

## The Mech 5401

Chapter 5401 The Limits of Inspiration

Ves became filled with thoughts on how to realize this latest idea.

It was incredibly daring to set a goal related to bringing the Mech Body Merger Progress forward.

His idea did not conform to the well-established pattern set by the mech community!

The mechers and a lot of other smart people methodically refined and optimized the cultivation trajectory of the mech piloting profession over the course of the Age of Mechs.

Ves did not want to sound arrogant and claim that he possessed the capability to subvert all of these proven laws and replace it with a completely new theoretical framework.

There were good reasons why every mech pilot could only wait until they had reached the very limit of what they could accomplish in their normal cultivation before embarking on the infamous road to no return.

However, it was exactly because the Mech Body Merger Process produced so many fatalities that Ves felt compelled to figure out a substitute!

"A cultivation process that tries to cram so many radical life-changing transformations in a single sequence is a mark of poor design." Ves frowned for a moment. "The results speak for themselves. The excessively high failure rate shows that this is one of the most awful breakthrough methods imaginable."

The mechers certainly knew this, but they were helpless about this outcome. The only other way for a peak ace pilot to advance successfully was to complete all of the four transformations at the same time!

The success rate of that reckless and highly risky method was even worse, so the mech community settled on the Mech Body Merger Progress because it was the least-bad option available.

This illustrated the enormous difficulty of a mech pilot trying to ascend to a True God without the assistance of the Kingdom of Mechs!

The huge jump in difficulty was simply too much for mech pilots who relied on 'automatic' cultivation for the entirety of their careers!

There was no way the mechers were content with this outcome. They must have worked incredibly hard to improve the Mech Body Merger Process or develop alternatives with higher success rates.

None of them succeeded apparently, or else the mechers would have popularized them a long time ago. Their need to produce more god pilots was too high for them to keep a better method for themselves.

What this meant was that the demand for a better way to help mech pilots ascend to godhood was insanely high!

Even if Ves could only produce a minor improvement, such a solution would already offer incredible value to the mech community at large!

Ves knew that Jovy and the Survivalists had already recognized that his Carmine System had the potential to make one of their most difficult dreams come true.

However, potential was not enough. There were plenty of other brilliant and crazy mech designers out there that came up with promising ideas.

Unless Ves was able to come up with a systematic theory and a practical solution, his idea would only remain a fanciful daydream to the mech community!

It was even worse if the solution could not be replicated without his design philosophy. Ves was still a Senior, which meant that his work and philosophy had yet to prove their value and permanence to the mech industry.

Only Master Mech Designers had the capital to make permanent contributions to the development of mechs!

This was because they had already contributed their design philosophies to the Kingdom of Mechs or rather the Red Kingdom.

Even if they perished, their extraordinary design principles would live on, thereby permanently enriching the strength of mechs in future generations!

Ves understood that it was a bit too premature for him to single-handedly solve one of the major problems related to the Mech Body Merger Progress when he was still a relatively inexperienced Senior Mech Designer.

"I can still try, though."

He had already discovered numerous parallels between the Blood Pact and the early phases of the Mech Body Merger Process.

There was no hope of relying on the Carmine System to attain corporeal union and total union. The last two phases of the Mech Body Merger Process were among the most extreme and deadly.

Only the strongest, luckiest and daring of ace pilots could successfully overcome these insanely difficult hurdles!

A means to complete the first two steps of the Mech Body Merger Process in advance was not that valuable in comparison.

While it would certainly help peak ace pilots improve their chances of success, Ves did not expect the success rate to improve by more than 10 percent at most.

"That is already enough to produce one or two more god pilots per mech generation." Ves made a conservative estimate.

There were far too many variables that affected the emergence of god pilots. Population was the most important factor by far, and red humanity was far too short of human bodies.

The best way to increase the rate of breakthroughs was by boosting the population. There were good reasons why the Polymath insisted on producing human clones en masse!

Ves shook his head. He was letting his mind wander yet again.

When he turned his focus back onto his work, he recalled that the fabrication run had already persisted for four standard days.

There was not much time left before the Blood Star completed its radical metamorphosis!

Even now, its mech frame already integrated enough high-end parts that the fundamental character had already changed.

Its transformation to a quasi-first-class expert mech massively strengthened its spiritual foundation!

Ves became impressed by how extensively this fed back to Venerable Benjamin.

Whenever the Blood Star grew stronger, so did his grandfather!

Benjamin literally looked as if he had undergone a round of life-prolonging treatment. The lingering traces of his physical frailty had disappeared entirely and he was visibly gaining a bit more body mass.

While it wouldn't surprise Ves too much if these improvements took place over months or years, to see it happen in the span of just a few days was too shocking.

The visible proof of a deep relationship between a Carmine mech and a mech pilot validated much of Ves' hopes and expectations towards the Blood Pact!

This soul bond was absolutely extraordinary. So long as Ves managed to improve it, Carmine mechs such as the Blood Star could turn any of their pilots into powerhouses!

"It is not that easy to improve it, though." Ves frowned.

His theoretical frameworks were not comprehensive enough to direct him towards a viable solution.

Vulcan also did not have access to a complete enough inheritance from a Divine Blacksmith to contribute to this effort either.

From the perspective of artifact cultivation, the Blood Star was most definitely a soulbond artifact.

Radical upgrades to its material performance might strengthen its intangible properties as well, but these were merely secondary reactions that took place without the direct involvement of a mech designer.

What Ves wanted to do was to figure out a safe and effective way to directly improve the Blood Pact!

He needed to do this in a direct and targeted fashion in order to produce the most effective result.

However, any thought related to tampering with the Blood Pact in any way caused his intuition to buzz.

Ves grimaced and narrowed his eyes.

It was not a good idea to experiment on an active Blood Pact without thought.

This was because this extraordinary bond was strong and resistant to tampering. The only way for Ves to directly alter its properties was by using force!

It went without saying that if Ves tried to hammer at the soul bond with the spiritual equivalent of a sledgehammer, the most probable outcome was that he would break it entirely!

This was a disastrous outcome for both Benjamin and the Blood Star!

"How can I change the Blood Pact then if I cannot take any direct action?"

He could only resort to softer and more indirect methods. He was already trying to improve the current Blood Pact by upgrading the physical and spiritual design of the Blood Star, but he had already reached the limit of what he could do after he completed this project.

That left Ves with the slowest and most time-consuming method of improvement.

"Growth."

Growth was a powerful force. As the central concept of his design philosophy, Ves was highly familiar with its strengths and weaknesses.

One of the greatest advantages of relying on growth was that it was usually the gentlest and least harmful way to strengthen a living mech!

Growth could complete the most radical transformations that would have ended up in disaster if they happened under any other circumstance.

By dragging out the changes over the span of years or decades, it became far more manageable to control for the negative consequences.

"All good things take time to come into fruition." Ves whispered to himself.

Though Ves did not prefer to rely on such a slow and relatively uncertain method of improvement, he could not come up with any other ideas for the time being.

All he could do was create a new blueprint and embed it into the spiritual design of the Blood Star Mark II.

"As long as the Carmine mech continues to cultivate, it will gradually be able to strengthen itself in a targeted manner!"

Ves thought back on the cultivation method that he had attached to this mech.

He had only made a few superficial changes to the Larkinson Metal Guardian Mantra. It primarily focused on strengthening its metal aspect, but also sought to improve the qualities related to blood to a minor degree.

Ves did not feel satisfied with this shallow solution.

"This is not the best fit for a Carmine mech."

A Carmine mech was a lot different from an ordinary living mech. A cultivation method that mainly focused on improving the non-organic qualities of a mech would not be able to realize the full potential of the Blood Star!

"It needs a different cultivation method, one that not only focuses on improving its biotech components, but also reinforces its Blood Pact." Ves concluded.

As much as he got caught up in the latest wave of inspiration, he was unable to solve such a deep and complicated problem.

It took a lot of time and research to develop a comprehensive new cultivation method for his living mechs!

Doing so in the middle of a fabrication run was impossible to Ves. He could only come up with minor alterations to the Larkinson Metal Guardian Mantra at most, but that was far from enough to satisfy his demands.

As the upgrade process slowly came to an end, Ves still hadn't managed to produce any further breakthroughs.

His latest ambition may be great, but reality was too cruel.

Ves could only shake his head and shelve this interesting idea for the time being. He had plenty of time to explore this interesting new research direction once he was done with his remaining mech design projects.

Besides, developing an effective and comprehensive cultivation method for Carmine mechs was such a massive leap in progress that it could single-handedly form the basis of the third generation Carmine System.

Ves had yet to complete a single second generation Carmine System!

The Blood Star Mark II was supposed to be the first living mech of its kind to showcase the improvements that he had been working on over the last half year!

Ves needed to spend way more time on testing, verifying, refining and optimizing the implementation of the second generation Carmine System.

It was not proper for him to get ahead of himself and skip past these necessary procedures. The Carmine System was too important for him to compromise his research!

By the end of the sixth day, the Blood Star Mark II finally reached completion.

Gloriana looked disappointed as the upgraded Carmine mech failed to become a masterwork mech.

"You were right, Ves."

The metallic components were all excellently made. Their overall quality was no worse than the quality of the Lionheart!

Just as Ves predicted, what ultimately held the Blood Star Mark II back from undergoing a masterwork transformation was the Carmine System.

If this complication did not exist, then Ves and Gloriana would have been able to receive another masterwork certificate by this time!

Chapter 5402 Too Soon To Tell

Just because Ves predicted this outcome did not mean he liked it. He never put all of his faith in his predictions because he had seen too many people get screwed when they happened to get it wrong.

If even the Polymath got misled by her assumptions and projections of the future, then Ves should never put much too much stock in his own predictions!

There were always variables that could cause reality to deviate from the most probable outcome. This was why Ves faintly hoped that he could produce another miracle and turn the Blood Star Mark 11 into another masterwork mech.

"Too bad it didn't happen."

This was a missed opportunity. A masterwork mech was not just a unique work of art. It was a rare state that provided all kinds of benefits to its mech pilot.

For example, now that General Ark Larkinson received a masterwork expert mech in the form of the Lionheart, he would definitely be able to break through sooner or later!

The reason why he had failed to do so during the first activation was because a simple testing session failed to stimulate his willpower and emotions extensively enough.

Ark had already made plans to speed up his Warborn's deployment to the border regions once he returned to his posting.

The best way for him to trigger his second apotheosis was to go all out against an opponent that was not a pushover!

With such a powerful and exquisite expert mech at his disposal, the threshold for Ark to break through had dipped to the lowest point in years.

If he could not break through in the next 5 years under such favorable conditions, then he was truly hopeless!

Venerable Benjamin had a much harder road ahead of him. The absence of a masterwork mech would make it a lot harder for him to overcome his bottleneck.

Although Gloriana's second generation god body method combined with the Larkinson Metal Guardian Mantra should be able to promote the growth of the Blood Star Mark II over time, Ves was not sure whether that was enough to overcome the handicap imposed by the Carmine System.

Ves could only wait and see whether the Blood Star Mark II would be able to overcome its own deficiencies.

At worst, it would remain stuck at an impassable junction like the Ouroboros. Only outside intervention might allow the Blood Star Mark II to reach the second rung of the Ladder of Craftsmanship.

There was no need for Ves to get too hung up over this issue. Masterworks were helpful, but not essential to the cultivation of mech pilots.

Plenty of mech pilots managed to advance to the rank of ace pilot while piloting perfectly normal expert mechs.

Ves believed that a Carmine mech had its own advantages. The Blood Pact transformed the relationship between mech and mech pilot to the point where their mutual feedback became at least an order of magnitude stronger!

If this was the case, then the advantages of a Carmine System more than made up for its disadvantages!

While everyone beheld the final outcome of this fabrication run, Ark approached and placed his hand on Benjamin's shoulders.

"Are you okay, dad?"

The old but surprisingly rejuvenated Larkinson smiled in response. "I am fine, Ark. It is not a setback if I did not hold any high expectations to begin with. Regaining my strength as an expert

pilot and restoring my lifespan is more than I could have ever hoped for. Piloting the original Blood Star has allowed me to rediscover my original passion. Now that it has turned into a proper expert mech, I have everything I need to fight on behalf of our family."

Benjamin's positive attitude dispelled the air of disappointment that had settled into the mech workshop after the outcome became clear.

Though Gloriana still expressed obvious discontent at missing her goal, there was nothing they could do to improve the Blood Star Mark II.

"This is a fine high-tier expert mech." Ves affirmed after he had collected his thoughts. "I am proud that I was able to upgrade your Carmine mech to this extent. Masterwork or not, it will serve you well enough in the coming years."

The conclusion of the Blood Star Mark II Project signaled the end of projects related to expert mechs for Ves and Gloriana.

While plenty of Larkinson mech pilots would undoubtedly advance to the rank of expert pilots in the coming years, Ves intended to pay less attention to any new expert mech design projects.

There was no need for him to go all-out into designing the most extravagant expert mechs for a bunch of low-tier expert pilots.

His wife might have a different opinion, but she needed to take the next months off in order to receive her long-awaited cranial implant upgrade and recover from the operation.

This gave Ves a good opportunity to put more emphasis on designing standard mechs.

Whether he designed them for the Larkinson Army or the mech market, Ves felt a strong compulsion to go back to his roots and focus on meeting the needs of ordinary mech pilots!

A few days went by as the mech designers recovered from their exertion and spent more time with their family.

In the meantime, both the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II went through multiple testing sessions.

The Lionheart needed very little tweaks and adjustments. Gloriana had done a good job at interpreting Ark's wants and needs. The expert command mech already fit him like a glove from the start, and the minor changes that followed afterwards were so trivial that they weren't even necessary!

The Blood Star Mark II needed a bit more tweaking in order to accommodate Venerable Benjamin.

The old man had not fought like an expert pilot for over half a century. Neither he nor Gloriana could accurately anticipate how the Blood Star Mark II needed to be configured in order to fit his current fighting form.

All of those years of living his life as a normal person had changed Benjamin in many profound ways.

He was not young anymore. His fiery passion and his impulsive edge had made way for a more level-headed and patient outlook towards life.

The Blood Star Mark II exuded a steady but reassuring presence. With the Golden Cat as its design spirit, the expert offensive space knight inspired both love and protection.

This caused Ves to consider whether it would have been better to design it as a defensive space knight.

Ves shook his head at that thought. "Jannzi already has that covered. The Larkinson Army is better off with a sturdy machine that can take the initiative and carry its own weight on the battlefield."

Aside from the Carmine System and the optional shoulder-mounted luminar crystal cannons, the Blood Star Mark II was not an exciting expert mech.

Usually, high-tier expert mechs tended to gain one or more powerful trump cards that synergized well with the developing abilities of their expert pilots.

The Blood Star Mark II did not come with so many bells and whistles. Its configuration was a little bland, but that enabled Ves and Gloriana to make it solid and reliable.

What they actually wanted to pay attention to were the effect of the Blood Pact and the implementation of the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem.

Previously, the Lionheart was the only Larkinson mech that had been built according to the standards of the new mech ecosystem.

There was no effective way to test it out because it was expressly designed to work in cooperation with multiple Larkinson mechs.

The greater the strength and quantity of Larkinson mechs, the more drastic the effects produced by the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem!

Pairing just two of the mechs with the new ecosystem together was enough for Ves to verify a few theories.

As the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II finally deployed together for the first time, Ves watched on as their respective pilots tried to figure out how to make use of the Energy Weaver functions.

That was one of the downsides of the new mech ecosystem. It was so far beyond the experiences of most mech pilots that they had very little foundation in these sorts of activities!

The strong auras of the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II failed to harmonize with each other.

The local E energies claimed by the two expert mech refused to merge with each other. Ark and Benjamin tried various ways to combine their strengths, but made no progress in this area.

Ves thought that their close family relationship would have made it quick and easy for them to combine their forces, but it turned out that this assumption was wrong.

Just because the mech pilots of the Gemini Family could merge their powers together did not mean that others could do the same!

Ves couldn't bear to see his uncle and grandfather bumble around like fools. He transmitted lots of instructions in the hopes that one of his ideas might allow the two to get started.

"Don't try to cooperate directly with each other. Work through your mechs instead, as your machines are the interfaces that can facilitate greater cooperation. Grandfather, your job is easy. Just

leave it to your living mech. Ark, your job is a little harder because your Lionheart does not possess an independent personality. You will have to reach out to the Blood Star Mark II yourself through your second skin mech."

When the two Larkinson expert pilots tried this suggestion out, they found to their surprise that their expert mechs were finally beginning to reach out with each other!

The resonance strengths of their pilots were strong, so their initial attempts at utilizing the advantages bestowed by the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem were quite drastic.

At this time, the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II produced notably less clashes as their resonance shields started to get in touch with each other.

Though the two expert mechs were ultimately not able to combine their resonance shields and form a much more resilient defensive barrier, this was just the start!

Ves already anticipated that the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem would be challenging to learn and even more challenging to master!

Ark and Benjamin at least needed to practice with a troop of Energy Weaver mechs for multiple months before they developed their first proper applications.

"Try and see if you can produce a better result by borrowing the help of Goldie."

When the Golden Cat manifested above the Blood Star Mark II, she managed to improve the cooperation between son and father for a bit, but it was still too early to produce any drastic results.

There were too few participating units!

Neither Ark nor Benjamin developed any significant proficiency with the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem!

The amount of additional E energy that they were able to harness through their combined efforts was not trivial, but it was not game-changing either.

All of this left Ves a bit dissatisfied. He had hoped that his powerful uncle and grandfather might be able to prove the value of his new mech ecosystem, but it appeared that he needed to wait until he completed a bunch of other Larkinson mech designs.

The Fey Project was already close to completion. Once the Larkinsons produced a few hundred copies and started to put the new machines into use, the mech pilots assigned to the new drone mechs would surely be able to explore the potential of his mech ecosystem!

"Alright, that is enough testing for today. I have seen enough."

The Miracle Couple had conducted enough tests on the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II to confirm that they had reached their optimal states.

They were ready to be shipped back to their respective places.

General Ark Larkinson eagerly wanted to bring his Lionheart back to the Warborn Mech Division and lead his elite unit in battle against the aliens as soon as possible!

Venerable Benjamin Larkinson would be taking his Blood Star Mark II back to the expeditionary fleet and participate in the Golden Skull Alliance's next expeditions.

Either way, neither of the powerful living mechs would be gathering dust in the coming months!

## Chapter 5403 The Promises of the Fey Project

It was always hard to say goodbye.

As much as Ark and Benjamin wanted to stay at Diandi Base a bit longer so that they could spend more time with Ves and his children, their places were elsewhere.

As expert pilots that had reached the threshold to the next rank, their main priority was to use their new machines and seek their breakthrough opportunities in battle!

Even if the two men truly enjoyed their time on New Constantinople VIII, they did not feel comfortable amidst all of the extravagant wealth and luxury on display.

This was not their world.

Their hearts beckoned them to return to their true homes.

As such, the two guest Larkinsons gathered in front of their hosts one last time before they returned to the middle zones.

Ves' children were especially sad to see their grand-uncle and great-grandfather go! There weren't a lot of other Larkinsons they were close to in the small and underdeveloped Premier Branch. They missed the hustle and bustle of the expeditionary fleet.

"Are you going away to beat the aliens with your new mech?" Andraste asked as she looked up at the tall and dashing Ark.

"I certainly will. Each soldier has an obligation to stand up and do their part to defend our state, our society and our race. I fight not because I enjoy the violence or because I relish in the suffering of alien beings. I fight because the humans of our dwarf galaxy need the protection of those who possess the strength to resist our enemies. Make sure to pay attention to the news. The Warborn and 1 will be making a name for ourselves in the Torald Middle Zone. We shall do our utmost to pose as a shield between the murderous aliens and the defenseless citizens of the Krakatoa Middle Zone!"

Meanwhile, Aurelia exchanged a few words with her great-grandfather.

"Are you happy with papa and mama's gift?"

"More than you can ever imagine." Venerable Benjamin replied as he gazed at the young lady with pride. "It is not entirely necessary for me to obtain such a mech as fantastic as my new Blood Star. The greatest gifts that my grandson has given me is to thrive and have lovely children such as you. Nothing makes me happier as an old man than to see my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow up and live their own happy lives. In a way, I am grateful that Ves has restored my ability to fight again. The stronger I become, the more I can relieve your burdens."

Benjamin was fortunate enough to grow up and spend much of his decades during the high tide of the Age of Mechs. He lived in a galaxy where humanity reigned supreme and where the threat of aliens was an afterthought.

If he was being honest, then he would have liked for the Larkinsons to remain in the old galaxy.

Sure, the Milky Way Galaxy did not offer much excitement. The absence of phasewater, E energy radiation and hyper materials meant that the mech designers over there were stuck with the same old resources as before.

However, Benjamin envied the safety and stability that the people of the old galaxy took for granted.

Even if a disaster took place in a star sector, there were still plenty more where humanity would remain safe and sound.

Benjamin envied this simple luxury.

Here in the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy, humanity was locked in such a huge confrontation that no zone was safe!

Neither the Agamemnon Upper Zone nor the Krakatoa Middle Zone were guaranteed to remain intact. It would only take a few massive offensives from the native aliens to break through the frontlines and ravage all of the colonies within their reach!

As far as the old man was concerned, it would be best if the majority of the Larkinsons retreated all the way back to the rear of human space.

Given how rapidly Ves rose in status and importance, it should be possible for him to move his immediate family to Bridgehead One or one of the Central Star Nodes.

However, his stubborn grandson refused to do so for reasons that Benjamin did not understand.

Though the old expert pilot would like nothing more than to personally drag Ves and his children all the way back to the other side of human-occupied space, he lacked the authority and power to make this happen.

The future belonged to the younger generations!

The time where Benjamin held significant sway over the Larkinsons had passed. His grandson was the most powerful voice within the clan, and that was not necessarily bad.

Ves certainly brought far more prosperity to the Larkinsons than anyone else in the old family!

"I hope your father will keep you safe when I am not around." Benjamin said in a good-natured voice as he bent down to hug Aurelia. "If he fails to do so, tell me. I will make sure to come back and teach him a lesson about caring for his family!"

"Hihihi!"

After everyone said their goodbyes, Ark and Benjamin finally disappeared from view.

One of the warships of the Bluejay Fleet would be taking them back to their respective destinations together with their shiny new expert mechs.

Whatever happened after that was largely beyond Ves' power.

At most, Ves would be able to help his Uncle Ark in a pinch through his weak but permanent relationship with the Lionheart.

This was also another reason why Ves regretted the fact that he was unable to turn the Blood Star Mark II into a masterwork mech.

If Venerable Benjamin ever got into trouble, Ves could not help him with his own power.

The only way Ves could directly intervene was by lending his own power to another mech on the battlefield that happened to be one of his masterworks.

"It will be alright." Gloriana comforted him as she led the children back inside. "Your uncle and grandfather chose this life for themselves. They are fighting so that the rest of us can remain safe. We should respect their service."

"Hm, you are right. There is not much point in worrying about what they will get into now that they have proper mechs again. The best we can do for them is to help our clan in our own ways."

Everyone had a part to play. Mech designers such as Ves and Gloriana could contribute just as much if not more by designing fantastic mechs.

The couple spent the next few days analyzing the newly gathered data and processing everything they had learned.

Completing the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II and witnessing them in action had verified a lot of theories and assumptions about the latest tech.

The second generation god body method, the second generation Carmine System and the fourth generation luminar crystal weapons all worked as intended more or less.

Aside from that, the Larkinson mech designers personally verified the soundness of many other applications of hyper technologies.

The Larkinsons were fully qualified to design hyper mechs that better made use of the changing environment!

This was great news for the remaining mech design projects.

The Fey Project in particular contained many essential aspects that hinged on Ves' ability to realize all of the drone mech's ambitious new features.

A versatile and powerful mech like this could never become as good if it did not take advantage of the Hyper Generation!

While Ves and Gloriana could have completed the mech design sooner, they deliberately extended its development so that they would still have room to apply the lessons from designing the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II.

The Fey Project experienced a lot of small but useful improvements in the days that followed.

The complicated mech relied a lot on its fey to augment its combat effectiveness. The issue with that was that the fey were too small and compact to pack a lot of power.

It would have been great if Ves designed the Fey Project as a first-class mech. He could fit a lot of miniaturized components in the small fey and still make sure they were powerful enough to be of use in battle.

However, it was a bit too difficult to make them strong enough while Ves was stuck with second-class technology.

The only ways that Ves could make up for this shortfall was by leaning heavily on both hyper technology and E-technology.

The variant of the Fey Project that was exclusive to the Larkinson Clan should possess ample enough power to cement its place in the mech roster.

The Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem should be a lot more effective for a living mech that could deploy multiple fey that also happened to be alive!

This would allow any mech units with this mech model to capture a lot of E energy radiation and harness all of that power for other purposes.

"The greater the quantity of fey, the greater the effectiveness of this mech model."

Ves was not able to determine how many fey a copy of this mech could effectively control.

He assumed that it should not be difficult to control 4 fey at a time, but how much time would it take for the Fey Project to grow to the point where it could control 6 fey at once?

Ves did not have enough data to make a reasonable projection. It may be that the Fey Project would not be able to expand its effective control over the fey when it evolved into a third order living mech.

If that was the case, then one of the key factors that Ves relied upon to raise the value proposition of his product would become invalid!

"Urgh. It is too difficult to make predictions when I can't simulate any of this stuff."

Hyper technology and E-technology were so new and mysterious that no adequate mathematical models existed to make accurate predictions.

It used to be a lot more manageable back during the Phasewater Generation. A few years after the use of phasewater became widespread, a lot of clever people had studied this exotic material so extensively that they derived a lot of formulas that could be used to increase the accuracy of simulations.

If nothing unusual happened, then the Phasewater Generation would have persisted for at least two decades, granting the mech industry enough time to refine the mathematical models and improve the application of transphasic products.

Unfortunately, the fast and unexpected rollout of the Hyper Generation had interrupted the old technological cycle and started up a new one, bringing everyone back to the starting line.

To say that Ves and many other mech designers were annoyed at this was an understatement.

It may have been necessary for red humanity to embrace hyper technology as soon as possible, but the researchers and developers who needed to keep up with the changes had all been dragged out of their comfort zones!

"Do you think the Fey Project will live up to its promise?" Ves idly asked his wife.

Gloriana briefly contemplated the question. "I am confident that both editions of the Fey Project will end up satisfactory. They have to be considering all of the work that we have put in. The real question is whether they will be successful enough to take the second-class mech market by storm. That is still in question. In my opinion, there is a small chance that it will sell well, but only as long as the competition has not released anything that can rival its value."

In other words, the Larkinsons had not been able to make the Fey Project good enough to dominate the sales charts.

Ves did not like this as his competitors would be the ones to determine the success and failure of his work.

There were a lot of brilliant mech designers out there. Who knew whether a handful of them could release a powerful alternative to the Fey Project.

After all, Ves should not be the only mech designer who recognized the new and powerful synergies between hyper technology and drone mechs!

Ves narrowed his eyes. "I won't admit defeat that easily. Let us focus on refining the Fey Project earlier. I do not want my first original commercial product of the Hyper Generation to turn into a flop. We need to do whatever it takes to get our mech business back on track!"

#### Chapter 5404 Marketing Considerations

The completion of the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II represented a turning point for Ves and Gloriana's stay on New Constantinople VIII.

Gloriana no longer had any heavy obligations left that held her back from going on a trip to replace her cranial implant.

The only reason why she decided to linger for a bit longer was to assist with the partial upgrade of the Macharia Excelsia.

It was a genuine ace mech after all, and the fact that it hailed from the Hex Federation made Gloriana even more enthusiastic about the machine!

Unfortunately, her inadequate qualifications prevented her from providing too much input. She was not even allowed to apply her god body solution as that would require a complete overhaul and rebuild of the ace mech.

The most she could do was to get into closer contact with the Macharia Excelsia and study the properties of an ace rifleman mech first-hand.

This was already valuable enough for a mech designer with her specialization. Combined with her modest involvement in the iterative upgrades of the Mars, her comprehension of machines that surpassed the existence of expert mechs had definitely improved by a lot. This would definitely serve her well once she was able to design her own ace mech in the future.

In any case, the minor delay also granted more time for the Survivalist-owned implant development company to optimize its augmentations for their VIP customer.

Gloriana also took the time to help Ves finalize the Fey Project. While she was not that passionate about mass production mechs, she deeply understood the importance of this new mech line.

The Fey Project had the potential to become one of the mainstays of the Larkinson Army as well as a bestseller on the second-class mech market!

"I think there is a good chance that we can persuade the Hex Army to adopt both public editions of the Fey Project." Gloriana remarked as she leaned against Ves as they studied the latest iteration of one of the Fey models. "As long as the performance of the Standard Edition or the Elite Edition

surpasses that of other mech models at the same price range, the Hexers will surely fall in love with its capabilities. It is just too versatile and useful."

As a new mech line that was targeted towards several different audiences, Ves had chosen to split up the development of the Fey Project into three broad variations.

The Standard Edition consisted of a cost-effective second-class non-transphasic hyper mech that was fairly expensive but still affordable for the most part.

The Design Department always had the option of designing additional variations in order to perform better under certain circumstances such as landbound combat.

The production cost fluctuated considerably due to geography and volatility in the resource markets, so it was not easy to figure out how much it cost to produce a single copy. Ves aimed to limit the cost to 2 MTA credits, though it was incredibly challenging for him to design an effective drone mech with so many limited means.

The Elite Edition was the much more powerful quasi-first-class transphasic hyper mech take on the Fey Project. Ves did not hold himself back as much and shopped around for lots of expensive tech and materials.

Its cost was much greater as a result, so much so that it was unaffordable to the vast majority of second-class forces!

With an estimated average production cost of 85 MTA credits, a lot of potential customers with enough starship capacity on their hands were better off spending that money on acquiring an entire mech company's worth of machines as opposed to a single boondoggle!

The Larkinson Edition largely resembled the Elite Edition, but it improved upon the version intended to be sold to well-heeled clients by upping the parameters that could still be raised!

Not only did the Larkinson Edition make use of significantly higher quantities of phasewater, it also incorporated the exclusive Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem. This would give the Larkinson Army a massive edge and ensure its superiority in the middle zones!

Another factor that distinguished the three editions from each other was the use of hyper materials and hyper technology.

As more and more hyper materials continued to emerge from every part of the Red Ocean, the supply of low-grade and certain mid-grade variations had already started to become more adequate.

In order to keep the costs down, the Standard Edition predominantly made use of mid-grade hypers that were a bit more common.

The Elite Edition and Larkinson Edition utilized high-grade hypers that were not that easy to source.

It just so happened that the T Institute had already been working on expanding the production of many of the high-grade hypers that were needed to mass produce the more powerful editions of the Fey Project.

If not for the fact that internal demand of high-grade hypers was too high, Ves would have permitted the T Institute to sell a portion of its output!

The main factor that limited the supply at the moment was the difficulty of obtaining the 'precursor' materials that could transform into medium and high-grade hypers.

A lot of high-grade hypers originally came from relatively worthless materials, but that did not mean that there were trillions of tons of them lying around in a typical star system!

The current medium energy environment was not able to transform those precursor materials into hyper materials. The concentration of E energy radiation was not high enough, which meant that all of these hidden treasures had yet to show their true value!

An entirely new prospecting and mining industry had popped up that expressly hunted down these precursor materials.

The identification and mining of these crucial precursor materials was constantly progressing at a fast rate. Many companies smelled profit and eagerly roamed the stars in search of greater gains.

However, securing a supply of hyper materials was not helpful unless it could be converted into greater value.

It was not easy to develop powerful hyper technology based on ordinary hypers, but Ves possessed unique insights on hyper technology. He was also able to produce a lot of synergies by tying hyper technology with living mechs!

This was one of the reasons why Ves grew so confident in the sales potential of the Fey Project.

The unique synergies raised the value proposition of all three editions of this mech line, thereby ensuring that each of them would be worth considerably more than their production costs!

At this time, the three editions were close to completion. Ves and Gloriana had recently upgraded the designs to incorporate the latest insights from the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II.

They only needed to test a bunch of prototypes before they were ready to end this project.

Now that the Fey Project had reached this point, Ves needed to make up his mind on how he wanted to market his latest product.

"It has been too long since the LMC has released a high-profile commercial mech, boss." Gavin reported to Ves. "Unlike the other commercial mechs that we have put on sale in the previous generation, I think we can boost the interest in your new product by holding a product reveal. We can take advantage of your rising celebrity and esteemed status to attract a lot more attention to the Fey Project. The effect will be at least an order of magnitude greater than if we attempted to hold a regular marketing campaign!"

A product announcement under these circumstances was also a lot cheaper. Sure, the Larkinsons needed to spend significant sums to rent an appropriate venue and pay for the services of all kinds of partners in order to ensure the event would go smoothly, but that was much cheaper than funding an entire marketing campaign!

Ves knew that his current reputation and prestige had already risen to the point where thousands of news publications would flock to him whenever he wanted to make a public announcement.

All of this was free publicity!

It would be criminal if Ves did not take advantage of such favorable circumstances!

He nodded to his assistant. "It has been years since I have presided over an old-fashioned product reveal. Let's do it, Gavin. The Living Mech Corporation needs a marketing boost in the new mech generation. Starting off our commercial revival by announcing the Fey Project to the public is an excellent way to reignite our brand and secure our place in the mech market."

"Those are my thoughts as well. Where would you like to hold the product reveal?"

"Can't we do it here?"

"Oh, no! That would not do!" Gavin immediately protested. "Perhaps you might have forgotten about it, but the Terrans do not have a good reputation among the second-raters. The people who live in the middle zones both hate and envy the arrogant, stuck-up first-raters who regularly look down on everyone who is unable to enjoy an exceedingly high standard of living. While you are technically not a first-rater, your choice to relocate to the Terran Alliance sends an ugly message. This will turn into a powerful point of criticism if you dare to hold a product reveal on New Constantinople VIII."

Though Ves did not agree with the sentiment, he could understand how this course of action might piss a lot of people off. He had indeed lost sight of how associating too closely with the Terrans would send all of the wrong messages.

"So we need to hold the product reveal in a middle zone?"

"That would be our recommendation." Gavin responded. "I have taken the liberty to explore three potential locations where you can present your work to the public. You can choose to unveil the Fey Project within the Hex Federation of the Magair Middle Zone. This would be an excellent choice for you to appeal to the large number of Hexer dynasties that you can personally woo into placing large orders for our new products."

That surprised Ves. "Really, Gavin? The Hex Federation?"

"It makes complete sense, boss! The Hexers are among our most loyal and fanatic customers, so if you want to build up more hype and cause our early sales to skyrocket, then starting here is an excellent strategic choice. However, I also have to mention that there is also the risk that our new product will become so closely associated with the Hexers that it will be known as one of their exclusive mech models, even if that is not actually the case."

Ves did not want to hear anything further. "Pass. I do not want to create any misunderstandings. Our relationship with the Hex Federation is already close enough. Besides, we have already captured it as a solid market for our products. The Hexers will buy my Fey Project in larger quantities regardless of whether I unveil my work in their state."

"My next suggestion is to hold your product reveal in the Colonial Federation of Davute. This would be a good opportunity for you to check up on the Larkinson Branch, negotiate any deals with President Yenames Clive and possibly collaborate with Master Decimus Horst on the Supremo Project in person."

All of that sounded compelling to Ves, but he did not have a good impression of Davute these days. He was always afraid that he would get sucked into its vortex again as soon as he came close.

He left Davute for good reasons.

"Not good enough. Do you have any other suggestions that aren't as loaded?"

"Well... if you want to present your work to the customers who need the Fey Project the most, you can hold your product reveal in one of the booming markets in the Torald Middle Zone. The Bortele System has become one of the strongholds and the economic centers of the war against the aliens. Almost every second-class mech force will pass through the port system whenever they venture to the border regions and back. It is a popular destination to dump a lot of salvage and purchase new mechs to replace the losses sustained in combat."

"The Bortele System again, hmm?"

Ves thought about it for a moment. Gavin presented an excellent argument for this choice. It was certainly a lot more palatable than the previous two options.

"Alright. Let us settle on holding our product reveal in the Bortele System. Please make the arrangements. Oh, contact the expeditionary fleet and ask whether it will make it back to this port system on the date of my presentation. It would be good for us to get in touch with each other again and see how everyone is doing these days."

"I shall do my best to make that happen." Gavin promised.

Chapter 5405 Bye Gloriana

The time had finally come for Gloriana to depart for her life-changing operation.

After months of waiting, she would finally be able to replace her old and outdated second-class Erestal-015 cranial implant with a much more superior version!

While her upcoming replacement implant might not be the apex of what red humanity could make at this time, it was still a top-grade product that was only affordable to a small proportion of first-raters!

Gloriana was incredibly lucky to be able to acquire such a fantastic cranial implant free of charge. She benefited enormously from the deal that Ves had made with a Survivalist Master Mech Designer during the infamous conference.

Though Ves regretted the fact that he could not make use of this opportunity himself, he was more than happy to see his wife make use of this sumptuous gift to become a much better mech designer!

On the day of her departure, she and Saintess Ulrika Vraken prepared to go on a trip to the Vulit Central Star Node that would last for about a month.

Saintess Ulrika and her ace mech did not accompany Gloriana in order to protect her against any threats. No one dared to attack a warship of the Bluejay Fleet deep within the boundaries of human-occupied space.

Ves could count on the mechers to do their utmost to protect his wife against outside threats.

What he truly was concerned about was the threat from the mechers themselves!

He knew them well enough that they would do anything to get their hands on more trade secrets.

It would be too easy for the implant development company to tamper with the new cranial implant before placing it inside Gloriana's head.

This would give the Red Association a direct feed to everything that went through her mind!

The mechers could do way more than that. What if they installed a back door that could take over her body? What if they only needed to transmit a single command for her head to blow up like his experimental subjects?

There was no limit to how shameless the mechers could be if they were allowed to act without restraint!

Saintess Ulrika Vraken hardly posed a threat against the Red Association, but her Saint Kingdom could pick up any signs of malicious intent.

Ves had tasked her with verifying the safety of the implants while also monitoring the operation from beginning to end.

The implant surgeons had no problem with this arrangement. It was actually quite common among the upper echelon due to the need for additional guarantees.

After all, powerful and important figures were at their most vulnerable when they bared their brains to a bunch of strangers!

Ves had personal experience with the unpleasantries that could arise when the precautions were not sufficient.

"Why are you leaving, mama?" Marvaine asked with tears in his eyes.

"I want to go with you!" Andraste hugged her mother's legs. "Why can't we go on vacation? Vulit is so cool!"

Gloriana lovingly patted their heads. "I would love to take you, but this is a work trip, not a vacation. I will not be able to accompany you while I am recovering from the operation."

"You will fall behind in your studies if you accompany your mother to Vulit." Ves added. "Your study programs at Joan Devos are so demanding that it will be too difficult for the three of you to catch up if you have skipped too many classes."

"We can still do our homework and take remote classes!"

Ves shook his head. "Joan Devos cannot fully accommodate remote teaching. Stop complaining. None of you are going. You will stay on this planet for the time being where your nannies will take care of you when we are not around."

"Awww..."

"Can we go with you instead?"

"No. The journey to the Bortele System is a work trip as well. Don't worry. I will not be leaving right away, and I won't be gone as long as your mother."

The Larkinson Clan and the Living Mech Corporation had already scheduled a public event in one of the economic and military hubs of the Torald Middle Zone.

The Larkinsons hardly needed to send out any invitations before they became inundated with requests to attend the closed event in person!

Expectations for this upcoming product reveal were already high. Many people expected one of the rising stars of the Age of Dawn to surpass their expectations and come up with another shocking surprise.

The hype surrounding the upcoming product reveal placed a heavy weight on Ves' shoulders. He needed to put his full focus on this event and make sure that he would not disappoint his audience.

It hadn't taken long for Ves to agree to this proposal, but the Larkinsons under his command had already formed elaborate plans that would be sure to make the Fey Project stand out from the competition!

Bortele was no place for his children, though. Ever since the Red Two fortified the port system and turned it into a key logistical center of the war effort, the entire region had militarized at a rapid rate.

The Toral Middle Zone no longer represented a place of opportunities and new beginnings. The escalating threat posed by the native aliens had forcibly turned all of the surviving colonies into bulwarks designed to stop or slow down the enemy advance.

Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine were better off staying far away from this risky region.

As mother and father tried their best to console their children, the appointed time had finally come.

Gloriana grasped the heads of each of her children and planted a loving kiss on their heads.

"Make sure you behave, and do not fall behind on your studies. I love you, and I cannot wait to return so that you will be able to see your new and improved mother!"

"Bye, mama!"

Gloriana and Saintess Ulrika Vraken soon teleported out of Diandi Base and emerged inside one of the warships of the Bluejay Fleet.

While the mecher fleet was not under Ves' direct command, his relationship with Jovy was good enough to ask for small favors as long as they were not excessive.

With Gloriana leaving to upgrade her cognitive functions, the Premier Branch had become quieter all of a sudden.

Gloriana was such a great part of his life that he clearly felt her absence in the following days.

While Alexa, his children and the students of the Eden Institute continued to keep Ves company, his design sessions became a lot more monotonous now that he could no longer bounce his ideas off his long-standing partner.

Ves still had plenty of work to do that did not require the presence of his wife.

One of the more interesting developments were the negotiations with the Terrans and the Rubarthans.

Progress had been fairly slow over the last months as both groups had surprisingly been plagued by indecision and internal disagreements.

This prevented Ves from taking action and delivering kinship networks to the powerful first-rate colonial superstates.

It was a bit frustrating to see these initiatives get stalled because the Terrans and the Rubarthans couldn't get their acts together.

"The negotiations will not drag on for much longer." Alexa reassured Ves when he expressed his irritation about this issue. "No one can deny the usefulness of your kinship networks. They are frankly amazing and can be used to foster greater trust in large populations. The impressive unity of your clan serves as proof of that. The only points of contention aside from the obvious are related to how effectively they can monitor and administer the kinship networks. As you can imagine, those who can gain administrative access can cause great damage if they abuse their new-found powers. This includes you and any agents of yours."

Ves seriously nodded. Trust was hard to come by in this cosmos, and he had strong trust issues himself.

Rushing this matter was the worst mistake that the Terrans and the Rubarthans could make. They were fully justified in taking it slow. The longer they waited, the more time they could spend on understanding how kinship networks worked and how they could protect their citizens against its potential dangers.

"What does your grandfather think?"

"I have not been in touch with him as of late. He is preoccupied with his own affairs. Otherwise, he is doing well for the most part."

"I understand."

The first year of the Age of Dawn had almost come to an end. General Axelar Streon did not have many more years to prepare for his ambitious heist. He needed to unite the entire Terran Alliance around his daring objective early enough to prevent the aliens from taking more precautions and fortifying their defenses further.

Ves wished he could contribute to Axelar's operation, but there was little more he could do so long as he was still a second-class mech designer.

He needed to step up on his studies and master all of the essential high technologies that was expected of a first-class Senior Mech Designer.

It did not help that the start of the Hyper Generation forced a lot of mech designers to master all kinds of subjects related to hyper technology. Ves needed to master more knowledge and skills in order to gain enough trust to design first-class mechs for his customer base.

Ves continued to chat with Alexa about various different topics. He still had so much to learn about Terran society and first-class society in general.

"You are about to fabricate the first production copy of the Fey Project, correct?" The young woman asked.

"That is correct. Do you wish to participate?"

Alexa shook her head. "I am content with an assisting role. I do not want to interfere with your work and lower your chance of making another masterwork mech."

"It will be fine." Ves dismissively waved his hand. "My skills are good enough that your work will hardly create a negative impact. Don't forget that Blinky has a design network as well, though his version is not as developed as that of Alexandria. I can guide your work much better if it is just the two of us. I will be able to direct all of the work."

That sounded interesting to the former Terran. She began to waver in her mind.

"I am open to trialing this new approach."

"Great! Do you have any other questions about our upcoming fabrication run?"

"Which edition will you choose to fabricate first?"

"Shouldn't the answer be obvious? It will be the Larkinson Edition. It is not only the best and the most complete version of the Fey Project, but its existence will add another valuable living mech comparable to the Quint to the Larkinson Army."

Surprisingly, Alexa disagreed with that decision.

"I do not advise you to fabricate the Larkinson Edition as the first concrete example of your work. There will not be any negative consequences if you fail to turn it into a masterwork mech, but if you happen to succeed, you will not be able to retain possession of it for a long time."

"What? What are you-, oh. I forgot about the Association's awful habit..."

Many of the masterwork mechs that Ves and Gloriana had made as of late consisted of expert mechs.

By definition, every expert mech was exclusive to a single chosen expert pilot.

A masterwork version of an expert mech was useless in the hands of any other pilot, including one who hailed from the Red Association!

The story was different if the masterwork happened to be a more standardized mech.

Although the Larkinson Edition of the Fey Project was meant to be utilized by the Larkinsons and no one else, it did not come with any strong safeguards that prevented it from being piloted by third parties!

This meant that the mechers could just snap up a masterwork mech of the Larkinson Edition and make use of it without any hindrance!

Alexa gave a suggestion to Ves. "Would you like to try and do less than your very best in order to prevent the Association from appropriating your work?"

"No way! That goes against my professional ethics! Every living mech that I have brought to life deserves nothing but the very best from its creator! Besides, I don't want to deliberately shortchange the Association. The mechers have helped me many times. I do not mind it if I can pay them back for all of the favors that I have received over the years."

"If that is the case, then I suggest you fabricate a copy of the Elite Edition instead. This way, you will not lose anything sensitive."

"Hmmm, I guess you are right."

Chapter 5406 The Association's Power Plays

Ves had long grown annoyed at the Red Association's habit of requisitioning masterwork mechs.

He still had no idea what the Mech Trade Association had done with the Little Angel for example.

The only reason why he had managed to avoid this problem for years was because he invested a lot more effort into designing expert mechs!

Now that he thought about it, one of the original reasons why he had become so enthused about designing high-level mechs was exactly because he wanted to avoid his work from getting hijacked by the greedy mechers!

Exquisite machines such as the Amaranto, the Everchanger and the Phobos were absolutely irreplaceable to Ves. He expressly designed them to excel in their areas of specializations in order to bestow amazing advantages to the forces at his disposal!

He did not invest his heart and soul in each of those amazing masterwork expert mechs just to allow the mechers to leech off his hard work!

Though Ves detested their policy a lot in the past, his perspective had broadened since those years.

The mechers served many essential functions in human society. They may be greedy for masterwork mechs, but they probably had good reasons for their power.

"Alexa, I wonder if you or the Terrans know what the Association is doing with so many masterwork mechs. Why can't they rely on the ones they built themselves? I mean, the mechers must have plenty of masterwork mech designers in their ranks that can fully meet their own demand."

"It is not that simple, sir." The woman shook her head. "From what I have learned, the reason why the Mech Trade Association can never have enough masterwork mechs is because each of them are notably more effective in combating an internal threat that is difficult to fight against with mundane mechs. Not even the most luxurious first-class multipurpose mech can adequately resist this danger if they do not possess the qualities of a masterwork."

There was only one enemy in the Milky Way Galaxy that could make the mechers so spooked.

"The Compact."

Alexa nodded with a serious expression. It did not surprise Ves that a woman of her background was aware of the existence of this infamous cult.

"You are correct that the Mech Trade Association has sufficient Master Mech Designers in its ranks that can produce masterwork mechs non-stop." Alexa continued. "These Masters occasionally produce masterwork mechs of their best designs in order to meet certain quotas or earn additional MTA merits. However, they cannot dedicate all of their time to this single priority alone. Each of them must invest far more time in their core research and mech design projects. Anything that detracts from these activities will reduce their chances of advancing to Star Designer."

That made sense for the most part. Time was the most scarce and precious resource of every mech designer.

One of the most severe demands of masterwork mechs was that they could not be produced en masse with the help of the most advanced production method mastered by the first-raters.

Materialization technology was fantastic at fabricating exact carbon copies of mech designs, but they lacked the essential human touch that could elevate the products beyond their physical existences.

It took a lot of time and effort to fabricate a high-quality first-class multipurpose mech. Even the most reputable Master Mech Designers such as Master Vayro Goldstein would have to waste hours if not days to fabricate a proper mech by hand.

This was not an efficient use of their time!

As such, it became easier for the Mech Trade Association to just lay claim to random masterwork mechs built by third parties.

It was not as if the space peasants could resist the power of the mechers. At least they received handsome amounts of MTA merits in return for their 'voluntary' contributions.

"Almost none of those requisitioned masterwork mechs are up to the standards of the Association." Ves argued. "It is quite troublesome to upgrade them into first-class multipurpose mechs. The amount of work put into this effort is excessive."

"That is true, but it is important to identify who is doing all of the work. The difficulty of upgrading an existing masterwork mech is much lower than making one from scratch. The Association can delegate the former to various journeymen, Seniors and Masters who are not as important. Working on these upgrade projects also serves as excellent creative exercises for them. They can all get into contact with foreign mechs that are designed according to completely different principles than what they are accustomed to. Every masterwork mech has their own points of brilliance no matter how humble they actually perform."

That was information that Ves had not been able to obtain or deduce in the past. It was quite useful to know what happened immediately after the mechers swiped the masterwork mechs off the hands of their original makers.

A part of Ves felt a little annoyed that the MTA mech designers easily took advantage of the hard work of the space peasants they talked down upon most of the time.

"Okay, I can understand why the Mech Trade Association values masterwork mechs so much, but is there any reason for the Red Association to maintain the same stance?" Ves asked with a frown. "As far as I am concerned, the Compact's presence in this dwarf galaxy is negligible. There is no need to accumulate a large amount of masterwork mechs just to combat a special threat that is not easy to fight against through conventional means."

One of the factors that was relevant here was that Messier 87's exotic radiation created an environment where it became easier for mech pilots to break through.

Expert pilots and higher were much more effective at fighting extraordinary threats!

Besides, the main high-level threat of the Red Ocean were the phase whales and phase lords.

Their spatial manipulation abilities were quite powerful, but they were otherwise a lot more physical in their threat profile.

The best way to beat them was to overpower their defenses and demolish their enormous fleshy bodies by relying on overwhelming firepower.

It was not a coincidence that the Destroyer of Worlds and the First Flame annihilated the ancient phase whales the fastest during Operation Night Jazz!

Alexa was smart enough to deduce what Ves was thinking. She shook her head yet again.

"There are additional motivations for the mechers to lay claim to masterwork mechs. Do you recall that mech pilots have a much higher chance of breaking through if they pilot masterwork mechs as opposed to normal machines?"

"Oh. Yeah. I should have thought about that. Are you saying that the Association wants to promote the rate of breakthroughs through this policy?"

"Yes, but that is not all. Think about it, sir. The continuous transfer of masterwork mechs from the states to the Association will not only increase the rate of breakthroughs in the latter, but also reduce the same rate for the former. Over the long term, the mechers will welcome a larger amount of expert pilots while the armed forces of many states will see a reduction in the number of mech pilots who undergo their first apotheosis."

"What?! That's outrageous!"

Ves almost stood up when he heard this explanation!

What the mechers were doing was nothing less than stealing the breakthrough opportunities of the masses!

How many more expert pilots could states such as the Bright Republic, the Heavensword Association and the Garlen Empire produce if they managed to retain all of their masterwork mechs?

There had to be tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands over the span of several centuries.

All of those poor mech pilots that originally had brighter careers ahead of them all lost their opportunities without even knowing it because the Mech Trade Association stole away their breakthrough machines!

Instead, those masterwork mechs went through extensive overhauls before they got assigned to a large number of freeloaders within the MTA.

Ves found this conspiracy to be profoundly dishonorable and disgusting. He understood that it served to increase the Mech Trade Association's superiority over the space peasants, but that was not enough to excuse these heinous acts.

The injustice of it all gave him another reason to dislike the mechers!

Alexa gave him a rueful smile. "Expert pilots are not the strongest individual combatants that humanity can produce, but they have all embarked on the path to godhood. The larger the pool of expert pilots, the greater the amount of ace pilots that will emerge from their ranks. In turn, a larger pool of ace pilots will increase the number of god pilots that successfully survived the greatest test of their lives. This is why the Mech Trade Association has the largest number of god pilots under its sway. The Terran Confederation and the Rubarthan Federation on the other hand have to make do with less due to their more limited opportunities."

This was a conspiracy! This was a clear and obvious scheme to strengthen the Association at the expense of the subjugated states.

A scowl appeared on Ves's face. "Why don't these mechers go ahead and deprive the right to own masterworks among expert mechs and ace mechs?"

"That is counterproductive to their overarching goals. The Association is still invested in the goal of producing the largest number of god pilots as possible. It is just that the mechers would rather make it so that as many god pilots come from their own ranks as possible, hence the mass transfers of masterwork mechs. However, once a third party makes a masterwork expert mech just as your Lionheart, the mechers will violate their own policies if they attempt to take it out of your hands."

"Ah. I understand. The Lionheart will not be able to produce any breakthroughs if it falls in the hands of the mechers. However, taking it away will hinder Uncle Ark from advancing to ace pilot and eventually god pilot."

The mechers were able to tolerate the existence of god pilots who did not pledge their loyalty to the Association. This was because powerful heroes such as the Light of Sol and the Destroyer of Worlds helped to counteract the pressure from other rival powers such as the Common Fleet Alliance and the Five Scrolls Compact.

This consideration held true for the Red Association as well. The mechers of the Red Ocean had no incentive to stop their thieving ways.

Ves crossed his arms as he thought about the massive implications of this conspiracy.

He was personally affected by this nefarious policy. If he successfully fabricated a masterwork version of the Fey Project, none of the bright and talented mech pilots of the Larkinson Clan would be able to enjoy this reward!

Instead, Jovy himself would probably swoop in and spit out a poor excuse before teleporting the freshly made masterwork mech away.

It was one thing for Ves to let this happen when he remained ignorant of the greater truth, but now that Alexa had enlightened him to this dark secret, he was not as pleased!

"Wait. I am an honorary member of the Red Association. Doesn't that mean I am exempt from this policy?"

That made Alexa chuckle. "That is true, but you are a mech designer, not a mech pilot. There are no other honorary members within your clan, correct? You need to see this from the perspective of the mechers. Of all of the possible mech pilots that can contribute to human civilization, the ones that have received the best training and can pilot the strongest mechs come from the Association. An RA expert pilot is a thousand times more valuable than a Davutan expert pilot. Humanity will become much weaker if there are less first-class expert pilots and more third or second-class mech pilots."

That sort of made sense. It was a justifiable reason to transfer the most valuable breakthrough resources from the weakest to the strongest pool of mech pilots.

It did not make Ves any less angry, though!

"So from the perspective of the Red Association, my Larkinson expert pilot are not worth as much. Did I get that right, Alexa?"

"That is an accurate characterization." She affirmed. "To be fair, it is not personal to the mechers. It is merely a game of numbers to them. They are driven by their goals. That encourages them to think in absolutes. They constantly think about the big picture and ignore all of the individual harm they cause with their decisions. It is a common fault of hegemonic organizations. It is usually responsible for their eventual downfalls as well."

## Chapter 5407 The Strategic Value of Masterwork Mechs

The Mech Trade Association and by extension the Red Association craved power.

It was in the nature of a dominant organization to do whatever it took to preserve their dominance and reduce the ability of others to overturn its reign.

The mechers had never made it a secret that they were cast from the same mold. Their deliberate attempts to castrate the many states of human civilization successfully prevented other human groups from growing too strong during the Age of Mechs.

Ves never really had a problem with that for the most part. The hegemonic model set by the Big Two after the disastrous end of the Age of Conquest led to centuries of growth and stability.

It was difficult to think of another alternative that could have led to a more favorable outcome for human civilization.

Nonetheless, Ves was under no illusion that the mechers and the fleeters were the good guys. They were clearly interested in advancing human civilization, but only a version where they stayed on top!

Every development that might lead the human race to a brighter future but where the Big Two lost out was intolerable as far as they were concerned!

This was why the mechers and fleeters suppressed the Terrans and the Rubarthans anytime they could get away with it. Robbing the first-raters of their masterwork mechs turned out to be a surprisingly huge component in a strategy to prevent the former leaders of humanity from rising up again.

Ves never imagined before this day that masterwork mechs possessed such significance!

It should have been obvious in hindsight. Ves had learned about Senfovon's Ladder of Craftsmanship years ago. He discovered that high-quality mechs helped to drag mech pilots up to their level, meaning that breakthroughs happened a lot more frequently!

Ves thought of how masterwork mechs enriched the Larkinson Clan and boosted the performance of its key assets.

Unique treasures in the form of the Amaranto and the Everchanger had single-handedly turned battles around due to the rare advantages conveyed by their masterwork properties!

The key takeaway from his conversation with Alexa was that masterworks were strategic assets.

The benefits they provided to their owners were so substantial that the addition or absence of just a single one of them directly affected the future of an entire organization!

How many benefits could Ves bestow to the Larkinson Clan if he turned the first production copy of the Fey Project into a masterwork mech?

It was difficult to make a solid prediction, but he only had to look towards the Quint to know that the Fey Project could unlock the potential of a lot of promising mech pilots!

The more masterwork mechs Ves supplied to his clan, the more expert pilots and ace pilots would emerge that could protect the Larkinsons against the looming threats of the future.

Ves did not forget about the fact that the mechers were all spooked by what little they managed to ascertain from Messier 87!

Given that this supermassive galaxy had an insanely high energy level, the aliens who rose up in this kind of environment had to be much more powerful than anything humanity had ever faced in the past.

Ves suspected that only True Gods had a chance of self-preservation if they ever came into direct contact with the natives of the much larger galaxy.

As such, the value of masterwork mechs had shot up even more in the Red Ocean!

After all, back in the Milky Way Galaxy, the only threats the Big Two had to guard against were the Seven Apex Races and the much-diminished Five Scrolls Compact.

While these enemies certainly had the capital to make a comeback due to their deep foundations, the MTA and CFA controlled them well enough to prevent them from gaining enough strength.

It was different in the Red Ocean. The natives of the Red Ocean were already difficult to resist due to their overwhelming numbers advantage. The aliens of Messier 87 were many times more powerful!

Only god pilots, Star Designers and other True Gods could resist the threat posed by all of these dangerous aliens.

Of course, Ves was aware that the Red Fleet most definitely disagreed with this notion. The stance of the fleeters was admirable, but it was also a huge gamble driven by ideological motivations rather than sound logic.

Ves did not want to bet on the possibility that the cult of pure technology was right.

During Operation Night Jazz, the dreadnoughts of the Red Fleet fought admirably and displayed amazing capabilities that had never been unveiled before.

A lot of warship enthusiasts gained confidence. It looked as if the renaissance of warships was close at hand!

However, most people did not agree with this sentiment. Dreadnoughts were incredibly massive and must have cost an insane amount of high-grade exotics and hypers to build!

The Red Ocean was just a dwarf galaxy, and red humanity only occupied a small slice of it. How could the fleeters possibly gather all of the high-end resources to construct a couple of other dreadnoughts?

All of those resources could be utilized to construct dozens of serviceable battleships or entire mech armies of first-class multipurpose mechs!

Perhaps it was his bias as a mech designer that led him to make this conclusion, but Ves believed with all of his heart that warships could not save red humanity in the times to come.

They were too big, too clumsy, too inflexible and most importantly too wasteful!

Every decent engineer pursued efficiency in their work. Why use too units of resources to solve a problem when you could do it with 10 units of resources instead?

Mechs had their fair share of shortcomings, but the synergies they could achieve with mech pilots had unlimited potential.

It was much easier for red humanity to raise powerful enough mech armies due to how much less resources they demanded compared to more conventional warfleets.

"It is not just the mechs that demand attention. The mech pilots can also affect the combat effectiveness of these mech armies."

Developing talents was a matter of life and death in the Red Ocean. Any state or organization that could amass more expert pilots, ace pilots and possibly even god pilot would be the new reigning powers of the new frontier!

Ves even saw how much this new reality tied into the New Elites Program.

The Deep Strike Plan conceived by the Fist of Defiance sounded like a bone-headed scheme at first, but it actually sought to transition human civilization into a more brutal society.

If the plan truly was an awful idea, then the Survivalists would have never given it a chance to get voted upon!

The premise behind the Fist of Defiance's plan was that only a strong but cruel society had a decent chance of resisting the alien powerhouses that might come and knock on humanity's doors one day.

The new status of warlords was originally reserved for the high-ranking mech pilots who would not only serve as protectors, but also leaders who earned their right to rule by relying on their fists!

The mechs deeply comprehended that only a True God could defeat another True God!

While this rule was not entirely true all of the time, it took an excessive amount of resources and planning in order to take down a True God without relying on the strength of a comparable entity.

Even then, the combat effectiveness of True Gods varied a lot depending on their nature and their progression.

A design spirit that was born less than a decade ago like Gaia was one of the weakest and most pathetic existences of this level.

Her roots were weak and her foundation was brittle. She only managed to become insanely strong due to a few coincidences that caused her to become worshiped by a lot of unwitting devotees of Old Earth.

Though Ves was aware that Gaia had been working hard behind the scenes to shore up all of her deficiencies and make up for her fragile foundation, there was no denying that she was a shame to the class of True Gods!

Of course, that did not mean she was a pushover. Her transcendent life state meant that she could still overpower nearly everyone that was not on the same level of a True God!

There was one clear exception, though.

High-ranking mech pilots had nothing to fear from her. God pilots could probably squash her like a bug if they managed to enter into a direct confrontation with the Mother of Earth!

Cynthia had emphasized multiple times that god pilots were the most unreasonably powerful True God-level combatants that she knew of. They had sundered the Five Scrolls Compact and kept all of the aliens of the old galaxy in check!

The might of all of these god pilots was so great that they could confront much older and more powerful True Gods and still come out on top. They were the only ones that had access to the massive synergies derived from the perfect fusion between the best form of willpower cultivation and the most extreme variation artifact cultivation!

All of this highlighted the role of high-ranking mech pilots in human civilization even further.

Any resource that could promote the rate of breakthroughs and accelerate the progression of mech pilots was of paramount importance to the Red Association.

Ves already knew this to an extent due to how much the mechers valued his companion fruits, his Carmine mechs and the transcendence glow.

However, due to all of the excitement surrounding his most notable innovations, Ves had overlooked the extensive benefits that masterwork mechs could supply to their owners.

They were not merely a means to increase the proportion of high-ranking mech pilots in the Larkinson Army.

They could turn the Larkinson Clan from a chess piece into a chess player!

This was especially crucial in the coming decades where the probability of coming into contact with the natives of Messier 87 became ever greater.

All of this led to an important consideration.

Should Ves utilize his bargaining power to force the mechers to keep their hands off his masterwork mechs?

This was an important question, and the answer was not as obvious as it appeared.

Certainly, Ves had gained enough status and importance for the mechers to respect his wishes.

He was sure that if he called Jovy right now and told him to keep his hands off his future masterwork mechs, the Red Association would not come in and take away his more brilliant works.

However, every action had its consequences.

Denying the mechers the right to requisition his masterwork mechs would send numerous messages.

Ves would make a selfish impression that negated some of the contributions he had made to benefit human civilization. He would appear to push back against the premise that he was willing to be a team player.

Keeping a relatively weak second-class masterwork mech for himself would deprive red humanity of an opportunity to nurture multiple powerful first-class mech pilots in the future!

This would have deep political implications. Would Ves truly be better served by destroying a part of the goodwill that he had engendered among the mechers through his many contributions?

On the one hand, the more high-ranking mech pilots that rose up in the Larkinson Clan, the greater its self-preservation ability over the long run.

On the other hand, the better his relationship with the Red Association, the more advantages Ves could gain by deepening his cooperation with this dominant organization.

Which one was the better option?

"It would be nice if I could have the best of both worlds." He sighed.

It was not that simple, though. Even though his craftsmanship had improved by a huge extent ever since Vulcan started to transition into a more authentic God of Craftsmanship, it was not enough for Ves to be able to fabricate masterwork mechs on repeat.

Ves understood his strengths well enough that he worked at his best when he worked on new and interesting tech and designs.

He just couldn't muster up enough passion if he had to fabricate another copy of the same mech design.

Perhaps he and Vulcan might be able to advance their craftsmanship to the point where they could permanently settle on the second rung of Senfovon's Ladder of Craftsmanship, but that would not happen today!

Ves furrowed his brows. "I can't have this dilemma hanging over my head before I produce a copy of the Fey Project. I need to make up my mind before I start my fabrication run!"

#### Chapter 5408 Neo-Feudalism

Ves did not have many people to turn to for advice. The Premier Branch was too small. He missed the inner circle that he had gathered around him back when he was still running with the expeditionary fleet.

Not even Gavin could offer an informed opinion about this deep and contentious issue. His background was way too shallow and all of the effort he put into catching up to the meteoric growth of his boss did not delve too deep into the greater secrets that actually shaped human society.

Fortunately, he had a former direct descendant of a Terran Ancient Clan by his side.

Ves thanked himself for the umpteenth time for making the daring decision to recruit Alexa Streon as his disciple!

On the morning of the day he was scheduled to fabricate the first copy of the Fey Project, he sent his children off to school before he descended into his main mech workshop.

It was there that he asked for Alexa's input on this matter.

The young lady paused in her inspection of the stock of raw materials. "I am glad that you have asked for my advice. If I was still a Terran, then I would have advised you to persuade the Red Association into letting you keep your masterwork mechs. However, now that I have become a member of the Larkinson Clan, I think that you should be more measured in managing your relationships with great powers."

That was an odd answer.

"What do you mean by that, Alexa?"

"It means that you need to recognize your place in the hierarchy and act accordingly." She replied in a serious tone. "Think about it, sir. You have been promoted to a tier 3 galactic citizen and have earned the personal attention of many different leader figures. Do they value you? Yes. Do they fear your power? No. Not truly. There is a mismatch between your value as a mech designer and the force of arms that you can rally to your banner. The Larkinson Clan that serves as your primary base of power is fundamentally a second-class organization. Do you think the mechers and other first-raters have any reason to fear the Larkinsons?"

"...No." Ves admitted as he let out a deep breath. "When you put it that way, my clan is practically a non-entity in this galactic landscape. It is unable to pose any significant threat against the established first-class powers. The expeditionary fleet may be able to defeat weaker alien fleets, but it stands no chance against the primary warfleets that can inflict casualties against the forces of the Red Two. Without enough force of arms, a mech designer like myself is too vulnerable to the malicious intentions of those who see me as an obstacle."

To hammer home this point, Alexa pointedly raised her index finger above her head.

"The main reason why you have been able to live your life in peace all of these months is due to the Bluejay Fleet that is shadowing your every move. Its open presence not only grants you concrete protection against many different threats, but it is also a clear signal that the Red Association has extended its guarantee to you. I think the most accurate description of your current state is that of a vassal. You enjoy a measure of autonomy, but at the end of the day, you must still answer to the mechers that you rely on to shield you against dangers that you cannot handle."

This was a sobering realization and a reminder of his current situation.

Ves might have become too full of himself in the months that followed after the Survivalist conference.

All of the respect and appreciation he received from the likes of the Xenotechnician and General Axelar Streon inflated his ego and caused him to act like a bigshot.

Though he had definitely gained a lot of importance since he returned from the conference, he put too much stock in the illusions of grandeur that ensued.

It was only now that Ves reminded himself that people did not necessarily give him so much deference because of how much he could be of service to them. A key factor that forced other groups to play nice with him was because they could not resort to more forceful actions that might displease the Red Association!

In other words, when Ves presented himself to other players, he did not just represent himself, but also the power that was backing him and guaranteeing his safety!

He sighed. "I guess that I am not as independent from the Red Association as I previously thought, is that correct?"

"That is the fate of the weak. You do not have the qualifications to stand up to the great powers on your own merits. You have value but not the corresponding strength. That is why your success and wellbeing is dependent on those who can make up for this shortcoming. This is the true meaning behind your honorary membership of the Red Association. You have fallen under their banner. It is hard to escape the web of the Association once you have become entangled."

That did not paint a pleasant picture in Ves' mind. What depressed him the most was that he was helpless to change this reality.

The only ways for a vassal to escape the grip of a liege were to become strong enough to break this unequal relationship or to find another powerful backer.

Neither of these two options were available to Ves. This was why Alexa was in favor of maintaining the status quo.

The overall purpose of her words was to remind Ves of his actual place in society.

"Do you understand the responsibilities of a vassal?" She asked.

"I do." Ves slowly answered. "Protection does not come for free. I need to deliver enough value to the Red Association to cover the cost of guaranteeing my protection. If there is one thing that you can be certain about with the mechers, it is that they always profit the most in every transaction."

This was a privilege that only the most powerful groups enjoyed!

People wouldn't be so willing to let the mechers take advantage of them if this was not the case.

The Red Association had so many powerful mechs and warships at its disposal that no one wanted to go to war with such a powerful organization.

It was actually not a bad deal to fall under its protection. The mechers were relatively fair and benevolent. Ves knew enough prominent mechers in person to understand that their intentions were noble to a certain degree.

Worse people could have come into power. In fact, that had almost happened.

If the Polymath hadn't been stopped in the crucial moment during the final day of the Survivalist conference, the Red Association would have descended into tyranny!

This made Ves a bit more vigilant towards mechers. Even they were vulnerable to their own flaws.

"Whether it is the Milky Way or the Red Ocean, the mechers command the greatest number of god pilots." Alexa remarked. "Do you understand what this means? The Association enjoys a near-absolute advantage over our society. If relations have truly deteriorated to the lowest point, the five god pilots that lead the mechers can systematically destroy the defenses and wipe out the population and infrastructure of every major colony that belongs to a hostile state. No mech army in the Terran Alliance or the Rubarthan Pact can threaten even a single god mech."

Her words painted a distressing image in Ves' mind.

The scenario sounded so outlandish that it was highly unlikely to happen, but it still hammered home the point that the mechers could overturn the table in the most destructive manner if they did not get their way!

"Only god pilots can fight against god pilots, is that right?"

"That is roughly the case." Alexa partially agreed. "God pilots have their limits, though. The fleeters have done a good job at mitigating the possible threat by adopting a strategy of decentralization and redundancy. The Red Fleet holds relatively few fixed assets. The fleeters instead chose to establish their extensive foundation across many different warfleets, each of which are constantly on the move in order to prevent them from being easily tracked. It is virtually impossible for the god

mechs of the Red Association to hunt them all down. This is how the fleters have been able to restrain the mechers from staging a coup."

"I see."

Only the fleters could pursue this strategy. The Larkinson Clan's own fleet was too small and weak to stay out of the reach of the mechers. It was also only a single force, which meant that it did not take much trouble to track it down.

The Terrans and the Rubarthans derived much of their wealth and power from all of their prosperous territories. They could not afford to get rid of all of those valuable planets and star systems because they would quickly experience massive shortages due to losing access to so much population and resources!

Only god pilots could resist the Red Association's own god pilots.

Every major player knew it, which was why everyone worked hard to advance as many of their mech pilots as possible.

There was no way the mechers would allow others to beat them in their own game, though. No other organization knew more about mech pilots and what it took to facilitate their breakthroughs.

With a constant supply of masterwork mechs and the successful development of cultivation elixirs, the mech pilots hailing from the Association would be making far more progress than any other state or organization!

This would not change until other parties were able to field more god pilots than the ones that currently led the Red Association.

Ves understood more deeply how General Axelar Streon's possible breakthrough would alter the balance of power in the Red Ocean.

It only took a single more god pilot for the first-rate colonial superstates to finally gain a measure of parity against the Red Two!

If Ves knew that the political implications of Axelar's successful ascent to godhood were so massive, he wouldn't have agreed to enter into a secret agreement with the Streon Ancient Clan so quickly!

The unfortunate reality was that he had already waded into this mess. He had no other choice but to make the best out of his current situation.

"I agree with you that it is not a good idea to lose the favor of the mechers for the foreseeable future." Ves steadily shared his thoughts. "A good vassal must always offer regular and sufficient tribute to his master. I cannot make any mistakes in this regard. Offering my masterwork mechs is but a small gesture, but it is enough to prove my fealty."

"It is good that you understand your current reality, sir. What you and your clan need the most is development time. Maintaining your status as a vassal is advantageous to you because you do not need to look over your shoulder all of the time. Make use of the protection granted by the Red Association to gain more strength and build up your forces. So long as you expect your circumstances to improve in the coming years, there is no incentive for you to break your current arrangement."

"Mhmmm. You are right as always, Alexa."

Ves actually felt a little better about giving away his masterwork mechs.

Letting them go was undeniably bad to the Larkinson Army, but Ves depended far too much on the protection of the Red Association.

Supplying the mechers with his masterwork mechs on a more frequent basis would cement his image as their loyal vassal.

This made it easier for Ves to ask for favors and to obtain more insider knowledge from Jovy.

A more solid relationship with the Red Association would also make it harder for any critics or enemies to take any actions that were detrimental to his own interests!

The more people such as Master Termaneo Dervidian and Master Vayro Goldstein approved of Ves, the more they were willing to look out for him in the situations that mattered.

This was the way the cosmos worked. No one was truly free unless they possessed the force to protect their rights!

#### Chapter 5409 A Bundle of Personalities

Now that Ves had settled his conflicting thoughts, he tried his best to shove all irrelevant matters aside and fabricate his next mech.

It felt rather strange to be doing this without Gloriana by his side. She was so obsessed with collecting masterwork certificates that it was difficult to think that she was willing to pass off this opportunity.

Her decision to leave before Ves started this fabrication run emphasized how much she cared about obtaining a powerful first-class cranial implant!

Though Ves most definitely noticed her absence in his work, it was not as if he lost the ability to do his job without his wife at his side. He had not degenerated to this point.

Ves had his own style of designing and making his mechs. Without Gloriana's direct input, he was free to apply his full vision onto the Fey Project without any pushback.

If Gloriana fabricated a copy of the Fey Project, then it would be as materially perfect and flawless as it could be. That did not mean that she aimed to minimize the differences between her work and the output of a materializer.

As bland as her work might sound, she still believed in the value of a human touch. Her ultimate goal was to design the perfect vessels for her clients. This meant that she was open to making on-the-spot deviations to the actual mech so long as it would help.

This also made it possible for Gloriana to tolerate her husband's many antics in their work.

In any case, Ves did not really care too much about reproducing a design as closely as possible.

It was a good idea for mech designers to adhere to the parameters of a mech design as closely as possible at the start of their careers.

However, mechanically fabricating the same parts without any regard for material inconsistencies, emotional investment and other variables usually ended up producing mundane commodities that did not deserve to climb up the Craftsmanship Ladder.

One of the undeniable traits of a masterwork mech was that its maker cared enough about the product that he invested a piece of himself into his work!

Both Ves and Gloriana happened to excel in this aspect. This was one of the many reasons why they cooperated so well with each other despite their many differences.

Ves expressed his love and dedication to his mech designs by trying his best to impart each of his handmade mechs with a unique character.

In his opinion, no mech should be completely identical to each other. Every mech pilot was different, so why should they be stuck with piloting the same rigid mechs that did not adjust to their piloting styles and other circumstances?

Gloriana held the same stance. She mainly sought to overcome this problem by customizing her mech designs so that they fit their intended pilots right from the beginning to the best possible extent.

Ves wanted to produce living mechs with personality that would befriend their partners. Over time, these adaptable living mechs would grow and mature as they accompanied their mech pilots, thereby increasing their fit in an organic fashion.

Of all of the living mechs that he had made, the Ouroboros was the finest example of dynamic in action!

Initially, many of the qualities and properties of the first-class hero mech were seriously deficient.

It was only after Axelar continually committed to piloting his Ouroboros that it gradually grew into a monstrous second order living mech that could provide a huge amount of help to its mech pilots in battle!

Thinking about the Ouroboros gave Ves a bit of inspiration.

The legendary journey of this old living mech not only showcased the power of growth, but also proved that it was okay if a mech started out imperfect.

Ves just needed to have the right intentions. So long as he was earnest in his work, he had a lot of hope that his mechs would have a bright future ahead of them. This was especially the case for his masterwork mechs!

"In the hands of the Red Association, my masterwork mechs will enjoy the best possible growth conditions."

The only downside that frustrated Ves was that it took too damn long for his living mechs to grow into powerful beings.

It took a century of time for a renowned machine such as the Ouroboros to reach its current state. That was a bit too long as far as Ves was concerned!

"My other mechs don't have to wait as long this time." His expression eased. "The medium energy environment combined with persistent cultivation should speed up the growth of my living mechs by a considerable extent."

How did that relate to the Fey Project?

"This is the most interesting living mech that I have designed in quite a while." Ves grinned.

The last time he was presented with such a difficult and complicated puzzle related to the spiritual engineering of his work was back when he designed the Phobos.

Just as he somehow managed to kludge together a mystical combat module in the form of the Geist System, Ves was presented with another mystery box when he worked on the Fey Project.

The defining characteristic of a drone mech was that it shifted much of its combat power to its combat drones, or spurs in order to distinguish them from their standalone versions.

Why this mattered so much to Ves was that he had only ever imbued a single life in every mech he designed and built.

He had never been tasked with designing a mech that consisted of multiple different elements that could operate separately from each other.

The spurs were sufficiently self-contained that it felt wrong for Ves to design them as extensions of the main body.

This was why he designed the Fey Project with the goal and the presumption that every spur was a living entity in itself!

Of course, Ves did not make the spurs completely independent from their main body. That would make them weak and rootless when they were deployed in battle.

His real vision for the Fey Project was to make all of fey alive but connected to the main mech.

"The fey are like the pets or the companion spirits of the main body."

There were multiple reasons why he hoped to establish these connections. Spurs tended to get consumed in battle at distressingly high rates.

What would happen if a Fey Project lost all its fey?

While it was not that expensive to fabricate a replacement batch and assign them to the drone mech in question, it would be an enormous setback for the fey to be reset and start over from the beginning!

This was why the connections were so important. His greatest hope was to make it so that any living fey that had fallen into battle could be 'revived' when the main mech received a replacement spur!

Ves had puzzled long and hard over the spiritual engineering to make it all possible.

Though Ves had come up with a lot of creative and inventive solutions over the past year, he did not have any clue whether his design would work as intended.

This was the greatest point of uncertainty about the Fey Project. Much of its unique value was based on this key feature. If Ves had failed to design a working example of this mechanism, then his product wouldn't be able to live up to its promise!

"I cannot let that happen." He vowed to himself.

He had a lot riding on this fabrication run. This was the final test that would prove whether his elaborate spiritual design for the Fey Project would hold up in reality!

Before he started his work, he briefly made sure he worked on the correct variant of his new mech line.

"The Elite Edition."

Though he would rather fabricate the more exclusive Larkinson Edition, it was not the best choice if he ended up offering his work as tribute.

"Let's start!"

Ves employed his Living Workshop ability yet again, causing the entire first-class mech workshop to be engulfed by his powerful glow and life energy!

The environment became a lot more accommodating to the formation of living mechs.

Perhaps the favorable circumstances might also result in the creation of stronger and more successful fey!

Next, Vulcan descended into his body yet again, thereby boosting Ves' effective craftsmanship to a much higher level.

This was such a powerful mental rush that Ves felt there was nothing he could not construct!

It took a moment for him to sober himself up a bit. It was only after he had managed to enter into a more reasonable state of mind that he began to operate the superfab and other high-tech production machines.

Just like in the last few projects, Alexa worked quietly in the background. She dutifully moved resources and inspected the fabricated parts so that Ves would not have to waste any time on trivial matters.

As Ves fabricated the many small parts that would ultimately comprise the four fey that would become a part of the Elite Edition's starter loadout, he began to entertain strange thoughts about how he should craft their lives.

The fey were originally supposed to start off as blank slates, much like his living mechs.

This ensured that they would start to get along with mech pilots with the least amount of biases that might spoil their cooperation.

While this was a safe design choice, it also made the fey rather... bland.

"What if I change this? It is not good for every copy of the Fey Project to come with strong personalities, but this is different. This will become a unique work that will be able to stand on its own. Why don't I add a little personality to its fey at the start?"

Every masterwork mech possessed a unique destiny that inevitably caused them to diverge from the mech model they were derived from. This already happened to the Quint, and Ves had every reason to believe his current work would follow a drastically different trajectory as soon as it fell into the hands of the mechers!

Ves knew that the first production copy of the Fey Project would definitely undergo a huge overhaul that would strip it of much of its original parts.

The masterwork mech would go through such an extensive overhaul and upgrade cycle that it would become practically unrecognizable at the end!

However, there was one element that the mechers could not pervert with their input.

Much of the intangible and fundamental spiritual properties of the Fey Project would remain intact!

This ensured that his masterwork mech would still retain the essence of what Ves had put into its mech frame.

If this presumption was correct, then Ves should put an even greater emphasis on the spiritual design of his Fey Project!

A smirk appeared on his face. "Let's go a little wild, then!"

Instead of sticking to his original plan and designing the four fey to be as pure and neutral as possible, he wanted to turn them into colorful personalities that would add a bit of excitement to the Red Association!

Naturally, Ves did not want the characters of the fey to be dull or forgettable. He wanted to force the mechers to acknowledge and respect the living fey if they wanted to make good use of their extraordinary properties!

The question now was what sort of personalities should he shape into the four fey?

Many different possibilities came into mind.

For example, he could insert the personality of a mecher, a fleeter, a Terran and a Rubarthan in each of the fey!

That would certainly lead to a lot of interesting discussions and disagreements between the fey. Perhaps all of the constant quarrels would drive the mech pilot mad!

"Oh, I have a better idea!"

A more promising and wicked combination caught his attention as inspiration struck his mind like a lightning bolt!

Ves couldn't help but grin like crazy as he envisioned a much more imaginative take on his fey!

"Alexa, I need you to withdraw a few matches of other materials from our material reserves!"

"What? Why do you require materials that are not included in the original design?"

"Isn't it obvious? I am going to need them to design and make more distinctive variations of my fey on the spot. I can assure you that you will love what I have in mind!"

#### Chapter 5410 Deeper Applications

Ves grinned like crazy when inspiration bestowed him with an idea that surpassed all of the ones that he had entertained in the past.

He called up the full design of the Fey Project yet again and thought that it was a lot less magnificent than before.

It was remarkable how a single realization could drastically alter his perception and evaluation of his mech design.

Before he embarked on this fabrication run, he thought his Fey Project was shaping up to become the best and most effective standard mech design after its completion.

The design incorporated much of the fancy new hyper tech that came out after the start of the Hyper Generation. It also benefited from Ves and Gloriana's recently acquired insights after they fabricated the Lionheart and the Blood Star Mark II.

Yet it was only now that he realized that his approach towards designing the Fey Project was too conservative and restrained.

The Age of Dawn introduced red humanity to a bright new future where people gained access to an entirely new source of power that possessed unlimited potential.

The Red Two's joint development and release of scientific theories and engineering principles gave the common folk a structural and systematic introduction to the wonders of the hyper technology, but they did not go into too much depth of the uses of E energy and hyper materials.

This made sense as the vast majority of red humans had only come in touch with all of this brand new phenomena for a short amount of time.

While Ves was convinced that the mechers and the fleeters could do a lot more with the same resources, they withheld much of their advanced knowledge for two reasons.

The obvious one was that the Red Two sought to preserve their technological superiority. This was nothing new as they had already done the same with phasewater technology.

The less obvious reason was that hyper technology could be dangerous if misused or misapplied. E energy was not harmless and could produce all kinds of accidents or self-destructive applications if hyper tech was handled without care.

Nonetheless, the risks were commensurate with the rewards. The only way to squeeze more power out of hyper technology was to move beyond its shallow applications and start to play around with more advanced concepts.

Fortunately, certain people like Ves did not have to blindly explore this vast field. They could draw upon the ancient legacies of the past to give them a head-start and clarify more advanced theories in advance!

While not every piece of knowledge from the past could be applied to the present, the wisdom of the ancients still provided Ves with plentiful ideas and inspiration!

That was exactly what happened to him just now. After so many months of working on the Fey Project, he finally connected the multi-spirit properties of the mech designs with the theories of cultivation science.

There were various different ways that Ves could apply his insights on cultivation science to the Fey Project, but only one particular idea resonated with him more than the other ones.

He became attracted by a bold and risky strategy that could completely transform the Fey Project and transform it into a drastically different but superior machine!

Any comparison between the original Fey Project and the one that incorporated his latest idea would lead to the latter outshining the former in almost every aspect!

Of course, the price of implementing his latest idea was also considerable.

First, he needed to incorporate a lot of new hyper materials attributed towards multiple different attributes.

The supply of mid-grade and high-grade hypers was relatively inconsistent from region to region. Ves already knew that Diandi Base was lacking in the ones that he needed to turn his latest vision into a reality.

Fortunately, New Constantinople happened to be a port system and the capital of the Riston Territory.

As the main seat of power of the Devos Ancient Clan, a lot of traders flocked and sold their wares in one of the many marketplaces of New Constantinople VIII.

Alexa had already contacted the Premier Branch's fixed suppliers and easily ordered several batches of the required hyper materials on favorable terms.

The second complication related to his new idea was that Ves needed to solve several new design problems in order to realize his bold vision for the Fey Project.

The main body and its associated fey needed to cooperate and synergize much more extensively with each other than before!

Ves could not treat them as casually as before. He had to tie them together and figure out a way for each unique construct to interact with each other despite their strong differences.

Lastly, in order to make the Fey Project a lot more powerful while preventing it from tearing itself apart, Ves had to delve a lot deeper into cultivation science.

More specifically, Ves had to dive a lot deeper into aspects of qi cultivation that he previously neglected due to his limited interest in this field!

"Every piece of knowledge has its uses." Ves reminded himself. "Mechs are artifacts that can effectively incorporate almost any power or concept. The only limit is the imagination of the mech designer."

Right now, Ves felt incredibly brave and inspired. His idea had incredible potential, but also introduced a lot of heavy risks that could easily ruin his chance to fabricate a masterwork mech!

Although Ves could have taken the more sensible option by reserving his latest idea for a future mech design project, he was unwilling to shove it aside when he could work on it right away.

So what if he chose to develop a substantially more radical variant design of the Fey Project on the spot?

His passion had been stoked and his design flame burned hotter at the prospect of transforming the Fey Project into a more promising and exceptional machine!

"It is a good thing that Gloriana isn't working with me at the moment, because she would never tolerate the decision to scrap the schedule and go freestyle!"

Ves completely liberated himself from a lot of planning, scheduling and other preconceived notions.

His surging mind became more stimulated as his creativity continued to come up with all sorts of strange ideas that might or might not be helpful to his latest brainchild.

He picked the ones that sounded promising and fitting enough for his latest vision and decided to implement them into his current work without too much consideration!

The mech design of the Fey Project changed rapidly as Ves utilized his cranial implant to quickly and efficiently alter the schematics!

None of the changes had been tested. Ves simply did not have enough time to verify and optimize the spontaneous changes and additions that he had made to his mech design.

The Fey especially went through an extensive redesign as Ves had envisioned entirely different roles for them! They no longer became as weak and expendable as before.

As Ves spent an entire hour in the mech workshop on redesigning the Fey Project on the spot, it was as if he was completing weeks worth of design work in just a fraction of the time!

Ves was not surprised by this. His productivity always rose meteorically when his passion burned strong and when inspiration struck his mind.

He also made a lot of new connections between many discreet theories and phenomena.

It was as if he had struck his head with his hammer!

He recognized that he had fallen into a natural inspired state, one that was considerably more effective than the false version that he could artificially induce with the help of the Hammer of Brilliance.

In fact, part of the reason why he was so effective this time was because he was intimately cooperating with Vulcan at this time!

Vulcan became affected by Ves' inspiration as well.

Due to his different heritage, cultivation method and experiences, the design spirit was able to produce a lot of brilliant ideas that Ves wouldn't have thought of under normal circumstances.

This meant that the current inspired state had doubled in effectiveness! Ves got at least twice as many benefits from this period of heightened excitement than in past cases!

The final contributor to Ves' rapid rise in productivity was Blinky.

Though the companion spirit had to direct a lot of focus towards fueling the demanding Living Workshop ability, his Blinkyverse was more than just a reservoir of lots of spiritual energy.

The primordial planet was partially covered by E-computers. Months of cooperation with the researchers of the Transhumanist Faction had caused the imaginary processors and databanks to leap past many different generations!

Although the current iteration of E-computers still performed far worse than any modern computing system, they had already reached a point where they could imitate the performance of a relatively basic first-class cranial implant that was especially configured for mech designers!

All of that additional processing power came in handy at this time as Ves had to perform a huge amount of calculations in a short amount of time.

If not for the additional help provided by all of the E-computers, it would have taken Ves several more hours to come up with the same amount of revisions to the Fey Project!

His current gains taught Ves another important lesson.

"Inspiration alone is not enough for me to produce a far better mech. An ordinary third-class or second-class mech designer would never be able to realize anything close to my newest vision. Better resources, workshop facilities and processing power are all essential to producing more transcendent works."

Ves did not linger too much on that. It was more important for him to complete the rapid development of a brand new type of mech that was certain to be unprecedented in the entire mech community!

The reason why he was convinced that no other mech designer had ever developed this kind of mech was because the demands were too high!

It required a much deeper and more intricate application of hyper technology and more importantly E-technology!

As his redesign started to take shape, it finally became clear on the surface what Ves was working towards.

"Fire."

A red-coated fey came into view.

"Water."

A blue-coated fey appeared next.

"Wood."

A green-coated fey showed up in the projection.

"Earth."

A brown-coated fey took the place of the last one.

"Metal."

No fey appeared this time.

Instead, the gunmetal gray main body of the Fey Project showed up last.

The four elemental fey soon made a reappearance. They were initially mounted on the slots in the main body's rear.

Once the redesigned fey became activated, they detached themselves from the drone mech frame and surrounded it from four directions!

The visual image produced a striking impression!

"The five elements combined into a cohesive whole." Ves uttered in a reverent tone.

Even though the simulated image of the redesigned mech could not reproduce the powerful and complex interactions of five different variations of E energies, Ves was certain that his bold new machine would not be weak!

A mech like this shouldn't even be possible in the early stage of the Hyper Generation.

The easiest applications of hyper technology was based around harnessing the power of a single E energy attribute.

The slightly more complicated ones combined two different attributes. This introduced a lot more complications, but could usually be managed by working with complementary elements.

Design applications that utilized three or more E energy attributes in a significant capacity were much rarer, because it became exponentially more difficult to juggle them at the same time!

Ves had learned enough about cultivation science to know that combining the five classic elements was one of the most difficult but powerful accomplishments in qi cultivation!

The Beginner Five Elements Spells Manual that he had acquired from an enlightenment fruit only hinted at the endless power and potential that could be gained by fusing the five elements.

This was not a power that Ves was qualified to work with in his current state, yet he did so anyway!

The reason why he disregarded all of the warnings and broke the rules without fear was because he was utterly convinced that he could do the impossible this time!

Perhaps ordinary qi cultivators would never dare to fuse the five elements together, but this was different!

Ves wanted to create a brand new synthetic life form that innately wielded the power of the five elements!

"The inherent synergies of this amazing mech will become insanely strong! I just have to make sure that it doesn't blow up on the spot!"