other sides of their makeshift fortress.

The fortification resembled a mountain, one that the Nelerat Mark I's did little to dissuade. P&T had even coated the external armor plates with a brown shade that turned white at the top!

This design characteristic was not just cosmetic, but helped to reinforce everyone's impression that it was as solid as a mountain.

When a considerably power energy vortex managed to form inside this supposed mountain fortification, Ves reacted with mild shock.

"How many earth hypers did you stuff into that external armor?"

"You would be surprised." Master Kreshnik finally grinned for the first time. "According to current trends, it has become customary to devote 0.5 to 15 percent of the mass of a mech part to supporting hyper materials. It is rare to raise this proportion any further as any further gains derived from hyper technology will be overshadowed by the strong reduction in the base performance of the affected parts. However, this rule of thumb only applies to the mech frame itself."

"The deployable armor plating isn't as important to the Nelerat Mark I." Ves quickly concluded. "It is designed to help your rifleman mechs withstand punishment, but it doesn't really matter if you cut back on its toughest alloys. By adding a lot of earth hypers in their place, you can boost the performance of every mech system that relies on Earth-attributed E energy for enhancements!"

This had great implications for the Nelerat Mark I. Even if its fortification got smashed to pieces, so long as the debris remained in the vicinity, they could still strengthen the concentration of earth energy in the immediate environment!

This not only increased the defensive coefficient of all of the armor, but also enabled the gauss rifles to strike much harder than normal!

In short, the Nelerat Mark I's offensive and defensive parameters received an enormous boost at the cost of sacrificing all of its mobility.

If a situation ever arose where that lack of mobility turned into a giant weakness, then the Nelerat Mark I always had the option of leaving the mountain and fly free as a liberated mech.

This was one of the many reasons Master Kreshnik did not turn the Nelerat Mark I into a heavier but slower cannoner mech or a heavy artillery mech.

Once the four Nelerat Mark I dug into their fortification, they began to place their rifles into special slides that not only served as additional anchor points, but also enabled the rifleman mechs to quickly and smoothly change their firing angles to track fast-moving targets at closer distances.

It was an elaborate and complicated contraption that somehow came together in a technologically brilliant fashion. It enabled the rifleman mechs to fire their weapons at most angles without getting in the way of each other inside their relatively cramped fortification!

If Gloriana was here, she would probably kneel and express her open admiration for this mechanical marvel!

It became clear that P&T under the leadership of Master Kreshnik did not waste all of the months spent on designing and perfecting the Nelerat Mark I!

Eight earth gauss rifles soon began to open fire at the three Fey Fiannas and their accompanying fey on the other side of the long arena.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The caliber of the rifles was not large. In fact, they leaned on the smaller side.

This granted the defensive rifleman mechs numerous advantages. Their weapons were smaller and easier to handle. They could be fired at a faster rate. They could carry a lot more gauss rounds with them, which meant that it would take much longer for them to run out of ammunition!

Of course, the downside to all of this was that each shot inflicted significantly less kinetic damage than usual, but that was only the case if the weapons existed in isolation.

What was different this time was the high concentration of earth energy in the mountain-shaped fortification!

The weapons as well as the rounds were all impregnated with earth hypers. Each of them received substantial boosts from the more favorable environment.

Once the rifles opened fire, their rounds became saturated with earth energies. This significantly altered their characteristics and caused them to strike at their targets with considerably greater impact force than normal!

The Fey Fiannas that had begun to perform evasive maneuvers almost flinched when the solid projectiles slammed against the water energy shields generated by their energy shield feys.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Not only did the projectiles strike the energy shields hard, but they also arrived at an alarmingly fast pace!

It became abundantly clear that the Nelerat Mark I's did not hold back. They sought to concentrate their fire on one of the three Fey Fiannas and seek to overwhelm its defenses with the force of an avalanche!

The Standard Fey Fiannas on the other hand had already started to fight back. The three drone mechs were all equipped with 2 fire lumina crystal fey and 2 water energy shield fey each.

This was a relatively simple and balanced fey composition that directly strengthened the firepower and the damage tolerance of the Fey Fiannas.

The mix of fey gave the Fey Fiannas the capital to enter into a ranged slugging match against the Nelerat Mark I's.

Though the latter clearly enjoyed an advantage in this scenario, the Fey Fiannas were able to weather the storm, at least for the time being. With two energy shield fey as well as the drone mech's native energy shield, the mech was not as weak as it appeared.

Yet its energy shields were beginning to destabilize at an alarming rate due to the repeated gauss rounds chipping away at the defenses.

The attacks of the Fey Fiannas did not yield the desired results either. Before the fire energy beams managed to strike the surface of the fortification, the attack became blocked by the earth-attributed energy shields of the Nelerat Mark I's!

The Fey Fiannas weren't the only mechs in the field that enjoyed multiple layers of protection!

Chapter 5552 Piling Up Disadvantages

"Interesting choice."

"Hm?"

"I gave you a good look at my mech design yesterday. It should have been clear to you that my Nelerat is a hyper mech that is entirely centered around the application of earth energy." The much older mech designer elaborated his thoughts. "It has become well-known that there are strong complementary and oppositional relationships between the most common E energy elements. Fire energy inflicts less damage on defenses that are reinforced with earth energy. This is because fire can actually feed earth. Surely a mech designer that is familiar with extraordinary sources of power should understand this basic fact."

Master Kreshnik essentially referred to how the Fey Fiannas were inflicting much less damage against their opponents than the other way around.

The luminar crystal rifles along with the luminar crystal cannon fey had all been equipped with fire beam attack phase crystals that shot fire-empowered laser beams.

Although Ves had managed to develop much better attack phase crystals that could inflict much more serious damage, the most basic fire beam attack phase crystals were cheap, efficient, easy to mass produce.

That made them particularly suitable for a mass production model like the Standard Edition of the Fey Fianna.

Despite launching fiery hot laser beams at the distant mountain-shaped fortification, the energy weapons harnessed by the Fey Fianna hardly produced any waste heat. Their energy cells also did not get drained at an alarmingly fast rate. They could easily keep up the firepower for quite a while.

At first, these fire beams were making brisk progress.

Even though Master Kreshnik had made the unusual decision to equip his Nelerat Mark I with earth-attributed energy shields, their capacities were small because it was impossible to equip the rifleman mechs with larger generators.

Even so, the earth energy reinforcement along with the favorable environment toughened up the rifleman mech's energy shields so much that they neutralized a significant portion of the thermal damage.

The small capacity energy shields of the Nelerat Mark I's managed to last significantly longer as a result!

However, it was hard to turn a molehill into a mountain by relying on a lot of earth energy.

Eventually, the energy shields broke, allowing the Fey Fiannas to channel their collective firepower at the actual fortification.

The repeated fire beam attacks were starting to make real progress. They began to melt and vaporize the hard and thick alloys, especially at certain sections that were easy to target due to the fact that the fortification was completely stationary!

The Fey Fiannas did not manage to do all of this with impunity.

Their water energy shields were taking a considerable beating during all of this time. The painful aspect about orienting all of their defenses around the water element was that they shared a common weakness against earth energy-based attacks!

Ves had to refrain himself from wincing each time he saw one of the water-based energy shields of his mech or fey getting destabilized at an alarming rate.

The high rate of fire along with the elemental advantage of the Nelerat Mark I was a nightmare to the Fey Fiannas!

The only saving grace was that the relatively good maneuverability of the drone mechs enabled them to evade a part of the incoming attacks. This helped to ease the strain on the energy shields at the cost of expending a lot of energy in order to power their intensive energy maneuvers.

The Fey Fiannas did not let their energy shields burst, which induced the greatest strain on their generators. What they did instead was to alternate their energy defenses.

Whenever an energy shield fey was nearing its limit, it retreated and allowed another fey or mech to put a new energy shield forward.

This was a relatively simple but effective rotation that enabled the energy shield generators that no longer came under strain to recharge and return to their optimal states with the least amount of complications.

If the opposing side deployed melee mechs or tried to attack the Fey Fiannas from angles, then it became a lot harder to grant the nearly depleted units enough rest to restore their conditions.

However, because the Nelerat Mark I's all huddled together inside their makeshift fortification, it became very clear that every attack they launched only followed a single trajectory.

The Fey Fiannas merely had to concentrate their defenses in a single direction to block all of the attacks coming their way.

It hardly helped. The Nelerat Mark I did not rely on positioning to gain an advantage on the battlefield. They were hard hitters that preferred to hide inside their little castles. Their gauss rifles continued to fire round after round with no abating.

The elemental disadvantage of the Fey Fianna became increasingly clearer as a result. Despite the fact that the drone mechs and fey were able to rotate their energy shields, each of them were getting drained at a much faster rate that they could replenish in so little time!

This was especially problematic when the Nelerats tried their best to focus their fire on one of the Fey Fiannas. Their goal from the beginning was to eliminate one of the three drone mechs as soon as possible.

In the meantime, the barrage of fire laser beams was making moderate progress in burning through the earth-reinforced external armor plating.

The main reason why the repeated energy attacks appeared to be fairly effective against the fortification was because the latter was made out of affordable and disposable alloys.

However, their thickness granted them a considerable buffer, making it harder to bun holes right through the other side.

As the surface of the fortification became more and more hot due to the repeated attacks, the Fey Fiannas suddenly encountered a familiar obstacle in the form of earth energy shields!

The Nelerats had already restored the conditions of all of the energy shield generators that had only been depleted a relatively short time ago.

The unexpectedly quick reappearance of these energy shields significantly interrupted the momentum of the Fey Fiannas.

Attacks meant to drill through the holes made into the fortification instead struck the energy shields that stubbornly prevented the incoming fire from damaging anything material.

The earth energy shields did more than that. They offered enough protection to allow the Nelerat Mark I to make an even more surprising move.

Ports opened on their torsos. Nozzles extended from the ports and began to spray a thick solution into all of the cavities on the hot exterior of the fortification.

Once the thick slurry entered these cavities, the alloys rapidly cooled down while the gaps in the defenses started to get filled!

Though it was clear that this quick fix could never restore the defenses to their full conditions, the emergency measure could buy valuable time for the defensive rifleman mechs!

The modest earth energy shields did not last very long. They reached their limits soon after, enabling the luminar crystal weapons of the Fey Fiannas to strike the fortifications once more!

Each of their fire beams deliberately struck the sections that had been filled with the hardened solutions.

Just as expected, they broke faster than proper armor, but they still did a decent job at preventing the Fey Fiannas from threatening more important components!

"What a great design solution." Ves couldn't help but comment. "I can see how this sort of routine is tailor-made for countering alien starfighters. Those alien craft love to swing around and perform intensive attack runs before flying away to prepare for their next ones. By relying on a combination of fast-regenerating energy shields and field repairs, your defensive rifleman mechs can continually restore their damage buffers, making it impossible for alien starfighters to inflict serious damage unless they go all out in overwhelming the defenses of your fortified mechs."

Master Kreshnik couldn't help but smile. "Thank you for your appreciation. We have truly worked hard to develop, acquire and perfect the technologies that we have chosen to make use of. The

armor repair solution alone was difficult to research. It had to be economical enough to be used by second-raters, but it also had to be effective enough to resist attacks without immediately crumbling apart. Armor systems and repair systems are not my strengths, but they synergize too well with my proprietary energy shield systems."

There were clear differences between the energy shields of the Fey Fianna and the Nelerat Mark I.

The former was based on a more traditional pattern. It had become quite common to resort to the water element to reinforce energy shields. Not only did they possess fantastic synergy with transphasic energy shield generators, but they also performed well against energy weapons, which were widely used by both human and alien combatants.

However, the energy shields of the Fey Fianna were slow to restore their integrities once they resisted a lot of attacks. This was the common shortcoming of many energy shield systems available to mechs.

The Nelerat Mark I did not suffer from this problem. Though their energy shields were not able to resist as much damage before they reached their limits, it became clear that they could bounce back at a remarkably fast rate under any circumstances!

As the ranged slugging match continued, it became more and more clear that the Fey Fiannas would eventually lose all of their energy shields.

In contrast, the Nelerat Mark I's could always rely on their energy shields getting back online after a certain delay!

This granted the defensive rifleman mech a notable advantage in the later stages of a match. Their earth energy shields would keep bouncing back on a repeated basis, thereby effectively increasing their ability to withstand damage by a far greater extent than their appearances suggested!

The best way to overcome these fast-regenerating energy shields was to launch an overwhelming assault. Burst weapons or melee weapons were ideal at chipping away at these weak but constantly renewing energy shields.

Unfortunately, the Fey Fiannas did not enter the arena with such a loadout. They were all equipped for attribution battles. Their luminar crystal weapons were not known for their exceptionally high attack power. They were clearly configured for endurance battles!

This was why Master Kreshnik still found it perplexing that Ves had chosen to field his Fey Fianna like this. This was the completely wrong loadout to deploy in this particular matchup.

"If I was in your shoes, I would have equipped your Fey Fiannas with the heaviest axes that they can lift with their slender arms. Each Fey Fianna should be accompanied by 3 gauss cannon fey and just 1 energy shield fey." The older man spoke to Ves who was floating by his side. "Rush them forward. Go for maximum and overwhelming impact. Your mechs may stand a better chance of winning this challenge match if they attempt to break through the layered defenses of my Nelerats as quickly as possible. Doing this will give my rifleman mechs less time to take advantage of the fast-regenerating properties of their energy shields."

Ves knew that quite well, yet he declined to adopt this logical approach.

Instead, he put himself at a greater disadvantage and stupidly tried to make his Fey Fiannas outlast the defensive rifleman mechs that were clearly optimized for this mode of combat!

"Hehehehe." Ves chuckled and smirked. "What can I say? I like to live dangerously."

"There is taking risks and there is launching yourself into a star. I truly cannot think of any rationale that will give your drone mechs a clear advantage in this matchup. Not with this configuration that you have chosen. Are you deliberately attempting to lose this challenge?"

"No." Ves firmly replied. "I am very serious about winning this match. I can promise you that I have no intentions of disrespecting your challenge. I am committed to proving the superiority of my Fey Fianna, but that is precisely why I am forcing my machines to fight under these adverse circumstances. I want to show the public that my work can overcome the inherent disadvantages of this situation and secure a decisive victory in the end."

Chapter 5553 Showing Their Age

"So these are the living mechs of the new generation."

"Mhmm."

"How much do you know about the new Fey Fianna?"

"Not as much as you think. I mainly involve myself in swordsman mech designs. I have little motivation and reason to push myself into other mech design projects, even if they are assigned a sword or a knife as a backup weapon. Ves' latest pet project is clearly oriented to mid-ranged combat. The battle has clearly taken the wrong turn. The Fey Fianna is primarily designed to avoid close confrontations."

"I see." Venerable Joshua responded as he enjoyed the warmth of Ketis' hard and athletic body. "Are you interested in designing a melee variant of the Fey Fianna? It might be fun to make a mech that indirectly controls 4 extra swords that can swing in any direction and in different places at once. It might be difficult to make the sword fey strike hard enough, but I am confident that your swordmaster expertise can solve this problem."

Ketis shoved her elbow against her silly husband's side with more than a little force.

"Mech design doesn't work like that. We can't magic every difficult problem away. My gifts as a swordmaster can only do so much."

As the married couple enjoyed a rare day off, they settled into the couch as they watched the projected feed that dominated half of their stateroom aboard the Spirit of Bentheim.

Meanwhile, a pair of cute and growing kids went off to play with each other. Currently, big brother Kirian was trying to teach basic swordplay to his adorable little sister.

"You need to swing your sword this way!"

"This way?" Little Mayra asked as she swung her fuzzy sword-shaped toy in a wobbling manner.

"You're doing better, but you should control your grip. Don't hold the hilt too tight, but don't loosen your fingers too much either. Do you get it, sis?"

"I'm bored. I want to play with my dolls."

"Dolls are boring! Don't you want to become a cool swordmaster like mommy?"

"Mmmmm.... No." Mayra shook her head.

"You're stupid!"

"No, you're stupid!"

"Nuh-uh, you're stupid!"

As the children started to feud against each other, their father reached out and gently drained their frustrations with his soothing force of will.

"Settle down. No one here is stupid. Kirian, if Mayra wants to play with her dolls, just let her. She is not old enough to begin her swordsmanship training. Give her time."

Once he was done with admonishing his children, he resumed his observations of the product reveal that had already produced a lot of excitement.

The patriarch unveiled all kinds of new and improved features with the introduction of the Fey Fianna.

"Fourth generation luminar crystal technology. Fifth generation living mechs. Multi-spirit living mechs. All of that sounds amazing. How soon will those improvements roll out in the expeditionary fleet?"

"You are in for a long wait." Ketis replied in a flat tone. "It takes time to update all of our existing mech models. Many of our lead designers have left to undergo EdNet training. I would like to help, but I only design melee mechs. Ves is the only mech designer in our clan that can implement his improved solutions, and his schedule is always full."

That caused Joshua to frown. "He should hire more mech designers if that is the case. He used to be a lot more relaxed and approachable in the old days. Now, he is not in the same location as us anymore."

"The clan has grown, and so has our patriarch. His burden of responsibility has become much greater than before. I predict that it will take at least a year before he even thinks about updating your Everchanger. There is a chance it may even take longer before he gets around to improving your living mech." Venerable Joshua dramatically threw his hands up. "That's too long! Not just me, but the rest of the old gang have heard little about any anticipated updates to their old expert mechs. Our machines aren't weak, but ever since our resonance strength started to grow like a rocket, many of us feel like our own battle partners are starting to fall behind. We can do much more if we have room to express our expanded power. We at least want our expert mechs to keep up with the times and take advantage of all of the new hyper tech."

Though Ketis pretty much knew what her husband was talking about, it was best not to mention the experimental general cultivation elixirs out loud.

Half of the people in the expeditionary fleet knew that the expert pilots of the Larkinson Clan benefited from an amazing opportunity.

The general cultivation elixirs could be hidden, but their effects were far too obvious!

Every working resonance meter could easily detect the discrete jump in resonance strength right after the expert pilots recovered from their latest elixir ingestion.

Joshua happened to be the expert pilot that derived the most benefits from the general cultivation elixirs!

Whereas the other expert pilots only managed to grow their resonance strengths by 2 to 3 laveres, Joshua never failed to boost his own resonance strength by 4 laveres!

That was not all. He recovered considerably faster than anyone else. Though the traumas induced by the illusions created by the elixirs could push any expert pilot to their limits, Joshua possessed qualities that enabled him to bounce back with greater ease.

This has caused his schedule to go out of sync compared to the other Larkinson expert pilots.

Whereas Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson and Commander Casella Ingvar had to wait at least 3 months before they could safely ingest another elixir, Joshua was able to restore his condition back to his peak in less than 2.5 months!

It might even be possible to push the interval down to just 2 months, but not even the mechers dared to endanger Joshua's health to such a degree!

They were much more interested in keeping track of his progress over a longer period of time.

In any case, Joshua's growth over the recent months had been nothing less than record-breaking.

Starting from around 24 laveres, Joshua swallowed 3 elixirs, which combined with his 'regular' progress caused his resonance strength to measure at 38.8 laveres on average last he checked!

This meant that Joshua went from a fresh mid-tier expert pilot to almost reaching the threshold of a high-tier expert pilot!

He did not know of any other expert pilot in the past that managed to race through the ranks in such record time.

There were far more expert pilots who stagnated and eventually never managed to push their resonance strength past 40 laveres due to many different factors.

Not even the Chosen Human could match's Joshua's growth rate at this stage!

Of course, that did not mean that Joshua became conceited enough to think he was superior to a god pilot.

He had mixed feelings about the general cultivation elixirs. They were certainly effective, but they made it too easy.

If not for the fact that the expeditionary fleet still remained active in the border regions of human-occupied space, Joshua would have started to feel that he did not deserve to receive his rapid boost in strength.

In any case, it was due to this extreme occurrence that Joshua yearned to pilot a more powerful version of the Everchanger even more!

Though the mech had received minor upgrades every now and then, the core technical features and attributes of the machine remained the same.

Ketis did not entirely agree with this assessment.

"Technically speaking, the Everchanger is already a hyper mech. The same goes for all of the other older Larkinson mechs. We did not know it back then, but when Ves incorporated Unending alloy into your machines, he turned them into prime mechs, which nowadays is regarded as a variation of a hyper mech. You should feel grateful, Joshua. You are far ahead when it comes to harnessing E

energy. Your combat effectiveness has skyrocketed ever since we entered the Age of Dawn. Your mech has almost fully kept up with the times. The only changes that are truly necessary is to bring your armor system and a number of other systems in line with the standards set by the Red Association."

Joshua pressed his fingers against his forehead. "I know that my Everchanger is special and has grown a lot during the Age of Dawn, but it still feels back that my battle partner is still working with tech that is a decade old. Many other expert pilots like those from the Cross Clan and the Boojay Family meanwhile get to show off their completely updated expert mechs in front of us. I don't even have to look outside of our clan. Have you seen what the new Blood Star Mark II and the Lionheart can do?! Those expert mechs are on another level than the rest of our machines."

"The Blood Star Mark II and the Lionheart are indeed technological marvels, for different reasons." The female mech designer admitted. "Both of them are designed as high-tier expert mechs from the start. They are also quasi-first-class mechs that push the limit of what their power reactors can support in their mech frames. I would not say your Everchanger has fallen too far behind compared to them. Your expert hero mech is armed with the Scarlet Ember and has access to the Gray Lotus as well."

"Those are nice weapons, but they don't really fit my expert mech. The plasma sword is an energy hog, and the Gray Lotus hardly makes a difference when I don't know where all of the important alien officers and leaders are located inside their huge warships."

Venerable Joshua did not want to wait much longer. He was on track to become a high-tier expert very soon. This was where all of his accumulation so far would begin to produce qualitative changes that significantly boosted his combat effectiveness!

If his prodigiously fast growth rate persisted after this crucial turning point, then it would only take a little over a year for him to become an ace pilot candidate!

By then, his demand for a proper high-tier expert mech version of the Everchanger became most acute!

Not being able to pilot a properly upgraded Everchanger by that time would be as painful as trying to fight a sparring match against Ketis while armed with a skinny little knife.

His wife picked up his growing need. She placed her calloused hand over his palm.

"I will let Ves and his wife know. I think Gloriana will be especially eager to test her new cranial implant by working on multiple expert mechs."

Joshua smiled and relaxed. He gestured at the projected live broadcast. "If you do manage to get in touch with Ves, can you ask if he can add a few of these spurs to my machine? My intuition tells me that I can do a lot with them. There should be enough room on my Everchanger, right?"

"Ves and Gloriana will have to redesign the rear sections of your Everchanger depending on the size of the new spurs. Are you sure you want to add this extra complication to your expert mech?"

"I am sure." Joshua spoke with greater firmness in his tone. "I don't need too many spurs, but the possibility of having a pair of them by my side makes me excited. Just imagine what it would be like to pilot an expert mech version of the new Fey Fianna. Maybe I can produce amazing decoys, or maybe I can produce a really big energy shield that can cover an entire starship."

"Keep dreaming."

Every mech pilot of the Larkinson Clan dreamt of piloting more modern and powerful mechs.

The Fey Fianna model had already begun to roll out in the expeditionary fleet, but that only satisfied a small group of Larkinson mech pilots.

The rest still yearned for updates of their established mechs. As the battles against the native aliens continued to intensify, the Valkyrie Redeemer, the Ferocious Piranha and many other mech models were all starting to show their age.

Chapter 5554 Contest of Endurance

It became increasingly clearer to all of the viewers that the Fey Fiannas were not doing well.

They started out the fight outnumbered. The Nelerat Mark I was cheaper than the Fey Fianna, so the opposing side was allowed to field an additional mech to equalize the odds.

Though the Fey Fiannas still had more guns at their disposals due to the fact that each of the drone mechs were tied with 2 luminar crystal cannon fey, the fire beams they continually launched towards the mountain-shaped fortification on the other side of the mech arena still stood strong!

Sure, a lot of scorch marks and uneven surfaces had appeared, but none of them managed to go too deep.

It was not as if the Fey Fiannas were unable to breach the external armor plating, but everytime they did so, the Nelerats always deployed their fast-regenerating energy shields before patching up the holes with a special repair solution!

The continuous cycle of breakdowns and repairs caused the fortification to look increasingly ragged. Yet it was clearly serving its purpose as the defensive rifleman mechs huddled inside remained just as pristine as before!

The mountain persevered.

In contrast, the Fey Fiannas were beginning to reach the limits of how much damage their energy shields could withstand.

The water-attributed energy shields of their defensive fey had withstood a lot of abuse. Just like the fey of yesterday, each of the subordinate spirits had developed their own intrinsic understanding of the water element.

By contextualizing their comprehension in the form of artistic conceptions, they not only improved the defensive performance of their energy shields, but also conjured impressive illusions of mythical creatures or compelling natural phenomena.

Still, all of the whirlpools and dragons could not negate the constant stream of kinetic damage launched by the gauss rifles of the Nelerat Mark I's.

The challenge match so far made it abundantly clear that mechs that were saturated with the earth element enjoyed a considerable advantage against mechs that predominantly leaned to the water element for defense!

Due to reasons that few people understood, earth beat water if everything else was equal.

The Fey Fiannas did not enjoy a defensive advantage that was overwhelming enough to overcome this fundamental weakness.

Though the mech's clever design and use of rotations to give mechs and fey the chance to recharge their energy shields, their restoration rates paled in comparison to the energy shields equipped by their adversaries!

The differences between energy shield generators equipped by the two mech models attracted a lot of attention.

"The rifleman mech's energy shields are getting back up to full strength way too quickly. Is this the tech that first-raters get to play with? It's amazing that P&T can equip such a useful energy shield into such an affordable mech."

"The Nelerat is only affordable in a relative sense, brother. I would not call a mech with a list price of 2.2 MTA credits cheap. It is just because it looks cheap in comparison to the Fey Fianna and all of the other mechs that are subjected to inflated prices. I don't know why the Nelerat's energy shields can recharge so quickly, but if P&T has managed to make it so cheap, then we will be paying the price for that sooner or later. Probably sooner. Cheap mech parts tend to break down faster than you think when they are subject to so much abuse."

"Those fast-charging energy shields can block a lot of damage in prolonged fights... but they're utterly useless when fighting against alien warships. A stronger energy shield like the ones equipped by the Fey Fianna might not be able to block all of the damage of smaller warship guns, but they can buy you enough time to eject, whether manually or automatically. I would not bet my life that the much weaker energy shields can neutralize the damage of an initial barrage from a gun battery. They will crumble like paper and allow the overpowering attacks to destroy the mechs as well as the pilots."

"My troops could have suffered much fewer losses with this energy shield model. It is ideal for defensive warfare. I wouldn't rely on them for assaults. Mechs have to expose themselves to enemy fire much longer, and there are no handy terrain features in space where they can take the time to quickly recharge their energy shields."

Many people among the audience were not that easily fooled by amazing new tech. They possessed a wealth of experience and understanding that enabled them to figure out the various shortcomings of the fast-charging energy shields of the Nelerat Mark I.

Nonetheless, the entire challenge match seemed to showcase the Nelerat Mark I's dominance since it had begun. The Fey Fianna which was supposed to be the star of the week had been reduced to a foil when it faced off against its first challenger!

If the other challenge matches started off in the same way, then the Fey Fianna line would definitely stumble as a lot of people would begin to doubt its combat effectiveness in the field.

The Fey Fianna had to win this match. The Nelerat Mark I certainly had its strong points, but the defensive rifleman mech's combat approach was so disgusting in the mech arena that it attracted relatively little support from the audience.

"The Nelerat is supposedly designed to counter alien starfighters, but they were never really a threat to our forces to begin with. I actually wish that the aliens expand the amount of starfighters they

deploy into battle. The more small craft they bring, the fewer ships they have left that are mounted with lots of gun batteries."

"I would still choose to pilot the Fey Fianna over the Nelerat if the latter wins. Being able to build your own little metal castle in the field is nice and all, but a single attack from the main guns of a warship can wipe it all out in an instant. Mobility is king in today's battlefield. It is better to avoid a warship attack than to resist it head-on. How stupid can Master Kreshnikbe be for sticking to an outdated approach?!"

Despite these complaints, the fact that the Nelerat Mark I was making progress was undeniable.

The clearest sign yet of this was the fact that their repeated gauss cannon attacks had finally begun to break through the final water-attributed energy shields and begun to attack the modular armor of the Fey Fiannas!

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

After minutes of firing their weapons, the mech pilots of the Nelerat Mark I's managed to gain a better read of their opponents. Their hit rate improved slightly as they managed to predict the evasive patterns of the Fey Fiannas that were in their sights.

With eight gauss cannons at their disposal, the defensive rifleman mechs possessed enough firearms to box in their priority target and force the latter to suffer at least two attacks per salvo.

All of this damage quickly took a toll on the armor of the Fey Fianna. Their modular armor plating suffered repeated impacts that created dents and destroyed important circuitry.

As the compromised plates started to fall to the arena floor, more modular armor plates moved into place to cover any weak points.

Fortunately, the fact that the Nelerat Mark I's declined to move meant the Fey Fiannas did not have to take attacks from other angles into account.

This made it a lot simpler for the Fey Fianna to use up all of the modular armor plating one by one. If not for the fact that the earth gauss rounds pounded the water-attributed modular armor plating with even greater ferocity, it would have looked like the drone mechs would have been able to last quite a while!

Fortunately for the Larkinsons, the Fey Fianna's continuous fire laser beam attacks finally managed to yield results.

The fortress had been shot at so many times that most people lost count. Though the Nelerat Mark I's continuously deployed their energy shields so that they could quickly fill up the gap with a strange solution, there was only so much of it that they could carry in their mech frames.

Once the Larkinson mech pilots found out that the opposing side could no longer patch up the holes in their makeshift fortification, the Fey Fiannas fired all of their luminar crystal weapons with greater enthusiasm than before!

Slowly but steadily, the continuous fire energy beam attacks melted and vaporized both solid armor plating, earth hyper materials and hardened repair substances.

"The rifleman mechs are taking real damage this time!"

The effect of the fire energy beams against the armor of the Nelerats still weren't good. The latter's armor system did not possess any modular features, but the armor plating was thicker and much more resistant against damage on an overall basis.

Together with the defensive reinforcement bestowed by the higher concentration of earth energy in the immediate location, the Nelerat Mark I's showed that they could still withstand a lot of attacks without relying on the protection offered by their makeshift fortification!

The visible damage suffered by the Fey Fiannas looked much worse in comparison. Modular armor plating continued to fall from the exterior of the fey used to shield the drone mechs from damage.

The energy shield fey bravely put themselves in harm's way despite the fact that their energy shield generators needed a long time to recharge. They served no other useful purpose at this time, so they could only use their naked 'bodies' to endure the risks on behalf of their main bodies.

They did so in an admirable fashion.

It helped that the attacks of the Nelerats were not too powerful. The strong earth element amplification made every kinetic attack hit harder, but that was of limited use when the caliber of the gauss rifles was not that big to begin with. The highly responsive adaptive modular armor system designed by Beatrice Hendrix cleverly adapted to the current circumstances and already pulled out spare modular armor plating and kept them ready so that they could quickly swoop in and cover a gap in defenses as soon as it appeared!

The challenge match entered into an odd new equilibrium at this time.

The Fey Fiannas were continuing to endure all of the incoming kinetic attacks by expending the modular armor plating at a relatively fast rate.

The Nelerat Mark I's were huddling inside their half-broken fortification while relying on a combination of their fairly tough armor systems along with the occasional relief provided by their fast-charging energy shields.

It looked as if this match had truly devolved in a contest of endurance!

Since neither side had any overwhelmingly powerful attack methods at their disposal, they simply resorted to trading attacks back and forth while relying on their relatively high defenses to remain in the fight.

"Is this your secret master plan, professor?" Master Kreshnik commented in a bemused tone. "Are you trying to show off the defensive capacity of your Fey Fianna when they have expended their energy shields? It is a decent idea. Your drone mechs can last for a notable amount of time so long as the match remains static. However... who says that the mechs must remain on the opposite sides of the arena?"

Just after he spoke, the situation in the large arena field abruptly changed.

After many minutes of fighting out an artillery barrage at opposing ends, one side seemingly got tired by this game.

The Nelerat Mark I's abruptly burst from their burned and melted mountain fortification and soared in the air like butterflies breaking out of their cocoons!

Their fast-charging energy shields resisted numerous salvos of fire energy beam attacks as the exposed rifleman mechs boldly flew forward to close in on the Fey Fiannas!

Not only were the Nelerats attempting to close the distance against the opposing drone mechs, they were also starting to split up so they could approach their enemies from multiple angles!

This was bad for the Fey Fiannas as the mechs expended so many modular armor plating that it became much easier for the opposing rifleman mechs to target their exposed weak points!

Chapter 5555 Outburst of Aggression!

The fight just became a lot more dynamic now that the Nelerat Mark I's unexpectedly shifted its strategy!

The defensive rifleman mechs huddled inside their makeshift fortification for a long time. They showed great willingness to let their deployable armor construct absorb a lot of enemy fire on their behalf.

It was not until the temporary fortification withstood so many fire energy beam attacks that it had essentially crumbled apart that the Nelerat Mark I's shifted gears.

They did so in a dramatic fashion.

Despite being categorized as defensive rifleman mechs, the Nelerats were quite fast and light when they weren't weighed down by so much excess armor.

Of course, the defensive rifleman mechs still flew a tad bit slower than traditional rifleman mechs. The Nelerats were not only weighed down by armor, but also had to carry many other components such as energy shield generators, energy cells to keep the former running and a lot of spare ammunition.

At this time, the Nelerats expended a lot of ammunition, so much so that they had actually chosen to put down their second rifles.

Flying forward with only a single gauss rifle in their arms might slow down their firing rate, but made their shots more precise and controllable when they maneuvered in the air.

It also helped to make their remaining ammunition reserves last longer. The mech pilots hired by P&T had to pay a lot of attention to how many times they could still fire their rifles. They needed to finish off their opponents before they fired their last rounds, or else they would lose the match by default!

"In the previous demonstrations, your Fey Fianna demonstrated their defensive capabilities by resisting attacks from one direction." Master Aulaus Kreshnik said to Ves as both mech designers observed the unfolding battle. "This has cast your mechs in a favorable light, but also obscured the fact that mechs equipped with modular armor systems are generally vulnerable when attacked from multiple angles. Even if you can borrow the modular armor plates that are carried by all of the Fey, they can only last so long."

Ves did not look particularly concerned when he saw that his Fey Fiannas were about to get flanked and assailed from multiple directions. He silently watched the Nelerat Mark I's show their most handsome sides as they flew in the air and sped towards the other side of the oval-shaped arena with a lot of momentum.

It was at this time that more people started to believe that the Nelerats had managed to gain the upper hand in this challenge match!

"The Fey Fiannas are going to lose!"

"The only reason why the new LMC mechs are at a disadvantage is because they are really bad at fighting mechs that are strong in the earth element."

"Is this everything the Fey Fianna can do in a fight against other mechs? This is seriously disappointing. Even if we aren't able to fight as many mechs as we used to, I would never entrust my life to a machine that cannot even win a match against another mech.

The pressure exerted by the Nelerats rose sharply as they assaulted one of the three Fey Fiannas.

Just like before, the defensive rifleman mechs primarily launched their kinetic attacks against one of their foes.

The Fey Fianna received so many attacks that multiple fey had to utilize their own metal bodies to block the incoming damage!

This made it much harder for the Fey Fiannas and their fey to return the favor. The fire laser beams launched by the luminar crystal weapons missed their shots much more frequently than before.

It was much harder to hit a moving target than a stationary one, especially if the former came closer!

Not only that, but the increased stress and the vibrations produced by the heavy kinetic impacts spoiled the aim of the main body and the offensive fey.

In contrast, the fire energy beam attacks did not seem to bother the Nelerats at all. The attacks emitted a lot of brightness and heated up the surface of the defensive rifleman mechs, but unless the repeated laser beam strikes managed to hit the same sections, it was hard to inflict any critical damage.

The range between the two mech teams shrunk quickly. Once the Nelerats began to get fairly close, they rose in the air while also slowing down to prevent themselves from crashing into the shielded boundaries that separated the arena grounds from the audience who were seated further away.

It did not help that the Fey Fiannas stuck fairly close to the large energy shield barriers. Their positioning meant that the Nelerats had to fly even closer while watching their velocities carefully in fear of overshooting and colliding against large energy barriers that had been known to break many crashing mechs in the past.

Yet it was during this crucial time interval where the Nelerat Mark I's helplessly slowed down so that they could start to circle around that the Fey Fiannas unveiled their own gambit!

Previously, the Fey Fiannas had been content to fly and maneuver in the same space while fighting like traditional drone mechs.

The Fey Fiannas fought in a similar fashion to rifleman mechs, but with more weapon systems at their disposal. Having entered the fight with a luminar crystal rifle as well as two luminar crystal fey made it seem as if the drone mechs had geared up for a ranged firefight.

Even if the drone mechs possessed light melee combat capabilities, everyone in the mech arena unconsciously regarded them as pure ranged mechs. They ideally preferred to attack their opponents

from afar, as the backup knives assigned to them did not look threatening enough when wielded by largely ranged combat-oriented mechs.

It was because of all of these assumptions that the Nelerats had moved a lot closer to the Fey Fiannas!

Now, this crucial decision provoked a targeted response from the Fey Fiannas.

Though the drone mechs were not yet in a hurry to make their moves, their relatively faster and lighter fey moved first!

No matter whether they were luminar crystal cannon fey or energy shield fey whose generators were still in recovery, each of these fey completely stopped what they were doing and started to fly towards the closest Nelerat mech!

"Huh?!"

The mech pilot of the latter machine grew shocked, so much so that his mech no longer dared to fire its gauss rifle.

The Nelerat quickly turned around and tried to distance itself from the 12 fey that seemed to radiate bloodlust and fury.

Yet how could a defensive rifleman mech possibly outpace the much smaller and lighter fey at such a close range?

What compounded the Nelerat's problem was that it had been moving closer when the fey radically altered their behavior.

This made it impossible for the poor mech to outrun the living spurs!

A few seconds later, the fey almost managed to catch up to the fleeing Nelerat. None of the other defensive rifleman mechs could offer any support as their attacks would more than likely cause friendly fire.

A brief interruption occurred when the Nelerat's fast-charging energy shield had just come online in the nick of time.

Yet the chasing offensive fey easily took care of that by firing their forward-facing luminar crystal cannons at the target in front of their muzzles enough times for the weak energy shield to shatter for the umpteenth time!

This left the stricken defensive rifleman mech completely vulnerable to all of the fey!

The smaller combat machines physically mobbed the Nelerat from every available direction.

Soon, all 12 fey pressed the Nelerat from every side, which not only caused it to become immobilized, but also forced the machine to descend to the arena floor!

The defensive rifleman mech tried its best to dislodge all of the fey and resist their combined pushes, but the Nelerat simply did not have the thrust power or leverage to free itself from its predicament!

Once the Nelerat touched the surface, it was practically pressed flat onto the arena floor with no way to utilize its limbs!

Let alone using its gauss rifle, the mech could not even move its limbs to punch or tear the fey away!

Although the mech in crisis received a bit of support from the other 3 Nelerat mechs in the field, the modular armor plating successfully blocked most of these attacks, though not perfectly as a few gauss rounds still managed to get through.

Regardless, the fey could still withstand a light beating, so they continued to fire their thrusters at maximum power so that they could give no chance for the Nelerat to escape!

The only problem at this time was that the fey were unable to inflict meaningful damage to the trapped machine.

The luminar crystal cannon fey were unable to push against the Nelerat with their cannon barrels pressing against the mech.

That would break or deform the weapon!

The offensive fey could only imitate their defensive brothers and use the flat sides of their bodies to keep the Nelerat immobile.

Fortunately, the Fey Fianna had more tricks up its sleeve.

Even as the remaining Nelerats opted to open fire at the Fey Fiannas that had suddenly become a lot more exposed due to sending out their fey, the drone mechs made a simultaneous move.

"Fix bayonets"

"What?!"

The Fey Fiannas calmly withstood the gauss attacks that tried to wear down their modular armor systems and pulled out their backup knives.

They then proceeded to slot the handles of their knives into a holder that unfolded below the barrels of their luminar crystal rifles.

The Fey Fiannas suddenly looked a lot more deadlier than before!

The knives themselves might not seem threatening, but everyone knew that the Fey Fiannas had become much more troublesome to fight against now that they were wielding bayoneted rifles!

Two of the Fey Fiannas blindly charged at the remaining Nelerats in order to spook them and prevent them from firing their gauss rifles without interruption.

The third Fey Fianna flew straight towards the immobilized Nelerat.

With all of the fey still restraining the opposing machine, the Fey Fianna found it trivially easy to charge and thrust its bayonet between the gaps of fey and into the exposed rear of the Nelerat!

The descending charge attack was so powerful that it deformed the fairly light and thin luminar crystal weapon, but the mech pilot did not care as the trapped Nelerat had instantly shut down due to the fatal attack!

"One down!"

The 12 fey abandoned the defeated enemy mech and promptly approached the next Nelerat!

The enemy mech pilots had wised up after they saw what happened to their colleague's mechs. The Nelerats did not dare to tangle with the Fey Fiannas anymore and quickly sought to fly to the other side in an attempt to distance themselves from the fey.

However, the fey were not slow at all. The head-start of the Nelerats meant little, especially when the limited fighting space inside Phoca Arena made it impossible for the defensive rifleman mechs to keep accelerating in the same direction!

The fey pulled off the same tactic as before. As long as these devious machines managed to catch up to an enemy machine, they would all plunge to the ground and leave their prey completely vulnerable to the bayonet attacks of one of the Fey Fiannas!

In fact, the other two Fey Fiannas did not remain idle. They ran interference and prevented the remaining free Nelerats from targeting any weak points. They even charged forward and attempted to spear the Nelerats with their bayonets whenever they had an opportunity!

The complete outburst of aggression exhibited by the Fey Fiannas took everyone by surprise!

No one expected for the Fey Fiannas to counter the Nelerats by using the fey as physical trapping machines!

If the Fey Fiannas fought against proper melee mechs, then the fey would never have been able to get away with this ridiculous stunt, but that was not the case this time!

Chapter 5556 Fulfilling Outcome

Almost everyone reacted with shock at this explosive outcome!

Many people still hadn't gotten caught up by the fact that the Fey Fianna managed to gain the upper hand in the final stage of the battle.

In a situation where the drone mechs suffered clear elemental disadvantages and was unable to inflict enough burst damage to overcome the fast-charging energy shields for long, a lot of people assumed that the Fey Fianna would suffer a slow and ignoble defeat.

What happened was pretty much the opposite to their expectations!

Whether the decision made by the mech pilots of the Nelerat Mark I had been a mistake or not, from the moment the defensive rifleman mechs crossed the length of the massive arena, they had made themselves vulnerable to a surprise fey rush!

Yes, a fey rush!

No one expected the fey to have the power to physically overpower and push down other mechs.

Such a tactic had never taken place before, at least to the spectators who managed to witness this unique and remarkable occurrence!

The spurs of other drone mechs were normally a lot smaller than the fey, and lacked the thrust power to perform this kind of feat.

This did not apply to the fey, which were not only larger than almost every other spur, but possessed a relatively high thrust-to-weight ratio!

After all, the fey needed to accelerate fast enough to perform agile maneuvers and keep up with frequent changes on the battlefield.

A single fey did not have the strength to overpower a mech, but what about 12 fey?

It didn't matter if these fey were never designed to entrap mechs with their physical forms!

As long as they worked together in unison, they could physically overpower any mech so long as they were not too strong!

It just so happened that the Nelerat Mark I's were neither physically powerful nor possessed a lot of thrust power.

The local gravity of Bortele III also became a hindrance to the defensive rifleman mech.

While the Nelerat Mark I was designed to carry around a lot of excess armor, its mobility clearly took a massive hit when carrying such a great burden.

This was also an important reason why the 4 Nelerat Mark I's built their temporary fortification right away. None of the machines wanted to straighten their flight systems just to deploy their external armor plates at another location.

In any case, as soon as the first Nelerat Mark I succumbed to this surprise tactic, the match had already been decided.

The remaining three Nelerats did not pose enough of a threat to take down the three Fey Fiannas quickly, even if the latter had sent away their feys.

The adaptive modular armor systems of the drone mechs had done their jobs admirably. The mechs may have been losing modular armor plates left and right, but so long as there was a decent supply of them, they could last long enough to protect the absolutely vital weak points!

The results became abundantly clear. The Fey Fiannas completely abandoned their previous combat approach and turned into berserkers that fearlessly charged the defensive rifleman mechs that had little to no ability to defend themselves at close range.

Even though the Nelerat Mark I possessed many good qualities, the realities of second-class mech design meant that Master Kreshnik was unable to make them competent in melee combat with the design budget that he had set.

The audience cheered at the courage shown by the Fey Fiannas. They became amazed at how the fey were able to suppress the Nelerats one by one.

When the Fey Fiannas finally struck down the final Nelerat without losing a single mech or fey, even the most critical observer could not deny that the latest product of the LMC had won a clear and decisive victory!

An unconventional win, but one that did not violate the terms of the challenge match!

Master Aulaus Kreshnik's failed to control his expression for a few seconds. He looked as if he could not accept that his Nelerats had actually lost in such an absurd fashion.

He could accept that his Nelerats would lose by getting outgunned by all of the fey.

He could not accept that his proud rifleman mechs lost by getting pressed onto the ground by a swarm of fey!

Ves looked completely different from his older rival. The grin on his face made it look as if he had just witnessed a well-laid plan coming together.

Master Kreshnik finally turned to Ves with a look that made it clear that he found it hard to accept this unexpected reality.

He never expected that his mechs would make fools of themselves when he issued his challenge!

If he knew that the Fey Fiannas could fight like scoundrels, he would have tried to market his incomplete mech design in a more traditional fashion!

The older man eventually made a wry smile and stretched out his hand. "Good fight. Your mechs have performed... admirably. Your Fey Fiannas deserve this victory."

Ves smiled back as he accepted the gesture and shook hands with the Master Mech Designer.

"Thank you, Master. Your mechs are quite impressive as well. Their ability to fight a battle of attrition is exceptional. I wish I had access to the tech that you have managed to stuff inside the Nelerats. The ability to fill up gaps in the armor and rely on energy shields that keep returning to full capacity is useful in many situations."

Master Kreshnik's mood lightened a bit after Ves praised his characteristic energy shields.

"If you wish to make use of my fast-regeneration energy shields in your future mech designs, you are welcome to call me. We can always come to an arrangement."

"Perhaps I will take you up on your offer."

Not likely. Fast-regeneration energy shields were primarily useful in battles between small craft and so on. The predominant trend at the moment was battles between human mechs and alien warships. Many people would much prefer to gain a more powerful defensive barrier that might only be relevant once per fight.

As the referees officially confirmed that the Fey Fianna had won the challenge match in a fair and legitimate fashion, Ves felt relieved.

No matter how the remaining challenge matches unfolded, Ves could at least point to a single victory to prove that his Fey Fianna line was not weak.

"Did you plan this tactic in advance?" Master Kreshnik asked as couldn't hold in his curiosity.

"It is one of multiple contingency plans." Ves responded. "There are multiple ways for the battle to unfold. If your Nelerats chose to stay in place, my Fey Fiannas probably would have moved closer on their own initiative. There's no way that my mechs should allow your Nelerats to keep buffering a lot of damage with the help of their fast-regenerating energy shields."

Master Kreshnik shrugged. "My Nelerats relied so much on their energy shields that they expended a large amount of energy in the process. It is not out of the realm of possibility for my mechs to run out of energy first."

"I know, but I don't know how many energy cells you have put inside your defensive rifleman mech, and I am not familiar with their individual qualities either. My Fey Fiannas could not afford to bet on the uncertain possibility that they could actually win a battle of attrition against mechs that already excel on this front. It is just better to bite the bullet and charge forward in order to take advantage of their superior combat performance at close range."

"And use all of those fey to physically bully my Nelerats?"

Ves chuckled at that. "How could my mech pilots possibly resist? None of my Fey Fiannas are eager to chase after fleeing rifleman mechs. Even if your Nelerats are not as fast, the difference in mobility is not too great, which means that your products can stay out of knife stabbing range for quite a while. That will give your other rifleman mechs a lot of time to take potshots at my mechs."

Anyone listening to his explanation would think that using a lot of fey to mob the Nelerats was the most logical course of action to take.

The Fey were faster, more maneuverable and just powerful enough to press down the defensive rifleman mechs if they all worked together.

Even though Master Kreshnik was able to follow Ves' logic, he still felt this entire situation had turned into a farce!

"I think your Nelerats have impressed plenty of people." Ves told his challenger. "They dominated most of the match. So many potential customers have witnessed their excellence in defensive warfare and attrition warfare that I wouldn't be surprised if they have made inquiries at your mech company. Your work isn't to blame for the loss. If our mechs were fighting against each other in an unrestricted space environment, then your Nelerats would have been able to move much more freely in battle."

That eased Kreshnik's frustrations.

Ves was right. The limitations of Phoca Arena prevented the Nelerats from using their mobility and their advantage in ranged combat to the fullest.

Of course, the same could be said for the Fey Fiannas as well.

None of that was relevant at the moment. Both sides agreed to hold the challenge match in Phoca Arena under normal conditions. It was only natural for them to prep their mechs to fight in a way that best matched the conditions at hand.

Whether deliberately or not, the relative passiveness of the Fey Fiannas during most of the fight had given the Nelerats ample time to showcase their strengths.

Master Kreshnik and his mech company did not really lose out at all. The mark of defeat might stain the Nelerat Mark I to an extent, but the huge increase in publicity and brand awareness more than made up for this demerit!

His powerful mind was already hard at work. He planned to rush his mech design to completion based on the final 'tests' of his prototype mechs. At the same time, Pritchard & Terse should get ready to mass produce a lot of copies of the finalized version of his proud new mech design!

The Master Mech Designer shook hands with Ves one final time.

"Very good. You are a more interesting mech designer than I thought. I hope I will meet you again in the future. I will leave you to face your remaining challenges. Good luck with them. I hope your Fey Fianna model will overcome the other works. I do not want to see an outcome where my Nelerat Mark I is the only product that has lost against your work."

"Hehehehe. You don't need to worry about that. My Fey Fiannas have plenty of fight left in them. They have surprises that they have yet to reveal during the last fight."

"Oh? Your Fey Fiannas were holding back? I do not know whether to feel glad or insulted."

Ves shrugged. "It's not a big deal."

Master Kreshnik finally floated away after a few more minutes of chatting.

As Ves waited for his next challenger, he still thought back on the previous match.

The fight had been incredibly fulfilling for Ves. He was proud to see his products succeed in a difficult circumstance, and he was even more glad to see that so many viewers genuinely appreciated the Fey Fianna.

His mechs existed to be used in battle. They were not toys or display models. They were not tech demos that solely existed to show off fanciful new technological applications.

They existed to fight, and they fulfilled their primary purpose in a beautiful fashion today.

"The next match is going to be different."

Ves wasn't sure what he was thinking when he accepted a challenge from a mech designer who presented a melee mech, but now that he had reached this point, he could do little else but root for his living mechs.

Chapter 5557 Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain

Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain was a severe-looking woman with middle-length gray hair. She wore a neutral gray suit and coat that hugged her slim build but did not add much color to her appearance.

Despite the fact that she was 'only' 180 years old, she carried herself as a mech designer who was a century older. Ves gained the impression that the female Master had spent many hours on quiet studying, experimentation and other boring-sounding stuff.

Her mech company reflected her focus on design over the other spheres of the mech industry.

According to the galactic net, the GHC Mech Consulting Bureau did not produce a lot of mechs in-house, but designed a lot of mechs on commission to many different clients.

Based in the more distant Greenwich Middle Zone, GHC had managed to carve out a good niche in the competitive mech market. It designed complete mechs if needed, but also did a lot of business by providing consulting services to any mech designer or department that was struggling with a difficult project.

There was one particular reason why Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain became such a valued consultant and adviser in the mech industry.

She originally came from the galactic center of the Milky Way!

Even if she only grew up as a relatively unassuming second-class mech designer in one of the numerous marginal buffer states in the prosperous region, she gained access to many benefits that were practically unattainable in the galactic heartland and the galactic rim.

She had access to significantly more advanced augmentations. There were even cases where redundant or used stocks of first-class augmentations got dumped in whatever second-rate state could afford these dubious goods.

She was able to study at a mech design university that taught a lot more high technologies that were usually present in first-class mech designs.

She had access to many relationship networks that enabled her to forge connections with first-raters. She also started her business in a region where average customers had so much more money at their disposal that it wasn't even funny!

It did not surprise Ves that second-class mech designers from the galactic center found it much easier to promote to first-class mech designers.

Anyone who grew up under those circumstances could soar into the heavens!

However, Master Ginevra did not enjoy a powerful start. She insisted on starting her own business and experienced slow growth throughout her first century of life.

It was only after she became a Master Mech Designer and started over in the Red Ocean that she started to build up momentum.

The new frontier was a much more suitable place for her to do business. Not only was the market a lot more fluid, but the rise of new technologies enabled her to leverage her intellectual prowess to the fullest.

Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain had earned a reputation for understanding phasewater technology and hyper technology quickly. She increased her proficiency in these new and exciting fields so quickly that she purportedly managed to construct her own unique comprehension that better utilized their properties.

This was why she became a successful consultant. Many other mech designers with busy schedules simply did not have the time to study phasewater technology or hyper technology to the same extent.

It was much better to hire a consultant that could solve specific design problems that were intimately related to the new technologies that introduced a lot of new and unfamiliar paradigms.

In any case, it was not just her learning ability that enabled her to stand out in this day and age.

Her design philosophy also became a lot more relevant during the last two mech generations.

It was rather interesting to Ves that Master Ginevra originally settled on a Class VIII design philosophy that was not too relevant when she started out roughly 150 years in the past.

She chose to dedicate her entire career to exploring the field of Exotic Energy Conversion.

Exotic energy was not an unknown concept during the Age of Mechs. Humanity had already developed an extensive degree of familiarity with the basic and fundamental types of energy.

Many different human technologies made ingenious use of thermal energy, kinetic energy, gravitic energy, electrical energy, sound energy, radiant energy and mechanical energy.

Yet that did not encompass every energy type in existence.

The universe was far more amazing than many humans could ever imagine from their limited perspectives.

Many different aliens managed to harness the power of more exotic and unusual energy types.

One of the more iconic examples in the previous age happened to be Worclaw energy. The powerful Alshyr race was known to eschew a lot of technology because it was mostly redundant to these powerful beings.

This large and potent avian race could fight and travel faster-than-light by relying on their own bodies alone!

They could accomplish so many more feats that they were practically the opposite of a tool-using race.

The Alshyr were probably the closest equivalent to body cultivators in the modern era of the Milky Way Galaxy!

Yet it was exactly because the Alshyr developed so much pride towards their own abilities that they never escaped its shackles.

The Alshyr constantly underestimated the power of technology, and that ended up being one of the root causes of their defeat at the hands of humanity.

In any case, Ves developed a greater interest in the former resident of the galactic center as soon as he found a list of the exotic energy types that she had managed to harness over her long career.

One of the entries just so happened to mention Worclaw energy!

Even though the sleuths on the galactic net only managed to ascertain that she had implemented in only a couple of experimental mech designs, that was already remarkable in itself!

Ves did not really put a high priority on finding a cooperative scientist that could help him make use of Worclaw energy in a more systematic manner.

However, now that he had coincidentally gotten in touch with a mech designer who happened to work with Worclaw energy in the past, how could he possibly let this opportunity slip from his grasp?

He made sure to project a polite and friendly demeanor towards Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain. It was as if he regarded her as a friendly acquaintance rather than a rival and an opponent.

"Welcome back to Phoca Arena, Master Ginevra." Ves greeted the stately-looking woman while extending his hand. "I look forward to seeing how your Montebra model shall fare against my Fey Fianna."

"Your new drone mech model presents an interesting challenge to my new lancer mech model." The older woman said as she accepted the handshake.

"I reckon that this challenge match will end much sooner than the last one. Lancer mechs are kind of all-or-nothing machines."

"Is that what you think?" Master Ginevra raised her eyebrow as she directed a challenging look towards the younger mech designer. "I have already mentioned to you that my Montebra GHCMQ-3 model is capable of purging its armor so that it can acquire the characteristics of a spearman mech. Its ability to engage in high-speed maneuvers should not be underestimated."

Ves smiled at her. "I am aware of that. My remark is not just based around your Montebbras, but also my Fey Fiannas. Take a closer look."

As the second batch of challenge mechs entered the main arena field, everyone could immediately observe what kind of configuration the Standard Fey Fianna had adopted for this match.

Each drone mech was accompanied by 3 luminar crystal cannon fey and just 1 energy shield fey!

That caused Master Ginevra to develop a greater interest in this matchup.

"That is a bold choice on your part, Professor Larkinson. You have chosen to put much more emphasis on offense. Did you consider the option of replacing the final energy shield fey with another offensive fey?"

"I did. I almost came close to going all out on an offensive fey loadout, but I held back due to your Montebras's ability to purge its armor. I thought it was better to add an extra defensive buffer to account for any surprises."

"Good choice. Why did you choose not to add any further defensive fey to your drone mechs? Your works might have a chance of blocking the charge attacks of my lancer mechs with a full loadout of energy shield fey. The limited length of this mech arena prevents my Montebras from building up enough momentum to breach even the heaviest of armor."

Ves shook his head. "That sounds like a trap to me. I do not dare to assume that your lancer mechs are entirely subject to those limitations. You do not strike me as a person who has chosen to issue a challenge to me without taking prevailing circumstances into account. It is better not to bet on the possibility that 10 energy shields stacked together can block the charge attacks of two lancer mechs."

Master Ginevra looked disappointed when she heard that. This reaction reinforced Ves's suspicion that he had made the right decision!

"The way I see it, this challenge match will end fairly soon. Either your Montebras will be able to impale my Fey Fiannas with their lances, or they will miss and quickly get picked off by all of my offensive fey."

"That is an overly simplistic view of this fight. My Montebras are not as simple as they appear. You will see soon enough."

Both mech designers waited for the RA inspectors to thoroughly examine and confirm that the mechs conformed to all of the terms of this challenge match.

Anticipation started to build up among the audience yet again. No one knew which mech held the advantage in this matchup, but most people started to root for the Fey Fianna once again.

It was always pleasant to back a winner!

Ves meanwhile tried to explore the other Master Mech Designer's attainments in exotic energy.

"E energy is not a completely new phenomena to human civilization." He casually said as he continued to float by her side. "It is present in certain parts of the Milky Way. Did you have the privilege to work with E energy during the previous mech generations?"

Master Ginevra directed a deep and slightly knowing look at him. "I am afraid that I have to disappoint you. I am not a part of an exclusive society that has dabbled with the power of E energy. I dedicated my studies to more common and accessible forms of exotic energy. In the star cluster where I operated for most of my career, I was able to come into contact with numerous varieties of

energies that had long been mastered by alien races. Much to my surprise, most researchers had little interest in them, so I took the opportunity to study them myself. My goal was to integrate them into human technology to the point where people can harness them as easily as other conventional energy types."

"Have you made much progress in your ambition?"

"Not enough." Ginevra shook her head. "There is an overpowering bias in the supremacy of human technology in the galactic center. This is despite the fact that many of our staple technologies were originally based on alien inventions. I have been working against these contradictions for most of my life. It was only when I entered the Red Ocean that I was finally able to earn widespread acceptance for my work. Everyone desires more accessible forms of phasewater technology. Recent events have caused people to develop the same desires towards hyper technology."

Moving to the Red Ocean was like a breath of fresh air. She belonged in this dwarf galaxy. She was like a fish to water.

"Phasewater is based around a special form of exotic matter. How does your design philosophy enable you to do stuff with this material?"

"I do not act upon phasewater directly, but rather the spatial energy that is intrinsically locked inside the matter." The older woman answered. "The line between energy and matter tends to blur when the former is more exotic in nature. The distinction is not as absolute as in other cases."

"I think I know what you mean."

Chapter 5558 Montebra

The inspections revealed no abnormalities or rule violations. The mechers cleared all four mechs for action.

As the two teams split up and positioned themselves at opposite ends of the mech arena, everyone looked forward to witnessing a different kind of fight from before.

The second challenge match only involved 2 mechs on each side.

Most observers had become a lot more familiar with the Fey Fianna by now. They had watched Ves' presentation the day before and also witnessed the drone mechs winning a tough and exciting match just before.

The drone mechs already proved its capacity to fight and win when the odds were against their favor. The Standard Fey Fiannas might be a bit on the expensive side, but they made up for it by offering a compelling combination between flexibility and hard combat power.

Even a single fey was powerful in itself!

It was only a fraction of the size of a mech, but could fully reproduce one of the functions of the latter!

Whether it was offense, defense, mobility or utility, the Fey Fianna could excel in any of these areas depending on what sort of fey accompanied the main body.

The only major shortcoming aside from its relatively high upfront price of 3 MTA credits per copy was the lack of fey models.

Ves had not spent much time on designing enough varieties of fey to satisfy the needs of every potential customer.

This was why the LMC launched the Fey Shaper Contest a short time ago. The incentives of this little competition should hopefully persuade enough people to earn a living by designing and selling more creative and diverse fey types.

It would have been handy if Ves had more fey models at his disposal. His Fey Fiannas could have won the last match a lot easier if they had access to an offensive fey that was aligned with the wood element.

It didn't matter too much, though. The previous challenge match had proven that elemental disadvantages were not decisive. Mechs had won and lost more battles than anyone could count despite the fact that they should have lost in theory.

What people were much more interested in were the two lancer mechs.

They looked fairly normal at first glance. Ves had designed his fair share of lancer mechs, so he possessed a good grasp of this mech type.

The oddly-named Montebra carried a lot of armor at its front side, which enabled it to resist a lot of damage when it commenced its attack runs.

The quantity of armor was not excessive, though. Part of that had to do with the flight system of the mech.

The flight system of a normal lancer mech was mostly designed to maximize their straight-line acceleration parameters.

This made lancer mechs great at speeding up in straight trajectories, yet also caused them to exhibit poor maneuverability, especially at high speeds.

In any case, the Montebra's flight system clearly betrayed the fact that it was not a pure lancer mech, but rather a compromise between a lancer mech and a spearman mech.

This was not uncommon in the mech industry. Lancer mechs possessed devastating charges but were pretty much useless outside of them. Spearman mechs were good in static battles but lacked the punch to break through enemy lines.

A mech armed with long weapons that could perform both roles decently well was an attractive product to many mech forces!

So what if the Montebra was not able to outperform a pure lancer mech at the same design budget? So long as its brawling capabilities were not too poor, its applicability would definitely be a lot higher!

While all of these factors seemed obvious enough when Ves studied the appearance of the Montebbras, he failed to ascertain its more hidden traits.

This was rather annoying. Ves could clearly sense that there was a depth to the Montebbras that currently remained dormant beneath its steel gray exterior.

The only signs of 'exotic energy' that he could sense from the Montebbras was its strong affinity to the metal element.

A considerable reason why the Montebra was more expensive than a typical second-class mech was because Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain chose to impart it with higher grades of metal hyper materials.

While she clearly did not go overboard and made the mech completely unaffordable, she had definitely made a lot of compromises in the design in order to turn the Montebbras into a metal-attributed machine.

This was a deliberate design choice. It told Ves that metal E energy was bound to play a key role in its upcoming performance.

Ves actually found it a bit strange that Master Ginevra dared to deploy a metal-aligned mech against the predominantly water-aligned Fey Fiannas.

Metal fed water, so the Montebra's attacks were bound to weaken when they struck the Fey Fiannas.

Of course, if the Montebbras successfully struck the Fey Fiannas with their lances during a charge attack, the sheer kinetic momentum of the impacts alone was enough to overpower any elemental disadvantage!

Ves did not have the capital to say that these elemental relationships could decide the outcome of battles. The previous match had already disproven this assumption.

Master Ginevra most certainly knew what she was getting into when she issued her challenge yesterday.

The more the Montebbras looked like they were at a disadvantage, the more Ves suspected that they had access to a powerful trump card that could change the entire equation!

"The challenge match shall commence in 1 minute."

The countdown started. The mech pilots from both sides made their final preparations as they beheld their opponents on the opposite side of the expansive arena.

"Do you think my Montebbras will successfully drive their lances into your Fey Fiannas?" Master Ginevra asked.

"Nah." Ves shook his head. "Lancer mechs excel at breaking slow and unwieldy targets. Everyone knows that. My Fey Fiannas aren't as maneuverable as light mechs, but they are pretty mobile compared to other medium mechs."

This was a clear and obvious fact, yet Master Ginevra did not seem to treat it as an insurmountable obstacle.

"Rules are made to be broken." The woman spoke in a sagely voice. "This is especially the case in my field of specialty. In all my years of working with exotic energies, I have challenged many facts, broken many rules and rewrote the truths that many humans previously held sacred. I encountered plenty of opposition from more close-minded mech designers due to my controversial research activities. My theories ended up wrong in many of those cases, but that does not diminish my few crucial successes. I am more of a researcher than a mech designer, but whenever I set out to design a mech, my primary goal is to make a statement."

Those were strong words. Ves felt more emotion in her than in the previous minutes. Her conviction was strong. Her confidence in her mechs was unusually high.

The Fey Fiannas were definitely in trouble this time.

"3... 2... 1... START!"

From the moment the second challenge match commenced, the four mechs took action right away!

The Fey Fiannas started to move and fly in order to make themselves as difficult to strike as possible.

The two drone mechs had 6 luminar crystal cannon feys at their disposal. These fey had immediately begun to bombard one of the Montebras with a succession of hot and searing fire laser beams.

The Fey Fiannas themselves also pitched in by firing their luminar crystal rifles.

The Montebras were both equipped with metal-attributed energy shields that appeared to be decently strong, but not quite capable of resisting so many incoming attacks for a long time.

However, the lancer mechs did not remain in place. Their flight systems boosted the Montebras forward, allowing the machines to build up speed and momentum as quickly as possible.

Phoca Arena may be the largest mech arena on Bortele III, but the Montebras could only boost themselves forward for a relatively short time before they already reached the other end!

During this short but intensive period, the Montebras did more than resisting the incoming attacks and trying to build up more and more momentum.

If the lancer mechs could only do this, then they did not have any chance of hitting the fast and agile Fey Fiannas!

In fact, a few seconds after the Montebras had commenced their charge, the Fey Fiannas already deployed another countermeasure.

All of the luminar crystal cannon fey began to release obscuring smoke clouds.

The clouds were never meant to last too long, but they blocked enemy sensors long enough to reveal 8 identical-looking Fey Fiannas!

The offensive fey had activated their decoy functions which caused them to look like actual mechs.

Their appearances as well as their emissions were so alike that the sensor systems integrated in the Montebras couldn't distinguish truth from falsehood at this time!

Not even the weapon discharges could help them identify the real mechs from all of the decoys.

This was because the weapon characteristics of the luminar crystal cannons suddenly resembled the luminar crystal rifles to an almost perfect degree!

As the designer of both weapon systems, it was easy for Ves to make one of them resemble the other. Luminar crystal technology happened to be highly scalable, so Ves did not even have to make too many alterations in order to add this functionality to his Fey Fianna design.

"I can see you have put a lot of effort into strengthening certain capabilities of your lancer mech, but I very much doubt that you have equipped your machine with high-quality sensor systems."

"You are correct." Master Ginevra admitted.

Offensive mechs such as the Montebra were usually designed to go after obvious targets. They were not designed for scouting and reconnaissance, so there was little reason for them to waste valuable capacity to obtain better eyes.

It was much better to rely on other mechs that specialized in this role!

The Montebra model was never designed to fight in isolation. It was meant to become a part of a combined arms force where many different mech models combined their strengths and covered for their weaknesses.

The challenge match did not reflect these circumstances, so the Fey Fianna had an opportunity to make good use of its tricky decoy function!

Ves had no doubt that the Montebbras would be able to distinguish the real Fey Fiannas from all of the false decoys in time. So long as their sensor systems continued to gather a lot of data, small flaws and inconsistencies would eventually betray the actual states of the mechs and the disguised fey.

However, there was no time for the Montebbras to play the long game. At this moment, 8 luminar crystal weapons continually pummeled the lancer mechs, making it clear that the two melee mechs were on a time limit!

Ves glanced at Master Ginevra and found that the woman did not look concerned for her mechs at all. Did her Montebra model possess a handy function that could successfully guide its lance to the correct target?

"Watch, Professor Larkinson."

A dramatic change suddenly occurred. The two Montebbras began to absorb a lot of metal energy from the environment! Two energy vortices appeared closely together as the lancer mechs became saturated with the power of metal!

Yet that did not last for long. Mysterious processes came online that somehow absorbed all of this metal energy and proceeded to convert it into electrical E energy!

"No, not just that!"

The Montebra model not only had the capacity to convert metal E energy into electrical E energy, but also produced a lot of conventional electrical energy as well!

This was a massive surprise! The ability to produce electrical energy from E energy alone was enough to revolutionize a lot of existing human technologies!

However, this was not the extent of the changes.

All of that electrical power meant nothing if it wasn't put to good use.

Different streams of lightning bolts sparked from the two lancer mechs and instantly closed the distance before striking all of the Fey Fiannas and fey at once!

Through this brief electrical contact, the Montebbras instantly locked onto the only real mechs among all of the false decoys!

The deception had failed!

Chapter 5559 Unbreakable Connections

Everything happened at a fast pace. The Montebras were in the process of charging from one end to the other end of Phoca Arena.

During this short but crucial interval, the two lancer mechs had to find a way to successfully drive their lances through the frames of the two opposing drone mechs.

The Montebras already solved one problem by using their electrical bolts to accurately distinguish the real mechs from the surrounding illusions.

There was nothing wrong with the visual illusions and the false emissions projected by the offensive fey. They had successfully fooled the relatively modest sensor systems of the Montebras, but they failed to take more physical detection methods into account!

Illusions were ultimately false and intangible in the end. There was no way for the luminar crystal cannon fey to produce the correct kind of response when they were inexplicably zapped by electric bolts.

However, locking onto the real mechs was not enough for the lancer mechs.

If the Montebras wanted to drive their lances into the Fey Fiannas, they needed to be able to catch up to the relatively fast and agile drone mechs!

Ironically enough, the limitations of the mech arena actually made it a little easier for the Montebras. They weren't able to build up a lot of momentum, so the mechs could change their course a lot easier in a situation where their speed was quite modest for their mech type.

Yet that was not enough to secure a high success rate.

This was why the supercharged Montebras resorted to another solution, one that directly took advantage of all of the electrical energies produced through mysterious processes!

Two streams of lightning instantly formed between two pairs of mechs.

Each lancer mech channeled much of its electrical energies to its target on the other side!

The mech pilots of the Fey Fiannas reacted with surprise at this unexpected move, but found that the electrical streams were much less threatening than they appeared.

The constant flow of electricity continually tried to lock onto the metal frames of the main bodies, but became blocked by the water energy shields.

Yet that was not the purpose of this highly unusual phenomenon.

Once the electrical streams had been formed, the Montebras became attracted by the Fey Fiannas.

Literally.

The effect was not that obvious when there was still a lot of distance between the two sides, but as the Montebras rapidly closed in, the purpose of these odd electrical streams became more and more evident.

Somehow, two pairs of mechs became affected by electromagnetic forces that physically tried to pull them together!

Similar to how an electromagnet was able to attract ferromagnetic metals, the Montebras had essentially turned into powerful directional magnets that channeled all of their excess power into pulling in their chosen targets!

So long as the electrical streams tied the opposing mechs together, there was no way to block this inexplicable effect!

The Montebras had to exert a huge amount of effort to maintain this exceptional state. Electrical sparks continually blasted off its exterior as the machine continually converted a huge amount of metal energy as well as its own energy reserves to sustain this powerful phenomenon!

A lot of heat radiated from the Montebras. It became clear that their exertions were so heavy that they were already beginning to strain their heatsinks!

Ves could even tell that all of the forces and energies acting on the Montebras were taking a horrible toll onto their internals.

He did not think it was possible for these lancer mechs to pull off this dramatic move a second time!

The mechs already started to release the awful kind of smoke that could only be produced when components started to short circuit!

Yet all of the self-inflicted damage appeared to be worth it as the electromagnetic pull became stronger and stronger as the lancer mechs came closer to the elusive drone mechs.

None of the fey could do anything to stop the impending collision from happening.

The energy shields produced by the two defensive fey might be able to bleed away a bit of energy, but they would probably be nothing more than speed bumps in front of the two powerful lancer mechs.

The continuous barrage of fire laser beams was taking a toll on the defenses of one lancer mech, but the machine carried more than enough frontal armor to withstand all of the incoming laser attacks before it was able to complete its charge attack.

The mech pilots of the Fey Fiannas practically despaired as they saw the approaching lancer mechs magnify in front of their views at an alarming pace.

The Fey Fiannas did not give up, though. They started to make a lot of lateral movements. The more they moved sideways relative to the incoming lancer mechs, the greater the chance that they could evade the crucial charge attacks!

Yet as the distance continued to drop, the electromagnetic attraction forces rapidly rose in strength!

When the two mechs were only a few instants from making full contact with each other, the pull exerted by the mysterious electrical streams had become so strong that it seemed as if the two opposing sides were fated to 'meet' each other!

Naturally, the Fey Fiannas were not willing to connect with their fated partners at all! None of their attempts to shake off the attraction forces succeeded.

During the final moment before collision, the Fey Fiannas made a few unusual moves.

First, they hung as close to the large energy shields as possible. This would ensure the lancer mechs would painfully collide against the powerful defensive barrier if their momentum was still too great.

Second, all 6 offensive fey moved further away in an attempt to escape whatever might happen once the lancer mechs struck their targets.

Third, the two defensive fey overloaded their energy shield generators as much as possible. The subordinate spirits that were driving the two fey also did their best to channel their artistic conceptions as much as they could during this crucial interval.

A water dragon circled around a whirlpool! Both illusions put themselves in the middle of the electrical streams, causing them to crackle with lots of sparks, but utterly failing to break off the connections.

Fourth, the fey all removed their modular armor plates at once, causing them to expose their vulnerable internals.

The modular armor plates rapidly gathered in front of one of the Fey Fiannas, forming a thick physical shield over the mech's torso that was made up of a surprising amount of layers!

Whether all of this additional armor could make a difference remained questionable, but at least it was better than nothing.

Fifth and most importantly, the two Fey Fiannas made one more move that could possibly decide the outcome of this entire challenge match.

They did not separate from each other in an attempt to meet their impending dooms alone.

The mech pilots of the drone mechs instead chose to fly in alternating patterns around each other.

This caused the electrical streams to come into contact with each other.

Once the streams came into contact, they started to glitch out right away.

The two streams mutually interfered with each other in a way that caused the attraction effect to become a bit fuzzier.

Though the electromagnetic attraction forces that pulled the two pairs of mechs together did not break, their mutual interference caused the trajectories of the lancer mechs to wobble a lot more than they should!

Unfortunately, this was not enough to prevent the lancer mechs from homing in on the Fey Fiannas as if they were guided missiles. The interference would only cause the lances to strike at the target mechs a bit off-center at most.

Everyone became gripped by suspense as the ultimate collisions were about to take place.

At the final possible moment, the Fey Fiannas made one more move before the lances threatened pierce through their torsos.

The two mechs met with each other and physically utilized their legs to kick at each other's frames while at the same time trying to boost into opposite sides!

This last, desperate measure caused both mechs to make abrupt lateral movements that slightly helped to spoil the aim of the incoming lancer mechs, but only to a small extent.

BOOM! BOOM!

A rapid succession of loud crashing and collision noises ensued as both Montebras succeeded in driving their spears through the Fey Fiannas!

Shortly after the lancer mechs managed to land their brutal strikes, their momentum continued to propel them to the large shield barriers that prevented the match from threatening the lives of all of the spectators that were seated beyond.

The powerful energy shields flared as the two lancer mechs practically crunched their frontal armor upon collision!

Such crashes could disable many mechs, but the Montebras were made to withstand powerful forces.

The two lancer mechs instantly purged their frontal armor plating, causing them to drop a lot of warped and deformed pieces of metal that only served to weigh the machines down at this point.

The Montebras had transformed into spearman mechs at this point. Their dented and steaming frames did not appear to be in good shape.

Neither melee mechs came away unscathed. The self-inflicted damage combined with the strong collisions had definitely caused their conditions to deteriorate!

Normally, that shouldn't really matter so long as the opposing mechs had been taken out of the fight.

The Montebras would immediately be able to secure victory as long as they demonstrated at least a little bit of combat effectiveness!

The newly converted spearman mechs did not hold people's attention for long.

Everyone wanted to know what had happened to the Fey Fiannas!

As the dust started to settle, two very different drone mechs came into view.

One of them was in much better shape than the other.

The Fey Fianna that had received the additional protection of all of the modular armor plating of 8 fey managed to survive this battle, if only barely!

A large chunk out of its side had been torn away from the lance that still managed to pass through this section.

The drone mech in question experienced a lot of acute failures. Many of its systems malfunctioned, and a lot of emergency measures took place in order to contain and control the damage.

The poor Fey Fianna's flight system sputtered as its damaged components were unable to produce enough thrust power to keep the heavily damaged machine aloft. The mech made a haphazard controlled descent in order to reduce its burden.

The other Fey Fianna did not fare as well as its sibling. Without the protection of additional modular armor plating, the Montebr that charged into its direction struck with its lance with considerably greater force and direction!

The cockpit of the Fey Fianna instantly received the protection of Phoca Arena's powerful remote shield generators.

This measure successfully protected the life of the Larkinson mech pilot, but did nothing to prevent the rest of the torso from shattering apart!

The top half of the mech became separated from the lower half!

Both halves fell onto the arena ground in the midst of another shower of small metallic debris.

The four 'naked' fey that used to be connected to the destroyed drone mech seemed to lose direction and entered into standby mode.

The second challenge match had taken a turn that few people could have imagined.

The two Montebras successfully managed to complete their charge attacks. They undoubtedly paid a heavy price to secure this outcome, but the melee mechs still remained in fighting shape, if a bit reluctantly!

In contrast, the sole remaining Fey Fianna left in the fight was barely hanging on. The inability to fly severely restricted its mobility. The remaining damage to its torso also damaged many of its other systems, causing it to look as if it was a mechanical zombie that was on its last legs!

"Well..." Ves belatedly spoke up after he witnessed this dramatic result. "Your Montebras have certainly broken the rule that lancer mechs cannot strike agile targets. This... is quite a surprise."

Chapter 5560 The TEMP Mechanism

The Montebra GHCMQ-3 clearly wasn't ready for primetime.

The mech appeared to be well-designed and polished from the outside, but now that it had completed an incredibly intensive charge attack, it had exposed a lot of flaws and shortcomings.

Whatever electromagnetic wizardry enabled it to form an unbreakable lock onto a target mech, the extreme measure clearly hadn't been designed for a mech of this caliber!

The fried components, the obvious reduction in fluency, the shaking limbs and many other indicators showed that the two Montebras had paid a heavy price to deliver their most powerful killing blows at their targets.

It worked, more or less.

Though one of the Fey Fiannas managed to blunt the force of the incoming lance by making use of the sum total of all of the modular armor plating attached to all of the fey, the powerful electromagnetic pull had been at its strongest when the distance between the two mechs had shrunk.

This enabled the Montebra in question to muster up enough force to deliver a crippling blow to the Fey Fianna!

Now, the main body in question was barely holding on to its remaining functions. The torso was a critical element to any mech. So many energy cells and other important components had been ripped away from the machine.

Many of the adjacent components became affected by all of the damage as well. The Fey Fianna's degree of compartmentalization was not high due to its slim build, and its redundancy was not that impressive either.

The fact that it could remain standing after missing an entire chunk out of its side was already a technical accomplishment!

Unfortunately, few people paid attention to the Fey Fianna at this moment. They had witnessed this mech model plenty of times now, so the novelty had started to wear off already.

The Montebras had become the latest highlight of the moment!

Even in their damaged and diminished state, the spear-wielding machines still looked amazingly handsome and deadly.

Electrical sparks continued to crackle off their dented mech frames. The loss of all of their prior excess armor caused the machines to look a lot less bloated and a lot more proportionate.

Combined with the strong electrical energies that continued to surge from the insides of the machines, the metallic machines gave the illusion that they were godly warriors that had been bestowed with the gift of lightning!

"Amazing! These lancer mechs can run down any agile mech with their electromagnetic power!"

"These Montebras have subverted one of the fundamental adages of lancer mechs."

"Who is Master Hubert-Colmain? How come I have never heard of her? Is she a famous mech designer over at the Greenwich Middle Zone?"

In contrast to the people who didn't know any better and became affected by the dashing sight of the lightning-blessed mechs, the mech designers among the viewers did not unilaterally praise the Montebras.

The mechs had certainly demonstrated great strength, but it did not pull off their amazing charge attacks without suffering great damage in return.

"The real reason why the Montebras are able to purge their heavy frontal armor is not because they need to gain a lot of mobility to improve their brawling capabilities. The mechs have no choice but to shed all of their excess mass because they cannot adequately fight anymore after they have overexerted themselves. Without this essential function, it is doubtful whether the Montebras could pull off a second charge attack!"

It became clear that the melee mech model in its current state was not meant to go on sale right away.

No one looked forward to buying and using a mech that fried itself to a semi-crippled state after pulling off just a single big move.

The logistical burden imposed by such a powerful and inefficient mech was more trouble than it was worth in most practical cases.

It was only in specific situations such as an important match that such an investment could be justified!

Ves directed a pointed glance towards Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain.

He had the feeling that his Fey Fianna had become the foil this time. The Montebr model attracted so much admiration and interest that hardly anyone was thinking about how amazing it was that one of the two drone mechs had managed to escape certain death.

Many other mechs would have never been able to get away if they were put in the same position a moment ago! How come no one appreciated that the Fey Fianna was surprisingly hardy and difficult to take down for a machine of its kind?

"As you can see, the Turbo ElectroMagnetic Pairing mechanism is not yet complete." Master Ginevra calmly explained to Ves. "The E-energy to electrical energy conversion process is too rough and inefficient. The short-circuiting that took place is an inevitable consequence of trying to produce more electrical power than a standard mech of this construction can handle. It would have been much better to implement this mechanism in an expert mech or a first-class multipurpose mech. Their materials and components are able to endure much greater loads."

"Maybe you should dial down the power level." Ves made an obvious suggestion..

"I have tried that before, but the results were not satisfactory. My newly developed TEMP mechanism can achieve the greatest effect when it cannot be shaken off by the target machine. I have found that lower power settings not only reduces the activation range by a large extent, but also enables the opposing mech to break the lock. For better or worse, the TEMP mechanism can only be produced at an unsustainable level to the Montebra design."

"I see."

The mechs in the field had begun to make their next moves.

As the Montebbras shook off the consequences of their brutal charge attacks and started to descend towards their final remaining target, the surviving Fey Fianna in the field took action as well.

The machine took control of all 6 offensive fey regardless of whether they were occupied by a subordinate spirit.

The fey did not have to be inhabited by an actual living spirit in order to be used!

Every Fey Fianna possessed the capacity to commandeer orphaned fey by relying on more conventional spur control mechanisms.

The mech pilot just had to take more direct control over the fey that did not contain any living spirit.

This was not a significant challenge to a trained drone mech pilot that had already piloted a more traditional drone mech like the Sparrow Storm in the past.

Once the Fey Fianna took charge of all of the offensive fey, the armor-less machines immediately opened fire with their luminar crystal cannons!

A salvo of 6 fire energy beams struck the Montebra that had incurred the greatest damage!

This just happened to be the mech that the Fey Fiannas targeted with their ranged attacks in an earlier sequence.

The Montebra in question already lost its energy shield. This enabled the fiery energy beams to rake across the diminished armor plating of the newly converted spearman mech without any obstacles!

Getting hit by a single energy beam was hardly threatening to a typical mech. Even a light skirmisher could shrug off a typical beam attack, especially when the attack was unable to concentrate all of its power onto a single point.

However, getting attacked by 6 fire laser beams at the same time was another story!

If the targeted Montebra had still been equipped with their full armor loadout, then it would have been able to endure a lot of salvos before anything serious happened.

Yet now was exactly the time where the spearman mech was at its most vulnerable!

The fey were relentless. They did not remain static, but obeyed the direction of a furious Larkinson mech pilot and began to circle around the spearman mech's rear!

Compared to its remaining frontal armor, the rear of the Montebra was considerably thinner and less protected!

The luminar crystal cannon fey did not attack the Montebra blindly, but purposefully tried to target its flight system, which not only happened to be particularly vulnerable, but had already incurred a considerable amount of internal damage due to the harm caused by the TEMP mechanism.

"How come the Fey Fianna is able to control 6 fey all of a sudden? Wasn't its limit supposed to be 4 fey?"

"The Sparrow Storms can control up to 64 spurs. What the Fey Fianna is doing is hardly a challenge."

"Two of the fey aren't as accurate and responsive as the rest. It is clear that there are shortcomings to controlling more fey than the recommended limit." Regardless of how the two additional offensive fey missed their shots more often than the other four fey, the continuous attacks from 6 fey already caused the targeted Montebra a lot of grief!

Without the benefit of an energy shield, the Montebra had no means to block the incoming shots from melting and vaporizing the crucial components that were responsible for granting flight capabilities to the spearman mech.

At a certain point, the rapid buildup of damage ultimately triggered a small explosion that completely disabled an important subsystem of the spearman mech!

The machine descended at a much faster rate than before because of the sudden loss of lift capacity.
Crunch!

Though the machine did not outright crash onto the ground, its damaged legs groaned and cracked in a few places as it clearly made a rough landing.

The offensive fey did not relent in their attacks. They were like sharks who smelled blood. Now that the Montebra had lost much of its mobility, it practically turned into a sitting duck!

The fire laser beam attacks continued to heat up the mech. None of the electrical energies sparking from the Montebra offered any protection against the barrage of energy beams.

The mech's mobility had become so compromised at this time that it was completely unable to evade the attacks!

Eventually, the fire laser beams managed to burn past the weak points at the rear and inflict enough crippling damage to the poor machine's internals that the Montebra ultimately shut down.

"What a quick takedown!"

"The Montebra was already half-dead after it had completed its charge. The fey only needed to finish the job."

Though the 6 offensive fey had done a great job at saving a bit of face for the Fey Fianna, by the time they redirected their attacks to the other Montebra, it appeared that they were already too late!

The other Montebra was in a much better condition. Its energy shield remained at half-strength due to internal damage, but that was more than enough to withstand the firepower of the Fey Fianna's luminar crystal rifle.

The additional firepower of the 6 offensive fey caused the energy shield to wear down much faster, particularly as the fire element possessed a strong advantage against metal-based defenses.

Yet the spearman mech easily managed to weather the storm long enough to land in front of the sole remaining Fey Fianna.

Even as its weakened energy shield finally lost cohesion, the spearman mech did not take notice of the fire beams raking its rear armor as it began to thrust its spear at the semi-crippled Fey Fianna!

The drone mech was in no shape to run or fly away. The only way for it to survive was to fend off the spearman mech at close range.

The Fey Fianna had shakingly attached its bayonet to the front of its rifle.

As the first spear thrust threatened to poke through the gaping hole on the Fey Fianna's side, the drone mech hastily attempted to deflect the attack.

Crackle!

When the spear made contact with the bayoneted rifle, the Montebra's remaining electrical charge suddenly spilled over to the Fey Fianna!

This caused the latter mech to endure unexpected shocks that induced multiple glitches and breakdowns of its damaged and vulnerable internals!

The Fey Fianna briefly lost the ability to move.

Though the mech's emergency measures worked hard to restore its functionality, the Montebra took full advantage of the opening and made a sharp thrust that poked straight into the exposed internals of the drone mech!

Boom boom boom!

Numerous secondary explosions erupted from the Fey Fianna's interior!

The mech finally couldn't take it any longer and completely collapsed as it was unable to recover from all of the excessive damage!

The arena's defensive measures made sure to protect the life of the Larkinson mech pilot, but they did nothing to save the Fey Fianna itself from ruination! "The Fey Fiannas... have lost the second challenge match!"