

## Mech Touch 6551

Chapter 6551 Joshua's Faults

Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger both grew dejected from their failure.

The Everchanger lamented that his outdated tech and materials held his battle partner back from winning this crucial test.

The First Sword was in a similar position, but she was still able to give her pilot just the right amount of support to facilitate her breakthrough.

The direct comparison between success and failure made the living mech's lack of positive results a lot more glaring.

Was it because of the Everchanger's messy configuration of Ascension Runes?

The First Sword only ever specialized in one mode of combat, so all of her Ascension Runes were focused on making her armor tougher and her attacks hit harder. This was how the expert swordsman mech effectively channeled the growth of its spiritual foundation in a useful direction. The Everchanger pursued a different strategy from the onset. As a mech that was able to change his design spirits on command, he had given up on pursuing maximum combat power and instead went all-in on maximum versatility.

This was why the growth of his spiritual foundation became dispersed as he invested a handful of Ascension Runes into a dozen different Ascension Paths.

For example, the Everchanger had invested 5 Ascension Runes into the Path of the Illuminator. This not only increased the firepower of his Vitalus luminar crystal rifle by a small margin, but also made it easier for Venerable Joshua to resonate with the weapon, thereby amplifying its damage even further.

Yet in the recently concluded duel against the Teenage Swordswoman, the highly damage-resistant properties of heavenly energy almost completely negated the damage potential of the Vitalus! This not only invalidated the Everchanger's ranged capabilities, but also wasted the Ascension Runes invested in this area!

The Everchanger had always been designed to function as a quintessential hero mech.

He was never designed to function as a pure swordsman mech like the First Sword or as a pure rifleman mech like the Promethea.

Stripping the melee or ranged capabilities from the Everchanger resulted in a half-baked expert mech whose remaining combat power could never match up against a proper swordsman mech or rifleman mech.

This shouldn't have been a disqualifying factor. The original intent of a hero mech was to utilize its strength to target an opponent's weakness.

In the years since Venerable Joshua began to pilot what he considered to be his ultimate dream mech, he had always managed to make use of this advantage to make himself at least somewhat effective on the battlefield.

Even if he was not able to gain the upper hand in a fight, he was still able to hold his own on the battlefield. Powerful hero mechs rarely fell into a heavy disadvantage.

None of that happened today.

The Everchanger failed. This was indisputable. Venerable Joshua failed as well, but his mech certainly did not help to bail him out this time.

know this is not necessarily a demerit when piloting a hero mech, but not every enemy will fall into the category of being vulnerable to your sword or your rifle. Your recent duel has proved that you are completely vulnerable to opponents who are powerful and skilled enough to withstand both of your armaments. At that point, you have no choice but to rely on the tools you have available and use whatever strengths you have to overcome the enemy's own advantages by force. This is why Saint Dise was able to win her duel while you did not. If you invested more effort into polishing your swordsmanship, you could have at least forced the Teenage Swordsman into a draw! Regret suffused Joshua's mind. He thought back on all of the training and sparring sessions organized by his wife.

Ketis enthusiastically tried to pass on her love of traditional swordsmanship to him, but he had always rebuffed her attempts because he had no passion for this discipline.

Joshua should have forced himself to take her lessons more seriously and improve his ability to defeat difficult opponents with the sword alone.

It was too naive for him to assume he could solve every opponent by relying on his admittedly middling attainments in swordsmanship and marksmanship.

"Before you think about taking remedial classes from me, I personally do not think this is the right approach for you.' Ketis surprisingly said and interrupted his thoughts. "Anyone can change, but I think it is too much to ask you to completely transform your approach towards swordsmanship and become a weapon maniac!

"Then... what do you suggest I do instead?"

"You need to play to your strengths, Joshua. As a mech designer, I admire what Ves had done to make the Everchanger. There is no other mech like your machine. The Everchanger is never going to become as good in performing swordsmanship techniques as the First Sword, so don't even bother. While I still think you need to shore up your fundamental weapon skills, don't spend too much time on it. You are better off trying to plumb the depths of your expert mech's ability to change and adapt to different circumstances."

"I tried, but that clearly did not work this time, Ketis. There is a limit to how versatile my Everchanger can be. The patriarch will probably have to turn my battle partner into a smart metal mech or a biomech to allow him to change into more effective configurations:

Ketis shook his head. 'You are not necessarily wrong, but I think a hero mech configuration already grants you enough possibilities. Don't obsess too much over the faults and limitations of your battle partner. Dise has never obsessed over the known shortcomings of her First Sword, and look where she is now. The Everchanger is not a modern mech anymore, but his performance is still decent enough to remain useful on the battlefield. It is a luxury to ask for anything more. What you need to do instead is to focus on the variables that you control, and one of them is to explore how you can expand the versatility of your existing expert mech and your own abilities!"

An avid mech pilot such as Joshua could never stop thinking about piloting a newer and more powerful machine. This was a universal desire that was intrinsic to the piloting profession.

However, the Larkinson Clan is still at least a solid year away from upgrading the Everchanger, if not longer.

Instead of wasting his energy on a factor that could not be sped up no matter what he wanted, it was better for Joshua to focus on improving the conditions that were within his control. Perhaps he might not be able to do much under his own power, but Ketis believed that he could still drag himself into breakthrough territory if he worked hard to squeeze out his existing potential. "You need to be more focused and purposeful in your training plan!" She continued to advise him. "At

the same time, you need to open your horizons and think about how you can make your Everchanger deal with less standard and more abnormal opponents that can circumvent your existing strengths. If you have been able to prepare for a weird enemy such as the Teenage Swordswoman in advance, then your duel may have produced a different outcome. Do you understand?"

"I... understand. I think I know what to do from now on. Thank you, Ketis. I... might have failed today, but that doesn't mean I will repeat this outcome. No matter what, I don't want to turn myself into another Ark.""

General Ark Larkinson was his senior and became an ace pilot candidate years before Joshua.

Yet the man who was older than Ves' father still remained at the exact same level as Joshua!

Meanwhile, men and women who were an entire generation younger than Ark had surpassed him and entered the ranks of saints, thereby creating new legacies for themselves that had little to do with the glory of the old family!

Before they could speak any further, the Heavensword finally changed its pattern!

It no longer floated in space as if it had gotten stuck in a logic loop. The grand work slowly shrunk in size until it returned to its original dimensions.

The sword then proceeded to fly straight towards the combat carrier where Ketis could be found.

The Amphis Extremis and the Everchanger hastily moved and put themselves onto the path of the relic weapon, but the Heavensword simply disappeared before it crashed into the machines. An instant later, the Heavensword directly appeared inside the hangar bay of the starship and appeared in front of Ketis yet again!

The Heavensword thrummed with heavenly energy. It looked a bit more active than usual, and was probably ready to take action!

Ketis grew a lot more nervous, but she still held out hope that the Heavensword would see reason this time.

"I am impressed by what you have managed to do, but that is no reason for you to impose yourself on me. I already have a sword, and I am committed to developing my own swordsmanship even if it cannot measure up to yours. Nothing you do or say will persuade me to give up what is mine! The swordmaster gripped her Bloodsinger in a stance that was poised to attack. She had gained a bit of inspiration from observing the swordsmanship of the three energy manifestations.

The swordmaster did not mind showing the Heavensword how she thought of applying what she gained if the two came to blows!

#### Chapter 6552 The Heavensword's Solution

One way or another, the threat of the Heavensword had to be addressed one way or another.

While many Larkinsons were grateful that it had shown Dise the way to trigger her second apotheosis, the clan would still suffer a severe loss if Ketis lost her swordsmanship and her passion in her craft in the process!

Perhaps other people might argue that red humanity needed a sword saint in control of a recharged Heavensword far more than a weak Journeyman Mech Designer and swordmaster combination, but Ketis did not ascribe to this idea!

Now that the Heavensword had revealed a small measure of its mysterious history by unveiling realistic energy projections of the sword cultivators who may have wielded the grand work in the past, Ketis had gained a little more insight into the weapon.

The Heavensword likely served as an artifact that was passed down from one generation to another through an existing formal inheritance process.

This suggested that the Heavensword originally represented an institution rather than just a single owner.

Whether this institution was a family, a state or a sect, the Heavensword likely served as the symbol of authority as well as a tool to enforce the holder's power over the masses.

At the same time, the Heavensword also imposed its own standards and requirements into the wielder. This meant that the institution would always have a leader that conformed to its original values and principles. Any selfish and less pure leaders would inevitably get brainwashed by the Heavensword and cease to become a problem anymore!

Ketis had to admit that if this was how the Heavensword was designed to work, then it must have done good job all of this time.

It was a pity that the institution ultimately couldn't survive the passage of time.

What was a relic weapon supposed to do when the institution it was meant to represent had disappeared in the dustbin of history?

Its actions in the Majestic Teal Star Sector gave Ketis a lot of clues of its eventual answer.

The Heavensword did not try to bring back the institution, knowing that the Big Two would not allow it. The broken Milky Way was unable to generate enough energy to restore the original swordsmanship of the old institution anyway.

The sentient artifact therefore proceeded to do the next best thing and try to create a small haven where traditional swordsmanship could still be practiced among humans.

Of course, a barren galaxy like the Milky Way was unable to make swordmasters harness the power of heaven and imbue their attacks with strong elemental traces, so the results were not too good. The Heavensword was only able to keep a semblance of traditional swordsmanship alive. All of the fancy use of different energies became invalid, leaving only the purest expression of willpower as a means of wielding extraordinary power in modern times.

How many years had the Heavensword experienced in a universe that had lost its main source of exotic radiation?

It must have been pure torture for the sword to experience more eons than any other ancient artifact, and spent much of that time in an energy-deprived state.

Yet the sword managed to stay intact and not get too corrupted in the process!

Perhaps the Heavensword had already deviated far from its original state, but it could have been worse.

In a way, managing to survive for so many years and withstand all of the changes that took place in the Milky Way was a testament of its strength and its adaptability.

The fact that it also retained a semblance of its original mission and raison d'être after going through so many events that could completely change the lives of other sentients was a testament of its remarkably strong conviction!

Even if the Heavensword was not able to develop extraordinary willpower due to its nature as an object, Ketis believed that it could easily match that of a sword god!

How could a sword with a 'will' comparable to a sword god be so easy to negotiate with? It was already powerful enough to ignore most existing human institutions!

In this regard, Ketis found that it was already a blessing that the Heavensword was willing to compromise with her. The fact that it bothered to expend its energy to conduct a test showed that it cared for her opinion.

Why was this the case?

What did the Heavensword want from her, exactly?

How far was the Heavensword willing to go to fulfill its objectives in a more energy-rich galaxy like the Red Ocean?

Would it care at all about the wants and needs of its wielder?

Ketis did not have enough information to deduce the answers to these crucial questions, so she had no choice but to make a few assumptions and hope that she was mostly correct.

"Heavensword." She spoke in a serious tone even as she maintained a guarded stance. 'I admire your power, but that does not mean I covet it. No matter how much power and knowledge you can give me, it will only turn me into a shadow of your original owners and makers. I have no interest in reviving the brilliance of the past. I am a mech designer and a swordmaster. I am more than capable enough to forge my own path. I am developing my own form of swordsmanship, and will mold my own personal sword to match its requirements. I have no need for your inheritance, especially if it comes at the cost of giving up who I am. You should go elsewhere if you want to pass on your inheritance to red humanity. There are more swordmasters in the Red Ocean than Fred Walinski and myself. Even if their qualifications are inferior from your perspective, they are fully willing to follow your directives and bear your power!"

""

The Heavensword did not make any other move aside from floating in front of Ketis with its tip pointed downwards.

What did this mean?

Did it even register her words?

It had already demonstrated earlier that it was capable of at least one direct form of communication that was understandable to humans!

Ketis grew frustrated at this relic's bizarre behavior.

"Saint Linda Cross and Saint Dise Larkinson managed to pass your test. You have seen how powerful they are. You have seen how they managed to defeat your energy manifestations. The Larkinson Clan has more expert pilots and ace pilots who are willing and able to fight on my behalf. Is that enough to prove that I am not weak?"

The Heavensword maintained its inanimate facade, giving Ketis no clue what it was truly thinking about.

After thirty or so seconds of non-activity, the relic weapon finally began to make a move.



It slowly approached Ketis, but in a manner that was not as aggressive as before.

Ketis remained on guard and was ready to chop her Bloodsinger at the grand work if it came within her reach.

However, the floating Heavensword paused just outside of it, as if knowing that the weapon would invade her private space if it moved just a centimeter closer.

This was an encouraging sign. It respected her rights. This meant that it was sincerely putting effort into trying to accommodate her demands.

Was it enough to lead the Heavensword away?

"What are you doing?!"

It turned out that the answer was no!

The Heavensword took action so quickly that Ketis did not even have time to think up a response!

Within a blink of an eye, Ketis suddenly found that her sword stance had changed!

Instead of appearing poised to hack down her Bloodsinger upon the target of her wrath, she suddenly held two very different swords in a dual-wielding sword stance!

It looked incredibly awkward for her to wield her personal greatsword in one hand, but Ketis was strong and skilled enough to bear the weight of the Bloodsinger.

What really bothered her was the fact that the Heavensword had forced itself into one of her armored hands!

Ketis naturally tried to get rid of the weapon as soon as possible, but it acted as if it remained magnetized to her gauntlet!

"Get off, you blasted sword!"

The swordmaster swung her arm multiple directions. All it did was cause her to change her grip on the Heavensword.

She discovered that the relic weapon 'permitted' her to hold it in any way onto its grip, but did not allow her to drop or discard the artifact!

Ketis temporarily let go of her Bloodsinger, allowing the greatsword to float within easy reach, before attempting to pry the Heavensword off her grip.

She discovered that she was easily able to transfer her grip on the Heavensword from her left hand to her right hand and vice versa.

Yet any attempt to remove both of her limbs from the sticky weapon failed to produce any results!

"This is annoying!"

Ketis took back her Bloodsinger and retreated from the hangar bay.

Once she passed through an airlock and entered a changing room, she removed her custom suit of armor and pulled off her gauntlets straight away.

"Of course this loophole doesn't work.

While she was able to remove her gauntlets without effort, the hilt of the Heavensword automatically

found its way into the palm of her closest hand.

"Damnit!"

Ketis grew so frustrated at the Heavensword's naughty behavior that she swung the blade in a random direction!

This careless motion accidentally caused the blade to shoot out a small but potent wave of heavenly energy!

The bulkhead of the changing room and the compartments further in the rear got breached! Alarms began to ring and Ketis received multiple emergency notifications!

Though the accident caused her to become even more angry at the Heavensword, she quickly suppressed her emotions and told the crew of the combat carrier not to worry about her condition.

In any case, the vessel was currently being run by a skeleton crew, and no one should have been stationed anywhere close to her location.

That was no excuse for her to lose control like that. She had to remind herself that she was currently holding an actual grand work, one that contained vast powers and energies that were more than capable of destroying an entire settlement if not more!

Once Ketis managed to handle the incident of her own making, she grew more morose as she studied the swords in her hand.

One of them held the hilt of her trusty Bloodsinger.

The other held the undesirable Heavensword.

The apparent message was pretty clear.

"Is this your solution? Since I refuse to replace my Bloodsinger with you, are you just fine with coexisting with my original weapon?"

This was a compromise solution that Ketis had never imagined. If this was truly the direction that the Heavensword was going for, then... the swordmaster did not think it was unacceptable.

"...Fine. If this is what you want, then I can live with it, I suppose. Just don't interfere with my swordsmanship or my choice of weapons. I am the swordswoman here. I decide which sword to wield, is that clear?"

""

"...Can you permit me to let go of you, now? I can't keep holding you in my hands on a permanent basis. I am still human! Do you have a scabbard where I can stow your flashy blade?"

Ketis felt a narrow object pressing lightly on her back.

She turned her head around and just managed to observe the familiar scabbard that used to be worn by the Heavensword Saints of previous generations.

When Ketis cautiously lifted the arm holding the relic weapon and slowly sheathed behind her back, she experimentally let go of the hilt.

Her hand became free again!

"Yes!"

Naturally, Ketis tried to pry the scabbard off her back, but only managed to lift it slightly from her back before it absolutely refused to move further away!

"Damn it!"

It appeared that the Heavensword had decided to make itself a permanent fixture in her life!

Chapter 6553 Sunsetting Unending Alloy

The incident centered around the Heavensword came to an end.

From the perspective of most people, the outcome turned out to be massively in favor of the Larkinson and red humanity as a whole!

The most immediate gain was the ascension of a new ace pilot.

Nobody doubted that Dise Larkinson earned her sainthood. While she may have broken through outside of a real battlefield, she had demonstrated heroism, competence, ability, perseverance and many more admirable traits.

Her breakthrough strengthened red humanity even further by adding an ace pilot that could put up a fight against the alien phase leaders.

Even if the current batch of ace pilots and god pilots appeared to be able to cope with the current amount of enemy phase lords in the frontlines, the native aliens could still field many more.

It was therefore important to raise as many ace pilots as possible in the ensuing years in order to keep up with the expected increase in phase lords as well as phase whales that might get deployed in the Red War.

Dise was an especially useful gain as she was a consummate duelist.

She was completely unlike ace pilots that were far more suited to defeating massed enemy cannon fodder such as Saint Commander Casella.

As a swordsman mech specialist, Disc excelled at confronting and defeating enemy champion units!

Even if she was not able to win her bout, she could still attempt to drag her opponent into a stalemate.

She was accustomed to fighting by herself and did not need any support to take care of herself on the battlefield.

Although she possessed clear shortcomings, others could easily solve the issues that she would struggle with, such as wiping out huge swarms of dispersed enemy small craft. What red humanity was short of the most was singular powerful champions that could defeat enemy phase leaders by themselves.

Saint Disc was therefore the most valuable and desirable variation of ace pilot in the Red War!

The Larkinson Clan had gained an insane advantage due to her breakthrough.

At this point, the Larkinsons needed to begin with designing a proper ace mech for her so that she could start with hunting down lesser phase lords right away.

The only mech designer that Saint Disc trusted to lead this difficult and ambitious project was the other major beneficiary of the recent incident.

Swordmaster Ketis had entered the spotlight yet again. While she was no stranger to the attention of the public, the news that she had 'won' the approval of an ancient grand work that had regained a semblance of its enormous power was already making the rounds!

Numerous publications took the scant facts that they have managed to obtain through remote observation and interviewing rabid Heavensworders and began to spin all kinds of narratives.

As Ketis, now accompanied by a certain sword that refused to part from her body, returned to the Spirit of Bentheim, she stood outside of the entrance of a medical chamber where Dise was currently undergoing a complete examination.

While she felt genuinely happy that her fellow Swordmaiden managed to reach a higher state of life, she also grew incredibly more annoyed after skimming through the

headlines that were circulating on the galactic net.

The newly established Cultivation News Network.

[SAVED BY HEAVEN: SWORDMASTER HAS GAINED POSSESSION OF AN ANCIENT SWORD THAT IS EQUIVALENT TO A GOD MECH IN POWER]

"Well, as expected of a news network that is directly owned and operated by the Red Collective. At least the collies have managed to remain mostly factual, but why are they suggesting that the Heavensword is literally as powerful as a god mech? This is a completely incorrect characterization of a grand work!"

The Terran Telegraph.

[A SHOCKING INHERITANCE FROM ANCIENT HUMAN HISTORY! A YOUNG MECH DESIGNER AND SWORDMASTER HAS SUCCESSFULLY EARNED THE APPROVAL OF THE HEAVENSWORD, A SENTIENT SWORD THAT IS OLDER THAN MODERN HUMAN CIVILIZATION! WHAT FORGOTTEN SECRETS HAS KETIS LARKINSON GAINED? WILL SHE LEAD RED HUMANITY TO A FUTURE WHERE EVERY HUMAN CAN FIGHT MECHS WITH SWORDS ALONE?]

"Pff, you Terrans are so obsessed with legacies and inheritances that this is all you can focus on. Isn't it too presumptuous for you to assume that just because the Heavensword is really old, it can magically uplift everyone into swordmasters and sword saints?"

The Rubarth Daily.

[THE LARKINSON CLAN'S SWORD GODDESS: KETIS LARKINSON WIELDS THE HEAVENSWORD, ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL RELICS THAT ORIGINATES FROM THE MILKY WAY, IN THE HANDS OF THE SWORD GODDESS, THE HEAVENSWORD

SHALL PIERCE THE PHASE LEADERS AND LEAD RED HUMANITY TO VICTORY!] "Why do they keep calling me a Sword Goddess?! I am not even close to becoming at sword goddess yet, and if I did, I would never accept such a generic and meaningless title! Also, don't think I have overlooked what you are trying to do. You Rubarthans are

still too eager to tie the Larkinson Clan to your superstate due to past family ties." As Ketis continued to browse the news on the galactic net, she became more and more upset that journalists and commentators were making wild and unsubstantiated claims. about her and the Heavensword.

She needed to set the record straight!

She could not do so straight away. She needed to address the aftermath of the incident and spend a little time on figuring out what the Heavensword was willing to offer Ketis now that it had forcibly inserted itself into her life.

Since the annoying weapon insisted on accompanying her so much, she might as well take advantage of it by seeing if she could exploit the artifact to her advantage. Only then would she be ready to release a thorough press statement that would hopefully cut down on all of the ridiculous rumor mongering.

After a bit more waiting, the doctors finally gave Ketis permission to enter the recovery room where her friend was resting.

"Is she okay?"

"Saint Dise is in good health. Her body has become exhausted because it has spontaneously undergone a transformation that has perfected her genes and optimized her physique. She is also mentally weary and will soon require extensive periods of rest to gradually recover. All of these are normal phenomena that have happened to many individuals that have become ace pilots in the past. The only significant deviation is that she is livelier and more able to remain focused than the average. We believe this to be a side effect of possessing a companion spirit. Other than that, we have not discovered any concerning health problems that may lead to problems over time."

"That is good to hear. Thank you for your care."

When Ketis stepped inside the bright recovery room, she could already feel the dormant domain settling around the patient lying on the bed.



Ketis' own aura reacted to it, but did not come to blows with it. The two Swordmaidens knew each other so well that their respective auras felt comfortable in each other's

presence.

Although Dise's domain had evolved and become a lot harder and less compromising than before, it mainly reserved its hostility to the ace pilot's true enemies.

Her domain only became a little more alarmed when it clearly felt the presence of the

Heavensword.

Fortunately, placing the ostentatious grand work into its scabbard did much to hide its transcendent quality and its threatening energy emissions, so Dise did not enter into a

panic.

That did not mean that she had overlooked its presence. The woman on the bed had halted her greeting from the moment she spotted the hilt poking out from Ketis' back.

It looked completely out of place on the swordmaster's Larkinson uniform. The ace pilot's expression grew a little tenser, but not too much seeing that Ketis had apparently tolerated its presence.

"Dise."

"Ketis."

When the younger Swordmaiden stopped beside the bed of the older Swordmaiden, she could see that Dise's dark skin almost appeared to glow after it had mysteriously become smoother and more perfect.

"It looks like your advancement has given you a free cosmetic makeover." Ketis lightheartedly said. "I know that ace pilots begin to look increasingly more handsome in that uncanny inhuman manner,

but your transformation is more noticeable than usual." Dise shrugged as she continued to lie on her bed. "I have no control over that. I think that the differences are easier to detect for me because there was more material to work with. I never cared too much about looking good in front of other people." "How are you feeling now that you have broken through?" Ketis asked next. "The doctors told me you will make a full recovery, but what do you think?"

"I feel... as if I am finally ready to step up and take on greater responsibilities." Dise said with evident relief on her expression. "Before this day, I constantly felt burdened by the lack of progress. I knew that I was ready somehow, but my inability to figure out why I remained stuck had been gnawing at my mind. It is such a relief to finally become stronger again. You can think of it like visiting the toilet after holding yourself back for an entire day. You cannot imagine how liberated I feel right now." Her analogy may sound crude, but it certainly got the point across. After a bit more chatter, Ketis soon brought up the topic of Dise's ace mech.

"I have already been working on the preparations of the First Sword Mark III Project, so it will not take as much time to complete it as before." The mech designer began. "I initially started it with a high-tier expert pilot in mind, but since the project is still in the early phases, I can easily convert my work so far to an ace mech without throwing away too much progress. Unless your requirements have changed, I will design an almost pure ace swordsman mech for you. The new design will not include any true ranged armaments and it will not include any unnecessary auxiliary modules either. The only additional gimmick that I plan to add are optional sword fey that you will be able to control by remote. The First Sword will still remain a machine that is completely focused on enabling you to kill with swords."

Dise listened to Ketis and nodded in satisfaction.

"That sounds acceptable to me. I trust you to upgrade the First Sword to the best of your ability. My demands are largely the same, but I have one additional request. I want you to make sure that the First Sword holds enough hyper materials that work well with the metal element. Back when I just broke through, I was able to infuse my machine with lots of metal energy. It makes sense for me to do so since my mech is not only

entirely made out of metal alloys, but much of her armor system also consists of Unending alloy. I am not a mech designer, but I think I might be able to reinforce my mech even better if you replace the Unending alloy with a hyper material that can contain even more metal energy."

"Don't worry, Dise. I have already added that to the revised plan for the First Sword Mark III Project. I will also make sure that the Decapitator will be upgraded with metal hypers to ensure you can channel as much of your intent to kill and destroy through its blade. Unending alloy has served you well all of these years, but it is time to sunset your dependence on it. Unending alloy is a

universal hyper that is kind of like a jack of all trades but a master of none. Now that you have discovered the full extent of your domain, there is no need to make use of a generalized solution when a specialized

solution can strengthen you so much more."

The ace pilot liked what she heard. She had already felt powerful enough when she relied on forced resonance to execute the strongest sword technique to date. She couldn't wait to see how much more powerful her First Sword would become when it was fully designed and optimized to channel metal energy!

Chapter 6554 Replanning the First Sword Mark III Project

Ketis and Dise chatted a bit more about the First Sword Mark III Project.

A mech designer and a mech pilot could talk all day about mechs if they wanted, but the two kept their conversation relatively brief due to the present circumstances.

Fortunately, Saint Dise still possessed the same preferences and inclinations as before, so she did not request any drastic changes to the mech configuration of the future version of the First Sword.

The only major request to integrate a lot of metal hypers was a braindead design choice that Ketis intended to implement anyway.

There was one sensitive topic that Ketis felt obliged to address with her client.

"The First Sword will become a first-class ace mech. We are already strong enough in the middle zones. Our clan urgently needs to establish itself in the upper zones, and the Red Association also encourages second-class ace pilots to switch to piloting first-class mechs. Once I am done with upgrading your machine, you will have to fight alongside other first-raters like Tusa is doing now. Your time with the expeditionary fleet will come to a close at that point."

Dise sighed. "I know. It will be hard to fight away from most of our fellow sisters, but... maybe it is for the best. They need to be able to fight without counting on me to bail them out. The Swordmaidens need more expert pilots that can take over my role, and that won't happen if we are being too overprotective. I will make sure that I will be ready to leave once my time has come. I will use the months that I have left to make sure I won't have any remaining regrets."

"This doesn't mean that you will have to remain isolated from the Swordmaidens forever, you know. Our clan is still in the process of selecting, augmenting and training our most talented and intelligent mech pilots so that they can pilot first-class mechs. I have been told it will only take around 2 or so years for the Premier Branch to establish the rudimentary form of a first-class mech corps. You will be able to see and accompany the best of the Swordmaidens at that time. I will be there as well, eventually. I need to master the ability to design first-class mechs if I want to keep your First Sword up to date."

Dise grinned with anticipation. "I am looking forward to all of that. Did you imagine back when we were still roaming the Faris Star Region in the old galaxy that we would become first-raters and work with first-class ace mechs of all things?"

"Of course not. I thought that we would live and die as ordinary third-raters. Becoming second-raters was just a distant dream. It is all thanks to Ves and the Larkinson Clan that we managed to make it this far."

The Swordmaidens had fought hard and risked their lives plenty of times to survive and thrive to this day, but they never forgot that a single male mech designer was responsible for giving them so many fantastic opportunities.

Ketis owed Ves even more after he had brought her into the Mech Designer System.

That was also her basis of confidence into sprinting her way to becoming a first-class mech designer.

As long as she earned enough Ascension Points, she could exchange them for precious Enlightenment Fruits that could give her the raw knowledge of all sorts of high technologies that were essential to first-class mech designs.

Ketis did not think that would be enough to reach her goal. She also needed to do plenty of studying and practice on her own in order to fill up the gaps and meet the other requirements to promoting to a first-class mech designer. She could speed up her progress in this area by practicing an auxiliary qi cultivation method that boosted her intelligence and learning speed.

As long as she followed all of these steps, she no longer needed to study for several decades straight in order to make this comprehensive leap.

This was much better than her original plan!

She originally intended to remain a second-rater until her children had grown up and could go off and study on their own, but now that the Red Ocean had become a lot more dangerous, she felt it was necessary for her to step up her timetable.

"Wait a second." Dise frowned. "The First Sword Mark III will become a first-class mech, and an ace mech at that, right?"

"Correct. I just told you that earlier."

"These are the second-most powerful machines that you can design and build after god mechs. The gap between the mechs that you have designed up until now and the First. Sword Mark III is huge. You also aren't a first-class mech designer as of yet. Aren't you afraid that you will bite off more than you can chew if you attempt to design such a complicated mech?"

Ketis smiled and shook her head. "I am the project leader. That doesn't necessarily mean I have to master all of the science and engineering that is needed to design a proper first-class ace mech. I was planning to collaborate with at least one Master Mech Designer to begin with. My only problem is that I can't solicit the help of Master Benedict Cortez. My recent deal with the Cross Clan will turn us into rivals. He will not be happy with me to say the least."

"Maybe it is for the best." Dise reassured Ketis. "Master Benedict is good at energy tech, right? His specialization isn't relevant to me. My First Sword is not an energy hog like the Mars that spits out lots of energy beams on a regular basis. It's better if you can find another Master with a more helpful specialization to collaborate with. Have you found any names?"

Ketis shook her head. "Not yet. Barely enough time has passed for me to complete my list of criteria and approach different Masters based on my requirements. So far, I only have a tentative idea on what sort of Master can contribute the most to the First Sword from an ordinary Journeyman these days. You are not only a student of Ves, but you have blazed your own trail by imbuing your own swordsmanship attainments into your works. As far as I am concerned, it is other swordsman mech specialists that should be eager to collaborate with you the most. You are the only mech designer that truly understands how swordsmen and swordswomen fight at every level."

Ketis smiled. "I do not disagree with you, but Master Mech Designers who specialize in designing swordsman mechs are not incentivized to help me grow and succeed. I am a competitor to them, and an especially threatening one at that. Unless one of them is particularly selfless and kind, I do not see myself working together with one of them anytime soon. Besides, I am also afraid our design philosophies may overlap."

That sort of made sense, unfortunately. Ketis would have to improve her swordsman mechs by relying on her own efforts, which was ultimately for the better.

In any case, there were many kinds of Masters that could offer meaningful contributions to the First Sword Mark III Project.

Ketis even made another notable suggestion.

"I was even thinking of inviting a specialist in drone mechs to contribute to the project. I think that the use of sword fey to expand your close to mind-range options and reduce your reliance on the Decapitator can truly make your First Sword unique. No other ace swordsman mech will be able to do what your future machine can do. It is worthwhile to invite a mech designer who possesses high-level expertise in the development of spurs and drones to improve them to the best of our ability."

Although Saint Dise had always been accustomed to betting her life on just the greatsword in her hands, she was not opposed to making use of additional spurs that were welded onto sword blades.

It sounded like an interesting novelty. What was even better was that they were external equipment, so they wouldn't necessarily ruin the First Sword's optimization as a pure melee mech depending on how they were designed.

"Compared to before, I think I can do much more with these sword fey. Dise responded. "My metal domain can probably strengthen them and sharpen their blades much further than before. That might be enough to turn them from minor threats that are only good for cleaning up alien phase fighters to actual threats against powerhouses such as enemy phase lords. Many of them will probably get broken during a serious duel, but as long as you don't make them too expensive, that won't matter too much." Ketis looked impressed. "That... is actually a good idea. We can mass produce the fey in advance to ensure that you will always have enough replacements on hand. The upfront investment will be significant, but our clan is not short on money these days."

#### Chapter 6555 The Red Association Come Calling

After Ketis concluded her talk with Saint Dise and gained a better idea on how to shape the First Sword Mark III, she left the new ace pilot alone and returned to her own office.

Now that she resolved the most immediate internal concerns, Ketis knew that she needed to address a number of external considerations.

Many outside parties had attempted to make contact with Ketis and the Larkinson Clan to inquire about the Heavensword.

It made a lot of sense as those in the know understood how powerful and exceptional a grand work can be. Even if it was just a sword instead of a god mech or a space station-sized superweapon, its power and more importantly the secrets it might contain may already be enough to reshape the current order in the Red Ocean!

Ketis could not underestimate the intelligence of the dominant players of human civilization.

They already possessed existing case files on the Heavensword, and may even know more about it than herself.

They also understood the implications of the Heavensword entering a dwarf galaxy that was enriched with exotic radiation. The mechers and the fleters would never assume that the relic weapon would remain as weak and unthreatening as it used to be in the Milky Way.

In fact, the big shots had already guessed that the Heavensword might become even more powerful if it ever ended up in Messier 87, which was the ultimate source of all of the E energy radiation transforming the Red Ocean in the past few years!

In that sense, the value of the Heavensword was inestimably high.

That was not necessarily good news for Ketis. She felt as if she was a kid holding the crown of the New Rubarth Empire. Too many greedy people coveted the Heavensword. Ketis could not possibly defend herself from all of these malicious parties, especially if she did not fully master the power of the relic weapon, which was most definitely the

case.

Only a sword god could fully master and control the Heavensword. Ketis was just a simple swordmaster. When she experimentally held the Heavensword in her hands, she did not feel any measure of control and mastery over the weapon.

The uncomfortable fact of the matter was that the sentient artifact was the dominant partner in their uneasy relationship. All of the power was in its hands. The Heavensword could decide to grant

Ketis the power to fight against mechs, but it could unilaterally decide to withhold its might at any time, thereby leaving her helpless and exposed against her enemies!

As a swordmaster, she couldn't tolerate these possibilities!

"This is why I would rather prefer to keep my Bloodsinger." She murmured.

Her trusty Greatsword was currently sheathed in its own floating scabbard. Sharpie comfortably rested within and steadily used her willpower to reshape the greatsword to suit her swordsmanship on a gradual basis.

Having done this for multiple years, Ketis was able to resonate with the custom greatsword far better than any other blade in her hands!

She felt so close and so in control over herself whenever she wielded her favored weapon that she did not want to substitute it with anything else.

Yet... now that the Heavensword had imposed itself into her life, Ketis might not have any other choice to move away from the ideal of a swordmaster who grew stronger while remaining wedded to a single sword from beginning to end.

"That said, it is not bad to become a swordmaster who prefers to select the right tools for the right jobs." Ketis concluded.

There were many variations of swordmasters. It is not necessary for her to make a big deal out of conforming to one template or another. What mattered was that she could draw strength from one and use it to direct the growth of her willpower.

It was not as if the only way for Ketis to advance her swordsmanship was to turn the Bloodsinger into the equivalent of a Carmine mech.

As long as she opened up her mind and no longer obsessed too much about using the Bloodsinger as her one and only weapon of choice, she could live with having the Heavensword by her side.

"Damn. I am already being corrupted by this unwanted guest." She cursed.



She recognized that she was already changing her attitude and approach towards her own swordsmanship and future cultivation due to the addition of an extra variable.

This was probably one of the Heavensword's nefarious schemes. It sought to infiltrate her life and slowly transform into an increasingly more important and indispensable part of her swordsmanship.

Once she had reached the point where she could no longer call herself a swordmaster if she lost access to the Heavensword, then she would have surrendered all of her power to the relic weapon!

Even if she thought she still possessed enough agency to be her own person, in truth she would be no different from a sword slave if this doom scenario ever came to pass!

Ketis constantly had to remind herself that until she was able to master and control her own sword, she should never place too much trust in its power and promises!

A few minutes passed as she affirmed her new resolve. Once she felt she was in control of herself, she sat down behind her desk, making sure not to press her body too hard against the backrest of her office chair, and began to handle all of the requests for

communication.

Ketis did not bother to answer the calls of unfamiliar people and opportunistic small fry. She redirected other calls to her staff. She made sure to update them on what

information they were allowed and not allowed to disclose.

An emissary from the Red Association deserved to be addressed in person. "Congratulations for your successful attempt at subduing the Heavensword." The projection of a Senior Mech Designer from the Mech Supremacist Faction greeted. "Also, congratulations to your clan for gaining another ace pilot in a short amount of time. Your Larkinson Clan filled with talent. The rate of breakthroughs at the ace pilot level is disproportionately high according to our statistics. Part of that can be explained from the fact that the Minerva and the Dark Zephyr Mark III are masterwork mechs, but the Promethea and the First Sword lack this qualification. Regardless, there are second-rate states that have fewer ace pilots at their disposal than a clan whose total population can fit into a single large settlement."

Ketis simply smiled back. "Our clan has always believed that piloting a living mech can facilitate the growth of our mech pilots. I cannot talk about this topic in detail with you. Talk with Ves if you want to hear proper argumentation. If you ask me, I think that Ves is more than justified in his belief."

"Well, I believe we shall find out whether that theory is valid when his Yellow Jacket mechs have reached mass adoption on a scale unprecedented in our civilization." The female mecher said. "The subject of living mechs is not on the agenda for today. Swordmaster Ketis, the Red Association has tracked what happened in the Viola Magnifica System and would like to ask you a series of questions. Are you willing to resolve our doubts?"

"You may ask your questions, but I hardly know anything about the Heavensword myself, so do not expect to obtain much clarification."

"That is acceptable. No information also constitutes a piece of information. Now then, let

us begin with the first and most pressing question. As the current possessor and wielder of the ancient relic sword known as the Heavensword, can you guarantee that you will not allow this weapon to harm humans without justification?"

"No." Ketis flatly answered. "I cannot. The Heavensword has a mind of its own, and it is far too powerful for me to exert any measure of control over it. Do not be fooled by the sight of the weapon resting peacefully on my back. It is there because it is indulging me. For whatever reason, it cares about my opinions, but I have no illusions that if I ever get on its bad side, the Heavensword will withdraw all of its power and leave me dry. I won't say it is a completely unreliable weapon as it has initially shown its willingness to be wielded by myself, but I can never fully trust it, and so should your Association." The mecher nodded in total agreement. "I see. We shall take note of your clarification and implement the appropriate measures. For now, our Association is inclined to regard the Heavensword as an asset as opposed to a liability. It is undeniable that it is a grand work of great power. Do you have any concrete ideas on how its presence at your side can contribute to the survival and growth of red humanity? Are you able to borrow its power to fight against our enemies in space, and have it shared any useful information that we can use to strengthen our armed forces?"

Ketis calmly raised her palm. "I can't answer your questions yet because I don't have enough time to explore what I can actually do with it. The Heavensword imposed itself on me just a few hours ago. That is not enough time for me to experiment with it and try to communicate with it. Honestly speaking, I do not think I am ready to fight against serious enemies with the Heavensword. It is more than powerful enough to do so, but I am just a swordmaster. The gap in power is too much to justify my participation on the battlefield. I should at least spend more time practising with it and seeing whether I can safely harness it at a higher power level."

The RA Senior Mech Designer fully understood Ketis' arguments and concerns, but she did not fully agree with this overly cautious approach. "Swordmaster, you do not have to take my advice seriously, but I implore you to be more bold in leveraging the power of your priceless historical artifact. Normally, your approach is the correct one to take, but we do not live under normal times. Multiple fortified star systems across the fourth defensive band have already fallen. Our projections indicate that the enemy forces in the Torald Middle Zone will soon descend upon the Viola Magnifica System with the determination to overrun its defenses. If you can harness the greater power of the Heavensword, then please use it to defeat the invaders. The more powerful the enemy, the better. Even if you do not have full confidence in your ability to control this special weapon, any solution is better than no solution. As long as the risks are manageable, you should do your utmost to step up and contribute to the defense of our race and civilization."

It had begun. Ketis was afraid of this. People thought that now that she had obtained a weapon 'comparable' to a god mech, that she had become at least as powerful as an ace pilot all of a sudden!

Ever since martial law had come into effect, people expected those with the power to fight against the native aliens to step up and volunteer for service.

While Ketis had no objection to this, the problem was that the Red Association and other

organizations based her combat power on the Heavensword as opposed to her inherent swordmaster capabilities!

"I do not think it will be as easy as you think for me to wield the Heavensword against

alien phase lords, ma'am."

The mecher gave Ketis a friendly and encouraging smile. "Please try your best, swordmaster. We welcome any contribution to the war effort. If you are able to exert enough power on the battlefield as one of the energy manifestations produced by your new possession, then you have already done enough. You will be able to earn rich rewards if you are able to help us maintain our hold on this port system. You will be able to earn a large amount of war merits that you can spend on high-quality materials and

exclusive technologies that can help you raise the future ace mech of the latest ace pilot of your clan to a higher starting point."

Ketis narrowed her eyes. The mechers sure possessed a good grasp of her current needs and motivations.

The emissary was not wrong. Saint Dise had earned plenty of war merits in the last months and years, but there was never enough!

"I would truly like to see if I can use the Heavensword to hold back a phase lord, but what you are asking of me borders on fantasy."

"Then let us explore how you can use the Heavensword to turn fantasy into reality." The RA Senior smoothly responded. "The Red Association will never neglect a hero that has helped us hold back the alien menace. I believe that you are currently seeking Master

Mech Designers to help you design a worthy upgrade to the First Sword. I can arrange introductions with several notable and renowned Masters within my faction. As long as you have made enough contributions on and off the battlefield, they will be more than willing to spare a portion of their valuable time to help you design a first-class ace swordsman mech that can meet the standards of our Association. Does this sound more to your liking, swordmaster?"

Chapter 6556 Still Disconnected

In the two months that Ves single-mindedly worked to complete the Amaranto Mark III Project, the Larkinson Clan not only gained a powerful ace pilot, but also gained

possession of the legendary Heavensword.

Just one of these developments was enough to demand his full attention and change his short and medium term plans!

Yet instead of doing so, Ves became a prisoner to his own artificial fixation. The Deep Research Mode simply would not allow him to spare any significant attention to outside developments.

Perhaps the only way to shake him off his months-long fugue was to physically prevent him from doing any more design work, or threatening to take away his life!

Gloriana and the liaisons of the Red Association briefly contemplated this option, but quickly discarded it because of the unforeseen dangers to Ves. Who knew whether he would suffer brain damage or incur massive trauma due to getting forcefully pulled away from his abnormal mental condition.

At least the biotech specialists of the Larkinson Biotech Institute, the Red Association as well as the Phase Lord Department of the Red Collective had become certain that Ves would naturally pull himself out of this state once he finally completed the project.

In this way, each of the parties gained a much more thorough understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the Deep Research Mode.

Certain theorists even speculated that one of the reasons why the Red Cabal was unable to mobilize as many phase whales to the Red War was because over 80 percent of them had entered into Deep Research Mode for entire centuries if not millenia!

What Ves had put himself under may be far more common among phase whales and certain species of phase lords.

Although the disadvantages were more pronounced than people initially thought, they still understood why the phase whales embraced it a lot.

Ves had truly become a much more effective worker than before. The power of being able to set aside all distractions that were not directly related to his current preoccupation sounded like a simple change, but it was a far-reaching measure that truly ensured he invested all of his potential into his current work.

By reducing the priority of other developments and daily interactions such as spending time with his family, Ves was able to maximize his potential in a way that was virtually impossible to attain by other humans.

Perhaps only the likes of Star Designers were able to produce a similar effect, but that was way too far away for the vast majority of mech designers.

Under this exceptional state, Ves had turned into a much more competent, obedient

and helpful contributor to the Amaranto Mark III Project than before.

As long as Gloriana overlooked the many problematic aspects of the Deep Research State, she had come to fall in love with its effects on Ves.

How could she not like this new version of her husband? He had become the ultimate good boy as far as she was concerned!

He obeyed her instructions without wasting any time on questioning her motivations or theories.

He did not waste time on thinking about strange and unrelated tangents.

He did not insist on implementing his own suboptimal solutions instead.

While Ves still made sure to add his own unique touches to the Amaranto Mark III Project, he solely limited his creative energy to his predefined areas of responsibility. In the past, Ves regularly suggested improvisational solutions that he occasionally produced in his mind on a whim.

His ideas were always inspired, and to his credit his solutions were never truly awful, but Gloriana could not tolerate the constant disruptions and course changes!

She always wanted to work on her mech design projects in an orderly fashion.

The female mech designer rarely managed to get what she wanted whenever she collaborated with Ves.

The problem had been fairly manageable in the early years of their union, but it had grown progressively worse over time.

As Ves became more knowledgeable and experienced in multiple fields of mech design, more and more scattered ideas began to collide with each other in his mind, causing him to develop all kinds of new and unconventional proposals.

The vast majority of them were questionable at best. Their compatibility with the actual project at hand was not always good. It was much better if Ves set aside his crazy ideas and reserved them for future variants, or better yet an entirely new mech design

entirely!

All of that came to an end when Ves was actually able to concentrate his normally-scatterbrained mind to his actual tasks. He became incredibly task and mission-oriented and demonstrated a degree of efficiency that Gloriana had never witnessed from him in the past!

He did not actually grow smarter or expand his brain or anything. It was clear that his new state merely optimized the utilization of his cognitive functions, but that already resulted in a roughly 20 percent boost in productivity!

While Ves got stalled more often whenever he faced problems that needed to be solved with a creative and non-standard solution, he was still able to overcome them as he

gradually brought back more and more of his active imagination, but only as long as it

was necessary.

For these reasons and more, Gloriana gladly tolerated Ves' nearly complete disconnect with the rest of reality.

Even as Ketis took the initiative to seek cooperation with several Master Mech Designers from the Mech Supremacist Faction to help elevate the First Sword into a powerful first-class ace mech, Ves never expressed any opinions about this development.

Ketis and Gloriana actually got into multiple arguments about how to approach the First Sword Mark III Project.

The swordmaster had initially proposed to design an upgrade to the expert swordsman mech without the involvement of Ves and Gloriana!

This was an outrageous proposal that Gloriana could not accept!

"Have you gone crazy, Ketis?! You cannot unilaterally decide to shut us out of this project! Ves may have put you in charge of maintaining and upgrading the First Sword, but do not forget that it is clan property! Ves would never agree to losing his share of ownership in the project! If you think you can take advantage of his current state to monopolize the First Sword Mark III Project for yourself, then it will not work. Ves will come around sooner or later and tell you that you have made a grievous mistake."

"I don't think that Ves will be as unforgiving towards my decision as you think." The projection of Ketis calmly answered to the director of the Design Department. "The First Sword may be a Larkinson mech, but it is more important to maximize her compatibility with Saint Dise as much as possible. Unlike her colleagues within the clan, she is much less dependent on gimmicks and other bloat to perform effectively on the battlefield." "I resent the implication that our design solutions constitute bloat in the First Sword." Gloriana hissed at the projection. "My god body method will guarantee that your fellow Swordmaiden's ace mech will turn into a masterwork no matter what happens during the fabrication process. The archtech that I have more recently begun to master in has massively strengthened the Dark Zephyr's internals and made them much less vulnerable to getting disabled. My companion spirit can also help us all collaborate much more effectively with each other."

Ketis' expression grew pensive in response. "I am not denying that you can make the First Sword stronger, but this is a question of fit and compatibility. There are other mech designers that can strengthen the First Sword just as effectively if not more, and they do not rely on alien technology or complicated principles to work. Right now, I find it questionable whether Saint Dise's new affinity for the metal element will work optimally with archtech. From my understanding, the archmetal that this alien tech is based upon is more aligned with the electric attribute. It is also partially based on organic principles. Lastly, it is too complex and far more difficult to repair and service." Gloriana pressed her fingers against her forehead. "These are not good enough reasons to eject me from the First Sword Mark III Project. Do not forget who has sheltered the Swordmaidens, funded their increasingly greater expenses and gave you all enough

opportunities to better yourselves. Even if you have found a third-party Master Mech Designer that can strengthen the mech frame more effectively than I, do not forget that the First Sword must always remain a Larkinson mech as opposed to an RA mech." "You do not understand." Ketis shook her head in frustration. "The First Sword needs to strive for simplicity, but your design philosophy is becoming increasingly more complex. I am still reluctant to apply archtech into the mech frame, and I am also questioning whether Ves' design philosophy brings much added value to the machine. Dise is not a warrior who relies on a design spirit for help. She is already fine with piloting a relatively basic living mech, and I can already design such a machine myself with the help of my own insights into living mechs. Why would I ask Ves to spend his precious time on a



project that does not demand his intervention anymore?" Although Gloriana did not feel obligated to stand up for her husband's right to participate in the First Sword Mark III Project, letting Ketis get away with this would also weaken her own right to stay involved!

"You are heavily underestimating how much Ves has advanced his living mechs as of late. He has already worked his specialization up to the sixth generation by his own words. His Ultimate Modules alone are incredibly powerful in the right circumstances. Do not think of them as simple gimmicks. It is ingenious to grant living mechs their own 'companion spirits' and have them grow in a specialized direction. In the current day and age, my husband's E-technology carries considerably greater weight than before. It is a mistake to judge his usefulness on your much more rudimentary attainments on

living mechs."

The two female mech designers weren't able to come to an accord in their first remote conversation.

It took multiple arguments spread over multiple days for Gloriana to convince Ketis to reluctantly suspend her scheme and wait for Ves to get his mind back together to cast his verdict on her insolent request.

That moment came closer and closer as the Amaranto Mark III Project finally came to completion.

At this stage, Ves still disregarded the enormous implications of the rise of Saint Dise and the arrival of the Heavensword.

What was even more outrageous was that the Mech Designer System had already completed its upgrade more than a month ago, yet Ves treated this life-changing event with the same degree of importance as waking up 5 minutes late in the morning! On the day when the upgrade process was scheduled to commence in the private workshop of Diandi Base, Ves spent much of his time going over the upgrade plan as well as the finished mech design to make sure he could execute his assignments as best as

possible. Gloriana, Harry Kaikkonen and Venerable Davia Stark both observed the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan remaining completely absorbed in his own world.

"Are you sure he will do a good job?" The expert pilot skeptically asked.

"I cannot guarantee anything, but his output will probably not disappoint you." Gloriana carefully replied. "If he truly makes a mess of his work, then we will forcefully snap him

out of his state or at the very least remove him from the workshop. I can complete the upgrade process and make sure to preserve the Amaranto's status as a masterwork mech by myself if necessary."

"Will you be able to construct the new Instrument of Vengeance without his assistance?"

"To be honest, I am not certain. The greatest challenge is to properly make and install the Two-Step Execution Crystal, I roughly understand Ves' theories on Ultimate Modules, but I have never tried to make one myself. Hopefully it will not be necessary for me to take action myself."

#### Chapter 6557 Upgrading the Amaranto Mark III

There were two additional points of concerns related to the highly anticipated upgrade process of the Amaranto Mark III.

The first one was that Harry Haikkonen had never engaged in any practical work at such a high level in his career.

This was the first time the second-class Journeyman Mech Designer was about to participate in the upgrade of an existing machine into a much more powerful quasi-first-class high-tier expert mech!

The Amaranto Mark III was actually already a first-class ace mech for the most part. Even the old set of resonating exotics had been replaced with more powerful ace mech-grade alternatives.

As long as Venerable Davia Stark successfully managed to break through, it shouldn't. take much work to swap out the power reactor for a much more powerful version and make other corresponding adjustments to accommodate the much greater energy output.

These deliberate design choices therefore represented Ves and Gloriana's confidence in Venerable Davia Stark's growth potential.

Of course, there was a considerable possibility that they ended up making the wrong

bet.

If Venerable Stark still failed to break through after piloting the Amaranto Mark III in the next few months or years, then Ves and Gloriana may actually have to consider downgrading the Amaranto Mark III in order to better accommodate the needs of the expert pilot!

The Larkinsons wanted to avoid this outcome at all cost, so a lot was riding on this upgrade process.

It didn't help that there was a second complication that might negatively affect the outcome of this upgrade run.

Due to pressing obligations related to the Red Tide Offensive and other unforeseen factors, Master Benedict Cortez had no time to travel to New Constantinople and contribute to the fabrication process in person.

This was rather unfortunate as he had integrated the ace mech-grade resonating exotics into the design. He also designed and integrated the Endex System Version 3.0 into a ranged mech that relied heavily on energy weapons to make herself useful in the field.

Fortunately, Master Cortez did what he could by prefabricating the necessary parts that Gloriana and the rest of the design team would probably struggle to make by

themselves.

These parts included the customized version of his improved Endex System as well as processed and shaped pieces of resonating exotics that could easily be slotted into a mech frame.

It would have been more ideal for the parts to be made on the spot, but Gloriana could work with the current situation.

"At least. Master Benedict put his care and attention into the fabrication of his parts." She commented as she inspected the batch of parts that had been shipped from the expeditionary fleet in advance.

The silver lining of Master Benedict's absence was that there was no one left to challenge Gloriana's authority. She could confidently take the lead in this fabrication run, knowing that every other mech designer would not try to usurp her reign!

Her husband lacked the awareness and ego to do so, and Harry Kaikkonen lacked the competence and courage to even think about taking charge.

This was good. As far as Gloriana was concerned, the Amaranto Mark III had become her baby.

Ves used to claim most of the ownership of the expert rifleman mech. He considered the Amaranto to be one of his passion projects where he got to devise and realize a crazy mech concept.

While that identity still remained true, Gloriana felt she managed to claim the lion's share of the ownership of the updated design this time due to how extensively she worked on reforming the mech frame.

There was hardly anything left from the original mech frame in the latest iteration of the Amaranto.

She replaced the heavily outdated and horrendously thin and fragile mech frame with a slender but much more internally robust archemetal frame.

Although the complexity and production difficulty had risen by a lot, Gloriana believed that her effort was worth it as the Amaranto Mark III could cope a lot better with adverse situations!

She was especially proud of how she successfully managed to combine two hyper materials, Solarium and Divurnas Alloy, into an archemetal frame!

Archetech originally wasn't developed with hyper materials in mind. The arche race were pretty much on the same starting line as red humanity in this regard.

Gloriana had to conduct a lot of research and experimentation to find a way to properly integrate the two high-grade hypers into a complex archemetal frame without producing too much interference or causing accidents.

Even now, she was not completely certain whether her solutions would hold up in reality. She had only been able to test the stability of the integration of these powerful hypers under limited testing conditions.

Everything was a lot more serious when it came to the final outcome. The Amaranto Mark III was designed to perform at a very high level, to the point where she could easily induce excess strain on her energy transmissions systems.

One of the relative shortcomings of the Amaranto Mark III was that Master Benedict Cortez withheld his Magma Vein System, both the original and improved version, on this

project.

To be fair, this was not because he was feeling selfish or anything. The Magma Vein System was fundamentally incompatible with archetech because the way they transferred energy from one part to another was drastically different.

The Amaranto Mark III and other archemechs hardly possessed any 'veins', which in this case meant dedicated energy channels.

Instead, energy dynamically flowed from one archemetal block to another without any

visible separation to prevent shortcuts and such.

This was because these measures were not necessary for properly designed and fabricated pieces of archemetal.

In any case, Gloriana had no pining for the Magma Vein System. It was already enough that Master Benedict contributed the Endex System Version 3.0.

"I have heard that Master Benedict has made considerable improvements to the utility and performance of his Endex System." Harry Kaikkonen said as he helped to perform a last-minute

inspection on the imported parts. "Is it true that there is a small portion of the brain tissue of a greater phase whale inside this module?"

Gloriana nodded. "That is correct. The Endex System is more effective when the organic component is derived from more powerful beings. Venerable Stark had to exchange most of the war merits that she has earned up to this date in order to exchange this precious ingredient from the Red Association, but it is more than worth it. Not only will the Amaranto Mark III gain access to a free energy source that can perpetually recharge the living mech's energy cells, but the more powerful Endex System can also significantly increase the rate of E energy absorption."

Realization dawned upon the Journeyman Mech Designer's face. "I see. The former trait vastly improves the Amaranto Mark III's staying power. She can continue to operate in the field much longer without emptying her energy reserves as long as she slows down her firing rate. The latter trait increases the Amaranto Mark III's burst power. The more energies she can gather and accumulate, the stronger her single-shot damage output." "That is correct, Harry. One caveat that you have overlooked is that it is difficult for us to use the Endex System Version 3.0 to its full potential without the corresponding Magma Vein System Version 2.0. Having a stronger power source is moot if the mech cannot safely transfer all of the excess to where it is most needed. The Volcanic Outburst Mode would have been especially useful for a highly energy-dependent mech such as the Amaranto. I suspect there will be numerous cases where the new Amaranto has more energy to spare, but cannot safely channel any more of it into her next attack unless Davia Stark is able to control the risks with her willpower."

"I see. The Amaranto Mark III should already run very hot during intensive combat. The Amaranto will radiate so much heat and light from her archemetal frame that this will entirely neutralize the benefit of integrating Solus Gas into the outer layers." Gloriana shrugged. "Ves insisted on it anyway. He thinks he can turn the Amaranto Mark III into an ambush predator that is exceedingly difficult to detect from a distance. While that may be true, it only ever applies before the first shot. Once the Amaranto Mark III has opened fire for the first time, there is no hope of hiding her presence any further. At that point, Solus Gas becomes a detriment as the Amaranto becomes more powerful when she shines brighter."

This was a bit of anti-synergy that still made her upset to this day. If not for the fact that Venerable Davia Stark insisted on keeping the Solus Gas integration into the design, Gloriana would have reverted its inclusion!

Another half hour passed by as the mech designers completed their final inspections.

When they became completely satisfied that everything was in order, they finally kicked off the fabrication process!

Everyone thoroughly understood their respective roles and responsibilities.

"Maow!"

Alexandria showed up right away. The red feline companion spirit was brimming with energy and immediately began to connect Harry Kaikkonen and Venerable Davia Stark into a common design network with Gloriana.

The Queen Cat deliberately left Ves out this time. She experimentally attempted to pull him into a design network while he was still in Deep Research Mode in the past, but she quickly regretted the experience.

His mind had become so inhuman that Gloriana could not keep up with his thought.

patterns!

Ves paid no attention to Gloriana's thoughts at all, so there was no point in connecting them to the same design network.

Since it was not possible to work together with Ves like before, Gloriana had already resigned herself to using her hyper-focused husband as an automated bot of sorts. He could be trusted to fabricate the parts that he worked on himself and understood

well. He was also suited to carefully strip down the Amaranto Mark II while making sure to keep the living mech alive.

The other mech designers could easily work around Ves and make sure to complement

his own work. Gloriana had meticulously planned out the design schedule to enable this

mode of cooperation.

Progress was slow but steady in the first few days.

Gloriana proficiently operated the specialized archemetal production machines, which she especially reconfigured to work with larger quantities of hyper materials.

One of the greater difficulties of working with large quantities of hyper materials was to prevent them from spontaneously attracting lots of E energy.

This was especially an issue when it came to high-grade hypers!

In order to minimize the chance of accidents, the Design Department upgraded the workshop and much of the equipment with materials similar to B-stone to isolate and protect the more delicate and sensitive components.

Selectively making use of Lufa's glow also made the workshop a lot safer, giving Gloriana

greater confidence in handling so much more high-grade hypers than almost any mech had utilized before.

There were multiple good reasons why other mech designers weren't crazy enough to

form the majority of a mech frame out of hyper materials! Fortunately, Gloriana had made enough preparations to forestall accidents. She was able to fabricate one archemetal part after another at a consistent level of quality.

She could have done better, but it was difficult for her to do any better with her current

level of craftsmanship and her shallow mastery of archetech.

While Gloriana pretty much managed to keep up with her schedule, she noted that

Harry was slowly falling behind.



This was disappointing as she had deliberately put him in more of an assisting duty. His lack of experience was showing, but Gloriana at least became satisfied when she understood that he rarely made the same mistake twice.

At worst, Harry would just have to take shorter breaks in order to make up for lost time.

Other than that, the upgrade process largely proceeded according to Gloriana's expectations.

If this pattern continued, then she did not expect to see any drastic results.

Gloriana just hoped that Ves would remain stable and docile until the end of the fabrication run.

Chapter 6558 The Mind of a God

Multiple days passed by as the three mech designers continued to work according to the schedule set by Gloriana.

While a few unforeseen complications had occurred that caused their progress to slow at times, everything still remained within tolerance.

The Amaranto Mark III was slowly being rebuilt section by section. A lot of old parts and outdated parts had been strapped from the mech frame so that much newer and more powerful parts could take their place.

One of the difficulties of this project was the heavy reliance on archetech for the upgraded version of the Amaranto.

It was difficult to upgrade an existing machine and try to keep it alive when archetech temporarily had to cooperate with conventional tech.

Gloriana had to invest additional hours to solve compatibility issues that she hadn't foreseen.

She also needed to supervise Harry Kaikkonen and occasionally correct his mistakes while also keeping an eye on Ves to ensure he remained a good boy.

Though Gloriana had to shorten her break periods in order to keep up with her elevated workload, she felt she was largely in her element. The work she planned out in advance largely unfolded according to her thoughts. No major disruptions occurred that completely messed up her expectations for the fabrication run.

Although the lack of disruptions meant that the chances were low that they would hit the jackpot and produce a work that exceeded her expectations, it also reduced the chance of accidents that could ruin the Amaranto Mark III!

Gloriana did not ask for too much this time. She just wanted to preserve the masterwork quality of the expert rifleman mech while also reshaping the machine to conform to her design style.

One of the advantages of Ves' abnormal mind state was that he had become so

goal-oriented that he literally did not care about subjects that were not relevant to his current work and goals.

Style and aesthetics fell under this category. Ves sought to make the Amaranto stronger and not necessarily more stylish as it was hard to measure such a change in an objective manner.

Looking good also wasn't as important as defeating the enemy phase lords and phase whales as far as he was concerned.

Everytime Gloriana glanced at her docile husband, she continued to observe a mech designer that was doing everything right, at least according to her perspective.

Thus the days passed by while Gloriana held few complaints. As the living mech slowly

completed her gradual metamorphosis into a much more powerful ranged mech, everyone involved grew more and more exhausted.

Assuming all of the burdens and responsibilities upon herself had exhausted Gloriana a lot more than usual.

She did not realize how much she depended on Ves for several different matters of concern.

From leading the Larkinson Clan to keeping everyone united under a single direction, Ves was the glue that held all of the Larkinsons together.

He was also the source of a lot of confidence and inspiration to the mech designers of the Design Department.

Many members joined the Larkinson Clan not because they valued the identity of a Larkinson, but because they wanted to work alongside a growing legend.

Given how much Ves already managed to accomplish as a Senior Mech Designer, who knew what else he would accomplish once he grew older and more powerful.

Gloriana envied him for becoming so famous that he became an attraction and role model for many other mech designers.

She still lacked such a status, and did not expect to get anywhere close to what Ves had attained through his own work for quite a few more years.

The woman accepted this reality. She might not be perfect for now, but as long as she improved herself with each passing day, she would eventually be able to catch up and maybe even overtake Ves.

Not every mech designer could imitate a freak like her husband and casually solve the genetic aptitude tyranny before he had begun to realize his design philosophy!

In fact, his historic success in solving one of the most far-reaching problems of the mech industry excited Gloriana.

Not only did it vindicate her excellent judgment to hook up with Ves and never let him go, but it also gave her a lot of pressure to improve and exceed her past work. Only by working harder than almost any other mech designer would she have hope of one day making an accomplishment that could match Ves' greatest feat! Whether it was even possible for a mech designer like Gloriana to produce such a groundbreaking work or invention was a redundant question as far as she was concerned.

If a boy like Ves could do the impossible, then a woman like Gloriana should be able to do no less!

In any case, as the fabrication run had entered its final hour, Gloriana already felt satisfied with all of the lessons she learned and the insights she obtained during this novel experience.

The Amaranto Mark III largely looked complete by this time. The expert rifleman mech had undergone such an extreme makeover that Gloriana would not blame others for not being able to recognize the same machine.

The material composition had completely changed.

The transition to archetech gave the mech frame a much more sophisticated vibe.

The Instrument of Vengeance had grown much thicker and more angular.

The high phasewater content seemed to make the machine a little more ethereal.

The integration of Solus Gas also caused the presence of the machine to become more subdued, especially when the living mech remained inactive.

Yet despite all of these changes, the fundamental nature of the Amaranto still remained the same.

She retained her identity as a living mech as well as a masterwork mech.

The iconic third eye surrounded by a hexagon maintained a prominent place on the forehead, proving that she was a genuine work of Ves and Gloriana.

The machine also retained her intimate connection with the Illustrious One, whose presence and attention graced the expert mech for many years.

All in all, the latest iteration of the Amaranto had become a drastically improved version of herself in practically every conceivable way without losing sight of her original identity and purpose!

The three mech designers had already completed all of the more difficult and risky work assignments.

At this point, they were applying the finishing touches to the powerful machine. The Amaranto Mark III had become a much more powerful but also complex archemetal construct, so a lot more variables could go wrong. She therefore needed drastically more tuning and adjustments in order to ensure Venerable Davia Stark would be able to

control her just right.

Finally, everyone withdrew from the machine and lowered themselves to the ground. Each of the mech designers looked up to their completed work while feeling a profound sense of awe and satisfaction at the fruition of all of their efforts.

"It is done." Gloriana declared while withdrawing the design network.

A hint of visible emotion stirred on the normally expressionless face of Venerable Davia Stark.

Her longing to pilot the Amaranto Mark III grew so strong that she almost couldn't hold herself back from entering the cockpit right away!

At the same time, Ves' eyes glazed over as it gradually dawned on his one-track mind that he had finally reached the end of his destination,

His work was done. The Amaranto Mark III Project had reached its ultimate conclusion.

With no more goals left to forcefully pull his attention towards a single direction, his focus suddenly became a lot more scattered.

Ves became dazed as he felt unable to adjust to what should have been his ordinary

scattered mindset.

The transition was so extreme that he simply felt lost!

He felt so much

focused and productive when he

working under his previous

mind state that he became disgusted by how much he had lost after it had expired!

It was as if he was a god that had been cast down to the mortal plane. The transition felt

nothing less like a devolution!

"Aaahhhhh!" Ves screamed as he held his head and fell to his knees!

"Ves!"

"Sir!"

While the surrounding people grew alarmed at his reactions, Ves suddenly suddenly

collapsed as all of the fatigue he accumulated by overworking himself over the span of

two months finally caught up to his true body!

Time passed by as Ves gradually regained his consciousness again.

"Urgh... my head..."

Due to the fact that he possessed several external incarnations, Ves had not remained completely unaware of the passage of time.

However, the fact that his main self had put himself into such a deep and focused state of mind for so many days had caused him to grow increasingly out of sync with Vulcan and Veronica.

While he was glad that at least a few parts of himself were able to retain their sanity and continue to progress as normal, Ves grew concerned about how much his connection had begun to weaken.

Perhaps his permanent bonds with his incarnations may not be as impervious as he previously assumed.

In any case, the deep sleep should have enabled Ves to recover from most if not all of the sequelae of overworking himself to exhaustion. The reason why he still suffered from a headache was that he was forcibly getting in sync with his incarnations again.

As the pain gradually started to die down, the entrance to his bedroom slid open.

"Ves! You are finally awake! Are you of sound mind again?"

"I... think so. I... probably overlooked a lot of stuff while I was working on the Amaranto Mark III Project."

His wife finally reached his bedside and placed her slender hand on his palm.

"The Deep Research Mode that is apparently inherent to all phase lords and phase

whales is more dangerous than we thought. It is not a good idea for you to experiment on yourself in such a reckless manner. Leave this to the Phase Lord Department of the Red Collective. It is their job to study and document all there is to know about phase lords. Until the collies have completed a comprehensive investigation, please do not put yourself into this dangerous state of mind again, agreed?"

"Agreed." Ves grimaced but nodded. "It is most definitely a powerful tool, but.... I can't afford to disregard everything else, especially during a time as sensitive as this, I missed out on a lot of important stuff, did I?"

"You have no idea."

While Gloriana enthusiastically began to summarize the most important developments

that Ves missed out on, he secretly thought about whether he should employ the so-called Deep Research Mode again in one of his future projects.

Regardless of all of the dangers and negative side effects, Ves still yearned to return to

that pure and focused state.

During the days he worked on the Amaranto Mark III Project, he felt as if he had attained the mind state of a god. Even if his actual thinking power fell short of such a standard, just acquiring the mentality of one was such a powerful advantage that it held an irresistible attraction to

Ves!

The ability to snap his fingers, become completely focused on a single goal and not stopping until he had completed his work was such a powerful experience that Ves craved to experience this unique rush yet again!

Although Ves possessed enough awareness to realize that he was in danger of becoming



addicted to the Deep Research Mode, he didn't care as being able to get a lot more work

done in the same amount of time was exactly what he needed to reduce his lengthy backlog of projects!

As Gloriana wrapped up her summary of shocking events that certainly required a lot deeper consideration from Ves, he only cared about one issue in particular.

"Did Venerable Stark break through when she piloted the Amaranto Mark III for the first time?" He carefully asked.

His wife sighed. "She... did not. Davia Stark hasn't been able to repeat Tusa's feat. She

responded well to the Amaranto Mark III, though. She has taken her lack of immediate breakthrough in stride. Now that she has gained a much more powerful machine, she and her battle partner are currently on their way back to the expeditionary fleet. I believe that Venerable Stark is confident that she can earn her sainthood in her first, serious action after gaining a much more powerful expert mech." "Hmm... that may very well be doable. I hope her confidence is not misplaced."

Chapter 6559 Strategic Shifts

Ves had a lot to catch up to after he withdrew from his Deep Research Mode.

He had inconvenienced himself and a lot of people by suddenly disconnecting from reality.

The fact that he and others never anticipated that this would happen at this timing was the worst part about it. Nobody had made any preparations to deal with his temporary absence from the public sphere, his inner circle and his ongoing diplomatic efforts. Fortunately, Ves had made sure to conclude a lot of important affairs during and after his last business trip, so no particularly acute issues suffered from his prolonged absence. The Red Collective had rapidly managed to establish its authority and respect across human-occupied space. The universal benefits brought by systematic cultivation had quickly won over the approval of the common folk.

The greater space-time bubble surrounding Bridgehead One had grown more and more volatile. Scientists that had been examining the data from this artificial phenomenon night and day came up with all kinds of wild theories about what was taking place inside, but no one formed any definite conclusions. The one fact that they could agree upon was that it was bound to end fairly soon, as the spacetime bubble's energy consumption increased so rapidly that it would run out quickly.

The Red War had progressed in a direction that was slightly more unfavorable to red humanity than before.

The native aliens had managed to topple more fortified star systems in the 4th defensive band, but they had yet to unleash their rumored 'final push'!

The intelligence agencies collected more and more clues about this final push. The native aliens were increasing their efforts to stockpile additional supplies, but it was not up to the level to support a sustained assault.

This made more and more people suspect that the native aliens might not be trying to push through the existing border regions. What if the native aliens secretly formed a massive armada and took a huge detour just so that they could attack Yernstall or one of the other critically important central star nodes?

Fighting a war in space was much different from fighting a war on a planet!

If the aliens truly wanted to, they could rely on warp travel to travel far above or below the galactic plane.

By traveling 'up' or 'down' the disc that represented the stars of the Red Ocean, the native alien armada would encounter no obstacles and no annoying human defensive forces that could hinder their advance.

Although alien warp travel was a lot slower than modern human FTI. travel, the former

was not bound by as many restrictions as the latter. The only question was whether the native aliens were willing to invest months if not years of monotonous travel time in order to unleash a devastating strike behind the lines.

Efforts to monitor the huge void of space above and below the galactic plane had drastically increased once people recognized their vulnerability to such an assault, but the amount of manpower and assets being used up was considerable.

What if they guessed wrong? What if they wasted resources that could have been elsewhere?

Unfortunately, there was no way to make a sure bet. Human strategists could only make recommendations based on flawed and incomplete data.

One of the more important developments that spun from red humanity's anxiety towards the native alien's attempt to deliver a coup de grace was the reallocation of many second-class ace pilots.

Their combat power was high, but they were all limiting themselves by piloting second-class or quasi-first-class ace mechs.

That was an acceptable practice during the Age of Mechs. The Big Two had always sought to minimize the destructive scope of warfare, so third-raters and second-raters were strictly forbidden from employing weapons that exceeded their tech level.

The Age of Dawn had invalidated many of these rules and traditions. It made little sense to deliberately shackle some of red humanity's best champions due to artificial constraints.

With the imposition of martial law, the Red Three gained the authority to commandeer these ace pilots and force them to pilot first-class ace mechs by any means possible. Only the more powerful ace mechs had a realistic chance of killing or at least containing alien phase lords.

Weaker machines that often lacked the energy to inflict high damage couldn't even get past a phase lord's spatial barrier before they exhausted their reserves!

The second-class ace pilots affected by the Red Three's directive understood this very well. They also knew that the changes were for the good of red humanity as a whole, so they did not object to their mandatory transfer to the upper zones.

Of course, a lot of second-class mech forces suddenly lost their most important protectors. The middle zones were bound to suffer more casualties as a result, but the strategists at the top believed this to be a worthwhile sacrifice.

The logic behind these decisions was that the most decisive battles in the upper zones had to be won at all cost.

If the first-raters lost their respective battles, then it didn't matter if the second-raters or the third-raters had done better.

Everyone would all get swept by an unstoppable tide of native aliens as there were no

mechers, fleeters, Terrans and Rubarthans to defeat the most formidable enemy assault fleets!

"This is an incredibly risky and radical strategic shift." Ves frowned as he sat in his main office.

Once he recovered from his abnormal shape, he tried to get back to work as soon as possible.

He was doing his best to catch up to two month's worth of developments. Gavin Neumann shrugged his shoulders as he personally briefed Ves. "I am no military mastermind, but from what I have been able to read on the galactic net, it sounds as if the bigshots don't mind sacrificing multiple middle zones and lower zones in order to force the native aliens to waste their time on conquering less important territories. Every star system located in the zones directly behind the border regions will probably see massive bloodshed and warfare. The governments over there are doing what they can to fortify their most important locations, but it will be too little too late."

"This includes the Krakatoa Middle Zone, right?"

"Correct. If the Red Three is truly giving up on holding the Torald Middle Zone, the aliens will have a straight path to invading the Colonial Federation of Davute. If the Davutan armed forces still had all of their ace pilots, then they might be able to stall the invaders long enough to wait for a turnaround, but now..."

The situation did not look optimistic to Ves. He could understand the dilemma of the higher ups. They had made the most rational strategic decisions to maximize their chances of winning the Red War, but they also brought a huge amount of human

suffering.

"Maybe the situation won't be as bad as we think." Ves optimistically remarked. "There will be plenty of chances for high-tier expert pilots to break through during all of the desperate defensive actions. Even if they can't pilot ace mechs in the short term, they should still be able to slow down the alien advance."

He moved on to studying how the conscription of second-class ace pilots directly affected his clan.

The expeditionary fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance had to transfer away most of its ace mechs in order to transform them into more effective counters against phase lords. The only ones left at the moment were Saint Linda Cross of the Cross Clan and Saint Dise Larkinson of the Larkinson Clan.

"Saint Dise is allowed to stay in the expeditionary fleet?"

"That is because Swordmaster Ketis has already started the First Sword Mark III Project in advance. In the meantime, our latest ace pilot will continue to pilot her current expert mech in battle, just like Saint Commander Casella Ingvar. According to her latest estimates, it will take four to five months for the Dise's living mech to be upgraded into a

first-class ace mech, boss."

"That fast?"

"Ketis has entered into a collaboration with a number of Master Mech Designers of the Red Association. She chose to work with them because Master Benedict Cortez is not suitable for the project and preoccupied with other obligations." Gavin explained. "There are a number of critical time-sensitive decisions that you need to make about the project. Director Gloriana will brief you in person once you head over to the design lab." "Understood." Ves said as he imagined all of the benefits of gaining another powerful ace pilot. "Dise is an excellent warrior. I am glad that she has managed to break through before the final push has begun. A duelist as good as her is what we need the most in the Red War. Anyway, what else is on the agenda?"

"Your deputy over at the Astral Octagon is waiting to brief you as well. You will need to move over to our secure communication chamber in order to speak to your chief of staff about the most important matters relating to the Red Collective. It shouldn't take too long as the RC is still in the process of implementing its existing plans."

"Fine. Let's get this over with as soon as possible."

After Ves concluded his short and brisk talk with Eliza Mo Ragadan, he finally moved to the design lab where his wife summoned him to her office right away.

"Woah. Why the hurry, honey?" Gloriana was clearly gnashing her teeth as she stared at Ves with impatient eyes.

"I need you to set Ketis straight about her stupid and borderline treasonous attempt to kick us off the First Sword Mark III Project."

"What?"

"Let me summarize the situation for you!" Gloriana said.

She proceeded to fill Ves in about how Ketis chose to undertake the First Sword Mark III Project.

The ambitious swordmaster did not let the Heavensword's insertion into her life stop her mech designer ambitions.

She not only negotiated a deal with the Red Association by herself, but also wanted to increase her ownership over the First Sword!

Kicking out Ves and Gloriana from the project was a bold decision that was guaranteed

to create a lot of controversy, but Ketis apparently possessed enough courage and determination to persist.

An impasse had formed between Ketis and Gloriana as a result. The two female mech

designers failed to resolve their disagreement in the month since Ketis had begun to design the next ace mech of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves furrowed his eyebrows. As was typical of his wife, she had made plenty of biased remarks that sought to paint the situation in her favor.

However, even without this needless effort, Ketis did not exactly paint herself in a good light by making such an extreme decision.

"Do you remember how we designed the original First Sword?" Ves asked. "Ketis was

already in the lead at the time. We provided our own design solutions and helped with compensating for her lacking technical skills, but it was undeniable that we gave her enough room to put forth her own vision. What she is doing right now is not much different from what she did back then. These days, she can collaborate with far more mech designers than you and I. She is maturing as a mech designer and has put effort into expanding her own network of contacts. She has many more options available than years ago, so she isn't obliged to repeat the same decisions she made in the past. A good mech designer must be able to respond to current and future needs rather than mindlessly following tradition."

His wife slowly started to look more and more upset with him. "Are you... taking this

insolent woman's side? Are you deliberately trying to indulge her just because she used to be your student?"

Ves did not take his wife's reaction seriously. He maintained his calm and leader-like

case

disposition. "Sentiment has nothing to do with how I see this issue. I am taking a rational approach towards the decisions made by Ketis. As long as she can successfully present where replacing our design applications with the contributions of other mech designers will make the First Sword better, I see no reason why I should deny her proposal. It is you who are letting yourself get swayed by your emotions. As the Director of the Design Department, you should not allow your own biases and selfish desires overtake your judgment.

"I CANNOT BELIEVE WHAT YOU ARE SAYING, VES! KETIS IS TALKING ABOUT USURPING ONE OF OUR ACE MECHS AND CLAIMING IT FOR HERSELF! NOT ONLY THAT, SHE EVEN INTENDS TO COLLUDE WITH OUTSIDERS TO KEEP US OUT! THE FIRST SWORD IS ONE OF OUR MORE IMPORTANT EVOLVING WORKS! HOW COULD YOU BE SO STUPID FOR ALLOWING IT TO SLIP FROM OUR GRASP!?"

#### Chapter 6560 First Sword Dispute

The First Sword was one of the legendary first 6 high-ranking mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

The first 6 possessed the greatest fame and prestige due to their long history of turning battles around and securing decisive victories.

The original incarnations of the Dark Zephyr, the Amaranto, the First Sword, the Riot, the Shield of Samar and the Everchanger represented the initial generation of expert mechs and played key roles in setting up the Larkinson Clan for success.

The clan wouldn't exist without their deeds. Ves was able to become the most successful mech designer of his generation because of how they managed to overcome one challenger after another.

Although subsequent machines such as the Promethea, the Minerva and the Phobos performed considerably more dramatically in combat, they were products of a younger era. This also included the Bastion which was the successor to the Shield of Samar.

They I arrived later when the Larkinson Clan had already built up a solid foundation, The new technologies available at the time also made it considerably easier to design much more potent mechs.

Although Ves had numerous favorite works, he tended to look back at the first 6 with greater fondness than normal. He fleshed out his design philosophy over the course of working on them and invented numerous new design applications that enriched his toolbox of solutions.

Gloriana probably held the same sort of sentiment towards one of her earlier works. As outdated as the First Sword had become, she was still a living mech that constantly improved in other ways.

His wife must have been looking forward to overhauling the First Sword physical structure. This way, she should be able to reinforce her ownership over an ace swordsman mech that would go on to accomplish much more notable deeds such as slaying phase lords!



Mech designers could be quite possessive towards mechs and mech models that became recognized and celebrated due to their success on the battlefield.

Even if Saint. Dise earned most of the credit for using the First. Sword Mark III to win a crucial battle in the Red War, part of the glory and prestige of this victory would still be attributed to the design team responsible for designing the latest iteration of such a machine!

When it came to mechs that had been worked on by different design teams, only the ones who were actually responsible for the work that made a difference on the battlefield earned recognition.

This meant that if Ketis truly proceeded to kick Gloriana from the design team of the

First Sword Mark III, the latter would no longer have anything to do with the ace mech despite the fact that she was a part of the design team of the earlier iterations!

All of this meant that there was a lot at stake in the dispute between Ketis and Gloriana. Ves also had a stake in the matter considering that Ketis thought about removing him from the design team as well!

Compared to his overreacting wife, Ves behaved remarkably nonchalant at the prospect of no longer having to do anything with the First Sword.

That caused Gloriana to look at him as if he was an idiot.

"Did the Deep Research Mode inflict permanent brain damage to your ego, Ves? How come you are not upset at Ketis for pulling off this attempted coup?! The First Sword is clan property, which means it is our property! A mere lead designer has no right to usurp our work and claim it for herself! Just because you put her in charge of designing the earlier iterations of the First Sword does not mean she owns it outright! We have contributed to the project as well, so we should have a voice in the matter as well!" Ves calmly crossed his arms. "You are not entirely wrong about that. I do think it is rather presumptuous for Ketis to just decide to remove us when she hasn't spoken to either of us whether this is a good idea. It is also true that she shouldn't be able to unilaterally decide upon its future. Strictly speaking, the mech designers who can currently claim partial ownership over the design are Ketis, me, you, Juliet Stameris and Master Moira Willix."

"The latter two are not able to participate in the First Sword Mark III Project, so that leaves us with the first three." Gloriana stated the obvious. "As one of the mech designers who helped to make the earlier versions of the First Sword, I strongly believe the ace swordsman mech has a bright future if

I can implement by god body method as well as my interpretation of archetech to the project. I think you would also like to develop a brand-new Ultimate Module for the First Sword. This means that there are two votes in

favor of our participation and just one vote against. Ketis will have to withdraw her illegal demand and settle for working alongside us both."

While Gloriana looked self-satisfied for having argued her way towards victory, Ves interrupted her daydream by clearing his throat.

"Ahem, not so fast, dear. While Ketis has made a controversial proposal, it is not as bad as it sounds from my perspective. First, how many design projects are you working on at the moment?"

Gloriana grew upset again when she saw that Ves was not willing to follow her lead, but she still answered the question.

"We still need to complete the Minerva Mark II Project, the Riot Mark III Project, and the Promethea Mark II Project, in that order. Since we have decided to switch from a parallel work approach to a sequential work approach, progress in those other projects have stalled. We still have much work to complete if we want to roll out the upgrades as fast as possible. I am also supervising the progression of numerous low-ranking expert.

mech design projects, which I have delegated to other design teams."

"That sounds like a lot of work. No. Your workload is already huge, Gloriana. Besides, how many expert mechs and ace mechs did we design already? It must be over a dozen. Why do you care so much about the First Sword when there are plenty of other high-ranking machines that also deserve your attention? The more you split your focus, the less you are able to make sure that each of them will receive the care they deserve. As far as I am concerned, you should welcome the opportunity to lighten your burden. Ketis is much more passionate about the First Sword. Let her decide how the living mech should evolve in the future. If this is to be decided by majority vote, then she has my support. That means that there are two votes in favor and one against. You should be clear what

that means.

His wife looked as if Ves had personally betrayed her. Her expression conveyed her absolute dismay at his verdict.

"You... you..."

"You already have many opportunities to make your mark!" Ves raised his voice a bit. "Instead of worrying about the First Sword, you should invest your energies into the Minerva Mark II Project and the Riot Mark III Project instead! There are many more upgrade projects that you will need to tackle as well. If our clan isn't giving you enough opportunities to tinker with expert mechs or ace mechs, then there is always the Glory Seekers! You are spoiled for choice, so why are you so opposed to sharing

responsibility?"

Gloriana looked more and more angry, but she made an admirable effort to hold in her outburst. She knew that in the face of a rational argument, an emotionally heated response would not advance her cause.

If she wanted to refute Ves' argument, then she had to employ logic rather than insults.

"You are so insistent on doing what is best for the First Sword and the clan, so let us consider what that actually means. While both of us are Senior Mech Designer, you know as well as I do that we cannot be judged by our ranks alone. We are geniuses. We have developed mind-blowing design applications that have opened up new ground and improve mechs in ways that our predecessors in the industry have never conceived of. Do you think that Saint Tusa and his Dark Zephyr would have been able to outduel not one, but two greater phase lords and land a killing blow on the Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa if the living mech did not possess an Ultimate Module and an archemetal frame?"

"Just because our design philosophies can make mechs stronger doesn't mean that the rest of the mech industry is useless." Ves retorted. "There are still plenty of good Masters out there that have changed the course of mech design by realizing their amazing design philosophies. I am sure that Ketis is thinking about working together with a handful of them in order to elevate the First Sword to the next level. Let's do this. Instead of arguing with each other, let us bring Ketis into the conversation."

His wife did not have any strong objections towards this proposal.

Soon enough, the physical projection of Ketis appeared inside Gloriana's office.

The swordmaster had changed. The events of the last two months had a profound impact on her life.

She looked brighter and happier.

That must have been because Dise had finally broken through, thereby birthing a powerful champion and representative of the Swordmaidens.

She must also be having the time of her life by leading the upgrade project for the next iteration of the First Sword.

"Good afternoon, Ves. I am glad that you have returned."

"Good morning to you as well, Ketis. My wife here has filled me in on your... dispute. Are you truly thinking about removing me and her from the design project?" "That is indeed one of my possible plans." Ketis told Ves while doing her best to ignore Gloriana's withering glare. "The original concept of the First Sword Mark III put most of the focus on her direct sword fighting capabilities. I decided to add modules relating to the deployment of sword fey as auxiliary armaments, but then I realized that my current attainments in living mech design doesn't allow me to make the same kind of living spurs as the ones that make the Fey Fianna such a celebrate drone mech design. I therefore came up with two different evolutions of the First Sword."

"Let me guess, one of them includes the sword fey and the other does not." Ves said. Ketis looked amused. "Correct. The two proposals emphasize different advantages. The pure configuration of the First Sword is a commitment to staying true to the swordsman mech archetype. Saint Dise will not be burdened by any distractions or compromises that can reduce her ace mech's ability to rely purely on the sword in her hands to vanquish every enemy. It is a configuration that is exceptionally strong against enemies that cannot cope with powerful swordsman mechs, but will struggle against many other

enemies."

"And the other?"

"The sword fey configuration of the First Sword is a risky attempt at increasing the ace

mech's versatility and ability to handle a more diverse range of situations. Dise should be able to empower her sword fey to a similar degree to how Saint Commander Casella can empower other combat assets on the battlefield, but in a stronger and more specialized manner. If Saint Dise can become good at this, her sword fey may become strong enough to eliminate entire swarms of alien phasefighters at once. The downside is that I am not yet certain whether it will strengthen the First Sword against massive opponents

such as alien phase lords. The latter is one of the reasons why I am thinking about

choosing the pure configuration instead."

"You think the plainer and more boring ace mech configuration is better?" Ves frowned.

"The First Sword was never about relying on gimmicks to win her duels. The pure configuration takes the known strength of the current First Sword and makes everything stronger and better. This way, there is little ambiguity in what has improved

and whether the changes are stable. The sword fey configuration is a big gamble. If the fey do not live up to their potential, then the First Sword will never be able to reach her full potential during the critical years ahead. This can have devastating ripple effects on the Red War. What if this change causes the ace swordsman mech to lose crucial battles,

thereby leading to the eventual collapse of our civilization? This is why the safest option

is a legitimate

choice."

"I see."

"Either way, I do not see a place for Gloriana's work in either proposals."

"I OBJECT TO THAT!"