

Mech Touch 6481

Chapter 6481 A New Chance For the Unfortunates

There was one more group of people who were even more suitable to pilot Carmine mechs aside from infantry soldiers.

There was nothing particularly wrong about converting infantry into Carmine mech pilots. Even if they never came into prominence due to the idolization of mech pilots, it was incredibly cheap to train and employ these troops.

As long as there was no demand for elite commandos or whatever, the cost to raise and employ an entire infantry troop from scratch for several decades could never exceed the cost of purchasing a single mech!

However, most groups knew it was useless to field millions of infantry soldiers on the battlefield.

A few mech companies would tear them to shreds, mostly at a distance but also up close when it suited them. The combat power of a single mech was simply too much, and their effectiveness rose when they fought alongside other complementary mechs. Infantry was only really useful in trying to conquer enemy warships, clearing out enemy fortifications without blowing everything up and occupying conquered territories.

The vast majority of infantry troops were therefore trained to fulfill these roles. They were not expected to carry the war by themselves, but merely served to support the operations of mechs.

Infantry was often used to clean up the messes behind by rampaging mechs. Nobody was optimistic about them, but they could not neglect their roles either, as a force without any infantry at its disposal could easily succumb against those that did not make this mistake.

Now, infantry had gained a resurgence. Each of them had turned into useful assets. Their weapon handling skills, their ability to work in a military hierarchy and their mental tempering all turned them into one of the most suitable choices to put into the cockpits of Carmine mechs!

It only took days for many far-sighted groups to regard their own infantry forces as a reserve manpower pool for Carmine mech pilots.

While it would still take a couple of years for them to train the necessary skills and learn the theoretical knowledge to pilot Carmine mechs competently, this was still incredibly fast compared to the traditional process of turning potentates into professional mech pilots!

The manpower pool of potentates and conventional mech pilots had been shrinking rapidly.

The native alien's preference for attrition warfare had taken an awful toll on human defenders in the past few years, not just during the Red Tide Offensive.

If the supply of potentates wasn't so small, then the Polymath's plan to produce a huge amount of batch humans and the Red Fleet's efforts to promote the Starfighter Corps would not have happened!

Many of these solutions had largely become redundant after the release of Carmine mechs.

While the solution was not perfect, red humanity already had so many infantry forces at its disposal that it should readily be able to transform billions of footsoldiers into reserve Carmine mech pilots as long as the supply of Yellow Jackets was sufficient. At the very least, manpower was no longer the most concerning bottleneck that limited red humanity's warmaking potential. That granted a lot of relief to leaders. They instead had to face the problem of limited war resources, which was not as troublesome to solve.

Just the salvage retrieved from captured and destroyed alien warships was enough to choke the manufacturing complexes!

The biggest problem facing red humanity was that there was still a buffer time before the conversions could be finished. Two or three years might not sound like a big deal, but the frontlines might not be able to last this long!

This was why the various forces had turned to not one manpower pool, but actually two different pools that used to hold no value, but suddenly became a lot more attractive!

One of them was disabled veteran mech pilots, Brain damage and other heavy physical injuries were not common in mech warfare. Cockpit breaches usually resulted in fatal outcomes. This was why most mech pilots tended to remain completely healthy or die without leaving a recognizable body behind.

In the rare edge cases where the cockpits got breached but the pilots still managed to survive a heavy blow launched by a mech, defensive fortification or warship, then there was a considerable chance that they would become disabled.

This was a fate that many mech pilots feared. There were even warriors who considered it to be a fate worse than death, because there was no glory in returning to civilian life!

While incidents of mech pilots being forced to retire due to brain damage did not happen often, they still occurred frequently enough in a population base as large as red humanity for millions of them to accumulate over time.

A proportion of them were actually quite promising back when they were still combat capable.

There were even expert pilots among them who suffered the same miserable outcome as Benjamin Larkinson.

Now that Yellow Jackets had become available, all of these disabled veterans finally saw an opportunity to regain their former glory and make up for the regrets of their

lives!

Many military mech forces were also extremely eager to pick them up and allocate Yellow Jackets to them as they only required a month or two of retraining and familiarization with their new Carmine mechs in order to get ready for battle!

These disabled veteran mech pilots had become the best showcase of what the Yellow Jackets were capable of in the hands of skilled mech pilots.

One of the downsides to releasing the Yellow Jackets to the public was that too much footage of amateurs failing to control their brand new machines had flooded the

galactic net.

Even if most of the viewers did not judge the exuberant Carmine mech pilots harshly for their lack of control, Ves still became annoyed that more and more people gained the impressions that his Yellow Jackets were weak and useless!

Fortunately, the footage of squads or companies of Yellow Jackets piloted by disabled veterans started to show up and gain prominence in the news.

Their ability to leverage the greater potential of the Yellow Jackets was much greater. They did not have to start off in the most simplest configuration by attaching just one modular weapon slot to the mech frame.

They immediately started with 2, 3 or even 4 limbs, thereby mimicking the configurations of the conventional mechs they used to pilot!

Each of them only exhibited moderate signs of unfamiliarity and lack of precise control. Piloting a mech through the Blood Pact was different from relying on a traditional man-machine connection, so these veterans had to unlearn a few habits. and master new ones in order to regain their old level of combat effectiveness. Nonetheless, the approach to controlling a mech was similar enough in both cases that they did not require more than a few weeks to smooth out all of the wrinkles! This was good news for everyone as the frontlines would start to get reinforced by a lot of Yellow Jackets in a month or less!

Even if the veterans converted into Carmine mech pilots had not yet completed their retraining programs yet, they should have already spent enough time with their Yellow Jackets to avoid ending up as liabilities on the battlefield.

Their entry in the most crucial contested star systems did much to compensate for the sudden deflation of the Starfighter Corps!

"The invention of Carmine mechs has almost collapsed the Starfighter Corps overnight." Gavin spoke with a hint of glee in his voice. "There is almost no one who

wants to pilot a starfighter when they can pilot a Carmine mech instead. The only issue is that the loss of recruitment and the defection of many starfighter pilots has

gap in reinforcements. The mobilization of Carmine mechs piloted by disabled veterans will do much to address this problem, but the numbers do not entirely add up. We still need starfighters to make up the numbers, but no matter what the fleeters do, they can't attract more people into piloting their strike craft. The only solution left is conscription, but this is a highly controversial decision."

The mention of conscription caused Ves to frown. The Red War would become a lot uglier if there weren't enough mech pilots and volunteers anymore to do the hard

fighting.

"The Starfighter Corps isn't the only initiative started by the fleeters. There is also the Auxiliary Warship Program. Can't they divert resources from the former into the

latter?"

"It is not that simple, boss. You of all should know that. Starfighters are small, light on resources relatively simple. They can easily be mass produced by any factory that is capable of fabricating mechs, and don't drain too much resources if the fighter craft are predominantly made of abundantly available materials. Warships on the other hand can only be built in orbital shipyards or low-gravity moons. It takes a large amount of highly educated naval engineers and a huge amount of capital to construct all of those shipyards. They also need to be fed with a huge amount of bulk materials on a regular basis, which also imposes a huge burden on logistics. None of the states can produce too many warships at a time. Even third-class and second-class warships require at least half a year to a year in order to complete. Quality is also a big issue as all of the newly constructed shipyards are staffed by new and inexperienced workers." In other words, red humanity could not rely on auxiliary warships to save the day in

the short term.

"At least there is another manpower pool that Carmine mechs can tap into." Ves

remarked.

Aside from disabled veterans, there was another group of sad and unfortunate people

that suddenly became a lot more useful.

They were low-aptitude mech pilots.

Many potentates that discovered that they possessed suitable genetic aptitude to pilot

mechs, yet only receive a score of E or D were perhaps the most tragic people of the

modern era!

Each of them barely possessed the capacity to pilot mechs, yet could only make do with frontline mechs, if anyone even bothered to hire them in the first place.

A lot of mech academies disdained to waste their valuable resources into training

them. When the manpower pool of professional mech pilots still remained adequate, there was far too little demand for these untalented fellows!

A lot of low-aptitude potentates simply gave up and proceeded to live as civilians after their spirits got crushed by the rejection of society.

Yet there were still potentates that loved mechs so much that they could not bear to

give up their dreams.

As far as they were concerned, they were still better off than norms because they at

least possessed the ability to pilot a mech, even if they would never have a chance to fight on an actual battlefield!

There were still shabby mech academies that weren't picky about genetic aptitudes and gladly trained their low-aptitude mech cadets.

Of course, the quality and rigor of these academic programs was not up to par with

the more standard programs, but it was not as if low-aptitude pilots could make use of more advanced mechs.

There were actually a lot of potentates that possessed lower-than-average genetic aptitudes, so this manpower pool was not small!

They already received greater attention than before due to the increased shortage of

mech units. Many of them had already been recruited to form frontline mech units, but now that the Yellow Jackets had come out, they suddenly received better opportunities!

Even though the Yellow Jacket could halfway be considered a frontline mech, the

difference was that the Carmine System enabled these low-aptitude mech pilots to exert much stronger control over their machines!

At minimum, their 'effective genetic aptitudes' reached the C-grade, which meant that they were able to control their Yellow Jackets as well as professional mech pilots with C-grade genetic aptitudes!

This made an enormous difference to these untalented mech pilots! Many of them had

already fallen in love with their assigned Yellow Jackets as they no longer fought as if they were partially disabled!

Chapter 6482 Savior and Destroyer

Carmine mechs changed the lives of many people.

So many red humans who previously couldn't pilot mechs due to brain damage or low genetic aptitudes suddenly gained an opportunity to prove their worth.

Their gratitude towards the Father of Carmine Mechs was enormous. Many of them even took the initiative to write letters to Ves. They expressed their deepest emotions and thanked him with the bottom of their hearts.

Though Ves did not feel as if he had put a huge amount of effort into developing Carmine mechs, reading these letters reminded him of how much his latest works had changed the lives of so many people for the better.

The feedback from his enthusiastic customers validated his design philosophy and reminded him why he fell in love with mech design.

Becoming a mech designer was not just about combining advanced technologies into an awesome war machine.

To Ves, the profession was all about satisfying the people that he had dedicated his life to serve.

No matter how weak or disadvantaged they may be, Ves believed in principle that he could always offer them a product to better their lives.

He above any other mech designer had lived up to this aspiration by being the first to break the genetic aptitude tyranny!

Ves had actually begun to feel a little more depressed and wary towards the existence of Carmine mechs.

After all, his mother and the Beast of Fear were convinced that unleashing Carmine mechs onto the humans of the Milky Way would cause their society to plunge into chaos and anarchy!

While Ves wanted to refute this assumption and argue that his Carmine mechs would lead to a rise in strength and prosperity, he could not defeat the wisdom of the two True Gods.

The Milky Way was much different from the Red Ocean. His own analysis of the situation of original humanity also supported the conclusion that giving Carmine mechs to its masses would light up the spark that detonated the powder keg.

Given these predictions, was it any surprise that Ves began to see his Carmine mechs as a curse upon humans rather than a blessing?

Therefore, Ves actually drew a lot of encouragement from the feedback of all of the customers from the Red Ocean.

"Carmine mechs can still be a force of good" Ves asserted to himself. "At least red humanity has urgent need for them. I can't say the same for humans in the Milky Way, but they will ultimately come to terms with my works as well."

Once Carmine mechs became available, it was impossible for all of the norms in the old galaxy to give them up. Ves felt very much as if he was Pandora who was about to open up a box.

Opening the box meant unleashing great evils to a galaxy that was unprepared to absorb so many shocks, but it also meant granting the people hope for a better future.

Mechs were not inherently good or evil. They were products that could produce great changes in the hands of people.

It was up to the owners and pilots of those machines to decide how they wanted to make use of the power of mechs.

This was why a lot of people in the Red Ocean had taken the time to send him letters filled with praise.

It would also be why the people of the Milky Way would probably blame him for everything bad that may unfold in the coming years.

Ves found it difficult to accept this duality.

He could accept becoming a celebrated leader and role model among the people he served.

He could reluctantly accept becoming a hated war criminal among the people who suffered at the hands of his products.

If he only held one of these identities, then his life would remain simple and straightforward. His design philosophy would retain its clarity and give Ves a clear direction to navigate towards.

However, if he held both identities at the same time, his mech designs would have vastly different meanings in two completely separate societies.

How could he keep his design philosophy coherent if he had to cater to the needs of two substantially different customers at the same time?

Ves already felt tempted to focus solely on meeting the demands of red humanity while relegating original humanity as his test subjects.

It was the most convenient approach to take. By ceasing to care about the demands and wellbeing of the humans of the Milky Way, he would have no qualms about throwing highly experimental mechs into their lap.

He could realize many of the controversial and outright illegal mech concepts and design applications that he had accumulated over the years!

It didn't matter if his experiments failed in the most catastrophic manner. All of the ones that got hurt were inconsequential humans from a galaxy he no longer cared about anymore.

A failed experiment still yielded useful empirical data. It was not uncommon for Senior and Master Mech Designers to endure over a hundred continuous failed experiments just to chase after a critical success.

They were only being held back by their own morality and the prevailing laws that constrained their options.

Ves had an opportunity to cast off these troublesome restraints and freely conduct any dangerous experiment that he liked with the people of the Milky Way! While Ves had to account for failure, it would be better if his experimental mechs yielded good results.

A successful experiment granted Ves another useful design application that he could responsibly apply to his much more important products reserved for red humanity!

This sounded like the perfect setup, yet... Ves refused to sink to this depth and treat all of original humanity as his test subjects.

The primary reason why he rejected this easy solution was because he made a promise to Master Willix.

In light of all of the assistance and favors she provided to him, it was reasonable for Ves to respect her earnest plea to be merciful to the humans who resided in the Milky

Way.

Besides, Ves agreed with Master Willix that mech designers needed to uphold certain universal standards not because he cared all that much about original humans, but because mech designers needed to be better.

As Ves grappled with his conflicting feelings, the Bluejay Fleet arrived in the Reticula Corein System situated in the Torald Middle Zone.

Ves originally planned to return to New Constantinople straight away, but then he figured there was no urgent reason for him to reunite with his family as soon as

possible.

The Larkinson Biotech Institute had assumed more and more responsibilities, so it was well worth the effort for him to step aboard the Dragon's Den and discuss various strategically important biotech research initiatives.

It was actually quite risky to travel to this destination. The fourth and fifth defensive bands were located quite close to the Reticula Corcin System.

This made it possible for the native aliens to bypass the string of fortified star systems

and directly launch an assault on this star system.

The probability of this happening was low, though. There was nothing particularly worthwhile to raid or attack in this region of space.

Reticula Corein V had gained a bit of strategic significance to the Larkinson Clan, but the only structures built on the surface were devoted to the harvesting of Solus Gas.

It didn't matter if all of the structures got lost or destroyed. It should be easy enough for the Larkinsons assigned to work on the surface to evacuate from the planet and

leave the star system.

When the Bluejay Fleet relied on the superdrives equipped by every modern RA and RF warship to speedily arrive in orbit of Reticula Corein V, it soon became clear that the mining operation on the surface had expanded by a considerable margin.

After the fall of the Emperor Tree, the Larkinsons had chosen to shift the assets of Chimera Base to the newer Emperor Base.

Built on top of one of the dozens of major Solus Gas deposits of the planet, Ves did not

know how much of the exotic substance that the Larkinson Clan managed to collect

from this strategic site.

It should be more than enough to satisfy the demand of every high-ranking mech built

for the Larkinson Clan.

However, Ves did not think the quantity was enough to incorporate Solus Gas into every mass produced mech built for the Larkinson Army.

A finite reserve of Solus Gas would run out sooner or later no matter how much of it

had fallen into the hands of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves did not even know how much gas could be harvested from Reticula Corein V before the untamed planet ally exhausted its supply.

He feared that there was no other planet in the Red Ocean that possessed the rare conditions to produce Solus Gas in the environment.

Ves did not want to deal with another Unending alloy situation where his reliance on

a rare and difficult to procure material would force him to resort to inferior

substitutes when he exhausted his original stockpile.

This was one of the reasons why the Dragon's Den remained in orbit of Reticula Corein V despite the growing risks of residing in this middle zone.

If Ves wanted to make permanent use of Solus Gas, then his researchers had to

uncover the source and more ideally the method of reproduction of this strategic material.

When the Bluejay Fleet finally came close to the small fleet that surrounded the Dragon's Den, Ves, Lucky and his Apocalypse Wardens teleported over to the bioresearch ship.

"Welcome back to the Dragon's Den, Patriarch." Vice Director Maria Abselon bowed in

greeting.

Ves nodded in acknowledgement of the former Terran bioresearcher and took a look around the interior of the ship.

He grew more and more dissatisfied with what he saw.

After spending a lot of time aboard a first-class warship and visiting an extremely developed central star node, he became dissatisfied that much of the Larkinson Clan's most important research projects took place within an outdated second-class

research vessel.

"How old is this ship?"

"She was commissioned 23 years ago on the date we acquired her from the Life

Research Association." The vice director responded. "More than a decade has passed since that time. As far as starships are concerned, this vessel can easily persist for a century without requiring any major overhauls. Her maintenance has always been good, and her organic components require less care and attention as they are

self-repairing."

"That sounds good, but I think that the LBI needs a new home. As useful as the Dragon's Den has proven over the years, she is still a second-class starship. I think it is safe to say that if you want to speed up your research projects and conduct more

high-end studies, you and your research teams need access to first-class laboratories that are equipped with much more powerful instruments. I don't want you guys to become bottlenecked by the inferior facilities of this serviceable but ultimately

outdated research ship."

The Vice director responded with a modest smile. "To be honest, I would deeply appreciate it if you can give us access to better research facilities. It is true that the labs on this ships are limited compared to the much better facilities that I used to have access to back when I was working for Terran employers. Our second-class researchers do not mind so much, but it has become difficult to satisfy the first-class

biotech researchers that we have hired in growing numbers. We are able to satisfy dozens of them by transferring them to the well-equipped biotech research facilities built underneath Diandi Base, but they are ultimately limited in scale. We need access to a first-class full-sized research facility to work at our best. It would be best if the facility was mobile in the same manner as the Dragon's Den, but I do not dare to issue this request as there is a severe shortage of capital ships."

Chapter 6483 Engineering the Descendants of the Larkinson Clan

Ves visited the Dragon's Den for many reasons, but his first concern was the work facilities.

The Larkinson Biotech Institute had become more and more important over the years. It had constantly increased in scope and importance, but the Dragon's Den had failed to keep up with this growth.

As Ves toured the interior of the capital research vessel, he could observe plenty of signs of upgrades, yet there were limitations to everything. The Dragon's Den clearly needed to spend at least a year in an orbital drydock in order to undergo a

comprehensive overhaul.

That was clearly a waste of time. The Larkinson Clan was better off buying or commissioning the construction of a brand new bioresearch ship.

Ves vastly preferred the latter solution, but twas unlikely that he could convince any shipyard to accept this order.

The Red War raised the priority of military vessels so much that it was criminal to waste valuable shipbuilding capacity on a non-essential research vessel.

Ves could forget about commissioning a replacement hull or overhauling the Dragon's

Den.

Ves actually owned two orbital shipyards himself, but Starfarer Bay and the E-66 Experimental Yard were both too small to accommodate a 3.3 kilometer-long capital ship.

Vice Director Maria Abselon shook her head. "I can understand the importance of keeping our most sensitive research activities contained aboard a starship that is fully under our control. Not only can we minimize potential leaks, but also avoid massive losses stemming from an inability to fully evacuate a fixed research site that has come under attack. It is just that the intensification of the Red War makes it risky to set up fixed research sites."

This was the reason why Ves still chose to drag his feet with regards to the construction of planetary settlements.

He did not want to invest a huge amount of resources into so much real estate, only for an alien fleet to swoop into orbit and bombard all of the buildup into smithereens.

However, just because he was afraid of putting all of his eggs in one basket did not mean he was completely opposed to setting up small-scale labs.

"I think we need to bow down to reality and make a compromise decision." Ves spoke. "The LBI should construct a dozen or so new research labs on various different planets, preferably in the upper zones. I am aware that it will be difficult to guarantee security and confidentiality by doing this, but we can limit the scope and priority of their research activity to minimize any potential damage. If that is not enough, we can always invest into expanding the facilities of these planetary research complexes. What do you think?"

The female biotech director furrowed her brows. "It sounds fine in theory, but it is difficult to conduct large-scale research if all of the assignments are split up and assigned to different research labs. It is also difficult to keep the egos of different star researchers in check. There is great convenience in keeping every related research activity under a single roof. Communication over the galactic net is insecure, so we may need to resort to transferring valuable research materials as well as encrypted data containers in order to share progress with each other. It is a logistical and managerial nightmare."

"But it can be done, right?"

"Perhaps..." Maria Abselon reluctantly said. "Do not expect it to work well in the initial years. We will suffer many teething problems as we slowly transition to a more decentralized form of conducting research. However, I suppose it works well to safeguard the Larkinson Biotech Institute against alien invasions, sabotage, terrorist attacks and other potential disasters. In a time of war, the most secure option is not the most efficient, but it is the least prone to suffering ruinous losses. If you believe that human-occupied space will become much less secure in the future, then I have no objections to transitioning to a more decentralized approach."

Ves gave the woman a rueful smile even as he continued to tour the Dragon's Den. "I can't say too much, but let me just say that I do not expect stability in the new frontier to rise anytime soon. I would like to think that no one is stupid enough to launch an attack on the assets of my clan, but who knows what people will do in the future. By the way, where is the LBI currently conducting meaningful research?"

"Aside from the Dragon's Den where we conduct most of our core research, we have also established somewhat sizable research labs on the surface of Davute VII, Ocanon VI and most recently Reticula Corein V, which is down below." The woman replied. "That is way too few." Ves shook his head in disappointment. "We are putting too many eggs in the Dragon's Den. If any enemy manages to sneak up and take out this ship, the LBI will mostly be ruined. The research teams assigned to those planets are probably too few to take over all of the research. They probably

won't be able to retrieve all of the confidential research data and valuable materials stored inside this ship. I can't tolerate such a vulnerability anymore."

The two leaders quickly discussed how the Larkinson Biotech Institute should invest in a lot of labs on various safe and secure first-class planets.

"You are asking for much, sir. Many first-class planets have developed so rapidly that they are running out of land and real estate. This problem is especially egregious in the hinterland of human space. Prices have inflated to a ridiculous degree, and in many cases you cannot buy any land or structure no matter how much money you

wave in front of people."

Ves smirked. "That may be true in the case of ordinary people, but we are different, remember? I am the Father of Carmine Mechs as well as the head of the Upper Council of the Red Collective. My clout has grown so much that I can probably negotiate deals with the governors of those highly developed planets. I do not think that any of those groups will refuse the olive branches that I extend."

The vice director thought for moment. "That is true. I did not yet account for the latest changes. That is an error. It is difficult for me to estimate how much your clout is able to help us obtain additional footholds in the upper zones located in the rear, but if you are able to achieve results, then this will help us enormously. It becomes much easier to hire experienced and more qualified biotech researchers if we are able to offer them job positions at research labs located in these safe havens. However, everyone is aware of this, so it will not be easy to form the necessary agreements." "We shall see. For now, please coordinate with my personal assistant on this matter. It is best if you can get this done without my direct intervention. If necessary, I can step in and help you conclude the deals, but I don't want to waste too much time on this. We urgently need to expand the LBI's research capacity as my demands have grown

larger."

The Larkinson Biotech Institute was in urgent need to expand both its high-end research facilities and its research teams. The vice director enthusiastically agreed to cooperate and do much of the hard work required to set up all of the additional labs. After the two talked about expansion for a time, they finally entered one of the research wings of the Dragon's Den.

"What kind of research are you conducting here?" Ves inquired.

"This is the Human Genetics Division. It is here that we conduct R&D on genetic modification of the human genome. We have developed dozens of Larkinson-exclusive genetic augmentations. We have also developed our own designer baby formulas. One of them has proven to be highly popular, but also expensive in terms of Larkinson

merits."

The vice director guided Ves to a research lab that clearly conducted research into designer babies. The woman accessed a terminal and called up a research document that offered a comprehensive description of a successful result.

The designer babies developed by the LBI was originally based on the research that the Larkinson Clan bought from the Gemini Family.

As controversial as this family's practices may be, the Geminis most definitely knew their way around human genetics.

The LBI's geneticists and other relevant specialists managed to build upon this existing base and slowly master more and more competences.

"This is one of our recent but also popular results that we have achieved in cooperation with the T institute. We have developed a designer baby formula that should allow for the conception of a fetus that has integrated a small companion spirit seed at the start. We have discovered that the sooner we integrate the companion spirit, the more time it has to grow into maturity, just as is the case with your children. This should significantly improve their cultivation talents, making them more suitable to practice not one but two methods at the same time. Now, we can bestow this advantage to any descendant to the Larkinson Clan as long as their parents are

willing to invest the necessary Larkinson merits."

Ves looked impressed. Compared to the dangerous spiritual operations that he conducted on his then-unborn children in the past, this systematic approach sounded

a lot safer and more reliable!

While the potency of the results might not be as great, that did not matter as the

young children and their immature companion spirits would have plenty of time to grow into their power!

"I am impressed." He admitted. "Has this formula been verified? What is needed to impart a designer baby with a companion spirit?"

"We have not yet conducted any longitudinal studies as not enough time has passed for us to collect the necessary data. However, our geneticists and other experts are quite optimistic about the outcome, so much so that we have begun to accept volunteers who are willing to raise such children at a discount in Larkinson merits. Forming a designer baby with a companion spirit seed is not too difficult. The genes are not the most important components. It is the companion spirit fruit that we have pulped and inserted in the cultivation tank at the moment of forming the first biological cells of the new baby."

The procedure sounded incredibly crude compared to all of the technological sophistication that went into forming a designer baby, but as long as it worked, Ves

didn't care.

"Companion spirits can make our Larkinsons a lot more powerful. That said, we cannot hand them over to every clansman for free. They need to work hard and prove they earn the right to obtain them for themselves or pass them onto their offspring"

Maria Abselon nodded. "We have no objections to that principle, sir. The cost of this special designer baby formula is still steep even taking the current discount into account. Enough mech pilots and high-ranking members of our clan should have accrued enough Larkinson merits to afford this service. The most successful Larkinsons are able to help their next generation start off on a stronger footing." There was an implicit warning about aristocracies and suppression of the lower-ranking members, but Ves could do little about this inevitable trend. Even in a meritocracy, the descendants of the rich and wealthy had much better

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As long as the Larkinson Clan had enough rules and policies in place to properly reward the clansmen as long as they performed well, it should be enough to keep social mobility at an acceptable level.

The clan was not old enough for Ves to worry too much about this problem. There was still a lot of room for promotions.

Ves began to rub his hairless chin in thought. "I have a few ideas on the development of subsequent designer baby formulas. Transhumanism and posthumanism have both become ascendant. We need to make sure we can keep up with the competition, or else we will fall behind in the long run."

"What do you have in mind, sir?"

"Do you think it is possible to embed a cultivation method into our designer babies?"

Can we make it so that they can start to cultivate right when they are still inside the wombs of their mothers?"

"...I cannot respond to that question."

Chapter 6484 Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Methods

While Ves occupied his time by inspecting the Larkinson Biotech Institute and its many research initiatives, the Red Tide Offensive continued to batter against the defenses of red humanity.

After more than 6 months of continuous fighting, the defenders had endured an enormous amount of tempering.

Many brave and dutiful soldiers had died, but more had risen from the ranks of mediocrity and managed to embark on the path of godhood!

Expert candidates broke through in droves. The high intensity of combat, though brutal, provided excellent stimulation. The more the mech pilots around them died, the more the survivors fought to preserve their own lives as well as causes greater than themselves!

Compared to previous conflicts, the rate of breakthroughs at nearly every level multiplied by several times.

Years-long exposure to exotic radiation finally started to show results as many people who previously lacked the 'talent' to step onto the path of godhood finally gained an opportunity to surpass the extraordinary threshold.

Among them were many mech pilots who already satisfied all of the other qualifications a long time ago. They were highly disciplined, they were perfectly able to control their fear and they invested a lot of emotions in their respective causes. The only factor that held them back all of these years was their lacking spirituality, but now that constant exposure to E energy radiation made up for this shortcoming, they finally began to break through in large numbers throughout the Red Tide Offensive! The explosion of expert candidates was one of the many reasons why red humanity managed to hold onto their remaining fortified star systems.

The Red Cabal and the alien empires that operated under its direction continued to throw raiding fleets and assault fleets at the frontlines with very little regard for consumption.

Although the native aliens definitely began to experience an escalating degree of strain due to all of the losses they suffered, the enemies gritted their teeth and persisted in their effort to send so many troops and warships to their graves in the hopes of finally breaking past the defenses of red humanity!

Nobody was able to count the amount of human and alien lives that had died among the stars. Frozen blood had spread in every direction and far too many pieces of debris were left to float in the darkness of space as the salvagers began to grow picky about their yield.

Among the frozen corpses and shattered chunks of metal, mechs and phasefighters continued to collide against each other as if there was no escape.

Alien warships bombarded the titan shields of orbital fortresses. The highly resilient space stations weathered the blows with difficulty and struck back with just as much ferocity with the power of their warship-grade gun batteries.

A symphony of death and destruction unfolded in strategic locations such as the Viola Magnifica System.

There were a limited number of port systems in the Torald Middle Zone. As red humanity continually lost possession of them, it became more and more difficult to maintain safe and efficient supply lines.

Human starships were able to travel much faster and more directly to port systems. Their FTL drives were able to dial in their coordinates from a much further distance, thereby not only saving them a lot of time, but also reducing the probability of enemy interception.

Port systems therefore not only served as excellent logistical hubs, but also served as an excellent location to draw and redirect reinforcements.

The fall of a port system usually meant that all nearby fortified star systems became a lot more vulnerable!

This was not just because the native aliens could direct more of their available assets to assault their other targets, but because the loss of a port system significantly slowed down the arrival of reinforcements.

This was quite fatal to the defending humans. They were so badly outnumbered that they had to maximize the few advantages they retained.

Not only did the humans rely a lot on their defensive posture, but also managed their logistics carefully.

Alien logistics was a mess. The thirteen alien races, of which not all participated in the current war, only reluctantly fought alongside each other. They were rational enough to understand the need to unite against a common enemy for the most part, but that did not mean that they could erase racial grievances going back tens if not hundreds of millenia!

In practice, every race had to handle their own logistical needs. There was a limited degree of trade and commerce at the star systems that the aliens designated as staging points, but it was impossible for the orphans of the war to rely on others to ship the supplies they needed to wage war on a galactic scale.

In contrast, red humanity managed their logistics a lot better. As divided as the major human players may be, their common identity was much stronger on account of belonging to the same race that had all suffered the same misfortune.

Even as the temporary removal of Bridgehead One disrupted the war machine of human civilization in the Red Ocean, the remaining central star nodes quickly compensated for the absence and made sure that everything ran as smoothly as before.

As long as the port systems still remained standing, their associated defensive bands would largely remain firm in the face of persistent alien attacks.

It did not matter too much if the native aliens managed to overrun the defensive locations around them. So long as the port systems remained standing, the continuous influx of mech forces, auxiliary fleets and essential supplies barely kept the defenders alive and in an adequate fighting condition.

They could even branch out and repel the alien forces that had just conquered a star system previously held by humans!

Yet these counter attacks were all too rare and only really happened after an errant. god pilot passed by to cleanse the local alien infection.

Aside from these rare bright spots, humans had continuously lost ground during the

Red Tide Offensive.

The continuous setbacks suffered by red humanity had made it harder for the soldiers

to keep up morale.

While the bravest and most determined among them still found ways to excel as long as they managed to stay alive, many other soldiers could not help but begin to feel as

if their situation was doomed from the start.

The aliens possessed too many numbers. Even the most ignorant mech pilot could guess that the native aliens could still throw ten times more warships at red humanity

if they wanted.

However, the events that recently took place in the Sapphire of the Red Ocean had given the defenders numerous reasons to regain their optimism for the future. The people in the rear had not

been wasting their time. The historic unveiling of Carmine mechs, the founding of the Red Collective and the unveiling of the Oblivion Gates all gave the human soldiers hope that their sacrifices were meaningful.

Aside from renewing everyone's hope and confidence, many of the announcements did not have an immediate effect on the situation at the frontlines.

After all, what did Carmine mechs have to do with all of the existing mech pilots and

other servicemen assigned to many different positions?

There was no immediate benefit to switching careers. Mechs still needed to be serviced. Orbital fortresses still needed to be manned by specialists. Starships still needed to be managed by officers.

It was irresponsible for them to abandon their vital posts just to indulge in their childish mech piloting fantasies.

Even if former mech technicians, space station personnel or starfighter pilots fought

hard to switch over to piloting Carmine mechs, their lack of training meant that they had to spend precious years training the necessary skills to become useful on the

battlefield.

That was unacceptable.

The people fighting at the frontlines could only hope that the groups in the rear rushed the training of Carmine mech pilots as quickly as possible in order to relieve

the pressure.

Yet even that would take at least 2 years.

The news about the Oblivion Gates also did not impress the soldiers all that much. Once they got over the excitement of regaining contact with the Milky Way, they quickly understood that the precious trade goods had no direct effect on their own

circumstances.

What high-level resources got swapped between the galaxies would mostly benefit the god pilots and other bigshots. That might make red humanity a little stronger, but the changes weren't tangible enough for the soldiers that were fighting in the trenches.

The lack of transparency did not help matters either. Nobody knew what the Evolution Witch obtained from the Milky Way and whether any of it would flow in their

direction.

The only solid piece of information they received was that the Evolution Witch intended to use much of the imported resources to upgrade the Red Oblivion Gate.

In the end, it was the Red Collective that had the most direct and immediate impact on

the lives of the people fighting at the front.

The year-long preparation enabled the Red Collective to start off on a strong footing. Even if most of the departments under the new superorganization sounded as if they had nothing to do with the lives of ordinary people, there was one institution in

particular that no human could ignore.

The Repository managed by the Cultivation Method Department had quickly become one of the most popular virtual portals visited by both civilians and soldiers. Just the fact that many qi and body cultivation methods were able to extend their

lifespans was enough to lure even the most skeptical individuals into trying out the extensive free selection!

As mech pilots began to explore what was available, they quickly learned that there was a special category of cultivation methods that were specifically designed for their

profession.

"What are these 'auxiliary qi cultivation methods'?"

"It is not advisable for mech pilots to practice normal qi cultivation methods, especially the more advanced and complicated ones. There is a risk that practicing them will cause you to evolve into a superhuman that has gained impressive powers, but also closes the door to transforming your willpower. You can still choose to practice them if you think you have no hope of triggering your apotheosis, but if you have any desire to become an expert pilot one day, take all of the warnings seriously and do not make a careless selection." "Then what am I supposed to do, then?"

"Doing nothing is a waste of E energy in the Age of Dawn. In order to give mech pilots such as yourself something useful to do, the Red Collective has compiled numerous different auxiliary qi cultivation methods. As their name suggests, they only exist to promote your evolution in a narrow scope, making sure to keep your chances of becoming stronger mech pilots intact. I highly suggest you begin by practicing the free curated cultivation methods from the Controller series. They are all geared towards beginners in cultivation and are not that difficult to practice. As long as you are diligent enough, it only takes a short time for you to gain newfound strength that will help you survive the coming battles."

"I see that there are more than a dozen different choices available. Which ones should

I choose?"

"It depends on your goals and specializations. Read the descriptions. For example, the

Healthy Controller Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method mainly focuses on extending your lifespan, increasing your physical regeneration and making your body a little tougher. This is the easiest option for mech pilots and is only really meant to be practiced by old, injured and retired veterans. Don't expect any miracles as it is just a low-difficulty free cultivation method. If you want to increase your immediate combat effectiveness, then there are many other choices that can increase your learning ability or sharpen your combat instincts. Once you have made achievements in these free methods, you should think about spending your RC merits or war merits on exchanging for a premium method."

As the curious mech pilots began to explore and try out the brand-new auxiliary qi cultivation methods, they slowly began to see the difference in as little as a week!

Chapter 6485 The Controller Series

The auxiliary qi cultivation methods devised by the Red Collective ignited a new storm within the mech community.

All of the excitement surrounding Carmine mechs seemed to have little to do with existing mech pilots.

Mech pilots had heard that mechs equipped with both a neural interface and a Carmine System could raise the effective genetic aptitude of their bonded pilots. Unfortunately, the lack of suitable machines that possessed this configuration prevented curious and eager mech pilots to verify this exciting claim in person.

It was therefore the Red Collective that increasingly occupied their attention. Unlike the Red Association that mainly focused on improving their machines, the Red Collective had worked hard to develop methods that could improve the mech pilots directly.

This alone caused almost every mech pilot to develop an immediate good impression of the Red Collective!

It helped a lot that all of the beginner cultivation methods were free to practice by anyone.

In order to speed up the progress of mech pilots that bravely fought in the frontlines, the RC made sure to invest in enough instructors that provided both virtual and in-person lessons to get them all up to speed.

A lot of mech pilots hated the idea of going back to school, but the attraction of these fancy new auxiliary qi cultivation methods was so strong that they endured the indignity of returning to their school benches.

Fortunately, learning the first chapters of the free cultivation methods was not that difficult. The Red Collective understood what mech pilots were like and deliberately limited the scope and ambition of the beginner methods in order to prioritize tangible results.

Over the course of a single week, the more talented and diligent mech pilots had already begun to notice the results of their cultivation practice.

"I feel stronger and more alive than ever!"

"This is impressive, Mr. Reyre. According to the latest physical examination, you have largely recovered from your disease. Your body cells have shown signs of rejuvenation. They are beginning to divide again. You will be feeling and looking as if you are a decade or two younger if this pattern continues for a number of months. You have made the right decision by practicing the RC's Healthy Controller Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method. Would you consent to allowing us to utilize your anonymized

data for a study? I hope to publish a paper faster than other doctors on the de-aging effect of cultivation methods."

Many old mech pilots that chose to immigrate to the Red Ocean in order to live out their retirement and spend their remaining lifespan in a different galaxy never imagined that they could become spry and healthy enough by practicing a weird form of meditation.

The Healthy Controller Method may be the simplest of the Controller Series due to lacking any components that offered a direct improvement in combat capabilities, but just the fact that people could absorb E energy to extend their lifespan and rejuvenate their cells was amazing, especially when they did not spend anything to harvest this gain!

Life-prolonging treatments no longer received any attention anymore as cultivation provided everyone with a much more convenient substitute.

The older the individual, the more concerned he was about their health and longevity.

This was why the health-oriented exercises had immediately become the most popular cultivation methods since the opening of the Repository.

It may take months or years for the practitioners to be able to extend their lifespans by just a handful of decades, but that was more than enough for people who otherwise had no alternatives!

Of course, the mech pilots that still had plenty of years left in them had little interest in wasting their time on extending their natural lifespans.

They were more liable to die on the battlefield at the hands of the native aliens!

What they needed was immediate combat power. The Repository offered numerous easily available options.

One talent that happened to make noticeable progress was a third-class light skirmisher specialist. The middle-aged mech pilot had already begun to lose his edge.

Third-raters tended to have the shortest careers as their lack of augmentations meant that they did not receive any bonuses to their lifespans.

Yet when this pilot had begun to practice the Fast Controller Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method, everything had begun to change.

The pilot along with other colleagues who practiced the same method began to experience a small boost in reaction speed and pattern recognition. Their intuition also became better at detecting lethal threats.

All in all, the mech pilots who had begun to practice the Fast Controller Method already began to enjoy the fruits of their efforts as they had managed to lower their loss rate by 15 percent!

It was amazing to see how extensive a small improvement in cultivation could

produce such a drastic result!

"Hahahah! It actually works! I knew I should have put more stock in the claims made by the RA. These cultivation methods are completely legit! My reaction speed has returned to its best state. Did I just make myself younger again by practicing this method?"

Pilots that practiced the Fast Controller Method gained more benefits than that. Their pattern recognition and instincts had already improved by a considerable margin, both of which were vital to keeping light mech pilots alive.

The native aliens fighting on the battlefield were the first to suffer from these spontaneous improvements!

Whenever the two sides began to wrestle for control over fortified star systems, the light skirmishers roaming around the flanks of the battlefield had become a lot more active than before.

Previously, these light skirmishers focused on harassing and exploitation. Their role was not to stand in the frontlines and take hits like other mechs, but instead became responsible for annoying the native aliens and persuading them to split their forces. This was a dangerous responsibility as the light mechs had to fight far away from friendly support. If they ever got in trouble, their ability to get out of it was much lower than other mech pilots.

Yet after more and more mech pilots began to practice the Fast Controller Method, their ability to swoop in and get out before the enemy phasefighters caught up to them had become a lot better.

The light skirmishers managed to make a lot of small time savings by optimizing their movements, achieving their objectives in less time and recognizing when they had overstayed their welcome.

In dogfights against alien phasefighters, the light skirmishers managed to pull off tighter maneuvers and improve their coordination with each other.

It was as if every ordinary mech pilot had become elite, and those that already performed at this level fought as if they were expert candidates

Meanwhile, other mech pilots began to show improvements in different aspects.

Those that piloted rifleman mechs and heavy artillery mechs preferred to practice the

Precise Controller Method.

This product of the Controller series mainly strengthened the pilot's precision, situational awareness and pattern recognition traits.

There were a lot of elements that were identical to the Fast Controller Method. This was not a surprise as all of the methods of the Controller System were derived from the same base. They just incorporated different combinations of 'modules' to form a

coherent nookana that directed limited resources to accential areas of impratamant

Precise Controllers gradually became slightly more accurate when they launched their attacks.

The improvements may only amount to a 5 or 6 percent increase in hit rate, but that was already a remarkable result in the early stages of systematic cultivation. The small increase in landing shots caused a lot of ripple effects. Alien phasefighters

got shot down faster, which meant that mechs got rid of the hindrances faster, thereby enabling them to tackle enemy warships a little sooner.

If the increase in hit rates doubled or tripled in the coming months, then the ranged mechs would be able to make much more drastic contributions in every battle.

It would be as if every mech force fielded twice as many ranged mechs!

Of course, there were mech pilots that did not have any use for an auxiliary qi cultivation method that increased their ranged combat prowess.

There were many different specialists who all prioritized different strengths.

The Skilled Controller Method happened to be highly favored by offensive melee mech specialists.

They were able to learn sophisticated weapon handling skills faster and also improved their instincts that could help them make the right moves before they put any conscious thought behind their actions.

The Intelligent Controller Method primarily boosted a pilot's intelligence, theoretical comprehension and data processing capabilities.

These were particularly helpful for mech pilots who got promoted up a tech class and needed to absorb a lot of knowledge related to piloting more complicated

second-class or first-class mechs.

The Intelligent Controller Method was also helpful for mech pilots who made use of support mechs that required a lot of calculations and judgment calls. This was particularly relevant for mech pilots that utilized scout mechs, ECM mechs, combat repair mechs, external shield mechs, stealth mechs and many more.

The Commanding Controller Method on the other hand focused on improving the practitioner's ability to command on the battlefield. While it provided a small boost to intelligence, it placed much more emphasis on multitasking, battlefield analysis and

leadership.

The mech officers who practiced this method did not notice any differences, but it had only been one week. They trusted the Red Collective quite a lot and were committed to persisting in their cultivation in the hopes of becoming better leaders.

Aside from these basic methods that were widely compatible with every pilot, there was also a special collection of free cultivation methods in the same series that provided more esoteric benefits.

The Elemental Controller Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Methods enabled the practitioners

to improve their comprehension and increase their affinity to a specific elemental E energy attribute.

Split into fire, water, earth, metal and wood, the instructors of the Red Collective dissuaded mech pilots from practicing these exotic methods unless they already possessed a strong preference for one of the aforementioned elements.

However, mech pilots found that they could easily check whether they possessed a talent biased towards one of the 5 'classical' elements.

The small group of mech pilots who were lucky enough to discover that they had a lot

of talent in fire or metal were able to make much faster progress in these basic elemental cultivation methods.

While their practice did not help them shoot fireballs out of their hands or promote

the growth of trees, they discovered that they were slightly able to increase the performance of the hyper technology of their mechs!

"These auxiliary cultivation methods are awesome! It's like using E energy to obtain

the power of an expert candidate or expert pilot in advance! We won't be able to catch up to high-ranking mech pilots entirely, but we can close the gap and become a lot more useful on the battlefield. Praise the Red Collective!"

This description was not hyperbole.

Most mech pilots had very little idea what traditional qi cultivators were capable of, but they possessed a better understanding of high-ranking mech pilots.

Their frame of reference was therefore oriented towards the champions of their professions.

By practicing their chosen variations of the Controller Series, every ordinary mech

pilot had an opportunity to master the power that used to be reserved for the greatest of their kind.

This greatly motivated the mech pilots! The allure of breaking the human limit and mastering strange reality-defying powers at their current stage was so strong that more and more mech pilots practiced their cultivation methods with greater fervor! Although the widespread adoption of systematic cultivation had yet to affect their breakthrough rate, the mech pilots still gained a lot more confidence in the future. Even if they never developed the extraordinary willpower needed to

trigger their apotheosis, this 'qi cultivation' business gave many mech pilots a lot of ideas. Was it possible to excel in piloting mechs in a different way? What if they ditched

their 'auxiliary' qi cultivation methods and committed fully to a proper qi cultivation method instead? Was it possible for them to become 'cultivator pilots' that combined the power of

Chapter 6486 Melkor's Alternative

The Controller Series provided tangible gains and a lot of hope for mech pilots who never managed to break through in the past.

Perhaps they lacked talent.

Perhaps they were not courageous enough.

Perhaps they did not have a greater cause worth sacrificing their lives.

Whatever the case, the amount of mech pilots who remained mundane had remained huge ever since their profession came into existence.

Part of the reason why expert pilots, ace pilots and god pilots were so revered was because only a fraction of mech pilots succeeded in attaining one or multiple breakthroughs.

This thoroughly mythologized the heroes that managed to succeed against all odds, but also left a huge amount of regular mech pilots behind.

Many of the latter were not resigned to their own mediocrity, but what else could they do? The only 'reliable' method to force a breakthrough was to throw themselves into repeated life-and-death battles, but that tended to cull everyone but the strongest of their kind.

Mech pilots who did not possess the recklessness and overconfidence to proactively seek out near-suicidal challenges had very little alternatives to become extraordinary. However, that was in the past.

For the first time since the start of the Age of Dawn, mech pilots truly began to appreciate the new possibilities that this era had to offer.

Previous introductions of hyper technology mildly impressed mech pilots, but they just treated it as another technological innovation, much like phasewater. All of the benefits went to the mechs, not necessarily the mech pilots.

Systematic cultivation changed everything.

More and more mech pilots began to experience the benefits of being able to promote their own self-evolution, all without needing to pay extravagant sums of money!

Of course, these mech pilots were still in the honeymoon phase of cultivation.

Once they had reached an advanced stage in their beginner cultivation methods, they would inevitably hit a plateau where any subsequent improvements became a lot harder to attain.

This was the moment where they needed to switch to advanced auxiliary qi cultivation methods, which provided greater benefits and additional power.

That was when the mech pilots would begin to bleed and suffer. These premium cultivated methods cost a lot of merits or other price to obtain. They were also a lot harder to learn and practice.

It was very much possible for mech pilots to waste their investment because they lacked the talent, comprehension or affinity to get started!

Even if they managed to attain initial results, it may take decades as well as regular purchases of expensive reagents in order to sustain their progress.

The life of these mech pilots would become a struggle, just like other cultivators. Only a minority would be able to overcome the successive challenges and prove their excellence at the top.

However, few people outside of the Red Collective were cognizant of this reality. It was fine for red humanity to fall in love with the promise of systematic cultivation.

For now, red humanity had yet to grapple with the reality of accessing and practicing the much more demanding advanced cultivation methods.

Most mech pilots working for ordinary organizations generally had to rely on earning enough RC merits or war merits in order to access and sustain the practice of the better options available in the Repository.

Members of the Larkinson Clan on the other hand had more convenient options available.

That was because the Larkinson Clan had earned the designation of a 'sanctioned sect', which made it legal for the Larkinsons to develop and practice their own homebrew cultivation methods.

Of course, the Larkinsons still had an obligation to submit their cultivation methods to the Red Collective for curation.

No sect was exempt from this rule.

This included the Larkinson Clan which was led by the high-and-mighty chief councilor of the Upper Council.

Ves had expressed his dissatisfaction at being forced to surrender his homework to the freeloaders over at the Red Collective, but he understood that this was for the good of red humanity.

Just as was the case with the MTA and RA, only by sharing and centralizing all professional knowledge would their society be able to develop a specific sector the fullest.

The business model of the MTA had proven its effectiveness many times over during the Age of Mechs. It was not shameful for the RC to copy the other superorganization's best practices.

Even if the Red Collective's Cultivation Method Department ended up getting copies of every sect's exclusive cultivation methods, it was still fine.

Not every cultivation scientist could imitate or reverse engineer the proprietary knowledge and theory of every single sect.

In any case, now that more than a week had passed since red humanity had become introduced to the wonders of systematic cultivation, the leaders of the Larkinson Army attended a meeting in order to familiarize themselves with the cultivation solutions developed exclusively for their own clan.

Every legion commander transferred over to the Spirit of Bentheim and attended the meeting in person.

Avatar Commander Melkor Larkinson looked particularly upbeat at this time. His eyes radiated happiness despite the fact that they were blocked by his oversized visor. "You look a lot better than before, Melkor. What has made you so much more optimistic and much less glum?" Legion Commander Hugin Cinnabar of the Battle Criers asked in a friendly manner.

Melkor saw no reason to hide the source of his newfound sense of confidence. "This cultivation business is a lifesaver to me. I... well, you know how I have tried to break through over the years. Even as many other friends and subordinates have broken through to become expert candidates and expert pilots, my willpower is still as ordinary as always. I thought that I would never have a chance to bend reality according to my thoughts. Now that the Red Collective has opened up the Repository, I tried out half a dozen of the free versions of the Controller Series, and I found I can make a lot of progress. Perhaps spending time with all of the design spirits has given me a head start in this. Or maybe it is because I have a companion spirit who can practice a separate qi cultivation method. I am already dreaming about combinations." Multiple legion commanders looked at Melkor with interest. It was not a secret that the trueblood Larkinson had been desperate to surpass the extraordinary threshold, but nothing worked over the years.

If qi cultivation could give Melkor the satisfaction of becoming a powerful mech pilot, then that was a cause to be celebrated.

An extraordinary life of staring death in the face and developing an uncompromising attitude was not for every mech pilot.

Even if Melkor understood in his heart that mastering qi cultivation would never make him as powerful as a high-ranking mech pilot at the same level, he had already reached the point of letting go of his fruitless obsession.

Sentinel Commander Sorril Larkinson smiled in encouragement. Sorrel was a trueblood officer who previously served as the aide of Casella Ingvar.

Although he was not a mech pilot and nowhere near as good at leadership as the current Saint Commander, the Living Sentinels did not necessarily need a bold leader. "I am happy for you, Melkor. Our Larkinson Clan has more advantages than others.

We have easier access to companion spirits, and I am sure that our design spirits can lend a hand as well. I even heard that the new exclusive cultivation methods are closely intertwined with some of our design spirits such as Ylvaine and the Superior

Mother"

"Watch what you are saying. The Superior Mother is not a 'design spirit. She is a Supreme, and the mother of our patriarch. She is also the Oblivion Empress, who has worked together with the valiant Evolution Witch to bridge the gap between the galaxies. There is nothing a Supreme cannot do in this universe!" Penitent Commander Valerie Chancy looked a little younger and more vibrant since the last time the legion commanders met. She had clearly made a few attainments in cultivation herself to be able to turn back the clock to this extent.

Though she had tempered her religious fervor the longer she remained a part of the Larkinson Clan, she still made outbursts like this from time to time. Nobody was crazy enough to argue with her about matters relating to her faith. "When will Ketis arrive?" Vandal Commander Abis Firelight asked as he crossed his arms. "She is late. That is usually never the case. She has always made sure to be

punctual."

Swordmaiden Commander Sendra Larkinson-Wodin raised her hand. "I think she is about to arrive. Can you feel it? One of our Saints is accompanying our swordmaster."

It was easy to distinguish the identity of the Saint as she approached the conference room. The domain of every ace pilot was unique, and the one belonging to Casella Ingvar made every Larkinson feel as if she could always lead them to victory no matter the circumstances on the battlefield,

As two more women simultaneously stepped inside the secure compartment, the swordmaster accompanied by her trusty floating greatsword still managed to maintain a strong presence while walking alongside the Saint Commander.

The legion commanders simultaneously rose to their feet in respect to Saint Casella

Ingvar. The most powerful woman in the chamber did not feel the need to issue a verbal response. Instead, she remained silent and took one of the distant side seats, signaling that she did not intend to take the lead in this meeting.

That honor was reserved for Ketis Larkinson, who received the patriarch's trust and appointment.

The Journeyman and swordmaster confidently strode to the head of the table but declined to take a seat.

Instead, her back remained ramrod straight as she opened the meeting right away. "Good morning. All of you know why you are here. The T Institute finally obtained the

certifications for all of the so-called cont certified cultivation methods that our clan

has submitted to the Cultivation Method Department of the Red Collective. Just because Ves is in charge of 149 senators doesn't mean he gets to call all of the shots. We have to follow the new rules just like everyone else. Luckily enough, the delay has been rather small. Now that we have obtained the RC's seal of approval, we can prepare to offer and teach our own exclusive cultivation methods to our clan. The most important and relevant of them are the methods that are tailored for every mech

legion of the Larkinson Army"

The legion commanders all perked up. This was what they had been looking forward

to for months. They worked together with their patriarch and the T Institute to develop the cultivation methods that would do much to strengthen the unique identities of their own military units.

Ketis knew how important this was for everyone. "Ves is apparently quite good at this,

and the scientists over at the T Institute are not bad either. The Red Collective has not rejected any of our proposed methods, which means that you can trust their craftsmanship."

That provided a lot of relief to everyone. It was not that they distrusted the works of

their own patriarch, but it was always better to obtain independent verification whenever he developed a radically new invention.

"For now, our focus rests on the auxiliary qi cultivation methods that are especially targeted towards our mech pilots. As far as I have been told, their benefits are the highest for standard mech pilots and expert candidates. If a practitioner is able to

advance to an expert pilot one day, then much of the gains will get subsumed by his or her willpower. There is little point for the demigod to practice the auxiliary qi cultivation method any further as developing your resonance strength will partially yield the same gains and more. This does not include companion spirits, which can still retain their own independent cultivation. In short, the word 'auxiliary' is there for good reasons. It is a complementary activity, not an objective in itself. If you truly want to go down further in the road of qi cultivation, then I advise you to practice one of the more dedicated options. Do you understand?"

Chapter 6487 Spirit Vessel Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method

As Ketis stood at the head of the conference table, she commanded the attention of all of the legion commanders as well as the only Saint Commander.

During the Age of Mechs and Age of Dawn, it was considered strange for mech pilots to show so much respect and deference to a norm.

Mech pilots acquired an innate sense of superiority from other people since the start of the Age of Mechs.

Their superiority did not necessarily stem from being richer or having more subordinates under their wing. Strength was not necessarily a component either as there were instances of third-class mech pilots looking down on first-class norms. The reason why mech pilots existed in a class of their own was because they believed they were the protagonists of the times.

Everyone else were side characters compared to mech pilots who possessed the sole privilege of treading the path of godhood that led to the most powerful destination of its kind.

In the face of the power of a god pilot, everything else paled in comparison, or at least that was the prevailing thought among both mech pilots and norms.

It was no surprise then that the entire population of mech pilots had ingrained this sense of superiority no matter whether they were low-ranking or high-ranking mech pilots. It was a universal trait that could not be removed even with the onset of Carmine mechs.

While the cultural changes stemming from the release of the Yellow Jacket designs did not have enough time to ferment, genetic aptitude would still play a role in distinguishing 'real' mech pilots from the imitators.

The Carmine System developed by Ves Larkinson was anything but perfect. It was amazing because it bridged a divide that no one had ever managed to cross in the past, but the bridge came with its own limitations.

Once it collapsed due to the death of a Carmine mech, the Carmine mech pilot had no other recourse left to persist in his career.

This heavy limitation was enough to preserve the most essential interests of potentates and help them maintain their innate sense of superiority during these changing times.

However, none of the mech pilots gathered in the room looked down on Ketis.

She was a rare Journeyman Mech Designer who had also proven her courage and indomitability in actual battle.

Unlike mech pilots who at least gained the assurance of having thick layers of armor between their fragile bodies and their opponents, swordswomen like Ketis could only brave dangers in ordinary clothing or a relatively flimsy suit of armor at best.

Any mech could easily smash her body apart up close or at a distance no matter what fancy sword techniques that Ketis had learned.

Perhaps that might not necessarily be the case anymore as she was technically capable of forming a Blood Pact with a Carmine mech as well, but for now she was a soldier who preferred to fight on foot.

Nobody looked down on her for that. Her indomitable willpower was proof of her courage and daring. She was the most brave mech designer to exist, even exceeding that of her much more famous mentor.

There was another difference that distinguished Ketis from Ves.

As much as he had done to help the Larkinson Clan and its diverse cast of members rise above their stations, Ves had turned into a distant political animal in the past few years.

Now that he had 'outgrown' the expeditionary fleet and had begun to schmooze with mighty god pilots and wiley high officials, Ves led the Larkinson Clan from such an immense height that he had lost his relatability.

He no longer even physically spent any time in the heart of the clan anymore. He and his immediate family had moved to New Constantinople and decided to build an entirely different first-class branch of the Larkinson Clan.

All of that was way too distant to the humble second-class clansmen left behind in the expeditionary.

While the Larkinsons remaining with the fleet did not necessarily lose their high opinions for their patriarch, their affection for their leader had made way for awe and cold respect.

Ketis on the other hand distinctly chose a different path. Despite the fact that she received invitations to undergo EdNet training or transfer to the Premier Branch, she decisively chose to remain with the Swordmaidens in the expeditionary fleet. She stuck to her roots and did not fall for the temptation of greater power and prosperity. Through her words and deeds, the swordmaster proved that her heart still lay with the Larkinsons who needed her help the most. She earnestly continued to design numerous different second-class mechs to help the Swordmaidens and occasionally other mech legions gain more powerful offensive combat options.

It was therefore no surprise that even the Saint Commander herself did not object to deferring to Ketis.

Other ace pilots may be arrogant and conceited enough to look down on everyone that was not on the same level as theirs, but Casella Ingvar respected the capabilities and contributions of those who were ostensibly weaker than herself. She wouldn't be a good mech commander if she completely disregarded the individual value of her subordinates.

In any case, Ketis had no trouble attracting everyone's attention as she began to introduce the new modes of cultivation for the Larkinson Clan.

"Starting from today, the Larkinson Clan shall add numerous different advanced cultivation methods to the Larkinson Exchange." She announced in a more formal tone than usual. "Since the development of our mech pilots is one of our highest priorities, the first batch of sect certified cultivation methods will largely consist of exclusive auxiliary qi cultivation methods that are exclusive to every mech legion. This will serve as the foundation to the Larkinson Army's differentiation and growth in strength." Commander Melkor Larkinson briefly raised his hand. "What do you mean by differentiation exactly, ma'am?"

Ketis' eyes glinted as she began to grin. "A mech force in the Age of Mechs is different from a mech force in the Age of Dawn. The mechs have changed, but not that much. A swordsman mech is still a swordsman mech even if it is integrated with hyper technology. What truly makes a difference is systematic cultivation. The mech pilots can choose to invest their time on practicing all kinds of methods that have a wide variety of effects. We will not be the only force to do this. There are many advanced auxiliary qi cultivation methods available in the Repository, and there are also many 'sects' that are in the process of developing their own approaches."

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar understood what the swordmaster was trying to

convey.

"The effects of systematic cultivation on mech pilots is often described as obtaining the power of an expert candidate or expert pilot in advance!" The powerful woman commented. "Many expert pilots develop unique abilities that align with their personalities and approach towards combat. Tusa has gained unnaturally good evasion abilities. Davia Stark never misses a shot no matter the difficulty. Dise is the best sword wielder by far among all of our expert pilots. Even Vincent Ricklin is able to punch harder when his ego swells in his head. With the help of the right auxiliary cultivation methods, hundreds of not thousands of mech pilots can develop identical abilities. Imagine how that would change our mech legions."

"The gap... between standard mech pilots and expert pilots will shrink." Commander Sendra of the Swordmaidens whispered.

It was only now that the implications truly sunk in. The legion commanders all understood how powerful their mech units would become if their subordinates all made a lot of progress in cultivating the advanced methods that Ketis was about to

introduce.

The more powerful the cultivation methods, the greater the power at their disposal!

Every legion commander therefore gazed at the swordmaster with great eagerness. Their expectations glowed through their eyes as they welcomed any development that could strengthen the Larkinsons!

The Larkinson Army may have fared better than most mech forces during the Red Tide Offensive, but even the Larkinsons could not avoid painful sacrifices.

No matter how weird systematic cultivation could be, the mech pilots could not afford

to reject a magical means of growing stronger.

Seeing that everyone developed the right attitude towards this subject, Ketis

continued her introduction.

"As far as our Larkinson-exclusive methods are concerned, we will not bother with developing any low-difficulty introductory methods. The Controller Series developed by the Red Collective is freely available and does everything we need. The ceiling may be low and the scope of improvement may be limited, but the safety and steady progress promised by this series makes it excellent for building up a good foundation. Far more people have worked on these auxiliary cultivation methods than the amount of researchers working for the T Institute. We may as well not bother in the first

place." This was an understandable policy decision. While it prevented the Larkinson Clan from developing a large amount of expertise and practical knowledge on developing basic cultivation methods, the T Institute already had its hands full with more

important projects.

"Therefore, the mech pilots of the Larkinson Army are advised to wait and practice the methods of the Controller Series of their choice for as long as it takes to develop a basic foundation. The longer they stick with the basics, the easier it will be for them to get started with the advanced methods exclusive to their respective mech legions. The difficulty of the latter is much higher, so do not underestimate them. A good foundation as well as a mature companion spirit makes it several times easier to comprehend the first chapters of the methods that I am about to announce." The swordmaster proceeded to spend another minute or two on sharing common sense about cultivation

methods before she moved on to the exciting part. "With that out of the way, let me introduce you to the first method that is specifically developed for the Avatars of Myth. The Spirit Vessel Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method is moderately difficult to practice. To summarize what it does, it aims to turn the mech pilot into a suitable vessel for design spirits to channel their power through. I know the Avatars have already mastered a trick that does something similar, but its effectiveness will be drastically higher if the mech pilots have made attainments in this exclusive cultivation method."

The Avatar Commander looked enthused as he understood the potential of this

advanced cultivation method.

"Our Avatar Invocation Method has helped us defeat tough opponents while suffering

less losses than usual. Melkor said. "We have always been limited by how little we can

host the power of the design spirits that we are friendly with. If this new method can truly allow us to channel their power more effectively, then the potential is enormous. Maybe... our connection with the Golden Cat can finally be boosted to the point where we can effectively execute Ancestral Learning!"

One of the benefits of invoking the Golden Cat as opposed to other design spirits was

that she had become the repository of all of the combat skills mastered by the

Larkinsons.

That included the remarkable fighting skills of high-ranking mech pilots! Just the ability to channel a fraction of Venerable Dise's extraordinary swordsmanship or Venerable Stark's insanely precise marksmanship was a dream to many Larkinsons.

If the Avatars of Myth were able to invoke the Golden Cat more effectively, then

learning or borrowing those skills might not be impossible!

Yet their attempts almost always failed. The success rate was so low that most Avatars

no longer bothered with this dream anymore.

With the introduction of this so-called Spirit Vessel Method, Melkor had a faint feeling

that what may have been impossible in the past was no longer the case in the future. Anything was possible in the Age of Dawn!

He had to get his hands on this auxiliary qi method. He had to learn its strengths and weaknesses. He had to master it as soon as possible!

Chapter 6488 Eighty Unity Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method

The Avatars of Myth was the first mech force of the Larkinson Clan.

They took a lot of pride in that. They had started off at the same time the Larkinsons began to surpass the limitations of their old family.

Under the leadership of Ves Larkinson, the Avatars of Myth went from a fresh new mech unit with no existing baggage to a storied mech legion with a martial tradition that had been tempered over dozens of battles.

The Avatars of Myth of today was known as the original elite mech force of the Larkinson Clan.

Its story and traditions may arguably be the most boring among all of the other mech legions, but it was also able to adapt well to almost any circumstances.

The Avatars were mostly oriented towards frontal assaults, but they could also fulfill other roles due to their inherent versatility. Their mech pilots made use of offensive melee mechs, defensive melee mechs, rifleman mechs and also drone mechs in recent times.

The heavy use of the Bright Warrior Mark III model and the Fey Fianna model further increased the versatility of the Avatars. They could dynamically change their configurations and loadouts to fulfill every role. This came in particularly handy when the mech units lacked a specific capability such as ECM or search and rescue.

Commander Melkor Larkinson had led the Avatars for a long time. His relatively dull personality partially reflected on his mech legion as it never became too eccentric like the Swordmaidens of the Eye of Ylvaine.

This was not always a disadvantage. The Avatars accepted all sorts of people, up to a limit. As long as a mech pilot was skilled and disciplined enough, he or she would certainly be able to earn a spot in this elite mech legion.

Perhaps there were clansmen who accused that the Avatars of Myth had remained boring because of Melkor, but these voices were in the minority.

The Avatars fought well, and they also had their own special features.

The Avatar Invocation Method taught to every member of this mech legion was their defining technique.

While it originally started off as a failed derivation of the battle formations employed by the Swordmaidens and the Penitent Sisters, the Avatar Invocation Method had become a mainstay of the Avatars of Myth.

It was impossible to launch dramatically powerful attacks through invocation. The fusion of like-minded mech pilots that characterized proper battle formations did not occur because the Avatars were too different from each other.

What happened instead was a half-baked version that caused design spirits to connect to the minds of the Avatar mech pilots and trickle a portion of their power into them. This could produce noticeable effects, but at a much weaker scale than what could be accomplished with an actual battle formation.

However, invocation had its own advantages. The difficulty threshold was much lower, so every Avatar mech pilot could pull off during a stressful battle situation. It was not dependent on homogeneity, so it didn't matter if the mech pilots possessed different thoughts and beliefs.

More importantly, the Avatars could borrow the powers of every willing design spirit.

So long as the individual mech pilots in question developed a good enough relationship with a design spirit, he or she could fight with a part of the extraordinary powers bestowed by their chosen patron.

They could also maintain their invocations long enough to last a typical battle. They weren't at risk of getting exhausted after pulling off battle formations just once or twice. This made the Avatars a lot better at attrition warfare than the other elite mech regiments!

None of this was normal in the slightest.

In fact, it was not inaccurate to state that the Avatars of Myth already tasted a preview of what systematic cultivation was capable of. It was exactly because the Avatars wielded powers beyond the reach of mortals that Commander Melkor keenly appreciated the value of the Spirit Vessel Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method.

"Both the patriarch and my husband contributed to the development of the Spirit Vessel Method." Ketis shared an important fact. "Ves is able to channel the design spirits through himself and his design spirit quite well. Joshua and his Everchanger can do similar actions. It is with their assistance that the Spirit Vessel Method can teach other Avatar mech pilots to imitate these methods."

"That sounds impressive." Abis Firelight whistled in appreciation. "I hope my Vandals get something just as good, or else we will all become disappointed."

"The Vandals will not be neglected. You will like what I have to share later." Ketis promised to the Vandal Commander. "So what is your opinion, Commander Melkor?" "I love it already." Melkor grinned. "My Avatars will be able to complete their mission much faster and with greater confidence once they can borrow a larger proportion of the power of design spirits. Few people will think that we are bland once they see us borrowing the power of the Golden Cat to improve our skills or Qilanxo to harden our defenses during combat. My mech legion will finally be able to live up to its name."

Ketis smiled back. "It is good to hear that you think highly of it. That said, the T Institute did make sure to attach an important warning to the practitioners of the Spirit Vessel Method. Frequent exposure to design spirits can help you in battle, but also ruin your potential to ascend to an expert pilot or higher. There is a risk that mech pilots can become overly dependent on borrowing the power of one design spirit or another. If they become so reliant on this crutch to fight that they cannot properly fight anymore without this special ability, then they have become slaves to their own cultivation method. Real mech pilots must maintain their own will and confidence in their

fighting skills to retain their chance to become expert pilots one day. That is why they must not become too reliant on what they can do after practicing this new method."

Melkor frowned as he processed her words. "That is... difficult to follow. The Spirit Vessel Method is all about borrowing the power of design spirits. Are you claiming that if we make use of it, we are sabotaging our own future as high-ranking mech pilots?"

"That is one potential outcome, Melkor. This should not always be the case, or else religious mech pilots would not be able to exist. In my opinion as a swordmaster, I think it all comes down to the mech pilot's attitude towards a god or design spirit. If one of your Avatar mech pilots regularly invokes the Golden Cat to the point of wanting to slavishly devote himself to our ancestral spirit, such a pathetic soldier has lost the qualifications to transform his willpower. If your Avatar mech pilot was merely grateful and respectful towards Goldie, then he should still possess a strong enough confidence in himself to preserve his breakthrough opportunities."

The legion commander with a visor looked thoughtful. He even began to rub his stubbled chin in thought.

"The division makes sense. There is a difference between looking up at a higher existence and utterly debasing yourself before a god. Maybe it is acceptable for priests and ordinary civilians to bow down to their respective gods, but we are mech pilots. Our knees must remain unbent. Figuratively."

Though his eloquence left much to be desired, Melkor possessed enough knowledge and experience to be able to tell the difference.

This was because his mech legion had a bunch of highly talented mech pilots who nonetheless hit a wall in their growth trajectory. Bottlenecks existed, and it was not that easy to develop the mentality of a greater being than your current rank. After thorough investigations, Melkor learned that they had surrendered too much of themselves to their favorite design spirits. Such a mentality could ruin promising mech pilots if they went far enough.

Although this was an unfortunate outcome, the Larkinsons couldn't stop people from worshiping the design spirits. They could only advise the mech pilots who showed signs of falling into a pit of slavish devotion.

Seeing that Melkor understood the implications, Ketis looked pleased that she did not have to waste too much of her time on basic explanations.

"Good. Let me move on. The Living Sentinels will gain the right to practice the Eighty

mech pilots can become overly dependent on borrowing the power of one design spirit or another. If they become so reliant on this crutch to fight that they cannot properly fight anymore without this special ability, then they have become slaves to their own cultivation method. Real mech pilots must maintain their own will and confidence in their fighting skills to retain their chance to become expert pilots one day. That is why they must not become too reliant on what they can do after practicing this new method."

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"Good. Let me move on. The Living Sentinels will gain the right to practice the Eighty

and conduct the live testing ourselves. The Red Collective must have gathered information from them as well, but they have not shared too much data in return." The Living Sentinels gained their own chance to punch above their weight. They just

needed to get started with the Eighty Unity Method and practice their newly acquired skills against each other.

The Sentinels generally collected a lot of unmotivated mech pilots, but that did not

mean they had to stay this way. The excitement of being able to channel so much power and let a lucky recipient gain control over it all would be magnificent! "Are there any design spirits that can help our mech pilots execute this unity technique?" Legion Commander Sorral asked.

"Yes. Titania is closely related to the Eighty Unity Method. Her assistance can make it easier for mech pilots to pool their power together. She can also help the Living Sentinels maintain their concentration and issue warnings."

"That sounds excellent. I look forward to seeing whether this method will allow our Living Sentinels to challenge expert mechs head-on."

Chapter 6489 Large or Big

The Avatars of Myth and the Living Sentinels were fairly bland as far as mech legions were concerned.

That was not necessarily a problem as they opened their doors to all kinds of mech pilots that satisfied their minimum requirements. They just seemed a little boring compared to the more specialized mech legions.

Ketis turned to the next mech legion on her list.

"Battle Criers." She said as her attention turned to Legion Commander Hugin Cinnabar. "Up to this point, your mech legion has developed into a counter against enemy manifestations of E energy. This was mainly for contingency reasons in the past, but now that systematic cultivation is able to turn any human into a metaphysical threat, it has become more important than ever to prepare your troops to contain such enemies. The cultivation method that we have prepared for you will help you resist and negate enemy supernatural attacks. It should also help you strengthen the effect of the Godkiller heavy luminal crystal rifles equipped by the mechs of the Battle Criers. However, I should also warn you that this method comes with potential risks. There is a chance that you and your mech pilots will... reduce the likelihood of breakthroughs."

The older man's expression remained calm. "It is fine. Our patriarch is far-sighted to be able to foresee the need of a mech legion that can resist these magical powers. We have spent years preparing ourselves for this purpose. We are ready and willing to accept whatever you give us. I think it is only a matter of time before we grow more relevant. If humans like us can cultivate, then the aliens will figure it out sooner or later. I bet the cosmopolitans are already working hard to tutor those phase whales." That was a scary prospect. Systematic cultivation had already produced plenty of results this early. If the aliens started to catch up and practice their own cultivation methods, then they would become vastly more powerful than before!

"The Mental Fortress Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method is exactly what it says." Ketis explained. "All practitioners must build a fortress in their mind that is primarily geared towards defending their own minds and spirits against external manipulation. The effect should be just as good as the mental defenses bestowed by strong willpower, though it will also dull your emotions if you practice it in certain ways. Later chapters of this method will strengthen your offensive capabilities as well. You will be able to impart the power of negation in your attacks that can help you break your enemy's extraordinary effects. Since much of this is based on the power of Lufa, this cultivation method is an excellent complement to mechs and weapons that already channel his power."

Legion Commander Cinnabar looked satisfied. "That sounds exactly what we need, Swordmaster Ketis. Our Battle Criers do not need to wield exotic powers. It is already enough if we can break them with our strength."

"The power of cultivation will only become more and more common as the years go by. We will all need to rely on your strength to proactively deal with the more troublesome enemies that are as threatening as the cultivators of old. To be honest, it would be even better if we can equip you with true mechs, but the Red Association is keeping these rare machines to themselves."

"I haven't seen a single true mech since it got introduced." Commander Sendra remarked. "There isn't even any hype around these strange mechs that rely on these so-called complete neural interfaces."

"That is because systematic cultivation has not yet had time to empower so many people... and maybe aliens." Commander Melkor stated. "From what it sounds like, true mechs only exist for one purpose. Maybe they can still be used to fight against more conventional opponents, but it would be a waste for them to do so. Besides, true mechs are much harder to learn and master. Maybe we need to learn a new approach towards piloting in order to use them to their full potential."

Little was known about true mechs as they infrequently showed up in large settlements. They generally did not appear on the frontlines as their principal enemies were not present on the battlefield. Yet.

The Larkinson leaders quickly set this topic aside and focused on the other cultivation methods that Ketis was about to introduce.

"Commander Firelight, the mechs of the Flagrant Vandals all have speed and evasion in common, so your mech pilots will have the right to practice the Small Zephyr Auxiliary Qi Cultivation method. Just as its name suggests, it was made with the cooperation of Saint Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson. The Small Zephyr Method shares many similarities in that it can increase a practitioner's reaction speed, pattern recognition and intuition, but since it is an advanced cultivation method, it can go much further in the later chapters."

The Vandal Commander looked disappointed. "Is that all? Not that I am complaining. Our pilots can certainly do much if they obtain a fraction of Saint Tusa's amazing speed and evasion abilities. It just sounds... incomplete compared to the methods of the Avatars of Myth and the Living Sentinels."

"I am not finished yet." The swordmaiden grinned. "The Small Zephyr Method does more than that. It ties everything together by helping the practitioners grow their affinity towards the wind element. It is not a particularly strong effect, but those who already possess an existing bond with the wind E energy attribute will be able to progress much faster than others. At the later stages, mech pilots will

truly be able to evade attacks at almost the same effectiveness as a low-tier expert pilot. The mech needs to be able to keep up, though."

That sounded a bit better to Commander Firelight. He was not entirely sure why it was so important to develop an affinity towards wind when the Larkinsons fought most of their battles in space, but this was probably some kind of cultivator nonsense. "That is more to my liking. I am sure the rest of the Vandals will be happy with this as well. I have a question. Since this is called the 'Small Zephyr Method', is there also a corresponding 'Large Zephyr Method'?"

Ketis nodded. "It is in the works, though last. I heard the cultivation scientists over at the T Institute have not made up their minds whether to call it the Big Zephyr Method or the Large Zephyr Method. It is an ancient tradition that has gotten lost in translation or whatever. What I do know is that the follow-up cultivation method may not be an auxiliary method anymore."

"What do you mean by that, swordmaster?"

"I mentioned earlier that auxiliary methods are especially designed for mech pilots as they don't imperil their chances of becoming expert pilots or higher." The swordmaster said. "They are what our patriarch refers to as 'willpower cultivators! The boundary to expert pilot is a life-changing threshold. This is important because crossing this boundary will determine whether a person can become a willpower cultivator or qi cultivator. If a low-ranking mech pilot decides to switch from the Small Zephyr Method to the Big or Large Zephyr Method, that person has already chosen to abandon his chances to step on the traditional path of godhood in favor of becoming powerful in a different way. Since it is all systematic, there is much less dependency on luck and serendipity for breakthroughs."

This was quite an important distinction. If there was one aspect about breakthroughs that mech pilots hated, it was that there was no progress bar or any other indication whether they were close to breaking through.

This was especially a huge problem for standard mech pilots. They could only make rough and usually inaccurate estimates of how close they were based on their own

self-evaluations.

For example, Commander Melkor had times where he felt he was close to breaking through, but did not know how much further he had to push himself to become an

expert candidate.

There were also periods where he felt he had only made 5 percent progress towards triggering his breakthrough, when in reality he was closer to 50 percent or higher! The lack of information was maddening. Many more mech pilots than Melkor suffered from the same problem.

The advantage of systematic cultivation methods was that they were usually structured into multiple chapters. Every practitioner should also have much more tangible information on how much progress they have made and how far they needed to go before reaching the next stage.

In any case, the commanders present in the conference room could foresee that many Flagrant Vandals who had yet to attain much success in pushing up their willpower

may feel tempted to switch to the follow-up qi cultivation method.

"I would like to remain informed about the development of this next book."

Commander Firelight requested.

Ketis nodded. "I will pass that on to the T Institute. Do not expect to see quick progress. Figuring out the cultivation steps at the later stages becomes exponentially more difficult, especially when no one really knows what people are capable of at that point and what they need to do in order to become stronger. We may have to wait until dozens of Flagrant Vandals have completed the final chapters of the Small Zephyr Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method."

She soon moved on to introducing the next method.

"Are we next?" Swordmaiden Commander Sendra eagerly asked.

"Not quite." Ketis said. "I have a special plan in mind for my fellow Swordmaidens.

Please wait until the end. It is the Penitent Sisters that are next." Penitent Commander Valerie Chancy sat straighter as she awaited her gift.

"In cooperation with the Superior Mother, we have devised the Single Phase Mastery Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method." The Swordmaster introduced. "Penitent Sister mech pilots should choose 1 of the 6 phases of existence of hexism to master: life, death, godhood, damnation, dust and woman. The more they practice the chapters associated with a single phase, the more their affinity will align with their choice. They will develop various powers and abilities that are related to one of the phases. Every Penitent Sister can pray to the Superior Mother for guidance, but whether she will answer your doubts or lend a hand is not certain."

This was exactly what the Penitent Sisters have been dreaming for. This auxiliary cultivation method immediately conquered the Penitent Commander's heart! The former Hexer even asked a question. "Is it possible to master two or more phases of existence at a time? Many of us already have companion spirits. It should be more than possible to let each of us practice two phases at a time. Even if there are Penitent Sisters who do not have them yet, what is stopping them from practicing all 6 phases at the same time or in sequence?"

Ketis raised her palm. "Slow down. You are asking way too many questions. I do not have all of the answers, but from my understanding, it is possible for a companion spirit to master a different phase of existence, but we cannot be sure about the results. As for trying to practice multiple phases yourself without the involvement of a companion spirit, that is not recommended. Doing this at the same time will cause your domain to get confused and split. It will lose focus and prevent you from making further progress until you have reconciled the conflicting attributes somehow. It is safer to do it sequentially, but the time it takes to make progress will increase more and more as it becomes harder to incorporate new stuff. I am not the right person to answer these questions. You are better off praying to the Superior Mother for clarity" "Thank you. I shall do that. You have already provided a large amount of clarity" The Single Phase Mastery Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method had a lot of potential. It possessed greater depth than the other cultivation methods. Commander Chancy even felt that it faintly promised every practitioner to follow in the Superior Mother's footsteps!

Chapter 6490 Conflicted Ketis

Almost every mech legion received their exclusive auxiliary qi cultivation methods.

The legion commanders all felt how much care and attention the clan had devoted to their troops. The Larkinson Army served as the indispensable protectors of the Larkinson Clan.

Without the armed forces under its control, the clan would have never been able to survive all of the successive challenges and thrive to this day!

In a dwarf galaxy descending deeper into the throes of war, it became more important than ever to secure every possible advantage.

This was why all of the Larkinsons were highly receptive towards embracing mystical power.

Many mech pilots found this cultivation business to be weird, dangerous and unfamiliar. It was decidedly out of their comfort zone, and they could not help but worry about what would happen if they suffered an accident.

Mistakes related to mechs mostly caused the machines to glitch and malfunction. The mech pilots usually remained safe due to the separation between metal and flesh. Systematic cultivation did not offer this safety buffer. To cultivate was to promote their own self-evolution.

To put it in a different way, they directly tinkered with their own lives!

Nonetheless, those who fought most often against the native aliens feared systematic cultivation the least. The Larkinsons were already more accustomed to weirdness than usual, so all of these strange new methods were merely an extension of an existing pattern as far as they were concerned.

Almost all of the legion commanders were grinning at the moment. The Larkinson Clan was bound to rise even further after its clansmen began to practice the clan-exclusive cultivation methods.

The civilians and non-mech pilots could all choose from a variety of advanced qi cultivation methods. While they were not that different from the premium versions available in the Repository, they represented the future direction that the Larkinson Clan wished to take.

A future where every clansman could become extraordinary, and where the most excellent among them may have a chance to gain the power of gods one day.

As Ketis briefly indulged her own introspection before she resumed her presentation. She directed her attention towards the relatively new legion commander of the Eye of Ylvaine.

Derrick Kronon was a relatively unfamiliar figure among the leaders of the Larkinson Clan. He was a former third-rater and a former citizen of the old Ylvaine Protectorate.

That meant his background was similar to that of the former legion commander. After the now-maligned Taon Melin got exiled from the clan, the Eye of Ylvaine suffered a leadership vacuum. Derrick Kronon had little choice to step up as he was the only military officer and devout Ylvainan that could muster measure of respect among the insular Ylvainans.

Even so, it was hard for the members of the Eye of Ylvaine to lift their heads up these days. Even if they had nothing to do with Taon Melin's missteps, they still felt their honor had been tarnished by the distorted expert pilot's missteps.

Ketis thought that the Ylvainans were taking the 'betrayal' of their former leader a bit too personally.

It was difficult to shake them from their current malaise. The Ylvainans were incredibly close and tight with each other. They literally treated each other as close brothers and sisters. Their common faith and belief in the Great Prophet's words bound them together regardless of their blood.

This made it much more difficult for the Ylvainans to get over the affair. Perhaps they needed a reason to close the chapter of the past and open up a new one. The cultivation method that Ketis was about to present might be able to do the job.

"Commander Kronon." The swordmaster addressed the man with a slightly gentler tone. "The Eye of Ylvaine is still underperforming in the past half year. While your troops are fighting adequately enough that few of us have complaints about whether they are doing their duty, their heart is not entirely in the fight."

"My apologies, swordmaster. We are... coping, but it is difficult for us to move on. I have been trying to nurture the rise of new heroes that can replace our former commander's role, but it will take time to see whether they have what it takes to serve as our new exemplars."

Ketis nodded. "It is good to hear that you are pursuing a solution. Perhaps our gift may help. Our clan has devised the Temporal Vision Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method for you and your fellow Ylvainans. Compared to the other methods, it is the most difficult one to cultivate. This is mainly because it is more abstract than the others. You see, practitioners who cultivate this method much exercise and strengthen their prescience, their pattern recognition and their weapon precision. On top of that, the method also seeks to increase the practitioner's affinity towards time."

That caused multiple people to look surprised.

Time affinity!

Even if many of the gathered officers possessed a shallow understanding of systematic cultivation, they already understood that there were certain E energy attributes that were much harder to work with than others.

The time attribute ranked at the top in terms of difficulty!

It was hard for any cultivator to develop an affinity for time and be able to use that to

manipulate this highly abstract and obtuse concept.

Even Commander Derrick Kronon had an inkling that this may not entirely go smoothly. "Are you sure, ma'am?"

Ketis smiled. "Your Ylvainans will not be alone in this. The cultivation method is devised in cooperation with the Great Prophet. As long as your devoted members pray to him, he may reach out to them and give them a little help in comprehending the power of time. Of course, he is not their personal nanny or tutor. He is willing to lower the difficulty threshold, but he won't do all of the work for you. If there are Ylvainans that fail to develop any affinity to time, then they may be better off practicing one of the more general qi cultivation methods offered by our clan or the RC's Repository. Perhaps it may even be better if these mech pilots transfer to other mech legions."

Hearing that Ylvaine himself may reward its devoted worshipers with his personal guidance melted all of the Commander Kronon's concerns. The man bowed in gratitude. "Thank you. I shall make sure that all of our Ylvainan mech pilots will prove themselves worthy to receive the Great Prophet's grace."

"This is an advanced cultivation method, Kronos. It is not as easy to progress as the simple ones. You need to take into account Ylvainan mech pilots who cannot get started or who can only progress at a snail's pace. Before you develop any misunderstandings, this outcome is not necessarily due to a lack of piety and devotion to Ylvaine. Every human is different. We all possess inherent or acquired talents and inclinations. Some of your mech pilots may not be cut out for developing a relationship with time."

The Ylvaine Commander looked thoughtful at that. "I understand. We should account for failure and a possible schism between those who managed to practice the Temporal Vision Method and those who are not compatible with the scriptures. I know what I need to do to prepare our legion for the future."

There was no need for Ketis or the others to mention anything further. It was not good form to interfere with the internal situation of another mech legion. The Eye of Ylvaine needed to be able to sustain itself and solve its own problems.

Now that every mech legion got their new cultivation methods aside from the

Swordmaidens, Ketis saved the 'best' for last.

She turned to Commander Sendra Larkinson-Wodin of the Swordmaidens.

As far as legion commanders were concerned, Sendra had worked to preserve the soul

and traditions of the original sisterhood to the present day.

The mechs, the technology, the enemies and the level of prosperity had changed drastically in the last two decades, but the Swordmaidens still remained the same in

essence.

This was not just due to the efforts of Commander Sendra. Ketis, Venerable Dise and the distressingly smaller number of original Swordmaidens had gone above and beyond to keep the original blueprint of Lydia's Swordmaidens alive.

Of course, changes and adaptations could not be avoided. None of the old school Swordmaidens wanted to keep everything exactly the same. They used to live much shabbier lives in the past. What was wrong with embracing stronger mechs and making use of much better training facilities?

"Let me be honest with you all." The swordmaiden said as she began to grasp the hilt of her Bloodsinger, "I am split on the development of the Swordmaidens. A part of me wants to stick to promoting traditional swordsmanship among our fellow sisters, knowing that only a minority will be able to exceed their mortal limitations by sheer force of will. This approach towards cultivation has never been about trying to comprehend the laws of the universe or systematically building a fancy palace in your mind. True willpower cultivation is about being more stubborn than ordinary humans and trying your very best to bend the reality around you. I unambiguously believe that this is the purest and most proper approach that traditional swordsmen and swordswomen must pursue in order to stay true to themselves... and their swords." Ketis grew more animated as she spoke. She channeled her excitement into her sharp aura as well as her personal greatsword. She sounded like a

true warrior at this time. "However, I have to acknowledge that what I have learned in the past few months and years is that there is no single correct approach towards swordsmanship. I have heard vague descriptions from Ves that there is a high chance that the alien swordsmen from Messier 87 fight by harmonizing with the power of the environment rather than appropriating it by force. I can roughly understand how this works. I have even used my own insights to help with developing a few qi cultivation methods that should resemble the cultivation used by the sword-wielding natives of Messier 87,"

Her tone clearly lost a bit of fervor at the end.

"You sound upset." Saint Commander Casella Ingvar softly remarked. "What is the problem, Ketis?"

The female swordmaster sighed. "I don't like it. I don't like to turn swordsmanship into an art that is more about manipulating the power of E energy than trying to cut your enemies apart with your overwhelming willpower. A qi swordsman is too dependent on the external environment to amplify his power. That is a clear vulnerability because unlike mechs, E energy radiation is not exclusively under the warrior's control. Everyone is able to harness E energy, Willpower cultivators can even claim their sovereignty over it and deprive access to their enemies."

"So you think that setting your Swordmaidens upon the path of 'qi swordsmanship' is setting them up for failure?" Casella guessed.

"I suppose so, Casella. I know that many more Swordmaidens can become moderately

more powerful by practicing a form of qi cultivation that is compatible with their swordsmanship, but... is this what our Swordmaidens will end up as? Sure, they may become as impressive as the Apocalypse Wardens introduced during the founding ceremony, but I cannot help but feel that a strong enough sword saint or ace pilot can forcefully erase all of their tricks and completely annihilate them if desired. I do not want to lead the Swordmaidens into the wrong path and cause them to die at a greater rate due to the inherent weaknesses of their cultivation approach."

Casella gave the woman a sympathetic look. "I can understand your concerns, but do you deserve to make this choice for your sisters? They are all mature enough to be able to make their own decisions. Just tell them the pros and cons of different cultivation methods and let them decide on their own future direction. Perhaps there will be many. Swordmaidens that end up making the wrong choice, but that is life. Those that wish to wield the power to bend reality by force must be prepared to fail. Even if they end up squandering their potential, at least they tried."

