

## Mech Touch 6981

Chapter 6981: Ferrum

The Larkinson Clan designated medium-grade and high-grade superdimensional matter as strategic resources.

This meant that they had to be placed in secure vaults whenever possible. Not just anyone could take the materials out and use them however they wanted.

They needed to submit an application and wait for approval before withdrawing the permitted amounts of strategic resources.

That was not the end of the story. They had to make use of the materials in a timely manner and submit their logs and reports to prove they made meaningful use of what they had obtained.

If they did not do this, then they would get into serious trouble.

Just because the Larkinson Clan had grown wealthy and flush with phasewater and other resources did not mean that it tolerated waste!

If mech designers or other professionals could not be bothered to provide a proper accounting for their work, then they did not deserve to get close to the clan's strategic reserves.

Ves couldn't be bothered with that hassle.

Back when he was still a proper patriarch of his own clan, he could visit the vaults whenever he liked and take out every material he chose without any concern.

While he still made sure to update the logs and write proper reports on his progress, that was mostly because it was a good habit for serious mech designers to document their work.

He did not submit his reports to anyone because he was his own boss.

This time, Ves had no intention of transmitting his logs and work files to the Saint Commander or any other Larkinson.

The mechanical cat avatar was a creation designed for skulking and sabotage.

Its existence enabled him to become an active participant in a battle by creating mischief behind enemy lines.

In truth, Ves did not expect to be able to accomplish anything massive with this fine piece of craftsmanship.

He just wanted to get involved in this battle and future ones.

The creation of his latest mechanical avatar would fulfill his goal in a safe and relatively low-risk manner.

Of course, losing the cat avatar would definitely represent a considerable loss to Ves and the Larkinson Clan.

Although Ves kept it small to facilitate stealth and reduce its demand on resources, it still did not change the fact that Ves invested small but valuable quantities of superdimensional matter.

The hull-grade stuff was not too precious, but the weapon-grade superdimensional matter was much scarcer and more important!

In order to produce the claws and teeth, Ves did not withdraw the weapon-grade superdimensional matter from one of the vaults.

Instead, he simply repurposed the existing samples that he already brought into his private lab in order to conduct his own observations and experiments on them. Most of them were still running according to the directions he programmed in the lab machines.

It did not take much weapon-grade superdimensional matter to arm his mechanical avatar with one of the sharpest and most deadly set of claws and teeth in existence.

As Ves carefully affixed the sharp implements one by one, the lethality of his creation rose by another measure.

Finally his work became complete.

"Congratulations, sir. You succeeded. You created another masterwork."

Ves smirked in satisfaction. "I expected this outcome, but it is still a relief that it has come true. It is a big challenge to use superdimensional tools to process superdimensional alloy. What you are able to see with your eyes is only part of the story. If I was not a phase lord, this would have been much harder, especially if we don't have access to the advanced superdimensional production machines developed by the major powers."

The Red Three and the first-rate colonial superstates had already made good use of their formidable research and industrial capabilities to develop initial sets of superdimensional production lines.

The Larkinson Clan on the other hand was not as capable. Last he heard, the Larkinson Advanced Research and Development Institute or LARDI had only made 30 percent progress in this effort.

The people over there needed a lot more time before they could produce a set of superdimensional production machines that likely performed only a fraction as well as that of the major powers.

Still, at least it belonged to the Larkinsons. Ves and the others no longer had to knock on the doors of the Red Association if they wanted to borrow their exclusive equipment again.

Unfortunately, the LARDI's slow progress meant that Ves would likely have to make the same decision as Ketis and ask for the Red Association's assistance in upgrading the Riot to his superdimensional Mark III iteration.

Ves may have directed most of his time and enthusiasm towards the Arboreal Project as of late, but that did not mean he neglected his commitment to Venerable Rosa Orfan.

The Riot Mark III Project was still plodding along. In fact, many of the important design choices had already been made. The design was also not particularly complicated outside of the innovative and unconventional Chaos Armor.

Jovy Armalon had taken responsibility for designing this reality-warping armor system, while Gloriana was still busy with trying to figure out how to integrate archetech with superdimensional matter.

Ves and Master Laila Rebecca Devos took over other responsibilities, which were still fairly much but not as time-consuming as the aforementioned work.

At this stage, the latter two were mainly waiting for Jovy but especially Gloriana to complete their difficult but critical research.

Once they both figured out how to integrate superdimensional matter into the Riot Mark III, the project would finally enter the next phase where they would be designing it straight to completion.

Last he heard, Gloriana and her research associates had been making progress. This was good news. So long as they made progress, there was hope that they would deliver a positive result within a reasonable timeframe.

"Shall we proceed to test your creation, sir?" Alexa asked.

"Ah, yes, of course. Let us clean up this workshop and subject my latest work to a thorough examination. I will call over a few people later so they can witness my latest work."

Several hours went by. Ves stood proudly as he stood before a floating platform that supported a lifeless mechanical cat.

Although his latest work did not make use of archetech, the cat still possessed a exotic and almost alien vibe.

The brand-new creation generated a sense of unease among the observers that was difficult to dispel.

Part of it was due to the black Solus armor plating. It dampened almost every signal and emission that tried to pass through it. This made it difficult for others to take the latest creation's measure.

The black cat avatar could be as harmless as a normal house cat or a force of nature that possessed the power to depopulate entire planets!

"Is this the secret weapon that you have been working on, Ves?" Casella asked.

"Yup." Ves proudly replied. "Don't look down on Ferrum. He is extremely deadly. His superdimensional arsenal is strong enough to cut straight through your personal shield generators and swipe your heads off your necks."

That description generated considerable alarm among the small audience. They made sure not to step too close to the dormant machine.

"Why does it, him, resemble a copy of Lucky?" Gloriana asked an obvious question.

"Meow?"

The gem cat accompanied her to this control room.

As soon as Lucky caught sight of the mechanical cat, he grew confused.

Was he looking at himself?

It was only when Lucky repeatedly turned his head around to compare his body to that of the new mechanical cat that he noticed the differences.

Lucky had fully incorporated archetech, though he had not made much progress in manifesting the superdimensional matter that had become a part of his diet.

Ferrum on the other hand was still based on conventional human tech, but it was made out of more superior materials.

There were other notable differences between the two dark cats.

Their exterior plating deviated slightly in tone.

Lucky's armor plating possessed a lot more texture as well due to archetech.

Their body proportions also did not entirely match with each other. Ves had clearly taken inspiration from Lucky's design, but he also referenced the body shapes of other cats, including that of Veronica.

In order to maximize the chances of turning Ferrum into a masterwork, Ves designed his latest creation so that he could gain his own identity. Although his artifact spirit had only just been born and still lacked a well-defined personality, that could develop in time.

"How does it work?" The Saint Commander asked.

"It relies on the same principles as my other mechanical avatars. Do you remember them? I have completed three of them and deposited them in different locations."

"Ah, I recall." Gloriana said. "You haven't made prominent use of them yet as far as I know."

Ves sighed. "That is because I found that people react weirdly when they talk to Aureus, Argent or Aes. They look like dwarves in order to strengthen their connection with Vulcan. This makes it much easier for me to control them by remote for extended periods of time. However, people still have difficulty associating them with me. It is usually better if I just talk to the people over at the Astral Octagon or the expeditionary fleet by calling them over the galactic net."

Red humanity was not ready to accept all of the wonders of the Age of Dawn.

People probably wouldn't raise an eyebrow if Ves created a conventional mechanical avatar that worked on old-fashioned conventional technology.

In contrast, the notion of a remote mechanical avatar controlled by the creator through the spark of himself that he had left behind in his masterwork sounded completely bonkers!

Oh well. Ves believed that red humans would slowly become more acclimatized to the weirdness over time, assuming that they did not lose the Red War.

"Ferrum is my fifth mechanical avatar." Ves explained further. "He is mainly created for infiltration and sabotage. Many of his features are designed to facilitate this purpose. However, he can also put up a mean fight. His hull-grade superdimensional body will enable him to resist most attacks. The miniature transphasic hyper luminar crystal gun integrated in the tip of the tail grants him the ability to assassinate key targets from a distance. The weapon-grade superdimensional claws and teeth enable him to bite or cut through pretty much every obstacle."

Saint Dise grew more and more interested in the small but surprisingly formidable mechanical cat avatar!

"So this is the weapon that you want my First Sword Mark III to transport to the enemy. What do you intend to do with him once he enters an alien stronghold?"

"Steal data." Ves seriously answered. "I am sick and tired of working with incomplete or missing information on phase lords. All of those phase lords are never without company. They are all accompanied by their own minions, retainers, slaves or whatever. Each of them are responsible for serving their native god in many different ways. What I need is to sneak onto their ships or other strongholds and snoop around until I am able to access their data room or archives. Ferrum is equipped with hacking suites and other hardware that is useful for stealing large amounts of data."

"Can your hacking suite interface with alien computer systems?"

"It should." Ves said. "The Terrans freely gave me the hardware designs and related software when I asked. Their work should be pretty good, though Ferrum's processing power is the main limiter. I don't expect to be able to extract every hoard of useful data that I come across, but I still want to try my luck. To be honest, I think that Lucky's hacking capabilities are stronger."

"Is data theft the only mission that you are interested in performing?" Casella asked.

Ves smiled. "Not at all. If the need is great or if the native aliens are aware of Ferrum's infiltration, then he can use his formidable set of tools to sabotage critical systems and assassinate key personnel. While there is only so much a single mechanical cat avatar can do on a large alien starship or base, I intend for Lucky to accompany Ferrum on his mission. Two cats can do far greater damage than one. They can also support each other if one of them gets in trouble."

"Meow?!"

Chapter 6982: The Cost of Bestowing the Potential for Greatness

After Ves gave an explanation about his latest creation, he proceeded to put it through its paces.

He used his special connection with his masterwork to possess the partial superdimensional alloy body and proceeded to control it with great familiarity and fluency.

How could Ves not understand how cats moved?

His companion spirit Blinky was a cat.

He also already had Veronica for a few years.

If he was a mech pilot, then he would have done everything in his power to tiger mech!

The tests he set up were relatively rudimentary, but they served as barely acceptable props to showcase Ferrum's powerful capabilities.

When the new cat activated his stealth systems, he became virtually undetectable at longer distances and was still damn hard to pick up at closer distances.



Unfortunately, the active stealth system supplemented with Solus plating was not completely infallible, but nothing was ever perfect.

Ferrum was incredibly scary when engaged in combat. Numerous armed dummies fell after getting struck by transphasic fire laser beams.

The thin but fiery hot beams penetrated the relatively ordinary armor of the bots and quickly burned and vaporized the internals.

"The accuracy leaves much to be desired." Casella commented as she witnessed Ferrum haphazardly winding his tail from one direction to another. "It is not advisable for this feline machine to employ this weapon system when he is deployed alongside friendly units. This tail weapon can easily rake them by accident."

"You try controlling a precision laser weapon with your tail, then! This is completely different from holding a pistol in your hand!"

Gloriana frowned at the unreliable display. "Why did you not integrate the laser weapon in a more convenient location such as the head, the paws or the side of the body?"

"There's no room!" Ves answered. "I had to stuff a lot of tech in a tiny cat-sized body. Sure, I could have made Ferrum larger, but that not only uses up more superdimensional matter, but also makes him more conspicuous and harder to hide. I chose to maintain a compact size and stuff as much tech as I can get away with. The tail happens to be a limb that facilitates balance for quadruped lifeforms, but it can be more than a simple chain of interlinking parts."

In fact, if Ves really needed to, he could still mount a miniaturized luminar crystal weapon on another part of Ferrum's body, but he simply didn't feel like it. He wanted to integrate it into the tail and that was the end of the story as far as he was concerned.

Gloriana obviously understood this truth, but she only gave him a measured look. She did not bother to argue the point.

She understood the eternal truth that boys would always be boys.

At least Ves had not made the most outrageous and juvenile choice of turning a certain other limb into a miniature luminar crystal weapon.

The weapon tests involving the claws turned into a spectacle as well. Ves was much more skilled in controlling Ferrum's limbs. The mechanical cat avatar swiped the enemy dummies and static targets with enough grace to look natural.

Even Lucky looked impressed by how easily the new cat was able to cut through energy shields and armor plating with ease.

The bite attacks were also lethal. None of the dummies had any chance of saving themselves once Ferrum latched on and bit them into pieces!

However, there was one major problem related to his arsenal.

"His claws and teeth are so short." Gloriana noted. "They are deadly alright, but they extend so little from their base that it takes time to cut through thick walls."

Ves shrugged. "It can't be helped. I can make the claws longer, but that will make it much more troublesome to store them safely inside his own body. It also takes significantly more weapon-grade superdimensional matter. That goes against my intentions. One of the reasons why I kept Ferrum small is to make him disposable. If the native aliens ever kills him or has prevented us from retrieving him, then I can readily abandon him without feeling too much pain."

Any quantity of superdimensional matter was precious at this stage, but so little of it was used to make Ferrum that the Larkinson Clan could still bear this loss.

"Will it be difficult to create a replacement for Ferrum?" Saint Dise asked.

"Not really. I won't be able to create an identical copy of him, as he was always meant to be a unique existence. However, I will be able to create a similar mechanical avatar that possesses his own unique quirks and features. Masterworks are never meant to be commodities, but there is no rule that states that I have to start from scratch every time. As long as my intention and sincerity are good enough, then it is not too difficult to create a series of masterworks based on a common template."

Gloriana and Alexa nodded their heads in understanding. They both knew about this subject to understand his argument.

The ace pilots did not quite get it, but that was okay.

"So this is how you intend to contribute to our operations from now on, Ves?"

"Yes, Casella. I am not the kind of person who can sit still when there is so much going on. It is obviously a monumentally bad idea for me to unfold my true body and let Sev come out and play, so this is the only other good alternative. Since I have the capacity to do this, I may as well do it. I think the people of the Bluejay Fleet are also happy to see me stay back and spend my time on controlling a 'cat drone' by remote. I don't even have to be in the same star system or zone in order to transfer Blinky to Ferrum, though I have to bear much greater strain and expend much more energy to perform remote avatar channeling at longer distances. This is why it is usually better if Vulcan does this on my behalf."

"Why did you not resort to him again as you have done with your other mechanical avatars?"

"That would mean that Vulcan gets to have all of the fun, Gloriana. More seriously, Vulcan has many talents, but discretion and skullduggery is not one of them. Blinky is also much more suited for dangerous missions, and is also very helpful in controlling cat bodies. If necessary, he can release E energy from the Blinkyverse and perform a variety of different spells to assist Ferrum in battle."

"How long can you sustain the connection?" Casella asked another serious question.

"I am not sure, but I think it will not be a problem to sustain it for at least a couple of hours at my current strength. The premise is that the distance is not too far, or otherwise I'll be lucky if I can maintain the connection for an hour."

Ves answered a few other questions. The Larkinsons were intrigued by Ferrum and what he represented. This was an amazing new weapon that also happened to be exceptionally lethal at close range. He could easily be used to assassinate key military commanders or even ace pilots outside of the cockpits of their mechs!

"Can other mech designers replicate what you can do?" Gloriana asked. "Can I make and deploy my own masterwork cat avatar?"

That was a question that Ves never considered. He only thought about himself when he devised this stuff.

"I am not sure to be honest." Ves responded. "You and I are masterwork mech designers at the Senior rank, which is extremely rare in our industry. I haven't talked to any Masters whether they are able to descend on their own masterworks, but I think it isn't likely. I am only able to do it because of several conditions. First, my masterworks are alive, or at least have the capacity to host my consciousness. Perhaps another artisan can do something similar by creating a high-level artifact, but this is not the only requirement. You also need the capacity to extend your awareness at a distance."

"What do you mean?"

"Incorporeal design spirits such as Vulcan are able to extend parts of themselves to many different locations." He said. "This is an inherent quality to them. Humans like you and I are much different because our spirits are anchored to our bodies. We can only rely on special techniques or tricks to break the cage of our bodies. Fortunately, both of us happen to possess companion spirits."

Gloriana frowned. "There is a problem with that. Our companion spirits cannot move too far away from our bodies."

Ves grinned back. "That is true, but have you forgotten what masterworks represent? They have become so good that we unconsciously separate a piece of ourselves and insert it into the masterwork in order to bestow it with our potential for greatness. Don't think my explanation is nonsense. It is real. I can transfer my companion spirit over to the Amaranto, the Everchanger, the Minerva and all of our masterwork mechs because they all carry tiny pieces of myself. In fact, I have imparted so much of myself to so many different works over the years that I am afraid that I may be overdoing it, especially when I have yet to gain the strength of a Master Mech Designer. Nothing comes for free."

His wife looked disturbed by his theory. "That... actually sounds plausible. I have not noticed any signs of weakening myself. I believe that it is safe enough for us if we only limit ourselves to creating a handful of masterworks a year. If our output of

masterworks is higher than once a month, then we must monitor our conditions extra carefully."

"I am not too concerned." Ves dismissively waved his hand. "My Spirituality is notably stronger than yours or any other Senior Mech Designer. Besides, I am not too obsessed with maintaining a high output of masterworks. That only makes me commoditize them, which is ultimately detrimental to my craftsmanship."

The magic of masterworks had to be preserved. Quality had to come before quantity.

Alexa decided to ask her own question. "Do you think that works that reach a level of quality above masterwork may demand the creator sacrifice a greater amount of power to fuel its transcendence?"

Both Ves and Gloriana exchanged glances.

"We don't have to worry about that for a long, long time." Ves eventually replied. "For what it is worth, I think you have raised a very great point. I think your theory is plausible enough to be true. It may be the reason why we have never heard anyone below the rank of Master Mech Designer having created anything that can be classified as a grand work. It may also be one of the hidden challenges that they must overcome in order to ascend to the rank of Star Designer!"

Ves had no idea whether this was true, but it made too much sense.

He knew the approximate spiritual strength of Master Mech Designers.

He also met a few Star Designers in person and became overwhelmed by how much stronger and more encompassing they had become.

Comparing a Master Mech Designer and a Star Designer was like comparing a campfire to a forest blaze!

The latter probably possessed plenty of power to fuel the creation of a grand work.

What about the former? It would definitely exhaust itself half to death just to create a single grand work!

If this was the case, then a lot of Master Mech Designers must be working hard to grow the size and strength of their 'campfires' as much as possible.

Not only did they have to make it strong enough to feed the voracious appetites of their possible grand works, but they also had to build up enough of a safety margin to preserve their lives if they failed to break through!

All of that took a lot of time and effort. If all of this happened to be correct, then that would explain why so many Master Mech Designers languished for hundreds of years without making the ultimate jump of their careers!

Chapter 6983: The Master's Road

Alexa came up with a thought-provoking guess!

If the creation of a masterwork required the maker to sacrifice a small part of himself, how much more would he have to give up in order to create a grand work?

Logic dictated that the price had to be much greater in magnitude!

Ves just had to think back on the amazing performance of the Heavensword to understand that relics like that must have demanded an unimaginable price to construct.

The cost to create such an amazing work not only encompassed physical goods and materials, but also pure spirituality. The latter served as the essence that elevated the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Grand works possessed a far greater quantity of the latter, so it should be logical that their creators also had to give up a lot more in order to bring them into fruition.

If this was the case, then any attempt to create a grand work may be a career-ending decision for a Master Mech Designer.

It turned out that Masters did not have it easy. They had to confront a test that was similar to the Mech Body Merger Process that prevented many peak ace pilots from smoothly transcending the last vestiges of their mortality.

Ves had never heard of Masters dying in droves, so the attempt to create a grand work likely did not lead to a fatal outcome, especially if they made as many preparations as possible.

However, the success rate was probably incredibly low, or else the vast mech industry would have produced way more than around a hundred Star Designers.

Ves could not imagine how much pressure these Masters endured as they sought to develop a product that was innovative enough to qualify as a grand work, but also increase their spiritual qualifications so that they became strong enough to sustain the incredible consumption!

Even then, the low success rate of such attempts meant that a lot of Masters still failed to achieve their goals.

Ves did not have enough information at the moment to determine whether these Masters possessed the ability to recover and try again, but even if they could, they likely had to wait for decades or even a century to return to their peak conditions and make another attempt.

There may be other variables that affected this condition. Ves was not arrogant enough to assume he figured out the full story behind what a Master Mech Designer needed to accomplish in order to ascend to godhood and become an honored Star Designer.

Ves just felt that Alexa had only partially lifted the veil behind this mystery.

As the three mech designers continued to think about the insane demands that Masters had to fulfill in order to realize one of their greatest dreams, Ves eventually shook his head.

"Let us set this matter aside and focus on more immediate concerns." He told Gloriana and Alexa. "Neither of us are Master Mech Designers. It is pointless to know about what is needed to be promoted to a Star Designer in advance. The mech industry deliberately withholds information about this from us. This means that it only adds

needless clutter in the minds of little Journeymen and Seniors. Instead of trying to prepare to become a vaunted Star Designer, let us first worry about realizing our design philosophies first. This junction alone has already stopped many mech designers from progressing further."

A mech designer must first prove that he or she possessed the knowledge, discipline, ambition and ability to make a significant and meaningful contribution to the mech industry.

If they could not persuade the Red Kingdom to look favorably towards their design philosophies and the applications derived from them, then it was useless to think any further ahead.

Even Ves who believed his qualifications were better than many other Seniors still had to take this challenge seriously due to his own career choices.

He chose to aim high, which promised great rewards if he succeeded, but could also ruin him if his actual capabilities did not match his ambitions.

Everything was fair. If he wanted to become a Master at all cost, then he could have downgraded his goals, but he felt that this was not a true test of his capabilities as a mech designer.

At most, the theory that Alexa proposed just now gave Ves a potential explanation why this was the case.

Not that it changed anything. Even if he remained in the dark, numerous well-meaning Master Mech Designers had given Ves enough hints and guidance on the importance of correctly setting a goal for himself.

Mech designers who only truly cared about becoming Master Mech Designers and thought that going any further was beyond their reach could concentrate their research on more modest inventions.

This was usually the case for many second-class mech designers.



It was not that they wanted to take a step further, but doing so required them to prove their excellence and achieve great success in the mech market.

If their works were merely good but not exceptional, then that indicated that their qualifications and potential were not that great compared to the best of the mech industry.

Given that even first-class mech designers universally struggled to cross the great divide that separated them from advancing to the rank of Star Designer, how could second-raters possibly think they had a better chance?

It cost an unimaginable amount of funding to engage in the kind of immense research projects that were needed to develop any sort of grand work. It was impossible for many mech designers to earn so much money or attract enough funding from outside investors.

That did not necessarily mean that these Masters were ready to lie down and relax, but they understood their own situations best. They could only remain patient and consider a promotion as a very distant long-term goal that would probably take centuries for them to be ready to make the attempt.

Perhaps an event might take place in the meantime that abruptly changed the equation.

Ves thought about it and believed that the Age of Dawn may have created better opportunities for mech designers.

After all, now that they entered a medium-energy environment, it became a lot easier for mech designers to grow their spiritualities. It was also easier to rely on external sources of power to imbue their creations with E energy, though most of it was admittedly low in quality.

Multiple Star Designers should emerge from the mech industry in the next few decades if his theory was correct.

What was unfortunate was that all of this took time to ferment. Only a few years had passed since the start of the Age of Dawn. Mech designers still needed time to familiarize and take advantage of the new possibilities. They still had to build up a lot of accumulation in order to enact a big plan.

It all came down to time.

Would the native aliens be friendly enough to give red humans the time to sort everything out? No way!

This was why the upcoming operation was so important. Attacking a single den of alien thieves might not be significant enough to turn the entire war around, but it should still have a considerable effect on the changes to the ownership of the Caesarion Upper Zone.

As the two fleets continued to cut through space at a blistering pace by engaging in warp travel, the Larkinsons and their allies were gradually finalizing their preparations.

Ves had already concluded his hasty test and demonstration of his latest creation.

Saint Dise had taken the now-inert Ferrum back to the Vulcan's Glory. Lucky accompanied her as well, much to the gem cat's dismay.

Lucky was naive if Ves thought that he would let his cat grow lazy while trying to digest samples of superdimensional matter!

If the cat did not exercise his combat capabilities every once in a while, its personality would grow completely rotten!

At the final hour before it was time for the Premier Fleet's only fleet carrier to test out her shiny new gravitic catapult, Ves received an unexpected guest in his office compartment.

Formation Master Andrea Vos of the Moloch Squadron had decided to ferry over to the Tortuous Scream in order to speak to him in person.

"Hello, Andrea." Ves greeted the woman in a familiar fashion. "What is the matter? If you have any need to discuss the upcoming operation, then you should contact the Saint Commander. She is the real person in charge."

"We have already held our discussions with Saint Commander Casella Ingvar." The woman known as the Farseer responded. "Our Moloch Squadron's many cultivators are currently working to provide various forms of support to the elements of our two fleets, from scrying the enemy's position in order to track whether there have been any unexpected arrivals or departures, to bestowing inconsistent blessings to our mechs and warships. As support personnel, our contributions are not as visible, but they are not trivial. I am proud of our men and women for being able to make a difference in this operation."

"It sounds like you guys have everything in hand. Why look for me, then?"

"We have heard that you are planning to conduct your own infiltration mission at the same time we are entering into battle." She said. "To be more precise, you hope to use a specialized infiltration device to board an important enemy vessel or base in order to steal covert intelligence related to phase lords or other information that is related to the native aliens."

Ves raised his eyebrow. Although he and the Larkinsons did not work too hard to maintain confidentiality surrounding Ferrum, it shouldn't have been common knowledge. It was quite noteworthy that the collies had managed to sniff out his plan.

Had the Farseer used her famous scrying abilities to spy on him? That wasn't supposed to happen. Not only was he sensitive towards being observed, the collies had already taken the initiative to install anti-scrying measures on the Tortuous Scream.

"I don't know how you figured that out, but you are correct." He said. "Personally, I don't expect too much from this. The native aliens may be a little more primitive and inexperienced than us when it comes to a lot of different matters, but they are not stupid. They know better than to bring highly classified data on strategically valuable subjects so close to the frontlines of the Red War."

The Farseer smiled. "What you say is correct. More importantly than that, the native aliens also exercise decently good information security. If they think that their ships are about to fall into the hands of red humans, they will transmit a command that will immediately wipe out the most sensitive data stored in their data banks and other storage media. What is worse is that they are improving in this aspect with every passing month. They have become much stricter in policing their data since the start of the war."

That made sense. The native aliens may have been sloppy at the start of their confrontation against red humans, but after making so many mistakes in the first year, even dummies knew how to plug their shortcomings.

"If that is the case, then my primary mission has very little chance to succeed." Ves flatly said.

"Not necessarily." The formation master responded. "We know that there is one glaring exception to this rule. The mortal aliens are able to impose their regulations on other mortal aliens, but what about their gods? They never have the courage to tell a god to follow their rules?"

Ves became a lot more interested in what Andrea had to say!

"Do you mean that the native aliens over at Screed Tanner VI-F may have brought personal storage devices that contain juicy secret information?"

"Yes. We have employed our unconventional intelligence gathering methods to determine whether this is the case. While we cannot give you absolute confirmation, we have good enough reasons to believe you may be able to find what you are looking for at several possible locations."

Ves leaned forward. "Tell me more."

Chapter 6984: The Protector of Karnak

The Farseer projected three different images of three different phase lords.

Different sources took these snapshots.

The images depicting a jureg greater phase lord and a nunser greater phase lord were relatively clear and detailed.

The one showing a slimy zzamayel phase lord was not in high definition, so the image looked a bit fuzzy and lacking in detail.

"These are the three greater phase lords that we are 95 percent confident are present at Screed Tanner VI-F." The collie began to explain. "We have enough intelligence in our hands to identify them and understand their position in alien society."

She gestured towards the jureg greater phase lord.

"This is the Protector of Karnak. He is a typical fanatical worshiper of phase whales and occupies an honored place in the Red Cabal's hierarchy. He is in charge of the alien garrison at the conquered and occupied moon. His large fleet has placed a space station in orbit that can service and receive the cargo of half a dozen starships at a time. Since this orbital facility alone cannot store all of the plunder brought back by the raiding fleets, the garrison fleet has also built a large base on the surface of the moon that stores the bulk of the stolen goods."

Another projection came to life that showed Screed Tanner VI-F and the facilities she mentioned.

Both the space station and the base looked fairly big. The tech did not appear to be too sophisticated or high-end, but the alien soldiers that manned them all appeared to be well-trained and well-equipped.

The architecture was built to accommodate a wide variety of species, so the hallways were wide and the ceilings were tall.

The warehouses and depots already stored a large amount of containers. What stood out to Ves was that they were not entirely uniform. There were several types of containers that conformed to different dimensions, material requirements, shapes and markings.

It was clear that every major race stuck to their own standards.

This showed that the major alien races likely were not too keen on promoting trade between their civilizations. It was only due to the Red War that forced them all to work more closely together, hence a phenomenon like this occurred where containers of different formats were put alongside each other.

Ves got distracted from his thoughts about the trade relations between the native aliens by the Farseer's next remark.

"There are three possible locations where the Protector of Karnak has stored some, though likely not all of his data storage devices." She said. "We estimate that there is a 42.5 percent chance that you can find them in Karnak Base on the surface, named after the phase lord in question."

"Reasons?"

"The Protector of Karnak spends much of his time on the surface. He must also be close at hand to protect the bulk of the valuable trade goods and deter other visiting aliens from attempting any thefts."

That made a lot of sense.

"What about the space station?"

"Tiller Station is where the Protector of Karnak moves in order to greet other arriving phase lords. The crew of the raiding fleets and their accompanying phase lords are ordinarily not allowed to land on the surface of the moon. We estimate that there is a 26.4 percent chance that you may find what you seek in this orbital facility."

"I see. What else?"

A projection of a modern alien battleship appeared. Ves could see more obvious elements of human technology and design principles in her appearance.

He could easily tell that she was definitely more powerful than the original Tortuous Scream!

"This is the flagship of his fleet and his seat of power." The Farseer explained. "He does not appear to spend any significant time aboard this vessel, but that does not reduce her significance. Many of his attendants have left the ship in order to attend to their god, but it is probable that they have left numerous belongings behind. We estimate that there is a 31.1 percent chance that you may find what you seek on this vessel."

Ves narrowed his eyes. What the Farseer presented to him was not simple.

"I suppose the other two phase lords have stashed their belongings on their own flagships, correct?"

"Yes." She replied.

Andrea projected two more alien battleships, both of which looked completely different.

One of them was a more conventional looking vertical homeship that clearly belonged to the nunsers.

The other was a biological vessel that looked so fleshy and disturbing that Ves did not want to stare at it for too long.

Ves let out a noise of disgust. "There is no way in hell that I am letting my infiltration device board that organic monstrosity. Besides, this vessel is filled with unfamiliar biotech that I can't figure out. I can't do anything useful on this ship."

"Very well." Andrea Vos said as she removed the last projection. "That leaves you with four possible locations to conduct your missions. Each of them are located fairly far apart from each other. If you are not able to arrange for rapid transport for your infiltration device, then you can only conduct your operations at one of them for the duration of the upcoming battle."

This left Ves with four choices. No. That was not quite right.

"I noticed that your estimation does not include the nunser flagship."

"That is because the fleet led by the nunser greater phase lord known as the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet is transient, Ves. He has only arrived fairly recently and is not expected to linger for long. We cannot provide you with reliable estimations on whether you will be able to fulfill your goals, so you should use your own judgment."

"Well, I am mostly keen on obtaining valuable information, so I think it is best to try and steal that from the Protector of Karnak as opposed to the Lord of Biscuit."

"Bis'qet, not Biscuit." The Farseer corrected Ves. "Have you made your choice?"

"Why do you care?" Ves asked back.

"We care because it is our mission to protect and serve you. You may have fallen out of power in your own clan, but that holds no bearing for us. We, along with the rest of the Bluejay Fleet, are following the Premier Fleet solely because it is our duty to accompany you. However, aside from offering our protection, it is also within our power to offer you additional assistance so long as it is within our power. You may have overlooked that, so I am visiting you on their behalf to remind you that you can call upon our services at any time."

He had indeed overlooked this important fact. Ves felt a little sheepish for feeling that he had immediately turned into a homeless orphan as soon as it became clear that he needed to give up his leadership position in the Larkinson Clan.

While his organization had definitely grown far beyond its original roots, Ves reminded himself that the clan originally managed to get on everyone's map because of him, and not the other way around.

If the Larkinsons completely abandoned Ves, then he could still fall back to the Bluejay Fleet and rely on the forces of the Red Three to keep him safe in this dangerous dwarf galaxy.

Ves felt more and more bemused as he thought about it. He worked hard to raise a clan so that he could become independent and sovereign, but in the end the mechers, fleeters and now the collies may eventually prove to be his most dependable comrades.

Of course, he may be exaggerating a little. Just because he was no longer the leader did not mean the Larkinsons no longer wanted him around. They still looked up to him and he could still look forward to transitioning into a highly respected and honored elder position.



This actually suited him better as a mech designer. He could no longer be bothered to perform tedious leadership duties. It was best to throw those responsibilities to an actual leader such as Casella.

"What is your advice on which location I should choose?" He asked.

"I have already given you our analysis." The Farseer said. "We do not presume to tell you more in order to avoid tainting your decision with our own biases. I have my own thoughts on the matter. The information that I have shared with you is condensed from thousands of pages of data that is difficult to verify. I hope you understand why we are reluctant to share more."

Ves let out a tired breath. "Well, I am rather accustomed to this treatment. Ylvaine is also frustratingly vague in his prophecies. Since this is the case, then I won't ask for further information. If I have to make a choice based on what I currently know, then I will choose to attack Karnak Base."

The Farseer looked mildly surprised. It appeared that the Moloch Squadron did not expect him to make his decision so quickly and decisively.

"Could you explain your reasoning behind your choice?"

"Sure. First, this base has a simpler layout than the orbital space station and the Red Cabal flagship, so it will be easier for me to navigate. Second, Karnak Base is also filled with valuable loot, so even if I cannot secure my primary objective, I have the highest chance of retrieving other valuables from this site. Third, this is the place where the Protector of Karnak spends most of his time, so I believe that many of his mortal attendants will be present here as well. Perhaps I can capture or steal what they know. Fourth, once the battle commences, the fighting will largely center around what happens in orbit. The base on the surface will likely be neglected for most of the battle, which gives my infiltration device more room to play."

The formation master listened to Ves and approved of his reasoning. "If this is what you have decided, then the Moloch Squadron shall provide you with limited support. Due to the uncertainties involved, I am not certain how we can be of assistance, so I cannot divulge any specifics. This is our first formal operation against a hostile party since the establishment of the Moloch Squadron. Many of our cultivators lack experience and power, so do not expect us to produce any miracles... in the foreseeable time."

Perhaps the Moloch Squadron may be able to shift the battlefield much more noticeably in a few years, but that was too far away.

Ves understood quite well that weak cultivators could only perform parlor tricks at most. He did not expect much from the cultivators of the Moloch Squadron.

"I don't need help in killing enemies or evacuating my assets. What I need is help in figuring out where I can retrieve valuable information."

"Understood. The Protector of Karnak is a jureg greater phase lord. As he originally belongs to an aquatic species, he and his attendants may have stored their valuables inside an artificial lake."

"Good tip."

They soon ended their discussion now that the Farseer had conveyed her message.

Time was ticking down. It would not take much longer for the First Sword Mark III to launch from the Vulcan's Glory. Ves needed to make sure that he could maintain a reliable connection to Ferrum.

The two eventually rose from their seats.

The Farseer passed on a final warning.

"We have already conveyed to the Saint Commander that the native aliens that are based at Screed Tanner VI-F are better adapted to fighting against human forces than what you have encountered in the past. Saint Piercer arms have become more common among greater phase lords. They have also made other adaptations in order to improve their performance against our ace pilots. Our forces may be confronted by their new innovations. The Red Cabal has been more receptive to the technological assistance provided by the Cosmopolitan Movement."

"Ugh. Those human traitors are still at it, I see."

Chapter 6985: Gravitic Catapult Launch

As long as the native aliens were not idiots and posted proper scouts and listening devices in the Screed Tanner System, then they most certainly detected the human arrivals in advance.

Even if the ships of the Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet maintained a high warp factor as they moved closer to the center of the star system, the fact that they were engaging in a form of superluminal travel in realspace did not mean that they could reach the native alien stronghold before the light of their passage got detected.

That only worked if the native aliens were completely negligent in occupying the star system, but that was clearly not the case.

Stealth ships such as the Morpheus had already observed the native aliens kicking up a storm shortly after the arrival of the two fleets.

This clearly showed that the aliens already detected the arrival of uninvited guests in their star systems. They all understood the danger and were scrambling to ready their phasefighters for deployment and their warships for serious combat.

On top of that, the aliens also prepared their fixed defenses, which admittedly was not much, but could still make a difference in the upcoming battle.

"The intelligence we have gathered is accurate. Our forces are about to confront 13,000 phasefighters, 133 warships, of which 16 of them are classified as alien battleships belonging to various different races. While the quantity of hostile capital ships is fairly low, every enemy hull is built within the last four years. Each of these hulls are fairly modern and incorporate human technologies to an extensive degree."

"What of their phase lords?" Saint Dise asked.

"We have yet to gain visual confirmation on any of the greater or lesser phase lords, but they are most certainly poised to deploy. The only point in our favor is that the different fleets are clearly not accustomed to coordinating with each other. They are keeping their ships far apart from each other. This will lower the probability that they will get in each other's way, but it will also make it harder for them to mutually support each other."

"How well guarded is Karnak Base?" The ace pilot asked next.

"It is covered by a strong titan shield dome. The alien soldiers are also manning their stations and conducting rigorous patrols. The base defenders appear to be highly alert. They are not taking our arrival lightly."

The ace pilot studied the data on the large azure energy shield that served as the primary layer of defense of Karnak Base.

"Where are the probable locations of the shield generator and the primary power generator of this base?" She asked the staff officer.

"Here." The female officer adjusted the projected image. "These are the probable locations. It is likely that this base holds multiple redundancies, but these sites should be fairly critical, so taking any of them out will seriously disrupt the operation of Karnak Base, especially if you can inflict other damage to the infrastructure."

"Got it. Thank you for the information."

After Saint Dise was done with absorbing the latest intelligence, she dismissed the staff officer and looked up at her proud machine.

The First Sword Mark III looked like a metallic armored warrior that was ready and eager to test her mettle against the formidable defenders of Screed Tanner VI-F.

The prospect of challenging three greater phase lords at once did not seem scary anymore now that she had undergone full superdimensional conversion!

At this time, the eager ace mech had already been loaded inside a large metallic shell.

The First Sword Mark III was certainly not going to be launched from the gravitic catapult 'naked'.

It was possible to do so, but the exit velocity of the machine would be limited by its inherent tolerance towards G-forces.

Getting accelerated out of the catapult without any buffers or protection was like getting struck by a giant mech-sized hammer!

Superdimensional or not, the Larkinsons did not want to take the chance that the sudden gravitic shock to the First Sword Mark III would damage her more vulnerable internals, much of which were much more fragile than the machine's superdimensional structural components.

This was why the big shell was for. It incorporated powerful inertial dampeners and other tech that enabled it and its payload to safely endure a strong gravitic push.

It was also damn expensive to build and replace and took up valuable space in the fleet carrier.

Fortunately, they were reusable, though the Larkinsons manually had to retrieve them from the battlefield.

Right now, the surrounding mech technicians and engineers had already completed their final inspection of the contraption.

"How beautiful." Saint Dise spoke. "Don't you think so, Ves?"

She turned her gaze towards the two floating cats.

One of them was Ferrum, which had just begun to host Blinky.

The other was Lucky, who still looked unmotivated to take part in the upcoming mission.

"Meow..."

"Nyow nyow."

"Meow meow meow!"

"Nyow!"

"Me-meowww..."

Well, the cats certainly looked energetic. They would need it if they wanted to infiltrate Karnak Base and mess around while the rest were fighting up in orbit of the moon.

"Can you even say anything that I can understand?"

Ferrum turned towards Dise and shook his head from side to side.

"Why am I not surprised? How will we be able to communicate?"

"Nyow."

"I see. Well, it is your choice. I am just your chauffeur this time. Let us get you settled."

The two cats floated after the female saint as she lifted off from the deck and entered the cockpit of her powerful machine.

The long sword box that was designed and built to hold 33 sword fey hovered silently behind the ace mech's back.

Due to technical reasons, the sword box was not physically attached to the back, as it would get in the way of her excellent flight system.

If necessary, the sword box could be discarded or even used as a makeshift shield.

The cats did not enter the cockpit. They would have to get off at one point. It was very inconvenient and also dangerous to open up the cockpit entrance just to allow two passengers to disembark.

Instead, they occupied a specially built protective cage that the Larkinsons had installed onto the mech frame.

"Meow meow."

"Nyow nyow nyow."

Both Lucky and Ferrum did not have much room for maneuver inside the cramped box.

This made the gem cat a lot more uncomfortable. At least Ves was able to abandon his mechanical cat avatar if anything went wrong. The same could not be said for Lucky!

[We are launching in around seven minutes if no new variables have emerged.]

Everyone grew more quiet and focused as they worked hard to put the final preparations in place.

Numerous priests and other weirdly dressed collies had been spending time on blessing and bestowing other unknowable effects on the first-class multipurpose mechs.

The Larkinsons looked bemused at the return of superstition. They did not intervene any further and allowed the collies to do their own thing. Who knew whether all of these rituals had a noticeable effect on the success rate.

The First Sword Mark III meanwhile got completely locked into place inside the gravitic catapult.

The shell then got loaded into the gravitic catapult.

This was a tense moment for the Larkinsons. Loading in the shell meant that they have removed most of the obstacles that stood in their way of solving the problem.

[3 minutes until the activation of the gravitic catapult. Saint Dise, can you confirm that you are still in a good condition?]

"I do not require any further assistance." She said. "We are ready to take the fight to the enemy at any time."

[1 minute to launch.]

The gravitic catapult's activation had become very obvious now.

Not only was it drawing energy from multiple sources, it was also trying its best to contain the powerful energies in order to delay until the right timing had arrived.

That moment drew much closer. Saint Dise could practically feel it in her frame.

She held her greatsword with its tip pointing down close to her body. Of course, the ace pilot did not thrust the tip into the material or the shell, or she would risk compromising it further.

The gravitic catapult loudly hummed. It absorbed and concentrated so much energy that it could easily explode and destroy a considerable section of the fleet carrier!

All of that juice had to go somewhere soon, or else this dangerous scenario may actually unfold.

[Are you truly ready and willing to exit the ship by launching from the gravitic catapult?]

"Yes."

Once the captain received this notification from the powerful ace pilot, he personally pressed the fateful button.



The Gravitic Catapult entered a new stage at this point. After a brief delay, the entire contraption discharged its energy nearly all at once, enabling it to successfully complete its objective!

The shell containing the First Sword Mark III did indeed surge out of the bow of the Vulcan's Glory and raced towards the distant enemy like a lone artillery shell.

Due to the fact that the Larkinsons had launched the First Sword Mark III early as instructed, it would take minutes for the powerful ace mech to arrive.

This left the two dark mechanical cats in a miserable position. They had vaguely felt the launch of the main channel, but the shell's excellent inertial dampeners made them feel isolated and left out of the party.

"Meow!"

"Nyow."

"Meow meow."

"Nyow nyow."

From the moment the shell got launched, Saint Dise and the First Sword Mark III pretty much signed up for a dangerous duty.

They had to raze hell among the native aliens without any form of backup for an uncomfortably long period of time.

It would take precious minutes for the mechs and warships of the two fleets to enter into actual engagement range.

Perhaps it may be foolish to launch the First Sword Mark III so early, but Saint Dise believed in their strength and did not think the native aliens could stop them so quickly!

As the gravitic shell had traversed a certain distance, it finally opened up and allowed the ace mech to fly free.

However, just because the First Sword Mark III left its now-useless shell did not mean she had lost any speed.

She was still charging towards Screed Tanner VI-F with great momentum!

The native aliens must be scrambling to figure out what was coming, if they could even detect the recently built ace mech.

Unlike other machines, the First Sword Mark III had been impregnated with Solus Gas, which dampened her emissions and reduced her detectability by a drastic degree!

Many electronic sensors were able to detect the empty gravitic shell, but not necessarily the mech that emerged on its own!

No phase lords had yet to take the field, perhaps believing that their services would not be necessary during this phase of the battle.

By the time the native aliens belatedly managed to detect the charge of the First Sword Mark III with the help of their optical sensors, it was too late!

The defending forces could only hurry up and begin to raise the power level of the azure energy shields before an immensely powerful projectile slammed into the massive azure energy shields that previously protected Karnak Base!

Almost an instant later, the same machine crashed through the roof, walls and other important structural elements that kept the building intact!

Though the First Sword Mark III had actively sought to slow down at the end, the pet still came out fairly strong!

The powerful energy shield that previously covered Karnak Base like a dome had disappeared as well, making the facility and its rich plundered treasures a lot more valuable!

More than a dozen seconds later, dozens of swords erupted from the crash site. The superdimensional blades cut through the bodies of most surviving aliens and only needed a slight amount of effort and time to cut through more material goods!

The First Sword Mark III had gotten her first taste of blood in her new form!

Chapter 6986: Butchered Like Pigs

The gravitic catapult of the Vulcan's Glory proved effective!

Sure, it behaved a little clunky, but it was nonetheless effective at inserting individual mechs deep into the heart of the enemy!

The native aliens never imagined that a lone ace mech would descend into the heart of their moonbase like an unstoppable spear.

The massive energy shield that was supposed to protect Karnak Base from battleship-grade armaments utterly failed to repel the superdimensional mech.

The thick roof of one of the main structures that was rated to resist limited warship bombardment functioned no different than a mild speed bump.

It actually helped the First Sword Mark III arrest her speed and prevent her mech frame from completely crashing through the ground floor and deep into the underground tunnels!

Now, the metal monster had entered the midst of one of the alien strongholds in the star system.

The native aliens still did not understand what was going on at that point.

Nobody expected for a mech to arrive in such a sudden fashion.

Shouldn't the humans approach from afar with their mechs and warships and steadily advance forward while firing their guns?

Melee mechs usually came into action much later. They could also be tracked from afar, making it so that the aliens wouldn't be caught by surprise once they finally came close enough to swing their blades or other weapons.

Nothing of the sort happened this time. Even now, every single alien soldier that was stationed in and around Screed Tanner VI-F still remained ignorant that one of the most dangerous mechs ever made in the Red Ocean had just arrived in their midst.

Even the sensor systems of the heavily damaged structure failed to make heads or tails of the new arrival.

They continually tried and failed to obtain any responses. Only a few more unusual sensors managed to obtain a few weak and abnormal returns, but none of them made any sense.

The optical sensors could vaguely detect a solid metallic form surrounded by dozens of smaller metal blades. Those floating blades surrounded the larger mass like a protective swarm and also happened to break up its silhouette, which combined with all of the dust made it even harder to complete visual verification.

Unlike the lifeless alien computer systems, the nearby surviving alien troopers had a better idea of what they faced.

Many of their comrades had gotten crushed by the crashing ceiling or the shockwave produced by the sudden landing.

However, the armored soldiers who stood further apart still managed to get saved by the buffer provided by their personal energy shields.

Though many of them felt grateful that they managed to survive a strangely effective kinetic siege attack, their minds and souls soon became frozen as they sensed an entirely different threat, one that felt much more frightening than getting struck in a physical manner.

This was because they had fallen into the Saint Kingdom of a human ace pilot.

To humans and those that evoked no hostility from an ace pilot, entering a domain field was simply a mildly disturbing experience.

It was as if a law enforcement officer had entered your mind and watched your every thought, word and move.

No matter how much you tried to hide your intentions, an ace pilot could always find out the truth.

This was what it meant to be in the domain of a saint.

Even if ace pilots still had a long way to go before they attained genuine godhood, they already acquired a fraction of the power of one.

This small preview may be trivial in comparison to a true human deity, but it was already enough to override the feeble mental defenses of most mortal beings!

The near-absolute exposure associated with Saint Kingdoms was why most people preferred not to be around an ace mech that was actively being piloted.

Almost no one could bear the scrutiny of a saint. Ordinary people were frail, mortal and weighed down by sins. Even if they knew it, they liked to keep their weaknesses private. Having an ace pilot strip all of their veils of secrecy and judge them in totality was a traumatic event to typical folk.

What these aliens were being subjected to was way worse than that. Each of them were aliens.

As footsoldiers in the service of the Protector of Karnak, who in turn answered to the Red Cabal, their racial makeups and backgrounds were extremely diverse.

Although the Protector of Karnak clearly favored the recruitment of juregs, there were plenty of orvens, nunsers and other assorted races under his command.

The only notable absence were puelmers, who universally rejected the divinity of phase leaders.

The fact that those ball aliens remained staunch about this belief and managed to survive in the Red Ocean all of this time was suspicious. There had to be more behind this mystery, but few if any humans knew anything more.

In any case, these alien soldiers all felt as if they had entered an imaginary field of swords.

Even though such a thing clearly did not exist in reality, they felt as if making a single move would cause them to cut their bodies to pieces.

Their combat armor gave them no reassurance that they could withstand these cuts!

More than that, they felt as if they were being judged by an entity that they could only equate to a god.

This was not the god they worshiped or served for so many years.

The Protector of Karnak amazed them whenever he revealed his true body and became large enough to alter the orbit of the moon they were standing on at the moment.

The sight of such a divine body was enough for these mortals to completely surrender to the obvious divinity of their lord and god.

Yet now that they became subjected to a Saint Kingdom, they felt that their previous surrender was absurd.

Although they had yet to glimpse the human god, they all instinctively felt that they had entered the presence of true divinity for the first time.

They were lucky that ace pilots could not literally read their minds. Yet what this human god could sense from their emotions and intentions was already enough to make him, no her, mad!

Many of the soldiers under the command of the Protector of Karnak had human blood on their alien appendages.

The native aliens had conquered many planets stolen by the humans who arrived from another galaxy.

Only a few cycles passed since they carved a foothold in the Red Ocean, and already trillions of filthy pink-skinned bipedals had come to transform the worlds into imitations of their distant homeworld.

The alien soldiers all became outraged at what had happened. They channeled that fury in their treatment of the humans that resided in the worlds that had been conquered by their gods and homeships.

Although it was most convenient to cleanse a world from its human infection by bombarding it wholesale, that was an extraordinarily wasteful process.

It was much cheaper and easier to convert the world if it was dealt with more finesse and precision.

Hence the reason why their gods ordered soldiers like them to make landfall and wipe out the human filth through conventional warfare.

The forces serving under the Protector of Karnak had already done this on three human-occupied worlds.

Each time, the humans put up a fierce resistance, but once their precious mechs got wiped out, the rest of them died easily enough.

Some aliens wiped out any humans they encountered — soldier, civilian or even infant children — quickly and without hesitation.

The alien troopers regarded the invaders as filthy bugs or heathens that did not acknowledge the divinity of their own gods.

Other aliens possessed a cruel streak. Faced with a human population that lost the ability to escape or pose a serious threat, there had been plenty of aliens that sought to channel their fury as well as their sadistic desires upon the defenseless human colonists.

Regardless of how they behaved, the amount of bloodshed on their hands was enormous!

Each of them had taken part in operations that cleansed millions of humans in different settlements.

Screed Tanner VI-F happened to be the latest that received this treatment.

As the ace pilot that had just crashed into the base sensed from their hearts how many human lives they ended, she almost lost control over herself!

It was only her extreme willpower and discipline that enabled her to maintain her rationality and stop herself from going berserk.

Even so, her honor and dignity as a protector of humans did not find it acceptable to grant mercy to these cruel and murderous aliens.

Saint Dise cared nothing about whether the native aliens acted righteously when they avenged the alien residents who died as humans swooped down on their worlds to colonize it for their own purposes.

Even if humans bore ultimate responsibility for invading the Red Ocean in the first place and seeking to wipe out all of the intelligent alien species that occupied the dwarf galaxy, Dise was never a stickler for law or justice like Venerable Jannzi.

Dise simply cared about her Swordmaidens and increasingly other red humans that sought and needed her protection.

To know that millions of humans once made themselves home on Screed Tanner VI-F, only for all of their lives to get snuffed out enraged her beyond belief!



"ALL OF YOU... DESERVE TO DIE!"

Her original plan was to stir up a bit of trouble by taking out a few generators before moving up in orbit, but she changed her mind and unleashed her sword fey!

Led by the Prime Sword Fey, the autonomous floating blades spun around the First Sword Mark III and proceeded to cut through everything in a slowly expanding radius like an all-consuming tornado!

The whirlwind of superdimensional blades was so strong and unstoppable that everything got cut without exception!

The pieces of rubble, the emergency energy shields that hastily came online and the armored soldiers that still remained frozen by the ace pilot's Saint Kingdom all got cut or obliterated in just a short interval of time!

The storm did not abate after that. Instead, its radius continued to grow, beginning to cut through walls, machines, storage containers and more with greater speed and violence!

There was no elegance in the motion of the blades. Saint Dise did not direct any of their movements. The individual sword fey moved at her behest, but decided their trajectories by themselves.

Of course, this haphazard arrangement also lacked the force of sword formations, but the sword fey did not require them at all as they continued to crumble through walls and objects alike!

Even if they were made out of mid-grade superdimensional alloy, the sword fey were still way more than any of the defenses of Karnak Base could withstand!

The focused rage of Saint Dise only fueled the true resonance that amplified the already impressive properties of the sword fey even further. The shining metal gleam of the blades further indicated that they had been strengthened by metal energy.

All of these effects combined meant that there was nothing the mortal defenders could do to stop their base from getting shredded from the inside!

The native aliens stationed further away were horrified, yet still sought to resist in any way they could.

Stationary turrets opened fire at the storm of blades.

Floating armed vehicles struck with transphasic energy beams, kinetic projectiles and missiles.

Phasefighters scrambled in the air and sought to destroy the storm before it could expand any further.

None of these measures worked. The sword fey did not linger in the limited range of the First Mark III's Saint Kingdom.

They instead shot out and impaled all of the heavier and more precious military hardware with unstoppable force and speed!

The exceptional penetrative properties of these sword fey enabled them to pierce through any azure energy shield and transphasic hyper alloy armor with the same ease as cutting through sheets of paper!

Explosions erupted all across Karnak Base as the sword fey reaped a horrific toll against phasefighters and other vehicles that most human mechs would have struggled to put down.

This was the power of a full superdimensional ace mech!

The base defenders had yet to confront the ace mech directly, and already they were proving to be as defenseless and vulnerable as the human civilians they had once butchered like pigs!

Chapter 6987: The Protector of Karnak

Karnak Base was being devastated from the inside, and the native aliens did not know how to respond.

Their initial response against the storm of blades had proven utterly ineffective!

Any soldiers and vehicles that attempted to get close instantly got impaled or crushed to pieces by the floating swords.

The defenses that were positioned far away enough to escape this fate proved nothing more than nuisances.

The swords moved with enough speed and agility to evade many incoming attacks.

It did not matter if the alien attacks managed to hit their intended targets.

Whatever energy beam or projectile that managed to strike the sword fey did not even leave behind a single scorch mark or dent!

Despite the utterly despairing sight, not many alien soldiers panicked after their initial shock subsided.

Were they afraid?

Definitely?

Did they think their efforts to defend their base was futile?

Yes.

Yet that was not a good reason for them to give in to despair.

They were the soldiers of the Red Cabal.

They were the worshipers of the Protector of Karnak.

The humans had their gods.

So did the native aliens.

Given how much devastation the First Mark III had wrought in a short amount of time, the greater phase lord charged with defending this base did not remain still for long!

Saint Dise remained fully alert despite the demonstrated power of her superdimensional ace mech.

Her ace mech remained fully poised and held her Decapitator in a prepared stance.

The power of true resonance and metal energy hummed through the superdimensional greatsword.

The recently upgraded weapon may have become sharp enough to cut through nearly anything short of a god mech, but that was no reason for Saint Dise to be arrogant.

She was still a junior ace pilot when it came down to it. Her Saint Kingdom was not as strong as that of Saint Tusa, and her mastery over her ace mech was far from satisfactory.

Aside from that, her instincts warned her of multiple impending threats, of which one happened to be strong enough despite her powerful machine!

Soon enough, an alien roar erupted throughout the entire base!

The soldiers that previously struggled to maintain their confidence instantly became buoyed!

Their hearts no longer wavered and they fought to suppress the whirling blades with greater fanaticism!

Several developments took place in quick succession.

First, two organic masses emerged in orbit.

Anyone on the ground that looked up in the air would be able to spot two large ballooning shapes.

Each of them rapidly grew in size until they became large enough to affect the gravity on the surface of the moon!

The Fifth Lord of Bis'qet had unfolded his true body!

The Endless Stomach had ballooned in size as well!

While the greater phase lords had grown far too large to be able to fight the First Sword Mark III without generating enormous collateral damage, their exaggerated sizes alone already did wonders to alien morale!

Not only had they recovered from their shock and confusion, they also felt invincible, as if death was no longer to be feared!

The aliens all began to roar their own war cries. They roared as if it was more important to impress their gods than to avoid death!

This was because they all believed that as long as they showed enough valor and devotion, they would get honored by their gods and enjoy a privileged position in the afterlife!

The alien counterattacks grew fiercer. The sword fey all began to endure greater pressure as the base defenders no longer showed any fear or hesitation towards the unstoppable storm.

Even if their attacks still yielded no results, they continued to attack because they knew their gods were on their side!

Saint Dise grew more alert than ever. She could sense that she had attracted the hostility of a powerful phase lord.

As a hunter, she knew that she had put herself in an unfavorable position. She had turned into prey that was too conspicuous to hide.

Her First Sword Mark III was in the open while the nearest phase lord lurked out of sight.

This meant that her ace mech could be attacked at any time, but it would be difficult to attack her main adversary without trying to dig through this entire base.

That made this situation unfavorable to her. Saint Dise did not like it, but the mission demanded that her ace mech attracted the attention of the enemy.

Now, she became more certain that the enemy phase lords possessed the capital to defeat her and her machine, so she needed to be extra alert.

"WHERE ARE YOU..."

Although her First Sword Mark III had gained such powerful defenses that she was almost impervious to the attacks of mundane enemies, she knew that phase lords and especially the greater ones were not to be underestimated.

Just because red humanity made a major advancement by adopting superdimensional technology did not mean the aliens remained stagnant.

Her instincts affirmed this stance. The tension in the air grew stronger. Malice tried to penetrate her Saint Kingdom in an attempt to smother her with fear.

An attack was coming.

The timing was crucial. Even if Saint Dise no longer had to evade attacks as if her life literally depended upon it, she refused to test the durability of her upgraded ace mech.

It was better to evade an attack than to block it head-on. If her intuition remained sharp enough, she should be able to detect the attack quickly enough for her to respond.

Seconds passed by as the storm of blades spinning outside no longer took up her focus.

If she was more insecure, then perhaps she would have recalled the sword fey and employ them as her shield.

She did not do so. Instead, she fell back into old habits and put her trust in her fundamental skills as a swordswoman.

The greater phase lords in orbit did not appear to be in a hurry to descend.

Their lack of response made Saint Dise only more determined that the final native god was looking to launch a surprise attack on her ace mech.

The fact that this unseen threat remained patient only made her take her adversary more seriously.

This was not an inexperienced fighter by any means. Phase lords tended to be quite full of themselves, but the ones who reached the greater stage tended to be much more skilled and competent.

The current threat knew how to rely on the threat he posed as a weapon.

The First Sword Mark III remained stationary as the native aliens continued to organize and prepare for combat.

They were bringing in more hardware.

If this continued, then the sword fey may ultimately start to deform and incur other signs of damage.

Saint Dise quickly checked the state of her passengers.

Her Saint Kingdom had already noticed them sneaking out of the container that held their feline bodies.

The two cats employed their own means to avoid enemy detection and sneak away unnoticed.

Dise had nothing to fear at that point. Her First Sword Mark III raised her sword arm and pointed the tip of the blade at the approximate direction of the main threat.

"Are you a coward? Either face me in open combat, or admit that the phase whales are too weak to prepare you to fight against an opponent of my caliber."

Though Saint Dise broadcasted her words in the open without translation, she believed the native aliens should have their own translation programs.

Sure enough, just a few seconds had passed before the hidden enemy finally decided to make a move!

**"YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO HARM THE REPUTATION OF THE  
DESCENDANTS OF THE ELDER GODS!"**

A silvery metallic projectile that possessed a certain degree of familiarity crashed through multiple walls and threatened to slam directly into the Minerva Mark II!

The speed, momentum spatial distortions generated by this incoming projectile were immense enough to shatter many rooms!

Before it could strike the First Sword Mark III directly, the ace mech reacted just before the threat emerged and unfolded her impressive Electro-Reactant Flight System!

The oversized electronic wings looked dramatic, but their power was very real.



The potent first-class power reactor of the First Sword Mark III pumped a lot of energy into the flight system, enabling it to produce such a strong and rapid impulse that the ace mech seemingly got swatted to the side!

"You missed." Saint Dise taintingly spoke as her superdimensional machine remained untouched.

The projectile meanwhile crashed through a number of walls and destroyed a lot of containers and machines along the way. Hundreds of hapless alien soldiers were also killed along the way!

It was only when the silvery projectile managed to arrest its forward movement with the help of its formidable spatial manipulation that its identity became clear.

The Protector of Karnak had arrived.

His base just suffered a great amount of damage due to his own actions. The scale could actually rival that of the damage inflicted by the intruder's storm of blades.

Yet the Protector of Karnak showed little concern about the collateral damage. This was because he could clearly sense the frightening strength of the superdimensional ace mech that had turned around to face him with a blade that tripped many warning signs.

If he was an ordinary lesser or greater phase lord, then he would not be so eager to confront an enemy that could slice his body to pieces with disturbing ease.

He was no ordinary phase lord, though.

The crustacean-like phase lord stood his ground and raised his claws in a menacing fashion.

Saint Dise regarded her main adversary for this battle.

Although she also needed to guard against the other two phase lords that were posturing in orbit, the ace pilot knew that the phase lords hailing from the Red Cabal received much better equipment and phasewater organs.

That was evident despite the relatively small stature of the Protector of Karnak.

Saint Dise was slightly surprised that the jureg phase lord opted to keep his body to such modest proportions.

Was he afraid of producing more collateral damage? That did not sound too likely.

No, the real reason why the greater phase lord continued to keep most of his body mass inaccessible and out of sight was because he was armored from top to bottom.

This was no ordinary raiment.

The greater phase lord wore a complete form-fitting raiment made out of the same material used to make the Saint Piercer arms!

The amount of superdimensional matter used to armor the clawed greater phase lord was way more than the quantity used to build the First Sword Mark III!

Although the quality and grade of the enemy superdimensional could not be determined, if it was anything like the material used to make Saint Piercer arms, then it should sit between mid-grade and high-grade.

That might not sound impressive, but Saint Dise was well aware that the new armor and weapons could not be underestimated due to their greater scale.

Not only was the greater phase lord several times bigger than the First Sword Mark III, but the armor plating was thicker and the claws looked much sharper and deadlier.

The greater quantity of superdimensional alloy alone was enough to fend off more strikes from her Decapitator.

There did not appear to be any weak points either. The raiment fully enclosed the Protector of Karnak.

In fact, its design not only looked disturbingly human, but also appeared to imitate mechs to an extent!

"FALSE GOD. THE GREAT DESCENDANTS OF THE ELDER GODS HAS DEEMED YOUR POSSESSION OF THE BONES OF THEIR ANCESTORS FORBIDDEN. I AM CHARGED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BRING YOU BACK TO ACCOUNT FOR YOUR DESECRATION OF OUR HONORED DEAD."

Saint Dise grinned as her ace mech held her greatsword in a different stance.

"That is funny coming from a greater phase lord who is trying to imitate us. With a full raiment of this size, it seems that you and the Red Cabal are beginning to abandon your old traditions and try to copy our methods!"

Dedicating so much superdimensional matter to construct a raiment that was only a fraction of the full size of a greater phase lord represented a massive paradigm shift!

If the Protector of Karnak was not the only one who received this kind of equipment, then that showed that the Red Cabal no longer put blind faith in the power of their immense true bodies!

#### Chapter 6988: Alien Phase Lord Adaptations

Just as red humanity feared, the native aliens expanded their exploitation of superdimensional matter.

The Red Cabal previously had been stingy with handing over Saint Piercer arms to various martial greater phase lords.

While they certainly made a difference and proved much more effective at repelling or even killing the human false gods, the superdimensional spears alone was not enough to create enough parity.

Human ace mechs all maintained the same approximate size range. While their ability to inflict damage on a large scale remained a bit limited, their potent combination of

speed, agility and power still allowed them to run rings around their much larger but clumsier adversaries.

So long as the ace mechs managed to overcome the formidable spatial barriers that protected these phase lords and directly targeted the head or other weak points, these human false gods were able to slay mighty phase lords in a disturbingly effective manner!

The Red Cabal understood this problem for a long time.

The phase whales tried various different solutions. The Protector of Karnak clearly obtained the privilege to test one of them.

A full superdimensional raiment that exposed no obvious weak points left Saint Dise with no easy openings to take down the enemy phase lord in a short amount of time!

Though Saint Dise felt confident that her resonance-empowered blade could cut through the enemy's superdimensional raiment by force, she knew that it would not be easy.

This was precisely what the greater phase lords needed to put up a more equal fight against human ace pilots and ace mechs.

Too many of their fellow gods had already perished at the hands of the humans because they arrogantly fought with their true bodies exposed.

Armor existed for good reasons. The native aliens previously did not experience a threat that was serious enough to warrant full coverage with superdimensional alloy.

Yet when confronting a human ace mech, the Protector of Karnak had delayed his arrival long enough to don his customized superdimensional raiment.

As far as craftsmanship went, the raiment was designed and built to excellent standards.

Not only that, but Saint Dise spotted plenty of design elements that looked right at home in high-end mechs.

She sneered. "Those traitors are at it again. The cosmopolitans cannot limit themselves to leaking our tech to your side. They also have to lend the expertise of their own mech designers to improve and optimize your raiment. Pathetic. You aliens have obviously decided that since you cannot beat us by relying on your massive true bodies, you aliens have instead decided to imitate our human mechs."

Though the Protector of Karnak hated the human false god's slanderous words, even he could not deny the truth of her statement.

Phase whales and phase lords previously pursued size at all costs.

Skill and finesse became secondary to raw might and indomitable true bodies.

The bigger phase leader almost always won a confrontation against their weaker peers. That was the way of life among the native aliens before the human invasion.

This was why Saint Dise was surprised that the Red Cabal had already been willing to relent so much. She thought that the native aliens would have dug their heels.

She had misjudged the shamelessness of the native aliens.

However, the enemy had probably made the right choice.

Saint Dise did not fear a battle against a greater phase lord that fought in a traditional manner.

Her superdimensional ace mech gave her infinite confidence in her ability to deal with such clumsy brutes.

Yet a greater phase lord that was willing to let down his pride and abandon his old way of fighting in order to imitate human mechs posed a much more serious threat.

This feeling became more pronounced when the Protector of Karnak raised one of his sharp and metal-clad claws and began to perform a strange spatial technique, likely with the help of an unknown phasewater organ!

The claw began to buzz and shimmer. The infusion of spatial power somehow made the implement more threatening!

Saint Dise could instinctively sense that it would be a very bad idea for her ace mech to get pincered by this empowered claw.

The strong spatial energies surging at the sharp edges somehow activated a hidden aspect of the superdimensional alloy to the point where it almost gained the power to cut through space itself!

Although Dise did not expect to encounter such a threatening foe, she slowly began to grin.

She could not have dreamed of a better opponent!

Instead of butchering the phase lords that were stationed in this star system as if they were fat and stupid pigs, she could actually enjoy a proper duel against an adequately equipped opponent!

Her Saint Kingdom grew more energetic. The illusion of blades grew stronger as her excitement rose.

The ace pilot took the Protector of Karnak so seriously that she recalled her sword fey without hesitation.

This time, she no longer let them wander around freely, but instead guided them to line up behind her electric-winged ace mech like an army of rigid soldiers.

Her lips curled into a grin.

"Before I can devote my full attention to you, let me clear out the trash. I don't want our duel to be disturbed by spoilsports."

Before the disturbingly well-equipped phase lord could issue a response, the massive electric wings of the ace mech made a powerful flap, causing the machine to launch upwards with formidable speed!

It took a small moment for the greater phase lord to realize that his opponent had fled from his claws.

His angry alien roar thundered across the damaged base!

His armored form rose shortly afterwards and flew straight in pursuit of the ace mech!

The fabric of space warped around the Protector of Karnak as he tried his best to intercept the ace mech.

The alien god was old and wise enough to understand exactly what Saint Dise intended!

While the jureg greater phase lord proved to be impressively fast among his kind, he was not quite able to match the speed of the cutting-edge superdimensional ace mech.

What was worse was that the First Sword had already built up a considerable lead.

The Protector of Karnak could only helplessly transmit a warning to the two other greater phase lords and assorted lesser phase lords that were hovering protectively over their homeships.

None of the lesser phase lords were foolish enough to ignore the magnitude of the incoming threat.

They all understood the horror of particularly powerful ace mechs and had no interest in tangling against a human false god that felt confident enough to confront them alone!

Of course, the lesser phase gods used to be a lot more courageous in the past.

It was only after hundreds of them mercilessly got cut down by the human false gods that they curbed their arrogance and recognized reality.

Nowadays, many alien phase lords had become a lot more familiar with human high-ranking mechs.

Those among them whose eyesight had not improved after all of this time had already paid for their mistakes with their lives.

This was the cruelty of the Red War!

As the lesser phase lords completely disregarded their demeanor as 'gods' and scattered from the flight trajectory of the superdimensional ace mech, the two greater phase lords did not move from their protective positions.

Unlike their lesser counterparts, the greater phase lords could not let down their pride so easily.

Despite the warning issued by the Protector of Karnak, the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet and the Endless Stomach possessed their own sources of confidence.

The former was not only equipped with a thick raiment that did a good job of covering his head and most of his nunsen body, but also wielded a Saint Piercer arm.

The Endless Stomach looked forward to devouring the human ace mech and grinding the mech frame down with the help of its newly acquired superdimensional teeth.

While both greater phase lords refused to back away from the incoming threat, they did not attempt to confront this enemy alone. They possessed enough sense to lean on each other for help.

When it became clear that the First Sword Mark III had set her sights on the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet, the Endless Stomach distanced himself from his own fleet and moved to reinforce his fellow native god!



Yet because the two fleets initially distrusted each other, they had positioned themselves too far away to reinforce each other quickly.

The Endless Stomach was also not a particularly fast greater phase lord, so the First Sword Mark III's fearless charge put all of the alien gods at a disadvantage!

The First Sword Mark III's Electro-Reactant Flight System proved their value many times over.

They expended energy like nothing else, but the thrust power generated by the large electric wings was the real deal.

Multiple alien warships tried to intercept the ace mech. Their secondary armaments opened fire along her rough trajectory with surprising coordination.

Not only did they fire their guns all at once, they also covered many different angles and coordinates to the point they weaved a dense web of energy beams and projectiles!

It was rare to see this level of coordination from the native aliens, but their better-trained soldiers needed to rely on advanced tactics in order to defeat the human mechs.

While 90 to 95 percent of the attacks ended up missing their mark, they had already served their purpose because the remainder always managed to strike the mech frame with every salvo.

The First Sword Mark III did not even bother to evade. She was not fast and agile enough to imitate the Dark Zephyr in trying to evade the dense net of firepower.

Dise chose to put her faith in her Saint Kingdom and her superdimensional mech.

They did not fail her. Energy beams, solid rounds, explosive shells and even more destructive transphasic missiles all tried and failed to slow down the ace mech.

No matter whether the attacks arrived at the front or rear, the superdimensional machine no longer possessed any glaring weak points!

Saint Dise could readily ignore attacks below a certain degree of power and intensity.

As the First Sword Mark III closed in on the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet, the greater nunser phase lord prepared to meet the approaching machine.

The Fifth Lord did not excel in spatial manipulation, but he tried to set up the battlefield by warping the space around him, turning it into a quagmire that often interfered with the movements of nearby enemies.

It was not enough to truly entrap ace mechs, but they had to expend a lot more willpower and strength in order to maintain their trajectories.

As the First Sword Mark III continued to charge forth, the nunser phase lord chose to make a stand by pointing his Saint Piercer arm straight ahead.

His intention could not be more obvious. Recognizing that evading the charge attack was useless, the greater phase lord wanted to make the ace mech impale herself onto his own superdimensional weapon!

Whether he was fast and accurate enough to nail the ace mech remained unclear, but the threat of it should be enough to make the human false god hesitant!

The First Sword Mark III did not slow down.

She continued to accelerate forward, seemingly disregarding the very real danger posed by the Saint Piercer arm.

Her response was to command her sword fey to move slightly ahead of her machine. They gradually moved forward until they formed a wedge formation.

This enabled them to resonate with each other in a specific way. Although weak, there was power in this sword formation that enabled the sword fey to concentrate their power in the blades at the front!

The Fifth Lord of Bis'qet felt an unreasonable amount fear from this sword formation.

His instincts may not be as sharp as that of an ace pilot, but they were not blind to the lethality radiating from the blades!

Chapter 6989: Within A Minute

Many people eagerly observed the first true debut performance of the First Sword Mark III.

As the first high-grade superdimensional ace mech, the First Sword Mark III would set everyone's expectations of the power of armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter.

The previous performance of the Fist of Defiance opened people's eyes to how superdimensional matter could make a difference at the top end of the power spectrum.

The superdimensional Invictus seemingly gained new wings with the help of its material upgrades.

Not only was it capable of resisting the attacks of several ancient phase whales at a time, its superdimensional fists enhanced the killing power of the god mech to a whole new level.

What about its effects on lower-end mechs?

Nobody aside from the crazy Larkinsons were crazy enough to waste this precious new material on expert mechs.

Everyone else already intended to use it to upgrade their most precious and promising peak ace mechs.

Famous champions who were just a single step away from ascending to godhood such as the Renewer of Terra, the Mace of Retaliation and the Gamer all held a lot of promise.

If they received a major upgrade to their hardware, they could not only kill enemy phase leaders more effectively, but also gain a considerable boost to their upgrade chances.

However, the latter still remained a low-probability event. Nobody was able to calculate the exact improvement bestowed by a full superdimensional upgrade.

There were mech designers and theorists who believed that it could multiply the success rate by 3000 percent.

There were also others who believed the improvement only amounted to an improvement of 50 percent.

All of these figures may sound impressive, but when the 'normal' success rate of embarking on the road to no return was definitely a figure that was way below 1 percent, the most optimistic scenario only yielded a success rate of maybe 10 to 20 percent!

These were still terrible odds!

While it was true that the individual circumstances of peak ace pilots varied so wildly that they could not easily be compared to each other, the estimated and calculated probabilities still provided sufficient reference value.

Loosely speaking, if 10 peak ace pilots broke through, only 1 of them would survive and become the latest god in human form.

As for the other 9?

Everything that was part of their bodies and mechs became erased from reality.

There was no way to preserve anything that belonged to them. This included many tons of precious armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional alloy!

Given that Swordmaster Ketis was only able to open up a portal to the Blue Dimension once every few months, the amount of high-grade superdimensional matter attained harvested by red humanity did not amount to much.

At most, the big powers were able to upgrade 2 to 4 peak ace mechs to the highest specification per harvest, assuming that they did not expend the precious high-grade superdimensional matter on other priorities, of which there were many.

Peak ace mechs were not the only machines that had a high demand for this wonder material.

Many powerful and highly influential figures lobbied for bits and pieces of high-grade superdimensional matter to upgrade their Starships, their personal protection and other assorted gadgets.

It was difficult to reject these requests entirely, especially when they gave abundant amounts of strategic goods such as starships in exchange, so the actual quantity of high-grade superdimensional matter being used to upgrade peak ace mechs was actually less than ideal.

This was why the performance of the First Sword Mark III received so much scrutiny that the warships of the Bluejay Fleet focused as much of their sensor systems on the ace swordsman mech as possible.

Since Saint Dise was pretty much a fresh ace pilot, the performance of her First Sword Mark III should be an adequate representation of the baseline of a superdimensional ace mech.

Three Master Mech Designers from the Mech Supremacist Faction had contributed to the design of this exquisite machine.

This meant that the Red Association almost completely comprehended the design of the loving machine that was demonstrating her power for the first time.

The mechers looked forward to conducting a statistical analysis that enabled them to normalize the data and make predictions on how superdimensional matter could enhance the performance of other, more powerful ace mechs.

They only needed to measure the empirical data of the First Sword Mark III in action in order to fill up the missing data.

This would subsequently set everyone's expectations of superdimensional ace mechs throughout the Red Ocean in many years to come!

Both Jovy Armalon and Vector Loban stood next to each other as they examined the live footage as well as the raw data readings from the control panel.

They became more and more encouraged whenever they witnessed the numbers grow bigger and the graph lines rise higher.

This alone did not necessarily tell them anything useful, so they also performed calculations in order to estimate the performance of a theoretical non-superdimensional First Sword Mark III.

Although the accuracy and reliability of these estimated figures remained questionable, it was better than nothing. The resulting analysis and conclusion played such an important role that it could seriously tilt the allocation of superdimensional resources in favor of peak ace mechs!

The Red Association naturally wished to see this happen. This was one of the strongest reasons why the Bluejay Fleet happily agreed to accompany the Premier Fleet in this campaign.

Even though the original contract with Ves Larkinson explicitly stated that the mechs and warships of the Red Association would not lend its aid in any offensive operations, that was just a pile of words.

The mechers made the rules, but they did not always abide by them. That was their privilege as rule makers.

Besides, now that the Red War had reached this stage, it was better to put the Bluejay Fleet at the disposal of one of the few rare ace commanders that could amplify their performance.

Already, the mechs and to a lesser extent the warships of the Bluejay Fleet already received the amplification of the Minerva Mark II's Command Field.

By this time, the Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet had already slowed down and allowed their mechs to lead the advance.

Their long-ranged armaments would soon be able to open fire on the alien forces, but it would still take a bit of time for the two fleets to be able to provide cover to the First Sword Mark III.

Despite the fact that the superdimensional ace mech was all alone for the time being, no one showed too much concern.

Superdimensional tech represented a technological paradigm shift to red humanity. Not only was it better than phasewater tech in many ways, it also happened to be a much more effective counter against phase leaders.

Right now, both Jovy and Vector harbored great expectations towards the ace swordsman mech.

"How long do you think it will take for Dise to eliminate the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet by herself?" Jovy asked with a smile on his face.

His Transhumanist friend raised an eyebrow. "You and your bets again? It depends. Are you talking about killing or forcing the greater phase lord into a retreat?"

"I think that the difference is irrelevant in this case." Jovy boldly answered. "You should have read the personality profile of Saint Dise. She is not one to let her prey escape alive, especially now that she is looking to prove herself with such a powerful machine."

Vector hesitated. Although he agreed with Jovy's analysis, not every greater phase lord was as easy to kill as others.

The Fifth Lord of Bis'qet had previously unfolded his true body to a size that was practically impossible to kill through mundane means. Only a large number of

warships firing their primary batteries in repeated salvos could make a serious dent in such a large phasewater-reinforced body.

Of course, greater phase lords had long learned the lesson that relying on a big body alone was not enough to defeat senior ace mechs.

This was why the Fifth Lord of Bisqet had folded his true body to the point he became as large as a juggernaut before wielding a Saint Piercer arm that complemented his current size.

That was a size that many greater phase lords had grown comfortable with. They no longer became giant, sluggish targets that could only get beat up by the small but incredibly powerful metal flies.

However, they still maintained enough of a scale advantage that they could leverage their superior strength and reach to suppress the mechs in a physical sense.

Superdimensional ace mech or not, there was no way the First Sword Mark III would be able to lock weapons with the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet!

The nunser race was famed for their superior physical strength, and the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet was a pure martial phase lord.

Many of his phasewater organs complemented his current development trajectory. Even the ones that manipulated the power of space were mainly used to trap and debilitate opponents at close range.

Vector had already read through the intelligence report of the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet. He also analyzed his current state with the help of the collected data.

He remained still as he utilized his cranial implant to perform a thorough analysis based on his own theoretical frameworks.

"I estimate that there is a 15 percent probability that the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet will die to Saint Dise within a minute of making contact. However, if the First Sword Mark III fails to achieve immediate dominance in spite of her superdimensional properties, then the odds of being able to secure a kill is much lower. The Protector of Karnak and the



Endless Stomach will catch up and reinforce their fellow greater phase lord. They may be rivals to each other, but when they are directly being challenged by a full superdimensional ace mech, they are rational enough to completely unite against this common foe. Saint Dise still lacks the experience and specialized skills to leverage the full strength of her superdimensional ace mech and overcome the combined defenses of all three phase lords."

Jovy looked impressed. "Good analysis. My own judgment shares much in common with yours. You have yet to answer my question, though. Stating a probability is not the same as making a bet. What do you think? Will she be able to complete a kill with the power of her ace mech and nothing else?"

"No." Vector eventually said. "A 15 percent success rate in the first minute is too low. As much as I want the First Sword Mark III to succeed and baptize herself in the blood of a greater phase lord, Saint Dise is clearly harboring an overinflated sense of confidence. None of these native gods are simple. If she chose to challenge them a year or two later, then the outcome would not be in doubt."

In the end, he thought that Saint Dise was being far too impatient this time. What was wrong with settling down and taking things step by step? Even senior ace pilots could not guarantee that they could kill a greater phase lord in a single confrontation!

As the First Sword Mark III rapidly closed the distance, she looked readily to pierce the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet in the most direct possible fashion.

Her Electro-Reactant Wings produced so much thrust that her momentum had soared despite the fact that she had to escape the gravity well of Screed Tanner VI-F!

As her 33 sword fey assumed a wedge formation directly in front of the path, it looked as if the ace mech had turned into a giant arrow head.

Even the ace mech's Saint Kingdom had condensed into a triangular shape in order to complement the sword formation!

The vast majority of humans and aliens who faced such a charge head-on would probably panic and lose their courage.

Yet the Fifth Lord of Bis'get maintained a stationary position and chose to meet this charge head-on. The nunser greater phase lord had no doubt that he would suffer a serious injury if the superdimensional mech struck his true body, but fleeing was no solution.

He knew that the First Sword Mark III was flexible and maneuverable enough to make course corrections.

There was no running away.

Since that is the case, then the Fifth Lord would try to impale the ace mech first!

He was still confident enough in his highly developed arms. Multiple phasewater organs reinforced his limbs in various ways, enabling him to perform well in duels against other martial phase lords.

So long as the First Sword Mark III failed to evade the tip of his Saint Piercer arm, the charge would definitely fail!

A cruel grin appeared underneath the armored faceplate of the nunser phase lord.

As the seconds ticked down, the Fifth Lord felt as if his body and soul were about to get impaled by a giant metal sword!

However, the greater phase lord relied on his supreme confidence in his physical strength to resist this illusion and make sure to track the ace mech's passage.

"#\$&@\$#&!"

"ANOTHER FALSE GOD OF THE HUMANS SHALL DIE!"

An instant before the tip of his superdimensional weapon was about to impale the First Sword Mark III, the ace mech's Electro-Reactant Flight System made an extreme course change!

The ace mech had made an abrupt turn!

Contrary to the greater phase lord's expectations, the superdimensional machine did not juke in any of the four directions that would enable her to attack the Fifth Lord from the side.

Instead, the First Sword Mark III had chosen to turn back, putting her completely out of reach of the Fifth Lord!

"What?!"

Many people reacted with surprise! Had Saint Dise decided to chicken out of this collision!"

"No!"

The ace mech may have averted a collision, but the 33 sword fey continued to fly forward with indomitable momentum!

The sword formation actually dispersed from the middle. This enabled each and every blade to completely avoid contact with the Saint Piercer arm and continue forward until they struck the spatial barrier and almost immediately slip through!

Once the resonance-empowered sword fey reached the other side, they quickly reformed their original triangular formation before plunging straight against the nunser phase lord's raiment!

#### Chapter 6990: Superdimensional Cutting Power

When the sword fey condensed into a sword formation and struck the chest plate of the nunser phase lord, many humans and aliens paid attention whether this attack could penetrate through the armor.

The raiment worn by the Fifth Lord of Bis'qet may not be as advanced and complete as the raiment worn by the Protector of Karnak, but it still offered a good deal of defense against superdimensional weapons.

Most importantly, the nuns' greater phase lord's raiment boasted the greatest thickness at the front. The armor layers were thicker and more numerous as that was the side that the Fifth Lord most often expected to receive attacks.

Right now, a silent collision occurred as the sword fey concentrated all of its power into the leading Prime Sword Fey!

Although it was made out of mid-grade superdimensional alloy like the other sword fey, it not only bore the willpower amplification and metal energy empowerment of Saint Disa, but also served as the tip of the spear of the entire sword formation!

Upon the moment of collision, sparks, spatial disruptions and other energy fluctuations erupted from the point of impact!

It became extremely difficult for anyone to get a clear look at what had happened!

Only an instant passed before the other remaining sword fey continued to surge forward and collide against the raiment.

While the effect of the Prime Sword Fey remained unclear, it was still possible to quickly determine the effect of the ordinary sword fey.

"Failed to penetrate!"

This was a disappointing but expected result. While they retained their willpower and metal energy empowerment, the sword formation had lost effect as soon as it had crumbled.

In fact, this was also a sign that the sword formation clearly wasn't powerful enough to drill straight through the armor and body of the Fifth Lord of Bis'get.

Now, the real question became how deep the Prime Sword Fey managed to punch through the armor.

As the disturbances slowly cleared up, many sensor systems were able to observe the actual results.

"The tip... partially sunk into the armor!"

"The leading sword spur has penetrated through at least three armor layers! The other sword fey have only managed to produce shallow cuts in a single armor layer."

This did not sound impressive, but those who understood the circumstances better all grew incredibly impressed!

"A junior ace mech with access to hull-grade superdimensional weapons is already able to damage the layers of the Fifth Lord's Saint Blocker raiment!"

According to the analysis of the Red Three, the superdimensional alloy used in the making of the so-called Saint Blocker raiments roughly performed better than mid-grade superdimensional alloy but was a little short of matching high-grade superdimensional alloy.

Plenty of human material scientists and metallurgists speculate that the native aliens actually had a way of producing or harvesting hull-grade superdimensional matter.

They then relied on special methods and complementary resources to produce superior superdimensional alloys.

In other words, the Red Cabal probably relied on superior metallurgical attainments or some sort of profound ancient heritage to surpass red humanity in this field!

This strengthened the theory that the phase whales likely produced their own superdimensional matter rather than mining it from the Blue Dimension.

Regardless, the naked penetration power of the sword fey shouldn't be strong enough to pierce through the first layer of the Saint Blocker under ordinary circumstances.

It was only through the application of overwhelming brute force or more exotic forms of amplification that Saint Dise was able to produce such a result.

The latter was apparently strong enough to surpass the inherent material shortcomings of the sword fey!

Both Jovy and Vector exchanged glances as they witnessed all of this happening from a control room in the Tarrasque.

"It appears that you have lost the bet." Jovy directly stated.

"Right." Vector directly conceded.

At this time, the First Sword Mark III had just completed her first attack run and had already circled around by this time.

Her sword fey did not return to her side.

It was a bit troublesome to recall the sword fey now that they had penetrated the Fifth Lord's spatial barrier with so much effort.

Besides, why call them back when they could continue to attack the greater phase lord?

Under the command of their ace pilot, the intelligent sword fey dispersed and began to stab at the greater phase lord's body from all sides.

The sword fey failed to inflict much damage this time. They dispersed too much and did not leverage the power of sword formations.

They also could not build up any momentum to add more power to their attacks.

Even so, the Fifth Lord of Bis'get could not afford to ignore the harassment!

His raiment may have been designed and molded to fit his quadruped body at its current scale, but it did not cover every part of his body!

To be more specific, parts of his underside and many of the joint areas were still exposed, making it easier for the sword fey to pierce his flesh directly if they managed to land a strike!

Even if the sword fey were not able to strike with enough force to sink down to the hilt, the shallow stab and slash wounds already generated a considerable amount of distress!

"\$#&%@!"

"BEGONE!"

The Fifth Lord tried to swat the sword fey away. While he managed to batter them to the side by whacking the closest ones with his Saint Piercer arm, the sword fey quickly recovered and immediately resumed their autonomous attacks!

Even if he was able to block and push the sword fey within his reach aside, that left the other floating blades free to attack the greater phase lord's body from other angles!

Although the Fifth Lord had a growing urge to rotate his body and batter aside the other sword fey, he did not dare to face away from the source of his misery.

At this time, the First Sword Mark III was charging forward to launch another attack run!

The greater phase lord could only endure the multitude of weak attacks, trusting in his Saint Blocker raiment to prevent the silly blades from targeting his vitals.

He knew that as long as he destroyed or repelled the ace mech, the sword fey would automatically cease to pose a threat.

The lesser phase lord quickly restored his previous stance and became determined to impale the incoming ace mech this time.

He had a better measure of his adversary at this time. The First Sword Mark III had already exposed her speed and maneuverability. Now that he possessed this

information, the experienced martial phase lord became a little more confident in his ability to intercept his adversary at this time.

However, the same also applied to Saint Dise.

She not only figured out much of the Fifth Lord's capabilities first-hand, but also had a much better measure of her strength and that of her superdimensional ace mech!

If a bunch of mid-grade superdimensional sword fey were able to penetrate one to three layers of the enemy phase lord's armor, then how much more damage could she produce by stabbing it with the Decapitator?

As the First Sword Mark III charged forward yet again, the ace pilot condensed her Saint Kingdom and used it to complement her next sword technique!

Compared to messing around with sword formations, Saint Dise possessed much greater familiarity in the sword style that she had honed for her entire career!

She had multiple different choices at her disposal, but she could not ignore the threat of getting stabbed with a Saint Piercer arm by the full force of a physically superior greater phase lord.

Dise therefore decided to execute the technique that she and Ketis especially devised to counter phase lords like the Fifth Lord!

Just as the First Sword Mark III was about to collide with the greater phase lord again, the Decapitator glowed with energies that produced an indescribable disruption effect.

At the same time, Dise sent her companion spirit Respa into the space suppressor of her ace mech.

Just before the First Sword Mark III managed to get close enough, the ace mech already weakened the Fifth Lord's spatial manipulation!

His limbs grew weaker. His spatial barrier lost a bit of power. His ability to lock down the surrounding space had no chance of touching the incoming ace mech!



These setbacks threatened to disrupt the Fifth Lord's concentration, but the nunser phase lord had lived for a long time. He had faced numerous perils throughout his long life, so he knew the importance of maintaining focus during this critical time!

Just before the First Sword Mark III entered into his striking range, the Fifth Lord decisively stabbed his formidable Saint Piercer forward, confident that he had predicted the ace mech's movement!

"#\$%&#!"

"YOUR ARROGANCE SHALL BE YOUR DOWNFALL!"

Just as he predicted, the tip of his Saint Piercer surged directly towards the charging ace mech with unerring accuracy!

The weapon struck so quickly and with so much force that the Fifth Lord could not imagine a possibility where the ace mech could block, deflect or evade his stab!

Even if he could feel the Saint Kingdom trying to weaken and arrest the momentum of the Saint Piercer, it had little to no effect!

After all, Saint Piercers were weapons that the phase whales specifically designed to counter ace pilots and ace mechs. They were absurdly effective at piercing through the nonsense of domain fields.

They almost always came in the form of polearms as that made it even more inconvenient for Saint Kingdoms to affect their entire lengths.

Right now, the Fifth Lord could almost imagine the tip of his sharp and hungry spear punch through the chest plate of the ace mech!

Superdimensional or not, willpower empowerment or not, the Fifth Lord's strength combined with the First Sword Mark III's own momentum should produce a highly lethal result!

Even if the tip of the Saint Piercer got ruined after this, the outcome would be completely worth it in his opinion!

Yet before his proportionally larger weapon could even graze the chestplate of the pristine new ace mech, a masterwork greatsword swung at the slender speartip from a tricky angle.

"PHASE CUTTER."

At the same time, the ace mech's Electro-Reactant Flight System briefly overloaded, producing a massive thrust directed towards the side!

"He missed!"

"The Fifth Lord of Bis'get actually failed to pierce through to the ace mech!"

"No, it's worse! Look at his weapon!"

Everyone including the nunser greater phase lord himself became shocked as they witnessed the current state of the Saint Piercer arm.

This lengthy polearm which must have made the lives of numerous ace pilots miserable in the past had lost its head.

The Decapitator had decapitated the Saint Piercer, causing its sharp but unmoored tip to tumble off into another direction of space.

Meanwhile, the slightly shortened polearm had been left with a diagonal cut that revealed an entire cross section.

Although it looked as if the sharp edges of this cut might still be used to stab at enemies, the effect wouldn't be as good as before!

Saint Dise had practically reduced the nightmare of all ace mechs into a much less threatening staff!

That was not all. While the Fifth Lord struggled to accept how easily the ace mech had cut through a weapon that had resisted the attacks of multiple other ace mechs, the First Sword Mark III did not turn swerve too far away.

Instead, the electric-winged ace mech relied on her impressive mobility to redirect her momentum yet again. Her sharp turn allowed her to close the distance to the phase lord a lot faster than before!

While the Fifth Lord had become unbalanced due to the sudden setback, he was still strong and experienced enough to realize the danger.

He immediately began to wield his Saint Piercer like a staff and sought to physically batter away the ace mech with the side of its shaft!

Although the strike arrived quickly, Saint Dise already predicted the greater phase lord's move far in advance.

Before the shaft could get close enough to inflict a powerful strike against the offensive ace mech, the latter's electric wings made another powerful flap.

This happened to push the fast and agile ace mech far away enough for the shaft of the Saint Piercer to miss!

"He's open!"

The First Sword Mark III continued to charge forward and directly used the tip of her Decapitator to pierce and shatter the greater phase lord's spatial barrier all at once!

This was the power of a weapon-grade superdimensional greatsword!

However, just before the ace mech was about to stab at the Fifth Lord's raiment, the greater phase lord reacted faster than expected and tilted his armored body upwards so that he could launch a desperate kick at the First Sword Mark III!

"Watch out, Dise!"