

Mech Touch 6601

Chapter 6601 Reforging Traditional Swordsmanship

Ketis tackled her Missions with a renewed sense of optimism and motivation.

Ves knew that she would shape up eventually. She was not as weak and fragile as other mech designers.

Although the long-term isolation from her family and support network was abrupt, she was a trooper who overcame many challenges. This was just a different kind of test than the more direct combat-related ones.

Ketis soon found her own groove as well. She alternated her time between designing mechs, conducting research and expanding her grasp on swordsmanship.

As the latest bearer of the Heavensword, Ketis already recognized that she was much more special than the other swordmasters such as President Fred Walinski.

Even if she did not lead the Red Swordsmanship Federation herself, her teachings already influenced large parts of the official body of swordsmanship in the Red Ocean. She was pretty much the Heavensword Saint in all but name and rank.

It did not matter that she refused to sacrifice her own swordsmanship accumulation in order to gain immediate mastery of the arts that allowed her to draw out the greater potential of the legendary blade.

She did not feel tempted at all at the prospect of being able to gain so much combat power that she could probably give a greater phase whale a run for his money!

That was because she knew for certain that the instant acquisition of a whole foreign sword style with its own separate principles and philosophy would end her forward progression.

No Heavensword Saint managed to make any meaningful improvements in his acquired swordsmanship since they became the bearer of the grand work.

Sure, these past cases did not serve as perfect references as the Heavensword was stuck in low-power mode back in the Milky Way, but Ketis did not think her situation was all that different.

As a mech designer as well as a disciplined swordmaster, she highly valued the gains made through her own efforts.

Just like how Ves repeatedly warned her that relying too much on the System would cause her to atrophy her technical problem-solving capabilities, inheriting a highly mature and developed sword style would cause her to be unable to improve it due to her lacking experience and insights.

This was why she decided to adopt another approach to the gifts of the Heavensword. She decided to digest its teachings on an incremental basis.

Instead of allowing the Heavensword to dump a huge chunk of its high-end inheritance

straight into her mind like an enlightenment fruit, she insisted on taking old-fashioned lessons as if she was apprenticing herself to its past wielders!

"Ha!"

Ketis performed series of sharp and impactful strikes with her Bloodsinger,

Despite the formidable length, mass and density of the exquisite greatsword, Ketis wielded it with a highly familiar degree of power and control.

Greatswords actually weren't that slow or heavy, but it was easy to make mistakes and leave yourself open to counterattacks.

They were also pretty impractical to use in confined spaces and way more exhausting to use over a longer period of time.

Despite all of these disadvantages, they had their charm. Enemies always became intimidated by their sight and they were excellent at clearing spaces.

In mech combat, greatswords were considerably more practical. Swordsman mechs could be designed with stronger arms and artificial musculature, as Ketis had done many times. She had gained a huge amount of proficiency in optimizing mechs for wielding these large and formidable blades.

Baseline humans were nowhere close to good at wielding proportional greatswords as the likes of the Second Sword and more recently the Storm Sword.

Genetic modifications and other augmentations could close the gap to an extent, but the human physique could only be molded so much before they reached a limit.

Becoming a swordmaster partially broke a few of those physical limitations, but the scope was still limited.

Ketis showed no sign of feeling deterred by these material limitations.

This was because she understood that the true essence of extraordinary swordsmanship centered around the manipulation of energy rather than just the blade.

That did not mean that knowing how to wield a sword in a proficient manner was not important.

The sword was the foundation that extraordinary swordsmanship rested upon.

It was the wand that wizards used to cast their deadly spells.

It was the mech that high-ranking mech pilots used to amplify their willpower and distort reality.

As Ketis developed more and more insights and theories about the essence of swordsmanship, she eventually discovered that her existing paradigms could no longer keep up with her brainstorming.

In order for Ketis to make sense of her explorations, she decided to set aside all of her prior theories and assumptions and start from a blank slate.

A typical swordmaster would never have the guts or ability to do this as they were warriors first and foremost.

Ketis was not a typical swordmaster. She was a Journeyman Mech Designer. She was trained and educated to conduct research and development.

This was merely another R&D project as far as she was concerned.

The Swordmaiden mech designer probably wouldn't have committed herself to such a massive project under the current times.

The Red Tide Offensive was steadily working up to a climax. Ketis felt she needed to arm her sisters with the best mechs and arms as quickly as possible. She also felt an

obligation to keep herself as combat capable as possible.

There was no time for her to take advantage of the Heavensword's generosity and explore the fundamentals of swordsmanship. She would have felt much more inclined to learn immediate applications of this potent grand work.

Entering the System Space and taking a lengthy break from the main universe ended up being a blessing in this regard.

With much more time at her disposal, she could invest herself in a longer project without feeling harried by her enormous workload.

The separation from her family, her confidantes and the rest of the Larkinson Clan also turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

Ketis did not realize how much her daily entanglements burdened her down and prevented her from spending long periods of time on deep philosophical ponderings. She actually discovered the benefits of isolating herself so that she could solely concentrate on her obsessions.

No wonder Ves was able to make so many wonderful gains at times.

Ketis therefore approached her new undertaking with greater and greater enthusiasm. By employing the Scientific Method to reconstruct her theory on swordsmanship, Ketis was able to discard a lot of useless and outdated baggage. This forced her to ponder over

a large amount of basic questions.

"What is a sword?"

"How do the properties of a sword affect one's swordsmanship?"freewebnovel.com

"What is swordsmanship?"

"What is a swordmaster?"

"What makes a sword saint greater than a swordmaster?"

These were basic questions that Ketis could readily answer based on her old theories,

but she refused to adopt this brain-dead method.

She needed to make an effort to formulate her own arguments based on the most basic

axioms.

As long as she did this often enough, she could steadily build up a new theoretical framework that was untainted by the mistakes and biased interpretations of her

predecessors.

Ketis did not entirely understand why she felt an increasing desire to forge a brand new start for traditional swordsmanship, but she could not get rid of this obsession.

With the occasional hints and support from the Heavensword, Ketis was able to make brisk progress in reconstructing a theory on swordsmanship.

The female swordmaster did not consider her activities to be a burden or a waste of time.

Even if she spent precious time on reinventing the wheel instead of completing another lucrative Mission, Ketis believed her investment in the fundamentals was worth the equivalent of thousands of Ascension Points!

This was because she became increasingly more determined to upend the existing paradigms of traditional swordsmanship and reforge it into a form that was adapted to the circumstances in the Red Ocean!

"Traditional swordsmanship is powerful, but it is also flawed." Ketis summed up her thoughts. "Extraordinary willpower is an amazing energy medium. It is born from human conviction and amplified by sword technique through the phenomenon known as resonance. Yet... there is a limit to how extensively willpower can bend reality. The law of conservation of energy still applies even if I don't have a full understanding of all of the relevant variables. All I need to know is that the willpower of a swordmaster is the starting point rather than the destination."

She continued to swing the Bloodsinger in a sharp and piercing manner that bore a striking resemblance to Saint Dise's newly acquired mastery over the metal element. With every strike, her Bloodsinger cut the air with a slightly sharper edge. What was remarkable was that this incremental improvement never stopped!

Ever since Ketis came into contact with the Heavensword Association, she became fascinated by its enduring legacy of traditional swordsmanship.

It completely overtook the inferior and more primitive forms of swordsmanship practiced by Ketis and her fellow sisters in the past.

In the ensuing years, Ketis continued to master the existing tenets of traditional swordsmanship as she wholeheartedly believed in the superiority of its existing

paradigms.

Yet now that Ketis took stock of her current understanding and evaluated it from a fresh perspective, she realized that she was pursuing a dead end all this time.

While she certainly learned a lot of valuable lessons from the traditions of the Heavensword Association, Ketis no longer blindly took its gospel as the absolute truth.

According to her new theories, the practice of traditional swordsmanship in the Milky

Way was more like a helpless devolution.

The swordsmanship demonstrated by the past wielders of the Heavensword was much richer and more magnificent. She saw very little of that splendor in the more basic

sword styles in use today.

That did not necessarily mean that the swordmasters the Milky Way were fundamentally wrong. They were merely limited by their environment. They were like third-class mech designers who could only design weak and basic mechs.

Until recently, Ketis and Dise had both been trying to develop their swordsmanship as if

they were still third-class mech designers.

In truth, their conditions had already improved to the point where they earned the

qualifications to promote to second-class mech designers.

They could design much richer and more varied mech designs now that they could make

use of better and more powerful means!

Saint Dise only just managed to complete this life-changing transition by successfully discovering her affinity towards the metal element.

Ketis took inspiration from her sister's successful ascension.

As a witness to this profound breakthrough, the swordmaster wondered how she could replicate this process to make it suitable for swordmasters.

"Swordmasters and expert pilots share the same root. What separates an expert pilot from an ace pilot is the formation of a Saint Kingdom. Then... if a swordmaster wants to become a sword saint, he must do whatever it takes to generate a domain field of his own."

According to Ves' teachings, a domain was the characteristic property of cultivators of the second major rank.

Every cultivator at this level acquired a domain in one form or another.

"What is a domain?"

The best explanation that Ketis could come up with was that it was an energy field that channeled the inner strength of an entity of the second major cultivation rank.

"What is inner strength?"

Was it one's conviction? Was it the artistic conception of qi cultivators? Was it the overwhelming belief in one's own self?

"Perhaps... it is all of this and more, at least as far as swordmasters are concerned."

Although Ketis was not able to come up with solid answers to every question, she believed she was steadily making progress in constructing a fresh new paradigm of swordsmanship.

She spent hours writing down her notes in a virtual document. She frequently examined

her words and either erased or rewrote them if they failed to meet her high standards.

Over the course of several weeks and months, these writings gradually evolved into an increasingly more coherent manual.

A manual of reformed swordsmanship.

Chapter 6602 The Theory of Reformed Swordsmanship

Time seemed to blur as Ketis continued to invest in her effort to reshape her entire cognition and interpretation of swordsmanship.

Her latest project had become an obsession to the ambitious swordmaster.

Ketis could no longer extricate herself from her current purpose.

She still made sure to reserve parts of her weekly schedule on completing Missions, but they became less important to her. She would rather invest entire days pondering over the truth of gaining power through wielding swords.

To Ketis, the sword had become more than just a weapon. Trying to find answers to the question of what a sword actually meant to a practitioner caused her to develop a lot of wild tangents on the possible answers.

She needed time to explore their viability and test her possible theories by performing empirical tests whenever possible.

Though Ves noticed that his former student was spending an increasing amount of time on activities that weren't directly related to earning more AP, he merely shook his head and let her do as she wished.

Ketis was an adult who could make her own decisions. Even if her latest pet project. adversely impacted his own plans, Ves was not selfish enough to stand in the way of a creator who was earnestly pursuing her passion.

Besides, he trusted her to spend her time wisely and provide a great yield at the end.

Ascension Points were not the only form of profit that they could earn during this marathon.

Slowly but surely, Ketis felt she was making real progress towards developing a new paradigm, one that made sense in the current day and age.

She occasionally debated with Ves about his own perspectives on living mechs and cultivation science, and occasionally incorporated that information in her increasingly more refined virtual document.

The text had become more than just a set of organized notes. She consciously changed its phrasing, structure and formatting so that it offered better instructions to other readers.

She even began to give it a new name to reflect its great purpose.

After Ketis puzzled out her theories, she eventually sat back and let out a deep breath. The swordmaster looked tired, but also satisfied in a way that she hadn't felt in a long time.

This was because she did it! She not only completed the first draft of her text, but also completed the foundation of her new approach towards swordsmanship!

Although she had yet to test all of her hypotheses, she felt that its pieces fit together so well that there was no way her work was off the mark!

At most, she needed to fill up more gaps and make a few adjustments to her initial draft. As far as the core theories were concerned, Ketis had gathered too many clues to believe she had gone astray.

She immediately felt the urge to share her new gains, so she automatically turned towards the man she trusted the most in these kinds of matters.

"Ves!"

"Ketis? You look... as if you have just lifted a huge burden off your shoulder. Are you finally done with your latest endeavor?"

The woman eagerly nodded as if she was ten years younger. "I did it. Everything is clear to me now. By taking the time to start over from scratch and create my own theoretical framework, I have devised a new paradigm that has given me far greater clarity than anything else I have read or heard. I don't deserve all of the credit as the Heavensword has given me a few hints here and there, but I tried my best to base my theoretical underpinnings on proven phenomena. That is why I am confident that my new text can serve as a new instruction manual for all of the sword practitioners in the Red Ocean. This not only includes swordmasters, but also mech pilots who specialize in swordsmanship!"

Ves could sense that Ketis deliberately emphasized that last remark.

"Have you found a commonality between traditional swordsmanship and mech piloting?" "I did, Ves. I don't want to use the term 'traditional swordsmanship' to describe my new vision. It sounds old-fashioned and creates the impression that all sword practitioners must value tradition over innovation. That is completely wrong in my opinion. I prefer to use the term 'reformed swordsmanship'. This shows that while I have learned from some of the gains of the past, I have consciously repurposed it to fit our changing circumstances. I like to think of it as an evolution of the swordsmanship tradition of the Heavensword Association."

Ves grew more intrigued about her theories. Even if he was not a sword practitioner himself, there were many parallels between swordmasters and mech pilots. Understanding one profession could advance his understanding of the other profession. The two mech designers began to sit down.

Ketis proceeded to transfer a virtual document to Ves.

"This is my first draft. It is rather thick and lengthy, but many sections describe specific sword practice instructions that you can skip. You should pay attention to the purely theoretical chapters instead. I will summarize my findings and hypotheses while you read."

Ves glanced at the title of the large document.

"The Manual of Reformed Swordsmanship, by Ketis Larkinson. That sounds remarkably... plain and boring"

"There is no need for me to sensationalize the title." The swordmaster shrugged. "The title reflects the contents. It is meant to be the definitive text on the new model of swordsmanship that I wish to spread across the Red Ocean. Everyone else has been practicing their swordsmanship blindly all of this time. I don't blame them, as they never received proper instruction from sword practitioner who actually knows what he or she is doing. Now that I have come and solved this long-standing problem, they have no excuse to remain ignorant anymore."

"Do you realize how much arrogance you exude when you say that? You sound as if you think that every sword practitioner aside from you is wrong and needs to go back to your school in order to take remedial lessons."

"That is a deliberate choice on my part." Ketis viciously grinned. "I do not think that there are swordmasters who have figured out the nature of swordsmanship better than I. If they think they know better, they are welcome to challenge me. If they can defeat me with their swordsmanship or their argumentation, then I will readily admit my inferiority. My goal is to create a new future for swordsmen and swordswomen. I don't care whether I will earn the greatest credit in the end. I just want people to engage in critical thinking and stop following old traditions solely because their parents and teachers have done the same."

The more she spoke about her purpose, the more driven she appeared. Ves' appreciation for Ketis grew as she truly sounded as if she had made a groundbreaking invention. "If that is the case, then explain your new theoretical framework to me. How do you think that people should approach extraordinary swordsmanship?" Ketis raised her hand and projected a model that resembled a triangle. "Reformed swordsmanship is centered around three variables. These are the central pillars that grant swordmasters the ability to wield an artifact to defeat enemies far beyond the means of ordinary humans with blades in their hands. These variables are Heaven, Earth and Man. They are intrinsically related to qi cultivation, artifact cultivation and willpower cultivation respectively according to your terminology. Regardless of what you call them, they form the trifacta that every reformed sword practitioner must master in order to become stronger, develop their own domains and ultimately attain their godhood."

Ves straightened his back as he heard this familiar terminology. "I have heard references of this trifacta in other ancient cultivation texts."

Ketis jerked her head towards the grand work that was peacefully sticking onto her back. "The Heavensword taught me that. I have no reason to reject its suggestion. I do not inherently object to old theory. It just has to make sense in order to earn a place in

my new paradigm."

"That is a rational approach to take. I approve. Can you elaborate on this trifecta?"

"Why certainly. I believe that you already possess a good impression on what they stand for, but I can assure you that the meaning that I have ascribed to them does not entirely match your interpretation. Let me start with the origin, which is Heaven."

"Not Man?" Ves questioned.

"No. The reason why I want to start with Heaven is because it is the reason why

everything else is possible. Without the matter and energy spawned from the universe, the galaxies and the stars around us, none of us would exist and be able to do all of the stuff we have done in our lifetimes. I can talk all day about this, but in the most immediate context of reformed swordsmanship, Heaven specifically stands for the E energy that is the most easily accessible source of extraordinary power for all cultivators, not just sword practitioners. There is no reason for any human swordmaster to reject its usage. Relying on Earth and Man alone has never allowed us to produce our own sword saint. Only by adding in this new variable can we complete the circle."

"I see." Ves looked mildly impressed. "That makes sense. That is one of the reasons why Dise was able to advance to the rank of ace pilot."

Ketis continued her explanation. "Earth is next. As I have mentioned earlier, everything

related to Earth is spawned from Heaven. Earth can have different meanings to people. To some, it refers to the literal planet that they are standing on. To others, it represents the raw matter that can be mined and harvested from planets and asteroids. To me, it represents all of the raw materials as well as the products that can be manufactured from it. A reformed sword practitioner cannot fight like one if he does not use the bounty of Earth to use as a focus of his power and to use its inherent material properties

to defeat his foes."

"So Earth in this case is the philosophical representation of the sword in your hand?"

"Yes, but that is not a complete answer, Earth stands for so much more. It can signify the personal shield generators that we are both wearing to protect us from attacks. It can represent the suits of combat armor that we use to protect ourselves from damage and environmental hazards. In a more extreme case, it can even represent a Carmine mech and the mech sword in its loadout!"

That sounded like an ambitious definition!

"Does that mean that Carmine mechs have a place in your new model of

swordsmanship?"

The swordmaster's confidence sapped a little. "To be honest, I am not sure. This is one of

the unproven assumptions I devised. Let us leave this aside for the time being and move to the third variable, which is Man. This variable represents the self, the human who is shaped by both Heaven and Earth. A reformed sword practitioner may lose access to both of these variables for whatever reason, but they can never let go of Man because that represents the foundation of their existence. If Heaven is the rim of a

wheel while Earth stands for its spokes, then Man serves as the axle in the center."

A wheel.

Ves loved the visualization, even though he did not fully understand what he was

supposed to read from this analogy.

"So reformed swordsmanship is a wheel that consists of three essential components. How does that benefit your sword practice?"

"Only a complete wheel can move forward." Ketis succinctly replied. "The wheels of all of the swordmasters that I have met in the past are incomplete. In the better situations, they can still roll forward, but the ride is so bumpy and takes so much energy to advance

that their progress has slowed to the point they can never make a breakthrough in their lifetimes. This aptly describes the situation of most swordmasters, both the majority who reside in the old galaxy and the minority who reside in the Red Ocean"

"What about the less optimistic cases?"

Ketis grimaced. "Their wheels are so flawed that they either collapse or are unable to

make progress no matter how long they can live. I count the Heavensword Saints of the past and present among them. Due to inheriting the grand work, their Heaven score has improved while their Earth score has skyrocketed. However, the reason why they have doomed their futures is because their Man score has plunged to the bottom. When the axle of a wheel has broken, the entire foundation has turned hollow, I always understood this on an instinctual level, but now that I have formed a proper theory, I can finally present a logical argument."

Chapter 6603 Sword Pacts

"So what exactly is the significance of your theoretical model?" Ves asked. "Aside from the use of fancy terms, your description has not exactly introduced anything that sounds practical and immediately applicable. What is a swordmaster supposed to do with your teachings?"

Ketis crossed her arms. "You should have noticed that I used the word 'score'. That is deliberate on my part, because I want every sword practitioner to start evaluating on how well they score in terms of Heaven, Earth and Man. They can use a numerical scale such as 1 to 100, or a letter scale such as D to S. They can even use a simplistic binary scale such as weak to strong if they can't be bothered with finer distinctions. What matters is that every sword practitioner must make an effort to quantify their progress in how extensively they mastered Heaven, Earth and Man at their respective ranks. That will tell them what they need to improve the most."

Ves immediately tried to put this instruction into practice.

"Let's start with a typical swordmaster from the Heavensword Association. If I have to judge his score, I would say that his Heaven score is D, his Earth score C and his Man score is A. Their willpower is probably top-notch, but willpower cultivation alone is not enough for them to break through. The swordmasters of the old galaxy are hindered by the deprivation of the power of heaven. This has also made it so that most of the swordmasters in the new frontier are still not used to leveraging E energy radiation." Ketis nodded in agreement. "The way you scored typical swordmasters is close to my own interpretation. You are right that we are still new to mastering the potential of Heaven. You are also correct that swordmasters have impressive willpower that it has formed a source of extraordinary power by itself. As for Earth... no swordmaster has developed the proper techniques to tap into the power of their equipment. That is partially because no one has

been able to forge a proper sword artifact in the past. The swords wielded by the Heavensworders are excellent products of modern engineering, but they lack the qualities that can turn them into full artifacts."

"What distinguishes a regular material sword from a sword artifact?" Ves asked an important question.

The female swordmaster replied by taking hold of the floating Bloodsinger and partially drawing out its remarkable blade.

"As you know, my Bloodsinger started out as a normal CFA-issued weapon all the way back when we entered the Starlight Megalodon."

"I remember, Ketis. You repeatedly modified and upgraded your personal sword. Even if you haven't used any of the proper traditional blacksmithing techniques, it has sort of evolved into a low-level artifact under your care. Your weapon has especially benefited from long-term exposure to Sharpie's willpower baptism."

Ketis smiled. "This shows that before I created my new theory, I instinctively understood

the value of nurturing my Bloodsinger. However, I cannot consider my efforts in doing so a qualified success. My Earth score should therefore be rather low, just like all of the other swordmasters who have carried their weapons by their side for many decades. Almost every swordmaster does it, but I find it incredibly absurd that no one has truly made an effort to explain why this is beneficial and why their current methods failed to make a meaningful difference""

Her explanation made sense. It was all well-and-good to treat their swords like cherished possessions and ascribe greater meaning into them than mere physical objects, but without solid results, it all amounted to superstition in the end.

"So how do you intend to turn this pseudoscience into an actual working solution?" "By taking a page out of your book." She replied. "I do not know how other sword practitioners have managed to do it in the past. I suspect that they are able to acquire much more developed sword artifacts that are specially designed and forged to conduct binding rituals. I cannot think of another way for a sword cultivator to increase his utilization of a sword artifact aside from forming a bond that can bring them together. Witnessing your Carmine mechs turn ordinary people into mech pilots leads me to believe that there is great potential in this. The necessity for peak ace pilots to merge with their prospective god mechs is another piece of evidence that backs up my hypothesis,"

In other words, every swordmaster aside from the Heavensword Saint failed to make substantial progress because they never successfully explored a way to increase the utilization of their weapons.

"What you are describing is artifact cultivation." Ves stated.

"Yes. Artifact cultivation is the right phrase to use when it comes to this, Ves! In my new manual, I wrote that a reformed sword practitioner cannot make enough progress unless he raises his Earth score. There are not many proven and reliable means to do so at the moment, but one of the methods that I have suggested is to convert a favorite weapon into a 'life sword.'"

"A life sword?"

Ketis grinned wider. "It is exactly what you think it is. It is the deliberate choice to form a permanent bond with a sword artifact that is capable of accepting it. If the bond is successfully formed, a contract exists between the two, just like your Blood Pact. Both of them shall prosper together. While I have attempted to soften the terms of the contract so that it can still enable the sword practitioner to wield other swords, the effect will not be as good in most cases."

That was a rather clever idea. Ketis clearly wanted to imitate the model of the Carmine System to empower her reformed swordsmanship, but she did not blindly copy all of its traits. She put her own spin on the concept and tried to make it less restrictive and more palatable to everyone.

Whether it would actually work was uncertain, but Ves applauded her initiative.

"What do you call your version of the Blood Pact, then?"

"A Life Sword Pact. It is the most extreme and sacred pact that I have devised up to this point."

"You created more?"

Ketis nodded. "I did. Why would I stop with one? The Life Sword Pact has the potential to produce the most dramatic results, but the downsides are equally as severe, just like the Blood Pact it was modeled after. In order to accommodate the needs and circumstances of other sword practitioners, I have tried to develop other possible sword pacts. I have written them down in the manual, but I have made sure to warn my readers that it is all based on unsubstantiated theories. This is one of the reasons why the current text is only a draft rather than the final version."

Ves quickly scrolled down the virtual document he received and focused on one of the chapters in the Earth section.

He quickly became impressed by the amount of pacts that Ketis managed to devise. Her imagination must have been working in overdrive when she wrote this chapter! "Interesting. Interesting! What is the premise behind the 'Mother-Child Sword Pact'?" "That is an answer to sword practitioners who want to enjoy most of the benefits of a Life Sword Pact, but still want to wield many more words." Ketis said. "The idea is for a sword practitioner to form a pact with a sword that is especially designed to shed pieces. As long as the pact has developed to a point, it should theoretically be possible to split the sword pieces and turn them into 'children' that are still somewhat connected to the sword practitioner. They can subsequently be reformed into full swords. If this works as well as I hope, then the loss of a 'child sword' will only set the sword practitioner back on a temporary basis."

The idea sounded rather similar to the premise behind the Fey Fianna, but the details were naturally different. Ketis relied too much on her assumptions and not enough on actual proof for this particular idea.

"The Spirit Sword Pact sounds interesting."

"This is another idea that is based on your work, Ves. The idea is to form a pact with a companion spirit that is shaped into a sword. As long as the conditions are right, the sword practitioner has successfully acquired a 'spirit sword'. The two are much more tightly bound together, and shouldn't have any compatibility problems. It is much easier to hide the spirit sword, but it is also not that useful to use against powerful physical targets. The best way to use the spirit sword is to temporarily imbue it into a physical sword so that the latter can gain additional power."

Many mech pilots with companion spirits were already doing this with their mechs, so

Ves knew that there was merit to this proposal.

The only part that Ves was not certain about was whether it was possible for a swordmaster to treat a companion spirit like a literal sword.

If Ves hadn't already created Blinky, he would have felt tempted to pursue this idea! Forming a spirit sword sounded fun.

Ketis came up with a few more sword pacts than that, such as a Slave Sword Pact, an Inheritance Sword Pact, a Bone Sword Pact and a Planet Sword Pact.

However, without proof to back up her increasingly more outrageous assumptions, it all sounded like fantasy.

"Don't pay too much attention to these other Sword Pacts." Ketis advised. "They are ultimately derived from the most foundational Life Sword Pact, which possesses the strongest empirical backing. The ultimate goal of forming the concept of a Sword Pact is to tell every serious sword practitioner that they must bond with a sword if they want to promote the development of their own domains. This is exactly what I have been missing. Without a Sword Pact, my prior attempts to become a sword saint were ultimately ineffective."

"It sounds like you have managed to clear the fog that has kept you lost all of this time.

This is incredibly valuable."

Ketis nodded in agreement. "I have already decided to put my theory to the test. I am ready to form a Life Sword Pact with my Bloodsinger."

"What?!"

This was a big deal!

"If this is anything like the Carmine Pact, then you know that this will be permanent,

right?! I mean, you probably know the pros and cons far better than I, but are you truly ready to turn your Bloodsinger into your lifelong weapon even if it is clearly not the best

weapon that you can acquire?"

What about the Heavensword? "My decision has already been set long before this day, Ves." Ketis calmly replied in order to show that she maintained her reason. "Forming a bond with the Bloodsinger is the right decision. No other sword qualifies, and that includes the Heavensword for reasons that I have explained earlier. You are correct that it is not the best sword that I can bond with, but I have spent a decade nurturing this blade. Why would I throw away this investment? I have already made it mine for the most part. Forming the pact is the final step that completes my ongoing attempt to join my fate with the fate of the Bloodsinger. I will start right away now that I have accounted for myself." "WAIT! Don't be in a hurry! You can still apply last-minute upgrades to the Bloodsinger! Won't it be nice if we purchase a few rare materials from the Divine Bazaar and upgrade the materials of your greatsword? Aside from that, we can also attempt to transform your weapon into a powerful D-arm that is equivalent to a high-level artifact through Demoncasting!"

Ketis shook her head in rejection. "I can upgrade the Bloodsinger after I have turned it into my life sword. There shouldn't be any restriction that prohibits me from doing so. I

just need to keep the weapon intact enough, just like when you upgrade one of your old mechs. As for Demoncasting... no. Just no. Do not attempt to persuade me further." Her mind was set. There was no way to persuade a swordmaster to change her mind. Ves couldn't even persuade her to slow down and test her Life Sword Pact on another swordmaster before she made her own attempt!

"I will not put others at risk of suffering from my mistakes." She self-righteously declared

as she fully unsheathed her impressive Bloodsinger. "It is only right that I shall bear the risks of my own work! I am my own test subject!"

Chapter 6604 Rising Scores

From the moment Ketis chose to form a so-called Life Sword Pact with the Bloodsinger, it was as if everything fit into place.

All of the years she spent on nurturing an intimate emotional bond with the weapon paid off all at once.

The continuous willpower baptism had already enabled Ketis to impart a strong imprint of herself onto the weapon.

Combined with her meticulous care in maintaining and upgrading the greatsword, the Bloodsinger had long evolved past its starting point as a standard-issue CFA weapon!

As Ketis boldly treated herself as her first and only test subject for her newly conceived Life Sword Pact, the Bloodsinger began to glow and vibrate as if it was explicitly answering her offer!

The minor vibrations generated by the Bloodsinger rapidly rose in frequency, causing the weapon to produce a harmonious humming sound!

The newly bonded weapon sung to its new life partner!

Although the Bloodsinger did not undergo any physical transformation, the weapon most definitely became stronger in other ways.

When Ves observed the formation of a Life Sword Pact, he took note of several interesting observations.

First, the Bloodsinger had not actually formed a Life Sword Pact with Ketis herself, but rather her companion spirit!

Even if Ketis and Sharpie were ultimately two sides of the same coin, they still counted for two separate beings as far as pacts were concerned,

It made sense. Sharpie was the swordmaster side of Ketis. The companion spirit also spent a lot of time inhabiting the blade in order to subject it to willpower baptism. It was hard to disassociate them from each other.

Aside from this interesting development, Ves also took note of the Bloodsinger's accelerated evolution as an artifact.

One of the theories he formed on artifact cultivation was that it was only possible to practice it in the first place if the object in question was alive, at least in a very minor

sense.

It was usually enough for it to possess a spiritual foundation.

However, in order for the practitioner to benefit from this form of cultivation, the artifact needed to be powerful enough to drag the human up to its level.

That did not happen all that much in this case.

The Bloodsinger was a fine weapon, but it was never designed as an artifact. Ketis had yet to turn it into a masterwork, which could have helped a lot in this circumstance. This ultimately caused the weapon to provide much less help to Sharpie than was ideal. While the new Life Sword Pact caused Sharpie to become more complete and fulfilled, the companion spirit did not appear to have grown all that much stronger.

At most, the formation of a life Sword Pact had plugged a few flaws and caused Sharpie to strengthen her foundation as a swordmaster.

Ketis looked happy, though. She did not regret her decision to bond with her personal greatsword even though there were vastly superior arms within her reach.

If Ketis chose to form a Life Sword Pact with the Heavensword, the difference in power between the two would have been so enormous that the grand work may have been able to boost Sharpie's cultivation to a sword saint in an instant!

Yet it was exactly because the gap in power between the two was so great that Ketis prudently rejected this offer.

When a mortal attempted to form an intimate contract with a god, there was no way that the latter would be able to retain his sense of self.

The relationship would turn from a bond of equals into a slave contract due to the enormous power disparity!

The Heavensword was pretty much a god among swords. The only reason why Ketis would want to form a pact with the ancient relic weapon was if she was willing to sacrifice her future cultivation as a swordmaster in order to gain an instant boost of power.

Perhaps she might have been tempted to choose the latter if red humanity had already entered into an unstoppable decline, but that was not the case at the moment.

Ketis still possessed enough optimism for the future to bet on her long-term development.

In this regard, forming a Life Sword Pact with a personal weapon that was not too strong was most conducive to her growth prospects.

The difference in power was minimal, so Sharpie's cultivation did not explode to the point of compromising her existing foundation.

Now that Ves understood Ketis' calculations, he applauded her prudent choices. The decision to form the very first. Life Sword Pact with a weapon in modern times turned out to be quite safe.

As Ketis slowly recovered from forming her life-changing pact, she slowly opened her eyes and held the humming Bloodsinger as if she was trying to communicate with the evolving artifact.

Soon enough, the Bloodsinger turned dormant, causing it to look no different than before. Ketis gently slipped its blade into its floating scabbard.

Sharpie meanwhile continued to occupy the Bloodsinger. Not only was she continuing to baptize the weapon with her extraordinary willpower, but she was also deepening the newly forged Life Sword Pact.

Ketis was not lying when she said she ripped off the model of the Life Sword Pact from his Blood Pact.

Ves did not feel offended that she copied his homework and only changed a few details so that her own version was not exactly the same.

He felt honored. She was his student. The more she learned from him, the more he felt. validated as a teacher.

Besides, the Blood Pact was such a good invention that Ves wanted to spread its benefits to others. It was a way for weaker individuals to gain power by bonding themselves to stronger objects, whether they were Carmine mechs or other objects.

The initiative shown by Ketis also opened Ves' eyes. She had developed her Sword Pacts in a different direction than his own Blood Pacts. By making comparisons between the two, Ves gained more insights on the workings of these permanent bonds, thereby allowing him to improve his work in ways he could have never imagined by himself. Ves valued the Manual of Reformed Swordsmanship a lot more because of this reason! The other variations of the Sword Pact presented interesting research suggestions. Even if Ketis had not been able to prove their viability, the creativity she had shown when coming up with these strange ideas gave Ves a lot of inspiration.

As Ves tried to figure out if he could imitate Ketis and borrow her own ideas about the Sword Pact to increase the variety of his own Blood Pacts, the swordmaster finally spoke with contentment.

"I knew it would work. I can already tell that my new model of Reformed Swordsmanship holds genuine merit. It may not be the best way to practice swordsmanship in the Age of Dawn, but I am certain that there are no better alternatives available. I can feel it, Ves."

"Feel what?"

"I am growing stronger." Ketis grinned. "Sharpie's willpower is condensing. Now that she has bonded with the Bloodsinger, there are qualities about the latter that are beginning to bleed into the former. Before this day, Sharpie had already grown fairly strong, but she was unable to make much progress because her willpower lacked... substance, if you will. The Bloodsinger is a material artifact that can give her exactly what she needs. It reminds me of the Mech Body Merger Process. Perhaps one of the requirements for swordmasters to advance their cultivation is to promote a closer union between themselves and their blades."

That was... an interesting theory, but Sharpie's progress was not enough to serve as conclusive proof. There were so many variables interacting with each other that it was difficult to attribute a specific outcome to a specific cause.

"Does this mean that you have found your path to becoming a sword saint?"

The proud woman nodded. "I have already found it. My actions merely confirmed that it

was not a mirage. As far as my Earth score is concerned, it has already risen, but it is not yet up to the standard of a sword saint. You are right that the quality and properties of the Bloodsinger are not the best, but I have all of the time in the System Space to remedy that problem. The Workshop of

Creation offers the best tools to reforge my life sword into a weapon that best reflects my growth as a mech designer as well as a reformed sword practitioner."

Ketis expressed so much confidence that Ves half-believed that she was bound to break

through for that reason alone.

Even if her trifacta theory turned out to be wrong, the belief that she was heading in the right direction may just be enough to become a saint!

Ves certainly had no reason to offer too much doubt and criticism. He did not want to burst her bubble and ruin a good thing.

Confidence was a vital quality for expert pilots to trigger their second apotheosis. Without a strong belief in their own infallibility, how could they possibly dare to break a barrier that few of their peers had ever surpassed?

The same should apply to swordmasters as well since they were also willpower

cultivators.

"Okay." Ves said. "According to your own model, you should be able to earn a high score in both the Earth and Man categories, if not now, then in the near future. That leaves the Heaven category. What do you intend to do in order to raise your score in this aspect?" Ketis deliberately raised her arm and reached behind her back so that she could unsheathe the Heavensword.

The grand work eagerly leapt into her palm and began to release a soothing white glow

from its blade.

"I am the bearer of the Heavensword. I can already channel a portion of its powers. I have also received a few lessons and hints from the blade. I have witnessed its past wielders in action. I have observed Dise's masterful manipulation of metal energy and observed her breakthrough. Do you think I can possibly fail to raise my Heaven score after gaining all of these advantages?"

The answer was obvious. There was no need for Ves to make a fool of himself.

"I will become a sword saint." Ketis stated with absolute certainty. "The only question is how soon I can attempt my breakthrough. If I am successful enough, I will be able to breakthrough while I am still inside the System Space. If not, I will most definitely be able to do it shortly after leaving it. The faster I progress, the more ready I will be to defend my family when the aliens make their final push.""

"Are you confident you will be able to fight back against the native aliens in a meaningful way after becoming a sword saint?" Ves questioned.

"Not with the Bloodsinger." Ketis readily admitted and casually swung the grand work in her hand. "My life sword still needs more time to grow. I will make use of the power of the Heavensword if it still approves of me. A good sword should not remain unused. Now that I have chosen my life sword, the threat posed by this sticky relic weapon has diminished. The only remaining issue is that I do not think I can make enough of a difference if I am still a swordmaster. I have to become a sword saint and form my own domain in order to become qualified to tap more power from the weapon and become strong enough to defeat a phase lord,"

Ves truly hoped that she was not being overconfident about her optimistic predictions.

"You will definitely make a strong statement about the strength of your reformed swordsmanship if you are able to beat a phase lord without a mech. Does this mean you have sworn off the possibility of piloting a Carmine mech?"

Ketis frowned for a moment. "I feel it is... inappropriate. I have already formed a Life

Sword Pact. Even if it isn't precisely the same as a Blood Pact, there is enough overlap that I fear that I am no longer permitted to establish one with a Carmine mech. I am okay with that. All I need to attain godhood is a good sword."

Chapter 6605 The Importance of Foundation Building

"I think you are wrong about the pacts." Ves claimed.

"Oh? What did I overlook?"

"Sharpie has formed a Life Sword Pact with the Bloodsinger. That still leaves you free to form your own pact. You thought you only had one slot available, but you actually have two. Now that I think

about it, everyone with a companion spirit should have access to two slots. This is an incredible advantage. You can still bind yourself to another sword... or mech."

Though Ketis realized the significance of this claim, she did not look particularly enthused.

"I am a swordmaster and a Journeyman Mech Designer. It makes little to no sense to me to bind myself to another sword in my capacity as a mech designer. I do admit that there is a slightly greater reason for me to form a Blood Pact with a Carmine mech. I can have my cake and eat it too. I can develop as a swordmaster, but also enjoy the advantages of scale and superiority that a mech can provide. It is just..."

"You still think it is inappropriate?"

Ketis let out a sigh. "I do not believe in the polite fiction that companion spirits are separate entities from their principals. Sharpie is me, and I am Sharpie. Sure, I treat her as if she is a separate individual, and my companion spirit is more than happy to play this role, but it is just that. A role. There is something about splitting up a piece of my mind to form a companion spirit that makes this come naturally, but I haven't forgotten that we share the same base. Besides, I truly think that it is unnecessary for me to rely on a Carmine mech to make a difference in the Red War."

"That s easy to say for the latest holder of the Heavensword."

"Just because I am on guard against its influence on me does not mean I hate it." Ketis retorted.

"Now that I have spent more time with it, I have become a little more reassured. I have not been able to decipher its true intentions, but I think I have a much better idea on what it wants. So long as our goals do not collide, there is no harm in spending time together."

"Let's talk about how your work may benefit other people. Ves changed the topic. "Will you permit other 'reformed sword practitioners' to pilot Carmine mechs, with or without companion spirits?"

"I personally have no objection to it. I will not hold others to the standards that I set for myself. I am well aware that my conditions are much different from that of other people. The reason why we practice swordsmanship should never be for its own sake. A sword without direction is a danger that can cut off your own head. We practice swordsmanship in order to become strong enough to defend ourselves and the people we care about against those that wish us harm. If I impose too many restrictions on others, then they will abandon the sword for a rifle or better yet a Carmine mech."

She sounded cognizant that reformed swordsmanship did not exist in isolation. It existed in a reality where people had the ability to master other weapons.

Reformed swordsmanship needed to be competitive enough to attract people to practice it on a large scale. Otherwise, Ketis.

In the Age of Dawn, it was impossible for her to disregard the existence of Carmine mechs.

One of the motivations why mech pilots practiced swordsmanship so earnestly was because many of their skills transferred over to piloting swordsman mechs.

Now that a much larger population of people gained the opportunity to pilot their own Carmine mechs, interest in classes related to swordsmanship, spearmanship, marksmanship and more had exploded in popularity!

Even if people could not afford to buy their own Carmine mechs or enroll into one of the many new Carmine mech pilot training programs, they could still afford to sign up for those weapon training classes!

Who knew whether they would be able to put their fighting skills to use in a Carmine mech one day.

It was for that reason that the Red Swordsmanship Federation had become a lot busier than before. It even had to go on a hiring spree just to be able to handle all of the extra work related to founding more sword schools and certifying new sword instructors. "When a reformed swordsman pilots a Carmine mech and manages to break through, will he become a sword initiate or an expert candidate?" Ves asked an important. question.

"I have an idea what might happen." Ketis shrugged her shoulders. "My hypothesis is that it is dependent on how the swordsman sees himself. Willpower cultivation is all about the cultivation of the self, correct? I would imagine that if the individual in question sees himself as a sword practitioner first, then he will evolve into a sword initiate and subsequently a swordmaster. If he sees himself as a Carmine mech pilot first, then he will become an expert candidate and subsequently an expert pilot."

"That makes sense. Your logic is extremely sound. I think this is a safe assumption to make. You should make the life-changing consequences of this distinction clear to everyone."

"I have attempted to do so in the manual, though I do not strictly think it is necessary. Instructions are redundant. By the time a breakthrough has come, they do not need to use their logic to justify a decision that they have already made with their hearts." Ves proposed another interesting scenario. "What if the swordsman and Carmine mech pilot had a companion spirit? Do you think that both of them can become willpower cultivators that pursue godhood with different bonds?"

This was too much for the ambitious swordmaster. She let out an exasperated breath. 'I have no idea. I can only speculate on whether it is possible, which means I have no

confidence in my answer. It is better to just wait and see what will happen in reality." "That is reasonable, Ketis. I think I am pretty happy with your answer. The swordsmanship community will react well that your new approach towards swordsmanship does not reject Carmine mechs, but accepts their usage as another factor that falls under the Earth category."

It had only been a short time, but Ves already accepted Ketis' new theoretical model as factual truth.

"I do not think that reformed sword practitioners should attempt to challenge a phase lord with just a sword and a few pieces of cloth on their bodies." Ketis said. "We are not primitives. We have access to advanced technologies. It would be foolish not to make use of them if we can afford it. As long as the gear is compatible with swordsmanship, then I see no reason to prohibit its use. What worked in the past may not work in the present. What works in the present may not work in the future."

"Well said! I agree with you. From what I can gather, ancient cultivators lived in a time where the Milky Way was powerful enough to produce a high-energy environment. The power of Heaven was so strong at the time that cultivators could easily destroy planets just by knowing how to harness the power of E energy in the environment. It is clear that this is not possible in the Red Ocean where we are only receiving a fraction of the exotic radiation that is saturating Messier 87. In these cases, it is important to rely on the power of Earth and the power of Man to make up for the shortcomings."

"I suspect that it isn't entirely necessary for sword practitioners to score well in all 3 categories in order to make further progress." Ketis proposed. "Just as you believe that mech pilots can become stronger by pursuing qi cultivation, I think that there is room in our society for swordsmen who forgo the development of Man because of an inability to transform their willpower and go all-out in developing their attainments in Heaven and

Earth."

That was an interesting proposal. Ves paused in thought.

"That might work, but... they will have to do much better in these areas than typical swordmasters. Willpower makes it so much easier to amplify the performance of gear, and also allows you to harness E energy radiation by force, thereby forgoing the need to understand an E energy attribute to a deep extent. However... the advantages are also clear. It is much easier to keep track of your progress in these areas. Qi cultivation is usually split up into well-organized phases, while the performance of your gear can be measured with objective criteria,"

The development of Man in the form of willpower cultivation was the most difficult and demanding condition to meet.

There was no way to cheat the process of becoming a willpower cultivator. Perhaps people might be able to invent elixirs or special artifacts that may make it a

little easier, but willpower was inherently a quality that could only be born from hardship

and strong personal qualities.

Every swordmaster and expert pilot was a hero in one way or another. They earned their transcendence.

"I think I know now why those who have reached the first major cultivation rank are called foundation builders." Ketis said. "It is because they are literally engaged in the process of building the foundation of their future domain and ultimately their godhood. At this stage, they still have the ability to change or tweak their development. Once their foundations are strong enough, they can finally welcome the birth of a domain that is based on the choices they made."

Her words rang with universal truth. Her description applied to way more cultivators than swordmasters.

Whether it was expert pilots or Senior Mech Designers, all of them were still foundation builders!

Before they developed their own domains, they could still influence its development!

Ves gained a greater appreciation towards the transition from the first major cultivation rank to the second one.

Ace pilots became drastically more powerful after the acquisition of their Saint Kingdoms.

Master Mech Designers successfully realized their design philosophies and managed to make their gains accessible to other mech designers connected to the Kingdom of Mechs or Red Kingdom.

What would sword saints gain? What sort of transformation would they go through that caused them to take a significant step closer to attaining godhood?

One of the quirks that Ketis was not aware of was that mech pilots received a lot of hidden care from the Kingdom of Mechs or its offshoot.

Sword practitioners lacked this benefit, so the breakthrough experience of Ketis and other swordmasters may not be what they imagined.

"What is a domain, in your opinion?" Ves inquired.

He wanted to know how she interpreted from the lens of her Heaven Earth Man Trifecta, She had put so much thought into it that she definitely developed her own ideas. "That is a good question, Ves. From my experiences, a domain is... an expression of a more powerful version of yourself. In the mech community, a domain is referred to as a Saint Kingdom or a God Kingdom. I think that it

is a deliberate choice to refer to it as a kingdom, as it is literally a volume of space that is under the dominion of a single ruler. Every Domain Shaper is the founder and the ruler of their own personal kingdoms. I can't say anything more than that. I don't have enough information to form any further conclusions."

Ves smiled. "That is okay. Your answers are already illuminating enough to me. I think I

have a better idea on how to help mech pilots breakthrough. I have always wondered what exactly limits the effectiveness of the transcendence glow on expert pilots such as Venerable Joshua and Uncle Ark. The theoretical model that you have devised just now can be used as a tool to figure out their shortcomings and advise them on how to

improve their breakthrough conditions." "You... may be right."

Chapter 6606 Applying the Heaven Earth Man Trifecta

When Ves applied the new model to different champions, he could figure out their strengths and weaknesses in a much more structural manner than before.

He was not exactly uncovering new information by applying the Heaven Earth Man Trifecta. He was merely reorganizing existing data so that he could form clearer and more accurate conclusions.

Ves and Ketis decided to have a little fun by applying her new theoretical model onto familiar mech pilots.

Even though Ketis originally devised her model to serve as the central paradigm of reformed swordsmanship, there were enough parallels between sword practitioners and mech pilots that the same principles still applied for the most part.

"Let's start with your husband." Ves said. "You spend the most time with him, so you must have a clear idea of his shortcomings."

Ketis nodded. "Now that I am looking at his situation with a more informed perspective, I am no longer surprised why he has failed to break through despite making multiple attempts to do so. He doesn't score well in any of the three categories. His Earth score is fairly low for obvious reasons. The Everchanger fit him well when he was a low to mid-tier expert pilot, but times have changed. It is outdated and hasn't kept up with his accelerated growth. The sooner it has undergone an upgrade, the better."

Ves nodded in agreement. "Gloriana and I will tackle this project after we are done with the Minerva Mark II Project, the Riot Mark III Project and the Promethea Mark II Project." The swordmaster frowned. She clearly thought that was way too long. Then she realized that nothing much would change if he got his hands on an upgraded mech a few months or years earlier.

"That may be for the best." She sighed. "The other pilots have a greater need for upgraded machines than my husband. He... needs more tempering. He scores the lowest in the Man category out of all of the high-tier expert pilots in our roster. Part of it is because he is younger and less experienced than Saint Dise, but being fairly young hasn't stopped the likes of Saint Tusa and Saint Isobel from breaking through."

"Resonance strength isn't everything" Ves concluded. "It is a numerical scale that measures the growth of extraordinary willpower in a quantitative sense. The numbers don't say anything about how it has shaped in a qualitative manner."

Ketis nodded in agreement. "The cold hard truth is that Joshua hasn't done enough to temper himself. Other expert pilots eagerly take the initiative to challenge themselves and make new attainments. Dise has been working non-stop on this ever since she became an expert candidate. She never does the minimum. She always tries to go above and beyond what is expected of her duty in order to temper her willpower further. Tusa has not worked as hard, but he also had the benefit of receiving the Dark Zephyr Mark

III, so he was able to rely on sufficiently high scores in Heaven, Earth and Man to get past the threshold. As for Joshua... he is too comfortable in his current place." "What do you mean by that?"

"I have a feeling that Joshua might not be taking his responsibilities seriously enough." Ketis said after a moment of thought. "He is not slacking off. He is training every day and he is participating in all of the battles of importance. It is just... he isn't doing too much beyond that. He is not setting any difficult challenges for himself. He doesn't try to get too close to phase lords. To me, his attitude towards his work is too... ordinary. He cares more about completing his shift so that he can go home and spend time with Kirian and Mayra"

"Are you suggesting that Joshua is failing to temper his willpower because he cares too much about his children?"

The female mech designer shook her head. "Not necessarily. Tusa is a father to children as well, but he comes across as a pilot who treats his career as the center of his life. There should be a way to balance between the two. Joshua isn't able to neglect or set aside his children as easily as Tusa. The

latter has been traveling from warzone to warzone, leaving the responsibility of raising Doria and Giovanni to Ranya Wodin-Larkinson. He may not be the ideal father, but he is most definitely a qualified

saint."

Parenthood was a huge burden to people. It was also a source of great fulfillment.

"So being a father is not necessarily bad for expert pilots, but it presents another challenge to them." Ves analyzed. "Saint Tusa did not let his parenthood interfere too much with his career, but Venerable Joshua is clearly not able to do that. While he is probably a good parent, that doesn't necessarily make for a great champion."

This was one way to interpret this situation. Ves wanted to argue that parenthood did not affect one's career in a negative manner, but that was clearly not the case. Many professionals had to balance out their work with their personal lives. Very few of them managed to find an ideal middle ground that allowed them to be content as parents as well as breadwinners.

Ketis realized this as well. "As a mother, I do not want our children to grow up while their father is away weeks or months at a time. There is only so much that correspondence through physical projections can substitute for personal attendance. However, the mech designer and swordmaster in me tells me that Joshua needs to be more decisive about pursuing greatness. He not only needs to think more about himself, but he should also leave the expeditionary fleet for a time. The clan offers too much warmth and support for him. This strengthens his reasons to fight, but it also makes his life too comfortable." Ves thought about Joshua's situation and believed that Ketis was correct.

"If that is the case, then I think the best choice he can make is to leave the expeditionary fleet and fight in a different star system. As long as he stays away for half

a year, he will not only leave his comfort zone, but he will also be able to focus most of his attention on his own development. He will suffer great hardships and he won't have as much backup at his disposal, but this is exactly what expert pilots need to promote their evolution."

It was quite surprising how a fresh take on an old problem led to a much more sensible proposal.

The Heaven Earth Man Trifecta was already paying off in spades.

"I do not expect Joshua to be able to temper his willpower as much as Saint Dise." Ketis remarked. "What I do expect is that he puts a serious effort into raising up his weakest aspect so that it doesn't sink his chances of triggering a breakthrough. He has a much better chance of becoming a saint by relying on the strength of his Heaven and Earth

scores."

Joshua would most definitely score better in the Earth category in a year or two. The only downside was that he had little control over this variable. It was the job of mech designers to provide him with a better expert mech.

As for the Heaven score, Ketis possessed a pretty clear overview of his development in this area.

"Just like many other expert pilots, Joshua has only dabbled with E energy attributes so far." Ketis said. "He is most familiar with the life attribute for obvious reasons, but that is not the extent of his grasp on the power of Heaven. The nature of his Everchanger means that he is able to produce useful results with many different attributes. He has become familiar with manipulating the power of light, death, space, duty and more with the help of their associated design spirits. While he doesn't excel in any of them, it is impressive to realize that he has been able to develop so many varied solutions. This is one of his best traits as an expert pilot."

That indeed sounded like a remarkable advantage of Joshua. most definitely expanded his versatility and helped him respond a little better in almost every situation. However, his failed attempt to defeat the Teenage Swordswoman showed that this approach had its limitations.

"Versatility can be a source of strength." Ves stated. "It can also be a source of weakness. The Everchanger is inherently designed to promote this development, but... it is hard to imagine how Joshua can possibly develop a domain that can encompass his familiarity in so many different attributes that don't seem to share much in common with each other. According to our current theories as well as the examples that we have witnessed so far, the Saint Kingdoms of ace pilots almost always have a single overpowering theme. They are never made up of many different elements mashed together."

This suggested that Joshua may be working himself towards a dead end when it came to his development in the Heaven category.

This concern weighed heavily on Ketis. The woman grew silent for a longer time in order to consider Ves' analysis.

"You may be right. Ketis eventually said. "The problem is that Joshua has committed too much on his current path to stop. He cannot bring himself to abandon his pursuit of other E energy attributes when they offer so much to him. They are also key to developing his cooperation with other design spirits."

"Then the solution is obvious, Ketis. He needs to organize his relationships with all of those E energy attributes by placing them under a unifying umbrella."

"That is what I have come up with as well, but... what can he possibly use to reconcile his many interests?"

"It has to tie into his remarkable affinity towards the life element." Ves decisively answered. "Perhaps symbiosis. That makes the most sense. It is what he has been doing ever since he piloted his first living mech all the way in the Bright Republic." Ketis gave Ves a measuring stare. "I think you are overestimating Joshua's intellectual capacity to comprehend a concept as abstract and complicated as symbiosis. Your suggestion is still good, but... I fear that my husband will not be able to comprehend it as easily as more straightforward attributes such as fire and water."

"Well, he has to, because what else is he going to do? You know his situation better than

I. Does he really have another way out? Last time I checked, he almost killed himself by believing he can bring out the power of life by comprehending the power of death... by experiencing it in person."

"Don't mention that to me. The swordmaster scowled.

This incident was one of Joshua's biggest shames. It was certainly not an event that Ketis wanted to recall!

Ves smiled at Ketis. "I think you are underestimating Joshua's capacity to comprehend the concept of symbiosis. As I have mentioned before, he has been practising it for his entire piloting career in one way or another. He understands more about living mechs from a piloting perspective than anyone else. I think he is made for this. He just has to find a way to recognize and unlock this

hidden strength, just as Dise suddenly mastered the power of the metal element after she made her own realization."

Ketis did not think that Joshua would be able to acquire so much strength by making a discovery about himself, but she was willing to give it a try.

Personally, she believed that it was much more probable that Joshua needed to work

hard to reform his own approach towards power and make sense of his disorganized affinities towards so many E energy attributes.

She was at least able to provide concrete directions to Joshua. That was much better

than groping around in the dark.

Ketis already felt grateful for herself for investing so much time on reforming her

swordsmanship.

If she was able to pass on her structured analysis and recommendations to Venerable

Joshua, then he may be able to break through the instant he received the Everchanger

Mark III!

Chapter 6607 A New Approach to Hyper Mechs

After applying Ketis' new model to Venerable Joshua, Ves and its creator soon began to use it to evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of other famed Larkinsons. "Venerable Stark is a driven woman. Her willpower is most certainly not weak. Her Man score should definitely be high." Ketis analyzed. "She has just received the Amaranto Mark III, which means her Earth score has also shot up. Given that she has yet to break through, she either needs a breakthrough opportunity in combat where her Man score temporarily peaks above her normal level, or she needs to work on her Heaven score."

Ves was less familiar with Venerable Stark than Ketis due to his departure from the expeditionary fleet, but he still possessed a decent understanding of her progress over the past few years.

"Stark comes across as a materialistic individual to me." He said. "She doesn't invest much attention into the more magical and metaphysical stuff around her. She is totally focused on her mission to kill powerful aliens and her drive to improve her marksmanship skills. While that has caused her to temper her willpower a lot better than others, her self-centered attitude has left her blind to the wonders of the cosmos. I think we need to nudge her to view E energy radiation as more than an extra power source. It is a vital pillar that can support her attempt to break past her limitations as an expert pilot and form the building blocks of her Saint Kingdom."

When Ves compared Joshua Larkinson with Davia Stark, the latter clearly possessed better breakthrough prospects.

This was because it was generally a lot harder for mech pilots to raise their performance in the Man category on a systematic basis. They needed to change their behavior, push themselves out of their comfort zone and take risks that others deemed insanely dangerous.

In contrast, raising one's Heaven score could easily be done by borrowing the resources and learning material of the Red Collective.

The superorganization had a lot of old records related to qi cultivation in its possession, and it had developed a lot of modern cultivation methods that could strengthen one's affinity and comprehension towards all of the common E energy attributes.

Any expert pilot should be able to reference a suitable cultivation method and use it as a manual to increase their ability to wield their chosen element in a reliable and systematic fashion.

Of course, the more advanced qi cultivation methods were not that easy to get into. Their requirements were higher and most certainly demanded permanent transformations that could only be performed by uncommitted practitioners.

In any case, Ves and Ketis moved on to analyzing the individual circumstances of more expert pilots.

"Venerable Jannzi's willpower is quite strong, and her Bastion is more powerful and modern than the Shield of Samar. I think she can also accomplish a breakthrough fairly quickly once she works on improving her Heaven score."

"General Ark's situation is a little trickier. He is older and has tempered his willpower more extensively, but recent setbacks have damaged his confidence. His Lionheart is a modern and powerful masterwork expert mech without any doubt, but I don't think he leverages the power of Heaven all that much. I believe the best course of action is for him to focus on raising his Heaven score. Once he is able to harness greater power than before, his confidence will automatically be restored. That should put him in the best position to trigger a breakthrough opportunity."

While the pair of mech designers did not understand the full details of every expert pilot, they soon realized that the common shortcoming of most of them was their underutilization of E energy radiation.

This was still a fairly new phenomenon to red humanity, so it was not a surprise that expert pilots had yet to realize its value and potential.

Therefore, Ves became increasingly more determined to summon the champions of the Larkinson Clan to a mandatory meeting and give them a crash course on the importance of developing their affinities towards an element or concept.

"The RA and RC may know a thing or two about this as well." Ketis guessed. "Perhaps it will not be long before they publish similar instructions."

"They're too slow." Ves shook his head in disappointment. "That's the trouble with big bureaucracies. I bet that their science departments demand every researcher to conduct extensive experiments and observations before they can definitively prove that they are 95 percent correct. The Red Three cannot afford to tarnish their reputation by publishing flawed research. We are not subject to these restrictions, though we will definitely damage our credibility if we end up being horribly wrong. Are you confident enough in your theory that you are confident enough to provide guidance to the entire mech community?"

Ketis did not hesitate. "I wouldn't have shared my manual with you if I thought its core theories were wrong. There are many speculative portions in the text, but I have clearly marked them as such. I am confident that the Heaven Earth Man Trifecta is a sound theory. I am more than willing to put my credibility on the line if that is what it takes." Ves directed a deep stare at Ketis. If she actually persisted in this effort, then she would either earn great fame and renown, or become known as a disgraced Journeyman. "For what it is worth, I believe in your theory"

After talking a bit more about how her Manual of Reformed Swordsmanship could make a much more profound impact on the mech community than the swordsmanship community, the two mech designers quickly moved on to how they could apply the new theories to mech designs.

"Since the start of the Hyper Generation, mech designers have increasingly begun to

design mechs centered around harnessing the power of specific E energy attributes." Ves explained. "Your Stormblade Samurai mech line is a good example of that, as it uses electrical-based hyper materials to augment their shocking attacks."

Ketis nodded. "Hyper mechs do encourage the use of elements since they are so convenient to acquire and implement in the design."

"That is true, but you have to admit that the application of hyper technology is very shallow and rudimentary for the most part. Sure, only a few years have passed since the start of the Hyper Generation, but I think it is necessary for the mech industry to think more profoundly on the relationship between hyper technology and mech pilots. The former can substantially influence the development of the latter."

"You will have to explain that further, Ves."

"What are the most common E energy attributes used in hyper mechs?"

"Metal is the most common element used in hyper mechs." Ketis easily answered. "Anyone who pays a bit of attention to the emerging trends in the mech industry can tell you that. Metal hypers are the most straightforward way to strengthen mechs because they are overwhelmingly built with metal alloys. There is no way you can go wrong with this solution, but the effects are mostly basic for the time being. They are especially

popular with cheaper mechs."

"What is next?"

"Water. They are much more heavily used in high-end mechs because they can directly amplify the performance of phasewater technology. They are one of the key materials used to build azure energy shields, which is the strongest technological energy shield tech in the Red Ocean at the moment. The water attribute can also strengthen a transphasic weapon's ability to overpower transphasic defenses. This is vital to defeating the well-shielded warships of the native aliens."

Ves began to smirk. "Have you noticed a common flaw in both of your descriptions? What you have said is all true. Your descriptions accurately capture the common viewpoints of almost every mech designer in the Red Ocean. That means that they all happen to make the same mistake. Even I failed to recognize this glaring shortcoming until you have shared your new theories."

It took half a minute for Ketis to figure out what Ves was getting at. She had spent much more time thinking about improving the state of swordsmanship to spare much time on thinking how her theories could improve the state of mechs.

"Are you thinking about how hyper technology can be used to make mech pilots

stronger?"

Ves grinned and nodded. "To be more precise, I am thinking about how your theories can be used to improve the growth of any mech pilot, not just expert pilots. Anyone can acquire or develop an affinity towards an E energy attribute. Sure, talent exists, but as long as a mech pilot seriously works to increase his comprehension towards an element, he or she should usually be able to master it to an extent. The biggest challenge is

getting started. Those with companion spirits can satisfy this condition much easier, but most soldiers don't have one. The job of the mech industry is therefore clear. We need to adopt a new approach towards hyper mech design that explicitly seeks to increase a mech pilot's mastery over specific E energy attributes."

Ketis thought about it and frowned. In the main universe, she had just released the Stormblade Samurai Mark II. She could have used this latest insight to tweak the design of her work and help her future customers learn how to harness the power of electricity

over time.

"I agree with you, Ves. I feel tempted to go back to my Stormblade Samurai Mark II design and revise it according to your recommendation. I cannot stand the thought of selling it far and wide when it doesn't serve its mech pilots as well as it should. Do you think is a good idea to go through with this plan?"

"I do." Ves decisively replied. "You should invest the time inside the System Space to design a minor upgrade to the Stormblade Samurai Mark II that incorporates this new function. As soon as you exit the System Space, you should publish your new work and announce a recall of all of the

existing copies of the original Mark II that have already been sold and put to use. As compensation, the LMC should replace them with copies of your improved version free of charge. This will cause a lot of logistical problems and impose a lot of additional costs on the LMC, but our mech company can afford it. It is better to do it as soon as possible as sales of the original Mark II are still relatively limited."

Issuing a recall was an inherently damaging action. The monetary cost of doing so was fairly manageable, but the greater cost was reputational damage. Both Ketis and the LMC were bound to tarnish themselves by implying that the Stormblade Samurai Mark II model was unfit for public consumption.

This was not actually true, but it didn't matter if the public had already cast its

judgment.

The only way for Ketis to restore her reputation was to ensure that her improved version of the Mark II received much greater appreciation from her customers. The good vibes

would easily make people forget about the recall.

"This is going to be a challenge. Ketis frowned.

While she felt confident enough to improve the design of the Stormblade Samurai Mark

II by incorporating her latest insights, she was not certain whether the differences would be great enough to justify her new plan!

Ves reached out and patted her shoulder. "If it was easy, you would have done it already. This is a worthwhile endeavor. Mech designers must always put their customers first. If your Stormblade Samurai Mark II has been out for a year or so, then I would have advised you to work on the Mark III. That is not the case, though. It would be rather incongruent for the recently released Mark II to cling to an old paradigm while you are trying to convince everyone to adopt a new paradigm right afterward. You need to put your money where your mouth is and adapt your mech designs accordingly."

Chapter 6608 The Elemental Universe

Changing the Stormblade Samurai Mark II design to incorporate the new theories on pilot development would certainly help a lot of mech pilots in the ongoing war.

It was not enough to improve the growth conditions of every mech pilot.

Ves found it particularly important to promote the short-term development of the entire body of mech pilots in the Red Ocean.

It was impossible for him to affect so many mech pilots at once, so he shifted his focus on his current customers.

He still had a few ways to directly affect every pilot that currently made use of a living mech.

After a bit of thinking, he soon came up with a good idea.

"Ketis."

"What is it, Ves?"

"You have been working on trying to improve the MSTS, correct?"

"I am, though it is admittedly not my highest priority. I have been more consumed with reforming our understanding of swordsmanship as of late. I have... neglected my other assignments."

"That is okay. I was just thinking that the best way to make people benefit from your new theories is to modify the designs of all of our living mechs so that they focus a lot more on developing the affinities and comprehension of their mech pilots. That is clearly not realistic due to all of the designs we have to go through, so I believe it is better to upgrade an aspect that is common to all living mechs."

"The Mental Simulation Training System."

Ves grinned. "Exactly. Every living mech has at least limited access to the MSTS depending on their pricing and whether they are training mechs. It has always received good evaluations from our customers, and it has always remained fairly popular. Many companies have begun to implement a lot of improvements to their own simulation programs, but their technological calculations cannot fully imitate the mental influence exerted by different E energy attributes. The MSTS also remains

the only simulation program that can fully channel the living personalities of my products. That alone ensures that it will remain the most favored solution for simulation training to our customers."

Since the MSTS remained so dominant among mech pilots paired with LMC mechs, then any upgrades to the proprietary simulation program would have the potential to affect hundreds of millions of mech pilots, especially if Carmine mech pilots were included as

well!

The female swordmaster tried to think how this potential change could impact the

mech community.

"If the instruction granted by the MSTS is effective enough, then this could be a gamechanger." She said. "Mech pilots may spend less time on polishing their technical piloting skills, but exploring the elements and increasing their affinities to them is a different benefit. It will not help them all that much if they have not yet broken through, but the value in raising their Heaven score lies in improving their breakthrough chances. If you can statistically prove that your customers are able to advance to the rank of expert candidate and expert pilots at least 10 percent more frequently than the rest, then people will flock to living mechs just to benefit from this new function!"

Despite the obvious benefits of the MSTS to mech pilots, Ves had long neglected its importance and development due to his shiny toy syndrome.

That was partially the reason why he passed on the responsibility of updating it to Ketis. In hindsight, this was not the best decision he made, because Ketis turned out to be just as easily distracted!

However, now that they recognized that upgrading the MSTS was the best way to improve the breakthrough conditions of millions upon millions of mech pilots, they would definitely focus on improving it over other projects!

Ves already formulated a new plan.

"We cannot stop at upgrading the functions of the MSTS." He said. "We need to reset the expectations of our customers and convince them to take our work much more seriously. In order to do so, I want to begin by changing its name. MSTS is a clumsy acronym and doesn't inspire

anything good by itself. We can market it much more effectively if we replace it with a more catchy name, one that hopefully encompasses the new features that we plan to implement."

"I take it that you have already come up with a proposal." Ketis knowingly said.

"I do. I want to call it the Elemental Universe. What do you think?"

Renaming the MSTS into the Elemental Universe was a big move!

Ketis furrowed her brows as she thought about how mech pilots would react to this change.

"Well, you are right that it sounds much more interesting than four seemingly random letters placed next to each other. If you truly intend to rename your old work into the Elemental Universe, then you will most definitely draw people's attention towards the function of increasing their mastery over the E energy attributes of their choice. However, I am afraid that the original functions may get overshadowed."

"It will be fine." Ves reassured her. "Existing customers are already familiar with the pilot training features of the Elemental Universe. They won't disappear, and mech pilots will never stop using them because their lives are on the line. What I want is to make a high-profile marketing shift in order to convince them to take the new training features more seriously. I am not certain how effective it is to increase their mastery over a

specific attribute within the Elemental Universe as opposed to doing it in reality. Even if the effect is not as strong, I am hoping that the convenience of accessing the Elemental Universe through their LMC mechs offers great convenience to our customers. There were many methods for people to develop a greater grasp over an E energy

attribute.

Practising basic cultivation methods usually did not require any special conditions and could be done anywhere.

However, if practitioners wanted to move beyond the basics, then they had to satisfy more difficult conditions. This could range from ingesting expensive elixirs to meditating in a specially constructed chamber that was filled with hyper materials shaped into

totems.

It was difficult for most mech pilots to satisfy these expensive or demanding conditions, especially under the current climate.

This was why Ves was convinced the Elemental Universe would take off once mech pilots understood the value of raising their Heaven scores.

For existing users of LMC mechs, accessing the Elemental Universe should be the easiest way for them to conduct effective training on increasing their mastery over an E energy

attribute!

As for mech pilots assigned to the products sold by other mech companies, Ves could not take care of them. Others were free to take up the responsibility of providing them with elemental training.

Once Ves laid out the blueprint of his new plan, his former student easily agreed to his proposals.

"This is a big expansion of the MSTs." She said. "You're not just introducing ways to allow mech pilots to harness the power of E energy. You are also giving them opportunities to fight alongside each other or against each other, just like a virtual reality game." "That is exactly what I had in mind for this major update. The Elemental Universe needs to hold much greater attraction in order to lure mech pilots into using it to its full potential. Perhaps they will initially be lured into using it so that they can enter into realistic multiplayer battles on simulated battlefields with their own living mechs. Afterwards, they may try out the other training features, and gain even more benefits as

a consequence."

"If the Elemental Universe works as effectively as you think, then you will be putting many competitors out of business."

"Maybe. It is their fault if they blindly stick to old methods and solutions. The Age of Dawn has already begun. If other companies think they can get by without innovating their existing products, then they deserve to get driven out of business. We aren't even professionals in this area. It is very

much possible for the established simulation companies to develop superior solutions based on more advanced and creative

applications of E energy. They just need to expand their E-technology capabilities."

That was difficult because there were far too few people who had managed to make attainments in this new but promising field.

In any case, Ves quickly began to explain how he intended to organized the Elemental

Universe.

"Every mech pilot that enters the Elemental Universe will initially emerge in their Personal Habitat. Ves said as he projected a sketch of such a space. "The most basic form is a small apartment that is attached to a small hangar that hosts their living mech. People can invite others connected to the Elemental Universe into their Personal Habitat. They can also spend FC to decorate their personal space and add new rooms."

"EC?"

"Ah, I forgot to explain that to you. EC stands for Elemental Credits. It will be the new currency that I plan to institute into the Elemental Universe."

"What are EC based on, Ves? Do mech pilots have to exchange them for MTA credits?" "No. That doesn't make much sense. Mech pilots can earn EC by providing spiritual feedback through their living mechs. Usually, just piloting their machines in reality is enough for them to earn a trickle of EC over the course of a day or week," "Why go through the trouble of implementing this new currency?" Ves smiled. "Good question. There are good reasons why the Elemental Universe is

called this way. I want mech pilots to treat it as an alternate reality where they can live a second life of sorts. Any gains they make in the Elemental Universe will end up profiting them in the real universe. The use of currencies can reinforce this perspective shift. We need to employ a more quantitative and flexible means of controlling the energy balance of the Elemental Universe. By setting different prices on different services, we can ensure that we can maintain a positive energy balance and prevent it from draining

Vulcan."

The MSTS was currently supported by Vulcan, which was the most suitable design spirit to undertake this demanding task.

Even so, Vulcan could not bear the strain of simulating the battles of so many mech

pilots at once, so access to the MSTS's realistic simulation battles had to be limited one way or another.

Ketis understood these conditions well enough, so she did not object to the introduction of Elemental Credits. She could see numerous advantages to adopting it as the currency of the Elemental Universe.

"Since you place so much importance in this virtual currency, you are probably thinking about hoodwinking mech pilots into spending it on less energy intensive options." "Hahaha!" Ves laughed. "That's right! You know me too well. In fact, one of the new facilities that I intend to introduce is the Living City. It's a virtual urban environment

that can accommodate many mech pilots at the same time. They can relax, relieve their stress, visit coffee shops and buy fake clothes to dress up their fake avatars. The Living City will have its own economy, one that is dominated by the handicrafts made by Vulcan as he has learned how to create a lot of exquisite stuff over the years." "Even if you designed the Living City to earn easy ECs, I can see how it can benefit a lot

of mech pilots. Many soldiers have accumulated a lot of stress after fighting in the frontlines for at least several months. They need access to a sanctuary or a place to decompress, but their options are limited when they are stuck in warzones. Being able to enter the Living City and sit around in a park or a cozy cafe can help them adjust their

mentality"

"I haven't thought about that." Ves admitted. "You are right. The Living City holds even

greater value if it can help mech pilots in this manner. The current iteration of the MSTS does not offer any sort of opportunity for relaxation. This is a grave oversight that we can correct by working on the Elemental Universe."

The Living City could represent so much more. The greater it simulated the operation of a real city, the more mech pilots could inhabit it as their second homes!

Chapter 6609 Energy Balance

The comprehensive additions that Ves intended to introduce in the MSTS Version 2.0 caused it to grow far beyond its initial confines as a training system.

This was why Ves saw enough reason to rename it into the Elemental Universe.

He wanted to give his customer base the impression that it had turned into a more complete virtual universe where mech pilots and their battle partners could take refuge in when they wanted to retreat from their harsh reality.

It was not meant to serve as a playground. Much of the Elemental Universe still retained the core training function that was meant to prepare mech pilots to fight against their real opponents with greater skill.

However, the institution of a currency as well the option to purchase and own virtual objects turned it into more than just a place to polish their piloting skills.

Ves actually did not have a complete plan for the Elemental Universe, but that was okay. He could set it up first and see how his customer base reacted to its changes.

His plan to create a Personal Habitat and Living City for the Elemental Universe could not be completed in a short amount of time.

Ves and Ketis had better things to do with their time than to design an entire virtual city. It was better to wait until they completed their marathon and exited the System Space before dumping this responsibility onto Vulcan and other workers.

"How will you arrange the training sections of the Elemental Universe?" Ketis asked.

"I intend to divide them into 4 discrete facilities." Ves answered. "The Mech Pilot Training Grounds will serve as a place for mech pilots to train specific skills under optimized training conditions. For example, there will be a targeting range for ranged mech pilots, and there will be a simulated swordsman mech for melee mech pilots. I could use your help to program the latter. It is best if you can divide its combat prowess into multiple levels so that everyone can experience a suitable challenge."

"No problem. This is one of my strengths. Will you charge EC to make use of these virtual training grounds?"

"Most of these training sessions will cost EC in order to access, but not too much. The training facilities are fairly small and limited in scope, so they do not cost too much energy to run."

"What is next?"

"The Cultivation Grounds are the entire purpose of renaming the MSTs into the Elemental Universe." Ves replied. "I will come up with many different training rooms where mech pilots can experience an E energy attribute and either meditate on it or whatever. I may even devise a few more interesting training exercises that can help

people increase their comprehension of different concepts or elements. Every training opportunity will cost EC. I do not want mech pilots to look down on this facility, or devalue it in their minds. Only when stuff is costly will people learn to appreciate its value."

"What can also happen is that people will think that you are doing them a disservice by overcharging for your services."

Ves shrugged. That will undoubtedly happen, but as long as no better alternatives were available, then he would rather overcharge than do the opposite.

"Do you even know how to design the Cultivation Grounds so that it can provide focused training environments that are conducive to promoting the affinities of mech pilots?" "Not completely, Ketis. My comprehension of the earth element is too low to construct such a training environment. That is what design spirits are for. I will design a few basic training grounds myself, but I will leave the ones that I am not able to develop myself to external helpers. If nothing else, I will use my connections with the Red Collective to convince their cultivation experts to assist with the designs."

That sounded like a decent plan, though it will take more time to make the arrangements and wait for the third-party developers to complete their work.

"Aside from that, what else do you intend to create?"

"The Trial Grounds will encompass much of the current training scenarios. It will offer individual mech pilots or a small team of mech pilots the ability to pay EC to enter into simulated training sessions where they can fight against virtual mechs, virtual phasefighters or virtual alien battleships."

Ketis grew a little more interested. "Will you attempt to simulate a phase lord as well? It would do mech pilots a lot of good if they can get used to confronting phase lords on the battlefield in advance."

That caused Ves to look a little more uncertain.

"I can't deny the benefits of doing so, but I fear that I will do a bad job at this. Sure, I may be a phase lord myself, but I am very different from the more developed and battle-hardened ones that appear on the battlefield. I think I will probably have to approach the Phase Lord Department of the Red Collective to enlist the aid of experts to accurately portray dozens of powerful phase lords and maybe even phase whales. The Elemental Universe will also charge a hefty amount of EC just to be able to confront such a powerful opponent once. It will be difficult for Vulcan to accurately simulate their auras, their spatial abilities and more."

Standard mech pilots were not supposed to fight against phase lords in the first place. Their mechs were simply too weak to pose serious threat to these alien monstrosities. At most, they could rely on massed firepower to deter the phase lords from persisting in their attacks.

Capturing or killing them was out of the question.

Oh well. Perhaps mech pilots might be able to keep their morale up whenever they fought in a battle where phase lords were close enough to intimidate entire mech

armies.

"What about the multiplayer features that you talked about earlier?"

"I intend to create the Combat Dispatch Center to accommodate the mech pilots who want to satisfy that specific need. This is where large groups of mech pilots can sign up for big simulated matches that pit them against each other. This facility is not meant to help mech pilots devise specific tactics and solutions against native aliens. It instead serves to temper the courage, refine the application of combat skills and increase the overall combat experience of our customers. Mech on mech combat

involving actual human pilots on both sides is a homage to the Age of Mechs. I think it will do these mech pilots a lot of good if they can compare their skills against each other."

Ketis saw another benefit to the Combat Dispatch Center despite the fact that it had nothing to do with the aliens.

"Mech pilots are highly competitive. They want to be the best. At the very least, they want to outperform their direct peers. Giving them a venue where they can enter into simulated battles against similar mech pilots who also make use of living mechs is a great way to stoke their competitive streak. Those who lost against an identical mech to their own will work harder in order to produce a better outcome next time. Those who won will not only boost their confidence, but also gain more fame and other benefits." Virtual reality mech simulation games also created a competitive dynamic between players. The companies who developed these games knew exactly how to profit from the customers who wanted to defeat their opponents in the virtual arenas of battlegrounds. Ves summed up his overall setup for the Elemental Universe.

"In short, my new vision for the future of the MSTS is a comprehensive virtual training and relaxation destination where every customer can participate in activities to raise their Heaven and Man scores. Mech pilots have a good amount of agency in doing both. They merely need additional guidance and training venues in order to improve in a targeted and more effective manner."

The only factor that most mech pilots could not improve on their own initiative was

their Earth score.

The Elemental Universe may be able to improve the growth and development of living mechs, but it could not apply any material upgrades to their designs.

This could only be done by the party who owned or fielded the LMC products.

While Ves found it regretful that the Elemental Universe was not complete enough to address this need, the current plan was already comprehensive enough to help mech pilots a lot more than before.

The Cultivation Grounds should help his existing customers gain a much better connection to the five classical elements as well as various other attributes.

This should remain the case even if they were already practicing auxiliary qi cultivation methods.

The two could even be combined to produce a compound effect that would allow them to gain better results!

The only price that mech pilots needed to pay was to continue to make use of living mechs and to exchange their spiritual feedback with Elemental Credits.

"The blueprint that you have created for the Elemental Universe sounds attractive." Ketis commented. "I have a feeling that many mech pilots will soon grow frustrated by how much everything costs. What you have described is not cheap in terms of energy consumption. If the only way you can support all of these activities is by fueling it with the spiritual feedback of your customers, then most of them will probably be able to partake in a few activities a week or less."

Ves sighed. "It can't be helped. I need to make the Elemental Universe attractive enough

to increase its usage rate. This statistic a bit too low for my liking at the moment, so I really need to bring out the big guns in order to lure more customers into using the evolved version of the MSTS on a regular basis."

He actually gained inspiration for this idea from learning about the mysterious prison that sustained the Nyxian Gap.

The Elemental Universe was a partial recreation of the mysterious prison.

Of course, instead of capturing unwilling souls and forcibly squeezing them in order to produce spiritual energy across eons, Ves merely wanted to earn spiritual feedback from his customers through honest work.

While he could not guarantee that he could retain enough customers in the long-term,

he did not mind it because he felt confident enough in his work to continue to bring them back again and again.

In other words, as long as Ves continued to do his job as a mech designer, he should

never be afraid that the Elemental Universe would cease to maintain a positive energy

balance!

Vulcan might even be able to reinvest the surplus income into accelerating his own personal growth and development!

The Elemental Universe had the potential to become a huge phenomena. Red humanity

may be able to derive so many benefits from it that it could become a public service that was almost as helpful to all of his customers as the Red Kingdom!

Of course, the gap between the two was far too great at the moment. Ves did not hold

any unrealistic expectations in the short term, but who knew what might happen in the long term.

If Ves wanted to, he could come up with additional energy income sources for Vulcan. He refrained from exploring them further. Each of them introduced additional risk factors, thereby increasing the possibility that his external incarnation could become

compromised.

The additional functions of the Elemental Universe would also impose a much greater burden on the design spirit. Just maintaining the Elemental City that could potentially accommodate millions of mech pilots was a heavy burden that would persistently prevent Vulcan from spending his energy on other activities.

Ves still remained committed to it, though. Mech pilots did not just pay for accessing the

Elemental Universe with their spiritual feedback.

They also paid with their information.

Vulcan would be able to grasp their piloting skills, their interpretation of different E
energy attributes and more.

This would subsequently allow him to enrich his understanding and apply his newfound gains onto his increasing number of artifacts!

Chapter 6610 Shifting Priorities

The Mental Simulation Training System or MSTS would soon become a thing of the past. Ves planned to transform it into the Elemental Universe, which incorporated all of the functions of the MSTS but vastly expanded it into a separate reality.

In the Elemental Universe, the users of LMC products would be able to enter a community of like-minded mech pilots and partake in one of the many services that Ves planned to introduce.

If not for the fact that mech pilots needed to 'earn' Elemental Credits through regularly piloting their living mechs, the Elemental Universe might actually be able to consume their lives to the point of living permanently in their cockpits!

It was just as well that the Elemental Universe possessed this inherent usage restriction. The purpose of making it available to mech pilots was to strengthen them and help them prepare for the very real threats bearing down on red humanity.

Ves had to refrain himself from introducing too many predatory practices that people typically encountered in virtual reality games, especially the ones centered around multiplayer sessions.

He liked to earn a profit, but he wanted to maintain a win-win relationship with his customers. An enduring business relationship could only withstand the test of time if both sides kept benefiting from each other.

If he introduced too many exploitative elements that exerted an undue amount of pressure onto mech pilots, then either the Red Association would forcefully step in, or the demand for an alternative would become so great that a powerful competitor may rise!

Instead of letting that happen, Ves felt it was better to maintain a relatively free but limited persistent service and earn a lot of goodwill in the process.

Besides, his external incarnation already stood to earn a lot of profit in the form of any surplus income as well as vital data.

Vulcan actually needed this a lot. Cultivating the Metal God Method to the 4th stage enabled him to safely and efficiently absorb a lot of high-grade metal energy from the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown, so his growth was already prodigious.

His Heart of Steel had matured to a significant enough extent that he had already developed a domain and gained a few notable traits that surpassed the mundane.

However, despite practising an advanced combination of creation cultivation, deity cultivation, artifact cultivation and qi cultivation at the same time, Vulcan mostly saw himself as a divine artisan.

His domain reflected this as it mainly strengthened metal, granted strong mental and spiritual resistance at the cost of dampening emotions, empowered dwarves and

increased the productivity as well as the creativity of craftsmen.

There was no explicit combat focus to Vulcan's power development.

The only defensive boost was solely designed to guard against the unwelcome mental contamination from the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown, and the design spirit wouldn't be completely safe from this threat until he had reached the 7th stage of his cultivation method.

Vulcan did not grow stronger by focusing on combat.

He grew stronger by becoming a better craftsman.

The Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown may satisfy his energy demands, but it did not enrich his knowledge and understanding of products.

If Vulcan wanted to meet one of the requirements for advancing to a True God, then he needed to become good enough to craft a grand work by himself!

This was a nearly impossible task for any but the best artisans in the Red Ocean. Perhaps Vulcan might be able to polish his skills through persistent practice and study over the span of several hundred or thousand years, but the God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship did not have the luxury of time!

He had no choice but to resort to shortcuts if he wanted to break through in a hurry. However, unlike Gaia whose foundation was extremely feeble shortly after her birth and immediate ascension into godhood, Vulcan's cultivation was a lot more solid and systematic.

His foundation had already become extremely solid, and his domain was gaining more and more resilience with each passing day.

If not for siphoning so much juice out of the symbol of authority, it would have literally taken hundreds of years or more of steady practice in a medium-energy environment to achieve similar results!

All of this sounded great, but the gap between his energy state and his craftsmanship attainments was constantly growing wider.

It couldn't be helped. The deity cultivation aspect of the Metal God Method was meant to help him develop his craftsmanship through receiving the spiritual feedback of many worshipers, but this method had very clear limitations.

First, there weren't a lot of pure craftsmen out there. The population of red humanity was just a fraction of the population of original humanity.

Artisans who mainly relied on superior craftsmanship to create quality products and sell them at enormous premiums also constituted a tiny minority of the total industrial

sector.

Most products used by people in modern times consisted of mass produced factory goods!

The developments of the Red War also made the situation worse.

The demand for consumer goods, especially handmade luxury goods such as designer bags, had plummeted in the past year.

As the wartime economy steadily ramped up, more resources and attention shifted to military industries.

The civilian economy suffered in every way, especially after states instituted martial law in order to force their citizens to change their spending behavior.

One of the obvious consequences of this industrial upheaval was the shuttering of a lot of workshops.

Not even brands that had occupied a niche for multiple centuries could keep their businesses running in a society increasingly beginning to deviate from the lost

prosperity of the Age of Mechs!

Perhaps the only consolation for the many craftsmen that soon found themselves out of

a steady job was that the Red Collective quickly picked them up and put them into

brand-new training programs.

The collies recognized the importance of creation cultivators.

They were the only individuals who were capable of producing artifacts, especially high-level ones that possessed traits that could never be acquired through mass

production.

Therefore, a lot of people who previously worked with metal, bone, leather or thread suddenly began to learn a lot of extraordinary methods and techniques that enabled them to imbue special qualities in their handicrafts.

The emergence of traditional craftsmanship benefited Vulcan a lot, but the problem was that most trainees still had to go through a few years of focused learning and practice before they became half-decent traditional craftsmen.

This left Vulcan with an increasing slowdown in knowledge acquisition. Setting up the Elemental Universe in the next few months should therefore compensate for this

development to an extent.

Observing how these mech pilots increased their comprehension and ability to harness various E energy attributes did not automatically mean that Vulcan could do the same.

However, just watching a lot of people increase their mastery over the classical elements and so on provided Vulcan with a lot of reference data.

This would not only help him craft better artifacts that were based on the same E energy attributes, but also help Ves develop better elemental Carmine mechs!

In short, the Elemental Universe could prove to become a vital component of Vulcan's growth as a spiritual entity.

Since the future cultivation of one of his other selves was at stake, Ves did not dare to neglect the importance of this new priority.

Ves added time slots in his schedule that were solely reserved for building up the Elemental Universe.

The time detracted from his Mission-clearing activities, but Ves had long given up on maximizing his AP income by this time.

He understood Ketis' perspective a lot better now that he was engaging in a similar activity.

Some gains were more important than Ascension Points.

The greatest value to earning AP was to extend his stay in the System Space. While Ves still wanted to earn enough AP to upgrade the Dimension Observatory and

acquire a few juicy enlightenment fruits, it became increasingly more difficult to meet all of his goals for this marathon.

"Plans change." Ves shrugged. "I already accumulated plenty of knowledge for the time being. My demand for enlightenment fruits is not particularly great when I am not even close to fully utilizing what I have already learned."

Utilization had always been an old problem for Ves.

Access to the System had spoiled him in terms of knowledge accumulation.

While he was not as bad as the Polymath, he could not resist the opportunity to learn

and gain proficiency in exotic new fields if the opportunity presented itself. This caused his head to become increasingly more congested with information, much of which he never utilized all that much.

For example, the Introduction to the Withering Curse Enlightenment Fruit had granted him a lot of knowledge related to a curse that was based on the wood element. This opened a lot of new possibilities, but after making initial use of it, he had set it aside as his subsequent projects had very little to do with this valuable knowledge. "Perhaps it is time for me to change that." Ves murmured.

The Introduction to the Withering Curse granted him valuable insights related to his upcoming ambition to design a Woodsap mech, but that was still a distant prospect. Ves dug up one of the mech design proposals from the depths of his cranial implant. He remembered that he devised this idea in one of his daydreams.

[The Null Project]

Just as its name suggested, Ves originally came up with this idea in order to supply the

Battle Criers with a signature mech design.

The Battle Criers had become his go-to mech legion when it came to countering

spiritual shenanigans.

While the Battle Criers had lost a bit of relevance after the outbreak of the Red War, the mechs armed with the special Godkiller Heavy Luminar Crystal Rifles became

increasingly more relevant as they were quite good at draining azure energy shields.

Over time, the Battle Criers would become even more relevant as the native aliens steadily began to implement more hyper technology in their hardware. There were also indications that the native aliens had begun to dabble in cultivation

science as well.

While they were still far behind red humanity when it came to adopting systematic cultivation, the more clever phase lords already showed signs of harnessing new abilities that were traditionally associated with qi cultivation!

That would make them even deadlier than before. Phase lords already possessed

amazing physiques.

If they could amplify their strengths and mitigate their shortcomings by making use of a

completely different power system, then they would definitely pose a greater threat against all human units aside from champions!

High-ranking mech pilots would become even more important than before as their extraordinary willpower allowed them to overpower most qi cultivation techniques. "Expert pilots and ace pilots aren't always available in sufficient numbers." Ves determined. "A lot of breakthroughs have occurred in the past half year, but it takes time for them to acclimate to their new strength and obtain the right mechs that can allow

them to channel their full power!"

There were simply too many battlefields and not enough champions to cover them all.

Human High Command had already made the helpless decision to transfer a lot of second-class ace pilots to the Upper Zones in order to bet on winning the most crucial battles of the Red Tide Offensive.

Where did that leave the defenders of the Middle Zones?

The lack of ace mechs in the Torald Middle Zone and other comparable regions would

likely enable the phase lords over there to dominate the battlefield!

Was there a way for Ves to inhibit these phase lords from overpowering conventional

human defenses?

"I am not sure whether the Null Project can affect phase lords, but it should definitely be effective against other threats such as phasefighters and warships, especially if they are reliant on hyper technology."

It was a little too premature to introduce the Null Project at this timeframe, but Ves was

already thinking about what red humanity might need after successfully withstanding the Red Tide Offensive.

"Sooner or later, the native aliens will catch up to red humanity in terms of hyper technology and cultivation science. When they do, my mechs will be ready to ruin their

day."