

## Mech Touch 6611

### Chapter 6611 The Null Project

When Ves presented his latest mech design proposal to Ketis, the swordmaster looked skeptical.

"We are already taking time away from completing Missions by building up your ambitious Elemental Universe. Now you want to take even more time away from your schedule by designing this Null Project of yours. Are you sure you want to divert so much time on designing a rifleman mech that is designed to counter hyper technology and qi cultivation? Such a mech is much more useful to use against our own side than the aliens."

Ves nodded in acknowledgement. "You are right about that last part. The timing is off, but... if I don't design it now, I will have to design it later at one point. The Red Cabal and the major alien races that are aligned to it have shown a remarkable degree of adaptation. They have worked quite quickly to assimilate all of the human tech supplied by the treacherous Cosmopolitan Movement. I have no doubt they are rolling out more and more human-developed applications of hyper technology as we speak. Preparing a specialized solution that can negate the amplification granted by exotic radiation is a preemptive move."

"Does that mean that the Null Project is a commercial project?"

"Sort of. I will adopt the same plan that you have used for the Stormblade Samurai Mark II Project. I intend to design a fairly affordable and easily mass producible second-class rifleman mech for commercial use. At the same time, I will design a quasi-first-class version that is exclusive to the Larkinson Clan and more specifically the Battle Crier Mech Legion. They can finally retire their modular Bright Warriors equipped with outdated Godkillers and switch to piloting dedicated mechs that can do the same job a lot more effectively."

Though Ketis still looked as if Ves was pursuing a weird direction again, she took the time to study his proposal.

She fixated on the draft and noticed several important details.

"The design looks pretty standard as far as rifleman mechs go. The only complications that look out of the ordinary are the oversized ammunition canisters and the ECM modules, but they do not appear to be custom jobs. I imagine that will cut down on the complexity."

"That is true. This is a solo project of mine. I do not intend to do anything too remarkable on a technical level. Much of its strengths lie in its hyper technology and E-technology, and is primarily oriented around the rifle. The mech frame merely exists to make good use of the weapon, though I can still change my mind on that later in the project. Even so, I intend to publish this mech design immediately after we exit the System Space. The sooner it comes out, the better"

Ves wanted to maintain a fairly tight focus on this project. Every hour inside the System

Space was precious, so he could not afford to explore too many wild ideas at once. Ketis could clearly spot a lot of aspects about the draft design that showed that Ves took this priority seriously. He had made a clear division between the parts and systems that required greater attention and those that he could complete by relying on his existing base of solutions.

There was a fair amount of overlap between the planned design of the Null Project and other rifleman mechs that Ves designed in the past.

The most special part was the weapon.

Ketis soon noticed an odd design choice made by Ves.

"Do you intend to pair your rifleman mech with a ballistic rifle instead of a gauss rifle?" Ves nodded. "That is correct. A gauss rifle is nice and all, but it imposes heavy restrictions and demands on the projectile design. What is important about the Null Project is that it must be capable of firing Null Rounds. This is the special hyper ammunition type that produces a myriad of debilitating effects on the enemy when struck. The complexity and requirements that I have imposed on this projectile type are so much that I can only resort to a low-tech kinetic rifle type."

Gauss rifles relied on electromagnetic propulsion to launch a solid piece of metal forward.

Ballistic rifles relied on igniting a firearm propellant to produce hot gasses that shoved a projectile out of a barrel.

The former was more advanced, powerful and effective at longer ranges due to their vastly higher muzzle velocities.

The latter was much simpler and cheaper. They were easier to maintain and repair due to their low tech design and proven principles. They were pretty awful in spaceborn combat because their muzzle velocities were too slow to hit anything fast and agile at a decent distance.

Gauss rifles had pretty much become the default ranged solutions for second-class mechs because of these advantages. They were not as accurate as directed energy weapons in spaceborn combat, but they tended to strike significantly harder on average.

Ves had always abided by this custom.

However, the interesting use of ballistic weapons for an ace mech as powerful as the Amphis Extremis had caused him to take a second look.

While their cons were just as severe as before, Ves discovered that their advantages had grown after the start of the Hyper Generation.

Weapons that launched missiles and solid projectiles were already experiencing a resurgence due to the obvious benefits of using hyper rounds.

High-grade and certain medium-grade hyper materials were still scarce and difficult to procure in large quantities, but the same could not be said for low-grade hypers!

As long as a company bothered to mine the many tons of low-grade hypers available in most star systems, they could easily supply all of the raw materials used to produce hyper ammunition in bulk at dirt-cheap prices!

Sure, the effect of low-grade hypers was not that strong when applied to solid projectiles, but that was why Ves made sure to add 4 detachable ammunition canisters onto the mech frame!

The ammunition canisters were so big and contained so many spare rounds that they impacted the mobility of the Null Project.

Ves believed that the advantages of carrying plenty of rounds outweighed the loss in agility and acceleration.

As long as the Null Project was able to expend much of its ammunition, it would steadily reduce its mass and gain more and more maneuverability.

Mech pilots could even choose to prematurely eject the ammunition canisters in an emergency if they were beset by enemies at closer ranges and desperately needed to dodge incoming attacks!

Ketis could surmise all of this easily enough by skimming over the mech proposal.

Just because she generally refrained from designing ranged mechs did not mean she had no idea how they worked.

A Journeyman Mech Designer was still expected to understand enough principles about every common mech type to be able to design a basic version.

Ketis pointed out another obvious problem.

"The low muzzle velocities of ballistic rifles will severely limit the effectiveness of your Null Project. I do not understand why you want to use it to replace the use of your Godkiller Heavy Luminar Crystal Rifles. The damage profiles are too far apart."

"It's okay because the Null Project is an electronic warfare rifleman mech focused on debilitation instead of elimination." Ves responded. "It is not meant to kill enemy units by itself. It should be used as a support mech instead. It can provide close to medium-ranged supporting fire that can directly hinder enemy units from employing their full capabilities in combat, especially if they are reliant on hyper technology, E-technology or cultivation science."

In order to give Ketis a better idea of why he insisted on falling back on ballistic weapons, Ves called up a draft for the special Null Round that was meant to make this

mech design special.

"This is... a strange design. What does it actually do that makes it worthwhile for you to design this special mech?"

"I haven't fully thought out the Null Round yet." Ves admitted. "I still need to conduct more research and figure out what I can apply based on my knowledge base. However, its main feature is to use a hyper material that can hold a small portion of the power of

two design spirits, namely the Superior Mother and Kalo."

The swordmaster looked surprised. "That is... an unusual combination of design spirits."

"I know, but I think I can combine their powers to produce a very special debilitating effect. You see, the Null Round is principally designed to apply a curse upon contact. This curse is aimed at cutting the bonds of karma that are tied to the target. One Null Round might not be able to do the job, but if the target is struck by a few dozen or several hundred rounds, the continuous applications of weak curses will probably build up to produce a powerful metaphysical isolation effect!"

Ketis looked completely lost at this point. "Karma?"

"Ah, that is a more obscure and advanced concept in cultivation science. I won't bother

to explain it in full. Just know that karma is what allows people and objects to recognize each other. By sabotaging these bonds with curses applied by Null Rounds, I think I can not only cut off a target from its own friends and allies, but maybe even cut off its connection to the power of heaven! My new weapons can do this by leveraging the damnation phase of the Superior Mother. I also intend to make creative use of Kalo to increase the confusion and prevent our target from putting the bonds of karma back together. All of this will hopefully render many forms of hyper technology and so on

ineffective."

It sounded dubious and convoluted, but Ves clearly believed he could make it work!

"Is that possible?!"

"It should be possible in theory, but I am not too sure at the moment." Ves admitted.

"This is why I must develop a prototype weapon in order to test whether the concept is viable. As long as the results are positive, I can safely proceed with this project."

Ketis thought about how such an outrageous effect could hinder a lot of different enemies.

"If your new mech design and its weapon can sabotage hyper technology merely by

firing lots of Null Rounds at the target, then are you not afraid that the native aliens will copy your work and turn it against red humanity? Your work may end up hurting our side much more than the enemy because we are much more reliant on hyper technology

at the moment."

Ves chuckled and shook his head. "I have already accounted for that possibility. This is why the addition of the two design spirits are integral. is practically impossible for anyone else to replicate their effects on a large scale." That assuaged the security concerns somewhat, but that did not make the Null Project perfect. The biggest concern was the questionable effectiveness of the so-called Null Rounds. As long as Ves had not yet produced any empirical proof that they could isolate a target on a metaphysical basis, then it would be stupid to commit to this project. However, as long as Ves was able to pull it off, then the rest of the mech design should

be fairly quick and easy to design.

Even if it lacked the advantages of other design philosophies, Ves still believed it held value due to its heavy reliance on hyper technology and E-technology.

Aside from that, Ves did not intend to stop at this point. He wanted to apply a couple of

new insights that he obtained after learning about Ketis' new theories. The Null Project served as an experimental platform where he could puzzle out how his upcoming mech could promote the development of its mech pilots in new and

interesting ways.

"This mech design project can either result in a throwaway mech design, or introduce

another game changer that can become an enduring seller in the coming decade!" Ketis

predicted.

"If nothing else, it will serve as an interesting exercise."

#### Chapter 6612 Seventh Generation Living Mechs

The marathon continued as Ves and Ketis tried to balance their time between their personal projects and earning AP.

Occasionally, they were able to combine the two if they happened to be working on the right Mission.

The Mech Designer System obviously imparted hidden meanings in each of the Missions available in the upgraded Mission Hall.

The ones that compelled Ves to conduct strange rituals widened his horizons and encouraged him to explore different fields of cultivation science.

The mech design assignments that demanded him to design mechs with strict limitations and unusual traits allowed him to exercise his design skills and build up his experience.

Ketis received similar benefits whenever she accepted a Mission related to swordsmanship.

After becoming more and more preoccupied with their solo projects, the two mech designers spoke less often with each other.

Now that they had been working in the System Space for several months, they had fully adjusted to their new solitary work environment.

There was only so much the two mech designers could talk about during their daily meetings.

Spending day after day with the same person for so long could get rather tiring, especially when both mech designers would rather spend their precious time on more productive activities.

This was why they decided to lower the frequency of their meetings to once every three days.

That appeared to be the most optimal balance. They still gained enough social interaction to keep their heads straight, but did not break their rhythm too often.

Ves had no problem with working an entire week or a month by himself, but he figured he still needed to keep tabs on Ketis.

The swordmaster still hadn't entirely gotten rid of her maternal instincts, but she was able to endure the long days of separation from Kirian and Mayra and focus on her work.

Every day she spent on improving her swordsmanship or accruing more mech design experience would allow her to come out of the System Space stronger and more prepared to face the enemies of red humanity.

The Null Project steadily took shape, especially after Ves successfully managed to develop a working version of the Null Round.

Aside from the application of hyper technology, there was not much technical complexity to designing the ballistic rifle as well as the rest of the mech.

The hyper ECM modules attached to the Null Project were fairly complex by themselves, but Ves had no intentions of designing them from scratch. He merely selected a number of third-party solutions and slotted them into the mech design as best as possible.

All of this meant that Ves did not need to rely on other mech designers such as Gloriana to improve and optimize the technical performance of his work.

Sure, he also gave up on innovating in this aspect, but Ves knew his strengths and weaknesses.

He did not deem it a productive use of his time to obsess over these aspects. He would much rather improve the spiritual foundation of his living mech design.

This was his passion. Ever since he got introduced to the Heaven Earth Man Trifecta, he constantly thought about how he could apply this theory to his living mech designs. The universality of the principles espoused by Ketis convinced Ves that there should definitely be a way for him to promote a mech pilot's growth in the three areas through his work!



The creation of the Elemental Universe was a part of this greater initiative. This would mostly serve his existing customers, the ones who were already making use of copies of his older mech designs.

That did not quite satisfy his core goal of designing a mech that could improve a mech pilot's Heaven, Earth and Man scores by directly interacting with his living mech.

As promising as the Elemental Universe sounded to Ves, it was ultimately a roundabout. solution to the current problem. It did not entirely satisfy him, which was why he eagerly wanted to work on the Null Project.

Ves did not spend his time in vain. Although he had difficulty trying to develop concrete new ways to apply the Trifecta to a mech design, he was slowly altering the entire concept of a living mech based on his progress.

When he next shared his progress with Ketis, he made a notable declaration.

"I think I am working on a big update to my implementation of living mechs." He said. "There will definitely be a substantial difference between a living mech like the Null Project and my more recently completed works such as the Fey Fianna mech line as well as the Dark Zephyr Mark III. While I cannot make any solid projections, I think the performance difference will be great enough to determine that the Null Project will be my first seventh generation living mech."

Seventh generation!

As one of the few mech designers who was capable of designing a living mech, Ketis understood the significance of this declaration.

She looked at Ves in a different light.

instruction from their own machines will steadily be able to improve their attainments in the cultivation method embedded in the mech design. I can even include an entire series from basic to advanced in order to accommodate a wide range of customers. I am doing all of this to promote their Heaven scores and hopefully bring them closer to their breakthroughs."

The idea did not sound revolutionary. It was a sensible application of Ketis' new theoretical model.

Yet despite how simple it sounded, the ramifications were huge if Ves actually turned it into a reality!

This was reason enough for Ketis to settle down and think seriously about the viability and usefulness of this development.

"First question. I do not think you need my help to devise this solution. Why bother asking for my assistance?"

"You are correct, but I still find value in consulting your expert opinion. You already know the ins and outs of this mech-directed instruction. Why should I bother to reinvent the wheel when you already created a perfectly round object? Besides, you have already moved beyond theory. Your practical experience is essential to optimizing my own implementation. I want my first seventh generation living mech to start off on the strongest possible footing. Neglecting your input is not wise."

"Mmhmmm. I guess I can help you address a few issues that I have neglected in my own initial implementations." Ketis said as she acquiesced to his call for aid. "I have the feeling that this new feature may be significant enough to declare a new generation, but that you will not be entirely satisfied with this alone. What other changes and additions do you have in mind?"

She was right about her suspicion that Ves had more in store for his seventh generation

living mechs.

Ves had another feature in mind that could add more definition to his next generation of

living products.

The only issue was that Ketis might not approve of his next idea.

"While I don't have to add my next proposal to my seventh generation living mechs, I

think they would become a lot less impressive without this feature. Let me warn you in

advance, Ketis. My other idea is based on Demoncasting."

That most definitely provoked a reaction from Ketis!

"Are you serious?! I thought that Demoncasting is only applicable to individual mechs and objects that you have personally worked upon. Are you trying to mass produce a lesser form of D-arms through demonic cultivation or other immoral means?" Ves raised his palms in innocence. "Hey! I am not crossing any of the lines we have set during our last discussion on Demoncasting! Let me explain my idea first before you cast your judgment. You know how Demoncasting works, right? It relies on burning a

demon until it becomes fluid enough to force into a Demoncasting Mold, which promptly reconfigures the highly pliable demon into a specific shape that can enhance a specific property before pressing it into an object. Well, what if you try to do it in

reverse?"

"In reverse?"

The mention of it sounded so absurd that Ketis had absolutely no idea what kind of craziness that Ves managed to cook up in his own spare time!

"It's quite simple, Ketis. Just swap the input and output of Demoncasting and change a few more details to make it work. The goal is to strengthen the mech pilot in a specific manner by using the living mech as a special version of a Demoncasting Mold. The input is the souls of defeated adversaries. As long as the Null Project or any other seventh generation living mech is close enough to a bunch of dying aliens, it will do its best to harvest their souls and process them by quickly filtering out as much harmful and unproductive junk as possible. The living mech should then begin to press them through its integrated mold before applying whatever is left onto the mech pilot somehow, I know it sounds vague and iffy, but I think that this is a fantastic way to further speed up

the cultivation of my customers!"

"..."

"Well?"

"...Let me be honest Ves. This is one of the most idiotic ideas related to mechs that I have heard in my life. I will not even address the insanity of thinking about pressing 'processed' alien souls onto vulnerable human souls. Whatever the result will be, I can already predict that you will end up contaminating and corrupting lots of gullible mech pilots. There is no way the Red Association will let you get away with such a crazy experiment. That you think that you can even introduce such a mech to the market speaks volume about your mental stability. Are you sure you are able to maintain your sanity during this marathon? Because I am beginning to doubt your ability to maintain a

clear head."

"Well... it is admittedly not the soundest idea that I have come up with." Ves reluctantly conceded.

Chapter 6613 Ultimate Module: D-Chamber

Okay, so the crazy idea to add a way to 'Demoncast' the souls of deceased enemies onto the mech pilot got shot down.

In hindsight, Ves may have been trying to force it too much. He couldn't help it. He valued Demoncasting and wanted to apply it on a mass scale.

Ves did not mind too much that he had to withdraw this crazy idea. There was no harm in coming up with new proposals. Even if it ended up too impractical to ever get implemented in his seventh generation living mechs, he still managed to exercise his imagination and maintain a proactive mindset.

Besides, he already developed a less extreme proposal that applied the same principles to a more innocuous target.

"If you don't want me to apply Demoncasting to the mech pilot, then let's switch it up to a more acceptable target." Ves said after he gave up on his initial proposal. "My next design application cannot serve as a core component of seventh generation living mechs. It can only be implemented to the Null Project as an Ultimate Module."

He began to project the design of the Null Rifle to Ketis. Ballistic weapons were low tech, so the design of the weapon did not encompass a lot of sophistication.

The Null Rifle possessed the typical characteristics of a mech-grade assault rifle designed to unload a lot of bullets in a short amount of time.

It boasted a high firing rate, relatively high recoil, medium accuracy and relatively low effective range.

Persistent heavy use could quickly cause the weapon to overheat. The barrel had to endure a lot of abuse and might even have to be scrapped after a single long engagement!

However, the materials used to construct the barrel of the Null Rifle were fairly common and could easily be recycled.

All in all, the Null Rifle was a cheap and serviceable weapon that could do its job but not much else.

The only unusual quirk aside from its optional belt-feeding system that could supply it with rounds on a continuous basis was the secondary chamber.

Ves had clearly invested more time and attention on designing this second chamber into the rifle structure.

"Is this the Ultimate Module?" Ketis guessed. "What does it do? It looks as if it does nothing aside from holding a single round. Have you designed a super bullet?" "No." Ves shook his head. "It is just a Null Round. I don't want to develop a separate ammunition type for this feature because that will just increase the logistical burden of the Null Project, which is not conducive to mass adoption. It is not a big problem to use

basic Null Rounds for this Ultimate Module, because it is called the D-Chamber."

Ketis took a moment to process what she just heard. While the current idea was not as crazy as the last proposal, she could still recognize several questionable points about the implementation.

The name was already enough for Ketis to figure out what Ves had in mind.

"I see. You still haven't given up on Demoncasting. If my guess is correct, then the Null Round in this special chamber will be subjected to a form of Demoncasting when the Null Project mech is

engaged in battle. Any fairly strong enemy soul that is captured by the living mech will be pressed into the Null Round, which will hopefully cause it to undergo a qualitative transformation and grow stronger to the point where its power has far surpassed its existing limitations. The resulting D-Round must be fired quickly to inflict a much more painful blow onto an enemy target or risk destroying the D-Chamber from within. The mech pilot can also choose to eject the D-Round and store it in a fortified storage container to save the D-Round for later use."

"I don't see this idea working out as well as you think. First, can a component as small as the D-Chamber even induce the process of demonization?"

"It works because it is an Ultimate Module." Ves patiently responded. "Have you forgotten the working principles of Ultimate Modules? They are the body of the companion spirit of a living mech. This means that it can possess a complete function from the main machine. In this case, I intend for it to imitate Helena's Death Feather technique which is apparently very effective at inducing demonization."

Ketis did not bother to ask about the Death Feather technique and how Ves learned that it was good at producing demons.

"Minor Demons cannot come from any soul as far as I know. Will the Null Project mechs be able to harvest enough eligible souls in a typical battle?"

"They should be as long as they fly close enough to a large enemy warship. Their senior officers are usually strong enough, though the exact numbers and proportions can vary depending on the alien species."

This was not an ideal circumstance, but it was the best Ves could do given the limitations.

"What about the crucial steps needed to transform a Null Round into a so-called D-Round? I cannot see how your D-Chamber can possibly reproduce a process that actually requires a large System-provided Demoncasting Forge."

"I don't know yet." Ves admitted. "I need to conduct an experiment to figure out whether it is viable. I should have enough time during this marathon to obtain the answer. Don't forget that a full Demoncasting Forge needs to account for a lot of different variables. It needs to be able to work on larger objects, produce more powerful effects and accommodate an incredible variety of Demoncasting Molds. My D-Chamber will function as a much more constrained version of a Demoncasting Forge that only serves to apply a single Demoncasting Mold to a single Null Round."

Ketis still looked skeptical. "I fear that you are overestimating your E-engineering capabilities. We have only Demoncasted a single product, and you are already dreaming about replicating the entire Demoncasting Forge in a more limited and miniaturized form. I do not know whether you understand the depth of your arrogance."

Ves grinned and shrugged. "At least I have the will and ambition to surpass the current. limitations of mechs. I have to try, because how else can my Null Project save the day? At worst, I will just leave out the D-Chamber and replace it with another Ultimate Module. I still think I can make it work. The most difficult problem I need to solve is to learn what a Demoncasting Mold actually is and how I can imitate it in a smaller form." After Ves introduced his secondary idea to Ketis, he shifted his attention back to his seventh generation living mechs.

Ves was not done with trying to distinguish his seventh generation work from the previous generations.

He still wanted to turn it into a serious accomplishment that served as a strong attraction to the mech market.

It not only had to be a strong selling point, but also serve to provide additional help in winning the battles in the frontlines.

The Red War loomed tall over the mech industry. Many mech designers would be more than willing to fight on the frontlines if it made a difference, but they were merely non-combatants.

Even if they formed a Blood Pact with a Yellow Jacket, they wouldn't be able to make a mistake in the short term. Just because they understood how to put a mech together did not mean they could control it as proficiently as a professional pilot.

What else could he do with his seventh generation living mechs?

Perhaps he could popularize existing solutions that Ves previously kept exclusive to his

clan.

Battle formations came to mind.

The ability to manifest the power of design spirits in the material realm and change an entire battle around by launching a powerful attack could be used to snatch victory from

the jaws of defeat.

The demands of battle formations was hard, but it was not impossible for other groups to be able to reproduce the trump cards of the Larkinson Clan,

The Glory Seekers were a good example of that. They had employed battle formations that summoned the power of the Daughter of Death so many times that the native aliens specifically had to devise a counter to their antics.

Nowadays, anytime a troop of Valkyrie mechs clumped together, the native alien warships would quickly launch devastating missiles and torpedoes at them, seeking to disrupt or destroy the mechs in massive explosions!

The Glory Seekers wised up, though. The clever Hexers often tried to bait out these missile volleys in advance by pretending to form a battle formation.

They even formed five or ten different battle formations, of which only one or two were genuine while the rest were decoys!

Due to how effectively the death-aspected battle formations were able to depopulate entire warships that lacked the protection of strong defensive hyper technology, the presence of Penitent Sisters and Glory Seekers on the battlefield was enough to restrain the native aliens!

They could no longer fight as aggressively as before and had to widen the distance between warships in order to prevent them all from getting swept in a single battle

formation pass.

This already constituted a strategic advantage.

What if more alien forces had to alter their tactics and take this threat into account?



The conditions to reproduce a battle formation were tough, but not impossible to meet. The forces that acquired the appropriate mechs just had to gather the right mech pilots and train them to cooperate with each other on a deeper level than usual.

Ves could already imagine the sight of battle formations terrorizing the border regions.

No alien force would be able to unscrupulously invade a star system without the fear of suffering massive losses!

However, there was one issue that restrained him from including battle formations to his seventh generation living mechs.

Most design spirits could not bear the repeated energy consumption of channeling lots

of power in the material realm.

Nothing came for free. All of those death energy attack waves sapped a lot of juice out of

Helena.

Perhaps his eldest sister may have grown to the point where she may be able to support the occasional summons of the Hex Army, especially if Ves took the upcoming proliferation of the Rule Breaker Project into account.

Once the Milky Way embraced the first Carmine mech line in their galaxy on an unprecedentedly huge scale, both Lufa in the Aspect of Transcendence and the Daughter of Death were bound to receive a huge amount of spiritual feedback! However, this did not really affect other design spirits all that much. Ves knew that it was possible for them to exchange spiritual energy with each other, but they all had to go through the costly and inefficient effort to convert it into a form that was more digestible to them. It just was not worth the effort unless they were literally starving. Ves shook his head. There was no need for him to trade away his trump card to give red humanity a better shot at holding onto the frontlines.

The aliens might outnumber the red humans, but the latter still showed enough signs of

being able to cope with massed cannon fodder.

The true threat consisted of phase lords who exerted a disproportionate effect on the battlefield.

With the ace pilots who used to fight in the middle zones getting transferred to the upper zones in a hurry, the situation in the former was bound to deteriorate.

Ves did not fault Human High Command for making this sacrifice. The best strategists and planners that red humanity had to offer must have made extremely detailed calculations. Their logic for this strategic shift was sound, though the human cost was extremely heavy.

"I can't save all of red humanity, but what I can do is help with filling up this gap as much

as possible." He was still a Senior Mech Designer and a young one at that. While he may have become famed for introducing powerful innovations that changed how red humanity fought, Ves was not able to whip out a massive game changing invention on demand.

The best he could do for the time being was to introduce the Null Project, a ranged mech that had the potential to inhibit the performance of phase lords.

A single rifleman mech armed with a ballistic rifle might not be able to make a difference, but what about a hundred? What about a thousand?

If all of them unloaded their magazines filled with Null Rounds onto a phase lord, they

may actually be able to weaken the phase lord to the extent that he would rather retreat from the battlefield than to risk serious harm!

Since the Null Project was largely centered around the use of special ammunition, Ves

began to think about how the mech could amplify the effectiveness of their attacks even

further.

The inclusion of mech-directed auxiliary qi cultivation instruction should already be enough to slightly promote the breakthrough rates of mech pilots in the medium and long term.

That would not do enough to relieve the short term crisis that engulfed red humanity. Ves needed to introduce a more immediate solution.

#### Chapter 6614 The New Value of Living Mechs

Mechs defined the Age of Mechs.

Human civilization had reached the right conditions to introduce mechs and promote them on an enormous scale.

The technology, the demand and the surrounding infrastructure all happened to provide more than enough support to turn mechs into a galaxy-wide phenomenon.

Yet now that red humanity had entered the Age of Dawn, it was not quite certain whether mechs would remain dominant.

There were plenty of armchair theorists who claimed that warships would become dominant again or that infantry became the future due to the long-term effects of systematic cultivation.

Nobody could say for certain what could become red humanity's next premier war platform.

The mech industry insisted that mechs had too many advantages for people to abandon wholesale. They provided the right balance between power and practicality. The infrastructure centered around the development, production, repairs and recycling was not only extremely expansive, but had also reached an incredible degree of efficiency. That last reason alone ensured that mechs would be able to stick around for a long time. Even if other viable competitors existed, it was too hard to dislodge the advantages of an established player.

However, what if mechs in their current state failed to remain competitive in the long run?

Mech designers such as Ves could never afford to let that happen. Their entire careers were based around the mass proliferation of mechs. If their products became a lot less popular, then not many of them would be able to maintain their business presence!

This was why it was the solemn duty of all mech designers to constantly push mech development to a greater height.

Only through constant innovation and reimagination would the mech industry be able to keep its sole product category dominant in human society.

Low-ranking mech designers could forget about taking part in this collective mission. They still needed to learn the ropes of mech design and were far from ready to make contributions that could make a significant impact on the mech industry.

Ves was in a much better position to do this than many other Senior Mech Designers. That was not to say that every other Senior was inconsequential. People like Gloriana and Jovy Armalon had already made significant attainments in coming up with revolutionary design applications that could enrich mechs once their inventors became Masters.

These examples actually showed that Seniors faced an uphill battle when it came to popularizing good inventions. The mech industry frequently looked down on their innovations because they were only valid on their own works.

Ves was no exception in this regard. Even to this day, his iconic living mechs and his civilization-changing Carmine mechs still remained exclusive to his own works!

This was why the mechers and the fleeters assigned a permanent escort force to him, and it was also why hardly anyone else tried to imitate and further iterate on his solutions.

It was not because his competitors were unwilling to adopt living mechs, but they were unable to do without the secret support of the Red Kingdom!

Even if most mech designers remained blissfully unaware of the existence of the Red Kingdom, they still understood the common sense that only the design philosophies of Master Mech Designers became universally available.

Ves therefore continued to encounter hindrances when it came to popularizing his solutions, and thereby promote the evolution of mechs in his own way.

Not even the boundary-breaking mechs such as the Yellow Jacket line which received universal acclaim for its historic features could convince people that living mechs represented the future evolution of mechs.

Ves turned to Ketis, who knew more about living mechs than almost any other mech designer.

"What do you think about living mechs?" Ves suddenly asked.

The woman blinked. "I thought we were talking about what you intend to introduce with your seventh generation living mechs."

"We are, but I first want to hear your thoughts about the current state of my products. You happen to be able to be able to design living mechs by yourself, but you never embraced them as extensively as I. Why are you okay with that? Is there stuff about living mechs that you do not believe in or find redundant?"

"Not as such." Ketis shook her head. "I think your sixth generation living mechs are definitely good. They wouldn't sell so well if they were inferior in performance. It is just... I want my works to be able to succeed in the mech market on their own merits. If I put more effort into adopting your design solutions, I may be able to sell more mechs, but it will be to your credit as opposed to mine. I do not believe I can lose to you purely in terms of designing swordsman mechs. This is my specialization and my passion. By constantly measuring up my work to your own, I can gain a clearer idea whether my products are good enough. So far, I am not too dissatisfied with the state of the Monster Slayer and the Stormblade Samurai Mark II."

In other words, Ketis did not dislike his living mechs or thought that they were bad. She just sought to maintain a certain degree of distance from his works in order to build up her own brand.

That was completely fine. He would do the same if he was in her place. She could never become a market leader if he or she kept reproducing the solutions of a better mech designer.

The only exception to this rule were direct disciples. Ves considered Alexa Streon to be one of his direct successors, which meant that she would not have that many issues if she replicated all of the features of his latest generation of living mechs.

Of course, Ves had to teach her all of the tricks of the trade in order for her to be able to replicate his latest works.

Ves still thought that his influence over the mech industry and red humanity as a whole was still too limited in scope.

Many of his problems could easily be solved if he managed to realize his design philosophy and finally advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer, but that was not realistic in the short term.

Ves therefore had to find an alternative means to increase the value of his living mechs and make them more valued and indispensable to society.

"One of the ideas that I came up with as I was thinking on how to develop the D-Chamber is what exactly happens to living mechs when they sustain too much damage and have to be scrapped for whatever reason. There are also old and outdated living mechs that get sold to salvaging companies in order to get recycled.

Ketis tilted her head after hearing that. "What are you on about this time?"

"Think about it. Don't you think that it is a waste of living mechs, especially the more recent third order living mechs, to die simply because people have better use for their materials?"

"That is pretty normal, Ves. I do not think that people are callous enough to ignore the existence of the living personalities inside the machines, but... what can they do with it? Upgrade them to a newer version? What if your LMC has yet to do so, as is the case with some of your older classics such as the Valkyrie Redeemer? As for reconstructing the old and damaged machines, that is possible for the personalised machines of up-and-coming heroes, but it cannot be done on a large scale. The effort is too wasteful and too heavy on the logistics. We are at war. We are also suffering from extensive resource shortages. We cannot waste serviceable mech-grade alloys when they can still be used to produce more modern machines."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I do not object to your descriptions. As sad as it is, not many people at the top think it is worthwhile to reconstruct heavily damaged machines, even if they have evolved into third order living mechs that have years of experience under their belt. Our industries are much more efficient at mass producing new mechs than repairing damaged ones on a larger scale. This is

why I have been thinking about how to improve how much can be salvaged from a living mech when it has reached the end of service life for whatever reason."

His former student could already deduce what he had in mind based on the direction of his talks.

"Let me guess. You want to make it easier for people to 'recycle' the spiritual foundation of your living mechs."

"Yes. Living mechs and particularly third order living mechs are treasures in my eyes.

Why would you throw it all away? One of the problems with taking them out of existing mech frames is that they are intangible and damn hard to work with on a material level. This is why I have decided to install hyper keystones underneath the cockpits of all of my living mechs. These keystones are essentially hyper materials that can absorb and contain most of the spiritual foundation of a living mech."

"Is that even possible, Ves?"

"Not in the past, but this is the Age of Dawn. My understanding of hyper technology and E-technology has improved. Better hyper materials have also become available. One that is suitable to serve as a keystone might not be able to maintain a 100 percent retention rate, but I am already happy if it can preserve 50 percent of the spiritual foundation of a third order living mech."

He projected the draft design of the Null Project and zoomed in on the cockpit. Just as Ves described, the underside of the cockpit seat contained a keystone that could potentially contain the spiritual foundation of a third order living mech if there was no other way for the mech frame to remain operational.

Ves designed it so that the mech pilot could easily slide open a mechanical lock and take out the briefcase-sized keystone before evacuating from the cockpit.

While the keystone was rather heavy, Ves made sure to make it easy to grip by including a handle. Ketis actually looked a bit impressed at this user-friendly implementation.

"If you can upgrade your living mechs to make this work, then I can definitely see this work. Will you make it so that you can effectively 'revive' third order living mechs by sliding them in the same slot under the cockpit seat of a freshly produced machine?" "Yes, so long as they belong to the same mech line!" Ves replied. "This is a great way to preserve older and much more developed third order living mechs. They are too precious for people to discard just because it is costlier to scrap a heavily damaged mech than to restore it. There will be a degree of loss, but the most important bits will still be preserved. I will make sure to slightly change the dimensions of the hyper

keystones and the slots so that mismatching will not occur."

Ketis thought a bit more about this feature.

"Not everyone will bother to pay for a new living mech just to host these hyper

keystones. What if they do not want to acquire a new Valkyrie Redeemer to replace the one that has just gotten blasted apart? What if the LMC has no longer decided to update

old mech lines such as the Aurora Titan and the Crystal Lord? Will the hyper keystones from those extinct lines become worthless?"

Ves shook his head. "Nope. Think about it, Ketis. The developed spiritual foundations of

these living mechs can still be repurposed. This is why I originally came up with this

idea. I think that it would be great if they can be used as key ingredients in the process

of crafting powerful artifacts."

"Artifacts? That..." "Didn't you come up with the idea of Beastcasting a while ago? You can treat this as a

similar idea! High-level artifacts can be distinguished from low-level ones by possessing their own form of life and intelligence. It is normally very hard to create them because most methods involve imbuing them with an existing soul."



"That is not what I have read." Ketis said.

Ves smiled. "You are right. There are exceptions. One of the best ways to circumvent this

requirement is by creating a masterwork or higher. That seems to birth a rudimentary soul or boost the power of an existing one. Other than that, most traditional craftsmen can only make do with repurposing existing souls, especially if they want to ramp up production. Instead of supplying them with unethical human souls or downright hostile alien souls, we can instead supply the increasing number of traditional workshops with more powerful and more cooperative spiritual foundations of third order living mechs!" If this could work, then Ves could increase the value of his seventh generation living

mechs by making them useful even if they had reached the end of their service life! As long as their hyper keystones remained intact, they could be pulled out so that the valuable spiritual remnant contained within could be used to enable the production of high-level artifacts by adequately skilled traditional craftsmen!

#### Chapter 6615 Kickstarting High-Level Artifact Production

Ves possessed enough connections with the Red Collective to understand that the production of artifacts and especially high-level artifacts had become a rising priority.

The collies may be new to the scene, but they were led by plenty of far-sighted leaders, Ves included.

While Ves had remained mostly hands-off when it came to directing the policies of the latest member of the Red Three, he had a strong interest in promoting the rise of creation cultivators.

This was because he believed that the use of artifacts could help red humanity fight back against the native aliens.

Not only that, the use of powerful artifacts could also help red humanity's greatest heroes meet the threat posed by the aliens of Messier 87!

Artifacts had yet to become a phenomenon in human civilization, but it was only a matter of time before artifact production became the latest pillar of red humanity's industries.

Certain parts of red humanity embraced traditional craftsmanship a lot more enthusiastically than others.

Aside from the Red Collective, two notable groups also invested a considerable amount of resources into manpower into artifact production.

The Eternal Vulcan Empire embraced traditional craftsmanship for obvious reasons. The dwarves had come to worship Vulcan almost universally, and that gave them greater motivation than others to take up extraordinary crafts.

Becoming creation cultivators was not only an excellent way for them to embrace the new possibilities of the Age of Dawn, but also allowed them to get closer to their supposed god!

Another broad group of people that invested more in traditional craftsmanship was surprisingly third-raters.

Not all of them expressed interest in it, but there were proportionally more of them that saw value in becoming traditional craftsmen.

This was because this new and emerging industry offered a much better pathway to prosperity than other career choices.

Second-raters and third-raters might be able to attain better results by relying on their superior augmentations and easier access to more expensive materials, but craftsmanship was ultimately about being able to make products with heart and soul. As long as third-raters became good at creating high-quality artifacts, they would definitely earn the appreciation of big companies and investors!

If they were able to become good enough to create masterworks of their own, then even

first-class groups might take an interest in these emerging talents!

Whatever the case, the demand for artifacts would definitely grow in the future! "When you think about it, Demoncasting can be considered an attempt to produce a high-level artifact through the unorthodox means of embedding them with a relatively powerful demon." Ves explained. "However, that also means that there are regular methods that do not involve such a dangerous source of power. The problem is that most of them are fairly troublesome. For example, you have

been trying to turn your Bloodsinger into an artifact by spending a disproportionate amount of time and attention on carrying it around and upgrading it on an incremental basis. Yet all you have to show for it is a sword that is still within the range of a minor artifact."

Ketis frowned, but did not refute his description. "That was true before, but now that I have turned it into my life sword, I think it will take less time for it to evolve into a major artifact."

"Oh really? Let's compare, then."

Ves decided to retrieve the Oceancaller from the Vault of Eternity. The remarkable flute appeared in his hand in an instant and already began to pulse with the anticipation of getting used.

Ketis took a deep look at the flute before she decided to pull out the Bloodsinger.

Compared to its earlier state, the Bloodsinger indeed appeared to be a little stronger and more alive after forming a pact with its wielder.

Yet when the Oceancaller and the Bloodsinger were placed next to each other, both mech designers could perceive a very clear difference in strength, sophistication and development.

"This is not a fair comparison. You obtained a ready-made high-level artifact from the System while I acquired and built up the Bloodsinger through my own efforts." Ketis complained.

Ves smiled. "You are right. I am not passing off the Oceancaller as my work. My purpose in making this comparison is to give you a clear indication of what actually constitutes a high-level artifact. My flute here is governed by a mature artifact spirit. As for your Bloodsinger, I think it has only recently obtained the prototype of one due to the Life Sword Pact. If not for this sacrifice, your greatsword would have remained only slightly more special than a regular manufactured product."

"Why is this important?"

"Because not everyone is willing or able to replicate your method to transform a sword or other object into a high-level artifact, Ketis. Traditional blacksmiths may be able to forge a hundred or so sword artifacts per year. You can't expect them to repeatedly pay the price to empower their creations. Unless they are so good that they can produce masterworks at will, they can only resort to using external sources to imbue their creations with artifact spirits."

Ketis began to understand his argument. "And you think that the spiritual foundations of living mechs are better suited for this than the alternatives?"

"Yes" Ves grinned and nodded. "My latest proposal hits multiple birds with a single stone. First, it preserves the personality of a living mech even after the machine is destined to be scrapped. It provides the emerging artifact industry with an abundant and sustainable source of hyper keystones that can be used to imbue unfinished works with intelligent, friendly and reliable artifact spirits. As long as the latter still retain the memories of their previous incarnations, then they will maintain a high degree of loyalty towards red humanity and would be glad if they can be put to use despite adopting another form. This will be especially great if the artifacts consist of mech-grade weapons such as swords, rifles and more."

Infantry-grade artifacts were nice and all, but the real value in their existence lay in their ability to augment the combat power of mechs!

Even Ketis could foresee how many mechs could stand a better chance in a fight if they were lucky enough to wield genuine high-level artifacts!

"The Swordmaidens can definitely benefit if I can convert the mech greatswords of their Second Swords and Storm Swords into customized high-level artifacts." She said. "It would be better if our clan has trained enough traditional blacksmiths that can do this work without my assistance."

"That should easily be doable, Ketis. Your helpers and assistants only need to become good enough to produce low-level artifacts, which shouldn't be too difficult as long as you hire talented workers. Once they are trained into actual creation cultivators, they can forge a mech greatsword before using a hyper keystone to imbue them with a well-developed artifact spirit. That should be enough to convert the weapon into a relatively basic high-level artifact. It still won't be as sophisticated as the Oceancaller, but the new mech greatsword artifact should definitely be able to inflict greater damage and pierce through defenses a lot easier than before. The high-level artifact will also become a much better medium to channel extraordinary sword techniques. The mech pilot will be able to channel the power of heaven a lot more effectively than before." Ancient sword cultivators could not be separated from their sword artifacts. Only when they wielded a powerful enough blade would they be able to overcome the strong while

being weak!

Even the Heavensword grew enthused at the prospect of enabling the mass production of high-level artifact weapons. It glowed in a clear sign of approval! "Compared to your last ideas, this one is

both sound and practical. Ketis concluded. "The implementation of the hyper keystone is questionable. Unless you can create a working example and test it to see whether it can preserve most of the spiritual foundation of a third order living mech, the viability of this proposal remains uncertain. However, as long as you solve this key issue, this can open up so many possibilities. I can think of no other source of 'souls' that are more suitable to be converted to artifact spirits than ones that have already served in this capacity. When you think about it, third order living mechs have a few similarities with high-level artifacts."

Ves agreed with all of her points. He only made this realization relatively later, but he believed that this was a good development.

It not only showed that his living mechs kept getting better with each generation, but it also proved that traditional craftsmanship was not the only means to creating high-level

artifacts!

"So you have no ethical or moral concerns about the potential repurposing of third order living mechs?" He asked. "After all, not all of them may be pleased to be reduced from a powerful and potentially autonomous machine to a much more limited weapon that cannot even move by itself."

"Perhaps that is a quandary that is more relevant to you rather than me, Ves. As far as I

am concerned, it doesn't hurt to ask the prospective artifact spirit what it wants. You should at least make an effort to match its past with its future. For example, a living mech spirit that used to occupy a swordsman mech would probably hate to be imbued into a rifle artifact. You need to set rules on this sort of stuff and make sure that traditional craftsmen abide by them. Also, if a spirit trapped in one of those hyper keystones doesn't want to fight anymore and wants to end its own existence, I think you should give it the option to do so rather than force it to persist."

That was a fair request. "I will modify the design of the hyper keystone so that the spirit inside can voluntarily choose to disable containment and go free, thereby preventing it from being used and abused by humans as well as our enemies."

This was a prudent measure in case the hyper keystones fell into the hands of the native

aliens!

Ves did not want this new resource to end up benefiting his own opponents! "How easy is it to create a high-level artifact by making use of a filled keystone?" Ketis wondered. "You have never created a high-level artifact like the Oceancaller before." "That is true, but Vulcan has accrued a huge amount of knowledge and experience in modern craftsmanship." Ves retorted. "He is also becoming more proficient in multiple forms of traditional craftsmanship, though his understanding of it is still rather spotty and incomplete. He should actually be capable of creating a basic high-level artifact if he is lucky enough to produce a masterwork, but the end result does not start off on a strong footing. It takes time and persistent usage for the masterwork to grow into the power of a high-level artifact, which is not much different from my living mechs. Outside of that, there are multiple different rituals and processes to convert external souls into artifact spirits. The simplest ones don't require a lot of time to learn."

Of course, the results usually weren't the best. It was a waste of a good spirit to crudely mash it into an artifact embryo, but Ves could not expect much from inexperienced craftsmen that did not have time to polish their new skills.

As far as he was concerned, any high-level artifact was better than any low-level artifact!

So long as Ves managed to design and sell a lot of seventh generation living mechs, he

was not afraid that the supply of filled hyper keystones would run out anytime soon, especially during times of war!

In this way, living mechs would play an indispensable role to human civilization. They

had the potential to birth an entirely new supply chain that could kickstart the artifact industry and put it on overdrive!

More and more mechs would subsequently be able to swap out their regular weapons

with powerful artifacts that could give them a much stronger edge against the native aliens! The longer the Red War dragged on, the more high-level artifacts became available. This

would cause the mech forces of red humanity to steadily become more powerful even if

their numbers steadily dwindled!

Quantity over quality!

Only by raising the average combat power of mechs would red humanity stand a chance of overcoming the hordes of native aliens!

Chapter 6616 9 Months

By the time Ves presented his idea to make living mechs the incubators of artifact spirits, Ketis looked a lot more impressed than before.

"You know, you should have started with presenting this proposal instead of what you previously had in mind." The woman said. "You are too obsessed with Demoncasting. The thought of trying to reverse Demoncast a human soul by using dead alien souls as fuel sounds insane on so many levels that you should have known better. At least now you are relying on more known and familiar phenomena to put this solution together.""

Ves had a different thought on the matter.

"I know that the implementation of hyper keystones is a lot more palatable to everyone, but it will probably take a year or longer for this policy change to start producing widespread changes. After all, the freshly produced Null Projects need time to grow into third order living mechs. Then they need to perish in battle, but not to the extent that their hyper keystones got destroyed in the process. Only then can they be used as the artifact spirits of high-level artifacts or anything that comes close to their level. Then these powerful new artifacts need to be shipped to their users, who will probably need more time to get used to their new gear and learn how to make optimal use of their special capabilities."

He hated the fact that it took so many steps to produce a meaningful strategic shift in the Red War. Every step took a certain amount of time and effort to complete. The more steps between the start and the end of the supply chain, the greater the overall delay!

In comparison, his previous idea was much simpler in concept. Most of the steps took place inside his living mech. As long as the mech fought on a battlefield and managed to get close enough to a bunch of dying aliens, the Null Project would already satisfy the most crucial requirement.

The actual casting process was really simple. No other external factors needed to get involved at this point.

So long as Ves devised the actual mechanics of this spiritual process and integrated it into a standard mech design, he only needed to sit back and wait for changes.

Perhaps the process may take months to produce results, but Ves still expected lots of mech pilots growing stronger and more capable of fighting the native aliens after the reverse Demoncasting attempt finally yielded results!

The outcome may turn out to be dangerous or risky, but that only excited Ves. Even a failed result was better than no result. He would just have to return to the design of the Null Project and tweak the parameters in order to finetune the special functions.

Alas, Ketis' reaction was a powerful indication that the rest of the mech community might not look upon this proposal with favor.

Ves did not dare to neglect her advice, nor dismiss her feedback as worthless. She

represented the common sense of red humanity. Many other people would probably react in similar ways if they learned about what he had cooked up in his mind.

Even if Ves was not able to turn this insane idea into reality, just voicing it would cause his reputation to plummet!

He could hardly afford to tarnish his reputation when he needed as much backing as possible to maintain his current privileges.

This was why Ves readily agreed to shelve his earlier idea and adopt the current one instead.

"Is this the extent of what you have in mind for your seventh generation living mechs?" Ketis asked.

"Yes. My seventh generation living mechs need to make a statement, and I think this is enough of a package to make people take my upcoming products seriously. The combination between mech-directed auxiliary qi cultivation instruction and hyper keystones will not produce an immediate improvement on the battlefield, but as long as our side can hold the line for a few months, the first changes will begin to be felt. High-level mech-grade artifacts have the potential to immediately boost the combat power of expert mechs and ace mechs, which will subsequently help them cope against phase lords."



Ketis also grew more optimistic about the prospect of high-level artifacts falling into the hands of powerful mechs.

"This may be crucial in closing the gap against phase lords armed with Saint Piercer arms. Whether high-level artifacts can resist the damage inflicted by superdimensional weapons or not, at least our side will be able to retaliate much more effectively than before. That should restrain the enemy champions and rein in their aggression."

All of this sounded great, but nothing was certain yet while Ves had yet to produce any solid results.

This was why he directed his attention back to the current session.

"We are already a few months into the marathon." He said as he reflected on how he and Ketis spent their time so far. "I think it is safe to say that our plans couldn't keep up with our changes. I do not necessarily think that is bad. Our primary goal is to prop up red humanity by giving it the resources and tools that are necessary to put up a better fight against the native aliens."

"Which we are still doing but in another way." Ketis added.

"Agreed. We initially thought we could get this done by earning lots of AP, upgrading the Dimension Observatory and absorbing an expensive enlightenment fruit from the Tree of Possibilities. Instead, we have used most of the time we have earned from completing a number of Missions to invest in our personal projects. In hindsight, this is even better, because we can meet our goal by relying on our existing capabilities rather than depend on the System for a huge knowledge infusion. That said, we need to adjust our planning

and rethink our AP allocation."

The two mech designers briefly listed out their AP revenue and expenditures and performed a few calculations. They roughly tried to predict how extensively they could milk the remaining batch of Missions. I determine much longer they could afford to remain inside the System Space.

Soon enough, Ves and Ketis found themselves at a crossroads.

"We have two choices." He said. "Since we have given up on exchanging enlightenment fruits, our only AP expenditures left in our planning are the planned upgrades to the Dimension Observatory. I think we need to earn at least 1000 AP between the two of us in order to bring it up to a useful enough state. That is a heavy investment with an uncertain payoff. The alternative to this is to drop this demand entirely and just use all of that AP to extend our stay in the System Space by 2 years or so. We can get a lot of work done during that time."

The way he put these two choices made it sound that it was a braindead choice to go for the latter.

A Senior Mech Designer and a Journeyman Mech Designer who also worked as a swordmaster could truly conduct a lot of valuable research and complete half-a-dozen high-quality design projects during this time!

"Three years have passed since the start of Age of Dawn." Ketis said. "Our society has gone through a huge amount of changes during that time. Red humanity has already diverged enormously from the folks back in our original galaxy. While many people have contributed to these changes, I still think that the two of us can unleash a set of changes that can put our civilization year ahead of the curve if we can develop our ideas for 2

additional years."

Time was the scarcest and most precious resource of a mech designer. The ability to earn additional time was one of the most valuable and subversive benefits offered by the

Mech Designer System!

While the prospects of being able to extend their stay for 500 to 700 additional days sounded like a dream to any mech designer, the problem was that the individual in

question was still human!

Ves stared directly into Ketis' eyes.

"Will you be able to endure 2 years of isolation from your children and your fellow sisters of the Swordmaiden Mech Legion? Even if we leave the System Space for very short intervals in order to remind yourself who you are doing this for, this may end up doing more harm than good. You will still suffer from a sense of temporal dislocation with the

people who remain in reality."

The swordmaster lowered her head. She felt conflicted about this matter. She was supposed to be stronger than this, but Ketis the mother did not want to prolong her stay to such an exaggerated extent.

"Given the stakes... I am willing to do what is necessary, but... I would truly prefer it if we can end this marathon under a tighter schedule. "Mhmm, I understand, Ketis. To be honest, I would prefer it if we stick to a semblance of our original plan as well. I invested an entire Upgrade Track into establishing the Dimension Observatory. I hate for it to remain unused. Let us try our best not to come up with any further distractions and cause our plans to become outdated yet again. We have already devised enough stuff to shock red humanity once we emerge from the

System Space."

The two mech designers were determined not to get carried away by future whims or bursts of inspiration.

No matter how tempting it sounded to explore a fantastic new idea, it was not wise for them to bite more than they could chew.

They should focus on digesting their current gains first in order to make sure they could present concrete gains to a race and civilization that urgently needed a short-term

boost!

This was what they set out to do since this pivotal meeting.

Ves continued to split his time between completing Missions and fleshing out the Null

Project. Not only did he have to figure out a way to reproduce Demoncasting in a miniaturized form in order to create the Ultimate Module for the Null Project, he also had to develop the key systems that would define his seventh generation living mechs! Ketis meanwhile continued to flesh out her new swordsmanship paradigm and began to formulate numerous extraordinary sword styles that conformed to the so-called School of Reformed Swordsmanship.

It was not enough for her to publish a manual filled with vague explanations about Heaven, Earth and Man.

She wanted to give sword practitioners of every skill level in the Red Ocean a clear roadmap on how they could systematically progress to the next rank.

So long as she herself was able to move closer to advancing to the rank of sword saint,

other swordmasters would be able to accomplish this as well!

While there were not a lot of pure swordmasters in the new frontier, as long as they were able to make quick progress, they might be able to attain their sainthood in time for them to intervene in the ongoing war.

Sword saints by themselves were too weak to make a difference, but the story was different if they formed a Blood Pact with a powerful Carmine mech and formed a Life Sword Pact with a high-level mech sword artifact, possibly with the help of a companion

spirit.

Equipment could make all of the difference for sword practitioners! This was why Ketis

especially devoted so many pages on the Earth portion of her new paradigm! More months passed by as Ves and Ketis fell into a comfortable routine. Their occasional breaks and talks turned inconsequential as they remained focused on their priorities and refrained from making any further alterations from their plans.

Before they knew it, 9 months had passed since the start of their marathon. Both mech designers were approaching the end stage of their stay in the System. Ves had completed the first iteration of the Null Project. This meant that he had devised

plausible solutions to all of the problems that he had set for the two variations of this deadly ranged mech.

Ketis had not only completed the minor update to the Stormblade Samurai Mark II design, but also rewritten her epoch-defining manual multiple times. Knowing that many people would take her work as gospel, Ketis became a lot more careful about mentioning her claims. She expanded upon some of the speculative portions of her writing and made sure to add more empirical proof to back up her bold assertions. She also removed the more fantastical claims that she was not able to back

up with anything solid.

All in all, both mech designers had reached a state where they could shock human

society with the work that they have done over this magical stretch of time!

"Alas..."

For all of their successes, the pair of mech designers also failed to meet some of their goals.

They completed less Missions than anticipated and earned a bit less AP in the process.

All of the time they spent on their personal projects had severely affected their

Mission-clearing efficiency.

Since the two of them needed to spend 1 AP each to extend their stay in the System

Space, there came a point in time when the two needed to cut their stay short, lest they end up losing more Ascension Points than they could earn!

Chapter 6617 Checking the Gu Containers

"So how much do you have in your account?" Ves asked.

"419 Ascension Points. You?"

"383"

"Really."

"Hey! I started out with less AP than you because I had to expand my storage space! I urgently had to earn more Ascension Points just to be able to stay in this marathon! By the way, this reminds me that we should check on the results of my first attempts to produce a Middle Demon."

Ves or rather Veronica had spent enough AP to transfer 3 of the 5 Demon Mixers into the System Space.

He had to remove a lot of phasewater and other miscellaneous goods in order to make enough room for the demimechs.

For the entire duration of the marathon, Ves had simply placed the Demon Mixers in one of the expansive spaces next to the Workshop of Creation.

Normally used for storing raw materials as well as finished mechs and other goods, the three Demon Mixers had remained a constant presence on this section of the System

Space.

In the first month, Ves visited the Demon Mixers multiple times a day. He could not get tired of approaching them and verifying whether their 'jars' remained intact.

He was initially afraid that stuffing so many violent Minor Demons in a confined space would cause them to produce so much destructive activity that their collective efforts might break containment!

These fears steadily abated after a time because nothing actually happened that suggested that the Demon Mixers were sustaining damage.

Ves grew curious about what exactly happened inside the jars, but the principle of gu cultivation was that outside observers should never be able to track what was happening inside in real-time.

Just opening up the 'lid' to take a peek inside was already enough to taint or outright break the ritualistic process!

Even if this was not the case for this specific implementation, Ves did not want to take the risk of ruining all of those Minor Demons and wasting all of the time and effort to set up these experimental attempts.

Therefore, Ves tried his best to rein in his curiosity and stop obsessing so much about the state of the Demon Mixers.

He and Ketis kept them within the periphery of their sight, but no longer paid conscious

attention to them anymore. The three Demon Mixers may as well have become a part of the background scenery over the course of their marathon.

That did not mean they stopped paying attention to them entirely. They merely ceased to worry about anything going wrong.

The pair made sure to craft a few monitoring units to keep the Mixers under a constant state of observation. If the demimechs generated any unusual activity, then Ves would know about it in an instant.

Those monitoring units never generated any alarms since Ves placed them around the Demon Mixers.

This gradually caused his concerns to fade. He adopted a more laid-back attitude towards his first gu containers. Why bother worrying about success and failure when his actions had no bearing on the outcome?

The entire premise of gu cultivation was to set up the conditions to bring a lot of weak specimens together and have them fight each other to the death in an enclosed area.

In other words, the setup was the most important phase of gu cultivation. Much of the work depended on acquiring the right specimens, preparing the right gu container and making sure that the ritual would proceed as intended.

Once he closed the lid, Ves' only remaining responsibility was to store the active gu container in a place where it would not be disturbed.

There was no other way for him to intervene in what was happening inside.

Since the loss of agency was a feature rather than an error, Ves learned to accept the situation and maintain his composure. There was no point obsessing over what was taking place inside the jars as he could not meaningfully affect the fighting without spoiling the rituals.

As the months passed by, Ves paid less and less attention to them to the point where entire days passed by where he never acknowledged their existence.

This actually caused him to overlook the possibility that the Demon Mixers may have actually completed their tasks!

As Ves and Ketis approached the three Demon Mixers, they looked up at the machines to see if any changes had occurred.

"Since everything that takes place inside is supposed to be a secret, when will you actually know when the process is over?" Ketis wondered.

"That is actually easy to determine. I designed the Demon Mixers so that if the battle royale has led to a single surviving demon, that entity will subsequently merge with the living mech. We should have observed very obvious signs of demonization when this occurred. Seeing that none of these Demon Mixers have grown any spikes, turned dark all of a sudden and undergone other obvious physical mutations, I believe that the gu cultivation process has yet to produce a final result in these three cases."

That was disappointing. Nine whole months had passed. That was a lot of time for 40 to 80 Minor Demons to brawl against each other over the course of multiple rounds and

finally determine the winners.

What was taking them so long?



Though Ves knew that he wouldn't be able to sense the interior of the jar from the outside, he nonetheless approached Demon Mixer 2 in order to check up on the

machine.

He stepped closer and was just about to touch one of the four short legs that supported the demimech before he heard a warning.

"WATCH OUT, VES!"

Ketis had already unsheathed the Heavensword from her back by the time Demon Mixer

2 abruptly drew out its spikes!

It turned out that Demon Mixer 2 had already undergone the process of demonization,

but quietly!

For whatever reason, the demon that survived to the end happened to maintain just enough awareness to prepare a nefarious ambush for its creator.

This was not supposed to happen!

Demons were irrational beings that were too consumed by the need to destroy to form

any coherent thoughts!

They shouldn't be capable of planning and executing a quiet takeover and waiting for weeks if not months for Ves to stray close and get taken by surprise!

There was no time for him to consider his mistaken assumptions and blame him for failing to account for this possibility.

"There's two of them!" Ketis gasped as she already raised her Heavensword in preparation to put down the Demon Mixers by force. "Avoid the attack on your right!" The state of Demon Mixer 5 was remarkably similar to that of Demon Mixer 2! Both demimechs had been taken over in an identical fashion and both of them decided to prepare this ambush together!

While Demon Mixer 5 was placed a little too far away, Demon Mixer 2 was already poised to impale Ves' body with a long and thick spike that radiated murderous intentions! Yet before the demimech could land a killing blow onto its creator, Ves rapidly unfolded

his true body!

His smart clothing automatically responded to his dramatic increase in size by stretching out its surface fabrics and making sure he maintained his dignity.

While it took too long for Ves to reach a size that allowed him to tower over a typical mech, he had nonetheless unlocked just enough of his body as a phase lord to look

down on the demimechs!

This also happened to unlock enough of his prodigious muscle power to exert a strong push at the top side of the rogue demimech!

Despite the fact that the Demon Mixer was being supported by four short but fairly stable legs, the demimech also happened to be fairly narrow and slender in order to minimize their overall volume.

All of this meant that it was remarkably easy for Ves to tip the Demon Mixer over!

Crash!

Demonized or not, the overall shape of the Demon Mixer 2 still resembled its original state, which meant that it still suffered from most of its design shortcomings!

The Demon Mixer design was never meant to possess any combat capabilities. That resulted in an outcome where the demon had no way to fight against a phase lord

aside from growing longer spikes!

Once Ves got over his shock and potential fear, he actually grew amused at this development.

"These Demon Mixers probably have no idea I am not as weak and fragile as other mech designers. They should have known better since I am their creator."

Demon Mixer 5 proved to be almost just as easy to solve. It became completely surprised by Ves' partial transformation and sought to create more distance between itself and its makers.

However, the four demonized legs may have lengthened to an extent, but they were hardly racing limbs.

The phase lord had more than enough time to turn around and topple the second threatening machine onto its back!

Its four mutated legs helplessly scrabbled in the air or against the hardened stone floor.

Their configuration made it impossible for the Demon Mixer to push itself upright again! "Demon Mixer 5 is down." Ves said while holding up a palm to prevent Ketis from retaliating with the help of a grand work that she could not fully control. "Calm down. I am in control. The spike launching in my direction wouldn't have been a threat as my super-class personal shield generator would have blocked the damage. It's a waste of a shield charge, though, so I thought it was best to take matters in my own hands." Though Ketis did not dare to let down her guard at the moment, she was willing to obey Ves and refrain from taking action.

She eyed Ves vigilantly and confirmed that he had not been poked by an errant spike. The poised swordmaster then shifted her attention to the failed assassins.

If Ves happened to be a typical nerdy mech designer with no inherent combat

capabilities, then the attempt on his life may have actually succeeded! Perhaps his shield generator may have protected him to an extent, but the demonized demimechs happened to have channeled dark and dangerous energies to amplify their strike at the last second!

Who knew what might happen, especially if he was a more ordinary mech designer who failed to receive free gear from the Red Three!

account

"I am so glad that I designed the Demon Mix with this possibility sighed. "They look stupid and completely ineffectual by design. A Minor Demon or Middle Demon should never have enough power to turn these silly demimechs into serious threats. There is only so much they can do with these handicapped mech frames. It is like attempting to transform a fragile sheet of paper into a sword that can cut through alloys. It can't be done."

Ketis frowned and used her Heavensword to gesture to Ves to back away. "Are you sure this is the time for you to gloat over your far-sighted design choices? The Demon Mixers may be squirming on the ground at the moment, but who knows whether they will undergo another mutation that causes them to pose an actual threat?"

It was wise to remain cautious. Neither of the two understood what exactly happened to the Demon Mixers and how they managed to circumvent all of the layers of security that

Ves had set up beforehand!

However, if this was the extent of what the demonized machines could do, then the threats had already been neutralized.

"Let's use the workshop tools to restrain the machines and prevent them from going

wild." Ves suggested.

"Sure. By the way, make sure to check up on Demon Mixer 3. I don't trust this machine.

It may have finished its process as well and decided to remain in hiding after seeing what happened to its two unfortunate brothers."

"Good call, Ketis. I don't think it has completed its job, though. I will try to confirm this just to be certain."

#### Chapter 6618 The Winning Demons

After Ves and Ketis successfully restrained the two demonized demimechs with the help of the facilities of the Workshop of Creation, they successfully contained the threat without much risk or effort.

As for Demon Mixer 3, Ves personally examined it and tentatively confirmed that it had remained in its original state. Its spiritual foundation had not undergone any secretive changes and no form of corruption marred its physical frame.

"It seems like putting 80 Minor Demons together will take longer to yield a result." Ves concluded with a frown. "That is... disappointing, but not surprising"

He believed the outcome would be worth the additional wait. No matter what, the demon that emerged at the end of all of the culling was bound to absorb the strength of all other 79 Minor Demons!

It would have been nice to know how many more days he needed to wait in order to obtain a result.

Once Demon Mixer 3 had finally assimilated with the final surviving demon, Ves would be able to gain a broad estimate on how long it took for 80 Minor Demons to finish their death tournament.

That would make it easier for him to plan ahead and calculate his yearly output in advance.

All of that could wait for later as Ves first needed to confirm whether his initial experiments yielded the right results.

"The entire point of mixing these low-value Minor Demons together inside these strange jar-shaped demimechs is to produce Middle Demons." Ves reminded Ketis. "If I fail to obtain the latter, then this experiment has failed, and I will need to try again. If I succeed, then I should be able to mass

produce Middle Demons as long as I invest in the right setup and wait for it to complete the cultivation process on a large scale"

It could be argued that Ves could obtain similar results by introducing his seventh generation living mechs and enabling the artifact industry to obtain a steady supply of filled hyper keystones.

However, Ves believed that there were still significant differences between regular high-level artifacts and D-arms.

Sure, right now the Maiden Knife, the only D-arms that Ves made so far, was practically a toy in the hands of Gloriana. It was in no way comparable to the Oceancaller or even the Flower Parasol.

However, these were not not fair comparisons as the Maiden Knife was an extremely poor first attempt at Demoncasting.

Once Ves learned the ropes of Demoncasting and learned how to increase the

utilization of a demon's power, he believed that his D-arms and D-mechs would definitely be able to produce superior results compared to conventional high-level artifacts at the same level!

The Maiden Knife already hinted at this as its effects were utterly bizarre, but also worth the price of a first-class fleet carrier to the right people!

Compared to empowering an artifact with a regular artifact spirit, Ves found it much more interesting to cram a powerful but unwilling demon into it after beating it into a specific shape!

The entire premise of it was already enough to cause his heart to beat faster. Repurposing destructive demons into engines of power had the potential to break the game and dominate the battlefield!

Now, Ves was on the cusp of discovering whether his attempts to produce the most vital ingredients bore fruit.

He and Ketis carefully approached Demon Mixer 2.

"Do you think that mixing up 40 Minor Demons in a confined space is enough to produce a Middle Demon?" Ves asked.

"I don't know, I have no reference to base my judgment. Let's just take a look and find out the answer ourselves."

They did just that. Demon Mixer 2 did not like it very much as its spiked and mutated form pressed against the heavy metal restraints.

Unfortunately, the Workshop of Creation made use of the best equipment available in human space.

The mech restraints were rated to contain the movements of powerful first-class ace mechs!

There was no way the extremely weak second-class demimechs could cause a single vibration, especially since they had been lifted off the ground!

The absence of a solid surface caused the armless and flightless mechs to completely lose the ability to exert any leverage!

Ves therefore found the futile attempts to break out of the restraints to be rather amusing.

That said, he did not dare to underestimate the Demon Mixers too much. He still exhibited the necessary caution and tried to watch out for the sudden growth of spikes.

He examined the demon that had emerged from the jar and merged with the spiritual foundation of the living mech. He carefully made use of Blinky's senses to get an impression of the power and rank of the demon inside the small mech frame.

It helped that he could already make comparisons with the admittedly defective Middle Demon contained in one of Lucky's gems.

"There is a difference, but... it is not as great as I hoped." Ves said with a tinge of disappointment in his voice. "There is a gap between this demon and the one that is occupying the Maiden Knife. This one gives me the impression that it is strong for his rank, but has yet to surpass a threshold and become a Domain Shaper. The clearest indication of this is the absence of anything resembling a domain."

This was a bummer. He had loosely calculated based on the price list of the Demon Summoning Circle that a Middle Demon was worth 20 Minor Demons.

This may indicate that it took 20 Minor Demons or even less to produce a single Middle

Demon!

However, Demon Mixer 2 brought together a whopping 40 Minor Demons, and all Ves got at the end was a single strong and battle-hardened Minor Demon! Perhaps the other notable change despite a considerable boost of strength was the increase in rationality.

Ves was able to sense that the Minor Demon inside Demon Mixer 2 had lost a lot of his irrational rage that previously drove him towards indiscriminately attacking everything.

Why was this the case?

"Did the Minor Demon absorb a little bit of intelligence from every defeated opponent until he obtained all of it?" Ves wondered. "Or is it because he assimilated the calm and rational spiritual foundation of the living mech? It could also be because he has merged with a mech, which is inherently dependent on logic and data."

Ketis shrugged. "It could be all of those reasons at the same time. You can't know unless you create a Demon Mixer that refuses to merge with the winning demon."

"You're right. We can explore that question later. For now, it is enough to take any of

those possibilities into account."

Whether a Minor Demon accidentally grew smart and rational due to an as-of-yet-undetermined factor was not too relevant to Ves at the moment.

A somewhat rational Minor Demon was nearly useless!

If Ves wanted to perform Demoncasting with a Minor Demon, then he would have done



so with one of the basic ones produced by Helena.

Perhaps the results wouldn't be as good, but the differences should be so great as it remained in the same rank.

What Ves really wanted was a Middle Demon of the second major cultivation rank.

"Damnit." He cursed. "I don't know why putting 40 Minor Demons together is not enough to yield a successful result. It could be because the gu container that I have designed is too flawed and rudimentary to run an efficient gu cultivation process. It could also be because it is impossible to birth a single Major Demon with so few Minor Demons" "I think your earlier guess is the most likely reason for the failed result. Ketis

commented. "These Demon Mixer demimechs do not look reliable at all before they got mutated. Since this gu cultivation business is an entirely separate discipline that possesses a lot of depth and expertise, it is unrealistic for you to be able to reach the same degree of efficiency as those who have mastered this unorthodox method. You are like a Novice Mech Designer thinking that you can produce a work that is on par with that of a Master Mech Designer. Your expectations are too unrealistic." "You're right, I suppose. I was dreaming too much. At least this attempt is not a total failure. The fact that it took 9 months or less for a single Minor Demon to emerge that is stronger, smarter and a lot more in control of himself represents progress. It at least proves the validity of gu cultivation and that I can reproduce it to a lesser degree. All I need to do to obtain better results is to analyze the data, conduct targeted research and improve upon the Demon Mixer design."

Ves guessed that the current Demon Mixer design was functionally able to serve as a gu container, but not a good one.

This gave him enough reasons to continue to iterate on the Demon Mixer design rather than write it off as a failed work and start over from scratch.

He was heading in the right direction. He only needed to move forward in order to

realize more gains.

Ves did not bother to take out the stronger and smarter Minor Demon from Demon

Mixer 2.

There was no place else to store the strengthened demon aside from the prison supplied by the System Space.

Instead of bothering with that, Ves might as well keep it in its current form, as it wouldn't be able to go anywhere. He could still conduct further tests and examinations on 'naturally' demonized living mechs by using Demon Mixer 2 as a test subject. When Ves and Ketis moved to Demon Mixer 5 and began to examine it, they quickly found a qualitative difference.

"This demon... is on another level compared to the last one." Ketis said. "I can already feel

it through my sword aura. This demon... has a domain. A weak one, but it exists. If it is given time and energy to develop, it can one day grow to a strong state!"

Ves made the same conclusion. His lips curled into a grin as he finally obtained a positive

result! "It's true. The fifth demimech has truly managed to produce a Middle Demon! All it took was 40 Minor Demons as well as an additional injection of 100,000 souls!"

He carefully did not mention the origin of all of those souls. "Still, despite devouring so many extra souls, this Middle Demon feels like he is even weaker than the ancient maiden that you have Demoncasted into the Maiden Knife." The swordmaster noted with a frown. "There is a huge world of difference between an ordinary soul and a Minor Demon produced from a stronger alien soul. It may take

millions more to bring this Middle Demon to a more respectable state."

The recently evolved Middle Demon that had merged with Demon Mixer 5 came across

as a weak and malnourished example of his kind.

He was truly looking like he was begging for sustenance. The Middle Demon made for a pathetic sight, which explained why it fell so quickly.

However, Ves did not mind this too much because surpassing the threshold was the hardest part.

It probably wasn't necessary to resort to a difficult and time-consuming process such as gu cultivation to quickly improve the strength of the malnourished Middle Demon! Perhaps the requirement of feeding the Middle Demon with millions of souls may sound onerous to most people, but this was not a problem to him! Helena could supply him with all of the juicy souls he needed in the near term!

Ves began to record his experimental results. "My tentative conclusion for the time being is that it is definitely possible to produce a single Middle Demon out of 40 Minor Demons. I think that energy is the principal reason why Demon Mixer 2 failed and Demon Mixer 5 succeeded. The former did not contain any souls that could bolster the strength of the Minor Demons and feed more juice to the ultimate winner. The latter just

happened to contain enough souls to give the eventual winner enough of a push to break past his bottleneck."

If this was true, then solving it was incredibly simple. If inserting additional souls was what it took to produce Middle Demons, then he would attempt to do so in abundance!

#### Chapter 6619 Last Demon Standing

The two demons that emerged out of Demon Mixer 2 and Demon Mixer 5 both possessed distinctive characteristics.

Ves and Ketis studied them in greater detail in order to figure out their special qualities.

They had yet to encounter many demons and wanted to know what made them special compared to regular souls.

Aside from confirming that they possessed enough rationality to not waste their energy on useless struggle, the pair discovered a number of interesting aspects.

"It is as if we are examining a dark mirror of normal souls." Ketis said with a hint of distaste in her words. "Normal souls typically have a neutral or balanced attribute makeup. Every adult human possesses a mix of positive, neutral and negative attributes, and they are usually within proportion of each other. Those with brighter outlooks tend to be biased towards positive attributes, while those who are mired in fury or depression are weighted towards negative attributes. However, I have

never witnessed a case where a soul had become so corrupted that there is hardly any light left inside."

Her description held a greater implication.

"Ah, but what is special is that both of these demons do not consist of pure malevolence." Ves said with a smile. "Not anymore, at least. That tiny portion of light that is hidden inside all of that filth and darkness is likely responsible for giving them a clearer head than normal. Compared to the remnant of the ancient maiden that emerged directly from Lucky's gem before getting Demoncasted into the Maiden Knife, these pair of recently strengthened demons are clearly more rational and subsequently more intelligent. It is quite scary for them to gain these qualities as that makes them harder to predict and guard against."

The fact that they were wise enough to hide their possession of the Demon Mixers and prepare an ambush against their creator was proof of that! Their plan may have worked if Ves was an ordinary mech designer as opposed to a part-time phase lord!

This incident reminded him once again that any activity related to demons was inherently risky.

No matter how clever they became, so long as they remained in a negative state, they would always maintain their hostility towards neutral and positive life forms!

Neither Ves nor Ketis could explain where this hostility came from and why it existed.

It was as if there was a natural law in force that compelled negative life forms, even ones that may be intelligent enough to question its own instincts and purpose, to always seek the demise and destruction of everything else!

The only exception may be other demons, but it was clear that their restraint towards each other was not too strong.

"I think it is a matter of priorities." Ketis said. "If these demons are hostile towards each other, then they would have wiped themselves out long before they could pose a threat against us. There are probably instincts baked into them that tell them not to fight each other so easily."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I think that something like this is definitely going on. That may be one of the original reasons why ancient cultivators invented gu containers. They want to force

poisonous creatures to fight and devour each other, but simply placing them in a large space will cause them to instinctively avoid each other unless they are hungry. By compressing their space and forcing them into each other's comfort zones, you can induce them into a fight or flight mode, and since the latter is not feasible anymore, they have no other choice but to brawl to the death. When you wrap a ritual around this process, you can accelerate and supercharge this process."

Now that he had gained a greater insight into gu cultivation, Ves already came up with numerous different ways to improve upon the Demon Mixer design.

He had a better idea on how to design and configure the ritual so that it could produce greater yields next time.

His goal was to increase the efficiency of the demon gu cultivation process.

As a mech designer and a spiritual engineer, he could not stand the thought of stuffing so many Minor Demons and possibly other souls inside the jar, only for 50 or 70 percent of all of that energy to go to waste!

Ves still had a lot to go before he could reduce this proportion to an acceptable level. Right now, he was more interested in getting to know the two surviving demons on a more personal level. They had to possess remarkable qualities in order to be able to vanquish over 39 other Minor Demons in their respective gu containers.

"Let's take a look at the Minor Demon that has merged with Demon Mixer 1." Ves said. "If you examine it closely and look past the obvious demonization aspects, you can still piece together a semblance of the original soul."

Ketis furrowed her brows. "That may be so, but it is difficult for me and Sharpie to look past all of the ugliness inside this Minor Demon. All I can sense is a hostile entity that needs to be banished from this realm."

It was not a surprise that a swordmaster would have that reaction.

"It's different for me." Ves revealed. "I can rely on my affinity to darkness and Blinky's fine-tuned senses towards E energy to look past the surface layers. Do you know what I see? I can sense that the original soul that spawned this Minor Demon used to be a Senior Mech Designer. We are looking at one of our former colleagues."

That caused Ketis to look surprised. "A Senior Mech Designer? Shouldn't there be demons derived from soldiers in this Demon Mixer?"

"Yes, I made sure to insert the souls of expert candidates or similar in each of them. I thought their combat acumen would give them an edge after their demise, but apparently that is not the case. There may be other factors that have given this Senior Mech Designer the last laugh."

"Brain over brawn." Ketis remarked.

Ves shrugged.

Since everything that took place inside a closed container remained a secret to outside observers, it was unlikely for Ves to figure out the truth.

He moved on to examining the demonized mech designer.

"As far as I can tell, the Senior Mech Designer is between one and two centuries old when he died and got converted into a Minor Demon," Ves said as he used his senses to get a read on the Minor Demon's original identity. "He is definitely a man. There are still remnants of his design philosophy left inside. As far as I can tell... he has a Class VI design philosophy in ranged skirmisher mechs. He never worked on any other mech type aside from ranged skirmisher mechs."

"Ranged skirmisher mechs?"

"I'm not too surprised that you are unfamiliar with them since you don't bother with designing ranged mechs." Ves smirked. "They are a subcategory of rifleman mechs. Ranged skirmisher mechs are defined by relatively high mobility and prefer to fight at closer ranges. They are usually armed with submachine guns or shotguns that allow them to strafe or overwhelm a target up close before darting away with the help of their

superior speed"

"That sounds like a light harasser mech."

"The two mech types definitely share a close resemblance to each other. Ranged skirmisher mechs can be seen as the big brother version of a light harasser mechs. They are always medium mechs. They essentially trade mobility for better armor, higher caliber and greater ammunition reserves. They have more staying power and can take a

beating."

"That sounds interesting." Ketis looked intrigued. "They actually sound as if they are good at countering melee mechs. Fighting at closer ranges is risky, but as long as their mobility is higher than that of a swordsman mech, they can still remain out of harm's way. Their rapid-fire machine guns or impactful shotguns can quickly compromise and wear down the armor of a typical melee mech. Precision is not as important for those weapons, so they can always inflict damage even if all of the mechs involved in a fight are maneuvering like crazy. Why haven't they become more popular?" "Because they are too demanding to pilot." Ves responded. "You know as well as I do that mech pilots can roughly be divided into two broad categories. There are the gung-ho warrior types that prize their martial skills and want to dive into the thick of battle in order to hack and slash their enemies apart. Then there are the more rational and analytical types that like to maintain their distance from the enemy and pick them apart with precisely placed shots with their trusty firearms. Which of these categories best describe? the mech pilots of ranged skirmisher mechs?"

The swordmaster crossed her arms and pressed her lips in thought. "They should definitely be counted among the former category, but..."

"If they are bloodthirsty and get excited about the prospect of overpowering their enemies up close, then they may as well do that by specializing in swordsmanship or similar. That is not to say that specializing in submachine guns and shotguns are bad, but they not only require a different set of skills to master, but also introduce a number of complications in battle. The greatest shortcoming is that if an enemy melee mech ever manages to catch up to a ranged skirmisher mech somehow, the latter will lose all of its

advantages.

Third-class mech cadets were not as capable of learning a broad range of skills as their second-class counterparts.

They had to make hard choices on how to invest their time in the mech academy. There were already mature and well-developed pipelines for training and educating regular melee mech pilots, so that became the default choice for all cadets who sought a life of action and excitement.

"If that is the case, this Senior Mech Designer probably never managed to attain critical success. His products have never managed to grow beyond their niche status." Ketis

analyzed.

"That is probably the case. I can clearly feel a strong source of resentment in him. It is a type of resentment that is familiar to many mech designers. It is the resentment of dedicating your entire life to realizing a design philosophy, yet failing to earn recognition from the market. Too few mech pilots appreciate his works, and it was likely that few if any of them have managed to become an expert pilot with the help of his work. Even when he worked his way up to the rank of Senior, his industry influence and market impact was probably too weak."

"I can imagine how angry he must feel as he had reached the end of his lifespan without managing to fulfill any of his major ambitions." Ketis said in a sympathetic tone. "He died aggrieved, having reached a measure of wealth and academic accomplishments, yet failing to leave a lasting legacy behind. With his death, his design philosophy has become lost. Most of his work and accomplishment has become buried with his body." That was one of the most painful outcomes that could happen to a truly passionate

mech designer.

No ordinary individual could become a Senior Mech Designer. The original identity of this Minor Demon had definitely invested far too much of his life into his work.

If only he had more time.

Since the Senior was unable to afford life-prolonging treatment, that probably meant that he was ultimately not commercially successful or not valued enough by the establishment to receive more than the cheapest form of life-prolonging treatment. Ultimately, the mech market was fair. If the Senior Mech Designer actually designed mechs that were practical and powerful enough to make a difference in a conflict, then his life and career wouldn't have ended in a whimper.

The fact that the Senior still retained so much resentment after his demonization meant. that this was probably the main source of the Minor Demon's strength and motivation! It turned out that the man was so unwilling to die as a loser that he fought like hell inside Demon Mixer 2 and successfully managed to become the last demon standing!

Chapter 6620 Us vs Them



When Ketis heard Ves' description of the Minor Demon's original life as a human, she couldn't help but feel more sympathetic.

The former Senior Mech Designer from a third-rate state had worked so hard to make difference by specializing in designing 'ranged skirmisher mechs, only for the mech market to remain unmoved by his works.

With much of his professional legacy disappearing after his death, the Senior Mech Designer ultimately led an unfulfilled life.

No matter whether he found the love of his life or raised a prosperous line of children and grandchildren, Senior Mech Designers ultimately cared more about whether their mechs contributed to their society and whether any of their work would be remembered after their passing.

Given the notable amount of resentment that the Minor Demon held towards his feeble

legacy, he probably lived through his final years as a bitter and feeble Senior!

Perhaps he may have been able to work himself up to a Master if he was given 50 or 100 years more time, but the mech community clearly did not feel he deserved another chance.

Knowing that must have made the Senior extremely depressed and disappointed at his own incompetence.

Feeling the life fading from his body while he still needed a lot more time to progress his design philosophy was a chronic form of torture.

It was like fabricating 90 percent of a mech, only to quit before it could get completed and be put into use!

"What a sad mech designer." Ketis said before she realized that she got so caught up in Ves' narrative that she inadvertently overlooked a very important fact! "Wait. When you initially chose to go ahead with Demoncasting, did you not promise me that you would spare human souls from this treatment? Why did you turn the soul of a Senior Mech Designer into a demon? Were all of the other demons and souls human in origin?!" Oops.

Ves had made that promise almost 9 months ago. He had failed to remember which secrets he should withhold from Ketis. This was an unacceptable oversight on his part. He had become too fixated on the many benefits of Demoncasting to remind himself that not everyone was okay with using human souls as fuel to produce demons!

In truth, Ves always believed that Ketis would find out the truth eventually. It was not possible to hide the origin of souls for demon production to a swordmaster with sharp instincts and an extremely powerful grand work that was older than modern human civilization!

He just hoped that by the time that Ketis learned about the truth, Ves would have already built up a collection of powerful D-arms and D-mechs.

It would have been much easier to defend his actions when his Demoncasting efforts clearly made a difference in the ongoing war!

Alas, he would have to make do without this particular help.

Though Ves did not believe that Ketis would get outraged to the point of unsheathing her Heavensword and chop it in his direction, he better make sure he channeled his Devil Tongue as best as possible lest he ruin his relationship with the swordmaster! "Helena is the one who supplied the souls!" He said while raising his hands in innocence! "As you may or may not know, she still retains a presence in the Yeina Star Cluster in the old galaxy. Not only does she remain by the side of my mother in the Nyxian Gap, she is also the object of prayer of a large number of defeated Hexers in the Komodo Star Sector as well as those who have fled to other star sectors. There are more than enough of them that Helena is able to witness the deaths of many people in this corner of the Milky Way Galaxy."

"So that gives her the right to harvest those innocent human souls and pervert them to your cause?!" Ketis angrily shot back. She looked closer to drawing out her Heavensword or at least her Bloodsinger! "I thought you had standards, Ves! They may be lower than mine, but they should at least respect the sanctity of the human race. For you to treat the souls of humans of the old galaxy as nothing more than resources to be utilized is a step too far."

"Okay, you may have a point that repurposing human souls for Demoncasting is not exactly right, but necessity trumps morals. We cannot get hung over our own bottom lines when the native aliens clearly have much fewer of them! Our enemies do not care about our restraint or our unwillingness to get our hands dirty. They will continue to run over our strongholds and massacre all of the red humans they come across. This includes everyone you care about such as Kirian and Mayra. Do you

want to look at your children and tell them that your principled opposition has contributed to red humanity's doom, but at least we will all die with a clean conscience?"

A part of Ves felt ashamed for resorting to this low blow yet again, but he did so because it was remarkably effective!

Ketis anticipated this response, however.

"You keep using the same argument to excuse your unethical behavior and actions! While I hate that I still cannot refute your stupid excuse, there has to be a point where the 'children card' should no longer serve as an effective immunity against wrongdoing. Do you even think that what you are doing is wrong in any way?!"

"I didn't lie. Technically. I consider myself a red human, and so should you. We have already split away from original humanity due to the Great Severing. The more time passes by, the more we diverge from the folks back in the old galaxy. Our culture, our genetics and our history are becoming more and more foreign to all of the people who

reside in the Milky Way. If I have to choose who to save, I will pick red humanity every time, because this is what my family and my clan have become. The people in our former home... are still humans, but they are not our people anymore."

"And that excuses your attempts to torture their souls to the point of undergoing demonization before having them fight each other, or worse putting thousands of weak and defenseless human souls into those awful Demon Mixers where they end up getting torn apart and devoured by these evil beings? These are still humans! Just because they live in another galaxy does not make them any less important!"

"Is that true?"

"What do you mean by that, Ves?"

"You heard my question. Now answer it. Do you think the life of a human from the old galaxy should receive as much care and protection from us as the life of a red human?"

Ves smirked. It turned out that this was not an easy question to answer.

The swordmaster eventually sighed. "I know what you are doing. You are purposefully trying to split original humanity away from the category of 'our people! This will make it easier for us to exploit them for our own gains."

"Perhaps you are right, but so what? None of this is false. Red humanity is for all intents and purposes our only people. Original humanity does not want nor deserve our protection. At the same time, the folks in the Milky Way have not done nearly enough to support us in the Red War. Even if material transfers have become impossible, they could still assist us with conducting R&D and provide us with technical support. Instead, they have gone back to their own selfish ways. Since they have made a clear break with us, we do not have to treat them as if they are on the same side as us anymore. They should be treated as aliens in human form."

Though Ves tried his best to reinforce the separation between the two branches of humanity, Ketis did not accept this argument!

"Do you know how disgusting you sound when you engage in othering? You are using the same tactic that has excused countless dishonorable acts throughout history! This entire 'us' vs 'them' dichotomy has been the cause of countless acts of infamy! By pretending that humans with darker skin tones are not human, we dehumanized them into slaves that are no different from livestock and other property. By pretending that humans that belong to another tribe, religion, political affiliation or geographic region are not a part of 'us', we can brainwash ourselves into feeling no guilt as we commit genocide on them. It is so bad that the very act of labeling a group of people as 'them' automatically dehumanizes them to the point where we can excuse any atrocity, such as bombing their territories into ruin and slaughtering them en masse! Now, we can add torturing their souls and feeding them to demons as additional atrocities!"

Ves never imagined that Ketis could be so upright and principled given her history. How could she remain so clean all of these years?

Perhaps the Larkinson Clan protected and sheltered her a little too well. She had never been placed in a position of leadership as Ves. She never had to make the hard choices that had brought the Larkinsons to their current height.

"Okay, it is true that I am purposefully dehumanizing the people from the Milky Way." Ves admitted with a sigh. "Perhaps I am doing it in order to assuage my own conscience, but I do not think what I am doing is wrong. This is not a matter of ethics or philosophy. It is a matter of survival. I am completely certain that the members of the Survivalist Faction of the Red Association are 100 percent behind my standpoint. In fact, I think the majority of the Red Three will stand behind me. We have an obligation to use whatever resource is acceptable to win this war. The native aliens

aren't holding back all that much. They are literally throwing away the lives of an astronomical amount of cannon fodder in an attempt to drown us with alien blood. Since they are ruthless enough to drive so many of their own kindred to their deaths, then we must respond in kind, or fall

behind."

"You speak as if we have an obligation to compete in a race to the bottom, Ves!

"You may not like this competition, but that does not mean it is inconsequential." He argued. "All I am hearing is objections from you. What you have failed to do is present alternative solutions that can solve the problem at hand. If you have a better way to empower red humanity and arm them with powerful weapons, then share it with us all. If not, then do not try to shut down my earnest attempts to safeguard the future of my own children as well as yours. I am a parent as well, you know. Will you deny a father like myself the opportunity to fight for their right to live in this bloodsoaked galaxy?"

Ves gave her a knowing look. "The morals that you have imported from the Milky Way

don't apply as well in the Red Ocean. We have entered a more primitive galaxy where the survival of the fittest trumps the rules of chivalry. There is a time and place for honor, but please wait until we have defeated the genocidal aliens first. They will not hesitate to wipe us out to the last man if they ever gain the upper hand. It is only fair for us to do the same to them, even if we have to repurpose the souls of humans who are

not a part of us anymore."

"..."

"Besides, I don't think we are abusing the souls of all of those people." Ves said in a more conciliatory tone. "Think about it. Instead of dying like faceless space peasants, we are giving them a chance, however small, of gaining a second chance in another life. It is like we are reincarnating them. Sure, a bunch of them are turned into demons, but they can continue to grow and gain more rationality and power as long as they are successful! Perhaps a demon like this former Senior Mech Designer may one day become so smart and powerful that he is ultimately able to revive his design philosophy and realize it, thereby completing his previous life's work and leaving behind a lasting legacy! If you ask me, that is a better trajectory than disappearing with a lot of unresolved resentment in

his belly."

Ketis looked at Demon Mixer 2 that contained the former Senior Mech Designer in question and wondered what she would have wanted if she was in that man's place.