

The Mech 5381

Chapter 5381 Strategic Value of Mech Designs

Ves appreciated the heads up from Jovy.

Being able to gain crucial information about the big picture enabled Ves to gain a proper understanding of the current trends of the Red Ocean.

He became quite alarmed by the news that the aliens would soon be hitting red humanity harder than before!

The Red Cabal had plenty of reasons to take revenge on the humans. Many of the native aliens understood that they could not allow the foreign invaders to accumulate their strength over time.

All of this and more indicated that the frontlines would become even more dangerous than before!

Ves had plenty of reasons to be concerned about these changes. The expeditionary fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance and the Warborn Mech Division under the leadership of General Ark Larkinson soon had to face greater dangers.

The Davutans and the Hexers would also suffer a lot more losses if the alien onslaught grew too fierce.

Various border regions such as the Torald Middle Zone and maybe even the Agamemnon Upper Zone might fall due to the rapid escalation of alien offensives!

Suffice to say, Ves was not happy with these developments. His plan for the upcoming years relied heavily on a certain degree of stability in human space.

If red humanity already started to crumble before the Deep Strike Plan could take effect, he wasn't sure whether he would be in a position to meet all of his short to medium term goals.

At the very least, the massive disruptions in the mech market and human society as a whole would make it much harder for Ves to operate!

Right now, Ves needed to focus on what he could do to affect the course of the coming campaigns.

Different from many other people, a tier 3 galactic citizen like Ves managed to gain enough power and agency to materially influence the direction of the war. Even if his ability to strengthen red humanity was still too limited for liking, it was better than nothing!

His current situation reminded Ves a lot of his time in the Sand War. Back then, a few clever mech designs significantly strengthened humanity's ability to resist the invasion of the sandman race.

Could he replicate this old feat and save red humanity on a far greater scale than before?

Though Ves was not conceited enough to assume that he could single-handedly win the war, he could at least do his part to tip the scales in the human race's favor!

The revelations from Jovy urged Ves to help with the coming crisis by designing the appropriate mechs!

Of the handful of projects in development, there were two mech designs in particular that had the potential to exert an outsized influence on the war.

"The Fey Project and the Supremo Project can significantly affect the battles involving second-class forces." He told his wife and his new disciple Alexa when they gathered in the design lab. "We need to rethink their configurations and make sure to load up as much hyper technology on them as possible in order to maximize their ability to impact the war going forward. They will be the mech designs that will put the LMC back into prominence!"

The two female mech designers did not appear entirely convinced by his argument.

"Even though I am still an Apprentice Mech Designer, I am fully capable of designing a low or mid-tier first-class multipurpose mech. These products are rarely used by frontline military units, but they are still widely employed by smaller independent outfits. So long as we combine your living mech traits with my technical design, we should be able to publish a relatively basic first-class mech design that is enriched by our unique value proposition."

"It is too soon for us to intervene in first-class battles." Ves flatly noted. "If we want to introduce the Living Mech Corporation in the first-class mech market, we need to start with a strong opening. A mech that is mostly designed by an Apprentice will produce the opposite effect. It is much better for us to wait until both my wife and I have been promoted to first-class mech designers."

"I agree." Gloriana backed him up. "Failing to take advantage of the current timing means that we will completely abandon our chance of staking our place in the new mech market, but I do not want us to humiliate ourselves by releasing a sub-par product. There are benefits to biding our time. We can wait for the mech industry to develop more refined and mature applications of hyper technology. We can also continue to experiment with new technologies while we are still working on second-class mech design projects. We should only move on when we are thoroughly able to design a revolutionary first-class mech."

They no longer talked about first-class mech designs and turned back on what they could do with second-class mech designs.

"How is the Supremo Project going along?" Gloriana asked. "This mech design is restricted to the armed forces of Davute, so is it worthwhile for you to put additional effort into turning it into a fully fledged hyper mech?"

"It is worth it." Ves spoke. "Think about what the Hex Federation has accomplished with its own set of living Hexer mech models. I want to do the same for Davute. So long as its people grow dependent on my products, I will hold power over them. While the Krakatoa Middle Zone is not right next to the border, I am sure the Davutans are feeling a lot more nervous and desperate now. They need stronger mechs, and we can take advantage of that to gain more power over their state."

"I thought you didn't care about states, especially second-class ones."

"You are not necessarily wrong, but your thinking is too simple." Ves steadily responded. "The right mechs can conquer an entire state. In an age where the current order is set to crumble, it is not a bad idea to build multiple power bases."

His wife let out a breath in exasperation. "I am unable to follow your train of thought. I will give you the benefit of the doubt, but I hope that you will prove to me that your investment is not in vain."

"Don't worry about that. Don't forget that the Supremo Project is not my solo project. I am still collaborating with Master Decimus Horst, who has access to a large support network in Davute. My

collaboration partner can do most of the work of replacing outdated parts with newly developed versions that incorporate hyper tech. One of the advantages of having the backing of a state is that there should be plentiful hyper materials available to produce this new artillery mech in large numbers."

The Supremo Project might just be a commissioned mech, but Ves wanted to use it to trial several useful innovations.

He could use the data generated by its usage to refine the Transcendent Punisher Mark III Project. His ambition was to turn it into one of the most effective quasi-first-class artillery mechs in service!

As Ves and Gloriana discussed a few other details about the Supreme Project, Alexa Streon quietly listened and learned.

The former Terran grew quite surprised by some of the hopes and ambitions of her new mentor. Ves had already improved to the point where he actively sought to employ his mech designs as strategic tools!

"If you are determined to play this game, then at least promise me that you work on updating our Hexer mech lines as well." Gloriana insisted. "You do not need to worry about spending too much of your precious time. The Hex Federation has its own Master Mech Designers and development companies. They are more than capable of developing the right hyper mech parts for the Valkyrie Redeemer and Maiden of Adversity."

Ves had no objections to that. He wanted those older works to remain relevant and up to date in order to maintain his strong influence over the Hex Federation. If the Hexers were forced to phase out those mech models in order to keep up with the evolving battlefield, then he would lose his leverage over this state!

They soon turned their attention to the Fey Project.

While Gloriana had little involvement in the design, the Fey Project had made a lot of gains over the last month.

Ves may have left the expeditionary fleet, but he was still able to collaborate with the other lead designers of the Design Department by remote.

Cormaunt Hempkamp, Miles Tovar and most notably Beatrice Hendrix had contributed significantly to the design. The Fey Project was shaping up to become a beautiful and innovative product, though its price would certainly not be cheap.

If nothing unusual happened, Ves predicted that it would only take a couple of months to complete the design.

The recent unveiling of the Hyper Generation ruined the original schedule. There was no way that he would release a lastgen product at this time.

"It will take longer to bring the Fey Project up to standard because we aren't collaborating with a state this time." Ves explained to the two women. "We will need to work with various different third parties to develop the right hyper parts for our drone mech design. The spurs will especially require a lot of attention."

His wife knew him well enough that he had another interesting idea in mind.

"What are you planning to do this time, Ves?"

Ves waved his hand, summoning a projection of the Fey Project.

He pointed at the four spurs or 'fey' that defined this mech design.

"The Red Two's previous broadcast strongly emphasized the importance of employing space suppressors. They are red humanity's most effective tool in countering the heavy use of phasewater technology by the aliens. However, it is rather risky to dispatch a lot of melee mechs to an enemy warship. Every attack run will exact a serious toll on the mechs because the aliens will desperately try to shoot them down in order to weaken the space suppression effect. If we can let cheaper and more disposable fey take their place, we can drastically reduce the casualties of such an attack!"

At the very least, the fey could act as decoys if they were dispatched alongside melee mechs!

Both Gloriana and Alexa looked intrigued at this proposal.

"There is one caveat to this plan." Gloriana said. "Will the fey remain affordable enough to withstand this usage? Do not forget that space suppressors are not exactly cheap. The ones built with phasewater have the best effect. The ones without phasewater are much weaker. Do not forget about their power supply. Space suppressors have a moderate to high demand for energy. From what I can see, these fey of yours do not have much capacity to begin with. If you want to turn them into space suppression tools, then you will have to dismount any weapon systems that you wanted to pair with them. They can only fulfill one function at a time."

Alexa was more optimistic about this design. "The space suppression effect of these fey will not be adequate if a mech can only deploy one of them at the same time, but the combination of several overlapping fields will produce a stronger result. The crucial variable is how many fey your mech can control."

Ves grinned. "That number is not fixed. We are currently aiming for a target of 4 fey, which is admittedly a bit ambitious, but that is what makes the Fey Project so special. It is a living mech, so it can partially take over the burden of controlling and coordinating the fey. When the living mech grows stronger and evolves in a third order living mech one day, this capacity will drastically expand. I think it will easily be able to control 8 fey with a satisfactory degree of control! Just think about what that means."

"From what I can see, the mech frame cannot support so many fey."

"Who says that all of the fey needs to be attached to the mech frame when they are no longer in use? You can dump them in any cargo hold or free space if you want to stow them somewhere. You can also bring lots of spare fey and have them take the place of the ones that have perished in battle. Space won't be a problem. What we need to pay attention to is to increase the utility and combat effectiveness of the fey as much as possible. Even a slight improvement will have a substantial effect on the total package!"

Chapter 5382 The First Months of the Hyper Generation

As much as many people got caught up by all of the excitement of Operation Night Jazz and the Hyper Generation, no further drastic events took place that upended their plans.

Ves and many other people had formed new plans and returned to their routines.

Months went by as Ves and his fellow Larkinson mech designers reconfigured their incomplete mech designs.

It was annoying to push back the completion of the mech designs he cared about a lot such as the Jupiter Project and the Blood Star Mark II Project, but the additional wait would pay off in spades.

Since Ves and Gloriana already made early attainments in hyper technology, they adapted to the new tech a lot faster than their peers.

Ves possessed a lot more additional insights in the true nature of hyper materials.

This not only gave him strong advantages in the production of higher tiers of specific sympathetic materials, but also allowed him to employ clever tricks to leverage their properties even better!

He had even begun to experiment with attribute combinations. By compounding the effects of different types of hyper materials, he could generate strong synergies that made his mechs stronger!

However, he soon discovered that there were a lot of limits to playing around with combinations of different attributes.

Mixing up more and more attributes meant that the E energy profile of a mech became a lot more muddled.

For example, it became harder for a rifleman mech to fire a hotter laser beam if it became contaminated by unrelated attributes such as water or calm.

The E energy attracted by one part could adversely affect the performance of another part.

Ves thought back on the situation where the Guns of Armageddon leveraged both fire and water at the same time.

The shipwrights and engineers who upgraded the starship hadn't been able to solve the incompatibility between these two opposing elements.

This left the Guns of Armageddon in a rather awkward position. If she relied heavily on her fire energy cannons, then the performance of her azure energy shield would become adversely affected.

Ves was sure that he could engineer a solution to this kind of problem, but he needed inspiration in order to make any serious progress.

Solving this problem fell outside of the scope of his current projects. He just wanted to finish them in a decent timeframe so that he could meet his current obligations and free up his schedule.

Ves gained a lot of renewed interest in the Fey Project.

It was already rather special due to the interesting challenge of turning its fey alive. The recent addition of hyper technology strengthened every aspect while also opening up a lot of new possibilities!

What Ves was most interested in was to design a specific fey model that maximized the use of space suppressors.

Just as his wife had warned, it was truly too difficult to mount anything else on a fey once it carried a space suppressor module.

The most Ves could do was to strengthen its armor and tune up its small propulsion system in order to increase its survival rate.

Ves made a lot of calculations on how effective it would be to employ four smaller space suppressors instead of one larger space suppressor.

The model that was suitable for fey was a lot smaller and weaker than a model fitted for full-sized mechs.

It would not be worthwhile to go through all of this effort, only to produce a substantially weaker effect.

Fortunately, Ves did not have to fear that the fey had lost too much strength.

As he stood in the control room of an underground testing chamber, he watched with interest as four prototype fey buzzed around and converged onto different energy shields.

They had no effect on standard energy shields, which Ves already expected.

A single fey could only slightly weaken a transphasic energy shield.

Four fey sticking together induced a much greater effect, especially if they stayed in close proximity to the surface of the transphasic energy!

While the combined effect of four fey was not as strong as the effect of four mechs equipped with normal space suppressor modules, it was not drastically weaker either!

Their effect became even stronger than average with the inclusion of the Phase King. The design spirit was able to amplify the effect by a minor extent just by contributing his glow.

All of this meant that it was worth it to deploy these space suppressor fey against alien warships!

Ves could already imagine the sight. "Four fey won't be able to make a dent in any warship-grade transphasic energy shields, but what about 40? What about more? An entire mech company can dispatch at least 160 fey, and that is when the Fey Projects have not yet grown!"

160 fey was such a great quantity that their combined effect would undergo a qualitative transformation!

Of course, deploying all of these fey in fairly close proximity also made them vulnerable to certain area attacks such as large explosions or shrapnel blasts.

The most Ves could do was to strengthen their defenses, but even that had its limits as there was simply not enough capacity!

Ves rubbed his tired face with his palm. "Ugh! It is really annoying that I have to squeeze additional components inside this tiny fey!"

"This is why drone mechs are not that popular. It is much more convenient to keep all of the systems contained within a single mech frame." Gloriana commented. "Are you able to test whether the data linkages can be blocked?"

"Not yet, honey. These fey are handmade standalone prototypes. They have yet to be paired with a living mech. I can only conduct this test later on. I just wanted to get ahead and confirm whether my new space suppressor fey is effective enough. I am pretty satisfied with the results."

The fey were not exactly cheap. Ves only tested the regular ones, but the transphasic versions that he had yet to try out were bound to be even more expensive!

Given the diverging demands of different customers, Ves had made the impactful decision to design two different editions of the same mech at the same time.

He mainly designed the transphasic edition of the Fey Project to accommodate the Larkinson Army. It was a top-of-the-line quasi-first-class powerhouse that incorporated a lot of higher end mech systems.

He was open to selling this edition to any private second-class forces with deep pockets so long as they could supply their own phasewater, but he did not expect that it would sell like hotcakes.

This was what the non-transphasic edition was for. It substituted expensive transphasic parts for much more economical alternatives. Their performance was substantially worse in every way, but the inclusion of hyper technology partially compensated for this massive drop.

It was difficult for Ves to properly judge the combat power of both editions. None of the simulation programs could accurately calculate the performance of either of them in any combat scenario because the relevant theoretical frameworks were still incomplete!

The Red Association had already made a lot of strides into trying to construct a workable set of formulas and tables that could help with making predictions in performance, but it would probably take years to bring them up to standard.

This was why it was so important for Ves to conduct physical tests. Seeing the prototype fey in action with his own eyes was much more useful than trying to make a lot of baseless guesses in his mind.

"Alright, I have seen enough. Let us wrap up this testing session. I have gathered enough information to confirm my direction for the Fey Project."

What he had witnessed so far only revealed a glimpse of the potential of this mech design. Ves wanted to complete the design as fast as possible, but tried his best to rein himself in. He needed to do this right and make sure that both editions delivered a lot of value at their respective price points.

Ves could already envision that his work on the Fey Project would affect a lot of people's lives and careers in the future!

The higher its performance, the more copies it would sell.

The more copies it sold, the greater impact Ves would make on society!

After he advanced to Senior and learned the truth about the Kingdom of Mechs, he confirmed that societal impact definitely had a positive effect on his progression.

It had been a long time since Ves last released a commercial mech model that went on to become a bestseller.

The fairly recent Second Eye model had the potential to become a decent seller, but unfortunately the arrival of the Hyper Generation ruined this trajectory!

Who would be stupid enough to buy lastgen mechs in the current climate? Real lives were at stake! The better the mech, the higher the chances of survival. It made a lot more sense for customers to

withhold their purchases for half a year to a year so they could place orders on the first batch of hyper mechs released on the market!

Fortunately, Ves or any other Larkinson mech designer could just revisit the design of the Second Eye and straightforwardly replace all of the key parts with the corresponding hyper tech versions.

That was what a lot of mech designers were doing at the moment. The fastest mech designers had already completed this update cycle within the first month of the Hyper Generation!

Ves could have chosen to follow suit, but he looked down on this shallow integration of hyper technology.

None of the original mech designs were designed with the possibilities and performance boosts of hyper technology in mind.

The hasty application of hyper tech also caused the updated mech models to utilize only a fraction of the potential of the hyper materials added into their designs.

Ves held his work to a higher standard. While he did not go as far as scrapping all of his ongoing design projects so that he could start again from the ground up, he sincerely sought to maximize the use of hyper material.

All of these extra demands increased his workload, but he did not complain about it at all. He enjoyed the process of working with new technologies. He gained a huge amount of satisfaction for solving a difficult puzzle and finding yet another way to squeeze more performance out of interesting combinations of different technologies.

Under the concerted efforts of Ves and his fellow collaborators, the two editions of the Fey Project gradually took shape.

Even though Ves still had to split his time on designing other mechs such as the Jupiter Project, there were other mech designers and development partners who made sure to bring them closer to completion.

Every mech design project was a team effort. Ves gained a greater appreciation at how having numerous capable mech designers by his side could increase his productivity to another level.

Of all of the mech designers working on the various projects, Alexa Streon's contribution was indispensable!

She managed to surprise the entire Design Department by how much work she could shoulder by herself.

Her excellent learning ability enabled her to master the basics of hyper technology a lot faster than any second-class mech designer.

Ves and the other Larkinson mech designers gradually entrusted her with more and more work related to incorporating hyper technology into existing mech systems.

While Alexa's work was not sophisticated, she had gained such a strong grasp of the fundamentals that she never made mistakes and always finished her assignments in a short amount of time.

Her productivity was so ridiculously high that Gloriana grew even more jealous at the former Terran's augmentations!

Fortunately, the development of her own custom suite of first-class implants was nearing completion.

Once the Design Department completed the Fey Project, the Jupiter Project and many of the other remaining mechs under development, Gloriana intended to go on a trip in order to complete her surgery!

Chapter 5383 Little Combat Genius

Andraste adopted a stern expression as she stood in front of a challenge course.

The training ground possessed a standard feature that enabled its controller to dynamically arrange all kinds of interesting obstacles and adversaries.

Usually, there was no need to arrange anything deliberate. The randomization function worked well enough, especially if the controller set the appropriate parameters and limitations.

Given that Andraste was still a growing child, the challenge course had to make accommodations for her size and physical stature.

"Are you ready?" Saintess Ulrika Vraken asked as she stood in her impeccable Hexer uniform.

The young girl nodded. "Ready!"

"Then begin on my mark. Three. Two. One. Mark!"

The cute red-haired girl in a training suit shot forward at a remarkable speed!

The devious training course immediately presented Andraste with a puzzle. The way forward was split up by three branching routes, each of them separated by thick stone walls.

There was no way of determining which one belonged to the most optimal route. It could be that one or two of them led to dead ends. Perhaps all of the three routes would enable her to move on to other challenges, but the length and difficulty would vary drastically depending on her choice.

Instead of using regular means to determine her choice, Andraste made use of a rare capability that not every human possessed.

A black translucent kitten dove out of her head and immediately started to explore one of the routines!

"Maaw."

Yaika flew quickly and managed to make it all the way to the limit of how far she could travel away from Andraste.

Once the cat had gained a quick impression of the first route, she phased through the wall and explored the second one. After that she phased through the third wall and took another look at her surroundings.

Andraste made a quick judgment and took the center route.

The path happened to be the shortest of the three, but it also demanded a bit of physical exertion to get through.

She agilely dropped to the ground and squeezed through the low opening that trickily curved upwards.

She jumped over a wide pit and just managed to catch the bar hovering in the center, using it as a fulcrum to acrobatically leap her way up to a higher floor.

The girl started to breathe harder as she exercised her body, but her excited grin and her wicked eyes showed that she was enjoying herself!

After Andraste demonstrated her acrobatics in several more ways, she finally entered the next section of the challenge course.

With Yaika scouting the way forward, Andraste already knew what to expect when she turned around the corner.

A large square ground came into view. A dozen humanoid bots that exhibited the reaction speed of well-trained but unaugmented humans turned around to spot the new intruder.

The few bots that were facing the entrance from the start raised their stun rifles first and started to pull the trigger without regard for Andraste's tender age.

The girl's eyes narrowed, but showed no panic.

From the moment Yaika scouted the situation, she already formed an action plan.

Now was the time for her to execute it. Her short legs sprinted across the ground with certain steps.

She just managed to make it to the first humanoid bot and did not hesitate to leap and kick at the arms holding the rifle!

The bot lost control over its posture, giving Andraste an opportunity to skillfully disarm her opponent and grab the rifle that looked oversized in her small arms.

In the meantime, the other bots had turned around and taken aim by now. The bots showed no regard for their artificial brother and mercilessly opened fire, causing the weaponless bot to get hit by stun rays that quickly disabled its systems.

Andraste used her small size to her advantage and deliberately propped up the back of the fallen bot so that its torso turned into an improvised form of cover.

With Yaika giving her a bird's eye view of the terrain, the girl skillfully peeked out and opened fire at one of the bots that were moving to flank her position.

Despite not spending any time to properly aim her weapon, her stun ray precisely struck the exposed neck area that functioned the bot's weak point!

Andraste did not dare to take another break. The bots did not act like stupid dummies and were actively moving to flank her from both sides. She continued to alternate between making rapid snap shots and returning to cover before any retaliatory strikes could hit her back.

With two different perspectives, she could already determine whether a muzzle was aimed at her body or her weapon!

She could even tell when the bots were about to pull their triggers!

So long as she paid enough attention to this information and made the corresponding movements, the young girl could eliminate her current adversaries with impunity!

The dozen bots did not last more than a minute.

Once the final ones had fallen, she discarded her current weapon and picked up two other ones from her first eliminated targets.

She skillfully checked the state of the weapon and confirmed how many shots it could fire.

Andraste knew that a lot of weapons came with heavy restrictions and were almost always locked to their designated users.

However, there were still ways to hack or circumvent these locks as long as she possessed enough means.

Andraste had yet to learn how to do that, so the weapons in the challenge course were unlocked by default.

She attached one of the rifles on her back and held the remaining one in her hands. They were both sized for adults, so she couldn't carry them as well as real soldiers.

Still, this was not the first time she handled such large weapons. She adjusted herself as best she could and moved forward with determination.

As she entered the next tunnel, she continued to rely on Yaika to scout the way forward, only to get surprised as a pair of turrets descended from the ceiling!

Before they opened fire on her, Andraste displayed her lightning fast reaction speed. She had already tilted up the barrel of her stun rifle and pulled the trigger two times, eliminating both turrets while firing from the hip!

She proceeded in the next area which appeared to be an obstacle course.

She had to climb over walls, walk across a tightrope and leap over gaps while keeping hold of her weapons.

Each time, she had to remain on alert and be ready to fire her weapon whenever a bot or turret showed up from different angles!

It was not until she reached the end that her weapons automatically locked themselves up, signifying that they could no longer be fired.

Andraste tossed aside her almost spent weapon but did not get rid of her spare.

Instead, she flipped it around and held it like a club!

This proved to be a wise decision as the next chamber was filled with a group of bots armed with swords.

The bots did not move to intercept Andraste when she appeared. They instead formed a half-circle formation that allowed them to threaten their adversary from multiple angles while still remaining close enough to cover each other.

This was a tricky situation, and her earlier exertions tired her little body out to an extent.

She could not afford to squander her stamina, nor leave herself open to attacks.

Andraste did not delay too much and moved to the far left in order to pick off her first target!

The swordsman bot responded to her approach by chopping down its weapon!

Metal crashed upon metal as Andraste successfully slammed her rifle stock against the side of the blade, causing it to go off-target and leaving its wielder open for a brief amount of time!

The other bots were closing in on her position, so the young girl used her rifle to slam against the weak point of the bot, causing it to weaken so much that she successfully managed to hijack its sword!

Despite the fact that it was disproportionately large and heavy for her size, Andraste demonstrated higher than usual strength and managed to slash her new prize across the bot's neck.

A cruel smirk appeared on her face now that she managed to take hold of a proper weapon.

She did not turn around but instead moved past her first victim just as three other swords attempted to strike her body!

Now that she had moved past this dangerous hurdle, she briefly circled around before moving in to attack the bots!

Her opponents were not slow. They turned around and moved to adjust their formation so that they could leave her with no way to defend from every direction.

However, the adult sizes of the bots made it a little more awkward for them to strike at a shorter enemy!

Andraste took advantage of her small stature and her agility to skillfully evade the first sword strikes.

Once she managed to come close enough, she stabbed out her sword with both of her arms without hesitation!

The sword flew past the armored chest and struck the bottom side of the robotic jaw.

The tip of the sharp weapon easily penetrated the head from below!

After that, she pulled out the blade and leapt away before the other bots could strike at her vulnerable body.

What happened next was a thorough display of skill and power. Andraste effortlessly handled her dwindling adversaries by relying on skill and agility.

She was able to read the sword techniques of her adversaries and find the most efficient ways to block, parry or evade the attacks.

By the time she confronted her final opponent, her sword smoothly parried the incoming overhead chop and struck the bot in the neck!

Andraste did not drop her vigilance and kept on scanning her environment with her eyes and the senses of her companion spirit.

It was only after she passed through the exit of the course that she finally lowered her guard. She placed her stolen sword onto a nearby tray and cheerfully skipped her way to her father!

"How did I do, papa?! I murdered those bots as fast as I could! Was I a good girl?"

Ves responded with a proud but slightly uncomfortable smile. He caressed his second daughter by the head.

"You have learned faster than I or anyone else has expected. You're a natural at combat."

Andraste giggled and basked in the warmth and love of her father.

"Hehe, that is because I want to become the strongest mech pilot one day. Ever since I saw all of those god pilots thrash those giant whales, I knew that I would have to improve more than any other kid my age. I can already beat all of those other Terran kids at school, no matter whether we are sparring with swords or firearms."

"I am so proud of you, my little pumpkin. However, there is no need to train yourself to death. You will only break yourself down if you keep this up. You need to maintain the right balance between work, leisure and rest."

His daughter petulantly rolled her eyes. "God pilots aren't ordinary people. They are soldiers through and through! My goal is to become as strong as the Fist of Defiance or the Huntsman! I won't be able to get there if I spend too much time playing silly games. I am already working on honing my willpower in advance!"

Her words might sound inspiring if she was ten or twenty years older, but she only made herself appear cuter when she expressed her ambition!

"Oh, dear..."

Ves felt rather conflicted about putting his daughter through all of this training. It appeared that she inherited the workaholic habits of her parents as well, because she hardly played with her toys nowadays!

The main reason why Ves did not object to Andraste's demanding training regime was because the Red Ocean would soon become caught in the throes of war.

Peace would become a luxury in the coming years and decades.

Ves profoundly understood that weakness was the original sin in the frontier.

Out of his three lovely children, Andraste had the highest hope of navigating her way through tougher times.

Chapter 5384 Long-Awaited Upgrade Plan

After Ves praised his daughter, Andraste merrily skipped away so that she could take a shower and change into a different outfit.

The father watched the girl go with a decidedly mixed expression.

"It is impressive to see how much her marksmanship has improved." Ves spoke. "She has only been at it for less than a year, correct?"

Saintess Ulrika Vraken nodded. "I have never taught marksmanship to a child this young. I cannot say whether any young girl under 10 can become as effective in combat as her, but my intuition indicates that not even her Terran peers can keep up with her rate of improvement. If she can develop the aptitude to pilot a mech, then I can easily imagine her becoming a terror on the battlefield, and that is without taking account of the fact that she has earned Helena's favor."

All of this sounded too good. Many parents would be filled with pride if one of their children demonstrated so much skill and talent for combat at a young age.

Of course, it was absolutely luxurious for Andraste to receive the personal tutelage of both a swordmaster and an ace pilot who specialized in ranged combat.

Not every child could improve so quickly under the same circumstances. The fact that Andraste managed to absorb much of their teachings and internalized them much faster than anyone could imagine signaled that she had a bright future as a soldier or a mech pilot!

The Age of Mechs may have come to an end in the Red Ocean, but mechs still occupied the mainstream in current society.

A part of Ves wished his daughter would be able to pursue the career that eluded him. Seeing his daughter succeed as a mech pilot would do much to make up for past regrets.

"It would be nice if she ends up developing a high enough genetic aptitude, but the odds are still too fickle to be certain." Ves sighed.

The Hexer ace pilot nodded. She was one of the many hopeful people who lucked out in this regard. She knew a lot of other Hexers who had been forced to abandon their dreams of pursuing a glorious piloting career.

"It is not wise to place too much hope on a child. Andraste has developed so many expectations that she will crash harder than any other girl if she fails to obtain the qualifications to become a mech pilot."

Ves grimly nodded. While this was not strictly an insurmountable problem anymore, it would still be devastating if his girl could not follow in the footsteps of her new idols.

Just like any other child, Andraste had become enthralled by god pilots ever since she watched the broadcasts.

She had made it her life's mission to become as powerful as those impressive god pilots one day!

However, in order to do so, she first had to pass the first major test of her life. It would become much harder for her to fulfill her ambition without the support of the right genetic aptitude.

Saintess Ulrika directed a pointed stare at Ves.

"I have noticed a gradual shift in mentality from your daughter. It started a few months ago. Is your daughter engaging in meditation?"

"Sort of." Ves replied. "I am not sure how much you know about this, but there are ways for the human mind to leverage the E energy around us. It is much easier to do this if you have a companion spirit, but you can do this without one if you work really hard. I promised to give my girl a meditation method of sorts that will hopefully improve her chances of developing the right genetic aptitude."

The Hexer ace pilot grew speechless for a moment.

"If I am being frank with you, that sounds... impossible. However, you are the Supreme Son. You are known for producing miracles. Since you are dealing with your own daughter, I assume that you understand the potential risks and dangers. A child as young as Andraste shouldn't be meditating at all in my opinion."

"It is not as dangerous as it sounds." Ves explained. "I have developed multiple different methods, and the one that I have formulated for my own daughter is relatively simple. It is nothing more than

a way to direct her wishful thinking in a more focused manner. Combined with the instruction that she should practice it in proximity to a mech, the worst that could happen is to reinforce her current obsession."

He had promised to give his daughter a way that could increase her chances of becoming a potentate. He fulfilled her request, but did not put anything fancy in her meditation method.

From what she learned from her mother, cultivation was a process of active self-evolution by absorbing energy and directing it to make focused changes in alignment with an artistic conception.

The more basic methods were mostly harmless, but produced relatively weak results. So long as Ves did not add any excessive or convoluted steps in the method. He only added that part about spending time with mechs in order to reinforce Andraste's self-delusion.

Ves was actually a bit hopeful about this meditation method. Its effects were bound to be weak, but he guessed that even a slight effect would produce an actual result.

If ordinary children thoughtlessly practiced the same method, they were unlikely to produce any noticeable changes, but his daughter was different!

Her active spirituality, her partial primordial human physique along with her companion spirit all gave her the ability to actively shape her interaction with E energy radiation!

Even if she was a little weaker, she was still connected to the Larkinson Network. If she really wanted to, she could borrow a bit of strength from Goldie.

The same applied for Helena. The Daughter of Death would never mistreat her niece and would certainly step in if Andraste inadvertently put herself into danger.

All of these favorable conditions gave Ves a bit more hope that his daughter would have her wish come true during her tenth birthday.

Nothing was certain, however. Ves did not dare to assume that his daughter was destined to become a talented mech pilot.

Ves and Saintess Ulrika spoke a bit more about Andraste's rapid training progress.

"The degree of skill and control that your daughter has demonstrated at her age are all signs that she has the potential to become an excellent mech pilot." Ulrika did not hesitate to praise Andraste yet again. "Even if her genetic aptitude ends up mediocre, she can still rely on her talent and learning ability to thoroughly master her fundamental fighting operations. So long as she is able to transcend her mortality, she can surpass any deficiencies relating to her genetic aptitude."

"Thank you for your vote of confidence."

"If her genetic aptitude is qualified but not high enough, you may consider starting her off with second-class mechs." Ulrika advised. "There is nothing wrong with second-class mechs. The Destroyer of Worlds even went on to become a god pilot despite her humble background. It may be more comfortable for your daughter to grow up without needing to compete with the monsters who are capable of piloting first-class multipurpose mechs. The demands that first-class states impose on them are too excessive in my opinion."

She made a good point. Though Ves wanted to provide her daughter with the best possible education, first-class mech academies only paid attention to the rare talents with A and B-grade genetic aptitudes.

Any potentates that scored lower than that never gained access to the best learning environment. Their teachers were worse, the training facilities were cheaper and their classmates weren't brilliant either.

Ves shook his head. He was worrying way too much about stuff that might never become relevant. He needed to rein in his concerns about Andraste's future and just wait until she grew a few years older.

Ves and the ace pilot continued to wander around the challenge course as they finally moved on and talked about other topics.

"Our Design Department is almost about to complete our remaining ongoing mech design projects." He explained to her. "We have made a lot of advancements and mastered a lot of new tech. While I am obligated to design a lot of other mechs after this, I should have enough time to upgrade your ace mech. I have not seriously worked on your Macharia Excelsia, but I have been thinking about what I want to do with it for many months."

That finally made Saintess Ulrika smile. One of the reasons why she agreed to accompany Ves to New Constantinople and tutor his daughter was to transform her lifeless ace mech into a living mech!

"The Master Mech Designers of the Hex Federation have already designed a technical update for my ace mech." The powerful woman stated.

"I know. I have already corresponded with the designers of your ace mech. My work won't conflict with theirs. I will do what it takes to turn your ace mech into a living mech, with all of the benefits that come with it. I will also apply limited physical upgrades with the support of your machine's original design team. In particular, I want to replace your old Hexfire rifle with an extremely powerful fourth generation luminar crystal weapon. Once I am done, you can bring your half-upgraded ace mech back to the Hex Federation where the Masters over there can finish the job."

This suited both sides just fine. Ves would be able to put his mark on the ace mech without excessively encroaching on the territory of its other mech designers. He would also save himself a lot of time on upgrading the remainder of the powerful machine.

Although it was an incredible privilege to work on an ace mech that was one step closer to a god mech than other machines, Ves knew his limits.

He may have gained the qualifications to design an expert mech by himself, but he needed to become a Master Mech Designer before he could confidently take charge in the design of an ace mech!

Besides, the Macharia Excelsia was never his work to begin with, so it would be a lot harder for him to make deep structural changes because he did not fully understand how it worked.

It would be a lot easier for Ves and Gloriana to upgrade the Jupiter Project into an ace mech because of how much they invested in its original design.

"Can you provide me with a description of the direction of your upgrade plan?"

"Why certainly." Ves grinned. "I have been entertaining a lot of ideas ever since we were all able to witness Operation Night Jazz as it unfolded. Being able to see those eight cutting-edge god mechs display their individual strengths is a priceless opportunity for any mech designer. Ever since I watched the likes of the Geneforger and the Heartpiercer display their unparalleled technological progress as well as their fantastic synergies with their god pilots, I have been thinking on how to replicate a part of their impressive power in a lesser form."

His words caught the Saintess off-guard.

"Are you claiming that you can bestow my ace mech with the power of a god mech? That is impossible! I am aware that you have a track record for producing miracles, but what makes a god mech is not just its tech, but also the willpower of a god. While I am confident in my own strength, there is still an enormous gap between my Saint Kingdom and a genuine God Kingdom."

"I am well aware of that, Ulrika. I am not deluded enough to think that you can reproduce even a fraction of the strength of a God Kingdom. However... I have been wondering whether it is possible to close the gap through unconventional means. I have come up with two possible ideas that can make this happen. The first is to enhance your existing Saint Kingdom with additional factors. The second is to upgrade your ace mech in a way that allows it to leverage your willpower significantly better than before."

Chapter 5385 Mechs as Artifacts

The most precious resource of a mech designer was time.

The second-most precious resource of a mech designer was inspiration.

When the Red Two broadcasted all four battles of Operation Night Jazz in full, the mech designers were among the people who gained the most from this public service!

Ves along with every other mech designer in the Red Ocean harvested a huge amount of inspiration from witnessing the performance of so many powerful and cutting-edge combat assets.

The mechs and warships presented lots of new possibilities, especially in combination with hyper technology.

Yet of all of the amazing human-built products on display, none of them inspired mech designers more than the eight god mechs that represented the best of what their profession had produced up to this point!

There were many mysteries about god mechs that vastly exceeded the scope of most mech designers, but there were still a lot of other properties that could spark a billion new ideas.

Practically every mech designer rewatched the footage of all of the god mechs at least 10 times!

Ves was no exception to this. He watched it again and again, paying particular attention to the interaction between the God Kingdom and the physical mech frame.

He managed to harvest a lot of useful insights from his detailed examinations of all of those impressive god mechs, but that did not necessarily mean he could translate that into immediate results.

Many of the ideas he generated so far could only be shelved until he gained the strength, knowledge, resources and access to realize them all. He would have to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer at the very least to work on his more outlandish ideas!

Ves was just a Senior for the time being, so he needed to remain more grounded and work within his means.

As Saintess Ulrika asked for further clarification, Ves took a moment to figure out how he could best convey his vision and ideas for the Macharia Excelsia.

"There are enormous differences between ace mechs and god mechs." He began after a period of silence. "They differ in many ways, which I am sure you are more familiar with, but when it comes down to it, the key factor that separates one from the other is energy."

The Hexer ace pilot raised her eyebrow. "What do you mean by that?"

"While this approach is simplistic, the strength of a unit can mostly be determined by looking at how much energy it has at its disposal. An ace mech derives much of its strength from a Saint Kingdom, but a god mech has access to a God Kingdom. The latter is far superior in terms of quality and quantity. These are the factors that enable god mechs to break reality and impose a different one within the confines of this monstrous domain."

The Saintess crossed her arms. "I am aware of that, but understanding this does not mean that my Saint Kingdom can narrow the gap to a genuine God Kingdom. I am still a junior ace pilot, and a relatively new one at that. My resonance strength is still only over 200 laveres, and it needs to approach 1545 laveres before I can work towards attaining the power of a god. It is too premature to dream about acquiring this power in advance."

Ves grinned. "I wouldn't be so sure if I were you. Remember the first idea that I mentioned earlier? One of the strategies that I think will definitely allow you to fight more effectively is to work together with another powerful entity. You already have a taste of that with the upgrades that I have applied to your Hexfire rifle and your plasma sword. You can significantly enhance the power of your transphasic weapons by calling upon the assistance of the Phase King."

The female ace pilot had been practicing with those weapons long enough to understand how stronger her attacks had become if she activated their new functions.

"How do you propose to make them stronger aside from applying hyper technology to them?" Saintess Ulrika asked.

"You have already mentioned it." Ves smiled back. "Hyper technology will be the key to greatly increase their damage potential. To be more precise, it is a combination of hyper technology and E-technology that will strengthen your mech. Have you ever heard about prime mechs?"

"I have heard that phrase before from the expert pilots of your clan." Ulrika answered. "I do not have a clear understanding of what that is supposed to represent."

"It is basically a more thorough way of binding the power of a design spirit to one of my living mechs. All of my early expert mechs are made this way. They take advantage of a special alloy that I found in the Nyxian Gap to bestow them with properties comparable to modern hyper materials. I used to call it a prime material back then, because I have developed an application for it that can lead to the creation of a prime mech."

Ves began to explain what made prime mechs so special.

For her part, Saintess Ulrika expressed a notable amount of surprise when she heard that he had essentially discovered a new form of resonance!

"Let me summarize your proposal." She eventually said. "You want to rely on a certain hyper material to bless my ace mech with the power of the Superior Mother. The purpose of doing so is to allow her to lend more strength to me whenever I need to summon more power in a fight."

Ves nodded. "You can think of it as teamwork. The most basic ace mech derives all of its extraordinary power from the pilot alone. Once I have made your mech alive and assigned a design spirit to it, a new cooperation model is formed. The ace pilot, the living ace mech and the design spirit can all leverage their own energies to produce stronger results that are unattainable through regular means. This is especially the case if I can turn your Macharia Excelsia into a prime mech. All of these changes will result in a massive increase in the total amount of energy that you can leverage on the battlefield."

There was another factor that he did not mention. The strength of the design spirit had a large influence on the effectiveness of a prime mech.

The Superior Mother was undergoing a rapid evolution that would eventually lead her to catch up to her principal.

Once she had fully completed her evolution, she would become a genuine True God-level incarnation, which meant that the quality and quantity of her power would become unsurpassed by all other design spirits except for Gaia!

Ves couldn't wait to produce more prime mechs for the Hexers. The more they could draw their power from the Superior Mother, the more they could channel the power of a True God.

Of course, there were limits to how far he could go. A standard mech could only borrow a fraction of the power of a True God. Moving beyond the limit could easily cause the fragile mind of a standard mech pilot to crumble!

What made ace mechs more attractive to Ves was that the strong willpower of an ace pilot could tolerate a lot more pressure!

In fact, even though Saintess Ulrika was just a junior ace pilot, she could already resist the overpowering aura of a True God and maintain control over herself!

An ambivalent expression appeared on Saintess Ulrika's face. She thought about her past interactions with her fairly recent blessed weapons. Did she want to take this to the next level?

"No." The woman eventually said. "No more. I admire your work, Larkinson, but that does not mean I like it. My conviction compels me to rely on myself for strength. Excessive help from other powerful beings violates my own principles. I do not want to become stronger by begging for handouts from others. Even if the Superior Mother herself descends in front of me, I would rather defeat my enemies on my own than to rely on the Supreme."

Ves looked disappointed, but not too surprised. He knew her pretty well and understood that she was never the most faithful of Hexers.

The Vrakens were the most pragmatic and secularist among the Hexer people. A conviction that did not have room for divine assistance fit the character of a member of the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty.

"I understand." Ves gently responded. "It is just an option. Prime mechs are one of my more interesting works, and according to my own theories, they become a lot stronger when harnessed by an ace pilot. The power boost that you can gain from harnessing prime resonance at this level is massive. Are you sure you want to forgo all of this extra power while you are doing your duty to your state and people?"

Ulrika's willpower pressed harder onto Ves. "My decision is final. Please do not say anything further about this. My goal is to become a god pilot like the ones that we have seen on the broadcast. I can tolerate all of the difficulties and challenges that I have to overcome by relying on my own power. This is a tempering process, and it would not do for me to avoid so many hardships by borrowing the power of the Superior Mother."

Ves could respect that decision. He might even make the same decision if he was in her place.

"Alright. I will not press you again about this." He conceded. "While we cannot proceed with turning your Macharia Excelsia into a prime mech, I can still take its model and swap the undesirable variables with less objectionable ones to make it more palatable."

"I am lost. Can you explain this alternative solution in a clearer manner?"

Ves summoned a simple wireframe version of a mech. "This is your ace mech. Assume that I have already turned it into a living mech."

"Okay."

He then proceeded to fill parts of the projected mech with red gas.

"This is E energy based on the erosion attribute that aligns best with your domain. I can use hyper materials to fill up your mech with lots of this specific energy."

That caused Saintess Ulrika to become a lot more interested in this idea.

"I can follow you so far."

"Good. Now, it is not enough to fill your mech with this E energy. After all, you already have access to E energy by using your Saint Kingdom to harness the radiation in the environment. What truly enables you to resonate with all of this extra E energy is to bind it to your living mech!"

Saintess Ulrika understood what Ves was going with this idea.

"You are claiming that you can make my ace mech stronger by giving it a larger reservoir of E energy?"

Ves nodded with a smile. "It is kind of similar to fostering a companion spirit. It is a pity that you have grown too strong for me to bestow you with one, but boosting the power of your living mech beyond the norm is a good alternative. It is sort of like turning your Macharia Excelsia into a prime mech, but instead of borrowing the power of the Superior Mother, you instead rely on the basic relationship between a mech pilot and a living mech. It is an inferior or simplified version of a prime mech. You can call it... a subprime mech."

The word subprime did not exactly carry a lot of positive connotations, but it was a fitting addition to his theoretical framework.

What mattered was that this was one of the methods he recently came up with to empower his living mechs with the use of hyper materials!

The greatest advantage of using hypers in this manner was that they could supercharge a living mech!

By merging them with a much larger pool of E energy, he could effectively amplify their power!

From the perspective of cultivation science, this was a relatively simple and direct way of using better materials to upgrade an artifact!

Chapter 5386 Visiting Relatives

"Papa, papa, papa, when are they coming?!"

"Soon, Andraste." Ves bent down to pick up his overly energetic daughter. "Space travel is never completely stable. Even the RA's own starships are vulnerable to the gravitic tides that happen every now and then. They will come when their ship has finally arrived. Until then, be patient and wait."

"Booring-"

The girl squirmed her way out of her father's embrace and began to tease Lucky instead.

"C'mon Lucky! I want to play basketball. You will be my ball, okay?"

"Meooow!"

Ves chuckled as he sat down on a chair and relaxed. Today was a special day. He and his wife had taken the unusual decision to put down all of their work and take a break.

They deserved it after they had worked harder than ever to complete a bunch of mech design projects!

After several months of revision and technological exploration, he and his wife had finally designed their first proper hyper mechs!

Unlike the more rudimentary applications of hyper technology in the designs of the Greenaxe and the Bloodripper, the Jupiter Project and the Blood Star Mark II both conformed to most of the technological standards and specifications set by the Red Association!

While there was no obligation for any mech designer to conform their work to the directives of the mechers, it was a good idea to do so most of the time.

Sticking to a common standard as opposed to clinging to a proprietary standard promoted standardization, mutual understanding and a more rational allocation of resources.

What this meant for the two recently completed expert mech designs was that they had been thoroughly future proofed. It would be much easier for them to keep up with the pace of technological advancement for the remainder of the Hyper Generation!

This was even more relevant for the two projects because they both centered around high-tier expert mechs.

Both of their intended recipients happened to be ace pilot candidates. They possessed a wealth of combat experience and mental precipitation. If not for their lack of good mechs and a few major shortcomings, they would have been able to undergo their second apotheosis without any special assistance.

As it was, Ves was glad that he could finally give his two blood relatives the catalyst they needed to distance themselves from their past and take a bold step into their new future!

"Miaow-"

"Hihihi, your ears are so fluffy, Clixie."

Marvaine rolled around in the grass of the country estate as he chased after the Rubarthan Sentinel Cat.

Meanwhile, Aurelia allowed her mother to braid her hair yet again a short distance away. Mother and daughter appeared to be in complete harmony as they talked about all kinds of feminine subjects.

This was family. Ves needed moments like these to ground himself to his original reality.

Though it was nice to spend a lot of time in the Eden Institute of Business & Technology, the Terrans had a way of thinking that diverged too much from the values of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves didn't know what he would turn into if he spent time among the Terrans by himself.

It was too easy for him to get assimilated by the people around him. He noticed this happening with the mechers, and now he needed to remain on guard against the Terrans every day.

Half an hour went by before a change finally took place.

His lips curled into a smile when he received a notification from Gavin.

Minutes later, a pair of highly familiar relatives teleported in the middle of the back garden of the country estate.

All three children completely stopped what they were doing and instantly laid eyes on the new arrivals.

"Great-grandpa!"

"Grand-uncle!"

Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine all ran up to the two older Larkinson and began to hug their legs.

"Hahaha, I missed you so much!"

"Oof! You have grown even heavier than last time."

Ves and Gloriana stood up from their seats and approached at a more sedate pace.

"Welcome to New Constantinople." Ves greeted Ark and Benjamin. "I hope that you will enjoy your stay here. Is it troublesome for you to leave your posts at this time?"

"I do not have any obligations, so I am glad that I can reunite with you and your family again."

Venerable Benjamin spoke. "I am finally looking forward to the day that I am no longer a burden to your clan."

"You are never a burden to us, grandfather. You are already at the age where you can retire without any complaints."

"Perhaps that was true in the past, but ever since you gave me a second chance, my fight is far from over."

"What about you, Ark?"

"I have already made the appropriate arrangements far in advance." General Ark Larkinson spoke. "The Federal Military of Davute fully understands the need for me to go on this pilgrimage in order to obtain the mech that can truly unlock my strength. The need to fight on the frontlines has become more pressing over the last month. The stronger I can become, the more advantages that I can win for the state and its citizens."

Naturally, Ark and the Larkinsons in his Warborn Mech Division would also benefit a lot in the process.

After they completed their meet and greet, they retreated to a picnic table where the chefs had already prepared a sumptuous meal for the Larkinsons.

Ves nodded in understanding. "How long can you stay?"

"It shouldn't be too problematic for me to stay with you for two or three weeks. I can postpone my departure for an additional few weeks if it is worthwhile, but it is best for me to return. My mech division is still too new and raw to go without my direct leadership for too long. I do not have any capable deputies who can fully take over my duties."

"Does that include Patriarch Reginald Cross?"

Ark did not hide his contempt for the only ace pilot in the Warborn. "Reginald is a fantastic warrior, but it takes more than that to lead a professional military mech division. I have spent years fighting alongside the warlords of the Garlen Empire. My powerful friend may sound as if he hates his former state, but he is cut from the exact same mold. The longer I leave him alone, the greater the chance that he will lead my subordinates astray."

The two talked a bit more about the current circumstances of the Warborn. Even though General Ark could not talk about overly confidential matters, Ves was not exactly an outsider so he was able to receive plenty of insider details.

"President Yenames Clive actually promised to allocate territory to the Davute Branch if your Warborn does well?" Ves raised his eyebrow.

Ark nodded. "I have no doubt that your rapid rise in status has a lot to do with it, but I think this is a fantastic opportunity for our clan to gain control over our own planets and star systems. I know you do not care too much about it, but holding territory will make others take us a lot more seriously. Our clan won't be known as a rootless and mercenary organization anymore. By holding territory, we signal our intent to play by the rules and to commit to the common safety and prosperity of the Krakatoa Middle Zone."

The high-tier expert pilot sounded optimistic about the future. Not only would he be able to fulfill one of the old family's long-standing dreams of gaining rulership over an entire planet, but he would soon be able to pilot a mech that could at least stand equal to the Mars!

Hearing Ark speak passionately and willfully about his plans caused Ves to feel a bit alienated.

A decade ago, Ves would have probably been just as excited as Ark. The prospect of claiming one or more star systems without going through the trouble of founding colonies from scratch would have delighted him beyond measure!

However, he was different from his past self. He had grown too much. His vision was higher now.

As far as he was concerned, gaining control over a bunch of star systems in a middle zone was no longer a game-changer for him and his clan. It was almost just as dispensable as taking control over a near-worthless third-rate colonial state.

Ves quietly lamented the fact that Ark's vision remained so low all of this time. Clearly, the Premier Branch was slowly shaping up to become the central focus of the Larkinson Clan, but Ark's old values had become so deeply rooted that he would probably refuse to transfer to a bigger stage.

Venerable Ark looked around and took note of the luxurious garden and the first-class multipurpose mechs standing guard in the distance.

Each of the impressive mechs of the Bluejay Fleet could easily squash his Travon Exine!

They might not have any powerful metaphysics to amplify their performance, but these first-class multipurpose mechs possessed such potent power reactors that their base parameters alone could overpower any second-class expert mech!

"You have it so good here." Ark sighed. "The Terrans and the other first-raters enjoy the best resources and the greatest opportunities. None of them have to live in fear and uncertainty. Even if the aliens press into their territories, the wealthy states and organizations can always dispatch enough starships to evacuate all of the colonists in time."

"What is the point that you are trying to make?"

"The Terrans do not need my protection. The Rubarthans do not need my protection. The Red Two most certainly do not need my protection. They have everything they need to defend their own states. The god pilots most certainly will not stand by and let the best of our society suffer too much damage. I do not feel as if I have anything to add to all of that, would rather remain in the service of Davute and protect all of the colonists that are not important enough to merit the protection of the top powers. I hope that clarifies why I am not eager to join you in your Premier Branch. It is not solely because I am set in my ways."

The Larkinsons around the table gained a better impression of Ark. He sounded both noble and sincere when he expressed his conviction to his family.

"Venerable Benjamin smiled at his proud son. "You are a free man, Ark. There is nothing wrong with doing what you think is right. However, you should not disregard the goals of our family or the burden that your decisions impose on us all. Your new mech is anything but cheap. It has taken a large amount of time and money to design your upcoming high-tier expert mech. Even if Ves hasn't demanded a price from you, that does not mean you should take his charity for granted. So long as you are in charge of the Davute Branch, you should do whatever you can to offer support to our clan as a whole."

Uncle Ark seriously listened to his father. "I have not forgotten about the clan. I just think that there is no contradiction between serving the Davutans and serving our fellow Larkinsons. It will be just like old times."

It was exactly because the Larkinsons clung too much to their old traditions that Ves felt the need to break away from the original Larkinson Family.

He did not want to spoil the mood by arguing this point, though. Ark had his opinion, and Ves had his own opinion. There was no need for them to debate about every disagreement that existed between them. Family was more important than winning meaningless arguments.

As the Larkinsons gradually finished their meals, they spent the evening as a single harmonious family. Both Ark and Benjamin enjoyed playing board games with the children.

A part of Ves wished that times like these could go on forever, but he knew that it was not to be. He predicted that moments like these would become more and more precious in the future.

Chapter 5387 The New Common Standard

It wasn't until the next day that Ves and Gloriana presented the fruits of their labor to their visiting relatives.

They waited until they sent their playful children off to another day at the Joan Devos Elementary School before they brought Ark and Benjamin to the design lab.

The two older Larkinsons had been waiting for a long time to get introduced to their new high-tier expert mechs.

Ever since Ves demonstrated his exceptional talent and abilities as a mech designer, every other Larkinson believed that he was capable of developing the most wondrous mechs.

Though Ves did not feel as if he could live up to the unreasonably high expectations of his relatives, he hoped that his work on the two expert mech design projects presented enough surprises to delight his uncle and grandfather!

"Alexa." Ves greeted the young woman when he entered the design lab.

"Ah, you must be his latest protege." Venerable Benjamin spoke as he laid eyes on the former Terran. "I have heard that you have played an indispensable role in completing my grandson's mech designs."

"I have my strengths." The woman politely replied. "I have heard much about you as well. You have always served as the compassionate elder and the moral compass of the Larkinsons. It is rather amazing how you have been able to recover your strength after suffering a serious injury all of this time. Brain damage is hard to recover from even for first-raters."

They chatted for a bit before they all gathered around a projection of the two completed expert mech designs.

As the pilots who placed so much of their hopes on their new machines, they instantly fell silent and became engrossed by the sights.

Even though the projection was only able to convey a fraction of the charm of these two amazing high-tier expert mechs, they had remained in contact with the mech designers often enough to understand the broad strokes of their upcoming machines.

"The Jupiter Project and the Blood Star Mark II Project are both high-tier expert mechs that are completely adapted to the Hyper Generation." Ves began to explain. "They share many of the same features that I will explain soon enough, but they also differ substantially from each other due to your individual preferences and conditions."

Both Ark and Benjamin nodded in understanding. When they glanced at the design that they weren't as familiar with, they could sense a lot of similarities and differences.

The oldest among them smirked for a moment as he laid eyes on the latest iteration of the Jupiter Project.

"You always wanted to be at the center of attention. With this bright and shiny lion-headed mech, you will definitely be able to attract everyone's eyes without a doubt. I am afraid that you will go too far with this. It is not always good to present yourself as the highest priority threat on the battlefield."

"I can take it, father." Ark retorted. "I am never truly alone when I fight. The hopes and expectations of my troops always bestow me with the courage to challenge stronger opponents. I will truly be able to lift off with my new mech once I advance to ace pilot. I am much more concerned about your own mech."

"What is wrong with my Blood Star Mark II? It is a powerful machine in its own right as far as I can tell."

"I do not doubt the design abilities of my nephew." Ark shook his head. "What I am questioning is the theme of your expert mech. You have always presented yourself as a hero and ; protector of our people back when you were in your prime. You were my hero, you know. I always tried to pick up where you left off. What made you agree to turn your expert mech into a machine that looks like it is piloted by a vampire?"

The contrast between the Jupiter Project and the Blood Star Mark II was strong.

The former looked like a mech that a hero from an action drama would proudly pilot!

The latter was coated in red and possessed an aggressive and not all that benevolent vibe.

Venerable Benjamin let out a sigh. "I am no longer the man I was before, Ark. You have never suffered a setback as enormous as mine. My experiences as a powerless cripple has changed me. I no longer care too much about the values that I once held dear before. I agree with my grandson that family is more important than any other duty and obligation. If we want our clan and its people to remain alive, it is not enough to have the right intentions. The Blood Star Mark II is an excellent reflection of my new self."

Both living expert mechs were supposed to align with their respective pilots.

While General Ark Larkinson still remained an idealist at heart, Venerable Benjamin Larkinson's much richer and more diverse life experiences had caused him to transition into a realist.

This was why Ves got along a lot better with his grandfather than his uncle these days.

Gloriana clapped her hands. "Ahem, the two of you can discuss family matters at a later date. Let us introduce the full features of your respective expert mechs to you. It is important that you gain a

thorough understanding of what we hope to accomplish with these designs. It will allow us to be more in sync when we finally begin the fabrication runs."

She waved her hand and set the projection of the Blood Star Mark II aside.

"As you can see, the Jupiter Project is designed as an unusual command mech with enhanced direct combat power. We have tried our best to outfit it with the usual command and control modules that are expected for this mech archetype. Many of them are miniaturized, so they take up less space and impose a lower burden on your machine. You can still command your units in comfort, but the sensor and communication system won't be able to penetrate through heavy jamming unless you direct a lot more power to them. This shouldn't be necessary if you make good use of our new mech ecosystem."

"Mech ecosystem?" Ark questioned.

"Ah, I haven't explained much about it because I have been working to complete it in the last few months." Ves explained. "It is a mech ecosystem that is supposed to be exclusive to our clan, though I do not mind extending it to your Warborn as well. It is a product that deeply combines the properties of living mechs and E-technology. While I cannot rule out the possibility that other brilliant mech designers can imitate this ecosystem one day, I am pretty confident that it will remain unrivaled for quite a while."

He was very proud of coming up with such a useful and promising mech ecosystem!

"That does not give me much information." General Ark frowned. "Can you explain the different this mech ecosystem of yours can make?"

"Why certainly, uncle. First, you should already be familiar with all of the strange and mystical networks that I have created. Kinship networks and battle networks have always served as the trump cards of our clan. When I started to think about tying the mechs of the Larkinson Army more closely together, I took inspiration from these networks to devise a means to increase the collective power of our Larkinson mechs."

Both Ark and Benjamin were familiar with the dynamics of a mech ecosystem. They were particularly prominent in mech militaries as the adoption of one or several ecosystems could massively reduce the logistical burden of large forces.

What was strange was that Ves did not utilize the same mold.

"Conventional mech ecosystems are mostly technical in nature." Ves explained. "What makes mine different is that while they impose a certain degree of standardization and the use of common parts and measurements, it is not the focus this time. As I have mentioned before, E-technology plays a major role, so my mech ecosystem is mainly concerned with binding and collectively empowering my mechs through the medium of E energy."

"That... sounds similar to what you have done with a battle network." Ark remarked.

"That is an astute remark. I have taken a lot of inspiration from my battle networks when I devised my mech ecosystem. You can think of the latter as an attempt to make the power of a battle network available to every Larkinson mech pilot. The basic requirements necessary for a Larkinson mech to conform to my ecosystem is that it must incorporate a plentiful amount of hyper materials. It is not enough for it to be a hyper mech. It has to be a prime mech or a subprime mech."

"Tch." Gloriana made an ugly sound. "I told you to stop using that ugly word, Ves. Subprime makes your work sound worse than it actually ought to be. Who would feel proud for piloting a mech that sounds subpar? Anything that is preceded by the word 'sub' is always regarded as flawed and imperfect. Dwarves are subhumans. Cheap handbags are substandard. Mechs that are designed in tournaments perform suboptimally. Do you truly want to put your so-called subprime mechs in the same group?"

"...Now that you mention it, perhaps it is better if I come with an alternative label." Ves conceded. "Let me think. Hm, seeing as subprime mechs are pretty much an exploration into their nature as living artifacts, perhaps it is better to call them artifact mechs."

His wife's expression softened after she heard the new name. "That is a sound name for this new classification of mechs. None of your living mechs will feel ashamed for carrying this label."

With that little incident dealt with, Ves resumed his original explanation.

"In any case, one of the common traits that every modern Larkinson mech will share is that they will have a lot of E energy at their disposal. Whether it belongs to a design spirit or a living mech is not a big deal. What matters is that every living mech has access to a notable reserve of E energy. The problem is that unless the machine has gone through a lot of growth, it cannot effectively leverage it. This is why I want my works to join forces and pool their energies together. Once enough Larkinson mechs group up with each other, they should be able to produce fairly powerful effects that enable them to punch far above their weight. The greater the number of living mechs gathering together, the more power they can exert as a collective!"

"What makes this different from a battle network?" General Ark frowned in confusion.

"The full explanation is too complicated." Ves replied. "I won't give you the full story because you will just get lost. In short, a battle network is different because it attempts to tap into the power of a strong entity that is normally out of reach. My new mech ecosystem doesn't try to do that under normal circumstances. It tries to leverage the E energy that is already embedded into the Larkinson mechs. The threshold and difficulty of harnessing all of this power are a lot lower as a result. Any Larkinson mech pilot can make use of the power of our new mech ecosystem."

Previously, only certain highly cohesive and homogenous mech legions such as the Swordmaidens and the Penitent Sisters could utilize the power of their own battle networks.

This was way too restrictive for Ves, so he sought to develop an alternative that could allow his troops to effectively make use of a weakened but more accessible variation of a battle network!

He succeeded in his endeavors. The new Larkinson-exclusive mech ecosystem was his greatest hope of boosting the power of the Larkinson Army, thereby giving them a much better chance of survival in the years to come!

"What is the name of this new mech ecosystem of yours?" Ark asked as he had already begun to visualize what he could do with this promising new feature.

"I call it the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem." Ves answered with a grin. "The possibilities are endless. Anyone who is strong and capable enough can take charge of a collective and shape much of the combined energies into different expressions. From forming an energy manifestation of a design spirit to channeling all spare power into a single mech, our forces will change forever after my new ecosystem is applied to all of Larkinson mechs."

This was the power of Ves' spiritual engineering, or rather E-technology!

Chapter 5388 The Warrior of Light

Both Ark and Benjamin Larkinson reacted with shock after they learned about the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem!

It sounded like no other mech ecosystem they had ever heard before. It was so typically Ves that they had little doubts that it would turn out to be as effective as he described.

"None of our mechs has yet to acquire this mech ecosystem of yours, correct?" General Ark asked.

Ves nodded. "Your expert mechs will be the first to receive this particular benefit. We want to test it out with the two of you first. This will allow us to verify its performance and make quick adjustments. Once we have done that, we can apply the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem to every Larkinson mech going forward. Every time we bestow a new mech mode or update an existing one, we will make sure that it conforms to the standards of our mech ecosystem. My goal is to unite all of our Larkinson mechs this way within 4 years."

"Four years is not much." Venerable Benjamin observed. "You will have to update a lot of existing mech models. Will you be able to handle the workload?"

"Do not worry about it." Gloriana confidently replied. "My husband has become a lot more effective at his work in recent months. I will soon undergo a massive upgrade as well. Once I have obtained my new augmentations, I can help him upgrade all of our older mech designs at a much faster rate than before."

Ark asked another question. "You have mentioned that you intend to apply your new ecosystem to Larkinson mechs. Does that mean that you will withhold it from your commercial and commissioned products?"

"That is right. The Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem has amazing potential, but it is also rather complicated. It is an experimental product, so it is not proper for me to attach it on any mech intended for use by my customers. It is also one of the benefits that our people should rely on to earn more war merits in the coming years."

Ves made it clear that he considered his new mech ecosystem to be an exclusive advantage of the Larkinsons. Unless it benefited his clan directly, he did not want to spread it out any further!

Neither Ark nor Benjamin had a big problem with this, but Gloriana did not share the same opinion.

She pressed her elbow against her husband's side. "You shouldn't be so selfish, Ves. The least you can do is to extend this benefit to the Hex Army as well. The Hexers can grow much stronger if they can pilot millions of Energy Weaver mechs! Just imagine it. Tens of thousands Valkyrie Redeemers flying in unison. Each of them working together to summon Helena. Once she appears, she will have so much E energy at her disposal that she can single-handedly wipe out all life in an alien warfleet!"

"I don't think it will be that easy to make that happen." Ves skeptically replied. "While my Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem imitates the functions of a battle network, it is not meant to replace it. Aside from that, once the Hexers show off the capabilities of my work on a massive scale, a lot of different parties will demand that I share my work with them all. I don't want to be forced to give

away yet another trump card. So long as we keep this particular advantage to ourselves, we can make use of it to beat our competitors and accelerate our progress."

This was the main reason why he put so much effort into coming up with this mech ecosystem.

His status had risen quickly, but his clan failed to keep up with his growth. If he wanted to lift his clan up, then he needed to bestow them with a powerful advantage.

The Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem could only be applied to prime mechs or the recently renamed artifact mechs. It was one of his proudest works in recent times.

Its usefulness was limited when it came to individual living mechs.

There was no way that the Jupiter Project or the Blood Star Mark II could boost their combat power if they were by themselves.

Energy Weaver mechs thrived when they fought together. They were the embodiment of the strength of the family that characterized the Larkinson Clan.

The greater the number of Energy Weaver mechs, the grander they became!

If the Larkinson mechs happened to be led by powerful units such as an expert mech, then it would be easy to channel all of that collective energy to these capable champions!

Although Ves did not emphasize it, he secretly hoped that his work would enable the high-ranking mechs of his clan to punch above their weight!

He especially kept phase lords and phase whales in mind when he developed his new mech ecosystem.

If the expeditionary fleet or the Warborn ever became ambushed by a powerful phase lord, General Ark or Venerable Benjamin could always draw upon the power of all of the friendly units on the battlefield to defeat a native god!

While Ves did not think that his Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem could bestow the power of a god pilot to anyone less than that, it was at least a step in the right direction!

He answered a few more questions about his promising innovation, though he could not offer as much clarity as he wanted because it had yet to be tested in reality.

They soon moved on to more familiar ground.

"Let us get back to explaining the configuration of your Jupiter Project." Ves said. "As you can see, the dominant theme of your expert mech is light. It literally and figuratively weaponizes the power of light. The brighter it shines, the more powerful it becomes. This will especially be the case once it is upgraded to an ace mech, but it is already strong enough in its current iteration."

As Ves continued to explain his vision, General Ark felt drawn by the finished design. The way it embodied light made him feel as if this machine was part of his destiny. There was no future for him as a mech pilot if he was not able to fight with an artifact that was precisely tailored to his needs!

"It is so majestic and beautiful." He couldn't help but comment.

Ves grinned. "I am a bit of an artist as well, you know. I have done my best to raise its appearance. The more impressive it looks, the easier it will be for you to command the respect and adoration of your troops."

He had made express use of Vulcan's rapidly growing expertise in designing the appearance of the Jupiter Project. Their combined efforts made the expert mech look like a humanoid white lion king!

"This is not a regular living mech, correct? You have made sure that it doesn't have an independent personality like many of your other living mechs."

"That is correct." Ves replied with a frown. "I do not entirely agree with this decision of yours, but I have done what I can to accommodate your request. The current iteration of the Jupiter Project is a second skin mech. It should fit you like a glove once you interface with the completed mech. Can I ask what made you issue this request?"

"I have seen what Patriarch Reginald can do with his Mars. I know what your other living mechs are like. I regularly exercise with Venerable Rosa Orfan and so on. The Riot is... quaint, but I do not think it will fit my style if I treat my new expert mech like a living horse. What I want is a much stronger version of the mechs that I am accustomed to piloting in the past. I have won many battles and attained great success by piloting mechs that bear no life at all. I think it is better to stick to my familiar piloting style and fight without too many excessive distractions. If Patriarch Reginald can make it work, then so can I. The Jupiter Project shall become the vessel for me to project my power."

As Ves listened to Ark's words, he felt a bit regretful that he couldn't turn the Jupiter Project into a classical living mech.

It could have become incredibly powerful on its own if it started out as a third order living mech!

Still, he understood that a second skin mech fit Ark's style better.

Though Ark liked to paint himself as a protector and a servant of the people, he could be incredibly self-centered at times.

Ves eventually moved on to explaining another key feature of the Jupiter Project.

"One of the most essential characteristics of an expert mech is that it contains a resonating exotic that enables you to amplify its performance by exerting your extraordinary willpower. Aside from the generic resonating exotics that are responsible for producing a resonating shield and so on, we have looked long and hard to find an excellent key material that can better amplify your strengths. The key resonating exotic that we have settled upon is Lumosium."

A new projection showed up that depicted a shiny and luminescent exotic material.

"Lumosium is not a newly discovered resonating exotic. Our civilization discovered it a long time ago, but regarded it as useless for a long time. Normally, it doesn't do anything but shine a light by itself. It is only after the Age of Mechs that mech designers discovered that it can actually function as a resonating exotic. Even then, its only useful application is to amplify the power of laser beam weapons. It would have been more useful if it amplified the power of every variety of electromagnetic radiation, but it mostly acts on light in the visible spectrum, which severely limits its usefulness."

All of this sounded a bit too complicated for Ark.

"What role does it play in my Jupiter Project?"

"Well, aside from making your mech shine a lot brighter, I have also discovered that it actually synergizes well with luminar crystal weapons. To be more precise, Lumosium can allow you to massively empower the quasi-first-class transphasic fourth generation integrated luminar crystal cannon system with your true resonance!"

Ark's eyes practically grew dizzy as he heard the overly long sequence of words.

Even though he considered himself to be smarter and more learned than his fellow peers, that word salad was so excessively long that he couldn't keep up with Ves anymore!

"Can you... use normal words to explain this to me?" General Ark requested.

Ves let out a sigh in exasperation. "Look at your Jupiter Project. It has weapon hardpoints onto its mech frame."

"Just like the Mars."

"Correct. The integrated luminar crystal cannons can fire really powerful light beams. They are powerful because the weapons are not only transphasic, but also hyper tech. Do you understand?"

"I do. Many high-end mechs combine phasewater technology and hyper technology these days. I am glad that my Jupiter Project can take advantage of this combination as well." Ar smiled.

"Well, that is not enough in my book. I have made it so that the ranged attack power of your Jupiter Project has become a lot stronger by adding Lumosium to its design. This resonating exotic can amplify every energy attack that consists of light, and the fourth generation light beam attack phase crystal happens to fall into this category. The consequenc of this is that your expert mech has become really powerful at defeating other high-ranking mechs, but is also very threatening towards other targets such as phase lords and alien warships."

As a Larkinson, Ark was familiar with the strange light beam luminar crystal weapons. They were among the most mysterious of the energy beams fired by these alien-derived weapons.

He didn't know what to make of it. Light beams sounded powerful, but Ark was afraid that he might not be able to grow comfortable with them. Perhaps he could request Ves to swap them with regular laser beams if he ended up disliking light beam weapons for whatever reason.

Chapter 5389 Cleansing Light

Ves continued to explain the configuration of the Jupiter Project to its intended beneficiary.

The more details he conveyed, the more General Ark Larkinson fell in love with the machine that would determine his future for the coming decades.

If possible, the Jupiter Project may become the machine that would accompany him throughout his life and define his career as a mech pilot and mech commander!

Ark was fully aware that not every mech pilot enjoyed this privilege.

He had grown a lot more jaded and depressed ever since he left the Bright Republic and tried to build a new future in the Garlen Empire.

Though the powerful Garleners respected his combat prowess and his ability to command a lot of troops on a chaotic battlefield, their callousness, warlust and endless pursuit of vainglory had thoroughly alienated him from the powerful second-rate state.

This was one of the reasons why he cherished the opportunity to serve the Colonial Federation of Davute.

The people of Davute came from many different parts of human civilization, but they had all become earnest and upright colonists after settling into their new homes.

Ark wanted to protect the honest lives and livelihoods of all of these people. He could do his job quite well with a decent expert mech like the Travon Exine, but in a cosmos where the power of the fist determined everything, a much more amazing machine like the Jupiter Project would definitely help him realize many of his ambitions!

His heart stirred with hope and expectation as he beheld the bright and glowing projection of the Jupiter Project in all of its glory.

Even though he could not fully comprehend the more technical explanations, it was enough for him to know that his nephew had done the utmost to make his new machine as powerful and fitting as possible.

After Ves had explained the properties of the armor system, flight system and combat drive of the Jupiter Project, he finally moved on to highlight the weapon loadout of the Jupiter Project.

"We have equipped your upcoming expert mech with three weapon systems as its initial configuration. This is based on your past usage of weapons as well as your preferences. However, there is always room for more. Once you get used to your new mech and begin to employ it against challenging alien opponents, you may feel that your arsenal is not enough to fight against particularly troublesome opponents. If you need a strong cannon that can overcome the defenses of an alien battleship through brute force or a shield that can help you resist the heat that comes with being the bright presence on the battlefield, you only need to ask."

Ark responded with an appreciative look. "Thank you, Ves. I will keep your words in mind. I will try not to strain your resources. Three weapons should be more than enough to deal with most enemies. I am not like those first-class mech pilots who cannot adequately fight unless their mechs come with at least 20 different weapon systems that are only useful in very particular combat scenarios."

That provoked a reaction from the only first-class mech designer in the design lab!

"You do not understand the benefits of carrying a diverse array of weapons into a fight." Alexa said. "There are good reasons why all of the first-raters have embraced the multipurpose mech as the ultimate form. That is not to say that other mech archetypes are completely useless. My own grandfather has always adhered to his hero mech and achieved great success despite all of the limitations. However, carrying many more weapons can grant mech pilots unparalleled flexibility on the battlefield, ensuring that they can never be truly countered."

Gloriana cleared her throat. "Let us not get into this discussion. Neither of the two expert mech designs are multipurpose in nature, so let us focus on what is in front of us. Aside from the integrated lumina crystal cannon system that we have already mentioned before, the Jupiter Project comes with two melee weapons. The spear is suitable for charging and for sustained combat, while

the plasma sword is a high-intensity weapon that is suitable for breaking through hard defenses and finishing off difficult opponents."

A new projection appeared that highlighted the two weapons.

Both of them displayed a sense of weight and majesty. Ves had put a lot of effort into turning these white-coated weapons into artworks in their own right.

The female mech designer pointed to the spear. "This is a quasi-first-class transphasic hyper spear that is partially designed by Dulo Voiken. It is relatively simple and plain, but that also makes it solid and reliable. It is suitable for both charging attacks and more direct forms of combat. In order to ensure that it can withstand the rigors of high-level combat, we have decided against making it extendable. We do not want the weapon to break because you have attempted to block a powerful attack."

Ark showed no objections to this design choice. "I am well-versed in all manner of spears. I can handle a single length."

"That is good to hear, general. The only special trait about this spear is that it is incorporated with a hyper material that is attributed towards water. This will amplify the armor-breaking properties of your spear, making it exceptionally suitable to pierce through hard obstacles. It performs decently well against transphasic energy shields, but it is not the most efficient weapon to deal with these sorts of defenses."

Ves grinned as he took over the explanation of the second melee weapon. "That is what the Cleansing Light is for. This is a special plasma sword that is designed in cooperation with Ketis as well as a Terran development company. While the Terrans are known for their excellent Destroyer weapons, their plasma swords have not fallen behind. It is easy for them to customize a version that is specifically tailored to your circumstances."

The projection zoomed in on the plasma sword. When Ves tipped his finger, the weapon became active, extending a powerful blade of white-hot plasma that looked dangerous enough to burn through anything!

"The energy consumption of the Cleansing Light is massive, but the Jupiter Project should be able to handle its demands for a decent period of time. It is not a transphasic weapon, but it is a hyper weapon that is attributed towards light. This has multiple implications. First, the Cleansing Light will glow brighter than other plasma weapons. Second, it will deal more damage if it is filled in an environment that is filled with light. This means that the Cleansing Light synergizes extremely well with the dominant theme of your mech."

Ark nodded in understanding. The brighter his mech, the stronger the plasma sword. That was easy enough to understand.

Ves grinned as he triggered a special function that caused the plasma sword to extend and thicken by multiple times, making it look as if it had entered a turbo-charged mode!

"What is interesting about this Terran tech is that the plasma sword can also be overloaded to briefly increase the damage and reach of this weapon. It will also shine brighter, which means that the hyper weapon will become even more potent as a result. We specifically requested to add this function to give you a means to break through the most intractable defenses and allow you to deal an effective killing blow against monstrous enemies such as phase lords and phase whales. The

consequence of activating this Giantslayer Mode is that the weapon's internals will almost certainly sustain heavy damage, causing it to shut down shortly afterwards. Do not use it unless you have no other choice."

The general's expression looked serious. He fully understand the value of this powerful weapon mode. He did not think it was inappropriate that it could only last for a short amount of time.

"If you have advanced to an ace pilot, then the Giantslayer Mode should impose a significantly lower burden on the structure of the weapon." Gloriana helpfully added. "A powerful Saint Kingdom can reinforce the internals to a much greater extent, thereby allowing the plasma sword to withstand more abuse without breaking down."

In other words, the plasma sword was too powerful of a weapon for an expert pilot. Just like the Scarlet Ember of the Everchanger, the Cleansing Light could only truly showcase its potential when wielded by an ace pilot.

It was up to Ark to work towards earning the qualifications to unlock the true power of this mighty plasma sword.

So long as he advanced to ace pilot, the Jupiter Project would definitely be able to pose a threat against the Mars right away!

After Ves explained a few more ins and outs concerning this powerful plasma weapon, he completed his explanation by briefly touching upon another subject of importance.

"One of the common features of a powerful living mech are Ascension Runes. While your Jupiter Project is not a classical living mech, as long as it becomes comparable to a third order living mech, it can bear Ascension Runes. Considering the dominant themes of your Jupiter Project, it only needs to develop along a single trajectory. The Path of the Illuminator is the most suitable one as it strengthens the foundation that your machine depends upon the most to display greater strength in battle."

Both Ark and Benjamin were familiar with the overall concepts of Ascension Runes and Ascension Paths. Many other Larkinson expert mechs already make use of them to great effect.

"I have heard descriptions about the Path of the Illuminator from Venerable Davia Stark." Ark spoke. "As far as I know, this Ascension Path is only responsible for increasing the damage output of the Amaranto's energy weapons."

"The Path of the Illuminator can certainly do that, but it encompasses more than making your energy beams more potent. This Ascension Path encapsulates the wide range of powers of the Illustrious One. Depending on how you develop along this branching path, you can amplify the brightness of every light source, increase the conversion of light into heat or even make your light more blinding and disruptive to both organic sight and artificial sensor systems."

That interested Ark a lot. His Jupiter Project may come armed with integrated ranged weapons, but he believed that they were only suitable for wiping out cannon fodder. It did not make too much sense to strengthen them if they could only pressure stronger opponents at most.

What he needed was to shape the power of light in a way that granted him greater advantages when he squared off against phase lords or particularly strong alien battleships.

He definitely liked what he heard!

"If the Path of the Illuminator can do all of that, then it is enough. I will make excellent use of its properties."

Ves smiled. "That leaves me with the final element that is important to the growth of your expert mech. Aside from the second generation god body method that my wife has mentioned earlier, your living mech also comes with the Lesser and Greater Larkinson Metal Guardian Mantra. This is basically a means for your Jupiter Project to absorb the ambient E energy attributed towards light in order to make it stronger. Since your mech has no independent personality, it cannot cultivate at full efficiency. Whenever you are away from the cockpit, it will automatically cultivate the Lesser version of the mantra. When you are actively piloting it, you can manually command it to cultivate the Greater version, which is not only a lot more effective, but can even grant you certain advantages when you use it in battle."

His uncle did not fully understand the significance of this cultivation method for mechs, but that was okay. He would understand its value soon enough once he piloted his new expert mech.

Ark asked another question.

"Once I receive this mech, what will happen if I advance to ace pilot? Can I pilot it right away, or do I need to bring it back so that you can upgrade it again?"

"The latter." Gloriana said. "We have already designed the Jupiter Project as a half-step ace mech of sorts, so you can still make use of it if there is no other choice. However, there are still major differences between ace mechs and expert mechs, so it is best to properly adjust and upgrade your machine as soon as possible. If you cannot bring it to us for whatever reason, then you can bring it to Master Benedict Cortez. He should be able to apply the necessary upgrades in our stead."

"Understood."

Chapter 5390 All in the Blood

Once Ves and Gloriana had exhaustively explained all of the complicated functions of the Jupiter Project, they finally turned their attention to the other expert mech design project.

"The Blood Star Mark II is different from the Jupiter Project." Ves emphasized to his grandfather. "While it shares a lot of common tech and principles, the overall purpose, vision and design direction all diverge significantly from the earlier design."

His grandfather nodded. "I can feel it. This mech of mine is not only more alive than what I have experienced before, but it also contains a lot of hidden potential. It may take a long time for me to explore and tap into its latent power."

Ves smiled. "Another aspect of what makes this design different is that it is an upgrade of your existing Carmine mech. Since we cannot construct a brand-new mech for you, we are somewhat restricted in how extensively we can replace and substitute the existing parts of your machine. In particular, it is troublesome to comprehensively upgrade the organic parts of your Carmine System. In order to upgrade it to the second generation that I have recently come up with, I have to implant new organs and inject viruses that can rewrite its DNA. This is a rather troublesome and time-consuming procedure under normal circumstances, but with the help of the advanced instruments from the Terran Alliance, we can speed up the transformation so that the biological modifications will be done after we fabricate the Jupiter Project."

His grandfather frowned for a bit. "You have alluded to the second generation Carmine System to me before, but you have never fully explained what it is all about."

"That is because many of the details of the Carmine System must remain confidential for the time being. Now that you are here in person, I can reveal a bit more about what I have been working on to you in person. There are secrets about the Carmine System that I cannot easily divulge to you all, but what I am about to tell you falls outside of that scope."

Ves swept his gaze across the design lab. Gloriana, Ark, Benjamin and Alexa all understood the significance of this reminder.

Even though not everyone understood the reasons why the Carmine System was so sensitive, they knew that Ves had a habit of coming up with strange but useful inventions.

"Each of you should already understand the basic working principles of the Carmine System. The second generation differs from this by tapping into the power of blood. Instead of using regular human-derived blood, I came up with the idea to use more powerful blood derived from powerful beings. The idea is that the stronger blood can bestow a part of their extraordinary properties to the pilot and Carmine mech."

Alexa reacted with shock most of all. Ves had yet to teach her about the Carmine System, so she only understood the basics up to this point.

"That should not work at all. Even if there is a basis in truth to it, injecting alien blood into your body will only result in blood poisoning."

Ves smiled. "I am aware of that, but the Carmine System will make sure to alter and filter this foreign blood so that it will not poison anymore. The source of power does not lie in the blood cells, but in the hidden energies contained within. The blood of a strong extraordinary organism contains a lot of remarkable traits. According to certain esoteric theories, it is possible to tap into them or extract them directly. The second generation Carmine System is a relatively crude attempt to derive more power from a small quantity of extraordinary blood."

The description disgusted General Ark. He looked at his father with concern.

Even though Benjamin's physical condition had recovered at a remarkable rate, his old body was still marked by time.

How could the old man withstand so much strain on his relatively weak physique?

"Is it necessary for you to conduct this experiment on your grandfather?" Ark skeptically asked.

Ves shook his head. "I admit that grandpa will be more than fine with the original incarnation of the Carmine Version, but we can't stop progress just because we are afraid of the consequences. Besides, I have made a lot of precautions to prevent my latest changes from overwhelming his body. The second generation Carmine System won't flood my grandfather with foreign blood from the start, but will only gradually trickle in so that his body can gradually get used to the new variables. Over time, grandpa will be able to tolerate more and more of this foreign element. Just like how phase lords get stronger when their phasewater concentration has risen, a similar process should also occur in this case."

That led to the next obvious question.

"What sort of blood have you chosen to bless me with?" Venerable Benjamin plainly asked.

"There are many possible choices." Ves replied. "There are numerous powerful mutated beasts aboard the Dragon's Den that have all developed strange abilities that have become noticeably stronger in the Age of Dawn. However, fit and compatibility are also important. I do not think that you have the sort of young and adventurous mindset to embrace these exotic powers."

The old man gruffly nodded. "I was just about to say that. I appreciate the value of power more than most people, but that does not mean that I am eager to pursue it unconditionally."

"Don't worry, grandpa. After an extensive selection process, I have settled on a source of blood that might not be the strongest, but contains enough extraordinary factors to make it useful. The blood comes from... myself."

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"Really?" Ark eventually broke the silence.

Benjamin did not speak up, but his expression made it clear that he looked rather disturbed.

"My blood is quite abnormal, to say the least." Ves defended his choice. "I think both of you have enough senses to tell that I am anything but an average human. Biologically speaking, I have ascended to a higher life level. There are numerous different powers that have seeped into my body and blood. For example, there is a tiny amount of phasewater running through my body. This actually makes me a phase lord, if only barely."

"Isn't phasewater toxic to humans?!" Ark grew alarmed. "Even if your body can tolerate this exotic for a strange reason, that does not mean that others can cope with it as well. What if it ends up killing my father!?"

Benjamin raised his hand. "Calm down, my son. Ves here must have good reasons to make this decision."

"As I have said before, the second generation Carmine System will come with many safety features that will prevent my blood from risking my grandfather's health." Ves confidently explained. "As a high-tier expert pilot, his body has already surpassed the limits of an ordinary human. It might be a bit too reluctant for him to get exposed to phasewater, but once he advances to an ace pilot, his body will quickly change and grow even stronger. I think this may be a means for him to gradually acquire at least some of the traits of a phase lords through gradual exposure therapy."

This was basically an adaptation of one of his earlier ideas. Ves had theorized that it was possible for him to advance his phase lord cultivation by piloting a Carmine mech that circulated a greater concentration of phasewater in its artificial blood stream.

Since it could theoretically work for him, then it could work for other people as well!

Although Ves was aware that it was extremely reckless for him to experiment on his own grandfather, he was confident that it would work out the way he envisioned!

Not only were the two blood relatives, but they also shared a strong family bond. He believed that these relationships would exert a large influence on the Blood Pact and turn the impossible into the possible!

After all, one of the defining traits of high-ranking mech pilots was their ability to distort reality!

In order for this experiment to produce a successful result, Venerable Benjamin had to exert his force of will to make his body more compatible and tame the donated blood!

All of this sounded a bit too esoteric and mystical to everyone else. None of them had a background in cultivation science, so they did not understand why Ves was so unreasonably confident in this matter.

Fortunately, every member of the Larkinson Clan had developed the habit of giving Ves the benefit of the doubt.

If he was convinced that a wacky new invention would work, then they were willing to give him a chance to prove his claims!

"Alright." Benjamin finally spoke. "If you truly think it is beneficial for me to get exposed to your strange blood, then I will try and make it work."

"Don't worry. It won't happen all at once. This is a process that may take many years. We can only truly ramp up your exposure to my blood once you become a Saint."

"I will try my best to keep your wait to a minimum."

After they had dealt with this heavy topic, Ves and Gloriana proceeded to explain the remaining features of the cyborg expert mech.

"The configuration of the Blood Star Mark II is much less complex than the Jupiter Project." Gloriana took over for a time. "According to your preferences and track record, we have shaped it into an offensive knight. Its defenses are considerably stronger, but they are not as formidable as that of a defensive knight."

The Blood Star Mark II could take quite a beating. It could form a resonance shield like other expert mechs, but it could also resist a lot of damage with its transphasic azure energy shield generator.

"Azure energy shield generators are a luxury to most mech pilots because they require phasewater in order to construct them. Aside from that, they also require high-grade water hypers, which are much more scarce due to their high demand. Our clan is able to supply both of these strategic materials, so we do not suffer from this problem. The azure energy shield generator of the Jupiter Project is relatively small due to its limited capacity. The Blood Star Mark II has more room for defensive systems, so its azure energy shield generator is substantially larger and more effective."

Ves was not entirely comfortable with letting his grandfather enter the battlefield once again. He made sure that the Blood Star Mark II was robust enough to withstand plenty of unexpected setbacks.

As far as Ves was concerned, the main goal of the Blood Star Mark II was not to annihilate the enemies of the Larkinson Clan, but to preserve and enrich his grandfather's life!

This was also a motivating factor for adding his own blood to the expert mech's second generation Carmine System.

Ves hoped that his powerful vitality would seep into his grandfather, thereby causing Benjamin to rejuvenate his aged body and allow him to live longer!

Of course, Ves did not let this secret goal detract from the fundamental purposes of a mech.

"The Blood Star Mark H's initial weapon loadout is relatively simple, but we have tried to make their parameters as strong as possible." He explained. "The quasi-first-class transphasic hyper sword and physical shield are relatively unassuming aside from one factor. The hyper material that we have integrated into both of them are attributed towards water. This means that the Blood Star Mark II is almost entirely based on the water element. This may also include the shoulder-mounted weapon hardpoints. For now, we intend to occupy them with a pair of quasi-first-class transphasic hyper shoulder-mounted laser cannons that are also aligned with water. They can be useful in breaching weaker transphasic energy shields with remarkable efficiency, but suffer a bit if the defenses are too strong."

Water was not the best choice for a pair of laser weapons, but Ves did not want to add any conflicts that could weaken the performance of the other systems of the Blood Star Mark II.

Whether that was the right choice remained to be seen.