

## **Mech Touch 6511**

Chapter 6511 The Amaranto's Charm

Out of the three high-ranking mech design projects currently in development, Ves and Gloriana both had their favorites.

The Amaranto Mark III Project, Riot Mark III Project and the Minerva Mark II Project all had their highlights that pushed the boundaries of mech design to a new frontier.

The Amaranto Mark III Project offered unparalleled long-range striking capability.

The Riot Mark III Project reveled in chaos and unpredictability.

The Minerva Mark II promised to become a conductor of large-scale battles.

The two upcoming expert mechs and single ace mech all possessed their own unique flavor and personality that made them utterly different from other high-ranking mechs. No one would be able to mistake them from the works of other mech designers.

While Ves injected his love and expectations in each of the mech design projects, he looked forward to realizing one specific living mech in particular.

Selecting a favorite was difficult for Ves.

Even though the Minerva Mark II was supposed to become a fully-fledged ace mech, he did not find it too attractive on an emotional level. The ace command mech possessed strong features and promised to amplify Saint Commander Casella Ingvar's impressive Command Field, but it seemed rather boring in other aspects.

Perhaps it was because the Minerva Mark II mainly amplified Casella's existing capabilities, and did not actually introduce any new and revolutionary abilities.

This was a shortcoming that Ves needed to address by developing an Ultimate Module that could complement her combat approach.

He had fallen behind in this aspect. Ves needed to make progress in this assignment quickly if he wanted to avoid getting on his wife's bad side.

Anyway, compared to the relatively bland Minerva Mark II, Ves felt a much stronger affinity for the Amaranto Mark III the Riot Mark III.

The Amaranto was his first true 'extreme' mech, and she had become the first masterwork among the high-ranking mechs he designed from the ground up. Her firepower had saved many Larkinsons as well as living mechs from death, and she could always be counted upon to land the right shot at the right time. She held a special place in Ves' heart, and would have been more perfect if she was piloted by a dedicated Larkinson mech pilot.

The Riot was not an expert mech that Ves especially loved from the beginning, but he had conquered his heart over time. He did not particularly like the pilot of the expert spearman mech, but the Riot possessed a strong sense of grit and resilience that allowed the machine to stand the test of time. The living mech had grown stronger and more exceptional with each passing year.

The two made for a strong contrast.

The Amaranto had always been one of his highly-regarded works from the beginning, and it had maintained its place even as newer mechs attempted to steal the spotlight.

The Riot was a scrappy expert mech that Ves looked down upon in the beginning, but slowly earned his appreciation through hard work and struggle.

It was agonizing for Ves to pick a favorite between the two living mechs.

While Ves always ranked the Everchanger and the Devil Tiger as his most favorite works, the Amaranto and the Riot had both made compelling cases on why they have earned a place just below.

After a few minutes of mental struggle, Ves ultimately made his choice.

"They are both good mechs, but the Amaranto is just a little more remarkable."

The Amaranto Mark III promised to be a gamechanger, especially if Venerable Stark was able to advance to the rank of ace pilot in the near future.

Even if Davia Stark became a newly promoted junior ace pilot, her fantastic new machine should definitely grant her enough firepower to threaten lesser phase lords from a comfortable distance!

That did not necessarily mean that the Riot Mark III was inferior. Venerable Rosa Orfan still had room for growth, and so did her battle partner.

As long as they continued to temper themselves during the Red War, they may be able to undergo enough sublimations to reinvent themselves. They were like diamonds in the rough that needed to be cut enough times to become dazzling jewels!

Ves let out a sigh.

He missed this. He missed the wonder and excitement that accompanied every high-ranking mech design project.

He had spent too much time on mass production models as of late.

There was nothing wrong with them, but the reality of designing mechs destined for mass production meant that Ves had to make a lot of compromises during the design process.

Designing a high-ranking mech was like realizing a dream.

Designing a mass production mech was more akin to setting up a factory.

Both kinds of mechs presented Ves with interesting challenges, but he would never remain satisfied with working on one of them for a long time.

He couldn't be like Gloriana who completely eschewed mass production models in favor of dedicating all of her design time to high-ranking mech design projects. He would eventually grow bored and frustrated at the lack of connection to the greater community.

He also couldn't remain committed to designing mass production mechs despite the fact that he was directly able to serve a lot more customers this way. The limitations of budget and other practicalities prevented him from implementing all sorts of amazing high-end technologies.

As Ves thought about the current state of the Amaranto Mark III Project, he had plenty of reasons to feel amazed at all of the technological innovations and enhancements in the works.

The differences between the Amaranto Mark II and the Mark III had become so great that Venerable Davia Stark would definitely become at least twice as effective as before regardless of any breakthroughs!

After Ves sorted out his thoughts and conducted a little research, he called a meeting with both Gloriana and Harry Kaikkonen.

Both mech designers already knew why they had called over, though Gloriana looked a little annoyed that he summoned her as if she was a servant.

Gloriana immediately crossed her arms and tapped her foot. "What do you want to talk about this time, Ves? I was in the middle of a design session, you know."

"I wanted to talk about the current direction of the Amaranto Mark III Project." Ves stated as he gestured to the newcomers to sit down. "I haven't been able to devote my full attention to this project and all of the other ones that you have been working on in the past half year. The Evolution Witch herself insisted that I devote as much of my attention to rushing the Swarm Project to completion as possible. You should be able to guess the reasons why. Now that I have completed my obligation, I can finally give the Amaranto Mark III Project the attention it deserves from me. I intend to make up for lost time."

His wife did not look all that happy after hearing his explanation.

"We only recently talked about setting up two new Carmine mech design projects, remember? These projects require your attention as well. Do you have enough time to complete your assignments for the high-ranking mech design projects?"

"It won't be a problem, Gloriana." Ves confidently replied. "I will remain involved in the projects, but since I won't be leading them, it will be up to Harry and Ketis to do the heavy lifting. I am just there to provide support related to living mechs and the Carmine System. Is that doable for you, Harry?"

The only Journeyman Mech Designer in the office nodded, though he did not convey as much confidence as before.

"I shall do my best to meet both of your expectations. I may be lacking in experience, but I believe I shall not lead the Carmine mech design project that I am responsible for astray under your guidance."

"Good. In any case, I did not call you over here in order to talk about the Carmine mech design projects. I want to share my own ideas about the Amaranto Mark III Project now that I have caught up with the latest developments."

"Do you approve of Harry's work?" Gloriana asked as if she was a proud parent showing off her pupil.

Ves smiled back. "I do. I am fine with letting him take charge of the Carmine rifleman mech design project, and I am also okay with letting him design the updated version of the Instrument of Vengeance. I do recall that I promised to turn the main weapons of the Amaranto Mark III into Ultimate Modules. I have fleshed out my plans with regards to these two weapons."

"I have not forgotten. I was hoping that you would make progress in this task now that you have returned." Gloriana responded. "You distinctly promised to collaborate with the Red Fleet in order to integrate that strange alloy called EE-343F-00334R into the Instrument of Doom. Have you made progress on this front?"

"Uh, not yet, but my relationship with the RF has warmed up during my most recent business trip. I do not expect to encounter a lot of barriers if I request their technical support in my attempt to redesign the Instrument of Doom. The weapon pretty much behaves like a small warship-grade cannon already, so the fleeters should be able to offer plenty of relevant advice."

"I will leave this completely up to you, Ves. It will be your fault if you fail to deliver the necessary results in time. The Amaranto Mark II currently relies more on the Instrument of Doom than the Instrument of Vengeance due to the nature of the enemies we are encountering as of late."

The Instrument of Vengeance was a weapon that possessed quite a lot of power, but mainly stood out in terms of accuracy and finesse. It was best employed against tricky or fast-moving opponents whose weak points were hard to strike.

The Instrument of Doom was a weapon that personified brute force. It possessed both firepower and penetration power in spades, but was a lot bulkier and clumsier to use in the field. That was generally not a problem if the Amaranto mainly exchanged firepower with enemy warships.

"The Instrument of Vengeance is currently underutilized, but I do not intend to keep it that way." Ves presented his own vision for the weapon. "It is a weapon that excels at long-range sniping. We just need to make that more pronounced. You told me half a year ago that we can definitely make the weapon a lot more useful by making it more effective at ranges far beyond anyone's ability to strike."

Gloriana nodded. "I did tell you that. I suggested that we invest the power of Ylvaine into the Instrument of Vengeance. Have you been able to persuade him to lend his cooperation?"

"There is no need to ask the Great Prophet." Ves said with a grin. "If he can truly predict the future, then he should have already anticipated our request. He should have already agreed to anchor a piece of himself inside the Instrument of Vengeance and allow Venerable Davia Stark to borrow his foresight in combat. What matters is that we design the Instrument of Vengeance in a way that can effectively enable it to inflict effective damage at a range of several light-seconds away."

That was easier said than done!

To laymen, a light-second sounded like a measurement of time, but it was actually a measurement of distance.

A light-second was simply the amount of distance that light could traverse in vacuum!

That was currently 300,000 kilometers per second, which already represented a ridiculous distance.

There were far too many variables that prevented conventional weapon systems from effectively damaging targets at that distance.

Ylvaine was able to control one of the variables, thereby turning an insurmountable problem into a non-issue.

That did not mean that the other problems could be dealt with so easily.

One of the main reasons why directed energy weapons tended to become ineffective at extreme ranges was because their beam convergence was almost never completely perfect!

So long as the energy beams were even slightly convergent or divergent, they began to spread apart into an enormous cone after traversing so many kilometers!

What the Amaranto needed was an Instrument of Vengeance whose focusing crystals were so perfect that they were able to produce completely parallel energy beams.

This was an extremely challenging technical problem!

#### Chapter 6512 A New Ultimate Module

Perfect beam convergence was impossible to attain in reality.

No energy weapon could produce completely parallel beams where all of the light photons or energy rays shot forward without ever intersecting with or drifting away from each other.

The weapon in question needed to be built according to a level of precision and control that not even the best materializers could attain.

It was easy to design a perfect weapon in a virtual or imaginary environment, but reality was messy due to the influence of many variables that simulation programs could never fully replicate.

"Normally, it is impossible to produce perfectly parallel beam alignment in reality." Ves told Gloriana and Harry. "However, there have been instances where this has actually been produced. The easiest way to generate energy beams that are so parallel that they can strike at targets at cosmic distances is to rely on the reality-defying willpower of high-ranking mech pilots to smooth out any imperfections."

His wife crossed her arms. "We know that already, Ves. We have already conducted an investigation into this phenomenon. If the expert pilot or ace pilot possesses the right specialization, then it is indeed possible for this to happen. However, the concentration and effort needed to forcibly align a flawed energy weapon is considerable. I fear that Davia Stark will end up exhausting herself after firing half-a-dozen shots at extreme distances. This is not compatible with my vision for the Amaranto Mark III. The battles fought during the Red War are not only larger in scale, but also tend to drag out over time. We cannot make the marksman mech too exhausting to use, or else Venerable Stark's firepower will not be available during the moments where we need it the most."

One of the best moments for ranged mechs to strike was at the end of a battle.

As long as the native aliens withdrew their remaining forces, ranged mechs were able to chase after their prey and take potshots without encountering as much counterfire as before.

The breakdown of order and the messy disposition of rear guard forces usually created a lot of gaps in the defenses of the enemy fleets.

Damaged and partially disabled warships fell out of formations and turned into vulnerable prey.

It was especially crucial to pursue enemy phase lords before they successfully got away.

Letting these alien powerhouses retreat with their lives intact would negate much of the work put into damaging them in the first place.

Only by harvesting their lives would red humanity be able to gain a little more breathing room!

"I am aware of what you said, Gloriana." Ves responded. "A problem that can be solved with technology shouldn't be addressed with extraordinary power. It is the job of the mech designer to arm an expert pilot such as Venerable Davia Stark with tools that can ease her burdens. Doing the opposite is counterproductive. I have been thinking about how we can solve the beam convergence problem from a technological approach."

"Did we not ascertain earlier that there is no feasible means to produce perfectly parallel beams with the current state of human technology? Not even Harry here has a clue on how to accomplish this, and he knows more about converging energy beams and focusing crystals than both of us. It is possible the Polymath or the Resonance Smith can present a technological solution that is close enough to make the Amaranto Mark III effective at striking targets that are over 1 million kilometers away, but we are far short of meeting this standard."

His wife was correct. Their technological prowess and access to materials was not good enough to solve this problem in a more conventional manner.

One possible solution that Ves could employ was to use one of the favors he saved up to request the help of a Star Designer.



He had done it once before by requesting the formula for Yondu Milk from the Xenotechnician.

It turned out that he had largely wasted this favor as Divine Lucie Miyazaki ended up importing the authentic version of Yondu Milk from the Milky Way.

Should he exchange one of the favors that he had left to request the personal intervention of a Star Designer?

Ves actually felt tempted to do so. It would turn the Amaranto into an undeniably useful asset in the Red War as well as many conflicts to come.

The ability to strike at extreme ranges with total precision and reliability was an advantage that almost no force possessed!

The Larkinson Clan could completely take advantage of Venerable Stark's unparalleled sniping capabilities to assassinate troublesome opponents when they least expected an attack.

The Amaranto Mark III would also become extremely useful in pursuits. It would take much longer for fleeing opponents to escape the effective striking distance of the deadly expert marksman mech.

He inwardly shook his head.

Ves decided not to expend a precious favor. There were many ways he could put it to better use. It sounded wasteful to expend such precious social capital on a boon that mainly favored a guest pilot as opposed to himself.

He decided to solve this problem with his own means. He considered this a test of his design philosophy as well as his own capabilities.

"A problem like this that cannot be solved with pure conventional technology can be addressed with more unconventional technology." Ves explained his thoughts. "The most direct solution is to borrow the power of Ylvaine as we have discussed before, but I am reluctant to rely too much on his power. He is not a design spirit that has a strong affinity for the Amaranto. I also think that Venerable Davia Stark is less than enthused about the prospect of praying for Ylvaine for his

guidance. She is a woman that possesses a strong sense of responsibility. She would rather take action on her own than rely too much on others to fight her battles."

Gloriana thought for a moment before nodding in agreement. "That is true. I have always been uncomfortable with the idea of adding Ylvaine to the Amaranto Mark III. There is logic behind this combination, but Ylvaine does not fit the marksman mech's theme. Basing a design choice solely out of logic and practicality is an inadequate measure. If you can present us with a better alternative, then please share your idea."

Ves smiled and projected the incomplete design of the Amaranto Mark III in the air. He zoomed in the image of the wireframe model and removed the mech frame so that only the Instrument of Vengeance remained.

The design of the current iteration of the rifle was not complete, but it also showcased the undeniable influence of Harry Haikkonen's work.

The rifle had always been rather long and sizable, but the vastly increased strain that the weapon was expected to withstand in the future made it necessary to increase its volume by a large extent.

The weapon had become so large and unwieldy that it was almost completely unsuitable for use at close range!

While the Amaranto Mark III could technically hold it like a spear and poke at incoming enemies with a bayonet, the rifle was ultimately not designed to function like a polearm.

In any case, Ves did not call up the design in order to criticize the excessive size of the weapon.

He zoomed in the image even further and highlighted the areas that should normally be occupied by the focusing crystal.

"Many, though not all energy weapons contain focusing crystals that are mainly responsible for controlling the beam convergence of the resulting output." Ves said. "In most cases, people are already fine with 'good enough' results. Modern industrial fabrication can already produce focusing crystals and energy weapons that can ensure that energy beams remain relatively coherent and effective at distances that range up to thousands of kilometers. With a bit more effort and controls, an energy weapon can even strike at large and relatively immobile targets on a semi-reliable basis that are tens of thousands of kilometers away. Of course, this is mostly the case when fighting in the vacuum of space."

None of this was new to Gloriana and Harry. In fact, this was downright basic information!

There was a reason why Ves felt the need to rehash this basic knowledge.

"I have decided to turn the Instrument of Vengeance's focusing crystal and the surrounding elements into an Ultimate Module."

"I could have predicted that months ago. What is important is how this Ultimate Module of yours is actually able to help Venerable Stark land a precision shot at a target that is over a million kilometers away."

Ves began to radiate more confidence at this point. "Oh, the idea behind my Ultimate Module is simple. In order to enable the Amaranto Mark III to land an accurate shot at such distances without relying on the guidance of an external party, I believe we have to make a compromise. The one I have chosen for this is losing the surprise factor by letting the Amaranto fire a calibration shot first."

"A... calibration shot?" Gloriana furrowed her brows.

"Yup. In other words, Venerable Stark will attempt to take aim at a distant target and configure the settings of the Instrument of Vengeance according to her and her battle partner's intuition, judgment and calculations. It is not necessary for them to get every parameter right. What matters is that they get close enough to unleash a good calibration shot. This attack will most likely miss. The probability of nailing the target is almost zero. What truly matters is that this shot provides enough quality calibration data for Stark and the Amaranto to quickly adjust the settings of the focusing crystal to discharge the execution shot, a fully-charged energy beam attack that should hopefully strike the target."

"..."

"..."

The two mech designers sitting opposite of Ves became speechless.

"What is the matter?"

"THIS IS RIDICULOUS! IF IT WAS THAT EASY FOR VENERABLE STARK TO LAND HER SHOTS AT SUCH EXTREME DISTANCES, THEN WE WOULDN'T NEED AN ULTIMATE MODULE IN THE FIRST PLACE! BESIDES, THE SEQUENCE THAT YOU HAVE JUST DESCRIBED DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH AN ULTIMATE MODULE!"

Harry provided more constructive feedback. "We have contemplated this approach before, but deemed it unviable. The calibration data from the first shot has to be analyzed and processed in a short amount of time. The longer the delay between the first shot and the second shot, the lower the value of the calibration data as the target has probably already moved far away from its original coordinates. Other circumstances such as temperature, space debris, relative motions and so on have also begun to diverge to a significant degree. Even if we attempt to speed up the calculations and shorten the delay between shots, it still takes precious seconds to fully charge and accumulate all of the power for the execution shot. This will mean that Venerable Stark and her Amaranto Mark III cannot rely on pure calculations and must always make predictions in order to plug the correct numbers at the correct time. This is why we have decided it is better to land one successful shot right away than relying on a two-step process."

Both mech designers had good reason to express their skepticism towards Ves' approach.

He already thought about these problems as well, but he believed his work may actually be able to solve this problem.

"This is why the focusing crystal and the processors that control its beam convergence are not made of normal parts. I instead intend to turn them all into an Ultimate Module. This means that they will be governed by the subordinate spirit of the Amaranto Mark III. The Two-Step Execution Crystal will be entirely dedicated to making the sequence work, and will rely heavily on E-technology in order to get the job done."

Neither Gloriana nor Harry understood the true implications of these words.

"Why is this important, Ves?"

"Humans are able to cultivate and gain all manner of amazing and reality-defying powers. Is this correct?"

"Yes."

"Companion spirits can also engage in cultivation, correct?"

"Yes."

"Living mechs are also able to cultivate. It is difficult to notice the differences, but that is because they are already so big and strong that the absorption of E energy takes longer to produce material transformations. Is this also correct?"

"Yes. I suppose you are correct."

"Since Ultimate Modules are essentially carriers of the companion spirits of the living mechs, who says that they cannot cultivate by themselves? What if the Ultimate Module practices a custom qi cultivation method that can make up for the shortcomings of Venerable Stark and the Amaranto Mark III? Do you think it is possible for my proposed Two-Step Execution Crystal to assist them in performing the right adjustments and correct their aim right after firing a calibration shot?"

"This..."

Chapter 6513 The Magic of Ultimate Modules

Ves only took a short time to come up with the concept of the Two-Step Execution Crystal, but he had already fallen in love with the idea!

Sure, the solution sounded a lot more convoluted than relying on Ylvaine's guidance to land an accurate shot at extreme ranges the first time, but it was a much better fit for the Amaranto Mark III!

Ace pilots such as Venerable Davia Stark clearly wanted to rely on nothing else but her own power and that of her battle partner.

Forcing them to beg an external party for help each time they wanted to perform a difficult action would cause their willpower to develop flaws and ultimately stagnate.

Unless Venerable Stark converted to the Ylvainan Faith or somehow triggered a massive mental shift that caused her to become a substantially different expert pilot, she would never feel comfortable with relying on outsiders for guidance.

Throughout her career as an expert pilot, Venerable Stark had unceasingly trained and improved her marksmanship skills.

Every battle she participated in gave her the opportunity to exercise her ability to hit distant or rapidly-moving targets no matter the challenge.

Just like Saint Tusa became ridiculously good at evading incoming attacks after putting his life and the life of the Dark Zephyr on the line, Venerable Stark also became incredibly skilled at predicting the evasion patterns of her targets and exhibiting enough superhuman accuracy to ensure her energy beam attacks struck their marks!

However, even Davia Stark had her limitations.

Ves' plan was therefore simple. If her skills, experience, judgment, intuition as well as the assistance from the Amaranto Mark III was not enough, then perhaps the additional help from the Ultimate Module may be able to bridge the remaining gap!

After Gloriana and Harry Kaikkonen got over their initial shock reactions and mulled over Ves' proposal from a more critical perspective, they roughly understood the merits of this idea.

"I can see the logic in this Two-Step Execution Crystal of yours." Gloriana said. "The challenge in landing a successful execution shot is to process the data from the calibration shot as quickly and correctly as possible. You assume that Venerable Stark and her battle partner will not be able to accomplish this by themselves, so you add a third entity, this time internal, that is completely specialized in processing and performing accurate judgments based on the calibration data."

"Leaving aside the unconventional nature and properties of Ultimate Modules, this is not an uncommon approach to solve a problem such as this." Harry said in a thoughtful voice. "Mechs that rely heavily on predicting patterns are usually augmented by AI processors that are specifically programmed to perform specialized tasks. A light skirmisher that needs to fly faster can mount additional external boosters. A space knight that needs to block more damage can carry an external shield generator module. What each of these solutions have in common is that their footprints are relatively light, but their positive impact on the performance of the mechs are greater. If this Two-Step Execution Crystal can truly perform the functions as described by Professor Ves, then it may be able to turn the Amaranto Mark III into an extreme range executioner."

Ves grinned. "I am glad that you have figured this out. The Ultimate Module for the Instrument of Vengeance is meant to unlock a new capability that is otherwise impossible to attain through conventional means. While this solution is admittedly imperfect, Venerable Stark and her battle

partner can ultimately land her attacks on extremely distant targets by relying on their 'own' strength. No matter whether the Ultimate Module can cultivate by itself, it is still a part of the Amaranto Mark III, so it cannot be treated like an external party."

While Harry appeared to be open-minded enough to buy Ves' arguments, his wife was a bit more difficult to persuade.

"Your story sounds good, Ves, but what if one of the many assumptions that you have made fail to reflect our actual reality?" Ves maintained his confidence. "Then give it more time. The Instrument of Vengeance has gained the potential to grow on its own with the help of this Ultimate Module. At the start, a living Two-Step Execution Crystal starts out fresh and relatively weak, but will quickly grow stronger after feeding from the spiritual feedback of a strong high-ranking mech pilot. The Ultimate Module will begin to advance its 'cultivation' and form Ultimate Runes, many of which may be derived from Ylvaine, the Illustrious One, Titania and other helpful design spirits. However, the Two-Step Execution Crystal is only 'learning' from them by absorbing their Ultimate Runes. It will never rely on the design spirits during actual battles."

"Give a hungry man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." Harry quoted. "This is a brilliant solution now that I think about it. There is still an unwelcome reliance on an unnatural and unscientific factor, but at least it is internal to the Amaranto Mark III system, which reduces potential vulnerabilities and makes the living mech more self-sufficient."

Even Gloriana started to get around to the idea.

"As Harry has mentioned, this is hardly a perfect solution." She said in a more composed tone. "However, I have to admit that your solution has a greater chance of working than the alternatives that I have devised on my own. It sounds as if you are cheating by exploiting the advantages of the E-technology mechanics of your Ultimate Modules, but this is your strength, so I can understand where you get your confidence from. I can say for now that your proposal is worth trying, if only because it is the only viable solution so far that does not cost an excessive amount of resources to test in reality. If your Two-Step Execution Crystal fails to deliver on its promises and has no long-term prospects, then we can always remove it from the mech design and start over."

The project lead made a logical and mature decision.

Ves actually expected that he would have to endure the screeching of his wife a little more, but she acquiesced a lot sooner than expected.

This was strange because his proposal actually contained a lot of sketchy aspects. He had been waiting to explain the mechanics of his Two-Step Execution Crystal in more detail, but his wife had essentially thrown her hands up and gave him permission to proceed in advance.

Perhaps Gloriana already predicted that she would not be able to stop his initiative.

He did not like how she already started to take failure into account, but this was also a reasonable decision to make from her perspective.

Not every mech designer was able to keep his promises.

Since Gloriana accepted his proposal to develop the Ultimate Module that he believed would best suit the Amantato Mark III, the vision for the Instrument of Vengeance became complete.

Aside from the expected material and technological upgrades that required little thought and ingenuity, the old and new version of this special luminar crystal rifle had at least two major distinguishing factors.

Harry Kaikkonen's ERC luminar crystal technology was meant to add another layer of firepower amplification and attribute modification.

Ves' Two-Step Execution Crystal promised to vastly increase the effective range of the Amantato Mark III at a reasonable cost.

One of the main advantages of the proposed Ultimate Module was that it did not demand a heavy consumption of power from Venerable Davia Stark, especially if it had more time to grow and develop its capabilities!

While Ves did not expect the Two-Step Execution Crystal to completely automate the calibration process, it was already extremely helpful if it could take over much of the burden from the expert pilot.

The more work the Ultimate Module was able to complete, the lower the burden that Venerable Stark had to bear in order to land a shot at extreme distances.



She would be able to conserve her extraordinary willpower and reduce her mental strain even if she repeatedly nailed shots that everyone else thought impossible!

Another added advantage to this proposed solution was that it had a ridiculously high growth ceiling. Ultimate Modules were alive, so they possessed the capacity to evolve and transcend their limitations.

One day, the Two-Step Execution Crystal may transform into a powerful high-level artifact in its own right!

Ves felt incredibly satisfied with this solution. It largely conformed to his design philosophy and would remain relevant for many years without requiring active input from himself.

The only caveat was that there was a chance that he did not possess the capability to realize this promising idea.

If the Ultimate Module was unable to execute most of the steps that it was designed to accomplish, then it would turn into a useless burden.

"Let us talk about the Instrument of Doom." Gloriana changed the topic. "As much as I dislike the fact that My beautiful and elegant expert marksman mech resembles an ugly cannoneer mech whenever it is wielding the luminar crystal cannon, the firepower is undeniably strong. It needs to become much more powerful if we want this weapon to keep up with Davia Stark's demands in the future. This is the most promising weapon that we can use to land the killing blows on phase lords when Venerable Stark finally breaks through."

That did not necessarily mean that the weapons wielded by other ace mechs were ineffective against the native alien gods.

However, there were many weapon types that were heavily disadvantaged when employed against physically imposing opponents.

Even if the ace pilot had ultimately decided to reject the title Phase Bane, he had already fallen in love with the superior reach and lethality of this Terran mech weapon!

A good weapon can make all the difference in a confrontation against a massive phase lord.

When Saint Tusa-Billingsley-Larkinson took off for the frontlines with the Dark Zephyr Mark III, he made sure to pack the tier 3 Destroyer spear as well!

Even if the ace pilot had ultimately decided to reject the title Phase Bane, he had already fallen in love with the superior reach and lethality of this Terran mech weapon!

A good weapon can make all the difference in a confrontation against a massive phase lord.

Tusa did not even think of employing the pitiful knives of his ace light skirmisher against his gigantic adversaries!

Ves actually preferred to keep the precious tier 3 Destroyer spear within his reach in case he needed to borrow its destructive edge in person.

He was also afraid that the Dark Zephyr might get trounced on the battlefield and lose hold of this precious weapon somehow!

Then, Ves recalled that Destroyer weapons had no longer turned into an endangered species in the Red Ocean.

The Terrans of the new frontier may not be able to reproduce them, but the Terrans of the old galaxy should still be able to produce new ones as if nothing had changed!

With the creation of the Oblivion Gates, Ves should be able to import a batch of medium to high-tier Destroyer weapons from the Milky Way!

The challenge lay in making contact with a friendly and willing Terran trading partner.

Perhaps he could leverage his friendships with the Streon Ancient Clan or Devos Ancient Clan of the Red Ocean to establish contact with their counterparts in the old galaxy.

His mother already planned to form an unholy alliance that dragged in every potential source of opposition towards the Big Two. There were bound to be Terrans in this messy coalition!

If Ves asked his mother nicely, she might be willing to negotiate with the 'old' Terrans to trade for a pair of Destroyer knives and other requested arms!

Ves inwardly shook his head. He could think about the possibilities of intergalactic trade later. His mother and her fellow conspirators were way ahead on this front.

All he knew was that his mother owed him a lot for agreeing to work on the Rule Breaker Project.

She had no choice to refuse to pay back this favor by transferring a batch of precious Destroyer weapons to the Red Ocean!

What other goodies originating from the old galaxy could he ask for that were not too troublesome to import...

#### Chapter 6514 Inflated Ambitions

After Ves concluded his meeting with Gloriana and Harry, he gained a much more solid direction on how to contribute to the Amaranto Mark III Project.

His wife already handled much of the assignments related to the project. She had become incredibly invested in trying to design a mech frame that successfully incorporated a much greater proportion of offensive-oriented hyper materials than normal.

If she succeeded, then the Amaranto would become one of the boldest and most interesting high-ranking marksman mech in the Red Ocean.

The design of the latest incarnation of the Instrument of Vengeance was on the right track. Now that Ves devised the Two-Step Execution Crystal, all he needed to do was to realize it step by step until it turned into a viable and working Ultimate Module. In contrast, he still did not have a good idea on how to augment the Instrument of Doom. Since his wife was growing more and more impatient about his delays, he decided to address this issue as soon as possible by scheduling a meeting with the recently promoted Commodore Zonrad Reze of the Red Fleet.

Before he met with the RF officer aboard his flagship, Ves decided to spend more time catching up with the other mech designers in the design lab.

The mech designers he sought out first were Maikel and Zanthar.

It had been years since he last tutored them in person. He had let the two young mech designers go in order to let them find their own path to success.

Ves could have given them more help. He could have guided them for a few years more. He could have sent them off for EdNet training. He could have assigned other lead designers to teach them their craft.

He did none of that. Instead, he let the two trueblood Larkinsons fend for themselves in the Design Department, putting them on the same starting line as all of the other low-ranking mech designers who mainly performed assisting work.

This was not a glamorous job, nor one that allowed them to put their stamp onto a mech design.

However, it was the trajectory that launched the careers of many mech designers that eventually became successful.

It was difficult for a mech designer to learn the right lessons from all of the grunt work while also devoting much of their free time for additional study and private design work.

Ves had confidently thrown Maikel and Zanthar into this harsh but fair work environment in order to test them and prevent them from getting spoiled.

He wanted to avoid that last outcome at all cost. A spoiled mech designer might be able to coast along pretty easily at the start, but they would hit an insurmountable wall by the time they sought to realize their design philosophy.

It was not until Journeymen and Seniors had to rely on their own initiative, ingenuity and problem-solving capabilities that the unworthy began to suffer for their inadequacies.

If Ves continued to give Maikel and Zanthar handouts on a regular basis, then the two mech designers would never be able to develop the right attitude and skills related to solving difficult problems by themselves.

It was better for them to struggle with overcoming the relatively low-level design problems that low-ranking mech designers typically encountered during this stage of their career.

That was how Ves managed to climb his way up as well.

Of course, Ves was well aware that he could not be used as a proper example as he depended a lot on the System to improve his Skills and Sub-Skills.

He actually felt tempted to give Maikel and Zanthar access to the System for this reason, hoping that they would be able to follow a similar trajectory to his own and achieve success in a remarkably short time.

Ves eventually rejected this proposal.

The reason why he chose to withhold the System from the two young mech designers was not because of lack of trust.

Maikel and Zanthar were Larkinsons through and through, and they had never exhibited any signs of rebellion or wanting to become independent.

The issue was that Ves ultimately did not think it would be conducive to their growth, at least at their current stages.

They at least needed to be able to advance to the rank of Journeyman Mech Designer by relying on their own power and prove they possessed true passion and the willingness to work harder than ordinary mech designers to realize their ambitions! While this sounded like a healthy plan, the problem was that this phase was taking an awfully long time.

That caused Ves to harbor doubts about whether he had made the right decisions for the two Apprentices.

On the surface, Ves shouldn't really have any complaints. Not every mech designer was a prodigy or a lucky bastard who was able to become a Journeyman before reaching the age of 30.

It was pretty normal for Journeymen to arise at the age of 50, 60 and maybe even

more.

While breaking through at a later age granted the mech designers less time to advance to Senior and Master, late bloomers were actually incredibly common in the

mech industry.

Besides, with the onset of systematic cultivation, age had become even less of a

concern.

People gained easy access to free curated cultivation methods that could easily double their current lifespans if they devoted enough time and effort into their practice.

As long as the Red War and subsequent conflicts did not collapse all of human civilization and turned red humanity extinct, then Maikel and Zanthar would have all the time they want to find a way to become Journeymen and higher.

Yet... was Ves really satisfied with allowing these two brats to take their sweet time to advance to the next rank?

As a highly celebrated mech designer who managed to become a Senior at around 40 years old while being married to a woman who managed to make a similar accomplishment, Ves grew increasingly less satisfied with the slow progress of his two once-students!

While he was on his way to the section of the design lab where they could be found, Ves tried to make up his mind on what sort of stance he should take.

Should he be lenient and patient with them for doing their jobs at their own pace, or should he express anger and disappointment at their lack of notable accomplishments

over the years?

Ves failed to make up his mind by the time he reached their workplace. He decided to withhold his judgment and hear them out in person.

"Sir!"

"Patriarch!"

"Good afternoon, Apprentices. I am here to check up on your progress. I hope you haven't been wasting the time I gave you since our last proper meeting. You might not be my direct disciples, but I still consider myself responsible for your education and progress. Let's sit down and have a good talk"

"Very well, sir."

Maikel and Zanthar both looked fairly young and tender, just like how they appeared back when they were still studying under Ves.

However, their temperament had changed considerably. If Ves had to describe it, it was that both of them had lost their immaturity that they still possessed during their adolescence. They had grown calmer, more weathered and more prepared to face the realities of their difficult careers.

At least the two had grown up to the point where they appeared to possess the right mindset of a Journeyman.

Then why had they failed to attain their breakthroughs? What was holding them back?

Once the three sat down at a nearby work table, Ves steepled his fingers and gazed at the Apprentices with a critical expression.

"Neither of you are stupid, so you must have guessed why I have come. Let me state in advance that I am not prejudging you. Every mech designer is different, and you are still in your thirties, which is still a prime age for Apprentices. What I care about more is whether you have spent your time fruitfully. If you are lingering in your current ranks because you have been messing around and not employing your advantages to the fullest, then I am questioning whether you deserve to stay in the Design Department. After all, I do not want you to stay here if the work environment is making you too comfortable and complacent. Mech designers rarely tend to make good progress if they feel too fulfilled. It is the absence of fulfillment that produces the strong motivation that we rely upon to create works that surpass the normal

standard."

Both younger mech designers nodded with serious expressions.

"We have not been wasting our time, sir." Maikel spoke first. "To be honest, the main

reason why we are still Apprentices is because we chose to pursue more difficult and ambitious design philosophies. We could have settled for more modest goals, but... if we did so, we would never be able to reach your level of success and contributions. We don't want to end up as average mech designers. We want to become a pillar of the Larkinson Clan and a legend of the mech community like you. Both of us are aware that we can never get close to reaching your height if we choose to commit to narrow and less ambitious design philosophies."

Zanthar echoed his fellow trueblood Larkinson's intent. "This is why we deliberately set our targets high, teacher. We decided that if we wanted to pursue our careers to the fullest, we either try to rise as blazing stars, or fail to get off the ground at all. We don't want to settle for becoming another average or faceless mech designer in the crowd. We would rather fail outright and admit that we are not as talented and lucky as you. So far, I think our progress will surprise. We have not yet managed to reach our first goal, but I think we have gotten rather close."

Ves did not know how to feel at the moment. He distinctly felt it was his fault that his students had chosen to enter a high-risk, high-reward trajectory when they did not necessarily have the qualifications to pursue such a difficult career direction. Not everyone was suitable to become the stars of the mech industry. For every massive success story like the Polymath and more recently Ves, there were millions if not billions of unexceptional mech designers that failed to achieve galaxy-wide

renown.

That did not necessarily mean the latter were failures. These quiet and unassuming mech designers were able to achieve modest successes that were more than enough to make them content.

What was wrong with becoming a humble Journeyman or Senior?

Even if they managed to work their way up to becoming a Master Mech Designer by

pursuing a fairly low-grade design philosophy, there was no reason to belittle their accomplishments.



Any contribution was helpful no matter how small or modest.

In fact, Ves knew that many mech designers ended up getting stuck and failing to

attain any further progress not because they were selfish or lazy, but because they bit off more than they could chew.

Cases where overambitious mech designers such as Maikel and Zanthar aimed too

high, yet failed to live up to their inflated expectations were distressingly common in

the mech industry!

Right now, it remained to be seen whether the two former students had what it took to become a legend in the making like Ves.

Ves adopted a stern expression as he faced the two dreamers.

"Every mech designer has a right to dream. Choosing a design philosophy is a deeply personal choice that is tied into your passion. If you are not satisfied with more modest goals, then it is indeed a valid choice to chase after a more ambitious idea. Far be it for me to dissuade you from doing what your heart thinks is right. However, reality rarely accommodates your personal desires. Don't forget that both of you must all earn your keep in the Design Department. So many mech designers want to work in this design lab that I cannot justify the decision to keep you around when there are more deserving professionals around. In order to establish whether the two of you are still worth subsidizing, I want to hear what you are trying to accomplish."

The two mech designers did not look too surprised after hearing this. They already

made the psychological preparation to account for what they have been doing over the past few years. "That is fair, teacher."

Ves gave them a cold smile. "Now that we are on the same page, let's start with you,

Zanthar."

## Chapter 6515 EEE Munitions

When Ves notified Maikel and Zanthar Larkinsons that he wanted to have a discussion with them, the two Apprentice Mech Designers understood quite well that their reckoning had come.

This was the moment where the two younger Larkinsons had to account for their decisions and the progress that they had made since the start of the Age of Dawn. Many people had welcomed the Hyper Generation and managed to take off like a rocket after they successfully took advantage of the new opportunities.

Ves was the definite example of this kind of a success story. It took remarkably little time for him to develop many useful inventions, most of which did not seem to have any direct relations with mech design!

It was only after he released his historic Yellow Jacket models that he cemented himself as the most successful mech designer of the younger generations.

No one dared to accuse him that he had gone astray in his mech design career anymore!

It was not easy for other mech designers to grow up in the shadow of such a giant of the industry.

How could other Larkinsons possibly harbor any pride and conceit towards their own works when they paled in comparison to the celebrated works of their patriarch?

In that sense, Ves had a negative impact on the workforce of the Design Department. Mech designers were humans as well. They possessed the capacity to feel envy, jealousy and inadequate.

A lot of mech designers working for the Design Department must be suffering from a case of inferiority complex. Continuing to work for a highly successful mech designer who had not yet managed to realize his own design philosophy must have exerted a lot of pressure on all of his juniors.

Ves was only just beginning to comprehend the severity of what it was like to work under him, Maikel and Zanthar suffered the worst from this problem as they had received his personal tutelage.

It was absolutely unacceptable for them to end up as ordinary mech designers after receiving so many privileges!

Whether Ves had inadvertently 'ruined' the two trueblood Larkinsons that he once hoped could inherit his burdens and prop up the Larkinson Clan would soon become clear.

Zanthar did not take much time to compose his words. He began with an apology.

"Before I explain the current direction of my research, I want to say sorry to you for failing to meet your expectations. You must have looked forward to having me take

over your knowledge related to luminar crystal technology and carry forth your research. The alien tech fascinated me for a time, but the more I studied it, the less I cared about it. Energy weapons don't excite me as much as big explosive cannons. I never became satisfied with the mechs that I have designed that made use of luminar crystal weapons."

That was a regretful outcome. Ves felt a little disappointed that Zanthar failed to embrace luminar crystal technology, as it had lots of promise.

The sting was not as painful as it should have been.

"It's okay." Ves said. "Another mech designer has taken over the mantle of furthering the development of luminar crystal technology. We are far past the point where I have to rely on an Apprentice like you to develop the future iterations of luminar crystal weapons."

"I am glad that you managed to bring Harry Haikkonen into the Design Department." Zanthar said with a smile. "He talked to me multiple times in order to collect my own opinions and insights on luminar crystal technology. The more we exchanged with each other, the more I became impressed by his love and diligence towards this alien tech. I already concluded by the end of our first talk that he could take luminar crystal technology much further than I can ever manage."

"Okay, Zanthar, Since you have decided to abandon luminar crystal technology, what have you been doing instead?"

The younger mech designer assumed a more eager posture as he was ready to share his true passion.

"As I have mentioned a moment ago, I adore big guns. I want to arm all of my mechs with large and heavy cannons so that they can blow apart enemy mechs, warships or whatever else they are assigned to destroy. I think that I will mainly design heavy artillery mechs in the future, but I am also willing to design other mech types if there is enough demand. I don't necessarily love the cannons themselves, but the explosive munitions that they can launch towards their targets. I like anything that explodes. It doesn't matter if they come in the form of artillery shells, missiles, rockets, torpedoes or mines. My design philosophy is all about making them stronger and deadlier. That is what I have been spending much of my free time on. I have dedicated years to developing an original new technological paradigm of explosive munitions that requires a completely different form of defense to withstand."

Ves immediately grew intrigued. The focus on munitions sounded familiar. He had recently completed his collaboration with Lord Richard Brownstone, who reveled in developing exotic new rounds for his kinetic weapons.

So far, the biggest difference between the two was that the Rubarthan Senior Mech Designer preferred to work with solid projectiles, while Zanthar had taken a liking for explosive projectiles.

That was not enough to make the latter special. It was easy for mech designers to develop new explosive shell types. What mattered was that their solution offered superior performance at affordable prices. Not many professionals were able to meet this standard.

"Oh? I can hear the passion in your voice. You also sound confident in your current research direction. What is it exactly that you have been working on as of late?" Zanthar Larkinson used his comm to call up footage of a test run of his munitions. He had taken a generic heavy artillery mech and replaced the standard munitions of the artillery cannons with his own custom-developed ordnance.

The test involved a heavy artillery mech firing the new explosive shells at a target dummy protected by a fixed azure energy shield.

Under normal circumstances, a heavy artillery mech had to fire dozens of explosive shells to exhaust an azure energy shield of this strength level.

Boom!

When the generic artillery mech fired the first shell, the projectile slammed against the surface of the energy shield and exploded, just as predicted.

There was nothing special about the blast. It was moderately powerful but that was all. The azure energy shield rippled slightly and in a pattern that suggested that the explosive shell was laced with hyper materials.

So far, Ves had not seen anything that distinguished this shell from the ones that any mech force could buy off the shelf.

What was special about Zanthar's work?

It was then that he noticed a subtle detail.

His gaze only strayed briefly towards the target dummy, not expecting to find anything amiss, which was why he became surprised that he noticed a change.

"Did you manage to spot it, teacher?" Zanthar grinned.

"The damage unleashed by that detonation... partially bled through the azure energy shield and affected the target dummy! Even if only a fraction of the power of the explosion has ultimately managed to dent the exterior of the dummy, this is already a major accomplishment!"

It was not unheard of for weapons and munitions to be able to partially or completely bypass energy shields.

It was a lot more difficult to accomplish with the most powerful transphasic hyper energy shields, but as long as the circumstances were right, there were still ways to penetrate or bypass this layer of projection!

The most familiar instance to Ves was Saint Tusa and the Dark Zephyr's ability to

employ the Leap of True Freedom to bypass every obstacle on a conceptual level and reach their destination on the other side of a powerful energy shield in an instant! Whether Tusa managed to pull it off by phasing through a completely different dimension or a more direct form of teleportation, he was one of the few mech pilots that could completely ignore any barrier.

The Phobos piloted by Venerable Zimro Belson also possessed a similar if lesser capacity to bypass active transphasic energy shields. Some of the fiends spawned from the GEIST System were able to pass through these barriers and quietly infiltrate the interior of enemy starships and find a way to open up a gap in the defenses to let in other destructive fiends.

Then there was Lucky whose phasing ability had continually improved ever since he gained this power. As far as Ves was aware of, the gem cat was able to pass through weak to moderate strength energy shields with difficulty.

Given that he already witnessed instances where stuff got through energy shields in the past, Ves shouldn't be particularly surprised that Zanthar had also managed to find

a way. There was a huge difference, though.

As the footage of the test continued, the heavy artillery mech slowly fired its heavy

artillo

cannons and

one.

Every explosive shell launched by this machine struck the dome-shaped energy shield

at slightly different angles.

Much of the explosions ended up getting blocked by the energy shield, but there was

always a small proportion of destructive energies that somehow managed to pass through the protective layer and impact the target dummy!

After firing over a dozen explosive shells, the dummy still managed to retain its original shape, but it clearly looked as if it got beat up by a mob.

Ves grew impressed. No matter how Zanthar managed to attain this result, the use of multiple shells that otherwise did not appear to be remarkable indicated that the cost

of his new innovation was not too high!

This was incredibly significant as the previous examples were all special cases that demanded a huge amount of investment in order to produce those results!

As for the heavy artillery mech in the footage, all Zanthar needed to do was to load in experimental shells that were probably economical enough to mass produce!

The biggest issue was that the explosive munitions were clearly half-baked at this

stage. The bleedthrough rate was not high enough to grant the attacker any advantages, but this was just the start.

The difficulty in this line of research was the first step!

As long as Zanthar managed to figure out a way to pass at least a tiny amount of

damage through an energy shield, he had successfully created an opening which he could expand in his follow-up research!

He just needed to figure out how exactly he managed to bypass the energy shield and

how to multiply the yield until he created a form of munitions that could inflict effective damage onto targets protected by barriers!

"How did you manage to produce this result?" Ves eventually asked.

"E energy." Zanthar straightforwardly answered. "I took inspiration from the Destroyer of Worlds and how she is able to make her main cannon attacks so amazingly

powerful. I don't dare to hope to reproduce what she is able to do with her god-like power, but what I wanted to create for the mech community is a more affordable and widely available means of enhancing the power of explosive munitions that anyone can use. The answer I came up with is to imbue the explosive ordnance with their spiritual equivalent. Think of it as implanting E-bombs into physical bombs. If everything goes right, I will eventually be able to develop a Class II Design Philosophy that will probably be called E energy Explosive Munitions or EEE Munitions in short."

"That... might actually work."

Ves never imagined that E-technology could be used to produce such an interesting concept!

"It took a lot of time and experimentation for me to get this far." Zanthar said in order

to explain why he remained stuck as an Apprentice for so many years. "I studied much

of the internal notes, articles and textbooks that you have written on living mechs in order to develop the right E-munitions. That was not enough for me to achieve a breakthrough in my research, so I also approached the researchers over at the T Institute for advice and additional study material. That helped a lot, but what truly allowed me to get so far is the use of my companion spirit."

In order to prove how much he had dedicated himself to this line of research, Zanthar

proudly unveiled his companion spirit.

"Mawah! Mawah!"

A green cat made out of swirling and volatile energies emerged from Zanthar's

forehead! "Meet Alfred. I took inspiration from the Destroyer of Worlds and focused on growing a cat that could enhance the power of any explosive device. So far, he is able to do a decent job at that. In fact, the main reason why I have been able to achieve limited success in my research so far is because I have attempted to reverse engineer the explosive imbue ability that Alfred has naturally developed according to my own



desires."

Ves had a sense of deja vu when he gazed upon Alfred.

The green cat reminded him a lot of a much more powerful orange cat!

Ves found it rather shameless that Zanthar attempted to solve his problem by copying the companion spirit of the Destroyer of Worlds.

It was also incredibly cheap for Zanthar to produce his research results by trying to reverse engineer the ability of his own companion spirit!

However, no one could fault him for figuring out a much more convenient way to realize his ambitions.

"This is... brilliant." Ves honestly expressed. "I applaud your ingenuity. You have

managed to produce a result that hardly any other mech designer can imitate by relying on the resources and advantages at your disposal. You have not wasted them at all. I have much greater confidence that you will be able to break through as a Journeyman as long as you have managed to raise the bleedthrough rate above single

digits!"

Chapter 6516 Taboo Mech Idea

Ves was fair to Zanthar.

If the young Apprentice Mech Designer squandered his resources or failed to make use of his opportunities, then Ves would have dressed him down.

Yet now that Zanthar had proven through his own actions over the years that he had methodically worked to attain a result that was impressive enough to earn everyone's appreciation, he deserved an applause for making this much progress in a difficult research direction.

Sure, his current results did not seem impressive at all. There was still a long way to go from producing a proof of concept to developing a mature design application.

This was why Zanthar had yet to become a Journeyman.

A Journeyman Mech Designer was a professional that had already managed to develop a working mech design that was reflective of his design philosophy.

It did not have to be too practical or economical, but it definitely had to possess at least a bit of real substance in order to serve as the permanent source of strength of a Journeyman!

Now that Ves managed to gauge Zanthar's progress, he understood that his former student should not take too long to finally surpass the extraordinary threshold for real and become a high-ranking mech designer.

"What sort of EEE munitions are you aspiring to make?" Ves asked with clear interest in his voice.

"I have devised multiple concrete applications that should be useful to many customers, teacher. The first form of EEE munitions that I am trying to develop is close to what you have already seen. I want to devise a means to mass produce explosive rounds that are all implanted with E-energy explosives. The point is that when the physical shell explodes, it will simultaneously trigger the detonation of the E energy warhead, causing an eruption of power that not only amplifies the original explosion, but also damaged anything related to E energy such as hyper energy shields."

"What else?"

"Well, a more advanced form of weapon system that I have been dreaming to develop are EEE munitions that are entirely made out of E energy." Zanthar grew more passionate as he unveiled his next idea. "This is admittedly similar to the strange hyper energy beams that can be fired from a weapon like your Gray Lotus. I want to develop a cannon that is similar to gun, but instead of firing energy beams, it can launch E energy projectiles that should theoretically be able to bypass many forms of obstacles and directly detonate inside a mech frame or the interior of an enemy warship!"

Ves could definitely see a lot of uses for such a weapon!

Even without significantly strengthening the physical attack power of the conventional warhead, including a means of damaging any form of E energy manifestations made it a lot easier to destroy azure energy shields, disrupt the true resonance of high-ranking mech pilots and maybe even inflict real harm on the comparatively weak and vulnerable spiritualities of gigantic phase lords!

"I think that hyper energy shields and hyper alloy plating should be able to resist such attacks." Ves explained. "The resonance shields and Saint Kingdoms of expert mechs and ace mechs should be even more effective at blocking these spiritual attacks. However, as long as you can launch enough of them at the enemy, they should definitely be able to exhaust the intangible defenses of the targets, so they should at least be useful in one capacity or another. You will need to conduct a lot of research in order to fully understand how your E energy explosive warheads can undermine different enemy types."

"I shall do so as soon as I can develop a weapon that can launch pure E energy warheads." Zanthar promised.

The eager Apprentice mech designer shared a few other ideas.

From EEE torpedoes that were designed to annihilate the spiritualities of every crew member of a heavily shielded enemy warship to shield breaker shells aligned towards the space attribute that could quickly destabilize transphasic energy shields and azure energy shields, the possibilities were endless!

The depth and breadth of ideas clearly indicated that Zanthar had a solid idea on how to derive practical applications from his initial theoretical framework.

As long as he was able to advance to the rank of Journeyman Mech Designer, he should quickly be able to realize the low-hanging fruit that did not take much effort to realize and establish a foothold in the mech market!

Ves did not fear that Zanthar would fail to attract a willing audience for his products. Their usefulness was as high as living mechs.

If the younger Apprentice did not lie by stating that most of the effects of his EEE munitions was largely based on E-technology and could easily be attained with the use of inexpensive hyper materials, then he should be able to design products that offered immensely compelling value propositions!

This was the key to attaining critical success at the Journeyman stage!

Whether Zanthar Larkinson was able to realize all of this amazing potential remained to be seen, but Ves no longer had any reason to dissuade him from pursuing his chosen ambition.

"You have big dreams." Ves stated at the end. "What separates idle dreamers from

innovative mech designers such as myself is the ability to realize your ideas. In order to bring your fantasies to life, you must work hard and boldly tread new ground that others have not traversed. This is not always a rewarding or easy direction for mech designers to follow, but it is one that has the potential to yield the greatest reward. I can foresee that if your EEE munitions live up to their promise, your work shall become as famous and desired as my living mechs."

The smile that bloomed on Zanthar's face was the happiest and more fulfilled one that Ves had seen from a mech designer!

"Thank you for your encouragement, teacher! I have repeatedly tested my patience and persistence these past few years. I have seen other mech designers such as you, your wife and Ketis progress by leaps and bounds while I have still remained stuck at the initial research phase. However, now that I have gotten far enough to produce a small but positive research result, I hope that my days of working without producing any worthwhile mech designs will soon be over."

It did not matter too much if Zanthar suffered a few more setbacks during his research and remained stuck as an Apprentice for 5 or 10 years.

As long as he kept studying, experimenting and trying out all kinds of strange ideas, he would continue to accumulate more data and knowledge. His theoretical framework would grow more expansive and enable him to explain a lot more

phenomena than before.

Ves did not really care what Zanthar planned to do next because he was already set on

the path of success.

The remaining twists and turns might cause Zanthar to go off-track or gain the precursor to another useful design application, but he should eventually be able to become a Journeyman sooner or later.

As Zanthar beamed due to receiving the personal recognition of a legendary mech designer, Maikel on the other hand looked a lot more nervous.

Ves hoped that Maikel did not appear apprehensive because his work for the past few years was much more disappointing compared to his fellow former student. "Maikel." Ves addressed the other young mech designer. "It is your turn now. Last. I checked, you were working on developing highly autonomous living mechs. To be honest, I do not think this is an idea worth dedicating your life for, because living mechs already have the potential to control their own mech frames by themselves. If you insist on pursuing this line of research, you will only end up acquiring almost the same design philosophy as myself, but with a few differences that may or may not lead

you astray."

Maikel maintained a serious expression as he nodded. "I agree with your assessment, sir, which is why I have sought to... find a better argument to justify the existence of such mechs. I won't explain the journey that I have taken and the explorations that I

have made. After an extensive period of theorizing and observation, I have found one potential demand that my work may be able to satisfy"

"And that is...?" "Immortality. Life after death. To continue to fight an unfinished war."

???

Ves looked flabbergasted. What did all of this have to do with his autonomous mechs?

"Those are high-minded words, Maikel. How do they tie into your design philosophy?"

The young Apprentice clearly looked hesitant to share his idea. It was only until Zanthar jabbed his elbow into Maikel's side that the discussion resumed.

"It is like this, patriarch. I... eh... want to design a living mech that... fuses with its

mech pilot. Well, a better way to put it is letting the living mech absorb the mech pilot. This way, the human will be gone, but his mind and personality will still live on inside the living mech. With the release of your new Carmine mechs, this service is no longer

exclusive to potentates anymore."

"...Really?"

"I know it sounds crazy, but I think that there is a large market for this kind of living

mech! There are many reasons why people would want to obtain the capacity to merge a human with a mech. For example, you can save the life of a dying human by letting a living mech proactively absorb his mind and spirit. This will enable the converted human to still live on after his first death and contribute to the survival and prosperity of his race when he would have ordinarily disappeared from life. The converted human would also be able to accompany his descendants in the years to come, maybe even letting his children or grandchildren pilot his new 'body'!" That sounded incredibly repulsive to Ves for a moment!

However, once he got over his instinctual disgust, he could actually find reasons why

this might be a good idea!

Ves even saw how Maikel's potential design application could attain excellent synergy with Alexa Streon's living legacy mechs!

The two of them could work together to develop an entire dynasty of living mechs whose spiritual foundations were originally comprised of members of the same family! Of course, the consequences of turning this into reality was bound to evoke a lot of

controversies!

The very notion of converting a human into a non-human entity for the purposes of survival and exploitation was a definite taboo in human society!

If the red humanity was not already locked in a war that it was on the verge of losing, then Maikel's insane idea would never have any chance of getting accepted!

As it was, the air of desperation that had spread throughout the new frontier had made many people a lot less resistant towards more extreme solutions.

If Maikel dared to pursue this idea in the Milky Way, then the MTA would have cracked down on him a long time ago!

It was still questionable whether the more tolerant RA would allow Maikel to persist in his current aspiration.

Perhaps he may only be permitted to design mechs with this special capacity under constant supervision!

"Wait" Ves suddenly froze as an extremely daring idea came to mind. "Have you ever thought about what would happen if one of your living mechs is able to absorb the spirit, mind and willpower of an expert pilot or ace pilot?"

Maikel's lips twitched. "I did, but... I lack the knowledge to predict what would happen

or if it can even happen. My assumption is that if the willpower of the mech pilot is too strong in proportion to the spiritual foundation of the living mech, then the latter will never be able to absorb the former. However, if the process is able to go through, then

the high-ranking mech pilot should absolutely be able to establish himself in his new giant mechanical form."

Nobody knew whether any of this was true!

Such a taboo mech sounded incredibly dangerous, but also held a lot of promise!

Ves was not quite sure yet whether he was willing to support Maikel's ambitions, but he had certainly found a bold research direction for himself!

## Chapter 6517 Man-Machine Conversion Process

Ves felt disturbed at the turn that Maikel Larkinson had taken with his prospective design philosophy.

It was already bad enough that Maikel wanted to design autonomous living mechs.

It became even worse now that Maikel wanted to tie his machines with absorbing the souls of their own mech pilots!

Even if Maikel had the best of intentions when he devised this 'solution', it introduced a huge amount of ethical and legal problems!

If Maikel remained in the old galaxy, then Ves had much less qualms about letting Maikel get his way.

It would have been perfect actually. The Milky Way was no longer his primary concern, and the demand for this kind of life-prolonging mech was undoubtedly greater in a low-energy environment!

The masses over there lacked easy access to life-prolonging treatments. The space peasants that deserved to be called this way had too few opportunities to acquire them and extend their lifespans.

The low viability of systematic cultivation deprived original humanity of a cheap and accessible way for humans to promote their self-evolution and extend their lifespans through their own effort.

Another issue that created a lot more fertile ground for Maikel's taboo mechs was that there was a huge number of old people living in the Milky Way.



The demographics of the old galaxy and new frontier diverged enormously from each other.

Back in the Milky Way, the last cataclysmic war that engulfed all of human space happened over 4 centuries ago.

Although humans had never gotten rid of the phenomenon of war, the conflicts that broke out since the start of the Age of Mechs were akin to brush fires.

From a galactic perspective, humans were not at risk of driving their species closer to extinction. Many parts of the old galaxy had enjoyed peace for many generations, thereby creating room for a lot of old people who had retired from the workforce.

Many of them had begun to suffer health problems and did not have any expectations of finding relief or extend their lifespans.

Not all of them were resigned to their fates!

There should definitely be a considerable proportion of old fogeys that would do everything to transfer their minds and spiritualities to living mechs!

Compared to the alternatives available to these poor and forgotten folk, becoming a living mech and permanently getting rid of the frailty and other weaknesses of their failing mortal bodies was more than worth the price!

All of these factors and more clearly made Maikel's proposed design philosophy a lot more useful in the Milky Way!

It would have been great if Maikel got left behind if that was the case. His journey to realize his design philosophy would have remained difficult, but his chances of winning over a huge amount of buyers should also be immense!

Alas, Ves and Maikel had to work with what they got.

Red humanity's demographics obviously leaned towards the younger end. When the greater beyonder gates first opened up, the ones that were willing and able to enter the new dwarf galaxy largely comprised of rich and highly skilled people that sought to build new lives in the new frontier.

Old people had little business with the Red Ocean. Their lives were already set once their bodies started to deteriorate due to their advanced ages. How could they possibly pay back the money needed to earn a quota for passage to the new frontier? Few pioneers and colonists wanted to bring dead weight to the Red Ocean. They mainly sought young to middle-aged professionals who could form the bedrock of entirely new states and contribute to its development for many decades.

As such, the proportion of people who were actually old in the Red Ocean was distressingly little!

Very few people grappled with the onset of ailments that caused their bodies to age and decay during their twilight years.

The demand for Maikel's mechs would therefore become a lot more limited. Perhaps there were a lot of injured veterans from the Red War that were unable to obtain proper treatment and were currently suffering.

However, it was rather questionable whether the Red Association would even permit for Maikel to sell his living mechs to these desperate customers.

The taboo mechs crossed way too many bottom lines!

The negative impact on the mech industry would be significant as people would permanently change their opinions on mech designers, and not for the better!

Ves sighed multiple times as he ran his fingers through his hair.

"Alright, Maikel. You have presented your case, or at least the beginnings of it. I would like to answer a few questions for you, is that alright?"

The nervous but still optimistic Apprentice Mech Designer nodded. "Ask away." "First, how do you name your brand of living mechs? What do you call the process that

in thaoru could be able to allow neonla to live in another form?"

"The keyword is conversion." Maikel stated with considerably greater conviction than before. "For now, I refer to my works as living conversion mechs. The process that enables the living mech to absorb the minds and spirits of their mech pilots and allows them to take root inside their new metallic shells should be called the man-machine

conversion process."

Conversion.

This would probably turn into the core attribute of Maikel's domain if he was able to progress his design philosophy a lot further.

It was a sophisticated word, but when used in this context, it sounded like a

euphemism to a much more macabre ritual!

"Are you aware of how much the Red Association and a lot of other squeamish leaders will react towards your so-called living conversion mechs?" Ves asked.

Maikel's eyes shone with optimistic anticipation. He even began to grin in a manner that reminded Ves of himself whenever he gained inspiration!

"I am more than clear about the obstacles that I might face in society, sir. Regardless, just as how you managed to convince the public to embrace your living mechs on a wide scale, I should be able to build a case for my conversion mechs as well. I just need to highlight the benefits and find enough early adopters who can transform their lives for the better after conducting the man-machine conversion process. Once we have built up enough word of mouth about the amazing benefits of my products, demand will grow organically as there are always people out there who have strong reasons to abandon their weak and tiny human bodies for well-engineered war machines made out of damage-resistant alloys!"

Maikel's plan sounded far too simplistic, but the underlying logic was still valid. He could indeed build up a case for his living conversion mechs by letting the people who needed them the most make use of them first.

The Red Association would probably adopt a wait-and-see attitude and observe whether Maikel's living conversion mechs truly allowed humans to live in a completely different form.

What happened next heavily depended on a lot of different factors such as the state of the Red War or the policies favored by the mechers who gained the right to pass judgment on Maikel's works.

No matter what, Maikel's subsequent path ahead was bound to be filled with thorns! As his former teacher, Ves felt an obligation to check whether Maikel had invested his time in the right research direction. He could never allow this overly ambitious Apprentice to ruin the lives of many mech pilots due to preventable oversights! "Have you been able to design and fabricate a working version of a living conversion

mech?"

Maikel's expression faltered a little. "Design, yes, Fabricate, not so much."

"What's the matter?"

The Apprentice Mech Designer called up his mech design and transferred the files

over.

Ves immediately began to examine the mech design. He recognized a lot of aspects of his own living mechs in Maikel's work.

However, Maikel had made a conscious effort to develop his own design style by

making his machines more human-like, as if to more closely mirror the human form.

There was an almost organic quality to the mech design due to all of the unnecessary curves and articulation in the design.

All of it added to a certain 'weight' that was meant to support a life-changing ritual.

Yes, ritual.

Ves was surprised to note that Maikel had actually based his core design application on the mysticism of rituals!

It looked as if he managed to get his hands on a few scattered cultivation science books related to rituals. He subsequently proceeded to cobble one together that was meant to 'transcend' a human by adopting a superior metal form!

There were plenty of parts about this entire ritual that felt dodgy, unrefined and downright unreliable!

However, Ves appreciated the ingenuity and hard work that Maikel had put into its

development.

The Apprentice Mech Designer had invested his passion and love for mech design into the conversion ritual. He managed to overcome many difficult obstacles and figure out new mechanisms that could not be found in the records he had access to. No matter whether it worked or not, Maikel had undoubtedly grown as a mech designer by engaging in an earnest form of invention.

Yet just because Maikel acted in a manner befitting an ambitious mech designer did not necessarily mean his mech design deserved to be realized.

"This experimental mech design of yours is too immature." Ves said without bothering to hide his disappointment. "I can sort of understand what you have done and what you are going for, but... this mech design is like a ladder made out of random sticks that you picked up outside of Diandi Base. Some sticks are thick and solid enough to support the weight of a person, but there are others that are far too thin and fragile to be relied upon. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"I do." Maikel said as he knew his own work best. "I have done a good job in designing some parts of my experimental mech, but I have not done so for other aspects. This is not acceptable in my case as the success of my living conversion mech is not determined by the average quality and reliability of all of its parts, but the properties of its weakest components and systems. If there is one

aspect about the man-machine conversion process that is poorly designed and highly prone to failure, my experimental mech can never be safely utilized."

Ves grimly nodded. As a responsible mech designer, he could never allow Maikel to go

through with fabricating this experimental mech.

It did not deserve to be realized. There was little point in arranging a testing session where Ves arranged a condemned criminal that could serve as the guinea pig for the unverified man-machine conversion

process.

Maikel's mech design needed to be straightened out first before overly ambitious Apprentice earned the right to bring up the topic of human experimentation.

He knew that as well, so Maikel never dared to express an intent to fabricate his

flawed mech design.

Ves now faced a difficult decision.

Did Maikel deserve to be praised for his innovation and be encouraged to continue his

problematic research direction?

Or did Maikel have to be admonished for violating too many taboos and straying too

far away from the fundamental purpose of mechs?

Ves did not want to force Maikel to throw away years of earnest research. Even if the young Apprentice was able to salvage his accumulation thus far and

reorient himself by switching to a less controversial design philosophy, there would still be a lot of waste.

Yet... Maikel knew what he was doing. He played with fire with the awareness that he

could get burned at any time.

Mech designers needed to account for their own design choices and career choices. An inability to cope with the consequences of their own choices would ultimately impede their growth and prevent them from making further progress, especially in the

later ranks. How should Ves respond to this situation?

Chapter 6518 This Kid

When Ves thought about rebuking Maikel for violating a lot of taboos and developing a ritual that had a high chance of killing the mech pilots of his own product, he couldn't summon the motivation to commit to this choice.

As principled as a mech designer he may be, he felt like a hypocrite if he accused Maikel for committing misdeeds that Ves already committed!

Had Maikel gone astray?

Not necessarily, at least by the standards of Ves.

The more rigid adherents to the rules and regulations imposed by the Red Association may harbor very different opinions about Maikel's work, but Ves appreciated his bold attempt to develop the man-machine conversion process.

Even if it entailed a lot of potential dangers to the mech pilots that might become exposed to it, Maikel's intentions still remained noble. He never meant his potential customers any harm, and genuinely sought to better their lives by providing them an alternate way to live.

Mech designers were ultimately service providers. They designed mechs to solve the problems of the mech pilots that they pledged to serve.

Most people tended to interpret this principle with limited notions on how mech designers should better the lives of mech pilots.

Ves preferred to adopt a much more expanded approach to solving problems. He did not hesitate to venture into other fields and fulfill needs that no one expected from a mech!

Looking at Maikel was looking at a younger and less fortunate version of himself.

In his struggle to design and popularize his living mechs, Ves had borrowed a lot of conveniences from the Mech Designer System.

While Maikel had likewise benefited a lot from the benefits and infrastructure of the Larkinson Clan, these advantages paled in comparison to the ones available in the System.

It was pretty admirable that Maikel managed to get this far given his circumstances. He never lost his heart and continued to commit his heart and soul into his chosen

research direction despite how many people would object to his taboo conversion process.

Could Ves bring himself to crush Maikel's earnest dream?

No.

Did that mean that Ves should just smile, pat Maikel on the head and encourage him to continue his illegal research?

Not necessarily.

After a bit of thought, Ves eventually realized the fundamental reason why he struggled to find a resolution to this case.

He felt he did not possess the right to judge Maikel.



What Maikel had done went beyond the jurisdiction of a teacher.

Only one authority had the right to pass judgment on Maikel and his work on living conversion mechs.

Ves briefly struggled with his decision before he ultimately chose to go through with what came up in his mind.

He decided to pass the buck.

"Maikel" He spoke up in a voice that conveyed the seriousness of this moment. "Before I say anything else, I applaud your initiative and your courage. You have chosen to stray off the beaten path and find a unique direction to develop your mechs towards. You have made an inspired decision by trying to develop a radically new design application for living mechs that I haven't even thought of. I know how difficult it is to pioneer a new field, but there is always a price to pay for making unconventional decisions. In your case, the legal and ethical implications of your work is too great for me to handle. I have no choice but to turn to the Red Association to figure out what to do with your research."

The Apprentice Mech Designer looked afraid. Maikel knew very well that his work would not be met with approval of most mech designers, especially the ones that represented the authority of the Red Association!

The mechers were the managers, caretakers as well as the enforcers of the expansive mech community.

Their persistent efforts ensured the rise and prosperity of a reliable mech industry and a huge mech market.

One of the reasons why the MTA and the RA were able to keep mechs ascendant for so long was because they always applied the rules fairly, at least on the surface.

The mechers understood extremely well that for mechs to maintain its dominant place in society, every industry and market process needed to be handled fairly and without bias.

This was bad news for Maikel. If the RA stuck to the letter of its laws, it would definitely prohibit living conversion mechs without a doubt, and sanction their creator at the same time!

Ves gave the Apprentice an encouraging smile. "Relax, Maikel. There are certainly problematic elements in your case, but none of it is serious enough for the mechers to treat you as a criminal. At most, they will label you as a scientist that has pushed too special about it. Besides, one of the main reasons why I want to call in the RA is because I think the Transhumanist Faction will take an elevated interest in your work. Instead of remaining uncertain whether the Sword of Damocles will fall onto you, it is better to proactively pick the smallest possible knife and drop it onto your own neck."

"I'm sorry, that was a bad analogy. I will call one of my pals over. If he is not preoccupied with anything, he should be arriving fairly quickly."

Fortunately, it did not take too long for the mecher in question to arrive.

Since the Red Association had recently upgraded the anti-teleportation defenses of Diandi Base, the invited guest was not able to arrive directly in the office.

He had to teleport at a designated area outside and pass through multiple entrances before arriving at the design lab.

Soon enough, Professor Vector Loban arrived in the office.

"I assume you are already aware of our discussion and what I am expecting from you,

right?"

The other Senior Mech Designer nodded. "I am. You have made the right choice, Ves. We would have come to Maikel sooner or later, but it is better that you have brought me in on your own initiative. Just to be certain, are you willing to transfer responsibility over deciding what must be done with Mr. Maikel Larkinson and his design work to the Red Association?"

"I am willing." Ves confirmed. "What about you, Maikel?"

The young mech designer helplessly shrugged. "Do I have a choice?"

"Hello, Maikel." The new arrival approached the Apprentice and offered his hand. "You may have already heard of me or seen me visit Ves a number of times, but let me introduce myself properly to you. I am Professor Vector Loban, a biomech designer and an esteemed member of the RA Transhumanist Faction. I am attached to the Bluejay Fleet to serve as a direct liaison between your patriarch and my faction."

"Well met... professor."

Vector smiled wider. "There is no reason for you to feel concerned. Your work, while flagrantly violating a number of the rules that our Association has set, has remained entirely theoretical and imaginary thus far. You have invested much of your love and effort into developing a radical new solution that can potentially save the lives of many people. I can understand your eagerness to bring it into reality. You have had opportunities to fabricate experimental mechs and test your highly unreliable man-machine conversion process many times, but you have exhibited satisfactory self-control. These are qualities that we greatly appreciate in a mech designer. You have demonstrated the courage of a mech designer that is not content with being average, but also exhibited the caution that is necessary to avoid accidents that can

prematurely end your career."

Maikel Larkinson quickly grew relieved. The praise even inflated his pride and satisfaction over his work. He had lost much of his apprehension towards the RA and no longer maintained much wariness towards Vector anymore.

What a sublime example of manipulation.

Professor Vector Loban continued to maintain a refined but relatively gentle bearing. It was the posture of a mecher engaging in friendly conversation with a humble space

peasant.

"Now, you are not in trouble, but we are not entirely certain how to handle your case. I will need to interview you and examine your research in much more extensive detail before I am capable of making a decision that will directly affect your future as a mech

designer. Ves."

"Yes?"

"I need to bring Mr. Maikel to another office so that we can talk in depth with each other. I estimate it will take two hours to conclude our discussion."

Ves waved his hand. "Go ahead. Take all the time you need, Vector. As for you, Maikel, cooperate with my friend as best you can. Be completely truthful and transparent even if you have to share our clan's trade secrets with him. If you truly care about your research direction, then do your best. This is your chance to pursue your passion." The young Maikel nodded in understanding and stood up without any further words. He proceeded to follow Professor Vector out of the office so that they could enter another room.

"Will... will Maikel be alright?" Zanthar cautiously asked.

Ves smiled back. "Definitely. As the Transhumanist had said, Maikel's work only exists in a bunch of electronic files. The mechers have always made a strong distinction between fantasy and reality. Anyway, now that this is over for the time being, I suggest you go back and put your time to good use. Once Vector and Maikel are done, you can

come back to hear the RA's verdict."

"Okay, teacher."

Two hours and thirteen minutes went by fairly quickly. The two mech designers

emerged back out with different expressions.

Professor Vector looked as if he was a cat who got the canary while Maikel appeared

both confused and maniacally happy!

Ves and Zanthar immediately returned to the main office so that they could all hear what was to become of Maikel.

The Transhumanist did not drag out his verdict. "After an informative and illuminating

discussion with Mr. Maikel here, I have conferred with a number of colleagues over at the Transhumanist Faction. We soon came to a consensus on how we should respond to this affair."

"What is your verdict?" Ves asked as he tried to hold in his impatience.

"We have extended a formal invitation to Maikel Larkinson of the Larkinson Clan to

join the Red Association, naturally under the auspices of the Transhumanist Faction." "What?!" Ves reacted with shock!

He had guessed the Transhumanists would be lenient towards Maikel because his

work partially aligned with the goals and ideology of their faction, but to outright invite him to become one of their own was much more amazing! Zanthar also looked shocked at his fellow Larkinson mech designer. He never

imagined that Maikel had gone as far as to impress the mechers to such an extent! "Congratulations, Maikel!" Ves genuinely felt happy for him. "You have managed to gain the best kind of appreciation of the greatest mech authority in our civilization. Once you join the Transhumanists and gain their extensive support, your research will be able to progress by leaps and bounds. Designing and fabricating a truly safe and reliable living conversion mech has become a lot more viable once you are able to gain the support of the RA."

Maikel thrust his palm out further before Ves could continue to speak. "Teacher, you are mistaken. I... rejected the invitation. Rather than join the Red Association and work with complete strangers, I prefer to stay in the Larkinson Clan and collaborate with my fellow clansmen, Almost nothing makes me happy than to

design mechs with many other Larkinsons by my side. I won't have all of that if I transfer to the Red Association."

This kid.

Ves became speechless for another time. Everytime he thought he figured Maikel out,

this confounding clansman unveiled another surprise!

Why the hell did he reject the holy land of mech design in favor of remaining in the much smaller and vastly more limited Larkinson Clan?!

Chapter 6519 Choose Your Future

Both Ves and Zanthar grew stunned when they heard that Maikel not only received a direct invitation to join the Red Association, but actually rejected it outright!

It did not look as if Maikel put much thought behind his reaction. He straightforwardly snubbed Professor Vector Loban, paying no heed to how his response might offend the mechers!

"No way..." Zanthar struggled to keep up with this development. "Did you really say no to the RA?"

"I did. I know what I want. I did not work so long as an Apprentice Mech Designer and received the care of Ves and his clan just to abandon them at the first possible opportunity." Maikel reasoned with a surprising degree of rationality. "I wanted my living conversion mechs to serve my fellow Larkinsons first and foremost. I want to save their lives by having their machines absorb their pilots from the moment the latter is on the verge of death due to imminent cockpit breaches. I wanted to design my mechs for the Larkinsons who took care of me and helped me rise up from an ordinary third-rater all the way up to this point."

"Your loyalty and dedication to my clan is admirable, but you don't have to stick around, you know." Ves complimented Maikel. "However, there are instances where leaving the clan is expected and sometimes even encouraged. If the mechers truly want to employ you, then there are likely more reasons in favor than against."

"That is not the case for me." Maikel stubbornly replied. "Leaving the Larkinson Clan is an unacceptable demand to me. I am a Larkinson and have always dreamt of serving our clan. I want nothing more than to be like all of our other brothers and sisters and do my part in helping each other get better. Now that I am on the cusp of being able to seriously pay back the clan for everything I have gained from everyone, I do not want to end up feeling like a traitor for the rest of my life for running off to the RA at this time."

Ugh. The Larkinson Clan had been a little too successful in indoctrinating its members.

This should normally be an advantage to Ves and the clan, but this time was the opposite!

Ves couldn't believe how Maikel made such a politically inept decision due to his blind loyalty to the clan!

Even when Ves made it clear that he was willing to give Maikel a rare exemption and bless his entry into the RA, the stupid kid still insisted on snubbing the Red Association!

"Maikel, I do not think you understand the full implications of your decision." Ves growled in frustration. "What Professor Vector is offering you is not just a place among the mechers. He is also giving you an opportunity to commit to your current design philosophy and allow you to further your ongoing research with the permission and active support of the Transhumanist Faction. Do you understand what I am saying? You won't be allowed to do anything related to living conversion mechs if you insist on staying in our clan!"

"I know, but can't I have it both ways?! I don't want to leave the Larkinson Clan just to continue my existing work." Maikel sounded a lot more torn and frustrated at this time! "Can't you ask for an exemption from the mechers?"

Ves shook his head. "Maybe I can, but I am unwilling to trade my social capital for this favor. Even if I secure this pricey favor from the mechers, it still won't benefit you all that much. Look at us. We can't support the ambitious research that you must embark upon if you want to help people transform into actual mechs. Only when you join the RA and work together with the researchers of the Transhumanist Faction will you gain access to the best research facilities, extensive access to their internal library and receive all of the human test subjects that you need!"

"I don't need so many luxury benefits in order to conduct my research..." "Trust me, you do. This is not a matter that you can afford to take lightly, especially since your work puts actual human lives at risk. Look, the most important advantage to working for the mechers is not the material benefits. The most essential advantage that is relevant to you is that you can get away with doing stuff that would get other mech designers arrested. The members of the Red Association are the arbiters of the laws governing the mech industry. That means that they govern their subjects harshly, but also gain the ability to apply a more lenient set of rules to each other. As long as you work under proper supervision, the mechers will give you enough leeway to explore and flesh out your man-machine conversion process to the fullest."

Although Maikel was a fanatically loyal Larkinson, he was also a passionate Apprentice Mech Designer.

At this moment, these two identities came into conflict with each other.

This was the reason why Maikel experienced a duality of immense emotions.

"Your patriarch is completely correct, Mr. Maikel. Professor Vector said. "We will not force you to join the Red Association, but there are consequences to every decision. I can promise you that if you join and work under the Transhumanist Faction, we will do what we can to enable your current line of research. If you choose to maintain your membership of the Larkinson Clan, then we cannot allow you to persist in your dangerous and illegal research on living conversion mechs."

While Ves and Vector belonged to different organizations, they were totally united in their cause at this time.

Both of them were mech designers who only wanted what was best for Maikel.

Ves let out a dramatic sigh. "You cannot have your cake and eat it too. As a Larkinson,

I would love for you to stay, but I don't think you will be very useful to us if you do. As a mech designer, I would much prefer it if you do what is best for your career and the future of the mech community as a whole and join the one organization that can help you realize your ambitious vision."

The kid's defenses finally began to crumble.

"Choose your future, Maikel." Vector pressured the young Apprentice. "What do you desire more? Would you like to remain a Larkinson and lose what may very well be your only chance of becoming as great as Ves, or would you like to become a part of our massive Association and enter an entirely new world of mech design?"

Maikel clenched his fists and lowered his head.

"If... if I do as you say, and accept the invitation, will I... still be able to remain at least a nominal member of the Larkinson Clan?"



Vector stared down at Maikel with a serious expression. "You are far from the first scion of a powerful clan, family or dynasty that has asked this question. The short answer is... no. You cannot maintain your existing oaths and contracts with the Larkinson Clan. You need to make a clean break with the past and dedicate yourself to the mission of the Red Association. From the moment you become a mecher, you no longer exclusively serve the Larkinsons. You will become a servant of red humanity as a whole. That means that you can still help your former clansmen, but you cannot put them ahead of other humans. You can never be permitted to maintain double loyalties. Have I clarified your doubts, Maikel?"

"I understand, professor. I guess it is nothing less than what the Larkinson Clan demands of its own recruits."

"One of the necessary steps that you will have to take if you want to join our Association is to sever your bond with the Larkinson Network. We have been working hard to set up our own kinship network. This is the best means for you to start the next phase of your life and integrate with your fellow mechers."

The mention of getting cut off from the Larkinson Clan caused Maikel a lot of distress. He looked as if Vector had just punched him in the stomach.

Leaving the clan he cared so much about and bidding farewell to all of the Larkinsons

that he lived and worked alongside with for so many years was an emotionally difficult

turning point!

Yet Maikel knew that this was the only way for him to be able to pursue his dream to

the fullest.

Only by working within the structure of the greatest mech authority of the Red Association would he be able to design living conversion mechs that could turn into

lifesavers for many people!

"I... will do it if I must"

The two grown mech designers bumped fists with each other.

Ves smiled as he witnessed this moment of intimacy.

Although it took a bit of browbeating, Ves and Vector finally convinced Maikel to make the best possible decision for his career.

This was a satisfactory conclusion to this affair.

From now on, any violations committed by Maikel Larkinson was none of Ves' business.

The Transhumanist Faction agreed to take over all responsibility for his works and actions.

Of course, that also meant that the Transhumanists stood to harvest the most gains from Maikel's works, but that was exactly why they took a shine on the young

Apprentice.

The only thing about this development that Ves found regretful was that Maikel and Zanthar would be going their separate ways.

Both of them still retained the honor of being his former students, but their progress would probably diverge a lot from today onwards.

How exciting.

Chapter 6520 The Crumbling Monopoly

"You gave him up too easily."

"Hihihihhi!"

"Meow meow."

"Miaow""

After returning from the design lab and enjoying supper, Ves and his immediate family enjoyed a bit of quality time in the living room.

While Aurelia and Mairvaine sat on the ground in order to play a virtual board game with Lucky and Clixie, Andraste had wormed her way onto Ves' lap and cuddled up against his chest.

"I want another kiss!"

Ves grinned and leaned down to plant another kiss on her forehead.

"Another one, papa!"

"That's more than enough for you, young lady."

"Awwww..."

Ves playfully pulled Andraste's adorable cheek, causing the girl to grow even fussier. "Maaw! Maaw!"

A black-haired companion spirit angrily jumped out of Andraste's head and began to wack at Ves.

"Mrow mrow mrow~"

However, a fluffy purple-haired cat jumped out of Ves' own head and tackled the younger and smaller companion spirit.

Blinky proceeded to give Yaika an impromptu bath!

"Stop it, papa! My companion spirit doesn't even get dirty! She doesn't need to get licked!"

"Doesn't matter, Blinky can give Yaika a bath anytime he wants because he is stronger. If Yaika doesn't want it, then she can come and beat him in a fight. Might makes right!"

"Are you listening Ves?!" An annoyed Gloriana burst out as she felt neglected while sitting on a luxurious club chair.

"I am." Ves nonchalantly replied even as he began to tickle his adorable 8-year old daughter.

As tough as she liked to present herself to be, Andraste was still a kid at heart.

"Hihihihhi! It tickles!"

"I know what you are trying to say." Ves said as he continued to multitask. "Maikel has grown into an asset. He is one of the few mech designers who has learned how to design a living mech, and his research direction holds a lot of value to the

Transhumanists, who have always been working on achieving transcendence by shedding their mortal human frailties."

"Since you are cognizant of all of that, why did you not demand any concessions from the Red Association?! You practically let the Transhumanist Faction poach Maikel from our clan for free!"

Ves smirked as he gazed in her direction. "Is that what you think? I can assure you that this is not the case."

His wife clearly looked skeptical. "Oh? Then explain it to me. How does the wiley and insightful Devil Tongue interpret this transaction?"

When Ves no longer tickled his daughter, Andraste took the initiative to turn around and pound at her father with her little fists. "You're so mean, papa!"

Ves just ignored her blows and continued to plant kisses on his little girl's head. He loved his daughter so much!

"First, we need to establish that Maikel likely does not hold much value to our clan." He began to explain. "We do not have the authority, the resources and the facilities to fully support the development of his design philosophy. While his man-machine conversion process may be useful to the Larkinsons, it is not worth bothering if Maikel is not permitted to test it in reality."

"He could always switch to an alternative and more acceptable design philosophy" Gloriana suggested. "Maikel is a talent that may take a bit more work to realize his potential, but that does not diminish his value too much. I believe you are underselling his worth"

"Even if your assessment s accurate, there are still opportunity costs, Gloriana. Maikel has worked on his living legacy mechs for a number of years now. If we tell him to set aside this effort and start over with another research direction, he will not only be forced to spend years on exploring a different design philosophy, but also get demoralized at the same time. He will remain stuck as an Apprentice Mech Designer for at least several more years, thereby causing him to squander a significant chunk of his golden years."

"Age is no longer as scarce and precious as before now that systematic cultivation is able to extend everyone's lifespans."

Ves shook his head in disagreement. "Time is always precious. Do you want. Maikel to remain stuck as an Apprentice even as the two of us become Masters one day? Now that Maikel has progressed to the point where he is almost ready to advance, it is incredibly wasteful to have him start over. It is for his own good that he switches over

to the Red Association."

"That is what I am questioning, Ves! I do not deny that it is better for Maikel to continue to develop his current design philosophy in an organization that can enable him, but is it best for our clan that he leaves? That is why I am in doubt of your decision. It feels to me that you have given away a treasure for a pittance."

"Not a pittance" Ves retorted. "The relationship between me and the Red Association is complex and multifaceted. The same goes for my relationship with the Transhumanist. Faction in particular. I have helped the mechers a lot, and they have helped me in return. It is impossible to quantify and itemize each and every favor that we have traded to each other. However, what matters is that we always treat each other fairly. If passing Maikel onto the Transhumanists has put me at a disadvantage, then they will figure out a way to compensate me and bring our relationship back to an equilibrium, I would do the same if the situation was reversed."

Gloriana crossed her arms and frowned.

"That is a relationship based on actual trust and friendship. I am highly doubtful that you actually trust the Red Association to this extent. Haven't you always maintained a considerable degree of skepticism towards the mechers? Where is the Ves that sought to maintain his distance from Association?"

"That Ves is still here, but he has evolved." He asserted. "I hate to say it, but now that I have gained more experience in politics, I have learned that I cannot rely on crude and simplistic methods anymore. There is an art to politicking and relationship management. I cannot afford to become estranged or alienated from the Red Association at this junction. It is better to keep our relations warm and active by taking the initiative to send gifts every now and then. This will also encourage the mechers to extend favors to us in return."

"A Larkinson mech designer who has learned how to design living mechs from the Father of Carmine Mechs himself is more than an ordinary gift." Gloriana spoke through grinding teeth. "Do you understand the implications of this action?! You have long dominated the mech market and forced the mechers to collaborate with you because you held a monopoly on designing living mechs! Your Carmine mechs are especially highly desired, yet because you are the only mech designer who can develop them, the RA did not hesitate to strengthen the defenses of Diandi Base as well as upgrade the mechs and warships of the Bluejay Fleet just to keep you safe!"

"So?"

"Now that the Transhumanists have gained a living mech designer of their own, you are no longer unique anymore!"

"My monopoly on living mechs was never going to last, Gloriana. I already taught people such as Alexa, a bunch of other low-ranking mech designers in the Design Department and my students over at the Eden Institute how to design living mechs. The RA was probably waiting to recruit one of the latter any day now Maikel is a

better choice as he is much further ahead than others."

"That makes this situation even worse! The Red Association has to spend less time and effort to upgrade Maikel's augmentations and have him undergo accelerated training and learning to bring him up to standard. Once he is ready, he will soon begin to design all manner of exclusive living mechs for the Red Association. He may even be able to design his own Carmine mechs now that you have submitted the complete mech designs of the Yellow Jacket line to the mechers! Your monopoly will be much sooner than we originally anticipated. To put this in your own crude language, handing Maikel over to the RA is no different from punching yourself in the face!"

"That is a bit overblown, honey..."

"Andraste." Gloriana spoke with a sharp and commanding tone.

"Yes, mama?" The little girl turned her head and blinked at her mother with her adorable eyes.

"Please punch your father in the face. Do so as many times as you want."

"Yay!"

The red-headed girl eagerly did as instructed. She fearlessly began to throw punches

at her father's face even though she failed to inflict any meaningful damage!

Ves was not amused, though.

He took hold of her body and turned her around so that she laid on her lap.

He then proceeded to swat her in her behind a few times!

"Bad girl! What did I tell you about blindly listening to your mother? Not every order

she gives is a good idea! Think before you act!"

"Waaaaa!"

Andraste grew embarrassed to the point she jumped away from her father and ran over to her mother!

Gloriana smiled lovingly at her second daughter as she embraced her child. She soothed Andraste.

"Oh, dear. Your father is so mean, right?" The mother said as she gently planted kisses on the growing girl's head.

Andraste eagerly nodded her head. "He is a meanie!"

Ves rolled his eyes. His wife and children were far too prone to theatrics.

"Ahem. While I admit that your words are not entirely without merit, there is a

difference between letting the RA wait longer to hire an inferior mech designer that can barely put a living mech together and taking the initiative to hand the mechers a superior alternative. We don't owe the Association anything in the former case, but

we can expect to gain a hefty gift in return in the latter case. If I am on track to lose my monopoly on living mechs, then I want to do so on my terms. Besides, there are other benefits to letting Maikel into the Transhumanist. Faction?" "What benefits are you talking about?"

"Well, this is sort of like an arranged marriage in that we have established a more

enduring relationship with the Transhumanists." Ves replied. "We have almost become like family now. Even if Maikel is obligated to put the interests of the Red Association ahead of everything else, all of the love and attachment he has built up for the Larkinson Clan hasn't disappeared



overnight. His growing value as a mech designer means that his opinions will become increasingly more respected. He can give our clan a lot of subtle help by advocating for policies in favor of us. He may defend us against detractors inside the RA that we may not even know of, and he may also speed up the adoption of living mechs among the powerful mech forces under the Association." Whether Maikel still remained loyal to the Larkinson Clan or not, he would definitely

engage in different forms of advocacy once he joined the ranks of the Red Association. Gloriana finally began to look a little more convinced. Perhaps she was not willing to concede this fight against Ves, but she did not completely discount his arguments. "You should have worked harder to keep Maikel and negotiate exemptions for him to continue his research on living legacy mechs in the clan. Do not lie to me and tell me that is impossible. Your relationship with the Transhumanists should already be good enough to request such favors."

"That's not a good idea." Ves shook his head. "There is another reason why I was a little

eager to send Maikel away. I... recognize parts of myself within him. I recognize that he shares the same hunger and drive to stand out from the crowd, which encourages him to push the limits of what is possible... or permissible. This is not necessarily good. If Maikel has taken after me in these specific ways, then he is a disaster in the

making. I don't want to keep this ticking time bomb around so that it blows up our entire clan one day. Now that I have transferred him over to the Transhumanists, it has become their problem, so we are not culpable for any damage Maikel does in the

future." His wife's expression flattened. "Are you serious? You eagerly sent Maikel away because... you think our clan cannot accommodate two controversial troublemakers with low impulse control, despite the fact that they also have the potential to become

one of the most brilliant and innovative mech designers our industry has ever seen?"

"Err, I suppose you are correct."

"YOU IDIOT!"