The Mech Touch

Chapter 7541 Carving Out A Path To Victory

"Hatred Crafting." Gloriana flatly said.

"Yes. That's the one."

"You are being serious."

"I am."

"Do you know how insane this sounds?"

"Brilliance can often be found within the intersection between genius and madness." Ves retorted. "If we want to find a truly powerful solution to the problem at hand, then we need to think outside of the box. What may seem stupid at first may actually turn out to be the salvation that we have always sought. I am not asking you to love my proposal at first sight. I just want you to look past the surface and realize how much of a difference it can make."

His wife still remained skeptical. "It seems to me that you are trying to force the use of Demoncasting for your own selfish motives. I know that you have been trying to justify this choice by finding occasions where you can use it as a solution, but this matter is far too dangerous for you to let your biases overrule your judgment. Tell us why you think this will work."

Ves helplessly spread out his arms. "It's quite simple, really. The Omega Threshers are our most formidable source of firepower at the moment. As far as I am concerned, we already have plenty of ace mechs and Ascended Giants that can defend our fleet at close range and entangle any enemy champions that the aliens might throw at us. The true battle is the one between our regular forces and the seemingly endless tide of deathborn. We need to be a lot more effective at killing the latter. The Principles of a Divine Kingdom may help with that by strengthening her Command Field, but I think it is worthwhile to focus on the mechs that benefit the most from her Commandeering and Enfeoffment."

His clever wife quickly deduced his logic. "I see. You want to increase the base strength of the Omega Threshers, so that when Casella's Command Field acts upon them, applying the same multiplier on them will ultimately produce drastically greater output."

"Exactly. It's a math problem as far as I am concerned. This is not just about increasing the raw power of the Omega Thresher's ranged armaments. It is also about imbuing the power of hatred in them. This will make these weapons a lot more effective at killing the deathborn. Purely material weapons have proven to be a lot less effective than desirable.

The only reason why they can kill the deathborn at all is because of the very recent adoption of hyper technology and to a lesser extent E-technology. By performing Hatred Crafting on these mechs, we are in essence increasing the weight of the latter. When these upgraded weapons benefit from the multiplicative boost of the Minerva Mark II, their firepower will reach an entirely different dimension. Think about what this means. As long as we work fast enough, we will effectively be able to deploy several hundred expert mechs that are especially good at killing deathborn and other incorporeal enemies!"

Gloriana and the other mech designers no longer thought that his proposal was nonsense anymore.

He actually made a very good argument. The Saint Commander's overall strength and agency largely depended on the forces under her command.

The stronger the units at her disposal, the greater her impact on the battlefield!

Among these assets, warships provided a lot of hard firepower, but was not scaleable due to several reasons.

She was much more capable of amplifying the power of mechs. The degree of amplification was highly complex and depended on many different variables.

There was no need to dive too deep into this convoluted mess.

They all understood the general principle that a weak mech still remained fairly modest even after getting boosted by Casella's Command Field.

Even if the Saint Commander managed to improve her domain field by 30 or 60 percent, the eventual output still wouldn't raise too many eyebrows.

On the other hand, when a powerful mech enjoyed the same effect, the absolute difference in performance ended up much greater!

This was how Ves justified his proposal's focus on the Omega Threshers. He truly could not pick better mechs to strengthen aside from maybe the Dracoloids.

However, the Dracoloids performed best at close range. Choosing them may be a viable alternative, but they would have to use them alongside the Ascended Giants if that was the case.

Due to restrictions imposed by the Command Field, it was better to strengthen their long-ranged firepower instead, allowing them to use the souped-up Omega Threshers as their most effective firepower batteries!

"We get it now." Ketis spoke with a tone of finality. "Now that we have each presented our proposals, it is time to decide which one to adopt. Before we go further, does anyone want to withdraw their proposal in case you think another one is better?"

They all looked at each other. They had invested a lot of thinking into constructing their respective plans. They did not easily wish to give up on them. They still maintained sufficient confidence in their own proposals!"

This did not make it easier for them to come to a consensus, though.

"I do not have time for this." Gloriana let out an exasperated noise. "We have worked too much already. Let us hold a vote. You can choose to favor any of the four proposals aside from your own. Hopefully, this should either lead to a clear favorite or narrow our choices at the very least."

Ves and the others nodded in agreement. "That sounds straightforward enough."

They proceeded to note down their votes without sharing any of their opinions with each other.

Gloriana quickly announced the tally. "Alexa's plan received two votes. My plan received a single vote. My husband's plan also received a solitary vote."

The results painted a clear picture. Alexa Streon surprisingly managed to win over two other mech designers.

This meant that so long as the young mech designer still favored her own initiative, her plan had managed to win over a clear majority!

Alexa herself looked bewildered more than happy. She clearly enjoyed the validation she received from her fellow mech designers, but did not expect them to cast their votes in her direction.

"I thought my proposal was considered high risk high reward. The other proposals might not yield as much, but they come with considerably less complications."

"You're right, Alexa." Ves responded. "I still think it is worth a try. The Last Defiance Manual can comprehensively strengthen our Woodsap mechs even without considering the special gambit. Even if we fail to trigger a genocide among the deathborn, our living mechs will still be able to fight far above their usual level. What is even better is that the method of this enlightenment fruit can also be shared to Ascended Giants. We have brought enough of them that strengthening them will result in a massive difference once the fight begins."

Ketis cast the other vote. "I share the same thoughts as Ves. While I personally prefer a direct decapitation strike, it is not a bad idea to make the forces at your disposal a lot

more powerful. You cannot neglect their contributions. Our clan has been pampered by our champions for a long time that it is all too easy to forget that ordinary troops still exist. I believe that it is important to make sure the latter can still keep up with the development of the former. If the gap between them grows too big, it will become all too easy for them to reject each other's existence."

The swordmaster clearly held deep concerns about this. She did not want the high-ranking mech pilots to become so strong that they considered themselves to be a separate species from the ordinary folk!

This was also why she did not feel too upset that her own proposal ended up receiving none of the votes. She had become too fixated on helping Saint Dise and the First Sword Mark III that she had overlooked the value of the other units in the combined fleet.

It couldn't be helped. Ketis still remained very unfamiliar with the rest of the first-class forces fighting alongside Ves.

Gloriana on the other hand felt a little relieved that her proposal received at least one vote. She quickly deduced that it belonged to Alexa. The former Terran was quite sensible in this regard.

"Wait." Ketis suddenly turned to Gloriana. "Did you vote for Ves' proposal?"

"I did." Gloriana admitted with a sigh. "Do not misunderstand me. I believe that all four proposals have their own merits. When I cast my vote, I did not solely consider their contents. I also based my choice on the people who devised those proposals. Whenever I have doubts about Ves, he has repeatedly defied the odds. I have learned over time that betting on him will often pay out despite the questions that I may have about his unorthodox thinking."

"I see. Now that we have learned that Alexa's proposal has received two votes, are you willing to change your mind?"

A 'majority' among just four mech designers sounded rather pathetic, but they were not ordinary people. Each of them were highly competent mech designers with very pronounced strengths.

Gloriana could not ignore that. She threw a single apologetic look at Ves before announcing her verdict.

"As I have stated before, I think that all of the proposals are acceptable. Even if I possess a slight fondness for my husband, I see little problem in shifting my support to Alexa's plan. I am concerned about its risk factor, but if we want to catch the deathborn completely off-guard, this may be the plan that can do this the best. It is worth an attempt."

The four mech designers had come to a consensus.

They decided to realize the proposal based on redeeming the Last Defiance Manual Enlightenment Fruit!

Though each of them had not let go of their affection towards their own individual proposals, it was clear that there was no point in arguing for them. Alexa has received too much support already.

As the decision settled in, everyone's expression grew severe.

Implementing Alexa's plan would not be easy. Ves might be able to gain a lot of understanding and proficiency in the associates techniques, but everyone else would have to make do with the texts that he was about to transcribe.

In fact, Gloriana and Ketis would not be able to provide much help going forward. They still lacked too much understanding of biotechnology to help with upgrading the Woodsap mechs in such a special way.

"I feel as if we are standing at a crossroads of destiny." She voiced her own apprehension. "We managed to earn a respectable amount of Ascension Points this time, but it is only enough to redeem a single fairly expensive enlightenment fruit. Each of the ones we have used to formulate our plans promise amazing benefits for us all, but they are all different. Choosing the Last Defiance Manual means that we will not be able to access the knowledge contained in those other fruits. It will take years for us to absorb the remainder. I hope... that the delay will not end up dooming us all in the far future."

They could only move on from one direction at the crossroads. This was why Gloriana felt so uncertain at the moment. She was not accustomed to making such weighty decisions.

Ves was different in this regard. He had already become accustomed to making high-level decisions. He personally believed that even if he ended up making the wrong choice, it was always better to be proactive than reactive!

Perhaps this was just an excuse for his habit of making risky decisions, but he did not see anything wrong with that. One of the reasons why he often managed to get away with such reckless behavior was because the advantages obtained from the Mech Designer Systems were truly powerful enough to force impossibilities into reality!

In other words, he was a strong believer in carving out a path to victory by force!

Thank you for reading my work. If you wish to support The Mech Touch, please vote with your golden tickets!

Chapter 7542 Frightening Cost

Chapter 7542 Frightening Cost

"So this is the fruit, huh?"

It looked deceptively playful.

It did not look like an item that was worth 350 whole Ascension Points.

Instead, it looked like a children's toy, or a custom piece of candy.

The enlightenment fruit looked like a large version of a red chili pepper. It exuded a sense of heat and excitement, but not much more.

If any ordinary human came across this item, they would never imagine that it encapsulated a huge amount of knowledge and other properties related to an ancient and lost cultivation technique.

It lacked a certain gravitas and solemnity. Aside from a rather subtle and invisible weight, it held no obvious traits that clearly identified its explosive contents.

Ves could not possibly be as ignorant. He had spent too much AP to overlook such a banal matter.

Besides, even if he did not spend so much AP to redeem it, he could read the description that appeared as a popup in his vision. The Mech Designer System made sure that he would not be able to mistake it for anything but an enlightenment fruit.

As he continued to stare down at the fruit that he had just exchanged, three female mech designers stood impatiently a short distance away.

They could read the description as well. Their eyes all betrayed their respective wants and needs.

The girls wanted to ingest the fruit themselves.

Even if the Last Defiance Manual did not match their style or inclinations, they would be lying if they tried to claim that they had no use for this knowledge.

Whether they wanted to gain an additional trump card that they could use on the battlefield, or utilize the vast amount of knowledge to impart similar properties to their upcoming works, none of the mech designers believed that the enlightenment fruit would be wasted in their hands.

Yet despite their varying degrees of desire and greed towards the fruit, they all acquiesced to the decision to allow Ves to take a bite out of the giant pepper fruit.

Of course, just because they agreed with the logic did not mean that their emotions could remain calm.

"Well?" Gloriana impatiently asked. "Will you get on with it, Ves? You are continuing to tempt us with each second of the fruit's continuous existence. Please end our torment and devour the fruit."

"What she said." Ketis conveyed her sentiment with the least amount of words.

Their admonishments started Ves, causing him to shake out of his contemplative mood.

"Ah. Sorry about that. I got lost in my own thoughts again. I suppose there is no reason to put this off any further."

Ves took a deep breath and began to bite into the fruit.

In his human-sized form, he could never swallow the enlightenment fruit whole.

He had to take several continuous bites in quick succession.

Ves did not linger on the taste, which predictably reminded him of a rather spicy but barely tolerable large chili pepper.

The taste was actually a lot more complex than that, but that was the last thing he cared about.

From the first bite onwards, knowledge already started to pour into his mind.

The rate of transmission accelerated as he swallowed the bitten pieces of fruit.

By the time he ingested the last remaining piece, his body shuddered as he largely lost his awareness of the current environment.

Though he still remained standing, his eyes became empty as he no longer registered the System Space or the mech designers standing in front.

Instead, his entire consciousness became immersed in the forceful rush of knowledge!

It was as if a direct channel had formed from his stomach to his brain.

This high-capacity channel not only transferred a vast amount of theories and other information directly into his mind, but did so in a directed fashion.

There was no way that Ves would be able to perfectly absorb and memorize so much knowledge in so little time.

Yet under the invisible direction of the magical enlightenment fruit, he perfectly managed to internalize the new knowledge in a way that made it difficult for him to forget even a single passage!

It was as if Ves had gained decades worth of deep study on the contents of the Last Defiance Manual in just a handful of minutes!

However, what Ves prized more than all of the raw knowledge was the forceful infusion of mastery and true comprehension.

Just as the description of the fruit had promised, Ves began to understand the principles and underlying concepts behind the cultivation techniques as if he had repeatedly practiced them for almost half a century!

Ves could feel himself growing more formidable by the second.

He knew that if he ever got caught in a desperate situation, he could perform a carefully chosen variation of the Last Defiance Technique that would allow him to instantly convert his latent energy reserves into an immediate outburst of power of violence!

At the cost of digging deep into his corporeal and noncorporeal foundation, he could immediately trade his long-term capital into short-term power, the kind that would enable him to punch far above his weight, if only for a brief amount of time!

Though the conversion rate was horrendously low, Ves still valued this technique for possessing a remarkably high ceiling!

This was the charm of the Last Defiance Technique. It placed a very high priority on granting the practitioner as much power as possible just so that he could defeat the strong while ostensibly being weaker.

The negative consequences were great. Ves received a much greater understanding and appreciation of the enormous price that he would have to pay if he executed any variation of the technique.

He knew without a shadow of a doubt that if he forcefully tried to perform the most severe version of the Last Defiance Technique, he would essentially burn his entire body, mind and spirit all at once in order to completely surpass his boundaries for just a single instant!

Ves could not precisely measure the magnitude of a spark of power borne out of the most absolute demonstration of sacrifice.

His new expertise and mastery only gave him hints of what he could expect.

There was no way to know for certain, because if he truly performed this ultimate desperation technique, he and possibly all of his incarnations would utterly perish, with no possibility of revival or resurrection!

Yes, that latter part applied as well!

This was the meaning of total sacrifice!

He could only vaguely feel that he became so strong that he might be able to inflict deathblow on a greater phase lord.

A part of him felt disappointed at that. After giving up so much of himself, was he only able to pose a certain threat to greater phase lords?

What about ace pilots and ace mechs?

Ves had much less confidence in his ability to kill them. This was because their Saint Kingdoms and their superior alloys granted them much better comprehensive defenses on every level.

He inwardly shook his head.

He did not redeem the Last Defiance Manual for the purpose of targeting human ace mechs.

Plenty of formidable alien champions stood in his way, if not today, then definitely in the future!

No matter if the Dark Apostle challenged them in person or if he allowed one of his many subordinates and living mechs to fight in his stead, each of them could benefit greatly from the Last Defiance Manual!

Red humanity was beset by hostile aliens from all sides.

Many of them grew stronger over time. In terms of quality and quantity, both the native aliens of the Red Ocean and the extragalactic aliens of Messier 87 constantly sought to increase their ability to contend for supremacy in the new frontier!

Though there were many ways for red humans to keep up and possibly surpass their alien rivals and adversaries, Ves believed that the Last Defiance Technique would definitely give them a hefty boost!

Unfortunately, it was not a method that human soldiers should use lightly or frequently.

He already received an indication of its many dangers from the brief description, but now that he had absorbed the entire enlightenment fruit, its risk factors had been carved into his very bones.

His body briefly shuddered when he truly understood the true cost of defiance.

The technique was not truly difficult to commence at his level of artificial mastery.

What was truly challenging was to maintain a sense of sobriety while all of his senses and emotions amped up due to the enormous boost of strength!

It was human nature to become drunk with power. Ves knew without a shadow of a doubt that the enlightenment fruit could not fully impart the discipline, willpower and experience that was necessary for a practitioner to maintain complete control over himself.

He still had to rely greatly on himself to measure how much power he wanted to convert from this technique and when he should stop before it was too late.

If he did not adequately control the timing and execution of the Last Defiance Technique, then he faced a very severe risk of digging far too deep into his foundation!

While Ves believed that he possessed a far deeper physical and spiritual foundation than most ordinary qi cultivators, that only granted him a larger buffer.

Poor control and judgment would still cause him to deplete much more of his current foundation than he wished, thereby severely crippling his future potential!

Death may be the ultimate consequence for losing control, but the loss in potential was almost just as bad in his opinion!

He knew that the Last Defiance Technique truly had the potential to burn anything so long as it contained any scrap of power.

That meant it was all too easy for him to burn the stuff that he relied upon to achieve greatness, such as Blinky, his companion spirit, or his design seed, which represented the essence of his power as a mech designer!

Sacrificing just a single essential piece of either of them would cause immense and permanent harm to his future progression!

Ves understood that he could never take this dangerous technique lightly.

He could not afford to become complacent and rely on the artificial proficiency granted by the enlightenment fruit to keep him safe.

He would have to practice the technique in controlled or low-intensity conflicts in order to truly gain a measure of control over its formidable output.

"How scary." He whispered as the rush of knowledge finally came to an end.

His expanded and partially digitized mind did not require any further time to digest the knowledge. He already understood the theories and other information by heart.

As long as he worked to address the other shortcomings, he would truly be able to feel that he had gained a sufficient degree of mastery over the Last Defiance Technique!

Chapter 7543 Leaving

Digesting the contents of the Last Defiance Manual brought profound changes.

Every technique had been created with a purpose in mind.

Every creator injected parts of himself into their works.

The same applied to the Last Defiance Manual.

Ves already expected this, but what he got from the latest enlightenment fruit encompassed more than he initially anticipated!

The unknown warrior who wrote the text did not hold back when it came to injecting his personal beliefs and philosophy into his descriptions.

The entire theoretical framework of his desperation methods was built on a foundation of extreme struggle!

The ancient duelist and challenger believed that the mightiest of gods could only be forged through frequent and arduous combat!

Not just any fight would do. It had to be real in a way that pushed the threat of death as close to the surface as possible.

Only when survival truly came into question would a warrior be able to summon the greatest of desperation.

The Last Defiance Technique literally depended on this extreme emotion to fuel its effects!

It was both pointless and wasteful to perform this special technique in situations where it was not needed.

Most practitioners wouldn't even be able to trigger it in the first place due to failing to meet the requirements.

This also introduced a significant problem to Ves.

It was impossible for regular soldiers to become proficient in this technique by relying on routine practice.

The only way they could pull it off was to do so on an actual battlefield.

Yet that was precisely the most dangerous time for any practitioner!

When a soldier that lacked any experience tried to perform it for the first time, there was a very high chance that he would become drunk with power and lose control over himself!

Such a case could easily cause the deranged soldier to continue to fight above his level until he hollowed himself out. If he did not drain himself to death, then he would still come away with very deep losses to his essence and foundation!

Ves immediately concluded that it was not appropriate to spread this desperation technique far and wide.

Even though red humanity was beset by multiple hostile alien groups at this time, the situation had not truly deteriorated to the worst possible situation.

Perhaps he could restrict access to the contents of the Last Defiance Manual to vetted elite soldiers.

Only when the mech pilots proved that their mental strength and discipline were up to par would they be able to learn and perform the Last Defiance Technique without killing themselves in the process.

Even then, Ves could not rule out the possibility of frequent accidents. The Last Defiance Technique possessed an insanely strong addictive component. Even the most disciplined soldiers might not be able to resist the urge to give up their future potential for an extended burst of immense power!

The only consultation that made him feel a little better was that the output was truly exaggerated.

That still made it worthwhile for Ves to try and see how he could make it work with others.

By others, he meant both mech pilots and living mechs.

However, there was no time for him to utilize the Last Defiance Technique for its intended purpose.

The enlightenment fruit was part of a greater plan to set a very devious trap for the deathborn.

Ves closed his eyes and shook his head a few times.

He tried his best to stir away the contamination brought by the enlightenment fruit.

He repressed his desire to go out right now and challenge himself by diving directly into the dark miasma.

He also held back his instinct to teach the most basic technique to a bunch of mech pilots in order to test how well they could handle it without burning out entirely with their first attempt.

Ves needed to invest way more time and effort on figuring out how to roll out this technique correctly.

Otherwise, a lot of good soldiers would end up killing themselves for no good reason!

"Are you alright, Ves?" Gloriana asked with evident concern. "Did this fruit bring any unpleasant side effects?"

"I... need a bit of time to settle down." Ves let out a sigh. "The Last Defiance Manual is a testament of a battle maniac. It will be difficult for others to prevent themselves from getting overly caught up in the philosophy behind the desperation techniques. Those who learn one of them will inevitably develop the compulsion to use it on the battlefield. It takes a strong and disciplined mind to resist this natural temptation."

The expressions of the three mech designers began to show varying degrees of concern.

"Is the technique that dangerous?"

"We all underestimated it, perhaps." Ves sighed. "At the very least, this is good news for us in the short term. Alexa's plan hinges on two very crucial conditions. The first is baiting the deathborn into swallowing the fruit. With the brand-new knowledge that I have in my mind, I think it should not be a challenge to artificially condense life-bearing fruits that contain a seed of this technique. The second condition is making sure that the deathborn will not be able to stop the runaway process once it starts. I have greater confidence in the latter. Unless the deathborn have fallen under absolute control of a being of a higher rank, it should be impossible for the feral and unruly deathborn to resist the temptation to squeeze more power out of themselves. It goes against their entire nature."

Alexa grinned when she heard that. "Your words vindicate my decision to make use of this enlightenment fruit. I had not been completely certain whether it truly contains the knowledge that is vital to creating the bait."

"Ah, it won't be as simple as you wish, Alexa. The Last Defiance Technique is strongly biased towards generating a lot of power in order to expend it right away. It was never designed to generate a large amount of life energy only to hang on to it all just so that they can serve as new pieces of bait. This sort of indirect attack falls outside of the normal scope of what the original creator of the technique envisioned. We will have to figure out how to break down one of the techniques and retool it until it aligns with your proposal."

"How much time will that take?"

Ves shrugged. "A week? Two weeks? I am not entirely sure. I have a strong feeling that without performing the Last Defiance Technique myself, I will never truly be able to convert my artificial proficiency into true mastery."

Gloriana frowned when she heard that. "If that is the case, then we will need to extend our stay in the System Space even further. We have less than a couple of days in reality to enact one of our proposals. Alexa's plan calls for modifying all of our Woodsap mechs so that they will all be able to dangle poisoned fruit in front of our enemies. Such work will definitely take many hours to complete in realspace. That means that we cannot waste any hours just to develop the specific implementation of this risky plan."

"Alexa and I are all that is needed to complete the necessary steps." Ves spoke with confidence. "No offence, Gloriana, Ketis, but the two of you are largely redundant at this stage. Unless either of you become a lot more competent in the field of biotechnology, there is very little that you can contribute to our progress."

"But... but..."

"Do you have any AP left that you can spend on a few biotechnology or biomech-related enlightenment fruits?"

"No."

"Then that's it." Ves crossed his arms. "If you cannot be of any further assistance, then I suggest you leave early and avoid wasting more resources. We have already paid a heavy price to get this far. We need to cherish every AP that we have left."

"..."

Though his wife looked upset at this, Ketis simply shrugged her shoulders.

"I am fine with that. I know my limits. If you truly think you can make do without our help, then I am not opposed to leaving this System Space first. I wish you all good luck. I look forward to hearing you guys succeed."

Ketis' body disappeared directly afterward.

She had decisively withdrawn herself from the System Space, as was typical for the swordmaster.

Her absence left a very noticeable hole among the remaining users of the Mech Designer System.

Ketis had brought an element of strength, discipline and excitement to the group.

Now that she and her very imposing Heavensword had departed, the mood among the remaining three mech designers had shifted downward.

Ves threw a pointed look at Gloriana. "I am eager to get to work, honey. Is there any reason why you are prolonging your stay here?"

"Not necessarily." His wife reluctantly responded. "I wish that I could contribute more to your work, but it is evident that Alexa's proposal never accounted for my possible input. Very well. If this is how you want to play, then I will leave you two to it without needing to endure my continued presence."

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Chapter 7544 The Initial Hurdle

Once the irrelevant people left, Ves remained in the System Space with Alexa.

The young Journeyman Mech Designer looked quite eager to start their collaboration work.

She had dreamed about realizing her proposal for numerous days, yet did not dare to place too much hope that she could successfully persuade the others in backing her idea.

After all, she herself knew how her plan hinged too much on a number of crucial assumptions.

If reality did not match the conditions demanded by her proposal, her hope of killing all of the deathborn with a single move would definitely perish!

Even now, Alexa still did not know whether she had done the Larkinsons and other related people a huge favor.

The alternatives were too frightening to consider.

"Hey." Ves softly said as he raised his arm and pressed it onto her shoulder. "Relax. You are not alone in this. The rest of us have seen enough promise in your proposal to back it above our own plans. Even if you end up getting it wrong, we won't blame you for it. We all bear responsibility over our own actions."

Alexa remained silent for a few seconds before she responded with a brittle smile. "I... apologize. I should not have shown so much weakness to you. I am not as accustomed to bearing so much responsibility all at once. I will be fine. I only require another minute to regain my composure."

He could tell through multiple ways that his direct disciple still remained shaken in mind and spirit.

She had been relatively fine when she initially presented her idea, but that was when she still considered it a longshot.

The fact that Ves and the others decided to rally around her proposal so quickly and with so little arguing took her by surprise!

Even if she understood the logical sequence that led to this result, her emotions still needed to catch up to the present.

"There is no need to hide your true self before me." He said. "You are family. You are my student. We have an obligation to protect you and help you. It will be a terrible day if other Larkinsons seek to take advantage of your weakness. You can trust me, Alexa. Even if you doubt every other Larkinson, you never have to raise your guard in my presence alone."

Alexa shook her head. "Thank you, Ves, but I do not need your reassurances. I am no immature child who is lacking in comfort. As I have said, I am merely unaccustomed to bearing so much responsibility. That will definitely change over time."

Ves inwardly shrugged. He truly wanted to remind her that she had no need to put on a brave face in front of himself, but he silenced his own words. She would just deny it all over again.

They had much better things to do with their limited time.

"Let's get back to the matter at hand. Let me transcribe the contents of the Last Defiance Manual into a digital file before transmitting it to you. I will make sure to add my extensive understanding and interpretation as well in order to make it faster and easier to digest the reading material. Much of what I understand and master is relatively neutral and unbiased, so you don't have to be afraid that I will make too many mistakes."

That had been a boon from the enlightenment fruit. Ves needed all of this additional understanding in order to become proficient in applying the Last Defiance Technique.

Much of these clever tricks and methods hadn't been formally documented in the Last Defiance Manual.

This was fairly normal. The tome contained the core explanations and methods, but it did not do its utmost to coddle its readers.

If it did, then the text would have become at least 10 times more bloated!

At some point, the creator of powerful and unique techniques no longer wished to spell out each and every step that their successors had to master in order to become their inheritors.

The ability to successfully practice and perform the relevant techniques served as a test on whether the individuals were qualified to make use of this precious heritage.

Those that faltered or even managed to kill themselves due to various shortcomings clearly deserved what they got for overestimating their abilities!

Ves had a very strong feeling that the creator of the Last Defiance Manual ascribed to this style of inheritance transmission.

Therefore, Ves tried his best to write down each and every idea in order to make the resulting document as complete and thorough as possible.

The thick explanations might not necessarily guarantee success, but it should hopefully cut down on the accident rate!

Alexa began to skim through the many pages of convoluted text with great interest.

She slowly began to frown as she began to encounter many obscure theories and references that did not have anything in common with modern science and sensibilities.

"It will not be easy for me to gain a basic but qualified grasp of the theory behind the Last Defiance Technique. I estimate that I will need at least 2 days of focused study before I can gain enough confidence to realize my plan."

"Very well. I will go ahead and build up the initial framework for the poisoned fruit." He said.

The two spoke for a few more minutes before they split up in order to tackle their respective assignments.

Ves still possessed a very fresh and strong perspective on the Last Defiance Manual.

Before the knowledge and insights truly settled into his mind, he intended to take advantage of his current mental state and let his creativity run wild.

Ves sat down besides his personal worktable and drummed his fingers against the surface.

The Last Defiance Technique was never designed with the purpose that Ves and his fellow Larkinsons had in mind.

There was no straightforward way to convert the principles and methods of the Last Defiance Manual into a readily usable design for a poisoned fruit.

He needed to take bits and pieces from this desperation technique and somehow use them as the puzzle pieces of a new design.

"This is a big endeavor."

He clearly could not complete such a considerable undertaking in a single step. He needed to make this process more manageable by focusing on the key principles and processes first.

As long as he figured out the core steps, he could build the remainder around this framework.

He identified two important variables.

"Life energy. Power."

He lifted his finger and began to draw two projected bubbles in the air. Each of them represented one of the aforementioned variables.

He proceeded to draw a single arrow from one bubble to the other.

"The conversion of life energy into power is already covered by the Last Defiance Technique. The only challenge is to develop a seed that can enable a deathborn to perform this technique autonomously."

There was no way a deathborn could execute this technique by itself. The most essential theory needed to activate the most rudimentary version of the Last Defiance Technique was not heavy, but it was not something a feral being could learn without spending time and effort!

Ves would essentially have to develop a bootleg version of an enlightenment fruit in order to let the deathborn instinctively learn the technique upon swallowing the bait!

Yet doing so was probably a dead end, because there was no way to know for certain whether the deathborn would be able or willing to act upon what they have learned.

They were so irrational that they might not possess the necessary focus and intent.

If they happened to be rational for whatever reason, then they may be able to recognize the trap inherent in the technique.

This was especially a concern for the higher-ranking deathborn!

Not only did they possess actual intelligence, they were also capable of imposing their control over many more deathborn!

This was one of the major shortcomings of Alexa's proposal.

This was why he intended to address this issue by designing a spiritual seed that performed a variation of the Last Defiance Technique by itself.

"I can use my design flame as inspiration."

It came to mind that the design seed or design flame of a high-ranking mech designer actually possessed a similar function!

They held way more features than that, but Ves could not deny the convenience that they offered to many mech designers.

Design seeds enabled Journeyman Mech Designers to infuse extraordinary elements into their works without needing to perform any complicated or convoluted cultivation techniques.

Mech designers seem to be able to create wondrous designs and works without putting any conscious thought on this aspect!

This was one of the most basic 'abilities' bestowed by this humble design seed!

As a mech designer progressed, the design seed slowly evolved into more advanced forms.

At Ves' current stage, it had already transformed into a small but relatively capable design flame.

Once he realized his design philosophy, it would truly metamorphose into a blazing sun!

He had already encountered plenty of Master Mech Designers. Even if he did not dare to probe them too closely, he could never ignore their bright and powerful spiritual radiance!

Naturally, these bright spiritual stars possessed far more expansive features and functions than their initial forms!

Ves did not bother to think any further about the high-level manifestations of a mech designer's essence.

What he was truly interested in was to reproduce the most basic and rudimentary version of a design seed.

It did not need to be anywhere close as capable of a real design seed. It just had to possess the bare essentials, just enough to get the job done.

"This will not be easy. I don't even know how to create a design seed to begin with. How can I possibly figure this out on my own?"

Ves let out a tired breath. He certainly had his work cut out for him. He still had plenty of hours to figure out this initial problem.

If he still failed to come up with any ideas, then he might have to wait for Alexa to be done with her studies.

A fresh perspective may be needed to overcome this important hurdle.

Chapter 7545 Dreaming of a New E-Generator

Ves had no idea how to create a facsimile of a design seed.

He spent several hours trying to brainstorm a viable idea, only to crash into one wall after another.

It was only after he spun around for the umpteenth time that he finally got struck by an epiphany.

"What if... the design seed is alive?!"

This was a radical idea that he had never considered before!

In fact, he doubted that any mech designer would have any reason to contemplate such a crazy suggestion.

Yet the more he thought about it, the more he felt that he may have moved closer to the truth!

Struck by inspiration, Blinky turned his sharp spiritual senses directly towards the modest design flame burning quietly inside Ves.

Alas, this inspection did not reveal any pertinent details. The purple companion spirit could only tell that the deceptively simple-looking design flame was an intangible construct that hid a lot of complexity.

It was impossible for Ves to examine the true depth of a design seed or design flame. He lacked the strength and techniques to perform such a deep and exquisite examination of one of the most multi-faceted phenomena of the mech designer profession.

Nonetheless, this lack of results did not diminish his confidence in his latest theory in the slightest.

He became even more certain that his design flame possessed a certain degree of life!

The lack of hard proof did not bother him in the slightest.

He also did not feel disappointed when his intuition failed to provide any clarity or direction.

He just felt that his guess made sense. The logic behind it sounded compelling.

The principal reason why he believed that his design flame contained signs of life was because it existed as an independent high-level construct within his Spirituality.

Ves originally birthed and nurtured his design flame from his own soul. It unquestionably belonged to him, but he did not have a strong degree of control over its behavior. The design flame acted completely autonomously.

This reminded Ves of multiple shenanigans involving the creation of internal and external incarnations.

"It's not a companion spirit... but close to it." Ves tentatively concluded. "My design flame shares the same proximity as Blinky, but my control over it is nowhere near as close. Why are they so different?"

He already had a possible answer in mind.

It was because Ves was not the only 'parent' of his design flame.

In truth, while Ves may have donated most of the spiritual energy required to form the initial design seed, it was only due to another source that it had gained its exquisite structure!

The Kingdom of Mechs and later on the Red Kingdom provided the blueprints, the expansion modules and all of the other intricate instructions to form his current design flame!

Ves could never provide these complete templates and instructions by himself. Only an existence on the level of the Red Kingdom could fill up all of the gaps and impose so much uniformity among all of the mech designers under its jurisdiction.

It was for this reason and more that his design flame did not open itself up to him despite the fact that it existed to help him perform his primary duties.

Ves did not care too much about why the Progenitors of Mechs created these circumstances. All he was interested at the moment was figuring out how he could create a bootleg copy based on his latest inspiration.

"Design seeds and companion spirits share a few traits in common. I can work with this if I start from this premise."

He actually felt that there was greater significance behind this assertion. He felt that he was closing in on a major realization, one that could change his entire perspective on a major subject.

However, given his current priorities, he lacked the interest to explore these unrelated tangents. He readily set aside his flights of fancy so that he could maintain his focus on his core objectives.

He began to doodle a few models and stuff in the air. The projected interface became increasingly more cluttered as Ves continued to explore numerous ways to proceed.

His initial idea was simple. He recalled the old design for a companion spirit fruit and began to adjust it based on his present needs.

It helped a lot that companion spirit fruits and companion spirit trees had been in use for several years now. Ves had access to a rich amount of empirical data. He knew it worked on a wide variety of human beings. He also possessed a decent understanding on how companion spirits formed out of the souls of different individuals.

He leveraged all of this understanding to engineer a new kind of fruit that did not seek to birth a new companion spirit, but instead sought to perform the Last Defiance Technique.

Ves encountered plenty of new problems along the way. He only managed to form tentative solutions to them. Without testing any of his work in reality, he could not completely guarantee the soundness of his work.

As a result, by the time he completed the initial design of the poisoned fruit, he did not harbor too much confidence in its mechanisms.

"This... is a decent start, but it is far from enough."

Companion spirit fruits had originally been designed for human consumption only.

Ves tried to change that with his new design, but he was far from certain that it had become compatible with intangible life forms.

The deathborn did not 'eat' in the conventional sense. They were unable to ingest material ingredients. This meant that the poisoned fruit needed to function without relying on the physical act of eating a solid piece of fruit.

This mattered quite a bit because there was a powerful ritualistic component associated with this process.

"Perhaps it doesn't affect the outcome that much." Ves looked uncertain.

He could only keep this issue in mind while he proceeded to address other matters.

Ves returned his attention to his original purpose. As long as this new fruit worked as intended, then any deathborn who 'ingested' it would spontaneously convert life energy and any other potent energy in its possession into immediate power!

That was a problem, because Ves did not want to make his enemies more powerful!

He could already imagine how much more threatening they might become when thousands of them emerged on the battlefield.

They could potentially overwhelm the defenses of his Woodsap mechs if the latter lacked additional protection!

This must never happen. Therefore, Ves needed to make sure to change the existing process or add another one.

"Alexa's original proposal relies on a chain reaction to neutralize the deathborn at large. The plan was never to give the deathborn performance enhancers. The reason why we use the Last Defiance Technique is to use its underlying principles to create a new technique, one that takes advantage of the former's universal energy draining properties and converts it all into life energy, or something else that is just as appealing to our enemies."

The universality of the Last Defiance Technique was definitely one of its most brilliant advantages. Ves had no idea how the battle maniac who wrote the Last Defiance Manual managed to develop such a high-level trait, but the fact of the matter was that practically any somewhat intelligent living being could execute a version of this desperation technique!

Ves himself repeatedly felt amazed by the fact that the Last Defiance Technique could 'burn' anything from conventional E energy to the vitality of a strong organic body. Even the power of the mind or will could be used as fuel!

The problem was that Ves did not want to burn up all of this precious fuel.

Instead, he wanted to convert the different sources of fuel into life energy as much as possible.

This was a very difficult endeavor under normal circumstances, but this time was different because the Last Defiance Manuel hid crucial clues on how to make this transformation possible!

Ves had to wrack his brains for several more hours, but he made very little progress at this point.

"The core of the Last Defiance Technique is to use desperation as an engine to produce immediate power. Every concept and variable is deeply related to each other. They form a complete logical chain from beginning to end. If I change one variable, this chain will break, because the different concepts do not match with each other anymore."

Wait.

That was not entirely true.

The simplest versions of the Last Defiance Technique may be relatively flat and monotonous, but the more advanced versions produced much more comprehensive results!

Of course, the complexity of the more elaborate versions had skyrocketed. Even with all of the artificial comprehension and insights, Ves still struggled to understand the underlying principles and mechanisms behind the more advanced operations.

Nonetheless, Ves pushed through in his studies because he realized that he was close to obtaining the ultimate key!

"The rudimentary versions of the Last Defiance Technique only injects raw power into a desperate fellow. This will only allow him to launch one or two desperate counterattacks before running out of steam. The higher-level versions of the technique can do much more. An important component is the transformation of latent energy and potential into focused healing and restoration. While the efficiency of this conversion is not high, the ability to quickly heal an injured body is invaluable in most circumstances!"

This was a miracle in itself. The ability for a fighter to rapidly stand up from near-death and return to adequate fighting condition was enough to overturn the outcome of entire duels and battles!

Ves needed to identify, isolate and imitate this key mechanism in order to develop the poisoned fruit of his dreams.

Only when the deathborn uncontrollably drained their dark essence in order to fuel a forced transformation into life energy would there be grounds for a chain reaction!

"Ugh. This is even more difficult."

Even though the theoretical foundation behind this advanced mechanism was way more dense and complex than any other form of E-technology that he had encountered up to this point, he still insisted on mastering this knowledge!

This was because as long as he mastered this transformation, he could freely develop life E energy generators that possessed countless applications!

In fact, he was already thinking about augmenting the Woodsap mechs of the Arboreal Project with a test version of this E-generator.

If it truly worked according to his vision, then the performance of his latest major work would definitely break another ceiling!

It would turn his Woodsap mechs into products whose comprehensive performance completely exceeded any other first-class multipurpose mechs!

As an ambitious mech designer, Ves could not resist the urge to improve his latest prestige work to a large extent.

"My Woodsap mechs will never run out of life as long as I master this secret!"

Chapter 7546 The Imbalance of the Ouroboros

When Ves thought about his new E-generator, he suddenly recalled another sophisticated construct that was designed to provide useful energy to a beneficiary.

In the past, Ves benefited greatly from the so-called 'Grand Dynamo' that had once taken root in his mind.

Although the Blinkyverse had superseded the role of the Grand Dynamo, he still used its existence as a template to ultimately bring his companion spirit to life.

Ves wondered whether he possessed the necessary know-how to develop E-generators such as the Grand Dynamo.

"Probably not." He sighed and shook his head.

The Grand Dynamo deserved its name. Although it did not seem like a massive spiritual construct, it was actually capable of extracting energy from the rotational movement of an entire galaxy!

Ves could not even begin to determine the core principles behind such an intricate design. Whoever developed the Grand Dynamo must have been a True God because only an existence on this level could dream of harnessing the power of an entire galaxy at once!

Compared to this incredibly profound work of E-engineering, the E-generator that he had in mind was a lot more modest.

Yet even so, Ves still questioned his ability to develop the most basic transformation of death energy to life energy.

Without solving this crucial problem, there was no way for his poisoned fruit to spread a disease that could affect all of the deathborn on the battlefield.

It would also hinder his research into developing a more universally applicable life energy generator, one that he could embed into every Woodsap mech.

"This is not going to be straightforward."

The key to solving the problem was mastering one of the most advanced and obscure processes of the Last Defiance Technique.

The ability to rapidly heal and restore your wounds by overdrawing your foundation was incredible, but that also made it particularly difficult to comprehend!

Ves ran his mind through the relevant passages in the Last Defiance Manual over a dozen times in the last hour, yet still failed to understand the essence of this process.

He felt way out of his depth. He had a strong suspicion that he had touched upon an application of energy that only qi cultivators at or close to the level of a True God could truly master!

"My mother would probably be able to figure this out in an instant." He guessed.

In fact, given her 'exciting' past, Ves believed it was more than probable that she had mastered at least one such desperation technique, if not the exact one described in the Last Defiance Manual!

Unfortunately for Ves, his mother's understanding of the relevant concepts and techniques remained inaccessible.

Even if he made contact with his mother through his external incarnation Veronica, he knew without a doubt that Cynthia would flat-out refuse to share anything while repeating the same excuses she made before.

As far as his mother was concerned, passing on the Mech Designer System to Ves was all of the help to his career that he ever needed.

In that regard, it was hard to blame her for not doing enough to facilitate her son's success.

No. He could beg for a solution from his mother.

He needed to solve his problems by himself as much as possible.

"Perhaps I need to spend more time on studying the texts." He frowned. "I am no stranger to the concepts of life and death. As long as I can tie them together in a more effective way, I can get over this hurdle."

That was easier said than done.

Ves failed to make substantial progress in the next hours. He repeatedly hit a wall that seemed impassible. He had underestimated the difficulty of deconstructing advanced cultivation techniques.

The only meaningful realization he made during his exploration was that comprehension alone may not be enough to replicate the intended process.

He already had a good idea that this was the case, but when he reread the same passages from the Last Defiance Manual for the umpteenth time, he basically confirmed that there was a big difference between performing a technique himself and letting an independent construct do all of the work.

The latter lacked the strong emotions and higher cognition of a true living being. This was especially bad in this case as the Last Defiance Technique relied much more heavily on the desperation of a practitioner to trigger and sustain the processes.

Was it possible for Ves to create a living construct that could adequately simulate the desperate mind state of a dying warrior?

"I can make a superficial copy with ease, but... it will lack authenticity."

He had a feeling that it wouldn't work as well as he hoped.

"Well, I will find out soon enough I guess."

He continued to work on the problem at hand, though he continued to encounter one difficulty after another.

By the time Alexa finally came back to him, he felt grateful now that he had a second opinion by his side.

"Welcome back. Now that you have been brought up to date, what do you think?"

The young woman looked slightly tired, but her sparkling eyes betrayed her strong interest.

"I still do not understand much of the contents of the Last Defiance Manual, but... I have learned enough to understand its depth and thoroughness. I do not know whether it is because it was written by an ancient warrior, but the contents lack... academic rigor. The structure is sloppy, the theories are inadequately explained and much of the text is riddled with strange terminology and references to forgotten myths and stories. All of this makes it harder to conduct a systematic study on the techniques described in the book."

She sounded very helpless about that. Ancient humans who lived during a time of myths and gods did not adhere to the scientific method at the time. They accumulated and shaped knowledge in completely different ways, much of which seemed alien from the perspective of modern people!

This was one of the hidden barriers that hindered contemporary humans from quickly relearning their old heritage.

The Red Collective devoted huge amounts of researchers to the task of modernizing ancient methods and techniques!

Their work was definitely necessary because if the masses attempted to practice these old and decrepit scriptures by themselves, they would definitely end up producing mass casualties!

"It's alright." He said. "The enlightenment fruit gave me a much more instinctive understanding of the Last Defiance Manual. You do not just have to understand the technique. You have to develop the right feel for it. This is primarily a work of passion. The detailed stuff will fall into place as long as you understand the overall intent and concepts involved."

Alexa still looked helpless. "That makes it even more unlikely that I shall ever master this technique. I am not a soldier or warrior. I have never fought enemies directly, let alone become a champion and duel against other powerful fighters. Out of all of the mech designers in the Red Ocean, I can think of no one who is more suited to master the Last Defiance Technique than you. It is as if this enlightenment fruit was fated to end up in your stomach."

Ves smiled back. "I don't necessarily disagree with you. While I still need to figure out a lot of stuff on my own, it is impressive how well I can make use of its teachings. Anyway, let's proceed with the task at hand. I have managed to figure out a framework for our poisoned fruit, but I am not entirely sure how to solve a number of specific issues."

He proceeded to elaborate on his tentative plan. Alexa nodded continuously as she was able to follow his train of thought without much issue.

Once he finished his explanation about the difficulty of trying to convert death energy into life energy, Alexa leaned back in her chair and began to look intrigued.

"Do you have any suggestions on how to make this possible?"

The young woman did not say no. "Possibly. What you have just described vaguely reminds me of my grandfather's Ouroboros. You should know all about him and his unique ace mech. I had the privilege of spending time on this impressive machine. The Ouroboros is one of the driving reasons why I wanted to become a mech designer in the first place. I may not understand how this mech works on the same level as you, but... when it comes to the duality between creation and destruction, I am slightly confident that I can make an original contribution to this discussion."

Ves adopted an expectant look. "You sound confident. Let's hear it, then. What do you have in mind, Alexa?"

The female Journeyman spread her arms, with one of her palms pointing down while the other pointed upwards.

"creation and destruction are intricately opposed to each other. Life tries to overcome death, while death tries to overpower life. When the two are out of balance, then there is usually a great contrast. Life struggles to thrive in an environment steeped in death. Death cannot find much purchase in an environment that is saturated with life. That said, these rules do not always apply. There are many cases where they can swing abruptly in one direction or another."

"So how can you produce these swings?" Ves asked.

Alexa shrugged. "I cannot tell you with any certainty. I have only heard my grandfather describe some of his experiences in brief. For example, one of his persistent gripes in the past is that his tier 2 Destroyer sword is too powerful relative to his rifle. The sword's very existence frequently tilts the balance towards death. Decades of fighting and learning has slowly allowed my grandfather to learn a few tricks on how to prevent this slide towards death from going too far."

General Axelar Streon never told Ves about this stuff!

"Go on. What tricks did he employ?" He eagerly asked.

"Well, one of them is to enter a special state of mind while utilizing his weapons. I cannot describe it adequately to you. He only told me that he 'must sow death in order to fertilize the birth of new life'. By imagining himself as a farmer, he consciously sought to use the enemies he killed with his Destroyer sword to empower his rifle. He faced many difficulties at first, but because he persisted in it for years, he eventually managed to achieve a breakthrough and made it work. He gained insight on the cycle of creation and destruction due to this effort."

Life and death were closely related to creation and destruction.

Ves might even argue that they were practically the same!

Though Alexa's did not provide a clear solution, her broad description already provided him with a potential blueprint.

"Thinking like a farmer, huh...?"

Chapter 7547 Old Approach

Alexa's feedback might not provide any direct assistance, but it nonetheless served as a breaking point in their development.

Ves took inspiration from her tale and latched on to the metaphor of a farmer participating in the cycle of creation and destruction.

"I think... your grandfather made effective use of symbolism to enable new applications of power." He analyzed. "Whether he knew about it or not, his actions align with the Myth Reproduction Theory."

Alexa looked thoughtful after he mentioned this theory. "Are you thinking of adopting a similar approach to our problem in order to overcome the difficulties in realizing my proposal?"

Ves nodded. "While I am not a full-time ritualist, I have exchanged enough ideas with them to understand the gist of their approach. I have also dabbled with rituals in the past, so I am not totally inexperienced in this kind of stuff. While my methods were crude and inefficient, they occasionally worked. In fact, I used to rely a lot more on rituals and symbolism in the earlier years of my career. In hindsight, these methods allowed me to paper over the worst shortcomings of my immature works. The fact that I do not rely as much on these fanciful techniques anymore is a sign that I have become skilled enough to do without them for the most part. It is only now that we are faced with near-insurmountable problems that I may have to go back to digging out my old toolbox."

This realization prompted Ves to do a lot of reflecting on his evolving approach towards mech design.

Back in the early days, he had been filled with dreams and imagination. His foundation as a mech designer was a lot shallower back then. His experience also was not as rich at the time.

While most people would treat these circumstances as limiting factors, Ves interpreted it differently.

He did not possess clear boundaries at the time. He did not know what was possible and what was impossible. If he had a crazy idea, he felt a bit more inclined to experiment with it because he truly did not know what to expect.

As he grew older, his mech catalog grew in leaps and bounds. He had tried out many ideas and developed a more distinct and thorough work style. He still possessed a lot of imagination, but it became increasingly more constrained by solid theories and empirical findings.

This was the natural evolution of a mech designer. He knew that as people of this profession grew older, they gradually lost the ignorance and spontaneity that defined the early stages of their career.

Mech designers grew more rigorous, professional and formulaic. Known solutions began to crowd out whimsical experimentation.

While their works became increasingly stronger and more defined, they also started to incorporate less whimsical or risky features.

Ves always considered himself to be a remarkably inventive and creative mech designer.

Yet now he realized that he had progressed further up this evolutionary trajectory than he initially thought.

He felt... disappointed in himself.

Although many mech designers possessed a lot of different perspectives on this subject, the general consensus was that they should try their best to slow down as much as possible.

If they evolved too quickly and became too rigid in their actions and thinking, they no longer possessed the spark of brilliance that could enable them to break past their barriers and develop truly transcendent works!

Was Ves afraid that he would crash against this wall too soon?

Not necessarily.

Yet he still felt that the passage of time had begun to exert an increasing amount of pressure on his shoulders.

He could not afford to mess around for too long. He needed to make the most out of the period when he still possessed enough of his 'immaturity' to milk it for all it was worth!

"Ves? Are you paying attention?"

"Ah, I apologize. I got distracted by something. Anyway, now that you have reminded me of how I used to design my mechs, I think it is worth a try to go back to old habits and reimagine my Woodsap mechs."

"Reimagine your Woodsap mechs?" Alexa looked mildly surprised. "Are you thinking of overhauling your entire design when it is already complete?"

He shook his head. "Not to this extent. We don't have time for a full rebuild. We need to do this quick and dirty, so we can only change the surface details at most. It will be like changing into a different skin. Do you understand?"

"I understand." The Journeyman nodded. "So what do you have in mind?"

Ves leaned forward and began to manipulate the projected interface. "We need to find a theme that will allow us to grant our Woodsap mechs the ability to manipulate the power of life and death, and the best one that I can think of at the moment is farming. This will be the key to allowing my works to borrow from the established myths of the cosmic landscape. Farming is universal. Countless sentient species have risen up by engaging in one form of agriculture or another. It is one the foundational building blocks of civilization. As long as I successfully implant the image of a farmer or something similar into a Woodsap mech, it should theoretically be able to transform death into life, if only to a limited extent."

This was an ambitious outlook!

Alexa assumed a critical expression.

"Farming is... a fitting theme when you want to leverage the concepts of life and death at the same time. However, I believe it will be challenging to apply it effectively to your existing works. Your Woodsap mechs are designed to function as pure combat mechs. You and your collaborators have treated them as organic combat machines from beginning to end. You have never put anything related to productive pursuits into your designs. For this reason, I believe that rashly trying to force the image of a farmer into the vessel of a soldier will result in compatibility problems. You have often warned me to avoid this whenever possible."

"I did." He remembered. "You have a point. This will not be easy. That is for certain. We will have to refine the image in order to reduce the compatibility problems."

They spent a bit of time brainstorming. They began to swap numerous ideas at a fast pace in order to find the best theme for the issue at hand.

Ves started with the most obvious suggestion. "The classical image of a farmer won't work. If I redesign my Woodsap mechs so that it wears a straw-like hat and a bag of seeds, its exterior manifestation will clash too much with its original nature as a soldier. We need to find an image that ties the process of farming to combat a lot better."

"Hmmm..." Alexa remained silent for a few seconds before she gained an idea. "Agriculture is not confined to farming crops. There is also animal husbandry. What if we reshape the Woodsap mechs into herders or shepherds? We can design them with the intention of 'herding' the deathborn for the purpose of extracting nutrients from them. Unlike farming crops, pastoralism better aligns with what we are trying to accomplish. The cycle of life and death still applies. I would even argue that it is a better fit."

Though her suggestion sounded a lot better than the previous suggestions, Ves still shook his head. "Not combative enough. A herder is associated with managing relatively docile animals such as sheep and cows. There is no real combat edge to this association. I am not saying your idea is bad, but it won't do enough to remove the compatibility issue. We need an image that preserves this aspect a little better."

They swapped a few more suggestions before one of them came up with another inspired idea.

"A reaper of souls? Adding a scythe would not only look cool, but also fit the classical idea of a grim reaper."

"That is the problem, sir. It is too skewed towards the concept of death. This image is far too removed from both farming and the cycle of life."

"I guess you're right." Ves shrugged.

Alexa proposed an idea of her own. "Woodsap mechs are based on the Emperor Tree. What if we reinterpret them as evil trees that seek to lure the unwitting deathborn into fertilizer? After all, the concept of farming does not necessarily have to be expressed in an explicitly human form. I think that this image sufficiently blends the role of farming and combat into one. From the perspective of the evil tree, the act of poisoning its victims for the purposes of devouring their energies can be regarded as a form of combat as well as a form of farming."

"It sounds more like a slightly convoluted form of predation to me, but other than that I kind of see where you are coming from." Ves said as he thought about it further. "This may be the best idea yet. Let's put it in reserve and go back to it if we haven't figured out anything better."

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The Mech Touch

Chapter 7548 Predator Variant

Their brainstorm session did not yield any better ideas than they had already come up with. After an extensive discussion, Ves and Alexa finally decided to settle on the image of the predatory tree.

Ves found himself unsettled by this course of events. His eyes fixated on the projected draft design as if it was a monster about to swallow him whole.

"What is wrong, sir?" Alexa quietly asked as she sensed his discomfort. "Are you... dissatisfied with our choice?"

"I really wanted to stick to the image of a farmer." He softly responded. "It might not be a good match with the combative role of a Woodsap mech, but... it would have made this whole business right in my opinion. The fact that we have decided to go this particular route is disturbing because... it reminds me far too much of my mother. She is the embodiment of predation. Nobody knows more about this concept than her in my opinion. Predation has become so deeply rooted in her that she practically treats everyone else around her as prey. Even her own family is not exempted from her callous perspective."

"I see. Are you... afraid you will come to resemble your mother?"

Ves slowly nodded. "I suppose so. As a mech designer, I have long held the stance that power should be used for productive pursuits whenever possible. I take great pleasure into designing mechs that go on to form symbiotic relationships with their pilots. I am all about creating win-win relationships where both sides benefit from each other. While our current work does not violate this principle, I still feel that I have taken another step down the slippery slope. The more I engage with predation, the more I will come to resemble my mother in all of the ways I hate."

His direct disciple frowned for a moment, but soon softened her expression. She raised her hand and caressed him on the shoulder.

"I have heard about your mother, but never had the pleasure of meeting her in person. From the limited amount of information available to me, I think your fears are overblown. Your ego is strong. You are surrounded by people who love you and respect you. The mechs that you have designed and the organizations that you have built are the embodiments of the mutually beneficial relationships that you have championed for much of your life. You may be your mother's son, but you are not her heir. If you truly followed in her footsteps, then you would have never wasted your time and resources to breathe life into the Golden Cat, a spirit whose primary role is to strengthen trust and reinforce the bonds of family."

Ves couldn't help but smile after hearing that. He became encouraged by her words. His heavy mood lifted after he identified with her description.

"You are right, Alexa. I am definitely not my mother's heir. She has never tried to make me resemble her in any way. In fact, it is very much the opposite. She has tried to keep me

separated from much of her affairs. Thank you for reminding me of that. Just because my mother excels at predation does not mean that she can claim exclusivity on it. Right now, we are just making use of it to solve a specific problem. As long as we do not read too much into this, everything will be fine."

At least he hoped that this would be the case.

Now that he had restored his composure, he began to work on the variant alongside Alexa.

A couple of days passed as the pair of mech designers quietly solved the problems that followed after they had found their design direction.

None of them posed any major hindrances, though the involvement of so many new and abstruse theories made it difficult for the two mech designers to maintain absolute confidence in their work.

Nonetheless, they tried their best to grapple with the situation by limiting the scope of their design and making reasonable assumptions about how the processes will work in reality.

Ves and Alexa's comprehension of the principles of the Last Defiance Technique slowly rose due to their labor.

While they did not get to enjoy any major breakthroughs, actively trying to leverage them in their latest design forced them to dig deeper into what they learned.

At the end of their design session, they had managed to stay close to their original vision and ended up with a biomech design that possessed a distinctly different vibe from the existing Woodsap mechs.

Though Ves felt somewhat satisfied with the results, he couldn't get rid of the twinge of doubt in his mind.

During the multi-day design process, he had made numerous design choices that somehow caused the variant design to adopt more traits that he found concerning.

The appearance of the variant design made that very clear.

Ordinary Woodsap mechs of the Arboreal Project may possess an ebony exterior, but the Terran designers added enough specks of green to create a more heroic and uplifting bearing.

This made sense as the Terrans intended to treat the upcoming biomechs as the prestige mechs of the current age.

Their populace needed to take great pride in these unique and resilient elemental Carmine mechs.

Due to their nature as biomechs, the Terrans knew they had to put in serious effort to make them appear friendly and approachable to the common citizens.

They could not accomplish this if the Woodsap mechs looked too ugly or terrifying.

That made this situation so difficult for Ves to accept.

Compared to the upright appearances of the normal Woodsap mechs, the variant that he and his apprentice worked on somehow got warped to the point that it would feel right at home inside a nightmare!

From the sickly exterior to the drooping branches, the variant design did not look like they belong to the good guys in the slightest!

The heavy fruits dangling from their protruding branches amplified this contrast.

In order to strengthen their role as bait as much as possible, Ves tried to design them to look as appealing as possible.

Unlike the rest of the biomech, the fruits did not look wrong at all. They resembled particularly large, bright and shiny pears. Their plump green skin carried a strong hint of sweet and juicy fruit.

Much of the charm of the fruit did not just lie fresh and attractive, but also the strong concentration of vitality locked inside.

In fact, one of the reasons why the Woodsap mechs appeared so macabre was because they needed to channel a great amount of their life energy into their fruits!

The contrast between the two was vital.

The deathborn needed to bite and devour the fruit, not the biomechs themselves.

As long as the Woodsap mechs had no chance of outshining their fruits, then the deathborn should not even bother with them. All of their attention should solely be locked onto the bright and life-filled fruits!

In fact, the giant pears looked so appealing that anyone would find it difficult to restrain the urge to take a bite!

Ves couldn't do much about that. The fruits had to be genuine enough in order to serve their role as bait. The fact that they might also possess an allure that was difficult to resist for other life forms such as humans and Ascended Giants couldn't be helped.

In any case, he did not intend to make widespread use of this variant. As long as he controlled its proliferation, then no accidents should occur.

"It is not necessary for us to go this far, Ves. If you think the life energy differential is too extreme, we can adjust the levels so that the Woodsap mech no longer appears as ominous."

Ves shook his head. "No. We can't. The Woodsap mechs need to blend into the local environment as much as possible. Draining them of life and bringing them closer to death is a necessary camouflage measure. Their safety margin will disappear if we introduce more life into them. Besides, maintaining the current image is vital to reinforcing their current roles. The symbolism of an evil tree turned out to be a lot stronger than I expected. My confidence level in this gambit has risen by at least 20 percent for this reason."

It was not without reason that Ves had ended up designing his variant in this manner.

From the moment he began to shape his biomech design in this direction, it was as if he had inadvertently stepped onto the fast track.

He found it several times easier to drain the life out of his Woodsap mech and make it seem as if it was deep into its decline.

Ves not only drew upon his insights on the concepts of life and death, but also tapped into the concepts of withering and predation.

Even if he felt reluctant to make use of the last one, he truly found it impossible to leave it out of his latest work entirely!

The entire variant design had morphed from an honorable soldier into a shameless predator!

Instead of defeating its adversaries through honest combat, his variant sought to exterminate its prey through a combination of deceit and disease!

His nature as a mech designer felt a strong aversion to this approach towards combat. Even if it promised to be a million times more efficient at its job than the alternatives, the Ves that grew up with the idea of mechs as the steeds of honorable soldiers could not make peace with his latest work.

Strangely enough, Alexa did not look bothered in the slightest. She had always maintained an open-minded attitude about their macabre-looking work.

"You are ascribing too much of your values and biases into your works." She explained her own perspective on the matter. "That is not necessarily a weakness. The fact that you pour so much of your passion and beliefs into all of your mech designs is one of your

characteristic strengths. No one can accuse you of releasing generic products. The issue that you are struggling with is that you rightfully feel concerned about the wellbeings of their bonded partners. It is foreseeable that converting existing Woodsap mechs into this predator variant will inevitably impact their Woodsap mech pilots."

Due to the Woodsap System, which could basically be described as a wood E energy-flavored Carmine System, the biomech formed a permanent soul bond with its human pilot.

This meant that any drastic changes to the former had a high chance of bleeding through to the other side of the connection!

Ves already witnessed numerous instances of this feedback mechanism.

He did not have many reasons to feel concerned about the health of the soon-to-be-modified Woodsap mechs. They were designed to be incredibly resilient and tolerant from the beginning. They could withstand a huge amount of abuse and still bounce back. It should not be too much trouble to convert the predator variant back to their original configurations.

The same did not apply to their human pilots. They had always been the more fragile and vulnerable side of the equation. If they became affected by any adverse changes, it might not be as easy to restore them to their healthier states!

"Do not underestimate Terran soldiers." Alexa told him. "They are both professional and patriotic. There is no sacrifice they are willing to make as long as you can convince them it is for the good of the Terran people and nation.

Chapter 7549 Poison Willow Variant

"I see why you saw the need to present this work in person."

After Ves and Alexa finally exited the System Space, the former wasted no time in seeking out Saint Commander Casella Ingvar.

Despite the immense burden of responsibility resting on her shoulders, the ace commander maintained a calm and controlled bearing.

It was as if she held no concern at all for the lives of everyone in the combined fleet and the entire war effort on this side of the new frontier!

Of course, that could not possibly be true. Even saints experienced moments of doubt and fear. They were simply a lot better at pretending that they could surmount the difficulties ahead of them. Many of them literally hypnotized themselves into believing that they could accomplish victory under the direst of straits!

Though this approach sounded crazy and delusional, it actually produced more successes than it should.

Ves had eventually come to learn that high-ranking mech pilots were the literal embodiment of self-fulfilling prophecies.

As long as they maintained confidence in themselves and their strength, they could literally warp reality to make their optimism come true!

He figured that Casella leaned particularly heavily in this effect. It did not matter whether she was conscious of the facade taking place. Truth or falsehood became irrelevant as long as she produced actual results.

Nonetheless, just because she put up a brave front did not mean she no longer needed any help.

Anything that could increase the success rate of their upcoming operation would definitely be met with open arms!

Her initial reaction did not betray much emotion, but Ves could definitely tell that the ace commander had become intrigued.

She did not give voice to her impatience by rattling off questions left and right.

She instead chose to study the projected design of what Ves had eventually come to call the Poison Willow variant of his original Woodsap mech design.

The biomech truly looked like it deserved its moniker. Its dark ebony exterior looked cracked, old and dry. It featured many branches due to the need to offer as many poisoned fruits as possible, which also caused them to droop. The eerie leaves adorning them amplified their terrifying visage.

As for the fruits themselves, nobody could tell from the outside that they contained lethal payloads. They looked like the freshest and most carefully selected bounties of nature that had been specifically grown to be sold at a ridiculous markup to a pampered first-rater.

Casella spent more seconds than she should on examining these paradoxical fruits. Her intuition failed to recognize their potential harm.

If not even she could detect the trap inherent in the fruit, then it did not seem likely that the deathborn could defeat her on this aspect!

Unless this mysterious extra-galactic species had encountered too many traps like this to develop a mature set of countermeasures, the plan devised by the Larkinson mech designers had a considerable chance of working!

Unfortunately, a chance was still far from absolute certainty.

"This is a gamble." Casella plainly stated.

"It is." Ves directly admitted. "It is a worthwhile gamble. We have put a lot of thought into this scheme. Even if it does not work entirely, we still believe it will at least cause large-scale disruption among the deathborn. This will make the subsequent engagement at least several times easier."

She could not argue against that so long as it actually worked.

Yet was it truly so easy to eradicate all of the deathborn?

She asked a number of critical questions, many of which Ves and his fellow mech designers already considered in the past.

The answers she received in return did not satisfy her entirely, but it kept her skepticism below an important threshold.

"Will the modified Woodsap mechs retain their combat effectiveness after they have lost their fruit?"

Ves shrugged his shoulders. "That is a complicated question to answer. The initial modifications will make them weak on multiple levels. They will deploy on the battlefield in a brittle and exhausted state. I do not advise them to fight at all so long as they remain in this condition. The only way they can return to a proper combat state is to absorb all of the excess life energy that is produced by the infected deathborn. They can also regain a portion of their former combat effectiveness by allowing them to absorb Gaia Trees or other sources of organic life, but there is not that much left in our fleet."

"In other words, every Woodsap mech converted into a Poison Willow mech means the loss of a useful combat asset."

"Unfortunately, that should be the case. It is a tradeoff."

"Then do you suggest that we should limit this conversion to a handful of Woodsap mechs?"

Ves shook his head. "No. The success rate of this plan is uncertain. The deathborn may not necessarily fall into a pandemic after absorbing a single fruit or even a couple of dozen fruits. Then there is also the control imposed by higher-ranking deathborn. These leader entities possess enough rationality to force the feral deathborn to resist their instincts. We may have to deploy multiple Poison Willow mechs in multiple locations if we want to escape their meddling. The best way to do this is to convert as many Woodsap mechs as possible."

It was like playing the lottery. The probability of winning the jackpot with a single ticket was low, but if you bought a hundred of them, then the probability of getting lucky at least once rose by a considerable margin!

Of course, this was assuming that the chance of winning the jackpot was not too miniscule.

Casella understood this logic, so she did not object to it too much. She simply felt it was a shame to lose so much reliable combat power.

The combined fleet did not field too many first-class multipurpose mechs to begin with. The Woodsap mechs could have served as reliable Knights or Barons due to their excellent compatibility with her Command Field.

"Do the Poison Willow mechs need my empowerment?"

"I am not sure about that." He responded. "They should be able to take care of themselves without relying on your domain field, but they can definitely use additional protection. It may actually be counterproductive to actively Commandeer or Enfeoff them in their entirety. The deathborn will not be able to bite into the poisoned fruit due to the barrier formed by your willpower. Have you ever tried to empower mechs in part rather than as a whole?"

The Saint Commander adopted a strange expression. "I never had the need to undertake such an action. I do not believe I can do so at this point. I will have to modify my techniques and strengthen my control over my Command Field. I may be able to develop this capability, but not immediately. It will take weeks of experimentation to figure it out, and I cannot guarantee that I can produce results after that. Can your Poison Willow mechs detach their fruits instead? The physical separation will make it much easier to protect your biomechs without affecting the purpose of their payloads."

"Sadly, no." Ves shook his head again. "We already thought about it, but it is impossible for various complicated reasons. Our work is too crude. The poisoned fruit can only work if they remain attached to the branches. It is vital that they are still connected to their mechs. This reminds me of the other complication."

"What is it, Ves?"

"I will need to manually go over every Woodsap mech at our disposal and modify them one by one. Neither Alexa nor any other personnel can do this work. They can only assist me in small and unimportant matters. I am the only one who can complete the core conversion processes."

The Saint Commander understood the underlying problem. "How much time?"

"I don't know. It will be slow at first. An hour. Maybe two hours. Once I have gotten the method down, I can accelerate my efforts, but that still does not mean I can breeze past so many changes in a short amount of time. The only consolation is that modifying a biomech is different from modifying a metallic mech. I only have to shape the mutation of an organic machine long enough to confirm that its growth direction is set. I can move on to modifying another individual Woodsap mech."

That still sounded relatively cumbersome.

"How many mechs do you think you will be able to convert by the time they are needed on the battlefield?"

"At least half of the remaining Woodsap mechs." Ves loosely estimated. "If there are any delays or anything, you can expect a lot more."

"I see." Casella frowned in thought. "We are short on time. Delays are undesirable. The upcoming battle may not necessarily reach a high intensity from the start. It may turn out to be a drawn-out affair instead. If that is the case, we may need you to continue to modify our Woodsap mechs even after we have approached the orbit of Hypeh-Tekas II."

"No problem. I want to see this plan succeed as much as possible. If I can do so by working overtime, then that is but a small price to pay."

"Will the Dark Apostle be able to accept your decision?"

Ves crossed his arms. "Wiping out the deathborn is the highest priority as far as I am concerned. I do not think he finds it pleasant to fight on a battlefield while surrounded by millions of ravenous deathborn."

Chapter 7550 Trial Balloon

Ves began to work right away after his meeting with the Saint Commander.

Before he proceeded to bring the Poison Willows into existence, he first chose to spread the Last Defiance Technique among a select few champions.

Ves recognized its immense danger to an unskilled or undisciplined practitioner, yet that was no reason to keep it buried. He believed that the strongest combatants of the combined fleet possessed the qualifications to learn this technique.

Of course, a few days might not be enough for them to thoroughly master the Last Defiance Technique, but he did not want to deprive them of a means to turn the tables on the enemy just before a critical battle.

Since everyone was busy at the moment, Ves did not insist on holding a face-to-face meeting. He simply requested a virtual meeting and waited before a pair of projected forms made their appearance.

"Saint Dise. Fiery Axe. Thank you for accepting my invitation on short notice. I have recently come into the possession of a new and powerful technique that may prove useful to you and other warriors. I have already sent a pair of couriers to you that are tasked with delivering a secure datachip right into your hands. I would like to ask you to be careful about accessing the virtual documents as the reading material can be very dangerous in the wrong hands."

The projections of both the ace pilot and the strategos showed interest. Anything that demanded this level of security was most definitely serious in nature.

"What technique do you want us to learn?" The female giant impatiently asked.

"It is something called the Last Defiance Technique..."

Ves summarized his understanding and interpretation of the contents of the Last Defiance Manual over a span of 5 or so minutes.

He did not explain anything specific enough that eavesdroppers could use to practice the technique themselves. That was not necessary as the women could study the detailed theories and explanations in their own time.

He merely shared enough words to give them a broad understanding of what he was about to gift them. That was already enough to astonish the female warriors.

"Will it truly work for Ascended Giants such as us?" The Fiery Axe asked.

Ves nodded. "I can guarantee it. The Last Defiance Manual is universal enough that it can be used by practically any extraordinary being. Phase leaders are not exempted from this. You just need to figure this stuff out yourself in order to make sure you get it right. Strictly speaking, there is no single Last Defiance Technique. It is a template that you can tweak to your individual preferences and circumstances, though the dangers of changing any parameter is very dangerous if you are lacking in both experience and comprehension. The better the configuration and execution, the greater the power and the lighter the consequences. A high degree of mastery can completely allow you to consistently punch above weight while only needing to take extended vacations after every fight."

Though the Fiery Axe became progressively more excited after hearing all of that, Saint Dise still maintained a strong degree of caution.

"That sounds like the best-case scenario." The ace pilot responded. "What if we fail to measure to this high standard?"

"As I have told you earlier, improper or excessive use of the Last Defiance Technique will cause you to overdraft your life and the foundation of your strength. The drain is so overbearing that your vitality, willpower, spirituality and more may become shattered beyond recognition. Perhaps you can mend some of the cracks, but others remain so severe that you can never restore them for the remainder of your life. This is why I do not dare to spread this technique to anyone. I have expressly chosen the two of you for the first trial because out of every combatant in the combined fleet, I can think of no one who is more qualified to study this manual."

"I am... honored to earn your trust." Fiery Axe said. "It may be too late for you to give it to me now. I have browsed cultivation methods and techniques before, but many of them are so academic that I have barely made any progress to this day. I am a fighter, not a nerd."

Ves smiled at that. "I applaud your prudence. Overconfidence is absolutely dangerous when it comes to stuff like this. However, I think that you may find yourself in a better state than you think after you have read the texts for the first time. It is true that the Last Defiance Manual is filled with complicated theories, but you do not have to understand all of the underlying mechanics to execute the simplest versions. A pure warrior invented the Last Defiance Technique. Greater knowledge and comprehension certainly helps, but what is more important is that you possess the heart and courage of a warrior that desires to achieve victory at almost any cost. As long as you fit this description well enough, you will find that much of the principles of the technique are intuitive in nature."

That caused the Fiery Axe to look a little more reassured.

"If that is the case, I will try my best to learn it so that I can pull it off in the next battle. Do you expect us to do so, sir?"

"Not necessarily." Ves shook his head. "I am not in a hurry. Treat it as a trump card. If the opposition is not threatening enough to justify its use, then I would rather see you fight normally. The whole point of this desperation technique is to reverse an impending defeat. The same technique will produce much more inferior results if the pressure is not as great, but the negative consequences will not be that much lighter. If you are not confident in your proficiency, then please do not take any excessive risks. You can always try next time."

The female strategos nodded, though whether she would truly hold herself back in this scenario remained to be seen. Ascended Giants persistently tended to overestimate their capabilities.

It had taken a lot of effort for Ves and red humanity to chip away at this defect, but their work was far from complete.

"What do you expect from me?" Saint Dise asked after the giant had fallen silent.

Ves turned to the other projected form. "Ascended Giants such as the Fiery Axe may not be the smartest beings around, but their greatest advantage is their fault tolerance. Their huge true bodies are filled with more mass and energy than entire starships. This gives them an extremely generous buffer that will take a long time before the drain reaches the point of no return. In other words, they can afford to make mistakes. Your conditions are different. If the giants are mostly about quantity, then you are all about quality. Your extraordinary willpower has evolved to an impressive degree, but its absolute volume is not that impressive if I am being honest. This is one of the reasons why you are so reliant on an ace mech to draw out your full potential."

This was the nature of a mech pilot.

A human, even a highly evolved one, could never match a battleship in terms of raw power.

Yet a human paired with a well-designed machine that just happened to fill up many of the former's shortcomings could produce synergies that could make the combination competitive against many warships!

"Does the Last Defiance Technique also drain my ace mech along with myself?" Dise asked next.

"It depends." Ves said without much elaboration. "You should read the manual yourself. You will find your answers there. What is undeniable is that you will bear the greatest burden. The good news is that saints such as you are exceptional in many ways. Out of all of the ace pilots on hand, there is no one who has stood out more when it comes to exercising control and mastering profound techniques. That makes you uniquely qualified to master what I am giving to you. I have little doubt that you will learn this technique quickly and gain a respectable degree of proficiency in a very short amount of time. Even if your reserves are not as great as an Ascended Giant, your superior skill, control and discipline should allow you to suspend this technique before it crosses the line where you suffer permanent damage to your foundation."

He placed a great amount of expectations onto Dise's shoulders, but she truly deserved his trust.

"I see now why you have turned to me as opposed to Tusa, or worse, Rosa." Dise mildly responded.

He shrugged. "To be honest, I think that Tusa also has enough control over himself to try it out as well. You are just a much better choice for the first wave of trials. If it turns out that even you cannot fully remain in control when you execute the Last Defiance Technique, then I can forget about spreading it to others for the foreseeable time. As for Rosa Orfan... it will be a complete disaster."

Saint Dise could not possibly disagree with this assessment.

"Any further questions?"

Ves continued to offer a bit more clarification before he finally ended the meeting. He did not want to be too involved in this matter.

He considered this trial to be a test balloon of sorts. He wanted to see if the Fiery Axe and Saint Dise could rely on their efforts to master and make proficient use of the Last Defiance Technique.

If they could not do so without requiring a lot of handholding from Ves, then that proved that this dangerous technique simply was not worth the trouble of spreading to other high-ranking combatants.

In any case, now that he had completed this chore, he transited over to a Terran combat carrier and personally explained his intentions to the Second Elf and other Terran officers.

His audience expressed a bit of skepticism towards the plan.

"I must admit that I do not understand anything about this design." Caracalla Shuku said as the elven leader gazed at the projected form of the Poison Willow. "From what you have described, this variant loses much of its effective combat potential in order to set a trap for the deathborn."

"That is true, but the potential returns are much greater." Ves responded. "There is no guarantee that this will work, but if it does, a handful of Poison Willows can potentially eradicate almost all of the deathborn that are currently roaming in this entire star system! This exaggerated possibility makes this venture worthwhile. I am not asking to convert all of the Woodsap mechs that are still available. I don't have time to convert them one by one anyway. I just want to convert a third of them or so. This way, you still get to have enough Woodsap mechs to prove your worth in battle, but there will also be experimental versions that seek to explore a different way of completing our objectives. If this works, then that will multiply the value of the Arboreal Project."

The Second Elf could not possibly ignore that last part. The collaboration project between the Larkinson Clan and the Terran Alliance had spawned the so-called Green Coalition.

As a new group of politically active Terrans that sought to enact great change in their society, the Greens depended heavily on the success of his Woodsap mechs.

Anything that could expand its strength, utility or overall value directly translated into greater power and influence for the coalition that sought to integrate Gaia into the fabric of the Terran colonial alliance!

Caracalla Shuku did not make a judgment on his own. He instead turned to the local scientists and experts in order to consult their opinions.

He would have preferred to contact his superiors and much more knowledgeable experts back home, but due to the ongoing communications blockage in the Hypeh-Tekas System, he had little choice in the matter.

While Ves respected the competence of the biomech designers and other biotech experts stationed on this carrier, he knew as well as anyone here that the Terrans did not dare to station any authoritative experts on this hull.

Not every high-ranking scientist or engineer was as crazy as Ves for volunteering to take part in dangerous campaigns and expeditions!

The consequences of that was that the scientists advising the Second Elf did not understand all that much either.

They completely failed to decipher the true properties of the Poison Willow. All they saw was a weakened version of the Woodsap mech that strangely grew a bunch of incredibly energy-rich fruits.

Their inadequate understanding of hyper technology and E-technology caused them to completely overlook the more esoteric aspects of the variant design.

In the end, they had little choice but to take Ves at his word and assume his latest work would perform as promised.

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter