

The Mech 5281

Chapter 5281 The Smokestack Prince

Ves spontaneously offered to create a kinship network based on Clixie for specific reasons.

Before he met with the Inferno Spear Prince, he had learned a lot about the Rubarthans.

It was one thing to negotiate with a party that he just met, but if he was about to hold an important discussion with a party that was well-established, he would be a fool if he did not study his counterparts in advance!

With the help of Minister Shederin Purnesse, Ves had quickly developed a good understanding of the internal dynamics of the Rubarthan Pact.

At first glance, the first-rate colonial state was organized in a similar manner to the Terran Alliance.

Both of them were founded by extremely powerful superstates from the Milky Way. Both of them were effectively divided into multiple different territories and provinces founded by numerous powerful Terran and Rubarthan groups.

The Terran ancient clans held the most sway in their own colonies. Although their level of investment in the Terran Alliance varied due to individual circumstances, they were roughly comparable in power. None of these powerful clans held greater sway over the others, and there was an implicit agreement that none of them should ever become powerful enough to dominate the others.

This was also one of the reasons why General Axelar Streon faced an uphill struggle in his attempt to reform the Terran superstate. His proposals led to greater centralization, accountability and the removal of several rights that the ancient clans had taken for granted. No one wanted him to boss everyone around!

The Rubarthans were quite different in this regard. Unlike the modern Terrans, the Rubarthans had always grown up under a central authority. Their entire empire was set up in a way that not only encouraged every citizen to accept the authority of the Star Emperor, but derive pride from the fact they were governed by such a powerful leader!

Of course, the New Rubarth Empire was too large and expansive to be ruled by just a single leader, so most of the actual governance fell onto his many offspring.

The thousands of princes and princesses all had an opportunity to assume greater responsibility and be in charge of the many arms of the state.

This model of governance also spread to the Rubarthan Pact, which the Imperial Household treated as a backyard of sorts at a time.

Even though the Rubarthan Pact was separated from the Milky Way Galaxy by hundreds of thousands of light-years, the connectivity offered by the greater beyonder gates and the galactic net reduced these problems into speed bumps. The authority of the Star Emperor still shone brightly on the colonies!

It was a pity that the Great Severing produced a figurative and literal schism in this model.

The Rubarthans who resided in the Red Ocean suddenly got cut off from the Milky Way Galaxy!

Even though the Rubarthans still possessed a few special channels that enabled the Star Emperor to remain in contact with his subjects in the displaced dwarf galaxy, many people already figured out that the new situation couldn't last.

Empires rose and fell for various reasons, but the most common ones were usually related to weakness and instability at the top!

With the Star Emperor no longer able to effectively impose his authority in the distant colonial superstate, the Rubarthan princes who had chosen to relocate to the Red Ocean quickly recognized the opportunity this situation presented!

None of the princes ever had the guts to contemplate a takeover of their superstate. Their father loomed too large in their minds.

It was hopeless to wait until he grew too old to persist any longer because the Rubarthans definitely mastered high technologies that could extend the powerful ruler's lifespan through exorbitant and maybe even alien means!

However, a situation had arisen where the princes actually saw hope of becoming the emperor of a new colonial superstate that was ripe for the taking!

As the direct descendants of the Star Emperor who had established a strong enough base in the Rubarthan Pact, they possessed many of the qualifications needed to assume its new throne!

While the Rubarthan princes still respected and obeyed their father's distant authority on the surface, they had already begun to make their moves in a power struggle that was bound to break out sooner or later.

Unlike the Terrans who were content with maintaining a stable oligopoly, the Rubarthans were naturally driven to seek succor from a supreme authority!

Since the Star Emperor could no longer fulfill this role, it was natural for the Rubarthans to look up to one of the current princes instead!

Due to various circumstances and developments, numerous factions had sprung up in the Pact.

The Imperial Household was not short on princes, so many of them scrambled to build their own powerbase in order to compete for greater rights and privileges.

Not all of the 150 or so Rubarthan princes set their sights on the newly constructed throne.

Plenty of them possessed enough self-awareness to know they could not defeat their betters. This was why they offered to back the ones that had a better chance and merely participated in the game in order to earn an important posting.

There were only a handful of leading princes that had a real chance to become the supreme authority over the Rubarthan Pact.

The Inferno Spear Prince was impressively one of them. His greatest dependence was his friendship with the Destroyer of Worlds. The implicit approval of a god pilot was enough to propel him into a serious contender, and the fact that he was one of the rare Rubarthan princes that had worked hard to become a senior ace pilot also earned him a lot of popularity!

While he wasn't considered the favorite due to his lack of influence outside of the military, the adoption of the Deep Strike Plan had suddenly caused his chances to shoot up massively!

The Fist of Defiance wanted to reshape red humanity into a civilization that put its martial leaders ahead of civilian leaders.

The Inferno Spear Prince happened to match the ideal of a warlord the most out of all of his competitors, so his chances of winning the struggle for the throne had shot up drastically in the last week!

Still, as much as the Inferno Spear Prince appeared to be the most suited prince to lead the Rubarthan Pact in the changing times, he was not the actual favorite.

Prince Titus held that contention.

As the 476th Prince of the New Rubarth Empire, he had lived considerably longer and built up a much greater network.

If not for the fact that he had become embroiled in a controversial affair more than a hundred years ago, he would have remained comfortable in his home state!

As it is, the so-called Smokestack Prince had laid low for a long time. He only grew to prominence again when he went all-in on the Rubarthan Pact!

The Smokestack Prince invested all of his assets into building up a powerbase in the new colonial superstate. He founded many companies and became involved in a lot of colonial industries. His favorite move was to invest in various businesses and attain a minority stake in each of these vital engines.

This effectively allowed him to get his hooks into every sector and prosper as long as the Rubarthan Pact's entire economy was booming!

As the head of the Rubarthan Industrial Council, the Smokestack Prince possessed the greatest influence and control over the colonial superstate's economy than any other prince!

He had become the dead favorite to win the throne shortly after the power struggle had begun.

While his great prominence meant that he also attracted a lot of opposition from the other princes, this was not a crippling setback.

His rise would have been more assured if not for the fact that the implementation of the Deep Strike Plan completely changed the rules of the game!

It was no longer enough to be rich or have a lot of friends. Unless a leader earned the qualifications of a warlord and seriously committed a lot of resources and assets in the escalating war against the aliens, there was no pathway to victory!

Still, the New Elites Program did not cut off the chances of the Smokestack Prince and many other ambitious princes.

It was not necessary for them to participate in a deep strike expedition in person, though they would find it a lot harder to earn war merits and promotions as a consequence.

Those who only contributed from a distance were only entitled to earn 10 percent of the rewards compared to participating in person!

While this sounded as if the Smokestack Prince was never able to become as good as the Inferno Spear Prince, the former actually amassed so much wealth and assets that he could raise a lot more deep strike forces than any other Rubarthan prince!

So what if the Smokestack Prince only earned 10 percent of the rewards?

If he sent out dozens of deep strike fleets at once, he would still amass a gigantic amount of war merits, all without personally risking his life!

This was not the extent of his revised strategy.

It was pretty much an open secret in the Rubarthan Pact that the Smokestack Prince was gearing up to develop a closer relationship with the Spacelock, the original god pilot assigned to guard over the Rubarthan Pact.

As long as the Smokestack Prince gained the backing of Divine Camden Everard, his advantages would become so comprehensive that it would be difficult to interrupt his momentum!

What was interesting here was the dynamic between the two god pilots. The two were not direct opponents to each other, but they possessed a lot of stances that were different from each other.

The Spacelock was an older god pilot who had long earned the trust of the Rubarthan Imperial Household. He had been assigned to guard over the Rubarthan Pact for good reasons as he strongly revered the Star Emperor and vowed to guard the life of his many offspring to the best of his ability.

Divine Camden Everard also had a reputation for being a traditionalist who believed in maintaining the supremacy of the Rubarthan Imperial Household. Only the Star Emperor and his blood relatives were capable of maintaining the stability and prosperity of the Rubarthan superstate!

These traits made the Smokestack Prince a good fit for the Spacelock. Even if the two only shared a casual acquaintance in the past, their shared interests might cause them to join forces in the near future.

Compared to the native Rubarthan, the Destroyer of Worlds did not hold as much respect for the Rubarthan Imperial Household.

As a former citizen of a second-rate state, the Destroyer of Worlds had climbed her way to the top from humble beginnings. She possessed much more sympathy towards the common folk and believed in the meritocracy that the New Rubarth Empire was known for. Without enough upward mobility, there would be no way for excellent talents to gain the opportunities they needed to realize their enormous potential!

While that sounded great, this stance also made it difficult for the female god pilot to respect a lot of Rubarthan princes. Most of these rich and pampered scions owed much of their prosperity and status to their high birth and not much else. Even if they were geniuses who performed well in their various professions, that was only because they had access to the best augmentations and education that the Rubarthans could offer!

This led to the fact that the Destroyer of Worlds enjoyed more support from the grassroots than in the upper society of the Rubarthan Pact.

While there was no one who was brave enough to reject the Destroyer of Worlds in public, it was clear that a lot of Rubarthan princes and their dependents would rather back the god pilot who was committed to protecting their interests!

All of this had caused the political dynamic in the Rubarthan Pact to morph into an invisible competition between its two god pilots.

The funny part about all of this was that the Destroyer of Worlds and the Spacelock weren't even present all of this time!

Both of them had fallen out of contact shortly after the Age of Dawn had commenced. Perhaps they were still ignorant that they had become the unwitting protectors of two rising Rubarthan factions!

Chapter 5282 Sweet Cat

Context was important.

Ves did not hold any interest in meddling in the affairs of the Rubarthan Pact in the past, mostly because he lacked the power to make a difference.

That had changed since his return from the Survivalist conference. He not only gained the power to exert influence on the first-rate colonial superstate, but also possessed a solid reason to intervene in the ongoing Rubarthan power struggle!

From the moment he revealed that he possessed a notable connection to the Destroyer of Worlds, he had already been regarded as a participant in this great game!

The fact that he was the inventor and the supplier of numerous revolutionary innovations such as companion spirits and kinship network massively boosted his value to the Rubarthan superstate!

All of this made it untenable for Ves to remain out of contact with the Rubarthans.

Fortunately, he recognized this new reality fairly quickly. He was not opposed to establishing a relationship with the Rubarthans so long as he gained enough benefits.

However, Ves needed to think carefully about wading into the ongoing power struggle between the Rubarthan princes.

It was not necessary for him to pick a side and back one of the princes.

After all, even the god pilots themselves would not explicitly back any of the princes. It would go against their official duties to wield their outsized power that could not be stopped by others.

It would only take a slight amount of effort for them to decide that none of the princes deserved to rule the Rubarthan Pact and ascend to the throne themselves!

According to the current rules of the game, the god pilots would only be able to provide implicit support at most. It was up to the princes themselves to leverage this advantage in their own ways.

In any case, Ves still had the option of maintaining relative neutrality so that he could maintain a healthy distance from the intensifying fight between the different Rubarthan princes.

This was why his latest move presented so much risk and danger.

The Inferno Spear Prince approached Ves as a member of the Rubarthan Military Council for at least two official reasons.

The first one was to clarify Ves' relationship with the Destroyer of Worlds.

The second one was to inquire about commissioning a kinship network for the Rubarthan Pact.

It was actually really significant that the Inferno Spear Prince was the one to establish initial contact with the famous new tier 3 galactic citizen.

Even if Prince Antonius did not want to spook Ves by pulling him into the vortex right away, the powerful Rubarthan never expected that the Larkinson Patriarch would propose to intervene on his own initiative.

What truly caught Prince Antonius and his staff off-guard was that Ves not only expressed the intention of wading into this imperial mud fight, but also proposed an enormous gambit that would have enormous implications for the entire Rubarthan Pact!

The Inferno Spear Prince no longer regarded Ves as a novice to high-level affairs anymore.

The fact that this second-class Senior Mech Designer took the initiative to propose a scheme that would eventually tilt the balance in the favor of the Destroyer of Worlds and the prince that earned her favor made it clear that Ves was qualified to act as a player in this great game!

"I see now why you are known as the Devil Tongue." The senior ace pilot as his eyes betrayed a lot more wariness and vigilance than before. "As the mech designer who managed to ensure the downfall of the Polymath, it is clear that your reputation as a destabilizing influence is not a fluke. Do you know how unnerving it is for you to set your sights on our colonial superstate? It might be better to keep you out of our affairs entirely."

Ves smiled in response. He recognized that he had managed to hook the Inferno Spear Prince. For all of the man's vigilance, there was no way he could remain unmoved to this offer!

When it came to proposals, the most important part was determining who benefited the most.

While Ves would definitely benefit from having one of his pets become the guardian animal of the Rubarthan Pact, the Inferno Spear Prince also stood to make a lot of gains!

In the political struggle between the Inferno Spear Prince and the Smokestack Prince, the former's accumulation and support base were too meager.

Once the latter managed to gain the implicit support of a god pilot, the former would fall too far behind!

This meant that the Inferno Spear Prince was on a timer. He needed to find ways to strengthen his position and ensure that he remained competitive enough to keep his imperial ambitions alive.

What Ves proposed was to find a way to strengthen the position of the Destroyer of Worlds in the Rubarthan Pact.

Perhaps it sounded a bit absurd, but Ves genuinely believed that as long as he could convert the Rubarthans into cat lovers, he could grant such an enormous advantage to the Inferno Spear Prince that his chances of winning the power struggle would become almost assured!

Of course, this was a huge and complex plan that depended on a lot of different variables. There was no guarantee that the scenario would play out the way that Ves had foreseen.

The selection of Clixie as the nexus of the Rubarthan kinship network was also highly suspect. There was no way the Rubarthans would accept such an unusually sketchy offer outright.

What if they introduced a spiritual trojan horse to their society that ultimately brainwashed the citizens of the colonial superstate into becoming the unwitting vassals of the Larkinson Clan?

The Rubarthans weren't fools! The more dramatic the offer, the more they needed to take their time to root out all of the possible risks and dangers!

Ves had to spend much of his time during this meeting on reassuring the Rubarthans.

"The mechers already trust me to provide not one, but four kinship networks." He told the wary prince. "My spirits may not be neutral, but they will be operating under constant supervision from a dedicated department established by the Red Association. Since you insist on obtaining a kinship network according to the same model, your colonial superstate can do the same. So long as you appoint the right people to lead this new supervisory department, you can be certain that Clixie will not be able to abuse her authority over your citizens."

The prince crossed his arms as he continued to regard the elegant cat as a possible threat. "That may be true, but you are the person responsible for constructing these additional observation and control systems in the first place. Do you recognize the problems with this state of affairs? We cannot develop a heavy dependency on an outsider in order to run our own state. We especially cannot accept a reality where we must rely on the protection and guidance of someone else's pet of all possibilities!"

The prince was right to question the viability and suitability of this radical proposal. It broke several major rules that would have caused it to get rejected outright in Rubarthan society!

However, Ves did not give up. He keenly recognized that the prince was still tempted. He just needed to allay enough concerns so that the Inferno Spear Prince and the people under him would continue to keep this option into consideration.

"Clixie is not inherently powerful by herself." Ves spoke as he approached his daughter and picked up the cat. "She won't be able to take over the Rubarthan Pact or anything. As long as she does anything that crosses the line, I am sure that either of your god pilots can take action to rein her in. Not that my cat will ever do so. She is far too lovely to do anything like that. Isn't that right, cutie?"

"Miaooow "

Though the cat initially had no idea what Ves was doing, she had gained a lot of clues after she listened in on the conversation. She knew that he wanted her to cooperate with him, so she immediately put on her sweetest act. Her tail was already starting to swish with excitement!

When Ves transferred the cat to the projection of the Inferno Spear Prince, the powerful ace pilot looked down on Clixie without appearing to have any direction.

Prince Antonius had spent most of his time on becoming better at fighting. In order to earn his amazing strength and keep himself in his best fighting condition, he had sacrificed many of the pleasures and experiences that life could offer to a privileged son.

This was also the reason why most of the other Rubarthan princes with piloting qualifications hadn't been able to match his martial accomplishments.

Despite his association with the Destroyer of Worlds, the man barely handled pets in his life. It took an unusually long time before he started to change his hold over the cat and pet Clixie on the head.

"Miaow- miaow- miaow-"

There was just something about cats that could melt the heart of even the most hardened and strong-willed soldier!

"Clixie is a genuine Rubarthan Sentinel Cat and has not undergone any subsequent modifications to her genome or anything." Ves explained as the prince slowly familiarized himself with the pet. "Her genes are designed by the people of your state, so you should be familiar with her bioprogramming. Clixie is designed to serve as a loyal and loving protector of the person she is designed to guard. She used to accompany my wife, but she is now tasked with keeping my daughter company. If she assumes the role as the nexus for your superstate's kinship network, then you can count on her to provide the protection and companionship that your people will need in the times to come."

The Inferno Spear Prince nodded in agreement. "Our Sentinel Cats are indeed known for their loyalty and dedication. While I can see that Clixie here is an excellent example of one, she has clearly mutated from her genetic template in order to acquire her current powers."

"If you need more assurance that Clixie will remain well-behaved, then I invite you to send a party of biotech experts and other relevant personnel to come to my location and thoroughly examine my pet. I understand that there is much at stake for you to accept my claims without evidence."

"That is a welcome offer. We may take you on it depending on our deliberations."

Even though the remote connection made it difficult for the Inferno Spear Prince to extend his full senses across a huge distance, his projection's direct contact with the Rubarthan Sentinel Cat at least enabled him to make an initial determination about Clixie.

Apparently, his evaluation was positive, because the prince began to look increasingly less wary towards Clixie.

Ves decided to pull out another card. He sent a mental transmission that soon caused a small sun to light up in the active Hyper Chamber.

"Nyaaaaaa-!"

The Golden Cat had made another appearance!

"This is the Golden Cat. I am sure you have learned about her already. She is in charge of our Larkinson Network. While she is a different sort of existence from an actual flesh-and-blood cat, you can expect Clixie to serve in a similar capacity."

Goldie already knew what was going on. She floated over to the Inferno Spear's physical projection and presented herself for inspection.

The Rubarthan prince obviously never encountered a life form like her before. Goldie was not only a spirit, but the heart of a growing spiritual network, and that caused her to embody the Larkinson Clan in a way that increased her weight in a metaphysical sense!

"Impressive." The Inferno Spear Prince couldn't help but say. "It is astounding to see what wonders can be wrought with the right application of power and knowledge. However, we are still considering whether it is suitable for your cat to occupy a sensitive position. We should at least be given an opportunity to examine the alternatives that you have presented."

Chapter 5283 Alternative Choice

The Inferno Spear Prince spent a bit of time familiarizing himself with two very different cats.

"Miaow- miaow-"

"Nyaaa- nyaaa-"

Though the man tried to be as objective as possible, the allure of cats could not be denied. Clixie and Goldie were just too cute!

"We cannot help but observe that your Golden Cat lacks the precautions and the control mechanisms of the kinship networks that you have proposed to make for the mechers." The prince said even as two adorable cats vied for his attention.

The man had let down a bit of his stiff demeanor in order to play with the two lovely felines.

Of course, the Inferno Spear Prince did not see it this way. He was currently engaging in a pure fact-finding mission at the moment.

As Goldie climbed on top of his head while Clixie purred as the ace pilot's hand rubbed her belly, a lot of Rubarthans would probably react with shock if they saw that one of their dignified princes in this state!

"The extra conditions requested by the mechers are artificial constraints that only exist to reassure their concerns." Ves responded. "If they knew how kinship networks actually work, then they would understand that it is not that necessary to add an extra layer of oversight. The Golden Cat is the embodiment of our clan. She is connected to every member of the Larkinson Clan, which means that it is a fusion of everything they have in common with each other. Their hopes, their values, their attitudes and their ambitions are all encapsulated by the Golden Cat. She is never out of tune with our clan because that would go against her very nature."

The prince looked intrigued. He started to gain a deeper appreciation of the spiritual cat that was vying for his attention.

"That is remarkable. I can see that you and your clansmen must trust her immensely. What if enemies seek to damage your clan by subverting or changing your Golden Cat?"

"She is not that weak." Ves assured the prince. "Aside from being able to call for backup from lots of other friendly entities, she can ask all of our clansmen to donate more power to her in order to repel a difficult attack. The stronger and more numerous the people she is connected to, the more power she can call upon to help her resolve a crisis. We are all lucky that nobody has ever attempted to test Goldie's defenses, but I know I can count on her to put up a good fight if she is pressed in the future."

That information had a lot of implications to the Inferno Spear Prince. He and some of his advisors recognized the potential of this mechanism.

If the Golden Cat had already become this powerful by becoming the guardian of a single clan, what if another entity watched over an entire colonial superstate?

The power that this entity could call upon might become strong enough to fight against threats that even their god pilots might struggle against!

Of course, the Inferno Spear Prince doubted that it would be that simple to call upon so much power. It did not look likely that an evolved Rubarthan Sentinel Cat could handle so much excess strength.

Even so, this was not the sort of power that Prince Antonius wanted to leave in the hands of a cat that was nominally the pet of an outsider.

That reminded him of another point that he planned to bring up during this conversation.

"The Larkinsons are descended from Rubarthans." The prince suddenly said. "Although our laws about exiles and emigrants has caused your ancestors to lose their qualifications for citizenship, our rules are also clear about when it is possible to earn it back, either for themselves or their descendants. Given your enormous accomplishments as well as your recent promotion to a tier 3 galactic citizen, I can bestow you with Rubarthan citizenship right away. No one will reject your entry into our state. As soon as you become an officially recognized Rubarthan citizen, there will be much less barriers towards your involvement in our internal affairs. We will also have much less misgivings about bestowing great responsibility towards your cat."

If the Inferno Spear Prince made this offer a decade or two decades earlier, Ves would have pounced on it like a starving cat!

However, now that he had become a tier 3 galactic citizen and obtained great leverage as an independent, Ves no longer felt any attraction towards becoming a citizen of one of the most powerful human states.

While Ves was certain that he could gain a lot of benefits by joining the Rubarthan Pact, he was not blind enough to ignore all of the responsibilities and obligations associated with citizenship!

Nothing came for free.

As long as Ves was stupid enough to become a Rubarthan citizen, he would also be forced to work for his new state in one way or another!

Why would he possibly reduce himself to becoming a pawn of another state again when he had worked so hard to slip his way out of the Bright Republic?

States always prioritized their own interests, or at least the interests of those in power!

If it was in their best interest to screw Ves over, they would do so in a heartbeat!

This was why Ves resolutely shook his head. He did not even bother to pretend that he was seriously considering this offer in order to extract further concessions.

He needed to make his stance clear.

"I am grateful that you deem me worthy of citizenship, but I am not prepared to take up the identity of a Rubarthan citizen." He told the prince. "The Larkinsons and I have already formed our own

separate identity and culture. We would have to throw away much of the aspects of our life that we cherish if we become subjects of the Rubarthan Pact. Perhaps my family and I are descended from the Rubarthans, but I can use the same argument to claim that we are also distant descendants of the Terrans. As far as I am concerned, so much time has passed that only a tenuous and symbolic relationship exists between the Larkinsons and the Rubarthans."

The Rubarthans probably grew disappointed that Ves firmly rejected this offer. It would have been a great way to absorb a rising talent into their state.

Of course, they had already anticipated this outcome in advance. It was not hard to predict how Ves would react based on his past behavior. The Inferno Spear Prince simply brought this up in the hopes of getting lucky.

Anyway, since Ves made it clear that he did not want to entertain this topic, the prince quickly changed the topic.

"There are people who wish to consider an alternate choice for your cat. As much as I appreciate Clixie's qualities, it is not possible to make a serious consideration without the ability to make a proper comparison."

"Miaow miaow." The cat blinked her eyes as the ace pilot scratched her just behind her ears.

"I have already given you a list of names. I can briefly introduce you to the ones that have caught your attention."

Ves wanted to make sure that the Rubarthans did not get the idea of ordering a custom ancestral spirit from him. The more attention they directed towards his existing spirits, the lower the probability that they would make this crucial realization!

"Among your list, there is an entity called 'Qilanxo' that possesses similar maternal and protective traits as Clixie. She is also well-versed in spatial manipulation according to your claims."

"That is right. Qilanxo is much older than Clixie. Let me call her in so that you can get an initial impression of one of my most defense-oriented spirits."

It did not take much trouble for Qilanxo to manifest a small extension of her presence. A tiny scaled-down representation of her lizard-like body emerged in front of the Inferno Prince.

Qilanxo and the Rubarthan prince immediately exchanged glances with each other. They might even be communicating with each other on a level that was difficult to detect by outsiders!

"She is indeed as you say." Prince Antonius eventually said. "Though she is clearly alien in origin, she has been exposed to so many humans that this should not be an issue anymore. Can she demonstrate her ability to manipulate the fabric space?"

"Sure. Go ahead, Qilanxo."

The design spirit showed off a fraction of her power by forming a simple spatial barrier a short distance away.

It had become easier than ever for the spiritual entity to do this on her own. She did not even exert that much of her own energy as she had become a lot more proficient at harnessing the power of exotic radiation to fuel her abilities!

"Remarkable!" The Inferno Spear Prince said. "It is remarkable to see an ascended alien creature display so much control and technique over space. I wonder whether she can serve as a good complement to the Spacelock."

The mention of that god pilot's name suddenly caused Ves to think about why the Rubarthans were paying more attention to Qilanxo.

Perhaps the Rubarthans that were whispering suggestions in the ears of the Inferno Spear Prince were not entirely composed of his cronies.

Maybe the reason why he was allowed to make first contact with Ves was because the other factions had a say in this as well!

Ves was not quite certain about the detailed moves of the power struggle between the Rubarthan princes.

Although he had managed to learn a lot about the Rubarthan Pact in the last day, he had only become familiar with the broad strokes of the battle for the newly erected throne.

He was not an insider who was up to date with all of the nuances between the emerging factions!

Ves could only guess that the Smokestack Prince made sure that at least a few of his men got involved.

It did not make sense for the Rubarthans to inquire about Qilanxo unless the cronies of the Smokestack Prince sought to push for an alternative that was much more compatible with their side!

Right now, Ves had a feeling that the Rubarthans were starting to consider a choice between Clixie and Qilanxo.

The former had a greater affinity towards the Destroyer of Worlds.

The latter was clearly more compatible with the Spacelock.

After all, his title already made it clear that he was a god pilot who had become famous for his ability to impose his will onto reality in such a way that locked down the surrounding space in strange and terrifying ways!

Despite the fact that it looked as if Ves might get pulled into a high-level power struggle, he did not actually feel upset about this possible development.

As long as the Rubarthans limited their selection to Clixie and Qilanxo, Ves was bound to win regardless of the outcome!

He just felt it would be a pity if Clixie lost out. The Rubarthans might have embraced cats just as much as the Larkinsons!

The Inferno Spear Prince eventually wrapped up this eventful meeting. Clixie and Goldie both received a few gentle pets before they moved back towards Ves.

"Miaow miaow."

"Nyaaa nyaaa."

"You have given us a considerable amount of information, Professor Larkinson. We thank you for being candid about your kinship networks." The man said as he regained his formal and princely

demeanor. "We will need more time than we expected to process the information and debate on our choices. If we are unable to come to a consensus, we may need to postpone this decision until later."

That was understandable. It would be reckless to the extreme if the Inferno Spear Prince made his choice on the spot.

"My offer shall always remain open to you and your state." Ves responded with a smile. "I do not suggest you take too long, though. The sooner a kinship network comes into force, the sooner it can begin to grow. Besides, I cannot rule out the possibility that the Terrans will form their own agreement with my clan that involves supplying them with a separate kinship network."

The Rubarthans couldn't afford to take their time. They endured too much pressure and faced steep competition. If they did not find a way to strengthen their own advantages, then it was conceivable that they would fall behind.

They could not afford to lose their competitiveness!

Chapter 5284 Daughter's Insights

"Miaow?"

"You did a good job, Clixie. I could tell that you have managed to worm your way into the Inferno Spear Prince's heart. Even the most hardened warriors yearns for a soft touch every now and then. Prince Antonius has spent so much time within the halls of power that he has lost sight of what true companionship represents."

"Miaow..."

"I agree. Rubarthans like him constantly have to keep working hard in order to remain competitive in the race for power. Even the princes are not exempt from the perpetual rat races that dominate their society."

The Terrans were much better in that regard. Their power structures were much stabler and more solidified, which meant that the leading Terrans actually had more time to spend on leisure. However, they also had a tendency to take their complacency to the extreme, thereby causing them to stagnate in areas where progress should be made.

The issue over kinship networks reflected this difference. The Terrans hadn't brought up this topic at all while the Rubarthans clearly conveyed the intent to move forward at the beginning.

Ves, his daughter and their cat had all left the Hyper Chamber now that they had concluded their meeting with the Inferno Spear Prince. They had retreated to a private lounge where they could talk in confidence.

"What do you think, Aurelia? You missed the first half of the meeting, but you should have heard enough to know what is going on. What do you think of my proposal?"

His young but growing daughter idly caressed Clixie's back as she remained in thought. Despite her youth, diplomacy was a part of her dense curriculum.

"Your proposal is too weird, papa." The girl eventually said. "You are being too obvious about what you want from the Rubarthans. You are trying to take advantage of them by turning Clixie into their ancestral spirit, right? They would be stupid to accept it! Everything I have read about their people is that they are proud and hate relying on others. Your scheme shouldn't have any chance of

working, but the attitude of the Inferno Spear Prince suggests that the Rubarthans haven't ruled out this option."

Ves grinned as he leaned forward to pull his girl into a sideways hug. "The Rubarthans have little choice. Kinship networks are unique products that only I can make. On this particular issue, my negotiating position is superior to that of a first-rate colonial superstate! There is nothing the Rubarthans can do to exert more leverage onto me. It is impossible for them to employ coercion because I am under the protection of the Red Association. They don't want to push me too hard because they are afraid of souring my relationship with them. They can't even use Rubarthan citizenship or other bargaining chips to attract my attention as I don't really care about that stuff."

His daughter still looked befuddled and a bit scared about what her father had just done!

Ves sighed and gently rubbed Aurelia's head with his hand. "You are still thinking from the perspective of a second-rater. Don't. We have stepped up in society. While it isn't easy to explain my current position, the most important part is that I am an inventor that has developed numerous products that have become must-haves in our society. So long as I am the only effective supplier of at least some of these powerful goods, nobody wants to upset me or touch me. It is a mistake to stick to our previous cautious attitude. We need to maximize our advantages, and that means we need to take a bolder approach in our talks with other groups."

"I... understand. I know we can do more now that you have become more important, but..."

"What is it, sweetie?"

"I am afraid... that you are pushing our limits too far." She said in a lower voice. "You are basing your new strategies on the assumption that you are the only person who can supply red humanity with kinship networks and so on. What if that is not true anymore? There are many smart and capable people in the Red Association and the Rubarthan Pact. What if one of their Star Designers manages to reverse engineer your work and create a better version themselves? They have done that often enough in the past."

That was indeed a legitimate concern for Ves. As soon as another researcher or inventor managed to replicate his work or develop a substitute product that offered greater convenience, he would get into big trouble!

All of the resentment and animosity generated by throwing his weight around would surely come to bite him back in the butt!

As much as Ves wanted to dismiss the possibility that anyone else could legitimately compete against him in these areas, it would be a deadly mistake to believe this was true.

The power and ingenuity of humans were limitless. This was especially the case now that red humanity had entered a medium energy environment. Exotic radiation boosted all variations of cultivation and spiritual engineering.

Talented people who had previously been stymied by lack of resources suddenly found themselves surrounded with more E energy radiation than they could handle!

The descendants of long-dead cultivators had dug up all kinds of ancient legacies and inheritances from their vaults and archives. Every week, a new invention might emerge that would substantially affect the development of their civilization.

The emergence of general cultivation elixirs served as an especially wakeup call to Ves!

A part of him felt pissed about that. Even though it was unreasonable to think that way, he felt incredibly angry that he had nothing to do with this particular innovation!

He should have been the one to present the mech community with another enormously useful means to empower its pilots!

At the very least, he should be the one to control its supply. That way, he would have been able to retain his monopoly on cultivation aids and boost his leverage even further. It was intolerable that an entirely different party came and developed a much more effective means to rapidly accelerate the ordinary cultivation progress of mech pilots!

Ves briefly closed his eyes.

This was not a productive mindset. He had no power to stop others from exploiting their own understanding of ancient traditions to develop products that suited the new age. He knew that there were many others working to reintroduce the wonders of ancient cultivation back to modern society.

Even if the mechers hadn't managed to figure out how to produce these amazing elixirs, then the Terrans or the Rubarthans would have been able to invent them sooner or later.

This was because the brewing of elixirs was a common practice in ancient times! Many ancient cultivators had mastered the art of making them. The Water Scroll also contained countless teachings related to this discipline!

The reintroduction of elixirs to human society was a foregone conclusion. As much as Ves wanted to grasp all of the keys to cultivation, it was impossible for him to retain everything.

He needed to focus on his own advantages.

A smirk appeared on his face. From his mother's reaction to his various creations, he knew that it was not that easy to replicate his works. His talents were unique and his ingenuity was unsurpassed as far as he knew. He regained his sense of confidence.

He bent down and kissed his daughter on the head, causing her to issue a small complaint.

"It is true that I am not the only one who is capable of inventing powerful solutions to many problems. However, what is important is not the works that I have already created, but the capacity to keep creating more. So what if other people have managed to replicate my kinship networks? I originally stole the idea from Master Toqueman Huron. It is only right that others can gain inspiration from my products as well. It is the creator that is most important. People do not revere the Polymath's many works. They revere the Polymath because of her endless ability to invent and improve new technologies. Do you understand, Aurelia?"

His daughter looked awed. "I do. You are saying that even if others manage to reverse engineer your works, you have already spent enough time on developing other solutions."

"That is correct. That is the reason why the Red Association sees fit to promote to a tier 3 galactic citizen. This status reflects how much I can contribute going forward, not the accomplishments that I have already made. So long as people believe that I can continue to whip up more innovations over time, they will respect me and give me space in order to gain access to whatever powerful

solutions I present to them in the future. That gives me power over them. This is why I can be more aggressive in my negotiations with the Rubarthans. I admit that they are powerful, but they recognize that a kinship network is a necessity to them. This is not a battle that they can win by force."

That said, Ves did not completely rule out the possibility that the Rubarthans might feel tempted to employ underhanded measures in order to gain an advantage.

As much as he felt reassured about his current protective measures, he could not afford to be complacent. He needed to look into bolstering his personal security as soon as possible.

"The Rubarthans are unlikely to concede so easily," Aurelia said after a while. "Their pride and conceit won't allow them to fold completely. They need at least a symbolic victory in order to justify an agreement with us. I think we may have to make serious concessions of our own in order to get Clixie or Qilanxo to become their guardian spirit."

"Oh?" Ves grew intrigued. "What do you think they will propose?"

Aurelia looked down on Clixie with concern. "If they choose Clixie... they won't allow her to remain outside of their control. I think they will insist on transferring her back to the Rubarthans if they agree to turn her into the nexus of their new kinship network!"

This was a realistic possibility. Aurelia made a very clever guess!

However, the possibility obviously distressed her. The young lady clutched Clixie even tighter as if she was afraid that the Rubarthans would come and snatch her closest feline companion away!

"Miaow miaow miaow!" The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat expressed her loyalty to Aurelia.

"That is not all," Aurelia continued. "If the Rubarthans have grown too concerned about how much leverage you gain over them, they may insist that you send me or my sister to their state. They will want to put us into their schools so that they can make us develop a greater belonging towards their culture and state."

"Unacceptable! I won't let the Rubarthans take you away! That goes for Clixie as well! She's family! We never abandon our own!"

"Miaow!"

Ves knew that this practice was not uncommon in these circles. Nonetheless, family was important to him. Perhaps that may be exactly why the Rubarthans might want to target that, but he did not want his success to come at the expense of the people he loved and cherished. That would defeat much of the purpose of what he was working towards!

"Okay, that is enough for now." He said as he rose up on his feet. "I appreciate your insights, but you still have much to go before you can handle these talks in my stead. Don't worry. I won't let the Rubarthans walk all over me. I won't let them take you or Clixie away. If they want more oversight on our cat, then they can send their men to us. If that is not enough for them, then they can either turn to another provider or go without a kinship network."

He was beginning to enjoy all of this plotting and scheming a bit too much as of late. He needed to turn his focus back on his core work before he got lost in this entirely!

Chapter 5285 Reducing Workload

His talk with the Rubarthans caused him to revel in his new position of superiority, but it also made him realize that he was allocating too much of his time on diplomacy.

Ves recognized the importance of conducting diplomacy. The downfall of the Hexadric Hegemony and the Vulcan Empire always served as the defining examples of how large and powerful organizations could fall. The people of these ill-fated states made too few friends and far too many enemies.

For all of his massive success, Ves never forgot that he was still an upstart in many ways. His Larkinson Clan still amounted to nothing in the greater scheme of things.

This was why it was important to maintain friendly relationships with all of the major players. Ves did not need to become bosom buddies with them all, but he should at least prevent them from developing a strung grudge against him and his clan.

In any case, Ves was done with diplomacy for the time being. He already conducted the most important talks. Unless the Terrans and the Rubarthans had many major decisions that demanded his personal attention, he could leave most of the proceedings to his subordinates.

Ves wanted to get back to work. As important as it was to remain on top of all of the drastic changes due to the changing times, he could never overlook the fact that he was a mech designer first.

This was why he threw himself back into routine. He checked up on the T Institute so that he could direct and oversee the progress that his researchers had made into forming different hyper materials.

The totem method used to produce a favorable elemental environment had spawned dozens of new hyper materials, each of which possessed properties that were completely new and unmatched by known exotics.

Ves did not forget about the deal he made with one of the Master Mech Designers at the conference. He selected a few samples of new and interesting hyper materials and transferred them to the Bluejay Fleet. The mechers had their own shipping channels.

As long as the Association verified that the supplied hypens were completely new and not yet registered in its database, Ves was entitled to receive substantial rewards.

He could ask for numerous different rewards in exchange for his contributions.

Despite all of the attractive choices he could make, he was mainly interested in obtaining more permanent EdNet quotas.

Ves fully recognized the importance of the EdNet to the development of the Larkinson Clan. The Premier Branch needed to consist of as many long-time Larkinsons as possible, but it was difficult to maintain its expansion when there weren't enough internal promotion channels.

This was why Ves inquired about the possibility of exchanging rare and precious hypens for permanent EdNet quotas.

"I am not sure whether it can be done." Jovy's projection told Ves. "I will make inquiries about it. You were lucky when you managed to obtain those initial 10 quotas. Master Xena Wintress clearly wanted to earn your favor by making them available to you. If you want to obtain additional quotas, you will have to do so at a significantly higher cost. You shouldn't expect to obtain any further deep discounts no matter how much your importance has grown. The EdNet's capacity is already

stretched to the limit due to the introduction of the New Elites Program. Too many people are in a hurry to shore up their qualifications for the tough battles ahead."

Ves looked a bit disappointed. "Thank you for your clarification. Just do the best you can. This won't be the only way I intend to earn more quotas. As long as I keep working at it, the number of permanent quotas in my possession will slowly grow to a more acceptable amount."

It would make a huge difference to the Larkinsons whether they had access to 10 quotas or 100 quotas!

Unfortunately, Ves was clear that he had to continue his cooperation with the Red Association to earn more quotas. He was quite clear that the mechers likely identified how much value he ascribed to these quotas and deliberately dangled them in front of his head like a carrot!

Thinking about how frustrating it was to remain at the beck and call of the mechers urged him to find a way to upgrade the MSTS.

"It has been a long time since I worked on the Mental Simulation Training System." He frowned.

He knew that Vulcan, who essentially hosted the MSTS, constantly worked to expand its capabilities over time, but these improvements mostly amounted to minor updates to the physics model.

Aside from making the simulations more realistic, the fundamental properties of the MSTS hadn't changed in quite a while.

"If I can find a way to accelerate the perception of time when connected to the MSTS..."

He knew that it was not that simple to imitate the selling feature of the EdNet.

Even if Ves found a way to accelerate time in the simulation environment, the brains of the mech pilots would rapidly overheat and fry from all of the excessive mental strain!

The reason why the EdNet was so successful was because the mechers utilized a lot of cross-disciplinary tech to maintain the health of its users while they subjected their brains to a lot of abuse.

This was a capacity that his own researchers simply couldn't match!

"Maybe I don't have to follow the model of the EdNet so closely. There has to be a different way to produce the same result."

This was bound to be a difficult problem. Ves did not think he could rid himself of his dependency on the EdNet anytime soon.

In any case, before his expeditionary fleet arrived at the Bortele System, Ves wanted to take a bit of time away from his miscellaneous duties and focus on pure mech design.

When he entered the closed chamber where his cyborg leg had constantly been at work behind a desk terminal, Ves hesitated whether he should bother to reattach his limb.

"Hm, I don't think it is healthy to keep the sub-brain separated from me for too long. Who knows what it will grow into if it continues to remain by itself."

It was a strange sensation to reattach an artificial limb that had been standing on its own for a considerable amount of time.

Fortunately, his fears did not come true. No accidents occurred. Ves did not detect any hint of incompatibility. It was the opposite in fact. He felt truly complete now that his sub-brain had reconnected to the rest of his nervous system!

Ves could already feel his thinking processes returning to a more optimal state. It was as if he had added a secondary processor to a computing system. The two working in harmony with each other produced small but helpful synergies that would be helpful in solving particularly difficult design problems!

Though Ves still felt tempted to separate his cyborg leg whenever he had to go away on another business trip, there was something to be said about keeping his body whole.

The pleasant boost resulting from reattaching his cyborg leg put him in a particularly good mood. He sat down behind his desk terminal and soon started to get lost in his design projects.

During the weeks he was engaged in other affairs, his cyborg leg and Veronica had both worked on numerous different design projects.

Most of the work was relatively preliminary in nature as not enough time had passed to make substantial progress.

Recent changes and developments in society as well as his own circumstances had also caused many aspects of his design projects to become obsolete overnight.

This was rather annoying as he had to spend a considerable amount of time revising a lot of details.

It was all necessary, though. He had to account for the many new insights and innovations that other people had introduced during the Survivalist conference.

If he did not do this work in advance, then his mech designs would probably become obsolete as soon as the Association announced the next mech generation!

Even so, without access to much of the promising new tech and technological principles, there was little Ves could do aside from ensuring that he could easily replace old tech with new tech.

There was still value in knowing what was to come. Many other mech designers had little clue about what was to come, and they would definitely suffer for their lack of preparation!

As Ves continued to go over the progress he made while he was gone, he briefly considered whether it was important for him to continue working on these second-class mech design projects.

Ves needed to reserve more time to study the huge amount of knowledge required to become a first-class Senior Mech Designer.

Since he was about to design first-class mechs in the near future, was there any point in spending his time on second-class mechs?

He vigorously shook his head. "Ugh! I'm thinking like a snob again! Bad Ves!"

Ves spent too much time among the Survivalists. They all held an attitude that only first-class mechs could decide the outcome of the war, but that was way too narrow-minded for his tastes.

Even though the mechers had a point that second-class mechs and third-class mechs could not compete directly against the leading alien warfleets, there was still value in investing in quantity!

"Besides, most of my clan will still consist of second-raters for the most part. I can't abandon them just because I can play with shinier toys in the future. I should never forget my roots."

After a bit more thinking, Ves made an important decision by delaying and postponing a few projects.

"I should keep working on the Blood Knight Project since the mechers want to conduct more research on the Carmine System. It's a bit troublesome since it is a biomech, though. I need to spend more time on solving problems that I have never encountered in my other projects."

The Blood Knight Project was already troublesome when it was supposed to be a second-class biomech.

The design project would become ten times more difficult if it was centered around a first-class biomech!

His shallow understanding of biotechnology and biomech design were far from enough for him to design a decent first-class biomech!

"The Elephant Project suffers from the opposite problem."

Its complexity and requirements exceeded that of a second-class mech. Ves was already struggling to contain all of its powerful functions in a quasi-first-class mech frame.

Now that he thought about it, the Elephant Project would have a much better future if he respecified it into a first-class mech!

"I can also add a lot more powerful features to the mech design!"

There was one kind of high technology that Ves deeply wanted to integrate into the Elephant Project.

"This support mech is the perfect platform for shield link technology and energy link technology!"

The fragility and lack of capacity of the Elephant Project would instantly become a thing of the past as long as it was able to draw power and energy shields from other sources!

Not only that, but support link technology also allowed the Elephant Project to project these links on numerous mechs on the battlefield, thereby turning it into an even better heavy support mech!

There was nothing better that could compete with modern support link technology. This was one of the strongest means for first-class multipurpose mechs to survive when fighting against powerful alien warships.

As a tier 3 galactic citizen, Ves had become an honorary member of the Red Association. This meant that he gained high-level access to a lot of restrictive and powerful high technologies, which happened to include support link technology!

Though Ves wasn't allowed to implement this tech into publicly available mechs, it was not a problem to reserve it for his own clan's use!

"The only problem is that this tech is too demanding. It is unfeasible to apply it onto second-class mechs."

Chapter 5286 Postponing Projects

The biggest gamechanger to Ves was not just the transition from second-class mechs to first-class mechs, but access to more exclusive high technologies.

The foremost high technology that Ves had always been greedy for was support link technology!

Also called linking technology, it was a sophisticated way to transfer energy from one machine to another.

Ves had witnessed it in action several times. He had seen CFA warships link their defenses together to withstand the strongest blows with their combined strengths.

He had also seen the MTA's first-class multipurpose mechs confront alien warships head-on without fear for their overwhelming firepower.

While energy link technology and shield link technology was subject to a lot of constraints that imposed limits on what they could do, they were still essential to develop mechs that could compete at the highest level!

A first-class mech force with access to support link technology could easily overwhelm a first-class mech force that lacked this high-end tech!

For a long time, Ves never thought about incorporating this useful tech in any of his mechs. Only the top first-class powers possessed the wealth, resources, manpower and infrastructure to make widespread use of this tech.

It would definitely be a struggle for the Larkinson Clan to implement support link technology into all of its future first-class mechs in the short term. The demands were too high. Ves would have to barter for assistance from the mechers or other first-class powers in order to incorporate this tech in his own products in a shorter time frame.

"If the time has come to go on an expedition, my mechs cannot deploy on the battlefield without the protection bestowed by shield link technology! The attrition rate will become too high if my mechs can be picked off one by one!"

The battles against the wheednar and yurzen raiding fleets had already taught him that even weaker opponents could make his forces bleed. Mechs were simply too small and easy to pick off. Shield link technology could make it a lot harder for the aliens to inflict serious casualties.

"I don't have to worry about this right away. I need to study and become proficient in all of the science that leads up to shield link technology before I can even think about applying it onto my own machines."

That was the troublesome part about first-class mech design. Unless Ves was able to obtain a suitable enlightenment fruit, the only way to get started on all of this powerful tech was to spend a lot of time on studying!

"This is why I need to cut back on my projects for the time being."

He decided to set aside the Elephant Project for the future. He also chose to postpone his work on an experimental transphasic field ECM mech that he had high hopes for. While it might help a lot in

countering the phasewater tech employed by aliens, Ves was not sure whether he could turn this into a practical product in a reasonable timeframe.

This still left him with way too many projects that he could not easily dismiss.

The most crucial ones were the expert mech design projects.

The Dawn Star Project that revolved around upgrading his grandfather's Carmine mech was nonnegotiable. Ves had already made decent progress on it through his incarnations.

However, due to confidentiality as well as other reasons, he didn't have any collaborators who shared the burden of designing it, which meant that Ves still had a huge amount of work ahead of him if he wanted to deliver a proper high-tier expert mech.

Even his wife was limited by how much assistance she could provide by implementing her god body solution on the metallic components of the upgraded version of Venerable Benjamin's current machine.

Other than that, Ves needed to do all of the heavy lifting himself.

"Still, it will be worth it. This expert mech out of all of my other ones will encapsulate my design philosophy the most. Not even the Everchanger can compare to it due to the absence of the Carmine System!"

That caused him to contemplate whether he should offer to integrate his other Larkinson expert mechs with their own Carmine Systems when it was time to update their designs.

"There is no point in thinking about this now."

Ves at least needed to upgrade them into quasi-first-class mechs in the next five years, but he still had plenty of time to tackle these projects.

Aside from the Dawn Star Project, the Bloodripper Project and the Jupiter Project also demanded his attention.

Fortunately for him, his wife had taken charge of both expert mech design projects.

She had become especially attached to the Jupiter Project.

Designed for General Ark Larkinson, this was a genuine high-tier expert mech design whose scope easily matched or exceeded that of the Mars Project!

Ves did not have to worry too much about the progress of the Jupiter Project since his wife had obviously fallen in love with it. She was especially ecstatic about implementing all kinds of newer and more updated tech that they previously weren't able to incorporate in the initial version of Patriarch Reginald's machine.

That left a bunch of standard mech projects.

Although he was officially involved in the design of the Storm Sword Project, it belonged to Ketis for the most part. His only job was to make the mech alive and to connect it to Respa. That was the extent of his contribution. He was more than happy to leave the rest to Ketis and her other collaborators.

As for the rifleman mech project that he intended to embark upon after finding an external collaborator, Ves decided to shelve it until he had more time at a later date.

While the Larkinson Clan most definitely needed a new and dedicated spaceborn quasi-first-class rifleman mech, Ves ultimately thought that it might be better to wait a bit more so that he could gain access to newer and better tech.

He had learned about lots of useful technological advances during the conference that were bound to be introduced in the near future.

The mechers were especially keen on strengthening the ability for ordinary forces to threaten alien warships. This meant that the next mech generation was bound to include powerful new offensive tech that would make it a lot easier to drain transphasic energy shields at a distance!

"I can't delay my heavy artillery mech projects, though."

Ves had already accepted a bunch of commissions for the Colonial Federation of Davute. The decision made sense at the time, but now seemed out of place now that he could obtain much better concessions.

Nonetheless, a contract was a contract. Ves did not object to completing the Supremo Project along with the remaining commissions for a second-class colonial state.

Perhaps the heavy artillery mech designed especially for the Davutans might not weigh so heavily on his mind anymore, but it was still a project that he had high hopes on. It was not a waste of time to design this interesting machine in collaboration with a Master Mech Designer who specialized in this mech type!

So long as the Supremo Project and future Davutan mechs produced great results in the war against the native aliens, Ves could gain a lot of reputation by being able to point out that his works could substantially boost the combat effectiveness of an entire state!

The Hex Federation would no longer be the only state that gained a huge amount of benefits by making use of his exclusive living mechs.

That alone made these second-class commissions worth it. The Davutans probably didn't dare to hassle him about completing them in a hurry, so Ves could space them out so that he did not get swamped by too many projects.

Ves decided to postpone the Transcendent Punisher Mark III for the same reasons as he did for his rifleman mech project.

While he had made a lot more progress in the design of this strategically important Larkinson mech, it did not make sense for him to work on it any further for the time being.

When he initially made the decision to upgrade his Transcendent Punishers, he didn't know at the time that the Red Association was on track to introduce a lot of new technologies aimed towards boosting the firepower of ranged mechs.

That left him with the final ongoing mech design project. Ves struggled whether he should continue to work on the Fey Project or respecify it into a first-class mech.

"No. It should already be useful as a quasi-first-class mech. It is an advanced and costly design, but it is not as exaggerated as the Elephant Project. What is most important is that its features are in much greater demand on lesser battlefields. I doubt I can design spurs that are effective enough to withstand the firepower or fool the sensor systems of first-class opponents."

Ves needed to master a lot more first-class technologies before he could design a proper first-class incarnation of the Fey Project.

He breathed a lot easier now that Ves had substantially reined in his work schedule. Now that he had reduced his scope to 6 mech design projects, of which 2 of them did not impose too many demands of his time, he had freed enough time to study for the future!

"As long as I don't make my workload any greater than the current level, I am sure I can get started on designing my first proper first-class mech in four or so years!"

The timing was crucial to Ves. He wanted to design and fabricate at least a couple of essential first-class living mechs before he and his clan embarked on their first deep strike operation.

Ves did not want to become a warlord by relying on first-class mechs designed by others!

As powerful and trustworthy as they may be, it just wouldn't be the same.

It took a bit of time to register these changes in the Design Department. Once he had made it clear to everyone that he intended to juggle fewer mech design projects at the same time, he dropped by his wife to discuss their progress.

"You should have reduced your workload much sooner." She told him. "In fact, you should have never been arrogant enough to accept so many projects in the first place. I am happy that you finally regained your senses."

"Hey, it's not that bad. If it wasn't so important for me to be promoted to a first-class mech designer as soon as possible, I would have been able to complete those projects within a year."

That sounded like a stretch to Gloriana. Ves didn't even have a first-class cranial implant! How could he possibly solve so many design problems without such a powerful tool?

That reminded her of her own impending upgrade. She couldn't help but grin at the thought.

"I have already begun to correspond with the research team of the implant development company that you have arranged for me. I won't be able to replace my old cranial implant with a new one until I have completed my ongoing design projects, but that is not a detriment. The implant engineers will have more time to customize the high-quality cranial implant according to my needs. They can also implement the latest technological advances that have come out at an accelerated rate ever since we entered the Age of Dawn."

It would be even better if Gloriana waited for a couple of years before undergoing implantation operation, but that was way too long for her. She wanted to become a first-class mech designer by relying on her own efforts just like Ves, and the only way she could come close to his upgraded learning speed was to rely on the power of technology!

Ves understood this reasoning, so he didn't attempt to persuade her to be patient.

That said, he learned about a number interesting new technological applications that his wife might want to add to her future cranial implant.

"Have you heard about experiments that involve integrating hyper materials in cranial implants? I have heard that they can help with absorbing the right kinds of E energy. I think it might be interesting for you to consider this option. It might not be useful to you directly, but I am sure that you can speed up Alexandria's growth with this upgrade."

"Is that true?!"

Chapter 5287 The Next Generation of Luminar Crystal Weapons

"Even I am barely able to resist the temptation to cut open my head and stuff a hyper material inside. Do you know how useful it is to attract more E energy radiation?"

"It sounds dangerous." Gloriana said. "Everything I have learned about hypers suggests that dosing yourself with E energy radiation risks exceeding your safe tolerance level. Once you begin to get exposed to more exotic radiation than you can handle, the probability of suffering random accidents as well as malignant mutations increases dramatically. This is already bad enough if you implant a hyper material inside your arm or leg, but if any accident occurs within the center of your brain, a quick death is not the worst outcome."

Her concerns were valid. Most of red humanity was just beginning to get to grips with materials that had formed after being infused with the power of heaven. The properties derived from specific elemental variations of E energy produced all kinds of wondrous but unpredictable effects.

This was the start of the Age of Dawn. Just as they did during the starting years of the Age of Mechs, a lot of researchers and developers had no idea what they were dealing with! They mostly attained their results by trial and error!

Suffice to say, this approach usually yielded a lot more errors than successes!

Ves did not feel too concerned about it, though.

"The treatment that I have bartered for you is top-notch, Gloriana. The implant development company won't be treating you as an ordinary test subject. You are a client and a VIP no less. As the wife of a tier 3 galactic citizen, the implant engineers won't dare to employ any truly untested tech in your custom cranial implant. Technological progress is happening really fast right now. A lot of the products in development seem dangerous at the moment, but most of the risks will subside in a couple of months as our scientific community quickly learns what is wrong and what is right. Hyper materials are part of our future. Don't miss out on it. It will be much more troublesome to upgrade your implant once it has been installed into your brain."

Ves truly believed this was the best way to boost the capabilities of his wife.

Out of their immediate family, Gloriana was the most ordinary of them all. Ves started out relatively normal, but he went through so much evolution and modification that he had turned into a hybrid that possessed at least some of the traits of a primordial human.

Their children were much further ahead in this regard. The gifts bestowed by the likes of Gaia and the Superior Mother along with other superior conditions caused them to come much closer to the state of a primordial human!

In fact, as primordial humans were much more diverse due to their ubiquitous capacity for self-evolution, his children might have actually crossed this important threshold!

What mattered was that Ves and his children were easily able to improve their basic capabilities through cultivation. Their dependency on augmentation had dropped because they could essentially make themselves stronger by utilizing deliberate cultivation methods.

This was not always a benefit. The downside to relying on cultivation was that it produced many mysterious alterations that interacted poorly with many forms of augmentations, especially when applied afterwards.

Foreign implants became prone to malfunctioning while genetic modification treatments could completely ruin or regress some of progress attained through cultivation!

In short, people like Ves that had surpassed a significant stage of cultivation could no longer safely augment themselves further!

With the power, influence and connections that Ves had at his disposal nowadays, it was trivially easy for him to arrange a customized cranial implant upgrade for himself.

When Ves conducted research on the kinds of premium first-class implants that his wife could benefit from, he felt incredibly envious of their power and capabilities.

The implants optimized for mech designers did more than offer a lot of processing power and data storage. They went further and literally rewrote entire parts of the human brain so that they could massively improve and optimize a lot of cognitive processes relevant to their profession!

Ves could not even hope to understand these deep and profound changes. Only the foremost experts on human neurology and implant development understood what was taking place!

Cranial implants that produced such extreme effects were almost always custom in nature. A standardized product could not account for all of the unique and diverse brain configurations of baseline humans and most particularly designer babies.

The difficulty of installing them became exponentially more difficult if the intended recipient already bore an existing cranial implant!

Only first-raters possessed the tech, resources and expertise to safely boost Gloriana's base capabilities to an insanely high level.

Though his wife needed to be patient, once she completed her long-awaited upgrade, her productivity would likely become insanely high!

Her work speed would exceed that of any other second-class Journeyman Mech Designer by a noticeable margin, all without compromising the quality of her results!

Her ability to devour new knowledge would improve substantially as well, as her integration with her new implant had pushed forth the digitization of her mind to an even deeper level!

If Gloriana failed to promote to a first-class mech designer despite receiving a customized first-class cranial implant, then she might as well quit mech design entirely and raise her children in peace!

Ves felt a lot of pressure at her impending upgrade. He knew that he needed to find a way to upgrade his own design capabilities, but his odd evolution track prevented him from employing the easiest and most common solution available to mech designers.

He needed to rely on his own efforts to increase his internal processing power. This was difficult, but there had to be a way to make this happen. He deeply suspected that Divine Blacksmiths were able to turn a part of themselves into supercomputers.

There was no other way for them to be able to forge the most advanced and demanding armaments in ancient times!

All of that could wait for the time being. After the couple was done with talking about cranial implants, they moved on to discussing the progress made on numerous important mech design projects.

Gloriana had fleshed out much of the Jupiter Project by herself.

"I haven't met your uncle too many times in person, but I have corresponded with him often enough to lock down the configuration of the Jupiter Project. I am still searching for the appropriate component models. Your recent rise in status has given me access to much better and more experimental mech systems, so I will have to delay the next phase of the design process by a few weeks in order to select from the best available choices."

His wife projected a recent draft of the Jupiter Project.

Ves liked what he saw. The expert command mech exuded a strong and valiant air. Though it possessed obvious command and control modules, the high-tier expert mech was no slouch in direct combat.

"The Jupiter Project inherits much of the configuration of the Travon Exine." His wife explained. "General Ark's current high-tier expert mech does not fit him perfectly, but the Master Mech Designers of the Garlen Empire are not incompetent. Your uncle has also spent years on becoming proficient with its weapon configuration, so he should immediately adapt to his new living expert mech as long as the latter's weapons are similar enough."

This was not an unusual choice. It was much less troublesome to stick to what was familiar rather than try to adapt to a completely different style of combat.

Gloriana continued to explain the overall configuration of the Jupiter Project.

"Ranged combat is important. While Ark and I have discussed whether it is better for his expert mech to equip an external rifle that boasts superior firepower and convenience, we ultimately decided to base the Jupiter Project's ranged armament on a set of integrated transphasic luminar crystal cannon system. This will be his main means of ranged output. We will be counting on you to develop it to a point where it can become effective against alien warships."

Ves looked intrigued. The proposed integrated energy weapon system clearly shared a lot of similarities to the ARCEUS System of the Mars. His wife had participated in its design. Not only that, she also collaborated with Master Benedict Cortez on an infrequent basis whenever the Mars was due for another minor upgrade or overhaul.

Even though the ARCEUS System was a licensed product of Immace Energy Armaments, that did not stop Ves and Gloriana from 'taking inspiration' from many of its interesting design solutions.

They could even take it a step further and license the ARCEUS System or a newer variant of it for the Jupiter Project!

However, neither Ves nor Gloriana proposed this solution because they had advanced their craft to such an extent since the initial development of the Mars that they could develop a completely bespoke integrated energy weapon system by themselves.

The design might be rougher and less optimized at first, but there was much more room for improvement.

Both mech designers knew quite well that the initial version of the Jupiter Project would only last for a short time.

Once General Ark Larkinson successfully advanced to ace pilot, his new living expert mech immediately became obsolete again!

That would be the point where Gloriana truly intended to transform her work into a mechanical monster without equal in the Larkinson Clan!

"The ARCEUS System works well for the Mars because it is entirely based on numerous transphasic positron weapon modules. They are powerful enough to allow Patriarch Reginald Cross exchange fire against most warships at various ranges, though they perform the best at closer to medium ranges." Ves told her. "As for the Jupiter Project, we can make a range of impactful choices. We can make its ranged output flexible by allowing it to switch out its attack phase crystals. However, this will add more complexity while reducing the degree of optimization. It might just be a better idea to stick to just one attack phase crystal."

His wife furrowed her brows. "I know you well enough that you only make stupid suggestions half of the time. Why do you sound as if you are favoring only a single choice? Does it not make sense to take advantage of the versatility of luminar crystal technology? If the Jupiter Project faces a warship, it can quickly dismantle the target's transphasic energy shields with empowered disruptor beams. Once our expert mech has stripped this layer of protection, the mech can switch to positron beams to inflict maximum destruction onto the hull plating and internal hull structure of the enemy vessel. The efficiency of this process will severely diminish if the Jupiter Project can only fire positron beams."

Her argument made a lot of sense. Ves used to hold this opinion as well, but recent changes had caused him to change his attitude on this matter.

The problem was that it was difficult for him to explain his thoughts in a logical manner.

"You are not wrong, honey, but this is the Age of Dawn. Have you seen what the Everchanger managed to pull off with the Gray Lotus? This little weapon represents the future luminar crystal weapons as far as I am concerned! By using aspected hyper materials as the basis of a new variation of attack phase crystal, the luminar crystal weapons will not only be able to draw power from the power reactor of the expert mech, but also ambient E energy!"

His wife widened her eyes!

She had overlooked this important detail!

The reason why she had dismissed the Gray Lotus in her mind was because she had long been accustomed to regarding it as a unique and unreplicable artifact. It relied on a material called Black

Demon Steel in order to fire lethal death beams that could at least partially phase through any barrier!

If they could apply similar advancements to the Jupiter Project's integrated energy weapon systems, they could turn the powerful expert mech into a true ship-killing machine!

Chapter 5288 The Leader of the Pack

The synergy between luminar crystal technology and hyper materials was insane.

Hyper materials or more specifically sympathetic materials interacted extensively with E energy radiation.

They basically acted like physical interfaces that could directly draw in the power of exotic radiation and infuse it into a controllable luminar crystal weapon!

Before the Age of Dawn, Ves had no special thoughts about developing more products like the Gray Lotus in the short term.

As powerful and useful as this relic weapon may be, the lack of suitable materials made it impossible for him to develop this technological direction any further!

That was no longer the case. The Age of Dawn had changed the rules. Hyper materials that were previously so rare that they only showed up in weird places like the Nyxian Gap and the spaces controlled by the Five Scrolls Compact were about to become a lot more ubiquitous.

Even if the emergence of higher grades of hypers were a lot more demanding, that did not stop the fact that they would probably become a lot more common in the Red Ocean in the near future!

However, just because a lot more odd and peculiar sympathetic materials comparable to Black Demon Steel became available did not mean that it was easy to make use of their properties!

While it was possible to use them as the base materials for simple products such as swords and armor plating, this was only the most shallow application of their unique properties.

Using them as a core material of an energy weapon system was much more difficult. Constructing a laser weapon by substituting ordinary exotics with more interesting hypers did not necessarily lead to a transformation in performance.

Mech designers and engineers needed to be a lot more clever than that in order to successfully channel the power of exotic radiation through an energy weapon.

Luminar crystal technology happened to offer a ready-made template to make this happen. The attack phase crystal that converted electrical energy into various different energy beam types was a sophisticated weapon component that performed radically differently depending on its material composition!

Luminar crystals actually resembled archemetal a lot in this area. Both were composite materials that were practically designed to offer wide compatibility to different materials and produce dramatically different results based on endless combinations.

Before the Age of Dawn, Ves had casually managed to develop 6 conventional attack phase crystals.

Laser beams, positron beams, light beams, slicer beams, kinetic beams and disruptor beams all produced extremely useful results in the right situations.

Much of the power of the ranged mechs of the Larkinson Clan was based on their ability to employ the right attack phase crystals at the right time.

The funny part about all of this was that Ves didn't even specialize in crystallography or energy weapon systems!

However, by borrowing the alien insights and intuition of the Illustrious One, he had been able to make far more progress in this field than he should. His advancements in luminar crystal technology essentially allowed the Design Department to operate without a lead designer who specialized in ranged weapon systems.

Yet for all of the progress that Ves had made in developing stronger and better luminar crystal weapons, he only recently made the realization that he had been playing with a neutered version of this alien tech all this time.

He long speculated that the original luminar race had lived in ancient times where the power of heaven was abundant in the Milky Way.

It made a lot of sense that luminar crystal technology was more suited for a medium or high energy environment.

The way that luminar crystal technology easily enabled Ves to make effective use of hyper materials showed him that it was practically made for this purpose!

The Gray Lotus and more recently the Ignitron rifle equipped by the Promethea both possessed special properties that enabled them to exceed the overall performance of conventional luminar crystal weapons!

Their existence made every other luminar crystal weapon obsolete!

This included the powerful Instrument of Doom wielded by the Amaranto and the Irvan rifle wielded by the Minerva!

All of the Transcendent Punishers Mark II that were equipped with luminar crystal cannons were even more out of date!

It became imperative for Ves to upgrade these weapons into newer variants that made effective use of hyper materials.

The difference in effective combat power between a current generation luminar weapon and a next generation luminar crystal weapon was massive!

Ves personally estimated that the gap in effective performance was as much as 50 percent!

His wife grew increasingly more hungry as Ves explained the enormous potential of luminar crystal technology in the new age.

"Right now, my progress in the development of luminar crystal technology can be divided into three generations. The first generation was the first time I made use of it in my third-class mechs. The second generation was when I learned a bunch of stuff from the MTA and successfully developed improved crystals that are much more suitable for second-class mechs. The third generation mostly consists of custom luminar crystal weapons that I have designed or upgraded for our expert mechs.

What characterizes their performance is that their damage output can be boosted by design spirits. The Instrument of Doom is the most obvious example of such a weapon."

"I see." Gloriana looked thoughtful. "You probably expected to stay in the third generation for a longer period of time."

"That's right, but my planning couldn't keep up with the changes in our environment. Now that sympathetic materials are becoming more available, it would be stupid for me to neglect their amazing synergy and compatibility with luminar crystal technology. I am already treating this as the fourth generation of luminar crystal weapons. The integration of sympathetic materials opens up a lot of new possibilities. For the integrated luminar crystal weapon system of the Jupiter Project, we need to consider what sort of element we want to imbue into its attack phase crystal."

This was a difficult decision as there wasn't an obvious answer available.

Pairing the Everchanger with the Gray Lotus made at least some sense as Venerable Joshua excelled in the opposite element. By exposing him to the polar opposite, he could take advantage of the contrast and interactions between the two elements to rapidly advance his understanding of his domain.

The fire beam attack phase crystal integrated in the Ignitron rifle was a natural fit for the Promethea. This recently developed upgrade complemented Venerable Isobel Kotin's abilities and enabled her to launch her flaming companion spirit at her targets more effectively.

As for the Jupiter Project, the story became a lot more complicated. The reason for this was because General Ark Larkinson's domain was not based on primal elements such as fire or life.

"I have studied your uncle's domain in detail." She said. "I have also listened to Ark's own interpretation of his power. From what I have been able to understand, he is a command-oriented expert pilot at heart, but he is so obsessed with taking responsibility that he is not willing to let his troops suffer on his behalf. He possessed a powerful sense of noblesse oblige that translates into a form of personal empowerment."

"That sounds like my uncle alright." Ves nodded. "A Larkinson is raised to protect the weak. Even though Ark has chosen the command track, he doesn't see himself as a chess player like Commander Casella Ingvar. He sees himself as the leader of the pack. It is not in his nature to stick to the rear."

His courage and sense of duty had caused Ark to shape himself into a commander that fearlessly fought on the frontlines!

Gloriana nodded in agreement. "To be more precise, your uncle can derive a large amount of power depending on how much he can raise the morale of the troops under his command. The more his presence and feats can inspire his men, the more power they feed back to him. This can often lead to a positive feedback loop where his entry into the battlefield and initial successes in combat can increase his men's beliefs in him. This translates into greater empowerment where he can become even stronger than before, allowing him to inspire his men even further!"

This was one of the reasons why he had managed to earn so much respect while he served in both the Bright Republic and the Garlen Empire!

Ark was a perfect fit on the battlefield as he often fought at his best when he was being propelled by the confidence and the beliefs of the mech pilots under his command!

"This ability doesn't make him invincible, though." Ves pointed out. "If Ark suffers an early setback or if another powerful mech pilot outshines him on the battlefield, he won't be able to empower himself as much as he should."

"I am aware of that. This is why it is important for him to rely on shock and awe to make a strong impression in front of his troops. The main reason why I think it is best if we implement an integrated energy weapon system into the frame of the Jupiter Project is that it can produce a powerful visual spectacle at the start. The results will be even better if the results of its opening salvo can produce an immediate and dramatic effect on the target."

In other words, pure combat effectiveness was not the highest priority. The Jupiter Project had to look awesome while it fought against its adversaries, because this translated greater power for General Ark!

"The death element won't work well in this case." Ves frowned. "Death beams are incredibly harmful against most organic life, but it is difficult to see the results when bodies start to drop inside the hulls of alien warships. The lack of clear and obvious material damage will limit the feedback from friendly troops."

"What about fire, then? The Promethea's damage output is not only visible, but also much more dramatic."

Ves liked this suggestion a bit more. "I suppose this choice works better. The new fire beam attack phase crystal has already been tested on the battlefield, so we can shorten the development time. However... I don't think that my uncle's synergy with fire is good enough. He won't be able to control or amplify the flames nearly as well as Venerable Isobel. He might even lose control of the fires, which means that there is a decent chance that he might burn his troops! I can't think of a greater way to destroy friendly morale than this. I don't think we should recklessly play with fire."

It was better to be cautious in this regard. His wife reluctantly agreed with this stance, though she didn't want to rule it out entirely.

Ves thought about the dramatic explosions produced by the Destroyer of Worlds. Her damage output had an enormous effect on morale. Each time she pulverized a powerful target in a domineering fashion, she struck terror in the hearts of her enemies.

At the same time, she buoyed the confidence of friendly mech pilots, mostly because they knew that there wouldn't be much left for them to clean up. Their god pilot had already shattered the backs of their enemies!

However, it was difficult for Ves to gain access to the power of destruction. He had already expended Emma's spiritual fragment, and he didn't know how to replicate a comparable domain to that of Divine Irene Mox.

Besides, destruction was a difficult force to control. A mech pilot who had no special affinity with this element had a high chance of suffering an accident!

"What about light?" Gloriana suddenly suggested.

"Hm?"

"We can exaggerate the light show produced by the ranged damage output of the Jupiter Project." His wife said as she became increasingly more enamored by the idea. "With the help of the Illustrious One, we can make it so that the Jupiter Project can light up the entire battlefield! This is perfect for your uncle! He sees himself as a white knight, so what better way to exemplify his presence than to turn him into a beacon in the dark?"

That... actually sounded really good. Ves seriously considered the viability of this choice.

Chapter 5289 Misnomer

Light paired well with the Jupiter Project.

This was rather strange as most command-oriented mech pilots usually wanted to attract as little attention as possible.

They spent much of their time on managing their units and polishing their command abilities, so they weren't able to spend as much time on refining their combat skills.

Commander Casella Ingvar was the typical example of such a pilot. She invested a lot of attention on her subordinates. By bonding with them, she was able to channel her power onto them more effectively on the battlefield.

The stronger she became, the more she could uplift the strength of the mechs under her command!

General Ark Larkinson followed a different combat approach. While it was still important for him to take charge of his troops and build up a close superior-subordinate relationship with them, he was not the sort of expert pilot who could directly boost the combat power of his troops.

Instead, his ability reminded Ves a lot of deity cultivation. Somehow, Ark was able to derive power by posing as the 'god' of his own subordinates.

The more they worshiped and revered their commander, the stronger Ark became!

Image played a crucial role as a consequence. Ark had to pay a lot of attention to how he looked, how he presented himself, how he behaved and how he shaped his relationship with his troops.

A handsome and flashy mech could help him strengthen his image by an enormous margin!

Right now, Ark must not be having the best of times. His Travon Exine was a relatively ordinary high-tier expert mech, and completely lost its luster whenever it was standing right next to the Mars!

Even though the mech hadn't been designed for this purpose, the powerful and domineering ace hybrid mech never failed to make a strong impression on the battlefield!

If Ark wanted to do well in the future, then his upcoming machine had to outshine the Mars somehow!

This was an incredibly steep challenge, especially if the Jupiter Project started out as an expert mech as opposed to an ace mech.

Still, as long as the Jupiter Project harnessed the power of light, Ves believed it might be possible to overcome this challenge!

"If we do this, then the Jupiter Project will become the brightest mech on the battlefield." He said. "Subtlety is completely out of the question. Ark's mech will shine like a torch in the dark of space, thereby attracting a huge amount of attention and enemy weapons fire."

"He can take it. His domain and abilities are shaped by a desire to protect his troops by presenting himself as a more attractive target. Turning his mech into a giant light source plays into that role. We can make him so bright that his enemies will forget about attacking the much more fragile mechs that are fighting alongside the Jupiter Project. This should be a desirable result so long as the opposition is not overwhelming."

Though his wife made a lot of sense, Ves worried about whether this would backfire on Ark one day.

If he and his forces ever encountered an overwhelming enemy one day, the blindingly bright Jupiter Project would definitely find it difficult to escape pursuit!

Still, there was no way to avoid this possibility. Ark had long grown accustomed to bearing the greatest and dangers himself. He fueled his growth by constantly subjecting himself to elevated pressure whenever he attracted all of the attention on the battlefield.

Ark attained great success due to his courage, but might also fall one day due to the same reason!

The only thing that Ves could do was to support his uncle as best as possible. A high-tier expert pilot possessed too much conviction to turn his back against his own nature.

Now that Ves and Gloriana had a much better idea of their end goal, they revised the draft design of the Jupiter Project and made a lot of changes.

Ves mostly spent his time on altering the appearance of the Jupiter Project.

Gloriana was not a shabby artist by any means, but Ves possessed a more emotional and intuitive touch.

Both of them worked fairly quickly. The draft design soon took on a different form. The white mech not only contained a lot more light sources that enabled the mech to glow like a star at their brightest intensity, but also came paired with a long and flowing projected cape that could be configured to glow in any color!

Perhaps the most dramatic visual change to the draft design was the complete redesign of the head of the humanoid expert mech.

Gloriana had initially designed it to resemble the heroic visage of General Ark, but Ves had scrapped that and put a white lion head in its place!

The lion shared a great resemblance to Ark's recently acquired companion spirit. Despite his relative youth, Noah already possessed great power due to his principal's high resonance strength.

Ves couldn't imagine how valiant the Jupiter Project might become once it deployed in the field with Noah embedded into the head!

"This... is impressive. I would have never thought about designing the Jupiter Project in this fashion if you hadn't provided your input."

"That's why we always work best when we cooperate with each other." Ves grinned.

The two were not regarded as the Miracle Couple for nothing. They just hadn't been able to collaborate with each other in such an excellent manner as of late due to various distractions.

Now that Ves properly engaged in mech design once more, he soon experienced the joy of working together with a mech designer who complimented him well.

His wife soon furrowed her brows as she continued to stare at the latest draft of the expert mech.

"Our design choices have caused the mech to deviate from its original theme. I do not think we can justify the name of Jupiter anymore. The ancient god of thunder and the skies only shares an indirect relationship with light. We can still add electric weapons to the design so that it can evoke the power of lightning."

Ves shrugged. "Don't bother. It's just a code name for now. We can call the Apollo or something when we are done with our work. For now, it is best to avoid any confusion and stick to a consistent name."

Perhaps they started out the Jupiter Project with the intention of designing an expert mech that could be associated with an ancient king of the gods, but that had changed.

Ves much preferred to orient the Jupiter Project around the element of light. This was not only a much better symbolic fit for General Ark, but also complemented one of his existing design spirits extremely well!

"I originally wanted to install the Golden Cat as the design spirit for the Jupiter Project, but I think I will have to squeeze in the Illustrious One as well. The combination of the two pretty much reflect how General Ark fights his battles."

Ves wondered why he hadn't figured out this combination earlier.

His wife manipulated the projected mech until it highlighted the integrated luminal crystal weapon system.

"Let us get back to the matter at hand. If we want to turn the power of light into a more substantial addition to the Jupiter Project, then you need to develop an attack phase crystal that is not only highly attuned to the Illustrious One, but also fires much stronger and brighter light beams or laser beams. Which one do you prefer, by the way?"

That was not a simple question to answer. There were pros and cons to either beam types.

Laser beams were much more standard. Humanity had built up an enormous understanding of laser weapons. Laser beams were also excellent for long-ranged combat as they struck their targets at the speed of light.

Ironically, light beams didn't actually travel at the same stupendously high speed. This was because light beams did not purely consist of waves or photons anymore.

Calling it a light beam was a misnomer of sorts. Ves didn't know what he was thinking when he settled for the name. Perhaps he had become impressed by how bright the beams had become, but that wasn't even its most important property.

Ves had the sense that it had transformed into a more advanced version of electromagnetic radiation, one that had become more deeply intertwined with spirituality.

The fact that light beams were more effective at damaging spiritual entities and spiritual barriers suggested that it was one of the killer weapons that the luminar race reserved for ancient cultivators!

In any case, light beams were not the best beam type to employ against alien warships as their defenses were largely based on energy shields and phasewater technology.

The only reason why this combination worked particularly well for the Jupiter Project was because General Ark literally grew more powerful when his mech became flashier!

Besides, given the continued proliferation of exotic radiation throughout the Red Ocean, it was only a matter of time before the native aliens started to engage in a form of qi cultivation.

The Jupiter Project would be perfectly positioned to counter any new exotic effects!

"I will have to task the T Institute to focus on cultivating larger batches of light-aspected sympathetic materials." Ves spoke even as he already drafted a note in his mind. "I don't have any suitable hypers at our disposal at the moment, but it shouldn't be too difficult to produce a few basic varieties that I can experiment with. As long as I can successfully develop a fourth generation light beam attack phase crystal, we can proceed with this configuration. The integrated luminar crystal weapon system will become unprecedented."

This must be what the Xenotechnician must feel like whenever he figured out a way to successfully adapt the advantages of alien technology into his products.

The relationship between humans and alien technology was complex and ambiguous.

On the one hand, humans distrusted alien technology and were reluctant to employ it directly.

On the other hand, humans valued the more powerful and useful applications of alien technology too much to abandon them outright!

It was best if humanity was able to reverse engineer incomprehensible alien technology into a more understandable form, but that was not possible for luminar crystal technology.

For better or worse, Ves remained committed to using it in its original alien form even though he still had little idea how all of the alien circuitry worked.

Compared to the debate on how to configure the Jupiter Project for ranged combat, deciding its melee weapon loadout was much simpler.

"General Ark is an all-rounder when it comes to weapons handling." Gloriana said. "He is actually a good fit for a first-class multipurpose mech due to his proficiency in both ranged and melee combat. His control and techniques are inferior to those who hone their weapon skill with great dedication such as Venerable Stark and Venerable Dise, but his ability to derive power from his troops enable him to compensate skill with greater power."

This had great implications for Ark.

Compared to other high-tier expert pilots, he would never be able to match the accuracy of Venerable Davia Stark or be able to match the exquisite techniques of Venerable Dise.

However, he did not have to beat those expert pilots at their own game.

So long as the Jupiter Project received enough empowerment, then the powerful machine could overwhelm most opponents by relying on brute force!

This was why Gloriana had opted to pair the Jupiter Project with both a spear and a plasma sword.

Ves understood the logic of these choices.

A simple transphasic spear could be used to perform charge attacks while also keeping enemies at bay by relying on simple stabs.

A plasma sword was an energy-hungry weapon, but it could burn through defenses like nothing else as long as it channeled enough power!

However, Ves wasn't entirely satisfied with these simple choices. He felt he could do more with them. Was there a way to augment their combat power with hyper materials?

Chapter 5290 The Dawn Of Hyper Technology

Ves did not gain any inspiration about how he could qualitatively improve the performance of the weapons of the Jupiter Project.

While it might be useful to incorporate hyper materials into them in some fashion, doing so could just as easily mess up their performance on the battlefield during a critical moment where failure was unacceptable!

"You should leave this up to Ketis and Dulo." Gloriana placed her hand on his arm. "We are not designing this expert mech alone. Ketis has developed a few interesting ideas on how to design the plasma sword, and Dulo knows much more about spears than either of us. Leave this work to the specialists."

"Hm, you're right, I suppose." Ves conceded. "It doesn't really matter if the plasma sword and the spear are not as advanced as the rest of the Jupiter Project's configuration. They can easily be updated or replaced since they are just external equipment. From everything I've witnessed during the Survivalist conference, I expect that the Red Association will soon announce a new mech generation that will introduce lots of new innovations."

His wife's eyes brightened as she stared at him with repressed enthusiasm. "Can you give me a preview of what is to come?"

"Hm, I'm not sure how much I can share with you. A lot of the stuff I've learned is confidential. I can tell you that part of the new release will consist of restricted technology that the inechers have decided to let go in order to strengthen the masses. None of this is new to the big shots, but it can make a substantial difference to everyone else. Another part of it will consist of counters to phasewater technology. Overcoming transphasic energy shields is one of the greatest hurdles to defeating alien warships. The most important part is any useful tech on hyper materials and E energy radiation."

"I believe the final part is the most critical set of tech." Gloriana insightfully said. "The Age of Dawn shall truly commence once our industries start to incorporate this new category of technology."

Ves shared the same sentiment. "The Survivalists at the conference already started to use different umbrella terms to name this new field. The most common ones I have heard are hyper technology

or dawn technology. I think the former will win out since it is much easier for most people to harness the power of E energy radiation by manipulating hyper materials."

Hyper technology or whatever people decided to call it was on the cusp of revolutionizing the tech base of red humanity!

Not all of it was new. Applications such as general cultivation elixirs originally came from ancient cultivation heritages.

What Interested Ves much more was how red humanity would manage to blend modern technology with E energy. The fusion between modern technological principles and ancient knowledge might produce wonderful surprises that could redefine mechs In the new age!

Every mech designer had high hopes for the future. They had to in order to maintain their faith in mechs. If the Age of Dawn did not do enough to benefit mechs, then the future of every mech designer and mech pilot would come under question!

"What will become of red humanity?" Gloriana wondered. "Will unexplainable powers like yours become the norm in our society? Will science experience a regression as $1 + 1$ no longer equals 2? Our clan is blessed by your innovations, but if your works are representative of what Is to come, I am not certain whether I will like what our technology is mutating into. Will we still be human by the time we are done?"

Ves shook his head even as he leaned over and pulled her into his embrace. Her scent wafted in his nose, causing him to appreciate her company even more.

"We don't have the luxury to consider all of this high-minded philosophy stuff. Leave that to the tier 1 galactic citizens. Our only concern should be to figure out a way for our family to survive the coming years. I would do everything to keep our children happy and alive. I don't want them to grow up in darkness and despair. Whether that means that we will have to turn ourselves into the monsters of the dark, I will do so without a heartbeat. Survival trumps everything."

His wife smiled as she relished in his body warmth. "Spoken as a true Survivalist. I suppose you are correct. I have noticed that the Red Association has taken charge as of late. The Red Fleet hasn't generated as much attention as of late. Do you know what the Heelers are planning?"

"Not really." Ves shook his head. "Just because they're being quiet doesn't mean they are weak. Don't underestimate them. There is talk that the fleeters are working on their own brand of hyper technology that is highly applicable to warships. For example, what I can do with fourth generation luminar crystal technology, the Heelers may be able to accomplish with conventional human tech."

That time was coming closer. He could feel it. It was not sustainable for the Red Fleet to remain low-key all of this time. A day would come when they would unveil whatever they had been cooking up all of this time and shock everyone who thought that they were slowly fading into oblivion!

His wife continued to nuzzle her head against his shoulder. "I hope that the fleeters will inject much-needed common sense into human technology. No offense to you, but much of your work is so counterintuitive and psychoactive that nothing makes sense anymore."

"Hahaha! I don't blame you, Gloriana. It takes a special mindset to navigate it all. To be honest, the main reason why I haven't gotten lost is because I let my intuition do much of the heavy lifting. I know it is not entirely proper to build up a dependency on factors outside of my understanding, but I think this is how cultivation science was originally practiced in ancient times."

His wife made a contemptuous expression. "Back then, ancient people did not have access to modern computers and scientific principles. An ascended barbarian is still a barbarian. I very much doubt that our distant ancestors could achieve anything meaningful without resorting to metaphysics to cheat their way out of a problem."

"Are you calling me a barbarian?" Ves asked.

"I think you are barely clever enough to answer your own question."

The couple went back to mech design. They passionately discussed the design choices for the configuration of the Jupiter Project.

Compared to before, the lion-headed machine embodied General Ark Larkinson's personality and combat approach a lot better!

The flair and personality that Ves had injected in the draft design elevated it into a promising piece of artwork that had yet to be realized.

Though neither Ves nor his wife addressed this directly, the Jupiter Project had the makings of a potential masterwork expert mech.

It had all of the necessary 'ingredients' to become a work that transcended the mundane.

Ves and Gloriana cared a lot about this project. Their passion burned hotter as they continued to puzzle over how they could turn their ambitious design goals into reality.

The upcoming expert mech had great significance to its intended pilot and the rest of the Larkinsons. This was not only a vehicle for General Ark Larkinson to break past his bottleneck, but also held the potential to become the first proper ace mech of the Larkinson Clan!

What was even more important was that the Jupiter Project incorporated a lot of new innovations. Aside from incorporating fourth generation luminar crystal weapons, the mech would also come equipped with more powerful armor systems and flight systems.

Gloriana and the other mech designers did not neglect the potential of hyper materials and had become determined to figure out their uses in the following months!

All in all, the Jupiter Project had the potential to become just as big if not bigger than the Mars at the time of its completion. The expert mech design project outshone all of the others of its kind, which also included the Blood Star Mark 11.

While Ves did not intend to put less effort into designing an expert mech for his grandfather, the scope and significance of his first proper Carmine expert mech were entirely different.

The Blood Star Mark 11 was much more experimental and speculative in nature, which meant that nobody could foresee what it would turn into when the project had finally reached completion.

As the hours passed by, Ves and Gloriana eventually finished their collaborative work session on the Jupiter Project. They spent a bit of time going over their other design projects.

"The Fey Project is turning out to be a time-intensive project." Gloriana told Ves. "The scope and features of all of these fey will take too many hours to flesh out. Are you sure you want to persist in this design? If I were you, I would postpone it for next year or the year after that. I am sure that the new tech introduced during this period will significantly increase the potential of the automated combat drones of this special mech."

Ves shook his head. "Our clan needs this mech. The concept is excellent and it is the most suitable mech to help our second-class mech forces fight against alien warships. Our troops will continue to go on expeditions without me as linefighters. They are not going to wait 5 years or so before the first deep strike operations commence. The sooner they can get accustomed to making use of the Fey Project, the better they will be able to take advantage of its powerful properties in the battles that matter. Besides, the interaction between the living mech and its living fey is a new area that I have yet to explore. I think I can do something new and interesting with this dynamic, but I will have to work it out by myself. I think I might be able to enhance their connection with the use of hyper materials."

His wife shrugged and didn't argue with him further. She could tell that he was still passionate about this project.

"I think that your Fey Project has great potential as a commercial mech design." She told him instead. "I can understand your desire to keep it exclusive to our clan, but if I am being honest here, I think it is a waste of its potential to limit its proliferation. If this drone mech can truly live up to its promise, then I am sure it can be of fantastic use to all manner of second-class mech forces."

She had a point. Compared to the drone mech models on the market, the Fey Project simply offered a lot more added value due to all of the quirks that Ves wanted to add to his work.

However, he already considered this idea before.

"It won't work." He said. "I intend to design the Fey Project as a quasi-first-class transphasic drone mech. The production cost is projected to go through the roof. While the expense is bearable for our clan, not many other organizations will be able to afford it, and don't get me started on the need for phasewater."

"I think you are underestimating the tipper segments of the second-class mech markets. There are more wealthy organizations out there besides the Larkinson Clan. They are all suffering from a shortage of carrier vessels. More and more of them are striving to invest in quality over quantity. It should not be a problem for their organizations to supply a decent amount of phasewater. In fact, if the value proposition of the Fey Project is high enough, we can apply market forces for our product. If a customer wants to purchase a copy of our new mech, he or she has to supply enough phasewater to produce two copies!"

Ves looked intrigued. He was well aware of this exploitative scheme. He still remembered the instances where he had to supply double the amount of phasewater to various development companies in order to obtain their experimental transphasic mech components.

While the transactions were sort of worth it, he deeply resented those companies for forcing him to give up so much phasewater in vain!

This was why he felt rather strange now that his wife suggested that he could occupy the opposite side of this transaction.

It didn't necessarily have to center around the Fey Project either. Ves could think of a number of other possible Larkinson-exclusive mech models that could fool people into transferring lots of phasewater...