

## The Mech 5301

### Chapter 5301 Dream Of A God Machine

In order to implement his new 'mech as beast concept' in his Blood Knight Project, he needed to select an appropriate 'blood donor'.

This was an extremely important decision. Ves needed to take into account a lot of factors. Strength, safety, risk, compatibility, willingness and more all varied considerably based on his selection.

Based on these factors, Ves drafted up a list of names and steadily whittled it down until he ended up with three possible candidates.

These were the names that scored the highest in the aforementioned criteria. They were also so different from each other that they presented an interesting array of unique options.

"Venerable Joshua should be an excellent candidate."

This was by far the safest possible choice that Ves could make.

Every other extraordinary being within reach developed unique domains that granted them a strong advantage in a specific area.

This always worked out well for someone like an expert pilot who depended on this strength to excel in battle.

However, when another mech pilot came along and tried to pilot a copy of the Blood Knight Project that was based on an existing expert pilot, compatibility became a serious issue!

If the Carmine biomech was based on Venerable Isobel Kotin, then a pilot who possessed a strong affinity towards water may have a miserable time!

This problem existed for so many different possible choices aside from one glaring exception.

Venerable Joshua's life domain was inherently gentle and inclusive. He was compatible with anything. He could even get along with Helena and her death domain because he was so inherently open to different attributes.

A Carmine biomech based on Venerable Joshua should therefore be compatible with all kinds of mech pilots!

If any rejection reaction occurred between the biomech and the mech pilot, then the blood donor was not to blame. The true fault would rest on another variable related to the Biocarmine System.

Ves also saw other advantages to choosing Venerable Joshua as the first blood donor of the Blood Knight Project.

He believed that Joshua's life domain might promote the health of the mech pilot. Anything related to the life domain was beneficial to all kinds of life.

"Perhaps it is possible to heal different ailments, extend people's lifespan and possibly restore aging pilots to their peak condition again!"

This turned Joshua into the ideal blood donor for the Blood Star Mark II Project!

His grandfather had already reached a relatively advanced age as an expert pilot. Combined with his other conditions, his health could certainly use a powerful boost.

As far as Ves was concerned, the Blood Star Mark 11 did not exist to add another powerful combat asset to the Larkinson Clan.

It mainly existed to preserve his grandfather's life and allow him to enjoy his life as long as possible!

Therefore, Ves did not feel any urgent desire to add a lot of combat power to Benjamin's upcoming expert mech.

That was also the downside to using Joshua as a blood donor. His strength came from his versatility. It was difficult to express this advantage in a Carmine biomech.

This was why Ves did not immediately settle on Joshua despite how many benefits he brought.

If Ves aimed to bestow his Blood Knight Project with the strongest possible boost in power, then he needed to select a much stronger blood donor!

Saintess Ulrika Vraken was the best possible candidate within his reach!

Though Ves had yet to request a blood sample from the powerful Hexer ace pilot, he could already predict that he could use it to design and fabricate the most powerful version of the Blood Knight Project!

Of course, the safety factor of this decision was also the lowest. The probability of accidents was too great!

Compatibility was also a severe issue. Ves predicted that only Hexer mech pilots could properly bond with a Carmine biomech based on Saintess Ulrika.

It would be even better if they shared other commonalities such as bloodline.

"I don't think that any Larkinson can pilot such a Blood Knight Project."

That was not a big deal when it came to an experimental mech design. Ves treated this project as an attempt to realize a proof of concept more than anything. It was not a work that was meant to be used in the field, though it would be nice if it could participate in battles without much fuss.

Besides, even if the Ulrika Blood Knight was limited to the Hexers, Ves could easily use the Glory Seekers as his test subjects for this risky implementation.

The fact that he did not care as much for their lives as he did with his Larkinsons was a selling point as far as he was concerned!

However, Ves also came up with a third possible candidate.

"What If I use my own blood as the basis for a second generation Carmine System?"

That... sounded extremely interesting... and dangerous.

Unlike the previous two options, Ves did not know what to expect at all with his third possible choice.

Using his own blood as a source of power for the Blood Knight Project sounded crazy and nonsensical!

What could his blood add to the mix that his design philosophy hadn't already accomplished?

It sounded rather redundant to put more of himself into his work than necessary.

It also seemed incredibly dangerous as his physique was anything but normal!

From getting operated on by a crazy Compact cultist to accidentally becoming a phase lord, Ves had veered so far away from the baseline human norm that he could justifiably claim he compromised his own separate species!

Still... Ves couldn't get rid of this idea.

Out of curiosity, he drew his own blood sample and carefully examined it like all of the other ones.

Many of his findings matched his expectations. He was quite familiar with his abnormal physical state, so he did not find it surprising at all that his blood contained a lot of additional junk that originated from the inhuman attributes of his Jutland organ.

Although Ves had done little with it, he never forgot that the Jutland organ functioned similarly to a power reactor. It had assimilated his human heart in its entirety, which meant that it exerted an enormous influence on his blood!

What was funny was that the alien-derived substances added to his blood were not even the most toxic part about his own blood composition.

The true danger lay in the trace amounts of phasewater integrated in his blood!

Although the concentration was so low that it was barely noticeable on the surface, its presence still presented a lethal threat to any other human body!

Torn blood vessels. Ruptured brain cells. Unending pain throughout the body. Exploding hearts. All of these ailments and more were bound to happen so long as a Carmine biomech attempted to channel the blood of a phase lord in a body that was not qualified to handle such power!

There was one compelling reason why he considered himself to be a valid choice as a blood donor to the Blood Knight Project.

"The only person who can pilot a Blood Knight attuned to my own blood is... me." Ves whispered.

He could already imagine it. The Blood Knight made after his own biological image could serve as a substitute to his weak and tiny physical form.

Although it was difficult to make solid predictions about such a hypothetical Carmine biomech, Ves believed that it would function much like the body of a more powerful phase lord.

For example, even if he was a relatively weak phase lord, if he combined this body cultivation with that of a biomech with all of the advantages that came with it, he had a hunch that he could effectively compete against the likes of the Trampier of Stars or the Eminence of Torment!

"This is like cheating!"

Ordinary phase lords patiently worked to increase the phasewater concentration in their blood.

Even then, their cultivation would always be constrained by their lack of a genuine phasewater production system.

Unless they managed to obtain a PPS from the phase whale race, lesser phase lords would likely remain stuck at this stage for the remainder of their admittedly long lives.

"As for me..."

Why should he allow himself to follow the outdated and highly suboptimal cultivation method of the indigenous alien community?

The essence of human ingenuity rested in humanity's ability to develop much more effective solutions to existing problems!

Ves began to get immersed in a grand illusion that charted a completely different means to gain power as a phase lord!

The heart of this radical idea rested on his recently developed 'mech as beast concept'.

By designing a strong Carmine biomech with phasewater concentration that was slightly higher than his own concentration, Ves bet that he could use it as a cultivation tool to improve his own strength with ease!

As long as his own body did not blow up right away due to introducing an excess amount of phasewater in his own cardiovascular system, the physical and metaphysical strength of his Carmine biomech would gradually feed back to him through both the Biocarmine System as well as the hypothetical Deep Blood Pact!

"This... this can actually work!"

Even though this radical idea was based on way too many assumptions, Ves actually felt confident enough to turn it into a reality!

Not only would this unique biomech enable him to fight with the effective combat strength of a much more mature phase lord, but it could also allow him to finally make progress on his body cultivation and gradually make him stronger without exerting any additional effort!

That was not the limit.

If Ves and his clan were able to hunt down a genuine phase whale and harvest the massive alien's PPS, he could trim it down and install the essence into his phasewater-erapowered biomachine, thereby creating the first artificial greater phase lord in existence!

"Even if it can't turn me into a phase lord that can fight head-on against an ancient phase whale like the Tide Caller, I can just continue to upgrade my personal biomech with other powerful high technologies until its comprehensive strength can reach this ultimate level! it has the potential to become the first god mech that isn't paired with a god pilot!"

Such an exceptionally powerful biomech could qualify as a grand design, a living god machine that transcended all existing boundaries, becoming a pinnacle work that could never be replicated before or after its creation.

In other words, this was a mech design project that could potentially allow him to break past the limits of a Master Mech Designer and advance to Star Designer!

Yes, Star Designer!

Even though Ves still knew too little about what a Star Designer was supposed to be and what he needed to do in order to become one, what few clues he gathered so far did not contradict his current notion.

He knew in his heart that if he was actually able to pull off this incredibly ambitious grand design to the fullest extent, he would have birthed such an amazing creation that he would have satisfied all of the requirements to becoming a True God!

However... was this truly how he wanted to break past the ultimate bottleneck?

His enthusiasm faded as he reminded himself of the core tenet of his profession.

"Mech designers exist to serve mech pilots, not themselves. This design project... is powerful alright, but if it is solely centered around me, then it is not appropriate to treat it as my main goal. At most, I can work on it as a side project if I have enough time."

Ves didn't care too much about his status as a phase lord. He never asked for it, and that hadn't really changed.

While it would be handy to gain additional power in order to defend himself against the distant threats that the Survivalists were spooked about, Ves ultimately did not think he was suited to fight in person.

He was a mech designer. Rather than do all of the fighting himself, he should entrust the mech pilots around him to do the fighting in his stead!

Ves quietly shelved this crazy idea. As interesting as it may be, he had better things to do with his time.

"Let's settle for the safest option for the time being. It is better to maximize the success rate by selecting Venerable Joshua as the blood donor for the Blood Knight Project."

Aller all, with mechers paying so much attention to him, it wouldn't do for his test subjects to explode in a violent fashion as soon as they interlaced with a Blood Knight for the first time!

## Chapter 5302 Modest Ambitions

"So you're finally leaving."

"You sound as if you already predicted this outcome in advance."

"You're a gem in a pile of trash. Anyone who has spent enough time around you will realize that as long as you don't get yourself killed for a stupid reason, you are destined to go further. This day had to come sooner or later. I just didn't expect it to happen this soon, but that proves that the mechers have a good eye for talent."

"I don't blame you. I share the same thoughts. Moving up at this time is both a curse and a blessing. On the one hand, I can gain access to much greater knowledge and resources than before. On the other hand, I've become so exposed that every move I make will have massive implications. A part of me still yearns to go back to the life of a relatively quirky and dispensable second-class mech designer."

"You did what was necessary to preserve your interests and prevent us from losing our freedom. This can happen at any time, even when it is inconvenient, it is your ability to adapt and improvise that will determine whether you will get ahead or fall behind. You made the right decision, Ves. Now you need to deal with the consequences of your own actions."

The time for Ves to part ways with the expeditionary Heel had come closer. His clan already made sufficient arrangements to continue the operation of the main fleet in his absence. His allies had already been informed and made the appropriate adjustments.

Ves just wanted to visit a few of his friends and acquaintances one last time before he left for the upper zones.

The former Skull Architect readily invited his guest to his design lab. It wasn't as if his mech designs were of much value to the likes of a tier 3 galactic citizen.

"I'm counting on you to keep the expeditionary Heel intact, Benedict. Out of everyone who will remain in the Heel, I trust your judgment the most. You are the only person among us whose experience in adversity is close to mine. This is why I feel most relieved by giving you operational command. The Larkinsons will listen to you in times when it is appropriate. Hopefully, General Verle will defer to your advice and instructions just as he did with mine."

Master Benedict Cortez nodded in a serious manner. "I will do my best to earn the trust of your fellow Larkinsons. I am not going easy on them, though. You are fortunate enough that the mechs have decided to fast-track you, but that doesn't mean that you have gotten rid of me. I have my own ambitions. However, I can only resort to more ordinary means to get started with first-class mech designs."

That was going to take a long time. Master Mech Designers had to abide by much higher standards in order to get taken seriously in a first-class mech market. The amount of knowledge and high technologies they needed to learn was astronomical!

Ves found it rather curious that Master Benedict actually chose to reject the offer of an EdNet quota. The man was determined to go his own way.

"Are you going to take advantage of the New Elites Program to move your way up, Benedict?"

"I am. Since the Fist of Defiance was generous enough to break apart the status quo and allow for the rise of a new generation of leaders, it would be stupid for me to let this opportunity pass. Exciting times are ahead for all of us. He has single-handedly restored my faith in red humanity. I think it is very much possible for the Cross Clan and I to rise up and become a small part of the first-class power structure. We just need to earn enough war merits and avoid a miserable death, which is admittedly challenging during these turbulent times."

Ves smiled at the Master Mech Designer. "I hope your tone does not match your approach. I'm not sure how much information you have about our opposition, but the native aliens will not let you run them over with ease. You have already witnessed the power of their warships. Not all of them are as scary as they sound, but the aliens are bound to upgrade their vessels with stolen human tech. Make sure you scout your targets in advance and never let the aliens take you by surprise."

"You do not need to teach the art of war to me, Ves. Besides, if I happen to overlook a few details, the leaders of your clan will definitely give me a reminder, at least the ones that have chosen to remain that is. The Golden Skull Alliance is filled with talents and highly knowledgeable experts. Let them prove that they can manage without you. Our people cannot grow up if you constantly feel compelled to act as their parent."

The older mech designer was right. Ves frequently felt anxious about letting his clansmen resume the Trailblazer Expedition without his supervision, but there was little he could do about it. Benedict was correct about needing to let go and allow his clansmen to bloom by themselves.

"The New Elites Program is able to offer anyone a pathway to the top, but they have to rely on their own efforts for the most part." Ves remarked. "It's harsh but fair. I guess that is the only way that the Red Two can whip people into shape to the point where they can adequately resist the aliens."

Master Benedict turned and faced Ves directly. "Failure is inevitable, you know that? Sooner or later, we will collide against a more powerful alien force and suffer severe casualties as a consequence. The Larkinsons you regard as your friends and family may perish in large numbers. Not even our expert pilots are exempt from this. Are you prepared to let them continue their expeditions knowing that they may pay the ultimate price for their ambition?"

Ves closed his eyes and let out a sigh. "I know what you are saying. I am not ignoring this risk. I hope that my clansmen will be able to keep themselves safe for a long time, but if they want to become a linelighter or warfighter so badly, they need to accept the risks that come with these honored positions. Part of the reason why the mechers are pushing the Deep Strike Plan is to weed out the incompetent. Our clansmen must pass the test set by the Fist of Defiance if they want to enjoy the rewards that come with becoming a New Elite."

One of the reasons why a lot of mechers were initially hesitant about the Deep Strike Plan was because it entailed a lot of risks and dangers.

Not everyone could succeed. There would be lots of people who would either overestimate their abilities or suffer a streak of bad luck in the process of fighting against the aliens.

The fault tolerance in any serious battle against a powerful opponent was inherently low!

This meant that even the simplest of errors could lead to lots of deaths.

Ves did not want to experience a future where he would receive news that the expeditionary fleet lost half of their men.

He especially did not want to live in a reality where his closest friends and comrades such as Venerable Joshua Larkinson and Commander Melkor Larkinson died while he was too far away to provide enough assistance!

Still, the probability of that happening shouldn't be too high. The Larkinson Clan had plenty of trump cards, from battle networks to retaining access to the Spirit of Bentheim.

Ves actually felt tempted to bring his upgraded factory ship along his journey to the upper zones, but he would probably become a laughing stock if he did so. The vessel may have reached quasi-first-class standards, but that was just a fancy way of saying that it was still a second-class capital ship in essence!

The first-raters tended to be very snobbish about standards. If Ves wanted to get taken seriously, then he needed to make use of a first-class starship.

The Bluejay Fleet of the Red Association was enough to satisfy this requirement for the time being. He could work towards upgrading the Spirit of Bentheim to a proper first-class factory ship in the following years.

It wouldn't be too difficult to turn her into a ship that wouldn't look too out of place in the most prosperous regions of human space. Much of her hull had already received a lot of high-quality structural renewals in advance.

Ves only needed to find a way to upgrade his flagship's power generators, the computer processors and the superdrives. He then needed to secure enough first-class personnel to man the upgraded systems. That should be enough to barely push the Spirit of Bernheim into first-class territory.

"So what is the Cross Clan's blueprint for the next decade? How do you intend to catch up to me? Will you truly invest your efforts into helping the Crossers that are effectively under your control, or are you thinking about going solo?"

Master Benedict crossed his arms. "Good help is hard to find. You should know that well. Due to the existence of the Cross Network, the Crossers are the most trustworthy and reliable soldiers that I can count upon. It will be difficult and costly to uplift some of them to first-class standards, but this effort is bearable due to the opportunities provided by the New Elites Program. I have to admit that if the Fist of Defiance did not win out, I might have chosen differently. Since that is not the case, I see no need to divest myself from the Cross Clan."

"It sounds as if you have found your people."

"I won't necessarily say that." The Master Mech Designer shook his head. "I do admit that these people have grown on me. They are obedient and adhere to military discipline. They are skilled and motivated enough to embrace the mechs that I have designed for them. Their patriarch is difficult to manage, but other than the Crossers have potential, especially now that we have entered an age where their martial culture fits with the times. Perhaps the only notable fault is that they are not as charming as your Larkinsons."

The Crossers were a bit lacking in terms of diversity and personality.

Ves smirked in response. "Well, your kinship network is overseen by a spirit derived from a serious ace pilot. My clan is watched over by a playful cat. Aside from that, the rules we set and our recruitment policies have all shaped our organizations in different ways. You should loosen up your clan and widen the pool of recruitment if you want to increase its versatility."

"I think we shall stick to our current policies. We have our own ways."

The two mech designers talked a bit more. They shared their visions of the future as well as their plans for the coming years.

Master Benedict Cortez had already begun to make a bit more progress in developing a viable means for his mechs to power their electronic systems through E energy radiation, it was quite impressive how he managed to utilize his Endex System as a springboard into researching a much more powerful version that readily exploited the new circumstances!



As long as he worked fast enough, he had a good chance of making a huge contribution to red humanity. If his work could potentially make conventional power sources unnecessary, then the mechs would definitely (real him well!

Still, competition was fierce. Many other mech designers and researchers aimed to invent similar solutions. Ves wasn't too optimistic that Master Benedict would be able to succeed, but he still had plenty of time to do better in the future.

Master Benedict had a much better chance of becoming a warlord first. No amount of book learning and minor experiences could match what the former fugitive had gone through.

Though the older man had been forced to abandon his old name and life in order to adapt to a more civilized society, it was time for him to go back to his roots.

### Chapter 5303 Goodbye For Now

A part of Ves felt guilty for leaving without bringing along comrades who supported him extensively in the past.

However, people like Master Benedict Cortez had their own lives. They couldn't abandon their own friends, family, support network and arrangements on a whim.

They also had their own pride. It was one thing to accept an easy ride to first-class society. It was another thing to do so when the New Elites Program allowed them to move up by relying on their own efforts.

The members of the Golden skull Alliance were all proud and battle-tested. Their many victories had given them the confidence that they could attain anything they wanted as long as they fought hard enough for their goals.

Though Ves had deliberately instilled this sentiment across the entire expeditionary fleet, a part of him wondered whether he had inadvertently created a monster. The Larkinsons and their allies all seemed a bit too eager to go back into the fray. It was as if they didn't know any other way to sustain their current success.

Ves never minded this when he was able to take charge of his forces in person, but he felt considerably less assured when he left this job to other people.

"They will be fine." Gloriana reassured him. "Even with the departure of Saintess Ulrika Vraken and other strong individuals, they still have enough manpower left to take care of themselves."

She was right, though Ves suspected that she mainly held this opinion because she no longer had to bear any of the risks of participating in a dangerous expedition.

Gloriana had complained to Ves enough times about personally subjecting themselves and their children to all of the dangers of the deep frontier when they could safely stay behind.

Now that her wish had finally come true, she no longer felt bothered about what might happen to the remainers.

After all, if a powerful alien fleet happened to smash them apart, she and their children would remain safe hundreds if not thousands of light-years away!

Ves took one last look at the hangar bay of the Spirit of Bentheim.

A crowd of Larkinsons had gathered in order to bid him goodbye.

This would hopefully not be the last time that Ves would ever be able to speak to these Larkinsons in person, but no one was able to predict the future.

It was not quite clear how many of these people would rejoin him at the Premier Branch. The selection process for the EdNet quotas was still ongoing. Many Larkinsons had spent a lot of time refreshing their knowledge so that they could prepare for the upcoming theoretical examinations.

Others were putting in more effort into training in the hopes of earning lots of war merits as a New Elite.

Though his wife was impatient to board the shuttle that would take them away, Ves lingered for a few more minutes in order to chat with a few people.

"How is your body, Joshua?"

"I feel a little more tired than before." The expert pilot said in a weary voice. "My condition wasn't the best after... you know. I was doing fairly well after that, but now that I have donated a lot of blood and a bit of my own flesh, I feel I have returned right back to my previous low point."

"Sorry about that, Joshua. I really needed to harvest as many genuine samples of your blood as possible. Your contribution will greatly assist in my research."

"Can you tell me why you needed my blood, sir? Isn't it easier to just clone it instead?"

Ves shook his head. "I can't tell you what I am using your blood for. I hope you understand. I will tell you how much of a difference you have made to me in the future, but right now I can't say anything more. I cannot rule out the need for additional blood samples. If this happens, be ready to donate a bit more. I will make sure that your blood will get shipped to my location. Hopefully, I will figure out a way to clone your blood cells to the fullest extent so that I can produce them on an industrial scale. Until then, you should probably be prepared to provide samples several times a year. The fresher, the better, so it is best not to stockpile them ahead of time."

It was best to coincide the delivery of blood samples with the periodic shipments of general cultivation elixirs. The Bluejay Fleet's courier vessel was ideally suited for this job.

Though Joshua did not exactly like the idea of his blood being experimented upon, he accepted the reason provided by Ves. If his blood could truly be used to produce a breakthrough, then that was more than worth the minor inconvenience!

Ves briefly chatted with the expert pilot a bit more before he patted Joshua on the shoulder.

"Take care of the fleet and Kctis for me, will you? You can reach out to me if you ever need my help. You know what I can do with the Everchanger, so do not hesitate to ask for my personal intervention if there is an emergency."

"I know. I will try my best not to let our situation deteriorate to this point."

"Good man. I hope I'll see you again in person when you have become an ace pilot. We have access to many different means to facilitate your breakthrough. The time for restraint has passed, so be sure to make liberal use of the transcendence glow if the situation is good enough."

"I understand." Joshua nodded.

The Everchanger was by far the most effective mech that could channel the transcendence glow in the field. The capacity to radiate it across many kilometers of distance at a high intensity would serve as the most powerful advantage of the Larkinson Clan in the coming years!

Access to the transcendence glow was one of the secret bargaining chips that Ves had used to keep the Golden Skull Alliance together.

While Ves was not too worried that the Adelaide Third Fleet and the Boojay Family would want to go their own way after his departure, it was best to give them additional incentives to stick around.

Even if Ves did not value the Adelaides and the Boojays in the long run, they at least provided additional mech and bodies to the expeditionary fleet. Greater numbers provided greater safety.

"By the way, make sure to take your time. Don't be in a rush for quick success. There are still plenty of years before we need you at your absolute best. The first deep strike operations will probably take a minimum of 5 years to get started."

Venerable Joshua knew what Ves was talking about.

"You do not need to remind me of that, sir."

The reason why Ves felt necessary to mention this was because the A7-KE1 General Purpose Pilot Cultivation Elixir had an especially powerful effect on Joshua's resonance strength!

Every other expert pilot who ingested an elixir only advanced their resonance strength by just over 2 laves on average.

In contrast, Joshua's resonance strength growth peaked at 4.1 laves!

The Red Association had never witnessed such an outlier in the past. The mechers eagerly dissected all of the data in order to figure out why the general cultivation elixir responded particularly well to Joshua in particular.

Ves already came up with a plausible explanation in his mind. It was Joshua's domain that was responsible.

For whatever reason, Joshua was probably able to extract more strength from the minute quantity of god pilot blood blended into the vial of elixir. This was a newly discovered advantage and might have considerable implications in the future.

Ves could at least look forward to saving a handful of vials if nothing else. A collection of 500 vials sounded like a lot, but it was actually not that much when it had to be allocated to many different expert pilots!

Not only did he have to supply general cultivation elixirs to the Larkinson and Glory Seeker expert pilots in the expeditionary fleet, he also had to do the same for the expert pilots who currently served in the Warborn Mech Division!

He was already starting to think on how he could exchange a second batch of general cultivation elixirs. Would it be enough for him to contribute his second generation Carmine System when he

completed its development, or did he have to come up with additional bargaining chips in order to persuade the stingy mechers?

Ves could figure that out later. For now, he said goodbye to his favorite expert pilot and moved on to Venerable Tusa Billingslcy-Larkinson.

"Your ability to bypass transphasic energy shields is invaluable, cousin." Ves spoke in an appreciative tone. "If I wasn't so distracted by so many different affairs as of late, I would have spent a few weeks collecting more data and studying how exactly you are able to get through the toughest defenses of our alien adversaries."

Tusa smirked. "I don't think you'll get too much out of studying me. My new ability is intrinsic to my own power. It is also difficult to teach mech pilots who aren't comparable to me. I will try and figure out a way to pass on some of my tricks to the Speed Demons. If they manage to break through one day, they may be similar enough to me that I can pass on my technique outright."

"Hopefully, the Larkinson Army will witness many breakthroughs. This is one of the new priorities of our clan."

"Won't it be too much?" The expert pilot asked in concern. "I mean, we don't have enough mech designers to take care of so many expert mech design projects. I am afraid that all of these necessary projects will delay the upgrade to my own expert mech. My Dark Zephyr is starting to fall behind the times, you know."

"We will hire additional second-class and maybe first-class mech designers when it comes down to it." Ves spoke. "We might even decide to outsource much of the development of initial expert mechs for our new heroes. You don't need to worry about projects getting backed up. I think that I will upgrade every older expert mech to quasi-first-class standards in the coming years. After that, I expect you all to break through to ace pilot before I am willing to overhaul your battle partners more extensively."

Although the use of general cultivation elixirs and the transcendence glow should massively speed up the growth of all of his expert pilots, it would be a bit too difficult for Tusa to break through if his Dark Zephyr was still equivalent to a mid-tier expert mech.

The expert light skirmisher stared out as a machine that was optimized for an expert pilot that had recently broken through. While Ves left enough room for growth to account for two decades of growth, he never expected that the variables would change to such an extent that Tusa would exceed the upper limit of his battle partner in record time!

Ves valued his cousin's capabilities a lot. He could already foresee that the ability to bypass virtually every barrier in a manner that seemed incomprehensible to him would be of enormous use in the future!

The stronger the enemy, the easier they fell once their defenses had been breached!

Every adversary had a weakness. The Dark Zephyr was perfectly positioned to defeat the strongest possible enemies by directly targeting their weak points without fail.

This was an advantage that would only grow in value as they encountered more formidable enemies in the future!

It would be great if Tusa could tutor additional mech pilots into developing similar abilities once they broke through in the future.

If not, then Ves would just have to make sure that Tusa did not die by making his Dark Zephyr strong enough to survive every possible adversity!

Chapter 5304 A New

Leaving the expeditionary fleet at this junction felt bittersweet to Ves.

He always had the notion that he was departing while he had yet to finish the job. It gnawed on him like an incomplete mech design project, it was in his nature to complete his assignments to his satisfaction.

However, this was the right decision to make. Ves already understood the pros and cons. He just found it difficult to reconcile his reason with his emotions.

"The fleet will be okay." Gloriana quietly said as both of them stared out of the window of the departing shuttle.

The Spirit of Benthelm and the hundreds of other starships that comprised the expeditionary fleet grew increasingly smaller.

In fact, Ves could have teleported to the Tarrasque in an instant, but he wanted to leave the fleet the old-fashioned way in order to come to terms with this event.

His departure from the expeditionary fleet felt like closing a chapter in his life. From now on, he would mainly be dealing more directly with first-raters such as mechers, Terrans and Rubarthans.

It had always been his dream to speak with them on an equal or a superior footing. Ves did not want to turn away from this just because he felt reluctant to separate himself from most of his clansmen.

Ves quietly shook his head and turned around. He needed to get used to spending time away from most of his clan. It would take at least 4 years for the first lucky clansmen to graduate from the EdNet and join the Premier Branch.

He had to make do without much of the support and camaraderie that he took for granted after he founded his clan.

While he was confident that he could get over this, he wasn't too sure whether his children could get used to this drastic transition to their lives.

"Mama, will we go school in the Terran Alliance?" Little Marvaine asked as he sat on his mother's lap.

Gloriana kissed her youngest child on the head. "I am still discussing this with your father. It depends on our schedule. If we decide to stay in the New Constantinople for a number of years, it is not necessary to enroll you into a virtual school. I would much prefer it if you can make friends with Terran children in person. These contacts may serve you well when you have grown up. Are you looking forward to that?"

"I like making friends!"

Aurelia and Andraste paid close attention to this conversation. They interrupted their playtime with their cats to inquire more about this situation.

"Will we get enrolled into local schools as well?"

"There is no reason to treat you differently, my girls. The original reasons why we tried to enroll you into virtual schools are twofold. First, we expected to reside on a roaming fleet on a long-term basis. Second, we did not have the confidence that any schooling within reach was sufficient enough to meet our standards. Neither of these two reasons are necessarily valid anymore now that we are changing our plan."

The children all perked up at this. They roughly understood the difference between physical schooling and virtual schooling. The latter could be just as effective as the former, but the downside was that it was too hard to play with children their age!

Even though the Hyper Chamber did a fantastic job at minimizing the differences, there were still enough barriers to make it awkward to forge true friendships across enormous distances.

Ves sighed as he took his seat inside the shuttle. "It would be best if we can stay in the New Constantinople long enough until each of you are ready to enroll into different universities, but that is not politically viable. If we want to preserve the Larkinson Clan's independence, we cannot afford to show too much favoritism to any major human group. We'll probably have to make an arrangement where we will rotate from one first-rate colonial state to another on a periodic basis."

He did not really mind this as he always liked to travel around, but he felt a little bad for his children. Frequent travel would make it difficult for their children to maintain friendships over the years.

Already, they were feeling glum about getting separated from the Larkinson children who resided on the Spirit of Bentheim.

Ves believed that the gradual establishment of the Premier Branch should provide enough relief in the future.

Once the Larkinson Clan established a serious presence in first-class society, there should be enough trustworthy young clansmen around for his kids to make friends for life.

He continued to discuss possible schooling options with his wife until the shuttle had finally reached its destination.

The hangar bay of the Tarrasque was actually a lot more cramped for a ship of her size. Much other volume was dedicated towards increasing her direct combat capabilities. This was why she didn't have much room for first-class multipurpose mechs and other vehicles.

"We'll be staying aboard this ship for a couple days." Ves gently told his children. "The mechs are more than willing to give you a tour throughout this vessel. There is a lot of cool and expensive tech inside this hull."

That interested the two youngest children in particular!

"Can I get inside the cockpit of one of those first-class multipurpose mechs?!" Andraste eagerly asked as she held Lucky in her arms!

"Meow."

"I will see what I can do, pumpkin." He generously told his daughter. "As for you, behave. Don't eat anything that you shouldn't. I have already spoken to the mechers about supplying meals to you. You won't go hungry on this trip."

The gem cat looked skeptical, but he did not complain any further.

"Can I get close to the big guns of this ship?" Marvaine asked next.

"I will ask whether that is permissible. Military tech like this is fairly sensitive, so the mechers might not give permission. I am sure that they will still be willing to show you other awesome tech."

Ves kept answering questions as he and his family moved deeper into the hull so that they could settle in their assigned stateroom.

In the meantime, the Bluejay Fleet separated from the expeditionary fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance and began its swift journey to the Terran Alliance.

The modern RA warships were all equipped with high-quality superdrives, so the journey shouldn't take long at all. The mechers could even speed up their journey by utilizing their portal jump technology, but the priority was not high enough to justify their use. There was no need to rush to New Constantinople.

Later that night, Ves and his family dined with Joshua and a handful of other high-ranking officers of the Bluejay Fleet.

Saintess Ulrika Vraken declined to join in despite the fact that she was coming along this trip as well. This was mainly due to the pressure she would exert onto everyone else.

While none of the mentalities of the people in the dining room was weak, it was still a bit strenuous to relax in the presence of such a powerful figure.

As exotic dishes materialized on the tables, the Larkinsons and the mechers gradually got to know each other.

"My husband has always spoken highly of you." Gloriana said as she started to cut into her thin and delicate steak. "Is it possible for you to collaborate with us on a number of mech designs?"

Jovy shook his head. "Not immediately. My time is precious, and I have a reputation to uphold. I have already told your husband that I will not be participating in any second-class mech design projects. I am willing to collaborate with you if you happen to present a serious first-class mech design project where my input is an integral part of your vision."

"I shall take your requirements into account when I am ready to plan out our future first-class mech design projects." Gloriana seriously responded.

"Are there any restrictions on who we can sell our mechs to if we enlist your cooperation?" Ves inquired.

"Do not expect any of our collaborations to be put to use by the armed forces of the Red Association. Our needs are already being met by numerous renowned Star Designers and many highly accomplished Master Mech Designers. It is permissible to sell our mechs to the public as long as I do not incorporate any restricted or classified tech in their design."

That was exactly what Ves wanted to hear. "Great! I think we can make a big difference if we pool our efforts together. I have been dreaming about it for several years."

This was another reason for Ves to quickly become a qualified first-class mech designer.

Probability Manipulation was too powerful of a design philosophy!

If it was as insane as Ves expected it to be, a living mech that could manipulate probabilistic outcomes would likely be a terror on the battlefield!

Of course, becoming a first-class mech designer at the Senior-level was not easy. It would take years before Ves could collaborate with Jovy on a proper mech design project.

While Ves and Gloriana continued to talk about mech design with Jovy, their children started to chat with the other mecher officers.

Despite the enormous gaps in age and status, the professional officers of the Red Association did not belittle the children.

The fact that they were the direct descendants of a tier 3 galactic citizen was enough to treat them in a sincere fashion!

"Is it hard for you to learn how to pilot a first-class multipurpose mech?" Andraste curiously asked the highest ranking mech pilot at the table.

"It depends. It is challenging to pass all of the courses in a mech academy if your talent is not as high and if your augmentations are not up to standard." Major Simon Jankowski responded without much emotion. "I grew up within the Association, so my circumstances are better. Most first-class mech academies have formed their study programs to challenge potentates with B-grade genetic aptitudes to their limits. They can fail to graduate if they do not work hard enough to master all of the skills and theories that are needed to pilot the best mechs designed by our race."

Mech pilots with genetic aptitudes this high were already rare! For the mechers to push their mech cadets to this extent showed that they were more than willing to discard people who performed just a little bit below standard!

Andraste tilted her head. "What about A-grade potentates? Will they have it easier?"

"It depends on what they want, young lady." The RA mech officer smiled. "I have studied alongside many A-grade mech cadets several decades ago. There are those that lean too much on their talent and do not feel as motivated to make the most out of their studies. There are also those that aspire to become god pilots and train themselves past their breaking point. In my personal experience, I have found that neither group of mech cadets are able to make promising attainments in the future. For example, I outranked the vast majority of the A-grade mech pilots of my old class on this day. I have done this despite being held back by my B- genetic aptitude."

"Ohhh... that is impressive! How hard do you need to study to do as good as you, major?"

"There is more to piloting mechs than studying." The man responded. "I am not qualified to give you any actual study advice. We do not even know if you will be able to develop the right genetic aptitude. If you are among the small proportion of 10-year olds who are eligible to enroll in a mech academy, then my personal advice to you is to seek out competition as much as possible. There is no better motivator to polish your skills than to suffer the sting of defeat in duels against your



fellow classmates. Each of you have attended similar lessons, so each of you have a good chance to defeat your peers. If you are unable to do so, then you only have yourself to blame. If you do not want this to happen, then just get good."

Just get good. That was easy enough, right?

## Chapter 5305 Diverging Training Approaches

"Wow. Is this a first-class laser gun?" Little Andraste asked as she held a sleek and light energy weapon in her small but growing hands.

The advanced white-coated armament had just shrunk in size as internal mechanisms had folded it into a more compact form to fit the grip of its current wielder.

"It is a training pistol designed for children. The name is not important. It comes with many different features that assist in training, but in my opinion they are entirely dispensable." Saintess Ulrika Vraken spoke as she held her own adult-sized version of the same product line.

"Huh?" The red-headed girl looked up at the Hexer ace pilot. "Isn't gear important? Having a good weapon is just as crucial as a good mech!"

The powerful member of the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty smirked. "Is that what your mech designer parents told you? They are not wrong. Gear can make an enormous difference. Your practice weapon for example has enough power to punch through the defenses of any second-class infantry soldier with a single pull of the trigger as long as you have disabled all of its safety settings. However, if a real fight occurs, I can bet 100 percent that the soldier in question will gain the upper hand against you despite the fact that his loadout only cost a fraction as much as that first-class pistol of yours."

"What? That's impossible!" Andraste sputtered. "That is like claiming that a second-class mech can defeat a first-class multipurpose mech in a mech duel, it's impossible! The difference in tech, materials is too big!"

Her current instructor looked anything but impressed at the moment.

"Tech and materials are indeed important, but you are forgetting about one crucial factor. Any fight between two intelligent living beings is also decided by other factors. Skill. Tactics. Confidence. Motivation. Willpower. Differences in each of these areas can mean the difference between victory and defeat. If you want to achieve superiority, it is not enough to rely on your parents to gain the latest toys. You need to maximize your advantages and excel in as many of the aforementioned variables as possible. Only then can you proclaim your superiority over opponents."

Andraste already started to soak up Ulrika Vraken's insightful words like a sponge.

"I understand. Gaining access to better weapons is straightforward. Increasing your skill and such is not as easy. You need to put in a lot of effort into training and maintaining discipline. My swordsmanship tutor taught me that as well. What if I am in a position where I am forced to fight against someone stronger? Not everyone is able to fight the opponent of their choosing. My papa suffered a lot from this problem in the past. He still managed to win, though!"

Saintess Ulrika crossed her arms. "Do not think that you can replicate what your father has done. He is blessed, and he is craftier than he looks. Unlike in those unrealistic action dramas, it is not customary for the weak to defeat the strong. Your father has invented many powerful weapons and

other means that have enabled him to crush his enemies. From my perspective, he is not weak at all. He is a wolf disguised as a sheep. Any other predator who thought they could devour a sheep always ended up turning into your father's prey instead. The Fridaymen have made this mistake too many times."

"Ooohh..." Andraste looked impressed.

"We have gone off-topic. Let us get back to your instruction, if you have decided to embrace the career of a soldier, you will come across a variety of weapons. This can include pistols, submachine guns, shotguns, rifles, cannons and more exotic weapon types that haven't even been invented yet. Each of them have their own set of properties, skills and tactics. A third-rater or a second-rater is expected to familiarize herself with the basics of each weapon type before choosing to specialize in one or two of them. This is usually their limit."

This was clearly not an approach that was suitable for a young girl who possessed the opportunity to receive first-class schooling.

"How many weapons do I need to master?" Andraste hesitantly asked.

"All of them." Ulrika mercilessly answered. "A first-rater is expected to accomplish more than any other mortal soldier. Since this is the standard that you are expected to meet, you will not be able to escape this requirement no matter if you become a mech pilot, an infantry soldier or even a military officer. Standards are high because a first-class professional is expected to be superior to a second-class professional on every conceivable front, if a person cannot satisfy this condition, then Terran and Rubarthan employers would rather dismiss her entirely because they do not wish to embarrass themselves."

In a society where advanced augmentations and stellar education could turn every ordinary person into a decent supersoldier, many organizations simply raised their recruitment standards to an insane height in order to prevent useless bums from taking up important jobs.

First-raters already took this for granted, but it was extremely difficult for second-raters to adapt to this extreme mentality.

In fact, part of the reason why the first-raters demanded so much excellence from their employees was to prevent too many second-raters from entering into their society!

Otherwise, a lot of jobs for relatively normal first-raters would get snapped up by second-raters who just happened to possess good talent and spent their entire lives on polishing a few skills to the limit.

Though Andraste did not think she would fail to meet the inflated standards set by the first-raters, that didn't mean she looked forward to all of this repetitive training.

"Ketis never told me about this. When she taught me, she always insisted that I should choose a single sword to master after I have tried all of the other ones out. She told me that a single sword is all that is needed to break all barriers!"

Saintess Ulrika nodded in respect. "With an attitude like that, it is no surprise that she has become a swordmaster worthy of note. I will not say that she is wrong, nor claim that the more comprehensive approach of the first-raters is correct. They are only two different outlooks towards what it means to become the ideal soldier. The reason why their strategies diverge so greatly in the

first place is due to their diverging circumstances. Ketis was originally a third-rater, so she lacks the augmentations and opportunities to invest in too many skills, she and her fellow Swordmaidens are already burdened with the need to master the greatsword. The Terrans and the Ruharthans are different. Their mech pilots are expected to gain a high amount of proficiency in swords, spears, hammers and many other weapon types. Now let me ask you a question. Are you closer to a Swordmaiden or are you closer to a first-rater?"

"...The latter."

"Good. I do not like it when people lie to me. Before you are ready to defeat your opponent, you need to know yourself. This means that you need to be frank about your current capabilities and what you can accomplish in the future through training. The fact of the matter is that you will be wasting far too much of your talent and training time if you only invest in a single swordsmanship style."

"Won't my chances of breaking through be higher if I only focus on a single weapon and fighting style?" Andraste asked.

Saintess Ulrika smiled in response. "That is a common theory. You may be right, but is this enough to satisfy you? This is equivalent to thinking that you are a champion when you have barely earned a passing grade on an exam. You can master many more skills in the same amount of time. Once you have begun to master the art of wielding dozens of different weapon types, you will be able to combine what you have learned from each individual skill and develop an overall fighting proficiency that allows you to make effective use of any possible weapon no matter whether it is conventional or unconventional. That is the goal that you must strive for in order to become a powerful first-class soldier."

Though Andraste did not entirely think that Ulrika's argument was correct, it was hard for her to argue back against a powerful ace pilot!

"Think back on the scenario that I have described to you." The Hexer champion spoke. "Ordinarily, a second-class mech stands no chance against a first-class multipurpose mech, but if the difference in skill and other pilot qualities are great enough, this may no longer be the case. If I am piloting my Macharia Excelsia, I am absolutely confident I can defeat any single first-class multipurpose mech that is stationed on this ship."

"Really?! Papa told me that the mechs of the Red Association are too advanced!"

"He is partially correct." Ulrika admitted. "I am confident I can defeat an isolated first-class multipurpose mech in a mech duel, but it is a different story if there are multiple of them working together. My chances of winning will drop even further if any of these first-class multipurpose mechs enjoy the support of a ship. The reason why that is the case is because the mechs will be able to take advantage of shield link technology to pool their defenses together."

"So tech does matter."

"I can assure you that I can vanquish a squad of first-class multipurpose mechs with ease so long as I have access to a first-class ace mech."

Andraste and Saintess Ulrika became increasingly more engaged in their discussion.

Meanwhile, another pair of guests were making use of the gun range.

The two women weren't the only guests who decided to exercise their skills at this time.

Ves had actually brought along both of his daughters, though only Andraste was in need of a serious tutoring session from an ace pilot.

He and Aurelia did not possess much talent or enthusiasm for marksmanship, so they only made do with a quick refresher lesson from Nitaa before they started to plink their practice weapons at distant targets.

Of course, even if they never intended to excel in personal combat, their results were still considerably above average compared to their peers!

Ves just figured that this was a decent way to pass the time while the Bluejay Fleet remained in transit.

The trip from the Torald Middle Zone to the Agammemnon Upper Zone was projected to take a couple of weeks. This was a remarkably fast travel time given that the Bluejay Fleet had to make their way out of the territory that was administratively included under the umbrella of the Red Ocean Union and venture deeper into the Terran Alliance.

The rules, customs and power distribution was substantially different in the territories claimed by the Terran Alliance. Although the Red Two nominally had the greatest say in all of red humanity's space, in practice the Terrans called the shots!

So long as the people within Terran space did not engage in egregious taboos such as playing around with weapons of mass destruction or engaging in indiscriminate slaughter, the mechers and the fleters would remain in the background.

The first-rate colonial superstates always tried to do everything possible to minimize the presence of their current overlords!

Given that the Terrans and the Rubarthans both had the allegiance of several Star Designers and god pilots, they possessed enough bargaining power to gain a bit more autonomy than usual.

Ves was sure that the relationships between the two major power blocs had become even more complicated now that the Red Ocean was functionally cut off from the Milky Way, but he hadn't entered the scene long enough to figure out any further nuances.

In any case, all of that could wait. He first wanted to make up for his previous absence by spending quality time with his children.

"Aurelia, do you want to learn a trick?"<sup>1</sup>

"What is it, papa?"

"Let me show you, dear."

Blinky emerged from Ves' head and flew towards the projected target in the distance. Ves lifted up his practice weapon and fired a considerably more accurate burst of laser beams!

Aurelia looked impressed. "You are so much better than before. Andraste is still better, though."

Ves coughed at that. "Well, Andraste's genes are optimized for combat. Mine... are not. This is why it is handy for me to use my permanent bond with my companion spirit as a targeting guide' of sorts

to improve my aim. Your sister has no need to rely on this trick, but you don't have the time or talent to become as precise as her. Try it out yourself. Once you have mastered this trick on a stationary target, you can practice it on moving ones. This is considerably harder as you will have to rely on real skills for this, but you can improve that over time."

"Okay, papa..."

## Chapter 5306 The Normal Way

"So what is your plan, Ves?"

"I'm not too sure of that myself. I don't have enough information about what I can do these days, and my situation is changing so quickly that a plan can quickly become obsolete the next day. I am just taking this as I go. This is why I still have no idea how long I will stay in New Constantinople. I could be sticking around for a couple of months to a couple of years."

Jovy Armalon did not look pleased with this answer. He and Ves had gathered in private again so that the Red Association would have a better idea of what their newest tier 3 galactic citizen had in mind.

From what it sounded like, Ves might not have any solid ideas floating in his mind at the moment!

It was no wonder that the predictive software returned so many deviating results. Ves was still blundering around!

Jovy sighed. "You can make a lot of people's lives better if you form a solid plan and stick to it. You have great talent and a proven ability to come up with fantastic innovations. The second generation Carmine System that you have described to me earlier sounds highly promising, if somewhat dangerous. We are more than willing to provide you with support to conduct experiments related to your Blood Knight Project. However, it is difficult for us to anticipate what you may have in store next time."

What could Ves say in response?

"I can't tell you much. I come up with most of my ideas through inspiration. You can't really predict or anticipate stuff like this. I only came up with the innovations for the second generation Carmine System a few days ago. I did not put any thought into the possibility of improving the Blood Pact by upgrading the blood itself. I can only tell you that I am also working towards developing fourth generation luminar crystal weapons. I think I can make them a lot more special and powerful by incorporating hyper materials into their construction. The Gray Lotus and the upgraded Ignitron rifle are prototypical examples of this new design."

As a person assigned to monitor and accompany Ves, Jovy had grown quite familiar with luminar crystal technology.

"It is rather impressive how those two weapons can directly convert E energy into metaphysical effects that add powerful net properties to attacks." The RA Senior spoke. "The research team that is still engaged in this alien tech has managed to produce similar results by copying your methods with our own batch of hypers. We have found that not every hyper can increase the threat of a luminar crystal weapon, but the results are not promising enough compared to what we have accomplished with more conventional alternatives."

Ves was still bound by an agreement that he had made with the Red Association about sharing technological advances related to luminar crystal technology.

Although the mechtechs would probably steal his tech without this agreement, at least Ves was able to get a lot of valuable data in return.

The only problem was that much of the mechtechs who were originally assigned to study this branch of alien technology resided in the Milky Way.

Very few of them had been stationed in the Red Ocean when the Great Severing occurred, which meant that a lot less of them were left to spend their time delving into luminar crystal technology.

These RA researchers were already busy with many other projects, especially ones related to E energy and hyper materials. The main priority of the Red Association was to develop new applications that could strengthen conventional technological products.

This was why Ves did not expect to receive too much support from the mechtechs related to this field.

"There is more to luminar crystal technology than what is obvious on the surface, Jovy. I have found that it synergizes well with both E energy and living mechs. It would be a mistake to dismiss this tech just because it is alien in nature. Sure, there is still stuff that we do not entirely understand, but its power is undeniable, especially now that we have entered a more favorable environment. Now that we live in a time where too many mechs are struggling to penetrate the transphasic energy shields of alien warships, they urgently need access to an affordable means of boosting their firepower."

Though Ves made a lot of sense, Jovy shook his head.

"I know what you mean, but do not underestimate our research gains in our attempts to improve conventional energy weapons. You will learn what we have worked on to improve the firepower of every mech in the following months. Some of them are based on phasewater technology while others are based on hyper technology. We are already working on combining both, but I am not too up to date on research in this highly promising field."

This was important news! Jovy essentially confirmed that the Red Association was ready to announce the next mech generation in the near future!

Everything was about to change once again.

This time, the shift in tech would be much more expansive than the introduction of the Phasewater Generation!

After all, phasewater remained fairly scarce all of this time. Ordinary people had no way to take advantage of transphasic products.

Hyper technology offered greater promise. A lot of ordinary materials throughout the dwarf galaxy were being transformed into different hyper materials. Even if much of it was fairly weak and lower quality, they still introduced a lot of new ways for products to derive additional power from E energy radiation!

This meant that the spread and penetration of hyper technology would quickly exceed that of phasewater technology and become the dominant trend at the start of the Age of Dawn!

"Arc you sure your Association wants to introduce all of that new tech so quickly?" Ves asked with a tinge of doubt. "I mean, if you take your time and wait for a year or so, you'll be able to introduce a much more expansive, systematic and most importantly tested set of technologies and technological standards."

"Those are my thoughts as well. We have discovered that there are numerous risks to working with hyper materials that are completely new and unfamiliar. It would be better if we can spend more time on verifying the safety and reliability of much of the new tech, but our hand is forced. The Red Fleet doesn't want to wait that long."

Even though It seemed that mech generations had little to do with the fleeters, this was not the case.

A lot of the tech introduced by the mechers were applicable to both mechs and starships. Advances in materials, fundamental sciences and so on did not discriminate between combat platforms.

Ves couldn't figure out why the fleeters wanted to publish their findings sooner rather than later.

"Why the hurry?"

"Well, we have received word that the Red Fleet is working on a large initiative that must be unveiled fairly soon." Jovy revealed. "Part of that initiative also involves the release of tech that is presumably related to the construction of starships and warships. I believe the fleeters are finally ready to unveil their new frameworks on how to fight enemies that are growing stronger and develop greater powers by the minute."

That sounded interesting. The fleeters had been laying low while the mechers hogged all of the attention. That might change in the near future if the Red Fleet decided to take a more proactive stance in society.

Ves and Jovy continued to chat and speculate about the future.

Compared to previous conversations, Jovy had become a lot more candid and informative than before.

As a tier 3 galactic citizen, it wouldn't do for Ves to remain uninformed and in the dark about the major developments that were taking place across the new frontier

Ves appreciated these talks a lot. Even if many of the topics had little to do with him, they still painted a broader and more detailed picture of how red humanity was doing in this new era.

The good news was that the recent announcement of the Deep Strike Plan and the New Elites Program hadn't destabilized human space all of a sudden.

Most people still continued on with their lives as if nothing had changed. Only the upper layer of society had begun to make a lot of preparations for the dangerous operations to come.

In addition to that, a lot of forces that were previously involved in ordinary wars and conflicts were preparing to venture to the frontlines.

Many troops could already earn a significant amount of benefits if they became linefighters right away!

The sooner they took part in the defense of human space, the more war merits they would earn.

Earning war merits early on was extremely helpful because they allowed forces to strengthen their assets several years before the deep strike operations commenced!

"By the way, Ves, there is another interesting development that you might want to learn about. Do you remember the time when you had to attend a secret session on hitman phase lords?"

Ves remembered that alright. The mechers hadn't given him much choice about that. He still resented that. His rise in status should at least prevent incidents like this from happening again.

"Let me guess. Experiments aren't going well."

"It is still too early to say, but from what I have heard, you are correct." Jovy said with a sigh. "Our researchers have attempted to apply the strange orven ritual that you have talked about, but every attempt results in a fatal outcome."

"I warned you that this would happen. This stuff is too dangerous. You will need to make additional preparations to increase your success rate. Blindly trying to mess with an important piece of yourself in the hopes of becoming a phase lord is foolish."

Jovy did not look disturbed. "It is alright. Our researchers know what they are getting into. The test subjects should not be anyone important. Many of them actually comprise of orven prisoners of war. Since this ritual was developed by this race in the first place, it should work best on them. However, it seems that the method utilized by these aliens is too unreliable."

"It mostly has to do with qualifications, I think." Ves said. "The vast majority of orvens are part of the lower castes of orven society. Their names are shorter and their growth circumstances are much poorer. It is the higher caste members of the orven race that you should target. These fellows are stronger and more developed. This gives them a slightly higher chance of success."

"Our researchers have the same idea. This is why we have increased the priority on such prisoners, but it will take time to capture enough of them to resume our experiments. In the meantime, we can only settle for other test subjects."

"Why did you bring this up, Jovy? I have already provided my input on this matter. I have been quite frank and forthcoming. I am sure you guys can figure out the rest."

"That may be true, but our researchers have begun to assume that they attain results much faster if you participate in this secret project."

That caused Ves to straighten his back. "You want me to serve as an external consultant to your human phase lord project?"

Jovy shook his head. "Not an external consultant. You are already a part of us, Ves. Have you forgotten about that already? However, your guess is mostly correct. Our secret research team does not require you to contribute to its research on a full-time basis. We only need you in an advisory capacity. Does this interest you in any way? I can tell you that this is an easy and cost-effective way for you to earn MTA merits, especially if the project manages to produce solid results."

Thai certainly intrigued Ves. He was open to this offer so long as it was rewarding enough.

"How much?"

"At minimum, a few million MTA merits. At most, 50 million MTA merits."

Ves immediately lost his enthusiasm. "That's not enough, Jovy."



"It is when you consider how little commitments that we demand from you. This is how most mech designers earn their merits, by the way. We cannot all be like you and risk our lives in dangerous expeditions all of the time. I think it is good for you to get accustomed to earning merits the normal way."

"I'll think about it, then..."

## Chapter 5307 The Overlord Project

The invitation to advise on the research project related to creating human phase lords was actually a great opportunity.

Ves did not need to spend a lot of hours in order to earn easy MTA merits. Even if the research project never produced a single success, he could still collect a couple of million MTA merits while doing almost nothing!

However, he knew this offer wasn't as simple as it seemed.

If there was one thing about the mechers that Ves had learned, it was that they never lost out on a transaction!

The reason why the Red Association didn't demand all of his time was because it was unnecessary.

What the mechers truly wanted from him was his knowledge and his guidance.

Perhaps they already figured out that he had hid a lot of important information.

Perhaps they believed that his personal experiences might offer effective guidance.

Whatever the case, spending a few million MTA merits on a venture that might end up in failure was not that much of an expense to the Association!

If the research project happened to fulfill its primary mission, then the gains from figuring out a practical method to create human phase lords was worth way more than 50 million MTA merits!

The latter was one of the reasons why Ves did not have a good impression of this offer. He felt like this was yet another attempt of the mechers to rip him off. Given how powerful phase lords could become, figuring out their cultivation should be worth much more than the price of a first-class multipurpose mech!

Despite feeling Insulted about the low price, Ves did not close the door immediately. He Instead wanted to see if he could fish for a higher reward.

"I am really busy as of late, Jovy. Not only do I have to work on half-a-dozen different design projects, I also have to spend my time on studying heaps of knowledge related to first-class mech design. If that is not enough, I also have to spend a significant amount of time on developing improved versions of luminar crystal weapons and the Carmine System. Oh, don't forget about my teaching obligations either. I take my responsibilities seriously, so it is not acceptable for me to neglect my students just because my schedule has become too full."

His friend stared at him with knowing eyes.

"Do not be so quick to refuse this opportunity to participate in this research project. Interest is high. The contribution you can make is considerable as human phase lords can grant us an additional means to resist the native aliens. Furthermore, advances in this field may be highly relevant to your

own individual condition. You will gain full access to any discoveries and developments on this topic. What is also important is that you can start to integrate in the high-level research circle. You will come into contact with many renowned experts and scientists and have a chance to become acquainted with them. These contacts will serve you well in the future whenever you need support of this nature. Most of these people are more than willing to reciprocate the assistance that you have given."

Give and take. That was what Ves took from levy's argument. A lot of researchers were inherently selfish and wanted to keep all of their best discoveries to themselves.

However, selfishness did not benefit their greater society. In order to encourage these stingy scientists to share their best works, the Association built a research environment that was based on mutual exchanges.

When Ves looked at the invitation from this perspective, he felt it was actually a lot more reasonable.

Sure, 50 million MTA merits for a successful result still did not sound like much, but it was the intangibles that served as true reward for his cooperation.

The research project wasn't necessarily the most important part about this offer. What truly mattered was that if Ves accepted it, he would begin to work more intimately together with the mechers!

This was a good way to pull Ves into the orbit of the Red Association. He predicted that as long as he continued to cooperate with the mechers on other research projects, he would eventually discover that he had become so entangled with them that it was difficult to separate himself from their crowd!

Still, that would only happen if Ves became complacent. He believed that he could prevent this scenario from happening so long as he exercised enough control.

"I don't think it is difficult for me to make friends with highly accomplished researchers these days." Ves noted. "Whether it is my current contributions or my future potential, few people are willing to dismiss me. I don't think I need to participate in this project to improve my friends circle."

levy smiled. "That may be true, but this is different. Human phase lords is a topic of great interest to our Association. We do not possess a sufficient understanding of our enemy. Being able to develop their powers as humans will help us decipher their strengths and weaknesses, allowing us to combat them on more favorable terms. Your contribution can save us many lives in the long run. We may even be able to train our own army of human phase lords that can effectively combat this threat."

The mechers were playing the 'for the good of red humanity' card again.

Ves was not immune to this tactic. He knew it was important to do his part in strengthening his own civilization, if only because he did not want to become a fugitive in alien territory.

He reluctantly shook his head. "I don't know, Jovy... It is unclear how many years this research project will last. What if it stretches on for decades? I also don't want to spend so much time only to get 50 million MTA merits in return while you guys take all of the credit."

"We will not withhold your name if you happen to facilitate a breakthrough in our research." Jovy assured. "As for the reward, we can be flexible. I know that you are eager to obtain more EdNet Quotas. Let us set this as a reward instead. I can promise you 2000 single-use EdNet quotas if the research project has produced a successful result."

Ves snorted at that counter-offer!

"Don't give me that crap! My clan hardly has any use for a quota that expires after it is used only once! Give me permanent quotas instead and I will do my utmost to create the second human phase lord in existence!"

Jovy's mouth twitched at that. "Permanent quotas do not grow on trees like your companion fruits, Ves. I am not even authorized to give you this as a reward."

"Then contact Master Goldstein or whoever is responsible! I am sure there is a person above you who has the right to dispense permanent quotas."

No matter how many times Jovy tried to sway Ves from demanding a permanent quota, he failed.

Ves took a strong stance because he wasn't actually that much interested in participating in this research project. The other benefits that Jovy mentioned so far sounded interesting enough, but that was far from enough to trade for his services.

The only unique reward that the Red Association could offer was EdNet quotas. None of the other major human powers were able to promise anything comparable.

Unfortunately, the RA's monopoly on the EdNet meant that Jovy could still drive a fairly hard bargain. It was not as if Ves could go to a competitor.

The two mech designers continued to negotiate for a while until they finally hashed out an agreement.

Jovy eventually let out a tired breath. "I am not allowed to go higher than this, Ves. Our final offer is 5 permanent EdNet quotas upon failure and 100 permanent EdNet quotas upon a complete success. The latter is defined by the development of a reliable, practical and systematic human phase lord cultivation method. Any result that is inferior to this description will entitle you to less quotas. We will not impose any time commitments on you, but if your contributions are deemed too trivial, you will not be able to earn the minimum reward. Is this agreeable?"

That caused Ves to smile. "I'll take it. I'm not too happy with the minimum figure, but I am glad that you have raised the upper limit. You won't regret it. If you happen to require my assistance on other important research projects, please be ready to offer further permanent EdNet quotas. I am sure I can squeeze a bit more time in my schedule on an extra obligation."

"I am not sure if our Association is ready to deal with you so soon again. As I have told you before, the EdNet is a service that is permanently in high demand. Each reserved quota adds another logistical burden to us. Permanent quotas are worse as the total cost of letting an unknown quantity of people make use of them in perpetuity is astronomical."

Ves wasn't fooled. "Don't sound so pathetic, Jovy. The Red Association is still one of the most powerful and wealthy organizations in this dwarf galaxy. You guys will gain access to even more

resources if we are able to turn this war around. The burden imposed by these permanent quotas is trivial compared to the immense amount of value that your Star Designers can provide. Besides, the value of developing a viable human phase lord cultivation method is worth way more still."

It was not quite clear which side managed to gain the upper hand in the end. It was difficult to weigh the value of such matters.

Though neither side was completely happy with the deal, they were at least content that they did not lose out too badly.

"By the way, don't forget about adding in a clause in the contract that allows my clan to make unrestricted use of it." Ves reminded his friend. "I'm not sure if my clan will ever decide to make use of the results, but I want the option to be available for my clansmen."

"Hm, this is not an unacceptable request so long as your people do not spread the method without authorization."

Jovy briefly made a few arrangements before he presented a complete contract.

Ves carefully checked it over and found no obvious problems. The Association generally didn't screw people over like this as its credibility and image of fairness was paramount.

Perhaps a lawyer might find a few hidden traps here and there, but so long as they weren't a big deal, Ves didn't care too much.

If the mechers ever dared to go against the spirit of the agreement, then Ves would just increase his engagement with the Terrans and the Rubarthans instead.

Jovy smiled when Ves finally signed the contract. "Excellent. You have made the right decision, Ves. The project leader will contact you shortly to swap ideas and allow you to offer your critique."

"That's no problem as long as it happens outside of my existing obligations. Who is the project leader, by the way?"

"Master Xena Wintress has recently been put in charge of the Overlord Project. The Xenotechnician himself has taken a greater interest in this research after you have given our Association hope that it can be done."

Ves had a good impression of Master Xena Wintress. She reminded him a lot of Master Moira Willix.

She had been the one who had given him his initial 10 permanent EdNet quotas during the Survivalist conference, so it wasn't a surprise that she had the power to award additional ones.

If Ves developed a closer relationship with Master Wintress, he might be able to squeeze even more permanent EdNet quotas out of her! He refused to believe that a representative of the Xenotechnician couldn't scrounge up a few hundred quotas from her back pocket.

He grinned. "I look forward to cooperating with Master Wintress on this Overlord Project of yours."

Chapter 5308 Respect And Fear

After concluding a deal with the Red Association, Ves started to correspond with Master Xena Wintress.

For a long time, the Overlord Project made virtually no progress into fulfilling its primary goal. A lot of researchers had come in to propose theories and conduct experiments, only to squander the Association's resources. They expended a lot of precious phasewater only to learn what didn't work while leaving a lot of dead bodies behind.

That said, the Overlord Project hadn't completely wasted their time. They not only learned all of the ways phasewater could be lethal to organisms, but also developed limited solutions that could limit the damage caused by accidents.

These developments were actually highly relevant to Ves!

He thought back on his daydream about embarking on a grand design to create the ultimate artificial phase lord god machine.

If he made use of the mitigation tech invented by the research team, he could increase his safety factor and prevent himself and his evolving Carmine biomech from getting torn apart by uncontrolled spatial disturbances!

This was not the time and place for him to get invested in such a ridiculous project. It was way too soon to irrevocably bind himself to a highly experimental biomech that incorporated an excess amount of untested technologies.

Ves didn't even know whether the Blood Knight Project was viable!

As much as he wanted to test out the mitigation tech that he just gained access to, he needed to stop getting sidetracked all of the time. He already had enough work on his plate. Promising to help out in the Overlord Project already added another burden to his considerable workload.

Fortunately, Master Xena Wintress expressed a lot of understanding towards Ves' difficult position.

"Every serious mech designer suffers from the same problem. None of us have enough time to explore all of our ideas and complete every project that holds our interest. I am aware that your recent rise to prominence has added many new commitments to your life. We hesitated whether it is appropriate for us to request your assistance, but the importance of our work is so great that we do need your active guidance. The clarification that you have given to us during the secret conference session has already proven your qualifications."

Ves leaned back on the admittedly comfortable hovering chair and stared back at the projection of the RA Master Mech Designer.

He wasn't thinking about the actual problems of the Overlord Project at the moment.

Developing a viable phase lord body cultivation method from scratch posed a lot of challenges, but Ves was confident that it could be done so long as there was enough expertise.

What truly concerned him was the greater undercurrents surrounding this project.

Who benefited the most from the rise of human phase lords?

Was this a scheme to get him involved in affairs that did not align with his interests?

Was the Xenotechnician plotting to use the results of this research project to secretly conduct diplomacy with the aliens behind everyone else's backs?

As much as Ves wanted to think about happier matters, he had paid the price of neglecting important concerns before. For better or worse, he needed to find the answers to deeper questions if he wanted to stay on top of everything.

He did not believe that the Overlord Project was as simple as it appeared on the surface. The implications of allowing humans to become phase lords were massive and intricately intertwined with the native aliens.

This was why he did not hide his suspicions during his first talk with Master Wintress on this project.

"Before we talk about more substantive topics on the Overlord Project, can you tell me what it is all about?" Ves straightforwardly requested. "I do not want to work on anything that will get me into a lot of trouble with people I don't even know. Give me context. How many human phase lords do you want to make, and what is the point of having them when we already have plenty of mechs?"

His questions briefly overtook Master Wintress. Though she maintained impeccable control over her body language, it was clear that Ves had broken the rhythm of the conversation.

The Master Mech Designer who wore a refined lab coat over a subdued suit made out of alien materials evaluated Ves over the communication channel once again.

"You have adjusted quickly to your new station in life. It is good that you are becoming more aware of the implications of every action. It is not our intention to deceive you, but there is little gain in trying to educate you on affairs when your perspective is still too limited."

What did that mean?

"Can you answer my questions, Master?"

"Please be patient, Professor Larkinson. I am in the process of increasing the security of this communication channel, but there are limits to what I am able to accomplish under the circumstances. I am unable to divulge particularly sensitive matters, but I should be able to provide partial clarification. Is that acceptable?"

Ves sighed. "It will do. Let me ask you this, then. Is the effort to create human phase lords an attempt to bring the Diplomacy Plan back from the dead?"

That caused the RA Master to express a bit of mirth.

"This is not a conspiracy to undermine the Deep Strike Plan. The Fist of Defiance has won the competition. The Xenotechnician has no desire to renege on his promises. That said, human phase lords may be useful in conducting diplomacy in a future phase of war. You see, not every war ends with the total defeat or annihilation of the losing side. I believe you are quite familiar with that since you have grown up in a state that is marked by serial wars against another state."

Ves narrowed his eyes. "Are you anticipating that the war will end up in a stalemate where it is more favorable for us to sue for peace rather than press forward?"

"This is a common result in wars between humans and different species." Master Wintress factually said. "Unless either side possesses the will to fight on and the resources support enormously draining military campaigns, it is usually better to demand a temporary or permanent end to hostilities. You should be well aware of the great disparity in numbers and resources between red

humanity and the native aliens. Even if the Deep Strike Plans allows our civilization to even the odds, it is not realistic to expect That we can turn the odds even further in our favor."

Her logic was sound. Red humanity was the definite underdog in this fight. Gaming parity was relatively doable, but to go even further and build up a decisive advantage was a lot more difficult, especially when previous efforts already drained a lot of resources!

"I am not sure whether the Fist of Defiance is happy with this outcome." Ves retorted. "If he is as stubborn as I think he is, then he will not settle for anything less than a total victory."

"It is in his nature to substitute reality with his own will. However, this war is too great for that. For better or worse, we must prepare for an outcome where we must negotiate a peace between enemies that we would rather exterminate. If the aliens have suffered enough losses that it is in their best interest to pause the active fighting, there should be enough common ground to agree on a set of terms."

That caused Ves to frown. "The native aliens have a lot of territory, and they will likely retain a lot of holdings by that point. Time will be on their side as they can accumulate a lot more resources than us. Is it truly better to call for a break?"

"There are many more variables that you must take into consideration." Wintress gently rebutted the younger mech designer. "Our diplomats and planners are much more competent in these affairs than mech designers such as ourselves. You should leave this work to the professionals."

"I get that, Master, but how do human phase lords play into this dynamic? Are you hoping to use them as diplomats?"

"You have guessed correctly." Master Wintress nodded in response. "As you should know, the Diplomacy Plan hinges on the cooperation of the Cosmopolitan Movement. Ever since we have effectively rejected their outreach, the cosmopolitans have developed a grudge against us. It does not appear likely that we can solicit their cooperation again. Even if we can, we are unable to believe in their sincerity. You were right when you addressed the delegates. The cosmopolitans are too unreliable to pin our hopes upon. If we want to secure our objective, we must rely on ourselves."

Ves widened his eyes. The pieces finally fell into place.

"Since the cosmopolitans can't act as mediators anymore, you are hoping to present a bunch of human phase lords to make contact with the leaders of the other side. Since phase lords are a major part of alien culture, the ones from our race have a much better chance to earn the respect and admiration of the aliens."

"It is not just that, Professor Larkinson. Let us flip this scenario. How do you think we shall respond when the orvens present their own version of god mechs and god pilots one day? How much of an impact will that make on our society?"

"Everyone will react with shock!" Ves gasped! "They will become horrified! If the aliens have managed to duplicate one of our greatest advantages and symbols, red humanity will suffer an enormous psychological blow!"

Master Wintress smirked. "Do you see now why the Overlord Project is so significant? The unveiling of human phase lords has the potential to damage the morale of our adversaries and instill fear in their hearts. While there is a possibility that some of them will be prompted to fight even harder, others will begin to doubt the wisdom of persisting in their aggression. Aside from that, your earlier description is correct. The alien leaders will be much more inclined to hold substantive thoughts if we dispatch our own version of their 'gods'."

If this was the case, then Ves actually felt a lot better about the Overlord Project, it was not just about fulfilling people's power fantasies. Real progress translated into better possibilities to preserve red humanity.

Although Ves did not like the sound of stopping the war before any side had collapsed, it was unrealistic to expect red humanity to vanquish over all of the native aliens in a single go. It may take multiple wars interspersed with years spent on recovery before one side finally managed to finish the job.

It may be that people like the Xenotechnician were content with suspending the war between red humanity and the native aliens.

If they regarded the unknown but overwhelming enemies from Messier 87 as the actual threat, then it may be more advantageous to keep all of the natives of the Red Ocean around!

After all, once the aliens from M87 finally made an appearance, the war for supremacy in the dwarf galaxy no longer mattered anymore!

Though Ves fully understood the logic behind these preparations, he couldn't help but feel it went against the spirit of what the Fist of Defiance and his growing base of supporters were working towards.

Ves himself did not want to live in peace alongside aliens who had no qualms about wiping out every red human. How can they possibly live in harmony when they both wanted to claim the Red Ocean for themselves?

He inwardly shrugged. This went way over his head. Master Wintress was right. Ves should leave these issues to the professionals who were much better equipped to handle them. How the Red Association intended to manage the war was not his business.

Leaving aside all of these diplomatic and geopolitical considerations, the Overlord Project was pretty noble in itself.

Making red humanity stronger by giving people access to a new power system certainly wouldn't hurt in a time where everyone desperately yearned for greater strength!

## Chapter 5309 Goals Align

"In the context of the Deep Strike Plan, the Overlord Project is yet another effort to increase the high-level combat power of our civilization. There are powerful aliens among the opposition that cannot be defeated by relying on quantity alone." The projection of Master Xena Wintress patiently explained to the newly instated advisor and consultant.

"Isn't that what god mechs and powerful battleships are for? I mean, I can understand how cultivating human phase lords can make a difference, but there is so little time that the war will probably be decided long before any of our homegrown body cultivators can reach the top."



That caused the RA Master to smile.

"Ah, but that is what is special about the Overlord Project, it is true that it can take many years for typical phase lords and phase whales to increase their phasewater concentration, but they can employ shortcuts to accelerate their progress. Many of them rely on absorbing phasewater as well as other materials obtained from external sources to grow stronger in a shorter period of time. In addition to that, it is possible to leapfrog their progress by implanting phasewater organs from other sources."

That caused Ves to jerk in his seat!

"Wait! Is that what you mechers have been trying to accomplish whenever you capture a phase whale?"

Ves thought back on the expeditions where he somehow bumped into a phase whale. Whether the enormous alien was mutated or not, the Association always swooped in order to study the hell out of the biologies of those powerful beasts!

"As I have stated earlier, knowing our enemies is crucial to winning this war. We have conducted enough examinations on the bodies of a variety of phase whales, unclean whales and other miscellaneous phase lords to develop a basic understanding of their growth processes. What we are particularly interested in is the fact that the cultivation of phase lords can be sped up at an enormous rate so long as there is an abundant supply of relevant resources. This makes it possible for us to rapidly transform a select number of human candidates into greater phase lords. If one of them is particularly talented and qualified, we may even be able to produce an ancient phase lord. If this can be done in twenty years or less, then we can change the balance of power in the Red Ocean."

That was an enormous ambition!

Ves wasn't too sure whether it was possible to produce a sizable batch of human phase lords in such a short timeframe. Cultivation had to be done step-by-step. Expending lots of resources could speed this up too quickly, causing the foundations of the body cultivators to become so flawed that they might eventually collapse!

Aside from that, Master Wintress mentioned an unfamiliar phrase that caught Ves' attention.

"Ancient phase lord?"

"Ah. That is our label for a hypothetical phase lord who has grown to become the equivalent of an ancient phase whale. The intelligence that we have collected from the indigenous aliens indicate that such a powerful being has yet to arise, but that it is possible for a greater phase lord to attain this level of strength. The reason why it has never happened throughout the long history of the Red Ocean is because we speculate that it requires the implantation of the enormous organs of an existing ancient phase lord."

That made a lot of sense. Aliens outside of phase whales were naturally deficient in this special body cultivation method. They only managed to get started on this because they were too fixated to quit and develop more suitable cultivation methods for themselves.

The phase lords that emerged as a result of their strong determination to become physical gods needed to make up for their inherent inadequacies by borrowing the strength of real phase whales!

Theoretically, if the aliens could do it, so could humans!

The carcasses of ancient phase whales should be especially valuable for this purpose, but obtaining them was easier said than done!

No native alien had the guts to confront and kill an ancient phase whale. These were the oldest and strongest of the descendants of the Elder Gods. Fighting them was not only far too difficult, but also a religious taboo in alien society!

This was not a subject that the Overlord Project should be focusing upon right now. Red humanity hadn't even managed to develop a reliable method to get humans started as phase lords. It was much more important to complete the first steps of a phase lord body cultivation method than to think about the last stages!

"You are not required to work with us right away. We are still in the process of collecting information from our growing archives of ancient knowledge." Master Wintress explained. "We have found that your advice that we should treat the development of a phase lord as a body cultivation to be remarkably useful. While none of our knowledge repositories has lied any method to phasewater, our specialists have accumulated a large amount of relevant expertise in this broad area. We expect that they should soon be able to compose the basic framework of a systematic body cultivation method. Our biotech researchers and phasewater experts should be able to supplement the model even further."

That sounded like the right approach. Even though the mechers had been following the wrong direction for years, they were not incompetent by any means. They just lacked enough information and direction.

Now that they made up for both shortcomings, their progress and efficiency had become remarkably better, especially now that a top Master Mech Designer such as Xena Wintress had been put in charge!

"It sounds like you guys are already managing fairly well by yourselves." Ves spoke in an impressed tone. "Doi even need to provide my feedback at all? I am sure that the members of your expanded research team have already mastered a lot more specialized knowledge than myself."

Master Wintress responded with a rueful smile. "Past Incidents have shown that expertise alone is not enough to succeed. You are a pioneer in this field. The fact that you are the first human to become a phase lord without relying on a systematic and purposeful method means that you are gifted in this area. We anticipate that any progress we make in this project will affect you the most."

Ves couldn't help but grow skeptical at this. "Are you saying that my talent in phase lord cultivation is the highest? You have little proof of this. Besides, even if I am good at this, I am already a Senior Mech Designer. I don't have the time to dedicate all of my efforts to this stuff."

"We understand. We do not mean to impose on you. Your personal experiences and insights as a lesser phase lord is still of enormous value to the Overlord Project. Our dependence on this input will decrease significantly once we have finally managed to create our own human phase lords."

They talked a bit more about the planning and the expectations of the Overlord Project. Ves grew more and more reassured that the mechers knew what they were doing.

Even if they got a few details wrong, Ves could always offer corrections through his feedback.

Once they went over all of the essential topics, Ves inquired about the place of phase lords in red humanity's society.

Master Wintress did not cut back on her answer. "We are transitioning red humanity into a martial society. Personal strength and capabilities will become Important measures to power in our new society. Wealth will still remain important, but it will become more difficult to preserve it without enough strength. Not every human is suitable to become a high-ranking mech pilot or mech designer. This is why our Association is working to introduce multiple means of self-evolution. The Overlord Project will open up a new avenue for humans who are not brilliant enough to become excellent mech designers or not talented enough to become successful mech pilots."

If the Overlord Project fulfilled its main goal, then humans with different inclinations and talents gained hope of being able to gain personal combat power equivalent to a high-ranking mech!

They could attain all of this without pulling too many people away from the mech community.

This was important as the Rod Association would never abandon its focus on cultivating as many god pilots as possible!

There was one problem that the mechers couldn't avoid, though.

"If this actually takes off... the demand for phasewater will skyrocket even further." Ves spoke. "All of those little human phase lords will need to gain access to lots of phasewater if they want to raise their strength. The supply of phasewater in onr meager territories is already inadequate. Adding a whole new burden will exacerbate the shortage to a whole new extreme!"

The female Master Mech Designer did not look concerned. "We are aware of that. We have already planned for it, even. When the demand lor a scarce resource skyrockets, the incentive to proactively seek it out will increase as well. What do you think will happen, Professor Larkinson?"

It did nor rake much time for Ves to run this scenario through.

"Oh. I get it. If the demand for phasewater grows much higher, a lot of humans will be eager to obtain it at any cost. I can think of no better way to acquire large quantities of this rare material by stealing large reserves of it from the aliens. I bet that a lot more forces will be eager to take part in the upcoming deep strike operations!"

All of this tell in line with the Deep Strike Plan.

No matter whether people were greedy for war merits or phasewater, the greater the attraction of raiding alien territories, the more ferociously red humanity fought back against their enemies!

Greed was a powerful motivator! Ves had plenty of first-hand experiences with this. The promise of becoming a phase god that could resist powerful mechs by relying on the body alone was enough to drive people mad!

'Phasewater is not the only resource that will see an increase in demand as a consequence of our work." Master Wintress added. "Phase whales augment their own capabilities through biotechnological self-modification. Native alien phase lords often rely on constructing technological equipment to make up for their substantial shortcomings. We can employ the same approach but to a much greater extent. We have developed many powerful technologies and products that are

dedicated to strengthening mechs. We can adapt much of it to phase lords without needing to start from the beginning."

"That..."

Ves recalled the battle against the Trampler of Stars. The nunser phase lord initially fought with an advanced suit of armor that was tailor-made to complement his own strengths.

While its properties weren't impressive when compared to mechs, there was lots of room for improvement!

He couldn't help but think about the original purpose of the Metal Scroll.

The modern incarnation of mechs didn't exist in ancient times. Creation cultivators that worked with metal did not produce anything like the war machines that were ubiquitous today.

Instead, they worked valuable materials into powerful armaments.

Powerful combat-oriented cultivators could gain a huge increase in defense, offensive and other properties by equipping themselves with exquisite sets of armor and weapons!

If human phase lords rose up one day, it would be stupid of them to participate in battle while wearing ordinary armor.

They needed high-quality equipment in order to maximize their combat power!

Ves anticipated that a lot of mech designers would be eager to meet this demand. Perhaps an entirely new branch of industry would emerge that was dedicated towards servicing phase lords!

He didn't know what to make of this scenario. It sounded as if society was progressing forward, but it felt more like a regression that brought red humanity back to ancient times.

"Phase lords won't take over our society, right?"

"There is no reason to fear their emergence, Professor Larkinson. There isn't enough phasewater in the Red Ocean to make that happen."

"I hope that assumption is true."

Chapter 5310 Arrival In New Constantinople

As the Bluejay Fleet cut through space like knives, Ves remained distracted throughout the remainder of the trip.

The Overlord Project turned out to be a bigger deal than he anticipated.

If it succeeded, then it had the potential to open up an entirely new branch of red humanity that pursued power in an entirely different form!

Mechs and warships would no longer hold a duopoly on power. The rise of phase lords in human society would trigger a major restructuring of the existing power base!

The Red Association was playing a dangerous game here. Granting people a lot of power would likely lead to inflated egos and other detrimental consequences. The situation could easily grow out of control.

Perhaps the constant shortage of phasewater may temper the ambitions of many human phase lords, but there would always be people who made a lot more progress than others.

Still, this had little to do with him. His responsibilities were much more limited. He felt better by knowing what the mechers were up to by working on the Overlord Project, but there was no need for him to involve himself any further.

He didn't have the time to spend on these affairs anyway.

Though Ves couldn't keep his mind off the implications of the Overlord Project, it did not slow down his work too much. He still made adequate progress in his design projects during the remainder of the journey.

Numerous days quickly went by. The Overlord Project was still in the information gathering stage, so Ves had ample time to spend on other activities.

He mostly busied himself by designing his mechs, chatting with Jovy, corresponding with the Larkinsons who stayed behind in the fleet, playing with his children and more.

His life had actually become a lot calmer now that he had separated himself from his clan. The Larkinsons who remained behind were more than capable of sorting out their own affairs and didn't really need any input from the patriarch to make most of their decisions.

That said, Ves still missed the warmth and company that he could only experience by surrounding himself with family and trusted comrades.

Although the mechers assigned to the Bluejay Fleet were much stronger and offered much better protection, Ves couldn't bring himself to trust them to the same extent.

The mechers that he met aboard the Tarrasque were all decent and polite enough, but when it came down to it, they would always obey instructions from their higher ups!

Ves couldn't really imagine a future where he slowly converted them into his own personal guard. Jovy may have painted a pleasant picture to him about this, but reality was not that simple.

The company of his wife and children did much to relieve his feeling of alienation. So long as he kept those he held most dear close to him, he was sure he could manage in the months to come.

Besides, his immediate family weren't the only Larkinsons who came along. His honor guard and a few other staffers came along as well in order to handle trivial matters.

It was a pity that none of them had reached first-class standards, but that could always be improved over time. Numerous guards and assistants had already been granted EdNet quotas in order to provide Ves with qualified protection and administrative help in the near future.

"I am afraid that I will have to rely more on the bodyguards provided by the Bluejay Fleet for protection than you guys." Ves told Nitaa and the other guards he called over in his temporary office.

None of the Battle Criers who had pledged their lives to guard the patriarch looked pleased with this announcement.

They were professional enough to accept this assessment, though. The cold hard truth was that they simply weren't able to defend their principal against first-class threats.

Ves waved his hand, "I am not blaming you for this. I've been moving far too quickly as of late. There isn't enough time for all of you to keep up, especially when many of you were originally third-raters. While a part of your unit is preparing to undergo EdNet training, I still want the rest of you by my side. I trust you guys the most, and in my personal experience, it is always better to have familiar people by my side."

"Are you certain whether that is wise, sir?" Nitaa spoke up. "Some of our equipment has reached quasi-first-class standards, but that will not amount to much in Terran space. Our training and skills are also woefully inadequate."

"That is why I have requested the Bluejay Fleet to provide you all with customized first-class guard infantry equipment. I have emphasized the need to keep them as simple and solid as possible to reduce the difficulty of operating them. Even then, you will be required to undergo significant training in order to make use of all of the functions without relying too much on AI systems. Once you have completed this crash course in operating simplified first-class gear, your presence in the field won't be a detriment anymore... I think."

That was the most he could do for them. They needed to learn way too much to operate more advanced technological equipment, and that couldn't be done in a few months.

While it was technically possible to make them effective right away by relying on highly automated systems, Ves disliked this option even more.

There was no difference between doing this and relying on a bunch of armed bots for protection.

Any enemy that was highly proficient in technology could hack or sabotage them, causing the stupid AIs to turn against the person they were supposed to protect!

Too many incidents like this had occurred in humanity's lengthy history that nobody was stupid enough to put their lives in the hands of automated protection these days.

This talk was one of the many necessary adjustments that Ves had to make in the wake of all of the changes.

"We will do our best to perform our duties in spite of all of the difficulties." Nitaa promised.

"Good. I believe you can become much stronger once it is your turn to undergo EdNet training. I will make sure there will be plenty of quotas available for that. For now, it is best if you focus on protecting me from threats that the goons from the Red Association are less equipped to handle. I trust in their ability to protect me against all kinds of conventional threats, but there is plenty of weirdness out there that can't be defeated by relying on straightforward means. You will need to step in if that happens."

That caused Nitaa to frown yet again. "We don't have the necessary skills and equipment to handle this responsibility. The mechers cannot provide us with what we need, at least in the short term."

"Don't worry. I will spare a bit of time in a workshop and fabricate individual pieces of equipment for all of you. That reminds me that my Unending Regalia is due for an upgrade as well. Its performance is no longer adequate in the upper zones."

He needed to do this sooner rather than later. Ves felt much less comfortable now that he had left the middle zones and entered a much more dangerous society.

One of the downsides to rising up so quickly was that Ves had stepped on a lot of people's toes.

He couldn't rule out the possibility that people would make an attempt on his life because he threatened their interests. He had already learned from Master Xena Wintress that the cosmopolitans hated him especially!

Ves went back to work after he concluded this little talk. Time continued to pass until the Bluejay Fleet finally arrived in the New Constantinople System.

The Terrans had made ample preparations for his arrival.

As Ves and his wife stood in the front of an observation chamber, both of them stared out in the void of space where overlays started to light up many different symbols that signified artificial objects and stellar objects.

The New Constantinople System was the capital and the economic heart of the Riston Territory, which essentially functioned like a semi-autonomous state within the Terran Alliance.

The Devos Ancient Clan called the shots in the Riston Territory. The New Constantinople System was also under its control.

The Devosans had spent the last weeks reinforcing the defenses in the port system.

This turned out to be necessary because a lot of Terran vessels had utilized their superdrives to race towards New Constantinople in the hopes of establishing contact with the hottest tier 3 galactic citizen to hit the scene!

Despite all of the reinforcements, it was difficult for the Devosans to hold back all of the eager opportunity seekers.

Fortunately, Ves and his staff had already corresponded with the Devos Ancient Clan.

As much as Ves saw the advantages in making lots of new friends among the Terrans, most of these relationships would remain shallow and worthless if they weren't backed up by serious mutual commitments.

Ves and the Larkinson Clan were too new and unfamiliar with the first-raters at the moment, it was not wise to dive into the deep and get entangled in relationships that ended up becoming burdens rather than boons.

For now, Ves had already made a decision to limit most of his interactions with the Terrans to the Devos and Streon Ancient Clans.

This was not fair to all of the other ancient clans that were just as powerful and influential, but it couldn't be helped. The Terran Alliance had inherited the Greater Terran United Confederation's lack of reverence towards a supreme authority. There was no single group that could represent the interests of every Terran.

in any case, his clear request meant that Ves should have a relaxing time while he stayed in the New Constantinople System.

Even if other Terran groups wanted to do business with Ves, they would have to convince the Devosans or the Streons to mediate on their behalf.

As much as the two ancient clans tried to reject the Terrans who wanted to push through their requests, it was difficult to refuse all of them due to complex political reasons.

Ves knew that the Devosans and the Streons would still be forced to dump a heap of proposals onto his lap shortly after he arrived.

As he thought about all of the tedious letters he would have to reply to in a sincere manner in order to avoid causing any offense, his wife suddenly grew animated!

"Look, Ves!" She shouted as she pointed to a window to the side! "A detachment of the 1st Streon Mech Army has just entered the star system! Sensors have confirmed that the Termite Hill is among the new arrivals. This is great!"

It took a few seconds for Ves to realize the significance of this news.

The port system always saw a lot of traffic. Recent events had caused it to spike, but all of this meant that the arrival of a new fleet was not news in itself.

The 1st Streon Mech Army was not an average unit.

Just as its name suggested, it was the premier mech force of the Streon Ancient Clan!

Each pilot was an elite with genetic aptitudes that measured at B+ at minimum. Each of them went through hellish training that was considerably more intense in order to weed out anyone that failed to meet the exacting standards of a powerful ancient clan.

The first-class multipurpose mechs of this mech army were so well-equipped and packed with high technologies that they were almost just as good as the ones utilized by the Red Association!

The Termite Hill served as the flagship of this formidable mech army. The large fleet carrier was over 7 kilometers long and was packed with defenses. While her age was not small, her hull had received frequent upgrades over her existence in order to keep her as up to date as possible.

There was one more aspect about the Termite Hill that caused Ves to almost freeze.

The proud fleet carrier happened to be the seat of power of a famous ace pilot known as General Axelar Streon!