

## Mech Touch 6671

### Chapter 6671 Setting a Trap

Given the circumstances of the upcoming confrontation, Melkor decided to lay an ambush.

After all, why try to set up a spell array in the middle of a battle while phasefighters were shooting the mechs that carried the crucial formation anchors?

The chance that something would go wrong was too great!

One of the first lessons that a formation master needed to learn was that when one wanted to employ a spell array proactively against an enemy, it was best to employ them as traps.

By setting a trap in advance, the formation master would be able to take the time to calculate the right placements without any urgent time pressure.

Another factor that played in his favor was that the absence of fighting meant that the chosen battlefield remained relatively static.

If energies started to spew in every direction while asteroids were blowing up, Melkor may be forced to redo his calculations as his previous ones were no longer accurate anymore.

While Melkor learned that more advanced formation masters would be able to

compensate for these changes on the fly, right now he was still just an auxiliary qi cultivator. His prior practice up until now only made him a little smarter and allowed him to multitask better. These improvements were far from enough for him to perform dynamic calculations in the middle of a battle!

"I have just sent out the coordinates along with instructions on where you need to place the formation anchors. Do your best to get close to them as possible and place the objects as precisely as you can relative to my mech's position. Do you understand?"

"What if there is an asteroid in the way?"

"There won't be. If you look at the locations corresponding to the coordinates, the anchors should be buried just below the surface of different asteroids. Make sure to cover up the digging as best as possible. It is unlikely that the alien craft will be able to detect anything unusual when our mechs will attract all of their attention, but let's not make this easy for our enemies."

The mechs carrying the formation anchors proceeded to split up so that they could bury the metal pillars into each of the designated asteroids.

Melkor had selected them carefully according to the calculations performed with the help of his mech's formidable processors.

Normally, it was beyond his ability to plant formation anchors in a three-dimensional space that was filled with asteroids.

Melkor had to make use of the enhanced eyesight of his companion spirit Jonas to scout for asteroids that possessed the right traits to hold a formation anchor and subsequently narrow down the coordinates by performing follow-up calculations. "This is quite convenient."

A suitable companion spirit could easily lower the difficulty of becoming a formation master!

While Melkor's decision to specialize in deploying and controlling spell arrays meant that he now became a supportive qi cultivator twice over, he did not regret his decisions.

Support mech pilots were able to do just fine while they did everything they could to boost other mechs. They performed a noble function that was just as honorable as fighting more directly.

Time passed by as his subordinates obediently planted the formation anchors at the designated coordinates.

While it may seem as if these pillars that were predominantly made out of hyper materials could be knocked out of position at the slightest disturbance to the asteroid they were hiding on, Melkor was not too worried.

Most spell arrays were able to tolerate minor deviations. The efficacy of the resulting qi formation might drop, but it shouldn't disappear so easily.

As long as Melkor activated the spell array before the ensuing battle could mess up the environment further, everything should be okay as the empowered qi formation should automatically lock itself into place.

It would become far more difficult to mess up the spell array once it came into power, especially from attacks from the inside!

Melkor's only concern now was that it was theoretically possible to break apart any spell array by relying on brute force. Excessively powerful attacks could break any barrier.

If Melkor could increase the flow of E-energy into an active spell array, it could withstand more attacks before reaching its breaking point, but he currently did not have many ways to make that happen.

This made him feel concerned about whether the ritual may fail because the enemy phasefighters were strong enough to break the effect by force.

If the enemy craft consisted entirely of cannon fodder small craft, then the chance that this would happen was small, but not zero.

Transphasic weapons hit harder and inflicted more effective damage than

The puelmer phasefighters were worse. Many of them mounted additional high-tech weapons that enabled them to inflict massive damage to their targets.

If the strike craft also happened to mount missiles with fairly potent payloads, then the spell array might shatter in an instant!

"Change of plans." He decided.

"Sir?"

"The capacity of my new trap isn't high," Melkor determined. "We shouldn't entrap too many mechs, or else they will try to blast out of the border and succeed this time. Let's do this. Let us wait until half of the expected enemies will enter the qi formation before I activate it. The remaining

mech units should focus on eliminating the enemy phasefighters that are trapped outside of the spell array."

"That.... is a big change of plans, sir. We can alter the assignments quickly, but many of us will still get caught off-guard."

"This measure is too important for us. This ritual has to succeed. Dividing the enemy so that they are cut off from each other is a good way to sow more division and create coordination problems. That should hopefully distract them enough for them to avoid doing the obvious."

Melkor along with a few mech officers began to formulate a revised plan for the upcoming battle.

He actually liked his new plan better. It became a little more complicated, but it was also better proofed against unexpected or undesired outcomes.

"Oh, I also shouldn't forget about swapping my fey"

Doing this was fairly easy as there were numerous other Fey Fiannas among the gathering of Larkinson mechs.

He soon contacted the mech pilots of two other quasi-first-class Fey Fiannas and called them over.

"I need to exchange my offensive fey with your azure energy shield feys." Melkor said. "If you do not urgently need the additional defenses and could use the extra firepower, you can have my luminous fire fey and infinite coil fey. They are both transphasic, so

they pack a mean punch."

"Sure"

"I can adapt."

Melkor had grown more proficient in piloting a drone mech while at the same time controlling a multitude of fey at the same time.

He spent the last months participating in battles where he could deploy 6 fey at a time, which was more than the starting point for the living mech.

It was not until very recently that he was able to expand his living fey entourage to 8

fey at a time!

This was a pretty major boost in power and flexibility. A typical fey was considerably larger and more powerful than most spurs attached to the back of the mech.

It was thanks to the help of the Commanding Controller Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method that he quickly became a qualified drone mech pilot.

Much of the gains he made with this auxiliary qu cultivation method would get subsumed by a more superior qi cultivation method as long as there was enough

overlap.

As time passed by, the scouts of the Flagrant Vandals successfully encountered and had begun to lure them over to their chosen ambush site.

The Flagrant Vandals tried not to make it too obvious. While the native aliens had neglected the importance of scouting ahead for their main forces, Melkor did not want to underestimate his opponents too much.

If one of the puelmer phasefighters possessed an extremely powerful high-tech scanning system, then they could probably detect a large amount of mechs hiding behind asteroids.

If these mechs wanted to do a better job of hiding themselves, their pilots could shut down their power reactors and let the machines cool to nearly the same temperature

as the space rocks.

Melkor had declined to do so. He did not mind it if the aliens detected his mechs in advance. It would make this even better as the native aliens were obviously tasked

with clearing the asteroid belt of human enemies.

"They are about to arrive!"

The waiting mechs began to heat up a bit more in anticipation of moving into action.

The Fey Fianna piloted by Melkor meanwhile began to deploy all 8 azure energy shield

fey around the mech frame.

The legion commander would leave the responsibility of attacking the enemy to other mechs. He needed to focus all of his concentration on conducting the initiation ritual while simultaneously controlling the spell array.

The Flagrant Vandal mechs soon flew into sight. The light mechs nimbly weaved

around the asteroids while presenting themselves as enticing targets to the vanguard

of the main enemy force.

As dozens more phasefighters came close, hundreds of mechs started to emerge from behind their asteroids!

The melee mechs began to charge forward in order to intercept the leading

The ranged mechs began to attack the alien craft while using the asteroids as cover

whenever possible.

Energy beams, gauss rounds and missiles began to fill the kill box as the light phasefighters desperately tried to use their superior mobility to evade the attacks! Many of them suffered hits onto their azure energy shields. The defenses held up only for a moment before they began to collapse in quick succession.

The volume of fire proved too much for the phasefighters to evade or withstand all of  
  
orce of enemy

the hits! Even as 16 or so phasefighters fell from the initial barrage, the main phasefighters had finally arrived to reinforce their heavily bruised vanguard! The fighting rapidly grew more and more intense.

The native aliens did not seem to pay too much attention to whether they were being  
  
lured to an ambush.

Multiple phasefighters had tried to disengage from the thick of the fighting and began to scout the periphery in order to detect any nasty surprises. Whatever scanning methods these craft used, they apparently did not detect anything

suspicious about the buried formation anchors!

Since the Larkinson mech force truly did not install any bombs or other suspicious

devices into the surrounding asteroids, the alien fighter pilots became more certain the enemy did not prepare anything special.

The mixed native alien force began to commit harder to the fight. They flew forward

to strafe the human mechs and fired their missiles whenever they saw an opportunity to inflict serious damage to their targets.

Melkor smirked at the sight. Despite the losses that had begun to occur, the native

aliens did not notice that their phasefighters were gradually getting pulled within the range of his soon-to-be-activated spell array.

He had a feeling that his plan was slowly coming together.

The only concern was that the puelmer elite phasefighters had yet to commit to the fight themselves.

They maintained their distance from the main fight and stayed in reserve for the time being as their alien fighter pilots ruthlessly analyzed the unfolding battle. Melkor felt uncomfortable about them, especially now that he was approaching a

critical moment.

"Swordmaidens, go send a unit of Storm Swords and Stormblade Samurais to circle around and engage the elite puelmer phasefighters in battle. We need to know what they are capable of and how well they can fight. Vandals, send out your light mechs to

"Roger."

"Acknowledged."

Dozens of mechs that had yet to go deep began to disengage from the main fight and

flew their way past other phasefighters in order to confront the most powerful enemies on the battlefield!

The puclmers definitely noticed that their craft were being targeted. Now that the humans had sought to challenge their tech, they no longer remained

passive and began to unveil their technological gifts!

Right before their eyes, seven of the enemy phasefighters suddenly flew into each

other and linked up, causing them to form a combination 'gunship' that was much larger than a typical phasefighter!

A large muzzle extended from the center and suddenly began to generate a relatively massive energy signature!

"Careful! Evade!"

The charging Swordmaiden mechs hastily aborted their attack run and began to split away from each other, but it was too late!

A massive transphasic positron beam erupted from the muzzle of the combination craft and whipped it from left to right, causing a large handful of mechs to sustain heavy damage or outright get cut in two pieces!

Even the defenses of quasi-first-class mechs failed to withstand the might of this energy discharge!

#### Chapter 6672 Evolving Alien Strike Craft Doctrines

Unlike red humanity, the native aliens never really developed an obsession with their own small craft.

While they did use them to varying degrees in the past, they never placed much emphasis on these craft. They were mostly used as patrols and occasionally screening units for their homeships. They were mainly useful for doing the jobs that were too small for ships to bothered with most of the time.

That changed when red humanity won their battles one after another by relying on mechs alone.

Compared to warships, mechs were far smaller and possessed only a fraction of the power.

Yet it was precisely because they were small and maneuverable that they were able to evade a large amount of warship attacks and concentrate their power in ways that allowed them to achieve maximum results with minimum investment.

Even if human mechs won as many battles as they lost, the native aliens actually lost out in a material sense as warships were much more expensive and took much more resources to build!

The native aliens may have their pride, but most of them could not ignore the reality in front of them. They had begun to imitate their human foes in order to shore up their weaknesses and close the gap.

The problem with their behavior was that they could never surpass red humanity through imitation alone.

No matter whether it was the orvens, the puelmers or the zzamayel, none of them had been able to replicate a mech that could work for their race. Even the active collusion of the Cosmopolitan Movement could not overcome the fundamental technological obstacles that stood in the way of this ambitious endeavor!

Neural interface technology was solely developed with human brains in mind. Alien species that looked close to humans actually possessed very different biologies and brain structures. It was impossible for the same neural interface that was solely designed with humans in mind to work perfectly with an alien.

This caused the native aliens to remain stuck with phasefighters. To be fair, the alien scientists and engineers had actually done an excellent job of modernizing their old starfighters with human-derived technologies.

Now that the higher ups were willing to invest serious money, resources and manpower into them, the speed of development of phasefighters had skyrocketed.

The phasefighters developed in the current year were much better than the ones the

While this rapid improvement phase would eventually reach a plateau, this was probably years away.

For now, the native aliens had only spent a few years on focused development of their phasefighter concept. The weapon platform was still relatively fresh and new to them, which meant that they were just beginning to think about making more impactful changes than simply arming them with upgraded weapons and shield generators! What the puelmers had just unveiled was deeply concerning to red humanity.

They had moved beyond imitation and had begun to innovate their own solutions on how to make use of phasefighters!

An analyst began to share his key observations with the command group over a separate communication channel.

"The puelmer elite phasefighters are equipped with different tech and modules, but their frames are nearly identical in shape and dimensions. It appears that this unit has adopted this common form factor to allow them to combine together into a combination gunship. Once 6 of the craft have attached themselves to a seventh puelmer phasefighter, they automatically begin to fuse their energy generation, their azure energy shields, their computing systems and sensor systems. This will not only make them tougher and more resistant against our attacks, but it can also enable them to fire transphasic energy weapons at a power level that far exceeds the damage output of a quasi-first-class mech! The mechs that had been struck by the super energy beam attack were actually struck down by a strike that even first-class multipurpose mechs would struggle to resist!"

All Melkor knew when he heard that was that none of the mechs under his command could withstand such a powerful strike!

He briefly checked the conditions of the mechs and mech pilots affected by the devastating enemy strike.

The second-class mechs had been severed apart to the point where the cockpits outright vaporized with their mech pilots still inside!

The quasi-first-class mechs managed to fare a lot better, but they sustained so much damage that they were no longer able to participate in the ongoing battle.

The ones equipped with stronger azure energy shields and thicker armor were able to limp away under their own power.

The other quasi-first-class mechs that were too heavily slanted towards offensive clearly suffered a lot more crippling damage due to their inadequate defenses.

Fortunately, many of the mech pilots still managed to survive thanks to their well-shielded cockpits. They were able to eject without a problem as their rear side had not suffered as much thermal damage as the front side.

to intercept and down our clansmen!"

Whether the cockpits would make it back was uncertain, but Melkor was forced to shift his attention to the elite puelmer phasefighters.

The quirky alien race had brought 21 in total. They had already formed into 3 combination gunships, with each of them outputting elevated energy emissions that far surpassed that of any individual mech or phasefighter!

The good news was that the combination gunship that just launched a huge attack did not appear to be capable of discharging such a powerful attack in a short amount of

time.

It had retracted its super positron cannon and instead began to use a multitude of regular phasefighter cannons to launch a multiple of weaker and more manageable

attacks.

The gunship still remained dangerous and difficult to deal with, but as long as it was not able to eliminate a lot of quasi-first-class mechs in a single sweep, then its threat level had dropped to a more reasonable level.

There were two other combination gunships. They both shared similar aesthetics, but were mounted with different modules developed and installed by the puelmer fighter pilots themselves.

Melkor could not underestimate their power. He distinctly gained the impression that the puelmers had purposefully tried to develop a solution that relied on a greater scale in order to more effectively resist expert mechs!

"It's so obvious, but none of us ever thought about it before because our thinking has always been constrained by the MTA and RA's rules and limitations on the sizes of mechs." Melkor figured out. "The native aliens aren't subject to those rules, and they don't have a strong bias to the current size range for mechs. It is pretty logical for them to explore the concept of slightly larger craft such as gunships in order to develop a more convenient anti-mech solution. The aliens are evolving their strike craft doctrines!"

Even though there were merely three of the combination gunships on the battlefield at the moment, their impact was nothing less than a low-tier expert mech due to their much stronger attack and defenses!

Their mobility had taken a big hit, though. Their forward acceleration had improved by a notable extent, but their turning radius and responsiveness had deteriorated by a large extent, causing them to become vulnerable to flanking attacks.

The aliens were not stupid, though. Soon enough, the three combination gunships became surrounded by a large escort of regular phasefighters!

This made it much harder for the mechs of the Larkinson Clan to storm them with melee mechs or wear them down from a distance with ranged mechs.

Although Melkor had already issued a set of new orders, the mechs tasked with trying to get past the screen and disable the combination gunships struggled to produce

results.

While the Fey Fiannas, Valkyrie Redeemers, Red Axes, Second Swords, Storm Swords and so on were able to chew through regular phasefighters at a decent pace, they were all bogged down by the cannon fodder.

While there were ranged mechs that were able to gain an unobstructed angle towards one of the three combination gunships, their attacks were akin to drops in an ocean as the combined energy defenses of 7 puelmer phasefighters easily resisted these

incidental strikes!

This put the combination gunships in a perfect position to strike back! Equipped with the latest stolen human and alien technologies, the combination gunships strafed every mech in their sights with a diverse combination of laser beams,

positron beams, graser beams, plasma bolts, electrical bolts, gauss projectiles, micro-missiles and even more exotic weapons.

Not only were most of these weapons as powerful as the ones used by real first-class multipurpose mechs, but the puelmer combination gunships were scarily accurate in their weapons fire!

The puelmers had always been infamous for possessing better targeting systems and fire control systems than the other alien races.

Their warships were able to track and predict the movements of mechs better than

every race, including red humans!

The gunships had not reached that exaggerated level, but they came pretty close.

"These gunships are shredding our mechs apart!"

"It's like we're fighting against three expert mechs!"

"Their power reactors are much better than ours! They won't run out of energy anytime soon. If we do not eliminate them right away, most of us will die!" Melkor grimaced. He and the rest of the Larkinsons had severely underestimated their enemies. They based the strength of this alien strike force on past encounters, which

was a mistake due to the fact that the native aliens were rapidly improving their phasefighters.

He could not see a way to overcome this acute problem through regular solutions.

Anytime he ordered his mech units to circle around and strike at the combination gunships from another angle, the aliens would react right away and make sure to send enough phasefighters to block this flanking attempt from succeeding.

If Melkor had more mechs at his disposal, then he could have overwhelmed the enemy

Unfortunately, he neither had the numbers nor the champions to turn this situation around.

At best, his mech force would be able to attain a pyrrhic victory for a battle that was ultimately not worth all of the losses.

At worst, the alien phasefighters could annihilate everyone, especially considering

that the human skirmishing forces were so dispersed from each other that reinforcements would take at least half an hour or longer to arrive!

"I can't delay this any longer." He concluded.

The only way he could think of that could turn the battle around was to deploy his spell array.

The formation anchors corresponding to a relatively simple confinement array had already been placed in the correct coordinates. The ensuing battle had only slightly

caused them to drift away from their most optimal positions.

"What should I attempt to seal with this spell array?"

If he could temporarily confine the bulk of enemy phasefighters in a sealed space generated by the spell array, then the puelmer gunships would suddenly lose much of their protective screen, making them a lot easier to attack and take down. However, if the puelmer gunships turned all of their guns onto the spell array, they could potentially overwhelm it and cause it to break down a lot sooner than intended. The same would happen if they happened to be trapped inside. It would just take

longer for them to get free as the spell array was inherently designed to prevent the people inside from breaking out of their cages.

"However, trapping fewer aliens inside the confinement array will cause the ritual to take a lot longer to complete. Can I afford to remain stuck here for so long?" Melkor tried his best to think of a good way to employ his sealing spell array. There

were no perfect solutions available, so he had to choose between two risky and suboptimal courses of action.

Should he attempt to confine a large quantity of cannon fodder craft, or should he attempt to trap the much more powerful combination gunships?

Chapter 6673 Larkinsons Outmatched

Alien phasefighters used to be considered a joke. At the start, the aliens trotted them out in order to stop mechs from surrounding and whacking their homeships with

impunity.

The alien craft performed badly because the humans were not used to fighting with strike craft to such a refined degree.

The primitive alien strike craft doctrines were adequate for the low-level conflicts that they fought between themselves, but proved completely inadequate when fighting against a race that spent four centuries perfecting the use of mechs in multiple levels of warfare!

No one considered alien phasefighters to be a joke now.

While they still possessed similar characteristics as before, their designs had improved considerably.

Their transphasic energy shields turned into more superior azure energy shields. The native aliens finally began to put more emphasis into training their fighter pilots. The many hard lessons they learned on the frontlines caused them to evolve their strike craft doctrines at a rapid pace.

The relatively small battle taking place in a specific section of an asteroid belt in the Viola Magnifica System taught red humanity that alien phasefighters had moved on from being a joke to becoming a real threat!

Even though only 21 elite phasefighters demonstrated traits that were powerful enough to overwhelm ordinary mechs, that was already more than what this contingent of the Larkinson Army could handle!

Melkor cursed under his breath. If he had been careful enough to bring an expert pilot. along, then the puelmer combination gunships wouldn't have been able to down so many mechs and end the lives of so many clansmen.

However, the expert pilots had their own responsibilities to deal with. There was no good reason to divert them to the asteroid belt where only skirmishes were supposed to take place.

The planners did not anticipate that both sides would consolidate their scattered units in order to conduct a proper fight!

Melkor partially regretted his decision to take this action. He was able to accept the destruction of living mechs. As precious as they were, the machines were generally okay with dying so long as they fulfilled their functions to the end.

What he could not accept was that his greed to strengthen his cultivation and gain the

Larkinson mech pilots.

Around a thousand Avatar, Vandal, Swordmaiden and Penitent Sister mech pilots entrusted their lives and futures to Melkor, but he had failed to lead them properly.

He underestimated the threat posed by the puelmer elite phasefighters. Their state-of-the-art hybrid human and alien tech was far beyond what a good second-class mech force could handle!

Melkor did not remain idle. He continued to issue orders and attempted to reposition the forces in an attempt to open up a chink in the alien armor, but to no avail.

The aliens not only had plenty of well-shielded cannon fodder to throw at the mechs, but the puelmer combination gunships always seemed to know which mech units posed the greatest and most acute threat.

Their scarily accurate and powerful cannon barrages regularly shattered quasi-first-class mechs or at least managed to drive them away.

The difference in firepower between the two sides was so great that it may end up deciding the outcome of this battle by itself!

This was an amazing prediction given the strength of the Larkinson mechs.

The Larkinson mechs attempted to make use of their trump cards.

The Avatars invoked numerous design spirits to give them an edge against their opponents. While their mechs did become stronger as a result, the boost was not enough to make them last longer in the face of the absolute firepower advantage by the puelmer combination gunships!

Dozens of Swordmaiden mechs came together in order to perform a battle formation, yet they had to scatter in advance as the prepared puelmer craft launch extremely potent transphasic missiles at the rigid formation of swordsman mechs!

The puelmers had proven with their tech and responses that they were not only familiar with the Larkinson Army's battle tactics, but also prepared counters to neutralize them as effectively as possible!

The Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem that Ves frequently touted as a trump card of the Larkinson Clan was having an effect.

Mech units that had cooperated and fought alongside each other for months tried to coordinate their maneuvers so that they were able to combine their forces and assert control over a large amount of E energy radiation around their formations.

They were generating pseudo-domains around themselves!

With the conscious efforts of the living mechs as well as their mech pilots, they began to produce metaphysical phenomena that no other machines could generate at this time!

most authoritative mech officers in a unit took charge of the formation and tried to leverage all of the E energy into amplifying the attacks or the defenses of mechs so that they could put up a better fight.

Mechs that previously struggled to overwhelm the defenses of phasefighters began to produce results a bit faster as their attacks destabilized the enemy azure energy shields significantly better than before.

The more creative among the mech officers tried to shape E energy into other forms, such as decoys that could attract firepower or create a translucent cat construct that was able to frighten the less experienced alien fighter pilots!

While these measures made a difference, the use of the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem only allowed the Larkinsons to narrow the gap instead of closing it

entirely!

"This isn't working! As long as those puelmer combination gunships keep making use of their advanced tech and guns, our measures aren't enough to take them down!"

The feeling of getting countered at every turn made the Larkinson mech pilots lose their confidence even faster than before.

If they weren't able to properly leverage their strengths, then how were they supposed to win this battle?

Loss of confidence was a fatal outcome in any battle!

As Commander Melkor saw that his forces were becoming increasingly more disarrayed, he realized that his soldiers were not taking this situation well.

They had rarely ended up in situations where they had lost so much initiative and control. They also weren't used to fighting without the cover of allied units or

powerful champions.

This should actually be a situation that could best stimulate the breakthrough of a desperate mech pilot, but unfortunately for the Larkinsons, no such event had

occurred by this time.

It was quite logical for their morale to drop.

Melkor felt as if he was out of his league. He not only made mistakes before the start of

this battle, but he also failed to make the right responses.

He couldn't help but suspect that if a more competent and impressive mech commander such as Saint Commander Casella Ingvar was in charge, the Larkinsons

would have been able to gain the upper hand by this time!

Was Melkor even cut out for this job?

He was just an ordinary Larkinson who rose up from his third-class roots, but never

fully managed to keep up with the brightest talents of the clan.

troops in battle more than ever he had done in the past.

"I am letting my impostor syndrome fill my head with doubts again."

He was aware that this was detrimental behavior, but he couldn't help it. Melkor was intimately familiar with this mental condition as he never felt he fully measured up compared to much more successful mech pilots and mech commanders.

In a clan that was filled with a multitude of talents who had managed to realize their potential, it was hard for relatively ordinary and mediocre Larkinsons to feel strong and capable enough to matter.

Right now, Melkor felt frozen by indecision. The only other way he could change the situation besides ordering a retreat was to activate the spell array that his mechs deployed in advance.

The problem was that he felt a lot less confident about being able to contain the enemy and complete the ritual.

The firepower of the enemy elite phasefighters exceeded his estimations. While Melkor did not understand spell arrays to a great degree, he roughly understood that the basic one that he procured from the Red Collective was not designed to resist so

much firepower!

With no good choices available to him, Melkor felt paralyzed and helpless to stop his forces from suffering a defeat at the hands of the aliens.

Getting beaten by alien phasefighters was not that uncommon nowadays. There was

not much shame in getting defeated by them. Many mech forces that were active in the frontlines had suffered losses in the past.

The Larkinson Army was different. The premier armed forces of the Larkinson Clan boasted excellent talents, superior living mechs and equipment, excellent maintenance and abundant high-level support. The Larkinson mech pilots had rarely suffered any true defeats since the start of the Red War.

Melkor did not want to contribute to the first truly catastrophic loss of the Larkinson

Army.

As the pressure of the deteriorating situation continued to weigh down on his shoulders, he suddenly froze as he made a realization.

"What am I doing?" Instead of trying to figure out a proper response to the disadvantageous situation his troops had fallen into, he was procrastinating like an incompetent idiot. This was not

what a proper mech commander should engage in at this time! Even if he harbored doubts about his qualifications to command a mech force, he needed to compartmentalize all of his distractions and deal with them after the battle

He remembered that he was not an ordinary red human. He was a Larkinson. He was a

member of the best clan in the Red Ocean! There was no way he and his fellow clansmen would allow the native aliens to drive them away like ragged beggars! An angry fire lit inside Melkor's heart. He immediately activated a communication channel and began to broadcast his words to every mech under his command! "LARKINSONS! Stand fast and do not give up! The native aliens have caught us by surprise with their amazing tech, but our mechs are not weak either! We are the vanquishers of gods! Our mech forces have managed to slay dark gods as well as native gods over the course of multiple battles in the past! Are we going to allow these

ball-shaped alien losers to trample over our dignity and tear down our pride? Not a chance! Remember who you are! We are Larkinsons! We belong to the strongest and most successful clan in the Red Ocean! Our living mechs are the envy of red humanity! Trust in your battle partners and they shall reward you with their performance. Trust

in my command and I shall lead you to victory! For the clan!"

"FOR THE CLAN!"

"For the Golden Cat!"

"FOR THE GOLDEN CAT!"

"For victory!"

"FOR VICTORY!"

Yelling a few slogans might sound trivial, but had a marvelous effect of reversing the

decline in morale and boosting everyone's spirits.

However, Melkor was well aware that the effects of his speech would only remain temporary if he did not capitalize on this momentary advantage. This was why he was ready to turn the tables on the native aliens!

"Do not lose hope, men. There is still a pathway towards victory. Be prepared to follow my commands as best as possible. We need to position our forces and the enemy forces precisely according to my new plan if we want to make our Larkinson name proud!"

Melkor did not bother to use his voice to issue verbal commands as it was too slow for his needs. He directly used his neural interface to upload a set of orders and movement commands to the different mech units that were still active on the battlefield.

Soon, hundreds of mechs and phasefighters began to shift across the asteroid-filled battlefield like moving chess pieces.

Almost every element was moving exactly as Melkor envisioned.

Chapter 6674 Costly Endeavor

Avatar Commander Melkor no longer thought about failure.

He needed to win.

He had to win.

As a Larkinson, Melkor bore the responsibility of upholding the honor and prestige of the clan.

No alien was going to kill his men and get away with it. So what if the puelmers were known as the smartest and most technologically advanced race in the Red Ocean?

Melkor was not about to let them defeat his mech force!

His brain began to heat up as he started to make a lot more calculations.

He used the processing power of his advanced Fey Fianna to help him simulate the movements of different mechs and phasefighters. He used his intuition and gut feeling to issue orders that would hopefully nudge the different elements to the locations he wanted.

The placements of every piece on the chessboard needed to close to perfect in order to produce the effect that Melkor wanted.

The most important variables that he needed to control were the three puelmer gunships.

They were in the wrong locations at the moment.

If he wanted his new plan to produce the best possible effect, then they needed to move forward and take a small turn in order to enter the range of the spell array.

In order to lure them forward, the Larkinson mechs under his command began to perform dangerous maneuvers.

As the dogfights intensified, the battle lines began to blur, causing many mechs to move back and forth around the asteroids.

The puelmer combination gunships were the exception. They only flew at a relatively low pace as they did not need to engage in any maneuvering. The surrounding phasefighter escorts blocked the vast majority of mechs trying to attack the key assets. Any ranged attacks that did manage to get past simply crashed against their powerful azure energy shields.

Melkor was not looking to defeat the combination gunships at the moment. He only wanted them to advance, and that was what they did.

The battlefield was not a static box that remained completely fixed until the battle had run its course.

battlespace constantly shifted back and forth.

Melkor had to make sure the fight drifted to the area that was most favorable to his plan. At the same time, he had to make sure that specific friendly and enemy units ended up in the right place at the right time.

It was extremely difficult to make this all happen by issuing orders alone. There were many occasions where mech units suffered losses and had to flee backwards, thereby messing up one of his arrangements. He would be forced to issue another series of orders in order to compensate for the disruptions.

The old Melkor could have never kept track of so many different units and knew what to do in order to advance his demanding plan.

This time was different. Cultivating the Commanding Controller Auxiliary Qi Cultivation Method for a number of months had vastly increased his raw cognitive capabilities. Now that he had gained more confidence in his abilities, he became more efficient and adept at ordering his subordinates around.

It also helped to have more confidence in himself. He regularly beat himself up in the past, causing him to place himself at a lower position relative to other prominent Larkinsons.

This was not a healthy mindset. Melkor was much better off if he recognized his current strengths and relied on them to work his way towards victory.

It did not take long for the situation to move towards his ideal state. If he wanted to trap a portion of the enemy phasefighters without thinking any further, then he could have activated the spell array a lot sooner.

Instead, he purposely delayed this step and waited for his mech forces to subtly position the enemy phasefighters without making the native aliens suspicious about his true intentions.

All of these demands added to the delay, causing dozens of mechs to get destroyed and more to sustain serious damage.

The longer he waited, the greater the balance of power would shift towards the enemy.

Wait too long, and the battle became unsalvageable.

Though Melkor wanted to wait longer in order to improve the variables even further, time was running out. He could not let the current situation drag on for too long.

"It's time."

Commander Melkor took a deep breath before he retrieved a special artifact. The small disc looked like a strange black dining plate, but it was actually the standard shape of a formation control artifact.

not only activated the artifact, but also allowed it to sync up with the formation anchors and trigger them online!

At the same time, he began to close his eyes and began to repeat a mantra whose meaning he did not fully understand.

The surroundings began to change as lots of E energy began to alter their behavior due to external stimuli.

The space that encompassed a part of the current battlefield immediately began to change.

Much of the space had already become less visible due to the spread of debris, the discharge of energy beams and all of the dust and pebbles that exploded from the nearby asteroids whenever they got struck.

However, as soon as the spell array went to work, visibility dropped even further as a strange white mist began to develop numerous mechs and phasefighters.

They were all pulled into the confinement array, which had taken on the shape of a giant cube!

Everything that happened to fall inside this giant cube of white mist had lost complete contact with friends that had been left outside of the confinement spell array.

With just a single move and a lot of preparations, Melkor successfully sowed confusion while also splitting the enemy force in half!

The alien fighter pilots did not understand what they were dealing with! The ones caught outside of the mysterious spell array quickly disengaged from the human mechs and tried to make sense of the area that had become engulfed in white mists.

They soon found out that the mists was a byproduct generated by especially high concentrations of E energy!

What was also interesting was the units that became engulfed by the mysteriously impenetrable white mists.

Over two-thirds of the standard alien phasefighters had disappeared!

That was not all. A more serious consequence was that one of the combination

gunships had also been swallowed up by the mists!

As for the humans, only a quarter of the mechs in the field had disappeared into the strange white mist, and nearly all of them consisted of Avatar and Swordmaiden

mechs!

They were the strongest and most formidable mechs when fighting at close range.

The Redaxes, Second Swords, Storm Swords and Stormblade Samurais and so on would clearly fare a lot better in a tighter and more confined space than any ranged

mech!

This suggested that the white mists was not a natural phenomenon, but was instead generated by the humans!

The aliens began to open fire on the mists. They made sure to shoot the edges and the far sides of their targets for fear of causing friendly fire, but these disruptions were beginning to make it a lot more difficult for Melkot to control and sustain the spell

array!

"Intercept the phasefighters that have remained behind!" Melkor barked. "You don't have to go for the kill, but just keep them occupied so that they don't shoot at the spell array from the outside. The one that is currently deployed is not that great and is known to be vulnerable to external shocks. Do not let the puelmer combination gunships fire all of their guns at this active array!"

It would be hard to force the deadly alien gunships from focusing their multitude of

weapon barrels at the obvious target. The only way to force them to aim their guns in another direction was for the remaining mechs to fly forward and threaten to hack their way past the azure energy shields.

That was what the Larkinsons were doing. The Penitent Sisters jumped at this opportunity to 'serve their penance'. Their origins and traditions compelled them to do the jobs that required the greatest sacrifice.

Their Valkyrie Redeemers and Maidens of Adversity were no longer in the best conditions anymore, but they still tried to force their way past the phasefighter screen and threaten the two remaining puelmer combination warships!

Although their assignments were extremely risky, they managed to pressure the alien phasefighters without suffering too many losses at this time.

The alien phasefighters that were left outside of the confinement array were unable to repl their opponents with as much ease as before!

This profoundly changed the dynamic of the battlefield.

The remaining two combination gunships had lost a significant portion of firepower.

It no longer became as unbearable for human mechs to approach their positions as before!

What was also impactful was that many of the escort phasefighters disappeared as well!

By locking away two-thirds of the enemy phasefighters, the remaining third were much less numerous than before.

Since their numbers had dropped by such a large extent, they were unable to provide effective screening for the two remaining gunships as before.

The ranged mechs of the Larkinson Army were able to focus their fire onto the priority targets much easier this time!

and tried to occupy the enemy screening elements as much as possible! While the battle outside of the confinement spell array had yet to swing decisively

towards the Larkinsons, they had definitely gained an advantage this time!

"It's working! There's not as much cannon fodder in the way this time." "We need to take out a combination gunship as soon as possible. Even if two of them

are left, their damage output is still too great!"

More and more mechs tried to bypass the diminished number of phasefighters and attack the elite puelmer craft directly!

Now that the Larkinson melee mechs were finally able to get close, they were able to subject the alien gunships to space suppressors.

This had a very noticeable effect on the layered azure energy shields of the two combination craft!

Their defenses weakened significantly, causing every sword strike and energy beam attack to inflict much more effective damage than before.

Even though the melee mechs came under heavy attack as they circled around the two alien gunships, their mech pilots chose to persist as long as possible in order to make the greatest possible contributions.

Even if their living mechs shattered into pieces and their lives came under threat, the

Larkinson mech pilots gritted their teeth and drew out all of their potential just to keep them active for a few seconds longer!

The desperate and costly measures were taking effect.

Since the mechs focused all of their efforts on just one of the gunships, its defenses deteriorated at an alarming speed to the puelmers.

Eventually, its energy defenses broke, causing the high-tech frames to become

exposed!

The puelmer fighter pilots apparently panicked, because they hastily split up from each other and fled in different directions!

"Hunt them down! Do not let a single of those craft escape!" Although the high-quality materials used by the puelmers caused their phasefighters

to resist attacks a lot better than usual, their relatively thin armor ultimately doomed

them to a quick demise!

"We did it! Our pressure has instantly dropped by half! We need to finish off the other

one as well."

The Larkinsons outside of the spell array finally felt relief now that they had tilted the balance further in their favor.

revenge on the remaining combination gunship that was left outside!

Melkor no longer paid much attention to what was taking place around the spell array. This was because he became much more concerned about the conditions inside.

The melee mechs that had been trapped alongside the alien phasefighters initially gained an advantage, but the confined aliens quickly made adjustments and had begun to fight back with all of their power!

Chapter 6675 Confinement Spell Array

The humans and alien craft that got caught in the spell array found themselves in a very different space than before.

Somehow, the E energy radiation around them exhibited completely different behavior. Instead of flowing passively from Messier 87 to outward directions, it had instead begun to form into complicated loops that caused them to change the surrounding space and produce all kinds of unclear effects.

While the humans had been warned in advance of what they should expect, the aliens enjoyed no such luxury.

The pilots initially became confused by how they ended up in a space filled with mist. While the density of this strange and insubstantial fog was not as severe inside the spell array, it reduced the range and effectiveness of all of their sensors.

Of more concern was the total cutoff of communications with the alien units located outside of this strange area.

When the phasefighters attempted to fly away in order to escape the confusing mist, they found that they weren't actually getting away!

Their sensors and positioning systems started to make all kinds of illogical observations. Despite traveling in somewhat straight trajectories, the craft somehow ended up looping around so that they passed by the same asteroids as before!

This was impossible!

Had a phase lord arrived and contorted this area of space into a closed loop? That shouldn't be possible given that no obvious spatial activity had occurred. The aliens were highly familiar with this series of phenomena and would have known if they were being affected by the power of a native god.

The humans must have employed a powerful trick. That quickly became the consensus among the alien fighter pilots.

The puelmer fighter pilots of the sole combination gunship that got pulled into the strange space gathered the most data and conducted a rapid analysis.

They were the first aliens to conclude that if they wanted to break out of this human trap, they should open fire at their surroundings and attempt to overwhelm the effect that trapped them in the same volume of space!

It was best if they concentrated their attacks in a single direction of coordinate so that they could quickly overwhelm whatever invisible barrier kept them contained! Although the theories formed by the puelmer fighter pilots were not completely correct, their solution happened to be the second-best choice they could make!

the key nodes or weak points of the active spell array, then they should be able to cause enough disruptions at critical junctions to produce a cascade of failures, thereby unraveling the entire spell array with minimal effort!

However, the native aliens shouldn't have brought such an expert along. The best they could do was to rely on brute force and fire lots of hyper weapons to disturb the flow of E energy radiation.

This process took a lot longer and wasted a lot more resources, but it would still be effective in this case due to the rudimentary quality and properties of the spell array! It couldn't be helped. The Red Collective had only begun to develop spell arrays relatively recently. None of its formation masters were any better than apprentices in their new and unfathomable craft.

In fact, it was not as if Melkor could make use of stronger spell arrays anyway. The entire point of deploying the confinement spell array was to conduct a ritual that would allow him to become a proper combat spell array master.

With that in mind, Melkor had to do two things at the same time.

He had to devote a significant portion of his concentration to verbally repeating a mantra while constructing a specific artistic conception in his mind.

The legion commander also had to actively control the active spell array.

The experience was rather weird and disorientating, but not as much as he expected. If he had to describe it, his control over the spell array was probably similar to that of piloting a Carmine mech, though he had never done that in person.

The descriptions vaguely matched. With that in mind, Melkor quickly tried to leverage his decades long experience as a mech pilot to get past the novelty and try to operate the spell array as quickly as possible.

He was beginning to make progress. He found that he could obtain a vague panoramic view of the three-dimension space that encompassed the confinement array.

He then found out that he could perform basic operations, such as reinforcing the containment barrier in a specific direction so that it could resist more violent and disruptive attacks.

What he found more useful was the ability to increase the density of the disorienting fog. This decreased the detection range of the enemy phasefighters even further, causing them to miss the mechs that were not all that far away from their positions.

"This confinement array is a lot more useful than I thought."

The ability to blind the perception of the enemy to this extent was quite powerful, though he knew it wouldn't work against more powerful entities that possessed proper defenses against these kinds of effects.

puelmer phasefighters might be great at detecting enemies in conventional space, but they were not equipped to counter an effect that the ball-shaped aliens had never encountered in the past!

Melkor found that he could do more with the array, but he lacked the proficiency, knowledge and cultivation to be able to make use of them at this time.

For example, if he was better able to master the operation of the array, he could selectively kick a friendly or hostile unit out of the spell array.

He could also allow for friendlies to pass by unobstructed while leaving any designated enemies trapped in the same space!

However, Melkor was still far from reaching that point. He also needed to get his

hands on a more powerful and advanced spell array to be able to do a lot of nifty stuff such as isolating every enemy phasefighter in their own isolated cages so that they could be defeated in sequence.

All in all, the world of qi formations had a lot of potential. While Melkor believed that the native aliens would eventually wise up and develop their own countermeasures against them, red humanity should always remain several steps ahead!

Instead of fantasizing about how he would be able to manipulate the battlefield once he became a stronger combat spell array master, Melkor needed to focus on his current priorities.

He largely disregarded what was taking place outside of the spell array and focused on continuing the ritual while directing the mechs inside to attack the confused

phasefighters.

While he was straining to exert more control over the spell array, he suddenly thought.

about using his companion spirit to enhance his connection.

The Jonas exited his head and entered the formation control artifact.

The idea actually worked!

As an energy-based lifeform, the feline companion spirit was able to interface with

the active spell array much easier!

Melkor found that Jonas was able to exert a bit more control over the spell array due to his inherent advantages.

It was like Melkor was struggling to see in the dark, only for a cat to be able to look at his surroundings as if he was in daylight!

The legion commander took advantage of this convenience and began to direct the trapped Avatar and Swordmaiden mechs to attack the phasefighters.

At this time, the spell array was already beginning to expose a few faults. The sustained attacks from all of the trapped phasefighters as well as the combination

A spell array wouldn't be able to fare much better. It was only due to its unconventional nature and properties that its containment was not fully susceptible to material attacks.

This was why the mechs couldn't arrive too soon. When the powerful melee mechs came close enough for the aliens to detect their approach, it was already too late for the targeted craft to evade!

The mechs did not attempt to attack all of the enemy phasefighters at once.

Instead, they grouped up and charged at only a fraction of the enemy craft at a time. By ganging up on their chosen targets, the defenses of the latter quickly succumbed due to a combination of powerful transphasic attacks as well as the effect of multiple overlapping space suppression fields.

The cannon fodder phasefighters did not last more than a few seconds. Once their azure energy shields popped, their metallic frames quickly got torn to pieces!

"Get out!"

The mechs did not turn their weapons against the other phasefighters, but instead turned around and disengaged!

The alien fighter pilots instinctively attempted to pursue, but the disorienting environment of the confinement array made it difficult to keep track of the fleeing

mechs!

Melkor tried his best to intervene. He and Jonas tried to manipulate the internal space so that not all of the phasefighters would be able to maintain pursuit.

As a few seconds passed, a few phasefighters found themselves flying off-course. They suddenly became separated from the main elements and lost sight of the fleeing mechs as well!

As the phasefighters attempted to turn around and fly back in order to seek refuge in numbers, a contingent of Avatar mechs suddenly charged in from the flanks and overwhelmed the phasefighters!

Though the phasefighters tried to put up a good fight, the mechs held the initiative and their pilots were more than experienced enough to capitalize on this advantage! Melkor repeated this trick multiple times. This wouldn't have worked if the veteran Avatar and Swordmaiden mech pilots hadn't been instructed on what to do in advance.

All of the prior planning and preparations paid off big time. The trapped phasefighters were beginning to lose more and more of their numbers while the Larkinson mechs managed to minimize their own losses!

This was all because of the fact that the spell array had trapped the phasefighters in an environment that was under his effective control!

"This is rather fun!"

Melkor fell in love with qi formations. If he could repeat these kinds of feats on a larger

scale in the future, then he would dedicate his remaining life towards his chosen qi cultivation method and become a master at deploying and controlling these wonderful

spell arrays!

"Damn, the aliens aren't taking the bait anymore!"

After repeated cycles of hit and run attacks, the Larkinson mech units found that their enemies no longer dared to pursue the annoying machines.

It was clear that doing so would only cause them to get split up and defeated in detail!

The puelmer fighter pilots most likely deduced that rather than play into the hands of

their human enemies, it was better to turn their remaining guns against the spell array and break it as quickly as possible! Melkor could not allow this to come to pass!

The ritual had made a lot of progress. He could feel that he had repeatedly jumped

closer to getting started in his new qi cultivation method every time a bunch of aliens

died.

"Change of plans!"

The Avatar and Swordmaiden mechs no longer tried to defeat the trapped enemy

strike craft by chipping away at their numbers.

They understood the urgency of the situation and boldly committed to a full assault,

causing them to charge at the phasefighters with the intent to draw their weapons away from their breaching attempt and direct their firepower elsewhere!

"It's working!"

"We're getting hammered, though! We've managed to kill plenty of phasefighters, but they still outnumber us. They also have the support of their powerful combination gunship!"

Both sides began to suffer a lot of casualties. Melkor winced whenever he sensed the

death of a Larkinson mech pilot, but he persevered, knowing that this was an unavoidable aspect of warfare.

Though Melkor did not intend for this to happen, the demise of those clansmen boosted the progress of his ritual even further.

It was working its way towards completion at a much faster rate than he expected!

Before he knew it, the ritual had finally reached its apex!

"It's coming!"

The entire spell array shuddered as Melkor suddenly felt as if he was able to

Chapter 6676 Melkor the Sealing Master

From the moment Melkor's ritual succeeded, his mind and spirit exploded.

He immediately felt as if a hidden part of himself had accumulated so much energy that it opened itself up to the universe!

He immediately began to attract a large amount of E energy radiation, thereby generating an energy vortex that visibly affected the surrounding space!

That was not all. His ongoing connection with the confinement spell array allowed him to use it as an additional source of E energy!

At the cost of reducing its strength, Melkor was able to speed up his breakthrough process and strengthen his new foundation as a combat spell array master considerably faster than usual.

This was the benefit of using a shortcut to get started in the Combat Spell Array Master Qi Cultivation Method. The Red Collective definitely knew its business when it came to optimizing this kind of stuff.

As Melkor's essence changed on a fundamental level due to the absorption of so much E energy, his artistic conception quickly became more powerful and real.

The artistic conception was based around the image of a spell array. In fact, it shared a great resemblance to the confinement spell array that he used to promote his breakthrough into a formal qi cultivator!

This had massive implications for Melkor. His artistic conception became the focal point of his qi cultivation and would have a great influence on his affinities, abilities and inclinations.

One of the consequences of forming an artistic conception around a sealing spell array was that his affinity for this type of qi formation rose massively.

This was why he could immediately feel a much greater sense of closeless and compatibility with the confinement spell array!

He was already beginning to take advantage of this by strengthening its effect, making it harder for the distressed alien phasefighters to break out of the cage by attacking the mists in a single direction!

If Melkor had not broken through, then the probability was high that they could have broken out by now, but because his control of the array improved so much, he was able to fortify its defenses past its normal performance!

He was even able to exceed the standard control options and perform changes that were outside of the normal bounds of the spell array. This allowed him to strengthen the containment in one direction at the cost of weakening the other directions.

single direction might break the confinement spell array, but it was too bad that Melkor was able to respond much better to this measure than before!

"This is amazing." He sighed as he continued to marvel at his increase in strength and capabilities.

His improvement in cultivation also expanded his mind by a considerably larger degree than he expected.

He felt as if his mind suddenly expanded in a nearly physical sense as he could recall many more memories, keep track of ten times more variables and speed up his calculation speed by who knew how many times!

It was as if he had truly turned into an organic processor, all without relying on artificial implants and augmentations!

"Is this what it is like to be a mech designer or an engineer?"

His sudden expansion in cognitive capabilities caused him to view reality from a much different perspective than before.

He found that he became more analytical and data-driven. His perception improved as well, allowing him to more intuitively estimate the dimensions, mass and density of different objects.

He was even able to perceive the flow of E energy radiation a lot better than before. Melkor could also feel that he could manipulate it with the help of his newly established foundation as a combat spell array master!

He had read about this in the extensive notes about the ritual and the qi cultivation method.

Combat spell array masters could be divided into further categories.

There were general array masters that could work equally with every type of qi formation.

Then there were specialists who purposefully chose to specialize in using one classification of spell array.

Melkor had chosen to become the latter because he would rather excel in one area than become mediocre in all areas. He was done with staying unexceptional.

Having spent so much time in the Larkinson Clan, he had long figured out that the most successful talents tended to dedicate themselves towards a single pursuit above all else.

They were quite clever and self-aware about their strengths and weaknesses. They knew not to be too greedy and purposefully narrowed the scope of their progression in order to make sure they could make the greatest contributions to the clan. Even Ketis was an example of this despite pursuing two non-overlapping careers. maximized the synergies between her two professions to the greatest possible extent! Melkor did not regret the decision to specialize in scaling-type spell arrays. The ritual demanded the use of a spell array, so he could not become a general spell array master from the onset.

The only way to become this was to follow the normal process, but that took way too long and demanded too much book learning.

In contrast, upon breaking through, Melkor understood so much more about sealing spell arrays than a few minutes prior.

He not only mastered the existing theories that he studied beforehand, but also understood truths and concepts that he had not formally studied!

This was amazing, and was a testament to the power and efficacy of the ritual!

It appeared that Melkor had pulled it off at a high standard. Not only did he manage to confine hundreds of trained soldiers, but a proportion of them also died inside the

spell array.

This included the living mechs!

Though Melkor should have felt guilty about taking advantage of the deaths of his own clansmen to fuel his cultivation, he was way too ecstatic about gaining true power to

let this inconvenient fact ruin his mood.

"I have just become a sealing master!"

From today onwards, Melkor felt confident in his ability to deploy and operate all of the sealing arrays that the Red Collective managed to develop up to this point.

There were ones that could encompass a much greater volume of space, potentially allowing him to entrap an entire alien warfleet!

There were also ones that were much stronger than the basic spell array that he was limited to using at the start.

Then there were spell arrays that provided much finer and more precise control. They may even include features that were characteristic of other types of spell arrays!

However he was unable to leverage the latter effects as well as sealing.

This was the price he paid for committing to a specialization.

He was aware that there were many other nifty spell arrays that could launch attacks, resist attacks, generate convincing illusions and even heal wounded people. He was not prohibited from making use of them, but he wouldn't be able to deploy them as quickly and use them as smoothly as other types of spell array masters.

If there was no one else available than Melkor, then letting him make use of an attack or defense qi formation was better than nothing.

Melkor could focus on what he was good at while leaving other types of spell arrays to other qi cultivators.

He was perfectly fine with committing to sealing-type spell arrays.

In his opinion, the ones that focused on attack were redundant because mechs and warships could already output much more damage than all but the most extravagant

attack spell arrays.

The ones that focused on defense were probably perfect for protecting structures, towns and warships. Melkor actually felt tempted to specialize in them instead, but he ultimately concluded

that a function that could easily be replicated with technology was not worth investing in, at least for the time being.

Perhaps formation masters may be able to develop more unique and innovative defensive spell arrays that could guard against enemies in more effective ways, but Melkor did not want to rely on such a passive means of qi manipulation. The spell arrays that focused on illusions could produce many strange and weird effects. The confinement spell array had minor illusionary properties by generating mists that could scramble most sensors, but they could easily be negated with the right techniques or equipment.

More powerful and advanced illusory spell arrays were not so easy to defeat. They were among the most difficult to detect and guard against. Most targets probably wouldn't even notice that they had entered into the wrong area.

From what Melkor learned from the Red Collective, illusory spell arrays could employ

many devious tricks onto their victims. They ranged from hiding entire structures or warships out of any form of observation, mistaking allies for enemies, distort the perception of time so that much more of it passed in reality than they thought and hypnotize targets into committing actions that they would never do if they were

sober!

Though Melkor felt incredibly attracted to these effects, he ultimately felt a little put off by their evil vibe.

Only those who possessed a compatible mindset would be able make the most out of illusory spell arrays. Melkor could easily see an individual like Ves make use of illusions to fool his opponents, but a more rigid and straightforward personality like Jannzi was completely unsuitable for this approach!

According to his own sensibilities, he felt that he might actually have a high compatibility towards utility spell arrays.

These were generally helpful and relatively harmless qi formations that could provide

a myriad of positive effects.

The ability to promote physical recovery or observe a meeting between alien commander multiple light-hours or even light-years away could be incredibly valuable over the course of the Red War!

Yet Melkor ultimately felt it was better for a non-combatant to take up this

specialization.

He wanted to become a combat spell array master in order to gain more agency on

the battlefield.

This ultimately led him to specialize in sealing spell arrays.

The ability to confine the movements of enemies was an invaluable capability. It was

also very hard for modern human technology to replicate these effects on a wider

scale. Melkor also felt more attracted by the other possible functions of sealing spell arrays.

He had already learned that the Red Collective's own formation masters were working hard to develop spell arrays that could seal space, thereby weakening every form of phasewater technology and spatial manipulation.

The formation masters were also working on spell arrays that could remove alien

spacers from their warships, prohibit the use of energy weapons, disable flight and

more!

Best of all, once Melkor became a domain shaper, he could use his artistic conception

to deploy a weaker version of a sealing spell array into reality by using his inherent powers alone!

This was one of the benefits of specializing in this type of array!

There was no need for him to deploy any formation anchors beforehand! Of course, the range and power of this innate spell array was only a fraction as

powerful as the real deal. Melkor could only gain enough power to protect himself,

and only if his enemies weren't too strong.

It was better than nothing.

A true formation master ultimately had to rely on preparation and planning in order

to make the most out of his capabilities. He was never meant to fight against enemies on the spot.

Melkor was completely okay with that. He already experienced the power of a sealing

master today, and he had become completely enthusiastic about what he could do in the future! "First, I need to finish off these enemies." He reminded himself.

Once he pulled himself out of the high of his own breakthrough, he became more

aggressive in controlling the active confinement spell array. Enough Larkinsons had died today! Melkor was not about to let any more of his

#### Chapter 6677 The Cost of Spell Arrays

After Melkor broke through and became the only combatant of the first major cultivation rank on the battlefield, the entire dynamic of the skirmish had taken a decisive turn.

The native aliens had already fallen into a disadvantage after getting split into two without warning and losing much of their cannon fodder phasefighters.

The destruction of one of their puelmer combination gunships had caused the enemies to lose one of their trump cards, while the other two combination craft were currently under heavy siege!

Although their powerful first-class armaments devastated many of the melee mechs that attempted to wear down their overlapping azure energy shields, the gunships were not able to cope with so many quasi-first-class mechs at once!

"Slaughter these puelmer bastards!"

"Vengeance for the fallen!"

"Teach these aliens that our clan never loses!"

No matter whether it was the combination gunship that was located inside or outside of the active spell array, the Larkinson mechs swooped in on them with righteous fury and prevented them from escaping!

From the moment they became affected by over a dozen space suppression fields at once, much of their attacks and defenses became a lot feebler.

In the end, both combination warships chose to split apart from each other, causing them to splinter into 7 smaller vessels that subsequently fled in multiple directions.

There was no way the Larkinson mechs were willing to let these puelmers bastards get back alive after all of the mechs and clansmen they killed!

"Pursue!"

"WAIT!" Melkor sent out a priority transmission! "Back off! Their power reactors are heating up. Their safeties have been overridden. They are about to explode!"

The warning could not come too soon. Many of the melee mechs had already begun to fly away before 14 elite puelmer craft simultaneously self-destructed!

This was the most correct decision that their fighter pilots had made. There was no way any of the craft would be able to overcome the blockade of all of the mechs that surrounded them from every angle.

Since the puelmer fighter pilots were about to die, they may as well take as many enemies down with them as possible, and there was no better moment than now when there were so many mechs in their vicinity.

The early warning helped, but the power reactors used to feed all of the advanced energy-hungry systems along with the remaining energy reserves of the elite phasefighters were akin to energy bombs by themselves.

When the puelmers deliberately induced all of these parts to blow up in the most violent way possible, their final gestures shattered the armor of many melee mechs that failed to get away in time!

A handful of machines suffered so much damage that there was nothing intact in their highly deformed mech frames. Their cockpits automatically ejected their mech pilots at the highest possible speed in order to prevent the pilots from suffering the same fate!

Melkor winced a bit when he saw how much damage just 21 puelmer elite phasefighters had inflicted on his forces.

While the puclmers had the backing of cannon fodder from other native alien races, the fact remained that this skirmish had pressed the Larkinson forces under his command a lot harder than they should have been capable of doing.

It appeared that the latest wave of reinforcements consisted of much stronger assets than usual!

Though costly, the decision to confront the native alien phasefighters head-on in this asteroid belt was ultimately the right decision.

The Avatar Commander and his forces had gathered detailed up-to-date intelligence about the latest technological advancements that the puelmer race managed to realize.

If the puelmers had brought more of their sophisticated elite phasefighters, or if the elite phasefighters developed by other races possessed similar advantages, then the decisive battle that was on the horizon would probably be a lot more hard-fought than everyone expected!

This was a concern for later. For now, Melkor needed to consolidate his gains and clean up the battlefield.

Though both sides had suffered severe losses, the native aliens had lost the only reason why they remained competitive in the battle.

Without the oppressive combination gunships, the remaining phasefighters lacked the strength and the numbers to overcome the battered but vengeful Larkinson mechs! There was no need for Melkor to keep the confinement spell array active anymore. He chose to deactivate it in order to prevent it from suffering any further strain.

He already knew that the formation anchors had suffered damage as they struggled to resist the earlier attacks. They had paid the price to contain so many powerful attacks. He did not look forward to retrieving them and inspecting the damage. He

developed an attachment to the very first spell array that he deployed in battle.

While the mysterious white mist quickly cleared up, the additional clarity did not provide much relief to the alien fighter pilots.

Their leaders had perished!

Without the strength and the leadership of the puelmer fighter pilots, the rem aliens lacked the authority, rank and gravitas to command the remaining alien

phasefighters!

It was situations like these where the quality of soldiers became most pronounced.

If the Larkinsons ended up in this situation, then they would have appointed one of their own as a temporary commander without a problem. Letting anyone take charge was better than letting everyone run like headless chickens.

The clansmen also shouldn't have too many problems with following orders due to their strong trust and camaraderie towards each other.

No matter what, even if a battle had taken a turn for the worse, it would take much more extreme conditions for the Larkinson mech pilots to lose all semblance of order! Commander Melkor temporarily set aside most of his thoughts related to becoming a combat spell array master and focused on his more immediate leadership duties. He made sure to dismantle the resistance of the enemy phasefighters as much as possible while keeping any further losses to a minimum.

Once the eager Avatar, Swordmaiden, Penitent Sister mechs managed to break apart most of the phasefighters, the battle was all but over.

Melkor instructed the Vandal mechs to pursue the remaining stragglers that were desperately fleeing away before instructing the remaining intact mech units to set up patrols and perform search and rescue operations.

It was only after the Light Hunter mechs of the Flagrant Vandal Mech Legion reported that no other enemy phasefighters were present in the surroundings that he relaxed

for a bit.

He did not dare to lower his guard entirely in case there were secret stealthed archships lurking around, but it was unlikely that those ships would bother to enter

the asteroid belt.

"We've won, sir." Captain Sara Koltov of the Flagrant Vandal transmitted. "We annihilated the alien phasefighters, but we're down to less than half our mechs. This is not an ideal victory, but it is the best we can get in the Red War." Commander Melkor did not feel this was anything worth celebrating about.

"How many of our mech pilots who piloted those destroyed machines managed to preserve their lives?"

"Too much, but it could have been worse, sir."

"We paid too great of a price just to take down 21 puelmer elite phasefighters." The Avatar Commander bitterly said. "I suppose we managed to get ahead according to the calculus of war, but it doesn't feel this way."

"At least you managed to become a formation master. We have all seen what you have

been able to do by yourself. What you have done is a feat that not even an expert pilot can do. If you can do this again but on a larger scale during the next big fight, then you can definitely teach the aliens a hard lesson."

"It's not that simple, captain. Melkor corrected the Vandal mech officer. "Do you know how many merits it took to redeem the cultivation method? Do you know how much MTA credits our clan had to spend in order to commission the production of the formation anchors? I won't bore you with the specifics, but this single set of formation anchors costs millions of MTA credits."

"Oh."

"You get what you paid for." Melkor begrudgingly admitted. "You have to understand that it is really amazing to be able to deploy a sealing spell array over a large volume of space. Large as in relative to human size, not strike craft size. It was also able to withstand a lot of punishment, far more than what a typical army of footsoldiers can produce. This was a spell array that overwhelmingly relied on the use of high-grade hyper materials to perform so well. This is the only way to make it effective in a battle like this. It is too fragile and limited in scope to be de 1 in a larger battle or in a

fight involving many more first-class combat assets" "Oh. That is disappointing to hear. Does that mean that your nifty spell arrays are only useful in the Middle Zones and the Lower Zones, and only in smaller engagements?"

"Not exactly, captain. This is just what I am capable of at the start. If I have time to progress my cultivation, learn more theories and order more advanced spell arrays, I can do the stuff that you mentioned. The latter can get very expensive, though. I am not a full formation master, so I can't make my own spell arrays. Training other Larkinsons as formation masters won't help too much because the biggest reason why the costs are so high is that it takes serious money to acquire the raw materials." "So you are suffering the same problem as many other first-raters. There are too many buyers and not enough sellers."

"Correct." Melkor sighed. "It all comes down to resources. This is why we are fighting so hard to defend the frontlines. If we are getting pushed back, then we will not only lose access to the

resource-rich star systems in the vicinity, but also expose the star systems further in the rear to native alien incursions. Once these new locations are turned into battlefields, it is no longer viable to mine resources or produce goods anymore. That will further exacerbate our resource problems.

promote the Formation Master Series among the general population.

As it was, it was completely impossible for ordinary or even moderately wealthy civilians to become formation masters!

Despite the obvious value and demand for spell arrays and battle formations among a

growing number of far-sighted groups, it took far too much capital to raise a large

number of formation masters!

While many people may be able to justify the price given that a formation master was able to produce as much of an impact on the battlefield as an expert pilot, that

argument was only valid for wealthy parties!

Ten minutes passed as the mechs assigned to retrieve the formation anchors buried in

the surrounding asteroids returned with their precious prizes.

Melkor frowned as he studied the conditions of the anchors.

"They're almost scrapped. They can still be used, but they will probably break entirely

if they are being subjected to similar strain."

The good news was that even if the formation anchors broke, some of the high-grade

hyper materials could still be recycled and reused.

His mech forces also managed to retrieve the largest pieces of scrap from the puelmer

elite phasefighters.

The Larkinsons could have earned a much greater profit if it managed to preserve much of the integrity of these high-tech phasefighters, but the pilots had been too vengeful to hold back at the time.

Melkor did not blame the pilots. He hadn't issued any orders to capture them intact.

"Be prepared to leave this site after we complete our S&R operations. It is meaningless

for us to remain as we are no longer in a state to fight another battle. The native aliens will send a considerably stronger force of phasefighters to clear this sector. They are determined to sweep the entire asteroid belt as soon as possible. We do not want to be here when the next alien force arrives."

Chapter 6678 Investing in Melkor

While the human mech forces tried to delay the advance of the native aliens as much as possible, they ultimately only produced moderate results.

Many alien phasefighters went down, but the defending side also lost a higher amount of mechs than expected.

It became abundantly clear that the latest wave of reinforcements from the front consisted of phasefighters of a better generation than the ones that had been widely used in the recent past.

The technological progression of phasefighters was much faster than with mechs due to how little the native aliens initially cared about small craft.

While that caused the aliens to begin at a lower starting point, it was very easy for them to catch up to mechs and quickly implement all kinds of nifty technological solutions.

The other mech forces that had been sent to scout enemy phasefighters and skirmish them whenever possible suffered badly whenever they came across the most modern phasefighters!

People began to voice a lot of concerns when the mech forces gradually returned to the main stronghold planet.

They shared their observations and discussed the extent to which the aliens were making use of the more modern and advanced phasefighters.

The mech pilots started to suspect that the native aliens may have more surprises in store. If their elite phasefighters had already improved to this extent, then what about their warships?

The mech pilots couldn't forget about the phase lords either. Ever since the Red Tide Offensive began in earnest, many phase lords engaged in direct confrontations against human expert mechs and ace mechs.

They rarely gained an advantage as ace mechs proved to be too good in many areas. The biggest discrepancy between the two was the use of equipment.

Ace pilots always relied on the best and most cutting-edge materials and tech to amplify their combat power.

Their ace mechs were among the best and most powerful individual machines that were active in the Red War!

The phase lords on the other hand usually only wore giant garments and basic weapons and raiments that were merely adequate for their exaggerated physiques. However, that also made it easy for the native aliens to improve the gear of phase

but they could still get their hands on much better designed equipment that was not so difficult to develop and produce.

It was for these reasons and more that most of the defenders became convinced that the native aliens were probably planning to win the fight by leveraging their

technologies.

The rapid technological progression of the Red Cabal and the major alien races was making everyone feel uncomfortable.

Melkor knew his history lessons and so did most people. The history of humans during the Age of Conquest was a universal teaching subject in practically any school. It was important for people to understand where they came from and why they had grown so great.

They all knew that one of the principal reasons why humans managed to grow so quickly and surprise their complacent and arrogant alien opponents time and time again was due to their rapid technological adaptation and innovation.

Humans first started to imitate super alien technology. They learned more and more about how stuff worked, and used those insights to apply their own technological ideas and paradigms onto alien solutions.

This usually produced a lot of new results that the alien scientists and engineers had never thought about before. Humanity took advantage of this gap to push familiar alien technologies into new ground, thereby attaining a form of superiority that they weren't supposed to possess!

The explosive rise of humans in the Milky Way Galaxy was the archetypical example of how weak and technologically inferior race could ultimately vanquish over its much more powerful and developed peers.

Right now, most people began to feel as if they were in the position of the Seven Apex Races during the Age of Conquest.

Though their situations were not entirely the same, the sense of discomfort of being overtaken by aliens they used to consider technological primitives was deeply disturbing.

"Damn cosmopolitans."

Everyone blamed the human traitors for giving the native aliens so much

technological support.

A lot of red humans would have been alive today if the native aliens did not manage to upgrade their tech so quickly and in such great leaps.

While the expeditionary fleet licked its wounds and prepared for the decisive battle that was due to start tomorrow at the latest, the Avatar Commander held a talk with the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan over a secure communication channel.

to the T Institute.

The T Institute subsequently passed it on to Ves, who immediately decided to call Melkor after he became impressed by what he saw.

"I admit that I am frequently guilty of looking down on qi cultivation." Ves admitted. "High-ranking mech pilots are simply more impressive on the battlefield. It is also well-known that they are very resistant to the attacks of qi cultivators. However, that doesn't mean that people like you are ineffective against our current opponents. The ability to manipulate the battlefield to such a great extent is an amazing power and one that is well worth investing in. I have already told my personal assistant to draft a plan to set up a separate division under the T Institute that is dedicated to raising a group of formation masters. You can be a part of this division as well, Melkor." The legion commander politely smiled at Ves' projection. "I think it is a good idea for you to do that, but you should mind the cost of raising a formation master and the amount of effort it takes to become one the normal way. I would be glad to contribute to the new division once it is set up, but I can't do this on a full-time basis as I am still responsible for leading the Avatars of Myth."

Melkor was not old or weak enough yet to hang up his cape and transfer to a desk job. He was still committed to fighting the Larkinson Clan's enemies on the battlefield! "That's okay. Our clan is not large enough to support a large division centered around qi formations. I have seen how expensive those material anchors can be. We can keep this division relatively small and only raise enough formation masters to develop a limited collection of spell arrays based on the unique advantages of the Larkinson Clan. You can buy third-party spell arrays from the Red Collective or other groups if you need a function that our formation masters cannot provide. Does that sound like a good arrangement to you, Melkor?"

The legion commander nodded. "I do not have a problem with this setup. It's your money after all, so you get to decide. I just hope you don't expect me to perform miracles anytime soon. I am just starting out as a formation master. I still have much to learn and I need to spend more time on 'cultivating'"

"Neither of the two are problems as long as you have enough money and resources at your disposal." Ves' physical projection smirked back. "Always remember that as long as you are useful enough, our clan would be happy to support you. It is only fair. Spell arrays can do stuff that conventional technology cannot replicate. The same goes for battle formations. Our clan is not short on cash these days, so the burden of supporting you is not that great in my eyes."

Melkor felt a little uncomfortable about how his cousin placed so many expectations on his shoulders.

The legion commander was afraid that he would ultimately disappoint Ves and everyone else who expected the Larkinson Clan's first combat spell array master to

"Qi formations aren't as strong as you think at the moment. Most of them cannot withstand the attacks of warship gun batteries. My usefulness is severely limited during larger engagements. It is only in the smaller fights that I can make a real difference."

Ves did not look too disappointed. "Qi formations are too new for us at the moment. While I don't understand how they work, I can make a few inferences. The best way to improve the power of a spell array is to design them better and build its formation anchors out of the best hyper materials. Just like how an expert pilot needs a good expert mech to realize his potential, you will need a set of strong and well-developed spell arrays in order to protect our clan to the best of your ability. As for the time it takes for you to grow your power, the Red Collective is gradually ramping up the sale of elixirs and artifacts that can speed up your growth. I want you to achieve your second major breakthrough as fast as possible. Can you do that, Melkor?" "That will take years even if you stuff me with elixirs, Ves. If I want to become a combat spell array master that is able to deploy a qi formation with his domain alive, I would have to study and practice for a decade if not longer, and that is when my ability to think has improved by a massive extent after my breakthrough!" Melkor may have become a qi cultivator that was capable of performing genuinely powerful feats, but he still hadn't gotten rid of his impostor syndrome. He began to question his own competence again after he thought of how much he needed to work in order to reach a breakthrough that would allow him to birth his

own domain.

Despite his cognitive boost, Melkor still had little confidence in studying the full theories related to qi formations.

The borrowed texts only made him dizzy and confused. Just because his cognitive capabilities had improved by a huge extent did not mean he obtained the qualifications to work with qi formations at a higher level.

Melkor needed to study a lot of textbooks and maybe even attend virtual tutoring

sessions just to make effective use of the more advanced spell arrays. Sure, he got a formidable boost in brain power, but that sounded a lot less impressive

when it was an improvement based on his previous level of intellect.

In other words, the smarter the person, the more suited he was to become a

formation master!

Mech designers who converted to formation masters would be able to progress much

faster and produce much better results than Melkor.

While Ves had shown great willingness to use clan resources to speed up his own progression, Melkor knew that the only reason he was able to receive this extravagant benefit was due to sentiment and familiarity.

It was much less likely for Ves to be so generous to a random Larkinson.

In other words, Melkor could only establish himself as a combat spell array master in the short term by relying on nepotism rather than his own talents! "You don't need to spend so much if there are better ways for the clan to spend its money and resources. Those high-grade hyper materials are very rare, you know. We are talking about materials that are on the same level as Mentalist Crystals!" Ves briefly frowned. "That is indeed a problem, but that doesn't change my decision. It is easy enough to raise formation masters from a bunch of clever nerds, but they are too vulnerable to deploy in an active war zone. You are a veteran mech pilot and mech commander. You know how to handle yourself on the battlefield, as evidenced by your latest performance. Sure, you are not perfect, but I am not asking for that. Just focus on becoming good at deploying a set of useful spell arrays as quickly as possible. There are many wonderful uses for sealing-type spell arrays in and out of combat, and there are even more great uses for other types of qi formations. I can probably make

you a lot more powerful by designing a mech that is especially designed to complement your new capabilities!"

"Really?" Melkor blinked, though his visor blocked his expression. "You are already piloting the right kind of mech. Don't you think it is interesting if

your living fey are replaced by spell array fey? Who says that formation masters can only work with static and lifeless formation anchors?" Ves grinned.

#### Chapter 6679 Cultivator Mech Concept

When Ves spoke to his cousin Melkor about his breakthrough and other interesting experiences, he suddenly realized that he had overlooked a lucrative as well as impactful market.

What if mech pilots chose to further their evolution by committing to qi cultivation as opposed to willpower cultivation?

People who managed to become expert pilots and ace pilots would naturally be equipped with expert mechs and ace mechs appropriate to their rank and capabilities. Nobody ever believed that it was best for these powerful champions to keep piloting inferior machines that were more suited to be used by their lesser peers.

An expert pilot had to be paired with an expert mech.

An ace pilot had to be paired with an ace mech,

This was common sense in the mech industry. These rules had become so ingrained among mech pilots and mech designers that no one questioned their validity anymore. It was true that the water was wet.

He saw an opportunity that hardly any mech designer had thought about, let alone try to explore.

Ves did not blame the mech industry for this. Most of them were still unfamiliar with systematic cultivation. Their grasp on cultivation science was only a fraction as extensive as his own.

He was different. He possessed a much deeper grasp on both, and also happened to have plenty of experience with trying to incorporate systematic cultivation in his living mech designs.

Part of the reason why his seventh generation living mechs were supposed to be better than the previous generation was due to their ability to proactively guide and assist the pilot's own cultivation efforts!

Sure, Ves had only added a relatively limited auxiliary qi cultivation method to the Karma Cutter model that was supposed to help mech pilots become more perceptive of the bonds of karma, but this was already a game changer in his opinion.

Karma was a highly advanced and abstract concept that was difficult for ordinary people to get in touch with, let alone comprehend. It was very hard for people to get started without receiving expert instruction or special resources.

What made Ves proud of his Karma Cutter design was that it fulfilled both functions at once!

It was like a tutor and cultivation artifact in one. Piloting the mech should effectively reduce the difficulty threshold of learning how to perceive and weigh karma to a minimum!

Though Ves had already been thinking about expanding this nifty feature into his other mech designs, it was only now that he was thinking about using this function to benefit real qi cultivators!

Unlike mech pilots who were still young, fit and way too confident for their own good, the more mature types who lost their hope of breaking through could still become fairly powerful in other ways.

Qi cultivation was not that bad now that he learned how Commander Melkor managed to defeat a bunch of highly advanced puelmer elite phasefighters.

Ves saw immense promise in qi formations. He already concluded that the profession of formation master would one day come close to approaching the value and prestige of a mech designer!

Seeing how a bunch of static formation anchors were able to cut an enemy force in half and cause the trapped phasefighters to fight under much less favorable circumstances, Ves fully acknowledged that Melkor had become an existence that could affect the battlefield to a similar degree to an expert pilot!

Even though a 'combat spell array master' affected the flow of battle in a radically different manner from an expert pilot, the magnitudes of their impact should not be too divergent from each other?

What did this mean?

The Larkinson Clan effectively obtained another 'expert pilot-level champion! Though Melkor clearly sounded as if he understood how much more agency he obtained by gaining so much powerful capabilities, he clearly undersold his own value.

The Avatar Commander had been beating himself up for so long that it had practically become an instinct for him. Perhaps he had good reasons to keep his ego in check while he was still mediocre, but all of that had changed now that he had taken his first true step on the path to godhood.

"Melkor"

"Yes?"

"What you have been able to pull off in the previous battle is only a fraction of what you are capable of when you progress your cultivation and master more advanced techniques, am I correct?"

The Avatar Commander nodded. "That is true, but it takes time and expensive gear to make that happen."

"Melkor, the time where humans fought against each other with their bodies and cultivation alone is long over. We are a race of tool users. Leveraging technology to amplify our own capabilities has been the standard for our civilization for multiple millenia. Our clan is not so poor that we cannot afford to invest in quality equipment for people such as you. I am already thinking about designing a new classification of mech

to help you realize your full potential, I should have thought about this before. Qi cultivators can become much more powerful if they are paired with the appropriate 'cultivator mechs'!"

Melkor couldn't help but look astonished. He had not considered this idea even though he spent a lot of time agonizing over his future as a qi cultivator.

The classical image of a qi cultivator was a man wearing an elegant and exotic robe while performing feats akin to magic.

Few people would ever think about putting a wizard-type figure into the cockpit of a modern mech. The two belonged to completely different settings!

Yet because red humanity had entered the Age of Dawn, this conflicting idea had suddenly turned into a viable concept!

Ves began to grin as his inspiration injected him with new ideas. "There is no rule that states we have to stick to the classical model of qi cultivation. By merging every form of qi cultivation with artifact cultivation, we can drastically improve the survivability and potency of qi cultivators such as yourself! is such a great idea that I cannot imagine why others have failed to realize it already."

Melkor started to warm up to the idea. If he had a choice, then he would naturally welcome the possibility to amplify his combat effectiveness as a formation master by an

order of magnitude or more.

"What you just said makes so much sense to me, Ves. I have consulted with other qi

cultivators in the past, but they never thought about piloting a mech or Carmine mech. They all assumed that they could best wield their powers without relying too much on conventional technology"

"I am not surprised, Melkor. Those cultivators have all fallen into the same trap. Expert pilots require expert mechs because they are barely stronger than a well-trained infantry soldier outside of the cockpit. A qi cultivator such as you is a lot more powerful when utilizing spell arrays by yourself. This naturally produced an attitude that assumes qi cultivators don't need to bother with mechs in order to exert their power to the fullest. I believe that this is a faulty way of thinking. At the very least, we need to test my new hypothesis and gather empirical data on whether cultivator mech can significantly boost your combat effectiveness as a qi cultivator."

Melkor really wanted to work with such an experimental mech, but when he thought about the upcoming battle, his mood began to sink.

"I would love to cooperate with you, Ves, but I am afraid there is not enough time to explore this idea of yours. I need to focus on the upcoming battle. I have to work with

the assets that I have right now."

Ves snorted when he heard Melkor's words.

"Who do you think I am? We don't need to complete a full experimental mech design project in order to give you a powerful boost. I can whip up a short-term solution within

a day or less. This should be enough to give you a leg up in the upcoming battle. I will need to think further on how to design a proper cultivator mech for your specific circumstances. I will not only need to discuss this with Gloriana, but also the people of the T Institute and the Red Collective. Cultivator mechs have the potential to become a big deal considering how much easier it is for people to achieve low-level breakthroughs as qi cultivators as opposed to willpower cultivators."

Hearing that Ves could whip up a quick solution sounded great, but Melkor did not understand how the patriarch would be able to make such improvements.

"What do you have in mind for my current situation?"

"I have already studied the design and modification plan for your Fey Fianna. I understand its current condition quite well. I need to perform a close examination of the so-called formation anchors that you have been using and any theories about it that you can share with me. My goal is to figure out how to convert these formation anchors into living fey. If that is not possible due to compatibility issues, it should at least be possible to mount external thruster modules onto them and allow you to control their flight."

"Uhm, my Fey Fianna is only paired with 8 living fey at the moment. My confinement spell array can only be activated by deploying 25 formation anchors."" "That is true, but I bet you can finely control way more than 8 fey at a time." Ves guessed with a smile. "You told me that your breakthrough has caused your cognitive functions to expand by a lot, right? Your multitasking ability should have improved by a lot. How many fey do you think you can really control now that you are much stronger than

before?" Melkor frowned. "You are right. I should be able to handle many more now. What about my Fey Fianna? I know that living fey are special because the Fey Fianna is able to split. up pieces of itself and insert them into the spurs. Can my machine handle so much splintering in a short

amount of time? The previous times my Fey Fianna's capacity expanded, the people responsible for doing the work warned me that this can only be done once every few months, because we need to give the living mech time to recover

and heal."

Ves chuckled. "This is true, but only under normal circumstances. I can think of several ways to skip this healing and adaptation process. Besides, your Fey Fianna should have grown a lot more powerful as well, I know that when mech pilots break through, they release a lot of energy. Living mechs can absorb a portion of the released energies to substantially fuel their growth. I do not think the effect will be much different when it comes to the breakthroughs of qi cultivators. Don't bother telling me what you think about this. I will remotely examine your custom Fey Fianna and attempt to upgrade it

right away."

"Thank... thank you, Ves."

The Avatar Commander felt honored that the patriarch of the clan was willing to set

aside his current work schedule to figure out how to upgrade his current machine in the

short term.

The eventual result might not be as promising as a proper cultivator mech as Ves envisioned, but it was better than nothing.

"By the way, do you have other spell arrays on hand? You told me that your formation

anchors have already cracked and are close to breaking apart. If it is possible, I would rather work with the formations anchors of an untouched and undamaged spell array" The Avatar Commander shook his head. "I hate to disappoint you, but I do not have anything available. I don't think I can find anything comparable in the Viola Magnifica System as I am pretty sure that I am the only formation master in this Middle Zone." "Damn. Well, let me take a closer look at the formation anchors, then. Maybe there is a way for us to repair these artifacts..."

Chapter 6680 The Value of Different Perspectives

Ves threw himself into this side project with great interest.

He would devise a more formal mech design project around the concept of a cultivator mech in the future, but for now he was content with setting up a small experiment.

The mech designer first wanted to take a good look at the 'formation anchors' that were vital to deploying a spell array. He had never gotten in touch with them before so he was curious to see what they were like. He already formed a lot of suspicions on how they worked.

"They're pretty big" Ves commented as a handful of mechs brought them to the private workshop inside the Spirit of Bentheim,

"They have to be." Commander Melkor said. "Many of the ancient qi formations that the Red Collective managed to recover are mostly useful at the infantry scale. Their effects typically encompass a radius of hundreds of meters or maybe several kilometers. The formation anchors are also designed to be fairly small and portable. They often come in the form of small flags or pieces of rock and metal that you can easily stuff in a rucksack or whatever."

"That makes sense. A formation master has to pull them out and be able to deploy them in the field without needing lots of helpers or equipment." Ves nodded.

"There are larger versions of spell arrays. They were originally designed to provide defenses to strongholds and cities. The formation anchors are much larger and more complex, but they are able to attract much more E energy and shape them into much larger protective barriers. In fact, most of them aren't able to sustain their exaggerated effects by absorbing E energy radiation alone. Their energy demands have to be supplemented by other sources of E energy. There are references to special stones or crystals that are highly concentrated with E energy that were commonly used at the time."

"I take it that these city-grade formation anchors have formed the basis for the modern formation anchors like the one you have used."

Melkor nodded. "That is correct. They are different in multiple different ways, but they share the same root. This is because only the formation anchors that work at the scale of a city are strong enough to be useful in this age of warfare. Even then, they are still not quite up to strength in my opinion. Spell arrays are largely useless in the Upper Zones because they are too fragile. The overwhelming firepower of alien warships can break every spell array by relying on brute force alone."

If Melkor dared to use the same confinement spell array on a phase lord or a couple of powerful alien warships, then it would be no different to trying to cover a person up with a large paper bag. The individual could easily tear apart the bag in order to get rid of its effects!

Ves frowned. "When I watched the battle footage, I didn't see any sign that you needed

to rely on another source of E energy in order to power the spell array. How is it able to function so well?"

"Just because ancient cultivators used to possess a rich tradition in qi formations doesn't mean they did everything perfectly." Melkor calmly replied. "According to the Red Collective, the design and fabrication of most spell arrays left much to be desired. The formation anchors had to be handmade by the formation master and possibly his apprentices and assistants. They worked over most materials by hand. Even if their perception, precision and craftsmanship has received massive improvements due to their growing cultivation, how can they beat the precision, consistency and sophistication of modern superfabs, materializers and other production tech?"

"That makes sense." Ves nodded as he possessed a much better understanding of how modern fabrication technology can make a great difference on the quality of the output. "Our craftsmanship is much better. The materials are also a lot better as well. Our civilization's grasp in metallurgy and materials science is much stronger. Combined with using advanced processing machines to produce hyper alloys that are otherwise impossible to produce through other ways, the formation anchors that we can produce in the modern day are much better than the ones used in the distant past. To put it in simpler terms, the efficiency of modern manufactured formation anchors is probably much higher than what people made in the distant past."

The tools used to extract ores, refine minerals and shape them into formation anchors were all worse. Even if cultivators could use special abilities to mitigate these shortcomings, there had to be limits to what they could do to improve the quality and consistency of their works.

"The only reason why our spell arrays aren't stronger at the moment is because our theory and our ability to design more sophisticated qi formations is not as good. Melkor added. "This will improve over time as formation masters figure out more stuff. Once they do, they can use the same set of high-grade hyper materials to build the formation anchors of much more powerful spell arrays."

This would naturally improve over time. Ves could not do much about it. As he examined the formation anchors by remote, he winced when he looked at the very visible cracks and other signs of damage.

"It is quite impressive that the spell array can still work despite the anchors being damaged to this degree. How are they supposed to be repaired?"

"I don't know." Melkor shrugged. "I chose to specialize in deploying and controlling spell arrays. I completely skipped out on all of the lessons related to designing the spell arrays and producing the necessary formation anchors. These are completely different subjects that I don't necessarily need to know in order to do my job."

Ves wondered whether it was possible to extend the lifespan of these damaged formation anchors merely by restoring their physical damage.

It sounded a bit too simple for it to be true.

If he had more time, Ves would have loved to contact the formation masters of the Red Collective and hear their advice on how to restore the damaged formation anchors as

best as possible.

Every hour counted. Ves decided not to waste his time on this endeavor and focus on attaining more immediate results.

"Forget it. We'll just use them as is. Right now, the simplest way to turn them into living fey that you can control with a greater degree of control is to build a protective shell around them and slap thrusters onto the exterior. This should allow you to control and move all 25 of them by yourself."

Melkor frowned when he heard that. He looked rather underwhelmed by the proposal.

"Are you sure that the results will be worth it, Ves? I mean, I already managed to move the formation anchors to their places by using other mechs as porters. Our mech forces are not so small that we cannot afford to assign 25 machines for this assignment." Ves shook his head. "You are not thinking big enough. There is a huge difference between moving the formation anchors with mechs controlled by other people and letting them move directly under your direction by converting them into fey. With the latter, you are able to form a much closer bond with them through the neural interface of your Fey Fianna. Your living mech and its many subordinate spirits will effectively serve as a much better bridge to them than your dinky little disk-shaped control

artifact."

That... may actually be possible!

Melkor had never thought about it before, but if Ves could really make this happen, then his ability to control the formation anchors would massively improve!

That in turn would massively boost his ability to control the active spell array!

"I never thought about that. I am beginning to understand much better why you have become so good at inventing new stuff. The idea you proposed sounds really simple and logical in hindsight, but formation masters such as myself never thought about it because we never bothered to consider how living mechs can be combined with spell

arrays."

Ves chuckled in response. "I am not arrogant enough to claim that only I can come up with such an idea. A clever mech designer or scientist should be able to connect the dots and propose a similar concept sooner or later. The difference is that there is still a massive gap between a formation anchor that has been turned into a regular spur and one that is turned into a living fey. The latter makes it so that the formation anchors possess life. I wonder if that also means that you can infuse life into spell arrays. What would it be like if they came to life and started to take actions by themselves? Can qi formations even be alive in the first place?"

All of these ideas and speculations sounded way too crazy for Melkor!

He had no interest in finding the answers to all of these convoluted and difficult

questions. He just wanted to pilot a good mech that would hopefully help him deploy his spell array a lot better than last time.

"Will the attempt to turn the formation anchors into fey even work?" Melkor skeptically asked.

"When I procured the set from the Red Collective, one of their people warned me that it is best not to bring them close to other hyper materials. The formation anchors contain a large amount of hyper materials and need to be able to interact with E energy radiation without any nearby disturbances."

That was a serious warning and one that Ves needed to think through.

"I think... that this may be sound advice. He conceded. "If I had more time, I could have performed experiments on how the proximity of other hyper materials may affect the functioning of the hyper totems. I don't believe that they will malfunction or produce glitches just because of this reason. Just to be safe, I will design the fey shell of a formation anchor so that it is only made out of stable exotic materials. That should allow the flow of E energy radiation to remain unimpeded."

That would limit the performance of the new formation anchor fey. The silver lining was that it saved Ves a bit of work and effort.

"What about the living mech itself?" Melkor asked another important question. "The

Larkinson Edition of the Fey Fianna is a transphasic hyper mech after all. If you turn the formation anchors into living fey, some of the Fey Fianna's stuff will get passed on to the

new fey. Wouldn't that comprise a disturbance in itself?"

"Yes... and no."

"You need to clarify that, Ves."

"I know what the formation masters are worried about when they issued that warning.

The thing is that living fey works differently. If my theories are correct, turning the formation anchors into fey will not add a disruptive variable to the total package. It will instead fill up a gap that was missing all this time."

"What are my formation anchors missing?"

"Artifact spirits, or rather just one artifact spirit that is spread over multiple different

anchors. If this is the case, then what I am about to do will not cause the spell array to malfunction or collapse entirely, but it will instead enhance them to a higher level! If their quality and conditions

were much better, then I suspect that the end product may actually be powerful enough to trigger a lightning tribulation event!"

That risk still existed, but Ves did not think the heavens would be picky enough to

respond to his upcoming work. The spell anchors were in terrible condition and the design of the confinement spell array was too basic and rudimentary,

Ves was very interested to see what would happen if all of the formation anchors obtained their own 'artifact spirits'. This may be enough to turn them into pseudo-high-level artifacts!