

Mech Touch 6221

Chapter 6221 Cost and Ease of Use

Optimizing the subordinate mechs for kinetic ranged weapon usage came with a lot of consequences.

It would impose a standard that many customers would probably abide by. Their success and failure on the battlefield would depend in large part on the weapons they employed.

"We believe the tradeoffs are worth it." Jovy confidently said. "There are three advantages to pairing the Swarm Project with kinetic ranged weapons. First, the mechs are fast and relatively fragile, so they are not that suited for long, drawn-out engagements where energy weapons generally hold an advantage. It is much better for the Carmine mechs to enter the battlefield, fight intensively for a short period of time before rapidly disengaging from the battlefield in order to repair and resupply. If we had chosen to make the subordinate mechs large and bulky, then an argument could have been made to favor energy weapons instead."

"You can make a similar argument for pairing heavier mechs with kinetic weapons, Jovy." Ves pointed out. "Most heavy artillery mechs tend to favor physical projectiles over energy beams."

"Yes, but there are additional factors at play that we will not get into. The second advantage to pairing our subordinate mechs with kinetic weapons is that they will not exert a large drain on the energy reserves of the Carmine mech. Our designs will have greater leeway to channel more energy into other functions such as the flight system and the hyper shield generators, thereby increasing their overall survivability. Pairing our mechs up with energy weapons can quickly drain their energy reserves and force them to return to base earlier anyway."

This argument partially depended on the power of the energy weapons. The cheaper human starfighters tended to put a lower cap on the firepower of their energy weapons in order to moderate the energy consumption and the heat buildup of the craft in question.

However, Ves didn't really want to limit the firepower of the Carmine mechs too much. It would be too difficult for them to make a substantial impact on the battlefield if they behaved like little more than oversized fey.

"What about the third advantage?"

"The sheer variation of choice of high-attribute ammunition. One of the main characteristics of Lord Richard's work that has earned him a group of devoted fans is how his mechs and kinetic weapons can easily respond to different situations by picking and choosing the most appropriate ammunition types for their missions. A fight against alien warships at long range will call for heavy kinetic rounds that can produce electrical disruption effects upon impact. A fight against alien phasefighters may merit the use of lighter rounds that can be fired at a more rapid rate or short-range canister rounds that can inflict spread damage. The additional effects generated by the use of specific exotics and hypers means that the combinations are virtually endless."

This was the real value to using kinetic ranged weapons. There was a huge variety of projectiles available. Although most customers did not really put too much thought into selecting the kind of ammunition they wanted to employ, their choices actually had a huge influence on the outcome of their battles!

By inviting a mech designer known for developing a lot of exotic ammunition for kinetic weapons into the design team, a lot of Carmine mech pilots would gain an easy way to increase or specialize their combat performance.

This was especially important as so many subordinate mechs would probably get sold and used that it was impossible to upgrade and customize all of them according to the desires of their users!

Since Carmine mech pilots were permanently bonded to a single Carmine mech for the rest of their lives, they could not easily upgrade their combat effectiveness by switching to a better mech. They had to wait until a mech designer or mech company became available to upgrade their existing Carmine mechs, and that could only happen if the clients found a way to cover for the expenses, which probably wouldn't happen all that often.

Upgrading a Carmine mech in order to increase its performance was impractical for most Carmine mech pilots.

In lieu of upgrading the mech itself, a much more convenient way to increase their combat power was to switch to using better high-attribute ammunition!

The cost of these superior rounds was undoubtedly greater, but it should still be within a tolerable range as long as they did not make use of overly scarce materials.

The extensive variety of damage types and additional effects that characterized Lord Richard's work reminded Ves of his own work in luminar crystal weapons.

Many of his ranged mechs were armed with luminar crystal weapons. One of the more notable features of these alien-derived armaments was their ability to switch their damage types by swapping out their attack phase crystals.

The two different weapon systems obviously possessed a lot of similarities, but differed in numerous key details.

Luminar crystal weapons were more cost effective over the long run as long as the guns as well as their corresponding attack phase crystals remained intact. However, they were difficult to repair and also troublesome to mass produce. Their cost was also on the higher end as they relied on good materials to form good luminar crystals.

Although Ves personally preferred to equip his first commercial Carmine mechs with luminar crystal weapons, the alien nature of their underlying tech held them back. If the Carmine mechs attained mass adoption, then it became crucial that as many aspects of the design remained as transparent and easy to work with as possible.

Ves could not escape the fact that the organic Carmine System in itself was a huge pain for clients to maintain and take care of, but there was no way to avoid this burden.

If he wanted to make life easier for his future clients and customers, then he had to make sure that the rest of the subordinate mechs could easily be serviced, repaired and upgraded by any technical crew.

That meant that it was better to skip out on luminar crystal technology. The Larkinson Clan may be well-equipped to produce, repair and maintain the abundant amount of luminar crystal weapons in use, but that did not apply to other groups!

Lord Richard Brownstone's design philosophy was a lot easier to work with on this level. The kinetic weapons themselves weren't anything special. Any generic first-class, second-class or third-class kinetic weapon could be used to fire any appropriate high-attribute round for the caliber, weapon type and tech level.

Ves looked more and more intrigued. "Let's schedule a meeting with Lord Richard as well. How long will it take to bring him over? I would prefer to talk to him in person, but if the delay is too much, we can chat by remote."

"Lord Richard Brownstone currently resides in the Brownstone Principality. Since the Rubarthan Pact has to bridge the Red Ocean Union in order to enter the Terran Alliance, it will take at least several weeks for the Rubarthan mech designer to arrive in New Constantinople VIII, and that is assuming he boards a fast courier vessel equipped with a modern superdrive."

"That's too long." Ves frowned. "Since our project needs to deliver 6 mech designs within half a year, a week is already too much of a delay."

"This is not an unacceptable circumstance in my opinion." Jovy shared his own thoughts. "Lord Richard's work is much less tied to the mech frame than what is typically the case. We can start our work in advance and wait until he has arrived before he begins his own work. It shouldn't matter too much if he arrives late as his obligations are not as demanding as that of Lady Romanda."

The Survivalist made a good point. Ves thought for a moment before he made a decision.

"Then allow me to hold a brief discussion with Lord Richard before we invite him to New Constantinople VIII to hold a more elaborate talk. I do not want to call him over just to waste time by concluding that he is not a good fit for the Swarm Project. We could have spent that time to examine and invite another Rubarthan mech designer."

Jovy briefly frowned. "I shall see what I can arrange for you. Do note that your Carmine System should still remain confidential. You are not allowed to leak any direct information about it to third parties. Even if it is becoming increasingly more difficult to maintain total secrecy over the Swarm Project, the longer it remains in the shadows, the less likely that enemies such as the cosmopolitans will take action to sabotage our endeavor."

The mention of cosmopolitans instantly made Ves' blood boil. He still hadn't forgiven Master Xieliq Quan for his bizarre assassination attempt!

"I know. I will try my best to control the information I reveal to the man in our upcoming call."

They talked about a few other related subjects before they ended the meeting.

Since time was of the essence, Ves already had an appointment to meet with Lady Romanda Devos later in the evening.

It was quite fortunate that she was not only present on New Constantinople VIII, but also willing to meet with Ves on short notice!

Just before Ves was about to get teleported back to the surface of the planet, Vector Loban briefly held him back by touching him on the shoulder.

"Yes?"

"Please make a good effort to recruit Lady Romanda." The Transhumanist quietly said. "There are other Terran candidates that we can choose from if she rejects your invitation, but I would prefer it if that does not happen."

"I have no intention of botching this recruitment attempt, Vector. Why are you going out of your way to plead for Lady Romanda in particular?"

"I have an exciting design application in mind that has the potential to transform the Carmine mech even further. If you have managed to get her onboard the Swarm Project, then I intend to hold a long discussion with her about combining our design philosophies to develop a joint design application."

Ves raised his eyebrow as he thought about what the two Seniors could produce together.

"You want to turn Lady Romanda's ultra-large cockpits into partial or fully organic systems?"

Vector nodded. "That is a rough description of my idea."

"Won't that make the subordinate mechs a lot more difficult to maintain and produce? A lot of mech outfits simply aren't equipped to service biomechs or cyborg mechs."

"I do not think it is that great of an obstacle in the case of the Swarm Project. There are biomechs that are highly capable of repairing and maintaining their own organic parts and

systems. People only need to give them enough space and resources to conduct their own repairs."

"Well, if you truly think this is a good fit for the Swarm Project, then you are free to explore the viability and practicality of this design application. Just make sure you come to me with a proposal before working on it any further. Turning the ultra-large cockpit into a fully organic thing is a really big deal for many people, especially when it occupies half of the torso!"

Although the complexity of the subordinate mechs would become much greater by incorporating a lot of organic elements to the design, the tradeoffs may be worth it, so Ves did not rule out this bold suggestion right away.

He still remained a bit ambivalent on how much of his Carmine mechs should be organic as opposed to metallic. The more organic parts he added to their design, the less people were able to work with it in any capacity.

"It is not too serious of a setback if my idea is unworkable." Vector reassured Ves. "I still need to explore the potential benefits further. I see great promise in fully organic cockpits, but I need to conduct more research before I can make more solid claims about the benefits."

"Take your time, then. I look forward to seeing what you have in mind."

Chapter 6222 A Less Successful Version

The capital city of Sandan had become a lot more sober and less exuberant since the last visit.

In the recent past, Ves and Gloriana were still able to bring their children out to the city to play and shop for toys.

Despite the necessity of getting accompanied by a large security detail, the sense of confidence and optimism among the predominantly Terran citizens and visitors livened up the city.

That was no longer the case. The Red Tide Offensive had forced every human state to take the war a lot more seriously. They were all forced to accelerate their war mobilization plans and convert their civilian industries into more military-related industries.

The supply of a lot of consumer goods, luxury goods and so on would soon be cut as more workers and resources had to be diverted to more necessary endeavors.

Shops had already started to close as the Terrans began to adapt to the current and future changes.

The Devos Ancient Clan had also beefed up their military presence in the city. The Devosans set up additional checkpoints and were already working to build additional urban fortifications in case the aliens ever committed to an urban assault.

Ves did not visit Sandan in order to take a leisurely day off. He visited this place in order to meet with Lady Romanda Devos at a pleasant location.

His armored shuttle steadily approached a floating garden and touched down on the most central landing zone.

The escort of first-class multipurpose mechs of the Bluejay Fleet spread around the entire floating structure in order to stand guard and deter anyone from approaching the site.

The mechers implemented more security measures out of sight, but Ves paid no mind to these activities as he calmly stepped out of the armored shuttle.

"Meow." Lucky yawned as he lounged on Ves' shoulder.

"I know you don't want to go out with me today, but who knows whether I need your services? Just stay put and remain observant. If you sense anything amiss with the woman that I am about to meet, don't hesitate to voice your concerns. I trust your senses."

"Meow meow."

The gem cat flipped his tail before he proceeded to take a short nap.

Ves wordlessly bore the lazy feline on his shoulders as he moved to the center of the floating garden. Artworks depicting numerous Terran heroes of the past tastefully added a layer of sophistication to the place.

As he entered the central garden while under escort by a team of armored soldiers, he immediately spotted the woman he wanted to meet.

Lady Romanda Devos truly looked like the stereotype of a scion of an ancient clan. She dressed herself in an impeccable maroon dress that exuded a peculiar kind of understated luxury.

She had done her hair up in voluminous curls that framed her face in such a perfect fashion that Gloriana would probably grow jealous at the sight.

Her footwear consisted of long black boots that added a touch of aggression to her otherwise sophisticated appearance. The heels were fairly low, and the metalwork on them looked as if they could serve as combat boots in a pinch.

Ves worked with enough leather to recognize the sight of treated puelmer leather. This was a popular choice as the unusual method of locomotion for the aliens caused their hides to grow resilient, bouncy yet also supple in the right circumstances.

The lady briefly looked up as Ves came into sight, but otherwise went back to drinking her tea from a cup that exuded such a strong sense of age and history that it may have originated from before the Age of Mechs!

As Ves wordlessly walked up to the dainty black metal table, he sat down without a word and poured himself a cup of exotic-smelling coffee from the nearby heated pot.

As he lifted the cup to his lips and took a sip, he honestly couldn't taste anything aside from a tiny amount of warm water.

He might look like a normal human on the outside, but his physiology had already exceeded human limitations for a long time.

Phase lords still needed to eat and drink, and lots of it, but they had a lot more flexibility on the timing and frequency of filling their stomachs. They could easily go for years without ingesting anything and still remain in relatively good condition.

Ever since their bodies exceeded the confines of the material dimensions, they gained the ability to derive a lot of energy from other dimensions. That was why the humongous ancient phase whales did not need to eat enough food to comprise a small planet every once in a while.

Unless the phase whales experienced a rapid growth spurt, there was no need to eat to keep their bodies functional. As long as they did not lose their body mass due to injuries and so on, it was actually quite easy for them to maintain an even balance between energy consumption and energy absorption just by existing.

To Ves, eating and drinking like a regular human had lost meaning a long time ago. Even though his recent sublimation restored his taste buds, his lack of hunger made him a lot less sensitive towards the tiny portions that more normal humans delighted in, but there was no way he could feel sated in any way due to the enormous proportions of his true stomach.

Therefore, Ves saw little point in wasting too much time on indulging in the Terran custom of high tea. He decided to not act pretentiously and simply dumped the rest of the cup into his mouth as if he was drinking a tankard of beer.

He reached out and grabbed a few scones in order to take a bite at them, but he frankly couldn't derive a lot of enjoyment out of the proportionately tiny portions. He pretty much wasted the efforts of the top chefs who worked at the floating garden.

Although his mecher buddies placed a lot of importance on this meeting, Ves did not want to present a false image of himself. If Lady Romanda agreed to join the design team, then she would have to learn how to work alongside the real Ves. It was better for her to get a good impression of his actual personality.

Besides, Ves could not pretend to be classy like Gloriana because he originally grew up as an ordinary third-rater. Many people knew about this, so they tolerated his lack of manners.

"Professor Larkinson." The older woman finally broke the silence. "You are as impressive as you appear in the broadcasts."

"Oh? Did you expect to see anything different?" Ves raised an eyebrow as he casually raised one of his arms to pet his dozing gem cat.

"Maybe I did. I am not displeased by your current appearance. Your uniform is well-made, and you carry yourself in a manner completely unlike other Terrans or anything I can recognize.

Your existence defies many boundaries. You are neither a first-rater, a second-rater or a third-rater. You are associated with both the Red Association and the Red Fleet, but you are leading the initiative to set up a direct competitor to them. You relocated to New Constantinople VIII after the Great Severing, but you built your base well outside of any existing population centers. In short, you are a walking contradiction that simply cannot be defined by a handful of words."

Ves chuckled. "That is not the first time people failed to pin me down. I think one of the reasons why that is so is that I have tried my best to live my own life. I refuse to fully bind myself to the mechers, the Terrans or any of the other groups that I have associated with in the past."

"You can say the same for your work." Lady Romanda said. "Your design philosophy is unlike anything our industry has ever seen. You have combined your mother's old heritage with modern human technology in such an inspired fashion that your living mechs have become its own category in the mech market. It is admirable of you to bravely pioneer the development of such a radical departure from the definition of a traditional mech."

"Your work is also new and different." Ves complimented the woman back. "Your design philosophy, though unusual, dares to reimagine one of the core aspects of mechs that people have long taken for granted. Whether your vision is the future of the mechs or not, I admire your dedication for sticking to your ideas for so many years while receiving considerable stigma and pushback from your fellow Terrans. Why do you insist on catering to the barely receptive Terran market when you have a greater chance of appealing to foreign customers?"

The Terran Senior Mech Designer did not reply immediately. Her eyes grew hazy as she took another elegant sip from her tea cup.

"I was born and raised a Terran and a member of the Devos Ancient Clan. I have an obligation to serve my people first. I do not have a particular reason to market my products to foreigners. Maybe it is true that I can attain more success if I do so, but my accomplishment will feel hollow so long as I have not been able to gain more traction in my home market."

Ves honestly did not understand why she would make such a strong distinction between domestic and foreign markets, but then again, he was not born a Terran.

He was originally a Brighter, but lost all of the pride he once held for his original state. The Larkinson Clan had taken the place of the Bright Republic for the most part, but if Ves was being really honest, he no longer wanted to shackle his life to any state or organization.

"I can respect your attitude." Ves politely said before he decided to get to the point as he was not adept in these kinds of conversations. "Anyway, you may have guessed that I requested a meeting with you because I am interested in collaborating with you on a very special mech design project."

Lady Romanda looked surprised that Ves was being so direct about his purpose. She gave him her full attention as she gently put down her tea cup and saucer.

"The Devos Ancient Clan guessed as much. In fact, my elders have urged me to accept your offer of cooperation regardless of your conditions."

She did not sound too satisfied about that. Lady Romanda's relationship with the Devos Ancient Clan was not exactly the best given its poor reaction to her design philosophy.

Ves gave her a sympathetic smile. "Disagreements with the elders of my own family is one of the reasons why I chose to step out of it. I hope that the overly enthusiastic actions of your ancient clan did not spoil my proposal in your eyes."

"You do not need to be concerned about that, Professor Larkinson. I admire you and your work. I am more than willing to listen to your offer of collaboration and weigh it on its own merits. As long as you plan to properly implement my design philosophy in your new mech design project, you will have a high likelihood of attracting my interest."

Though Ves had only talked to Lady Romanda for a short time, he already felt as if he had gotten her measure.

Lady Romanda reminded him a lot of himself.

She was like a much posher but also less successful version of himself.

She clearly wanted to pursue her own ideas, but unlike Ves, she had never mustered up the courage and the opportunity to sever her toes to her ancient clan and set up an independent organization around herself.

Despite her unwillingness to separate herself from the Devos Ancient Clan and the Terran Alliance, she was still willing to dedicate her entire life to proving the concept of her quirky and unusual design philosophy.

No matter how many times the Terrans rejected her defeatist mech designs, Lady Romanda one day hoped to earn vindication by earning true acceptance and recognition from her people!

Ves confidently smirked.

Though Romanda was unlikely to accomplish this ambition by herself, Ves believed he could help her fulfill her dreams with his assistance.

He checked to make sure that all of the jamming devices and other precautions were in order before he started to make his pitch.

"Let me introduce you to a revolutionary new idea that I have been working on..."

Chapter 6223 Forcing Cooperation

As Ves continued to talk with Lady Romanda Devos in the middle of the floating garden, he began to experience a bit of pushback.

The Terran mech designer definitely expressed interest in Ves' secret project. What few details he revealed already enticed her to the point where she no longer bothered to hide her urge to participate.

"Are you truly being serious, Professor Larkinson? Have you actually managed to solve the barrier that only permits potentates to pilot mechs?"

"I did." Ves grinned and gestured at the surrounding guards of the Red Association. "Why do you think I am working so closely with the Red Association? This secret project is definitely one of the reasons why the mechers are crawling all over me. I do not have to explain the enormous implications of my work."

Lady Romanda contemplated all of the revelations. "Are you that confident in your work?"

"I am." Ves boldly claimed. "I will go down in history as the mech designer who has liberated mechs from its restrictions and allow any human to pilot them in a manner that is just as good

as piloting mechs with the help of a neural interface. My collaborators will be remembered as well. Their work might not be core to the revolutionary control system that I have invented, but their names will still be attached to the first ever public and commercially available mech of this kind. I can guarantee you that you will be the most famous Senior Mech Designer of the Terran Alliance. I don't think the Devos Ancient Clan will be able to disregard you as easily as before after completing this lifetime feat."

That actually caused the woman to frown.

"I do not know if you were able to deduce this after you have studied my background, but I have my own pride. I have fought for over forty years to earn recognition from fellow Terrans. I have received opportunities to collaborate with others in the past, but even if those collaborative mech designs have met their goals, it is almost never because of my contributions. I tire of this outcome. I feel honored that you have sought to cooperate with me on a historic mech design project, but I do not want to contribute to a work that does not make better use of my ultra-large cockpits. Their inclusion may actually decrease the popularity of your mechs and cause them to sell less units than if you have chosen to collaborate with another mech designer."

"You are wrong." Ves shook his head. "I have not divulged all of the details about the new control system that I have invented. Once you sign up with me and gain access to more complete information, you will understand quite well why I have sought you out. Your design philosophy is a near-perfect complement to my new design application. I can promise you that as long as you contribute to my secret project, you will be more than just a name on a list. Many mech pilots, whether they come from the Terran Alliance, Rubarthan Pact or elsewhere will all be grateful that you have made my work more practical. Their piloting experience will be significantly worse if you are not able to lend your expertise on recovery after a loss."

That caused Lady Romanda's expression to soften. Although Ves had not given her an exact description of one of his latest works, she was able to piece together a rough image based on all of the hints and information she had received so far. The assumption that her design philosophy may actually be able to contribute a lot more materially to the secret mech design project actually gave her hope that she may be able to earn recognition from her people by relying on her own efforts.

Sure, her accomplishments would get overshadowed by that of Ves, but she was not dissatisfied with this scenario. As long as she received partial credit that was already ten times if not a hundred times better than the accolades she earned in the past!

"How confident are you that you will be able to succeed in this ambitious project?"

"Your new control system has not been fully verified as of yet? Has the Red Association completed any longitudinal studies on your new device?"

"I am almost 90 percent certain that the project will spark a completely new trend in our society." Ves smirked. "You have to know that I am not talking about a theoretical invention. It already came into existence several years ago. The first two pilots that have benefited from this revolutionary system are still making good use of it to this day. The Red Association has already stepped in and performed many studies on the test mechs that I have provided to them. While I cannot say anything about their long-term consequences, so far they are all living up to their promise. There is no need to worry about any complications, at least in the short term. Both the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction are fully in favor of accelerating the development and commercial release of my revolutionary new mechs."

A woman as clever as Lady Romanda definitely did not fail to catch the underlying problems behind those words.

"Your new control system has not been fully verified as of yet? Has the Red Association completed any longitudinal studies on your new device?"

"No." Ves shook his head. "In fact, if it were up to me, I would have waited a bit before embarking on a new mech design project. The mechers have different priorities. I am sure you can guess why that is the case. Let me be honest with you. I cannot fully guarantee that there will be problems down the line. If any major problems occur with the people who have chosen to take advantage of the opportunity that my upcoming work has presented them, then you will bear a part of the blame as well. This is the risk that you have to bear by cooperating with me on my secret project."

"Thank you for being honest with me. My enthusiasm for this potential collaboration project has diminished. I am still tempted by the possibilities, but I cannot responsibly work on a mech design project that is based on questionable experimental technology. The Red Association imposes clear rules and guidelines on how much we are allowed to put our own customers at risk in the name of scientific progress."

"Don't worry about the Association. The Evolution Witch herself has developed a personal interest in this particular project of mine. She is our hidden backer essentially." Ves boldly exaggerated.

"That is reassuring to hear, but... just because a god pilot has given her blessing does not mean that she forces others to adopt the same stance. There are many professionals in our industry that will condemn your recklessness and lack of scientific rigor. If I become a collaborator, then I become culpable as well." Lady Romanda argued.

There was not much Ves could do about that. He continued to pet Lucky as the cat lazily lounged on his shoulder.

"Speed is of the essence. Red humanity might not be around anymore by the time the earliest of those long-term studies are done. There are times where we must do our work properly, and there are times where expediency is more important than everything else. The Red Tide Offensive has forced us in a position where we must scramble for miracles in order to turn around our disadvantaged situation. We cannot get away from this predicament without taking risks. I am willing to bear the potential infamy for introducing an experimental new control system that has unpredictable long-term side effects in exchange for reinvigorating red humanity. What about you, Lady Romanda? Will you let your professional ethics stand in the way of a priority as important as the very survival of the human race?"

The Terran Senior clearly felt pressured by his plea. She clearly disliked it that he was cornering her with his words. She understood what he was doing and thought worse of him because of that. If she held on to her usual standards, then she would have risen to her feet and said her goodbyes without any qualms.

However... Ves' words clearly affected her cognition. Martial law was coming into effect in more and more places. An entirely new wind had begun to blow in the mech industry.

The old status quo that mech designers enjoyed during the Age of Mechs had become a relic of the past.

The female mech designer lowered her head in thought.

"Take a chance." Ves encouraged her. "What do you have to lose? Your design philosophy is very peculiar and does not hold much value to the public on its own. I can make your ultra-large cockpits a lot more relevant by combining its properties with my unique new control systems. Sure, you won't earn as much credit for the success of my mech design project if it manages to take the mech market by storm, but even partial recognition is better than nothing. More Terrans are willing to give your mech designs a serious look, and that is far better than what little respect and recognition that you have earned up to today."

The female mech designer continued to think for a minute before she changed her posture.

"Very well. You have persuaded me to give your bold initiative a chance. I have never participated in a project with stakes as large as you have described, but... it may be just what I need to break out of the spiral that has trapped my career."

"Great! You won't regret this decision!" Ves grinned and reached out with his hand.

Lady Romanda raised her own slender arm and reluctantly exchanged a handshake with her new collaborator.

"This is a big project, Lady Romanda. It involves 6 mech designs spread across all three classes. Three of them are fairly conventional mechs while the other three are completely new machines that rely on an alternate control system to enable norms to pilot their new craft. I will give you the full details once you show up at my workplace that is located on another side of this planet."

"Can these new mechs of yours be piloted with conventional neural interfaces as well?"

"Not for these particular mech models. They are exclusively targeted towards norms and should not be used by professional mech pilots. It is possible for the latter to control mechs with both a conventional neural interface and my new control system at the same time. The combination has proven to be quite effective, so much so that I think that a lot of mech pilots will end up embracing my work."

The older woman looked more and more intrigued. "My curiosity grows. I am beginning to understand more and more why the Red Association has developed such a strong interest in your work. Once we have concluded this meeting, I shall return to my own design lab and prepare for an extended leave of absence. I have a suspicion that both of us will be better served if I devote my full time and attention to our collaboration."

"My clan welcomes you to stay at our base on this planet as our guest for the duration of our collaboration. I hope you do not have any objections about working with a Rubarthan guest."

Romanda instantly guessed the reason.

"I see. The political significance of involving a representative of the Rubarthan Pact will do much to add to legitimacy of your upcoming work. While I have never worked alongside a Rubarthan in a professional capacity, I do not object to it. There are Terrans who obsessed a great deal over their rivalry with the Rubarthans, but most members of my generation do not think it is worth obsessing over. Both of us have plenty of common enemies who would love nothing more than to see us squabble over disagreements originating from before the Age of Mechs."

The rivalry between the Terrans and the Rubarthans was old news now. The younger generations were especially nonchalant about it. All of those historical fights and grievances had long been buried in the archives.

Chapter 6224 Explosive Burden

Though Lady Romanda still looked reluctant to participate in a project revolving around experimental tech, Ves successfully 'persuaded' her to lower her ethical standards and agree to collaborate with him anyway.

That did not remove her personal objections over this risky endeavor, but the dark clouds that the Red Cabal cast over human civilization had done much to reinforce the urgency of the situation.

Lady Romanda felt as if she answered her calling.

By participating in a secret project that was way bigger and more impactful than a typical commercial mech design project, she had the potential to make history.

Not only that, but her work may end up getting appreciated by millions or even billions of 'new' mech pilots over the ensuing years and decades!

No mech designer could remain calm at the thought of servicing so many people with a single project. Every professional craved validation. The more validation they received from their customers and their peers, the more they understood that they were on the right track!

Obtaining validation was not a luxury for Lady Romanda. It had practically become a necessity as her mech designs had still not gained significant traction on the mech market.

How would her career progress if she did not accept the offer? Perhaps she would continue to toil while remaining stuck in a marginal position until external events finally caused a shock through the mech community.

It was very much possible for the native aliens to overrun red humanity and make it impossible for Lady Romanda to sustain her business activities!

This was part of the reason why she said yes. She wanted to gain more control over her life and not be governed by events outside of her control.

She recognized that as long as she participated in this monumental mech design project, she would be able to alter the course of red humanity in her own way.

Whether her contribution ended up helping or hurting red humanity remained to be seen. Lady Romanda had a feeling that she had boarded a pirate ship that had an unclear destination.

It could either lead her to paradise, or straight into a bottomless cliff!

As Lady Romanda left in order to put her affairs in order, Ves boarded his shuttle and made his way back to Diandi Base.

As he sat down on the piloting seat, he grabbed hold of Lucky and placed the cat on his lap.

"So what are your impressions? Did you sense anything special about Lady Romanda?"

The cat sleepily yawned as if to send a signal that he had been dozing all of this time.

Ves smacked the archemetal cat on the head. "Be serious. Have you sensed anything off or abnormal about her? It is better to hear about it now than later."

To be honest, Lady Romanda did not give Ves the impression that she was more than what she appeared on the surface. First impressions were anything but perfect, but Ves had a good feeling about the Terran Senior.

Surprisingly enough, Lucky did not entirely concur with that assessment.

"Meow meow meow." The cat explained as he continued to lay on Ves' lap.

"Oh? You sensed an unusual cranial implant inside her head?"

"Meow!"

Lucky activated a projection that showed one of his scan results.

Just as Ves expected from a Terran and a scion of an ancient clan, Lady Romanda's brain was extensively modified and digitized.

Though she did not engage in any extreme genetic modification, her brain and cell structures were far stronger than usual.

"Meow."

Lucky pointed at a specific implant buried close to the center of her brain. It looked quite different from the others because it was not obviously connected to any of her brain tissue.

That was highly unusual, as implants installed into the brain were always supposed to integrate with the surrounding brain matter in order to do their jobs.

Ves did not recognize its function. "What is it? Do you have any clue, Lucky?"

"Meow..."

Lucky's powerful senses towards metal allowed him to sense a high concentration of high-quality exotics inside the pill-shaped implant. It was also filled with other substances that confused the gem cat.

"It's okay. I'll take this scan to the mechers and see what they make of it. I don't know if it is a potential source of trouble, but it is best to make sure."

Once the armored shuttle returned to Diandi Base, Ves waited until he got teleported to the Tarrasque in orbit before he proceeded down to the design lab to discuss the results of the recruitment attempt.

The Transhumanist liaison especially looked forward to working with Lady Romanda.

"Good job, Ves! You successfully managed to gain her cooperation. I can proceed to approach her with my proposal once we have brought her up to speed."

"I think many Carmine mech pilots will have reasons to be grateful that you have persuaded Lady Romanda to work with us on this project." Jovy said in a more measured tone.

"Accommodating her design philosophy into our subordinate mechs will force us to make numerous painful compromises, but I believe that many people will agree that it is worthwhile to sacrifice a small or even a moderate amount of performance to give Carmine mech pilots a much greater chance to preserve their piloting careers. Professional mech pilots may be able to switch to other mechs with ease, but Carmine mech pilots play by different rules. It is only natural to rethink the purpose of the cockpit to this group. This reminds me that we may need to reimagine or reinterpret many of the assumptions about mechs that we take for granted."

Ves nodded in agreement. "You have made a good point. We can explore this issue in depth later on as we begin the actual design process. I will proceed to call Lord Richard Brownstone next. I don't expect him to deny a request to travel to New Constantinople so that we can initiate him into our project in person, but it will take a while before he arrives. I guess we'll just have to adapt our design schedule to account for his delayed arrival."

Jovy made a suggestion.

"We do not have to put all of our eggs in one basket, Ves. If you want, we can invite other Rubarthan mech designers to make their way over to this star system. There are still other promising names on that list I displayed to you last time. They can serve as our backup options in case we cannot proceed with Lord Richard for any reason."

"Hm, that sounds like a decent suggestion, but... what will they do if they end up making this trip in vain? Will we just send them back to the Rubarthan Pact without gaining anything?"

"Of course not. Our Association is more than happy to compensate them with MTA merits for their trouble. We have the ability to do so. Even if they are not entirely pleased by our requests, it is of little concern to us. The smooth progress of the Swarm Project takes precedence over their feelings."

Ves frowned. "I don't know, Jovy. That sounds like a really awful way to treat our fellow Seniors. What if... what if we invite them to work on our Swarm Project anyway? Instead of working as contributors, they can fulfill the role as assistants instead. It is rather demeaning to ask a bunch of Seniors to assist other Seniors in their work, but if we give enough hints about how important this project is, they may feel honored for participating in a set of mech designs that will eventually make history."

That actually sounded like a good suggestion. Both Jovy and Vector contemplated it for a moment before they agreed with this suggestion.

"We can bring them in, but they will have to remain with us regardless if they agree or not. We cannot have them return to the Rubarthan Pact and leak valuable clues to the intelligence services."

With that decision made, the three prepared to start another design session.

"Wait." Ves said. "Before you go, I want to show you guys something." Ves called.

He proceeded to show the scan that Lucky had made of Lady Romanda's brain and peculiar cranial implant.

Jovy did not recognize the function of this implant, but Vector possessed more knowledge in this area.

"I know what it is." The Transhumanist said. "It is a security implant that is designed to prevent a person from divulging classified information in any way, whether directly or indirectly. There is a large amount of advanced technology packed inside this deceptively small implant. Do not ask me how it works, because I do not specialize in this field. The implant is solely there to prevent Lady Romanda from divulging information that the creators of this device had specified beforehand. In this case, she is not permitted to explain anything she has witnessed, worked on or otherwise managed to learn during her employment at a secret Terran research institution."

"How far does it go to protect all of this information?"

"Let me say that it is an expensive but highly effective security measure. The Terrans will not invest so much money into it for more mundane purposes. The cranial implant can detect any form of mental tampering, hacking, biological data extraction and more. If it detects anything

amiss, Lady Romanda only has a short amount of time to take corrective action. If she is unable to do so, then the implant will explode in an attempt to physically deny anything recoverable that could be used to learn about the activities of the secret Terran research institution."

"I see."

The amount of times this mysterious Terran research institution popped up made Ves suspicious about it. What kind of sick and twisted research were the Terrans engaged in? What was so important that her former employers forced her to carry this implant for the rest of her life?

Perhaps he was exaggerating. Every state maintained a few secret R&D institutions here and there. They worked on all kinds of projects relevant to the armed forces such as proprietary stealth systems and new applications of hyper technology. Just because they were secret did not mean that there was anything objectionable about their existence.

"Will this strange implant affect her cooperation with us in any way?"

"No, Ves. You can rest assured that it will not do anything suspicious such as recording what Lord Romanda is able to sense and transmitting the files to a secret Terran listening post or anything. I will tell the specialists of the Bluejay Fleet to examine Lady Romanda thoroughly before letting her get through, if only to rule out any unlikely dangers."

"Good. I would hate it if she ends up being a member of a secret cosmopolitan cell."

"Don't be ridiculous, Ves. The cosmopolitans would have attempted to assassinate you the moment they came in close proximity. Your head detached from your neck is much more valuable than keeping you alive. You still represent their best chance for one of them to integrate into the Red Cabal and grow into a greater phase whale."

That was right. This goal had become such a strong obsession to the cosmopolitans that even a Master Mech Designer as old and prestigious as Xieliq Quan blew his cover in order to make an impressive attempt at his Ves' life!

With this concern out of the way, Ves proceeded to sit down behind a desk terminal and begin his design work.

While Jovy and Vector mainly spent their time on the first-class iteration of the subordinate mech, Ves already made brisk progress in designing the third-class version of his upcoming Carmine mech.

He avoided the sections that required the input of his potential future collaborators, but made good progress elsewhere. Third-class mechs were so simple to design that Ves expected to be able to test out of the first prototypes within two months or maybe even less!

Chapter 6225 A New Class of Warriors

In the following days, the dynamic in the Tarrasque's design lab changed with the addition of Lady Romanda Devos.

The woman clearly stood out from everyone else. She was a Terran who had entered the heart of an RA heavy cruiser. The way she dressed, the way she comported herself and the way she approached her mech design projects were so much different.

She reminded Ves of Gloriana at times, and that was a good thing.

Ves and Gloriana formed an effective design team because their perspectives diverged by a lot. They argued frequently about many design choices, which was not bad because it allowed them to refine their arguments and become more attentive towards any shortcomings in their work.

Although Lady Romanda was not as... eccentric as Gloriana, the Terran mech designer brought a fresh perspective to the Swarm Project. As she studied the archives and listened to Ves lecturing about the essence of the Carmine System, she picked up details that Ves and the others had missed.

"I understand now why you invited me to take part in this mech design project." The woman softly said as she took in the enormous implications of what she had learned in the past few hours. "This Carmine System of yours is truly amazing, but the unique restriction that everyone has to abide by is an enormous constraint that can prematurely end many people's ambitions to become a mech pilot. The rate of mech breakdowns is relatively high enough that most mech pilots lose their machines twice on average over their careers. However, this is a generalized figure derived from a dataset from the Age of Mechs. In the current age, a mech pilot is twice as likely to lose her machine in combat. The only reason why this figure is not higher is because the likelihood that the pilot outright dies has grown too high after so many 'near-death' incidents."

It made sense for a mech designer with a specialization in ultra-large cockpits to possess a good understanding of the relevant statistics.

Ves agreed with the idea that a pilot could only get lucky so many times. When mechs got damaged to the point where they turned inoperable, there was less than 100 percent chance that the cockpit remained intact enough to be able to eject and flee to safety.

A pilot might be able to get away like this once or twice, but how many times in a row could they flip a coin and have it land on heads?

The native aliens understood the significance of cockpits and tried to shoot them down whenever possible. The enemy clearly understood that eliminating mech pilots who were probably experienced combat veterans would save them a lot of grief in the future!

"The fundamental issue with Carmine mechs is that a Carmine mech pilot can only ever forge a single bond." Ves stated. "Before you ask, there is no easy way around this rule. It is a promise that the Carmine mech pilot must abide by for the rest of his life. I have already thought of a potential solution that can shift the other end of the bond from a single mech to a whole related family of mechs, but that is a story for another day. For now, we must work on the assumption that a single Carmine mech pilot can only ever use a single Carmine mech. This is why your ultra-large cockpits are more important than ever. If our suspicions are correct, we can turn your 'cockpits' into the core of a Carmine mech. So long as they exist, the living mechs will also be able to persist."

The female mech designer understood what Ves had in mind. She looked incredibly intrigued. She studied the data further and paid close attention to the instances where the mechers wanted to find out the consequences to forcing a Carmine mech to eject its cockpit.

The data overwhelmingly showed that the spiritual foundation of the living mech was always tied to the mech frame that got left behind!

This attracted Lady Romanda's interest and encouraged her to dive deeper in order to figure out the 'boundary'.

Unfortunately, the mechers did not conduct exhaustive enough tests on this subject.

It was actually quite traumatic for the Carmine mech pilots to lose their one and only Carmine mechs. Although the Red Association did not necessarily object to inhumane experiments, this particular study went a step too far.

"I will need to conduct my research on this subject. I need to gain access to the design of one of these basic Carmine mechs of yours." Lady Romanda demanded. "I will proceed to design several variants at the fastest speed that will incorporate cockpits of escalating sizes. I need to understand where the limit lies and what other variables can affect this determination."

"I think it doesn't only have to do with size, but also essential components." Ves shared one of his theories. "Try and incorporate the power reactor into the cockpit structure. At the very least, we can rule out this theory if it makes no difference."

The Terran mech designer nodded. "Will do. I have made another observation about your Carmine mechs. Have you ever thought about the implications of mech designers piloting these machines?"

"Uhhh... not really."

"I can tell you that mech designers will react more enthusiastically towards your work than any other group. It has always been their dream to pilot their own mechs. It is no secret in our industry that many of us have only chosen to become mech designers because we were unwilling to accept our inability to pilot mechs. Unless their parents or family has decided your career trajectory in advance, many mech designers are people who are so unwilling to accept their cruel reality that they chose to engage in mechs from another angle. In other words, their love and attachment to mechs are so strong that they are unwilling to turn away. What do you think will happen once they receive an opportunity to pilot their own mech?"freewebnovel-com

"They... they will all grow wild with jubilation. Then they will try to order their own Carmine mechs as soon as possible. These mech enthusiasts will not wait until you have released a superior model. They are mech designers. They can design their mechs according to their own preferences much better than others!"

"Exactly. You will predominantly see low-ranking mech designers take advantage of your Carmine mechs. Seniors and Masters are already old and experienced enough to be able to control their impulses. If they choose to pilot a Carmine mech, they will only do so to improve their own craft. This is not necessarily the case for the younger generation who still have not been able to shake their childhood fascination for mech piloting. They will not only use your

Carmine mechs with great enthusiasm, but they will also take advantage of their own expertise to customize and personalize their machines before baptizing them in actual combat.."

Ves could easily envision this happening. Hell, even he felt tempted to give this a try. The biggest reason why he pushed back against this action was because he did not want a budget model as cheap as the subordinate mech of the Swarm Project to become his permanently bonded partner.

"So a lot of mech designers will begin to have their dreams come true and gain the ability to pilot their own mechs. They will even start to use my work as a base to apply their own design philosophy and creativity. What next?"

"You may start to see them in battle." Lady Romanda stated. "Not every mech designer is content to stay in the rear. I believe that in the months after the release of the Swarm Project, a new sort of warrior will arise that is neither a professional mech pilot nor a pure mech designer. The warrior will instead combine traits from both professions. You will see the rise of pilot designers who are inherently more self-centered than others. They are purely focused on their own experiences."

Pilot designers. That was a strange and awkward term. There had to be a better phrase to call this emerging group.

"Are you treating this as a bad development, Romanda?"

"Not necessarily, but the possibility exists. A large number of low-ranking mech designers are not faring well at this time. Employment opportunities where they can take part in the actual design process are becoming increasingly more scarce. The mech market is pushing them out, making it much more difficult for them to succeed as independents. While there is an increased demand for mech designers in many different technical functions, if they have a chance to fight with actual mechs, then they will not be able to restrain their childish impulses. If this behavioral shift takes place across human space, then it will distort the availability of low-ranking mech designers."

Now that she mentioned it, Ves understood how this could be a serious issue. Low-ranking mech designers were useful in many different places. They might not be able to design mechs as good as Ves, but they could be put to work on designing variants, supervising mech production, leading repair efforts and so much more.

Low-ranking mech designers with limited wealth, connections, talent and competences were better off turning away from designing mechs and do honest work in a lesser but still important capacity.

If all of those young but disillusioned mech designers suddenly gained a much more exciting alternative to pilot their own machines, then they would overwhelmingly take it unless they were cowards!

This was good to all of those overgrown kids that always complained that their inadequate genetic aptitude denied them from their true destinies!

However, the mech industry might not remain happy about this revolutionary invention as it would continue to encourage people to leave the mech industry in ever-increasing numbers.

Sure, a lot of mech designers would continue on to ply their old trades, but many more might become so tempted by the glory of combat that they would only ever apply their design skills to their own Carmine mechs!

Ves wanted to palm his face. It was the fault of the mechers and many others for glamorizing the life of a mech pilot.

In the past four centuries, human society had unceasingly elevated the status of mech pilots to an unofficial class of noble soldiers. They were the modern heroes of humanity. Individual skill and heroism trumped everything else, including the destructive warships that had made a mess out of human space during the Age of Conquest!

This excessive hero worship of mech pilots worked fine in a time when only 3.5 percent of the human population possessed the qualifications to pilot mechs, but what if the remaining 96.5 percent gained a chance as well?

The entire structure of human society might collapse and transform into an unrecognizable form!

"I see you understand one of the grave repercussions of your work." Lady Romanda said with a smile. "Your Carmine System is a boon to humans. I have no doubt about that. It can also lead to widespread disruption in our society. The mechers must have foreseen this long ago, hence why they insist on so much secrecy. They require time to complete their preparations so that

they mitigate the adverse changes and preserve the current order of our society as much as possible."

She was probably right about that. Ves was not informed about these kinds of developments, but the Red Association should never be stupid enough to let themselves be overtaken by this problem.

Ves crossed his arms. "Whatever the Red Association is cooking up will not prevent the fundamental human desire to pilot a mech. Low-ranking mech designers who are not faring so well in their current careers will find this alternative to be especially attractive."

"That depends."

"Depends on what?"

"On whether Carmine mech pilots can break through and step onto the path of godhood." Lady Romanda explained.

Chapter 6226 Female Input

Was it possible for Carmine mech pilots to break through without using a neural interface?

Ves did not know the answer, and neither did the mechers.

They were not entirely clueless, though. His grandfather Benjamin not only regained his power as an expert pilot, but had grown until he had reached the limit of his rank. This proved that existing high-ranking mech pilots could fully control their Carmine mechs without any apparent complications.

The only question was whether Venerable Benjamin was able to break through.

Although he was far older than the other expert pilots of the Larkinson Clan, Ves was growing less confident in his ability to break through.

Benjamin was too old. His restoration had rejuvenated him to an extent, but there was a limit to how much his willpower was able to 'reverse' the damage and decay wrought by the human aging process.

Not only that, but he had stayed idle for far too long. He was no longer the vigorous mech pilot of the past. He was an oldster who was supposed to enjoy the twilight of his life. Switching gears to such an extreme extent was such a big change that he needed to spend a long time to become accustomed to a much more active lifestyle.

One thing was for sure. As long as Benjamin successfully managed to break through, he would serve as proof that it was possible for mech pilots to break through with the help of Carmine mechs. This single instance could serve as convincing proof that the Blood Pact was fully able to substitute the role of man-machine connection.

Ves closed his eyes for a moment before he faced Lady Romanda with a confident demeanor. "We have yet to obtain any hard proof that it is possible for mech pilots to break through with the help of the Carmine System, but I think it will not take long for relevant data to arrive. Even if it turns out that neither norms nor potentates can break through by relying on the Carmine System, it is not a major setback. Many people are already content if they can pilot any mech. Being able to break through and become an expert candidate is icing on the cake. Besides, who says that the development of the Carmine System has come to an end? It has only just emerged. There is still a lot of room for improvement. I myself have already come up with a very ambitious idea that involves combining my invention with hyper technology. Early results have been... promising."

There was no need for him to elaborate on this advanced topic. He proceeded to get back on track and complete his lecture on the Carmine System.

Lady Romanda looked intrigued to the point where she wanted to work with Carmine mechs right away.

"I will need the design files of one of your early Carmine mechs as well as RA assistance on the fabrication of a new proof of concept mech. Before I proceed with collaborating with you on the Swarm Project, I must understand the limits behind combining my design philosophy with your Carmine System. I will report to you as soon as I have discovered an ultra-large cockpit configuration that satisfies both of our requirements."

"I will tell the mechers to facilitate your experiments as much as possible. How likely do you think you'll be able to find a good solution that we can use as the basis of the subordinate mechs of the Swarm Project?"

"60 percent." The Terran Senior calmly replied. "The percentage should be higher, but I am lacking too much reliable data. My experience tells me that it is very much possible that this combination will yield the desired results. If we are unable to produce the right cockpits, then that is due to our own shortcomings, not the underlying tech."

That was an interesting remark. She must be feeling really confident in her tech if that was the case.

"Then go ahead and conduct your research. Please keep in mind that while you are working on the Swarm Project, your movement space will be limited. You are only permitted to stay aboard the authorized sections of the Tarrasque and inside Diandi Base. The need for secrecy for this project is too great. I hope you understand."

The woman nodded. "I am already aware of what my commitment entails. This is not the first time I am working under a strict regime. You do not need to be concerned for me. I will dedicate my time to the Swarm Project on a full-time basis."

"That is good to hear."

Ves left the Terran mech designer to her work after a while. He was not entirely certain whether she would be able to advance the Swarm Project by leaps and bounds, but he had a good impression of her so far. She displayed enough interest, intelligence and initiative to up to this point.

After spending time on his own work assignments, Ves eventually teleported back to Diandi Base hours later.

He dropped by his wife's design lab shortly afterwards and brought her up to speed on how Lady Romanda Devos fared in her first day at work.

"She sounds competent enough." Gloriana said as she tinkered on the incomplete design of the Riot Mark III Project while holding a napping Marvaine in her arms. "Your project is in good hands. Adding a woman to your otherwise male-dominated design team will keep you all focused and on track."

She lovingly kissed her son's head as she continued to refine the archemch frame that was supposed to embody chaos. Marvaine smiled and snuggled up to his mother even more as a response.

Ves did not even deign to respond to her insane argument. He only cared about the specializations and other work-related competencies of the members of the design team. The overarching goal was to deliver the best possible result for the Swarm Project. Being a man or woman should not have anything to do with this goal.

"Let me worry about the progress of the Swarm Project. Unless you are willing to assist in our work, please do not make any judgments like that." He said.

Gloriana rolled her eyes. "You are the one who felt the need to talk to me in order to reflect on your decisions. No matter. You are all Seniors who have accumulated enough work experience. The most you need to do is to find a good teamwork dynamic for your specific group of mech designers."

"I know what to do. Anyway, enough about the Swarm Project. Give me an update on the expert mech design projects. How are the Amaranto Mark III Project and the Riot Mark III Project doing as of late?"

"Our work is continuing to proceed according to schedule, Ves. Much of the labor lies in converting them from a conventional mech frame to a near-total archemech frame. The complexity of my work is not excessively high, but I have to manually solve many problems. I suppose I can automate these processes if time is of the essence, but I refuse to surrender this task to AIs. I need to do all of this myself. I need to know exactly why an archemetal component is designed and shaped in a certain fashion. If I cannot grasp the construction of a mech, then it is not my product anymore."

He understood what she meant. Mech Designers could automate their work to a much greater extent in order to save a lot of time and effort.

However, this not only resulted in qualitatively worse outcomes, but also caused mech designers to lose their understanding of their own work.

The more egregious downside was that mech designers that relied too much on automation lost the ability to solve these problems themselves. The lack of practice and improvement would eventually come to bite them in their behinds when they sought to design a more advanced mech that could not effectively be done by relying on heavy automation.

This reason and more was why Gloriana insisted on the manual approach. This was not just work to her. It was the method that mech designers used to improve their own 'cultivation', in a manner of speaking.

Ves had not been keeping up in his archetech studies as of late, so he still did not understand all of the complicated design choices made by his wife. The more he looked at the projection of the incomplete mech design of the Riot Mark III, the more he felt as if he was looking at a fundamentally alien machine.

It didn't matter. The whole point of bringing mech designers of different specializations together was to pool together rare and valuable skills. His wife did not fully understand how he designed his more advanced living mechs to this day, and that was also fine from her perspective. It was better to leave every complex design task related to E-technology Ves.

"By the way, the vessel carrying Ketis is due to arrive later this week."

"I have heard." Gloriana responded. "Andraste will be happy to see her swordsmanship tutor again in person. She has made sure to keep up her practice. I am not a swordswoman myself, but even I can notice how she is becoming increasingly more skilled at wielding blades. I had to arrange older and more experienced sparring partners for her because every child of her age that has learned how to wield a sword or any melee weapon for that matter is unable to keep up with her. Even the most combat-oriented designer babies are unable to surpass our baby girl."

She sounded awfully smug about that, as if it was her impeccable genes and upbringing that allowed Andraste to make so much progress.

Ves felt both proud and concerned for his daughter. Andraste was doing a little too great, to the point where the mechers and everyone else paid very close attention to her and the rest of his kids.

It was actually quite impressive how much better Andraste was doing. Her original designer baby package was not that high-end compared to the much more expensive and sophisticated gene treatments enjoyed by the wealthier Terrans.

Other factors such as her partial primordial human physique and early acquisition of a companion spirit clearly made all of the difference.

Ves felt both proud and concerned for his daughter. Andraste was doing a little too great, to the point where the mechers and everyone else paid very close attention to her and the rest of his kids.

They were destined to never lead normal lives. Their amazing potential and impressive growth rates meant that they were doomed to greatness.

The best Ves and Gloriana could do in the face of their brilliant offspring was to make sure to shower them with lots of affection. They needed plenty of reminders that they were only human in the end. Not everything in life should revolve around study and work.

"Why did you invite Ketis to New Constantinople VIII anyway? Shouldn't she be making her way over to the expeditionary fleet in order to support our troops at the front?"

"You are not wrong, but I need her here in order to fill her in on a few plans." Ves vaguely said. "The delay is worth it. Since the mechers don't allow me to ride with the expeditionary fleet anymore, Ketis is the best surrogate that I have. I need to make sure she understands my plans and intentions for the coming years. I won't be able to supervise the expeditionary fleet as often as I used to in the past. Ketis will have to serve as my agent and make sure that Commander Casella Ingvar, Master Benedict Cortez and the rest don't wander off in a completely different direction without my notice."

"I see. Will you also discuss the major overhaul of the First Sword with her?" She asked. "She has already approached me in order to inquire about the most significant changes to turning the First Sword into an archemeh. Both of us will need to work extensively with each other in order to ensure the new archemetal components are still able to move and perform sword techniques with both strength and precision."

The First Sword was a mech that heavily emphasized technique. If the archemetal conversion caused the machine to perform worse in this aspect, then Ketis would probably reject the notion of transforming the expert mech into an archemeh!

Chapter 6227 The Next Evolution of Stormblade Technology

"I miss you, mommy."

"I miss you too, Kirian."

Ketis embraced the virtual projection of her son in a hug.

Meanwhile, Joshua watched on while holding their little girl in his arms. Mayra giggled as she reached out with her smaller arms towards her mother.

"I miss you as well, my darling girl."

After showering the physical projections of her two children with kisses, she continued to cuddle with them for a few minutes before Joshua gently shooed them to the side so that he could speak with his wife in earnest.

"You are almost about to reach New Constantinople VIII, right?"

"I am." Ketis confirmed. "And you have just arrived in the Arvest Lima System. How is the expeditionary fleet doing?"

"Everyone is doing fine as far as I can tell. The fighting in the border system has not broken out in earnest, so everyone still remains in high spirits. The native aliens that arrived first are continuing to receive reinforcements, though. Their numbers are continuing to swell, but they are not yet committing to an assault. This is making our strategists worried because it shows that the alien commander is patient enough to gather all of the alien forces he can before he throws them all out at once. Once the fighting starts... death will rain everywhere. Both human starfighters and mechs will take a huge beating."

Joshua clearly did not see much reason to feel as optimistic about the coming battles as the other Larkinsons. He was just a high-tier expert pilot. He was unable to prevent much of the human casualties from falling because he and the Everchanger could only do so much under their own power.

Ketis looked sympathetic. "You cannot save everyone, Joshua. This is war. Casualties are a fact of life. Only when the stakes are high does war have meaning. This is a lesson that I myself have learned recently. Do what you can within your own power, but do not forget that you are merely an expert pilot. In the battles of the past, that was enough to dominate the battlefield, but at this level of warfare, you are barely more than a footnote on the battlefield. How many mechs and starfighters are you expecting to be deployed during a major engagement?"

The expert pilot threw up his hands. "I don't know. I don't pay too much attention to all of the numbers. There should be around 100,000 starfighters and three to four times as much mechs. I get what you mean, though. A single expert mech will get drowned between all of that

hardware. Only ace mechs are able to stand out and affect the battle on a large scale. If I broke through on the surface of the planet back then..."

"Don't think about that idiocy any further." His wife snarled. "You were engaged in doing something worse than what Isobel has done to herself. I know that pilots such as yourself are willing to do anything for a breakthrough, but almost killing yourself is definitely not the solution."

"Okay, okay. I won't think about it anymore. I will figure out a different way to improve my willpower." He promised.

They chatted a bit more. There was too much that Joshua could say over the galactic net. He simply did not possess a lot of information to begin with, and he was not permitted to share more up-to-date intelligence on the ongoing reorganization of the Arvest Lima System.

"I have a hunch that many mech pilots are about to break through during the upcoming fighting." Joshua softly said. "There are so many peak expert pilots in our clan. There are also many mech pilots and expert candidates who have been waiting for an opportunity to combine all of their accumulation into the upcoming battles. This is one of the first proper large-scale military actions that we are participating in. All of the prior battles amounted to short-lasting skirmishes, ambushes, raids and so on. The Larkinson Army has never been testing for anything like this. I am afraid... the men may not be able to bear the pressure."

The expert pilot heard a rumor that if the Arvest Lima System continued to remain contested for weeks on end, the Red Two would continually direct more reinforcements to this key industrial and logistical node. As much as a million mechs and starfighters may end up appearing on different parts of the battlefield at once!

What amazed Joshua even more was this would not come close to the record of the largest battle in the Red War. There were other defensive sites where even more small craft were being deployed at the same time!

"I know you want to save every pilot that enters the battlefield, but don't try to bite off more than you can chew. Just focus on taking care of the Larkinsons and our direct allies. It is not your responsibility to save everyone else. Those other pilots all understand the risks. They should look to their own brothers and sisters first if they need any assistance."

"I know, Ketis. I will try to avoid doing anything unnecessary. It is not my time yet. If I want to do more, I need to have the power to back up my ambitions."

Joshua clenched his fist as he spoke those words. He obviously grew more frustrated at his lack of strength and his inability to break through. He desired to become an ace pilot more than ever after seeing how much more Saint Tusa was able to accomplish after gaining his own Saint Kingdom.

Ketis could do little more than to say a few encouraging words. She herself had come little closer to becoming a sword saint herself, so it was not as if she could share any sage advice.

The two ended their call shortly afterwards. The two had remained in frequent contact while they remained separated, so it was not as if they had fallen out of contact for a long time.

After Ketis was left alone in her cabin aboard the courier vessel she was traveling on, she fell into a contemplative mood.

Her Bloodsinger floated in front of her, prompting Ketis to hold her greatsword by the scabbard and feel out her weapon.

"Can you feel it, Sharpie?"

"Sharpie!"

Ketis did not sense any apparent danger related to her visit to New Constantinople, but she felt restless anyway. This was a powerful indication that her life was about to change in a massive way. Ves did not summon her to his location for a trivial reason, that was for certain.

She wondered numerous times what was so important that he had to share it in person with her. None of her guesses sounded close to the truth, so she simply gave up on speculating and decided to let the situation play out without forming any preconceptions.

Ves at least shouldn't be plotting anything too dangerous or detrimental to human society. He deserved the benefit of the doubt.

Hours went by as Ketis eventually shook off her uncertainty and went back to her usual routine. There were always mechs to design, and she needed to spend several hours of her day on swordsmanship practice in order to keep her skills and body sharp.

A smile appeared on her face as she gazed at her almost complete design of the Stormblade Samurai Mark II.

Not only did she painstakingly upgrade the initial version to the Hyper Generation, she also took steps to commercialize it. This meant that she removed a lot of expensive components that were not cost-effective and replaced them with more affordable substitutes. She also changed a lot of design characteristics to make the Stormblade Samurai more universal, as the Larkinson Clan had developed a very specific set of standards for its own mechs.

The work had been surprisingly more comprehensive than she thought, but that was a good thing as the Mark II version possessed a very clear separation from the older and already outdated Mark I version.

The original Stormblade Samurai was her first successful implementation of stormblade technology. She fell in love with the tech and recognized how well they performed against transphasic energy shields.

Now, the Stormblade Samurai was poised to provide melee mech pilots with similar options. Stormblade technology was designed to be commercialized from the onset, so it was not difficult for her to adapt the tech to a true mass production model.

Aside from the technical improvements, Ketis also spent a lot of time on refining and optimizing the swordsmanship that she specifically designed to work in tandem with an electrified blade. She wanted the weapons to destabilize enemy transphasic energy shields more effectively. The effect should be great when combined with space suppressors!

As she continued to work on refining the Stormblade Samurai Mark II, she unknowingly entered a period of heightened concentration. Her mind entered into a zen-like state as she thought about how she could further enhance the effectiveness of her mech's ability to overcome the powerful alien defenses.

The original version of the Stormblade Samurai wielded their twin stormblades well enough, but she always had the feeling that there was something missing from their performance.

It was as if she was on her way to design a great mech, but stopped short at the last few steps.

What did she miss? What had she overlooked?

Although the Stormblade Samurai Mark II was already shaping up to become a good commercial offering, Ketis was not satisfied with releasing a serviceable product!

She knew that if a Journeyman like herself wanted to gain enough traction in the mech market, she needed to be a lot more creative and inventive in order to produce a unique and compelling package.

In other words, she needed to be a lot more like her mentor Ves!

The Larkinson Patriarch always managed to wow the crowd by presenting a completely new gimmick or feature. Such additions were usually so powerful or useful that it was practically assured that his work would turn into bestsellers!

If Ketis wanted to enjoy the same degree of widespread success, then she needed to take her design a step further.

She knew how Ves would react when he saw her current mech design. He would call it boring before proceeding to propose a radical change that could easily cast the mech design in a different light.

What would Ves do in this situation?

"Wait."

An idea suddenly came to mind.

She thought about his Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem and how it had begun to produce results on a large scale after the introduction of his most recent hyper mechs.

By grouping multiple living mechs together, they were actually able to manipulate ambient E energy radiation as a collective. So long as they coordinated their efforts well enough, it was not impossible for them to produce pseudo-domain-like effects!

The reason why she became inspired by this design application was because she recognized the potential for her Stormblade Samurai II to combine their powers as well.

What if the mechs could all pool their currents together and produce a much more powerful electrical blade that could cut or annihilate through transphasic defenses much more effectively than what the mechs were able to accomplish by themselves?

"This is not going to be easy to design." She frowned.

It reminded her a lot of Ves' battle networks. The conditions that mechs and mech pilots had to meet in order to execute them were harsh, and Ketis was afraid that her potential new application would end up far too convoluted for his customers to bother with the newly introduced option.

"That means that I need to put more effort into designing this new feature."

She grew more fiery and passionate at the thought of implementing such a promising new feature into her commercial mech design.

Only by adding a killer feature to her swordsman mech would she be assured that it would catch on in the mech market!

The market was fair in that regard. No matter what, the stronger and more superior mechs always ended up getting sold in greater numbers!

Chapter 6228 Ketis the Prideful

The crackle of lightning and electrical discharges frequently spread across the cramped cargo compartment in the courier vessel.

Ketis had specifically requested to clear it out to serve as her makeshift training room. As a swordmaster, she could not afford to slack off and let her body drop from her peak physical condition.

Though the work she put into maintaining her transhuman body was time-consuming and monotonous, she did not feel she was wasting her time.

Not only was she polishing her strength as a swordmaster, she also had enough spare brainpower left to contemplate the many problems she faced in her design projects.

There was nothing like swinging her blade while simultaneously becoming engrossed in performing mental calculations that might lead her to develop a brilliant solution to a stubborn problem!

That was what she was doing right now. She used the time to spar in order to figure out how she could implement her latest idea.

Stormblade technology was not designed to produce the massive effect she envisioned. She needed to figure out a way to make her Stormblade Samurais combine their power without causing them to overload and get fried in the process.

She did not wield her usual Bloodsinger this time. As good as her greatsword may be, it was not designed with stormblade technology in mind.

In order to familiarize herself with how mechs fought with this tech, Ketis had taken the time to forge different blades with this technology.

Right now, she held two of those infantry-scale stormblades and began to cut through one imaginary opponent after another. The electrified blades regularly discharged their power in the process, causing the air to become charged with energy.

Her arms swung like the wings of a dragonfly. They moved so dazzlingly fast that it was hard for ordinary observers to distinguish them. The rest of her body moved accordingly in order to support her imaginary assault.

As her blades continued to swing at a rapid tempo, they frequently came close to colliding against each other, but Ketis always managed to avoid contact by the barest of margins.

There was a purpose to this action. She did not deliberately seek to short circuit her stormblades, but wanted to use the momentary proximity of their electrified blades to generate an electrical interaction that she could use to form a lightning blade of sorts!

Unfortunately, her attempts failed. She exerted her willpower many times, but the sparks lasted so short that she was not able to react fast enough to do anything useful.

She was clearly doing something wrong here. Her blades were not optimized for the specific purpose she had in mind. Using her willpower to produce a lightning blade would not give her much direction on how to replicate the effect by relying on hyper technology and E-technology. The same actions might produce completely different consequences when executed by a towering mech as opposed to a swordmaster.

Ketis knew all of this, but she wanted to give this approach a try, if only to see that she was not completely going off-track.

"I need more time." She eventually concluded as she steadily reduced the speed of her sword swings.

Her body had become stronger than ever after ascending to a swordmaster, but it was still limited to human boundaries in many ways. She could not endlessly swing her twin stormblades without accumulating fatigue.

Ketis breathed heavily as she wound down. Her sweat-covered body exuded a lot of heat, though her well-designed training suit did a good job of containing her emissions.

Her thoughts continued to linger on her theories and her most recent observations as she took a quick shower before changing into a Larkinson uniform.

Her sheathed Bloodsinger silently hovered behind her back as she stepped back into her cabin and thought about what she needed to do in order to successfully elevate her first commercial product in years.

Should she ask for advice from Ves?

The logical answer would be yes. Her mentor always had a way with coming up with inventive solutions. He was particularly good at blending the metaphysical into his products. This fell right into his area of expertise.

However, the stubborn and pride part of herself rejected this notion. She had been doing fine with designing the Stormblade Samurai Mark II so far. She had not resorted to much outside help, and she wanted to keep it that way. The mech design needed to be a reflection of her current progress and realized potential.

How could she possibly see herself as a successful Journeyman if she had to return to Ves on a regular basis in order to overcome her own hurdles?

Although it was important for her to be able to design and release the Stormblade Samurai Mark II quickly enough to help as many melee mech pilots as possible during the Red Tide Offensive, she was not willing to fail her own test.

Ves and Gloriana had both advanced to the rank of Senior Mech Designer in recent years.

Many other Larkinson Journeymen were making a huge amount of progress while they continued to undergo EdNet training.

Ketis could not afford to fall behind.

Having chosen to reject the offer to make use of an EdNet quota herself, she had to live with the repercussions of her choice by working harder in order to keep up with all of the other Larkinsons.

She needed to be able to stand out and work on her own brilliance. She needed to leverage her unique advantage of being a Journeyman and a swordmaster at the same time.

Above all, she wanted to take a solid stride towards reaching the next ranks of her dual professions!

Since Ketis saw no feasible way of advancing to the rank of sword saint anytime soon, she invested much of her hope on becoming a Senior Mech Designer first.

Unlike swordmasters, mech designers had a much better idea on what they needed to do in order to break through. There were just so much more of the latter, and they also had access to much more extensive support.

Ketis knew that if she wanted to cut her time as a Journeyman short, she not only needed to design a lot of mechs and accumulate a lot of knowledge, but also develop a brilliant solution that seemed so compelling that she wanted to rely on it to realize her design philosophy in the future!

That was quite difficult as she had yet to stumble upon a specific application that satisfied this exacting demand.

She could choose from multiple viable directions.

For example, she could choose to commit to stormblade technology and try to reach an entirely new height with her stormblade mechs.

While she considered stormblade technology to be a nice complement to her swordman mechs, she did not feel passionate about it to turn this tech into her main specialization.

She much preferred to stick with her roots and focus on developing a killer application based on sharpness or skill inheritance.

Once she had completed her work on the Stormblade Samurai Mark II, she intended to design a mech or several mechs that specifically excelled at cutting through obstacles.

In fact, her dream was to design a swordsman mech that could cleave transphasic shields apart like curtains!

Though most mech designers considered it impossible to accomplish this feat outside of high-ranking mechs, Ketis did not think she was limited by this constraint.

She just needed to figure out the right approach.

As she continued to think about how she could take her mechs to the next level, her ride eventually reached her intended destination.

New Constantiple was a developed port system. The Devos Ancient Clan invested a lot to turn it into a regional hub. It was clear that the effort bore fruit as hundreds of first-class starships continually arrived and left the star system.

The only issue was that the recent developments prompted the Devosans to implement more security measures.

Every arriving vessel had to complete a thorough inspection before they could head into the inner system.

Ships also had to travel at fixed speed along designated space lanes. Any unauthorized deviations could cause the patrolling first-class multipurpose mechs to open fire if their pilots felt it was necessary!

The mood in the port system had most definitely dipped due to the more oppressive and militaristic atmosphere.

The Bluejay Fleet occupied an entire orbital section as it continually hovered above New Constantinople VIII.

The large collection of RA warships and the odd presence of an RF heavy cruiser exerted enough deterrence to force most arriving or departing vessels to stick to the opposite hemisphere of the planet.

Ketis did not transfer directly to the flagship of the Tarrasque.

Her work had nothing to do with whatever the mechers were up to, and she had not received any invitations to take part in any secret projects.

Her ride directly descended to the surface, skipping any security checks and waiting lists, before touching down a few dozen kilometers away from Diandi Base.

Once she left the vessel, she boarded an armored shuttle that was accompanied by a small escort of mechs. The vehicle quickly brought her to her ultimate destination.

"Welcome to New Constantinople VIII." Ves greeted the swordmaster with a smile. "I am afraid that we can't show you around and allow you to get a taste of Terran prosperity, but we have plenty of matters to discuss, so you will feel anything but bored."

"Ketis! It's so great to see you in person again!"

The swordmaster's number one fan ran up and threw herself in Ketis' embrace.

The older woman reacted with mild surprise at how much little Andraste had grown since their last face-to-face meeting.

"You've grown stronger, and not just in a physical way."

Ketis touched the girl's arm, shoulder and back muscles to gain a feel on how much power they contained.

Though Andraste did not deliberately train her muscle strength, her frequent sword swinging caused her to stimulate the growth of her physique to a more ideal biological configuration for swordsmanship.

If she decided not to become a mech pilot, then she would undoubtedly have great promise as a swordswoman!

The little girl enthusiastically babbled her latest progress to Ketis, thereby leaving her father with no opportunity to hold his own conversation with the new arrival.

Ves merely smiled at the sight. He did not mind his daughter's antics. Ketis had practically become Andraste's godmother. The bond between them was already very close.

He even had the feeling that the little girl would much prefer it if Ketis ended up as her real mother as opposed to Gloriana.

Of course, he wasn't stupid enough to mention this suspicion to his wife.

In any case, the real conversation between himself and Ketis would take place in a much more secure location than the landing zone of Diandi Base.

As the group moved to the central area of the base, Ketis leisurely described some of the sights she witnessed over at Reticula Corein V.

"We still do not know where Solus Gas comes from or what it even is. We did manage to find a few clues on the planet that can narrow down the list of possibilities." The swordmaster said.

"Do you want to hear my personal guess?"

"I do! Tell me please!" Andraste begged.

"I think... that Reticula Corein V is hiding a decaying phase whale corpse!"

"No way!"

"Solus Gas may be the gaseous residue generated by the abnormal rotting process of an organism that exists in many more dimensions than usual!"

That sounded like a fascinating theory, but Ves seriously doubted that this was the case. The native aliens would have never neglected the planet if it had any relation to the descendants of the Elder Gods!

His own theory about the origins of Solus Gas was that it was merely formed by underground magma activity. The combination of heat, pressure and a special combination of exotic ores coincidentally produced this gas.

Chapter 6229 The Second User

In the evening after Ketis arrived at Diandi Base, Ves and his family accompanied and entertained the Swordmaiden mech designer.

Ketis impressed the children with her tales of adventure and her feats of swordsmanship. She also talked shop with Ves and Gloriana by talking about her ongoing work on the Stormblade Samurai Mark II.

It didn't look as if she was an old friend on a visit instead of going on a pure business trip.

As far as Ves was concerned, Ketis was part of the family. She was more than just another Larkinson. She was a trusted comrade in arms, a long-time collaborating mech designer and a powerful warrior in her own right. All of these reasons and more prompted Ves to treat her as a relative who was closer to him than many trueblood Larkinsons.

Once the evening dragged on, Ves and Gloriana patiently put their children to bed and kissed them good night in order to enjoy their sweet dreams.

"I see that you still have pressing business to discuss with Ketis." Gloriana knowingly remarked. "If this matter cannot wait until tomorrow, then go ahead and have your talk with her. Our guest is clearly anxious to learn why you summoned her all the way to New Constantinople. It is better if you can solve her apprehension as soon as possible instead of allowing it to fester in her for the entire night."

"Aren't you curious what I intend to discuss with her?" Ves asked.

"I am, but I know better than to force an answer out of you. Now that you have entered the big leagues, you have been keeping more and more secrets. I would not be a good wife if I insisted that you share everything with me. You have your life, and I have my life. I am already preoccupied with designing the upgrades to a pair of expert mechs as well as supervising the transformation of the Dark Zephyr Mark III into our first ace mech. On top of that, I also have to lead the Design Department since you have handed it over to me. If I want to spare enough time to raise my children when they return from school, I truly cannot handle any further responsibilities."

His wife was just as busy as himself, and that was good. Gloriana was clearly a woman who wanted to prove herself. By taking over many of the chores that Ves would otherwise have to handle himself, she was doing a great job at relieving his burdens.

Ves smiled and leaned over to kiss her. "Thank you for your work. Your contributions are truly indispensable. I hope that you can keep up the good work."

Gloriana smiled back and pecked him on the cheek. "I will do so as long as you continue to make us all proud. Our division of responsibilities outside of mech design are clear. You should continue to handle all of the external affairs of our clan while I make sure that our internal affairs remain in order."

Ves did not recall that he had surrendered so many leadership responsibilities to his wife. He only gave her the right to take charge of the Design Department and supervise all of the R&D institutions of the clan. That was still a far cry from being able to lead the clan from the inside.

It didn't matter. Once his oldest daughter grew up, Ves hoped to ease her into the role so that he could rest assured that his clan had fallen into more responsible hands.

He rose to his feet and moved to depart. "Don't wait for me. What I am about to discuss with Ketis is so important that our talk will probably consume the entire night."

As he left his secure mansion and headed underground, the weight of his upcoming action seemed to press down onto his shoulders.

Each step grew heavier as Ves momentarily became plagued with doubts and concerns.

He was about to reveal the Mech Designer System to another person.

Outside of his parents, Ves had tried his best not to spread this secret any further!

Even Sigrund and Calabast only vaguely found out that he was the Holy Son of the Metal Scroll a long time ago. Perhaps they might suspect that he had access to a miraculous relic with the functions of the System, but they most certainly should not have access to detailed information.

Now, Ves was on the cusp of exposing nearly everything about a powerful device that he had relied upon so long to propel himself to success.

He would be lying if he claimed he was not feeling nervous. If his control over his body wasn't so excellent, his feet would have been shaking by this time.

As a paranoid mech designer who had suffered many instances of betrayal in the past, Ves still felt extremely reluctant to expose such a sensitive secret.

Ketis would essentially have blackmail material over Ves after he made the big revelation. She could go to the Red Association or another big organization and spill all of the secrets she learned from him in order to do incalculable damage to his interests.

The fear that the wrong person in possession of this information could ruin his life at any time was one of the biggest reasons why Ves had yet to make use of the opportunity to invite another mech designer to make use of the System.

He would rather keep the Mech Designer System severely underutilized than to put himself at personal risk.

"I can't go on like this, though." He sighed.

The main reason why he changed his mind this time was because the circumstances had changed.

The Red Tide Offensive was more effective than people anticipated. The 3rd defensive band was being battered at this very hour, and the continued separation of Bridgehead One from the rest of human space had disrupted many plans.

Ves also needed the help of another contributor in order to pay for all of the necessary upgrades to the new Dimension Observatory.

Even though months had already passed since the System completed its third upgrade, Ves had yet to make use of it, which was ridiculous!

If future upgrades to the Mech Designer System added more and more expensive functions, then the time where Ves could take care of everything by himself was over.

Ves considered this to be an experiment of sorts. He could not predict what would happen after he brought in a second user.

It would be better for him and his clan if he started to bestow access to the System to other trusted mech designers.

Ketis was the first.

Ves considered this to be an experiment of sorts. He could not predict what would happen after he brought in a second user.

Would the Mech Designer System undergo a spontaneous upgrade or transformation?

Would Ketis change overnight after getting overwhelmed at all of the options that had become available?

Would others somehow find out what he had done?

All of these questions and more continued to plague him, but they did not deter him from going through with his plan.

Time was running out. Ves needed to take action regardless of the risks and consequences. It was better to be proactive and face the possibility of failure than to do nothing and suffer a guaranteed loss.

Besides, Ves possessed so much trust and confidence in Ketis that he did not think she would deliberately betray his trust.

A part of Ves felt it was only fair for him to reward years of loyal service and dedication with becoming the second user of the powerful Mech Designer System.

She would not just become a fellow beneficiary of everything that the growing fragment of the Metal Scroll had to offer, but she would also become his partner in earnest. The System would bind the two together in a secret group that was utterly unique.

As Ves stopped before the entrance of the secure chamber, he briefly shifted his gaze towards his silent but ever-present RA bodyguards.

Although he did not directly command them, the heavily armored guards obeyed his silent instruction and took up positions to the side of the armored blast doors.

Ves entered the secure underground chamber and moved to the center where two plain metal chairs were placed next to a simple metal desk.

Ketis had already arrived in advance. She was currently having a lovely time with Lucky.

"Meow!"

The cat eagerly sat on top of the floating Bloodsinger as the sheathed weapon flew back and forth around the confines of the chamber.

That soon ended as Ves arrived before Ketis. The Bloodsinger returned to her rear while Lucky floated over to the metal desk.

"Did you perform the checks, Lucky?"

"Meow."

"Good. Keep watch and make sure that no one is able to find out what is happening."

In order to make sure that Lucky did his job, Ves reached into his pocket and threw a chunk of high-grade exotic ore onto the desk.

"Meow meow meow!" Lucky enthusiastically promised before he began to dig into his reward.

Ves did not start to talk to Ketis right away. He deployed his usual suite of jamming devices and other sources of interference.

He utilized his spatial senses as well as Blinky's sharp spiritual senses to perform a quick sweep to ensure that nothing strange had slipped into the chamber without his notice.

He just knew that the Red Association was secretly trying to eavesdrop on the important conversation that Ves intended to hold with his former student.

The mechers couldn't help it. It was in their nature. It did not even matter that he had become one of their strongest allies and associates. They probably would have attempted to spy on god pilots if they found a way to circumvent the detection mechanisms of God Kingdoms somehow!

In any case, his final sweep did not reveal anything untoward. The mechers wouldn't attempt to spy on him and breach his trust in such an egregious fashion by slipping in a listening device that could not easily be hidden.

That did not rule out that the mechers succeeded in planting a device that amazingly avoided all of his detection methods due to working on unconventional or alien technology.

Ves had a solution for that as well.

It was a bit of a risky move, but if it worked out the way he envisioned, then the probability that the mechers would be able to gain any useful information on what took place should be close to zero!

"Ketis." Ves greeted the woman.

"Ves." The woman stood up. "You wanted me. Here I am. I hope I can finally obtain answers from you. What is all of this secrecy about? Why do I feel you are about to change my life forever?"

"Patience, Ketis. I intend to clarify everything to you in due time. First, take my hand."

Ketis looked puzzled, but did as instructed. Her firm, meaty hand which showed the traces of long practice with wielding a greatsword clasped Ves' own hand with a strong grip.

The two hadn't even completed one handshake before their environment completely changed!

No longer were the two mech designers locked in a cold and sterile metal chamber that was built for privacy.

They had appeared at the bottom of a majestic-looking mountaintop that appeared to be situated on an idyllic terrestrial planet!

Ketis instantly went on guard as soon as she noticed she appeared in a completely different space.

The only reason why she had not lashed out yet was because her Bloodsinger accompanied her and because Ves' expression told her that he was the one responsible for bringing her to this mysterious site.

"Ves, what is this? Where have we appeared? Is this a secret phase whale enclave? No. That doesn't make sense. We wouldn't be in open terrain if that was the case. This place... the air is too clean and the gravity is exactly 1 g. This place is..."

Her words trailed off as a giant announcement filled her vision.

[WELCOME TO THE MECH DESIGNER SYSTEM, KETIS LARKINSON. AS THE SECOND USER, YOU HAVE FULL ACCESS TO ALL OF THE AVAILABLE FACILITIES IN THIS SPACE.]

Chapter 6230: A Profound Introduction

Ketis was taken aback by the massive revelation.

Her shock amplified as Ves quickly proceeded to give her a summary on the origins of the Mech Designer System and briefly described how he relied on its insane functions to accelerate his progression as a mech designer.

Though he did not give her comprehensive information on everything he knew or guessed about the System, what little he revealed in the twenty minutes after entering the System Space was already enough to keep her off balance.

Only her strength and conviction as a swordmaster allowed her to digest the massive revelations and maintain most of her composure.

She continued to look around and paid special attention to all of the little clearings further above that hosted the special 'facilities' Ves had mentioned.

After her former mentor completed his story about how he managed to upgrade the fragment of the Metal Scroll several times in recent years, he ended his lecture with a single message.

"The Mech Designer System is not a static existence. It is continually growing. It is becoming stronger and more versatile over time. Whether this is due to the assistance that I have provided to it or something else, the System is evolving into a higher form.

I do not know what it will end up as, and I do not know whether we will suffer any consequences for making it happen, but now that you are a user, you have become involved as well.

If my worst fears are true then we may end up facilitating the resurrection of the powerful ancient cultivator who once created one of the five Sacred Scrolls."

Ketis grew grave when she heard that. It was not reasonable for a relic as amazing as the Mech Designer System to be so generous and offer people like Ves the opportunity to acquire all sorts of magical items and skills at a very low cost.

It made more sense to her that the creator of this System had a much more selfish and nefarious goal in mind.

Did that made her afraid of the System and its associations with the scary cultivators of ancient times?

Yes.

Did it deter her from seeking to take advantage of its many useful features, ones that had helped to turn Ves from an average third-class mech designer into the most powerful and successful Senior Mech Designer of the Red Ocean?

Hell no!

As a swordmaster and an ambitious Journeyman Mech Designer, Ketis was not afraid of trouble!

Just like most Larkinsons, she was more than willing to take certain risks in order to obtain a huge payoff.

She did not begrudge Ves from forcing her into a mystical contract with the powerful Mech Designer System. He considered her to be a true friend, and would never go out of his way to deliberately harm her interests.

Ketis fully understood why he was being so incredibly cautious about the Mech Designer System. It was not just his inherent paranoia that prompted him from taking action. The System was way too magical and desirable to expose any mention of it in realspace!

She could not imagine how wild and crazy the mechers would become if they caught wind of the System.

Friends and allies such as Professor Jovy Armalon or even the awe-inspiring Evolution Witch may not be able to resist the temptation and turn against Ves for the purpose of plundering the System from his possession!

In fact, such thoughts briefly crossed her mind as well, but she quickly squashed them because the mere notion of it already desecrated her honor.

As a swordmaster, she could never allow herself to act despicably against her family and her friends.

She held her Bloodsinger and tried her best to center herself. At this time, the last thing she wanted to do was to get overtaken by her roiling emotions. She needed to maintain her rationality and take all of these changes with as much calm and control as possible.

"Show me." She requested. "Show me what this so-called System Space has to offer to me. I need more than verbal descriptions. I need to see for myself."

Ves studied the swordmaster carefully before nodding. "You are taking this quite well."

"Well, it is not as if I have always assumed you managed to go from being a small figure in the Bright Republic to a tier 3 galactic citizen in the span of two decades without receiving help from somewhere. I just assumed that your mother helped you in other ways.

I never expected her to gift you such a powerful inheritance which she has supposedly stolen from her old cult organization."

"My entire life has changed because of this System." He said. "I have little doubt that if I did not obtain it at the start of my career, I would have trudged along without accomplishing anything worthwhile.

Perhaps I possess a bit of talent, but without enough resources and opportunities, it is too difficult for a mech designer to climb his way up from mediocrity."

"Do you feel ashamed for relying so much on this System to reach the heights that you have reached today?"

"No." Ves shook his head. "Life is not fair. Everyone has a different starting point. People like Alexa Streon and Jovy Armalon are set up for success at the highest level before they are even born.

People who are born in a third-rate state like myself can never catch up to those kinds of privileged people unless we resort to uncommon means ourselves.

The System has indeed allowed me to overcome a lot of difficulties without as much effort, but after a few years of taking advantage of all of its services, I sobered up and consciously tried to reduce my reliance on all of its conveniences."

"Because you do not want to be reduced to a slave to this machine."

Ves nodded. "Mech designers can only progress as long as they approach their work earnestly.

It is okay for us to take shortcuts every now and then, but to do it so much to the point where we no longer bother to put in the hard work to study or design anything that exceeds our limits will mean that we have ceased to grow through an organic development process.

Just like how mech pilots must never rely too much on automation to fight their battles, we must also be vigilant to never rely on the functions of the System alone to produce all of our progress."

Ketis nodded in agreement. She knew that Ves was cautioning her out of a concern that she would grow mad with the power provided by the System.

It would be a shame for her to ruin her long-term prospects by getting spoiled by all of the amazing benefits that she gained when she became a user of this incredibly powerful relic.

While she continually tried to tell herself not to get too excited about what Ves had introduced to her, she could not hold in all of her curiosity.

It was impossible for her to deny the System entirely. She had hit several walls in her work as of late. Ves and many others were making rapid progress.

Though Ketis was rather special in that she was a mech designer as well as a swordmaster, none of these professions provided her with any way to accelerate her progress.

Even if her future potential was amazing due to being able to develop in two completely different ways at the same time, it didn't matter if she had to wait for several centuries before she had a chance to become a Star Designer and a sword god.

Ketis was tired of constantly being treated as a 'junior' who had yet to develop her potential to a sufficient degree.

She wanted to design mechs that could have an immediate and significant impact on human society.

This meant that she needed to progress faster. She wanted so badly to catch up and keep up with the likes of Ves. Only then would she be able to become powerful enough to enact meaningful change to human society.

"I know how to control myself." Ketis said as she made an effort to demonstrate her composure. "Besides, doesn't the System come with limitations that prevent its users from becoming omnipotent without putting in any effort?"

"It does. Let me explain it to you along the way. Let's visit the first facility."

The pair of mech designers finally began to move up the mountain. They took the first possible turn and stood before the Vault of Eternity.

"This is a big storage space." Ves said. "It can hold a lot of stuff. Originally, it was supposed to store items that are native to the System, but lately you can also rent a cubic meter of storage space by paying 10 Ascension Points a year."

"Ascension Points? Is that the currency the System uses to set the prices on its goods and services?"

"Yes. It originally used Design Points, but the System back then was a lot cruder and more limited at the time. Do not look down on a sum of 10 AP. It is normally very difficult to earn.

You can earn 1 AP by completing one mech design where you have led the design process. You can also earn a lot more AP through other means, but the System won't make it easy for you. I will explain it to you later.

For now, you should know that you can stuff pretty much anything except living organisms into the Vault of Eternity and retrieve it at any time."

"Even when I am separated from you by several light-years?"

"I haven't verified it yet, but it will most likely work." Ves replied with a touch of uncertainty in his tone. "I believe that the System is currently anchored to me, but that you will still be able to access its many useful services as long as you reside in the same galaxy.

Perhaps future upgrades may make it powerful enough that you can still access it if one of us has traveled to Messier 87. If you have the AP to spare in the future, I highly suggest that you rent a bit of space and stuff your combat armor and other survival gear into it.

You never know when you might need emergency gear one day."

Ketis definitely understood the value of being able to carry around weapons and armor in places where it was not possible for her to sneak in such dangerous equipment.freewebnovel.com

"I will definitely follow your advice."

The pair left the Vault of Eternity and reached the Wishing Fountain next.

Ves maintained a complicated expression as he gazed at the fountain.

"This is the Wishing Fountain. It is a giant lottery more or less. You can spend AP to buy a few low-tier lottery tickets, but in my personal experience, you can hardly get anything good.

It is better to find a way to earn more valuable lottery tickets before coming here to make use of an opportunity to draw a valuable prize."

"Is this where you get your strangely powerful gadgets such as that odd flute of yours?"

"You guessed right."

That caused Ketis to grow a lot more interested in the Wishing Fountain.

"Is it possible for this fountain to award me with a powerful sword?"

Ves chuckled and pulled a radiant lottery ticket from his pocket that he had previously retrieved from the Vault of Eternity.

"Most definitely, but it is not so easy to get a lottery ticket that can bestow you with such a prize. Take a look at this radiant lottery ticket of mine. Do you know what I had to do in order to earn this valuable reward?"

"No."

"The Mech Designer System awards me with a radiant lottery ticket for each masterwork mech designer that I have created with my own hands. It has to be because of the thought, passion and workmanship that I have put into my work that a mech is able to reach masterwork quality.

Machines that gradually evolve into masterworks by relying on Gloriana's god body method doesn't count. Do you understand the value of this ticket, Ketis?"

"I do"

After hearing that she needed to create a masterwork mech, her enthusiasm deflated.

Compared to Ves who was seemingly able to fabricate a masterwork mech every year, Ketis' craftsmanship was nowhere near as good!