

Mech Touch 6711

Chapter 6711: The Struggle for Control

Joshua felt a little bad about it, but he controlled the Everchanger to back off from the Eight Lord of Takansha.

The withdrawal did not change the situation all that much. The Greenaxe and the Bloodripper were already doing a good job at keeping the sole remaining orven phase lord in a defensive posture.

Though there was no true safety on the battlefield, the focus of the engagement had definitely shifted towards the space around the greater phase lords. They were leading the armada forward and had already begun to demolish the most outlying orbital defenses.

The Everchanger hardly attracted any attention under the circumstances. It was as if the expert hero mech had become inconsequential, which happened to be true in this case.

Joshua was tired of being weak. He did not want to spend the next years of fighting as an expert pilot that was only able to tickle the lesser phase lords at best.

Wielding the Bitter Scimitar was supposed to mitigate one of the Everchanger's shortcomings.

However, the D-arm was so hostile towards its own wielder that it had become only moderately more lethal than the Heartsword.

Ketis was right.

If Joshua wanted to enact real change, then he needed to make a few hard choices.

Though he prized his ability to pilot any mech he would like, for the sake of becoming an ace pilot, he was not opposed to forming a Blood Pact with the Everchanger.

He just expected that he wouldn't have to make this decision so soon. He expected to have a deep discussion with the Larkinson Patriarch about whether to install a new and customized variation of the Carmine System that was designed just for himself.

Joshua would have loved to form a Blood Pact with the Everchanger with the help of a well-engineered and more advanced version of the Carmine System.

This was why he felt so hesitant about the current proposal. Trying to form a hastily modified version of a Blood Pact with the Everchanger sounded like a desecration to him. It was as inappropriate as trying to hold a wedding in a sewage plant. It was hardly the solemn and sacred ceremony that he envisioned in his dreams.

"IT IS OKAY, JOSHUA." His battle partner vocalized. "EVERYONE LOVES A GOOD CEREMONY, BUT INCREASING YOUR STRENGTH NOW IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVERYTHING ELSE. THIS DWARF GALAXY DOES NOT CARE FOR CEREMONY OR FEELINGS. IT CARES ABOUT RESULTS. I WOULD BE GLAD TO FORM A PACT WITH YOU, JOSHUA. IN FACT, MY PROGENITOR IS CORRECT. WE DO NOT NEED TO EXCHANGE BLOOD IN ORDER TO FORM A PERMANENT BOND. THE TWO OF US ARE ALREADY TIED TO EACH OTHER. WE ONLY HAVE TO REINFORCE AND UPGRADE OUR EXISTING CONNECTION SO THAT IT RESEMBLES A REAL BLOOD PACT."

Despite the unusual method used to form a Blood Pact with the Everchanger, Joshua was not too worried about botching this process.

So long as both sides wanted to form a permanent bond with each other, they would find a way to make it work. They knew each other too well, and both of them had grown considerably stronger over the years.

The real challenge lay in forming an earnest bond with the Bitter Scimitar.

There was no way in hell that Joshua could form a true bond of friendship with the D-arm.

It would be impossible for the hostile weapon to agree to form a Life Sword Pact with Joshua given their complete lack of mutual respect and understanding.

This was why Joshua decided to issue an ultimatum to the rebellious scimitar.

He took a deep breath before he decided to communicate with the D-arm.

"Enough is enough. I am tired of your stupid games and your continued defiance against any form of cooperation. Let's have a showdown between you and I. Shortly after I am finished, I will

attempt to form a Life Sword Pact with you. This means that our souls will become connected to each other. This is supposed to tie each other together and help each other grow stronger and such, but I think that you will not be satisfied with that, am I right?"

The Bitter Scimitar shook in the Everchanger's sword hand.

"Yeah." Joshua grinned. "Since you don't agree to do that, then let us do this instead. Let's make a bet. If you allow me to form a Life Sword Pact with you, we can have a fair contest about who gets to possess and control my body. From what I have gathered, you used to be a mech pilot yourself, right? I am not too clear about where you come from, but you clearly know a thing or two about mech piloting. Well, here's my body. It is ripe for the taking, but only if a channel exists between you and I. No pact, no bet."

The scimitar shook again.

"I am not cheating you. The Life Sword Pact will only involve the two of us. I won't draw upon the power of my living mech or any of my design spirit friends. You won't be convinced that I am stronger and more deserving than you if I rely on outside help. I am truly, sincerely and honestly putting my body and life on the line just to be able to wield you properly in battle. All I am asking from you is this. If I win the struggle for control, you will put away your hostility towards me and the Everchanger. I expect you to obey my orders. Do not misbehave. These terms will be embedded in the pact, so don't think about pretending to agree."

"..."

"Fine. I will change this term so that you are only expected to cooperate with me to the best of your ability. Any further objections?"

"..."

"That is a huge demand! It is not acceptable for me to permit you to challenge me again! If I win this bet, then you need to abide by the outcome. Those are the rules."

"...!"

Joshua sighed. He did not have the time or patience to haggle with his D-arm. "Fine. If you are so stubborn about it, then I will agree to give you the right to challenge me for control over my body

when you have become stronger and feel confident enough that you can win. However, I don't want you to take advantage of me when I am weak, so you can only make another bet when I am able to compete in my best condition in a reasonable time frame. If you win, you get to live again using my body as your new shell. If you lose, then I not only expect you to cooperate as before, but I also get to claim a part of your strength."

"!!!"

"What, are you the only one who is allowed to take something from others? A bet is a bet. If you want to take over my body, then I will only give you this chance if you are willing to put yourself on the line. This time, I am only asking for you to drop your hostility towards me and cooperate as best as possible with me and my Everchanger. Next time, you will sacrifice a portion of your strength to me. This will make you weaker and less able to mount another challenge so soon. I don't want to worry about getting challenged by you every week or so. There has to be a price for every bet you want to make. Do you understand?"

The Bitter Scimitar stilled.

"Good. I am glad that you are sensible enough to accept my proposal."

Joshua knew he was taking an awfully huge risk, but this was the time where he needed to stop doubting himself and believe in his own strength.

He understood that the Bitter Scimitar had a fair chance of success. It might not possess abnormally strong willpower like himself, but it was considerably more powerful than him in different ways.

Part of why the Bitter Scimitar was so disobedient towards him was because he lacked the strength to make it fall in line.

Trying to compete with it directly under the circumstances was hardly the wisest decision that he could make, but his wife believed he would come out on top.

That was enough for Joshua.

He was willing to trust Ketis' judgement and chose to believe in himself.

Joshua proceeded to conduct the ritual. It did not involve anything too complicated. He was already strong enough and could readily use his companion spirit Willy to perform the necessary steps more directly.

In other words, the Carmine System was not strictly necessary for an expert pilot at his level.

It did not take long for Joshua to strengthen and evolve the existing spiritual bond between himself and the Everchanger.

It helped a lot that the Everchanger not only understood what he was doing, but actively helped on his side.

Life energy surged from both Joshua and the Everchanger. Just as expected, it acted as a more direct and higher-quality medium than organic blood and readily bound the two together.

As the pact was struck, Joshua knew without a shadow of a doubt that he had become a Carmine mech pilot.

From today onwards, he forever gave up his ability to pilot other mechs.

In exchange, his understanding and his control over the Everchanger improved in a qualitative manner.

He could already feel far more in tune with the expert hero mech than before. He could feel the age of his components, the vitality accumulating within his hyper materials and the multitude of connections with nearly every known design spirit.

The lines between Joshua and the Everchanger had blurred.

It felt as if the two hadn't established anything particularly new. They merely recognized a bond that already existed and brought it to the foreground.

While Joshua wanted to explore this wonderful new 'Blood Pact' further, the Bitter Scimitar was growing impatient.

The expert pilot quickly began to reach out to the D-arm for the purpose of forming a Life Sword Pact.

Suffice to say, it was much more difficult to make this happen as no meaningful bond existed between the two. Joshua had to force himself to reach out to the Bitter Scimitar.

Meanwhile, the weapon was not really helping.

It took a bit longer than Joshua liked to finally form the beginnings of a Life Sword Pact.

Fortunately, the Bitter Scimitar did not resist its formation. Its artifact spirit was incredibly eager to start the bet and win the struggle for control!

There was nothing the Bitter Swordsman wanted more than to gain a second chance at life as a human mech pilot!

Joshua could practically feel the greed and hostility radiating from the Bitter Scimitar. When the Life Sword Pact finally reached a state of maturity, the Bitter Swordsman immediately pounced!

A huge surge of dark and malevolent energies exploded from the D-arm and rapidly climbed their way up along the sword arm before spreading across the torso!

Though the Everchanger quickly resisted and tried to preserve his integrity over the remainder of his mech frame, it was clear that he was not fully capable of pushing the invasion back!

Meanwhile, Joshua began to scream in pain as his head suddenly turned into a violent battlefield!

A specter of the Bitter Swordsman had passed through the newly formed Life Sword Pact and directly invaded Joshua's head for the purpose of taking it over!

Joshua could not permit that from happening and immediately leveraged his willpower to resist the invasion.

"Ah!"

An explosion of dark and malevolent energies erupted from his helmeted head as he suffered a disadvantage during the initial collision.

It was just as he feared. While his willpower caused him to hold the advantage in terms of quality, the Bitter Swordsman was considerably more powerful in quantitative terms.

The latter possessed a lot of energy!

"That is not all." Joshua gasped.

The spiritual invader managed to concentrate his power and inflict effective damage to Joshua's willpower immediately after arrival.

This told Joshua that he was dealing with a highly skilled and experienced fighter!

Chapter 6712: Joshua's Own Power

Venerable Joshua had arguably made one of the stupidest decisions in his life.

He placed himself in a corner and practically begged the Bitter Swordsman to come and take over his body!

Such an action amounted to nothing less than suicide for most people. The Bitter Swordsman was the source of much of the Bitter Scimitar's extraordinary power. The demonic artifact spirit possessed power that was on the same level of a design spirit in certain aspects.

For Joshua to challenge this entity to a showdown over the control of his own body was not the wisest decision for that reason!

After the initial collisions, Joshua immediately understood that the Bitter Swordsman was both competent and experienced in these kinds of battles.

The artifact spirit started out strong. He leveraged his full power to amplify his momentum and suffocate Joshua. He also transformed aspects of his intangible self and turned into a demonic swordsman that actively used his resentment to draw upon a large amount of negative energies!

Though Joshua was able to block the flow of much of these dark and corrupting energies due to his willpower, the effort induced a lot of strain!

That was not all. The Bitter Swordsman did not just rely on his strong control over malevolent energies to wear Joshua down, but also took action more directly by flashing forward and launching a flurry of attacks with a spiritual copy of the Bitter Scimitar!

Unlike Joshua and the Everchanger, the artifact spirit was able to wield the Bitter Scimitar with a great degree of proficiency and control.

Even if the copy in his hand was not identical to the real D-arm, the artifact spirit was still able to rely on his great familiarity and understanding of the scimitar to simulate its power.

The Bitter Swordsman's offensive kicked into an even higher gear when the weapon in his arm began to charge itself up by absorbing a certain type of E Energy!

"What?!"

Joshua reacted with shock as he could feel that the artifact spirit's weapon had actually imitated the phasewater-charged tech that was supposed to make the Bitter Scimitar so deadly against phase lords.

The difference between this version and the original D-arm was that the former absorbed life energy in order to empower its blade!

This was extremely bad news for Joshua as life E energy happened to be his primary element!

One of the sources of his strength had suddenly turned into a liability as the Bitter Swordsman demonstrated a scary capacity to feed off life energy and use it as fuel to amplify his attack power!

Joshua's willpower was being sapped at a considerably faster rate!

All of this was bad news for the expert pilot who issued this challenge. He had known that the Bitter Swordsman would fight hard for the chance to come back to life, but his offensive rhythm was so much higher than predicted.

Though the offensive blitz immediately put Joshua on the backfoot, his willpower was not that easy to tear down.

The battle that took place inside Joshua's body roughly mirrored the final battle that decided the ownership of Viola Magnifica.

The malevolent artifact spirit clearly relied on attrition warfare to wear down and tire out the expert pilot.

Joshua was able to hold his ground for the time being because his willpower was able to resist a lot of E energy attacks.

However, the Bitter Swordsman was a being who had reached a higher life state. Even if qi manipulators were at a natural disadvantage when facing willpower cultivators, the artifact spirit clearly understood that no one's willpower was infinite!

As long as the Bitter Swordsman kept up his attacks and actively drained as much life energy as possible, Joshua would eventually get exhausted, thereby making it easy to absorb him and take over everything in his possession!

Joshua could not allow this to happen. Staying on the defensive was a dead end strategy. He needed to go on the attack and rely on his greatest strength to reverse this situation!

However, what was his greatest strength?

Cooperation. He and the Everchanger had developed the art of cooperation to a much deeper extent than any other pair of mech pilot and living mech.

To his fellow peers, design spirits were like the icing on a cake. Only when an expert pilot needed to amplify the power of his blessed weapon did the power of a design spirit become a lot more relevant, but aside from that they acted like mascots most of the time.

Joshua was different. He did not regard the practice of borrowing the insights and power of design spirits to be a form of weakness.

Instead, he saw it as a way to achieve better outcomes by generating powerful synergies.

The problem now was that Joshua had explicitly vowed to not draw upon the power of his expert mech or any design spirit for this fight!

He had voluntarily waved away his greatest strength and advantage.

While he knew that this would put himself at a considerable disadvantage, he did not regret this decision.

He wanted to prove his strength by relying on his own merits for once. A breakthrough based on borrowing the power of a much more powerful design spirit such as Gaia or the Superior Mother would eventually turn into a flaw that would continually serve as a source of doubt going forward.

If Joshua wanted to prove that he was strong enough without relying on his 'friends', he needed to fight this battle by relying on himself!

His yearning to prove his strength and catch up with the likes of Saint Tusa and Saint Commander Casella had grown so strong that he was willing to put his life on the line!

Joshua recognized that most of his previous breakthrough opportunities failed because he did not push himself enough.

He had come closest to breaking through during the battle against the Emperor Tree.

While he admitted that he had not been in the right mind by pointing his pistol at himself in the belief that comprehending the power of death would enhance his mastery over life, he still recognized that the best way to induce another breakthrough was to put himself in a similar situation.

Only when he was driven into a corner with no help coming would he be able to unlock his greater potential.

Here he was. His current situation was very similar to that past incident. He had once again turned his own weapon against himself!

The biggest difference between the two scenarios was that in one of them, he still had control over his own service firearm.

This time, he completely lost control over the Bitter Scimitar!

It would be more correct to say that he never really controlled the mysterious D-arm to begin with. By opening himself up to a direct assault from its artifact spirit, Joshua initiated a fight that could not be stopped!

Win or lose!

Life or death!

Resist or capitulate!

Joshua had no other choice but to fight for one outcome or another!

There were no complications anymore. There were no outside factors that could influence or interrupt the process.

Joshua was on his own, and that meant that the only way he could beat the Bitter Swordsman was by putting up a fight instead of inviting others to do all of the hard work!

Though the expert pilot felt far more vulnerable and threatened than before, he also felt more in tune with his life!

His previous theory that coming in touch with death would allow him to deepen his appreciation of life was not wrong!

The greater the pressure, the more he valued his own being. He no longer took his life for granted and desperately wanted to fight to preserve his own existence!

"I can't remain passive like this! I need to fight back!"

Joshua had already begun to push back, but it was difficult. Every time he concentrated his willpower and tried to attack or suppress the Bitter Swordsman, his adversary used his formidable reserves of negative energies to withstand the blows!

At the same time, the artifact spirit continued to drain Joshua's life energy, causing him to speed up his exhaustion!

This wasn't working.

Joshua quickly realized that he not only needed to figure out a more effective way to attack the Bitter Swordsman, but he also needed to reduce his energy deficit.

He soon came up with a promising idea.

The Bitter Swordsman was able to feed off his life energy because it was inherently compatible and helpful to nearly every living entity.

What about other energies?

The demonic entity was clearly a being that was tainted with darkness, so what better way to counter him by exposing him to the light?

While Joshua himself was not able to channel light energy as easily as the Illustrious One, it was not necessary for him to call upon the help of this design spirit.

He already possessed the capacity to channel other E energies that he was familiar with! He just had to shift the focus to his companion spirit.

"Willy!"

A green long-haired cat joined the fight!

His appearance briefly took the Bitter Swordsman by surprise.

Willy may possess a separate identity from Joshua, but the companion spirit was not independent enough to constitute a different individual.

This meant that according to the Life Sword Pact that Joshua had formed with the Bitter Scimitar, Willy could be regarded as an extension of the former!

While the companion spirit was not able to affect the fight in his current state, Willy quickly demonstrated his amazing versatility by doing his best to imitate the Illustrious One!

Joshua had deliberately developed Willy as an avatar for other design spirits.

It became a lot easier for the expert pilot to channel the power of the likes of Qilanxo, the Superior Mother and the Illustrious One when his companion spirit evolved into an incredibly versatile and adaptable vessel.

Normally, Willy simply opened himself up for design spirits to descend on him and manifest into a miniature version of themselves.

Just because the companion spirit was not allowed to do this anymore did not mean he had learned nothing from all of those possession attempts!

Both Joshua and Willy had developed a decent understanding of the light element due to all of the times the latter acted as a vessel for the Illustrious One.

Now, Willy altered himself so that he not only strengthened his affinity towards the light attribute, but also used all of the lessons he derived from the Illustrious One to draw in light E energy and shape it into an energy shield!

The change happened quickly.

In one moment, the Bitter Swordsman merrily assailed Joshua by draining his life and assaulting him with blade strikes.

In another moment, the Bitter Swordsman cried out in pain as Willy infused Joshua with radiance, causing him and his willpower to repel the malevolent being!

Though Willy was much weaker than the Bitter Swordsman and was unable to fully drive back the darkness, the helpful companion spirit was at least able to make Joshua more resistant against darkness and slow down the drain of life energy!

Joshua began to grin. His initial use of Willy's talents caused him to realize that his options were not as meager as he thought.

It turned out that he was capable of weaponizing other E energy attributes without needing to borrow the help of other design spirits!

Willy had never handled E energy like this in the past, but he was a quick learner.

The companion spirit soon began to utilize Joshua's understanding of his own expert mech to shape light energy into a facsimile of a mechanical construct.

Soon enough, Joshua's soul was no longer surrounded by a simple light bubble.

Willy had encased Joshua in a lightcast imitation of the Everchanger!

With a light energy version of the Vitalus luminar crystal rifle in one hand and the Heartsword in the other hand, Joshua finally felt in control again.

He was much stronger if he fought as an expert pilot!

Joshua felt so much better and more confident that he faintly began to resonate with his false mech!

He had tried to resonate with Willy in the past, but the results were negligible because his companion spirit was not a mech that was integrated with resonating exotics.

Yet when Joshua resonated with the lightcast Everchanger, he found to his surprise that he was actually able to generate a small but significant amount of true resonance!

Even if it was nowhere comparable to the real thing, this was still a massive improvement!

How was he able to resonate with a mech that did not really exist?

"Is it... the Blood Pact?"

He suddenly thought back on the bond that existed between himself and the Everchanger.

The lines between the two had blurred. From the moment they formed a lifelong bond of mutual assistance and growth, the two had become one.

A part of himself had transferred over to the Everchanger, while a part of the Everchanger had already transferred over to Joshua!

This had massive implications, but one of them was that he was able to simulate the Everchanger to a significantly greater degree than normal!

What did this mean?

Joshua would always have a version of the Everchanger by his side!

No matter how much he was separated from the cockpit of his 'Carmine' mech, he would always be able to pilot a weakened version of the Everchanger by having Willy produce an E energy manifestation!

"This... is my own power!"

Chapter 6713: The Lightcast Everchanger

The struggle for control took a drastic turn when Joshua finally discovered and embraced his own power.

Ketis was right all along. Versatility was his greatest strength.

Joshua did not excel in any specific skill or E energy attribute. His conviction and reasons to fight were not as strong or defined as that of his peers.

That did not necessarily mean he was weak.

What he lacked in specialization, he made up for it with versatility.

His exposure to many different design spirits who all specialized in their own E energy attributes and power expressions had allowed Joshua to build up a huge repertoire of techniques and abilities!

Even if he was not able to reproduce them particularly well, it didn't matter so long as he used his strengths to counter the enemy's weaknesses!

It turned out that he did not need to pilot his Everchanger in order to leverage his own versatility.

Just his companion spirit was enough to exploit his amazing versatility in a fight between two very different souls!

Having Willy produce a light energy manifestation of the Everchanger hit multiple birds with a single stone.

First, it gave Joshua access to the power of the element that served as a direct counter to the element employed by the Bitter Swordsman!

Although Joshua was at a disadvantage because his understanding of light was not that good and couldn't gather nearly as much energy as his adversary, he could easily use it to fortify his existing strengths!

By blending life energy, light energy and his own willpower in a single combination, his facsimile Everchanger became highly resistant against the attacks launched by the Bitter Swordsman.

His lightcast Everchanger was filled with so much positive energies that Joshua felt as if he had become a beacon in the dark.

The light burned at the darkness around him and fortified his confidence.

With the small amount of true resonance that he was able to generate with his lightcast Everchanger, Joshua found that he could replicate some of the abilities and techniques he used when he piloted his actual expert mech.

"Take this!" He shouted as he infused the lightcast Vitalus rifle with greater light and life energy.

The energy beam that spat from its muzzle precisely struck the Bitter Swordsman, causing the hostile and angry artifact spirit to cry out in pain.

What distressed the Bitter Swordsman more was that the pain did not disappear.

The energy beam left behind a persistent stain of light on himself that continued to burn and inflict damage!

Although the light stain was rather small and the persistent damage was not too great, the resonance empowerment bestowed by Joshua caused this weak effect to be far more difficult to remove than normal!

Joshua grinned. The Sticky Energy Mode was one of the many small tricks he developed after working together with the Illustrious One.

The genuine sticky energy beams inflicted considerably greater persistent damage as the Illustrious One was the primary source of light energy. Joshua merely provided the true resonance and light energy that enabled an attack to persist and stay alive for a time.

Trying to satisfy all of the conditions by himself was difficult and not as effective, but at least it worked.

Joshua fought like he was piloting a mech. The Everchanger constantly spat out sticky energy beams after sticky energy beams.

The resonance-empowered attacks did not damage the Bitter Swordsman as much as he hoped, but the lightcast Everchanger was easily able to keep up the effort.

Each strike not only hurt the demonic spirit, but also caused him to become covered by another patch of persistent light energy.

Splotches of light began to cover the Bitter Swordsman, causing him to look as if he was diseased!

The spreading pain irritated the artifact spirit and broke his momentum. He was forced to slow down his attacks and direct his attention to getting rid of the sticky light that proved to be awfully persistent due to Joshua's willpower!

The fight between the two had entered a new stage. As Joshua continued to 'pilot' his lightcast Everchanger, he quickly became accustomed to fighting in this way.

He moved faster and was able to evade the attacks launched by the Bitter Swordsman more easily.

When the enemy managed to outmaneuver the lightcast Everchanger and threatened to slash the manifestation with a blade that was steeped in darkness and resentment, a lightcast version of the Heartsword occasionally blocked or parried the attack.

It quickly became clear that the lightcast Everchanger fared better when it was able to maintain distance and pelt its adversary from afar.

The Vitalus luminar crystal rifle was not a particularly advanced or powerful firearm, but that happened to be an advantage in this situation.

Joshua and Willy did not fully understand how the Everchanger worked on a technical basis.

The lightcast version created by Willy was not really a genuine replication of the expert hero mech. It was more like a superficial three-dimensional drawing. The only reason why it worked at all was because Joshua breathed life into it and also used his willpower to distort its reality.

One of the realizations that Joshua made over the course of this fight was that as long as he used enough willpower, he could turn false into true!

His strong desire to pilot the genuine Everchanger enabled him to increase the authenticity of the lightcast Everchanger.

The latter was still far from the real deal, but Joshua was already able to work with what he already managed to obtain!

The simpler the subject, the easier it was for him to make it real. Joshua was highly familiar with both the Heartsword and the Vitalus. He wielded them for many years and understood their properties. He also held strong sentiments towards them, so it was a lot easier for Willy to simulate their actual forms.

Their simplicity helped a lot as Joshua found he needed to expend less willpower to fill in the gaps and turn them into weapons that were real enough to put the Bitter Swordsman on the backfoot.

Joshua continued to gain all sorts of realizations as he fought for control over his body.

He felt truly alive at this time. Death still loomed over his head, but as long as he was able to fight like a mech pilot, he knew he was putting up his best possible fight.

The Bitter Swordsman did not stay down for long, though. The angrier he became, the more reckless he fought!

He sped up and struck harder. He forcefully burned away the persistent light spots by flooding them with darkness energy.

No matter what, the Bitter Swordsman did not allow the lightcast Everchanger to maintain its distance!

The artifact spirit no longer held back. The amount of darkness energy expended by him rose dramatically!

The Bitter Scimitar in his hands began to burn darkness energy, causing it to become infused with so much power that it started to inflict real damage on the lightcast Everchanger!

Joshua came under greater pressure. The Bitter Swordsman was far better at wielding his blade, and he possessed so much ferocity and aggression that it was easy for him to maintain the initiative.

Meanwhile, Joshua was put on the defensive as his lightcast Everchanger was receiving constant damage.

Though he was able to repair the damage easily enough, his willpower wore out faster.

Both sides were draining themselves quickly!

If this went on, the fight would turn into an endurance race. Would Joshua exhaust his willpower first, or would the Bitter Swordsman run out of energy sooner?

Joshua did not have enough confidence in his ability to win this race. He was still an expert pilot and had not yet properly developed his ability to attract and manipulate energy.

The Bitter Swordsman was comparable to a qi cultivator of the second major cultivation rank.

Though he was still in a fairly weak state, the fact that he possessed a domain of his own allowed him to leverage a lot more negative energies from the environment!

This meant that it would take a long time to exhaust the artifact spirit.

Joshua did not want to bet the outcome of this struggle on outlasting his opponent. It was way too passive of an approach.

"I can do more!"

He started to get creative. In the past, he only utilized the power of light to enhance his ranged attacks. It was a natural complement to his Vitalus luminar crystal rifle.

What if he began to use it to augment the performance of his Heartsword instead?

His melee weapon was already predominantly comprised of light energy, but Joshua began to channel even more of it in order to make it stronger!

The heartsword became firmer and glowed brighter. It was better able to block the enemy's darkness-infused scimitar strikes.

The lightcast Everchanger was even able to hit back with the Heartsword a few times. Each time Joshua saw an opening, he took it and struck the Bitter Swordsman with a light-based attack that inflicted considerable pain!

Even so, Joshua realized that this was not enough.

His lightcast Everchanger was faring well, but all of that would end once he exhausted his willpower.

Meanwhile, his adversary was consuming a prodigious amount of negative energies in order to keep up his elevated performance.

Though the Bitter Swordsman was expending a huge amount of darkness energy, he could easily afford to do so as he was drawing most of it from E energy radiation as opposed to his own reserves!

"Willy!"

"Mraaw! Mraaw!"

The green cat attempted to do something he had never attempted to do before. He no longer stuck to channeling the light energy, but also began to draw upon other energies!

It was rather difficult for the cat to multitask, but he was still able to do so at the cost of weakening his control over light energy.

The companion spirit had taken on a heavy burden as he tried to maintain the form of the lightcast Everchanger as best as possible while also augmenting it with other energies!

Joshua began to get pushed back due to the weakening of his false mech. Despite the setback, he persisted with his new approach. He believed in his ability to leverage multiple E energy attributes at once!

"Solid Reinforcement!"

Joshua used the small amount of space energy generated by Willy to reinforce the resonance-empowered defenses of his lightcast Everchanger.

The new synergistic effect had already begun to make a difference!

The attacks inflicted by the Bitter Swordsman got reduced even further as the lightcast Everchanger was much more able to withstand the incoming scimitar strikes!

"Peace Field!"

The lightcast Everchanger began to generate an energy field that slightly negated the Bitter Swordsman's darkness and lightly calmed his aggression.

The negation field was not that strong, but it was not too weak either. Joshua quickly figured out that he could blend the negation field with both light energy and life energy to make it a lot more effective and difficult to resist!

The combination was clumsy and sloppy, but it didn't matter so long as it worked!

The Bitter Swordsman indeed became hindered by the augmented negation field. He was not able to draw upon darkness energy as easily as before, and his scimitar strikes grew feebler as he was not able to channel as much ferocity in his attacks as before.

Joshua realized more and more that versatility was a power in itself. As long as he gained enough of an understanding in an E energy attribute, he and Willy could leverage it alongside other energies to produce brand-new synergies!

Seeing that he was able to shore up his defenses while also debilitating his opponent, Joshua sought a solution that could enhance his attack power.

His mind was already under heavy strain. He and Willy could not handle the burden of juggling too many E energy attributes at once. He could only add one more element to his mix.

His eyes suddenly lit up as he came up with the perfect choice for this occasion!

"Death!"

Chapter 6714: Joshua the Mixer

All of the powerful heroes and gods of the human race that Joshua knew of tended to excel in only one concept or element.

The Xenotechnician was the ultimate authority on alien tech.

The Evolution Witch embodied the horrible power of biotechnology.

The Huntsman was the ultimate authority on hunting.

Joshua once imagined that he would become a powerhouse with a strong focus on life or a related subject one day.

However, the older he became, the more he knew that his future would probably look different from his initial dreams.

The power of life was more like a gateway to him. It allowed him to approach and befriend various different design spirits and other entities. The relationships he built with his talent all added to his success.

He used to think that cooperation was his strength. After all, he often took advantage of the Everchanger's ability to pick his own design spirit to channel the power of different entities.

Just like how the Everchanger was able to choose whether to fight up close or from afar depending on the situation, Joshua was able to select the design spirits that could best solve his opponents.

It was only now that he understood that power based on the help of others was ultimately not reliable enough.

Joshua had his own pride. He needed to become strong enough in his own right in order to deal with design spirits on a more equal level.

If he remained weak while all of those design spirits grew stronger, then their friendship would morph into something worse over time.

One of his greatest fears was that if he got left behind, he would no longer possess the qualifications to communicate with the design spirits anymore!

High and mighty entities such as Qilanxo, Lufa and the Phase King would no longer consider him as an equal partner, but instead treat him as a worshiper or supplicant!

That was not the kind of identity that Joshua wanted to obtain! It sounded far too demeaning and subservient to him. He could not see any way for him to become an ace pilot if the entire basis of his combat system amounted to praying to other gods for their blessings.

This was why Joshua felt so good at this time. Even as he and his companion spirit were struggling to channel multiple different E energy attributes at the same time, they were not deterred by the challenge!

"Versatility is my strength!"

His lightcast Everchanger had already gained more complexity by channeling the power of space and the power of negation.

Both elements served to blunt the Bitter Swordsman's offensive and aggression.

Even if Joshua was not too skilled in applying his power in this manner, he was quite satisfied with the results.

However, if he wanted to defeat the demonic artifact spirit in a convincing display of superiority, then he needed to do more.

This was why he turned to a familiar E energy attribute.

Joshua was no stranger to death. Anyone who fought in wars became intimately familiar with the inescapable fact that soldiers occasionally had to pay the ultimate price when they entered the battlefield.

Death was the antithesis of life. The two shared a strong and unmistakable relationship with each other.

Though Joshua had a bad encounter with death after he became delusional enough to seek it out in the hopes of breaking through, his theory was not entirely wrong.

Comprehending death should also increase his understanding of life.

Right now, Joshua had no intention of repeating his prior madness. He did not seek to make use of the power of death to promote his understanding and mastery of life.

He had already gotten rid of his obsession with life.

Instead, he chose to deal with death as if it was another resource at his disposal.

There was no need for him to consciously ascribe special meaning or significance to this universal concept.

Death was a part of existence. The same applied to other attributes such as life, space and fire.

Each of them presented a range of possibilities to Joshua.

By treating the death attribute as another weapon in his arsenal, he demystified it and inoculated himself against developing strange thoughts.

He never wanted his fascination for death to lead him to pull out his gun and press the muzzle against the side of his head!

"It's just death. Helena works with it all of the time. It's no big deal."

Despite changing his approach towards the death attribute, Joshua still maintained his caution and made sure to keep channeling the power of negation as a potential shield to defend against any potential side effects.

He soon found it difficult to channel death energy on top of all of the other energies.

Death fell under the category of negative energy, so it was quite understandable that he had to expend far more effort to attract it considering that life was his main element!

This was where Willy's adaptability came into play. At the cost of reducing his effort to channel the light element, the companion spirit was barely able to attract enough death energy that was usable!

The lightcast Everchanger grew weaker, but Joshua already accounted for this. It became harder to keep up with the Bitter Swordsman, but the use of space energy and negation energy still blunted his attacks just enough to make it bearable.

Joshua tried his best to maintain all of his current activities while also trying to channel death energy into the Heartsword.

This was quite difficult as he had already blended it with life energy and light energy. Both of them were positive energies, so they strongly rejected the introduction of death energy!

"Behave!"

While Joshua was fine with following the natural order, this time he wanted to produce a different outcome.

Negative energies normally did not mix well with positive energies. If he wanted to change this rule, he needed to make use of his willpower to change the rules of reality!

How could he possibly become the most versatile mech pilot if he was not able to mix positive attributes with negative attributes?

Even qi cultivators were able to make this happen by practicing advanced cultivation methods!

Unlike qi cultivators, mech pilots like Joshua preferred to make stuff happen by using the force of their own willpower.

"If I tell you to combine, then do so! You will get along whether you like it or not! I will not accept any other outcomes!"

His efforts worked. The more he desired to add death energy to his weapon, the lower the resistance from the other two positive energies.

Joshua felt as if he was practising a novel form of magic. Though the three elements barely got along with each other, his Heartsword began to change as a result.

"Maybe I've been underestimating this weapon all along."

He had a feeling that one of the reasons why he successfully pulled this off was because the Heartsword was inherently compatible with every E energy attribute, just like the Everchanger!

As the original melee weapon paired with the expert hero mech, the Heartsword was also designed with versatility in mind!

It was just that Joshua was unable to recognize and appreciate this advantage. He only channeled one design spirit at a time in the past, which made it so that the Heartsword did not perform exceptionally well.

He changed his mind. The unassuming sword was more suitable to him than he thought. What it lacked in killing power, it made up for it in versatility.

There were times when having the right solution at his disposal was better than wielding overwhelming brute force!

Of course, Joshua recognized that versatility alone may not be enough to defeat every opponent.

His newfound appreciation for his old mech weapon did not change his mind about the necessity of taming the Bitter Scimitar.

The weapon was designed to kill phase lords! It would probably take a lot less work and effort for him to defeat a phase lord with the Bitter Scimitar than if he relied on his old combination of the Heartsword and the Vitalus.

"Enough. It is time to end this bout!"

As the power of death settled into his lightcast Heartsword, the manifested weapon gained a distinctly sharper and more lethal edge.

Joshua still found it difficult to integrate the power of death more profoundly into the sword. The current result was barely enough for his purposes.

His eyes grew sharper as he tried to recall all of the lessons and advice he received on swordsmanship.

"I am not a swordsman, but I don't need to beat you by relying on superior skill in arms. That is Dise's routine. Versatility is my strength! Now taste my death edge!"

The lightcast Everchanger became a lot more threatening to the Bitter Swordsman after the latest change!

Although the Heartsword only contained a small amount of death energy, its forced interaction with light energy and life energy generated brand-new synergies that caused the weapon to become qualitatively stronger and more lethal!

While the Bitter Swordsman's life-fueled scimitar continued to batter at the lightcast Everchanger's fortified defenses, the Heartsword lashed out at the demonic artifact spirit and inflicted wounds that cut surprisingly deep!

The Bitter Swordsman was taken aback by the enhanced effectiveness of the Heartsword!

The seemingly simple sword had become absurdly more dangerous to demonic entities like himself. Not only was it suffused with light and life, the addition of death seemed to weaponize the positive energies and make them a lot more focused towards killing beings corrupted by negative energies such as himself!

The lightcast Everchanger immediately took advantage of the Bitter Swordsman's surprise and pressed the attack. The manifested mech continually pressed forward and unleashed a flurry of

sword strikes that cut into the Bitter Swordsman regardless of whether he managed to block the weapon.

The artifact spirit was not wielding the real Bitter Scimitar. He only shaped his own energies to form the weapon to make it more convenient for him to attack his target.

Therefore, attacking the manifested Bitter Scimitar was no different from attacking the artifact spirit directly!

Joshua had set aside all thoughts about defense. He solely focused on cutting the resistant and rebellious personality that had given him so much trouble and grief over the past few days.

"The elements are under my control!"

The Heartsword struck again and again. Even shallow wounds inflicted significant damage!

"Your weaknesses are mine to exploit!"

As Joshua gained more confidence in his performance, the lightcast Everchanger glowed brighter.

"No longer will I tolerate your defiance!"

His momentum continued to grow, causing him to completely take over the initiative and deny any breathing room to his opponent!

"You will fall in line, or you will die!"

The Bitter Swordsman cried out in pain as the lightcast Everchanger lunged forward and cut off one of his arms!

"Will you submit, or will you resist to the bitter end?"

The manifested expert hero mech finally relented in its attacks. Joshua paused his assault not because he wanted to show mercy, but because he sought to preserve the power of the Bitter Scimitar as much as possible.

After all, he still hoped to wield it against his true opponent after this ordeal!

Given how extensively the tides had turned, the Bitter Swordsman did not see much hope in making a comeback.

He had already started off strong and quickly proceeded to fight at his full strength. Yet ultimately the human expert pilot developed entirely new capabilities and managed to overpower him in a clear display of strength.

The Bitter Swordsman would have been a lot more unwilling to accept his loss if Joshua borrowed the power of others or won because of a trick.

That was not the case this time. As angry and unwilling he may be, the Bitter Swordsman was still rational enough to recognize that he had been beaten fair and square.

Perhaps a semblance of honor still remained inside his blackened heart, because he did not choose to deny or contest the outcome.

The Bitter Swordsman resentfully bowed his head. He acknowledged his loss, but he did not forget the terms of their pact.

Once he recovered and managed to grow stronger, there was no doubt that he would mount another challenge in the future in the hopes of taking over Joshua's body!

The expert pilot responded with a savage grin.

"I will be waiting for you to try again. The outcome will be the same. Do you know why? It is because I already have you figured it out. No matter what abilities you use next time, I will always be versatile enough to counter your means."

When the struggle for control formally came to an end, Joshua regained his awareness of his cockpit and his expert mech.

Although Joshua and his D-arm had fought each other for quite a while, not as much time passed in reality as he expected.

"DID YOU WIN?"

"You wouldn't be asking me this question if I lost."

When Joshua directed his attention towards the Bitter Scimitar, he felt relieved when he noticed that it had ceased all forms of resistance.

The powerful weapon had finally surrendered control to him. It rested obediently in the Everchanger's sword hand, and looked ready to be used for its intended purpose!

Joshua confidently grinned as he activated a special command.

The Bitter Scimitar immediately burned 100 grams of phasewater, causing its curved blade to glow with piercing might!

"Let's finish this fight!"

Chapter 6715: A New Relationship

When Venerable Joshua successfully won the bet and managed to preserve his life, he grinned like crazy.

He did it! He conquered the Bitter Scimitar!

The potent weapon had finally surrendered to his control!

As he began to feel out the newly subdued D-arm, he noted that the resentful artifact spirit still chafed at the terms imposed on him. He most certainly did not like to hold back against his current wielder!

Yet what could he do? Joshua had bonded with it with one of the most binding spiritual agreements, the Life Sword Pact.

No matter what kind of traitor or rulebreaker the Bitter Swordsman may be, he had pledged his own corrupted soul to the terms of the pact!

This was how Joshua managed to do what he previously thought was impossible!

Though the risks were high, Joshua had managed to find his strength and proven his superiority.

The Bitter Scimitar was under his complete control!

The mysterious D-arm did not simply stop its resistance towards his efforts to harness its full features and potential.

Joshua was actually able to compel the artifact spirit to cooperate with him on anything he wanted.

For example, shortly after he activated the phasewater-charged blade setting, the Bitter Swordsman begrudgingly but obediently worked to strengthen and optimize this mode so that it increased the cutting power of the scimitar to the uppermost boundary!

This made a huge difference!

Though Joshua could not measure how many percent better it became at neutralizing and piercing through transphasic defenses, he instinctively felt that the spatial barriers generated by the Eight Lord of Takansha shouldn't be a problem anymore!

As his confidence and optimism swelled, the Everchanger glowed brighter!

A bright green corona surrounded the expert hero mech, causing him to look like a defiant soldier that attempted to pull one last feat of heroism in the hopes of reversing a losing battle!

Time was of the essence. The Bitter Scimitar had already swallowed 100 grams of phasewater to enter into its highly active setting.

Joshua did not spend the few seconds that passed by in vain. He rapidly understood what the weapon was capable of and how he should best wield his D-arm now that it fully opened up to his control.

When the Everchanger finally went into action again, his performance was radically different than before!

The Bitter Scimitar which previously inflicted mediocre damage against the Eight Lord's energy barriers suddenly began to inflict visible tears in their structure!

"Look at the Everchanger!"

"Wow! His weapon has become much more powerful!"

"That's the power of phasewater-charged technology. I can't imagine how much phasewater the Everchanger has burned in order to destabilize the spatial barriers so much."

"It's wrong. This is not the kind of power that phasewater-charged technology can produce. Even if we account for the amplification produced by hyper technology and true resonance, the new scimitar is so much more powerful and effective than any other bladed weapon that it is already getting close to matching the effectiveness of Saint Piercer arms! Is this the Larkinson Clan's attempt to imitate those infamous alien weapons?"

Not too many people paid attention to the Everchanger considering that there were bigger and stronger assets on the battlefield.

Yet those that had a considerable stake in Joshua and the Everchanger's success noticed that the pairing had suddenly burst out with greater power than they had previously shown!

The Eight Lord of Takansha was taken aback by the sudden explosion of aggression from the Everchanger. The lesser phase lord had previously dismissed the green expert mech as a low-priority threat, but now the alien had to revise his evaluation because his spatial barriers were getting torn up in a matter of seconds!

Venerable Glendale and Venerable Rodrigo of the 77th Warborn immediately adapted to the Everchanger's drastically increased effectiveness.

The Greenaxe and the Bloodripper began to circle around and attack the rear defenses of the lesser phase lord.

Neither of them had any hope of tearing down the spatial barriers as quickly as the Everchanger, but they could prevent the enemy from concentrating all of his energy defenses in the direction of the most acute threat.

The two living expert mechs also positioned themselves in a way that allowed them to stall the Eight Lord of Takansha should he decide to make a retreat.

As the Everchanger continued to tear his way through the successive layers of spatial barriers, Joshua did not settle for the current results.

He could do more. He could do a lot more. Willy was already trying to put his newly discovered capabilities to good use, and Joshua took the time to communicate with his resentful D-arm.

"Work with me, and you shall taste the blood that you so dearly crave." Joshua told his sentient weapon. "If you help me kill this lesser phase lord, then I promise you that if no one else has a greater claim on his soul, I will allow you to devour it for yourself, but only if he dies at our hands."

The artifact spirit was taken aback by this offer. Why was Joshua trying to be so generous after he had worked hard to compel absolute control over the D-arm?

It didn't make any sense from the perspective of the Bitter Swordsman!

"We could have spared all of the arguing and fighting if you cooperated with me from the start." Joshua admonished the artifact spirit. "While I do not regret that I have bound you to a pact, I don't want our relationship to be defined by its restrictive terms. There is still a chance for us to set aside our stupid grievances against each other and cooperate earnestly with each other. What do you say? Would you like to work with me to kill aliens and gods not because a stupid pact is forcing you to follow my lead, but because we can help each other grow stronger?"

The Bitter Swordsman was not able to make a firm decision on this matter. The very nature of his being resisted the notion of cooperating with a living person and an expert pilot no less.

If he was as feral and irrational as before, he would definitely reject this overture!

However, the Life Sword Pact changed him. The differences were too numerous to mention, but one of the most important consequences was that he was able to understand his new life partner a lot better.

There was no way the Bitter Swordsman could miss the meaning and the sincerity behind Joshua's words!

The Life Sword Pact also caused the Bitter Swordsman to absorb a portion of the expert pilot's strength regardless of whether he wanted it or not. His irrational fury had abated as a surge of reason and control had reasserted themselves in his chaotic mind.

The Bitter Swordsman realized that he had lost his purity. By agreeing to form a lifelong pact with Joshua, he unwillingly developed a sense of intimacy and understanding towards the living human expert pilot.

This was not supposed to happen!

As a soul that had been consigned to damnation before being forced to inhabit a weapon artifact, the Bitter Swordsman had become another soldier of the other side.

The living were supposed to be his enemies!

One of the reasons why the Bitter Swordsman kept hindering and tormenting Joshua previously was because the two were fundamentally opposed to each other!

The only ways for the two to stop fighting against each other was if one of them fled, surrendered or died.

There weren't supposed to be any other options!

This caused the artifact spirit to fall into confusion.

Surrendering to Joshua felt bad. The Bitter Swordsman felt humiliated by his loss and did not want to be puppeted by his new master. If there was a chance for him to regain a semblance of his dignity and raise his status to a near-equal partner, then that was better than the alternative!

The only downside was that the artifact spirit had to be willing to set aside his original mission and mandate.

Was it more important for him to maintain his hostility towards the living, or would he rather make his cage more pleasant and enjoy the illusion of control?

The Bitter Swordsman did not take long before he made up his mind.

The artifact spirit acquiesced.

Joshua laughed. "Hahaha! Good! We are already doing great, but we can do better if you are actively participating in the fight. Get ready, because we are about to claim this phase lord's head!"

The Bitter Scimitar's performance did not change right away, but Joshua already felt that the weapon had become more responsive and more willing to follow his lead.

For now, the D-arm had become as pliable and willing as a typical living mech. Though the Bitter Swordsman was not able to place all of his trust into Joshua straight away, any progress was better than nothing!

As Joshua had gained new realizations about his power and his capabilities, he had been thinking more and more about what kind of pilot he wanted to become. Discover stories with freewebnovel

Versatility had become his greatest strength, and he fully intended to develop it to the fullest.

However, if he wanted to master every power that could be used to defeat his opponents in the future, he clearly could not settle with cooperating with the limited amount of design spirits available for cooperation.

Joshua strongly believed that if he wanted to expand his repertoire, he would have to seek out other formidable existences and befriend them to the point where he could borrow their power.

As long as he learned enough about the nature of the borrowed powers, he and his companion spirit would be able to reproduce weaker versions of them without any external assistance!

This would be one of his new goals and ambitions. He needed to become stronger in order to protect his family and his clan, and the best way to do so was to master a hundred different E energy attributes!

He would definitely have to travel around a lot in order to complete this ambitious goal. He suddenly felt the urge to roam around and meet new people and enemies. He wanted to descend to the surface of untamed planets and familiarize himself with the interesting powers developed by gifted calamity beasts.

Perhaps not all of them would be willing to befriend him and share their insights on their own capabilities. Joshua would try his best to change their minds by force if necessary.

His goal was never to subjugate and enslave all of these unwilling entities.

Joshua already figured out that his stance on this matter would have far-reaching effects on his progression as a high-ranking pilot.

He strongly rejected the notion of becoming a tyrant and an enslaver!

Though he wouldn't necessarily show mercy to those who resisted him, he would still respect their decisions on whether they wanted to share their secrets with him. If they ever decided to cooperate with him, then they had to do so voluntarily, and not because he coerced them against their will!

Joshua hoped that the measures he took against the Bitter Swordsman would be the last time he forced another spirit to submit to his control.

He would much rather expand his versatility and master a hundred different E energy attributes while still maintaining good relations to the entities who taught him over the course of their friendships.

By understanding their powers and attributes well enough, he would be able to cooperate with them on a deeper level!

"Let's put this theory to the test!"

The Everchanger was already making good progress in dismantling the energy defenses, but the problem was that the Eight Lord of Takansha became so spooked that he already tried to flee to the rear!

The expert mech needed to speed up his pace, or else it would become untenable to persist in the effort to slay the phase lord!

Soon enough, the Everchanger began to attract more E energy from the environment.

What was remarkable was the expert hero mech no longer predominantly absorbed energy of a single attribute.

Instead, the expert mech gained a more complex aura as he began to absorb as much life energy, space energy, death energy and darkness energy as possible!

The unusual combination of elements immediately started to alter the properties of the expert mech and the phasewater-charged scimitar.

Though the Everchanger initially found it difficult to balance between all of these attributes at once, his true resonance gradually molded these forces into a cohesive combination!

Chapter 6716: The Birth of the First Fusion Spirit

The Everchanger changed.

This was not an unusual observation in itself. The expert hero mech frequently altered his more subtle characteristics by changing his glow.

If he wanted to focus on ranged combat, then he would switch to the Illustrious One. The design spirit was able to make his relatively weak Vitalus rifle luminar crystal rifle inflict considerably more damage than usual.

If Joshua wanted to increase his hit rate and strike at targets far beyond his normal range, then he would channel the prophetic capabilities of Ylvaine.

If he wanted to break through pesky transphasic energy shields, he would tap into the power of the Phase King. This happened a lot more often as of late.

While Joshua most definitely formed a list of favorites, there were no useless design spirits as far as he was concerned.

Each of them had been vetted or created by the patriarch. They were all capable of making contributions in the right situations. Joshua had developed a rich appreciation for the diversity that was already available.

Yet had he done his best to exploit the capabilities of those design spirits?

He used to think so, but he thought much differently this time!

His previous ordeals had opened his eyes to many more possibilities.

Right now, he was making use of the combined capabilities of himself, Willy, the Everchanger and the Bitter Scimitar to simultaneously channel 4 design spirits and 4 E energy attributes at the same time!

It would have been difficult for one of them to do all of this work, but Joshua already realized that there was no need for him to do all of the work.

He instead decided to split up responsibilities and hoped that their cooperation was good enough to mix the different elements together.

This was the most complex operation that he attempted to pull off at this time. The burden was considerable as the effort to combine all of these elements together was exceedingly difficult due to their inherent differences and lack of compatibility.

Yet as Joshua continued to work, he found that it was remarkably easy to make all of it happen.

"This is because I am never alone."

The four of them were separate existences, but their spirits were also tied to each other. This made it much easier for them to understand and cooperate with each other.

Joshua worked to evoke the power of life, which was the attribute that he was most familiar with. Life brought vibrancy, resilience, vitality, growth and other positive aspects. It was the attribute that defined living mechs and represented his ethos of growing stronger through cooperation. It was the lubricant that gave him the capital to work with a diverse array of entities.

Willy called upon the power of Helena. The companion spirit was the most suited to manifest the Daughter of Death and evoke her chosen element. Death was the opposite of life and enhanced the lethality of every weapon when included. Joshua had grown more accustomed to leveraging the power of death in his solutions.

The Everchanger had already been channeling the Phase King from the start. As the design spirit that possessed the deepest comprehension of space and phasewater, he was by far the most suitable design spirit to employ when fighting against a phase lord that relied enormously on spatial barriers for protection.

The Bitter Scimitar channeled the power of darkness. It was quite dangerous to leverage this E energy attribute, but since Joshua was on the offensive, he wanted to make use of an element that could amplify his offensive even further. The D-arm was steeped in darkness, so the weapon was especially good at drawing it in and shaping it into different forms.

Darkness was an ominous and corrupting force that Joshua would never want to touch under ordinary circumstances.

However, ever since he formed a Life Sword Pact with the D-arm, the darkness E energy attribute was no longer as foreign and dangerous to him anymore.

Had Joshua become a little more evil due to getting exposed to so much darkness energy?

He didn't think so! He just made use of the talent of his new 'life sword'.

Since this was the case, shouldn't it be natural for him to gain control over his sword artifact's capabilities?

This was how he was able to handle darkness energy without suffering an immediate backlash.

Joshua did not keep the different energies pooled in their own little silos.

He actively attempted to mix them together in his Everchanger.

The machine was by far the most suitable vessel for this purpose.

Joshua became pleasantly surprised that the decision to invest in multiple Ascension Paths made it a lot easier to host several elements at the same time.

Whereas other Larkinson expert mechs only accumulated Ascension Runes in one or two Ascension Paths derived from different design spirits, the Everchanger had invested in as much as 12 different Ascension Paths!

The disadvantage of this was that the Everchanger was never able to specialize in any specific attribute, but Joshua always wanted his battle partner to become more flexible and fluent when using different attributes.

Now, this strange development strategy paid off as the Everchanger was more easily able to balance and combine the different energies.

As a result of this effort, the expert mech not only gained more power, but also acquired a combination of additional advantages.

The corona around the Everchanger changed in tint. Joshua's characteristic true resonance always produced a vibrant green glow, but after blending in the other elements, it had begun to grow darker. This was an unmistakable sign that the expert mech had undergone a profound transformation in power expression!

This was not all. As the Everchanger continued to get closer and closer to removing the final obstacle that stood in the way between him and the Eight Lord of Takansha, the corona around the masterwork mech began to expand and take on a different shape!

Instead of maintaining its current contours around the expert hero mech, the darkened corona began to morph into a larger and more animalistic shape.

It looked as if the Everchanger had birthed a new form of life that amalgamated all of the different elements together!

This was not far from the truth. Venerable Joshua did not know why he did this, but as he struggled to mix the different E energy attributes together, he suddenly felt inspired by the artistic conceptions of qi cultivation to try something similar!

Joshua did not consider himself to be a particularly imaginative or creative individual, but the only sort of creature that he could think of that encapsulated all four chosen elements was a strange bird!

Dark wings extended from the sides of the Everchanger as the silhouette of a crow-like creature settled across his mech frame.

The crow was not an illusion.

It was alive, if only partially.

As soon as the different energies blended together with the help of Joshua's evolving willpower, the dark crow not only gained life, but also purpose!

When the Everchanger next struck one of the remaining spatial barrier in the way, the energy silhouette launched forward and pecked the spatial barrier at the same spot with its beak.

The energy defense broke in an instant!

The power and the effectiveness of the crow's attack almost matched that of a single strike from the D-arm!

If the strange corona given life was able to do this everytime the Everchanger swung his scimitar, then his attack power had effectively doubled, but only for as long as Venerable Joshua was able to maintain this state!

Right now, the expert mech had become even stronger! Each of his attacks effectively dealt double damage with the help of this powerful new apparition.

What was even more impressive was that the crow helped in other ways as well.

The crow-shaped corona was originally derived from the Everchanger's resonance shield. It had only become more effective at resisting damage.

Incoming attacks from numerous orven warships easily bounced off the crow as if they collided against a strong spatial barrier.

The living resonance shield also amplified the effect of the Everchanger's space suppressor, which weakened all of the Eight Lord of Takansha's spatial abilities even further.

The crow also enhanced the Everchanger's mobility. Each time the energy bird flapped its wings, the Everchanger almost seemed to skip through space!

This capability reminded people of the Dark Zephyr Mark III.

While no one argued that the Everchanger had suddenly become faster and more maneuverable than the famous expert light skirmisher, the power granted by the crow had somehow caused Joshua's battle partner to close the gap!

"What is going on?" Ketis asked in confusion. "How is the Everchanger able to do this? With the appearance of that energy crow, his effective combat power has surpassed the level of a second-class mid-tier expert mech. Has Joshua broken through and formed a special domain?"

The energy projection of Ves shook his head. "No. Joshua hasn't broken through yet. He is merely relying on several different assets to combine different attributes together into a single amalgamation. It is normally difficult to force the elements of life, space, death and darkness to get along with each other, but Joshua has somehow managed to replicate the same solution that I like to use when trying to combine different elements together. He used his willpower to turn his mixture alive."

"What? Did he just give birth to a new design spirit!?"

"Not so dramatic, Ketis. I can clearly feel that this... fusion spirit of his is only alive for as long as it is sustained by true resonance. As soon as Joshua withdraws his willpower, the fusion spirit will be unmade... probably."

"You are not sure?"

Ves adopted a thoughtful expression. "I am already thinking about ways to 'capture' the fusion spirit and stuff it into a vessel. Don't you think it will make for a good precursor ingredient for a new D-arm?"

"Don't even start, Ves."

"Fine. It is too premature to think about this when we hardly know anything about the latest rabbit that Joshua has pulled out of his hat. Anyway, Joshua has clearly gained an epiphany or three. He has drastically changed his approach towards combat. It's rather surprising that he hadn't broken through yet. Maybe his power application is too new and unrefined for him to reach his limit, or maybe he needs greater external pressure to turn from coal into diamond."

As Ketis continued to observe the Everchanger's dramatic performance, she also paid attention to the telemetry transmitted by the expert hero mech.

The numbers did not make much sense anymore, but one measurement that hadn't been distorted by all of the latest weirdness was the resonance meter.

It was still below 67 laveres, and the latest data readings did not show any indications of a rising trend.

In fact, it had dropped by 0.3 laveres!

Ketis frowned at that. "I think your second guess is most likely accurate. For whatever reason, the new abilities that Joshua has devised has swelled his confidence so much that he no longer feels threatened by the Eight Lord of Takansha. There is no challenge in this fight anymore. It doesn't help that the lesser phase lord has refused to meet the Everchanger all of this time. In fact, he is currently trying to flee from the Everchanger as much as possible."

The two mech designers grew disappointed. A lesser phase lord was supposed to be sufficiently threatening to stimulate Joshua's breakthrough. All of the other pieces were in place now that Joshua had found his true pathway towards power. The fact that he was ultimately being denied a breakthrough because he had grown too strong in his current rank was absurd!

Yet... it shouldn't be much of a surprise to Ves.

His living mechs and companion spirits had always been designed to complement their users and generate new synergies through cooperation.

The addition of a life sword in the form of the Bitter Scimitar allowed Joshua to generate even more synergies!

When all of these different synergies combined together in a single expert mech, they also had the potential to produce another layer of synergies!

This was why the Everchanger was so powerful at the moment!

Venerable Joshua and his partners concentrated so many different elements together in a single machine that the whole far exceeded the sum of its parts!

In fact, Ves was surprised that the Everchanger hadn't attracted a lightning tribulation already!

"Why are the heavens blind?"

"What was that, Ves?"

"Oh, it's nothing."

Chapter 6717: The Final Attempt

Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger had broken new ground.

No longer were they relegated to channeling the power of other design spirits to gain an edge in combat.

They had taken a step forward and had begun to experiment with combining and transforming multiple different E energy attributes!

None of this should be possible, but the true resonance generated by the two forcefully combined the different energies together into a 'fusion spirit' that took on the form of a dark crow!

Nobody had a clear understanding or explanation of where this crow came from and how it became so powerful.

That did not stop them from appreciating how much faster the Everchanger was tearing down his adversary's defensive layers!

Though the Eight Lord of Takansha had made strides to reach the side of one of the greater phase lords, the interference from the Greenaxe and Bloodripper slowed him down just enough!

As soon as the combined efforts of the Everchanger and assisting units broke the last spatial barrier, the Eight Lord of Takansha became vulnerable to attacks!

The azure energy shield generator mounted on his raiment was able to delay the aggressive human mechs for a moment, but it didn't last very long against the onslaught.

His raiment immediately began to incur a lot of damage. The lesser phase lord quickly whipped out a giant scepter that could function as a mace. The scepter was infused with a lot of phasewater which he used to bend the fabric of space around him. He managed to divert some of the ranged attacks that struck and dented his raiment, but he was not able to block all of them, especially if they came from different directions!

The Eight Lord of Takansha had grown a lot more desperate at this time. He flailed his scepter back and forth, which not only disturbed the surrounding space and diverted a bunch of attacks, but also forced the Greenaxe and the Bloodripper to evade.

Their pilots did not reduce their aggression. After spending so much time and effort to break down the phase lord's spatial barriers, they finally managed to get past!

The Bloodripper's luminar crystal submachine gun began to fire a rapid sequence of copper-colored energy beams.

The transphasic hyper positron beams inflicted significantly greater damage against solid armor!

The expert harasser mech did not utilize his firepower to get past the armor and damage the lesser phase lord's flesh. His attacks weren't strong enough to make this a worthwhile endeavor against this kind of opponent.

Venerable Pedro Rodrigo instead focused on crippling and debilitating the lesser phase lord.

The luminar crystal submachine gun targeted all of the functional components of the enemy's raiment.

Different from a mech, a battle bot or a starship, a raiment functioned much more as a suit of armor, so it was not able to place any important parts and systems deep inside its structure.

That meant that crucial parts such as the power reactor, the azure shield generator, the sensor modules and so much more were all mounted close or on the exterior surface of the raiment.

The Bloodripper took it upon himself to target and destroy all of these modules so that he could quickly render the raiment useless!

Meanwhile, the Greenaxe did his best to coordinate with the Everchanger by facing the vulnerable phase lord on the opposite side at all times!

This added to the Eight Lord's stress.

If the native god tried to fend off the Everchanger, the Greenaxe would just approach his rear and hack into his raiment's rear armor with his giant weapon!

If the Eight Lord turned around to force the Greenaxe to back off, then the Everchanger would repeatedly slash his Bitter Scimitar onto the phase lord's rear.

This was especially devastating to the beleaguered phase lord as the dark crow echoed every scimitar strike that landed onto the phase lord.

Meanwhile, the Barons under the control of Saint Commander Casella Ingvar were also providing an indispensable contribution!

Although the firepower of 39 brand-new Karma Cutters weren't dealing particularly effective damage against the armored lesser phase lord, the torrent of resonance-empowered Null Rounds striking the increasingly more damaged raiment actually produced a more useful effect.

The new rifleman mechs were gradually cutting off the Eight Lord of Takansha's bonds of karma with others!

While their progress was fairly slow as the lesser phase lord possessed so many more bonds of karma than any mortal, the fact that the Karma Cutters were able to attain this much progress was already fairly amazing!

It was impossible for the Null Rounds to have any significant effect on a lesser phase lord under normal circumstances. The difference in power was just too big.

However, once these new machines became affected by Saint Commander Casella's true resonance, their effectiveness drastically rose!

The stronger bonds of karma that the Eight Lord of Takansha maintained with his orven subjects and worshippers were surprisingly difficult to sever.

The same did not apply to the weaker bonds of karma!

The more the Eight Lord got struck by a multitude of Null Rounds, the more difficult it became for others to remember his existence and spot him on the battlefield.

The nunsers, the puelmers, the jureg and members of other minor races unconsciously began to overlook the plight of the lesser orven phase lord.

It was as if he literally did not exist to these aliens anymore!

What particularly worked in the favor of the Karma Cutters was that the bonds of karma that the Eight Lord of Takansha shared with the other surviving phase lords also happened to be shallow!

If they wanted to, the Herald of the Void, the Lower Herdmaster or the Fatedriver could have noticed the Eight Lord's plight and alter their course in order to save his life.

Yet because the three phase lords weren't familiar with their orven counterparts and only met each other a short time ago, there was no way for them to possess any deep friendship or camaraderie with their fellow native god!

If Khaso Leiyen or Zren-Divar were still alive, then they would most certainly be able to remember that the Eight Lord existed, but it was too bad that they had already died!

"What is funny is that the Eight Lord probably doesn't realize that the Karma Cutters are making him less noticeable among the other aliens." Ves grinned as he observed his latest mechs at work.

How could the orven phase lord possibly know any better? Karma was an extremely nebulous concept. The native aliens probably did not know about its existence at all. They had even less reason to develop senses that could specifically measure this phenomenon.

While the panicking lesser phase lord clearly felt that something bad was happening to him, it was extremely difficult for him to focus on these subtle changes when he was getting assaulted by three different expert mechs, of which one of them possessed enough power to take his life!

The Eight Lord swiped his transphasic scepter in a wide sweep in front of him that forced the Everchanger to back off for a moment.

The phase lord took advantage of this small opening to advance straight in the direction of the Lower Herdmaster.

Of the two greater phase lords, the Herald of the Void had already advanced far ahead.

The Lower Herdmaster maintained a more controlled pace and was therefore closer to the Eight Lord.

Since the orven phase lord was not able to ask the considerably more powerful nunser god to come to his rescue, the Eight Lord of Takansha simply decided to move directly in front of the greater phase lord!

The Eight Lord refused to believe that the Lower Herdmaster would continue to ignore him and his plight!

This posed a problem to the human attackers. The three mechs were making good progress in damaging the phase lord's raiment and had already begun to cut into his flesh, but they were not able to slow him down too much!

The Eight Lord even took the initiative to absorb serious blows in order to avoid slowing down his flight!

"We need more time!" Venerable Joshua urged!

"Ask, and you shall receive." A new voice sounded.

After a long period of waiting, Avatar Commander Melkor finally moved into action!

His custom Fey Fianna looked much different from before. Not only was his machine glowing with the power of the Saint Commander's Enfeoffment, but the drone mech was also accompanied by 25 recently made formation anchor fey!

Melkor had carefully put them out of harm's way in order to avoid attracting any enemy fire.

Now, the 25 fey closed in on the fleeing lesser phase lord and began to surround him at seemingly random distances and angles.

The fey soon went active as Melkor held the formation artifact and immediately activated his bonded basic confinement spell array!

The formation anchors drew in a huge amount of E energy from the environment.

Enhanced by the power of Casella's true resonance, the formation anchor fey worked a lot more effectively than they should. Not only did they attract E energy in a wider radius, but they also enhanced the strength and other performance parameters of the spell array that just came into existence!

The Everchanger, the Greenaxe and the Bloodripper immediately disappeared inside the mysterious mist that had engulfed their area.

Thankfully, the phenomenon did not really attract that much attention as the native aliens were not familiar with sealing spell arrays.

Besides, they were already preoccupied with much more urgent concerns. The only aliens that worried about the lesser phase lord that had disappeared from their sights were the orvens, and they grew more confused than anything.

What if this was a means for their phase lord to disappear from everyone's sights and escape from the battlefield?

Unfortunately for all of them, this was most definitely not the case.

Inside the active spell array, the Eight Lord of Takansha initially became befuddled, but he hadn't lived so many years for nothing. He only flew around for a short amount of time before he figured out that he had been trapped in a warped space region.

The phase lord tried his best to channel whatever spatial abilities he had left and forcefully break open this invisible cage, but the spell array proved to be far too resilient for him to open up a breach with this method!

The Eight Lord uttered a silent roar in frustration but still did not give up! His spatial senses were still developed enough for him to determine the direction where the spell array was the weakest.

He flew forward and soon began to swing his scepter in front of him, hitting nothing but empty white mist.

Although the Eight Lord did not appear to be striking anything, he was actually damaging the boundary that kept him trapped in this space!

"Hurry up, guys!" Melkor gritted his teeth and communicated to the expert pilots inside his confinement spell array. "This phase lord is recklessly using his transphasic weapon to tear a hole in my spell array. My formation anchors were only partially repaired by the patriarch, so they are still quite fragile. Don't let him destroy my fey!"

The three expert mechs were racing against time. They could not afford to let the Eight Lord get loose, or else he would quickly rendezvous with the Lower Herdmaster!

The Greenaxe attacked so aggressively that the expert axeman mech got smacked multiple times by the panicking phase lord's scepter. The machine's resonance shield drained significantly with every impact, but Venerable Glendale remained fearless!

The Bloodripper no longer spread out his attacks and concentrated solely on burning a hole through the phase lord's head!

The Eight Lord responded to this assault by overexerting the phasewater organs that were still capable of producing spatial barriers and forcefully projected them around his head!

This still left his chest vulnerable. The Everchanger eagerly took advantage of this vulnerability and continually maneuvered around the taller and clumsier phase lord to slash his Bitter Scimitar at the crumbling chest plating!

Each successful hit was quickly followed up by an attack from the dark crow. The sealing spell array did not weaken the fusion spirit in the slightest.

In fact, the changing environment seemed to make it more ominous and in its element!

When the Everchanger finally managed to break open enough of the chest plating, the machine briefly paused and fed another 100 grams to the D-arm in order to renew its phasewater-charged condition!

The curved blade of the scimitar glowed brighter and more menacing than ever as the dark crow flapped its wings at the right time, allowing the Everchanger to evade the incoming scepter strike and gain a clear shot at his target's chest!

When the Bitter Scimitar's unnaturally sharp and empowered edge finally dug into the hide, bone and flesh of the orven phase lord's chest, a runaway reaction occurred!

Before the dark crow could peck into the Eight Lord's vulnerable flesh, the Bitter Scimitar went into a frenzy as it greedily sucked all of the alien phasewater-infused blood from the open wound!

The D-arm went crazy and automatically started to cut deeper on its own accord!

Chapter 6718: The Bloodthirsty Blade

The Eight Lord of Takansha had disappeared from sight!

Melkor's modified Fey Fianna had deployed 25 recently constructed formation anchor fey. They successfully reached the coordinates calculated by the newly established qi cultivator and formed a spell array that was large enough to trap the orven lesser phase lord in place!

At this time, the white mists that contained and obscured the active spell array were roiling violently from time to time.

While most of the other alien races hardly noticed the disappearance of a lesser phase lord, the orvens most definitely saw what happened!

Their warship gun batteries trained their muzzles towards the coordinates of the formation anchors and opened fire, only to see their attacks passing through the mists as if they hit nothing.

They had no understanding of how qi formations worked, and they couldn't afford to divert too much firepower away from their human opponents, so they only attacked the spell array half-heartedly.

What they did notice was a single mech that was seemingly responsible for deploying this mysterious anomaly!

Commander Melkor's machine soon came under heavy attack!

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar already anticipated this response. She ceased to Enfeoff the Karma Cutters as they had already done their jobs and shifted her most powerful form of empowerment to a company of Rigid Wall mechs from the Living Sentinels!

The defensive space knights excelled in defense, and these ones had been especially modified and upgraded to resist even more transphasic attacks than usual!

"Our defenses are impervious!"

"We are the walls that stand in the way of destruction!"

"The blessing of the Saint Commander shall make us impervious!"

The Rigid Walls formed a half-sphere formation that covered the Fey Fianna with multiple thick and overlapping tower shields and armored mech frames.

As temporarily empowered Barons, the Rigid Walls proved far more effective at withstanding enemy firepower than ordinary small craft!

Even so, there were limits to how much firepower they could resist with the help of the Saint Commander's true resonance.

Melkor was not skilled enough to be able to sustain and control the active spell array while on the move. His Fey Fianna needed to remain stationary in order to keep the confinement array as strong and stable as possible.

This instantly negated the best defense that small craft possessed against warship-grade gun batteries.

All of the mechs were stuck in place, making it trivially easy for the powerful primary and secondary gun batteries of enemy cruisers and battleships to bombard their coordinates!

Rigid Wall after Rigid Wall endured crushing amounts of damage that could have easily flattened a city district.

The mechs honestly shouldn't have been capable of tanking direct attacks from the most powerful guns of orven warships.

They were actually quite lucky that the native aliens had not developed the habit of mounting enormous spinal cannons onto their largest hulls.

Perhaps this might change in time with the help of cosmopolitan intervention, but for now the Rigid Walls were performing admirably well with the help of the Minerva's empowerment.

However, the Living Sentinels were only able to deploy so many Rigid Walls for this onerous task.

While the Saint Commander frequently rotated the spent and worn out Rigid Walls with fresh ones that were previously hovering on standby, the rate of depletion was too high. The Larkinsons would soon run out of defensive mechs to shield Melkor's mech against bombardment!

"Jannzi, is your Bastion ready to give me a hand?!" Commander Melkor urgently requested.

"I am sorry, Melkor, but Zren-Divar's plasma sword has overloaded most of my defenses. I can barely maintain a resonance shield at this time. Don't worry. There is another defensive mech on the way. His machine is more modern than mine, and has yet to sustain as much damage, so he should serve you well."

Melkor soon understood what Jannzi meant as an expert mech that possessed a similar configuration to the Amphis Extremis flew to his Fey Fianna's side!

The Blood Star Mark II had arrived!

"Benjamin!"

The father of Ark Larkinson and the grandfather of Ves Larkinson had been faring decently well during the battle.

Though his expert offensive space knight did not engage in any flashy theatrics, the machine instead fulfilled the role of a troubleshooter.

The Blood Star Mark II had flown across the battlefield and helped out the soldiers by breaking formations of elite phasefighters, assaulting and disabling sub-capital warships with hulls bristling with anti-mech armaments and more.

Now, Venerable Benjamin Larkinson arrived where he and his expert mech were needed the most. The Blood Star Mark II quickly took over much of the burden from the Enfeoffed Rigid Walls and did a much better job of resisting the incoming attacks!

The resonance shield generated by a high-tier expert pilot and a high-tier expert mech was much more effective at withstanding punishing blows that were powerful enough to demolish city districts!

"How long can your Blood Star last?!"

"A minute or maybe a minute-and-a-half, but not much longer." Venerable Benjamin spoke. "I have sustained relatively little damage so far, so my resonance shield is in good condition. The firepower that the enemy warships are bringing to bear is still difficult to resist even for expert mechs like my Blood Star Mark II. My battle partner's defenses are not as exaggerated as that of the Bastion!"

Both of them fell under the space knight classification, but they were designed with completely different purposes in mind.

The Bastion exemplified the concept of extreme defense and sacrificed nearly every other advantage in favor of raising her ability to resist attacks to the limit. Her most recent performance clearly proved the value of such a machine, and everyone gained a newfound appreciation for an expert mech that they previously looked down on for being slow, clumsy and lacking in agency.

The Blood Star Mark II possessed respectable defensive attributes, but did not compromise too much in terms of mobility. The living expert mech was meant to be a relatively mobile assault unit that could fulfill flexible roles on the battlefield.

The expert offensive space knight was able to switch from a defensive assignment to an offensive assignment with ease.

While the Blood Star Mark II's was not as good at resisting a huge amount of attacks as the Bastion, his mobility allowed the machine to evade many devastating attacks.

Unfortunately, when assigned to a task of defending a static target against focused attacks, the Blood Star Mark II was clearly out of his element!

Fortunately, Melkor shared a piece of good news.

"You don't have to weather the storm for long, old man. Joshua doesn't need much time to finish off his enemy."

Inside the damaged but still functional resonance-empowered spell array, the Everchanger had finally tasted first blood!

The toxic and dangerous phasewater-infused blood from the orven lesser phase lord did not harm the Bitter Scimitar in the slightest.

In fact, the D-arm had developed an instant liking for phase lord blood!

The weapon was originally forged as a highly saturated transphasic hyper weapon, so getting exposed to phasewater posed no threat to its material structure.

The mysterious transformation induced by the Demoncasting process caused the D-arm to gain other properties.

One of them happened to be the ability to devour phasewater — as well as phasewater-infused blood — to fuel its phasewater-charged mechanism!

While Joshua imagined that this might happen, he did not dare to put too much hope in this possible interaction. He had already been prepared to launch repeated attack runs in order to finally land a killing blow on the lesser phase lord.

What happened instead was that the Bitter Scimitar exploded in power shortly after its blade sunk into the Eight Lord's exposed chest!

The flesh, bone and other toughened organic tissue tried to resist the advancing blade by any means possible, but the phasewater that reinforced their structure and granted them transphasic capabilities had turned from a source of strength into a serious liability!

Any organic tissue that contained any scrap of blood got drained by the Bitter Scimitar!

Any pieces that did not contain blood could not withstand the sharpness of the resonance-empowered transphasic blade.

Even if the Everchanger did not press the D-arm any deeper, the Bitter Scimitar drove its blade deeper into the chest on its own accord!

Though the Bitter Scimitar clearly exhibited signs of going out of control again, Venerable Joshua did not try to interrupt what was happening.

If he wanted to develop a respectful relationship with the D-arm, he needed to extend his trust to it and give it space to take action on its own initiative.

Killing the Eight Lord of Takansha was their common goal. If the Bitter Scimitar thought that driving its blade straight through the chest, then that was a viable choice!

It became a lot more difficult for Joshua to maintain the fusion spirit that empowered the Everchanger so much. The dark crow briefly grew fuzzy as Joshua tried to sort of the explosion of euphoria and power from the D-arm.

He still managed to keep it together. This time, the dark crow no longer used its beak to peck into the lesser phase lord's body. The Bitter Scimitar was already doing an excellent job in its phasewater-charged state!

What the dark crow did instead was serve as an additional defensive layer to the Everchanger.

While the Bitter Scimitar was still digging deeper into the chest of the Eight Lord of Takansha, the suffering phase lord frantically used his scepter and his knees to bash into the stationary Everchanger!

The expert hero mech's resonance shield was still intact and able to resist a number of direct attacks, but the additional protection provided by the fusion spirit granted the machine an extra safety margin!

Soon enough, the phase lord started to lose his strength as the Bitter Scimitar cut too deeply into his large body. Phasewater-enriched blood continued to spill out of the open wounds. Anything that wasn't devoured by the bloodthirsty blade freely seeped into vacuum and disappeared into the mists!

After the Everchanger made another concerted push, the D-arm finally cut into the enormous heart of the phase lord.

The Bitter Scimitar especially enjoyed the act of draining and devouring this key organ.

Orven hearts functioned similar to human hearts. Both of them were responsible for rhythmically pumping blood to every organ and piece of flesh in an organic body.

The catastrophic damage inflicted to the lesser phase lord's heart caused his true body to quickly lose most forms of blood circulation!

Even if phase lord bodies were able to last considerably longer without a fresh supply of blood, there was no way for the Eight Lord of Takansha to save his life unless others immediately came to the rescue.

Alas, the confinement spell array still remained active. Nobody was able to come to the lesser phase lord's rescue, let alone observe what was taking place.

The orven phase lord had lived for so long and amassed so much power. He had managed to scheme his way to the top of his society and successfully passed the life tests that resulted in his ascension to godhood.

He should have enjoyed a much more glorious life, but because he got drafted into the Red War, he instead lost his life at the hands of a human expert pilot!

The Eight Lord made one more expression of despair behind his closed helmet before losing consciousness.

"Is he dead?!"

"No. Not yet. He's comatose."

"Should we capture him, Joshua?"

"That is not a good idea. We won't be able to get away with hauling away this huge corpse without driving every orvan soldier crazy. We should end his life immediately and quickly harvest the most

unique and valuable phasewater organs that we can carry away. It will be messy, but I have been told that it is fine if just half of the organic tissue is left."

The Everchanger withdrew the Bitter Scimitar from the ruined chest of the dying phase lord and flew up until he reached the same height as the top of the alien god's head.

Joshua did not bother to conduct any ceremonies and straightforwardly chopped the Bitter Scimitar directly through the forehead that was covered in armor.

Armor and skull bone parted easily enough. Once the Bitter Scimitar finally cut apart and drained the vulnerable brain tissue, the Eight Lord of Takansha had finally perished!

A soundless scream briefly shuddered through space as the Bitter Swordsman instantly captured and devoured the orven lesser phase lord's soul!

Just as Joshua had promised, his new life sword could freely devour the soul of the defeated champion!

Chapter 6719: Phased Withdrawal

After Commander Melkor finally suspended the basic confinement spell array and caused the mists to disappear, everyone was able to observe the outcome.

The orvens instantly grew dismayed when they saw that their third and last 'god' had also perished at the hand of a human expert mech!

As the Everchanger, the Greenaxe and the Bloodripper hastily withdrew from the corpse with sloppily removed phasewater organs in their arms, the orven soldiers serving in several of the assault fleets participating in this battle completely lost their composure!

The aliens who suffered a crisis of faith went completely crazy!

All thoughts about following orders and pushing the humans away from the Viola Magnifica System left their alien heads. All they cared about was retrieving the divine corpses of their fallen phase lords and getting the hell away from this cursed location as fast as possible!

Although the expeditionary fleet preferably wanted to claim the bodies of the phase lords for themselves, this was not a viable choice.

The orvens were too protective of the bodies of their gods. Even if the phase lords had already perished, there were still plenty of orvens that believed that their gods could be resurrected so long as their remains were brought back to their other gods!

Of course, the Larkinsons believed that the true reason behind the existence of this custom was to give living phase lords a chance to claim phasewater organs for free.

Whatever the case, the orvens fanatically stopped anyone that attempted to steal away the bodies of their deities!

The most the Larkinsons could get away with was to steal a few valuable phasewater organs.

Although the orvens grew offended by the sacrilege, the crime was not severe enough for them to dispatch a powerful force to retrieve the stolen organs. They unwillingly let the Larkinsons take their pound of flesh and focused on preserving the rest of the corpses.

As the orvens took the bodies of their deities and proceeded to turn around to flee, they completely ignored the angry calls by the other alien leaders to remain in the fight.

"The orvens are leaving!"

"The plan actually worked!"

"The other aliens must be pissed that the orvens abandoned them all. We should take advantage of this opening as much as possible!"

The remaining human forces gleefully pounced on the weakened enemy forces. The reduction in phasewaters, warships and phase lords had left large parts of the alien armada vulnerable to counterattacks!

Even if the humans had lost so many assets that they were not able to launch a vigorous counterattack, they did not need to put too much effort to devastate a lot of vulnerable phasefighters and warships.

The alien armada crumbled as they found themselves outnumbered and outgunned.

If not for the fact that the two greater phase lords were able to press forward despite all of the resistance they encountered, the humans could have rolled up the confused and demoralized alien forces and secure their hold on this star system for a while longer!

"Begin the next step of our phased withdrawal."

"80 percent of our orbital defense facilities have been evacuated. Automated systems have taken over and have received commands to overload their remaining guns in an attempt to take down one or two additional warships."

"All planetary facilities have been evacuated and scuttled. We have also left plenty of mines and other surprises behind to keep the native aliens busy."

"Suspend all search and rescue efforts. The aliens have advanced too far forward to make it viable for us to pick up any additional ejected cockpits and escape pods. We can only leave the surviving mech pilots and other soldiers to the mercies of their alien captors."

Those were empty words. Although neither side explicitly talked about it, the humans and aliens had never treated their captives well.

The Red War centered around domination and extinction. Both sides wanted to eradicate each other.

Most red humans believed that the only way they could attain peace was to wipe out all of the powerful aliens that called the Red Ocean home.

Meanwhile, the native aliens wanted to stamp out every single human presence to cleanse their dwarf galaxy of extragalactic invaders!

Neither side possessed much of an interest in taking prisoners of war. It was a burden to confine and feed millions if not billions of aliens.

While there were plenty of researchers and entrepreneurs who could recognize the value of alien captives, their demand was not too high, so it was fine with taking a limited amount of prisoners while killing off the rest.

As far as most mech pilots were aware of, if they failed to return to their motherships in time, they may as well press their sidearms against the side of their heads and pull the trigger. It would be too late for them if they got captured by the native aliens!

In the end, the final battle of Viola Magnifica ended with both sides suffering severe losses.

The expeditionary fleet and the other participating mech forces all sustained serious damage.

Many mechs got wrecked.

Plenty of mech pilots had died as well.

Red humanity lost all of the resources invested in the fortification of the star system.

A lot of trained, educated and experienced soldiers paid the price of their lives.

What was worse was that all of the human as well as alien assets that met their end in the Viola Magnifica System had left multiple debris fields behind. This meant that as long as the enemies maintained control over this location, they could collect abundant quantities of salvaged materials and use them to speed the production of high-quality replacement phasefighers and warships.

The aliens and the puelmers in particular would also love to get their hands on broken and abandoned pieces of high technology.

Leaving all of this stuff behind was painful to the members of the expeditionary fleet.

Normally, they were the ones who controlled the battlefield at the end and earned the freedom to pick up any salvage that they wanted!

Still, Human High Command should be satisfied with how much the defenders made the attacking aliens bleed.

It would take time for the native alien factories and shipyards to churn out replacement hulls based on more modern designs.

Therefore, the defenders had definitely met their original goals. They inflicted just enough material losses to delay the advance of the native aliens.

The unexpected orvan withdrawal had made it much harder for the native aliens to renew their offensive and attack the fifth defensive band. If the orvens stationed in other star systems began to relent all of a sudden, then the aliens would soon suffer from their lack of coordination.

As the Everchanger triumphantly returned to the Spirit of Bentheim, Venerable Joshua shut down his expert mech, but not before he commanded his machine to carefully return the Bitter Scimitar to its isolating container.

"...!"

"You don't want to get stuffed in a dark and confining box? Well, I am fine with letting you remain by the side of the Everchanger. Just make sure to behave and never put any human crew member under threat unless they literally go on the attack. I am trusting you to behave. Do not screw this up. I will put you back in the box if I hear any complaints about your behavior."

"..."

Joshua decided to place the Bitter Scimitar in a weapon rack that was located close to where the Everchanger was stationed. The living mech was already scheduled to get serviced by one of the best maintenance crews serving on the Spirit of Bentheim.

As soon as he exited the cockpit, he sought out his fellow expert pilots and asked for Venerable Rosa Orfan's condition.

"She is still alive, thankfully." Saint Commander Casella Ingvar answered his question. "We rescued her in time. The Riot has done a good job of preserving the cockpit. It was breached and deformed, but not to a severe extent. Orfan's personal shield generator and armored piloting suit managed to keep her alive, though they weren't able to protect her entire body. The doctors who have applied emergency treatments on her estimate that she will require 3 to 6 months of recovery and rehabilitation. She will remain out of commission during this time."

"Hm, that is good news. Suffering injuries is better than dying. Will she retain any lasting injuries?"

"The doctors have no reason to believe so. Her helmet did an excellent job of cushioning and protecting her skull, so she is still able to use the neural interface. Well, brain injuries aren't as devastating as they used to be. Orfan can always opt to become a Carmine mech pilot... like you. How did you manage to form a Blood Pact with the Everchanger without the inclusion of the Carmine System?"

"It's complicated." Joshua shrugged. "I think you can get a clearer explanation from the patriarch or my wife. They taught me how to do it. You can possibly form a Blood Pact with your Minerva as well, though I am not too sure about it. I don't regret my decision. The Everchanger is my sole mech for a number of years, so it is not as if much will change for me. I just need to be more careful about not losing my bonded mech in battle."

That was a serious concern for Joshua as well as others that had a stake in his future.

"You almost broke through, didn't you?" Casella asked.

The pilot of the Everchanger nodded. "I deployed on the battlefield in the hopes of becoming stronger when I return. In a way, I reached my goal, but not in the way I expected. I am not too upset that I hadn't managed to become an ace pilot like the others, but I have learned stuff that is almost just as good. It turns out that I haven't reached my limit yet. There is so much I can do to take advantage of my versatility and find new synergies to stack up my combat power. I think... it is best if I explore and master my new capabilities first before attempting another breakthrough. Next time, I will be much better armed and ready to fight at a higher level."

The Saint Commander noticed that despite fumbling his latest breakthrough moment, Joshua had truly changed for the better. His posture radiated confidence and his willpower had grown a lot firmer than before.

It shouldn't be as easy for Joshua to fall into doubt or falter at a critical moment.

Whether that was enough for him to succeed in his next serious breakthrough attempt was another matter.

Nothing was set in stone. The successive breakthroughs of Davia Stark and Ark Larkinson provided strong support for the validity of the Heaven Earth Man Trifecta, but the results were not conclusive enough to convince any scientists.

"If you have anything to share that other expert pilots may find useful, then write a report and transmit it to my account. I will read it and decide whether it is worthwhile to pass it on to our colleagues."

"I will do my best, Casella, but I don't think anyone can do what I can do. None of our peers are as versatile as myself."

"I see. If you have nothing to share with other expert pilots, then at least write a report for the Design Department. Once the Miracle Couple have begun to design the Everchanger Mark III, they can use your feedback to adapt your expert mech to your new capabilities."

"That is a good idea. I will do so quickly."

The two continued to talk about various topics.

"So what is next in store for our expeditionary fleet?" Joshua asked.

"We have sustained serious damage and lost plenty of mechs. We are currently withdrawing from the frontlines. We need to spend at least a couple of weeks replenishing our mech roster and transfer new personnel to take the places of those who have sacrificed their lives."

"A couple of weeks?! That is too short!"

The Saint Commander sighed. "We have no choice, Joshua, or rather red humanity has no choice. All indications show that the native aliens are determined to storm through the fifth defensive band and blitz straight through our vulnerable hinterland. We need to be ready to fight when that happens."

"If that happens."

"I did not misspeak."

Chapter 6720: Increased Workload

The battle that took place in the Viola Magnifica System had far-reaching consequences to many people.

The fall of the star system meant that the Torald Middle Zone had almost completely fallen into the hands of the native aliens.

There was only one defensive band left. Once the final line of fortified star systems got breached, many people who lived in the much more populated planets in the Krakatoa Middle Zone would become vulnerable to an unceasing stream of alien raids.

This was devastating to a lot of people and companies! Many of them had planted their roots in a star system that was as close to the center of the dwarf galaxy as they could manage.

Each of them had entered the Red Ocean with the belief that the locations close to the galactic rim would hold the least amount of value due to being so far removed from zones with a higher star density.

Now, these colonists and entrepreneurs found themselves more vulnerable to alien incursions than others. Many of them invested their life savings to afford new homes and businesses. If they were forced to evacuate from their planets, they would lose much of the wealth they had sunk into their investments.

It was consequences like these that Ves had always been reluctant to invest too much in landbound facilities. Recent events made him feel vindicated. It had been a good idea to not settle down his roots over in Davute.

If the Torald Middle Zone fell, the Colonial Federation of Davute would definitely turn into a warzone!

"Well, it's not my problem. Mostly. It sucks for the Davute Branch of our clan, but who told them to construct and operate so many factories and other facilities?"

The aliens didn't care about all of that. They only thought about looting everything that they could repurpose for their own uses while bombarding the rest. Every settled planet had to be cleansed from the human menace!

Although the Larkinson Clan was bound to suffer considerable losses in property and wealth once the native aliens began to raid the Krakatoa Middle Zone, Ves did not care too much.

Property could be rebuilt. Planets taken over by the aliens could be taken back.

What truly mattered was that the Larkinsons would be able to evacuate in time and resume their lives elsewhere.

Ves cared more about the impact on the latest battle on the mech pilots who participated in the fighting.

The casualties were heavier than he liked, but the survivors had grown considerably in every way.

Rookies became blooded. More experienced mech pilots turned into veterans. New heroes had emerged.

As far as Ves was concerned, the quantity of Larkinson soldiers had dropped, but the quality of those who survived the gauntlet had definitely increased in quality!

This was a worthwhile trade in his opinion. This was especially the case considering that his clan obtained not just one, but two additional ace pilots!

Not many people were in the mood to party after completing a phased withdrawal from the Viola Magnifica System, so the Larkinsons kept their celebrations small and subdued.

The clansmen already gained enough comfort in knowing that Saint Davia Stark and Saint General Ark Larkinson had entered the big leagues.

Naturally, the breakthroughs of these two individuals brought forth a lot of changes. People regarded them a lot differently than before. Their performance on the battlefield had been so convincing that they both received their fair share of admirers.

One of the biggest issues that Ves had to deal with was how to fit the new upgrade projects in the schedule.

"You know, I am actually glad that Joshua did not break through during this battle." Ves commented as he picked up a dozing Clixie and began to pet her luxuriously soft and fluffy fur. "I can't imagine how difficult it would be to tell him he needs to wait 2 years to receive his upgraded Everchanger."

"Miaow~" The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat purred in his arms.

Gloriana turned her gaze away from her projected screen. "I am not as slow as before. Systematic cultivation has not only improved my utilization of my recently upgraded cranial implant suite, but it has also made all of our contributing and assisting mech designers more productive. First-class ace mech designs are not simple, but as long as we outsource more technical work to our in-house R&D institutions, we can complete a modest upgrade in as little as 3 months, and complete a major upgrade in 6 months."

Upgrading a more recent and future-proofed mech like the Amaranto Mark III to the standard of a first-class ace mech did not take much effort.

This happened to be the most extreme example as Gloriana only needed to replace a small set of components and reconfigure the software settings to enable the Amaranto Mark III to fully keep up with Saint Stark's recent explosion in strength.

Upgrading an old and much more outdated mech like the Everchanger to a first-class ace mech was much more onerous work.

At this point, the differences between the two had become so great that Ves and Gloriana pretty much had to start from scratch in order to design the Everchanger Mark III!

Just the conversion from a classical mech to an archemecch entailed a complete overhaul and redesign of the internal architecture!

This was why Ves and Gloriana actually dreaded the moment that a pilot with an old machine would break through. It would add a lot of time pressure on the pair.

This was why the two actually felt pleased that Venerable Joshua failed to break through this time.

As far as the Design Department was concerned, Joshua was more than welcome to take his time!

"Well, I don't think we have to worry about Joshua breaking through in the short term. His latest discoveries and insights have opened up a brand new way for him to exercise his power. It should take him a considerable amount of time before he has mastered his latest tricks. Right now, there is still a lot of room for improvement, so he is not under as much pressure to acquire the power of an ace pilot as before."

"Mmhmm. That is good news." Gloriana said. "The Minerva Mark III Project is making brisk progress. We can start up the Riot Mark III Project and the Promethea Mark II Project directly afterwards. I think we can focus on designing them concurrently for greater efficiency. The Red Association has already notified me that Saint Isobel Kotin's recovery is proceeding according to schedule. We should have her ace mech ready by the time she is ready to resume her service."

Ves and Gloriana had previously decided to focus all of their time on one high-end mech design project at a time. This was great for rushing a single machine out of the door as quickly as possible, but it ultimately caused them to take a longer time to complete a bunch of mech design projects due to inefficiencies.

For example, there were certain phases in a mech design project where heavy processing power was needed.

Once it was no longer necessary to perform so many calculations, all of that processing power would go to waste if it wasn't being used to simulate outcomes for other mech design projects.

This example and more was why Gloriana was eager to resume their previous approach towards project management.

"Since that is the case, we should upgrade the Amaranto Mark III to a first-class ace mech as soon as she is shipped to our location. You will have to allocate a few hours that you originally reserved for the Minerva Mark II Project to this upgrade job, but it shouldn't be too much of an issue considering that it is already mostly an ace mech anyway."

"Hm, I suppose you are correct. I shall make sure to do that. I know how important it is for our clan to mobilize ace mechs as quickly as possible."

Even Gloriana could not ignore the specter of war looming over everyone's heads. She knew that if the native aliens ever managed to breach past the fifth defensive band, the Larkinson Clan would have to scramble as many mechs as possible.

During times of crises, the protection offered by those at the top became very scarce.

Many people and groups had no choice but to fend for themselves!

The female mech designer frowned. "What about your uncle Ark? Now that he has become the 'Saint General', his potential has skyrocketed. He fares best in large battles involving millions of soldiers. He has become a junior ace pilot that red humanity needs the most during this ongoing alien offensive."

Ves thought about it for a moment. The Lionheart was a fairly new fifth generation living mech, but it was not cutting-edge anymore.

It was not an archemec, so Gloriana would have to spend a lot of time to completely overhaul its internals and such in order to bring the machine up to her standards.

The good news was that he saw no need to change the vision and concept of the Lionheart. Translating the expert command mech's existing design solutions to a mech frame comprised of archemetal should not take much time, especially since Ves and Gloriana had done this several times already.

That did not change the fact that trying to fit the Lionheart Mark II into her already packed schedule was quite a challenge!

"I see no other choice but to put it in the back of the line." She sighed. "I cannot help it. The Amaranto Mark III, the Minerva Mark II, the Riot Mark III and the Promethea Mark III already fill up my time slots for at least an entire standard year. I see no other way to deal with the Lionheart Mark II Project aside from placing it in the back of my queue."

"We could split responsibilities." Ves suggested. "I can upgrade the Amaranto Mark III to a first-class ace mech by myself, and I can also handle the remaining work on the Minerva Mark II once you are done with designing the archemetal mech frame."

"NO! ABSOLUTELY NOT! I will not hand over final control of the outcome of those upgrade projects to you! These ace mechs are my babies! If you take over responsibility for them, then I just know that you will spontaneously gain 'inspiration' and implement a completely new design solution onto our designs that drastically changes our original vision! I will not give you any chance to spoil my perfect designs!"

Ves backed off as Gloriana engaged in another tirade. Even Clixie turned her head away as she grew discomfited by the woman's shouting.

"Okay, okay! Forget I ever asked! We still need to come up with a good solution to ease the work burden. We can't go on like this. If you don't want to split up the projects, then how about bringing in additional core personnel who can speed up their completion? I am already thinking about letting Alexa Streon take over a few high-level mech designs on my behalf. You can do the same with your own protege... if you have one. Have you raised or recruited any talents as of late that can substitute for your work?"

"No one can possibly equal my work." Gloriana corrected Ves. "I do recognize the need to train disciples that can independently design archemechs. They do not have to be as good as myself, but they should at least help me save time when working on lower-priority projects. I am already working on it, but do not expect any expedient results. It is too difficult for most mech designers to understand the essence of archetech. Of the ones that do, there are even less of them that have the same appreciation for quality."

"Well, the sooner you have raised a qualified disciple, the better, because I don't think our workload for high-ranking mechs will drop anytime soon."