

Mech Touch 6751

Chapter 6751: Archemetal Battle Skirt System

The Minerva Mark II Project was slowly coming together. The first-class ace command mech would become a sight to behold.

She may lack the Saint Kingdom of regular ace mechs, but her ability to empower friendly units and manipulate the battlefield would reach a whole new level.

The configuration of the Minerva Mark II was pretty much complete. Ves and Gloriana had already made every design choice that mattered. All they had to do was to fill up the increasingly more complete mech design.

This still amounted to a lot of work. If not for the fact that Ves and Gloriana wanted to maintain at least a certain degree of confidentiality and information security, they could have delegated or outsourced more work to design teams and consultants.

However, the pair did not want one of the most important assets of the Larkinson Clan to be transparent to his potential enemies and rivals.

They had to pick their help very carefully for that reason.

They only delegated work to the most trustworthy design teams in the Design Department.

They also sought meaningful contributions from fellow Journeyman Mech Designers despite their obvious lack of qualifications.

Ves invited Viktor MacMillan to employ his specialization to develop the most luxurious and powerful close-surface azure energy shield system that he had ever realized.

"I am not qualified." Viktor said as he looked overwhelmed by the offer. "The Minerva Mark II is a first-class mech. Not only that, it is an ace mech. I... am still a second-

class mech designer. I have been working hard to pass all of the courses required to become a first-class mech designer, but it is still too premature for me to work on such a high-end project."

Ves responded by casually placing his hand on the other mech designer's shoulder. "Tough luck, Viktor, because we don't have much to choose from besides you and a few others. I can easily look for outside consultants. There are plenty of third party Seniors and Masters that would salivate over the opportunity to put their mark on the Minerva Mark II. However, no matter how much we isolate all of the more sensitive and confidential parts of the mech design, they will always be able to learn many of the properties of our future ace mech. Since this is the case, I would rather turn to a fellow clansman than rely on the discretion of a stranger. Do you understand?"

Viktor felt ambivalent about this. He understood what Ves was getting at.

Personally, he looked forward to contributing a small but still important aspect of an ace mech that was bound to become a legendary machine among the Larkinsons and the rest of red humanity.

However, his integrity as a mech designer forced him to acknowledge that he was far from the best at improving the design of a first-class ace mech.

It was only because Ves himself insisted upon his participation that Viktor was reluctantly able to set aside his misgivings.

"If you trust me that much, then I will do my best not to disappoint you." Viktor eventually said. "I may not have completed my studies in first-class high-technologies, but I think I can whip up an extremely powerful azure shield generator so long as you permit me to license an existing first-class component design and give me permission to obtain the necessary phasewater as well as other expensive materials."

"You will have it, Viktor. Please coordinate with Master Laila Rebecca Devos for your licensing needs. You can also talk to her about purchasing the rare exotics and hyperts that you want to use to build the shield generator."

The Journeyman frowned when he heard that name. "Is Master Devos involved in this mech design project?"

"Yes." Ves sighed. "Proper ace mechs can only be designed by Master Mech Designers. We used to have an understanding with Master Benedict Cortez, but he has recently become more preoccupied. Certain events have also put our relationship with him under strain. This is why we reluctantly turned to Master Laila Devos to design the aspects of an ace mech that only a Master Mech Designer can fulfill. She has actually provided a lot of help as she is able to leverage the full resources of the Devos Ancient Clan. We actually had to decline many of her offers since we don't want the Minerva Mark II to become a fully-fledged Terran ace mech."

The Terrans and the Rubarthans had refined their mech design capabilities considerably ahead of other groups.

They were only slightly inferior to the mechers in this regard!

The Red Association generally fielded the most well-regarded mechs because it encompassed a huge variety of high technologies.

This allowed the mechers to mix and match a wide selection of tech and design philosophies to form the most synergistic mech concepts.

The Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact employed plenty of mech designers as well, but they could not beat the Red Association in terms of quantity and variety.

This was why the colonial first-raters chose to narrow their focus and specialize in a limited selection of broad fields.

For example, the Terrans chose to put more emphasis on the development of melee mechs while the Rubarthans typically put more weight on the evolution of their ranged mechs.

By narrowing the focus of their R&D and industrial development, the Terrans and the Rubarthans were still able to design and field excellent first-class multipurpose mechs that remained somewhat competitive in comparison to RA mechs.

In any case, the Terrans could offer a lot of good stuff to the Minerva Mark II Project, but Ves and Gloriana were hesitant to accept them because they did not master the proprietary tech themselves.

As much as Ves had developed good relationships with the Devos Ancient Clan and Streon Ancient Clan, there was a limit to how much he wanted to make his most strategic assets dependent on other people's tech.

Viktor MacMillan went to work. As a Journeyman who had proven his competence during the Fey Shaper Contest, he was much more competent than the average mech designer.

He urgently studied the most essential pieces of knowledge that were necessary to fulfill his latest assignment and proceeded to understand and modify the Terran azure energy shield generator according to his limited expertise.

There was room for another contributing mech designer.

Ves thought the Minerva Mark II needed a stronger bite. He briefly thought about involving Zanthar Larkinson, but Gloriana insisted on bringing in Beatrice Hendrix.

"Your luminar crystal rifles are already strong enough." She said. "There is little added value to substituting the next version of the Irvan luminar crystal rifle with one of Zanthar's strange 'EEE Weapons'. As far as the Saint Commander is concerned, her subordinates are her weapons. It is best if we invest in additional defenses. Enemies will focus more and more on eliminating the Minerva Mark II as she becomes increasingly more famous and powerful."

"Then who do you want to suggest instead?"

"Beatrice Hendrix has made strides in improving her Adaptive Modular Armor Systems. She is able to design a basic but functional first-class edition of the Battle Skirt System that will provide an extra layer of adaptive protection for the Minerva Mark II as well as the Victrix. The modular armor plating of this system also synergizes extremely well with the resonating ability derived from Dragon Scales."

If they were working on another project, then Ves would have argued that such a strong focus on defenses was excessive.

They already tasked Viktor MacMillan to develop an extra powerful azure shield generator for the Minerva Mark II.

Adding an improved version of the Battle Skirt System almost sounded redundant.

However, Ves acknowledged that Gloriana made an excellent point. There was no need to put heavy emphasis on direct offensive power in the high-end mech design project.

Classical ace command mechs weren't supposed to defeat their enemies directly.

They were designed to empower other friendly units while trying to stay alive as much as possible.

Many famous high-ranking command mechs possessed multiple redundant defensive layers due to the fact that they lacked traditional Saint Kingdoms.

Without a strong domain fueled by willpower that was centered around themselves, the ace pilots were much more vulnerable to powerful attacks!

Ace mechs that did not compensate for this critical shortcoming tended to attract assassination attempts and decapitation strikes at much greater frequencies than normal.

Enemies simply couldn't resist the obvious opening!

By turtling up the Minerva Mark II, the Larkinsons would not only be able to reduce the success rate of any targeted strikes, but also deter enemies from making the attempt in the first place.

One of the benefits of the new Battle Skirt System soon became clear.

"There is strong synergy between the adaptive modular armor plating and archetech." Gloriana judged after she worked with Beatrice to puzzle out a custom solution for the Minerva Mark II. "The regular modular armor plating consists of a solid plate at the front, but is embedded with relatively fragile electrical components in the rear. Even if

they are shielded and covered up with protective layers, it is still a fact that these modular armor plates tend to lose control before their physical structures are entirely spent. We can eliminate this shortcoming by making the modular armor plates out of archemetal."

This was an intriguing suggestion that could significantly increase the performance of the Battle Skirt System.

"All of this sounds great, Gloriana, but it will also make the Battle Skirt System more expensive and troublesome to make." Ves mentioned. "Unless the new archemetal plating is easy to mass produce by other specialists in our clan, you will have to devote extra time to fabricate a lot of spare plating in case the Minerva Mark II or the Victrix incurred serious damage."

"I am prepared to do so. It shouldn't take too much time to mass produce enough spare archemetal modular armor plating to replenish the entire Battle Skirt System at least two times."

Ves actually grew more and more impressed by the properties of this archemetal variation of the Battle Skirt System.

"We should look to implement this design application in other mechs whenever possible." Ves said.

"I agree." Gloriana said. "It should have been an excellent fit for the First Sword Mark III, but Ketis has shut me out of the project."

"Ketis has found another mech designer to take care of the defensive needs of the First Sword Mark III."

"I predict that the solution from this outsider is not as elegant and feminine as the Battle Skirt System."

"Looks don't matter as much as being able to resist the impact of superdimensional weapons head-on." Ves pointed out. "The Archemetal Battle Skirt System does not score well in this area unless we make the modular armor plating out of armor-grade superdimensional matter."

"Then tell Ketis to hurry up and convince the Heavensword to open up another portal to the Blue Dimension!"

Ves' refusal to allocate the limited amount of armor-grade superdimensional matter to the Minerva Mark II still did not sit well with his wife.

As much as he felt tempted to change his mind, he ultimately stuck to his original decision whenever he imagined his ambitious vision for the Riot Mark III.

Venerable Rosa Orfan needed the power of superdimensional matter much more urgently than Saint Commander Casella Ingvar!

He tried his best to set this matter aside and resume his work.

The contributions of Viktor MacMillan and Beatrice Hendrix should provide more than enough of a defensive boost to the Minerva Mark II to keep her safe and active on the battlefield.

However, it was the unique contribution made by Master Laila Rebecca Devos that truly gave an additional dimension to the Minerva Mark II.

Master Laila most definitely possessed the expertise and wisdom to become the leading authority on mechs within the Devos Ancient Clan.

She had lived for over 300 years, which meant that she had entered the mech industry during the start of its heyday and lived through the remainder of the Age of Mechs.

Her design philosophy reflected this long journey of development.

Chapter 6752: The Design Philosophy of Master Laila Rebecca Devos

Ves did not meet with Master Laila Rebecca Devos too often, but the few times they came together always sparked an insightful conversation.

Both of them were mech designers who belonged to vastly different generations. Ves was in his forties while Master Laila had already begun her third century of life.

The Master Mech Designer was also born and raised in the Devos Ancient Clan, which was one of the best places for a human to start out in the old galaxy. While she may have spent the vast majority of her life in Terran space, she had witnessed much over the course of her lifetime.

Then there were her professional qualifications. Master Laila Rebecca Devos dedicated herself to a design philosophy that could only exist in a prosperous society.

She possessed a Class I design philosophy in Mechanical Miniaturization.

"What the hell is Mechanical Miniaturization, exactly?" Ves asked in his first professional exchange with Master Laila.

"I am one of the reasons why mechs continue to grow more powerful while maintaining their relatively compact sizes and dimensions." Master Laila responded with a patronizing smile. "The mech industry constantly seeks to develop better parts that make mechs stronger, but that often tends to make them larger, heavier and more expensive. Oftentimes, the detriments outweigh the benefits. This puts a hard limit on how extensively you can improve a mech on a decennial basis. Many mech designers and developers are actually capable of developing many techs that can make their mechs 10 or even 20 percent stronger, but doing so without regard for size limitations will make their machines substantially larger. This is an outcome that they must avoid because larger mechs are not accepted by a market that has built all of its infrastructure around machines that fit within a specific range of dimensions."

It was as if the entire mech community had been working with cubes for centuries.

If a crazy enough mech designer insisted on introducing spheres as a superior replacement for cubes, the attempt would definitely fail even if the new products were truly better than the older ones!

Of course, this was a very simplified analogy that only scratched the surface of the mech industry's rejection of larger mechs.

Ves sort of understood what Master Laila Devos was trying to convey.

"I see. Your focus as a mech designer is completely different. Most mech designers including myself are constantly thinking of making mechs more powerful. You on the other hand are one of the few who think about making them more efficient. Your preferred means of doing so is to take relatively large components and make them smaller."

"That is a good description, but it is not complete." The Master Mech Designer said. "I specialize in making components smaller with the least amount of tradeoffs. I rely on my vast comprehension of multiple disciplines of science to shrink the size of components as diverse as energy cells, artificial musculature, mech engines, power reactors, energy cells and integrated weapon systems. Over the centuries, I have kept abreast of every development and learned how most forms of tech related to mechs worked. I have amassed more knowledge and experience than you can imagine when working on shrinking one component or another."

"Damn..." Ves genuinely looked impressed at the old woman, though she clearly did not look that old due to her excellent life-prolonging treatments. "Your knowledge base must be a lot closer to that of the Polymath if that is the case."

Master Laila Devos smiled in amusement. She did not outright laugh, but she would have done so if she did not maintain impeccable control over her body.

"My body of knowledge cannot come close to that of the Polymath or any Star Designer for that matter. I do not dare to call myself the Junior Polymath. I am known as the Precision Ruler in the Terran mech community."

"That sounds... pretty lame, to be honest."

"It is not my preferred choice, but I do not care for it too much. I have already grown old enough to become indifferent to fame. This is why I prefer to go by my mortal name rather than the title imposed by others. I am still far from becoming a Star Designer. I think it is pure conceit for other Master Mech Designers to insist on being called by their titles when they have not yet earned their breakthroughs."

Master Laila Devos sounded like an old mech designer who did not care for subjective opinions and purely focused on objective results.

Ves kind of liked that because the Master Mech Designer did not come across as a Terran who relied on scheming, deception and trickery to work her way to the top. He was far more willing to hang around with Master Laila than any of the god pilots and Star Designers of red humanity.

"I don't have a clear understanding of your progress as a mech designer, Master. How far away are you from becoming a Star Designer?"

"Too far." Master Devos shook her head. "Until recently, I was unable to find any research direction that could lead me to become a Star Designer. In my 300 years of working with mechs, that is an abysmal situation. Mech designers who are a century younger than me have succeeded in breaking through, while I am still lingering as a Master Mech Designer. Much of that is due to my own choice, but that does not make me feel better about my lack of vertical progress."

"I don't quite understand."

"My situation resembles that of yours, but at a more advanced stage." The older woman clarified. "Just as you are a mech designer who dabbles in many different fields, I have spent a disproportionate amount of time in broadening my knowledge base so that I can miniaturize every component I come across. I have mastered all of the basic sciences and much of the more standard forms of high technology known to the Terran mech community. I have also delved into dozens of alien and more exotic techs. While I am satisfied with what I have learned, much of this falls under lateral progress."

"What does that mean?" Ves asked.

"It means that I have become a better Master Mech Designer, but have also come no closer to advancing to the rank of Star Designer."

"Ah. That sounds familiar."

"It should." Master Laila replied.

"Is it truly the case that all of this lateral progress is of little help to progressing your design philosophy?"

"That is a complicated question to answer, Ves. I have my own answer on this matter, but it is deeply personal to me. You should form your own ideas about this subject."

That was quite thoughtful of Master Laila. Ves realized that it was indeed for the best if he formed his own opinion about this sensitive topic.

"Wait." A thought came to his mind. "Your knowledge base is really broad. You even claimed that you understand a lot of universal and Terran high technologies. Does this mean you possess a mastery of Destroyer Technology?"

"I do possess a decent mastery in Destroyer Technology." Master Laila Devos confirmed. "This used to be classified information, but it is not that relevant anymore since the only source of Destroyer particles is in the old galaxy. The unveiling of the Oblivion Gates has given us hope of reestablishing a channel for Destroyer weapons, but it is impossible for the Terrans in the old galaxy to agree to transferring raw Destroyer particles to us. It is much more profitable for them to use their finished Destroyer arms as bargaining chips."

The Master Mech Designer made a good point. Knowing how to develop a Destroyer weapon wasn't as valuable as before in this dwarf galaxy.

The Terrans of the Red Ocean needed to establish a homegrown supply of Destroyer particles in order to make use of their exclusive expertise, but that did not appear to be happening anytime soon.

Ves diverted to another topic.

"Earlier, you said you saw no prospect of becoming a mech designer until recently. What changed? Is it hyper technology?"

"No." The woman shook her head. "Hyper technology opens up many new possibilities, but all it has done for my work is to introduce another source of volatility. Miniaturization has become considerably less safe when trying to bring different hyper materials into close proximity to each other."

"Then what else has caused you to find an opportunity to make a lot of progress in your design philosophy?"

"It is best to start with my desired end goal. Every good mech designer is working towards an ambitious result that can only be turned into reality when you have gained command over a fundamental rule or law. This is what Star Designers rely upon to design works that are impossible to replicate by lesser individuals. They can aptly be described as human gods who can impart a touch of their divinity into their works. Different from god pilots, the divine touch of Star Designers continues to linger in their products, thereby allowing them to retain their reality-defying properties at greater distances."

Ves already knew most of this information, but Master Laila provided additional context due to how she framed the subject.

"I see." He said with dawning comprehension. "The rule that you are trying to achieve a breakthrough with is miniaturization or something related to it. From your perspective, the ultimate work should be a successful instance of miniaturization that comes with no negative tradeoffs. It is kind of like designing a mech that is as powerful as a juggernaut, but continues to maintain the size of a standard mech."

Master Laila nodded. "That is an accurate guess. I have been working for centuries to realize this sort of outcome. You cannot imagine how many different scientific fields I have studied in order to make concrete steps in designing such an idealized mech. However, much of what I have learned over the years has not brought me much closer. There is moderate overlap and synergies between the fields that I have comprehended, but none of them can produce the result that I truly desire. That is why my progress has remained stagnant for so many years."

When Ves thought about how the Terran Master could possibly realize her dream of designing a mech with 'perfect' miniaturization, he suddenly connected the dots to a very recent event!

"Wait. I think I figured it out! You... the reason why you have found a new pathway towards becoming a Star Designer is because of our introduction to superdimensional matter! Its strange dimensional properties make it so that you can fit a lot more stuff in the same amount of space. A lot of matter is actually pushed into other dimensions, which is what makes them so special."

Master Devos finally began to look enthusiastic. "I have closely followed the publication of research articles on superdimensional matter. Much of the information in these academic articles has made it clear that while it is extremely difficult to shape superdimensional matter in the dimensions outside of the material realm, it is still possible to produce results when you work with transphasic or superdimensional tools. Do you understand the significance of this discovery? It means that it is theoretically possible to develop a laser pistol that fits in the palm of my hand but can actually fire an energy beam that is as powerful as one that is launched by a mech rifle!"

She was right. Ves had not put too much thought in what people could do with superdimensional matter because he did not specialize in this kind of stuff.

However, Master Laila Rebecca Devos happened to possess the right combination of expertise and passion to be able to develop highly advanced and useful applications of superdimensional matter!

The notion that superdimensional matter may be the key to developing her perfectly miniaturized mech meant that she must be extremely desperate to obtain samples!

Chapter 6753: Terran Trade

Superdimensional matter opened up a completely new branch of science and technology.

Phasewater technology only encompassed a small portion of superdimensional theory.

Theoretical scientists had already made strides in figuring out the basic principles of superdimensional theory by conducting a lot of experiments on phasewater, but they had very little to work with in the past.

Previously, the scientific community had gotten stuck in their research into phasewater technology. Researchers had been basing their increasingly more complicated theories out of baseless assumptions and unproven assertions.

They continued to spin one new theory after another, but the problem was that much of their explanations were built on top of unstable foundations. By deriving a new theory out of a set of unproven theories, these researchers dabbled more in fantasy than grounded science.

It became nearly impossible for them to attain any further breakthroughs in their studies due to the lack of confirmations of their theories!

Phasewater was incredibly versatile, but it was only a single resource. Scientists had already theorized the existence of many other types of superdimensional matter.

People even suspected that several if not all Star Designers secretly acquired samples of superdimensional matter from one source or another.

If this was true, then they certainly never disclosed any information about it. So long as superdimensional matter remained impossible or prohibitively expensive to acquire, nobody expected for red humanity to make any breakthroughs in this exotic branch of science.

Then the Red Cabal started to hand out Saint Piercer arms to greater phase lords.

Red humanity almost couldn't believe that the aliens possessed clear technological superiority in such a powerful scientific field.

Humans had long assumed that they were always ahead of their opponents in almost every branch of science aside from phasewater technology.

Even then, red humanity's scientists, engineers and mech designers were so incredibly competent that they had rapidly caught up to their alien foes!

Many people suspected that the cosmopolitans played a key role in helping the phase whales of the Red Cabal develop their Saint Piercer arms, but that did not change the fact that the native aliens enjoyed a monopoly on these types of goods!

It was therefore extremely good that Ketis had chosen to open a dimensional portal to the Blue Dimension.

Ever since those scientists had gotten their hands on a huge variety of samples of superdimensional matter, they suddenly gained a lot of answers to their questions, allowing them to complete their theoretical models and dispel a lot of mysteries!

All of this meant that red humanity at large finally gained a proper introduction in the field of superdimensional science.

Unfortunately, despite the enormous quantities of mostly low-grade superdimensional matter flowing out of the 24-hour dimension breach, very little ended up flowing in the pockets of the Terrans and the Rubarthans.

The Larkinson Clan and the Red Three claimed the bulk of all of the juicy superdimensional resources.

The government of Davute and other miscellaneous forces managed to harvest the remaining scraps.

Perhaps the Devos Ancient Clan might be able to purchase samples of structure-grade and hull-grade superdimensional matter from these parties, but it was probably impossible to obtain anything better!

Ves knew what Master Laila Devos wanted.

"Our clan is currently shipping much of our haul of superdimensional resources to the New Constantinople System." He said. "The goods should be arriving any day now. While we have already allocated much of our batch of superdimensional matter to different projects, I can spare a few samples to your clan."

The Master smiled more earnestly than before. "Does that include armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter as well?"

"Yes, but only a few kilograms at most. I cannot spare more of it until Ketis is able to open up a second portal to the Blue Dimension."

"That is more than enough, Ves. Let alone a few kilograms, a handful of grams is more than enough to verify many of my conjectures and refine my theories further. With the amounts that you have promised, I can move beyond theories and begin with applying them in basic applications. This is immensely useful to me because I can already begin to experiment with ideas on how to fabricate true superdimensional constructs. Even if the supply of superdimensional matter becomes more abundant in the future, I still appreciate the time savings. Given how much your gift can make a difference in my

research, you deserve compensation from us. What would you like in exchange for donating your samples?"

Neither of the two were stupid. Ves readily gifted the samples of higher grades of superdimensional matter because he could afford it and because he knew without a doubt that the Devos Ancient Clan would never accept it without offering fair compensation.

"I need your help with incorporating armor-grade superdimensional matter into the special armor system for the Riot Mark III Project." Ves explained. "We previously planned to commission a Master Mech Designer from the RA Supremacist Faction to develop an armor system that can resist superdimensional attacks, but from what I have heard from you, I think it is a much better idea if we rely on your contributions instead."

"I am honored to receive your confidence in this matter. I can tell you that while I do not specialize in armor systems, I possess more than enough experience and expertise in this area. I can also promise you that I will be able to propose a more refined implementation of superdimensional armor. It will be more effective than covering your expert mech with sheets of unprocessed superdimensional matter."

"That is good to hear, because the special armor system that I have envisioned for the Riot is by far the most important aspect of this high-ranking mech. I want it to be as powerful and resistant towards damage as possible."

"Your clan deserves more than just my participation in a single mech design project." Master Laila said. "If you can promise to supply my ancient clan with superdimensional matter on a more regular and consistent basis, we can form a more elaborate trade agreement."

Ves hesitated for a moment. "I am not sure how often we will be able to open portals to the Blue Dimension. I am not opposed to forming a new trade agreement, but it will have to be tentative with the assumption that supply is not entirely consistent."

"That is not a problem on our end."

The two mech designers began to conduct an impromptu negotiation. Neither of them were interested in squeezing out every possible advantage out of this deal.

The Larkinson Clan needed more friends that could be relied upon in good times as well as bad times. Ves therefore did not set too high a price on superdimensional matter. He also made sure that the actual prices in their agreement was not constant, but could vary depending on market trends.

At the same time, the Devos Ancient Clan clearly wanted to develop closer relations with the Larkinson Clan. To that end, Master Laila offered generous compensation in MTA credits and a selection of rare and strategic resources.

The two therefore came to a consensus on the key points fairly quickly for that reason. Neither of them were interested in posturing or wasting time.

"We can leave the details to our negotiators." Master Laila said. "You have expressed interest in exchanging sensitive and proprietary tech from us. I cannot arbitrarily agree to conduct a trade on every tech that we rely upon to maintain our competitive advantage in human society, but you have earned enough trust that I can ask our councils and higher authorities to debate on the matter. I must warn you that even if we agree to trade you our secrets, the price in superdimensional materials will be high."

"That is fair." Ves conceded. "You Terrans have developed a lot of good stuff. I thought that you would insist harder on keeping all of it in your hands."

"We used to be much more protective about our secrets, but... when the native aliens are on the verge of assaulting the fifth defensive band, we must do more to ensure the continued survival of the Terran Alliance and our race as a whole. It would be helpful to know what exclusive technologies you wish to exchange."

"Well, for starters, I would like to learn the secrets to Destroyer Technology."

Master Laila raised her eyebrows in mild surprise. "It is not surprising for you to develop a fascination for it, but I am afraid you will not be able to gain much out of it. Destroyer Technology is useless to learn if you do not have a supply of Destroyer particles. Before you ask, I do not possess any knowledge on how to produce it. I can only teach you how to infuse and compress Destroyer particles into weapon prototypes and slowly combine them into proper Destroyer weapons."

Ves grinned. "That is enough. I acknowledge that it is likely I won't have a use for this tech for a long time, but I think the expertise in itself will lend me well in developing other kinds of weapons. Besides, who knows whether we will be able to find another source of Destroyer particles in the Red Ocean."

He actually had a few promising ideas about this problem.

One potential idea was to work together with the Destroyer of Worlds to produce Destroyer particles.

Ves was convinced that Divine Irene Mox absolutely possessed the right domain for it. She either pretended not to be able to produce Destroyer particles because she did not want to provoke the Terrans, or she was lacking critical ingredients or recipes to succeed.

Either way, none of these were insurmountable problems. He was even willing to broker a deal between the Terrans and the Rubarthans if that was what it took for the Destroyer of Worlds to become a new producer of Destroyer particles in the Red Ocean!

Another potential idea that Ves was entertaining as of late was to find a dimension that contained Destroyer particles.

This was not a certain result. It was only a possibility. The Dimension Telescope could only observe the 20th to the 1000th dimension at this time.

What was the probability that Destroyer particles happened to occur naturally in one of them? Not high.

Ves or Ketis needed to pay a whopping 1000 Ascension Points to unlock access from the 1001th dimension to the 10,000th dimension!

Even then, all of that spending may be in vain as there was no guarantee that Destroyer particles could exist in all of those dimensions either!

Still, as long as such a dimension definitely existed, it was probably worthwhile to locate it and open up a dimension breach!

Harvesting the particles may be difficult as anything that entered the deadly dimension might get destroyed on the spot.

However, as long as they made enough preparations, it should be possible for Destroyer-resistant shuttles and mechs to harvest enough particles to make this ordeal worth all the cost!

This was why Ves was willing to trade precious superdimensional matter for the secrets of Destroyer Tech.

As a bonus, Ves also suspected that there may be parallels between Destroyer weapons and D-arms.

The principles between producing Destroyer weapons and Demoncasting may be entirely different, but they both dealt with stuffing dangerous things inside weapons to empower them way beyond their original parameters.

Ves hoped to improve his Demoncasting or maybe Demonforging capabilities by applying any relevant lessons from Destroyer Tech.

There was no need for him to explain this to Master Laila, though.

"What other technologies do you seek to learn from our ancient clan?" Master Laila asked.

"Well, you Terrans have made a lot of strides in the development of biomechs. I would like to receive more extensive knowledge and tutoring on how to design more advanced biomechs, particularly ones made out of wood-based materials."

"Ah, you want to gain more control over the Arboreal Project?"

"That, and more. Is there anything special that you can offer in particular that will enable me to design much better Woodsap mechs?"

Chapter 6754: Mecher and Terran Biomech Development

Biomechs did not manage to attain widespread adoption, but they still managed to carve out a niche in the mech market.

Compared to third-class and second-class biomechs, first-class biomechs enjoyed considerably more advantages.

When money no longer became as serious of an impediment as before, there were plenty of first-raters that were willing to invest big to obtain exotic and exciting organic machines.

The Terrans, though not known to be particularly enthusiastic about deviating from established trends, unusually possessed a greater interest in making use of biomechs than other first-raters.

Compared to the Rubarthans and other first-raters, the Terrans possessed a greater appreciation for nature and organic life.

This was mainly due to their obsession with Old Earth and propagating the original ecosystem of the human race across the stars.

The biotech industry of the Greater Terran United Confederation and by extension the Terran Alliance enjoyed greater development.

Perhaps only certain factions of the MTA and RA could rival the Terrans in terms of biotech development, but the mechers generally pursued different ideals.

Both groups possessed different resources, perspectives, goals, rights and cultures. This led to a divergence in how they approached the development of biomechs.

"Biomechs are largely a curiosity to most mechers." Master Laila Rebecca Devos patiently explained to Ves. "The MTA and RA have made no secret that they wish to master all of the knowledge and methods related to mech design. Most mechers therefore wish to grasp the secrets to designing biomechs without actually caring about them. Only a small proportion of mech designers from the Mech Supremacist Faction, Transhumanist Faction, Longevity Faction and smaller factions possess any actual enthusiasm towards biotechnology and organic machines."

"That is understandable." Ves looked thoughtful. "So how do the mechers approach biomechs?"

"You should already possess a basic understanding of how the Transhumanist Faction views biomechs. They are obsessed with blurring the lines between human and biomech. The Transhumanists view the Evolution Witch as one of the most ideal outcomes to strive for. Even if they cannot become god pilots themselves, the Transhumanists still endeavor to develop solutions to achieve integration between human and biomech."

"The Transhumanists became really happy once I unveiled my Carmine System to them." Ves briefly smirked.

"Indeed." The old Master smirked back. "The Transhumanists have lodged many complaints about our exclusive collaboration on the Arboreal Project. They are none too pleased that the first Carmine biomech in development is a Terran product."

Ves shrugged. "I am already cooperating with the Transhumanist Faction on many different fronts. They should learn how to share."

"That is a tall order to ask from the mechers."

"I already have a good idea of what the Transhumanists seek in biomechs, but what about the Mech Supremacists? They are not so obsessed with turning themselves into human biomechs."

"That is true, Ves. The Mech Supremacists value the unique strategic capabilities that biomechs open up. Their biomech doctrine is largely based on the pioneering works of the Grandmother of Biomechs."

Chellie Askadi was one of the older and more famous Star Designers of the human race. She was around 370 years old and had been one of the first true biomech designers to come into prominence.

She faced a lot of skepticism, hindrances, opposition and other foul play due to pushing a vision of mechs that disgusted a lot of mech insiders.

Whether it was in the past or present, there were many people that simply could not fathom the idea of piloting a mech that looked like a human exobeast that was one moment away from going out of control!

To be fair, these suspicions were not entirely groundless. Enough incidents had taken place where experimental biomechs inexplicably gained minds of their own and started indiscriminate fights.

However, properly designed biomechs that had been grown using standard procedures rarely if ever went out of control. The MTA had continually amended its rules and regulations until they ended up with a formula that minimized situations where biomechs went out of control.

That rehabilitated the reputation of biomechs somewhat, but they had never been able to get rid of the taint up to the present day.

The Grandmother of Biomechs largely worked in the time before this shift took place. She experienced pushback at every level, yet she took her hits without complaint and continued her efforts to impart value into biomechs.

Though all of her peers and other critics continued to disparage her and her seemingly foolhardy endeavors throughout her career, everything changed when she unexpectedly managed to advance to the rank of Star Designer!

In a time where Star Designers had not become as numerous as today, each and every mech designer who had managed to reach this exalted rank received near-universal respect and admiration.

Whatever sins and shortcomings they accrued in the past often became irrelevant the moment they transcended their mortality.

One of the reasons why this was the case was because mortals did not dare to criticize the works and ideas of higher existences.

Anyone with a sense of intelligence in their heads would definitely keep their mouths shut unless they truly believed in their cause.

Chellie Askadi went from a pariah into a superstar virtually overnight.

Although her ascension failed to push biomechs into the mainstream, she nonetheless contributed immensely to the begrudging acceptance of biomechs as an established if still somewhat niche option in the mech market.

Biomechs therefore avoided the fate of juggernauts. The latter failed to gain the support of a Star Designer or a broad coalition of advocates. This was the reason why juggernauts became virtually extinct in the later centuries of the Age of Mechs while biomechs still managed to maintain a small but healthy presence.

Though the proponents of biomechs failed to make their products more popular, they at least managed to convince most people to pinch their noses and tolerate the existence of these squishy and freaky organic machines.

"Are you familiar with the design philosophy of the Grandmother of Biomechs?"

"I do, Master. From what I have read, she is really big on Biofusion Technology. She doesn't consider biomechs as standalone organic machines. She instead sees them as 'children' that are biologically linked to their 'mothers'. In this case, the latter can refer to bioships, biofortresses or even actual living designer beasts. The Grandmother always designed her children as an intrinsic part of their mothers. These two are part of the same package. This is because every child can seamlessly fuse with their mothers whenever necessary."

This was similar to how Titania operated back when she was a giant astral beast!

The 'mothers' usually consisted of organic fleet carriers, but they were also known to come into the forms of fully functional designer beasts that were uniquely adapted to particularly difficult and hostile environments.

The Grandmother of Biomechs became most famous for designing titanic monstrosities that looked as if they came straight out of myths.

She brought life to designer beasts as varied as enormous volcanic turtles, jellyfish that were over 10 kilometers long, astral beasts that fed off the minerals found in an asteroid belt, indescribable mollusks that could operate inside gas giants and more.

These creatures were not only adapted to support the operations of biomechs, but were also able to survive the harsh conditions of hostile planetary environments and deadly hazardous regions!

The Grandmother of Biomechs clearly relied on the fact that biomechs and bioconstructs happened to score better in these aspects to give her works their *raison d'être*.

"It is regrettable that the Grandmother of Biomechs had not managed to immigrate to the Red Ocean before the Great Severing took place." Master Laila Devos sighed. "The MTA maintained strict quotas on who was allowed to enter the Red Ocean first in order to prevent the Milky Way from hollowing out too quickly. Besides, few individuals felt any urgency over the matter. The Grandmother of Biomechs likely waited in line for the next rotation of Star Designers to occur. Before that was supposed to happen, she could easily import much of the phasewater and novel biological samples that she needed to conduct her research in the comfort of her biolabs in the old galaxy."

From what it sounded like, the Grandmother of Biomechs would have been fantastic at helping red humanity adapt to the hostile environments of different dimensions.

"Have any of her proteges managed to enter the Red Ocean in time?" Ves inquired.

"There should be. The MTA imposed much less control over the movements of its Master Mech Designers. The Grandmother of Biomechs should have been able to dispatch at least one of her teams to the new frontier. Only a mech designer who understands her work well possesses the qualifications to act as her agent and procure the right samples on her behalf."

Maybe Ves should get in touch with these biomech specialists. He had certainly grown incredibly interested in how his design philosophy could synergize with the most impressive and controversial works of the Grandmother of Biomechs.

"I have a good understanding on how the Transhumanists and Mech Supremacists like to approach their biomechs. What about Terrans such as yourself? What aspect of biomechs are you trying to innovate the most?"

"There are several directions of research that the Terran biomech industry has made strides in the past few centuries. The most prominent among them is Terran Rapid Adaptation Biotechnology."

"I take it that it has to do with the ability for biomechs to rapidly change their organic makeup on the battlefield." Ves immediately guessed.

"That is correct. Biomechs are most famous for being able to regenerate quickly on the battlefield. What my fellow Terrans have tried to do is to extend this advantage into in-combat adaptations. If you encounter an enemy that employs long-ranged laser weapons, you would want to deploy mechs that are able to resist thermal damage. If you are confronting an enemy that fields swordsman mechs, you would prefer your biomechs to be able to resist physical damage, particularly slashing and piercing attacks. If you are confronting an entrenched company of heavy artillery mechs, you would want to field light mechs whose armor systems are completely optimized to resist explosive and concussive damage."

Ves easily comprehended what this strange tech was all about.

"I can see how that can work, but aren't they trying to do the same job as modular mech platforms? Also, aren't first-class multipurpose mechs supposed to be the universal solutions to all of those situations?"

"You know as well as I do that first-class multipurpose mechs are not truly universally strong in every situation, Ves. They are mainly popular because they can fare at least decently well in every combat scenario. They can still be defeated by more specialized mechs in many different circumstances. As for the difference between conventional modular mech platforms and rapidly adapting biomechs is that the latter come with a significantly lower logistical footprint. The former demands you to carry large amounts of optional and sometimes redundant parts."

Ves was not unfamiliar with this problem. "That is one of the biggest pains of fielding the Bright Warrior Mark III's in our clan."

"The large collection of spare parts for modular mech platforms takes up valuable space on a carrier that could have been used to accommodate other mechs. Rapidly adapting biomechs are meant to cope against many different enemies by relying on the mass that is already contained within their organic frames. At most, their motherships

may contain a common pool of nutrient stock that they can absorb to replenish their depleted minerals and organic tissue."

"I see how that can be more efficient in terms of space and maintenance." Ves understood. "However, these rapidly adapting biomechs try so hard to be versatile that their designs are probably filled with compromises. They cannot utilize as many weapon systems and their variable defenses are probably less effective than fixed defenses."

The old Master nodded in acknowledgement. "These are all valid complaints of Rapid Adaptation Biotechnology, but as long as you are fighting against enemies on a smaller scale or do not make use of a rich variety of weapon systems, our biomechs are often able to gain an advantage."

Chapter 6755: The World Tree Project

The research directions favored by the mechers and the Terrans said much about their scope and ambitions.

The Mech Trade Association favored huge layouts and grand ambitions. The mechers were not content with developing incremental improvements. They sought to reinvent the market for biomechs and fundamentally change humanity's relationships with biotechnology. The Mech Supremacists and Transhumanists did not hesitate to invest huge amounts of money and resources to realize their ambitious layouts.

The Terrans meanwhile remained more grounded in their research and ambitions. They had big dreams as well, but they did not have as much room to squander so many resources on research and development. This was why they largely sought to develop biomechs that possessed enough practical value to earn a profit within a decade.

Ves personally liked the approach adopted by the Terrans. Its biomechs were at least a lot more practical and affordable than the crazy stuff developed by the mechers. Even if Terran biomechs were not affordable in an absolute sense, the cost-benefit ratio was at least within acceptable bounds.

The mechers of the old galaxy clearly paid less attention to this parameter. They had money and resources to spare. What they did not have was better mechs, so they were willing to invest massive sums just to produce marginal improvements.

Although the MTA was probably one of the least efficient organizations in the Milky Way Galaxy, Ves and pretty much every other mech designer was still grateful that the mechers invested so much manpower and resources into these wild ideas.

This was because the research and applications that emerged out of all of these research projects usually managed to trickle down to the masses.

The mechers clearly did not share all of their research results, and it could take one to four mech generations for them to generously pass on a fraction of their new technological advances to the general audience.

Even so, the MTA still ensured that the mech industry became more and more sophisticated with every passing year. The development of mechs had never stalled or lost momentum at any point during the entirety of the Age of Mechs.

One of the reasons why the mechers were continually able to keep mechs fresh and exciting was exactly because they conducted research that no one else dared. There were many innovations that could only be attained with immense capital or plans that stretched for half a century.

No other institution was willing to entertain such research aside from the only superorganization that was completely dedicated towards mech.

"You may not be aware of this, but the Arboreal Project that you are developing in cooperation with our biomech designers and biotech research teams already incorporate minor design applications derived from our Rapid Adaptation Biotechnology." Master Laila Rebecca Devos informed Ves.

That took Ves by surprise. "Really?"

"Do not harbor any illusions about it. Our work cannot be considered a true implementation of Rapid Adaptation Biotechnology. We are only able to apply minor improvements on your TE Wood-based biomechs whenever it is convenient. If you want to design a true rapidly adapting biomech, then you will need to start from the ground up and adopt a different approach towards biomech design. It is currently difficult to design such a product by using bioengineered wood as your primary material. Flesh is faster, more malleable and easier to program."

"I see. That makes sense."

Wood was more rigid and inflexible than flesh. This made the former harder to change and less prone to adaptations.

While there were many ways to make wood more malleable, the costs outweighed the benefits.

"Do you Terrans have any biomech design applications that are actually useful to the Arboreal Project?" Ves asked with a touch of impatience.

"There is." Master Laila said in a measured tone. "It is one of the reasons why we support your initiative to develop a biomech based on wood. The tech is highly contentious and it is not one we wish to reveal to the public at this date. If you had not earned our trust, I would not mention it to you at all, because it is not a capability that we are eager to share to the public."

Ves started to have ideas about what this secret tech may be. "Is it an innovation that violates a taboo?"

"Yes, and not in a small manner. It is classified tech that we have only ever thought about using it against the native aliens, and even then we are reluctant to permit it because it will harm us as well in the long term. The main reason why we have taken it out of our secret archives and updated it is because we may not have another choice."

Master Laila Devos decided to show Ves what she meant instead of describing the secret weapon with her own words.

The projection of a typical planet showed up. Ves did not recognize it, but he could see that it featured a mix of greenery and urban development. The foreign architecture clearly showed that the planet was occupied by an alien race. It was unlikely that the biosphere was compatible with the human race.

One day, a Terran fleet arrived in orbit.

Instead of engaging in orbital bombardment or sending down mechs to raid the alien cities, the fleet instead launched a fat torpedo that plunged into a lake before drilling through the bottom.

Nothing seemed to change at first. It was only after time went by that earthquakes started to occur. Their frequency rose quickly. Eventually, entire tectonic plates started to shift, causing apocalyptic damage to most urban settlements.

Eventually, a massive tree burst out of the lake that used to absorb the fat torpedo!

It turned out that it contained a massive bioengineered seed that had taken root inside the planet. Once the seed had sprouted, it had voraciously absorbed much of the surrounding nutrients to grow at a rapid speed.

The earthquakes that rippled across the planet were all caused by the rapid growth of all of its roots and the cavities that emerged after so much underground water and minerals got sucked away.

This ultimately produced a gigantic tree that thrust up in the skies and almost seemed to breach the atmosphere!

The growth of this gigantic tree absolutely devastated all life on the planet. The earthquakes, the depletion of minerals and the dramatic disruptions to the climate generated so many mass extinction events that the globe had practically been cleansed of all life!

Almost nothing of value was left by the time the tree had grown immensely tall and thick.

Its size and mass had already exceeded the scope of most moons and already comprised a significant fraction of the planet.

Ves was both horrified and fascinated by this vision.

"Does this have anything to do with biomechs at all? So far, all I have seen is a weapon of mass destruction. The scale of devastation is only slightly less than what the Destroyer of Worlds has wrought on alien planets."

"Wait for it, Ves. This display has not yet reached its end."

The enormous tree began to wilt. Enormous leaves the size of battleships came loose and floated in the wind before they fell in many different locations, some even reaching the opposite side of the planet!

At the same time, the trunk visibly began to shrink as the tree gave back its resources to the planet it spawned from. The globe was undergoing a profound transformation. Even its roots began to break down and return what it had plundered from the underground environment.

Soon enough, a pristine planet emerged at the end of this profound transformation. The massive tree had become much diminished by the end of this impressive display, but was still large enough to tower over the surface.

Many of the ships of the Terran fleet descended on the surface. They released colonists that readily began to build settlements on the surface. The human colonists did not bother to wear vacsuits or hazard suits because they could easily breathe the local air.

"This tree... terraforms planets?"

"The World Tree embodies both destruction and renewal." Master Devos solemnly affirmed. "We can bioprogram it to perform many different assignments."

This became obvious when a part of the trunk opened up. An entire city made out of wood emerged!

Millions of Terran colonists readily moved into the city and could immediately make use of the facilities without needing to install any additional hardware.

All the way up to a crowd, a lot of leaves and branches parted to the side in order to make space for a huge flat surface that was made out of dense mineral-heavy wood.

Dozens of starships descended from orbit and landed on the flat crown.

Once they opened up their hatches, a surprising development took place.

Wooden biomechs emerged from hidden cargo elevators!

The so-called World Tree appeared to have produced each of these bioconstructs. They were all controlled by AIs for now, but Ves could easily imagine human mech pilots taking them over.

This was not all. Existing biomechs, both damaged and undamaged, exited the landed carriers and entered the World Tree. They soon emerged from the crown. Each of the bioconstructs had received comprehensive repairs and upgrades that made them as good as new!

Due to the fact that the planet's resources were likely different from the ones used to build the original biomechs, the material compositions had become more difficult. Even so, the biotech mastered by the Terrans allowed them to integrate many different materials in the same biomechs while keeping their performance and structure surprisingly consistent.

When the carrier vessels were done with replenishing their biomechs, they set, but not before loading in another massive seed that was concentrated with critical minerals and other nutrients needed to grow a World Tree on another planet!

The World Tree finally shrunk even further. It had diverted a large amount of mass into large wooden growths that eventually morphed into wooden bioships.

Through the vessels did not look as solid, reliable and well-built as proper warships, these grown biowarships still possessed most of the necessary parts needed to traverse the stars and assist with waging war.

Human crews arrived and installed all of the necessary hardware that couldn't be produced by the World Tree. This included superdrives and other pieces of high technology that could only be produced through special means.

The new bioships soon began to lift off the World Tree and joined the fleet waiting in orbit. The expanded armada subsequently moved out in order to conquer another planet.

"Amazing, is it not? When I learned about it for the first time, I became fascinated with the possibility of using it to turn all alien planets into human ones."

"It is certainly a big invention." Ves said. "I wonder why you Terrans developed it in the first place."

"It is not difficult to deduce that we developed the World Tree in preparation to make use of it to conquer alien territories as quickly and effectively as possible. If we entered a second Age of Conquest, we thought about relying on the World Tree Project to rapidly accelerate our conquests. The World Tree allows us to conquer, destroy, terraform, extract resources and produce new mechs and other war materiel much faster and more efficiently than any of the alternatives. It is a means for us to conquer vast amounts of alien territories while keeping logistical disruptions at a minimum. One of its greatest advantages is that it can theoretically allow an invasion fleet to continually push into enemy territory without needing to return to friendly space in order to replenish lost mechs, supplies and possibly even warships. Each World Tree planted on a resource-rich planet can solve many of its problems."

What a horrible but ambitious invention. Even though it encompassed way more than biomechs alone, it showed that the Terrans were not incapable of devising and realizing big big plans!

Chapter 6756: The Frightening Terran Superweapon

"This World Tree Project... is too huge." Ves spoke in a whisper. "It works incredibly fast. It is effective on all sorts of alien planets. It is capable of producing large amounts of organic mechs and starships regardless of local environmental conditions. It can even reproduce by producing spare World Tree Seeds, thereby opening up the possibility for rapid proliferation. The World Tree is able to account for so many variables with such perfect coordination and decision-making that... I cannot imagine that any random Terran R&D team can produce such an amazing bioconstruct. This... is the work of a Star Designer, right?"

"You should already be able to guess who is responsible for realizing the World Tree Project." Master Laila Devos said.

There weren't many Star Designers that had a strong penchant for biotechnology and trees.

"This should be the personal work of the Dryad Queen."

The Terran Master Mech Designer nodded in confirmation.

"The original World Tree Seeds are grand works. It is difficult to shape organic products into masterworks, let alone grand works, so it is all the more impressive that the Dryad Queen is able to develop them at all. Each original World Tree Seed is a strategic weapon of the highest order. They are incredibly versatile and can learn how to work with new materials such as phasewater and superdimensional materials as long as they are fed with the relevant data. The derived World Tree Seeds lack this intelligence and improvisation capabilities. They must rely on human instructions or data imported from the original World Tree Seeds to solve problems that are not included in their databases."

Amazing. Ves had not connected the dots, but now that he understood that the World Tree Project was the brainchild of the Dryad Queen, it all made sense.

Only she could develop such a massive and ambitious superweapon!

Though Ves knew a lot less about the Dryad Queen than other Star Designers due to maintaining a lower profile, he remembered that she harbored strong animosity towards the Big Two.

"This World Tree Project... is probably one of the contingencies that you Terrans originally relied upon to guard against the Big Two, am I right?"

"Your guess is as accurate as ever. If the worst outcome took place where the mechers and the fleters sought to eradicate the first-rate superstates once and for all, we planned to take our World Tree Seeds and plant them in human space as opposed to alien space."

That was diabolical. It was one of the many extreme measures the Terrans had prepared to deter the Mech Trade Association from eradicating the Greater Terran United Confederation.

"I guess that is not the case in the Red Ocean."

"The native aliens pose a much greater existential threat to us than the Red Association and the Red Fleet." Master Laila Devos confirmed. "If the war deteriorates past a certain point, we will dispatch many suicide fleets into alien space. Each of them will carry at least several World Tree Seeds. Their sole mission is to create the longest trail of destruction in alien space. None are allowed to turn back. They must rely on the resources, biomechs and other supplies generated by the World Trees to sustain and prolong their campaigns as much as possible."

"That is... quite extreme."

"The planets they drain of resources may not even be converted into human-compatible biomes. The alien globes will be drained completely of their nutrients in order to deny our enemies to the best possible extent."

"There aren't enough spacers and mech pilots to make use of all of that organic hardware."

"This is why it is possible to automate them." Master Laila Devos replied. "As long as there are at least a handful of key personnel in charge of the controls and key systems, we can mitigate much of the risks associated with extensive automation. It is not a perfect solution, though. The mechers and the fleters are capable of sabotaging or subverting them if they put effort into their attempts. The native aliens lack such capabilities, so it is much safer to rely on automated mechs and warships to wage war against their territories. If necessary, the propagation of World Trees can be completely automated, but this is a last resort that is only reserved for the direst of circumstances."

If the native aliens collapsed the fifth defensive band and began to invade the hinterland of human-occupied space on a large scale, Ves had no doubt that the Terrans would deploy this doomsday weapon without any shadow of a doubt!

He could even see how the World Trees synergized with Gaia. The Terrans must have proceeded to update and modify their World Tree Seeds to cooperate with the True God.

Ves felt as if he finally understood the entire context of the Arboreal Project. It turned out that the Terrans valued wood-based Carmine biomechs so much because of their compatibility with the World Tree Project!

"The World Tree Project can preserve the future of the Terran people, culture and nation far better if we have access to Carmine biomechs." Master Laila Devos frankly explained to Ves. "Any norm can pilot them, though they will have to rely heavily on automation if they want to become combat effective with little to no training. This synergizes well with the fact that Carmine biomechs that are specially designed around our World Trees can be produced, repaired and upgraded with minimal traditional infrastructure."

She revealed the most ambitious goal of the Arboreal Project.

"You want the Arboreal Project to enable your side to rapidly militarize your population." Ves figured out. "You draft billions of civilians, send off to planets devoured by World Trees and force them to pilot the freshly produced Woodsap mechs. Even if they are not made out of TE Wood, they are likely made out of the best materials the planet has to offer. This will allow you to dispatch a huge amount of poorly trained but incredibly numerous mech forces to many other hostile star systems."

If human space no longer became safe anymore, then civilians might as well make themselves useful by volunteering to become Carmine mech pilots!

The World Tree Seeds completely allowed the Terrans to skip the cumbersome process of colonizing planets and building industries. They just needed to plan a very big seed and wait long enough for it to sprout and start producing a huge amount of bioconstructs!

Carmine biomechs such as Woodsap mechs were the final piece of the puzzle that completed the grand design.

The World Tree Project was still devastating without them, but the addition of wooden biomechs that could easily be piloted by any human individual allowed the Terrans to make their enemies bleed a lot more!

"World Trees can also be used defensively." Master Laila informed Ves. "If the native aliens have breached the frontlines and have begun to tear into Terran space, then we are ready to plant the World Tree Seeds that we have prepared on multiple planets. Even if we program them to minimize the destruction to the environment, damage to existing infrastructure and the ecosystem will still remain extensive. The population must be evacuated into orbit or to designated safe spaces prior to planting the World

Tree Seeds. After that, the World Tree will leverage much of the resources of the planet to fortify and build a massive amount of arms to repel alien invaders. Much of evacuated Terrans will either be evacuated by transferring them onto cheap wooden bioships with basic FTL travel capabilities, or will be drafted into war."

"Why the insistence on forcing your untrained civilians to fight the aliens in person rather than leave the job to automated mechs and other bioconstructs?"

The older Master Mech Designer's face grew stern. "If we are too cowardly to stand and fight for our ideals and our Terran nation, then we have already succumbed to weakness. The death toll will be astronomical, but those of us who survive will possess the grit and determination to keep our Terran heritage alive."

Spoken like a true leader who knew without a shadow of a doubt that she was far too important and high in rank to ever risk her life on the battlefield like all of those poor Terran schmucks.

Many drafted Terran civilians would likely be assigned to man various stations in the bioships or defensive fortifications if they possessed the right expertise.

If they did not possess any relevant skills to do those jobs, then they would probably be put into the cockpit of a Carmine biomech and be told to pilot their semi-autonomous machines into battle!

"Since this is your true goal, is there any point in working with TE Wood, then?" Ves asked with a frown. "Are Gaia Trees even necessary?"

"Do not discount the value of your work, Ves. The Arboreal Project as you have envisioned will be the most elite and premium version of the wooden Carmine biomechs that we intend to field. The Gaia Trees that are currently in development derive a small part of their design from the World Tree Project, but they are still fundamentally different creations. Gaia Trees cannot be grown by draining the nutrients of other planets. They can only be grown while fed with large quantities of phasewater, Solus Gas and many other high-end materials. They solely exist to support the operation of the Arboreal Project. We are merely planning to derive dozens if not hundreds of variants of Carmine biomechs that substitute TE Wood with other material compositions."

Ves grew a bit more mollified after hearing that. He actually found the Terran scheme to be incredibly ambitious, inventive and promising.

No matter whether the Terrans intend to deploy their World Trees offensively or defensively, they could always count on this trump card to ignite the full warmaking potential of any planet, especially if it already had an abundant human population!

Ves took a deep breath. As much as he felt grateful for Master Laila Devos for revealing such a massive secret to him, he felt that they had strayed way beyond the original topic.

"It is incredibly interesting to learn about this World Tree Project of yours, but... this stuff is too high-end for me. I am looking for more practical exclusive tech that I can incorporate in my future biomech designs. That stuff about Rapid Adaptation Biotechnology is much more interesting."

Master Laila smiled. "Do not be so quick to dismiss the relevance of the World Tree Project. You have much to offer to us. We welcome your concessions. As long as you are willing to trade large quantities of superdimensional matter, mech design commissions and contribute to a number of our secret projects, we are willing to supply you with a single World Tree Seed."

Ves almost shot out of his chair when he heard this offer. "What?! Really?!"

"Ah, do not get too excited. Our original World Tree Seeds are too precious to trade, so we can only offer you a derived World Tree Seed. The two operate on the same scale, but the latter requires more active human direction and control in order to operate as intended."

"Can the latter produce more World Tree Seeds?"

"Yes, but there are many requirements." The Terran Master answered. "A new seed can only be grown on a resource-rich planet and takes a certain amount of time. The third-generation and subsequent generations of seeds will also be lesser in capabilities. Exceptions do exist. If you plant a seed on a planet that is rich in high-grade minerals and other precious resources, much of that can be used to grow a superior seed rather than strengthen the existing World Tree. You can also actively modify the World Tree or World Tree Seed with your own technological applications. You can design your World Tree as long as you possess the right amount of courage and expertise."

"And completely piss off the mechers and the fleeters by owning and making use of a biological weapon of mass destruction." Ves sardonically remarked.

"Taboos are a relic of the previous age. Now that the Red War has come this far, I would have expected you to possess a more enlightened view towards the use of superweapons."

"I still want to maintain friendly relations with the Red Association and the Red Fleet, Master. Besides, I don't think you will set a low price for a derived World Tree Seed. I am not sure whether I am willing to make this sacrifice."

"Then let us explore the possibilities further..."

Chapter 6757: Derived Seeds

The power of a World Tree Seed was enormous.

It could do so much stuff. Unlike other superweapons, its organic nature meant that its ability to create was just as powerful as its ability to destroy!

A World Tree could extract any planet with resources to produce a multitude of wooden biomechs and bioships. It could also be used to terraform the entire globe in a hurry. It could further be used to create entire settlements, either on the ground or inside its enormous trunk.

So long as Ves had a World Tree Seed in his possession, he would never have to be afraid of lacking a means to erect a colonized planet!

Depending on how extensively Ves was willing to drain the ecosystem and resources of a planet, he could instruct his World Tree to build enough settlements and basic infrastructure to house millions if not billions of people.

If he did not care about preserving the ecosystem of the planet, he could use the World Tree to drain every scrap of highly valuable resources from the globe and use it to produce a large amount of biomechs, bioships and other manufactured goods.

Would the stuff grown by the World Tree be as good as properly fabricated products?

Nope.

However, it was by far the most effective way to plunder a planet to such an enormous extent that Ves and his clansmen would be able to enrich themselves beyond their wildest dreams so long as they conducted a raid on the right planet.

Growing a World Tree did not come without a heavy price. Its rapid growth characteristics came at the cost of efficiency. This meant that it was very much possible to waste its enormous potential and end up with less value than before.

If Ves ever obtained a World Tree Seed, then he should only plant it on resource rich planets or highly industrialized hubs.

This would not only allow the World Tree to produce larger quantities of high-quality biomechs and bioships, but also concentrate enough resources to form another World Tree Seed!

"Wait." Ves frowned. "Can a World Tree reverse its growth and return to its seed form once you are done with plundering a planet?"

"It depends." Master Laila Devos responded. "The original World Tree Seeds are capable of doing so. They are miracles given life and form. They are also much more efficient than their less perfect counterparts. The Dryad Queen has worked hard to impart them with the ability to regress back into their original seed forms. As long as we do not lose physical possession of them, we can continually reuse the original World Tree Seeds on as many planets as we wish."

That... that was incredibly powerful!

These original World Tree Seeds were perfect for plundering a huge amount of resources from resource-rich planets!

As long as the owners of the seeds did not care about taking over the planets and using them to house their own populations, the Terrans could scale up their forces so quickly that they may become unstoppable to the native aliens!

Perhaps only ancient phase whales and enemy superweapons could stop these World Trees from draining world after world.

However, Ves noted a very important distinction.

"The second generation World Tree Seeds are incapable of regressing back into their seed forms, is that correct?" He guessed.

Master Devos nodded. "That is regrettably the case. Derived World Tree Seeds are all copies of the original. They lack the unique and exquisite qualities that the Dryad Queen herself has imparted in her grand works. All second-generation seeds, third-generation seeds and so on are slower, less efficient and lack multiple capabilities, the most obvious of which is to return to their original seed forms. Once you plant a derived World Tree Seed onto a planet, the resulting growth is permanent. A second-generation World Tree can only produce a third-generation seed if it has access to an abundant amount of energy and high-grade resources. If you are concerned about this, you can prepare the necessary resources beforehand."

The derived World Tree Seeds were clearly inferior to the originals in every way. Not only would Ves have to use them as consumables, every cycle resulted in a degradation of the quality of seeds.

Second-generation seeds were produced by the best variations of World Trees, so they were not too shabby.

Third-generation seeds were spawned from second-generation World Trees, which meant that they were missing out on even more stuff.

Fourth-generation seeds were spawned from significantly inferior third-generation World Tree, which meant that they were massively inferior compared to the originals!

Fortunately, Master Laila Devos mentioned a way to stop or reverse this degradation cycle.

Every World Tree Seed could still be modified and upgraded. The most basic way to do so was to substitute lower quality materials for higher quality materials. A seed that was comprised of superior materials performed better in many ways.

A more advanced way to upgrade the seed was to alter or improve its bioprogramming. This was incredibly difficult and required a lot of manpower as the complexity of each World Tree Seed exceeded most people's imaginations.

The most difficult but rewarding way to upgrade a World Tree Seed was to augment it with new or improved organic modules and systems.

Doing this would not be able to turn a derived seed into an original seed.

It was instead a way to mutate a derived seed into a more unique product that had deviated from its original scope.

Many different biotech institutions were capable of adding useful new functions to a derived seed that reflected their strengths and specializations.

Ves wondered what he and the Larkinson Biotech Institute could add to a derived seed. Perhaps they may be able to infuse life into the seed, allowing it to gain its own form of intelligence!

"So what is your decision, Ves? If you agree to an exchange of knowledge and resources, your clan can become the owner of a second-generation World Tree Seed."

The price that the Devos Ancient Clan expected from the Larkinson Clan was anything but light.

Master Laila Devos most definitely wanted to obtain large amounts of superdimensional matter. Armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional ore ranked high on her list of priorities.

She not only wanted enough of them to fabricate at least a dozen fully superdimensional mechs, but also supply it all within 2 years!

If the Larkinsons failed to meet this demanding deadline, then the Larkinson Clan would have to provide heavy compensation in other forms.

In addition to that, Master Laila Devos wanted to obtain extensive knowledge on living mech design from Ves. She wanted to acquire knowledge that exceeded the scope of the basic lessons he taught at the Eden Institute of Business & Technology.

It was not that difficult to understand why she desired to learn the more advanced applications of living mech design.

She and her fellow Terrans wanted to design their own Carmine mechs. At the very least, they wanted to gain a lot more leeway into developing more divergent variants of the Yellow Jacket model and the upcoming Arboreal Project.

The Terran mech designers would face an uphill battle if they tried to copy Ves' design philosophy without the support of the Red Kingdom.

However, it was not impossible for them to do so. If they had excellent rational mech designers on hand that had already made a lot of preparations, they may be able to pull it off.

Ves was not too worried that sharing his trade secrets would cause the Terrans to overtake him.

He had already imparted much of his design philosophy to Alexa Streon, but she was still not able to reach his level. It was out of the question for her to build up on his work and beat him at his own game. The most she could do was to pursue her own research direction.

Even so, Ves did not want to sell his expertise on living mech design so easily.

This was not because he wanted to maintain his monopoly on living mechs. At this point in his career, he benefited a lot more if more mech designers joined his side and expanded the market presence of their product category.

From that perspective, Ves should actually be more willing to help the Terrans acquire the capability to design their own living mechs.

It would be even better if they were able to design their own Carmine mechs, though Ves did not believe that any third party could acquire this capability so easily.

Still, Ves would be a fool to underestimate the Terrans. They were incredibly competent and the Terran Alliance clearly had a huge stake in the development of Carmine biomechs.

The Red Ocean's mech market was far too big for Ves to cater to the needs of so many customers.

Even now, there were lots of norms who disdained the use of the Yellow Jacket models and its many variants.

Customers who possessed greater ambitions clearly wanted to form Blood Pacts with more powerful Carmine mechs!

While Ves was already working on the Arboreal Project, it was far from enough to satisfy every norm, especially those who lived outside the Terran Alliance.

If the Terrans started to design and publish their own living mechs, then the consequences would be vast.

The LMC would instantly lose its monopoly on living mechs. This would most definitely lead to a reduction in the amount of revenue and profits it could earn as many customers would turn away and spend their money on other products that fit their needs better.

However, Ves expected that his new competitors would mostly focus on the markets and product categories that he and his clan neglected.

The first-class and third-class mech markets were currently heavily underserved by the LMC.

Demand remained skyhigh, but the Living Mech Corporation was unable to meet the needs of so many customers due to the limitations of the Design Department.

This was bad not because the LMC was missing out on a lot of sales, but because a lot of market segments simply had no chance of getting their hands on their own living mechs.

Ves already figured out that he could progress his design philosophy if it achieved better market penetration.

It was not entirely necessary to accomplish this with his own mech designs alone. The works of other mech designers could contribute as well so long as they propagated at least a part of his vision on mechs.

The swordsman mechs designed by Ketis were a good example of this form of propagation!

Despite the swordmaster's clear attempts to differentiate her works and realize her own vision of mechs, the fact that she always made her mechs alive represented a continuation of his own design philosophy!

In short, the more the mech industry adopted his living mechs, the more his design philosophy gained validation, thereby enabling it to progress faster than what Ves could accomplish by himself!

This deal was a good opportunity for Ves to convince the Terrans to join the living mech hype train.

Since they were willing to trade away a derived World Tree Seed for the secrets of living mech design, then the Terrans would definitely work hard to get their money's worth!

From this perspective, this demand was not a big deal for Ves.

It was the other demands that made him reluctant to commence this trade.

"I admit that I am tempted to pick up a World Tree Seed, but since the one you are offering is not an original one, I am not inclined to meet your extravagant asking price. For one, we can't possibly supply so much high-grade superdimensional matter to you." Ves said. "We have a need of it ourselves, and I doubt that Ketis can open up a

portal to the Blue Dimension often enough to meet either of our needs. I also do not want the entire Terran mech industry to become my competitor. There is a limit to how much I am willing to teach you about the finer points of living mech design."

Master Laila Devos smiled in response. "Do not be so quick to turn away. Everything can be negotiated."

Chapter 6758: A Fair Deal

Ves did not possess an overwhelming need to acquire a derived World Tree Seed.

However, he thought that it was better if his clan had one in its possession than not. Who knew when it could be useful one day.

World Tree Seeds were probably especially useful if his clan ever embarked on a deep strike expedition.

Ves was not sure anymore whether red humanity could even pull off the Deep Strike Plan at this stage, but as long as there was an opportunity to go on an attack, the Larkinsons could attain drastically more results with the help of this special seed.

Aside from that, if the worst outcome ever took place, then Ves might have an urgent need for a biological superweapon that could quickly terraform a planet to make it liveable for lots of human refugees.

He would first have to find a safe haven that was out of the reach of the native aliens, but he could tackle that problem at a later date. It was not necessary for him to have everything ready the moment he gained possession over the World Tree Seed.

Since Ves did not consider the World Tree Seed a must-have item, he bargained hard for this strategic weapon. He was well aware that a second-generation seed did not come close to the value of a first-generation seed, so he was determined not to get scammed.

In comparison to his relaxed stance towards the World Tree Seed, the Devos Ancient Clan was a lot more eager to conduct a large trade.

The Devosans and the rest of the Terrans were eager to learn the more sophisticated design applications in the field of living mechs.

The product category originally invented by Ves had gained immense strategic value.

By definition, all Carmine mechs were living mechs. It was impossible to form a Blood Pact with a lifeless mech.

The Terrans had even greater reasons to value living mechs because of their inherent synergies with World Trees and other Terran biotechnology applications.

As for superdimensional material, Master Laila Rebecca Devos was desperate to obtain as much of it as possible.

Though Ves had generously agreed to donate a luxurious batch of structure-grade and hull-grade superdimensional matter to her, this would only allow her to conduct research.

A mech designer did not progress by engaging in science. It was only when a mech designer applied his existing understanding of the arts and sciences that he conformed to the expectations and obligations of his profession!

If Master Laila Devos wanted to make serious progress in advancing her design philosophy, she needed to design and produce tangible superdimensional mechs.

She could not do that unless she obtained a lot of tons of armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter!

To her credit, Master Laila had been incredibly transparent about her lack of progress and her hopes that superdimensional matter would allow her to design the nearly perfectly miniaturized mechs of her dreams.

On this matter, the two sides were on complete opposite ends.

Master Laila wanted to gain a massive amount of high-grade superdimensional matter.

Ves did not want to cripple his own clan's utilization of superdimensional matter.

If he truly had to make a choice between adding superdimensional mechs to the mech roster or acquiring a derived World Tree Seed, Ves would always pick the former over the latter!

The shrewd Terran Master clearly managed to deduce that from Ves and adapted her negotiating strategy accordingly.

Eventually, the two sides found a middle ground that was somewhat acceptable to both sides. The two reluctantly shook hands.

"It's a deal, then." Ves said. "Whenever our clan harvests armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter, you will get 50 percent of our haul. This division will continue until you have enough to produce 6 standard-sized superdimensional mechs. On top of that, I will teach you how to design more advanced living mechs. At the very least, I will give you my textbooks, articles and notes on how to design second order living mechs as well as the fundamental theories related to Carmine mechs and the Carmine System."

"That is correct, but do not forget that you must fulfill the superdimensional matter quotas within 2 years. If you exceed this time limit, you must pay a sizable penalty."

"I remember." Ves tersely replied. "In exchange for all of that, you will hand over a second generation World Tree Seed in my possession by the end of this week along with all of the knowledge required to make use of it. Your clan must also provide supervision and scientific support to us when we attempt to modify or upgrade the seed."

Their deal actually encompassed a lot more clauses, but they were relatively minor details that could easily be hashed out by their lawyers.

Ves let out a deep breath. "The mechers and the fleeters will be pissed. They never approved of third parties and private individuals getting their hands on weapons of mass destruction."

"You are beyond such limitations. The Red Association and the Red Fleet will never risk a breach in their relationship with you over violating a single taboo. They depend too much on your works to defend their outdated principles. Aside from that, have you

forgotten about your identity as the chief councilor of the Upper Council of the Red Collective? You are a collie, Ves. That means that it is legal for you to own your own superweapons as long as the RC gives you permission. This should not be a difficult task for a man who has amassed as much clout as you in recent years."

"The Red Collective is a big mess, and you know." Ves retorted. "It is not even close to matching the cohesion of the Red Association and the Red Fleet."

"In this stage of the Red War, you are hardly the only private party that has discreetly acquired superweapons. Many individuals are beginning to fear the worst. A superweapon may not be able to preserve their homes, but they can still be used to deter the native aliens from persisting in their pursuits. The prohibition against superweapons that the mechers and the fleeters have upheld for over four centuries has become unenforceable. As long as they are faltering in their attempts to hold back the native alien invasion, they are losing their legitimacy. More and more 'space peasants' are waking up to the fact that the RA and RF cannot be relied upon."

Ves pressed his lips. "Don't think I am unaware of what you are trying to do. I already mentioned it before. You are trying to drag me onto your pirate ship. By turning my clan into a power that holds a superweapon, it has become much more aligned with the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact. As more and more groups break off from the taboos imposed by the original Big Two, we are sliding more and more into warlordism."

Master Laila Devos leaned back while smiling in satisfaction. "And you are allowing yourself and your clan to get pulled into our ploy. That indicates that you do not possess enough faith or trust in the mechers and the fleeters. Otherwise, you would not have made a decision that is certain to alienate and distance yourself from them. Even if you are able to maintain cordial relations with them, they will still remember this slight."

The Terran Master was very much correct about that. Ves actually saw this as a good opportunity to make a strategic realignment.

The Larkinson Clan had become too close to the Red Association. This did not fit his desire to maintain his independence.

If he wanted to Red Association to treat him and his clan as friends rather than vassals, then Ves needed to cozy up to other major powers and prove that he could gain assistance elsewhere.

The deal that he just concluded with the Devos Ancient Clan should make it abundantly clear that Ves had no intention of becoming a sycophant of the Red Association!

That did not mean he wanted to cozy up to the Terran Alliance. Ves needed to carefully balance his relations with all of the major powers in order to maintain his independence.

He stood up and made a short bow towards the Master.

"Thank you for all of the words of wisdom that you have given to me today. I need to go back and explain my decision to trade away a huge amount of superdimensional matter to my wife."

"Goodbye. I shall be in contact the moment we are ready to transfer the derived World Tree Seed."

Later that day, Ves briefly summarized his new deal with the Devos Ancient Clan.

Just as predicted, his wife was none too happy with this commitment.

"Why do we need a superweapon?! Are you that insecure about our safety? If you wanted to obtain a weapon of mass destruction so badly, why did you accept the first proposal offered by the Terrans? You should have set aside this ridiculous World Tree and obtained a forbidden solution that is actually effective in space!"

"Gloriana, the value of this World Tree Seed is higher than that of other superweapons. I admit that it is impractical to use in space, but it can create a lot of stuff for us if we plant it on a resource-rich planet. It is a weapon as well as a terraforming machine and production plant rolled into a single organic entity. I have a feeling that there may come a time where we will all be grateful for the capabilities bestowed by this seed."

His wife scowled. "You were played, Ves! The Terrans understand you so well that they exploited your impulses to conduct a dubious trade. They only had to dangle a single shiny superweapon in front of your nose, and before you knew it, you traded away enough superdimensional matter to build 6 whole superdimensional mechs! SIX! Do you understand how many expert mechs and ace mechs we could have turned into nigh-unbreakable masterworks with that many tons of superdimensional matter?! You did not even consult me before you agreed to the contract in principle!"

Ves rolled his eyes. "I do not answer to you, Gloriana. This is a fair deal considering what a World Tree Seed can do. We just need to make good use of it in the next few years. I am not too worried about fulfilling the most critical obligations. The next time Ketis opens up a portal to the Blue Dimension, our clan will be ready this time. I have already tasked the relevant departments of our clan to stockpile mining shuttles, mining demimechs and other relevant gear. Our personnel are also undergoing training to learn how to operate this mining equipment as effectively as possible. I estimate that we can easily triple or quadruple our harvest of armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter next time. We can even get away with more if Ketis has found a region that corresponds to a location in the Blue Dimension that is more saturated with solid matter."

He knew that the mechers and fleters had already started to figure out how to conduct surveys in the 365th dimension.

If they were good enough, then Ves and Ketis might be able to ignore the existence of the Dimension Telescope and its expensive upgrades!

They could completely rely on the scouting conducted by the scientists of the Red Two to open up dimension breaches to dimensional locations that were rich in superdimensional matter or other materials!

The Terrans had conducted a trade based on the assumption that the harvest of armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional ore would only undergo a moderate increase in subsequent runs.

Ves did not believe that the yield would remain so low.

He believed that his clan would definitely be able to obtain a lot more superdimensional matter at a time!

Master Laila Devos would have her precious superdimensional matter sooner rather than later.

Chapter 6759: Gradually Coming Together

Just as expected, Gloriana was none too pleased with the deal.

That did not change anything, though. Ves was the one who made the decision, and he did not intend to get back on his word.

Superdimensional matter was extremely precious for now, but that was mainly because so little of it had fallen into human hands.

Once Ketis used the Dimension Blade a few more times, the shortage of dimensional matter would no longer be as acute as before.

Demand for this stuff was not going to drop anytime soon, but the Star Designers and other major powers should at least be able to obtain enough superdimensional matter to conduct research and develop a superdimensional mech.

The Larkinson Clan had 2 years to supply the requested quantities of high-grade superdimensional matter.

If the clan failed to make enough progress during most of this period, then Ves and Ketis could always start another mission marathon and scrounge up enough Ascension Points to open a lot of dimension breaches.

This was not a cost effective way to spend his AP, though.

[Semi-permanent Breach - Level 1 (5,000 Ascension Points): Can generate a semi-permanent self-sustaining dimension breach that is able to persist without any further input. Can still be destroyed through external means.]

This particular System upgrade regularly tempted me. Unlocking it would completely change the game for red humanity. It would allow for the creation of dimension breaches that simply did not dissipate by itself. Ves knew that it would permanently give humans access to what may very well be one of the most powerful resources in this universe.

Yet in order to unlock it, Ves or Ketis had to accumulate 5000 Ascension points. This was a herculean task, and one that neither of them were capable of fulfilling in the short term.

Even with the latest upgrade, the Mission Hall only released a limited amount of Missions at a time. Ves would have to wait weeks before the Mission Board refreshed its offerings.

He did not look forward to monotonously waiting for the next batch of Missions to appear before trying to complete the ones within his power.

How many times did he have to repeat this cycle?

Five times?

Ten times?

Ves would go crazy if he tried to complete the System's arbitrary and wacky demands!

Although he recognized that the Missions mostly acted as diversions that allowed Ves to come into contact with new and unexplored aspects of mech designs and systematic cultivation, he could only tolerate so much novelty within a specific period.

He was still human.

Ketis might be able to persist longer on account of being a swordmaster, but she would also be at risk of breaking if she pushed herself too hard.

Ves wished that the System offered a way to sell stuff in exchange for AP. He had access to lots of phasewater, high-grade exotics, high-grade hypers and now superdimensional matter.

He was sure that the System could put all of this stuff to good use, but it had never once made any attempts to claim these powerful materials.

This meant that Ves and Ketis could only earn AP the honest way, just as intended. Only hard work and personal ingenuity could allow a mech designer to earn greater amounts of Ascension Points.

The worst part about trying to unlock this extravagantly expensive Dimension Observatory upgrade was that Ves and Ketis could not split the bill!

They could only spend their own stash of AP on a single upgrade choice. The overly rigid Mech Designer System did not offer a way for users to transfer AP to each other or split the bill on an expensive item.

This meant that either Ves or Ketis had to earn a whopping 5000 AP!

No discounts!

The astronomical amount of work required to earn so much AP was enough to put Ves in despair!

He really did not see any way for him to earn such a massive amount of AP without feeling tempted to spend his earnings midway on a useful enlightenment fruit or other goodies.

It was pure torture for the System to list out this attractive possibility before locking it behind an excessively high price tag.

Ves shook his head. He refused to think about it any further.

After concluding yet another contentious discussion with Ketis, Ves went off in order to fulfill one of his contract obligations.

He gathered, organized and amended all of his articles, textbooks, design schematics and other documentation related to the finer points of living mech design.

Ves was lucky that he had already prepared a similar information package for Alexa Streon.

He merely had to call it up again and update it. He expanded the amount of knowledge and was not afraid of adding more complicated stuff to the package.

The Terrans should have plenty of clever Master Mech Designers among them. They should be able to understand the gist of his more elaborate theoretical framework.

That was not enough for them to design a living mech, though.

A Class IX design philosophy was not that easy to replicate, especially without support from the Red Kingdom.

The Terran mech designers all had to undergo the same struggles of Ketis and Alexa Streon.

In order to design a real living mech, these mech designers had to be able to shift their mentality and genuinely regard mechs as living entities that were just as smart and powerful as humans.

They also had to accept the principle that mechs deserved nearly the same respect, consideration and treatment as humans.

This was a bridge too far for many mech designers. The older ones who were more set in their ways should especially find it difficult to adopt such a subversive cognition when they clung to their own views on mechs for so many years.

"I am obligated to teach these Terran mech designers my craft, but it won't be my fault if they understand my theories but cannot accept my perspective and cognition on living mechs."

Very few Terrans should be able to succeed. Ves personally believed that only younger and more open-minded mech designers should be able to attain a higher success rate.

He at least recognized that there were enough highly educated scions like Alexa in the Terran Alliance that might be able to do more than pay lip service to the idea that mechs deserved to be treated as equal partners.

The Vulcanite mech designers that were interning at the Design Department had been doing fairly well in understanding the essence of living mech design.

Ves had been a lot more earnest and attentive in teaching Trent Aaden and the other 9 Novices.

It helped a lot that they were young, impressionable and incredibly smart and studious. The Eternal Vulcan Empire had definitely sent their best candidates.

Ves actually found it a pleasure to teach so many enthusiastic students. Even if his time was limited, he still tried to be earnest about helping the dwarven mech designers find their groove.

He did not want to give the Iron Emperor an excuse to suspend the deal and miss out on receiving a modern first-class fleet carrier!

There was no way he was willing to invest so much personal attention to teach a bunch of random Terrans.

He would give them an honest chance, but it was up to them whether they had what it took to design living mechs well enough to be able to develop their own Carmine mechs.

Ves decided to write down his extensive warnings in a document before promptly sending it all to the Devos Ancient Clan.

He was not stupid enough to transfer the files over the galactic net. He instead transferred his information package into a secure data chip before arranging a courier to deliver it to Master Laila Rebecca Devos by hand.

It would not be devastating to his work and career if his information package got leaked anyway.

Ves would merely lament the lost opportunity to sell his knowledge to other interested groups.

After taking care of this issue, Ves began to direct his attention towards another important matter.

"What is the state of our first-class fleet, Gavin?"

"There are currently 15 first-class combat carriers at our disposal. Each of them are capable of housing and carrying the supplies for 30 first-class multipurpose mechs each." His personal assistant reported without delay. His recent augments allowed him to call up the most current data and information at a rapid speed "Most of them are built by Starfarer Bay, so they are consistent and high in quality. The rest are second-hand vessels that we procured from other parties at considerably high costs. None of them were modern, so we had to commission repair yards to service them and update the most essential systems."

Ves grimaced. 15 combat carriers did not amount to much. The Larkinson Premier Fleet needed to become a lot bigger before he became satisfied.

"Well, I already know that the Tortuous Scream is being finished up. She will be here within 2 months." He recalled. "What about the archeship? Have we manage to refurbish her so that actual humans can operate her controls?"

"The archeship designated as A33 has indeed completed her conversion to a human-operable scout archeship." Gavin informed Ves. "She still needs to be operated by a crew that knows what it is doing. The Premier Branch has already hired the necessary officers and specialists. They are currently undergoing extensive training on how to operate archetech systems."

"I see. That sounds good. Has there been any updates about the first-class fleet carrier that the Eternal Vulcan Empire is supposed to build on our behalf?"

"We have received inconsistent updates on that front, boss." The assistant mentioned. "Ever since the start of the Hyper Generation, the Eternal Vulcan Empire has been... becoming increasingly more isolated from the rest of human space. We still have intelligence that indicates that our fleet carrier is still under construction. The

Vulcanites have even revised and upgraded certain pieces due to newer developments in phasewater tech and hyper tech. This has caused the delivery date to be delayed, but it should be done several months after the Tortuous Scream has arrived. She will still have a 320-mech capacity, but this can be expanded upon if you are willing to make tradeoffs."

"That won't be necessary. The fleet carrier needs to be fast and tough enough to withstand the rigor of warfare. She also has to retain as many bunkers as possible to house our heavy artillery mechs."

"Ah, about that, sir."

"Hm?"

"We are in the process of amassing a respectable amount of carrier vessels, but we do not have any living mechs to fill up their hangar bays and mech stables." Gavin noted. "The only first-class living mech of your design is the most expensive version of the Yellow Jacket model. I doubt that you want to rely on Yellow Jackets to fight from the Larkinson Premier Fleet."

Gavin indeed pointed out a serious flaw in Ves' short term plans.

"That is very much the case." Ves sighed. "I do not know if I can remedy this issue in the short term. I suppose we can apply quick-and-dirty upgrades to our most popular quasi-first-class mech designs. Upgrading their power reactors, energy cells and heatsinks should at least bring them past the first-class threshold. Strengthening their energy transmission systems and other necessary adjustments will take time as well. Perhaps we are better off with ordering several hundred first-class mechs designed by other mech companies."

"That is an understandable decision, but it will paint you as incompetent if you go ahead with this move. A mech designer who cannot adequately serve his own needs is pretty pathetic."

"You are right, but I don't think I can do much about this at the moment. I need to think over it further."

"Very well, boss."

"Let's switch to another subject." Ves' eyes grew sharper. "Have you contacted the RF yet on what is taking it so long to award our clan the RF Warship Tokens that we deserve for killing a bunch of orven phase lords in the last battle?"

Chapter 6760: Tour Recommendation

When Saint Davia Stark went on a tour, she initially applied to begin her tour on the frontlines of the Terran Alliance.

However, Human High Command rejected her request.

Despite her explosive debut as an ace pilot, the office in charge of managing high-ranking mech pilots thought that she was too green and underdeveloped to fight in the most dangerous battlefields of the Red War.

The Terran Alliance was being hit harder than the other fronts. The native aliens clearly recognized that out of the three colonial alliances, the Terran one was distinctly weaker due to enjoying the protection of only one dedicated god pilot.

The Light of Sol worked hard to do the work of two god pilots by shuttling from star system to star system at the fastest possible speed, but no matter how amazing his mobility may be, he was forced to cover way too much ground.

Not only did the god pilot have to wipe out aliens that invaded the fortified star systems of the Terran Alliance, but he also had to travel to the enemy staging points to delay subsequent invasions.

The god pilot never truly enjoyed a break since the start of the Red War. He destroyed so many alien phasefighters and warships that it should have been enough to break any single alien polity by this time.

Yet the aliens kept throwing in more forces at the frontlines. The natives of the Red Ocean possessed a vast amount of accumulation, so they could afford to take these highly unfavorable trades just to keep the annoying god pilot occupied.

The RF reluctantly helped out by assigning a couple its dreadnoughts to patrol the frontlines, but they were less destructive and easier to avoid. The aliens understood their capabilities a lot better.

In fact, the native aliens implemented other measures to mitigate the losses generated by human god mechs and dreadnoughts.

Combat in the upper zones generally took place between smaller units dispersed over many different locations.

The native aliens did not dare to concentrate their fleets unless they received strong proof that the god mechs and dreadnoughts known to patrol the surrounding regions had shown up in other places.

The humans did not make it easy to predict the movements of their top assets, but the native aliens could afford to make a lot of mistakes so long as they continued to dispatch more forces to the frontlines.

This was why the frontlines were so difficult to hold for red humanity.

The aliens were constantly learning from their mistakes.

What was worse was that they actively learned from the best, which in this case happened to be their human foes!

The native aliens showed more patience when the risk of receiving a visit from a god pilot was high.

They annoyingly broke up their fleets and operated in small squadrons and units. They focused on attaining small goals such as destroying the surrounding infrastructure that was typically present in a developed first-class star system.

The native aliens even diverted their fleets to surrounding star systems in order to raid less strategic star systems.

If the human defenders attempted to follow suit and disperse their forces too much, there was always a risk that the native aliens would suddenly consolidate their units and assault the inadequately defended strongholds!

All of this sounded like an intricate and complicated strategic game to pilots such as Saint Stark.

As powerful as she had become, the ace pilot would be among the first to admit that she was no strategic or tactical mastermind like Saint Commander Casella Ingvar.

Stark understood her strengths best. Her main power was to kill enemies at a distance. She happened to be extremely good at it, but just like her exceptional ace marksman mech, she made heavy sacrifices in other areas in order to pursue such an extreme.

Evidently, HHC treated this as a detriment rather than an advantage. They thought she needed to widen her horizons and develop a different approach towards combat now that she had become an ace pilot.

"Saints such as yourself are symbols as well as powerful combatants." A liaison from the HHC explained during their first meeting. "Many humans look up to ace pilots such as yourself. They will take inspiration from you and seek to imitate your deeds. Your words have power. Everything you say in public will be scrutinized and obsessed over by millions of humans. Do not take this lightly. We highly advise you to limit your exposure to the public and avoid saying anything that can be misinterpreted or used to encourage misbehavior."

Saint Stark was not happy at being told what to do by a random bureaucrat. She knew that Human High Command was an umbrella organization that consisted of the best military strategists and planners of the Red Three, the first-rate superstates and other major human institutions.

In other words, HHC represented the interests of the bigshots of red humanity!

Though the HHC had done well to safeguard the overall state of human civilization in the Red Ocean, Stark could never fully trust its intentions.

The HHC had no qualms about sacrificing lots of humans to the not-so-tender mercies of the native aliens to secure more strategic goals. Its ruthless decision to pull out most of the ace pilots of the Middle Zones would likely result in the demise of a huge number of second-raters in the ensuing months!

Saint Stark wouldn't have agreed to cooperate with the HHC if not for the fact that its decision still made sense.

It was truly important to prevent the Upper Zones from falling in the hands of the native aliens.

Stark just wished that the bigshots wouldn't be so eager to leave the second-raters and third-raters to fend for themselves.

"Our psychological analysis on you has revealed that you are still being affected by deep-seethed traumas and resentments." The liaison spoke in a gentle tone that conveyed genuine sympathy. "The Larkinson Clan has done well to restore your motivation by giving you a new purpose, but what it has not done well is to address your problems. As a saint, these are weaknesses that will become increasingly greater obstacles as you become stronger. You do not want them to fester until they become impenetrable walls that can sabotage all of your attempts to advance to the rank of god pilot. For the sake of your mental health and your future prospects, we would like you to attend therapy sessions. We have the best professionals on hand that have always maintained absolute confidentiality when speaking to saints such as yourself."

"..."

Saint Stark's stare conveyed enough of her feelings on the matter. If that was not enough, her aggressive Saint Kingdom caused the entire compartment to grow hotter and less pleasant by the second.

The liaison remained oddly unflappable. His emotions did not even fluctuate the slightest. It was as if he was made to resist the anger of volatile and emotional ace pilots!

"Since you are less than predisposed to undergo professional therapy, then we would like to offer you an alternative. Before you object, do not be so quick to dismiss this offer. There is a pair of exceptional peak ace pilots who have suffered great traumas of their own. Their suffering and grievances mirror your own. We believe that you should have much in common to talk about when you meet each other in person."

The offer sounded intriguing. As Saint Stark inquired further, she knew that the liaison spoke the truth. The pair of ace pilots had become shaped by the tragedies that pushed them past their breaking points in their earlier years.

The two heroes did not let their nightmares break them as was common to other traumatized mech pilots.

Instead, the two siblings, twins really, persevered and leaned on each other as they gradually processed their traumas and tried to build better lives for themselves.

They no doubt relied on the fact that they were not alone for being able to remain strong all of these years. Yet they also demonstrated greater strength and conviction that enabled them to overcome their bottlenecks and continue to grow stronger.

Now, they had reached the threshold that would allow them to become god pilots. If not for the enormity of their emotional baggage, perhaps they would have chosen to step on the road of no return a lot sooner.

Saint Stark envied the pair of sibling saints. No matter how dark their worlds had become, they could always rely on the light of their closest blood relative.

Stark did not have a shoulder to lean upon. Not really.

The Larkinson Clan offered to be that shoulder.

The saint had to admit that the Larkinsons were truly deserving of people's trust. They were a trustworthy, honorable and valued family over greed.

Yet Stark was too broken to agree to join this clan. She would only drag down the optimistic Larkinsons and embroil them in her own problems.

Besides, their patriarch was a very different kind of Larkinson. His leadership had led the clan to prosperity, but he was also a man defined by his scars.

Stark understood what the HHC aimed for when the liaison presented her offer.

The bigshots wanted to mix Saint Stark with ace pilots that had suffered the same kind of injustices but managed to persevere long enough to heal their own wounds.

Though Stark did not really think it was the best decision to move to the Rubarthan frontlines, her interest in the pair of siblings had grown too strong.

She had to meet them. She had to learn how they had come to terms with their traumas.

"I will do it." Davia Stark declared. "I will fight alongside the twins."

"You have made the right decision." The liaison smiled in satisfaction. "The Rubarthans will welcome your arrival. The twins are always happy to mentor up-and-coming saints such as yourself."

The HHC made the arrangements immediately. In fact, the people working for the umbrella organization already made a few preparations in advance as they already predicted that there was a high probability that Saint Stark would accept the suggestion to fight alongside the twin saints.

The liaison continued to talk with the ace pilot without showing any sense of inferiority or superiority.

"The Rubarthan frontlines are less intensive, but that does not mean that you should lower your guard." The bureaucrat advised. "The Red Cabal has appointed several leaders to the front. Each of them harbor their own ambitions. They cannot advance their station and reputation if all they can do is to maintain the status quo. The native aliens are still able to transfer enough troops and warships to the Rubarthan front to make life difficult for the defenders."

"I understand. What else do I need to know about fighting on the Rubarthan front?"

"Battles are relatively less intensive in the Rubarthan Pact, so take advantage of that to experiment and develop your new capabilities." The liaison earnestly advised. "You will not be able to enjoy this opportunity for long. When the Red War has reached the next stage, the enemy will punish you much more severely for every mistake you make. We have high expectations for you. We have a growing need for your exceptional firepower to push back the phase leaders of the alien races. For now, you are still new to your Saint Kingdom, but we hope that you will develop the means to use its strengths effectively in your future deployments."

"I have every intention to do so." Saint Stark said.

"Ah, in your case, we do not fear that you will cease to work on improving your firepower and marksmanship. We are instead concerned about your imbalance approach towards your development. Your new mentors should be able to offer you guidance on the responsibilities of a saint. You are more than a soldier now. You are a symbol and a role model to the troops. You are a leader whose words can lift their morale and terrify your enemies at the same time. Do not disregard these possibilities. You will need to leverage every advantage at your disposal to save our civilization from extinction."