

Mech Touch 6521

Chapter 6521 Killing Efficiency

While Gloriana still did not agree with sending Maikel to the Red Association, the deed had already been done, so her opinion was irrelevant.

After Ves endured her admonishments, they moved on and went back to work.

In the next few days, nothing particularly noteworthy happened.

The most interesting event that happened was Ves briefly meeting with Commodore Zonrad Reze in order to secure the RF's cooperation in the development of the Instrument of Doom.

"Your request is not that easy to meet, Ves." The fleeter told Ves during a brief personal meeting. "It is 10 times easier to arrange a collaboration between our weapon engineers and your Design Department if you did not set any demands regarding the selection of materials. Insisting that we use EE-343F-00334R as a core material for the luminar crystal cannon of your high-ranking ranged mech completely changes the nature of your demand."

"How so?" Ves curiously asked.

"There are only a small number of naval engineers and material scientists that possess the knowledge and security classifications to work with this experimental alloy. The work that they do for the Red Fleet is absolutely crucial. Assigning them to work on a project that bears no direct relation to our organization will cause delays in other important projects. Newer generations of warships that are armed with superior technologies will enter the battlefield later than expected, causing all of red humanity to suffer significant losses. Do you truly believe that this price is worth the gains you stand to make if we help you develop this overpowered mech cannon of yours?"

When the commodore put it this way, Ves felt a lot more reluctant than before to persist in his request.

However, Ves did not let Sigrund's attempt to guilt trip him succeed.

"What you just said is way too abstract and unrelated to my decisions, commodore. I don't believe that the schedules of your RF are so tight and inflexible that delays in one area causes a cascade of

delays in other areas. That just sounds stupid and completely unbecoming of a superorganiation as great as the RF. Also, I am confident that the Instrument of Doom empowered by this super-class alloy can provide greater value on the battlefield than a dozen of your latest warships."

Friend or not, Sigrund could not allow Ves to trample on the dignity of the Red Fleet so easily!

"That is an exceedingly bold claim, Ves. Do you have any proof to back up your outrageous assertions?"

"Not per se, but think about it. You should already possess details of what EE-343F-00334R can do. When you combine its properties with one of the most powerful energy cannons that a high-tier expert mech or ace mech can wield, you get a compact weapon that might not necessarily be able to match the raw damage output of a sizable warship, but is much more effective at killing key targets. By that I mean phase lords."

"For all of your vaunted tech and warships, the Red Fleet has always struggled to kill phase lords. I have read the statistics. Out of every force out there, the RF is one of the forces that are least capable of landing the killing blow on enemy phase leaders." "Mechs do not actually perform better." The RF flag officer quickly retorted. "Their individual success rates are actually significantly lower. They only achieve better results because there are many more mech forces than naval warfleets, and every individual mech force can easily field thousands to hundreds of thousands of mechs on a single battlefield."

Ves wanted to smack his palm on his face. "That is a deceptive comparison, and irrelevant to boot. Both mechs and warships suck at killing phase lords because they are too weak or clumsy to land effective killing blows onto phase lords. However, there is a glaring exception to these statistics, and they are ace mechs. Although it is still difficult for any ace mech to kill a phase lord, they are responsible for harvesting the lives of most native gods during the Red Tide Offensive. Their efficiency is much higher than other combat assets no matter whether you treat them individually or as a whole."

As much as Commodore Reze wanted to argue back against Ves, he could not contradict hard numbers.

"I am aware of what you are referring to. Commander Reze said. "There are still differences between ace mechs. Do you truly think that Venerable Davia Stark, who is merely a high-tier expert pilot at the moment, can use the proposed Instrument of Doom to attain the same degree of killing efficiency against phase lords as the likes of the Gamer, the Messenger of Silence and the Fleet's Heart?"

The mention of the latter caused Ves to grow amused. Both the mechers and the fleeters shared a love-hate relationship with the controversial ace pilot.

It couldn't be helped as the Fleet's Heart became infamous for being an ace mech commander who loved commanding warships in battle!

He was incredibly effective in large-scale battles that erupted frequently during the Red Tide Offensive, but neither the mechers nor fleeters dared to take pride in his accomplishments!

The very existence of the Fleet's Heart had become a taboo of sorts to the Red Association and the Red Fleet. They had learned that it was better for them to remain

silent and pretend very hard that he did not exist.

If not for the fact that the Fleet's Heart was able to use the combined advantages of his ace mech's sniper rifle and the interdiction capabilities of his subordinate warships to entrap and kill his fair share of phase lords, he wouldn't have become so much more famous in the past half year!

However, this conversation did not center around this eccentric ace pilot. Ves quickly reoriented his thoughts.

"I do think that Davia Stark has the potential to kill a phase lord" Ves boldly claimed. "Granted, she probably has to advance to the rank of ace pilot first in order to gain the capability to do so on a regular basis, but you know what she is like. Davia Stark and her Amaranto have the highest single-target killing power out of all of the champions in our clan. Arming her with a luminar crystal cannon that possesses both extremely high firepower and exceptional penetration power can definitely be employed as a killer weapon against phase lords. In order to guarantee the latter, the use of EE-343F-00334R or an equivalent material is essential. An ace mech can make much better use of the quantity that I have left in my vault than any warship." Commander Reze frowned but did not refute this argument. This was one of the greatest advantages of high-ranking mechs. They borrowed the power of true resonance to dramatically increase the properties of every material and component, allowing them to increase their performance by one or even two orders of magnitude!

That is a yield that could never be attained by conventional warships!

The only vessel that came close was the Dominion of Man, but she was a unique Carmine dreadnought that was currently lost with Bridgehead One.

"Okay, you have convinced me, Ves. I will take this up with Admiral Mieli who will likely make the final decision on whether to assign the necessary scientists and engineers to cooperate with you on the development of an EE-343F-00334R-empowered mech energy cannon. I hope that you are aware that you are granting exceedingly extravagant treatment to a single expert pilot. The amount of firepower that will eventually fall into her hands can easily be used to breach the hulls of warships and possibly annihilate other ace mechs with a single attack."

Ves only grinned after hearing that. "Good. This is exactly the kind of exaggerated firepower we need to turn the tables against those huge and massive phase lords. I have fought against them in person, so I know exactly how frustratingly difficult it is to overcome their defenses and inflict telling blows against them. The new and improved Instrument of Doom should give my clan the capital to single-handedly deter enemy phase lords from attacking a strategic location. This will ultimately benefit red humanity a lot more."

Whether that was true remained to be seen.

They ended the meeting after Commodore Reze promised to get back a definite answer within a week.

Meanwhile, Ves met with Vector again in order to catch up with a few recent developments.

"How is Maikel doing?"

"He is still in transit to Yernstall where he will formally be inducted into the Red Association." The Transhumanist replied, "He is a low-ranking mech designer of great interest to us, so I can assure you that he will receive the corresponding treatment. Those of us who are aware of his potential and inclinations have provisionally designated him as a talent that is worth developing. This effectively means that he will receive similar treatment that Jovy and I have received."

Ves looked impressed. The mechers tended to provide excellent treatment to young but talented mech designers. Maikel would definitely be able to improve quickly after receiving so many luxurious benefits!

However, the RA did not treat these talents with so much extravagance for free.

These high-potential mech designers had to work hard in order to complete demanding assignments that were especially tailored to match and slightly exceed their limitations.

Maikel would become subjected to years of demanding education and high-pressure design exercises. If he failed to endure the pressure and improve quickly enough, then his status within the Association would drop, causing him to lose much of the 'free'

benefits.

The Red Association was fair in its own way. Its mech designers had an opportunity to receive the best treatment, but they had to bear greater burdens as recompense. "Do you think that Maikel has the potential to become a Senior Mech Designer in his forties like us?" Ves asked.

"I do not think so." Vector emphatically shook his head. "Jovy and I are born within the Association and have been raised according to much higher standards than Maikel can imagine. He is only just beginning to enter our organization, so he must start from zero in multiple aspects. It will still take years for him to properly integrate within the RA. All of the delays will make it unlikely for him to become a Senior Mech Designer at the same age range as us, although... systematic cultivation may help him pass numerous important thresholds much sooner. This may especially be the case since he possesses a companion spirit as well. That is such a cheat."

Ves grinned. "Oh yeah. The two factors can indeed accelerate his progress by a considerable extent. Many of our fellow mech designers in the previous years have never been able to take advantage of cultivation and companion spirits, but the ones that emerge afterwards are different. The next generation of up-and-coming mech designers will surely be a lot younger and less experienced as a whole"

Technically speaking, Ves and to a limited extent Jovy could also be regarded as part

of this 'cheating' generation of mech designers.

Ves made use of a companion spirit long before other mech designers, and Jovy was

the first mecher to receive his Eye of Providence.

The fact that they were able to become Seniors in their 40's had a lot to do with the conveniences provided by their companion spirits!

Vector Loban deserved much greater respect because he was able to become a Senior

Mech Designer by relying much more on his own merits.

In any case, Ves felt reassured that the Red Association saw promise in Maikel and was willing to invest a large amount of resources into his professional development. "What about Saint Isobel Kotin?" Ves changed the subject. "How is she doing so far?"

"I cannot say for certain as I do not have any information on her status. By my estimation, her... body... should have either reached the Evolution Witch's side directly, or been transferred to an excellent medical facility where she can undergo pre-treatments."

"Will she truly be able to recover in 1 or 2 years?"

"The Evolution Witch will not lie about this. You can rest assured that she will fully

cooperate to help your ace pilot get back on her feet in the shortest possible timespan."

Chapter 6522 Demons on the Rise

Ves did not believe that the Evolution Witch would prioritize Saint Isobel Kotin's recovery so highly.

It was a lot more probable for the god pilot to spare a small moment of her time on accelerating Isobel's torturous and complicated healing trajectory.

That was enough. If the god-like powers of Divine Lucie Miyazaki could shave several years from Isobel's normal recovery timeline, that was already good enough for Ves and the Larkinson Clan.

Ves hoped that giving the Transhumanist Faction a large favor by handing over Maikel Larkinson without a fuss would encourage the mechers to put more effort into helping Saint Isobel regain her full body.

As Ves resumed his normal design activities and spent a lot of time on developing the Two-Step Execution Crystal for the Instrument of Vengeance, he made sure to keep up with other developments as well, though not as diligently as before.

The news from the frontlines rarely sounded optimistic. The best outcome that listeners in the rear like Ves could hope for was no news, because that meant that red humanity's strongholds hadn't suffered another costly beating.

As far as the Red Collective was concerned, the organization was still in a rapid expansion phase.

Many plans had been formed in advance and were now being executed.

New plans had to be made once the old ones expired, but it was the job of the Lower Council to draft the new bills, propose the addition or removal of clauses and negotiate compromises between different lower councilors and power blocs.

It was not fitting for a senator and a leader at that to go down the trenches and participate in this political mud fight.

Ves just needed to keep track of major developments so that he would know how to vote when the time had come for the Lower Council to pass a bill to the Upper Senate.

His semi-regular virtual meetings with his chief of staff over at the Astral Octagon also enabled Ves to remain loosely connected to the gossip and trends that were proliferating in the Sapphire of the Red Ocean,

"The honeymoon period of systematic cultivation is about to end in the near future." Eliza Mo Ragadan warned her superior. "We have tried to prevent it as much as possible, but the first confirmed instances of demonic cultivation have already taken place here and there. Many individuals who have gained access to illegal cultivation methods have failed to suppress their greed and have preyed on their fellow relatives, neighbors and other humans in their desire to gain a large amount of power in a short amount of time. The pressure exerted by the Red Tide Offensive has driven more

individuals to desperation than we projected."

Ves grimaced. "That is bad news. If they want power, they should try and become Carmine mech pilots instead."

"Demand still vastly exceeds supply, sir. The production of Yellow Jackets has become so extensively reserved that there is no possibility to obtain the Carmine mechs on the open market. People cannot wait for curated cultivation methods to reach the later stages or for a Yellow Jacket to become readily available for purchase at reasonable prices. When the people of our society have become demoralized, they lose trust in all institutions. They only trust the power that they can readily clutch between their fingers. This is where the more destructive but easier to practice demonic cultivation methods can find fertile ground."

This was an inevitable outcome. Red humanity was made up of a huge diversity of people. There was bound to be a lot of bad apples among the population.

"Can you give me a look at the confirmed cases?"

"Certainly, sir. I cannot transfer the complete files over the galactic net, but I can show you a number of still images,"

She first transferred over an image of half-a-dozen comatose patients.

"All of them are brain dead without any immediate cause or explanation that can justify their conditions. Due to the abnormally heightened frequency of encountering comatose individuals, our investigators quickly visited the patients and confirmed that their souls have been extracted. They soon proceeded to analyze a large amount of log and observation data and tracked down every suspicious individual. This process of elimination quickly brought them to the perpetrator."

The image changed to show a clearly deranged man whose eyes displayed pure madness while his hair had fallen from his head.

"To his credit, the 'demonic cultivator' put up a mean fight," Eliza explained. "He had fed on more souls than the ones obtained from the braindead patients, and was able to suppress and manipulate the souls of our investigators. One of them almost lost consciousness while another was on the verge of becoming hypnotized."

That sounded like a much more serious threat than Ves thought!

The investigators had to be qi cultivators themselves, so they should have been able to put up a resistance. For them to be brought to their knees by a single demonic cultivator was a distressing occurrence!

"How did this incident conclude?"

"The investigators brought one of your Pacifier mechs along. This is standard practice, because as soon as they activated their glows, the demonic cultivator immediately lost access to much of his powers. As soon as he was no longer able to dominate the minds and souls of our investigators, it was child's play to put him into

custody"

"I see. I am glad to hear that one of my old products can be of use."

The sales of the Pacifier mech line had definitely multiplied as of late!

"What else can you share with me, Eliza?"

The chief of staff displayed another image which showed a much more macabre crime

scene.

This one showed a literal cult gathering!

Over fifty hoodwinked and likely brainwashed cultists had gathered in a large basement. The floor, walls and ceiling had all been carved with strange symbols and lines that the Red Collective had deliberately blurred in the image.

"The markings hold power in themselves." Eliza said. "It is dangerous to proliferate accurate images of them as others may be able to copy them, thereby subjecting other victims to their malevolent effects."

"How do these markings affect people?"

"This."

The woman transmitted another still image that showed the aftermath of the ritual conducted by the unwitting victims.

The entire basement had turned into a bloody sight. For whatever reason, the cultists had gone utterly mad and brutally fought against each other with their knives, fists,

teeth and nails!

Many bodies got torn apart, and blood spilled in abundance.

Once most of the cultists had perished from the awful wounds they inflicted on each other, much of the flesh that spread across the blood-soaked ground had started to

converge in the center!

A large amount of flesh amalgamated together around the cult leader and only survival. His body swelled into an ugly and highly asymmetrical flesh giant!

When Ves studied the exceedingly ugly and discordant shape of this monstrosity, he immediately made a conclusion.

"This guy failed."

"He did. When our enforcers arrived on the scene, they were able to neutralize the mutated cult leader by relying on their firearms. They only needed to rely on their cultivation and defensive equipment to resist the mental pollution generated by the bloodied markings and the insane ravings of the perpetrator."

Getting gunned down by infantry-grade firearms represented a clear failure to these demonic cultivators.

powerful in record time.

"So how did this mess go wrong?" Ves asked.

"Two reasons. First is the lack of true comprehension by the cult leader. Many demonic tomes are difficult to read at best. No translation can properly convey the full

context of their archaic meanings, which often reference concepts that cannot be described with modern words or deities that have long been forgotten."

"I have a feeling that this will become a recurring problem for many demonic cultivators." Ves guessed.

"The second is the lack of proficiency in executing instructions. Our investigation revealed that the cult leader had not been precise enough when he made those carvings. The power in the symbols and lines fooled him into thinking that he had done well, when in fact his work is so poor that cultivation deviation is a definite

outcome."

Ves couldn't help but chuckle. "Even evil requires a minimum level of competency to

succeed."

"Right. I can show you more examples, but the cases all start to look the same after a time. The fundamental circumstances always share similar patterns. A weak and susceptible individual is able to obtain a forbidden demonic cultivation method. He or she attempts to practice it in secret. If they are able to prevent themselves from getting caught straight away, they can usually drain power from half-a-dozen individuals before drawing too much suspicion. The local authorities or our specialized enforcers are usually able to subdue them quickly enough, thereby ending the selfish and destructive criminals."

"This can't continue to go on." Ves stated as he crossed his arms. "You can't keep responding to incidents as the killings have already begun. It is too late by then. You need to figure out how to be more proactive and detect dangerous situations sooner." The virtual projection of Eliza nodded.

"This is one of the reasons why we are the strongest advocates for connecting everyone to kinship networks. It is not impossible to circumvent them, but they are sufficient to monitor the vast majority of cases that emerge from the bottom of our society. Before that can happen, our Red Collective must first complete the rollout our own kinship network to all of our members." The

mention of the Red Collective's kinship network put a smile on his face. He had played a role in the proposal and the preparation work of it during the time he led the Interim Leadership Council.

He was able to exert a sizable degree of influence over the decision-making process.

"There is no problem with using Lufa as the nexus of the Red Collective's exclusive kinship network, right?"

"There are still many detractors that strongly object to using this design spirit due to

your extensive relationship with him, but... his influence has a remarkably good effect on many qi cultivators. He can help the practitioners of more demanding and extreme premium qi cultivation methods regain their sanity and reset their mental balance. The advantages that Lufa can bestow to our most powerful qi cultivators are too great, and he has directly played a role in saving hundreds of leader figures from

getting corrupted or ruining themselves."

The strongest argument that Ves used to push Lufa into a central position within the Red Collective was that he could always save a cultivator gone astray no matter the

time or place!

Even if the members of the Red Collective did not actively draw on Lufa's help, the

kinship network would ensure the Angel of Tranquility would be able to respond to sudden incidents with minimal delay.

While Lufa sounded perfect for the job, there were plenty of paranoid or jealous people within the leadership of the Red Collective that advocated for a fresh and more importantly unbiased spirit to become the nexus of the Kinship Network. There were a lot of pros and cons to each decision, but Ves was glad that the RC saw

reason.

"Lufa will help the Red Collective more than most people can anticipate." Ves smiled in expectation.

"Well, now that the initial tests have proved that Lufa can provide important boons to individuals connected to the kinship network, we are currently working to apply it on an organization-wide scale. This is expected to take several months. I have heard that the timelines are roughly similar to all of the other major organizations. They are determined to confirm the loyalty of every member and root out any traitors in the ranks no matter whether they are cosmopolitans or members of other fringe groups." Red humanity was no longer in the mood to play around!

Chapter 6523 Defending the Established Order

Ves narrowed his eyes as he faced his chief of staff.

The incidents that he witnessed so far were fairly minor, but they were merely a preview for the future.

For every demonic cultivator caught in the past few weeks, how many more managed to stay under the radar and continue to strengthen their powers in secret?

How many more weeks and months would pass until they became ten times, a hundred times or a thousand times more powerful?

If they managed to avoid getting caught after a few more years, they would soon gain the power to slaughter hundreds of thousands of people within seconds!

As long as they did not get caught, they might be able to destroy an entire city before a proper response force could arrive!

This was why the Red Collective took these early incidents extremely seriously. They invested an excessive amount of funding and resources into the Enforcement Department because they wanted to showcase extreme deterrence right from the start.

Demonic cultivation could never be allowed to gain a proper foothold in society!

Even though it would be impossible to eradicate this poisonous phenomenon entirely, diligent monitoring and brutal retaliation should cause many demonic cultivators to curb their excesses.

So long as they did not inflict damage to the point of destabilizing human society, their threat would remain contained.

As Ves read through a list that summarized all of the incidents that the Red Collective had detected as of late, he became impressed by the sheer variety of demonic cultivation methods being practiced in secret.

However, one point stood out like a glaring signal fire.

"These guys... how did they get their hands on these strange and obscure demonic tomes?" Ves furrowed his brows. "It is not strange for a descendent from an old family to stumble upon a super secret cultivation manual in his ancestral library. However, most of the perpetrators that got caught by our enforcers are commoners who are not wealthy enough to have access to impressive legacies or competent enough to join any powerful secret societies. They are also predominantly third-raters."

"Ah, you have noticed that." Eliza Mo Ragadan said in an acknowledging tone. "We have a theory for that. The stories on how most of these demonic cultivators obtained their practice manuals vary considerably, but we think that is only a facade. The Secret Department has ascertained that there is likely at least two or more groups fanning the flames behind the curtain. Their victims are mostly third-raters because they are easier to manipulate. They are more naive and they are more eager to attain power. It is easier to set them up and ensure they will not be caught in a short amount of time because they are more likely to live in less developed settlements where they can avoid monitoring."

Ves suddenly realized what was going on. "These poor fellows are being treated as test subjects. The parties responsible for doing this are deliberately throwing many different demonic cultivation manuals in the direction of these lab rats. The likely goals for doing this is to observe the effectiveness of the demonic cultivation methods, the speed in which the cultivations of the test subjects grow, the dependence on talent and more. The masterminds may also be examining the effectiveness of the Red Collective's Enforcement Department. By observing our modus operandi, they can formulate targeted countermeasures to avoid our retaliation."

The projected assistant looked impressed. "These are remarkably thorough deductions. You have even guessed that the responses of our Enforcement Department is also a target of observation.

While we have not been able to find hard proof that this is the case, the suspicion within the Secret Department is strong."

"If the Secret Keepers and so on have deduced this much, then they should have an idea of who the originators of this destructive scheme might be, is that correct?"

"Well, one of them is most certainly the Cosmopolitan Movement. They have the knowledge and they have the motivation to do so. The more radical cells that are still plotting red humanity's downfall want nothing more than to spread more chaos and instability across human space. The more our existing order is destabilized, the more room they have to maneuver between the cracks."

Ves made an unusual expression after he heard that. He found that he could understand the Cosmopolitan Movement's approach unexpectedly well.

It was because their approach was similar to what the Oblivion Gate Consortium was plotting in the Milky Way.

His role was reversed this time.

Back in the Milky Way, Ves and his family were the rebels who sought to tear down the hegemony of the Big Two.

They resorted to underhanded means to attack the support base of the MTA and the CFA because they were far too weak and outnumbered to attack them upfront.

Here in the Red Ocean, Ves and his clan had firmly aligned themselves with the prevailing authorities of human civilization. He even managed to occupy a high position in the Red Collective, which pretty much cemented his place in this camp!

Since Ves had become an integral part of the established order, it was in his best interest to protect and preserve as much of the current hierarchy as possible. It would be devastating if any of the Red Three started to crumble and lose power.

This duality made it so that Ves not only understood the position of the cosmopolitans, but also understood the purpose behind their current strategy.

The Cosmopolitan Movement was old and enjoyed a rich heritage, just like the Five Scrolls Compact.

While their goals were completely different from each other, it was inevitable for them to cross paths every now and then. The cosmopolitans definitely managed to accumulate a small collection of cultivation heritages. They only had to select the more destructive and dangerous cultivation methods in their library and selectively spread them around in order to sow chaos!

Wherever there were people, there were bound to be gullible fools who wanted to obtain lots of power no matter the cost!

Many of the demonic cultivation manuals were able to brainwash their practitioners to commit heinous deeds due to their poisonous content.

The very act of reading through the old scriptures would distort their minds and contaminate their thoughts with malice and irrationality!

Unless the unwitting victims possessed clear awareness of the dangers, strong willpower or a firm mentality, they could not escape the fate of becoming mentally polluted.

The resulting demonic cultivators were nothing more than raving fools whose weak minds and wills caused them to degenerate into slaves to their own impulses.

Ves and Eliza Mo Ragadan continued to discuss who else besides the Cosmopolitan Movement may be responsible for spreading these dangerous cultivation methods.

"The cosmopolitans traditionally harbor no special interest towards cultivation," Eliza told Ves. "Their primary motive is to weaken our civilization, so they are largely responsible for spreading reckless, flawed or incomplete demonic cultivation methods that deliberately cause their practitioners to go berserk after a time. While dangerous, we are confident that we can contain this threat. It is the other parties that we are concerned about."

Ves could easily figure out why. "Because they are more committed to demonic cultivation, is that right? It makes sense. The demonic cultivation methods spread by these masterminds are more stable, less destructive but no less malicious. They are excellent choices for people who want to practice them seriously without losing their rationality. In order to make sure that these high-quality demonic cultivation manuals are worth studying, it is best to spread them around and observe how their test subjects are faring with this forbidden knowledge."

This was 10 times more serious than what the Cosmopolitan Movement was doing.

The reason for that was because this hinted at the establishment of a secret organization that would soon amass a high concentration of power!

Once the tests had run their course, the hidden conspirators would collect and analyze all of the data before determining the best and most effective demonic cultivation methods!

When a large number of people started to practice them on a large scale, their organization would soon balloon in power and become a force that could no longer be dislodged with ease!

"Do you have any information about who they may be?" Ves questioned. "Could they be a part of the Terran Alliance or the Rubarthan Pact?"

"We initially suspected that to be the case, but our Secret Department has not been able to find any solid links. We are still taking this possibility into account, but we feel that the Terran and the Rubarthan colonial states are not responsible. At best, only a handful of groups or individuals may be involved."

"Could it be... the Five Scrolls Compact?" Ves mentioned the other likely possibility.

"Strictly speaking, we do not know, sir. It is a logical fit, but... the Red Collective can be considered a successor to the Compact. We have collected a large amount of fragments of their cultivation archives, and we are able to engage in much of their activities in the open since we are a legal superorganization. Anyone with an interest in cultivation and the power it holds is better off joining the RC than start an illegal shadow organization that can only scurry in the dark."

She was right. The Red Collective was an unimaginable superorganization to the old fogeys in the Milky Way. The MTA and CFA hated the Five Scrolls Compact with such vehemence that they actively suppressed any organization that had anything to do with systematic cultivation!

Fortunately, the Red Ocean was different. What could have turned into the Five Scrolls Compact in the new frontier instead became a much more benign Red Collective.

Unless the cultivators were truly depraved, there was no reason for them to prefer a persecuted shadow organization over the bright and shiny Red Collective!

Since Eliza was not able to confirm whether any remnants of off-shoots of the Five Scrolls Compact was responsible for spreading demonic cultivation methods, there was little point in talking about it any further.

They only needed to take into account that this secret shadow organization would definitely become a lot more threatening in the future!

The chief of staff soon switched to another topic.

"By the way, you have mentioned that I should inform you of any developments related to the greater spacetime bubble of Bridgehead One. There have been developments as of late."

Ves immediately corrected his posture. "Oh? Is it showing signs that it is falling apart?"

"Not quite, sir. The bubble still remains fairly stable, but we have been able to detect that significant changes have taken place inside. We are not able to observe what is taking place inside the spacetime bubble, but we were able to detect that the barrier surrounding the Bridgehead One System has drastically changed."

"Changed in what way? Did it grow smaller or bigger or anything?"

"No, the bubble maintained the same size, and it is just as impenetrable as before. Our observers and scanning equipment have detected fundamental changes in the operation of the spacetime bubble. We... believe that the Polymath and the other survivors trapped inside may have been able to alter the parameters of the bubble. This is a good sign. It shows that the red humans have not only gained a small control over their own cage, but that they are also able to change its rules. This is an encouraging sign that they may just be able to unravel the spacetime bubble from within, which is the most ideal solution."

Ves couldn't help but smile. The Polymath may be a gigantic egotistical madwoman, but he never doubted her competence.

So long as she put her mind into it, she should definitely be able to figure out a way to free Bridgehead One from its current trap!

The only question was whether she and her fellow helpers would be able to break open the bubble in time to help red humanity defend against the current offensive.

"Let's hope the Polymath prevails sooner rather than later."

Chapter 6524 Concerning Portends

One of the critical reasons why Ves spared his valuable time on getting briefed by his chief of staff at the Red Collective on a regular basis was because he wanted to stay in the loop.

The Office of the Chief Councilor of the Upper Council was such a high position that Ves was entitled to learn about confidential information!

This was why he had to keep his office. Getting booted from it would mean he would lose access to a lot of juicy high-level information from the Secret Department.

The Red Collective's intelligence arm had only existed for a short time, but already proved to be incredibly competent and well-informed.

It had to be because its cadre largely consisted of the members of the Evolution Witch's personal spy agency!

So long as Ves remained a high-ranked figure within the Red Collective, he would continue to remain much more informed than the vast majority of other people in the Red Ocean.

This was crucial because Ves needed to be forewarned of potential threats and dangers.

It was better to hear it first from the Red Collective than find it out himself when he eventually stumbled into another crisis!

"The native aliens are beginning to stir as well."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Our spies planted inside alien-occupied territory have found disconcerting clues." Eliza Mo Ragadan said. "The Secret Department along with the intelligence agencies of other groups have come to the conclusion that the native aliens are preparing to launch a decisive push in the near future. The Red Tide Offensive has dragged on long enough according to our enemies, so they are trying to gather a larger concentration of forces in order to topple the 4th and 5th defensive band in a single overwhelming push."

Ves furrowed his brows. "How reliable is this intelligence?"

"There is incidental proof that the native aliens are rushing the deployment of reinforcements from afar. So far, our spies have not been able to detect enough additional troop movements to justify a final push, but our analysts have concluded that the native aliens have found a way to circumvent our monitoring, possibly with the help of the cosmopolitans, in order to position their best warfleets in secret. We will not be able to predict the time of their final push until it is too late.

That sounded extremely disconcerting. While it sounded as if there was no absolute certainty whether the native aliens were contemplating a final attack, it made too much sense to Ves. This was why red humanity could not afford to disregard this threat.

"So how do we respond?" Ves inquired.

"All of the major groups have been notified of this possible development. They are currently keeping it secret because too much panic and unrest will ensue if we spread this information in advance. The native aliens will also learn about this and adjust their plans to make it more difficult to respond to their actions. We determined it is best to wait for the native aliens to make their move. Our current response is to quietly speed up the buildup of defenses of our strategic strongholds."

"Will it be enough?"

"Nobody can say for certain." Eliza said. "We do not think the leadership of the Red Cabal is incompetent. The phase whales and the major races have reasons to feel confident in their final push. The losses they suffered so far has not hurt their foundation too much, but it is ultimately unbearable for the war to last so long without dealing a decisive blow against their enemies. Red humanity is proving to be more and more undefeatable to the alien masses. This is bad because it can damage the morale of the alien population in the long run. The legitimacy of the native gods is based on absolute power. If they cannot prove to their subjects that they lack the power of an actual god, then their support base will begin to crumble."

"I see."

Perhaps not even the arrogant phase whales expected that their divinity would come into question so quickly after attacking but failing to defeat red humanity.

Right now, humans only occupied a corner of the galactic rim of the Red Ocean, but this relatively small piece of territory remained stubbornly in the hands of the extragalactic invaders!

The disparity in numbers and accumulation was too great, yet because of the domineering power of just 8 god pilots, the 13 major alien races failed to make any progress in wiping out the presence of red humanity in their dwarf galaxy!

In that sense, the Red Cabal may feel pressured to the point of abandoning their attrition warfare doctrine even though it had yielded successful results up to this point.

Even if a final push would magnify the total losses suffered by the native aliens by a huge extent, the sacrifice would all be worth it so long as red humanity suffered a total defeat in the end!

Ves felt grateful that he had gained enough importance to learn about this secret development in advance. If he did not become the chief councilor of the Upper Council, he doubted that he would be on the list of those who were entitled to know about this possible turning point.

Now that he knew, he could make preparations in advance. He just had to make sure that he did not recklessly leak what he learned and spread unnecessary panic.

"How will the RC respond to this potential development?"

"Our organization is too new. We have not amassed enough combat capable cultivators to join the war effort on a larger scale." Eliza succinctly answered. "As such, our war plans only involve the deployment of cultivator troops in a small number of key strategic locations. It would be best if we can engage in guerilla warfare against the native aliens, but such weak and dispersed measures will not be able to stop a major push in any meaningful way."

"Mhm, that makes sense, as regretful as it sounds. The RC is still too young. We need more time to develop."

The history of the Red Collective might get cut short depending on what happened in the following months.

The climax of the Red Tide Offensive was at hand. Ves grew more nervous as he thought about how little time he had left to make his own contributions to the war

effort.

At the very least, his Design Department needed to rush the Riot Mark III Project, Amaranto Mark III Project and the Minerva Mark II Project to completion before it was

too late!

The two upcoming Carmine mech design projects were not as important in

comparison.

If he did not receive this crucial piece of intelligence in advance, then he may have chosen to allocate more time and effort into designing a pair of premium Carmine

training and combat mechs.

This was an awful use of his limited time because designing them and releasing them sooner would not help red humanity in the slightest in the short term!

It would still take years for Carmine mech pilots to complete their rushed training and gain initial combat effectiveness while piloting their bonded machines. Compared to the millions and maybe billions of Carmine mechs that might get flooded on the battlefield after a few years, the value of doing this was much less than granting powerful new expert mechs to three of the Larkinson Clan's celebrated champions! As long as Venerable Stark, Venerable Orfan and Saint Commander Casella Orfan were able to break through after receiving their upgraded machines, they should definitely be able to gain enough agency to stave off defeat in a heavily-beleaguered star system! Ves had a powerful hunch that this final push would test red humanity's defenders to such an extent that a record number of heroes, saints and gods would ascend from

their prior shells!

As a mech designer, it was not his place to join the soldiers at the frontlines and get his hands dirty.

His job was to equip the mech pilots with the best possible machines that would allow them to exert their full strength and beyond.

"If this final push begins, red humanity must devote all of its strength to repelling the massed enemy forces," Eliza said with a voice that conveyed grim determination. "Martial law is already in effect in many states, but its severity will grow during this difficult period. Everyone must be ready to get called for service at any time. Property might get confiscated in order to better support the war effort. Private forces must. unconditionally answer to a centralized military command formed by the Red Three in order for them to fight where they are needed the most. Not even the Planetary Guard will remain untouched. As long as they can spare any law enforcement mechs, they will have to be brought to the frontlines as well."

"If that will be the case, then the hinterland of human space will lose much of its defenders. Troublemakers such as the Cosmopolitan Movement will have more room to sow chaos and inflict severe damage to our infrastructure."

"We know, sir, but we have little choice in the matter. Most of our military planners would rather have damaged supply chains but intact borders than the other way around. Our industries can recover fairly quickly, but the same cannot be said for our

border."

All of this had far-reaching consequences to both soldiers and civilians. The former would bear the brunt of relentless alien attacks while the latter might lose their jobs

and maybe even their lives!

Ves suddenly thought about his wife, his children and the rest of his clan. They all faced the risk of falling victim to the deteriorating security in the new frontier.

He did not want any of them to come to harm!

Was it time for the Premier Branch to abandon its foundation in New Constantinople?

Perhaps it was better and safer to return to shipboard life and spend all of his day

inside the protective embrace of the Tarrasque.

Staying mobile made it harder for enemies to prepare an overwhelming ambush and

cut off his escape route.

He and his clan would also be able to move away from the star systems that came

under attack by the native aliens.

Avoiding overwhelming enemies was better than confronting them in battle!

Ves did not dare to travel to Yernstall or other well-protected star systems because

they would most certainly become priority targets to the ambitious native aliens! "Ugh." Ves scratched his head in frustration. "There is too little time."

It was no wonder that the Red Three's ultimate solution to preventing the native aliens from spilling into much of human-occupied space was to drop to their knees and pray for a peak ace pilot to successfully break through!

His chief of staff looked concerned, but not pessimistic.

"We shall find a way." She said. "Desperate measures are being prepared. Additional superweapons are being moved to the border regions. The Red Association may also be prepared to employ your 'Aspect of Transcendence' on a large scale at that time. The mechers believe that many of the mech pilots who have been struggling to fight and survive in the last half year have grown in impressive ways. They too may be waiting for a final push to surpass the extraordinary threshold." Ves did not have too much confidence in this measure. "The transcendence glow is largely effective for weaker mech pilots. It is nice if additional ace pilots can emerge because of that, but that is ultimately not enough I fear. If we truly want to hold onto our border regions, then we will need the strength of god pilots. I very much doubt that the transcendence glow can offer any material

help to peak ace pilots. They must ultimately rely on their own willpower and mechs to make the final leap."

Red humanity was about to face its ultimate test!

Chapter 6525 Priority Change

"Change of plans."

"What?"

"I have changed my schedule so that I can devote additional time on our high-ranking mech design projects." Ves walked up to Gloriana in the design lab and announced his latest decision. "I have decided to withhold my desire to work on additional mech design projects and only limit myself to working on three Carmine mech design projects. This won't buy me a lot of time, so I have decided to resort to a more extreme measure to speed up the completion of our projects. I am cutting back on my sleep schedule. I am thinking about sleeping once every few days, and minimizing every sleep session to just 3 hours or less."

Gloriana set aside her current design work and turned her seat around to face her husband with a serious expression.

"That is not a healthy decision. You have always resisted this in the past."

"I am a phase lord, Gloriana. Sleep holds a very different meaning to a biological lifeform that has far surpassed mortal limitations. Phasewater flows through my veins despite the fact that it is deadly to other humans. Cutting back on sleep is not as dangerous as it sounds."

"Even if that is the case, this is still an adverse decision!" Gloriana exclaimed! "Sleep is an essential habit even for transhumans and posthumans who have entirely eliminated the biological necessity for sleep! There are many examples in the past where people who have gained nocturnal augmentations eventually drove themselves crazy due to persistently staying awake! Many studies have shown that their perception of time has warped and that their attachment to their own humanity has permanently weakened! Sleep may sound like a simple phenomenon, but it is one of the most effective natural processes to preserve our mental balance!"

Sleep was a phenomenon that transcended race. Almost every organism of a certain degree of complexity slept to an extent. Life persisted by alternating between activity and rest.

Most people who tried to eliminate sleep from their daily life cycles had come to regret their decisions.

Just because technology had advanced to the point where it was biologically possible to eliminate this mortal necessity did not mean that they were mentally strong and

prepared enough to endure sleepless nights!

Through theory and plenty of examples throughout history, humanity had come to a consensus that sleep was not a waste of time.

It was a necessity of human life, and that of many alien lives as well.

According to the intelligence that Ves was able to access, even phase whales and phase lords required sleep in order to maintain their physical and mental health.

In fact, there were many cases where phase leaders willingly went into hibernation and slept for thousands of years at a time.

Their ascension into 'godhood' had caused them to develop a drastically different attitude towards time.

Their vastly inflated lifespans caused them to become less attached to the moment. Once they grew bored or cared too little about stuff that was taking place in the current time period, they may easily decide to retreat to a private pocket space and hibernate for such a long period of time that most residents of the Red Ocean had already forgotten about their disappeared gods!

Ves remained steadfast in his decision, though.

"I am aware of the risks, Gloriana. What I am doing is not natural, but the challenges that I must overcome cannot be overcome by clinging sentimentally to my humanity. If I want to do my best to protect my clan and more importantly our children from the murderous intentions of the native aliens, I need to increase my productivity by a huge extent. Completing the high-end mech design

projects a few months earlier might not be enough to turn the entire Red War around by themselves, but it is the best and most effective measure I can come up with in the short term."

The female mech designer began to figure out that Ves had reasons to feel more urgent than before. She was not certain whether his judgment was correct.

"The mech designs that I am in charge of are difficult to speed up. Much of the design hinges on the integration of archetech with numerous demanding requirements. Your assistance is helpful, but limited. Is it truly necessary for you to fixate on my three projects? If you want to make a greater impact on the war effort, why not design a good mass production mech such as your recent Fey Fianna and Ultimatum models? Their recent sales figures have jumped after your latest invention has brought an unprecedented degree of attention to your works."

"I already thought about that, Gloriana. It takes too long to design a new Carmine mech or conventional mech that can help red humanity put up a better fight in the short term. My only consolation is that Ketis recently released the Stormblade Samurai Mark II model. I have already taken a look at its specs and test performance. It might not be the best swordsman mech in every situation, but it is a well-designed premium product that can make a slight but meaningful difference as long as they are mass produced and shipped to the frontlines in the coming months."

Gloriana had studied the design of the Stormblade Samurai II as well. For a mass production model that had been designed for commercialization, Ketis did an adequate job. She had clearly matured by a notable extent. Her latest work proved that her skills had improved at an impressive rate.

"If you refuse to work on another mass production model and insist on spending additional time on my projects, then you will not be able to get away with taking extra classes on archetech. I do not need you to reach my level, but you need to comprehend enough theory to assist me with solving a large amount of trivial problems. Is that acceptable to you, Ves?"

Ves nodded. "I need to learn more about archetech anyway, so I might as well do this sooner. By the way, in order to speed up the delivery of completed high-end mechs, I want to propose another change. I suggest that we do not split our time equally across all 3 projects, but instead focus on completing them sequentially."

"You want us to devote all of our time on completing one high-end mech design project at a time?" Gloriana contemplated the suggestion. "There are a number of issues that will cause us to spend more work hours on completing the projects in total. There are numerous cases where it is better if we plug in a set of parameters in a simulation program and give the processor a day or two to calculate a solution through brute force. Designing these complex mechs sequentially means that we

will get slowed down at times. Making other alterations to the mech design may cause the results of the calculations to become skewed, thereby introducing potential flaws that we will not be able to detect in time."

She was right. There were advantages and disadvantages to working on multiple projects in parallel.

Both Ves and Gloriana had become accustomed to stopping their work on one project whenever they hit a wall and needed more time to mull over the problems.

They also found it convenient to work on another project whenever needed to wait for the processor banks to complete their calculations.

"We can take measures to minimize the delays." Ves responded. "For example, the times where we need to wait for our processor banks to complete their math and simulation tasks can be drastically shortened. I am prepared to spend hundreds of billions of MTA credits to build a huge underground processor facility. The processing power of Diandi Base was sufficient at first, but it has quickly grown inadequate as our needs have rapidly grown."

"Hundreds of billions of MTA credits! Are you even able to draw that much cash at the moment?"

"Our clan's expenses have admittedly grown. This is especially the case when we are building branches on many planets and funding the construction of high-quality first-class starships. However, we should still be able to bear the financial burden despite the rising inflation and the low margins of the Yellow Jacket Models. So many of them are being produced and sold every day that all of the small figures are adding up to a huge sum. The biggest difficulty is getting priority on our order as we are not the only ones who are in a hurry, but this should not be a major issue. I think my reputation and high office should be enough to convince the processor

manufacturers to put me at the top of the list."

Ves was not a nobody or an immature upstart anymore!

He was a bigshot that had become a household name to red humanity! His wife thought over the various proposals. "If you are truly willing to cut your sleep schedule and invest billions of MTA credits to upgrade our processor capacity, then... it may actually work. We may just be able to complete one of the high-end projects in as little as two months. However, we will have to choose the project carefully and recall the associated pilot to New Constantinople in advance to conduct examinations and perform tests. I highly suggest we do not try to complete the Minerva Mark II

Project first because I am still waiting for the Mentalist Crystal that you have promised. Without this crucial material, our project will get stalled at one point. It is better to wait for it to get shipped over first before we resume our work on it in

earnest."

Ves nodded in agreement. "You are right. In that case, let us prioritize the Amaranto Mark III Project first. I am on a roll when it comes to designing the Two-Step Execution Crystal. You have already overcome the biggest bottlenecks regarding the integration of lots of hyper materials in the archemeh frame, so you should be able to complete your work smoothly. How do you think Harry Haikkonen will fare in completing his own assignments?"

"He is competent enough. You can rely on him to complete the redesign of the Instrument of Vengeance in time. His only weakness that is relevant to us is that he is inexperienced with working on a mech design project as high-end as this. We need to provide him with guidance on a regular basis to ensure that his work remains on the right track. The only other point of uncertainty is the Instrument of Doom. If the collaboration that you have proposed with the Red Fleet suffers delays or encounters any setbacks, then it might not get finished in time."

"Leave aside the Instrument of Doom for the time being." Ves made a radical decision. "The Amaranto originally made use of the Instrument of Vengeance just fine. The oversized luminar crystal cannon came much later. We can just repeat history and do this again. What is important is that Venerable Davia Stark gets her hands on a functional version of the Amaranto Mark III as soon as possible."

"...You do know that the Amaranto Mark II is mainly relying on the Instrument of Doom to inflict effective damage against enemy warships and occasionally phase lords,

correct?"

"Hehehehe." Ves grinned and chuckled. "That is because the Amaranto Mark II has grown outdated. Once she is upgraded to a fully-fledged first-class mech that makes use of much more powerful materials and technology, she no longer has to worry about a deficit in firepower even when she is stuck with using the next iteration of the Instrument of Vengeance!"

The high-end luminar crystal rifle was not only about to receive a massive

technological overhaul, but would also become larger and bulkier!

Ves believed that he could get away with this design choice because the extensive

upgrades to the Amaranto Mark III also increased her mobility, allowing her to move faster and haul around larger objects with greater ease.

After a bit more discussion, Gloriana reluctantly agreed to work according to her husband's suggestions.

Completing the Amaranto Mark III Project as quickly as possible had become their greatest priority!

Chapter 6526 Deep Research Mode

Ves entered a period where he drastically increased his productivity.

He enacted all of the measures that he proposed to his wife and started to stay awake for several days at a time.

Just as stated in the literature, Ves began to experience the side effects of this risky decision pretty quickly.

In fact, he became surprised by how quickly he was able to enter this alternate state of mind. It was as if phase lords were naturally predisposed to experiencing time as if he was a god drifting through an entire timeline.

His perception of time began to blur as the monotony of design work began to occupy a disproportionate share of his attention span,

It became more difficult for him to keep track of current events. Ves was still able to register the information passed on through his briefings, but he was not able to bring himself to care about matters that he usually found important.

The biggest issue was that he became 'out of sync' with the people around him. He found that he worked best if he isolated himself in his design lab and continued to work on assignments that did not depend too heavily on teamwork and coordination. He also found it difficult to connect with his friends and family. His loss of humanity became a lot more obvious when he found it difficult to muster up his love for his children.

Naturally, his perceptive son and daughters noticed his abnormal behavior straight away.

When they started to cry, Ves tried harder to resist the apathy that had shrouded his mind and spirit.

Fortunately, he was able to use the drastically different perspectives of his incarnations to break out of this spell.

"I'm sorry, kids. I am having a bad time as of late."

While Ves tried his best to restore his mental composure whenever he returned home from work in order to spend a few precious hours with his children, his inhuman side still bled through to an extent.

It was as if the differences between himself and the people around him became incredibly pronounced.

Ves felt an innate sense of superiority towards the weak and frail mortals around him.

His true body was much bigger than theirs, and could easily survive hazards that would shred other people's bodies.

His lifespan was vastly superior to most humans even if they made attainments in qi cultivation merely because he was a phase lord.

The phasewater flowing through his veins and the phasewater organs integrated in his body caused him to become a powerful superhuman that could fight against other mechs and win!

Although Ves had always been aware of these differences, he never really developed a god complex because he clung so strongly to his humanity.

He was unable to do so anymore due to his altered state of mind. His mental transformation brought so many disadvantages that he felt tempted to snap out of it and work on his mech designs the old-fashioned way.

He resisted this choice.

The benefits were too important to him. His focus and attention became sharper. Was this how all phase whales and phase lords felt whenever they decided to shut themselves in their own pocket spaces and settled down to conduct R&D activities that could span many years, decades, centuries or even millenia?

It was no wonder that all of those phase leaders eventually grew into arrogant and conceited bastards whose minds weren't always able to focus on the present!

When Ves understood how serious his mental condition had become, he was still rational enough to convey his condition to the Phase Lord Department of the Red Collective.

Suffice to say, the biotech researchers over there had expressed great interest in his altered characteristics!

"We have not encountered this phenomenon in any of our human phase lords, upper councilor. What you have described is highly unusual, but would explain much of the behavior of alien phase whales and phase lords. When we conveyed your details to the Ur-Titans, they tried but failed to enter into a similar state of mind. We do not know why they cannot replicate your condition. Whether it is because there is a threshold of R&D that a phase lord has to meet or because the phasewater concentration is still too low, we cannot be certain. Please stay in touch with us. The more data you are able to transfer to us, the more likely we will be able to decipher this fascinating condition."

Ves didn't really care about what the collies were doing with all of the data on his physiological and mental parameters and agreed to cooperate with their observation study.

Of course, the Phase Lord Department made sure to generously compensate Ves for agreeing to become their giant-sized lab mouse.

He immediately obtained an advance reward of 500 million RC merits, with a potential to earn additional bonuses amounting to hundreds of millions of RC merits

if he managed to make a major discovery about his current mental state!

These were no small sums. He could purchase the right to read a lot of high-value cultivation tomes and secure the right to practice a high-grade qi cultivation method for himself or his children.

He could also spend his RC merits on more material goods such as cultivation elixirs and rare reagents. These could play a huge role in accelerating the cultivation of mech pilots, mech designers, qi cultivators or body cultivators depending on their practice.

Another benefit promised by the Phase Lord Department was that it would 'grease the wheels' and expedite the transfer of the Mentalist Crystal that he had selfishly reserved for his own use.

The annual quota of Mentalist Crystals supplied by the Hunting Association had become a hot commodity. They continued to grow in value as more and more people learned about their exceptional benefits.

Too many researchers and high officials wanted to get their hands on a Mentalist Crystal that the competition for the limited quotas had intensified in the weeks after the founding of the Red Collective.

Far too many wanted the crystals whole, but there were also a lot of collies who became satisfied if they could get their hands on a single fragment.

This actually caused the RC to break apart more Mentalist Crystals, thereby causing the destruction of an extremely high-value hyper material just to create a lot of mid-value fragments of the same hyper material.

Ves felt this was a huge shame, as whole Mentalist Crystals were qualitatively better. They possessed strong properties that could not be replicated by mashing a lot of

fragments together.

Due to his rational decision to cooperate with the Phase Lord Department, he accidentally managed to withstand the pressure of fragmenting 'his' Mentalist Crystal just so that the Red Collective could satisfy the demands of other greedy parties.

If everything went right, a Mentalist Crystal should arrive in New Constantinople well before the completion of the Amaranto Mark III Project.

His wife grew happy when she heard the news. "Good! The sooner I obtain the Mentalist Crystal, the sooner I can start with conducting experiments on how to integrate it into the Minerva Mark II design. We can work on it next after we complete the Amaranto Mark III!"

In any case, Ves continued to maintain his altered mind state regardless of rewards.

Just the ability of being able to shake off all of the distractions that used to draw him away from the design lab and waste precious time on other affairs was extremely precious to a mech designer like Ves!

He knew exactly what kind of person he was. He could not hold in his curiosity and often grew bored if he worked on a single project for a long stretch of time. Not even the more diligent mech designers could maintain a one-track mind for such an extended period of time as well as Ves in his current mental state!

He even kept track of his work process and roughly calculated that his productivity had risen by around 20 percent.

This meant that Ves was able to complete roughly 20 percent more work on average!

Nobody knew that this was even possible, so the Amaranto Mark III Project actually began to progress slightly ahead of schedule!

This 'Deep Research Mode' as Ves eventually decided to name it was a fantastic ability. It might not have much value to the Ur-Titans, but it was a wonderful benefit for researchers! It helped many phase whales endure many years of loneliness while they conducted solitary research on developing new and improved phasewater organs. The more time Gloriana spent around Ves in his weird mental state, the more Gloriana became accustomed to his altered traits. She found ways to work around his severe deficiencies and take advantage of his strengths.

One of the more welcome discoveries she made was that Ves was able to absorb theories and grasp their essence considerably faster than usual!

He was also able to tackle more complicated subjects that he used to struggle with outside of the Deep Research Mode!

Gloriana eagerly made use of this discovery by forcing her husband to attend more private tutoring sessions.

She intensified her lessons on archetech and help Ves master the more basic

principles and applications of archetech according to her current understanding.

The time that both invested in these tutoring sessions caused the Amaranto Mark III Project to progress slower until it had returned to its original schedule. Neither Ves nor Gloriana had any complaints as the benefits of learning more about archetech would pay off in subsequent high-ranking mech design projects. "My work has become so much easier now that I can delegate the less critical archetech design problems to you." Gloriana said with satisfaction as she petted a certain gem cat on her lap. "None of the other mech designers in our Design Department has been able to learn archetech as effectively as you. It is so exhausting for me to do all of the hard work related to this alien tech by myself."

"Meow." Lucky agreed with the woman while letting out a lazy yawn. An awkward silence stretched for several seconds as Ves was slow to register her words and formulate a response.

The two had already grown used to this clumsy manner of speaking to each other.

"Oh...? Didn't you... put Maisie-Ann and Rennie under your wing... a long time ago? I haven't kept track of them as of late. How... are they doing these days?" "My students are doing almost as good as yours." She said. "Unlike you, I have been

more active in guiding them. They have not gone astray and devoted their time to exploring odd tangents such as yours, but... perhaps I have been hovering too much over their heads. Witnessing the Red Association absorbing Maikel in its ranks has lit a fire within the two girls. I expect for both of them to produce meaningful results

quite soon."

"...What.... specializations... have they chosen?" Gloriana smiled with pride. "Maisie-Ann has set her sights on realizing the dust phase of existence of hexism. This is a broad goal as there are many ways to interpret 'dust!

She did herself no favors by making this choice before spending years exploring many different branches of technology to find a connection with the concept of dust. However, her extensive research and exploration has broadened her foundation and set her up for success. Now that she is actually motivated to move forward, I think it is

impossible for her to remain stuck as an Apprentice."

"That sounds... good. What about... Rennie?"

"Rennie has also decided upon an ambitious goal. She has decided to work out a

design philosophy based on the death phase of existence of hexism. Her challenges are

greater as death is much more abstract and difficult to apply to mechs. It is only after the beginning the Age of Dawn that she has been able to make concrete progress. Helena has also provided her with meaningful assistance."

Chapter 6527 Education in the Age of Dawn

From what it sounded like, Gloriana definitely had more than a passing influence on her students.

It didn't help that Maisie-Ann and Rennie briefly studied and resided over at the Hexadric Hegemony back during the old days.

The time they spent while immersed in Hexere culture had definitely caused them to become changed women by the time they returned to the Larkinson Clan!

"Why... are the two so adamant about... specializing in the two phases of existence?" Ves slowly frowned. "These are... extremely broad and abstract concepts that have little to no existing basis in modern mech design. Before they can even formulate... a proper design philosophy, they need to figure out what... they actually mean and how to implement it into their mechs in a more concrete fashion. Why... commit so much of their youth to... translate religious doctrine into mech design principles...?"

"Why not? Unlike other Hexer mech designers, Maisie-Ann and Rennie enjoy greater advantages than most in coming into touch with these concepts. Gloriana replied to Ves even as she began to scratch Lucky's chin right where he liked it the most. "They have earnestly built up relationships

with the Superior Mother and the Daughter of Death in order to experience the meaning of dust or death first-hand."

"Meow~"

Lucky rolled over and offered his dark-plated tummy to the mother. Gloriana naturally began to rub his belly, causing the spoiled mechanical pet to purr.

"There is no guarantee... that all of their research and effort will go anywhere..." Ves asserted.

"I vehemently disagree. You do not know what you are talking about, Ves. Hexism is real. The guidance provided by your own mother and eldest sister has ensured that Maisie-Ann and Rennie are working in the right direction at the very least! Trust me. I have supervised them for numerous years. The two girls will prove themselves equal to Maikel and Zanthar. Just you wait."

Though Ves was skeptical about this claim, he did not voice his doubts to his wife. Gloriana had become way too invested in raising the two female Larkinson mech designers, so there was no way she could make an objective judgment.

Besides, for all of her boasting, Gloriana was usually highly attentive and thorough in her work.

She would have made sure to mentor Maisie-Ann and Rennie extensively and prevent them from making the common beginner's mistake that could trip up less experienced professionals.

Ves ultimately did not spend too much thought on the two girls. He had already

shifted responsibility over them to his wife. As long as this pair of female Apprentices weren't obviously suffering or anything, there was no reason for him to pry any further.

The married couple continued to chat with each other. However, neither of the two intended to spend too much time on talking as they needed to get back to work pretty

soon.

Besides, Gloriana could not endure Ves' delayed speech for too long.

"Aurelia is reaching her tenth birthday soon." Gloriana brought up their daughter's name. "She still has half a year to enjoy her remaining childhood, but once she celebrates her most important birthday, it is time for her to work towards her glorious future. We need to make preparations in advance and decide on her schooling"

Ves turned to his wife and frowned. "Why... do you want to talk about this? We already... decided to raise her into a politician and leader, which falls completely in line with her designer genes. I have given Aurelia a few alternative choices, but... she has no objections to following our original intentions. What is there... to discuss? Do you want to select her next school... right away?"

Gloriana tried to suppress her scowl. As much as she tried to be understanding towards her husband, Ves' flawed speech pattern grated on her ears the longer they spoke. He knew that as well, which was why he readily isolated himself in his design lab most of the time.

"Times have changed, Ves. The Age of Dawn has witnessed the rise of many miracles. From the Carmine mechs that you have gifted to the masses to the revival of systematic cultivation, norms have much more options at their disposal than before. Aurelia has repeatedly insisted that she wants to become a part-time Carmine mech pilot, and I intend to oblige her because this age is much more dangerous than the one that came before. I fear that few people will end up growing old without having the power to protect themselves. What do you think, Ves? Should we restrain Aurelia's qi cultivation to preserve her chances of advancing to an expert pilot, or should we encourage her to practice a serious qi cultivation method?"

Ves crossed his arms. "Isn't the answer... obvious? Aurelia is not a warrior. Sure, she is... still young and malleable, so we can still train... her into becoming an excellent. Carmine mech pilot. It would be even better if... she has gained a good genetic aptitude. She can become an authentic... and orthodox mech pilot. However, I think this is not a good... direction for her. She's softer and less talented... in combat than Andraste. Our oldest daughter's chances of... achieving greatness is still better than average due to... superior endowments, but.... her strengths lie elsewhere!" Gloriana felt so frustrated that she wanted to bash her head against a wall to escape this torture!

She maintained a brittle smile as she tried her best to endure the situation.

"If I had my way, I would love for Aurelia to become a political leader or a musician." The concerned mother said. "Yet in a society that is increasingly becoming more martial and less civilized, it is becoming clear that strength is the ultimate capital of leadership. Just look at the Evolution Witch and how she is able to dictate Red Ocean politics. She is one of the best role models for girls and women everywhere. Her example clearly proves that strength is the foundation of power in the Red Ocean, I do not intend for Aurelia to become a leader without a sufficiently

strong backbone." Ves shook his head. "I know what you are... dreaming about, but it is too difficult for her. Have you forgotten how... much blood, sweat and tears it takes... for mortals to push themselves past their limits and transcend their willpower? I am... confident that Andraste can do this because she has been training for this since... her childhood. Besides, high-ranking mech... pilots tend to be very direct, transparent... and dogmatic to the extreme. They make for excellent figureheads, but... not necessarily excellent politicians. It... is better for Aurelia to practice a variation of a qi cultivation... method because she at least retains a greater... degree of sanity and flexibility that will enable... her to respond deftly to all sorts of situations."

Gloriana's teeth were grinding like millstones.

"According to the Red Collective, all of the qi cultivation methods, even their most expensive premium ones, are ultimately not able to defeat a high-ranking mech at the same level in combat. You have given me similar warnings in the past. If Aurelia does what you suggest, she will always remain beholden to the expert pilots, ace pilots or god pilots in her orbit."

"That is not necessarily... the case." Ves said. "There are ways for qi cultivators... to beat willpower cultivators. I already... formed a plan for Aurelia. She should... improve her charm and social skills so that.... she can easily befriend other powerful allies. The best way for her... to defeat a hostile expert mech, is not to fight it directly, but... have a friendly expert mech take her place. I want... for her to amass an army... that will become more loyal to her than me. She is... strongly predisposed to making friends and... building coalitions."

His wife had to admit that there was a strong appeal to that development trajectory. Why should Aurelia ever have to dirty her hands when she could command her many loyal and fanatical subjects to fight in her stead?

However, there were still flaws to this approach. Gloriana seemed much less certain than before whether this was still the right plan.

"Should we enroll her into one of the many cultivation academies founded by the Red Collective?" Gloriana asked. "Our daughter will not be able to learn as much traditional classes, but she will be able to master a structural and fully systematic

cultivation framework that will allow her to make the best use out of her qi

cultivation."

That was a good question.

As a high-ranked figure within the RC, Ves possessed a bit more awareness of the policies adopted by the Education Department.

"Those cultivation academies... are a product of the times." Ves said. "Under ordinary circumstances, most of... the academies should have a strong civilian focus. Aurelia would be able to take classes... on arts, history, languages, psychology, sociology... as well as more cultivation-oriented subjects. That is... not the Education Department's priority at the moment. At this time, the people... over there are more interested in... creating military academies where enrollees will primarily... undergo physical training and learn about how to kill, how to wage war and so on. The Red War... is unlikely to end in the short term, so we... may still be locked in a conflict against an... endless amount of native aliens. Not every cultivator... is suited for war, but many of them have no other choice"

Gloriana grew more upset, and not just because she was being driven mad by her husband's speech pattern.

"That is far from what I expected out of these cultivation academies. I want our daughter to become strong, but not necessarily turn into a soldier. I believe... that elegance and grace are among Aurelia's best traits. She may lose them if she is forced into undergoing harsh military training."

Was that what his wife was worrying about the most?

Ves scratched his head. "Aurelia doesn't have the attitude... of a serious cultivator. I think she is better off attending regular... classes at traditional schools, and focus on absorbing... more refined subjects that will give her an excellent... foundation in the upper echelon of human civilization. As for her cultivation, I am totally... within my rights to pass on a cultivation method to her and give her... extensive guidance and tutoring to strengthen her foundation. The Larkinson Clan is a sect, after all. I am confident that I can... help her grow faster without needing to rely too much... on the facilities available at her next school.

His suggestions threw Gloriana off-guard. She lost her composure for a moment as she tried to figure out whether there was any purpose to Ves' suggestions.

"Do you truly think you can make up for full-time systematic education and training

by tutoring Aurelia in person?"

"No. Not seriously." Ves conceded. "I can give Aurelia... enough of the basics as I understand them. That should be... enough to turn our daughter into a capable cultivator, but not an excellent one that can unravel... and reconstruct cultivation methods. That isn't... necessary for a future leader like her. We need a... leader who can do more than declare wars and solve problems by resorting to... brute force."

His wife looked more and more convinced in his argument. "Very well, I shall take a closer look at the traditional schools. Well, it may be fine enough for Aurelia since I have learned that more and more universities are beginning to incorporate systematic

cultivation in their loggan nlang"

"Makes sense. They can't afford a massive drop in enrollments. The cultivation academies are bound to steal a significant chunk of students."

Their oldest daughter would be the first of their offspring to reach 10 years old, to

grow into an adult and to take up a job.

Aurelia... had a bright future ahead of her. That did not mean she was guaranteed to attain greatness, but she had many more opportunities than others.

Chapter 6528 Wild Modularity

Talking became annoying when Ves entered his Deep Research State, but there was nothing wrong when he was left to work by himself.

The development of the Amaranto Mark III's Ultimate Module progressed quickly. Ves was able to complete the development of the Two-Step Execution Crystal considerably faster than expected due to the advantages of his special mental state.

As Ves began to apply his newly gained insights into archetech to handle relatively simple assignments related to the tech, the advantages of his Deep Research State became a little less pronounced.

Perhaps it was because he did not master enough archetech to work fluently with it yet, or maybe it was because he was not passionate about this field.

Whatever the case, Gloriana began to request that Ves pull himself out of his abnormal mental state because his strange condition was beginning to produce more and more problems for himself and the clan.

Even if other people had expressed sympathy and understanding of Ves' sudden drop in empathy, humanity and charisma, it was still disturbing and upsetting to interact with a man who clearly showed no interest in socializing with others.

This incident revealed that Ves had come to rely a lot on building an expanding network of friends, acquaintances and business partners to form his own empire. Fortunately, the immense reputation and his historic accomplishments propped Ves up when his current words and behavior did not always befit a man of his stature. Ves knew that he should not disregard the growing voices of criticism. There was a time and place where increasing his productivity and completing his mech design projects sooner may turn out to be a matter of life and death.

He did not know whether he should classify the Amaranto Mark III with the same degree of severity, but he decided that it would be enough after completing this mech design project.

He at least wanted to maintain this state when upgrading the expert mech alongside his fellow collaborators to see whether anything would happen.

Once that was over, he would immediately return to his normal state of mind and work on the remainder of his projects the old-fashioned way.

Many people around Ves grew more and more eager to see Ves return to his original self.

No matter whether Ves was providing valuable observation data to the Red Collective or not, almost everyone had lost their patience with the problems that he had inadvertently caused!

Meanwhile, the people around him grew more and more concerned about the possibility of a final push by the native aliens.

Weeks had passed. Red humanity had plenty of time to gather proof that the native aliens were about to unleash a final attack, yet the answers from all of the scouting parties were universal.

"We have found no conclusive proof that the native aliens are amassing their warships and other combat assets. All of their staging points are operating at normal capacity. Our spies and the spies of other organizations have attempted to find any logistical trails that can lead to the hiding places of the possible reinforcements, but we have yet to acquire any. A passerby may take a look at this situation and think that we are being overly paranoid to the point of spotting ghosts where there are none."

Eliza Mo Ragadan calmly delivered her report on this subject, knowing that Ves was incredibly concerned about any developments related to a final push.

Not even his Deep Research State could make him apathetic towards the potential extinction of red humanity.

"How... can this be? I was sure that... the native aliens were preparing to finish the job. There should have been more indications in the past, right?"

"Yes, but our adversaries are clever and cunning, sir." His chief of staff from the Red Collective explained. "The native aliens have tightened their procedures and became more conscious of the information they may convey to enemy observers. The intelligence we have gathered behind enemy lines have become considerably less reliable as a result."

That sounded tricky. Ves had no doubt that the Cosmopolitan Movement was behind this effective response. The human traitors were still furious about their inability to stop the rollout of kinship networks across every state and organization!

"So do... you still believe that a final push... is coming?"

Eliza narrowed her eyes. "We hope for the best, but prepare for the worst. We cannot afford to get caught off-guard. We would rather assume that the native aliens have found a way to gather reinforcements completely beyond our detection capabilities than to believe that our enemies are failing to see their offensive through. This is why we are expediting many bureaucratic procedures and approving many more projects than before. Similar activity is taking place in other states and organizations."

This would be an excellent time for Ves to propose a radical mech design... if he was interested in the subject.

Ves was still fixated on completing the Amaranto Mark III, so it was hard for him to shift a lot of focus to another exciting new mech design.

Alas, he could only stick to his original plan as he was not in a condition to do anything extraneous.

"I guess we can't do... anything else without any solid clues." Ves thought in resignation. "Are there... any other noteworthy developments taking place at... this time?"

There is, sir. The Artifact Warship Department that you have originally proposed to serve as a joint venture between the Red Collective and the Red Fleet has recently taken shape. It is still years away from developing a functional warship that is able to harness the power of E energy radiation in a qualitatively superior manner, but the fleters are highly optimistic about this initiative."

"Hm. Good. We need... better warships. The Red Fleet needs to... keep up with the times, and they can't do so by squandering their time and resources... into their

Starfighter Corps."

Surprisingly enough, the Starfighter Corps had not collapsed as Ves anticipated.

In the buffer period where most Carmine mech pilots still needed to undergo intensive training in order to pilot their Yellow Jackets in battle, starfighters were needed to make up the numbers and increase red humanity's ability to resist repeated invasions.

Starfighter pilots may have lost their allure, but their duty to their race and civilization remained strong

These people willingly piloted inferior strike craft out of love and duty to red humanity!

Naturally, the Starfighter Corps no longer received as much ridicule as before. Its future may be bleak, but the heroism of the starfighter pilots who remained was

commendable.

Ves started to lose interest in the briefing. Eliza Mo Ragadan continued to report on half-a-dozen other developments, but it seems the information passed through one ear and went out of the other ear.

He wanted to get back to the Amaranto Mark III Project. Ever since he first entered his Deep Research State, he had instinctively designated its completion as his most

important objective.

This properly focused his attention in the right direction, but also made it harder for him to care about other stuff.

His work on the Rule Breaker Project would have suffered badly if this was the case!

It was not a good idea for Ves to anger his mother as well as the other scary True Gods of the Oblivion Gate Consortium!

Fortunately, Ves had already discovered that his incarnations could largely escape Ves' mental distortions.

Veronica at the very least suffered little problems when she worked on the Rule

Breaker Project by herself.

In fact, she could also choose to enter a Deep Research State of her own if she wanted,

as she was technically a phase lord as well!

The Cyborg Cat wisely declined to do so because of the need to maintain her wits. She

also needed to remain sociable enough to collaborate with Master Moira Willix.

It felt so good to be able to work alongside Master Willix on a collaborative mech

design.

This time, they worked as equals, which was an entirely new experience for the both of them. It was refreshing as the Rule Breaker Project was not a technically demanding project. It just demanded a lot of variations in order to account for regional resource

availability.

What was especially nice about working alongside a rational mech designer at the Master level was that Moira Willix was able to replicate a large selection of design philosophies with great proficiency!

There was no need to bring in other contributing mech designers to this taboo mech

design project.

Willix could easily replicate four different design philosophies and apply them to the mech design!

"Leaving aside the rich E-technology aspect, modularity is central to the Rule Breaker

Project. This is the universal base that we must develop first in order to give birth to all other possibilities. The most relevant design philosophy that I can imitate and apply to this mech design is Wild Modularity. It is a rather extreme approach to modular mech platforms by allowing a machine to slot in parts and wield equipment that were originally designed by other mechs."

"Wait, what?" The Cyborg Cat reacted with astonishment. "Is that actually possible?"

"There is an assimilation period that can last for months, faster for stronger mech pilots. Once the assimilation period has run its course, the 'wild' parts that have been grafted onto the modular mech have become metaphysically integrated. This advantage should massively increase the popularity of the Rule Breaker Project, as Carmine mech pilots can acquire the favorite parts and systems from their favorite

mechs, convert them into modular equipment and slot them into their Carmine

mechs." "That sounds amazing! Let's include Wild Modularity into the Rule Breaker Project. right away! What other cool design philosophies can you imitate?!"

While Veronica made good progress on the Rule Breaker Project with the help of an incredibly useful rational Master Mech Designer, work on the Amaranto Mark III Project had reached the final phases before the design team was ready to begin the exhaustive upgrade process.

The design became functionally complete after one-and-a-half months of exemplary

diligent work. It had become feature complete and only needed to be refined and optimized over multiple rounds in order to reach its final form.

Venerable Davia Stark frequently moved to the practice range and changed into a

strong suit of combat armor on order to test different scale models of the Instrument

of Vengeance.

Yes, Venerable Stark had already been recalled from the border regions so that she could do what she could to help the mech designers complete their assignments. "I should have stayed with the expeditionary fleet. There are too many aliens that need slaying" The older female expert pilot grumbled under her breath on occasion. Despite her absence from the battlefield, she obediently cooperated with the mech designers to cooperate in tests and help with gathering useful empirical data. Although she was unable to properly test the performance of the Ultimate Module as it would only properly work on the real Instrument of Vengeance, she still looked forward to taking advantage of its amazing properties.

Venerable Davia Stark had big plans for the Two-Step Execution Crystal! She intended to nurture it carefully so that it would quickly grow and mature into a

much more powerful and useful form of targeting correction and aim assistance system.

"When will the upgrade process begin?" Davia asked as her body was shaking with

anticipation.

"Less than a week." Gloriana replied. "We have imported all of the necessary materials and calibrated all of our advanced production machines. There are still aspects of the Amaranto Mark III design that I feel are rushed, so I insist we use the remaining days to work out the more glaring imperfections and ensure that the Amaranto Mark III will appear stellar when she has unveiled her presence on the battlefield."

She already had confidence that the Amaranto Mark III would exceed the Dark Zephyr

Mark III on almost every level.

From the increased complexity of archetech to the multiple sources of amplification of the firepower of the Instrument of Vengeance, the expert marksman mech was slated to become the ultimate ranged executioner of the Larkinson Clan!

Chapter 6529 The Blood-Soaked Castrator

Due to the mental changes induced by the Deep Research State, Ves had become

hyperfocused on completing the Amaranto Mark III Project.

While he kept himself informed of other developments, his emotional attachment and interest in them had dropped to a precipitously low level.

When phase whales and phase lords became engrossed in their own research and practice, they needed to be able to tune out every external distraction for extremely long periods of time.

They also needed to be able to endure the passing of entire ages. Few mortal organisms were able to withstand the mental impact of seeing thousands if not hundreds of thousands of years pass before their eyes without growing mentally unstable or unhinged.

Phase leaders therefore gained the capacity to deal with their changed relationship of time in different ways.

From being able to hibernate for eons without causing their mental and physical state to deteriorate all that much, to the ability to dedicate entire centuries worth of time to excessively engage in a single grand research project, these body cultivators proved to be anything but mindless brutes.

True phase leaders spent far more time developing their true bodies and knowledge base behind closed doors than on waging active campaigns against their enemies!

The Phase Lord Department actually gained a huge amount of insights into the true nature of the phase whale race by studying how Ves largely became disconnected to society.

A lot of phase whales must still be caught up in their own research or hibernation. Not even the Red War that would decide the fate of their own dwarf galaxy had succeeded in pulling them away from their own timeless perception of reality!

The analysts feared that the speculation that a majority of powerful phase leaders were actually still isolated and in hiding may be a lot more probable than before.

Red humanity was lucky that the current iteration of the Red Cabal only represented a fraction of all of the powerful phase whales that were still alive in the new frontier today!

If the phase whales were truly able to wake up all of the 'native gods' in isolation, then they would have probably been able to crush red humanity at the start!

That was not the case, fortunately.

The ability to perceive the passage of time like a distant god rather than a vulnerable mortal defined the phase whale race.

It turned the phase whales into excellent researchers as well as long-lived organisms. It was the secret to their success. The phase whale race was able to establish a solid foothold in the Red Ocean despite their relatively small population base because this crucial advantage enabled almost every individual to become a genius through hard work and lengthy accumulation.

No phase whale could remain ignorant and stupid after spending a million years on study and research!

Phase lords were probably less able to treat time in this manner because their cultivation was not a perfect fit to their racial circumstances.

Unlike phase whales who never really found any value in demanding worship from their fellow phase whales, the other major races

However, for all of the advantages brought by their ability to treat the passage of thousands of years as an afternoon nap, the disadvantage of becoming detached from current events was too big of a flaw.

It may even be the key to winning the Red War and vanquishing the phase whales.

Whatever the case, by entering into a Deep Research State, Ves became so fixated on completing the Amaranto Mark III Project that he accidentally missed several major developments!

One of them was the reappearance of the Heavensword!

The other was the completion of the promising upgrade cycle of the Mech Designer System!

The third was the gradual collapse of the 4th defensive band!

Each of these were massive developments that had great implications for Ves, but because his mentality had become a lot more inhuman, he uncharacteristically ignored these major events as if they were inconsequential to his life!

Still, just because Ves was unable to bring himself to care about the events unfolding in the Red Ocean did not mean that other humans felt the same.

Ketis Larkinson had been waiting for the arrival of arguably the most powerful sword artifact crafted and wielded by humans that had survived up to the present time.

Perhaps other powerful swords had managed to survive the crisis that engulfed the Milky Way a long time ago, but none of them made an appearance in public, so Ketis did not know of anything else that could surpass the splendor of the Heavensword.

The female swordmaster had mixed feelings about the arrival of the Heavensword. She did not have a good understanding of its motivations and intentions, but she could make a number of guesses.

She doubted that its goals aligned with her own. There was bound to be a contradiction between their respective motivations.

How would the Heavensword respond if Ketis showed resistance to one of its goals?

Would the sentient relic show understanding and accept a compromise, or would it leverage its enormous power to force Ketis to conform to its directives?

She did not know!

In order to guard against the worst case scenarios that might unfold during the less-than-desirable reunion, Ketis began to make numerous preparations.

First, she informed the expeditionary fleet and asked for the aid of its most powerful champions.

While Ketis already secured the help of her fellow Swordmaiden Dise and her husband Joshua, she doubted that a pair of high-tier expert mechs could suppress the

Heavensword.

If the Heavensword ever turned hostile, then she would definitely need the help of not one, but multiple ace mechs!

She therefore organized a short virtual meeting with all of the ace pilots in the

expeditionary fleet.

This not only included Saint Commander Casella Ingvar, but also the ace pilots of the other members of the Golden Skull Alliance.

The swordmaster also invited Patriarch Reginald Cross of the Cross Clan, Saint Kalasandra Boojay of the Boojay Family, Saint Marissa Lewandowski of the Adelaide Mercenary Company as well as the guest ace pilot that accompanied the Glory Seekers for the time being.

The Glory Seekers had yet to produce an ace pilot from their own ranks, but they were able to make use of their good ties with the Hex Federation to borrow its own saints

on rotation.

The current guest was a controversial figure to say the least. Saint Davara Chisholm was a junior ace pilot who fought with the Hessex Impaler, a multi-armed ace mech that wielded up to a dozen different spears at a time!

What caused a lot of unrest within the expeditionary fleet as well as the other defenders of the Viola Magnifica System was that she had gained a lot of notoriety during the Komodo War!

During the war that engulfed the Komodo Star Sector in the Milky Way, the Hexers became infamous for providing mixed treatment to the captive soldiers of the Friday

Coalition.

The Hexers had no qualms about treating female Fridayman soldiers with the dignity and respect they deserved.

Males received very different treatment. How badly they were mistreated largely depended on which matriarchal dynasty gained custody of a batch of prisoners of

war.

The Amorte Matriarchal Dynasty was among the worst in this aspect. Saint Davara Chisholm actually insisted on meting out 'punishment' to the POWs regardless of whether the male Fridaymen were at fault!

The aggressive junior ace pilot therefore became known as the Blood-Soaked

Castrator.

Even though it was originally meant as a crude insult, Saint Chilholm actually embraced the title, reveling in how it was able to enhance her intimidation factor! Nowadays, no male was able to feel comfortable in the presence of her piercing Saint

Kingdom.

The Blood-Soaked Castrator had turned her domain field into a weapon against all men regardless of race!

The predominantly male soldiers of the native aliens arrayed against the Blood-Soaked Castrator had very little means to defend against her overbearingly hostile willpower.

It was not a strange sight to see the Hessex Impaler fly in the middle of a formation of enemy small craft, only for hundreds of alien phasefighters to spin out of control! Their alien pilots had become frozen in fear or got overtaken by the pain originating

from their lower bodies!

Due to Saint Chisholm's inhumane Saint Kingdom, the Hessex Impaler actually became one of the best ace mechs to assist with capturing enemy warships intact.

So long as the accompanying boarding troops consisted entirely of Hexer or female soldiers, it became trivially easy to neutralize the disabled alien crew members and

take control over the alien hulls!

While the Blood-Soaked Castrator along with the other ace pilots accepted the invitation from Ketis, most of them offered bad news.

"We will not be available to help you defend against this ancient sword." Saint Kalasandra Boojay spoke. "We have received a directive from the Red Association that compels us to upgrade the Royal Jeem to a first-class ace mech before deploying to a more strategic location. The Red Three has begun to make more extensive use of the expanded rights afforded to them after instituting martial law. The strategists above our heads are of the opinion that the most decisive battles will be waged in the upper zones. There is a deficit of first-class ace mechs, and we have been called to fill this

gap."

Saint Marissa Lewandowski also spoke of the same. "The Adelaide Mercenary Company has received an identical request. My Jedda Sandivar is long overdue for an

undrade animau. All of the fighting in the Torald Middle Zone has allowed us to acome

a huge amount of MTA credits and war merits. I have been saving up for an even more

dramatic upgrade in the future, but it is not bad to transform my Jedda Sandivar into a first-class ace light skirmisher now rather than later. I want my mech to be able to fight at its very best in time for the rumored final push to arrive."

Not everyone believed in the rumors of a possible final push by the native aliens, but it did not hurt to take precautions in advance.

Perhaps the Red Three got spooked by news of this possible alien attack as well, which

was why they insisted on turning so many second-class ace mechs into first-class ace

mechs!

"Saint Chisholm?" Ketis inquired.

The Blood-Soaked Castrator eagerly nodded. "I am also being reassigned. The Red Association has promised additional material and technical support to upgrade my Hessex Impaler. The mechers even promised that all of the helpers they send my way

will be women. They have high hopes that my ace mech can significantly weaken and disrupt the concentration of male phase lords."

Most of the native alien civilizations in the Red Ocean tended to be patriarchal. It was

not necessarily the case that female aliens were being oppressed, but they had less opportunities to transcend their mortality and take an active role in the Red War.

Most of the female phase whales and phase lords remained in the rear of alien space for the time being.

This was good news for Saint Chisholm. The fewer female phase lords on the battlefield, the more she was able to gain a massive advantage when fighting against the male native gods!

Ketis briefly wondered whether the Heavensword regarded itself as a 'male' artifact.

During the times she was able to wield it, she gained the distinct impression that its original owner and user had definitely been a man!

Sadly, it appeared that Ketis would not be able to learn the answer, because the Blood-Soaked Castrator would soon depart from the expeditionary fleet! She turned to the champion of her own clan.

"Casella?"

"I will be available, at least for the next couple of months." The ace command pilot

responded with a reassuring smile. "The only issue is that my Minerva is still an expert mech, so it is constraining my performance. My approach to combat is also not as suited to suppress a sword that is at least as powerful as an ace mech by itself." "Thank you regardless, Casella. Any help is appreciated."

Chapter 6530 Saint Linda Cross

Ketis experienced an unexpected setback in her plan to guard against any hostile intent from the Heavensword.

She did not expect that the RA was so desperate to reinforce the contested star systems in the Upper Zones that it had compelled many second-class ace pilots to leave the second-class mech forces that they fought alongside with for many years.

If second-class ace pilots of this caliber possessed the power and the resources to pilot first-class ace mechs, yet refused to do so, it was usually because they were committed to defending their comrades.

This was an expression of true loyalty.

It was normally difficult for the mechers or other groups to persuade these stubborn and emotionally committed saints to leave their comrades and fight for a different cause.

Yet this time the RA succeeded.

The Red War had taken such a dire turn that the survival of red humanity came under increasing doubt.

Even if the saints were able to protect their comrades and loved ones on an individual battlefield, their victories became meaningless if the rest of human civilization was falling apart around them! The importance of defending the race and civilization that sheltered every red human surpassed the importance of more selfish goals!

As such, the RA's call to arms successfully persuaded a lot of second-class ace pilots to finally make the jump even if it meant that they could no longer fight alongside their familiar comrades.

The good news was that enough ace pilots, most of whom had managed to break through relatively recently, had decided to stay behind and watch over the second-class mech forces.

It was still sad to see so many other dependable champions depart.

While Ketis ultimately believed that the Red Association's desperation measure would ultimately benefit everyone, it did not help her case at the moment.

How could she protect against the Heavensword or at least deter it from making any shady moves?

Should she think about turning to the regional branch of the Red Association for help? That did not appeal to her. If the mechers were able to suppress the Heavensword, then they would feel tempted to capture the priceless grand work and claim it for themselves!

That was not what Ketis wanted!

She did not regard the Heavensword as an actual enemy. She merely worried about whether it would force changes upon herself.

Conflict should be avoided at all costs.

Although she would like to think the best of this ancient and revered sword relic, she could not help the feeling that her modern sensibilities may clash against the Heavensword's ancient values.

Ketis turned to another ace pilot.

"Patriarch Reginald? Now that the 77th Warborn Mech Division has been assigned to defend the Viola Magnifica System, you can lend a hand to us as well. Are you willing to cooperate?"

It initially came as a surprise to both the expeditionary fleet and the 77th Warborn that the two would converge in the same star system.

Ever since he founded the Warborn, General Ark Larkinson always tried his best to maintain a separation between his troops and the troops of the expeditionary fleet.

It would be much harder for him to establish his authority if the members of the Warborn repeatedly looked up to the notable individuals of the legendary expeditionary fleet.

A few years had gone by since then. Ark had already cemented his control over the Warborn. The strategists also forced him to take his mech division to Viola Magnifica due to being the single most important port system of the 4th defensive band in the Torald Middle Zone.

Although the arrival of the Warborn in Viola Magnifica initially led to a little friction between the two forces, they soon managed to get along fine, though not to the extent that the two could seamlessly cooperate with each other.

"I hate to say it to you, but my situation is similar to the others. The vigorous ace pilot and clan leader gruffly spoke. "I would have stayed and guarded your back if I could. You are one of the few

mech designers in this dwarf galaxy that possesses the guts and courage of a warrior. would be a shame if anything happened to you. You should be able to call for other help. Master Benedict has been planning the upgrade of my Mars for a long time, so there is no excuse for any delays."

"I see." Ketis said as she tried to think of other names to call upon.

Should she request assistance from the RA or RC?"

"I was not done yet." Reginald spoke. "My deputy, Saint Linda Cross, will still remain with the expeditionary fleet. I can tell her to watch over you when it is necessary."

That was good news!

The Larkinson Clan was not the only member of the Golden Skull Alliance that had gained new ace pilots.

The Cross Clan had finally produced its second ace pilot after its patriarch by

witnessing the breakthrough of Linda Cross!

With her upgraded ace space knight, the Amphis Extremis was able to block and mitigate damage to an ever greater extent than the current iteration of the Larkinson

Clan's Bastion!

Everyone turned to one of the more recent saints who had proven her valor in combat many times over during the Red Tide Offensive.

Linda Cross used to be one of the expert pilots of the original Cross Clan. She survived the retreat from the Garlen Empire in the old galaxy and accompanied the reformed Cross Clan into the new frontier and helped to win the battles that allowed it to rise to prosperity.

In the present time, she was just beginning to get her bearings as an ace pilot with her recently upgraded Amphis Extremis.

The quasi-first-class ace space knight possessed a balanced configuration, allowing it to perform well in both a defensive and offensive capacity.

While its armor system did not have the bulk to rival the much more impressive defenses of heavy space knights, the Amphis Extremis nonetheless tried to compensate for this by possessing a much more powerful custom azure shield generator. The SA-DIX Azure Shield Generator was one of the strong points of the Amphis Extremis. The ace mech was able to supply an abundant amount of electric energy to it. The SA-DIX also possessed a high phasewater content and was enriched with high-grade hyper materials that were difficult to obtain through regular channels. What truly enabled it to stand out was the integration of resonating exotics. Saint Linda Cross was able to infuse a large proportion of true resonance into the SA-DIX to increase its ability to withstand damage, which was particularly helpful when dueling against

enemy champions.

The Amphis Extremis was also able to channel true resonance into the SA-DIX to drastically expand the radius of its azure energy shield. This allowed it to shield a troop of mechs or the side of a friendly starship from incoming damage.

However, the SA-DIX was largely optimized for offensive operations, so this feature was not as strong as it could have been. It was unrealistic for the SA-DIX to be able to resist repeated salvos of warship-grade cannon fire before reaching its limit.

Even so, Saint Linda Cross was still able to resist a huge amount of punishment for a limited amount of time, which was usually enough to escort friendlies to safety. Her Amphis Extremis therefore split its time on defensive and offensive missions. It would be great if the Amphis Extremis could approach an enemy phase lord and lock the alien monstrosity in combat, but the alien leaders were usually too cunning to get

caught so easily.

The ace space knight was also not suitable to confront enemies that were too powerful

by itself.

Saint Linda still had a lot of room for growth, though.

Master Benedict Cortez had designed an excellent ace mech for her, but the junior ace pilot needed at least a few years to acclimate to her new abilities and grow her resonance strength to a more respectable level.

While Saint Linda and her Amphis Extremis were not as oppressive on the battlefield as the Mars, the combination was at least a lot better in a defensive capacity. The Amphis Extremis should be able to shield and protect Ketis if the Heavensword

turned into a physical hazard.

The female ace pilot directed a friendly smile towards Ketis. "You shall have my protection when the time has come. I can make no guarantees as I do not understand the mysterious powers of this weapon, so make sure that you do not solely rely on my

defenses."

"Thank you, Saint Linda. I still remain hopeful that I am being overly paranoid. If the Heavensword agrees to respect my right to choose my own decisions, then it should not pose any threat. Your help will ultimately not be necessary. I merely want to guard against the possibility that it will force me to become its next Heavensword Saint." The more Ketis thought about the relic weapon's habit of transforming any swordmaster into an ace pilot that had become completely dependent on the extraordinary weapon,

the more frightened she became.

Would it employ the same method to establish a foothold in human society?

It was questionable whether Ketis could resist this transformation. Prior swordmasters had all volunteered to become the next Heavensword Saint. They

put up no resistance at all and willingly abandoned their old swordsmanship for the one imposed by the most powerful sword they knew. They also gained the right and responsibility to rule over an entire second-rate state.

Ketis had no desire to become a similar figurehead, so it became necessary for her to

plan for the worst.

Saint Linda's assistance combined with the help of other available Larkinson expert

pilots may barely be sufficient to put up a strong united front against the Heavensword. Now that Ketis and the ace pilots of the expeditionary fleet gained an understanding, they began to chat about other topics during this virtual meeting.

"It will ultimately be good for ace pilots such as us to separate from the expeditionary

fleet." Patriarch Reginald said. "The native aliens don't value the battlefields of the middle and lower zones all that much, so they always assign the more shameless and cowardly phase lords to these war theaters. They are not necessarily weak, but... it is becoming increasingly more difficult to force them into an honest fight. It is not without reason that the mechers want to move us. There are too many ace pilots in this star

system that we aren't giving the rank and file enough of a challenge anymore to feel

desperate and break through. Maybe that is why the rate of breakthroughs have

stagnated during the ongoing offensive."

That may very well be true!

There was a point in which the continued protection of an ace pilot ultimately did more

harm than good.

The members of the Golden Skull Alliance looked up to their established champions and protectors, so much so that they became too dependent.

As long as the enemy was unlikely to divert a lot of troops or strong phase lords to the

current battleground, it was fine for the regular troops to fight without so many of their powerful saints watching over their heads.

Only mech pilots who were willing to brave dangers without the expectation that they would be saved by others possessed the qualifications to break through.

Ketis knew that this may be one of the reasons why her husband Joshua continued to remain stuck at his current bottleneck.

It would ultimately be better for his development if he had to shoulder greater burdens.

Other Larkinson expert pilots were in the same position. When Ketis thought of the dramatic events that took place during the fight against the Emperor Tree, she knew that Joshua and his peers had not yet exhausted their potential. They just needed a powerful enough opportunity to trigger their second apotheosis.