

Mech Touch 6491

Chapter 6491 Sword on the Way

Now that Ketis made a decision, she announced her intentions for the Swordmaidens. "For now, the Swordmaidens as well as the Heavensworders within our clan should practice the Preparatory Sword Adept Auxiliary Qi and Body Cultivation Method. Different from the other ones, this method not only seeks to improve a practitioner's affinity to the metal attribute, but also seeks to strengthen her fitness. A strong body often results in better swordsmanship. We have made sure it is compatible with most of the people that aspire to become better Swordmaidens or Heavensworders, but it works out better if they already possess an existing talent in the metal element."

"Why is it a preparatory method?" Commander Melkor curiously asked.

"The word 'preparatory' is included to make it clear that this is only a rudimentary method. I do not want my people to have any misunderstandings about that. Its ceiling is low and the improvement in power is relatively limited. I tried hard to improve the aspects that can increase the chances of achieving a breakthrough in willpower as opposed to the alternatives."

"Does that mean that if the Swordmaidens or Heavensworders who practice it will not be able to make any significant attainments if they fail to break through?"

"That is correct." Ketis said. "Ideally, I would like the Swordmaidens to commit to this approach. Many sisters will not be able to breakthrough despite the harsh training and sacrifices they endured, but... life isn't fair. I would rather have 10 of my sisters turn into powerful expert pilots and gain the power to protect the rest of us than have 1,000 Swordmaidens break through as sword-wielding qi cultivators. I feel we firmly need to stick to the elite approach for our sisters. What do you think, Sendra?"

The Swordmaiden Commander made a firm nod and adopted a firm if almost cruel expression.

"Your thoughts coincide with mine. Before we joined the Larkinson Clan, we endured many greater hardships than now. We have it so much easier these days, but that is not an excuse to grow soft. We cannot allow the name of the Swordmaidens to degrade. Every true sister must work hard to break their limits. There should be no complaints from them about accepting the toughest and riskiest field assignments. Whether a breakthrough occurs or not, we must not let the possibility of dying deter us from becoming stronger. As long as we commit to this course, we will eventually be able to produce enough breakthroughs to make this effort worthwhile."

This was a risky approach, but one that could pay off well. The Swordmaidens did not have as much interest in giving every sister an equal opportunity to grow stronger. They instead chose to commit to the development of future champions.

"The Preparatory Sword Adept Auxiliary Qi and Body Cultivation Method is ultimately supposed to serve as a precursor to willpower cultivation." Ketis emphasized. "There is no good reason to practice it anymore if a Swordmaiden has chosen to forgo the chance

to become an expert pilot and become a qi cultivator instead. I think it would be appropriate to transfer the sister in question to the Heavensword Mech Legion."

Commander Valerie Chancy looked intrigued. "Have you finally decided to organize the Heavensworders into a formal mech legion as opposed to letting them run around in small mech units?"

The swordmaster nodded. "They deserve to have their own mech legion long ago. I have not been in a hurry to raise it because I wanted to do it right. Previously, there was not that much that set the Swordmaidens and Heavensworders apart. These days, I think that can be changed. The Heavensword Mech Legion should be positioned as a broader and more accessible club for sword wielders. There will be a small measure of overlap with the Living Sentinels, but I do not think it should pose too much of a problem. The Heavensworders should still be fairly serious about swordsmanship."

Everyone grew thoughtful at that. This was a big step. The addition of a new mech legion demanded a lot of administrative work as well as shifting of assets and resources.

It wasn't difficult to create a new mech legion in the past, but that was because the Larkinson Clan was a lot smaller at the time.

Now that it had grown so much, every change involved a lot of work. It couldn't be helped. One of the reasons why Ketis pushed to organize the Heavensworders under a formal mech legion was because it would become even more troublesome to implement it in the future.

"Is it necessary for us to maintain two dedicated mech legions based on pure swordsmanship?" Commander Sorral Larkinson asked. "It is not as if the Avatars of Myth or my own Living Sentinels reject the recruitment of serious swordsman mech specialists. We have already absorbed a fair number of Heavensworders who cannot join the Swordmaiden Mech legion due to their gender."

"You are correct about that, Sorrel, but I can see the merits in organizing them in a single cohesive mech legion." Commander Sendra retorted. "Mech legions like yours have adopted broad and versatile mech doctrines where swordsman mechs are merely treated as offensive tools. It is different in the case of my Swordmaidens. We can do so much more with our swordsman mechs because we know them best and drill more complicated and effective tactics. Once the Heavensworders grow much more powerful with the help of qi cultivation methods, they can pull off even more stunts. To keep them within the Avatars of the Living Sentinels will only constrain them from using their best swordsmanship to the fullest. That will not happen within this new mech legion." That was a powerful argument in favor of Ketis' proposal, but it did not convince everyone.

The conference room began to play host to a mild argument and discussions about the pros and cons of forming a new mech legion.

The Avatar Commander suddenly recalled an important piece of information.

"Ketis, did you decide to push for the creation of the Heavensword Mech Legion

because of the strange self-animated sword that carved its way out of that metal sphere?"

The swordmaster glanced over at Melkor. "That is an astute observation. I was working on this proposal longer than that. Seeing the Heavensword smuggle its way into the Red Ocean has made me decide that it is better to do it now than later. I do not want to give that bossy weapon an excuse to complain that I have been dragging my feet or neglecting the former citizens of the Heavensword Association."

"I see. Will we... will we have to prepare for the arrival of the Heavensword?" Ketis paused for a few seconds as she tried to decide how to formulate her answer. "I do not wish to sound vain or arrogant, but I am almost 100 percent certain that the Heavensword is on its way for a reunion with me." She slowly stated. "I don't know why the sword chose to enter the Red Ocean at this time when it has always been content to remain in the galactic rim of the Milky Way. Whatever its motivations, as long as it does not hold any ill intentions towards us, having this weapon by our side will probably do more good than harm. It was already powerful in the Milky Way. Now that it has entered a galaxy that can feed it with F. energy every minute of the day, it is probably growing even more powerful as we speak. We may be able to take advantage of that by borrowing its power to defeat tough opponents, but I am afraid that it will try to push its own ideas onto us. No matter what, we cannot allow ourselves to become its slaves, no matter how benevolent it may appear."

The surprise transfer of the Heavensword caught Ketis off-guard and unprepared. She truly did not know how to handle this soon-to-be-developing situation.

Perhaps other people might become ecstatic at the thought of being able to stay in the same room as an impressive grand work. They would even be willing to kill their own parents just to wield such a mighty relic!

Ketis was not one of those people.

She only recognized the arrival of trouble. The Heavensword possessed a mind of its own. It was impossible for a mere swordmaster to control it in any way. Fortunately, the sword was not a complete wildcard to her. Ketis had the pleasure of wielding it or a phantom version of it years ago. That brief moment of contact and cooperation had given her a good insight into what the ancient and respectable weapon

was like.

Ketis recalled that she had become impressed by its former wielder's swordsmanship and the swordsmith's craftsmanship.

Just the thought of the Heavensword trying to impose its own ideas onto her and her fellow Larkinsons made her concerned. What if the sword wanted more from Ketis and the Larkinsons? What if it overreached and tried to take over her mech legions? Powerful relic or not, Ketis would not allow her fellow Swordmaidens and Larkinsons to become completely subservient to the intelligent sword!

"Let us leave aside the Heavensword for a different meeting. We do not know what it intends to do, why it is heading in our direction and whether it will stay with us." The swordmaster calmly said. "For now, we need to plan the adoption of systematic cultivation for every mech legion. Now that you know what your subordinates will be practicing in the future, do you have any suggestions?"

Commander Melkor raised his arm. "I do. Since there are auxiliary qi cultivation methods, there should also be proper qi cultivation methods. How much of the latter is

available?"

"Not much, to be honest." Ketis replied. "Most are still in the works. The T Institute prioritized the development of the auxiliary qi cultivation methods because of the need to enhance the combat power of all of our mech pilots first. If you, your companion spirit or anyone else wants to become

a full-time qi cultivator, our clan will gradually release more and more certified qi cultivation methods. If you are not patient enough to wait for that, you are free to spend your war merits on exchanging a premium curated cultivation method in the RC's Repository. We cannot guarantee that you can switch to practicing a Larkinson-exclusive method afterwards, though. There is a chance that you will build an irreversible foundation that cannot be removed without suffering massive consequences. Choose carefully."

That caused Melkor to frown. During the meeting, he had become more and more impressed with the possibilities offered by qi cultivation. It might not sound as powerful and absolute as becoming a high-ranking mech pilot, but he could exercise much more control by selecting which qi cultivation methods he wanted to practice.

Since Melkor happened to possess a companion spirit, he was not locked with a single

choice!

He could practice 2 qi cultivation methods at the same time in the hopes of producing impressive synergies!

Alternatively, he could also choose to have his companion spirit become a full-time qi cultivator while leaving his main self open in the hopes of breaking through one day. Even if that day never came, his powerful companion spirit might be able to make him powerful enough to satisfy his need for power, if only barely!

Other legion commanders made similar calculations. Their command responsibilities often meant that their ability to step onto the path of godhood had crashed.

For example, Swordmaiden Commander Sendra had become a lot more mellow and less eager to blindly charge forward now that she married Venerable Brutus Larkinson and became a mother.

For mech pilots and mech commanders like that, the stabler and less demanding requirements of qi cultivation was a much better fit for their current lifestyles and

outlook.

"By the way, what does our patriarch think about all of this? Does he plan on pushing Carmine mechs onto us as well?"

Chapter 6492 The Implications of Universal Transcendence

"I have spoken briefly with Ves about systematic cultivation over the galactic net." Ketis answered the last question. "He is fully supportive of any attempt to make our Larkinsons stronger. He is fond of high-ranking mech pilots, but he is also optimistic about qi cultivation. The latter will become a growing trend in our society. It is foolish to neglect it, or worse, reject it altogether. Those that commit to qi cultivation without hesitation will rapidly grow more powerful in the coming years. Our clan cannot afford to be left behind."

"Qi cultivation is not only useful for mech pilots. It is also useful for other Larkinsons." Saint Commander Casella Ingvar reminded everyone. "Our mech designers, mech technicians, tactical officers and so many more people will all become stronger, faster, smarter and be able to postpone their retirement by decades if not centuries. Baseline humans will cease to exist in any form. Everyone will become superhuman. That is not a process that we can change. The only difference is to what extent we have grown stronger. That is a process that we can control."

The logic was very clear. E energy radiation had the capacity to directly fuel qi cultivation.

It was a huge waste to let all of that energy fly past or allow the human body and spirit to passively absorb it in an inefficient manner.

Systematic cultivation turned a natural but highly wasteful process into an artificial but much more brutally efficient strengthening cycle.

A part of Ketis did not like it. Compared to the painstaking struggle of trying to hone oneself into an excellent warrior before proceeding to break that limit through

willpower alone, the more structured progression pattern of qi cultivation did not sound so challenging, at least at first.

Having read through a dozen modern qi cultivation manuals herself, Ketis found that their makers felt a compulsive need to classify and categorize everything.

Big cultivation steps got split up into multiple smaller steps. This made it easier to make steady incremental progress, but deprived the practitioner of her freedom and ability to deviate from the standard recipe.

It all seemed too precise and clinical to Ketis. It was as if they wanted to turn every qi cultivator into a precise machine. There was little room for variation and choice, which was probably one of the goals.

Less variance usually resulted in less accidents.

Perhaps she was mischaracterizing modern qi cultivation as she had very limited experience with them. The later chapters of most cultivation methods were purportedly a lot deeper and more profound.

In any case, not even Ketis could afford to ignore qi cultivation herself. She did not

necessarily need it as a Swordmaster, but she definitely needed to rely on it to remain competitive as a mech designer!

Yes, even mech designers gained access to their own forms of auxiliary qi cultivation methods.

The Red Collective already included several cultivation method series that were tailor-made for mech designers of any rank and tech level.

Ketis enjoyed the rare luxury of being able to acquire useful Skills at a reasonable effort through her access to the Mech Designer System.

However, that did not negate her need to improve her basic Attributes such as Intelligence. Becoming smarter and more creative helped enormously in all aspects of mech design. It was one of the key reasons behind Ves' overwhelming success! Unfortunately for Ketis, the System had suddenly decided to take a 1 month-long break after it decided to undergo an upgrade or whatever. She would not be able to exchange any cheap but necessary enlightenment fruits anytime soon.

This unexpected interruption served as a small wakeup call for her. It reminded her that she needed to take Ves' warning seriously about not growing overly dependent on the System's services.

Who knew whether it would disappear permanently rather than temporarily one day? Ketis finally recalled that she was doing just fine before Ves introduced the System to her. It was not difficult for her to restore her old mentality and design her mechs without thinking about what sort of System goodies could help her improve her work. With the rapid gains that she had already made in the past

year, Ketis grew more and more confident that she would be able to advance to the rank of Senior Mech Designer sooner rather than later.

She previously thought that absorbing enough knowledge to reach the standards of a Senior Mech Designer would take her the longest. It took long hours of solitary study to master all of the advanced sciences and engineering wisdom of a second-class mech designer.

The study burden was at least 10 times worse if Ketis aspired to become a first-class mech designer!

The meeting continued for half an hour. Many commanders freely raised topics and asked tricky questions about systematic cultivation. They could never be too careful, as a matter as big as this directly affected the success and survival of all of their troops.

Ketis also mentioned another important priority.

"Now that our patriarch has jumped into a high position in the Red Collective, he is able to do much more than before. It should be easier for him to obtain first-class combat. carriers, which means that our clan can also field more first-class mechs. He is currently split between recruiting existing first-class mech pilots and promoting them from the

ranks of our mech legion. The latter used to be unthinkable outside of allocating an EdNet quota to our second-class mech pilots, but this cultivation business changes everything. As long as our best and most promising mech pilots practice the Intelligent Controller Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method to a high stage, they should be smart enough to acquire the bare minimum of first-class mech piloting certifications at an accelerated timeline."

The gathered mech commanders all looked surprised.

They never thought about it, but now that Ketis mentioned it, it may actually be possible for a second-class mech pilot to become a first-class mech pilot a lot easier than before! In the past, it took millions of MTA credits, 5 to 10 years of continuous training and education and a huge amount of effort for second-raters to competently pilot a genuine first-class mech.

This was without taking the much more difficult to control first-class multipurpose mechs into account!

The leaders in the conference room gained a whole new appreciation for systematic

cultivation.

Even the weaker auxiliary qi cultivation methods opened up brand new opportunities for a huge amount of mech pilots!

The more far-sighted among them also made a connection between systematic cultivation and the New Elites Program.

The synergy between the two was incredibly strong!

The New Elites Program granted the bravest and most dutiful mech pilots of any background opportunities that were previously reserved for the wealthiest and most talented first-raters.

However, many of the goodies that mech pilots could obtain through War Exchange were not so easy to digest.

Auxiliary qi cultivation methods could help mech pilots overcome some of the hurdles in their way and rise up much faster than before, thereby allowing them to take better advantage of the benefits of the New Elites Program!

People such as Commander Melkor and Commander Sendra realized at this time that even third-class mech pilots could become first-class mech pilots as long as they worked and fought hard enough!

"Any mech pilot has a chance to qualify for the Premier Branch of the Larkinson Clan." Saint Commander Casella Ingvar noted. "Unless there are unavoidable circumstances, each of our mech pilots can earn enough merits and improve fast enough to pilot a first-class mech within a decade, if not less. What is important though is that we keep winning."

That was easier said than done, but everyone became more motivated than before.

"What about us?" Melkor asked. "What if legion commanders such as ourselves work hard and become eligible to become first-class mech pilots? Are we allowed to resign from our current positions and transfer to the Premier Branch?"

Ketis smiled. "If that is what you truly want. I do not think that Ves will mind. None of our mech legions have set up formal first-class mech units as of yet, but it is only a matter of time before that happens. If you think that you have already spent enough time leading the Avatars of Mechs, then you are free to transfer leadership to a subordinate that you trust to be able to do a good job."

"I think it may be better if we rotate leadership of the mech legions on a regular basis." The Saint Commander proposed. "None of you should hold onto your positions for an entire generation. There are advantages and disadvantages to maintaining such a long continuity, but I think it is better that the mech legions must ultimately become strong, independent institutions as opposed to your personal kingdoms."

"This is not an urgent issue at the moment. We don't know whether we will be able to

live past this year. We can discuss a solution later when we can afford to think about the long-term implications of raising the frequency of leadership shuffles. Is there anything else you would like to discuss?"

A brief pause ensued before the leader of the Penitent Sisters asked a question.

"Since all humans will undergo massive improvements with the help of systematic cultivation, I fear that the changes to our clan and society will quickly spin out of control. Yes, I am aware that the Red Collective will not sit around and let us descend into anarchy, but it is still too new to be able to enforce its laws everywhere. I don't think that our clansmen will intentionally hurt others with their newfound powers, but accidents are a different matter. Then there are others who have begun to practice all manner of cultivation methods. I think we need to bolster our security to guard against both internal and external threats."

"We are already doing that." Ketis said. "Maybe not against the threat of cultivators, but we are hardly defenseless. Our planetary branches are the most vulnerable against outside threats, but it should be easy enough for them to invest more in their defensive measures. As for potential dangers

from our own ranks... I believe that the Golden Cat is more than up to the task of warning us of any dangerous cases."

"Nyaaaaa-" Goldie communicated without bothering to manifest herself in the conference room.

That was a definite confirmation from the ancestral spirit. "What if something truly unforeseen happens?" The Peninent Commander pressed. "The Red Collective warnings reminds me of what went wrong with Taon Melin and Lanie Larkinson, Accidents can happen on the battlefield, and when mech pilots have become superhuman, their ability to damage everyone and everything around them has become much stronger than before."

"Then we need to rely on tougher means to restore order." Ketis responded. "We cannot

afford to be too reluctant to resort to force. I hope that our clan won't suffer too many of these incidents, but I can never guarantee what will happen in the future. I have learned that there is a greater chance to make mistakes when attempting to practice the more advanced and complicated qi cultivation methods. The side effects can include personality shifts, extreme mood swings, a growing propensity towards violence and so on. This is an outcome that can occur without malice or fault. Those who are more desperate to chase after power are more prone to take the wrong turn. This is not much different from mech piloting. If you want to make greater achievements in qi cultivation, then you must pay a greater price and brave greater dangers. This is also why talent is so important. If you are talented in a specific form of cultivation, you can make great achievements without making so many sacrifices."

"Is there an easy way for people to ascertain their talents, swordmaster?" "Not as far as I know. This should be a priority of the Red Collective. Just wait."

Chapter 6493 The Maturation of Ketis

Once the mech commanders of the Larkinson Clan finally wrapped up their meeting, Ketis continued to spend her time on other affairs.

She handled the administrative work that was necessary to get the ball rolling on forming the Heavensword Mech Legion.

Fortunately for everyone, the Larkinson Clan had long anticipated this need. The Heavensworders pretty much half-organized themselves since they day they volunteered to join the Larkinson Clan in order to follow the woman they thought could elevate their swordsmanship to a higher level.

Numerous notable leadership candidates had also emerged. Ketis was not in a hurry to appoint one of them to lead the Heavensword Mech Legion.

Excellent swordsmanship allowed them to gain the respect and awe of their fellow brothers and sisters, but it did not necessarily translate to superior management and battlefield leadership qualities, as she herself had learned the hard way.

Sometimes, a seemingly mediocre leader such as Avatar Commander Melkor Larkinson or Sentinel Commander Sorral Larkinson may end up as the right person for the right job.

Instead of taking risks, it may be better for an organization to build itself up at a slow but steady pace. Before trying to do anything adventurous, it was better to focus on completing the basics and build a strong foundation.

In any case, Ketis felt optimistic about the future of the Heavensword Mech Legion. Once the ancient relic sword arrived from afar, she could easily predict that the members of this new mech legion would get all fired up and become more motivated to earn glory on the battlefield.

They certainly needed it as the fighting in the Viola Magnifica System had never ceased. The native alien forces had not yet committed to a full assault in recent weeks, but they made sure to harass the outlying defensive strongholds.

From moonbases to fortified asteroids, the native alien forces persistently sought to dismantle these defensive outposts before commencing their decisive attack.

The defending humans never expected to maintain these disposable defensive assets. They only sought to delay the native aliens and create opportunities for ambushes and surprise attacks.

Half of the strategically important port system therefore descended into a period of frequent skirmishes and small-scale battles.

Although the intensity of combat was not too high, the cost to both sides was still considerable.

Precious mechs, phasefighters and occasionally warships were getting felled at a

constant rate, causing both sides to bleed precious assets that could be used to give them an edge in the upcoming battle.

Such encounters had become more frequent as of late a red humanity's strategists and tacticians had continually refined their combat approach over the past half year.

Although fighting in this way was not always optimal, it helped to limit the losses after suffering a major setback.

It also offered the participating fighters a good amount of tempering without exposing them to excessive risks.

It should not be a surprise that red humanity favored this approach in the hopes of producing more expert pilots and ace pilots.

What was strange was that the aliens occasionally showed signs of tacitly cooperating with their human opponents.

A competitive spirit had emerged between both sides. No matter what disagreements they may have with each other, neither the humans nor the aliens wanted to lose a fair fight!

Many soldiers had come to enjoy the current pattern of warfare. The risk of dying was not too great, and the battles rarely escalated to a point where they needed to stand their ground or face certain death.

Of course, the native aliens were not doing this out of the goodness of their hearts, if their physiologies even included these organs. There were times where they lulled their human opponents into a false sense of security before launching a sudden all-out attack that involved more phase lords than usual!

This was why the defenders assigned to the Viola Magnifica System could never truly let down their guard.

Swordmaster Ketis Larkinson had presided over the expeditionary fleet for a while now, and she became more and more concerned about the immediate future.

The fourth defensive band had managed to stop the native aliens from pushing any deeper for a remarkable period of time, but it was already becoming more and more

tenuous.

She intuitively felt that she wouldn't have to wait too long before it finally collapsed. Then they would have to retreat to the fifth defensive band, which was the only proper 'wall' left to keep all of the hostile raiding fleets and assault fleets out of

human-occupied space.

It was not that red humanity attempted to erect more defensive bands. There were many voices on the galactic net who accused their leaders for being stupid by not

investing resources into forming a sixth defensive band.

The problem was that it already took a huge amount of resources and logistical assets to prop up the existing defensive bands for so long.

The 1st and 2nd collapsed too soon to make any difference, but the 3rd and 4th continually managed to stand firm against relentless alien assaults due to timely and plentiful reinforcement and resupply runs.

From the perspective of human leaders, it was more cost-effective to prop up the existing defenses than to frequently erect new ones from scratch.

While that certainly ensured that humanity's current borders remained as strongly defended as before, the problem with this policy was that the more internal defenses and strongholds had badly lagged behind.

There were still the occasional strongholds and fallback points, but they were too loose and isolated from each other. Many analysts pessimistically predicted that red humanity was as good as done once the 5th defensive band got breached.

The solution to avoid this calamity therefore became very simple. Red humanity simply had to keep hold of the remaining 2 defensive bands at all cost.

This responsibility became more and more difficult to bear when Ketis and other clever and perceptive soldiers in the Viola Magnifica System smelled a grand assault on the

horizon.

The swordmaster felt more and more burdened by the responsibility of navigating the Larkinsons under her auspices through the coming ordeals.

Back when she was young, she never imaged that she would become such a worrisome

leader.

"Sharp! Sharp! Heaven! Heaven!" Her possessed Bloodsigner cried out as the greatsword bobbed up and down in the air.

"Can you feel the approach of the Heavensword?"

Sharpie, her companion spirit, apparently possessed greater sensitivity towards the relic

weapon.

"Heaven! Heaven! Heaven!"

The swordmaster sighed. The contamination of her companion spirit gave her cause for concern. What if Sharpie automatically succumbed to the authority of the

Heavensword?

All of the Heavensword Saints in the past got forcibly converted into the sword slaves of the powerful relic, and that was when the ancient weapon was still in a 'power-saving

mode'!

Now that the Heavensword had entered into a much more favorable medium-energy environment, Ketis suspected it could do way more with its endless variety of powers

than before!

What if the old blade decided to make good use of its partially rejuvenated state and take matters into its own hands?

There was nothing Ketis, Saint Commander Casella or any of the other strong combatants in the Viola Magnifica System could do to resist the grand work's actions!

Ketis started to understand why Ves felt so aggrieved whenever he interacted with the likes of the Evolution Witch.

Their 'patrons' likely harbored goodwill towards them, but that did not mean their meddling was necessarily welcome!

Both the Evolution Witch and the Heavensword were so powerful that they could ignore.

a lot of pushback. They were not confined by any normal rules and could do anything so long as they did not cross any bottom lines.

With the help of Sharpie's relations with the Heavensword, Ketis roughly estimated that the powerful self-controlled weapon would probably arrive in another week, maybe longer if it got distracted along the way.

"I wonder how the Heavensworders back in the Majestic Teal Star Sector are feeling"

Ketis mused.

The Heavensword Association were probably devastated at the loss of the sword that symbolized the second-rate state.

Fortunately, there were so many swordmasters over there that they should easily be able

to keep their traditions alive.

Ketis even guessed that the departure of the Heavensword may actually lift a burden off the state and allow its swordmasters to flourish without an overbearing presence at the

top.

The fact that the Heavensword may actually come and shift the burden onto herself and her subordinates was not a good development.

The woman kept her concerns even as she wrapped up her work related to the

Stormblade Samurai Mark II Project and proceeded to move back to her grand stateroom deep inside the Spirit of Bentheim.

Many Larkinsons greeted or saluted her with respect along the way. Ketis always made sure to take the brief amount of time to nod in acknowledgement, though she did not go further and chat with the clansmen.

Now that she had assumed the burden of leadership, Ketis became a lot more attentive

on how she presented herself and spoke to her fellow Larkinsons. She briefly paused in front of a reflective surface.

Compared to how she looked when she was young, Ketis looked so much more mature

and weathered.

Her body remained as athletic as ever. She never let up on her exercise and sword

training.

Her unnatural green hair had made way for a relatively short cut of more natural-looking

red hair.

Her slightly ornate Larkinson uniform may lack rank insignia, but still conveyed an undeniable sense of authority.

Part of this was due to a combination of Ketis' intelligent demeanor. Another part of it

was due to Sharpie's willpower. Both factors caused her demeanor to become less aggressive but no less dangerous.

As the mech designer and swordmaster continued to study her appearance, she liked

how she had managed to progress her demeanor. She shed many of the follies of her youth and managed to exude an undeniably mature and reliable temperament. This was a quality that not even Ves was able to match!

As brilliant as he had proven himself to be, there was always something about Ves that

made people think that he had become incorrigible. There was always a rebellious bone inside him that continually pushed him into making unconventional decisions.

Ketis spent a lot of years with Ves, so she certainly understood why he ended up this

way.

She could not bring herself to imitate her former mentor that closely. The more responsibilities she assumed, the more she felt the need to remain steady and avoid excessive risks.

Of course, she did not go as far as to deny her own nature.

She still grasped her Bloodsinger in her hands and boldly chose to accompany boarding

parties into disabled but not destroyed enemy warships every now and then!

Only by letting her greatsword shed actual blood would she be able to progress as a swordmaster!

Ketis still had aspirations to become a sword saint and eventually a sword god, so she insisted on participating in these boarding actions despite the vehement objections of her husband and almost every other Larkinson!

Every native alien species presented difficult challenges in boarding combat.

The orvens liked to rely on excessive firepower and traps to hinder boarders from taking over their homeships.

The nunsers were the most fun to fight against as they disdained tricks and usually liked to fight their enemies head-on, though often taking advantage of their superior mass and numbers!

The zzamayels were the most awful species that Ketis had the 'pleasure' to fight against.

The less said about the disgusting slime-like race and their horrendously sticky organic warships, the better.

While Ketis certainly appeared to grow a lot younger and wilder whenever she indulged in her need to fight with her Bloodsinger, she otherwise made a conscious effort to keep herself restrained.

There was one decisive reason why she made an effort to grow up and become more responsible.

"Mommy!" "You're back, mommy!"

Ketis smiled with genuine joy as she bent down to embrace Kirian and Mayra.

As a mother, she wanted nothing more than to raise her children and see them grow up

in front of her eyes. "I am home."

Chapter 6494 Kirian's Future Cultivation

As leaders and role models, both Ketis and her husband led busy lives.

It was difficult for them to spend enough personal time with each other, especially when the Red Tide Collective loomed over everyone's heads.

Nonetheless, neither wife nor husband refused to sacrifice their family time.

They were not always able to return to the grand stateroom and enjoy a family dinner together, but they tried to be present often enough to keep their children fulfilled.

It was only after Ketis returned home that she let down her guard. Her tough persona faded away as a matronly vibe took its place.

As a collection of bots began to deliver numerous dishes on the dining table, everyone began to take their seats and partake in their meals.

As the Larkinsons filled their stomachs, they began to chat about what they had done for the day.

One topic immediately stood out to the children.

"Everyone in school is talking about cultivation." Kirian Larkinson spoke while chewing on a piece of garlic bread. "Their moms and dads have started to grow noticeably stronger or smarter after they began to practice. We all want to cultivate as well, but the stupid Repository doesn't give us access to them. Why do we have to wait until we are 12 years old before we begin to cultivate?"

Ketis smiled in a good-natured manner. "Systematic cultivation is dangerous. Even the free methods that are deliberately designed to be easy to learn and master can lead you in the wrong direction if you make mistakes or worse, think you are better and try to make careless changes. Children as young as you and your sister are too imaginative and not calm enough to stick to instructions. It is irresponsible to let you cultivate when you are so young"

Her son couldn't accept this answer. "Eh, but when I talked to Andraste, she bragged to me that she had already been practicing a rudimentary cultivation method before the Red Collective was founded! Her father developed a method just for herself! She told me that children who obtained companion spirits don't have to wait until they are 12 before they can begin to cultivate. They can start early!"

As the children of one of the most prominent couples of the Larkinson Clan, it went without saying that both Kirian and Mayra already received their companion spirits. It was trivial for Ketis and Joshua to secure a pair of companion spirit fruits for their lovely son and daughter.

That meant that Kirian made a valid demand. The 12 year age limit set by the Red Collective had little meaning for children who developed their spiritualities in advance with the help of their companion spirits.

Every companion spirit was inherently intangible and made out of E energy. That meant that even the weakest of them possessed an inherent talent in E energy manipulation and absorption.

In other words, if a child obtained a companion spirit, they essentially possessed enough spirituality of an ordinary adult, if not more!

Venerable Joshua laughed when he heard how impatient his son had become.

"What did I tell you about trying to grow up too quickly? You are not even 10 years old yet. Slow down. Wait until you are older before deciding what you want to become. If you commit to a cultivation method too early, you will lock yourself to specific jobs. It will be too late for you to change your mind."

"I already know what I want to become!" Kirian stubbornly pushed back at his father. "I want to become a mech pilot just like you, dad! If my genetic aptitude isn't good, then I want to become a swordmaster like mom, but also become a Carmine mech pilot at the same time!"

One of the greatest gifts that Ves had given to a huge amount of children living in the Red Ocean was that he single-handedly broke the nightmare that was looming over their heads for years.

Each of them dreaded the day they turned 10 years old and went thorough the infamous genetic aptitude test.

Once the examiners put a strangely-shaped helmet onto their heads, little boys and girls would soon learn whether they were a part of the lucky 3.5 percent or the deeply unfortunate 96.5 percent of the population.

Even if they were still young, every child was clearly aware that it was much likelier for them to fall into the latter category!

That was why children were so afraid of it, to the point where they actually wished they would never grow older than 9 years old just so that they could maintain their blissful ignorance for a longer period of time!

This was why children around the age of 10 or younger cheered the loudest when Ves finally announced his historic Yellow Jacket models!

The existence of Carmine mechs and the revolutionary Carmine System permanently liberated all of these young and sensitive children from the fear of discovering that mech piloting was forever beyond their reach!

Ketis and Joshua exchanged glances with each other.

Many of these children were not quite aware that becoming a Carmine mech pilot would be tough because human society could never allow all children to pursue this career

option.

The genetic aptitude tyranny may have been cruel to the people who grew up under its reign, but it also played an important moderating function.

The development of genetic aptitude was not entirely random, but it was so uncontrollable that it may very well be the case. Neither rich or poor could influence the development of a child's genetic aptitude in any meaningful way.

This meant that there was a sense of fairness in the mech community. The rich and powerful could not monopolize the mech piloting profession. The poor had a chance to become heroes on the battlefield as long as their genetic aptitude was high enough.

All of that threatened to change once Carmine mechs became available. The limiting factor that prevented people from becoming mech pilots was not genetic aptitude, but other factors such as background and capital.

Of course, Ketis and Joshua were both powerful and wealthy enough to allow for both of their children to dedicate their lives to becoming Carmine mech pilots. They were not the ones who stood to lose in this new contest.

They were much more concerned for other parents and children. The Larkinson Clan had a need for talented and loyal mech pilots, but their demand was not high enough to accommodate every single child with a dream.

Sooner or later, the clan needed to formulate a policy that raised a lot of barriers to

prevent too many of its descendents from becoming Carmine mech pilots as opposed to

mech designers or starship personnel.

The amount of manpower required to fulfill those other responsibilities were much

greater!

It was impossible for any organization to sustain itself with mech pilots alone!

The combat power of a mech force was not decided by the amount and quality of mech pilots alone. The support structure around mech pilots was just as important. The clan needed to think carefully on which children were allowed to become Carmine mech

pilots.

"Let us wait until you are 10 years old before we decide further whether piloting mechs should be your future, Kirian." The mother said. "As for practicing a cultivation method, I will see what I can arrange for you. As far as I know, there is another reason why children under the age of 12 cannot responsibly practice cultivation. Their comprehension is usually too poor to make great achievements. You can only practice the simplest methods, and only the first chapters at that. Don't expect to make much progress unless

you are a genius."

"Aw..."

Kirian was a designer baby and had been raised under good conditions. He was not stupid, yet there was still gap between himself and a genuine monster like Andraste

Larkinson.

Both children dedicated a lot of time on practicing their swordsmanship, but Andraste's study load was much higher due to her superior capabilities.

While Ketis could afford to grant her son powerful augmentations and help him enroll in

a first-class school, she was reluctant to subject Kirian to so much pressure when he was

still so young.

Besides, if her son wanted to become a swordmaster or expert pilot so badly, developing his heart could make a much more positive difference than stuffing lots of theoretical knowledge in his head.

"The simpler auxiliary qi cultivation methods are sufficient for you." Ketis told her son. "Don't obsess too much over them. Just use them to increase your comprehension and speed up your studies. If you truly want to become a strong warrior like your father and I, then you need to be more active rather than sitting around while engaging in mental gymnastics several hours a day.

There is an inherent contradiction between qi cultivation and willpower cultivation that cannot be reconciled. You can either choose to overcome wall by chipping away at its weak points, or bashing it apart by relying on brute force. The former approach is clever and efficient. The latter approach is powerful but much more difficult to attain. It is up to you to decide which one you prefer the

most."

"I don't want to outthink my problems! I want to outfight them!" Kirian decisively spoke! "Since dad has become an expert pilot and you have become a swordmaster, there is no reason for me to be any worse. I will completely work to become a swordmaster or expert pilot myself! Hey, I just thought of something. Since I have a companion spirit, is it possible to become an expert pilot and swordmaster at the same time?!" Venerable Joshua made a noise of concern. "That sounds crazy. I don't know what will happen. As promising as it sounds, I don't think it will be easy to accommodate two different kinds of willpower in the same body. You could either become the most powerful warrior of red humanity, or you might literally split yourself apart if you can't reconcile two different but equally powerful wills. Don't mess around with things like this. Your mother is right. Cultivation becomes most dangerous when clever little munchkins like you think you can game the system."

"What if it works?! If I can really become an expert pilot and swordmaster at the same time, then I can become twice as strong as you at the same rank!" Though Ketis liked to believe her son was clever and educated enough to know that his proposal had a high chance of producing a deadly accident, she still worried whether he

would try to pull it off anyway.

Fortunately, it was anything but easy to surpass the extraordinary threshold through willpower.

Trying to do it twice in a reasonable timeframe was even less likely!

So far, Kirian was too young to possess the qualities that could trigger a breakthrough.

Ketis would rather have her son muddle around for a few decades before finally deciding on his future course as a soldier or anything else.

If he insisted on following the footsteps of his mother or father, then Ketis at least wanted him to develop only one form of extraordinary willpower.

He or his companion spirit that had not broken through in this manner could easily

increase his versatility and fault tolerance by practicing a complementary qi cultivation method.

This was the ideal cultivation plan that a worried mother had devised for her rambunctious son.

However, Ketis was afraid that if she tried to impose it on him, Kirian would just rebel and try to pull off an extreme stunt out of her sight.

"Oh Kirian..."

Raising children was never easy.

Despite the fact that Kirian had turned into a growing source of concerns, Ketis never

ceased to love her son. It was precisely because she worried so much about him that she wanted to shower him with love.

Chapter 6495 Diligent Mayra

As the family continued to partake in their dinner, Ketis eventually proceeded to shift her attention to Mayra.

Unlike her son who possessed black hair but already started to shape up into a small swordsman, her daughter lacked the sharp edge that came with training weapons and learning how to kill in the most brutally efficient way possible.

Both Ketis and Joshua were already more than satisfied with raising their son into a mighty soldier or warrior. Fighting could never be avoided in this day and age, and they wanted at least one of their children to be able to protect their loved ones by themselves.

Mayra therefore had the luxury of pursuing other career options. The mother and father therefore made deliberate choices to steer Mayra away from more violent professions and develop a liking for more peaceful and productive pursuits.

Fortunately, Mayra developed an early love for designing mechs. She deeply looked up to her mother and built up a keen interest in learning how to play around with emchs.

Just like little Marvaine, Mayra had already begun to play with Mekano sets. Although her progress was not particularly fast, the fact that she was enjoying the process of putting different parts together and trying to invent better configurations was already enough to make her parents satisfied.

"How is your progress at school, Mayra?"

"My teachers say that I am doing well. My companion spirit helps me learn and remember the study material faster. I am also getting better at calculating sums. My math teacher even allows me to study ahead and try to solve equations from the textbooks meant for older students, but it is harder for me to do so. I get stuck more often and have to skip to other problems. Can you look at my work and help me solve the most difficult problems?"

Ketis smiled indulgently at her daughter. "Math is easy and fun at first, but it can quickly get more and more complicated. If you ever get stuck, don't try to look up the answer on the galactic net or ask me how to solve it. Just go over the latest chapters of your textbooks and try to find a connection between theory and problem. As long as you think hard enough, you will figure out the answer eventually. Only by doing this over and over will you train your problem-solving skills. Mech designers have to solve hundreds of problems like this every day, and their difficulty is much harder the more sophisticated your mech becomes. If you cannot solve the low-level problems of these textbooks, you can forget about designing mechs in reality"

It was not quite fair to expect her daughter to solve problems in textbooks meant for students who were several years older than herself, but Ketis believed her precious girl was up to the task.

"Can I cultivate as well?" Mayra pleaded. "I have heard that there are many methods that can directly make you smarter. I can solve these problems much easier after I have begun my practice!"

"No. Kirian may be old enough to dip his toes into cultivation, but you are still too young. The risks are too great, companion spirit or not. Wait until you are as old as Kirian before you ask me this question again. You'll be old enough to improve your control over yourself. We will also know

much more how qi cultivation methods work with cases like yours. Right now, we still do not fully understand the positive and negative effects of cultivation in relation to children with companion spirits."

Unlike a certain infamous Larkinson Mech Designer, Ketis was not so eager to use her own children as test subjects.

The reason why she reluctantly allowed her son Kirian to practice an auxiliary qi cultivation method was because of his slightly greater age and the mental tempering that came with repeated swordsmanship practice.

Having taught Kirian herself, Ketis had already sought to mold her boy into an indomitable swordsman. This made his mentality harder and better able to resist

external shocks.

Mayra lacked this quality, so she wouldn't be able to endure as much stress. It was better for the girl to take it easy for a few years.

Ketis continued to chat with her daughter. Her lips curled in pride when she saw the shadow of herself in her daughter.

In fact, the mother felt proud of both of her son and daughter.

Kirian had taken after the swordmaster side of Ketis. The mother felt that Kirian would definitely be able to inherit her swordsmanship legacy.

The one regret that Ketis had when training Kirian into a swordsman was that he would not be able to join the Swordmaidens.

Unless he made the radical and somewhat risky decision to undergo a medical procedure that could turn him into a woman, Kirian would not be able to join the Swordmaidens.

Ketis did not really feel upset about this. She would have insisted on bearing another daughter if she deeply wanted to dedicate an offspring to the Swordmaiden Mech legion.

The truth was that she never felt a strong urge to do so. To Ketis, the Swordmaidens was a sisterhood. Every member of this elite and highly offense-oriented mech legion was a sister in thought if not in blood.

All true Swordmaidens had long shed their attention towards bloodlines and fully embraced each other as their new family.

It felt wrong for Ketis to specifically raise one of her daughters so that she would become eligible to become a Swordmaiden.

The swordmaster did not see the point in this as she already had many 'sisters' in the Swordmaidens already. The addition of her daughter only added one more relative to the lineup, which did not sound impressive in the slightest.

In any case, Ketis felt no regret if none of her female descendants ever chose to join the Swordmaidens.

Her love and affection towards the Swordmaidens compelled her to do whatever it took to keep the mech legion 'pure'. The sisterhood developed by its members remained untainted by selfish and corrupting thoughts, and she would never wish to break such a treasure.

"Mayra, since you have been playing with Mekano for a while now, have you developed a preference for a specific mech archetype? Have you taken a liking for swordsman mechs like your mom, or do you prefer to work with other mech types?" Mayra scrunched her face in a cute manner. "I can't make up my mind. I love all of the mech types, mommy. I tried to put together multiple swordsman Mekanos with the Basic Melee Mekano Set, but... it's too boring. I don't want to play with mechs armed with only swords all of the time. I tried to put together a Mekano armed with swords, spears and halberds. I really like that last one. It has so many different ways to cut that you can do a lot with this weapon. I don't know why it is more popular. I have also been trying out the Basic Ranged Mekano Set, but the toy weapons only fire weak light rays or tiny foam bullets. It is fun to see the tiny weapons fire a dozen times, but then it gets boring. I am thinking about designing a doom crawler next! I haven't made that before!" "You shouldn't try to explore radically new configurations too soon. I think you have plenty more Mekanos that you can design with the existing sets. I won't buy additional sets for you as it will only do more harm than good."

"Aww..."

Hearing about Mayra's latest explorations with Mekano caused Ketis to frown.

The mother felt slightly disappointed that Mayra had not yet developed her love and passion for swordsman mechs.

Another part of Ketis felt concerned that Mayra may have become too flighty or

indecisive. All of that bouncing around reminded the Journeyman Mech Designer of Ves. The patriarch of the Larkinson Clan also possessed a restless spirit. He never seemed content to design many variations of the same mech or mech type. He always chased after novelty, which was one of the reasons why he worked so hard to innovate.

Was Mayra beginning to develop in the same sort of mech designer?

It would be scary if that was the case!

As her mother, Ketis felt an undeniable responsibility to educate her little girl and firmly teach her that the best approach towards mech design was to pick a narrow range and stick to it for the rest of her career!

"My girl, the future mech designer of the Larkinson Clan." Joshua spoke as he already

began to imagine the splendid sight. "Be patient, Mayra. It will still take many years before you can graduate as a mech designer. That gives you plenty of time to decide what sort of mechs you want to design."

There was not much more to talk about with Mayra as she was still too young. It would take years before she participated in a genetic aptitude test and found out what sort of

talent she possessed.

"Wait. Her eyes suddenly lit up as she recalled a previous but related discussion.

Joshua was sharp enough to notice his wife's distraction, "What is it, Ketis?"

"I suddenly had a good idea. One of the problems associated with systematic cultivation

is that people are unclear of their talents and affinities to different E energy attributes. I

was thinking... can we develop a way to measure the relevant data and calculate the talents and affinities of a human? I think we can prevent many people from making decisions that they would regret due to incompatibility"

That sounded like a helpful suggestion. Information about systematic cultivation was still

too sparse and inconsistent.

Modern society thrived on information. Bad or unknown data could ruin anyone's

calculations.

Even Joshua recognized the immense value of being able to precisely determine one's

cultivation qualifications.

"That sounds like a great idea, my dear. How will you be able to implement such a

device?"

"I have my ideas," Ketis tested as her thoughts spun for a moment. "The test has to be conducted on a spiritual level. The MSTS is perfect for this. It already exists and it has accrued a monstrous amount of data that allowed it to reach a more perfect state. It should be able to conduct discrete measurements on the mech pilot's spirit to quickly ascertain that person's qualifications.

"That only works for mech pilots and maybe Carmine mech pilots." Joshua retorted. "Maybe the Golden Cat can gather this information on her own initiative. She is already connected to every clansman."

Ketis still shook her head. "You may very well be right, but it is not a universal solution. The MSTS has the advantage that it can be accessed by people outside of our clan, though only after paying us in phasewater. We may as well introduce a new service while we are at it. These are also the soldiers whose qualifications we need to know the most." The swordmaster became more and more optimistic about expanding the functionality of the MSTS, but she needed to have a good talk with Ves in order to implement this

demand.

In fact, Ketis also wanted to talk to him about expanding the MSTS.

She understood a part of the reason why he had restricted its proliferation. It cost

energy to operate a new instance every time a mech pilot connected to it. The MSTS became a growing burden to maintain upon active use. Earning a profit within 24 hours was not always guaranteed."

Previously, the MSTS had to be run sparingly in order to avoid draining its reserves.

Now, abundant access to E energy radiation caused everything to enjoy a glut of energy.

The main problem that hindered the proliferation of the MSTS had crumbled after the start of the Age of Dawn!

Not only was the MSTS able to maintain a positive energy balance a lot easier than before, it also began to acquire more complex and mysterious characteristics due to constant E energy exposure!

Chapter 6496 Teach Me

Ves spent a lot of hours aboard the Dragon's Den.

He toured every department and inspected every major research project.

The Larkinson Biotech Institute had expanded quickly and became highly productive.

It also experienced a lot of growth pains, but good management helped to smooth over many issues.

The main factors holding the LBI back was that it assumed way too many responsibilities in so little time.

Ves recognized that he was partially to blame for that. He kept on acquiring cool new stuff before ordering his pet biotech researchers to conduct R&D on his new acquisition. Doing that once or twice was not a big deal, but doing it many times over significantly burdened the LBI's workload!

"Now that you have seen how we have become burdened by too much work, I hope that you can reconsider your past decisions." Vice Director Maria Abselon eventually made a final plea when the long and exhausting tour came to an end. "We can vastly increase our progress if we collaborate with the Phase Lord Department of the Red Collective. Their researchers have developed a systematic approach to human phase lord cultivation that has broken much new ground. We can overcome many hurdles and borrow many existing solutions if we work side-by-side with our peers in the RC. Doing so will force us to share our own research progress with the collies, but they will also have to share their insights into adapting phasewater organs for human usage. We consider this to be a fair trade."

Ves frowned, signaling that he was not happy with this proposal.

"That is unacceptable, vice director. My concern isn't about earning a profit or loss in a transaction. It is confidentiality. Letting too many outsiders work on core phasewater organs that will become a part of my combat system is a huge security risk. Not only will it increase the chances that our collaborators may slip in nefarious bioprogramming, but they will become much more aware of my strengths and weaknesses as a phase lord, thereby allowing them to prepare highly effective countermeasures."

Ves did not think that he could rely on the goodwill and promises of other people and groups.

He still decided to keep everything in-house. The Larkinson Biotech Institute had its flaws, but he was certain it remained in the palm of his hand.

He could not say the same for other research institutions. Despite knowing that the Red Collective was far ahead in terms of understanding and deciphering human phase lord cultivation, Ves still believed in the importance of doing everything himself. He was already preparing for a contingency where the support structure of human civilization

no longer loomed above their heads.

Ves did not spot any strong indications that human civilization in the Red Ocean may enter a freefall in the future. However, his intuition had become quite strong, and it currently told him that he would be a fool to rely on the assumption that everything would remain the same.

The Milky Way was not the only galaxy that would undergo major upheaval in the near future!

While that strengthened the argument that the LBI needed to become more self-sufficient, leaning too much in this direction would slow everything down. That was unacceptable to Ves.

He needed to upgrade and expand his phasewater organs sooner rather than later. "Vice Director Abselon, if you truly wish to transact with the Phase Lord Department of the RC, you are permitted to do so under limited circumstances. If you can exchange knowledge that is vital to you with knowledge or goods that are not too critical, you can go ahead. Knowledge sharing may be good for our civilization as a whole, but we cannot selflessly dedicate ourselves to the good of our race if we cannot address our more personal needs as well."

The current woman in charge of the LBI smiled in evident relief. "Thank you for heeding my words. This measure alone can significantly reduce our work burden on the phasewater organ projects."

"Make sure to prioritize research on the lesser Collie organ. Its functions are incredibly useful to me and can help me become more productive. You can slow down progress on studying the other phasewater organs as long as you are confident that you can speed up your progress on the research that matters."

After Ves stated his demands, the work visit finally came to an end.

Just after he picked up a bored-looking Lucky and returned to the Tarrasque, he

received an unexpected call from Ketis.

Guessing that she may wish to talk on more substantive topics, Ves sighed and settled in his office at the design lab before he accepted the communication request.

"Hello, Ketis. What brings you here today?"

The swordmaiden went straight to business. "There are a number of topics I want to address with you. First, I'd like to share the feedback and reception towards the introduction of Larkinson-exclusive auxiliary qi cultivation methods. Overall, the legion commanders have been highly receptive towards them. It is hard to say whether they will remain enthused once their subordinates start to practice the advanced methods on a wide scale, but for now they are swayed by all of the possibilities."

"Hmm. That is natural. The ones that we have devised for our mech pilots cannot be any less effective than the premium curated cultivation methods available in the

Repository."

"The gathered leaders are also sharp enough to wonder how a companion spirit might change the game. They are already researching the available options to develop the most optimal combinations according to their vision."

Ves curled his lips into a smile. "I am not surprised. You can do a lot more when you have a little incarnation at your disposal. You and I are excellent examples of how we have managed to leverage our companion spirits to enhance our capabilities. That said, I cannot rule out the possibility that the wrong choices can lead to anti-synergy. Our clansmen need to receive enough instructions about the dangers of recklessly mashing two volatile and incompatible attributes together."

"Do you truly believe that will become a problem, Ves?"

"Yes. Don't underestimate people's stupidity. Most of these guys haven't honed their sensitivity to the point where they can instinctively feel that what they are doing is dangerous. We need to treat this with a firm hand."

The two talked a bit more on the problems that may arise with the introduction of Carmine mechs at an early stage.

There was no need for either of them to impress anyone at the moment, so they did not hold back when sharing their criticism.

"...Alright, enough chatter about this Ketis. What is the true reason why you called me? You are radiating a noticeable sense of urgency"

"If you want the simple answer, it is because I have developed new ideas of the MSTS. Have you forgotten about it already? One of the reasons why our Larkinson mech pilots and the pilots of other well-known mech families have been able to adapt so quickly is by frantically training inside the simulated space generated by the Mental Simulation Training System. I have not forgotten about the original reason why he made this

device."

That was not entirely true. Ves had become so swamped with responsibilities that his determination to improve the MSTS continually got pushed down his priority list.

Upgrading the MSTS became more and more important, especially when Ves considered

a huge amount of influx of Carmine mech pilots.

It would be much easier for them to prove their ability to pilot mechs ahead of time if they were able to experiment freely with their techniques and methods!

Ves eventually sighed.

"The fact of the matter is that I don't have the time to upgrade the MSTS right now. I have too many obligations. I urgently need to help my wife complete the designs for the Amaranto Mark III, Riot Mark III and the Minerva Mark II. Their expert pilots have already waited too long to obtain upgraded machines."

The swordmaster's expression softened. "You are correct about that. They do deserve to

receive their new machines. Anticipation for the Minerva Mark II is especially high in our clan. That said, improving the MSTS has the potential to benefit far more mech pilots than the Larkinsons and our allies. With the continued spread of living mechs and Carmine mechs, the MSTS can quickly help mech pilots acquire new skills and improve their existing ones in a vastly superior simulated environment."

Ves truly felt torn between these two priorities. He really wanted to work on the high-ranking expert mechs for the next few months while also designing the Rule Breaker Project on the side.

He suddenly gained a brilliant new idea.

"Wait. Ketis, your schedule should be rather clear after you have finalized your Stormblade Samurai Mark II Project, correct?"

His former student nodded. "That is correct. I was thinking about designing a

swordsman Carmine mech as well as a machine that is suitable for the Heavensword

Mech Legion. Oh, have I mentioned that we should finally get serious about raising this

mech legion?"

"I have no objections to it as long as everything is done properly. I imagine that the unexpected arrival of the Heavensword may have given you plenty of motivation to get the ball rolling."

"I can't deny that it has played an important motivating factor." Ketis admitted. "I think it

is prudent for us to not give the powerful sword a reason to grow upset at us. In any case, we can handle the work involved with raising the Heavensword Mech Legion." "That should keep you a little busier, but not to the point of where you can assist me. Ketis, would you like to work on the MSTS on my behalf?" "What?! I do not understand anything about the underlying technological principles behind the operation of the MSTS. I do not have the qualifications to work on this game." "I disagree." Ves shook his head. "Even if you are not quite as aware of the dangers lurking in the shadows, you are a fast learner. I can tutor you on the bare basics needed to understand the mystical design and programming of the MSTS. Perhaps it is better to introduce a fresh perspective on this project. It doesn't matter if you lack the skills to modify the MSTS. You can always share your ideas with me. I can decide what to implement and what I should leave alone."

This gave Ketis greater confidence in her new assignment. This was a good opportunity for her to learn E-technology and enrich her own options.

Ves made a big step today. Ketis could tell how much he had to overcome his paranoia

and suspicion in order to give Ketis the right to make changes to a mysterious realm

with wonderful applications.

She was partially afraid that she might botch her work and trigger a flood of accidents that ultimately led to the destruction of all of their work.

That was not a good reason for her to reject change. The situation in the border regions

had always grown worse over time.

Ketis had already decided to unveil her 'ability' to cut a tear into a different dimension once the Heavensword arrived.

As long as the weapon chose to stick around and allow Ketis to swing it every now and

then, she already planned to use this ancient grand work as the ultimate excuse to explain all of the drastic improvements!

Nobody knew what exactly the Heavensword was capable of. However, recorded history

already described many different dazzling powers. The weapon was meant to be used,

no matter in war or in peace.

Before the Heavensword was about to arrive and change her life trajectory forever, Ketis

focused back on the original request.

If Ves was willing to let Ketis improve the MSTs, then she would definitely do the best

possible job!

"Teach me, please."

"That is what I am for, Ketis." Ves grinned.

Chapter 6497 Do You Dare Accept The Evolution Witch's Favor?

Ves gave Ketis a crash course in E-technology over the galactic net.

He was not able to devote too much time on these tutoring sessions, but he made sure to give the swordmaster plenty of reading material and homework in order to help her get accustomed to using her new theories.

There was not much he could convey to her under the current circumstances. This was why Ves kept everything simple and stripped out any superfluous steps.

He should have taught her E-technology years ago, but he had become so busy after the Great Severing that he had neglected this particular obligation.

The good news was that Ketis already comprehended a part of the basics of E-technology. She had to be able to master at least this much in order to imbue her characteristic swordsman mechs with her swordsmanship styles.

After verifying where she stood in this field, Ves understood that he needed to broaden her skillset. She could invest more time in deepening her existing skills and applications in her own time. What he needed to do right now was to broaden her horizons by giving her a lot of new tools and theories.

By expanding her theoretical framework, Ketis would be able to figure out how to piece different fundamental building blocks into more advanced amalgamations that could be used to solve more complex problems.

That was all Ves sought to do in the next few days. He did not want to be greedy and eat up too much of his time.

Ketis had ultimately chosen to go her own way instead of inheriting his design philosophy. There was no need for Ves to bestow her his entire heritage of specializations. She wouldn't be able to digest it because she lacked the passion and interest for his more profound works.

All he needed to do was to give her a broad primer on E-technology so that she could paint her canvasses in her own distinct style.

The MSTS already carried a strong flavor of Ves and Vulcan. They exercised their creativity and added the functions they believed were important.

However, their perspectives could only encompass so many features. A substantially different mech designer such as Ketis might be able to recognize gaps and develop new functions that Ves could have never imagined.

In fact, if this little experiment yielded successful results, Ves even thought about giving Alexa administrator access to the MSTS as well and see what she could do with it. As a highly educated first-class mech designer, her outlook on mechs was substantially different. He looked forward to seeing what she might add to the MSTS on her own

initiative.

In any case, Ves continued to teach and tutor Ketis about the basic aspects of E-technology that the latter had not already learned or fully comprehended.

Since E-technology was still a very new discipline, there was not much ground to cover. Ves also lacked a strong enough foundation to be able to effectively teach the vaguer and more esoteric concepts.

While Ves made a conscious effort to make his teachings simple enough for a mech designer like Ketis, the woman clearly needed more time to fully digest what he taught. "This is all I can spare to you at this time." Ves said in an apologetic tone. "You should review the study material that I have transmitted to you in your own time. They contain a combination of standard theories compiled by the Red Collective and additional notes that convey my personal understanding. The latter is what makes my work unique, but don't lean too hard on it. You have reached the stage in your career where you need to innovate rather than imitate."

The physical projection of Ketis nodded in understanding even as she petted Lucky's back. "I know. I am not a Novice or Apprentice anymore. I think I need to spend a couple more weeks completing my homework. Once I am done, I already have a good idea on how I want to apply my skills."

"Oh? Would you like to share your proposal?"

"Not yet. I am not confident I can implement it in your MSTS. I don't want to introduce a promising idea to you, only to come back later and tell you I can't get it to work."

"Suit yourself, then."

The pair talked a bit more about how Ketis should access the MSTS and what she needed to pay attention to when she began to work on the underlying programming and logic engines.

"The MSTS is entirely based on E energy, but it has become so much more after years of exposure to a lot of mech pilots. While there is definitely an element of mysticism going on, the programming is based on modern standards, so you don't have to be afraid of getting lost in all kinds of obtuse descriptions."

Ketis smiled at that. "This is good to hear. If the logic of the MSTS is at least somewhat understandable, I should be able to wrangle it with my own programming capabilities. Thank you again for teaching me your personal insights on E-technology. Your take on this new field is much different from others. It will be difficult for me to make my own mark, but I will try my best."

After giving Ketis a few more tips, the two eventually ended their last remote teaching session.

"Meow!"

Lucky lost his comfortable perch when the connection cut off. The cat could only float in the air and gaze at Ves before snobbishly turning his head around.

"Meow meow meow."

Ves rolled his eyes at his cat, but did not bother to waste his time on this matter. He had a lot of work to do due to his new responsibilities, and he preferred to complete as much of it as possible before the Bluejay Fleet finally returned to New Constantinople. As he dealt with various issues, he received a strange offer out of the blue. Normally, his personal assistant threw away every proposal that turned out to be junk for one reason or another.

The amount of people trying to scam Ves or take advantage of him was astronomical. If not for the expansion of his staff, it would have taken forever to sort through all of the incoming messages that were not immediately labeled as spam.

Even if a proposal made by a third party sounded rather dubious, as long as it seemed legitimate enough and satisfied the interests of the Larkinson Clan, Ves was not entirely opposed to signing an agreement, but only if there were strong guarantees in place. Ves almost froze when he read through the letter. He looked up at Gavin with a certain degree of unease and trepidation.

"Is this legitimate?"

"Yes. The proposal is sent straight to Professor Vector Loban, who promptly verified its authenticity before transferring the documents to myself in person. The codes and other markers match. The contents of the files are authentic. The seal of the god pilot can be faked, but absolutely no one dares to commit such a suicidal act."

Impersonating a god pilot in any way was a dead sentence in a society that revered them as gods in human form!

Now that Ves gained a bit of reassurance, he quickly skimmed through the letter for the fifth time in order to make sure he had not missed anything critical.

"The Evolution Witch... is actually willing to 'reward' me by personally helping Saint Isobel Kotin heal and reconstruct her body in advance?"

"That is what is offered in the letter, boss. The lack of any timeframe makes it unclear how long it will take for our most heavily injured high-ranking mech pilot to regain her body and fighting capabilities, but I estimate it may take two years or less. That is a much more favorable time frame for us than the 5 years projected by the Larkinson Biotech Institute. No offense, Ves, but if I had to choose between the original plan and the Evolution Witch's proposal, I would go for the latter 100 percent of the time." Ves had a different take on this matter. He knew what the Evolution Witch was truly like. That woman never did any charity and always had an ulterior motive in mind. Had the god pilot embedded a trap in this seemingly innocent and sincere-sounding

proposal?

Was there a greater plot behind this seemingly simple process?

Was she intending to poach Saint Isobel Kotin under his nose?!

His paranoia refused to accept the most obvious outcome that Divine Lucie Miyazaki casually found out about Isobel's situation and gave her charity.

While Ves struggled to find an answer, Gavin applied his logical reasoning to the situation.

"It is highly unlikely that the Evolution Witch is willing to betray your trust and compromise Saint Isobel. You should get a verbal promise from her just to be certain. It is not an insult to make this reasonable demand."

"Still..." Ves gnashed his teeth. "The LBI formed a 5-year plan. One of them involved buying out a first-class genetics research institution. The next step is to develop a cybernetic body so that Isobel can come back better and stronger. The plan may be slow, but it should have been steady and comfortable. If the Evolution Witch can rebuild Saint Isobel's body in a short timeframe, then I cannot responsibly ignore this offer." Gavin shook his head in disbelief. "Have you considered that the Evolution Witch is helping you gain a strong protector and alien killer out of the goodness of her heart, as well as a genuine appreciation for an up-and-coming ace pilot? Perhaps she believes that we cannot afford to let every injured Saint languish in their recovery pods and wants to restore them to their peak conditions as soon as possible. The current state of the Red War is precarious. Any ace pilot that can be brought back to the battlefield will make us a little more secure."

"Depending on how long the treatment lasts, there is a significant chance that we won't have an ace mech ready for her." Ves grumbled. "My wife and I planned to take our time on the Promethea Mark II Project. If we can expect Isobel Kotin to return healthy and eager to pilot a powerful new machine, she may have to wait half a year or longer just to

obtain her coveted machine."

That was anything but optimal.

His wife might adore the opportunity to participate in the design of a powerful ace

mech, but she would definitely grow angry at the disruptions of her schedule for the upcoming year!

"Do not decide this matter on your own." Gavin urgently advised his superior. "Think about it. Share it with your friends and colleagues that you can trust to remain discreet. Gather their feedback and decide what must be done to Saint Isobel Kotin."

Was Ves' need to control the variables strong enough to resist the incredible convenience of leaving Isobel's body with the leader of the RA Transhumanist Faction!

Who knew how adventurous the Human Biodisaster could be. She probably could not wait to conduct live experiments!

The two choices offered an extreme contrast with each other.

One of them offered a steady and low-risk way of restoring and improving Saint. Isobel. Ves would always hold the initiative and had no obligation to share it with others.

The other one offered great convenience and speed, yet there was too much of a risk that Isobel would get compromised along the way.

Ves genuinely suffered a dilemma. Both options had their own pros and cons. Once he added them all up, their scores roughly remained equal to each other!

This certainly did not help Ves make up his mind whether he should take the Evolution

Witch at face value, or assume that her offer turned out to be another poisoned chalice.

Hours passed by without any resolution.

"Aaaaaarggggh! This too difficult!"

Ves practically wanted to tear his hair out! This dilemma was driving him nuts!

Chapter 6498 Who Chooses

"Only a fool like you would think about rejecting the Evolution Witch's goodwill."

"You don't know her as well as I do, Gloriana. Everything she says has double meanings and everything she does is tinged with ulterior motives! The Evolution Witch's infamy is completely justified!"

"She is your backer! She is on your side! Why are you being so unreasonably suspicious about her motivations? Get a grip, Ves! Saint Isobel Kotin deserves better than remaining stuck in a vat with just her brain and parts of her spine intact. Who knows whether the LBI that you love so much is capable of fully reconstructing her body? You are expecting far too much from your biotech researchers! Rather than make this uncertain gamble, we are all better off if you transfer Saint Isobel to the Evolution Witch's care."

Ves let out a frustrated grunt as he pushed back against the projection of his wife. "You are being too naive! This situation is anything but simple! You are disregarding the value of keeping all of our efforts in-house, and you are overestimating the Evolution Witch's good intentions! Just because she is a god pilot doesn't mean you have to chuck away all of your common sense and engage in blind obedience!"

"I cannot believe how you can still remain stubborn when the life of one of our precious ace pilots is at stake! Do you think Saint Isobel wants to remain incomplete and infirm for 5 whole years?! It is pure torture for a model soldier like herself to remain stuck in recovery! Your caution is well-founded at times, but this time you are completely off the mark! You are being too paranoid for no good reason!"

"I am just doing my due diligence as a clan leader! It is you that is wrong! You accuse me of being paranoid, but the way I see it, you are way too gullible for your own good! The clan would have been ruined already if you were in charge!"

"YOU INSOLENT BOY! DO NOT ACCUSE ME OF BEING INCOMPETENT WHEN YOU HAVE FAILED TO ARRANGE SUPERIOR TREATMENT TO SAINT IS—"

Ves emphatically transmitted the command that forcibly ended the call.

It also blocked any form of communication from his wife for at least two hours.

It also transmitted an instruction to his personal assistant and his staff to not convey any messages sent from his wife.

He had issued this string of commands so often that he had turned it into a custom macro command. It only took a single thought to activate this handy sequence of instructions.

There were times when talking with his wife could lead to productive results, and there were times when they were less than useful.

As much as Ves grew annoyed at his wife's lack of caution, he could not entirely dismiss her arguments. She was not actually stupid. She just tended to put way too much

undeserved trust in female authority figures.

If Ves removed this particular factor, he could still find arguments that favored the Evolution Witch's proposal.

As tricky as she may be, she still adhered to a bottom line... even if it was a lot lower than that of other god pilots.

In any case, the Evolution Witch had formed a close partnership with his mother, so it was unlikely that the female god pilot would stab him in the back anytime soon.

That did not mean that the Evolution Witch was not allowed to do anything at all. She could 'legitimately' attempt to poach Saint Isobel Kotin and bring the ace rifleman mech expert under her wing.

The god pilot would be obligated to pay compensation to the Larkinson Clan, but no amount of goodies could make up for the loss of a young ace pilot that had not only demonstrated enormous offensive capabilities, but also possessed excellent growth prospects!

How could the mechers possibly resist the urge to convince Saint Isobel to fight on behalf of the Red Association?

Although Ves believed that Isobel Kotin had developed a moderate attachment to the Larkinson Clan, it was not as strong as it could have been.

Unlike Tusa, Jannzi and Joshua who married fairly early and already began to raise kids among the Larkinsons, Saint Isobel remained committed to her career.

Ves was not aware that Isobel possessed any notably strong friendships within the clan. This meant that there was an absence of strong anchors that could keep her tethered to the Larkinson Clan.

As long as an outside force offered enough incentives, Isobel Kotin may very well choose to go elsewhere!

The best way to avoid this possibility was to prevent Saint Isobel from getting into contact with the Evolution Witch and the mechers.

As Ves mulled over his dilemma, he began to feel more and more inclined to stick to his original plan.

The only problem was the expected recovery period.

5 years was way too long for his liking.

So much could happen during the Red War. People were still uncertain whether the 4th defensive band would fall within a month and whether the 5th defensive band might fall within a year.

The ebb and flow of warfare constantly changed, but those who understood war the best could still imagine the next broad steps.

Their predictions of the future were pessimistic. It became a lot more important to get

stuff done in the short term than to plant a lot of seeds hoping that they would sprout a few decades later.

Ves could not afford to make more ideal decisions if they failed to yield any returns in the immediate future.

Short-term gains mattered above all. If the Evolution Witch did not try to poach his precious ace pilot, Saint Isobel Kotin might be back and ready to fight in as little as 1 or 2

years!

He sighed. He needed to gather more opinions in order to make sure he got his priorities straight.

"I think your wife, as unpleasant as she may sound at times, is correct on this," Gavin said. "You are placing your own interests above the wellbeing of a young ace pilot who has suffered more fatal wounds than anyone else who is still alive today. She deserves all of the relief she can get. If you gave Isobel a choice, I am 87 percent certain that she would accept the Evolution Witch's offer in a heartbeat. No one wants to remain comatose and without a proper human body for so many years."

"What if the Evolution Witch snatches my ace pilot?"freewebnovel.com

"Then she is gone and you need to accept that, Ves. You can't get it right all of the time. You took a risk, and you lost. The consequence is that you have lost direct control over an ace pilot, while the Red Association is able to field another powerhouse. From your own perspective, you have undoubtedly suffered a heavy loss, but from the perspective of our society as a whole, you have allowed one powerful key combatant to return to the battlefield much sooner than anticipated. This is a great contribution and will make fighting against the native aliens much less stressful."

Gavin made a good point. There were times where humans must show solidarity to each other and make sacrifices for the greater good.

It was just that. Ves did not really like to allow other people to take advantage of him. The Larkinson Clan had painstakingly invested in Saint Isobel Kotin's growth.

Ves and Gloriana earnestly designed the Promethea for her when she advanced to the rank of expert pilot.

The clan also accelerated her growth by feeding her with general cultivation elixirs.

The Larkinsons put so much effort into raising their champions in the hopes that they would mature and become powerful enough to dominate entire battlefields in their own

right.

Was it reasonable to ask for a return on investment by having a powerful ace ranged specialist fight the Larkinson Clan's enemies and earn lots of glory, prestige and war

merits in the process?

When a high-ranking mech pilot developed a Saint Kingdom, then that was the point where he or she could truly dominate a battlefield by himself!

Ves hated the thought of losing out on such a strong ace pilot if he let her get moved out

of sight.

He decided to look for further feedback.

"What do you think, Alexa?"

His direct discipline looked thoughtful. "Unlike your wife, we Terrans understood the capriciousness and power plays of the Red Association much better than others. The mechers are highly duplicitous and often try to get away with incidents that would not provoke any further action. It is always prudent to take a step back and calmly take stock of your situation before making a decision."

"So do you think we should give Isobel Kotin to the mechers for treatment and other

stuff?"

The physical projection of Alexa Streon paused for half a minute before issuing a reply.

"Isobel herself should be the one to make this decision. Since she has not left any next of kin in the clan or this dwarf galaxy as far as we know, you have the right to decide on her treatment. This is a heavy responsibility, and you have an obligation to choose what is best for her, not necessarily what

is best for you or the clan. Of course, it is best to form an arrangement that satisfies all three of you, but that is not always possible."

"What is your recommendation then, Alexa?"

"Do not make a hasty decision" Alexa strongly recommended to Ves. "As long as you still harbor doubts and concerns, try to resolve them. It is best if you communicate directly with the Evolution Witch, or a Transhumanist who is responsible for this matter. Good communication can erase a great amount of misunderstandings and bring the two sides together. By that time, you should be able to make a much more sober and rational

decision."

In other words, Alexa indirectly rebuked Ves' haphazard way he lived his life

He preferred to take frequent action and climb the wall that I have never been able to

ascend.

Ves still appreciated her words. "You have done the right thing by putting yourself in the perspective of the wronged student. This is what every proper mech pilot should do. The fact that I failed to assume the right perspective was because I strayed from the

mech designer's creed."

A mech designer existed to serve mech pilots.

This was a fundamental rule and principle that all mech designers should abide by, but

rarely managed to do so in practice.

Alexa's physical projection smiled in response. "You are welcome. Back to the topic at hand, I think you can afford to delay your decision by a week or two. Be warned however that the longer you remain undecided, the greater the chance that all of this would lead to massive explosions. There is a time limit. Doing nothing is worse than committing to

a single path."

"I see. I shall definitely take your words under advisement. By the way, how much have you progressed since you initially came up with the idea of building living mech dynasties?"

"Do not get me started." Alexa looked glum again. "Original research is always the hardest

path that we can pursue. It is still necessary for us to understand in an age of rising

resentment and conflicts. The greater the violence, the less researchers are able to invest their time into materials science."

Both Ves and Alexa understood the importance of original research. They did not want

the clan to be filled with unimaginative engineers that were doing the bare minimum to remain employed on the ship.

After Ves talked with a few more other familiar friends and family, he gradually started to lower his objections towards sending Saint Isobel Kotin to the Evolution Witch.

Perhaps he had grown up and matured.

Perhaps he was acting too impressionable to a crowd of strangers.

Perhaps he ate the wrong food and felt bad all day.

Whatever the case, Ves was gradually letting go of his paranoia and letting trust fill in

the void.

Chapter 6499 Acceptable Condition

After holding lots of talks with his advisors and subordinates, Ves eventually made a decision.

He accepted the Evolution Witch's offer.

"Against my better judgment, I have decided to put my trust in the Evolution Witch and put Saint Isobel Kotin in her direct care." Ves announced to Professor Vector Loban after he called him into his office within the Tarrasque.

The Transhumanist liaison smiled in response. "You have made the right decision. Given your history with our leader, I am not unsympathetic towards your lack of trust towards her. However, I can assure you that we are all working for the same cause. Red humanity must survive. Her Divinity has been working tirelessly to uplift red humanity and increase our advantages so that we may stand a chance in the current war. Saint Isobel Kotin is an unquestionable asset in our fight against the native alien menace. Strong offensive specialists are especially in high demand. Alien phase leaders rely heavily on their formidable bulk and defenses to withstand repeated attacks, allowing them to survive normal killing blows and enabling them to come back again and again." As a mech designer who kept up with the developments at the frontlines, Ves understood what Vector meant. Phase lords may not be as outstanding as high-ranking mech pilots at roughly the same level, but they all excelled in saving their own lives.

No matter whether they were martial or erudite, all alien phase lords required a huge amount of effort to kill.

If they got in trouble and believed that there was a good chance that they might die, they never behaved like brave and battle-hungry ace pilots and persisted on the battlefield in the hopes of surpassing their limitations.

Cowardice was not necessarily a sin to phase lords! The aliens abided by a different culture where it was more permissible for their gods to run from the battlefield. Their brainwashed worshipers would even put their own bodies in the path of their enemies just to give their craven gods a better chance of making it out alive!

All of these factors meant that it was always an uphill battle to contain and eventually take the life of a phase lord who was determined not to stand his ground.

After going over these truths, Ves gained a much better appreciation of Saint Isobel Kotin's value.

She held great promise in the Red War. Back when she was an expert pilot, she already possessed the capacity to burn down huge alien warships left and right. She often had to constrain her deadly purple flames because nobody wanted to be left with worthless burned husks as salvage.

Now that she had become an ace pilot, she finally gained the power necessary to burn down phase lords with her persistent and awfully sticky purple flames.

By leveraging the amazing complementary fire abilities of her companion spirit Kiroshi, Ves even had a hunch that she was capable of burning lesser phase lords to death right away!

How could any group not adore such an amazing offensive asset?

Red humanity was currently stuck in a defensive posture. Everyone's efforts primarily focused on holding ground instead of trying to slay as many alien champions as possible. This was a problem, because the Red Cabal and the races that answered its call were not short of manpower and war assets!

The native aliens kept throwing phasefighters, warships and the poor aliens that crewed them like they would never run out of cannon fodder!

While there was a limit to how far they could go with their attrition warfare, their phase leaders ensured that no alien dared to disobey the instructions of their 'gods'.

The alien hierarchy was too strong. Any fleet led by a phase lord was characterized by absolute obedience and absolute suppression of fear.

It was nearly impossible to break enemy morale under those conditions.

If the native alien forces assaulting human defensive positions withdrew, it was because their gods issued the command to do so in order to preserve whatever combat power was left.

What mattered was that the native gods anchored the fighting spirit of the native alien forces.

Few aliens were suicidal enough to repeatedly throw themselves against the desperate but determined human defenders, knowing that many of them would get wiped out by the end of the day.

Yet because of a combination of religious fanaticism and ingrained institutional obedience, the native aliens willingly allowed themselves to be driven to their deaths just because their 'gods' expected them to obey!

The way the phase leaders had indoctrinated their population to serve them on an unconditional basis sounded completely reprehensible to Ves.

While the setup certainly sounded incredibly strong and inconvenient when everything was working correctly, it had one glaring weakness that could cause everything to collapse at once.

As long as the phase lords leading the alien fleets died, the remaining phasefighters and warships lost a lot of cohesion!

The faith of many aliens would collapse!

After losing their divine mandate, none of the remaining alien commanders possessed the capacity to command the confused and panicking alien soldiers.

The sooner the alien phase lords got taken out, the fewer humans would die due to

withstanding the determined assaults of alien forces.

Saint Isobel Kotin therefore became a prime asset for both the Larkinson Clan and any other force that could command her loyalty.

Could Ves truly bring himself to move Isobel out of the control of his own clan and put her in the care of a superorganization with a history of poaching high-value mech

pilots?

He had no choice.

From the moment he started to think about what was best for Saint Isobel Kotin and

human society as a whole, only one answer was acceptable.

Ves needed to let go of his selfishness and accept the opportunity to restore Isobel Kotin to her prime in advance.

5 years was way too long of a recovery time.

As capable as the Larkinson Biotech Institute had become in the past few years, its restoration capabilities paled in comparison to the Evolution Witch and the Red

Association!

Even though Ves had made a decision, he still wanted a few assurances.

"Before I pass Saint Isobel Kotin to the Evolution Witch's care, I would first like her to sign a written contract or at least give me a verbal promise!" Ves insisted. "Don't worry, I have no intentions of binding her with excessive demands or having her fall into a trap. I

just want her to make one single promise."

"And that is...?"

"The Evolution Witch must respect Saint Isobel Kotin's whenever possible." Ves said. "It is currently not possible to ask what she wants because she is currently comatose, but once she recovers to the point where she can adequately think for herself and communicate her demands, Her Divinity must hear Isobel out and respect her opinion. This is what the ace pilot deserves. In no way should anyone attempt to railroad her into pursuing a path that is not of her own choosing. If your leader cannot bring herself to make this simple but essential promise, then I would rather leave the injured ace pilot under our own care."

"I shall pass that on through the right channels. I personally see no issue with your reasonable request. If the Evolution Witch can still be reached, she should be able to give you an answer within a day or two." Vector said.

"Good. I hope I am not wrong about you. Don't use bureaucracy and stuff as an excuse to avoid an answer. I don't believe the Evolution Witch is busy to the point of becoming

unreachable."

Now that they had handled this important issue, the two Senior Mech Designers began

to talk about other topics.

"You have already started to work on your next Carmine mech design project, but there

are clear indications that it is not meant for the mech market of the Red Ocean." "That's right." Ves frankly admitted. "For the record, I am not designing it on my own initiative. I am working on it on commission from the Oblivion Gate Consortium. If you want more answers, go talk to the organization that is able to span two galaxies due to its possession of the Oblivion Gates. I don't dare to refuse this commission. The first batch of Carmine mechs designed for the Milky Way play a vital role in the plan of the new consortium."

A mech designer as clever as Vector Loban must have been able to deduce the ill intent and the unpleasant implications of this Carmine mech design project.

It did not seem like it, but the Transhumanist Faction had made a lot of targeted preparations in the past half year to maintain stability.

It took a lot of clever planning and extensive preparations just to prevent human society

from spinning out of control after learning about the Carmine System!

What would happen if the MTA of the much larger and more densely populated Milky Way got completely caught off-guard by a revolutionary series of mechs that enabled

every norm to become a mech pilot?

Human society would completely upend itself overnight!

Despite the many awful implications of the Rule Breaker Project, Professor Vector Loban clearly knew that it was not his business to meddle in this problematic affair.

He schooled his expression and smoothly shifted the topic. "Do you have time to fit another Carmine mech design project in your schedule? It is

time for you to think about meeting the demand of the upper end of the mech market." He was right. Ves had been neglecting this important issue.

"I am not sure whether my schedule can permit me to split my time on another project, but I will see what I can do." Ves shared his preliminary thoughts on their new project. "I don't have too many substantive thoughts on what we should design at the moment. I think we should think about designing a humanoid modular mech platform similar to the Bright Warrior Mark III, but that sounds too generic. I am aware that the early Carmine mech designs don't necessarily have to be too excellent or optimal. It is better to aim for a versatile and broad set of base models that offer a lot of room for customization and upgrades. Still, I don't want to settle for such a passionless idea."

Vector frowned at that. "I can understand your need to design a mech that meets the inflated expectations of your potential customers, but you do not need to start a revolution with every new product. It is completely acceptable for you to seek stability and release a serviceable but not particularly excellent mech model. You cannot delay your work just because you are not feeling inspired enough to innovate in your next

mech design project."

"I don't necessarily disagree with you, but I still think it is a waste to rush this project when I can do better with the right inspiration. Don't dismiss the importance of this

condition. Give me a little time. If I don't manage to get fired up, I suppose I can force myself to work on this essential project."

"Do not take too long. The more weeks pass by without meeting the demands of the more well-off individuals, the more pressure we will have to bear. On the other hand, catering to their demand will earn you their universal gratitude. You should be able to understand how many doors you can open by fulfilling the dreams of many powerful but. jaded individuals."

That was reason enough for Ves to hurry with this project. Acquiring the goodwill of so many powerful leaders should help all of his future endeavors!

"However my upcoming Carmine mech for this market will turn out, I will definitely add a Biodome to the design. I will need you and Lady Romanda's help to ensure the Carmine mech pilot will be able to survive the worst and retain his piloting qualifications. I don't want a cheap barely acceptable version this time. I want the premium stuff, so if you aren't doing anything important, you can start your work in advance by figuring out how to build a much tougher and more damage resistant Biodome." "Good idea, Ves. I shall explore this demand in my own time."

Chapter 6500 A Small Confrontation in the Family

"You made the right call, Ves. You have earned my respect."

Ves looked up from his daily paperwork as a certain ace pilot strode into his main office. Saint Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson possessed a special status in the Bluejay Fleet. He was the ultimate guard and protector. He was also an honorable soldier who abided by his promises. For that reason, he gained the authority to enter almost every compartment of the Tarrasque without needing to ask for access permissions.

That was why he was able to enter the office compartment despite the fact that Ves specifically ordered it shut and prevent anyone from coming in and disturbing his work. There were moments when Ves needed to be alone, or at least alone enough to be able to let down his guard and ponder about all kinds of problems without getting bothered by distractions.

The only people he permitted in the compartment at this time were the two silent but fairly unobtrusive Apocalypse Wardens that stood guard.

Even Lucky had scurried off after getting bored.

Ves looked forward to spending a bit of time to plan out his schedule for the next couple of months, but it appeared he had to set that aside in order to placate the strongest and most important ace pilot of the Larkinson Clan.

"You did right by Saint Isobel." Tusa continued as he leaned against the desk and stared at Ves. "I did not expect you to let go of your desire to cling to her at all cost. You have changed too much over the years. They say power corrupts, and spending time with you is like seeing those words of wisdom unfolding right in front of me. I don't particularly like what you have become. I vastly prefer to hang around with the Ves of the past. Yet we cannot choose the relatives we have. Besides, even if I like your old self more, he was so weak and incapable that he can't help anyone. Your current self may have grown a lot more deplorable than before, but at least you have gained enough power to protect your clan. The fact that you still have enough heart to care about the lives and wellbeing of all of the Larkinsons that have signed up to your dream is your redeeming factor."

Ves resisted the urge to sigh. He had heard about incidents like these. When expert pilots and ace pilots grew powerful enough, they began to question the people and organizations they served.

If there were any flaws, the high-ranking mech pilots would not be able to ignore them forever. There came a point in time where the stubborn soldiers became increasingly more sensitive towards the faults that tarnished their masters.

So long as the expert pilot or ace pilot perceived that his employer was too corrupted, dishonorable or a detriment to people, it was not unusual for the powerful champion to decide to quit!

The mechers always maintained a standing invitation to ace pilots that possessed an upright reputation and demeanor.

Saint Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson could easily join the MTA and become one of its honored standard bearers if he wanted.

He would have to break his oath to the Larkinson Clan, but ace pilots tended to have ways to break their promises without suffering the consequences.

The ace pilot could sufficiently discredited the other party.

He could also try to reason that continuing to serve a corrupt institution would only perpetuate injustices.

As long as the reasons sounded valid enough, they could be used as proof to convince the brain-damaged, self-righteous fools to betray their employers.

This was also one of the reasons why so many parties worked hard to uphold their reputation and honor. They had tangible value, and there were serious consequences to losing them both.

Ves knew that he had engaged in a lot of controversial behavior in the past. He had no intentions to adjust his behavior, so it was a given that he would continue to engage in 'deplorable' behavior in the future.

Just the fact that he was working on the Rule Breaker Project which had great implications for a huge number of innocent civilians in the Milky Way proved that Saint Tusa was right to feel concerned!

Was it truly honorable to continue to offer his strength to the current patriarch of the Larkinson Clan?

An ace pilot with justice in his heart should never compromise too much, or else he would only end up corrupting his ideals and the convictions he held dear.

High-ranking mech pilots were the strongest idealists among their peers.

Their stout hearts and their unwavering commitments to their causes literally sustained their extraordinary power and status!

From the perspective of Ves, high-ranking mech pilots were not entirely human anymore. They had magnified their obsessions to the point where it controlled their minds and bodies like puppets.

Perhaps one of the reasons why the road to no return was so difficult to traverse was because ace pilots needed to shed or convert all of their remaining humanity into the obsessions that had grown monstrously more powerful.

Whatever the case, Saint Tusa had become one of the many ace pilots who aspired to survive that dreadful transition.

So long as he was serious about becoming a god pilot, he had to abide by all of the demands that could help him survive a transition that killed far too many promising heroes.

In that sense, a conversation like this had long been overdue. Saint Tusa must have harbored his doubts towards Ves a long time ago, but there was no hurry to bring forth a confrontation.

Tusa still had reasons to stick with Ves. There was no better pair of mech designers that could help the Dark Zephyr reach his full potential than the Miracle Couple.

Even so, if Ves crossed too many lines, then there came a point where an ace pilot had to let his conviction take precedence over his greed to obtain a better living mech. "No matter what you may

think of me, I am a mech designer. I am a service provider. Everything I do is to help mech pilots such as you fight your enemies better and benefit the people around us." Ves said in a tired voice.

"You sure have the nerve to claim that you are a servant of the people when you clearly harbor dangerous intentions towards the people of the Milky Way."

"Hey! When a god pilot and a terrible qi cultivator True God orders me to design a bunch of Carmine mechs, I can't say no. I am not responsible here. If you have any problems with my Rule Breaker Project, you can take it up with the aforementioned powerhouses in the old galaxy."

"Heh, not so easy now, right? Not only can they kick your ass, there is no feasible way you can travel to the Milky Way at the moment. I don't mean to belittle you, but please don't try to accuse me of stuff when I am not in charge. Until you can become a god pilot, you will continue to remain under the thumb of more powerful individuals who

hold actual power."

Tusa stubbornly crossed his arms. "Nice attempt to use your Devil Tongue on me. I can accept your arguments, but that does not mean you can escape all culpability. You cannot shake my misgivings towards you that easily. However, you are family and you care for the Larkinsons. You don't brazenly abuse your power or engage in unnecessary acts of cruelty... mostly. You have also begun to care more for the big picture and become more aware of how your actions can affect the lives of many others. Even your intentions towards the people of the Milky Way are not too bad. I can accept your excuses, but there is a limit to my tolerance."

This was a warning from Tusa to not go too far.

Ves most definitely got the message.

"I am not going to change the way I solve my problems." Ves spoke from his own heart. "We do not live in an ideal society. Perfect solutions do not exist. I can only make sure to do what is right for myself, my clan and occasionally red humanity as a whole. I am not capable enough to do more than that. I am not even a Master Mech Designer yet. Don't listen to all of the hype. I can't singlehandedly bring down society by myself. Don't try to place too many expectations on me when I am just one man"

"You are not just 'one man'." Tusa rejected the patriarch's description of himself. "I do

hold high expectations for you, because you have proven many times that you are more than an ordinary mech designer. You are like the second coming of the Polymath. There is no way I can treat you like I treat your wife or any of the other mech designers working for the clan. I do not think it is unfair to hold you to a higher standard as you have way more power and influence than any Senior Mech Designer in this galaxy. I am not the only one who is paying attention to you. There is no need to mention anything about Jannzi, and the other expert pilots are observant as well. You have founded the clan on the basis of honor and kinship. I hope that you can still stay true to your own intentions and words after spending so long in a high position."

Ves grimaced but leaned back in his chair.

"This is how the game is played, Tusa. I don't make the rules. Until I become powerful

enough to flip the board, I can only play along with everyone else. Perhaps one day I will become a Star Designer that can dictate an entirely new set of rules to others, but I will still have to rely on strong and dependable helpers such as you to build a better society. You don't have to offer your service to me for free. I will make sure you are amply rewarded for your continued assistance. Do you think that ordinary ace pilots can obtain a masterwork ace mech as good as the Dark Zephyr? I think my intentions to deliver a strong machine like that to you is enough to prove my sincerity."

"It does. For the moment. As I have said, Ves, my tolerance has a limit." The tension in the air grew stronger. Though Tusa did not pose a physical threat towards

a phase lord like Ves outside of the cockpit of his mech, a halfgod with a domain field should never be underestimated.

Ves deliberately clapped his hand. "Okay. Is the show over now? I have already made arrangements with the mechers to pick up Saint Isobel Kotin from the medical care facility and ship her over to wherever the Evolution Witch can be found. Her treatment is out of my hands from that point. Whether she returns in a healthy state or chooses to

come back at all is up to Isobel herself. You know what I think?"

"What is on your mind?"

"I think the Evolution Witch can't resist the urge to recruit Isobel. However, our ace pilot

will not be tempted to defect to the RA." Ves began to grin. "Do you know why? Isobel is

a loyal soldier. More than that, she believes in me. I have brought her out of the Sentinel Kingdom and allowed her to rise to a height unreachable by many others at record time. I may not be too powerful at the moment, but I am growing quickly. She can grow just as fast as long as she continues to remain in my service. While I admit that I have many flaws, can you always rely on the fact that I offer the greatest care to the mech pilots who depend on my services. That is because I am a mech designer, and serving the needs of the strongest mech pilots of our clan has always been my first priority." "Hmm... you are not wrong."

Ves steeped his fingers together. "I also think that any mech pilot who thinks that

others will invest more care and attention towards servicing the needs of mech pilots, such as you is delusional. The Red Association is already filled with many talents. The mechers will never appreciate ace pilots such as you and Isobel as much as our Design Department. You are the Larkinsons who we have painstakingly nurtured and enabled. Our commitment to you goes beyond transactions. We are all family in the end. Just as I am willing to tolerate your insolence, I would please ask you to give me the same courtesy and continue to tolerate my... own actions."