

Mech Touch 6831

Chapter 6831: Kalister Devos

Ves needed more mech designers like Alexa Streon and Klaus Robar-Fulton.

They both wanted to design living mechs, but they wanted to approach their work from a different angle.

Alexa and Klaus sought to develop living mechs in slightly different directions.

This only benefited Ves as their work added greater variety to the spectrum of living mechs.

Ves wholeheartedly welcomed their initiative and hoped that they would be able to make serious attainments in their future works.

Of course, it would probably take many years for their living mech designs to truly showcase their advantages.

Even if Klaus did not develop any exceptionally good works in the coming years, his mech designs should still have a place in the Larkinson Clan.

His specialization should be especially compatible with ranged mechs and more importantly support mechs. Ves could easily come up with a dozen different mech concepts that could make excellent use of a large E energy reservoir.

After Ves asked a few more questions to Klaus, he waved the eager new recruit back.

Two more Apprentice Mech Designers hoped to present themselves to their former teacher and current employer.

Ves turned to the other young man. "I remember you as well, Kalister Devos. You have earned better grades, which is not that much of a surprise considering your superior augmentations and background. Is the Devos Ancient Clan fine with letting you defect to the Larkinson Clan?"

"I would not be here if I did not receive the personal approval of Master Laila Rebecca Devos." Kalister respectfully said. "The Devos Ancient Clan is not short of mech designers who have learned from you. It is by far the greatest direct and indirect employer of all of your former students. I believe that you are aware of how many Devosans have attended your Introduction to Living Mech Design course."

As the founder and owner of the Eden Institute of Business & Technology, it was trivially easy for the Devos Ancient Clan to place its own descendants into his courses.

Other ancient clans tried their best to sneak their own students into his courses by concluding backroom deals with the Devosans.

Ves did not have a good grip on all of these shady deals, but he did not really mind this sort of stuff.

It was inevitable for the rulers of the Terran Alliance to put its own descendants ahead of other people.

Ves had even met with Master Laila Devos to make sure that the classrooms did not entirely get filled by highborn brats.

He liked it more when his classes contained a variety of different people. The common folk who lived in the Terran Alliance tended to have special qualities. They wouldn't have been able to keep up their studies at the Eden Institute if they were not as competitive.

Of course, Kalister Devos was completely different from a commoner like Klaus Robar-Fulton.

As a scion of the Devos Ancient Clan, he enjoyed superior conditions from conception.

Since he was a designer baby, his starting genetic makeup was only inferior to the main branch members of his ancient clan.

Combined with the superior education and training provided by the Devosans, Kalister Devos was already set up to become a good mech designer.

However, Kalister uncharacteristically deviated from the path set by his clan.

"If I recall, you have always earned high grades during my fabrication classes." Ves said. "Your craftsmanship stood out compared to many of your peers. You not only demonstrated greater mastery of the use of superfabs, but have also begun to inject your own passion and vision into your crafts. It is really unusual to see a mech design student who has become so proficient in artisanship."

Kalister Devos smiled with pride. "I avidly played with Mekanos and similar toys in my youth. I prefer the feeling of putting a mech together with my hands as opposed to working with a virtual design suite. While the supervisors of my ancient clan did not approve of my interest in manual fabrication at first, their opinions changed once I managed to earn your praise in your classes. Even after I passed your Advanced Mech Fabrication course, I continued to practice and refine my fabrication skills. I am nowhere ready to produce my own masterwork mech, but I am proud of the quality of my handmade mechs."

"Can you show me your works?"

"Certainly. Please excuse the flaws of my work. I am trying my best to make them as precise and even as possible, but I am still lacking in experience."

When Kalister started to project the mechs that he had fabricated in the past, Ves grew quite impressed.

As a member of an ancient clan, Kalister had much easier access to superfabs and the materials he needed to fabricate his mechs.

While his designs were not too special at his level, his skills and practical intuition were considerably better than the norm.

Ves was quite impressed by the quality of his works!

When Kalister was a Novice, his works already reached the quality expected of an experienced Apprentice.

When Kalister became an Apprentice, his mechs could easily match the quality of mechs produced by Journeymen!

As Ves continued to study the projected mechs, he began to narrow his eyes in suspicion. He briefly glanced at Gloriana, and couldn't help but notice that she looked pleased at Kalister.

"Your works look quite interesting. What is your vision for mechs? How do you treat your living mechs?"

Kalister already anticipated this question. He clearly had an answer ready.

"I have studied your living mechs. They are marked by a design style that is relatively volatile and individualistic. Each living mech of the same design possesses a common starting point, but can evolve in wildly different directions depending on many variables. I can appreciate the logic and the philosophy behind this strategy. It is not how I would choose to design my own products."

The former Devosan waved his hand.

Two new projections appeared.

One of them showed a line that continued to form many different branches as it moved upwards.

The other projection displayed a single thick line that went straight up and took no detours.

"This is how I visualize the differences between our design philosophies." Kalister said. "This tree-like diagram is a model of how your living mech can evolve. It can follow a relatively straight direction, but it can also deviate further from the norm and follow one of the many branches according to how it is being used. The result is that once many mechs of the same model have grown for multiple years, they will continue to diverge unless they have almost become separate species."

The young mech designer gestured towards the other projection that was much simpler.

"This is my model. What I want to design is a living mech that is similar to a clockwork in both a tangible and intangible form. I want there to be no mutation in how the living mech develops over time. Its E-technology must remain completely consistent with my original design and layout. Over time, mechs of the same model will all remain highly identical to each other. The only major variables that can set them apart are their ages and how long they have been put to use. My living mechs should otherwise greatly resemble each other so that it is difficult to set them apart."

What an original idea!

Ves never imagined that Kalister would form such an interesting design philosophy that largely contradicted his own design style!

How refreshing!

"What is the reasoning behind designing living mechs that develop along the exact same trajectory?" Ves pressed the younger mech designer. "You should be aware that all of my living mechs have always been well-received because they are designed to adapt to their mech pilots. If I try to emphasize consistency and uniformity, then none of the living mechs will be able to adapt themselves to individual mech pilots. This may result in deteriorating performance."

Kalister remained confident in his work and philosophy.

"I am not surprised that you would ask this question, sir. My vision of living mechs is that they are one and the same. As long as we can gather many of my living mechs in a small area, I believe that they can inherently combine forces with each other. I theorize that they should be able to fuse their strength together and become powerful enough to defeat phase lords by themselves."

Ves raised his eyebrows. That sounded similar to what he attempted to accomplish with his Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem.

Unfortunately, the results were a bit too weak to make a difference in high-level confrontations.

Phase lords were too powerful for tricks like these to work.

He thought hard about the reasons why his works underperformed in this aspect.

Perhaps his mech ecosystem needed more refinement.

Perhaps the living mechs needed to experience a lot more growth to leverage this function to the fullest.

Perhaps a medium-energy environment simply couldn't sustain stronger manifestations.

Whatever the case, Ves could add a fourth reason to why the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem underperformed.

The living mechs weren't consistent enough.

So long as they experienced a year of growth, they already evolved in unique directions depending on what they witnessed in the field and the personalities of their pilots.

It was impossible to keep all of the living mechs the same!

Ves had always regarded this pattern of divergence as an advantage. Every customer that made use of one of his living mechs would experience the feeling of piloting a custom mech.

While all of that sounded nice, Ves had neglected to think about whether his customers were better off relying on living mechs that did not show the slightest sign of mutations!

"Have you been able to test your assumptions with real results?" Ves critically asked.

"Not yet, sir. My research has yet to advance to this stage." Kalister responded.

"Well, you should definitely gather enough empirical data to back up your conclusions. Everything you have described may be completely wrong. You do not want to find out later that your negligence has caused you to overlook small but extremely serious flaws that can break out at the worst time."

The Apprentice Mech Designer nodded. There was no way he would ignore the guidance of his former teacher.

"I shall do as you say, but I am confident that the results will validate my assumptions." Kalister said. "I believe that living mechs that remain uniform during their growth can one day combine into a juggernaut! My machines will not only be able to form a combination juggernaut by merging with each other, but also be able to merge their souls so that they can temporarily or permanently form a powerful fusion that can bring great power to my work! You may think that my claims are implausible, but I am willing to devote a great amount of time and work into making this dream come true."

Ves could respect such a passionate stance.

Kalister Devos certainly did not set his sights on smaller and more attainable goals. His ambition was great, and he had the background and the talent to succeed in his more challenging endeavors.

"Thank you for your encouragement, sir. I have long wanted to hear your opinion on my work. I feared that you would not be able to appreciate my design philosophy."

"I do not hate your work, Kalister. Your design philosophy is just too interesting to me. I welcome diversity in thought. Your unusual research direction should be able to expose new rules and mechanisms that can enrich my own work on living mechs. I truly do not care whether your orderly living mechs are better or not. In the unlikely event that you overtake me one day, I would still applaud your progress because we are all committed to popularizing living mechs. Only a narrow-minded mech designer would take issue with a research direction that is opposite from their own."

Chapter 6832: Tarsa Merovik

Ves became thoroughly impressed by Kalister Devos.

Although his spirituality was much more average compared to a natural talent like Klaus Robar-Fulton, the former member of the Devos Ancient Clan not only possessed a considerably stronger foundation in mech design, but also pursued a strong vision.

Ves really could not fully wrap his head around the concept of a living mech that always followed the exact same growth trajectory no matter the circumstances.

The mere idea of it completely contradicted several important principles of Ves' design philosophy!

However, this was why Ves developed an enormous appreciation for Kalister.

The young Apprentice not only demonstrated courage in defying the pattern set by his teacher, but also proved his willingness to dedicate his career to an idea that might not work as well as he hoped.

Aside from that, when Kalister showed off his portfolio of mech designs and fabricated mechs, he also showcased another advantage.

Ves turned to his wife, who previously appeared content to watch and listen with a smug expression on her face.

"You must be quite happy to pick up this talent, am I right?"

Gloriana smirked. "I am. Your design style and design philosophy is... chaotic. Whimsical. Improvisational. Far be it for me to criticize your approach towards mechs. Your many boundary-breaking works serve as infallible proof that your... eccentric style and work methods can be successful. However... I still have a number of issues. For one, you are too inconsistent. I can never fully predict or anticipate what you will deliver. I am even questioning whether you will do the work you are supposed to do. You have the most frustrating tendency to get distracted and pursue completely unrelated side projects at random times."

"There is no schedule to my inspiration! When the right moment and ideas fill my mind, I have a limited window of opportunity to investigate them further. It is only

when inspiration strikes that I am in the most passionate mood to pursue a fantastic new design application. Many of my greatest works are products of my inspiration! I would rather gamble on these 'distractions' than ignore them and risk losing an opportunity to expand my toolbox with another fantastic invention!"

His wife did not appreciate his explanation at all. She only looked more and more frustrated by his stubborn stance.

"This is exactly why I cannot stand you at times!" Gloriana dramatically threw her hands in the air. "Another long-standing issue with your work is that your approach towards raising the quality of your mech designs is partially contradicting my own. All of our collaborations result in additional work on my part because I have to struggle to balance your sloppy design work with my more flawless results without causing the two to conflict with each other."

"It is the intersection between two different interpretations of quality that we are able to produce so many high-quality works." Ves said. "The extra effort adds to your workload, but it is all useful in one way or another. You definitely wouldn't have been able to make so much progress in improving the quality of your own works if you did not have to overcome so many challenges all of the time. I am not deliberately trying to make life difficult for you, but you have obviously benefited a lot from studying and adapting my design solutions."

His wife grimaced at that. She could not deny his argument. Despite her constant complaints about how slapdash Ves designed his mechs, she never once made the decision to quit because of this reason.

She was addicted to his work!

She depended on it to exercise her skills and improve her quality!

She also took inspiration from his solutions, thereby allowing her to widen her horizons and become more creative in her own mech designs!

All in all, Gloriana enjoyed a lot of advantages whenever she worked alongside Ves. She just had to put in the work to harvest all of these gains.

"Alright, I admit that trying to correct your design solutions has constantly made me better at improving the quality of my own designs." She said in a slightly unwilling tone. "That does not mean I am happy to wrestle against your work every day." There are instances where I just need reliable design solutions in relation to living mechs. Mr. Kalister Devos over here has the potential to meet my demand better than any other living mech specialist."

"Because he is a strange fusion between me and you." Ves observed.

"You can say that. I have already spoken extensively with him about how he approaches his mech designs. Kalister has grasped the basic principles of living mech design, but he is also a man who is accustomed to prioritizing precision, consistency and uniformity. His vision on living mechs is completely unlike yours in this regard, and I think he will be able to establish a new niche in the field of living mechs that is more... palatable to my sensibilities."

If Kalister developed the right skills and specializations, he could help Gloriana design living mechs that needed to be reliable rather than unique pieces of art.

His wife also looked forward to designing living mechs where her vision and design philosophy gained a lot of dominance.

The trouble with working with Ves was that his vision was often strong as well.

The collision between two very different visions quickly got old at times.

In any case, Kalister Devos most definitely deserved a place in the Design Department.

Ves ultimately turned to the last figure. "Tarsa Merovik, right? If I recall, your performance in my Introduction to Living Mech Design and Advanced Mech Fabrication courses was not too exceptional. You basically did not stand out as far as I remember. It appears that you have become a lot more successful after your graduation. How did you manage to pass through all our screening?"

The female Apprentice used to be a middle-class citizen of the Terran Alliance. Her background was better than that of Klaus, but couldn't compare to that of Kalister.

Tarsa Merovik also did not possess an inherently high spirituality like Klaus.

The latter was able to make much better attainments in many forms of qi cultivation due to his gifted spirituality.

As for the former, her spirituality may have been good enough for her to surpass the extraordinary threshold in the previous age, but it was nothing special either.

Her fabrication work was also decidedly average. Back when she attended his fabrication classes, she completed all of her assignments without any fuss, but failed to develop a distinct style or personality. Even when he encouraged her to be more adventurous, her work still remained boring and without any strong personal touches.

So what caused her to earn Gloriana's approval?

"Hello, professor." Tarsa Merovik stepped forward and presented herself. "I have been working hard to become proficient in designing living mechs. I am far from the only student of yours to do this, but I have made my own attainments in my specialization. To be honest, skills are not as good as that of Kalister, and my intuitive comprehension of E-technology is not as good as that of Klaus. My design philosophy is still a work in progress. The reason why I am here is due to the potential of my research."

"What is your design philosophy?" Ves asked. "According to you, that is your main selling point. What are you working on that has earned my wife's approval?"

She responded by projecting her portfolio.

Ves fell silent as he studied her mech designs. They immediately stood out for multiple reasons.

"I have never... seen anyone design mechs quite like this..."

"Perhaps it would be better if I clarify my works." Tarsa gained a bit more confidence after she saw that she bewildered the Father of Carmine Mechs. "When I first began to study living mechs under your tutelage, do you know what I saw in your examples? I

saw metallic shells that contain artificial souls. Much of your teaching emphasizes the need to develop a special mindset to 'breathe life into mechs'. That life is supposed to come from us, but what if that is not necessarily the case?"

"Are you saying you want to rely on external sources to breathe life into your living mechs?"

"Exactly, professor. My premise towards living mechs is this. Rather than design them with the intention of filling them up with artificial souls, why not keep them empty and make them open to absorbing human souls?"

"...What."

Tarsa gained more confidence as she continued to speak. "What I see is an opportunity to save the lives of many people, especially those who are fighting and dying in the frontlines. You should know better than I how many brave mech pilots are dying on the frontlines. Suppose that my living mechs happen to be present on the battlefield. When they rolled off the production lines, my machines will start off devoid of any life. This allows them to pull the souls of deceased mech pilots into their structure and take their place as the spirits of my mechs. They will be reborn and gain the chance to fight again!"

That... sounded crazy!

Ves had never conceived of such an idea! Trying to mess with souls to this extent could be regarded as an act that desecrated the dead!

Yet as long as he overlooked the very obvious ethical concerns, he could figure out numerous benefits to this kind of living mechs!

The most obvious one was that people could still be saved. Even if they lost their human bodies and identity, they could still live on and accompany their family and comrades in another way.

Ves wondered whether Tarsa's unique take on living mechs could have saved the life of Venerable Imon Ingvar without all of the brainwashing.

He had a feeling that it shouldn't be so easy to make that happen.

"I am... impressed." Ves said. "Your design philosophy will most certainly receive a lot of objections from the mech community during ordinary times, but now... I do not think anyone will begrudge you for trying to save the dead, even if the results are not ideal."

"It is not just about saving the soldiers who are fighting on our behalf." The female Apprentice said. "As long as the repurposed souls are able to adapt to their new 'bodies', they should be able to provide much more relevant and knowledgeable assistance to the living mech pilots. In fact, it may not even be necessary to put any human in the cockpit. The living mechs should technically be able to pilot themselves as long as their new souls have retained most of their piloting skills. This can serve as a flawed but effective means to solve the shortage of skilled and experienced mech pilots."

It became clear that Tarsa had worked long enough on her insane design philosophy to fully justify her research direction!

She cleverly framed her work so that it solved several major problems. If successful, her work could urgently fulfill the needs of red humanity and give them a way to put more mechs in the field!

"You are the expert on E-technology and cultivation science in the Design Department." Gloriana said. "Do you think that Miss Tarsa's vision on mechs can be realized? Can she truly give the soldiers who perish on the battlefield a chance to live a second life as a living mech?"

Ves frowned. "I don't know. I may be able to design it myself. The idea just never crossed my mind. I believe that the strength of the spirituality of the deceased is a major variable. If it is too weak, it will not survive long enough to complete the transition. If it is too strong, her living mech will not be able to accommodate it all. There should be many other limitations to her work. Still, if all the circumstances are ideal... then I see no reason why it would fail."

Chapter 6833: Another Backup

Tarsa Merovik pursued a design philosophy that sounded considerably more extreme than usual.

Not even Ves went as far as to attempt to give humans the chance to enter a second life as a living mech!

As the man who pioneered living mechs in the first place, he could think of hundreds of different problems that could hinder Tarsa from turning her life-saving mechs into a reality.

From trying to preserve as much of the soul of the deceased human as possible during the transfer process, to trying to instill everything it needed to know to manipulate the mech frame on a more technical level, Ves did not look forward to solving all of these problems.

Still, that did not stop him from appreciating the female Terran Apprentice for trying to put a radical spin on living mechs.

If Tarsa succeeded in her ambitious design philosophy, then she would definitely earn a lot of fame and recognition for her invention!

Ves briefly glanced at Gloriana. He figured out her game easily enough.

Both Klaus and Kalister were sure bets. They had already realized a part of their potential and their talents were clear. Their design philosophies presented interesting new possibilities, but did not try to subvert the functioning of human society.

Tarsa Merovik's ambition was different. Her aspiration to grant deceased soldiers a chance to live again in a shell of metal held a lot of promise.

Still, Gloriana should know better than to take a screwball design philosophy so seriously.

The fact of the matter was that Tarsa's design philosophy faced too many hurdles. It would take a long time to resolve them all. It could take decades before the ambitious former Terran mech designer produced a successful result.

Ves could lend a hand and speed up her progress, but the Apprentice Mech Designer ultimately had to do the most important work herself in order to prove herself worthy and dedicated enough to advance to the rank of Journeyman Mech Designer.

"Gloriana." He spoke in an expectant tone.

"Our children." His wife curtly answered.

"Ah."

That explained everything. If there was one matter that could persuade Gloriana to break her criteria and make an exception to her own rules, it was their children.

Sooner or later, Andraste and perhaps her siblings would end up piloting mechs on the battlefield.

No matter whether they piloted conventional mechs or Carmine mechs, each time they deployed against an enemy, they always faced the threat of death.

This was an intrinsic part of warfare. No one could guarantee absolute survival.

The Larkinson had a good track record of keeping its soldiers alive, but in truth a lot of ordinary mech pilots died in almost every engagement.

Most clansmen tended to gloss over the casualties and focus on the glory of earning another victory.

Yet that did not make the families of the deceased any happier. They had no choice but to grieve for their loved ones.

Besides, not all Larkinsons died on the battlefield. They could lose their lives through ambushes and assassinations.

Ves particularly worried about the possibility of his enemies trying to get to him by targeting his kids.

He absolutely could not stand this possibility!

So long as Aurelia, Andraste or Marvaine remained alive and moved away from him and his core power base, they constantly required protection.

What if that was enough?

His children could only fend for themselves, and if that was enough...

Ves narrowed his eyes. Death was not an ending to certain people.

If entities such as Qilanxo and his mother could come back from the dead, then so could his son and daughters.

Unfortunately, he was not familiar with the methods. Perhaps he should have a good talk with Helena about this subject, but he doubted that she could intervene directly in case the worst had happened.

There were too many limitations to defying death that he was not familiar with. If it was more straightforward, then he would have been able to preserve Venerable Imon Ingvar.

While Ves believed that there were multiple ways to save his children from death, there should never be enough options.

The Design Department could afford to support a single Apprentice Mech Designer who hoped to design a living mech that could not only save the lives of his children, but every other Larkinson!

"I have spoken extensively with Miss Merovik about her design philosophy." Gloriana spoke up again. "She cannot give us any guarantees that she can succeed in her goal, but she will do her best and hope that she can attain a breakthrough in her work with the support of our clan. In the meantime, she is still willing to perform all of the duties expected of an assistant mech designer and more."

Tarsa was quite aware of her situation. It was impossible for her to make any substantial progress in her design philosophy if she went at it alone. She needed access

to funding, knowledge, lab instruments, workshop equipment and testing facilities in order to conduct her research.

Supporting her activities should not be cheap, but that was not a particularly serious problem to the Larkinson Clan.

"I will allow it." Ves said. "You should know how busy my schedule is, so I cannot teach her too much in person, nor supervise her work all that often. The same goes for the other recruits as well."

As much as he was interested in tutoring Klaus and Kalister on more advanced theories related to living mechs, Ves could not afford to take too much time off his schedule.

The Minerva Mark II Project and the Final Glory Project were beginning to reach their completion fairly soon. Ves wanted to finish them as soon as possible so that his works could make a real difference in this critical period.

Ves suddenly thought of a good way to give the kids the tutoring they needed. He turned towards his direct disciple.

"Alexa."

"Yes, sir?"

"I hate to add to your workload, but I would like you to teach them what I originally taught you about living mechs. You don't need to delve in the most advanced stuff. Just teach them the follow-up lessons of my Introduction to Living Mech Design course."

Alexa did not look particularly surprised at receiving this task. "I can do that. I may not be able to answer all of their questions, but I should be able to give them a more comprehensive foundation in living mech design. It will only take around half a year to bring them up to standard. All of us are former Terrans, and I assisted you at the Eden Institute, so I should be able to give them structured lessons that they can quickly absorb."

"Thank you, Alexa."

He felt rather bad for delegating less pleasant and important assignments to Alexa Streon. It was as if he was treating her as free labor instead of a valued mech designer who shared a similar vision towards mechs.

Perhaps he needed to make time to give her more personal attention. Just because she had been incredibly competent and diligent so far did not mean she could solve every problem.

"Alexa, I'd like to talk to you in private after this is over." Ves spoke.

The female Journeyman did not expect to hear this request, but she only raised her eyebrow. "I will be at your disposal."

Now that Ves and Alexa had been formally introduced to the new recruits, Gloriana moved on and addressed staffing issues.

"Klaus, Kalister, Tarsa, the three of you will need to split your time between study and work. We are short on manpower and could deeply use the help of first-class mech designers who are proficient in the data-driven design approach. As long as you are able to complete the assignments that I am allocating to you, we should be able to complete the Minerva Mark II Project up to a week in advance."

That made a significant difference. Saint Commander Casella would not have to wait as long to pilot her new machine. She would also be able to unveil her full power on the battlefield in case an emergency took place.

Ves had grown more worried about the security of the New Constantinople System.

Even if the Devos Ancient Clan garrisoned a lot of first-class multipurpose mechs in this star system, it was still possible for the native aliens to bypass other locations and launch a direct strike on New Constantinople.

They would most definitely attempt to attack this star system in order to kill Ves, the mech designer who had made their lives a lot more difficult!

If Ves had a choice, then he would have rushed the Tortuous Scream over here already, but unfortunately he had no way of speeding the refit process of the alien battleship.

The sooner Saint Commander Casella received her Minerva Mark II, the safer everyone would be. Ves had high hopes for her Command Field when she was no longer limited by her outdated machine.

"From the moment you have joined the Larkinson Clan, you should have already accepted the fact that we do not always avoid danger. We confront it directly." He told the new recruits. "While I don't ask you to fight directly against the aliens, we will soon be relocating to a new first-class fleet that will be seeking to confront the alien raiding fleets that have crossed into the Upper Zones. Are you sure you can stomach the risks?"

"I am not a soldier, but I will not run away." Klaus vigorously responded. "I admire the Larkinson Clan for taking the bull by the horns. I have faith that you will keep us all safe to the best of your abilities. As a Larkinson, I cannot ask others to confront threats that I am not willing to brave myself. I am more than willing to work alongside the mech technicians and service damaged mechs during combat."

Ves grinned. "Well, at least one of you has the courage expected of a Larkinson! Working in a mech workshop or hangar bay during active engagements is an excellent way to familiarize yourself with the practical side of mechs. The dangers are not trivial, but as long as you are able to stay alive, you will learn many valuable lessons from this experience."

"We may as well prepare ourselves for emergency repair duty." Kalister Devos said. "Now that the native aliens have breached the 5th defensive band, no red human is truly safe anymore. Whether we turtle on New Constantinople VIII or roam the stars in a fleet, our enemies can arrive at any time and attempt to take away our lives. They will not pay attention whether we are combatants or noncombatants. This is total war. None of us are innocent. Since that is the case, we should serve our armed forces as best as possible."

Ves nodded with approval. Despite his privileged upbringing, Kalister did not grow up with a spoiled personality. He sounded quite tactful about needing to contribute.

Tarsa Merovik frowned. She appeared to be the only mech designer among them that disliked the idea of subjecting mech designers to greater risks.

"I have heard many stories about the bravery of the Larkinson Clan. While I do not want to sound like a coward, I am not a soldier. I do not think there is much logic behind putting highly educated but defenseless noncombatants such as ourselves closer to the line of fire."

"Thank you!" Gloriana enthusiastically responded. "Finally one of you has displayed actual common sense! Not every mech designer is as addicted to playing with fire as you, Ves. What you think of as 'character building' or 'gathering inspiration on the battlefield' is pure stupidity in my own opinion! Your fault tolerance may have grown explosively ever since you somehow became a phase lord, but nobody else shares your physical prowess. You cannot apply your own standards onto others, Ves. You are one-of-a-kind."

"That is exactly the problem, Gloriana. Too few mech designers are willing to step down from their ivory towers and witness how their machines truly perform in the field."

Chapter 6834: What To Do With A Juggernaut?

Ves and Gloriana held their umpteenth debate about the merits of sending mech designers a lot closer to the action.

It was a debate that neither of them could win. Their life experiences caused them to develop opposing stances towards this subject. Since neither of them was willing to concede easily, they could never come to a consensus.

The couple was accustomed to these kinds of arguments. They eventually decided to drop the topic after they reiterated their stances and made futile attempts to convince each other.

"If there is nothing else, I will go on my way to give our three new assistants a tour." Gloriana told Ves. "I will also introduce them to our SF-02 and give them a quick instruction on how to work with the smart AIs."

He waved her on. "You can go ahead and do that. I need to have a talk with Alexa. See you later."

Several minutes later, Ves entered his design lab with his direct disciple in tow.

While Ves took his usual seat, Alexa Streon remained standing.

"Why did you call me over?" She asked.

"I wanted to check up on you. We haven't talked in depth for quite a while. My work has consumed so much of my attention that I almost forgot about you. How are you doing on a personal level?"

The younger mech designer gently sat down on a nearby chair as she carefully thought on how to answer this question.

"I am doing... fine." She eventually replied. "It is difficult to imagine what will happen to all of us now that the Middle and Lower Zones are beginning to suffer widespread incursions. Once those territories fall completely in the hands of the native aliens, the Upper Zones are at great risk. The Upper Zones that are located close to alien space will transform into isolated islands that can no longer be supplied or reinforced with as much ease. Any cargo vessels that attempt to ship goods to these isolated zones are at great risk of getting intercepted by alien fleets. If that happens, the only way the Upper Zones will be able to persist is if there is at least one god pilot on guard. Even then, it is doubtful that he or she can cover more than a single star system."

Many first-raters feared the scenario that Alexa described. The Upper Zones only comprise a minority of the territories in the new frontier. They were also much less prevalent in the edge of the dwarf galaxy.

All of this meant that unless the first-raters who resided in the more vulnerable Upper Zones took the initiative to evacuate from their homes, many of them may end up dying if the aliens enacted a stranglehold against these isolated territories.

"As far as I know, the Streon Ancient Clan invested in the Red Ocean relatively early. Your former clansmen shouldn't be at great risk in the short term."

"I am not too concerned about the Streons." Alexa responded. "My grandfather is a good leader, and he has many forces at his disposal. He may not be able to save every Terran, but he will do his best. What I am concerned about is the greater societal

consequences of losing those Upper Zones. They may not be too large, but each of them are endowed by large quantities of high-grade resources. They also host a large amount of vital industry and infrastructure. The loss of several Upper Zones will inflict great damage to our high-end production of mechs, warships and other essential materiel. So far, we are already on the losing end. When we lose all of those vulnerable territories, our ability to recover from our losses becomes even worse."

Ves grimaced when he heard all of that. None of this was a secret, but he still found it unpleasant to acknowledge these uncomfortable truths.

"It sounds bad, alright. We can only trust in the HHC and the other leading powers to preserve our core territories and buy time for us to launch a proper counterattack. Our clan is too small to shift the strategic outlook of red humanity, at least from a military approach. The most we can do is to win individual battles with our Premier Fleet."

"I am not complaining about our lack of agency, sir." Alexa said. "I am mostly worried about whether we will reach a tipping point where we can no longer salvage a victory. If that ever happens, the only remaining outcomes left amount to different degrees of defeat. We can either preserve the few star systems that are permanently under the protection of god pilots, or we may no longer be able to preserve any openly held territories. The only people who are able to cling on to life are those who have hidden themselves extremely well and those who are stationed on starships that have outrun their pursuers."

Both scenarios sounded catastrophic, but one was more devastating than the other.

In a more optimistic scenario, around 95 percent of red humans would get eradicated.

In a more pessimistic scenario, over 99.9 percent of red humans would get killed.

"I think it is a little too premature to assume we will degenerate to that point." Ves said. "Still, our clan should make preparations to survive in case those scenarios unfold. I would much rather prefer to focus on the short term for the time being. How is your work?"

"I am making good progress in my work so far." Alexa said. "If I encounter any problems, I know who to approach for help. That has not been necessary so far. My work on modernizing the Otalon Sprius is progressing slowly. It is impossible to fully update it to the modern era in a short amount of time. It takes significantly less time to

repair it, so if you urgently require more combat power, we can make use of my preparations. I have made enough scans and identified plenty of parts that need to be replaced. With the help of Polly, I have even designed a crude but effective flight system that is scaled to a juggernaut. The expected mobility of the Otalon Sprius in space will not be great, but it should at least enable the giant machine to maneuver on the battlefield."

The juggernaut did not seem necessary a few months ago. It was an outdated landbound juggernaut that had been rotting for multiple decades in the Evolution Witch's private trophy collection.

This did not give Ves much confidence that the Otalon Sprius would be effective in combat after getting fixed up. It was too clumsy and did not possess any advantages over warships.

The Otalon Sprius was a massive combat machine when fighting on land, but it was distinctly less impressive in space where warships could mount much more devastating armaments across their hulls!

Perhaps the only area where juggernauts could gain an advantage was in melee combat.

Even then, it was extremely difficult to make these giant machines vast and maneuverable enough to get into position.

Any attempt of a juggernaut to close in on an enemy warship would quickly attract a lot of concentrated attacks!

No alien would be willing to let such an ostentatious machine get close!

"I do not see any compelling reason to fix up the Otalon Sprius and make it suitable for spaceborn combat." Ves told his disciple. "If we want to convert it into a proper war machine, then we need to do a proper job. We have to reinvent it as a living mech, and also implement powerful design applications that take advantage of its ludicrous scale. Do you have any suggestions in this regard?"

"I have a number of ideas, sir. It is pointless to convert the juggernaut into a slow but well-armored gun platform. It will just end up as an inferior version of a warship that

happens to be controlled by a single person. I believe it is much better to turn it into a melee-oriented executioner. We can use advanced technologies and fairly high-end materials to quickly turn it into a devastating ship killer. It would be similar to deploying an artificial phase lord."

That fell in line with Ves' thoughts.

"Do you have any specifics?"

"In fact, I do. My juggernaut proposal is still incomplete, but it should give you a thorough impression of what we can do to transform it into a powerful asset in a matter of months."

Alexa activated a projection that showed off a draft design for a much more powerful version of the Otalon Sprius.

"This juggernaut... is clad entirely with superdimensional alloy!" Ves reacted with surprise! "We don't have that much stuff to cover an entire 350-meter long juggernaut!"

"It is not what you think, Ves! Look closely. It is true that this proposal calls for replacing the old and outdated armor plating with superdimensional alloy armor plating. However, the latter should ideally make heavy use of hull-grade superdimensional matter. This variation is considerably cheaper and more abundantly available than armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter."

That sounded a lot more reasonable. Although hull-grade superdimensional alloy was not too common, it was not too scarce either.

If there was enough hull-grade superdimensional alloy to clad a starship, then it could most certainly be used to cover up a juggernaut in armor plating that significantly outperformed transphasic defenses!

The reason why Ves disdained the use of hull-grade superdimensional alloy in mechs was because its defensive properties were not that much better when processed in relatively thin plating.

However, a huge juggernaut was clad in much thicker armor plating!

Even if its thickness could not match the armor belt of a serious warship, the armor of a juggernaut was not small!

This degree of thickness should make the use of hull-grade superdimensional matter a lot more viable.

Ves grew more and more intrigued in the proposal.

"Cladding the juggernaut with mid-grade superdimensional alloy is a clever idea. Its material composition may be slightly inferior, but the thickness of the armor plating that can be made out of this material will help enormously in keeping our juggernaut intact."

Alexa pointed at the prominent melee weapon held by the superdimensional juggernaut.

"In order to make the Otalon Sprius as effective as possible, I have chosen to strip much of its ranged armaments. The only serious weapon it has left is what I call the Doomaxe. This is a large two-handed axe with a considerable amount of reach. The juggernaut should be able to crash it down onto enemy phase lords and warships with crushing force. Much of the structure of the axe should be made out of hull-grade superdimensional alloy. The only exception is the edge. This must be made out of armor-grade or ideally weapon-grade superdimensional alloy. The combination of abundant physical force and exceptional penetration can turn the Otalon Sprius into a nightmare to the Red Cabal. This is especially the case when the superdimensional juggernaut also integrates a starship-grade space suppressor."

That sounded like a lethal combination!

What Alexa just described was a juggernaut that made excellent and strategic use of its advantages.

It could do what other warships could not do, and that was to chop a giant superdimensional axe repeatedly onto a hapless enemy target!

Such a machine might lack the flexibility and the true resonance of an ace mech, but it was the best way to quickly add an ace mech-level asset to the Premier Fleet.

"It is too difficult for me to predict whether this superdimensional juggernaut can become one of our trump cards." Ves said as his frown deepened. "Superdimensional matter is precious. There may not be enough hull-grade superdimensional matter in our inventory to apply it all to the Otalon Sprius."

"That is not a serious problem, sir. We can selectively apply superdimensional alloy over the core components of the machine. We can apply for additional hull-grade superdimensional matter after our next exploration of the Blue Dimension."

Chapter 6835 The Long Game

What an outrageous idea.

Alexa had a lot of guts.

She had boldly thought about incorporating the rare and exceedingly precious superdimensional matter into the structure of a juggernaut!

This was a remarkably bold choice due to the scarcity of this material.

Yet her design choices appeared surprisingly apt.

This was because she predominantly sought to make use of relatively inferior hull-grade superdimensional matter.

The only instance where she wanted to use high-grade superdimensional matter was to enhance the strength and penetration power of the edge of the so-called 'Doomaxe.

As Ves contemplated this bold proposal, he grew more and more invested into the idea.

However, Alexa's draft design still had a number of problems. She already mentioned that it was still incomplete, so he did not judge her for the gaps and shortcomings in her work.

"Your proposal to refit the Otalon Sprius with predominantly mid-grade superdimensional alloy is highly inspiring" Ves did not hesitate to praise her vision. "You have made a strong case that the Otalon Sprius can become a formidable juggernaut just by using up a lot of hull-grade superdimensional matter. However, there are a number of issues that still look dubious!" "Please tell."

"Why arm this juggernaut with an axe?" Ves questioned. "A spear or lance allows for much better value for superdimensional matter. There are good reasons why the Red Cabal makes extensive use of Saint Piercer arms that come in the form of long, thin polearms. You can obtain supreme penetration power in a minimal package. You also do not have to waste as much high-grade superdimensional alloy just to make the tip harder and more easily able to penetrate through defenses.

His direct disciple already had an argument ready for this line of questioning.

"I thought carefully about this subject. First, the Otalon Sprius is not a mech that is particularly suited for melee combat. I can make quick changes to enhance its swinging power and so on, but it is very hard to increase its weapon speed. A spear wielder needs to be able to perform swift and powerful stabs at a high frequency in order to make the best use of such a weapon. Unless I can effectively reinvent the Otalon Sprius, it will struggle to wield such a weapon with as much speed and ferocity: If her description of the juggernaut's shortcomings was accurate, then her argument may be valid. "So you thought to use an axe with a rather heavy blade because the Otalon Sprius is more suited to wield power-type melee weapons?

"That is my conclusion." She nodded. "After an extensive examination, the Otalon Sprius is not able to make rapid changes in its movements, but it is quite strong in committing to relatively simple and straight motions. It can swing a mean axe, and its power will be amplified if it does so while charging forward. The use of a relatively heavy axe with a long shaft should enable it to crush past energy barriers and inflict a serious laceration to the body of a phase lord. The effective damage inflicted by a single axe strike definitely exceeds that of a single spear stab."

Ves understood the logic behind these differences. 'Saint Piercer arms are designed to be used

against mechs. When wielded by greater phase lords of a reasonable size, these weapons can punch a large enough hole to cripple or eliminate an expert mech or ace mech. In contrast, a juggernaut of this size wielding a similar superdimensional

weapon can only poke a relatively tiny hole the enormous body of a phase lord. The only way for this weapon to inflict more serious damage is to penetrate deep enough to damage a phasewater organ or somehow manage to penetrate the brain cavity. Neither of this will be easy when fighting against a greater phase lord that is on guard" "That is why I think an axe is preferable over a spear or a sword!" Alexa affirmed.

No matter whether they were martial or erudite greater phase lords, enemies this powerful could not be easily defeated by a clumsy juggernaut.

"Then there is the mobility issue." Ves said. "This transphasic flight system is bulky, but it cannot provide enough thrust to make the juggernaut fast and maneuverable enough to duel against a phase lord who knows what he is doing. The reason why ace mechs are often able to do well against the native gods is because they are so damn fast and responsive. Juggernauts trade speed for size. I believe that you cannot make the Otalon Sprius maneuverable enough duel against phase lords unless you enhance its mobility."

Alexa frowned. She had definitely considered this problem, but she clearly remained uncertain about how to solve this issue.

"Should I mount a larger and stronger flight system on its back?"

"No." Ves shook his head. "It will become excessively large and bulky, making it too easy for enemies to damage and compromise the juggernaut's mobility. My suggestion is to add multiple boosters on its legs and torso. The Otalon Sprius doesn't necessarily need stronger straight-line acceleration, but it must be able to rotate and alter its course a lot faster than its bulk will normally allow."

He reached out with his hand and began to modify the draft design of the superdimensional juggernaut. He loosely added dozens of boosters that looked like circles across the massive frame. "Polly, please calculate the overall increase mobility when adding generic boosters of the

proportionate size and power"

A grey virtual cat briefly appeared in the design lab and presented a table filled with numbers.

[According to your parameters, the mobility of this juggernaut is estimated to increase by 9 to 24 percent. The upper limit can only be reached by making use of high technology, rare materials and a willingness to exchange endurance for greater power.]

Alexa widened her eyes. This increase in mobility might not sound much, but that was because it encompassed every variable related to mobility.

When the former Terran studied the more detailed data graph, more relevant parameters such as rotation speed saw a drastic increase in improvement.

The juggernaut could even inflict more damage by using the boosters to increase the momentum behind its weapon swings!

Yet as helpful as the boosters may be, Alexa was not blind to their obvious disadvantages. "These boosters add serious vulnerabilities to the Otalon Sprius." She pointed out. "The armor in these sections will become compromised, and the boosters themselves are much less capable of withstanding damage than solid plating. Any self-respecting enemy will try to punch through these weak points in order to damage the internals of the juggernaut. This is the reason why only light mechs make use of boosters. It doesn't really matter whether they introduce additional vulnerabilities when the armor system is not that thick to begin with. The same rationale completely fails when applied to a machine that is so much bigger"

The Otalon Sprius would never win any races. It would never be able to evade attacks as confidently as the Dark Zephyr Mark III.

The juggernaut functioned more like a sub-capital warship that happened to have arms and legs. There was no way a machine of this size could move through space as if it was swimming like a small fish.

"I admit that this is not a perfect solution to the mobility problem." He said.

"However, if I have to choose between the two versions, I would pick the one with the boosters. Despite its superdimensional frame, I do not have full confidence that the machine can withstand every attack. It needs stronger mobility in order to evade attacks that it cannot withstand and leverage superior

positioning"

It was clear that Alexa Streon did not entirely agree that the armor system of the juggernaut could be defeated so easily, but she did not choose to argue this point.

The Journeyman Mech Designer looked frustrated. "The root of the problem is that the Otalon Sprius is originally designed as a landbound juggernaut. Granting its flight capabilities in such a crude manner is suboptimal because the mech frame is too thick and solid. Let me ask you a question, Ves. Do you want to refurbish the Otalon Sprius fast enough that it can become a functional addition to our Premier Fleet in a few months, or do you want to remain patient and design a proper juggernaut

for this modern cra?"

This was a highly consequential question.

"The latter." Ves immediately replied. "This is not an ideal situation. I would still like it better if we take our time and design a proper upgrade to the juggernaut. I not only want to incorporate a lot of superdimensional matter, but I also want to convert it into archetech. This will not only allow us to slim down its massive form without necessarily reducing its performance, but I will also mitigate the weaknesses introduced by the boosters. By applying all kinds of modern technological solutions, the effective performance of The Otalon Sprius should easily be several times better than if we do a rush job. An inadequate upgrade leaves too many flaws behind!

To be honest, Ves preferred it if he and Alexa could convert the Otalon Sprius into a useful combat asset in the short term.

That did not seem so realistic anymore. The work that Alexa had already done on this subject clearly showed that there was a large chance that the Otalon Sprius would end up as a big piece of cannon

fodder.

Even if Ves decided to use up all of his reserves of hull-grade superdimensional matter, it would only turn the Otalon Sprius into a better target dummy.

Perhaps it might be able to perform well against enemy warships, but it was far too lacking in

mobility.

Ves may as well leave the outdated and inoperable juggernaut in the cargo hold if that was the case. Alexa thought about what was needed to transform the Otalon Sprius into a fully modernized juggernaut.

"A refit of this scale cannot be done in open space, Ves. The juggernaut needs to be rebuilt in an enormous workshop environment. The refit will also require a large amount of materials that come from many different sources. We may find ourselves unable to convert the Otalon Sprius into a fully modernized juggernaut if red humanity's infrastructure has collapsed!"

"We still have the Spirit of Bentheim and the Diligent Ovenbird." Ves said.

Alexa shook her head. "Both of these vessels are only capable of producing second-class or quasi-first-class machines. Regardless of whether you have modernized the production facilities, they still cannot upgrade and modernize the Otalon Sprius without an abundant supply of many different raw materials. A high-end juggernaut design can only be built in an environment with abundant infrastructure. It may be difficult to satisfy this demand in the future.

Her message was clear. She saw greater value in the Otalon Sprius by quickly converting it into a readily available combat asset.

Since both sides disagreed on this matter, Ves automatically won.

After all, he was in charge.

"I am sympathetic to your stance, but... the Otalon Sprius is special!" Ves apologetically said. "As a mech designer, I feel it is an enormous waste to repair it while applying rudimentary upgrades. It has a weight to it, and not in a physical sense. It feels disrespectful for us to throw it into battle in a careless manner when it has much more potential than that. There has to be a reason why the Evolution Witch kept it in her giant storage closet for so many years"

"You are ascribing value to the Otalon Sprius where there may be none. You are letting your emotions dictate your decisions." Alexa warned Ves.

"It is not all about my personal feelings, Alexa. There is logic behind my stance. As long as we have enough time to work on it, I am sure we can turn it into a juggernaut that can truly contend against enemy phase lords. By combining the advantages of living mechs, hyper technology, phasewater technology, superdimensional matter, archetech, Solus Gas and other nifty secrets into a machine that is the size of a sub-capital ship, I suspect that the resulting product will be powerful enough to challenge ace mechs without needing to rely on high-ranking mech pilots!

"You are talking about constructing a completely new juggernaut. Why not do that instead?" Ves grinned. "I am glad you asked! A newly fabricated juggernaut does not possess the accumulation of age of the Otalon Sprius. Trust me. This is the good stuff for living mech designers such as

ourselves!"

Chapter 6836 Minerva Mark II Completion

Ves could not adequately explain why he changed his mind and wanted to save up the Otalon Sprius for a major upgrade in the future.

His rather whimsical decision threw Alexa off and caused her to grow rather upset.

She had spent a considerable amount of hours studying the viability to upgrade the juggernaut into a machine that could help the Premier Fleet win its battles.

"Your work is not useless! Ves tried to console her. "You have given me enough data to understand the pros and cons to overhauling the Otalon Sprius early or late. Your work has made a convincing case to hold back the urge to fix it up right away and instead wait until we can redesign and modernize it in a more systematic fashion. Information is valuable in itself!"

"If you say so." Alexa said, not bothering to hide her dismay.

"Are you okay?"

His direct disciple looked morose after her proposal got shot down. She must have been a lot more emotionally invested in her work than he expected.

Ves found it unusual to see Alexa in such a vulnerable state. She was ordinarily so professional and enthusiastic that she never was never unpleasant to be around.

Perhaps aware of how much attention she was attracting, Alexa made an effort to straighten her posture. "This is not a serious setback. You do not need to feel concerned about me. To be honest, I have developed the ambition to turn the Otalon Sprius into a hypothetical ancestor' living mech "Oh?"

"My idea is not fully developed yet, so I cannot properly explain what I had in mind." She said. "To put it in the simplest terms, I believe that a juggernaut can serve as a more ideal head of a mech dynasty. The Otalon Sprius could therefore serve as the common ancestor of an entire dynasty of related living mechs, of which most excel in melee combat. As long as the larger size of a juggernaut carries a much larger and stronger spiritual foundation, it should be easier to take samples out of it and implant them onto other living mechs or mech designs."

"That sounds... rather fantastical. Ves responded as he looked both impressed and skeptical. "It is good to hear that you have continued to develop other solutions. Just be careful. Not all ideas will produce results. Even fewer produce results that you are satisfied with. This is the life of a mech designer that must rely on empirical data to go forward. You cannot fully control when you are able to proceed with a specific line of research."

"How do you deal with the difficulties of facing a bottleneck in your research? The younger mech designer asked.

"Everyone has different coping mechanisms!" He gently responded as he reached over and held her slender palm. "My wife for example likes to simmer the problems that have stood in her way. She hasn't forgotten about her difficulties, but she will simply choose to work on another project while mulling over her original issues. I sometimes do that well, but my preference is to improvise my way out of a problem.

Alexa's lips curled into a smile. "That is more than obvious. It is a testament to your skill, experience and ingenuity that you can overcome most of these problems and make your mechs work!

"That is the charm of living mechs, Alexa. You don't always need a full solution ready. You merely have to create the framework of a solution that you are comfortable with and let the living mechs do the rest."

"That... sounds excellent! How do you know that your framework of a solution is enough to produce positive results?"

"You don't. This is always a gamble, but that adds a lot more spice to a project!"

The pair of mech designers continued to have a hearty talk about work and other subjects.

Though Ves failed to have a true heart-to-heart talk with his student, he still managed to improve his relationship with her. A former Terran scion like Alexa most definitely noticed that he was trying his best to make up for his inattention.

Two weeks passed by. The 3 new hires quickly settled into their new workplaces and started to attract attention.

Klaus, Kalister and Tarsa may still be assistant mech designers, but they were much more productive than their second-class counterparts.

The 3 former Terrans were not only proficient in working with projects related to first-class mechs, they were also good at every other form of work.

As long as it related to mechs or engineering, they could whip up solutions.

They also adapted remarkably quickly to the resident smart AIs. While the Terrans had never worked with AIs as clever as the likes of Polly or Momo, they adapted quickly.

Unfortunately, the specter of war continued to cast an increasingly more oppressive cloud over everyone's heads.

The good news was that the native aliens suffered much greater losses in their attempts to crumble large parts of the 5th defensive band.

Combined with the intense resistance at the border of multiple Upper Zones, the native aliens had no choice but to slow down their operational tempo and wait for reinforcements to arrive from the rear of alien space.

Even so, slowing down did not translate into withdrawal. The aliens stubbornly tried to hold onto any major star systems they conquered. The native aliens had developed the habit of transporting prefab defensive structures and deploying them in a single star system en masse.

The aliens did not manage to complete their most ambitious goals, but they at least secured the most essential ones. It became clear to more and more people that the enemy intended to encircle the Upper Zones.

After that, all of the first-rate states became subjected to destructive raids!

It didn't matter if the invading fleets conquered any territory. Every factory and orbital facility that got blown up would weaken red humanity's ability to make a comeback.

The Larkinson Clan suffered damage at the hands of the native aliens as well. Numerous branches that were located close to the border regions suffered serious losses.

Factories got wiped out. Branch headquarters got bombarded into pieces. Many side branch members of the Larkinson Clan had to evacuate in a hurry.

What Ves feared the most had come true. A growing pile of reports described instances where Larkinsons effectively wanted to make their last stand.

They were usually older and expected to enjoy peaceful retirements in an exotic new distant galaxy.

What they got instead was genocide and despair.

"COME ON, PEOPLE! IF WE ARE DESTINED TO DIE, THEN WE SHOULD AT LEAST GIVE OBSERVERS A SHOW WORTH REMEMBERING! FIGHT!"

"This is madness, but it is just the kind of madness that I can condone! WE DO NOT FEAR DEATH! IF SHE WANTS TO TAKE OUR LIVES, THEN SHE CAN COME AND TAKE IT FROM MY FISTS!"

The heroic displays were incredibly uplifting to people who only heard one piece of bad news after another.

Ves gained more motivation to complete the Final Glory Project.

All of those Larkinsons and allies that remained behind and resisted the alien advance could truly make excellent use of his upcoming Carmine mechs.

Fortunately, his progress was fast on both fronts.

The 3 new hires were still acclimatizing to their workplace, but that did not stop them from

completing a frightening amount of work assignments.

With their assistance, the Final Glory Project was already close to completion.

Ves could have finished it sooner, but he decided that it was more important to finish the Minerva Mark II Project first.

His wife agreed with him. They made heavy use of the smart. Als to automate a lot of problem solving.

Polly, Momo and Aria learned rapidly from the Miracle Couple and became increasingly more adept at anticipating the solutions they demanded.

Finally, Ves and his wife had tentatively finalized the most important mech design project of the year.

"Casella? It's done."

"Oh. That was... fast. How long did it take to design the Mark II in total?"

"That's a bit complicated to explain. To put it very simply, we invested approximately 4 to 5 months of full-time design work into the Minerva Mark II Project."

"Not even half a year? Will my Minerva truly be okay after her latest upgrade, sir?*

"Don't worry, Casella. One of the demands we have set on our work is that the overall quality of your living mech cannot be allowed to degrade. We rushed the design project to completion, but only on the premise of retaining its quality. There should be nothing wrong with the new design."

"I hope you are not wrong in this, Ves."

Though the Saint Commander expressed a bit of doubt, it was not a big deal. She knew as well as the other Larkinsons that the Design Department had made a lot of improvements.

Its productivity had grown by leaps and bounds!

What was important was that the most crucial pipeline for high-ranking mech design projects was

not as slow as before.

Progress was still limited by Gloriana's productivity, but at least she had access to much better

facilities and assistants.

Ves and Gloriana planned to commence the upgrade process as soon as possible.

This was a fairly big job as it entailed a nearly full rebuild and replacement of the original Minerva.

Hardly anything of the old machine would be left in the Mark II.

The extensive use of archetech promised to completely transform how the mech worked and how it reacted against damage.

The addition of a singular living fey in the form of a relatively large archetech owl called the Victrix added a sense of mystery to the ace command mech.

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Chapter 6837 Psychic Storm Lethality

An important day had arrived.

Everyone in Diandi Base knew that today marked the last day of the Minerva Mark I.

Once the Larkinsons initiated the upgrade process, they would not stop until the renowned command mech had completed her long-awaited metamorphosis.

This was a big deal. The Larkinsons of the Premier Branch took extensive precautions by locking down the base and raising their security protocols.

The security personnel and mechs dispatched by the Bluejay Fleet also entered into a state of elevated readiness.

The native aliens had already begun to chip away at the border regions of the Agamemnon Upper Zone.

The probability that the Red Cabal intended to launch a deep strike operation at New Constantinople during a sensitive time where the Minerva was partially disassembled and in no state to enter the battlefield was not low!

Of course, Ves and the others did not think it was likely that the aliens would take so many risks and invest so many armed forces into overcoming the formidable defense of New Constantinople.

Yet as long as the possibility remained open, every relevant party had an obligation to guard against the worst case scenario.

This was why even the Devos Ancient Clan had imposed restrictions on traffic around New Constantinople VIII.

The potential threat was so serious that the Devosans actively chose to deploy their armed forces in advance. They wanted to be ready to respond to any surprise attack.

Even Ves had underestimated how many interests were tied to the upgrade project!

As he entered the underground workshop that had recently received a few upgrades, the entire place was already packed with personnel.

From mecher and collie guards on foot to mech designers from the Design Department, the upgrade project already turned into a spectacle.

Off to the side, Saint Commander Casella Ingvar had already pulled Admiral Gori Tensen and Commodore Zonrad Reze in an avid conversation.

Although they were purely talking about military matters, Ves could already tell that the shrewd woman had captivated her target audience.

Nobody disliked a friendly ace commander. This was especially the case if her Command Field was directly able to enhance the performance and defenses of mechs and starships!

Both sides therefore had a strong incentive for friendship and cooperation.

Even if the good admiral and commodore were suspicious of Casella's motivations, they had no choice but to play along in order to maintain good vibes.

That would give the Saint Commander enough room to operate. Through repeated interactions, she could slowly win them over, if not in mind, then in heart.

Ves thought about approaching their club, but he eventually decided against it. A professional soldier and simply did not fit in with their kind.

He instead sought out a fellow mech designer.

He was not a

"Master Laila!" He greeted the woman who had played a limited but integral role in developing the Minerva Mark II. "Thank you for accepting our invitation. Will you be participating in the fabrication and assembly work?"

The Terran Master calmly shook her head. "No. You and your fellow Larkinsons already have a strong tacit cooperation with each other. My participation will disrupt the harmony between each of you. I have no need to put my personal touch onto your ace command mech. I have designed and produced so many mechs in the three centuries of my life that I am fully willing to leave this responsibility to the younger generation such as yourself."

Ves already expected such an answer. If Master Laila insisted on leading the upgrade process, then he would have tried to come up with arguments to push her away.

"We will not disappoint you." He confidently said. "What do you think of the complete package?" "The Minerva Mark II is an extravagant ace command mech. It is more than what a typical junior ace pilot is expected to pilot. More and more mech insiders are recognizing the benefits of 'archetech' that your wife has specialized in. You are putting us to shame. Do you know that ever since the latest iterations of your Dark Zephyr and the Amaranto began to show their strength on the frontlines, our own ace pilots are requesting us to commission Madame Gloriana Wodin to upgrade their own machines into archemechs?"

Ves smirked. 'My wife would probably reject those requests, though she would hate it while doing so. Our clan is already giving her more work than she can handle. She is in no state to address the demands of third parties. Besides, I am sure that you and pretty much every other major group has invested into mastering archetech yourselves.'

"That is true! Master Devos acknowledged. "Too many of us have looked down on archetech solely because it is alien technology that is based on technological paradigms that are at odds with our own. Such tech is not rare in both the Milky Way and the Red Ocean. We have developed our own exclusive human mech architectures that can deliver close to the performance of archetech without needing to master alien scientific principles. That has worked out well for us until the Great Severing occurred.

"I see. We can't win by quantity anymore. The only way to win the Red War is to raise the quality of our mech designs instead. Every performance boost counts. Archetech has multiple downsides, but what it is really good at is making the most out of limited quantities of high-quality materials! Master Devos nodded in agreement. "Exactly. We are running short on multiple kinds of high-grade resources. We are more accustomed to designing mechs and raising mech armies in times where our manpower and capital was far more abundant. Those days have passed. We must quickly adapt to a more frugal approach to mech design, or else we will not be able to gain any advantages against the native aliens.

This problem became more and more acute with every zone that fell into the hands of the alien invaders.

"How close are you to putting out your own archemechs?"

"It should not take too long, Ves. Your spouse may have made considerable attainments in this field, but we also have mech designers who are able to persevere and master the technological principles of archetech. Under my supervision, we shall convert our own ace mechs into archemechs within the next quarter!"

That was fast!

"How many other groups will do the same?"

"It is difficult for us to determine. The Streon Ancient Clan is taking its time, as are many others.

Their prized ace mechs are highly optimized and perfected over a span of multiple decades at the minimum. It is highly disruptive to convert them into a completely new mech architecture during a time where they are expected to wage frequent battles. This is why these groups wish to monitor the performance of our first achemechs. As long as our conversions have yielded substantial improvements in effective performance, you can expect archetech to become much more common among high-ranking mechs. Congratulations to your wife for setting off another technological trend."

That sounded huge. Ves was not sure whether his wife would grow jealous at all of the extra competition or proud for sparking off this trend.

"It's too bad that this conversion comes a little late! Ves lamented. 'I think that a lot of ace pilots would have been able to perform a lot better against our enemies with the strength of archetech. "Not necessarily" Master Laia Devos shook her head. "Repairing archetech is disproportionate challenging and expensive. If the new archemechs incur damage, then they will remain out of action for an extended period of time. We are working hard to train mech technicians and engineers that can produce and repair archemetal components, but their progress is limited. takes a certain mindset for people to understand the knack of archetech"

Archetech was not omnipotent. This was why Gloriana was eager to develop her own take on it. Only by turning it into human tech would people be able to learn and master it on a wider scale.

"Is there anything else about the Minerva that has impressed you, Master?"

"The Victrix" The old woman said. "Your living fey are a fascinating blend between spurs and E-technology. When controlled by an ace commander, its potential is unlimited. Perhaps a future may arrive when the Victrix can become as powerful as the Minerva. You have taken a large risk by investing an entire Mentalist Crystal in this fey. There is currently not enough data to prove that it will produce the effect that you are hoping to produce."

Ves shrugged at that. "Even if the Mentalist Crystal doesn't help to extend the Saint Commander's Command Field, it shouldn't be completely useless. I am willing to accept other boosts such as speeding up the ace commander's thoughts or increasing

the intensity of the Command Field. I refuse to believe that this strategic resource will play no role at all. If it turns out that is really useless, then I will pull it out of the Victrix, but I think this is highly unlikely!

Master Laila Devos glanced at the young Senior in mild surprise.

She found it rather perplexing that a mech designer was willing to use an extremely precious material for completely uncertain outcomes.

Nobody knew how the Mentalist Crystal would behave when put inside the Victrix. Master Laila would never make such a reckless and uncertain bet if she was in Ves' shoes.

However, it was clear that Ves' risk tolerance was much greater. He also seemed to enjoy the uncertainty behind it all. The less he knew about the outcome, the more he looked forward to trying

his luck!

"There is one aspect about the Minerva Mark II that appears incongruous with the rest of the ace command mech! Master Laila siad. "Why did you choose to favor Mindstorm Alloy over other key resonating materials? It is certainly strong if you want to provide the Saint Commander with the ability to intervene directly on the battlefield, but her Minerva is already armed with a rifle. She can also rely on her many Knights and Vassals to intervene in their own ways. The ability to generate psychic storms within the range of her Command Field sounds redundant."

Ves smiled back. 'I think that you should have already figured out the potential synergy between Mindstorm Alloy and a Mentalist Crystal. I think that this combination can yield great results.

"That may be true when it comes to ordinary ace pilots, but Casella Ingvar is an ace commander whose domain is more dispersed. The psychic storm generated by the Saint Commander should not be strong. Even if your claim is true, it will at most bring the power of these resonating attacks back

on par:

"What if it is possible to generate a psychic storm within the hull of an enemy warship?"

Master Laila immediately widened her eyes as her powerful mind rapidly considered the

implications.

"Is that possible?!"

Mindstorm Alloy was still a new product as it could not be made without blending mind-attributed

hyper materials.

That was why not a lot of people understood its full capabilities.

It was not until recently that Mindstorm Alloy gained even more value than before! "Other users of Mindstorm Alloy have discovered that it is possible to directly generate a storm inside the hulls of enemy warships." Ves grinned. "Ace mechs can even generate psychic storms inside massive organic bodies such as that of phase lords. Now before you make any misunderstandings, I have to mention that any form of energy defenses can rapidly weaken the power of these storms. Physical barriers also reduce its power, but not to the same extent!"

Master Laila Devos recognized the key point.

"It shouldn't take too much power to eliminate the fragile organic bodies of alien crew members!"

She realized. "If the lethality of Mindstorm Alloy on the crew serving on fully shielded warships is too low, then the amplification from a Mentalist Crystal may just increase just enough to kill weaker alien organisms!"

If this was the case, then the Minerva Mark I had the potential to become a fearsome combatant by

herself!

Chapter 6838 Backstage

Resonating materials had long presented a lot of mysteries to mech designers.

They possessed the unique property of being able to resonate with extraordinary willpower of high-ranking mech pilots on a large scale.

Resonating materials therefore formed the foundation of expert mechs, ace mechs and even god mechs.

Without resonating materials, mech pilots had no practical way to tread the path of godhood.

"When the Great Severing took place, each of us understood that our capital to conquer the Red War had turned from an absolute certainty into a long shot." Master Laila Rebecca Devos frankly explained to Ves. "Each of us understood how little territory, manpower and development are in our possession. The native aliens possess too much industry and population for us to realistically defeat. One of the few advantages that we can count upon is that our champions are generally superior. This is why it is essential for us to improve their advantages and enable them to defeat several times their number of phase leaders whenever possible."

"To do that, you need to develop better resonating materials." Ves stated the obvious.

The old woman nodded. "Precisely. We are fortunate that when the greater beyonder gates got cut off, we happened to have the best authority on resonating materials in the new frontier. The Resonance Smith had originally relocated to the Red Ocean in advance because he had become interested in developing resonating materials that incorporated phasewater. Now that our dwarf galaxy has been displaced in the same cluster as Messier 87, he has entered paradise as far as he was concerned. The emergence of all kinds of new hyper materials has opened up many new combinations of resonating alloys."

"Is Mindstorm Alloy one of his products?" Ves questioned.

Master Laila Devos nodded, though not as firm as before. "I am almost certain that he has a personal hand in its development. If he did not lead this development project himself, then one of his many disciples or specialists has developed it in their own labs. The Resonance Smith is a literal miracle worker, but he does not work alone. He has built up an entire network of disciples, retainers, employees, business partners and other allies. Each of them are promoting his cause of developing and producing better resonating materials that can give our high-ranking expert pilots greater possibilities."

"So you are saying that we would have been in a much worse position if he was not stuck in the Red Ocean."

"That is correct, Ves. It is due to the Resonance Smith and his highly developed R&D institutions that our mech industry has been able to gain access to an abundant variety of next generation resonating materials. This is one of the greatest contributions of the Star Designer to our civilization. He has enabled our champions to kill more phase lords and win more battles through his presence."

Her description was not an understatement. High-ranking mechs were one of the few pillars of support of red humanity.

The local aliens may be slavishly devoted to their native gods, but humans were not so different from their enemies.

People were already accustomed to treating their high-ranking mech pilots as demigods or gods!

Even secularists who firmly believed that the universe was made up of logical and immutable laws automatically made an exception in their minds whenever they thought about an ace pilot or a god pilot.

This form of cognitive dissonance was so ingrained in society that nobody recognized that it was a problem and a contradiction.

In the end, it was material scientists such as the Resonance Smith that supported and enabled the high-ranking mech pilots.

While the Fist of Defiance was responsible for smashing ancient phase whales like punching bags, he did not get to launch continent-destroying punches just by slapping raw pieces of superdimensional matter onto his god mech.

It took a Star Designer to develop the right means to enhance the god mech with superdimensional matter in record time!

The Resonance Smith was undoubtedly responsible for processing armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter into a processed alloy that enabled the god pilot to fight a hearty battle while outnumbered!

The Star Designer's contribution was not as obvious as that of a flashy and powerful god pilot, but the former definitely received the recognition that he was due from the people that mattered.

"The reason why I brought up the Resonance Smith is because any product that is released under his watch is not simple." The Terran Master told Ves. "Mindstorm Alloy is the first resonating material that incorporates the power of rare mind-attributed hyper materials. Even if they do not consist of Mentalist Crystals, any hyper material that directly affects the mind has interesting properties, much of which we do not fully understand. This may be why the Resonance Smith has developed an interest in its usage."

Ves picked up a clue from her words.

"Are you saying that the Resonance Smith may pay attention to the Minerva Mark II?"

"I would be surprised if he ignored this wonderful ace mech of yours. The combination between Mindstorm Alloy and an ace commander may produce multiple unexpected interactions and synergies. You have made the correct decision to include it into Mark II."

Interesting.

If Ves was lucky, the Resonance Smith would begin to develop a better appreciation of him and his clan.

It was not unusual for mech designers to become 'fans' as they continued to track the exploits of their favorite mechs and mech pilots.

This sort of behavior was no different from people supporting their favorite mech athletes or sports teams.

So long as the fans in question developed a strong enough emotional connection to the objects of their admiration, these people were willing to provide plenty of support in order to win!

Perhaps the Minerva Mark II may be a way for Ves to establish contact with the Resonance Smith.

On his own, Ves was still not qualified to speak directly to Star Designers. He had to rely on special measures in order to communicate directly with them. He was confident that he could extract benefits from them so long as he had an opportunity to make his case.

It was a pity that Star Designers deliberately kept their distance from him. They were doing it for his own good, as receiving too much help from the top of the mech designer progression may cause him to stall in his own progression.

Ves did not entirely agree with this premise. His specialization was so different from that of anyone else that he doubted that any Star Designer could substitute his work.

Receiving help from Star Designers may cause him to stagnate in other ways, but he was willing to take the risk if it strengthened his chances to survive and thrive in the turbulent future!

After Ves concluded his insightful chat with Master Laila Devos, he bid her goodbye and moved over to the most important people in the busy workshop.

"Are you guys ready for the big show?" Ves asked.

Alexa pointed off to the side. "As you can see, Gloriana is proceeding with her own pre-work ritual."

Just like before, Gloriana spent her time to shower her children with love and also pray in front of an altar of the Superior Mother.

Ves rolled his eyes when he saw her bend her knees in order to worship the avatar of Cynthia Larkinson.

He just could not understand the logic behind worshipping the Superior Mother when Gloriana should obviously know better.

"Hexers." Ves said in an exasperated tone.

Everyone else tactfully ignored that remark.

"Viktor, Beatrice." He called up the names of the two Journeyman Mech Designers who participated in the Minerva Mark II Project. "The upgrade project will require substantial contributions from the two of you. Are you familiar enough with archetech to be able to assist us in our work?"

Both Viktor MacMillan and Beatrice Hendrix appeared a little nervous.

This was not the first time they had been entrusted with greater responsibilities in the Larkinson Clan, but they were still relatively inexperienced and lacking in confidence.

"We have spoken extensively with Gloriana on the limited work that we are responsible for doing," Viktor explained. "We are mostly tasked with the limited fabrication of non-archemetal components and assembly work. She will pay close attention to our work and may decide to increase or decrease our workload depending on how well we perform."

"Are you confident that you can do the work that is expected of you?" Ves asked them both.

Beatrice nodded. "Yes. My familiarity with archetech has improved. Since I started work on the Battle Skirt System of the Minerva Mark II, I developed an increasing interest in archetech after learning how well it synergizes with my design philosophy.

Gloriana has personally taught me the comprehensive knowledge needed to become proficient in archetech. I have yet to digest all of her lessons, but I am further ahead than most in the Design Department. Mastering archetech has become one of my new goals."

Ves was glad that Beatrice had developed a strong interest in archetech. Perhaps she might be one of the growing number of mech designers that could share Gloriana's heavy burden in the future.

Viktor MacMillan sounded less confident than his fellow Journeyman. "I will do my best, but do not hold high expectations. My studies in archetech has progressed slowly. I am not that interested in mastering a new alien mech architecture because it bears no direct relation to my specialization. I am an energy shield specialist."

"That is okay, Viktor. We do not hold high expectations for your work. Just do what you can, and tell us if you think you are getting overwhelmed."

It was not reasonable to ask anything more from Viktor. Archetech was undoubtedly useful, but the difficulty of becoming proficient in it was too great.

Only mech designer who benefited directly from the advantages of archetech had the motivation to overcome this massive obstacle. Gloriana was one of them and it sounded as if Beatrice would follow suit.

Ves turned to Alexa. "What about you? Your specialization doesn't directly relate to archetech, but you should have enough time to get started."

"I have studied it for the purpose of being able to participate in projects like this." She responded. "Do not expect me to do more. Archetech will only complicate my personal mech design projects. Rather than trying to master archetech myself, I am better off if I cooperate with those who have stronger reasons to design archemechs. Speaking about this, I would like to talk to you in private about a project that we have discussed not too long ago. A new development has taken place that presents our clan with a risky but promising opportunity."

"Is it about the juggernaut?" Ves guessed.

"Yes. Ordinarily, I wouldn't mention it in order to avoid distracting you, but given the circumstances, it is better if you can issue your response with minimal delay."

That sounded important enough for Ves to address it right away. He trusted Alexa not to waste his time on trivial matters.

"If that is what you want, then let's head to one of the nearby offices and talk."

They did just that. Neither of the two bothered to sit as they knew this wouldn't be a long conversation.

"Tell it to me straight." Ves commanded as he crossed his arms.

"Do you remember that my proposed refit for the Otalon Sprius includes the Doomaxe?" Alexa asked. "My sketch for this weapon was still rudimentary when I showed it to you. In order to develop a proper version of this weapon, I contacted Venerable Kolak Glendale and solicited his advice on the requirements of an axe that is suitable to be wielded by a 350-meter juggernaut."

"How did he respond?"

"He wants in." The former Terran replied.

"What?"

"He wants... to pilot an axe-wielding juggernaut." Alexa explained. "He doesn't want to consult on my refit project. He wants to claim the Otalon Sprius for himself. In his words, he wants us to merge his Greenaxe with the Otalon Sprius and pilot the resulting fusion into battle!"

Chapter 6839 Ace Juggernaut Concept

Ves grew speechless.

Of all of the hairbrained demands he heard in his life, an expert pilot requesting to merge his expert mech with a juggernaut certainly ranked in the top 10!

"Did you tell Venerable Glendale how idiotic it is for him to pilot a juggernaut?"

"I did, sir." Alexa calmly responded. "One of the reasons why mechs had reached their current size is because it has reached an optimum balance between scale and control. If expert pilots force themselves to pilot mechs that are larger than the standard dimensions, then they will find it exponentially more difficult to cover the enlarged mech frame with their true resonance. At a certain point, their resonance shields will not be able to cover the entire frame. This is a fatal defect as the parts of the mech outside of this barrier will no longer enjoy any strong protection."

One of the most important reasons why expert mechs were able to dominate many standard mechs was because the former was able to block many attacks with the help of resonance shields.

The strength of a resonance shield depended on many factors, but it was generally determined by the size of a mech, the quality of its resonating materials and the resonance strength of a mech pilot.

However, there was no effective way to extend the range of a resonance shield or an expert mech as far as Ves knew.

The only 'proper' solution was for the expert pilot to advance to the rank of ace pilot.

At that stage, the resonance shield transformed into a proper Saint Kingdom, which could not only negate attacks, but do all kinds of other stuff!

It was not impossible for an ace pilot to amplify the performance of an entire juggernaut at this stage!

Since that was the case, why didn't ace pilots switch to piloting ace juggernauts on a wider scale?

After all, bigger was better! It should definitely be worth it for ace pilots to control a war machine that was as large as a destroyer!

The story was not so simple.

Since Ves was able to come up with the idea, so could others.

He recalled that the mech industry had dabbled into ace juggernauts multiple times during the Age of Mechs.

While it was certain that a lot of these attempts remained secret from the public, a few stories did manage to find their way into the public sphere.

What was clear was that pretty much every attempt ended up in failure.

Ace juggernauts that were hundreds of meters long possessed much greater scale than any standard ace mech.

Just killing them was much more troublesome as they could clad themselves with thick armor and protect their core components under lots of additional layers of alloy plating.

They could even mount titan shields that were ordinarily designed to protect starships or fortified bases to frustrate their enemies.

Ace juggernauts were also able to leverage far greater physical strength, making them ideal for swinging down blades that could chop an entire starship in half!

Their large structures also allowed mech designers to mount them with all sorts of warship-grade armaments. They could fit a broad array of plasma cannons, torpedo launchers and other ridiculous modules.

While controlling them all without any dedicated personnel imposed a large burden on the individual, an ace pilot possessed superhuman capabilities and should just be able to command all of these weapon systems!

All of this already sounded strong enough, but with the inclusion of true resonance, such a powerhouse could definitely beat up hostile battleships and come out unscathed!

So why hadn't these monstrosities showed up on the battlefield?

There were many reasons why. The fact that they were slow and clumsy caused them to be unable to keep up with most if not all ace mechs in battle.

It couldn't be helped. Juggernauts were so massive and enormous that their mobility could only be raised to 'average' at best.

Most ace mechs were designed and built to be a lot swifter than standard mechs. Each of them relied on speed to keep up with each other and overpower any enemies that were slower.

In an age where important battles may be decided by the outcome of a duel between ace pilots, being too slow to block the attacks of an ace mech could be fatal!

This was why ace juggernauts turned into an epic failure.

Their massive melee weapons became useless if they couldn't be swung fast enough to hit a small but agile ace mech.

Their abundance of ranged armaments granted them a lot of firepower, but again, an ace mech was able to evade or circumvent them easily enough.

Once an ace mech snuck close enough to stab a juggernaut in the back, there was very little the big and clunky machine could do to protect its most vulnerable point!

Ace juggernauts also weren't worth it from a cost perspective. It took an exponentially greater amount of resonating material for an ace pilot to adequately resonate with the full mech frame.

If the juggernaut ever got damaged, repairing it was much slower and more troublesome than repairing a small and compact ace mech.

No mech workshop possessed the capabilities to repair heavy damage on a juggernaut!

Only shipyards or large-scale workshops possessed the capacity to fix up these giant machines.

All of these disadvantages killed the ace juggernaut movement before it could even kick off. Nobody was stupid enough to waste so many resources on a big pile of metal that could easily be exploited by enemy ace mechs.

"Have you told this guy how awful of an idea it is to pilot a juggernaut?"

"I did, sir, but he insisted on it." Alexa said.

"Why?"

"That requires a longer explanation. How many times have you met Venerable Kolak Glendale?"

"..."

Alexa threw Ves a knowing look. "Exactly. You have developed a good relationship with the first expert pilots to emerge in the Larkinson Clan. You showered them with attention and attentively designed their mechs for them. You first granted them their own personalized prime mechs before moving on to giving them expert mechs and ace mechs whenever appropriate. Everyone can see how much you adore them. This is a rather common phenomena in the mech industry. You essentially treat Tusa, Stark, Orfan, Dise, Jannzi, Joshua and Casella as your surrogates."

"Are you accusing me of living vicariously through those mech pilots?!"

"Yes." Alexa plainly said. "This is not an accusation. This is an observation. This is not deplorable behavior. The more mech designers care about their favorite mech pilots, the more invested they become in supplying them with better mechs. The problem that people may have with your favoritism is that mech pilots who fall outside of your exclusive club may feel... neglected by you. They may develop the impression that you are treating them as nameless assets."

"That is..."

Alexa did not give him enough time to come up with an excuse. "It is true, is it not? Do not insult my intelligence and observation capabilities. Your behavior is clear to many Larkinsons, not just myself. The others never called you out on it, but I feel it is necessary to clear the air and bring clarity to this issue. Tell me honestly, sir. Are you treating the later generation of high-ranking mech pilots differently than the ones that became prominent before?"

Seeing that his direct disciple had made such a thorough analysis on him, Ves saw no reason to put up a charade.

"You got me. You're right. I do play favorites. The high-ranking pilots that you have mentioned earlier are the ones who I can trust with a high degree of confidence. They have been with me since the old days. They fought many powerful enemies on my behalf. We are all comrades who have forged our bonds in battle. That sort of brotherhood sticks with you for a long time. I don't share that kind of bond with the likes of Venerable Pedro Rodrigo, Venerable Kolak Glendale and the many expert pilots that came after. I don't think I can call up their name without accessing a database from my cranial implant. I have left the tedious job of getting to know them to Gloriana. She is responsible for giving newly advanced expert pilots their first expert mechs."

There was a limit to how many mech pilots he found worthwhile to befriend in person. After accumulating a core circle of powerful and promising champions, he felt it was not necessary to forge any further bonds.

Perhaps he might pay more attention to the likes of Venerable Zimro Benson. The man piloted the only high-ranking stealth mech of the Larkinson Clan. Yet even that did not rank high in Ves' priorities.

As Ves stared at his subordinate, he felt grateful that he did not look at him with judging eyes.

He knew that his behavior was not entirely fair to all of the champions of the Larkinson Clan.

"Venerable Glendale has expressed understanding of why you are closer to the first seven champions than the rest." She said. "He is jealous, but he does not blame you. He just wants to earn your trust and appreciation, just as the others have done before."

However, this is an uphill battle for him as he is neither able to fight under your direct watch nor able to outperform his peers."

Ves nodded. "Glendale fights with the 77th Warborn Mech Division, right? I don't really make it a habit of watching much of the battle footage from General Ark's pet mech force."

"He originally chose to join the Warborn because he assumed that he would be able to fight more meaningful battles under General Ark. His Greenaxe is also more suited when fighting against mechs than warships. Before the Age of Dawn, his decision made sense."

"Is that why he wants to switch to piloting a juggernaut? Does he think he can perform better and earn my approval by piloting a massive machine that can chop apart alien warships and weaker phase lords alike?"

"You have to admit that juggernauts may be more suitable when deployed against enemy warships." Alexa said. "Juggernauts are larger and less able to evade the attacks of warships, but their defenses are exponentially stronger. Expert juggernauts do not make sense, but ace juggernauts have the potential to become a devastating alien killer. Not only can they withstand an astronomical amount of damage, but when they are armed with melee weapons, they may become powerful enough to breach the spatial barriers of many greater phase lords with a single blow. If we make the ace juggernaut out of superdimensional matter, then its threat against enemy phase lords will become at least an order of magnitude greater!"

Ves was forced to seriously consider this idea. The concept of an ace juggernaut initially sounded absurd to him, but now that he put all of the arguments in order, he realized that it had actually turned into a viable proposal!

The enemies of red humanity had changed. No longer were humans fighting against each other. It was not necessary to design ace mechs with the assumption that they would fight against each other.

Instead, mech designers needed to design more ace mechs that were geared towards fighting the latest threat, which was enemy warships and phase leaders.

As far as Ves knew, none of the alien champions had displayed a penchant for speed and agility. They simply did not fight like light mechs because their mass and bulk did not allow for such absurdity.

Even if they possessed warping capabilities that could speed up their traversal, any warp interdicator or space suppressor could shut them down.

All of this meant that as long as a juggernaut was not too large and unwieldy, it should be able to trade blows against enemy phase lords on a much more even basis!

However, that still did not make it sensible for Venerable Glendale to pilot a giant machine.

Chapter 6840 The Price Of His Attention

"Venerable Glendale understands the consequences of piloting an ace juggernaut." Alexa Streon said. "He is willing to dedicate himself to fighting against the native aliens so long as he is able to wield a giant axe. In my opinion, letting him pilot an adapted version of the Otalon Sprius holds great merit, but only if he wields the power of a saint."

Ves looked skeptical.

"That's the biggest issue with this proposal, Alexa. He is still a high-tier expert pilot. It is a complete waste to design a juggernaut for him when he is still an expert pilot. Trying to convert the Otalon Sprius into an ace juggernaut in advance won't work. He won't be able to pilot it without breaking his willpower or whatever. It is simply too big and powerful."

Alexa already had a response to that. "Venerable Glendale is not asking us to do anything for him in advance. What he wants from us is a promise. As long as we promise to merge his Greenaxe into the Otalon Sprius and turn the combination into an ace juggernaut, then he will gain a strong motivation to accomplish his breakthrough."

That was a nice trick. Ves had given promises to other high-ranking mech pilots before, but the results were rather mixed. It worked in a few cases, but had yet to yield results in other cases.

It was still better to have an additional strong motivation to attain greater power than not. Venerable Glendale's breakthrough would benefit everyone in the Larkinson Clan.

"Is it necessary to merge the Greenaxe into the Otalon Sprius?" Ves inquired. "As far as I remember, it is a post-living mech. It has never developed an independent personality."

"That is true, sir, but its spiritual foundation has still grown stronger and more attuned to him. It has already accumulated a generous collection of Ascension Runes, many of which enhance the Greenaxe's strength and cutting power. If you can transplant the expert axeman mech's spiritual foundation to the Otalon Sprius, Glendale will not have to start from scratch."

"It would have been better to preserve the Greenaxe as a backup mech." Ves said with a frown. "There may be instances where the Otalon Sprius is too large to deploy in battle. The Greenaxe can still serve as an adequate substitute, no matter whether we upgrade it or not. I do not feel comfortable with permanently losing this machine by merging it into our juggernaut."

"Venerable Glendale will not mourn its loss." Alexa responded. "You can ask him yourself, but he has made his thoughts and feelings clear to me. He is willing to sacrifice the Greenaxe and make a break from his past so long as he can become useful to you. Piloting an ace juggernaut that wields a giant axe is a dream for him. He wants to wield the biggest axe and chop apart the greatest of foes. He can do that much better with a giant machine than a relatively small mech."

"Hmmm..." Ves rubbed his hairless chin in thought. "I have to admit that the idea sounds incredibly intriguing to me. If not for the fact that it will take an insane amount of time and a huge amount of expensive resources to realize this monstrous juggernaut, I would have jumped on it already. As it is... I really cannot see how we can possibly embark on such a project during a time where red humanity's infrastructure is falling apart."

Alexa lowered her head. It appeared that she had become quite invested in this alternative proposal.

"I think this is the best possible use of the Otalon Sprius. The investment is great, but the payoff will be greater. So long as Kolak Glendale can become an ace pilot, piloting this ace juggernaut can turn him into a much more powerful giant slayer. He will be

our most direct answer when it comes to killing oversized enemies. If there is any need for us to defeat ace mechs, we can assign that task to Saint Tusa or Saint Dise instead."

What Alexa proposed was a move towards specialization. It was not a wise idea to do this if the Larkinson Clan only had a single ace pilot, but now that it had accrued multiple of them, it could afford to turn one more into a specialized juggernaut user.

Ves couldn't help but grow intrigued. Many established rules would break when designing an ace mech on the scale of a juggernaut. He already began to salivate at the thought of the more promising benefits.

However, the cost was way too disproportionate. He could stomach the investment of relatively common versions of superdimensional matter, but the ace juggernaut needed way more expensive materials in order to function at its fullest.

The ace juggernaut concept was the most extravagant luxury product that the Larkinson Clan could embark upon!

The cost in resources and manpower exceeded all proportions!

While many starships were far bigger than juggernauts, the former was also a lot simpler and not as dependent on high-quality resonating materials and other high-grade materials.

Most starships depended more on scale than on quality to deliver powerful performance.

Juggernauts designed at the ace mech level had to be of the same standard or better at minimum. Ves could not accept anything less, and neither would Gloriana.

This gave Ves a headache because the Larkinson Clan would struggle to fund such a massive project even if it was at its peak.

Now that red humanity's entire economy and industries were beginning to crack, Ves felt it was stupid to even think about embarking on this prestige project!

However... he did not want to snuff out Venerable Glendale's either.

Ves felt a little sorry for the man for breaking through in a time where he was no longer able to earn the attention and appreciation of his patriarch.

"I have made a decision."

"Please tell me." Alexa said with anticipation.

"You can inform Venerable Glendale that I am... interested in this proposal. However, our clan will not design this extravagant ace juggernaut for him if the circumstances do not permit us to do so. There are several strict requirements before I can think of agreeing to go forward with this project."

"What are your requirements?"

"First, Kolak Glendale must become an ace pilot. This is an absolute necessity. He can forget about getting it while he still remains stuck as an expert pilot."

"He already agrees."

"Second, so long as he still wants this ace juggernaut, we will not be upgrading his Greenaxe. It is a waste to upgrade his relatively outdated machine to a much more powerful version when it is destined to get absorbed into the Otalon Sprius upon his breakthrough."

Alexa frowned. "That is a heavy demand, sir. You are asking him to potentially doom himself to remaining stuck as an expert pilot because he is not able to gain any additional support from his expert mech."

"Our clan is not a charity, Alexa. We can only allocate our resources where they are needed the most. I am not in the mood to squander Gloriana's precious design time on a high-tier expert mech that is doomed to destruction. Venerable Glendale is responsible for his own choices. He can either choose to receive the treatment that

every Larkinson expert pilot receives, or he can choose to prove himself worthy of my personal attention and favor."

He deliberately set this up as a test in order to stimulate Venerable Glendale. The requirement he set was harsh, but not unreasonable. Ves made sure to argue that it was all for the greater good of the Larkinson Clan.

His disciple certainly looked convinced by the argument. "I shall do my best to convey your words and intentions to him. From what I understand of his personality, there is a 80 percent chance that he will accept your challenge. To him, receiving a generic upgrade to his Greenaxe is not enough for him to fulfill his goal. He knows that it is difficult for him to surpass the first movers who have already won your favor such as Saint Tusa and Saint Commander Casella."

The fact that the expert pilot was not wrong in this assessment made Ves a little depressed.

He moved on. "The third requirement that Venerable Glendale must meet is that he cannot rely on a breakthrough alone to receive an ace juggernaut for free. This thing is so expensive that he must 'earn' it through his actions. As long as he makes a great contribution to the Larkinson Clan, he can quell the resentment of fellow champions who have not received such extravagant treatment."

"This demand sounds... reasonable, if difficult for him to satisfy." Alexa said with a frown. "I cannot imagine that he will be able to earn such great merit unless he slays a greater phase lord in person."

Ves chuckled. "I am not expecting a feat as extravagant as that. I will be happy if he is able to kill a lesser phase lord. Other than that, he can earn merit in other ways. What is important is that he should not think that he is entitled to receive an ace juggernaut just because he asked. He needs to prove himself worthy to pilot such a great machine. If he is not able to measure up to this standard, then he can forget about it. He can always change his mind and request an upgrade to his Greenaxe. It is a perfectly fine mech concept. Even if its configuration is relatively simple, I can always expand it with additional features."

"Do you wish to impose any other requirements, or is this sufficient, sir?"

"Well, there is a fourth condition that must be satisfied, but Glendale has no control over it. In order to refurbish the Otalon Sprius into an ace juggernaut according to his desires, red humanity must retain enough of its industry, commerce and infrastructure to enable such a massive construction project. We cannot afford to squander our resources onto this boondoggle if we are all reduced to space nomads in a dwarf galaxy that has once again fallen into the complete control of hostile aliens. This project only really makes sense if red humanity does not lose too much territory and has managed to stabilize its frontlines."

The female mech designer nodded in agreement. "This is also a reasonable requirement. Even if you still want to develop the ace juggernaut, I would have tried to discourage you if it imposes an excessive burden on our finances and industrial capabilities."

The two continued to talk about other requirements. Both Ves and Alexa gained a clear idea on what sort of conditions had to be satisfied to embark on this bold transformation.

If for whatever reason Venerable Glendale managed to satisfy all of the requirements, then Ves would be willing to go all-out to turn this fantasy into a reality!

Ves already had a feeling that the Otalon Sprius had the potential to turn into a powerful machine beyond comparison.

Now that he had become enlightened to this new possibility, his feeling for the juggernaut had grown stronger!

It was too bad that this was not the time to think about embarking on such an ambitious project.

For now, he needed smaller and more manageable mech design projects.

It took less time than expected for the Design Department to complete the Minerva Mark II Project.

The First Sword Mark III Project should also be close to completion.

The Riot Mark III Project should be done in around 4 months.

The Lionheart Mark III Project might be done at around the same time if Ves and Gloriana were willing to work on multiple high-end projects at the same time.

All-in-all, it should take way less time than they had originally anticipated to work away the backlog of high-ranking mech design projects.

Even then, the Greenaxe still wouldn't get its turn under normal circumstances. The Everchanger had a great need for an upgrade, and Ves wanted to modernize the Bastion as well.

The only way for Venerable Glendale to get ahead in queue was to break through and earn enough merits to earn special treatment!