

Mech Touch 6921

Chapter 6921 Dead End Design Philosophy

Now that Ves had become familiar with Harry Kaikkonen's latest advancements in luminar crystal technology, he immediately adjusted the configuration of the Defiled Light Project.

The ability to weaponize his own joy and excitement had great potential, especially to a wielder who was able to draw upon these emotions a lot better than others.

That was not to say the other variations of X-ERC luminar crystal technology were useless, but Ves did not think he could channel them to the same degree.

"Do you intend to incorporate one of the X-ERC technologies in the next iteration of the Ignitron of the Promethea Mark II Project?"

The Journeyman Mech Designer looked uncertain. "I have yet to decide whether the Ignitron should be based on U-ERC luminar crystals or one of the X-ERC luminar crystal variations. Saint Isobel Kotin is still preoccupied with recovery and rehabilitation of her new and improved body. The few times I have been able to speak with her has not led to overly productive discussions. She has suffered enormous trauma by having her body burned to the point where she was only left with her brain. The transition back to a new body produced by the Red Association is a heavy burden on her psyche. Normal people might need a decade or two to regain their peak conditions."

Ace pilots could probably recover a lot faster, but no one knew for certain. Isobel may have broken through, but she pretty much sacrificed her body in exchange. That made her worse than her peers who broke through while remaining fully intact such as Saint Tusa and Saint Dise.

Ves could not imagine how much her confidence in herself had dropped as a consequence.

While he was confident that Isobel would eventually display the qualities of a saint and pick herself up again, who knew how much time it would take for her to fully readjust her mentality.

Whether she developed a strong affinity for emotions such as gloom, disgrace, pride or simple anger remained to be seen.

Until Harry was able to gather that information, the choice on the type of ERC luminar crystals he would use would remain in flux.

"I think that P-ERC luminar crystals synergize the best with her fire-based damage output." Ves said. "She relies heavily on starting and spreading fires to wear down lots of enemies over time. Being able to make her flames stickier and more difficult to put out will go a long way with enabling her specialized combat approach. She becomes a lot less effective if her enemies are able to quickly douse her flames. She can either become more versatile by developing new tricks, or she can choose to double down and make her purple fire as strong as possible. Personally, I think she will be more inclined to choose the latter."

"Can she still remain prideful after suffering such a setback?" Harry asked the critical question.

"Who knows. Anyway, don't forget what I just told you earlier. It is Saint Isobel's prerogative to make this kind of decision that heavily impacts her combat effectiveness and strategies. Ultimately, her compatibility with specific X-ERC luminar crystals is not determined by any obvious synergies, but by her personality and attitudes. It is best not to form strong expectations. You will just get disappointed if she makes a selection that is outside of your ideal plan."

"I understand. I will try my best not to do too much work in advance."

They talked a bit more about the possible uses of X-ERC luminar technology.

Harry spoke about the possibility of designing a batch of replacement crystals that could be slotted into the luminar crystal weapons wielded by the Bright Warrior Mark IV and the Valkyrie Redeemer Mark IV.

Each of them made use of his original U-ERC luminar crystal weapons, which caused the damage output of mechs armed with them to become a lot less consistent.

Highly skilled mech pilots who made the determination to master the use of U-ERC luminar crystal weapons had the potential to become highly versatile.

They could selectively channel different emotions that were known to produce different effects according to the situation at hand.

However, this was a demanding style of utilizing luminar crystal weapons. Only elite and specialized ranged mech units could afford to train their mech pilots into cycling multiple different emotions on command.

Everyone else could only reliably channel one or two emotions at a time, and their consistency still fell under question.

In short, Harry's current advancements in luminar crystal technology promised greater power, but also significantly increased the burden on mech pilots.

That was not an ideal outcome. Ves paid close attention to the piloting experience of his mechs.

He understood quite well that any unnecessary distraction and burden could add a lot of stress and cause mech pilots to miss stuff that they ordinarily shouldn't overlook.

This was why Ves was not entirely satisfied with Harry's current research direction.

"Once you have completed the initial development on X-ERC luminar crystal tech, what is your next step? Will you continue to investigate the link between emotions and luminar crystals, or will you seek to study a different facet of this alien tech?"

Harry was not stupid. He would have never been able to join the Larkinson Clan and enter the prestigious Design Department if he lacked perception and attention to detail.

"I have already mentioned that I am waiting for advancements in superdimensional tech. As long as I have learned enough theory about it, I may be able to develop

superdimensional luminar crystals in two years as long as there are no complications arising from new variables introduced by the strange materials. Aside from that, I have not yet decided."

That caused Ves to frown. "A mech designer like yourself needs to be several steps ahead of established capabilities."

"I know, sir, but I did not originally set out to become a mech designer by specializing in luminar crystal technology." The other mech designer defended himself. "My original specialization is based on precision focused laser weapon systems. Ever since I joined the clan, I did not have too many opportunities to design mechs that rely on increasing or decreasing the convexity of the focusing crystals to inflict more concentrated damage with energy weapons."

"Your specialization is not that relevant in the current war." Ves commented.

Harry frowned. "You are correct. In an age where most mechs fight against machines that rely primarily on armor as opposed to energy shields, concentrating the damage output of laser weapons to a small point results in much more efficient local penetration of armor plating. However, energy shields do not really care about that as it is more important to deplete its integrity. A broader and less focused energy beam will produce the same effect as a narrower and more focused beam, only with much less calculations and microadjustments."

Ves leaned forward as he thought about Harry's unenviable situation.

"I see. You are afraid that if you return to your roots and continue to develop your original specialization, you will work yourself into irrelevancy. After all, with so many enemies that rely so heavily on energy shields, your precision focused energy weapons only introduce a lot of additional cost and complexity with very little discernible value. Everyone knows that as long as you can get rid of the energy shields of alien units, their physical structures are a lot easier to damage... mostly. I have heard that newer alien vessels make increasing use of superior human-developed alloys, but even then the aliens still prefer to stick to their shield-heavy design philosophy."

The native aliens may have access to much of the Red Ocean's resources, but even they would feel distressed if they have to build lots of warships with thick and relatively high-quality hull plating.

It was much more economical for them to rely on their much more abundant reserves of phasewater to install multiple powerful azure energy shield generators.

Energy shield defenses could easily be restored if they took damage. So long as the azure energy shields did not break entirely and possibly damage the generators as a result, the energy barriers could save the vessels from conducting a lot of physical repairs.

This was clearly the better choice given that the native aliens did not have a robust infrastructure in place to repair too many damaged ships and vehicles at once.

In any case, Harry's precision focused energy weapons would continue to remain irrelevant so long as enemies kept relying so much on azure energy shields.

Many mechs even relied on the same paradigms to keep themselves in one piece. Red humanity had learned from the aliens and used the same kind of tech on its own machines.

As long as there was enough phasewater to spare, there was no reason to reject the use of highly effective azure energy shield generators!

Even if the Red War magically came to an end and humans soon returned to fighting against each other for all kinds of petty reasons, the prevalence of superior transphasic energy shields and azure energy shields would not go away.

In this case, how should Harry deal with his design philosophy? Should he try to phase it out and replace it with a more relevant design philosophy that was more adapted to the current age?

Doing this was possible, but Harry would incur huge penalties if he wanted to change his design philosophy.

A design philosophy was a mech designer's belief on how products should be. The individual therefore had to be really certain about the right direction of his research in order to make fruitful contributions.

Still, changing to a more suitable design philosophy may ultimately lead to a better outcome over time.

"If you were in my shoes, what would you choose, sir?"

"My answer may not be appropriate for you." He said. "My mentality and approach towards mech design is unique to me. That said, I would never give up. Once I have formed my design philosophy, I will need to see it through the end. Even if the entire Red Ocean is working against me and my specialization, that does not change my persistence in my life's goal. Even if it is nearly certain that I will crash myself against a wall if I don't change my research direction, I will continue to bash myself against the same wall over and over again in the hopes of weakening it until I can finally bash through one day. I just hope that I won't grow too old to savor my victory."

Harry frowned. "Energy shields are here to stay, as much as I dislike them. Weapons that are specialized for penetration cannot do anything against the former."

"Are you sure about that?" Ves grinned. "Perhaps there is a different way for X-ERC weapons to bypass the energy shields of such a well-protected vehicle. For example, you can devise a new luminar crystal weapon that has gained additional capabilities, for example a means of attack that can bypass the multi-layered azure energy shields."

"That sounds great, but... you probably don't know where to begin."

Harry lowered his head. "I cannot make up my mind so quickly. I need more time to evaluate everything."

"Thinking too much can be a trap in itself." Ves gently said. "Sometimes, there are no right answers. There are also times when you just need to stop procrastinating and make a decision. A design philosophy is paramount to any mech designer. Either commit to your original ambition, or give up on it and work towards a different ideal. You can still choose to remain undecided and wait, but you are only growing older. The longer this issue remains unresolved, the worse off you will be. Don't remain indecisive."

Ves truly did not envy Harry Kaikkonen. His energy weapon specialization was overly narrow, which made it far too easy for it to lose its value under certain circumstances.

This was a fault of the Journeyman Mech Designer's own making. He would have been a lot better off during the Phasewater Generation and Hyper GEneration if he pursued a broader and more flexible design philosophy.

Now, unless he was able to rely on major breakthroughs in energy weapon tech, Harry's only other choice was to steer his design philosophy in a different direction!

Chapter 6922 High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas

Mech designers did not have to stick to the exact same design philosophy that they initially chose upon advancing to the rank of Journeyman Mech Designer.

Otherwise, they would become far too set in their ways.

By sticking to old and outdated design philosophies, mech designers would turn from proponents of innovation to opponents of any significant form of progress.

That was not supposed to happen.

This was why there was a bit of leeway for mech designers to change or rather 'evolve' their design philosophies over time.

Ves actually did this himself. As he grew and shaped his ideas on his goals and ambitions, he gradually nudged his design philosophy into different directions.

This was why he currently ended up with Mutual Growth in Adversity.

He would have never come up with such an idea back when he had just become a Journeyman Mech Designer!

All of this showed that mech designers were capable of evolving their works and design philosophies over time.

Yet there were still limits to how far they could move away from their original intentions.

As far as Harry Kaikkonen was concerned, precision focused laser weapon systems had little in common with luminar crystal energy weapon systems aside from the obvious.

Just because both specializations centered around the use of energy weapons did not mean that they belonged to the same category.

Expertise in one area definitely did not cross over into expertise into another area!

It was not impossible for Harry to switch to specializing in luminar crystal technology, but he needed to forge links between his current and desired design philosophies.

That was difficult and time-consuming. It would take years for Harry to essentially damage his original foundation and replace it with a new one that would happily repair the damage.

If Harry managed it correctly, then he would succeed in transitioning his design philosophy so that it fit the current area a lot better.

That would be great for the Larkinson Clan. Ves had handed over the inheritance of luminar crystal technology as well as the responsibility to further its development to the younger mech designer.

So far, he did not have many reasons to complain, but that may change if Harry did not come up with any major advancements in the coming years.

Just as Ves wanted to delve deeper into Harry's professional problems, he received an urgent notification from his assistant.

"What is it, Gavin?"

"She's arrived."

"Which one?"

"The Tortuous Scream. She looks glorious. She has just arrived at the edge of the star system. Traffic control is holding her at bay until she can undergo a thorough inspection, but she will be brought to orbit of our planet soon enough."

Ves' blood pumped faster and hotter.

Finally!

After a long time of waiting, the most important ship of the Premier Fleet had finally arrived in the Larkinson Clan!

The sad part about her arrival was that this may be the last big project completed by the E-66 Experimental Yard.

The orbital shipyard that Ves had bought at a high price was located in the Inferno Spear Principality of the Rubarthan Pact.

Its territories had come under considerable pressure as the native aliens cleverly targeted the principality that possessed the strongest chances of uniting the Rubarthans under a single banner.

Even as the Red War continued to spread devastation across human space, the Rubarthans were still obsessed with appointing their leader after they got cut off from the New Rubarth Empire!

Old habits died hard. The Rubarthan Imperial Household held a transcendent status among the common folk. They needed something to believe in, especially when there were too few sources of stability taking action.

Ves shook his head. The Rubarthan Pact was not an acute concern at the moment. He cared much more about the arrival of the Tortuous Scream.

The warship attracted a lot of vigilance, and with good reason.

Yet due to the importance of the Larkinson Clan, traffic control tentatively allowed the Tortuous Scream to proceed deeper into the star system.

Of course, all of her weapon systems had to be shut down and remain in a hardware-locked state.

This was quite difficult and time-consuming as the Tortuous Scream was mounted with a lot of direct weapon systems.

Even when the Tortuous Scream continued to move forward under the control and escort of the Larkinsons, the Devos Ancient Clan still remained apprehensive towards her presence.

What if the green and unfamiliar Larkinsons failed to understand how to operate the starship at all? That might result in a devastating situation!

However, the Tortuous Scream did not arrive at New Constantinople by relying entirely on green personnel.

The Larkinsons instead took the time to invest in students that would go on to work for one of its companies.

As the formidable alien battleship drew closer, many people clamored to tour the arriving warship!

"I want to go! I want to go! Please take me with you, papa!"

"Alright, dear. If you are not too impatient to endure hours of walking back and forth inside the interior of the enormous warship, then you can get ready."

"Yay! You are the best, papa!" Andraste kissed her father's cheek before racing off to 'prepare', whatever that meant.

"You two can come as well." He told Aurelia and Marvaine.

His eldest child did not express too much interest. SHe only agreed because it would be his home in the future.

As for Marvaine, he grew excited beyond measure after Ves agreed to give his little boy a tour of the largest weapon systems on the warship.

He couldn't resist the opportunity to study the biggest and most powerful guns up close!

Not even the mechs around him were allowed to wield such huge and bulky armaments!

Multiple departments and groups continued to verify the safety and the control of the Tortuous Scream.

The converted alien battleship was not allowed to enter into close orbit of New Constantinople VIII, but instead had to diverge to circling around a sparsely populated moon.

As the Devos Ancient Clan and the Larkinson Clan continued to conduct multiple rounds of verification and such, the time had finally come for Ves and his family to tour their new flagship.

Ves and his family all boarded a shuttle that would bring them up to orbit before moving to the warship that was parked further away from all of the hustle and bustle.

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar and other Larkinsons would not be joining them this time.

They needed to handle other obligations. They suddenly had to take care of a lot of work now that the Larkinsons intended to enter her into circulation.

As the shuttle under escort entered the large and relatively spacious hangar bay of the Tortuous Scream, Ves, his bodyguards, his cats and the rest of his immediate family slowly exited.

The Larkinsons that had already been assigned to the enormous battleship had already formed up into ranks.

Their predominantly red-and-white uniforms were styled differently than what Ves and others were accustomed to, but this was a nice touch that set them apart from the other Larkinsons.

As Ves continued to look around, he could immediately feel as if he had stepped into an alien warship that was only hastily converted to human tech.

The dimensions did not match. Alien tech openly operated alongside human tech, and not always in a harmonious fashion.

The layout of the Tortuous Scream was also relatively unfamiliar to red humanity. The alien battleship possessed a vertical deck layout. This contrasted from other starships that preferred horizontal layouts.

Ves was sure that a lot of Larkinsons would struggle to understand this layout and be able to navigate themselves to the right positions.

After the short greeting ceremony complete with music finally wrapped up, a well-dressed man in a fancier officer's uniform slowly walked up and bowed.

"Welcome to the Tortuous Scream, Patriarch Ves Larkinson. It is an honor to host you and your family on this partially converted alien ship. I am High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas-Larkinson, formerly a citizen and retainer of the Dermont Ancient Clan. Although I do not have any practical experience with serving on a bona fide warship, I have studied ahead and earned many of the necessary certifications on how to operate the weapon systems."

That was not as difficult as it sounded. The Tortuous Scream originally boasted a lot of cannons, yet that did not stop her from falling into the hands of the Larkinson Clan.

However, Ves had made the deliberate design choice to rip away tertiary and secondary gun batteries.

Bunkers took their place, offering both shelter and convenience for all of the Larkinsons that would feel more lost in the future.

Ves would be inspecting them soon enough.

"It is good to meet you, high captain." Ves returned the greeting. "If I may ask, what has brought you into my service? The Dermont Ancient Clan is pretty nice. How did you manage to earn the qualifications to captain a big ship like the Tortuous Scream?"

The entire procession began to move towards one of the massive elevators situated further away.

"I have no complaints about my service to the Dermonts, patriarch. They have given me the opportunity to serve on their starships as an officer. I started with a specialization in sensors and communications. I needed to learn diplomacy and relationship management right at the start of my service. Without developing an understanding and good relations with all of the officers in charge of different departments as well as the officers of other starships, friction and misunderstandings can occur. By understanding everyone's stations and responsibilities, I can connect the right people together and communicate with them in a manner that makes them more responsive to different commands."

Ves looked impressed. "It sounds like you were already being prepped for command."

Gilbert smiled in response as he thought back on the good old days. "I was. The Dermont Ancient Clan must have recognized my talent and effectiveness. I received fairly frequent promotions. Each time, I had to learn new knowledge in order to keep up with my expanding portfolio. I was lucky that my ability to find allies and assistants and forge them into a single interest group has succeeded more often than not. Eventually, I realized that a good commander does not necessarily command his troops directly, but instead gives them information and guidelines so that the soldiers can decide their own way forward."

The high captain indeed appeared to be the type that built up a huge amount of social capital and used it in the right moments at the right time.

While Ves felt a little disappointed that the smooth talker of a high captain was lacking in engineering or other technical skills, he understood that he was asking for too much.

Highly knowledgeable technical personnel still enjoyed a distinguished status among the people. "So what made you decide to jump into the Larkinson Clan, Gilbert?"

The high captain faced Ves and briefly evaluated whether he should be truthful.

"Your clan had a vacancy open. I applied and attended many different meetings. I roughly understand why your people are driving these people out. However, such events will lose their novelty quickly. I am gratified beyond measure to make it past a difficult gauntlet that challenged many different people. I thank my luck every night to remind myself of how I managed to enjoy this exalted rank where many others have failed."

Gilbert de Raanvanchas had to possess special qualities beyond the norm in order to remain in charge of the huge warship.

What were his secrets?

"Are you proficient in commanding lots of starships?"

"Yes." Gilbert confidently said. "I may not be the equal of the descendants raised and educated by the Devos Ancient Clan, but I have learned and exercised both squadron command and fleet command."

"That is good news. We already have numerous talents such as Saint Commander Casella Ingvar, but it is best to have alternatives on hand."

Chapter 6923 Artillery Bunkers

Ves and his family extensively toured the interior of the 3.6 kilometer long orven battleship.

The E-66 Experimental Yard had spent a lot of time and manpower on converting the Tortuous Scream for human occupation and usage.

However, the vessel's internal volume was so great that the Rubarthan shipbuilders could not completely transform her tech and architecture to human style.

Doing so was no different from designing and constructing a native human warship from the start.

The purpose of using the alien battleship was to expediently make good use of the CFA Battlecruiser Token that Ves had earned. It did not matter if the Tortuous Scream still operated on an alien programming system so long as the warship obeyed her new masters.

These reasons and more caused the exterior as well as the interior of the warship to look like a confused hybrid between human and orven ship design.

The greater height of the ceilings and the vertical deck layout were all typical to orven-developed starships. It took way too much work to convert it all to human style, so the shipbuilders did not bother to change the layout for the most part.

"The greatest changes that we have made to the hull is the removal of many secondary and tertiary gun batteries." The recently appointed high captain reported to Ves. "According to your directive, we have done this as extensively as we could. All secondary gun batteries and a large number of tertiary gun batteries have made way for bunkers that can house one or even multiple heavy artillery mechs. This also means that if no mech is active, the Tortuous Scream only possesses half of the point defense capabilities that she should normally enjoy."

Gilbert de Raanvanchas projected an image of the converted battleship and highlighted all of the gun batteries and bunkers on the hull.

Ves noted that while the Tortuous Scream still retained a lot of tertiary gun batteries, they were all located in corners, edged and other areas where it was difficult to install bunkers.

"I haven't thought about it back then, but now that I see this, it is a good idea that we have preserved the remaining tertiary gun batteries. They can provide immediate interception capabilities if the ship ever falls out of FTL travel and gets ambushed right away or whatever. We cannot rely entirely on mechs placed in bunkers for all of our defensive needs as their mech pilots are not always in their cockpits and prepared to fight at any moment."

It usually took a bit of time to bring the turrets online and tell them what to do, but they could still make themselves useful a lot faster than bunker mechs!

After a considerable journey, they entered one of the locations that was previously occupied by a secondary gun battery.

The turret occupied a relatively large amount of space. What was visible on the exterior of the ship was only the tip of the iceberg. It took a lot of components to make the large structure move and to feed it with energy or ammunition.

After the shipbuilders ripped away this bulky weapon mechanism, they converted all of the free space into bunker clusters as well as other functional components.

Ves grew particularly pleased with how well the new bunkers provided offensive support to the bunker mechs.

Any mechs equipped with a standard power slot would be able to connect to a power feed that directly supplied energy from a nearby first-class power generator.

The bunkers also possessed robust and reinforced ammunition feed channels. They could supply all sorts of projectiles, missiles and other physical ordnance to a mech so long as the crew made the necessary adjustments.

Clamps and other structural elements not only stabilized the bunker mechs, but also helped to shunt away their excess heat. The mechs did not have to worry about heat management at all as the massive alien battleship could easily absorb a titanic amount of thermal energy without issue!

In short, the converted battleship probably boasted the most luxurious bunkers that Ves had ever seen!

Only Red Association warships possessed comparable or superior bunkers, but even they did not have as many of them as the Tortuous Scream!

"As you can see, we are not only able to provide additional azure energy shields to protect the bunker mechs, but also provide additional emergency physical protection by rolling them into place at a critical time. This should significantly increase the survival rate of the mechs in question. We value all 155 artillery bunkers."

Ves knew how much of a difference all of these measures could make.

Ordinary secondary gun batteries were quite powerful enough on their own. Replacing them with bunker mechs sounded like an upgrade, but the story was much different once the Minerva Mark II empowered them with her true resonance!

The damage output of the battleship under the influence of Casella's Command Field would far surpass that of other alien battleships of the same size and scale!

At that time, the Tortuous Scream would definitely turn into a high-priority target to the enemy!

This was undoubtedly dangerous to the Larkinsons residing in the converted battleship. Ves would definitely put himself and possibly his family in greater danger if the vessel tore down enemy warships left and right.

Yet that was already in his consideration. If the Tortuous Scream became a must-kill target to the aliens, then their behavior became a lot more predictable.

The Premier Fleet could purposefully guide the actions of enemy units and funnel them into traps or kill zones where they could be eliminated with ease!

"We don't have any good bunker mechs on hand, do we?" He asked.

"Indeed we do not." Gilbert responded. "The artillery bunkers are designed to provide excellent accommodation to first-class heavy artillery mechs. They can still be adjusted to provide support to the Omega Thresher model that you have procured for the Premier Fleet, but this is not an optimal combination. The Omega Threshers are first-class multipurpose mechs that are designed to be fairly compact and mobile. They are mounted with a number of miniaturized integrated weapon systems that are still potent for their size, but are also limited by the same factor."

In other words, the Omega Threshers performed well when deployed in the field, but could not compete against genuine bunker mechs when put into static defensive positions.

Ves recalled the weapon systems mounted on a standard Omega Thresher mech.

"The wrist-mounted plasma sweeper cannons are only useful at very close ranges. The Phase Disintegrator Guns are fairly powerful, but not that effective at longer ranges. The same goes for the plasma cannons. They pack a mean punch, but their calibers are on the smaller size due to capacity limitations. The Omega Laser Cannons and the Datura Gravity Well Caster are pretty awesome, but their power levels cannot match the much larger armaments mounted on heavy artillery mechs."

In this regard, the Totori MAXXX model would have been a slightly better choice for bunker mechs.

"Unless you are willing to procure first-class heavy artillery mechs to occupy the artillery bunkers, it is still possible to make good use of the Omega Threshers." Gilbert said. "The FFEE1100 version is the base configuration of this mech line. There are other variants that are designed for different purposes. There are several that are designed to fulfill the role of bunker mechs. If you do not wish to convert 155 Omega Threshers to these bunker mech-specific configurations, then you can instead take advantage of their humanoid arms to replace their Datura guns with larger and much more formidable cannons."

The high captain gave Ves an example of what he meant. He produced a new projection that displayed this scenario.

An Omega Thresher mech was locked inside one of the bunkers. What was strange was that the mech had thrust both arms into mounted cannons that were so large and massive that it would have been difficult for the mech to carry in the field!

It was only due to additional structural support from the bunker structure that the Omega Thresher mech was able to aim and control the sizable cannons.

When the Omega Thresher opened fire, the first-class mech did not just fire with its smaller integrated weapon systems, but also unleashed a pair of much more powerful Omega Laser beams at a distant target!

Such powerful and concentrated energy attacks would have exerted a large burden on the first-class mech, but because the Omega Thresher was serving on a legitimate warship, the Larkinsons were allowed to directly link the mech with the hull!

This enabled the bunker mech to fire her demanding external weapons more frequently!

In fact, it was difficult to identify the additional Omega Laser Cannons as mech weapons.

They were mounted and linked into the structure and power channels of the Tortuous Scream, which meant that they could also be regarded as warship cannons.

Yet because they could only be fired by mechs, they should still match the definition of mech armaments.

This was an important distinction to the Larkinson Clan. Saint Commander Casella Ingvar's Command Field treated pure battleship gun batteries a lot differently than mech armaments.

The latter received a much more powerful boost than the former!

This was because genuine mech weapons were treated as extensions of mechs, each of which could be individually Commandeered or Enfeoffed!

Ves understood what the high captain attempted to do. Gilbert wanted to make a bet that despite connecting the larger Omega Laser Cannons to the bunkers of his warship, they retained enough properties of mech weapons to be treated as the equipment of the Omega Thresher mechs.

"This is interesting," He said. "If there is enough time, manpower, spare materials and funding, then I am in favor of putting this idea on trial. If it works, then you can apply this scheme to the remaining artillery bunkers. There is just one change I would like to make."

"What would you like to change, sir?"

Ves raised his fingers and erased the large caliber Omega Laser Cannons. He then began to draw crude versions of large caliber luminar crystal cannons in their place.

"Our clan makes use of our own variety of energy weapons. It is based on alien tech, but it has proven its worth to us many times. Omega laser weapon tech is strong, but

our clan is not too familiar with it. I think it is better for us to stick with what is familiar and use luminar crystal cannons to augment the firepower of our Omega Threshers."

Gilbert de Raanvanchas looked thoughtful. Even if he was new to the Larkinson Clan, he had done his due diligence and developed a decent understanding of his new employer.

"If you are confident that your first-class luminar crystal cannons can keep up with the formidable damage output of Omega laser cannons, then I have little objections to your proposal. Just to be on the safe side, I suggest we trial both weapon implementations. We can make a direct and objective comparison between two proposals."

"That is an even better idea. You can go ahead and make the arrangements. It would be best if this experimental setup is done before we start our campaign and get into our first true fight."

They continued to talk about what else they could do to improve the effectiveness of all 155 artillery bunkers.

Once they finished their discussion on them, they soon turned their attention to the much more special sniper bunkers.

The Tortuous Scream only boasted 4 of them, and that was because they were solely designed to accommodate the high-ranking mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

Chapter 6924 The Firepower of the Tortuous Scream

Different from the artillery bunkers, the sniper bunkers were designed to accommodate special machines such as the Amaranto Mark III and the upcoming Promethea Mark II.

They offered the ace mechs a stable and protective enclosure to launch attacks with the support of a formidable battleship.

The Amaranto Mark III did not necessarily need the additional support, but she previously struggled to find adequate cover in past engagements.

This was why Ves wanted to provide the powerful ace marksman mech with dedicated bunkers that could put Saint Stark at ease.

As an ace mech that exemplified the concept of extreme firepower, the Amaranto Mark III defenses were not too good, though they were at least a lot better than the previous version.

However, the Amaranto Mark III had yet to benefit from the emergence of superdimensional technology, so the machine could still be threatened in multiple ways.

The protection offered by the sniper bunkers could therefore play a very useful role.

"Compared to the artillery bunkers, the sniper bunkers enjoy much more robust protection." High Captain Gilbert proudly said. "The sniper bunkers are specifically designed to withstand battleship salvos. While they cannot resist continuous bombardment, they should at least block the first salvos and buy time for the mechs in question to take shelter or eliminate the threat directly."

Ves observed all of the defensive mechanisms and grew satisfied with what he observed.

"What about offensive enhancements?"

"The Amaranto Mark III should be able to draw upon the power of the battleship herself. The Tortuous Scream will be able to charge up the Instrument of Vengeance directly, allowing the weapon to be fired at a greater frequency than before. The sniper bunkers are also able to siphon heat away considerably faster, which is an important guarantee for the Amaranto and her energy weapon to remain relatively cool."

This meant that the Amaranto Mark III would be able to fire her primary armament a lot more frequently than before!

Ves could not imagine how much damage she could inflict onto enemy assets once she truly got going!

"Do you think that the firepower of the Amaranto Mark III will be able to match or surpass the firepower of one or multiple primary gun batteries?"

The former Terran naval officer paused in thought. "The comparisons are not simple and direct, sir. The assets you are thinking about are too different from each other. It is no different from comparing apples to oranges. The primary gun batteries that I am about to show you next are on a different level when it comes to scale and absolute damage output. They are the realization of technological brute force. However, they lack the speed and surgical precision of high-ranking mechs. The Amaranto Mark III in a sniper bunker may not be as good at destroying cities or large space stations, but her highly precise and focused burst of resonance-empowered energy beams are much better at damaging and eliminating enemy champions, no matter whether they are rival ace mechs or murderous phase lords."

With such a powerful ace marksman mech at her disposal, the Tortuous Scream became a lot more effective when employed to fight against other warships as well as phase leaders.

However, as the high captain mentioned, the Amaranto Mark III was ultimately an ace marksman mech and should be used like one.

This meant that Saint Davia Stark had to fight with precision. She might even have to withhold her formidable firepower for a long time in order to avoid tipping off the enemy.

Ves paid closer attention to all of the tech and design features that granted superior protection to the sniper bunkers.

From stronger access to the ship's potent power sources to multiple layers of defenses, the sniper bunkers promised to boost the Amaranto Mark III's offensive and defensive parameters at the cost of sacrificing her mobility.

That said, the designers of the sniper bunkers had also included several convenient escape channels. This would bring the affected personnel to safety before anything catastrophic occurred.

Ves approved of these measures. The value of the Amaranto Mark III and Saint Davia Stark could already come close to the value of the Tortuous Scream as a whole!

In fact, Ves had a hard time deciding which one he preferred to have more. It was rare for a private individual and organization to have a genuine battleship, but it was hard to defend such a possession without the deterrence of several high-ranking mech pilots.

This reminded Ves that they actually synergized well with each other. It was best to combine the two as much as possible.

Ves knew quite well that if he removed the high-ranking mechs from the picture, the Tortuous Scream would barely be able to distinguish herself from the other alien battleships employed in the invasion.

This was not good for the Larkinson Clan as it would have been too difficult to defend the Tortuous Scream without any additional support!

"It would have been great if we had our own expert heavy artillery mech specialists." Ves sighed. "The sniper bunkers would have become truly powerful in that case."

Expert or ace heavy artillery mechs came closest to replicating the firepower of primary gun batteries.

If Venerable Taon Melin did not suddenly make an unforgivable mistake during an ill-fated mission, a version of the Zeal would have been here by now to lend her formidable firepower to the Tortuous Scream.

Ves could already imagine it. If he truly upgraded the Zeal into a first-class expert heavy artillery mech, then this monstrosity would definitely be able to function as the main weapon against the enemy!

These days, if Taon gained a new expert mech, he must be fighting hard against the incoming native aliens.

Although his breakthrough happened many years later than the other young Larkinsons, he had a great opportunity to catch up by taking advantage of the resources and training of the New Rubarth Empire.

As Ves observed the sniper bunker, he did not forget about another pilot and mech combination.

"How well will the sniper bunkers be able to accommodate Saint Isobel Kotin?"

"Saint Isobel and her future ranged mech will not be able to offer as much value to them." The high captain answered. "If the Promethea Mark II will be similar to the Mark I, then her mobility will not be weak. It may be better to enable this machine to roam and attack the enemy from unexpected angles."

That aligned with Ves' assessment. His vision for the Promethea Mark II did not account for many instances where she would huddle inside a bunker.

"You are correct, high captain. That said, you should take this possibility into account. There may be times where the Promethea Mark II truly cannot enter the field for fear of provoking a disproportionate response from the enemy."

After completing his inspection of one of the four crucial sniper bunkers, Ves and his family soon began to visit the most exciting part of the Tortuous Scream.

"So big..." Marvaine admiringly said as he beheld a portion of the massive turret structure.

They were all staring at the housing and components of an enormous plasma cannon battery.

Several massive barrels were grouped together and could fire multiple plasma bolts that were so large and powerful that they could burn half a city upon impact!

"During the refit and particle conversion, the shipbuilders prioritized the performance of primary gun batteries. Without mechs, the Tortuous Scream would struggle much more extensively when trying to take down tough enemies. We have tried our best to apply fast and convenient upgrades to the primary gun batteries and supporting systems. They perform considerably better than alien equivalents, but we expect this distance to narrow as our enemies will catch up one way or another."

It was difficult for Ves to fully visualize the power of these massive cannons. He was not too familiar with first-class starships.

He had seen plenty of alien battleships in action, but they were often suppressed by swarms of mechs.

Perhaps this had given him the faulty assumption that once he took control of the Tortuous Scream, commanding all of those gun batteries was no big deal since certain ace mechs were capable of accomplishing more!

"The Tortuous Scream will likely undergo a baptism of fire." Ves revealed to the man who was responsible for commanding the warship. "We do not have time to perform proper months-long trials. We can only fight and hope that the warship will not suffer a catastrophic malfunction."

Ves continued to listen as High Captain Gilbert continued to lecture about the strengths and more importantly the limitations of the primary gun batteries.

Their enormously slow and sluggish tracking and turning parameters made them completely unsuitable for attacking fast-moving targets.

Even if their tracking was a lot better, their lack of fine precision made them terrible at swatting smaller targets at most distances!

"It is best to treat them as siege weapons, sir. They are best used against static fortifications. They are also good when used against enemy warships, but the problem with that is that if the Tortuous Scream can bombard an enemy warship, our adversaries can fire back. This is a considerable risk if the enemy outnumbers us in terms of warships."

"I am aware of the potential problems." Ves said. "I do not intend for the Tortuous Scream to take too many risks. It is best to keep her in the rear and rely mostly on our mechs to eliminate our enemies. That said, our battleship should not remain completely passive. If there is a good opportunity, I expect our warship to advance if doing so is to our advantage."

The high captain did not entirely look comfortable with this approach.

"The orvens have designed this battleship as a command vessel. She is not designed to serve in the vanguard. While she can still fulfill this role, it will be difficult to keep her completely unscathed unless we upgrade her defenses."

"Speaking of upgrades, is there any way for us to upgrade and modernize her primary gun batteries?"

"Not easily, sir. The E-66 Experimental Shipyard has already attempted to incorporate more extensive applications of hyper technology into them, but this has only produced limited results. Properly modernizing the gun turrets will require much deeper overhauls. I suggest you wait and observe the Tortuous Scream in action. I have no doubt that she will expose greater flaws and shortcomings in future battles. We should collect our findings and specify revisions based on the actual performance of the warship."

Ves grew disappointed when he heard that it was not easy for them to further upgrade the primary weapon batteries.

It made sense, though. They were so big and massive that it was very difficult to dismantle them or work on them outside of a drydock environment.

This was one of the reasons why Ves had tasked his shipbuilders to develop a proper battlecruiser for the Larkinson Clan.

Such a vessel would definitely perform much better than a stopgap solution like the Tortuous Scream!

Unfortunately, Ves had already heard that it would take at least 5 years or maybe double for the shipbuilders to complete such an ambitious project.

The timeframe may change for the worse as the Red War progressed. It took a lot of infrastructure, resources and stability to construct a huge warship.

The native aliens would never allow the humans to complete such a threatening vessel!

These concerns and more made Ves afraid that he would end up stuck with the Tortuous Scream for more years than necessary.

This meant that Ves had to be more serious about upgrading the battleship!

Chapter 6925 Additional Upgrades

The tour throughout the massive converted alien battleship seemed to last half a day.

The children and cats grew tired of it all. They had little interest in observing the more mundane but necessary sections such as hydroponics, life support and waste reclamation.

After their nanny and guards led them to a place on the ship where they could have fun, Ves and his wife continued their tour.

They both understood the importance of knowledge on the Tortuous Scream. The more information they received about the captured and converted warship, the less they would be taken by surprise if anything special happened.

Both Ves and Gloriana were about to entrust their lives and the lives of their children to the newly designated flagship of the Premier Fleet.

They could not tolerate unstable technologies, obvious security loopholes or critical vulnerabilities!

Even if they could not adequately address all of these shortcomings, they could at least take note and be prepared if enemies managed to exploit them somehow.

It was only at the end of the tour that Gloriana yawned and bid the two men goodbye.

"I need to return to the kids and make sure they have settled into their new home on this ship."

Ves and his immediate family had already claimed the most luxurious and well-protected suites in the center of the Tortuous Scream.

Shortly after Gloriana made her departure, Ves and Gilbert entered a quiet office in order to discuss a variety of important subjects.

Ves placed a lot of importance in upgrades.

"The Tortuous Scream plays a vital role in our fleet lineup." He said as he sat down and folded his hands on a table. "As our only true battleship, she can do stuff that mechs necessarily cannot. Since we need to rely on her for the coming years, we may as well invest in her so that we can depend on her when we need her strength the most. What improvements do you have in store?"

High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas clearly prepared for this discussion in advance. He projected a list of different items.

"We are just beginning the first upgrade as we speak. Our personnel are in the process of transferring the SF-02 Smart AI Data Processing Cluster from Diandi Base to our pre-prepared data center compartment. Once we have installed the hardware, we will immediately begin to link the software including the smart AIs to an isolated section of the parallel human control system. There are certain risks involved with doing this, but we hope that the isolation measures combined with the fact that our control system only operates on top of the original alien control system will prevent our warship from going out of control."

That sounded rather sloppy, but time was of the essence. None of the Larkinsons had enough time to do everything right. They had little choice but to cut corners when they thought they could get away with it and hope that they were right.

The Larkinsons had been planning this transition in advance, so Ves was not too surprised with this important transfer.

"How long will it take for the SF-02 to settle into its new home?"

"Five days if we are being optimistic in our estimates." Gilbert answered. "During this time, you and others will not be able to make use of the processing power or demand assistance from one of the smart AIs."

That was disappointing news as it would set back the Design Department considerably.

While Ves and other mech designers were capable enough to do their work by relying on much less processing power, their work speeds would definitely get affected. A lot of projects would fall behind schedule as a consequence. This was bound to piss off his wife.

Still, this was a necessary move. The SF-02 was the most valuable asset remaining in Diandi Base. There was no way that Ves would agree to leave it behind.

Besides, the SF-02 was originally designed to be stuffed inside the limited compartments of a starship. Ves could have selected a much larger and more demanding processor cluster if he was fine with remaining planetbound.

The partial integration of the SF-02 would improve everyone's lives. They would not only gain a better grip on the huge and multifaceted systems of the Tortuous Scream, but also gain access to its multiple smart AIs, each of which possessed their own personalities and preferences.

After addressing the processor cluster, Gilbert mentioned another important upgrade. He conjured up a projection that displayed the external hull.

"One of the upgrades that are still in progress is to integrate support link technology into the design. This will enable our ship to provide much better support to other mechs as well as starships that are also equipped with energy link, shield link and data link transceivers. Due to the generous size of the hull, we can install larger and more demanding support link arrays across the exterior."

Ves frowned when he looked at the projection that showed how much coverage they had before, which was not much.

Of course, much of that had to do with the fact that the Tortuous Scream was never designed to accommodate support link technology.

This was why the shipbuilders and naval engineers had to go through a lot of trouble to install additional modules.

However, Ves knew that it would be worth it. Support link technology became a lot more powerful when a strong source was within reach.

"How long?"

A year did not sound so bad, but that also meant that the Premier Fleet would not dare to get into too many scuffles. Every battle presented the enemy with opportunities to swoop forward and eliminate a lot of friendlies.

Shield link technology could save a lot of lives!

"Does the Tortuous Scream have enough energy to spare on to provide enough to support all of this linking?"

"We do for now." Gilbert said with a smile. "The greatest limitation is range as opposed to energy supply. The support link arrays that we can install onto the hull are relatively generic components. The Red Association is deliberately keeping out their best and most advanced implementation of this tech."

That sounded disappointing, but Ves should have expected the mechers to pull off such a trick.

It was a way for them to control how Ves and his Larkinsons made use of support link technology. By forcing them to utilize inferior and outdated pieces of tech, the Red Two maintained their technological superiority.

"Do you think the effective ranges of the support link modules installed on the Tortuous Scream are sufficient?"

"For the most part, the answer is no, sir. The Red Two make use of larger arrays that possess much greater effective ranges. The designs we have access to are smaller and more limited. Our mechs can only receive assistance from the Tortuous Scream at closer distances. Further away, only the E-MULE support mechs can provide support to the combat mechs at the front."

Ves certainly could not accept this outcome. Perhaps he needed to approach the Red Association and make another deal to trade for larger and more advanced support link transceiver models.

However, Ves knew that there were still many limitations to the use of support link technology.

One of the reasons why the effective ranges for it was so damn short was because it was difficult to maintain active links between many smaller units on the move.

Trying to keep track of so many moving machines and making sure that everything remained connected imposed a huge burden on any central hub. The SF-02 likely needed to loan a huge amount of processing power to help the support link transceivers keep up with the complexity of battle.

"Aside from installing the most crucial shield link transceivers onto the hull of the Tortuous Scream, the other starships of the Premier Fleet will be receiving them as well." The high captain reported. "In fact, these works have already been underway, so we expect most of them to be able to enjoy the protection of shield link technology. The installation of energy link transceivers is less urgent. They are mostly useful in supplying mechs with additional energy during combat. I have heard that the mech forces have already begun to train E-MULES to serve as energy couriers."

"Oh? Please elaborate."

The tactic turned out to be simple. E-MULES possessed considerable energy reserves, but could quickly be emptied once they transferred a lot of energy and shield power to the nearby Dracoloids and Omega Threshers.

As long as this happened, there was little point for the E-MULES to remain in the field. They were instructed to return to the rear and standby until one of the friendly starships activated an energy link.

This should quickly restore the energy reserves of the E-MULES!

Once the E-MULES managed to top off their energy cells, they could fly back to the front and resume their job of channeling energy and shield power to the first-class multipurpose mechs that truly needed the help.

The former Terran officer seriously nodded. "That is correct. If you want to use the Tortuous Scream as a siege engine, then it is possible to build an enormous spinal-mounted laser cannon on her hull. The tech is relatively simple in order to avoid complications, but the materials must be high in quality. However, the improvisational nature of this add-on means that there is always a chance of glitches and malfunctions."

The entire premise of this idea was not sound from the start. A spinal cannon added an enormous burden to the hull and systems of a vessel. There were good reasons why most of the warships of the Red Association, Red Fleet and even the native aliens lacked this feature.

It not only added a huge burden to the hull, but also put too many eggs in a single basket.

So long as the spinal cannon incurred moderate damage, it may be rendered inoperable, thereby causing a warship to lose a lot of value in an instant!

However, if the Premier Fleet was able to do a good job of protecting the Tortuous Scream, it may be worth it to invest in a spinal cannon, even if it was just a discount version like the one in the proposal.

Ves struggled to make a decision on this matter. The power and scale tempted him into accepting the proposal, but practicalities such as attracting greater hostility and trying to maintain such a huge and demanding weapon system cooled his brain.

"No." He said. "We will not be installing a spinal cannon onto the Tortuous Scream anytime soon. First, the hull shape and configuration is not conducive to this addition. Second, I much prefer to utilize spinal cannons of the warships that are already designed from the ground up to accommodate such an enormous weapon system. Third, installing all of these extra structural components is nearly impossible to accomplish in the field. We will have to send this warship to a massive orbital shipyard that is completely out of our control. There are too many ways for third parties to compromise our converted battleship."

In short, installing a spinal cannon onto a warship that was never designed to accommodate it in the first place was an unnecessary risk and hassle.

Ves would rather spend his limited resources on more practical upgrades.

Chapter 6926 Gradual Transformation

There were many possible ways to upgrade the Tortuous Scream, but the most significant ones demanded the use of a large orbital shipyard over long periods of time.

This was the trouble with starships and especially capital ships. For all of their power and scale, it took exponentially greater facilities to construct them and upgrade their hulls.

Ves much preferred to work with mechs. Their much more compact nature made it easy for a professional crew of mech technicians to repair, modify or upgrade the machines.

Even if the effort was a bit too expensive and cumbersome, the additional costs should still fall within a tolerable range.

Such a modest setup did not apply to an alien battleship as massive as the Tortuous Scream.

Even the E-66 Experimental Shipyard struggled to transform the Tortuous Scream. The facility was only rated to construct ships measuring up to 2.3 kilometers in length.

The shipbuilders and engineers over there had to perform a lot of work in open space where the lack of control over the environment resulted in greater hazards and mistakes.

All of this meant that the Tortuous Scream's conversion rate was not as great as Ves imagined.

"We have initially tamed and trained this battleship into an unruly but somewhat obedient mount." High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas informed Ves. "However, we have yet to fully decipher her alien programming or identify all of her hidden coding. Her orven operating system is akin to the instincts of a wild beast. Removing it entirely will result in death, which is not what we want. We have no choice but to

install control implants, place physical restraints and rely on various verbal commands and physical signals to tell the beast to move and fight at our command."

Ves frowned when he heard that. This sounded distinctly more precarious than he expected.

"What are the risks that the Tortuous Scream will slip out of our control?"

"Unknown, sir. I truly cannot say. It depends on how many backdoors the orven race has planted in their ship and how well their soldiers can exploit these hidden dangers. Our battleship will probably remain safe when fighting against the other alien races. It is inconceivable for the orvens to share any details about their own backdoors to rivals such as the nunsers and the puelmers."

"So the true danger arises when we are fighting against a significant orven force, is that correct?"

The high captain's expression remained serious. "Yes, sir. I highly advise our flagship to maintain her distance from any significant orven fleet contingent. We should also employ stronger jamming and ideally envelop the entire hull or at least the core alien data centers with the Saint Kingdom of an ace mech. Otherwise, there will always be the possibility that the aliens can covertly or overtly steal our data and sabotage our battleship."

This was the price for hijacking and repurposing an alien warship. Ves knew that the risk that the aliens would take back control of their stolen hulls was not a theoretical possibility.

It had already occurred a number of times during the Red War.

Ves was not the only person to earn RF Warship Tokens.

Others who managed to earn them through close cooperation with the Red Fleet had the bright idea of capturing and converting ready-made alien warships instead of constructing their own hulls.

The shipbuilding industry faced too many constraints. There weren't enough orbital shipyards, but expanding them did not magically solve the problem as the supply of raw materials remained the same.

However, the aliens proved that they weren't completely stupid by not only installing backdoors and other hidden surprises onto their warships, but also making use of them to sabotage the stolen vessels during critical moments!

One of the reasons why the E-66 Experimental Yard took such a long time to refit the Tortuous Scream was to reduce her vulnerability to these exploits.

There was a good chance that all of the modifications to the Tortuous Scream successfully inoculated her against the exploits used by the orven race.

Yet that was not a reason to put this to the test. If it was possible to do so, it was better for the Premier Fleet to maintain its distance from orven-heavy fleets.

This was quite difficult to accomplish as the orvens were among the most common enemies that red humanity faced.

Even if the orvens had begun to falter due to suffering heavier-than-expected losses during the Red Tide Offensive, they always had more bodies to throw at the enemy.

The taller and furred humanoids had earned the respect of many red humans.

The orvens did not particularly stand out compared to the other alien races, but they did not let that stop them from demonstrating their courage, faith and duty on the battlefield.

It was impossible to evade the orvens entirely. The best the Premier Fleet could do was to scout ahead and make a detour if there were strong orven forces in the way.

As Ves wrapped up his first lengthy discussion with the captain of the Tortuous Scream, they briefly discussed one more subject.

"There is one more question that we have in mind." Gilbert said. "Is it possible for you to transform our flagship into an extraordinary vessel such as the Dominion of Man?"

Ves had already put a lot of thought on this possibility.

"It is impossible to replicate a god ship like the Dominion of Man without the special qualities that only genuine RF dreadnoughts possess." He responded after a bit more thinking. "While it is theoretically possible for me to devise a way to turn the Tortuous Scream into an artifact warship that may become alive, it takes too much work and preparation to make it happen. The benefits will also be rather meager. The benefits are not worth the cost."

"I see."

"That does not mean it is impossible for this battleship to still come to life, Gilbert. The increasing integration of hyper materials along with the day-and-night work of a united crew of humans may slowly affect the growth and evolution of the hull. We can accelerate and direct this evolution to produce the outcome we want by implementing special measures such as placing totems of the Golden Cat in many compartments. Even if this does not outright bring the starship to life, it will at least lay the groundwork for a future transformation. This is what we are currently doing with the Spirit of Bentheim."

In fact, Ves was already pretty certain that the factory ship was ready to be transformed into a genuine artifact starship.

He knew that the Red Collective already produced a few initial successes in cooperation with the Red Fleet. It was a pity that they were keeping their artifact warships a secret from both human and alien observers. They had yet to show up on the battlefield in large numbers.

The high captain looked slightly optimistic. "So a direct transformation is out of our reach, but a gradual and delayed transformation is within our capabilities. If we keep making use of the Tortuous Scream for a decade or longer, then it is essential for us to seek every possible advantage. Please lend us your expertise."

"Don't worry. I will work with the T Institute to formulate a plan. It should be ready within a week."

Ves was not sure how long the Premier Fleet would continue to make use of the Tortuous Scream. It may very well be the case that the alien battleship would get beat up to the point that she had to be scuttled over the course of the upcoming campaign.

However, if red humanity deteriorated to the point where building new warships became extremely difficult, then the Larkinson Clan needed to preserve as many starships as possible.

Ves really hoped that this would not be the case, but he needed to plan for the worst outcome.

He already entertained a few ideas on how the Tortuous Scream could possibly become a living starship that exceeded her original scope and specifications.

He was not in a hurry to implement it, though. Not only would it take a lot of time, effort and resources, he also did not have much passion for it. He would rather invest his time on designing stronger mechs and solve his problems that way.

As far as Ves was concerned, the greatest significance of the Tortuous Scream was to serve as a siege platform and an excuse to link powerful mechs directly to the support systems of the battleship!

Ves and the high captain briefly spoke about the goals for their upcoming campaign.

Aside from pushing the native aliens back from intruding into the crucial upper zones, Ves also wanted the Premier Fleet to gather powerful tech and strategic resources.

"The Larkinson Clan has accrued a great amount of wealth recently." High Captain Gilbert noted. "Even if your recent investments have significantly reduced your warchest, your finances should still be healthy. It should not be too difficult for you to procure additional resources even if you have to pay enormous premiums."

"What I am looking for is not just mundane resources, captain. We still need a large amount of phasewater. Nobody is willing to sell or trade away this resource these days, so we need to gather it ourselves. Since we have not colonized any planets that

produce phasewater, we can only plunder it from our enemies. Aside from that, we need to acquire more superdimensional matter."

"Our clan already possesses the unique capability to open up a gateway into the Blue Dimension, sir. That alone ensures that we will always have access to a safe and stable supply of superdimensional matter. There is no need for us to take risks and confront enemies that are armed with lethal Saint Piercer arms."

"I don't see it that way." Ves shook his head. "It is exactly because we are able to equip our mechs with superdimensional weapons and armor that we must take the fight to the phase lords equipped with Saint Piercer weapons. The First Sword Mark III has become one of the few superdimensional ace mechs that can confidently confront enemies armed with these threatening weapons and easily gain the upper hand. By hunting and killing these phase lords, we are not only making greater contributions by depriving the Red Cabal of a powerful asset, but we can also capture the Saint Piercer arms and repurpose the bounty of superdimensional alloy."

There was also another reason that Ves did not mention. The Red Cabal only awarded Saint Piercer arms to the better and more proven greater phase lords.

That meant that their phasewater organs were likely superior!

Ves had become quite greedy for high-quality phasewater organs. Even if it took a long time for the Larkinson Biotech Institute to convert them into more useful products, Ves still wanted to accumulate as many good choices as possible.

Gilbert de Raanvanchas thought about what he had read in previous reports.

"The risks are greater, but... the rewards are also admittedly great. The Red Cabal has already begun to distribute more and more Saint Piercer arms to their trusted phase lords. That indicates that the native aliens have strengthened their supply of superdimensional matter. It will become more and more important to defeat the phase lords armed with Saint Piercer weapons. If we do not cull them frequently enough, they will continue to become more prevalent until nothing else but other superdimensional mechs can hold them back."

How the hell did the native aliens manage to get their superdimensional matter?!

Had a bunch of ancient phase whales managed to develop their own way of intruding into the Blue Dimension?

That sounded too outlandish to Ves. He was more inclined to believe the native aliens may have mastered the method of converting normal matter into superdimensional matter!

If this was the case, then stealing this trade secret was crucial to red humanity!

Only when humans mastered this process themselves would they be able to keep up with alien technological development!

Chapter 6927 The Vulcan's Glory

Obtaining the Tortuous Scream was a big development for the Larkinson Clan.

The firepower of her primary gun batteries was enough to devastate entire cities.

Naturally, the fleeters paid closer attention to how the Larkinson took control over the alien battleship.

Although the current war climate had made the Red Fleet a lot more preoccupied than before, that did not mean that Ves could abuse the power of the 3.6 kilometer-long warship as he pleased.

High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas along with an extensive number of security officers made sure to monitor the entire vessel and prevent anything untoward from happening.

All of the gun batteries had been locked down and physically cut off from any power sources.

The tubes of the large torpedo launchers and the smaller but more numerous missile launchers remained completely empty and sealed.

The only weapon systems that could be activated in a hurry were the tertiary gun batteries.

Despite their numbers, their threat level remained limited due to their paltry effective ranges and their small calibers.

Still, Ves received multiple reminders from various different people that he needed to wield the power of a warship carefully.

He personally thought it was a little ridiculous. A bunch of first-class multipurpose mechs already possessed the power to destroy a small settlement. Half a regiment of them could already turn a major city like Sandan into ruin once they managed to overwhelm the Titan Shields protecting all of the districts.

Yet just because mechs were individually smaller and weaker, many people automatically overlooked the enormous amounts of collateral damage they were capable of inflicting during major engagements.

Yet just because mechs were individually smaller and weaker, many people automatically overlooked the enormous amounts of collateral damage they were capable of inflicting during major engagements.

Ves had lived through battles where structures collapsed around him and where mechs could randomly fire a powerful laser weapon that could drill right through a wall and vaporize his entire body at any time. He knew better than to understand a mech's capacity for destruction.

Still, he begrudgingly admitted that the caution towards warships was not entirely unwarranted.

Mechs may be capable of destroying entire cities, but warships that were large and powerful enough had the potential to crack entire planets.

Even if they could only do so by relying on extremely powerful antimatter warheads, just the fact that the vessels received dispensation to carry armaments that were large and destructive enough to ruin entire continents forced everyone to treat them with a mixture of respect and vigilance.

Ves actually felt rather good about grasping this power for himself. Even if he had become a little underwhelmed by the Tortuous Scream's relatively poor suitability in most general space battles, he still appreciated the fact that he could command her formidable primary gun batteries to send a wave of destructive attacks in any direction of his choosing!

Although the Bluejay Fleet already possessed numerous warships, their primary guns weren't as big as that of the Tortuous Scream.

Ves also did not command them directly. If he wanted them to fire at a specific target, then he had to convince Admiral Gori Tensen and Commodore Zonrad Reze of the necessity.

Now that he gained control of a relatively modern orven battleship, he could skip all of that hassle and directly demand a cataclysmic round of orbital bombardment on any targets deemed 'acceptable'!

Ves had plenty of fun stuff in mind for the Tortuous Scream. He did not intend to put a heavy emphasis on upgrading his main warship, but if he was not able to obtain a better warship anytime soon, then it may be worth it to apply incremental upgrades over time.

Days after the arrival of the Tortuous Scream, other important vessels arrived.

One of them happened to be the second capital ship of the Premier Fleet.

"Vulcan's Glory has arrived."

The Eternal Vulcan Empire did not shirk its promise towards Ves.

Even though Ves had not talked directly with the Iron Emperor for a long time, his incarnation Vulcan was constantly being worshiped in every corner of the dwarven state.

It was a pity that a certain Rion Aaden did not hold much reverence towards Ves. Their complicated history made it impossible for the emperor to look up to the man who accidentally set him on his current path.

Rion did not even wear the Imperial Crown that Ves had painstakingly crafted for him. Vulcan possessed a direct connection to the masterwork crown, which enabled him to hear and observe anything that took place within its presence.

Unfortunately, the wiley dwarven leader clearly understood this truth, so he made sure to carefully lock up the Imperial Crown in a thick and isolating vault outside of ceremonial events.

The Iron Emperor mostly relied on the imposing mass and presence of his large and bulky suit of armor.

He even upgraded his suit of armor with a small mount of high-grade superdimensional alloy plating!

Even if the concentration of superdimensional matter was relatively low, it still made him look a lot stronger and more intimidating!

In any case, the addition of the Vulcan's Glory to the Premier Fleet pleased a lot of mech pilots.

The new 2.8-kilometer long fleet carrier was a truly modern capital ship that was able to accommodate 320 first-class multipurpose mech during extended campaigns.

As was typical of Vulcanite carriers, the Vulcan's Glory hosted more mech workshops than normal. She also possessed roomier cargo holds in order to accommodate a greater amount of supplies and plunder.

The downside was that she was also a little slower than other fleet carriers of the same length.

This was a concerning issue as Ves ideally wanted his fleet to remain fast and mobile enough to run away if it ever encountered enemies that were too powerful to confront.

Fortunately, the modern design and tech of the Vulcan's Glory meant that she was not as sluggish as she appeared. She could still keep up with the rest of the Premier Fleet and Bluejay Fleet if she overstrained her sub-light propulsion systems for a time.

As accepted the invitation to go on a tour in the modern Vulcanite fleet carrier, his family chose not to accompany him this time.

Instead, Trent Aaden had graciously offered to accompany Ves. The Vulcanite mech designer and liaison had multiple reasons to speak to Ves.

"Welcome aboard the Vulcan's Glory, sir. We are pleased to be able to hand over this fleet carrier to your possession."

The Vulcanites had organized a large and formal handover ceremony for Ves and the Larkinson Clan.

They forced Ves to participate in a lengthy ritual before they truly handed over control of the fleet carrier.

After that, Ves was finally allowed to tour the interior of the fleet carrier while the new crew arrived by shuttle and started to take over the most essential stations.

Ves looked up to the ceiling. "I am glad you dwarves did not make the ceiling too low for us humans. I am actually surprised at how much headroom we have."

Trend Aaden, the 'son' who was actually the test tube descendant of Rion Aaden, responded with a friendly smile.

"We are not as petty and impractical as the puelmer race. We do not deliberately need to lower the ceiling in order to discourage enemy tall folk from boarding our ships. Besides, the Vulcan's Glory is explicitly built to enter service in your clan, so we made sure to follow standard human naval design principles whenever possible."

The mech designer that studied how to design living mechs in the Design Department for a number of years diligently gave Ves a brisk tour through the fleet carrier.

He proudly introduced the well-equipped mech workshops that were more than capable of servicing or even fabricating advanced first-class multipurpose mechs.

He also introduced Ves to one of the 60 bunkers of the Vulcan's Glory.

"Only 35?"

"Yes. What the Vulcan's Glory lacks in numbers, she makes up for it by offering superior defenses to any bunker mechs."

While that sounded nice, Ves grew disappointed when he noted that there was no way to hook up the bunker mechs to the power network of the fleet carrier.

That was the rule, not the exception. Ves needed another RF Warship Token in order to make it legal.

He wondered how many groups would still bother to adhere to this rule once the Terran Alliance and other conspirators hatched their succession plan.

Perhaps Ves might follow suit as well once the Red Fleet gave up on enforcing its rules.

For now, the bunkers remained purely defensive in nature, though the bunkers of the Tortuous Scream were also impressive.

Aside from these features, the Vulcan's Glory did not offer too much novelty to the Larkinson Clan.

As the tour continued, Ves only paid cursory attention to the different facilities. It was all relatively high tech, but he had already become rather bored of this kind of stuff. The bridge, the data room and so on all promised excellent performance without offering anything too special or different.

The only exception was a rapid deployment system that had attracted Ves' attention from the beginning.

"This is the Gravitic Rapid Battlespace Deployment Catapult." Trent Aaden introduced with a more enthusiastic voice and expression than before. "This can be considered as one of the more uncommon specialties of this fleet carrier. The Gravitic Catapult occupies a notable amount of space in the hull, but there are good reasons for that. The sole purpose of this contraption is to launch individual mechs or protected containers of supplies to a distant location on the battlefield. Compared to launching mechs or shuttles from the hangar bays, the Gravitic Catapult can deliver its payload across greater distances in a matter of seconds rather than minutes!"

This truly sounded useful to Ves. He could see a lot of potential in it. The Gravitic Catapult could be used in many different ways.

For example, it could be used to launch the Superdimensional First Sword Mark III straight at a greater phase lord that thought he was safe in the rear of his own lines!

The Gravitic Catapult could also be used to launch E-MULES that had just replenished their energy reserves and urgently needed to return to their mech units in order to give them a second wind.

The Vulcan's Glory could also utilize her catapult to launch containers filled with ammunition canisters, missile racks and other essential supplies to the mechs that were deployed on the other side of the battlefield.

Though none of the dwarves mentioned it, Ves knew that another possible way to make use of the Gravitic Catapult was to launch a formidable explosive warhead to a distant target.

All in all, the Gravitic Catapult granted the Vulcan's Glory a core capability that the Tormented Scream lacked.

"This is extremely useful." Ves complimented the Vulcanites for their ingenuity. "Being able to launch mechs and other stuff at more distant locations on an active battlefield can be a life saver in many situations. Cutting down on travel time is always useful."

"We are pleased to hear that, sir, but please remember that the Gravitic Catapult can only launch one object at a time. It requires a considerable amount of time to reset and accumulate energy for another launch."

That somewhat constrained the usage of the Gravitic Catapult. It could not be used to send an entire mech battalion to a distant location all at once or in quick succession. It also consumed a lot of energy per launch.

Most of the mechs stationed in the Vulcan's Glory were better off launching from the hangar bay and make their way to their target destinations by relying on the power of their own flight systems.

Despite all of these limitations, Ves did not lose his appreciation for the Gravitic Catapult.

He even began to consider another possible use case for this feature.

"Is it possible for the Gravitic Catapult to launch a human phase lord... like myself?"

"..."

"According to the data on your true body, your height exceeds the ceiling of the launch tunnel. You will not be able to fit in the Gravitic Catapult, especially if you are wearing rigid armor."

Ves grinned. "That is only when I am standing upright. What if I lie down and launch from the tube like a superhero?"

"We... will need to investigate that further."

Chapter 6928 The Moloch Squadron

Though Ves ultimately got over the novelty of having a Gravitic Catapult at his disposal, he still remained fascinated by the possibilities it opened up. Being able to deliver any payload hundreds or thousands of kilometers away at a rapid speed was incredibly useful.

Speed dictated the outcome of a battle. The faster side had more initiative and could respond to enemy movements faster.

Ves and commanders such as Casella Ingvar understood the importance of speeding up deployments. They would not have to wait precious minutes for their next moves to take effect.

That was how important it was for the Premier Fleet to obtain a fleet carrier that possessed her own Gravitic Catapult.

The much smaller combat carriers of the Premier Fleet could not accommodate such a demanding system. Their hulls were too short and their power generators were too weak to support this feature.

All-in-all, Ves was satisfied with what the Eternal Vulcan Empire had supplied to the Larkinson Clan.

He could do without all of the overt religious iconography, though.

The Vulcanites were not secularists. They designed and built their starships as if they were cathedrals to their human or dwarven god.

Ves had encountered more busts, paintings and projected images of Vulcan throughout the interior of the fleet carrier to last a lifetime!

Aside from this wrinkle, he had little to complain about the fleet carrier. The capital ship added a lot of value to the Premier Fleet.

Due to the presence of the Gravitic Catapult, it was a given that Saint Dise Larkinson and the First Sword Mark III should make their home within the Vulcan's Glory.

While Ves thought about keeping the powerful superdimensional ace mech closer to home by stationing her and her pilot inside the Tortuous Scream, he quickly thought that this was a redundant move.

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar and the Minerva Mark II should offer sufficient protection against most threats that were able to sneak up to the alien battleship.

Even though logic dictated that it would have been better for the ace command mech to pair up with the fleet carrier, the Tortuous Scream was the true flagship of the Premier Fleet.

The bridge of the alien battleship had already been modified to accommodate the presence of the Minerva Mark II.

It would be much harder to add this command integration option to the Vulcan's Glory. The fleet carrier had already been built. If Ves wanted to add this feature, then he should have requested it during the initial design phase.

Another issue related to the Vulcan's Glory was that her construction was not entirely finished.

Sure, her hull structure and exterior were fully constructed.

The real issue was that the Vulcanite shipbuilders had rushed the construction and assembly of many interior compartments. They delivered the fleet carrier to the Larkinson Clan because Ves was in a hurry and because the Vulcanites wanted to lay down a new hull as fast as possible.

The Vulcanites had only completed the most barebones work needed to make the capital ship functional for the most part. There were real safety hazards and lack of redundancies that made the vessel a lot more prone to accidents.

Fortunately, all of this could be fixed over time. The Larkinsons that had taken over the Vulcan's Glory from the Eternal Vulcan Empire had already begun to complete all of the remaining construction jobs.

There was no need to bring the Vulcan's Glory to a drydock as the internal work did not impose heavy demands.

Ves just needed to take into account that it was best not to assign any strenuous or risky missions to the Vulcan's Glory.

"Now that we have received the promised fleet carrier from your state, will you be departing back to your home state?"

Trent Aaden glumly nodded. "My fellow dwarves and I have been recalled to the Eternal Vulcan Empire. Our expertise in living mechs has been deemed vital, and we are more needed among our people than ever. We appreciate all you have taught us, professor. While my work does not deserve your acknowledgement as of yet, I am confident that I will be able to present my mechs to you with my head lifted high one day."

Ves smiled and placed his hand on the dwarven mech designer's shoulder. "I may have tutored you and your fellow dwarves on how to design living mechs, but there is more to our field than that. Do not hesitate to pursue your own ideas even if they have little to do with living mechs. Each of you has good potential. You just need to possess the imagination and determination to forge your own path."

Ves would miss the dwarves, but their departure should also make the Design Department a lot more secure. The absence of guest designers should make it easier to keep all of their work more concealed.

As the dwarven guest designers held a small-scale party to celebrate their 'graduation' from the Design Department, Ves already moved on to the next big development on the agenda.

After a lengthy journey, the Red Collective's reinforcements had finally entered the New Constantinople System!

Three sub-capital warships of the 'Moloch Squadron' joined the Bluejay Fleet. They consisted of a light cruiser as well as a scout frigate as well as a much more precious stealth frigate!

Ves did not need to understand their specs to understand the purpose of every ship of the RC squadron.

The Moloch served as the base and home of all of the cultivators assigned to shadow and protect Ves.

Although she was 'merely' a light cruiser, the ship still offered enough internal space to adequately accommodate over 400 qi cultivators!

Their numbers sounded small, but each of them had made significant attainments in different forms of cultivation, many of which were related to production or assistance.

This meant that the cultivators dispatched by the Red Collective had definitely proven to be among the more talented of their populations.

400 qi cultivators sounded like a lot, but they had successfully managed to set themselves apart from their peers due to their strong callings.

They were the core personnel that Ves was determined to grasp in his hands, but the only way to make this happen was to win them over and convince them that serving the Larkinson Clan was for the best.

Aside from that, the Red Collective had also been generous enough to send two frigates with very different purposes in mind.

The stealth frigate's role was obvious. She was meant to quietly approach an enemy fleet or position and allow the cultivators on board to work their magic.

Whether that was activating their invisibility tricks before infiltrating enemy ranks, or to bring a batch of curse masters close enough to secretly plot the demise of critical alien officers, the stealth frigate clearly synergized well with the cultivators of the Moloch Squadron!

The scout frigate lacked the stealth capabilities of the previous hull, but made up for it with unparalleled speed.

If the Larkinsons failed and got entangled in a losing battle, then the scout frigate was compelled to evacuate all of the cultivators as well as other VIPs whenever possible.

Outside of that, the scout frigate could be used as a regular vessel. The small ship did not appear to possess any special accommodations for specific groups of cultivators.

With the arrival of the Moloch Squadron, Ves had to go out once again.

He had grown a little tired and overwhelmed at welcoming so many new people and assets to his growing band.

He still forced himself to put on his best face and properly greet the envoys and soldiers of the Red Collective.

Ves appreciated her initiative. When he looked up her record on the galactic net, he immediately understood that the middle-aged looking woman was actually more than 2 centuries old!

She did not exaggerate when it came to her record. She studied and graduated with degrees in mathematics, theoretical physics and strangely enough human philosophy!

Aside from that, she had climbed up the ranks of her university and received an appointment to serve as a dean of a mathematics department.

For whatever reason, instead of remaining at her cushy job, the older woman had committed to practicing qi cultivation as soon as the Red Collective opened up its doors for business!

Andrea Vos did not take too long before finding her true calling. She had not only studied to become a highly respectable formation master, but also specialized in an unusual but highly useful form of spell arrays!

"I have become known as the 'Farseer' for my rapid but effective understanding of scrying and anti-scrying spell arrays. None of the formulas that I have learned and deciphered in the past are directly useful to us, but my learning ability remains as good as ever."

Ves looked intrigued at the mention of scrying.

He wanted to investigate this further so badly, but this was not the time for him to become fascinated by an immediate shiny.

Ves tried his best to distract himself from his temptations focusing on rational considerations.

He continued to talk with Formation Master Andrea Vos on how to integrate the qi cultivators within the ranks.

It was quite pleasant to speak with Andrea Vos. Those who successfully got started in the Formation Master series tended to be incredibly smart and highly analytical.

The so-called Farseer could accurately divine the deaths of most people. She could voice a few specific words or push her chosen ones to fight harder, but her authority still remained rather paltry.

"The main reason why the soldiers of the Moloch Squadron allow me to be in charge is because of faith." Andrea Vos explained. "It is not because my power trumps theirs in all circumstances. If my decisions ever violate the interests of a powerful enough individual, then I will not be able to wrangle everyone to back a single provision."

She sounded more like a babysitter than their actual leader. Ves did not envy her burden, especially when others such as the human phase lords of the Red Collective scolded the children.

There were times where her expression exposed how tired she had become after trying to glue the pieces back together again.

"We are able to offer a wide variety of services to you." The old woman said. "The list is self-explanatory for the most part. We may be lacking in experience, but we are fast learners."

"Tell me more about your own specialization then, madame. What does scrying actually entail?"

The Farseer smiled. "Scrying in its most basic form is a means to observe what is happening outside of my field of vision. In this context, scrying has become a discipline that enables for scrying at longer distances. The vision-granting source can also convey other phenomena when I have become more powerful."

"So if I ask you to, are you able to peek inside the hulls of enemy starships and listen to enemy commanders formulate their plans to fight against our forces?" Ves asked.

"It is possible for us to do so, but we require initial intelligence to identify the target and form a spell array that can keep the scrying window on the right target. We may also be limited by distance. We may need to make use of the stealth frigate to bring me closer to their minds. As long as our enemies have not implemented specific countermeasures, my scrying should be able to penetrate everywhere."

Chapter 6929 The Astral Mirror

The formation master that already earned the moniker of Farseer possessed amazing capabilities.

She casually demonstrated her ability to observe distant locations by using a mirror made out of high-grade hyper materials to conjure up a view of an ongoing conference of a large industrial company taking place in a meeting room in Sandan down on the surface of New Constantinople VIII!

Ves looked impressed as he looked at what was basically a live feed of a sensitive corporate meeting!

"It even has sound!" He gasped in surprise. "Can you transmit messages through this mirror?"

"No." Andrea Vos shook her head as she maintained her concentration to keep up the 'live feed'. "Scrying is the act of glimpsing events from afar. My Astral Mirror can channel what I am able to sense on a surface that can be watched by others, but I am not able to establish a two-way communication channel. That requires a different set of techniques and spell arrays that I have yet to master."

She maintained the scrying feed for a dozen more seconds before she cut it off. What she had done was technically a violation of privacy laws, but neither of the two cared about this little detail.

Ves thought of all of the implications of having a formation master who specialized in scrying in his crew. The Farseer had immediately demonstrated her value to him. He immediately concluded that he had to secure her allegiance.

Information was power. Being able to spy on unsuspecting people and aliens from afar was a fantastic capability!

Her addition to the Bluejay Fleet alone made up for the absence of a couple of human phase lords.

While those big boys from the Flesh Chopper Phalanx could help the Premier Fleet win battles that it otherwise should have lost, a strong intelligence asset such as the Farseer could help the Larkinsons avoid those costly confrontations in the first place!

The superior intelligence gathering capabilities of a specialized scryer was just what the Premier Fleet needed to navigate the dangerous new frontier!

It was not just the talented and capable formation master herself that caught his attention.

Her artifact also stood out to his senses. The 'Astral Mirror' was a highly decorative head-sized artifact that possessed a powerful presence on its own.

Although he was not entirely sure whether it could be classified as a high-level artifact, it was definitely a lot stronger and more special than the more mundane variety of artifacts.

Whoever designed and created it knew his way around with metals and materials. The masterwork artifact blended hyper materials and transphasic materials in a way that created a mirror with the express purpose of facilitating the Farseer's scrying capabilities.

Ves' sharp senses detected the typical signs of a formation anchor. The Astral Mirror was embedded with a permanent spell array that could save a formation master a lot of time and effort into performing the act of scrying.

What was more was that the artifact held a strong core of power that went beyond normal E energy manipulation.

Whenever he tried to probe it further, he felt a strong repulsion from the artifact. That was not normal, especially for an object that lacked the accumulation of growth.

"This mirror..."

The Farseer proudly smiled. "I exchanged a large amount of merits and savings to commission the creation of this Astral Mirror. The Industrial Department obliged and assigned this task to the Silver Artisan, one of its famed master goldsmiths and gemcutters. Together, the Silver Artisan and I have designed this artifact to not only facilitate and partially automate my scrying, but also increase my ability to overcome interference."

"Is that a big problem?"

"Yes. As magical as my methods may seem, scrying is akin to creating an invisible but enormously lengthy telescope that is precisely focused at a distant location. It is not only difficult to pinpoint the right coordinates, but also overcome any factors that can disturb the scrying attempt. Excessive energy releases, cosmic radiation, stellar radiation, thruster discharges, electromagnetic jamming, E energy distortions, spatial distortions, true resonance and so on all degrade the 'signals' that I can project to the surface of the Astral Mirror."

That caused Ves to frown. Scrying did not sound as reliable as he initially assumed. If regular sources of interference could degrade the quality of the scrying feeds, then the Farseer might not be able to observe as much as he hoped.

"So the artifact helps with counteracting all of this interference?"

"Yes, but only up to a point. The strength of my cultivation, the effectiveness of my spell arrays and my understanding of the relevant concepts are the key determinants to the range and fidelity of my scrying attempts. The Astral Mirror serves as an amplifier. It can make good scrying attempts better, but it will not help an incompetent formation master succeed. This is why no one else in the Moloch Squadron is effectively able to make use of it aside from myself."

Ves looked closer at the Astral Mirror. The silvery and decorative artifact still possessed greater metaphorical weight than it should.

He had a feeling that he was missing an important detail.

"This artifact..."

"There is another important reason why this is a priceless artifact to many." The former academic said. "One of the steps to crafting this mirror involves the ritual step of quenching it into a solution that blends phasewater, liquid hyper materials as well as a single drop of blood from the Spacelock."

Wait, what?!

"You guys actually managed to request a donation of blood from a god pilot?!"

The Farseer's smile grew wider. "Yes, but it is not I who made the request, but the Silver Artisan. His works have impressed several god pilots. The Industrial Department is filled with talents. Every cultivator has a use for powerful artifacts, which is why it has become one of the most profitable departments of the Red Collective. Multiple impressive master artisans have taken it over and turned it into a center of extraordinary artificing. I had to empty two centuries worth of savings and investments just to commission a scrying artifact that is strong enough to accompany me for many years."

Ves looked impressed. He did not think she was lying because he had experienced the Spacelock's immensely powerful presence in the past.

Although the Astral Mirror had only come into contact with a small portion of his blood, it still carried the echo of that signature.

That instantly made the artifact a lot more valuable!

The Astral Mirror was a specialized tool that could only demonstrate its true value in the hands of a formation master that specialized in scrying.

If Avatar Commander Melkor Larkinson got his hands on it, he would not be able to use it for anything aside from using it as a food platter.

That was because Melkor specialized in employing sealing-type spell arrays!

Scrying fell under the category of utility spell arrays, which encompassed a large and disorganized collection of qi formations that did not fit into the standard categories.

The value of scrying was undeniable to any competent military force, but not that many formation masters were willing to specialize in this esoteric field.

Not only was it a lot harder to master, but it also did not produce any dramatic effects on the battlefield.

The willingness to send Formation Master Andrea Vos and her precious Astral Mirror showed that the collies were truly willing to invest in him and his future.

"So how does it help to quench this mirror in the diluted blood of the Spacelock?"

"It is considerably easier for me to use the Astral Mirror to scry past spatial disturbances." The woman responded. "This is important considering that many alien starships rely heavily on phasewater technology. I am also able to spy on enemy phase lords, though depending on how perceptive they are, they may be able to detect my attempt and take measures to disturb my observations."

Strong and perceptive cultivators generally developed senses that naturally made them more sensitive to unusual phenomena.

Scrying was a particularly targeted act of privacy invasion that had a greater likelihood of tripping alarms.

"So any strong cultivator can detect and interrupt your scrying attempts?"

"Yes, but as my techniques and mastery improves, I can lower the detection rate, thereby allowing me to spy on powerful individuals without getting caught." The woman explained.

This reassured Ves. The Farseer might not be able to spy directly on powerful individuals in the present, but she should be able to improve that so long as she continued to progress as a formation master.

"What sort of people are more easily able to detect your scrying attempts?"

"From what I have been able to ascertain, most general qi cultivators of middling strength are not able to detect my scrying attempts unless they have been forewarned. It is much harder to remain undetected when they know what they are looking for. Aside from that, expert pilots and especially ace pilots can detect my scrying attempts right away. Their instincts are too sharp. Even if I do not dare to harbor any hostile intent, the mere act of intruding on the sanctity of their privacy already constitutes a hostile act from their perspective."

It was a good thing the native aliens did not engage in willpower cultivation.

This also told Ves that there was peril in trying to scry other human forces.

The most important human command centers and headquarters tended to be guarded by ace pilots. They were too useful at preventing infiltration due to the effectiveness of their Saint Kingdoms.

"What about body cultivators such as alien phase lords? How well are you able to spy on them, madame?"

"The Astral Mirror is designed to counteract their spatial distortions more effectively." The Farseer answered. "Even so, I cannot guarantee that my attempts will succeed. The human phase lords that I have practiced on are sharper than usual due to possessing companion spirits. Yet even without them, these superhumans possess expanded minds and greater awareness. If they are complacent, then it is easier for them to overlook suspicious signals. If they are aware of the possibility of scrying, then it is harder to catch them off-guard. The more powerful the phase lord, the more energy I need to expend to overcome their passive resistance. This subsequently makes it easier to detect my scrying attempts. I will still need to verify this in reality."

Ves frowned in thought. "I see. What you said makes sense. I hope you will be able to improve your performance over time. Phase lords are by far the most important enemies that our Premier Fleet needs to guard against. The more intelligence you can collect on them, the better. In that sense, the Astral Mirror is precisely the right tool for the job."

"Rest assured that I am actively in the process of improving and refining my scrying methods in this direction."

"What about the other way around? While I don't think the native aliens will be able to spy on us from afar, since you are able to do it, there has to be other formation masters that can do the same. How well will you be able to protect our fleet from unsolicited scrying?"

The Farseer smirked. "Since I am a competent scryer, I am also adept at preventing it. I may need the help of artifact makers, but I can design and make spell arrays that can block most common scrying attempts. Even if a more competent scryer than myself is able to overcome the blockade, my qi formations should at least be able to trigger an alarm that can notify you of a possible intelligence breach."

"That sounds extremely useful. I will make sure that the T Institute and the rest of our clan will give you whatever support you need to put up these safeguards."

Chapter 6930 Mastering the Laws of Reality

The Red Collective did not gather a random group of qi cultivators and sent them off to Ves before calling it a day.

Whoever was in charge of setting up the Moloch Squadron put a lot of thought behind the selection of personnel to reinforce the Bluejay Fleet.

In hindsight, it shouldn't have been surprising that the collies sent a remarkably competent formation master to Ves who specialized in scrying.

This was because Ves was too important of a leader and innovator to remain vulnerable to this novel method of remote observation.

Even if Ves was confident enough that his Spirituality or his companion spirit would have been sensitive enough to detect and counteract such attempts, they might not be able to prevent all scrying attempts if they remained unaware of this potential method of intrusion.

Besides, Ves was not the only target of scrying. What if an unknown party tried to spy on his wife, his children or the other members of his clan?

Formation masters also did not sit still. They were constantly exploring the limits of their craft and improving the depth of their techniques. Their spell arrays were fairly rudimentary as they had only just started out, but they would definitely become a lot more refined in the coming years and decades.

It was not impossible for scryers such as the Farseer to improve their methods to the point where they could easily spy on Ves from a distance without setting off any alarms!

While Ves remained reasonably confident that ace pilots such as the Saint Commander Casella Ingvar and Saint Dise would be able to catch and squash most attempts, they couldn't remain in their cockpits and by his side all of the time.

It was much better to invest in specialized countermeasures. This must be the primary reason why the Red Collective sent a formation master as good as the Farseer to the Larkinson Clan.

It appeared that the Red Collective had already opened Pandora's Box.

The return of systematic cultivation to red humanity revived a lot of old and nearly forgotten specializations.

From scryers to curse masters, human cultivators mastered much richer and more diverse methods than a few years prior.

If not for the fact that the native aliens attracted everyone's hostility, Ves should have been a lot more afraid of what other human groups might do to the Larkinsons!

Strength remained the ultimate safety guarantee. Only by becoming as strong as a god pilot would Ves be able to shake off or deter most of these threats.

Ves continued to hold an avid discussion with Formation Master Andrea Vos about the value of scrying and anti-scrying.

The Larkinson Clan absolutely could not afford to neglect this new facet of E energy manipulation!

Ves even thought about whether he could upgrade the Astral Mirror. He surreptitiously glanced at it so many times that he lost count.

As a mech designer and a craftsman, he could understand the exquisiteness of this artifact.

After learning that it had come into contact with the blood of the Spacelock, Ves felt the professional urge to study and dismantle the work.

He wanted to learn all of its secrets!

Ves naturally suppressed this destructive urge. His desire to understand the Silver Artisan's proprietary crafting methods was too selfish.

He could not afford to break the Astral Mirror!

Ves already possessed a well-developed crafting style of his own. He had mastered his own collection of techniques that made up his core skillset.

If that was not enough, he could reach beyond his own inherent capabilities by borrowing the much richer and more diverse techniques acquired by Vulcan!

In short, he had no reason to feel jealous towards the Silver Artisan. The man was a full-time goldsmith long before the Age of Dawn. It was natural for him to quickly master extraordinary smithing methods and create an artifact as special as the Astral Mirror.

Ves was capable of creating his own powerful artifacts. With the ability to infuse life into his creations, he could produce works that were much more intelligent and responsive than others.

Then there was Demoncasting which he had yet to fully explore!

After reminding himself that he had no reasons to feel envious towards the Silver Artisan, Ves slowly suppressed his less productive urges and tried his best to focus on more important subjects.

He asked a lot of questions about the Farseer's scrying capabilities.

At this moment, she was able to scry events taking place on lots of planets and moons in the New Constantinople System.

"My maximum range is not a constant." She explained to him. "My scrying effectiveness fluctuates based on time, location, symbolism and luck. It is exhausting to explain the variables to you in detail. Under predominantly favorable circumstances, I can observe as far as the edge of the current star system. Under predominantly adverse circumstances I may not be able to scry the other side of a planet."

Ves frowned when he processed her words.

The Farseer's scrying capabilities did not sound very reliable.

According to her description, her floor was low and her ceiling was high.

This meant that she could be virtually omniscient on a good day, but become almost blind on a bad day!

Ves scratched his head. "Your abilities are too random."

The older woman looked almost offended by his contempt. "That is one of the disadvantages of pioneering a relatively obscure and difficult branch of qi formations. I am one of the most accomplished scryers of the Red Collective. I have penned dozens of academic articles that hundreds of formation masters rely upon to gain proficiency in this branch of spell arrays. I have spent most of my research and experimentation on extending the maximum range of my scrying capabilities. I have yet to turn my focus on increasing the stability and reliability of my techniques. That shall come later as it is more important to prove that scrying has a bright future."

Her strategy was sound. Scrying was a useful capability to be certain, but there was a big difference in being able to spy on people a few hundred kilometers away and half a star system away!

As long as Andrea Vos was able to do the latter, even if she was not able to repeat this feat very often, she would most certainly cement her value and the usefulness of her craft!

In any case, her claims already convinced Ves. He had to keep her in his pocket at all costs.

There was no way he wanted to let go of such a powerful intelligence gathering asset.

It did not matter if her current abilities and qi formations were inadequate at this time. She was a cultivator and could slowly develop her abilities over time. She had excellent growth prospects considering her deep foundation as an academic.

That was not the only reason for Ves to value the old woman. In order to be appointed as the leader of the cultivators of the Moloch Squadron, her leadership ability must be the real deal.

As long as she continued to do a good job, then Ves did not have to worry about trying to keep all of the messy RC cultivators happy. It would be a nightmare for him to manage them directly.

Their needs, desires and inclinations were so different that it would take up all of his time if he wanted to cater to all of their needs.

After Ves learned what he wanted to know about the Farseer's scrying abilities, the discussion soon turned to the capabilities of the other cultivators of the Moloch Squadron.

Just as he expected, the faction of the Red Collective that sent out the Moloch Squadron attempted to make a statement.

"I am glad to be away from the Astral Octagon." Andrea Vos confessed to Ves. "The foundation of the Red Collective is too weak. It has only been founded fairly recently

and has yet to establish a strong and unified culture. Its institutions are still developing and many different leaders and factions are attempting to establish dominance that can last for centuries. At this time, the Phase Lord Department has made the greatest accomplishments. Unlike other cultivators, the human phase lords of the Ur-Titan Phalanx and more recently the Flesh Chopper Phalanx are able to make an immediate difference on the battlefield. They are not subtle at all. Their size and direct combat power allows them to take credit for any success without dispute."

Ves nodded in understanding. "I see. I already guessed that would be the case. It is much more difficult to attribute a successful battle or operation to the work of other cultivators when they are mostly working in the background. The intelligence gathered through your scrying attempts can also make a difference, but because the relationship is indirect, it is difficult to earn recognition from the masses."

"This is why we want to prove ourselves by assisting you in your campaign and other endeavors, sir. Many of us are of the opinion that cultivators should be more than giant brutes who only rely on their enormous bodies to crush their enemies as if they are primitives. The true wonder of systematic cultivation is to enable us to grasp the power to reshape reality and wield forces beyond mortal comprehension. This is why many of us are avid volunteers. We may not be able to fight the aliens directly, but we intend to provide so much assistance that your Premier Fleet will suffer the least amount of losses when fighting against the native aliens."

In other words, her faction wanted to prove their value as force multipliers. They wanted to prove the usefulness of qi cultivation that did not demand people train to enter the battlefield directly.

It was absurd for a woman who worked as a scientist for more than 2 centuries to take up arms and fight the native aliens directly!

The founding of the Red Collective granted non-combatants such as the Farseer a new way to make massive contributions to the war effort. This was her chance and the chance for other qi cultivators to prove their value as a new class of force multipliers.

If the combination between the Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet performed exceptionally well in the coming months, then the Moloch Squadron would be able to claim credit for at least a part of the success.

Ves had no doubt that the Red Three and many other groups would be paying close attention to the victories as well as the processes that led to these outcomes.

Many smart people would be gathering every scrap of data they could get their hands on and analyze the reasons for all of the victories. The Moloch Squadron should not be shy about circulating word of any contributions made by the qi cultivators.

So long as they truly proved themselves useful, Ves did not mind affirming their contributions.

Although he did not have a lot of appetite for intervening in the factional disputes of the RC, he would not belittle the contributions of the Moloch Squadron so long as it actually made a positive difference.

"All we ask for is a fair opportunity." The Farseer made a short bow towards Ves in respect and gratitude. "We do not want human phase lords to become the face of the Red Collective. It would set the wrong tone and cause our superorganization to become too focused on martial pursuits. The state of the Red War is constantly pushing our civilization into a spiral of violence and barbarism. It may be tempting for humans to grasp this power, but we cannot forget that our race has only become strong by relying on our intellect and ingenuity. Only by mastering the expanded laws of reality will we be able to become the masters of the Red Ocean."