

The Mech 5951

Chapter 5951 Two Important Advantages

Ves found it difficult to rank the remaining three choices in consideration.

The fourth, fifth and sixth upgrade tracks all possessed a lot of promise. They promised plenty of benefits, enough to give him a chance of defeating enemies that were normally too powerful to overcome through conventional means.

Ves already achieved great success through regular channels. He was the most successful Senior Mech Designer in the new frontier, so he had no urgent need to obtain more basic forms of assistance.

What he needed was access to rare, high-end resources that could be converted into powerful advantages.

"It would be ideal if I can obtain more super-class resources."

All three of the aforementioned upgrade tracks granted him a viable shot at obtaining resources that were powerful enough to upgrade relics comparable to the Mech Designer System!

He needed to be able to harvest strategic resources that could be used to construct more powerful war weapons.

There were two kinds of advantages that Ves valued in particular.

The first was to obtain massive amounts of fairly powerful or unique resources that could broadly augment the combat power of human civilization as a whole.

The resources not only had to be fairly good, but they also had to be available in greater quantities.

Hyper materials was a good example of this. Compared to the previous age, the Age of Dawn sparked an immediate all-round improvement in the performance of mechs and starships.

The reason?

Hyper materials!

It was a completely new category of resources that had real applications in and outside warfare. Adding them to any combat platform immediately elevated their performance.

One of the reasons why red humanity was able to fend off so many alien raids in the past year was because the defending forces quickly gained an advantage in combat by relying on their newfangled hyper mechs and in certain cases hyper warships!

The aliens were a lot slower in their efforts to figure out hyper technology and add hyper materials to their own homeships. Their adaptability to an entirely new branch of technology was a lot poorer.

Even if the cosmopolitans stole red humanity's secrets and transferred a lot of scientific progress to the Red Cabal, the phase whales and other alien races still found it difficult to master hyper technology quickly!

They lacked the historical legacies and a certain family of cultivation like the humans. The native aliens needed to build their understanding of hyper technology and its related concepts completely from scratch.

This was difficult when many alien scientists and engineers had long considered phasewater technology to be the strongest and most superior discipline!

It was not only strong on an objective basis, but it was also blessed by the descendents of the Elder Gods!

However, all good things eventually came to an end.

Ves did not expect this tech disparity to last forever. Most of the aliens weren't stupid. They may be a bit stodgy and slow to embrace change, but when humanity's forces continued to pummel their opposition by relying on the advantages of hyper technology, even the phase whales would be forced to admit that phasewater technology alone was not enough for them to prevail!

This meant that it became more important to gain a source of unique resources that the aliens of the Red Ocean could not obtain as easily. The three upgrade tracks in question all promised to make this possible.

The second advantage that Ves sought to obtain was to gain access to a small amount of extremely high-end resources.

The former might be able to elevate the overall combat power of humanity's fighting forces, but these changes mattered less at the higher levels of confrontation.

Witnessing the Dominion of Man in action made Ves a lot more cognizant on the crucial value of top-end resources. The Rubicon Spatial Transfer System and the Spark Reactor wouldn't have been as domineering if not for the extremely special resources used to transform their functionality!

Super-class materials and True God-level entities were the sort of top assets that could truly make a difference in fights against the true powerhouses of the cosmos!

If Ves wanted to give his products a qualitative edge against the likes of god pilots, god ships, True Gods and possibly even God Kings, then he needed to power up his best works with the most powerful resources that he could obtain.

It was not impossible to design a mech with more commonly available resources that could pose a real threat against a True God, but he would have to work too hard to overcome this deficiency.

A strong mech did not just depend on a strong pilot and an excellent design, but it was also contingent on the use of superior materials.

This was why it became more important than ever to strengthen his efforts in this area.

The biggest obstacle to obtaining super-class materials was that he had no way of obtaining them aside from negotiating with major human powers!

Only the Red Two and the first-rate superstates possessed the power, numbers and infrastructure to produce or acquire a relatively small amount of top-end resources on a stable basis.

Even then, they needed these highly strategic goods so much that they were almost never willing to trade them away!

Though Ves could continue to play the diplomacy game, he would always suffer substantial losses if he tried to obtain the strategic materials necessary to elevate his mechs and starships beyond their usual limitations.

Sure, his brilliant E-technology circumvented this problem to an extent, but it did not change the fact that a failure to obtain enough top-end resources would ultimately cause him and his clan to fall behind.

Ves knew his shortcomings. He and his clan's refusal to strive for large, resource-rich territories limited their ability to solve this problem by themselves.

If he understood the necessity of accumulating strategic resources sooner, perhaps he would have reduced his objections to colonization.

Still, it was not as if the Larkinson Clan was in a good position to do so in the past. It was only recently that it had gained enough power, influence and clout to take possession of more lucrative territories and invest in their development.

In any case, Ves needed to make a lot of strides to secure this crucial advantage. Even a small amount of super-class materials could elevate the combat power of a high-ranking mech by 20 percent, 30 percent or even 100 percent!

"It's like implanting another version of one of Lucky's gems into a mech!"

Aside from that, strategic resources could also be used to dramatically boost the power of the Larkinson Clan's future battlecruiser as well as other starships.

He also couldn't forget about his personal equipment. The Unending Regalia badly needed an upgrade, and he also needed to develop an entirely new battlesuit to increase his combat effectiveness as a phase lord.

Ves did not forget that he had painted a much bigger target on his back in the last few months.

While the Red Two promised to bolster his security even further than what they had already done, he would be foolish if he assumed that was enough.

The cosmopolitans and the native aliens couldn't be underestimated. Either of them were already threatening by themselves. Once they properly joined hands and coordinated their actions, ordinary measures no longer worked anymore!

"Let's see how these advantages stack up against the three remaining choices."

As far as mass resources was concerned, dimensional tear definitely scored the highest in this aspect.

So long as Ves was able to create as many permanent dimensional tears as he wished, he could transform many barren star systems into resource-rich star systems!

This would instantly change the balance of the Red War as red humanity obtained exactly what it needed to supercharge its military industries!

Portal Exploration comes second. Ves needed to invest a lot of AP to create permanent two-way portals that led to resource-rich regions.

However, two-way portals could easily turn into a security vulnerability. Since humans could pass through them, so could the aliens!

Ves would have little choice but to collapse the exposed and vulnerable portals, thereby wasting the AP spent on forming them in the first place.

This sounded anything but ideal.

"I can't neglect the security aspect either."

Random Being Acquisition scored the best in terms of security. It was practically tailor-made to kidnap powerful alien beings in the most risk averse manner possible. It sacrificed a lot of other options just to excel in this activity!

Dimension Breach Creation scored a bit worse in security, but Portal Exploration posed constant dangers to Ves or anyone else who passed through the portals.

The probability that something might go catastrophically wrong by opening up a portal was too great!

Ves could not discount the possibility that he would accidentally open a portal to a planet where a powerful phase whale already resided.

Once the powerful alien creature detected the portal, the phase whale might be able to block the portal or launch a counter invasion!

"Dimension Breach Creation is a lot safer, but not the safest. The dimensional tears are too obvious. It will be difficult to hide their existence."

In any case, Ves moved on to judging the remaining upgrade tracks by how well they scored in supplying strategic resources.

It was a lot more difficult to judge this as there were too many unclear variables. He could only base his judgment on brief descriptions and a lot of guesswork.

"I think that Dimension Breach Creation scores the highest in supplying strategic resources, but this depends heavily on how easy it will be to breach a resource-rich dimension."

He knew they existed. Aeon Corona VII proved that it was possible to enrich a planet by exposing it with unknown higher-dimensional energies. He just did not know how much AP he had to spend to open a semi-permanent or permanent tear to the aforementioned dimensions.

Portal Exploration scored the worst in this aspect. Space was big, and it was difficult to obtain coordinates to locations that were especially rich in resources. Super-class materials were exceedingly rare. The aliens would never expose their existence and locations so easily.

Choosing this option meant that Ves needed to rely heavily on intelligence services to scout the right targets. Either the Black Cats or the many intelligence agencies of the major power needed to do a lot of work to discover lucrative targets.

Even then, intelligence was anything but reliable. A lot of information could either be false, outdated or simply misinterpreted.

Too much could go wrong in a hostile portal raid.

"Random Being Acquisition removes much of the risk. It is more limited compared to the other upgrade tracks, but it is also the least likely to produce accidents, especially if its ability to capture stronger beings is limited without the corresponding upgrades."

The limitations of this upgrade track were a bit too big, though. Ves could only extract value from a single being at a time.

It did not matter if the alien in question commanded a homeship or owned a huge palace. The Time and Space Gate would not give Ves the opportunity to plunder all of the captive's possessions!

However, if Ves wanted to acquire valuable organic tissue as well as powerful spiritual ingredients, then this option was by far the most convenient.

To Ves, extraordinary organs as well as high-quality spiritual ingredients were his versions of strategic resources!

He could do so much with them that he might not mind all of the other stuff he was missing out on. This was especially the case if he was able to capture phase whales and True God-level entities!

"Each key resource taken from a True God is probably equivalent to a super-class material!"

The prospect of upgrading Random Being Acquisition far enough to stably capture alien True Gods was the most compelling reason why Ves thought about settling on this choice.

Even if he had to pay 1000 AP or even 10,000 AP just to capture a single random True God-level entity, then Ves would still earn a massive profit!

"As long as the System is able to suppress these powerful entities as soon as they are taken away, the alien True Gods are nothing but giant collections of top-end resources in my eyes!"

Ves derived a huge amount of enjoyment at the prospect of defeating powerful alien True Gods by using their own strength against these arrogant enemies!

By using their own caracasses as raw materials, Ves became a lot more confident in his ability to develop true god-killing mechs!

Chapter 5952 Low Profile vs High Profile

After a lot of thinking, Ves did not manage to come closer to a decision.

He evaluated the three remaining choices from many different angles.

He could always come up with a compelling reason to pick one over the other.

He also identified a lot of serious limitations and shortcomings with all three choices.

When he weighed all of the pros and cons, Ves could not bring himself to rule out any of the three options.

Ves felt paralyzed yet again.

This was one of the most life-changing decisions that he could make. The benefits of each upgrade track was so massive that it would completely upend his existing development strategy!

Honestly speaking, Ves believed that if he chose any of the three options, he would not be suffering a loss. The options were roughly equal in value. He may as well flip two coins in succession to settle on his final choice.

It was a pity that he was stuck in a strange space without his body. He had no way of flipping a coin at this time.

Ves thought about what else he could do to make a decision that he wouldn't regret.

"What about trying to determine how well the options fit with my domain?"

Life. Mechs. Darkness.

These were the elements that currently defined his nascent domain.

As soon as he advanced to the rank of Master Mech Designer, he would not only gain the ability to wield the three aforementioned elements to a greater degree, but also incorporate them into his domain on a more fundamental level!

Once he took another step and advanced to the rank of Star Designer, Ves knew that a large part of himself would evolve into an energy-based life form.

If he possessed a weak human body, then it became so unimportant that Ves might be able to discard it entirely!

However, Ves was not sure how becoming a Star Designer affected his phase lord cultivation.

There was no way that he would give up such a powerful body, so he hoped that there was still a way to achieve success in both creation cultivation and body cultivation.

Ves mentally shook his head. "It's way too soon for me to think about these profound problems. I need to get back on track."

The question now was which of the three choices synergized the most with his core elements.

Random Being Acquisition obviously aligned the most with his life element. It could also complement his darkness domain if he just happened to snatch a creature that was strong in this element.

In fact, mutated beasts with an affinity for the darkness element were rare and difficult to obtain.

They were usually pretty sneaky and usually knew better than to provoke human hunting teams.

It would be a lot more convenient if he could acquire entities with a strong affinity for darkness by himself with the help of the System.

Portal Exploration could help any cultivator no matter their domains. It all depended on where he was able to open a portal to. He could commence a portal expedition on an untamed planet or an alien factory world. The spoils he could gain from raiding these planets were completely different!

Ves had little idea if Dimension Breach Creation matched particularly well with any of his core elements.

"It's probably unlikely that I will find any living beings in those strange dimensions. I am not sure if I can stumble upon a lot of metals either. I think that darkness will be a lot more prevalent in many dimensions."

It was unfortunate that Ves did not invest a lot of time on studying the properties of different dimensions. He would have been able to figure out a lot more answers if he took this matter a lot more seriously.

How could he possibly know that the System would suddenly offer him a way to open dimensional tears?!

Ves mentally sighed. The lack of information posed a major hindrance. In moments like these, it was essential for him to build up the confidence necessary to make the most logical decision.

He failed.

Logic only worked when Ves had access to enough reliable data.

Since the rational approach was only effective up to this point, Ves knew he needed to resort to a different approach to make his final selection.

"I need to set facts and logic aside for a moment. I need to listen to my gut feeling instead. Which upgrade track resonates with me the most? Which choice gives me the greatest reassurance? Which one is more effective at stoking my passion?"

Ves found it easy to switch to a more natural mindset. It was a form of thinking where he deliberately suppressed his rational thoughts and gave full play to his emotional impulses.

"Portal Exploration is out." He quickly decided. "It's okay, but it is too... structured. Too boring. Too... predictable. It is difficult to jump outside the box and create truly unique works by relying on resources that are already available in the Red Ocean. It will be more interesting if I can reach as far as Messier 87, but how long will that take?"

This upgrade track most definitely had its good points, but it did not offer anything unique. Ves could simply wait a few years for completion of the conversion of the greater beyonder gate.

By then, he would be able to sign up his forces for deep strike expeditions that pretty much did the same thing, all without requiring any help from the System!

At most, Portal Exploration had the potential to be safer as long as Ves gained the ability to form two-way portals.

"It doesn't matter. I need to reject one more option before I am done."

Ves became much more comfortable with trying to decide between two remaining upgrade tracks. He could make direct comparisons and let his heart swing back and forth.

"Dimension Breach Creation is the riskiest option. Random Being Acquisition is also inconsistent, but poses the least amount of danger."

Whenever Ves had to make a decision between a low-risk option and a high-risk option, he usually defaulted to the latter.

Of course, he was not completely crazy. He made sure that the high-risk option was viable enough for him to adopt with confidence.

The reason why Ves recalled this was because he felt awfully tempted to choose Dimension Breach Creation for this very reason alone.

He hesitated because tearing the walls between dimensions was an extremely ostentatious display of power.

Most people would probably assume that Ves was able to do this due to leveraging the power of a phase lord, but the smarter folk who understood how phase leaders worked would definitely attribute this ability to another source!

"I don't think that any phase whale or phase leader is able to create permanent dimensional tears. At most, they can do so on a temporary basis."

In contrast, Random Being Acquisition matched his inclinations a lot better. Ves did not necessarily want to attract more attention. It would be better if he could let the heat die down and blend into the background.

The best way to escape people's attention was by refraining from pulling off high-profile stunts.

Compared to creating dimensional tears that no one could ignore, Random Being Acquisition was a kidnapping service that offered total secrecy.

No one would be able to tie the random abductions to a simple mech designer like Ves!

How could he possibly be involved when he and his clansmen had never come anywhere near the star system where the kidnapping took place?

"The only way to tie all of the missing alien cases back to me is if my works clearly inherited the traits of the missing aliens!"

At first, it should be easy to hide this secret, but as long as more and more of his products exhibited the distinctive traits of powerful aliens, the secret would become known!

So what? At most, it would prove that Ves bought valuable goods from unscrupulous businessmen.

There was no way he did the deed himself when he and his clansmen were clearly nowhere to be found!

In fact, many of these kidnapping cases would probably happen in regions where there were no hostile humans anywhere in and around a star system!

The lack of hard evidence that could prove that he was the chief culprit would keep his involvement a secret for a long time!

Once people eventually deduced the truth based on the sheer amount of works that utilized ingredients harvested from all of the missing beings, Ves would hopefully be powerful enough at that time to cope with all of the heat

"Might makes right!"

This was one of the fundamental truths of the universe. The more powerful he became, the more he could get away with. The premise was that he did not violate the interests of his allies and enemies he could not handle.

"The Red Cabal has already put an extravagant bounty on my head, so it is not as if my relations with the aliens could get any worse."

Ves liked the fact that he could remain hidden and avoid notice for a long time if he opted to go for Random Being Acquisition.

This was not because darkness had become an intrinsic part of his domain. He just wanted to avoid drawing too much attention too soon. The more his enemies focused on flashy mech pilots, the less they spent time on targeting mech designers like himself!

"Dimension Breach Creation is a lot more open."

There was no way to hide his involvement. Everyone in human space as well as alien space would know he gained the power to tear the walls between dimensions.

If his ability to do so improved, then people would become even more dazzled!

Ves might be able to explain the origin of this ability by talking nonsense about combining the power of a phase lord with human science, but that would only fool others for so long.

Sooner or later, people would figure out the truth. The fragment of the Metal Scroll gifted him with this amazing power!

What would happen then? There was no way for Ves to resist the combined pressure from all of the major powers of red humanity, especially when they were united in their interests!

For all of his efforts to befriend and lock the major players in a web of mutual interests, when it became more profitable to extort him, the Red Two and the first-rate superstates would definitely force him to cough up the System one way or another!

After all, no matter what, Ves could not refuse cooperation when the likes of the First Flame came to his doorstep!

He hated his inability to resist coercion. His lack of hard power and his increasing reliance on external protection forced him to restrain his behavior and seek compromises just to prevent these sorts of scenarios from occurring.

"I can still avoid the worst outcome if I go for Dimension Breach Creation."

How?

By surrendering to the powers that be in advance!

If he proactively admitted his new capabilities and offered to create a bunch of dimensional tears for the major powers, he would be able to maintain the current status quo more or less.

In fact, there was a more sophisticated way to placate the Red Two and the first-rate colonial superstates.

"I can use this as a binding mechanism for the Red Collective!"

It would require a lot of deft diplomacy, but as long as he utilized the upcoming organization as the central administrator for all of the dimensional tears, then the Red Collective's inherent division would ensure that all of the players would end up spending most of their energy competing against each other!

Still, this potential solution did not remove the fundamental danger.

Perhaps the only other way he could divert attention from himself was to find another user of the System to take up the responsibility of breaching dimensions.

So long as Ves himself never exposed this power, he would be able to fade in the background as he originally wished!

"I only need to find someone trustworthy enough to wield this power."

Ves already had a very suitable candidate in mind.

"Ketis!"

Chapter 5953 Raising Pillars

Dimension Breach Creation was an attractive upgrade track.

Ves had both rational and emotional reasons to choose it over the other options.

However, the biggest problem with this choice was not the uncertainty of finding a profitable dimension to breach, nor the amount of AP he needed to spend to unlock the ability to create a permanent dimensional tear.

It was exposure.

Ves had already attracted far too much attention. It would have been great if he was already a Star Designer, but he was still a Senior Mech Designer at this point!

There was only so much weirdness that people could tolerate. Becoming too outstanding in a short amount of time would cause a lot of people to develop feelings of jealousy, envy and greed.

The creation of dimensional tears that had the potential to provide a vast amount of valuable resources would also create major disruptions in the mech industry and many other sectors.

A lot of people and organizations were bound to suffer losses if they missed out on this new bounty!

It was exactly because of how extensively Ves threatened the profits and benefits of so many different stakeholders that he got ambushed by the public inquiry last time.

Ever since he went through that ordeal, he became a lot more sensitive towards similar instances of generating too much discontent.

"This is why Random Being Acquisition is so much nicer. It is much easier for me to maintain a low profile while making use of this upgrade track."

Dimension Breach Creation had a much greater potential to supply unusual resources on a massive scale, but it was exactly because the movement was so loud that Ves needed to be more thoughtful in its application.

Ves found it troublesome to put in so much extra effort to manage people's reactions, but the expected rewards made it all worthwhile.

He already became preoccupied with mapping out a suitable political strategy. Just because he hated politics did not mean he refused to engage in it. Everyone who became powerful enough needed to learn how to win support and convince others to play along with his plan.

In order to spread his risks, divert the attention of his enemies and reduce his suspicion, Ves needed the cooperation of a trusted partner.

In order to spread his risks, divert the attention of his enemies and reduce his suspicion, Ves needed the cooperation of a trusted partner.

"Ketis is the perfect fit."

There were many politically convenient reasons to push her to the forefront.

First, she was a Larkinson, but she was different enough from Ves to avoid close associations.

She was part of a Swordmaidens, which outsiders saw as an outside group that somehow managed to become a subsidiary of the Larkinson Clan.

The implication was that Ketis had become a vassal of the Larkinson Clan as opposed to a core member.

It was sort of true in a way. The Swordmaidens integrated into the Larkinson Clan decently enough, but they stubbornly protected many of their old traditions, even though a few of them no longer made sense in civilization space.

Combined with the fact that Ketis pursued different interests from Ves, she successfully managed to build a brand that was relatively independent from Ves and the clan.

Second, she was already abnormal, but in different ways. She was the first Swordmaster who also happened to be a Journeyman Mech Designer. Her ability to combine the two professions had caused her swordsman mechs to gain more special features than normal, causing their popularity to grow without slowing down!

Her efforts to revive and spread traditional swordsmanship throughout human society also started to build up momentum.

Though Ves never paid attention to such matters, he occasionally heard about how more and more people had signed up for the distinctly different kind of swordsmanship classes.

The Heavensworders of the Larkinson Clan possessed a rich teaching tradition. They had taken upon themselves to set up schools at any planet where the Larkinson Clan had set up branches.

People yearned to become strong. People also yearned to obtain extraordinary power. With Ketis as the most prominent example, traditional swordsmanship offered many hopeful warriors a way to excel in battle despite the fact that their genetic aptitudes prevented them from becoming mech pilots.

The longer the Red War raged on, the more people felt the need for need!

Nobody wanted to become one of the many helpless victims who failed to resist when the aliens invaded their planets.

Of course, there was nothing much a single Swordmaster could do when an entire alien raiding fleet entered into orbit over a planet, but it was better than nothing.

"Ketis is a rising star."

Ves had already reached the limit to his rise of fame. Ketis was just beginning to enter the galactic scene. This was the right time for her to gain more prominence by unveiling a fantastic new ability.

She could easily promote traditional swordsmanship by exposing the ability to cut the walls that kept the dimensions apart from each other!

It sounded so much more plausible that her mysterious swordsmanship somehow granted her the unreasonable power to create dimensional tears simply by swinging her sword in a special way!

The explanation fit so well that most people probably would not bother to investigate any further.

The only issue with this plan was that Ves needed Ketis to play along with this deception.

Even though it was technically Sharpie that was the Swordmaster, Ketis would not sully her honor and integrity just so that she could promote traditional swordsmanship. She had her own principles

as a warrior, and while they were looser than that of a professional soldier, she would not deceive her audience!

"She doesn't have to offer any explanation." Ves pondered. "She will still be inclined to cooperate with me if all she needs to do is to keep her mouth shut. People can come up with their own explanations on how Ketis is able to master such an outrageous ability. It's not her fault that people develop misunderstandings. Maybe those who are better informed than others will attribute her new powers to the Heavensword."

The important part was that the ability to breach dimensions must not be tied back to Ves.

Perhaps Ketis might not like to participate in an act of deception, but as long as the goals and intentions were noble enough, she should be able to tolerate his demands.

This plan was not only good for Ves, but also boosted Ketis' own personal causes.

She had witnessed many times how her former mentor leveraged his increased fame and importance to secure greater advantages for himself. It was a much faster and more effective way to become more powerful than to stick to honest mech design.

More importantly than that, splitting responsibilities also helped the Larkinson Clan as a whole.

To prevent this scenario from happening, the Larkinson Clan needed to be propped up by multiple strong pillars.

Ves grew too quickly. His clan was growing faster than ever, but all of it rested on a single pillar.

If anything happened to Ves, his overextended clan would collapse like a house of cards!

To prevent this scenario from happening, the Larkinson Clan needed to be propped up by multiple strong pillars.

Gloriana was already on track to become a major pillar.

Alexa Streon was too young and still needed a lot more time to develop before she could serve as an adequate substitute for Ves.

So long as Ketis became the only person who was able to breach dimensions in a consistent manner, her importance to society would instantly skyrocket!

The rise of the Larkinson Clan would become unstoppable at that point.

If Ves was the only Larkinson who was able to earn the appreciation of multiple tier 1 galactic citizens, then people could still dismiss his clan as a personality cult.

If the clan was able to produce two or more top figures, then it had turned into a much more durable human institution!

His enthusiasm grew. He needed to spend a lot more time and effort to flesh out this ambitious plan, but the broad strokes of it was already enough for him to gain confidence in his ability to profit from Dimension Breach Creation.

The time had come for Ves to make his final decision.

When Ves put Random Being Acquisition and Dimension Breach Creation side by side with each other, he knew that his decision would radically affect his operational approach for the next decades.

This was a critical period of time that would make or break his career. His clan also stood at a crossroads. With the help of the resources provided by a powerful upgrade track, his fellow Larkinsons all had a chance to rise above their original limitations and achieve greatness in their own right.

Ves just needed to settle his mind on whether he wanted to maintain a lower profile or whether he was courageous enough to attract more attention to his clan.

His decision would not only shape his relationship with the major human powers, but also affect his involvement with the Red Collective.

"This is a big deal."

A part of Ves yearned to stop tempting fate and take comfort in the high degree of anonymity promised by Random Being Acquisition.

However, an even stronger part of him was willing to defy his need for secrecy just so that he could recreate the miracles produced on Aeon Corona VII!

"Maybe it is fate that the System has given me the option to replicate the unique state produced by the crashed Starlight Megalodon."

The Aeon Corona VII Mission had thoroughly derailed his career and introduced him to a lot of wonders. The blasted mission made him forge deep ties with the Flagrant Vandals and the Swordmaidens. It also tested his survival skills and caused him to understand the truth about power.

It had been many years since he put Aeon Corona VII behind him. He had grown so much since that point that Ves had become involved in much greater affairs than a pathetic attempt to salvage high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum from a crashed CFA battleship.

Yet... Ves had not managed to escape the grip of Aeon Corona VII.

Ves tried his best to consider other alternatives, yet none of them appealed to him more than Dimension Breach Creation.

"The likelihood that I can create a planet similar to Aeon Corona VII is low, but... maybe I can generate my own version of an ecosystem mutated by strange energies."

If there was one thing a galaxy was not short of, it was planets!

While only a fraction of them already contained alien flora and fauna, they were still numerous enough for Ves to pick an unoccupied one and conduct dangerous experiments.

So long as the planet and star system did not contain any phasewater or other valuable resource deposits, nobody would care if the Larkinson Clan opened a dimensional tear and exposed a lot of exobeasts and exoplants to dimensional energies!

The quantity of resources that Ves could obtain through this channel was incomparable to Random Being Acquisition.

Perhaps he might even get lucky and breach a dimension that contained exceedingly rare but highly desirable super-class materials!

The allure of hitting the jackpot tempted Ves even more. The System wouldn't make it easy for him, but as long as he earned enough AP, anything was possible!

"As a mech designer, I need to chase after any opportunity to design a mech that no one has made before. It will be a lot easier for me to do this if I can make use of much more exotic resources."

Now that he had made up his mind, Ves did not delay his decision any further.

"System! I am ready to announce my choice! I choose Upgrade Track #6. Please integrate Dimension Breach Creation to your feature set!"

The space around Ves' consciousness started to shake.

[Selection confirmed. The Mech Designer System Version 3.0 shall begin the process of adding Upgrade Track #6: Dimension Breach Creation.]

The view switched back to the System Space.

What was different was that a section of the mountain actively began to form into a new clearing!

A lot of rock and stone started to form into flat and straight surfaces as the System prepared to add an entirely new structure to the mountain top.

Ves began to look more and more forward to seeing the results of this profound change.

He needed to know how soon he could create his first dimensional tear!

Chapter 5954 The New Clearing

Large quantities of energies concentrated over at the latest clearing on the mountain top.

Whatever the System decided to add evidently did not take a lot of room, because the clearing was smaller than the ones that hosted the Mission Hall and the Tree of Possibilities.

When Ves glanced at the Time Gate, he noted that it remained unchanged.

Perhaps there may be a chance for him to evolve it into the Time and Space Gate in the future, but Ves did not think that the System would present him with the choices at a later date.

Even if it was possible for the System to implement the features of Portal Exploration or Random Being Acquisition, Ves did not have the AP to upgrade and make proper use of them all. He did not even have enough AP to fully exploit the possibilities that would soon be available!

Minutes passed by as the System Space continued to change. Once the renovation had reached its end, Ves suddenly appeared at the bottom of the System Space.

[Thank you for your patience. The Mech Designer System Version 3.0 has completed its latest revision. The Dimension Observatory has been constructed and is available for use. Unlike other facilities provided by the Mech Designer System, the Dimension Observatory is a unique structure that can undergo targeted improvements through the spending of Ascension Points. Existing features can be upgraded. New features can also be added. More possibilities will be added after the Dimension Observatory has developed further according to user direction.]

"Finally!"

He regained his body, though he questioned whether it was real. It was probably a simulated version of his physical form. His actual body still remained in realspace.

Ves did not waste any time on pondering about this question. He immediately set off and climbed the steps leading up to the top.

Though he originally intended to move towards the newly opened clearing, he reluctantly changed his mind and visited the other stations first to see whether anything had changed.

The Vault of Eternity, the Wishing Fountain, the Divine Bazaar and so on all remained unchanged. The transformation initiated by submitting EE-343F-00334R did not appear to improve any of the other functions of the System.

This meant it became even more important for him to check out the latest facility!

As Ves neared the top, he resisted the urge to turn towards the Dimension Observatory and headed over to the Sacred Temple in order to check whether it had changed.

Ves became a bit more reassured when he confirmed that nothing had changed. The soul mark had not grown stronger while the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown remained as docile as ever.

He also checked his status to check on his budget.

"Damn. 132 AP is not that much."

He recently spent a fair amount of AP on a Qi Restoration Potion. It was AP well spent, but that had also brought his reserve down to an uncomfortably low point.

There was a very real possibility that he might not be able to make good use of the Dimension Observatory when it was at its most basic state!

Ves needed to pay attention to the Mission Hall and be more proactive in completing different Missions in exchange for hefty sums of AP.

Now that he returned to New Constantinople VIII, he should be able to squeeze enough time in his schedule to work on a few side projects.

"Let's see what the latest upgrade has introduced."

He could no longer hold himself back anymore. He left the Sacred Temple and moved down the steps.

Soon enough, he stood before the facility that the System called the 'Dimension Observatory'.

Its name was certainly apt. It looked like a classic surface-bound star observatory. There was a large telescope that extended from the oval-shaped roof and pointed directly into the skies of the System Space.

The exterior looked familiar at first glance, but it possessed a number of mystical elements that Ves was not able to decipher.

"Interesting."

The fact that the all-metal structure adopted the form of an observatory signified that the new features did not just center around breaching dimensions.

Being able to look inside them was also important. It would help save a lot of AP by opening a tear that led into resource-poor dimension.

Once Ves was done with admiring the interior, he approached the entrance and entered the darkened space inside.

The interior of the Dimension Observatory was dominated by two obvious features.

One of them was clearly the base of the massive telescope. A terminal that looked like nothing else allowed for users to operate this massive device.

The second feature was the giant pillar in the center. Strong spatial energies emanated from the pillar that was suspended in the air.

He decided to approach the terminal of the telescope first.

An interface popped up as soon as he came close enough.

[Dimension Telescope Operation

Observe Dimension (5 Ascension Points): Can observe the interior of dimensions #20 to #1000 for a maximum duration of 5 minutes.]

Ves wanted to scratch his head. This was a very brief description, though Ves was able to deduce a lot of clues already.

The ability to peer into dimensions numbered 20 to 1000 was a powerful function!

Ves knew that this was only a fraction of the total dimensions in existence. Being able to look into 1000 of them was not that impressive in the greater scheme of things.

The real value of the Dimension Telescope was that Ves would be able to scout the wealth and dangers of different dimensions in advance.

In most cases, Ves expected to find absolutely nothing.

On other rare occasions, Ves could accidentally stumble upon a horror dimension that was filled with monsters beyond his comprehension.

It would be catastrophic if he opened a gateway to such a terrible place!

This was why scouting his targets in advance became so important.

It was just that the price of doing so was not light.

"5 AP for a single glimpse is not a big deal, but the costs will quickly add up if I use it on a repeating basis."

Of the 980 dimensions that the Dimension Telescope could peer into, how many of them were filled with valuable energy or materials?

Ves had no clue!

If only 15 out of the 980 dimensions contained the resources he needed to power up his mechs, then the probability of stumbling upon one of them was only around 1.5 percent!

He quietly cursed. "I will have to waste hundreds of AP before I can find a profitable dimension if that is the case!"

The good news, if there was any, was that a single successful hit was enough to allow him to earn back his investment.

Assuming that the dimension was not inhabited by a large amount of indigenous life forms, there should be a lot of resources that no one had ever exploited before!

All of it became ripe for the picking as long as Ves managed to breach this lucrative and untouched dimension!

"Where are the upgrade options?"

Ves fiddled with the interface before he managed to find the right page.

[Dimension Telescope Upgrades

Telescope Reach - Level 2 (1000 Ascension Points): Can only look at dimension #1000 to #10,000.

Observation Duration - Level 2 (200 Ascension Points): Can extend maximum observation time to 6 minutes.

Observation Clarity - Level 2 (200 Ascension Points): Can increase the visual clarity and the data collection of dimension observations by a small extent.

Observation Search - Level 1 (1000 Ascension Points): Can add an automated function to the Dimension Telescope that enables it to search a range of dimensions for designated parameters.]

His expression remained neutral while he processed the information.

The situation roughly matched his expectations. The System merely delivered the Dimension Telescope in its most basic form. It clearly had a lot of potential, but unlocking it required a huge amount of AP investment!

Ves focused his attention on Telescope Reach.

"1000 AP is a ridiculous sum. It takes lots of work to earn this much!"

He was not able to earn this sum so easily in his current state. He earned just a single AP for every completed mech design. This meant that he had to devote much of his time and attention on completing Missions.

Yet was it easy for him to do so? Many Missions required him to do a lot of weird stuff that he was absolutely not comfortable with! There were only a few normal Missions where he only had to design a very specific mech.

Ves felt more and more tempted to induct other mech designers into the System. Earning 1000 AP was a huge burden for a single mech designer, but if 4 users agreed to split the cost, then each mech designer only had to pitch in 250 AP!

He shook his head. He could think about this issue later. He still needed to process the latest upgrade and form a new development strategy based on the possibilities opened up by Dimension Breach Creation.

"Whatever the case, these upgrades are definitely worth it. I need to improve the Dimension Telescope as soon as possible."

Given his current situation, Observation Search - Level 1 was his highest priority.

The longer it took for him to purchase this critical upgrade, the greater the amount of AP he would waste by looking into completely empty or irrelevant dimensions!

"It only costs 5 AP to study a random dimension, but it takes 500 AP to look into a hundred dimensions!"

The cost of using the Dimension Telescope did not go away. It took energy and maybe other resources to operate it. Since that was the case, Ves needed to resist the urge to use it right away and start to save up lots of AP so that he could avoid wasting even more of it in the long term!

"Observation Clarity - Level 2 may also be necessary." Ves judged. "Data is important. If this upgrade can give me more data readings on the properties of unfamiliar matter and energy, I can quickly determine whether any of it poses a huge threat if they are brought back to the material realm."

It would be catastrophic if Ves inadvertently opened a dimensional tear that led to a dimension that was filled with antimatter!

Once just a tiny fraction of it spilled out, a cataclysmic explosion would take place that was powerful enough to blow up an entire planet, if not an entire star system!

"Telescope Reach will probably be necessary. It may unlock higher dimensions that may be filled with even more potent matter and energy. However, 1000 AP is way too much at the start!"

He really wanted to purchase it, but he would have to do too much work to earn so many Ascension Points. He needed to ration his time and resources and spent his AP on more essential upgrades first!

Ves lingered in front of the Dimension Telescope for 5 more minutes before he satisfied his curiosity for the time being.

He felt tempted to spend 5 AP just to try it out a single time, but this was an incredibly irrational and foolish waste of resources.

"Save 1000 AP first. Spend it on Observation Search - Level 1. Then I should be ready to take a peek."

He moved away from the terminal and began to approach a giant glowing pillar that was placed in a central location.

Ves could already feel the powerful spatial energies contained within this strange pillar. He could already deduce its function from that alone.

[Dimension Breach Operation

Temporary Breach (10 Ascension Points): Create a dimension breach of up to 20 meters by 5 meters that lasts for up to 10 minutes.

Temporary Breach (50 Ascension Points): Create a dimension breach of up to 20 meters by 5 meters that lasts for up to 1 hour.]

"Damn."

Ves was impressed that the giant pillar was able to create dimensional tears.

Ves was not impressed by how short they lasted. 10 minutes was not a long duration. It was only enough to conduct a quick retrieval operation!

"At least it is cheap enough for a starter option."

Chapter 5955 Short On AP

Ves became thoroughly captivated by the Dimension Blade.

Even though it looked like a giant cylindrical pillar that did not possess a sharp edge, he could feel the spatial energies warping around its physical form.

There was no need for the pillar to be sharp because its actual cutting mechanism consisted of concentrated and highly volatile spatial energies!

While Ves truly found the sight of the Dimension Blade to be inspiring, he was not as pleased with its starter options.

"A dimension breach that lasts for only 10 minutes only makes sense if I need to snatch something valuable with as little fuss as possible. It is much more efficient to open a dimension breach that lasts for a full hour. A prepared harvesting team can get a lot more stuff done."

He wanted to see the Dimension Blade in action. He found it agonizing that he had to wait months if not years before he earned enough AP to purchase the necessary upgrades.

"I need to stick to the plan!"

Not only did he have to accumulate a lot of AP to purchase the necessary upgrades, he also had to induct Ketis into the System!

Only when Ketis stepped forward and pretended to gain a blessing that allowed her to cut a hole through dimensions would Ves be able to draw attention away from himself!

He decided to distract himself by inspecting the upgrade options. There was no way that the Dimension Blade was only able to create breaches that lasted up to an hour at most.

[Dimension Blade Upgrades

Remote Breaching - Level 1 (500 Ascension Points) Can extend the maximum range of breach creation to 1 kilometer.

Breach Extension - Level 2 (250 Ascension Points): Can create a dimension breach that lasts for 1 day at the cost of 200 AP.

Breach Expansion - Level 2 (100 Ascension Points): Can expand the maximum breach size by 5 x 5 meters.

Breach Strength - Level 1 (250 Ascension Points): Enables breaching of more resistant dimensions. Enables breaching at locations with slightly higher spatial stability.

Breach Barrier - Level 2 (1000 Ascension Points): Can generate an energy barrier that can block the passage of undesirable energy and matter in both directions up to a low limit.

Semi-permanent Breach - Level 1 (5,000 Ascension Points): Can generate a semi-permanent self-sustaining dimension breach that is able to persist without any further input. Can still be destroyed through external means.]

"Now that is more like it! There are so many options!"

Many of them seemed nice, but there was one powerful option that offered exactly what he needed!

"I need to earn 5,000 AP as soon as possible! There is not much point in choosing this upgrade track if I don't obtain Semi-permanent Breach!"

This was the critical function necessary to transform more planets into different variations of Aeon Corona VII.

It was also a way to grant red humanity access to strange dimensions that were filled with nigh-inexhaustible resources!

Unfortunately, an asking price of 5,000 AP was so prohibitively expensive for Ves that it would take years if not a decade for him to earn that much Ascension Points in an honest fashion.

Ves had already been leaning towards inducting other mech designers into the System.

If he previously gained 75 percent certainty in this strategy, he now became 99 percent convinced that he needed to break his policy of keeping the System for himself!

Creating permanent dimensional tears was too valuable for Ves to ignore!

The longer it took to unlock this upgrade, the greater the opportunity costs he would incur for not being able to work with extradimensional resources sooner!

Though Ves fixated his attention on the Semi-permanent Breach upgrade, he did not forget about the other ones either. He made sure to study them to figure out how the Dimension Blade worked.

"Without upgrades, a dimensional tear can only become an oval that encompasses an area of 20 meters by 5 meters. That's... enough to send a few people or compact shuttles, but it is not enough to send a mech or starship!"

He needed to expand the maximum size of the breach by many times if he wanted to make it suitable for large scale use.

For temporary breaches, it was best if they could become big enough allow for starships to pass through.

This way, their superior volume and cargo space should allow them to quickly retrieve a lot of high-value resources in the new dimension and leave before the breach closed up again.

Size was less important for permanent breaches. Smaller ones were easier to defend, to control and to hide. They made it difficult for monsters from the other side to break into the material realm.

The Remote Breaching upgrade was probably a necessary safety precaution. Who knew whether opening up a dimensional tear would cause a huge amount of lethal energy to pour into the material realm.

Being able to breach dimensions 1 kilometer or 100 kilometers away would drastically reduce the danger to himself.

"In fact, if the range is long enough..."

Ves suddenly gained the idea that he could weaponize this power!

As long as the range and precision was high enough, he could time the creation of a remote dimensional tear right in front of an enemy warship!

However, when Ves noticed the Breach Strength upgrade, his excitement cooled.

The Dimensional Blade was not all-powerful, and the breaches were not impervious to external influences.

Without any additional reinforcement, the dimensional tears could probably be destabilized or outright destroyed.

"I will have to test this out at least once in order to gather the necessary data."

In short, the most basic dimension breach was only useful for peaceful purposes. Ves needed to spend lots of AP on Remote Breaching and Breach Strength to strengthen this capacity to the point where he could tear apart enemies from a distance!

"This could become a trump card as long as I commit to this investment."

The cost was too high, though. It made sense to upgrade Remote Breaching and Breach Strength at least once or twice, but any more than that was disproportionate.

There was no need for Ves to rely on this gimmick to defend himself. He should have plenty of mechs and warships at his disposal. His own phase lord abilities should also suffice. Having to waste valuable AP just to get rid of an enemy was the worst move he could make.

Before Ves completed his inspection of the upgrade options, he spent a minute on thinking over the implications of Breach Barrier.

The fact that the System found it necessary to provide this additional feature as an upgrade option practically confirmed that opening up dimensional tears could be dangerous.

Being able to project a barrier might end up saving many lives. Ves did not intend to neglect this option, but with how little AP he had at his disposal, he had no choice but to dismiss this as a luxury option.

Ves eventually grew a little glum at the end.

It was so frustrating to gain access to so many powerful upgrades, yet find himself awfully short on AP!

He felt more pressured than ever to go on a mad Mission spree. The last time he did that, he almost went crazy from all of the manic stress he accumulated throughout that ordeal.

Though Ves ended up earning a heap of AP, the thought of subjecting himself to that unique form of mental torture once again caused him to shudder.

He needed to put his life in order and build up the courage to initiate a long Mission completion session.

In the end, Ves turned away and left the Dimension Observatory. He gathered all of the information he needed.

Though he felt tempted to create a small breach, he quickly reminded himself that it would be devastating to do so while he was still residing in Diandi Base!

If he really had to spoil his plan and reveal his newfound ability of breaching dimensions, then he should at least board a starship and move to the edge of a star system before he commenced his experiment.

"I have more patience than that. I need to meet with Ketis in person before I make any further decisions."

It was a good thing that Ketis refused to undergo EdNet training.

There were a number of things he could do. For example, he could make use of the 10 golden lottery tickets that he earned from completing a Supply Mission. He could also make use of the Time Gate.

The only inconvenience was that Ketis was currently leading Task Force Solus over at Reticula Corein V. He could either take another trip, or request his former student to come to him instead.

"It is much more convenient to bring her over. I am done with travel for the year."

Before he left the System Space, Ves checked whether he had missed anything.

There were a number of things he could do. For example, he could make use of the 10 golden lottery tickets that he earned from completing a Supply Mission. He could also make use of the Time Gate.

However, Ves had already exhausted his mind by trying to analyze his available options and selecting the most suitable upgrade track for himself.

He decided to deal with these matters later. Ves hadn't entirely gotten rid of his laissez-faire attitude towards the System. He still preferred to solve his problems by relying on his own strength first.

This was why he hadn't made use of the Superpublish function as soon as it became available. If he kept using it as a crutch by discovering the shortcomings he needed to address, he would eventually lose the ability to diagnose the problems in his works!

This reminded him that he needed to introduce dimensional tears to red humanity without causing everyone to fall into a similar trap.

That might be hard to do when red humanity had very few advantages to rely upon. Who cared about these problems when people were on the verge of going extinct!

Ves briefly winced. A part of him regretted that he rejected the Universal Gate Network. He could have started to work towards creating a gate that could lead him and his precious children back to the Milky Way.

Alas, he rejected this easy escape route in favor of trying to upgrade red humanity's combat power by supplying them with special resources!

It was a choice that reflected Ves' unwillingness to become a coward and seek to defeat the most implacable alien enemies.

Ves finally exited the System Space and took a moment to catch his breath in reality.

"Meow?"

A dark-plated gem cat flew closer and took a closer look at Ves.

"I'm okay, buddy. I am really tired, but I still have a lot of work to take care of. Did you notice anything unusual?"

"Meow meow meow."

"Is that so? That is good to hear. I don't need you to guard me anymore. You can go off on your own if you want."

"Meow!"

Lucky took that as an invitation to leave. The gem cat phased through the floor as he was probably looking to play with Andraste or the other kids.

Ves raised his palm in front of his face and imagined that he wielded the Dimension Blade.

Would he be able to tear a hole in dimensions if he swung it in a certain fashion?

"Maybe it won't be my hand that wields this blade."

He needed Ketis to come over as soon as possible.

With that goal in mind, he settled into his seat and briefly called up the latest status reports of the expeditionary fleet.

He also called up the documents related to the Swordmaidens in order to catch up with the latest developments of this infamous mech legion.

Ketis had been doing well. She gained valuable leadership experience by directing and overseeing the units responsible for surveying Reticula Corein V and harvesting Solus Gas.

Aside from that, she made sure to keep up with her other work. She had learned a thing or two about his leadership style and heavily delegated responsibilities to her officers. This allowed her to squeeze more time in her design lab.

The Stormblade Samurai Mark II Project was making a lot of strides as a result. There was a lot of market potential for a commercialized hyper version of the original Stormblade Samurai model. Ketis had good reason to believe it might become the Larkinson Clan's next bestseller.

Ves agreed.

Chapter 5956 Emperor Tree

Hovering in orbit of Reticula Corein V, the Wild Torch occupied the center of a modest second-class fleet.

The fleet carrier was one of the prides of the Larkinson Clan. While the vessel had fallen behind the times, she performed well in relation to her circumstances.

The presence of the Wild Torch bestowed the Larkinsons assigned to Task Force Solus with a lot of confidence.

This was an effect that the Dragon's Den, the other capital ship in the task force, could never accomplish.

The reason for that was because the Wild Torch hosted one of the most important members of the Larkinson Clan.

Many outsiders assumed that the young clan was entirely propped up by its legendary founder and patriarch.

They were mostly correct about that. His contributions could not be denied by even the most skeptical observer.

However, those who spent years in the clan knew that they had plenty of other talents to count on. Ketis had already made a lot of strides in stepping out of the shadow of her patriarch!

Many clansmen saw her appointment as the leader in charge of Task Force Solus as vindication of their belief that she could be just as great as Ves one day!

The Swordmaster herself stood in her private design lab. The horned woman wore a white lab coat over an armored training suit. This produced an odd contradiction in style, but Ketis wore her outfit with confidence.

"Sharpie! Sharpie!"

The Bloodsinger cheerfully floated up and down as the weapon soared through the air. The personal greatsword that accompanied Ketis for years had grown even more powerful than before.

The reformed CFA greatsword had grown sharper and stronger than ever. Constant exposure to Sharpie's growing willpower and exotic radiation caused it to shine with deadly gleam that could make anyone fall into the illusion that the blade could easily sever the thread that kept them alive!

At this time, she spoke with a physical projection of Vice Director Maria Abselon of the Larkinson Biotech Institute.

Since Director Ranya Wodin still had a few years to go before she completed her EdNet training, Maria Abselon had been doing an excellent job at keeping all of the biotech researchers in check.

It helped that she was a fairly young but brilliant Terran biotech researcher herself!

What she lacked in age and experience, she made up with it with passion and an unusual zeal for studying exobeasts!

Everyone assigned to Task Force Solus knew that it was impossible for them to establish full or even partial control over a planet as wild and untamed as Reticula Corein V.

The effects of Solus Gas and the hegemony of multiple powerful calamity beasts had caused the planet's ecosystem to turn into a savage environment.

This led to a myriad of issues, not helped by the daring strategy chosen by Ketis.

"...under the current circumstances, Chimera Base is still at great risk until we have completed construction of all of the planned defensive works." Vice Director Maria Abselon explained. "We have gathered enough evidence to confirm that the Emperor Tree is a rare calamity plant. It is an exoplant that has not only gained sentience, but is also able to command wood energy at levels unmatched by any recorded calamity beast. If not for the fact that its favorable location is engulfed by Solus Gas released by a major deposit, many first-class biotech research institutions would have tried to claim this planet for themselves. We are lucky that no one else has discovered this exceptional plant ever since it managed to evolve to its current level."

A calamity plant!

Even Ketis heard about how much the biotech industry coveted them. Just like exobeasts, exoplants also had the ability to mutate and surpass their limitations as a species.

However, the mutation rate of exoplants was much lower. Mutated plants also grew at a slower rate. Their lack of mobility also caused them to become prone to accidents. Far too many of them inadvertently got crushed or torn apart by rampaging mutated beasts.

Only a few of them ever managed to complete a second evolution that turned them into calamity plants.

That was when these powerful organisms truly gained the power to defend their foothold.

Larger and more resilient than calamity beasts, these extraordinarily powerful plants not only gained enough sapience to think for themselves, but also displayed greater prowess in manipulating E energy.

Fortunately, most calamity plants that red humanity encountered up to date tended to remain rooted at their original locations.

The so-called Emperor Tree located a fair distance away from Chimera Base was one of them. The Larkinson Biotech Institute had not managed to discover why the plant managed to survive long enough to be able to evolve to its current height on top of a major Solus Gas deposit.

Solus Gas at these concentrations was lethal to all organisms, including the indigenous exobeasts and exoplants!

The Larkinson Biotech Institute became excited at the prospect of studying the Emperor Tree for this reason!

It was rather unfortunate that Ranya Wodin was attempting to fast-track her promotion to a first-class biotech researcher. The opportunity to study the Emperor Tree was a dream come true for the exoplant specialist!

"Have you figured out whether Emperor Tree can move?" Ketis asked the projected figure.

"We are still in the process of gathering data, ma'am. Our ability to do so is limited due to the interference of Solus Gas and the frighteningly effective detection capabilities of the tree. The entire area surrounding the Emperor Tree is under constant monitoring. Our best stealth probes cannot get closer within a handful of kilometers from the calamity plant before being destroyed by wood splinters or other violent responses."

"That is disappointing news." Ketis responded. "I am receiving daily reports about the beast waves that are frequently attacking Chimera Base. They are doing so much damage that the construction work has slowed. It doesn't take a biotech expert to figure out that those suicidal exobeasts aren't throwing their lives away at us because they care about humans settling on their planet. Have you at least been able to confirm that these beasts are solely attacking us due to the instigation of the Emperor Tree?"

The vice director shook her head. "We have yet to gather any hard evidence that indicates that this is the case, ma'am. We have only managed to gather circumstantial clues. The Emperor Tree does not rely on spreading pheromones to control the beasts that roam the regions surrounding the major Solus Gas deposit. There are sources that claim that some calamity beasts are able to dominate the minds of weaker exobeasts. This is usually the case for calamity beasts that do not excel in personal

combat. They seem to have channeled their evolution into improving their ability to conscript an army of beasts."

The reason why the Larkinsons referred to the Emperor Tree in this fashion was because it possessed the most outrageous ability to dominate exobeasts!

Its domination range was extremely high, allowing the powerful tree to form entire beast armies up to hundreds of kilometers away!

"So you are certain that the Emperor Tree is actively responding to the presence of Chimera Base by flooding it with beast tides?"

Maria Abselon grimly nodded. "It is safe to assume so. The Emperor Tree remains rooted in one location. Even if it has gained the ability to move, it clearly does not wish to do so unless it is absolutely necessary. This is the main reason why our task force established its first harvesting site on a minor deposit that is close to this calamity plant. While we are fortunate enough that the Emperor Tree has not seen fit to take direct action, it is clearly hostile to our intrusion into its territory. The beast waves will not stop for that reason. More exobeasts are constantly converging from elsewhere to occupy the rich lands around us. The Emperor Tree will subsequently take them over and throw them into the walls of Chimera Base."

Ketis frowned deeper when she heard that. She glanced over at a projection that displayed a partial map of the planet.

There were 27 major Solus Gas deposits on the surface of Corein Reticula V. Each of them were occupied by calamity beasts or powerful mutated beasts.

It was already bad enough that these powerful creatures occupied the best Solus Gas deposits.

What was worse was that the minor Solus Gas deposits were all located in the surroundings of those major deposits!

This meant that if the Larkinsons wanted to harvest Solus Gas on an acceptable scale, they had to establish a harvesting operation in the territory of at least one powerful beast!

It would be much easier to decapitate one of the calamity beasts and claim one of the major deposits.

Ketis knew better than to initiate such a reckless action.

While it was possible for the mechs of Task Force Solus to defeat one of these calamity beasts, doing so was not that simple.

There were plenty of stories on the galactic net where other groups had tried to eliminate every calamity beast on a planet by defeating them in detail.

However, the movements were so big that all of the calamity beasts on the planets became alarmed. The powerful creatures spontaneously dropped all of their animosity towards each other and converged upon the battlefield.

Suffice to say, very few mech forces were able to survive after getting besieged by dozens of calamity beasts that wielded extraordinary power!

Incidents like this occurred so often that people learned the hard way that the calamity beasts instinctively possessed a common identity that was tied to their own planets.

They might wish to kill each other in order to stimulate their evolution and devour the nutrients of the defeated, but when they were confronted by a powerful external opponent, they were smart enough to understand that it was better for them to unite their forces!

This made the conquest of any untamed planet a lot trickier than normal.

A human force could either deploy so many mechs that they could roll over the calamity beasts through sheer quantity, or it could try to defeat the powerful beasts without making too much noise.

Task Force Solus did not have the numbers to pursue the former strategy, and it did not have enough intelligence to employ the latter strategy.

For now, the Larkinsons had little choice but to leave the calamity beasts alone. This was fine as their primary mission was to begin a Solus Gas extraction operation.

Yet just because the humans wanted to leave the powerful indigenous life forms alone did not mean that the opposite was true!

"Is there a chance we can reconcile with the Emperor Tree?"

Vice Director Absalon did not look supportive. "No. Calamity beasts have always been hostile to humans, especially since we are not native to any of their planets. They rightfully regard us as invaders who are trying to steal their home planet's resources. The beast waves will continue to assail us until we have begun to exhaust all of the adult beasts in a very large radius around the Emperor Tree. Once we have slain enough exobeasts to impact the population, the calamity plant will not be able to threaten us as much as before."

"That should be the best time for us to negotiate with the Emperor Tree." Ketis proposed.

"Just because the Emperor Tree is sapient does not mean it is willing to entreat with us. You should prepare to initiate an assault with the goal of eliminating it. Fielding too many mechs at a time or employing excessive firepower will draw the attention of every other calamity beast, but if you send a smaller force of elite mech units, you can challenge the Emperor Tree for control of the region. This is much less likely to provoke a collective response as the calamity beasts believe that their own will not fall in a fight against a weaker and more inferior force."

That had a lot of implications for Task Force Solus. Ketis already had a bunch of names in mind for a possible assault force.

Chapter 5957 Chimera Base

Ketis continued to contemplate the information provided by Vice Director Maria Absalon.

Task Force Solus wouldn't be able to complete its objectives as quickly as she previously anticipated.

This was bad because it would keep her and the Larkinsons assigned for his mission away from the expeditionary fleet for a longer period of time.

However, Reticula Corein V was a nice change of pace for the soldiers who fought against the alien raiding fleets.

The abundance of hostile exobeasts gave every mech pilot plenty of chances to polish their skills, spill more blood and temper themselves in actual combat.

The fact that the Emperor Tree kept sending over beast wave after beast wave provided the defenders with much more opportunities to accrue combat experience than if they stayed with the expeditionary fleet!

Even if most battles took place on land, the exobeasts and mutated beasts that displayed unrelenting aggression towards the humans possessed a lot of diverse strengths and abilities!

Each mutated beast was unique. Their strength may be weaker than expert mechs on average, but their abilities were often strange and confounding.

One mutated beast possessed the ability to speed up its movement as well as the movement of nearby beasts by a factor of 5.

That creature was responsible for breaking multiple azure energy shields as well as a physical wall the other day!

Another mutated beast spewed out firebombs at a very long range. Each time a firebomb struck a target, it exploded with enough power to cripple a Monster Slayer in close proximity!

The fact that there were always at least a couple of mutated beasts with highly unpredictable abilities in every beast wave made it difficult for the defenders to avoid losses.

Plenty of mechs had already incurred significant damage. If not for the fact that Task Force Solus was accompanied by support ships that were able to fabricate or repair mechs at a modest scale, Ketis would have been forced to request reinforcements from the expeditionary fleet.

That did not help much when the mutated beasts managed to inflict enough damage to breach a cockpit and kill a mech pilot in an instant.

Her heart weighed heavier when she thought about the clansmen who died on an unimportant battlefield.

There was much greater honor in making the ultimate sacrifice in a battle against the native aliens.

Ketis could not afford to be softhearted in her first true independent command. She knew this was not an opportunity, but also a test. She needed to prove The situation was not sustainable, though. Until Chimera Base managed to construct enough defensive works, the beast waves would continue to inflict material damage onto the mechs.

As Ketis continued to talk with Vice Director Abselon in her capacity as the commanding officer, she inquired about the studies conducted on the carcasses of all of the defeated beasts.

"We have far too many beast carcasses than we know what to do with, ma'am. We have decided that it is best to throw many of them back onto distant forests and plains. This will help to preserve the ecosystem and divert many living exobeasts away from the domination range of the Emperor Tree."

Ketis nodded in understanding. "That is a clever response. What of the mutated beasts?"

"The carcasses of the mutated beasts offer a wealth of information, though not much of our discoveries are truly new. What we are particularly interested in is how exposure to Solus Gas affects their physical states and their self-evolution trajectories. The gas is not toxic to the indigenous organisms in lower concentrations, but it can still inflict damage. One of our highest priorities at this time is to discern whether the mutated beasts can adapt to Solus Gas exposure and

develop an immunity towards its harmful effects. This will give us a greater understanding of the Emperor Tree and other calamity beasts."

"Have you discovered anything important about Solus Gas that we do not already know?"

"We have made a number of interesting discoveries. We have discovered that Solus Gas is organic in nature. It is likely generated by at least one organism, but whether the creature is alive or dead remains uncertain. We have initiated surveys of the underground environment, but the presence of underground Solus Gas deposits and channels makes it difficult to maintain contact with our probes."

"Can you send down manned probes?"

"We have tried that, but there are dangers underneath the ground that have posed a threat against them. This planet is not simple. I fear that the source of all of the Solus Gas produced on this planet may be of a greater origin than we anticipated."

That caused Ketis to grow concerned. "Is it a phase whale? Do we need to evacuate some of our more sensitive and irreplaceable assets on the surface?"

"We cannot say what the source may be, but we do not think it is a phase whale, ma'am. There would be more phasewater present on this planet if this was the case. There are multiple sources of danger on this planet, but the threat from below should not be acute. It is more reasonable to guard against the Emperor Tree over other threats. Calamity plants are known to be more passive compared to their beast counterparts, but they are also known to lash out much more violently than usual when they perceive any intruders in their territory. In hindsight, Chimera Base is placed too close to the location of the calamity tree. We would not have attracted so many beast waves if we planted our base 50 to 100 kilometers away."

Ketis crossed her arms. "None of the minor deposits that are located further away release as much Solus Gas. It may be safer for us to occupy those sites, but we will not be able to harvest enough resources to satisfy our needs. Aside from that, provoking the Emperor Tree to this extent is helping us clean up the surrounding region of exobeasts in advance. Our mech pilots are also obtaining a large amount of practice from the daily intensive battles. It should not be long before the expert candidates assigned to our task force will have their chance to break through, especially with the help of my husband. They only need to participate in a battle that is more serious than a routine base defense."

Both Taon Melin and Lanie Larkinson had thrown themselves into the thick of fighting.

The Zeal's semi-modular guns roared with thunderous power as they shelled and pulverized scores of exobeasts with every attack salvo!

The customized Lucid Rage often darted in and out to defeat and disorient specific exobeasts, causing chain reactions that caused the beast waves to become more disarrayed.

Both expert candidates and their living mechs managed to improve their skills in ways that were not possible when fighting battles in space. The more grounded combat environment gave Taon and Lanie an opportunity to return to basics and immerse themselves in the fights.

Ketis' hands twitched. She longed to go down to the surface and swing her Bloodsinger against the horde of exobeasts that fought to the death in order to topple Chimera Base.

Alas, part of being a commanding officer was knowing when to keep her head cool. She deliberately kept her distance from the battlefield and stayed behind on the Wild Torch in order to avoid the temptation to kill the exobeasts in person.

"I... have a suggestion." Maria Abselon spoke.

"Explain."

"It is not necessary, but our research teams should be able to speed up our effort of understanding the Emperor Tree if we can obtain a sample of its body. We can learn a wealth of relevant information if a team of mechs can move closer to the major Solus Gas deposit and obtain a sample of the giant tree's root, trunk, branches and leaves. Our researchers can already make progress if they are able to obtain one of the samples, but the more we have, the greater our ability to deduce the Emperor Tree's strengths and weaknesses."

A confrontation against the Emperor Tree was not set in stone. Removing it would allow the Larkinsons to set up a much larger harvesting site at the major Solus Gas deposit.

This should yield enough Solus Gas to enable the mass production of mechs that incorporated this material as a means to counter detection and interfere with targeting!

However, Ketis also saw the Emperor Tree as a potential ally. The calamity plant may be hostile towards humans at the moment, but if the Larkinsons could prove that they did not have any intentions of killing every calamity beast and destroying the planet's ecosystem, they might be able to form a compromise with the calamity plant.

Before that could happen, the Larkinsons still needed to understand the Emperor Tree first.

"I will instruct Joshua to form a plan to gather the samples you request." Ketis decided. "An elite squad of mobile mechs will accompany his Everchanger. Even if they fail to retrieve any samples, the data gathered during this attempt should serve as a decent consolation prize."

The two women talked a bit further about the affairs related to their current mission. Reticula Corein V had thoroughly captured their imagination. Just the mysteries surrounding Solus Gas compelled them to persist in their investigation.

Once the meeting came to an end, Ketis stood alone in her design lab. She reviewed the information she learned and went over her decisions to determine whether she had made any mistakes.

"Is it too soon for me to pit my husband against the Emperor Tree?" She questioned herself. "He has grown so much, but the Everchanger continues to hold him back. It will be difficult for his living mech to pose a threat to the Emperor Sword without the Scarlet Ember."

It was difficult to make a proper strength comparison because calamity beasts worked differently from other enemy types. They showed a huge amount of variation in strength and abilities.

Most calamity beasts possessed advantages that matched or in certain cases exceeded that of ace mechs.

However, they also possessed weaknesses and shortcomings that caused them to be no better than expert mechs, especially when they had evolved relatively recently.

The good news was that the Age of Dawn had only just begun. Less than two years had passed, so most calamity beasts did not benefit from a lot of accumulation.

The story would definitely be much different a decade or a century later, but for now these outrageously talented and lucky beasts were still in a relatively controllable range.

Despite all of the uncertainty, Ketis did not allow herself to coddle her husband.

Venerable Joshua Larkinson was an expert pilot in his own right. His resonance strength may have grown rapidly through shifty means, but he fought and worked hard to make sure he lived up to his newfound power!

"It is just..."

As a mech designer who was familiar with Joshua's machine, she understood quite clearly how extensively the Everchanger fell behind the times.

Third order living mech or not, Ves originally designed and fabricated him in a time when the Phasewater Generation was still a stranger to the Larkinson Clan.

While the use of Unending alloy unintentionally turned the Everchanger into a hyper mech before such a classification even existed, the lack of transphasic components severely hampered his combat effectiveness against the alien raiding fleets!

Aside from that, the overall specifications and hardware limitations of the Everchanger were mostly optimized for a low-tier expert pilot.

Ketis had tried her best to raise the hero expert mech's upper limits, but there was only so much she could do to uplift a masterwork mech that was not of her own design.

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Only Ves and Gloriana could do the Everchanger justice.

Just as she was about to return to her design work, she received a call from a familiar friend.

Her lips curled upwards.

"I wonder what he wants from me this time. Do you have any idea, Sharpie?"

"Sharpie! Sharpie! Heaven! Heaven!"

Chapter 5958 More Powerful Than An Expert Mech

Ves stood up and straightened up his posture as the connection went through.

A faint aura of sharpness and unyielding determination radiated through the remote connection as the physical projection of the Bloodsinger became visible first.

The floating greatsword that looked sharp enough to easily split a human from top to bottom floated up and down in a friendly gesture.

"Sharpie! Heaven! Heaven! Sharpie!"

"Hello there, Sharpie. Are you still in your 'heaven' phase?"

"Sharpie!"

A hand smacked the floating greatsword back. "Behave, Sharpie."

"Hello again, Ketis. It's been a while since we communicated more directly. I apologize for not getting to you sooner. I got dragged into a lot of affairs as of late, as you may have heard."

Ketis rolled her eyes. "You mean you willingly threw yourself into one pit after another."

"Hey! The public inquiry was not my fault!"

"Says the founder of the Red Collective."

"An organization that does not exist at this time."

"I might not be the brightest politician, Ves, but even I know that it is doomed to take its place alongside the Red Two. There is even talk about putting you in charge of it, especially after you somehow upgraded the Dominion of Man into a living dreadnought. I am curious how you managed to do that, but you probably aren't allowed to share those secrets."

Ves nodded and started to pace around his office. "You are right about that. A lot of changes are in store. My latest business trip has yielded many results. Let me tell you the details that I am allowed to share."

He briefly summarized what he had done and what he had managed to obtain. Though he cut out a lot of portions of his story, he made sure to put extra emphasis on his many gains.

"I already heard about the first-class support mech, the Destroyer spear and the juggernaut," Ketis said. "Personally, I wouldn't have gone for them. They are too costly and impose far too many requirements in order to put them to good use. What purpose does the juggernaut serve, anyway? Did you just want to secure the bragging rights for owning an enormous mech?"

"I bought it for research purposes," Ves claimed with a straight face. It was emphatically not a toy for boys! "You should know what I mean. We can deepen our understanding of mechs if we step outside familiar ground and work on stuff that is different from what we handle on a daily basis. I already harvested a lot of insights when I participated in the transformation of the Dominion of Man. I think I can make similar gains when I start working earnestly on the Otalon Sprius."

"And when will that happen?"

"Not now," He admitted. "Maybe in a decade. There is way too much stuff I need to take care of first. My to-do list is so long that it can practically be turned into a book."

"Then you should delegate more. Haven't you always taught me that no mech designer can shoulder everything alone? You can easily shift more responsibilities to Gloriana and Alexa. I have spoken with that new student of yours a number of times. She has a bright head on her shoulders. I am not ashamed to admit that she is much more intelligent and sociable than me. Those Terran ancient clans sure know how to raise excellent descendants."

Ves approached and raised his arm to pat Ketis on the shoulder. "There is no need to denigrate yourself. Mech design is never about being the smartest. It is about serving mech pilots to the best possible extent. As a Swordmaster, you enjoy a unique advantage that makes your mech designs much more suitable for your target audience regardless of the imperfections they might have."

The swordmaster smiled. Ketis did not need any affirmations, but it was nice to receive a compliment.

They soon began to discuss the mech designs that Ketis had been working on in the past few months.

"I have been working hard to complete the Storm Sword." Ketis explained to Ves as she pulled up the design schematics of the quasi-first-class hyper transphasic swordsman mech. "It is by far the most powerful mech that I have designed so far. It is also by far the most demanding and complicated one. Not even the original First Sword can match the Storm Sword in terms of technological sophistication and material value."

That sounded like an absurd statement at first. How could a standard mech exceed the value of an expert mech?

However, Ves did not disagree with his former student. One glance at the design schematics already told him that the disparity had grown big enough to make such a statement.

The First Sword was an old mech design that originally contained no phasewater. It was only later on that the Larkinson Clan tacked on a number of transphasic parts, but the scope of incremental upgrades remained limited due to a reluctance to ruin what was already working.

Her best gimmicks was the fact that she wielded the masterwork Decapitator mech sword and enjoyed the protection of Unending alloy.

That was more than enough to allow a skilled expert pilot such as Venerable Dise to challenge and defeat a myriad of challenging foes!

Though the First Sword was able to accompany Venerable Dise a lot further due to the living mech's inherently high skill ceiling, the living expert mech ultimately showed her age, just like all of the other early generation Larkinson expert mechs.

This was how such an absurd situation came to be. Compared to a quasi-first-class mech design that incorporated a hefty amount of hyper technology and phasewater technology, the Storm Sword model indeed outperformed a second-class low-tier hyper expert mech on paper!

That did not mean that a Storm Sword or even 10 Storm Swords could defeat the First Sword in actual combat.

The combat power of a mech should never be evaluated in isolation. This was especially relevant in the case of high-ranking mechs.

The current Venerable Dise had evolved so far past the limits of mortal mech pilots that she could handedly thrash a squad of Storm Swords without much suspense!

The First Sword would get upgraded sooner or later. Ves and Gloriana just needed to modernize the Dark Zephyr first before they could tackle other upgrade projects.

Ketis understood this well, so she suppressed the urge to inquire about how much time needed to pass before the First Sword got her turn.

The current spotlight rested on the Storm Sword model. It was her latest pride and joy. She had worked hard to understand both phasewater technology and hyper technology to ensure her latest prestige project lived up to her growing reputation.

"How well did you cooperate with your collaboration partners?" Ves inquired.

"Well, you did not pitch in as much as you promised, but this is not necessarily a detriment to the design." Ketis said. "The Storm Sword is still a living mech, but I do not believe it has to evolve into a third order living mech to earn back its value."

"I know, but I think it is best if I make a final pass on your Storm Sword design." Ves responded. "Living mechs is a near-universal feature among the mechs fielded by our clan. Your Swordmaidens will feel as if they are missing out if they are the only ones who are piloting mechs that aren't as alive as the others. Aside from that, my contribution also ensures your Storm Swords come with the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem. This is a powerful force multiplier. The more Larkinson mechs are able to combine forces and form a pseudo-domain, the greater the advantages they can gain just by relying on numbers."

The swordmaster's expression changed. "I have witnessed the EWME in action plenty of times during this mission. The Fey Fiannas and the Transcendent Punisher Mark III's are making many Swordmaiden mech pilots jealous. Those currentgen mechs are able to conjure firestorms or surround the battlefield with mist as long as enough of them have gathered together. They can even interfere with the special abilities employed by mutated beasts."

The introduction of proper hyper technology already made the two quasi-first-class mech designs stand out from their peers.

Adding the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem on top of all of their other advantages allowed them to make an outsized impact on the battlefield!

The greater the mech army, the more dramatic the EWME became!

If not for the fact that the pseudo-domain was weak and easily overpowered by entities with real domains, the EWME would have given living mechs a power boost akin to half a battle network!

Ves was pleased to learn that Ketis had no objections to turning her Storm Sword into proper living mechs embedded with the Energy Weaver Mech Ecosystem. This would ensure that the high-end machines could fight alongside other Larkinson mechs without looking out of place.

Maintaining unity was paramount for morale and coordination. Mech ecosystems existed precisely to allow different mech models to fight alongside each other with minimal friction.

Ves studied the Storm Sword design closer. By default, they came with a blue coating, but were embellished by jagged purple patterns that represented lightning bolts.

"I already have a good understanding of the Storm Sword's defenses and mobility, but tell me about the weapons. Have you added anything special to them since the last time we discussed this project in depth?"

Ketis started to smile. "The Stormbreaker Greatswords that are paired with this model perform better than expected according to testing data. However, the effectiveness of this mech weapon is heavily reliant on the swordsmanship of the mech pilot. In the hands of Venerable Dise, the sword can be used to perform the Phase Cutter technique and break down transphasic shields with ease. In the hands of an inexperienced Swordmaiden mech pilot, the Stormbreaker does not fully live up to its name."

That caused Ves to furrow his brows. "Does that mean that only a small proportion of mech pilots are qualified to pilot the Storm Sword?"

"The Storm Sword is a swordsman mech that is solely designed for elites. Only the very best Swordmaidens can earn the privilege of piloting one. Compared to my original plan, I have made many design adaptations that have raised the skill floor of the Storm Sword. That makes it so that only advanced and highly trained mech pilots can effectively control my new mech, but given how much funding and resources I have channeled to the Swordmaidens, I expect them to step up and keep up with the growth of our clan. I do not ask them to become as good as genuine first-class mech pilots, but it is not enough for them to be simple second-class mech pilots anymore."

"How high did you raise the skill floor of the Storm Sword, exactly?"

"Very high. Maybe too high." Ketis responded. "To be honest, there are not enough mech pilots who are capable of piloting the Storm Sword properly, but I expect that to change in the following years. I can be patient enough. I do not want the Storm Sword to get overtaken so soon by a more recent mech design in the future."

Ketis may care a lot about the Swordmaidens, but that did not mean she wanted to pamper them. Her fellow sisters needed constant challenge and stimulation in order to sustain their growth and give them enough reasons to expand their limits.

This did not come without a cost. Many of the old veterans from the early days had already given up on this rat race. An increasing proportion of Swordmaidens from the younger generations began to surpass the old veterans.

The second-raters who attended excellent mech academies simply possessed better qualifications than a bunch of former third-class pirates!

"It is all worth it, right?"

"That, and more." Ketis viciously grinned. "A squad of Storm Swords piloted by skilled and experienced Swordmaidens will be a sight to behold. An entire company of them should also pose a fatal threat against any enemy sub-capital ship. Combined with their space suppressor modules, their Stormbreaker Greatswords will easily rip any transphasic energy shields to shreds. It can take only seconds for my most powerful swordsman mechs to pass through the energy shield layer under the right circumstances!"

Chapter 5959 Our Roles

The latest completed mech design by Ketis surpassed Ves' expectations.

Sure, Ketis had raised the design budget of the Storm Sword in order to accommodate more expensive tech and materials.

She also 'cheated' by relying heavily on recycled first-class materials originally taken from derelict alien warships to save on material expenses.

Yet it could not be denied that the Storm Sword design was one of the most powerful quasi-first-class transphasic hyper mechs that Ves had the pleasure of examining.

"I am truly impressed by what you have managed to come up with, Ketis. The mech may be on the expensive side, but you have made sure to justify every expense. Short of a first-class mech, your Storm Sword should be able to defeat any other mech at close range. Its offensive power is ridiculously high, and its defenses are also pretty luxurious. Its mobility is not the best, but it is definitely above average. The only faults are its complete lack of ranged counterattack capabilities

and its relatively low endurance. The Stormbreaker is especially high in consumption. Did you dial up its power?"

There was nothing Ketis could do about that. The Storm Sword excelled in melee combat exactly because Ketis went all-out on optimizing it for this purpose.

Ketis had already utilized the best energy cells that she could add to this mech. The Storm Sword imposed heavy demands on all of its parts and systems. It had to allocate a lot of energy to its transphasic flight system, its azure energy shield generator and most importantly its Stormbreaker Greatsword.

The swordmaster waved her hand and called up the design for the Stormbreaker Greatsword.

"I have worked together with the company that developed stormblade technology to raise its maximum power settings. The result is a much more powerful form of stormblade technology. The Stormbreaker is less efficient than the normal version of stormblade weapons, but the additional power is exactly what my mechs need to quickly breach through enemy transphasic energy shields. Don't worry. It is up to the mech pilot to decide how much power should be channeled into the Stormbreaker. If our forces end up fighting a protracted battle, then the mech pilots of my Storm Swords will need to restrain themselves and conserve their energy as much as possible."

Ketis trusted the mech pilots assigned to the Storm Swords to control their fighting intensity and ensure that their machines did not deplete their energy reserves too soon.

This was one of the many complications that the mech pilots of this powerful new swordsman mech had to take into account. It was far too easy for mech pilots to lose track of how much energy they were using up as they became affected by the throes of battle.

Fortunately, the Swordmaidens trained their soldiers to always retain control over themselves.

They were still capable of feeling angry or passionate, but the Swordmaidens always emphasized the need to be deliberate with their actions.

This had always been a necessity for them as using greatswords in battle always required a lot of forethought and planning. Making the wrong move during the wrong time could easily create a massive opening that could spell the end of a Swordmaiden mech!

The Storm Sword merely took this concept to a more exaggerated level. It could become the most powerful standard mech on the battlefield, but it could also turn into a disappointing machine that succumbed embarrassingly quickly during the early phases of a battle.

It all depended on the quality of the mech pilot!

"I truly look forward to seeing your Storm Sword in action, Ketis. This is a machine that should easily be able to perform on par with the Transcendent Punisher Mark III and the Larkinson Edition of the Fey Fianna."

Ketis shook her head. "I appreciate your vote of confidence, but it is too soon for me to celebrate. I haven't been able to test everything. I can only make a proper verdict once the Storm Swords are put into action in earnest. That shouldn't take too long. The Spirit of Bentheim is already prepared to fabricate them. The only annoyance is that it will take time for our clan to ship them over to Task Force Solus."

Although the Storm Swords were primarily designed to fight against alien warships, they were also suited to slay exobeasts, especially larger and more formidable ones!

"I think they will do well. Your Storm Swords are so good that I don't think I can design a better swordsman mech with the same tech and resources at my disposal."

"I doubt that. You always have a habit of pulling surprises out of your hat. If there is something important at stake, I have no doubt your imagination will inspire you to add an innovative feature to your mech designs."

She may be right, but Ves still believed that Ketis was blooming into a powerful authority on swordsman mechs. Hyperspecialization certainly had its perks.

Once Ves and Ketis were done with examining the Storm Sword, they soon moved on to other mech design projects.

The Stormblade Samurai Mark II was another swordsman mech model of great significance.

Due to various limitations, Ketis encountered a lot of setbacks in her attempts to transfer some of the strengths of the Storm Sword to the commercialized iteration of the Stormblade Samurai line.

Ves did not look surprised. "You practically set your own design budget for the Storm Sword. You can't be so extravagant anymore when designing a second-class mech that should be affordable enough. What is the design budget for the Stormblade Samurai Mark II Project?"

"3.5 MTA credits."

That was a far cry from the 180 MTA credits needed to fabricate a single copy of the Storm Sword.

"I thought you had already moved on from second-class mechs." Ketis commented. "I was wrong. You are not giving up on designing second-class mechs, correct?"

"There is a much greater market for second-class mechs. Of course I won't give up on it. I will only assign an assistant such as Alexa to fulfill my responsibilities in my stead."

That reminded Ves that he should pull Alexa aside and give her a thorough tutoring session on E-technology and other related subjects.

The two continued to talk after they went over Ketis' remaining mech design projects.

Ves hesitated in how he wanted to approach the topic he had in mind.

"Ketis?"

"Yes?"

"You should know by now that I did not call you because I wanted to know what you have been doing as of late. The real reason why I wanted to speak to you is because I have a presumptuous request."

"Oh? Please share."

Ves took a deep breath before stating his request. "I need you to travel to New Constantinople VIII as soon as it is convenient. I need to talk about cooperation in relation to some of the massive gains I have made during my business trip. The issue I have in mind is far too sensitive to talk about it over an unsecure channel."

Ketis sharpened her eyes. She had encountered schemes designed to trick her in one way or another ever since she became a Swordmaster.

Right now, her intuition warned her that Ves was definitely up to no good this time!

"Will I like it? Be honest, Ves."

"I estimate that there is 80 percent percent that you will like my proposal. However, I need you to come here in person before we can discuss the details."

That caused the swordmaster to become upset. "Can it wait? If you haven't forgotten already, I am still in charge of Task Force Solus. If you order me to put down my command and travel to where you are residing will send the wrong message. It will look as if I have failed and need to go back to you to account for my mistakes."

She made a valid point. Ves had completely overlooked this dynamic.

"Fine. Then stick around for as long as you have completed your main objectives for this excursion. How long do you expect that to take?"

"Unknown. We do not have a good understanding of the situation on the surface of Reticula Corein V. It can take years before we can establish a stable foothold that will not be targeted by the indigenous calamity beasts."

Ves' eyes lit up at the mention of that!

"I read about them in the reports. The Emperor Tree is of great interest to me. If its domain is based on wood energy, then it should have a strong affinity with life."

It was rare for Ves to encounter mutated beasts that evolved with a strong affinity for life. He could not let this opportunity pass!

"If you want to study the Emperor Tree so badly, then why don't you come to this star system?"

"No. I can't. There is too much work and obligations that I have to deal with in my current location. My wife and children will definitely grow more upset if I stay away for a longer time.

Ketis was a mother herself, so she fully understood Ves' perspective.

Seeing as the two could not come to an agreement, Ves decided to relent.

"Okay, if you insist on fulfilling your mission, then you can stay for the time being. Don't linger for too long, though. It is not desirable for us to delay this matter for too long."

He already considered whether he should travel to Ketis instead if she continued to stay put.

While Ves wanted to emphasize the importance of inducting his former student into the System, he really did not want to spill any secrets to those who might be eavesdropping on this conversation.

He had already said enough. It was up to Ketis to interpret his meaning.

Perhaps she caught a few hints or two from the serious look he gave her. This was bigger than getting to the bottom of Solus Gas.

After conveying his request, he switched the topic and began to talk about more general topics.

"Our society is continuing to change, and so must we." He told her. "What role do you think the Larkinson Clan should adopt during these changing times?"

"Our society is continuing to change, and so must we." He told her. "What role do you think the Larkinson Clan should adopt during these changing times?"

That was a broad question.

Ketis crossed her arms as she glanced at her Bloodsinger. "I do not think it is up to me to dictate what our clan should be striving for. Our clan is already doing a good job at growing and trying to fit into the role where our clansmen are needed the most. We are soldiers and problem solvers."

"What if we can become more?"

"Then... I would not object to stepping into a greater role if society truly asks for it. Is this about your political ambitions?"

"No. Not quite." Ves shook his head. "While I do not mind it if I gain more clout, it is more important for us to do whatever it takes to strengthen our civilization."

"You are assuming too much responsibility, Ves. It is great that you have found so many ways to help everyone out, but you are anything but alone in this fight. No one is asking you to be a savior. It is enough for you to be a mech designer."

"You make a good point, but... being a mech designer is not enough these days." Ves sighed. "Red humanity is only a fraction as large as original humanity. We are way too far behind in terms of population, territory, resources and production. If we want to win the Red War, it is not enough to settle for our current roles."

Ves had a lot of expectations for the god pilots, Star Designers and other brilliant people of red humanity.

Yet he did not think that their collective efforts were enough to win the Red War, let alone repel the Subjugation King!

Ves knew better than to leave his fate in the hands of unreliable allies.

He needed the help of a mech designer he could count upon, and Ketis was one of the first names that came to mind!

Chapter 5960 Inferiority

Now that he concluded his important talk with Ketis, Ves could only bide his time and wait.

He hoped that she would find the time to visit him sooner rather than later.

"Don't make me go on another business trip." He muttered to himself.

Now that he had done what he could to enact his ambitious new plan, he shoved all thoughts related to Dimension Breach Creation aside.

He lacked the AP to do anything useful with it, and he hardly thought it was wise to open a dimensional tear on an important planet located in a Terran port system!

Time passed by as Ves handled other matters.

For example, he returned to teaching his classes in person over at the Eden Institute of Business & Technology.

It might be beneath his present status to continue to lecture to a lot of students like this, but Ves found it important for him to remain connected to the future talents of the mech industry.

It certainly helped that he was able to screen promising recruits for the Larkinson Clan in advance.

Aside from that, he handled other necessary chores such as supervising the integration of the two new shipyards into the Larkinson Clan.

Enough time had passed for the first batch of existing Larkinson members to arrive at both Starfarer's Berth and the E-66 Experimental Yard.

With the cooperation of CEO Eric Poderin and Chief Shipwright Keziramous Demodian, the personnel base of both shipyards underwent significant upheaval.

It did not surprise Ves that a lot of employees who previously indicated that they wanted to leave and find employment elsewhere suddenly changed their mind. It was funny how thousands of shipyard workers tried to fight tooth and nail to retain their current jobs!

There was one overwhelming reason why all of the shipwrights, naval engineers and other workers wanted to stay so badly to the point of giving up their existing citizenships.

"The Dominion of Man." Kezi said during a remote conference. "Everyone and their mother wants to work on the next 'living starship' developed by the great Devil Tongue."

Ves grimaced when he heard that abominable moniker. "Well, they aren't doing their job security any favors by referring to me like that. Anyway, they are not wrong about their assumptions. I do intend to make more living starships with the shipyards under my control, but let's not get too hasty. I need to figure out a lot of stuff. There are a lot of luxurious conditions on the Dominion of Man that other starships simply do not have."

Anyone expecting his shipyards to pump out miniature versions of a Carmine dreadnought would be in for a massive disappointment!

Ves had not even begun to research a viable substitute for a Spark Reactor!

He definitely wanted to start making progress on this front, but he didn't have enough time to fit this in his schedule.

The most he could do was to suggest a few research projects to the T Institute.

The researchers over there weren't competent enough to develop a substitute of a Spark Reactor by themselves, but they could still save a lot of work for Ves by conducting a lot of precursor studies.

So long as Ves had access to enough empirical results, he could come up with a theoretical model that was much more grounded in reality.

In the meantime, Ves spent most of his work time contributing to the Dark Zephyr Mark III Project.

A lot of Larkinson expert mechs had been waiting far too long to receive their upgrades. Ves knew that it was unacceptable to delay the completion of the revision of the Dark Zephyr any further.

Now that he no longer became preoccupied with distractions, Ves could finally devote enough time on helping his wife complete her first proper archemeh.

It helped that they were making progress at a much more rapid pace this time. His wife's recent breakthrough had opened the floodgates. A lot of problems that had caused the two of them to get stalled for a long time no longer hindered them any longer!

Ves did not nearly understand as much about archetech than his wife, but Alexandria's design network rapidly made up for that shortcoming.

He did not expect to master archetech as thoroughly as Gloriana, but it was enough for him to master the basics.

His wife was happy to take responsibility over translating and refining the parts and systems that would make up the reinvented Dark Zephyr. She loved to tinker with the subversive mechanics, material science and electrical engineering aspects that made archetech so fascinating.

Ves helped with the broad strokes and the E-technology aspects of the Dark Zephyr.

Though his wife played an indispensable role in designing the physical structure of the expert light skirmisher, Ves always thought that it conformed to his vision more than hers. The Dark Zephyr was one of his babies as far as he was concerned.

In order to understand the Dark Zephyr's current metaphysical state better, Ves occasionally called Venerable Tusa and instructed him to examine the expert light skirmisher from many different angles.

While Ves found it difficult to get a clear overview of the Dark Zephyr by remote, he was still able to ascertain the third order living expert mech's overall growth and development.

"So the Dark Zephyr has gained 14 Ascension Runes in total, huh?"

The physical projection of Venerable Tusa nodded. "Yes. I cannot say whether that is fast or slow, but to my feeling, my partner has slowed down."

"I am not surprised. I do not fully understand Ascension Runes either, but I know enough to state that they are reflections of the growth of a living mech. Your Dark Zephyr continues to grow at a slow pace by himself. He also grows whenever he fights. What is important about the latter is that the battles must be fruitful enough to significantly stimulate your expert mech's growth. Has the expeditionary fleet fought a lot of easy battles as of late?"

Tusa pressed his lips. "I would not necessarily say so. Master Benedict Cortez is willing to take greater risks in order to plunder more phasewater, but he still tries to do his best to keep the engagements under control. He avoids any battle where enemy reinforcements are more likely to arrive. In addition, fighting under one or several ace mechs doesn't give me the feeling that the survival of the expeditionary fleet rests on my shoulders. That said, we are planning a big operation, so that might change."

"Haven't you guys heard that the native aliens are close to launching a major offensive?"

"We did, but that is exactly why we think it is a great idea to test the waters."

Ves did not inquire any further. It was not appropriate to talk about military operations over the galactic net.

He turned his attention back to the Dark Zephyr. He already figured out that the expert mech invested more Ascension Runes in the Path of the Wind Dancer.

This significantly made it easier for the Dark Zephyr to ignore all barriers and pass through enemy transphasic energy shields.

"The consumption has decreased." Tusa proudly said. "When I first started to perform the Leap of True Freedom, I was still very rough in the way I exerted my power. After the novelty wore off, I quickly became disappointed in myself because I could only do it once or twice before exhausting myself."

"What did you do to improve yourself?"

"I practiced. I worked together with the Dark Zephyr to optimize my technique. I talked to the other expert pilots for advice. One of the more useful lessons I learned from them is to try to make use of E energy radiation to fuel my ability. I was surprised when I found that it actually worked. Doing so makes it harder for me to control my technique, but the consumption is much lower. It would be stupid for me to go back to trying to fuel my Leap of True Freedom completely by myself."

"I take it that growing your resonance strength at a speedy pace has also made it easier for you to master this self-developed ability of yours."

"Being a high-tier expert pilot does have its perks." Tusa grinned. "I do not deserve all of the credit for my improvement. Trisk has helped us as well."

"Mhmm. By the way, how often have you practiced and utilized the Shadow Dance Dagger Style in actual combat?"

"The dagger style has excellent drills. I use them to keep my body in shape and to become more used to flowing movements. As for actual battle... the Shadow Dance is not that useful against alien warships. I never saw much reason to employ it when I am fighting against an alien warship that is many times larger than my own machine."

"That is... disappointing to hear. The Shadow Dance is very powerful, and I think it scales well as your resonance strength continues to grow. The darkness element may have negative connotations, but it has many useful strengths, some of which I intend to add to your partner. How comfortable are you with the idea of increasing the Dark Zephyr's darkness aspect?"

"If you asked me this question a year or two ago, I would have told you not to bother. Now that you have given me a companion spirit, I think I can handle more of it, but only if it doesn't interfere with my Leap of True Freedom."

A dark and shadowy bird flew out Tusa's head and cheerfully flew around in circles.

"Chip! Chip! Chip!"

Ves' eyes shone as he stared at the projection of Tusa's companion spirit.

Though Tusa along with many other Larkinson expert pilots only received their companion spirits relatively recently, their strength already exceeded that of others.

This was because they were all paired with powerful expert pilots!

Blackwing may look deceptively small and weak, but it could pose a huge threat to people, especially if Tusa lent his extraordinary willpower to his companion spirit!

"If you have the opportunity to use the darkness element to add or augment a capability of your expert mech, what would you choose?"

Tusa needed to think on how he should respond. Blackwing continued to flit around while leaving a shadowy wake in his flight.

"I am... already happy with the speed and the evasive solutions of my battle partner." The expert pilot eventually responded. "When I think of darkness, I think of engulfing my mech in shadow, or installing an active stealth system. That is not necessary as far as I am concerned. I can already outspeed most enemies while also evading virtually every attack aside from wide-area explosives at closer ranges. I am not in urgent need of stronger defenses either. What I truly need is a more powerful attack solution."

Lackluster offensive ability had always been a persistent shortcoming of the Dark Zephyr. Ves was not surprised in the slightest that Tusa mentioned this point.

Though Ves had given the Dark Zephyr a bandolier so that it could carry a bunch of transphasic grenades in battle, this was only a stopgap solution as far as he was concerned.

Tusa did not want to become a grenadier. He wanted to defeat his enemies by relying on superior martial might.

There were way too many instances where he looked at the Amaranto and the Promethea and grew jealous at their impressive capacity to inflict destruction.

While it was not fair to compare the offensive power of an expert light skirmisher to that of a pair of expert rifleman mechs, Tusa often felt that his Dark Zephyr never matched up to his peers.

"I understand." Ves said in a sympathetic tone. "It just so happens that I have multiple ideas on how to boost the attack power of your expert mech. Darkness is a very versatile element. With the right hyper materials and other tech, I think I can increase the lethality of your battle partner by as much as an order of magnitude!"

Tusa instantly became a lot more hopeful.

"Please tell me more, cousin."