

## The Mech 5291

### Chapter 5291 Commercial Reorientation

"Your wife has the right idea, boss. Your living mech models are in high demand, especially now that you have become a household name to red humanity. Many people have come to believe that a mech designer who happened to become a tier 3 galactic citizen in record time shouldn't be that bad at his job. In fact, sales of all our the LMC's products have skyrocketed."

After Gloriana gave him the idea of selling more of his works on the mech market, Ves decided to meet with his personal assistant in order to explore the viability of this strategy.

With everything that had happened as of late, Ves had neglected the business side of his clan. It couldn't be helped. His attention span was limited and too many changes had occurred. The income provided by the Living Mech Corporation also increasingly fell behind his clan's growing needs.

The income and merits earned from the last two battles far exceeded the earning potential of the EMC in its current state!

Unless its sales volume reached a titanic height, it was difficult to earn a lot of profit from selling mechs.

A typical second-class mech sold for around 1 MTA credit. While the profit margin was quite good at first glance, there were too many factors that reduced it by a considerable extent.

The biggest limitation at the moment was the lack of direct production. Aside from the Cat Nest and various other manufacturing complexes set up on a number of other planets, the EMC simply didn't have enough factories to meet the enormous demand.

This forced the LMC to outsource a lot of production to third-party manufacturers, which brought its own share of headaches as living mechs had to be produced in a specific manner in order to guarantee its quality.

In addition, materials become scarcer and more difficult to source over time. If not for the fact that Ves and the Larkinson Clan earned so much prestige that they were able to secure the cooperation of more material suppliers, they wouldn't have been able to increase their production any further!

Gavin patiently explained the changing dynamic in the mech market and mech industry.

"All of our bestsellers have experienced a resurgence. From budget models such as the Desolate Soldier to more premium mechs such as the Ferocious Piranha, they are all being bought at higher rates, so much so that the LMC is looking to raise their prices yet again. What is interesting is that the growing demand doesn't come from the Krakatoa and Magalr Middle Zones anymore. We have pretty much reached saturation in those markets. It is the more distant middle zones that are truly becoming aware of our product lines and what they have to offer to them. While certain models such as the Pacifier have already penetrated those markets in advance, our other offerings are beginning to get sold in greater numbers as well."

It was a bit troublesome to supply mechs to those distant markets. Shipping across different zones was expensive and troublesome. The only way the LMC could properly profit from this rapidly growing trend was to build new factories in distant branches or contract a host of regional third-party manufacturers to do all of the work.

In any case, the LMC was bound to become a brand that would have a presence in every middle zone, including the ones that foil under the spheres of influence of the Terrans and the Rubarthans!

Though Ves did not really appreciate the profits earned from selling second-class mechs, he knew that it was still necessary for the LMC to remain fresh and relevant.

Mech designers existed to serve mech pilots. That meant that the more mech pilots came into contact with his mechs, the more validation Ves would receive in turn!

The Kingdom of Mechs and by extension the Red Kingdom tracked everything related to mechs.

Not only that, they issued rewards based on how much a mech designer contributed to the mech community and society as a whole.

Ves gained a clearer understanding why mech designers who mostly played around with virtual mechs found it much more difficult to advance up the ranks. He also understood why mech designers who worked at design studios broke through at a slower rate despite working on lots of projects.

The second-class mech market still held a lot of value to mech designers like Ves.

The same could be said for third-class mech markets, though to a lesser degree. He figured that the Red Kingdom weighed every contribution based on its positive impact on human society. Third-class mechs were too weak to significantly affect the overall destiny of red humanity.

"Are there any market trends that we should pay attention to, Benny?" Ves asked. "For example, what sort of products is the market looking forward to the most?"

Gavin smiled at Ves. "The New Elites Program has changed demand practically overnight. For better or worse, many people are scrambling to become linefighters or warfighters. However, it is not easy for mech forces to obtain larger quantities of carrier vessels. Unlike before, many wealthy and powerful leaders are being pressured to take part in these dangerous incursions. They don't want to bet their lives on a limited amount of shaky mechs that are completely unsuited to fight against warships. They are willing to invest big money into the most premium machines they can obtain. The demand and market viability of quasi-first-class mechs like the ones you are working on have become a lot more attractive as of late."

Ves nodded in understanding. Perhaps his understanding of the second-class mech market had become outdated.

"What do you recommend we do, Benny? You should possess a sufficient understanding of the state of the LMC and the products we can release on the market. Are there any mech models of ours that you think will sell extremely well if we put them up for sale?"

Gavin paused in thought. "I can think of a handful of niche products that can refresh our product catalog and sell decently well. The Stormblade Samurai designed by Ketis is relatively cheap and economical in relation to its power. The use of stormblade technology enables these mechs to wear down transphasic energy shields faster without relying on phasewar. However, this is not what the would-be warlords are looking for. The Storm Sword Project that your former protege is working on is much more in line with their needs."

The Storm Sword Project promised to become one of the most powerful standard melee mech models of the current generation. Ketis wanted to combine the best traits of the Second Sword and the Stormblade Samurai in a single quasi-first-class transphasic mech frame!

Ves could not imagine how effectively the Storm Swords would be able to overwhelm the defenses of alien warships once Ketis had completed her project!

"I can see what you mean, but as far as I know, Ketis only has the Swordmaidens in mind when it comes to this project. The skill requirements are too high and specific. General swordsman mech pilots won't be able to handle the Storm Swords proficient enough."

"Perhaps you can encourage her to design a commercial variant of the Storm Sword Project once she is done," Gavin suggested. "She doesn't have to do much to make it ready for the market. She can keep much of the same tech, but make it more compatible with a variety of sword types."

"That sounds great, but we should leave this decision to Ketis. The Storm Sword Project is her baby. You can pass on your suggestion to her, and let her decide whether she wants to release another powerful swordsman mech onto the market. Her Monster slayer model is still doing well, right?"

"It is, but not as much as we hoped. The Monster Slayer is not the most suitable mech to fight against the aliens. It is purely landbound, which means it can only fight against alien troops that have bothered to deploy onto the surface of a planet. It is also a pure melee mech, which means it has to get within striking distance in order to fulfill its purpose. Most of the alien raiding fleets that have showed up so far rarely give landbound melee mechs a chance to strike. They just rely on orbital bombardment to soften up the defenses of a colony before launching lots of starfighters to achieve air superiority."

While it was possible for landbound mechs to equip merit rifles in a hurry, their accuracy and other parameters would definitely not be good. It would have been much better to field dedicated ranged mechs instead.

"What do you think about the sales potential of the Fey Project?"

"It is difficult to say," The assistant frowned. "We have yet to conduct any serious market research because we did not expect you to think about putting it up for sale. Our marketing managers are not familiar with the market conditions of drone mechs, and yours is a lot more special due to designing it as a quasi-first-class mech. My gut feeling says that as long as it is good enough, it has the potential to become a must-have for any leader who is trying to become a warlord."

The Fey Project offered many different ways to mitigate losses in battles against formidable alien warships.

From disguising its semi-disposable Fey as fully capable mechs to adding extra firepower to any force, the Fey Project had the potential to become a lifesaver to its users!

If Ves remained as selfish as before, he would have never put any serious thought about selling it on the market. He did not want his rivals to learn about strengths and weaknesses so that they could develop counters in advance.

However, now that the Red Two frowned upon conflict between human forces, Ves no longer had as much concerns as before.

So what if he sold the Fey Project? Spreading them out among the second-class forces that needed its capabilities the most was not only profitable, but would definitely save the lives of a lot of New Elites!

"Alright. I am convinced. Let's reorient the Fey Project as a commercial product." Ves spoke in a more decisive tone now that he had made up his mind. "With my reputation, I don't think we have to worry about lack of sales. So long as its performance is up to our expectations, it shouldn't matter too much if its price is too exorbitant. The premium on phasewater also shouldn't be too much of an issue. I will make sure the Fey Project is powerful enough to justify this added cost!"

Ves possessed a lot of confidence in the power of the Fey Project. Although he hadn't been able to make much progress since he conceived of this mech design, he was confident that he could solve all of the challenges as long as he spent enough time!

After Ves dealt with the Fey Project, he recalled another commercial mech that the LMC released in recent times.

"How are the sales of the Second Eye, Benny?"

"Sales used to be slow, but they are starting to ramp up. This is mostly due to your reputation instead of a growing appreciation for its unique feature. Personally, I expect this to change. From the handful of positive reports I have read, the Second Eye is particularly useful in identifying the weak points of unshielded alien warships as well as alien fortifications. Its effectiveness is not great against alien energy shields despite having a heavy laser luminar crystal rifle in its default loadout, but the story is different once their owners have swapped out the weapons with transphasic rifles."

Ves designed the Second Eye with different circumstances in mind. How could he know that the Great Severing as well as the New Elites Program would induce so many changes in demand?

still, it was a good idea to equip the Second Eye with transphasic armaments. It was not necessary for the LMC to supply these high-end weapons. Most organizations that were able to afford high-end transphasic weapons could usually obtain them from their own channels!

"Hopefully, enough New Elites will recognize how much value the Second Eye can bring to their operations."

## Chapter 5292 Return To Bortele

The expeditionary fleet had finally returned to the Bortele System.

Its arrival attracted a huge amount of attention from the locals and visitors of the busy port system.

This was not only because of the presence of a famous name that had become known throughout the new frontier, but also because of the ostentatious RA escort fleet that diligently fulfilled its current mission!

The formidable first-class warships and first-class multipurpose mechs of the Bluejay Fleet kept other snooping parries well at bay.

No other vessel dared to stray too close to the expeditionary fleet. The people who lived in the Bortele System did not want to cause any offense either.

The Red Two had already boosted their presence in the Bortele System. As one of the most important logistical hubs of the Toroid Middle Zone, the port system gained a lot of new fortifications.

The mechers and the Heelers clearly possessed the determination to defend the vulnerable star systems at the front!

Even if their main purpose was to slow down the advance of the aliens, many locals hoped that the Red Two would not allow their new homes to fall!

Ves could practically feel the hopes and nervous tension of the people who had come to invest their time as well as their life savings in the growing colony.

Those who could afford to sell their holdings in the Bortele System and move further to the rear had already done so. The ones left behind either couldn't afford to do so or had other reasons to stick around.

Ves couldn't help but feel a growing responsibility to do his part in protecting these people. The native aliens threatened to wipe out every human in the Red Ocean. There was no way he wanted that to come to pass!

"It's not up to me alone, though." He sighed. "Everyone needs to pitch in. We can only defeat the aliens together."

Now that the expeditionary fleet had reached the Bortele System, the time had come where Ves needed to prepare for his upcoming departure.

Most of the Larkinsons did not want him to leave, but Ves needed to lay the groundwork for the Premier Branch as soon as possible. He needed to enter the Upper Zones in advance so that he could handle anything important in person.

Besides, the second-raters of his clan were already capable of taking care of their own affairs. Ves deliberately wanted to separate himself from the expeditionary fleet in order to allow his clansmen to develop according to their desires instead of his own. It was time for them to fight for their own future.

His children did not take the separation from the expeditionary fleet well at first.

"Does this mean we'll be separated from all of our family and friends?" Andraste asked while she was clutching her practice sword.

Ves sighed as he bent down to pat his daughter on the head. "Yes, ray dear. You will all have to come with me. I will make sure to introduce you to lots of new friends."

"I don't want to leave! It won't be the same anymore, papa! How can I continue my swordsmanship training if Ketis can't teach me anymore?"

"She can still guide your swordsmanship training by remote. It won't be as good as teaching you in person, but the Hyper Chamber will allow her to spar with you a lot more effectively than normal."

"It's not the same!"

There wasn't much Ves could do about that. Ketis had decided to stay behind so that she could take care of her husband, her children and the Swordmaidens. Her priorities were entirely different and she deserved to have a life of her own. It was rather admirable that she had readily refused the temptation of promoting to a first-class mech designer in a couple of years so that she could stay with her family longer.

In a way, Ketis had come to embody the Larkinsons a lot closer than Ves.

He did not begrudge his own choices, though. The Larkinson Clan had to enter first-class society sooner or later. Ves was just going first. It would take a few years for thousands of other Larkinsons to follow suit.

He and his children would soon get surrounded by lots of Larkinsons by that time. Ves was already looking forward to how much better his men had become once they had used up their EdNet quotas.

"If you want to become a warrior beyond comparison, it is not enough to learn swordsmanship from Ketis." He told his daughter in an attempt to console her. "First-raters have excellent teachers and instructors as well. This will be a good time for you to polish your marksmanship."

"That's boring!"

"It is not! If you want to retain any hope of becoming a serious mech pilot, then you will need to master all of the skills required to pilot first-class multipurpose mechs! Many of the offensive systems of those machines consist of ranged weapon modules. You will need to master the use of all of them, from laser weapons, positron weapons, gauss weapons, plasma weapons, missile weapons and more. If you can choose between defeating your opponents up close or from a distance, then it is much more convenient to resort to the latter!"

His stubborn daughter did not look enthused at the prospect of reducing her swordsmanship practice so that she could practice her marksmanship instead.

Ves was beginning to get a headache. He realized that he and his wife had been spending too little time on raising Andraste.

It couldn't be helped. Ves and Gloriana were mech designers, so they had no combat skills worth noting.

Ves wanted Andraste to enjoy the best possible teaching, so he instructed Ketis and the Swordmaiden to keep his feisty little daughter busy.

Even though Andraste had too much schooling to spend much time among the Swordmaidens, they practically raised her during the times they could pass on their teachings.

In other words, Andraste had become indoctrinated by the Swordmaidens!

While Ves did not entirely consider this to be a bad development, he did not want his daughter to become a sword-obsessed madwoman.

Swordmaidens subjected themselves to brutal training regimes in order to become the most elite shock troops of the Larkinson Clan. They had to take on greater risks and sacrifice much of their time just to give them a slightly higher chance of surviving when they finally deployed on the battlefield!

Ves did not want his daughter to follow in the footsteps of the Swordmaidens. He wanted her to become a martial leader rather than a more expensive variant of cannon fodder.

Hopefully, Andraste would come to her senses after she started taking more lessons from first-raters.

As Ves prepared for his departure to the upper zones, he briefly met with his grandfather.

"It seems that we won't be able to spend as much time together as I hoped." Benjamin Larkinson said. "It may be years before I can hold my great-grandchildren in my arms once again."

"I'm sorry. I didn't expect all of this to happen so soon."

"It is alright, Ves. Children deserve to live their own lives. Don't let an old fogey like me hold you back."

"This won't last forever. Once we have upgraded your machine into a proper expert mech, you can work your way to breaking through to ace pilot. You can join us at the Premier Branch by that time."

"What if I am unable to do so? I am old. I've regained more strength since my recovery, but I am not sure whether I can recover everything that I have lost."

Ves smiled at his grandfather. "You'll succeed. I am sure of it. There is no way you can fail. Conditions for mech pilots are much more favorable than in the past. The stuff I told you about is just one of many measures that the mechers have taken to facilitate the growth of all mech pilots."

"I will take your word for it. I hate the fact that our society is split up into three classes. I wish the Fist of Defiance chose to abolish this division. It would make our lives so much easier."

"That is unlikely to happen, grandfather. Splitting people up into different classes protects the underprivileged. Besides, every human has come to think in this way. It will be hard for them to see each other as equals despite the huge gap in wealth and opportunities. The fundamental root behind this problem is lack of wealth and resources. Perhaps there will be a chance for us to reduce the extreme differences if we win this war. If we have access to all of the resources of the Red Ocean, we can share much greater resources to the people at the bottom."

Neither of them thought that was likely, though. The much more probable outcome was that the most powerful people claimed the most valuable resources for themselves. Second-raters and third-raters had little choice but to contend for the scraps.

Ves wondered whether the Polymath's Unity Plan intended to change this model. Perhaps it would have been better to give it a chance instead.

No. That was stupid. The Unity Plan brought way too many downsides!

"By the way, since you will be departing for the upper zones, how will our expert pilots gain access to those vials? They're being stored aboard the biggest ship of the Bluejay Fleet, right?"

"I have already thought about it." Ves told him. "Most of the stuff will remain in place. Every three months or so, we will transfer a part of it to the courier vessel and send her to the expeditionary fleet. It's not the most secure way of delivering the goods to their destination, but it is workable."

He had paid a lot of opportunity costs in order to secure 500 vials of A7-KE1 General Purpose Pilot Cultivation Elixir. There was no way he was going to leave them untouched!

That reminded him that it wouldn't take long before he could witness them in use. His expert pilots had recently completed a thorough health inspection to determine whether they could safely ingest the elixirs.

Ves truly wondered how they worked to increase the resonance strength of expert pilots. He had always thought that willpower cultivators had to polish their strength the hard way. It did not seem possible for shortcuts to work considering how they worked.

However, the mechers most definitely knew what they were doing. Ves suspected that the elixirs possessed extraordinary qualities that did more than provide a straightforward artificial boost.

The most important part about the elixirs were the ingredients. No ordinary materials could be used to synthesize them. If Ves was able to get a close enough look at the vials, he might be able to deduce the key materials used to make these remarkable elixirs.

If Ves was able to get his hands on some of these ingredients himself, he might be able to cobble up his own solution!

It didn't necessarily have to be an elixir either. Though his hopes were slim, he did not want to let go of any means to strengthen his forces.

As the expeditionary fleet steadily settled in orbit of the main planer, a lot of activity started to take place. Shuttles flew up and down as lots of goods needed to be shipped back and forth.

Ves dealt with numerous priorities during this time. One of the most important issues was deciding what he and his clan should do with the captured archship.

Right now, the hull of the damaged vessel was resting safely inside the Diligent Ovenbird. Not much progress had been made towards reverse engineering or repairing all of the complicated archtech.

Without assistance, it was impossible for the Larkinsons to make heads or tails about the alien vessel. The fact that Lucky was the only one among them that could exert slightly greater control over her systems was proof that the clan needed to find a different way to deal with this high-value salvage!

## Chapter 5293 A33

Given everything that happened as of late, the archship had largely slipped Ves' mind.

It couldn't be helped. A whole host of revelations and life-changing decisions overtook his life like a raging tornado. Ves could do little aside from letting himself get spun around while doing everything possible to avoid falling to his death.

It was only now that much of the storm had calmed down that Ves could catch his breath and take care of less pressing matters.

The archship captured during the Battle of Corellix needed to be dealt with one way or another. The alien vessel remained incomprehensible to the Larkinsons even after they sent hundreds of engineers and other experts to examine her systems.

If technology could be equated to language, then the archship was a completely different language.



At least the 'languages' used by other alien races made use of more relatable linguistic elements such as sound, intonation and written litters.

The turtle-like aliens on the other hand completely eschewed most of these tools and decided to use completely different elements such as the taste of their mucus slime as their method of communication!

Suffice to say, any normal human would get completely lost if he attempted to figure out an entire language from all of these weird and completely unreliable components!

Still, different from most groups, the Larkinsons could at least count on one advantage.

They had a cat who 'accidentally' learned a bit of the language!

"Meow." Lucky arrogantly settled his recently transformed body against the shell-shaped cavity that was originally designed to act as an interface for a member of the arche race.

Right now, the minor contact between Lucky's metallic body and the archemetal that comprised the alien ship's entire structure granted the cat a small amount of control over the vessel!

This singular circumstance gave Chief Shipwright Vivian Tsai and many other interested experts a small glimpse of how the alien vessel worked.

Even if much of the information was of no practical use to them, they still became inspired by the completely alien approach to shipbuilding.

As Ves calmly stepped into the compartment that equated to the bridge of the archeship, he remained quiet as Lucky lazed about while chewing on a nugget of archemetal debris.

"Meow meow meow. Meow meow."

"Uh huh. Thank you for your input." A Larkinson engineer said as she filled out a database.

Less than a minute later, Vivian Tsai approached from the side and greeted her patriarch.

"Welcome back to the A33.1 suppose you have come to announce your final decision."

"I have." Ves nodded. "I am not necessarily opposed to letting our clan play around with the archeship for a longer period of time, but... it's a waste of time and resources in my opinion. We can either keep the archeship permanently inside the Small Oven, but that will prevent our only capital fleet repair ship from servicing a lot of starships. We can also opt to transfer her to the Davute Branch, but the scientists and engineers over there are even less capable of studying archetech. The most effective way we can profit from this vessel is if we pass her off to a first-rate power."

Though Vivian understood that this was the most logical decision, she still felt disappointed. The archeship inspired her like nothing else. She often found it stimulating to roam her alien interior to imagine how the arche crewed this small but technologically advanced vessel.

"I understand. Have you decided which state or organization to send our archeship?"

Ves paused for a moment as he swept his gaze across the bridge.

"I have decided to accept the offer made by the Terrans." He eventually said. "The mechers understand archetech much more than the first-rate colonial superstates, but that means that A33

won't hold as much value to them. I am sure that they have already managed to capture dozens of intact archeships. We will have to make more concessions in exchange for lesser benefits if we want to rely on their services."

"The mechtechs already understand archtech to a great degree, so they can process A33 at a much faster rate." Vivian retorted. "They should also be capable of repairing and refitting our archship to the best possible extent."

"I know, but that means giving them complete control over what may be our first proper warship. I have already granted them the opportunity to do the same to the Spirit of Bentheim, and that is already enough in my book. It's better to turn to the Terrans and the Rubarthans since we can send our own shipbuilders to supervise all of the work.. The problem with the latter is that my relationship with them is a bit... shallow and ambiguous. That might change in the near future, but even if we end up concluding a far-reaching agreement tomorrow, I still won't let them touch my archship because the Rubarthans will be looking to gain as much leverage over me as possible."

His entire relationship with the Rubarthans had turned into a mess. He used his strange relationship with the Destroyer of Worlds as a means to bluff the other Rubarthans into thinking that he could be trusted to do business with. The fact that he attempted to take advantage of this dynamic by pushing Clixic into becoming their ancestral spirit most likely caused a lot of distress!

"Is this why you have decided to go with the Terrans?"

Ves nodded. "Unlike the Rubarthans, the Terrans are much more accustomed to compromise and cooperation. I am also on good terms with the Streon Ancient Clan, which is pretty decent in itself. I am sure the Terrans may have captured an archship or two, but A33 should still provide them with a wealth of new findings, especially if Lucky is around to interpret the alien control systems on their behalf. We can figure out how an archship works together, thereby allowing both of us to profit equally from this cooperation."

Perhaps choosing the Terrans might not be the absolute best choice, but it was the most decent one at hand. Ves might be able to find a better partner if he expanded his search and approached other organizations, but he didn't want to delay this matter any further.

"I shall make sure to prepare a team of Inspectors to babysit our archship while she is placed under the care of the Terrans. Will you send A33 to the New Constantinople System?"

Ves nodded. "Yep. The Eden Institute of Business & Technology will take responsibility for our ship. It is convenient to let its researchers study our archship first as I intend to stay there for at least a couple of months. Lucky will be available to help as long as I remain in the star system."

"It would be convenient if you extend your stay by a few years." Vivian frowned. "Despite her relatively low tonnage, her technological complexity is enormous. Every piece of hull plating and structural component also functions as processors and more. The density of working systems of this little vessel is frankly insane. It is amazing how much the arches have compressed so many useful systems in their scouting vessel. If we can master archtech ourselves, we can construct sub-capital ships that effectively possess the power of capital ships!"

This was the main reason why Ves did not want to get rid of the archship. He even forced his clan to give up on a lot of other spoils such as ownership of much of the puelmer heavy cruiser in order to claim this powerful alien stealth vessel in her entirety.

Together with the RF Frigate Token that Ves obtained from Master Henry Urbeck, the archeship had the potential to become an extremely useful warship in any upcoming deep strike operation!

"Whatever happens in the future, I need our clan to fully gain control over Ail in 5 years," Ves spoke in a serious tone. "If it looks as if we won't be able to make use of her anytime soon, we'll have to scramble to obtain another warship. We can't let our token go to waste."

"Understood. I am already registered for an EdNet tour. I will try to learn as much subjects related to archetech as possible. Hopefully, the inechers will offer subjects that go deeper into its principles."

Ves was satisfied with that answer. "I will try to learn the basics of archetech in my own time, but I am told that it is not easy to master it quickly. Our greatest shortcoming is that we are unable to interface with it directly."

Both of them shifted their glances towards a cat that was pretending to be the captain of a warship. The only element that was missing from this cartoonish Image was a cat-sized pirate hat.

"Lucky will give us a hand. He's practically made out of archemetal now. It is quite amazing how extensively his body assimilated this tech."

"Meow?"

The gem cat finally deigned to pay attention lo Ves.

Lucky's resentment obviously hadn't faded all that much. This was one of the reasons why the cat hadn't been hanging around him as of late.

"Don't be like that, Lucky. We need to move on from rhe past. You've already grown a lot stronger than before. I am sure you will be able to prevent yourself from getting caught in the future with the help of your archemetal body."

"Meow meow meow!"

"Hey, I have not forgotten about you! As soon as we enter into Terran space, I will make sure to supply you with a diet of first-class exotics. 1 promise! In fact, our clan will soon be able to supply you with hyper materials as well. I am talking about a completely new category of empowered metals. I am sure that they come with exotic tastes."

"Meow..."

The stomach was Lucky's key to happiness. The more he thought about the yummy food that he could ear in the days to come, the less he paid attention to the suffering of the past.

Ves did not try to push his luck any further. He spoke a bit more to his gem cat before saying goodbye.

Now that he had checked up on the archeship and informed his chief shipwright on his decision, he was ready to go on a trip to rhe Tarrasque.

An hour later, Ves and a bunch of expert pilots teleported over to the flagship of the Bluejay Fleet.

"Welcome, everyone." Jovy Armalon greeted the new arrivals. "I assume that each of you are well-rested and in good condition. We will conduct a short examination on all of you before we

commence your first use of the A7-KE1 General Purpose Pilot Cultivation Elixir. You should be aware by now that we are not being excessive in our precautions. The... effects of this elixir have already proven to induce a great amount of stress on your mind and body. It is possible for you to come under so much strain that it will take weeks for you to return to a condition that allows you to interface with a mech again. I hope this serves as a warning that none of you should take this lightly."

The mood among the gathered expert pilots became grave. Even though none of them had a solid idea of what was in store, their intuition already gave them enough of a foreboding that they would not come away unscathed.

Ves grew more and more interested at what the A7-KE1 formula actually did to people. He had come up with many different theories on how it could stimulate the willpower cultivation of expert pilots, but none of them sounded logical.

He even used Veronica to obtain an answer from his mother, but she just told him that he should just be patient and find out the answer himself. She clearly did not like being used as a database all of the time.

Whatever the case, the time had finally come. It would only take a bit more time before one of his pilots would ingest the first vial under heavy supervision.

#### Chapter 5294 Administering The Elixir

The final health inspection proceeded quickly. The expert pilots only needed to subject themselves to a powerful scan just to check if they hadn't injected any strange substances into their bodies or whatever.

The mechers had already warned the pilots that they needed to be close to their peak condition in order to safely imbibe the elixirs. The probability of suffering from severe side effects rose sharply if the users were too far away from their ideal conditions.

That did not do much to reassure them about the safety of these general cultivation elixirs.

In any case, once the pilots completed their brief inspections, they all changed into a tight but sophisticated medical vasuit that precisely monitored and regulated their body conditions.

Expert pilots may have transcended their mortality, but unlike swordmasters and other personal combatants, their physical conditions barely evolved after they reached their current stages. They still remained vulnerable to many of the same dangers as ordinary humans.

It was only when they advanced to the rank of ace pilot that their superhuman traits became increasingly more obvious, but even then they still remained awfully exposed outside of their cockpits.

"It would have been better if we were able to swallow these elixirs inside the cockpits of our living mechs." Venerable Joshua muttered. "At least we will have our battle partners by our side if anything happens."

The expert pilots had all been moved into a waiting room while the mechers were completing their final preparations and adjustments.

The young father was growing increasingly more concerned about the elixirs, and he was far from the only one who felt this way.

However, they also understood the necessity of accelerating the growth of their resonance strength. Even though Joshua had managed to grow particularly quickly due to being paired with an excellent masterwork expert mech, he barely managed to scrape his way into becoming a mid-tier expert pilot after so many battles and so much time spent on polishing his piloting skills.

It was usually the easiest for younger expert pilots to grow their resonance strength at the early phases.

Just because his resonance strength surpassed 20 laverses over the span of a few years did not necessarily mean he could sustain this rate of progress going forward.

Like many of the expert pilots gathered here today, Joshua yearned for greater strength.

There was a time when expert pilots meant much to the clan. That sentiment faded now that the Larkinsons were beginning to grow accustomed to fighting alongside ace pilots.

Joshua gripped his fist. The growing unease in his heart did not discourage him from going through with using an elixir.

He briefly shifted his attention to the others.

Most of the Larkinson expert pilots in the fleet had accepted this offer. The patriarch had also graciously extended this offer to the expert pilots of the Glory Seekers. This was why Venerable Brutus Wodin and the Handmaidens of Death had joined the crowd as well.

Apart of Joshua found it a pity that the Larkinson Clan hadn't extended this offer to the Cross Clan as well. The Crossers had fought just as hard as the rest.

There were only so many elixirs available, though. The available supply would quickly get used up if too many pilots made use of them every standard quarter year.

Joshua sensed increasing tension among the pilots. Now that the critical time was drawing closer, the powerful men and women all couldn't help but pick up greater warning signs.

This did not necessarily mean that what was happening next would be dangerous to them. The only thing they were certain of was that they would not be liking the experience.

Their patriarch eventually spoke.

"Alright, the doctors have just notified me that they are ready to go. While they can technically allow a bunch of you to swallow the contents of the vials at the same time, it is better and safer to do this one by one. This way, all of their resources and all of their best experts will be able to monitor and respond to every individual case. I am told that the main effects of the elixir typically lasts for a couple of minutes, so you won't have to wait too long to have your turn. Who wants to go first?"

Everyone looked at each other. A few of them were more than willing to brave the unknown. They were expert pilots after all. It was just a question of who among them deserved to go first.

"I should be the vanguard." Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson slated. "I am always the first to go into the fight. Besides, my mental and physical scores both rank at the top as far as I know. I'm confident that nothing will go wrong. It is best if I go into this without too much foreknowledge."

Ves stared at his cousin for a brief moment before nodding. "Very well. You can go first."

They all left the waiting room. The patriarch and the other expert pilots entered an elevated observation room where they could observe the proceedings from a respectable distance.

A pair of mechers took Tusa to a medical chamber that was well-equipped with all kinds of high-tech instruments.

The light skirmisher specialist slowly sat down on a contraption that looked like a cross between a piloting chair and an emergency treatment tank.

The device began to look a little more disconcerting when various restraints appeared in sight only to strap Tusa into place.

Meanwhile, another mecher entered the observation room. The man greeted Ves in a familiar manner before turning to face the Larkinson and Glory Seeker pilots.

"Let me remind you all that everything that you will witness and experience on this ship is classified. I am sure I do not need to elaborate any further of what this entails. Professor Larkinson has managed to secure a fantastic privilege for you all by giving you the opportunity to experience the benefits of our newly developed A7-KE1 General purpose pilot Cultivation Elixir. However, early products such as these are generally less stable and consistent. While we have done our best to test this formula on a wide variety of expert pilots, our Association did not have much time to refine it any further. The side effects may be severe in individual cases, but it shall never reach the point where it may threaten your life. We have too many means to prevent that from happening,"

Somehow, that made the expert pilots feel even less assured than before. Joshua and many others glanced towards Ves, but their patriarch did not show any sign that he was worried about the elixirs.

They had to be fine, right? This was the Red Association. The mechers always came up with the best stuff. Even their latest inventions had to be of impeccable quality in order to match the high standards of their powerful organization.

"What you may witness next may appear disturbing or distressing to you." Jovy continued to explain. "Do not be alarmed. Nothing you can do will help him. The elixir will occupy his attention to such an extent that he will be on his own. He cannot even hear or see what is taking place outside of his own mind."

The mecher basically warned the other expert pilots not to do anything stupid if they felt the need to intervene.

Joshua silently nodded in understanding. He was not a doctor or an elixir brewer. This was so far outside of his area of expertise that it made no sense for him to step in if anything happened.

It did not take much longer for the elixir to be brought inside the chamber.

A pair of heavily armed and armored guards stepped in while escorting an extremely sturdy and damage-resistant storage container.

The hovering metal box stopped in front of a doctor who wore a stereotypical lab coat. The mecher carefully went through the cumbersome process of unlocking it. From Inputting a numerical code to providing a sample of blood, it looked as if these people took the contents extremely seriously!

When the box finally opened up, every single expert pilot gasped as they felt a strong but subtle presence emanating from the glowing vials!

"That!"

"Wiry do I?!"

"What is this stuff?!"

While none of the expert pilots knew what exactly they were looking at, they felt a considerable threat from the exposed vials!

The contents of these vials were dangerous! They had to be! The mechers had massively undersold the danger they posed to expert pilots like themselves!

What set the expert pilots off even further was that they were unable to figure out the nature of the threat. Was there some kind of virus in the vials? Was the elixir poisonous to human tissue?

Whatever the case, Joshua doubted that he would come out the same after he swallowed their contents.

Even Ves widened his eyes in surprise and shock as he beheld the 11 vials that were reserved for this initial session.

"Do you know what these elixirs are made of, patriarch?"

A troubled look came over the mech designer's face. "I'm not sure, but I have my guesses. I don't think it is a good idea to say anything. It may set expectations that could prove detrimental to your first contact with these elixirs. If the mechers claim that it is safe enough for you to use, then you can trust on this. Remember that they are made to strengthen you in the end."

The RA doctor carefully took out a single vial and slowly brought it over to an apparatus that was attached to the strange chair.

"The elixir needs to be ingested orally in its entirety within a short time interval. You do not want to know what happens if you fail to do so." Jovy Armalon said. "We will precisely measure the dosage according to your individual condition such as body mass. It should not matter too much whether you ingest it while you are standing, sitting or lying down, but we have found that you pilots respond the best when you are sitting in the same posture as you assume in the cockpit. You will need all of the help you can get in order to endure this ordeal."

Once the vial had entered the contraption, the glowing fluid was sent through a transparent tube before approaching a nozzle that was pointed straight into Tusa's mouth.

An invisible force field had forced the pilot to keep his mouth open. His eyes already started to shake while his force of will was urging him to get away!

"Begin!"

With a single spurt, the glowing fluid ejected from the nozzle and poured straight down into Tusa's stomach!

The mechers had already taken precautions to ensure that none of the liquid entered Tusa's lungs. Instead.

As soon as the elixir settled into the expert pilot's body, it began to produce mysterious reactions that initially did not seem so severe.

That was until Tusa started screaming!

"AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH1"

Joshua could feel the pain radiating from his fellow expert pilot! Tusa's willpower became increasingly more disordered while his body was pressing against the restraints!

What was even weirder was that black lines and splotches started to show up on Tusa's skin!

It was as if Tusa suddenly gained a lot of tattoos that quickly spread across every surface of his body.

However, these tattoos were not static! They looked like the manifestations of a deadly disease that constantly crawled across Tusa's skin as if it was a water pool!

Like fish swimming in a pond, these ominous-looking splotches made Tusa look as if he was being subjected to a form of corruption that came from a powerful source.

If Joshua was able to feel how threatening they were from this distance, he couldn't imagine what torture Tusa was going through at this moment!

What the hell were these elixirs?! What taboos had the mechers committed in order to produce these strengthening aids?!

Chapter 5295 Joshua's Turn

"AHHHHHHH!"

Tusa continued to scream in pain as the A7-KE1 General Purpose Pilot Cultivation Elixir subjected him to unimaginable torture!

The expert pilots all reacted with alarm! If not for the fact that the mechers kept their composure, they would have thought that they deliberately set out to harm their comrades!

Minutes passed by while Tusa continued to experience pain and distress from the glowing liquid Ural he had just ingested. Whatever lye sluff had done when it entered his stomach, it seemed as if the elixir burned right through his stomach walls and ate up his entire body from the inside!

"Power can never be attained with ease." Jovy Armalon eventually spoke once Tusa started to scream at a lower intensity. "You have to understand that expert pilots such as yourselves can only grow stronger in adversity. One of our special research teams has successfully developed a means to substantially stimulate the growth of your resonance strength based on this principle. Its effects may appear extreme, but that is the only means for the general cultivation elixir to induce any noticeable effects on you. Anything less will fail to generate any meaningful progress, thereby investing a rare and expensive product in vain."



Though Joshua and the others were able to accept the mecher's explanation, it was hard to stomach it when they saw the consequences in reality.

Not all of the pilots wished for their enemies to experience this kind of torture. Tusa looked increasingly more haggard as his body convulsed in an erratic pattern while sweat started to pour from his brow.

Still, no matter how much he screamed or how disturbing the black splotches on his skin had become, the mechers did not see the need to take any specific actions aside from monitoring the data readings.

They essentially let the elixir run its course.

Although the entire event made a profoundly disturbing impression on the pilots, that was mainly because there were still too many unknowns.

No one understood what the elixir had done to Tusa.

As the main effects slowly began to peter out, the expert pilot's body no longer experienced as much strain as before.

The Larkinson pilot visibly relaxed as the ominous black lines and splotches disappeared from his skin.

It was as if they were never there in the first place.

Several more minutes passed as Tusa continued to take heaving breaths. It was as if he had just completed a marathon run and was just regaining his awareness of his immediate environment.

The doctors came and inspected him in person, not that it mattered as the data all remained within acceptable boundaries.

Meanwhile, Ves and Jovy studied the same chart.

"Good news." The RA mech designer smiled. "Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson has attained a new record. His resonance strength has peaked at 2.2 lavers above his previously recorded limit. I am told that once he stabilizes over the new month, his resonance strength may settle onto a stable level that is just above this level. This is an above average result and shows that he has good compatibility with this formula. The expert pilot is one step closer to becoming an ace pilot candidate. It is regretful that the elixirs are unable to induce breakthroughs. Every pilot can only do that the old-fashioned way."

If Tusa's case was considered a 'good result', then the remaining expert pilots were reluctant to find out what happened during less ideal outcomes!

Part of the signs that Tusa had managed to weather the storm fairly well was that he was soon able to speak coherently after the main effects of the elixir wore off. This was apparently not always the case.

"How do you feel, Tusa?" Ves asked over a communication channel.

"I... am okay... I guess." The expert pilot slowly said as if he had just completed an arduous battle. "I think... I get why these elixirs are such a big deal. I don't know whether I want to do this again..."

"I am told that your peak resonance strength will grow by at least 2.2 after you have completed your recovery, which is expected to take around a month."

That clearly sparked a reaction out of Tusa. "So much? Well... I guess I will sign up for the next session..."

As the doctors took Tusa away for monitoring, Venerable Zimro Belson went next since he was the newest and weakest expert pilot among the crowd.

An hour went by as the elixirs subjected multiple different expert pilots to the same kind of harrowing experience.

Each of the restrained expert pilots screamed in pain and maybe even terror.

Each of their skins began to display temporary black patches that swam across their bodies.

Each of their wills became increasingly more disordered, though they also spiked to heights that the pilots never attained in the past!

That last effect was probably the desired result. The outcome was not good if the pilot failed to receive sufficient stimulation.

Fortunately, the mechers exercised great control over the processes. They studied the properties of every single expert pilot extensively enough to adjust the dosages of every elixir to the exact right amounts.

"It takes great effort to hit the right sweet spot for every individual recipient." Jovy spoke to the dwindling amount of expert pilots in the observation room. "Administer a little too much, and the negative side effects will become a lot more severe. This will significantly delay your recovery. Administer too little, and the elixir will be unable to produce strong enough reactions. This will significantly lower the final result. We are constantly refining our ratios to improve our success rate."

After a bit more waiting, Venerable Joshua finally had his turn.

He went through the same steps as the expert pilots who came before him. Given that each of them had managed to survive their own ordeals in good condition, Joshua no longer felt as wary as before.

That started to change as the doctor holding the vial slowly approached the medical chair.

For whatever reason, all of his instincts screamed that he was coming closer to a source of great danger and power!

Though Joshua knew that this was just a false alarm, he could not prevent his danger senses from going crazy!

"Calm yourself." The older man said as he inserted the vial into a contraption with perfect control over his limbs. "This shall not take long from an external perspective."

"What does that mean?"

"You will experience time at a different rate once you come under the effects of the elixir. How much time will pass from your perspective varies greatly from case to case. I cannot say much more

than this. The only other advice that I can tell you is that your first contact with this elixir is the most crucial. It will greatly define how much you gain from subsequent sessions."

With that, the doctor retreated.

Joshua already started to breathe faster as a force field forcibly took control of his mouth and throat.

His alarm abruptly spiked when he could see the glowing liquid flowing through the transparent tube.

The closer the elixir came to making contact with his body, the more Joshua wanted to pull his body outside of this chamber!

"Begin!"

The elixir burned like searing hot lava as it quickly passed through his throat!

Though Joshua recognized that the pain was mostly illusionary, it was still difficult for him to maintain his composure.

He soon lost this battle as the elixir started to take effect!

Somehow, its extremely potent energies flowed into his body and raced right into his head!

"AAAAAAAAAAHH!"

Joshua lost most of his coherence as the pain truly started to set in! Somehow, the powerful energies drilled into his mind and began to erode his will without encountering any meaningful resistance!

There was nothing Joshua could do to repel this invasion! His willpower turned into a complete joke in front of this powerful source!

What was odd was that even his companion spirit Willy also experienced a similar kind of overwhelming pain!

As the active effects induced by the elixir started to affect him in a crude and agonizing manner, Joshua's perception soon started to grow woozy.

His eyes remained wide open, but he was 110 longer in the medical chamber.

Somehow, he found himself in a shaky and misshapen version of his cockpit. There were so many familiar shapes and colors that Joshua knew that he had entered the belly of his battle partner again.

"E-Everchanger." His voice shakily said in an oddly distorted manner. "I need you, buddy."

Silence greeted him. Though Joshua's active interface with his expert mech granted him control over its systems, he found it odd that the living mech remained unresponsive.

As his weary and buzzing head tried to investigate the state of his Everchanger further, he found to his horror that his expert mech was dead!

"No! Everchanger! Where are you?! Why have you died!?"

His expert mech had become as responsive as a lifeless rock! All of the years that Joshua spent growing alongside the Everchanger had given him a strong attachment to his battle partner, so discovering that his machine had become diminished was an alarming discovery!

It was at this point that the resonance shield of his expert mech received a powerful kinetic blow!

"Ahhh!"

Getting distracted was one of the greatest taboos of a pilot!

Joshua quickly tried to regain his situational awareness. He soon discovered what took place during his moment of absence.

"The fleet! No!"

An indescribably enormous mass of tangible shadows had enveloped all of the ships of the expeditionary fleet!

From the Spirit of Bentheim to the Indigo Tremor, this amorphous mass of space that had somehow gained substance engulfed the vulnerable ships as well as the mechs that tried to fight off this scary threat, to no avail!

No weapon could do anything to halt the advance of this inky shadow. As soon as a mech got caught by the tentacles of darkness, they got crushed, destroying them utterly while taking their pilots down as well!

"NOOOOOO!"

Venerable Joshua found it difficult to maintain his full concentration, but he tried his best to command his dead expert mech to fly forward while drawing out the Gray Lotus!

Beams of ominous death did nothing but disappear inside the dark mass. It was as if there wasn't anything actually alive to kill.

Joshua registered this futile result, yet he pulled the trigger over and over again as if that would help.

Once his glowing green expert hero mech got close enough, the machine struck at the mass head-on with a powerful plasma sword!

Unfortunately, the destructive energy weapon did nothing to harm this shadow!

It took less a second later for the nearest inky black masses to shoot forward and capture the Everchanger in a dark embrace, completely bypassing the resonance shield which should have offered actual protection.

"I'm caught!"

Joshua did everything possible to escape this hold. As the dark tentacles squeezed the frame of the expert mech, the Everchanger silently groaned and creaked as the sturdy armor plating started to deform remarkably quickly.

The forces acting on the mech frame were overwhelmingly powerful!

As the squeeze became tighter and tighter, more and more components got damaged, causing Venerable Joshua to experience painful feedback that became increasingly more distressing and debilitating!

"Aaaah!" He screamed inside the wobbling cockpit as his vision and his senses started to go haywire.

At a certain point, Joshua could no longer properly maintain the connection to his distressed expert mech.

Instead, he became surrounded by the powerful black inky masses that conveyed an overwhelming sense of power.

Joshua fell downwards into a pit that did not end.

There was no mech or comrade to stop his descent.

The threatening inky masses crept closer and closer, causing Joshua to experience their overwhelming danger increasingly better.

Once the dark tentacles wrapped around his body, they squeezed with forces that were strong enough to shatter an entire expert mech!

His body didn't stand a chance.

Flesh and bone shattered in an instant, causing Joshua to experience death in its truest sense!

He didn't even experience enough pain to let out one last cry!

Chapter 5296 Crude Elixir Formula

The elixirs severely impacted the conditions of the expert pilots.

After all 11 vials of elixirs had been used up, the expert pilots all went through numerous examinations and recovery processes in order to reduce the negative consequences of ingesting the elixirs.

None of them came away from this experience lightly. A few had been harder hit than others, so much so that it took half an hour for them to regain their wits.

Even now, Zimro Belson was still groaning as he rubbed his head in pain.

"Those elixirs... how can they bring so much terror? The experience of death in that illusion felt realer than the ones I've suffered within the MSTs."

"I think it is mainly because nothing we did in those illusions mattered in the slightest." Venerable Disc spoke in a resentful tone. "When the Swordmaidens fell in front of me one by one, the First Sword and I could do nothing to prevent the red star from burning them into a crisp. My mech and sword threatened to melt whenever I tried to come close."

Commander Casella Ingvar grimaced as she recalled her own nightmare. "At least a star is lifeless. What I had to fight against was a corrupted version of the Trampier of Stars. The alien had come back to take revenge against our expeditionary fleet. Nothing could stop him. Our ace mechs crumbled in from of his collisions and the remainder of our forces shattered as soon as he began to shake the fabric of space. The entire star system seemed to tear apart due to how extensively the phase lord destabilized the entire area. No amount of Commandeering and empowering on my part made any difference. I had no solutions."

As the expert pilots continued to swap their stories with each other, they discovered that each of them experienced different nightmares that shook them to their cores.

Although each of them experienced so much emotional distress that their resonance strengths had spiked to new heights, none of them had been able to come away without bearing additional mental scars.

"Nyaaaaaa..."

This was why the Golden Cat saw the need to make an appearance. The cat showed up unannounced and even managed to alarm the security systems of the Tarrasque for a moment!

Fortunately, Jovy Armalon acted quickly enough. He disabled the alarms and ensured the security personnel did not step in to subdue the cat that wasn't supposed to be present aboard the heavy cruiser.

The presence of the Golden Cat clearly benefited the expert pilots. Each of them had become so shaken by their extraordinary nightmares that they had entered a rare moment of vulnerability.

The gentle warmth and love radiating from Goldie took off the edge of those raw and bleeding emotions. The cute spiritual cat infused an element of joy and positivity in the resting compartment, encouraging the Larkinson and Glory Seeker expert pilots to relax and take their mind off their harrowing experiences.

Ves and Jovy observed the expert pilots as they socialized and slowly picked themselves up after they had exited the hallucinations induced by the elixirs.

"You are surprising us all yet again, Ves." The RA Senior Mech Designer spoke. "According to the files I have access to, the majority of expert pilots aren't in a state to talk or share their feelings with each other after they have ingested an elixir. Your pilots are supposed to be in a considerably more brittle state, but they are already starting to get up and about. It is as if their recovery process has been fast-forwarded by several days."

That did not particularly sound surprising to Ves.

"Our expert pilots have been tested plenty of times." He smirked. "Not only have they fought their fair share of challenging battles, they have also experienced plenty of defeats within our priority Mental Simulation Training System. Aside from that, I think our other advantages are helping them out as well. Their companion spirits appear to have escaped much of the negative impact, which provides every pilot with an oasis of peace in their minds. Finally, the Golden Cat excels under these circumstances. Her presence infuses the pilots with resilience in adversity. Her warmth and light dispels much of the darkness brought by their nightmares."

There were plenty of RA researchers that were eagerly working to record new data and form new conclusions.

The Larkinson Clan had unexpectedly introduced various new variables that could help the mechers figure out targeted methods that could reduce the negative consequences of the general cultivation elixirs in the future!

As Ves continued to stare through the one-way window, he grew reassured that none of the expert pilots appeared to have suffered any unacceptable sequelae.

"I never expected your elixirs to work in this fashion." He said.

"Oh? What did you expect?"

"well, I thought they would work much more like modern medicine or stimulants." Ves spoke. "You swallow them, they take effect and the recipient receives a straightforward boost of strength at the cost of stability."

"That does not sound much different from what actually occurred." Jovy pointed out. "The A7-KEI formula may have taken a number of additional steps, but what is important is that it has produced the desired result in all 11 cases. That is the purpose for these elixirs. Their value is unimaginable. Have you guessed why that is the case?"

Many doubts still swirled through Ves' minds, but as he continued to go over the clues, he found it difficult to resist the most likely conclusion.

The reason why he struggled to accept it was because it not only blew up his expectations, but also sounded far too extravagant!

His expression grew complex. "I still can't believe you mechs resorted to such a measure. I kind of understand why the Mace of Retaliation claimed that the initial value ascribed to a single vial of this elixir can reach as high as a million MTA merits. A part of me thinks that you guys have actually undersold the vials to me. They were never supposed to circulate outside of the Association, am I correct?"

Jovy smiled back at his friend. "You are still talking as if you are an outsider. You are no mere associate anymore, Ves. You are an honorary member of the Red Association, which automatically means that you have become a nearly full-fledged member of the Survivalist Faction. There is nothing stopping you from gaining access to exclusive benefits like these."

"Is the A7-KEI General Purpose Pilot Cultivation Elixir a product of the Survivalist Faction or the Transhumanist Faction?"

"Both. We worked on this together, though I cannot tell you which side contributed more. What is important is that the A7-KEI formula in particular is an exclusive variation of the Survivalist Faction. We are the only ones who can synthesize this elixir and distribute it through private trades and high-level exchanges. In fact, out of every Survivalist, it is only fitting that the Mace of Retaliation was the one that offered the elixirs to you. He was the only leader present that possessed the authorization to extend them beyond a select group of priority candidates."

The clues provided by Jovy cemented the conclusion in Ves' mind.

From the moment the mechs opened the locked container and unveiled all the vials of glowing elixirs, Ves already developed a suspicion of what he managed to gaze upon.

There was no longer any doubt about the reason why the A7-KEI formula produced so many powerful effects on his expert pilots.

"The general cultivation elixir... is made out of the blood of a god pilot."

Jovy solemnly nodded. "You have a good eye, Ves. Few if any people who first came into contact with an elixir have been able to draw this conclusion."

"I have more exposure to this kind of stuff. Besides, as the developer of the Carmine System, I have developed a greater fascination and understanding of the properties of blood. Even though the amount of blood drawn from an exceptional source hardly takes up any volume inside those vials, the extraordinary power diffused throughout the liquid is massive. It is surprising how well those containers are able to block my perception of their might. It was only when they became exposed that I and many other sensitive entities noticed how much power is contained in those elixirs."

The Tarrasque must have turned into a spiritual beacon that quietly lit up the entire Borteale System!

This was how powerful a miniscule fraction of blood taken from one of humanity's most powerful warriors retained after being separated from its source!

"The current series of elixirs are not properly made according to the formulas of ancient times." Jovy began to explain to Ves. "By their very nature, elixirs are meant to produce targeted effects by combining the properties of different reagents. The issue we have is that the Age of Dawn has only begun a relatively short time ago. Exotic radiation has already managed to produce an ample quantity of weaker reagents, but none of them are powerful enough to produce elixirs that can take effect on expert pilots."

Ves understood the underlying logic of this situation. "So you resorted to another source of extraordinary power. Rather than wait for years for more powerful reagents to emerge, you cheated by drawing the blood of an existing god pilot."

"Exactly. The power of our first generation cultivation elixirs predominantly come from the god pilot blood that we have processed. The remaining reagents that make up the mixture are mostly added to regulate and control this powerful ingredient. I do not need to tell you that ingesting blood in its rawest form is lethal to any lesser organism. Profound expertise is still required to tame this powerful substance to the point where it can generate predictable and stable outcomes."

Only an enormous organization like the Red Association was able to do this. The T Institute could never develop a product as sophisticated as these first generation elixirs!

"From what you've told me, the blood donor for this batch of elixirs ought to be the Fist of Defiance, right?"

Jovy smiled. "That is correct. The entire A7-KE1 formula is based around this key ingredient. Each vial contains 0.001 milliliter of the Fist of Defiance's lifeblood. The other factions have developed their own formulas that are precisely adjusted to regulate the blood of other god pilots."

That explained why the mechs look so many steps to guard and secure the 500 vials of elixirs. It was no wonder that Ves could not just take one out and study the contents in his own research lab!

Ves suddenly narrowed his eyes. "Wait, do you guys intend to keep using all of your god pilots as blood dispensers?"

"Of course not. Who do you think we are? This is only a stopgap solution. Our current circumstances demand that we accelerate the progression of as many high-ranking mech pilots as possible. Our god pilots are in agreement about this and have graciously donated unknown quantities of their most potent life fluids for this purpose. I cannot tell you whether the drawing of blood is harmful to them or not. I also cannot tell you the exact quantities they are willing to provide for this purpose, what I can tell you is that once we are able to produce higher quality



reagents, we should be able to develop new formulas that are able to produce comparable effects without relying on such an overpowering ingredient."

That might take a few years at the very least. In the meantime, formulas such as A7-KE1 were the only ones available for the time being.

Ves no longer regretted the decision to forgo an insane amount of MTA merits in exchange for 500 vials of general cultivation elixirs.

Given that each of them contained a tiny essence of a True God, he managed to obtain a bargain as far as he was concerned!

Each use of a general cultivation elixir amounted to absorbing a fraction of the power of the Fist of Defiance!

## Chapter 5297 Everyone Is An Ingredient

Ves was grateful to learn about the secret of the A7-KEI General Purpose Pilot Cultivation Elixir.

He initially did not suspect at all that it was basically formed by combining the blood donated by the Fist of Defiance with other miscellaneous reagents!

Perhaps he should have. He had developed a much better appreciation of the power of blood as of late. He had already applied his insights on blood to develop the Carmine System. It shouldn't have been a surprise that the Red Association managed to discover their own uses of this ingredient!

Of course, compared to a single clan leader like Ves, the mechers had access to much more bountiful and powerful sources of blood!

Ves couldn't help but feel jealous towards the Red Association for being able to experiment on the lifeblood of one of the most powerful beings of their civilization.

Though Ves technically had access to a True God as well, the problem was that she was situated in the wrong galaxy!

So what if he could draw his own mother's blood? Perhaps he might discover a lot of useful insights by experimenting on it, but any product he made with this ingredient would only end up helping the Oblivion Empire in the end!

Although he did not really pay too much attention to how his mother's growing empire was doing, the Lady of the Night had her own mysterious ways to promote the development of mech pilots under her command.

Ves continued his frank discussion with Jovy.

For whatever reason, the Red Association entrusted both of them with highly classified information about the development of the A7-KE1 General Purpose Pilot Cultivation Elixir.

This was just one of many signs that the mechers were being serious about roping Ves into their organization. They truly treated him as an insider.

"It all comes down to resources." Jovy said as both of them ceased their direct observation of the expert pilots and sat down next to a table. "During the conference, our faction leaders spoke of a lack of resources. Our civilization is too small and weak compared to the native alien civilizations in the Red Ocean. Since conquering additional territories is not an option in the short term, the only

way we can obtain more resources is to squeeze them out of what little is available. Our desperation has led us to recognize that our very own god pilots can also serve as resources."

That sounded awfully close to cannibalism. The very notion of using any human and a god pilot no less as a source of materials did not entirely sit well with Ves!

This was rather contradictory as Ves knew more about the power of blood than most people.

Every form of blood contained power.

It was not that big of a logical leap to assume that stronger individuals possessed more potent forms of blood!

No matter whether they were human or not, powerful organisms were among the most valuable sources of high-quality resources in any given environment, particularly ones that were rather poor in other terms!

Both Ves and Jovy exchanged complex expressions with each other. They both understood the cold hard calculus behind the decision to use god pilots as sources of high-quality ingredients.

"Our god pilots are all powerful enough for the time being," Jovy explained. "While I have no knowledge of what they can do to advance their strength after completing the Mech Body Merger Process, the common belief is that it may take an exponentially greater amount of time for them to attain a qualitative leap in strength. The fact of the matter is that we cannot wait that long. It makes little sense to invest an unreasonable amount of resources to promote their growth when the payoff is too far away. We need to realize our gains faster, and if that means promoting a large number of other high-ranking mech pilots at the cost of using our own god pilots as the source of their growth, then so be it. Everything is justified as long as it works."

This was yet another reminder that the Survivalists were quietly capable of making the most extreme and radical decisions as long as they were logical enough!

Though Ves held too much respect towards humanity's god pilots to regard them as moving repositories of high-quality ingredients, his rationality told him that this was definitely the most optimal solution at hand.

Jovy already told Ves that the mechers were scrambling to produce high-quality reagents that could reduce their dependence on god pilot blood. Subsequent elixirs developed for use by the New Elites would probably become a lot less remarkable.

Perhaps no one else outside of a small circle within the Red Association would ever learn that earlier formulas actually incorporated the blood of their greatest idols as the main ingredients!

Ves made an important realization today.

Ascended beings contained so much power that they all amounted to highly valuable collections of ingredients without exception!

Their rich and potent blood was just one of the resources that Ves and many other people could use to make the most powerful products.

Ves made another realization at this time.

What the mechers had done to their own god pilots wasn't even that unique. Many cultivators had resorted to similar measures in the past.

Rather than relying on the cumbersome and difficult collection of reagents in a poor or insufficient environment, it was much easier to harvest powerful substitute materials from mighty beings!

Ves bet that even the indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean were no strangers to this approach. The existence of unclean whales proved that not even the so-called descendants of the Elder Gods were exempt from this phenomenon!

Phasewater. Godblood. They were two different terms for the same exotic substance. Though their connotations were substantially different from each other, they both described two different facets of the same liquid material!

For an unknown number of eons, the aliens of the Red Ocean struggled to imitate the beings they equated as gods by doing whatever they could to infuse phasewater into their own bodies!

While the specific processes and methods employed by the aliens weren't important at the moment, Ves found it rather interesting that this approach was universal.

He even developed a greater understanding and appreciation of his mother's own principles and domain.

Cynthia gained strength from absorbing the nutrients of others. The more powerful her prey, the greater her harvest!

What she did was not an abnormality or a deviation from normal behavior. Her approach completely conformed to the ruthless but necessary cycle of life.

In order for predators to survive and gain more strength, they must devour the weak.

His mother successfully became a true god by embodying the concept of predation. She turned the cruelty of nature into her own artistic conception and developed it to such an extreme that she had managed to shed many of the shackles of her own mortality!

For whatever reason, Ves began to feel as if a part of the fog that obscured his future trajectory had faded all of a sudden.

The insights and realization he drew from this initially unassuming session broadened his perspective and allowed him to understand numerous greater truths that governed the cosmos!

Inspiration struck Ves.

Blood was power.

That power was directly correlated with the strength of an organism.

The blood of weaker beings was not worth that much, but they still contained at least a few traces of power.

The blood of stronger organisms ought to contain more power, no matter whether they engaged in body cultivation or a more esoteric form of cultivation.

Many different beings ranging from mech pilots, mech designers, swordmasters, phase lords and so on were all invaluable due to the power contained in their blood!

While the exact properties of their blood varied considerably due to many different circumstances, anyone who recognized its value could make use of this rich substance to make other powerful products!

The possibilities were endless. Ves could probably spend a lifetime on coming up with ideas on how he could transform blood into other forms that could be useful to many different people!

However, what was most relevant to him as a mech pilot was how powerful blood could alter the performance of the Carmine System!

Ves realized that he had heavily underutilized the possibilities introduced by the Carmine System. Its original name before he rebranded it was the Empowered Blood Sharing System.

The implication was that Ves would develop a means for blood to empower both the mech and mech pilot.

However, it could also mean that Ves could find a way to empower the shared blood itself, thereby increasing the performance of the Carmine System!

Ves developed a suspicion that this might be a way to rapidly promote the strength of an active Blood Pact.

By infusing it with the nutrients derived from energy-rich blood, the Blood Pact could acquire more extraordinary traits!

He immediately thought of the Blood Knight Project. While he was on track to complete it sooner than any of his other ongoing mech design projects, perhaps he should change his plan and work on it a little longer.

Ves became curious to see what would happen if his first proper biomech incorporated the blood and essence from a powerful organism!

A Carmine biomech that circulated a more powerful type of blood definitely had the potential to produce superior results!

He just needed to work it out and find a way to make it safe enough for general use.

Ves finally turned his attention back to his conversation partner. "Thank you for telling me all of that, Jovy. You have taught me a lot of stuff about what is possible with technology. I agree with you that as distasteful as it may be, drawing blood from powerful pilots can be beneficial to the greater whole. The taboos that we held dear in the past cannot be allowed to stand in the way of progress, especially now that we live in a time where we need it most."

That evoked a grin from Jovy. "I am glad you understand. Our society is being hampered by lack of resources. We all need to be more creative in order to develop more inventive means to do more with less. As exotic radiation continues to bombard every single resident of the Red Ocean, all of them shall grow more powerful as time goes on. This applies to both humans and aliens. If there is a way to produce an elixir by extracting the most potent elements from the blood of millions of alien organisms, then we would do so in a heartbeat."

Wait...

Was this what the Deep Strike Plan was all about?!

Aside from the goals that Ves had already figured out, perhaps another reason for attacking alien population centers in the rear was to harvest a huge amount of alien bodies!

Several years later, all of those aliens were bound to mutate into slightly more powerful beings.

Even if their blood and flesh only absorbed a fraction of the energies bestowed by exotic radiation, that was enough to cause their value to skyrocket!

Blood was power. This rule had grown even stronger now that everyone entered the Age of Dawn.

Too many people had yet to realize this important change. This gave Ves an important head-start!

As long as he harvested as much blood from powerful sources as possible, he could transform these high-quality ingredients into stronger Carmine mechs!

He could also figure out a way to empower his mech pilots directly. If the Red Association was able to do so with their general cultivation elixirs, there was no reason for Ves to fail in this endeavor!

His current priority was the Carmine System, however.

Ves wanted to explore many other possible ideas, but doing so would reduce the time he spent on his mech designs.

That was not acceptable. Ves should be able to gain plenty of rewards by furthering the development of the Carmine System.

#### Chapter 5298 Clues In Blood

Ves continued to remain inspired hours after he left the Tarrasque.

After a decent period of observation, the mechers concluded that none of the Larkinson and Glory Seeker expert pilots were in danger.

While a few expert pilots got hit a bit harder than the others, their conditions had not deteriorated after the session had concluded.

Their moods and physical states were actually better than the norm!

Compared to the vast majority of test subjects that ingested the same general cultivation elixir, the unique circumstances of the Larkinsons and the Glory Seekers substantially increased their tolerance towards these treatments.

Although Jovy didn't mention it, Ves bet that the mechers had probably developed a much greater interest towards his innovations due to these results!

Kinship networks and companion spirits just gained greater value now that they had proven their utility in at least one additional case!

After the Tarrasque teleported Ves and the other pilots back to the expeditionary fleet, many of them just wanted to take a long break.

"I need to get back to my wife and kids."

"I should go to my living mech."

"I wonder how much my resonance strength has grown."

Ves did not let the expert pilots depart right away. He cleared his throat in order to capture their attention.

"I understand that you are all incredibly exhausted due to the strain that you have just been subjected to, but you're not free to go yet. As much as I want you to go off and take the rest of the week off, we can't assume that everything is fine just because the mechers have said so. While I trust their examinations to be accurate, it is never wise to blindly trust other people's input. I must insist that all of you go through one more examination before you are truly free."

The expert pilots did not like this at all, but Ves exerted enough pressure for them to go through this additional hurdle.

Fortunately, the examination did not last too long. Venerable Tusa, Venerable Joshua and all of the others merely had to spend a few minutes as various scanning devices examined their bodies from top to bottom.

A bot also extended a device that painlessly drew a sample of blood from each expert pilot.

None of the test subjects thought that this was anything more than a routine checkup. Once Ves finally let them go, he eagerly laid his eyes on the small vials of rich and delectable blood.

"Marvellous."

Ves did not actually sense that much power from these small blood samples.

This was not a surprise.

When it came down to it, expert pilots were willpower cultivators that solely invested their energies into strengthening their willpower.

While they occasionally managed to strengthen their flesh and blood, these were more incidental benefits than anything.

What truly mattered was that their minds and wills underwent explosive growth so that they could exert more power through their mechs!

In any case, Ves should not expect too much from these blood samples. He needed to temper his expectations. There was no way he could produce anything amazing from the blood of expert pilots.

His enthusiasm still remained high when he moved to his private design lab. The facility had gained a number of biotechnology-related instruments fairly recently, so Ves had everything he needed to perform a basic exploration of the harvested blood samples.

As the sophisticated machines started to spit out lots of data, few of the numbers mean anything to him. He lacked the expertise to interpret the most obscure data points. He only really paid attention to a small amount of parameters that essentially told him that the expert pilots were a little stronger than average humans.

What truly mattered to him was the extraordinary factors contained within the blood. Each blood cell was produced from a body that was constantly exposed to the force of will of an expert pilot.

Ves needed to ascertain whether this interaction contaminated the blood in an extraordinary fashion.

"None of these machines can tell me the answer." He frowned.

He decided to employ a more primitive method by putting a blood sample under a microscope.

Ves did not care about taking in the appearances of individual blood cells and other junk.

The purpose of doing this was to provide Ves with a visual reference on what he actually wanted to focus upon.

"Blinky, you're up again."

"Mrow."

The Star Cat deftly dove out of Ves' head and began to attune his senses towards the small sample of blood.

Blinky's senses towards energy were much more powerful than his own. His companion spirit managed to perceive faint traces of power infused in the blood.

This lined up with what he knew and what he expected.

"It's a bit too weak to be of use."

"Mrow."

"Let's take a look at the other samples."

Ves managed to observe slight differences in power.

In general, the earlier an expert pilot broke through, the more power he was able to infuse in his blood.

The greater the resonance strength, the more potent his blood had become.

This meant that there were strong differences between Venerable Zimbrow Belson and Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson.

Their breakthroughs were many years apart. Not only that, but their resonance strengths were substantially different.

The differences between Tusa and Davia Stark were even more exaggerated.

A high-tier expert pilot exerted a noticeably greater amount of influence. Venerable Stark's blood was considerably more enriched with power than Ves expected.

This told him that resonance strength was the key variable here. The stronger the pilot, the stronger the blood.

"I wonder..."

Ves needed to gather more data. He decided to instruct his clan to harvest a blood sample from his grandfather.

At the same time, he took a brief visit to one of the Spirit of Bentheim's bays. He personally collected a sample of artificial blood circulating through the Blood Star's Carmine System.

Ves glanced towards the Bastion resting nearby. "Hm, since I'm here, I might as well expand my collection."

In the end, he managed to collect samples from both of the Carmine expert mechs in his possession.

He returned to his private lab where his clansmen had delivered additional samples of blood.

Ves not only got his hands on blood taken from Venerable Benjamin, but also obtained samples taken from Venerable Jannzi, Gloriana, Aurelia, Andraste, Marvaine and Clixie!

He would have insisted on collecting Lucky's blood if his gem cat possessed any trace of organic systems!

"Interesting. Interesting!"

Ves and Blinky already managed to collect interesting data from their examinations of the new blood samples.

Just as expected, the blood of more powerful individuals contained greater traces of energies.

However, there were substantial differences between mech pilots and other humans.

Gloriana's blood was actually the weakest out of all of the samples collected so far. This was no surprise at all. Mech designers weren't known for training and empowering their bodies.

His children's blood were remarkably more enriched with power. Their blood actually possessed far greater potency than any of his expert pilots, which was a remarkable result but not one that defied his expectations!

He just never connected the dots in the past.

"My kids are much closer to primordial humans than other folk. Their bodies are naturally stronger and more infused with power as a consequence."

When it came down to it, every primordial human engaged in a little bit of natural body cultivation. Even if they never did anything deliberate to train their bodies, their physiques still grew stronger simply by absorbing the power of heaven over their lifetimes!

However, deliberate cultivation was always better than remaining passive.

This was why Andraste's blood contained a significantly higher concentration of energy than either of her siblings!

"What!? She's actually stronger than Aurelia?!"

Aurelia was older than Andraste, so Ves initially expected that the older of his two daughters possessed an advantage in this area.

What was actually the case was that Andraste's blood was considerably more fortified.

There were other anomalies that caused his second daughter's blood circulation to be considerably stronger than normal.

Ves was able to ascribe at least a few of these deviations to her combat-oriented designer genes and energy-rich supplements.

However, the extraordinary factors in her blood were still too strong and abundant.

There was only one logical explanation why his little girl had actually grown much stronger than any other girl of her age.



"It's her swordsmanship training!"

Now that he thought about it, receiving personal swordsmanship instruction from a genuine swordmaster was extremely luxurious treatment.

Andraste essentially received proper lessons on how to practice traditional swordsmanship from a genuine willpower cultivator.

Even if Ketis did not mean anything else, her words, her willpower and her other actions all rubbed off on Andraste!

The thing about primordial humans was that they were much more attuned to external energies than modern humans.

They were like sponges that could easily get contaminated by any external influence.

This was not always a bad thing. All of his children grew up under the care and attention of Ves, his wife and the Golden Cat.

What was special here was that Andraste also absorbed a notable amount of energy from Ketis!

"No wonder she has become so addicted to Ketis' swordsmanship instruction. She has spiritually imprinted on her teacher."

Ves did not know what to make of these findings. He did not necessarily assume that this was a bad development.

Still, he did not actually want his daughter to become an extreme sword fanatic either. Every swordmaster became so obsessed with traditional swordsmanship that they eschewed all other modes of combat. Rifles practically did not exist in their eyes!

"Maybe she needs to start taking lessons from mech pilots instead."

If he and his immediate family wasn't already scheduled to depart from the expeditionary fleet, Ves would have requested Venerable Davia Stark to teach marksmanship to his little girl.

"Wait... maybe I should bring an expert pilot along."

One notable name popped up. The Hex Federation originally assigned Saintess Ulrika Vracken to the expeditionary fleet with the hope that Ves would upgrade her ace mech.

He could still fulfill this purpose if he brought her along.

While this would mean that his expeditionary fleet would grow even weaker, the Golden Skull Alliance still possessed enough combat power to handle most alien threats.

Ves wanted to bring Saintess Ulrika along for additional reasons aside from subjecting his daughter to the influence of a powerful ace pilot who specialized in ranged combat.

He also developed the urge to experiment on Saintess Ulrika and her ace mech!

The Hexers trusted him a lot. They essentially gave him free rein to do what he wished to the Macharia Excelsia.

Right now, Ves had a growing urge to upgrade the Macharia Excelsia with a Carmine System just so that he could collect a lot of data related to blood!

He had a hunch that the Carmine System and the Blood Pact associated with an ace pilot were much more powerful than he could imagine!

Not only that, but having an ace pilot close at hand meant that he could not only harvest as much of her blood as he wanted, he could even experiment on her directly!

"What would happen if I inject a portion of Saintess Ulrika's blood in Andraste's body?"

The outcome would likely prove disastrous to his little girl, but it didn't necessarily have to be this way.

The existence of the Red Association's general cultivation elixirs proved that there was a viable means to safely transfer the power contained in blood to an eligible recipient.

Ves just needed to develop his own solution to this problem!

No matter what, Ves believed that there were many possible methods for him to augment his daughter!

He even speculated whether strong exposure to an ace pilot like Ulrika might positively affect the development of Andraste's genetic aptitude.

While it was not likely for this theory to be true given that no one observed this relationship in the past, Ves believed it may be different for a child that exhibited most of the traits of a primordial human!

"If my daughter has become contaminated by Ketis to the point where she has almost become a sword initiate, then getting exposed to Saintess Ulrika should definitely raise her talent in mech piloting! I am willing to bet on this hypothesis!"

## Chapter 5299 Biocarmine System

Ves called up the design of the Blood Knight Project and studied it carefully.

Unlike all of his other serious works up to this date, the Blood Knight Project almost looked unrecognizable at first.

The reason why the Blood Knight Project looked so out of place was because its entire mech frame consisted of organic components!

The latest iteration of the Blood Knight Project consisted of a second-class spaceborn hybrid biomech.

Although Ves ideally wanted to design a quasi-first-class biomech so that it could match the latest standards of the main fleet of the Larkinson Clan, he did not want to bite more than he could chew.

This was his first true biomech design project. Compared to designing a conventional mech, Ves had to overcome brand-new difficulties and complications for the first time.

The biomech design-related skills that he acquired from the System could only support him up to this point. He lacked way too much experience to exploit these meager skills any further.

What was worse was that Ves couldn't apply much of the proficiencies related to conventional mech design to this troublesome project.

While there were definitely a lot of parallels between conventional mechs and organic mechs, they also differed in so many different ways!

Designing a mech comprised of metal was like assembling a clockwork machine. Each component was discreet and could be slotted into place with relative ease.

Designing a biomech was like shaping a holistic organic life form. Every organic part was interconnected to other organic stuff. Removing an organic component was not simple at all because it supported countless other biological systems.

Just like how blindly adding a second heart to a random human body would lead to a cascade of health problems, Ves needed to make a host of adjustments for each organic addition or removal to the Blood Knight Project!

Many times, Ves even had the illusion that he had become a beast designer as opposed to a mech designer!

The development of the Blood Knight Project had become very uneven as a result. There were periods where he breezed through the design problems, but there were also times where he got stuck on a single problem for days on end.

It didn't help that Ves became preoccupied with many other matters in the last few weeks and months!

His incarnations were somewhat capable of picking up the slack, but he had mostly prioritized other mech design projects during this period.

The Blood Knight Project was too special to Ves. It deserved his full attention. Only then would he be able to complete a Carmine biomech that introduced a lot of new refinements to the Carmine System.

"This machine is a lot different from the ones I've designed before." He rubbed his hairless chin in thought. "Not even the Carmine mechs commissioned by the Survivalists in a hurry can compare to the Blood Knight Project in terms of scope and integration."

The Carmine System implemented in conventional mechs had always seemed awkward to Ves. As a fully biomechanical system, it looked out of place inside the frame of a conventional mech.

Even the Bastion, which he considered his best Carmine mech to date, still possessed a fair amount of suboptimal solutions and unnecessary burdens due to the relatively crude addition of the very first Carmine System to exist.

This had been one of the contributing reasons why the Bastion failed to become a masterwork mech.

The Blood Knight Project might possess a lot more flaws and inadequacies compared to his conventional mechs, but one of its strongest advantages was the fact that its 'Carmine System' encompassed every single piece of organic tissue sustained by blood!

"In fact, the Carmine System doesn't really exist as a discreet system anymore. The ordinary cardiovascular system of the biomech essentially fulfills its purpose without doing anything special."

The original Carmine System was an attempt to introduce a blood circulatory system to a mech frame that did not have anything to do with blood in the first place!

Ves did not need to go through all of that effort this time because a biomech already incorporated this to a much more extensive degree!

The real challenge to incorporating the essential elements of the Carmine System into a biomech was to make its blood safe for the human body.

This was not technically possible unless a mech pilot subjected himself to extreme genetic modification and implantation.

The 'blood' utilized by a biomech was much denser and filled with all kinds of toxic substances that could quickly poison any human body from the inside!

In order to safely merge the cardiovascular system of the biomech and mech pilot, Ves had to design a filtration system in the cockpit.

This new addition was responsible for removing all of the toxic and dangerous elements in the enriched blood of the Blood Knight Project.

Only purified and diluted blood should be able to get into the body of the mech pilot.

Theoretically, everything should be safe. There was little reason to suspect that the filtered blood would pose a health risk to the mech pilot after undergoing a lot of processing.

Ves did not assume it was completely safe, though. He needed to test this new technological implementation to make sure that he did not overlook a few variables.

In any case, as long as those measures worked, the outcome should be quite considerable.

"The Carmine Systems integrated in conventional mechs such as the Bastion and the Blood Star function more like add-ons rather than a core system of those machines. They only comprise up to 5 percent of the volume of the mech frame. While they are working as intended, I always feel that much of their potential remains untapped."

The story was different for his Blood Knight Project. The reach of the 'Biocarmine System' or whatever was so extensive that it was in direct contact with at least 50 percent of the volume of the biomech frame!

The remaining 20 percent or so comprised of inaccessible organic metals that made up the bones and exterior plating.

Though Ves initially wanted to design the Blood Knight Project as an uncovered biomech, he did not have the confidence to make it sturdy enough by relying on a fleshy exterior.

This was why he went through the trouble of adding an exoskeleton made out of organic metals.

This increased the cost and growth of the Blood Knight Project by a considerable margin, but Ves wasn't too worried about the added expenses.

"It's not as if I'm putting this design on the market."

The Blood Knight Project primarily served as an experimental design for Ves. It might not see heavy use once he completed it, but its existence would definitely benefit him a lot as he got to test and discover many new Interactions related to the Carmine System!

The innovative new biomech design was not only important to Ves, but also the Survivalists!

Ves knew that Jovy and the mechers stationed aboard the Spirit of Bentheim and the Bluejay Fleet always kept tabs on him. Their interest would always peak whenever he worked on anything related to the Carmine System.

Even though he didn't like it, Ves had made peace with all of this snooping. This was a necessary cost of doing business with the Red Association.

It was fine so long as he wasn't outright enemies with this powerful organization!

Besides, if Ves wanted to work on a project that was truly dangerous and taboo, he could always make Veronica work on it instead.

There was no way the mechers succeeded in infiltrating the Throne of Light, the flagship of the Oblivion Empire!

The scrappy warship that served as the mobile stronghold of the Lady of the Night was under her permanent supervision!

Ves did not believe that a True God would be blind to any shenanigans that took place well inside the range of her own domain!

There was no need for Ves to resort to this measure for the time being. The Blood Knight Project contained plenty of innovations, but none of them crossed any lines that the Carmine System hadn't already done.

"Now that I think about it, the Biocarmine System is not so much an evolution but a variation of the original Carmine System."

Ves believed that the Biocarmine System could produce enhanced results compared to the base version. He anticipated that it could produce a much deeper integration between the biomech and its bonded mech pilot. The resulting 'Deep Blood Pact' could produce a lot of potential benefits, such as doubling the increase in effective genetic aptitude!

If this was the case, then Carmine biomechs should be the most effective platform for aspiring pilots with poor qualifications.

Mech pilots with extremely low genetic aptitudes and norms who did not possess any meaningful genetic aptitudes to begin with could effectively pilot a mech after bonding with a copy of the Blood Knight Project!

Even pilots with better qualifications could benefit from the Blood Knight Project as it took much less time for them to receive a substantial boost in control. They did not have to pilot their new Carmine mechs for several years in order to grow their Blood Pact to the desired strength.

Ves could already imagine it. Mech pilots who had the fortune to become potentates only to be devastated after learning their genetic aptitudes only reached the D-grade would experience a renaissance!

"I'm not sure how much their effective genetic aptitudes will increase when bonding with a Carmine biomech, but it is not outside of the realm of possibility to jump from D to C from the very start. Reaching B should also be possible as long as their Deep Blood Pact has time to grow."

What about more? Was it possible for these marginal mech pilots who always earned the least amount of respect in the mech community to attain a level of control over their machines that was equivalent to A-grade genetic aptitude?!

It sounded too good to be true!

Ves seriously doubted that it would be that simple, though. There had to be limits and complications that should cap or slow the relentless increase in effective genetic aptitude.

Even so, any boost was better than no boost. The initial results of the Carmine Trooper, Carmine Conscript and the Carmine Raider also proved that the base version of the Carmine System could produce at least one major jump in effective genetic aptitude!

The fact that it also worked in the upper grades was an important piece of information to Ves!

"If I can achieve all of that with a Carmine System that is hastily designed and grown, what about a proper Biocarmine System that is properly designed and made?"

The Blood Knight Project fascinated him more and more. It already held a lot of promise, but Ves wasn't entirely satisfied with its design and technological implementations.

As much as Ves had broken new ground by developing the Biocarmine System that could potentially form a Deep Blood Pact, it wasn't innovative enough to represent a generational advancement.

He still regarded it as a first generation product. The improvements all amounted to relatively minor and easy refinements as opposed to revolutionary additions.

Ves thought that it would take years for him to reach the point where he was ready to develop the second generation of Carmine Systems.

That had changed when he had incidentally discovered the greater potential of blood.

"Right now, the blood used to bind the mech and mech pilot together isn't all that special. What if I change that? What if I deliberately add extraordinary factors into the mix? Will that lead to a holistic strengthening of both sides? Will that strengthen or mutate the Blood Pact into an enhanced form? What if I Insert trace amounts of hyper materials instead?" The possibilities were endless! Ves truly felt that if he fleshed out this amazing idea in the Blood Knight Project, the improvements would become so significant that it essentially represented a generational leap!

"Compared to the first generation, the second generation will truly turn the Carmine System into a product of the Age of Dawn!"

Chapter 5300 Mech As Beast

Ves imposed high demands on the second generation of his Carmine System.

It needed to incorporate more than refinements of existing tech. It had to offer substantially better performance compared to the previous generation.

A part of the improvements also had to be completely new. Only by adding revolutionary new functionality would the second generation be worthwhile enough to overhaul the Bastion's original Carmine System!

However, a lot needed to happen before Ves was willing to apply an upgrade to one of his most important works.

He already spent a bit of time familiarizing himself with the power that was locked away in the blood of powerful entities.

It did not surprise him that Blinky's highly attuned senses easily managed to detect traces of unusual energies in the blood of expert pilots, mech designers as well as his talented children.

However, that was not enough data for Ves. He needed to discover more variations in order to build up a picture in his mind. Only then would he be able to figure out a more specific way to improve the Carmine System.

As the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan, it was not difficult for him to request a large quantity of blood samples.

It only took hours before a bunch of hots delivered thousands of vials of red liquid. The vitality contained in these modest samples were relatively weak, but when they were all placed next to each other, they exuded a collective sense of power that was tinged with the flavor of the Larkinson Clan!

Ves enjoyed himself as he inspected the blood samples one by one. He made a lot of different observations as he examined the extraordinary properties of different people.

Just as he expected, the blood drawn from expert pilots remained the strongest by far. Everyone else's blood was weaker to the point that there was barely any value in using them for other purposes.

While he detected a lot of subtle variations in the samples taken from different people, they weren't all that interesting most of the time.

"Whether a subject has surpassed the extraordinary threshold makes a substantial difference in blood potency."

Ves actually figured out that this might be a consistent way to detect extraordinary life forms. No matter how well these individuals hid their power, it was doubtful whether their lifeblood could hide their true nature.

In any case, Ves actually made a lot of interesting observations when he examined the blood of outliers.

For example, mutated beasts such as Arnold along with many other extraordinary creatures held inside the Dragon's Den possessed particularly powerful blood!

The potency of their blood could easily match or exceed that of a typical expert pilot!

That did not necessarily mean that mutated beasts were more powerful. What actually happened was that their physiques were more sensitive towards Ecnorg and absorbed it more effectively.

In other words, their natural cultivation was much more slanted towards body cultivation.

This was a particularly important discovery to Ves!

He even discovered that empowered blood or 'E blood' for short could even function as a hyper material to an extent!

Although the capacity of blood was pitiful compared to a more traditional hyper material, this still indicated that Ves had alternatives if he couldn't get his hands on proper materials!

"Interesting!"

The blood derived from extraordinary beings were also sensitive towards different elements. This made a lot of sense. Blood sourced from a mutated beast with an affinity for water reacted well when exposed to water-aspected E energy.

All of this lined up with his current understanding of cultivation science.

However, what truly mattered was how he could translate his findings and knowledge into a concrete improvement of the Carmine System and by extension the mech as a whole.

Ves called up the incomplete design of the Blood Knight Project once again and stared at it for several minutes.

Time passed as his eyes focused on different design elements. Eventually, a light shone in his eyes as a brand new concept gradually formed in his mind.

"The Carmine System... is originally based on the methods of the Gemini Family."

The Geminis evoked a lot of disgust and revulsion due to their tradition of turning twin siblings into married couples, but that did not stop Ves from admiring the results of all of their efforts.

No matter what, the substantial boost in power and coordination from two highly cooperative mech pilots was very real!

Seeing the twin ace pilots of the Gemini Family effectively merge their domains as well as their ace mechs together was one of the most impressive feats that Ves had ever witnessed as a mech designer.

It was impossible to produce this result in any other way. Ves admired the engineering that went into the Gemini Family's iconic ace mechs.

By designing them in a way that enabled them to merge into the Embodiment of Love and Sacrifice, the resulting combination mech perfectly fused the strengths and domains of Saint Sandro Gemini and Saint Kaia Gemini!

When Ves compared the extreme synergies produced by this fantastic combination with the synergies attained by his Carmine System, he found that his work lost out badly.

"The problem is that the relationship is too uneven." He frowned.

When it came to the Bastion, the expert space knight was actually considerably less extraordinary than Venerable Jannzi.

That was not necessarily a problem, though. The Bastion was a living expert mech that could automatically grow her spiritual foundation as well as the quality of her mech frame over time.

Exposure to exotic radiation significantly accelerated this growth rate!

Sooner or later, the Bastion would be able to catch up to Jannzi's approximate strength.



That was probably close to the best outcome that Ves could hope for. The Bastion would not hold Jannzi back, but she wouldn't be able to provide her human battle partner with any additional assistance.

"If the Bastion is stronger, she can channel greater benefits through the Blood Pact."

The situation was different for mechs that belonged to weaker mech pilots.

Three of the Carmine mechs that Ves had hastily designed and fabricated for the Survivalists were all relatively ordinary in this regard.

It was impossible for the Carmine Trooper, Carmine Conscript and Carmine Raider to produce remarkable results in this regard when their Carmine Systems were so basic.

Even if their associated Blood Pact grew stronger over a span of many years, it was difficult to produce new and powerful effects if the fundamental properties remained the same.

When thinking about the Carmine System, Ves often framed his work in the context of how much benefit it could provide to a mech pilot.

"A weak mech paired with a weak pilot will not result in a drastically greater boost in performance."

"A weak mech paired with a strong pilot will cause the former to undergo accelerated growth until it reaches parity with the latter."

Ves was already familiar with these relationships. He had collected enough data to confirm that they were true.

What was truly important to Ves was the next scenario!

"A strong mech paired with a weak pilot should theoretically cause the latter to undergo accelerated growth until he or she reaches parity with the former."

In other words, this was yet another way for a living mech to rapidly increase the strength of a mech pilot!

Though Ves already had access to measures such as the transcendence glow, general cultivation elixirs, the MSTS and so on, he still wanted more!

His design philosophy centered around Mutual Growth, and Ves could think of no better way to realize this ideal by upgrading the Carmine System!

His gaze rested on the Blood Knight Project again. Now that he looked at it from another perspective, he found his work to be relatively bland, weak and colorless.

It lacked flavor.

"Abiomech is like a giant humanoid clone, it is a monstrous creation of biomass that imitates powerful exobeasts to varying degrees."

Ves realized that his vision had been too shallow when he worked on the Blood Knight Project.

His approach to his first true biomech design was not necessarily incorrect. He had exercised a lot of restraint during the design process because it was way too easy to go overboard and create an uncontrollable monster.

Ves was extra sensitive towards this risk due to the examples provided by the Uranus and the meat suit.

However, just because he needed to act carefully did not mean that he should completely deprive his Blood Knight Project of much of its personality and flavor!

A basic biomech might have a higher chance of working properly, but it would also be weak and unable to benefit the mech pilot as much.

Ves sought to change this. Instead of turning the Blood Knight Project into a bland clone, he wanted to turn it into a clone of a more powerful being!

This meant that he wanted both the Carmine System and the artificial blood to mirror the organic properties of the source in question!

Theoretically, this should result in a more empowered biomech that could transfer greater strength and benefits to the mech pilot!

If this idea lived up to its promise, then the pilot of the biomech may even be able to inherit a portion of the extraordinary skills and domain of the 'blood donor'!

This reminded me of an experiment he conducted in the past.

Ves thought of a few possible candidates he could use as a template for his biomech.

He successfully managed to make Lanie Larkinson inherit a portion of the skills and experiences of Venerable Imon Ingvar, who was still an expert candidate at the time.

Though Ves never really followed up on this amazing experiment due to being swamped with other priorities, that did not mean he could attempt to replicate this ritual in a more practical form!

"Is it possible to embed a variation of Ancestral Possession in the second generation of my Carmine System?"

Ves did not know the answer to this question!

He felt it was possible, but it would be anything but easy to realize it. Nonetheless, that did not stop him from trying to see if he could get close enough to produce any worthwhile results.

His passion became stoked as he began to consider what kind of steps he needed to take to fulfill this particular dream. Ves was more eager than ever to turn the Blood Knight Project into a new and revolutionary mech design that took the concept of Mutual Growth to a greater level!

Success not only meant that he had produced a powerful new tool that could make humans stronger.

It also meant that he would be able to advance his design philosophy by a considerable margin!

Ves briefly furrowed his brows. "Developing the second generation of my Carmine System will bring me a lot closer to realizing my design philosophy. It won't be enough for me to advance to Master right away. My accumulation is far from enough, and I need to come up with a much more revolutionary invention in order to satisfy the most difficult condition."

He still had a long way to go before he could attain the breakthrough he desired.

Still, the faster he came up with advancements like these, the less years he would have to spend as a Senior Mech Designer!

"If I can keep up my current rate of progress, it is not impossible for me to realize my design philosophy within two decades."

That was remarkably fast!

The Polymath managed to set a record by advancing to the rank of Master Mech Designer when she was around 50 years old.

Ves would be more than happy if he could accomplish the same feat when he became 60!

"This is not a race, but... red humanity is walking on a tightrope right now. The sooner I become a Master, the sooner I can contribute more substantially to the war effort. I don't want my contributions to center around companion spirits and kinship networks. What I truly want is to change society forever with my mech designs!"

In this regard, the Blood Knight Project represented a crucial step to this future!