

Mech Touch 6531

Chapter 6531 The Bottlenecks of the Design Department

"The mechers eagerly want us to switch to upgraded first-class ace mechs before carting us off to the Upper Zones, but... doing so will reduce the safety margins in star systems such as Viola Magnifica by a large extent." Saint Marissa Lewandowski warned. "That means that if the native aliens do not completely act according to plan, they may send more phase lords to this strategic location. All the troops under us stand to suffer much greater losses if that happens."

"That is a possibility that we cannot dismiss." Saint Commander Casella agreed. "In this day and age, we cannot protect and save every individual soldier no matter how extensively we try. There is an argument to be made that by removing us from their orbit, many more of them will die, but that the survivors will grow multiple times faster than now. If a handful of ace pilots and a dozen expert pilots emerge from a single battle, then suffering 50 percent losses does not necessarily represent defeat."

The former legion commander of the Living Sentinels abhorred such views, but that did not mean she was unable to understand the cold-hearted perspectives of the

higher-ups.

The Red Association has sent enough messages to make Casella understand that the mechers made the decision to relocate the ace pilots partially for this reason.

Only by reducing the strength of the defensive forces in the contested star systems would they be able to stimulate more desperate mech pilots into breaking through! Since Casella was able to figure out this much, she made another prediction about how the Red Tide Offensive might unfold in the near term.

Pulling away the champions from the middle zones might create circumstances where the invading forces may actually be able to overcome the defenders and conquer more strategic locations!

If that happened frequently enough, then the 4th defensive band would collapse sooner than most people thought!

This may mean that the RA and by extension the RF and the RC have privately decided to abandon the 4th defensive band under their own terms.

This could be regarded as a potential masterstroke, but only if the upcoming storm produced enough powerful breakthroughs!

If the tradeoff worked as intended, then this was effectively a desperate and costly measure to trade territory for crucial breakthroughs. It may end up worthwhile if enough expert pilots, ace pilots and maybe even god pilots appeared in the following months!

Casella was not in a hurry to share her opinion on the RA's latest move to others. It was a controversial gambit, and many people may not be able to accept the callousness of this brutal calculation.

Her judgment may also be wrong. There were not enough clues to increase the certainty of her guess.

"To be honest, I was waiting to commission a living ace mech from your patriarch." Saint Marissa Lewandowski said in an emotional tone. "Having fought alongside your clan for years, I have come to appreciate the value and strength of your living mechs. I especially like how the living mechs of both weak and powerful pilots have become responsive and reliable partners. I think I can fight considerably better if I had a living light skirmisher like the Dark Zephyr."

Ketis raised her eyebrow. "Why have you not attempted to pass on your request to our Design Department? Ves and Ketis would be honored to convert your Jedda Sandivar into a living ace mech."

"The circumstances won't allow it." Saint Marissa sighed with regret. "I already chatted with Director Gloriana Wodin about this. She cannot promise that she can overhaul my ace mech within 2 months, and that her schedule is already packed with ongoing projects. Your Design Department is ultimately too small to accept too much work. You really should think about expanding it. Your clan's living mechs have become so popular that more and more expert pilots and ace pilots like myself want to pilot a high-ranking living mech of our own. We are so jealous of your Everchangers, your Minervas, your Dark Zephyr and so on. You Larkinsons shouldn't keep all of the good stuff to yourselves."

The more composed Saint Kalasandra Boojay nodded in agreement. "My thoughts align with Saint Marissa. There is no excuse for the Living Mech Corporation's Design Department to maintain its small scale when the sales and licensing fees of its business ventures have delivered an astronomical amount of income to your company and clan. Your patriarch is not only close to the

mechers, but also leads the Upper Council of the Red Collective. All of the impediments to further growth and expansion have disappeared."

Ketis frowned when she heard that. "I will pass on your feedback to Ves and Gloriana. I am not sure how they will take it, though. They like to maintain strong control over the Design Department. They have always resisted drastic expansion. Ves doesn't want their overall loyalty and commitment to come under question. Gloriana fears that bringing in too many new and unfamiliar mech designers will cause the quality of the Design Department's output to drop."

"There are consultants for that, Swordmaster Ketis. Saint Kalandra said. "If the two Senior Mech Designers do not know how to scale their design operations to a scale more befitting to one of the rising powers of the Red Ocean, then they should seek the assistance of the Red Association or other friendly groups that possess much greater expertise in this area. There should be solutions to expand their Design Department. while maintaining its current strengths. The Larkinson Clan must become more professional in all of its aspects if it wants to live as long as our Boojay Family," Even Ketis could not deny that the responsibilities and expectations of the Design

Department had far outgrown its current scale.

Expanding it was not that easy, though. As an insider, Ketis clearly understood that too many projects were dependent on Ves and Gloriana.

This was a testament to their strength and brilliance, but they had also turned into the bottlenecks that constrained easy expansion.

It would have been better if they managed to become Master Mech Designers.

There were considerable differences between Seniors and Masters.

The latter were not only smarter and able to get a lot more work done in the same amount of time, but their most important advantage was that they could pass on their design philosophies more easily!

They could take on as many disciples as needed to raise substitutes and helpers to take care of less important projects and work assignments that were depending on the design philosophies of their Masters.

The realization of a design philosophy also made it a lot easier for existing mech designers who already committed to their own specializations to become proficient in Ves or Gloriana's design principles!

Given their competence and learning capabilities, it shouldn't take too much time for other Seniors and Masters to learn how to design living mechs or to shape the perfect.

vessel like Gloriana!

This was how the design studios and design departments led by others were able to expand their scale so quickly without resulting in a serious deterioration of quality and

reliability.

"By the way, Ketis, how close are you to breaking through in your two professions?" Saint Marissa Lewandowski asked.

Ketis sighed. "Do not expect anything drastic to happen soon. It is not easy for me to invest my time in both of my careers at the same time. Do not get me wrong. I wouldn't trade this for anything else. Being a swordmaster while possessing the insights of a Journeyman Mech Designer has allowed me to approach my swordsmanship from a more analytical perspective. This complements my excellent intuition and instincts well. At the same time, my mastery of swordsmanship easily allows me to understand how to design swordsman mechs that can complement the fighting styles of my customers much better. This is one of the reasons why my Stormblade Samurai Mark II's are already selling well despite the fact that I am just a Journeyman."

She had become one of the few Journeymen of the current generation that defied the limitations of her rank. Her unusual set of advantages effectively allowed her to design swordsman mechs that offered value propositions that surpassed that of the mechs.

designed by her peers.

This is one of the key advantages to pursuing both a combat and production profession at the same time!

Therefore, even if Ketis simply did not have time to make quick progress in both of her careers, she was still doing relatively well for herself!

"I envy your clan for raising so many excellent mech designers who are actually worth a damn. Ves, Gloriana, you and maybe others such as Alexa Streon are shaping up to become future legends in your industry." Patriarch Reginald spoke in a judgmental tone. "Master Benedict Cortez is the only mech designer in the Cross Clan that I can respect. We have invested so much money and resources into augmenting and educating our smarter descendants, yet all we get in return are more spoiled Apprentices who may or may not be able to justify their rich treatment in a few decades. Absolutely none of them have shown any hint of the genius that characterize the best of your Larkinson Clan." "If it was that easy to produce mech designers on the level of Ves, then many more groups would have gotten them by now." Ketis crossed her arms. "You may have complaints about how Ves and Gloriana manage their Design Department, but they have always prioritized the quality of its mech designers from the beginning. By limiting the rate of recruitment to ensure they get the cream of the crop, it is easier for them to realize the potential of new talents. The smaller scale of the Design Department also makes it easier for them to supervise and guide the talents that they see promise in. You can't do that as effectively if they have ten times or a hundred times more mech designers under their command."

"If your Cross Clan isn't good at raising good mech designers from within, then why not recruit from outside?" Saint Marissa idly asked.

Patriarch Reginald scowled. "Tch. Our Cross Clan isn't as famous or attractive as the Larkinson Clan. Those snooty Journeymen, Seniors and Masters that are genuinely talented or skilled look down on us and Master Benedict. Our battlefield accomplishments have earned us lots of glory, but without a famous or highly successful

mech designer in our ranks, all of the mech designers that we are able to recruit are the rejects that can't get into more desirable mech companies."

Talent acquisition was serious business. Genuinely good mech designers had already found good employment years before they graduated from their universities. While there was still a bit of mobility in the hiring market for mech designers, the ones

with genuine value always found a way to receive lucrative applications from superior employers.

It was truly too difficult for the Cross Clan and its mech company to stand out from the

competition.

Benedict Cortez was not a bad mech designer per se, but his resume as a Master Mech Designer was still awfully thin compared to his much older and more experienced

competitors. "Swordmaster Ketis." Patriarch Reginald suddenly adopted a serious and intense expression. "Would you like to come over and work for us? We do not demand that you leave the Larkinson Clan and defect to our Cross Clan. You can stay with us as a guest

designer and work directly under Master Benedict. Think of it as an exchange. I think we can help each other out a lot. You can help whip our spineless mech designers into shape, and you can not only receive tutoring from a real Master Mech Designer, but also gain management experience by leading an existing design department. What do you think about this suggestion?"

Ketis blinked. She never expected Patriarch Reginald Cross to attempt to bring her over

to the Cross Clan, if only on a temporary basis!

Without the latter qualifier, she would never think about accepting this offer. However, if it was only for a few years, Ketis found this proposal sound a lot more compelling!

Chapter 6532 Deeper Development

Everyone knew what Patriarch Reginald Cross was like.

He was largely unsuited to be the leader of a large and growing clan. He was an ace pilot who was obsessed with earning glory. He was an impulsive man who put relatively little thought in all of his words and deeds.

It was easy to interpret the Crosser ace pilot's offer as a poorly conceived attempt at poaching Ketis from the Larkinson Clan.

However, the swordmaster thought about it from a different perspective.

Journeyman Mech Designers were supposed to be people who had initially found their design philosophies and needed to expand on its starting foundation by enriching it with design applications.

There were many ways in which Journeymen could develop their design philosophies. Ves had once explained the tree model to her in the past. He was an archetypical example of a mech designer who preferred to explore many different ideas, causing him to develop a broad but relatively short tree of skill sets and design applications. Ketis herself limited her output in many ways, choosing to limit her core work to swordsman mechs. That meant that her tree was destined to be narrow.

That did not mean that there was no need for her to travel around and gain new inspiration from different ideas.

The challenge of mech designers who wanted to develop like Ves was not to blindly pursue quantity by developing lots of unrelated design applications. They instead needed to find a way to tie all of these weaker solutions to each other so that they could produce powerful synergies.

A qualified mech designer must always design a mech that offered superior performance or value to their target audience!

There was no point in designing mechs if the output contained a lot of dubious gimmicks that did not offer any meaningful improvement on the battlefield.

As such, broad and adaptable mech designers had to be able to combine multiple design applications together so that the whole was always greater than the sum of its parts! Strictly speaking, Ves was not a typical broad mech designer. His most notable design solutions had already reached a degree of advancement that they could put a lot of narrow mech designers to shame.

It was just that his personality and the nature of his design choices reflected an attitude of not being afraid to explore drastically different subjects. Even if no existing synergy existed, he could always find a way to make it fit into his own design approach.

Ketis was a different mech designer. She purposefully focused on developing a narrow tree out of a clear understanding of her strengths and weaknesses.

As a woman who split her time between mech design and swordsmanship, she could never devote as much time on fanciful explorations like Ves. She had to ration them a lot more carefully.

She understood quite early that if she still wanted to make decent progress as a mech designer, then she needed to minimize her distractions and focus solely on developing her core strengths.

This was why she had no qualms about developing into a narrow mech designer and imposing multiple limitations on her work and research activities.

While narrow mech designers might have it easier on the surface, they still had to endure their own set of challenges.

One of them is that it was quite difficult to develop a narrow tree to a tall height. Ketis had to continually explore and advance her core specialization so that it became notably more effective than the design applications of broad mech designers.

Broad mech designers relied on combining multiple different weak solutions to produce a powerful result through synergy.

Narrow mech designers only relied on a single highly developed solution to outright dominate in a single aspect.

Not everyone was able to succeed in doing the latter. Even if they understood the research direction they needed to explore, they still had to rely on a lot of ingenuity, opportunities and hard work to make continuous breakthroughs and elevate a design application until it clearly overpowered compared to the alternatives!

This was difficult because the rest of the mech industry was not incompetent. There were many Masters and Star Designers that had furthered the development of mechs in so many different ways.

It was impossible for a Journeyman like Ketis to outcompete her most successful predecessors by beating them at their own game.

The only viable way for Journeymen and especially ones that chose to commit to narrow development strategies was to blaze a new trail!

By pioneering a new research field, a mech designer was able to avoid a lot of competition from the established market leaders.

The goal was to fulfill the demands of customers in a different way than usual.

Ves had managed to do so in a magnificent way. He successfully fulfilled a demand that had been left unmet for multiple centuries, which was to give norms way to pilot

mechs.

There were also mech designers who relied on different technologies to fulfill demands that had previously been met by established players.

What enabled them to stand out from the competition was to solve a problem at a much more affordable price, or find a way to increase the performance of their own

proprietary solutions!

Originally, Ketis sought to develop a design philosophy based around designing swordsman mechs armed with swords that offered superior sharpness.

That had gradually changed as Ketis started to shift her emphasis on sharpness to developing a design application based on imbuing the swordsmanship she mastered into her own swordsman mech designs.

It was not that Ketis had lost her passion for sharpness. It still served as the foundation of her personal sword style.

She just felt that she could not bring much value to the mech industry as sharpness was a common specialization to many existing mech designers.

While their methods may differ from her own, she could not deny the fact that the mech market already sold plenty of swordsman mechs armed with blades that could cut

through thick and resilient alloys.

Instead of thanklessly trying to improve a parameter that offered no real unique benefits aside from maybe making her own solution cheaper and more accessible, she would rather break new ground and offer her customers a benefit that they could never attain

from her competitors!

This was why she decisively chose to reorient her design philosophy towards a gimmick that only she could do, which was imbuing her swordsman mech designs with the custom swordsmanship styles developed by herself in the guise of a swordmaster! No other mech designer possessed a combination of professions like Ketis, and she would be a fool if she did not neglect the obvious synergies.

She had clearly made the right bet, because all of her products had been very well received by her target audience.

The Red Association currently registered her specialization as a Class VI design philosophy based on Skill-Imbued Swordsman Mechs.

Her root still remained the same. She wanted to design the best swordsman mechs in

the universe. She just chose to shift her emphasis from sharpness to the imbue of superior weapon skills. This was why she was successfully able to get away with such a major change in specializations.

She was rather lucky as well that she managed to make this transition early in her career as a high-ranking mech designer.

The later she changed her specializations, the less room she had to make any course

changes.

At that point, too much of her original design philosophy had already become solidified, thereby locking their cognition to the point where they could no longer accept radical changes in their design approach.

In other words, older mech designers had basically locked themselves in their chosen

directions!

They could only effectively explore radically different research directions if they were broad and versatile enough from the start.

The only other solution was to raise disciples who were willing to explore different but related research directions.

Ketis had yet to reach the point where she seriously needed to think about training disciples to do this kind of work.

She was still a Journeyman Mech Designer who had made decent but not too many attainments in her new research direction.

She instinctively felt that she still retained enough flexibility to make further course changes if she wished.

Not that she wanted to. She was happy with specializing in Skill-Imbued Swordsman

Mechs.

The challenge that she currently faced was that she found it difficult to devise new ways

to improve her core design application any further.

She recognized several shortcomings about her design philosophy that she could

address.

The 'memory capacity' of every swordsman mech design was limited. She could only

imbue so much information into her works. This severely limited her ability to pass on thorough and complete swordsmanship styles into words such as the Monster Slayer model and the Storm Sword model.

The teaching of swordsmanship styles was also rigid and non-interactive. Every copy of her mech designs taught the same set of sword techniques and principles without making any adjustments based on the circumstances of individual mech pilots! A true swordsmanship teacher would tailor his lessons to each individual student. Certain moves were not suitable to be employed by a different swordsman due to incompatible physiques, mindsets, habits and convictions.

Other sword techniques could still be taught, but needed to be altered to accommodate

the unique circumstances of individual swordsmen.

This was why true swordsmanship could never easily be learned by studying books or

watching a video guide.

Those that possessed the capacity to learn new sword styles through non-interactive study materials were already highly skilled and successful swordmasters themselves! What Ketis could do, the vast majority of her customers could not do. They lacked the skill, experience and other competencies to truly master unfamiliar sword styles. The most common feedback she received from her customers was that the sword styles taught by her mechs forced them into becoming swordsmen that they did not identify

with. The lack of adaptation and responsiveness to the unique circumstances of every customer limited the usefulness of sword styles that synergized well with their associated swordsman mechs.

Ketis eagerly wanted to solve these problems and more, but she lacked the imagination

and inspiration to come up with viable solutions.

This was why Journeymen occasionally had to leave the environment they were familiar with and venture to different places in order to gain new ideas.

While she hadn't really thought about it before, now that she received an offer from

Patriarch Reginald Cross, she finally saw an opportunity to enter a different environment and enrich her views on mech design.

Of course, accepting the offer to become a guest worker at the Cross Clan was not her only choice.

She could easily think of other groups located in more distant and exotic locations that would gladly host a mech designer of her pedigree and caliber!

As the first student of Professor Ves Larkinson, establishing a connection with Ketis was a good way to form an indirect connection with the Father of Carmine Mechs!

Ketis rejected this alternative because she wanted to be valued by her own merits, not by her benefactor.

She was also familiar with the Crossers and found them to be upright and trustworthy enough to work together on a deeper level.

Master Benedict Cortez was also a lot older and more experienced than her. He could offer her a lot of guidance and help her figure out how to develop her design philosophy further.

"Patriarch Reginald." Ketis spoke up after a long moment of thought. "Your offer sounds... interesting. Give me time to consider your offer. I may end up taking it. If I do, I hope you will prepare a guest position for me in your Cross Clan."

The ace pilot looked surprised. It was as if he did not actually expect for the swordmaster to accept his spontaneous offer.

That was no reason to look at a gift horse in the mouth, though. Patriarch Reginald

quickly responded with a wide grin!

"Of course! I will tell Master Benedict to reserve a place by his side right away! If he

doesn't do what I tell him to, then feel free to beat him up until he relents! He has promised to rectify our mech designers for multiple years, but I have yet to notice any differences. Maybe you can do a better job by applying the methods used by the Larkinson Clan."

This was a win-win proposition for the two parties.

Ketis wanted to work in a different environment in order to broaden her horizons and gain new inspiration.

The Cross Clan wanted to bring in an outside 'consultant' to rectify the Cross Mech Corporation's Design Department!

Chapter 6533 Cogs in a Machine

Ketis did not know whether she had made the right decision.

Working for the Cross Clan for a year or so may turn out to be a waste of time.

Patriarch Reginald may have been overly harsh when he accused the mech designers under his employ to be worthless, but his words shouldn't be completely false.

One of the joys of working in the Larkinson Clan was that Ketis was surrounded by talented and competent clansmen.

Even if the mech designers of the Design Department were not necessarily high in rank, they were still young and possessed an abundance of ambitious ideas and rich

imagination.

Spending lots of time with mech designers who possessed a lot of optimism and enough competence to realize their dreams fostered a very positive and encouraging work environment.

This was probably one of the secrets to the Design Department's success.

By deliberately refusing to hire older, more jaded and less imaginative mech designers, the Design Department avoided a situation where creativity and imagination became stifled due to the rigid mindsets of the people who were more likely to hold the most authority due to their seniority.

Of course, the lack of older and more experienced mech designers also came with its own fair share of disadvantages.

The LMC's Design Department scored relatively poorly in terms of efficiency, volume of output and consistency. It was filled with ambitious and creative minds that did not tend to respond well to monotonous low-level work assignments.

The Design Department therefore reflected the personalities and work approaches of the leaders in charge quite well. Ketis regarded it as an artisan workshop more than a manufacturing room.

From what little information Ketis managed to glean from Patriarch Reginald Cross, the Design Department of the Cross Mech Corporation was set up like a factory.

Every mech designer had a specific role to fulfill. While they were granted just enough time to study new knowledge, design their own mechs and conduct their own research, their mandatory responsibilities forced them to operate precisely according to the demands of Master Benedict Cortez.

As a mech designer who realized a design philosophy based on the efficient use of energy, he was a man who by his very nature treated his subordinates as cogs in a machine.

Master Benedict had very little tolerance for deviations and tried too hard to force every subordinate to fit into the roles he had designated for them. Showing too much

initiative was discouraged as wasting time on improvised and original solutions could result in significant delays to the project timeline.

It sounded like a nightmare work environment that couldn't possibly work, but it was actually quite common in the mech industry.

This was an approach towards mech design that worked best on a larger scale. Thousands of mech designers could work alongside each other without any serious disruptions or delays because everyone remained in sync with each other.

A large design department would also offer a huge variety of jobs and responsibilities. Many different mech designers should be able to find role that was compatible with their own inclinations.

As for those that still didn't manage to fit?

They would just get fired.

The mech designers who worked in these large and highly organized workplaces tended to enjoy the stability they offered. Their work was not too stimulating, but there was a very low probability that they would fail to meet the requirements.

This kind of Design Department offered the best possible support for a mech designer like Master Benedict!

He was the only mech design pillar of the Cross Clan, so he had to shoulder a huge amount of responsibilities by himself. In order to maximize his productivity and increase his output, he needed the help of a large machine filled with mech designers that acted completely according to his needs and nothing more.

This was how Master Benedict was able to juggle dozens of mech design projects and work on them so efficiently that he was able to complete them according to their tight and punishing schedules!

Master Benedict apparently structured his mech design projects in such a way that he only needed to rely on his superior capabilities to solve the most difficult problems in advance. That still left a lot of gaps, but he could delegate all of the remaining grunt work to his subordinates.

As long as Master Benedict was skilled enough to make this work, he had built a pretty good setup for himself.

Unfortunately, this design work model came with a very big downside. It was hardly the best way to help younger mech designers exercise their creativity and broaden their problem-solving skills.

The situation was entirely different in the LMC's Design Department as Ves and Gloriana were much more interested in developing the comprehensive design skills of the talents they carefully selected and recruited into their clan.

It was a waste of time, money, resources and potential if the talented young mech designers failed to develop any useful design applications!

The less strict and more informal work structure within the Larkinson Clan easily allowed assistant and contributing mech designers to take on a variety of highly stimulating assignments.

Even if the difficulty and importance of the grunt work was not all that educational, exposing assistants to a larger variety of problems still allowed them to exercise their design skills in a more comprehensive manner.

It was a lot harder for mech designers to keep up with their work schedule, though. There was a higher demand on competence and they always needed to be ready to take on brand new challenges. Their work was never stable enough for them to be able to do the same work on repeat for months or years.

Ultimately, the two different workplaces tended to propagate very different kinds of mech designers.

Those who did well in climbing up the LMC's Design Department tended to be less efficient but more creative. Ketis felt she was a good example of that as she could not stomach the idea of working as a mech designer in the Cross Clan.

That did not mean that the CMC's Design Department was completely unsuited to develop talents. Those who did well in this kind of workplace were essentially model workers that excelled at getting the most out of the least amount of resources. They were good at producing consistent work and slowly gained the ability to improve technological implementations

Ketis felt very fortunate to have worked in such a stimulating work environment.

She felt she needed to get a better insight on how the Cross Clan developed its mechs, preferably without talking to Master Benedict first.

Ketis and him were old acquaintances who went back a long way, back when Master Benedict was known as the notorious Skull Architect.

Mayra used to be an apprentice of the Skull Architect.

Since Ketis learned mech design from Mayra, that turned Ketis into something of a

'grand-disciple' of Master Benedict Cortez.

Not that it mattered all that much. Everything happened a long time ago in a galaxy that

had become unreachable.

Ketis had very little in common with Master Benedict, and their approach towards mech design diverged considerably.

However, was precisely because they were so different from each other that an

exchange became worthwhile.

Ketis would definitely benefit more from an exchange of knowledge than Master Benedict, but perhaps there were other ways for her to make up the difference.

Patriarch Reginald promised to give her a mandate to 'rectify' the CMC's Design Department. Improving it would not only make the ace pilot happy, but should hopefully

give Master Benedict more useful helpers to share his growing burdens.

In order to do that, she wanted to question a handful of Crossers in order to get a better

idea on how they obtained their mechs.

The swordmaster first decided to approach Saint Linda Cross.

Ketis felt it was a good idea to develop a closer relationship with one of the few ace pilots that would stay behind the expeditionary fleet.

The Swordmaster decisively shuttled over to the Hemmington Cross and entered a hangar bay where she had an opportunity to admire the Amphis Extremis up close.

"Beautiful."

The Amphis Extremis was a quasi-first-class ace offensive space knight that was clearly based on the original Amphis that Linda Cross piloted as an expert mech. Surprisingly enough, the Amphis Extremis turned out to be a brand new construction.

Ketis was slightly taken aback by this discovery, as she assumed that the Crossers would do the same as the Larkinsons and upgrade an existing expert mech into an ace mech. She soon figured out why the Cross Clan refused to reuse the original Amphis. Different from the Larkinson Clan which tended to value mechs as they grew older and more powerful as they aged, the Cross Clan tended to treat its mechs as machines that inevitably experienced wear and tear and deteriorated in performance unless special measures were taken.

It was logical for the Cross Clan to discard an expert mech that had become outdated and depreciated too much in value and develop a new ace mech from scratch. There were huge differences between expert mechs and ace mechs. Unless the latter was expressly designed to accommodate future upgrades, it was not very cost-effective to transform expert mechs into ace mechs.

Technology, skills, experience, mech doctrines, material availability, enemy types and more had all changed drastically over the years.

This was why Master Benedict Cortez clearly chose to start from scratch and design a

superior ace mech without the need to preserve any of the outdated baggage that were several decades old.

This was why the Amphis Extremis offered superior performance in almost every aspect aside from the ones that could only be gained from age.

It was a pity that the original Amphis never had an opportunity to become a living mech, and that the new Amphis Extremis hadn't gained this trait either.

The Cross Clan clearly did not want to depend too much on Ves Larkinson and his

design philosophy.

Their decision was not necessarily wrong. There was still value in non-living mechs.

Their growth potential was lower, but there was not much need to be fussy about their production or repairs.

The Cross Clan could more easily switch to using new mechs depending on what the situation demanded from its troops.

The older mechs could be sent to the recyclers so that their materials could be used to produce more useful products.

This was the conventional approach to handling mechs.

Ketis actually felt repulsed by this treatment, even though these lifeless mechs did not have feelings to care about how callously they were being handled.

This was an indication that she had spent too much time in the Larkinson Clan, where

everyone treated mechs as cherished brothers and sisters!

How the Larkinsons treated their mechs was the exception rather than the rule!

Ketis had always known about this on an intellectual level, but it was now that she truly understood what this meant!

She began to smile. To be confronted by a different approach towards managing mechs

already expanded her horizons.

She grew excited. She looked forward to what other novelties and culture shocks the Cross Clan would introduce to her. The abundance of lifeless mechs parked in the hangar bay continued to break apart the assumptions that shackled her cognition and

caused her to stagnate in her research. "Swordmaster Ketis." The female ace pilot greeted as she left her cockpit and floated

down to the deck. "Welcome to the Hemmington Cross. What do you think of my Amphis Extremis."

"It is a fine work of technological essence" Ketis admitted. "I can see how much effort Master Benedict had put into its design. Its shape and parts all scream brutal efficiency to me. Every limb should move smoothly and every force exertion should be able to produce a precise amount of force. Perhaps these design choices have made the physical frame a little less tolerant towards mechanical damage than what I expect from a space knight, but the powerful SA-DIX Shield Generator should prevent that from becoming an easily exploitable weakness."

Chapter 6534 The Amphis Extremis

The Amphis Extremis was an imposing mech up close, as it should be, as it was a powerful ace mech.

Ketis appreciated the opportunity to examine this relatively new machine up close. Master Benedict had only managed to complete the design and fabrication of this machine recently, so it had yet to show off its power too much on the battlefield.

The brief skirmishes between different scouting and raiding elements were not enough to give the Amphis Extremis room to showcase its full might.

Saint Linda Cross was obviously very happy to pilot such a powerful mech.

"Do you regret that it isn't a living mech?" Ketis asked. "The other ace pilots in the virtual meeting all preferred to commission a living mech from my clan."

Saint Linda Cross shrugged. "I can understand the temptation, but just like my patriarch, I am not looking to fight alongside a machine-turned-friend. Here in the Cross Clan, we believe that glory must be earned through our own efforts. If we let our machines decide our actions, we will ultimately grow dependent on them. What happens if we lose our living mechs one day? We already saw a preview of that by witnessing how badly Jannzi Larkinson reacted to the death of her living mech."

"That was an extreme case, Linda. Jannzi Larkinson developed an extreme attachment to her living mech. She stood out so much in this regard that it accidentally led to the development of the Carmine System. Most of the mech pilots in our clan are able to cope with the loss of their battle partners relatively well. They often describe it as losing a pet. It is something to mourn about, but not something worth giving up your life for. I think the lessons you learn and the companionship you gain from piloting a living mech is worth far more than the pain you will feel from losing it in battle."

Though Ketis did not particularly choose to become a shill, she didn't like how Saint Linda dismissed the value of living mechs so readily.

The older ace pilot merely smiled in response. "Reginald and I have built our careers off piloting mechs that don't backtalk against us or second-guess our decisions. There may be times where teamwork can produce better results, but we are mech pilots who grew up in the old Cross Clan. Back in the Garlen Empire, we were taught that only power is supreme. Technology, wealth and troops are all secondary in comparison. As long as we are skilled and strong enough, it is natural for everything else to fall in line. Those who put technology and other factors first are short-sighted because their success and failure is tied to the availability of external variables. We must never develop this weakness."

That was an extreme opinion that Ketis never expected to hear from Linda Cross, who was often regarded as a considerably more intelligent and reasonable champion than Reginald Cross!

It turned out that all of the old school mech pilots from the Garlen Empire were the same.

The newer generation of expert pilots that emerged after the Cross Clan entered the Red Ocean were not so fixated on glory and martial supremacy. It was a pity that they had yet to become powerful enough to challenge the dominance of the old timers. Seeing that there was no way for Ketis to convince Linda Cross to look at living mechs in a more favorable way, the swordmaster decided to change the subject.

"The weapons of your Amphis Extremis are quite interesting. What has stood out the most to me is that your mech is wielding a flail instead of a chained sword. The aesthetic design is certainly... inspired."

"That is correct. The female ace pilot smiled when she turned and took a look at the menacing appearance of the ball attached to the chain of the handle. "I was doubtful at first, but the Wrecker Skull soon won me over. Master Benedict added a surprisingly playful touch to the weapon by shaping the weighted ball in the form of a metallic skull. The asymmetrical shape happens to add more unpredictability to my swings. It also helps to induce more fear as skulls also have similar meanings to the native aliens." The Wrecker Skull was a fitting name given that the skull-shaped ball truly looked as if it could be used to crack apart the heads of enemy phase lords!

"Why did you decide to switch from attaching the chain with a ball instead of a sword?" Ketis asked. "If you chose to stick with the latter, I could have forged a special blade for you that is thick, sturdy and capable of cutting through lots of matter."

"There are multiple reasons why the main weapon of my ace mech is a ball. Back when I was still an expert pilot, my resonance strength was not strong enough to generate enough mass for a blunt object to break apart the armor of mechs or starships. I needed to rely on a sword to more easily cut through armor and solid matter. Now that I have become an ace pilot, I no longer need this compromise anymore. With the help of my Saint Kingdom, I can amplify the mass of my ace mech and any other weapon by ten times or more. I can rend apart the hulls of smaller starships and obliterate any expert mech that gets hit by a solid flail strike."

As a swordmaster, Ketis still couldn't stomach how easily Linda abandoned her sword for a flail.

"There are still advantages to wielding a sword even if you have managed to break through, Linda. Your reality-defying ability to amplify the mass of any weapon can help you cut through hardened materials much easier. You don't need to rely on sharpness at all in order to slice apart your enemies. You can just rely on the superior mass and momentum of your weapon to do most of the work."

Linda shook her head. "I know what you are talking about, but swordsmanship is not for me. I have witnessed Venerable Dise in action enough times to know that I can never catch up to her in terms

of pure skill. Besides, wielding a flail with a weighted ball is more suitable against the current enemies we are fighting against. My Amphis Extremis can easily exhaust the transphasic energy shields of alien warships because the more

massive ball allows me to amplify its bashing power much further. The same goes for the spatial barriers of enemy phase lords. As a mech designer, you should know why this is

the case."

"I do. Ketis replied.

Transphasic energy shields did not behave like physical armor. The former was much less susceptible to getting 'cut' or 'pierced'. Swords and spears behaved the same as blunt objects in most cases. Only special technology and materials made it possible for such weapons to actually penetrate through energy shields without exhausted its total

energy reserves.

The Cross Clan did not have easy access to these kinds of goodies.

Therefore, the effective conventional solution to increasing a mech's attack power against energy defenses was to employ a heavy blunt weapon instead!

The flail and other blunt weapons largely relied on maximizing the kinetic energy to produce exaggerated levels of impact damage against their targets.

In other words, bigger numbers translated into more damage! These properties and the relationships between them made it far more logical for the Amphis Extremis to exchange its sword for a blunt weapon. She and Master Benedict chose the flail over other weapons due to Linda's habit of using long chains to increase the versatility of her melee combat operations.

"The length of the chain can extend quite far if need be. Linda explained. "I have yet to show off the full length. Master Benedict and his partners worked hard to find a transphasic hyper alloy that can allow them to reduce the size and thickness of the chains while still making it resistant to breaking. This helps with packing a longer chain

in my mech."

One of the criticisms of the original Amphis was that its chained sword could only be thrown up to a certain length. The new ace mech addressed this persistent issue and probably managed to solve the problem quite well by utilizing chains that were much smaller and thinner!

This significantly increased the range of the 'melee' strikes of the Amphis Extremis. Yet this was not the only weapon in the space knight's arsenal.

"The tower shield has seen little improvements aside from making use of superior exotics and hypers." Ketis remarked as she tried to figure out if there was anything

special about its design.

"Master Benedict and I do not think the tower shield needs to be anything more." The Crosser ace pilot answered. "A solid enough tower shield should be able to resist a lot of weapons fire, but the main reason why it is so unsophisticated is because I can rely on it to stay in one piece if I use it as a battering ram. The forces that I can generate from a full charge is enormous if I make active use of my Saint Kingdom. The collision is too powerful. A high-tech tower shield that is integrated with all sorts of tech will shatter apart despite the strengthening derived from true resonance due to the presence of too many weak points. I do not have as many fears if I can freely abuse the physical shield of

my Amphis Extremis."

That also made sense. The favorite tactic of an offensive space knight was charge forward and weather all of the remote attacks with its protective tool before using it to

crash right into their targets!

Offensive space knights were quite similar to lancer mechs to an extent.

Aside from a flail and tower shield, the Amphis Extremis gained an additional weapon

system.

A pair of shoulder-mounted rapid-fire kinetic multi-barreled hyper machine guns graced the mech frame.

They were designed to follow the contours of the widened shoulder plates, so they did not ruin the silhouette of the Amphis Extremis. Thick ammunition containers were mounted on the back, which was designed to be easily removed or replaced by a logistical mech under field conditions.

"I mentioned earlier that my Saint Kingdom can amplify the mass of anything without affecting inertia or whatever. This works for something as large as my entire machine to objects as small as the metal bullet of a gun." Saint Linda briefly explained. "It seemed too good of an opportunity to add these multi-barreled machine guns to mech. Don't underestimate this relatively low-tech weapon. It can launch rounds at a high rate, and my control over them is good enough to be able to aim each muzzle at individual targets. Combined with the fact that I can easily increase the mass of every bullet by ten times or more, I can use this cheap and small ammunition to shred entire swarms of alien phasefighters, especially if my resonance strength grows stronger in the future. They are also good at intercepting a large amount of missiles or even solid kinetic projectiles when I become stronger."

This completely solved one of the greatest disadvantages of a melee mech like the

Amphis Extremis!

Even if an ace mech was able to rely on its Saint Kingdom to crush multiple weaker targets at a time, it was still a lot more wasteful than relying on machine guns to do the

job

"What about targets other than small craft?"

"The rapid-fire machine guns are also fairly effective at wearing down energy shields or punching through armor, though I can run out of ammunition quickly in those cases. That is what my flail and tower shield are for. Master Benedict offered to add more weapon systems to my Amphis Extremis, but I refused because this is all I need to handle all of the enemy types deployed by the native aliens. I don't want to compromise the integrity and reliability of my mech any further by adding redundant stuff." Ketis nodded in agreement. "You have made a good choice. You have put together a perfect combination of weapons to employ against the native aliens."

As an ace mech that largely conformed to the offensive space knight archetype, the

addition of the shoulder-mounted machine guns rounded out its attack options and massively increased its usefulness on the battlefield!

The Amphis Extremis was anything but a pure defensive bulwark that could do nothing

else but take a lot of hits!

It was designed to dish out as much damage as it could withstand, if not more!

Chapter 6535 The Technological Advancements of Master Benedict Cortez

Ever since the Red Tide Offensive erupted more than half a year ago, ace mechs became a much more common sight to the public.

Unlike the more restrained wars and conflicts between states, the aggression of the native alien invaders was relentless and unending.

The age where ace mechs were treated as trump cards only to be used in the most critical of circumstances was over. Their strategic deterrence no longer had an effect on the native alien forces that had all of the cannon fodder in the dwarf galaxy to spare.

In a war as bloody and brutal as the current one, only actual killing could make the other side relent!

It was for this reason that all sorts of ace mechs showed off their combat prowess without any intention of hiding their true strength anymore.

This gave the masses a much better understanding of the power and the capabilities of these incredible machines.

Combined with the fact that all of them had been updated with modern advancements from the Phasewater and Hyper Generations, high-end mechs had never become as prominent as today!

As far as second-class ace mechs were concerned, the design of the Amphis Extremis exhibited a lot of restraint, which did not appear to match its name.

However, a mech designer such as Ketis was able to comprehend why Master Benedict called it the Amphis Extremis.

That was because the ace space knight had been designed with extreme performance in mind.

Unlike multipurpose mechs that tried to solve every problem by carrying a solution for every occasion, the design of the Amphis Extremis tried to solve every alien opponent by relying on the minimum number of features.

Every design choice had a meaning. Every component had a purpose. Nothing was being wasted. With just a flail, a tower shield and a pair of shoulder-mounted machine guns, the Amphis Extremis should theoretically be able to defeat all native alien enemy types with the help of its Saint Kingdom!

Of course, the Amphis Extremis could not match the performance of other ace mechs in their areas of specializations. There were still differences in effectiveness.

For example, the Amphis Extremis lacked long-range striking capabilities. Its machine guns were devastating at short ranges, but their hit rates dropped rapidly at mid range. As for trying to hit anything smaller than a starship at long range? Forget about it. The

muzzle velocities and accuracy of the multi-barreled machine guns were downright awful compared to other ranged weapon types.

Gauss rifles that were able to accelerate kinetic projectiles to a small fraction of the speed of light were much more effective at longer ranges. On top of that, light-speed energy weapons were even better at this job!

Ketis found it curious that Master Benedict rejected the temptation of mounting laser weapons onto the Amphis Extremis. It showed that he remained confident that the Amphis Extremis would be able to deal with the opposition without long-ranged precision armaments.

This was the right choice as far as the swordmaster was concerned. The Amphis Extremis was primarily a melee mech, and excelled at inflicting damage up close. Instead of blindly trying to make up for its shortcomings, it was much more sensible to amplify its strengths.

Unlike bulkier and heavier space knights such as Venerable Jannzi's Bastion, the Amphis Extremis was actually fast and mobile enough to be utilized in assault roles.

It might not be able to catch up with the likes of the Dark Zephyr Mark III or the Jedda Sandivar, but no one expected for a medium mech to be able to win a race against those blazingly fast machines.

As a product of Master Benedict, the Amphis Extremis was not only extremely efficient when it came to the use and transmission of energy, but also possessed

higher-than-usual power generation capacities.

Its power reactor was close to the limit of what a quasi-first-class ace mech could bear, and the latest version of the Endex System significantly boosted its power generation through alternative means!

"I have heard that Master Benedict has made significant breakthroughs in advancing his main design applications. Ketis said.

Saint Linda nodded. "That is correct. The Magma Vein System Version 2.0 is improved in every way. I don't understand the technical details myself, so you can read the documentation if you are able to access it. What interests me the most is that it comes with the Volcanic Outburst Mode. I haven't used it yet, but it is supposedly a way to overload every part and system that consumes energy so that they temporarily become a lot more powerful than before. Activating this mode causes my mech to overheat and damage its internals at a fast rate, so I have been told to never activate it unless the circumstances are dire. If I keep it active for too long, my mech will melt or explode." Ketis raised her eyebrows in surprise. Overload modes had existed for a long time, but she never expected for Master Benedict to make use of this solution.

"Is there anything special about the Volcanic Outburst Mode that makes it different from other overload modes?"

"There is." Saint Linda nodded. "Master Benedict has carefully configured its settings as

well as the parts of my ace mech so that the breakdowns and other malfunctions will happen all at once instead of one at a time. What I mean by that is that my Amphis Extremis will remain fully functional before reaching the critical threshold. If I don't resolve a crisis by that time, my ace mech will be dead anyway."

Her description did not sound like much, but Ketis knew that I was much more difficult to attain this result in practice!

It demanded a deep understanding of all of the utilized technologies as well as how they materially deteriorated after being subjected to excessive abuse!

A Journeyman Mech Designer like Ketis could never develop an overload mode in her own mech designs that could work so well!

Her own solution would likely cause her swordsman mechs to blow up their flight systems or mech engines first, thereby causing them to become combat ineffective despite the fact that all of their other parts and systems were still in working condition! After Ketis was done with admiring the latest implementation of the Magma Vein System, she soon turned her attention to Master Benedict's other technological triumph. "What about the Endex System? I have heard that Master Benedict managed to make a large breakthrough in its operation."

Ketis recalled that Master Benedict also contributed to the Amaranto Mark II Project. The version of the Endex System utilized in the Amphis Extremis would probably be applied to the upcoming ace command mech as well!

"He did." Saint Linda responded. "I have been told that the Endex System Version 3.0 makes much more effective use of phasewater technology and hyper technology. I don't know how he came up with the idea, but he actually came up with the idea of using flesh taken from phase lords or phase whales to increase the amount of energy harvested from other dimensions. He instructed me to exchange a large chunk of my war merits for brain tissue harvested from a greater phase whale. With the help of this material, the Endex System installed inside my Amphis Extremis can practically power my Amphis Extremis by itself."

That was a remarkable result! Unlike conventional power reactors that relied on high-density fuel or other energy sources to supply a lot of energy to different parts, the Endex System perpetually absorbed it from other dimensions, making it practically free

and inexhaustible to operate!

As long as it became powerful enough and as long as Saint Linda controlled the energy consumption of her ace mech, the Amphis Extremis could theoretically keep fighting on the battlefield for an entire day without exhausting her energy reserves!

This was also why the Amphis Extremis did not contain too many energy-hungry components.

The only real energy hog of the ace space knight was the SA-DIX Shield Generator.

How could a space knight fail to resist a lot of damage?

Even if the design of the Amphis Extremis placed more emphasis on offense rather than defense, the inclusion of a custom azure energy shield generator that was largely dependent on energy supply neatly made up for its defensive shortcomings! "Most knight mechs designed in the past rely more on armor than energy shields to withstand enemy attacks." Ketis said. "Alien transphasic energy shield technology is so highly developed that it has changed our paradigms. Now, more and more defensive mechs have begun to rely more on their energy shields than armor plating for protection. As a space knight pilot, how do you feel about this shift?"

The ace pilot remained silent for a moment.

"To be honest, I am having difficulty adapting to this transition. A good mech pilot must

always be able to adapt to new technologies, but old habits die hard. I know many colleagues who insist on sticking to space knights that put more emphasis on armor than energy shields because that is what they have based their success on for so many years. I like to think that I am better than those inflexible pilots, but I still feel awfully exposed whenever I make use of the SA-DIX Shield Generator in the field. It is not as physical and solid as a good slab of metal. The protection is entirely based on fancy tech that I can never hope to understand how it works. It makes me feel as if my life and death is decided by technology rather than my own piloting"

"I see. I can sort of understand how that is distressing to a mech pilot that likes to feel in control."

This was probably another reason why the Amphis Extremis did not contain too many weapon systems and other gizmos.

Saint Linda Cross clearly preferred to rely on solutions that were simple, tangible and easily understandable.

In that sense, the loadout of the Amphis Extremis made complete sense. The flail was a simple enough weapon to understand. The tower shield even more so. The machine guns were low-tech weapon systems that lacked the abstractness and complexity of more advanced ranged solutions such as energy weapons and plasma weapons.

Ketis suddenly gained a crucial insight!

Simple and lower-tech solutions were not always inferior. It was not necessarily the wrong choice to resort to tech and design applications that were not very popular so long as they perfectly fit the mech pilot's preferences and inclinations!

The Amphis Extremis was designed from the ground up with the Saint Kingdom and the personal preferences of Saint Linda Cross in mind.

The design was as minimal as possible while still possessing enough features to elevate the performance of the ace mech to the next level!

The results were clearly gratifying.

While Ketis had yet to see the Amphis Extremis perform at its best, she already gathered

enough information to guess that it should be able to resist far more attacks and inflict much greater damage than the Dark Zephyr Mark III!

Sure, the Dark Zephyr Mark III was a completely different kind of mech that was never meant to perform assault missions.

That did not take away from the fact that the Amphis Extremis was far better designed

to fight against the native aliens today despite the fact that was not a living mech!

Perhaps the Dark Zephyr Mark III might be able to overtake the Amphis Extremis over

time by relying on the growth of the ace pilot as well as the ace mech, but how long would that take?

If it took 20 years for the Dark Zephyr Mark III to grow into his power and truly unlock his greater potential, then that had no bearing at all in the current crisis!

Ketis knew that living mechs could continually grow in E-technology terms until they

evolved into monsters.

It would be nice to have them at the Larkinson Clan's disposal right away, but that was clearly an impossible dream!

Chapter 6536 Dysfunction in the Cross Clan

After Ketis was done with drooling over the Amphis Extremis, Saint Linda Cross briefly gave her a tour of the standard mechs that were currently stored inside the hangar bay of the Hemmington Cross.

Every crew member and mech pilot bowed low and expressed their deepest respect to the female saint.

As the second ace pilot of the Cross Clan after Patriarch Reginald Cross, the status of Saint Linda Cross had already exceeded that of Master Benedict Cortez!

The Crossers respected high-ranking mech pilots a lot more than high-ranking mech designers.

Ketis actually found this cultural difference to be a little jarring because it was a lot. different in the Larkinson Clan.

The clansmen still looked up to the ace pilots and expert pilots of their clan, but nothing could break their utter belief and adoration of mech designers such as Ves Larkinson!

She shouldn't be surprised that the two clans looked up to the leaders of different professions.

The Cross Clan had always based its success off the leadership and accomplishments of its strongest mech pilots.

The Larkinson Clan grew incredibly fast and achieved great prosperity largely due to the efforts of its best mech designers.

The founders and leaders of the clans exerted so much influence that the members took on different shapes.

Ketis actually found it rather refreshing that the Crossers did not revere the ground that the most prominent mech designers in their clan walked upon.

Of course, it was also because there was a notable deficit in excellent mech designers in the Cross Clan.

Master Benedict Cortez was not originally a member of the Cross Clan, so he already suffered from a handicap. Even if the clan later went on to copy the model of the Larkinson Clan and open itself to mass external recruitment, the Master Mech Designer never received the respect he deserved.

She could pretty much hear it from the idle talk of the Crossers who were working on the Hemmington Cross.

"Tch. My mech has broken down again. It only took a small hit on the arm, but I lost complete control over the rifle. How am I supposed to keep my shots straight when a single attack can ruin my mech's accuracy? Master Benedict is slacking off again." "Is this what the CMC worked on in the last eight months? Why did they remove the third ammunition canister? Don't they know how many shots it takes to get past the

energy shields of those annoying phasefighters?! What, the caliber has increased but the firing rate has dropped by half? That out-of-touch Master Mech Designer has gone too far! How are we supposed to land so many hits when it has become harder to shoot down those fast and maneuverable phasefighters? I don't care if the math claims that it works out a lot better for us. That geeky old guy Benedict has no idea how difficult it is for mech pilots like us to eliminate phasefighters that are becoming faster with every generation!"

"Why is he telling us to abandon our swords? Does he not know how much I trained and fought to become the best swordsman of our class in the mech academy? I won first place in two competitions! Even if I am not as good as those Heavensworders over at the Larkinson Clan, I have been learning from them! Now, I have to set most of my specialized swordsmanship aside because this haughty mech designer thinks that swords are no use against energy shields! Hah! He can kiss my butt!"

Ketis couldn't believe what she heard. Master Mech Designers were among the more respected people of a society, yet the Crossers spoke so crassly about him that they clearly held far too little respect towards the man who was responsible for developing the mechs they relied upon.

Such talk would never take place in the Larkinson Clan!

Granted, the Crossers who carelessly voiced their true opinions did so out of typical earshot from anyone important.

Even if these Crossers did not dare to share their true feelings directly in front of Ketis and Saint Linda Cross, the fact that they shared these words at all was a sign that the Cross Clan did not give mech designers their due.

The ace pilot shrugged when her extraordinary senses were able to pick up the disrespectful chatter as well.

"Please excuse our clansmen for their lack of consideration. Our culture has always put mech pilots on top of mech designers. Some of our clansmen take this too far and cannot fully appreciate the work and sacrifice that mech designers have put into arming them with the best machines."

Ketis waved her hand. "It is okay. I am not a frail flower. I can handle it. I am just surprised that this problem has gotten so bad in your clan. I am not unfamiliar with how the Garlen Empire of the Vicious Mountain Star Sector operated back in the old days. Even if mech designers played second fiddle over there, the Garleners still looked up to mech designers who can design good machines. I don't think this is true for your clan anymore."

"There are better leaders in our clan that can explain it to you." Saint Linda said in a measured tone. "In my opinion, I think it is because our clansmen are making constant comparisons between the works of Patriarch Ves Larkinson and the works of Master Benedict Cortez. The latter are not necessarily weak, but they are not very... flashy. Let me show you what I mean."

Linda led Ketis to a section where dozens of mechs had been parked.

Many of the mech models looked familiar to Ketis. What stood out was that most of them fell into two different categories.

There were ranged mechs that overwhelmingly relied on energy weapons as their source of damage output.

This paired well with Master Benedict's design philosophy as the Crosser ranged mechs were able to output greater damage and last significantly longer on the battlefield than other comparable rifleman mechs!

The melee mechs tended to put much more emphasis on their azure energy shield generators. They relied on their superior power generation to keep their azure energy shields active for a longer time, enabling them to withstand greater punishment than most of the competition.

It was not entirely effective when these machines got struck by a warship-grade cannon, but it worked quite well in confrontations against alien phasefighters.

The weapons loadout of the newer melee mechs were pretty interesting to Ketis. She had apparently caught the Cross Clan in the middle of a major technological refresh. It was no wonder that she heard some Crossers complaining about a weapon swap." "Has the armed forces of your clan decided to replace their swords with maces?" "It is a controversial change because it is imposed from above. Linda confirmed. "The same rationale that applies for my Amphis Extremis partially applies to standard mechs as well. Blunt weapons with heft to them can inflict more damage to energy shields than bladed weapons. Master Benedict cannot stand the inefficiency that comes with wielding swords against enemies where swordsmanship is not as relevant. He truly believes that we can achieve statistically better results if our melee mechs all start to bash against energy shields with maces as opposed to swords."

As a swordsman mech fanatic, Ketis felt offended by the disregard that Master Benedict had shown towards the use of swords.

"It is true that maces can deal more effective damage against energy shields, but that is too simple of a perspective. Swords are lighter, but also faster and easier to handle. A skilled swordsman mech pilot should be able to launch attacks at a higher frequency and maintain greater control over the mech frame. The slight difference in mass also makes it a little easier for swordsman mechs to catch up to fleeing phasefighters. Finally, far more mech pilots are comfortable with wielding swords since it is the first weapon they trained in since they enrolled in the mech academies. It is deeply

uncomfortable for them to lose their swords and get maces in their place. They are all forced to train their proficiency in maces in order to keep up their performance in combat." Saint Linda Cross brought Ketis to a more isolated corner of the hangar bay before turning to face the swordmaster directly.

"I think you have seen and heard enough to gain an impression on what it is like in our clan. What do you think, Ketis?"

Ketis grimaced and tapped her finger against her forearm. "So far, your Cross Clan has not made a good impression on me. I do not know whether what I heard from the

mouths of your clansmen is universal in your clan. If it is, then there is clearly a dysfunctional relationship between the mech pilots and the mech designers around here. Maybe it won't lead to any major blunders, but it is clear to me that neither groups harbor good feelings towards each other. That will lead to constant friction and frustrations that will only hold you all back in the end.""

As an ace pilot, Linda Cross could easily hear the truth in the swordmaster's words. She could not deny that there was something wrong in her clan.

"Who do you think deserves more blame, mech pilots or mech designers?"

"It is not as simple as that." Ketis shook her head. "Both groups have reasons to blame

each other. The mech pilots over here are justified in their belief that mech designers aren't doing enough to listen to them. The mech designers meanwhile are constantly met with lack of gratitude despite all of the earnest work they are doing to give mech pilots a better chance of winning the Red War. I think the ultimate culprits behind all of this dysfunction are Patriarch Reginald Cross and Master Benedict Cortez. Both of them

deserve equal blame."

"It is quite brave of you to blame both of them at the same time."

"Oh, come on, Linda. I know you Crossers tend to forgive a huge amount of transgressions made by Patriarch Reginald, but you cannot possibly be blind to the fact. that he is an idiot who cannot properly administer a clan! That does not necessarily make him a bad leader, but he is much better

at inspiring and leading troops in battle than fulfilling the other responsibilities of a leadership figure. His lack of attention towards the treatment of mech designers is a serious mistake. Every other Crosser has blindly taken over this attitude and continues to devalue my profession. That has probably made it much harder for your clan to recruit and retain talented mech

designers."

"... You are not wrong, I suppose." Linda actually felt ashamed for the failure of her clan to give mech designers their due regard.

Ketis was not finished yet, though. "At the same time, Master Benedict Cortez deserves

his own share of blame. He has not reformed from the days where his customers were

ignorant pirates who did not know what was good for them. Don't get me wrong. His mech designs are all sound and his design choices are all logical. The problem is that he hasn't shaken the attitude that he knows what is best for mech pilots, and therefore tries to impose his decisions onto them. He is too dismissive of the feelings and opinions of the mech pilots that he is supposed to serve. That would never fly in our clan. Ves has always tried his best to understand the actual demands of the mech pilots of his clan and respond to their demand even if it doesn't lead to the most optimal and efficient

mech designs."

The differences were too great!

One of the reasons why the Larkinson mech pilots adored Ves so much was because he

always did his best to make the piloting experience as pleasant and comfortable as he could manage.

Even if the mechs did not offer superior performance, they always responded so well

and contained so little sources of irritations that the mech pilots never minded the shortcomings. The end result was that the Larkinson mech pilots became more motivated and managed to utilize their machines more effectively than average. Master Benedict apparently adopted a different

paradigm. He focused much more on maximizing the technical performance of his mech designs, thereby enabling them to attain considerably stronger results... in theory.

The only issue was that the Crosser mech pilots had plenty of reasons to complain about their machines. Master Benedict may have tried to make the objectively best design choices, but they collided so much against the personal needs of individual mech pilots that far too many of them were unable to utilize their machines to their full potential. At least, that was the way that Ketis saw it. The latter approach was not necessarily the

worst one, but she personally did not agree with this philosophy as it led to a lot of tension and frustration.

She could practically feel it across the hangar bay. The mech pilots of the Cross Clan were blessed with well-designed quasi-first-class transphasic hyper mechs that possessed strong advantages that they could give the Larkinson mechs a run for their money, yet none of the Crossers were grateful for being able to pilot such powerful

machines!

Chapter 6537 Challenging Master Benedict Cortez

After completing a quick tour through the Hemmington Cross, Saint Linda Cross led her guest to a private dining chamber where they enjoyed supper together.

The two women remained silent for the most part as Ketis had much to think about. The observations she made when she walked throughout the hull of the flagship of the Cross Clan had opened her eyes of what life was like outside of the Larkinson Clan.

The customs of the Cross Clan were much more different than she expected, and not in a good way. The flawed leaders of this martial clan had led to an avoidable buildup of tension and conflict.

The relationship between mech pilots and mech designers had always been harmonious in the Larkinson Clan.

No such thing existed in the Cross Clan. Between a patriarch who possessed a clear bias against non-combat professions and a former pirate designer who thought that every mech pilot was an unintelligent brute, the relations between the two professions had deteriorated to unhealthy levels!

Ketis could not imagine that the Cross Clan would continue to fare well if the two groups were unable to reconcile with each other.

One of the lessons she learned in the Larkinson Clan was that one could not succeed without the other. Mech pilots and mech designers obviously needed each other to reach greater heights.

She simply couldn't imagine that there were people who were stupid enough to disregard the value and contributions made by others.

Yet such an absurdity actually became a reality in the Cross Clan!

As Ketis finished her soup, she turned her head upwards and stared at the ace pilot.

"Does Patriarch Reginald acknowledge that his clan is not doing well?"

"Yes." Linda said. "He is not blind to this. The only issue is that he has a different opinion on who is to blame for this. He doesn't think that he is at fault. He will outright deny that he deserves any blame or that he needs to change in order to make our clan better. He has shifted all of the blame to Master Benedict and the CMC's Design Department."

Ketis wanted to palm her face when she heard that. Typical.

"What about you, Linda? Are you just as obstinate as your patriarch?"

The female saint shook his head. "I am not. I can understand where Reginald is coming from, but I have met Master Benedict and his subordinates enough times to know that they aren't deliberately being lazy or incompetent. They work harder than many other Crossers and deliver genuinely good products. The problem is that Master Benedict makes decisions without paying any serious attention to the actual opinions of his mech pilots. He looks down on their intelligence and their ability to make good decisions." "Master Benedict is good at the technical aspect of designing mechs. That is not in doubt." Ketis observed. "His design choices are likely among the most optimal ones he can make based on the resources, technologies and facilities available to him. I haven't met him in a long time, but I think he still means well. He is as unprofessional as to hate his own clients, but... he is not a man who is tolerant towards opposition. He does not suffer fools gladly, and I think that he feels surrounded by them while he remains with your clan."

Linda Cross frowned. "Our mech pilots are not 'fools'. They are brave fighters who are putting their lives on the line to secure a future for our clan and humankind. I had hoped that Master Benedict would be more tolerant towards our mech pilots given the huge stresses they must endure on a frequent basis."

"You should never look for that in a mech designer like him. To be honest, I think your clan would be better off if you start to partner up with other mech designers. I don't know why Master Benedict has decided to call it quits and go independent."

"The two of them are stuck with each other. Master Benedict can find no place else that can win so many battles, harvest a large amount of alien salvage and earn so much money and merits that he will not be short of high-level resources and other expensive benefits. As for our clan... even if we work together with another Master Mech Designer, I fear the outcome will remain the same."

This had become an institutional problem of the Cross Clan. Replacing a few bad apples wouldn't solve the fundamental problem because the rot had spread through all of the Crossers.

"Do you think that a Journeyman Mech Designer like myself can solve these problems?" Ketis skeptically asked.

"I do. I think our patriarch believes this as well, or else he hadn't enthusiastically invited you to work with us for a while. You are different from the other mech designers. You are a true warrior, and nobody can deny that. You won't be met with disrespect from our clansmen because they respect you as a swordmaster far more than as a Journeyman Mech Designer. You can take advantage of this to act as a bridge between our disgruntled mech pilots and our frustrated mech designers."

"That is way easier said than done." Ketis sputtered. "I refuse to believe that these long-standing problems can be solved just because I have a special identity. The structural problems of your clan cannot be solved overnight."

"Then please try your best." Linda earnestly requested. "Patriarch Reginald and I will back you nearly unconditionally. If you think Master Benedict is wrong, then we will give you the authority to overrule his decisions. Our Design Department is clearly not in tune with the mech pilots it is meant to serve, so it must be reformed from top to bottom. Since your clan is much better at it, we believe you can be the change agent we need to set our mech designers back on the right track."

"...That will put me in direct conflict with Master Benedict."

"Are you afraid?"

"That is an absurd question to ask. I am a swordmaster. I have slain monsters and dueled against alien warriors. Challenging a mech designer, even a Master, is trivial in comparison."

"Then why the hesitation?"

"I do not want to ruin my relationship with Master Benedict." Ketis plainly stated. "He is my teacher's teacher, and he is also a good collaborator of the Larkinson Clan. I do not want to invade his territory and trample on his pride by telling him he is wrong. The difference in rank makes it even more difficult for me to rectify the department he is in charge of. There is a massive difference between a Master and a Journeyman. Most mech designers will blindly obey the former just because he has made many more proven accomplishments than a junior. This is ingrained in our industry."

Linda calmly listened and thought for a moment. "I see. Let us do this, then. First, we will officially put you in charge of our Design Department. We will remove Master Benedict's position and transfer it to you for the duration of your stay in our clan. That will ensure that the mech designers of our clan have no choice but to obey you. If Master Benedict tries to interfere despite lacking the authority to do so, then he is in violation of our own rules. He has no basis to meddle with your temporary leadership. Does that satisfy one of your concerns, swordmaster?"

That was a rather extreme measure that was sure to make Master Benedict resent. Ketis

even more!

"Your proposal only solves one problem while exacerbating the other."

The ace pilot smirked and leaned forward over the dining table. "What you are actually telling me is that we have yet to offer you enough incentives to rectify our Design Department over the objections of our resident Master Mech Designer. Do not be concerned, Ketis. We do not expect you to work for free. Let me give you an offer. If you are willing to undertake this mission, we will give you nearly full freedom to do what you want as the director of our Design Department. You can start your own design projects and offer your own swordsman mechs onto our mech pilots."

Ketis grew a lot more attentive when she heard this offer!

"Are you serious, Linda? Your Cross Clan has often insisted that it should not become too dependent on the living mechs of the Larkinson Clan."

"I think the lack of competition has made Master Benedict and his subordinates too complacent." Linda soberly analyzed. "Let us make an agreement. You are allowed to offer your swordsman mechs to our mech pilots, but they must voluntarily choose whether to exchange their current mechs for your products. We will even allow you to use our own strategic resources, proprietary knowledge and R&D to participate in the development of high-ranking swordsman mechs, though you will need to gain the cooperation of Master Benedict or another high-ranking mech designer. If more of them have chosen to favor your works over the ones designed by in-house mech designers,

then that is the outcome that we have brought upon ourselves."

Ketis grew more and more impressed by Saint Linda Cross. She exhibited none of the short-sightedness of Patriarch Reginald Cross. They were totally opposites in this

regard.

"Why aren't you in charge of the Cross Clan? I have only talked to you for less than a single day, but it is incredibly obvious to me that you are a much better leader than Patriarch Reginald can ever hope to become."

Saint Linda actually chuckled when she heard that. "Hehehe, I can understand why you think this way. The simple answer is that only the strongest have the right to lead our clan. Leaving aside the differences between our ace mechs, Reginald enjoys a considerable headstart. He broke through to his current rank years ago, and he has never sat still. He had thrown himself into battle as often as possible and tempered himself against the native aliens with great enthusiasm. His resonance strength has grown so quickly that I can never close the gap even if I fight just as hard. I have no chance of defeating him in a duel, and that is what matters the most." "There is more to leadership than raw strength."

"I know, Ketis, but we have a different opinion on this issue. Strength is the only guarantee of survival that is universal in our reality. Reginald understands this rule better than anyone, I think. I am not blind to his many faults, but if there is one reason why so many of us respect him above all else, it is because he is strong enough to protect our lives and preserve our clan. That is all that matters in the end. If there are problems in our clan, then it is not necessarily his problem to solve, because he is only truly necessary to fight and win the battles that matter. This is why we do not mind so much if we have to resort to hiring an outside party like you to rectify our Design

Department.'"

"I see."

"So what is your response?" Saint Linda asked in an expectant tone. "Will you agree to temporarily lead our Design Department to enact the reforms that will hopefully heal the divisions between our mech pilots and mech designers? You will earn our gratitude, our patronage and plenty of favors depending on how well you have remedied our problems. Running our Design Department should also be a way for you to exercise your leadership and management skills. These are essential if you have any ambition of leading a large organization in the future."

Those were compelling arguments. Saint Linda successfully presented enough incentives to make this offer worthwhile for Ketis.

Although she was still very much reluctant to develop an antagonistic relationship with

Master Benedict, she did not let this consideration get in the way of fulfilling her own ambitions!

"I won't say yes. Not immediately." Ketis eventually said. "This is a matter that both our clans need to arrange properly. I will need to figure out if I can devote enough time on

this mission and whether I can truly benefit from this experience. I also need to know how badly the CMC's Design Department is run and whether I am up to the task of fixing everything. If all of that is in order, then I would be happy to move in as soon as a formal contract has been signed."

Saint Linda nodded in understanding. "That is how it should be. Our clan does not

comprise of Larkinsons you love and adore, but I hope that will not hinder you from offering your services to our Crossers. You have a great opportunity to make your mark in a clan filled with elite mech pilots who are highly receptive to alternatives, including the swordsman mechs that you have designed. I have already studied the new Stormblade Samurai Mark II model that you have recently released. The commercial too weak for our tastes, but the variant you have designed for your clansmen is

version much more to our taste."

Chapter 6538 Ambition of a Swordmaster

When Ketis left the Hemmington Cross and returned to the Spirit of Bentheim, her mind remained filled with thoughts.

The decision to accept the offer to take charge of the Cross Mech Corporation's Design Department was not an easy one to make.

She was bound to make a lot of enemies by coming over as an outsider and booting a Master Mech Designer out of his leadership position.

Yet... Ketis felt incredibly tempted to do it anyway.

She felt that she could gain a lot if she accepted this challenge. She needed more practical leadership experience, the kind that she could not gain in the Larkinson Clan. The problem with leading Swordmaidens and Heavensworders was that they already revered him from the onset. There was no challenge in winning over their loyalties, and there was no need for Ketis to go out of her way to prove her qualifications.

It was too easy.

While that made it easy for Ketis to run her own departments, it also meant that she never really learned how to manage people properly.

Once she expanded her organizations in the future, not everyone would be blindly devoted to her as her fans and followers.

She knew that she could only regard herself as a true leader if she was able to ensure the compliance of those who did not have any prior reasons to follow her commands.

Trying to lead a foreign and maybe hostile group of underlings was the best way to polish her ability to command people!

As long as she was able to learn from this rare opportunity, she would become qualified to occupy even greater leadership positions, just like her former mentor.

As a Journeyman and a swordmaster, Ketis felt inadequate.

She knew that she could attain greatness as long as she became a Star Designer and a sword god, but the time and effort it took to reach those exalted ranks was far too exaggerated.

There was little point in dreaming how easy it would be to cut down her enemies, design bestselling mechs and gain the allegiance of billions of people with only a modest amount of effort if she reached the ultimate ranks of those professions.

She still had a long way to go before she became a god in human form!

Ketis had to form her plans based on her present capabilities. That caused her to grow a little glum as there was not that much she could do under the present circumstances. With massive alien warships and gigantic phase lords bearing down on red humanity, a single swordmaster could never make a meaningful difference on a conflict of this scale. The only way for Ketis to make herself useful was to contribute to society in different ways.

One way to do so was to work as a mech designer and publish lots of strong and useful swordsmen mech designs. She had already taken steps to do so, but there was always room for improvement.

Another way was to take advantage of the rising trend of systematic cultivation and give the masses an affordable way to become a lot stronger by spreading the virtues of traditional swordsmanship.

She wouldn't be able to accomplish these goals by herself.

If she wanted to become a great figure on par with the likes of Ves or the existing legends of red humanity, then she needed to be more proactive and do more than her basic routine.

She needed to obtain better materials to design better mechs and strengthen her personal combat gear. She also needed to have a good talk with Ves to explore whether the Carmine System could allow her to express her swordsmanship on a scale that enabled her to put up a worthy fight against a phase lord.

She needed to expand the institutions and build the infrastructure that enabled lots of would-be warriors to learn different variations of extraordinary swordsmanship in order to establish a thriving sword cultivator community.

Ketis also needed to take advantage of the special opportunities that were rarely afforded to others. She already formulated different plans on how she could utilize the Mech Designer System, the Heavensword, the CMC's Design Department and possibly other assets to accelerate and expand her growth.

She had learned from the best. Seeing how well Ves was able to leverage his own network and organizations to expand his power and gain access to better tech and materials had lit a fire in her heart.

She was no longer content with remaining as his subordinate.

Ketis would have never dared to dream about this a decade ago, but now she believed that she had the makings to become a great woman who would not be inferior to Ves in any way!

She especially gained a lot of confidence after Ves had been gracious enough to give her access to his exclusive Mech Designer System.

At that point, there was no excuse for her anymore. She would never be able to forgive herself if she failed to make good use of her opportunities to attain greatness.

While her objective was to catch up and possibly surpass Ves, she held no animosity towards him. It was not necessary to betray his trust and beat him down in order to achieve her goals.

She instead considered herself locked in a friendly rivalry against Ves. Her patriarch and

friend may enjoy a considerable head start at the moment, but Ketis still had a chance of catching up if she made clever use of her own unique opportunities!

"I wonder how he will react once I finally manage to catch up with him. I would love to see his face at that time." Ketis briefly grinned.

There was still a long journey ahead of her. While Ketis awaited the arrival of the Heavensword, she first dealt with other matters.

She originally wanted to speak with Ves over the galactic net about the Cross Clan's offer of employment, but it turned out that he was not in a condition to speak with Ketis at the moment.

"I can patch you in with Ves, but he will not listen to you in his current hyper-fixated state." The virtual projection of the well-dressed figure of Gloriana responded. "He discovered a hidden phase lord ability that allows him to put himself into a 'Deep Research Mode' where he essentially becomes immune to distractions. He currently has nothing else but completing the Amaranto Mark III Project on his mind."

Ketis' expression dropped. "That is... inconvenient. I need to hear his opinion on whether it is a good idea for me to temporarily take charge of the Cross Clan's Design Department. I think it would be an interesting challenge to me and a good way to push a handful of living mechs to the Crossers. I am afraid that Master Benedict will not react calmly to my intrusion. Since this is a decision that can change our relations with the Cross Clan, only Ves can make a decision on this matter."

"Well, he is not in the right state of mind to do so." Gloriana responded while letting out an exasperated breath. "Tell you what. I will make a decision on his behalf. As his wife and the director of the Design Department, I think it is fair to say that I have the authority to speak for him when he is out of commission for whatever reason. I absolutely support your initiative. You have my blessing to accept the Cross Clan's offer. Show the Crossers how much better the Larkinsons are at managing mech designers. Teach them how to respond to the actual needs of the mech pilots that depend on them rather than impose your work on them in a top-down fashion. Above all else, show them that man such as Master Benedict is ultimately inferior to women such as you and I." Ketis had the feeling that Gloriana only really cared about that last part. The main reason why Gloriana approved of Ketis' intentions to work at the Cross Clan was to have a female mech designer upstage Master Benedict!

Though the former Hexer clearly harbored impure motives, her decision fell exactly in line with Ketis' demand. There was no reason for the swordmaster to voice any

objections.

"Thank you, Gloriana. Please tell the lawyers and negotiators of our clan to make contact with their counterparts in the Cross Clan to negotiate and sign a contract. I would like to have everything in order before I take over my new responsibilities."

"I shall see to it." Gloriana promised. "The Cross Clan is quite powerful and filled with fighters who have stood by us in the past and present. I always found it perplexing that we did not work harder to assimilate the Crossers into our clan. We would greatly benefit if we can subdue the Crossers and

turn them into our vassals. Patriarch Reginald Cross is a remarkably strong combat asset, and Saint Linda Cross appears to be an excellent woman who possesses the right combination of strength and intelligence." Gloriana was delusional if she thought that the Larkinson Clan could actually convince the Crossers to surrender their allegiance to the Larkinsons! "Patriarch Reginald and Saint Linda have far too much pride in their clan and heritage." Ketis coughed. "The only feasible way for them to do so is if the Cross Clan has perished or suffered too many losses to sustain itself. Other than that, the two powerful Crosser ace pilots will never pledge their loyalty to others."

The female Senior Mech Designer looked a little disappointed, but not too much. Ace pilots had their own pride and were often bound by existing commitments. "Reginald and Linda may remain unyielding in the present, but anything can happen in the future." Gloriana said in a hopeful tone. "If the Crossers are met with disaster, then I

hope the goodwill that you have built within the Cross Clan is enough to convince its survivors to take refuge in the Larkinson Clan. That way, we will stand to gain a large batch of thugs and raise our combat power even further."

Anything could happen in the future. Patriarch Reginald Cross and Saint Linda Cross all appeared to be strong enough to hold their own on the battlefield, but the native aliens were not completely helpless in combat.

With more and more experimental 'Saint Piercer' weapons appearing in the hands of

phase lords, ace mechs had to endure greater risks whenever they confronted the native gods on the battlefield.

Even the Larkinsons had to endure the same risks. It was fortunate that the Dark Zephyr Mark III was so fast that it was almost impossible for enemy phase lords to land a solid

hit on the highly elusive machine.

The Dark Zephyr Mark III may be deficient in attack power, but his ability to survive on the battlefield likely ranked at the top among all other junior ace mechs! Besides, the Dark Zephyr actually gained a lot of teeth now that it had borrowed the tier

3 Destroyer spear.

This should make it much easier for Saint Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson to earn more merits than Patriarch Reginald Cross!

Just as Gloriana wanted to bring up another topic, a preprogrammed alarm suddenly sounded from Ketis' comm.

The swordmaster briefly froze.

"What is the matter?" "The Heavensword... has been detected on approach to the Viola Magnifica System." Ketis explained as she quickly brought up her comm to verify the notification.

Gloriana vaguely understood the significance of this event. "I will leave you to handle the arrival of this powerful relic. It would be great if you can subdue it and bring it under your control. If our clan can control the power of an ancient but functional grand work, then we will instantly be able to bring ourselves on par with the likes of Terran ancient clans and Rubarthan principalities!"

It was way too premature for Gloriana to think about how controlling the Heavensword would elevate the rank of their clan!

Ketis first needed to ensure that the Heavensword would not run roughshod over herself!

Chapter 6539 Red Swordsmanship Federation

The Larkinson Clan had already made a number of preparations to 'welcome' the arrival of the Heavensword.

The most important priority was not to let any incident related to the Heavensword disrupt the defensive arrangements of the Viola Magnifica System,

The strategically vital port system was one of the few remaining strongholds left in the Torald Middle Zone that propped up the 4th defensive band.

This was why the expeditionary fleet had already taken the initiative to move away from all of the main defensive positions and parked its starships in the orbit of a small and lifeless planet.

Ketis did not stay aboard the Spirit of Bentheim or any of the valuable capital ships of the Larkinson Clan.

She instead chose to transfer to a disposable combat carrier that had been emptied of much of her crew and dependents before moving out into deep space.

If the worst case scenario ever happened, then there shouldn't be a lot of valuable assets and lives in the vicinity that would be at risk of suffering collateral damage.

Accompanying the combat carrier were a handful of high-ranking mechs that Ketis counted upon to resist the Heavensword if it ever decided to get pushy.

Just as promised, Saint Linda Cross deployed with her newly built Amphis Extremis. As the only ace pilot in the escort force, she held the greatest say after Ketis.

Whether the Amphis Extremis could actually hold back the Heavensword in case it turned hostile remained to be seen.

On the one hand, the grand sword could not possibly showcase its full strength without an actual wielder.

On the other hand, it was a sentient grand work that clearly surpassed the limitations of every other sword known to modern human civilization!

Joining Ketis on this little greeting trip was Venerable Joshua and Venerable Dise.

The Everchanger and the First Sword had both distinguished themselves in battle many times, but they looked rather weak and poorly equipped to handle the coming crisis. Venerable Joshua even persuaded his wife to call for additional help.

"Why didn't you ask to bring Jannzi along?" He asked over a secure tight beam communication channel. "If the Heavensword ever becomes violent, you can rely on the Amphis Extremis to hold it back while letting the Bastion give additional cover to your ship. Better yet, why not bring the Saint

Commander over as well? If we have the Minerva along with a couple of hundred of Battle Crier mechs by our side, I don't believe that the Heavensword will be able to pose a threat to us anymore."

Ketis rejected the solution. "The Bastion is not mobile enough. She will just slow us all down, Saint Commander Casella needs to stay behind to protect the expeditionary fleet, and I don't want to expose too many mechs and mech pilots to a dangerous scuffle. Don't worry. We aren't traveling too far away. Casella and the forces under her command will remain on standby. It shouldn't take too long for them to reinforce us and support us from a distance if we ever need the help. Stop worrying, Joshua."

Whether Ketis made the right decision to limit her escort remained to be seen. For now, she wanted to try the diplomatic approach first, and to do that, she brought along a pair of Heavensworders.

"You look eager, Charles."

"Why wouldn't I be?" Legion Commander Charles Antunovic spoke with repressed excitement. "The Heavensword has actually traveled all the way from the old galaxy to give its blessing to us all! This is a clear sign that we are doing its bidding!"

Ketis tried her best not to scoff at the man's words.

Charles Antunovic was the chosen candidate to become the legion commander of the newly formed Heavensword Mech Legion.

As a native of the Heavensword Association, the mech pilot originally followed Ketis into the Larkinson Clan and joined the Avatars of Myth as a swordsman mech pilot and mech officer.

Over the years, the Heavensworder fought and distinguished himself alongside his fellow Avatars.

Although he had never managed to surpass the extraordinary threshold, Charles Antunovic nonetheless managed to climb his way up to the rank of mech captain. Melkor even told Ketis that Charles may have been in line for another promotion if he had not left the Avatars of Myth.

While Ketis was not entirely sure whether Charles Antunovic could undertake the heavy responsibilities to help establish the Heavensword Mech Legion as a serious military branch of the Larkinson Army, he was one of the best candidates on paper.

Right now, Ketis had not only decided to bring Charles along because he represented a familiar institution, but also because he adored the Heavensword!

If the relic sword ever wanted to transform a human into a new wielder, the Heavensword would hopefully pick Charles instead of Ketis!

"The Heavensword is not a weapon to be feared. In this dire time, we need its power more than ever." President Fred Walinski spoke to the younger swordmaster. "If it can give you its blessing, you will not only be able to gain the power of a sword saint with a weapon that is powerful enough to cut a phase whale in half, but also command the absolute allegiance of every Heavensworder and those who seriously respect the swordsmanship tradition."

Ketis shook her head. "I cannot lie and say I am not tempted, but I would rather grow

stronger by staying true to my own self. I would never become the woman I am now if I succumbed to the power of a sword that does not belong to me. If red humanity truly needs the power of the Heavensword unleashed, then it should seek out a willing sword

wielder."

"What if you are the only suitable wielder that can unlock its full power in this dwarf galaxy?" Fred pressed.

"I will not let a sentient sword morally blackmail me into becoming its sword slave." Ketis growled. "If the Heavensword truly wants to be wielded by a swordmaster, then I will present it to you, seeing as you have become one as well. As the president of the Red Swordsmanship Federation and a former citizen of the Heavensword Association, you have a greater right to 'inherit' this legacy."

Much had changed for Fred Walinski ever since Ketis learned the Annihilator Sword Style originally created by his deceased brother.

Fred had been one of the senior leaders responsible for managing the other Heavensworders who had come onboard the Larkinson Clan.

Later on, he assumed increasingly greater responsibility over all of the sword schools and swordsmanship training programs that the Larkinson Clan had invested in across the new frontier.

Nowadays, the Heavensworders had erected so many schools and instruction halls that taught one variation of an extraordinary sword style or another that they had joined forces to form a federation to represent their collective interests.

The Red Swordsmanship Federation had previously remained obscure, but gained a lot more prominence when the founding of the Red Collective brought systematic

cultivation to the mainstream.

With the help of Ves' political maneuvering, the RC officially recognized traditional swordsmanship as a benign but difficult form of willpower cultivation.

While many norms would rather become high-ranking Carmine mech pilots, it was not cheap or easy to get their hands on a Carmine mech.

For the people at the bottom, it was still far cheaper and more convenient for them to buy cheap practice swords and sign up for swordsmanship classes at their local swordsmanship schools or instruction halls.

The reason why Ketis entrusted Fred Walinski with the responsibility of establishing new swordsmanship schools and managing the existing ones was not just because she trusted him, but also because he had finally managed to achieve a breakthrough and become a genuine swordmaster.

His mastery over the Annihilator Sword Style was not as profound as that of Ketis, but he had developed his own unique interpretation and insights of his late brother's sword

techniques.

Becoming a swordmaster with the power to bend reality to a limited extent had revived

his heart and mind.

Practicing the Healthy Controller Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method and making use of the life-prolonging solutions offered by the Larkinson Exchange had significantly rejuvenated him, causing his physical body to return to its prime condition!

Although Fred Walinski still possessed the mentality of an older man, he fought as if he

was a half century younger when employing his full strength as a swordmaster!

Ketis hoped that if the Heavensword insisted on being wielded by a genuine swordmaster, it would pick Fred Walinski over herself!

It was a pity that the older man in question thought that he was unworthy compared to

the female swordmaster!

"My qualifications are too poor compared to yours, Ketis. I was only able to become a swordmaster after the start of the Age of Dawn. Exotic radiation has made this a lot easier for all of us. I still feel as if I have cheated my way into becoming a swordmaster. You deserve much greater recognition than I. You not only became a swordmaster at a fraction of my age, you did so while simultaneously working as a mech designer. The Heavensword can accomplish much more with a wielder as unique as you. It is a great honor to be acknowledged by weapon!"

Ketis understood a lot better why Ves disliked religious nuts. They set aside much of their logic and became deaf to other people's refutations.

As much as she was tired of the people around her expressing blind reverence towards the Heavensword, she had brought them along for multiple reasons, so she could not

send them back.

"This is as far as we go. Please stop and hold position relative to the expeditionary fleet." Ketis instructed.

As the combat carrier gently floated around in deep space, the various monitoring systems and patrols organized by the defenders of Viola Magnifica clearly detected and mapped out the trajectory of the Heavensword.

Just as expected, the Heavensword was moving straight towards the expeditionary fleet, or rather the slightly isolated combat carrier where Ketis tried to strengthen her

reserve.

She grasped the hilt of her Bloodsinger and softly stroked the surface of its blade.

"Sharp. Sharp. Heaven. Heaven." Sharpie vocalized as the companion spirit assumed a combative mindset while residing inside Ketis' personal greatsword. "Heaven is coming"

Saint Linda Cross, Venerable Joshua Larkinson and Venerable Dise Larkinson all got

ready.

Their respective machines began to enter into a higher state of activity, though they still made an effort to rein in their aggression.

Ketis made one last check of her vacuum-sealed combat armor and made sure that her two Heavensworder companions were not lacking in this aspect.

"Open the hangar bay hatch and orient the entrance in the direction the Heavensword is coming from. Let us not give it an excuse to tear through the hull of this ship." Just as the combat carrier had finished turning around, a distant point of light steadily

grew larger and brighter.

Ketis could already feel it. Her grip on her Bloodsinger shook as the Heavensword approached her location with great momentum, so much so that the local defense forces had become alarmed at the potential threat posed by this rogue weapon artifact!

If not for the fact that the Evolution Witch had briefly held this mystifying weapon before voluntarily letting go of it, there may have been mechers or fleeters who insisted on treating it as a threat that had to be subdued before it could do any damage to

society!

"It's here." She finally said.

Faster than she expected, the Heavensword had warp traveled all the way from the

Yernstall Central Star Node and completed its journey right in front of the woman that had briefly wielded a shadow of its power the last time!

Brightness spread across the opened hangar bay as the Heavensword radiated so much

power and brilliance that it overwhelmed pretty much everything else in the vicinity! "Ketis! Are you alright?!" Venerable Joshua urgently.

His Everchanger moved a little closer, though still taking care not to bump into the hull

of the combat carrier.

"I am okay! The Heavensword has not behaved aggressively... so far."

Chapter 6540 Heavenly Creation

The Heavensword had arrived!

After crossing through multiple different zones, the Heavensword successfully navigated its way over to the Viola Magnifica System where the expeditionary fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance was currently stationed.

Ketis had already guessed since she first saw the Heavensword poking out of the container sphere during the historic live broadcast that the two would reunite.

In truth, she frequently doubted whether this would actually happen.

It seemed incredibly arrogant and conceited to claim that there was nothing more important in the Red Ocean to the Heavensword than seeking out Ketis!

Yet that was exactly what happened.

Whether this was because she was still the strongest swordmaster in the new frontier or because her past interactions with the powerful ancient sword, the Heavensword had obviously set her as its first destination after arriving in the dwarf galaxy.

Ketis felt honored, but became more concerned about what it would do now that it had sought out its target.

The pretentious Heavensword continued to radiate its splendor for half a minute.

It was difficult for Ketis to muster her willpower and maintain her sobriety in the face of the sword's great power.

It had clearly grown stronger after absorbing a lot of exotic radiation from Messier 87! Compared to the half-starved state it had ended up in after languishing in the Milky Way Galaxy for so long, the Red Ocean Galaxy had clearly given it a second life!

The differences between its prior state and its current condition were like night and day. Not only had the Heavensword managed to engage in interstellar travel for several weeks all by itself, but it had also managed to regain its strength as a transcendent grand work!

According to what Ketis had learned, only god-like creators possessed the capacity to bring a grand work into existence.

As a mech designer herself, Ketis could barely pick out a few visible clues on how the Heavensword far surpassed the quality of a masterwork. There were too many profound details about the relic weapon that were so incredibly refined that she grew dizzy when she tried to take a closer look.

It frustrated her that she lacked the qualifications to understand what made the Heavensword so much better than a masterwork sword like the Decapitator!

Just as Ketis attempted to make another attempt to understand the secrets behind the Heavensword's grand existence, the ancient weapon gradually withdrew its

overwhelming presence.

It mercifully toned down the lightshow, but also hid a lot of faint details that could have given Ketis a few more clues on what turned the weapon into a grand work.

How frustrating!

Ketis tried her best to rein in her professional greed and curiosity and tried to remain on guard against the legendary weapon's arrival.

It became a lot more tolerable to look at now that it had made an effort to accommodate the nearby humans.

While the recently rejuvenated Heavensword still radiated a soft white glow that seemed to give everyone who looked at it illusions of a mystical heavenly paradise, the weapon at least did not appear as overbearing as before.

Heavensword Commander Charles Antunovic and President Fred Walinski had already knelt as soon as the ancient relic appeared in front of the greeting party.

They had grown up worshiping this mythical weapon, so they had no qualms about expressing their highest respect and admiration upon its arrival!

No words were necessary for the mech officer and swordmaster to convey their utter willingness to surrender and obey to the will of the Heavensword.

Perhaps they may only hesitate if the Heavensword instructed them to act against the interests of the Larkinson Clan, but Ketis feared that they would rather take orders from an inhuman relic than the clan that showered them with opportunities and privileges!

In order to ascertain whether the Heavensword's purpose in the Red Ocean contradicted her own goals and that of the Larkinson Clan in any way, Ketis decided to break the silence.

"Why... are you here?" She asked as she gripped her own greatsword tighter.

She wondered how the Heavensword would communicate with her this time. It was clear that it was intelligent enough to talk like a human, but would it choose to do so, or opt for a more confusing means of conveying its intentions?

The Heavensword flew closer.

That was not all. It conspicuously turned around so that its blade pointed towards the open hatch of the hangar bay.

The Heavensword presented its hilt directly towards Ketis.

Both Legion Commander Charles and President Fred reacted with great pride and reverence towards this obvious action!

"Take it." Charles Antunovic urged. "The Heavensword... has chosen you... to become its new holder, its new Heavensword Saint."

"No."

"What? You..."

Ketis' expression remained flat as she firmly rejected an offer that would have made a lot of Heavensworders ecstatic!

"Haven't you listened to a single word I said in our last conversations? I have no interest in becoming the next Heavensword Saint. This is why I brought the two of you along. If this relic truly wants to be held by a genuine swordsman, then I would rather have one of you take up this responsibility"

Ketis wanted to palm her face. Hadn't they talked about this already? She thought they agreed with her plan! How come they completely forgot about it when the Heavensword finally arrived?

She not-so-subtly nudged the Legion Commander of the Heavensword Mech Legion

forward.

"You try, first."

"B-B-But I am just a sword initiate!" Charles Antunovic exclaimed. "Every previous Heavensword Saint used to be a bona fide swordmaster! I do not deserve to touch the

sacred sword!"

"JUST DO IT, CHARLES!"

Though Charles felt it was greatly disrespectful and very much wrong for an unworthy swordsman such as him to touch a relic of the gods, he reluctantly did so after getting

repeatedly prodded by Ketis.

"Please... please forgive me for my disrespectful actions."

When Charles slowly reached out with his armored sword hand and came close to gripping the hilt, the Heavensword suddenly released a pulse of heavenly energy that repulsed the approaching hand as well as the rest of the body!

"Ugh!"

Both Ketis and Fred backed off from the Heavensword as they saw the pulse of energy physically push their compatriot back by dozens of meters!

A soundless collision took place as Charles Antunovic's armored body crashed against

the deck.

Fortunately, that was all that happened. The shock-absorbing functions of his vacuum-sealed suit of combat armor perfectly kept his body unharmed.

The message was pretty clear. The Heavensword did not harbor any hostility towards Antunovic, but it obviously did not consider the mech officer to be a worthy holder.

"You're next, Fred." Ketis prodded the older man's armored form. "If the Heavensword doesn't approve of a sword initiate, then let's see whether it is willing to tolerate a

swordmaster such as yourself."

Fred Walinski smiled in a depreciating manner. "I appreciate your confidence in me, but I fear you are grossly overestimating my attractiveness to the sacred sword. Just as how swordsmen prefer to select the best swords in a weapon store, the Heavensword clearly wants to be wielded by the best swordmaster. Out of the two of us, you are clearly the

strongest."

"I am not a pure swordmaster." Ketis objected. "I am a Journeyman Mech Designer as well. I can never commit my entire life to combat."

"I do not think the Heavensword minds that. In fact, I think it may appreciate you even more because of that. Only a swordmaster with deep technical knowledge such as you can adapt and popularize the swordsmanship that the sacred sword stands for. I... I think I can feel what it seeks from you. It doesn't want to be wielded by a swordmaster who only knows how to destroy such as myself. It wants... it wants to be wielded by a swordmaster who also knows how to create."

She knew what Fred meant. As a swordmaster who was more powerful than him, she was vaguely able to read the Heavensword's strong aura as if she was examining a very

powerful ace mech.

Heaven... was all about creation, of bringing new possibilities to life.

What a remarkable weapon.... perhaps the fit between herself and the Heavensword was

not as low as she thought...

"Sharp!" Her companion spirit suddenly woke her up from her fascination.

"Damnit!"

Ketis' eyes grew strained as she forcefully took a step back from the alluring

Heavensword.

"Fred."

"Yes, Ma'am?"

"I gave you an order. Step forward and attempt to grasp the hilt."

Though Fred clearly thought that he would be met with the same reaction as Charles, he

no longer argued with Ketis and did as instructed.

The Heavensword released another pulse of white energy that 'gently' but very

decisively tossed Fred Walinski backwards!

Just like the legion commander, the armored form of president of the Red Swordsmanship Federation crashed on his back a small distance away.

Though Ketis had pretty much predicted this outcome, she still grew upset that the

picky Heavensword had rejected her counteroffers.

The weapon slowly floated closer to the only swordmaster who remained standing and

enchantingly offered her to take possession of the only sword-type grand work known to exist in modern times.

The woman felt increasingly more conflicted.

Ketis the Journeyman Mech Designer eagerly wanted to grab the Heavensword and claim it for herself in the hopes that she could figure out how to forge blades that were just as great one day!

Ketis the swordmaster emphatically rejected this forced imposition by a sword that embodied a different kind of swordsmanship.

"No." She addressed the Heavensword. "I do not want you. Can't you understand my message? I already have a sword! I do not need you to replace my weapon! You are not even a greatsword!"

She lifted up her Bloodsinger and waved it in front of the Heavensword for emphasis.

However, the Heavensword continued to press closer, which compelled Ketis to step backwards.

Ketis grew increasingly more angry. "I reject your presence. I reject your power. I reject any notion of turning me into your next Heavensword Saint! BEGONE!"

She no longer hesitated and whipped her Bloodsinger in a sweep that caused the flat of the greatsword's blade to smack the Heavensword aside!

For a moment, no one could believe that Ketis actually dared to push the Heavensword

away from her body!

It took a lot of willpower for her to resist the allure of possessing the Heavensword, but she felt better for being able to stand up to the overbearing sword!

She only believed in her own sword style and her own personal sword. The greatsword

was her favored weapon. She had no desire to switch to wielding a slender and lighter one-handed blade.

Yet the Heavensword not only ignored her words, but even began to close in faster!

Ketis' anger and frustration had reached a boiling point!

"I REFUSE TO BE YOUR SLAVE! BEGONE, HEAVENSWORD! I WILL NEVER YIELD MY BLOODSINGER AND MY SWORDSMANSHIP TO YOUR DEAD MASTER'S TYRANNY!"

She no longer held back and resonated with her Bloodsinger to unleash an extraordinary technique!

She abruptly thrust her greatsword forward!

"SWORD OF LYDIA!"

The empowered piercing attack had no chance in hell of penetrating or leaving a single

mark on the Heavensword, but the powerful collision still allowed Ketis to fling the Heavensword straight through the hangar bay hatch and out into space!

Of course, the Heavensword quickly managed to correct its flight. Ketis desperately hoped that the Heavensword would respect her demands, but clearly

that was not the case as it attempted to fly right back inside!

"Linda!"

A huge presence dove in from above and crashed into the comically undersized relic weapon!

It turned out that the Amphis Extremis had finally taken action!

The ace mech had charged closer and used its foot to kick the Heavensword far away from the combat carrier!

Even now, the relic sword was uncontrollably tumbling away as if it remained confused what just happened!