

## The Mech 5041

### Chapter 5041 Raising The Standards

It did not take long for the Red MTA to register the Golden Skull Alliance's victory against one of the wheednar race's raiding fleets.

This was actually a pretty big accomplishment for a second-class fleet. The Larkinson Clan and its allies took a lot of risks by confronting warships in open space. In addition to that, three ace mechs had been needed to restrain and dismantle the most threatening orven battleship.

Nonetheless, the mechers only awarded the expeditionary fleet with 300 million MTA merits in total.

This was a decent reward for a single group, but it did not amount to much when split up five-ways.

The members of the Golden Skull Alliance agreed to divide the merit award as well as all of the plunder according to the most current reward ratio.

The ratio roughly corresponded to the contributions of each alliance partner.

At this time, the agreed upon ratio was that the Larkinson Clan earned 20 percent while the Cross Clan was entitled to just 14 percent of all of the gains.

Meanwhile, the Glory Seekers, the Adelaide Third Fleet and the Boojay Family each received 22 percent of the share!

Nobody objected too much about this ratio as it roughly corresponded to the amount of effort and risks to each member of the alliance.

It was completely natural for the pioneering groups that brought an ace mech to the table to receive the greatest shares. These super machines not only turned most battles into guaranteed victories, but also provided valuable deterrence against many enemies that would otherwise try to prey on the expeditionary fleet.

The Larkinsons did not bring an ace mech to the table, but as always they made up for it with lots of unusual advantages.

From putting forth battle formations to wipe out most of the crews on a lot of warships to utilizing glows to suppress any alien combatants that remained, the Larkinson Clan had undoubtedly done much to preserve the captured warships and reduce the casualty rate.

The Larkinsons also brought along the Graveyard along with other utility vessels that substantially assisted in processing bulk salvage debris.

This left the Cross Clan in an awkward position. The Crossers did possess their own ace pilot, but Patriarch Reginald Cross remained stuck in Davute as he had made a commitment to serve Davute for a period of time!

No matter whether the war between Davute and Karlach had any hope of happening, the 77th Warborn Mech Division could still do much to protect billions of colonists against other threats.

If the aliens managed to overwhelm the Torald Middle Zone, the Krakatoa Middle Zone would be next! Davute and every other colonial state in the region would need all of the mechs that they could muster in order to resist the relentless alien onslaught.

Regardless, the Crossers assigned to take part in the Trailblazer Expedition fought decently, but couldn't come close enough to compensate for the absence of their only ace pilot and ace mech.

This led to an unusual circumstance where they received the smallest share of the plunder by far despite their comprehensive strength!

In any case, it had little to do with Ves. He was already happy with raking in 60 million MTA merits.

Sure, it did not sound like much compared to what his clan managed to earn in his previous encounters against alien forces, but it still provided him with the capital he needed to uplift his clan into a first-class organization.

"The Red MTA recently announced that it will be implementing enormous changes to its Merit Exchange." Gloriana told Ves as both of them paid a visit to the hangar bay. "Many high-end goods that used to be supplied from the Milky Way will soon be removed. The Association will gradually introduce newer high-end products in their place that are locally made and much better adapted to the new environment. We will probably gain access to a large variety of new and more exotic tech."

"Interesting. We should probably wait for any big purchases until the Red MTA put up better products on its exchange. Everyone is trying their best to leverage exotic radiation and the mechers are bound to excel in this area. I know you have been planning to buy an expensive first-class cranial implant in the near future, but I highly suggest you remain patient and wait a while. The MTA and its associated companies are bound to release much more powerful models in the coming years."

Surprisingly enough, his wife nodded and agreed with his proposal without kicking up any fuss. She may be eager for improvement, but she wasn't stupid! There was no way she would want to pay hundreds of millions of MTA merits for a cranial implant that was on the verge of becoming obsolete!

"I know." She responded. "I am not in a hurry to upgrade. There is so much to explore now that we have entered the Age of Dawn. I am already making enough progress without needing to rely on additional augmentations for the time being."

The pair directed their focus back to the present.

The Larkinsons had already brought back a bunch of useful salvage, one of which was a disabled but mostly physically intact orven starfighter.

Both Ves and Gloriana wanted to take a good look at the highly compact transphasic shield generator.

While they had no intentions of transplanting alien tech into their mechs for fear of instability and backdoors, they still wanted to learn the principles behind their operations.

They already had a lot of plans about equipping their upcoming elite quasi-first-class mechs with similar defensive measures!

As a crew of mech technicians and engineers carefully inspected and dismantled anything that could blow up and threaten the surrounding people, they slowly proceeded to remove the transphasic shield generator.

According to the scans, the device did not incorporate that much phasewater, but that was already enough to make the starfighter ten times harder to defeat!

"Transphasic energy shields will not help our mechs survive a direct strike from the primary or secondary armaments of a serious warship." Gloriana noted as she carefully inspected the alien circuitry.

Ves nodded even as he poked at the wiring of the internals of the device. "I know, but they can help our mechs survive damage near anything else. We've got hundreds of kilograms of phasewater in reserve, and we will probably be able to harvest more as our expedition progresses. All of that stuff is doing for us while it is rotting in our vault, so we need to get our Design Department into gear and design a series of quasi-first-class mechs that are comprehensively transphasic. It is not enough to make their armor systems transphasic. Their weapons need to be augmented by phasewater and we should also look into mounting cruise drives onto them if possible."

His wife already knew about his intentions to equip all of their future Larkinson-exclusive mechs with transphasic weapons and armor, but that last part was new!

"We do not have access to cruise drive technology, especially not the lower cost varieties that are suitable for mass production." She told him. "Even if you manage to obtain it, adding a cruise drive to every mech in the Larkinson Army will deplete our phasewater reserves much faster than we originally planned for. Are you sure about this, Ves?"

He nodded. "This recent battle might not be our most exciting or memorable, but it has fully exposed our strengths and weaknesses. Stronger weapons and armor can help in many situations, but it does not really make a difference during the lengthy and dangerous approach stage. Miniature warp drives can not only make our mechs spend less time in transit, but also increase the difficulty of shooting them down. We cannot neglect the importance of mobility in a future where battles against warships will become more common."

This was one of several solutions that he came up with to reduce the loss rate of his mechs going forward.

However, Gloriana looked less than enthused.

"You should realize that if you want to implement this to the fullest, we must attack larger alien strongholds or remain in the deep frontier for additional years. This is the only way for us to obtain all of the additional phasewater needed to propagate your new standards. We are bound to suffer considerably more casualties if that is the case. We may end up losing more mech pilots due to greed than by sticking to our original plan."

Ves shrugged. "I am aware of the risks, but mechs equipped with cruise drives are extremely useful in many other circumstances as well. I am ultimately planning to form a highly mobile strike fleet that consists of quasi-first-class or genuine first-class starships that are fully equipped with high-powered superdrives. This way, the entire Red Ocean is within our reach."

In truth, he also wanted to equip his starships with superdrives as an escape option!

Their warp travel capabilities granted Ves and his fellow Larkinsons the option of escaping the Red Ocean entirely and slowly make their way over to Messier 87 or one of the 50 or so satellite galaxies!

Of course, it would probably take hundreds if not thousands of years to cross such an immense void with relatively slow warp drives. It was extremely likely that the vessels would break down and get stranded in the vast and empty interstellar void between galaxies with no star or planet within sight!

It was better than nothing, Ves supposed. He was pretty sure that a bunch of scared and paranoid red humans had already started to depart from the Red Ocean entirely!

The couple discussed a bit more about the standards of the Larkinson Clan's new generation mechs. They not only needed to offer superior performance against the natives of the Red Ocean, but also had to possess at least preliminary combat effectiveness against the speculative alien forces of Messier 87!

Gloriana placed her hands on her hips when Ves mentioned that last part.

"You are shifting the goal posts yet again. Don't you think you are being too ambitious this time? The indigenous aliens of the Red Ocean pose the most acute threat towards us. We need to do all we can to strengthen our forces in the short term. I am not telling you that it is unwise to prepare against more distant threats as well, but we do not have the time or resources to do both at the same time."

"I don't entirely agree with that, honey." Ves retorted. "While it is true that exotic radiation is in the process of mutating a lot of materials and turning them into new and much more powerful exotics, we do not need to wait until these materials have shown up. Haven't you forgotten about my specialty in spiritual engineering? I can develop a number of new spiritual constructs that can actively strengthen the performance of mechs by making active use of ambient spiritual energy. I probably don't enjoy a monopoly in this field, but I am pretty sure that I have a huge head-start compared to the rest of the mech industry. I think I can get a lot of stuff done without adding to the material cost of my products."

"Hm, maybe you are correct. How long will it take for you to develop these brilliant new design applications of yours?"

Ves grinned at her. "Probably not as long as you think. I have a few... sources that I can consult to quickly master a couple of useful tricks. The new age is tailor-made for me and my talents. Our children will be able to thrive a lot more as well. Our future mechs are about to become far more outstanding than the ones we currently have."

In his opinion, the only way that mechs could attain the strength to defeat any opponent no matter whether they were human or alien was if they maximized the use of phasewater and E energy radiation!

He strongly believed that mechs in the future would not only be evaluated by conventional parameters such as their material composition and use of conventional tech, but also by how well they derived strength from the defining resources of the Red Ocean as well as Messier 87!

Chapter 5042 Imitating Gods

Ves did not pay too much attention to the follow-up operations after the battle.

His clan and his subordinates took care of all of the chores. They interrogated the surviving aliens, extracted relevant intelligence from the captured data banks, salvaged any materials that were of high value or immediate use and prepared the remaining salvaged warships and wreckage for sale.

The matter of processing and selling the captured alien warships was a matter of great importance.

The value of any reasonably intact vessel had shot up remarkably. Even a fairly awful wheednar cruiser could easily be sold for hundreds of thousands of MTA credits as long as the vessel did not have too many holes and retained the ability to traverse across the stars.

Broken wreckage was much less valuable but could still be sold for tens of thousands of MTA credits with ease.

However, it was not so easy to arrange shipping and delivery. It cost a lot to transport high-value salvage from the riskier side of the Torald Middle Zone. Many salvage and transportation companies outright refused to send any of their fleets this deep into a dangerous region!

As the Golden Skull Alliance tried to figure out whether it was better to digest all of the salvage internally or sell them to a third party at an enormous discount, the Glory Seekers suddenly offered an alternate solution.

Marshal Ariadne Wodin stood up at the virtual conference table. "The Hex Federation is willing to purchase the hulls and wreckage at 5 percent above the highest offer that we have received so far. The colonial state is willing to pay more to obtain the orven battleship in a state that is as complete and undamaged as possible. The Hexers will take full responsibility over the salvage that we are leaving behind. They will dispatch their salvage and recovery fleets to bring the hulls back to their colonial state in the Magair Middle Zone."

That was a surprising offer. Although 5 percent did not sound so much, it meant that the Larkinson Clan would be able to gain that much more money to fund the construction of future quasi-first-class mechs!

None of the other leaders had any objection to the Hex Federation's generous offer. They just wanted to get rid of the spoils that would only slow them down and continue on their expedition.

"Why is the Hex Federation willing to spend so much money and invest so many ships and mechs to obtain our prizes?" Ves skeptically asked.

"There are multiple reasons for that." The leader of the Glory Seekers openly responded with a grin. "We need starships, just like everyone else. The Hex Federation has many shipyards at its disposal, and it is faster to hollow out an existing hull and convert the interior into a carrier configuration than to construct a starship from scratch. It also saved the colonial state from trying to obtain a large amount of scarce and pricy alloys and materials. With the Fridaymen, the aliens of the Red Ocean and even greater threats on the horizon, the Hex Army must undergo an enormous expansion in order to keep up. Civilian needs must take a backseat in order to increase the militarization of our colonial state."

That made sense. The council of matriarchs decided to pull out all of the stops to ensure the continuation of their people and culture.

Ves thought there was more behind this demand, though. The alien hulls all consisted of warships. While it was not impossible to convert them into carriers, the amount of time and labor needed to do so were not small!

"Let me guess. The Hexers want to study actual alien warships in order to learn how to build their own, is that correct?"

Marshal Ariadne smirked. "Every serious colonial state is doing the same. We foresee that the Red CFA's latest initiative may be just the prelude. As the war against the native aliens continues to intensify, our society may develop in a direction that will lower the thresholds and requirements to owning warships. Mechs have great potential, but it will likely take a large amount of time before they can become strong enough to crush the aliens. Competitive warships can be constructed with greater ease, but the Hex Federation and many other states have never designed and built them in reality. The shipwrights and naval engineers all need existing examples of functional warships to quickly get up to speed and design effective warships"

"I see."

While it was interesting to know what the Hexers had in mind for the captured alien warships, it didn't really matter to the alliance partners. They just wanted to get their money!

Everyone voted in favor of accepting the Hex Federation's offer. The expeditionary fleet only needed to stick around long enough for a third-party mercenary outfit contracted by the Hexers to arrive and babysit the valuable hulls.

After presiding over a bunch of meetings in order to arrange various affairs, Ves finally had an opportunity to return to the Design Department and call for a general meeting.

Every lead designer of the Larkinson Clan entered the meeting room and waited for their leader to tell them what he had in mind this time.

"Hello again, everyone." Ves greeted his Journeymen. "I am sure that many of you are still working on completing the projects that you have been working on for a couple of months, but all of you should have plenty of room to accommodate new design projects. Before you propose your own ideas, let me tell you what I want our department to prioritize in the following years."

He began to explain the new standard that Ves wanted to apply to the Larkinson Army. Every elite mech designed in the future had to be a quasi-first-class transphasic mech with much more superior performance in every parameter.

"That will cost a lot of phasewater, Ves." Ketis stated the obvious. "I am talking about thousands of kilograms of phasewater."

"We can afford it. I am confident in that. We just have to keep doing what we have always done and steal the resources we need from the aliens."

"Our ability to utilize phasewater is still too low." Juliet Stameross mentioned. "We are spending as much of our spare time on studying phasewater theory and other related subjects, but it will take years for us to obtain the basic proficiencies needed to develop and implement transphasic parts and systems in an efficient manner. Until then, we will have to rely heavily on consultants and external development companies to make up for our lack of competency."

The latter was convenient but not ideal in terms of information security.

Still, Ves would rather have a strong and exposed mech at hand than the opposite!

Secrecy meant nothing once the stronger aliens of the Red Ocean as well as M87 started to confront the Larkinson Clan!

"Times have changed." He said to everyone. "We are about to enter into a period of unprecedented danger. We need to build up our strength no matter the cost, and if we have to increase our reliance on external developers, then so be it. Besides, we are not as helpless as you think. As long as we all specialize in one transphasic system, we can work together to meet our needs in-house as much as possible. I have a pretty good talent in working with phasewater and transphasic systems myself."

Ves elaborated a bit more about what he wanted to see in the Larkinson mechs of the next generation. He briefly touched upon his goal of expanding on their spiritual design so that they would make much better use of E energy radiation than any of his current mechs.

Beatrice Hendrix, the latest Journeyman Mech Designer to sign up with the Larkinson Clan, looked increasingly more thoughtful.

"You are describing a new mech ecosystem, one that places a strong emphasis on both phasewater technology and living mechs. None of us can design any of the mechs that you demand without your cooperation. Your design philosophy must play a central role in each of the Larkinson mechs of this standard."

Ves actually never thought about it in this way, but now that he thought about it, Beatrice had a good point.

While a complete mech ecosystem also imposed additional requirements such as trying to make their parts and materials as common and universal as possible, the rest matched up with the classical definition.

He smiled. "I guess you are right, Beatrice. I think we can proceed with this premise. The mech ecosystem that I am proposing is not just a simple upgrade wave. It is an ambitious attempt to harness the two most important resources of the Red Ocean and M87 into a series of mech designs that can derive untold power from both."

"It is a good idea." Gloriana said as she backed her husband up. "Human technology will still serve as our base, but that will not allow us to develop the mechs we need. If we want to gain more strength, we must study the basis of the power of alien gods. Phase whales and phase lords reign over the Red Ocean for good reasons. Messier 87 will undoubtedly have their own variety of gods. Both varieties of alien divinities can crush us with ease because our mechs are too weak and mundane. If we want to become strong enough to resist them openly, we must elevate our own mechs into gods!"

"..."

"..."

Although everyone found it difficult to embrace Gloriana's argument, her logic was sound, more or less.

Even if Ves and the others scoffed at the notion of creating artificial gods that could compete against any actual alien gods, it was undoubtedly essential to make sure their next mech designs were a lot stronger than their existing ones!

Ves clapped his hand. "Anyway, now that I have explained my vision for our new mech ecosystem, I would like to hear proposals. What ideas do you have?"

"You need to name your new ecosystem." Gloriana mentioned. "It will make it easier for us and our end users to distinguish between our older generation and newer generation mechs."

"Hmmm... let me think about it further. I haven't thought about it yet." He said.

The only mech ecosystem he had been involved in was the LaVoi System that he created in cooperation with Professor Taigen Herman Voiken.

However, Ves had minimal involvement with it after he completed the Pacifier design. The Senior Mech Designer from the Voiken Family took over the rest of the work and largely turned the ecosystem into his own playground.

This was different. Ves wanted to create a serious mech ecosystem that not only exclusively served the Larkinsons, but fully belonged to them as well!

He already had a few bold ideas on how he could empower and add more distinctive traits to his mech ecosystem.

He just needed to consult with his mother and maybe check out a few enlightenment fruits dangling from the Tree of Possibilities to figure out whether he could realize his latest creative ideas.

"Alright, let's not get too distracted." Ves said as he tried to get this meeting back on track. "I want to hear actual mech proposals this time. Please take the context of our future situation as well as the latest battle in mind. We urgently need a series of strong mechs that can help us defeat alien warships with greater ease and with much less casualties. I don't mind upgrading our existing mech models to the standards of our new mech ecosystem, but we need to add more to them in order to maximize our utilization of expensive materials. Our skills have improved and we have greater access to high-end resources. Many second-class mech designers would kill to have the opportunity to design such powerful mechs."

This was an opportunity for every mech designer to work on mechs they could only dream about.

Mechs as strong as the current iteration of the Bright Warrior and Valkyrie Redeemer did not cut it anymore.

Not even the powerful Nullifier model satisfied Ves anymore!

The ideal mechs of the Larkinson Clan had to use up a lot more phasewater and possess a lot more spiritual features in order to be ready to overcome any future threats!

## Chapter 5043 Convincing Decoys

"You already know about the Storm Sword that I am working on." Ketis began first as she nonchalantly polished the blade of her large and intimidating Bloodsinger. "The design project is still in its early stages as I spent most of my time on completing the Stormblade Samurai. I wanted to see my latest work in action in order to confirm that stormblade technology lives up to its



promises and can provide our swordsman mechs with a more effective way to drain transphasic shields."

As the recent battle clearly showed, the dozen or so Stormblade Samurais amply met her expectations for this new tech!

"I noticed." Ves responded as he leaned forward as he showed greater interest. "Those stormblades are indeed capable of destabilizing transphasic energy shields more effectively than normal weapons. I also noticed that the Stormblade Samurais drained their energy reserves a lot faster in order to keep their weapons electrified."

Ketis sighed. "That is an unavoidable downside to using stormblade technology. To be honest, I tuned up the power of the stormblade in order to help them break through energy shields faster, but that has caused their operational times to drop by half."

"So how do you propose to deal with this problem with the Storm Sword?"

"I have been thinking about asking Master Benedict to contribute to the design."

That caused the other mech designers to look a bit surprised.

"His help doesn't come for free, Ketis." Ves seriously told her. "While we are friends with him, he will expect us to reciprocate in exchange for his services. Are you sure it is worthwhile to call upon his help for this specific project?"

Ketis nodded. "I am. The Storm Sword has the potential to become one of the potent and effective melee shield breaker model in our mech roster. Don't forget that the Stormblade Samurai doesn't make use of any phasewater. It is able to damage energy shields with increased effectiveness by relying solely on electrifying its blades in a special manner. Once we incorporate this tech in a transphasic sword, I think it is not a dream for the Storm Sword to become a bane of all warships."

While Ves was not certain whether stormblade technology could effectively be combined with phasewater technology, Ketis sounded confident enough that it was probably feasible.

The synergy would actually be great if her ambition worked out! Stormblades were highly effective against energy-based defenses while solid phasewater blades were most effective against physical defenses.

Ves eventually bought into the proposal. "I will allow you to bring Master Benedict as long as you can win him over. Who else do you want to contribute to this project? Mind you that I must be involved as well."

"Why?" Ketis frowned.

"Because of the mech ecosystem that we just talked about, remember? I am not kidding when I say that I plan to implement a much more expanded version of a living mech to all of the mechs that are part of the same ecosystem. I can't explain what I have in mind right now because I still need time to complete the framework, but it will be better and more comprehensive than anything you have seen me make before."

The swordmaster looked dubiously at Ves. "Okay... anyway, if this is the case, then I would like to bring Tifi and Sara onboard as well. Both of them have worked on the design of the Stormblade Samurai so they are already highly familiar with the sort of mech that I have in mind next. I

originally wanted to include Juliet as well, but if you insist in meddling with my design, then I suppose I will have to settle for less than stellar mobility."

Compared to other possible mechs of the upcoming mech ecosystem, the Storm Sword would likely possess the greatest lethality at close range while also possessing respective staying power courtesy of Master Benedict Cortez.

However, the Storm Sword would likely feature adequate defenses and uninspiring mobility.

All of this was relative, of course. The heightened standards meant that the Storm Sword would still be a lot tougher and faster than the Second Sword in every way!

Ves was satisfied with this modified proposal. He had high hopes for this mech as it was set up to become the ideal flanking mech model.

So long as the enemy did not have any chance of focusing the bulk of their firepower at the Storm Swords, the new Swordmaiden-exclusive mechs would chop everything apart!

Once the discussion on the Storm Sword concluded, Ves decided to introduce his own mech proposal.

He first activated a projection that showed a recording of the previous battle. It focused entirely on the 15,000 mechs that had spread out and tried to close in on the distant fleet of alien warships.

"You should all be familiar with this sight." He said. "While it is true that we have won this battle with 'minimal' casualties, the lives of our mech pilots are too precious to squander on the native alien version of cannon fodder. It is not worth it to sacrifice hundreds of highly trained Larkinson mech pilots to defeat scores of lesser alien warships. While I have many ideas on how we can reduce the loss rate in future battles, I have an idea that is highly flexible and can be utilized against many different types of adversaries."

The projection changed to show a rudimentary draft design of a thin and unarmored mech frame.

"This is only the basic platform. Look at what comes next." Ves grinned and waved his hand.

The mech suddenly gained a lot of additional mass. Six bulbous constructs had been attached to the frame on all sides, which added a lot of protection on each side.

However, these constructs weren't meant to remain attached to the mech frame.

The projected image shifted as the constructs separated from the mech platform and started to hover around it in different formations!

"Those are autonomous spurs!" Dulo Voiken called out. "Are you actually thinking about designing a drone mech of sorts this time, sir?"

Ves nodded. "Yes. I know that the use of spurs is not always reliable, but hear me out. What you see before you is the Fey Project. Different from the Minerva Project that it is based upon, this command mech is solely designed to command and coordinate its linked spurs which I call fey. These fey are not ordinary drones. There are two distinct and unique features to them that make them extremely useful to our clan."

Everyone listened with great interest to his explanation. It was not common to field mechs like these as spurs tended to be fragile, unreliable and needlessly complex.

While Ves was familiar with all of these disadvantages, he was convinced that he could make it work!

The projection changed to zoom in on the drafted version of a fey. Its appearance and technical aspects did not look remarkable. The only noteworthy aspect was that it mounted a luminar crystal gun.

"One of the functions of the fey is to increase the volume of fire of our mech force, but that is only the most basic requirement. What I truly want is to turn them into effective decoys. That is why they are called fey. They are designed with trickery and deception in mind. I want them to trick every enemy we come across and draw lots of enemy fire, particularly warship fire. Every shot that is fired towards a fey is another attack that is not able to land on a piloted mech."

The fey in the image started to activate its inbuilt projector that surrounded its form with a realistic illusion of a Bright Warrior mech!

The false mech was even armed with a luminar crystal rifle, which could perfectly align with the luminar crystal gun of the fey so that it could fire actual energy beams without breaking the facade!

Although the gathered Journeymen looked slightly impressed at this idea, Miles Tovar shook his head.

"If spurs like these could function as highly realistic and effective decoys, drone mechs such as your Fey Project would have been more common in the mech market. It is too difficult to fool enemies for too long."

Ves smirked. "That is true in ordinary cases, but recall the battle scenario that I just showed earlier. Enemy sensors are much less capable of distinguishing reality from falsehood at longer ranges and under heavy interference. Even if the fey cannot maintain the illusion at shorter ranges, it doesn't matter too much as they have already served their primary purpose at that time. What matters is that the expendable fey draw as much enemy fire away from our much more precious mechs during the approach phase of every space battle."

This might actually work in those cases. While more sophisticated and technology advanced enemies had a much higher chance of penetrating the camouflage, everyone figured out that this implementation would be extremely effective against weaker opponents such as the wheednar warships!

"These 'fey' can do more than attract enemy fire." Gloriana said with an enthused gleam in her eyes. "They can also be used to give our opponents a mistaken impression of our total combat power! So long as the illusions hold, an enemy may think we are about to attack them with 50,000 mechs as opposed to just 10,000 mechs. The threat they pose on enemies is completely different! Our targets may even lose so much confidence that they have decided to give up the battle before it has even started!"

That would be a fantastic outcome! Enemies that have dropped all organized resistance in order to flee like cowards were much easier to roll over!

This was only a dream scenario, though. It was still extremely difficult to turn this into a reality!

"As long as we are facing enemies that are familiar with mechs, it is extremely difficult to maintain this camouflage." Miles told everyone. "It only takes a single flaw to allow our enemies to distinguish the real mechs from all of the fey that are pretending to be bigger than they actually are. It also becomes exponentially more difficult for the fey to serve as effective decoys at closer ranges."

"That is why I want you to take part in the Fey Project, Miles."

"Pardon?"

"Your specialty makes you good at emission control. What I want from you is to reduce the emissions of the mech platform and increase the emissions of the fey to maximize the probability that the enemy will target the latter. Can you do that?"

Miles looked rather interested at the prospect of helping Ves turn this mech concept into a reality.

"I will do so if you will have me. It is not what I ordinarily do, but I think I can make the fey appear close to a real mech to enemy sensors."

"Good." Ves looked satisfied. "Your work is key to making the Fey Project work. Its value will be a lot more discounted if the fey cannot convincingly pretend to be mechs."

He did not want to resort to the more obvious Journeymen all of the time. He had to make sure that all of the lead designers had an opportunity to shine in the Design Department.

He moved on to explaining the second key characteristic of the spurs of the Fey Project.

"Now, part of what can make the deception more convincing is if the fey can move and fight close to a real piloted mech. Even if they drop the illusion, they must still be excellently controlled in order to maximize their damage and survival rate. The mech platform must also maintain reliable connections to all of its fey, which can be very challenging at times. I have devised a special solution that can solve all of these problems."

"And that is..."

"I intend to make all of the fey alive." Ves replied with a smirk. "Each mech platform is a living mech by itself, but all of the fey that it can pair with are independently alive as well! In effect, every pilot of the Fey Project will be in charge of multiple living machines!"

"What?!"

#### Chapter 5044 Expanded Versatility

Ves continued to expand upon his vision of the Fey Project for twenty more minutes.

The fey offered a lot of versatility to the table.

They could be made to be large and tough enough to form a physical wall that could block anything short of attacks launched by warships.

They could be mounted with sharp blades and serve as an additional source of offensive pressure in close quarters combat.

They could be mounted with transphasic shield generators and spread out so that they could protect the lives of innocent civilians in a city under siege.

Under every circumstance, the fey always had the option of disguising themselves as authentic mechs, which could always throw off the adversary's estimates.

"Information is power. Misinformation is a weapon." Ves succinctly stated. "We can use the fey in a lot of brilliant tactical ruses. For example, they can pretend to be cheap mechs developed by an ordinary mech company. They can pretend to be high-end military mechs. They can even pretend to be mechs belonging to the allies of our enemies. As long as the deception holds, they can produce results that are unattainable by other means!"

Many of his fellow Journeymen understood the potential of the Fey Project and all of its versatile fey, but that did not mean they had lost their capacity for critical thinking.

Each of these mech designers had managed to break through the extraordinary threshold by propelling their design philosophy and design skills beyond mortal constraints!

Ketis stated the obvious.

"I can see how the fey can be useful, but each of these special spurs take up space. Is it truly wise to fill up the mech capacity and cargo capacity of our ships with so many spurs as opposed to more mechs and more supplies? I mean, how much space does the Fey Project even occupy on a carrier?"

"I have already thought about that." Ves calmly responded. "The fey can be designed in many different ways. They can be as large as actual mechs or be shrunk and flattened so that they can be stacked on top of each other like crates. The ideal way to store them is to design the fey so that they can be attached to their mech platforms and remain physically and spiritually connected to each other when not being put to better use. Look at this draft image."

He transmitted a command that caused the center projection to display the image of the Fey Project with its spurs attached to the front and back of its frame.

The extra additions added a lot of bulk to the mech, but the fey were designed in such a way that they seamlessly linked up with each other while also molding themselves perfectly to the mech frame.

"The mech stables and other permanent storage spaces for mechs on a starship or in a military base are designed to barely accommodate most reasonable versions of heavy mechs." Ves explained.

"The Fey Project's mech frame falls under the medium weight class. Attaching four to six fey will roughly turn the combined package into the equivalent of a heavy mech in terms of mass and volume. This is the most efficient storage arrangement of the fey. If necessary, the fey can also be stored into standard cargo containers and be placed in the cargo holds of different starships, though I do not recommend it as the mech platform and the fey are meant to form a social communion."

Though Ves provided an adequate solution regarding the storage of different fey, his last sentence exposed another odd situation.

Sara Voiken raised her arm. "I don't quite understand the positioning of these fey. At one point, you stated that you want to treat them as expendable decoys that can attract enemy fire. At another point, you claimed that they are alive and that they can grow more powerful over time. Wouldn't it be counterproductive to deliberately shove them forward and treat them as cannon fodder?"

This indeed sounded rather incomprehensible to the mech designers who were familiar with Ves. They all knew how much he valued his living mechs. Their potential rested in their ability to grow, adapt and become stronger over time.

This meant that his design philosophy shared an antithetical relationship with expendability. The less people valued a living mech, the more Ves could not tolerate such behavior!

Why did he suddenly change his mind concerning the fey. Was it because they were not full living mechs and could therefore be treated as slaves or commodities as opposed to valued children?

It did not surprise Ves too much that his subordinates expressed confusion about this contradiction.

This situation highlighted the differences in perspectives between the two. The Journeymen of the Design Department judged the Fey Project according to an interpretation of the design capabilities that Ves had demonstrated up to the present.

The problem was that Ves was not a static figure that remained the same all of the time.

He was a mech designer who not only developed rapidly compared to his peers, but also made shocking and revolutionary advancements from time to time!

"I have recently been working on figuring out a solution to preserving the essence of living mechs after their frames have fallen in battle." Ves said as he crossed his arms. "You can treat the relationship between the mech platform and its fey as a trial balloon in this context. I am trying to experiment with a way to preserve at least a part of the lives of the fey after they have been fallen into battle."

"How?"

"Well, I can design them in a way that they are not completely independent. Just as how we all have companion spirits that are extensions of our own selves, the fey can be treated as extensions of the living mech that they are paired with. The mech platform is the root for all of the living fey. As long as the bare machine itself is able to survive the battle, it should effectively be able to resurrect all of its fey."

That would be an impressive feat if Ves could make it happen!

Since no one else possessed a lot of depth in living mechs or spiritual engineering, the Journeymen had no ability to judge whether Ves could realize this new idea. They had little choice but to trust his word and believe in his ability.

"Is it even possible for you to design and make a mech that contains multiple lives?" Gloriana questioned. "You have never created such a product in the past."

Ves scoffed. "The past doesn't determine the future. I am the pioneer in my own field. I am pretty confident that I can make this happen. It is crucial to make the fey at least semi-autonomous. It plays an important role in what I have in mind for the next wave of spiritual innovations. If I can succeed, our exclusive mech ecosystem will definitely take off like nothing else in the Age of Dawn!"

His vision was so ambitious that he did not dare to explain too much to the others!

He wanted to remain at least somewhat cautious and avoid making promises that he couldn't keep. It was still highly uncertain how his actual implementation would look like as his work was heavily reliant on how well he solved a series of new and unprecedented problems.

They talked a bit more about the Fey Project, but it was clear that Ves had the ultimate say from beginning to end. This was one of his latest pet projects and he was determined to break new ground in the field of living mechs with this useful and versatile drone mech design!

"As the Fey Project is highly reliant on control and coordination, it needs to be equipped with a special neural interface that can better facilitate the control between the mech pilots and the fey. Cormaunt, can you make this interface?"

The dark-skinned mech designer nodded after a few seconds. "I have never developed a neural interface with multiple control objects in mind, but I understand the theory. I can do it as long as I refresh my knowledge and consult additional sources. Let me tell you that your proposed drone mech will be much more difficult to pilot with each additional spur. Normally, it takes high genetic aptitude to proficiently control three or more spurs."

"I think that the fey will not be as difficult to control as they should be able to think for themselves. We can figure out the exact mechanics later."

Drone mechs theoretically possessed a lot of potential, but piloting them was not simple.

If the spurs were largely controlled by Als, then they would lose many of the advantages of mechs. People might as well deploy independent drones in their place.

In order to justify the existence of drone mechs, their spurs had to fall under direct control of the mech pilot, which wasn't always easy as there were too many ways to interrupt the wireless communication channels.

Even if maintaining solid links was not a problem, a human pilot could only keep track of so much stuff.

Multitasking imposed an enormous burden to a controller. After a lot of trial and error, it became clear that only pilots with B-grade or A-grade genetic aptitudes could comfortably control a larger amount of autonomous spurs!

This was a highly restrictive demand, and one that did not sit well with many talents.

Mech pilots with excellent genetic aptitudes generally preferred to deepen their control over a single excellent machine and push it beyond its limits.

Compared to mastering the art of a sword or becoming a highly accurate sniper, puppeting a bunch of disposable spurs did not sound as exciting!

Ves hoped to change all of these rules one way or another. It highly depended on how he realized the Fey Project.

He had so many potential ideas that he could use to elevate his new mech design project, but he still needed to figure out which ones were viable and which ones he would ultimately select.

It was still too early for him to have a clear and concrete vision for the Fey Project.

Ves quickly added another Journeyman to the project.

"Beatrice. I could use your help as well." He told the latest mech designer to join the Design Department. "You have spent enough time in our clan to have a good idea of what we are about. The Fey Project will probably be one of the most interesting and advanced living mech designs that we will be working on for this year, so it will serve as an excellent introduction to our unique mechs. Do you think you can add useful input to this project?"

The woman did not expect to be called out at this time, but now that she learned that she would be assigned to this project, she decided to share an idea that she had in mind for the Fey Project.

"I can work on a modular armor system that is shared between the base mech and its fey. What I mean by that is that I can make them identical and interchangeable. If the mech platform ever sustains heavy damage, a fey can shed a number of its modular armor plating and transfer it to the damaged mech. This will ensure that the mech pilot remains adequately protected. It will also help with keeping the most important element of the Fey Project that can remain in the field."

"Excellent idea!" Ves' eyes lit up. "I haven't thought about it, but you are right. Every fey can serve as a repository for modular armor plating. They can not only refresh the damaged armor of the Fey Project, but also other mechs in an emergency as long as they are compatible enough!"

This would expand the versatility and the defensive utility of the Fey Project even more!

This was the advantage of adding more mech designers to the Design Department. Ves had a lot more options at his disposal compared to before!

#### Chapter 5045 Hard Firepower Needs

The Fey Project as Ves envisioned it had the potential to amplify the combat effectiveness of the Larkinson Army!

It was not a mech model that could smack down difficult adversaries by itself. Quantity alone was not enough to defeat truly challenging opponents.

However, the Fey Project could serve as an excellent force multiplier for the main forces of the Larkinson Clan.

The most basic luminar crystal gun fey could instantly multiply the volume of fire of the Larkinson Army by several times as long as they were fielded in large quantities!

Even if these fey could never be as precise and good at tracking fast-moving targets, they could still be useful in laying down a lot of suppressive fire!

Besides, it did not take as much skill and precision to strike a large warship. So long as tens of thousands of spurs simultaneously attacked any target, any form of defense would buckle under the overwhelming barrage, especially if the energy guns were transphasic!

The expense was too great, though. Ves had not made up his mind whether he would be willing to squander any phasewater to construct transphasic spurs. It sounded like an excessive luxury.

Energy also became a serious issue. If the Larkinsons employed all of the spurs as extra sources of ranged firepower, then they would only be able to make their presence felt in the first half of a battle.

It was like mounting five or seven full-sized energy weapons onto the same mech!



The volume of fire at the start would be great, but the mech would eat away its energy reserves so rapidly that it risked turning into an empty shell after only ten minutes had passed!

Though Ves supposed he could ask for help from Master Benedict yet again, this was not an optimal solution.

The Fey Project as he envisioned it had the potential to become one of the most useful core mechs of the Larkinson Army.

Ves felt the need to keep its development as in-house as possible. He not only wanted to maintain the confidentiality of its design, but also thought that he and his fellow designers needed to solve their own problems.

If their first response to any difficult problem was to call for outside help, then what was the point of becoming a mech designer?

Once Ves completed his presentation of the Fey Project, he brought up another demand.

"The Fey Project will certainly help with defeating alien warships once it is finished, but we can do so much more. As battles against alien warships will become more ubiquitous, we need stronger ranged firepower. To be more precise, we need a stronger bunker mech model that can better our starships as well as a stronger rifleman mech model that can contribute a lot more firepower to any offensive actions. Do you have any proposals that fits these categories?"

Everyone remained silent for a time.

"None of us specialize in designing ranged mechs." Merrill O'Brian spoke up. "In fact, over half of us are only competent in designing melee mechs. You are the closest to a ranged specialist in our department."

"..."

That was correct. While Ves had a lot of confidence in his ability to design ranged mechs, he already added a lot of work to his plate. It became increasingly more difficult to work on more and more ranged mech design projects.

He had little choice for the time being. Unless Zanthar Larkinson finally managed to break through and form a design philosophy centered around luminar crystal technology, Ves could not truly count on anyone else in the Design Department!

Ves let out a sigh. "Alright. Let me explain what I have in mind. As you all know, I have accepted three major mech commissions from Davute. The first one I will be working on is what Master Decimus Horst and I have taken to calling the Supremo Project. It is a purely landbound artillery mech that we project can play an extremely useful role in planetary combat. While it can function as a bunker mech in a pinch, it is not really optimized for this purpose. The main armaments of this artillery mech are its kinetic cannons that can fire high-explosive shells. These weapons are great in a planetary environment, but they are not nearly as adequate in space due to their average muzzle velocities and lack of gravity."

He briefly expanded upon the Supremo Project, but did not go into too much detail as it was a product designed for a client instead of the Larkinson Clan.

"An artillery mech as effective as this can help our clan as well." Gloriana said with growing interest. "Can we field this new mech ourselves? It can massively strengthen the branches that we have established on different planets such as Davute VII."

Ves smirked. "Of course I did. I would not easily agree to design an excellent mech for a client if I cannot make use of my own work. In any case, Davute mainly cares about preventing the Supremo Project and future commissioned mechs from being employed by Karlach and its other regional rivals. Our clan is not a direct competitor to the colonial state so the Davutans don't care too much if we field the new heavy artillery mech model ourselves."

This was basically another aspect of the trade between Ves and Davute.

The colonial state would get a powerful living mech that came with a number of unique and incredibly strong features courtesy of Ves.

The Larkinson Clan would gain the option of fielding a powerful new heavy artillery mech that was co-designed by a Master Mech Designer who specialized in this mech type!

Since both sides wanted to make good use of the Supremo Project, they had a strong incentive to do their best!

While the Supremo Project could potentially help the growing Larkinson Clan defend its various planetary branches a lot more effectively in the future, it was not as applicable in space combat.

The rules of combat were entirely different. Range mattered a lot more, and the only way to produce an effect similar to indirect fire was by employing guided missiles.

Ves was not yet willing to design a missileer mech despite its high potential. The effectiveness of missiles directly scaled to how much it cost to make them. The very best transphasic missiles were blazingly fast, possessed enormous effective ranges and could detonate warheads that were dozens of times more powerful than equivalent attacks from other conventional weapons!

However, the use of high-end missiles would deplete the Larkinson Clan's supply of potent exotics and phasewater at record speeds!

Ves would hardly have anything left to fabricate more quasi-first-class mechs if this was the case!

This was why he decided to turn back to an old and familiar mech model.

"I intend to design the next iteration of the Transcendent Punisher at the same time or a little later than the Supremo Project." He announced. "The Transcendent Punisher Mark I and Mark II have  
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served our clan well in many battles. Few adversaries are able to withstand the uncannily accurate volleys from our Ylvainain bunker mechs. I intend to bring it up to quasi-first-class standards and add a couple of new features that should massively increase its combat effectiveness."

The former was straightforward, but the latter sounded a bit too vague. Nobody knew what Ves had in mind, but it was clear that he still needed to work on his new solutions before he was ready to share his latest results to everyone.

In any case, the Transcendent Punisher Mark II could no longer keep up with the current caliber of opponents. Ves also disliked many of its design flaws that he had yet to address due to his ignorance on how good heavy artillery mechs were supposed to work.

Ves had great plans to reinvent this staple mech and change its configuration of armaments to better excel at fighting warships!

"Once we introduce the Transcendent Punisher Mark III to our fleet, it will make our fleet a lot more impregnable." He grinned. "This is because its transphasic cannons will integrate a higher proportion of phasewater than the weapon systems of our other standard mechs. We will all be counting on this mech model to defend our starships against many possible threats. It is not wise to be too stingy about spending phasewater when our lives and the lives of our own families are at stake."

Nobody disagreed with that. There were many differences between transphasic weapons. One that incorporated ten times as much phasewater was much more effective at wearing down the energy defenses of phase lords and alien warships!

The amount of phasewater needed to transition all of the mechs of the Larkinson Clan to quasi-first-class standards just went up by a large margin!

The expeditionary fleet urgently needed to raid a huge stash of phasewater in order to keep up with Ves' wild ambitions!

After informing his clan about his intention to start development on the Transcendent Punisher Mark III, Ves turned his attention to his demand for a new rifleman mech.

"We have several existing ranged mech solutions in our mech roster. The problem is that their mech concepts and weapon configurations are mainly optimized for mech combat." Ves explained his views on this topic.

The central projection displayed a Bright Warrior Mark II in a typical rifleman mech configuration.

"This is our most common general purpose ranged mech. It is fairly good at its job and is quite flexible due to its highly modular design features. However, it is lacking in hard power and does not fit the needs of mech pilots who are highly skilled in ranged combat."

That was a common shortcoming of a versatile and more accommodating mech model.

A cannoneer mech showed up next.

"Then we have the Eternal Redemption. The design is horribly outdated due to our rapid growth. Its superheavy gauss cannon packs a good punch, but it is only effective at middle to shorter ranges. Its ammunition capacity is also horribly limited as it always tends to run out of rounds before it has even managed to breach the defenses of a formidable alien warship. Finally, it is limited to the Penitent Sisters, which severely restricts how many of them we can field in our expeditionary fleet."

Juliet slightly frowned as Ves kept criticizing a mech model utilized by her mech legion, but she could not refute the points.

The central projection changed to show a pair of slimmer and lighter machines.

"Next, we have a pair of submachine gun-wielding mechs in the form of the Valkyrie Redeemer and the Stingripper." Ves continued. "While they function as serious ranged mechs, their light and fast-firing ranged weapons are solely designed to fight against mechs and other small craft. They lack the caliber and punch to deal effective damage onto warships. Their effective ranges are also

horribly low. These are the last ranged mechs I would pick if I had to muster up a force to confront a fleet of alien warships."

The Valkyrie Redeemer and the Stingripper were not weak. Their glows were incredibly useful and synergized well with their technical configurations.

However, the Larkinson Clan had fought against enough alien warships to learn that fancy tricks could not completely make up for an absence in hard firepower!

Ves looked at every Journeyman in the eyes. "All of these older mech models worked out well enough for us in the Age of Mechs, but now that we have entered the Age of Dawn, we cannot put so much emphasis into fighting small craft anymore. We need to introduce a new line of ranged mechs that excel at damaging warships. I put a bit of thought into what we need, and I have come up with a new mech concept that should give us the mobile ranged firepower platform that we can comfortably field in large numbers."

The central projection unveiled a draft design that was unlike any of the other mechs displayed before.

The entire meeting room fell utterly silent as every Journeyman became gobsmacked at the sight of the craziest idea that Ves had unveiled in this session!

"Uhm, sir?" Dulo Voiken tentatively raised his hand and asked.

"Yes?"

"Is that... an elephant?"

Chapter 5046 Are You Drunk?

"Were you drunk when you came up with this stupid mech?"

"Er... no. At least I don't think so. I was... in a special creative mood, I guess."

To be honest, Ves did not know what he was thinking when he came up with his latest mech concept.

The draft design he showed off today looked like an upright humanoid elephant creature with a pair of solid legs, four arms and a long and flexible trunk!

Although it looked formidable at first glance, every decent mech designer could immediately list its many shortcomings. It was a mech that did not look like it belonged in a space battle in the slightest!

How could Ves possibly come up with such an absurd spaceborn mech?

It was as if he formed a list of all of the deficiencies of the current mech lineup of the Larkinson Army, drank himself stupid and picked the first ridiculous idea that came to mind in order to resolve as many shortcomings with a single design as possible!

Although Ves indeed generated a lot of doubts about this highly unorthodox mech proposal, he did not dismiss it out hand.

When he thought about it a bit more, he found that its logic was actually quite sound!

His greatest difficulty was convincing others that he was being serious about introducing this new mech to the Larkinson Army!

"That... is not a dedicated ranged mech." Ketis stated. "It has four arms, and one of them is holding an axe."

"Yup. That is because its large frame bestows a lot of mechanical power to its limbs. It is a waste to leave all of that strength untapped. Besides, I don't want this new mech of mine to be unable to defend itself at close range. It needs to be able to protect its transmission channels from various threats."

Gloriana made her own remark. "I understand that you positioned the Transcendent Punisher Mark III as a powerful defensive ranged mech solution. It is logical to keep it stationary considering its comparatively enormous mass."

"That is right, honey." Ves replied with a loving smile.

"THEN WHY ARE YOU PROPOSING TO DESIGN A HEAVY MECH AS AN OFFENSIVE SOLUTION?! Can you not see how slow it will be when moving in space?! Adding this ridiculous mech to our offensive formations will slow down all of the mechs that it is accompanying!"

"That is true... under normal circumstances. This is not a normal circumstance."

"Explain."

Ves smirked and highlighted a specific module in the unusual draft design. "Look at its flight system. It's big, right? It can provide a lot of forward acceleration to this hefty mech frame. Sure, it won't be able to dance as nimbly in the void of space as our light mechs, but nobody is asking for that. Look at this cruise drive. Don't you think it looks larger and more powerful than the ones in the previous sketches? You guys haven't completely adapted to the Phasewater Generation. Even if my proposed Elephant Project is twice as slow as our medium mechs, as long as its cruise drive can amplify its speed twice as much, it can still keep up with most general offensive maneuvers!"

His wife looked at Ves as if he had gone completely bonkers!

"Did you hit your head too hard with that hammer of yours? This is the opposite of a cost-effective mech! The amount of phasewater needed to fabricate this powerful cruise drive may be four times or ten times as much as the cruise drive of a medium mech! The scalability of this new and experimental tech is too poor!"

Ves shook his head. "What you are saying is not wrong, but it doesn't matter. We are living in an age where red humanity has fallen into an existential crisis. Multiple alien races from multiple galaxies have the potential to overrun our fragile patch of space in the corner of the Red Ocean. We need to go all-out and fight aggressively in order to keep our heads afloat. This ambitious mech design is a reflection of our need to push our mechs to the extreme."

"I think it is better for all of us if you take the time to explain your vision for your latest proposal, sir." Merrill O'Brian spoke up. "It will give us more clarification than if you keep replying to these ad-hoc questions."

"You're right. Let's begin with the most distinctive feature of the Elephant Project. I am sure you are asking why it has four arms. Isn't two arms standard? Well, this is a heavy mech, so it has a lot of room for additional modules and weapons. The four arms grant my new mech a lot of flexibility and versatility. One of the arms holds an axe, while the other three arms can be used to hold other equipment. For example, our current situation demands a lot of additional hard firepower. The Elephant Project may not be a totally dedicated ranged mech platform like the Transcendent Punisher, but it can freely carry a pair of transphasic luminar crystal cannons and keep firing them for a long time due to its large energy reserves and high heat capacity."

The other mech designers began to comprehend why Ves did not discard this ridiculous mech concept out of hand.

Even though it looked like a slow and unwieldy heavy mech, as long as its mobility no longer became an issue due to the addition of a powerful cruise drive, it might actually make for a decent offensive mech!

The key to this machine was that it was multiple times more massive than a typical medium mech such as a Bright Warrior.

This meant that it could bring a lot of hard firepower to the table!

The four arms offered the Elephant Project a generous combination of versatility and power. The limbs all looked thick and strong, so they could easily carry a heavy mech weapon each!

Ves displayed various different loadouts in the central projection.

In one striking image, the sketch displayed the Elephant Project wielding an axe, a shield and two heavy luminar crystal cannons!

The cannons were especially designed for the Elephant Project as each of them effectively merged with an arm in order to grant greater stability and control.

This particular configuration turned the Elephant Project into a balanced and versatile heavy assault mech that could fire a lot of powerful energy beams in the approach of a battle.

Once the mechs of the Larkinson Clan collided with an enemy force, the Elephant Project could either keep providing support at a modest distance or go in and use its formidable bulk and melee equipment to push through weaker defensive lines!

The second sketch showed the Elephant Project wielding four heavy luminar crystal cannons, one for each of its thick and solid arms!

While the mech would not be able to achieve high accuracy and precision due to its inherent design shortcomings, it didn't matter as long as it lay siege onto a large warship!

In order to keep the hungry energy weapons fed, this version of the Elephant Project mounted additional external battery packs.

While the addition of these battery packs increased the mass and decreased the mobility of the Elephant Project, it did not matter as long as the mech was solely used to bombard starships at a distance!

"If we had a few hundred of these Elephant Project mechs in this particular configuration in the last battle, those wheednar warships would have folded twice as quickly as before. While I cannot make any solid predictions about its staying power, a single one of these cannon-wielding heavy mechs should easily be able to output at least eight times as much damage as a ranged medium mech. This is a huge boost in both firepower and efficiency when you consider our limited mech capacity."

Ves had made sure that the Elephant Project remained compact and reasonable enough in size to fit in a standard mech stable!

This was extremely crucial in a situation where the Larkinson Clan was unable to acquire more carrier vessels.

Replacing a bunch of medium mechs with Elephant Project mechs was an easy way to increase the amount of firepower that the Larkinsons could bring to bear against enemy warships!

Of course, the Elephant Project might be able to pose a significant threat towards warships, but it was less handy at defeating mechs.

The Elephant Project was completely incapable of dogfighting against other mechs. While its ability to wield melee weapons may be useful in fending off enemies up close, it would fare particularly poorly against mid-range rifleman mechs that possessed enough agility to evade many heavy cannon attacks.

Still, it was impossible for this proposed mech to excel in every area. Ves was already happy that the Elephant Project could fulfill a range of different roles by virtue of its large range of viable equipment loadouts.

Ves was not completely satisfied with this particular weapon combination. He did not come up with the Elephant Project just to carry four heavy luminar crystal cannons to a fight. He might as well remove the arms and affix the cannons directly onto the large mech frame if this was the case!

He changed the projection to a configuration that looked a lot different from the other ones.

While one of its arms still held an axe, the other three arms appeared to be holding thick and armored cables!

"That looks familiar." Gloriana spoke.

"It should." Ves grinned. "Remember the Blessed Squire that we designed all of those years ago? This is the jumbo spaceborn version of that old design. Those cables are designed to mount on other friendly mechs, particularly ranged mechs, for the purpose of supporting them. These cables cannot only siphon excess heat away from other machines, but also channel energy so that the recipients can fire their energy weapons once again!"

This was a completely different way for the Elephant Project to contribute to a fight!

While it was a lot simpler for the Elephant Project to wield a bunch of cannons and open fire on enemy targets, it would be horribly lacking in precision and efficiency.

Instead of undertaking this role itself, the heavy mech could instead support other ranged mechs that were much better at this job!

"If we employ the Elephant Project as the spaceborn version of the Blessed Squire, it can substantially increase our weight of fire at the beginning while also increasing the staying power of

our mechs if a battle ever rages." Ves explained his rationale. "Compared to the mechs of the Cross Clan, our own mechs tend to get exhausted a lot sooner. This is a deadly flaw that can screw us over in any large battles that drag on for hours. It is extremely unwieldy to force our exhausted machines to return to their motherships in order to replenish their spent energy cells. What we need is a more dedicated support mech that is filled to the brim with energy cells and heatsinks that can quickly and urgently replenish our combat machines in the field."

This was actually a good argument. It was similar to the one that justified the existence of the Blessed Squire, though its glow wouldn't be too unique in a mech army that was already flooded with living mechs!

Gloriana actually looked as if she was starting to come around to this idea. After all, she already supported and participated in the development of the original Blessed Squire.

"How quickly can the Elephant Project replenish a friendly mech?"

"That depends. I need to look further into the right technologies." Ves responded. "I am hoping that the Elephant Project can fully replenish a friendly mech in a minute or less. This way, the heavy mech can hang back and avoid attracting too much enemy fire. Any longer than that will not only make it too conspicuous, but also make the mech too vulnerable to enemy counterattacks."

It would be great if connecting to one of its cables could quickly replenish the energy reserves of a ranged mech by 20 percent or so in a matter of seconds. This was enough to enable a completely drained machine to contribute to a battle for a respectable amount of time!

"Why did you decide to add an elephant trunk to the mech, Ves?" Ketis couldn't help but ask. "No offense, but it makes your mech look... dopey."

"How eloquent." Ves replied with a smirk. "I added it because it adds a theme to my mech. Besides, this trunk is not a piece of decoration. You can think of it as an additional limb. It can serve a surprising amount of uses, from grabbing an extra piece of equipment to repelling enemies that can get too close. Since we are talking about a heavy mech, this design has more than enough capacity to accommodate an extra strong limb!"

## Chapter 5047 Fulfilling Needs

Nobody knew what Ves was thinking when he proposed a mech as ridiculous and counterintuitive as the Elephant Project.

The Larkinson Army needed a powerful and fairly mobile ranged mech in order to serve as the mainstay in every battle against warships.

Why did Ves suddenly propose a crazy elephant mech with two thick legs, four meaty arms and an elephant trunk of all choices?

Sure, the mech offered a lot of value in theory. Its thick armor, its high carrying capacity, its versatile weapon choices and its ability to provide support to other friendly mechs could all help the Larkinsons defeat their opponents faster, but mech design was never a simple game of stacking one feature on top of each other.

The combination of parts and design features had to synergize well with each other.



The configuration also had to result in a reasonable allocation of resources in order to be competitive.

The mech also had to fulfill a real need for the end users in order to justify its usage in battle.

Right now, the Journeymen of the Design Department questioned all three points with regards to the Elephant Project!

The previous design projects such as the Storm Sword Project and the Transcendent Punisher Mark II Project all had solid justifications that made them more than worthwhile to the Larkinson Clan.

The same could not be said for this crazy boondoggle of a design project!

Gloriana looked more pensive than most.

"Do you think that phasewater grows on trees? The requirements and expectations that you have set for the Elephant Project will result in a mech design that will absolutely drain all of our phasewater reserves! No mech aside from our expert mechs will demand more phasewater in its construction than this illogical heavy support mech!"

Ves remained unconcerned. "You are not wrong about the high cost of producing this mech, but that is not necessarily a disadvantage in my book. The large investment of resources will absolutely pay off once we have a few hundred copies of these new heavy mechs in our lineup. They can serve as powerful heavyweights in space and on land. They are flexible enough to fulfill one role or another role. They will pay off their cost." "Phasewater." Gloriana repeated the word. "You can fantasize about your Elephant Project all you want, but if our clan doesn't have enough phasewater to produce your new mech in sufficient quantities, you will waste the time spent on designing a mech that you can only admire in a projection."

"The phasewater requirements won't be a problem, dear." He told his wife in an annoyed tone of voice. "Do you think that our expeditionary fleet is roaming the Torald Middle Zone without aim? Our alliance is currently in the middle of preparing for a greater action. I can't say much about it as we still don't know much about our targets, but we should gain a sufficient amount of phasewater to meet all of our immediately needs if we succeed."

Ves was a clan leader as well as a mech designer. He had access to more information than his fellow mech designers and he also had the power to steer the direction of the expeditionary fleet.

He originally set up his clan to fulfill his needs as a mech designer, and it had done a great job at that. The clan played an even more important role for him now that red humanity had entered a much more dangerous era.

Though many people still expressed skepticism towards the Elephant Project, Ves used his prerogative as a leader to turn it into a formal mech design project.

He roped in Sara Voiken, Merrill O'Brian and Tifi Coslone as well.

The three women did not look particularly enthused to spend so much time on designing a difficult and overcomplicated heavy mech, but their expertise could all play a useful role in rounding out the design.

"What of an actual rifleman mech, sir?" Miles Tovar asked. "While it is clear that your Elephant Project can offer heavy fire support in assaults, we still need a more potent rifleman mech that can offer superior performance compared to a more general purpose mech such as our Bright Warrior."

He was right. The Elephant Project could not replace the role of a rifleman mech due to its high mass, terrible maneuverability and lack of focus.

Ves leaned back on his seat and steepled his fingers together. "I have a different plan in mind when it comes to this particular requirement. I am sick of being forced to take the lead on every ranged mech design project. We haven't been doing our utmost to recruit a Journeyman who specializes in ranged mechs. I intend to remedy that in the following weeks. I will either recruit a suitable mech designer or settle for collaborating with a third party."

"A third party?" Ketis questioned. "Aren't you contradicting yourself again, Ves? I thought our priority was to reduce our dependence on external consultants."

"You're right, but these are special times." Ves patiently responded. "While it is true that we cannot put much trust in a random mech designer, I am sure I can leverage my network to find a more trustworthy candidate. At least give me time to find a good recruit or collaborator. If I don't find any, we can always gather together and figure out a solution ourselves."

He already had a few ideas where he could find a decent ranged specialist.

The meeting continued as the mech designers proposed numerous other design projects.

Numerous Journeymen were still too preoccupied with ongoing projects to think about proposing any new designs, but that was okay.

It was also necessary to update the designs of existing mech models, particularly their commercial products. The changes brought about by exotic radiation at least demanded an adjustment to the material composition of every design.

As the meeting almost came to a close, Gloriana addressed the need to design two new high-tier expert mechs.

"It is high time for us to begin our development of the expert mechs for your grandfather and your uncle." She told her husband. "I will take the lead on the Jupiter Project for General Ark Larkinson. I have taken the first steps of understanding what he seeks in a new expert mech. You should take the lead on the Blood Star Mark II Project. You possess the greatest understanding of the Carmine System integrated with the current stopgap mech."

Although Ves' design schedule had already grown cramped from accepting so many new mech design proposals, he did not refuse this additional burden.

His grandfather was family.

Benjamin deserved to pilot the best possible living expert mech that his grandson could design!

"I will do it, but it will probably take a lot of time to complete this project." He told her. "The Carmine System introduces a lot of new possibilities, but also adds a lot of new complications."

"Doesn't the Bastion already prove that your Carmine System is operating stably, sir?" Dulo Voiken asked.

"The Bastion is different from the Blood Star." Ves responded. "The Carmine System is an addition to Venerable Jannzi's expert mech. Its importance is much greater for my grandfather's mech. It is right there in the name. In order for Venerable Benjamin Larkinson to rise again, he must learn to tap the power of blood, and the upgraded version of his current machine will help him do so. The Blood Star... represents the emergence of a completely new category of mechs."

His grandfather's life was literally at stake, so Ves did not dare to take this project lightly.

After a bit more discussion, the meeting finally came to an end. While not everyone accepted as many new mech design projects as Ves, it was not a big deal as every Journeyman had many ways to remain productive.

What mattered to Ves was that he needed to speed up the upgrade cycle of the Larkinson Army and turn it into a much more effective hunter of alien warships!

He wanted to improve his standard mech units to the point where they could defeat a fleet like the most recent one without relying on the overwhelming combat power of an ace mech!

Once his forces progressed to this point, Ves would feel much more relieved with splitting them up and allowing them to undertake independent missions.

Several hours later, Ves sat behind his desk terminal and started to frown.

He had looked into easy recruiting prospects but found no Journeyman Mech Designer who satisfied his conditions.

Many mech designers who used to be available for hire quickly found employment as a lot of different states and companies wanted to prepare for the harsher times ahead.

Manpower became a lot more precious as this was no time to hold back anymore.

The mech community needed a lot of mechs that were specifically designed to fight against formidable alien warships.

More importantly, all of these groups also sought to investigate and exploit any powerful advantage produced by exotic radiation!

It took a lot of time and effort to conduct broad research in this emerging field, and hiring additional Journeymen was a great way to gain a lot of qualified and at least somewhat sensitive researchers.

"Damn."

If Ves couldn't find an available mech designer who specialized in ranged weapons, then he could only take a step back and seek to collaborate with a cooperative individual.

Though Ves did not make much progress on this front, he at least managed to complete his preparations for the courses that he was hired to teach in the upcoming semester.

"Our department has just received the last shipment of living mechs from the Hex Federation." The projection of his teaching assistant joyfully said. "They are truly fantastic in every way. We paid extra to convince the Hex Army to send a complete collection of up to date mechs. I admire the Valkyrie Redeemer the most. The way its glow can induce a strong feeling of death and finality is profoundly disturbing. It succeeded in breaking the rhythm of the mech pilots working in security!"

Ves found it rather strange that a Terran mech designer would gush so much about a bunch of second-class mechs.

"My works are fairly simple compared to the first-class multipurpose mechs that Terrans such as yourselves are familiar with. There is not much substance to my mechs once you look past their glows and such."

Alexa shook her head. "You do not need to disparage yourself, Professor Larkinson. Your mechs may be inferior in terms of tech, but the effectiveness and applicability of your design philosophy are not in doubt. I am convinced that your future first-class mech designs will do just as well."

Ves scratched his head. "Did I tell you that I am trying to promote to a first-class mech designer?"

"No, but it is easy to make this deduction. You would not have worked hard to gain employment at a first-class university like ours if you were content with designing second-class mechs. It also fits an existing pattern as you have already left third-class mech design behind. Your overflowing talent combined with the victories attained by your clan all support the conclusion that you are strongly driven by your ambitions." "...You know me quite well."

"I am a Terran. I always do my research, professor." Alexa grinned.

They talked a bit more about the disposition of the living mechs received by the Eden Institute of Business & Technology before they spoke about the enrollment numbers.

"How many students have registered for my courses so far?" Ves asked.

"The numbers are fairly good considering that you are a first-time professor with a second-class background. 14 fourth-year mech design students have signed up for your Introduction to Living Mech Design elective course. 100 fifth-year mech design students are assigned to your Advanced Manual Superfab Operation elective course. In truth, many more students applied for this particular course, but Master Laila Devos imposed a quota to keep your classes manageable."

That was understandable. Ves was still new to all of this and could not oversee too many students.

"What about my Frontier Wisdom course?"

Alexa grinned.

## Chapter 5048 Terran Challenges

Ves established a good working relationship with Miss Alexa Striker.

Though he only met a few months ago and only ever spoke to her by remote, the teaching assistant assigned by the Eden Institute of Business & Technology never proved to be a hindrance.

In fact, it was the opposite. He could hardly think of a more perfect assistant!

Not only did Alexa prove to be diligent and knowledgeable in her work, she also supported Ves in a sincere and unprejudiced manner.

Ves expected that he would have to work hard to earn the approval of the Terrans and overcome their ingrained bias against a mere second-rater like himself.

After all, they were part of one of the great powers of the human race, and possessed a long heritage that stretched all the way back to the Age of Stars!

Perhaps it was part of her training or perhaps she genuinely respected his accomplishments.

Whatever the case, Ves found Alexa to be an excellent confidante as he prepared to teach a bunch of formal classes at a legitimate university for the first time.

While Ves had no illusions that other Terrans would prove as tolerant and easy-going as Alexa, he at least became a lot more confident about his ability to teach his upcoming classes with the help of a supportive insider.

He would never be able to navigate all of the rules and handle all of the paperwork correctly without an attentive assistant taking care of the bureaucracy on her end!

He also doubted that he would have been able to become aware of all of the invisible cultural rules that Terrans cared about the most without the guidance from his teaching assistant.

Nonetheless, Ves clearly understood that Alexa could only help him in peripheral matters. He still needed to do the heavy lifting of imparting useful theories to his students and helping them acquire new proficiencies.

If his teaching content and teaching methods turned out to be inadequate, then the Eden Institute would never be able to justify his continued employment!

Ves would lose what might possibly be his only early opportunity to get in touch with a lot of first-raters at this stage in his career!

It became crucially important that he not only made his students smarter and more competent by the end of the semester, but also gained their approval in the process!

"The Eden Institute especially marketed your new Frontier Wisdom elective course to all of our students," Alexa explained. "Given the content of your subjects, it offers more appeal to our business students than our mech design students as the former are more likely to attain leadership positions where they have enough agency to make use of the knowledge that you have taught."

Ves nodded in acknowledgement. "I already expected as much. The syllabus for this course is not particularly heavy on technical matters. How appealing is Frontier Wisdom to the students of the Eden Institute?"

"This course has proven to be particularly popular, but not always for the right reasons. There are students who clearly signed not because they take your wisdom seriously, but because they wanted to coast through an easy class where they hardly need to employ complicated science or academic theories to earn a passing grade."

That sounded a bit insulting to Ves. He tried his best to turn Frontier Wisdom into a legitimate and useful package of lessons!

"While it is true that Frontier Wisdom is not academic, I don't intend to make it easy for people to pass." He stated in a severe tone. "Are professors allowed to issue graded assignments where students have to navigate challenging situations in highly realistic simulated environments?"

Alexa nodded. "Yes. This is a common teaching and grading method in any first-class school, particularly universities such as ours. Each of our graduates must be well-prepared to utilize what

they have learned to solve real problems in professional settings. If you intend to do more than hold exams for this course, then you will need to prepare simulation scenarios in advance."

"Don't worry. I think I will be able to whip up a few exciting scenarios that will test the courage and the decision-making abilities of my cute little students." Ves deviously grinned. "By the way, how many students have signed up to learn what I have to teach about Frontier Wisdom?"

"The dean has set the limit at 250 students." Alexa replied. "Around two-thirds of them are business majors while the remaining third consist of mech design and other majors. They are not restricted by years so you will have to lecture first-year students as well as five-year students." That sounded a bit messy, but Ves could deal with it. He only thought that it would be a bit of a burden to grade the assignments and exam papers of so many individual students.

Ves and Alexa continued to discuss the logistics of his upcoming classes. The new semester was scheduled to start fairly soon, which meant that Ves had to reserve numerous time slots in his weekly schedule to fulfill his teaching obligations.

All of this work significantly decreased the amount of time he would be able to spend on his core job of mech design!

It would be difficult for him to complete all of his new design projects in a tight time frame.

Still, Ves did not regret applying to teach at the Eden Institute and agreeing to teach three different courses.

As long as he survived the first semester, he would gain a solid foothold in a first-class community!

It would become easier than ever for him to learn the comprehensive aspects of first-class mech design by taking advantage of his employment relationship with an authentic Terran university!

The greatest challenge at the moment was to find a comfortable balance between his two major obligations.

Doing well in his teaching job facilitated his long-term of becoming a first-rater.

Doing well in completing his current batch of design projects directly increased the performance of his troops and increased his probability of surviving future crises in the short and medium term!

If Ves truly had to make a choice, then he would pick the latter over the former without any hesitation, but he was confident that it wouldn't come to this point.

He just had to make sure that he was productive enough to complete his enormous workload in time!

Once Ves and his assistant completed their discussion on more mundane but necessary topics, they began to speak about other matters.

"I have received information that the fleet you are traveling on has just defeated a fleet of alien warships." Alexa spoke with a hint of concern in her voice.

Although the Golden Skull Alliance did not take the initiative to broadcast any information about this battle, it was not particularly hidden. The Red Two maintained a database that tracked many important events in the war between red humanity and the indigenous aliens.

Ves nodded. "That is correct. We earned 300 million MTA merits from this battle. This is probably a small sum to a Terran like you, but it is still a respectable reward for second-raters like myself. It's a shame that our clan had to split the reward with four other pioneering groups."

"Pardon me for asking this, but do you ever feel nervous about the possibility of losing or dying? A Senior Mech Designer of your status and attainments is not required to accompany troops as they enter into dangerous territories. Why do you insist on risking your own life when you can easily do your work in the rear? There is always a possibility that an alien warship will launch a superweapon that can instantly destroy your ship!"

The two mech designers made for a stark contrast. Ves appeared completely relaxed as he did not think his situation was anything special. Meanwhile, Alexa looked as frightened as if she was the one who risked her life in an expedition!

"My answer to this question is a bit complicated." Ves calmly replied as he motioned for his assistant to relax. "I will explain my perspective during my Frontier Wisdom classes. I think you will be able to get a fairly complete answer by that time."

"Is there no other choice? The Eden Institute of Business & Technology has never hired a remote professor that actively insists on participating directly in the war against the natives. Our department did not hire you with the expectation that you would actively expose yourselves to combat. At the very least, our department is concerned that an incident might occur that will prevent you from holding your classes in time."

Incidents such as dying as a phase whale ripped apart the entire expeditionary fleet for example!

Ves crossed his arms. "I am aware that this is a highly unusual situation for your school, but I will not compromise on this matter. The Eden Institute knew what it was getting when it chose to hire me. The risks are real, but I think that a mech designer like myself who is proactively working to secure red humanity's space against hostile aliens can teach a lot more about Frontier Wisdom than a stuffy academic whose only notable combat experience is winning a debate against a rival scientist."

That was certainly true. Ves may be a second-rater, but he was also an adventurer and a self-made man. The school administration was clever enough to recognize that people like him thrived in times of turmoil!

Alexa sighed. "We are all concerned about the escalating war. Our Terran Alliance is still holding strong, but we are noticing that the Red MTA and Red CFA are not always diligent in protecting our borders."

"Oh?" Ves straightened his back a bit. "What do you mean by that, Alexa?"

"Human space in the Red Ocean is divided into three broad regions. There is the Terran Alliance where the Eden Institute resides. There is the Red Ocean Union where you are currently operating from. And then there is the Rubarthan Pact where those imperialistic rebels have sought to establish a new empire."

Her tone clearly turned sour when she brought up the Rubarthans.

"I know that." Ves responded. "Are you saying that the Red Two are pulling their forces away from the borders of the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact?"

"The mechers and the fleeters are not being so blatant about it, but our analysts have noticed an increase in the amount of alien raiding fleets that are getting past the defenses organized by the Red Two. We are being forced to dispatch more and more defenders to the frontlines to protect our colonies from raids. The cosmopolitans have given the indigenous aliens a good understanding of our societal divisions, so our Terran mech forces must resist much stronger alien raiders than the ones that you are likely to face."

That sounded interesting to Ves. He did not really pay attention to the differences between the Red Ocean Union and the other two broad alliances.

"I don't think it is likely for the Red Two to neglect their duty to defend your space." He told her. "If the mechers and fleeters become too negligent, then that will give you Terrans a justification to secede from the current order and form an independent star nation of their own. Our current overlords wouldn't so stupid to give you people this chance."

This was a highly charged political subject, so Alexa did not say much more about this matter.

Ves still found it interesting to learn about the concerns and developments inside the Terran Alliance.

The transition to the Age of Dawn caused a lot of change among the Terrans who ended up stuck inside the Red Ocean that had teleported over to M87's orbit.

The separation from their powerful first-rate superstate severely damaged their confidence.

The enormous distance between their current locations and Old Earth also affected their psyche.

The Terrans had always based their identity around their more direct connection to humanity's ancestral planet.

Now that they become isolated from the Milky Way, how would they be able to maintain their current identities?

The more time passed by, the less the Terrans would have any connections to the planet that inspired their name!

## Chapter 5049 Human Evolution Disputes

Though Ves did not plan to chat so much with his teaching assistant when his workload had become a lot more burdensome than before, he did not want to pass up this opportunity to learn useful information!

While Alexa Striker was not particularly wealthy, powerful or well-connected Terran, she still possessed enough connections to gain a bit of information about major developments related to the Terran Alliance.

"There is a lot of division within the Red Two, but they have already made it clear that they are trying to promote a cultural change within our society." The young and well-dressed woman said. "Calling ourselves 'red humanity' is but the first step in their master plan to separate us from our original human roots and turn us into an entirely new race of their own making. They may even seek to influence our collective genetic evolution by propagating standardized 'treatments' and 'gene therapies' to various exotic radiation-induced mutations."

That... sounded like a conspiracy theory, but one that happened to sound plausible!



Ves was not fooled by the noble image of the Red Two. He had personal experiences in how the MTA and the CFA were more than willing to break ethical boundaries in order to advance their own interests!

The only question was how extensively the mechers and the fleeters supported this kind of initiative and how extensively they would force red humanity to adopt the genes of their choosing.

"Exotic radiation poses a serious threat to any organism that has never adapted to its effects in the past." Ves spoke in a less judgemental tone. "Almost the entire population of red humanity will require treatment in order to reduce their chances of growing ill. They will also need further adaptation to take better advantage of the new conditions and draw strength from E energy radiation. It makes sense to pool all of the solutions together and form a range of common responses that are proven to be safe, reliable and effective."

Alexa immediately shook her head. "That will never, Professor Larkinson. The Red Two will have to go to war against the Terran Alliance if they attempt to dictate our gene development. Besides, the Red Association and the Red Fleet are too opposed to each other to agree on a single racial evolution strategy."

His curiosity grew. He hadn't come in touch with this before, but now that he learned about it, he could not leave it alone.

"Oh? How do they differ from each other?"

"The Red Association is more open to the idea of making red humanity more receptive to exotic radiation. This means that the mechers want to make red humans more sensitive to the changes induced by E energy radiation. This has great potential as it gives every person the potential to become exceedingly powerful by absorbing energy from the environment."

That sounded exactly like what the Transhumanist Faction would do! Perhaps the other factions might not be as enthused about this direction, but even they should be willing to take certain risks to enable the rise of exponentially more high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers!

The Red Fleet on the other hand is more cautious towards extreme changes. The fleeters historically came about as a counterforce to the madness sweeping human civilization at the end of the Age of Conquest. Many fleeters think that letting humans evolve and modify their genes without as many restrictions as before will birth a great number of extreme personalities who can do untold damage to our civilization."

That sounded logical, but it sounded short-sighted as well. Exotic radiation possessed too much potential. If the fleeters did not want to take advantage of it, their rivals might easily overtake them in time!

"Are the fleeters really resistant towards adapting red humanity to M87?" Ves questioned.

"Not completely." Alexa shook her head. "The Red Fleet is not monolithic. Each fleet admiral has a different viewpoint. My prediction is that the fleeters will form a consensus around restraint. They will not discount the benefits that exotic radiation can provide to their own race, but they will err on the side of caution. The fleeters much prefer that red humanity develops a high degree of immunity towards the negative effects exotic radiation."

That sounded rather safe, but Ves knew enough about biotechnology and spiritual engineering that it was impossible for the fleeters to have it both ways.

Making people more immune to effects of E energy radiation effectively translated to sabotaging their spiritualities.

People wouldn't be able to break through and breach the extraordinary threshold as often, all so that they are less likely to go insane due to any wild increases in power!

It still made a certain amount of sense to the fleeters as they were the strongest proponents of conventional human technology. They essentially wanted to bet all of their chips on the assumption that their superior technology would become strong enough to defeat any pretender gods and alien cosmic horrors that were sure to emerge from Messier 87!

Although it sounded no different from burying heads in the sand, Ves did not think the Red CFA was run by stupid people. If the fleeters had enough confidence in their technological prowess, then maybe they were on the cusp of developing powerful new technologies that safely leveraged the power of exotic radiation without causing people to sacrifice their humanity!

Ves rubbed his hairless chin in thought. This subject sounded more and more profound and impactful to his life than he initially thought.

"What about the Terran Alliance? What does your polity think?"

"Our opinions are just as divided as everyone else's, but one of the points that has reached wide consensus in our community is that we must retain as many ties to our human identity as possible." The teaching assistant solemnly spoke. "There are already suggestions floating around that advocate 'uplifting' our original race to a superior one. The extreme pursuit of power and longevity may cause our genes and phenotypes to distort to such an extent where we begin to call ourselves elves or another inhuman name. Don't you think that this is a monstrous development?"

Ves shrugged. "Haven't the dwarves already done that? They are doing pretty well as of late."

"Heavy gravity variant humans are still humans!" The young lady heatedly insisted as she placed her hands on her hips. "Developing this genetic variant was a mistake born out of greed. Humans should have never tampered with their genetic code to this extent. We are all children of Old Earth. It was baseline humans who originally arose from our home planet during the Age of Stars. It was their natural descendants who relied on a combination of cunning, strategy and scientific brilliance to expand our holdings over much of the Milky Way during the Age of Conquest. The proliferation of extreme genetic modification only came later, and it has made our race worse in every fashion since."

That sounded quite logical, but Ves knew that the full story was a lot more complex than what was written in the public history books.

"So what do the Terrans actually support? Are they in favor of any form of genetic modification or not? Aren't you people all supposed to be designer babies or something?" He asked in a confused tone.

"Our designer babies and genetic modification treatments are much more centered around optimizing and improving our inherent human genes." She replied. "I have heard that there is a

great amount of potential in the baseline human genome. Tapping specific genes and eating a rich diet of exotic-fortified substances is enough to comprehensively attain superior performance without sacrificing your humanity. Anything that our human genes cannot do, our implants can do. If we have to distinguish our variety of humanity from others, then I would prefer to call ourselves high humans. This has been our preferred stance during the Age of mechs and I expect that to persist in the Age of Dawn."

This consensus fit with the fairly conservative mindset of the Terrans. They probably relied a lot more on their implants than any other group of first-raters in order to stay competitive with their rivals.

"The Rubarthans are a lot less restrained towards genetic modification, I take it?" Ves guessed.

"That is partially the case, professor. The Rubarthans have not formed a common policy towards human augmentation. There are people who hold similar opinions as us, but the majority of Rubarthans are too consumed in their pursuit of power to hold back. They will do anything to increase their competitiveness and attain higher promotions. More radical mutations based on incorporating alien genes in one's DNA introduces much more negative side effects, but their positive effects are stronger as well. The Rubarthans broadly regard themselves as posthumans, although they do not often use this specific term."

Interesting. What was better, high humans or posthumans?

"It sounds like the ideological differences between the Terrans and the Rubarthans mirror that of the fleeters and the mechers."

Alexa frowned in disapproval. "Not many of us would agree to that assertion. None of our ideologies match with each other. At most, our stances may lead us to take positions that are closer. While these differences have never produced too many divergences in the previous era, I predict that they will become much more severe in the Age of Dawn because E energy radiation exacerbates every difference and mutation."

"You're not kidding in this regard. According to my own research, E energy radiation will leave no human unchanged."

All of this sounded like a giant headache to Ves. It was times like these that he was glad that he was not a bigshot! He would hate to determine the entire future of his race by making a highly impactful decision on behalf of trillions of humans!

"What is your opinion, professor?" The teaching assistant suddenly asked. "What do you support?"

"I... don't know. I can't make a decision for everyone, and my own personal genetic evolution is really messy. I am sorry to disappoint you, but I guess that I am more aligned with the Red Association. I may not agree with every stance of the Transhumanist Faction, but I am their unofficial associate for good reasons. While I agree with you that maintaining a firm connection to our human identity is still essential, I don't think we can survive unless we are willing to take risks and pursue transhumanism. There are ways to attain greater strength without detaching ourselves from what ultimately makes us all humans."

His children were shaping up to become powerful primordial humans from what Ves could tell.

Their physiques and their spiritualities might not be as evolved as that of his mother, but continued exposure to exotic radiation may ultimately correct this shortcoming in the future!

"I... sincerely hope that you will change your mind on this issue." Alexa said as she couldn't hide her disapproval. "In a time such as this, it has become more important than ever to remind ourselves of our original humanity and our ties to Old Earth. Red humanity will effectively become extinct from the moment we drop the word 'humanity' and merely call ourselves 'reds' or another silly label."

That was easy to say for a citizen of a first-rate superstate who probably had access to implants that would make Gloriana green with envy!

As a mech designer who climbed his way up from a third-rate state, Ves did not have much tolerance for stuffy old ideas that held him back from improving his own station.

Ves stood up from his seat and prepared to say goodbye to his projected companion.

"All of this sounds interesting, Miss Alexa, but let's wrap up this meeting. I already know what to do in order to prepare for my first lectures at the start of the upcoming semester. I think I should go back and make additional preparations to ensure that my first Frontier Wisdom class will make a profound and unforgettable impression to the 250 Terrans that want to learn how to survive in a troubling new age."

Chapter 5050 Look, Papa!

Ves found it interesting that the upper ranks of red humanity already held disputes over the future evolution of their race.

Given how fractured and disunited any large population of humans tended to be, he had no confidence that the Red Two and the first-rate colonial superstates would ever agree on a single evolutionary development strategy!

He understood more than most people that the Red MTA would never give up on any means to increase the rate of breakthroughs of mech pilots and mech designers.

The Mech Trade Association in the Milky Way managed to rise up and become a dominant power with the emergence of many Star Designers and god pilots.

Not that the Red Association found itself cut off from its mother organization and beset by formidable enemies from multiple directions, the mechers needed to produce as many high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers as possible to regain their superiority!

The other three powers knew that as well, and preferred not to give the Association so much room for development.

For example, the Red Fleet's stance was probably the opposite of that of the Red Association. The fleeters showed clear distrust towards metaphysics and any other phenomenon that they could not clearly control with universal and fundamental sciences. They much preferred to minimize their dependence on a relatively small group of extraordinary individuals and put all of their trust in warships.

Ves supposed that the Terrans and the Rubarthans fell between these two extreme positions, with either of them clearly favoring one stance or another.

It did not seem likely that the Terrans and the fleeters would ever team up, though. They had too many contradictions and differences to have any reason to join forces.

The dispute over the direction of red humanity's genetic development was just one of the many fault lines that plagued their civilization after the Great Severing.

There were many more issues that caused all four top powers to either disagree with each other or reluctantly back each other's positions.

This was why Ves ultimately did not show too much concern about the future of red humanity.

The Red Two and the first-rate colonial superstates might have a lot of reasons to tear up their relations with each other, but that would only make it cheaper for their external enemies to defeat them in detail.

So long as the indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean and beyond all lumped humans as enemies to be exterminated, there was no other choice!

After all, the mechers, fleeters, Terrans and Rubarthans all shared much more in common with each other than the indigenous aliens that sought to exterminate anyone who wasn't native to their own dwarf galaxy!

"This is all going to turn into a big mess." Ves muttered to himself.

His thoughts continued to linger over this topic as he returned to his duties and set up his new design projects.

Due to the sheer amount of projects he accepted at this time, his work became a lot more cumbersome all of a sudden.

Fortunately, most of his projects were collaborations, so he only had to set the overall direction before dividing a lot of work to his fellow mech designers.

Although Ves still had to do the heavy lifting in the mech designs he had a personal stake in, namely the Elephant Project and the Blood Star Mark II Project, he resorted to an option that not many of his peers could replicate.

He multi-tasked.

As he sat behind his desk terminal that currently showed the draft design of the Elephant Project, he lifted up his left leg and 'unsocketed' his foot and ankle. Please read at !

He then placed his detached lower leg in front of the desk terminal adjacent to his own. The miniature brain integrated in his CyLeg proceeded to transmit commands to the work equipment so that it projected another design interface and loaded the design of the current iteration of the Blood Star Project!

Ves showed no restraint as he approached his work in this usual manner. He had already made sure to lock the door to his own design lab and spare other people from wondering how his leg had turned into a fully competent mech designer all of a sudden!

Even then, his own honor guards who silently kept watch over him and his surroundings did not realize that he could allocate a third iteration of himself to his design work!

Separated by a distance of over 50 million light-years, a certain cyborg cat perched onto a different desk and used her paws as well as transmitted commands to deftly navigate a different design suite.

The beginnings of the Transcendent Punisher Mark III soon appeared in front of the silvery cat.

"Veronica!" A ghostly lady materialized next to the terminal. "Would you like to come and play with me again?"

"Myaow. Not now, sister. I am too busy at the moment. I have a job, you know."

"Boring-" Helena rolled her eyes.

"Don't disturb me when I am working. I can get a lot more stuff done if I am in my groove. I will have time to play with you later, okay?"

"It's a promise!"

Ves did not experience any further disturbances as he split up his attention into several different threads.

Although he wasn't able to pool them together and focus on evaluating a single project from multiple angles, he found out that he was able to get a lot more work done if he designed several mechs concurrently!

As his main body and mind grew a little tired after spending hours on researching the possible high-end parts he should add to the design of the Elephant Project, he signed off from his desk terminal but left his detached leg behind.

It was not a big problem for his cyborg leg to continue to work for several days.

Ves merely opened a nearby drawer and affixed an ordinary mechanical leg onto the socket of his shortened left leg.

He hadn't been able to create an artificial limb that matched the transmission of sensory data and the fineness of control of his CyLeg.

Getting struck by lightning and sublimating himself somehow produced profound transformations that had elevated his entire being to a higher state, but also made himself further removed from a normal material being.

It raised a lot of existential questions about what exactly he was turning into. Would he still fit with any branch of humanity by the time he reached his end state?

"Well, as long as I consider myself a human in my heart, it shouldn't matter if I evolve into a monstrous freak with a dozen tentacles sticking out of my body."

Ves recognized the merits of the general Terran standpoint. The best way for all humans to remain grounded and united in a single broader group was to remind themselves that they were kindred to the people who came from Old Earth.

It used to be a lot easier for people like Ves who never even came close to the Sol System to recognize his lineage from the original humans who stepped out of their home planets. Please read at !

An innumerable amount of generations existed between himself and the people who optimistically left for the stars at the time.

Even the people who emigrated to the Red Ocean could still imagine an invisible connection that led all the way back to humanity's birthplace. This was because the greater beyonder gate still gave the pioneers and colonists an opportunity to travel back to the Milky Way and navigate all the way to the Sol System.

None of this was valid anymore.

The forced displacement of the Red Ocean no longer gave any red human the option to make a pilgrimage to the origin of the human race.

Perhaps not many red humans realized how badly this might affect their psyche and their image of themselves due to all of the other drastic changes that had occurred, but Ves had a strong hunch that it would become a much bigger deal in the future.

Although the Terrans most certainly had selfish motives in mind, their constant emphasis on tracing back humanity's roots to Old Earth was an excellent way for people to anchor themselves to a strong common identity.

"Perhaps... the mission that Gaia imposed on the Aduc Family might not be so irrelevant after all." Ves guessed with a frown.

He continued to remain distracted by his thoughts as he returned to his grand stateroom and enjoyed dinner with his family.

The recent refitting of the Spirit of Bentheim had also included a massive upgrade of his immediate family's personal chambers.

The security and luxury of his grand stateroom was incomparable to how it had been in the past!

Ves even suspected the Survivalists also took measures to increase the defenses of his grand stateroom when they applied their secret upgrades to his flagship.

As Ves sat on a couch and held his oldest daughter on his lap while they both watched a soap drama.

Nobody could count how many years this show had been broadcasted. Ves found it rather amusing that two different versions of the soap came about due to the Great Severing.

The entertainment network in the Red Ocean had chosen to create the next season with AI personalities posing as the current cast.

At the same time its mother network in the Milky Way continued on with the original set of actors!

This was hardly a unique example. This phenomenon happened a lot in many other industries!

As Ves and his daughter continued to cuddle each other while they watched the show, Aurelia even let Mana out to play.

"Mew-!"

The white Persian cat no longer looked as small as before, but she still had a few years to go before she reached an adult cat form.

Mana still looked cute and adorable, though.

"Mrow!"

Blinky emerged from Ves' head and pounced on his 'daughter' before proceeding to lick Mana's pristine white fur.

"Mew! Mew!"

"Ewww! I don't need a bath, papa! Stop licking!"

"Hehe, I will keep licking you anytime I want as long as you are my little girl!"

"Mew mew mew!"

Mana became so annoyed at her father's pampering that her form suddenly began to glow and accumulate energy.

"What?"

"Mrow?"

A bright flash of light and repulsive energy exploded from Mana's form!

"MROW!"

Mana managed to throw off his father from her body with the help of this new little trick!

As Blinky stabilized his spinning form in the air, the purple Star Cat looked confused at how his little kitten managed to throw him off with such ease.

"Mrow?"

"Mew!" Mana's cute tail rapidly wagged as she had managed to prove herself superior this time!

Ves meanwhile looked a bit astonished at his daughter and her companion spirit.

"That power... did not just come from Mana." He said. "You somehow managed to leverage the ambient spiritual energy around us and use all of that extra power to push my companion spirit away."

"Uhm." Aurelia's braided black locks shook as she confirmed his guess.

Ves furrowed his brows. "That shouldn't be an easy trick to pull off. It can even be dangerous if you don't exert enough control over the environment. How did you do it? Did you learn it from someone?"

"Mew!"

"I figured it out all by myself." His daughter proudly stated. "Ever since the Age of Dawn has begun, Mana and I have begun to absorb exotic radiation. The more I take it into myself, the more familiar it becomes. One day, I found out that I could exert slight control over the energy around Mana. Look, papa!"



Mana eagerly demonstrated her new capabilities by hovering in the air before starting to concentrate.

Her form glowed brighter as the young companion spirit began to attune herself to the environment.

The ambient spiritual energy in a few meters around Mana's intangible form began to stir and move in a slow vortex!

Ves' jaw almost turned slack at the sight.

Somehow, Mana managed to resonate with the surrounding ambient spiritual energy in a way that caused her to blend in the environment as if they were one and the same!

"Mew-"