

## Mech Touch 6701

### Chapter 6701: Maximum Defense

In the face of an incoming plasma sword attack, Venerable Jannzi felt much more confident than others in her expert mech's ability to resist this powerful strike.

Just like how the Amaranto embodied the concept of extreme firepower, the Bastion embodied the concept of extreme defense.

The reborn expert mech passed up a lot of attractive options just to elevate her defenses further.

Her mech frame was by far the largest and most massive out of all of the other Larkinson expert mechs. Her offensive ability was limited to just the Gravity Sword alone.

Yet in exchange for allocating all of her remaining capacity towards defense, the Bastion's ability to resist powerful attacks was unparalleled among other expert mechs!

"I am a knight! I fight by protecting my people!"

There was no other way for Jannzi to meaningfully contribute to this battle than to buy time for other units to evacuate Venerable Orfan.

The longer her Bastion blocked the attacks from the incoming phase lord, the greater the chance of saving her friend and fellow clansman!

Jannzi had a lot of confidence in her ability to fulfill her objective. Heavy space knight possessed the lowest amount of agency among all other mech archetypes.

They were awfully slow, they lacked the means to attack at range unless they deviated from their standard configurations and they were not as good in attacking at close range as more offensive machines.

Jannzi was willing to sacrifice all of these advantages just so that she could do better than anyone else at fending off critical enemy attacks.

"We shall not break from this plasma sword!"

People often speculated that the Bastion's defenses were so strong that her defensive capabilities could rival that of some ace mechs!

Now, Venerable Jannzi decisively put this assumption to the test by making her Bastion serve as a physical obstacle between the incoming plasma sword and the crippled mech frame of the Riot!

She knew that she had to pull out all of the stops in order to withstand the might of the plasma sword.

Though she had personally witnessed how the Riot succumbed so quickly when receiving a direct hit from the energy weapon, Jannzi never hesitated in her resolve to save Venerable Orfan and what remained of her broken expert mech.

She held nothing back.

Maximum Defense was not a special technique or ability. It was just a shorthand for activating every defensive measure that Jannzi and her battle partner could activate at the same time.

The first line of defense was her resonance shield. One of the advantages of the Bastion was that she was so big and massive that she was able to accommodate a lot more resonating exotics than smaller machines. Jannzi was able to strengthen the resonance shield of her Bastion to a much greater extent!

Considering the Bastion's awful mobility relative to other expert mech, she certainly needed this advantage.

The next line of defense was the iconic Rainbow Shield. Made up of a lot of Unending alloy, the reason why it carried an unusual name was because its hyper materials were split up and segmented into blocks.

Each block was infused with the spiritual energies donated by Ves and many different design spirits!

That turned the Rainbow Shield into a unique blessed weapon that was able to rely on the help of multiple different design spirits to better defend against different attack types.

Right now, Jannzi called upon the power of Qilanxo, the design spirit she knew best!

"Qilanxo, fortify my shield!"

The design spirit answered her call. The Rainbow Shield lit up as the Unending alloy containing Qilanxo's spiritual energy started to burn.

The Rainbow Shield's structure grew stronger and tougher while a small spatial barrier formed just above the surface of the exterior!

While the spatial barrier was not as large and strong as that of a lesser phase lord, it was still a welcome addition!

This was not enough for Jannzi.

The Bastion's Battle Skirt System engaged as well. The modular armor plating that previously hung from the waist down came to life and dynamically stacked behind the Rainbow Shield, causing it to become larger, thicker and more able to defend from wider angles.

While the Battle Skirt System defined the Maiden of Adversity model that was loved by female mech pilots, the Bastion possessed the best implementation by far.

The modular armor plates had been updated to much more modern and resilient transphasic hyper plating.

Their linking mechanisms had been strengthened as well, allowing the plates to stay together and combine their strengths much better than before.

The deployment of the modular armor plating caused the Bastion to look as if she was holding up a large metal umbrella as opposed to a tower shield!

The additional coverage gave Jannzi greater confidence that no part of the plasma sword would be able to bypass her defense and inflict further harm onto the Riot.

Jannzi had another trick up her sleeve to fortify the defenses of her modular armor plating even further.

"Callisto!"

"Yawl!"

A lizard-like beast that shared a passing resemblance to Qilanxo emerged from her head and dove into the armor plates that had been reconfigured to improve the depth and coverage of the Rainbow Shield.

The companion spirit helped Jannzi lighten her burden and micromanage her defenses a lot better than usual.

With the help of Callisto's spatial talent, the blessing that Qilanxo bestowed upon the Rainbow Shield partially spread to the adjacent modular armor plating, thereby significantly increasing their toughness and damage resistance!

All of this already sounded amazing enough, but there was still more.

If the previous defensive measures failed to block the plasma sword, then the next recourse that Jannzi and her battle partner had left was to withstand the potent weapon directly by relying on the azure shield generator.

The Bastion always reserved a lot of room for a larger-than-usual transphasic shield generator.

This had since been replaced by a more powerful and advanced azure shield generator that relied on water-attributed E-energy to amplify the performance of phasewater technology.

Even so, the biggest factor that made the Bastion's azure shield generator better than anything else was due to size.

The greater capacity of the expert mech not only provided more room for heavy-duty shield generators, but was also able to accommodate more heatsinks, energy cells, internal repair systems and other components that could make the azure energy shield last a lot longer than typical!

The azure energy shield did not form a wide bubble around the machine, but instead stuck very close just above the exterior of the Bastion.

This was a high-tech application of energy shields that was difficult to design and implement, but yielded improved efficiency as the energy shields were not blocking any attacks that would have passed harmlessly over or around the mech in question.

There was one more measure that the Bastion could rely upon to fend off powerful strikes.

This was the Bolton Armor that clad the mech frame.

Integrated with over 8.6 kilograms of phasewater, the Bolton Armor excelled at repelling transphasic attacks but also performed fairly well in repelling plasma weapon attacks.

The thick application of armor plating in every direction made it so that the Bastion had few true weak points.

Even her rear sections were well-covered by thick slabs of armor in order to deny light skirmishers the opportunity to easily disable the expert heavy space knight from behind!

The Bolton Armor was the primary means of defense for the Bastion when her Rainbow Shield and Battle Skirt System failed for whatever reason.

Jannzi was not afraid of relying upon it as it was just as tough if not tougher than her Rainbow Shield.

While the Bastion was not the most modern Larkinson expert mech anymore, her Bolton Armor was still recent enough that it was easy enough to apply a light amount of hyper materials to make the Bolton Armor more effective.

The addition of hyper materials also happened to make it easier for the living mech to channel the passive enhancements granted by the Ascension Runes that the Bastion had accumulated over time and growth!

Jannzi and her battle partner both agreed to stick to the extreme defense concept, so all of the Ascension Runes were formed from the Path of the Guardian derived from Qilanxo!

The Bastion had never been able to test the full effectiveness of all 25 Ascension Runes she had accumulated so far until today.

The Runes were already in effect, though they didn't leave any visible traces. The Bastion's armor plating grew stronger and tougher. They also increased the Bastion's resistance to phasewater technology and spatial effects.

All of these measures were fairly impressive on their own, some more than others.

Only the Bastion was able to agglomerate each of them into a single heavy mech frame.

No other expert mech could come close to matching her combined defensive prowess.

Even then, there were many observers who believed that the Bastion could only withstand the incredible power of the phase lord's plasma sword for a little while longer than the Riot Mark II.

This was because the Bastion was still an expert mech!

As long as Venerable Jannzi remained a high-tier expert pilot, her true resonance was not able to amplify the defenses of her Bastion to the point where she could properly block the attacks of an ace mech-grade opponent.

That did not deter her in the slightest, though. As the extremely hot edge of the plasma sword was already falling onto her prepared expert mech, Jannzi's heart swelled with courage.

Venerable Orfan was still alive. She could feel it due to her link to the other female expert pilot.

Since Rosa Orfan could still be saved, Jannzi did not think about retreating until rescue mechs had arrived to pull the broken mech frame of the Riot to safety!

"I AM A KNIGHT!" She roared even as the plasma sword ruthlessly crashed against the resonance shield of the Bastion!

Her willpower directly fueled the true resonance manifestation that served as the first line of defense!

The blue corona magically held the plasma sword back, largely due to Jannzi's sheer stubbornness in fulfilling her mission!

Unfortunately, despite the advantages granted by the Bastion's greater quantity of resonating exotics, the resonance shield of an expert mech ultimately did not defy reality to the point of completely neutralizing the power of the plasma sword.

A few tense seconds passed before the resonance shield broke!

The plasma sword exhibited faint signs of instability after it had been used to overcome a lot of resistance, but it still had plenty of energy left to assault the Rainbow Shield next!

The giant translucent silhouette of Qilanxo emerged from the Rainbow Shield. The design spirit took offense at the plasma sword and did her best to reinforce the tower shield's valiant resistance against the alien weapon!

Amazingly enough, the Rainbow Shield held for an awfully long time!

Seconds passed as it seemed to be able to fend off the plasma sword forever, but it had ultimately reached its limit when it started to heat up far too much to the point where the Unending alloy and transphasic alloys began to melt or vaporize!

The once-beautiful Rainbow Shield got partially split in half!

The only reason why it hadn't been destroyed any further was because the modular armor plating from the Battle Skirt System stepped up and took over the burden!

Reinforced by Callisto, the modular armor plating glowed brighter as they did all they could to hold back the hot plasma sword.

However, direct contact with a plasma sword was extremely damaging to the systems of the armor plates. They broke before the alloy plating had begun to melt.

This caused the components of the Battle Skirt System to separate and fall away as all of the electronics responsible for keeping them in place succumbed first to the overwhelming heat!

The plasma sword, which began to look as if it was growing increasingly more unstable after forcing its way to cut through several layers of strong defenses, continued to pass through the remnants of the Battle Skirt System until it collided against the Bastion's azure energy shield!

The azure energy shield held the deadly weapon at bay remarkably well!

"Venerable Jannzi is doing it! Her Bastion is holding up really well so far!"

Zren-Divar uttered another roar of frustration as he continued to press his plasma sword forward despite all of the strain he was being subjected to at the moment.

How come it was so difficult for him to finish off a single mech?!

Why was this other mech so damn tough and stuffed with defenses!?

The more the lesser phase lord grew frustrated at his inability to finish off a single expert mech, the more Venerable Jannzi felt as if she was fulfilling her greatest purpose!

As a space knight pilot, Venerable Jannzi derived no greater pleasure than to save the life of a precious Larkinson.

Though only a relatively short period of time had passed, her Bastion had succeeded in buying a short amount of time.

She could already see that the nearest available mechs allocated to rescue duty had almost reached the broken Riot.

This was not enough to save Venerable Orfan's life. The rescue mechs needed to remain undisturbed by powerful enemies as they attempted to bring back the Riot.



This meant that Venerable Jannzi needed to fend off the angry lesser phase lord even longer!

"Come on, you misbegotten alien! Is this all you got?!" She roared even as her resonance strength grew with her rising mood! "Your plasma sword shall burn out against my defenses! Your teeth shall be broken by my Gravity Sword! As long as I am here, you can forget about taking away anyone else's life!"

#### Chapter 6702: The True Meaning of Duty

The plasma sword wielded by one of the orven martial lesser phase lords was not an inferior weapon.

Although it was not as unnaturally sharp and penetrating as Saint Piercer arms, plasma swords were powerful enough in their own way.

They were also incredibly expensive to construct and operate. They consumed energy like nothing else, but it was usually worth it because their damage output was just as exaggerated!

The one wielded by Zren-Divar was more powerful than most, not just because of its much greater size in comparison to the Scarlet Ember.

Another reason why it was so powerful in the hands of the orven phase lord was because it was able to tap directly into the large power reactor integrated inside Zren-Divar's raiment to fuel its extreme hunger for energy!

The weapon's contact with the large raiment also allowed the latter to effectively serve as a heatsink, thereby draining a lot of excess heat that would have built up in the mechanical structure of the plasma weapon and cause its components to melt.

A third reason why the plasma sword was able to chop apart any other expert mech with relative ease was because it was based on modern and advanced human design principles.

The technological sophistication of the plasma sword was only slightly inferior to the ones wielded by expert mechs and ace mechs of the Red Association, the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan pact.

All of these strengths drastically increased the danger that the Bastion was in. The expert heavy space knight amazingly managed to last far longer than the Riot after getting struck by the plasma sword, but her margin of safety was dwindling by the millisecond.

Venerable Jannzi truly felt as if her battle partner had plunged into star!

The discharge of thermal energy was incredibly high!

Her willpower which was supposed to be strong and robust enough to allow her to last for an entire battle was rapidly being consumed just to resist direct contact with a plasma sword!

The Bastion was struggling as well. Her systems were being forced to perform under circumstances far greater and more destructive than she was originally designed to cope against!

How could Ves and Gloriana know that Venerable Jannzi would willingly put her Bastion in the path of an extremely powerful energy weapon?

It was exactly because Venerable Jannzi possessed the courage to put her expert mech in the path of this devastating energy sword that she began to feel as if she was truly fulfilling her purpose!

"I must hold on... I must hold on..."

The strain on Jannzi and her expert mech increased as the azure energy shield rapidly destabilized. The plasma sword fueled by the lesser phase lord's modern raiment was simply too powerful.

Even if the weapon was beginning to show greater signs of instability, it was so well-made that it would probably remain active longer than the Bastion could last!

"Save the Bastion!"

"We're trying our best!"

Zren-Divar paid a great price for ignoring everything else so that he could drive his plasma sword through the Bastion and finally finish off what remained of the Riot.

The Karma Cutters that had been Enfeoffed by Saint Casella Ingvar launched a torrent of resonance-empowered Null Rounds that were rapidly wearing down the phase lord's spatial barrier.

The Valkyrie Krista and the Valkyrie Ursa had abandoned their cautious fighting approach. The two expert marauder mechs continually stuck to the sides of the orven phase lord and not only made sure to weaken his transphasic capabilities with their powerful space suppressors, but also used their spears to break the spatial barrier even faster!

Even so, the martial phase lord had clearly invested significantly in his energy defenses. He had completely eschewed fancy spatial techniques in favor of fortifying his foundation.

This meant that his spatial barrier was not as easy to overcome as the spatial barriers of other phase lords!

The azure energy shield of the Bastion may be stronger and more sophisticated than that of other expert mechs, but it was impossible for it to match the strength of Zren-Divar's spatial barrier.

Both of them operated on a completely different scale!

The Bastion, while large compared to other expert mech, was like a dwarven child in front of Zren-Divar.

The shield generator had done its best, but all of the true resonance that Jannzi leveraged to amplify its performance could not stop it from reaching its hard physical limits.

It overheated and broke down!

"Careful, Jannzi!"

The plasma sword had finally overcome another layer of defense and was currently trying to burn directly through the Bolton Armor that gave the Bastion her iconic appearance.

Venerable Jannzi and her battle partner were on a timer now. The Bolton Armor was able to remain remarkably solid and intact at first, but the machine was rapidly heating up. Soon enough, the powerful transphasic alloys would reach their melting point and succumb.

The female expert pilot was determined to delay this catastrophic event as much as possible.

She could practically feel the interior of the cockpit heating up as she tried her best to resonate harder with her battle partner than ever before!

"I... WON'T... LET... YOU... DIE... BASTION. NOT... AGAIN..."

Jannzi had suffered a great amount of trauma after witnessing the death of the original Shield of Samar during a fateful clash against the Skorpion Kommando.

She was lucky that Ves managed to create a reborn version of her original machine. While the

Bastion was different in many ways, Jannzi still considered her to be a continuation of the expert mech that she had lost.

There was no point in ejecting her cockpit this time. Jannzi had formed the very first Blood Pact in existence with the Bastion. The two had become permanently tied together.

Losing the Bastion was like losing the other half of her soul.

Rather than live the remainder of her life as an incomplete half, she would rather end her misery straight away by dying with her battle partner!

The third order living mech knew that, so she did not try to persuade Jannzi to do anything else.

Both of them were of the same mind in this regard.

Given their strict circumstances, it was a stupid decision for Jannzi to send her expert mech forward and attempt to block the plasma sword head-on by putting both of their lives at risk.

Yet Jannzi did not make this decision out of logic, but out of duty and a sincere desire to fulfill her principles and ideals!

As one of the few Larkinsons who dared to question and criticize the legendary patriarch of the Larkinson Clan, Jannzi had always remained loyal to her beliefs and convictions!

How could she take Ves to account when she was unwilling to apply the rules to herself as well?

Seeing an important member of the Larkinson Clan in danger compelled her to act and stand in the way regardless of whether the calculus supported her decision!

While her Bastion was suffering progressively more due to her impulsive decision to come to the defense of Venerable Orfan and the Riot, Jannzi did not regret her decision in the slightest.

She would make the same decision even if she knew that she would put her Bastion in such a precarious situation!

"Even if the two of us die in the end, as long as Rosa and her battle partner are able to get away alive, it is worth it in the end!"

Already, Jannzi's noble gesture was bearing fruit.

Her Bastion had bought enough time for a squad of mechs to retrieve the broken Riot and hastily bring the wreck back to the expeditionary fleet!

More mechs joined the escort force. They utilized their bulk and their azure energy shields to form an overlapping wall that shielded the crippled expert mech from any opportunistic attacks launched by other alien assets.

The Flagrant Vandal mechs even detonated a large amount of sensor-blocking particle grenades in order to frustrate any cheap attempts to flood the protective detail with massed attacks!

While the Riot was no longer in acute danger, Zren-Divar still set his sights on the broken expert spearman mech!

So long as he was able to melt the Bastion apart, he would definitely use his superior mobility to catch up and finish his original target once and for all! He was too prideful to let the Riot slip away!

The plasma sword had burned so long against multiple layers of defense that it was beginning to behave increasingly more erratic.

The weapon was slowly losing power as automated systems throttled the output of the plasma edge to prevent the contraption from blowing up in Zren-Divar's face.

Even so, the continuous damage inflicted by the plasma sword was still strong enough to slowly part through the upper layers of the Bastion's chest armor and slowly make its way through the deeper layers!

Even if the Bastion boasted more layers of armor plating than other expert mechs, it would not take long before the incredible heat generated by the plasma sword would pass through the exterior and begin to cook the internal components!

If the Bastion was an archemec, then her internal components would have been so tightly integrated with armored structural components that the expert mech would have retained many of her core functions for a long time!

Yet because the Bastion had been developed before Gloriana successfully got started in archetech, the internals remained her most serious vulnerability!

As Jannzi and the Bastion's time were running out, both of them seemed to feel greater and greater fulfillment in their grand purpose.

The more the rescue force brought the Riot back to the rear, the more Jannzi and her battle partner felt that they had gone above and beyond to fulfill their noble ideals.

"This is our true calling." She whispered even as a gigantic plasma sword was getting closer and closer to breaching her cockpit and vaporizing her vulnerable human body.

"THIS IS OUR TRUE PURPOSE." Her battle partner affirmed.

"To be a knight is to commit your life to a vow of protection."

"TO BE A KNIGHT IS TO BE READY TO SACRIFICE YOURSELF SO THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE."

As Jannzi closed her eyes, she felt an unprecedented moment of peace.

She and her expert mech grew closer to each other like never before. During this moment, their thoughts, their goals and their emotions had almost become completely aligned with each other.

Though they were cognizant of the fatal crisis that they had put themselves under, they still showed no fear of dying because they were fulfilling their duty as knights.

Jannzi's force of will grew more condensed.

The incredible pressure exerted by the plasma sword no longer exhausted her willpower, but instead refined it into a stronger and more firmer substance!

As Jannzi's mood continued to rise, she could already feel her bottleneck loosening up. She only needed to make a final push before she could shatter this barrier and experience another rebirth that would bring her closer to fulfilling her duty and her purpose as a knight!

Just as she was about to utter the words that would cement her strengthened conviction, the enormous source of heat that was melting through her Bastion's final layers of chest armor had abruptly disappeared!

"GET THE HELL AWAY FROM MY SUBORDINATE, YOU ALIEN BASTARD!"

"W-What?" Jannzi blinked in astonishment.

She quickly regained her bearings and tried to figure out what happened.

Much to her surprise, the orven phase lord that had almost brought her to a breakthrough had been physically slammed aside!

The Lionheart of all mechs had soared across space like a shining knight in armor and charged straight into the side of Zren-Divar when his spatial barrier had already been weakened a lot by repeated attacks from other powerful mechs!

The timing couldn't be more perfect. The Lionheart braced a transphasic hyper spear designed by Dulo Voiken which was sharp and penetrating enough to punch through whatever was left of the spatial barrier and punch deep into the phase lord's raiment!

What was even more amazing was that General Ark deliberately did not try to avoid a collision, but proactively sought it out, allowing his expert command mech to physically slam into the orven phase lord's armored side!

This was the reason why Zren-Divar had been wrenched away before he could exert enough pressure to help Venerable Jannzi undergo her second apotheosis!

Right now, the heroic-looking Lionheart looked especially bright and dazzling as it had 'saved the day'.

With its flowing projected cape and a plasma sword of its own in its other hand, the Lionheart truly looked as if it was ready to save the 'damsels in distress' from the murderous alien villain!

The pilot of the Bastion watched on with a mix of loss and confusion as she witnessed the Lionheart glowing like a lantern in the darkness.

That lantern seemed to break, only to unleash a blazing wildfire!

The Bastion's resonance meter detected elevated activity!

"Is that... a domain...?"

The formation of a domain around the Lionheart was unquestionable proof that the greatest hero of the Larkinson Family before Ves had finally attained his long-cherished dream!

General Ark Larkinson had become the fifth ace pilot of the Larkinson Clan!

"NO DARKNESS SHALL STAIN MY LIGHT." General Ark Larkinson declared.

"I HAVE ALREADY FAILED ONCE BY LETTING IMON INGVAR DIE. I SHALL NOT ALLOW A SUBORDINATE TO FALL AGAIN DUE TO MY WEAKNESS. I AM THEIR



COMMANDER. I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR LIVES. IF YOU WANT TO KILL VENERABLE ORFAN, YOU WILL HAVE TO GET PAST MY CLEANSING LIGHT FIRST!"

#### Chapter 6703: Yearning For Attention

After struggling for decades to defy his original fate, break past his seemingly impenetrable bottleneck and forge a new future for himself, he finally succeeded!

General Ark Larkinson managed to break through!

The unmistakable signs of a second apotheosis had gripped the Lionheart.

The expert command mech never looked brighter, dazzling and more magnificent than today.

As a light-attributed hyper masterwork mech, the lion-headed machine had always had a morale-boosting effect on nearby soldiers.

Now, that effect was amplified by at least an order of magnitude!

Those who stared closely at the Lionheart instinctively felt that it was the right decision for them to admire and worship the expert command mech or more precisely the brand new ace pilot that used it as his vessel.

It was hard for both humans and aliens to ignore the presence of the Lionheart. Despite its limitations as an expert mech, the valiant machine was explicitly designed to attract attention.

General Ark's breakthrough clearly played into this trait and amplified it with his surging willpower!

Though the Lionheart currently shone almost just as brightly as the Amaranto Mark III at the beginning of this battle, the way the two treated the light element were completely different.

Saint Davia Stark never wanted to produce a spectacle. The light radiating from her unconventional archemch was a byproduct of her incredible ability to absorb and concentrate an extreme amount of light energies into her mech frame and Instrument of Vengeance.

Light was a resource and a weapon to the Amaranto Mark III. Neither the pilot and machine held any special thoughts or beliefs about the property of light. They mostly saw it as a form of energy that they could shape into a lethal energy beam that could travel at a blazingly fast speed and penetrate through any target in their sights!

In contrast, General Ark and the Lionheart treated light as a complimentary tool.

Light drew attention.

Light was able to direct where people looked at stuff.

Light made everything that shone under its rays look good.

It was for these reasons and more that General Ark had taken a liking of the light element.

Heroes fought under the light, while villains crawled in the darkness.

Previously, General Ark always struggled to attract the most attention while he was fighting in large battles.

It was difficult for him to remain at the center of attention when there were hundreds of thousands of small craft whipping around, of which dozens comprised of expert mechs and even ace mechs!

The latter were especially effective at stealing his thunder.

Prior to his breakthrough, the Amaranto Mark III, the Amphis Extremis, the Minerva Mark I and the First Sword Mark II hogged most of the attention.

The worst part about it was that General Ark couldn't blame the masses for keeping their eyes on all of those machines.

The Amaranto Mark III only remained active for a short amount of time, but had contributed the most to this battle so far by eliminating an orven lesser phase lord!

The latter three machines stepped up from there by directly confronting the two greater phase lords!

Saint Linda Cross was the only ace pilot with a proper ace mech in the star system. She had taken on the most burdensome task of holding back the Herald of the Void by any means necessary.

As an envoy of the Red Cabal, the Herald of the Void was a considerably better developed jureg greater phase lord than usual.

He had access to more powerful and specialized phasewater organs. He not only developed his physical body to withstand a lot of damage and inflict a lot of it in return, but also developed a few powerful spatial abilities that complimented his fighting style.

The Herald of the Void fought like a crustacean-shaped battering ram. His fanatical loyalty to the phase whales compelled him to push through all of the attacks that battered his spatial barrier and head straight towards the orbital defense ring that served as the bulwark of human resistance in the star system.

So long as he personally battered much of the orbital defenses into pieces, it became untenable for red humanity to continue the fight!

Against an opponent that appeared to be nearly unstoppable, only the Amphis Extremis had a chance of holding back his advance, and only on a temporary basis.

The Amphis Extremis was not a proper match against the Herald of the Void, but Saint Linda Cross somehow did a decent job with the help of fire support from the Knights and Barons empowered by the Saint Commander.

That still left another greater phase lord. The Lower Herdmaster did not possess the same degree of resilience and momentum as the Herald of the Void, but his threat level was arguably just as high!

This was because the Lower Herdmaster had been awarded with a Saint Piercer arm. The greater phase lord wielded his superdimensional weapon with considerable skill and power.

Even the formidable defenses of the Amphis Extremis could not block the incredible penetration power of this confounding weapon!

Amazingly enough, Saint Dise Larkinson and her outdated First Sword Mark II somehow managed to distract and slow down the advance of the Lower Herdmaster.

Similar to Venerable Rosa Orfan, Saint Dise squeezed out all of the performance she could out of her First Sword and her masterwork Decapitator.

The difference between the two Larkinson pilots was that Saint Dise was simply much better at it. Her resonance strength alone was stronger by at least an order of magnitude, and that made a huge difference!

Together with her Saint Kingdom, she was not only able to defy reality to a much greater extent, but also leverage a lot more metal E energy from the environment!

As a Domain Shaper who developed a strong affinity for the metal element, the recently emerged ace pilot was already capable of reinforcing her expert mech to a certain extent even if the machine was not explicitly designed for this purpose.

The First Sword moved faster and was able to endure far greater stresses than usual. It was not just her armor system that had become a lot tougher and more damage resistant than usual.

One of the tricks that Saint Dise applied to her old battle partner was to reinforce the internals with lots of metal energy!

Combined with her powerful true resonance, this effectively allowed Dise to get away with pushing the First Sword way past her safe levels!

These extreme measures were not enough to allow the First Sword to close the distance to a real ace mech such as the Amphis Extremis, but they were barely enough to allow the expert swordsman mech to dance around the Lower Herdmaster!

It was good that the First Sword had been designed to function as a relatively agile, responsive and maneuverable expert mech, because Saint Dise needed everything she could use to evade the fatal stabs of the greater phase lord's Saint Piercer!

Saint Dise had fought many exobeasts and other enemies that were more powerful than herself.

She showed no fear or hesitation as she repeatedly pushed the First Sword beyond her limits just so that she could evade the incoming Saint Piercer once more.

In order to prevent the Lower Herdmaster from ignoring the First Sword entirely, Saint Dise did not dare to fight too passively and actively directed her machine to charge forward and deliver a couple of devastating strikes onto the greater phase lord's spatial barrier!

The power of the Decapitator when it was fully empowered by her true resonance and lots of metal energy had become formidable enough that the Lower Herdmaster could not ignore its threat!

Another reason why the Lower Herdmaster was not able to ignore the First Sword was because the machine also carried a space suppressor that worked far more effectively than usual because its effects were amplified by ace pilot-grade true resonance!

Even if the space element was not Saint Dise's forte, she was still able to weaken and dampen a part of the greater phase lord's comprehensive spatial capabilities with her space suppression field and Saint Kingdom.

Once the Lower Herdmaster recognized the threat and inconvenience posed by the First Sword and tried to eliminate the expert mech in earnest, Saint Dise's situation became a lot more precarious.

The greater phase lord was too strong, and possessed just enough skill with polearms to be able to bring the tip of the Saint Piercer closer and closer towards the First Sword.

She needed help in order to stay in the fight!

The remote fire support from the Knights and Barons of the Saint Commander provided a bit of relief.

The additional firepower provided by the orbital defense ring helped as well, but not enough as most of it was needed to pummel the advancing alien warships.

This was where the Lionheart initially made itself useful.

General Ark Larkinson bravely but foolishly tried to intervene in the fight against the Lower Herdmaster.

Though the then-expert pilot had made the resolve to become the shining knight in armor that he had always envisioned himself as, when he finally began to help Saint Dise in holding back the Lower Herdmaster, he found that he had severely overestimated his capabilities!

The integrated luminar crystal cannons spat out light beam after light beam, but but the effects were fairly minimal due to the greater phase lord's formidable strength.

The Lionheart's space suppressor was having a bit of an effect, but it was miniscule compared to the effects of the First Sword's own space suppressor due to the disparity in resonance strength!

As for direct attacks, General Ark had made one attempt to attack the Lower Herdmaster with the Lionheart's Cleansing Light, and almost got pierced through the cockpit for his troubles!

The striking range of the hyper plasma sword in its regular active state was too short!

If not for the fact that the Lower Herdmaster took the First Sword a lot more seriously than the Lionheart, it was doubtful whether General Ark would have survived at that time.

After he learned his lesson, General Ark had withdrawn much of his arrogance and took on a more cautious approach. His Lionheart shut off and put away the Cleansing Light and wielded its transphasic hyper spear instead.

The Lionheart subsequently tried to serve as another distraction by performing charge attacks whenever the Lower Herdmaster had overcommitted in his attempts to impale the First Sword!

The charge attacks did not inflict that much damage on the greater phase lord's spatial barrier, but they were enough to relieve a bit of pressure for Saint Dise.

General Ark was not satisfied with this contribution, though. He was not fulfilling his objective by being the brightest star on the battlefield.

The three ace pilots that were currently active on the battlefield rightfully earned most of the glory from this battle due to being the main reasons why the greater phase lords weren't able to advance and kill everyone else!

As for General Ark, his Lionheart was unable to outshine the mechs of the three. His contribution to the fight was so low that he felt he was being relegated to a side character!

This was intolerable to an expert pilot that was determined to become the object of admiration and worship by his subordinates and other soldiers on the battlefield!

Ark had already been thinking about suspending his attempts to steal the show by attacking the Lower Herdmaster.

There had to be another way for him to find his calling and make a much more meaningful impact on the battlefield.

It was only when he saw the Riot and subsequently the Bastion getting overwhelmed by the much larger plasma sword wielded by the orven lesser phase lord that General Ark suddenly made an important realization!

"I am not just a mech pilot."

He was a mech commander. He was responsible for the safety and wellbeing of all of the soldiers of the 77th Warborn Mech Division.

This included Venerable Rosa Orfan, who had decided to transfer to his mech division along with a couple of other Larkinson expert pilots.

Though General Ark never maintained a close relationship with Venerable Orfan, he still considered her to be one of his key assets and subordinates.

As long as she was in trouble, Ark had an obligation to bail her out so long as doing so did not compromise his other objectives!

After he made this critical realization, General Ark suddenly felt as if he had fit the final piece of the puzzle that prevented him from rising above his current limitations.

As long as he remained the strongest combatant in the 77th Warborn Mech Division, he had an obligation to step up and bear the greatest burden!

The main reason why he had always been so desperate to pursue greater strength was so that he could deal with the strongest enemies and prevent them from directing their lethality towards his subordinates!

To allow an enemy champion to kill one of his subordinates in front of him was not only an affront, but also a failure to a responsible mech commander like himself!

"I have already failed Imon Ingvar once. I will not fail Rosa Orfan if it is the last thing I do!"

The Lionheart abandoned the effort to assist and reinforce the First Sword without warning and instantly flew towards Zren-Divar for the purpose of relieving the Riot and the Bastion!

"Wait for me! Your savior is coming!"

Chapter 6704: The Center of Attention

When the Lionheart flew towards the plasma sword-wielding lesser phase lord, its ace pilot continued to receive epiphanies.

He reflected on his past and felt ashamed for his many failings and shortcomings.

It was wrong for Ark to demand attention for attention's sake.

It became especially bad in the last few years. Everytime a younger and more talented Larkinson expert pilot became a saint, Ark felt more and more jealous at their fortune.

Despite having received an amazing modern high-tier expert mech himself, Ark still failed to break through with the ease that he initially envisioned.

This caused him to doubt himself at times. What was wrong with him? Why was he unable to get past his bottleneck like Saint Tusa and Saint Commander Casella Ingvar?

As much as he hated to admit it, the fact that those other Larkinson ace pilots managed to reach their current ranks under similar or significantly worse conditions meant that his willpower was ultimately not up to standard!



He hated this conclusion!

The thought that he was inferior to them on this critical aspect ate into his heart like a persistent worm.

Ark tried his best not to think about it or affect his mood, but there were times when he could not help himself.

What was he missing that would allow him to close the gap with the ace pilots?

He had been wondering about this question for a long time.

Ark had been afraid that he would never be able to find the answer until he was beginning to age and fall from his prime condition.

Fortunately for him, he finally managed to find the correct answer.

The answer was duty.

Just as it was the duty of the soldiers of the 77th Warborn Mech Division to follow the orders of their superiors, it was also the duty of General Ark to lead them to victory and keep them alive as much as possible.

Ark recognized that it was impossible in most serious battles to reduce his losses to zero, but he should at least do whatever he could to minimize this figure.

This became especially important for the high-ranking mech pilots under his command. The other expert pilots had placed their trust in his leadership.

By taking pilots such as Venerable Rosa Orfan and Venerable Imon Ingvar under his wing, he had a duty to supervise their development and prevent them from meeting fatal endings on the battlefield!

It was a pity that he had overlooked this responsibility as of late.

The more frustrated he became at his inability to break through, the more he focused on himself rather than his mech division.

That was a mistake.

He was a mech commander, not a mech pilot.

The two may share a lot of similarities, but they were ultimately different!

It was only now that he realized that a deep relationship existed between him and his subordinates.

General Ark needed the 77th Warborn to provide him with a strong base of admiration and worship.

The 77th Warborn needed his protection to fend off enemies that were far too powerful for them to defeat with their meager power.

In other words, there was a purpose for his strength.

Wanting to become stronger for the sake of puffing up his chest was a vain reason to pursue power!

It was no wonder that Ark repeatedly failed to break through in the past.

Only now did he set aside his vanity and understood his true purpose and intention for becoming the brightest champion on the battlefield.

Why did he yearn to become a saint?

It was because he could do a far better job at leading and preserving the lives of his subordinates and everyone else he felt responsible towards!

All of the soldiers that were currently participating in the fight against the alien armada were doing their duty despite the fact that they were outnumbered and outgunned.

One of the reasons why they still risked their lives to defend this doomed star system was because they looked up to the champions that possessed the capacity and willingness to bear the greatest burdens on the battlefield.

General Ark had previously been one of them, though he did not realize it at the time.

His lack of strength meant that he had little choice but to rely on the protection of the few ace pilots left in the star system to shield him from greater danger.

Before, General Ark felt worthless because his valiant attempt in challenging the Lower Herdmaster ended in utter failure!

If not for the fact that Saint Dise and Saint Commander Casella Ingvar occupied most of the attention of the greater phase lord, his Lionheart would have been impaled by the Saint Piercer within a couple of minutes at most!

This was not the role that Ark envisioned for himself.

Now that he recognized his true calling, he finally had a chance to transition from a soldier that needed saving to a champion that became powerful enough to save others!

The first people that he sought to save after he made these realizations were Rosa Orfan and Jannzi Larkinson.

One of them was his direct subordinate. The other was his trueblood niece.

No matter what, General Ark had to save them at all cost!

Only by doing so would he be able to redeem himself for letting Venerable Imon Ingvar die on his watch!

As the Lionheart to charged towards the offending lesser phase lord, his bright and shiny expert mech rapidly built up more momentum!

As General Ark grew more desperate and committed to saving the two expert pilots, his willpower continued to condense up to a hard limit that he had never managed to surpass in the past.

It was not until his Lionheart finally pierced through its target's weakened spatial barrier and slammed the lesser phase lord's body away that his willpower had finally reached critical mass!

After spending many years in hell, General Ark finally entered heaven.

The power of an ace pilot was his to command. His willpower had undergone a qualitative transformation. He founded his own Saint Kingdom and immediately expanded its borders several hundred meters around his bright and shining machine.

Even his expert mech went through an invisible transformation. The masterwork expert command mech became stronger and more aligned towards Ark. The affinity of the post-living mech towards the light element grew by a considerable margin, thereby enabling it to finally become powerful enough to turn the Lionheart into the brightest presence on the battlefield!

Many observers grew awed by the display.

Regardless of how effectively the Lionheart fought on the battlefield, it at least managed to draw more attention than the Amphis Extremis, the Minerva and the First Sword!

General Ark knew that most of it was because of the novelty factor. He had become an unknown variable to the masses. Everything that people knew about him in the past had become outdated information.

This presented him with a priceless opportunity to redefine himself!

He wanted to get rid of his image as a loser, an expert pilot who continually failed to defeat his bottleneck and a leader who wasn't strong enough to save his subordinates.

Ark Larkinson set his sights onto Zren-Divar.

The lesser phase lord looked a lot less comfortable than before. The stab attack had not inflicted that much damage due to how shallowly it punctured through his raiment and hide.

The collision did not inflict much damage either.

What truly frustrated the lesser phase lord was letting two of his prey slip out of his grasp because other enemies had intervened!

Though Zren-Divar was in a much more precarious situation than before now that his armored body became vulnerable to massed ranged attacks, he was still able to cope with them by remaining on the move and spreading much of the attacks across the surface of his raiment.

The most logical decision that the lesser phase lord could make at this point was to withdraw or seek refuge with another lesser phase lord.

However, his continued failures and denials had driven Zren-Divar to such a rage that he did not permit himself to back off against this latest challenger!

Despite the very real threat posed by a newly ascended saint, the orven phase lord charged straight towards the shining mech that had denied him the satisfaction of killing a valuable expert pilot!

General Ark grinned. Drawing the attention of the enemy away from his subordinate and his niece was exactly what he wanted.

He did not fear the lesser phase lord any longer now that he had finally reduced the gap in strength between the two of them. Even if his Lionheart was still an expert mech, it was much better off than the First Sword!

The Lionheart was a second skin mech that Ves and Gloriana had designed for Ark when he was already an accomplished high-tier expert pilot. Its ceiling was inherently higher, and Ark only felt moderately constrained and limited due to the relatively weak resonating exotics integrated into the machine.

As Ark resonated with the Lumosium embedded into his machine, the power of light further enhanced all of the physical properties of his Lionheart.

Its armor became tougher, its integrated energy cannons became deadlier and the Cleansing Light that had once again fallen into the Lionheart's hands became a dazzling torch that promised to burn everything it touched!

As his fighting intent rose to a new peak, General Ark decisively directed his Lionheart to charge towards Zren-Divar!

The two powerful champions quickly met each other when their plasma swords collided against each other!

A considerable explosion of heat and light spread from the point of contact as both weapons were determined to overpower the other!

Despite their diverging sizes, the two weapons actually had a lot in common.

Both were derived from advanced human science and engineering. Both were made out of exotics and hypers of similar grades and quality levels.

What made Zren-Divar's plasma sword so difficult to resist was its far greater size. Its edge was much longer and its absolute energy output was higher. It was practically a siege weapon masquerading as a melee weapon!

Despite the enormous disparity in size, the Lionheart's Cleansing Light still managed to hold its ground and resist the alien weapon due to the forced resonance and abundance of light energy amplifying its limited performance!

It was like witnessing a contest of power between a giant and a dwarf.

The dwarf should have lost due to the enormous difference in size, mass and hard power, yet magically the two were even in strength!

The plasma sword wielded by the lesser phase lord was a physically more powerful weapon, but the Cleansing Light still held on due to the disproportionately high light energy and forced resonance empowerment!

At this moment, the two plasma swords were driving each other to their limits as they continued to press into each other. The plasma edges shimmered and burned as their magnetic contaminants grew unstable.

Seeing that the Cleansing Light in its normal active state was not able to gain an advantage, General Ark decided to activate a function that he had been saving up for just this occasion.

"Giantslayer Mode."

The Cleansing Light removed some of its limiters while reducing the remaining ones.

The expert mech's plasma sword instantly surged in size, heat and brightness as its energy output multiplied by several times!

The Giantslayer Mode was an extreme setting that Ves had added to the Cleansing Light for fights against enemy phase lords, but he strongly recommended that Ark waited until he became an ace pilot before activating it in battle.

This was because the Giantslayer Mode was so damaging to the Cleansing Light that it would get scrapped within half a minute if it wasn't being empowered and reinforced by enough true resonance!

Right now, the temporary state of forced resonance allowed General Ark to confidently maintain the Giantslayer Mode with no short-term concerns about destroying his own plasma sword.

The power that the Lionheart currently held in its hands was intoxicating. The expert command mech looked much stronger and more impressive than before now that it wielded a plasma sword with an edge that was considerably thicker and taller than the length of the mech frame!

The latest display of power not only boosted General Ark's fighting spirit even further, but also caused Zren-Divar to start to doubt his ability to win this bout!

It was too bad that General Ark had no intention of letting his opponent go! He immediately drove his Lionheart forward!

"Let my light cleanse you of your sins! I will never allow you to threaten a Larkinson ever again!"

## Chapter 6705: Roaring Lion

The Lionheart might not be as new and cutting-edge as the Amaranto Mark III, but it was still a good representation of how far the Miracle Couple's high-ranking mechs had reached!

From the excellent integration of powerful phasewater technologies to the farsighted implementation of the Giantslayer Mode, the Lionheart had been explicitly designed to facilitate General Ark's transition to an ace pilot.

Though his delay in breaking through for so long had prevented him from realizing his machine at its full potential, those days were over now.

As an ace pilot, General Ark was finally able to use the more demanding capabilities of the Lionheart without worrying about breaking or mishandling the machine.

As his expert mech wielded an overcharged plasma sword, he felt more powerful than ever!

His momentum was so great at this time that his opponent actually flinched as the next collision pushed him backwards!

The Cleansing Light burned with such lethal radiance that the lesser phase lord's plasma sword was already beginning to sputter on contact!

"Trying to kill a Larkinson is the last mistake you shall make!"

Zren-Divar's response to this was to command the integrated energy cannons of his raiment to fire at his Lionheart at full power!

However, as soon as the transphasic energy beams exited the muzzles, they already started to weaken as they passed through the Lionheart's Saint Kingdom.

By the time the beams finally struck the expert command mech's shining surface, they only left shallow scorch marks behind!

"My turn now."



The enemy was not the only one who possessed integrated energy weapons.

The much smaller fourth generation luminar crystal cannons embedded into the mech frame of the Lionheart unleashed a salvo of deceptively small and thin bright light beams.

The properties of these energy beams were similar to the ones launched by the Instrument of Vengeance, but their scale and power was much smaller.

Even so, the energy beams fired by the Lionheart were still damaging and penetrating enough to surgically carve through the armor plating of the enemy's raiment.

General Ark did not allow his Lionheart to target random spots of his enemy's armor plating.

They instead focused on burning specific points in the lesser phase lord's raiment that happened to be shielding vulnerable electronics and other important internal components!

The raiment suddenly began to behave unstably as its power transmission lines got cut off, its energy cells blew up and its sensors became fried.

To add insult to injury, the integrated luminar crystal cannons also demolished the much larger but also more vulnerable integrated energy cannons belonging to the enemy!

The armor was turning from a valuable combat tool into a metal coffin that was increasingly limiting Zren-Divar's movements.

General Ark took advantage of his opponent's faltering momentum and pushed his Lionheart to attack more aggressively!

The expert mech empowered by forced resonance briefly withdrew, only to circle around and swing the supercharged Cleansing Light in a wide slash that promised to inflict ruinous damage to anything it struck!

The lesser phase lord hastily made a turn and backed off just enough for him to be able to block the strike in time!

Even so, Zren-Divar not only got pushed backwards a bit further, but his plasma sword also endured greater strain!

The condition of the phase lord's energy weapon had reached a distressing level. Zren-Divar had already abused the weapon to a considerable extent by using it to burn through all of the defenses of the Bastion.

The lack of resonance empowerment made its components considerably more vulnerable to the stresses of high-intensity combat.

Although its solid components still remained strong and reliable, the downside of using such a high-tech weapon was that its operations were ultimately at the mercy of the durability of its most weakest critical components.

The weapon began to release smoke as its most delicate internals already started to fail.

Ark could not possibly miss this development. He renewed his assault and forced his Lionheart to withdraw, only to circle around just enough to build up more momentum and crash against the phase lord with great force!

Although the enemy's plasma sword was well-built, the Cleansing Light was so much stronger and better, especially now that he had switched on its Giantslayer Mode!

The repeated collisions widened the differences between the two champions.

While General Ark grew more and more courageous, Zren-Divar grew increasingly more hesitant as his proud plasma sword was beginning to fail after being subjected to so many stresses.

When the Lionheart charged at its opponent for the fifth time, General Ark finally spotted an opening!

"Hear me roar!"

His companion spirit Noah had been lurking inside the head of the Lionheart throughout all this time.

The companion spirit had grown a lot stronger after Ark broke through. Now, the white lion opened his mouth and unleashed a mighty roar that was directly amplified by the head of the Lionheart!

Sound did not transmit across space, but the resonance-empowered roar unleashed by Noah was a more metaphysical attack that passed straight through Zren-Divar's helmet and shook his gigantic brain!

For a tiny instant, Zren-Divar froze. Though the lesser phase lord quickly recovered due to the size and strength of his physique, the momentary interruption had been enough for the Lionheart to swing down the supercharged Cleansing Light at the enemy's plasma sword at one of its growing weak points.

Before this collision, the skilled lesser phase lord had been fairly good at making sure to divert incoming pressure towards the stronger sections of his energy weapon.

Yet because of his momentary distraction, the most he could do was to maintain a rigid hold onto his weapon.

This proved to be a disaster as his much larger but more vulnerable plasma sword snapped!

A small explosion occurred as the phase lord's powerful weapon finally succumbed from all of the abuse.

Zren-Divar temporarily found himself without a functional weapon and was pushed to the backfoot.

Though the experienced alien fighter immediately tried to use his armored fists to punch the incoming expert mech away, the Lionheart deftly and skillfully evaded the hasty attacks and slashed its Cleansing Light straight into the armored shoulder and chest of its adversary!

The raiment tried its best to resist the resonance-empowered plasma, but the scorching white light was able to burn through the transphasic hyper alloys with considerably greater ease!

This critical occurrence highlighted the difference between willpower cultivators and everyone else!

As long as the willpower of the mech pilot was strong enough, he or she could defy reality and produce miracles that were impossible to replicate through conventional means!

While the Bastion was able to resist the enemy's plasma sword for an unnaturally lengthy period of time, the high-quality armor plating of Zren-Divar's raiment could not survive a single slash from the Cleansing Light!

Even though the Lionheart's energy reserves were already getting drained at an extremely prodigious rate, so long as there was enough juice to keep the Giantslayer Mode active, General Ark did not even think of backing off for fear of running out of energy.

If Saint Davia Stark was able to finish off her opponent before her forced resonance state came to an end, then General Ark should be able to do it as well!

"Witness my power!"

The poor lesser phase lord never gained any breathing room. The Lionheart may be a lot smaller, but it was also a lot faster and agile, especially after its pilot became an ace pilot!

It was as if the orven phase lord was being assailed by a rapidly-moving glowing comet!

The bright white Lionheart continually battered the phase lord's raiment from multiple angles. Every slash vaporized through multiple tons of transphasic alloys that should have normally put up a much better resistance against plasma attacks.

However, because General Ark's entire willpower was devoted to dismantling and killing his adversary, the overheating Cleansing Light forcefully broke down the armor and burned the more fragile internals into ash in a remarkably short amount of time!

Eventually, Zren-Divar had little choice but to shake off his half-ruined raiment just to free his body from his useless burden.

He managed to retrieve a backup sword from his rear holster, but the weapon did not deter General Ark in the slightest.

The Lionheart did not try to outmaneuver the enemy's long and thick metal blade even though it had enough mobility to make it possible.

General Ark wanted to do more than to defeat the enemy lesser phase lord.

He wanted to defeat the alien champion in such a domineering and convincing fashion that no observer would think of him as weak and ineffectual ever again!

This was a rare opportunity to completely turn people's established opinions about him around.

He also saw a good opportunity to formally introduce himself to the wider establishment of red humanity with his debut performance as an ace pilot.

Just like how Saint Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson had made enough of a name for himself to receive invitations to fight alongside the top champions of other forces, General Ark wanted to earn similar credentials!

His burning ambitions fed into his Cleansing Sword, causing it to grow hotter and brighter just as it was about to collide against his enemy's own backup sword!

"My light shall burn away your shadow!"

The Cleansing Light burned right through the blade as if it was as vulnerable as the armor plating of the lesser phase lord's raiment.

The Lionheart completely dismissed the threat posed by the shortened blade and continued to surge forward as well as upwards until its supercharged plasma sword finally seared right into the skull and into the massive brain of the phase lord!

Zren-Divar froze.

His true body may be greater than that of the Lionheart, but the latter's Cleansing Light still proved long and powerful enough to inflict fatal damage to the lesser phase lord's critical brain!

The Giantslayer Mode had fulfilled its purpose. It successfully enabled the wielder of the mech plasma sword to finish off an alien giant.

What happened was not an illusion.

Zren-Divar had been systematically overpowered before he finally succumbed to the might of the Lionheart in its strongest state to date!

The expert command mech looked especially valiant now that it had gone still in its moment of triumph.

Its handsome projected blue cape gave the glowing machine a royal appearance. Its majestic lion's head only added to its impressive stature.

Ark had finally switched off the Giantslayer Mode. It had already been active long enough for it to begin inflicting permanent damage onto the parts that received excessive heat and strain, far beyond what they could tolerate even when they were strengthened by forced resonance!

This was a sign that Ark still needed to raise his resonance strength further before he could think about keeping the Giantslayer Mode active for a longer period of time.

The energy cells of the Lionheart could also use a massive upgrade. Ark noted with a bit of concern that his expert mech's energy reserves had already dipped below 20 percent!

It was worth it. General Ark knew he wouldn't be able to last much longer because the crash that followed after his breakthrough surge came to end would put him out of commission regardless of what happened.

Although the Venerable Davia Stark still retained the crown for possessing the greatest firepower among all of the Larkinson ace pilots, General Ark Larkinson had proven in his own way that his offensive power was not necessarily inferior while possessing far superior defenses and mobility!

Sure, the Riot, the Bastion and the mechs empowered by the Minerva had pitched in and partially expended Zren-Divar's resources, but the Lionheart had ultimately been responsible for killing the lesser phase lord!

This was quite an accomplishment considering that phase lords were often able to preserve their lives and retreat whenever they fell behind.

General Ark gained a much greater appreciation for his Lionheart. Ves and Gloriana really designed an excellent mech. He just hadn't been strong enough to appreciate its full power and capabilities until today.

The Lionheart began to glow brighter despite the fact that the expert command mech had reluctantly holstered its inactive plasma sword.

The amount of people who admired Ark and his Lionheart had risen by a dramatic extent!

Ark basked in the glory of the moment. Even as his Lionheart steadily withdrew from its forced resonance state, its powerful radiance still remained strong, giving observers the illusion that it had still retained much of its combat strength!

The calls already began without Ark needing to prompt his men.

"Saint General!"

"Saint General!"

"Saint General!"

Ark couldn't help but grin with pride.

A Saint General should outrank a Saint Commander, right?

Chapter 6706: Orven Shock

The Larkinsons obtained another ace pilot!

This time the individual in question was unquestionably a member of the Larkinson Clan, making this event even more significant!

Though General, now 'Saint General' Ark Larkinson had generated a considerable amount of controversy and even opposition within the ranks of the clan, much of the criticism had paled now that he had entered an entirely new division of strength.

Ace pilots were much further removed from mortals that comprised the vast majority of the Larkinson Clan.

Even if a number of enterprising individuals had begun to make attainments in qi cultivation, there was no way they could think of challenging an ace pilot with one of the most powerful mechs developed by the Design Department.

In his debut as an ace pilot, the newly arisen Saint General unquestionably proved to all of his doubters and critics that he was more than a blowhard.

Slaying a lesser phase lord in battle was a massive contribution to the war effort.

As the Lionheart valiantly floated before the massive corpse of Zren-Divar, the shining machine attracted a crazy amount of admiration and appreciation!

The more knowledgeable mech insiders recognized that Saint General Ark Larkinson's success had not been solely due to his own strengths and qualities.

Without the support of a sufficiently powerful masterwork mech, he wouldn't have been able to eliminate a lesser phase lord in a relatively short interval!

Both the Amaranto Mark III and the Lionheart proved that the increasingly more famous combination of Ves Larkinson and Gloriana Wodin definitely possessed a magic touch!

Their high-ranking mechs were easily able to match and in a few cases exceed the power of excellent machines designed by much older and more knowledgeable Master Mech Designers.

Of course, that did not mean that the expert mechs and ace mechs designed by third parties were useless.



For example, while the Lionheart played the hero and saved Venerable Rosa Orfan and Venerable Jannzi from imminent doom, the Amphis Extremis had gone above and beyond to hold back Herald of the Void by itself!

Saint Linda Cross pulled out all of the stops and decisively activated the Volcanic Outburst Mode of the latest version of the Magma Vein System.

It was as if the same unlocking of limiters that made the Cleansing Light so strong applied to the entire mech frame of the Amphis Extremis!

While the principles were remarkably similar, the complexity of achieving the latter was far greater!

It was extremely difficult to overcharge almost every electrical component of an entire mech, especially a high-end one that incorporated numerous cutting-edge and experimental technologies.

However, this was exactly the area where Master Benedict Cortez excelled at. He knew precisely how far he could push certain components and how overloading several interconnected systems may affect each other in a way that caused their instability to explode.

The Magma Vein System had to be improved and expanded upon in order to cope with all of these potential disaster scenarios.

Even so, the Amphis Extremis would have exploded a long time ago if it wasn't being reinforced by Saint Linda's powerful true resonance!

For several minutes on end, the Amphis Extremis had been fighting much harder than the Lionheart just to be able to stand its ground against a greater phase lord.

The Herald of the Void was not as easy to stop as Zren-Divar. The former was larger, stronger, more massive and far more adept at manipulating the surrounding space with his spatial abilities.

The Amphis Extremis forcefully charged through gravity wells and warped space and slammed its mace against the greater phase lord's spatial barrier with greater force and mass than a weapon of this size should carry!

Unlike Saint Stark and Saint General Ark, Saint Linda Cross had enough time to develop more effectively ways to leverage her domain field.

Whenever her Amphis Extremis swung her Wrecker Skull, the chain extended by several times while its Saint Kingdom generated an energy manifestation that caused the destructive skull-shaped ball to appear a lot larger than before!

The impact damage generated from the collision was so strong that even the Herald of the Void was taken aback!

Before the greater phase lord could even attempt a counterattack, the overheating Amphis Extremis had already circled around before charging directly forward, allowing its tower shield with the iconic emblem of the Cross Clan to collide against the massive alien's spatial barrier like a battering ram!

On and on the Amphis Extremis attacked. The Ace offensive space knight had raised its tempo to the highest level. Its momentum rose higher, causing the Herald of the Void to feel increasingly more suffocated by the repeated heavy impacts that were taking a toll on his strong but ultimately finite spatial barrier.

What Saint Linda Cross and the Amphis Extremis were able to do was just as impressive as what Saint General Ark Larkinson and the Lionheart had accomplished.

Unfortunately, the performance of the Amphis Extremis was not as flashy, so it failed to attract as much attention as the bright and shining Lionheart.

"The Amphis Extremis won't be able to hold out like this for long. The Volcanic Outburst Mode imposes a huge amount of strain on many of its internal components. Once the ace mech exits this mode, it will fall into a period of prolonged weakness."

The good news was that the Amphis Extremis would not have to exit the battlefield right away.

The bad news was that the ace offensive space knight would become a lot less effective at holding back the Herald of the Void!

This was a ticking time bomb that weighed heavily in the minds of Saint Commander Casella Ingvar and other senior commanding officers.

None of this mattered all that much to Saint General Ark Larkinson.

He had secured the most important objective in his mind, which was to finally trigger his breakthrough.

As his forced resonance state began to subside, the latest ace pilot of the Larkinson Clan already began to feel tired.

His accumulation was considerably greater than that of the other Larkinson ace pilots, but any breakthrough event was inherently exhausting.

"I am falling back." He decisively transmitted.

The Lionheart's glow dimmed as the machine made a triumphant return to the Letven Archon, a fleet carrier that served as the flagship of the 77th Warborn Mech Division.

Ark had already made arrangements to transfer his command authority to his deputies. The 77th Warborn Mech Division incorporated many talents from the Larkinson Clan and Cross Clan, so he had little concerns that they would drop the ball all of a sudden.

The final battle that decided the ownership of the Viola Magnifica System had entered into a new phase.

The native alien combatants had received successive shocks to their morale.

The unexpectedly early demise of Khaso Leiyen was one thing. Saint Davia Stark and her recently upgraded Amaranto Mark III had proven to be unreasonably powerful at a distance, but they had already withdrawn from the battlefield.

What the alien soldiers did not expect was for the infamous Larkinson Clan to spawn yet another ace pilot during the same battle!

Another orven lesser phase lord got killed!

This had a devastating impact on the mental state of the orven soldiers that piloted a large amount of alien phasefighters and crewed a sizable portion of the alien armada!

Many of them were devout worshipers of their native gods. To see two of them fall in front of them in sequence caused them to suffer doubts and fears that they never entertained in the past.

How come their gods were so weak?

Were they truly divine in the first place?

What if the humans were about to kill the last remaining orven phase god on this battlefield?

The successive demise of Khaso Leiyen and Zren-Divar had put the Eight Lord of Takansha into a precarious position!

The erudite lesser phase lord was the only leader left who represented the orven race in this engagement.

Many orvens that previously looked up to the dead orven phase lords had all turned their desperate and fateful eyes towards the Eight Lord of Takansha.

Though the remaining surviving orven god was able to rely on his strong control over spatial barriers to shield himself and his allies from damage, he had become a lot less enthusiastic about pressing the attack!

The Eight Lord noticeably changed his approach. He had already been fighting fairly cautiously up to now, but now that he was the only orven god left in the fight, he did not dare to launch any serious counterattacks at the expert mechs that were battering at his defenses!

The orven phase lord had studied enough about human expert pilots that there was always a small chance for them to break through during battle.

The greater the pressure, the greater the likelihood of triggering a breakthrough!

The solution devised by the Eight Lord was fairly simple. He purposefully restrained his aggression and switched to a full turtling strategy!

This maximized his defenses and minimized the chance of suffering an 'accident'.

Of course, this did not mean that the Eight Lord was willing to let the Everchanger, the Greenaxe and the Bloodripper pummel his spatial barriers with impunity.

The three living expert mechs had teamed up to pressure the last remaining orven phase lord.

So far, the Greenaxe had taken the lead in attacking the Eight Lord of Takansha's spatial barriers up close.

Its iconic green-tinted greataxe swung against the spatial barrier with great force and destructive momentum!

Each resonance-empowered blow inflicted a considerable amount of damage to the integrity of a spatial barrier, thereby forcing the Eight Lord to reinforce the barrier or replace it with another one in order to shield his own body against this deadly axe!

The Bloodripper meanwhile tried to act as a persistent nuisance by circling around and unleashing a torrent of phase disruptor beams from his Copperpill, a fairly light but potent fourth generation luminar crystal submachine gun.

The persistent damage inflicted by the Bloodripper steadily wore down the Eight Lord's energy reserves, especially when the expert harasser mech flew close enough for his space suppression module to take effect on the spatial barriers.

The Everchanger looked a bit out of place among these two specialized expert mechs.

His outdated Vitalus luminar crystal rifle inflicted less damage than the Copperpill and was virtually useless against a phase lord that excelled in defense.

Fortunately, the new Bitter Scimitar was a much more powerful weapon!

The D-arm that had been especially prepared by Ves and Ketis made its first formal debut on the battlefield.

While the damage inflicted by a single slash from this extraordinary artifact came close to the damage inflicted by the Scarlet Ember that the Everchanger carried previously, the advantage was that it did not drain the Everchanger's energy reserves dry within a handful of minutes!

This should have given the Everchanger a massive advantage, allowing it to inflict as much damage if not more than a dedicated expert melee mech like the Greenaxe!

However, as the Everchanger repeatedly struck one spatial barrier after another, the Bitter Scimitar started to grow unruly.

The weapon resisted the expert hero mech's grip and occasionally inflicted less damage than it was supposed to. It became very clear to Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger that the D-arm's demonic artifact spirit had grown dissatisfied at the target of their attacks!

"Be patient, scimitar!" Venerable Joshua exhapseratingly tried to placate the impatient D-arm. "These phase lords always hide behind their spatial barriers, and this one just happens to be really strong at them. If you cooperate with us and help us take down these spatial barriers faster, you will get your wish and spill alien blood, I promise!"

The Bitter Swordsman reacted violently and caused the D-arm to shake even more violently than before. The powerful weapon actually looked as if it wanted to escape its wielder's grip!

"Why are you being so impatient! I told you that you will get to cut through real flesh in time, but first we need to tear them all down!"

Joshua's initial experience with wielding the Bitter Scimitar in actual battle was anything but positive up to this point.

He was already expending a considerable amount of effort just to keep the impatient and unruly weapon under control!

## Chapter 6707: The Hungry Blade

When Venerable Joshua initially deployed on the battlefield, he had high hopes about his performance.

The Bitter Scimitar had already proven to be an incredibly formidable weapon.

While it was also plagued by a spirit that was incredibly difficult to pacify, Venerable Joshua thought that the excitement of battle would focus its hostility towards the enemy instead of its wielder.

His assumptions turned out to be considerably off the mark!

The biggest problem was that the artifact spirit did not appear to understand how warfare in the Red Ocean was different from warfare in the Milky Way!

Everyone made much more extensive use of energy shields due to its obvious synergies with phasewater.

This happened to be a downer for the Bitter Swordsman as the demon-turned-artifact spirit still could not shed his hunger and desire to spill blood!

Joshua had promised the Bitter Scimitar that it would be used to sink into the delectable flesh of alien victims, yet so far none of that had occurred!

The D-arm even started to veer sideways as if it wanted to drag the Everchanger to another part of the battlefield where lots of warships filled with vulnerable alien bodies were ripe for the slaughter!

"No! We can't switch our targets! We should leave the job of attacking those warships to others. There are only a few expert pilots and ace pilots who are capable of holding back these phase lords. The Greenaxe and the Bloodripper will have a much harder time if my Everchanger disappears."

Venerable Joshua wasn't sure whether his words even managed to get through the Bitter Swordsman's mind.

He was like an overactive child who craved instant gratification above anything else!

Perhaps the Bitter Scimitar had spent too much time without being utilized for its intended purpose that when it finally took part in a real battle, its already feeble patience had crumbled in its entirety!

The Bitter Scimitar practically grew feral in how it wanted to do anything other than whack its sharp and potent blade against one spatial barrier after another.

The experience of attacking energy barriers was so devoid of gratification that it was no different from cutting a mountain or an asteroid from the perspective of the Bitter Swordsman!

In hindsight, Joshua picked a fight against the wrong phase lord. He assumed that since the Bitter Scimitar was primarily designed to kill phase lords that targeting the Eight Lord of Takansha was a good bet!

Unfortunately, the Bitter Scimitar hated being used against energy defenses so much that it had actively reduced its own power!

The D-arm behaved no differently from a spoiled brat that deliberately sabotaged its own performance just so that it could persuade its wielder to turn away from the Eight Lord of Takansha and attack much more vulnerable prey!

Venerable Joshua briefly thought about giving in to the demands of the D-arm.

The Greenaxe and the Bloodripper were doing pretty decently by themselves.

While the orven warships had begun to be more proactive in supporting their only remaining phase lord on the battlefield, the two expert mechs were able to hang on for quite a while.

The Bloodripper was the expert mech version of the Stingripper. That meant that he excelled at evasion and misdirection. The expert harasser mech gleefully weaved through numerous warship-grade cannon fire.

Even if Kalo's glow was not able to distort the perception of alien gunnery crew at extreme distances, the light mech's inherently high mobility made it very difficult for long-ranged gunnery to hit the machine.

Venerable Pedro Rodrigo was also highly skilled at evasion as well. He was almost just as good as Tusa back when he was still an expert pilot!



The Greenaxe was a lot more vulnerable to attacks, but the expert axeman mech was also able to endure a lot more hits.

Although it was not the most modern high-end mech of the 77th Warborn mech Division, its excellent transphasic defenses allowed it to focus more on attacking for a time.

Venerable Kolak Glendale may not be as good at evasion as his college, but he had his own way of coping with the situation.

His solution?

Just stick close to the Eight Lord of Takansha and make sure to put the lesser phase lord's body between the Greenaxe and most of the orven warships that were trying wear down his resonance shield!

This was a very viable strategy as the Eight Lord's true body was large enough to provide plenty of cover for the expert axeman mech.

The only weapons that were effectively able to get around this obstacle were transphasic missiles, but the Bloodripper made sure to intercept them well before they could explode against the Greenaxe's resonance shield.

Venerable Glendale would never take the risk of bringing his expert mech close to a phase lord that knew how to fight such as the Herald of the Void, the Lower Herdmaster or the late Zren-Divar.

Each of them were powerful, experienced and possessed the capacity to inflict a lot of damage.

However, the Greenaxe was able to largely remain safe because the Eight Lord of Takansha was a defensive specialist who only knew how to play with spatial barriers.

Though the expert mech struggled to destroy the spatial barriers that were both numerous and powerful enough to require a lot of effort to tear down, the Greenaxe was definitely making decent progress.

It was too bad that the combined efforts of the Greenaxe, the Bloodripper and the Everchanger failed to satisfy the Bitter Scimitar!

"Be patient!" Venerable Joshua growled at his own weapon! "If you just wait for a few more minutes, our enemy will run out of barriers. That will be the time where you will truly get to taste alien blood. I will only kill who I want to eliminate, and do so at a time of my choosing! You do not get to decide my actions! Either cooperate and help me tear down these spatial barriers faster, or continue to act like an immature child and make this ordeal last longer than necessary."

The Bitter Swordsman stupidly chose the latter course of action. The Bitter Scimitar seemed to grow weaker, causing it to inflict even less damage against the Eight Lord's spatial barrier than before.

This was one of the disadvantages of wielding a living weapon!

It was great if the mech pilot and the living weapon were aligned in thought and motivation.

However, the Bitter Scimitar was highly volatile and had never completely gotten along with Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger.

The worst part about it was that Joshua thought that he had made progress. The D-arm had been growing more accustomed to him and his expert mech. He thought that the powerful new weapon would remain this way when they entered the battlefield.

What went wrong?

Did Joshua make a mistake?

Why was the Bitter Swordsman so insistent on turning away from the Eight Lord of Takansha?

"What is it that you want?!" He shouted at his own weapon! "Tell me! I need to understand! Why are you refusing to cooperate with me?! Don't you know how important it is for us to kill or drive away this phase lord?!"

The Bitter Scimitar took offense at Joshua's confrontational tone!

It retaliated by lengthening and curling the spikes that were located close to the hilt.

The sharp metal spikes stabbed straight into the hand that held the D-arm!

"THAT HURTS!" The Everchanger complained.

The expert hero mech did not experience any physical pain as he was strictly speaking a machine.

However, the Bitter Scimitar was also capable of inflicting harm on the mech's spiritual foundation. Though its retaliation was not strong enough to be fatal, the Everchanger did not appreciate this gesture in the slightest!

While the Bitter Swordsman was being childish and irrational as usual, he at least conveyed the reason why he wanted to kill other aliens so badly.

Joshua widened his eyes as he realized the source of the Bitter Scimitar's bloodlust.

"Souls."

The Bitter Scimitar was able to detect the mass slaughter that took place in the distance.

It detected the deaths of humans stationed inside crumbling orbital fortresses that failed to evacuate in time.

It was able to sense the large number of humans and alien pilots that got killed as their mechs and phasefighters fought for supremacy.

It was also able to perceive the demise of massive amounts of alien crew members that served within the alien warships that got felled by sustained human bombardment!

The Bitter Swordsman did not crave for bloodshed or bloodshed's sake.

As irrational as he may be, he was also a slave to his own desires. For whatever reason, he hungered for souls, and what better way to harvest thousands of them by ripping into the hulls of huge alien warships and destroying them so that the aliens inside would perish en masse?

This was the best way to sate the Bitter Scimitar's appetite as far as the D-arm was concerned!

Venerable Joshua glowered. He began to doubt whether Ketis had any involvement in making this weapon. There was no way she would ever agree to forge such an evil blade!

"Why are you drooling over those worthless souls when there is a much bigger one in front of us? I don't know about you, but I think that the soul of a phase lord is much more nutritious than the alternatives."

The Bigger Scimitar clearly did not agree. Its spikes increased in length and burrowed even further into the Everchanger's hand!

"I refuse! I will not participate in the effort to destroy those warships because holding back the phase lords is more important. I will not compromise with you on this matter! If you want to harvest any souls during this fight, then you better cooperate with me, or else you will get nothing!"

Venerable Joshua found himself in a dilemma. When Ketis gifted him the Bitter Scimitar and taught him about her Heaven Earth Man Trifecta, he had devised a promising plan to form a relationship with the powerful D-arm and use it to facilitate his breakthrough as an expert pilot.

He recognized that trying to achieve symbiosis with a resistant artifact may be enough of a challenge to break through on the basis of this concept.

Yet now that he was attempting to put his plan into practice, he found that he had no choice but to put his foot down and tell the Bitter Scimitar who was in charge!

This was not the kind of relationship that he wanted to forge with the D-arm, but Joshua increasingly felt it was hopeless to befriend the weapon.

The Bitter Swordsman lacked too much self-control to exhibit any workable form of reason!

This caused Joshua to change his attitude towards the D-arm. Instead of treating the Bitter Scimitar as an equal partner like he did with the Everchanger, he was more inclined to treat it as a stupid and feral pet!

As Joshua continued to grapple with his unwilling and resistant weapon, a crucial development occurred not too far away.

The Amphis Extremis had exited the Volcanic Outburst Mode!

The Herald of the Void immediately noticed the changes and quickly switched from defense to offense!

The powerful jureg phase lord immediately launched a counterattack with his unarmored claws.

They were not covered by his raiment because it was not necessary. The claws of a jureg phase lord might not be as sharp as a Saint Piercer, but the enormous muscles that powered them could apply so much force that they had been known to snap expert mechs and ace mechs in half!

The Amphis Extremis tried its best to persevere in the face of this threat, but the damage and fatigue caused by the Volcanic Outburst Mode caused the ace mech to slow down a bit more than was ideal.

At one point, the ace offensive space knight lost half of its tower shield as the Herald of the Void managed to snap his claw forward at a prodigious speed and almost managed to clasp the torso of the Amphis Extremis!

Saint Linda reacted quickly and just managed to move Amphis Extremis away fast enough that only half of its tower shield got snapped.

The Herald of the Void gained greater confidence on this and began to advance with greater determination than before!

Nothing was allowed to stop him from destroying the orbital defense ring!

Chapter 6709: A Plan To Inflict More Losses

The greater phase lords could not be stopped anymore.

No matter whether it was the Herald of the Void or the Lower Herdmaster, their hard power was too great for ordinary measures to work anymore.

The Amphis Extremis had reached a state of fatigue. While Saint Linda Cross still possessed a decent amount of fighting spirit and had yet to exhaust her willpower, she had overburdened her machine in an attempt to hold back the Herald of the Void mainly herself.

A similar dynamic applied to the First Sword. Saint Dise Larkinson was the best swordsman mech specialist on the battlefield, but even if she was able to reinforce the parts of her expert mech with her Saint Kingdom, there was only so much she could do to maintain an exceptionally high level of performance!

The extreme maneuvers and excessive exertions of force that she thought was necessary to stay one step ahead of the Saint Piercer-wielding phase lord all took a toll on her machine.

The First Sword Mark II was only a mid-tier expert mech. It was never supposed to perform at a level that was close to an ace mech, and forcing it to do so drastically shortened its service life!

Therefore, the Lower Herdmaster also couldn't be stopped anymore.

While their spatial barriers continually got pummeled by the firepower that Saint Casella Ingvar and many other friendly assets brought to bear, the defenses were way more effective than ordinary azure energy shield generators.

They also became harder to target as they gained more room for maneuver. Without any effective opposition left, it became harder for the guns of the orbital defense ring to maintain a high hit rate against the large but also faster-moving phase lords.

The fact that there weren't as many defensive fortifications left as before also contributed to humanity's increasing inability to prevent the greater phase lords from rampaging.

The aliens had brought too many warships. Many of them got felled. Their larger and more valuable hulls especially got targeted due to how much harder it was to produce them en masse, but that still left a lot of smaller destroyer and cruiser-sized vessels that were all armed with their own collection of guns.

As for the phasefighters, they had suffered enormous losses, but they did not make it easy for the opposing mechs.

The aliens were able to tolerate casualties much easier than their human foes.

The loss of a single mech was a comparatively greater loss to red humanity than to the native aliens.

Losing the pilots made this comparison even more lopsided!

Mech pilots were far more skilled and experienced than alien phasefighter pilots, but that also made their deaths extra painful to red humanity.

While the amount of experienced and professional mech pilots was still fairly abundant for now, that might not remain true anymore after several more years of hard fighting.

This was why mech academies throughout human-occupied space had already begun to trim their curriculums.

It was no longer realistic for mech pilots to waste their time on further studies and attend an advanced mech academy for 4 or 5 additional years!

In any case, the introduction of systematic cultivation massively eased the difficulty of compressing mech piloting education.

As long as a mech cadet made enough attainments in an auxiliary qi cultivation method, he or she may only need 4 years to gain 10 years worth of proficiency in the skills that needed to be mastered!

Even so, the fact that it still took a couple of years to transform this year's mech cadets into half-way decent mech pilots could not be avoided!

This was especially inconvenient considering that mech academies had already begun to offer shortened training programs for a rapidly growing amount of norms that aspired to become Carmine mech pilots.

While the amount of volunteers who wanted to contribute to the war effort by fighting in the trenches was gratifying, there was no immediate way to turn them into readily available mech pilots in the short term.

A large influx of retired and disabled veterans had already been reactivated, but there weren't as many of them in the Red Ocean as the higher ups hoped.

After all, the Red Ocean was a place of opportunity for the young and healthy. The proportion of elderly and retired mech pilots that decided to emigrate to this dwarf galaxy was very low back when the greater beyonder gates were still operational.

The only significantly large group that could still be reactivated were disabled veterans who had suffered brain damage over the course of their service in the Red Ocean.

Even this group became sparse when the newly converted Carmine mech pilots got dispersed across the frontlines.

In any case, the ultimate point was that trained, educated and experienced manpower was a precious strategic asset to red humanity.

It was truly not worth it to kill 10 alien soldiers at the cost of 1 human mech pilot!

Yet the reason why the people stationed in Viola Magnifica did not evacuate unless they put up a mean fight was because they had no other choice.

Territory was just as valuable as manpower, if not more.

Giving up a star system without a fight might allow red humanity to preserve a lot of manpower, but it would lose a portion of its living space and industrial capacity for free!

It was stupid to give up ground for free. Doing it enough times would just cause red humanity to put itself at an even greater disadvantage than before.

This was why there was a consensus among the human leaders that every star system should be fought over.

People needed to fight not just because they needed to make the aliens bleed for every piece of territory they took, but also to keep up humanity's fighting spirit.



If red humanity conceded a star system without a fight a few times due to strategic considerations, then that was fine.

If red humanity started to give up star systems left and right just because its leaders were afraid of suffering too many losses, then this could easily spark a chain reaction where many officers and soldiers simply lost faith in their ability to resist the enemy!

The ultimate dilemma that red humans faced at this time was that they could not afford to incur too many losses, but had to suffer them anyway because their enemies gave them no other choice!

Since the native aliens forced red humanity to engage in attrition warfare, the latter could only accept the rules as given and try to struggle to even the odds as much as possible.

This was why Saint Commander Casella Ingvar felt so unreconciled by the results of this battle.

The elimination of two lesser phase lords was a great result, but the amount of mech pilots and support personnel that died over the course of this battle were also considerable.

If the human defenders left without inflicting greater losses onto the enemy forces, then this battle would ultimately end up benefiting the native aliens the most!

"Do you understand what Casella is asking of you, Joshua?"

"I think I get it." He said. "You want us to kill the Eight Lord of Takansha so that the orven soldiers will collapse and lose any motivation to fight any further. This will introduce massive fault lines within the alien armada and make it much easier to inflict losses onto the enemy."

Ketis nodded. "The benefits go further than that. Think about how the greater orven community when an invasion force led by two jureg phase lords, one nunser phase lord and three orven phase lords end up losing the latter after a single battle."

"I see! You want to sow division between the orven race and the other major alien races! The orvens soldiers stationed elsewhere will begin to suspect that their gods are being conspired against. The remaining orven phase lords might not entirely believe that this is happening, but they will definitely fight more cautiously than before, causing them to become considerably less helpful on the battlefield."

"Exactly. Killing two orven phase lords is not enough as that could still be chalked up to a coincidence. It is only when we kill the third orven phase lord that a pattern will be set."

"That sounds great, but how do you expect me to be able to kill the Eight Lord of Takansha so quickly? He has so many spatial barriers at his disposal that he can stall us out long enough to flee to the rear or converge with the greater phase lords."

Joshua recognized that killing a lesser phase lord that excelled at defense was impossible unless he was able to kill him quickly.

"The Saint Commander will help." Ketis responded. "She is prepared to direct the firepower of all of her Enfeoffed Barons to the Eight Lord of Takansha at once."

"What about her Knights?"

"They are still necessary to suppress and destroy the enemy warships. Haven't you noticed that the puelmer heavy cruisers are no longer causing any trouble? That is because Casella has thoroughly suppressed them to the point where they cannot breathe anymore."

That was good. What the puelmers lacked in phase lords, they made up for it with advanced technology. It was always better if there were less of them on the battlefield.

"I am going to need more help than that." Joshua said with a frown. "Venerable Glendale and Venerable Rodrigo are good, but our combined attacks aren't enough for the task."

"The Saint Commander has also decided to put Commander Melkor into play."

Joshua did not look impressed. "Really? You expect us to kill the final remaining orven phase lord with the help of Melkor?"

"Don't expect to receive any further help. The C-Man and the two expert Valkyrie mechs are doing their best to stall the Fatedriver. The Star Dancer Mark II is guarding our flanks to prevent the native aliens from encircling us. The Phobos has snuck behind enemy lines and is currently preoccupied with turning damaged warships into destroyed warships. Reassigning them to you won't make much of a difference."

"Then how..."

"Melkor is being assigned to assist you because Casella believes in your strength." Ketis firmly said. "I believe in you as well. So what if you have suffered a setback? This is your first time using the Bitter Scimitar in actual combat. It is normal to encounter teething issues. What is important is that you resolve whatever differences you may have with your new D-arm and use it to tear down the defenses of the enemy phase lord at a much faster pace. I was involved in the development and forging of this sword artifact. I have a good idea of how powerful it can be. You just need to charge the weapon with phasewater in order to unleash its full potential."

"It's not that simple, Ketis! First, my weapon has so much control over its functions that it has denied me from activating it on my own initiative. If I don't get this stupid weapon's agreement, I will never be able to burn phasewater to amplify the cutting power of my blade. Second, my expert mech is only carrying a limited reserve of phasewater. I am afraid that by the time I chop my way through all of the spatial barriers, my stash will run out. That will leave me with nothing to cut into the body of the Eight Lord of Takansha."

"That is not a problem."

"How so?"

"Think about it, Joshua. What is a substance that all phase lords have in their bodies?"

"I know that the true bodies of a phase lord contains phasewater. I am not stupid." The expert pilot responded with irritation. "It's not that simple. As far as I know, the phasewater concentration of the blood of a phase lord is not that high. Feeding raw phase lord blood to the phasewater-charged mechanisms will cause them to gunk up or malfunction."

"That is true in most cases." Ketis admitted. "Your D-arm is different. It has long moved beyond the realm of a technological weapon. It is an artifact. It doesn't have to play by the rules anymore. Besides, I believe that you should easily be able to overcome this problem if you empower of the Bitter Scimitar with your true resonance. This is your specialty, Joshua. It is time for you to move beyond the basics and develop your own unique powers and abilities. As long as you break through, killing the Eight Lord of Takansha should be a piece of cake."

Ketis had high expectations towards her husband, but would Joshua truly be able to live up to them this time?

## Chapter 6710: Character Test

The Larkinsons formulated a new plan. There were too many advantages to killing the third orven phase lord, but doing so quickly enough to prevent other aliens from intervening was difficult.

The fact of the matter was that the Saint Commander had little faith that it could be done unless Joshua broke through.

The new plan therefore centered around the highly optimistic assumption that Joshua would find a way to break through somehow.

This was easier said than done.

The Bitter Scimitar still held no goodwill towards him, while the Eight Lord of Takansha continued to play so passively that he denied Joshua the stimulus needed to trigger a breakthrough.

It was clear that if Joshua wanted the situation to change, he had to start with himself.

"You need to make a couple of hard decisions." Ketis said. "I roughly know what kind of ace pilot you want to become. You want to leverage the power of your intangible friends. This way, you will not only leverage your affinity for the life element, but also expand your versatility by giving you the option of borrowing the power of other spirits. This is a suitable approach to you, but unless you can make the Bitter Scimitar cooperate with you, I do not see a way for you to succeed in the short term."

"Then what do you suggest I do instead?"

"I don't have all of the solutions." Ketis admitted to her husband. "However, I can tell you what I would do if I was in your situation. As a swordmaster, it is intolerable for me to wield a blade that is not under my control. I will either threaten it and coerce it into cooperating with me, or I will take a chance and open myself up to the weapon in the hopes that we can form a mutual accord. These are the only solutions that I can make use of when I am on a time limit."

Venerable Joshua furrowed his brows. The two options presented by Ketis made sense, but each of them came with their own problems.

He had been thinking about trying to browbeat the Bitter Scimitar into submission ever since he first grappled with the disobedient weapon.

The D-arm was too spoiled, willful and violent.

Joshua often thought about treating the weapon like a disobedient pet that needed to be disciplined before it finally began to behave properly.

Though he frequently rejected this solution due to the fear of ruining his chance to form a genuine relationship with the Bitter Scimitar, he might not have another choice if he wanted to leverage its power without facing constant resistance.

Still, Joshua instinctively rejected the decision to apply coercive means.

He instinctively felt that as long as he resorted to this means, there was no going back.

This may be one of the most important character tests of his career. His decision on how to deal with the Bitter Scimitar may have far-reaching effects on his future as a champion!

Joshua did not dare to be careless on this matter.

"What about the other option?"

"You have read my new manual, haven't you? Of course you have. I even lectured you about the most important theories just to ensure you can properly benefit from my ideas. While I haven't lectured you about this topic, have you read and studied the chapter on Sword Pacts."

The expert pilot nodded. "I did, though mostly out of curiosity. Your theories do sound rather interesting. They sound very similar to the patriarch's Blood Pacts. I suppose this may be a good way for a sword practitioner to raise his Earth score according to your model, but... wait. Are you telling me... to form a sacred Sword Pact... with the Bitter Scimitar?"

Ketis' projection began to smile. "I see you have figured out what I was about to propose to you. It is risky, and it may very well drive you crazy if you are not careful, but I think you have what it takes to pass this test. I know it doesn't sound very appealing to you at this moment, but I truly did

forge the Bitter Scimitar exclusively for your use. That's why it comes in the form of a scimitar and not a straight blade as I know you will do better with a weapon that just expects you to slash."

"You can't be serious, Ketis! If I recall the words you wrote in your book, you strongly emphasized that a sword practitioner should only form a Sword Pact with a blade that calls or sings to you. All the Bitter Scimitar has done since it came into my possession is to insult and belittle me before trying to escape my grasp."

"I know what I have written, but those words are meant for typical sword practitioners who can devote plenty of time to commission or purchase the sword artifact of their dreams. You on the other hand can only make do with the D-arm that you already have. Look, this will not be easy for you. It may very well be life-threatening to you, but I would never make this suggestion if I believe that you will fail. As strong as the artifact spirit of the Bitter Scimitar may be, do not forget that you are an expert pilot that is on the verge of becoming an ace pilot. I have enough confidence in your ability to overcome the hostility of the Bitter Swordsman and form a partnership with your D-arm."

"I am not a swordmaster. I am an expert pilot. Is it even possible for me to form a Sword Pact with the Bitter Scimitar?"

"You can." Ketis confidently stated. "It is not even necessary for you to drip your blood on it, though it will help if you can do so. I am already in the process of developing a custom ritual for you that will allow you to use your companion spirit as an initial medium to make contact with the Bitter Scimitar. It will be based on the default Life Sword Pact and the Spirit Sword Pact. Wait. I just came up with a better idea. Please hold for a few seconds. I need to consult with Ves!"

His wife fell out of contact for a while. Venerable Joshua could only wait while trying to wear down another spatial barrier with his recalcitrant Bitter Scimitar.

Soon enough, Ketis spoke over the communication channel. "Ves and I have put our minds together and came up with an idea that is much more promising than what I devised before. The two of us have cobbled together a pact that is highly suitable for you. The idea is for you to form a Blood Pact and a D-Sword Pact with the Everchanger and the Bitter Scimitar at the same time."

"What?! How is that possible?! My Everchanger doesn't even have a Carmine System! Besides, won't the two fight or interfere with each other somehow?"

"It is possible because you and your Everchanger are already able to exchange a type of E-energy that possesses many of the same fundamental effects and meaning as blood. Life energy. Ves theorizes that it is entirely possible for you to overcome the lack of a Carmine System and so on by

using life energy that you already have access to. While the main goal of this plan is for you to form a Life Sword Pact with the Bitter Scimitar in the hopes that this intimate contract will cause the two of you to get along, bonding with the Everchanger in a similar fashion will yield many potential benefits. One of the advantages is that the Everchanger can serve as a neutral middle ground that can ease the tensions between you and the Bitter Scimitar."

Though Joshua never came up with the idea, he quickly realized how using the Everchanger as a buffer between himself and the Bitter Scimitar may ease the tension in their relationship.

"If what you say is true, then trying to fulfill it will forever turn the Everchanger into my sole machine. I will not be able to pilot any other mechs from that point onwards. I... I am not ready for this! Aren't there new versions of the Carmine System in development that comes with much fewer restrictions?"

Ketis sighed. "As I said before, if you want to advance to the rank of ace pilot today rather than the distant future, then you need to pay attention to your communications. You cannot wait until you have enough time to sort out your relationship with the Bitter Scimitar. You need to take action now, and that means working with what you got, even if they don't look too impressive or suitable. This is a huge and monumental decision for you to make, so we don't blame you if you do not want to try out this unproven and potentially dangerous ritual. Personally, I think you should do it. As long as you are strong enough, I know you will be able to persevere."

She framed this crazy proposal as a challenge, one that was dangerous but also rewarding enough that he may be able to advance to the rank of ace pilot!

It was working. Joshua was not entirely sure, but he felt that Ketis' speculations may be right.

There were many reasons to believe it would serve as a very challenging test for himself.

He would have to make sacrifices, the most significant of which was to say goodbye to piloting any other mech than the Everchanger!

By swearing off the use of other mechs, Joshua would become vastly more committed to piloting the Everchanger and nothing else going forward. The two of them would grow a lot closer in response until he turned into a pilot who was similar to Jannzi!

Though Joshua did not foresee any danger in trying to bond with a living expert mech that he had been piloting for multiple years, the opposite was true in the case of the Bitter Scimitar.

He possessed strong enough willpower for his rank, but the problem was that the Bitter Swordsman was an artifact spirit that possessed strength in his own measure.

Joshua the ace pilot may be able to subdue the Bitter Scimitar and force a Life Sword Pact upon the D-Arm.

Joshua the high-tier expert pilot still fell short in this aspect!

The consequences of failure would be dire. Not only would he drive the Bitter Swordsman crazy, but he may also suffer a severe blow to his mental power and spirit!

Yet if Joshua showed enough sincerity to lower the hostility of the D-arm and earn its reluctant acceptance, then he could definitely find common ground with the mech scimitar and utilize its full power against his foes!

As Joshua continued to weigh all of the options available to him, he ultimately sighed as he had already made a choice that aligned with his heart.

"Do it. Give me the instructions for this weird new pact. I hope it will work, because I probably won't be around if the ritual is botched. If I fail or become braindead, the responsibility will lie with you and the patriarch. Just so you know."

"The theory is sound, though it has never been put to practice in such an unorthodox way." Ketis defended herself. "Don't be nervous. It will work. I think you are on the cusp of greatness. A few unexpected transformations and changes may occur in the process of forming a three-way pact with your expert mech and mech weapon, but this may be exactly what you need to trigger your long-awaited breakthrough!"

Once Joshua received the instructions for the convoluted 'D-Sword-Mech Pact', he quickly memorized it. He learned that blood was not a necessary meaning if the cultivator was already strong enough to manipulate E-energy to an extent.

The true challenge lay in getting the Bitter Scimitar to agree to form a pact with Joshua.

He already had an idea on how to make this happen.



"We need to talk."